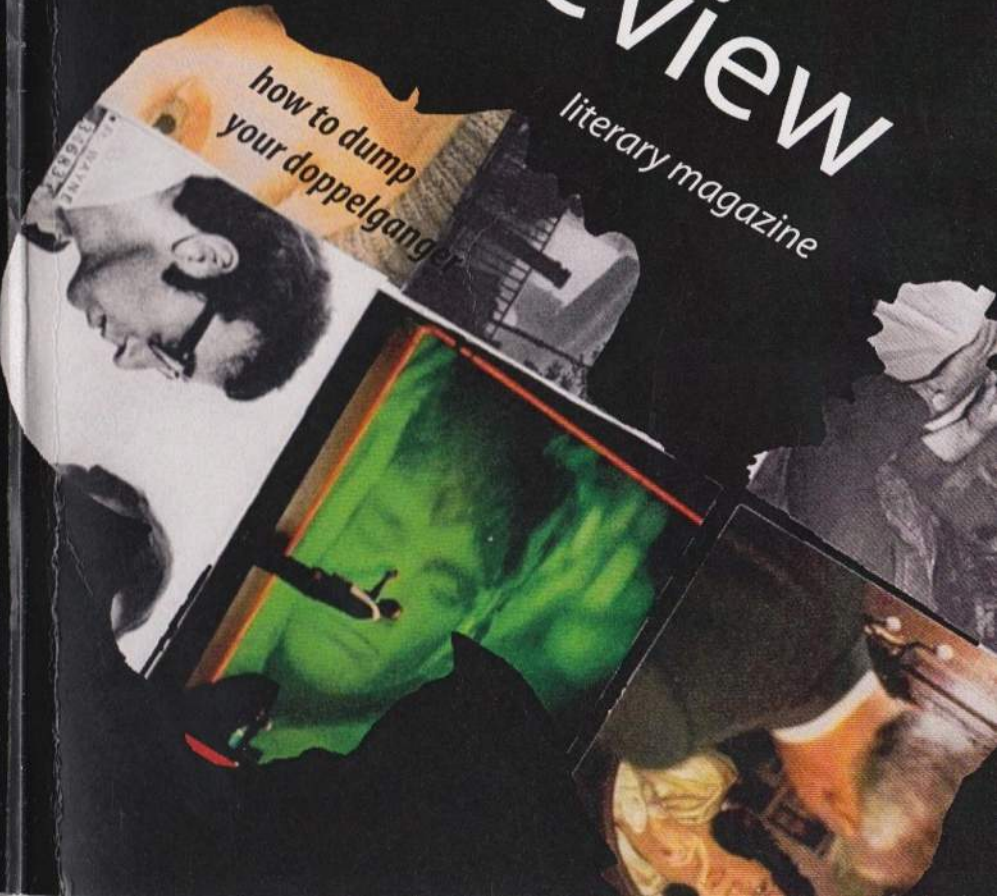


fall 2012
winter 2013

the rc review

literary magazine

how to dump
your doppelganger





NOTE

People in East Quad (and occasionally West & South 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
The Year in Exile

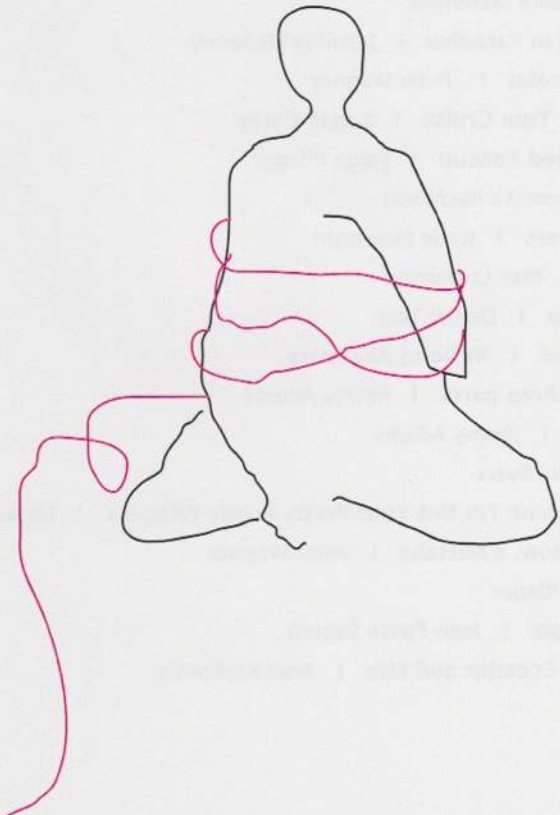


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Grad Student Shantytown

Allison Epstein

Holed up in the grad student shantytown,
gazing over walls built up from dog-eared volumes
of T.S. Eliot and W.E.B. DuBois
and letters and periods for mortar and limestone
as we look for the stars and find nothing
but black-coffee darkness and pinpricks of light
from the butt of Freud's cigar simmering in heaven. Neighbors in
mobile homes fashioning labs
to cook cures for cancer over thieved Bunsen burners and sell them in
parking lots behind libraries.
We are the thugs and the theses,
the drug lords and the dissertations,
penning our dialectic diatribes on the nature of being and of popping a
cap in your existential ass.
And we sit here, 'round fires stoked with
myths and minotaurs, essays and eagles, as we stare hungrily
through the stars to that ivory tower
where names on parchment twist themselves into
the guise of a liquid philosopher's stone.
While the rain falls heavier and faster than ever
and not even Whitman can keep out the chill.



Walmart

Aisha Naseem

You're not really into doing the groceries. Once when you were a kid you went to the "pet care" section. Peering into the different fish tanks you found one with a dead fish among all the swarming, living ones. Its body floated to the bottom of the tank, forgotten, half eaten even. Yes, it was traumatic; the "Pet Care" aisle no longer interests you now. But every once in a while, your mother says "Sheila, at least go out and get the God damn milk". She hands you a crumpled, sweaty Andrew Jackson twenty-dollar bill. You detest the chore, yet you're suddenly important to her, so you do it. Besides, you're just going to people watch. Decide to keep the change.

You will take your time as you scour the cosmetics aisle, think about pocketing the electric purple colored "Kinky in Helsinki" O.P.I., nail polish, even though you definitely have enough money to buy it. Because watching people steal on TV is different than the actual action of stealing. On TV there's this foreboding lens focused, a suspenseful song plays or the scene is silent. Susie so and so steals the lip gloss... she gets caught.

But in real life, you see the O.P.I. just sitting there waiting to be taken. Like your sister's wedding cake was begging to be eaten before she even cut it. No sweat, you dipped your finger in the frosting, please no one noticed. Okay, okay so you never did that, you were too afraid. But, somehow you don't feel bad about this.

In aisle four there is a fussy yuppie couple, arguing about what color curtains they want to put in the living room...lavender or an off-white crème. They are beginning to irritate you. You think about going home and writing a racy story about them. His name will be Ariel, hers Muriel- like twins with rhyming names. They're only getting the new curtains because his Jewish mother is coming over and she doesn't like windows bare.

You divert your attention to the little girl, about eight and man with a five o'clock shadow besides her pushing the grocery cart. One of his arms is around her shoulders; his fingers are inching down her spine. Or are they? It makes you cringe. Maybe you'll write about how he never bought her that book she always wanted, yanked her by the wrists when no one was around to say no. Mind out of the gutter you think, make it a happy story; he's a loving father. The kind you never had. You watch her pick up a book off of the shelf and place it in the cart. It's

that Stephanie Meyer teenage vampire love shit. Oh hell no. Imagine her fingers slipping on the pages, as she anxiously pushes past each one. Forget it you think, he probably isn't even her dad.

You'll write the story about the yuppie couple...unless they're actually siblings who delight in committing acts of arson together. On second thought the "Kinky in Helsinki" is looking a little too audacious, you swipe a pale pink lip gloss in its place, open it, smear a bit on your lips. It's yours you own it.

Grab the milk your mother asked you to run and get, remember it's the 1% kind, so she doesn't scold you. Pick up a pack of Marlboro reds. Anyone who sees you with them will know you mean business or lung cancer or business. Who cares. Head to the register, smile widely at the cashier guy whose name tag says "Harvey" or is it Javier? As you put the milk on the table for him to scan say "my dad has the same tie as you" and wink at him. You never met your real dad. You were seven when you first dared to ask your mother. She pulled out a picture of a man standing tall, hands behind his back in uniform. He looked good then, you measured your features with his. You used to think you had his lips. Now you wonder if he was even your father or just a picture of some random guy she gave you to shut you up.

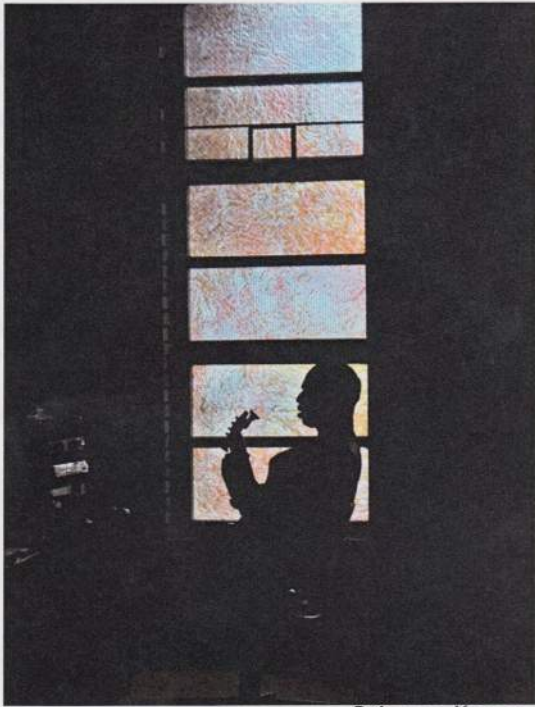
When you slip out of the store with the gloss on your lips, in your pocket, you feel like Jesus of Nazareth walking on water, maybe that's not the right comparison. Who cares, you're above the water right now, not below and that's all that matters. Walk to the car, go home, write about the yuppies, and write about the little girl if you dare.

moonset

Max Lockwood

I heard the biggest moon
falling through your hair,
its gravity slowed
by the friction of curls,
a dense and insulating canopy

when it finally landed on your breasts
and rolled away,
setting into my chest,
I felt the sound of its fall
resounding through an inexpressible expanse
of water,
and my body held its soft, invisible glow
like a riverbed in spring



Brianna Kovan

Jazz *Jean-Pierre Seguin*

Jazz
is sex is love is religion is background is center and whatever the
hell it is, is.

Likewise

Logan Corey

these are my people
who mistreat cashmere sweaters
stolen Salvation Army
who fish boxes Tiffany blue
upturn garbage can NewYorkCity
who memorize Bryant Park
newness, plaster discarded circulation leaflets
in grimy spirals against a mouthy palate
who travel by discount commuter train
borrowed boxcar redeye voyage
who never buy
tickets to sold out shows,
who scratch the bottom of the barrel
and reevaluate the notion of food,
who buy the biggest, cheapest bottles
of foulest champagne and toast wordless speeches
to friends they cannot afford to keep
who have never touched their foot soles against another country's soil-
stem
and spend their days manual-clutch training
optic nerve lenses in worship
of counterfeit grail that manic-gleam reflects
the uninhabitable absence of Here.



Brianna Kovan

Your Name
Conner Wood

It is springtime here, and here you are, telling me you don't have a name.

My darling, your name is the sound of the wind rustling through the pine outside my window.

It is the way you take off your scarf.

My dear, your name is "She who sits on my kitchen counter."

I hear your name when you wrap your arms around my ribcage.
It sounds like, "I have lost my bobby pins in my hair and on your carpet
and amongst your pillows,"
but is spelled like eskimo kisses.

When I whisper your name into the quiet stillness of a late winter evening
it is like walking alongside the corn in June.

Your name on the tip of my tongue tastes like the juice Yankees tap
from Concord grapes.

I have read your name three times: the first time it was in braille down
the center of your back,

the third time in cursive.

The second time it was inscribed around your navel, waiting to be discovered by one as intrepid as me.

My darling, your name is more than the sum of its letters.

When I am trying to fall asleep, your name comes to me like the tides to the sand: ever ebbing, ever flowing;
it comes to me not so very different from your love, or the geese to the south: trumpeting in arrival, trumpeting in departure, and ultimately circular.



Georgia Hampton

There's a Squatch in these Woods...
Allison Epstein

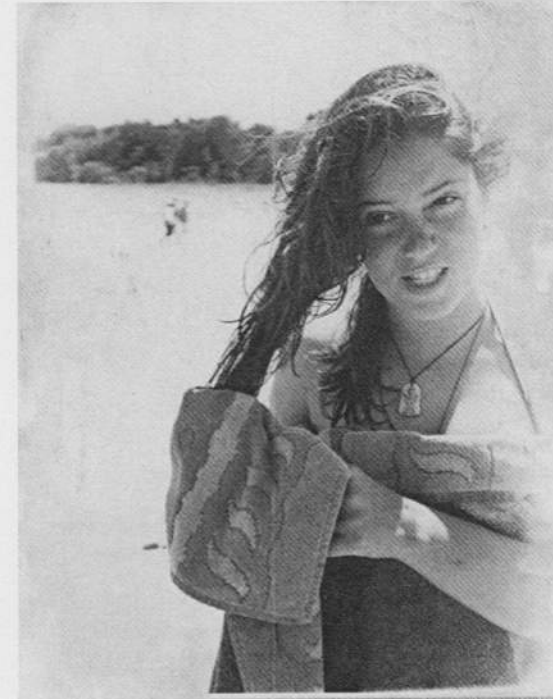
a sudden sunset
as the windowblind
zzzzzzzziiiiiiips
erasing the sun in one fell swoop.
no natural light needed
thanks to my eerie
Blair Witch Project night vision,
a faint greenish halo surrounding the black box on the desk that hums
and beeps and whistles and speaks and screams as i
sit silent and stall
steadfastly.
they call this the discovery channel
though i have to wonder
when will I use the discovery of how to hunt bigfoot
or under what circumstances is it acceptable to eat roaches
or
and
or
if
but
when
i don't know
my head hurts
plenty of mysteries left i guess.
it's midnight and it's midday and
i sit here on the couch
feeling its overstuffed cushions push back
against my thighs
trying to propel me upward
get up, get up, get up
you're crushing me
though i don't listen because i never listen
and because my watch has stopped so i have all day left still and i don't
take advice from furniture
anyway
on principle.
i look away from the dancing, glimmering screen filaments of light

trapped on my retinas
and flung up on the ceiling in the shapes of constellations ursa major
cassiopeia
ursa minor
sagittarius
ursa grilles
perseus
cancer
orion
orion's belt
orion's calvin klein three-piece suit
orion's hermès scarf
projected onto my planetarium,
the convex dome flattened,
squashed by a cosmic foot
and he tells me that there's a squatch in these woods
and i sit and watch and wonder
how he can possibly know
and what's left in the fridge
and when my paper is going to get written
and if ursa major and perseus mated, would you get a sasquatch
constellation
and what the greeks would have named it and
or
if
but when maybe yes
no yes
discovery
better drink my own piss

Would you still love me without makeup?

Jasmine McNenny

Would you still love me without makeup?
If I fell into your arms with my hair wild,
Lips opened and chapped,
Eyes naked,
Would you still catch me?
If I stood before you in my frumpy pajamas,
In an ill-fitting gray t-shirt that did nothing for my chest, In a stained
and soiled apron,
in clothes that were too big, or too small,
torn and colored with wear,
would you still love me then?
If I cried on your shoulder,
Mascara mixing with my tears,
Blood-red eyes and stuffed nose,
If I fell to pieces from a disappointment,
Or broke down in despair because of the stress,
If I yelled at you,
Or called you names,
Would you still love me then?
When all the layers come off,
When the walls of my fortress are destroyed,
When you encounter all of my demons,
And work through every challenge I place in your way, When you feel
like you made a mistake,
When you have doubts or regrets,
Will you still love me?
Will you still kiss me awake
With those butterfly whispers?
Will you still sing me my name when you speak?
Will you still act like a fool to make me laugh,
And laugh with me when you do?
Will you, when it is just me,
Delicate as a rose,
Open as a classic novel,
Honest as a light breeze,
Will you still love the girl you see now?



Rachel Pernick

The Patchwork Boat

Katie Marengi

Do
you
re-
member
when we
used to go
sailing through
the sidewalk pud-
dles and gutter
streams in our patchwork
boat
of newspaper and papi-
er-mâché?
It never did float,
but we never did drown
and I caulked the seams with as much
care
as you sewed them up.
We never did "show them," never stuck it to the
man.
But we never did a lot of things and our little boat never
did sink.

philophobia

Katie Marengi

a boy once told me
he signed his love letters with sailboats
that never came back
named me murderous, said I choked their hulls with matches
because to call yourself a lover you must first be an arsonist

every day I fall a little more out of love
gradual like street lights
autumn's bitter breath on the crabapple blossoms



the dare

Katie Marengi

don't look over your shoulder
until your shadow is dancing on
the tracks
the train whistle an insistent plea
on your neck



Rachel Pernick

The Last Night in Paradise

Jasmine Mcnenny

Through the kitchen window I could see the peeling wallpaper. I didn't say anything about it though. It's not really nice to draw attention to ugly things. Especially if you can't do anything about them. Ugly things are better left alone rather than embarrassed by people pointing out how ugly they are. But it was only wallpaper, what did I care?

"Hey, you want some of this?"

I took the yellowing cigarette. The handmade folds were sloppy and some of the contents were slipping down to the floor. Someone flashed a lighter and the heavy scent of smoke filled my nose and throat. The ash began to trickle down in a stream mixing with the dried leaves. They fell on my bare leg, but they didn't burn. I looked at them there, specks of dark green and gray against white. If I was an artist I suppose I'd think it interesting or poetic. But I'm not, and I didn't.

There was music playing. It was heavy like the smoke with bass and electric guitar, but now it changed, softer, whining, pleading almost. Was it a man or a woman singing? I didn't know, and it felt funny to ask, like I was just supposed to know. Why though? Is my brain so incredible that it knows a penis from a vagina just from hearing a voice? That's pretty fantastic. But I didn't say that out loud either. It didn't seem like the right time.

"What the hell are you doing, man? Put that out!"

Someone was talking, but I couldn't figure out who. Maybe my brain wasn't so amazing after all and I was glad I didn't say anything about it earlier. I could hear the voice still talking, the words though were slipping through my thoughts without me knowing what they were. Kind of like word ninjas. Or the FBI. Could they kill me if they wanted to? Maybe. You can never predict these kinds of things. I wonder how they would kill me. Would they pull a gun and if they did would I die with the first bullet or would it take another? I suppose they could run be over with a car, though I've never seen a ninja drive a car. Maybe they'll come up behind me in the dark and break my neck with one twist of my head. That would be pretty cool, me laying on the ground, head snapped at an odd angle, mouth open in surprise. Maybe someone would be sad for me, but my friends would think it would be cool, at least they'd get it since I wouldn't be there anymore.

I took another cigarette. This one was a little better, at least it wasn't leaking all over me. Now someone was yelling. Loud. Now some-

one else was yelling too. I kind of wished they'd stop, but I didn't care that much. It was a free country right? I wasn't about to call the cops or anything stupid like that. People yell all the time. I guess that's why we have mouths. For talking and for drinking.

I opened another one of the warm beers someone had left on the table. Was it a beer? It could have been a Pepsi. I guess I'm not that good of a judge. Now someone was laughing. I guess that's better than yelling, but I still wished they'd keep it down. There was another noise too. Like a popping sound? Or maybe like a snap? I was pretty sure it wasn't the music because someone had turned that off a while ago. The smoke was really thick. It made the room kind of hazy, like cloudy or something. I couldn't find my beer or was it a Pepsi?

Someone was pulling my arm. Why were they doing that? I was trying to find my drink and there they were tugging on my arm. That wasn't very nice, and here I didn't even mention the ugly wallpaper. But they stopped pulling, and the yelling and laughing stopped too. I guess they got tired of their mouths, I know I do. The room was really bright. Like an orange color. I reached for another cigarette and someone lit it for me. I thought that was nice, all quiet except for that snapping sound and someone is still here give me a light. I'm not the most talkative guy, but I hope they knew that I appreciated it just the same.

The ash started to fall around me, kind of like snow I guess. But it was gray and snow is white. I was really hot, but someone took my drink. I didn't mind much though, it was warm anyway. My arm started to hurt. I guess that's where that person was pulling on me. My leg hurt too, but I couldn't really explain that one so I just ignored it. The house looked better because I couldn't see that wallpaper anymore. I sighed. The flames had crept up the couch next to me. They were kind of cute, like a high school couple. They were just as desperate too.



Only For A Bracelet

Peter Wagner

It was quite odd when people closest to the Summa-Cum-Laude from Harvard Law, who The Onion deemed, "someone simply too brilliant to fail; a polymath so complete he makes the rest of us seem like simple fractions," - those close to him noticed he wasn't talking. People began to ask: why is the President silent?

The night before, his wife was the first to observe something odd. They were an hour away from the Prince of Norway's arrival. An opulent dinner featuring Fårrikål, the guest's national dish. After putting on her dress she asked if "it looked ok," if she looked fat. While not the best time to be quiet, the President nevertheless had nothing to say. Doors swung open, she stormed out, and Secret Service's questions fell flat as the President refused to answer those, too.

It's safe to say that no one was exactly "mad" at the President - a woman's reaction to the fat question is hardwired and reflexively angry, regardless if it's a positive or negative response, and so shouldn't be taken seriously - the people were simply confused. And with that confusion, the ripples soon spread to the President's Cabinet, into news stations, blogs, and eventually streaming into every American living room.

Presidential coverage was at its highest point since Watergate.

Left-Wingers thought it was an act of heroic proportion, thinking it stood for either: the President calling out companies who engage in slave labor practices and who fail to hear the voices of their employees; that it was a total-body commitment to National Sign Language month, and even though the President himself knew no gestures, he was partaking in his own special way; or, perhaps the world was in such despair the President was trying to focus more on its noises than his own to become more attuned, understanding.

The Right, on the other hand, tried to debase the President. A certain conservative on EIB Public Radio, whose name rhymes with Hush Himbaw, had such visceral words for the President when his silence became known, that Hush had burst a blood vessel on air and was rushed to a local ER. His websites still says "ON TEMPORARY LEAVE." Some conservatives viewed this as a God Given chance to take back the Hill by running viscous ads. But the majority of conservatives were in a sort of love-hate paradox with the situation. They looked at that term, conservative, and realized a certain economy with all aspects of life, including speech, was more preferable than overindulgence. So while this was their time to attack the President on political grounds, they were

awe-struck at his current silent streak, and had no urge to bring harm to anyone who mastered this art so well.

Once the silence was known, the President's personal ratings began to ebb and flow. World markets didn't know what to make of it. The US Dollar to quite a hit in the beginning but recovered once it was confirmed the President wasn't suffering from some sort of mental illness. He still attended his scheduled appearances, went to his daily meetings, signed bills, was seen talking walks with his wife (wearing normal clothes, but, oddly, no dress), he even stood on podiums, hands in its edges, before masses, completely silent. Citizens acknowledged he wasn't crazy - or his plans with all this didn't involve leaving the White House and become a hermit - they just hoped he wasn't a mute.

Every TV-channel had a Presidential Silence Tally on the screen's bottom right. People started using the number in relation to their everyday life. Instead of saying "Hey, I'll meet you here on Sunday?" they'd say, "Hey, I'll see you here on Day 10, right?" College students who wanted to support the President followed silently in suite. Within days of full media-coverage, every American classroom was filled with only Professors' voice.

People eventually seemed on edge. When interviewed by news stations, Psychologists who studied the students tried framing their condition in scientific terms, but what they said was blurry: it's a tip-of-the-tongue thing. There's something odd going on in their brains. Something is there. But we can't place a finger supposed to be a leader, yes? Their leader. Leader of the Free World. An odd phrase, at least to me, because he seems to be in some weird sort of slavery with his body. No longer able to produce the charismatic effects he requires. No longer free from usually human limitations. I mean, during his campaign, every speech went off without a hitch; it all seemed on it. As if the feeling's deep within their stomachs. Look, the President's so fluid, so moving. We haven't even made it through his first spring and he's frozen. And if the most powerful person we have isn't able to be free, in his own country, then what hope do we have? Our brightest and best have?

Once Day 30 passed citizens started accepting the fact that their President might never speak again. A conclusion was reached that he really must be "too brilliant." His thoughts simply transcend language's thin net.

Attacks from Congress lessened. Both sides admired the President for his courage: that during such rough political times he feels not the need to speak, but simply to act. To try and make things better. He needs no words. He knows what to do, does it, and that's all he needs.

* * *

When you came back I knew it was finally over, the silence could finally end. You asked if I had done it, if it was hard, if I made people angry. I said yes to all three. For my part of winning our little bet, you gave me a bracelet made at camp. We spoke of how much Mommy and I missed you. Though I didn't talk, I'd lie in bed listening to her speak about how she never wants to send you away again. I'd nod.

After you gave me the biggest hug, I put you on my shoulders, we stood on the White House's balcony, and I said to the world, "it's finally over. My Baby's back. I'm free to speak." The people below seemed awestruck. Something they were so accustomed to, that everyone had in common with one another, vanished. They needed meaning for why they had to accept yet another adjustment to their daily lives. They felt lost, betrayed, but one or two seemed happy. A kid smiled.

I was able to respond to the first question that reached my ears from below: what did you learn?

Jane Goodall & Tom Cruise

Logan Corey

"Find what you love and let it kill you."

- Charles Bukowski

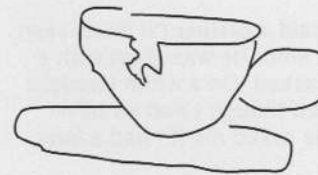
It was four weeks until authorities discovered the sluggish, grunt-like nature to Jane's vocal techniques and movements were symptoms of a larger problem, specifically, the crafty gorilla using Jane's hollowed out skin as a human disguise of sorts experts suspect this key factor also contributed to Jane's sudden drastic increase in body size over the past four weeks it's been decided the gorilla will be allowed to publish his findings for the past four weeks as long as he agrees to stop submitting articles written under the Goodall name

The Church of Scientology has issued an official day of morning to commemorate the deceased, who was unpleasantly crushed earlier today, when the L.A. billboard featuring Mr. Cruise's likeness leapt free of its hinges and pitched straight downward, deftly splitting Mr. Cruise's skull wide open along his hairline's subtle point, which, incidentally, revealed nothing but cybersparks and smoking gears as substitute for insides

Ode to a Chipped Teacup

Paige Pflieger

It is morning relief,
The first ray
of golden sun,
Shining through
white lace curtains
Like a loving mother,
It takes the liquid
to its ceramic womb,
holds it in it's bosom
nurses it.
Tea's winter jacket,
Coffee's fur coat.
Smooth
Like a red
Ripened apple
Nestled in
Tree's leafy hands,
Held like a baby bird,
Held like a small
Crushable
Life, between
Supple palms,
Locked in by
Laced fingers.
It is crumbling,
Imperfectly perfect
Like the ruins
Of the coliseum,
Like the Trevi fountain
Ancient, yet
Still gushing life's water,
Still granting wishes
For the price of a dime.



Minutes

Vanessa Rychlinski

The Angel of Death called me last night.

He said that's who he was anyway, and I'm not sure that I don't believe him. I had just canceled my service provider subscription - I don't use cable and anyone that calls me usually has my cell phone number, anyhow, unless it's a telemarketer call. I get a lot of those. I can't tell you how many times a week I used to get calls from some machine that has a glitch in its gears and refuses to speak. Hello? Hello?

I hadn't even bothered to take the phone off the hook once I canceled my account. I had just canceled my account at the end of November and waited for the blissful, silent December days to rid me from Emily from Clean Water Action or the account reminder from Northwestern Mutual, and of course, those damned dead lines from somewhere in cyberspace. The only time I'd left my apartment in weeks was to go to the convenience store in the first floor of my building to buy cups of coffee since I was too lazy to go to the store and get a bag. As I waited my turn in line I stood there glaring at the rows of shiny packages of Marlboros and Camels.

"You look like you want cigarettes," said a cashier I'd never seen before. I felt sheepish and he asked me what kind. He was short with a black gauge in his right ear. "What kind?" he asked. On a whim I bought menthols, because they were two for one, even though I had no business spending five dollars let alone twelve. He asked me if I had a long night.

"I'm working from ten p.m. til 2 p.m.," he told me as he rang up the green boxes. "So I'm waiting on my friend to drop something off. Need that Adderall."

Anyway, two cigarettes in my filthy kitchen later the phone rang. I was in the middle of making dinner - one of those microwaveable portion-control dinners my ex-girlfriend used to eat. The phone rang as I was contemplating the nutrition label - Is 500 milligrams of sodium a lot? Isn't corn starch bad for you? I was so surprised I dropped the package which hit Emily's fat grey tabby, Boondock, on the head, who was below munching on his favorite kind of Fancy Feast (Turkey Florentine with Wild Greens in a Delicate Sauce) from the deluxe fifty-dollar food-bowl-cascade-fountain thingamajig Emily insisted on buying him.

"Don't look at me like that," I said to the cat, lurching for the phone.

"Hello?" I said sulkily. And then again. "Hello?"

For a moment, all I could hear was heavy breathing.

"Yes, this is the Angel of Death calling," said the raspy voice

politely. "For Melanie Brandt?"

I sighed and swore under my breath. Damn phone company. I'd have to call them again. The microwave pinged.

Whoever you are, I said, opening the microwave with one hand.

I'm

sure you've got the wrong Melanie Brandt. I'm sure there's tons in this city —

The paper tray was too hot to touch. I swore again. Look, whatever list this is, take me off, I began exasperatedly.

The person on the line gave a delicate cough. "Melanie Brandt, the writer?" he prompted.

I paused. I'd been a struggling writer for a little over two years. My two gigs were the astrology sections for one of the two local newspapers and the "Health & fitness blogger" for a web portal called Enthuse. I guessed my admirer found me on the latter, although what I do for Enthuse could hardly be called "writing." I don't know the first thing about how to get rid of love handles or feel less tired. I make my meals in the microwave, for God's sake. I wrote my thesis on Virginia Woolf, and the book I'd been trying to write since my junior year of college was on hold while I attempted to pay the bills, finish watching the last three seasons of *The West Wing* and drink my way through the south side of town.

I cleared my throat. "Ye-es, how can I help you Mister...?"

"Don't worry about that right now, Mel, I don't have much time. May I call you Mel?"

I hesitated and the man continued.

"A bit informal, I know, but I'd like to offer you a proposition. I'm sure you're low on money, and though it's not my style I would like to offer monetary compensation for your services."

I ground my teeth together. A funny guy, huh. What is it with creeps on the Internet?

"I'm gonna have to decline on that one," I said stiffly before punching the off button. I stared moodily at the device in my hand for a moment, angry at everything, at my stupid dud writing career, at stupid Emily for leaving me for a new state and an old boyfriend, at my stupid rent payment coming due, my stupid stress acne and most of all, stupid technology, from the stupid site this joker probably found my picture on to the stupid telephone in my hand. Incensed, I threw the phone across the room. Living alone makes you prone to ugly displays like that. Maybe not you, probably just me. The device hit several framed photographs of Emily and me and an engraving that Em had bought on a family trip to Thailand. She's been everywhere — Thailand, Costa Rica, the Netherlands. I've only ever been to Canada, once. The ugly hunk of metal hit the floor with a loud bang.

"Argh!" I screamed helplessly, just for good measure. Clearly disgusted now, Boondock rose from the beat-up settee, flashed his pink butthole at me and flounced away to the guest bedroom.

I turned back to the microwave to retrieve my dinner of sticky linguine with imitation crab meat when the phone rang again. I strode to the phone dock and ripped the cord out of the jack in one fluid motion. Maybe now I could contemplate my sucky life in peace, or at least distract myself with at least two hours of outdated Aaron Sorkin propaganda before I passed out. I'd call the telephone company in the morning.

I gulped down the steaming-hot linguine. An unopened bottle of white wine was waiting for me in the refrigerator. I had consumed about half of it and was feeling almost cheerful when the phone rang.



Kara Mullison

I froze. My eyes darted to the phone dock – I was sure I'd – and so I had, the red plastic cord was still curled on the floor. I held up the bottle of Cupcake Riesling and examined it suspiciously, gave it a shake. I thought the Green Dragon was in the freezer still but you never know... The phone rang again.

I ran to the guest bedroom. "Are you hearing this, cat?" I shrieked. Boondock looked up at me sullenly, twitching his tail. The phone rang twice more before I could gather the courage to sidle back into the living room. The phone was silent as I cautiously neared the pile

of displaced wall décor. I chugged the rest of my Riesling before bending over, swaying a little, and stared hard through wine haze at handset. The screen was blinking green on and off and I automatically snatched it up. It rang shrilly in my hand. I must've jumped a foot.

"God damn it, hello?"

"Yes, Mel," the same raspy, restrained tone from before said, "I really would like to talk to you."

"Apparently!" I choked on the word. "Who the fuck are you?"

"Put down that terrible cheap stuff," the voice said bossily. "You are not the lush type."

"How would you know?" I spluttered incredulously. I was fucking creeped out, sure, but who was this guy to tell me about my dearly-held vices?

The mystery caller ignored this. "I have a job for you, Mel, and I happen to know, among many other things about you, that you are in dire economic straits."

"Whatever job you got, dude," I said, slurring, "I ain't about to bend over for, so count me out."

"Don't be revolting," said the voice, "You're a writer, what could you know about sex? The job I want you to do is much more worthy than that."

"Oh yeah, what's that?" I didn't even care at this point, didn't care that I was on the phone with a psycho-stranger who had still managed to get ahold of me, in my ruin of an apartment with no one but a sullen cat for company, through a dismantled land line. "What the fuck is that, and why should I care?"

"Care, don't care," said the man. "It's all the same to me. I need a scribe."

"A scribe," I repeated, my throat catching on the word. I couldn't help it. I started to laugh through my nose.

"A scribe, yes," said the voice loudly. "I have the best occupation in the world. The Angel of Death. Azrael, Samael, the tenth plague, many titles, you see, it's very important work to many people. But the thing is, I'm sick of part of this job. Writing down the names of each human that is born, only to have to wipe them away after harvesting, it gets very tedious. I also would like to work on my own memoirs, as well. Now you, you are unattached, you barely speak to your family, you are working barely making ends meet in positions you despise."

I shrugged and took another swig of my Riesling. This was true.

"Why not come work for me for awhile? You'll get out of that horrible apartment, with that creature that hates you." Boondock was in the doorway of the guest bedroom, self-absorbedly washing his mangy coat. I wondered just exactly how much this whacko – this "Angel of Death" that he professed himself to be, had found out about me.

"Nearly everything," he said.

I had to sit down.

"You will meet my team," he continued, "A very talented bunch

that
will get along great with you, I am sure of it. If you don't like it, we can deliver you back, of course."

"I hate to admit it," I said, "But you seem legit."

The voice made a hm sound, as if it were amused, or maybe just perplexed. "Yes, I am 'legit,' indeed," he said. "And it's not everyday that slovenly, lazy alcoholic writers get offers without doing anything but cutting out their landline usage."

Very true, indeed. It was almost as if I didn't even have any choice in the matter.

"Can I ask you one thing?" I asked.

"Ask away," said Death, as I'd come to think of him.

"Why me? There must be hundreds - no thousands - of writers

you
could choose from. Better writers." I've never had much of a curiosity about anything. I've always been smart but I blew off most of my college classes and decided to major in literature because it was easiest. I didn't travel after I graduated like I planned, preferring to live in a questionable flat with one of my college girlfriends who became my actual girlfriend since we both had nightmares. I've re-read the same books countless times, and I haven't seen many movies or watched much TV, unless you count the random storylines like *The West Wing* that I obsessively download on my beat-up virus-ridden Mac (a hopeful present from my father, who always believed that just the right gift would set me on track) and watch while so stoned or drunk that I can't even remember what happens. I don't read the newspaper, or watch the news. I don't speak to my family. I forget important dates and names of things. Birthdays. To be fair, though, I never even want to celebrate my own.

"Do you really want to know?"

I said, yes, that I did. Through the tinny bitter taste in my throat down to the holes in my socks, I had never wanted to know anything so badly.

"Well, you are attractive, Mel, I won't lie, I did see your picture on that Exciting or Stimulate or whatever they call it. Some other things enter into it, of course, such as planetary alignment and geometric dimensional concerns and all those necessary calculations, but after that, I chose you because there's something about you that's appealing to me. Most humans don't have this quality."

"Quality?" My voice cracked. I was desperate.

"Well, Melanie," Death paused awkwardly, as if he was figuring out how to best tell me I had imitation crab in my teeth. "You've been living as though you're dead. For almost the entirety of your existence."

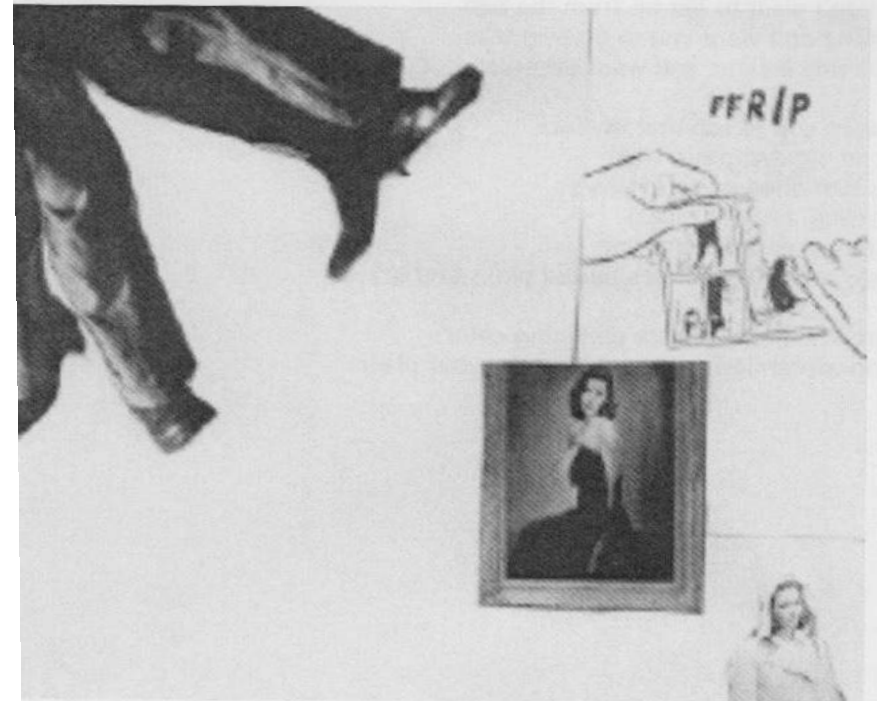
I set the wine bottle on the floor without saying anything.

"It's just, a bit unusual for your kind, made you stand out amongst the others," he explained hurriedly. "Of course, it's a quality I very much enjoy," he added, almost like an apology.

Death said his secretary would call me by Friday, during business hours, to finalize the rest of the details per our agreement. I hung up the phone and cried until morning.

Kat̄ī Marenghi

the only men unshaven in blue jeans
chewing gum leaning on the truck
your grandfather in the casket
they're working the Sunday morning
shift



wintersleep

Max Lockwood

the crackle of the record spinning under the needle a
repetitive pattern
the empty space at the end of side A over and over
and over again

golden apple sunlight
through windows and blinds
in the patient afternoon

ceiling fan caress
on the shifting stack of pillows
our lips your breasts

I didn't want to get up from the bed
and I don't want you to go overseas
but side B came and went eventually

I want you to see that my face
is an old sycamore tree
its hardened mask of years
peeling away to reveal
a pastel conglomeration:
pale tans dull oranges muted pinks and grays

already the leaves are changing color
and wintersleep will come to take your place



Warren Hecht

La Mujer Blanca *Daniel Toro*

It is hard to recall my youth with exact detail, but when I try my hardest, I get a feeling that it's not long gone. Yesterday, I arrived back at my place of birth. A place where a baby became a boy and that boy went on to become a passionate lover. As I walk through a familiar neighborhood full of joyful memories, I cannot help remembering the beautiful white woman with whom I once fell in desperate love. She was the woman who gave me everything I wanted and needed when I was feeling alone. It took a couple more steps down the broken road to see the old bench on which we used to make love. I remember the times when I made her mine and she gave me all she could. Now the bench seems frail and old. When I was younger, my desire for her was strong. Too strong, I dare say. Yet, not strong enough, I sometimes think. Regardless, I knew that when our bond was over, I would never see her pale beauty again.

I walk a little further, and see the house in which I lived as a young boy. Its newly painted walls brought a frown to my face as well as a profound feeling of loss. Maybe the new owners couldn't warm up to my mother's choice of green. It seems intriguing to me how this new coat of color shielded a layer filled with laughter, cries and the unknown. I couldn't decide whether it was protecting or hiding. Either way, I was the only person left to remember the layer of light green and heavy memories. The windows were different, too. They were no longer the small square panels of glass my father had once put up himself. They had been replaced with beautifully detailed stained-glass. It seemed very strange, as I had only encountered such windows in places such as a church, but it never occurred to me to explore the possible reasons for the changes. Instead, I focused on remembering how I looked out my windows as a child, and how those small glass panels, along with the beautiful white woman, changed my views on the outside world.

My friends knew everything about my love. They would run to my window and knocked as hard as possible to inform me when she was back in the neighborhood. They yelled with such intensity and excitement that I could not help but sometimes tear up as my heart raced upon hearing the news. She was back, and she was mine for as long as I could keep her. This memory brought me to the very last day I had with my lover. I hurried out of my house to see a man of about thirty com-

ing down the street. He was a very close friendship. In my mind, he was merely a way to pass the time before my white woman was back with me. We spoke very briefly, as we both knew what we each had to say. He spoke of his life. I spoke of mine in return. The anxiety built up in me like never before. Where was she? I continued to talk to him in the broken Spanish we spoke in my neighborhood. He understood it very well, as he was a frequent visitor. It never appeared strange to me that his coming also let me know the white woman was coming. It was as if the universe aligned two events in such perfect harmony that it was undeniably accepted. As the hour passed, I grew impatient and began to change the subject to more serious matters. He once loved the white woman as well, and he described the love in detail. There was not an ounce of jealousy in my heart. I interrupted his story with a brief "shh."

There she was. Right before me was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. Her paleness sent a cold bolt down my back. I felt my arousal overtake over my body. I instantly got a good hold of her and held her tightly as to eliminate the possibility of this not being real. After holding on to her for a long while, I smiled and turned away from my old friend, as I believed I'd paid him the respect he deserved. As I walked with her, there were no words. No words ever needed to be said with her. Walking down the road waiting to make love to her was always the hardest struggle of my life. Every bit of me wanted to undress her and make her mine. And so I did the second we reached our special bench. The bench was conveniently placed in the depths of a bamboo forest next to the road on which I lived. Past the forest, was a river, which always set the perfect mood to be with my beautiful white woman.

Our love making never lasted very long, but was never disappointing. I wanted more with every bit of her I had. I had full control, and yet no control at all. I was a possessed man with a desire that needed to be fulfilled. She brought me happiness, peace and pleasure. I wanted her more and more with every passing second. Our love-making came to an abrupt end as I saw a young boy of about five years of age staring at us. He was dark-skinned and wore nothing but old shorts which were stained with some sort of oil. His face was dirty, too, so I assumed he had been out playing with his friend in the streets. I motioned him to go away disregarding what he could have been feeling at the moment. His face became more and more familiar until I realized it was my neighbor's son, Aldemar. His mother was a single parent of three young boys, Aldemar being the youngest. Much like my own family, they were lower class Colombians who worked for every last piece of survival. Both had single mothers raising boys, and neither could afford anything

beyond the necessary. I sometimes played soccer barefoot with them in the street, but the games didn't last very long, as cars were constantly passing by and we had to pause and resume the games continuously. Now, as he stared back at me, I realized how fast I had been trying to live my life. I realized how slow my maturing had become. Tears came to my eyes, and he came to sit next to me and asked me what I was doing. I could not find an answer that would not corrupt another mind as it had my own. I dropped the white woman from my hands, wiped my nostrils with the bottom of my shirt, and walked him back home.

I wish you cared

Nicholas Anastasia

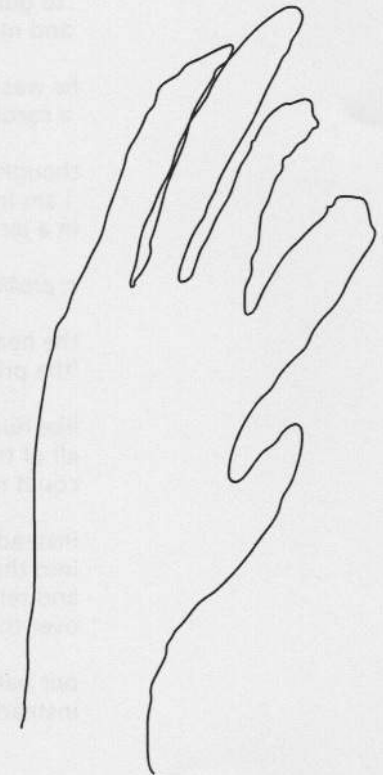
The box is wrapped in newspaper,
worn editorials stain my fingers
black and white
as I steal it from your hands.

Crinkling, trembling,
eventually discarded,
the ghost stories are removed, and
the box opens
on its rust-ridden hinge.

Shining inside,
the light reminds me
that the problem with gold
is the low melting point,
"too malleable,"
I thought as I gilded your finger,
third left from the thumb.

The light reflects in
your yellow-flecked teeth
as you explain this
was your grandfather's, once, on
your mother's side, you think.

Reminds me that
the problem with a heart is having
to give it away and sometimes
settling for pyrite.



love poem in three parts

Jimmy Adams

a. for you to know me

you must understand,
goddammit,
that if you ask me to write a poem
it's going to be at 5 a.m.
while you're trying to sleep.

b. acquiesce

a very distinguished
gray-haired man
wearing nipple clamps
and a sequined leotard once told me
to quit repairing my heart
and make mosaics instead.

he was an authority on hearts -
a cardiologist, he said.

though acquiescence is grand,
i am inclined to keep my faith
in a jar of optimism.

c. proliferate

the headlines will read.
'the prince of ann arbor has fallen'

like humpty dumpty
all of the men in the world
could not put him together again.

instead, they slipped pieces of him
into their journals and wallets
and relished
over their contraband.

our parents should have read dictionaries
instead of bedtime stories.

life in church

Jimmy Adams

i want to sit alone forever
on the dusty stairs
of a Presbyterian church.

i'll never move, and i'm
going to laugh at the men outside
as they step oddly
through their lives.

sunshine will ooze warmly
through the walls of colored glass
keeping me from
the flies and stench of the world.
here there's just a passionate
fragrance of candles and bibles.
i can burn the bibles for heat
once society dies
and i'm the only homo
sapiens left.

i see photos of churches
and think of how i would sit
on the dried wooden steps
creaking their way to the steeple,
always knowing they're useless.

i can keep them company
and they can keep me splintered.
oak keeps the best company, you know.

i want to sit on the dusty stairs of a church
in hopes that a god i don't believe in anymore
will keep me safe and warm.

oak, sunshine, and splinters are all that *i* need.

The End

Julia Byers

Dylan used to tell me sunshine on funerals was a good thing, like how rain on weddings was good. When I asked him how he knew, he said it was obviously true, because more babies were born during storms than when the sun was present and white and hot, and weddings and babies promised the same thing: a new beginning. So sunshine on a funeral was a good thing, too, since it was the opposite: the end.

I don't believe him, though. With the way the sun's shining down through the pine needles way up above, reflecting off everyone's shiny black shoes and pooling too bright against the newer gravestones that still haven't been worn rough by bad weather, I can't help but think that sunshine is an awful bad thing at a funeral, because it makes everyone slow and sleepy and content, sitting there in their rows of rickety white folding chairs, while inside I am screaming, and reeling, and dying myself, staring at his casket beside the hole.



Dylan used to tell me there was one four leaf clover in every field, if you just looked hard enough. When I told him it was BS, he scrunched his thick eyebrows low until they brushed against his eyelashes to tell me no, it had to be true, because it took a certain amount of luck for a piece of land to become a field for kids like us to play on, and therefore there must be a four leaf clover hidden somewhere there.

I don't believe him, though. We were lying out in a field, the group of us from the Regent High Photography Club that went out for burgers after our meeting instead of going home, when the bee stung him, and his throat swelled shut so fast he couldn't even finish chewing his mouthful. If that field had been lucky, the bee wouldn't

have landed on Dylan's cheek. It would have found my hand instead, which was just a matter of inches away in the grass. It would have stung me and it would have hurt, but not like this, since I am not the one who was allergic to bees.

Dylan probably would have said the field was lucky once upon a time, and someone just stole its four leaf clover, if he knew I was thinking that now, while clutching the program for his funeral in my unblemished fingers. But Dylan can't say anything anymore.

Dylan used to tell me the lines on the palm of your hand determined how long you were going to live, and while he traced a finger over my sticky skin with the heat blowing in on us through my open bedroom window, I'd ask him how he was sure, and he'd reply in that slightly gravelly, never serious voice, "Because yours say you're going to live 'til you're a hundred, and I wouldn't have it any other way."

I didn't believe him though, and now he'll never know, will he? He'll never know if I'll live to a hundred, and I'll never know what the lines on his hand said because I never dared look—I was never brave enough to see when he'd die. Thinking back on it, I still don't know if I'd rather have known or not. Maybe the bee was there because he had to die; maybe it was his time, and his hand said that, and it was not just some random occurrence, some twist of chance or fate, like Janice tells me over and over again when she calls me on the phone, crying, every night.

He never said he loved her. That's what she talks about mainly, when she cries. He never said he loved her, and now she'll never know.

Dylan used to tell me that God lived up in the clouds, on the biggest one in the sky. When I asked him how he knew, he said he didn't. But when he looked up there on sunny afternoons, when everything was too bright and too intense and too concentrated—so alive you had to squint to see it and it made you tired just to breathe it in... when he looked up at the sky, then, there was something in his face that made it seem like he did know, after all.

I believed him, though. I believed him that God lived on the biggest cloud in the sky, because although sometimes I didn't believe in Heaven, I did believe in the strong curve from Dylan's chin to his ear, and the way the little blond hairs along his jaw would catch in the sunlight, like they were shining too. I believed in the swoop of his thick, straw-colored hair along his forehead, and his rounded cheeks, and the way his eyes were never quite blue or green or grey, but a mixture of all of them, like that non-color the sink turns when you rinse out a paintbrush.

And now my stomach is burning, cold and hot and not quite

painful, but not quite okay either. And my eyes are burning too, but they're burning more like that sort of pain you get from sprinkling salt over rug burn, and the inside of my left cheek throbs from biting it to keep back the screams. My hair is twisted away in a too tight bun because the counselor told my mom not to leave it down or I might try ripping it out again. My dress is navy blue and too short for a funeral, with an off- white cardigan thrown over its spaghetti straps even though it must be ninety degrees out, because I never thought Dylan would die, so I never thought I'd need something conservative and black and impersonal to wear to his funeral.

Janice sits beside me and sobs with the heels of her hands pressed against her eyes, strawberry blond hair done in curls, down around her shoulders, but I am silent and still and staring, while inside I tear myself apart.

The day Dylan died he told me, "I need to get home, Alexis. I've got a chemistry test tomorrow," and when I said it wouldn't take all that long to get burgers, we were just going to the McDonald's down the street with the field out behind it, he said, "But I need to study real, real bad."

I didn't believe him, though. I said, "It'll take twenty minutes. A half hour tops."

And because the thing Dylan hated most in the world was disappointing me, more than he hated disappointing his chemistry teacher, or the people looking over his college applications, or Janice, who he was supposed to be studying with later, he said, "Fine."

And with the sun beating down on us, the group from the Regent High Photography Club walked down the street to McDonald's, while Dylan walked away from life. His fingers were warm, brushing against mine on the way there, as he pointed to the sun and told me how it meant the end.

His fingers were warm, and mine are still warm, but now his are not.



Georgia Hampton

Counter Viewpoint:
I'm Not Your Pretty, Pretty Princess
Logan Corey

Let's get one thing straight. Yes, I wear lots of dresses and even rock some ankle-breaking heels from time to time, but I'm not a little lady. True, you're more likely to find me covered in a ridiculous amount of layers and scarves than a bright red bodycon mini dress, but that in no way means I define myself as "modest." Quite the opposite actually, if you checked out last year's edition of the Daily's Literary issue of the Statement, you may have seen my poem "Fuck Me Heels." So, yeah. I don't do modest.

Say what you will about college life and hookup culture, love it or hate it, I couldn't care less. As long as whatever - or whoever - you're doing is safe and consensual, go for it, I'm not here to judge. But fight, argue, and shoot back at heteronormative and sexist comments? I can promise you I'm here to do that.

Men, if you view me as something either precious or worthy to be saved, please, I implore you: Back the fuck off. This kind of sexism that defines women as both "precious" and the responsibility of men is both tired and nauseating. I am not your princess, you are not my knight, this isn't 1963 and dinner will not be hot on the table at six on the dot. If this is what "real men" want, subservient, breakable little wisps of women, count me out.

"Real men," I'm not now, nor was I ever, in your care. I'm my own keeper, and I do a pretty damn good job. I say all this while being within a loving, monogamous relationship of nearly a year. No man bared his chest and swung down on a low hanging vine to scoop me up and declare, "You - Mine." Nope. I asked my boyfriend out on our first date, not the reverse.

For the record, I'm not straight. I'm an openly bisexual woman who has had amazing connections with both males and females on this fantastically open and understanding campus. So, to any "real men" still listening, remember this: not all women get all fancy in their panties at the sight of your uncontaminated image. And, it pains me that this even needs to be said, the notion that only heterosexual men are somehow "real" is both disgusting and more ignorant than a Glen Beck-themed after school special.

So, just to be clear. I'm not vulnerable. I'm not someone's princess. I'm not seeking out some male source for comfort, security, or protection. What I wear to a party is my choice, as is my body. Sure, beauty may fade, but, unfortunately, bold-faced ignorance rarely does. So, to be fair, I think I'd take aged and wrinkled acceptance over pure and shiny heteronormativity and sexism any day.

The Sting of Snow, A Mistake
Peter Wagner

The Father was jostled awake by the train's side-lurching, and against his better judgment tried once more for sleep. The dream came slowly. He heard birds and the sound of the sea taking its bath. The sun is setting, casting long shadows. The man next store is mumbling something over and over and it sounds like bye but the Father doesn't want to talk because when the man held the Father's baby that one time his arms were shaky. Some men below are laughing and sitting on street benches feeding pigeons. Behind them the top of a chapel runs above a wooden fence but its bell seems a little deeper than normal. The Father's wife is fast asleep, but wakes at the smallest things so he closes the window and checks on the baby. The men below start noticing that the bell-ringing is in fact from a bell but something beyond in the darkening street. The longer they look the clearer they see a formation three rows wide and endlessly deep marching toward them and they all have red bands with offset crosses and empty faces. The men scream and birds scatter. The commotion almost wakes the Father from his dream but he's still in and looks outside his window and sees the one of the three rows snaking its way into his apartment, up the stairwell. Below there is screaming and yelling. His baby starts crying. The neighbor, he now understands, was saying hide.

* * *

The Father was in one of the train's crowded inner compartments chatting with the SS's waiter, who was acting quite differently from the rumors that had reached the Father's ear. He had given the Father his repertoire of small talk, and seemed genuinely nice. The gun on his hip was barely noticeable. He had just come with hot water for their tea and was joking how he had a little spill on the way, then the Father heard the baby's screams and the Mother's voice go from high to higher to nothing. He was quick to his feet and the compartment's exit door gave way to the back balcony where the two screaming were exposed to the harsh winter winds that slapped them as the train sped along. He took the scene in in a single glance, saw the melted snow where his shoeless wife stood, baby in arms, and steam rising from the floor that was erased by the oncoming wind. The baby in its cloth diaper did not move; vapors

came off its hair and chest and nose and feet which were so, so scarlet. Its eyes lost somewhere in the back of its head leaving only white disks the exact shade of the flat landscape racing by. The Mother was down on one knee with a scarf rubbing aimlessly at what she held. The power of her scream so strong it took so much from her she was just able to kneel there, rubbing. The Father's first act was to take the child in his arms and rush back to the compartment where he had just come, and place it in the sink where only SS men could clean their hands. The water was equal to the temperature outside and he let it pour over the baby's feet and made a bowl with his hands and poured more water over chest and nose and hair, hoping only for the steam to stop. The Mother now inside and behind him pleading at Yahweh for help and she screamed at the Father to just go get gauze and damp towels already. He not really sure where to look since the SS's waiter was now gone and not available for questioning. The Father had a light step and his mind empty save that of an overwhelming sense of Duty, not even conscious of how smoothly he wove in and out of the train's other cars, weaving through the people, not hearing hundreds of groans, or seeing that their eyes were equally empty as his baby's, who was now again in front of him and needed bandages he could not find. Eventually a metal rectangle was found with a large red plus and was passed from hand to hand to the Father, the contents containing what might help his child, whose worst burns seemed to be on its left arm and both shoulders. The stomach's crimson was now lessening to a more tender pink the longer water enveloped it, and as far as the Father could see the feet seemed OK, and now the baby's screams seemed more from reflex and not from a deep pain within. Yet the small curled fists left the question up in the air. The Mother watching from behind, still muttering, now about something the Father still couldn't hear because that would in some significant way lessen his Duty. When he finally heard her, asking to wrap the baby in cool cloths, he wasn't sure, but agreed and lifted it onto a table the Mother cleared after yelling at the surrounding hoard to "PLEASE. BACK AWAY. MY BABY. MY BABY." Then it lay there while the Mother tried soothing it and checking its feet to make sure they were scald-free, the Father now face to face with the baby assuring it that he is here for him, that he is here for him, its eyes not acknowledging because they are still elsewhere but whose mouth now lets out screams not fit for a body that size, which strike the air so that the Father clinches his lower lip between both rows of teeth, not noticing the blood's metallic taste, again, because of his Duty. Two minutes which seemed like both no time at all and an eternity for the parents, pass like this, until a small strand of steam no bigger than a hair's breadth rose from underneath the baby's towels and which they traced to its diaper. Both parents' eyes expanded when they met.

Steam poured from the diaper after the father's hands were burnt from opening it, they now realizing where the majority of the SS's waiter's spilt water went during the accident; all of it had been burning the baby ever since that first scream, not noticed because of the parent's focus on chest and nose and hair and feet. The baby's screams had now softened so that it seemed as if they weren't even there. An infinite scarlet traced the diaper's outline and both parents simply stood. The baby now wholly naked on the balcony, back in the cold winter's air, cradled in the Mother's arms. The Father inside, having fainted a full second after the diaper's opening. The Mother again and again called to their God to please help and do something. When the steam finally stopped and the Mother saw the baby's eyes for the first time in what seemed forever, the door opened. But it was not the Father as she expected but was the SS's waiter who seemed now to be fiercely apologizing for having left and not providing help. His rapid German hit her like endless waves of nothing. He stopped when he noticed this. After standing in silence for some time, the waiter pointed to a small black rectangle off in the distance and said, in her language, Polish, "Hospital, we go there."

More silence.

The Mother was so exhausted at this point, squinted and concentrated so intensely on that dark speck that she failed to hear the waiter's now-continued speech or feel the weight that was lifted from her arms. It was only the gunshot's bang that brought her from that distant speck to the waiter who was motionless on the ground with a hole in his head's side, his gun pointed to the train's end, which is where she now looked and noticed another dot in the snow, racing away. It made a sound like the ones she'd been hearing for the last five eternal minutes. Her baby's. Without her husband to restrain her, her own sense of Duty drove her to jump from the train's connector. The now two dots shrinking into a white nothing as the train roared onward.

Bird
Paige Pflieger

We sit on his bed. The room barren, the wood floors creak and the roof slopes over head. It's freezing because he refuses to pay for heat, so I keep my jacket on. His eyes are red and part closed, half because of sleep deprivation and half because of everything he has smoked tonight. I suppose I can't judge, I am sure my eyes are blood shot too, because everything is still a bit fuzzy in a calm, blurring way.

I got you something.

He reaches in his pocket and pulls out a small manila packet, which fits right in my palm. I shake my head, and tell him he shouldn't have. His smile crinkles in a cat-like way, white teeth brightening his dark face, dimples showing beneath his black facial hair. A small beauty mark sits perched on the tip of his nose, and his thick black ray bans frame his squinted eyes.

By all means, he was beautiful. He had Morrissey hair and a style that embraced his long, skinny limbs. His pants hugged him and his shirts bagged, and he looked exactly as if he had stepped off of cobbled streets of Spain and accidentally ended up in this student ghetto. He had large dark eyes and they look at me as if they are seeing only me, as if he were undressing me with his glance down to bare skin and bones and deeper, deeper inside until I feel as if he can see all of the secrets I want desperately to keep hidden from him. How I am broken, how he deserves better, how I feel like maybe he just sees a beautiful face and wounded eyes and doesn't want to fully grasp the actual reality of how completely shattered my insides are. How I am afraid of abandonment, and how more than anything I don't want to love him.

He looks insistently down at the small package and I lift open the flap delicately and let the contents tumble out onto my hand.

Two dice, simple white with black dots, however on each side the one dot should be on, there is a small black raven. I look up at him, puzzled.

I remind him of a bird, he would always tell me. The feather tattooed behind my ear and the bird flying on my hipbone aside, he would say, it's in my eyes, and my thin fragile bones and the way I intake breath when I lose myself while singing. A bird that is fragile and beautiful and so fleeting that in the blink of an eye I might just fly away from him.

I don't understand, I tell him, searching his face for an explanation. Because, he says, closing my hand around the present and holding it in his.

It's time for you to roll the dice.



Brianna Kovan

Detroit Nostalgia

Jean-Pierre Seguin

A month after leaving, I already miss Detroit.
From this treed city of coffee shops, concerts, and
comfortable middle class liberals,
I gloss over the isolation, poverty, and anger that
fill its streets,
Forget the boringness of my old neighborhood,
Where a third of the houses stand
empty and my friends are gone or going soon.
I watch the bullshit of a city government that
cannot send cops and barely
picks up the garbage on time
From afar.

I miss the directness of Detroiters,
The lack of pretension and clear pride.
We have been hearing for decades how
our city is a living hell,
But to us it is home.
People are honest with you, because there is
no reason to hide our problems
when the burned out house on the corner
tells that story well enough.
Looking past the ruins we
form relationships,
create programs,
make connections,
nurture the communities we have.
We are tough, know how to live through it.
We don't flinch when we hear gunshots
somewhere outside our window at 2 am.
I'm not sure if this is healthy.
Waiting in the store we say hi, make eye contact,
say something about the weather,
the long line,
about something.
The paradox of hostility and friendliness runs deep:
When some of us get angry we really do,

But when someone looks you in the eye you
know
they are giving you their full attention.
Ten friendly people wait inside the gas station
while a funky loiterer lurks outside.
We all have faith in something,
Be it God, art, mere humanity
or all three and
we are unafraid to say so in our
everyday speech.
Detroit isn't just anywhere.
Its citizens have seen good and bad and
outsiders often look at us either like
exotic zoo specimens or
radioactive material.
It bothers us but we take it in stride,
Puzzle at the outsiders.

I fear becoming merely nostalgic,
Though I know I will.
The stigma of once being a Detroiter,
Of not being able to cope there,
Of losing my connection to
my hometown
Scares me.

Detroit's a powerful anchor
so I may return,
But from here it's hard to imagine.
My privilege there is the norm here, and
it's hard to go back when
I know what it would cost.

Reflections on Ecuador and Life

Ariel Kaplowitz

The first adventure I had in Ecuador was on my first night in Quito, when the other University of Michigan volunteers and I took a bus to the Amazon rainforest. We had come to Ecuador to volunteer in one of the poorest areas of Quito, to create a summer school for the lowest-performing students in the area. When we arrived in Ecuador, however, and showed up at the school, the principal greeted us at the front door.

"Ustedes no sabían?" he asked. You all didn't know? He had added one extra week of school to the kid's school year, without telling anyone back in Michigan that we should start our program a week later.

"Podemos ayudar en la escuela ahora?" asked Liz, one of the volunteers. Can we start helping around the school now?

"No," said the principal, giving us a smile that didn't reach his eyes. "Tienen que empezar despues de cuando terminamos aquí." No, he said. You have to start after we finish here.

We were left with an extra, unplanned week in Ecuador, and decided to make the most of it. That night, the ten of us volunteers bought bus tickets for an 8-hour night bus that would take us to the Amazon.

Since Quito was near the equator, it got dark there early. Our bus was to leave at 9:00 pm, and we got the station at 8:50. By then, it already felt like midnight. Before boarding the bus, we were told to sit in the waiting area. (Waiting, I soon discovered, is an integral part of traveling in Latin America. Every time we had a meeting, or we bought a bus ticket, or we went to our school in the morning, there was always a period of between 10 and 80 minutes of waiting. Ecuador taught me how to be late.)

While waiting to board our bus, we shared advice. Everyone in our group had heard something different about riding buses in Ecuador. Much of my information was from my mom, but others from my group knew from past experiences, parent's warnings, and gossip from other travelers. After we shared horror stories (Liz growing paler and paler; she had never been in a third-world country before), we compiled a list of group rules, to stay safe. The rules went like this:

1. Try not to store any bags under the bus in the luggage compartment. Whenever the bus stops, someone might steal something from your bag.

2. Don't take sleeping pills or Dramamine. If you are sleeping, someone could steal your stuff more easily.

3. Hold all of your bags on your lap. Don't put them on the floor under the seat in front of you. Greg, one of the medical students who lived with us in Quito, had already gotten his laptop stolen by putting his bag under the seat in front of him; apparently, someone had crouched down, slit the backpack, and slipped out the computer without him noticing.

4. Try not to act very American. Gringos are easy targets. Our rules didn't last us long. The first thing that happened was that the driver made everyone put our bags under the bus. David, who was to be my co-teacher when we started summer school, tried to get on the bus with his backpack, but the bus driver held him back and insisted that he follow the rules. As gringos, we had no grounds to protest. Lots of Ecuadorians were sick of the gringos coming in and telling them what to do, and the bus driver reveled in his ability to assert his authority. He stood in front of the doorway of the bus, chest puffed out, the buttons on his shirt strained from his belly, until we put our bags under the bus.

When we finally started the ride, all of the kids on my trip got seats together at the front of the bus, but they were two seats short. David and I were forced to sit in the back of the bus.

David was excited to be going to the Amazon. I was excited too, of course, but David was a lot chattier about it. He also had jet lag, since he had come all the way from California, and was wide-awake. I was not wide-awake. That didn't stop David. Although I didn't know it then, this first bus ride would be the start of a short and tumultuous relationship with my co-teacher.

As soon as we sat down, David started talking. He would ask me a question, which I'd answer, and then he'd talk about himself for a long while. Our conversation went like this:

"So, Ariel, do you believe in God?"

"Yes. Well, actually, no. I don't know, really."

"Well, me too. I have a hard time grappling with these deep philosophical questions. I want to believe there is a greater force out there, but I just don't think it's plausible. Like, if there was a God, wouldn't he have shown himself?"

"He or she," I corrected, but David wasn't listening.

"There is just too much doubt. If there was a God, you know, there wouldn't have been a Holocaust. And have you heard about those Holocaust-deniers? Those people are just crazy, I don't understand them, and I don't want to. Anyway, back to what I was saying, I just don't think there could be a God. But then again, who knows? I would love there to be a God because then things would be easier. But people who believe blindly in God, well, I don't want to sound rude, but how

can they do that? And if God exists, how is there science? I just have too many doubts."

The problem was that I mostly agreed with everything David said. He had good ideas, and most of his opinions fell directly in line with my own political, religious, and social beliefs. I usually loved people with whom I could agree on so many levels, but for some reason, David and I just didn't click. This made me feel slightly guilty – why was he annoying me so much, so quickly? Maybe it's because I'm tired, I told myself. Or maybe I'm just not in the mood to talk. I wish he wouldn't interrupt me.

After a while of trying to listen to David, I noticed that he'd put his bag on the floor under the seat in front of him.

"Hey, David," I said, interrupting his soliloquy. "Your bag's on the floor, and something could get stolen that way. Do you want to put it on your lap?"

David glanced down at his bag. "Nah," he said. "I won't be able to sleep all night if I have it on my lap."

"Do you have anything valuable in there?" I asked him.

"It's fine," he said shortly.

Sometime past midnight, I gave up, and finally managed to tell David that I wanted to sleep and wouldn't be able to talk anymore.

"You can still talk, and I'll just listen," I told him. "I just probably won't respond because I'm too tired."

"Oh, that's okay," said David. "I'll just listen to some music." He reached down and pulled an iPod out of his backpack on the floor. Aha, I thought to myself. He did have valuables in there.

I knew that I wasn't supposed to sleep on the bus, but I was tired and wanted to enjoy the jungle in the morning. I closed my eyes, and fell asleep quickly, dreaming of a story my mom used to tell us when we were little. It was a story about one of her first bus rides in Latin America, where everyone on the bus ate and then threw up iguana sandwiches. My sleep was not exactly peaceful.

I was jolted awake a few hours later. The bus had suddenly stopped in the middle of the road. The windows were fogged up all around us, and beyond the fog was total darkness. I froze in my seat, eyes wide open, feeling like I was somehow still in a dream. I pressed my face up to the window, but I couldn't see past my own reflection. Lots of other people had woken up, too, and they were talking in low voices.

"Quizás algo está roto?" said a woman. Maybe something is broken?

"No sé," said the man sitting next to her. "Nos podría haber chocado contra algo." We could have hit something.

I nudged David. "Hey," I whispered. "What's going on?" David didn't respond. I glanced at him, and saw that he was sleeping beside me. I pushed him again, gently, trying to wake him up to no avail. Perfect, I thought.

The buses in Ecuador are made so that the drivers have their own special compartment, and even though I strained my neck, I couldn't see what was going on. I could hear the driver's raised voice talking to his assistant. All of the Ecuadorians on the bus seemed unnerved.

My anxiety began to kick in, and I started to imagine horrible scenarios. The highways in Ecuador are carved right into the Andes. There are no guardrails or safety precautions – if you swerve off the road, will simply fall off the mountain. *What if, my brain squeaked, we are stuck, hanging off the side of the mountain? What if we are about to fall to our deaths?* I nudged David again, desperately wanting someone, anyone, to talk to. He kept sleeping.

I could hear men talking outside the bus.

"Quien es eso?" asked somebody sitting nearby. Who is that?

"El conductor, creo," replied the man sitting next to him. I think it's the driver. We waited, motionless, for another fifteen minutes. Then, the driver got back into the bus, slammed the door, and started up the engine.

The bus began moving again, slowly at first, but then faster. Soon, we were going incredibly fast, faster than I would ever dare to go on such a narrow mountain road. I was pressed against the seat. We flew over bumps, rocketing down the path. I clutched the armrests with both hands, knuckles white. David's head flopped onto my shoulder. I stared out the window, feeling the rocky road whiz by in the darkness.

I couldn't fall asleep again. I had absolutely no idea what had happened – why we so abruptly stopped in the middle of our drive, why we were now speeding down the highway. Were we being chased? Had we hit something, somebody, and were trying to flee? What would possibly explain this? I stared out the window, praying for the bus to stop, for us to get to the Amazon without dying.

When we finally did stop, hours later in the Amazon, I stumbled off the bus, so relieved to be alive that I wanted to kiss the ground. I looked at the pale, drawn faces of the other volunteers. Liz was green.

"What the hell was that stop in the middle of the night?" she asked. I exhaled.

"What stop?" asked David, who, alone, looked refreshed and awake.

absolutely no reason?"
said Liz.

"I have no idea," I piped up. "It scared the shit out of me."

"I thought maybe something was wrong with the bus," said Swati, another girl on the trip. "I couldn't tell."

Liz shivered. "I was literally saying my goodbyes in my head to everyone I love," she said. "I didn't think I'd make it out alive. I swear to God."

I laughed, shakily. "Me too," I said. I liked Liz. David rolled his eyes.

"You guys are so dramatic," he said. "I was awake the whole time, and I didn't notice a thing."

"No, you were sleeping," I said.

"I don't sleep on buses, Ariel," said David. "I never have. I think I'd know if we had stopped."

"You were definitely asleep," I said. "I tried to wake you up."

"Impossible," said David shortly.

I clenched my jaw. Liz and Swati stared at David.

"Whatever," said Jessie, another girl in the group. "It doesn't matter if David was sleeping or not. We're all okay. We're here. Let's just get going."

We walked away from the bus stop, toward a little restaurant for breakfast. Liz caught my eye and shook her head in a friendly way. As we walked, I couldn't quite shake the feeling of anxiety, of fear, that I had been feeling all night. This was my first time experiencing such uncertainty, but the feeling of not knowing quite what was going on was a common theme of all the bus rides I took in Ecuador. Uncertainty about where the bus was really going, and where the bus would drop us off - more than once, our bus pulled to the side of the highway and insisted that we were at our destination, when really, we were more than a mile away (Ecuador taught me how to hitchhike.) When riding the bus, there was uncertainty about the people you were with - whether or not they were safe, or if they'd try to pickpocket you, or if they'd point you in the right direction. We never knew who was going to come on, and who was going to get off.

What I learned from my very first bus ride in South America was that sometimes you needed to accept uncertainty. You need to be able to breathe, to know that you wouldn't receive much information, and understand how little control you have over anything at all. I learned that, in order to see the world, I have to put my life on the line, a little bit. There are many risks a traveler must take in order to have adventures, and riding on buses in the middle of the night is one of them.

melancholy *Max Lockwood*

tried to take a nap but
it wouldn't take



Kara Mullison



Georgia Hampton

In a yoga class of old women *Rachel Pernick*

In a yoga class of old women
our instructor told us
Now
as you enter a seated position
pick up the flesh of your thigh and move it beside you

She told us Move your flesh
I wanted to say
You mean, move our fat.
I wanted to say We are all well-endowed women here
with
fat on our thighs
that wiggles and ripples and rings
when slapped

We have thighs that are thick from baby weight
and hard from bouncing these babes up and down , up and down
and soft from last night's rice pudding

So please
I wanted to say
call our fat **fat**

It's ours and we see it and we know it's there Hell, we put it there
But flesh
Flesh is blood and muscle and tissues
that hold our parts together like bubble gum holds the sidewalk to your
shoe

Flesh isn't our fault (like fat is)
You can't cut out carbs and work off your flesh
or shave slivers off your bones 'til they're nice and slim or detox and
flush out your marrow and blood

Pick up the flesh of your thigh
She told us
and enter into lotus pose

Randall *Brett Phillips*

Randall Graham ran into himself on Armor Street.

He had been staring at the ground, strolling (with the usual morning crowd) to work when he had chanced a quick glance upward, only to find he was about to walk into a man who looked astonishingly like himself. The men bumped shoulders, nearly knocking the two steaming cups of coffee from Randall's hands.

The other man did not heed Randall, continued frisking through the sidewalk traffic and was quickly swallowed whole. But Randall stopped, something he rarely did in his life. He was fairly sure that man had been himself. He was also perturbed that he had not been attentive enough to avoid running into another person. He always prided himself on being attentive. Everything around him was moving quickly, the mass of people on the sidewalk advancing at a jogger's pace. They shot their gaze at Randall as they passed. He had caused a disruption in the steady movement of bodies. Those not glaring at him had their eyes pointed forward and down, like they were disallowing themselves from looking at a horrible accident. Their hands were glued inside of their pockets. Wires protruded from their ears. Randall was still, unmoving. Everyone was walking, but he had stopped. He had even turned around to face the oncoming surge of pedestrians, just for a glance at the man who may or may not have been him.

Seconds passed. Randall could not stand the thought of blocking the sidewalk any longer, so he moved to the outer wall of the flea market on the corner, where he could recover himself. He was confident that after he thought about the situation and reasoned with himself, he would come to the conclusion that what had happened was nothing he should be concerned about. That was usually what Randall concluded about things. So he decided to think about it on his way to work and allot himself no more time than the seven-minute walk he had left to consider this Other Randall.

So Randall nudged himself off the wall of the flea market and scampered back in line on the sidewalk. He walked to work and thought the whole time. The way to best remember him, Randall decided, was to go over each feature and compare them all to his own. The man had had the same color hair, surely. And his haircut had been identical too. Randall just had his hair cut earlier that week. The lady took too much off the top, which he didn't complain about, but when she was almost

finished, she accidentally sheared a patch into the side of his head. She had been laughing with another customer. Randall hardly ever went to that barber, who charged eighteen dollars and never remembered how he liked his hair cut and sometimes put patches in his head, but his usual barber was out of town at the time, and he really had needed a trim, and right then too. The incident had made his appearance much more noticeable than usual, as an unfortunate result.

On his brief walk, Randall also reflected on this Other Randall's eyes, nose, height, posture, eye brows, facial hair (both clean shaven), skin tone, ears, even foot size (he couldn't be sure about it. He thought they both had had the same black leather loafers, but he could not guess the size of the Other Randall's shoes). He discovered then how fiendishly hard it is to remember the characteristics of one's own self after seeing oneself out in public. Certainly, they'd been wearing the same newly pressed suit with the same blue-and-black-striped tie. But Randall never liked to make decisions unless he was absolutely sure he was not wrong, so the only decision he could make regarding the identity of his doppelganger was not to make one. He didn't get that good of a look anyway.

Upon reaching work, a law firm situated in the very busiest corner of the city, Randall Graham was forced to give up his thoughts and conclude that it was nothing he should be concerned about. And so Randall marched into work, where he had a pleasant day, void of distractions. He always prided himself in avoiding distractions. He received a minimum amount of chores from his boss, and the phone only rang four times the whole afternoon - one of which was just Randall's local state representative, reminding him to re-elect their distinguished governor in the upcoming elections. Yes, that day turned out to be fine, better than most other days, he thought. So by the time it was nearly done, he had nearly forgotten all about the stressful events of that morning. He did not tell his wife about it as they enjoyed their routinely taciturn dinner that evening. And when he fell asleep, he had no recollection of it at all.



I Want
Conner Wood

I don't want a blanket to keep warm tonight. I want a comforter with more definite shape.

I want to stand on my tippy-toes and reach out for you with such force of heart that I stretch the webs between my fingers.

I want gale-force winds to rip the clothes off my back and I want rain to flood my lungs, and I want to taste more than your name on the tip of my tongue.

I want to read your mind by the moonlight reflected in your eyes and I want to interpret the lines on the soles of your feet.

I want to become friends with your ankles and pal around with your elbows.
I want to carve the shape of your waist into the very air we're floating in, and I don't give a damn how long it takes.

I want to go to midnight mass at the chapel between your shoulder blades.

I want to make a map of your birthmarks and use it to chart a course to the blinding sun. I want to draw lines between those tiny brown stars in your firmament,
 fabricating constellations for you to wear like tattoos, and then I want to pluck my lyre and write epic poems
 in homage to the heroes and heroines for whom those shapes are named.
I want to be the Homer of your hide, the Jaques Cousteau of your nooks and crannies.

I want to fight a war of attrition over the autonomy of my left hand. I want to hold you so tight not even light can escape.

I want our bodies to blend like marble cake.

I want to feel that two arms are finally enough now that they come in pairs.

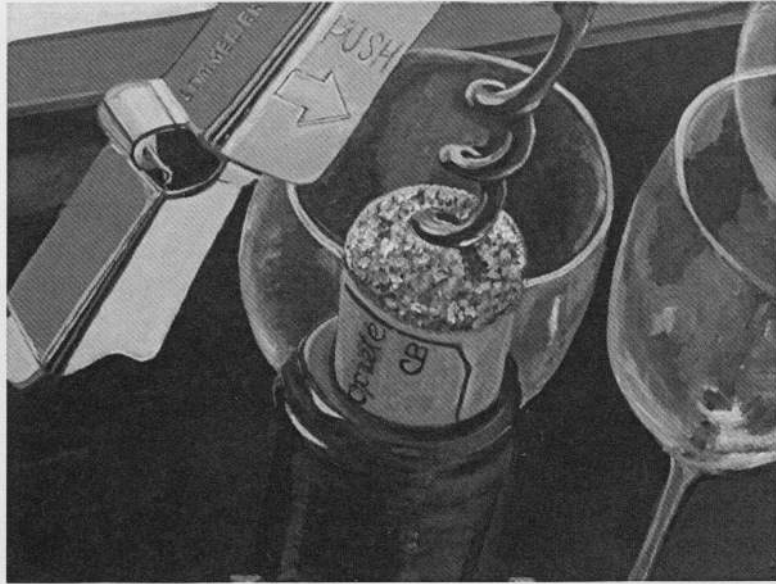
I want to compose a concerto on your skin and perform it on your spine. There will be ninth chords and quarter-rests, and the themes will change between the movements but the key won't, and there will be sixteenth notes and mellifluous harmonies and yes, it will resolve.

I want to found the People's Republic of the Mattress, and when contentedness corrupts the government and sleep makes the citizens complacent I want to start a resistance movement. The agents will be under-covers and up in arms.

I want to press my ear to your chest and hear thunder on the ocean. I want to feel you carving a novel into my back in hieroglyphics. I want to have to struggle just to stutter out your name. I want to fall asleep ensconced in the rings of Saturn. I don't want to have to wake up alone. Don't sentence me to solitary. Don't make me wake up alone.



Warren Hecht



Gillian Jakob

Sherry Vine Jimmy Adams

could change their lives. We watch him dance
, never in perfect time,
never quite matching words with music.

he.
she.
could change their lives
talk them into jim and cokes
whiskey sours
whichever drink the guest queen has in
his hand.

his hand
could change his life.
never in this bar
- sherry vine -
the man himself every wednesday night.

industry never looked so alive.

he could change your life.

'cause baby you're a fiiiirreee
croch belt it baby, out
of tempo out
of time out
of key.

sherry vine looks at me,
his eyes misted in tears and cocaine,
his sequins all around at his feet
all around at my groin
all around at my face

i say,
he could change your life,
glancing at him through the wig.
neither he was terribly interested.

even buddha gets chilly

Cammie Finch

My sister heaved onto her shoulder the bulging sack of knitting supplies—like Mary Poppins' bag of tricks—although this bag grew with every gently placed purl and needle, until, I am pretty sure, it has become bigger than her! Its contents are carefully orchestrated: each color knows its spot in the spectrum, each ball of yarn adjoining its split ends with its respected neighbors, reacquainting themselves after their last endeavor.

I keep telling her that she doesn't need to carry a 50 pound bag of scraggly nonsense with her every time we go for a walk, that it isn't a third limb, that she may suffer from back problems due to an off-balance weight distribution, that the bag slows her down (which is the truth, because we always arrive to our destination 15 minutes later than our planned time), but Mother quickly shushes me and tells me that she is a very curious sort, and that I need to tolerate her thirst for exploration. She doesn't seem to mind that my sister is always late, or hunches over from the heftiness of the bag, but then again, Mother says things like, The glass is half full...with liquor, and Time is just an illusion.

On this particularly dreary winter's day, my sister and I trudged through the chunks of charcoal sludge on our way to town; her creativity was dutifully grasped to her shoulder like a baby in a papoose. We passed by a Buddha statue in a hidden park, tucked in between two large skyscrapers, as if finding refuge from Jack Frost himself.

"What are you doing?" I ask my sister as she begins to wind her many colored strands of yarn in a network of patches around the statue's torso, creating a ceremonial dress of the unconventional pink variety.

"Even Buddha gets chilly," she says, as though everyone was aware of this fact.

"But surely, someone will steal it," I tell her that all of New York is threatened by thieves, but her face stays calm and she merely shrugs.

"Good, maybe it will help them keep warm," she smiled, and she heaved her bag of warming spirits back onto her shoulder, and we continued our journey through the wintrous breeze.



Vesper
Gillian Jakob

Blue or Black? I think of you as I plumb the depths of my cluttered room, trying to discern denim in my haste to meet you
Limb by limb, I step into the black ones, although you probably won't be able to tell the difference, not in the shadows of a Bushwick loft, not when they're on me anyway
And I'm zipped in their darkness, reminded of the midnights I walked with you, and the midnights I walked alone
I'm reminded of the time and my promise

to meet you
And my promise to all the others, who are waiting vaguely for something to happen to-night, for that empty, white-walled, gallery on Duane Street to give us a nod, for those 12th floor Dumbo doors to swing open
I shake the itchy feeling that we'll be at the center of it all, but with no cube of our own on the red, yellow, and blue Broadway Boogie-Woogie grid of Mondrian's canvas

With a last, long look in the mirror, I press my cherry-dressed lips together, and step out deliberately through the door
Down 3rd Street, which seems as wide as it is long, past the rows of endless brownstones that evoke the tube of fabric in Martha Graham's Lamentation, strength amidst grace, a geometric tension—diagonals that point down the Slope

Down to you
Where you are waiting for me before the F train
I look up at you and see the smile behind your Phthalo Blue-Green eyes—a color I know from a tube of acrylic paint, which I think we used once together
And we descend the black steps, where we swipe and sit and wait
We board the train, and let it swallow us
as we ride

Roasted Heart
Cammie Finch

I left my heart in your coffee cup. By accident of course, because who really plans on having their heart be drenched with hot liquid and have to be rescued with a spoon?

Is it still intact? If you have swirled it away or have let it sink slowly and heavily to the bottom of the mug, don't tell me. I'd rather be blinded by the washed mug's sparkling cleanliness than know the truth.

My heart was a hazelnut flavor, with a hint of cinnamon and gooey chocolatey yumminess. You wouldn't dare overpower the taste with an artificial Irish cream. Or would you, now that I'm not there, and my heart is, and the cookies that just came out of the oven would perfectly soften the sharp bite of vanilla whiskey and tough love.

When I left my heart in your coffee, curls of steam flourished in bouquets of heat and hung densely in the air.

I'm sure it has cooled down by now.



Voyeur
Allison Epstein

She was a nightclub girl in a curfew town, and none of us quite knew what to do with her. We would watch her tottering down the aisles of the Kroger produce section in razor-sharp heels, dangling a cigarette in her fingers as she browsed the bin of Roma tomatoes. Nights, we would watch the walls of her apartment shake with creaking bedsprings and Robin Thicke played at maximum volume, and we would pull our white lace curtains closed as if that would do anything to block out the noise. We sipped chamomile tea and sat around the evening news and wondered out loud what would become of her, this wild woman, this creature of another age.

There were times we could have called the police, like when the shrieks leaking through the cracks in the window frame reached a pitch beyond ecstasy, or when she parallel parked her car on the wrong side of the street, or when she arrived at Sunday mass with the veins in her eyes standing out stark like frayed electrical wire. (She came to mass every Sunday, without fail, even though we all wished she wouldn't.) But we never did. Calling the police would have meant admitting that there was a problem, something was wrong, some devil from the worlds of taxicabs and neon lights had slithered its way beneath our picket fences. Our policemen helped cats from trees and let schoolchildren ride in their squad cars. There was no reason to call them. Not here.

One day we heard a rumor that something had happened to the woman. That was what we all said, using those words. "Something had happened." What? Discussions buzzed like gnats at the grocery store, at the post office, between drivers' side windows of mothers in parking lots picking up their children from school. Maybe she'd had an overdose, or had mixed sleeping pills with her nightly cocktail. Maybe her boyfriend of the week had finally snapped, had finally lost it. Maybe she had a mistake growing inside her, waiting to force its way out and restart the cycle from the beginning. We had no way of knowing. She never came to Kroger anymore. The tomatoes sat in pristine stacks in the wooden bins, smelling of pesticides and no longer nicotine.

How long were we expected to wait for news? Too long, we decided. We tried knocking on her door. No one answered. We tried phoning, but realized no one knew her number or even what letter to search under in the phone book. Without someone to watch in the streets, the white lace curtains hung limp against the glass. Our chamomile tea sat

tepid and untouched in our mugs, bearing the gritty residue of over-steeped leaves. Even the news felt less sensational.

And then one day - it was a Tuesday - there she was again, in front of automatic self checkout number eight, scanning a carton of vanilla soymilk, a bottle of shampoo, and Ritz crackers. Her hair had not been washed. Her makeup was days old. She had grown visibly thinner, and she walked slowly, in a daze of perpetual slow motion and amnesia.

We smiled and turned off the TV.



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Oh, yes, and YOU.
Thank you for holding us in your warm, sweaty hands.
We'll try not to paper cut you.
(No promises.)

-The RCR staff

RIP Old East Quad - we can't wait to meet your doppelganger in the fall!

