

folio



Folio

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Accidente, 1936

Steve Sack

The question of responsibility
falls on the bleeding man,
the Humphrey Bogart fellow
in the cobalt blue slacks and jacket
who seduces the fireflies
from illuminating the truth,
and the crickets from crying for help.
Yellow headlights spotlight
crushed daffodils and twigs
surrounding him.
He removes a silk handkerchief,
fixes a splintered sign,
and erases every last fingerprint.

The Bat I Saw

Kari Banta

When the darkened spasm in my vision
burst like a light bulb, swaying, swinging
the bat flew on its mission
checking window and door, sonar ringing.

I thought of bats I saw in the desert—
shivering from torpor, smelling sweet
of a clean musk in their fur,
now mingled with desserts and coffee.

My thin pages fluttered on the table.
I reached to still them, my hand like that
which snatched bats from the air in the desert, not able
to seize them as well as that man

in the desert. The bat now shook,
furious and frightened in its flight—
a page of a burning book
lodged between my grasp and my sight.

Bern, Switzerland

Terri Wise

knife-sharp slicing through
blue feathered wings-- flit. flit. dive
shimmering. church bells

Cabbages

Kelly O'Leary

Rubbery, veiny, cold flesh
of cabbages
Leafy vegetable palms and
fists, push out of the black earth
and press me for an answer.
Do you love him anymore?
They stare at me
with their cold white-blue faces,
throw their limbs
in my path, but resist my tug.
I try to ignore them; I trip over them.
They open, they spread, they press.
Do you love him? do you love him?
I pause, my nose an inch from a cool white bud.
Breathe in, stand up, and pretend
I didn't feel the chill on my skin.

The Cardiac Arrest Love Song

Micole Raab

Twenty white garbed virgins
 pressed together and waiting
with (fear and) curiosity
 --they knew the day
would come
 when their silver
petal delicate gateway
 would give way
 to the greedy fingers
and lusting
 (mouths.)--
The first would leave
 never to return
 as the others leaned
 pressed to each other
(and towards) the doorway
(and towards) the bright future
 yearning
 to be (passionately!)
enflamed ,
 consumed by desire
 the heavenly spirit rising
in joy in peace in rapture.
 (but!) beware the one
 left behind
for if time captures her
 before the flesh
she will be
 old and stale.
'Tis true, they turn one
 dead and ashen
inside
 --ah, my little cigarettes!
(what) pleasure (is
 there) in (thy) pain--

Deus*

John Rodzvilla

The Japanese never had a word for love.
Through shogunate and emperor
Souls passed away with only honor
Pressed in their lips and written in their blood.
Only a word, only a word
Kept for centuries
As the most sacred emotion
While men died and children were born,
For honor not love.

They, like a prostitute, had to borrow
From the Chinese after the Christians came.
After learning the torture of Christ
Who now hung across their shrines
And stained their wood red.
Only then did they learn of love.

And what did they know of love,
Only its agony, the bleeding hopelessness
Of Christ Crucified.
That it was holy
To die twisted and disgraced.
While honor left corpses
Immaculate and peaceful
Forever held high to the heavens
For deeds done in the name of their Living God.

* When the first Christian missionaries went to Japan they presented their god as Deus, Latin for god, to the Japanese this sounds like dai uso, "big lie."

Dubious Connections

Ann Lyon

In the far corner of your eye
there beat a ripple
that matched exactly the
furrow of a fingerprint
of mine or maybe a villain's
which I saw once on a poster
while mailing a postcard to far away

Eleanor
(A Very Short Story)

Emily Mast

Cham told his wife he loved her every day. He would wake her up with a kiss and a tray spread with an embroidered napkin, buttered toast, and black coffee. She would squint up at him through sleepy eyes and say, "Thank you Cham." Often, she fell back asleep until Cham reminded her that her coffee was getting cold. Then she would take a sip and silently step into the shower while Cham finished her breakfast. He was always gone by the time she turned the water off.

On the way to work, Cham would make up love songs in his head for her. Simple ones that rhymed and abstract lyricless ones. He hummed these songs to himself in the office so that he would not forget them before he got home. At lunch, he often called her to ask how her day was going. She would reply, "It's going okay. How's yours?" Cham smiled at the sound of her soft weary voice. "What shall I get for dinner tonight?" he would ask, and she would say, "Surprise me."

At the grocery store, Cham bought french bread and exotic cheeses and wine. He set the table with candles and a white linen tablecloth. In a ceramic vase, he arranged poppies and wild daisies and baby's breath. He played operas on the stereo. She closed her eyes when she sipped her wine and moved her head slowly back and forth. "Exquisite," she said. Cham painted her face in his mind when she said that word.

One autumn evening, Cham played Mozart's *Requiem* over a dessert of fried apples and sugar. She didn't say, "Exquisite." Tears were rolling down her cheeks and falling into her apples. Cham got up immediately to turn off the music and she whispered, "Don't, Cham. Let it be." Cham watched her cry with her head bowed over her bowl. The ends of her hair had fallen into it, stickied with juice and sweetness. Cham held his napkin in his lap and listened to Mozart and his wife's quiet gasps.

That night, she crawled into bed and laid with her back to Cham. He looked at the curve of her shoulder as it glowed blue in the moonlight. He leaned over and kissed it, feeling it warm against his lips. "Eleanor," he said, "I would do anything to make you complete." She did not move, but Cham heard her whispery sobs when she thought he had fallen asleep. He gazed at her porcelain silhouette and did not dare touch her. He had always feared that he might crack her.

Cham had dreams of children and swing sets and popsicles. He wanted to caress his wife's tight round stomach and massage her tired feet. He wanted warm bundles with faces like hers to hold and kiss. He wanted to be able to look at her and tell her what a beautiful mother she was. But she told him, "I'm not ready to be a mother right now, Cham." He knew she would never be ready. She had closed her eyes to children.

One evening, Cham got an idea. He went to a gourmet grocery store and bought champagne and olives and pasta. He set the table with silk and red roses and little silver candles that floated in a dish of water. He prepared cheesecake with cherries and liqueur. He played Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*. When she sat down across from him, he took her hand and kissed its palm. "Mmm," she said as she sniffed the roses. After the champagne and pasta and olives, and after the cheesecake, he turned off Beethoven and drew in his breath. He took her hand and helped her to his feet. He slid his arm round her waist and began slowly swaying from side to side. She said nothing. Her hand rested lightly on his shoulder, so lightly it tickled. He began to sing one of his love songs to her. He held her close and sang it low and slow. He felt his neck grow warm and moist from her breath. "Eleanor by midnight ceases-- to feel my love with all of its creases. . ." he sang. Her fingers felt cold under his own. When he had finished the song, he drew back from the woman he loved and looked into her eyes, hoping to catch a spark of brilliant completion. But they were closed and her cheeks were wet.

Tiffany Lyman-Olszewski

Every night she gets drunk on
red dinner wine,
and her face reflects
the swallows she takes
long and deep
to make her skin shine
like a ripe currant.

She yells when the wine
is drained and runs
her tongue around the bottle-mouth
hoping for one
last taste, maybe more.
Her eyes survey us teasingly
and she gets up on the kitchen table,
bare feet hard and red.

She laughs.
She spills our glasses of milk
down her dress
and runs her fingers
across the plate of butter
licking them
with pleasure.

We sit as we always do,
our faces straight
our backs rigid against
the wood chairs
watching her until she sways and falls
as she always does,
snoring into the empty bottle.

Expanse

Meredith Haitkin

3:45 A.M.

She closes the trunk, slides into the driver's seat and starts the engine of the over-packed '86 Nissan Sentra. The radio hisses loud static at her until the antenna clicks into place and some love song starts blaring; she quickly reaches over and adjusts the volume. The car backs out of the driveway and rolls down Maple Avenue. As she switches on the blinker, she thinks, "I am turning on to Chandler Street for the last time."

7:50 A.M.

She's been on Route 80 for quite some time now. She doesn't have a road atlas. The thought of purchasing one had crossed her mind when she stopped for gas back on the Thruway, but she was too concerned with getting back on the road to take the time to do it. She finds Route 80 bland and somewhat confusing. Or maybe it's Pennsylvania she finds bland and confusing; the New Jersey portion of Route 80 was brighter and busier. She's not sure how far this road goes but she knows she's heading West—West and finally away from the East Coast. Away from Albany, New York, the town she grew up in, the town she was living in until 3:45 this morning. Thirty-four years was too long to stay in one place. She had only left a few times for funerals and vacations but had never gone any further West than some town in Georgia where one of her aunts had gotten married. Albany, Georgia. Sliding an audio book into the tape player, she begins listening to one of those vampire novels by Anne Rice. She borrowed the book from the town library on her husband's library card and has no intention of returning it.

11:35 A.M.

She thinks she might be somewhere near the Ohio border because she's been in Pennsylvania for such a goddamn long time.

She's not making any progress right now, though. She sighs as the fat police officer hovers by her open window, examining her driver's license. "Carlyn O'Rourke," breathes the officer. "What are you doing here in Pennsylvania going 84 miles an hour?"

"Carly," she says, smiles coyly, and leans on the base of the open window, deliberately exposing as much cleavage as possible through the neck of her v-neck t-shirt. "I'm going to visit a friend in Ohio," she lies. She hates the police officer. He is preventing her from getting wherever she's going as fast as she can. But she thinks about having sex with him. She would do it to get out of a ticket. Running through her head are images of grabbing his neatly pressed collar and pulling him into the back seat. Would he leave his gunbelt on? Maybe she would enjoy it, she's starting to feel turned on. She's only had sex with one man.

Handing back her license he says, "Well, I'm going to let you off with a warning. Keep an eye on the speedometer."

10:25 P.M.

The hotel room is pretty drafty and even though it's mid-July Carly finds herself shivering. A shower is what she has been dying for. She enters the bathroom and locks the door, by force of habit, turns on the water and peels her sweaty clothes off. She sits on the toilet and scratches viciously at a mosquito bite on her knee, waiting for the water to heat up. Her knee starts to bleed. She brings it up to her chest and licks the blood away. "This is what it will be like from now on," she thinks as she twists open the lock on the doorknob.

After her shower she crawls into bed. Since she didn't bring any bags into the room with her and she washed her clothes in the bathtub after her shower and they are now drip-drying on the towel rack, she sleeps naked. The sheets feel like satin against her torso; satin, like the blush colored dress she wore to her senior prom. Her date was Stan Heller, a tall soccer player. He took her to a diner in Delmar afterward. They slid into the sticky vinyl seats and drank their first cups of coffee.

It wasn't that she didn't enjoy Stan's company, he was a very sweet boy; but she couldn't help noticing their waiter. Or rather,

Carly remembers, she couldn't help being noticed by him—shoulders bare and pink, lipstick faded and tangerine. She'd had her hair done at the salon that her grandmother went to every Friday morning. The hairdresser, Cherri, had gone on and on as she'd fastened the baby's breath into place about how lucky Carly was to have hair such a gorgeous shade of blonde. But it wasn't her hair that the waiter had noticed when he came to take their order.

"You're not wearing any earrings," said the waiter as he collected their menus.

"No." She grabbed at her ears self-consciously.

"Most people wear such big earrings when they dress up. Especially when they have their hair pulled up like you. I like it with no earrings. You have beautiful earlobes."

Carly blushed. Stan grunted softly as the waiter faded into the darkened area of the diner. The deep voiced waiter had interrupted Carly's preoccupation with the decision of whether or not to sleep with Stan after they left the diner. He hadn't said anything to her about it, but she knew he wanted to; she knew he had driven all the way out to Delmar so that the ride home would be filled with as many opportunities to stop as possible. She'd been debating the issue all evening.

"Why not?" she'd thought to herself earlier in the evening when slow dancing with him and could feel his hot breath on her left shoulder blade. "He's always treated me well, he's very attractive and I like the feel of his skin. Besides, he seems like the kind of guy who might be good at it."

But there in the diner Carly knew she didn't want to sleep with him, but she didn't really understand her gut decision until Stan went to the bathroom and the waiter sat down across from her.

"Fidgeting with a utensil is a sure sign of boredom," he said.

"Or it could be a sure sign of the bashful way I react whenever my boyfriend is near me." She grinned.

"Oh. Is that the case? I am not hitting on you. I just thought I would keep you company while your boyfriend is in the bathroom. He's been gone a long time. Was tonight the Prom?"

"Yes. Shouldn't you be working or something?" Her fingers continued twirling the fork.

"I can leave if I'm making you uncomfortable. I'm just being friendly."

She smiled and bowed her head.

"Well, I think that means you want me to stay but you don't want me to know that you do. Is that it? Well, at any rate, it looks like your boyfriend has finally emerged from the bathroom, so I'll leave you be. If you decide you want to reciprocate my valiant efforts at friendship, my name is Paul and I think you know where to find me for the next three hours." He pulled himself up and started to walk away.

Carly's hand flew out and caught his pressed white sleeve. "He's not my boyfriend," she whispered, without looking up at him.

She didn't go home with Stan. Carly stayed with Paul until his shift was over. She told him about her friends and her family as she swiveled back and forth on a shiny red stool as Paul washed the counter. And Paul told her about his college years and what he'd been doing for the six years since he'd graduated. She liked his stories about diners and gas stations and big fraternity parties. She liked the smooth way his arms moved and the strange shade of blue in his eyes. "I'll bet he's slept with a lot of girls," she thought to herself.

When his shift ended at 4:00 A.M. he took her hands and asked if he could see her again the next night.

"I might be too tired," she said looking down at her feet and smiling coyly. "After being up all night with you, I might be too drained."

"You have plenty of time for sleep, it's only four A.M."

"But I have a feeling. . ."—she looked up at him—"that I won't be getting much sleep tonight." She kissed him. He took her back to his apartment and had sex with her. Six months later they got married.

Tonight Carly goes to sleep and dreams that her Nissan is a submarine and she has a sea lion as a pet.

2:45 P.M. (The following day)

Carly's back on the road, though it's no longer Route 80.

The hotel clerk had told her that if she stayed on this other road it would take her West through Missouri and Kansas. The scenery is starting to look flat and brown. The air feels dry and Carly rolls up her windows and turns on the air conditioner. Before her, the road divides. To the left is "Perry Lake," and to the right is "Paola." One is an exit from the main road but she can't discern which one. Perry Lake sounds interesting so she bears left.

4:30 P.M.

Carly realizes that she made the wrong decision back at the Perry Lake-Paola intersection. She's found herself on a desolate and dusty road. She's grateful that she remembered to fill the car up while she was still in a civilized area. There are no surroundings to enjoy, just dust. She hates the Midwest.

6:45 P.M.

Out in the sun, the hot silver roof of the Nissan burns Carly's forehead but she doesn't remove her head. She kicks the tire again and lets her fingers slide along the glass of the driver's side window; they squeak and leave greasy streaks. She wouldn't have gotten out of the car at all if it hadn't been an emergency. Her bladder had simply quit on her, and though she had wanted to wait until she came to a rest station, there were none in sight and the cramping had become unbearable. Inside, the last glow of the sun bounces off her silver key chain dangling from the ignition. "Someone will drive by soon," she thinks. "Someone with a cellular phone who can call Triple A. Or someone who knows how to break into a car."

She walks to the rear of the car and leans on the trunk, staring at the peach sky sinking in the haze of dust.

Peaches had made her realize that she was really in love with Paul four weeks after they were married. When Carly returned from the gym (Paul had told her to get a membership—he told her that she was starting to look "plump") she found herself breathing sweetness and flour. In the kitchen, she found a small baking pan wrapped in tinfoil cooling on the range. "Did my mother stop by?" she wondered. "That must be why Paul isn't here." The heat from

the oven lingered in the kitchen; she peeled off her sweatshirt and the heat clung to her arms and thighs. She walked over to the oven and prodded the warm silver treat, unsure of what it was. She slid into the plaid oven mits and moved it to the counter. Before she had a chance to remove the oven mits, she heard Paul come in the front door. She thought of throwing the bundle in the garbage before he entered the kitchen so that he wouldn't be reminded of her mother's visit and reprimand her again. But he was in the kitchen before she could move.

"What are you doing home so early?" he asked when he came through the door.

"I got off work early, so I went to the gym and now. . . now I'm home."

"You ruined the surprise. I went out to the store to get a pint of ice cream to go with the cobbler."

"Cobbler?" She peeled away the tinfoil.

"Yeah, I made a peach and rhubarb cobbler for you. I figured since you've been so good on your diet and I didn't let you get the apple pie last night at McDonald's, I thought I would make you a treat." He walked over to the freezer and put the ice cream away. He pushed his long bangs out of his eyes, exposing the charming, yet receding hair line and sighed. "Don't you like peach rhubarb cobbler?"

"It's my favorite." She couldn't discern whether the stronger scent of peaches was from the cobbler or Paul's flesh. She would have been content just to lick his fingers.

"However," he began as he approached her, locking his hands on her waist and lifting her onto the counter, "it's only for good little girls with big muscles who go to the gym regularly and don't waste their husband's hard earned money that he spent on membership fees. Let me feel your muscles." He slipped his large peachy hands into the short sleeves of her t-shirt and smoothed them gently up and down.

Carly leaned forward and kissed his collarbone. Wrapping her legs around his torso, she pulled him closer to her. They had sex on the counter and afterward ate the cobbler.

7:50 P.M.

Carly hums “The Theme From A Summer Place” as she peels the sticky t-shirt from her body. She looks around a third time to be certain that no one is around. Her khaki shorts are already folded neatly, resting on the trunk. All she is wearing now are her lacy green bra and matching panties. She runs the back of her hand across her forehead and smears away the thick sweat. “Where are all the other cars?” she wonders. Her knuckles are still red and throbbing from her vain efforts to pound through any of the car windows. She hadn’t been able to find any stones, twigs or other tools in the dusty expanse.

She rakes her fingernails through her hair. Her nails get caught in the dry snarls. She wishes she had her brush.

Carly wrings her hands roughly and paces in circles around the car and the sky dims slowly to a deep teal.

8:55 P.M.

Kick-ball-change. 1-2-3-4. Kick, kick, left, right, left. Carly is trying to remember the dance routine she did for the tenth grade talent show. The beautiful white moon is her spotlight in the thick darkness of the night. Her breasts, now free of their green captor, bounce up and down. She stares down at her feet. Her lungs are sore from breathing in the dusty air so deeply. She thought she was in better shape— perhaps if she had gone to the gym more over the past few years. Fish have different lungs than human beings. Carly tries to imagine how a fish’s lungs can extract the oxygen from water. Little orange gills pulling in water. Slurp.

Paul owned an 85 gallon fish tank. It had been a long time dream of his to work at an aquarium, and thanks to Carly’s job at Key Bank, where they give out free stuffed beavers to the grandchildren of their best customers, he had been able to come as close to making that dream come true as possible.

Two years ago he brought the tank home. Carly was watching TV, wrapped in a blanket decorated with cats and pelicans. Paul kicked open the door and dragged in the giant box containing the glass body of the tank.

“What is this?” Carly asked.

“An aquarium. Don’t bother me while I set it up,” he grunted as he ripped the tape off the box and opened the flaps, peering at the glass within.

“An aquarium? Where the hell are we going to put that? How can we afford an aquarium?”

“I took the money out of your account this afternoon. I just had to buy it, it was on sale. We’ll make do. Don’t worry.” He stayed up all night assembling the tank: filters, lights, gravel. He spent the following day running tests on the water: pH, nitrate levels, hardness. He bought a Clown Loach, a Marble-colored Angelfish, a large bloated Paku and a Plochastamus to suck the algae off the sides of the tank. And he bought an Arojuana. He had seen one on TV once, he told Carly. In the wild, the Arojuana can grow to be over six feet long. On TV it ate a small monkey. Paul mentioned something about having no more problems with stray cats. Paul brought home a bag filled with feed goldfish. Thirty, he found a great deal. He poured the contents into the tank and pulled a chair over to the tank. He sat in front of the tank watching the long gray Arojuana suck down the helpless orange fish. Its fins swished violently as it sucked down ten more. Arojuanas have teeth in their throats, that’s why Paul can slip his hand into the tank and pet the fish without fear of being bitten. Paul sat and watched the feed like some late night TV movie of the week.

The tank sounded like a small waterfall. Carly had to turn the TV up really loud to hear it over the “soothing white noise,” as Paul called it. The living room felt smaller with the tank taking up almost a full wall. She wondered what would happen if she poured vinegar into the tank while Paul was at work. Paul wanted to take baths and showers with her all the time now. The shushing of the shower and the rushing of water through the pipes in the ceiling would arouse him. He would let himself into the bathroom when he heard the shower. At first, Carly found it romantic and very satisfying: the steam, her lips against his wet chest. But soon it became tiresome. When she resisted once he slapped her and submerged her head in the toilet.

“Glub, glub,” mutters Carly as she rolls in the thin yellow

grass on the side of the road. She lies on her back and stares up at Orion's belt. Orion would want to sleep with her, she thinks, and cups her hands over her breasts.

9:05 P.M.

"Isn't it supposed to get cooler when the sun goes down?" Carly hollers. She is still lying on her back staring at the dense sky. It is as dark out tonight as her room was dark when Paul came home drunk two nights ago.

She had curled up and gone to sleep early. Work was long and taxing that day. At 10:30 P.M. Paul came in and fell on top of her. He tore the sheets off of her and ripped her nightgown. Her arms, without hesitation, tried to push him off; he pinned them down. He thrust hard and threw his head back, howling. He pulled out and came on the sheet beside her.

Carly lay silently on her back, waiting for Paul to pass out. However, he didn't show any signs of nearing that state.

"Carly, what did you eat for dinner? Dinner. I'm. . ." he mumbled. He usually passed out right after they had sex. She was getting sick of these sorts of evenings, they were becoming more and more frequent. "Carles!" he laughed. "Remember. . . remember. . . oh wait. Nevermind. Do you remember when you used to be a good lay? I do."

She took in a deep breath and smiled. Rolling over to face him she said, "Is that what you want? All you had to do was ask." She climbed on top of him and had sex with him again. She gritted her teeth the whole time. She wanted it to be over so badly her stomach churned. When it was over, she gave him a moment to rest and then started again.

"What's up with you tonight, Carly? You just can't be satisfied, can you?" He lay on his stomach and spoke into her pillow.

"No. I'm still not satisfied. . . come on, Paul. . . one more time."

They had sex again. After that, Paul was so wiped out he couldn't even move. Carly smiled and crawled out of bed. She put on the clothes that she'd left on the chair the night before. She

pulled the suitcases out of her closet and stuffed them as quickly as possible and threw everything in the car. Before she left, she went into Paul's pockets and drawers and took everything of value she could find: credit cards, cash, even forms of identification, and of course, the car keys. At 3:45 A.M. Carly emancipated herself.

9:15 P.M.

While seated on the trunk, Carly can see two headlights several yards down the road. She hurries to throw on her clothes before it gets close enough for the people in the car to see and think her a lunatic. Her bra is in her pocket, her underwear in her fist. The car puttters slowly toward her. She leans against the driver's side door of the Sentra and watches the other car pull to a stop next to her.

Inside is a gray man in a beige hat. There are small bugs with plochastamus mouths sucking on the inside of the windows. The man has strong arms and a dorsal fin. He rolls down the window and introduces himself as Mr. Paku. Carly feels the moon pulling on the tides within her body as she gets into the car with him.

The Files of Dr. Richard Fustion, Ph.D.

Aili Dalton

Dr. Richard Fustion, Ph.D., believed that most smells fell into either one of two categories-- kitchen smells or bathroom smells. Kitchen smells, like those of his wife, Desiree, were warm and full, traveling at a slow pace: vanilla, cinnamon, curry. Bathroom smells had more speed; bright and hard, they demanded instant recognition: lemon, bleach, mildew. All other smells were muddled: bedroom smells, laundry room smells. Too much mixing and matching happened there. You couldn't tell what smell wanted to dominate, so they all just clung to each other the way a square of static guard clings to a detergent-washed shirt as they tumble indecisively over each other in the dryer.

Most of Dr. Fustion's patients fell into this last category. When they first entered his office, a muddled aroma wafted in with them. He would listen to them talk, he would psychoanalyze, but all the while he'd be sniffing. Only when he had determined their scent would he be able to help. Sometimes it took five sessions, other times, fifteen. Schizophrenics and manic depressives were the hardest. He had smelled quite a few in his nineteen years of practice. Most of them never made it out of the mess of the laundry room and into the kitchen.

It was a personal comfort to Dr. Fustion that he could order smells into the rooms of a house, and that he had made a business of filing people according to those smells. He would write a patient's scent on a white label before the name, affix it neatly to a file, then put the file in a smart leather briefcase if he was taking his work home. Dr. Fustion was proud of his briefcase. He had got it when he began his psychiatric practice and it had lasted him ever since. With the proper care, he believed it would last forever.

Dr. Fustion liked to think that he, like his briefcase, carried the refined scent of leather. It denoted mastery. He had always liked to have a certain amount of control over his own odor, distinctly more than the average person's concern. But over the

past few years, when it first dawned on him how integrally one's scent and personality are reliant on one another, his obsession had become increasingly more pronounced. His nose was now fine-tuned and acutely sensitive to any and all fragrance.

Only when he got outside did Dr. Fustion's system fall apart. There was nothing like the muddle of outside smells, Dr. Fustion thought to himself. Absolutely unpredictable. Desiree liked them. In fact, recently she had been talking about their benefits in an attempt to interest him in a camping trip. But he found that if you went out there, once you'd gotten a good snort of something you liked and you'd almost put a name to it, the wind would inevitably blow in something new. Either that or you'd walk too close to it and then it wouldn't smell so good anymore. . . or it would disappear altogether. In the long run, outside smells didn't have much going for them anyway. And if they did, that scent had been perfected and given a proper title which ended up printed on a can that sat on a shelf in either his bathroom cabinet or kitchen pantry. Thus proving that the only decent, worthwhile scents were to be found in either of those rooms. Dr. Fustion convinced himself of this as he prepared for Annie Flamboy, his three o'clock patient.

Reclining in his office chair, Dr. Fustion reviewed File F—Depression (Dust)—Annie Flamboy, session #11. Annie Flamboy, like most of his patients who suffered from depression, smelled like dust under a bed. It was almost a non-smell, dull and cottony, yet it made his nose sting, and he knew that until his olfactory senses determined her substance he couldn't sneeze her out.

About five months ago there had been a fire in Annie's apartment, destroying not only everything she owned but, with it, her sense of stability. She was unable to maintain her data entry job due to acute depression and memory loss. Currently, she waitressed mornings at the Red Engine Diner down the block from his office.

That afternoon Annie told him that she had started having the fire dreams again. "They always start with me pacing up and down the carpet in the hallway that leads to my front door. And I'm wearing my slippers with the scratchy tread. First I wear the carpet down to threads with my scuffling. Then I take a step and a

flame shoots out from beneath my feet, like strike anywhere matches. Everytime I move my feet a new flame starts up and then I can't move. Right before I wake up I'm surrounded by fire. I tell you, Dr. Fustion, those dreams paralyze me. I couldn't make it to my morning job today and I could barely make it here."

"Why can't you leave your apartment once you're awake?" Dr. Fustion sniffed. One nostril sensed the slightest taint of a greasy handkerchief and the other picked up the musty scent of a pillow feather. Still, the two did not quite match, and he was puzzled by their relevance to Annie, aside from the fact that they could be found beneath a bed.

"Because I'd have to walk down my hallway."

"Why don't you try taking your slippers off?" he suggested.

"Yes, I suppose I could." Annie lowered her head sadly.

"But then my feet would be cold."

At the end of their session, Annie got up to leave, her rising body creating a slight air current. In the wake of her movement, Dr. Fustion's nostrils had a revelation. Eggs! Ever since Miss Flamboy started her job at the diner she'd come in with the smell of eggs in her hair. Why, she wasn't dust under the bed at all. It was the eggs that had been stinging his nose. Annie's depression was a heavy, yolky, cling-to-the-bed-all-day-or-muck-around-in-a-diner kind of sickness. Not fluffy and scattered like dust.

"Bless you, Dr. Fustion."

"What?"

"You sneezed."

"Yes, thank you. Excuse me." Dr. Fustion smiled and wiped his nose.

After Annie left, Dr. Fustion jotted down this latest development. He shook his head professionally as he tapped file F on the top of his desk so that the pages inside aligned neatly at the edges. As he placed it back in his briefcase he thought that it was a good thing he was around to help others sort out the clutter of their lives. He saw his patients almost in the same way as he viewed the box of scented markers he owned as a child. Though he was always careful to keep the markers in the same order as they appeared in their original package, invariably they fell to disorder at the hands of

the neighborhood children's play. Caps were lost and colors were shuffled. Little Fustion would reorganize the confused markers, smudgy with child's use, after dinner was called and he was left alone in his room. It hurt him to see the capless ones' scent dry up becoming indistinct and useless. His patients were no different. They too had suffered too much play and were incapable of finding their proper place or making sense of what's become of them. Dr. Fustion so liked his role of healing by order that he created categories for things even if they did not seek his help. He had gotten so used to it that he could not have peace of mind without.

That is why he kept file D. D stood for Desiree and the file contained all items pertaining to her. As, for instance, the grocery list, for which he was now searching. Dr. Fustion saved all of Desiree's lists. He kept them paper-clipped together, organized according to the year they'd been written, attached to a piece of paper with the date as a title. So far he had accumulated fourteen of these packets. The grocery list he was looking for would be stapled to two recipes he had cut out for Desiree earlier that day-- one for creamy potato soup and another for a new bread dough.

The last time Desiree made bread had been a disaster. It was about two weeks ago, a Sunday. Dr. Fustion thought back to her long matted braid and the red and brown strands that curled at her cheeks. Her face was as bright and shiny as her metal mixing bowls. He had taken such a keen delight in the perfection of the kitchen scene: the spice rack hanging neatly on the wall above Desiree's head, and her skin getting moist from steam when she peered in the open oven door. Moved by the undisciplined curls he wished to smooth behind her ears, he approached her, gentle fingers outstretched. Yet as soon as he was near, the warmth of her nutmeg scent stirred something in him and he burrowed his nose in her dampened neck. Lost in the embrace, he was made unaware of anything but himself and the savoriness of his wife. Until the reek of smoke shrouded the moment, inspiring in Dr. Fustion a sick horror. The bread, untended, had begun to burn. Within seconds the sinister scent of smoke had destroyed the raisin-tart of the loaf and the peppery sweetness of his wife. Smoke, black and clogging, obliterated everything and Dr. Fustion's daydream was spoiled.

Feeling somewhat anxious, Dr. Fustion held file D to his nose and inhaled deeply. His sense of peace was quickly restored. The envelope exuded Desiree's nutmeg scent because he had put some of the ground spice into a tiny cloth sachet and wedged it into its corner.

He slipped his hand into the envelope, and finding the grocery list, scanned the paper, checking to see if he needed to go to the fish market or whether the regular grocery store would do. It appeared that Desiree planned to make quiche. She had written in her scrawling hand "pie crust" and several types of cheese. Desiree would have to make a cheese meal, wouldn't she, Dr. Fustion thought. He would have to be quick to rinse off the plates before the cheese dried on. At the bottom of the list he saw that Desiree had written "eggs". The unbidden image of Annie Flamboy with her yolky-yellow complexion arose. It made the thought of eggs in his dinner distasteful and a little depressing. Tucking the list into his coat pocket, Dr. Fustion leaned over and took one last snort from the envelope. Putting File D back in his briefcase he thought fondly of Desiree, waiting for him in the kitchen.

Dr. Fustion ate heartily that night, the eggs were almost unnoticeable for Desiree had masked them with spice. Laying beside her in bed, he felt full and content, penning things into his daily planner :

- 8 am = Garbage out
- 8:15-8:35 = Shower/Shave
- 8:40 = Prepare coffee
- 8:45 = Dress
- 9:30 = Straighten office
- 10 = Patient R (Ammonia). . .

Desiree was reading a magazine. The magazine contained the article about outdoor life which had acted as a catalyst for her obsession to go camping. This was the third time she had read the article, entitled "Hiking is a girl's best friend: Start lichen the green outdoors!" "Do you crave a bed of moss?" it began. "Well, get your walking sticks and canteens out for there's no time like the present to rediscover your environment. With these forest-friendly

tips you'll be drinking from waterfalls in no time."

"Richard, will you please reconsider?" Desiree made a great commotion of turning on her side to face her husband. She held the magazine, opened to the article, between her thumb and forefinger and waved it in front of the Doctor's daily planner.

"Desiree, I just don't see the appeal. It's too cold this time of year and you know I like to be able to bring my briefcase and toiletries when I go on vacation."

"But Richard, think of the sky at night, a crackling fire, and pine trees. . . ." Desiree was dreamy now.

Pine! The scent of paranoia, Dr. Fustion thought. But he said aloud, "Fires are dangerous, Desiree. You can't play around with them. I'm not about to go disrupt nature's order by tromping in boots, stepping on wild grasses and breaking branches off trees and the next thing you know, you've got a forest fire. Besides, Desiree, you're romanticizing. I bet that article doesn't mention how messy it gets when it rains or the horrors of freeze-dried shepherd's pie, does it? Or about the fact that a campfire really isn't so wonderful because it's too hot when you're close to it but you're too cold if you take one step away from it. And Desiree, we've got the sky at night right here." Dr. Fustion waved a hand dramatically toward the window. "See the moon, right over there? Look how yellow it is. Now isn't that something?"

As he looked out at the moon he saw that its yellow color matched the yellow of the lighted windows in their neighbor's house. This observation took some of the charm out of the color. Dr. Fustion blinked and looked again at the moon. This time he was reminded of the yolk of an egg. The thought made him a little uneasy and for a brief moment he considered the possibility that the moon might look better if it weren't framed by rooftops.

"If you want to take a vacation, Desiree, we could go on a cruise." Dr. Fustion pictured the pleasant rows of lounge chairs, the smell of coconut lotion in a bottle, and the silver settings at the tables. These new images had a calming effect on him and he felt the chaotic distress he had worked up during the course of his camping monologue drift away. "The moon looks great from a boat," Dr. Fustion murmured.

Desiree sighed and tossed her magazine onto the floor. With exaggerated movements she snapped the light off above her head and flopped onto her stomach.



The next afternoon, Dr. Fustion sat in his office, preparing for his three o' clock patient. He took out File V— Hysteria (Flower Amalgam)— Iris Visabalchi, session # 9. He had only been seeing Iris for a little over two months but she was an incredibly interesting case. She always came to his office with several scarves wrapped like blindfolds around her head over which she wore a pair of dark sunglasses. Dr. Fustion would have to lead her slowly into his office by her arm. Though she complained about how any bit of light touching her eyes was excruciatingly painful, she drove herself to his office. She suffered from periodic delusions that she was blind. Dr. Fustion had traced this neurosis back to an event when she was a child, and had been witness to a violent and unnatural act. A group of neighborhood bullies and her brother had thought it would be a good gag to capture her cat, Coco, and give him catnip. After they had gotten the cat severely delirious, they dressed him up in her doll's coat and shoes, put cigarettes in his mouth, and performed a perverted puppet show for poor Iris until her bewildered pet swallowed one of the cigarettes. It was only a few bittersweet minutes before Coco combusted in her loving arms. Now, close to thirty years later, she slipped into so-called blindness whenever she experienced anxiety.

Despite the professional distance Dr. Fustion kept between himself and all of his patients, Iris Visabalchi made him a little nervous. The impression she created with her scarves and glasses was eerie and her smell was confusing. It seemed to Dr. Fustion that each of her scarves had a scent all its own. Almost as if she stored each one in a separate drawer with its own perfume. The paisley one had a musky odor, the purple dotted one was more of a citrus-y bloom and the rest he could not distinguish. They fell somewhere between the rich piquancy of lilies of the valley, to the lighter freshness of the tulip. He hadn't yet been able to get her to

take off the scarves. Not until she did would he be able to ascertain her true scent. Furthermore, she was always asking Dr. Fustion questions which upset the order of his sessions.

He had not slept well the night before; his argument with Desiree had kept him awake. Still, the session began as usual, Dr. Fustion slowly escorting her to her chair and then taking his place in his own chair near hers while she placed her handbag at her feet and straightened the scarves about her head. As she began to talk, Dr. Fustion jotted down the pieces of her life so that he could label them and place them in his file.

She told him that she might be developing a cough and that she was considering buying a seeing-eye cat.

"Don't you think that in your . . . condition, you should perhaps get a dog?" Dr. Fustion offered delicately.

"No, I really believe I'm ready for a cat." Iris nodded her head defiantly but flicked a nervous hand over her sunglasses.

As the last five minutes of the session approached, Iris offhandedly mentioned, "I saw your wife today."

Dr. Fustion looked at the scarves and deliberated whether he should first ask her how she saw his wife or how she knew who his wife was.

Iris continued. "She was looking at a tent at the All Outdoors Outlet in the mall and a man with messy hair was with her. I bought myself some gloves." Iris paused to pull out a pair of thick leather gloves. "Don't you think it's getting colder out? My hands chap."

This information scattered Dr. Fustion's thoughts and he felt suddenly unbalanced in his chair. The image of Desiree, his nutmeg and shiny-faced Desiree, out and about with this tousle-headed woodsman was upsetting. It didn't fit with the other information he kept in the D file. Surely this patient of his was crazy. Yes, of course she was crazy, that's why she was in his office. Madness! Dr. Fustion thought to himself. Why, she can't even see, yet she says she saw my wife. I'm sure she doesn't even know who Desiree is. Dr. Fustion felt the urgent need to urinate.

"If you'll excuse me, Ms. Visabalchi, this should conclude our session. I must use the lavatory. I'll be with you in one

moment to escort you out.”

Dr. Fustion fought off the impulse to race to the bathroom and managed to walk to the door with some semblance of grace. Yet once inside, he relieved himself sloppily, noticing that he was trembling. Putting the toilet lid down, he sat on it heavily and attempted to compose himself. I'm just on edge from lack of sleep, he rationalized. I'll collect myself in front of the mirror, get that woman out of my office, and then I will sit at my desk and go over Desiree's grocery list. That will put my head in the right place. The idea of reading Desiree's grocery list grew very important to Dr. Fustion. It was necessary that he see the careful column of items written in Desiree's familiar scrawling hand. I think she's making that potato soup tonight, he thought. Dr. Fustion tried to visualize how the list might read: potatoes, leeks, salt, cream. Her "s" would have a loop at the bottom. In the midst of contemplating the list he remembered Iris in his office, and composed himself quickly.

But when Dr. Fustion emerged from the bathroom a minute later, there was not a trace of Iris Visabalchi ever having been there. That's curious, he thought, as he hurried to the window to look for her car (a beige Volvo), but that too was gone. Dr. Fustion was too relieved by the alleviation of the disturbance she had created in him and too preoccupied with a desire for the list to be worried about his patient's whereabouts. But when he collapsed into his chair and swung his arm down to grab his briefcase his fingers closed on empty space. Disbelieving, he jerked forward and stared at the ground. Dr. Fustion's body went cold in alarm and he jumped to his feet. He tore open his cabinet and then attacked his desk, throwing his blotter, his clock, and his pen organizer to the floor in his frenzy. "My Files! The List! My Files! The List!" Dr. Fustion screeched as he raced about the room in confusion, checking beneath the chairs and scanning the corners.

Then his eyes alighted on Iris's handbag, leaning subtly on her vacant chair. In one swift, hysterical motion he snatched the handbag from the ground and unzipped its large pocket. Thrusting his head into the opening, he breathed in violently through his nose. The stink of smoke, dark and destructive, made his eyes smart

and his head ache. He pulled back in terror, jabbing a quivering finger into his nose to alleviate the painful burning sensation, while his other hand grappled inside Iris's pocketbook. When it emerged, a pack of cigarettes and a box of strike anywhere matches were in his sweaty fist.

"How could she?" he choked. How could she embrace the very thing that killed her cat? The thing that had caused her thirty years of distress? The thing, above all else, that made her blind? Though Dr. Fustion's head was congested with smoke and confusion, one clear image formed in his mind. The image of Iris Visabalchi, stripped of her brightly fragranced scarves, walking away with his briefcase in her tobacco stained hands. Iris was clear to him now, as real as the heat she had made in his nose. He knew that her eyes, uncloaked, were hard and black as the density of coal; the leather of his briefcase, fine and polished, was melting in her hand. Thinking of his briefcase, he pulled out his shirt and sniffled despondently beneath the collar, hoping to be consoled by the cultivated scent of leather. He was met with the same dirty stench of smoke, sparking in him a rekindled and insistent dread. Desiree. He needed Desiree. She alone could fill him with sensation. The sensation that the smoke had so quickly destroyed.

Dr. Fustion bumbled to his car and began his drive home. The streets made a network of dizzying humanity. Though Dr. Fustion drove quickly, it was a slipshod speed—making awkward turns at previously prided exact corners. He had one motive, to get outside of it all. It's decimating me, he thought. If I can just get home, to Desiree, this black cloud that congests me will thin.

Yet when he pulled in front of his house, he saw that it was as dark as a void. Opening the front door, he flared his nostrils in desperation, willing the familiar odors of home to bully away the ashy stain of smoke that smothered him. Yet though the scent of Iris's cigarettes had become less vivid, it was replaced with a sterility so lacking that it created in Dr. Fustion a new panic that was much more terrifying in its possibilities. It was as though a fire, ignited by Dr. Fustion's fear, had burned out all of his nerve endings, rendering him ineffectual and abandoned.

Dr. Fustion scrambled about the kitchen, seeking stimulus

to fill the blackness that asphyxiated him. But everything that he held to his nose was devoid of odor and felt cold in his hands. Yet the chill went deeper than his skin for beyond the desertion of his senses was the absence of Desiree. And this he felt more sharply than anything. Dr. Fustion weakly lowered himself to a crouch on the hard kitchen floor. As he did so, he felt the sharp edges of a bulk at the side of his trousers. Reaching into his pocket, he fingered the box of strike anywhere matches he had lifted from Iris's purse. Taking one out, he scraped it against his thumb, searing a bit of his flesh. Dr. Fustion dropped it quickly in surprise. Somewhere inside him a hot excitement flickered, and this new feeling possessed him.

Inspired, Dr. Fustion stumbled out into his backyard and began to break branches off the neatly groomed trees that bordered the house. The bark got under his nails and his palms became sticky. But Dr. Fustion was joyous for with each twig he broke, the sharp scent of pine was evinced. And it was a good smell. Standing in front of the sizable pile he had collected, he fumbled with the matches. It took a couple of strikes to light, for his fingers were eager and impatient, but within a few moments promising little flames were lapping at his feet. Sweet blue billows of smoke played at his nostrils and he inhaled rapturously, detecting strains of wood he had never noticed before. He was so entranced by the unpredictable movements of the flames that he did not see Desiree approach him.

"Richard! What is this? I thought I was bringing the surprise home today. I was going to tell you about my new job."

Dr. Fustion looked up at his wife, her head outlined by red-orange light, encircled by light clouds of smoke, and felt a deep peace. When she came toward him and lay her head on his shoulder, it released a passion uncontrolled. With his body pressed tight against her in disheveled and exuberant embrace, she replenished in him an emotion that he could not define, but accepted gladly.

finger paint

Bevin Fahey-Vornberg

how's your heart?
i know it was broken.
funny thing
talking about hearts
as though they can be smashed or shattered or
i think i may have seen you
melted even

makes me think of that time
we smeared pudding on the paper.
can you feel it slipping between your fingers?
cold and
sweet
and although we laughed
it's kinda sad to see a
smeared heart

when i hung it on the wall
it was slippery and sticky and red
and still a little warm
look closely and you can see the rivulets;
can you see them? there,
where your fingers have scraped
through to the paper.

Fish 'n Chips

Rosemary C. Whalen

Dori was quiet today. She stood vacant-eyed in the chill of the refrigerator light as Amr read from the obituaries.

"It's got to be him. It looks like him. He was all dazed and he was rubbing his eyes. I remember he had a long Polish name with 'ski' on the end and when he signed the check the writing ran onto the counter. I had to wipe off the 'ski'".

"Does it say it was a suicide?" said Dori, gazing at the lemons absently.

"Well, essentially. 'Died of gunshot wound.' He didn't seem like the kind of guy who'd get mixed up with trouble. God, I should have known."

"What could you do? You can't refuse to sell a customer a book. What could you say, 'Sorry, sir, but I think you're too depressed to read a book about suicide. Here's Calvin and Hobbes?'"

Amr was still concerned, but appreciated that she tried to relieve him of his guilt. He still wanted to talk about it; he was bursting to keep talking, but he knew she wouldn't have anything else to say but "um-hmn." So he changed the subject to spare her.

"So, what's for dinner?"

She didn't respond right away, then pulled out some fish sticks from the freezer. They were crusted with frost and smelled of freezer burn. She held them up for him to see. "With lemon. And peas and potatoes." She smiled, but only because she loved him, not because she really felt like smiling. There was a word that she couldn't think of. A word she never used, but had heard of a few times. She couldn't remember exactly what it meant, something like "miscellaneous", but a trip to the thesaurus gave her nothing.

I'm sick of this. She's just a vacuous temp so how should she remember such a big word? What a bore this chick is. I should know, I'm the narrator. I'm God. I don't really give a damn about

Dori's bad memory or Amr's panic that he helped some pitiful loser off himself. Makes me sick. Please. Like he has the slightest effect on anything in the world. He's just the face behind the register—he doesn't even read half the books he sells.

Not that I'm Mr. Change the World. But I'm taking an initiative. Usually I write more like a reporter. Well, I'm fed up with it all. This time it'll be *me* talking. I've got this psychic thing. Okay, so the God part is a load of crap.

I guess I should explain this. I've had psychic dreams ever since I can remember. It's not like I'm reading everybody's mind, but sometimes I get tuned into a story. My head will plunk down wherever it can and I'll go right to sleep. It's as frickin' clear as switching on the TV. It's usually just a handful of characters who are mad at each other or a boring monologue about some idiot's epiphany. I usually only see the main characters' thoughts, but sometimes I'll get a bystander's point of view. At first I just thought they were super vivid dreams, until I started reading the stories from my dreams in the papers. Then I thought I was just psychic, or more precisely a mind-reader—which I guess is maybe a possibility, except it really pains me not to write the stuff down. Which brings me to my point. I'm a starving artist. Well, okay, so I've got a job for money, but other than that I'm a narrator and a writer alone. I usually don't know the people, which is a relief. Could you imagine? There are just some things I don't need to know about my parents.

The weird part is that I can't block the story out. And once I come to my senses, I *have* to write it down. I mean, if I try to blow it off, it *hurts*. Well, it gives me headaches no matter what but they're worse if I don't write everything down. It's like I'm working for a newspaper and I have a deadline, except I have an invisible boss who likes to push pins in the head of a voodoo doll of me, I don't get to travel. . . nobody reads it. . . and I don't get paid. Heck! I'm a slave. Geez, if I got paid for this I'd be frickin' loaded. I've had to take days off my real job so I could concentrate and write it down before the images are gone. I've dropped off so many times at the factory that they had to put on my file that I'm narcoleptic.

The problem is, no matter how mundane the story is at first, there's always a point where I start to flip out and get really into it. It's like a spooky trance. I won't want to do anything but write and wait around for more dreams. God. This will happen with Dori and Amr, even if it isn't all that great a story. I'll start getting hung up on the fish sticks or something.

So I'd better go take a shower and get to work. Oh, and by the way, Paul Garbonzowski would have shot himself in the head whether he'd read that book or not. That loser was just waiting to die— postal worker. This isn't a psychic thing— Really— I just know because he lived down the block from me.

I fell asleep at work again. That probably means this one's a doozy. This is pretty much how it's going: Amr had a pretty regular day except that when some lady with way too much mascara tried to buy that suicide book, he pulled her aside and gave her a concerned speech like she should be really careful about not letting it get her depressed. She called the manager over and hollered about her freedom of choice and her right as an American to buy with her hard-earned money whatever the hell she could afford.

"Maybe you're too new here to understand my English. . . I (she pointed to herself). . . AM. . . BUYING (she rubbed her fingers together to indicate money). . . THIS (she shook the book like a madwoman) . . . SOMEPLACE. . . ELSE! (she pointed out the front window)" She moved her lips really pronounced like he was some moron who was trying to rob her of her God-given right. I thought he was gonna die right there. He kept quiet and let her storm out. The manager missed the sale but couldn't bare to say a word to Amr because he knew his heart was in the right place.

I don't know if I should mention this, but he also thought Amr had a nice butt. There are some times when it sucks to know what people are really thinking about.

As far as Dori's going, she just can't think of that word. She was at the grocery store 'cause it's her day off. The list said to get chicken, but she got fish instead. Salmon.

"It's funny," she told the teenager at the counter, "I always hated salmon. But I really want it today."

It was hard for me to see inside her head. She's obsessed with the word. All the way in the car home, she thought, "Bass. Tuna. Salmon. Bass. Catfish. Gefilte fish. Herring. Sardine. Caviar. Blowfish. Bluefish. One fish, Two fish, Red fish, Blue fish. Goldfish— No, you can eat it."

I just don't know what the heck's going on with her. If I could read her subconscious I'd know the word. Hell, she lives five minutes away, I'd drop her a note. . . Maybe. But it'd be more fun to just write that I know the word and that I can't tell her what it is because it's top secret information. But I can't see it if she can't. It's irritating.

Now I want to know the word.

I hate to have to mention every banal detail of their pitiful lives, but at least I'm writing in a real me voice for a change. It's a good thing, because I'm failing to see much of a story here. Oh— another one moved into my building today. By another one I mean another psychic narrator. I know who she is because the only other times I've been able to read somebody's thoughts while I was still awake was when they were mind readers, too. We usually just acknowledge each other and nod. One time this guy gave me a bad rap about my hairstyle. He was thinking, "What a shame. If he just brushed it forward. . ." So I tried it. It's pretty cool. Candid first impressions. I don't think there's much point to writing anything like that down unless it's a dream. I don't even know why this happens. It's too complex to be a freak of nature.

Anyway, I helped her with one of her boxes because she was dropping stuff on people's toes, and she thought it was awful sweet, so she got all chatty with me. I didn't mind at first, because it's awkward to communicate in front of other people without speaking. You know, all those automatic hand gestures and facial expressions. But she just wouldn't shut up.

"So are there any good restaurants around besides the Garden?"

"So, where's the movie theater?"

"You still live with your parents?"

Yack, yack, yack. I thought I was gonna yack. And guess what her name is— Gabby.

She was irritated that I was 25 and living with Mom and Dad. Hell, I'm irritated about that, too. It's hard to have an important psychic vision when someone's vacuuming your room. She was loud and freckly and too short. Yellow made her look ill. She examined my gut so I made a point to stare at her breasts and to let her know I was only doing it to be annoying. If you really need to cover up information, you can, and she had a biggy to hide. I think you can only read another psychic narrator's mind if your stories overlap, so I fished around her brain for the names Dori and Amr. But they weren't there. You pretty much have to take a passive role with this, so I've gotta wait around if I'm ever going to find out how our stories relate.

Amr's starting to get worried about Dori.

"Do you want to go fishing this weekend?" she asked hesitantly.

Amr blinked and stared at her, way too astounded by the question. "Of course not. Neither of us knows how. We don't have the equipment. I'm already filled with fish. You've got them up to your eyebrows." He stood up from the kitchen chair. "You've got fish on the brain." He stared at her, baffled. "You've never liked fish. Now, it's all you eat. It's Thursday. We had fish sticks Monday, salmon Tuesday, catfish Wednesday, and I just did all I could to swallow that swordfish. You know I hate to cook swordfish. And you. . . You've had bagels and lox for breakfast, tuna salad sandwiches for lunch, sushi and sardines every chance you get. How much longer can this go on? You'll fish yourself to death!"

Swallow. She was stuck way back, a few sentences back. *Swallow was part of the word. Swallow fish.* But she knew that wasn't what it meant.

Oh, come on, Dori. You're driving me crazy. You can't think about one damn word for a week.

Amr wouldn't let the fish thing drop either. "You have a job interview tomorrow. Did you remember? Or are you too absorbed with fish?"

"It's just this word. . ." she began feebly, not wanting to tell him even though she knew he was enough of a sap to try to understand. "I can't think of this word."

"Well, what does it mean?"

"Something crazy and mixed up, a big jumble of things that don't make sense, I guess."

"Unintelligible?"

"No, not that ordinary," she said.

"Balderdash?" He guessed.

"Closer."

"What does this have to do with fish?"

"It sounds like fish. Part of it sounds like fish. And part of it sounds like 'swallow'."

"So you think if you eat this fish you will have a revelation? Did you try a thesaurus?"

"Yeah, and the dictionary," she supplied.

Amr sucked in a long breath. "Well, when did you hear it?"

"I don't know. I have no idea where I picked it up. But I only heard it once or twice. It's not a regular word," she appologized like it was her fault for hearing about things that were beyond her.

Amr sighed. This was a lot less serious than he'd thought. He'd been all irrational and freaking out, that she was having an affair or that she was really sick. More likely she just needed to get a life, a stable job, maybe move into a house. "Well," his voice softened like he was reading a bedtime story to a kid, "we could go to the library and find a big book about fish and go through all the names." He sat down on the corner of her chair and put his arm around her, kissing her, and his voice got sickeningly cute. "We could go to the grocery store and ask all the kinds of fish they carry. We could go to the pet store and look through all the aquariums." She giggled stupidly, and felt very, very silly and very guilty for being so self absorbed the past few days. "We could go outside right now and stop everyone we see and ask them what their favorite fish is."

She kissed him back, and the conversation was over. Before it got too stifflingly cute, the dream was over and I was spared.

But I still can't figure out that goddamn word.

I got a call from that Gabby chick today. I guess you pretty much have to be in the same room with somebody to really get the psychic thing going, you know, if you're awake and all, 'cause we didn't have as many problems on the phone. It was probably just because she didn't let me say anything. But we still didn't exactly enjoy ourselves. "We shouldn't see each other right away," her voice pinched out. "It'll get too complicated. But I need to talk to you. I'll send you messages or call." Then she hung up. Oh, goody. I'll be hearing from her again soon.

I was at the factory, stuffing the chips into the bag, stuffing the chips into the bag, stuffing the chips into the bag until my hands were covered in salt. I was starting to really wonder about that word. So it sounds like a fish, but it also sounds like swallow. And it means some sort of nonsense. I imagined going to the water fountain and stopping up the drain with my salty hands to make a little pool for a fish. I tried to lure the fish to me. I closed my eyes for a second and missed a few bags on the conveyor. I don't hesitate to take advantage of being officially narcoleptic. 'Here, fishy, here fishy,' I called in my head. 'Would you like to swallow some nonsense?' Oh, who the hell am I kidding. I've never heard that word in my life.

I opened my eyes and started to get my stomach in a knot about that loud chick, Gabby. If I have to see her again I think I'm gonna puke. There are just some people I take an immediate aversion to, and there isn't a whole lot they can do to change my mind about them.

A few days later:

Jonathan— (the note was civil)
I know the word.
Will send fish accordingly.

— That loud chick, Gabrielle

What was the point here? Why wouldn't she just come right out and tell me? Dori doesn't even know it yet.

In fact, Dori was starting to get especially perturbed by the whole affair. If you want my opinion, she's getting even loopier. I mean, she just spaced out at that job interview. The woman who interviewed her asked her what temp agency she worked for and it took her way too long to answer. I couldn't see into the interviewer's head, which would have made it a lot easier because Dori's vacuum isn't much to work with. To make matters worse, the woman had an aquarium in the room. Most of the dream was just Dori clenching her jaw and staring at this little gray fish as it fluttered its tail and stared back. At one point this crazy even wondered what it would taste like, but knew she couldn't dodge the eyes of the owner, who she thought probably knew the word and just didn't want to tell her.

I'd just settled down with some nachos on Saturday afternoon when I konked out—

Amr was alone in the bedroom, his face all solemn. He was thinking about how Dori had seemed as though she wasn't letting it get to her, then wham!— she broke down. She had raved for several hours about— now wait, let me make sure I've got this right— about being lost at sea with a pirate who would only let her eat fish until she told him the meaning of life. Poor girl. She had been piling fish and chips lunches onto her tray at the cafeteria of the place she was temping, and then sneaking out at night to hit Long John Silver's. Amr cried. I nearly did, too. God, you know you've hit rock bottom when you crave that greasy crap. Anyway, she's in a nice, special ward of the general hospital, safe, where they won't give her any fish.

After that dream I got to have a real nap of my own. When I woke up I noticed there was a nacho chip stuck to my nose. I don't know why I didn't wake up sooner. It had flipped up in mid-bite and since I hadn't been conscious to pick it off, the cheez had

cemented the chip to my nose. Good thing it didn't block off my nostrils. Mom had always warned me about falling asleep while I was eating, not that there was much I could do about it. Besides, I'm sure if I started choking the dream could wait. When I went to wash off the dried cheez, there was a message from Gabby on the machine.

"This message is for Jonathan. I'm going to have to meet with you in order to complete my assignment. I think it'd be best if you come to my apartment. It's 4D. I'll be there until 6, so anytime today is good. Oh, and don't step on the fish."

It was 3 o'clock. I washed my face and ate the rest of the nachos. Dad came in and started counting how many chips I ate. He stood there, looking over my shoulder, counting, "Twenty-four, twenty-five. . ." as he leaned in and grabbed a few for himself.

By five o'clock I was heading up to 4D. I tripped coming out of my apartment and practically killed myself. Oh, yeah. The fish. I opened up the bag. How the hell am I supposed to know what kind of fish this is? But when I turned the wrapping over, it said "COD." Oh, *cod*. That helps me a lot. Now I'm gonna smell like *cod* all night. I stomped off to the elevator, chucking the package into a garbage can.

By the time I got there she was getting ready to go out for dinner. She was wearing a puke green dress that was way too tight and she was being attacked by a swarm of hair spray molecules, which latched onto me as soon as they could seize the opportunity. "I smell you got the fish," she said, as she thought, "at least it's an improvement." I raised my eyebrows to this but decided not to lower myself by responding. "Look, I don't have a lot of time," she said, "but I need to ask you some questions."

"So, what's your story about?" I cut right to the chase, convinced she'd never get to the point.

"You, you imbecile."

Oh. Well, I guess that's the only logical explanation. It's not like there's a whole lot more to bleed from the Dori and Amr thing.

"And it hasn't been fun. It flips around from your superiority complex to your stupid chip-packing and your stupid

avoidance of your parents. Actually, the reason I needed to talk to you is that I need you to do something. Anything." She started to frantically rush around for things to stuff into her tiny handbag. "I thought if you figured out the word that might be something to write about, but you're a little too slow on the uptake."

"... So...?" I motioned with my hands for her to fill in the silence.

"It's codswallop, you idiot."

"What? That's not a word. What the hell kind of word is that?" I've never heard of it!

"It means nonsense."

"Well how the heck am I supposed to know that? How many people use that word?"

"The clues were all there. You're slacking off when it's important. You've got the energy, but you're using it against your characters. A year ago you would have thrown yourself into the story; you would have been driven insane alongside Dori. And you certainly would have realized sooner that that was what the dreams were about. I can't believe you've been writing about fish for a week. A person doesn't go insane from trying to remember a word for too long. You didn't even try to do a background on her and Amr. If you'd checked, you'd have found out this is her third breakdown. And you could have even— oh my goodness, no— made something up for a change, and then the story would have made some sense. And for Christ's sake, like any self-respecting narrator, you should have at least asked around about a word you didn't know. Has any writer ever asked you to narrate for them? No."

"Hey hey hey hey hey I write my *own* stuff. And you're telling me I should be giving my stories away? I'm sorry but that's not the way I operate."

"And have you ever been published? Has anyone, even a family member or a friend, read your stories? Would you even let them?"

"Is that even important? You're telling me I'd be better off like Dori, heading for some asylum to draw pictures on the walls

with crayons than. . . "

"Stuffing chips into a bag? Yes! At least that would make a better story for me."

"So how am I supposed to hold a regular job when I keep going off into some psychic wonderland?" I was starting to get scared. I couldn't see into her mind at all. She was who I thought she was, wasn't she?

"Not exactly. But never mind. I want you to read a paragraph from the last section I've been working on. Then maybe you'll see what I mean."

I snatched the sheet from her hand.

"You can have that copy. And there's more where that came from. I'm late. You can show yourself out." I was expecting the door to slam shut, but she closed it calmly.

I started reading.

He slumped on the gold plaid easy chair, peering into the television, waiting for the light of God to shine out and rouse him from his stupor. He reached into the bag for another nacho, painfully reminded of his grueling days at work, but soothed as he dipped it into some fake melted cheese spread and raised it to his mouth. Automatically came the next chip and the chip after that, until he was seized by another vision, in mid-bite. Before him was a man weeping for the loss of his love's mind. But Jonathan bore no sympathy. One cannot care about other people when one is living in a shambles. He decided they would get over it pretty soon and when he awoke, he pried a half-eaten tortilla chip off his nose and went to wash the nacho cheese off of his face, thinking all the while, "God, I hate my mother."

Okay, so it wasn't one of my best moments— but where the hell does that bitch get off, talking about me like that? It's not like I'm some ogre. If I didn't care about this stuff, why would I bother to show my opinion all the time? Hell, I'm giving up hope of this headache ever going away. And I'm pissed that she told me the word. I would have figured it out sooner or later.

I decided to have a chat with Gabby. I waited at her apartment so I wouldn't miss her. I was still standing in the living room, deciding where to sit, when I was hit by the last vision from this story. Dori was sitting in a drafty paper gown playing solitaire,

missing Amr desperately, and absolutely never wanting to eat fish again. That was it, and I hadn't even hit the floor yet when I came to. I was actually able to save my head from plummeting into the corner of the coffee table.

When *Gabrielle* came in, she wasn't surprised to see me rise up to greet her.

"Now, Jonathan. Do you see what I mean? Do you think you might want to spice up your life a bit? I hate writing about you. No one can blame me for not getting into it."

"I thought we only had to write if there really was a story—something of interest."

"Well, most of us. But, never mind that. Do you think you could get a little more sympathetic toward the characters from now on? You've been sliding for the past couple of stories to the point where it's your opinion against the characters and your obtuseness against the plot that's right in front of you. And now, this cocky attitude is just full of . . ." she paused, glaring at me, to find the right word ". . . codswallop. You're not interesting enough to be a subjective narrator. You're not even interesting enough to write a story about. Who cares about someone who never likes anybody else?"

"I like writing about people I don't like, sometimes." I was whining already— I hate it when I do that. "I mean, I don't see the point in being completely nice all the time. Your story about me isn't exactly objective. Doesn't my point of view count for anything?"

"Okay, Jonathan." She collected herself. "When you were chosen to be a narrator, the consensus was that you had an odd point of view and you might be useful to us someday. But you've completely lost the points of the last five stories you've been assigned to. Come on, you should have been able to figure out that Jed left Susan because she didn't give him enough attention."

"It wasn't the cat?"

"Personally, Jonathan, I don't think it had anything to do with the cat. But I'm losing my point— you should have been able to write it that way and make it work. But anyone reading what

you wrote would have had no idea why he left her or that it even mattered. You've been neglecting to use your imagination past what information the visions give you. You're not doing your job, and we don't need you."

"How much do you know about this? I was chosen. . . by who?"

"I'm not allowed to tell you that information. And you'd better cut back on the God complex— it's getting very dull. Keep it on your own time."

"No. I don't see why I should." This secret psychic society gives me great dreams but why bother if I can't write about them on my terms? And what else is there for me to write about anyway?

She looked up at me and decidedly smiled and nodded as she said, "Well, then, Jonathan. It does me great pleasure, on behalf of the personnel department, to fire you. Now I can stop writing that blasted report."

"But I never even applied. How can you fire me from a job I never asked for? I would have quit last year if I'd known. . ." She had been shoving me out the door and before I could finish quitting, the door had slammed on the fingers of my right hand. I went flailing into the far wall of the corridor. Damn her. "I want a paycheck!" I smashed my fist into her oak door, which did not help alleviate the pain, and kicked it until the toe of my shoe ripped from the sole. The landlord gave me a curious glance from 4B, and helped me hobble to the elevator.

"What ails ya, lad?" he asked.

So I told him.

A couple floors away from Dori, I'm sitting here with a busted toe and purpled fingers. I just had the deepest, most luxurious sleep I've ever had. I've still got that migraine, but I'm sure it'll be the last. Mom and Dad are waiting for me out in the hall, I'd better get out of here. I should be back at work on Monday. I mean, at the job I still have. I asked the nurse's aid to send a note to room 305. All it says is "CODSWALLOP". Hell, I can be sympathetic if I want to be.

Gloves of Silk

Charlene Caprio

I would not have fallen in love with Amos
if-- after dinner's coffee,
a long day's hike,
he did not warm the nape of his neck
with the callused palm of his hand
and dip his head towards me,
tired brown eyes following,
long thick brows, Jewish nose,
and a high and tight hair cut.
He smiled, bashfully, as if my question somehow exposed his
thoughts.

"What do you think we are, some Arab country?" he answered,
laughing.
"Israel is the most democratic country I know. . ."

I laughed at my ignorance, and played it off with a smile,
listening to three Greek men behind Amos
singing syrtaki songs
to another mustached man, playing the bouzouki.
And a young village girl held a gridiron cooker
full of lamb chunks, dripping in an orange, olive sauce.

She scrunched her oil-stained apron tight
to her yellowed dress, and bent over,
stretching the rusty handle into the open flames.
Our same meal--
but only the fats remained, soaking in a tangy grease.

". . . And your ex-wife, do you still talk to her?"

And I, thirteen years his younger,
lived the same ill-fated fairy tale
four years ago.
Two inchoate soldiers
struck by one
cross-fired, formation glance.
He leading our squad,
I looked ahead, not caring
to inspect the sides of the road
'til we reached the resting ground.

Where, hidden behind a government painted face
while it slowly dripped off
in clumps of green and brown,
and smelling of field sweat and tadpole mud,
I peaked through the early autumn leaves to my leader.
"I'm falling too," he whispered.
For how could we have known
that childish Shakespearean Fury
of forbidden love
would plague us both?
(And what would happen if Juliet and Romeo lived older?
Would they grow apart too?
Would she tolerate his irrationale?)

". . . I live alone, in the traditional part of Jerusalem. . ."

An atheist Jew, he told me of the beauty of his land.
It is so similar, he said,
as we looked up to the sound
of a falcon falling below
the monastery of Varlaam.
It was one o'clock and the monasteries
were closed 'til three.
We had time to rest, drink some water
and look through the tapered peaks
where Zeus seemed to have thrown his thunderbolt

relentlessly, splitting the rocks into separate flames.

(But then Zeus retreated,
and took his bolt with him,
leaving its negative imprints
to sharpen the dagger edges
and frame the village of Kastrá below.)

"... Of course Arabs and Muslims live there too--
but all are separated, in carved-out sections within the walls..."

Amos stopped near the low-sprouting tree
and tore off an unripened green pod.
I-- not able to guess, he broke it apart.
And what looked like a pepper or fruit
hid millions of tiny black flies
flowing into his palm
eating the cottony mesh of their womb.

"... They are not ready yet. I think I just sacrificed them..."
But he pretended it was for science and moved on
to the *Cyclamia* flower, that also grows wild
in the Israeli mountains,
with its four pink silk petals swept backwards,
as if by an ivory comb.
He picked up one of these natural nymphs,
no longer than my shortest finger,
and gave it to me, to later look up
its modern Greek name.
Cyclamia.

"... In Isreal the name of the flower is also that of a woman.
It is sung about in many songs, because it is so beautiful, so
fragile..."

No sooner, however, did I drop it on the rocks,
stopping to photograph the dark rain clouds

that rested on the roof of the Grande Meteora,
with a thick, rising mist fading the tourist stairway.
How absurd looking,
these ascending stone appendages
pasted to the sides of the cliffs,
when alone they naturally grew
into the foundations of monastic homes.
I thought of Satori, the Orthodox monk (and ticket collector)
who lived in St. Nicolas-- alone.

"Please do not shout. Respect the character of this place."

I read the same sign on the walk down,
and wondered why the monks gave up this silent world
to the pollution of sight-seers, drinking their cokes,
smoking their cigarettes, then throwing their trash
over the sides of the road--
to rush inside the churches
and awe at the 16th century frescoes.
(Didn't they see the sinful red stream
flowing down the left side of each holy entrance,
drowning the wicked,
while two-headed monsters and hungry fish ate them up?
Or were they all Saints, seated on the right,
deserving to enter the sanctified space?)
I wondered how many monks fled north
to the serenity of Mt. Athos.

Walking back along the paved road
that hugged the mountains of Meteora
we stopped to watch a family of baby bats
flying away from their caves.
I feared they were still vulnerable
during those last crucial seconds
when the tip of the sun still shone.

"I received bad news from Israel today. Nine soldiers died in

Lebanon."

"How will Israel react?"

"Peace is so near."

"Did you know them?"

"They were much younger than I."

"How many soldiers are stationed there?"

"I don't know. Even if I did, this isn't a number that should be discussed."

I stopped asking questions
and wrapped my arms around my waist
fighting the temperature drop.
Walking farther away from Amos,
I thought of a West Point friend
who last year nearly froze to his death
wading through a swamp in Georgia,
trying to be a Ranger.

"Gloves of silk," he whispered, drawing me back by his side.
"A military term used quite often. It is what we must wear,
what we are forced to wear, when handling such issues. . ."

". . . You must understand. Most people in Israel are tired of
fighting and want it to end. But it is not that easy. We may sign a
peace treaty and the next day, one of the leaders like Yassir Arafat
gets shot. It's the small militant groups that want all or nothing,
no compromise. . ."

After sipping the last of our Greek coffee
he walked me back to my hotel
to meet again, in two weeks, in Athens.
Where, eating a greasy souvlaki dinner
he reminded me of my long floral dress and Nikon camera
that I wore when we first met in Meteora.

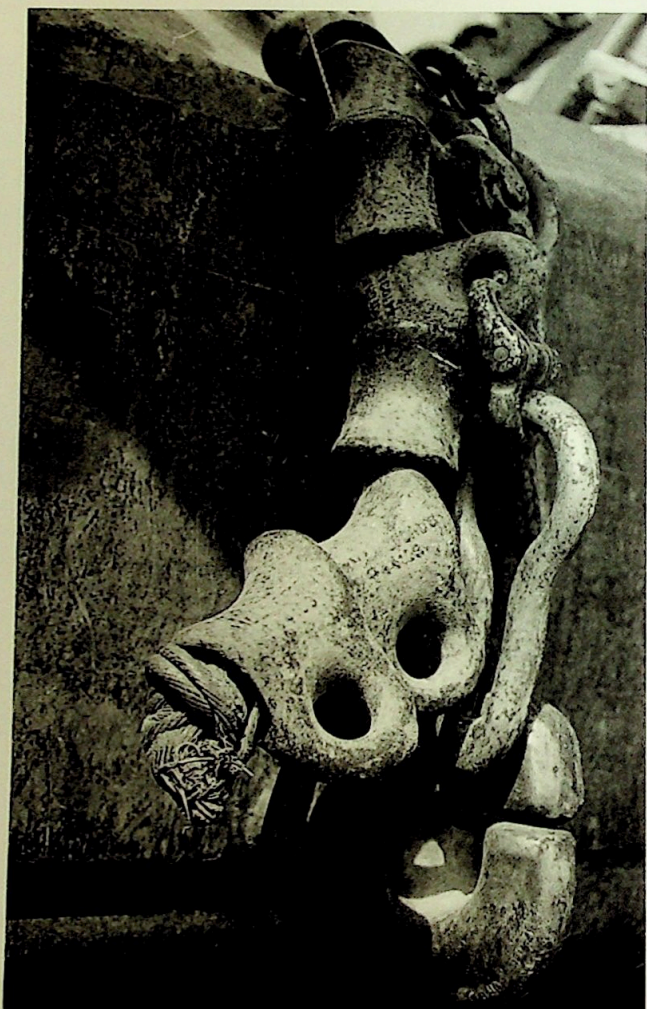
". . . I knew then, and wished we could begin. . ."

But knowing our tale must end
He caressed my cheek with his hand.
Departing that night, we both agreed
to leave our last couplet blank--
until five days later,
I heard his clairvoyant whisper:

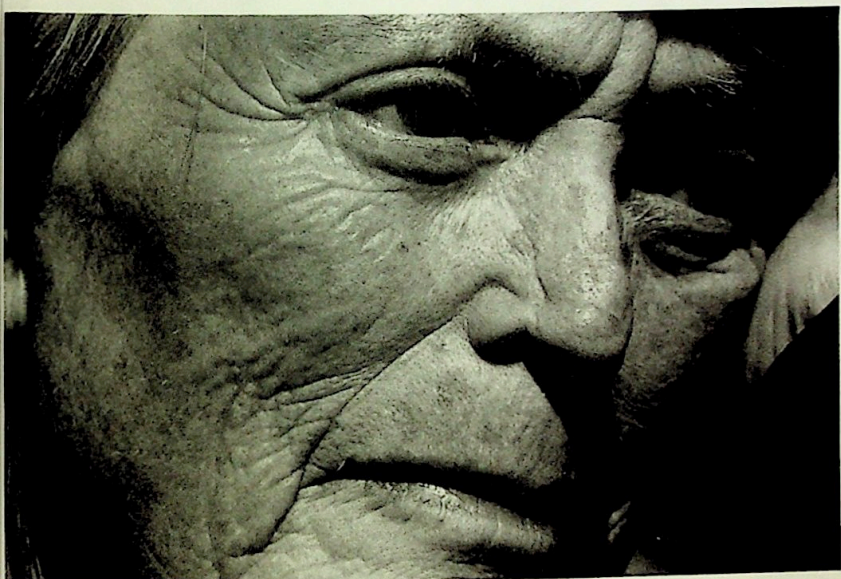
"Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin was shot and killed
by one of the few, not wanting peace."
And I knew I would not see Amos again.

And I wondered how many monks
gave up their homes,
fleeing north
to regain their unity with God.

Images



Gregg Emmel



Matthew Benson



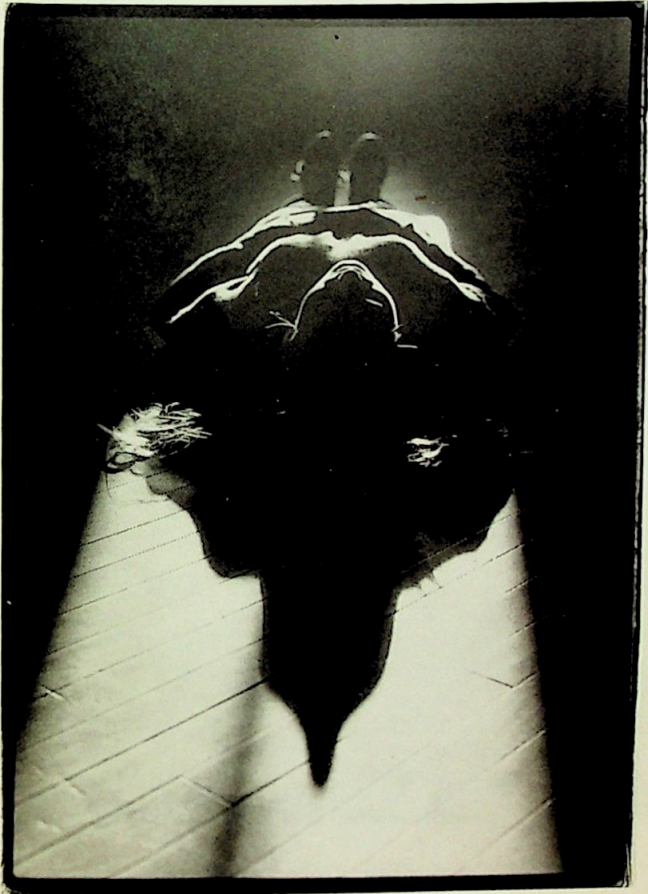
Jessica Lerner



Michelle McCauley



Emily Mast



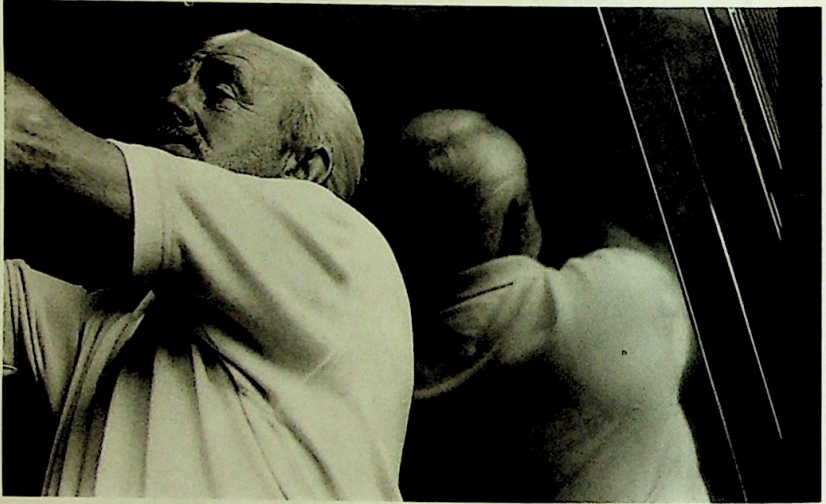
Emily Mast



Michelle McCauley



Sandra Kochman
Lithograph
12.5" x 17"



Maria Trimarchi



Matthew Benson

God Needs a Wet-Vac

Lauren Messina

I asked, 'God, what's a million years to you?'

And God said, 'A second.'

I asked, 'God, what's a million dollars to you?'

And God said, 'A penny.'

I asked, 'God, will you give me a penny?'

And God said, 'Yes I will, in a second.'

Chris stood outside for a minute, trying to straighten his worn, denim jacket, and make himself a little more presentable. He had been to the psychiatrist before, but the anxiety he felt at the beginning of each visit never seemed to fade.

He slowly opened the door, and peeked into the dimly lit waiting room. As he nervously peered his way around the edge of the door, he heard a familiar voice.

"Chris!" The receptionist smiled. "Hey, what are you doing up before lunch?" He laughed as Chris walked into the room a little more comfortably.

"Hey Matt," He smiled, "I didn't know you worked here."

"Yeah, me either." Matt shuffled some papers aside and handed Chris a clipboard. "You know what to do. Anyway, yeah, I've been working here for about a week now, covering for Mark while he and John are working on that book of theirs."

"Ah, the book. . . Luke told me about that. They hired him to edit it, you know." He handed the clipboard back to Matt and took a seat.

DAMM! The waiting room door slammed open, causing Chris to almost jump completely out of his seat. A maintenance woman and a man in a 3 piece suit walked in in an uproar.

"I just can't believe you, Lucy!" The man was almost yelling to the worker. "I've been to Dr. Solomon a hundred times, and I still think he's a fraud!"

"Then why are you coming back?" Lucy smiled and stepped

up on one of the chairs, reaching for the ceiling lights.

The man fidgeted for a while as he watched Lucy slowly pull the dead light bulb out of the fluorescent light. "I come here," he finally let out, "because, well, I could be wrong . . . maybe he's not a fraud."

"Oh, make up your mind, Tom!" She popped a new light into the ceiling, which transformed the dim room immediately. "Besides, Solomon knows everything."

"Chris?" The door in the corner of the room opened, and there stood Dr. Solomon, tall, stern, and almost regal, looking around the waiting room for his patient.

"Right here!" Chris sprang up, wanting desperately to get away from the two in the waiting room.

Chris followed the Doctor into the office. It was a comfortable looking office, with leather chairs, and a deep green rug that Chris had always admired. He took a seat in one of the chairs, shifting his position constantly, as Dr. Solomon walked calmly to the door. DAMM! he slammed the door, making sure it was completely shut.

The sound again sent shivers through Chris' spine, and so the session started.

"Chris," Solomon remarked, "You seem a bit agitated today."

"Well," Chris still squirmed in his chair as if he were a small child, about to be reprimanded.

"C'mon, spit it out." Solomon laughed calmly. "What crazy things did you do this time?"

After a short pause, Chris finally propped himself up in his chair. He slammed both feet on the rug, allowing the dirt from his sneakers to grind into the green rug, and, taking note of Solomon's powerful stature, tried to make his statement.

"Well," his voice could only muster a whine, "I only wanted to play pool!"

"Chris. . ." Solomon tapped his pencil and waited for a better answer.

“Okay.” Chris sat up even straighter. “This is what happened.”

“I wanted to play pool, you know, over at the bar down the street? Well, the table takes four quarters, and I only had three. I didn’t want to walk all the way home, so. . .” there was a pause as Chris’ face turned bright red. “I decided to make my own pool balls. That way I would never have to pay for them again.”

“Chris,” Solomon smiled. “Always inventing things. . . how did you MAKE pool balls?”

Chris sank down into the leather chair, which itself, let out a suitable whine. “You know that big, well, mass outside? That spherical thing that’s been looming out there for years? Well,” he tapped his foot nervously on the floor. “I figured I could get some good materials out of it. I just wanted a chip of it, but I accidentally, well. . . I broke it.”

“Chris!” Solomon almost lost his cool, but soon regained his posture. “So that was the big bang I heard this morning. What happened next?”

“It shattered.” Chris leaned a little forward. “Stuff flew everywhere. I tried to clean it up, really, I did. I turned my vacuum on, and pointed it right at all that crap floating around, but it wasn’t strong enough. I mean, the vacuum worked a little. It’s still holding the stuff somewhat together.

“So,” Solomon tapped his pencil on his desk, “What we have here is a broken sphere, and an all together, universal, MESS.” He sat back calmly. “Why don’t you just get a little more motivated, and take your vacuum closer to the mess. You know, swing it around, pick all the stuff up?”

“Well,” Chris again started to squirm. “There’s only one slight problem with that. One of the particles, I know it so well, I even named it after my dog, Earth, is full of water. . . and I don’t have a wet-vac.”

“Oh, Chris,” Solomon went along with Chris in a sarcastic voice. “This is a bit of a problem. Turning your vacuum off could make a mess. But still,” He tried to change the subject. “You seem to be carrying a lot of stress for a very little reason.” He noticed the statement pass right though Chris’ ears, and forfeited to the original

topic. "Is Earth the only particle with water on it?"

"No." He shook his head in disgust. "But I took care of that. I made sure that all the other particles that looked like they could carry water, wouldn't."

Solomon looked confused. "Chris, what did you do?"

"Well, I lit them on fire. It was great. They don't burn for very long, and while they are burning, you can see the other particles really well. Like on Earth, when I lit the particle next to it, there was light."

"So you were pleased with this?" Solomon still humored Chris.

"It was all good. . ."

DAMM! The outside door slammed hard enough to startle Chris again. He jumped from the seat, regaining the agitation he had been trying to work off.

"Chris," Solomon lowered him back into the seat, speaking calmly. "Let's move on."

"The water!" Chris was still a little shaky. "The light was cool and everything, but it only got rid of 20% of the water. Then I came up with an idea to get rid of the rest of it. I created little animals to live in the water. I was hoping they would drink it all up. . . heh," he smiled, "that would save me a lot of work."

"Chris," Solomon reasoned. "Didn't we talk about this last time? You can't have others doing your work for you. Remember, you resolved to get more motivated to help yourself." He noticed a look of disappointment and almost shame run across Chris' face. "We can deal with that later." Solomon smiled. "Now what happened next?"

"Well," Chris sighed, "I figured that water creatures weren't working fast enough. . . I mean, here it was, almost 11:00am. . . two hours from when this whole mess began! So I created some creatures for land. They were much better at destroying things. They were big and had teeth, and best of all, they drank lots of water." Chris almost began to crack a smile.

"So," Solomon asked in a dry voice. "Were you pleased with this?"

"It was all good." Chris' smile faded. "Well, maybe not that

great. You see, the animals weren't very smart. They were working too slowly."

"You have to work on your impatience. . ." Solomon was about to give some more advise.

"No!" Chris instantly protested. "I did wait! And the animals, my favorite ones, started changing, you know, evolving, into smarter creatures. So I waited for a while, and there were a few smart ones there. But. . ." His head dropped again. "You're right, I got impatient. I couldn't wait for all the animals to turn smarter, so I made a few myself. I called them people and. . ."

"What?" Solomon cut him off, in mock enthusiasm. "You made more creatures? Smart ones?"

"Yeah." Chris became defensive. "I am capable, you know. Besides, I figured that if I made them to be like us, they would realize that the Earth is a mess, and it has to be destroyed."

"And do they?"

"Well, yeah." Chris sighed. "But it's taking them too long. They destroy it little by little. It's been about an hour or so since I made them, and they're still just chipping away here and there, inventing things to destroy the planet, then inventing things to destroy the things they already invented. Ugh," He sighed, "They really suck. . . I mean, they aren't too good at it."

Chris noticed that he was getting more and more nervous. He ground his feet further into the rug, and sat silently. He wanted to avoid his usual embarrassing tantrum in front of Dr. Solomon.

Solomon said nothing; with a strong, intimidating presence, it was one of his best tactics. Chris sat in silence for a while, looking straight into Solomon's stern face. It was a face that could pry straight into even the most stubborn mind.

"OKAY!" Chris gave up. "They annoy me! They destroy stuff one minute, then they start reproducing, which really slows things down. . ."

DAMM! the outside door slammed again, causing Chris to leap out of his chair.

"And that word! That stupid sound! They say it constantly! DAMM this, and DAMM that! As if they knew I hated that sound! Oh sure, they may apologize once in a while, but. . ."

He stomped and yelled, "I'm so sick of them! It's 12 pm! The pool hall closes in three hours! Stupid animals! I just want to play pool!"

Chris' whines turned to tears, which streamed down his bright red face. Dr. Solomon watched silently for a while before finally letting out a satisfied sigh.

"Chris," He placed both hands on Chris' shoulders and steadied him into the chair. "Let's re-cap here." Solomon smiled as he talked directly into Chris' face. "You say you wanted to play pool, you didn't have pool balls, so you blew up that spherical mass." He laughed. "That LARGE spherical mass, boom! in one explosion. Then you say that you tried to clean it up with a dry-vac, but for some unknown reason, your vacuum wasn't powerful enough. Your excuse for not sweeping it up? A water-filled particle, named after your dog, which is filled with little smart animals that look like you, BUT they are all out to make your life miserable. Oh, and we can't forget that it lights up because of the numerous other particles out there, which are ON FIRE."

"Chris," Solomon laughed and walked over to his desk drawer. "You have been known to embellish under stress. Remember the time when Mike arrested you, and you made up that whole story about your mother, and the giant hair ball in the shower? Now, was that real?"

Chris looked down at the floor and shook his head. "No, I guess it wasn't. . . but. . . I'm not lying. . ."

"Honestly," Solomon muttered under his breath. "You have enough material to fill that book of Mark and John's."

"Now Chris," Dr. Solomon took out his pad. "I'm gonna give you a prescription. I want you to take two of these right away. They'll relieve your stress."

"But. . ." Chris started to object.

"But nothing, Chris." Solomon handed him the paper and led him to the door. "Sleep on it, okay? And if you wake up tomorrow, and your little world still exists, we'll find a way to get rid of it, okay?"

"Yeah," Chris let out a satisfied sigh. "Tomorrow."

John Rodzvilla

Hey Donut Lady, hows about a donut.
Not one too big or
small,

But one thick with cream
-y frosty
dripping down to where
only our fingers grasp.

Ring around the Rosie,
Pocket full of Prosie,
krullers, krullers, we all fall down.

Hey Donut Lady, hows about that donut,
you know what
I mean,

One perfect for dunkin'
deep
in your 2 sugared, cream coffee
that's just 22 seconds fresh.

his father

Emily Mast

it really wouldnt have been so bad
if he hadnt told me about his father
how his father built things first
with his eyes and then with his hands
how his father was rich with love
and how his father grew a coarse black beard
in his last days

in our last days
he told me that he wanted to grow up
to be his father
that he was already building
and searching for love
and about ready to grow a beard;

he just wasnt ready for me
 he said
and it really wouldnt have been so bad
if he hadnt told me about his father
because it was his father
who i grew to adore.

Hush

Jeremy Morrison

She's in one room, and I'm in another, and there is a silence that hangs in the house all around us like a blanket. I just banged on the piano. "Skldjdywu, uoigbk, 'aoiwhn," it said. The discordant sounds hung in the air while other notes swung past them in waves. It sounded, and that's all that matters. "Skldjdywu, uoigbk, 'aoiwhn."

The notes slowly lingered in the air until the noise was replaced by silence. I could feel it creep around me. I thought I heard my wife stir. But I didn't. It was just the silence folding back into the depths of the house. It was overbearing.

I keep thinking back to that one instant of time. She was in my arms, and she whispered, "But darling, I don't know if I love you anymore." And then I don't know what to think. I remember how she was in my arms. Sitting in my lap, her ear right next to my mouth. Her brown hair pushed back. The sweet smell of hair. My arms around her waist. And after she spoke, what did I say? I leaned closer to her ear. And nothing was said.

When we moved to the house this room had eagle wallpaper. The eagles clung to the branches with a sinister look. It was the room right next to what is now the master bedroom. I scraped off the wallpaper and sanded down the walls, just as my dad had taught me. Then I rolled out a fresh sheets of hot-air-balloon wallpaper. There are baby-blue balloons and baby-pink balloons.

After I fixed this room, I started redoing the whole house; we had lots of plans. She loved the kitchen because it was old-fashioned. She talked about it so much I thought she'd never stop cooking pasta. When my work on the house was finished for the day we'd sit down to eat. The pasta was completely different every night, and cheap too. She never used a recipe. Once she told me, "I make sure it's sweet, that's all." She's sweet too. She's got delicate shoulders with a tattoo of a geranium on the left one. She said it hurt like hell. So bad she didn't talk the next day. She just kept thinking about the pain, she said, and slept a lot. The geranium is

well defined. I like it because I've never seen anyone else with one. The rest of her body is as nice as that geranium. She's got a trim torso and powerful legs.

She'd wrap her legs around me when we talked in bed. There's a fireplace in the room. In the wintertime we'd talk till the logs went black. Then we'd fall asleep, her legs still wrapped around me.

The renovation was finished in a year. I had done all the general work and she had finished the fine details, like the stencils in the kitchen, and the quilt on the bed. Then things started to happen. We had to call the plumber five times this January. There were water problems in the basement. It ruined some of her silver and china. She planned to fix it herself. But she just couldn't get to all the things she wanted.

We had a huge talk after the plumber left, and started off talking about how we'd pay the bill. And we just kept talking all night, sometimes screaming. It was a little weird. I kept a fire going the whole time. She was sick of how I expected dinner every night. I told her I expected nothing. She said she didn't understand our relationship at all.

We decided she needed something more. We invested in a piano. She bought a book of finger techniques, scales and simple songs. She wanted to put the piano in this room, the hot-air-balloon room. I said no. But she insisted. The room wasn't being used for anything at the time, she said. She learned the song "You Are My Sunshine." She played the piece with doubt. I'd hear her practicing her scales when I got home. She was very sluggish. Some nights she would ask me to fix dinner. She'd shout from the room that she was onto something and couldn't stop, so I'd see what I could put together. I'm not much of a cook, and besides there were always things that needed to be fixed in the house, a light bulb, a leg on a chair, a fixture. I just didn't have the time. I needed her.

She never sped up the scales. Her playing lacked drive. In four weeks she gave up practicing. It wasn't as exciting as she expected. She'd come home later and go to bed earlier. She said that work was getting busier. She'd wait up for me, so that we

could share a couple words, then she'd doze off.

Once I came home and she was already asleep. Her blanket was draped over her; she was completely still. The fireplace was dead. There wasn't a noise in the room. The floor boards didn't even squeak as I snuck up to her side and kissed her. Lots of old floors squeak, but not ours. I went back downstairs and I made a bologna sandwich and had a beer. I wasn't ready to go upstairs. What was there for me?

I watched TV instead. There was a program on psychology. I'll never forget it. I learned about Harlow's monkeys. This guy took young monkeys and raised them without a mother, just these big wire cages shaped like a mother. One of them had cloth, like skin, on it. The other one didn't, but gave milk. The idea was to study the monkey's attachment to these two fake mothers, but in the meantime they took all comfort away from the poor things.

After awhile the little monkeys started doing things to themselves, like banging on their heads, or rocking on their backs in a painful way, or gnawing on their feet, so that they would be stimulated. I mean, they had nothing but themselves. They needed to feel something.

Then this Harlow let the monkeys, the depressed little ones, grow up and have babies. The monkeys didn't know the first thing about mothering. They walked over their kids. They wouldn't nurse right. There was a picture of a mother yanking a baby off of her nipple. And they wouldn't ever cuddle. Their kids were scrawny little depressed things too. The film didn't say it, but I bet they gnawed on their feet just like the mothers.

After watching the program I went to bed. She hadn't moved the whole time.

The next morning was typical. She got up before me and ate and took a shower. When she got out of the shower I got in. I kept thinking about those monkeys. When I was done showering I put on my green terrycloth bathrobe. It's really big on me. I paced to the top of the stairwell. I wanted to tell her about those monkeys. I called her name, and then at once her name diminished into silence. I remembered that she had been leaving early. I

remembered that she wasn't in the house.

This past Monday, she woke in real haste. "Work?" I asked.
"No."

The next thing I knew she was really busying herself in the kitchen, eggs and french toast sprinkled with confectioner's sugar. It tasted real sweet. I got full. And then she kissed me on the way out the door.

When I arrived home that evening she came to the door and gave me a kiss. She had never given me such wonderful treatment, especially recently. The dinner table was set. There were flowers in the middle.

She sat me down immediately and was talking a whole lot. Things were fine at work. She was happy to see me. She had been thinking a whole lot lately.

She wasn't in her pajamas yet. She was in a dress with a matching belt. It pulled on her tight and showed off her waist. Her hair was down. She looked good. Everything seemed nicer. She had put the pots away.

The pasta was in a dish on the counter. No recipe, except to make it sweet. And it looked good. She took it off the counter in her hands, and dropped it. She looked down disbelieving that the pasta and its red sauce had been spilt across the old-fashioned kitchen. The look on her face was withdrawn and silent. Her legs gave out. Those great powerful legs. They seemed overwhelmed. And she fell to the floor. There was a noise throughout the house. The noise of the crash. The echoes were almost rhythmic. Then she started too. She was crying, wailing. I immediately dropped onto the floor and held her in my lap. "It's OK," I whispered into her ear. "Hush, my darling, hush," I said. I ran my fingers through her brown hair and pushed it back. She relaxed. She didn't seem hurt. "I can get supper together," I said. "We don't need the pasta." She paused when I said this. She wasn't weeping anymore. She was awkwardly still. I waited for her to speak. She stared across the room. Then her eyes turned back towards mine. "But darling," she said, "I don't know if I love you anymore."

My hands were around her waist. I didn't know if they

were supposed to be. I felt her weight on my lap, like a heavy blanket. I leaned toward her ear with the intention of saying something comforting. I had nothing to say.

As I leaned toward her, she leaned forward and stood up. Her eyes wandered from table to doorway to ceiling to floor to table to fridge to floor but never fell on me again. She made her way out of the kitchen.

I went into the living room. I sat on the edge of the sofa. I found myself staring at the television. It was as silent as the rest of the house. On the black screen, I could see a reflection of myself. I still had my tie on from work. I felt my throat choke up. I wanted to say something to the man in the reflection.

I turned on the TV. It was good to have something going. There was a program about Physics; the narrator was the same guy who had talked about the monkeys. There were pictures of atomic bombs, and their clouds hanging like structures in the air. They were showing what could happen if man harnessed the power of physical forces. I remember the narrator mentioning that the U.S. dropped the bomb on Japan twice, just to let Japan know that the power was real and that repetition was a possibility. Imagine that. After talking about the A-bomb the narrator went on to say that the world can be described in terms of four forces, go figure. One of the forces is gravity. What got me was that they understand the workings of gravity, how much two bodies pull on each other, but they don't understand what causes it. It just happens. There is no explanation. There is a silent, indescribable pull between things that come near each other. This silent tension. They don't even have to touch.

The program showed a girl jumping rope. She was constantly being pulled back to the earth. A force was pulling the rope in tight circles. It was slapping the street. Tap, tap, tap. Even though the program advanced, I kept hearing the tapping of the rope against the pavement. I wanted to know what pulled the rope tight. Tap, tap, tap. I wanted to see what was happening. But there was nothing. Then I heard some piano music accompanying this tapping, and it wasn't synchronized with the tapping or the narrator. I mean it was real powerful; I can still hear it. My mind

finally separated the sounds. The piano playing wasn't coming from the TV at all. It was my wife. You are my sunshine.

It startled me. I shut the TV off to listen. She'd let a note sound, then she'd silence it, cut it, before she started the next. Every inch of the house was full of these staccato notes.

You are my sunshine, my only sunshine.
You make me happy when skies are gray.
You'll never know dear, how much I love you.
Please don't take my sunshine away.

The second I thought about what the words were saying I went blank. I was wishing so hard that what she played was true. But it wasn't. She had said so. Soon she stopped. She stopped abruptly, the same way all the notes were ended. I realized that the room was cold because the silence of the cold air pushed all around me.

I saw myself in the TV again. I tried to give the man in the reflection a smile.

After an hour of sitting, I headed up to bed. No matter what she'd said, I had to go to work the next morning. Life goes on. The room was dark, black like the burnt out logs. I stood in the doorway, listening for her. I didn't hear a thing. I thought the room was empty. When I turned on the light I saw her lying in the bed. Her eyes were open, full of tears, and staring at the ceiling. Quickly, I turned the light off. I crept to my side of the bed and got under my blankets. I wanted to say something only there wasn't anything to say. So I lay on my side and waited for sleep to come. I thought that she might talk. I was listening for her. I didn't want to make a noise, so I could hear her slightest peep. I was thinking of the different things she might say. There were so many things. She said none of them. After a while I fell asleep right next to her.

I had a dream. I felt like I was underwater. It was so silent that I could feel the water pushing in on my ears. The worst part was when I screamed for help, water came into my mouth and my throat choked. I panicked. I tried to reach out for things but there was only silent water around me. I was waiting for it to stop. I thought I might rise out of the water and gasp for air, but it didn't

happen. I jolted awake. I sat upright. For a moment I couldn't tell where I was, because there was a blanket over my head. I couldn't see or hear a thing. I took the blanket off and faintly recognized the fireplace. I felt some urgency, like I was late for something. There wasn't anything. It was three in the morning. I would have screamed if I had stayed and I didn't want to wake her. I took the blankets from my side of the bed. I wrapped them around me and I went down to the kitchen.

I went to the fridge and got the milk off of the metal rack. We keep the milk in a glass bottle with a wire caging around it. We liked that old fashioned bottle; the wire handle makes it real easy to hold and pour. It used to be her job to refill it until she started forgetting. I poured myself a glass. It was difficult with the blankets weighing me down. I sat at the table. And sitting just like that I fell asleep.

I jolted awake. I gasped, like I had been underwater for a long time. The sound of her bare feet slapping against the cold tile woke me up. The rhythm sounded like a crank pulling a rope tighter. Smells of coffee and pancakes were in the kitchen. There was a plate in front of me. Except for the shoes she was dressed for work, and was putting dishes away.

I called her name gently. She didn't respond, not one twitch of her body. Nothing. I don't know if she even heard me.

I ate in silence. I didn't know why she had prepared such a breakfast. I didn't know what to make of it. It tasted too sweet. I didn't do anything to deserve it. I ate what I could. I reached for the cup of milk. It tasted sour. I went to the bathroom to rinse out my mouth. Afterwards, I got into the shower. When I got out, she was gone.

That evening, when I got home, she was already asleep. I found some bologna in the fridge and sat on my chair. The blankets were still there. Sleep came easy when I wrapped them tightly around myself. In the middle of the night some harsh noises awoke me. She was at the piano, banging out, "You are my sunshine."

Since, things have been a blur. Every day I wake to her breakfast and come home to my blankets. Today was different,

though, because I didn't have to work. We both woke up late. I brought some Life cereal to the table. She put it in a bowl and ate it without milk. I listened to her crunch. Her bites were rhythmical. You are my sunshine, my only sunshine. She didn't look up from her bowl. She was still in her pajamas. I said nothing for five minutes. I poured a bowl for myself. I whispered in my morning voice, "Is there any milk?" I felt my whisper move throughout the house. She didn't respond.

I wondered, for a moment, what would happen if I started singing that song to her. But then I remembered how her legs had given out.

"Is there any milk?" I asked again, a little quieter. She kept chewing rhythmically. You are my sunshine, my only sunshine. I took a bite. We sat there, our eyes on our own bowls, spooning cereal into our own mouths.

She sluggishly pushed her chair back from the table and stood up. She pulled the milk out from the fridge. It swung free from her fingers and splattered onto the cold tile floor. I imagined that was how limp her fingers were when she played the piano. The noise was horrendous, glass and milk everywhere. The wire armature was rocking and tapping against the floor. She was staring down at the mess. I watched her shoulders drop. "I'm so tired. I need to go to bed. I know it's a strange time for bed. Don't take it to mean anything, just that I'm tired." And she left. The armature was still rocking and ticking. The milk was slowly spreading across the floor.

I watched the milk creep for an hour. I followed it out to the stairwell. I went upstairs. I sat down on the piano bench, wrapped in my blankets. I was listening for her. But after she went to bed there was nothing to be heard. I've sat here all day. I found myself picking at the dead skin on my feet. I felt disgust. My throat choked up, even though I wasn't wearing a tie. I lifted my hands, and with fists I banged on the keys, "Skldjywu, uoigbk, 'aoiwhn!" Now the air is still. It's hard to believe she is in the house; she is so quiet. There is nothing left to do today. I should fall asleep soon. I have to wake early enough to eat and go to work.

Ice Cream Man

Michael J. McCarthy

One case of chocolate eclairs, one case Bingo Bombs, a half case of Screwballs, one case Sno-Cones, a half case of ice cream sandwiches, and two cases assorted flavors Italian ice; blue raspberry, cherry and lemon. A bit extra lemon and a few less cherry, the kids seemed to be favoring the lemon lately. I'm ready to go.

Driving down Bay Ave, I can see the heat already begin to rise off the blacktop, even though it is before ten in the morning. I pull up to my favorite spot by the jetty, where the river empties into the ocean and the gulls fly over empty cases of beer carelessly left on the beach, not yet been picked up by Tom the Can Man. I wait. I don't need to ring my bell anymore. I don't have to drive anywhere else. The kids have learned that this is the opening that I drive to. It is June, and they will come at about noon after their lunches, running and hopping barefoot on the hot pavement, their soles not yet hardened to the hazards of summer abuse.

I've had this job for two consecutive summers now, and I'm thinking of buying the truck from Eddie if I make enough this summer. I don't need much, just enough to have some fun and get the new comics for my collection, since I live at home. My mother doesn't like me to make such a big investment, but I'm not a kid anymore, I turn 21 in forty-two days, and I need to make some moves in my life.

The ocean is calm and the water is light blue as the sun glares off the ocean onto my spotless, stainless steel countertop. My countertop is the cleanest of any of the guys working this summer. I believe you have to have pride in your work, and I shine and wax the truck every night. My prices are always up to date and I always carry the latest that the company has to offer. This month it's the Frozen Raspberry Chocolate Mousse Cup. I haven't sold many, except to some older people. I wonder why old people only order my Mousse or Eclairs, do they feel odd ordering a Bingo Bomb--

“Screwball!”

I am jerked from my thoughts, and spin to face the voice of this insult.

“What did you say?”

“I wan Screwball.”

My three and a half foot adversary is looking up at me with change in his hand. I quickly recover, smile, and turn to the freezer. The rush of cold air penetrates my nose and I take a few deep breaths, cooling my nerves, chilling them. I shouldn't be so on edge. Just because Ms. Adler hasn't appeared yet this summer I can't go on snapping at the customers. I turn.

“Here you go. 75 cents, please. Thanks! Tell your friends I'm here already. Bye-bye.”

Ms. Adler was the reason that I took this job again this summer. She lives at 306 Bay Ave, and has two kids, a small boy and a girl with blonde hair. I do not believe there is a Mr. Adler because I have never seen him and she wears no ring. Ms. Adler came to see me every day last summer, starting on June 28th. I love her. I never cared much for girls, not in high school or at the mall, they giggled too much. I never got much chance to talk to them, they never paid attention to me. They always seemed to pay attention to my hair and my body. They called me things like grease-ball, freak show, and greasy chicken legged freak. I wasn't very built, but I never paid them much attention. They weren't worth my attention. I never really found anyone else in high school that I really ever was close with, and I didn't even bother to go to the “halfway to five year reunion” that those snobs from my graduation class held. I was different than them, I didn't go to the parties. I liked to read my comics and stories. They were all just dumb kids anyway, and I decided to leave them where they belong, in my yearbook in the back of my closet, underneath the baseball cards that never increased in value. But Ms. Adler was different. She was a woman. She was nice. My mother told me never to trust a woman, that I wasn't ready for them. I never tell her about Ms. Adler. About how her ponytail bounces behind her as she walks, or how her smile makes me feel like the truck is a hundred million degrees. I remember the day she ordered a Sno-Cone and it had

dripped onto her white T-shirt. I offered to get her some water for the spill, but instead she climbed up into the truck and did it herself. She smelled like it does just after it rains in the spring and you are walking in the outside flower section of Simmon's flower shop. Her hair was damp. It brushed my pressed white button down and left streaks of moisture. I had thought about her all winter long. I asked some of the guys at the area where we park the trucks at night if anyone had moved from Bay Ave. No one had. Ms Adler still lived there, and the Pretzel Truck man smiled as he told me he had plowed her driveway all winter long. He had bought a plow for his new red Ford F-250 and had made a bundle over the season. But it was summer now. It was just a matter of time, it was early in the season. She would come soon.

I sell five Bingo Bombs, ten Italian Ices, six Chocolate Eclairs, the one Screwball, and twelve Secret Surprises. It's great the way one kid orders a Secret Surprise, wins a free pack of gum by having this month's winning surprise, and then all his friends hound their moms for more change. A lot of them don't even eat the ice cream and the area by my truck becomes dotted with melting orange blobs and whining kids with plastic sticks. It's a pack of gum. That's all they can win. At four o'clock I wipe down my counter for the last time, look around the lot and see no more people. The sun has settled below the ocean and the orange sky makes me look at the stains in the dirt and gravel, where the kids chucked their Secret Surprises. I turn the truck around and head back up Bay Ave. I slow a bit at the 200's and ring my bell loud until 430, then I turn my eyes to the road and glance at the fading house as I drive home. Tomorrow. Definitely tomorrow.

I still have enough stock to last today but I know that I will probably have to put in an order tomorrow. As I drive down Bay Ave this morning, I see a car in the driveway of 306, a blue Pinto with a fading "My child was student of the month" sticker on the rusting chrome bumper. I know it is her. My heart races and I forget all about writing a note to order more Eclairs and Secret Surprises. I drive down to the opening, my bell ringing the entire three blocks. I can see the white sails of the boats rise up from the

pavement before I can see the ocean. There is a slight breeze and the ocean rises and falls lightly on the jetty, the only sound the pleasant lapping of the water on the rocks.

I know that she will come today; there has never been a car in the driveway when I drive by in the morning. She must have a new job or something, work in the morning like me. She must have quit her job at Arthur and Pat's diner. I know she has because the Pretzel Man, that I talked to yesterday, said he heard some of the other ladies at the diner talking about how they missed her. I was glad to hear that. The Pretzel Man told me that his name was Pete. Pete the Pretzel Man. When I went to bed last night I knew she would show up today.

I examine my hair on my counter-top and wipe down the piece that was sticking up in back as I wait on my first customer. That damned piece always pops up no matter what I do. As I reach into the chest and pull out a lemon Italian Ice, I scrape off some of the ice that collects on the sides of the chest and run the cool stuff through my hair. My fingers drip and I stick them in my mouth as I hand the boy his Italian Ice. I tell him that he is the first, and that he can have it for free. I don't care. She is coming today. The sun is shining into my truck and I sit on the chest aiming my watch so that the sun reflects off it and try to shine it in the eyes of the sailors going by. They are too far to reach and I grow bored. I aim the beam into the rearview mirror and the sun glares into my eyes. I am still seeing black dots in my head when she comes to the window.

"Hello, my frozen treat man."

I hear her voice and my blood pulses quickly, but I can't stop blinking from the sun, and my eyes water. I can't see her. My head is trying to figure out something cool to say, but I cannot manage much.

"Hi, just a minute, the reflection blinded, hello, how have you been."

My eyes finally readjust and she is standing before me giggling. Her hair is pulled behind her like it always is, and she is wearing a black sport top type thing and gray cut-off sweat pants. She looks great. She asks me how I've been and what I did over

the winter, and I ask her about her new job, but I don't really hear what we are talking about. I stare at her mouth and the perspiration that has formed above her lip in the small blonde hairs. She orders a Bingo-Bomb, and I offer it to her for free, but she insists on paying. As I hand it to her, my fingers brush her hand and she smiles at me softly. We don't say anything for a while as she enjoys the Bingo-Bomb, and I enjoy her enjoying the Bingo-Bomb. I realize that this woman is the reason for my being here, that I have to take some sort of action. I have to do something to let her know how I feel. I am sure that she feels something for me too, I know it. She tells me that she has to go, that the kids are back at the house.

"I'll see you tomorrow, right?"

"Of course Ms. Adler."

"Call me Jane, will you? We know each other better than 'Ms. Adler,' don't we?"

With those words she turns and walks away, her tan legs keeping my attention. I watch her until I can see her no longer from my truck. I realize that she doesn't know my real name, and I wonder why I didn't tell her. I will tell her tomorrow.

I sell a lot of Italian ices, Screwballs, and sell out of Secret Surprises in the afternoon. I put up a sign that says "sold out" over the picture of them, but some of the kids still ask. Yesterday, I would have pointed at the sign and told them they should be in summer school if they couldn't read, but I tell them I will have them tomorrow. I make a note to restock my supplies when I get back tonight.

After no one else comes for a half hour I close up the truck and head back. I think of what I am going to do. I am going to ask Jane to have dinner with me. I am going to let her know exactly what's going on. I have never felt this much confidence in my life and I know my mother will not be happy when I tell her. But I have to tell her. I finally have found a woman. A woman who smiles at me, smiles for me. I am probably going to end up marrying Jane, so she better get used to the idea now. I ring my bell as I pass her house.

When I drop off the truck, Pete, the pretzel truck man, tells

me the boss wants to have my order in tonight. I tell Pete I saw Ms. Adler today and he gives a little laugh and congratulates me. I like Pete. I order a full stock of ice cream for tomorrow. As I go to sleep that night I know I am going to be very successful.

I drive down Bay Ave. today a half hour later than usual, because I stopped to do an errand. I pass many of the surfers as they carry their boards to the ocean. There must be an offshore swell creating waves, because the weather today is clear and warm. I used to surf, when I was young, before it was even cool around here. I don't paddle out at all now. The opening is wet and damp as waves have spilled over the jetty in the night. The ocean is very lively today, long waves rolling in and crashing on the jetty, peeling down the beach. I spot a few of the guys I went to high school with standing on the jetty. They are wearing fluorescent wet suits and talking to girls in bikinis. They look foolish in their rubber suits, guts sucked in, trying to be cool. I have the truck fully stocked. I polish the counter and the freezer top, and decide that the flowers I bought might not like the cold. I move them to the front seat, so they will be hidden until I surprise her. I sell a few Italian Ices and some Sno-Cones, but my mind is rehearsing the words I will soon speak. *You look great today. I bought these for you. Would you like to go to dinner some night? Great. How about Friday? What? You want to take the truck? Sure. I guess, sounds like fun. I'll see you tomorrow.* I have been going over this scene all night long. I know I can do it, that I can sound as calm as I do in my head. I look out at the jetty and see the guys jumping into the ocean and the girls returning to their towels in the sand. My eye focuses on a person who is not leaving at all. She is wearing a black top and has her hair in a ponytail. It is Jane. I must have missed her when I stopped to get the flowers. I lean back on the freezer and close my eyes. I open my eyes and she is still there. I don't worry, she has to come back. I can wait, I've waited all winter. Nothing has changed, I can do it. I sell a few Italian ices and some Secret Surprises, but I don't say a word to anyone. I am thinking of Jane and how happy we will be, how much better we are than the guys from school with their bikini bimbos. I barely even notice Pete when he comes to the truck. He asks me for a Bingo Bomb and I

get it but don't say a word, and he is laughing at me before I realize it is him.

"Pete, sorry. My mind was somewhere else. What are you doing here?"

"Don't worry, man, with all the action down here, my mind would be elsewhere too. I came down to check out the scene. It's my day off today."

He doesn't say anything else and turns away grinning as he gives me the thumbs up sign. I watch him kick off his shoes and walk onto the jetty. He walks past the surfers and stops in front of Jane. I watch him as he sits down next to her. How does he know Jane? I realize as he hands her the Bingo Bomb that he never opened it, and that it was for her. I begin to sweat and I can tell that my face is flushed. I grip the countertop hard and my fingers cramp under the pressure. He puts his arm around her and runs his fingers through her hair, my hair. As he is doing this, his hand forms the thumbs up sign once again. He leans over and kisses her, and she kisses him back. They do not release their embrace and I can't watch. I turn and open the freezer. I take out a case of Screwballs to make room for my head. I put my head in the freezer and the cold burns my face. My eyes are closed, but I see Jane and Pete on the beach, in his truck, in a restaurant. I see myself in my truck, in my bed, in my truck, alone. I remove my head only after the sweat that was on my face and the tears in my eyes have frozen my eyelids shut.

I move to the front of the truck, forcing my eyes open, and notice the flowers sitting on the driver's seat. The sun has been shining through the windshield, and the flowers are crispy and they crumble as I throw them onto the street. I rip off my shirt and open all of the freezers. I move the Screwballs up front and place them on the passenger seat. I then move the Bingo Bombs. The Chocolate Eclairs. The Italian ices. Popsicles. Eclairs. Secret Surprises. I sit in the driver's seat and turn the truck around. I head back up Bay Avenue. I am not thinking of much, just her and me and high-school and Pete and this shitty job. I pass her house and see a red Ford F250 on the street. I fire a Screwball at it. I begin throwing all the ice cream out the window. My ice cream

litters the road as I circle back and drive down the dead end road again. I begin to sweat and I laugh wildly and I am crying, hurling my frozen treats out into the harsh sunlight and onto the pavement. I aim for signposts, I aim for cars, I look for Ms. Adler but can't see her, so I aim for her house. Emptying an entire case of Bingo Bombs at one time, I finish out the supply. I know that tomorrow the ice creams will be smeared and will stain this road, the sticky colors turning brown as they mix with the dust and dirt of the road. I know that tomorrow Ms. Adler will probably laugh and think I am a freak. I know Pete is laughing right now. I know the surfers will laugh when they leave the beach. I know the children will laugh as they dodge the mess in their bare feet. They always laugh.

Impressions of Jackson Pollock's Lucifer— (1947)

Jonah Ibson

I

layers of graffiti splash across a wall
on the side of an old windowless building
becoming a thick blurry puddle
of confusion
as I rush by
watching from my seat on the subway car

the bass line begins with subtle calm
pulling you in like an undertow
then the heartbeat of the drums
and its alive
sax trumpet and trombone
explore new paths
meeting up again here and there to discuss
what they've seen
as you sit there
in the smoky-stillness of the room
bewildered and alive

the pale sky is far away and hidden
behind vengeful dark storm clouds
erupting threads of lightning
the rain falls hard
and warm
so I let it hit me
run down my face
soak my clothes until the colors bleed
and I laugh

II

watching from my seat on the subway car
the bass line begins with subtle calm
and it's alive
so I let it hit me
becoming a thick blurry puddle
in the smoky stillness of the room
layers of graffiti splash across a wall
of confusion
and warm
erupting threads of lightning
meeting up again here and there to discuss
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the rain falls hard
and I laugh
bewildered and alive

I Sing to You, *People Magazine*

Jeremy Greenfield

I watch you lying naked, open to the world
exposing staples— sharp and piercing;
Your concerns are of America alone.
Harmonious pages of Hillary and Hollywood—
oils on your pages mark a unity of society through filth.
You rest diamond-shaped on a wooden stool
 an oak stool, cheap, but Made in America.
An anxious audience awaits the Newest Testament.
The sun sends light piercing through an open window
and attacks your glossy cover—
You fend her off, reflecting her rays
toward a beautiful round maid.

Now cuddled up comfortable in pudgy brown hands.
You offer her Keanu Reeves who looks so young
and ripe. You show her what he wears and whom he dates.
Her smile falls through the air to meet his in that fantastic
 third dimension.

And she can dream,
 of freedom, of
A Room of One's Own—
 an apartment over the Pizzarama;
And the Steins would come to wash
 Her dishes, drive away the Jehovah's
 and retrieve you from her mailbox.
She would stand tall and read you. . .

 But as she rises she perspires and you
slip from her fingers, fall-
ing to the carpet.

He enters, gently slides a hanger into his overcoat
and sits.

His head turns side to side, searching—
places right ankle on left knee.
Body, erect but eyes, shifty
His suit— sharp
His tie— crisp
Picks you up off the ground on a whim of insecurity
and hides with you (almost perversely)
in the corner.

A man unlike the others who read you
Those
homeless hedonists
concupiscent childs—
slothful recipients of his income.

He abhors these people
and yet, he absorbs,
loathes, and idolizes you
coveting your world of
Armani estates and
Gucci mistresses.

You define our zeitgeist
And bind our people;
describe the Famous
strive for familiarity
but prescribe emulation.

I love to hate your sheets but
Love them more. I turn your pages rapidly, sweating on each
allegorical passage. Beauty and talent flood you,
our Bible.

We, mere spectators along the sideline,
watch the elegant motions of the Jordan
glisten with brilliance.

Yet,
People is people is people is people
So I sing songs of people
Because *People* above all is

for people and
for America.

People bathes us in absolution.

And on the seventh day *People* arrives
to prescribe and describe
to absolve and embrace
lives.

Lives of *People*—

people of chocolate brown jazz

people of classical Bach pretense.

So I praise you *People* magazine and thank you

For slipping

through my fingers and

allowing me to experience (but for a moment)

america through your glossy pages and

America through your oily sheets.

Loss

Jeremy Morrison

I guess it's the cat. At this time of night the cat comes in and settles on the end of the bed in a warm ball. But tonight (I can't blame the cat) it got onto the end of the bed and stretched out lengthwise belly up. It looked ready to be roasted. I want to lean over, touch the cat and relax it. A belly rub might help.

I feel if the cat will ball up the warmth might come back to the bedroom. And my wife and I could share sweet caresses that mean something. And I could say her name, and it would mean that I love her. And I would be fulfilled.

But I was instructed not to touch the cat, especially the belly.

We're short of cash. She's used to it and good at making the house welcoming with little money. There is dried corn on the walls and dried flowers in the vases. For the longest time I didn't need these cheap things; I had her. Tonight, though, I've noticed how empty the house is. Bare shelves with tiny decorations. I've started putting my sleeve down over my hand when I touch doorknobs. That way I don't feel the cold. But I wasn't doing that before. I didn't know.

I came in the house this evening, through the side door. I put my bare hand on the doorknob and pulled. I dropped my briefcase down inside the door, and immediately sat on the sofa. The TV was already going. She came down the stairs dropping her body from foot to foot, slowly making her way.

"My Darling!" I said.

"Hi." she said.

"How was your day?" I looked at her; she had started watching the tube from the stairs.

"Good."

"How was your grandmother? Did her car last the ride?"

"Yes, it did. She's good."

“Which one of you wound up cooking?”

“She did.” Her body dropped onto the couch, a foot away from me.

We sat for a while and watched the screen, even the commercials. I remember now there was one for cat litter. I was waiting for her to say that supper was ready. She said nothing.

And then the cat came in, step by step. It looked tipsy. It dropped against the side of the couch and stretched out.

The cat didn't move. Not one bit. I touched it. It was cold. I looked back at her but she had gotten up and left. I wasn't too sure what to do so I looked at the cat again. I saw the blood caked up between its legs. I shivered. I dropped my sleeve over my hand and touched the cat again. The cat moved, slowly. It awoke. And it looked at me oddly. It rolled onto its feet and staggered towards the basement.

“Cindy?” I called. “What happened to the cat?”

She responded from the bathroom. The door was shut; I could tell because her voice was muffled. “It's o.k. Grandma fixed it this afternoon.”

“Fixed it?”

“Yeah.”

“Did she pay the vet?”

“I said that grandma fixed it. There is no bill.”

Her grandmother grew up on a farm. She is short and fat and well over seventy. Her hands are worn and her arms still have weight in them. Things needed to be done on the farm. Nobody wanted to have the piglets of a weak pig. So they'd bring out a towel, wrap the pig up and use a razor blade to solve the problem. It was the same old same old except that day she used my razor blade, my towel, and my cat. My wife said she fixed him fine, she didn't drop him or anything. Before I came to bed I checked the hardwood floor; there were no stains.

I was surprised that the cat could make it up on the bed. I am trying to feel bad for the cat. I can't feel a thing. I have

nothing to go on. My wife tightens her arm around me. The cat lifts its head, then drops it. I move my wife's heavy arm off me. I sit up on the edge of the bed. I rub my eyes and I ask, "Honey? Did you hold the towel?"

Medicago Sativa

Emily Mast

*Sprouts for dinner, Sprouts for tea; Sprouts for you, and Sprouts for me.
Sprouts in winter, Sprouts in fall; whether large or whether small, Sprouts
enough to fill us all.*

In my bedroom, tacked next to my pillow, is a small drawing he gave me before he left. It's in black ink. In the upper left corner he drew the torso of a girl with curly hair. Strands of her hair detach from her head, curl into balls, and plunge into the mouth of an open machine. The machine resembles a blender, but is divided into two parts that are connected to each other by one tube. Sprouts are sliding out of holes in the smaller part of the machine and floating off into the air. He didn't sign it. He just tore it out of his sketchbook and handed it to me one evening. He said that the girl with curly hair was me.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

I had been working at Alfalfa Incorporated for three weeks before I even saw him. Then my shifts were switched around and we ended up with the same lunch break. It was hard not to notice him. He was, besides myself, the only person at the factory who ate alone. Most of the other employees sat together, scarfing down cheeseburgers in the cafeteria and gossiping over cigarettes until they had to return to work. He always took his lunch outside. I would watch him eat through the greasy glass doors. Each day he brought black bread and peanut butter in a brown paper bag. He would smuggle sprouts out with him in his pockets and make sandwiches. There was something fresh about him. Something crisp and alive. He was the only Alfalfa Inc. employee I ever met who actually liked the flavor of sprouts.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Sometimes, when one of the workers moved out of the way, I could see him across the conveyor belts at his station. He was a washer, which meant that he was in charge of spraying the sprouts with clean water. It was one of the most difficult jobs, since the belts moved quickly and there was a lot of organic muck to get rid of. He was always very focused on his work. His eyebrows knotted together in concentration when the sprouts were especially soiled. I, on the other hand, was able to let my mind wander. All I had to do was stick handfuls of clean sprouts into clear little plastic containers and close the lids.

I remember the first time he saw me. It was near the end of the day, and things were beginning to slow down. He sprayed, resprayed, and scooped a handful of dripping sprouts into his mouth before they had a chance to be whisked away by the black rubber belts. He looked up and blinked at me just before he wiped a few incriminating tendrils from his chin. That afternoon, as everyone filed out of the building to go home, I plunged my fist into the sprout vat when no one was looking and hid the mound of sprouts in the pocket of my company apron.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

“Would you like some peanut butter with your *Medicago sativa*?” he asked me the next day at noon. I was alone in the lunch room munching on sprouts I had stolen. He set two pieces of pumpernickel and a jar of Old Style Honey Roasted down on the table and then walked outside. It was the first time he ever talked to me. It was the last time I ate alone.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

From then on, we were intimately inseparable. We had silent conversations with our eyes across the factory in the morning. In the afternoon we would have sprout eating contests to see who

could stuff the most sprouts into their mouths the fastest without getting caught by the manager. After work, we would compare sprout piles to see who had smuggled the most out. He usually won. He said it was because he had more experience with these kinds of things. He had been at Alfalfa Inc. for almost five months.

After work, we would drive to my apartment so we could sit at the kitchen table and feel the last rays of the sun drip down on our heads as we played with each others hair. We drank peppermint tea until we got sleepy. We took naps on my bedroom floor, warmed from the tea and each other. Sometimes I would stay awake just to listen to his quiet sighs of sleep and smell his tart earthy breath.

When we awoke we ate dinner. Pasta usually, and white wine. He would sketch me as I ate. His fingers were very long and thin and beautiful. I called them "artist's fingers" and he smiled a soft curly smile. Our time together never felt stale. We would stay up into the early morning telling stories and dancing close to the smooth slow sounds of the tenor saxophone on the late night jazz station. He moved me like water. We shivered into each other like drifting currents until he said he had to go home. Before he closed the door good-bye, he looked at me as if he would never see me again. "I drink you up," he said. It sent tremors through me, warm mixed with cold.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

One drizzly evening when the nights were still comfortably warm, he said he had something to show me, something he had shown no one else. It was his apartment. We arrived there in the early evening, shortly after our tea. He pointed to his window, high above the maroon awning of a florist shop. The window was open and I could hear soft music coming from within. We walked up a flight of narrow steps in the dark to get to his front door. It was painted white and the numbers 22 1/2 swung on rusty nails from left to right when he pushed it open. My eyes had to adjust from the deep darkness of the hallway to the muted white lightness inside. It was one single room filled with sprouts

and the comfortable odor of moist dirt. Sprouts grew in jars, cookie trays, shoe boxes, soup cans, coffee mugs, and even a fish bowl. They carpeted the floor, filled his shelves, his sink, his bathtub, and poked out of his dresser drawers. He told me it was the beginning of his first successful harvest, thanks to the fertilizers and herbicides so kindly donated by the florist shop below.

I crouched down to look into the faces of the sprouts on his windowsill and smiled. They were like baby birds as they danced in the breeze, nodding their heads with their bud mouths wide open, begging for air and sun and water. I could picture them coupling up together and swaying in unison to the sounds on the radio when he wasn't looking.

There were drawings everywhere. Large, poster-size diagrams of sprouts and smaller ones sketched in green marker on scraps of envelopes and napkins. They were tacked to his walls, and stuffed in the napkin holder and under his pillow. I even found one sandwiched between two slices of pumpernickel in the cupboard.

He took my hand and gave me a tour of his farm. He told me how hardy his crop was, and how confident he was that it would survive autumn. He showed me how he planted the seeds by placing them in holes made by sticking the tips of his fingers just below the surface of the soil. He described how he cut the plants after they produced flower buds and before seed pods formed because that was when they were most nutritious. While he was at work he played music for them, Beethoven mostly, because he had read that it stimulated them to grow and prosper. He explained how sprouts convert inorganic material into life, and how they made him live. He told me how I made him alive and we fed each other fresh baby sprouts, strand by strand. I saw him reflected in the lucid color of the plants surrounding us and when he looked at me I noticed how green his eyes truly were.

He lit a candle that cast mottled raindrop shadows on his walls in the shape of a gray winter garden. Across from the garden was a window which he opened. After him, I crawled out onto his roof under the thick sky and above the dark empty street. We watched a black cat sulk under a bench, hiding from the threat of wetness. He massaged my feet and asked me to tell him rainy day

stories.

I told him how, when I was a child, I learned that black holes were born from collapsing stars. I used to have nightmares that the earth shuddered and shattered and launched me into the atmosphere where I was swallowed and squeezed into the deep stomach of the sky. I remember feeling utterly enthralled by the blackness of night; its potency consumed me. I told him that he consumed me.

When we were thoroughly soaked, and rain dripped from the ends of our hair to the tips of our noses, we crawled back inside and unstuck ourselves from our clothes. His body glistened slick and lean, and glowed white in the shadowy hues of night, and his hair stuck to his forehead as if drawn there in ink. We fell asleep to the sound of the rain hitting the roof, warmed by the whispering green life surrounding us. Our naked skin smelled like the wet sky. The next morning we awoke in a mist.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

For a long while, I had a recurring dream every night: he stood on his roof with a canvas sack full of his harvest slung over his shoulder. He reached into the sack and pulled out clumps of sprouts and opened his fists to the swirling wind. The sprouts unclung from each other and floated like feathers into the clouds. When all of the sprouts were gone, he turned his back to the wind and let it carry him away with it. He never said a word, but I could feel his voice inside me. I always woke up trembling and lost.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Then autumn came with its bonfire-scented chills and he was gone. One day he didn't show up to work. I waited until lunchtime, hoping he would lean over and surprise me with a sandwich and say he had just slept in by accident. But he didn't. I got into my car and drove straight to his apartment, squinting into the white sneer of the afternoon sun. I took the hall steps two at a time and when I arrived at the top I noticed for the first time in the

light how worn the door was. The paint was cracked and peeling and underneath the weathered exterior the door was black. I knocked and felt only a hollow vibration, so I opened the door. In front of me were all of his beloved sprouts. They had collapsed and withered to a weak dry brown. They smelled sour. I touched their frail expired bodies and saw stems that looked as though they had been sucked dry of their clear blood. I watered them with my tears and felt the echo of my empty sobs bounce off the walls.

Next to the sink I found a gardener's encyclopedia open to a page on plant diseases and a water-stained sketch of one of his sick plants. Underneath the drawing, he had scribbled the words Anthracnose Bacterial Wilt in pencil.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

He is a shadow in my thoughts now. I wake up and the fragrance of decaying leaves in early morning mist reminds me of him. The air smells stale. I quit my job at Alfalfa, Inc. because I couldn't touch the fragile green skeletons in front of me. I couldn't lock them up in their clear plastic prisons anymore. I wanted to set them free in the wind like birds so they could fly away and bring him, healed and green again, back to me forever.

My Adidas

Matthew Crowley

On the court,
it's what they make me say.

[a screen of shadow black,
surrounds,
when eyes try to peer through the lids that cover them.

Then a noise,
without even the thunder to warn you:

boomphf. . . boomphf. . .

okay, now you know I'm comin'.

In a wave you feel the footprint
when a dreamy pounce of light imprints a flash,
and 3 stripes]

but my mouth can't teach the game.

Tiffany Lyman-Olszewski

My uncle's home movies aren't
funny to me yet, but I keep thinking
maybe in five years I'll laugh a little.
Push a smile when I see my cousins and I
together at the summer lake
riding our rafts like pretend experts,
our hot-weather bodies smoothly-burned
and skinny.

I was a baby giraffe then,
arms and legs too long,
awkward in every bend of my curveless body.
I was camera-shy and turned away when
my uncle would move in for a tighter shot of me.
What intrigued him, timid gestures and short
curling hair, only made my face flush hotter
and drove me down through the water where
I could make faces that the lens would never see.

Rising above the surface again,
he was always there,
waiting to catch my head in frame,
my thin hair plastered across my forehead
and my eyes red from looking underwater.
I would squeal a little
and try to duck out of view,
protecting my face with my hands that were never
large enough.
But he would just laugh
and tell me not to be embarrassed.

I was the shyest then, that most shameful stage
vividly shot on the film
still makes me tense today

to see it ten years later.
And when I see my unformed figure
come into focus across the water again,
I press fast-forward
and breathe as I shoot somehow graceful
out of sight.

A poss'm

Kelly O'Leary

Ma ram over a poss'm yesterday,
It was big an' fat an' it had all these
squiggly, squirmy, squishy
brains an' stuff.
An' its eyeballs look'd like this.
An' its guts were in the wheel
An' there were boogies an' stuff.
So we scraped it up and took it home.
An' made me this sambwich.
Now will you trade?

The 76 Coke-head Diner

Kristin Kossack

Late, late nights in a smoke-crusted
diner, an ode to The Greasy Spoon.

-lost souls-
like nightingale feathers, collect on the
shiny plastic seat cushions-
transient ,terminal, but the stories similar.

Hot wisps of boldasbrass coffee
waft about the air currents--
dancing, kissing and being seduced by
the smoke which leaks from our nostrils

A half-projected realism of our hopes
and doubts
-played out in an eternal comedy above our
heads, unknown to us:

-the cops
-the nurses
-the insane
-the broken

And I can hardly see you across the table
because my steamy words have obscured
the passage of light.

And I drown my sorrows with crystal
palaces of sugar—
Sacrificing their neat,compact,cubed
souls to the wrath of the burnt brown
lava depths.
Check Please.

The Tilting of the World

Lilly Roberts

Today is Tuesday,
and I am wearing my nerves
on the outside.

Their dress decorates me
down to my ankles,
bunching and blossoming

in knots. I smile,
and offer it to you thinly
as a withered bouquet.

My lips hold
the air,
the space is as fragile
as the winter-used

stems. Today my stomach is tired
from that August afternoon,
when you unfolded me
to a fire. I drop a cup, the porcelain one.

It makes no sound as it hits
the kitchen floor,
splitting open, like an egg shell,
in the tinny September light.

But now my smile
is shallow as this afternoon,
creeping across the linoleum.

The light shoots straight across
the room, parallel to the floor,
ignoring gravity's plead and pull.

I am quivering in my gown of nerves. More than naked.

Slivers of an egg shell smile
glimmer in my hands.
And even the light has forgotten
which way to slant.

Trumpeter Taken Prisoner

Aili Dalton

The Playneses moved in next door on an early spring morning while I was pulling dandelions in my yard. I was twelve then and seeing a girl of my height interested me, for one is always seeking soulmates at that age. Peeking over the picket fence that ran along the right side of our property, I watched the moving men bring in furniture. Bare, dark stuff-- unlike the mismatched patterns in our own home or the bold floral prints that characterized the Dashee's, to our left. Jessica was sitting on a rock near our fence, reading a book, her legs crossed properly at the ankles. She was wearing a brown dress. I say wearing, but it was more like a dress had been thrown over her in such a square and nonconforming way that she looked like a brown paper bag of girl and book. And glasses. I was disappointed when I saw the glasses. Glasses are the scourge of adolescence. I was sorry she had to wear them.

Later that afternoon I sat on Rhona Dashee's bed, telling her about our neighbor.

"I know," sniffed Rhona, lowering her lids enough to show me she was bored. "My mom is making me invite her to my slumber party tonight."

Rhona Dashee was my beloved antagonist: beautiful and mean and terrifying. I was in the process of dedicating my life to being like her, right down to the tip of her fine, upturned nose. Rhona was always surrounded by throngs of budding young girls who were trying their hardest to grow in the same direction as she; reaching for the same sun that Rhona basked in. I was no exception.

"Maybe. . . " And now Rhona's eyes were wide again, full of sparkling sorcery. I was enchanted. ". . . maybe you'll go and invite her. You'll do that won't you? You know I can't because then she'll think I wanted her to come and not just because she's a neighbor. You do it, Lottie, it's a *neighbor* thing, right?" Rhona

grinned at me, a well-bred horse's grin with large gleaming teeth. I marveled at how she had whinnied the accent on neighbor. A clever reminder that I too was a friend by circumstance. Nevertheless, she hadn't called me Charlotte, and for this I was prepared to scale fences for her. Even the large picket one that separated our house from Jessica Playnes's.

Walking over, I practiced a Rhona-ish tilt to my head. Chin up, eyes steady, shoulder cocked towards cheek. A penetrating stare and a shrug at the same time. Yet as soon as I got to the doorstep I began to fidget and my neck got a crick. Jessica was crocheting on the bare floor of her new living room when her mother introduced me. Her eyes looked greasy behind her glasses and I could tell she fingered her lenses. The room had only one couch, and an enormous shelf of books covered the entire back wall. They hadn't even set up their television yet.

"I'm making a blanket for my doll," Jessica told me candidly, brandishing the small crocheted square of loosely looped tan yarn she was working on. The result was muddy, despite the feeble zigzag of pink around the border. I was more than a little bit mortified by this poorly-crafted badge of premature domesticity that was being held in front of my face, and the ease with which Jessica displayed it. Besides, doll playing had become taboo over a year ago. Suppose she offered this information at Rhona's party? Reluctantly, I mumbled forth the invitation, feeling strangely responsible for this strange girl, even though I hadn't invited her of my own volition. Jessica seemed pleased and I noticed she looked like an earthworm when she smiled. Her glasses erased all the character that eyes usually contribute to a face and her lips were weak constructions, pale and thin, blending with her cheeks, rendering her virtually mouthless.

Slumber parties are cruel affairs and Rhona Dashee's was a model of the form. It consisted of six girls: Em Martin, Candace Beet, Zaphne Roiler, Rhona, Jessica and me. Em was the tallest and the biggest and had a lot of brawn in her voice. Her specialty was prank phone calls and she took orders well from Rhona. Candace was a compulsive nervous giggler and I had seen her cheeks turn multiple hues of red when subjected to Rhona's

torturous truth or dare questioning. Zaphne was just plain boring because she had learned early on that the only way to avoid personal destruction at the hands of Rhona Dashee was to become docile and banal. Zaphne had no visible foibles for Rhona to pounce on nor any outstanding attributes for Rhona to become threatened by and thus was a perfect model of passivity.

Most of the night we sat in a meek cluster next to Rhona's bed, drowning in the lushness of her wall-to-wall carpeting as Rhona herself stretched out impressively on a bouquet-splotched bedspread. The walls that surrounded her were magnificent: bedecked with pictures of bold horses flashing their manes and glow-in-the-dark stickers of shiny stars and comets. A full length mirror was ornamented with glossy first prize ribbons for feats unknown.

At first, talk was mostly concerned with former teachers and subjects we planned to take in the fall. Jessica, being new, made her contribution by droning on about the books she was reading. "I like to keep two or three going at the same time, you know. So I can draw parallels," she emphasized, testing the word on us. Oblivious to our boredom-dulled eyes she continued, "Mostly I like biographies, though. First person stuff. It can get pretty psychological."

"You mean autobiographies," I interjected carelessly, forgetting momentarily that I was in Rhona's room.

"That's right, auto." Jessica corrected herself with an appreciative *simper* directed toward me, though I was quick to turn my head.

"Whatever." Rhona was snappish. It was at about this point that she deftly navigated the activities toward a game of truth-or-dare.

I picked truth and came away relatively unscathed-- admitting that I had only kissed one boy. (I omitted the information that he was a family friend and that it was a virtually obligatory embrace, it being New Year's Eve). Rhona was quick to tell her own truth-- that she had recently kissed her fifth boy and that it had been a kiss of great *length*. Candace's turn revealed that she had not yet gotten a training bra, Zaphne missed her turn because she was in the bathroom, and Em took a dare and had to

dial a random number, then speak in a Southern accent while attempting to sell maxi pads to whoever answered. But Rhona's crowning dare was reserved for Jessica.

"Jess-sica," Rhona began slowly, as if the thought were just occurring to her. "Why don't you make a bathing suit out of those streamers over there?" She pointed to a crumple of streamers with tape stuck on them, left over from her birthday party two weeks earlier. Jessica seemed doubtful and vaguely uneasy, but Rhona nodded encouragement and offered her closet as a changing room. Everyone was agonizingly quiet as Jessica bumped around, changing. Rhona took the moment of silent anticipation as an opportunity to apply lip gloss. She used masterful strokes and when she was done her mouth was an image of slick repletion. We were still in a state of rapt admiration when Jessica's sloppy figure emerged from the closet. I took in the vision of pale and bulging flesh wrapped in flimsy tissue paper and felt a chill go through me, as if I were the one standing almost naked in front of a captive audience. I picked at a strand of carpet and tried not to look. I heard Candace snicker and Em shouted joyously.

"Beeeeeootiful, right Zaph?" Rhona was giddy with her success.

"Yes, beautiful." Zaphne spoke without inflection and observed the scene through noncommittal eyes.

Jessica was silent. I wondered if she couldn't speak because, like I, she had something in her throat.

"Lottie? Hey Charlotte. You're not looking. Tell Jessica how excellent she looks."

I raised my head to see Rhona's thin-boned face stretched wide in mirth. It made my heart race. Infected with perverse excitement, I spoke loudly. "Jessica, you should be in the magazines."

Em roared with laughter, squeezing Zaphne's arm as she rocked back and forth. Candace's face assumed a deep purple shade and Jessica looked hopeful. Rhona surveyed the commotion with approval. I hadn't stolen her show, I had merely added to it. I think my comment earned my sleeping bag a spot next to hers.

I was the last one to fall asleep, or so I thought, judging

from the slow breaths of Em, Candace, Zaphne and Rhona. My breathing was ragged and fast for I was still agitated from the thrill of hearing Rhona tell me secrets in the dark. She had confided that she was going to camp in less than a week and that she planned to win the water ballet competition for which she had bought a new bathing suit. She also told me in expanded detail what a kiss of great length was like and that she had plenty of experience in that area.

I listened to Jessica wheeze down by the bottoms of our feet. She too took quick breaths, asthmatic in nature. I figured her a labored sleeper. With deep meditative concentration I was able to slow the rise and fall of my chest so that it matched Rhona's delicate snore. Thus satisfied, I drifted off to sleep.

It was Jessica who started me reading. When Rhona went to sleep-away camp for two weeks I had no one to concentrate my energies on. I found myself wandering over to the Playnes', at first hesitantly, then almost eagerly. Jessica refused to play outside. "I need to create," she said. "Running around doesn't challenge me." She was a little professor, collecting facts and displaying them loftily. More than a bit amazed with her intellect, she reminded me on occasion that she couldn't believe she was already reading at a high school level. Excitedly, she would pull out a volume from one of the many old encyclopedias her parents seemed to have collected obsessively and flip through it with me. I didn't need to bother reading the text because Jessica recited it from files in her head. "See here: Acanthus." She'd place a smudgy finger on the picture and tilt her face upward to prove that she wasn't looking. "A group of shrubs that spread from underground stems and sometimes become pests." And then she would lean close to me and say in a more confidential tone, as if the thought were her own, ". . . in Architecture, acanthus refers to a leafy decoration that was popular in Greek and Roman times." But I'd only have a moment in which to ponder this information before she was off again. "Acapulco! A Mexican port and resort city. . ." . . . and so on. By the time we arrived at the H's I was starving, despite myself, to go over and see what came after Hookworm. . . Hotchkiss. . . Hydroponics.

Jessica also lent me the book of Aesop's Fables to take home

and read on my own. "It's very light," she assured me. I found the stories brief and entertaining, but the meanings would not plant themselves in my reluctant mind. At twelve, I could not appreciate interpretive reading. Jessica liked to discuss them with me. For instance, she seemed especially fascinated by one about a soldier who played the trumpet and was captured by the opposing army. His pleas for release were denied for though he didn't carry a gun, he killed others by calling the troops to battle with his instrument. I would listen to her talk, but I just thought they were good stories.

Jessica called me her best friend but I was clearly her only friend, and an apathetic one at best. For the truth be known, I disliked the sight of her. It vexed me to have to look at the smears on her glasses and feel the soggy weight of her pudgy hand on mine. Despite the richness of her intellect and her unstinting camaraderie, I was far too concerned with aesthetics. Although I was sure Jessica bathed regularly, she seemed messy, maybe even dirty, simply because appearances were not a priority for her. I preferred a clean thing well done. Or overdone. . . as, for instance, Rhona Dashee. Where Jessica was the mineral wealth of a piece of sod, Rhona was the flamboyance of a botanical garden.

When Rhona came back I left Aesop's Fables to fold on itself beneath my bed. The week had been bountiful for Rhona. Her cheeks glowed and the silver sheen of her hair was even more tantalizing than I remembered. Her back was straighter, her shoulders shrugged all the more. She was a perfect hologram, at first glance an enticing brilliance, one step closer a brilliant untouchable. Standing in her room, surrounded by a the stampede of glistening, sweat-flanked horses, I noticed that her mirror was embellished with a whole new set of sleek blue ribbons that rustled a bit with the breeze from her window, like confident flags. I listened, spellbound, as she conjured up stories of camp. Ethereal things like sunbathing, swimming, bikinis, nail polish. . . She worked fantasies in my mind with her words and elaborate gesticulations; her rings glittered when they caught the late afternoon light that diffused itself through the cloud of her curtains. I was riveted, and would have stood in hypnotic adoration for hours had she not tired of me, ending the spell with an abrupt cessation of

movement and a lowering of her lids saying, "You should leave now, I have things to do."

However, it wasn't that I was incapable of perceiving Rhona for what she was, it was simply that I did not want to perceive her that way. Riddled with self-doubt and anxiety, I practiced a deferral of realization all summer long. I suspected darker meanings behind Rhona's secrets and confidences but I refused to acknowledge them. Jessica, on the other hand, despite her precocious talk, lacked insight into social nuance, believing the spoken word like facts in a book. As the summer went its course, with more parent-induced invitations to slumber parties and barbecues, she accepted each one as a sign of friendship. Furthermore, her confidence in my friendship fretted me. I was desperate that Rhona not hear of the time Jessica and I had spent together while she was away at camp. Nor would I venture toward the Playnes's any longer, making Jessica leave by the side door if she happened to stop by for a visit. Rhona's invitations seemed to be less frequent, but I was in such a state of apprehension, my perceptions may have been blurred. Some days I would just sit obsessively by my window that overlooked her yard, ready yet fearful to snatch any chance to spend time with Rhona.

Late one August afternoon, while I was keeping my neurotic semi-vigil, I saw Zaphne and Candace huddled on the steps leading to the Dashee's front door. Their heads were down and Candace was swinging a small handbag. Though my window was open and the afternoon was quiet, I couldn't hear what they were saying. Even so, I felt the charge of excitement that emanated from their hushed tones when Rhona opened her door. Finally, my curiosity, a stronger force than the lack of an invitation, together with the magnetism of unknown games pulled me to Rhona's bedroom, where they sat in a subtle, conspiring throng.

"Oh hi, Lottie. We're just playing with something Candace found in her brother's bedroom. Would you like to try?" Once again, I was mesmerized by the deliberate confidence of Rhona's eyes as they locked with mine, despite the drop of her lids. She held in her hand a tiny silver cap gun with a red matte handle. "Russian Roulette, would you like to try it?" she repeated, her arm

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outstretched now, ticking the gun back and forth below my nose.

"How do you play?" I stammered, still entranced by her smooth, ringed fingers, the way they flashed simultaneously with the silver of the gun as she waved it in front of my face.

"Simple," she beamed back. "There's eight caps in a roll. We shot out all except one of them. You have to pick four people you like and three you don't. Then you twirl the barrel and say the names of the people you like first. You know, like your mom, your dad. . . me. . . ," she offered, with a bewitching curl of a smile, ". . . and then the people you don't like. And you pull the trigger each time you say a name. See if you can get through the whole list without that one cap going off."

My head buzzed with the names of the people I would choose: Mother, Father, Grandmother, Rhona. They would expect me to head the hate list with Jessica. . . maybe Mrs. Rugburs, our English teacher; Richie, the cranky old man who owned the market at the end of our block. . .

I voiced my choices aloud while Rhona nodded. The room reeled a bit and I was heady with the weight of the thing in my hand. I spun the barrel myself.

"My mom." Click. "My dad." Click. I made it safely through four clicks, Rhona's being the fourth. She sat cross-legged and easy. Not a shred of doubt marked her face. She kept her gaze steady. "Go on, Charlotte."

"Umm, Mrs. Rugburs." Click. "Jessi. . ." A gut-wrenching shot erupted over the last syllable of her name. Horrified, I let the gun drop noiselessly into the thickness of her carpet; faint traces of cap-smoke played in my nose. I felt a cold, white sickness take hold of me and I couldn't hear what Rhona and the other girls were saying. Their voices seemed to come from far away, from a distant world, a separate dimension whose language I could neither hear nor understand. I felt urgently that I should leave, that I should rid myself of the vision of that bright little gun, twinkling there on Rhona's carpet.

Yet even after I had stumbled out of the room, mumbling something about dinnertime, and pushed past the front door into the warm evening air, I was still full of the deed I had

done. I knelt down in the Dashee's driveway, my legs suddenly feeling weak. Rhona's diabolical laugh, for the first time uncontrolled, lingered in my ears. I wanted to escape the sound of it, to be able to cover my ears and prevent it, but its brassy rhythm was caught up in the rushing of my heart, traveling my pulse to beat against the insides of my ears again and again and again.

I was sobbing a little and still crouched over in front of the Dashee's house when I saw Jessica's form emerge, as if from the ground. She had an enormous volume V under her arm and a wormy smile creeping up her face. "It's for Rhona," she explained. "She wanted to look up Voodoo."

"No. She. Doesn't." My voice became an uncontrolled wail, broken into short bursts. "She doesn't even like you. No one does. You're just a neighbor."

Jessica's face went pale first and then her hands jerked suddenly up toward her ears, as if to ward off the wound I'd already inflicted. The motion caused the book to slip from her arm and I watched it fall into a tangle of weeds beside me. Raising my head to Jessica, I looked behind her glasses for the first time and realized that I had dispelled the watery hope in her eyes that had captured what it was to be me.

White

Kimberly Hoffman

I strip in front of the bathroom mirror while the water runs into the tub. I'm not sure how I feel about my body. The first time Calvin saw me naked his eyes turned sweet and he kissed my forehead. Then he knelt before me and kissed my belly. I've never loved anyone before but I think I love Calvin. I know I miss him like crazy anyway. I turn from the mirror and add milk and honey to the water in the tub. It turns the water as white as my skin and makes me soft. I slip into the water and it covers me. I am camouflaged.

In the tub I close my eyes and picture Calvin as he was the last time I saw him, which was about four weeks ago. It was a Thursday and we were supposed to have lunch together at Ruby's Diner. Calvin is absolutely mad about Ruby's. We planned to meet at his apartment. When I got there, I let myself in through the back door and found Calvin in his kitchen leaning against the counter holding a carton of eggs. He had lifted one out of the box and was holding it close to his eyes where he could examine it carefully. I stood near the doorway, waiting for him to notice me. Only he didn't right away. Instead, he released his hold on the egg, and it fell to the ground. It cracked and ran. The liquid insides spread out over the cool blue linoleum and I let out a tiny gasp. Calvin turned his head in my direction for just a moment before selecting another egg from the carton.

"Hey there doll-face." He picked out the second egg, shook it and let it drop. His face fell as the yolk broke and slid across the kitchen floor. I swallowed.

"Calvin? Do you feel like getting some lunch?" I asked this question slowly, carefully, and waited for his reply. Only silence. I repeated the question in my head. I thought I sounded like a kindergarten teacher. Calvin continued to ignore me and one after another, he let the eggs fall to his feet.

"Calvin?"

"I'm busy."

"Calvin, please."

"What is it?"

"I thought we were going to Ruby's."

The sadness left his face and he turned his shining eyes to me. He grinned and bit down hard on his bottom lip. His head nodded rapidly as his eyes began darting around the kitchen.

"Ruby's, Ruby Ruby's," he sang. "Yes. Yes!" He clapped his hands and rubbed them together hungrily. "The meatloaf there is so good. Mmmmmmm." He closed his eyes. "I love, love, love it. I love meatloaf. Ruby's meatloaf."

"Good, let's go, then."

"Go, go, go. Yes we will."

I smiled at his affection for meatloaf and took a few steps closer to him, forgetting momentarily about the mess at his feet. I slipped a little and grabbed at the sleeve of his shirt. He looked down at the floor and wouldn't look up again. After a moment I gently lifted his chin and made him look at me. His pupils were huge and black and made his eyes hollow. The sadness had returned, and he chewed on the inside of his cheek.

"Calvin, what is it? What were you doing when I came in?"

"Look, I'm sorry but I can't have lunch with you."

"But the meatloaf. . ." I joked. He scratched his head and didn't smile back.

"I've just got stuff to do."

"What stuff? What the hell is this, Calvin?" There was a pause.

"It's terrible, Alice." He shook his head and slid down the side of the cabinet onto the floor. He sat there in the runny egg whites and cracked shells, looking confused and sadder than I had ever seen him. Dark circles rested heavily beneath his eyes. I sat down next to him, linking my arm in his.

"Do I get to know?" I whispered and buried my face in his neck where I could feel his heat. He took a deep breath and let his shoulders fall.

"I'm not being very nice to my girl, am I?"

“Calvin. . .”

“I got my sparkling white girl all dirty. I ruined you with my mess.” He was moving his head slowly, side to side.

“Tell me what’s so terrible.” I tugged at his sleeve. His chest expanded as he breathed in deeper.

“Alice, I can’t find any. I’ve been through so many cartons and there just aren’t any.”

“Any what? Calvin, what are you looking for?”

“The chicks, Alice. I can’t find the baby chicks,” he whispered, looking at me through eyes black and troubled. He ran an egg-soaked hand through his hair and was quite serious.

“Oh no.” I covered my face in my hands. The last time I found Calvin like this, he disappeared for nearly two weeks without a single word to me or anyone. I wasn’t sure I could stand that again.

I kick the stopper out of the drain with my toe and watch my body emerge as the water is sucked away. I am clean and white and glowing. I step out of the tub and wrap a towel that is whiter than myself around my middle, where my stomach feels tight after thinking of Calvin. I rub away a circle of steam from the mirror and stare critically at my face. I am almost invisible in the fluorescent light. I think I look like a ghost. Calvin says I look like an angel. Or he did anyway, when he was around. I reach up and undo the knot at the top of my head. My hair falls over my shoulders, long and white. The steamy water in the tub had made it curlier and thicker than usual, and it almost looks good to me. I stick my hand in it and smile, showing white teeth. The mirror steams over again and my face is lost.

The hallway is cold when I open the bathroom door. In my room, my bed looks warm and inviting. I unwrap the towel and rub it against my arms and legs. When I’m dry, I slide into bed and close my eyes. I wonder how long Calvin will stay away this time, and if he will go to the same place he went last time, although I have no idea where that place is. I begged him not to tell me; I didn’t want to know. I only wanted to hold him and be happy that he was home. I think of the party I’m supposed to go to tonight

and wish he was going with me. I'm feeling a little funny about going to a party anyway, and I wonder why I gave in to the girl from work who invited me. Her name is Amber and she seems to have taken an interest in me since the first time Calvin disappeared. We work the same hours at the library, three afternoons a week and usually weekends, with Thursdays and Fridays off. She's been checking up on me these past few weeks and making sure that I keep busy, because last time I guess I sort of shut myself off. I'm going to this party with her so that from now on maybe she'll leave me alone. She tells me Calvin is a loser and drug addict and that I can do better. But she doesn't know. My head starts to hurt thinking about it, and I take two aspirin from the bottle on my night table. I swallow and barely feel them go down. I'm getting good at taking them without water.

I stay in bed a while longer, waiting for my headache to go away. The note Calvin left for me the morning he took off is under the aspirin bottle. I pick it up and read it silently to myself. "When I'm in bed I'll wish you were there next to me. Calvin's going to miss his perfect white angel girl." There's no address where he'll be or any indication of when he'll be back. I turn the paper over. On it he's scribbled a bunch of circles, probably as he was thinking what to write. Somehow they remind me of egg cartons and I don't like to look at them. I lift my pillow and put the note underneath it. I close my eyes again because they sting a little. "Your white angel girl misses you, too."

When I met Calvin, he was working as a bagger at Kroger's market where I do my grocery shopping. I like to go very late at night when the store is nearly empty so that I don't have to listen to a million little kids asking their mothers what is wrong with me. That still makes me feel dumb, even now. But being around Calvin never made me feel awkward. The very first time I saw him I was too intrigued to be nervous. I looked up from my basket and he was standing there, pressing his springy black curls behind his ears so that I could see his eyes. He looked at me, then through me. Behind his glasses, his eyes were gray and thoughtful. He smiled quietly, and I thought that he seemed too important to be bagging

my groceries. He held out a bag and shook it open.

"Do you always shop so late at night?" His voice was warm, and I was enchanted.

"It's easier that way."

"Is it? I don't shop much myself."

"What do you eat then?"

"Have you ever been to Ruby's Diner?" He stressed the word "Ruby" and looked harder into my red eyes. I surprised myself by not looking away.

"No, I don't think so."

"Uh-oh. I better take you there. Yes, yes. We really must go."

I hung around the check-out waiting for his shift to end, so it was early morning when we got to Ruby's. It looked like a diner from the 1950's. There was polished chrome everywhere and they had a jukebox sitting near the center of the waxed checkerboard floor. The whole place seemed to sparkle. We sat in a small booth by the window. He ate meatloaf and two side orders of toast; I had cherry pie and a coke. It was raining outside and the road was shiny and reflective. Calvin told me about how he was going to travel and write and paint and *do* everything, and I believed him. He told me his secret wish was to discover a comet and have it named after him. I looked at him in wonder and smiled as "Calvin's Comet" flew through my head.

"What about you, Alice? What's your most perfect desperate wish?" He was eager and interested, and I answered quickly, without having to think.

"I wish I was darker." I laughed shortly, suddenly shy. Calvin sighed and looked sideways out the window.

"Silly Alice girl." He spoke softly and looked at the street. For the first time that night I felt foolish and self-conscious, and for the first time in my life I felt like that was a ridiculous thing to wish for. My throat tightened. Calvin seemed to sense the change in me and took my hand under the table. He squeezed it gently until I could swallow again.

We ordered coffee, and I relaxed as he told me about the stars. I listened intently and told him very little. When he got quiet

I tied my straw wrapper in a knot and pulled it apart. The knot broke and I smiled to myself. "It means someone is thinking about me," I explained. He smiled back.

"It was me."

"Oh," My cheeks burned red and I felt like dancing.

I roll over in my bed and look at my clock. I have twenty minutes before Amber is supposed to pick me up. I don't want to go. I'm not going to know anyone there. I stretch my body, making it long. The covers slide down off my chest and I think about what to wear. I sit up and reach for my bathrobe at the end of the bed. I twist myself into it and look outside. It's getting dark much later now and the twillight turns the sky an unnatural color. My gaze shifts to the painting on the wall. It's a portrait of me, but you wouldn't know it. The canvas is mostly white, with tiny flecks of pink and peach and light, light blue. Calvin painted it on one of those days that he was an artist. When I showed up at his apartment, he greeted me at the door dressed in a paint splattered t-shirt and overalls, and I knew. Days that he is a writer he wears his black turtleneck sweater and navy blue sweatpants. He asked me to pose nude for him in his make-shift studio, and I did it. For him. "Alice-angel, you're amazing. I can't make you white enough," he said to me. He waved his brushes about in his usual manner of drastic urgency that I found so unbelievably intoxicating. I remember thinking what an odd thing for him to say, because white paintings are about the only thing Calvin ever paints. When we first met he was working on five or six of these eight foot canvases, covering them in thick layers of pure white paint. Still, I blushed at his comment, and he let the paint turn pink in places. I looked to the bottom corner left corner of my portrait where he signed the painting "Calvin loves Alice" and I let my hand wander under the fold of my bathrobe so I can feel his touch. I don't want to get dressed but I get out of bed finally and walk over to my closet. I can't think. I decide that maybe it would be best if I put on my make-up first. I leave the closet door open.

Back in the bathroom the steam has vanished from the mirror. The floor is cold on my bare feet. I lean in close to my reflection and spread mascara all over my invisible lashes. Suddenly they appear, chocolate brown and way too thick. I tug on them with my fingertips to get rid of the clumps and when I'm done I look only slightly less ridiculous. I imagine Calvin's disapproving looks staring back at me out of the mirror, but I ignore them because he isn't here. He isn't going to be at the party. I put on lipstick, then wipe it off with toilet paper. I put on a different color and repeat this process several times. Every color is too bright against my white face. Every color gives me too much lip. My lips are sore from so much wiping, so I smear on some chapstick and go to my room to get dressed. I feel ugly and alone.

I pick through the clothes in my closet, rejecting every possibility. I know Amber will be wearing red, because she is always wearing red. Her dress will be small and tight and red. It will show off her tan and it will not be an accident. I pull my black dress from its hanger and slip it over my head. It falls easily over my hips. I twist and turn in front of the full-length mirror. In my black dress, I shine and shine. My mother says that black is slimming, the dark colors draw the eye in. I stare at my reflection and think that's fine but my limbs extend out too wide. My legs and arms are so bright that the color bleeds out over my edges and makes me huge. There is a knock on the front door. I look out the window and see Amber's car parked on the street. I am on fire. I am not ready for this. I tell myself that Calvin would adore me in this dress. I say it out loud again and again to make myself believe it. And I begin to. The knock at the door gets louder. She can wait. I slide into my shoes and run my hand up the side of my bare leg. I smile and think that I never felt anything softer. I catch myself in the mirror and I don't move. My smile is pretty when I'm thinking of Calvin. He is all that matters. I speak at my reflection and I like the way my colorless lips move. "Calvin, my love, your perfect white angel is going to a party."

Wings

Greg Wacks

"Instead of forever hovering above, I'd like to feel there's some weight to me to end my eternity and bind me to earth. At each step, each gust of wind, I'd like to be able to say, 'now' and no longer say 'since always' and 'forever'."

--from the film, *Wings of Desire*; Wim Wenders 1988

I. The City

The wings extend beyond bronze husks
in swift motions clothing concrete.

You feel their presence on the street
when the tired sky awakens in gusts,

forcing the drizzle into storefronts,
staining windows at the U-Bhan station.
In Charlettonburg, a man waits with expectation
while his failing eyesight hunts

through the hurried crowd with rush hour's cadence.
"She's not there. . ." he lowers his head.
Mounting steps, the wind turns cheeks red
as it touches him with momentary confidence.

A departing train passes over his shoulder
"Alone again; she's gone" his eyes sink.
A swift breeze dies, wings shrink,
old bones feel the pavement. It grows colder.

II. The Country

Out here, the blue sky is trapped
and the heavy clouds harden the land.

Steel tracks and brick, a large band
of barbed wire fences are wrapped

around a once crowded place.

Chimnies align now in rows
and patches of grass and weeds grow
from death. Out of ashes and bone a sacred space

is formed. At Birkenau the wind is blowing
against a young man's tired face.

"Why have I come here?" the wind stings his neck; stasis
where the past endures, immune to the snowing.

Following roads once paved
past crumbling brick ovens and stone
plaques bordered with prayers, alone
he places a rock on a symbolic grave.

III. Far Away

Shema Yisrael adonai elohanyu, adoni echad

The Teyelet at sunset is covered in red.

Baruch sheim kavod malchuto leolom vaed.

In Tel Aviv, some say the presence of God

is obscured by the West. Power lines
stretch across the sky and the wings
are tangled, scarred slightly from things
beyond their control. Land mines

in the Golan, warnings in red, mean nothing
when the number twenty-seven bus explodes.

A mother's dignity and self-pride erodes.

"*Lama Acshav?!*" she grieves for her son. The wind is
whirling

and its presence is here. Yet she cries,
numb to the world around her and the soft
touch of the wind. It carries the boy aloft
as his charred body basks under cloudless skies.

IV. So Close

In bed, when the time is both
very late yet deceptively early and through
gaps in the old windows, the faint blue
of daylight overtakes darkness, filling most

of the room with a new but familiar
presence. He is stirred by the sound
of a drafty window as if speaking to the ground
beneath the bed. Awake now, "I'm thinking of her

again" and the weight of his thought
drives his body deep into the mattress.
Masking tape on white walls reveals an emptiness;
a picture forgotten. An anxious fly, caught

between the window and a gray winter hue
breaks free, carried by wind-swept skies
and the buzz subsists. Hearing the wind rise,
he senses the wings, "They watch her too."



