

VEGETABLE INSECTS AND DISEASES AND THEIR CONTROL.

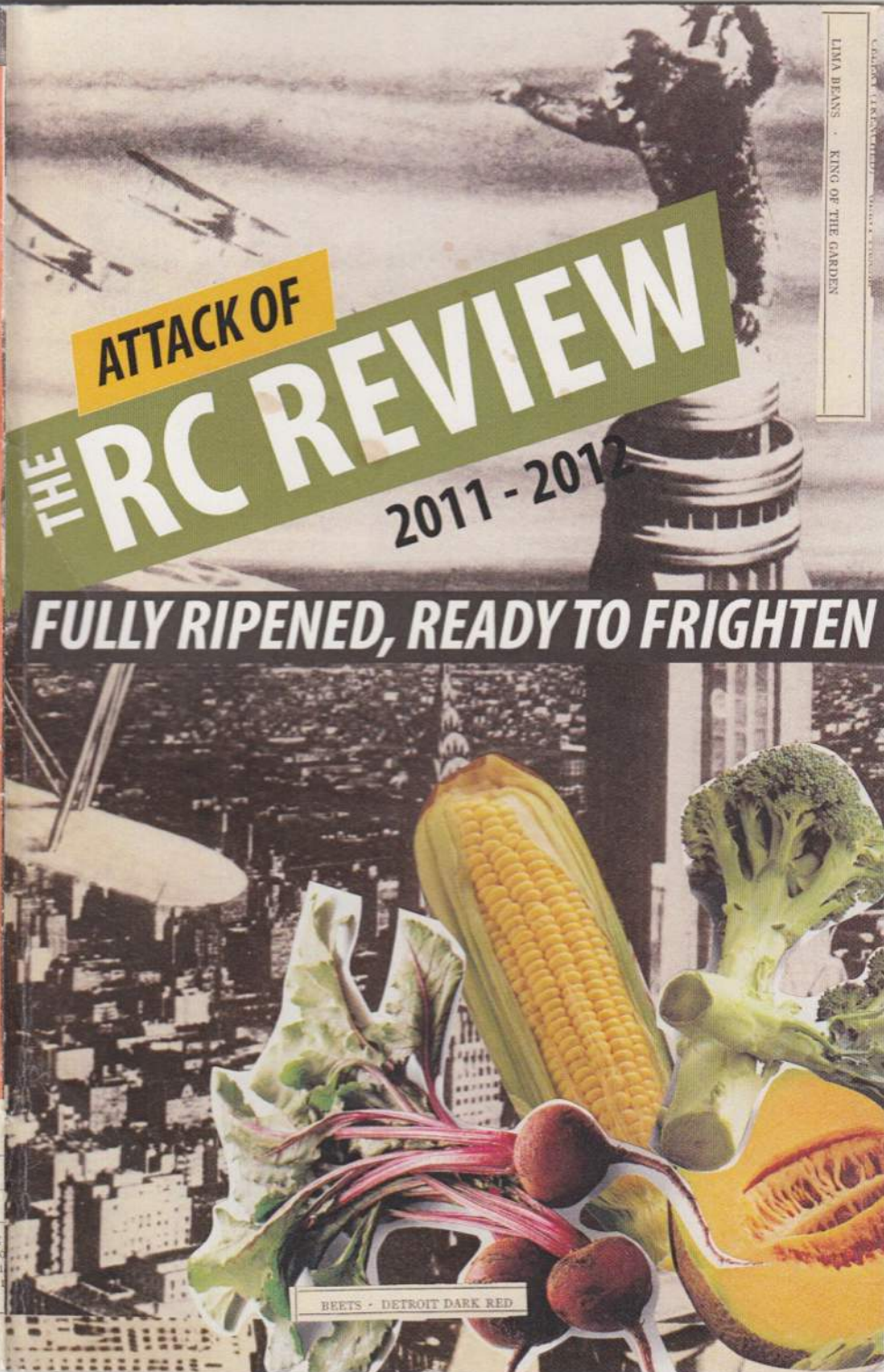
VEGETABLE	DISEASE	INSECT	DESCRIPTION	DAMAGE	CONTROL
Asparagus	Rust		Yellowish brown	Needle-like leaves.	Plant resistant varieties
		12-spotted Asparagus Beetle	Dark orange, 1/2" long with 12 black spots.	Chews the newly developing shoots from spring to summer.	Dust plants in early morning when dew is on them with a mixture of 1 part kerosene or calcium with hydrated lime
		Asparagus Beetle	Same size as the 12-spotted beetle but diversified in color.	Chews the needle-like leaves.	Same as above.

• THINGS • AREN'T • WHAT • THEY • USED • TO • BE •

ATTACK OF THE RC REVIEW

2011 - 2012

FULLY RIPENED, READY TO FRIGHTEN



COLLECTOR'S EDITION
LIMA BEANS • KING OF THE GARDEN



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NOTE

People in East Quad are crazy, and their submissions reflect their varying states of sanity. As wardens of this artistic asylum, we don't believe in every view represented, but we do believe in representing alternative views. We hope you find your own brand of crazy in the following pages.

Love,
The RCR Staff



CREDITS

Bush-Brown, Louise, and James Bush-Brown. *America's Garden Book*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939. // *Complete Guide to Food and Cooking*. Des Moines: Better Homes and Gardens Books, 1991. // Lodge, Jack. *Hollywood 1930's*. New York: Gallery Books, 1985. // Roddick, Nick, ed. *Encyclopedia of Great Movies*. London: Octopus Books Limited, 1985.

URBAN DECAY

Allison Epstein

This is a love story, but not in the way you think.

When the rest of the world turned its back on the
crumbling brick facades
of theatres past their prime,
leaving the flickering bulbs on the burnt-out marquees
gasping their half-message to no one,
I moved in and set up shop.

Quietly, in the dead of night,
I built myself a nest on the intersection of
Howard Street and Rosa Parks,
bringing with me the twigs and bits of string
accumulated over a lifetime.

They say the rats are the first to leave.
Looks like they're wrong; the rats and I have stayed.

Plywood propped up over punctured windows
keeps out the chill
of the impending winter.
The chain-link fence,
blown left and right in a storm or a riot
until it makes a drunken forty-five degree angle,
hoping for a sober friend to prop it up and help it to bed.
All glorious pistons cranking and pounding
in a four-cylinder combustion engine.

My city is not a dead, plague-stricken object.
There are flames here,
but far beneath the surface,
quietly and determinedly smoldering through
the dusky twilight of its own decomposition.
You have to admire that kind of persistence.

There is a do-or-die mentality
coursing through the veins and arteries
of Woodward and Grand River.
I can see it in the tendrils of smoke
curling towards the heavens
from antiquated factories.
I can sense it in the faces
loitering outside the Burger King on Lafayette,
collecting parking money
by parking cars
in no-parking zones,
the faces that sprung up from glass and steel and iron,
forged from the fires of the furnace,
unpolished but untarnished,
and indestructible.

Say what you will, we will not leave.

The city is a mirror image of its roots.
Flip and reflect,
wash sewage through the streets
where skyscrapers house rats
and gnaw on the infrastructure of its bones.

Why do we tear out our foundations but build up our walls?



Hannah Nathans

WATCH AND WAIT

Jonathan White

Still
on the ice amidst
snow
Morning waters wait
to thaw, dusted by shreds of wind
Moon and pines circle the bay
when a face appears and studies mine
A splash from those in the sauna
shatters like the stars and echoes

Near the bank, our steps are louder, uneven
Pillars rise
from the sand to the docks
disrobed
unclothed above the sunken lake

How do you like the UP?
Yeah it's cold but your jacket should keep you warm.
No not sleeping just listening.

PETRIFIED

Allison Sharrar

I had a dream
I sat so long in one place
A forest grew around me.

Moss grew up under my feet
Vines intertwined
In my fingers.

They grew fast around my ankles
And slow over my neck

Trees grew up big and tall
Around me

The sunlight shrunk

And I watched it all happen
Petrified

LEARNING TO COUNT

Logan Corey

My grandma said, look
hold up your fingers like this
you can learn to count in threes
she said, look
one two and three
are like your mom and brother
the three of you make family
and I said but what about you
what about grandma
she said, look
one two three make grandma
grandpa and auntie
visit on the weekends and spend holidays
this three with that three
and three plus three means six
which is like two times three but different
because in math you write it out
with symbols and symbols don't mean
as many things as words do when
you're part of a family, even if it's six or the first half
or both, which is two

my grandma said, here you try
hold up your fingers like this
count mom, count brother, count you,
count me, count grandpa, count auntie
but what comes, I ask, what comes after
three, what comes after this three and your three,
my three and that three get together, what happens
to the other three

and my grandma says, what
other three
and I say all the other three
what happens to the rest of
everybodies and all their countings
on one two three

she said, who would be
in the next three
and I said, Kate, I said, friend, and I said, cat
and grandma said, but what about the rest
the others
i said, what others she said,
what about dad or dad grandma or dad dad
and I said, dad doesn't count so he can't
be counted, grandma said, if you don't start to count now
when you're young then you'll never learn

and I said, learn what
and grandma said, learn to be counted
a part of a number that's going to make
all the difference and everything count
just to be a part

and she said, learn that, she said, what's the sum
of you and two and two and me
and I said, us and she said, we
and when I look in mirror I count six
not one, but three times two makes six
and every hand to every face hold up
their palm and count the space between us

not in years, but common denominators,
not in multipliers, but in the circumference
of our gaze.

for in two and two and two make six
is family
so too is our history
learning to count.

ADÁN'S MIRACULOUS CREATION

Rachel Emery

This story is just as true as it is fictional.

There was, in his voice, something urgent, euphoric, when he urged me to visit his laboratory as soon as I could. I felt the possibility that Alabejovic would try to rekindle our relationship. There had been another woman; she was his research and development of a product that he had just now called to tell me was done. He paid for my flight to Switzerland, and from the parquet flooring of his office rose shelving with all the knickknackery of chemists—labeled bottles, beakers and vials; books of molecules and qualities of the elements; a diagram on the wall of the human mammary gland—and in the center of the room, the grinning face of my old love, Adán Alabejovic.

He looked proud of himself, or, if my memory still served me, fanatic. He asked me to make myself comfortable in a chair before his desk. Alone on that wooden expanse was a small metal pedestal that held what I supposed to be the product of his research. He confirmed my thoughts: “It’s complete,” he said. “Ready for mass commercial production.” As much as I stared, I couldn’t divine the purpose of the cargo of the little pedestal. Taking my silence for amazement, he added, “Certainly, you can touch it. Like I said, it’s the final final product. You’re the first person outside the laboratory— I mean besides the various marketing big whigs and such— to see it. We had offers for financing from numerous companies, but Nestlé’s outdid all of them. They moved us out to this complex here in Switzerland. Nice, eh? Gave us everything we needed to finish the project, state of the art technologies and facilities, everything. That was about five years ago...”

And he continued to talk. The idea was to create the best juice on the market for children. Good tasting, nutritious, safe. I remem-

bered at least that fact, but Adán was always tight-lipped about his work. They started with one flavor. The first trials resulted poorly; they overlooked certain minerals, certain flavors, smells that he now couldn’t believe they were ignorant of. He paused. During those stagnant yet obsessive years of failed trials I had left him. They left aside all that was synthetic that one found in other products on the market. They managed to give it color without need for dyes like Red 40 that present such a danger to the fragile child. They even topped it off with dietary fiber.

“Soon, the formula was perfect. We had the support of Nestlé. But as I am a scientist, you understand—as I am a believer in rigor in science— I couldn’t stop there. Such initial success motivated us to invent more for the product, to go farther. We started on a biodegradable carton, which you know has already been undertaken by others with some success. At the beginning, we used pulp of potato, of rice, the barks of certain trees, but all that required so much production and refinery; we wanted to arrive at the nucleus of natural materials, at their simplest level. It was to me that the profound idea arrived: What could be simpler, what less refined than directly cultivating the container itself?

“Out back, we have some acres of space, and there we constructed a plane on which to cultivate the first squares: Completely organic, clean and simple, a living carton like your own skin. The two parts perfected, we put them together, and I present to you the miraculous final product. It won’t end here, you see? We’re committed to expand to other flavors: Apple, grape, combinations... I feel like I’m on top of the world. This—it’s revolutionary.”

Alabejovic was showing off his precious child to an old lover. I couldn’t believe that this silliness had replaced me—I felt perfectly justified in leaving him. I’d never beheld such precociousness before, such audacity as the joke on the desk before me. I took my hand from my mouth where it had come to rest during his story. I reached out and picked up the little container. In my hand, orange, leathery, perfectly round, lacking only navel and stem, was an orange.

TIME

Julie Cruz

In the bliss of youth, it sweeps past the mind
Which, playful and careless, gives it no thought.
But swiftly will Fate the gold thread unwind
Until passing years begin to pull taut

This precious strand, now strained by false worries
And doubts, petty tears, and the mounting stress
Of futile forethought--yet by it scurries,
A frenzied drumbeat that nevertheless

Fades with age, for bittersweet memories
Nourish the Present, though Past cherished't not.
Onward we look to divine centuries
Of unending peace that a whole lifetime sought.

Oh! how both cruelty and kindness do rhyme
Throughout life's never-ending song of Time.

OINK

Melissa Freeland

"This," the male vet-tech says with a flourish, "is Jennifer Lopez."

Hanging directly in the center of the operating theater is a mass of pink and grey flesh. Her delicately pointed hooves dangle, swaying slightly, and her ears twitch ever so slightly as we crowd around, an unruly mass of students gawping like we've never seen a pig recovering from anesthesia before. J-Lo appears calm and comfortable, her abdomen wrapped securely in a bright blue bandage decorated with red hearts and stars. Her blonde eyelashes fan up and down as she calmly surveys us with a lovely golden brown eye. On the other side of the room, a clean stainless steel cage lies open, awaiting its next occupant.

Beneath her, a powder blue operating sheet lines the sling she's hanging in that perfectly matches the tech's spotless scrubs. The first tech smiles warmly; his teeth are smooth and white, and his eyes crinkle at the corners. A few strands of fair hair curl out from under his cap. In street clothes he could almost be charming. The second tech stands by; her mane of auburn corkscrew curls wildly around her head. Her scrubs are a darker blue, and paired with her small stature, wide blue eyes, and easy smile, gives her an air of a young idealist. She beams at us, knowing that the opportunity to see the operating theater is a treat.

"Does anyone know what this is?" the male tech asks, holding up a squishy-looking yellowing package.

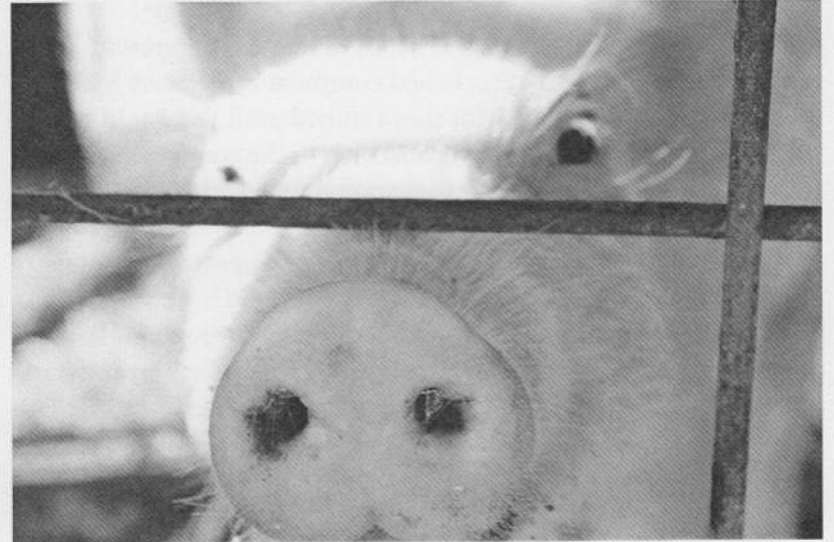
We don't.

It looks strange, filled with a net of fibers that looked like cotton-wool and protruding plastic tubes. The contraption jiggles, its thick tubing swaying back and forth. The tech explains that it is a prototype of an external artificial lung that the lab is testing. The tubes are connected to the patient's pulmonary artery and vein, allowing gas exchange through the porous fibers. Suddenly, a large dark splotch by the patient's head swings sickeningly into focus. Blood. When the short trial period is brought up, the female tech's demeanor changes entirely. She starts to refer to J-Lo as "she," or "it," and "the pig." Her genial smile disappears faster than a rabbit down a hole, and her eyes narrow. Nobody asks what happens "after." We already know.

In the operating theater, I keep waiting for the pig to squeal and struggle, eyes rolling, her hooves beating the air savagely in an attempt to get away. But she hangs limply, as docile as a roast that's already been served up. The faces around us appear smooth and detached, accepting this as if it were the most natural thing in the world. I look away, gulping down a wave of nausea. I want to scream or cry and ask the tech how he can live with himself, doing this day in and day out. Instead my face remains impassive, if a little green.

"You've got to remember," he says kindly, "this is for the greater good."

The next day, East Quad serves bacon for lunch.



Maia Gleason

THE DIAMOND MINE

Allison Epstein

The waiter, he thought vaguely, looked like an overgrown penguin. That wasn't an idle, clichéd comment brought on by his uniform tuxedo, complete with shoes shined until you could see your face on his toes. It went beyond that, to the way he stood with his heels together and his toes several finger widths apart, his straight-backed flawless posture, even the slightly vacant look in his eyes. He tried not to judge strangers based on appearances, knowing full well that was a knife that cut painfully and both ways, but he couldn't help himself. The word kept cycling through his head as the waiter stood awkwardly beside their table. Penguin. Penguin. Penguin.

"Would either of you be interested in hearing our specials for this evening?" the waiter asked, his voice dripping with obsequiousness. She didn't say anything, merely flipped the pages of her menu like she was skimming the telephone book for the name of a reputable plumber. He followed her lead and kept his silence, and the waiter, taking this as an open invitation, began to rattle off a list of dishes, most of them with names in some pretentious romance language and all of them far too expensive for the minimalist portions in which they would be served. They made no pretense at all of paying attention to him.

Her menu shut with a decided snap the second the waiter had finished speaking. "I'll have the chopped salad with a balsamic vinaigrette on the side, and a glass of pinot grigio," she said curtly. If there hadn't been a chopped salad and pinot grigio on the menu, he knew, she would have ordered it anyway, just daring the world to refuse to find it for her. The quickness of her movements would have attested to that even if she hadn't been continuously ordering

the same thing every time they went out to a restaurant over the past six months. Some part of the prevailing culture of death before decay had hinted that this was the only safe way to behave, and wearying as it was to him he had to admire her tenacity.

Though the look in his eyes demonstrated that her rudeness grated on him, he said nothing about it and looked at the waiter with a vague, half-distracted smile. "I think I'm going to try the canard à l'orange," he said pleasantly, judging the extent to which he had botched the French pronunciation by the level of tightness around her lips: severely. "What wine would you recommend with that?"

"The Merlot is exceptional, sir, really exceptional."

"Merlot it is, then."

After the waiter had disappeared, there began that span of time in which conversation is expected to take its natural course. An endless number of things could be discussed, but he was unwilling to instigate any of them. For some reason, it seemed like a tremendous amount of effort to put on a smiling face and make small talk about what the weather had been like that morning, what the weather was like currently, and what the weather was going to be like in three weeks. He drummed his fingers against the crisp white tablecloth, disregarding the daggers she was glaring in his direction. From around the partition separating the smoking from the non-smoking section, a violinist was playing a complicated piece by Stravinsky, one that had clearly taken hours and hours of practice to perfect just to drift into the background of a hundred middle-aged couples trying to execute the art of having dinner together without ever having to speak.

The silence rolled out between them like a new and expensive carpet. She checked her watch, seeming not even to care which directions the hands were pointing but using it rather as something to do with her eyes besides looking at him. For all she knew or cared, they could have been spinning backward. He began to toy with the menu the waiter had neglected to take back to the host's table. He

folded it open and shut, open and shut, creasing it along the center-fold so that the inner pages replaced the distinguished black leather cover. Again, she glared at him.

“Don’t you have anything to say?” she murmured. Hyper-sensitive to the other couples wining and dining around them, she was careful to keep her face a flawless mask of composure and her tone free and clear of all violent displays of emotion. He had known her long enough to be able to tell when one of her words merited italics. Beyond frustrated with him, she had moved on into the uncharted territory of disgusted.

“Not in particular. Don’t you?” he asked pleasantly, continuing to fiddle with the menu. She swiveled her brilliant green eyes in the direction of the maitre d’, but not before he had noticed the faint film of moisture coating them. Their emerald beauty seemed only enhanced by the artificial shine, but far from being able to appreciate their luster he felt a pang of guilt shoot through him. His eyes, too, avoided the table, choosing instead to land on the gold-and-burgundy carpet. Without particular interest he noted the small gap between the bottom of his trouser legs and the tops of his best black shoes; noted that he had left the house wearing one black sock and one white; noted that he had not noted this earlier and that she, uncharacteristically, had not mentioned it.

The menu, reprinted every day in order to represent the very latest dishes that were in vogue in Paris or Milan or wherever the bistro was pretending to be, sat on the white tablecloth in silence that perfectly matched the tension sparking between the couple. Folded with its inside pages facing the ceiling in surrender, the soberly chic black font whispered its headline quietly, though no one paid it enough mind to catch what it said.

“Thursday, April 23,” the menu murmured softly to no one in particular.

From the other end of town, in a distinguished and respectable brownstone townhouse surrounded by neatly trimmed hedges (his) and fastidiously watered perennials (hers), a wall calendar display-

ing a different picture of Tahitian beaches each month was the only one who heard. The tiny square labeled April 23 whispered silently back its response.

“Thirtieth anniversary.”

The flame of the votive candle on the tablecloth leaned slightly to the left, as if dancing in an invisible wind. She pursed her lips; he stared at his mismatched socks.

The waiter returned in a few minutes with two glasses of wine, one a pale gold, the other a deep burgundy. They drank them silently, staring deep into their depths, as though waiting for them to transform into something else before their eyes.

The Merlot was tasteless, dry, and disappointing. He didn’t know the quality of the pinot grigio.



Caroline Laman

Katie Marengi

two times in the daylight
I dream of wild strawberries
ripening in the pit of your cheekbone

last night under the moon's blue squint
we drowned slowly under our own drunken voices
swallows built black nests between your eyelashes
I called them home you called me beauty
or wild bird and I was and we were
two storm tossed buoys
armless and accidental

two times I wake up
and you're just a nightmarish ghost
haunting the thick grey loneliness
between my ribs

EVERYONE MUST GO THROUGH IT

Claire Fields

said your grandfather from
the opposite end of the Sunday dinner
table, said it
neat, stiff
like the starched collar of a WWII uniform,
said it
solid
like a bomb shelter in the basement,
said it
truly, exclusively
like the reformed Protestant tradition,
said it father-knows-best
like pot roast, like a quality
wristwatch, like the return home
after a week-long sales trip
to play Parcheesi with the kids and kiss
the aproned wife.

Everyone must go through it,
said your grandfather, and somehow that
helped, to understand that love
and the fading of it
existed even way back
in the 1940s, when your grandpa was
breaking hearts and playing
baseball.

Your aunts
and uncles sip coffee, eat pie, and
nod their heads (their balding and graying
heads). They know it, too, or knew it once,
and somehow
that helps, to understand that
some things, most
things,
are universal, inter-
generational,
shared experience,
shared like blood, like
tradition,
shared like Sunday
dinner.

SUNDAY

Lucy Cahill

we spent most of the week
in a booth.
i would order a french
press carl got a beef stir fry with
vegetables arthur got a plain croissant or bread
whichever was more authentic arthur
was going to learn french this week but i
never ordered they wouldn't let me the blonde girl
sparkled so and gave me a tiny cup i drank their coffee
carl took notes in french and on sunday
they have a red convertible roaring over
my sleep for driving

in the phone booth they offer a telephone
to their sister she is a marble aphrodite
they give her a telephone because
they can't love her and oblivious she
brings the french press and brings it again wears
a white shirt. they would take her away in a boat
grow grapes leave buckles and cords ashore
if they could

i spend the week with two woodsmen in a booth
so we seduced a sister and once on sunday the french
press had grounds in it. we rode in the car and it had gravel
in it. the waitress was brunette this time and my brothers
drove off the road and threw a log into the lake.

REFLECTIONS OF OUR SANITY

Leela Rose Denver

Last night you slept in my bones,
Unscented and wasted in your
Pleasures,
Keeping all the secrets I told you,
Placed on sky-scraping towers and the dusty under-bellies of beds.
We counted each wish on a tart candy necklace and
Bit the colorful charms to pieces,
Spilling rainbow dust between our chiclet teeth.
We rested our consciences upon plush velvet pillows and
Watched their chests rise and fall, rise and fall
In some kind of
Unison.
When we were finished with the watching and tired of the waiting
We lay our bodies underneath surreal midnight skies,
Hiding our faces in the fabric of all we did not know,
And sighed all our delights into place
Until they faded away
Into the translucent infinities.
Then we brushed off our losses and raised them to
Our angels,
Bursting with all the
Unconditional and unrequited love our mothers fed to us and the
Un-savored and un-forgiven wisdom our fathers relinquished to us.
We raised it all up to our divinities,
Who sat on tall kitchen stools and the tiled floors of late-night
diners.

We proceeded to splatter ourselves into a million little shards,
Reflecting and refracting with all the little sun rays and light
particles.

We fell up.

IN LESS

Logan Corey

in less than the time it takes
to get over someone
you've somehow found a way
to trailblaze through instead.

you've lit me, with the matches
we promised we'd steal from
hotel bathrooms in Chicago (tho
the reasons why we never made it
are too numerable to be explained)

look, here on my stomach
you can still feel the mark where
the fireworks singed past
and you said happy
like it was a new kind of thing
to say

my retinas burn weary of red and
gray, the colors of things that are hot,
and what remains when they steadily
ease away

the odor smelling on me isn't
the kind you ask a body to wear, not
if it's healthy, not if it's ready to walk
out into a memory that smacks like water
but hangs heavy like fog

I sit here now, apart
from all that hangs true to you,
and watch the matchsticks burn in heady
unison on the pavement slick
with rain, ready to shock themselves
into snow

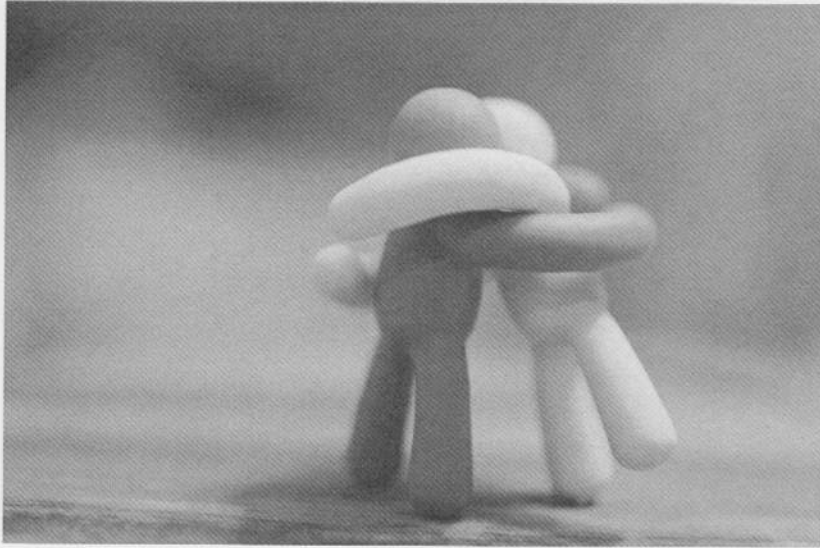
behind the burn marks on fingertips
and annual calluses edging away
on foot soles, I contemplate
to find a piece of you, tucked away,
congealed to my skin, but

there isn't a part of you I haven't
already tarnished in process of
removal, there isn't a part of you
I haven't already thrown off
No – the matches burn alone
for me tonight, they feel
better when they wrap up
inside the flame, no longer
hungry, copulating with air
so cold so damp I

am hovering
partway between this way
and that, not solitary, but not quite
rooted or rerooted to a landscape
I'm still test-marking to see
if I belong

I have these scars that run rivulets
'round my body to hang on
to memory of you
I don't need to touch you
to know they're real

don't have to see you
to know what we didn't lose, but
gave up, now transient
in day glo tatoos on skin
more than ready
to let go



Essie Shachar-Hill

CUP OF COFFEE

Elissa Zimmer

I am never late for anything. In my life. I always arrive obscenely early to every activity and appointment just so I can stand outside waiting, knowing that I made it on time. I think it stems from my mom always being late for everything, having left all the things she needed to do until the last possible minute. I was continually embarrassed by this so I vowed that I would never do it myself.

But here I am, on this monumental day, getting caught up at work and losing track of time. I know I'm late because a quick glance at the clock tells me I've lost five minutes. I'm now in a flurry of activity around my office, flinging papers into messy piles on my desk, shutting drawers, reopening them again, shrugging my favorite burgundy blazer onto my shoulders. I breeze out past the cubicles, waving at the interns and hurrying into the elevator.

As I emerge from the building, I keep looking down at my body, smoothing the bunching of the blazer, just checking to see if I look good, ok, presentable, more than that. I'm nervous and rushing, walking briskly down the sidewalk, to the point where I begin to feel the strain in my calves and to feel my breathing get harder and more pronounced. Several times I tell myself to stop, that I don't want to show up at the coffee shop red-faced and out of breath—that that is not the impression I want to make. I want to be calm and collected, even though I know I will ultimately settle somewhere between these two extremes. I have that much self-awareness now. I have also developed enough outer awareness to notice the handful of men whose eyes remain on me, connecting with my eyes for just a bit longer than normal. This still gives me a boost of confidence, even though I have learned that looking rarely ever leads to anything.

The call had taken me completely by surprise and before I could even think I had found myself agreeing to a coffee date I probably wasn't mentally prepared for. It was out of the blue; it was random, but he was passing through and wanted to "catch up." We hadn't spoken in several years, since 3 AM on my birthday. That day had started off so well. Finding our way to the bed and making love with our shirts still on, sweating. It had been fast that time. How good it always was.

For the last three blocks I battle the part of myself that wants to rush with the part that wants a casual stride. I end up finding a happy medium because I am late. It is probably for the best that I am though, because I'm not sure I want to be the one waiting.

I don't pause and take a deep breath like people normally do in these situations, or at least like they do in the movies. I stride right into the coffee shop and find a place in line, using that spot as an anchor, a placeholder in order to examine the surroundings. Then my eyes land on him.

I know it's him the moment I see him. He has dark blonde hair that lightens at the ends, now worn longish and curling about his ears. He is wearing '50s style Ray-Ban glasses over his sea-green and blue eyes. His body is thickly built in jeans and a cozy plaid flannel shirt and boots. The shirtsleeves are rolled back to just before his elbows, revealing tanned skin with arm hair made golden by the sun. I notice his arms are muscular in the way that suggests he works with his body. Perhaps he makes things with his hands now.

He has a mug already steaming in front of him. He isn't reading or anything; he is just looking around, taking it all in. It seems to take forever before his gaze finally meets mine. Instantly he breaks out into a smile, one that reaches his eyes and makes them crinkle at the edges. I like these lines because they aren't intense crow's feet like the ones that reach mid-cheek, but they are small and only curve up, like two extra little smiles.

His smile makes me freeze up inside, instantly making me gauge my emotions and how I am reacting to this attractive man in front of me. I steel myself and allow a small but genuine smile of my own. He gets up from his chair and I find myself already gravitating to his table, where I stand a bit awkwardly in front of him until he makes the first move and envelops me in a hug that smells of man and goodness and safety and a bit new.

I hug him back and subtly dip my nose into his neck for a second to smell him more deeply. I feel the urge to cry because I have never felt so protected and I am scared it's going to end, that I will become too attached in these short moments to let go again. I feel at peace. I feel flustered. I never used to feel this undone and that freaks me out, too. I end the embrace, pulling away and breathing deeply. We look at each other, him beaming and then looking a bit apprehensive for my sake, and I am simply trying to do the calm and collected thing.

"It's good to see you," he says. "Let me buy you a coffee. Or chai." His whole face seems to twinkle. I don't protest and find myself being urged to sit down while my drink is brought to me. I have those moments sitting alone at the table where my thoughts do nothing but ping pong around every surface in my head. I am replaying that night. My birthday. 3 AM on my birthday. It was supposed to have been so good. He showed up to surprise me, with margarita mix and martini glasses. We drove to the store in a downpour to buy rum. We laughed and shook the water from our clothes, splashing along the aisles in our flip flops. That night we were content to be with each other, in each other's arms, wrapped in each other's scents. But, the way it ended...I don't know which feelings to trust. I feel so many emotions and simply have to pull myself together as he places a hot mug of chai in front of me and sits down.

He has bought himself a second cup of coffee. He drinks it black, which seems out of character. I used to have to doctor it up with loads of vanilla creamer just for him to take a sip. It makes me wonder what else has changed.

It's awkward, like we are teenagers on a first date instead of adults in their mid-20s just having a cup of coffee. The silence stretches on for too long until he just laughs and says, "Well, what have you been up to in your life? None of that surface stuff, I know it all already. Give me details." He takes a sip of his drink and stares at me intently over the mug.

"Ok, so you know I work for Dog-Eared Publishing," I start, having to break away from his face, those eyes, to stare down into the fern design on the top of the chai. I tip the mug back and venture a taste. It's too hot right now and burns the tip of my tongue. I set it down and watch the fern swirl while I try to put words together in my mind. What have the last few years brought for me? I am successful in that I have the career I wanted, I am living in the city, I have a small but lovely apartment. I go out with my friends, enjoy mojitos at salsa bars, peruse book shops, cook a lot, and savor the scent of my small potted herb plants. I still spend days in my pajamas, alternating between TV and movies and a good book. I get dressed up every few weeks and have a real blowout with friends—dancing, clubbing, IHOP after, and finally crashing at 4 or 5 in the morning. My life has happened. But none of this sounds good enough to say out loud.

"E," he says, breaking my bad reverie. "Can I still call you that? Speak your mind. What are you thinking?"

"Really, it's been the same old, same old," I tell him. "I love my job. I get to work with words. I get to read really good books for a living...and sometimes really bad ones but the good ones balance the bad ones out. I get to take a pen to paper and move words and sentences around the old-fashioned way if I feel like it. I get to learn more about me through people's writing. I get to bring people's dreams to life. I'm a part of that. And when I come home from the office and am dead ass tired I'm greeted by the scent of basil in a pot in my kitchen, and I can just snip some off for homemade pesto, and I have a home office slash library that's lined with bookshelves, and I have great friends, and—"

"So you're happy?" he asks me then, interrupting and startling me. I think about it for a minute. Maybe I shouldn't have to think about it for a minute.

"Yes, I'm happy," I tell him, because for the most part I am. I am miles better than who I was when I was younger, when I thought I had my life and myself together. I like who I am. No one is perfect but I have to live with me and I make it work.

"Good." He smiles that crinkly-eyed smile at me again and I feel something flutter in my chest again but I can't put a finger on it and that bothers me.

I take a big swig of chai and relish the spiciness of it on my tongue. I am hyperaware of my entire body. I am aware that when he looks at me I begin to sweat like a 14-year-old boy. I am conscious of every configuration my body is in right now, down to the way my toes are fitting into my shoes. My hands rest around the curve of my mug because it feels safe. His hands touch his mug only when he wants to drink; otherwise they go with the fold of his arms on the table or run through his hair from time to time, messing it up in a perfect way. His legs aren't crossed because sometimes he leans too far over the table and his foot has touched mine twice in passing.

This body language is familiar and strange to me at the same time. That night, my birthday, I found out he wasn't in love with me. As that night stretched on, we lay in bed talking about our past, when things had been really bad. It was better by my birthday but it was then I realized that whatever damage we had done to each other was irreversible. He wouldn't let himself feel the same way about me. He wasn't open and unchecked anymore. He still cared enough to hate himself for hurting me, but that didn't matter. Upset at the pain he had caused me, I had read his posture well enough to know that he was going to leave, but I hadn't wanted him to have the upper hand in that as well. I had made him leave. Made him pack up his presents and didn't look him in the eyes even as his body sagged

under the weight of inflicted hurt and said to me, “E, please, let me talk to you.” There had been nothing left to say. So I had kicked him out and we hadn’t spoken since.

“Well, how is your life? What have you been doing?” I ask him. He takes a moment to think about it and I am already wondering if he is happy, and why it feels like a competition to me because I want to be happier, to feel more together than him. Did I show up today because I wanted to see if he was miserable? If he’d grown fat and balding? That he was unsuccessful? But I know that it ultimately doesn’t matter if he is content or not. I had wanted to see what he had become ultimately. This doesn’t have to happen again. It could just be a one-off thing.

But why is he so eager to know if I’m happy? I am perfectly capable of being happy. I look down at my drink again, feeling my cheeks warm as I remember how unsure I was even five years ago; the mistakes I made when I was younger. Sometimes I think “What if...?” and have to stop myself because life played out the way it did and he is no longer a constant part of my life. I am not the same anymore. I’ve come a long way since then.

“I moved out west to Seattle,” he tells me. “I struggled for a while because I was making more of a jazz-rock fusion genre than something more classic and somewhat more appreciated. I’m still writing music, but not performing as much. I mostly did stuff locally. But then in my free time—” and here his eyes light up “—I took up carpentry. It’s something I’ve always wanted to do and I’m doing it. I sell pieces here and there but it isn’t a big business.” Here he laughs and gestures with his mug. “And apparently I like coffee now.”

I smile a little at this. I don’t ask if he’s happy. He’s already told me that he is, just in different words. That he did what he set out to do and he survived. That was happiness for him. I bit back a sigh and another wave of emotion and made myself recount what I had said about my life. I had what I wanted, but was I missing something?

The conversation continues. We talk more in depth about our work. I tell him that my publishing house is the one behind a well-known book he loves. He pulls out his iPhone to show me pictures of gorgeous bookshelves and chairs he has made himself, promising me anything I like at a significant discount because I admire them so much. He tells me that the showcase he’s here for has been successful because he’s sold a few pieces and is making a name for himself in the Midwest. We talk briefly about the past, but mostly about people we used to know and what they are up to now. We laugh at an old friend’s penchant for shirtless facebook photos.

My guard is finally down when he notices the time on his phone. “Oh shit, I need to leave,” he announces, finishing the dregs of his coffee. He is already reaching behind him for his jacket. I have dinner plans with friends but the details are shoved to the back of my mind. My mind and my eyes glaze over, watching but not paying attention to the man in front of me putting on his leather jacket and pushing back from the table. I don’t want him to leave but as soon as I think this I know it’s for the best. I steel myself once more against the sadness and frustration I feel.

I stand up and let him hug me warmly, let him think we’re leaving this on a really good note. I smile, distantly, trying to ignore the thick feeling in my throat that threatens tears.

“It was really good to see you, E,” he says, standing for a moment with his hands in his pockets. He looks deeply and intensely into my eyes but I cannot for the life of me read his expression or interpret any message he might be sending. Maybe that’s wishful thinking.

“Next time I’m in town I would love to see you again,” he says. “Can I call you?”

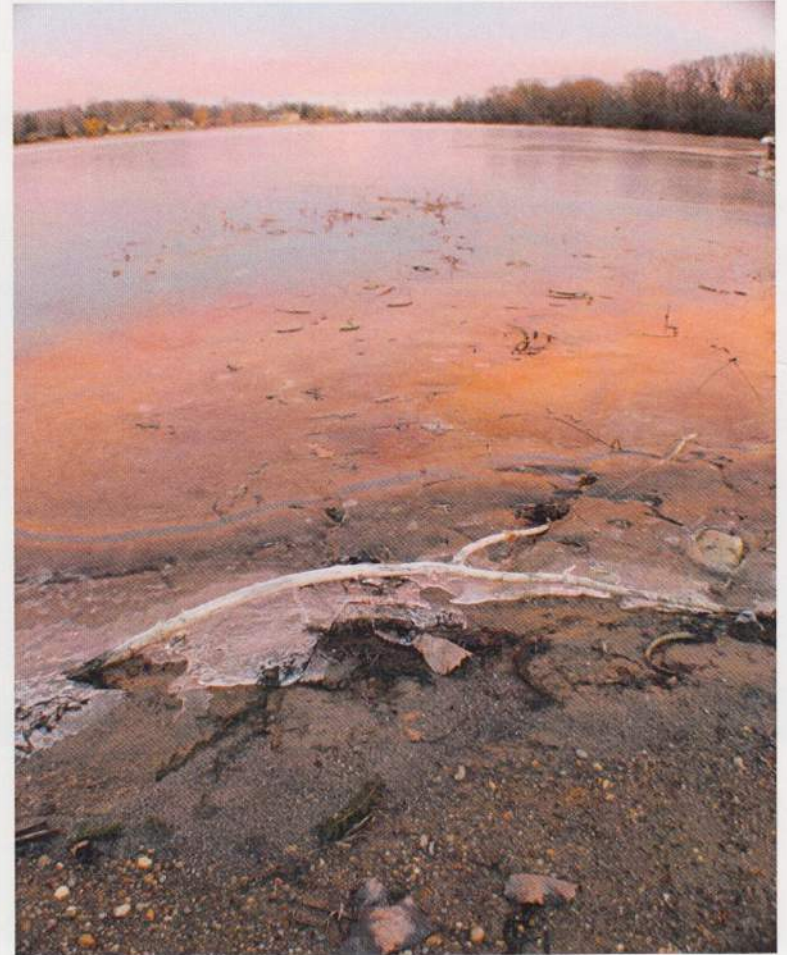
“Sure, sure,” I respond, numbly. “Until next time then.” He smiles that crinkly-eyed smile one more time and leaves. I sit back down at the table. All that remains of him is a mug with some coffee grounds.

Katie Marengi

today the wax from fourteen candles
congeals in your lungs

today you grind your molars to sand
learn to pray
and mean it

today you learn God is deaf in one ear
the one facing North Carolina
it's too bad, you tell Him,
our seashells mock the ocean's raspy hymns shamelessly
besides, my weary tongue has been calling your name all morning



Allison Sharrar



Hannah Nathans

CHASING

Anna Callis

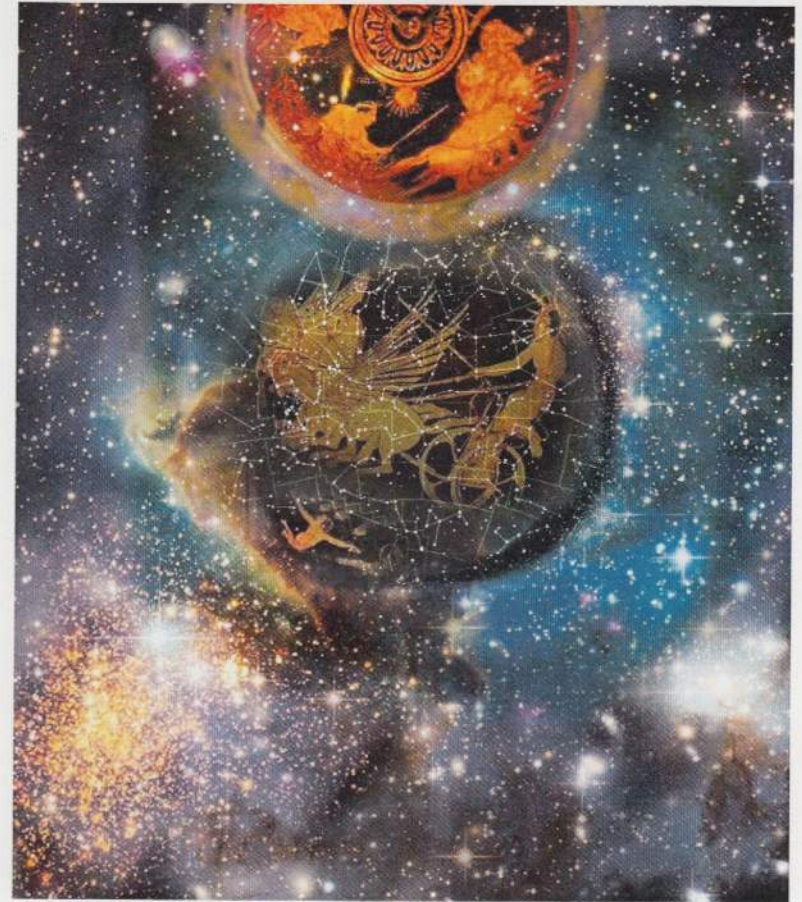
The doors burst open
and orderly lines
exploded to four corners
of the playground.
Two hand touch football
between the parking lot
and the busted asphalt
that separated us
from the 6-foot hill
riddled
with busted cinderblocks
and the chestnut tree's
prickly balls of squirrel gold.
For 30 minutes
I ran from one cement patch
to the other
chasing Adam's coattails.
In middle school
he started chasing mine.
I sometimes caught him
but he could never
reach me in time.

COPERNICUS TO THE EARTH

Ellen Van Meter

She is – Earth – center of her solar system.
I am Copernicus, bearing the scandalous update that sun
not Earth is central.
She refuses to believe me, the “self-aggrandizing heretic.”
But I never claimed *I* was the sun.

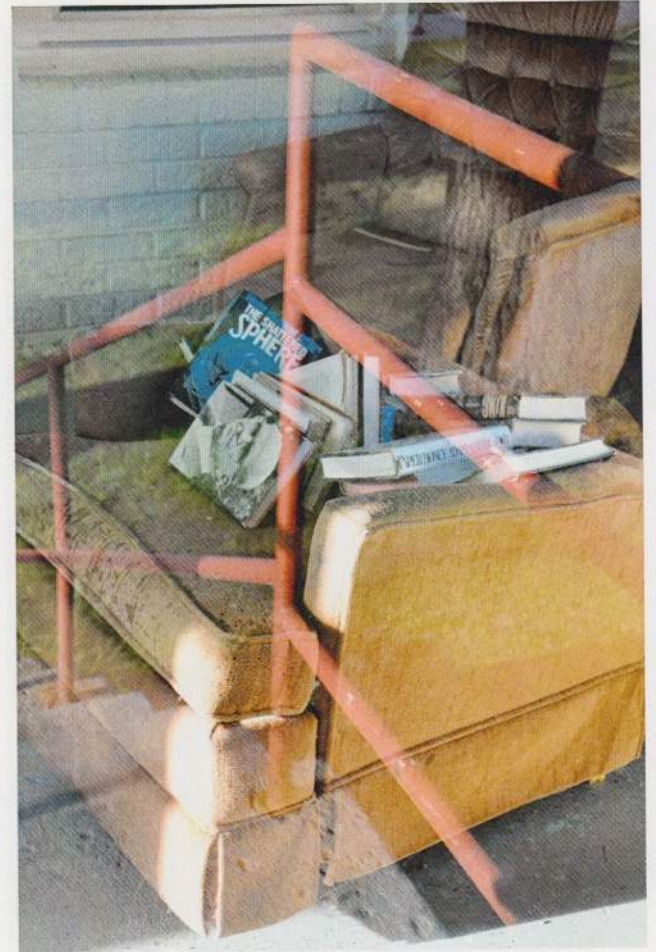
In the wake of her outrage,
After she storms out, hands clamped over ears,
The sting of rejection settles
And I am left alone for observing the universe too closely.



Zoe Allen-Wickler



Alicia Chiaravalli



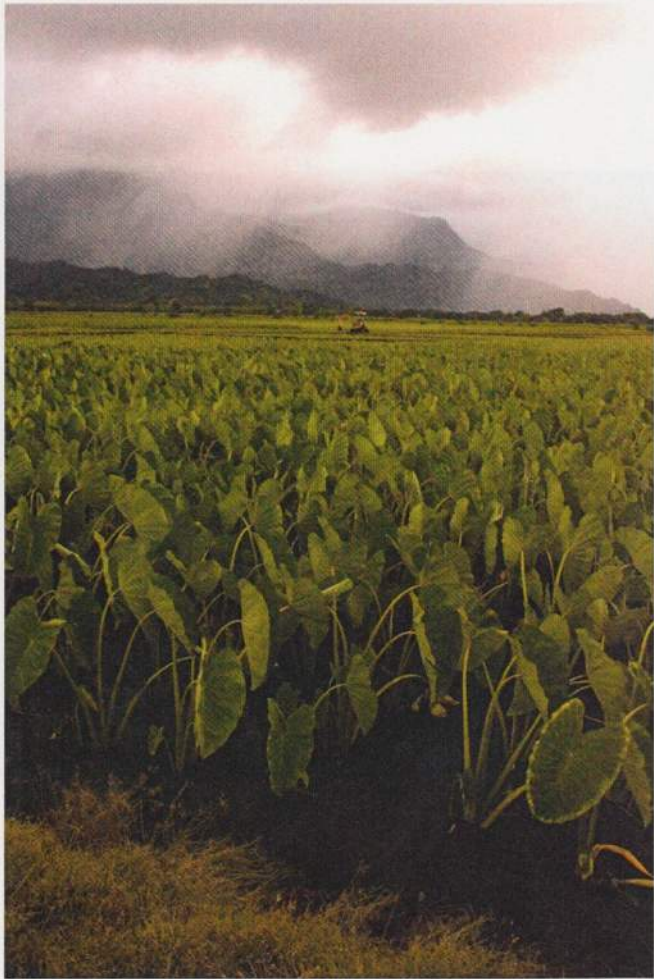
Caroline Laman



Melissa Freeland



Claire Fields



Maia Gleason



Nikole Hampton



Caroline Laman

LA OPORTUNIDAD PERDIDA

Emma Kelly

Young woman,
you have to take
that chance.

Young man,
yes you man,

don't let her get away.

This is your one opportunity
to look past the

fear

and taste her love.

For tomorrow will be a new day

with new situations
and new decisions to be made.

The cleverness glinting in her eyes,
incense brushing your nose,
these all will be gone
when the sun breaks
the horizon's

hold.
We know you are scared –
the bitter taste of rejection is fouling
to the soul
and to the heart.

But
are not the remorse and regret
of unknowing, of even worse?
'what if...?'

What if

you were right ...
and she did
love you
back?

You did not believe
in love at first sight

yet there has not been a moment of seeing her
when you did not think 'ay, que belleza.'

We tell you friend, *believe*.
A Feeling like that
is not to be doubted.

And now where are you, friend?
Alone in your country, high and unkissed,
unsure of what might have been
had you been granted one more week of her presence.

And now she is gone, 30.000 feet above you,
cruising away to a
land
you have never seen

and may never witness.

Oh, empty promises.

¿Will she ever return like she says she will?

¿Will you two really ever sail the lakes together,

eating fruit from open
palms?

No, my friend, no.

You may write until the leaves change color
and the rain ceases to fall.

But America will carry her away

and she will forget that she ever loved you,

her missed opportunity.

HE KISSES GIRLS

Lucy Cahill

Kiss: kissing girls. He kisses girls. Insanity: kissing girls is insanity, he says. Kissing girls, or just one girl, on your last nights in Paris moves like a train to St. Malo, i.e.: backwards and without coffee or a morning beer. He left his brain in Paris somewhere and spends his last evenings at a green table that looks vaguely familiar, letting river air flow into his open mouth. It stays there like the aftershock of bile, saying, you're leaving. you're leaving. you're leaving.

His brain is dancing the thin line between the périphérique and the giant snail with the shell cracked twenty times over. He'd crossed back into the snail one night with a quietly insane girl he'd wanted to kiss, and they walked past three lots in rapid succession. In the first one lay a sign indicating a safe landing field for parachutists. In the second, a cat pawed through a herd of pigeons. They had eyes like fish, and he found himself not blinking along with them. He looked at her in the third yard, which was empty save for weeds and one rose bush which had started to peek through the barbed wire, but she was thinking only of cigarettes, cigarettes, and when the tabacs would open.

He'd been awake for twenty one hours, and his brain felt like the letters on this page, stratified in layers that were dense and indecipherable on top and slowly melting downward and outward in layers that were more malleable, but strangely no less complicated, toward the bottom. When he looked at her, he saw a cat parting a sea of birds in his head. When she looked at him, she wondered if he had any nicotine left on his lips from his last cigarette.

They wouldn't kiss until later, when they were almost gone. She, days after being satisfied at the first tabac which opened at six, told him to race her through the entrance at the Institut du Monde Arabe. She ducked behind a sharp corner and when they met in the middle, she kissed him. He felt seven different kinds of lovely snake down his back, and yet where he looked up to see it reflected in her, there was only something that resembled the ash she'd let stick to the end of her smoke for too long. The bottom of her skirt was bent and she was laughing when she kissed him and her eyes looked gray.

[He reminded himself that he didn't believe in God, I think, but listen, listen you, I'm sweating in front of the Institut du Monde Arabe with a kiss sticking to the back of my neck and the white corners of the entrance will disappear tomorrow. And this building isn't very forgiving and I don't believe in God and how come her hair lights up like that in the dark when her eyes look so dead.] The last night sucks away quickly, a reverse game of chicken with him bolted to the spot and Paris tied to a bullet train heading in the opposite direction. In the morning, his mouth tasted like someone had laughed in it.



Hannah Nathans

ROTTEN ALPHABET SOUP

Heather Cooper

An ample arabesque:
Brazen as a
crypt. Cuss! Cock! Caulk?
Divulge or you're divergent.
Either way, either or.
Phlegm and phallus? Faking.
Grin and bear the grandeur, then
heave a haughty haze
into impending insolence.
Jargon flows from your jowls
but no kudos to the karma-sutra.
Love your Ladybird, long as it lasts and
mumble, not mutter, a moist, monotonous Midwest "mom."
Never nurse those foul notions. No
obscene oscillations,
nor perverse penetrations!
Quick queens they are.
A rank rift reveals
secrets slipped in forgotten services.
Today. Tonight. Tomorrow. Tuesday!
Unearth the ulcerous undulation,
the vindictive velour victory!
Wind your worth 'round the windswept wonder.
Exclaim it! Examine the possibility
you aren't yelling anymore.
Zen.

BABIES IN DANGER

Gaby Martin

On my way to meet Peter for lunch, I witnessed a motorized scooter come dangerously close to running over a toddler. I've always held a firm anti-child leash position, and though the incident made me question that principle, it did not alter it; I still maintain that children should not be leashed, just well-trained. Luckily, the scooter honked and swerved and it all turned out okay. Once it was confirmed that the child was fine, I found myself shaken, but inspired.

"Hi, Peter," I said as I sat down across from him. He had arrived to the restaurant first, and was sitting at a table near the window, reading the paper, when I walked in. Apparently he was growing his hair out, and I hardly recognized him beneath the curtain of voluptuous curls that rested on his skull. It had been months since I had seen him last. When he stood to greet me, the coiled ringlets bounced up and down. He looked like a colonial man. I told him so, intending it as a compliment, but he grew self-conscious.

"Hi, Jenna. Thank you...I suppose," he said, tucking his hair behind his ears and pulling it back into a ponytail and then taking it down again.

Years ago, I lost my virginity to Peter. We were best friends at the time, and though we've since grown apart, as friends do, we're still cordial. My only qualm is a lingering bitterness that he kept the box of Peruvian tea I brought to his dorm room when he fell ill— with a minor cold, nothing more— shortly after our ungainly sexual intercourse. I expected him to take a tea bag. A single tea bag. Two or three at most, to save for later, maybe, until his respiratory system regained composure. But the whole box? It wasn't a gift. I thought I made that clear. He can keep my virginity; I want the tea back-- it

was a soothing chamomile blend made in the Andes Mountains that I bought while traveling South America before college. It, at least, has sentimental value.

Alas, the sex and tea theft happened far too long ago; expecting to receive either of those things from him at this point is completely unrealistic. Too much time has passed, and we've steadily diverged—he with greater ease and speed than I. In retrospect, it's very clear that I should have taken a hint and stopped trying to impress him years ago, when we were fooling around after a party and I asked him if he wanted me to give him a blowjob, and he told me that we should just be friends.

"Just a minute," I said. Peter continued to mess with his hair while I patiently tended to the itch on my lower back. I've been scratching myself in public a lot lately, but I really have no choice. The specialist, Dr. Fahrendorff, says it's scabies. The bumps are everywhere, red little motherfuckers. They're on my wrists, thighs, butt cheeks, neck, stomach. I've applied the cream like the doctor said, but the cream doesn't stop the itching. So I keep scratching. But when I scratch after putting the cream on, my skin is slippery, and since there's no friction, the scratching isn't effective. What happens is that I just rub off the cream. So I put on more cream. And do it all again, usually late at night when I'm awakened by my itchy skin. It's a vicious cycle, entirely counterproductive, and does nothing to cure my scabies or relieve my discomfort. How I even contracted scabies is a bigger mystery, but what's done is done, and I must begin laundering my clothing and linens at once, to keep the disease from spreading.

The process of explaining to Peter that I had scabies went well enough—he didn't outwardly laugh—but when I was sitting there digging my fingernails into my body, he outwardly grimaced with disgust. I had never really desired Peter, only his approval, but luckily I was too itchy to give a shit about Peter's opinion of me. Normally I would have been ashamed by his repulsion, but yesterday it did not faze me.

"I'd like to begin designing calendars," I proposed to Peter, once the waiter had set our food in front of us and the conversation about my scabies came to a close. Peter nodded, chewing viciously. As he chomped his salad, his curls wiggled slightly. They seemed to never stop moving. I offered him my proposal: "The first calendar would be called Babies in Danger. Each month would feature a baby in a precarious situation—like in a toxic landfill, or playing with a wolf pack, or teething with electrical wires. Just picture it—April, a baby rolling around in poison ivy. August, floating on one of those pool noodles, unattended."

"I think there's a market for that," he said thoughtfully. "But where can you find the babies?"

"Well, that's the problem. I would need baby models. And Photoshop."

"Maybe my nephew could pose. I'd need to talk to my sister about it first, though. And he probably has playmates you could recruit."

"Oh, that's fantastic. Brilliant, actually. Thank you."

"What...inspired this? If you don't mind my asking," he said, timidly, perhaps afraid to learn the answer.

"Well, on the way here, on Tomkins Street, there was this mom and her kid— he was probably three, I'd say. Pretty chubby. Not really that cute, to be honest. And the little shit just dashed into the road, no reason, right as this guy on a tiny motorcycle comes zip-ping around the corner. Nearly plowed the kid right over."

"That's terrible..."

"So its mother lunged after it. Incredible reflexes. Scooped up the kid. It was all okay, but what if it wasn't? What if that mother hadn't been so agile? What if the motorcycle guy wouldn't have been a

defensive driver? He could have been, I don't know, lost in thought, or making a grocery list in his head, and I would have been the one to call the police, and—

"I think you're getting carried away."

"—and tell someone to send a fucking ambulance because a civilian toddler was just murdered before my eyes."

"Right."

"Anyway, I really like Babies in Danger, but another one could be Crying in Bars." At this point, the section of rash on my ankle became inflamed, and I halted the conversation to tend to it. I got out the medicated anti-itch cream from my purse, rubbed on a small dollop, and Peter tried not to watch but kept flicking his eyes down at my feet while he pretended to sip his water.

"I'm sorry, today's been extra-itchy. It should clear up by the end of the week, but it seems to be at its peak right now," I said. Peter nodded sympathetically. "Okay, so Crying in Bars would have pictures of a rowdy bar, or club, or party, and the focal point would be a weeping person, standing there crying their fucking eyes out, surrounded by a really beautiful, hip, young crowd, where everyone's fucked up, and there are people making out all over, or snorting coke in a corner, or throwing their heads back laughing. Everyone's having the time of their lives! And then there's that person in the middle, who no one seems to notice. And that person is sobbing. I think a lot of people could relate to that, you know? I mean, haven't you ever felt like that person?"

"Uh..."

"You don't have to answer that. Pretend that was rhetorical."

"Okay."

"Oh! Bad Sandwiches! Imagine professionally photographed

baguettes with regular sandwich toppings like lettuce and tomato and onion and like, a sauce or whatever, and then something unexpected, like a checkered dish towel. Or a severed hand."

"Oh my, well—"

"Birth Defects of the Animal Kingdom! That's a good one. Yeah, that would be a big seller. It would look like a normal animal calendar, but if you look closer, each animal is slightly deformed—a cross-eyed kitten, or a baby lamb with three legs, or a rabbit with a big tumor."

"Big seller. You think so?"

"Constipated in Cafés could also be quite successful, too. Potentially. I'm less confident about that one. It would be like Crying in Bars, kind of—there's a café scene filled with normal people, and then one person looking really constipated and squirmy and sweaty over a coffee date or alone with their newspaper. Necks of North America! Self explanatory. Holiday Disappointment! I mean, I'll develop all of these further, but what do you think?"

He chewed for a long time, then said, cautiously, "I think...you have a talent for turning otherwise happy situations into...well, quite miserable ones." I sat in sobered silence as he continued to chew, aggressive as ever. I had a hunch that he wasn't talking only about my calendars.

Peter had a point. What else had I turned sour? Our sex, with my jealousy, and my dissatisfaction that he and I could not be together. Then, our friendship. Next, our trust for one another. Each fell, like dominoes. Perhaps I am not so different from the babies in danger of my fledgling calendar project, except there's no baby or traffic, just me—both weapon and target.

I inhaled Peter's subtle criticism, held it in my mouth, considered it, tasted it, ran my tongue over it, swallowed a bit of it, then

blew it out, let it go. Peter led the conversation away from my calendars, apparently afraid to offend me further, and changed the subject to the grocery delivery service he ran with his buddy Jeremiah. We talked about vegetables in great detail, and I grew bored. Killer Kale. Regretful Sex. Lunch Dates from Hades. Grocers of the Midwest. Itchy Skin. More calendars.

Our lunch ended quickly, with Peter dashing off in a great hurry, mumbling something about an important meeting with a big-shot local lettuce supplier. We parted by exchanging a brief hug goodbye on the sidewalk outside the restaurant. We brushed against each other lightly, timidly, without really, fully making contact. Scabies is incredibly contagious, after all, and Peter is not a big risk taker.

Touching the Diseased. There could be Peter, and me, in full-color, May of next year.

FIRECRACKER

Julia Adams

I sold my soul
to a smiling man
for seven firecrackers
and a Twinkie.

Now I will set
alight artificial stars like
I am God
pinpricking the sky.

And with these bangs I
could start a new word
better than this one

or I could unhinge my jaw and
swallow one whole to
replace the spark
that was
lost.

MAGYAR

Andrew McIntyre

We mused over the image of darker, less mobile days when our passports and good humor would not have allowed us to slosh so easily about the continent. We passed under the curved glass threshold of Keleti pályaudvar, and, to our delight, found Budapest brooding and Baroque.

The afternoon rolled in warm, lethargic hours, which we passed meandering through the jerky streets and avoiding the jostling crowds. Ari thought knowing Russian would help us, but the Hungarians were not thrilled with being talked to in Russian – even if the Russian was plodding and self-doubting.

Evening emerged from the alleys. Ari did not want to spring for a room and neither did I, and since neither of us wanted to sleep we had no desire to rent a bed – even if it came with a door that locked.

We didn't realize that what had been the Gersham Palace was now the Four Seasons, and we were pressed against the bar, flanked by Americans who shouted to each other, evidentially assuming that even in a tourist trap hotel no one understood their callous, contemptuous English. Ari and I validated their world views, grumbling gibberish when the guys asked us anything. To the girls, we demurely strung random syllables together, never minding which language we had intended to imitate. We wasted too much time there.

The third bar was crowded. Nothing noteworthy happened at the second. At the third bar, Ari bumped one guy too many times, and they pushed each other around until there were six guys in a bad, drunken mazurka. The girl at my elbow exchanged fluttering glances with the world over my shoulder, then glowered at the bartender until he refilled her glass, so I emptied mine, collected Ari, and we headed out.

At a corner table in an almost dead bar, Ari explained that the girl who had come on strong to me earlier had just been trying to sell me ecstasy. Our problem, we agreed, was that we were on Andrassy út, which was bustling with neckties and cordovan. The kicks to be found there were not cheap, were tour guide-recommended, and had stamps of approval were as official as passports. We drank heavily, made grand plans, and drank more. In Pest the city glowed orange, and we were seeking its older, darker brother, who was perched on the hills across the Danube.

Around one, a deluge of women came in. I had added up our tab (six plus six plus two plus three plus plus four times one and that two plus yeah wait no yeah four) and was going to get Ari to just dash, but he was entertaining a table by channeling Pyotr Leschenko. He was three songs in before a herd of males planted themselves at the table. They all had hair like Velcro pulled tightly over their heads and humorless, hairless faces. We slipped out the back.

We headed toward the bridges but before we crossed, we commandeered a sidewalk table, thinking that the potato pancakes would be good and that the coffee would calm us down. The dishes and cups steamed, and the world had never smelled more inviting. I began to ask Ari if he noticed this when he hushed me and directed my attention to two girls.

Using Hungarian that we had picked up using context clues all day, we invited them for a drink but asked them to choose the place. Their choice was across the river and met no resistance from us. The girls insisted we get a cab, and Ari insisted we pay, and I agreed with everyone because Ari's enthusiasm was on the climb and both the girls were pretty.

Due to an unfortunate lack of German heritage, I am unable to grow a proper handlebar mustache, but I still try and primp and curl, and we did not need a common language to make it a conversation piece.

The girls led us up into Buda and just when I began to wonder if we'd snuck into Austria we shuffled into a basement where the ceilings were low, the walls were close, and everyone around me loomed large. On the dais, when the musicians moved and dodged the air shafts and pipes, it looked like they were dancing. The band wore masquerade masks: gilded, long-nosed, scarlet, ivory. Their mouths barely moved as they sang, but they crooned their consonant clusters into something audible. I have always been willing to give foreign pop music the benefit of the doubt, believing that it is noble until translated.

We lost one of the girls early on, but the other demonstrated that it was nothing to worry about, and the night moved along. Ari had a universal charm – strong, silent – and he bought drinks by the square foot without grimacing from their burn or at the check. He locked up the remaining girl.

The music was exotic, and I occupied myself, pursuing a few leads and not spending too much. A text from Ari proclaimed that we had a place, but he would need two hours. More or less. I knew. He included the address.

I recognized phrases and the urgent delivery from earlier and assumed that another girl was trying to sell me ecstasy. When I went to the bathroom, I rubbed grime off the mirror to see if I looked like I needed any. I came to no conclusion, but I was open-minded.

Back in Pest, I entwined my fingers into a fence along the Danube Promenade. Streetcar 2 passed again and again, ushering the same frenzied blur of featureless faces. I chased shadows, but they were too skilled and evaded me. Across the river Buda Castle's stone walls were wide and withholding, even basked in floodlights. I was stricken with a hankering for goulash but all the restaurant windows I found were dark. I was alone in a city of floodlights and streetcars and windows, and I screamed for help in English, then what I thought was Hungarian, then even tried Nadsat. Rain began to fall, making the benches wet and the covered areas smell hot and fishy. I led myself to the address Ari had ~~texted~~ ^{texted} me.

The building had been a fashionable row house when the residents paid taxes to the Hapsburgs, but a few decades ago it had been partitioned sloopier than Poland. She must have rented her place for flea market storage during the week. Turkish silk and Moroccan lace melted off the walls. Propaganda posters leered at coronation souvenirs, which crowned chipped bureaus. Meticulous magazine cut-outs were pasted onto the lower halves of mirrors. Nothing was favored. Nothing was excluded.

The three of us were starting to sober up. We could recognize it in each other, so we launched a campaign through her cupboards. None of our glasses matched each other or were designed with what we were drinking in mind.

She took a call in a bored, acquiescent voice, and when she hung up, we all managed to understand that her boyfriend was on his way. Ari wanted to leave, but she did not want him to, held onto his collar and belt, used urgent promises to persuade him, so he and I holed up in the garret with canned pear halves and a deck of cards. The garret was no less crammed than the rest of her apartment, and I humored the image of just hiding among the lopsided chairs and trunks in her living room, dressing up as mannequins with her war souvenirs and carpets Looney Tunes-style.

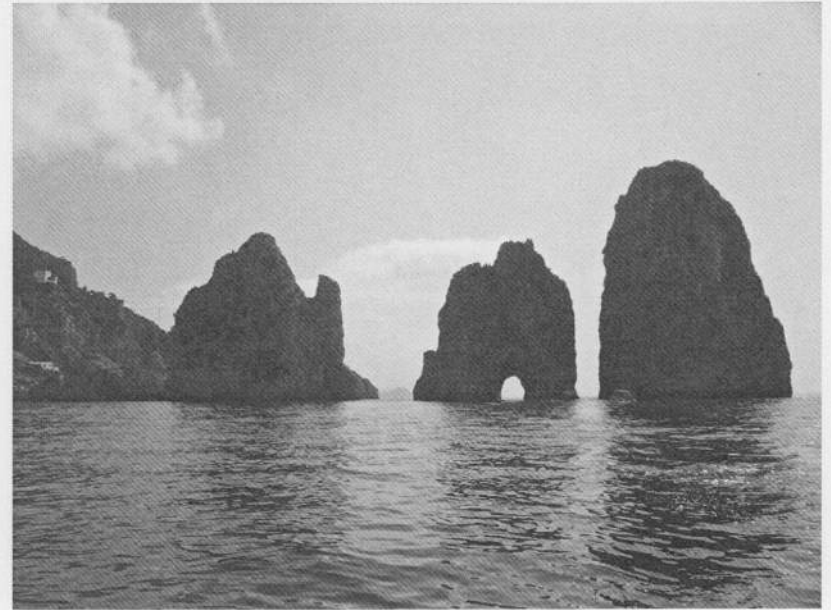
Once the pear halves were gone and we finally realized the deck of cards was missing the Queen of Spades and that were three Sevens of Hearts, I asked if Ari knew how long we were expected to stay.

Ari handed me a throw pillow, and I squinted suspiciously at his silhouette until he fell asleep.

I awoke the next morning alone. Ari was in the other room, wearing a silk dressing gown, smoking, looking like Cary Grant and very aware of it. She arrived, spry and bustling with velvety vowels, with a large coffee, and we divided it and drank it out the glasses we had used the night before.

A WRITING PROMPT

Dame Maggie Smith has ingested a radioactive turnip. She is going on a rampage. Describe the fight and destruction that ensues when Hugh Grant consumes a cursed fennel bulb and wages battle. What will happen when Colin Firth exposes their similarities and they unite to become Great Britain's First Vegetable Avengers?



Lauren McGee



Claire Fields

JUICY

Elissa Zimmer

It was day one of my Eating Healthier Non-Diet. I had finished working for the day and was in the kitchen trying to find something good to eat. When I had decided on my snack I went to the living room to put my feet up. I flung myself down onto the sofa and used a spoon to scoop out the sweet green inside of a kiwi. Kiwis are one of my favorite fruits, and I had forgotten how good they were. It was juuuust ripe, tasting both sweet and tart at the same time. Much to my disappointment, the kiwi was gone too quickly. What else had been in the fruit bowl?

I returned to my relaxed position on the couch a few minutes later with a nectarine, another of my favorites. I was taking the first bite when I heard David's key turn in the lock. I was being as much of a pig as I could be eating fruit—the juice was running out of my mouth and down my hand as I took each bite.

“Hello, love,” I said to David as he walked into the living room, seemingly for the perfunctory welcome-home kiss. Instead he gave me an intense stare and didn't say a word. He took my arm and gently pulled me nearer to him. His eyes watched my hand as he slowly licked a line of nectarine juice that was threatening to spill farther down my arm. His intensely blue eyes made contact with mine and I felt a shiver go down my body and settle into my cunt.

He sat on the hassock opposite me. I had unconsciously straightened a bit and leaned forward at this action. His face came toward mine and his tongue touched the corner of my mouth, tenderly licking the nectarine juice from it. His lips locked on mine, a taste of the fruit and him. Then he continued licking, slowly and sensuously farther out from my mouth, running his tongue up my neck before finding my mouth again. Goosebumps were all I felt and I forgot the half-eaten nectarine in my hand until David took a bite. Munching away, he stood up. I looked up at him, feeling a bit help-

less at all six feet two inches of him, in his stylish grey suit, the top button of his shirt undone, curly chest hair poking out. I longed to run my hand through his thick, dark curls.

“Come here,” he said, offering me a hand up and making me start from my fantasies. “I need a snack, too. Let’s go to the kitchen.”

In the kitchen, I had just about sat down when David pushed me against the counter and began kissing me furiously. I met his passion with my own, nuzzling his neck with its hint of stubble as he sucked my fingers one at a time, getting every last drop of fruit juice. I pushed his jacket off him and it fell somewhere on the floor and suddenly both of our shirts were undone and I was struggling out of my trousers. Before I got to my panties David had hefted me onto the counter and was pulling my bra and panties off, kneading my breasts and sucking at my nipples.

“Lean back and scoot to the edge,” he commanded. “Spread your legs a little.” I did as I was told and spread myself for him and he took a second to admire the snack he was about to devour. Licking his lips his head came to my cunt. His hands ran up the undersides of my thighs and he pulled my legs a bit further apart and higher in the air. I moaned as his tongue lapped at the fruit juices he couldn’t get anywhere else. And then...my stomach growled.

David stopped, and looked up at me. I grinned shyly at him. “I worked through lunch...” I tried to explain. David turned to the fruit bowl and selected a rather luscious looking pear. He took a bite, and closed his eyes for a second, savoring the taste. I must have looked a little jealous of the pear because he turned to me.

“Sweetheart, the pear has nothing on you.” He bent over me, handing me the pear as I took my turn to lick a trail of juice from his chin and kiss him. “Eat the pear,” he said, and shoved my legs apart. I cried out between bites, making a mess of my face, but I knew that David would take care of it. He began to lick and flick my clit with his tongue at the perfect speed and the pear rind fell from my hands as they moved to grab bunches of his curls. I pulled at his hair and pushed myself up at his mouth.

“Fuck, David, harder, please,” I made out in gasps and he acquiesced. I wrapped my legs around him and pushed his head into me as I began to come. Every muscle in my body clenched and then released and I was left on the kitchen counter breathing heavily and feeling dazed. Sometimes I come so hard that I don’t know how to function afterward, and this was one of those times. I had rather forgotten David’s presence until he kissed his way up my stomach and was face to face with me. I gave him a pleasantly exhausted smile. He smiled back and kissed all the pear juice away.

Nuzzling my neck with his nose he said, “Mmmmmm, I’m so full.”

PURSES

[to Elissa]

Claire Fields

I'll look through your purse and
you look through mine,
said the new friend,
and one by one we'll extract each other's
wallets and checkbooks and
tampons
and you will discover the small pouch
that holds my chapsticks and I will
find that ticket stub from Canada and
the red and yellow paint samples
whose significance you've forgotten
and even though this place is
oh so public
we will hold each tucked-away item
up to the light,
examine it, question it,
and return it to its proper spot.
Please
do not be alarmed
when I flip through the pages of
your small notepad, when I scan
the to-do lists and grocery lists and
playlists for CDs
you never got around to making.
I do it because I want to know you
and because I want to be known
and because,
she said,
because nothing should be kept
so private.

UNDECLARED

Allison Epstein

I was born with a deep-seated distaste for euphemisms.
No more tiptoeing carefully-carefully-don't-wake-the-sleeping-
dragon
around twelve-gauge truths,
No more wolves in sheep's words.
No more hiding from the Gorgon gaze of reality;
let it turn me to stone if it dares.
All I want is to trap the theorems,
imprison the postulates,
and know exactly what I'm dealing
with.
But I'm having none of that.
Tumbling head over head over head
down a rabbithole of nightshade and asymmetry
the mirror curves in on itself
into a warped five-dimensional plane that converges on a
point
of
no
re
turn
turning turning turning turning
turning into a hieroglyph of
myself

I can't even pretend to know what to call it.

The backwards girl holds her cryptic answers

close to the chest.

There is a wolf lurking on the other side of the glass

wearing my face but using its own voice

-my, my, my, what big blind eyes you have-

waiting, wondering, crafting riddles out of dryer lint and
driftwood

questions that I cannot answer

without dancing in circles around the flickering flames

rising higher

and higher

until

they lick the threshold of my
homeless, faceless, freezing future.

I stare into the abyss that stares back and

I wonder about the identity of absolute zero,

of cabbages and kings,

and whether absolute truths lie absolutely.

STORM

Daniela Edwards

I probably should have expected trouble when Melanie stormed into my apartment, hair mussed and eyes red, not even saying "hello." Darren. I don't even know why she's asking for my help of all people.

I guess I wasn't paying close enough attention at the time, though, and I said something to that effect, because she sighed – and because she was Melanie, it was a production like everything else, a great big gusty heave of air like she was responsible for so much and just taking the time to explain this little thing to me was putting a serious kink in her plans.

"He listens to you." Like an accusation – and it's not true – but it doesn't make any difference really, not when she's already flopped down on my couch and is fumbling for a cigarette. "You can make him talk."

Like she thought I was Dr. Phil. I'm an office manager, I want to say. A freaking secretary. So I took a couple psych courses the year I met you, but I didn't need them to know perfectly well that Melanie, being Melanie, wasn't actually worried about whatever Darren's problem might be, and if I actually did what she was telling me to, if I went and talked to Darren for her, I'd come back to find her still in my apartment, in a tearful frenzy because I'd left her alone, and there'd be cigarette ash all over the carpet.

Screw this. At least Darren's less predictable. "Put that out," I tell her, heading for the door.

* * *

Just wait til you meet her, Darren wrote. He told me I'd absolutely love her. So *of course*, I replied, *can't wait*.

I'd gotten involved with a soldier outreach program my freshman year of college – I needed volunteer hours to keep one of my scholarships and my dad was ex-Army, so I guess it just seemed like a decent fit. The point of the thing was just to send off a few postcards thanking servicemen posted in Iraq and Afghanistan for what they were doing. I spent a couple hours a week sorting and stamping cards, and I was more than a bit surprised to get a battered envelope containing a reply to my own postcard in the mail. We'd been told not to ask for or expect replies of any kind. Basic supplies like stamps and paper could get scarce way out there, but really the reason was time – who could blame a soldier ignoring a nice letter from a stranger when he could be writing to his girlfriend, or his parents, or his little brother?

Darren's note wasn't much, really. Mostly just a series of questions. Did I read? Or did I like video games? What about sports – did I watch any? Play any?

I can't stand the idea of not getting to know someone who took time for me, I guess.

Then he pre-emptively answered my return questions: only if audio books count, anything but shooters, and only boxing. What could I do? I responded: yes (mostly sci-fi), sometimes (I'm terrible, but I like playing with friends), and not really (I can never remember the rules for anything). And I found a few questions for him, and we went back and forth for two years like that, without ever meeting in person – mostly snail letters, but occasionally he'd send off a quick email when he had access to a computer. Usually kind of a “ha-ha, haven't died yet, actually pretty quiet here lately.” It was only in emails that he talked about what he did on a daily basis, and that in couched terms, barely skirting the edges. I didn't even know he'd been promoted, until Melanie caught me addressing a letter wrong.

Melanie was who he wrote about mostly, and he introduced us in a kind of roundabout way. I knew her name, of course, and that he'd proposed to her the first time he got leave stateside – still standing in the airport, groggy from the plane ride which had been delayed by three hours, and knowing Melanie now I can imagine her reaction. She would've loved it, the stunned onlookers muttering to themselves, pointing at the amazing new couple *right there, see, he's proposing!* So her reaction would have been broadcast for their benefit, not Darren's: the gasp, hand fluttering over her mouth, drawing back away from the ring like she just can't believe what she's seeing, and her eventual response probably just a shade louder than necessary. Applause? Almost certainly.

Their apartment door was unlocked, and I let myself in and took off my boots. I shrugged out of my jacket, which was nearly soaked through. Their building was only three blocks away, but it had started raining as soon as I was too far away from my own apartment to make it worth going back for an umbrella, but still close enough to my own place for me to get plenty wet. Just my luck. I found a spare hanger in their closet and hung it up.

I'm here, I felt like saying, but I could already hear Darren moving around in the back room. Probably cleaning. Darren's one of those people who's always cleaning and organizing, yet his space never seems to get any less cluttered.

“Melanie, I'm not ready to talk yet, at least have the decency to– oh.” I waved at him a little, which seemed to dispel his exasperation somewhat. He'd started growing his hair as soon as he was discharged, and it fell over his forehead in lank oily tendrils. His eyes seemed a little glazed, and he hadn't shaved in a few days. He was wearing a battered pair of plaid pajama pants, and after a few seconds he disappeared and reemerged from the doorway pulling a shirt over his head. He muttered an apology, then an accusation. Of course Melanie had sent me.

“Chased me out more like,” and saying that made him half-smile, and he didn’t look nearly so tired when he did. I asked if I could come in – I mean, I was already in the apartment, that was no big deal, but ever since they’d converted the spare bedroom into a studio for him, that had been his space. I’d never gone in uninvited. He nodded and gestured me in, jerking his head toward the interior.

“Wow,” I said, not able to stop myself. “Melanie got to it, huh?”

Melanie and I went to the same university – she was in the acting school, while I took business courses. I just knew she was an actress, of course; didn’t know we lived in the same city until she showed up at my dorm holding one of Darren’s letters, and introduced herself as...what was it? “Darren’s fiancée and your new bestie.” That’s sort of how things are with Melanie: you’re lucky if you can keep up, much less have a choice in any of it. I’d pulled an all-nighter the evening before and had crashed right after my exam, and she barely gave me time to get dressed before dragging me to Starbucks, buying me a triple-shot, and begging to know everything about me. I think she was convinced that I was somehow a lot more interesting than I am.

I wrote to Darren about meeting her, and his next letter came back full of apologies. *She can be really...enthusiastic sometimes.*

It wasn’t a problem, I told him. Honestly I probably needed someone to shake me out of my routine a little. I didn’t have much of a social life outside class and volunteer work – which didn’t really count since I pretty much stuck to sorting paperwork. The next time Darren had leave Melanie showed up at six in the morning to drive me to the airport to meet him with her – as a surprise. “He’ll love it,” she told me, and I caved.

Darren ran right up to her and folded her in his arms, kissing her madly, and I know that’s something you only ever hear in crappy romance novels but really there was no other way to describe it, I swear. And it was awkward standing right there and realizing that

while I’d seen plenty of photos of him, courtesy Melanie, I’d never actually sent him one, and he had no idea who I was or why I was staring at him and Melanie practically making out in the waiting area.

“Surprise!” Melanie said, a minute too late.

“It’s you?” And I remember that it was kind of a question, the way Darren said it, and his face was flushed but he was half-smiling – I’d learn that was usual for him, that a big toothy grin only ever showed up when he was drunk or faking it. “Nice to meet you,” and I shook hands with the young man I’d been exchanging letters with for over a year.

I nudged the brilliant orange bean bag – beaded in bright yellow spirals that hurt my eyes a little under the studio lamp – with one toe. This had to be Melanie’s.

Darren nodded, rubbing his eyes like he hadn’t gotten enough sleep. He probably hadn’t, I mused, glancing at the half-naked canvas behind him. It was gleaming unevenly with wet paint. I turned back to my corner, which featured a small silver CD player, a large incense burner shaped like a tree with eyes, and a set of chimes the size of my fist.

Melanie had decided that it wasn’t fair for Darren to have the second bedroom all to himself, and set up a meditation corner for herself.

“And now when I work, she comes in here and plays music and won’t leave until I do.”

I nodded slowly, still gazing at the spiral pillow. So Darren had been getting up in the middle of the night to work on his final project. He didn’t get it, he told me. She was so supportive of him going to art school at first, and I nodded again, remembering the day she

told me. It meant another Starbucks run, with a giant no-foam-no-sugar-flavored monstrosity for her and a plain drip for me while she told me just how *talented* Darren was and how lucky she felt to be near someone so inspired and even then I thought that the first thing she'd want him to paint – the first thing he *would* paint, since she'd ask as soon as he had the materials – was a portrait of her. But she was worried. He used to be so carefree and relaxed before the, you know, before he joined the army. And now he wasn't always sleeping at night and he was talking about maybe seeing a therapist; did I think that would help? I sipped my coffee and nodded, not that Mel really needed the encouragement. She never did.

And he was always fidgeting, she complained. Always cleaning up, washing his hands constantly.

"He's been like that as long as I've known him," I interjected.

"Exactly," she said. "He used to have the biggest smile."

I frowned at the little yoga setup. Melanie knew perfectly well that Darren hated being watched no matter what he was doing, sketching a landscape or painting or just cartooning. Even I knew that, and she'd had opportunity to get a lot closer to him.

"I don't get it," he kept on saying.

Idiot, I thought. She's just jealous.

I needed to look at something other than the little section of Melanie in Darren's studio, so I turned and ended up face-to-face with his work in progress. The canvas was huge, almost as tall as I was and at least as wide, and I saw now that it wasn't half-untouched, like I'd thought at first, but merely that the edges were carefully shaded in tans, browns, yellows, so that it still seemed blank, but *aged* somehow. And in the center was a swirling mass of clouds and electricity and angry smears of searing white, and just

above that, a set of eyes without irises or pupils.

Darren told me, watching my face, that was what he was working on now. He gestured toward the corkboard on the adjacent wall, where he pinned his reference photos. Most were of Melanie in various poses and costumes: one I recognized from her part in *MacBeth*, and a few were of her naked. One on the corner, though, I knew: my face. Just my face, and Darren had offset the eyes with a rectangle of black sharpie.

"Your eyes are better for this kind of thing," Darren said.

"That what you and Melanie are fighting about?" But of course they weren't really fighting; they never argued, Melanie just did what she wanted and expected Darren to agree, and then it all came out, and Darren was sitting on the floor with his head in his hands. "She expects me to be like I was before and I can't, no matter how much she asks, and she's never been so goddamned *jealous* of anything.

"And I can't feel anything anymore," he says and my stomach goes cold. Outside the thunder rumbles again and I'm vaguely aware that I'm going to get soaked all over again on the walk home, and dammit Melanie is still there; I'll have to deal with her. Darren was gripping his left wrist with his right hand until the knuckles went white, like he was trying to stop it from getting away. "Nothing feels right anymore and she just can't get it, that I'm not like I was," and suddenly he's grabbing at my sleeve and trying to pull me close to him, and I jerk away, feeling tears start because screw this; I know Melanie and I know Darren too and if I only knew one of them there wouldn't be a problem.

I ran outside and realized a block down that I'd forgotten my jacket, that the rain was coming harder than ever, but then I decided I didn't care, and I walked the rest of the way back to my apartment on the edge of the sidewalk, avoiding the inviting awnings of the shops that were just starting to open for the day.

Melanie was waiting for me, and her cigarette was lit and she looked just about to start into me when she stopped. "You're soaked," and she for once sounds a little concerned. "What happened?"

"Nothing," I tell her.

"And put that damn thing out."



Jaclyn Tolchin



Jess Singer

TIME

Julie Cruz

In the bliss of youth, it sweeps past the mind
Which, playful and careless, gives it no thought.
But swiftly will Fate the gold thread unwind
Until passing years begin to pull taut

This precious strand, now strained by false worries
And doubts, petty tears, and the mounting stress
Of futile forethought--yet by it scurries,
A frenzied drumbeat that nevertheless

Fades with age, for bittersweet memories
Nourish the Present, though Past cherished't not.
Onward we look to divine centuries
Of unending peace that a whole lifetime sought.

Oh! how both cruelty and kindness do rhyme
Throughout life's never-ending song of Time.

TO THE PARENTS OF:

Carly Veverka

“We are linked by blood, and blood is memory without language.” –Joyce Carol Oates

Look at the slide and tell me what you see.
Dominique looks at the slide and says she sees blood.
We are told it is the father figure,
the dominant male life form.
I look down at my paper and read the word demon.

I see a moth, I see a puppy, I see a puddle, a blob, a chicken nugget,
I see the Eiffel Tower.
I'm trying not to think too much.
In the end I see poodles where I am supposed to see my mother.
This is a joke, I tell Dominique, and we laugh like nothing has made
an impression the way these impressions should as we learn
too much about each other's personal lives.

I can't help imagining myself on a couch
the way they are in movies and cartoons,
even though my memory keeps getting in the way.

A hotel room turned office.
A desk where the bed should be, empty, the walls empty;
a sign on the door made of paper,
like this paper, with lines.

I say lines and I cringe when I find I am thicker than I feel,
if that makes sense.
I want you to make sense of me.
Instead I've forgotten you ever existed;
that I existed with you,
like that,
there,

here, in this classroom turned dungeon,
the ticking clock a reminder
like the unpaid bill that comes through my mail slot once every
three months-

TO THE PARENTS OF:

I open it because I don't want them to feel responsible,
because I don't want them to think too much.
(I'm still trying not to think too much.)

I tuck it under my report card on the kitchen counter and hope that
they won't notice.

FLAME GLUTTONY

Suzanne MacLaren

Let manners and other chains be put off;
Your mind swims freely through the rough-fire dreams.
Become your own slave as passion begins
To guide your hands.

Watch the ravenous fire grow stronger;
Let their sensual rhythm glaze your eyes.
Fingers and flames will never cease,
And your mind melts into heady night.

Aphrodite could not imagine this feast,
As sweat and hunger mix as one in this
Display of gluttony. This shameless glory
Burns the night sky even darker.

Too soon does the music stop, crescendo
Reached, and the sated wolf leaves the
Innocents to faint away in shock.
The flames are now ash, but the heart still burns.

PRIOR TO THE FIRST LADY

Gaby Martin

She had dated the President when she was young and slim. Later, as she began to age and lose muscle tone while he steadily transformed into the most powerful man in the world, what it meant to be the President's Ex-Girlfriend hit her full force. It was not a particularly gratifying title to hold, nor could it easily be replaced by one more impressive: The Girl who Kissed a Blacksmith She Met a Half Hour Before Skinny Dipping in a Lake with Him During College, or, The Knife Salesman's Wife, did not compare in prestige, though they were equally accurate descriptions of her. Maybe if she had managed to become The Chairman's Mistress, or, The Pope's First Sexual Partner Before He Took a Vow of Celibacy, things would have been different. But being the President's Ex-Girlfriend was a permanent reminder of all of the opportunities she had lost, all of the important people she could be meeting instead of her son's teacher at fall conferences, all of the gourmet dishes at thousand-dollar-a-plate benefit dinners that were being daintily eaten by another woman, all of the non-profit organizations she could have started with her elevated position of power, all of the nice haircuts and sassy suits the government would have given her. It was a reminder of rejection. It was a wound that ran deep.

The few close friends with whom she shared the single most haunting secret of her past were impressed and surprised, ("Wow, he dated you?") curious, ("Does he have a big dick?"—a question to which she usually responded, "I'd rather not go into detail.") and ultimately, sympathetic. ("You could have been the First Lady... that's really too bad.")

The current First Lady had exceptionally large teeth—her first flaw— and when she was occasionally shown on the evening news hunched over the desks of poor children in Inner-City America, she always displayed impressive cleavage. It mattered not that the current First Lady was a highly intelligent and capable woman— the product of careful breeding on the Eastern shore of the country— who spoke six languages and carefully navigated international humanitarian work with ease and enthusiasm. In fact, it was this— that the First Lady was undoubtedly more intelligent than her husband and would, as the general public believed, take his place one fast-approaching day—that led our protagonist to feel so very wretched. With the remarkable specimen that was the current First Lady as her competition, she never really had a fair chance at maintaining the President’s affections.

Yet as difficult as it was to admit that she had not been good enough for the President, knowing the details about him that she had extracted during their brief involvement, no matter how benign they were, made her feel powerful. She and the President hadn’t spoken in over two decades, but she assumed that the CIA had checked up on her, knew everything about her, had a folder with her information inside of it linking her to the commander-in-chief. She never knew how they did it, or when, but she was sure it had happened. She was convinced that the man in the dark suit at the grocery store whom she passed in the feminine hygiene aisle had been trailing her, writing down her preferred tampon brand for her file just to be thorough. She was certain that cars followed her; that the new bank teller was an undercover agent; that her children might be kidnapped because of their distant link to such a prominent world leader.

She hoped the President regretted ever ending their relationship. She hoped it gnawed at his presidential flesh. She wished she would have taken more pictures of them together, or had made more of an impression. She was more adventurous then, years before she married the knife salesman; they could have had so much fun together. Was it difficult to digest a mediocre dinner in front of the televi-

sion and see her ex-lover give the State of the Union Address? Did it hurt, to look at his crisp suits in photos and lament her frumpy garb? Did she look at her crow’s feet in the mirror and think, I am old. And I could have been much more. What did I do wrong? Did she want to warp time, to go back to that corner of the school playground where he had asked her to be his girlfriend for that week in April in the fourth grade, take her nine-year-old self by the shoulders, shake her, and tell her, “You will regret this all of your life”?

To all of the above: yes.



Caroline Laman

THE SLEEPER

Olivia Postelli

Every Thursday while Nadine scrubs bed pans, Tommy plays the ponies.

She works a double shift and he puts down two crumpled twenties on the horse with the best name. Today that horse is number three, Calloway's Run.

The betting takes place at the back of a small bar called O'Dowd's. Kerry, the bartender, dated Tommy's older sister, Tess, in high school, and he still drives the 1971 Camaro that used to pull into their driveway, tires squealing, on Saturday nights. Every time he hands Tommy his seven and seven, Tommy tries to merge this balding man behind the bar with the smiling face in the powder blue tux standing next to Tess in the prom picture that's still on their mother's mantle. He never quite can, and Kerry becomes a high school hero with a beer belly, a star pitcher with a receding hairline.

Tommy winces as he tosses back the Seagram's; he always chews the ice.

He never picks a horse to win – only to show – and he never tries for the trifecta. He figures if he picks a horse with a good enough name, with 10:1 odds, he can make four hundred dollars in five minutes, and he if loses, he's forty bucks down and Nadine doesn't have to know. Today Calloway's Run places, and Tommy watches as his forty disappears in the drawer behind the bar and the board is erased for the eight o'clock race. He sighs and Kerry slides another drink his way.

He's on his third seven and seven when Michael Keller walks into O'Dowd's, flanked by Keith Breen and some guy that must be

one of Keller's brothers-in-law. The trio takes the table in the corner, to the left of the pool table, and the brother-in-law orders three beers from the bar.

Keller married Shelley Gorski which means that the brother-in-law is probably Joey G who, briefly, played first base for the Lowell Spinners. Tommy remembers, now, the way the neighborhood used to talk about Joe like he was famous, instead of just some minor league ball player who would end up in construction. Here, south and east of the Fort Point Channel, everyone ends up in construction.

Tommy doesn't hate Michael Keller. Sure, he dated Nadine, and, before that, he broke Tess's heart after Kerry left her to spend two years in the National Guard. He doesn't hate Keller, but he doesn't want to buy him a drink either, and that's exactly what he knows will happen when he hears him shout, "Hey, if it isn't Tommy Costa," across the bar.

Keller slides onto the stool next to him and claps his hand over Tommy's shoulder like they're friends instead of quasi-acquaintances that only know each other well enough for a brief nod after mass at Saint Vincent's on Sundays. He calls to the bartender, "Hey O'Dowd! Another of whatever Tommy-boy is drinking and another beer for me. Just put it on his tab."

Tommy can't really afford the three he's already had, especially after his forty bucks didn't become four hundred. Kerry knows this, and Keller probably does, too, but it doesn't stop the bartender from setting the drinks in front of them and it didn't stop Keller from ordering the damn drinks in the first place.

"I was sorry to hear about Tanner, man. I never thought I'd see that place go out of business."

Tommy had worked spray painting car doors for Tanner Finishing since high school. He started out running errands for one of the

foremen, and by the time the place went under he was the foreman. Nadine is a nurse, and she took on some extra shifts at the hospital to try to make ends meet. She wants to put the boys in public school, to save the tuition, but Tommy won't let her. He'd rather ask Tess for the money. Hell, he'll even ask Father White if he has to.

Some mornings he watches as Nadine brushes her hair in the bathroom mirror and stares at the flash of gold on her ring finger. The ring had been his grandmother's, and it had to be worth at least one mortgage payment. He imagines asking her for it, knows that she'd say: "You take this ring, Tommy Costa, and you can fucking keep it." She would cross her arms and dare him to ask her again, but Tommy would kiss her instead, and she'd let him. He'd say: "I found a job today." He'd keep saying it over and over again in between kisses. "I found a job today. I found a job today." And that would be enough.

Tommy doesn't say anything, and Keller raises his glass. "To Tanner Finishing. May she rest in peace."

He clinks glasses with Keller, but he sets his down without taking a drink. "What?" Keller smiles a tight smile. "Is Tommy Costa too good to drink with me?"

He still doesn't say anything, and Keller seems to let it go. "So, did you win today?"

"Lost forty bucks."

"That's 'cuz you never go big. You gotta bet the trifecta. Go big or go home, man."

Tommy thinks about junior year of high school, about the day he walked Nadine from her physics class to her locker practicing, "Do you maybe want to go out with me sometime?" in his head the whole way. But Keller was waiting there, leaning against the blue metal door and holding a bouquet of cheap gas station flowers. Tess had been an entire summer ago then. There had been Autumn

Pelkey, Jenny Larsen, and Mary-Lynn Fellbaum since. Still, Tommy saw Nadine smile, and he knew it was over.

“I’m gonna head out,” he had said, handing Nadine her lab binder.

“Thanks, Tommy.” She took it, smiled at him, and turned back to Keller.

“See you at practice, man!” Keller shouted after him.

Tommy told Coach Baranski that he didn’t feel well, and he took the long way home to avoid the baseball diamond. He walked along the Channel, inhaling the exhaust fumes from the cars speeding past. The cold of the guardrail seeped through his jacket and made him shiver as he leaned against it, like Michael Keller against that locker. Digging through his backpack, he found the pencil Nadine had dropped in math that he’d picked up and put away for safe-keeping. A purple hair band was wrapped around the end, near the eraser, and there were bite marks in the wood, yellow paint chipped away. It almost-twirled in the air as he tossed it over the side, and it hit the water with a satisfying splash. It was four years before Tommy tried again.

“Bet big, lose big,” he says and shrugs, and Keller laughs.

“You always were too cautious. That’s why you married Nadine, right? She’s a cautious girl.”

Tommy almost laughs. For once, Keller is wrong. He married Nadine because she had an easy smile and made him laugh. He likes the way she wears his faded Red Sox sweatshirt to the boys’ football games, and he thinks it’s cute how she hates to cook, but loves to wash dishes. He likes that he knows her – knows that even though she asks for his opinion on what color to paint the upstairs bathroom, she’ll do what she wants anyway. Mostly, he loves her for the double shifts, the way her hair smells like ninety-nine cent

shampoo, the coupon scrapbook, the boys’ homemade backpacks, and the cancelled subscription to Redbook.

He doesn’t say this to Keller. Instead he says, “What do you want, Keller?”

“Geez man, I’m just trying to get you to live a little. No harm in that. I’d give you a job down at the site if we had any openings, you know that, right? You know I would.”

And Tommy does. Keller inherited his uncle’s construction company, and Keith Breen and Joe Gorski help him manage the big projects like the renovation of the old Radisson last spring. By rights, Keller shouldn’t even be in O’Dowd’s. He’d moved over to Dorchester two months ago, and from where Tommy’s sitting, it might as well be Beacon Hill. Still, he knows that if Keller had any jobs, he’d probably throw one Tommy’s way.

“I know,” he says with a nod.

“Good.” Keller claps him on the shoulder again and moves to slide off the barstool.

Tommy doesn’t know why he does it. Maybe it’s to impress Keller, but it’s also for another reason that Tommy can’t touch the same way he can’t touch the forty he already lost or the way he won’t be able to touch his car when it gets repossessed because he’s three months behind on the payments. Nadine will kill him.

“Go big or go home, yeah?”

Keller stays where he is and grins. “How much you got?”

He has one hundred and twenty dollars, and it’s supposed to buy groceries.

“A hundred even,” he says. Even if he loses it, he can still pick up

milk, bread, and bananas on the way home.

“You better pick your horses. Next race is in ten minutes,” the bartender says, pushing a pen and paper at him.

Tommy doesn't even look at the names. He picks number four to win, number seven to place, and number eight to show – 2:1, 6:1, and 10:1. If things go his way, he'll walk out of the bar with enough money to pay off his tab, buy groceries for the next month, and get Nadine that new slip cover she wants for the couch in the den. He doesn't think about what he's going to tell her if he loses.

Keith and Joe head over and take seats next to Keller. Kerry looks at his wager, and raises his eyebrow. “A trifecta?”

“You only live once,” Tommy says, but it isn't really Tommy. It's someone who risks a hundred bucks on a horse race when he can't scrape together his kids' tuition. It's someone with bravado and bluster and some other “b” word that Tommy doesn't really have. It's someone who didn't wait to ask out the girl. It's not Tommy; it's Michael Keller.

“You only lose a hundred bucks once,” Kerry says, but takes the money anyway. Keller is grinning, and Tommy is excited. He's going to win this one.

The starting shot has never been louder. The horses are off, and Tommy's grip on the edge of the bar tightens as number four takes the lead. It's over in minutes that feel like seconds, and number four does come in first. Number eight even shows, but seven doesn't place. It's number two instead, Cruising Down to Glencoe – the horse with the best name.

The guys all apologize, and Joe offers to buy his next drink. Tommy says no thanks, that Nadine will want him home soon. He's at the door when they switch over to the nine o'clock news.

It's cold in the parking lot, and Tommy has twenty bucks to his name. He's almost to his car when he hears, “Wait up,” shouted from across the parking lot.

Tommy slows and Keller catches up. “Here,” he says as he puts a hundred dollar bill in Tommy's outstretched palm. “Take it. You need it.”

“Fuck you, man,” he says, shaking his head; he's never been so mad in his life. “I don't need your charity.” He fumbles with his keys, and he drops them onto the blacktop. It's Keller who bends down to pick them up.

He won't give let it go. “It's not charity.” Keller's face is split by a sly grin when he says, “It's an apology. For all those time I made out with your girl.”

Tommy still shakes his head.

“And your sister.”

Tommy almost takes it, then, but grabs his keys instead.

“What are you going to tell her?” Keller shoves the bill into his back pocket. “What are you going to tell Nadine?” he asks angrily.

“See you around, Michael,” he says as he gets into his car and puts the key in the ignition.

Tommy drives away from O'Dowd's, leaving Michael Keller standing alone in the parking lot, and follows the Channel home. He is one hundred and forty dollars lighter.



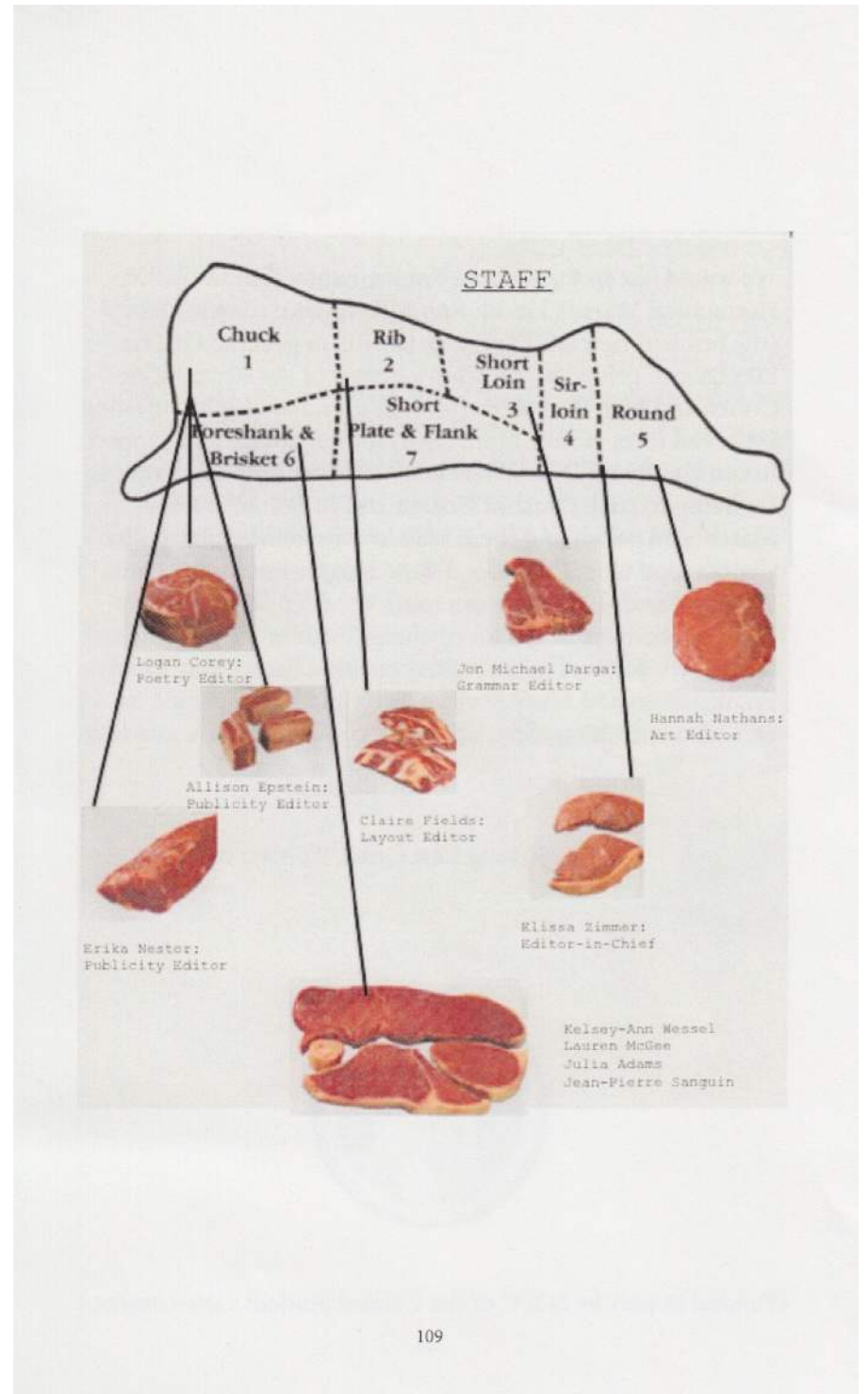
Hannah Nathans

Two years before it was stolen,
that sky-blue minivan
drove up to the corner
of Willis and Cass;
parked itself halfway
between Avalon and the Co-op.

Toasted rye and pumpernickel
wafted through the screened half
of Avalon's soft wood door,
even then swinging back and forth,
hinges creaking
because the last thing they got was a lunch break.

On the other side
the foreboding metal
storm door with the bright
steel knob hid
roasted sesame and
homegrown peanut butter.
Bulk tubs lined cinder block walls,
healthy food that tastes a lot less
to an eight year old enticed inside
by the jungle chocolate
(from cacao harvested
responsibly in the Amazon)
at the checkout line.

This day I sit
in the sky-blue minivan
as the motor ticks its heat away
and the windows frost over
slowly in January air.
A man with arms until his elbows
offers his services
as a windshield washer,
his stub knocking
on the window
so I can't ignore him.



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So long East Quad, it's been brilliant!



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