

THE NASSAU LITERARY REVIEW

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

The *Nassau Literary Review* has witnessed the development of many notable writers, including Galway Kinnell, John McPhee, Edmund Wilson, Booth Tarkington, W.S. Merwin, Woodrow Wilson, and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Continuing in this tradition, the current issue showcases the work of a new generation of talented Princeton students, with a special focus on how students of writing may one day evolve into established writers such as these.

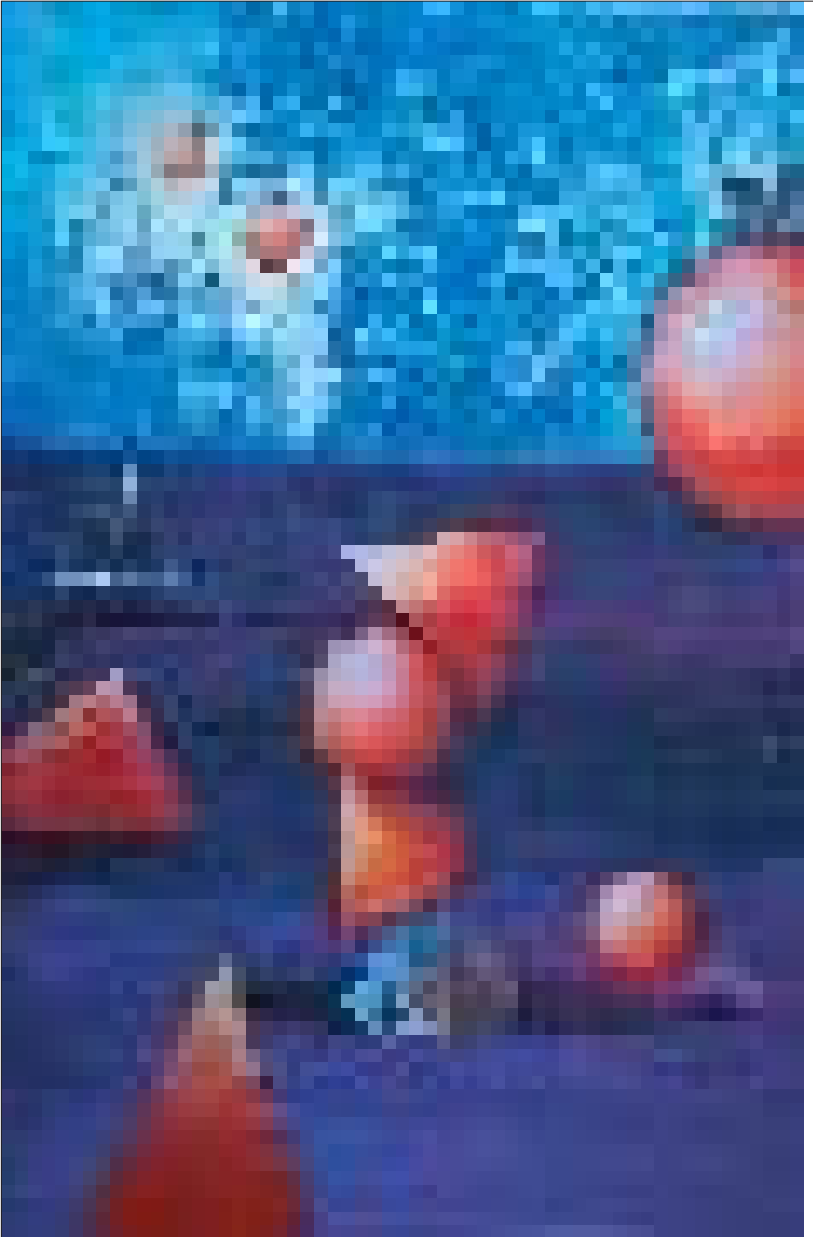
To hear their thoughts on this evolution, the *NLR* interviewed Justin Goldberg '02, recent recipient of the Poetry Society of America's New York Chapbook Fellowship, and his former thesis advisor, C.K. Williams, Pulitzer prize-winning poet and professor in the Creative Writing Program. The conversation between Goldberg, an emerging poet, and Williams, an established poet, offers us insight into the process by which a writer develops. It also touches upon topics such as honesty in poetry, drawing inspiration from visual art, the solitary nature of writing, and the student-mentor relationship. The interview is followed by a poem that Goldberg wrote as part of his senior independent work and later revised for publication.

This issue of the *NLR* features poetry, prose, and artwork that was selected from over 250 student submissions. We earnestly thank our editors and staff members for their hard work on the magazine, and wish the best to our seniors in their pursuits after graduation. We are indebted to our generous supporters, both on and off campus, whose contributions enable us to realize the vision of the *Nassau Literary Review* each year.

Enjoy reading,

Handwritten signatures of Courtney Napoles and Christine Malvasi. The signature on the left is 'Courtney Napoles' and the one on the right is 'Christine Malvasi'. They are separated by an ampersand.

Courtney Napoles '05 & Christine Malvasi '06
Editors-in-Chief



Marisa Reisel

INTERVIEW WITH JUSTIN GOLDBERG '02 AND C.K. WILLIAMS

As an undergraduate at Princeton, Justin Goldberg '02 wrote a creative senior thesis, a collection of poetry entitled Speaking Past the Tongue. After graduation, he began working as the assistant to the Executive Director of the PEN American Center, an organization that encourages reading, assists writers in financial need, and campaigns for international and domestic human rights on behalf of the many writers persecuted because of their writing. While working at PEN, Goldberg devoted his free hours to revising his thesis for publication. Last year, Goldberg won the Poetry Society of America's New York Chapbook Fellowship, awarded annually to two New York City poets age thirty or under who have never published a full-length manuscript.

On a recent Saturday morning, the Nassau Literary Review caught up with Goldberg and C.K. Williams, one of Goldberg's thesis advisors. An accomplished poet, Williams's recent books include the Pulitzer Prize-winning Repair and The Singing, which won the National Book Award. Goldberg and Williams shared with us their thoughts about the process by which a student of writing evolves into a writer.

Nassau Literary Review to C.K. Williams: When did you start teaching at Princeton and when did you begin working with thesis students?

C.K.W.: I started teaching at Princeton eight years ago. I'd been working with thesis students for many years before that through M.F.A. programs.

N.L.R.: Do you think undergraduates are ready to write a creative thesis?

C.K.W.: I think it depends on the student. Studying to be any sort of artist is a gamble.

In my own experience, it rarely happens that a student of poetry suddenly becomes a poet. When it does happen, you immediately recognize it. On the undergraduate level, that isn't likely to occur often because poets, at least all the ones I know,

don't mature that early. While we have students of fiction coming out of Princeton who publish novels almost immediately, I can't think of any poets who've published that quickly.

N.L.R. to Justin Goldberg: What were the best aspects of writing a creative senior thesis at Princeton?

J.G.: The privilege of being treated as a peer, as a working writer, probably prematurely. (to C.K.W.) You really gave me a great deal of independence that senior year...told me what I was ready to hear. There were some things I wasn't ready to know or do yet. You had a kind of patience.

C.K.W.: One important aspect of being a writer is that your apprenticeship really lasts your whole life. You're always looking for educational experiences. It's an odd thing, but as the years pass, it can sometimes seem that writing poems is almost subservient to learning about poetry. You're always trying to do something that you can't do. I suppose that's when the serious business of writing begins—when you realize how much there is out there that you have to know and how much is offered to you to know.

N.L.R. to C.K.W.: In *Poetry and Consciousness*, you describe sequestering yourself for an extensive period of reading and study after college. Do you feel that solitude is a key part of apprenticeship, and if so, how does being in a community of writers or students affect that experience?

C.K.W.: You can be in a community of writers twenty-three hours a day, but if you're sitting down to write for one hour, you're alone. The solitude is inevitable. Once you get to your desk, you're alone with the poem, though you're always in the presence of all of the poets whose books you have on the shelf before you or on the desk beside you.

I think what you're asking is whether you have to go off into the woods and be by yourself and beat yourself on the head. There's no easy answer to the question. You have to situate yourself in a place that fits your character. Some people are able to absorb the lessons that they have to learn in the middle of the street. Paul Muldoon works in his office with the door open; I couldn't do that in a million years. It would just take me too long

to get started again every time someone came by.

N.L.R. to J.G.: Did you seek out this type of solitude while you were writing your thesis?

J.G.: I was, to a large degree, afraid of being alone. During that senior year, I fled from the solitude that could have made my thesis stronger. I recall writing in a room full of people. A lot of times I would short-change my efforts for the sake of being social, making myself available, getting as much out of Princeton in that sense as I could.

C.K. is absolutely right that, fundamentally, writing is a solitary process. To some extent, it's traumatic. In workshop, something that made sense to you in solitude is suddenly wide open for all to see, and it often doesn't translate. I think especially as a young writer, the extent of your personal investment in what you write, your social life, and your moral life can be kind of exposed through the poem. You're putting a lot at stake.

N.L.R. to J.G.: Was there any single inspiration for the poems in your thesis and the chapbook into which it evolved?

J.G.: My first poems were written directly in response to my mother's visual art from the late 1960s and '70s, which I grew up encountering on the walls of our house. The first couple of poems in the chapbook engage with these same prints and paintings, but more specifically with my relationship to her unfinished work, and to her as expressed through art. She very clearly abandoned her art career to raise a family, but has both informed and encouraged my efforts at writing poetry throughout my life. At times, I feel my own work to be a continuation of hers.

N.L.R. to C.K.W.: How would you describe your contribution to the creative thesis experience as an advisor?

C.K.W.: In the most basic sense, what you're trying to do is show the student his voice, how to find the poetry that is already in him, and to cut away the things that impede writing in that voice. How you go about that is different with each student. With some students, you have to be very solicitous, and with others you have to be firmer—with Justin it was both. When Justin was

in my workshop, I felt I had to be very hard because his poems were all over the place, and he didn't want them *not* to be all over the place. By the time he started the thesis, he had made a lot of progress, and then I felt that it was important to be solicitous and encourage his strengths.

J.G. to C.K.W.: In the workshop, you were extremely hard on me, I thought. I was trying to make assertions that I wasn't prepared to make, trying to close poems that weren't fully realized. In response to one poem I showed you early on during senior year, you said, "What the hell is going on here?" I had composed a poem that was a cryptic little game (what I thought a poem had to be) and what I heard back from you was, "No, just say it. Stop dancing around the issue." I think I internalized a lot of your criticism. I went back and took it apart and tried very candidly to tell the story that was there to be told, and that was the first time that you responded to anything I had written with real enthusiasm. It was this kind of "Yes. That's *it*."

C.K.W. to J.G.: As you're talking I realize that in some ways I don't really teach a person, I teach the poem. Sometimes in a workshop I can hardly remember who wrote which poem because it's the poem that one is really trying to speak to. The person who writes the poem is in some sense incidental. That's true even when you're reading great poetry—sometimes when you know too much about the poet, it can actually interfere with your appreciation of the poem, which can be very depressing. You can know the biography of a poet too well, all their weaknesses and their sins, and then when you actually look at the poem, you have to sort of scrape all of that away. But that's not the case with undergraduate poets or even with M.F.A. poets. In their case, you're really talking to the poem.

N.L.R. to C.K.W.: Could we talk a little bit about the practice of writing? In *Poetry and Consciousness*, you describe the poem as a "dialectical event"—

C.K.W.: I'd prefer to use the word "process" now. For me, writing a poem is a process rather than an act. When I begin a poem, I assume its composition is going to take place over quite a long period. Some poets assume that it will just happen immediately.

There are two different poetic characters, you could say, and the resulting poem doesn't necessarily show which produced it. For what I'm calling a process poet—myself, in other words—a good part of the work of composition is making it seem as though there has been no process, making the poem seem spontaneous. With the other kind of poet, it actually is spontaneous, or at least more spontaneous. But there's always labor involved.

J.G.: I feel like, as your student, I transitioned from one way of approaching writing to the other. To some extent the poems in my thesis began as acts or events that kind of fell out of the sky and hit me on the head—

C.K.W.: Indeed.

J.G.: —that could not be recreated and to some extent couldn't even be deciphered. I had yet to see the poem playing out an on-going argument. I guess I had thought previously that I needed to make up my mind about something or have a sort of statement that I was making *prior* to writing the poem, whereas now I feel like I don't have to have the answers. In fact the poem is stronger if it illustrates the process of seeking.

C.K.W.: Well, that's good. I taught you something then. Or else I cursed you with something. (*Laughter*) That's a possibility.

J.G.: I've also learned a great deal about the importance of process, of craft, from visual artists I know. Most importantly, how to begin approaching poetry with their kind of physical, gritty, and seemingly endless attention. Some of them stare at a blank canvas or mess around with a color palette for hours and hours and hours. It had never occurred to me that poetry should be that hard, and yet it has to be. Their example has helped me look at poetry as something that I can simply work on that doesn't have to be accidental.

N.L.R. to J.G.: How important is reading to your writing process?

J.G.: As an undergraduate, it was almost like I read to write. A lot of the writing I did was very unabashed imitation of some of

the writers I admired. I feel that happening less and less now; I think there's more digestion. What I read doesn't bubble right back up to the surface in the form of an attempt at writing poetry, but rather it's building something.

N.L.R. to J.G.: Who are your favorite writers, and how have they influenced your poetry?

J.G.: The writers I respect the most have really put their moral selves on the line, have made enormous leaps in terms of depicting human frailty and immorality in poetry. There is a sort of risk-taking that I admire across the board in all different kinds of writing—poets like Frank Bidart. But, I don't necessarily feel like I want to write the way a lot of my favorite writers do. Ann Carson is one poet whom I have trouble understanding, just technically. She's such a virtuoso as a writer. I can't turn around and write like that, but I admire enormously the way some writers reveal themselves, reveal very problematic aspects of what it means to be a human being. C.K. is an incredibly brave writer. I think the most you can possibly strive for is to depict something that's morally problematic in the poem and to grapple with the consequences of it in such a way that a reader cannot help but engage with that problem and grow from it and be a better person.

N.L.R.: You both have mentioned being concerned about your poetry being honest. Is there such a thing as dishonest poetry?

J.G.: Well, all poets lie. They're all liars. That's the traditional view at least, going back to the Classics.

C.K.W.: "Lying" isn't the right word. Let's say "fictionalizing," the way novelists fictionalize—lying has too moral an edge to it. A good poem can't lie. It can use fiction, but it can't lie. In a bad poem the lies are evident. The basic lie in a bad poem is saying it's complete when it's not.

J.G.: It's a form of dishonesty to think that the poem is going to do some work for you that you're not ready or willing to do yourself, that work of examining your own assumptions about the world and about what other people are prepared to glean from your writing. I would get so frustrated in workshop, thinking,

“It’s there! It’s right there on the page!” It was just drivel. I was using these terribly compacted, abstract images that for me communicated the broader story, and really I just didn’t have the guts to unpack it and start telling the story from an earnest point of view.

When I was working with Linda [Gregg], she would read some of my poems and say she could hear someone in the basement banging on the door, trying to get out. I couldn’t convey what had actually taken place or my feelings about it. Going back to those poems a year later and revising them sometimes involved really trying to grapple with what the original impulse stemmed from and then reinserting things that I had previously edited out.

Since I finished revision on the chapbook, I’ve been writing about things that I was afraid to write about before—stories that compromise me somehow by revealing something that I would have been ashamed of or unable to write before. Now I feel like my personal life and sensibilities are less at stake in the poem.

N.L.R. to C.K.W.: Could you talk about the biggest challenge you faced at the beginning of your career, and whether it has changed?

C.K.W.: Oh, it’s changed very much. When I was first starting out, the challenge was to write a halfway decent poem, and to find the techniques and means to speak about anything at all. In a sense, that’s still the issue, except I have a lot more techniques that I’ve learned over the almost fifty years of my writing life.... My goodness, I never thought of it like that.

The challenge for me right now is to find a way to write about the great despair I feel about the world without my work being too intimidating. That’s what I’ve been concerned about lately—when I think of my children and my grandchildren, I realize that to let them know just how frightened I really am about the world would be even more terrifying for them. Because of that, I find that there are many things I can’t say. I’m trying to figure a way to resolve this issue.

I think that maybe in my earlier poems I thought I was going to change the world so it wouldn’t be such a dismal place. Now I realize that isn’t going to happen, and I’m faced with that other quandary.

N.L.R. to C.K.W.: What does a poem do that prose can't do, your poems in particular?

C.K.W.: As a poet, naturally I feel that there's something about poetry that makes experiencing it more intense than other forms of writing. I think of some of the great despairers in fiction, like Kafka, but their work doesn't have the same immediacy as poems do; there's a kind of inherent distance to fiction. The purpose of poetry is to obliterate this distance between experience and language.

J.G.: I think you accomplish that in a great many of your poems. A poem can express a kind of universal despair or helplessness in the face of enormous events, and yet inscribe those events within personal experience. I think the poem "Tar" does this. The moment of personal experience captured by the poem conveys the enormity of the event and the broader experience beyond it.

N.L.R. to C.K.W.: Would you write poetry if it were just for you, if no one were reading it?

C.K.W.: Yes, I'd keep writing. In some ways poetry is my life—not my career, my life. Would I have gone on writing when I first started out if no one was reading the poems? I'm not so sure. As well as learning the craft of poetry, you learn to connect your being to it in some essential way. I wasn't connected to poetry back then the way I am now; I had to learn that. But now I can't imagine not writing poetry. When I don't, I'm unhappy.

J.G. to C.K.W.: Can you describe why a young writer feels so inevitably and completely devoted to poetry even before having learned the craft or, as you say, connected to poetry?

C.K.W.: I think that initial experience of language becoming a poem and then in a sense you yourself becoming a poem, even for an instant, even if you sense just a glimmer of it, is very addictive. It's an experience really quite unlike anything else, which once you have you crave. Addiction is an unfortunate word, but it seems to be the most fitting. There's something inexplicable that happens to the brain and the body and the life in writing poems that just doesn't happen in any other situation, and so you want

more of it, you want all of it you can have.

N.L.R. to J.G.: What are some of your current goals for your writing?

J.G.: I'm going after a sort of erasure of ego. Some sort of transition takes place between the personal and the universal. In the end, we rely on our reader to tell us what things mean. You're trying in certain ways to allow your reader to participate in the struggle depicted by the poem. I want the poem to be unsettling. I want it to enthrall people and I want it to offend them. I want it to raise questions.

Samples of Justin Goldberg's poetry, song lyrics, and graphic/web design can be found at www.justingoldberg.com.

UNFINISHED WORK

Justin Goldberg

White ink on the right side
of an ash-black page, a wide-eyed girl
sits up awake in bed. The lines of her nightgown
trail off, interrupted when months into her pregnancy
my mother was told the chemicals could wound
her unborn child, that she was too fragile
to turn the uncertain crank of the press.

She wakes from a nightmare, searches
to reveal the bedroom's unlit distances:
at sixteen, she would tease children
from the pages of magazines
into sketches of an imagined family.

Standing at the press she held
one hand against its stubborn heft
and curled the other to guard
the swell above her hips
with fingerprints that had
been erased by zinc,
then inked a plate
and ran it through
to give life to what
her careful hand
had cut out.

Twenty years old, I hold my mother's last,
unfinished print against the wall above my bed
as she waters down paint on a paper plate.
I have never seen her face so thick with effort.
She labors over the eyes, steps away
to inspect the girl's grip on her sheets,
her troubled stare, then consults the page
and lifts her brush again.

When the printed draft is fully pictured there,
 silver lines stand out boldly against blue,
 but the left side of the wall is blank.



Elena & Todor Petev

CENTRAL PARK SONNET

Emily Woodman-Maynard

To write a mint-flavored day in the park,
how do I rid the palate of the sharp
cilantro and red sauce, the fragrant cheese
on black beans? How do I forget the street
behind the mansions on the park, the steps
and sways of Caribbean mamas on
brick church corners; farther back, the bite of
tamarind water?

Yesterday was heavy
with departures. How do I now, among
the trees and silk dresses, turn a veil, a
rose, a charm?

The bride and the camera,
the mint and the cilantro are all in
this eye, this mouth, this moment, and I need not
be then nor now, but in this branch, this skin.

ELEGIES FOR MADDIE

J.D.M. Williams

[1.]

This thing. This thing *we are*. How strange and how new and how / stupid and ordinary. I'd write about it, if it were me. It would be a shitty thing to do, though. Christ. What a bloody fucking bastard opportunist. It's like I see a car wreck some bloke something awful by the side of the road rolled over in a ditch and go yeah that'd be perfect that's just the right I could *do* that nice little piece maybe maybe like a villanelle or something a little meter you know something Frost. As counterpoint. But that would no question be exceedingly shitty yes. / So. This thing. This breath. Maddie, my falling, my / that leaves me *here*. The car. The interstate. It's so / funny. No place like the present amen. The human race is continually steam-rolled by an endless parade of bullshit platitudes and flag-waving bloody brand-name cheese Olympic sponsors the / words are so *owned*. What then? What now? The questions. Unknowing, silence, soft and softer still. Then and now, the four / three of us, the three of us are going home. / And him. Don't forget *Grady*. / Home. You can never go home. This is America. All roads to Rome. Las Vegas. Or something. Who knows anymore. God. I've driven this road ten thousand times / it's a kind of death. Lockjaw commuters, eyes blank, something like / mourning. The *dense* commuters. What is that? Auden? No. Yes. Auden. *From the conservative dark breath into the ethical life breath the dense commuters come*. When the form is the musculature of breath and the singing and the sung. Yes. / It was years and specialists and goddamn there's nothing are you going to tell me what I should have done instead? What a fucking terrible bastard, what an awful *father*, couldn't hold her couldn't keep her from / from falling. / Cliché. / Have the image of father's farm in Devonshire. Green. / *And* the inside oyster of her arm's white the image that will hold the mark the tangle of red resigned mute old. And new. Criss-cross. One. Two. Maddie. *Maddie*. Oh God. O. O. I / this thing. This thing *we are*. This thing that I would write, this one, the dark of it, the reaching. This car, this / breathe. We breathe. / Mad-

die, five. We were in the Fogg. Musée des Beaux Arts. It was a weekday. Tuesday. Bollocks. I don't know. No one comes to museums anymore. Sad Tuesdays. She was wearing corduroy overalls. And a shirt that said *Somebody in Waban Loves Me*. And she was singing. Soft rememberings of songs you never knew. Willow. Yes. / Yes. We're going home, Maddie. Home. You remember. The window squares of light. But your room's dark. So what now? Do you know? / This. This. And then. And then and then and then. / I don't know. Just drive.

[2.]

I tried to call her Madison when we started being—you know—us, the two of us, just so our names wouldn't rhyme or whatever. She hated it, said she hated being named after some dead president, and on top of it she didn't want us to sound like a law firm, so... so now I call her Fred.

She has good taste in music. Nirvana, Monk, Zappa, The Fugees, Black Sabbath. She has a turntable, which she actually uses. She likes Zeppelin without being—you know—excessively a stoner, which is—I don't know—nice. Yeah. Nice.

I'm holding her. She has this enormous quantity of stuffed animals on her bed, which makes it sort of—like almost disturbing for me, when it happens. I hate my boobs—she says—they're so flat, like a boy's, like an *android's* for godsake—you say *boobs*?—I say—what, you want me to say *breasts*?—um, I dunno, I'm just—I hate the word *breasts*...it sounds like some sort of like...unpleasant wildlife, whereas *boobs*—here she sat up, flicked her hair out of her eyes, like Cher almost, in a way, but attractive—boobs connotes...roundness and...and *gravitas*, neither of which, to reiterate, these...failures of mine have. I kissed her. Fuck you—she says—stop distracting me.

It's weird that I'm here, with them. In their car. Mr. Hull, Mrs. Hull, Winky, me. All of us...dead silent for the last like twenty minutes. I feel like right now it's one of those family things that you're not supposed to—I don't know—*butt in on*. Especially when you're not exactly their...favorite person. I think she thought it was weird, too. On the way up. I mean—she had better things to—she was...elsewhere. But it's worse now, anyway, without her. I have no idea what to say. Maybe I should just keep my mouth shut like everybody else. God. I hate being an *ado-*

lescent. I wish I had a car. You think about all those—you know, like those heavy moments, the sort of...life moments you have from time to time—and they're all ruined up until you're about eighteen because you have to get picked up by *mom* afterwards and sit there in the car while she drives and sings along with the Oldies station on the radio. Yeah. Whatever it is just...fades.

Fred loves math. I don't know why.

I never asked her about it, until.... I mean—I had seen them. She wore a lot of sweaters, even when it was hot out, but...I knew about them. She didn't really want to talk about it. So that time, I—I said I was sorry, that I was *there* for her, that she could talk to me about it, or something. She just laughed. She said that was a long time ago. But then it was raining one night—freezing rain, I mean, that big ice storm last winter, and I was home and she called and she just started talking about it, all of a sudden, about the feeling of it, the thumbtacks and cigarette burns and the years of doctors who just kept her...fogged in with the remedy and she was cool about it...but real quiet, like.... Then she cried, on the phone. I stole my mom's car and drove through the ice storm to get over to her house. That was pretty scary. I'm not so much a good driver anyway, so.... We sat up and watched *The Princess Bride* until like 5:00 or 6:00, until it was light out. She wrapped herself up in this old ratty quilt and she fell asleep, right up against me.

She has this picture of herself on her desk—it's her birthday party apparently; she's nine. She's holding Winky in the picture, who's obviously still a baby and sort of squinting up at the camera.... You know. A funny baby face. I like it—the picture, I mean. She thinks it's weird that I like it, sort of like...I don't know. I just like it. It's nice. She's smiling—or whatever that thing is people do with their faces when somebody makes them say cheese. Which is as close as she ever really gets.

I don't know. I feel like I...let her down, or something.... I don't know. I feel shitty about it. I mean—I'm supposed to be her—she's supposed to come to me with.... I'm supposed to be able to.... God.

She kissed me, said *send me a postcard*. That was it.

[3.]

Of course I wonder if I couldn't have done something more.

I'm her mother. But there's no use getting hysterical. It's best to work through it one step at a time. I try to remember things as they happened, the sequence in which they happened. I tell myself the story again every time it gets a little hard, so that I can understand. Point by point. These things are what they are. No one's to blame.

* * *

I was at the office. It was a month and a half ago, a Tuesday. I was making a design presentation—for the Norton, the new modern art museum they're building in Back Bay. I had worked on it for six months. I'd like to think it showed. Everyone congratulated me when I finished.

I was happy. I went back to my office, kicked off my shoes, sat down at my desk. There was a Post-it on my computer from Jeannie, my assistant, that said *Husband Called Urgent*. She was always very dire with her messages. But I called right away, anyway. There was no answer at home. I got him on his cell.

"Which is it," I said, "the Nobel?"

"Thank God," he said. His voice was choked, his accent thicker than usual.

"What's wrong?"

"It's—it's Maddie."

"What happened?"

No answer.

"John. What happened."

"Jesus Christ."

"John."

"It's Maddie. It's—Winky—Winky found her in the bathtub. He called me, poor little sod, said she was naked, blood on the floor, the.... She was in the bathtub."

I couldn't breathe. "Oh, my God. Oh God, oh God, oh holy shit—"

"No, no—Jesus, Liv, no—she cut cross-wise.... Winky called me, I called the ambulance, broke about forty traffic laws, got home just as they were putting her into the lorry. Poor Winky. He was there the whole—poor little man."

"Which hospital?"

"Mass General. The E.R. The E.R.—I suppose that's sort of obvious, isn't it?"

"For God's sake, John, why did you leave a *message*? You should have them come get me out of my meeting, if it's some-

thing like—”

“Just come here now, all right? Please? Let’s not do this.”

A pause.

“I’m sorry. I’ll be there in five minutes. I have to get a cab.”

“Right. All right.”

Another pause.

“I love you,” he said, softly.

I hung up.

It’s strange. I remember that conversation word for word: his inflection, my inflection, our stops and pauses. But the rest of that day is nothing, a smear. I put on my shoes. I ran downstairs. I got a cab. I went to the hospital. I talked to doctors. I went in to see her in her room, after she came out of surgery. I remember thinking that it was funny that I still hadn’t gotten used to the new color she’d dyed her hair. She was still under, so we didn’t speak.

* * *

Somehow, it goes on. A month and a half. I finalized the design. We opened bids for contractors. John’s new book was published, won prizes. Winky saw a therapist, started Little League, did well in school. And Maddie. Maddie lingered. She moved from bed to bed, hospital room to hospital room. She looked very tired.

* * *

This is the best thing for her. It’s an enormous old Edwardian mansion that they’ve converted, with a garden. It’s in the mountains. Vermont. There aren’t that many kids, and the doctor seems nice. It’s only a few hours away from us. It’ll be good for her. She’ll get back on her feet.

She has a plain little room. Four white walls—although they said she could put up posters. “Tape, not thumbtacks,” said the woman who accompanied us up, unnecessarily. Maddie nodded, drifted over to look out the window. John made a great show of unpacking her bag for her.

Saying goodbye was like a receiving line. Winky first—she picked him up, whispered something in his ear, held him tight. And then John, and then me—a quick hug around the neck and a dry kiss. And then Grady. We went out into the hall to give them some space. There was a Monet print on the wall. Somewhere down the corridor, very muffled, someone was screaming.

* * *

Of course I wish I could have done something more. I'm her mother.

On the way home, John drives. I watch the trees go by.

[4.]

Dear Madison Hull.....

Maddie!! Its me, Winky. How are you, Im good. we're driving home now. Everybodys real quiet, except Mommy says that Daddy drives to fast and daddy slows down for a little bit and then speeds up again. Its coz he's from Europe, I think. I miss you. sorry this letter is messy, Im writing in the car. I borrowed daddys pen and these are the napkins from lunch Im writing on sorry if its messy. I like Mrs A. did you have her for second grade two?? She came to one of my baseball games once, the one when I got that hit and it bounced off the score board and then landed in the trash can? Remember that? Seth thru that ball really hard but I hit it bak at him. Boy, was he ungruntled. I had to get a permission slip well not really a permission slip from mrs. A to come with Mommydaddy and Grady to take you to your new school. We were going to have a spelling quiz, so its OK I missed it. E L E P H A N T. M O N K Y. A L L I G A T O R. Its a barnyard theme. Why do you start school on a tuesday, plus its march. Mommy says that this place will make you feel better. I think shes the worst about it. she misses you a whole lot. Me two. Have you read Daddys new book? I tried but I'm not oldenough yet. The beginning says its deddicated to us, you and me. He says that means that he's happy we were around to help him with his poetry, even though we were usually bloody annoying littel buggers. I hope you make friends at your new place. the doctor was nice, and the lady gave me a lollipop. I don't like chery, but I ate it anyways. i hope your not scared not being at home. When mommydaddy and you and me went back to england that summer I once in a while woke up in the nighttime and I was scared, becoz i didnt no where I was. But your sixteen and im only seven and a quarter. Thats different I guess. Im little, but not to little. I was scared when I found you. But youre okay, right? Definitely. OK. I have to go now. were home. Remember to miss me and write me letters, you said you would. Next baseball game against Boxford I think I'll hit

a home run for you if i can. Boxfords pretty good, though. i'll try. you try two.

good day to you, good sir.....love, *Warren Hull*



Wilson Braun

BEDTIME SONG
after García Lorca

Christine Malvasi

Mommy,
I want to be all silver.

Silver like the clip in your hair.
I want to be a fine-toothed comb
that gets out all the tangles.

I want to shine like the fish
that daddy offers you
when he comes home late—
a silver apology.

You glance at the moon sliver
hanging from a hook in the sky
and look at me sternly
so I'll slip under sheets.
I try again:

I want to be a fine-toothed comb.

Slide me through your hair
before I tuck myself
into sleep.

I want to be all silver.

Wrap me around your finger.

Daughter,
you'll be awfully cold....

SEVEN VARIATIONS ON ICE CREAM

Jessica Gross

One

In OshKosh overalls, he stands
on a kitchen chair, reaching
into the tub of chocolate Ben and Jerry's.
He pushes hard so he can get
a tiny brown sliver
on his silver spoon.

Two

The mother smiles with two rows of
glaring teeth, queues of Chiclets.
The television screen is black and white.
You cannot hear her laughing;
there is only tinny music
as she feeds the Dixie cup
to her grinning, pigtailed daughter.

Three

My favorite flavors
are mint chocolate chip,
chocolate chip cookie dough,
and cookies and cream.
Deb said, "You're very conventional."
Of course, I meant to say
Rocky Road.

Four

Teenagers with cigarettes
sit on plastic benches outside the Dairy Queen
along the highway. Their uniforms
smell of smoke and car exhaust.

Five

I ate ice cream until I thought
I was too fat.

Six

In Serendipity's, the two of them
drink a milk shake out of separate
straws in the same cup,
and they look into each other's eyes
and scrunch their noses.

Seven

At eleven every night,
Mrs. Robert Mustin makes her husband's sundae:
one scoop vanilla,
two scoops chocolate,
three cherries,
chocolate sauce.
He eats on the couch, dripping
marbled ice cream mixture
onto his shirt.



Courtney Lix

from “REQUIEM IN D MINOR”

Yukai Li

I

rex tremendae maiestatis

Like so many sycamore wings
Veined with distant music
The loosed score drifts quiet
Tatters above the aged hand
Tightly gripping the yellowing baton—

O, if but one of that vast
Thrumming multitude residing only
In his head might at that
Moment have formed enough
Substance to meet the creating eye

He might have seen foundered
In the awful depths such pity—
Pity, bright even in death—pity
To silence flair in powdered pernambuco
And still fervor of maple and spruce.

II

qui salvandos salvas gratis

On the river-isle
Isle of poppies isle of sighs
With a Flemish air between
Your waiting hands evening
In the unkept poppy garden

Wove the red silence
Silence of birds call heard between
The sounds of thought and living
Silence temporal of fairest flora

Between timid breaths of the choral aura

Your hands hold enigma without proof
Shift on a penny turn on a dime
In the unkept garden of the river-isle
There shall be

No peace in our time.

III

dona eis requiem...

Who cried at the ninth hour
While honest folk turned
In their sleep towards the fetid earth
And their dreams sadly chided
In vain the wheels turning in their heads

There in the tallest spire the candlelight
Found the half-read catechisms crisp
Among fresh daffodils on the cold table
Which cradled the cold purple lips
Whence a soul had so lately fled

Whose last thought, fluttering among
The daffodils around his head, was whether
You, seated serene upon the steps,
With a quiet aura in your hair,
Might, for him, have spared a prayer.

IV

et lux perpetua luceat eis

Take these your rocks
For they are your rocks
Only as strong as you have made them
Let them have peace
Or what peace as you will give them

Let them not be abused by reeds

Nor by ice nor snow
Let them not be beaten by waves
Nor by the hard timber of ships
Nor the broken faces and limbs of sailors

But have mercy that these rocks
Your rocks which you
Crushed may praise you
Grant them rest eternal O Lord
And let perpetual light shine upon them.

FRAGMENTS SHORED AGAINST RUINS

Yiwen Yvon Wang

April.

I was seven when my grandmother told me the story of her feet. We sat on the woven rattan divan, its scratches brown-edged with age. She was not very old then, perhaps fifty. It was Sunday, before the town woke, before the rumblings of grimy trucks and tractors smoked away the clear coolness of the air. The shrimp-colored edges of morning still floated peacefully above us. We sat side-by-side, and she stitched up the sole of a shoe as she spoke. Her voice, cracked like her raw knuckles, slipped from her without emotion.

“My mother told me to sit on the edge of the bed. She came with a pair of long, long pieces of cloth, white and soft. It was the finest cloth I had seen in my life. She told me that this was for my future, that even though the family was not rich anymore, I was born from gentle blood. She took my left foot in her hands and pushed my big toe backward until it snapped and lay flat on the top of my foot. I screamed. She wrapped the fine cloth around the broken toe and then pushed the other toes against the bottom of my foot. With firm hands, she wrapped those, very tight.

“I was crying. I was eleven; it was my birthday. After we finished in the bedroom my mother brought me a big bowl of birthday noodles. They were very fine and white, made from the best dough in those slim days. I ate the bowl of noodles and then, still crying, fell asleep.”

I looked up at her. Her hair was wispy white. I imagined her without the creases around her eyes, with her hair sleek, black, braided. I imagined her sobbing and eating the steaming bowl of white flour birthday noodles, made long for a long life. She seemed as distant as the mountains, or the sea. Her care-bitten fingers scratched against the fabric of the shoe as her needle slid in and out, in and out.

December.

My grandmother died in the middle of the winter. I was in school and returned home to find my father hunched, calmly crying, at the kitchen table. He told me to come. I went; he put

an awkward arm on my shoulders. I dropped a pair of tears for her. They landed on my windbreaker and drew lines to the cuffs of the sleeves. I let my father embrace me, and I stared at the lines the tears drew.

My father showed me a photograph of the place my grandmother's ashes had been buried, a big piece of granite pocked with stars of black and rubbed mirror-smooth, with her name outlined in cheap gilt. I loathed it immediately, and even more so when I stood before it half a year later holding a bunch of chrysanthemums sagging in the chilly wind. It reminded me of the steps of the building in which my father worked, kept forever flat, slick, reflecting the feet that trampled on their perfection. When I was told, I stuck the flowers down into their niche a little too vehemently; they shook their heavy white heads and slid from their lamé-paper sheath. My father called my name as sharply as he slapped my face. I stood glaring at the glassy stone and my father's suit in it a daub of darkness, shadowing the gold lines of my grandmother's name.

He had a shabby mustache that lay unevenly over his top lip. That day its ends waved in the winter air as he paced before my grandmother. After half an hour he came back to me, as I stood immobile, still staring at the tombstone, and laid a hesitating hand on my shoulder blade. We descended the steps to the frosty road and left in a rusty truck for the city and the hotel. After two more days we came home.

July.

The cicadas would not stop rasping the day my father married. The abundant guests sat on folding chairs in the hot grass of the backyard and sweated into their cake-colored sundresses and polos. I stood in the spotty shade of the arbor and wriggled my feet in their black-and-white saddle shoes unworn since the trip to visit my grandmother's ashes. They had not been worn for a long while and chafed the sides of my feet.

My stepmother was blinding—pink, scarlet and powder blue under her polyester veil. Her mouth parted only a little triangle, on the left side, when she smiled, never showing her teeth. The little crooked triangle approached steadily across the lawn, between the irregular rectangle formations of guests, and joined my father. I stood during their speech, drowsy with heat and food. She called me to her near the end and put a hand on my arm; I felt the perspiration under her glove and my shirt slide

together wetly. She was a tall woman, taller than my father, but some extra slices of hard plastic and glue had helped him there. He stepped carefully toward us with his broadest gum-showing grin; the mustache had been removed for the occasion, leaving a sprinkle of black dots. One of his hands wrapped firmly around my stepmother's gowned waist and remained there as the other ruffled my hair.

The guests applauded with sticky palms and flocked to the table ponderous with balls of colorless ham and cheese, watery grapes impaled by toothpicks. Under my stepmother's white-gloved hand I wobbled to the cicadas' throbbing din. The titters of the guests melted slowly, entrancingly into the creaky cries from the trees. My father pulled on my collar as I, blurry-eyed with the heat, started to waver and fall, and the newlyweds together brought me to a hard-backed chair in the kitchen. The house smelled of new paint and carpet. My stepmother poured ice water into a new green plastic mug. My father put his hand on my hair and disheveled it again. I drank it as they left me through the sliding glass doors, and I watched my reflection sip at the mug while they cut a swathe through the champagne-sipping bustle, swiveling stiff as the pair of little plastic dolls atop the cake.

February.

My half-sister learned to walk before my half-brother did; they were a day or two past their 20th month, and I was sitting in the kitchen copying geometry proofs into my favorite spiral notebook. My sister put her fat hand on the glass door, then with amazing steadiness toddled to my stepmother, her little teal baby shoes tapping on the linoleum. My brother watched my stepmother pick up our sister, her smile stretching into chop-chops of laughter. "Bwoogh," he said, clutching my foot. My father made uncharacteristically encouraging sounds from behind the counter, poised in documentary eagerness with his new video camera. My stepmother turned, the laughs receding into a small tactful triangle, and patted my brother's head, chanting, "Stand up baby stand up baby stand up." He strained up toward her voice, his warm fingers poking into my knee, but slipped easily onto the floor as soon as he let go. Catching himself on his hands, he still stared, slack-lipped, at my stepmother and sister, then took a deep sigh and broke into bawling.

"Goddamn," said my father, clicking off the camera. His face was always ruddy now, around his growing jowls. My stepmother,

with my sister still in the crook of her left arm, leaned down to my brother and made ineffectual soothing noises at him. When I attempted to continue the proof, he pulled on my elbow and the tip of my pencil slashed through my perfect circle and the notebook paper, ridging heavily the sheets underneath. I pried him off, went through and closed the door of my bedroom on the din of his screams, my stepmother's coos, my father's muttered curses, and my sister's curious gurgling.

I opened my schoolbag and stuck in my damaged notebook, removing at the same time my social studies book. My favorite picture was the reprinted *American Gothic* on page 168, because the house, white with a stiletto peak, looked so much like ours. The woman's flowered dress looked like what my grandmother used to wear as she crouched over an enamel tub, snapping beans in half or killing a hen and letting its blood. Every morning before my seventh-grade teacher started to call roll I would slide out the social studies book, gummy with the prints of many hands, from my desk. Opening it with the practice of experience, I saw my grandmother, maybe my grandfather—I had to give them both black hair in my head—standing before our white house with its little dotted curtains. Sometimes I imagined that I could see my face behind the downstairs window, peering out. My breath would form a little gray halo against the cold black glass.

October.

At fourteen the girls all wore plastic-bead bracelets, strung with elastics. They wore these singly or from wrist to elbow, matching or clashing, and exchanged them, but when one set was taken off another was slid on, still warm. They were strangely heavy, and pressed red circles into the girls' tender wrists. My father's face was also red, all of it the same patchy rouge; his hands, too, were going the same color. He worked alone in his room often, tapping his dry red fingertips on the keys of his typewriter.

Once I found a pearl one lying in an open locker, each pea-sized bead gleaming white in the dust, atop a forgotten sheaf of notebook paper. I took this to my sister, who put it on her baby-fat-ridged wrist without hesitation and grinned at me for thanks. She waved her hand, but it was too large and flew off, cracking on a bowl and rattling to the floorboards. She sniveled for a little, stomped to it, seized it, and tugged on it until the flimsy ring of rubber snapped and all the white balls darted to the corners,

down the heater vents, tinkling against flatware and glasses. I picked up almost all of them, but my sister of course stepped on a pair I missed. My stepmother rushed to her as she screamed; my father threw open his study door and crouched beside her, kissing the bottom of the injured foot. I stood behind a corner and waited. My father's hand grew fleshier with age, so though it did not grind so hard on my cheekbone, it left a far more impressive imprint in high-contrast pink.

I sat cross-legged beneath the window in my bedroom and scribbled into my spiral notebook, angry loops, and filled the page with dense ballpoint chrysanthemums in bas-relief. The weak light stained the flowers with tea-colored ripples. My father drank green tea by the pot in the fall, and as I scarred the paper, I heard the whistle of the kettle and my stepmother's chop-chop steps across the kitchen floor. His cursing was rarer now, so all that filtered through my door was a sheepish silence, punctuated by the bubbling of refilled tea.

My stepmother never wore aprons in the kitchen because she would emerge from her car at 5:55 each afternoon to tie up her heavy black hair immediately, remove her pumps, and stand in her stockinged feet before the range. When she cut celery or pork ribs she displayed beautiful form. She was especially good at stewing and broiling, so we often ate large cuts of meat, lying in pools of broth. There was one of these for dinner, for which I was called out the evening of the broken bracelet, but without remonstrance. The oblongs of oil on the broth mingled and broke and I saw my face mingling and breaking in my bowl until my father, with an apologetic grunt, dropped a clump of rice into it. His face was redder than usual, a winey color. We ate in a silence more amiable than usual, after that. Evening wind slid raspy around the peak of the house, and that night by the cathode glow of the television my brother offered me, tentatively, a long-boarded coconut lollipop.

May.

We four stood behind the sterile glass and watched my father lie on the rubber mattress, sliding with a muted rumble into the white mouth of the CAT as the blue-gowned technician watched. Our faces glowed against the darkened glass. My stepmother put hands on top of my brother's and sister's heads, which still smelled childishly of milk and bubble-gum. We watched the machine swallow him, whirring; my brother had cried when

my father's head was swallowed, and he hiccupped through the mechanical churning. I shuddered when the bed re-emerged, clunking slightly, and half wanted it to be empty. But he still lay under the single-use sheet, eyes closed, his straggling mustache quivering with his deep breaths and his face gray-yellow with little spots of its old purple-red.

My father hated small places. My grandmother had told me this as she stirred a pan of cabbage. The white-boiled leaves twisted around her long cooking chopsticks and she would have to pause to unwind them, peeling them off in limp sheets. "Your father was stuck in an empty trunk when he was three," she said, placidly stirring. "It used to have the sweaters I knitted for him and his father. It was an old trunk, from my great-aunt, and somehow all the soldiers roaming the country during all the fighting and battles hadn't snatched it, maybe because it was so heavy.

"He was playing by himself. When I came out from the kitchen, from cooking dinner, I heard his fists on the lid and ran to open it. He'd only been in there for a moment, but he was panting and his eyelids fluttered like dying butterflies. He has never liked small spaces." She took the steaming cabbage from the stove, snapped off the flame, and hobbled in her self-sewn shoes to the cabinet of bowls and dishes.

We surrounded him when he emerged unsteadily, but even my brother and sister knew to keep a distance. My stepmother gingerly kissed him, but he pulled me against his starchy blue hospital gown and squeezed me to him. We were almost the same height, so I could see clearly the gleam of scalp under his hair, and he said something that moved his mustache but that I could not hear. He squeezed again, then the nurses came, put their gloved hands under his elbows, and led him away to the blood tests. They told us to go home, so we went; the point of the roof stood stark white against the clouded sky. Even when I opened the window, pulled aside the dotted curtains, and pushed myself as far as I could outside, there was no breeze, no relief. Every slab of siding breathed damp heat into my palms on the windowsill. My stepmother's chop-chopping step, muted by the carpet, entered and her hand patted mine, limply. I shivered. When my brother and sister put their arms around me, still carrying that warm elementary-school scent, I cried. The rain didn't come until very late that night, but when we drove to the hospital the next morning, it was falling in white sheets and we stepped

in churning puddles. We stood on the sanitized linoleum squares of the corridor with our feet soaked, our legs dripping from the knees down, and were told my father would die.

April.

We stood around my grandmother. Her name, carved into the black-spotted granite, had worn off its gold in the corners. I laid the chrysanthemums against the base of the stone, the lamé paper crinkling as the stems slid into the niche. The sky hung unusually clear above the tombstones; it was the day of the dead, so we came bearing rice liquor, sugar cakes, sweet rice, huge oranges. We spread the food on a lucky red cloth and burned three sticks of incense to my grandmother. The calm blue smoke rose in plumes, mingling and breaking, curling into my father's mustache. That was the only hair left on his head. Everything he did now was slow as the melting curlicues of the incense smoke. My father called me to him with my baby name, unused since he had married again. He could no longer tie his own shoes, and on impatient days he would not let us help him. Thus he sat in his socks on an ornamental bench, smiling as mildly as the caressing sunlight.



Cabell Belk

from “FIFTEEN PICTURES OF MY BABCIE”

Megan Ryan

1. Here, her hair is almost black, and it rolls from tight curls around her face. Pallid chiffon billows over thick knees and square ankles. Polish legs, Gagei called them. It must have been windy that Easter morning as leaves darken the ash sky and the ribbons of her hat flutter and unravel from underneath her chins. Something beyond the wooden railing is holding her gaze, and her eyes squint left to find it. I picture Gagei pleading with her to look into his new camera—just one smile, Helen, just one—but she won’t. She is lost somewhere far from this porch, away from this blustery Sunday, and beyond the hazy horizon she is watching.
3. The flour wiped absently into her hair and face blends into her aged whiteness now. Babkha dough sticks in piles to the plastic countertops, and she lets me stand on a stool to touch it. With her floury hand on my back, I grab fistfuls of dough and let it ooze through the spaces between my fingers. After it is kneaded, I scrape sticky babkha from my fingers with my teeth and watch her braid it into breads. Then she scatters poppy seeds from high above, as though the loaves are as wide and bare as her winter garden. Standing on that stool in front of her, they look like tiny black raindrops falling into our kitchen from nowhere.
6. She is beautiful as she walks down Benson Lane. She must be going somewhere this black and white evening, though I will never know where. With a silk babushka wrapped around her head and her sturdy black lace-ups, she charges forward with purpose. Mom used to wonder why Babcie never learned to drive. Looking at this picture, I know she never needed to.
7. Somewhere up ahead, the priest gives his homily. I cannot see him over the hats of the women in front of me, so I examine Babcie’s only ring instead. The opal has slid heavily down her loose, liver-stained fingers, twisting the skin with

it. I re-center the stone and watch it fall back down between her fingers when I let go. I do this until she pulls her hand away and gives me a hard look. Pressing my palms together, I pretend I can see past the wide-brimmed bonnets that line the pews ahead.

10. Gagei and Babcie are planting together. They are as muddy as the hoes they lean against as they pose for a snapshot.
12. I love how she throws the sheets up and lets them float down toward the bed. Sometimes she lets me lie down on the bare mattress, and I squeal as the cotton flutters over my face. She stretches them so tightly over the bed that they hover slightly above the frame. At night, I try to slide my body into this snug space without loosening the linen. Even when I succeed, she tears it all apart and begins anew the next morning.
13. She is wearing a shower cap outside because rain hats do not cover well and because umbrellas are bad luck. It is pink opaque with ruffles, and I am ashamed to hold her hand. I look down at my wet tights and patent leather snap-shoes as I trudge as far behind as her arm will allow. “Come, chou-chou,” she says. I come.
15. It is July, and we are pulling out backward from the driveway. They are waving goodbye to us. We roll down the windows and wave back. I blow a kiss to Babcie before I realize she is crying. Dad turns the wheel, and we are gone.

THE NAME OF THE SON

Julia Cain

My mother cried last night,
This time with her back pressed
Against the porch door,
Her shudders running like shivers
Up the dented screen.

Once I found her by the woodpile,
The snow spotting her hair,
Her breath puffing into the cold
Like steam from a bright white engine.

And I've seen her hands quiver,
Sifting through the afternoon mail,
Overdrafts here, more charges there.
She goes to work each morning early
Without coffee or toast.

In school all winter,
I outline gated houses
In the margins of my textbook.
Two-story windows, columns, archways
Sketched beside the black-and-whites of Paris:
Où est-ce que vous habitez?

I spy Will Carleton, Tom Pierce,
Betting on East High football
As if dimes were stones from a vacant lot.
I can picture Tom grown up,
Sporting a banker's tie.
He will have enough to mend the screens,
Warm the house,
And in December, to slide a coat
Over his mother's shoulders.

I gave Tom a black eye last week.
It didn't change a thing.

Not my promises worn thin,
The ties unworn, my father's suits
Still sizes too large.

The woodpile is shrinking
And I cannot swing an ax,
Buy opera tickets or imported tea,
Carry my mother in
Out of the snow.

STRUNG VARIABLES
for C. Bök

Daniel Scott Snelson

away	a ways
side	ideal lovers
all over	sound one
so undone	no relationship
nor elations	combat
hip comb	doll arte
at dollar	are side
tea residence	n.c. east
	or yon
	good display
a story on	Eden:
go odd is played	rout evil
en route—	
village	
run discord	la gerund is
	cordial
i alter,	term
mend.	end.

egad! no bondage!
won't lovers revolt now?

don't nod!

balla's reversal lab

real lyres
id edifies

tab li shed
disc or dim

i'll, in form,
edit

isopods
eat mean
on each.

O! send.

e.p.t. hun?

lo! stop!
enlist!

Sorrow away

really resided

if i established
discord, i'm
ill informed

it is

O! pod seat.

me, an one.

a chosen
depth

un-lost.
open lists

or row a way.



Marisa Reisel

DIFFERENTIALS

Elizabeth Landau

“That child is getting a synagogue confirmation as sure as I’m standing here,” Joe said.

“He already had a Bar Mitzvah,” Kathleen retorted. “I just don’t see why he needs to spend more time in Hebrew School if he’d rather spend that time playing soccer. And how do you think my parents felt last Easter when Danny said he wanted ‘more scientific proof’ of the resurrection?”

“So what? He’s allowed to question. Everyone should be so sure of things?”

“Well you sure don’t seem to be questioning your traditions. Joe, I thought we were going to compromise here.”

“Compromise? *Compromise?* Do you think 6 million innocents died in the camps because of compromise?”

“You never listen to a word I say, do you.”

“Why should I? You never admit I’m right!”

“But I don’t think you are right.”

Upstairs and to the left of Kathleen and Joe’s argument, sixteen-year-old Danny Motes gently shut his bedroom door on his parents’ words. He was sorry that the Torah said Jewish tradition got transmitted through the mother; maybe if it were otherwise his father would stop trying to ideologically re-engineer his son’s “gentile” blood. Danny was also glad he didn’t have younger siblings; they would scream and slam doors and try to take the side of one parent or the other, or else hop a bus and run across the Walt Whitman Bridge to New Jersey in terror. Danny considered himself fairly mature for his age; he knew not to ask why his parents had slept in separate bedrooms every night over the past year, why his father disappeared for days at a time without explanation, or why he sometimes heard his mother sobbing in the guest bedroom. These events had become part of the old stone 19th-century carriage house the Motes family inhabited, as natural as the yellow dust swirling around under the lights in the basement and the squirrels nibbling on acorns in the backyard.

The derivative of $2x$ is 2. Slope equals the change in rise over the change in run. The integral of udv is equal to uv minus the

integral of vdu. The cosine of pi is -1.

'I should be a mathematician,' Danny Motes thought, 'I'd never have to talk or be spoken to again.'

Shortly after Danny tucked his math notebook in his backpack, a large fleshy hand pulled the door open, letting it slam against the wall with a thud.

"How dare you?" asked the voice thundering from Danny's father, the giant who ambled over to the teenager seated at the wooden desk. Joe's face, seemingly more creased every day, was lobster-red. His eyebrows arched in a pronounced V. The sweat trickling down his forehead smelled like whisky, lots and lots of whisky.

The derivative of 2x is 2. Slope equals the change in rise over the change in run. Fractals are made of complex iterations and recursions. "What?"

"You worthless, lazy, rotten excuse for a son, and a traitor at that. You always side with your mother, your mother who wants to keep you a good God-fearing Christian. Well you're not a Christian, do you hear me? Christ, every word I hear in this house is utter blasphemy."

"Dad—"

"Shut up! You said you were going to keep up with your Jewish studies, you said you were going to become a man of the Torah. Don't tell me you didn't promise that!"

"I—"

"I do so much for you, I made you get a good education. Your mother couldn't really care less, but I cared, and now you quit your studies to play soccer? Well, well. I hope some day you have a stepbrother who will teach you some gratitude!"

The door slammed.

The integral of udv is equal to uv minus the integral of vdu. The cosine of pi is -1. Always.

Danny Motes couldn't think of any moniker for Philadelphia more hypocritical than "The City of Brotherly Love." From his perspective, "City Where Only the Fittest Survive" would have been much more accurate. In Philadelphia and all of its desolate suburbs, children shoved other children to get swings on the playground, teenagers shoved other teenagers to get cheese steaks at Pat's and Geno's, young women in black stockings and young men in pressed suits shoved each other to get seats on

the subway, and parents shoved their thirty-something children into marriage. These children, in turn, shoved their parents right back by wedding someone of a different religion, and spent the rest of their lives in constant conflict with their parents, their spouses, and their own children. Take the notorious McDonald family, for example. The curly-haired Lisa Stein married the pointed-nosed Peter McDonald, the two had blonde thick-eyebrowed children Leah and Simon, and after years of malaise in a declining restaurant business Peter ran away to Seattle the day after his daughter's 10th birthday. A classic Philadelphia story, leaving Leah and Simon doomed to grow up just as confused and resentful as everyone else.

Why didn't anyone ever move out of Philadelphia? Why did even the most tortured high school students attend Penn State branches, Temple, or UPenn? *Learned helplessness*, Danny speculated. *If you prevent a dog from escaping its cage and administer electric shocks, it won't leave when you open the cage door. Trying to escape the shocks is futile.*

The city of Philadelphia and its suburbs fed the underlying cycle of shoving by financing schools for these children to get a good religious education acceptable to everyone—at least, everyone who didn't want to deal with too many theological complications. In William Penn's woodsy autumn wonderland, the only universally acceptable religion was, of course, Quakerism. A branch of Christianity pioneered in Britain in the 1650s, Quakerism promulgated as its central tenant STEP: Simplicity, Truth, Equality, and Peace. In order to cater to both Jews and Christians, Quaker schoolteachers never once mentioned the name Jesus Christ to students, but they encouraged unconditional honesty, equality of all humans, and nonviolence. The idea that the light of God shines in every person seemed acceptable to Philadelphian parents of all creeds, so they actually smiled when their little kindergarteners came home singing "Walk in the Light Wherever You May Be."

Motes thought it amusing that not a single member of the soccer team at Wallingford Friends School was Quaker, but each and every varsity-letter adorned jock hushed just like everyone else upon entering Fox Meeting Hall every Wednesday morning. Meeting for Worship, that 350-year-old Quaker tradition of sitting in silence among hundreds of other people sitting in silence, each person waiting for a message from Eternal One to relay to

the community. Of course, in a community of hundreds of teenagers, those who chose to stand and speak words of wisdom did not always do so from divine inspiration. Motes remembered one Meeting where a student popped up from the benches and sang the chorus of Joan Osborne's "What If God Was One of Us," and asked the congregation what they thought God would look like. For others, Meeting seemed more like group therapy. Confessions of guilt, remorse, unrequited love, and suicidal thoughts were all apparently permissible. Motes never stood up to speak during his years at WFS, not even in Elementary School Meeting when restless kindergarteners shared insights such as "I got a bike on Tuesday and it's really cool!"

At Meeting the morning after his father had introduced the word "stepbrother" into his vocabulary, Motes stared across the benches at Cara Doherty and Jill Bates, two girls in the senior class with shiny straight hair, rosy cheeks, black leather boots, and tight t-shirts. They were cute, sure, but that day Motes was thinking about how normal they were, how they didn't have to worry about anything, never felt alone. They probably went to parties together, gossiped together, did homework together, and called each other all the time. Motes had buddies on the soccer team, but no close friends, nobody he would call up and say 'Hey man, I've had a really rough day.' No, he hadn't spent enough time with the athletic crowd to warrant any confession of "rough days." Recently the guys had started calling him by his last name, and he liked it, loved it, thanked his father's Russian ancestors for shortening the family surname from Motslovsky upon arrival at Ellis Island. Motes, simple and pithy, no first name needed. Only the in-crowd got that kind of nomenclature. The outcasts watched the athletes in awe, wishing they could lose their first names too.

But he couldn't avoid the freshmen outcasts in the cafeteria after school, especially not the ones who behaved years below their actual age. In line for snacks, ninth-graders who once knew him from his years trading Star Trek playing cards on the Treddy-frin-Eastown E Bus sometimes ran up to him and showed him their pearly braces-free teeth, their stellar report cards, their new graphing calculator games. One girl in particular seemed to have a curious affinity for him.

"Danny Motes, wanna trade pictures, Danny Motes? Today's

Picture Day! You've got pictures, right?"

Motes did not want to trade pictures with impish Annie Leeds. He did not want a wallet-sized school portrait of his wild chestnut hair, pronounced nose, and pointed, almost elf-like ears circulating around the ninth-grade class. The soccer guys would love that, roll around the field in hysterics as soon as word got around that freshmen were copying his picture and pasting it on their powder-pink ceilings. Motes didn't care if these girls who used to ride the bus to school with him idolized him like a rock star; he certainly wasn't going to have anything to do with it. That fall he had finally made Varsity Soccer along with pats on the back and grins of approval from the "so-cool" kids in his class. One step out of bounds, one rumor, one implication of immaturity, and it was back to the video game ranks for him.

"My photos, my business," he said, taking a long swig of his Coke. He interrupted his luxurious gulping when he noticed a Star of David on the cover of the book Annie held: *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* by Judy Blume.

"What inane crap are you reading?"

Annie timidly held out the book. "It's for my little sister. She reminds me a lot of Margaret in the story. You know, it's about a girl who doesn't know what religion to be because her mom's Christian and her dad's Jew—"

"Why don't you read something *useful*," he said, waving his hand in dismissal as though flicking off a moth, "Go learn calculus or something. No one disagrees about that kind of god."

After the girl fluttered off to her nest of giggling friends, Motes made sure no one was looking and carefully opened the envelope of photos. They weren't as bad as he'd thought. The curls around his face hid the elfish tips of his ears rather well, and the bushy eyebrows he inherited from his father neatly canopied the soft grey eyes he shared with his mother. The vertical black and white stripes of the shirt he wore in the picture made him appear taller than 5'9", and the long sleeves hid the dark arm hair that all the Jewish men in his family accumulated in their teenage years. 'No, not bad at all,' he thought.

He kept the photos a secret, but he hadn't seen the last of Annie Leeds that day. She recruited her friend Leah McDonald to watch Motes play in the Friends' League Varsity Soccer Playoff game. When they arrived at Sexton Field the game had already started,

so they darted for the first empty bleacher they saw, below a man and a woman sitting with a bag of water bottles between them.

“What’s Danny Motes *wearing*?” Annie asked Leah.

“I guess that’s the goalie uniform,” she said with a shrug.

Motes wore a huge red, white, and black jersey, latticed in a geometric pattern that made Annie think of harlequins. He wore immense black gloves.

“My brother said goalie gloves have fiberglass fingertips,” Annie whispered. “Pretty powerful stuff!”

“Wow!”

As soon as Motes’ fingers touched the ball, the large balding white-haired man sitting behind them let out a big grunt.

“You can do it, Daniel, come on, yes, get that ball back out there!”

“Let’s go, Danny!” called the matronly, fifty-something woman with a long gray ponytail and grey skirt.

At the sound of Motes’ first name Annie could not resist turning around to examine his parents. She wondered if their shouting was distracting him, especially since the only other spectators were the dazed friends and siblings of the players. He never once glanced up at the bleachers.

Mr. Motes seemed to compensate for lack of audience enthusiasm, even for the other players.

“Munchnik, what are you *doing*? That’s it, right, right, *no*, Johnson, you should have passed it! God!”

Annie felt her fingers tense up, her heart pounding. The soccer ball was completely out of her conscious awareness. She was watching Danny Motes, noticing facial expressions he’d never revealed all those years riding the E Bus to school. Every time his father shouted from the stands Motes bit his lower lip and flared his nostrils in silent rage.

The hyperbola $1/x$ is confined by asymptotes, lines beyond which the curve may not venture. As x gets infinitely large the curve approaches the horizontal axis, getting infinitesimally close without ever touching the line. The curve cannot ever cross the line. Cannot ever. Cannot.

A week later Kathleen Motes knocked on her son’s bedroom door more slowly than usual. Her fist against the door sounded like a distant drum beat.

“Yeah?”

“Danny, can I come in?”

“Sure, Mom.”

Kathleen’s slippers dragged against the carpet as she walked over and sat down on her son’s bed. Danny turned his chair around to face her.

“What’s up?”

“You’re a real man now, you know?” She stared at the floor tearfully and didn’t speak for a moment. Then she looked up at him and began again, “Remember how you used to look all over for coins?”

At recess in elementary school, Danny would spend his time scouring the playground for coins, and each day he would present his findings to the elderly principal, telling her, “I think someone lost this.” The principal became rather annoyed, so Motes started bringing the change home to his mother instead. Together they filled a big rubber piggy bank that oinked every time he added to his collection. He liked how his mother smiled when the pig made that sound.

“Yeah, those were the days, huh?”

She looked up at him.

“Danny, I think it’s time for a change.”

The circumference of a circle divided by the diameter is pi. Always.

“What kind of change? I thought you hated changes.”

“I do, but I think we need to, to do something. I want to move out.”

The length of the diagonal of a unit square is the square root of 2.

“I thought you were working things out. I...Mom, I’ll go back to Hebrew school if that’s what he wants, don’t do this just—”

“Oh honey, this has nothing to do with you. I want you to know that and to never think that you were responsible for anything—”

“But he said—”

“You know how your father drinks and then starts up one of his tirades. When he’s tired of arguing with me he starts blaming whoever else he can find for his bad moods. You know that. He loves you. We both love you.”

He doesn’t love me. I’ll never be what he wants. But that doesn’t mean you have to break up like this. Things can go on

the way they are, constant, stable, please....

Kathleen sighed.

“People grow apart, honey. I don’t want you to think that this is how all marriages are, but I just can’t live like this anymore.”

Neither mother nor son spoke for some time.

“I’d like you to come with me,” Kathleen said finally. “You don’t have to, maybe you don’t even want to, you are sixteen now, you’ll be going off to college before you know it. But I thought maybe, maybe you would....”

Danny looked around at his posters, his PlayStation, the growth chart behind his door, the finger-printed window that previewed a forest of reds, oranges, yellow, purples.... He used to play hide-and-seek outside in the yard with the neighborhood kids, before they grew up and stopped watching Star Trek. He liked to hide in a pile of leaves and jump out when the seeker least expected. His father used to make him hot chocolate when everyone went home.

“I’ll think about it,” he said. “Let me know when you start packing.”

The set of prime numbers consists of 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 13...15? No, 17, 19, and then? What next? He couldn’t think. There was no formula for prime numbers. Even after his mother closed the door, the numbers continued chaotically into infinity.

Motes hadn’t told his parents that Wallingford Friends was playing Pottstown Friends the next day, mainly because Pottstown had a reputation for recruiting six-foot giants from public schools just so their sports teams would be best in the league, and Motes hated when other people saw his team lose. Wallingford’s soccer teams hadn’t won against Pottstown in over ten years.

While the teams warmed up, two enormous, scruffy sandy-haired Pottstown players walked over to Motes.

“Hey, nice jersey there,” one of them said. “You look like you’ve been playing for awhile.”

“Yeah, what’s it to you?”

“Nothing, just, well, most goalies are, you know, taller.”

The fiberglass-tipped gloves heated.

“Yeah,” Number 21 said, “I mean you’ve got the *build* of a goalie, but, I don’t know, maybe your mother didn’t feed you enough vitamins or something?”

Number 17 chuckled. “Hey, doesn’t he remind you of that guy

from Akiba Academy? His name was Steinberg?"

"Oh yeah, Steinberg! But this kid's nose is smaller and his eyes are a lot lighter. I'd say we've got ourselves a regular mutt here. Better keep your eye on the ball, mutt."

Motes waited patiently while the teams huddled, positioned themselves, and scattered with the blowing of the whistle. Then he charged. The target was not the soccer ball; the target was the jaw of Number 21. *The sine wave and the cosine wave are not identical; they are transpositions of each other.* The crunch of fiberglass against teeth made Motes think of the sound Chiclet gum made when you snapped it out of the package, those little white rectangles he used to smack as a kid. *Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and violet form the colors visible to the naked eye, but they are not the only colors in nature. To the left of violet and the right of blue lie infinite spectra of invisible light.*

Annie Leeds had just sat down when she heard the crunch from the bleachers. She saw a Pottstown player she recognized as Leah's brother fall toward the grass in agony, heard the whistle screech, saw the players and coaches from both sides running towards Motes, and watched Motes disappear from the scene through the woods in a flash. As if by instinct, she jumped up and followed.

Wandering around the gymnasium, the math building, the school store, and then back outside, Annie wondered why Danny Motes was so angry with Leah's brother, Simon. He probably just thought he was cooler than Simon, just like he seemed to think he was cooler than everyone. The whole point of a Quaker school was that kids would see and treat each other as equals, no matter who they were or what kind of families they came from. Popularity and family backgrounds weren't supposed to differentiate people. Where had that philosophy gone wrong?

She rounded the bend towards Fox Meeting Hall with the intention of going home, but the sound of sobbing stopped her.

It could not be he. Danny Motes didn't cry. Never. *Light does not travel faster than 186,000 miles/second, ever.*

"What are you looking at, huh?"

Motes had never laid a finger on Annie Leeds or any other freshman before that afternoon, but now he held her fragile-as-porcelain wrists against a brick wall with all his strength. She had

tapped him on the shoulder when he was huddled on the leaf-strewn ground outside Fox Hall, and, as if by reflex, he pinned her to the building.

“I’m sorry! Motes, what’s wrong? Why did you punch Leah McDonald’s brother?”

He opened his mouth to speak, but then let her wrists go, crossed his arms, leaned against the wall, and stared at the sidewalk.

“Motes, Leah says her brother hardly ever talks to her; he’s so into his own world of soccer and pot. Leah doesn’t think he ever told anyone that her parents aren’t together; he wants more than anything to seem perfect for his friends, more than *anything*. And yesterday Leah told me he’s been reading the Gospels just in case he ever sees his dad again, because when he was little he wanted him to go to a Catholic school. Did you know that?”

“No, I did not know that.”

Annie wondered what he would tell Principal Reeves, his coach, his parents, how many days of detention or suspension he would receive as a result of slamming Simon McDonald’s jaw. She thought about all the times he acted like such a know-it-all, how he seemed to think he could do *anything* and just push people out of the way to get what he wanted, when in fact he was really no better than anybody else. All the while, he had never once said the words....

“I’m sorry.”

“What?”

“You heard me.”

He started to walk towards the parking lot, his broad shoulders hunched forward more than usual. Annie peered at him in hesitant curiosity for a few seconds, then sprinted over to walk beside him.

“You didn’t make any of that up, right?” he asked abruptly. “That was all true, right?”

“Yeah, of course, I mean it’s all what Leah told me.”

“God, if you did...you know, there is *nothing* worse than a lie, I mean *nothing*.”

He chewed on his lip, trying not to think about the lies he’d been told lately. At least math would never lie. *The laws of nature are described by unequivocal differential equations. A differential equation describes the relationship between two or more variables—*

“You don’t think so?”

“Huh?”

“There’s nothing worse than a lie, *nothing?*”

“No, absolutely not. I’d rather someone steal my wallet, smash my windows, burn my CD collection, *anything* but lie to me.”

“All because somebody tells you something that’s not true? I can’t imagine any lie could be *that* bad.”

“How about ‘I *love* you.’”

I love you. To Annie the words themselves were pure, so pure and beautiful in his low, raspy voice. Solidified into an object, the sound would be a dusk-blue crystal orb that Annie delicately rotated in her hands, peering into the glass contours at every angle. For a moment she forgot that he was older and in a superior social circle and imagined that it was for her, all for her, if only for a moment.

Motes, glimpsing how the mere mention of love had brought dimples to her mouth, looked away, uncertain how to react. He had been talking about his parents’ false promises of unconditional commitment, both to each other and to him. But now he wondered if maybe, wrapped up in the social ladder at school and his parents’ drama, he had forgotten how to care about other people.

Against the backdrop of the autumn leaves she did look pretty cute, too. Her ponytail bounced when she walked, and besides her grand Quaker delusions she seemed smart and open-minded. Her exasperation over what he did to the Pottstown jerk sort of reminded him of how his mother might react, back in the days when she wasn’t so distracted by her own problems.

“Yes,” Annie interrupted his train of thought. “That is the worst lie. I bet people who go around lying like that end up alone.”

They sat down on a fallen tree by Mill Creek. In silence they watched the sun descend, its reflection a dazzling cyclone of glitter dancing in the water.

“I think I’m going to be moving,” he whispered.



James Schrader

LEAVES

Yiwen Yvon Wang

Walking home tonight
I saw leaves lying on the cement,
pressed like bright flat Japanese prints
or plastic pieces cut perfect
from manmade molds;

my grandfather fried chips in a pan
with fragments of moon-colored lard
the food swam yellow and red
in the fizzling soup primeval
before we scooped it, rich, wet
to anxious tongues.

PRAISE SONG
Montreal, July 2002

Ronit Rubinstein

I smell the jazz in the thick air,
my skin salt-glazed by the sun;
my sway rhythm pounded by the
sound of horseshoes on cobblestone.
My mouth is chocolate deep-fried
and yours, caramel-apple.
The red-flowered woman wields castanets,
and with eyes closed, I can imagine I hear the water.

We survey the city through a squint.
The sky detonates over a slumbering
volcano that is crowned by a lake.
The gift you hand me is red, white, and plush,
diffusing music that is never in tune.

We discover that on a weeknight
microphones will still be open.
Some nights are thicker than others here,
and most nights I walk these streets singing.
I tie my hopes around my waist
and yours are in your back pocket.

Here, our feet will carry us, in black shoes,
past staircases that spill and sultry red lights.
My heel catches a loose stone.
And when I fall, it is to the rhythm.



James Schrader

SELF-PORTRAIT OF AN AMPUTEE

Alfred Brown IV

Jehu is nearly beside himself. There is a blue curtain and bright lights, and they've even given him the option of sedation, to be chemically suspended, to be far far away. On a boat. In the middle of the sea. Rowing, two-handed, gripping lightly, drugged and draped, splashing through placid waters. On a starry night. In a haze. They said it would be best, easiest, generate the least emotional trauma, that the recovery would only take a few hours, not to worry. But no, no thank you doctors, he has chosen the bright lights, the blue curtain, and a local blast of anesthetic. And now he lies awake and unfeeling, lip biting, beady-sweat sweating, one-quarter of the way beside himself. Angry. And he can hear the *buzzzzzzzz* of the saw *zzz zzzzzzzz zzzz zzzzzzzzzzzz* certainly *zzzz zzzzzzzz* more than just one-quarter *zzz z z z z zzzzz* through now, it must *zzzzz* be.

Anger, seeing so much red, such frustration, Jehu thinks. Frustration:

There is so much—so much everything—pent up in a finger. What will happen to eating? Chopsticks? Giving the bird? Forget it. Everything now marred by the neighboring, unsightly stump. And typing? An impossibility. Driving? Nose picking, for the sake of shit! Where would it end? Where did it start?

DNA. Deoxyribonucleic acid. That's where. Helixes and tertiary structures rolling around in the embryonic sack. In the eighth week, maybe? The sixth? He doesn't know. It must extend from the hand bud, a simple nodule, a little bump on a bump, bumping out into the warmth and the dark of the womb. Long division between the pinky and the middle fingers, just a joint, a hinge. And then the root bone pushing up like a small volcano, and then the first knuckle working intricately like a lock, and then slender forefinger connected to the second slightly smaller knuckle, and everything finally rounded out and circled off by a perfect translucent half-moon tip. That's gotta be done by the eighth week, he thinks. No fingernails in there, though, not in the womb—those come later, when you get out. Just a miniature version, not quite as big as now, see-through skin and pores

slowly matrixed around the bone, and yes, for sure by the ninth week: the ring finger.

Jehu looks at the curtain. His eyes are desperate, red. They twitch, maybe seeing through a crack in the thin linen, instruments and latex gloves reflected off doctoral goggles, refractions. It is sterile here and it smells like rubbing alcohol. He puts his own pictures to the shrill revolutions of the handsaw. Skin and veins ripping open, bone crunching, marrow leaking, pus and grime and grout. He thinks that it must be the same type of saw that they do the brain surgeries with, maybe, just a different blade. More teeth, less buzz z zz zzz. Forty-six percent through now, has to be.

And then he thinks that, of course, it had to be the left hand. Just had to be, didn't it. It just wasn't right. How would he write?

By Romans Jehu. *New York Times* Best-Selling Author of *This Pot Will Boil Over*. Romans Jehu was born in Los Angeles, California and educated at Purdue University and Stanford University. His collections of short stories include *Derfland and Back Again*, *Rondo a la Turkey: The Travel Logs*, and *A.E.: I. O. U.* He has written many novels, including *Vestigial* and *Ball Point Penning*, for which he was a joint winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction. Romans Jehu lives with his wife, Epin, in Seattle, Washington.

Wife. Do you swear? I do. Do you swear? I do. I did. She did. Now doesn't. So much swearing and cussing, Jehu thinks, just dragged out and strewn about the yard and the house, bottles of wine and pictures on the fridge surrounded by those tacky little create-your-own-poem magnets that she thought were great stocking stuffers for her brainiac, her wordsmith. And what will happen to the dog? That fucking dog. Sure, Epin, why not, as long as you really want one, honey. But why not something smaller, ok? And short-haired. Neither of us will like all that hair everywhere, on the couch and in the cereal, ok? Ok. Promise you're ok with something smaller? Swear? 'Cause they ask you to swear. Solemnly. I do's. We did's. Put it in ink, the last draft, proof-read and waiting for the royalties. Swear, oath, honeymoon in Belize, happily zbzzzz zzz z z ever after.

But she won't even be here to pick me up, Jehu thinks. I'm in the fucking outpatient wing and she won't be here. Not the patient type. Impatient. I'll have to call a taxi. Where's that wife

of yours, Mr. Jehu? They'll ask. Amsterdam. Again with that kid, her "artiste." Artist tryst: triste. She was concerned, yes, her voice was concerned, in her puny Epin-Peppin sort of way, the nervous crinkle of her inner cheek between words, across telephone wires, hesitant, still fumbling with the meaning of "separated," its description, her role. Was she supposed to fly home? No, no, of course not. Don't be silly, Epin. Stay there. Enjoy the tulips. But remorse? Yes, remorse. She should feel bad that she was not there to take care of him, his finger, the disease, the rotting out and rotten state of affairs. Fix it. She should be here to fix it, Jehu thinks, help put it back together. Feed that dog, or at least she should have taken it with her. Not leave it behind, to remind. She should feed it or fix it. But she is an Atlantic away, nothing, I'm sorry, she could do. I warned you, Rome, she had said, you never...you never take care of things, just wait until the last minute all the time, and look, see, where does this get you? Into the hospital losing fingers, that's where, Rome! she had said. From Amsterdam. Damn. Amsterdamm, thinks Jehu.

It is the left hand, between the pinky and the middle: the ring finger. It had been turning bright pink and losing feeling when he figured it was time to check up on it. The finger, not the ring. Symbolism, irony, metaphor, Jehu thought. There was rising action, a hang-nail, just a nag, a nasty little infection pustulizing and pulverizing and then slowly eating its way up the tiny fissures in his skin. He ignored the problems, her silence at night and the numbness of every touch. When things became swollen and unmanageable, the ring had to come off. Then it was tender, raw and wounded, and the chattering of the typewriter was only antagonizing the hurt. That apartment was just filled up with stories. Like he couldn't live up to what she imagined it would be, like his picture on the back jacket was a distant relative now, a mask. She married the picture of an award-winning author. Some real talent. Promising. But that same face dressed in pajamas, eating an English muffin, drinking Diet Coke to watch his waistline—that Rome wasn't her Romans Jehu, he thinks. He could feel the disease eating away as the days wore on, as her trips increased, as the miles grew. Soon it was pink and pus, and hot water soaks didn't purge the beast, time for the zzz zzzzzzzzzdoctor. Must be more than halfway done now, right? Yes, it must. What had they said, those doctors, yes, what of it, what can you do?

They had: Mr. Jehu, we'll have to act immediately I'm afraid. Your metacarpal joint is being eaten away, you see, and the infection has started to spread to the bone. If it gets into the marrow—into your bone's core—it could spread rather rapidly, I'm afraid, to the whole hand and then, I'm afraid, this will, I'm afraid, all be much worse for, I'm afraid, you.

Cut it, yes, do it, go ahead, get rid of it once and for all, doctor. Where will you have to slice? Oh, sorry, saw. Where will you have to saw? The 43rd carpal seam? Where is that, exactly? Oh, I see. All the way down there, huh? Well, yes, cut it, yes, do it, go ahead. No, don't knock me out. Just give me a local.

THE 43RD CARPAL SEAM

In eighth grade, on a sunny day in September, somewhere near the start of school, Romans Jehu had fingered Dakota Kasitona all the way up to the 43rd carpal seam on his left ring finger, having meant to use his middle finger but having misjudged the exact entrance of the young, yet-unshaven Miss Kasitona. This was the first time that young Jehu had ever felt a vagina, save for his rather extended exit from his mother's cuntal walls, and the event—this first fingering of the female crotch—would remain with him in jolts and smells throughout his life. Young Miss Kasitona was perched precariously on the dirty bench near Mack's Liquor and both children were waiting for the school bus to pick them up for school. No one else took their stop. His hand moved slowly up her skirted leg, shaved only from the knee down, blonde down tendrils of thigh hair grating against his trembling hand, up, farther up until things were damp with sweat that steamed from the crevice between her thighs and pelvis. His finger, the middle, rubbed past elastic, down over thick hair, and, somewhat by accident, his finger, the ring, slipped into (whoops!) the young Miss Kasitona's hole, rigid and unwet, his frictional skin rubbing and sparking against hers. Presto. Bang. All the way up to the 43rd carpal seam, if only for a moment, bliss and machismo undulating from her pulse into his fingertip, his unmoving, unknowing-what-to-be-doing fingertip. The bus came, she did not, and the rest of the day young Sir Jehu was hopelessly intoxicated by the stench that coated his finger. He sniffed and sniffed, looked as though he had a cold, addicted for all of first and second period. It was passed around, both the smell and the finger, during lunch, from Bobby Becket on down the line to Zackary Pierce, somehow proof

of balls dropping or voice cracking or underarm hair sprouting: of man and manliness. Building, in one day, Romans to mythic heights. But, near fifth period, after splashing driplets of urine on his Levi's, Romans left the bathroom horrified: he had forgotten the sweet mess, and the smell was washed off in the haste and repetition of habitual after-piss hand-washing. All before he had even got a lick, a taste.

THE 43RD CARPAL SEAM #2

When I was a boy, Jehu thought, my mother would take me to the Old Hometown Fair. This was the kind of place where amateur celestial photographers displayed cheap matted prints, where you filled bottles with colored sand for ten-dollar prices, the neighborhood baseball field covered with gyroscopes and bungees and dunk tanks. My mother would hold my hand, would look me in the eyes, would tell me not to disappear, not to follow strangers, to keep close to her, that, yes, I could pet the camel but no, I should not step in the camel shit. There was a booth where they would draw caricatures of Jehu, where his eyebrows would eat his tiny forehead up in one bite, big bushy to-be-ashamed-of things, where the cartoonist would ask him his name over and over, "Romans? Like the warrior brutes? Coliseum? With an 's'?" So, for a long time, Jehu hated his name, or felt like it was weighing him down. He thought his mother was mad at him. "One day we'll take you to Italy. You'll see some real Romans, Romans. You'll like your name," she said. I would be face-painted, like a lion, Jehu thinks, and play the poor Hometown Fair carnival games, tossing ping pong balls into sunny goldfish fishbowls, missing, crying, scolded, stop-being-a-cry-baby-ed, and getting a consolation prize: paper Chinese finger-torture devices. Fingers—including the ring ones—were inserted into both ends, and they were supposed to be trapped forever. My mother wanted a real pair, wanted to have a way to bind me up. To keep my hands from following my stream of consciousness. To keep me out of trouble. To stop me from twiddling my thumbs. From aggravating. From wanting more cotton candy, slimy tacos, frozen lemonades. A few hundred steps and the smell of funnel cake later, the dratted devices would be ripped off by my mother, my aggravated mother, just stop your fucking crying, Romans, lest the boy make any great scene.

Now there was a buzzzzzzzzzzing again from beyond the sheet,

and Jehu felt poisoned or hurt or like someone was filling him up with water, from his feet to his fingertip, all about to burst. He thinks: no, no, this can't be all that bad, no. I mean, it's just a finger. There's got to be other people that have lost their fingers before, people losing things all the time. Taj Mahal. Those people lost their fingers, didn't they? Other people lose things all the time much more important. A foot, gangrened. A lung, cancered. Helen Keller: eyes and ears, both at once. His was just a finger. So the dog gets walked with the right hand, so what? And handshakes never are with the left anyway, so I'm in the clear there as well. Wait, no: the Taj Mahal guys had their entire hands chopped off. Not a finger. But still, there's nothing you really NEED a left ring finger for. Helen Keller wrote books. Hawking too, and he barely had anything but a brain. I'm sure Hemingway lost something along the way. I'll be just fine, just a finger, just.

THE 43RD CARPAL SEAM #3

Epin was saying: no, no, absolutely not Rome. Not on our honeymoon, no way. We are supposed to make love and have passion and become one, Rome. None of this have sex stuff, none of this fucking fucking Rome! Come on! And no, definitely none of that tonight. Come on, Rome, don't even play around there tonight. Come on, I want this like Parker, like *Ball Point Penning*, come on. Fuck, Romans. You want it so bad, why don't you let me do it to you, huh? You ever tried to stick anything up there? Oh, it's no different my little mon cheri: anal is anal, mine or yours. Here, bend over, let me get my finger up there, how about?! EXACTLY. Just what I thought. Oh, don't come on honey me. So, we do the make love thing tonight, yes? ROMANS! [There was giving in, of course, on her part, in the carnal throes of entering and exiting, and in the confusion of forgetting which nerves belonged to what, which in was for the out and in out, in out all the way to the 43rd carpal seam.]

Which he'd no longer feel. Which would be cut off, interrupted, ended. Which she wouldn't fix. And he can't feel.

Am I feeling? Jehu thinks. No, that's just the bone, maybe shaking my arm from the buzzing. I'm blasted with drugs, locally. No way I can feel it. But I do wonder what it must look like. Bloody. Yes, but they have that dentist's suction tool working, and gauze. Maybe just bloodyesque. Bloodyish. But pus,

ring finger, not an ear. Not just his sense, then, but his tool, the means. You paint, Vincent, so you should have given her the finger. Maybe she would have given you back her heart, Mr. Van Gogh, maybe her heart-felt, bloody bandaged heart swapped for a finger, ring.

These are the thoughts that come between the big bright starry lights above Jehu's head, and thoughts which make, I'm afraid, him, Jehu, afraid. Painting, he thinks, meaning, shapes, words, painting, worth a thousand words. Artiste. Painting is a type of meaning, a type of story. Vincent the painter is Vincent the author, and he types with big brushes and paints. But Romans Jehu, *New York Times* Best-Selling Author, he types with typewriters, chattering. She liked the typing. Fell in love with the writing. She wanted Parker, wanted *Ball Point Penning*, wanted THE NIGHT. THIS NIGHT. THEIR NIGHT. THE WHOLE OF THE CRACKED EARTH WAS SMOOTHED OVER, WHISPERED ABOUT, HUSHED BY PARKER'S VOICE, PARKER'S EYES. HE AND SHE WERE TWO AND ONE ALL IN THE MOMENTS OF THE NIGHT, THIS NIGHT, THEIR NIGHT. THERE WAS NO MORE AFRAID. Afraid, that bzzzz z zzz it's nearly done, has to be zzzzz zzz but, oh the typing: and hen I type it ill alay be miing all of the letter that I ould have been typing ith that digit, thoe three inche of life. My living. No, no, I ill have to learn all again ho to rearrange on the keyboard to trike thee key and that jut, no, no everything i going to be too hard to get back to ho it once a. Take my ear, doctor, pleae, jut take the damn Amterdamn ear.

Above the curtain, which is draped over gleaming metal bars, disinfected and sterile, almost foreign, Jehu can see the tops of their heads. The one with the saw is bent over intently, squinting through thick specks outfitted with bright lights. There is a nurse, male, working the dentist's suction tool deep into what Jehu knows is his finger, sopping up the blood and guts and infected life. Can they keep it for experiment—they had asked—for the students at the medical school, dissection practice? The finger? His finger?

No, no, of course not, I'm sorry, doctors, said Jehu. He wants it, is demanding it in formaldehyde, a small vial, container, vile finger in a vial container, vile squared. Jehu wants the disease trapped up and put on display. He thinks maybe he'll put it on the windowsill in the office, just above the typewriter next to the radio and Three Dog Night and Neil Diamond tapes, where the sunlight might hit it near noon, where it might swim in the vile,

vile water. He could take it out when he got home, maybe, and do some of his very own experimenting, plunge into the appendage one slice at a time. What would happen if he cooked it? Jehu thinks. The finger would smell horrible, coated with formaldehyde and pussy water. Maybe the dog would like it. Eat it.

Or maybe he'll send it to her Amsterdam brothel. Jehu imagines: it is like Van Gogh, red sheets on a wooden bed, green couch cushions, his artiste smock dirtied with a new "piece," the blue wall connected to two more, delicate bottles of oils and patchouli and condoms and lubricants, and the deep, sweeping, majestic green aurora borealis pushing in through the curtains. Romance, Jehu thinks, Romans she can see and feel and touch and tryst, just send myself in a vial, maybe he can paint a picture of it. For every one he draws, I've got 1000 words to catch up.

And with a missing finger, a missing ring, a missing ring finger, where's the time? The odds, I'm afraid, are *zz zzz zzzz zzzzz* stacked, are broken. She won't fix it.

They say to him: Mr. Jehu, you doing ok over there, sir? We're just about done over here, just sewing the wound back up, cinching things off. Just wanna know if you are ok, there, sir.

Jehu is gritting his teeth, not feeling his left arm, not feeling much at all. He can be ok, he believes, but who wants ok? he thinks. No one wants ok. Ok is for a sixty-degree day. Ok is Mexican food that isn't made anywhere near Mexico. Ok is what you say when you are running out of time and a man, an author—of some menial historical notoriety—bends to one eye-gleaming knee and slips a ring over your ring finger. Ok is short of good, far from spectacular, a fly ball caught on the warning track. Ok? is what you say after you ask for a divorce, after you decide to close up shop on the monotony of fake Christmas trees and book signings and marrying a simple man whose stories have ended up being much more exciting than he will ever be. Ok is comfortable and comforting, and what you imagined a French girl from the countryside to be, and what she never wanted, and, damnit, Amsterdamnit, stifling.

Jehu says to them: Oh. Ok, yes, ok. I'm ok. Can you make sure you don't throw it away though? I'd be beside myself if I couldn't see it. Have it.

They say: sure thing, Mr. Jehu, sure thing. Everything's looking great. Everything's ok.

Ok, listen Epin, he had said. I know this is normal. Maybe

too normal. I'm sorry. But we don't need to create our own catastrophe.

But Jehu thinks that maybe now he will. He will wrap it up in gauze, pack it tight with bubble wrap and ship it, no, no, express mail it to Amsterdamm. To Epin. His triste trysting trifle. Maybe, he thinks, he'll figure out the keys, and he'll type this all out. Send her a nice note to go with it. With the vile ring finger. *New York Times* Best-Selling Author sends present to long lost love. Sends wound to long lost. Long ago lost sends love wound to Best-Selling Author. Best love lost. Selling Author to zzzbz-bzbzzzzbzzz wounds.

There was nothing left and everything to sew up. So, Jehu goes home and decides to write.

This.



James Schrader

A GREEK FEBRUARY

Caroline Loevner

My boyfriend says you can never understand a person until you have walked a mile in their shoes. My boyfriend will never understand me. My shoes won't fit him. They were made especially for me. My right foot is just like everyone else's right foot. My right foot can walk and run and dance and kick a soccer ball. My right foot is size 7, width B, arched, graceful with red toenails. My left foot is a rectangle—a toe-less, arch-less, graceless rectangle. My left shoe looks normal on the outside but the inside is distorted to accommodate my rectangular foot. I don't tell people about The Foot; it is not a nice-looking foot. My boyfriend is handsome, kind, charming and funny. I am wary of revealing The Foot to him for fear of scaring him away. He has never seen me bare-foot, or even in my socks. I sleep with my shoes on. He finds the sight of me in nothing but tennis shoes irresistible, quirky and endearing. He never dreams that lurking beneath the innocent exterior of a tennis shoe is The Foot. At night he wraps his arms around me and drifts off to sleep, never suspecting that the two of us are sharing the bed with a monster.

We have been dating for a year before I reveal the foot to him. He looks at it for a long time. Then he gets a sharpie out of the top right desk drawer and takes the foot into his hands. His touch is familiar all over my body but on my foot his fingers are those of a stranger. He measures my foot with the width of his thumb and draws a thick strong line just below where my toes are not. He bites his lower lip and wrinkles his nose as he draws the line. Then he draws another confident stroke, this one vertical from the top of the foot down to the first line. He draws a third and a fourth line, each segmenting the foot into successively smaller rectangles. Taking it gingerly, almost lovingly into his rough, ink-stained hands, he presents the foot to me. I stare back at him, impassive. He pushes his open palms toward me as though offering an English muffin or a banana.

“Look, the first rectangle is divisible into a square and another small rectangle with the same proportions as the original rectangle.” He traces his finger gently down one line. It tickles and when the foot twitches in his hand, surprise and horror flick

across his face. Vindicated, I twitch my foot again. This time he looks up, grinning.

“It’s alive! A living golden rectangle. A mathematical wonder. See? You can divide this rectangle into squares and identically proportioned rectangles indefinitely. It’s in art and architecture everywhere from the Greeks to the Cubists. Do you know what this means?”

“No.”

“Me neither.”

We stare at one another, my mathematical wonder still resting in his damp, warm palms.

Once I start looking, patterns are everywhere. My boyfriend’s zip code is a perfect square. My birthday is a palindrome. My brother’s GPA is pi. I collect them, my mathematical miracles. There is significance lurking below the surface of these numbers. There must be a pattern, a reason, some great truth hidden inside. I will discover it. I must because that is the inevitable legacy of a golden foot. My boyfriend leaves me in October. It is 4:00 in the afternoon and we sit on cracked pleather at a table booth at a diner. My notebooks and equations are spread out on the syrup sticky table. He says he can’t stand my math anymore. He doesn’t see the patterns I see. He leaves me on October 1st. 10/1/01. 10101. Ominous. I saw the date and woke up that morning with my stomach on fire with premonition. When he departs, the bell on the restaurant door jingles behind him. I finish my pancakes and walk to the university to watch the grad students as they leave their math classes for the afternoon.

I come home for Thanksgiving. My mother’s headaches are back, she is bedridden on any prime number. In my calendar, I circle the prime numbers, perfect squares and multiples of ten in the upcoming months. I wrap myself up in an old blanket, the golden foot protruding ominously from a nostalgic cocoon. I smoke cigarettes and stare at the calendar, looking haggard and crazed and romantic. My brother comes in and sits at the foot of the bed. I let him smoke a cigarette. He coughs and then pretends he didn’t cough. I don’t show him the calendar. I will be leaving him soon and there is no need to worry him.

My brother sounds young on the phone. It is months later. I think

for a moment that he is ten again and that he has called to tell me about the kids at school and their cruelty. But he is not ten and he wants me to come back home. Now. This week if possible. He tells me she is sick, which I knew. He tells me she is dying, which I didn't. He has looked up flight information for me. He wants me to come home on February 5th. There is nothing interesting about February 5th. February is the most mathematically mundane month. I find this reassuring. I want to comfort my brother; I want to tell him nothing bad can happen in February. Instead I just tell him that I can't. I say it doesn't feel right. I hang up the phone knowing that he is eighteen and I am twenty-five but it is me who sounds like a child.

When it happens, it is my brother who tells me. Over the phone. Long distance. He wanted to tell me in person. He wanted me to be there so he would not have to tell me. He says it happened on February 18th. I know that this must be wrong. I know that February 18th was a day like any other day. It was mundane. It was unremarkable. It was random. One's mother does not die randomly. One's mother does not die on a February 18th. I tell my brother he is mistaken. He asks me calmly to please not call until I grow up. Then my baby brother hangs up on me. I paw through a high school math textbook all night, drinking coffee, smoking cigarettes. 2/18/2002. It is not a prime number, it is not a square, there is no golden ratio or even a pattern. It is simply a number, just a date. February 18, 2002.

By 7:00 in the morning the sun has begun to rise, tinting the tips of the trees a pale pink. My eyes ache. I have poured myself another cup of coffee and lit another cigarette. The textbook, stained by coffee and dampened by sweaty palms, lies abandoned on my desk. I smoke my cigarette and watch the sun through the morning smog. February is not a pretty month. My golden foot aches and I rub it in slow circles with the heel of my hand. It is February 20, 2002 and that seems significant. But what does it mean? Can perfection be a coincidence? Can golden be an accident? The sun has risen past the tops of the trees and is stretching and limbering as it starts another long hike to the zenith. I stub out my cigarette and slide my mathematically perfect foot back into its slipper. February 20, 2002 is not a day for golden things. Not sunrises. Not feet.

THE NINE O'CLOCK BUS—
CHIPIONA TO SEVILLE

Julia Ioffe

The nine o'clock bus—Chipiona to Seville.

Andalusian farmland—
those rows of low green plants on chalky earth I'd dreamt
about;
squares of sunflowers now mere brown splotches in the set-
ting sun.

The ocean steams on the horizon—
a glinting spill of milk
now disappears behind the hills.

Hills here are supple, ancient curves
under the same green quilt
that once fed Trajan and Maimonides
their daily Spanish fare.

They gently slope with dinosaural ridges on their sleepy
humps.

This land is tired, old, and wise. It sleeps the sleep of aching
centuries, of silt and soil.

The Spanish hills have no sharp Appalachian elbows,
no anxious, bucking knees that never find their rest
beneath a blanket of land now ancient but once wild.

A HUNGRY ARTIST

Ross Kenneth Urken

*“Luck’s a chance, but trouble’s sure, / I’d face it as a wise man would, /
And train for ill and not for good. / ‘Tis true, the stuff I bring for sale /
Is not so brisk a brew as ale: / ...But take it: if the smack is sour, / The
better for the embittered hour;”*

-A.E. Housman

As a boy, I was told that if I were to open my eyes during a sneeze, they would pop right out of their sockets. Some snot-nosed kid, a different one each time, always seemed to be providing the caveat, and he always seemed to be a lying, no good, roguish, piece of...well, perhaps not that bad. Inevitably, the P’s in the word “pop” would be enunciated like popcorn in the microwave; round and round, spontaneously, kernels would turn to buttery flowers.

This warning of sorts, this early childhood calling, did have a precursor. My mother often clevered me into thinking that if I, Steven Daniel Hertzburg, didn’t wear a coat this instant, the germs would get me. A scratchy, woolen scarf was necessary and puffy gloves too; I felt nothing. I was a wide, hazardous blob of winter gear. But worst of all was the feeling nothing.

This Steve Hertzburg fellow seems awfully interesting, and I mean “awfully” in the most pejorative sense. He is a thinker, though. He thinks about inane things such as what would happen if you walked in the “Fifteen Items or Fewer” aisle at the supermarket with sixteen items in the cart. He also contemplates how very terrible, vicious, sinister the title of the ballet, *The Nutcracker*, can be when the topic of masculinity is at hand and when pondered over a bottle of cheap Korbel champagne. Emasculation is rather daunting, but its use is so palpable in prose.

The events of this story surround a phenomenal movement in Steve’s life...not so much a movement as an intrusion. London is the place. Thirteen is the age. Such baggage. Such nonsense.

If my grandmother had read Kafka’s “A Hunger Artist,” she would have insisted that the caged man be brought to her. “Just let him taste my noodle khuegle, Steven,” she would say. “See if he fasts then.” We were in Europe on a grandma-grandson

excursion. We were in London and still more specifically in Harrods that very afternoon. The green and gold Movado wall clock told me it was 2:30. How thoughtful of it. Shopping seemed somehow exciting in Europe; many things can seem that way: wine, women, and song.

Such maudlin antics. A rather pitiful chap, this Hertzburg fellow. So he makes an observation about the grandeur of Europe. Superb! Fantastic! Such gusto!

Well, this grandmother is quite a dame, and I mean dame in the most pleasant sense. She has short, salt-and-pepper, wavy hair. She had been quite the specimen in her day. Now she possessed the look of a stray cat in her eyes. She was bipolar at best, but dressed in style. Her husband's myriad apple orchards dotting the East Coast provided produce for the major supermarkets. They filtered cash into her metaphorical and physical purses—whatever that may mean. At any rate, she had the ability for travel, but as a product of the Depression, she was thrifty, parsimonious, perhaps stingy.

“How long do you want to stay, Grandma?”

“Not long. I'm just gonna fuss around, not buy anything.”

“Let's meet at 4:00 at the Movado wall clock.”

She gave it a glance and whisked off. It almost seemed as if she drew a cape around her shoulders as she vanished magically.

I pattered around the food court at first. I rolled up the sleeves of my tangerine colored Polo sweater; it had a horse by my heart. Harrods chocolate and pastries, coffee and scones; it was all so very happy. I saw jolly English faces, and aromas made warm offerings. I didn't want to eat anything, though—not at that moment anyway. There were certainly reasons; don't ever let anyone tell you there aren't reasons.

I pattered around in electronics. I browsed stereos and such, and I drew my right hand through my auburn hair every now and again just as Kafka would have done as a story presented itself in a scene through his window or perhaps in the accumulation of snow. I kept straining my eyes to check my leather-banded Swiss Army watch. The straining was certainly necessary, and eventually a strain brought 3:55.

Steve returned to the green and gold Movado wall clock. It was on the second level opposite the escalator. A guard, less prosaic yet less glamorous than a Beefeater, stood dutifully by the fire extinguisher that was caged in. He wasn't, dare I jest,

avant-garde.

This instant, Steve checks his watch again, digs his hand into his pocket, and fingers a crumpled Eurorail pass. He looks at the people going by. Not just at the people—that would be too conventional. He peers deep into their faces. He comes up with scenarios. Yes, scenarios! Like, who went to Cambridge and was a barrister? That man. That man who just passed in the Burberry scarf did. Yes, that one, who had come up from Piccadilly Circus to buy perfume for his new girlfriend. It was rather for his benefit. She most likely had a bit of an odor problem, but was quaint, and blond, and learned in Russian literature. You have to give a little somewhere to get a little.

Within the next twenty minutes, Steve turns his wrist over four times to check his watch. No sign of Grandma. He considers that she lost track of time or got lost. Perhaps she was in a line.

Waiting is atrocious, isn't it? I'd rather starve. At any rate, it must be understood that the night before, Steve had been smacked, approximately in the back of the ribs, with a shoe in a Paris hotel room. Grandma was the culprit. A bidet was peaking out of the ajar bathroom door. So much more than leather and sole had been smacked into him. The reason?...and there is always reason. Let's just say they had a difficult relationship. Steve had yelled some words that to him were invectives: "Philistine! Dilettante!" He sat up promptly in his bed. Paris, the city of lights. It seemed more Romantic with a red mark on his back. He wrote angsty poetry in a calico-patterned notebook.

I wrote ardently and, dare I say, brilliantly. I wrote about the ways of God to man, Oedipal notions, and laced my verse with the Eastern belief of pleasure and pain. I wrote the word *dukkha* on the page but once. How crafty! It's a crying shame my stomach was full. You wouldn't believe that I wrote by candlelight like all the greats. Well, not exactly by candlelight. From the window, each building seemed a candle. Jack, the one and only, so I had been told, had jumped over a candlestick. Some snot-nosed, lying, no-good, roguish (ENOUGH!) kid had related to me that this Jack had burned that certain something that would complete the rhyme. Apparently, this switcharoo made the rhyme fun to sing.

So much more than Parisian gravel stuck to the red mark on his smooth back. It was a difficult relationship, need I say again?

Such nonsense.

A redhead (dyed flaming red) approached the green and gold Movado wall clock. She was in fishnet stockings and wore Doc Marten combat boots. She would have been prettier if she cut the punk crap. Most definitely, she had a story too. Her family was part of London society. Her father played tennis and croquet with Tony Blair. Her mother wore diamonds and pearls. Pretty conventional. She had one of those little English brothers, too, with a button nose. Inevitably, he spent much time with the maid, wore a corduroy jacket, and donned a little English cap. Somewhere between the cocktail parties, O's of smoke from her father's pipe, and flowered dresses and buckled, navy shoes, she had gone astray. Rather cute, though.

Rita Lipshultz did not show that afternoon by the green and gold Movado wall clock. She did not see the Burberried barrister or the Bohemian chick from the good side of Tower Bridge. She did, however, walk out of the automatic doors at the entrance to Harrods at ten after three. Steve had realized that he had been through enough of the waiting. Such ennui.

"Excuse me," said Steve to the guard who stood dutifully. "Have you seen an older woman in a bright red vest?"

"No, no I haven't. There's lots of people, chap. Sorry."

I didn't have a pound in my pocket to take the Tube back to the hotel, so I muttered something that I thought was sacrilegious: "Iconoclastic shrew! Post-minimalist zealot!" I collected myself and declared I was lost.

"I'd suggest that you talk to the Security and Customer Affairs Office," he offered.

"Oh, er, where—"

"Down the escalator, lad, and to the right. Can't miss it."

When I reached my destination, I was confronted with a very stylish, dare I say, hip gentleman in a black suit. He wore narrow, piercing glasses and need I comment, too much hair gel.

"Afternoon," he said, looking at me with his piercing glasses.

"Hi. I was supposed to meet my grandmother at four o'clock, and she didn't show up." I paused briefly; he raised his creaky chin, and I continued. "I don't have money to get home...I mean to my hotel. Is there a way I could try to contact her?"

"Yes, very well. And what is your Christian name?"

"I'm...er...my what?"

“Well at least let’s have your surname for starters.”

“It’s Hertzburg,” I said.

Within the next ten minutes the stylish and hip gentleman received more information from our beloved Hertzburg fellow. Rita’s room was called, but there was no answer. To say Steve was embarrassed would be an understatement. His face was flushed, and the cuffs of his tangerine Polo sweater were damp with sweat from his palms. Just then, a thirteen-year-old’s dream sequence became a reality. A brunette in a French blue blouse appeared from behind a desk. She shook her brilliant shoulder-length hair before she informed the two gentlemen that she was heading in Steve’s direction. She introduced herself as Denise, and golly gee, she looked like a Denise. It really wouldn’t be a problem at all she informed them; she could pay for the Tube ticket.

“Are you sure?” Steve asked, only to be polite.

“Yes, come on now.”

“I’ll be sure to pay you back when I get to the hotel.”

They were off then. Over the lobby, and through the dual automatic sliding doors at the entrance, to grandmother’s hotel room they were to go. She was very perky in general and was perhaps twenty-eight. They walked half a block to the stairs leading to the Tube station. They passed the windows of pubs where two men, for example—clearly university chums—were having a pint and catching up. This was all too obvious to Steven Daniel Hertzburg.

In a flash that Steve would certainly not remember for long, they had bought tickets in an electronic machine and made their way past the gate. After they had entered the crowded Tube car, Denise spoke.

“So you’re traveling with your grandmum, are you?”

“Kind of...she...she takes all of her grandchildren on trips when they turn thirteen.”

“I see. Quite generous.” I nodded, and she continued, “And are you enjoying London?”

“I love it. It has character...a certain *je ne sais quoi*.”

“Pardon?” she said raising her eyebrows.

“The people are so nice.”

Denise smiled widely, gratuitously showing her ivory teeth. Quite impressive for a Brit! The Tube car seemed a cage to Steve—a glorious, red cage at that. Under Steve’s circumstances as an abandoned adolescent, the Tube was a train for ill, yet

there existed such beautiful isolation. The din of English accents surrounded him as the Tube flew by. Denise consulted the Underground map above the dual sliding doors in the car. An advertisement for glasses, piercing glasses, also proved interesting. Apparently, and perhaps luckily, Dr. Barnes could give you the flexible frames. Incidentally, Denise's lips were blushing—redder than the Tube. Don't think Steve didn't take note.

Steve stretched his torso out by holding onto and pulling away from the overhead bar. Denise was eating chestnuts she had pulled from her purse. Steve declined when offered, even though he was now famished. He didn't want to be full. She chomped the nuts with her crashing jaw. Cracking nuts.

Once out of the Tube station, Steve and Denise walked toward the Forum Hotel, only a block away. Low clouds seemed to be accumulating in the sky, and the glorious Thames was in the background running softly. An a cappella quartet sang as all of the different voices strangely became one. Down the street, a man played the violin jovially with his case open.

It was chilly out for the spring. Everything was obscured. Out of the blue, Steve considered the benefits of enduring the cold air, which led him to his next thought.

"Perhaps it may be heretical to say, but mothers are wrong."

"They are, aren't they?" responded Denise.

She said it in such a tone with her eyes cast down that Steve had to speculate. Perhaps she had had an abortion, a failed marriage, or both. Perhaps her mother had insulted Harrods, Mr. al-Fayed, or even the green and gold Movado wall clock itself. A broken glass of Guinness and a scream came to mind. Such nonsense!

We had unconsciously made our way into the hotel lobby, and I decided to avoid delving into that "mother" issue. There was a moment of silence, before I cut in.

"Give me two seconds," I said. "I'll run up and get money."

"It's rather fine. No worries."

"Wait here, I'll be right down," I insisted.

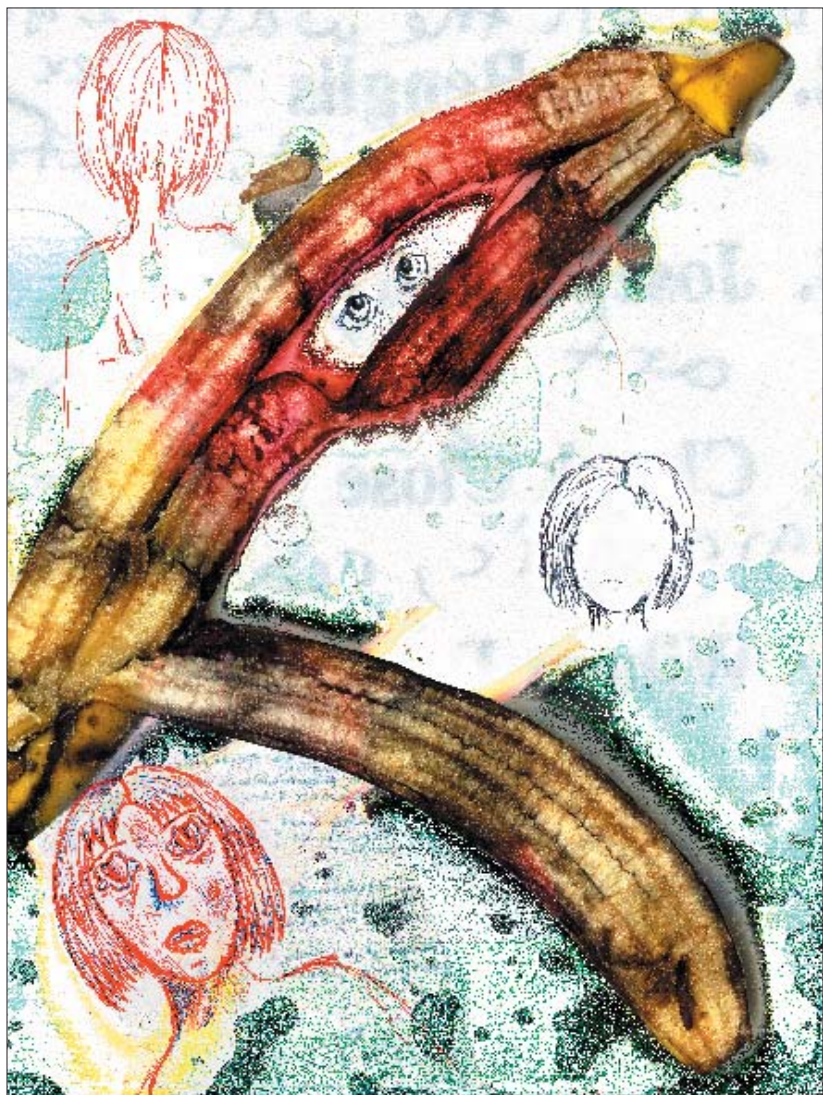
I ran across the marble-floored lobby to the elevators and smiled at her with my eyes. I guessed that the middle elevator would come up first, and golly gee, it did.

Just now, Steven Daniel Hertzburg sprints down the hallway of the 22nd floor. He breezes past the repeating floral pattern

of wallpaper until he arrives at room 2215. No one is home. He goes over to the bedside where yesterday's pants are draped over a chair. He pulls out a couple of pounds from his Taxi wallet and runs the inverse of his previous route. When he walks back into the lobby, Denise has escaped. He sees the jolly faces of the men and women at the front desk, and he observes the hardworking expression of the man, who is, dare I say, chic, working at the Concierge. Steve looks to the revolving doors and quickly rushes outside.

Many questions exist from my youth. Who really was Little Bunny Foo Foo, and what possessed her to travel through the forest picking up the field mice and bopping them on the head? It's strange how I think about such things. Out on the street, however, the air was thick, and it brought me back to reality. My stomach was gnawing now, scraping. I looked in all directions for Denise, but before I could come up with scenarios, I got the feeling to sneeze. I scrunched up my face and leaned back my head. As I lurched forward, I achoo-ed, and I swear I took a peak.

I was hatless, gloveless, and scarfless, but the fog—the thick, porridge-like London fog—somehow made me prepared, somehow granted me immunity. Though couples and families walked to dinner, I had only cold, hunger, and freedom. Satiated, stuffed, and nourished I would be.



Jessica Lynn Inocencio

CATALOGUE OF FAVORITE INDIVIDUALS

Julia Friedlander

The dog walker is up in the a.m., drags terriers across the marble floor of the lobby, ignores the scatter of their nails, their alarming squeals.

The one-armed car washer works pro bono and cannot accept tips unless you open your door into the ailanthus trees off the Cross Bronx Expressway to feed his pockets.

The overweight hula dancer has no worries about letting the hoop fall past her waist, but we are concerned about her career prospects.

The rotary phone salesman cannot bear the adversity of portable technology, caters to a nostalgic clientele, dreams of the pony express and bellows of the Lusitania going down.

The Italian Futurist rejects the disappointments of history as stagnant, unimpressive; little does he know that what comes next is worse.

The Tribeca peanut roasters allow the faint odor of grease and legume to sink under the cobblestones of Greenwich Street, knocking us senseless in the process.

The undertaker with the sallow face is not to be trusted with Aunt Maud's body, but we let him at it anyway—not like we know what to do with it.

The academic reeks of syllabi, of educated stereotypes, of coffee spilled during topical seminars on things we try not to think about while we sleep, carries the underbelly of the past in his head, can barely put his theories to practice, his emotions to words.

The expatriate wonders whether he'd be hated were he to return, reads the American papers like foreign language poetry, sighs, and falls asleep to Sunshine Radio Budapest.

The xenophobe is afraid of himself as well, and we say, "Serves him right."

BOUNTY HUNTING

Kendall Turner

Ever since he was five, he bored people
straight through with his baby blues—
more blues than baby, his eyes
were too saturated with sadness
and too intentionally violent for infancy.
They hit you hard, so you had to stare

back when your brother massacred the pet
dog, young and loud and beloved,
by slamming his metal bat home
into its head. Afterwards you slipped
your hand inside the bloody wound,
then rearranged the body on the bright street
so you could lie, say a car clipped him
lightly on the skull.

If someone asked why you stood
stitched to the sight of disjointed limbs,
denuded life, disheveled hair,
you would lie, say you didn't
know the appeal of suffering.
Why did you have to stare
at the too-old eyes, the too-young corpse

like you were bounty hunting there?
These days, you move unerringly
from home to work, work to home
good day to bad day more often than not.
You earn your bread, you eat it;
sometimes you fuck your wife
on top of the morning paper.

But you keep coming back
to your brother's eyes, to the gaping gash
and the feel of your hand inside

the animal, pushing out against the brain—
as if there must be something more—
as if you couldn't face
the rest of your life the same.



Jocelyn Miller

SPIT

Lindsey Hornbuckle

The plumbing of an apartment
on Melbourne's lower east side
deposits iron and sulfur in the tap water.
A small girl with corn-silk hair
brushes her teeth with spit
and drinks only milk and soda.
Her skin radiates warmth
in the fluorescent light
of her family's bathroom.
The naked walls twist her stomach,
and the room grips her hard
around the waist for remembering
the nearness of the next building,
the weight of the concrete above her.
The faucet keeps her awake
(the droplets sing plink-plop, plink-plop).
The sky outside the window
embraces the pavement below.
Clouds and thunder congregate
in the distance. It is not raining.
Last Sunday's paper flanks
the base of the toilet, wrinkled.
Above her pallet, paint hangs
from the ceiling, the bare spots
encircled by water stains
and the drywall swells
that push from underneath.
She imagines a continent's dirt
beneath her fingernails.

“TWO WORDS”

The Stories of Eva Luna

written by Isabel Allende

translated by Callen Bair

Her name was Belisa Crepusculario, not by baptism or the good choice of her mother, but rather because she herself looked for a name until she found one suitable and dressed herself in it. Selling words was her occupation. She traveled around the country, from the highest, coldest regions to the hot coasts, setting up shop at fairs and markets. She would drape a canvas awning over four sticks and, sitting under it, attend to her clientele while protecting herself from the sun and rain. She did not need to announce herself or advertise her merchandise because everyone knew her, no matter from where they came. There were those who waited a year or more for her to appear in their village, bundle under her arm, and when she did, they line up in front of her stall. Her prices were fair. For five centavos she delivered verses from memory, for seven she improved the quality of dreams, for nine she wrote love letters, for twelve she concocted insults to hurl at an irreconcilable enemy. She also sold stories. They were not fantasies, but rather long, true histories that she recited urgently, complete. So she carried the news of one village to another. The people paid her to add one or two lines: the birth of a child, the death of so-and-so, the marriage of children, the burning of harvests. In each place, a small crowd gathered to hear when she began to speak, and so they found out about the lives of far-off relatives, the details of the Civil War. To those who paid fifty centavos, she gave a secret word to scare away melancholy. It was not the same for everyone, of course, because that would have been a swindle. Each one received his or her own word with the certainty that no one else in the universe or beyond used it for that end.

Belisa Crepusculario had been born into a family so miserable that it did not even have names for its children. She came into the world and grew up in the most inhospitable region, where some years the rains turned into avalanches of water that carried away everything; and in others, not a drop fell from the sky, the sun getting larger until it occupied the entire horizon, and the

world turned into a desert. Since her 12th birthday, she had no other desire than to survive the hunger and fatigue of centuries. During an interminable drought, she had to bury four younger brothers, and when she realized that she would be the next, she set out across the plain in the direction of the sea on a quest to evade death. The earth was eroded, divided by deep cracks, sown with stones, fossils of trees, and thorny shrubs, skeletons of animals whitened by the heat. From time to time, she came upon families that, like her, were headed south, following the mirage of water. Some had begun the march carrying their possessions on their shoulders or in wheelbarrows, but after walking a short ways, they could no longer bear these loads and had to abandon their things. They dragged themselves along arduously, their skin turned into lizard skin and their eyes burned by intense light. Belisa greeted them with a gesture when passing, but she did not stop because she could not waste her strength on exercises of compassion. Many fell by the road, but she was so strong-willed that she managed to cross the inferno and finally reached springs, fine threads of water, nearly invisible, that fed a paltry vegetation and, farther on, turned into streams and marshes.

Belisa Crepusculario saved her life and, moreover, she happened to discover writing. As she arrived at a town in the vicinity of the coast, the wind placed a page of newspaper at her feet. She took that paper, yellow and fragile, and looked at it for a long time, not knowing what it was, until curiosity overcame her shyness. She approached a man who was washing a horse in the same cloudy puddle where she had just quenched her thirst.

—What is this? —she asked.

—The sports page of the newspaper —he replied without showing astonishment at her ignorance.

The answer left the girl amazed, but she did not want to be a bother and limited her investigation to the meaning of the flies' legs drawn on the paper.

—They are words, girl. There it says that Fulgenico Barba knocked out Negro Tiznao in the third round.

That day Belisa Crepusculario found out that words walked freely, without an owner, and that anyone with a little skill could take hold of and trade with them. She considered her situation and concluded that, apart from prostituting herself or employing herself as a servant in the kitchens of the rich, there were few occupations that she could hold. Selling words seemed to her

a decent alternative. From that moment on, she practiced that profession, and no other ever interested her. In the beginning, she offered her merchandise without suspecting that words were not only written in newspapers. When she realized the infinite possibilities of her business, she paid a priest twenty pesos, which she took from her savings, so that he would teach her to read and write. With the three that were left, she bought a dictionary. She perused the book from A through Z and then threw it in the ocean because it was not her intention to cheat her clients with canned words.

Several years later, on an August day, Belisa Crepusculario was in the center of a square, seated under her awning, selling arguments of justice to an old man who had been requesting his pension since he was seventeen-years-old. It was a market day, and there was much hubbub around her. Suddenly, everyone in the square heard gallops and shouts, and Belisa Crepusculario raised her eyes from the document. She saw a cloud of dust first and, immediately after, a group of horsemen bursting into the place. They were the Colonel's men, who came at the order of the Mulato, a giant known in all regions for the speed of his knife and his loyalty to his boss. Both the Colonel and the Mulato had spent their lives engaged in the Civil War, and their names were irremissibly attached to its damage and disaster. The warriors entered the village like a stampeding herd, enveloped in noise, bathed in sweat, and leaving a whirlwind of terror in their wake. Hens flew off, dogs got lost, women ran with their children, and no living soul was left in the market other than Belisa Crepusculario. She had never seen nor heard of the Mulato, so she was surprised when he addressed her.

—I am looking for you —he shouted, pointing at her with his coiled whip, and before he finished speaking, two men jumped on top of the woman, knocking down the awning and breaking the inkpot. They tied her hands and feet and slung her across the Mulato's beast like a sailor, setting out at a gallop in the direction of the hills.

Many hours later, when Belisa Crepusculario was on the verge of dying, her heart turned to sand by the jounces of the horse, she felt them stop, and four powerful hands deposited her on the earth. She tried to stand up and lift her head with dignity, but her strength failed her, and she slumped with a sigh, sink-

ing into a dazzling sleep. She woke up several hours later, the murmur of night in the countryside, but she did not have time to decipher those sounds because, upon opening her eyes, she found before her the impatient stare of the Mulato, who was kneeling at her side.

—Finally you awake, woman —he said, passing her his flask filled with revivifying liquor and a touch of gunpowder.

She wanted to know the reason for her abduction, and he explained that the Colonel needed her services. He let her wet her face and took her to one end of the camp, where the most feared man in the country lay on a hammock hung between two trees. She could not see his face for an uncertain shadow cast by the foliage and the indelible umbrage that falls on a man after many years living as a lowlife, but she imagined that it should bear a depraved expression, if his gigantic assistant addressed him with such humility. His voice surprised her, smooth and well modulated like that of a professor.

—Are you the one who sells words? —he asked.

—In order to serve you —she stammered, scanning the half-light, so as to see him better.

The Colonel stood up, and the light of the torch that the Mulato carried hit him head-on. The woman saw his dark skin and his wild puma eyes and knew immediately that she was in front of the man most alone in this whole world.

—I want to be President —he said.

He was tired of traveling that damned land to fight pointless wars and suffer defeats that no subterfuge could turn into victories. He had spent many years sleeping in the open air being bitten by mosquitoes, surviving on iguanas and snake soup, but those minor inconveniences were not sufficient reason to change his destiny. What, in truth, bothered him were the eyes of other people. He wanted to go into villages under arches of triumph, between colored flags and flowers, receiving applause and gifts of fresh eggs and recently baked bread. He was fed up with the way that, at his passing, men fled, women, frightened, dropped everything, and creatures quivered. Therefore, he had decided to become President. The Mulato suggested that they go to the capital, gallop into the Palace, and seize the government, just as they had taken so many other things without asking permission, but the Colonel knew that he could not win the affection of the people that way. His idea was to be chosen by popular vote in

the December elections.

—For that I need to speak like a candidate. Can you sell me words for a speech? —the Colonel asked Belisa Crepusculario.

She had accepted many jobs, but none like this. However, she could not refuse him, afraid that the Mulato would shoot her between the eyes, or worse yet, that the Colonel would begin to cry. She also felt the urge to help him because she noticed a burning heat in his skin and had a powerful desire to touch that man, to run her hands over him, to encircle him with her arms.

Belisa Crepusculario spent all night and a good part of the following day looking through her repertoire for words befitting a presidential speech, keeping a close eye on the Mulato, who did not move his eyes from her firm walker's legs or virgin breasts. She ruled out the rough and dry words; those too florid, colored by abuse, or unclear; those that offered unlikely promises or lacked truth, so that the only ones remaining were those unquestionably capable of touching the reasoning of men and the intuition of women. Making use of the knowledge bought from the priest for twenty pesos, she wrote the speech on a sheet of paper and then signaled for the Mulato to untie the cord with which she had been bound by her ankles to a tree. He took her to the Colonel again, and upon seeing him, she felt the same burning anxiety of their first meeting. She passed the paper to him and waited while he looked at it, holding it with his fingertips.

—What the fuck does it say here? —he finally asked.

—You do not know how to read?

—What I know how to do is fight —he replied.

She read the speech in a loud voice three times, so that her client could record it in his memory. When she finished, she saw the emotion on the faces of the troops that had gathered to hear her and noticed that the yellow eyes of the Colonel shone with enthusiasm, certain that, with those words, the presidential seat would be his.

—If the men stand with their mouths open after hearing it three times, then this woman is good for something, Colonel —the Mulato approved.

—How much should I give you for your work, woman? —the Colonel asked.

—A peso, Colonel.

—That is not much money —he said, opening the wallet that hung from his belt with the rest of the loot from his latest rav-

ages.

—Furthermore, you have the right to a free gift. The peso entitles you to two secret words —Belisa Crepusculario said.

—Why is that?

She proceeded to explain to him that, for each fifty centavos a client paid, she gave away a word for his or her exclusive use. The Colonel shrugged his shoulders; he had not the least interest in the offer, but he did not want to be discourteous to this woman who had served him so well. She slowly approached the footstool where he was seated and leaned towards him to give him his gift. Then the man caught the mountain animal scent that this woman gave off, felt the fire-like heat that radiated from her hips, saw the terrible chaffing caused by his horses, and felt the yerbabuena breath whisper in his ear the two secret words that were his right

—They are yours, Colonel —she said as she moved away—. You can use them however you wish.

The Mulato accompanied Belisa to the edge of the road, never ceasing to look at her with the imploring eyes of a lost dog, but when he stretched out his hand to touch her, she stopped him with a spurt of invented words with the power to quell his desire. She believed he was trying to put some irrevocable curse on her.

In the months of September, October, and November, the Colonel delivered his speech so many times that it would have turned to ash had it not been made with refulgent and durable words. He traveled all over the country, entering cities with a triumphal air and also stopping in the most forgotten villages, where a trail of garbage was the only indication of human presence, in order to convince the electors to vote for him. While the Colonel spoke on a platform in the center of a square, the Mulato and his men handed out caramels and wrote the Colonel's name on the walls with golden frost. Nobody paid attention to the merchants' appeals because they were dazzled by the clarity of the Colonel's propositions and the poetic lucidity of his arguments, infected by his tremendous desire to correct the errors of history and make them happy for the first time in their lives. At the end of the candidate's impassioned speech, the troop fired pistols into the air and lit firecrackers, and when they finally retreated, they left a wake of hope behind them that lingered in the air for many days like the magnificent memory of a comet. The Colonel quickly

turned into the most popular politician; it was a phenomenon never seen before. The man rose from the Civil War covered in scars and speaking like a professor; his prestige was scattered over the land and touched the heart of the country. The press paid much attention to him—journalists traveled long distances to interview him and printed his phrases—and so the number of his followers, and of his enemies, grew.

—We are doing well, Colonel —the Mulato said after twelve successful weeks of campaigning.

But the candidate did not hear him because he was repeating his two secret words, as he had been doing with greater frequency. He said them when moved by nostalgia; he murmured them in his sleep; he carried them with him on his horse; he thought of them before delivering his much celebrated speech; and surprised himself, enjoying them even when he was down and out. And every time those two words came to his mind, he recalled the appearance of Belisa Crepusculario, and his senses were agitated by the memory of the mountain scent, the fire-like heat, the terrible chaffing, the yerbabuena breath, until he began to go about like a sleepwalker. It was at this point that his men became concerned he would not make it to the president's chair.

—What has gotten into you, Colonel? —the Mulato asked many times, until finally, one day, the Colonel confessed that the condition of his spirits was the result of those two words that stuck fast in his stomach.

—Give them to me —asked his loyal assistant— so I can decide whether or not they are capable of affecting you so greatly.

—No, I won't give them to you. They are mine and only mine —the Colonel replied.

Tired of seeing his boss get worse and worse, as if condemned to death, the Mulato slung his gun over his shoulder and set out to look for Belisa Crepusculario. He followed her tracks all over the country until he found her in a southern village, set up under the awning of her office and recounting her rosary of news. He planted himself in front of her with his legs spread apart, brandishing his rifle.

—You are coming with me —he ordered.

She had been expecting him. She put away her inkpot, folded the canvas awning, threw her shawl around her shoulders, and climbed on to his horse's haunches in silence. They exchanged no words, not even a gesture, on their journey because the Mulato's

regard for her had turned to fury. Only the fear that her tongue inspired in him kept him from lashing out. He was not ready to mention that the Colonel was acting foolish, and that what he had not managed to find in so many years of battle, he had obtained by listening to a spell whispered in his ear. Three days later, they arrived at the camp, and he immediately led his prisoner to the candidate, in front of his troops.

—I brought you this bitch so that you can return your words, Colonel, and so that she can return your manliness —he said, pointing the barrel of his gun at the nape of the woman’s neck.

The Colonel and Belisa Crepusculario looked at each other for a long time, sizing each other up from a distance. The men then understood that their leader would not come undone by those two enchanting, potent words. Everyone could see the carnivorous eyes of the puma soften when she advanced and took his hand.

INVASION

Bella Tendler

Forehead pressed against
cold glass for hours, I hear
the slow chug of metal
on wooden tracks. Clouds over
prairie lands and
rusted cattle fences for miles.
My shoulder tensed, trying
hard not to touch
the large whiskered man
snoring beside me.

At this distance we are like lovers.
Only limply shuttered eyes protect me
from being enveloped.
I smell him. He reeks
like pedophilia like necrophilia
like something altogether too
human to inhale.
I wonder if he can smell me;
if his crud-covered tongue
can taste my secrets.

I pull my jacket tighter around my chest.
I wonder if he can hear me hating him.
I wonder what he will say to me
when he wakes and finds us
almost touching on the train.
Small beads of sweat pool above my lip.
I press so tight against the window
I can see the dead insects plastered
on the other side; I can make out the crusted mucus
wiped there by some previous patron.

We roll past Driggs and Emeas and Creekside and Casper.
Gray scum settles in my diaphragm and arms.
My head fills with urine,
my lungs clog with vomit,
my thighs and armpits slick with wetness,
my feet swim in lava, my fingers start shaking.
I want to burst out of my crouch and hit him
and break the window and shatter the perfectly unchanging
brown sandy scenery around me.

At Emerson he wakes up.
I look at him.
Polite words stick in my throat and I am caught.
His pale eyes are too alert;
they bore into mine with stolen intimacy.
I watch him smell me and I am sure I will die.
Then he leaves,
pushing through the crowded train
with apologies.



James Schrader

PRAKASH, THE TELLER

Fairy Pardiwalla

The compassion of a thousand unbalanced accounts
Colors the cognate swarms.
A broken home a rape victim here and there
A hundred good luck charms
Gone wrong. Prakash is going home
To the wife, in-laws, children, radio set
Crackling out the news—a man murdered here and there.
Where are my chapattis?
The whistle sends elastic feet running.
The 5:53 Virar Fast is leaving the platform
With a thousand unbalanced accounts
Inside it.

FORGETTING

Ben Pollak

When I was young, I was silent and insomniac.
My father would dance me on his shoulders
as David Allan Boucher's soft voice sifted
through the speakers like sand from a fist.

Last year I came full circle
while driving through Wellfleet,
the radio low and the car dark, save for the
cold phosphorescence of the speedometer
reflecting on my face.
I took a wrong turn and found myself
on Route 6 again. It was late
and the thick drops of rain
sounded like pebbles on my windshield.
Up ahead the road disappeared,
and glistening pools of shadow
flooded the empty pavement.
The circular yellow islands cast by streetlamps
looked like sandbars adrift in a dark ocean
seen through the window of a plane.

And in my mind, I saw the pale sheen
of the Hudson at night
when the icebreakers
part its thick curtain of ice.
And there—the shriek of the 12:51
train to Albany skidding north
on frozen tracks....

But I have become forgetful,
and the tapping of rain on my windshield
has become my father's soft footsteps.

When I was young, I was silent and insomniac.
My father would dance; I sat on his shoulders.
The thick drops of rain made imprints on the ground
like pebbles on a distant sandbar.

FIELD GUIDE TO THE HAWKS OF NORTH AMERICA

Branden Jacobs-Jenkins

My husband, Desmond, is trying to kill these hawks in our chimney. Four or five of them, we guess, nesting—or at least we think that they’re nesting. If that’s what you call it. And we’re pretty sure that they’re hawks; our neighbor, Ira, seemed to know what he was talking about, waltzing in here last Friday with a cold six-pack of Coors tucked away under his armpit and a fresh-sighting of the mama bird. Ira is originally from a town about two hours west of here—Palmyra—which isn’t Richmond at all, not by a long shot. All you have to pass the time in Palmyra, he once told us, is beer and bird-watching. “Cooper hawks,” he whistled sort of condescendingly, throwing himself into the couch next to my husband’s wheelchair and popping a tab. “Slick motherfuckers,” he said. “Mean, too. Surprised they ain’t kilt somebody’s dog just yet. I wonder what they lookin’ for ’round here.” He took a sip. “Probably heard y’all was nice enough peoples.”

So now Desmond thinks he’s only making it clear to the birds that he wants them gone—as if a mama bird could just pack up her nest, her eggs, her children and move on just like that. Really though, he just wants them dead, needs something to fade out of existence before he does. Or perhaps he’s just bored, plain and simple. I keep trying to tell him that Mother Nature is a damned intelligent woman. Things happen because they need to; the birds didn’t choose our chimney simply to annoy him. There’s so much scouting that goes into motherhood, planning and choosing. If anything, I tell him, we should be flattered. But he’s ignored me and started building a fire in the fireplace, even though we’re in the wettest week of another rainy April. In order to smoke them out, he says. In order to kill them out, he means. Working at it, he’s intent, eerily thorough, but I cannot stand it. I will not watch.

“But I think they’re cute,” I say.

“You would,” he says, tearing the shiny red paper away from the starter log sitting on his lap. The task is hard for him, I can tell. From the threshold, the ripping looks slow and sounds unnecessarily crude and unusual, loud and definite. He talks over

the log's undressing, "They're noisy. They're a nuisance."

"Baby hawks," I say. "Little baby hawks, what's the worst that they could do?"

"There's a mother hawk, Laura," he says. "Plus they kill chickens."

"We don't have any chickens," I say.

"They kill other birds," he says. His fingers fumble a little, but they finish.

"What's wrong with that?" I say. "That's what they do."

"All the same bad news," he says, and with a light huff he tosses the naked log into the black pit in our wall.

Everybody seems to hate these birds but me. Two days ago, after we'd decided on our new guests' genus, I went to the university library to check out a book. *Field Guide to the Hawks of North America*. There, a whiskered woman behind the circulation desk kept telling me about how an invasion of chicken hawks had ruined her father's poultry farm when she was a little girl growing up outside of Charlottesville. She told me she could still remember the baritone of her father's searing curses weaving in and out of the panicked clucking of another coop under attack, the shouting aimed at the speckled trees, the sky, the feather-stricken distance. She recalled coming home from school and finding gangs of the fowl settled upon the branches of the sugar maple in her front yard—the one that had held her favorite tire swing, which would then be covered in bird shit, like a threat. And the worst, she said, were the pellets. Just everywhere. She said she would just be walking along the outskirts of a neighbor's cornfield, minding her own business, and stumble upon piles of them sitting beneath a tree like a clump of baby squirrels. Four times her mother had had to chase neighborhood boys from off of the family's property. They would come in rowdy bands of five or six to collect and trade them, to pry them apart.

"Excuse me," I said. "Pellets?"

"Oh, yes, you know," she said loudly. She seemed to have no reservations about being in a library. "Hawks don't got teeth, so they can't chew." She pushed her enormous glasses up on to her nose and cleared her throat. "So when they eats a chicken or a rat or what have you, they have to swallow it whole and then vomit up what they can't digest."

"So what does that mean?"

“That means you get a little hawk gift,” she said, leaning in. “All the bones and teeth and beaks and mess like that wrapped up in the fur and skins and what have you, a little pellet. You just crack it open, and voila: a little skeleton inside. Isn’t that something?”

“Yeah,” I said.

“Nasty though, huh?” she said, with a snort.

“Yeah,” I lied.

“Pass me another starter log,” Desmond says.

I am hesitant. “Don’t you think that’s a little much?”

Sighing, he wheels himself around in the chair that still squeaks a little on its axle. There are two wheelchairs in this house. One at the bottom of the stairs, one at the top, and in between there is this monstrous-looking metal contraption that takes him from one level to the next—half of our retirement fund gone. The mediocre insurance Desmond still sort of receives from the university wouldn’t cover something that could easily be done without, but Desmond says he refuses to be confined to one floor of a house he’s still paying for, even if that means a whole lot of unnecessary readjustment. Originally, Dr. Pinckney had suggested that he sleep in the first-floor guest room by the kitchen, the room that we’d converted from an unused nursery. I’d offered to make the move with him so we could still sleep in the same bed. We’d even built on an addition to the living room to fit in a desk, a few more bookshelves, a fireplace—to make the space more livable, cozier. But Desmond said he’d rather be dead than feel like a goddamned guest in his own goddamned house. And he sure as hell wasn’t about to sleep in a room that was built for a baby.

“I’m being thorough,” he says now.

“I thought you were trying to smoke them out?”

“I am trying to smoke them out.”

“Sounds to me like you’re trying to cook them out. A couple of baby birds—”

“Will you just hand me the log?”

I don’t move. “Desmond, how do you know this is even going to work?”

“It will work.”

“Well, why can’t we just wait a week or two. I’m sure the baby birds will learn how to fly by then and then they’ll be gone

in—”

“Will you just shut up and hand me the fucking log, please!” The words explode through the spaces between his tight white teeth and I don’t say a word. He didn’t start yelling like this until recently, and never before at me. At first, the curses were directed at the smaller things, like the twitches in his hands that kept him from holding a pencil or stick of chalk steady or the times muscle weakness hit him so hard he couldn’t carry a bag of groceries up the two porch steps without nearly collapsing. You know: things before the wheelchair. Back when he had a decent pair of legs.

I carefully touch a canine tooth with my tongue, blink, and squint in the quiet of us watching each other, as if we are both wondering if what just happened really did just happen at all. But then his face softens, and he says, “I’m sorry.”

“These are just a couple of dumb birds,” I say.

“I know,” he says.

“Then why are you cursing at me?” I ask.

“I don’t know,” he says. He starts to wheel himself towards me in a way that almost repulses me, like how I might feel repulsed by a beggar crawling along a road. Inside, I feel some sort of sympathy, but there is also disgust. Something in my stomach unhinges itself. Then I remember that this man is my husband. “I’m sorry—” he says, and I try not to let on to how I see him now, how his apology is making me sick, but before I can hide it, he’s already sensed it, and I catch myself backing away.

“What?” he says, and stops wheeling.

“Nothing,” I say.

“What?”

“Nothing.” But his face takes on a landscape that I imagine might be a reflection of my own, and I start feeling pangs of something like guilt pulsing away behind my heart. His eyes move from mine to the basket of fire logs resting at my feet like a sleeping Labrador and he wheels himself over to it without looking at me. He bends down, can barely balance himself on the chair’s edge without falling over, but somehow manages to wrap two hands around another chunk of wood and swing it into his lap. I notice his upper arms twitch when he lifts, how his hands shake as he wheels himself back to the fireplace quietly. The axle still creaks, and he begins tearing the paper away.

“I’ll have nothing to do with this,” I say. Then we are both quiet.

I found them there before he did, the hawks. Or rather, I heard them first. I was working in the living room while Desmond was reading in the study upstairs—the second book of the *Divine Comedia* for the third time in four weeks—because recently I’ve found it hard to concentrate while on the same floor with him. Which is selfish, I know, but it is true. I cannot help it. Things either feel too quiet and I get anxious or he starts talking to himself and I get irritated. Either way, I wind up leaving. I don’t know if this offends him yet.

But I was reading, grading papers for the English survey class I assistant teach, when I heard the cheeping—*cheep, cheep*—that I first thought was just a ringing in my ears, but then I realized: it was coming from the walls, high up near the ceiling. Baby birds? *Cheep, cheep*. And for a second it reminded me of the four years in a row—third through seventh grade—in which my Catholic grade school science classes were required to hatch a bunch of chicks from a half-dozen farm eggs and a space-age-looking catalogue incubator. Under the watchful eyes of an oil-on-canvas Jesus and Sister Mary Cecilia, it was supposed to teach us about the miracle of life, God’s grace, the circle of existence and other assorted holinesses. But in the end, for whatever reason, only two or maybe three of the eggs ever hatched and actually brought forth life, chicks that we were required to give up anyway on account of our general inability to care for them, because, otherwise, we might have to see them die, and this wasn’t on the curriculum.

I put down the stack of papers and knocked on the wall, thinking that that might do something. The cheeping had become louder, more consistent, and I wondered if the birds had just hatched within my walls, with me sitting there, grading papers, clueless. In those four years of grade school, I’d never actually witnessed a single chick breaking through its shell. I’d just arrive one day and find them there—the fluffy yellow hatchlings blinking and shuddering about sort of cutely—inspect the discarded shells and just trust that someone else had seen it happen. *Cheep, cheep*. I knocked on the wall again, and it didn’t do anything, but I was charmed. There was life in this house now, I thought rather obtrusively, and this put me in a puzzled but pleasant mood. I wanted to share it with Desmond. I moved to the bottom of the stairway.

“Desmond!” I shouted.

“What?” he said.

“Come downstairs!”

“What?”

“Come downstairs! There’s something I want to show you.”

“What?” he said.

“Just come on!” I said, and I thought I heard him sigh. But, in spite of myself, I ignored the thought and smiled at the springy squeal of the floorboards buckling as he wheeled himself to the top of the stairs. Without a word he slid himself onto the weird metal contraption, hit a switch, and inched down the stairs. It made a grinding noise, loud and crass, like something big and metallic being tossed about in a blender. For the longest time, I’ve wanted to say something to Desmond about how invasive and rude the machine feels—like another body in the house, a ghost or a sloppy roommate I rarely see—but I haven’t. I held the wheelchair at the bottom of the steps steadily as he half-lifted himself, half-fell into it.

“This had better be good,” he said, and I pushed him over to the wall.

“Listen,” I said.

Cheep, cheep. Cheep, cheep.

“Birds?” he said, sounding perplexed. An eyebrow arched and he leaned forward in his seat, trying, it seemed, to touch an ear to the wallpaper, but even then he didn’t seem as pleased by the birds as I was. The look on his face was intimidating, stern, bothered. But I smiled anyway, I smiled and I smiled and I knocked on the wall again. At least he didn’t seem disappointed.

“Yes,” I said. “Baby birds.”

“Birds?” he asked. “Not bats?”

“I don’t know. Aren’t bats nocturnal?”

He didn’t respond, so I knocked again, softly.

“Why are you knocking?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you know what kind of birds they are?” His brow sunk and he seemed to be concentrating hard.

“Nope,” I said. “I don’t think so.”

We asked Ira.

During that awkward six-and-a-half-week period in between Desmond’s diagnosis and collapse, Ira was here almost every other day. An aging bachelor, balding, and occasionally redneck but a nice guy, Ira was—and still is—living off of some

strange government pension, the origins of which neither my husband nor myself are quite certain. Desmond theorizes that it has something to do with Agent Orange or perhaps recalled pharmaceuticals, but whatever it is, Ira doesn't work. And sitting around his modest mock Tudor all by his lonesome, he told us, gets pretty boring after the first hour or two—so, sure Ira could come over, fix a lunch or two, talk about guy stuff with Desmond because that was what sick guys needed: guy stuff to talk about. Cars, wrestling, women, guns—I don't know. But things that kept a man feeling young and stupid and sane.

Ira said all of this with a careful smile and gave my arm an uncomfortable rub that lasted a little too long.

"My husband isn't necessarily going to die," I heard myself to say.

"Oh, I know," Ira said, taking his hand away. His eyes glittered with a cold innocence for a moment and both of his eyebrows flew up in a way that left me feeling guilty. "I know. Oh no, I understand."

Desmond told me later, "I don't need a goddamned babysitter."

"He's not a babysitter," I said. "He's just going to help and keep you company."

"Help with what?"

"You," I said. "And cleaning. And fixing stuff when it needs fixing."

"Nothing around here needs fixing."

"Something will. Eventually."

"And where the hell are you going to be?"

"Work," I said, feeling defiant, "because some of us don't have the option."

Around the time when a tingling in the arms that we'd thought might have been Carpal Tunnel actually turned out to be a rare and severe form of multiple sclerosis, Desmond sort of stopped going to class, canceling maybe half of his seminars for the rest of the semester, and almost all of his lectures. Luckily, we were only three weeks or so away from the end of the academic year, so the administration didn't take too much notice, and yet, at the same time, no one was particularly happy with the situation. But this was just one of many readjustments that seem tiny now in comparison to the ones that came after: the depression, the sleep-

lessness, the zero tolerance for the country doctors who couldn't seem to tell him what exactly was going wrong. Or why.

By this point, he'd already sat and squirmed through so many biopsies and x-rays and MRIs and EMGs that he'd even begun to adopt a new collection of features, a new face to go with his new treacherous body—dreary, tempered and rigid as opposed to soft and fluid and open like the countenance of the man I'd married. This face of an ill man, a victim, a justified shrew, clearly deflected any challenges you could possibly pose to his right to do whatever he wanted, because hey, Fate had wronged him—not you.

So, a semester later, when a pain like a million pricking needles filled the entirety of his legs, woke him up early on the first day of classes, and told him to skip his first lecture, I didn't say anything. And I didn't say anything when he'd decided to skip the next lecture, and the lecture after that, and the lecture after that, and so on until the university president finally had to step in himself. And, in retrospect, this was probably a smarter move than I think anyone ever gave Desmond credit for, because, four weeks later, Ira came over to find Desmond in a ball of flesh and bone at the bottom of the steps. An ambulance was called. I came home to an empty house. And, since then, I've always tried to be optimistic.

Better to have it happen here at home rather than behind a lecture podium, I always tell myself, because I mean, what the hell would those kids have done? How would they have known what to do?

“We're not even sure if they're hawks or not,” I say.

“We know that they're hawks.”

“I mean, what does Ira know?”

“They're hawks, Laura.”

“They could be endangered. We don't know.”

“Either way they're pests,” he says.

“Hawks aren't pests,” I say.

“Any animal living in this house that isn't a pet is a pest.”

“Says who?”

“Says me. Will you pass me the matches?” he asks, but then he remembers that I won't and says, “Never mind.” With a little hop and a reach that I think amazes us both, he manages to grab the long box of torch matches that we keep on the mantle amid our old tennis trophies and photographs of family. I look into

the fireplace and count five pieces of wood and two starter logs which, to me, feels like a small bonfire. I realize that soon this will all be in flames and final.

“Why couldn’t we call the Humane Society or something?”

“And have them tear up my house in order to save a bunch of stupid birds?”

“Well what if you kill them?” I say. “What if you kill three baby birds?”

“I’m not trying to kill them.”

“But what if you do?”

“I think I’ll learn to live with myself.”

“Well then who are you going to get to remove the bodies?” I say. “Because I certainly am not. I’ll have nothing to do with this. I’ve already told you. And if you leave them there, they’ll stink and will probably attract buzzards or something—and they’re hawks, too, you know. What then? Huh? What are you going to do then? Build another fire? Who are you going to get to pull out a ladder and climb up on the roof and remove those bodies? Because you certainly can’t and I certainly won’t.”

He is quiet for a second, a long match poised over the sandpaper running along the side of the box. He says, “Was that supposed to be a joke?”

It wasn’t supposed to be a joke, his helplessness; I didn’t laugh. But then the guilt pangs return and I feel my insensitivity so clearly that it could be balancing on the tip of my nose. I feel apprehensive, and want to deny something, but I let the silence between his last words and my next few stretch on for far too long to salvage any sort of comfort. His back is to me, his hands still holding the match to the side of the box, unmoving. One of us needs the other to say something, but there’s nothing there. He begins striking the match, which crackles tersely for a second and then dies. They’re old matches. They’ve been around since we moved in.

“I can’t watch this,” I say, leaving.

“Fine,” he says, striking the match. It doesn’t catch.

“I have work to do,” I say.

“Okay,” he says, striking again.

“There’s work to do,” I say, though I really just need to leave.

“Fine.”

Taking out the trash, I trip over a raised brick on our patio and fall, skin the heels of my palms and twist my ankle. “Ow, shit,” I say, but no one hears me. I stand up, brush the soil and dust from the thighs of my jeans, and inspect my hands, which are ruddy and decorated with strips of torn skin. But there is no blood. “Jesus Christ,” I say, upset not because of the increasing sting, but because of the scarring that may or may not take place.

I pick up the two black garbage bags, set off towards the green plastic can stationed in the back alley, and find myself limping. I get there. I open up the can, which smells heavily of spoiled milk and sewage. I toss in the two big bags of rubbish at my sides, close the lid, and head back towards home.

I don’t know when I start tearing up, but the next thing I know I am bawling into one of my freshly-skinned fists and sitting on one of the green plastic garden chairs that we keep on the patio. These chairs, I forgot to turn them over before the showers last night, so the seat of my pants is wet from a puddle that I don’t see before I sit down and this, for some reason, makes things feel worse. The problem is I am not quite sure why I am crying—Desmond, the hawks, myself—or if there is any reason at all. It is a cry that is not hard or painful, but makes the muscles of my face ache in a way that leaves me feeling the tears are more forced than suffered. My neck is tense, stiff, but I look up and catch sight of the red brick chimney stretching up like a raised finger from the one-story addition to our two-story home. The grimy gray beginnings of Desmond’s miniature bonfire have just begun to spill from the lip. For a moment, I think I can hear the cheeping of the triplets suffocating inside the brick digit. Through my blurry eyes, I imagine them burning, screaming for a mother, for help and I wonder if the mother’s abandoned them, or if she is in there too, chirping out her chorus of desperation alongside theirs. I wonder where the father hawk is, how this family got to be here in the first place, if the mother will have the strength enough and the speed enough to carry the young away, or if it is even possible to pack up a nest, some kids, and some eggs and move on. I wonder if the baby hawks themselves will somehow find the panicked courage to sprout the right feathers and fly. And maybe then Desmond won’t seem so bad.

A clap of thunder resonates from somewhere behind me, signaling rain soon, but I don’t see any lightning. I want to sit here and watch the chimney’s lip, to search for signs of flight,

escape. Then maybe I will run inside. Soon this neighborhood in May will smell like out-of-season smoke that, for me, at least, will cling to everything. And if Desmond doesn't close the grate on the fireplace, the living room will smell, too. And more than likely he too will hold the scent of wood smoke when I lie down beside him tonight. And suddenly I begin to worry about getting sleep. I am too anxious to move. I know that he is waiting for me inside, sitting by the flames, and that it will be me who goes up to remove the bodies, if there's anything left, either tomorrow or the day after or a week from now, because who else is there? Who else will climb the ladder? Who else will peer down the chute? We can't just let things rot.

So, eventually, I stop my sobbing. I stand myself up. The smoke will just keep coming thicker, I realize. And I wouldn't see anything anyway, no matter how much I looked and no matter how much I tried, and if I did, I'd probably be lying to myself. So I make my way towards the back doors, towards home, towards the inside. I limp and I sting, but I eventually get there, and the entire time I keep wondering to myself how we'll ever know the difference between what is there and what we feel.



Elena & Todor Petev

THE BELIEVER

Mimi Chubb

Mark speaks slowly, the sound itself almost mellow, but when he nails you with his blue eyes, which rove around the group of believers, it is like being impaled, vampire-style, on a splintering, pointed stake. Actually, Mark's gaze never quite lands on anybody; it doesn't seem to seek eye contact—so it's the proximity, the almost-look, that gets you. "This is a myth and a misconception," he says. "Yeah. They tell you that without water you won't last three days. That is not true. I fasted last year, without water for seventeen days. It was a very peaceful time, a time of visions. A time of embrace by the monks, the seekers of truth—" He pauses and raises his hands and the corners of his mouth, shiny-eyed; he is hitting his humming place, where things begin to spin overtones and harmonize.

His voice eases up again. "For the first three days I was thirsty. After that, I wasn't anymore. You have to let your body adjust. The beginning of a fast is always the hardest part."

He talks on, and Azalea doesn't really concentrate, to be honest. The words are a pleasant, sweeping sensation and she lets them graze up and down her arms and legs, blow almost accidentally against her neck. She is sitting on the floor, which is getting hard and cold, and needs to be cleaned—it gets grainy, even though no one is allowed in the temple with shoes or socks on. Only bare feet. Gio, next to her, listens raptly, as if he didn't have a body at all—just a soul keening and blurring itself with Mark's, with the deity's. Gio has shaved his head on the sides, as some of the other hardcore guys have, letting his hair grow out into a shaggy ponytail mohawk. An important part of the look is fastening the ponytail with a series of leather bands. The longer it is, the more hardcore.

The look is different for women. It is about soft, motherly spirituality—in the sense of sexy-pregnant, extra curvy. It is modest, so Azalea is a little bit strategic about it. She wears saris that are a little bit sheer, makes them a little accidental off-the-shoulder, so you've got that stretch of shoulder line, and wears things underneath that cling or that push up her breasts. Some of

the other girls have pierced noses, and most of the other women are middle-aged.

They get new names—like Indira, or Raina, or Gio—except for Mark, whose spiritual name is so sacred as to be secret. Her name is Naima. She picked it out at some point, when they asked her if a spiritual name had been revealed to her. She'd thought about it already, of course, so she'd nodded and smiled and said it out loud—and she had been welcomed with her new name. Naima, because it sounded to her a little bit like a hiss and a groan, like something feverish. Then later on she had seen a real donkey, at the Church of St. Thomas's nativity scene/petting zoo, and it had opened its mouth and hee-hawed. The hee-haw did not sound like "hee-haw"; it sounded like na-eee-ma, half-yodeled, half-screamed, in an anxious, pining cadence.

The temple's little gift table sells cardboard pictures of Kali, the many-armed goddess of sex and death. In the picture she is blue and bodacious, with a faint smile, stepping on a man's head with her bangled foot and brandishing a knife. The man is expressionless and more crudely drawn than the goddess, probably because his skull is about to break. There is a golden retriever on Azalea's street, who is always smacking toddlers over with her tail, joyously and obliviously, and who carries around an old, brown-ing tennis ball, soaked in drool. Azalea had always thought the dog's name was Callie, and then one day a reminder from a vet that it was time to book a flea dipping had been left, mistakenly, in her mailbox—addressed to Family of Kali Bennett.

Azalea has not been part of the temple for too long; she's really just gotten to the point where she's fully integrated and accepted. She started going the summer after high school, when things had seemed to be fraying. Everyone was getting ready to leave home, their phone voices more and more distant. Her high school friends had been soft and sugary, like neatly decorated, flawlessly baked cupcakes. She had been probably the sweetest, cutest, most wholesome one, actually, round and doe-eyed, but then it turned out that somehow they'd all gotten higher grades, or had more money, or something. Everyone was going to college somewhere else, and buying paper lamps to hang from the ceilings of their dorm rooms, except for her. She would be going to community college, taking a dance class and a psychology class and a Spanish class.

She had happened upon the temple trying to park to get down

to the beach one day in midsummer. Her friend, June, had been mad scientist-obsessed with going off to school tan, constantly appraising her color in the sideview mirrors with wild eyes. They had ended up squeezing in, painstakingly and creepingly, between an SUV and a tattered old Bug painted red with messy black dots (to look like a ladybug) on Acacia Lane. Acacia Lane ran parallel to Pacific Coast Highway, just behind the gas station, the one with the ramshackle cottage next to it, that you had to climb to via winding steps made out of rotting boards, with split-apart surfboards lying around.

It was actually weird that she hadn't noticed it before. It had jacaranda trees exploding all over and a sign out front, advertising Gauranga's Vegetarian Restaurant (the temple's main source of revenue). "Temple of Hare Krishna," the sign said as well, in a slanty black script—the kind of lettering you'd see on a sign for "Ali Baba's Shish Kebab." The building was unassuming from the outside, smeary stucco like so many other places, but when she returned by herself and went inside she discovered the space of it all, of the temple itself—vast, gym-smelling, dusty, gilded. Her first impression had been, vaguely, of that dry salty feeling of skin that has sweated and dried and become breezed and purged, a feeling of open space. Then she had seen Mark.

Now he has just finished his sermon, and they are all rising. She pulls herself up; she starts to chant. She lets her eyes shine. She smiles. When they chant, the whole temple seems to grow brighter—the prayer banners on the walls seem to glitter, and the case containing plastic diorama models showing man's path to enlightenment seems to shrink away, less tarnished and off-putting. The diorama men look like purplish, rubbery gorillas. They chant Hare Krishna. They say the name of the deity. The chanting is supposed to build. When it gets to the right part she starts to sway, and then later on to dance, gliding-leaping from foot to foot, so that her bangles jangle in time to the chant. Everyone's flesh begins to rattle and warm, the floor is full of stomps and vibrations. Gio pounds it on a drum. And the sound is enormous, the booming, and crunching, and jingling, and the voices, piecing together and crumbling apart all at once. It might be celestial, not that she would really know. She doesn't believe.

She couldn't say quite why she came in the first time, but she kept coming because of Mark. Mark is gorgeous, with a naked skull that she wants to kiss as if her lips were softly feathered,

beating wings. The night after she'd first gone for prayer and meditation she'd had an odd dream, in which she'd only been able to make peculiar peeping sounds, and she'd been very, very small. The dream later explained to her, with irregular dream-logic, that she was a dead bird, downy and helpless. Then Mark had come, and he'd wrapped her in a rose petal and buried her.

Mark has vowed celibacy, so it's a long shot. For a while she'd worked on convincing herself that what she really wanted was spiritual communion, discipleship—but no. What she wants from Mark is sex—sex that is hard and feverish and so sweaty that they would both shake, that their tongues would swell, that they would be completely purged of every drop of water and left in a visionary state. This is not like sex she's ever had, which has been hand-job-in-the-backseat-type stuff—this is imagined—open eyes in the velvety dark. It's not a very wholesome thing to want, either. Maybe she isn't a very wholesome girl, after all, and that idea has a happy hum to it.

But at the same time she loves the temple and the people. They are all so nice. Gio is quiet and blushing, but when he pounds the drum, that is his moment, and it's kind of wonderful. Radha, whose husband, Jerry, has a dirt and demolition company, taught her how to make kheer and samosas for the restaurant, and she has a slow, worried manner that makes Azalea want to smile and stroke her. Azalea thought up getting a wire display rack and selling beaded necklaces and bangles at the little store-table, and lots were sold and everyone thought it had been a great idea. Mark had furrowed his brow and commended her on helping the temple community. She feels so kind here, as if she had become a cupcake the size of a cloud. She could just offer up her whole sweet, unbelieving, maybe even poisonous heart, with its strange lustful plumes of smoke, and other chords, uneven and perplexing, that seem to her to be a soft, milky, minty blue (if she had to give them a color). Her heart has been on her mind, even though the long brain lectures in her psychology class should have kicked it away—instead her heart has gotten more abstract, sneakier even. It creeps and billows like steam.

The chanting ends when Mark wills it to end. He raises his hand, and then everything ceases, and the silence is splintering and omnipotent. Mark repeats the prayer words one last time and then sends them on their way. They get up.

Azalea never feels like chattering at this moment, the world

is so oddly off-white, but Radha drapes her pillowy arm around her and asks, “How are you, Naima, honey?”

So she smiles and coos with Radha for a bit, and tells her she’s doing great. She widens her eyes and says that it’s so funny, hearing about fasting and stuff, because she drank an entire bottle of water just on her drive to the temple that morning. She giggles. She and Dalia—who’s maybe seventeen and probably won’t end up sticking around with the temple—tell each other how cute their saris are. She goes to the kitchen to help out a little bit with prepping for the Saturday lunch crowd, and realizes that it’s funny she’d know that about Dalia. Why wouldn’t she think Dalia would stay? The girl is too airy, too glassy-eyed, too into the fashion statement side of things. *Kind of like me, maybe*, she thinks, and wonders a little bit more.

She goes outside and waters plants in the vegetable garden, and the sun is hot and bright, and it feels good to be wearing a sari.

Mark can be very laid-back, too, and it’s hard to decide which is hotter—Mark chilled out, or Mark lit up. In an ideal world, Mark would fuck her with spiritual fervor, with his blood full of little blue electric volts, but he seems softer, more possible, almost broken-winged when he’s chill, and that is lovely too. When they close the restaurant at 3:30, Mark says they ought to take a walk on the beach, afternoon chant in the water. PCH always has so much traffic they have to book it across the street, looking kind of stupid; she hikes up her sari and knows her breasts are bouncing. It is her, Mark, Radha, Gio, Mahatma, Nithya, Kavitha, and Nicole, who never had a name revealed to her. She was a constant, devoted attendee, and Mark would ask her regularly if a spiritual name had been divulged to her, and she would just purse her lips and tell him, “Nope.” Nicole has a husky, awkward voice, and whenever she moves she seems as if she might run into something by accident. She doesn’t really make conversation; she speaks when she has something to convey. Azalea likes Nicole; she is the perfect person to be sprinting across the highway next to, sandals clacking.

They head down the path to the beach. Mark is smiling; he is advising Gio on his career plans. Gio would lick Mark’s hands and gaze up at him with saucer-wide, adoring eyes if that was something you did.

“Yeah,” Mark says, “yeah, man—” and then the ocean starts

to roar and his words get blurry. You can hear the note of surfer drawl in Mark's voice, as if some surfer-chuckle might break through. He is still wearing his white linen robe, with Nepal-style buttons.

They are all laughing and happy, and she plunges her feet under the sand and spins around and dips her toes in the water, and then they chant for maybe ten minutes, with the water smashing down around them and whooshing in white and foamy. Mark's voice gets deep and loud, as if he wanted to drown out the ocean. Some people walk by and gape and keep walking.

On the way back she tries to drop in next to Mark and ask him a spiritual question, which ends up starting out, "Why do we chant?"

Mark is suddenly fierce, his blue eyes glow, and he turns to her and says, severely and paternally, "Why do we chant? We chant for enlightenment; we chant for peace; we chant for ourselves and for the deity. Chanting the name of the deity is the only way. We must chant, Naima."

Her cheeks burn, and her question had not been what she meant; it hadn't come out the way she'd meant it to, and she wishes she weren't stuck smiling here, looking down and fingering the cloth of her sari, tongue dry and caught in her mouth.

The day seems to be more burnt and smoggy than it did before. As she drives off, to her psychology class at Orange Coast Community College, she watches a woman teetering down the street as if her feet were sore. The woman is wearing ugly silver platform shoes, her hair is upswept and frizzy, and her thighs are thick and bumpy. They are ugly, ugly thighs. The woman pauses at the window of From Soul to Solo Aromatherapy and More, and then goes in. Azalea could hate her, without knowing the first thing about her.

In her class they learn about Freud, and Azalea thinks about the id on her drive home, fixating on the red glare of a traffic light. All this stuff just hanging out down there, just bubbling away—unconscious. The chanting is meant to control some of this, to enclose it and pacify it, but honestly, she's really not sure how she feels about that—about getting mellowed out that way. What would there be of her, then? It's an unpleasant, disconcerting idea, kind of like smudging the features of her face with a hard, smudgy eraser. She keeps having the bird dream, and each time

it gets better—more shivery and explicit.

She has been wearing the saris everywhere recently. She ran into some boys she'd known in high school and chatted, but they were a little quieter than they had been before. Kind of gape-eyed, actually, because the sari was too extreme to be the new thing in at Express. Now, at home, she wiggles into some jeans, which have gotten tighter since the time she gave them up so that she has to shimmy her ass around to get them on.

For her art class she needs to write a paper on an artist she responds to, with relevant pictures stapled on the back. She wants to write about Wyland, even though he's not a name that's been dropped in class—his pictures just seem spiritual, but also kind of sweet and whimsical, and she will buy some postcards at the gallery to attach to her paper.

It's actually gratifying to be back in her other clothes. Guys driving by her in the left lane shout something and grin. She runs her fingertips along the metal of the door of her car. When she walks up the hill toward the gallery, people check her out, and it's really only about her breasts, not her religion. *Maybe I could get married*, she thinks suddenly, and it's a shocking little idea. She imagines herself going to morning Pilates classes and making strawberry-blueberry pies that you have to stick in the freezer for a while. Her husband is, for now, a faceless and hazy thing, like a suit that dances around of its own volition (probably on TV). Babies. No more temple.

She is smiling and chewing a bit on her lip, wiggling more than usual as she walks. Then she goes into the gallery, and there is Mark, looking at *Dolphin Play II* with his neck jutted forward and his nose up, so that he seems to be peering at a little eel in the left corner of the picture, rather than the little boy riding the dolphin in the middle. Her wiggle disappears and she freezes, and realizes what she's wearing and can she just turn around and leave before Mark sees her. But Mark turns his head and says, "Naima," his voice weirdly flat.

"Hi Mark," she says, and brushes her hair back and walks over to him. He is wearing a loose Tibet shirt and cotton pants.

"I didn't know you liked Wyland," she says, and giggles nervously.

"Do you have a favorite painting?" he asks her, and he sounds almost earnest, and the question comes out as oddly personal, so that she is able to look up at him through her eyelashes and

meet his gaze.

“I like *Magic Lagoon*,” she says. “It just makes me so happy—because the kids are about to play with the dolphins, they’re on shore and the dolphins are swimming, and it’s so pretty at night, too, you know.” She giggles; she isn’t quite getting out what she means. “I just think sometimes the happiest thing is just the anticipation—you know, like Christmas morning.”

Then she could just bite herself for talking about Christmas.

“Do you have a favorite?” she asks him, and it comes out piping and juvenile.

He doesn’t answer, turning back to look at the painting. “Are you on your way to the temple?” he asks her.

“Yes,” she says, and the roundness of the word seems funny, in the way that you can make yourself question your own name by saying it too many times.

On the way up the hill, about a million people are going by. Some of them have sand in their hair. They carry smoothies and towels and they stroll, sucking in the light and stopping to exclaim at the little wooden kitty cats in shop windows. It is a beautiful day. Then Azalea just asks,

“Is it hard staying celibate?”

“It’s a spiritual commitment I’ve made to myself,” Mark says. “It symbolizes something. I’m reaching toward purity.”

Mark turns toward her. “I think you understand, Naima. I think you understand. I see you seeking the same things, sacrificing in the same ways. We are reaching out for the same thing, we are learning and following—”

But when she looks at him, startled and delighted, he is looking up at some vague distant point (approximately at the garbage cans in front of a pizza place), and not at her at all. His brow furrows and he walks forward more quickly, clenching the muscles in his shoulders.

“Wyland’s paintings—that’s brotherhood and peace. The deep blue sea and *brotherhood*, man. But that’s how—in the sea, with whales, man. With whales, and kids....” He trails off, and with a little pop in her heel Azalea recognizes the feeling—having a half-formed idea turn sticky and sour in your mouth, so that you want to just spit it aside quickly and pray it doesn’t leave a little silver trail down your chin.

They walk past a swimsuit shop that has been there forever,

that has always had exactly the same window display: a funny plastic mannequin with a big curly synthetic blonde wig and no features to speak of on its plastic face, wearing a jangly metal bikini that makes its breasts look like cones. There is also a baby blue tank top hanging up next to it, that says, “Good Girls Go to Heaven. Bad Girls Go to Laguna Beach, California.” It’s cute. She would buy it if she didn’t live nearby herself—if, of course, she wasn’t still doing the sari thing.

She is smiling at it a little bit, still looking in the window, when a guy sitting at a picnic table in front of the bookstore next door calls out, “Hey baby, you looking at that? I buy you that.”

Then he laughs hard, doubling up a little, and waves to Mark. “Hey, man,” he says in a different voice. “Mark, man, what’s up?”

“Jack, man,” says Mark, slouching and smiling, the skin near his eyes crinkling, his body kind of swaying in the way the guy’s is. The guy has long, shaggy, saltwater hair, and mirror sunglasses so that you can’t see his eyes. He is tanned to the point of being brick-colored, and he’s shirtless and covered in soft-looking blond hair.

“Who’s your woman?” Jack says, smiling ironically at Azalea, and then Mark straightens up and gestures to her awkwardly.

“This is Naima. She’s a believer—” he crackles, but Jack stalls him out by shooting him a big grin. Jack winks, low and fluttering.

“Yeah, I can see that. How’s God? How’s the faith? How’s your soul, man?” He laughs again, and it is a lovely, contagious, loud and patient laugh.

Azalea smiles in spite of herself, even though Jack is still staring at her like an asshole—he’s hamming it up. “Yeah,” he says. “Our baby Mark has always been the believer, y’know. The sweetie-pie. Do you remember, man, when you banged that one bitch in TJ, and you felt bad ’cause you didn’t get her any money? Yeah, we had to drag our baby away to keep his change in his pockets.”

Jack laughs his same sweet laugh, and then asks, “So God, baby? Tell me the answer?”

Mark’s forehead has crimped; he’s smiling a terse little smile.

Jack laughs louder and longer. Then he moves his head to show that he’s looking Mark up and down, and he says, “Oh, we

love our baby, but look at him—he doesn't know shit!"

The air smells like gasoline and sea-water. She stares at Mark, who is carrying himself like a little boy—although of course he isn't, he's standing up tall and glint-eyed after all. But he is in fact falling down the stairs, just the same, with his own bruised-up body—*belief, disbelief, belief, disbelief*. These words make a laughing or a humming beat as she says them inside her brain. There is an awkward silence, which Azalea is unable to cope with; her breathing has gotten so dusky-feeling.

"I have to go, man," Mark says at last. "I have to go. Good to see you, man."

He nods his head and they slap shoulders. Jack looks at her, and Azalea steps up to him, but he ends up just grinning, leaving his hands palms-down on the back of the bench. "You watch your back, baby," he tells her, a sweet little growl tucked into his voice. She has to scramble slightly to catch up to Mark, who has already started walking away, and they leave Jack sitting there, soaking up the heat.

Mark is quiet and serious for the last little bit of their walk, and although his face isn't screwed up she can feel his scowl; the pieces of his face are cramping together, more taut than usual, and there must be blush-heat, she realizes, wanting to speak the word out loud, in his cheeks. He can't quite bring himself to look at her. Neither of them says anything. She looks at the ground for a bit, at the cracked sidewalk with blades of grass slamming their way through, senseless and glistening and juicy. A spilt ice cream cone lies on its side, the paper partway ripped off and curling up. The way the sidewalk is laid out she can take one step in each square.

Then she lets her eyes sneak over in Mark's direction, and then she lets her head turn and bob and her stride shorten, so that each step swings forward slowly. She lets herself drink him in with her eyes. Then she lets her gaze catch wherever it chooses—on a flash of silver gum wrapper, the shimmer of a plastic shower curtain through one of the windows of the cottage, on the temple—but every little flash seems to end up leading back to Mark, who seems to pick up sparks. He cuts into the temple ahead of her, walking quickly, and she can see that there is some sweat-haze on his forehead.

There will be chanting in two hours. When she gets inside,

Radha is there manning things. Her face wrinkles up when she sees Azalea.

“Naima, sweetheart, are you all right? You look like you saw a ghost!” she says, and then, after a half-beat, “Are you angry or something, or did something happen?” She is still about ready to bust out one of her big cackling laughs; she just needs the word.

Azalea doesn't give it—she half-smiles and gestures a bit; something ought to be said but it just doesn't seem to matter enough that it actually come out. She follows Mark into the temple, walking right past Radha and letting the door close softly.

The temple is very quiet, so that their feet fall heavily. It is dim and gray with the curtains drawn, and you can smell traces of incense. Azalea is going to ask him something about Jack, so that she can grab onto it and keep it or something like that, but when he turns around his eyes look so deep and marbled and troubled, or maybe just serious, the way they usually do. Azalea is quite collected. She reaches one hand up, so she can touch his skull, and then she kisses him. His mouth is cool, and it doesn't resist, and she pretends that her whole id is just flowing out of her, in a long and radiant beam.

Then, to her surprise, he reciprocates, with completely startling need and urgency, grabbing onto her left arm and then her waist and then her ass. She ends up tumbling onto the floor, and she can feel on impact where she will have a bruise. Her heart is racing and incensed and swollen, but the moment is stilting—tumbling out of dream-logic into life, a little bit. She is about to fuck Mark, and in the temple—with her back pressed up against the path-to-enlightenment display, to tell the honest truth. So for a moment she is kind of addled and vacant, detached from what's going on and wondering even as her clothes come off. Then they hear Gio's voice, they hear the door begin to creak its way open, and Mark kind of throws her clothes at/over her and leaps up himself, and when the door is open Gio sees Mark in the corner, lighting incense, and Naima, with a strange expression on her face, sitting awkwardly on the floor. Her clothes look a little rumpled.

Azalea gets up and goes into the foyer, where the shop is, and sits down and lets Radha talk to her. After a few minutes she gets up to pee in the temple's ladies' room, and she wishes she could bring her nose to the indentation of her throat, to see

if she could catch the scent of Mark.

She drives home without staying for chanting. The radio plays something loud and fast, and she speeds.

She stays away from the temple for a week. Things had felt so emblazoned and fantastic at her moment of revelation, like the eerie green and electric pink negative of something, but then they had gotten steadier again and more sour and kind of immense. A hamburger on the drive home was cold and greasy, sinking in her stomach like a sack of cold metal money. The garage door had trembled and groaned its way open when she clicked the button, and she'd thought, *There is no god for you*. When she'd clicked it closed, it got stuck in the middle, half-bent, and only brought itself down after stuttering and creaking around for a while. She started crying about it, about how hopeless it was, and she was only able to stare, speechless, when the mailman told her that the bush around her mailbox was full of wasps, that one of them had stung him. She forgets to rinse the conditioner out of her hair on Tuesday. On Wednesday she doesn't blow-dry, and she gets a C- on her art paper, mostly because she had never actually bought the postcards. Each night she has the bird dream, except it gets stuck—it's actually completely different. She is still a dead bird, but she is unable to even make the peeping sounds, and she is surrounded by an odd, bluish-black smoke. Mark has vanished.

On Friday she goes back. She imagines waves of unease swirling around, emanating off of everybody, but nobody looks at her or says anything. Everyone seems absorbed in Mark's sermon. She focuses on his body, as if she might be able to grab one of his arms with her brain and make him break a stick of incense, or something else mind-bending like that, but his body is remote. He is remote. She closes her eyes.

* * *

Cimbree has come to the temple for the first time and she closes her eyes when everyone else does, although she opens them into slits in order to check out the girl next to her—blonde and fleshy and gauzy all at once—who looks exactly the way she would want to look in some kind of a dream. She looks holy and sexy at the same time; she looks like the goddesses on the cool posters at the kiosk. Cimbree has acne and braces and bony elbows and brown bangs. It's hard. She heard the chanting outside before, just passing by (a chance quicksanded, of course, by fate), and

it cannoned up and down her spine and crystallized the lobes of her ears—and there is something so potent about repetition, about place. That, she knows, is where God lives. Cimbree felt compelled to come—to come for real. And she did, after she got out of cross-country practice, and with her friend Katie along for social justification.

So it does not seem out of keeping with anything when, in the middle of the chanting, the beautiful girl next to her suddenly shudders, then makes an odd, surprised sound that starts like a shriek and turns into something more like a peep, her back arching like a bow, her head thrown back as if someone were ripping on her hair, hauling down hard. The beautiful girl's arms flail out to the sides, then her hands reach for her own breasts, and then she falls backward totally limp, her head conking hard on the floor and her body rolling over to the side.

Everyone's reaction is what lets Cimbree know things have gotten weird. She is actually thrilled, delighted to stare. This is the realest thing that has happened to her since her car accident a year ago, when she'd been wheeled through the white hospital on a trolley, full of searing pain—but what that's gotten to be now is just her little plastic ID bracelet, which she put in a drawer and saved.

The beautiful girl comes to, with the minister guy propping up her head in his hands. She sits up, and her face is ecstatic and wondering. Tears pour down her face. She rises and begins to chant, whirling around breathlessly fast and slamming on a tambourine and sobbing. And when the minister guy reaches out to touch her she snarls at him, her hand snaps up to his face, and then she scratches him! He's bleeding! They all bow to her and chant, and it's uncomfortable and kind of awkward and stupid and grainy to have your forehead pressed to the floor, the way you do when you bow. Cimbree would like to sit up, but she is too excited and moved for that.

Cimbree comes back the next week and then the week after that and the week after that. After that first time, the same minister guy still talks for a while, but then the beautiful girl leads the chanting, stomping her feet so hard that the floor booms. But when she is not stomping around she smiles serenely, her eyelashes thick and black as paintbrush bristles—something about her face makes you look at her nostrils, and then notice the shapely slope of her cute little nose. Cimbree learns her name

is Naima, that she had a vision of the deity during the chanting, that she is maybe a little bit deity herself, and that she and Mark have chosen to unite their souls in the deity, which she assumes also has something to do with their bodies.

Since her vision Naima will get struck by the deity at random times. She cries onto the pansies in the temple garden while Cimbree helps her weed, and Cimbree realizes after Naima wanders off, smiling with her weird joy-tears, that what she was crying over was a hairy yellow millipede, scuffling around in the dirt. Cimbree courts Naima, kind of. She learns that she likes Razzmatazz smoothies from Juice It Up, and she gets into the habit of picking one up on her way to the temple. That way, Naima will smile at her, electric and maternal. Naima always sucks a little too hard, so the straw makes awkward bubbling noises. Once her sari hiked up and Cimbree saw that she was wearing a thong that said “Ain’t Love Grand?” and that her bikini line was neatly waxed.

Although people remember her talking, saying lots of stuff (about what? Oh, you know, whatever), now she seems just to chant, or deal with occasional logistical details in a beaded-honey voice, wandering through things with teardrop smiles. Cimbree gets to helping her garden a lot, and when Cimbree brings a metal revolving postcard rack for the mini-shop, Naima gives her a soft, jasmine-smelling hug. Naima has Cimbree take her car to the grocery store to pick some things up for her—kitty litter, plastic-wrapped six-packs of Mariner’s Delight cat food, Kleenex, cilantro, birth control pills—and she finds, in the backseat of Naima’s car, wedged under the floor mats, an essay from some psychology class, dated three weeks ago and entitled “My Faith.” It got a D+. She reads it voraciously, without even bothering to get out of her awkward squatted-over position.

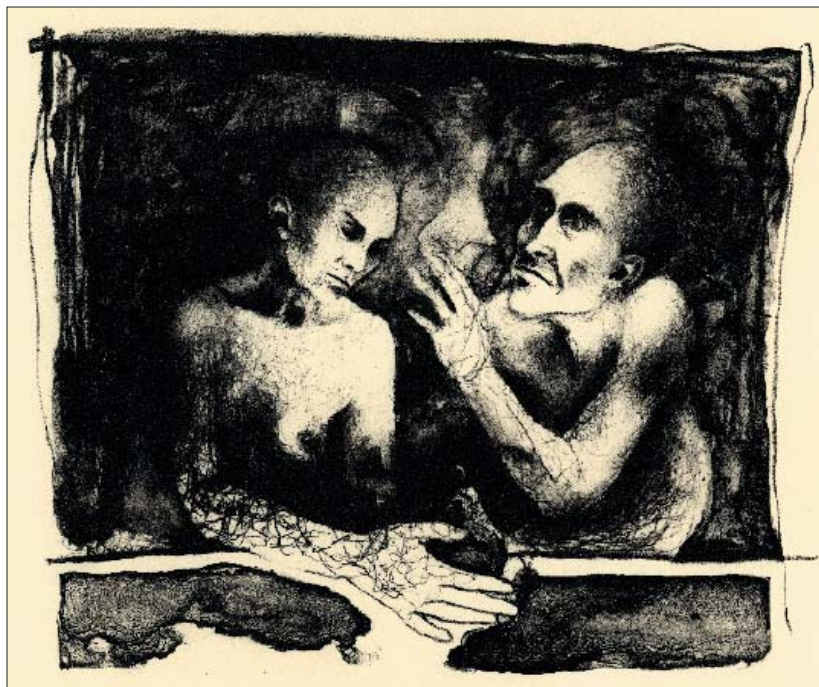
I believe in the chanting. The deity enters me and I explode. I explode. I explode. This is like the twisting of the knife—the deity is like a deer and a woman and a lover. It’s kind of sexual. The ego and the id don’t matter. They’re all me. It’s just me, and the closest thing to what I am is a comet, or this (see attached), or maybe not. There is individual personality variation. I’m different—I’m nicer, kind of.

It was a pretty feeble little essay, done in pen, with a xerox of one of the Kali pictures attached. It looked like she’d written it quickly, and there were some crossed-out lines at the end as if

she'd gotten dissatisfied and given up. It doesn't actually make any sense, but there is something urgent about it. She lets it lie, tattered, next to her on the passenger seat, and she wedges the car back into a space. A bush creeps out and scratches at the window, hooks into her arm a little bit, and it occurs to her how miraculous, how perplexing it is—the little reddish pink line on her skin.

She walks back through the rear garden plot where Naima was, and she isn't there anymore, and then Cimbree steps up on a bench to look through one of the long side windows that light up the temple, to see if anyone's still in there, and she freezes: through the smudgy window, frosty like a drinking glass, are Mark and Naima. Mark is saying something, his hand drops to her thigh and then lifts again, in a talking way. It is talking he means—his whole body seems full of what he's saying. Naima has the end of her sari in her left hand, and she kneads it slowly, twisting it around her fist. Naima nods her head a little bit, along with the kneading, and her neck seems to glide upward. Eventually Mark gets up and walks away and Naima turns, her body loose, so that she's sit-slouching, turning toward the window Cimbree's looking into.

Cimbree realizes what she's doing. She's watching. She's peeping in. And so when Naima turns to her for a moment she gets huge, as watchers do—godlike, unknown things. She also blushes, and prickles, and panics, but before she can make herself leap down away from the window she realizes that Naima doesn't see her after all. Naima is just smiling faintly, just sitting, slowly blinking, and she sees her eyes move across the prayer banners on the wall, considering them in turn, and glide over the window. It's the frosted glass, it must be, but Cimbree can't shake the sudden peculiar feeling that she has vanished altogether, or wasn't ever born in the first place.



Elena & Todor Petev

UNTAMED

Caitlin Giaimo

He liked the way her ears uncurled like the yawning fist of a chimpanzee. Smooth and serrated on the inside ridge, like the edge of a butter knife; belonging somewhere between the domestic and the savage, the dangerous and the safe. She ran her thumb across her inside ear, sawing back and forth, and he wanted to check her fingers, thinking it would have cut her, but nothing did. Those cushioned fingers were like the padded feet of wolves, and she was too. She was soft but somehow tough.

They went one Sunday to the zoo, and he half expected her to riot and roar, jumping in with the animals or dramatically trying to set them free. Instead, she just looked sad and placed her padded hand against the Plexiglas—zoos don't use bars anymore—and later bought some cotton candy. It seemed out of place, the cotton candy. Maybe because it looked too youthful for her adult body, or maybe because of how commercialized it was, how civilized against the landscape of her wildness.

That night he tried to stay awake, his body taut and attentive as he heard her crawl out of bed at midnight, his ears primed to the sound of her pacing downstairs in the kitchen. He lay still as he heard the refrigerator door open, the faucet run, the quiet tread of feet stop then start again. He fell asleep to the rhythm. The next morning he sat at the breakfast table, flipping through headlines, expecting to read about a break-in at the zoo, an elaborate attempt to aid the animals in their escape, a frantic account from zoo personnel who arrived at the pillaged scene of swinging doors to empty cages. But he found nothing, only articles about the budget cut; a case of vandalism at a school, another at a graveyard; a car accident.

She crept down the stairs an hour later, smoothing her hair with her bent-back wrists. She sat across from him, lapping up a cup of coffee, curling her legs up on the chair and hiding them under the pelt of a terrycloth robe. She said nothing but her expressive eyes blinked back at him from behind the ceramic mug. It

was tilted slightly up and her nose was buried in the dark and steaming cave of the half-filled cup like a snout, with only those deep eyes glinting out, unsmiling and pensive. He wondered if she was feeling affectionate or predatory. Visually, he traced the inside edge of her ears and the soft creases in her forehead. He flipped backwards through the paper once more, skimming the headlines and lead paragraphs in disbelief, glancing occasionally back at her eyes, warily.

NAMES

Maureen O'Connor

We memorialize as necessary.
A smiling class photo propped
on the altar. Azalea wreaths
by the sacristy and a pipe organ
that moans with soul.
Like John the Baptist, we seek
salvation by playing at names:
She was a devoted daughter,
kind sister, quick learner,
smart student, faithful friend.

We repeat a few good platitudes:
She touched so many, she was loved so well,
please accept my condolences—
like a verbal tick,
like a birthday wish,
like a prayer wheel spinning in your hand,
like three Hallelujahs followed by an Amen.
We are in good faith. We are in denial.
We are reciting Hail Marys
on a rosary shaped like a noose.

And we ignore the rest—
a locked door, her stomach full of aspirin.
The fifteen-year-old dead
on a pink flowered bedspread,
no name for how she died.



Aprajita Anand

ROSE

Bella Tandler

I guess you can say that she was more or less doomed by her name. Rose. Prickly, pink-lipped, long-stemmed, scarlet Rose. What can you expect from a Rose in the Lower East Side shtetl of Manhattan? Moshe, Aaron, Chani: names with roots as thick as Talmud, as weighty as pack mules. They can handle it. They'll even fight for it if you ask them to. But Rose, so whimsical, so feminine—what type of anchor can a Rose have in the herring and galoshes clutter of yiddishkiet? I never understood what possessed my great-grandparents to pick such a name.

I don't remember the first time I heard about Rose. For years I was sure I'd made her up but was too frightened to ask. We weren't allowed to speak of her in crowds. No one ever told me that rule. I was born knowing it. It was first of "the ten" in the Tandler household. I heard my parents talking about her once. Her name came from behind a closed door but it made my heart race and its mystery tingled through my spine and finger-tips for a long time. It made me wonder.

Fifty years ago, Rose ran away. She left her husband, her family, her religion and decided to start over. She married a new man, built a new home, and had new kids. No one ever knew why. The adults in my family didn't speak about it. The silence gnawed at their minds and they grew paranoid—their 3000-year tradition of self-confidence shattered by the fact that someone thought there was something better. It made them defensive, made them shake too wildly in the synagogue.

But we children talked about her all the time. We sympathized, eulogized, and embellished her. We dressed her in white flowing gowns and painted our struggles on her cheeks. She was our Lilith, our home-grown mythology. During the days we'd learn about Bubby and Sarah, Rivka, Rachel: righteous women who baked challah and did charitable works. At night, we had Rose. Her name whispered under blanket covers wafted around us like exotic perfumes. Languid. Tragic. We'd suck her up. We'd get drunk on her.

My cousins who grew up in a house of girls liked to tell the

Rose story in a dreamy sing-song. They'd repeat it so often it took on ballad proportions. "Rose left because of another man," they used to say. "She fell in love with a professor while taking a literature course at the local community college. One afternoon in autumn when the leaves were burning on the trees and the smell of rotting apples and nutmeg spiced the air, Rose met her professor after class and asked him about Ophelia. So he asked her about her covered hair. A week later, when the first winter breeze turned the dying grass crunchy, Rose asked the professor about Emma Bovary and so he asked her about her husband. A month later, sitting together in his parked Ford watching flurries settle on the hood and windshield, Rose asked him about Hester Prynne and so he asked her about the sadness in her eyes. When he asked her to marry him, she agreed." They liked to tell stories like that. Romantic. Harmless. I don't think they really understood it.

You see, Rose left because she lived in a library. A scholarly home, tomes lining every wall. Three thousand years worth of scholarly works and sermons and rulebooks all piled on top of each other, the dust grew so heavy she couldn't breathe. It settled in her throat and nostrils and made her choke. Three thousand years of dust packed into her trachea and she started wheezing and coughing and gagging and her fingers turned blue and her face turned blue and her eyes bulged and her knees shook and her armpits drenched with sweat and she knew that if she didn't get outside now she would die. And so she left. The dust made her leave.

Some of us who didn't know better would tell her story with shining eyes and feel her power pulse through us. She was our matriarch, our demon goddess, godmother, muse. She was our smug, knowing smile at our parents' self-righteousness. Our mother who did know better used to stay up late sitting under the honey-colored rays of a nightlight and worry that she might come. At night she'd check the locks and all the windows twice to be sure her shadow wouldn't creep in and breathe her dark breath on our faces. But she did come. Every time one of us would fight with our mother she'd be sitting at the kitchen table staring at us. When we slammed our doors in frustration she'd be waiting on the bed to gather us in and kiss us. She'd smile back at us from the mirror every time we practiced flirting in our rooms. Some nights I was sure she was in the back of my closet with my hidden

miniskirt and jeans or folded up in the third dresser drawer under my pajamas with the Victoria Holt romances smuggled from the library. I used to see her in the car with me when I passed JFK airport and beside me when I read a good book or watched a movie and imaged myself as the heroine. I used to feel her like a heat in my eyes and shoulder blades every time I wondered if there was something more to life than this.

My aunt Rose ran away. After ten years of marriage she left everything and ran off with a goy. My great-grandparents sat Shiva for her. They took down her pictures, erased her birthday from their calendars, cut her name out of their conversations. When their grandchildren were born they named them Yaakov, Mordechai, Hillel, Eli, sturdy names with history. My grandmother's last request before she died was that Rose should not be told about her passing. She did not want her at the funeral. But she came anyway, and as we lowered my grandmother's stiffened body into the ground, the mourner's Kaddish on our lips and tears blurring our eyes, we saw Rose staring back at us from the open tomb. She shone like an angel, like Satan, like everything we'd always been warned against but wanted. And as we walked away, arms around each other and shoulders heavy with helplessness, she crawled after us. Skulking like a guilt, she crept into our calves with the moisture, wrapped tight around our stomachs with the mist. She never left us and like a fever in our bloodstream she swam through us. At nights we'd lie in bed aching, our bodies wracked with Rose-pangs needing to get out.

Rose left us and our family didn't speak about her, but every night our mothers would pray that we were satisfied. And every morning our fathers would kiss our cheeks and wonder how much of her we carry in us. When Rose left she cut a gaping wound into our family fortress. No matter how hard our parents tried they could not stuff it up, they could not erase the possibilities she opened for us. And so we dreamed of her, whispered her name, play-acted her adventures and knew that if it ever got too heavy we could leave. And we'd never be forgotten.

TO THE ARTIST

Alexandra F. Day

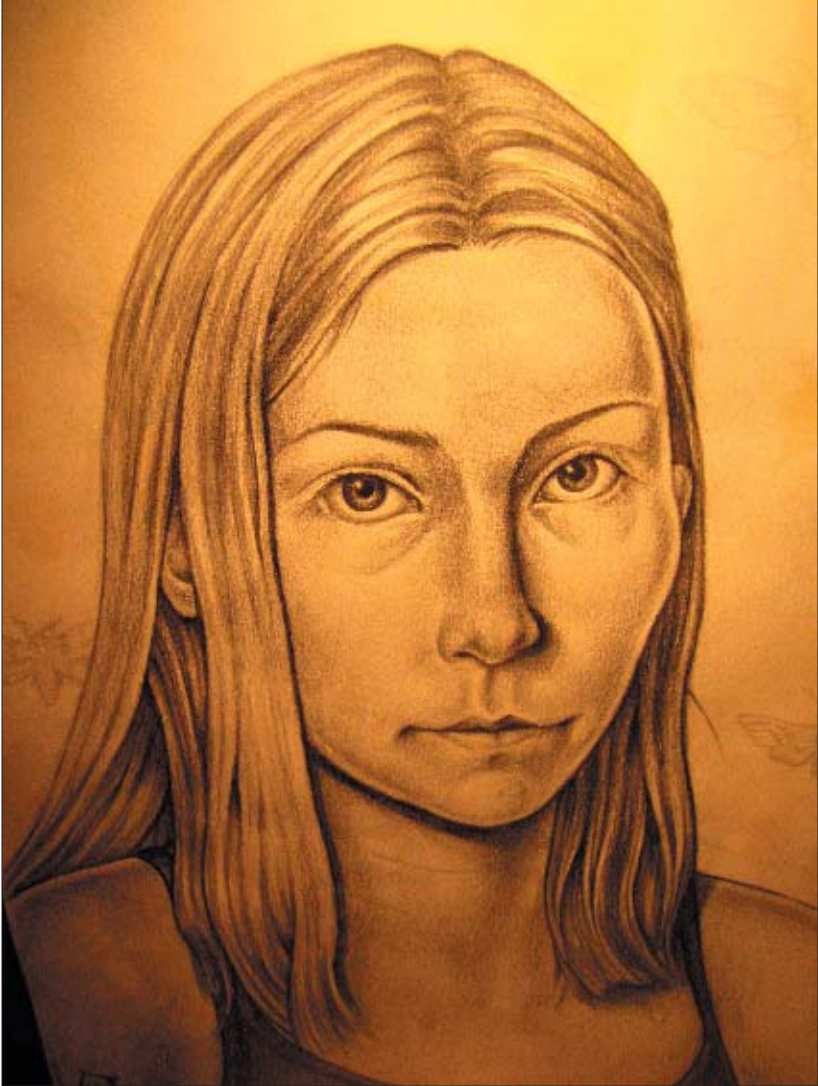
One thing that is true is your Penelope.
The black outline is anatomically sound.
I would have painted her eyes differently;
In my truth she sees a vast ocean.

With wind in her hair, she imagines sails
Because the water has been monotonously blue,
And the haunting sparkles of the sun
Do not allow her out, or him home.

You were right to draw her nude,
An empty freedom in lonely surrender.
The lack of binding binds deeper,
Great lashes of alone; she bleeds.

The truth in monochromatic sorrow
Swirls around her dark contours
As the long-haired figure bends low at cliff side
Preparing to disturb a calm ocean.

None will witness her dive.
Perhaps Fortune loved her after all,
Stirring you, a silent bard,
To mark her grave and paint her eulogy.



Allysa Adams



CONTRIBUTORS

Allysa Adams is a freshman from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania who plans to major in molecular biology.

Aprajita Anand '06 was born and raised by wolves in the heart of the Indian forest (Mogli-from-the-jungle-book style). She was found at the age of seven by indian-humans who taught her the ways of her people. This meant eight years acclimatization at the Fake-English-Accent Institute of New Delhi. After this, Aprajita set forth to Princeton in a My-Fair-Lady-esque attempt to convince people of her Britishness. Although there are some who remain undeceived, her struggle continues.

Callen Bair is a Southerner through and through, a devotee of the modernist aesthetic, an aspirant to things un-ordinary. She loves most of all things NeeNee, Stephan, and LaurLaur.

Cabell Belk is a sophomore from Charlotte, North Carolina who plans to be a Program II student in the English department. She is studying English and Spanish literature and plans to get a certificate in Latin American Studies.

Wilson Braun is a senior from Delaware.

Alfred Brown IV is not entirely sure that this “bio,” as they call it, will be as witty as all the others contained herein. He is very sure, however, that California will be welcoming him home very soon. He plans to stay put there for a very long time with a large plate of wonderfulness from El Tarasco.

Julia Cain is a Comparative Lit major, also working on certificates in Theater and Dance and Creative Writing. She is the president of the Princeton University Players and generally takes on far more theatrical endeavors than is healthy or sane. She enjoys art, writing, and writing about other people’s art. Julia also has a golden retriever named after Mark Rothko.

Mimi Chubb, occasionally known as Marianne, is an English major from California.

Alexandra F. Day uses poetry for relaxation and to explore a way of seeing the world that she might not otherwise be aware of. An

avid journalist, she is afraid of forgetting and is fascinated by words and images. She has been writing since she was small and it is more a reflex than something she elects to do. Someone once told her that “words are free” and she has been collecting them ever since.

Julia Friedlander is a junior from New York City majoring in History, whose parents suffered from the fortunate delusion that she could understand Wallace Stevens at the age of six months. She has received awards from Scholastic Inc. and the Poetry Society of America, and takes part in the Creative Writing Program at Princeton. She has a passion for traveling (the stranger the destination, the better), for espresso at 4:00 a.m., and for her friends and family who inspire her.

Caitlin Giaimo is a junior English major who is often inspired by nature, animals and Dr. Seuss.

Jessica Gross is a sophomore and plans to major in Anthropology, with a certificate in Women and Gender Studies. She lives in New York and thanks Mom, Dad and Andrew for their hugs and laughter.

Lindsey Hornbuckle is a first-year from Wilsonville, AL, a town of one traffic light and five churches somewhere southeast of Birmingham. She lives in search of the perfect pair of jeans.

Jessica Lynn Inocencio is a senior from Lytle, Texas majoring in Art & Archaeology (Program 2 Visual Arts). Once you get past the long-winded name, the major isn't so bad. For some perverse reason, she is fascinated by the violence shown in popular gangster films like the Godfather, Goodfellas, and Donnie Brasco, but in truth, she wouldn't hurt a fly (especially if that fly happened to be a well-connected wise guy). On a more harmonious note, she enjoys swimming in, staring at, and listening to the ocean. She will be spending her post-graduate years exploring the great country of South Africa working for a non-profit organization until she decides to return home to attend law school.

Julia Ioffe '05 is a history major from Columbia, MD, though she was born in Moscow. She wrote this poem while she was studying

flamenco dance in Spain. She is a fan of all things edible.

Branden Jacobs-Jenkins is an anthropology major from Washington, DC, who hasn't a single clue as to what's going on. Ever.

Elizabeth Landau '06 is from the suburbs of Philadelphia, which provides ample fodder for short stories. She studies Anthropology and Spanish, and hopes to do a creative thesis about cultural differences in Spain.

Yukai Li is a freshman from Canada.

Courtney Lix '06.

Caroline Loevner is a Mathey freshman looking to major in Classical Studies. She lives in Princeton and is sadly dubbed "a townie." She would like to thank caffeine for being the prime inspiration and motivation for her writing.

Christine Malvasi is a junior in the Politics Department from Atlantic City, NJ. She looks to forward to serving again next year as Co-Editor-in-Chief of the *Nassau Literary Review*.

Jocelyn Miller is a freshman from Washington, D.C. She likes purple orchids, existential crises, singing, and smiles. Jocelyn has studied at the Parsons School of Design in Paris, and was a Studio Art Major throughout her four years of high school. She loves all of the arts, and plans to lock herself in 185 Nassau for the remainder of her Princeton career. Look out for her designs in the upcoming Charity Fashion Show.

Maureen O'Connor is a sophomore from Edina, Minnesota. She plans to major in English and to continue participating in the Creative Writing program.

Fairy Pardiwalla loves experimental poetry, big cities, working on her Creative Writing thesis, vampires, and buffets at Kalluri. Everything around her has to be perpendicular to something else. Thanks to her mom, Versace, and the Lizard King.

Elena T. Petev is a graduate student at Syracuse University.

Todor T. Petev is a graduate student in art history at Princeton. He is currently completing a dissertation on the transition from manuscript illumination to printed illustration in the Low Countries in the late 15th century.

Ben Pollak is a sophomore from Poughkeepsie, NY. He is studying literature and visual art and has taken creative writing classes with Paul Muldoon and Yusef Komunyakaa.

Marisa Reisel is a sophomore from Los Angeles, California. She plans on majoring in Art & Archaeology (Program 2 Visual Arts) with a concentration in painting. Marisa has been creating art since she could hold a pencil. She is currently co-Vice president of Stella Art Club, program director for WPRB in Princeton, as well as a variety of other organizations. Her experience in the art world includes working with the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the UCLA Fowler Museum. She would like to thank her mother and grandmother for always pushing her to reach higher and paint longer.

Ronit Rubinstein is a senior in the English department who enjoys all things having to do with Canada, theater, and the lovely members of Shere Khan.

Megan Ryan is a sophomore from Cape Cod, Massachusetts. She is a lover of Billy Collins, strangely obsessed with Eastern Europe, and hopelessly addicted to afternoon Oprah. She is not named after the actress.

James Schrader is a junior majoring in architecture. Lived in Milwaukee, spent some time in Germany, took lots of pictures. Enjoys building models in the architecture school and not sleeping. No particularly strong influences. No post graduation plans yet.

Danny Snelson is a sophomore from Roy, Utah. Lately, he has been absorbed in the scientific pursuit of pataphysics. Also, Danny would like to send his love to family and friends.

Bella Tendler graduated last May from Yeshiva University (in New York) with a BA in History and Creative Writing. She is currently a first year graduate student in the Near Eastern Studies Depart-

ment researching (very generally) Muslim and Jewish cultural cross pollination.

Kendall Turner likes to write and also enjoys buttery leather goods and a good game of squash.

Ross Kenneth Urken grew up on the mean, glittering streets of Princeton, and throughout his youth, he absorbed the brilliance, and idiosyncrasies, and neuroses of those in the town in order to build a muscular prose style. Now a freshman at Old Nassau, he intends to be a Comparative Literature Major with focus on Spanish and Russian. He dedicates his story "A Hungry Artist" to Nathan Shore.

Yiwen Yvon Wang is a freshman who might major in History. She likes wheat, tremendous amounts of wheat, and being pre-tentious.

J.D.M. (Josh) Williams is a sophomore from Boston. He plans on majoring in Comparative Literature, with certificates in Creative Writing and African Studies. (For reasons that are unclear, he continues to labor under the misapprehension that one need not sleep until one graduates from college.)

Emily Woodman-Maynard is a Spanish major from Minneapolis, Minnesota. After she graduates in June, Emily plans on entering into a state of deep meditation for a year or two, or at least until she attains inner enlightenment. These may be her last words before she clears all distracting thoughts and phrases from her mind, poetry included.

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On behalf of the editors and writers, we thank you.

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