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theLighter

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theLighter

Fall 2006

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All submissions remain anonymous throughout the selection process. The Lighter welcomes submissions from all undergraduate, graduate and law students of Valparaiso University, regardless of race, gender, religious creed or sexual orientation. The editor assumes responsibility for the contents of this magazine. The views expressed in these works do not represent any official stance of Valparaiso University.

Cover art by Melanie Schaap.



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Artwork Introduction

Aimee
Tomasek

The Lighter Art Selection Committee has juried a wonderful portfolio of fine art to be featured in this semester's edition of *The Lighter*. Congratulations and thanks to each of you for your hard work and skillful applications.

Several Valparaiso University artists are represented in these thirty-four pieces. Some students represent members of the Valparaiso University Art Department; some don't. This eclectic group is testimony to the value of a liberal arts education.

The final selections for this semester's issue of *The Lighter* were juried from a total of one-hundred and sixty art submissions. I would like to offer encouragement and support to those students who entered and were not selected at this time. Do not give up! There isn't an artist anywhere that hasn't been rejected from a juried exhibit or collection. Your success will be defined by your diligence. Congratulations to each of you for staying in the game.

Juried collections often represent personal opinions and the personal vision of the juror. This statement should not be interpreted as a minimizing or demeaning one; jurors are selected because of their expertise and professional experience. Within the perimeters of this expertise, the individuals selecting work have motives that can be as varied as the art itself. *The Lighter* jury staff has demonstrated these qualities and should be respected and congratulated for their commitment to quality and creative excellence.

Addressing the collection of work before me is an exciting task. I am thrilled to see so many students expressing themselves in the visual arts. Many images are familiar to me, having seen them in class or at department critiques, but an equal number of works are new, and represent new ideas and vision.

"The Peeping Hole," by Melanie Schaap, is the image that seems to sum up all the rest. Looking through a peep hole offers a new perspective to the banal reality that exists on the opposite side of your front door. Reinventing the familiar is a common theme in many of the works; examination of the extraordinary that dwells within the ordinary. Medium makes no difference when you are *looking* and *seeing* everything in the midst of nothing. So many images, regardless of their medium, represent something that is close to us: the untitled chapel photograph, "Crayons," the untitled print of three mirrors, "Self," "Kitchen 2," "Shelter"... what surrounds us, what affects us, what matters.

Interesting people make interesting art; these artworks address interesting ways of looking and seeing our surroundings. They address the ability to interpret a conceptual issue and make it visual.

New technologies pose opportunities for growth, as do events related to travel and exploration. Learning about foreign culture helps to clarify what we know about ourselves. Engaging in the practice of new technology requires a solid foundation of historical methods and knowledge of how we practice them.

The photograph "Ejoka," by Thomas Natwick, captures a portrait, made and seen in the most traditional documentary style. The image is a new way of seeing for the artist, because it represents the opportunity to see a new part of the world. The discovery corresponds to the experience of travel; after all, that is why we travel: to learn and to grow. "Reaching Out," by James Wickboldt, addresses the act of exploration through new technology. The reinvention of the familiar through the act of utilizing these technologies is exciting as well as disciplined. Artists have been reinventing the use of materials and gadgets throughout history, and it seems quite natural that our own young artists would involve themselves in this type of forward thinking.

Enjoy this collection of visual art works, be inspired by it, and contemplate the issues related to how it was made, how you see it and how you value it.

In conclusion, I offer my congratulations to the selected group of artists that are featured in this semester's *Lighter*. I offer encouragement to all of the students that aspire to be artists, and hope they will keep pursuing opportunities like *The Lighter* to exhibit their work.

Literary Works Introduction

Walter
Wangerin, Jr.

Prose

There are six stories and five authors. Or perhaps five stories, if we count Benjamin Gaulke's two offerings as one: they mirror one another, much alike, but deeply different.

In every case the author has chosen a story-form which conceals remarkably the author, her intent, his own attitude to the work. Watch the excellence of these achievements—

In both sides of Gaulke's mirroring tale, the point-of-view established straightaway belongs to a Japanese "old man" whose "dry eyes were surrounded by wrinkles." When questioned by a young American, we hear the old man's private, interior responses. These responses, memories of his youthful experiences during World War II, are not spoken aloud. The American cannot be satisfied with the short-spoken answers the old man does utter. Or so we think—until we discover, mere lines before the ends of each mirrored piece, that the point of view is not the old man's at all (delivered in the 3rd person), but is, in fact, a first person "me," the young American, suddenly jumping out from behind his fiction. His fiction! Which implies that he is responsible for the old man's interior memories. It is an artful game by the author (who, incidentally, is not the narrator, but who is nevertheless responsible for the story). To strengthen the mirroring quality of the two parts, the old man's memories (the young man's imaginings) compare his victimhood (in Osaka at the bombing, part I) to his criminal behavior (watching the torment and murder of a Chinese person.)

Kathryn Shelly removes both the voice of the author (herself) and the voice of any narrator she might have imagined. We have only the characters alone. And of these we have nothing but their voices. She imposes severe restrictions upon her story form (not unlike those of a playwright, but without stage direc-

tions, stage sets, lighting, or actors). That she moves with such revelation and elegance through these narrow straits, creating character and plot and resolution through dialogue alone, gives witness to her talent.

John Little's narrator (if his two plot lines are meant to converge) or narrators (if they do not converge) is not John Little. You cannot find him within his story, only on its outside, editing, shaping and drawing a remarkable parallel (an extended metaphor, in fact) between a life altogether too common and a game so uncommon as to represent a fantasy. In each, the common overwhelms our desires to be uncommon.

Liz Hanson, a woman author, chooses as her narrator a man, a student, in fact, at a university teasingly similar to ours. He sounds like a male, thinks and acts like a male. Listen for the wry tones of Vic, our narrator; note the character revealed by his manner of thought-talk. This is the skill of the artist, to comprehend the experiences of persons not like herself: old, when she is young; dying, while she lives; male, though she is female, Japanese, though he is American.

And even so Heather Vargos's brief tale of death and loneliness. Her narrator is a child who presents to us more than she is yet capable of understanding: as fruit returns to the dirt that made it (her older sister has told her) so bodies return to the dust that made them (but neither her sister nor she herself can make that leap...yet. We do, the readers). We also are granted a quick flash of hope in the child's final declaration: "But I'm a fast runner."

Poetry

There are fifteen poems, thirteen poets. Formally, they offer a clear variety, some (Shelly's) obeying the strict form of rhythm and rhyme, others obeying a somewhat looser form, but form nonetheless: McSorley in "Last Supper" writes in tercets, every line—except one!—a trimeter or a tetrameter; one line alone is a pentameter, a five foot declaration which changes the direction of the poem: "Tomorrow he will fly back to America." A wonderful marriage of form and sense. Likewise, in "Plaza De Armas, Arequipa," note the rhyme emphasized by falling on stressed syllables: "Here, the *sky* meets the hor-*i-zon* / and shatters into a thousand *ti-ny* pieces").

Form nonetheless, I say: Hennings writes a sonnet of fourteen lines, an octave first, a sestet following; and although she does not bind herself to the regular iambic pentameter line, she does

use pentameter for the first and the concluding lines of the set—each line significant enough to want that formality!—and she, too, shouts out by means of interior rhyme: “birthmarks that stretched and skewed every time / you shrank or grew.”)

Natwick’s “iowa” observes (almost) six pentameter lines (the “almost” for his fifth line which, if you do not read the number, is pentameter, but if you do, it isn’t. That form. Moreover, though his sentences and punctuation seem too wild to be formal they do, in fact, remind me of the new journalism begun by writers like Tom Wolfe (*The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*) and Borroughs and Didion, a form of its own.

In Smith’s “Snake Girlfriends” I find not the formality of sound, but of imagery. To good effect she uses an image which I first met in Emily Dickenson’s “A Narrow Fellow in the Grass.” Though hers is the harsh irony of the alien in our lives, and Smith’s is the grinning irony of spiteful girls, both use snakes to signify radical differences between the narrator and...another living being; and both catch only flashes of the snake/insight: “But never met this fellow, / Attended or alone, / Without a tighter breathing, / And zero at the bone.”

Of course, those who write in imitation of another poem (Davis’s “Dog Days of Summer”; Boedecker’s rewrite of Collins’s “Litany”) have chosen forms most formal, requiring both a severe honoring of the previous text and a variation of thought altogether the re-writer’s own. When those two elements meet, the new poem is successful.

“Same Old Story Blues”: the first five stanzas Powell writes as quintets, each stanza (except the third, the central stanza!) containing two complete sentences; but the third introduces the menace which flies with deadly irony against the happy, childish games of the street. This is a poem of terrible beauty.

Horn, “Saturday,” offers us an octave without punctuation, as if this event is not confined by conventional fences. The line “As you enter the goldendrunken night” grants us her single figure of speech, but a powerful one, evoking both the expectations of the other (the “you”) and the unhappiness of the speaker. Immediately following comes the action that holds that other in a lasting condemnation, when nothing is set (up) right again.

A One-Act Play

Not only does “Plain Ride” draw us forward by the developing (personal) revelations each traveler offers the other in the space of a flight, but in the end it plays havoc with our own senses of reality, of juicy gossip (yes, yes, we are at fault too!), and of how sucked in a scandalmonger may be by the fictions others create for themselves, of themselves, to protect themselves. And that, friends, turns the spot-light all the way around to reveal the audience unto itself!



Inerview: John Balaban

Evan Scott
Bryson

On the thirteenth of September, a Wednesday night when the summer heat began maneuvers for retreat, the poet John Balaban gave a reading at the Deussenberg Recital Hall from his newest book of poems, *Path, Crooked Path*.

“Like losing species, we are losing words,” Balaban commented before reading his first poem out loud, and he meant not only is the appreciation for poets—and words—diminished, but also their place in society. Balaban is of the Vietnam generation. He was in Vietnam teaching, as he conscientiously objected to fighting. He went back to Vietnam to gather *ca dao*, the folk poetry of the people. He belongs to that other, smaller army of passionately engaged writers of the time, writers against the insanity of war.

He has authored eleven other books of poetry and prose, earning himself several awards, nominations and fellowships—among these, four Academy of American Poets Lamont prizes, two nominations for the National Book Award, and in 2003, a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship.

I sat down with the poet the next afternoon to talk about the state of words in America.

THE LIGHTER: At the reading last night, and in several of your poems, you describe the state of American poetry to be a strange business, a funny business. And in reading these poems, it also seems like a really sad business—why is this? And has it always been that way?

JOHN BALABAN: Well now, no—certainly a hundred years ago it wasn't that way. As the Twentieth Century closed, it certainly became strange. Fewer and fewer people read poetry. It almost became estranged from its readership.

You can almost imagine a date when poets threw up their hands and said, I'm not gonna write for anybody anyway—only for myself, or for the few people I know who will read this. So, for a whole host of reasons that lots of people have written well about, poetry just seems to have drifted away from the other six lively arts, at least from the grasp of the average and intelligent reader.

So poetry has small readerships. A good run, or an average publication run for a book of poetry is like one-thousand books. If you sell more than a thousand books of poetry that's a fairly amazing thing—that makes it strange. You hear poetry pretends to say great revealed truths. But nobody can read it anymore—or cares about it much to find out.

LITR: You haven't thrown up your hands, have you? Seems like in a few poems—

JB: No, haven't thrown up my hands. I think for the people who really are invested in writing poetry there's not much choice about it, so there's no choice about giving up on it. Although you would think clever poets (I'm not very) might.

Teachers I had when I was in school like you, they saw that I had a writing talent and were always very polite about this—but you could tell that they were hinting, just a little bit, that I was wasting time writing poetry. There wasn't much of a readership for it, and I think, of course, they were right in their way.

On the other hand, you have poets who still put their noses up, as the early Modernists did, like T. E. Hume...they say that prose is the museum where the old weapons of poetry are kept. So they can do things, be difficult—but its inaccessibility is an issue that poets should be more concerned about.

I work awfully hard in my poems to make them readable. I was real worried last night, looking at the average age of my audience, and knowing how that audience got into the room—probably because an instructor said you have to go—that, uh, that I could count on some misunderstanding...and I thought, in reading the very first poem, “The Lives of the Poets”—halfway through it, I realized, aye, this isn't going to work at all. Even if the audience just stipulates that these names belong to poets, they're going to feel like they don't know what this world is about.

LITR: When you were reading off the names, I felt it was a small assault on this generation—on quiet Americans sitting around complacently while there's a war going on overseas. I was wondering, what the role of a poet—especially a poet coming out of the Vietnam War—is nowadays?

JB: Again, poets—they aren't going to make the evening news, are they? I mean, it's a pretty rare thing. I think they did recently. And actually with the current war in Iraq, Laura Bush had this event, or was about to, where she invited writers to the White House. Poets, she was going to have poets. Her innocent—or at least naïve—view is that poets would be good guests, because they're artists and not political, right? But in fact, it was my editor at Copper

Canyon Press who organized a huge work protest. He was gonna go, I think, and talk about the war. And then it became a protest, and the whole event was called off because it was clear it was going to be an embarrassment. And it became a movement. There's an anthology that came out called *Poets Against the War*. Enough money was donated to it that we could afford an ad on the editorial pages of *The New York Times*. It became a political statement.

Still, what the poets say is probably less important to the public at large than what rock-stars or celebrities have to say. I mean, I don't pay much attention to their views on things. But somehow poets get through. Like this brilliant book very much about this war by a young Iraq War veteran, Brian Turner, *Here, Bullet*—fine book of poetry. You know the old saw that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world—and I'm not sure if Shelley really believed that...but despite their marginalization they always seem to come through, or at some moment of importance get to speak up.

Poets are feared. And you would think that anything as marginalized as poetry wouldn't be a bother to anybody in office or government or in control, but in Eastern Bloc countries of the former Soviet Union, poets were considered such a possible source of trouble that they were compromised in these writers' unions. And basically the function of a writers' union was to keep them in line. Keep them comfortable enough so they didn't dare risk their comfort, and have a service that minded their behavior in prose or poetry. I think there is always that latent fear that they will say something...

LITR: That people actually believe...

JB: Right.

LITR: You translate Vietnamese poetry...how many other languages do you know?

JB: In college I studied Latin, a little Greek, Old English, some French and Vietnamese. But I wasn't ever very good at making them stick. I mean, this makes me sound like I'm a polylinguist—but no, I just fumbled around in a lot of different languages.

LITR: You have in your collections of poems a Bulgarian friend that you hang out with, and this whole transnational poetry circle. How does that influence your writing?

JB: I think it widens it, opens it up. American poetry has sorta drifted into two realms, or so it seems to me, that aren't good for it. One is sorta abstract, pseudo-philosophical discourse. I'd rather read philosophy from the source, you know, than poets sorta making their attempts with it. And the other would be a very private little poem about going out, and this is what I saw today, and this is what I think it means. So—those are not the habits of poets in Eastern Europe, in Asia. There's a lot to say for what American poetry accomplished in the Modern period, with the early Imagists for instance; or, in terms of political realm, the way poets like Robert Lowell are political but successful at it—where they can make fairly large logo-poetic statements and manage to make them work. So, looking around the world and looking towards what goes on in other countries has obviously influenced my own sense of what to do in a poem.

LITR: Influences...who are your influences? Who do you consider your contemporaries?

JB: None of them are my contemporaries—for instance, Maxine Kumin is old enough to be my mother. Robert Lowell, who I met briefly when I was at Harvard. William Carlos Williams, who when I was your age looked at some of my poems. Those poets influenced me. Eleanor Wilner—contemporary poet.

One of the great things about poetry is you get to hear other people and make comparisons. Every college should be able to do what happens here at Valparaiso. I heard just recently Ted Kooser, a Nebraska poet. You say the phrase "Nebraska poet"—right away, you go, oh ho, oh dear. But he's incredibly smart, incredibly funny, incredibly gifted.

Who else? Ah, European poets—the poets in Bulgaria, in the Slavic tradition of high formalism, they've influenced me as well. Vietnamese poets, with their intense repertoire of images, and images that move through their poetry. It's hard to find a Vietnamese poem that doesn't begin with an image; even the folk poetry does. Sometimes the image will have apparently nothing to do with the rest of the poem, but it just starts us off, puts us in a world, a place.

LITR: How do you write and how often?

JB: Ah, not often enough and as best I can. Since I teach at a university and always have, I hardly do any writing in school. It's usually when I can get away from school.

LITR: So no set schedule? Wake up, write a poem—

JB: No, and I've always wished I'd developed that. I'd be happier if it happened that way, but no, it's never been like that. For me it seems like a whole different state of being to be working on a poem. I started a poem over this summer and went into lots of different versions, ended up e-mailing a friend whose whole manuscript I'd gone through—so I knew it wouldn't be a big favor. And asked him, saying, "This is a work, got any ideas?" And continued to work on it. But as soon as school started up I just put it away; I knew I wouldn't be in a state of mind to address the work intelligently. I'll pull it back out again.

LITR: How important is community to you when writing?

JB: Like what?

LITR: As far as e-mailing someone, or asking for help...

JB: I've only done it a few times. Maxine Kumin, did it once with her with a poem in a book. And I really got great help from a young woman named Alike Barnstone, who's really interesting. She has this great book of poetry, *Wild With It*. And she's just brought out from Norton translations from the Greek of C. P. Cavafy. And I had this poem, it was more or less in the shape—it's content was more or less there—it just didn't seem to work. She said to break it into stanzas. She suggested the breaks were already there; I just wasn't paying attention to them. So that was a huge gift because the poem just changed its identity. I don't think I changed much of anything, except making the stanza breaks where she suggested. And the whole poem changed shape. That was like a little magic wand over it.

So every now and again. I think Carolyn Kaiser, I've asked her, once. She read a few of

the translations I'd done. I asked her because she'd done a lot of translations of Chinese and knew the form the Vietnamese use as well. She gave me some good advice, and also made a few suggestions about diction, which were right. But I've never had a friend I've regularly written to.

LITR: How about the public reception? Getting in front of large groups and reading your poems—

JB: Oh I enjoy it. That seems to be the best part of the whole thing. The poem really comes alive again for you, you can be absolutely tuned to the audience. I think preachers have the same kind of thing with congregations. Up on the stage you get a sense of breathing, you get a sense of muttering, a sense of restlessness, if it's there; you can read people's eyes; you know exactly, pretty much, how well it's going over. That's an interesting thing, especially when it's going well. The other night was a nice audience, a polite audience, but awfully passive—not quite sure why they were there and when it would be over.

LITR: I believe that was a lot of people's first poetry reading.

JB: Probably was. But that's especially important—you want that reading to be really good. I never bring anybody to read at the poetry readings I run, if I haven't heard them before, myself, because there are poets who can't read their poetry, or who can't talk, and you don't want to lure young people because those experiences turn them off.

LITR: How important is criticism to you?

JB: I take it seriously. This book has gotten some good reviews, partly from what you observed—how it roams around the world and takes in larger than usual perspectives, both geographically but also back in time. One thing I got outta studying Greek and Latin was a knowledge of the classical world. The classical world and the contemporary world aren't that different. These ironies of the classical world are sorta always in front of you when you read the newspaper. So—what was your question? I've forgotten it already—

LITR: [laughing] How important is criticism to you?

JB: Oh yeah. My book got a real crappy review by one of the poets in a North Carolina local newspaper. Because he thought it was “grandiose”—I believe was the word. You know, that it took on these large themes. And, I thought, “What a stupid viewpoint.” I mean, if it took on large themes and failed it should say that in the review, but you can't criticize it for taking on large themes. It wasn't behaving like a familiar North Carolina, regional, southern poem, talking about farm and family, and the usual things, nor had I ever intended it to. There are other people who do that and do it well, but I'm not interested. In the same review, he discussed a book that did do that sort of thing. That book he belaboured because it was too close to small, winsome North Carolina. So he wasn't being nice to anybody.

And then, ironically, I got a starred review in *Library Journal*, which I guess is important for poetry, because if it's starred that means libraries across the U.S. will buy it. And that review praised it for being grandiose, and ambitious, and for what it tried to take on.

So, yeah, I take it to heart. Sometimes I believe the criticism, or at least I understand why the person said it. I don't know if it's going to change anything I do.

LITR: You threw out this statistic last night—

JB: Oh yeah, I was wrong about that.

LITR: Really? [laughing]

JB: I got corrected later on. Shakespeare used 34,000 different words in his works—which is astounding by itself. Contemporary Americans have about 10,000 words in their vocabularies.

LITR: And that is only going down...

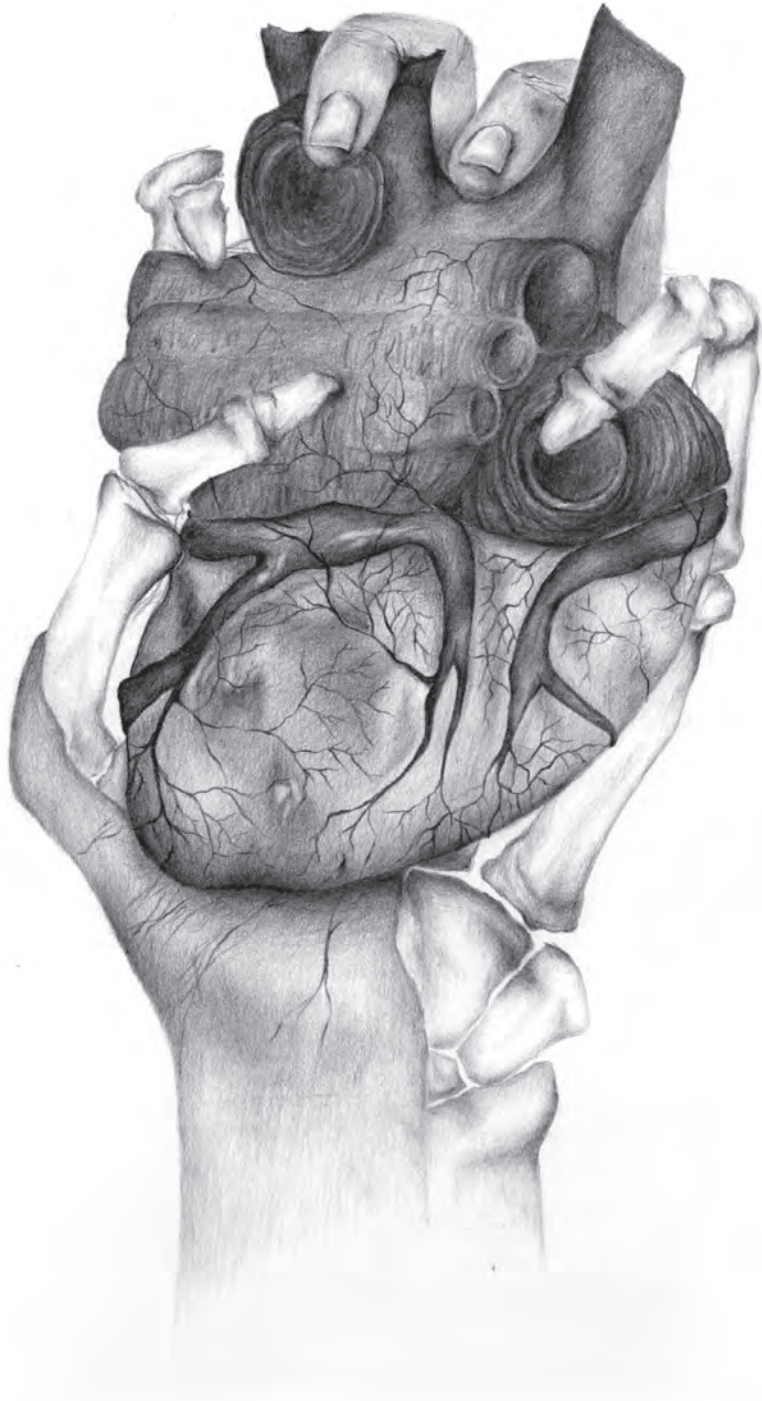
JB: That's going down, yeah.

LITR: What does that mean for our culture?

JB: That means trouble. It means a whole loss of nuance and subtlety and thinking in an argument. It means clumsiness in talking to one another about important topics—you want precision. I think, in Iraq, for instance, the whole confusion about who the terrorists are, and who our enemies are, and what clear and present danger means, all those issues which allowed for the confusion, from my view—well, it's not just my view—of the Bush administration attacking the wrong country. I mean, from my view they quite rightly attacked Afghanistan in trying to eliminate Al-Qaeda. I had no problem with that at all.

They just misunderstood the situation, misread it, or wanted to misread it. Their vocabularies when they talk about Iraq are just totally muddled. They lead an imprecision of language. And it may be that they are clever men who know this: the more vague and imprecise they are with the American public, the more likely they can get their way with that public. Though, I think if you just listen to George Bush he is genuinely a person who has difficulty speaking. And if you connect speaking with thinking, the supposition is (and it may be wrong), he may have trouble thinking. He may have problems with making clear distinctions. And human lives are lost as a result.

At this point, I don't know if we've killed more Iraqis than Saddam Hussein—but the war has. The war that we initiated. And today, there is a rebellion in the Senate. Republicans voted against Bush's notions on the Geneva Accords, his rhetoric of torture, and there is so much muttered speech about the Geneva Accords, and what they mean, and it stems from imprecise language.



Infatuation With A Junkhead
Zach
Sample

I dog-eared your scent
In the book of my desire
Whose pages you tore

Untitled * Christine Bandy

Aleksandr

Kathryn R.
Shelly

The chimney-sweeper king returns today.
His head is wholly wreathed like saints', they say,
in soot and clay, in mortar-dust, as smoke
ribbons behind his work-suit. Can you see?
Over the streets, in paces strangers' feet
have traveled before, many years ago.
How things have changed! Of course the children can't
remember what he looked like when he went.
There are no photographs to mark the growth
from boyish, striking, hardly captain's looks,
now chiseled by the chips that prison took.
Was it from Murmansk, or Mariinsk, or both?
"I have been with it twenty years," he said,
and "What do we know of our lives?"—but death
is what we children knew of years ago,
in mortar, bullets, Black Maria trains
that shipped us each month to Siberian plains
to vanish with the locomotives' smoke.



Small Sailing Treasure * Melanie Schaap

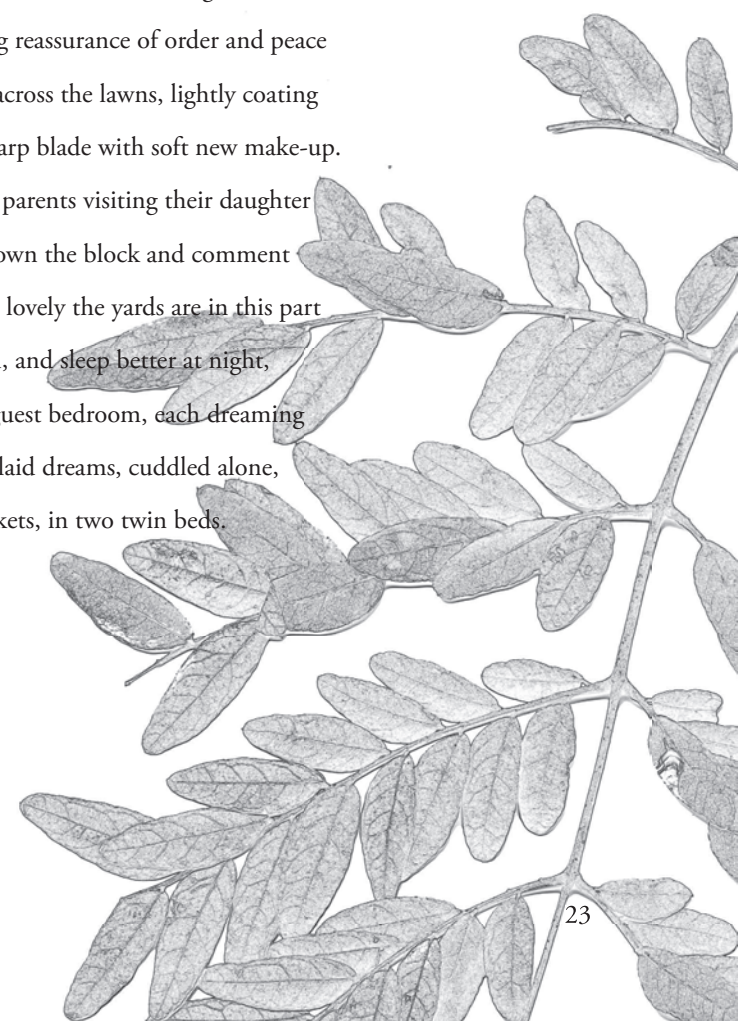


Grass of Our Neighborhood

Hannah
Smith

In the streets of our neighborhood
on humid summer afternoons,
shirtless teenage boys mow back
and fourth over chemical green
plots of lawn, weaving through mazes
of broken tricycles and dog chew toys.
They wipe away sweat accumulated
on their foreheads from weariness
and repetition. Across the street
cars pull into the straight narrow
driveways. Parents step out with wrinkled
suits, and help toddlers tumble
out of backseats, carrying lunch pails
and sticky homemade magnets
for refrigerator displays. Foreheads
crease and eyes squint as the sun
sets, illuminating patches of the bright
green grass, made new weekly
by Maple Lawn Maintenance Service,

that comes in the form of overweight
greasy men, in blue zip-up body suits,
locked and loaded with long black tubes,
spraying reassurance of order and peace
evenly across the lawns, lightly coating
each sharp blade with soft new make-up.
Tourist parents visiting their daughter
drive down the block and comment
on how lovely the yards are in this part
of town, and sleep better at night,
in the guest bedroom, each dreaming
green plaid dreams, cuddled alone,
in blankets, in two twin beds.





1401 * James Strasburg

At the Edge of the Highway
Liz
Hanson

By approaching the matter from a cultural anthropological standpoint, Wendy and I hope to be less weirded out at our friends' weddings next summer. "I ought to take notes or something," I mused, trying in vain to rescue a slice of French toast from the advance of the sausage gravy. It was breakfast-at-night night at the student union.

"Into a tape recorder. You know, it would be really funny if we went as non-dates and did that."

"I don't know. Going as non-dates just seems to reinforce the expectation that you're supposed to go to weddings with a date in the first place. It would be great if I didn't have to go at all, if I could come up with a way to get out of it without being a jerk. Is it too much of a cop-out to pick off a few fictitious elderly relatives at the last minute? Funerals cancel out weddings, right?" This principle made algebraic sense to me.

"You know, brutal honesty here, but considering the fact that A, it's a guy like you, and B, you're a really bad liar, they're going to figure it out."

Wendy and I had passed the banal part of an Indiana winter morbidly making bets on who would get engaged next. All told, I lost five dollars. This was some consolation, anyway, to Wendy, who stopped me in the hallway immediately upon the receipt of a Valentine's Day candy-gram from a secret admirer, craving the assurance that I had done it as a practical joke. I didn't know a thing about it, and I told her she'd have to keep asking around, for the poor fool who had made a gift of Starburst fruit chews and unshakable awkwardness in the name of hurricane relief.

Brad proposed to Natalie that night, and I hadn't seen it coming at all, so Wendy won five bucks and started nonchalantly on her Starburst. "Hey, it was for a good cause, anyway." If Scott and Karen get their act together before finals week, I'll break even for the year.

Wendy does not observe Valentine's Day, nor even Singles' Awareness Day. She celebrates Cheap Chocolate Eve. Every February fourteenth, she can hardly sleep for the visions of the Cheap Chocolate Fairy (who resembles a supermarket stock boy) dancing in her head, as he goes about his annual, magical work of marking down all the Valentine's candy for final clearance. Wendy also has the metabolism of a shrew.

But it had been a good three months now since her secret admirer almost ruined Cheap Chocolate Eve. I scraped as much of the gravy off my French toast as I could and boasted that I'd never been to a wedding in my life and couldn't afford to break my streak.

"I'm told I went to one for the neighbor's daughter when I was four, but I have absolutely no recollection of it. Probably I wasn't paying attention, or I got squirrely and my parents had to take me down to the church basement or something. I used to end up there a lot."

"You would've," I laughed. "You ought to hear the conversations the seniors are starting to have—the engaged ones, I mean." Some of the seniors have merely aimed themselves at their respective fields of graduate study with a dazzling singleness of purpose.

"The wedding talk?"

"It's like old people and funerals."

"I know. If you get my elderly relatives together, they will talk about nothing but the funerals they've been to lately. And other people's diseases. Mom always has to get in there and break it up, get them talking about the weather or the guy who comes in to play the accordion on Saturday afternoons or something."

We thought they started next summer. They start this summer. Sam and Martha are precocious. Martha handed out wed-

ding invitations in class on Friday. It is silently understood that everyone will go to everyone else's wedding.

After dinner, I went out the back door of the student union and climbed to the edge of a soggy sprawl of grass that I am occasionally reminded the university calls a meadow, and gazed across a canyon of minor highway to the bar you see before you see the chapel when you're driving back into town, and there were the cemetery and the armory with the gas station sign towering above them, reminding us solemnly that the world's supply of oil is expected to peak within the next year and a half and then begin declining and the Middle East is a sordid mess and we are dust and to dust we shall return and given enough millions of years, we will all be fossil fuels someday too.

I remained there in reverie until nightfall, when Wendy reappeared. "How do you feel about roasted marshmallows?" she greeted me.

"Opportunistic."

"Because there's a fire over there and I know where to find some very long sticks."

Off to the east was the main entrance to campus, with an ostentatious torch atop a tall concrete slab. I've gone here for three years and I never noticed that torch until Wendy pointed out to me that marshmallows could be roasted over it. She went back to her dorm for the marshmallows, and I searched the woods for sticks. We reconvened in the flickering light beneath the slab.

"You think we could get arrested for this?" It was completely dark now. The meadow end of campus is deserted on a Saturday night. The bar is the other direction. There was something lonely and subversive about this whole idea.

"How? What's going on here that's illegal? We haven't committed arson, because the fire was here to begin with. We're not trespassing, because we go to school here. We haven't vandalized anything, disturbed the peace, been publicly intoxicated—you name it, we haven't done it. They can't arrest you for benign irreverence." She skewered another two marshmallows. She could toast several at once to an idealistic golden brown. I incinerated mine individually. "Besides, what if they do? We can write some impassioned letter to the editor about it—no one's accused the university police department of trampling on our civil liberties in...going on two weeks now. Claim that their treatment of the student body is brutal, inhumane, and unconstitutional. You'll fit right in."

"Unconstitutional?" My marshmallow predictably caught fire. I extinguished it, wondering what roasted marshmallows might

taste like without a coating of ash.

“Freedom of assembly. Know your First Amendment rights. Come on, wouldn’t you like to be a political prisoner?”

“Wendy, look at us.”

“Hey, it beats getting arrested for vomiting in the escort van.”

The night gets later and darker, and we continue in our lonely work. “What are you doing after this, anyway?” I ask. I consider the “Post-Graduate Opportunities” folder sitting near the top of the foot-high pile of papers in my “Things I Don’t Have Time to Think About” box, under a third draft of my honors thesis on Dostoevsky and half a notebook full of dubious attempts at poetry. Something about my inflection and the surrounding silence suggests the long term.

“Founding an order of Lutheran nuns if I can get anybody else in on it.” She nonchalantly unskewers a marshmallow, knowing that to take the question seriously would have been to acknowledge an academic trajectory over which we seem to have uncomfortably little control.

“You can set up shop down the street from my Lutheran monastery.” A rental truck whizzes past the cemetery in a straight line. “Was this just an inspiration you had tonight, by the way? Are we the first?”

“No, I know some people who did it last year. They didn’t get caught. We’ll be fine.” We carry on in silence for a while.

“Life is strange.” The meadow is empty. The “Post-Graduate Opportunities” folder is very thick. I will have to start going to weddings soon.

“I’m going to have to agree with you.” She regards the torch, and then the gas station sign four lanes of intermittent traffic away. “I’m also going to have to ask for the marshmallows.” I hand her the bag. It’s almost done. “Thanks. Hey Vic? Here’s one—Wes and Jess. Five dol—make it ten.”

“When?” I challenge. This game gets too easy sometimes.

“They’ll see each other over the summer, right?”

“Yeah.”

“July.”

“That’s going to be really weird, but you’re on.” I know Wes. He won’t be engaged by July. I give him at least November.

The ghostly shape of a squad car passes on the highway below as Wendy wads up the empty marshmallow bag and we start down the darkened meadow. The saturated springtime earth gives uncertainly under our shoes. She veers off to find a garbage can and I continue alone across a sleeping parking lot.

I had to take the GRE the day of Sam and Martha’s wedding. I found out later that Wendy’s great-uncle died.



Turbo * Kimberly Sienkiewicz

A Rewrite of Billy Collins' "Litany" Emily
Boedecker

You are the smoke and the matchbook
the cigarette and the ash
You are the curling swirling smoke string
and the raspy congested voice
You are the tobacco-stained fingernails
and the bent knuckles clasping the burnt end.

You are the green olive in the martini
the condensation on the glass
and the smoothness of the stem between the thumb and forefinger
You are the oily bitterness of vodka that's hard to swallow
You are hard to swallow.

It is possible that you are the 5 o'clock shadow
and the thick-rimmed shaded glasses
and you are pretty close to being the charcoal fedora
and the overworn blue jeans.

It might interest you to know
speaking of the plentiful imagery of the world,
that I am the polished brass of the saxophone.

I am also the slippery keys of the flute
the worn ivory of the piano
and the tattered corners of the sheet music.

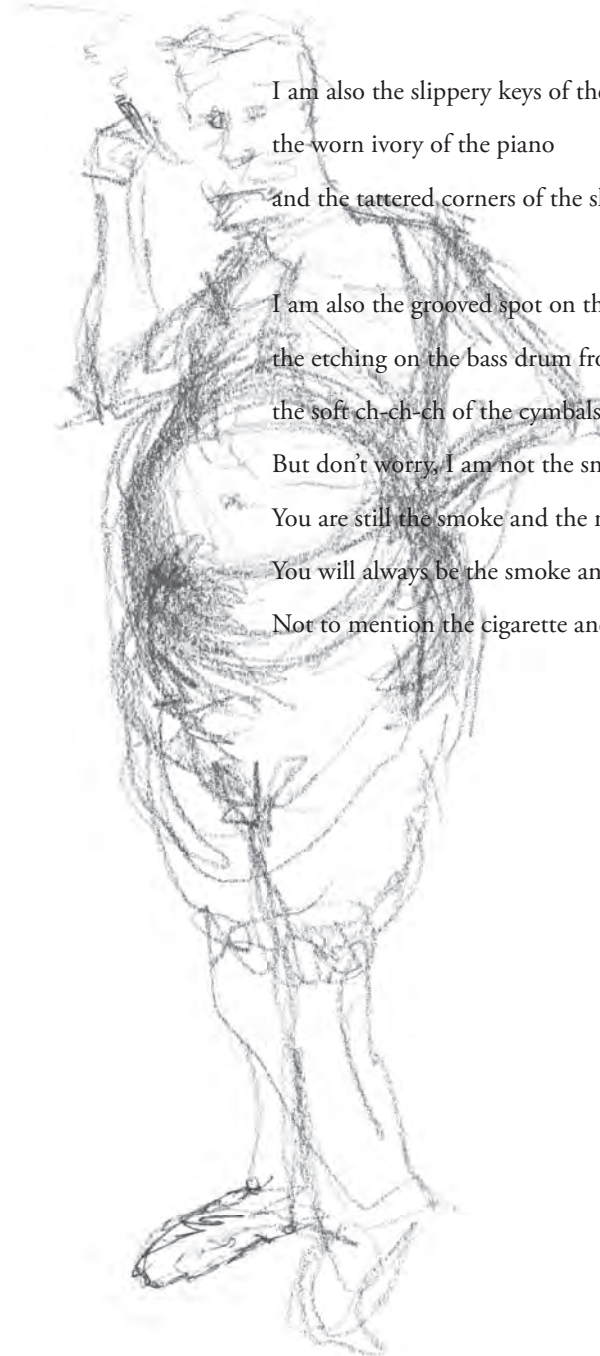
I am also the grooved spot on the stage from tapping feet
the etching on the bass drum from a heavy beating
the soft ch-ch-ch of the cymbals.

But don't worry, I am not the smoke and the matchbook.

You are still the smoke and the matchbook.

You will always be the smoke and the matchbook.

Not to mention the cigarette and somehow—the ash.



Piecemeal
Krista
Hennings

Your Crayola tattoos, inked by a two-year old,
were clots of pigment like technicolor
birthmarks that stretched and skewed every time
you shrank or grew. Cut and pasted
patches showed a history of borrowed
stories stitched together like a quilt,
proof that you were once blank and clear, open
for others to shape and color.

When I stumbled into you, I found no space
for my etchings. Your clays and canvas
were already staked and claimed; artists scored
their signatures in your skin. A mosaic:
carved coral and cerulean tiles,
your body was a suit of ceramic armor.



Crayons * Kimberly Sinkiewicz

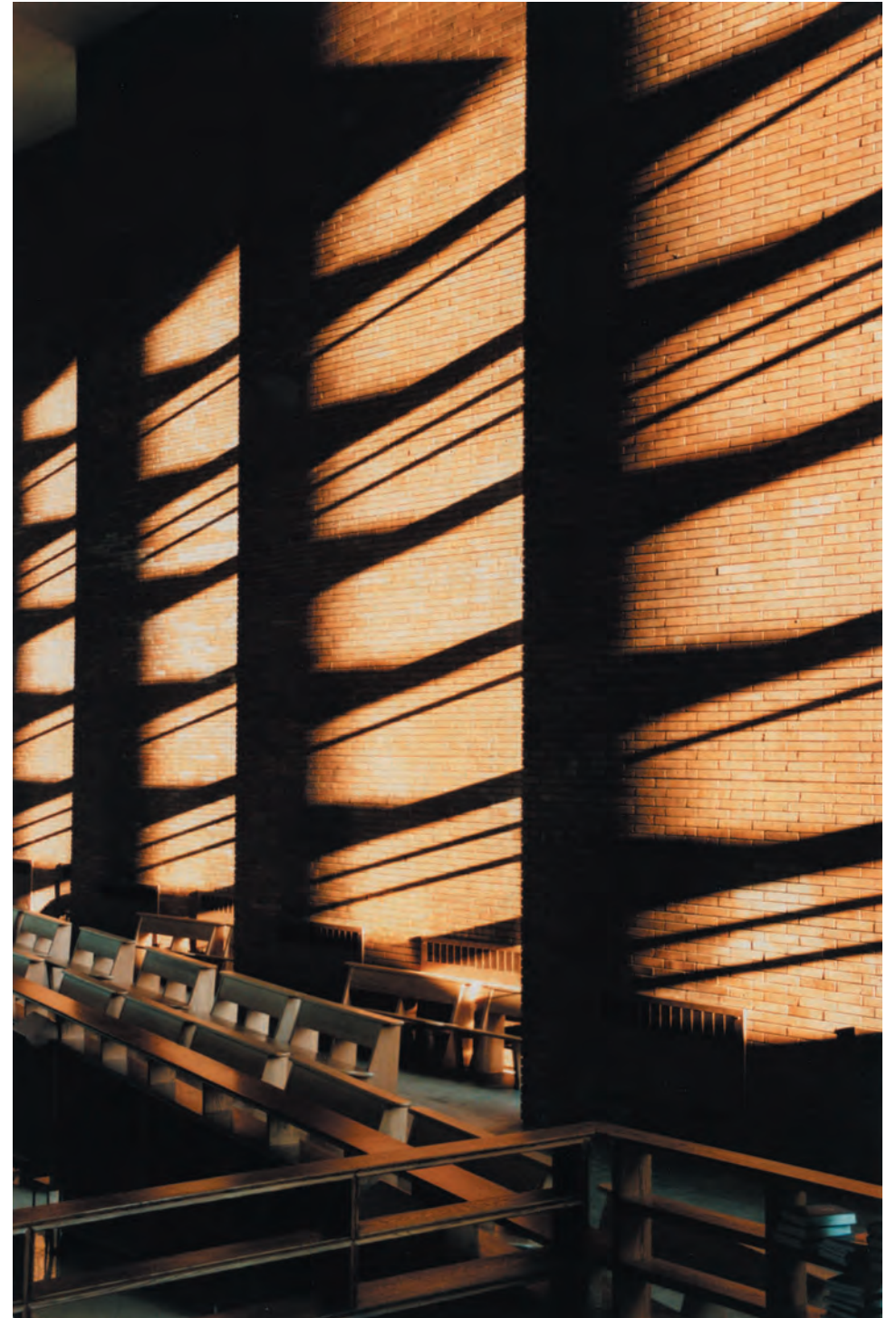
Untitled * Michelle Eckert



In the Eye of the Beholder * Abby Nordaune



FIN304 * Brekke Berg



Untitled * Michelle Eckert

Same Old Story Blues Gwendolen
Powell

Foxtrot through dim light,
feet feelin' cement drum beats.
Nobody up, this side o'
three o'clock. Spree,
still runnin' free.

Gumballs, pixies droppin'
sugar on sidewalk,
soda pop, bouncing cans
against ribs filled with laughter.
Ain't nothin' onto us now.

Shrill wailin' in the distance,
stars and stripes lights blazin'
in background. Our shoes
still movin'. We caught now.
Momma gonna be angry.

Kid cop, skin the color
of shinin' moon,
whippin' gun up like cowboy's
cattle crop. Put 'em up,
don't move one li'l bit.

Hands raisin', wavin' sugar
sticks; blade of hard candy
flappin' in harlem breeze.
Honkin' horn throws silence,
gunshot bangin'.

Red soda pop crash on that
same old story street.



Upon Finding An Intimate Moment * Valerie Cochran

Plain Ride
Nick
Heggestad

Two chairs sit next to each other, as close as possible. They represent two seats on an airplane.

W is already seated, and reading a paper.

M: Hi. I think I'm...

W: Oh. I'll just...*(Stands up.)*

M: Thanks. *(Sits down. Proximity is frightening.)*

W: *(Starts reading again.)*

M: *(Situates himself. Shoves his bag down under his seat, but it isn't quite working.)* Umm, can I—I'm just. I think I'll put this up...

W: Oh, here. I'll just...*(Halfstands, trying to give M enough room to get out. It's rough, but M makes it into the aisle. M looks up and the overhead rack is full.)*

M: The rack is—it's full. I'm, uh. Excuse me again.

W: Did you just want—I mean, we could swi—

M: Oh, no. This is just—I shouldn't need...

W: Okay, that's fine.

M: *(Weasles his way back into his seat. She is reading again, and a section of her paper slips down and falls between the two of them. They both reach down for it and their heads touch.)*

W: Oh, I'm sorr—

M: No, it's fine. It was my fau—

W: Oh, I'll just—*(Leans over and picks it up.)* You didn't want to—
(Offers the paper to him.)

M: Oh, no, I'm fine. I have—

W: Okay.

M: Good. *(They both settle into their places. M tries again to shove his bag under the seat. It sticks out halfway. M reaches into the bag and searches around, pulling out a book. They both sit reading. He has a copy of The Grapes of Wrath. After a bit, she notices the book.)*

W: Interesting book choice.

M: Well, it's considered, you know, one of the...

W: Yes, I—well, It's just...

M: What?

W: Well, I mean, it's not a very uplifting bo—

M: Well, it doesn't have to—

W: I'm sorry, I—

M: No, it's fine. Don't feel like you offended—

W: Oh, no, I mean. I'm glad you're not. Offended. Cause that would be—

M: Stupid?

W: No. Well, yes. I mean honestly. If the boring person sitting next to you on the plane thought your reading choice was elementary, and you were offended, well it would say something about your, well—

M: Personality?

W: No. Well, yes, but more about your level of self-esteem. I

mean if you are embarrassed to be reading a book, then don't read—

M: You really didn't offend me.

W: Good. For your sake. I mean, I would be worried if I had. I would feel awful, yes. At least I would pretend to feel awful, and then on the inside I would be thinking, what a pathetic—

M: Person, right?

W: No, soul, was the word I was going to use.

M: Soul? What do you mean when you use the word soul? I mean, is this in a sort of mystical, new-aged sense? You're not going to cast a spell on me are you? Or tell me I have bad karma?

W: Well, now, you just might be getting to the point of being offensive.

M: Oh, so your telling me, a complete stranger, that telling me I have bad taste when it comes to my personal library is fine, but me even referring to the slight chance that you might believe in some weird, off-color religion crosses the line?

W: I don't think that was the point I was getting at. I do think you need to be careful what you assume about peo—

M: Assume? You just told me that you would assume that if I was offended by you having a problem with my reading choice that I was a pathetic person—oh, no. I'm sorry, I believe the term you used was soul. Why don't you tell me about my soul, since you seem to have just figured me out. *(W sits there silently, evident of everything that was just said, but not responding.)*

M: What? No response? Did I win?

W: No, I'm just choosing not to speak to you anymore.

M: I'm sorry, can you do that? I mean, you're the one who started this conversation.

W: I can, and I will, and you know why?

M: Tell me.

W: I can because these are the only two hours I will ever spend with you in my life. When we get off this plane, that's it. We will never see each other again, and nothing we say or do matters.

M: So you are saying that if we went right now into the bathroom and did it, it wouldn't matter?

W: Yes, and no. Would the morality of it matter? Yes. But would it

have any effect on the future of our relationship? No. Because we will never see each other again.

M: Alright. You have a point.

W: Good, now I would like to get back to my paper.

M: (*M picks up his book, but looks over at W and sheepishly places it back into the bag. After a few moments...*) Is there a way...

W: Excuse me?

M: I was just wondering...well, earlier you had offered me part of your—

W: Oh.

M: I mean, if you don't want to—

W: No, no. That's fine. (*She hands M the sports section.*)

M: Well...

W: Is there a problem?

M: I just figured you would ask what section I—

W: Oh. Well, I just figured, you know—

M: I suppose every guy should want to read the sports section. That's fine. I just figured you might be more, I don't know, more of an adult about something like that. You could have handed me the driving section. Or even better yet, the classifieds. I bet someone has their baseball card collection for sale. Just the very thing I was looking for! I'm a man. I don't care about important world events or the state of our economy. But the mere fact that the Cubs lost last night could simply ruin the rest of my day.

W: Here. (*She hands him the arts section.*) I hope talk of impressionism in the 1800's interests you.

M: As a matter of fact it does.

W: I don't believe you.

M: Fine.

W: You mean you don't care that—

M: That I don't believe you? No. Why would I care? You're the one who said we could do or say anything we wanted and it would have no impact on our lives. For all you know, I've been lying the entire time.

W: I don't believe you.

M: Well, you'll never really know, will you.

W: Fine. I guess not. (*They both sit quietly for a moment.*)

W: When I was ten my sister and I were taking horseback riding lessons and she got thrown off the horse. She has been paralyzed from the neck down ever since. I enjoyed riding horses too much, so I refused to stop even when my parents wanted me to. I now own a horse ranch and to this day my sister refuses to speak with me.

M: What?

W: I got married when I was twenty-one and two weeks later I found out that my husband had previously been married and had three children whom he refused to see. I was furious, but I told him he needed to see them. He went to their house, saw his ex-wife, and within a couple of months I was no longer married and they were. Again.

M: What are you doing?

W: Telling you my deepest, darkest secrets. The most private things about my life.

M: Alright. I think I can play this game.

W: By all means, try to beat me.

M: Alright, let's see. Okay, here we go. When I was in middle school there was this kid named Frank. He always bullied everyone. He was a complete jerk and he always picked on this one handicapped kid named Tommy. Now Tommy couldn't do anything to defend himself, and one day Frank was being really rough with Tommy, so I went up to Frank and told him to back off. We got into a little fist fight, but we decided to settle it after school on top of a hill, out in the woods, away from school. A few of Frank's friends came along, as did a couple of mine, and we started the fight. Now Frank was a big guy, but he was slow, and he was also a smoker, so I just tried to wear him out by running around as much as possible. We both got a couple of good hook shots in, and both of our noses were bleeding. Then suddenly Frank got furious and ran at me. I ducked and grabbed him up, onto my back. I wasn't expecting so much weight, and I tipped backwards. I was closer to the edge of the hill than I noticed, and when I fell over, Frank went down the hill. He hit his head on a large rock and died on the spot. I figured I would be in huge trouble, but everyone was just so happy that he was gone, so nothing ever really came of it.

W: (*Whispering.*) So wait, you killed a man? You can't just kill a man. You are not a murderer.

M: How do you know? How do you honestly know?

W: I mean, I don't, I guess. But, still. I mean. You couldn't have.

M: *(Shrugs at her, smirking.)*

W: Well, I think I've had enough of this game.

M: What? Oh, we've only started. You can just quit!

W: I can do whatever I want.

M: You're right. You could. But I bet you have something that could top it.

W: I have no such thing.

M: I don't believe you.

W: Fine, don't believe me. But I'm telling the truth.

M: Fine. Game over.

W: Game over. *(They both go back to reading.)*

W: I met my best friend Sally when I was in third grade. Since she was in eighth grade she had dated this guy named Kevin. Now Kevin was a very nice man. Very smart, attractive, sensitive, the kind of guy that every mother wants their daughter to marry. Over the years I had developed a spot for Kevin in my heart, and on occasion, without Sally's knowing, we had done a little cheating. But I figured it was fine. It was senior year, and Sally and I were going to community college, while Kevin was going away to school, so I figured their relationship wouldn't last long anyways. Well, I was wrong. Kevin missed Sally so much that he moved back home after one semester. I was furious, and what was worse, is that Kevin wouldn't speak to me anymore, so I saw Sally even less. Then, all of the sudden, Kevin started seeing me, but Sally had no idea. Now, all the more, I wanted to be with Kevin, but I knew that as long as Sally was in the picture, there was no way Kevin would go with me.

M: You didn't kill her, did you?

W: Oh, no, it's much worse than that. She would be better off dead.

M: What did you do to her?

W: I cut up her face with a kitchen knife. I hid in the bushes as she walked home, and as she passed me, I jumped out and grabbed her, and then I just slashed away. And then I ran, and ran, and ran. And I couldn't believe what I had just done, but it felt so good.

M: So what happened to her?

W: Well, I hurt her more than I had planned. She had plastic surgery to get rid of the scars, but they were still highly noticeable. But they couldn't fix her eyes.

M: Her eyes?

W: Yes, she is now blind in both eyes. Irrevocable damage.

M: Well, what happened to you?

W: Oh, nothing. She never saw who did it, and the police never figured it out.

M: Isn't there guilt?

W: You have no idea. And the worst part is that Kevin kind of knew, or at least sensed I was in some way involved, but at the time, he was already planning to go away to a different school, and he was done with both of us. All of that over a stupid high school crush.

M: Hmm. *(Strange silence for a moment.)*

W: So, where are you headed?

M: Oh, my mom's 75th birthday. The whole family is getting together, and she doesn't know that I'm coming. I haven't seen her in a couple of years. Too busy with work. I know, I know, family's important. I should try harder. I know. You don't have to tell me.

W: No, I think that's sweet. I mean, yes, it's a shame you haven't seen your mom in so long, but you are going now, and that's what's important.

M: I suppose. *(Pause.)* What about you, where are you going?

W: Oh. Sally, my friend, well, you know. She, umm. Well, she couldn't handle living with herself anymore. I wasn't shocked to hear. I figured I should go to the funeral to show my support, I mean, it was me who, you know. It's my fault, really. In fact, it's completely my fault. But how do I tell my husband that. And my kids? I can't just give up everything I have to fix a mistake that happened so long ago. I just...it's not how I work. The past is done. It's over with. I'm not turning myself in.

M: I understand. It's okay. I mean, it's not, but it is.

W: Well, thank you for understanding. *(They both just sit and stare ahead for a while.)*

M: So is it true?

W: What?

M: Your story?

W: Oh, of course not. I mean, we were just trying to top each other, right?

M: Yeah. I mean, yes. And I'm glad, you know...that you aren't, well...you know. A murderer.

W: And you? Did you really throw that boy off the hill?

M: Yes. I did throw him off, but he didn't die. After a week in the hospital he was back at school. Never bothered Tommy again.

W: That's good.

M: You know, can I get—um...

W: Oh, sure. Time to use the, um...

M: Yes. *(Gets up and exits down the aisle.)*

W: *(Picks up her paper again and starts reading, hiding her face. Suddenly the paper comes down and she is crying. She drops the paper and buries her head in her hands. She is shaking, she is crying so hard. After a few moments, she composes herself when she hears M walking back to the seat.)* Well, that was quick.

M: Oh, there was a line. I don't do lines. Here, I'll just, um..

W: Oh, there. *(M sits down.)* We're getting better at this.

M: Yeah. We are. *(M gets his book and starts reading. W picks up her paper, but holds it lower in her lap. She looks ahead, thinking.)*



Clansmen * James Strasburg

iowa Thomas
Natwick

---iowa----summers----older & older---the land,
all that you become(have)----wise enough to know
what you love here is enough to stay==away
from those strings pulling from the canadian side--
items that comprise 1003 wishes and fishes----
one broken porch light----corn--the county fair.

that comprise
broken porch light

Childhood * Kimberly Sinkiewicz



--- iowa --- summers --- older & older --- the land,
all that you have become(have) --- wise enough to know
what you love here is enough to stay == away
from those strings pulling from the canadian side --
items that comprise 1003 wishes and fishes ---

The Ring Valerie Cochran

It began as a typical day, as days tend to do—my mother driving my young sister and even younger me to some destination that has since skipped from my memories. We were on our steady way when my sister shouted “Stop!” and my mother’s curious eye caught her in the rearview mirror, wiggling to look behind at something our car had passed.

“A diamond ring! There in the median! I saw it shine when we drove by!”

Without hesitation, my mother pulled the car over to the side of the suburban highway and gave us that look that told us to stay in our seats.

I looked at my sister, strawberry blonde hair framing her face that was glowing with hope, so different from my own mousy brown head, wishing I had been the one to find something so important.

My mother got out and walked back to the spot where my sister had claimed a ring was to be found. She looked around heartily; not some half-assed search just to keep her daughters satisfied, but kicking the grass around and picking the trash up off the ground.

And while she was out, my sister and I imagined the things we could buy with that ring: ponies and Barbies and boyfriends. (Everyone would like me if I wore a diamond ring to school, making a scene when I had to remove it for gym class.)

My mother walked back to us, her hopeful daughters, shifting and sweaty in our seats.

“No ring,” she said as she got back in. It was just a bit of tinfoil, gleaming like a finely cut diamond in the shiny summer sun.

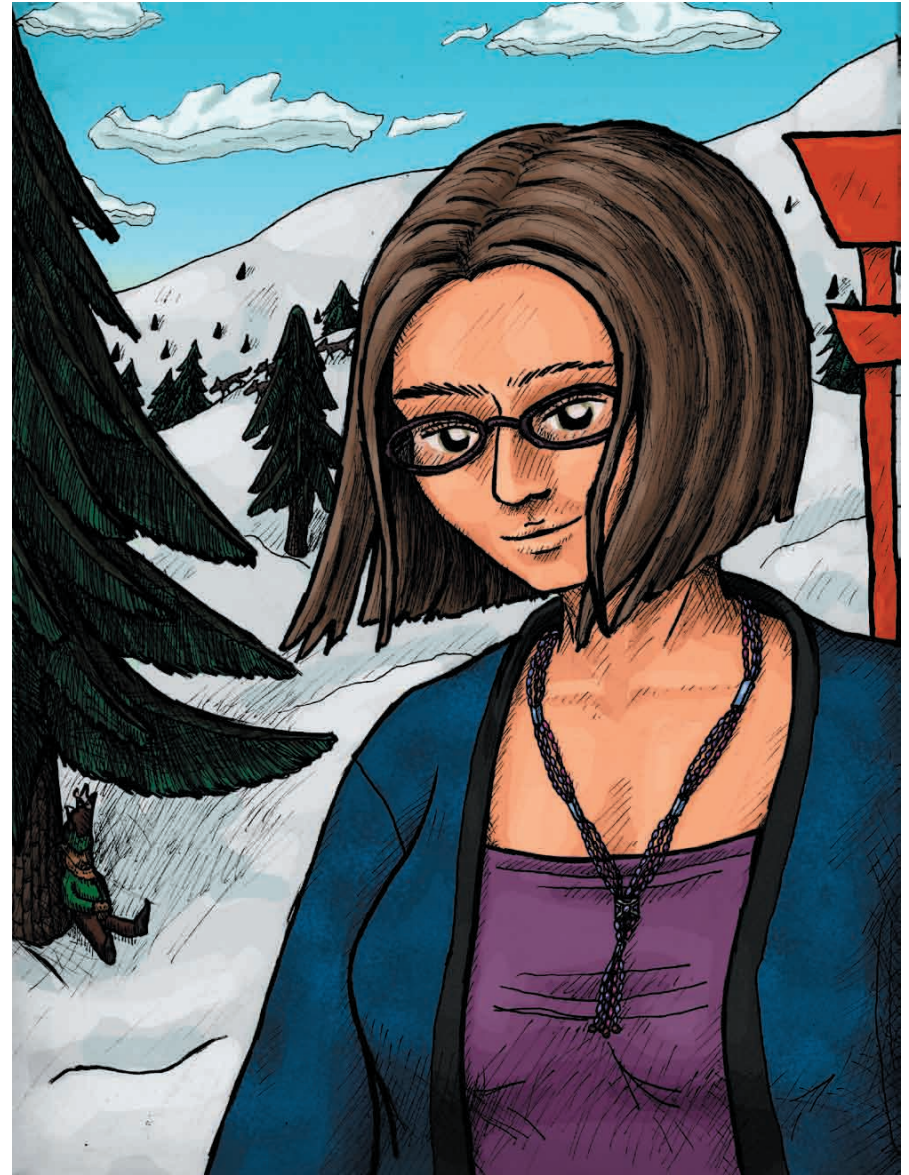
I expected her to be mad at pulling the car over, at wasting her time.

But it was disappointment that slumped across her features and kept the backseat quiet.



Saturday Stephanie
Horn

Friday night
Not over for another fifty-three minutes
And you're pulling my hair
Trying to get me to leave my room
Knock over my plants
As you enter the goldendrunk night
And don't look back
To set them upright again



Self * Sharayah Schram



Skyline Reflected * James Strasburg



The Peeping Hole * Melanie Schaap



A Flat Tire on Pioria Road * Brekke Berg

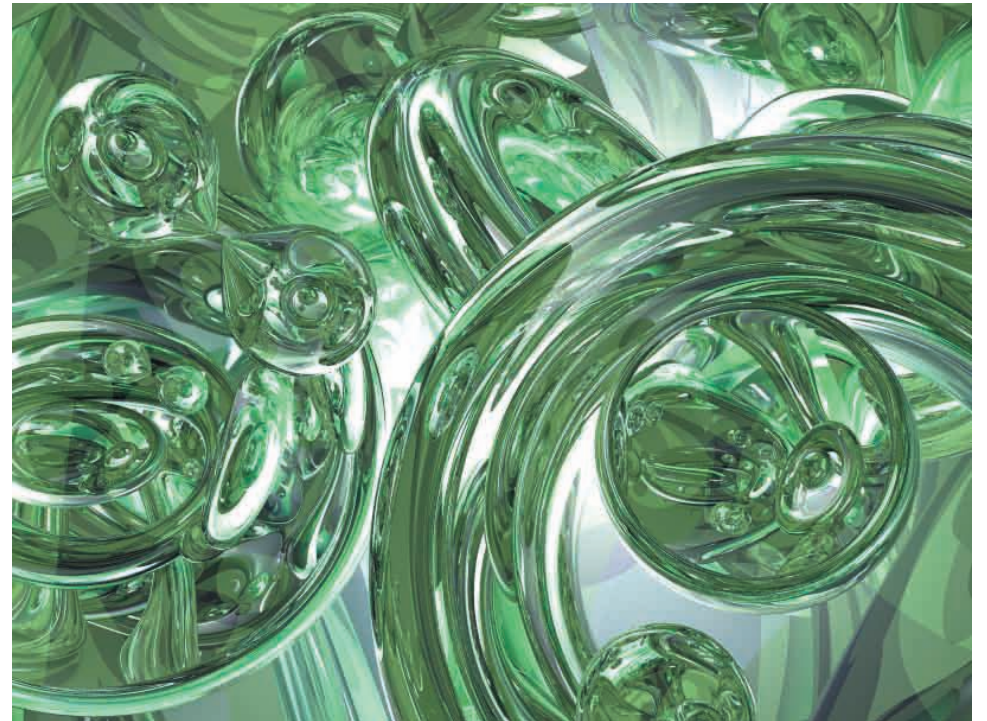


Incarnate * Dan Beirne



a cat and a fence * Brekke Berg

Planet Birth * Sharayah Schram





Rollerblades * Christine Bandy

Memorial
Elspeth
Taylor

Look—boys' poised nonchalance,
Greyish curls of smoke
Marking greedy entrails above their heads.

Ever wakeful, their eyes are steely,
Daring, ready to snap
Away to leaf-drop trees

Or ailing bicyclists rounding
The hairpin turn,
Fingers tinged with soot.

Glass beneath their face
Hints cold resolve,
Perhaps regret, but yet no tears

Show in their watchtower visage
Which no passer,
No pristine, ashless gaze

Could dare to call uncouth
Or Philistine.

Gerontion *(What Story Was Left)*

Benjamin
Gaulke

*Thou hast nor youth nor age,
But, as it were, an after-dinner's sleep
Dreaming of both...*

The old man's dry eyes were surrounded by wrinkles, the white wisps of his hair blew in the light breeze. The sun was bright. Osaka, Japan was beginning to experience spring. The old man's face was impassive, his lips were slightly parted, and one could imagine (incorrectly) that he was tired. His feet shuffled with a certain nonchalance as he approached the bench and sat down. His tan pants pulled up from his shoes, revealing gray socks and hairless, liver-spotted ankles. The old man unbuttoned the top right pocket of his button-down shirt and removed a pack of cigarettes. Lighting one, he put it between his lips and took a long drag. (He had started smoking soon af-

ter he first moved to Osaka. That had been in February of 1945.)

The old man reached into his pocket and pulled out an object wrapped in a paper towel. Unfolding the paper towel, he revealed two slices of bread, and the birds—sparrows, pigeons—came close and excitedly bobbed their heads in a mild flurry of activity. His hands carefully pulled on the crust and broke off a small piece, which he flung to the birds, which jumped on the crumb and pulled on it zealously as his fingers gently pulled off another clump of bread to throw them when the excitement died down. A child laughed somewhere nearby, at the playground.

The laughter had nothing to do with the birds or the old man.

"Sumimasen."

The old man adjusted his thick glasses as he looked up, the bright sun glaring in his eyes. The voice was foreign, uncertain.

"Excuse me, I would like to ask you some questions," said the young man in broken Japanese, bowing slightly. He was American, the old man assumed.

The old man attempted to smile, unperturbed. "Yes."

The woman (a native) standing next to the young man started to speak in Japanese. The young man was conducting a survey for a research paper. He wanted to know if the old man was old enough to remember World War II.

It was a long time ago, rather distant. "Yes."

Did you fight in the war?

The old man's head bowed slightly. He could remember the train station that the young recruits had left from. He could remember the girls cheering for them, hugging them joyously. He could remember how fewer came home. He could remember the lack of fanfare upon the return. He could remember faces full of pride and courage; he could remember faces dejected, lost. He could remember seeing these things.

"No." He had not fought.

What did you do during the war?

He could remember coming to Osaka sixty years earlier, escaping the countryside, unemployment, boredom, and insignificance. It had still been cold when he arrived at the pristine city in February. The war was going well; there had been setbacks. He had read about them occasionally.

"I worked in a factory."

What sort of factory?

Those who didn't fight worked in factories. There had been factories for ammunition, for armor, for weapons. For uniforms, for parachutes, for mess kits, for military handbooks, for swords, for compasses, combat boots, medical supplies, insignia patches and pins, ball bearings.

The old man tore another piece of bread. The birds converged on the morsel when he threw it.

“We made doors.”

What do you remember about the war?

The old man’s eyes squinted. He had never thought much about these things. A child laughed again.

“I did not fight in the war.”

But do you remember anything? Do you remember the bombings?

There had been bombings. The Americans had dropped the bombs early that spring on Osaka. His family had been miles away, had been safe, but he had been in downtown Osaka, where the explosions were. He had been eighteen at the time. He could remember the shaking of the windows in their wooden frames. He could remember the sound of sirens and then the pounding, the thudding, muffled, getting closer. It was night-time and the city was dark. Down the hallway a child screamed, crying, screamed, “Mama!... Maaamaaaaaaa!...” and he heard a woman’s voice praying. He remembered the sound of his lamp, extinguished, rattling on the dresser’s surface. *Thud. Rattle. Thud. Rattle.* The child screaming. “Maaamaaaaaaa!... Maaamaaaaaaa!...” *Thud. Rattle. Thud. Thud. THUD.* Closer. *Rattle.* The sirens.

“Yes.”

Did the Americans bomb your factory?

The next morning the bright sun had risen on blackness. The city was scorched, half gone. (A child laughed in the playground.) He remembered gutted brick buildings and standing straws of blackened timbers framing what was left of the wooden homes. There had been bodies. He had tried not to look. He would not have gone near the bombed areas at all, but he had had to pass by them. (The old man’s fingers, with an arthritic tremble, tore a small piece of stale bread that was white in the sun.) There had been a smell. It had been terrible. He could remember the smell. That he could remember.

“No.”

Did some Japanese commit war crimes back then?

It had been so long ago... He hadn’t fought...

“I don’t know.”

Do you have an opinion?

“I don’t know.”

Were the American bombings justified? Did America commit war crimes?

“I don’t know.”

Did China? The other countries?

“I don’t know. I can’t answer these questions.”

Was America right in using the atomic bomb?

He did not know the answer to the American’s question, and he said so. The birds scabbled for another crumb. The black dots of their eyes met the old man’s. The young man’s eyes searched the old man’s face.

Did younger Japanese learn enough about the war? Should Japan have apologized for what it did?

He did not know. He did not know any young people. Important people, he said, talked about these things. He could not answer these questions. There were important people who discussed these questions. He did not know. He did not know.

Years had gone by since that time. Now, the birds’ wings all flapped in another flurry as they dived to the next piece of bread. The old man was unruffled, impassive.

Do you have anything else to say about the war?

“Iie.”

The young man put away his pencil and notepad and then zipped up his backpack. The American and the woman said thank you and turned away. The old man threw another crumb.

Suddenly, the young man turned around and asked the woman, Sanae, if she could ask the old man another question. The young man—no, I mean *me*—I wanted to ask the old man what he had told his children and grandchildren about the war. I wanted to know if he had talked about it, if he had a story, one that I hadn’t created.

He said something in Japanese that I could not understand.

“He doesn’t have any children. He never married,” said Sanae. A child laughed in the playground, in another world. The birds’ wings flapped. It was a bright day. “He says he is all alone. He just says that every day he comes here to this same spot and feeds the birds.”



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“No.” He had not fought.

Nothing he had done counted as fighting. He was just a boy from the country. He had only done what he was told to do.

What did you do during the war?

He could remember arriving at Guǎngzhou early in February, with the rain pouring down instead of snow. It was exotic, even beautiful. When he arrived at Unit 8604 they told him that he would be an assistant. In actuality, he was just a janitor. He did work that anyone else could have done.

“I worked in a factory.”

What sort of factory?

There had been what they called the *maruta*—“logs.” At least several dozen. And rats. He'd mostly taken care of the rats. And he was thankful for how clean that work was by comparison.

The old man tore another piece of bread. The birds converged on the morsel when he threw it.

“We made doors.”

What do you remember about the war?

The old man’s eyes squinted. He had tried not to think about these things. He had only been a boy from the country at the time. He had only done what he was told. A child laughed again.

“I did not fight in the war.”

But do you remember anything? Do you remember the bombings?

The American thought that the factory was in Japan, where the bombings were. It was just as well.

There had been thousands of rats. They were very dirty. The whole place was dirty. The work made him dirty. He was always feeding the rats trash and cleaning up their waste. But there were worse jobs. He only took care of the rats and transferred them to different cages. He’d never actually worked with the rats. Or the logs.

“Yes.”

Did the Americans bomb your factory?

He only once actually saw a log getting cut. It was a small log firmly strapped to a table in an antiseptic room that was lit by a naked light bulb. There was a dirty drain in the center of the floor. He had been told to bring in a small knife. (A child laughed in the playground.) He had tried not to look. The log writhed on the table, said something in Chinese. The doctor had already started sawing. Anesthesia was never used for logs. (The old man’s fingers, with an arthritic tremble, tore a small piece of stale bread that was white in the sun.) The doctor had taken the scalpel from his hands: “Thank you.” There had been a muffled scream. It had been terrible. He could remember the screaming. That he could remember. The log had screamed.

“No.”

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“I don’t know.”

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Estate Sale Saturday

Abby
Porter

We walked.
There were no estate sales.
How sad,
there was no death.
We wandered three hours,
sweaty and annoyed.

You cut your foot,
but no complaints.
You simply
stopped at a sprinkler
to clean the wound.

I stood watching
the blood chasing itself down
the sidewalk,
red-pink water
rushing off to drain.

We laughed later
when you asked
for a bandaid with your snowcone,
us with our brightly colored lips,
mine red, yours purple,

And we drove home. Not accomplished,
but satisfied.



Figure Study One * Christine Bandy

Citizen's Army
Kathryn R.
Shelly

"Shoot the bastard! He's almost down—shoot him!"

"I'm trying. It's hard to get a bead on him at night, Liam. Like a rabbit, he is. You ever tried shooting a rabbit at night? Can't be done. Wait—there!"

"Good, he's down. He's down! We've got him. Nice shot."

"Ta, Liam. Oh, Jesus—look out!"

"He feckin' shot me, the bastard!"

"He's still moving. We missed. Liam! Liam, are you all right?"

"Shoot him again! Don't worry about me."

"I'm bloody well trying. He was in the fields. Where'd he go?"

"My shoulder! Shite! Danny!"

“Liam—Liam, I’ll call in the medics. Keep up, yeah? We’ll find him tomorrow, or whenever he comes out of whatever barn he’s gone to ground inside. It’s Armagh, not Londonderry or Belfast. He can’t hide forever.”

✱

“We’re on the same side, missus. You just don’t know it yet.”

“Bollocks.”

“Don’t talk that way. Doesn’t suit you.”

“It doesn’t suit you either. You were raised in a good home, weren’t you?”

“Home? Rossville Flats. Oh yeah, cracking. El Dorado.”

“And you think that I liked living here all my life?”

“Close enough. You’ve nice things. You’ve led a nice life.”

“Until you came along and pointed a gun at me and told me to not say a word, that the paratroops were after you.”

“Sure you’re losin’ your wits now, with the bold way you’re goin’ on. I’ve the gun. You’ve nothin’.”

“Except this house, which you broke into. Don’t you think the police will come, sooner or later?”

“Why? Living all the way out here at this poxy farm, they wouldn’t know you was in trouble. And you think they’d care about some past-it old spinster?”

“If they found out that there was a Provo here, they would.”

“They won’t find out.”

“Don’t be so sure.”

“Listen, missus—all I ask is to spend the night at your house. You can be generous enough for that and to spare a little bit of food and a place to sleep, yeah? You aren’t gonna call the Garda. They won’t arrest me. So let’s play nice, love, and I’ll be gone in the morning, and sure you’ll only be out a sandwich and some crisps, and maybe a pint. That’s less you’d be out than if you’d met me in the bars fifteen years ago and taken me home. Count your blessings.”

“Do you always talk like this to people whose houses you break into?”

“Only the ones who want to have it out with me.”

“How do you know I won’t poison the sandwich? I’d be doing a service.”

“Hah! Use your brain if you have one. You poison the sandwich, and as soon as I start to feel it, you’ll have a hole in your head. You wouldn’t dare. You’re not that brave, or that stupid. Were you either, you’d have done it already.”

“Thank you for the compliment.”

“Wasn’t meant as a fecking compliment.”

“I’ll take it as one. And as long as you’re in my house, you can do the decency of telling me your name.”

“So you can grass on me.”

“Maybe. But I’ll find out sooner or later, when the police come and I tell them about you.”

“I’ll be long gone. What’ll a name do for you?”

“I’d ask any visitor to my house their name.”

“Fine, fine. Wind your neck in, missus. It’s Connolly. Sean Connolly.”

“Like James?”

“*Nil ar chor ar bith*. Because unlike him, I won’t be shot in jail. But full marks for the knowledge of history. I wasn’t aware Unionists cared.”

“You said that we were on the same side.”

“Stop your jawin’ and go make me a sandwich.”

“Great man, you are. And a hard one, too. No relation to James, I’m sure.”

“If I was a hard man, you’d be dead already.”

✱

“I thought you said you were leaving in the morning. I gave you a place to sleep. I made you a sandwich. Now, you should be leaving—before I grass on you, right? Wasn’t that the story you told me before?”

“I’ll leave when I want to leave. Can’t right now. Went out last night, and saw the law in town. They’re after me.”

“You’re paranoid.”

“They’re still after me. I didn’t tell you the whole story. I had to come all the way out here. If I went anywhere closer to Derry or God-forbid-Belfast, they’d put me straight into Long Kesh.”

“You’re a murderer.”

“So are they. And I only killed a few policemen. I didn’t kill any real people. Their bastard red berets did. All unarmed, too, what they killed. They shot ‘em in the back, too. Jackie Duddy. He was runnin’ away from them when he was killed. One of ‘em took aim at him, plain intentional. Michael McDaid. They’d built up a barricade by my flat, and he was standing by it, and some soldiers on the walls shot him. Paddy Doherty. They got him at the car park of my flat. He was crawling to safety, too. Another fellow goes to help him, Bernie McGuigan. He waves a white handkerchief at the paras to tell them what he’s doin’, and they shoot him in the back of the head for that. Some others, too. Young kids. Only teens, five of ‘em. Want to know their names too? Billy Nash. Michael Kel— “

“I watch the news. I heard about it. And I’m sorry your friends had to die.”

“Friends? I didn’t know ‘em. Christ, missus, there’s thousands of us. You make me want to boke my sandwich right back up.”

“You chose to break in. You asked me for my hospitality. I gave it to you. Nothing’s keeping you here, Sean.”

“Believe me, if I’d a choice, I’d have stayed away from your farm. Feekin’ witch’s castle, it is.”

“Then go away—and stay away.”

“Nothing would make you happier, right? Maybe I’ll stay here. Take you as my wife. Your husband, you probably killed him off. You been married before, right?”

“Once. He died soon after.”

“That’s a right surprise.”

✱

“They’re still out there, then?”

“Arsing around in town, yeah. Actin’ less like the law than like college lads on their da’s money. Except Faulkner’s their da, and he’s given ‘em guns, not money.”

“If they’re behaving so foolishly, you could probably slip out tonight, from the back door, and run. You’d probably cross over the border into County Louth before too long, and they’d be too drunk to notice.”

“Keep talkin’ like that and I’ll get to thinking you’re tryin’ to help me out.”

“I just want you gone.”

“Tell me another.”

“You’ll have to leave sooner or later, and I don’t want them thinking that I had anything to do with it. I’d rather you just left without them knowing you came, honestly.”

“Change in the tide, here. Earlier you was saying that you’d have me poisoned, and now you’re saying you just want me to leave with no trouble. If I stay here a few more days, you’d probably be givin’ me money and nail bombs if I needed ‘em.”

“So this is how the Provos get their weapons.”

“You don’t let up, do you? Look, I promise you—I’ll be gone tonight, and then you won’t have anything to worry about. As long as you don’t remember the name Sean Connolly, that is. You do, and it’s none of mine what happens.”

“You’d let me die for your stupidity.”

“You’d let yourself die. And it’s not stupidity. It’s guts. Something you haven’t much of, sitting out here in this farmhouse, waiting to die. You could come with me, you know. You’re not that old. What are you, forty?”

“A few years past.”

“Still, as long as you can move fair enough. Why don’t you leave the house, anyway?”

“Because of Paul.”

“Ah, right. Your husband. The one you poisoned.”

“The one that died. He died on those steps, you know. Right outside the door you smashed to get in last night. There was blood all over him, all over the steps. He said, ‘Agnes, you have to stay here. You have to keep up the farm. You have to make sure things are set straight.’ So I stayed, and I’ve made sure. And I will yet.”

“But his ghost, it stays too.”

“What do you know about his ghost?”

“You think I haven’t ghosts of my own? You aren’t as old as you look. I’m older than I look. There’re plenty of them, and I see them just the same. Like I said, we’re on the same side, missus. Only difference is that yours is named Paul, and mine, she’s the woman they killed, my girl Morna. Other than that, we’re the same, Aghna.”

“Agnes.”

“Same thing. It’s just the language that’s different.”

“Sean, I want—to ask something of you.”

“No.”

“Enough of your lip. Listen. When you leave, whenever that is, I don’t want you to speak ill of me to your friends. I don’t agree with you, but I’ve treated you civilly enough, and there’s no cause for further ill will. Paul wouldn’t like that. I don’t care what you think of me, and I know you don’t care what I think of you. But we needn’t be enemies through and through.”

“That’s a load of bollocks.”

“Things are bad enough for the both of us. I see no cause to make them worse.”

“Should’ve thought of that before. But I’ll keep mum about it, and if you don’t believe me, you can go f—“

“I believe you. Listen then, and quick. Leave here. If the police are stationed in town, they’ll need a few hours to sleep off the drink. Another twenty minutes to get down here. Don’t go out by the front steps; there’s only one road into town from here. The one you took to get out here. But if you leave by the side door, there’s a path out, and you can cut through there and go along the shore to Louth. It’s winter. You’ll at least have a chance of getting clear.”

“How can I trust you?”

“I swear it on Paul’s grave—and by the Bible.”

“But you’re Protestant. I wouldn’t swear you a thing on Morna’s grave, or on your Orange book.”

“And you’re wasting time. Go! *Guid forder*.”

“Ulster for a curse, innit?”

“Good luck. You already knew that. We’re on the same side, as you said.”

“...right.”

*

“Jesus, that lady sure was a turn-up. Be good to have her on our side, yeah? Better ‘n a good lot of the Provos we know, eh, Morna? She stood up all right to me; she’d stand up fine to the screws. I’d take her in, any day. She held up better than I expected her to. You were right about her, *mo chara*. I was wrong. I didn’t believe you when you said, and I’m sor—“

“Right! Stop right there, and not another bloody word! Don’t take another step! Hands on your head. Spread your feet out. Now! Danny, get over there and search him. He’s bound to be carrying something, if he hasn’t already eaten it or burnt it or the like.

Now, pay attention, you little shite. You’re going to Kesh for a long stretch for that shooting in Londonderry. Connolly, isn’t it? Caught, just like your namesake. A lot of progress you lot have made in fifty years! What the hell were you talkin’ about anyway, gobshite?”

“Nothin’ you’d appreciate, you fuckin’—“

“Shut it or I’ll knock your teeth out. And listen well. I’m Liam. This is my mate Danny. Danny’s not happy, because he was trying to shoot you and he missed. I’m less happy, because you shot me. See this? Your fault. You’d better not give us further trouble, Provo, or you’ll regret it. On the double. Where were you hiding, anyway?”

“Everywhere. Nowhere you’d care about.”

“We’ll find out. If there was anyone helping you, they’d better be bloody worried right now, because once we find out—“

“Nobody was helpin’ me, you bastard. And you won’t know otherwise.”

“He means it, Liam.”

“I know he means it, Danny. There was someone, though. Connolly knows it, and he knows I know it. Listen to me, Connolly. They’d better be strong enough not to talk, boyo, because your time is up. Theirs is just beginning.”

Last Supper
Andrew
McSorley

Renzo takes the bread
In his hands and breaks it
Into two perfectly divided pieces.

He holds one out to his mother
And she accepts it with her eyes
Before it reaches her hand.

Renzo brings the cold loaf
To his lips and he can smell
The street in its white core,

The market vendor's fingers
On its stiff, delicate shell.
Small pieces fall from his mouth

And onto the unswept floor.
Tomorrow he will fly back to America
Where he will teach their youth

To manipulate the fragile sounds
Of his native tongue with their own.
In the cafeteria he will sit

At a small, round table, day dreaming
Of beaches surrounded by dark, smooth stones,
His breath slowly turning their bread

To something hard, brittle and cold.



Earth Mage Awakening * Sharayah Schram

John
Little

Forced Hand

“We are about to begin the game of Double Fannucci. The only rule I can tell you is that you may not say the word *Fannucci* until the game has ended. Ready? Begin!”

So it always began each and every time I played. Most of the time, this time included, I had the privilege of being the one to say it. For the previous two years I relished in the fact that I was a Grand Jester, one of the few in the area. As such, few Fannucci games could be played without my presence. I’d initiated a few other Grand Jesters over time, but most of them didn’t start many games if I was around. I was glad for this, as this group of seven players had the right mix of new faces and old for the most fun.

I enjoyed these games. I could recognize most types of players. The girl immediately to my left wearing the green coat had a panicked expression, she’d probably begin by asking a few ques-

tions before giving up and realizing the futility of it all. Too soon to tell whether or not she'd actually have fun.

The guy next to her with the Cubs cap and polo shirt, he already knew the rules. He could be a Grand Jester if he'd just inquire about taking the test, then he could play his own Fannucci games. He knows what the cards do, and how to have fun at the expense of the newbies.

The next guy in the red T-shirt and glasses, he hadn't played in any games that I'd been a Jester for but he had a confident look on his face. He'd played before, and he was looking for fun. Not sure how many rules he knew, but he seemed to feel that he knew enough.

Having delayed long enough, I tossed out my first penalty card of the night to the girl in green. "Penalty card for delay of game," I chanted, eager to see how this hand would play out.

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I love Subway, there's no getting around it. Most of the time I'll choose to get my lunches at Subway unless I feel like I'm sinking into a rut. I don't care for ruts.

But until I'm positive that I've gone to Subway too frequently, it feels as if a rut is impossible. So many different combinations mean that I can keep standard favorites in my mind for when I just can't decide on a new meal. The big trouble begins when I encounter an employee who decides that I'm enough of a regular to warrant a "usual."

"What can I get for you?" they ask, though the glint in their eye indicates that the question is merely a polite formality.

"Daily special," I'll say. Then the fun begins as they reach for an Italian Herbs And Cheese loaf.

"I'll have it on Hearty Italian bread, toasted, please." They quickly drop the initial bread (it had barely moved a centimeter) and grab the Hearty Italian.

"Six-inch, please," I say just as they come dangerously close to setting the ingredients down in the center of a foot-long loaf. A quick slice and they can resume their placement of ingredients. Some make the mistake of reaching for the Pepper Jack cheese.

"I'm thinking Provolone this time," I hastily interject. From here the preparation runs smoothly until we reach the cash register.

"Would you like a meal today?" he asks. This one's smarter than the one from last week. At least he didn't just begin handing me a small cup.

"Yes, please," I say. The register begins its clicking and whirring as it tallies up the cost of the meal while the employee reaches for my cup. "I'll take a chocolate chip and a peanut butter cookie for the meal," I say.

His eyes arch in alarm! "Um, I already rang you up for the chips, sir."

"It's still a meal though, right?"

"Yes, but cookies cost a few cents extra. I can have the manager void the sale and—"

"No, that's alright, I'll take the chips."

I hate ruts.

*

"Penalty card for not taking a penalty card."

"I took it!"

"Penalty card for talking, penalty card for not taking a penalty card."

"I've taken seven penalty—"

"Penalty card for talking, penalty card for not taking a penalty card."

I loved these little loops. They took the penalty card that I pushed to them, a few seconds would pass, and then I would push another one. Eventually he would get so angry that he would just start taking penalty cards himself from the deck that I was pushing them from. Which, of course, was what I wanted him to do, hence the name of the rule "penalty card for not taking a penalty card." I had to watch to make sure that no one would signal him. Tempting as it might be, signaling was against the rules, and Double Fannucci's rules tend to be unforgiving.

*

"Let's see here... what's on a Veggie Delite again? No meat, but any vegetables I want, right?"

"That's right. Why? You're not going to order it, were you?"

Something about this sandwich artist's tone struck me as needlessly confused. She had an expression that reminded me of my own expression whenever I couldn't work out a math problem. Something wasn't adding up.

"Well, I was thinking about it," I responded. "Why?"

"You just don't seem like the Veggie type."

"Well, I like trying new things, so I figured that I'd try this one now."

"But it's just vegetables! No meat. It won't fill you up."

My eye twitched at that line. I didn't eat vegetables to get full, I ate vegetables because I liked the taste. Forming that thought into words seemed especially challenging at the moment for some reason.

"I think it'll be okay—"

"You normally like daily specials, right? Why not one of those. It's the same price."

"Because I want the Veggie Delite!"

"Really?"

That question was unfair. Only one out of every ten people at a fast food restaurant actually knows for certain what they want. There's always a whispering shadow of doubt.

"Well...I don't know..."

"See, it'll amount to the same thing, but there's more on it."

"Why do you even have Veggie Delites on the menu if you don't want people to order them?"

"Well, if people really want them then we'll sell them."

"But I really...fine, daily special."

"Are you sure?"

It was like a freaky Laurel and Hardy routine.

"Yes."

"Because you don't have to—"

"Yes! Toasted, please. Italian Herbs And Cheese bread."

She pulled out the bread and quickly began to prepare a daily special.

"Sorry, I want a footlong, not a six-inch."

✱

"Point of order!"

The red shirt and glasses fellow was speaking up. Everyone set down the cards when the call to the point of order came, though I wasn't sure why it was necessary. Why not just take the penalty card?

"You can't give me that. Three undertrumps after an opponents discard is valid!"

"No it's not."

"Look, I've played this game before. I'm a Grand Jester. I know the rules."

"Then you know to take the card."

"I don't think you're a real Grand Jester. Who initiated you?"

"A guy named Darren. End point of order!"

People began picking up cards again, but weren't quite fast enough.

"Point of order, I wasn't finished yet."

"Maybe not, but we should move on."

"You're not playing by the rules!"

"The rules of Double Fannucci stand. I play the way I was taught, I'm sure you play the way that you're taught. You play next game."

"You just said the Word."

"Hmm?"

"The one rule you told us at the start, you said the word."

I blinked. Indeed, I had. I was normally more careful than that.

"Four penalty cards for saying The Word," I chanted as I dealt four cards to myself. As close to the end of the game as this was, I

probably wouldn't win with so many cards in the hand.

Still, it had been a while since I'd actually been in danger of losing a game. The challenge might do me some good.

✱

Still determined to have my Veggie Delite, I ensured that the turkey had a great amount of company. I never have lettuce, but I had a lot of it today. Tomatoes were thrown in too, though normally I steer clear of them in case they make the bread too soggy. The normal assortments of olives, pickles, cucumbers, green peppers, and jalapeno remained, naturally. I even tried some of the banana peppers just for fun.

Moving to my seat, I tried the sandwich. It was good, I will admit. It even convinced me to add the banana peppers to my normal selection of vegetables. Still, despite how good it was I plotted vengeance.

I gave this task up quickly, however. What vengeance could be worth it? The best I could come up with would be to storm into the restaurant some day when this same employee was working and loudly demand a Veggie Delite. The more I thought about such a scenario, the sillier it seemed. Add to that the trouble of figuring out what her schedule at Subway was and when my schedule would allow such a demonstration...it just didn't seem to be worth it.

Aside from the over abundance of lettuce, which was really no one's fault but my own, I enjoyed the sub. I cleaned my table, tossed the spare napkins and wrapping paper into the waste bin, placed the tray on top of the can, and walked out. The sandwich artist waved when I walked out, prompting an automatic response wave. I could always try the Veggie Delite next time.

✱

"Fannucci!"

Despite knowing a different set of rules, he didn't have any trouble figuring out how to win and subsequently end the game. I tossed my final two cards (a four and a seven; one more turn and I would have gone out) onto the table, sighed, and collected all of the spare cards when everyone else followed suit.

"Good game," he said, reaching over to shake my hand. I instinctively took his and shook it.

"Rematch?" I asked. He grinned, nodding his head. I pushed the cards over to him.

"Your deal."

Snake Girlfriends

Hannah
Smith

He thinks he is just tired.

“Or it could be the cigarettes,” he added as an afterthought. Wet leaves stick to the bottoms of his pristine white Converse shoes. He wears his worn out sandals to the car, then switches to his shoes; he wants to preserve their shine, to make it look as if he never walks through muddy puddles, or treads on watery grasses.

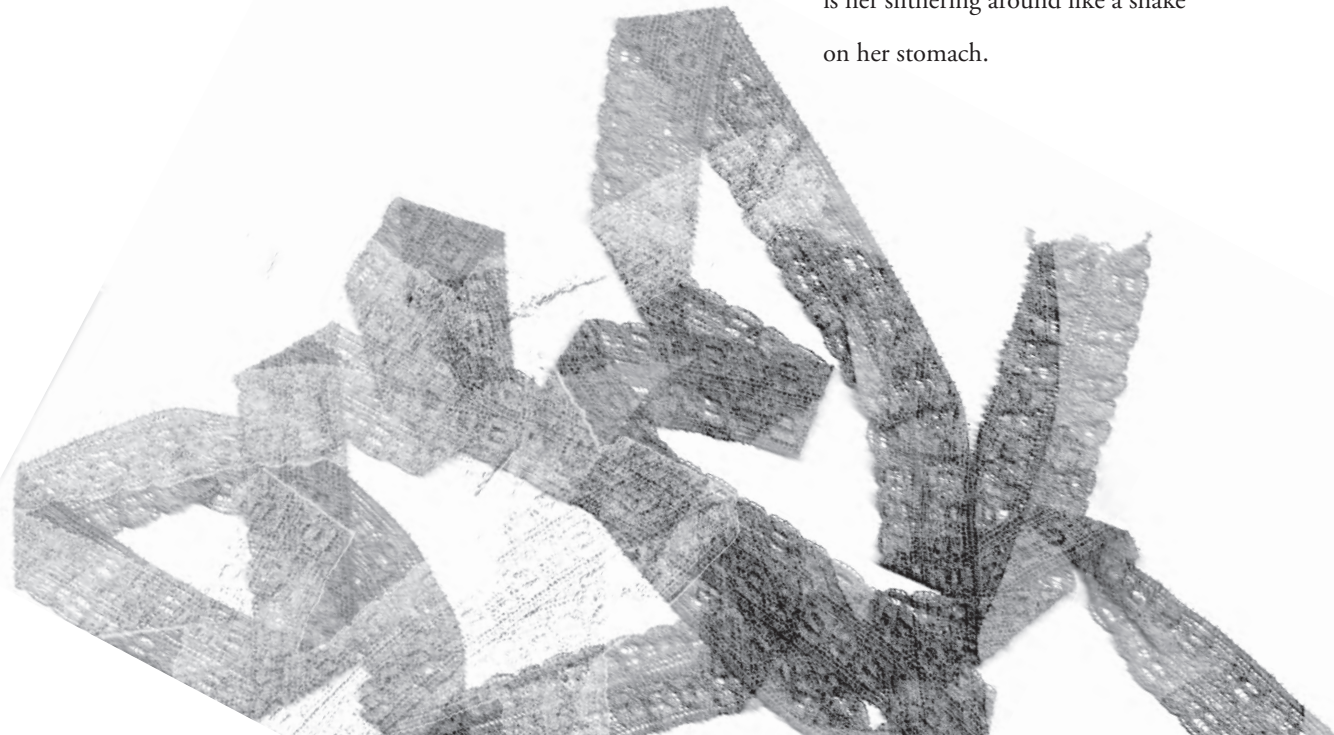
“I thought I’d have more time,” he talks about his nights—always spent with a girlfriend. I ask him why she doesn’t join us for burgers on Tuesdays.

“She isn’t very social.”

She has reasons though.

Under her shirt, beneath that slightly protruding belly, which she keeps hidden away, is written secrets. Her shirt came up once,

only an inch, but that was enough, to see layers of thick green scales, plated for expansion and comfort. I’d like to tell him that we will be kind, we would never tease her about those reptilian features she sports—but I can’t seem to get out those words of assurance, because all I can think about is her slithering around like a snake on her stomach.





Ejoka * Thomas Natwick



for the birds * Brekke Berg

*Reflections upon a
Hot Day in Ancient Rome
when a Religious Cult was
Punished for Arson Some
Weeks after a Fire Had
Destroyed Most of the City*

Benjamin
Gaulke

*I hear they'll hang you upside down
Stretched across their boards
For hearing distant voices
And crossing to the Lord.*

*O, God, no. No no no no. I don't want go here. Anywhere but
here. Jesus, no, anywhere but here. I don't want to go here.*

The soldiers took the thick leather straps and started to tie him to the wooden beams. They roughly grabbed his limbs. They forced his legs together and tied them first. Then the arms were stretched opposite from each other and also tied down. Splinters of wood painfully dug into his limbs and his back and his buttocks.

*God, no, no, no, I don't want to go here. I would go anywhere for
You, but not here.*

Finally, a strap was wrapped around his naked waist and cinched tight. They didn't want him to move when they nailed him to the wood. It was a hot, cloudless day in August.

My life used to be so simple. I remember the last day that was like this. I woke up in the morning and the sun hadn't risen yet. I kissed my wife on the forehead and then put my clothes on, cinching them with a belt around my waist.

I went outside and a fog covered the ground and the sun was beginning to peek over the horizon. I went for a walk because the dawn was beautiful and the town was so quiet and peaceful. I had no ideas or ambitions of great things to come. I was just a fisherman, like my father and my brother, Andrew, and this was all I wanted to be. Andrew was the one who was a disciple of John, the zealot in the desert who ate locusts and honey and wore rough camel hair for clothing. His was a life that I found unacceptable for myself, for my wife, my family.

I reached the lake and started to work on repairing some holes in my nets when I heard Andrew run up to me.

"We found the Messiah!" he exclaimed.

I asked him what on earth he meant, but he just insisted that I go with him. He brought me to a man who had a large birthmark on his face. He was so ugly that I could barely stand to look at him. The man knew my name. He said that I would now be called a rock. I had no idea what he meant.

The fisherman was old now. His strong body had already been beginning to weaken with age when they'd captured him. His frame had barely endured their abuse. Now, strapped down, he wanted to say something, but he couldn't think of words, he was too scared, his whole body was quaking with the feeling of helplessness. He wanted to say something noble, like the other martyrs had, like Christ had, to encourage the believers. He should pray, he should preach, he should forgive, he should exhort, he should prophesy. But no words came.

The straps were tight. He could feel metal points placed over his wrists, pricking his skin. His hands trembled in anticipation of the coming pain. *O God, no. I don't want to go here.* He saw the mallets raised high above the malice filled faces silhouetted in the burning sun. The sweat from the fear and the heat soaked him and he lost control of his bladder and wet himself and the hammers came down and his body recoiled and he tried to pull his arms away and the leather chafed his skin and the nails, *O God, the nails*, pierced his skin and he could feel them wedging between the bones of his arms and the muscles in his hands clenching and he no longer wanted to say anything and he certainly couldn't

because he screamed and screamed with the agony and his voice ran hoarse and the hammers kept falling, again and again, and he could feel the nails driving through him and binding him to the wood and he couldn't move, no matter how much he wanted, he couldn't move. He just screamed, and the crowd cheered with delight. The soldiers undid the leather straps on his arms and he tried to move his arms but he couldn't, they were one with the wood.

He passed out as they nailed his feet.

The next day, Andrew and I were sitting on the shore, washing our nets. We had caught nothing after fishing all night. The man with the birthmark, Jesus, approached, and a crowd followed him. He got in my boat and asked me to take him out onto the water; the crowd of people was too much and he needed space. I didn't want to offend Andrew by refusing and, besides, Jesus was intriguing and I had hardly anything better to do. He preached from the boat and I listened, as did the crowd. He was a powerful speaker and he spoke of things divine and things fallen, of sin and salvation, of heaven and earth. He was captivating, but at the same time he was clearly crazy; he was just some nobody from the country and yet he spoke like a prophet, priest, or king would. When he finished speaking, he told me to cast my net over the side of the boat. I told him that we hadn't caught anything all night long, but that I would do as he said. I didn't expect anything. I thought Jesus was worthy of ridicule. Who was this ugly, deformed man to tell me how to fish, and why should this crowd listen to him when he was clearly a lunatic? Why did my brother think that he could save us?

The net had barely touched the water when the whole boat lurched. There were so many fish in the net that it was breaking. I yelled for help and the other boat in the water came over to haul in the catch. Soon both boats were simply filled with fish, to the point where they sat so low in the water that they could have capsized. I felt so humbled by the event. I had just mocked this man, this Jesus, in my mind, and now it was clear that he was a man of God, so I fell down at his feet weeping. I said that he should leave me, for I was a sinner. He said that I shouldn't be afraid, that from now on we would catch people instead of fish. He said that I should follow him. So I followed him.

He woke up to excruciating pain as he was taken to the center of the stadium. Four men carried him. He could feel the jarring motion of each of their footsteps through the wounds in his wrists and feet. He gasped with each pang of pain. Finally they stopped and started to tilt him. The world dizzily whirled in his vision and was flung upside down and there was a jarring sensation as he was locked into place, head downward, suspended by the nails in his feet

and wrists, and the blood rushed to his head and he vomited and tried to lean his head back but he couldn't and the vomit trickled down his cheeks and into his nose and down his forehead into his hair and he saw his genitals meekly flopped onto his belly and realized that he was going to urinate into his face when he died.

The crowd cheered. The world looked crueler upside down. He was overwhelmed with the feeling of wanting to be *anywhere but here. I don't want to be here. Not here. Not here. I don't want to be here.*

Three other people who were in the boat that day also followed Jesus: my brother, Andrew, and two of our friends, John and James, who were also brothers.

Jesus was a teacher, but his teaching was often hard to understand and believe. He said that we had to hate our loved ones, our parents, our children, our spouses, if we were to follow him, yet he also said that we should love others. I followed him for weeks, as did several others, drawn to him without really understanding what he taught.

But he was more than a teacher. I could see that. I could feel it in my bones. He had authority. I saw people with demons and Jesus would rebuke the demons and they would come out of the people immediately and say that Jesus was the Son of God. When this happened, Jesus told the demons to be silent. He told us not to tell anyone what the demons said.

He healed people. I saw that with my own eyes as well. My wife's mother was sick, deathly ill with a fever, and he just touched her and the fever left and she made us dinner. We all wept for joy at this. She was dying one moment and then was well enough to serve us and everything was all right. It was a miracle.

Two naked women, one old, one younger, were led into the arena by two soldiers. They were shoved to the ground several feet away from where he was. They were crying. They looked at him and their eyes were terrified and no one, neither he nor the women, was able to say anything. The soldiers walked over by him. The younger woman tried to run away and a soldier rushed to her and grabbed her by the hair and dragged her back to the spot in front of the slowly-dying man. He watched the whole thing happening upside down. A gate opened inside of the stadium and some mangy dogs, hyenas, frothing at their mouths, ran into the arena, angrily, hungrily yelping with glee and malice. The crowd roared with joy. The guards shooed the hyenas away from the man. The two women cowered as the dogs circled them and glared with wicked eyes, long strings of spittle falling to the dusty ground from their ragged jaws. The women screamed; the dogs lunged.

They went for the soft parts of their bodies: bellies, breasts, necks. The man cried in agony and the tears dribbled down his forehead. He wanted to say something, but his throat cracked. The hyenas fought over the pieces.

He said at one point that he gave us peace, his peace. Yet he said at another point that he came not to bring peace, but to bear the sword. We listened to him without understanding him, but we were entranced by his words. He had the power to hold onto us merely by using words. He also was incredibly generous, caring, and above all selfless. Over time, I forgot that he was ugly and realized that he was beautiful, majestic, the grandest of men. Yet he was so strange, so unassuming. I didn't understand, but I started to have faith, to believe in him, that he was the Messiah, the Savior. I did not know what this meant, but I still believed.

He said that I and eleven others (including Andrew, James, and John) were his apostles, that we had authority over demons and sickness. He said that we should preach that the Kingdom of God was near.

There was one day when a man named Jairus, a leader in the synagogue, sent someone to tell us that his daughter was dying of some disease. He wanted Jesus to heal her. The crowd was so thick in the city (Jesus always drew a crowd by this point) that our progress to Jairus's home was quite slow. I could feel the press of desperate people all around me, yet Jesus himself was given space. They revered him. Suddenly Jesus turned around and asked who had touched him. I hadn't seen anyone touch him. I told him that there was no way to know who had done it. There were too many people. Jesus said that he knew someone had touched him, that he could feel that power had left him. Finally, some woman, untouchable, her clothes bloody and stiff and sticky from some unmentionable hemorrhage (I don't enjoy the thought of it), came forward and admitted to grabbing Jesus' robe. Jesus, far from angry, said that her faith had made her well.

It was at this point that a servant of Jairus came and told us that it was too late, that the daughter was dead. Jesus said that we shouldn't be afraid, that she would be saved. So we went to the house anyway. When we got there, he had James, John, and I go inside, along with the girl's parents. The girl was lying on the bed, certainly dead, and the parents wept hysterically, and soon James, John, and I wept with them because the whole scene felt so senseless, so tragic. This girl was beautiful with soft black hair and smooth tan skin and her face composed in a sad death mask. Jesus said she wasn't dead and I stopped crying and bitterly laughed at him. He said "No, really, she isn't dead," and he grabbed her hand and said, "Little girl, get up!" and she got up and said that she was hungry and Jesus said that we

should feed her and tell no one what had happened.

With the sky as his ground and the ground as his sky (nothing to stand on, no space to ascend) the inverted man watched helplessly as the yipping, filthy dogs tore his wife and daughter apart, from him, from each other, apart into pieces.

There was a storm once. We were on a boat and we were scared as the salt sea spray stung our faces and eyes. Jesus wasn't with us. We had been blown away from the shore that he was on. The wind raged and the waves crashed and it was as if the world were in disarray. Our grand adventure with this Messiah was going to end with us drowning without him.

But then we saw a figure walking on the waves. We thought it was a ghost, a demon coming to destroy us, but then we heard Jesus saying that we shouldn't be afraid, that it was him. I said that if he really was Jesus, he should tell me to join him. I somehow knew that I would obey Jesus' voice, that I would have to do so, while I would be able to ignore a demon. He told me to come and I came. I had to. But as I was walking I felt how strong the wind was, and how high the waves, and I was scared and started to sink under the water. I cried for help. Jesus caught me. He asked why I had doubted.

He tried to formulate a prayer, but he couldn't, he could only cry and feel pain and shock. The hyenas were lured away, one with his daughter's leg still in its mouth. Soon all that was left on the ground were bloodstains, and dust.

He could feel the blood from his feet running down the front and back of his legs, over his knees. He could feel the blood running from his wrists down his elbows down his shoulders. A puddle of blood, tears, vomit, urine, and sweat collected underneath his head in an obscene halo.

He had always thought that martyrdom would be beautiful. It wasn't. In no way was it beautiful, or glorious. This was unalterable fact.

Jesus asked who people said he was. We told him that they said he was John the Baptist, or a prophet. He asked us who we thought he was. There was a silence. Uncertain, I gave it my best guess and said that he was the Messiah. This is what he said: "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are a rock, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be

bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in Heaven.” And then he told us not to tell anyone who he was.

He rebelled against the reality and his muscles flinched and he tried to pull his limbs away from the wood, but this just made the pain excruciating. The nails would not move. *God, where are you? This is just pain. There is nothing in this but pain.* His body, weak, collapsed against the wood. The sun felt as hot as flames.

A man clothed in rich purple came out into the arena. He raised his arms for silence. The baying crowd eventually hushed. Then Emperor Nero began to speak.

Jesus said that he would die and three days later rise again from the dead, an idea I rejected. I drew him aside; this was madness and I started to tell him so. I had the right to; after all, he gave me this authority. But he grew angry and said in front of everybody that I was Satan, that I was trying to tempt him. He said I was focused on the flesh, not on the spirit. Then he told us that we would have to forsake ourselves—our loves, our knowledge, our lives, our purposes, everything—to follow him. He said that the only way to live was to lose one’s life, that even if we gained the world, we would still die if we tried to save ourselves. Only those who submitted to death would live. He said we would have to carry our own crosses if we wanted to follow him.

“Fellow Romans, here is the murderer!” thundered Nero to the city. “His followers burned our city! Their teachings are perverse, filthy, disgusting, and unacceptable. These Christians hate the human race. They are cannibals, murderers, and arsonists. Well, where is their God now?” The crowd screamed. “Where is he? Did he come back after we killed him? Where is he right now?” The crowd roared. Nero turned to the elderly man. “Have you seen him lately? Where is the promise of his coming?” The man stared forward expressionlessly. Nero spit on his face and then spoke words the man knew were coming. He listened to the emperor’s words and felt defeated by them; they felt true. “Ever since our first ancestors died, everything has continued in the same way. Your god never came to this earth. Nothing has ever changed, not since the beginning of all things.”

Nero turned back to the crowd and shouted, “We will kill all of them. All of the followers of Jesus will die, as Jesus died, as this man dies. We will kill them here, on my grounds. All Christians will die, for their teaching is the vilest of any religion.”

The religious leaders questioned Jesus because he had said that he was the bread of life that had come down from Heaven. He

said that whoever did not eat this bread would die. They asked him what he meant and he only made things worse. There was no ambiguity in what he said. He told us all that would have to eat his flesh and drink his blood to live.

I’ve never been more offended in my life. What a sickening thought... to tear at a man’s flesh with my teeth, to drink his blood, as if I was an animal. We told him that this was disgusting, that we could not accept such a thing. He said that we would see him ascend to Heaven, that flesh was useless compared to the spirit. He said that some of us would not believe (I thought he meant me).

Many followers of Jesus soon left in disgust. He turned to us, his apostles, and asked us why we didn’t leave. We were silent. I pondered the question and knew the answer but the answer was so terrible, to think that what he said was truth, that committing outrage against his body was somehow going to save us. So I just said that there was no one else to go to, that he was life, that we believed. At the time I barely understood what these words meant.

He couldn’t move. There was nowhere to go. Nero looked down at him.

“We killed your brother, too. In Greece. Have you heard?”

Andrew. Andrew had brought me to Jesus in the first place.

“He cursed your god’s name as he died. He was nailed to the cross like this—” here Nero shaped his body into an “X” “—and as he hung there he started to curse Jesus.”

The man did not react to this, not because he didn’t know what to say, but because he didn’t know what to feel outside of anger.

“He said it was all lies. And you will curse Jesus before you die, too. I will make sure that it happens. You will suffer and the only way to end the suffering will be to curse your god. If you do this, the sword will be swift and merciful.”

The apostle would have cursed God right then if he had had a voice. He looked at the Emperor with an expression of venom, of hate.

There was a bizarre day when Jesus took James and John and me to the top of a mountain to pray. The other two disciples and I were tired by the time we reached the summit and we started to nod off, our eyelids drooping. Suddenly, we heard voices saying something about leaving from Jerusalem. We looked up and Jesus’ face and robe were white like the sun and he was talking to two people and somehow I knew that they were Elijah and Moses. I’m not crazy; James and John saw the same thing.

The two men started to leave. James, John, and I were dumb-struck and frightened. I told Jesus that Moses and Elijah should

stay and I would make three shelters for them. (Of all of the foolish things one can say during a divine vision...)

A bright cloud came and its shadow wrapped around us. It was unearthly. We fell to the ground in terror. We heard God's voice say from the cloud, from all around us, "This is my Son, my Chosen, my Beloved. With Him I Am well pleased. Listen to Him!"

The light, the cloud, the rush, the awesome holiness, was then gone and there was stillness and I could fill the pebbles on the ground digging into my knees and shins. Then Jesus said "Get up and don't be afraid." We looked up, still scared. There was only Jesus standing there.

The sun was starting to set.

There was singing coming from one of the inlets into the arena, and awful groans. There were many voices singing and dying. In his delirium, the man shut his eyes and tried to pray. He tried to ignore the pain penetrating him and the headache from the blood pounding in his skull and the smell of himself in the puddle of filth above his head on the ground.

You have changed things before, changed the face of reality. I have seen You do this. Yet now, when I most need You, a sign, Your voice, You are gone. What sort of worthless God are You to desert me now, when I need You, when we all need You?

Then there was silence except for the leering multitude and the drip, drip, drip of his blood. The singing was still a low mumble.

I'm opening my eyes now. Change my vision. Let me see rightly again.

He opened his eyes and saw the procession start to come into the stadium, the soldiers walking on the ceiling of his vision, and the Christians borne thereby. Nothing was better. The disappointment was so profound that he wished he had never prayed, the suffering so great that he wished he had never believed, the darkness so piercing that he wished he'd never had vision.

At this point I started feeling like things were coming to a head, as if the story was reaching its most important point. Jesus kept talking about how he was going to be killed, how there would be great and terrible violence. I was afraid for his safety, for our safety. We were all afraid.

His teachings became more incisive, even more difficult. Jesus said at one point that it would be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for the rich to enter Heaven. I was astonished. We had all been so blessed over the years. We asked him how anyone could be saved. He said that for us it was impossible to be saved, but that for God all things were possible.

The saints were singing in tortured tones.

When we reached Jerusalem we saw the great temple. We were in awe at its magnificence, and said so. But Jesus told us that the beautiful temple would be destroyed, that not one stone would lie on top of another. Andrew and James and John and I were troubled and asked him when this would happen. Then he started to tell us awful things. He said that there would be wars, earthquakes, false prophets, famines, that our souls would be in greater peril than even our bodies. He said that would be only the beginning of the birth pangs.

They were all—Jew and Gentile, slave and free, man and woman—nailed to thick wooden poles, their bodies stretched in long lines along the poles, their hands nailed together straight above their heads, and one long nail for each of their feet that entered through the left side of the left foot, went through the wood, and came out through the other foot. The audience cheered riotously and the soldiers walked along the edges of the arena so that the crowd could spit and throw rocks at the believers in Christ. This was the hymn of the Christians as they tried to sing:

Christ, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

Jesus told John and me to find a home in Jerusalem so that we could celebrate the Passover, the holiday in remembrance of when the Lord saved our people from slavery and death at the hands of our foes. He said we should ask a stranger fetching water to help us. We did, and without questioning he gave us a room in his house. (This was a few days after we had entered the city in a procession, with the people laying palm branches and coats on the road before Jesus and praising his name.)

The night was dark. We all entered the room and Jesus started to wash our feet, in the way that a slave would. I was upset that he should wash our feet when clearly he was a greater person than any of us ever could be. I asked him if he was going to wash my feet and he said that I didn't understand what he was doing, but that I would understand later on.

He recognized the faces and voices of so many of those that filed past him and felt agony for their suffering, for the elderly with kindly faces, for the innocent children, for the pregnant woman, for the church leaders he knew and the converts he would never meet, all of them naked and tortured and bleeding, all of them going to death.

I said that he would never wash my feet but he said that if he didn't wash me, that I would have no part in him. I told him to wash my whole body, but he said that those who are clean only need to have their feet washed. I felt humiliated for not having understood these things. Jesus said that we were all clean, except for one of us. I was terrified that he meant that I was the one who was dirty. I felt like I was. I had doubted Jesus when I'd first met him and Jesus himself had said so many times since then that I didn't have enough faith; he even said this after he said that I was the rock he would build upon.

But let me tell the rest of the story of the supper. Jesus took a loaf of bread and said that it was his body, given for us. He took a cup of wine and said that it was his blood. He had us eat the bread and drink the wine. I was relieved to discover that what he had said earlier about consuming his flesh and blood to become part of him wasn't literal, that he'd only meant bread and wine. I was glad that nothing violent had to happen.

Their bodies were mutilated, skin hanging from the flesh, the blood staining the ground and the soldiers that carried them. The dozens of broken bodies were lined along the entire interior of the stadium, forming a circle around the man in the center who was flipped upside down. As they were dying their voices weakened and their lips mouthed the words to the song. The poles were dropped on the ground with screams. Dozens of vats of a hot, viscous and black substance, some sort of tar or pitch, were waiting for them there. The soldiers lifted the vats and poured them on the prisoners, scalding them, and the prisoners screamed more and stopped singing entirely.

Jesus then said that one of us would betray him and I was sure he meant me. Such a thing had never even occurred to me. I may have doubted at times, but I would never betray Jesus! All of us sitting at the table looked at each other and wondered whom Jesus was accusing. I think most people thought it was me.

I leaned over to John and asked him to ask Jesus who he had in mind. I was too scared to ask myself. John asked the question. Jesus held up a piece of bread and answered that the one he gave it

to after dipping it in his bowl was the traitor. He dipped the bread and gave it to Judas, one of the disciples. I was instantly relieved. I was still holy. I was one of the righteous.

Jesus told Judas to leave and do what he had to do quickly. I didn't understand that part either. Then he spoke to us about how God was glorified through him. He called us his little children and said that he was going where we could not follow. He said that we should now love each other as he had loved us.

As one of them was being scalded, he cursed the man in the center, screaming, "It's your fault that we're here, you liar, you fool! If Jesus was the Messiah, if he was God, how can this be happening? How can we suffer like this?" and for the first time since everything went upside down the man's eyes welled up with pity for someone besides himself, for this person who was just as lost him, who had the same agonizing and unanswerable questions. He wanted to tell the man that he loved him, but his throat was dry and all he did and all he could do was hope that the tears falling down his forehead said what his non-existent words couldn't.

I asked him where he was going and he said that I couldn't follow him then, but that I would follow him afterwards. I said I would follow him no matter what happened, even to jail, even to death; I said I would lay my life down for him—he had said in the past that he would do the same for me—and I meant to die for him, from the bottom of my heart, I meant it, but he said words that stung my ears like a slap: "Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." He told me that the rooster would not crow before I had denied knowing him three times. He said that we would all leave him, like sheep scattered without a shepherd. We all said that we wouldn't leave him, ever, even if everyone else did. I especially meant it. I no longer had the weak faith that I had had before. I was ready to die.

His head ached with the blood pooling in it and the wounds in his hands and feet were raw and the sun hung low on the horizon and splashed the stadium red and the Christians were groaning and crying and trying to pray and he realized that here at this most terrible of moments no one could stand for themselves, could stand on their own, that the survival of faith was grace and grace alone, that they were failing to endure what no human could endure; and although their bodies and minds were falling to oblivion and Hell's gates hung wide open to receive them, though they were ripped, gashed, burned, beaten, battered, bloodied,

bruised, shattered, pierced, scalded, slashed, and dying and dead, their souls belonged to a God transcending these things, and he only felt terrible now for having failed again, for having lied again about God's salvation, but he thanked God that the curse he had wanted to say couldn't be uttered, even though he knew that God had heard it. He wanted to go elsewhere, but he couldn't, and this was what he was starting to accept: that his faithlessness, like his death, like his faith, was inevitable, and that he was human clay to be broken and broken and broken before being remolded into something more, something whole. But there would always be suffering first, and so he suffered, and suffered greatly.

The garden, Gethsemane, so beautiful by day, was now dark and ominous and the long lines of tree leaves hung in curtains around us and Jesus told me and James and John to stay near him, to stay awake and pray, but we couldn't, the week had been so long, and we were afraid, so we kept falling asleep and thus hid from the exhaustion and the fear, even though we tried to be better than that. He kept leaving to pray nearby and each time he came back he was deeply hurt to find us sleeping. He had been praying so hard that he was sweating and the sweat... the sweat was mixed with his blood.

He scolded us for being so unfaithful to him. We had nothing to say. He told me that the spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak.

Then, led by the traitor Judas, there were soldiers with lanterns. And torches. Weapons. I tried to fight them and I cut off the ear of one of their slaves. Jesus told me to stop. He said those who lived by the sword died by the sword. This was when I got scared. I had thought my death would be that of a glorious warrior fighting against impossible odds. I *wanted* to die by the sword. Instead, Jesus—he who had talked so much about how he had come with the sword, how we should sell our cloaks for swords—Jesus said I couldn't even fight. So I had nothing now. He didn't want us to be warriors. He wanted us to be victims.

Jesus picked the ear up off of the ground and put it back on the slave. Then Jesus was arrested and taken away and, helpless, we all ran and were scattered.

I went to watch the trial that evening, but from a distance.

The poles were placed upright in the ground and the sun set and the victims' pitch-covered bodies were set against the pitch black sky and made one with it. The worst part was not knowing what would happen next, not knowing the means by which their pain would transubstantiate into the mirth of the onlooking multitude. It was now too dark to see anything. The man in the

center wondered why the crowd didn't leave and how the games could continue when there wasn't any light. Not knowing how or what to pray, broken words came from his mind like fragments: *remember me... I'm scared...this darkness... Thy will be done.*

It was a cold night and I was scared. The people in the area of the trial seemed very hostile and they kept questioning me. I said three times that I didn't know Jesus and a rooster crowed and Jesus looked at me with a glance that broke my heart. What more can I say than this? What more do you want to know? I was sorry and am sorry, but I'm still capable of the same sin and can't say for sure that I wouldn't do it again. So what do you want from me? Do you want a hero? Am I supposed to be your hero? I just do my best, and it's often not good enough. In fact, my best is never good enough.

I'd like to tell you that Jesus was a hero when he hung on the cross, but I can't say that either. I wasn't there; I was too scared to see it. Maybe he didn't look heroic. Maybe we need to stop thinking about heroes, or at least traditional heroes. Maybe that's another thing that we need to give up, in addition to everything else that we've already lost—and I know we've all lost so much.

My cross is upside down; his was right side up. In his mind's eye, the man contemplated himself and Jesus facing each other, the blood rolling off their respective bodies in opposite directions. His body was death; Jesus' was life. His overwhelming sense of his own failure was only outweighed by his realization of God's grace.

Soldiers with lanterns, torches, and weapons made a ring around the dark, suffering dozens nailed to the poles piercing the sky.

I shouldn't even say "maybe." Jesus was definitely not a hero in our sense of the word and no Christian can or should be a hero in that sense either, because the glory Christ gives us is not glory as the world sees it. We must keep this in mind when they start killing us, which will be any minute now.

The soldiers touched the torches to the Christians and the flames leaped onto them like predators. The pitch burned with a fierce and lasting heat. An unearthly, hellish scream of agony, one that made the man's hairs stand on end, arose singly from the throats of the victims and their bodies were consumed with bright, roiling flames and acrid smoke and they soon were dead but their bodies kept burning, the thick flames licking the faces frozen in screams. A smell of burning fat and pitch reached the man in the center. The audience cheered at the fireworks. There

was now illumination for the entire evening. The entertainment could continue.

The story is not just about loss, however, and this is something I must tell you as well. We all are right now waiting for death to visit, and it may be hard to believe in anything good, but you must believe me when I tell you that the story is not all suffering, even though any optimism given our present circumstance may seem utterly foolish.

Some of the women followers of Jesus came and said that Jesus' tomb was empty. This was early in the morning. The women were scared by what they had seen. I ran to the tomb with John and we found the empty linens that had been Jesus' funereal garments. There was nothing else.

He was starting to learn how to pray again and soon the words came to his mind. He prayed for those now being led into the arena to die in front of him. He prayed for those who tightly tied animal skins to the Christians as a crude joke and then fed them to ravenous beasts.

That evening we were eating dinner and Jesus appeared among us, despite the fact the doors were locked. He promised us peace.

Bears, tigers, hyenas, and lions devoured the Christians all night long, the flickering flames appalling the sight of their torture. The Christians were dressed in the skins of cattle and pigs and antelope. Some were dressed as sheep. Some died with prayers on their lips, some with curses. His mind was numbed by the violence, but he still prayed for all of them.

Life sometimes seems to have a beautiful sense of repetition, of familiarity, moments when God's plan seems apparent. This is especially evident for me when the end of a story is its beginning.

Some weeks after the initial appearances of Him whom we now call Christ, many of the disciples and I went fishing. All night long we caught nothing. Then there was a distant voice from the shore. The man on the shore spoke his words like plain men sing, and yet we did not recognize him.

There was no more reason to pretend that he was brave and noble. He realized that he was small, made most wonderfully small, and that nothing hinged on his success or failure. He was not the one in control.

He called us children, saying, "You have no fish, have you?" We said, "No." He said to cast the net over the right side of the

boat. We listened to him and this time we couldn't even lift the net it was so full of fish. John turned to me and said that the man on the shore was the Lord. My heart was overwhelmed with joy and I jumped in the water and swam to Jesus.

The killings continued all night long. As the sun rose, one final victim, an apostle, was brought into the arena. His mouth was gagged. He had not ceased to preach the entire time he had been jailed, and his words were dangerous and powerful, so they'd gagged him. The man hanging upside down from his nailed feet watched the soldiers escort Paul to a block in the middle of the stadium. Paul was a Roman citizen and, as such, would be swiftly decapitated. He walked boldly, unafraid.

Why am I always the weaker one? Why must I always suffer more?

After we all had breakfast with Jesus, he asked me, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?" I told him that he knew I loved him. He said, "Feed my lambs." Then he asked me again if I loved him. I gave him the same reply and he said that I needed to tend his sheep. I thought this would be the end of it, but he asked me a third time, and this time I felt wounded by his words and I told him that he knew all things, he knew I loved him, he *knew* I loved him, even if I was such a poor follower of him, and he said in reply, "Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." He said this to indicate the kind of death by which I would glorify God. After that, he said, "Follow me." So I followed him.

You are my sheep, and I will try to feed you. I don't know if I can succeed in this or not. Perhaps my words are of little encouragement to you. I was blessed to tell Jesus three times that I loved him, but I still denied him three times before that. You all have been much braver than I was.

The rising sun's slanted rays revealed a ground now covered with spilled blood like a sheet. Pieces of people littered the area.

Paul's head was placed on the block and the sword swiftly came down; his head tumbled to the ground. The other man was now alone. He wondered if he would be remembered as the last Christian. Or, more likely, forgotten as the last Christian.

I haven't always done a good job of following Christ in the thirty years since then. I was jealous of John at the time, who

was always the righteous one, the example of spiritual excellence. It is also humiliating to me to this day that I supposedly lead all of you and yet Paul, who never even saw Jesus before his death, is the one who seems to get all of the attention. Everyone thinks that he is so much wiser than me. It's not my fault that God chose me, a fisherman from nowhere, to lead you; it's not my fault that I am uneducated and ordinary and that I couldn't write my letters to you by myself. I'm sorry that I'm weak and often unloving. I'm sorry for having rejected my fellow Gentile Christians at one point. It embarrasses me to say this... but I'm glad that most of you eventually listened to Paul instead of me when he said that Jesus died for everyone. I don't know why I was so foolish and said at the time that only Jews, people like me, could be Christians. If anyone should be prohibited from being Christian, it should be people as weak as me, Jewish or Gentile. I am unworthy. I have rarely loved you in the way that Christ commanded, in the way that Christ loves you: humbly. I've never washed your feet. I cannot make you clean.

His body was now ready to finally succumb. His last breaths were labored and desperate and spots of encroaching darkness greedily consumed his sight.

These are dark times. Our numbers have been dwindling ever since our initial successes. After all of the Christians here are murdered (and unless there is a miracle, I don't think any will survive), I don't know how the church elsewhere will carry on with most of its leaders dead. We must trust God to care for them when we are gone. We must obey God and not any human authority.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, my beloved, God's chosen, I don't understand why angels and earthquakes have in the past shattered our chains and prisons, and yet now it seems like we will not be released. I cannot explain why I was once able to raise people from the dead and yet now I can do nothing for your wives, husbands, children, and parents who have been killed. I can't even tell you why the Spirit once empowered us and comforted us and gave us strength to live this calling, and yet now we seem abandoned again. I don't know where the tongues of flame on our foreheads have gone since my sermon when the Spirit came. I am sorry that there is nothing more I can do. Perhaps there will be a miracle at the last moment. We have always been blessed with miracles at the moment when it seemed like we were doomed.

We must take strength in Christ. While he was sinless and we are sinful, there is one similarity between his death and ours. Like him, we are going to be killed for a crime we never committed. I know that none of our own started the fire that destroyed most of

the city. I know that we suffered just as much in the fire as everyone else. The only good that can come out of the bitter injustice that we are suffering will be if we can still love our tormentors, just as Christ loved his. We must follow Christ's example. He died for all sinners; and we are all, persecutors and persecuted, sinners.

Forgive me for being such a poor model for all of you. My words must grow short now. They will take me outside soon.

Many of you have asked me what we can do. This is my answer: we must praise the Lord as long as we live.

I will praise the Lord as long as I live.

He closed his eyes. There was darkness and laughter and cheering. He breathed, groaned.

He died.

But then there was the Light, and the gates of Hell did not stand against it. And the darkness did not overcome it.

Plaza De Armas, Arequipa

Andrew
McSorley

Here, the sky meets the horizon
and shatters into a thousand tiny pieces.

The moon floats
silently, knowingly,

as if it carried no burden,
as if its dark side didn't have eyes as well.

Here, a man feeds pigeons with his daughter,
her smile erupting with their sudden flight,

her dress waving in the wind,
flapping like small, powerful wings.

He holds her in his arms,
afraid her feet might leave the ground.



Reaching Out * James Wickboldt



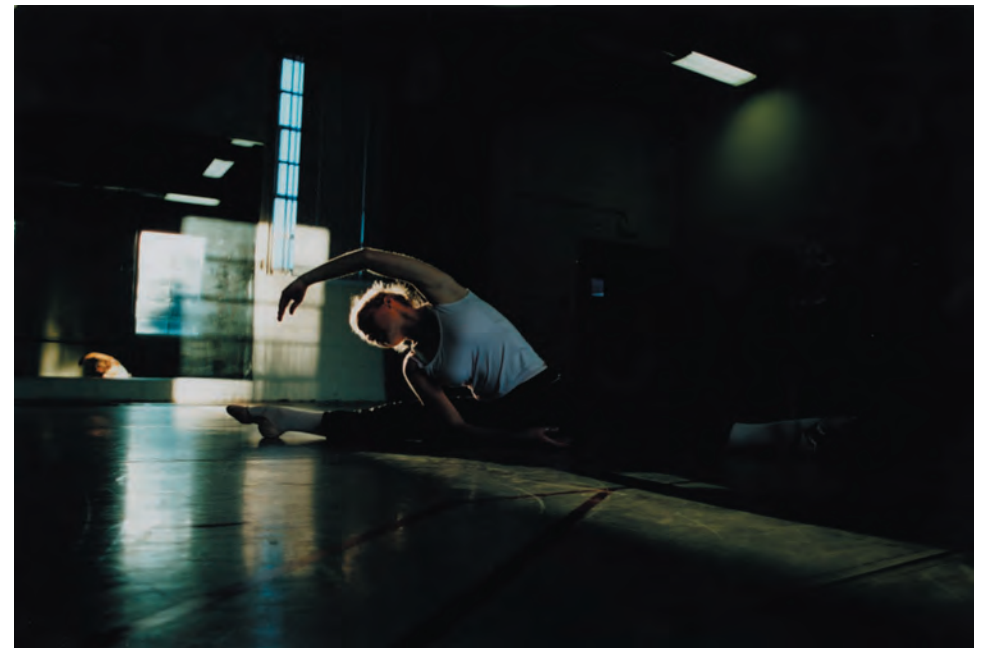
Untitled * Nick Heggstad



Pirate * Bryant Rosenwinkel



Jess * Tom Reem



Jessica * Tom Reem



Kitchen 2 * Brekke Berg



Untitled (Dress Series) * Melanie Schaap

Dog Days of Summer
(An Imitation of Allison Joseph's
"Good Humor")

Emerald
Davis

In our neighborhood of inner city sidewalks,
of overgrown lots and dilapidated dwellings,
nothing was more tempting than the ice cream truck's

mocking melody: *All around the ice cream truck,*
the bomb pop chased the children,
the push-up thought 'twas all in fun

pop goes the sicle.

The familiar yellow and white stripes
taunted us with tantalizing pictures;

dancing drumsticks and dazzling dilly bars.
We tried to ignore the call
of the loud speakers, blaring from blocks away.

We knew that it was all
a scam. You could buy twelve ice cream
sandwiches at the grocery for the price of two

here at the truck. So we went
inside, took the ice tray from the freezer,
crushed all its contents and added Kool-aid.

We sat on the porch and slurped
our slushies. Happily raising our glasses
to the truck in a jaunty salute.

Once or twice a year someone would splurge,
and buy a dreamsicle or a vanilla cone.
We would all gather around and watch

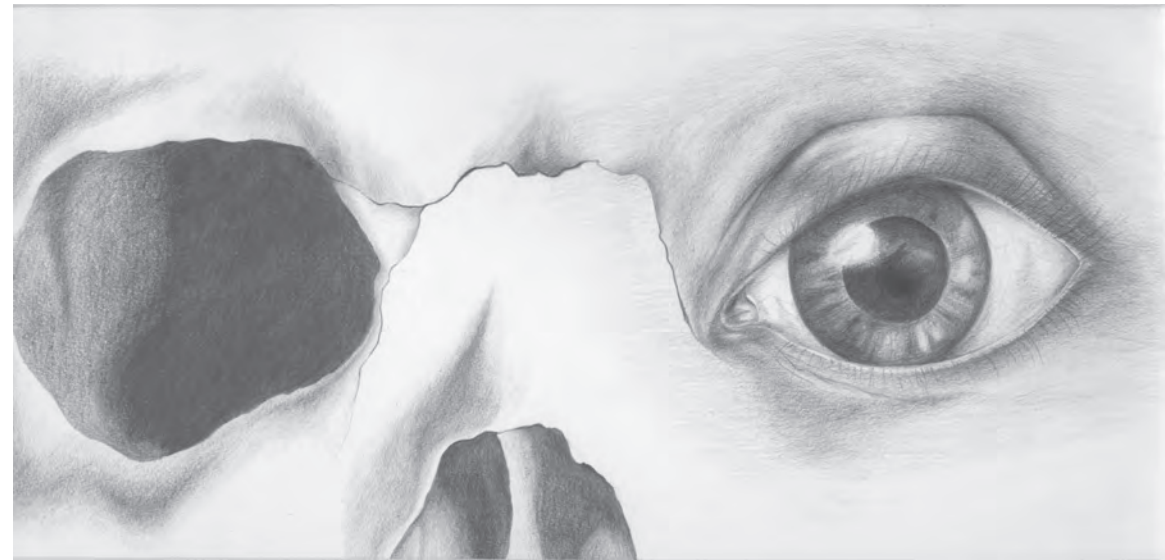
while the chosen one handed money
to the driver and waited for the marvelous treat
to be handed out of the miraculous truck.

The deliciousness began to dissolve as it left the climate control,
and the rest of us returned to our pastimes,
longing to lick and swallow everything that melted beneath the
summer sun.

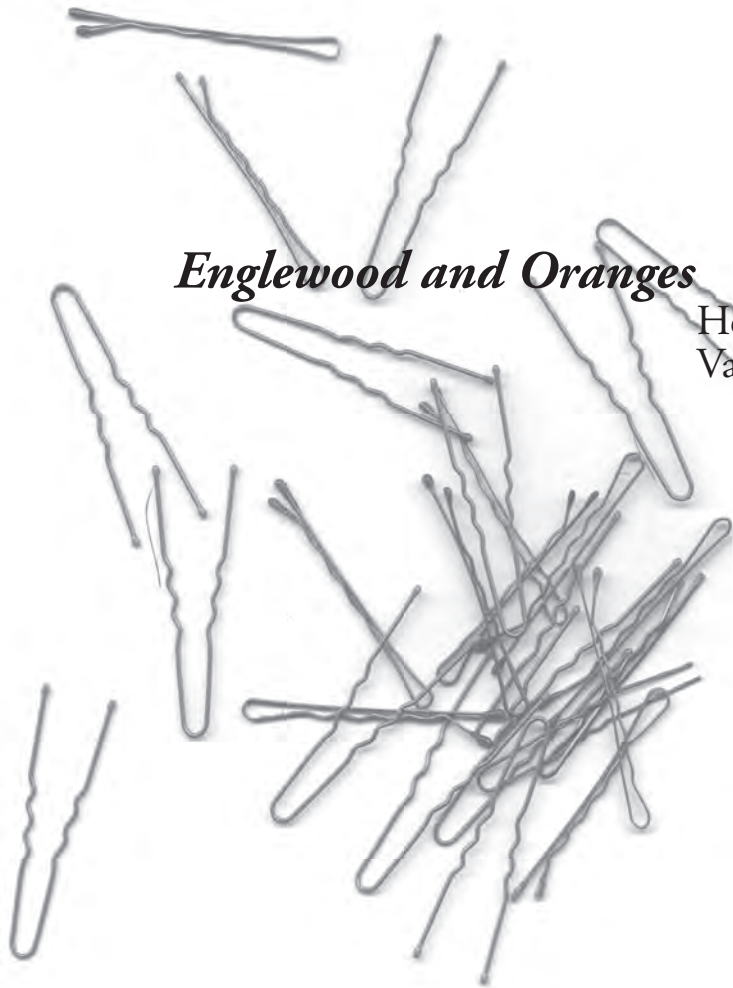




-er than me * Michelle Eckert



Untitled 2 * Christine Bandy



Englewood and Oranges

Heather
Vargos

It smelled like oranges, cause Shelley was eating one for breakfast. Mama named her Shelley cause when Mama was a little girl, she had a baby doll named Shelley and she loved her very much. Mama loved Shelley my sister very much too.

We was getting ready for school, and I telled Shelley to check if that old school bus was at the corner yet. I was putting on my shoes, and I was bending down to tie them, cause I don't need nobody else to bend down and tie them for me no more.

Then it smelled like broken glass. They was big boys yelling outside and fighting with guns, and they tried to shoot each other. Only instead, one of their bullets come through our front window and hit my sister Shelley in her neck, and then it was lots of blooooooood. Blood like drops sprayed on the yellow wall, blood was running down Shelley's neck, and the blood got on her scratchy pink sweater, too. And Shelley fell on the floor.

Shelley's orange went flying out of her hand and it hitted the wall and made a sound like splat. Shelley got killed. They wasn't any bus outside.

They had church on Thursday because of Shelley. She was in a long white box that shined and it had a lid. Everybody cried and cried. Reverend said to find faith in our Lord Jesus. I don't think Jesus is here with me though, cause now since Shelley's gone I been feeling like I'm all by myself a lot.

The news people came by us. They was all over our house, asking Mama questions, and she cried again, and on TV that was her crying later. Mama didn't see Shelley get hit by that bullet and die though. She was in the kitchen. Only I saw it.

Englewood is filled up of angry people. People wants those big boys who shot Shelley to go to jail. The police tell everybody they're looking, but I don't know. Those boys runned away pretty fast. And they all had guns with them, and everybody gots a gun, so how can they know which one was the one who shot my sister?

I got nothing to do anymore. Shelley always had funner stuff for us to do. One time in the alley she found a big sheet of those bubbles like you put in boxes, and she shared them with me. We squeezed our hands around all those bubbles, and twisted them, and they popped! Then we put it on the ground, and jumped on the bubbles! Sometimes she jumped rope with the girls, and I didn't like her then, but sometimes she was fun. Like with the bubbles.

When Shelley was eating a banana or an orange or an apple on her way to the bus stop, she always dropped the garbage from it on the dirt. And I said to her,

"Shelley, you shouldn't leave that on the ground, I'm gonna tell!"

And she said that the dirt is what makes fruit, and if you leave it on the ground, it turns back into dirt again. That's what kind of stuff Shelley was always teaching me. She was real smart, everybody in the neighborhood told me yes she was. They said she was gonna go to college someplace big and go away from here. I'm not so smart like Shelley was smart, but I'm a fast runner.





Shelter I * Brekke Berg

Faculty Corner: Dr. John Steven Paul

Dr. John Steven Paul and Soul Purpose create and perform liturgical drama for the church. The plays are liturgical in two senses: first, they have been written to be performed in the context of a service of worship. Usually, Soul Purpose performs a play following the reading of the Gospel and the play, which has been derived from the Lectionary texts for that day, serves as the sermon or homily in that service. Following the performance, the actors lead the congregation in a hymn. The plays are also liturgical in the original Greek meaning of the word, “the work of the people.” Soul Purpose conceives its plays in response to God’s action as revealed in God’s Word. The plays are intended to reveal the relationship between God and human beings and to proclaim the Gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Scholars locate the well-spring of the magnificently rich religious theatre of the European Middle Ages to these simple dramatizations of the Gospel stories performed as parts of Christian liturgies. Soul Purpose playwrights begin, like their medieval counterparts, by retelling the Bible stories by which God has been revealed to us.

In addition to serving as the director of Soul Purpose, Dr. John Steven Paul is a professor of theatre. He has taught playwriting and screenwriting, the world dramatic literature survey courses, and Non-Western Theatre and Drama, among other courses. His writing has appeared in publications such as *The Cresset*, *Arts*, *The Christian Century*, *Liberal Education*, and *The Chicago Tribune*.

The Things That Are God's

John Steven Paul
& Soul Purpose

Characters:

ONE (Dan)
TWO (Amelia)
THREE (Joe)
FOUR (Mark)
FIVE (Molly)
SIX (Margaret)
SEVEN (Sylvia)

Words from the Book of Exodus, chapter 33

¹⁸Moses said, "Show me your glory, I pray." ¹⁹And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, 'The Lord'; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. ²⁰But," he said, "you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live."

Words from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, chapter 1

¹Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. ²We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly ³remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.[...] ⁸For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. ⁹For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, ¹⁰and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

Words from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 22

¹⁹Show me the coin used for the tax.' And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰Then he said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?' ²¹They answered, 'The emperor's.' Then he said to them, 'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.' ²²When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

Prologue

- One. *(inspecting two coins)* The next question is obvious.
- Two. Obviously.
- Three. Then why don't they ask it?
- Four. Because they're amazed.
- One. No, because it's so...obvious. They didn't even have to ask.
- Five. Not to me. It's not obvious to me.
- Three. Me either. What are...
- Two. What?
- Seven. The things that are God's?
- One. Well, things like...uhm...well, like—
- Four. I'm telling you they didn't ask the question because the people, you know, the Pharisees and Herodians and those people were just *amazed*. They thought sure they had him and then he flashes this answer at them like Solomon.
- Six. Or Harry Houdini.
- Five. Jesus, the escape artist. Huh.
- Four. Yeah, and they're so amazed they can't even look him.

I

DAN (One) and AMELIA (Two) are at the far end of the staging area. DAN may look at AMELIA and vice versa, but they never look at each other unless the stage directions indicate it. DAN is absent-mindedly clinking two coins together.

Two. What are you doing with those, those...what are they?

One. They're hers.

Two. Her what?

One. Her coins. She forgot them. You know? (*DAN looks at AMELIA*) You can't even look at me?

Two. She forgot them?

One. You *won't* even look at me.

Two. Again?

One. Will you. Will you? Please?

TWO turns and looks at ONE.

One. (*as if stung, turning away*) Thank you.

TWO turns and looks away.

One. Look at me.

Two. I can't. I can't let you see me. I can't let you look at my face.

One. Why?

Two. Because...I hate you.

One. No. You love me. You told me you did.

Two. You're right. I hate *myself* for loving *you*. And, believing you. And thinking you had...stopped doing...*THAT*...stopped worshipping *THAT*. Sometimes I don't even know who you are.

One. I'm...*trying*. You know that, don't you? I'm trying and I was doing so well. I thought I'd turned a corner. Left it behind. Then I—well, you know, I got lost. I've been wanting to talk with you about it.

Two. Talking about it doesn't get us anywhere. You can't just talk. You have to walk. Don't talk. Walk.

One. You make it sound easy. "Walk, don't talk." I thought I'd turned it around.

Two. Try again. Turn again.

One. So, if I stop doing that, things will be fine? Right? (*Waits for an answer. No answer*) ...if I stop doing that?

Two. It would be a start.

One. A start?

Two. Yes, turning toward me and away from that would be a start.

One. Then what? What's next?

Two. Serving. And, waiting.

One. Serving? And, waiting?

Two. Start with the turning. Turning away from that.

One. Show me the way to turn.

Two. I can't do that. You have to find the way.

One. (*pause; paralyzed*) Obviously, I can't do that.

Two. You have to.

Four. (*from another part of the stage*) You have to help me.

One. Not by myself.

Three. No, not by yourself. We'd be doing it together. You'd just be leading.

Two. You're not by yourself. I'm here.

One. Now.

Four. People always say that to me. You won't be by yourself. But—

Two. I'll always be here. Believe me.

One. I believe you, but—

Three. But, what?

One. Can't you show me your face?

Two. But you cannot see my face.

Four. People always say that to me, “You won’t be by yourself,” then, one day, I notice I’m all alone.

II.

*JOE (Four) and
MARK (Three) are
talking in another
part of the stage.
MOLLY (Five)
enters to them.*

Three. I’ll be with you, in spirit. I may just not be there—physically. I’ll be waiting for you back here. And I’ll give money. Lots of money.

Four. Good. That’s good.

(enter FIVE)

Three. Where have you been?

Four. Haven’t seen your face for days.

Five. Class.

Three. Good?

Five. Good. Yeah.

Three. Which class?

Five. Service-Learning.

Four. Ah. Long? Class?

Five. Two hours. Why?

Four. Because we haven’t seen you.

Three. ...since Tuesday!

Five. Right. Well, I’ve been busy.

Four. With class.

Five. Yeah.

Four. Service.

Three. Learning.

Five. Uhm...yeah. You know service-learning isn’t just serving, you know. It’s learning, too.

Four. Yeah? Well that’s good. I guess.

Five. I mean it’s theoretical. There’s a theory of service-learning. In fact, it’s the theory part that really...I mean, I really like the theory part. Learning. The theory. Theories, that is.

Three. I’m not surprised to hear that.

Five. You’re not?

Three. No. Because—

Four. We’re not surprised to hear that because when it comes to *practice*, you’re lots more interested in

Three. ...*theory*.

Five. You’re trying to make a point.

Four. How’d you know?

Five. I can see by the look on your face. What is it?

Three. It’s Thursday.

Four. Yesterday was Wednesday.

Three. On Wednesdays we go to the—

Five. Shelter! On Wednesdays we go to the shelter and I wasn’t *here* to go *with* you.

Four. No.

Three. You weren’t.

Five. I was in Chicago. I was on that field trip. I completely for—

Four. It doesn’t matter. I went. It was fine. It wasn’t busy.

Three. I wasn't here either.

Five. Where were you?

Three. I was waiting. For a bus. It's a long story.

Five. So, you went by yourself? (*FOUR nods.*) I don't know what to say.

Three. I want to say...thank God, for you, Mark.

Four. What?

Three. (*goes to FOUR and embraces him.*) Thank God for you. Because you really do it. You really serve. You don't just talk about it. You serve when we're here. You serve when we're not here. Sometimes we're not here for good reasons.

Five. My reasons are...usually...thank God, for you, Mark!

Four. You're embarrassing me.

Three. Sorry. But sometimes you have to say a thing to a person's face. Thank God, for you, Mark. And, if you do go, you know we'll be praying for you.

Six. (*from another part of the stage*) I can't wait here much longer.

Five. Go? Where?

Four. You're going too, aren't you?

Six. I've been waiting for...centuries.

Three. I may go. I have to check some things. But you know I'd be supporting you from here.

Seven. (*enters and sits next to Six*) Whatcha doin' here?

Five. Where are you going?

Three. Mark's going down there to help.

Seven. (*standing next to Six on the bench now*) Lady? Whatcha doin' here?

Five. Down there? What about school? What about classes?

Four. I thought you said you were going too. I don't think I can go by myself.

Seven. Can I sit by you?

Three. We can be helping from up here. Right Molly? (*FIVE looks at THREE and FOUR, perplexed.*)

Seven. Why ya got that look on your face? Are you worried?

Five. Absolutely. There's lots that we can be doing here.

Seven. Want some of this? (*Gives bird seed to SIX*)

Six. (*Finally taking notice*) Thanks. (*Feeds geese.*)

Three. And, we'll give lots of money. Right Molly?

III

*MARGARET
(Six) and
SYLVIA
(Seven) sit on
a park bench
feeding geese
and talking.
MARGARET
fights anxiety.*

Seven. Whatcha doin' here?

Six. Waiting.

Seven. For what? The bus? (*no answer*) I wait for the bus every day. Not here. By my house. Over there on the other side.

Six. Do you mind it? Waiting?

Seven. Not now. I used to hate it.

Six. But you don't hate it now?

Seven. No.

Six. Why not?

Seven. 'cuz now, I wait with my body. (*gives more seed*)

Six. How do you do that?

Seven. Well...when I get to the bench, I first sweep it off with my arm like this. Keeps my pants clean. Then, I sit down a little at a time, like on one board at a time. No, I forgot, I put my book bag on this side and my lunch box on this side; that way I got everything I need. Then, I sit down.

Six. One board at a time.

Seven. Next I get the bird seeds out of my book bag.

Six. Do you ever forget things?

Seven. Not important things. Well, not usually at least. But sometimes. If I forget bird seeds, I can buy 'em in that machine over there. For twenty-five cents.

Six. Oh. But what if—

Seven. What if I forgot something at home?

Six. Yes.

Seven. My Dad brings it if I really need it.

Six. Is that it then? Is that how you wait with your body?

Seven. Wait, there's more. On the other side is my lunchbox.

Six. What do you do with that? You don't sneak anything, do you?

Seven. Mostly not. But I think about what's in there.

Six. You said you wait with your body. Thinking's in your head.

Seven. I don't think with my head. I think with my tongue. And with my nose.

Six. That kind of waiting would make me hungry.

Seven. Yeah, I know. But mostly during all that waiting, I'm thinking of how good lunch is going to be.

Six. *(becoming anxious again)*...still waiting. Still waiting.

Seven. So then, I'm done touching, and tasting, and smelling, and I start counting.

Six. Counting?

Seven. One-thousand-one, one-thousand-two.

Six. I'd be up to nine-hundred-ninety-nine-thousand-nine-hundred-ninety, and still—

Seven. No, it never gets that high.

Six. Why not?

Seven. The bus comes. Besides, about every one-thousand-one-hundred, I sing a song.

Six. What song?

Seven. *(sings)* IF YOU KEEP YOUR FAITH IN ME
I'LL NEVER LEAVE YOUR SIDE
KEEP TURNING TOWARD MY FACE
I'LL FOREVER BE YOUR GUIDE.

Six. Wonderful! Sing it again.

Seven. I do motions, too.

IF YOU KEEP YOUR FAITH IN ME
I'LL NEVER LEAVE YOUR SIDE
KEEP TURNING TOWARD MY FACE *(she turns around as she sings)*
I'LL FOREVER BE YOUR GUIDE.

One. *(from off)* Sylvia?

Seven. That's my Dad.

Six. You do it every day? Wait with your body?

One. *(from off)* Sylvia? Where are you?

Seven. Almost. I've got to go. *(starts to go then turns back)* What are you waiting for?

Six. Is that your name? Sylvia?

Seven. Yeah. Like silver.

One. *(from off)* Sylvia. Time for supper.

Seven. It's time for supper. *(starts to go then turns back)* How much longer do you have to wait?

One. *(from off)* Sylvia, come on, it's getting dark.

Six. Not much longer I hope. I so hope.

One. *(from off)* Sylvia. Where are you? Let me see your face.

Seven. What are you waiting for? *(enter ONE)*

Six. I'm not so sure that's the right question.

Seven. Well, what's the right question?

Six. The right question. The right question is not what am I waiting for, it's who am I waiting for?

Seven. I know exactly what you mean.

One. *(entering.)* Sylvia.

Seven. Hi, Dad. *(to SIX.)* I hope your who comes soon.

Six. I think she did.

One. Who's your friend?

Seven. Hey, what's your name?

Six. Margaret.

One. Hello. Sylvia, we have to go. I made lasagna. *(pause)* And guess what? Your Mom's home.

Seven. She is?

One. She is.

Seven. *(to Six)* That's our *who*. That's who we've been waiting for. Right, Dad?

One. For whom we've been waiting. Let's go.

Six. Better go with your dad before the lasagna gets cold.

Seven. That's OK. I like Dad's lasagna, even cold. That's how I'll have it for lunch tomorrow anyway. OK, Dad? *(turns to go)*

One. And you forgot these. *(Holds up two coins)*

Seven. My allowance!

Six. Sylvia?

Seven. What?

Six. Thank God for you, Sylvia. *(Seven exits)*

Seven. *(from off)* Bye, Margaret. Hey, take one of these. You can use it in the bird seed machine.

IV

Five. *(entering)* Margaret, you're still here? It's getting dark.

Six. So?

Five. Hasn't shown up yet?

Six. I don't know. Maybe.

Five. A good day then?

Six. I don't know. Maybe. You?

Five. Bad day.

Six. Oh, what?

Five. Blew off an appointment. A promise.

Six. Blew it off?

Five. Forgot it. I was in Chicago. Shopping.

Six. You and your shopping.

Five. I know. It's like I'm addicted. But I'm going to quit.

Six. Cold turkey?

Five. Cut up the cards. Mailed 'em back in.

Six. That may not be all there is to it, you know.

Five. I know. I shop when I'm bored. What should I do when I'm bored?

Six. I thought you were helping Mark and Joe at the shelter.

Five. Mark's going down south to help.

Six. Are you?
Five. No. I have classes. *(beat)* I can't wait 'til I'm done with classes.
Six. You have to wait with your body.
Five. What?

Epilogue

One. The next question is obvious.
Two. Obviously.
Five. How do you wait with your body? Don't get all cryptic with me.
Three. Then why don't they ask it?
Four. Because they're amazed.
One. No, because it's so...obvious. They didn't even have to ask.
Six. I just learned this, Molly. You wait with your body. You wait with a purpose. Waiting is active, not passive. While you wait, you serve. And all the time, time after time, you turn. You turn away.
Five. Turn away from what?
Six. Isn't it obvious?
Five. Not to me. It's not obvious to me.
Two. Maybe the question is obvious, but not the answer.
Six. Turn away from idols and toward God.
Five. Sometimes you amaze me. I suppose you're calling shopping an idol?
Four. What are the things that are God's?
One. Well, things like...uhm...well, like—
Two. Turning, serving, waiting

Six. I didn't say that.
Five. I'll go down there with Mark. Is that good enough?
Six. Don't serve Mark, serve the living and true God.
Five. Sounds like you've been reading the Bible, Margaret.
Six. I've been looking into the face of God, I think.
One. Turning.
Two. Turning from idols.
Five. Where? Where's God's face?
Four. Serving.
Two. Serving a living and true God.
Six. Oh, it's here. God's face is here. God's face is...smiling on us. You can't see God now. But God is here.
Three. ...and waiting.
Seven. With your body! Who are you waiting for?
Five. What are you waiting for, Margaret?
Six. I'm waiting for God's son from heaven.
One. "Give therefore to God the things that are God's."
Two. Turning.
Three. Serving.
Seven. Waiting
FIVE is speechless.
Four. When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.
FIVE exits, alone.

End

Contributors' Notes

Christine Bandy is an art and creative writing student (among many) who isn't quite sure what she is going to do with her studies but loves what she does. She can usually be found somewhere between Valpo and Chicago doing crazy and wonderful things.

Brekke Berg would like to thank fellow artists Tom Reem and Melanie Schaap for their encouragement and inspiration.

Valerie Cochran would like to thank her mother and sister for all the neat memories. And also Nate for posing so well. And she would also like to thank the blonde one and the tall one for being so great. And pretty much everyone else too.

Emerald (Emme) Jubilee Davis is a freshman English major. She graduated from North Side High School in Fort Wayne, IN as salutatorian of her senior class. Her current plan is to write the next great American novel, but she could very well end up being an English teacher. Other interests besides English are singing, dancing, playing piano, reading and spending time outdoors. Her favorite food is ice cream!

Benjamin Gaulke is an aspiring starving artist who will write for food. He graduates this spring with a degree in existential-agony. He wishes for his readers to know that the epigraph for "Reflections" comes from the song "Far, Far Away" by the late, great Five Iron Frenzy and that the epigraph for "Gerontion" comes from some hack poet whose name eludes me—no, I mean *him*—at this exact moment.

Liz Hanson is a senior English, art and humanities major from Wheaton, Illinois. She keeps her unpublished novels in her "Post-Graduate Opportunities" folder and does not know where she is going to grad school. Many thanks to Karl, Katie, Ben, and Professors Wangerin and Schuette-Hoffman for their insight and support.

Nick Heggstad is a senior theatre major from Mentor, OH who enjoys all aspects of theatre, especially design. His favorite type of comedy, and the one that helps him get through these hectic days, is the veiled insult.

Krista Hennings is a senior creative writing major from White Bear Lake, Minnesota. She thanks her classmates from Profes-

sor Byrne's Poetry Writing class for their helpful comments on "Piecemeal." This poem was partially inspired by a woman who got tattoos that her preschool-age son designed for her.

John Little is a senior with a major in creative writing and a minor in math (somehow). Interested in everything from poetry to stage musical writing, John is a founding member of Dramawrights and writes radio scripts for his WVUR radiodrama, "DJ Fate's Wacky, Fun-Time Review."

Thomas Natwick found inspiration for "iowa" in a failed border crossing in Noyes, MN on a humid night in July 2005. The photograph was taken in Nakor, Kenya. He hopes to go on a very long canoe trip someday.

Abby Nordaune is that crazy girl you see around campus who seems to have a camera permanently attached to her hand. This picture was taken on a particularly windy fall day, but she was somehow thankfully able to capture one brief moment of calm before the wind started up again. The title "In the Eye of the Beholder" is based on her personal belief that something does not have to be perfect in order to be beautiful.

Abby Porter is a junior creative writing major from St. Louis, MO. This is her first publication. It was written for Michelle, who is the coolest person. Ever.

Gwendolen Powell is a junior psychology major with minors in Japanese and creative writing. She is the PR rep for Alpha Phi Omega and treasurer for Japanese Club. She works for IT as a student consultant and as a TA. Writing has always been a passion, and though she generally works with novels, she enjoys writing the occasional poem in her free time.

Tom Reem would like to give a shout out to all of the dancers of the past, present and future. He is inspired by their discipline, passion and strength. Keep on pushing. Special thanks to Jessica for being amazing.

Zach Sample's poem "Infatuation With A Junkhead" was inspired by people he met this past summer. They showed him that not every addiction starts with drugs. He dedicates the poem to his sister, Amy Sample: "She has always encouraged me in

everything I do and I will forever look up to her, no matter how tall I may be.”

Kathryn Shelly is from upstate New York, and graduated from Mt. Holyoke in 2003 with a BA in English and a minor in film. She has written several screenplays, and is currently working on a World War One novel, *On the Siberian Front*. She is a second-year student at the law school and is enrolled in the dual degree JD/MALS program.

Melanie Schaap would like to thank Tracy Monson and Evan Scott Bryson for being great encouragers throughout the production of this book. She would also like to thank Nicholas Doornbos for his graphic designing assistance. Thanks also goes out to the subjects of each of her photographs: the small toy ship, the peeping hole out of her apartment and Kendra.

James Strasburg is a freshman history and mathematics double major. He is very honored to be in this fall's *Lighter*. In addition to photography, he also enjoys writing, the music of Sufjan Stevens and World Cup soccer. One day he hopes to travel to Iceland.

