

the garland
spring 2004



the garland

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editor's note

Chrysanthemum growers -
you are the slaves
of chrysanthemums!

- Yosa Bason

This is a collection of poems and images and stories.

This is what you don't hear walking through campus or dorms or bars. But it's being thought - clearly. It's the undercurrent of the whole experience: the attempt to make sense of the specifics, to name the everyday, and to chart, in some concrete way, an image that effects us or an idea that makes us slow down and look.

The poems and pictures and stories that follow focus on a variety of topics and are written in different styles. And while they're all unique, they are all about thinking and creating and revising and slowing down and looking: they're all about perspective.

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overhead view of a drawing

Like a child draws a picture
from the edge of a white page,
you step in life so cautiously
and will until old age.

And as he draws, he's leaving out
some sun, some trees, some limbs;
for they're outside his simple sketch,
left in oblivion.

Then when he's done, the pencil down,
you tack it on the wall,
and see a space in center point,
a space not used at all.

Laurence Ross

pledged distaste

Fusel leaks
Sheer acid bounds skyward;
A stewardess slinks by a lecher
Hands grab;
Billboards streak
Hollowed from years of wear.
Gang violence perpetuating hate;
Flimsy excuses ignite city fires.
The city with its merchants, millionaires,
inventors and patriotic poets,
with its black sins
Has exceeded the bounds of God's wrath:
God was enraged.
A hundred times he'd threatened vengeance,
A rain of sulphur, thunderbolts hurled down,
Each time he took pity
For a promise made
Not to destroy his city,
But a god's promise should retain its power:
Just then two lovers walked across the park
Breathing the scent of hawthorn shrubs in flower.

Brittany Kane

winter marsh

Down the snowy trail
I made tracks in the crust
Silence and crackle underfoot
The venerable trees with their sickly branches;
Gray crisscross against the milky sky
Along the fretted bank lined with tall reeds.
Meanwhile, up the river
Beneath the gloss and smokescreen
Twigs, leaves, and murk
Shadows of shadows
I watched the circle of ducks on ice
Prodded-delicately at the shreds of cranberry and bone
A hollow lump of feathers and entrails.

Stephen Faig

winter field

The country side is blindingly white
An old barnyard fence follows the ridge
To a distant tree
Limbs exploding into the vast blue
Like the bristle of dead reeds
Poking through snow like forgotten tombstones.

Stephen Faig

spring I

All at once, the pear trees lining that too familiar path inhale the thawing air,
absorb the melting sun.

After months of powder overflowing from the rims of brittle branches, the
trees seem to float with relief.

Winter has derailed, if not permanently, time enough for the glistening white
carpet to shine upon itself and bask in snow light.

Honeyed daffodils punch intuitively through the slushy fields.

Leaves, no longer dead and dangling, give way to the fuzzy sepals aspiring to
become delicate rosy buds forever afraid of the impending rain blown
from the north.

The weather, unlighted and unchanging, sails confidently in towards the
unsuspecting pear trees.

Fruitless in silencing the trees' bark, winter must surrender.

Stephanie Chizik

monday

she was drinking coffee on a Monday and singing quietly to herself, dressed in her fuzz-balled sweats (left over from a college love affair after being soaked in the rain) and thinking about idyllic summers that print themselves on movie screens. her hair is up like a soft brown birds' nest. she'll be walking later with others of her ilk,

all cosmopolitan

workers of the world.

all breathing in blue, magenta, maroon and yellow with a calla lily in every vase spewing Voltaire and Versace

closing their eyes under nights never able to see in the first place as the caffeine runs in their blood,

go to the red cross to give a decaf or caf drip for the nurses.

she breathes chardonnay blue into her cadet sky room and turns the page.

she was drinking coffee on a Monday and singing quietly to herself...

Stella Ostrander

tuesday

It was Tuesday, just a day past Monday, and she was walking to work, her overpriced coffee in her hand, avoiding the looks of the landscapers. Her patent leather heels tip-tapping on the ground barely denting the thunderous herd of capitalism taking her along the street. I think we're all cattle she thinks, the heifers and the bulls snorting and pushing their way around her, wielding briefcases like so many mafioso violins. The wave carries her on, her well ironed skirt suit, it could stand on its on, parting the sea and her perfume armor against the smells of the sewers. She catches the rheumy eyes of an old man, salt and pepper hair, kindred to some old oak tree with his oily newspaper and Salvation Army couture. She flicks him a quarter from her purse and opens the door to her office.

Stella Ostrander

serenity amidst chaos

One hundred and seventy-six acres of greenery set outside the city.
A summer home - built as an escape.
A long driveway makes its way through the trees, winding up to the house.
The Victorian proudly displays beauty and stability.

Looking at its lush and manicured lawns,
The symmetrical gardens and paths of flowers -
One can almost see its past.

A young wife sits beside her husband,
Her radiant beauty set off by his weathered years.

Late afternoons on the lawn,
A tray of delicate bleak teacups trimmed in roses
Sits atop a table.
Women dressed in long white afternoon gowns
Chatter from underneath
Their broad-brimmed hats - the ribbons
Tousled in the breeze.

Men chuckle as one comes close
To winning the croquet match,
But misses.
Children laugh and yell,
Playing games on the soft grass.

Walking back towards the house I feel as if they are real, their lives playing out
before my eyes...then the laughter slowly disappears.

Catherine Horstmann

the museum

The museum was created
to confront the enormity of The Conclusion.

6 million people dead.

What should I do but wonder,
or cry, or scream in disbelief?

6 million people.
Individuals, with stories and lives made less
important by sheer magnitude,
their common fate absorbed into
Catastrophe.

What did I do?
Shut down, unable to comprehend

the innate, grotesquely pertinent point
of The Burning —
from 6 million people dead
not a drop of humanity survived.

The Museum sought
to recapture humanity lost
by displaying recovered artifacts.

The most personal of items,
confiscated luggage, in piles, personal effects
spilling out of a re-created train.

And shoes, a small mountain of leather
remains, surrendered by their owners.

And hair. A plasticine case, lining the wall,
filled to brimming with hair, every color. Pounds
and pounds of the hair of the shorn:

Still here, I find no humanity.

Simply
too
much

To understand,
To believe.

Even if I were there,
in Aushwitz, Treblinka, Dauchau,
running my hands through smoldering ashes
of the freshly burned,
still. Even then,
their humanity would intermingle
with a thousand others.

Still, then,
I would not understand.

Victoria Woods

catching propaganda

The post-war sign read outside the store front:
HISTORY WILL NOT REPEAT ITSELF.

A number in millions,
Tagged with a collar,
Buzzed to the scalp,
Performing the role of dutiful son for mother.

If I could tell you that the son wished to rebel,
To burn the ticket that would send him to Hell;
Fileted limbs,
Strategic ticking bombs
Click to alarm clocks. ..
Striking noon
Detonation resumes.

If I could tell you that the tranquil horrors
Chiseled behind your lids would fade,
Sons would line up
Like at amusement park rides
Just to feel an adrenaline thrill.

If I could tell you that glamour fades
Heroes would fall in with the poltroons
At the base of the line,
Only an adumbrate sketch of a Questful Journey
Would linger in the folds of history books.

Crinkles of age sit in a circle outside the storefront,
Cigar rings hover
Eyes are pried and watchful of passersby,
Veterans soiled by tattered causes.

If I could tell you what each has seen,
What each has lost.

What each has feigned to hope.
Then maybe the sign will not continue in falsity.

Brittany Kane

[have a seat, have some cookies, have some iniquity]

my warning to you both: placing pence over your eyes before
passing into this place, would be wise if you both are willing –

will definitely be: well, your will shall be heard through the wall >
guaranteed!

will probably be:, smacking a face, hurling a liquid, exiting a door >
disagreed!

will not be: tolerant to change, compliant to novelty, obliging to new,
but will eventually be: "why haven't I tried this before?"

at One, if you make eye contact, if you clasp on the couch,
if you manage to stay calm: please, pull the plug on the oil.

[satisfaction]

at Two, if a serpent sheds scales, if a mantis dismantles petals,
if a school boy drops pants: please, do not think twice.

[instinct]

at Three, if craving precedes reason, if a beast has two backs,
if a mirror is on the ceiling: please, don't kill yourself.

[nirvana]

at Four, if you yearn for repetition, then again . . .again . . .again

Greg Parasmio

like looking for chirping birds on an autumm day

Like looking for chirping birds on an autumn day –
The green, red, orange leaves
Make it impossible for our eyes to see
Just exactly where he hides.
But we know he is there,
Ours ears tell us so.

Mike McMonagle

the burren

The famine walls slash through the land of Eire,
raised scars on the land
that refused to grow.
Rolling miles of green
which used to feed millions,
then suddenly, one season,
stopped.

In church, I sat behind a woman
with a portable oxygen tank
machine breathing for her in rhythmic clicks,
pumps like an even paced steam engine.
She was too weak to take a breath.

How must it feel to know
that you're dying?
- an x-ray, tiny cancer eating your lung -
- surveying stagnant soil, potatoes rotting in the turf-

Incongruous knowledge, such an odd sensation.
- like watching the moon rise over Galway Bay
while the sun is still in the sky -

seeing something you're not supposed to see.

Knowing something you're not supposed to know.

Victoria Woods

beach debris

Through an alcove of trees,
We break onto this fragment of beach,
Littered casually with accessories of life, long-forgotten.
We are waltzing and weaving over these pieces of forgotten trash.

Ajar of green glass, a snail trapped inside
The black hat you try on, tip forward, like Charlie Chaplin,
I find a feather boa -
We foxtrot.

Among this, you ask me to find
A smooth stone
To skip
On the Lake

The Lake
That brings our lives back.
Things never really lost,
Just misplaced -
Like this future memory of you and I
That we have created
Searching through layers of life like slate,
Trying to find what was there in the beginning,
Before the bone of the Earth was covered with the
Litter that is us.

Dayna Hill

lost

She's upset.
They say you might be trying
To get closer to her. But
She's not comfortable with the
Questions.
And you're not comfortable with
The answers.
So you argue.

She's lonely.
They say you might be trying
To pull away since you know
She's leaving. But she
Doesn't want to be without you.
And she's afraid she'll come on
Too strong
When you need to figure things out.
So you distance.

She's hurt.
They say she should just tell you
What you want to know
About her past, no matter
How much it pains her.
Because you want to know
And if you're to be close, then she
Should be able to tell you.

And now she's told you and
You still aren't satisfied.
You don't know, now, what you want.
Even after she's told you
How she was invaded,
Even after she told you
There was nothing to tell.

She opened herself up to you,
Hesitant,
And you still don't know.

So now she's tired and
You're detached
And now neither one of you know
How to act.

Stephanie Chizik

why this probably won't work

i like you too much
maybe if i didn't, that would make it easier
to look dumb when you ask why i didn't return
your phone calls.
i'm not used to all this attention.
neglect me - then i'll come around.
because at some point, everyone and everything
sickens me.
and you're next.
it's harder than you think to be a bitch;
to constantly keep your guard up and appear cold
to keep you in check.

i like you too much
maybe if i didn't, that would make it easier.

Kewannah Wallace

aesthetics

Your lipstick was cold.
The sun retreated beneath a wall of clouds on the horizon,
Leaving starless sky in its place.
I stayed a long while there,
contentedly waiting for the moon that would not come.
How many times did I watch the leaves fall,
standing next to you?
They piled on the ground, suffocating the fern floor,
brown and broken. Some would think it beautiful. Appealing.
That there is beauty in dying.
But how far does the philosophy go?

Wrapped in the warmth of a bed, it was too easy
with you, forgetting work, principles – forget reason.
I don't remember what reason feels like.
I lost it under the covers
with my sock.

I strip the bed and remake it in the dark,
but now strange coolness comes,
the uncomfortable newness of it.
Morning is slow to arrive.
Eventually the pale gray sky seeps through the curtains.
I walk to the window and
try to focus on the reflection, hazy and faded.
The forms of things are clearest in black night.
I stare through myself at the giant tree outside,
bending its wrinkled boughs in the wind,
rooted, and standing alone.

Laurence Ross

botanica

walking into the room you feel the warmth;
the intense heat of eighty-six candles
laid out in order by saint, angel and spirit,
color-coded, some are bejeweled
some flicker, making smoky twirls while
others stand upright like palace guards.

eighty-six pieces of citrus give off a refreshingly
clean scent to cut evil spirits and the smell of wax.
moving around the circle I take my place near my
spirit's candle - an old Indian woman who
will make sure I have success.

i am uncomfortable with the heat of eighty-six bodies
in a small room and leave.
breathing in the fresh night air, i realize that nothing
will comfort me tonight, not even eighty-six prayers.

Kewannah Wallace

a family gathering

Stranded at the Christmas table, a privilege so they say,
a boy pokes at his string beans while his siblings get to play.
He had outgrown the kitchen table since the previous year,
and progressed to the glass one - its advantages unclear.
The father tells a story of his friend who lost a limb,
while Uncle Jimmy starts on how the government screws him.
The mother, sensing trouble, yells for quiet in the den,
while Aunt Joyce and the grandfather discuss England again.
The grandmother complains that they all talk at the same time
and asks the boy to fill her up another glass of wine.
The shiny glass, the chandelier, the mirrored chest combine
with lace curtains and candle light to alter state of mind:
a haze created like the misty air above the beach
in the early morning when the churning seagulls screech -
regardless of the other walkers wandering dazed and stoned,
you're still so small and distant, entirely alone.

Laurence Ross

my word problem

If Al

Leaves the station

At noon to kill John with

Forceps, salt, pliers, and Pop Rocks,

But John

Rides a

Horse named Friday,

Owens a space shuttle, and

Lives on the Prime Meridian . . .

Then what?

Greg Parasmio

lines from the tate modern

Pick a urinal,
any urinal
and turn it upside down.
Suggests rebellions.
Take a blade
and carve the cracks of your wounded soul
into the white porcelain.
Evokes pain.
Enclose in a streak-free glass case,
placed in the center of the high-ceilinged, white-washed *gallery*
Call it...let's say..."modern art."
Become the millionaire your daddy never thought
you could be
and be proud. Call let's
But I keep searching
until 2:30 when we meet again
in the fourth floor expresso bar
between exhibitions
you have to pay to get into.
There must be something beautiful,
hidden inside.

Jill Colley



stella ostrander



stella ostrander



kelly costello



christine potter



kelly costello



maggie dougherty



christine fabrizio



christine potter



maggie dougherty



kelly costello



christine fabrizio



laurence ross

the small time

I glanced back to make sure that the sofa was still safely wedged in the bed of the pickup truck. The few street lamps lining the road put off a pale, orange glow against the leafless branches, and made it seem as if we were driving through a tunnel, complete with an ore-fractured ceiling. Stacy was zoned out in the driver's seat with thoughts of geometry or breakfast or road kill looping through her mind - the kind of things you never intend to think about but often do when behind the wheel of a car. Her straight red hair looked brown in the dark and her face looked whiter and somehow more pretty. The radio was off but it seemed more awkward to turn it on and undo the silence between us. Ahead, Mark drove Tim's station wagon and our headlights silhouetted the recliner crammed sideways into the trunk.

The furniture seemed like a big deal. Usually we stole something like flowerpots from the outdoor garden center at Wal-Mart and used them to spell out K-Mart Rules in the empty parking lot. My mother said that it was depressing to see children so bored and at such a young age when surrounded by all of God's creation. But it was the unfortunate truth of our adolescence, and there would be no tornado to sweep us away to a more colorful existence. During a drive by last weekend, car lights off and horn blaring, we pelted the house where the angry old gas station owner lived with dusty pieces of plastic fruit, booty from the local diner. The apples and grapes landed softly on his lawn, creating small, shallow craters in the snow. Tim always suggested the same thing - pulling up *For Sale* signs and replanting them in houses further down the block - and although the rest of us never found the act itself that amusing, Tim's laughter was contagious.

But the furniture was large and obvious, and we looked like real robbers, at that hour and under those conditions, who had carted away the insides of a house while the family slept soundly upstairs. The truth was we'd hauled off items from the annual good-as-new sale in the church parking lot, an event organized and run by the old women who carried wooden rosaries and still received communion on the tongue. They geared up once a year to sell used crap in the name of charity. Integrated into the homily for the past six masses, Father Burton had urged the community to donate any unwanted belongings to church. Jewelry boxes covered with macaroni and glue, a dead uncle's brass harmonica collection and moth-ball infused lavender, grey and black dresses adorned with lace ruffles were piled in taped-up boxes outside the door to the

rectory. Whatever hadn't been stuffed inside was lined up by the altar boys in the parking lot and covered in white tarps. We'd rifled through half-filled coloring books and semi-functional toasters in the dark, flashlights bouncing off of scratched antique wall mirrors, until we came upon the real prize: a green leather couch with only one cushion missing.

Up ahead, Mark slammed on the brakes and Stacy screeched to a stop behind him, the couch sliding into the cabin of the truck, arm against the window. Mark left the car running in the middle of the street as he got out and walked towards us. I saw the wry smile on Mark's face and wondered what sort of scheme he was concocting. Mark's brain functioned at a level somewhere between juvenile and delinquent, ever longing to just have a good time. Through a series of nondescript circumstances, Tim and I had become attached to Mark like a string of paperclips to a magnet, clinging to a confidence that we both lacked but nonetheless admired.

His long legs looked longer in the slanted shadows. His white T-shirt stood out in stark contrast to the deep bluish air, speckled with an occasional living room lamp or porch light. He hugged his arms to his chest and Stacy rolled down the window. The oddity of the situation struck me. Not the sin-stricken furniture in back, but that I was riding with Mark's girlfriend. If Stacy had been mine, she certainly wouldn't have been riding with Mark. Clearly I posed no threat to their *relationship*, and that depressed me. She leaned out the window to confer with Mark as I sat tilting the air vent toward the ceiling, then toward the floor, then back toward the ceiling again. The social structures of adolescence were written in inerasable ink, and Mark, Tim and I had been permanently and impenetrably fixed to each other, until Stacy had appeared.

Tim's station wagon puffed out thick white plumes of exhaust. He was fully reclined with his feet pressed up against the windshield. I watched his head bob from side to side, indicating that he was listening to the radio or at least hearing music in his head.

Residents of Middletown, Connecticut, under the age of 25 were doing at least one of three things at all times: one, sleeping; two, eating; three, trying to figure out a way to escape. Even the dogs went straight to their hair-covered blankets right after dinner. I shifted in the passenger seat, sure that we were being watched through the slits in some old woman's bedroom blinds. Alerted by prolonged activity after nine p.m., she would begin to panic and call her equally elderly neighbor who would peek out her own window, reach for the baseball bat wedged in her umbrella stand, and keep her eyes pasted to the

street. Words like *hoodlum* and *riffraff* would be exchanged.

Calling my parents from the police station would have tethered my foot to Middletown forever. There would be no car for graduation, no college in warm, oh-so-far away Miami, no brief letters in the mail saying *everything is fine and here is a little spending money*. Two weeks before, my father had pulled me out of bed and dragged me downstairs to the dining room. My mother was holding a family meeting because my younger brother had been arrested. Chester was in the sixth grade. He and his best friend Anthony had gotten halfway through writing their curse word on the wall of the library when the police happened to drive by. A large *fuc* was written in thick black marker across the stone wall. The officer stood over them and forced the two junior hoodlums to change the word to *foolish* before he shoved them in the backseat of the police cruiser. Chester said that Anthony cried.

My mother sat at the dining room table, wrapped in her bed robe, face flushed and eyes bloodshot. Her short hair stood straight up in the air as if she had spent a large portion of the morning pulling at it. Chester sat in a chair across from her, legs crossed beneath him, idly playing with a rubber band. My father was pissed about the graffiti fine. My mother half-screamed, half-weep a speech about how she had tried to raise good children. She began to list the ways as if she had to prove it to herself. Hadn't we been made to rake the leaves for Mrs. Marley next door? Hadn't we been shoved into elf costumes every Christmas to help Santa distribute toys to the children at the hospital? Every year she made us valentines to give to our teachers. Then suddenly, her youngest child was on a collision course with alcohol addiction, a convenience store robbery and friends named Diesel and Axe. Chester was forced to draft a handwritten essay to the police commissioner about the proper use of the magic marker, while my mother, who forced us all to sit there while Chester wrote the damn thing, moderated a family discussion on the meaning of "community respect."

"We're going to the park," Stacy announced, rolling up the window against Mark and the cold.

"What for?" I asked.

"Because that's where Mark wants to go."

"It's just going to be cold and I hate the park. We may as well go to Tim's basement and watch you and Mark make out all night."

"And you could sit there and stare as usual," said Stacy, focused on the car in front of us. She reached to turn the heat to its highest setting, and I wished I

had kept my mouth shut.

My mother always told me to never go to the park after dark because that was the time people were surprised by drug dealers, kidnapers and men with knives. I doubted that my mother had ever seen a marijuana leaf, much less an actual drug dealer, but she was also the person who inspected the shrubs that surrounded our house with a flashlight before going off to bed. She liked to think that no one noticed. As if anyone, even the dimmest elderly neighbor, believed my mother was merely walking the dog around the house a few extra times. Sometimes it was not even completely dark when she wandered around the garden, leash tight in hand.

In actuality, the only miscreants we had ever encountered in the park after dark were naked people, couples rolling around on the wooden footbridge among their discarded clothes or kids meshed together on a bench, adding their initials to the dozens already there. That fall, our headlights had illuminated two naked girls running around in a circle on the open field. They were girls, not women, one with a wide face and a body that spread in the hips and the other with nearly no distinguishable curves and short hair. They wore only socks. Shielding their faces from the light, they dropped to the ground and began to slither towards the trees on the other side of the park, like slippery fish trying to make their way upstream.

I wondered what Stacy looked like naked, if she would look the same as those two girls, pale and washed out in our beams of light. Would she have dropped to the ground, embarrassed by exposure? It seemed like she would have stood there and stared back, right into the blinding glare.

The blasting heat had dried my mouth. Why couldn't I be in the station wagon with Tim listening to Buddy Holly sing "That'll Be the Day?" A cloud pulled over the nearly full moon, making the sky significantly darker. Stacy was slouched forward and her face looked placid, sliding in and out of the dim street lamps. I looked up but could find no end to the cloud.

We pulled up to the green chain-link fence that half-surrounded the park.

"Well, let's get started," Mark said as if we were workers for Habitat for Humanity. He popped the trunk of the station wagon while Tim struggled into his sneakers. "You two get the couch." Mark had his jacket on then and he granted under the weight of the heavy chair.

"What are we doing?" I always had to ask.

"Playing house."

I was not really expecting an answer. Or an intelligible one anyway.

Playing house reminded me of kindergarten children in oversized aprons, playing with frying pans the size of a chocolate chip cookie.

Stacy hopped onto the bed of the truck, unlatched the hatch and propped herself between couch and cab, feet right below the window. "So are you going to help or what?" she said, pushing. The couch slid forward and tipped off the truck into the mud. I turned around hoping to switch jobs with Tim or Mark, but Mark was already halfway across the field, an end table tucked under one arm a desk lamp in his hand. I didn't even know we took those. Tim wasn't far behind, pressing toward the strip of trees like an armadillo with the recliner hefted up on his back. Stacy and I hoisted the couch, heels in slush, and I felt like I was part of a desert caravan, only it was cold, and there was snow in my shoe.

The field was a camouflage of dirt, snow and dead grass. The *No trespassing* sign had been uprooted long ago and thrown into the creek where it still lay rusting - one end below the surface of the water and the other jutting out, polished white with snow. Mark had once stolen Mora Comely's bicycle while she was darting about at field hockey practice. She turned to see him riding it right into the creek and went screaming after him, crying. When she finally caught up, she found the bike partially submerged on a bed of rocks with suds and debris slowly filtering in the spokes of the wheels. Mark cautioned against tattling, threatened to spread a rumor that she was a slut, and after Mora pulled her bike from its wet bed of deteriorating soda cups, unrolled condoms and a slush of cigarette butts, the matter was never brought up again. Mora walked home with brown stained sneakers and a swollen face.

Mark adjusted the lamp on the end table. "Too bad there aren't any outlets out here."

Tim plopped onto the recliner, pushed the footrest forward, and stretched his arms up and over his head. "What took you guys so long?"

Mark positioned the sofa parallel to the chair and pulled Stacy down on top of him. They took up two cushions. That left me the end. Cold metal coils pressed upwards under the worn fabric as we sat in silence. Tim used a stick to draw lines in the mud, oblivious to the awkward lack of conversation. A cold wave moved through my body and I realized that I was nervous again. Uneasy silences made me anxious, I was a wreck cutting class, always looking over my shoulder, arriving home in the afternoons expecting a phone call from the principal and a lecture from my mother. Saturday mornings I shot up in bed. Was it a Tuesday? Had I overslept? No time for a shower, run!

Mark and Stacy kissed quietly beside me. There was a slit in the arm of the sofa so I stuck my hand into the hollow space. Any stuffing that might have been there was missing. A beam of headlights washed over the scene, our living room in the woods. The police. An essay: *The Proper Placement of Furniture*. The white cars would come speeding across the field, red and blue pouring over the blanched ground and illuminating the dark tree branches, Mark's hand on Stacy's bare lower back. Cocky nightshift officers on too much caffeine with too little to occupy themselves would step out of their cars with black nightsticks and fur-collared jackets. *This was all here when we got here, officer*. That wouldn't work. Mark would suggest that someone must have mistaken the park for a dump. Tim would ask the officers if they'd ever shot anyone, and if, just for laughs, they had ever pulled water guns instead, you know, just for laughs. This would lead the cops to the clear conclusion that Tim was stoned, that we were all stoned, and after a thorough search of our vehicles, would link the unusual amount of loose change in our ashtrays with a recent laundromat robbery. During the whole search, Stacy would just sit there silently, not letting anyone know what she was thinking and Mark's hand would be resting on her knee. I sat very still, watching the car, resisting the urge to flee blindly across backyard fences, then calmed myself as the lights passed and the trees went dark again. Probably just some guy whose pregnant wife had sent him out for sharp cheese. My ear was suddenly burning, then cold and wet.

"We're not setting off fireworks out here, so who's going to see?" Mark laughed. I wiped the slushy snow from my face. "Take the stick out of your ass, man."

"So what are we going to do?" I asked. A plane passed overhead, red and white lights blinking a straight line across the sky. Aisles too narrow, knees against the flip-down tray, seats reclining a pathetic eight degrees. I wondered where the passengers were headed and if any of them were awake. I thought about the word Connecticut: *connect*, a reference to the state's role as a bridge between everything south of Pennsylvania and those sections of New England that people actually want to get to; *cut* as in "someone please cut my pinkie off because there's nothing more entertaining around here than a Friday-night trip to the ER"; and finally, the lonely little *i* stuck in the middle.

"I'm bored," Mark said, which seemed unfair for the boy with the girlfriend to say. "Let's go to the playground." He had his arm around Stacy's waist, bunching her coat into ripples. She had one leg up on the back of the couch.

Her hair covered the back of her neck and I wondered if my neck would be warmer if I had long hair. The picture was disturbing.

Tim pulled his hat down over his eyes - *whatever* spelled out in big white letters across the front. "I'm too lazy," he admitted.

Mark and Stacy wandered toward the playground, holding hands. Outlines of monkey bars, metal slides and swing sets stood out like skeletal beginnings, the framework of something incomplete and abandoned.

I stretched out on the sofa and looked up at the sky. The moon shone through a tiny tear in the clouds, reminding me of a very tired eye. Or maybe God was glaring at us. I wondered if it was going to rain. It was cold, but not cold enough for snow. What would the first kid who came to the park in the morning think when he saw a living room set up next to the jungle gym? What did the mean man that owned the gas station think when he found all that plastic fruit strewn across his snowy lawn? The furniture would be ruined and it was difficult not to feel guilty. Maybe I would go to church on Sunday and bring a ten-dollar bill for the collection to even things out. I looked over at Tim who was also looking at the sky. He had spun around so that his feet were slung over the back of the chair while his head rested on the retractable footrest.

"So what do you think of Stacy," I said.

"I don't know. What do you mean?"

"You know, like, what do you think about her? Hanging out with us and stuff."

Tim clapped his shoes together, allowing the slush in the treads to fall on the head of the recliner. "She's a girl," he said, like it was the start of a list that he forgot to continue.

"And?"

"She has boobs?"

I was pretty sure Tim's eyes were closed. He began to hum John Denver's "Leaving, On a Jet Plane."

"Remember those naked girls that we found that one time?" Tim asked while drumming his fingers on the arms of the chair.

"Yeah." Naked girls, spinning in their mesmerizing spiral, their own mixture of ring around the rosy and Wiccan ritual.

"Do you think that they ever came back?" He paused trying to think of the answer to his own question. "I wonder where their clothes were stashed."

"I don't know." I looked at the spot in the field where the naked girls had

danced. There was nothing but a trail of our footprints. Mark and Stacy had disappeared somewhere in the distance and shadows of the playground. "Why do you think they were wearing those socks? I mean it's not like they weren't already naked."

"Maybe they didn't want to step on a slug."

"I guess. But then they rolled on the ground."

"Yeah, but that was after we came."

What kind of jobs did such girls grow up to have? Teacher? Mother? The ice-cream scooper who offered extra sprinkles on cones? Would I recognize them on the street, fully clothed, flipping through a magazine in a drugstore aisle, leaning against a railing outside the mall, or sipping cream soda with their boyfriends outside the ice-skating rink?

The clouds had shifted again. Moonbeams lit up the sky like an x-ray, exposing thin edges of grey clouds surrounding deep blue splotches where the clouds grew thicker like old scabs. Mark and Stacy were dark blobs at the swing set. Stacy was talking to Mark but we were too far away to hear what was being said. I wondered what they talked about. What would I talk about with Stacy? Biology class, the sex organs of flowers, the intertwining of the pistil and the stamen among the petals, a theory or two about how Mr. Headly, the Spanish teacher, had lost his leg and what he used to do before teaching. Mark hung on to the chain of a swing while leaning against Stacy. I could not tell if they were kissing but supposed that they had to be.

The car would be freezing again by the time Mark was ready to leave. I would ride home with Tim no matter what.

Mark pushed Stacy on the swing as she kicked woodchips in the air. The scraping of her shoes against the ground echoed slightly in the open night. She swayed and I thought of the pendulum of the grandfather clock in my living room, swinging bronze behind the little glass door. Both Stacy and Mark looked older farther away. Their rounded features were undefined. The chain twisted a little and Stacy crashed into Mark on the downswing, kicking him back into muddy slush. Tim laughed loudly. Though it was dark, I knew that Mark's expression was angry. Tim's cackle was so loud that every person in every house bordering the park must have heard. Tim's laugh probably carried even farther than that. He shook so hard that he looked like he was going to topple out of the chair. Stacy sat on the swing staring at Mark, her momentum reduced to a slow sway.

Moving fast, another car drove by and lit up the park in a spectrum of

sharply contrasted greys. I once dreamt I was flying over a grey world, between grey clouds and grey buildings. People were toned in black and white and looking up at the sky. I started to plummet quickly yet was very aware of each instant of freefall as if something was resisting my descent.

The snow in my sneaker had melted, soaked my sock, and had begun to freeze again. I knew that when I took my sock off that night, my foot would be white and wrinkled. It would hurt to stand in the shower.

Tim dropped me off in front of my house, an ice-cube in an ice-cube tray of a neighborhood. During the week the sun had melted most of the snow from the weekend before, revealing patches of dead things all over. It had eaten holes in the snowy spreads that covered the roofs, all slanted in the same direction. Our flower boxes looked vacantly ugly again, plastic wrappers and wadded paper had reappeared in the gutters. The half-eaten bird that my father had refused to dispose of, despite my mother's constant pleading, had resurfaced-inch by inch on the front porch. The walkway was a frozen stampede of boot prints.

Chester was slumped on the couch, the house dark except for the flashing activity of the muted television.

"What are you doing?" I asked as I wandered behind the couch. *I Love Lucy* played on the television in black and white.

"Thinking of sixteen ways to solve world hunger. What do you think I'm doing?" Middletown's most-wanted was watching sitcoms, biding time until the next opportunity for petty crime presented itself.

"There's no sound."

"I didn't want to wake mom up. She'd come down and tell me that I should be sleeping and not wasting my time watching stupid shows that only people with meaningless, boring lives have time to watch. Besides, I've seen this one already."

Lucy was a tragic character; her strongest trait, that flaming head of red hair, quelled by the limitations of film and technology. Lucy, Ricky, Fred, and Ethel - thrown together in an apartment building, friendship forged by proximity. Even Fred, who no one really liked that much, was not rejected. I wondered which bed Little Ricky had been conceived in, and if Stacy and Mark had squeezed into his twin yet. I wondered whether or not they climbed in naked or waited until they were under the covers to slip out of their clothes.

A trail of grey tread marks led from the front door, staining a path of dark wet blue on the carpet. I had forgotten to take off my shoes. I wrestled out of my coat and

threw it on the arm of a chair. The picture frame on the mantel was streaked with glare. Inside my mother and father played bride and groom, she, though posed, looked completely comfortable, relaxed even, in the brown tones of the print. My father, on the other hand, stood rigid, adding a strange element of precise geometry to the picture, shoulders perfectly perpendicular to the spine, lips parallel to the shoulders. Only his eyes held a glimpse of estranged emotion. Yet oddly enough they fit together, like an apple and a steel core-remover - an unnatural yet logical combination.

"What did you do tonight?" Chester said without taking his eyes away from the screen.

"Nothing." Lucy wailed on the kitchen counter, palms slapping down in over-exaggerated swings, like treading water. Her face stretched in a frozen whine as she looked at each person in the room waiting for a reaction.

"Sounds riveting."

"Just as fun as your night, I'm sure." The television was our mirror, bouncing the conversation off the set so that eye contact was unnecessary like two people looking straight out the windshield of a car, united by a shared vision.

Outside, the street shone suddenly with the reflection of oncoming headlights. A car came into view and pulled next to the curb in front of my house. The police had somehow tracked me down. I would be arrested in front of my younger brother. My mother would come scurrying down the steps in her nightgown and curlers, all set to give a speech about guests after eleven before realizing exactly who the company was - then she'd put her hand over her mouth and run up the steps to get my father. I would go to court and be sentenced to some private military school and excommunication.

The engine cut off and a car door slammed shut. The knocker fell in three quiet taps. I flipped the switch for the porch light and opened the door wishing for a girl scout, an evangelist, an employee of corporate America asking for participation in a survey about hair dyes and animal testing, or a member of a newly formed political party handing out buttons reading *change for the better* in blocky green letters. Stacy stood alone, blinking under the high-powered porch light.

"Hello," I said, opening the storm door and stepping outside as if it were three in the afternoon. The frosted windshield of my father's station wagon gleamed like a sheet of scratched acetate. In only fifteen minutes, my body had forgotten how cold it was. "Hi," Stacy said.

Her red hair, which had seemed brown all night, was rich again in the bright light of the porch lamp. Her unzipped coat hung stiffly off her body and she moved a gloved hand toward her neck.

"So what are you doing here?" I asked, incapable of nonchalance. It seemed like a logical question. After all, we had sat on stolen furniture, exchanged mundane small talk that would be forgotten by morning, watched to see if anyone else was letting signs of frostbite show through their cool exterior. Mark was overly annoyed at Tim for laughing at his fall. We left the virtual living room set up in the park - no one willing to put forth the effort of returning the items to the church. I rode home with Tim; Mark rode home with Stacy. As far as we could tell, we were all going to go to sleep, wake up tomorrow and still be in Connecticut.

"You left your wallet in my truck. I thought you might want it back." She held it out. The wallet was bright blue nylon with a Velcro strip to keep it shut.

I was sure that Mark had brooded in a wake of incongruity sitting next to Stacy, pounding through radio stations, running down a list of our evening's deficiencies. Or maybe he had insisted on driving Stacy's truck, the tires found a patch of black ice, the hood a tree... But the truck sat right there in the driveway, gleaming lines of white salt reflected on the black paint.

I scanned the street for a moment. "Thanks," I said dumbly, shoving the wallet into my pocket. I wanted to go inside and get my coat. I glanced back through the storm door and saw Chester munching away at a newly opened box of vanilla wafers. "You could have dropped it off tomorrow. There's nothing inside it anyway. It's kind of just for show."

"It's no big deal." She moved her head slightly to look past mine. "Parents up late?"

"No. My little brother."

"Mark was telling me about him. He said he was cooler than you are." I looked at her blanched face under the harsh porch light, her hair casting a grainy shadow over her pale cheek. I tried to smile but couldn't keep eye contact.

"I was just kidding," Stacy said and her lips curved slightly upward in a thin smile.

I tried to think of something to say - not school, not Mark.

"So where's Mark?" If anyone was awake watching us they must have wondered what we were doing, standing on the small porch not speaking,

freezing to death. Perhaps a secret rendezvous, a girl in need of- in need of what? Answers for the chemistry test, a joint, a way to make her boyfriend jealous, love, sex, good conversation. My mother would claim the drugs were moving from the park to the heart of the neighborhood if she saw that same scene enacted across the street.

"I dropped him off," she said.

Stacy didn't move. Maybe she had tucked a note in the folds of my wallet - a love note complete with little doodles, the kind everyone saw passed between the seats on buses or handed off in the busy hallways of every high school. I wanted to have a conversation like adults did. *Can you believe she is blowing off the carpool again? He didn't pick up his part of the bill as usual. I'm glad my kid doesn't do that. Let's get together for dinner on Friday at that new place on Johnson Street.* But we were not adults. I considered bringing up *I Love Lucy*, a comical situation we could both pretend to laugh at. But laughing was so much easier with Chester or Tim. Burps, farts, general ignorance, an insult or a fault. Anything that pertained strictly to our masculinity - or jeopardized it - held potential for hilarity. Stupidity was supposed to be funny, like Lucy defrosting a turkey in the bathtub and getting a leg stuck in the drain, causing a flood in the bathroom.

The fire station let go an echoing siren that seemed to float across the sky in a rhythm of long breaths. The wails climbed up again and again only to be let back down. If something was happening in Middletown at that time of night, it must have been the end of the world.

I should have reached for her hand, kissed her on the forehead, fumbled myself toward some astonishing physical declaration but I stood planted on the icy welcome mat.

"I should go," Stacy said, staring at me for a moment before turning back toward her truck. Her hair slowly faded back to brown as she walked, securing one foot on the glazed path before lifting the other. She opened the truck door and disappeared into the interior. The engine revved, the headlights flicked on, and she drove away.

I opened the foggy storm door. Chester was sleeping on the couch or at least pretending to. *I Love Lucy* had ended.

"Well that wasn't very interesting," Chester said in a muffled voice, eyes closed. I ignored him because anything I said would only prompt a laugh from him, obnoxious and grating like the truth tearing.

There was an infomercial for a stain remover on the television. A woman

with blonde hair poured a glass of red wine on her blouse without flinching. The gesture was so matter of fact; it was hard to believe the infomercial was real and not created solely as a late-night comedy show for the lonely insomniac. No sound came out of her mouth but she looked very happy, as if she should have started splashing herself with burgundy years ago. I turned back toward the storm door and drew a shape in the wet fog with my fingertip - some formless creature like a deflated jellyfish. Then I erased it with a swipe of my palm, clearing a window to the dark of the other side.

Laurence Ross

aerial view

The train sped through the south of France quickly, bypassing stretches of the rough beach along the Mediterranean. They passed lonely provincial cottages boarded up for the fall and cows lying on the browning grass. The sun was going down, casting eerie shadows and making the sea appear larger, deeper, and more ominous. Leah imagined herself walking around the litter, cigarette butts and dead fish, the cold wind and spray from the sea buffeting her. She was bound for Austria with seven strangers, eight people haphazardly grouped together, their different languages coercing them into silence. Leah believed Austria to be a country full of mountains and echoes and Vienna to be the city of endless music, of Mozart and Strauss.

The little French girl seated beside her started to sing a nursery rhyme, *Loup, y es tu? M'entends tu? Que fais tu?* A young, dark man in a business suit unfolded a newspaper but never seemed to turn the page. Leah stared at a photograph on the front advertising travel in Granada, two women lying seductively on beach chairs in bikinis.

The young man put down his newspaper, inspected the beach bunnies on the front before asking Leah, *"Mademoiselle? Savez-vous a quelle heure le train arrive? "*

She shook her head, hoping to neither confirm nor refute the question. She was embarrassed. The man wasn't handsome, but he reminded her of Paul. Well, not really. Leah supposed anyone would have reminded her of Paul then. Fixed in her mind's eye, Paul was still a young college professor even though ten years had passed. He laughed loudly at the opera, tipping his head rudely back, disturbing everyone nearby. It was Paul who used to put his arm around her when they entered the galleries, the art shows. The same Paul who left for Vienna one night because he was offered an international grant. He had to go. Right then, in the middle of the night. Abandon Leah like an addiction. Suddenly gone, cold turkey.

Leah, you must come to Vienna. You need to say goodbye. I am dying. Soon I will be dead. Please come.

Paul's ex-wife, Kate, never liked Leah, and why would she? After all, she eventually found out that it was Leah who slept with her husband before her marriage went to tatters. Kate knew it had gone on for months. There were the little things, the earring left behind the couch cushion, a misplaced winter hat in the car. Empty bottles of beer piled in the trash, cigarette butts lost under the

bed. Leah was careless with the affair even before Paul separated himself from Kate. Recently Leah received an anonymous postcard in the mail that read: *Paul Gaustave is terminally ill*. Of course it was in Kate's handwriting and there was a ridiculous scene on the front, a techno-colored countryside.

"Pardon? Mademoiselle?" The man with the newspaper looked at her again and then pointed out the window, *"Il fait pleut. C'est belle, oui? Comme le printemps?"*

Leah shook her head again, glancing out the window, trying to understand. The man looked at her quizzically.

"I don't understand," she admitted in English.

"Ah. You are an American?"

Leah nodded and the other passengers smiled to themselves and lowered their glances.

"I said it's raining outside, but it looks beautiful. And before, when I asked you a question, I asked if you knew what time the train would arrive."

"Oh. I didn't notice it was raining. And no, I'm sorry, I don't know what time we get in."

"Four. The train arrives at four. I only asked you to hear your voice. You are quite beautiful..."

Leah watched the sandy cliffs pass outside the window, cliffs she could imagine herself falling from without purpose, a misstep, erosion crumbling, "Beautiful? I'm sure you say that to all American women."

"Well, all American women are beautiful."

The man leaned in closer and Leah imagined bumping into him accidentally, feeling the broad arms around her. He was not handsome like Paul, but at least his clothes were attractive.

"May I call you sometime, Mademoiselle? I can show you a good time around Vienna, or Nice, where I am from, for that matter. I speak the language, you see."

"No, I'm meeting someone," she said somewhat reluctantly.

"Well, in case you change your mind, my name is Marc," he said with a tone of finality. As if he was the only Marc in France. As if he was the only man Leah could fall in love with. As if there weren't many men just like him. Many men just waiting for any woman who didn't know her way or speak the language.

As the train slowed into the Vienna station Leah saw the unmistakable

figure of Paul standing near the gateway. He was much thinner than she remembered. She was foolishly dressed in a pair of shorts and she wondered, was she flaunting her health? When she pulled down her bag from the overhead compartment the weight of the thing practically toppled her backward. How thoughtless to over-pack, as if he'd care whether she had the "right" shoes.

"Leah!" Paul stepped quickly to her like a much younger man.

"Paul!" She tried to mimic his enthusiasm, but his name emitted weakly.

"You look great! Ten years has not aged you a bit! You look just like I remember!"

She knew she didn't look great and she certainly didn't look the way she did ten years before. The years were tightly packed on her body, and they weighed her down. She could feel the heaviness of her limbs as if aging were oppressive.

"Look who's talking! In fact, you look younger than I remember!" Of course he didn't. He looked like someone she didn't know, an elderly stranger she'd hold the door for.

Paul was tall and thin with dark curly hair. But now it was all wrong. The strong jaw and the once capable hands were skeletal. Skin stretched across bone with finality. Even worse, he wore what he always wore. Jeans, Italian boots, and a turtleneck.

"Let me take your bag." Leah passed the ridiculously heavy bag over to him and recalled the way horses were ridden until they died, until they simply expired, dying a little more with each progressive hour.

Paul opened the door to his place. The room was expansive but had a trace of dampness. There was a high ceiling of wooden beams and there were two cats lounging. The large oil paintings were propped against the walls - they were massive canvases. The first thought that foolishly ran through Leah's mind was that his illness was like a cold and that if he'd only taken better care of himself they wouldn't be where they were then. It was too damp, too disorganized in here for an ill man. If only he'd taken an extra blanket to bed, lit a fire each night, picked up his paints, maybe then he wouldn't be thinning away.

"Do you like them? It took me over a year to get them each looking like that, to pinpoint what it was exactly."

The paintings were brilliant, technically he was better than she remembered. He was famous, but stylishly so. Humble, hard-working, never forget-

ting it was the work that made him. Paul painted extravagantly, he had always been gutsy. The paintings were abstract expressionism at its lyrical best. A cross between Franz Kline and Helen Frankenthaler. Paul was famous for his oils, the large and dark gestures on top of fields of brilliant blue, subtle pink and orange. Sometimes it seemed to Leah he'd invented color. She was always taken aback by the intensity, the bold planes. When Paul and Leah were younger, they used to lie in bed, rub children's bath paints onto their bodies in a strange desire to make themselves into something.

"Leah, come here! I want to show you something!" Paul touched her hand, tried to pull her toward him. His skin was dry and cool and it reminded her of a stranger's hand. She pulled away without thinking, as if he were a distant uncle at a family reunion.

"Are you mad at me?"

"No, I'm exhausted."

"You look scared."

"I'm just tired. I had some French man hitting on me on the train and now you're here... and the paintings. Why are you standing there grinning like that? It's all impossible! You're such a fool!" She began to weep.

"Oh, well maybe we can get some rest later. I'm not such a fool at everything," He winked at her inappropriately.

"But Leah, really. What can I say? It is what it is." He reached out and hugged her. She closed her eyes and imagined winter, thousands of dark branches waving in the weak light, evening coming on suddenly.

Several beggars slept on the stairs of St. Stephan's Cathedral and several pigeons weaved around them. Leah pressed her palm against the heavy wood door and imagined all of the palms that had once flatly touched that same wood.

Inside the cathedral she was immediately aware of the height of the ceiling and the echo of the heavy door. Several rows of candles moved like lapping water against the cold walls. Leah walked over, waved her hands over the flames and watched *the wax and light sputter. So many people, she thought*

Paul waved Leah to a pew. She tried to whisper to him, but he put his finger to her lips and nodded to the front. A priest was leading a service in German. Leah imagined the days of Hitler, the massive echo of German voices on black and white television, crowds, events, parades. A nun who seemed to be an adolescent suddenly turned to shake Leah's hand. Leah was startled, but

then realized everyone shook hands with the neighbor beside them. Paul smiled at her, he had always been Catholic. Another nun took Leah's hand in her own and started speaking in German, her eyes closed. *Vespers service*, Paul mouthed, trying not to laugh. This was funny to him, she thought, a game, even. But it was hardly a joke. She wanted to run, shriek, "He's dying!" and point at Paul.

Her eyes welled up with tears. There was a shuffling of shoes as the parishioners were ushered out of the cathedral in procession. The statues of Peter and John seemed to look disapprovingly at her.

Paul was quiet as they left, he descended the steps carefully. The homeless men were calling in their sleep. The white pigeons fluttered around Paul. Leah didn't know much about Jesus, but right then she imagined that was something Jesus might do: hear the voices of the poor calling out and disperse the birds into a clatter of flight.

The streets of Vienna seemed empty. The tourist season had passed and it was too cold to go tromping through the theatre houses or to even visit the Palace. The tour guides were all waiters during the winter. Even the local street performers appeared lost, miming to no one in particular on the side of the road. Leah and Paul walked hand-in-hand along the cobblestone streets, silence interrupted only by an occasional moped careening by or a foreign car horn.

Paul and Leah walked to the Prater fair. A few local children rode on the ancient carousel. The miniature roller coaster raced around the track empty. Everything was bright pink and orange. Old cranks turned slowly because of the rust. Paul stopped and grabbed her shoulders.

"Leah, let's go ride on the Riesenrad!"

Paul paid for a ticket to ride on the giant Ferris wheel, the Ferris wheel with booths made from old train car rooms. They were wooden lounges that slowly rotated around an enormous wheel. Inside there were chairs, a table, even flowers.

"Leah, this is just how I want to remember it," Paul said as they were lifted into the air.

Leah stood next to Paul and watched as the car rose off the ground. A couple below sat on the lap of a stone sculpture. The window was smudged with their breath and Paul leaned against her shoulder. She put her arm around his waist. The coarse tweed wool scratching her wrist, that's what she'd recall

later. Then, she'd remember the ground so far below, the faint indications of life. Patches of snow, figures walking alone or in pairs with dark coats and hats. This was how it had to be, she supposed. The lonely, rusty ride as the winter day ended. The empty metal cafe chairs and tables covered with snow. The thin line like a dark purple bruise that indicated sunset. The old stone houses disappeared in the darkness along with the ancient chimneys.

Dayna Hill

cheetah

As she ran the length of the field towards the growing pile of her teammates, she was acutely aware of her muscles. Each one seemed to define itself as she ran - her calves contracted with each stride, her abs flattened, her shoulders pulled. The muscles felt light and strong, and though she felt like she had never run faster, the pile seemed miles off.

Once, in *National Geographic*, she read about cheetahs and how they chase their prey solo, muscles in perfect unison. Running from moderate distances in silent pursuit, the cheetah approaches prey grazing in peaceful oblivion. She was saddened by the cruel irony that the beautiful sprint ends in a silent, bloody death. But she stared at the pictures of the cheetah in motion much longer than those of the dead antelope. In the still-frames, the cheetah extended and contracted, its muscles captured in tight pockets, like clenched fists, simultaneously pushing and pulling the body forward. Though beautiful sprinters, cheetahs are not known for their endurance.

Thinking about it later, she'd draw the cheetah analogy. But in the moment, she only knew that the ground was firmly moist, like the floor of a rain forest, and her team had won a game they were never supposed to win. She crossed midfield. Disbelief forced itself out in a smile, her throat swelled. Tears brimmed in her eyes though she couldn't tell if it was the emotion or the chilly fall air slapping her face, intensified by the sprint. A stream of teammates from the sideline had already thrown themselves onto the victory pile. The thrill of an upset.

She could have run forever. It was a soundless sprint, fearless and breathless. She never felt more connected to any teammates - streaking across a long field, from one empty goal to a growing, moving pile in front of the other. She was vaguely aware of reality only by the suspense and desire to fall into the pile of bodies in front of the goal and scream.

She approached, dove, and landed half on bodies and half on the moist ground, where she stayed until the entire pile disintegrated, leaving her alone again, this time still. The rushing, cheetah-like movement inside her chest faded as the cold set in and the water seeped up from the wet ground. She shivered and was suddenly aware of the slow wheeze of breath escaping from her chest.

At significant crossroads and meaningful moments in her life - her own

college graduation, her wedding day, her husband's funeral - she thought about that sprint: solitary and grounded only by a single, physical goal. She thought about the last days of college, the surprisingly calm last-minute wedding preparations, and the happy, naïve days preceding sudden death. But the vivid details of the graduation, wedding, and funeral would later blur in her memory, sustained, if at all, by photographs. And, similarly, thinking back years later, she would remember little of the pile of bodies. But she would always long for the sprint.

Maggie Dougherty



maggie dougherty

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