

The Lighter

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The Lighter Spring 2010

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the lighter
spring 2010

literary
selection

the lighter staff

John Ingram, editor
the staff

be square!
the lighter!

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issue two

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acknowledgements

The staff of the *Lighter* thanks our faculty advisor, Allison Schuette, for her guidance and continued support for this publication. Thanks to Dan Lund for keeping it real with the visual artists and organizing that selection committee and to Amanda Gartman for her totally retro sensibility. Special thanks to poet Cornelius Eady for taking the time to share his wisdom with the university in the interview presented herein, and a whoppingly huge thanks to Jake Just for volunteering to transcribe the interview. Thank you to the members of the selection committees for their dedication and effort, and to all the students who so graciously submitted their work this semester.

All submissions remain anonymous throughout the selection process. The *Lighter* is an award-winning university journal of literature and art that 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 publication. The views expressed in these works do not represent any official stance of Valparaiso University.

literary selection

Kendal Ahlmann
DJ Crenson
Emerald Davis
Laura Ehlen
Jacob Just
Lauren Nelson
Lilia Oakey
Ellen Orner
Jeremy Reed
Ciara Reyes
Jazmine Reyes
Christopher Stohs
Megan Telligman

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Dillon Carter
Hilary Clark
Annie Fenimore
Amanda Gartman
Abbey Houx
Adam Jackson
Jacob Just
Sam Kämpersal
Abby Lange
Ellen Orner
Jazmine Reyes
Molly Reynolds
Megan Telligman

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Cornelius Eady on Young Writers and the Writing Life

John Linstrom

*Cornelius Eady writes poetry and is an Associate Professor of English at Notre Dame. He visited Valpo in February of 2010, meeting with students to talk about writing and inspiring the campus with a passionate reading in the Mueller Refectory. His eight books of poetry include the recent collection *Hardheaded Weather* (2008), *Brutal Imagination* (2001), *You Don't Miss Your Water* (1995), and *Victims of the Latest Dance Craze* (1986), and with poet Toi Derricote he is co-founder of *Cave Canem*, a non-profit organization for African American poets. He was kind enough, during his day in Valpo, to take the time for an interview with the *Lighter*.*

Cornelius Eady: What is this interview for? It's for the newspaper, right?

JL: Not the newspaper—the campus literary art journal, the *Lighter*.

CE: Oh, okay.

JL: Well, I guess the first question I had was, a lot of the undergrad students at Valpo have questions about wanting to do creative writing but aren't sure how you choose a genre; I know I have been struggling between creative nonfiction

and poetry because they seem pretty close in some ways. So I am just wondering, why do you write poetry? Why do you do what you do? If there is an answer to that...

CE: There's no good answer to that, is there? I mean, why would a poet write poetry? It's what we do. So at a certain point you just sort of—you've got to understand that at my age it's sort of self-evident. At your age, I guess, it's one of those things where basically you're trying to think about just what the ramifications of the choice might be, right? Well, if you're going to be a writer, number one, the ramifications are that you are doing it because you really love to write; that you have this relationship with language that is overwhelming, you know? And it expresses itself in a way that you really want to really do it the best you possibly can, right? You want to be able to learn the craft of it. That's separate from whether you want to make a go of it as a career. But hopefully in that, somewhere, is the possibilities or the makings of a career—the hope of the makings of a career. You can't know that. That's part of what being a writer is about or being any kind of artist. To be blunt about it, it's a leap of faith. You have to have, maybe, the mistaken belief, but a belief nevertheless, that at some point something's going to kick in. Somebody is going to pay attention to the piece you wrote. There's

going to be some response that is going to be encouraging enough, whether it's publication or publication and money or some sort of job that's related to what you love, and that you will continue to do this and at some point be able to work out some sort of way of making some sort of living out of it. Now, maybe not even directly but maybe indirectly: say, for example, you're teaching, right? I mean, I feel I am very, very lucky in a sense that I'm at a point where everything is related. That if I'm not writing I am doing something related to writing. I'm talking to students about writing so that the joy and passion I have for what I do hopefully is something that is being conferred to those students. If I'm not writing I'm talking about writing. If I'm not talking about writing I'm reading something or judging a contest. So all those things become the life but you can't really plan it, if I'm not misunderstanding the center of the question. You have to at a certain point hope that you've gotten enough of the craft down and then you launch yourself out there into the world and the world will do what it does, you know? So if you're going to be writing it's because it's a passion for you. It isn't because you can rationally say "I can do this" or "I can take it or leave it." If you can take it or leave it you probably won't do it because you'll probably be sensible enough to see there

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are better or easier ways of making a living than trying to figure out what to do as a writer! So, say that you're writing nonfiction. Writing nonfiction to me means that you're alert and you're out in the world and you're paying attention to what's happening in the world and you're going to try and comment on that world. That's really what you're about.

You're a reporter, a certain sort of reporter. "I know this is happening around me and I want to make my commentary on it because I want to be the representative voice of what's going on in the culture." Right? Or at least one piece of the representative voice. If you're doing fiction than you're thinking, "Well, you know, I want to invent. I want to make it up. But also as I'm making it up, once again I'm trying to make a commentary on the times we live in and how I feel about it and how I fit into that world." So that passion is what's going to pull you forward or drive you forward. You have to be more conscious of the fact that all your sense of feeling, of better options, falls away, burns away. And this is what you want to do, sometimes much to the dismay of your friends and your family, you know? But what's to stop you. If you really need to do this you're going to do it.

JL: You mentioned you can have that passion of just going at it until just something clicks, someone takes notice. How did that happen for you?

CE: It isn't just one moment. You'll find out it's a string of moments, a string of things. Basically, you have to have at some point somebody at some level who says, "Not bad. Not bad, kid." And again, that could be a number of things. Someone puts an A on one of your assignments, you're writing, you show something to a group of friends and they really get it and they let you know they've gotten it. That leads you to looking towards, "Can I do more of it? How can I do this full-time? What do I have to do to make this work?" So you hopefully run into somebody with some sort of authority. And I don't mean the authority like a policeman but somebody who just has this idea that you sort of admire, you know? Or you see the makings of your career or your writing through this person. And they see it. Now it's set up nowadays as much more formal in the MFA programs we have across the country. That's the standardized way of doing it. That's what you're doing, you're hoping that at some point somebody in your program or one of these programs is

going to say, "That's great work." Just the acknowledgement of having your manuscript or your application acknowledged and accepted for a program is another level. Suddenly you're now inside a group of other apprentice writers trying to figure out a way of making a career or getting some sort of accreditation in order to justify their craft. So then you're in the workshop... See, there are all these different kinds of steps. You run into the sympathetic reader or you encounter the editor who gets you. And that'll happen more than one time. I mean, I could tell you that personally one wonderful encounter I had was with my high school teacher when I was growing up in Rochester, New York. She just somehow understood or took a liking to me but said, "What you're doing is good," and that sort of allowed me and gave me permission to write more. Lots of different ways you get permission. I was very lucky, you know? I was lucky in the sense that I was somehow always in a situation where somebody was going to say "yes" and not know. And that's also part of the mix, too, is having to be conscious of the fact that a lot of this is like that joke about Jesus. I mean, Jesus always answers your prayers but sometimes the answer is no, right? Well that's very true. Sometimes the answer is no. No, you can't go into the workshop. No, we're not going to publish your work. You have to realize that that is also part of the mix. Some writers are incredibly lucky and lightning strikes and their editor falls in love with them and they get in the fast track and they get a six figure deal for their first... I mean that happens. But for the vast majority of writers, and there is a huge pool of them out there, that's not what's going to happen. More realistically, it's a slow slog. That's why you always have to fall back on the fact that you want to do this. It isn't that you're doing it because, I mean, you'd like to make a living out of it. Of course you would, that's the ideal. But the real reason you are doing it is because you love to do it. And that gets you through those moments when nothing is clicking or no one seems to be paying any attention to you or they are actively telling you, "Don't do this, kid." The thing

you'll have to hold on to, and this again is almost egotistical and unbelievably large, is to believe that somebody's going to get it. And this is not just for writing. I also work in the theatre and theatre is a perfect example for that. Most of the people in theatre will never get big roles. Most of them will end up in regional theatre and they'll be lucky. If they get

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a gig for a commercial, they're in heaven. If they get a TV series which most people look down on, believe me, they're in heaven. It's a steady paycheck, man, right? Most of them are looking for that kind of gig and if they become Denzel Washington, so much the better. Most people, most actors will never get to that level. So why do they keep doing it? This isn't unknown, it's not like people don't know a life full of rejection, so why do you keep doing it? People do it because it's what comes out of them. They want to be in that world more than anything else. For a lot of them, the only place they fit is in the theatre. Nothing else makes sense for them. And people who after some point have to come to some sort of realistic realization about their careers, they're not going anywhere. Maybe you need to stop and get out. They are usually very miserable about it. But until you get to that point where you realize all your options are gone, and most people don't get to that point, but there is a moment where you get to the point where there are no options. You're too old or you're too this or you're too that and you have to say, "Okay, this is it, I have to get out." But most people walk with the belief that that's never going to happen. They have the confidence that that is never going to happen. At some point a door is going to open and the character role you've been

looking for is going to open and writers go in with the same idea. At some point I am going to have a critical mass of work that somebody out there—an editor, a publisher—that's going to get to that person and they're going to go, "Of course. I'm going to publish you." A lot of people think that publication is the end of the rainbow but actually it's the beginning, where it starts. That's when you're really in it. I mean, getting your first book published is a fabulous point in your life. You only have it once and it's like your first love, and you only get this once and it's a great time to go through. But it's not the end. That's the beginning, then you have to actually do the next book. Book number two, right? And the stakes rise because now you're known. The difference between an apprentice writer and a published writer is the fact that now you're a known quantity. In fact some ways being an apprentice writer is a lot better because you don't have any bad repercussions for what you do. You can simply think "Nobody is paying any attention." You're trying to get their attention and in doing that sometimes you need to do various things to try and get there. But also trying different things is what the MFA program is really good for. You get to explore and try new things and there's no penalty for trying it. Nobody says, "Oh he was a very wonderful, narrative, lyric poet, and now suddenly he became a language poet." Agh, you're career's over because no one wants to read you. You can do this as an undergraduate student, you can do this as a graduate student and there are no repercussions because you are trying it on. Once you're published though, people start expecting, and saying, "Okay, this is where it is. This is what you're writing." Then if you're going to shift that, they're going to say, "Why is he shifting?" And you become conscious of the fact that there is a readership and there is an audience out there. So you have to juggle that with this idea of trying to find out what you need to do as a writer which is sometimes not the same thing as what the readers want. So you are constantly going through this process. First you are developing your muscles, then you are trying to figure out

what you can do with those muscles. Hopefully if you're lucky, part of that is what happens after you are published. Then, also the question becomes, "How do you negotiate being a published writer?" And that can be a number of things. What you're doing in some aspects is trying to sort of... I'm trying to find a way of phrasing this without sounding pretentious, but what you're really saying is, "Here's my stake in this venture. Here's my hat in the ring. Baldwin. Hemingway. Alice Walker." I mean, really, you're in that conversation. It's really a conversation, a long, going conversation. The books you've read, the writers that are still alive, the people that have passed on, and you're saying, "This is my contribution to that conversation. I am now a citizen of that location, that world. My book is my passport into that citizenship. I am now part of that life. So, how do I fit in? Where's my place in this?" That's the other thing you are trying to figure out as a writer: "I'm a citizen of this weird country called Writers, so what's my stake in it? What corner of the town do I live in? Do I simply stay with the language poets or do I hang out with the nonfiction people or am I a person who does both? Do I write short stories and fiction or do I write just poetry, because that's what I can do or because that's what the market does? There's a part of me that goes simply for deadlines and there is another part of me that I reserve just more for the creative stuff. There may be another part that says, "Nonfiction can be very creative stuff. I don't need to write novels." But when I say that, I am also making a statement about nonfiction, not just a way to write nonfiction but also a way of writing about what nonfiction can do, if it's really really outstanding and creative. You're figuring this out as you go along. Also, this is all going along while your life is going along. Sometimes they interweave and sometimes they feel like they are worlds apart.

JL: So you're reading a lot to be part of that.

CE: You're reading a lot, I will say this only there is no more breath in my body. I do not trust a student who tells me that

they don't read. I really don't, I don't know what that means. How can you be a writer and not take the effort to know what... In fact, to me, from my point of view, any student who says that is actually saying, "I'm here at a table." Why would you sit yourself at a table with other writers if you weren't at some point, had some encounter with some piece of writing that you thought was so fantastic or so good or moved you in such a way that the only response was to think, "I want to do that, too." Sometimes you can remember what that piece is, sometimes you can't, but I will bet, talk long enough to a student who says, "I want to be a writer but I don't read" and I would say, "What was it? Was it Huckleberry Finn? Was it Tom Robbins? What was it? What was that one piece that you said, 'Wow. Cool. I want to do that.'" But that's why you want to do it. It's not just "That's really cool, look at all these publishers, he's published and she's published and look at that and people love their work and they're beloved and they get lots of money... I want that." But what you're really saying on a level is simply, "I want to write that way. I want to respond to that book, to that article,

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that poem, that play." Something just goes, "Ah, yeah. You can say that?" or you can say, "I know what that is. I can do this." There's also a moment when, basically, not only are you talking back to the writer, to that book, but you're also saying, "I know how to put a sentence together. Then I can put a paragraph together. Then I can put another paragraph

together, and I can do it in such a way that I can give it to my friends and they're going to say, "Oh my God, I like that. I like that." And that's also the part that says, "I know how to do this. Not only do I like it and I admire it but I think, I think my sense of it tells me I can do this, too." And so that sets you down at the table. That's why you're at the table. It's not that you're writing from a vacuum and you don't want to know what anyone else is doing and you are just trying to protect yourself. What you are really saying is, "I know I have the goods. I think I have the talent to do this. I may not know yet, but I think I do. So I'm going to test it out." And again, if you're lucky, you'll get in situations where people will say, "You know, you're right. You're absolutely right. You do have a talent you do have something that I respond to when I read, as a human being and as a reader." So suddenly you're in that conversation, you're in that stream, that same stream. Now, "I'm not Hemingway" or "I'm not Tolstoy"—but so what if I'm not? I want to talk to the best that I find in that work. I want my work to talk at the same level of truth or revelation as those other older writers do. I want to say to James Baldwin, "This is what it was like for you, and this is what it was like for you to be African American then, and this is what it's like to be African American now." And this is just Baldwin as an example. I want to add to that conversation. Because you told me something that I recognize. So I want to talk back to it. But I want to talk back to you in my own voice. I don't want to imitate you. I want to say something to you in that same level of excellence that I see in your essays or your novels. Or I read *Beloved* or all these other books because literature on one level is a way of finding yourself and the story of yourself, written by others. Yeah, okay, this is my story. Oh my God, yeah, I get it. I see that work. Or I read *Updike* and I don't see myself but I see my father or my parent's work and I know my relationship to that orbit. So I'm going to write stories from the kids' point of view. For example, I don't know if you watch that TV series, *Mad Men*, its on AMC about the 1960s. What I love about that show is

that what the story to me is really about are the kids of Betty and Don Draper, not Don Draper and Betty Draper. Because those kids are about my age. You know, it's the mystery of your parents that those stories are really revealing for those kids. How did Betty Draper become Betty Draper? How did my father become my father? Why is my father so distant and unavailable? Well those back stories are what the viewer receives, right? But the kids can't know that. That's what is hidden from them. Why is my mom...? why does my dad...? Not only is this them but it's also the context of the culture that they're involved in. And this is a little part of the story you don't get to see. So I'm writing from that mystery because I can't know all the stuff that you know, but that lack of information forms my personality. I'm going to write stories that talk to that silence or that mystery. This is the way I saw it. I was eight years old or ten years old and I saw my mom and dad break up. And that makes me wary about people, too. I didn't know that's because my mom and dad acted the way they acted. I could only tell you what the impact of their lives was on me. And if I'm going to be a writer, this is what I'm interested in, the part of the story that's hidden that you can't see because they don't know of the damage they are doing to their kids. So this is my stake in that story, I'm going to write about that. Or maybe I don't write about it at all. Maybe I think suburban stuff is crap and boring and I move away from there and do something a little bit more exciting. Or I'm the kind of novelist who writes critiques of that sort of life. So, where is your stake and where is your foothold in all of this stuff that you are doing? Or you're writing to your peers because your peers are in the same boat, right? And I read all these stories about Updike and stuff like this, and I'm thinking, that's not my life. But you're in a group that says, that's not my life. And you write stories that say, that's not my life, and everyone with you says, yeah, that's not my life. Yeah, you got it, you got it. Or you write nonfiction and you're talking about stuff that's in the air. What are people trying to do in this crazy democratic society that we try to

keep working out? The ways we try to work out what we think democracy is. And that can mean a number of things. It can be artistic or political or economic. I mean, there are lots of ways of talking about this and lots of sides to take. So what's your position? What do you want to do? Do you think Sarah Palin is absolutely the smartest, shrewdest politician

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or just this evil thing that is going to destroy the country? You want to comment on it but you also want to comment on what other people are commenting on. We like to think it's a free press but actually we like regulations. We like regulators. Is my nonfiction about this or is it about the little things that happen in life between and through the cracks? Nobody else will put a spotlight on this unless I'm around to see it and bring it to light. Every time I write a story it's like a spotlight on something you didn't see. I mean, there are lots of ways of presenting yourself and setting that up but that could be one motivation. Why do I do it? This feeds me as a human being but also as a writer, to think that what I do feeds the rest of the world. There's a certain confirmation that you can't get if you are just going to be listening to prerecorded news cycles. You're just going to get the surface. You're not going to get anything deeper about who these people are and what these people are talking about. That's what my job could be, that's how I want to position myself as a writer because that's what's lacking. Whatever is lacking, I'll fill it.

JL: You were talking about the MFA programs, and sometimes a concern that comes up is whether the MFA program is the best environment for a writer to be in. I mean, clearly you get a lot of support and insight, but then there's the worry about falling away from the real world.

CE: Well the thing is and the question you need to ask yourself is, do you want to teach? If you want to teach, you have no other option than to go through the MFA program. You cannot get a full-time, tenured-track job in this country without that degree. It's just the way it is. Years ago, up until like the late 80s, you could have a situation where for certain, the answer was jobs. You could have the life equivalent of a degree. A lot of people got into teaching in that way. The academy wanted writers and most of the writers weren't academically trained. So there were provisions made for writers. Say you've got two books under your belt and one of those books won an award. That would be the equivalent of having a degree. But that's gone, that's evaporated. The question you want to ask yourself before you do this is, is it necessary for me to teach? At some point down the road, if you want to consider teaching, you have to have an MFA. That's how I would answer that question. You have to ask yourself, do I want the professional accreditation to be considered for a position? Or is that really not important to me? What is really important is how to improve your craft as a writer. There are other ways of getting that information without going through an MFA program at all. For example, in New York, City College, which is ranked as an undergraduate but doesn't have an MFA. Only a couple colleges in the city school system have MFA programs but the City College doesn't have it. At least the campus in Harlem doesn't have one. It has an MA with a concentration in Creative Writing which is infinitely less expensive than getting an MFA. So the instructors there are first rate. Marilyn Hacker, for example, isn't going to do a different course at City than she would at an MFA program where she's visiting. So if you want to know what Marilyn Hacker thinks about poetry, you can do it for a little bit of money and get that information and get to be a stronger poet but you don't get the accreditation. Or you can say, I'm going to go to an MFA program where Marilyn Hacker is part of the visiting faculty. So I get to work with Marilyn Hacker but I also get the accreditation. That gives

me the option in case I want to decide at some point that I do want to teach. It keeps your options open.

JL: Can you say anything about whether it's wise to go straight into that after undergrad?

CE: Not necessarily. In all honesty, I've seen it done many ways. I've seen students who have taken years off and gone off and worked. I think that's probably a nice way if you can do it. You probably should. It doesn't hurt to live for a while. All that stuff is going to help you and all those experiences are going to inform you and deepen you as a writer. But I've also seen student go straight from their Bachelor program into an MFA program. It depends how urgent that feels to you. You may feel, "I better do this right now because all my friends are in this program and they are going forward and I'm not." People start thinking along those lines, that they're in a race and they have to keep up, even, with everybody. I mean, I don't like to tell people what to do with their lives but it just seems to me that given the job market, realistically there is always going to be a glut of students out there with degrees and a small percentage of job openings. So is it better to jump straight in with your bachelors? It might be. But also I'm not sure that taking a time off to get a sense of who you in the world or how the world works is going to ruin that possibility when you decide to try the job market. I really don't know. I'm talking the way I am because I am in a different set of circumstances. I'm not looking for work. So I don't want to act as if I am aware of the pressures that a younger writer might have at that point in their lives.

EDWARD BYRNE: How's it going?

JL: Pretty well.

EB: This is the last place I looked.

JL: Oh, sorry.

EB: I went down to the fish tank room and you weren't there.
And I checked around the piano and the circle room...

JL: Yeah, it's a little quieter up here.

CE: I'm sorry, my answers to your questions are too long.
I'm sorry.

JL: Oh, no. It's great, just so interesting. So no, yeah, thanks
a lot.

CE: Yeah, yeah, thank you.

EB: Did you finish?

JL: Yeah, if you need to get to Books and Coffee, that's fine.

CE: Well, thank you....

JL: Yeah, I really appreciate it.

CE: ...for the coffee.

JL: Oh yeah, sure.



Letters to My Grandfather | Dillon Carter

A Human Case

Jeremy Reed

The hospital was too large. It was too tall, too foreboding. The front doors didn't even require a human hand to touch them they were so detached. Swish. Swish. Taking the exhaustingly long elevator ride to the twenty-third floor, a young man went up to another of the long, artificially lit, sterile hallways, the one with the flickering light at the end; they had put in an order for the maintenance team to fix it three months ago, but the paperwork hadn't made its way through the system yet. He walked down the hall until he reached a door with a number like all the others: the same number of screws holding it up, the same number of inches apart, drilled to the same depth within the wood. He slowly opened the door and looked inside at the curtains drawn between the patients within the room. He pulled back the second one, closest to the window.

"Hi, Dad."

No answer. An elderly man lay in the bed. He lay there insufferably, looking out the window as the sunlight streamed in and over his face. It was a summer day out there. Inside, it seemed like February. He looked out the window.

The young man slowly walked farther in to the room. He pulled up a chair next to the bed. Someone checked in on

them and left. The old man was still looking out the window. Didn't notice a damn thing, his son thought. His oxygen machine was still pumping, you could tell by the beep. It hooked into his gnarled, hairy nose that fit with his cragged face and arthritic hands. There was something about the father with his preoccupied look, wispy white hair barely present, spider veins running up and down his legs that were visible where the sheet was pushed back halfway up his calf.

He had begun to twitch last Tuesday. It began in his smallest finger on his left hand, almost imperceptible. He put it off figuring he had slept on his arm wrong. By 5 o'clock, he would have called the local doctor, but the office had just closed. Wednesday morning, his whole arm slightly convulsing, he was waiting outside the doctor's office at 8 A.M.

He was checked out, from top to bottom, but nothing seemed to be wrong. He was sent home with some muscle relaxants and told it was probably just an oddly pulled muscle or maybe a pinched nerve, but that it would more than likely figure itself out in time.

The treatment worked for a while. However, by this past Sunday he could sense that something was wrong; he felt it

in his bones. He went to the doctor and was just told to go home, the treatment had worked for a week and there was no reason for him to worry.

Monday, his finger came back alive, but moved more slowly than the first time. It was as if it were tapping out some barely whispered rhythm, and was moving slowly as an old man from old age. But it did progress. Tuesday, he went back to the doctor's office a changed man. He looked as if he'd aged ten years in seven days. The doctor, after being taken aback by his appearance, began to look him over, but as time went by a specific look came to the doctor's face. It was a look of calm but irrefutable vexation with a tinge of guilt, as if he were the one who could be held responsible but at the same time so could anyone, or rather everyone. This was visible in his face. It did not need to be said.

It was decided that on Wednesday afternoon, Frank Byron would check himself in at the hospital and be watched for twenty four hours. They would do all they could there that his doctor couldn't do. They had more people with more backgrounds and more fancy degrees hung on walls, after all. After an hour or two of physical examinations, he went into the MRI room, the machine buzzing while looking inside his brain, and they found nothing. It was decided he would go off the muscle relaxants and all his other medicines that went with being an older man and they would see what happened.

At ten o'clock that night, the monitors at the desk which corresponded to his machines didn't seem to be working. The floor nurse walked down the hall to his room and checked everything, but nothing seemed to be out of place. She got a new machine from a different room and tried that one, trying to resuscitate her trust in the robotic beep. It didn't work either. After asking for help, she went to the closet down the hall and brought out some of the older models, one of the older nurses said they had never had a problem with them and the rest figured it was worth the try. It worked. It only

held the most basic information, but it worked. After this, they kept a nurse in his room for the night. She was needed at midnight.

The machines began to twitter and shudder. No one quite understood what was going on. It was as if even the most basic machines weren't capable of doing the job. The doctors and nurses didn't know what to do. They just knew the son of this patient would be coming in the morning and then they could relinquish responsibility; the forms wouldn't be in their hands, it wouldn't be their signature on the dotted line. Until then, he was under their protection. They needed to calm him from his shaking, cool the blood in his veins, and make his eyes stop squinting shut even tighter as if he were having a bad dream.

He was lying in his bed at home. The sheets were turned back, pushed down around his ankles. His wife was next to him at a nice, middle-aged forty-five. There were traces of tears down her cheeks, down the small wrinkles, the roads laid down years before just for this occasion. He was there simply thinking back to earlier that evening in wonder at how quickly things had changed.

She had seemed distant at dinner. He hadn't understood why. There had been awkward silence, enough to fill three entire houses let alone one dinner table between the two of them. He just kept glancing up at her, wondering what was wrong. She cleared the table, something as natural to her hands as lighting a match to a smoker, but she dropped a plate in the sink and the silverware slid down, cutting her first finger. It bled profusely like any small cut at first. He rushed over to her, thinking it was more serious than it was, and hurriedly pressed his grandfather's handkerchief to her hand. It became covered in blood and later that night would be thrown away, but just as he was applying the pressure to her finger he noticed her crying.

She explained that she had cancer, whatever the hell that really means, and that it had just snuck up on her. It was pretty late in terms of finding it, and she had been told by the doctor to just live her life the way she had always done, as if that were even possible to continue living life without change. They spoke about it, and when the crying was over they went back to their normal evening routine. It was all they had to go back to. They only wanted mundane change from day to day. Maybe seeing a movie instead of watching TV. Maybe going to the local diner instead of eating in. Maybe inviting old friends over for cards one night. But not this.

He was lying in bed. He didn't know what to think, but his brain wouldn't stop. The wheels were moving, like a clock going until it will break itself apart. He just couldn't sleep. She was on the other side of the mattress. He turned to his side and looked over at her. He scooted a little closer, awkwardly, but unknown to her, She was fast asleep facing the ceiling with one arm curved over her unbridled hair and her legs slightly turned away from him, the inside of her knees uncautiously open to him. He crawled up next to her extending his left arm, his hand brushing over her stomach. She awoke and, turning toward him, lightly dragged her right hand's fingertips down his forearm. She briefly looked down at him, not realizing that he had been awake longer than a moment. He looked up at her and held her eyes open with his, even through the darkness of the room. Then turning from their held glance to let her drift off again, he pulled her closer into an embrace just loose enough that they were able to lie comfortably. He was able to fall asleep.

The nurses and the doctors were all gathered around him. It was two in the morning. The machines were still not acting correctly. All of a sudden, Frank Byron gave a violent squirm, as if an involuntary reaction to some horrible happening. But he was still sleeping. The machine to the left said so.

They had been dating only a couple months. He felt strongly for her and he thought she felt somewhat strongly for him as well. However, neither of them had said anything of significant substance to the other on the topic. They were driving out to the country for a picnic, like many young couples do when they want to avoid a few middle-aged stares. They both wanted to defy convention. They were young and thought it was some sort of control the first generation had on the next. They often spoke of these conventions.

She asked him, "What do you think of marriage?"

"Marriage. I don't know. It always seemed like more of a reaching out than a reaching, at least to me. You know what I mean?"

She did.

"It just seems as if everyone's going for something, anything, more than what they have already, and when they get there they realize it's not the end-all, be-all, solve-all they were expecting. They expect a solution and they end up with a situation they have to try and make work out. I don't know if you understand what I'm saying. Maybe it doesn't make sense."

He looked over at her from behind the wheel and saw her face. Through the windshield, the light came down and reflected from the ridge of her eyebrows to the ridge of her cheekbone and around the inside of those valleys making everything that happened within them. And at that moment, she was looking back at him.

"I understand what you mean," she nearly whispered without breaking her glance.

He broke the stare to look back at the road, "Okay, maybe it's not all wrong then." He felt a twinge of something deep in his stomach. He readjusted himself because of his posture hitched to one side from the filthy handkerchief he always kept in his back pocket.

He convulsed again in his bed. The doctors were beginning to get worried. It was four o'clock in the middle of the night and they didn't have control, the one thing they wanted more than anything else in rooms like this and in the end all the rooms in the entire building were the same. They fretted and worried, worried and fretted, wringing their hands and walking circles. The night shift wasn't supposed to be this exciting. They never expected to run into something they didn't know how to handle. They had degrees. They had experience. They had never met a human case like this one.

But then, he calmed for no apparent reason to any of them.

He was walking through the greenest grass. A shadow was above him. He looked up toward it and saw his strong, limping grandfather walking beside him, looking down toward him. Frank remembered this one. He had remembered it often. His grandfather said something and leaned down to show him an object on the ground. It was a brown, natural, spiked ball. He knew it was a nut now, but had wondered in amazement at what it could be when this had actually happened. His grandfather and he walked back toward the house, past the tractor, the small strawberry patches, and the horses in the pasture next door.

They sat down on the cinder blocks used to make a large planter by the back door of the house on the other side of the circular gravel driveway winding its way around the entire building. Grandfather laid the encapsulated nuts down on the cement and produced his tiny pocketknife from somewhere. He began to cut into the first one and then stopped, looking sidelong at his grandson, Frank, beside him. He put his tool and purpose down and pulled out his handkerchief from his back pocket. He began to say something to Frank as he wiped the dirt off the child's face and brow. But for all Frank could now try, for all the times that he had remembered back to this happening in

his childhood, he could not remember what had been said. He did remember the feeling of the handkerchief. He had repeated it for years after the funeral of this loved one, when he had inherited that cotton cloth. Frank had felt that day the sacred object with the strong hand behind it move up one side of his face and down the other, from side to side, cleaning everything from him. Exactly what he desired.

His grandfather got back to work with the nut. He finally cracked it and held his palm open with the present for his little grandson. Frank slowly took it into his grasp and put it in his mouth, moving his jaw down upon it, savoring the taste. He would remember this for a long time. It was warm, the nut had been sitting in the grass in the sun all afternoon, but it tasted as if it had gotten its warmth from the ground. It was like roots, deep roots, sinking into his memory. The earth had worked its way into his life. It would take his grandfather. It would eventually take everyone and everything including himself, but at that moment it had only taken a small portion of his mind and made it into a taste that would be remembered.

He had calmed around six. They had left a nurse in the room, just to make sure, now that all trust was lost in the machinery until the next patient would come through the door. They had switched shifts at seven, and so when the son of Frank Byron arrived, the nurse that checked on the two of them looked well rested and well fed, practically brimming with young life. The disbelief was still held suspended; the staff had done their job.

The old man had woken just ten minutes or so before his son walked in, and had spent it silently looking out at the sun actively drenching whatever lay twenty three floors below. It was probably just asphalt, but it might not have been. As the young man was sitting there, hand on the side of the bed like he was supposed to do as the lone child and lone member

of that family belonging only to memories, the father looked up at his boy.

From somewhere, a slight breeze crept into the room, like a breath whispered, and played across his face pushing the white wisp of hair about his forehead. His eyes became clear and he hoarsely said, "The worst kinds of dreams are memories, memories too far gone to change."

His lock of hair settled in nearly the way he used to wear it in his younger days. And the breath was gone.

The son of Frank Byron stayed there just a moment longer. Stood up, looked down upon that old man, and walked from the room, leaving the curtain drawn and the door open. He passed room after room. He took the elevator all the way down, nodded toward the receptionist at the main entrance, and walked through the doors. Conveniently, he didn't even have to touch them.

Swish. Swish.

As he was walking across the parking lot, some blessed rock lay in his path. It was lying in such a way that when he stepped on it he fell and fell hard. He propped himself up on his elbows and put his hand to his face. It came away red, deeply red, and a deep warmth covered his hand as well. He slid his fingers across each other slowly and then put his hand back to his face. ❖



The Stump's Innermost Wish | Abbey Houx



Moroccan Footwear | Janet Pfister

Yellow Dreadlocks

(a kairone cycle — 1)

John Linstrom

Hair like wild weeds
sprouted out of soft mud,
sun-stained and see-through
like fingers over a flashlight:
you're unwatered.

Some weeds don't sway, they hiss
in the wind, though the rains
meant well enough, that was months ago.

I would not straighten a crimped weed
in a pot, force its veined stems to follow
my own thin-skinned stalky fingers,
no—and if it rejected water,
what but leave it to its drying?
And would I thus be undermining
my own convictions?

There Was a War There

Mark Schoeck

When someone asks me what my favorite animal is, I tell them it's a Guinea pig. When someone asks me what the best pet I've ever had was, I tell them a Guinea pig. I have owned one pet in my life. It was a Guinea pig.

I played no role in the naming of Polly. Tom Hanks did.

Apollo 13 had just come out in theatres. My family went to see it. Most families go to dinner after the movie. Most families go home or go to the mall after seeing a movie. We bought the only pet our family would ever own after seeing *Apollo 13*.

"Be creative," my mother told Scott when they thought of what to call him, our new Guinea pig. "Apollo is creative. Call him that."

The Guinea pig looked like a yin-yang with four legs: half black and half white, the line between the shades revealing no pattern. A black spot. A white spot. And then eyes, ears, and all of that too.

"And then you can call him Polly," my mother said to my older brother. "That's cute. And creative. Do you like it?" My brother nodded. I loved the name. Tom Hanks played a terrific role.

My grandmother died when I was eight years old. From her funeral, I remember four things:

My father laughed at jokes and talked football while his mother was mourned;

I had no idea that her name was Caroline and Jane was only what everyone called her—I only called her Grandma;

My four-year-old cousin thought she was sleeping, the same way kids always do;

I asked my mother for a tissue so that I could cry, and she told me I did not need one. I was only eight years old, anyhow.

Polly lived in our room, the room I shared with Scott—him eleven, me nine. We fought over him. Like boys do. And I made the propositions, why don't you play with him after school until six o'clock and I'll play with him after six, and he said probably not, I'll probably play with Polly until I don't want to play with Polly anymore, and then you can, and I said okay, I agree to those terms.

We used to vacation. I see now what the point was. I noticed as a child that my father's feet were orange with cracked

callus. I noticed as a child that my mother sat in her recliner from four to nine p.m. every night and then went to bed. I thought the vacation was for Scott and me.

But it was this year, my ninth year, that I didn't want to vacation. It meant leaving Polly. Can we please take Polly? They would laugh. We're leaving Polly with Danny, my mother told us. Randy, call Danny and ask him to take care of Polly. Danny will take care of Polly, she told us.

My cousin Patrick was named after his father, Pat Sr. It wasn't until his funeral three weeks after his nineteenth birthday that I realized that only our family called him Patrick. He was Pat, Pat Jr., Cool Pat. It was fine by me. They saved Patrick for us.

I had just turned twenty. I left class early to travel to the wake with Scott, who lived just an hour away. We rushed to the funeral home, the last ones there, and quickly hugged and shook hands and went to make sure that it was the same Patrick we thought they were talking about.

As it turns out, it wasn't.

My brother and I took turns approaching the lifeless body of a once energetic vessel of our family blood. Scott went first, then me. And for the way that my body collapsed when I received the phone call, and the way that it couldn't pick itself back up for days after, this seemed easy. This is like looking at a photograph. I thought, and I don't even have to be in it with him.

The photographs were in the next room. And I was in them with him. My father was laughing with family friends I had never met. My mother cried. She looked at me and I ran away.

In the bathroom, I cried silently, privately, and only as long as it takes the average person to pee.

Our vacation was to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. My great-great-great grandfather Patterson Rupert served in the Civil War. Pap Pap still had his discharge papers. This was our fourth visit to Gettysburg.

I hated Gettysburg.

I understood the appeal of it. Lots of cool things happened there. Abraham Lincoln was there once. There was a war there. But it's not here anymore, I thought. It's just grass. What a vacation.

I remembered the year before when we went to Florida. Pictures hung in our house of my cousins and me stacked in a pyramid on the beach. Scott, Danny and me on the bottom. We held the rest of them up. Patrick and Sallie and then Jared. That was fun. There was hardly any grass at all.

When we got back, Polly was dead.

A simple misunderstanding, as it turned out. Danny was in charge of Polly. But dad called Danny Storm from down the street. Scott's best friend, eleven-year-old Danny Storm. My mom meant Danny Christian. Cousin Danny. Her sister's son, Danny. Thirteen-year-old Danny.

Maybe if my father had called the right Danny, Polly would have lived longer. But I knew that one boy could not be a killer and the other a savior and both boys he called the same thing.

My mother put Polly in a shoebox. Scott and I buried him. I cried and I cried and my mother hugged me. It's okay, sweetie, she told me, it will all be okay. I'm so sorry, she told me. It will all be okay. Scott did not cry.

When I left the bathroom, I went back to try to brave the photographs. I can do this, I thought, as I stood next to my mother. Cool Pat with his sunglasses on in a Speedo. Pat Jr.

with Pat Sr. The pyramid picture. All of the cousins firing cap guns at the camera in Gettysburg. Patrick riding a carousel with my father.

Your dad lost it on this one, mom told me.

What do you mean?

He was looking at the pictures. He saw this one and he couldn't hold it in. He started crying uncontrollably. Don't tell him I told you.

There's your grandmother, she told me. Go hug her.

I hugged my grandmother. Her white face red from the tears.

It doesn't hurt to go see him in the casket, she said.

I said yes.

But the pictures, she said.

Yes.

We looked at the pyramid picture. All of the cousins firing guns in Gettysburg. Patrick and my father.

Your dad lost it when he saw this one, she told me. I nodded.

Don't tell him I told you. ❖



Untitled | Caleb Kortokrax

Radio Flyer

Emerald Davis

Sidewalk cracks blur beneath bare feet slapping sun-warmed concrete. Too fast. Wind tugs at loose locks, a wild mane of summer-spun gold. Never fast enough. Red, wooden slats press into sweaty palms. Momentum is essential. SPF evaporates and air pierces lungs with each heave, harsh but for a smoky promise of barbecue down the block. The rider squeals - or screams? - but barriers blend, bend, and we're flying, midair.

Grit glitters -
brown and white and red
tangled heap.

Cardinal

Lauren Nelson

i

Smoke from my cigarette mingles with the flaking snow
and gossipy chant of ladybirds. Twittering
brown bodies molt like cattails on bare limbs
poking through chain-link, pecking thistle and millet
while tom cats prowl behind door screens.

ii

The red breasted male in his flaming cap
plunges out of the ozone, silencing the congregation,
and on a highway in Estero I watched a gopher tortoise
hump his mistress, stalking her toward the sanctuary
of her burrow beneath shade trees.

iii

Static-charged wires hiss and sag over the bacchanalian
backyard aviary, hollow fluttering, my own vapors.
Suburbia vibrates with the metallic warbling of spinsters
watching the bellicose cardinal spar his reflection
behind the sweep of rubber sheaths.



Untitled | Christopher George Stohs



Below the Bark | Nicholas Burrus

At Conrad Polk's Cabin On Squaw Point

Lauren Nelson

The old Ford moans over the pockmarked road as the pavement fractures into gravel. Through the side yards of Lincoln Log cabins I snatch glimpses of the lake. The water is white and choppy beneath an ashen sky and still the surface is scarred with pontoon boats and jet skis. I scan the water for fishing boats and see none. Just as road begins to narrow near the end of the point Conrad cranks the wheel and the truck lurches into the back yard of the cabin. The little building shrugs beneath a grove of oak trees, tucked between two lots under construction. Conrad mentions something about new owners tearing down the old cabins to put up permanent homes. I notice that the foundations walls have been laid within feet of where the property line must be.

I follow the old man to the back door. A half finished path of interred cinder blocks stops ten feet before the steps. My strides lengthen to match his as we step over the recently seeded lawn. Above the door the underside of the awning swarms with a constellation of insects. Mayflies careen on ellipses of chaos. Cobwebs cradle swaddled corpses of beetles. I swallow my breath and squint against the winged

fog guarding the door. The brass leaf on the handle flakes off in the palm of my hand. Beneath the paint the handle is mottled and dull. The screen door whines shut behind us.

Conrad hangs the car keys on a rack by the door. Plastic tags cuff the heads of most of the keys while others chain themselves to paper tags protected by a thin rim of tinsel. Their labels are varied and specific: *garage door west, bathroom door, trailer hitch, tool shed, Monarch, boathouse, back door, lawn mower*. Behind the key rack a banner of wallpaper stripes all four walls of the kitchen—pale blue spattered with white hydrangeas; the sole evidence of a female presence in the home.

The kitchen is a square brown hole; cavernous and flanked with red orange counter tops dating back to 1969. The room smells of dishwasher and forgotten fruit. A handful of fly fishing rods slouches against an old icebox tucked into the nook behind the door. Electric bills, receipts, and handwritten letters blanket the top of the icebox. A toolbox collecting dust sulks on the corner. Two aluminum cans of insecticide tower over it and behind them a plastic jug of lighter fluid is frozen in a perpetual squeeze. A collection of

batteries scatter over the counter like mouse droppings on the carpet. I remember Conrad keeps at least one loaded flashlight in each of the drawers.

Across from the icebox, the kitchen table is bare except for a Styrofoam cooler. The table has the slick, metallic look of a diner. It is too long for the wall and hangs over the doorway to another room. Dividing the rooms is a brown plastic curtain pleated like an accordion. The only piece of furniture in the room is a white metal bunk bed set in front of a wall of shelves. The covers are torn off and the bare mattress lies beneath a chain dangling from a bare bulb on the ceiling. We've left the blankets folded in the truck bed.

I go to put the beer in the fridge and am not surprised to find it primarily housing condiments. Two bottles of ketchup, a jar of Dijon mustard with brown speckled gunk caked on the rim. Pickle relish and an economy size bottle of soy sauce. A tub of margarine, unopened. The shelf on the door is littered with packets of taco sauce. On the main shelf someone has refilled a cranberry juice container with tap water.

From the back door I can see through the kitchen a corduroy recliner in the center of the living room. The track marks in the carpet where the chair was dragged were rubbed out long ago under the sleeping bodies of grandchildren. A new flat screen television perches on top of two cinder blocks on the floor while the old set remains wedged in its socket on the face of the entertainment unit. The old dial is rusted to a standstill on the weather channel. On the adjacent wall, a little wood-burning stove looks neglected. I ask Conrad if he's ever thought of tearing it out.

"Nah," he shrugs. "Been here longer than I have."

The stove sleeps at the feet of two blue and white plaid couches sprawled beneath yawning windows. I turn the blinds to look at the front yard and the grey lake churning just beyond. Weeds dangle from the wooden dock and a

brood of ducklings swim underneath. The hen nestles in the sumac by the fire pit, watching her offspring from the bank above the water. At the edge of the water I notice a new addition to the view. Wooden and painted white with tiny shingles glued to the turret, it pays homage to the great sentinels of the Northeast. The lighthouse is rooted to the shore like a sentinel, unlit and unarmed, waiting for something to happen. ❖



Sea Change | Dan Lund

Chord Searching

(a kairotic cycle - 2)

John Linstrom

It's cold hands out here,
raindrops beating a white noise rhythm
on the metal canopy.

He takes my cigarette and pulls,
like teasing out a new thought
he might not want to taste.

It's funny that he holds it like a pencil.
In high school Spanish, the only words
you absolutely must know: *¿Puedo sacarle punta*

a mi lapiz? but smart kids remember
that punta is point, and sacar
does not mean to sharpen.

Take it back, brushing cold electric fingertips,
lift to lips, tease out a thought from air,
hold your cigarette like a pencil, there -

Running from Gary

Ellen Orner

I step out of my dad's Chrysler onto a dark gravel parking lot and slam the door. Illegally parked. I wonder if the loud policewoman who just shooed me off the curb will write me a ticket. If she does, my dad will pay for it. He'll be mad, but he shouldn't have made me find a parking spot in downtown Gary if he didn't want a parking ticket.

I press the lock tab on the key fob four times as I abandon the car, stepping out onto a cracked, weedy sidewalk. I have to walk a block and a half west to the RailCats stadium. Double-A baseball in the middle of Gary. This means progress. My dad, or rather, his bank, has a skybox for entertaining customers. And me, of course. I'm always invited. *If I can make it there in one piece*, I think.

Approaching on my right, a man with yellowed eyes and purple-black skin. I smell booze. He smiles at me with three teeth. I check my pockets for change, for show, but I realize he isn't begging, exactly. Seems to have what he wants, for now. An open bottle, paper-bagged. He isn't moving toward me, but still—we're too close. I know he's not scary, but I'm scared. Maybe he can see it in my wide-eyed smile; he moves on down the street behind me, trips a little, brushes the graffiti-plastered wall for support. He settles into a doorway, while I speed-walk across the intersecting street. I won't let myself run. Everyone knows, running only heightens

fear. And besides, there's nothing to run from. He mumble-shouts after me, *still friendly*, I think, but disappointed. *Is he pouting?* I won't look back as long as he I can hear him, but out of earshot, I turn.

His shelter for the night is abandoned, to say the least. Even the boards on the windows are busted up. Spray paint from gang symbols has dripped and hardened on a yellow sign marked "Gary Liquors." To my eyes, the building and the man are almost one—abandoned and beyond repair—and I'm just relieved to be on the other side of the street.

I hate this, this instinct to run. To run from Gary, especially. I've grown up despising the fear that made people pack up their furniture and abandon their houses in the white flight. My father has raised me to shake my head when I consider the mass of scared Caucasians who deserted their hometown upon the election of Gary's first black mayor, Richard G. Hatcher. I've been taught that the senseless fear that moved them south to sundown towns is responsible for Gary's condition today.

Scuttling down 5th Avenue, I think, *this is Scary Gary*, the "murder capital of the world" that I defend when outsiders grimace at it, or worse, drive around it. This is the city whose

beautiful blue steel mill flames intrigue me, whose Calumet River concerns me, whose mayor Scott King exasperates me. This is the place my grandfather chose to stay and raise his family, working to integrate neighborhoods when most of his neighbors fled. *And here's me, only pretending not to run.*

The thought of Poppop slows me down. I remember a different day in downtown Gary, encountering a similarly friendly drunk. I was six, maybe. My grandfather and I were together, as usual, in the afternoon, this time waiting outside Methodist Northlake Hospital, where Grandma volunteered at the gift shop and Mom was one of the few white nurses. Most others refused to work at Northlake, not because of the patient base, they said, but because the dreaded driving through downtown. My grandfather was legally blind, as he had been most of his life, but this gave him an odd self-assurance. He could see enough to drive, at least, and I could help. If we came to a stoplight, for example, and he couldn't tell what color it was, I could see it for him. So I trusted him.

We strolled down the weed-filled sidewalk, doing our usual things. Poppop picked up a beer bottle and I picked up a penny. We stopped at a rusty pole in the cement and he lifted me by the armpits. I cupped my hands to the hole. "Helloooooo down there. . . ." Dark, earthy air rose up and met my face. No answer. And then, a man approached and shook my Poppop's hand. He may have complimented him on his hat, too. It was a soft brown one with a brim that Grandma always wanted to wash.

The wobbly man wants something from us. I vaguely hoped he wanted money, so Poppop could give it to him and we could keep walking. I reached in my coat pocket and felt my penny. I put my other hand in Poppop's. But the man didn't want money. He wanted to talk, which was Poppop's favorite thing to do, so we might stand there for a long time, talking about what kind of liquor in his paper bag, and the shooting last night, and the problem with his left knee. I wasn't scared,

because Poppop wasn't. But for the first time, I felt slightly displeased with his sense of the appropriate.

I squeezed my grandfather's hand, as a request to keep walking. He was chuckling in his dry way, and the man laughed too. His eyes smiled when he mumbled, "Have a blessed day, now." Poppop shook his hand again, and then put his arm around me. The man rambled on down the sidewalk, out of sight.

I reach the stadium, swing open the glass doors, and present my ticket. The ticket lady directs me to the elevator. I push the button and ride up with the dessert cart. I have my self-assurance back. It's a lot different from Poppop's kind: it depends almost entirely on my circumstances. It's a false assurance, probably, and far more dangerous than not being able to tell if the light is red or green. I reach the skybox floor, and stride down the carpeted hallway, looking for the Mercantile National Bank suite. *The one with cash-patterned wallpaper.* My mind is out there on the sidewalk. I'm wondering about my home, and what makes me say, emphatically, "Gary" when people ask where I'm from, and not "Miller Beach," as other people do.

I find the skybox, and my dad, too, entertaining customers. Once he realizes I've come in, he hugs me and leaves his hand on my shoulder. He introduces me to all the new people and refreshes my memory of the old ones. I smile, shake hands, and say all the appropriate things. Then I hand him the keys. "Sorry if it gets towed. I couldn't find a spot. And it's dark out."

He laughs and pats my shoulder a little reproachfully. "Where did you park?" But the RailCats end the inning, the Bears give up a touchdown on TV, and Lisa, his administrative assistant, approaches with news that the salsa has run out. He's off.

After a plate of chips without salsa and some small talk with the clients' wives, I find Dad again. He's explaining the corruption of Northwest Indiana politics to a man from Chesterton. I can't tell if the man cares, but it's obvious that he knows he supposed to. I could tell him a thing or two about the new mayor, and the renovation of the Genesis Center, and the consolidation of Bethlehem and U.S. Steel, and the 2% cap on property taxes, and the projects going up where my brother used to play Little League. Usually, I would chime in, reciting some fact about the Gary Airport or Wirt High School that Dad forgot to mention this time. Maybe just to make the man from Chesterton wonder if he had deprived his own daughter of some benefit that only growing up in Gary can provide.

But I don't say anything this time, because I just ran down 5th Avenue, away from an intoxicated Gary resident who needed some help, but only wanted to talk. I don't say anything because I can hear my moral complacency creaking; I suspect, uncomfortably, that my strongest attachment to this city is the privilege it gives me to disdain the kids from Chesterton, whose fathers and grandfathers had fled.

I used to sound black. I was a seven-year-old girl with a blonde bowl cut and skill in Ebonics. I used to practice phrases during recess, perched on the monkey bars with Brittany Buggs and Amber G. Evan, a skinny kid with complicated designs shaved into his buzz cut, would sneak up behind us. I hadn't really minded when he gave me a ring and pecked me on the cheek last year, but we were in first grade now, and his attention had become a bother. Besides, I liked Leon. I protested at the first foot Evan set on the ladder, but he wasn't fazed. Amber made faces and shook her pig-tails. Still, he approached, grinning. And then, Brittany let loose a torrent of crushing insults and terrifying slang. Her head slid horizontally over her shoulders as she told him off: her whole body swayed in confident rhythm. She ended by giving him the finger.

It was very effective. I watched Evan until he had run halfway across the playground, and then turned to admire Brittany. I tried a few of her words, to see how they sounded in my voice. They sounded silly, but I would keep practicing. She taught me how to jump rope, too, and dance. Well, I never really learned how to dance, but at least I tried.

Despite my shortcomings, I could, by second grade, walk down an aisle of toys in Wal-Mart and effortlessly say, "There go my play-doh." I gloried in the incongruity I could produce. It was so satisfying to surprise people. Before long, I even forgot they would be surprised. It was easy, then, to call Gary home. It wasn't a matter of struggling to deserve it. I had to struggle to be popular, to be better at math than Brittany, to get Leon's attention, and not to get beat up, but I never really noticed that I was the only white kid in my entire school.

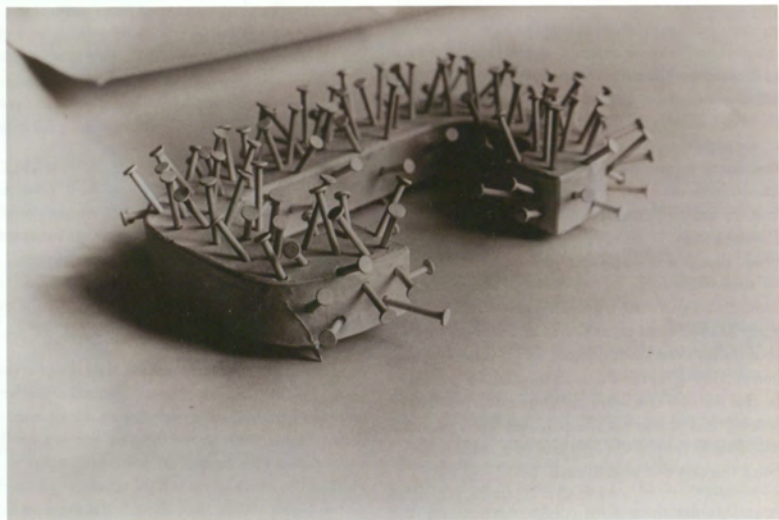
In third grade, my parents began homeschooling me, not because of the race ratio or the average test score, but because several area schools had closed and Nobel was overcrowded, holding classes in the closets. The next time I stepped foot in a Gary school was to take the SAT. I drove myself to Wirt High School, one of Gary's better schools, though it graduated less than half its class in 2006." I walked through the broken metal detectors and showed my driver's license to a security guard in a worn blue uniform. "Ahhright, baby," she said. I smiled, recognizing the phrase as one of my mother's, borrowed from the other nurses at Northlake. "Good luck on your test." I walked in the classroom and sat at a desk in front of Brittany Buggs. I hadn't recognized anyone yet, so I sat and reveled in the unforgettable atmosphere of hair oil and no air-conditioning. Then Brittany tapped me on the shoulder.

"I remember you," she said. "We were all this big, last time I saw you." She held her hand about two feet above the floor. "Your hair was always so straight."

We hugged across our desks and talked about our first grade teacher, Mrs. Willard, and Amber G., and not about Leon, who, nine and a half years ago, while in line for the water fountain, she'd tricked me into confessing my love for. Brittany was still better at math. She finished the math section six minutes before time was up, but I finished the verbal section just as early, and sat quietly, looking around at what I hadn't seen since third grade. I was the only white kid in the entire room.

And now I look around another room, wallpapered in cash and crowded with men in business-casual-baseball attire. There's a full bowl of salsa on the table. My dad has the keys to the illegally parked car. I sink into a couch and dip a chip in the salsa. So does the man from Chesterton, who has finally escaped from my dad's economic inequality lecture. Now, I'm not the only anything in the room. I'm not the only one who, when the game ends, is going to walk down the carpeted hall, descend the elevator, push open the glass doors, and swallow the urge to run down 5th Avenue with my eyes closed, so I don't see the black man, whose bottle is now empty, asleep in the corner of an abandoned liquor store. I'm not the only one who's content with sinking deeper in the couch and laying my head against the cash on the wall behind me. Not the only one who's compromised a principle before I knew I held it, and not the only one who's feeling guilty, either. Finally, I'm not the only one who realizes well that not being the only one is no excuse.

I resolve myself to one thing: *if the car has been towed, I'll pay for it myself.* And then, riding down a fresh wave of conviction, I turn from Gary to watch the game. ♣



Man Ray's C | Abbey Houx

Scars, maps

Lauren Nelson

Today it is crimson and curdling
tucked into the tenuous folds behind my knee,
sinewy and brown,
like rope fraying from overuse.

Yesterday it was higher up on my thigh,
bulbous and blue,
seeping under skin like the worry
creeping from some place questioned and concealing.

A little bulb with a tender nucleus sprouts from my bicep
where the ember fused flesh and nervous tissue,
finally dissolved of its pink unhealing,
after three years and three brown slashes

that are still freckles and I am still standing
on the back porch kissing cigarettes, remembering
things funny at the time on cruddy college decks
slippery with fog light and whisky-plyed voices.

Tomorrow it may be pressed into the trampoline pad
of my stomach, blossoming necrotic fingerprints
soldiering toward the navel,
smeared red rims running over my body like skid marks

On Hands

Ellen Orner

Fifty-two bony bits, I counted
them all, and wrinkles
like the sand on the shore.
My right hand danced
like a jellyfish, while the left
watched quietly, and snapped
its frog leg of a thumb.
My mother's hands were birds:
her blue veins murmured
under cracked-shell skin.
Her nails curled like feather tips.
They rasped between
my sleeping wings: sprinkle,
whisk, simmer and flip—
I'm awake
to a man's hand
made of candlesticks
with long, hard wicks for tips
that do not singe my skin—not even
on the night he smears
the chilly aloe in.
His shoulders are skittish;
aloe conducts nothing
but heat. My hands
dance an extra lap, then catch
on the verge of his collar bone.



Untitled | Caleb Kortokrax



Disconnected | Abbey Meyer

Molting

Megan Telligman

She had always hated the red bumps that rose like pin pricks on her upper arms, and white dots peppering mottled, pinked skin. She furiously scrubbed her upper arms in the shower, looking like a person trying to stay warm on a too cold day. The spots persisted, but sunk to the back of her mind, reappearing only in self-conscious moments.

Until one day, they began to grow. During her daily scrubbing, she felt pain, and in running her hands over her arms, she felt hard spots buried beneath the skin. She quickly washed the soap off herself, jumped out of the shower, and spun around in the mirror. The spots were, without a doubt, growing, and were dark purple, the size of dimes.

She wore long sleeves to work that day, and made a mental note to make a dermatologist appointment during work that day. She rubbed her hands over the bumps all day, giving her hands the numb feeling of having ran them along a length of chain link fence, and leaving the skin more red and raw than before.

When she woke the next morning, after a night of fitful sleep, she immediately felt her arms, and there was, again, no doubt that the bumps were growing. She could feel long thin twig like hardness under the thinning skin, and the skin was raw and irritated as though whatever was growing under there was on the verge of puncturing her. She wore a bulky sweater to work that day and called her dermatologist again with a more urgent message.

The next day she awoke and showered, her arms in much the same condition. She slipped the shower, and soon realized there was a waxy liquid coating the tub. There was clear wax running down her legs, and she called off work.

The wax continued to trickle slowly down her legs that day, and she spread blankets on the couch and towels on the floor to contain the mess. She sat, watching TV vacantly, and absentmindedly fiddling with her bumps. Sometime in the mid-afternoon, she yelped with pain, and found that one of the bumps had ruptured and a barb had protruded. She examined the small black barb as best she could, it

seemed to have a plastic like covering and was hollow. She pulled it and it emerged further and further, but she tried to pull it out, she felt immense pain, as though she had tried to pull out her hair. She left the barb, and proceeded to spend the rest of the night unveiling all the others on her arms and back.

Clumps of her hair fell out in the shower the next day, and when she tried to call work, she couldn't speak, but instead let out a series of raspy chirps before hanging up the phone. She decided not to talk anymore. She spent the day examining the new black barbs that covered her body, soon realizing that the shell was easy to peel and break open. She learned to slide her ever-lengthening nails into the slits she made and she revealed, to her surprise, a feather.

It was black and smushed. A narrow feather, but a feather. She ran its soft length between her fingers, and began smoothing and straightening its edges. She soon found the wax was useful in shaping the feathers, and she worked well into the night freeing her feather from their shells and smoothing them into a glossy black coat.

She slept for two days after her preening. When she awoke, hungry and thirsty, she ran to the kitchen, where she found she had no hands with which to open the refrigerator door. She ran to the mirror, and she saw that her face, now indistinguishable, was black, uniform with the rest of her body, her nose had lengthened and hardened. Her eyes were black, beady, expressionless.

Without much thought, she opened the balcony door, hopped up on the wooden railing with a newfound agility and jumped. She spread her arms, and found herself flying. Flying, flying, the wind cut by her wings, vibrations running

through every single feather. She tried out her new voice, trilled into the wind, and heard hundreds of calls in response.

From then on, she was a member of the flock. Lighting from power lines to lampposts, to fields, picking at seeds and the soft heads of worms, flying in groups that darkened the sky indistinguishable from the rest of her flock, forever following the others. ❖

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Their tentacles reached out towards one another | Amanda Gartman



Sooner or Later (Both of Us Must Know) | Abbey Houx

Winter In Question

Lauren Nelson

It is December the first
and I am bare legged
and that is all the evidence I need.

Do I sound bitter?
I am not bitter.

I am concave
and clambering.

I am a mute swan
slipping between currents,
clenching river-stones
with tuberous talons
when the sky is grey
and leaking.



Art Chapel | Dan Lund

Shelter at Will Park

(a kairotic cycle - 3)

John Linstrom

Rain water on my cold Trek bike,
cloud flash behind the black swing set.
Wood chips under a plastic slide, and my thighs feel prickly,
my hand claws where I remember a mistake.

Raindrops like Pop Rocks,
crickets like rain.
I wonder why water tinkles on metal
but hammers on polyethylene.

Worms on the sidewalk,
birds hide in trees.
Pen glides through wet spots:
is this how people write poetry?

The bird in the tree, grease-beaked
and twisting stalks around in the skin,
you admire not for its description so much
as its presence, unseen, preening.

The worm on the walk,
rain on the grass,
the air on the walk, and wind
a long deep gasp for the wood of the birds.

The worm-holes of grass-earth fill:
I scoot, dodge falling droplets, plastic tunnel.



قَدَا (blue in arabic) | Janet Pfister

Lemon Meringue Pie

Lilia Del Bosque Oakey

His hand always grasped the long neck of a Budweiser, the one pleasure he could afford. Beads of moisture would slither down the neck, hug the curve of his knuckles, and sink into the brown creases between his fingers, settling in the shade to keep from the heat of the flame on the gas stove. Some days, his face would be shadowed while taking long swigs of Jim Beam from a ceramic flask from Mexico. When he pulled the flask down, the liquid would never swoosh, it would settle in a soft hiss, a siren call for one more touch of his lips, one more dance on his tongue. Just one more.

In Mexico, he owned a Panderia and always had the dust of flour on his knuckles. But in America he worked in Brach's chocolate factory, watching Chocolate Stars as they sat on the conveyor belt, checking for defects, and slipping a few in his pocket on slow days. He was always in the kitchen, mixing and drinking. Smelling of his vice and his work; sweating from beating batter and from dehydration.

I am told that my great-Grandfather, Tata, was a man of scents. On weekdays, he smelled of coco, in winter, of crème, in summer of meringue. But some days the sugar wasn't strong enough and when he would lean in to kiss my mother on the cheek, or when she passed him the baking soda, or when he walked through the door, she could smell it. When she was younger, she thought it was molasses. It was the same dark

color but was in cans instead of jars. After you eat a spoonful of molasses, you always need to sit down or take a nap, to let the iceberg of sugar, suspended in folic acid, breakdown and Tata was always letting the his molasses set. He would melt into the couch and let his sugar run his veins

Tata baked for everyone. My mother would sit in the kitchen, hands folded on the wooden table, and watch him hand whip the meringue. He pulled the pie out of the oven and placed it right in front of her so she could watch the pie set and thicken and smell the sugar that pierced through the hot kitchen air. It would make her remember, in anticipation, every slice of lemon meringue pie she ever had. And make her realize that this pie would surpass them all. As she waited for it to cool, Tata would grab his flask and sit across from her and smile. She thought it was out of accomplishment but learned it was out of weakness.

There was a picture that my Grandmother had on her bedside of Tata when he was in the army. The photo was cheap and poor quality. He stood, facing the camera straight on in his Army uniform and a big hat that probably never stayed on when the trees swayed. His arms were tight by his side, sucking the air out of his thick shoulders, and his eyes were small and deflated, just like my Grandmother's and just like mine. But the edges of him weren't crisp, they

melted into the graying background making his left arm seem as if it was being erased with a poor eraser. As if he was disappearing right there, but the camera man's fingers twitched before he could fully turn into ozone. He always seemed like a ghost—he would fade into the scenery or melt into the couch but when he wanted to make a scene, you couldn't help but stare at him.

She didn't invite him to her eighth grade graduation because she knew what would happen. But he came. She knew the flask would be empty and not from being upside down over the sink. He came late and yelled for her over the crowd. He introduced himself to a teacher that she never had and as he went in to shake hands, his whole body fell against the teacher in an unconscious flurry of involuntary humiliation. She dug her fingers into the white cap but her blushing cheeks gave her away. There were chuckles from classmates and she felt the heavy disapproving glances from the other parents pressing down on her back. After graduation she told him how much she hated him and how she never wanted him to talk to her or come to anything ever again. All he did was ruin things. He could stay in the kitchen, stay slumped in the arm chair, and stay out of her memories.

When work is long or kids are kids or her day spins slow like a broken wheel, she buys Brach's Chocolate Stars. They only sell them at the hardware store but she stands in line behind the men with nails and the couples with pails of paint and buys her little bag of chocolate stars for \$1.49, always exact change. She waits until everyone clears the house or stays in the parking lot with the radio off and places the star on her tongue and lets it melt. She never chews it or tosses it with her tongue; she just let it sit there. She closes her eyes and sees Tata standing over the stove, hunched, his sternum staring at his belt buckle. He his whipping meringue fast and never lets his eyes leave the mixture—he was not foolish, he knew not to over mix. When he put the lemon meringue pie in the oven, she would sneak into the kitchen and open the

oven just a crack and close it quickly, letting the heat of the flames carry the smell of sugar, making her mind swish in a high of sweet lemons.

He died in January. He was driving my Grandmother to collect unemployment after Nabisco had let her go. He told her to wait by the building while he fetched the car. He cut through an alley and she leaned over the brick wall to see her father, his stride cut by age, take small, certain steps down the pavement. Then he stumbled, reached his hand to the soot darkened wall and fell into the water collected between the seam of the wall and the pavement. She ran to help him.

"It hurts too much to drive."

And then he passed out.

She yelled for help but no one came. She heard footsteps and people were silhouetted by the street lamps. But no one came.

She never was able to say I love you. Or sorry. When he died she was selfish and thought of what he must of thought of her. She would take his pies too. Even when she was angry she would still eat them.

A few months after he died, my mother tried to make his lemon meringue pie. She made four pies, each one tasted the same but it did not taste like his. They were too sweet and flat. Nothing urged you to take another bite and one piece was just fine. His recipe cards had no measurements, and were half in Spanish but she watched him enough for this to not be a hurdle. After a week of baking and many eggs wasted in this ordinary pie, she gave up. What did you put in it? Her brother asked. Eggs, flour, sugar she replied. Here. He handed her a brown bag with a neck whose grooves her hands knew. Whatever he was drinking, he put in it, her brother said, and she did. She threw in some Jim Beam and it tasted like his. But she never let that bottle hit her palm again. ❖



Untitled | Caleb Kortokrax



Perspective | Dillon Carter

Delicious

Mark Schoeck

BLACK SCREEN

We open with a V.O. A dinner blessing.

NAVE (V.O.)

For food in a world where many walk
in hunger; for faith in a world
where many walk in fear; For
friends in a world where many walk
alone, we give you thanks, O Lord.

INT. NAVE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

We FADE IN on a close up of Nave as he finishes the dinner blessing. He is in his early-twenties. He is content. He loves what he has just said, and you know it. He looks around at his guests and says

NAVE

Amen.

Silence. Nave awaits their reply. Then, with his arms, he gestures for them to repeat.

ALL

(Halfheartedly.)

Amen.

We MOVE BACK to show the entire table. Four guests sit at a square table. Nave sits next to his girlfriend, Grace, and across from David, who sits next to his girlfriend, Lizzy, who is across from Grace. They are all in their early twenties. Casual dinner-party clothes. David has curly hair and wears a necklace with the Star of David. Yeah, he's Jewish. Nave is having trouble sitting down; he wears a leg brace that covers his entire left leg on top of his pants. He's slowly falling into his chair.

NAVE

Nope. I've got it.

GRACE

Dig in, guys.

Grace, David and Lizzy each grab a dish. Salad, pasta, vegetables. They scoop and splatter on their plates. They pass and pour a bottle of red wine. Nave still struggles.

NAVE

No, I'm good. Just fine.

Grace holds a pasta dish for Nave to take from her while looking away from him for the next dish. Nave still hasn't fallen completely into his chair. His leg slides, he holds himself up. She's losing her grip on the dish.

GRACE

Nave.

She looks to him. He loses his grip and tumbles into his chair.

NAVE

(Catching his breath.)

Ah, no, I'm good. I'm fine.

Grace places the pasta dish in the center of the table. Nave is a bit confused, quietly frustrated.

NAVE (CONT'D)

Oh. No. Not about the... Ah. It's fine...

Nave stands again. He grabs the pasta dish, places it next to his plate, and slowly and grudgingly attempts to sit down again. No one is concerned.

NAVE (CONT'D)

Did you all like the dinner blessing?

LIZZY

It was beautiful, Nave.

Nave scoops pasta onto his plate. The others eat. He falls back into his chair.

NAVE

(To Grace.)

No one has made the joke yet.

GRACE

(Sarcastically.)

It's a good one.

NAVE

Someone always jokes that Grace should be the one to say grace. Might be more appropriate.

Silence.

NAVE (CONT'D)

Well, they say it with better comic timing. A little more... You know. How's the pasta, David? Lizzy?

DAVID

It's delicious.

LIZZY

What's in this sauce, Grace?

GRACE

It's a blend of-

NAVE

You don't want to know.

GRACE

No Nave, you don't want to know.

Grace blocks her mouth so that Nave cannot see her but David and Lizzy can. She audibly reveals the ingredient in her sauce to David and Lizzy, who both act surprised.

LIZZY

Wow, you can't even taste it.

GRACE

It's always better for Nave to not know what's actually in the food. He gets so picky.

NAVE

If I don't know, I don't mind!

DAVID

And if you're allergic?

NAVE

No, God blessed me with an allergy. Free body. Thank God.

We ZOOM IN on Grace. She slightly rolls her eyes and smiles, locking eyes with David. We show David smiling back at her.

DAVID

Thank God for that.

INT. NAVE'S APARTMENT - LATER

A CLOSE-UP of a Chinese Checkerboard. Dishes clink in the background. David speaks as we slowly ZOOM out to show Grace placing dishes in and around the sink. Wine glasses half-full. All six corners on the Chinese Checkerboard are full, though only four players play.

DAVID

Now, usually six people play, but that's okay. We won't use these two corners. The object of the game is to take over the corner across from you. So Nave, you want to take over

my position, and Grace, Lizzy's, and, you know...

LIZZY

Vicey versa.

DAVID

Right.

David shows the others how to move the pieces. We ZOOM IN on his hand and the marbles.

DAVID (CONT'D)

You move one marble at a time, then the next person moves. If there is a marble in the spot in front of yours...

David pulls a marble from his corner and places it in front of his own marble to show.

DAVID (CONT'D)

...Then you can jump it. Two spots in one move. You can hop as many times in a row as the opportunity grants you.

David sets up marbles to allow him three consecutive jumps. He takes one marble and jumps over all three that he has set up. Then he empties the middle of the board and sets his marbles back at his home corner.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Got it? Basically, Nave, I want to be in your corner.

We ZOOM IN slowly to David.

DAVID (CONT'D)

I'm going to set myself up to take over your spot in as few moves as possible. Since you're new to this, don't get frustrated. But you'll get the hang of it.

We ZOOM OUT to show all four characters.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Grace? Do the honors?

We ZOOM IN to the board. Grace moves a front-row piece forward one spot.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. NAVE'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

We stay ZOOMED IN to the board, pieces are now scattered in the middle of the board. No one yet has a clear advantage. The characters are in the middle of a conversation. They continue to play.

NAVE

It's funny. I'll admit it.

LIZZY

How did you miss the stair?

NAVE

I just wasn't looking. Can you believe that? I really had no idea where I was, I guess. I missed that first step.

GRACE

And he nailed the rest of them.

NAVE

Fell all the way down a whole level of stairs. Tore my ACL in half, sliced up all of my cartilage. I've been in this darn brace for a month already. Another one to go.

DAVID

Not so graceful, eh?

GRACE

I can't say I understand why they call it what they call it. Why Chinese Checkers?

NAVE

(To Grace.)

The Chinese invented it.

DAVID

It's actually not even a variation of checkers. It was developed in the late 19th century and was called Stern Halma.

GRACE

What does that mean, David?

NAVE

It's Chinese, dear.

DAVID

No, it was a variation of the game Halma, which is Greek for the word "jump." Stern is German for "stair." It's a star-shaped board on which you... jump.

(Beat.)

Unless you're Nave, that is. Since you have a couple of months before you can do that.

Lizzy chuckles. Grace laughs hysterically. Nave is confused.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Your leg, Nave. It's a joke, man.

NAVE

Oh!

Nave laughs hysterically. All alone. We show the board. David has most of his pieces in Nave's corner. Grace is moving in on Lizzy's corner.

NAVE (CONT'D)

You know, I'm not surprised you know all of this, David. About Chinese Checkers. Anyone who wears a Chinese Checkers necklace probably knows a thing or two.

We ZOOM IN on David's Star of David necklace. We ZOOM back OUT to show his reaction, an "Are you serious?" type of look.

GRACE

Oh, honey. It's a--

LIZZY

David... David certainly knows a lot.

DAVID

Well, just enough...

David moves his final piece into Nave's corner.

DAVID (CONT'D)

...To win!

The others react.

NAVE

Well that took you no time at all! I didn't even realize you had moved in so quickly.

The others continue to play. Nave gets out of his seat to refill his wine glass. We ZOOM IN on Grace. She is holding hands with Nave, but watches David's every move.

NAVE (CONT'D)

I don't even know where to move next. I guess I haven't been paying attention!

Grace is still locked on David. We stay in on Grace until Nave speaks. We slowly ZOOM OUT.

NAVE (CONT'D)

Grace,

Grace snaps out of it.

GRACE

Yeah?

NAVE

Your turn, sweetie.

GRACE

Oh.

Grace moves. We CUT TO her hand on one of her pieces. She does a double-jump and lands her last piece in Lizzy's corner.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Alright!

NAVE

My goodness, you two!

David returns to the table, standing. He places his glass on the table.

DAVID

Atta girl. Hey, I'm going out for a smoke. Anyone care to join?

He looks to Grace.

GRACE

Sure. I'll come.

We ZOOM IN on Lizzy. Concern. Grace gets up. She and David move to the door.

NAVE

Don't take long, you two!

We show the door close behind David and Grace before a PAN back to the table. Nave and Lizzy still sit.

NAVE (CONT'D)

And then there were two.

LIZZY

Are we still playing?

NAVE

I have no idea how to play this game.

LIZZY

Oh, you just... You mind if I use the restroom?

NAVE

Right inside that door. Liz. I would get up.

LIZZY

No, no. I can handle it.

Lizzy stands and enters the bathroom. We stay at the table with Nave. He sits in silence, smiling. We hold the shot. He is alone. And he is still smiling. And he is still happy. And content.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Lizzy splashes water on her face. She looks at herself in the mirror. Worry. After a few moments, she dries her face. She walks out of the bathroom and we follow her. The bathroom is connected to NAVE'S BEDROOM. She puts her hand on the door to exit, then looks to an open window. Faintly, she hears Grace laughing. We follow Lizzy as she moves to the window, looking out at David and Grace. They both laugh, joyous. Neither of them are smoking. Their hands are touching. They stand for a moment, staring at each other. David moves in to kiss her. Before they kiss, Lizzy looks away and we CUT AWAY with her. She sighs. Slowly, she exits Nave's bedroom and we follow her. She closes the door behind her.

INT. NAVE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

We are still on Lizzy, distraught, as she sits back down at the table. We PAN and ZOOM OUT to show Nave as well. He still smiles.

NAVE

I can't get her to stop smoking. I try, you know?

Silence.

NAVE (CONT'D)

Well, I mean, I used to try. I can't say I actually knew she still smoked. I can't handle it, myself. All the smoke. The smell and all of that.

Silence.

NAVE (CONT'D)

You smoke at all?

LIZZY

No.

NAVE

Me neither. I can't handle it. The smoke and the smell and all of that.

Silence. For a few moments, they sit without speaking. Lizzy is pissed. Nave still smiles. Several seconds pass.

NAVE (CONT'D)

The Chinese really put together a confusing--

The door opens.

NAVE (CONT'D)

Oh, there they are.

David and Grace ENTER.

NAVE (CONT'D)

Welcome back. Have fun?

DAVID

So what do y'all say? Another game?

NAVE

Oh, sure. We can--

LIZZY

I actually don't feel so well. Must have been the, you know... The ketchup.

NAVE

(To Grace.)

You put ketchup in our pasta?!?!

DAVID

You sure, Liz?

LIZZY

Yeah. We should get going.

Lizzy stands. She grabs a coat from behind her chair. David does the same. He's taken aback. Does she know? Lizzy moves to the door.

LIZZY (CONT'D)

Thanks for everything. Everything was... great.

Lizzy opens the door and EXITS.

DAVID

(Looking to Grace.)

Well. I guess I'll see you later. Thanks Grace.

(To Nave.)

Nave.

David exits. Nave still sits, content. Grace stands, distraught.

NAVE

Well. That was fun.

Grace pushes Lizzy's vacant chair back to the table. She moves to David's chair. Frustrated, she slams it back to the table, knocking over David's WINE GLASS, spilling it on the table. It drips onto the floor. She sighs.

NAVE (CONT'D)

Oh, honey.

He stands. He's concerned, but not upset. He grabs a TOWEL from the kitchen counter. The SHOT is from under the table, watching Nave attempt to move while we show the WINE dripping onto the floor into a puddle.

GRACE

Nave, just... Just leave it.

NAVE

Well, now...

We SHOW Nave and Grace and the puddle.

NAVE (CONT'D)

...You can't just make a mess and not clean it up. Right?

Nave drops the TOWEL onto the puddle. Grace stands, upset, hands over her face.

NAVE (CONT'D)

It's okay, honey. It was an accident. Everyone messes up!

(Beat.)

You seem upset.

GRACE

I'm fine.

Nave grabs his BIBLE from the counter.

NAVE

You know, I read a passage today I really liked. Maybe it will cheer you up.

GRACE

Nave...

NAVE

Here, honey.

He hands her the BIBLE.

NAVE (CONT'D)

Read it.

Reluctantly, she accepts the BIBLE from him. Eye roll.

NAVE (CONT'D)

It's bookmarked there. Just open it.

Grace opens the BIBLE

NAVE (CONT'D)

Chapter nine.

Grace sighs, then reads.

GRACE

Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out its seven pillars. She has prepared her meal and mixed her wine; she has also set her table.

Grace continues reading in a V.O. We

CUT TO:

EXT. NAVE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

David and Lizzy have exited the building. They approach DAVID'S CAR. David attempting to hold Lizzy's hand. Lizzy pulls her hand away. David knows. He knows that she knows.

GRACE (V.O., CONT'D)

She has sent out her maids, and she calls from the highest point of the city. "Let all who are simple come in here!" she says to those who lack judgment. "Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed.

NAVE (V.O.)

See? We just did that!

GRACE (V.O.)

Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of understanding.

CUT TO:

INT. NAVE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Grace continues reading.

GRACE (CONT'D)

"Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult; whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse. Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you.

CUT TO:

INT. DAVID'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

David drives. He knows. Lizzy stares out the window in silence. She knows too.

GRACE (V.O., CONT'D)

Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning.

CUT TO:

EXT. DAVID'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

David and Lizzy drive through a quiet city at night.

GRACE (V.O., CONT'D)

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. For through me your days will be many, and years will be added to your life.

CUT TO:

EXT. NAVE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

All is quiet outside Nave's apartment. Street lights. Cars drive by.

GRACE (V.O., CONT'D)

If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer."

CUT TO:

INT. NAVE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Grace still reads. Nave listens, smiling.

GRACE (CONT'D)

The woman Folly is loud; she is undisciplined and without knowledge. She sits at the door of her house, on a seat at the highest point of the city, calling out to those who pass by, who go straight on their way. Let all who are simple come in here!" she says to those who lack judgment. "Stolen water is sweet.

GRACE AND NAVE

Food eaten in secret is delicious!"

Nave chuckles. Grace does not.

GRACE (CONT'D)

But little do they know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of the grave.

CLOSE UP on Nave.

NAVE

Did you like it?

CLOSE UP on Grace.

GRACE

What does it mean?

CLOSE UP on Nave.

NAVE

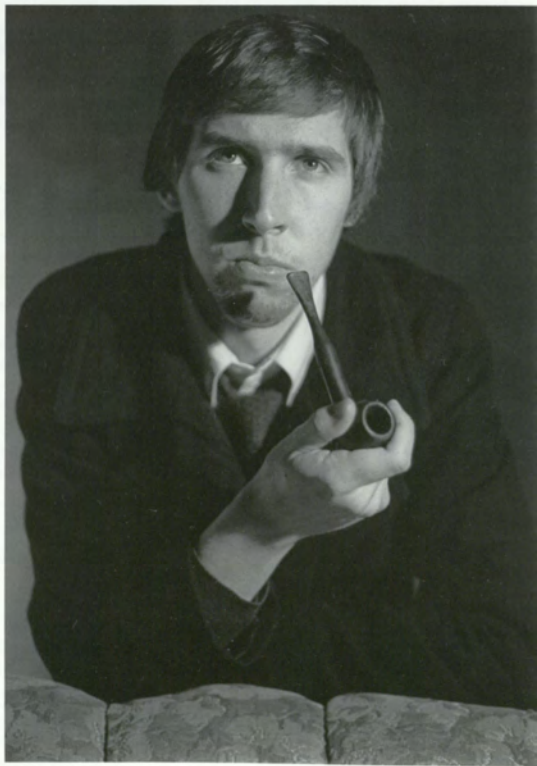
I don't know. Just thought it sounded like us.

We slowly ZOOM IN further on Nave, who smiles from ear to ear.

DISSOLVE TO:

BLACK SCREEN

End.



Oh Kickerboonie | Abbey Meyer

Chapel, 4 pm

Ellen Orner

Spine pressed against
a pew, I eyed the sun.
Light split on my lids,
like in microscopes,
and under fists,
It hung on my lashes,
floaters bobbing
in vitreous humor,
like diatoms on fire,
Filaments split and decomposed,
spontaneously generated
purple. And behind the purple,
marigold, roaring through
the phases of eclipse.
White fire worked arcs
unbending like skeletal
petals, sprung from a few
dead specks—

magnified and glorified,
fragmented and polarized,
kaleidoscopic, cobalt-green,
gaseous, red-flecked sight.
The sun withdrew
to the west and I
was left with my pew
and colored panes.
I thank You,
for I might have gone blind,
staring at Your substance
on my lashes.



Folk Music | Nicholas Burrus



Untitled | Janet Pfister

Can We Call This Conversation?

Jeremy Reed

You ever think of who you'll remember and who you'll forget? I do sometimes. I'll be with a friend and they'll be talking about something they think is downright world changing, and I'll think to myself, "Will I even remember this in five years? I mean, will I even remember that this conversation happened? Will I remember this person after five, ten years have gone by?" This is all sounding a little too high brow and a little too I'm-going-to-be-a-serious-person and a little too look-at-me-I'm-sad for my liking, so let me try to explain it a different way.

I was walking home the other night from a friend's house. We'd all been drinking a little, playing some music, doing that whole thing and I eventually decided it was time to head home. So, out I went into that cold Midwestern Winter. I had a little more than a nice buzz going, a little drunk, and was just smiling.

Earlier in the evening, I'd been hanging out with this girl. Yeah, I know, oh boy he got hung up on a girl, but no it was more normal than that. We've known each other for probably something like two, three years. Knew of each other before that, but hadn't really met. Anyway, throughout the night we hung out together, chatting about the other people at the party, chatting about how Dave had gotten too drunk and made a fool of himself again, the normal party things. One

thing led to another and we were having a pretty good time. Found ourselves on the couch, talking over the rims of our glasses. Talking about relationships, far past and recent, but talking about them in that falsely intimate way when you realize both of you just want to have fun with each other. As the night progressed, and the alcohol did what it does, we ended up in the laundry room, more of a closet really, lips locked and hands exploring, her sitting on the washer and me standing against it. Just as things were getting under way, her phone went off - a friend of hers wanting to know where she'd gone. We realized what we were doing and it turned awkward, as it always does.

When I left her there to collect herself, run her fingers through her hair and that sort of thing, I went to the kitchen and got another drink. When at a house party like this one, you get there and have something quick just to take off the edge. Maybe a mixed drink, something like that. Pretty soon afterward you do a couple shots with the guys, only a couple though so you stay respectable, and you watch the guys that are going to get too drunk get closer to being there. You usually chat and walk around then for a while after that, or sometimes you find a girl and have a conversation over another mixed drink. And then as the night continues everybody eventually has a beer or two and everything seems to calm down, either from some accepted point of

reference as when things should start coming back to reality or because the people who had taken too many shots earlier have already passed out. At this point in the night, I was thinking about how I wasn't really having that much fun anymore and without thinking about it grabbed a beer from the fridge. I was a little ahead of schedule compared to everyone else, no point of reference reached, but I grabbed one anyway. I drank it in the kitchen while leaning against a counter watching everything go on around me.

As I was there just nursing what I had, a girl I'd never met before came up and started talking to me. She was nice and all, but she just rubbed me the wrong way. She just looked a little young for our group of friends and I wondered how she got there. I wondered if she was witnessing the same party I was. Did she see Dave go upstairs with Allison? What did she think when Jake had gotten stuck in the living room because the other guys had moved the furniture to box him in when he wasn't paying attention? We'd all laughed at the time, but I hadn't seen her there. Had she seen me go off to my own little corner of the house?

But instead of any of that, she just started talking to me about rocks. Yeah, I know you won't believe me, but I mean it. She was really interested in rocks. She started talking about all these different names that I couldn't understand and which didn't really make a whole lot of sense to me, but she carried on as if she were talking to someone in the field, someone just as interested in it as she seemed to be and even asked me my opinion a couple of times (which of course I just mumbled about because I didn't have a clue about what she was saying).

She started talking about Death Valley, maybe she was from Nevada or something, but she was into it. Apparently it used to be a bunch of seas or something, she called it Lake Manly (which was when I started looking around for someone else to help me, because that's obviously ridiculous, but I guess

by then everyone had reached that point where they'd agreed to calm down, or at least I assume so because all of a sudden there was nobody there to save me from this rock girl). What happened was, whenever all these seas had dried up, they had left a bunch of salt on the ground and so when you drive through Death Valley (which just seems like a dumb idea) it apparently looks really cool. You can see all the normal desert stuff too, because it's in the middle of the Mojave Desert, but apparently the salt gives it that little something extra.

Or at least so she said. I'm not really sure what I think about it, because more than anything else I just wanted to get the hell out of there. Things hadn't worked out with my friend on the washer machine. Dave had made a fool of himself which I would have to tell him about the next day, all of a sudden this girl comes up who I think is too young to even be there and she starts talking to me about salt in Death Valley of all things, and added to all of that, then my beer ran out. I don't know about you, but I was out of there.

I listened to the rest of her conversation, but kept acting as if someone was calling my name, moving this way and that, body fidgeting against the countertop. I made some kind of awkward ending to the conversation. I gave it a real try, don't get me wrong, but once I started talking I just knew there was no way to save it. She looked kind of sad, but not overly so. I think more than anything she just wanted to keep talking about rocks, but, I mean, it's rocks.

I went and found Allison, who'd finished with Dave and left him asleep in the room upstairs, and said goodbye, it being her house and all. I grabbed my coat and went out the front door to begin my way down the sidewalk and across town to get to my place. This little apartment just off Main Street that doesn't cost that much per month. As I stepped off the porch, I saw the beer can still in my hand and I left it on the porch rail. I figured someone would find it in the morning.

As I was walking along, I started thinking about that girl again. I mean, a girl like that doesn't just leave your thoughts like nothing. So, I'm walking along, pretty drunk but still doing just fine, and I think to myself, what is there to know about rocks? They're there, sure, and they're everywhere, sure, but there's no real point in thinking about what they do, right? Now, I'm not talking about people who know when an earthquake or a tsunami or something's going to happen, that's important, but just the average Joe who walks up and is thinking to himself, you know, I really like rocks. Well, what is there to that?

Look at this rock right here - I'd kicked a chunk of sidewalk out in front of me - what is there to like about a rock like this? I picked it up and started walking again, moving my fingers over it to try to get to know it better (you think like this when you're a little drunk, you think everything is known by how much of it you've actually seen or touched). I figured there was nothing to it, it being just a chunk of sidewalk, (and if I were being honest with myself, not even really a real rock because of that, I mean, it was made by somebody, right? But that's beside the point) and so I threw it. When I threw it, I aimed at a tree that I was walking past and hit it right where I'd wanted it - Boom. But when it hit, parts of the bark went flying and parts of the chunk of sidewalk went with it too, and I didn't feel good about it. There was some part of me right below my chest but right above my stomach that didn't feel good about it. As I walked away I was thinking to myself that I've felt this feeling right below my chest but above my stomach for a while now. I mean, it's not like it hurts or anything, it's just this pit of something that's been there for a while and sometimes it's worse than at other times, and this time, when I threw that rock at that tree, it was worse.

Now, I know this may not make a whole lot of sense right off the bat, but when I saw those bits go flying and I felt that pit in my stomach and when I kind of half-stopped myself there on that sidewalk by that tree, this picture just came

up straight into my head and it's from when I was a kid and the whole memory just came whizzing back out of nowhere. I mean it's something I haven't thought about in years, but it was just like that - bam - and the whole memory was back.

When I was a kid, my friends and I were out in the front yard trying to come up with something to play, some new imaginary game where we'd give each other imaginary names, but we were having a hard time coming up with a new idea. It must have been late in the summer because I remember complaining about how we'd played everything already. As we were talking we were peeling bark off the sycamore tree in my front yard and just kind of running our fingers along it until we found another piece sticking out that seemed like it should be broken off. Now this tree had been there for like a hundred years, I mean, this thing was huge. So I thought I knew what was coming when I heard the screen door on the front of the house open up, my mom yelling down at all of us - my sister and I and all the neighborhood kids too - "What do you think you're doing? What has that tree ever done to you? Now you say you're sorry."

Group response: "Sorry."

"Now hug the tree."

What did she just say? We all wondered if she was serious. I mean, I was ten years old, Dave just a little older, my sister and Allison younger than both of us. Could she really mean for us to do, to do that? In front of everybody else and the whole neighborhood too? Who knows who would look out their window and see us?

But in the end, we did it, all of us. And when that tree was cut down because they thought it was rotting from the inside and going to fall on the house, I thought about how all four of us lined up that summer afternoon and hugged that tree while we still had little bark pieces stuck on our hands. When they'd cut it down and finally got all the pieces gathered up

so they could load it in the truck, I looked out and saw that the trunk was still full all the way through. It hadn't rotted yet. They had been wrong. And that upset me.

Now, that night not too long ago when I threw that chunk of rock into that tree and all the pieces went flying off into who knows whose lawn and onto the sidewalk in front of me and I had to walk over the pieces I had just put there - that night, I thought about that day too. I thought about the four of us looking at each other with those side glances wondering who was going to go first. That was the image that popped up into my head just like nothing.

And on top of all of that, as if it all wasn't enough already, I couldn't get that rock girl out of my head with all of her rocks and salt piles in the middle of the desert. I still think rocks are weird, and they are, you can't convince me they're not. But at that moment for some reason I thought about how in the winter the Midwest basically turns into a desert just as much as Death Valley. I mean, the wind blows, and whips around the buildings, and makes the snow shift across the ground just like the sands are supposed to. There are even dust devils, those little whirlwinds, only this time when they strike your face they're cold and made of snow. It almost seems as if the rest of the year is just there to make you acquainted with a place so that when winter comes around everything will change on you. The landscape changes with every little breeze that blows. The landscape you were used to is no more - gone, goodbye.

At this point, I wondered to myself if I was drunker than I'd thought I was, but it didn't really matter because I was home. I stepped off the curb of one side and walked to the other side of the empty street. When I got across, I stepped onto the sidewalk, but it had ice on it and I slipped into the snow bank left there by the plows the day before and it was cold. Let me tell you. When that happened, everything kind of slipped with my foot, including my hands in my coat pockets.

And when they did that I felt a little bit of gravel that must have stuck to my hands from that piece of sidewalk I had tried to figure out with my fingers.

Now, call me crazy, but if you were to have asked me right then what I felt like, I would have told you that I felt like that piece of sidewalk back there that broke off into little chunks of gravel. Not to mean that I was all sad and depressed and woe-is-me-kill-me-now-but-let-me-cry-cry-cry-first. No, none of that bullshit. I just mean to say that I felt like I was separated out into a bunch of pieces. And what did that rock feel like when it hit that tree, or what did the tree feel like when I picked off the bark when I was a kid? I think it would be like this, don't you? I mean, to be honest with you, sometimes I feel like I'm just a piece, or a fragment of a piece of what I used to be, or what I could have been. But it's not like I go around thinking about this all the time or anything like that. Most of the time I just walk around, go to work, try to pay the bills, go to a party every once in a while and maybe when I get there I'll run into a friend who wants to go to the laundry room and have a little bit of fun. Now that I think about it though, I think the rock girl, whoever the hell she was, was a little more interesting than normal. I don't know why I think so, but now that it's been a little while and I've gone to other parties I can tell you that I've started looking around for someone that might be interested in something as stupid as rocks. I haven't found one yet, and it would probably be just as awkward as it was that first time, but I've wondered every time if I'll run into somebody like that again.

That night I went into my house, got undressed, got into bed and pulled the blankets up over me to keep the cold out. Slept really great, that kind of sleep you only get when your being drunk and your not having any sleep line up just perfectly, and wake up the next morning to one more day in my weekend and not really knowing how to make sense of what I had thought the night before. I could have just been drunker than I realized, but I don't know. ♦



Instruments | Dan Lund



Untitled | Caleb Kortokrax

Leaving the Party

(a kairotic cycle - 4)

John Linstrom

The moon bled this morning.
A crabapple hung from the branch of a tree,
conspicuously red and dark, beetle-shelled,
and after a moist night the chill day
half-encased it in thick glints, in frost.
The morning brought a bleeding moon.

We danced like satellites, I think, last night,
spinning, the Christmas lights in our glasses,
our bottles. We turned, our toes twisted
in socks in carpet, caught
glimpses of hair, sweatshirt sleeves,
glint of eye or painted nail. The record
skipping, the popcorn bursting, the fingertips
brushing fingertips, it made us woozy -
warm - sated - Merry
Christmas - see the holly, smell the wine in me,
we're both the mistletoe and needle-tree.

So tell me, when I left
and there was no moon but your face
rising and your body waxing,
your thanks-for-coming to an event forever
ending, why were we
so full?
Was the importance in a glance,
distant, half-lidded,
in a compact thank you,
dark and beautiful, or in a million midair
snowflakes shining
like streetlights, like headlamps
under cloud cover,
more than dashboards?

From your stoop you might remember
the silence of taillights,
the lovely crawl of bodies,
intoxicating hum—and that is stilled.
hung out to collect the morning frost.



Old World, New Image | Adam Jackson

contributors' notes

Nicholas Burrus is a sophomore art and music major who enjoys woodcuts, etchings, and pen and ink drawings. Aside from frantically searching for employment over the summer, he plans to draw up designs for a full size nautical-themed carousel complete with a water purification system.

Dillon Carter can only be described by the following words of Sagan Newham:

Pickle Carter the first
lived in a world of thirst
drank his sorrows
to the morrows
now his face reddens with gin.

Emerald Davis loves running barefoot in the summer. Pushing red wagons is fun too. Flying over them and landing hard on the sidewalk, however, is not so great. She still has the scar on her elbow to prove it.

Amanda Gartman is finally finished with both school and this semester's Lighter! Now she's off to California for... wait... three more years of school. Guess she's not finished.

Abbey Houx About the awflist: She was bored on the first of Julyber, became an awflist, went to Valpsno, and the rest is a misery. Much thanks to the Lighter and to you all.

Adam Jackson is a senior art major from Hobart, IN who came to college with a love of tattoos, and has since evolved into a black and white photography fiend! He still loves the ink, yes, but has really picked up speed as a photographer and is not going to stop any time soon. He was supposed to graduate this May but recently decided to stay and corrupt tomorrow's youth by becoming an art teacher. This is going to be one crazy ride. Valpo, I'm here to stay!!!

Dear Reader,

I, **Caleb Kortokrax**, love to draw and paint. I've been studying portraiture for the last six months and am continually developing my talents and trying new things. Hopefully I'll have more to give you next semester.

Love, Caleb

John Linstrom concludes his final year of caffeine at Grinders Bar this semester, but he has come to realize that true coffee-drinking is not preparation so much as it is lifelong vocation. He looks forward to pursuing further immersion into this field next year when he runs away to Iowa, where he will brush elbows with a great number of flannelled farmers and a veritable host of husky cornstalks in the shadowy cafés of Ames. His poems appearing in this issue may be attributed to the influences of his parents, a whole gaggle of profs, a tiresome organ recital, his two favorite baristas, the Bowe family farm, a particularly hairy Norwegian, and other various dusty bits of God.

Dan Lund is a junior history and art major who is currently taking up residence in the fine establishment that is Grinders. Coffee, music, and argyle sweaters get him through the day.

Abbey Meyer is a sophomore here: new-media journalism major... though she's certain she NEVER wants to be a journalist. She'd rather own her own photography studio and live in the loft above it, with her dachshund, Sam. She's always mentally photographing everything as practice. To her, it's an art of observation. It's about finding something interesting in an ordinary place. She's found it has little to do with the things you see, and everything to do with the way you see them.

Lauren Nelson is a senior English major who currently has four possessed rabbits living in her backyard and enjoys watching them from the rocking chair on her dock in the afternoon. She also strongly dislikes the scent of vanilla and admires elephants. Her recent influences include Alice Friman and T.C. Boyle.

Ellen Orner has spent her semester practicing strange dialects, including but not limited to Scottish Freedom, Norwegian Pickled Herring, and Stupid Boy; in the end, she discovered her true Julia Child's heart. Ya sure, indeed.

Janet Pfister is a senior biology and Spanish major and plans to attend medical school. She studied abroad during the fall of 2009 in Granada, Spain. Not only did the experience allow her to become very close with her host family and learn the language, but it also made for some great rookie photographer opportunities. The photographs included in this edition were taken on her trip to Morocco, only a hop, skip, and a jump across the Strait of Gibraltar from Spain.

Jeremy Reed reads a lot, in all places. Please talk to him about Hemingway, Ellison, or Whitman - you will make his day. If you bring up Russian novels, he will ask if you know anyone to teach them (and he'll ask excitedly) - be prepared. English and Spanish majors and CC kids are pretty cool in his book, being that he is one of all those things. His story "Can We Call This Conversation?" was written just a couple months ago, while "A Human Case" was written in Prof. Byrne's short story writing class about a year ago.

Mark Schoeck is a senior Creative Writing/TV-Radio major and minors in Philosophy. He wrote "There was a War There" in half an hour after hearing Cornelius Eady read, and "Delicious" after watching "Inglorious Bastards" several times in a row. Neither work has anything to do with its respective inspiration, which doesn't make sense. Which makes perfect sense.

Christopher George Stohs wanders around and takes pictures from time to time. Sometimes these pictures are of hummingbirds. Sometimes these are of sunsets. Rarely these are of people. If you take a picture of a person you trap their soul in your camera and it cannot get out. This is a human rights violation, according to the UN, but probably not to Kant. Kant would probably suggest applying the categorical imperative to this situation.

Megan Kathleen Telligman is a biology/creativewriting/humanities major who is completely out of gups to add to the contributor bio section of the Lighter, which fitting, because she is a senior. She's just tapped. Dry, really. Call the dermatologist.

