



Spring **THE GARLAND** 1999

THE GARLAND

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The Art and Literature Magazine of
Loyola College

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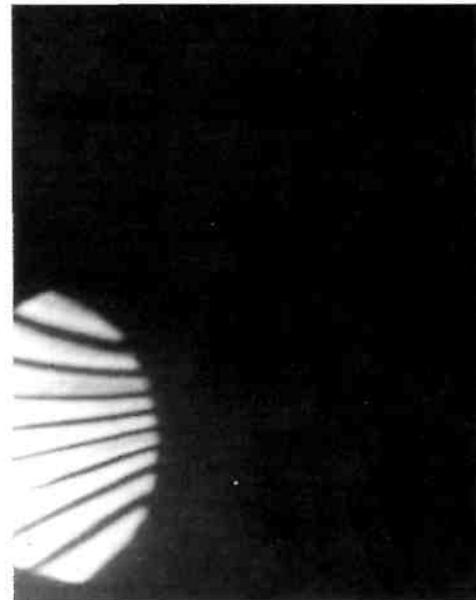
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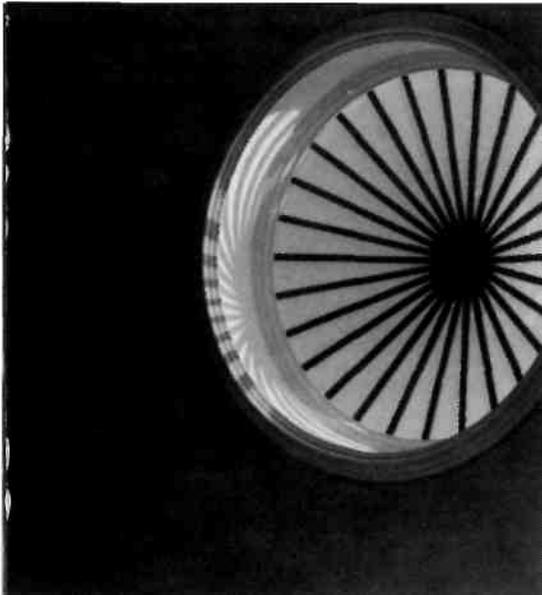
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A Note From the Editor...

Everyone is familiar with Robert Frost's famous lines, "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I- /I took the one less traveled by, / And that has made all the difference." There are some of us, though, the painters, the writers, the photographers, the musicians, for which these lines are not just a faded poetry lesson from grammar school. They are a testament to perseverance and hope; that learning the skill of expression and the creation of beauty will, in fact, impact lives. And this reward for choosing to express ourselves through art is not necessarily so that the world may know us, but so that we may know ourselves more completely. And that is what makes all the difference.

Those published in *The Garland* are only a small cross-section of the talented artists at Loyola, so I encourage students to continue to submit their writing and photography. I offer my many thanks to all who submitted and allowed us to review their work, and congratulations to those in this year's issue.

I also extend my appreciation to the staff for their patience, sound advice, and good humor at spur of the moment meetings. A special thanks goes to Dan Newell for his wonderful help and for doing all "the hard stuff" over the past two years.

And last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank Dr. Dan McGuinness for his quiet encouragement and guidance over this project.

I hope you enjoy this year's *Garland*.



Megan Casey

Past Work Experience

Jim Palma

To Whom It May Concern:

Based on the small space allotted for job experience on this application, I am enclosing an extra sheet in order to adequately list and explain my past work experience. I apologize for the length, but I feel that it will be much more accurate if I explain these jobs than if you call these former "employers" for information.

1986-1987 Now Playing Video

Being my first job, I found my experience at Now Playing to be quite an exciting one. As the only person from Eastern High working at a video store, I was nearly elevated to celebrity status, as I'm sure you can imagine. Suddenly everyone was my friend, and everyone loved to come and visit me in the store. However, store owner Bill Brennan was not a very amiable man, and threatened to fire me after walking in on one of my in-store showings of "Dirty Dancing" that I liked to hold for my friends. He was very angry about this, but I'm sure he wasn't so concerned about the chairs that I had set up as he was jealous of the beauty and grace of Patrick Swayze, who is featured so prominently in the film. His inability to listen to reason was truly unveiled when I was fired after being accused of renting free videos to my (then) best friend Missy. This was an unfounded accusation, however, as there is a fine line between free and "borrowed." However, I do not want to bore you with a lot of video store industry jargon, so I will move on.

1987-1987 Common Grounds Coffee

Thoroughly disgusted with my video experience, I decided to try my hand at the world of coffee brewing. By far the biggest surprise for me at this job was learning that shops like this open at 5 am each morning, something that they forgot to put on their job application. Luckily, the owner Rich and I eventually came to an agreement that it would be in our best interest if I only work the late shift, as

my early morning grogginess had led to a freak coffee grinder accident which nearly took the fingers of a customer. (Again, I will spare you the coffee industry jargon of the story and move on). My move even opened up a space for my (ex) best friend Missy to work the early shift, which I felt very good about as Missy is a little slow and sometimes has trouble getting jobs. But most importantly, it gave me a chance to meet Mark Delano. Yes, I was hypnotized by Mark Delano, with his curly hair, chubby little hips, and eyes that I swear looked like the Columbia Supremo beans that were on special the day that we met. Our relationship brewed faster than that day's house blend, and before I knew it I was in love. We spent all of our time together, in and out of work. Unfortunately, I soon lost my job at the shop. After winning tickets on KC 101 (I was on the radio!) to see Bon Jovi, I begged Rich to give me the night off. He wouldn't budge, though, and I'll be damned if Richie Sambora would come to my town without me seeing him. I went to the concert, and lost my job the next day, which on reflection is a good thing since I truly was not being challenged brewing coffee all day.

1987-1987 Friendly's Restaurant

A new Friendly's had just opened up, giving me the opportunity to find employment very quickly after Common Grounds fell through. This job soon turned out to be a terrible choice, as by the end of my first night I ended up tired and grumpy, with ice cream smeared all over my shirt and arms. (What their application fails to tell you is that you not only have to serve tables, but you have to clean them as well. Slavery, anyone?). My father, who I'm sure is on a quest to ruin my life, came in for dinner the first night and took pictures of me as I waited on his table. Half the school is in the place, and he starts taking pictures. So, for the first time, I left a job without being asked to leave. I just threw my apron at my father and walked straight out and drove to Mark's. Dad wasn't too happy, but he has to learn somehow that I am a mature adult, not just his little 16 year old daughter.

1987-1987 Ashley's Ice Cream

Feeling confident in the food service business, I moved on to ice cream. Luckily Mark and I were able to keep in touch— I missed him terribly, but knew that our love for each other would withstand our separation. Things seemed to be going well, that is until that fateful March night when Missy came strolling in hand in hand with none other than Mark! What a surprise she got, thinking that I wasn't working that night. It turned out that Missy took the late shift when I left the coffee shop, and her and Mark found love somewhere between the dessert rack and

the espresso maker. And she thought that she could get away with it. Stupid Missy Orlando! Missy, who could barely spell her own name, not to mention get a job without my help. And Mark, pudgy little Mark, who I thought I found love in. What I never told him was that he smelled—he really did. No matter what he did there was always this strange beef-vegetable soup odor to him. Despite my shock, I felt like I handled the situation much better than they did. They only stood there, tubby and the mental midget, at a loss for words. So I decided to break the silence, and said, "How about a banana split guys, or are you saving that for when you're alone later on?" Well, I thought Missy was going to pass out, and Mark had to practically carry her out (not without shouting some very hurtful words to me which wouldn't be appropriate to include here). Unfortunately, I was fired the next day, as I got very depressed after they left and went though nearly a gallon of Rocky Road while blasting Eric Carmen's masterpiece "All by Myself throughout the store repeatedly.

1987-?? McDonalds (Hopefully!)

OK, I know that you haven't hired me yet for this job, but since I feel so confident that I could succeed here, I thought that I would include this anyway. Some of my "friends" at school think that it is funny that I have a desire to put on a paper hat and work the french fry broiler. However, it is a responsibility that I look forward to greatly. Growing up, I have spent much time at this fine restaurant, and I feel like I can give something back. Before Missy became an evil traitor we would spend hours here, passing the time with a Big Mac or milkshake. It is a place where I feel at home, and could succeed. The fact that Missy has succeeded in turning many of my friends against me has freed up much of my time, so flexibility will be one of my strong points. Finally, I feel that my past work experience has turned me into a mature person (much more mature than someone like Mark or Missy). I ask you to take all of this into consideration as you read this application, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Brake Light Siren

If not possessed by the still urgent call to find new latitude-
the feel of being in some wrong time
but close to right,
the wind to my ride like the drop back
salt of a nasal drip
and the light so covert aggressive
as to tweek my eyes for gain

and if I hadn't grown so tired of the mundane tune-
sliding through sound pockets
and the awkward swash of the visor,
the wayward tilt of the rearview
and the shifting contour of myself, sitting

and if not eaten by the taste for different-
Hitler the water in a Park Heights deli
on his break reading Madonna's manuscript
singing the joy of keeping your legs closed and subtlety
or for once not saying what's on your mind,

I never would have been your nameless acquaintance-
bound by a slow unsure glance
and license plate recognition

or seen the textbook warmth of your not forehead
gliding me
giving me next
smiling in front I'm sure
as if tickled or silently hears the joke I might've told you.

Steve Lichtenstein



Andrew Zapke

To the Grandfather Buried in the Wrong Plot

No one has yet worn smoke as well as you,
like the purple hearts,
a forgone accessory to the yellowing of your teeth
and the AM static of your voice—

though aesthetics
are as irrelevant as cloudy days,
because no birds could ever assemble
your hair the way sleep did
or men fish in candid pocks
which define your face—

and thank you

for the bearded candy,
the wrapper lost to the sweaty pocket
in the throws of passion-
 my sweet reward for freeing weeds
 on warm days by the lagoon,
 the smell like egg chemicals memorized

and for the Christmas and Hanukkah gifts
which may have been for the child you fancied,
not the one you were given-
 perhaps as portrayed on a picture frame
 in the check-out aisle
 of the last place you bought cigarettes
 and told stories about the war.

Steve Lichtenstein

Voodoo Reincarnation

It has nothing to do with
what I heard the other day
from a pickle that used to be Marilyn Monroe,
but it seems that when you die,
there are no gates and angels playing harps
or devils and fiery cliffs,
as goes popular belief,
but rather—
you come back to this earth
as everything you ever detested,
all that you spit out, scoffed, disregarded
and found altogether subordinate—

which apparently makes me
a cigarette butt,
mayonnaise,
a Jehovah's Witness,
a stop sign,
blister and
my father's side of the family—

and you a fig branch or a dove—

but my only wish is that
when your alarm goes off
for round Two
of what used to be this world
and you stagger to the mirror

that your first complaint is that

you can't figure out what to do with my hair.

Steve Lichtenstein



April Iommazzo

**Life is Not the Wick or the Candle,
but the Burning.**

for Al Reigel

Mourning from the other side,
where your body now lays,
is never as difficult. It is
a paradox of light and
dark, a transfer of thought and
form.

But on a Friday morning, as
a line forms around the corner
passing the liquor and check
cashing store, the maitre d' is
silent.

And it is a noticeable silence. Like
the notes John Coltrane never
played, not because he couldn't, but
because he recognized the need
for space.

Space is different now. More
open. The seats in the first floor
room that have been hosting lunch
for five years are still full. But the
stool in the corner is not.

And on the street is a
river of wax. What the Buddhist
will see as manifestation, and the Christian as symbol, or
sign.

Matthew A. Daloisio

Agoraphobia

There is a difference between
being angry
and knowing that you are
angry.

One you can tolerate but
the other leaves you
hanging, un-reconciled, in a
whirlwind.

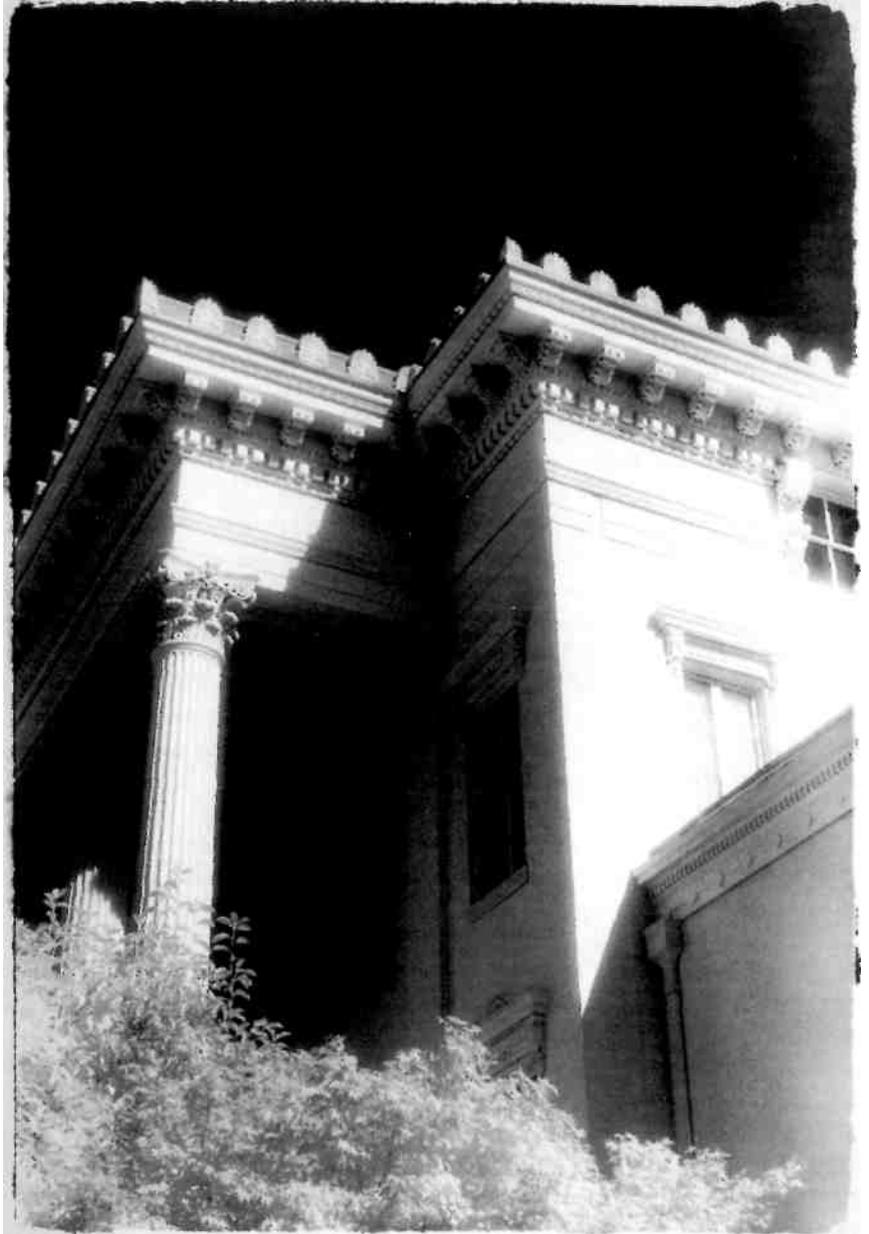
The distinction
is similar in degree
to the value of
absence and return.

Like on winter days
when you leave the warmth of
fire and return, worn out,
with new perspective.

In the same way that
being self-conscious
implies that there
is a self.

Not an appearing and
disappearing self, but free-
floating as if descending,
holding an umbrella.

Matthew A. Daloisio



Andrew Zapke

Fire Dancing

Alyssa Milletti

Janie was slowly coming undone.

To make matters worse, she was seeing a married man.

Not married for long though, Janie thought Peter had told his wife he wanted a divorce. "Well what did you go and do that for?" Janie whined. Sharing someone's husband had only entitled her to half a man. Even less. She hadn't wanted this. A whole man? All to herself? What would she do with him? And as she listened, again, to how Carol had dropped a bottle of wine, red splattering everywhere, Peter nestled his head into her lap and began to weep uncontrollably. Crying, he said, because he was mourning his failed marriage and feeling guilty for leaving the children. Crying, Janie knew, because he wanted to take her to bed but was sure she'd say no.

It wasn't until she met him that she realized how lonely she'd been. He was a warm body to sleep next to. So, when he kissed her, she kissed him back, offering him the passion his marriage was supposedly lacking and the understanding he thought he deserved. And they could talk. About his wanting to quit the mutual funds corporation he worked for and write children's stories. And how she found, at the awkward age of twelve, how a camera could express her anger at her father's sudden death and her mother's subsequent nervous breakdown. Had she been home, this would've never happened, but she was here, alone. Everything new and uninviting.

But she couldn't stand the guilt festering inside her any more — she was a thief. As the divorce became finalized, she became more and more disgusted with herself, but she blamed Peter instead. Every touch, every kiss, made her shudder. And he noticed.

She couldn't deal with him. Not tonight. Tonight she needed to breathe. She needed to think. Needed him gone. And with a few tender embraces and warm kisses on his neck, she lovingly pushed him over the threshold and closed the door.

It was past midnight and the dark bags under her eyes told her she needed sleep. Instead she cleaned, trying to organize something in her life. She scrubbed until her eyes watered from bleach and her nose burned with ammonia. She labeled everything: boxes of scrap paper, envelopes for credit card receipts, tin foil covering half-eaten food, bags for stockings with runners. She alphabetized her CDs, tapes, and videos. She color co-ordinated her closet and drawers. She even re-arranged her books in size order. And finally she fell down exhausted, as the sun rose across an orange sky.

"What are you doing?" Peter demanded on his next visit.

"What are you doing?" She threw back at him as she stared out the living room window. He was talking about the apartment's pungent smell of Lysol. She was talking about Carol and the kids.

He said he didn't understand what had been going on for the last few months, but that she was the one. Could she remember that?
One what? Janie thought.

The phone was ringing and Janie reached out from under the warmth of her covers, feeling for the receiver.

"Hello," the frog in her throat croaked.

"Hello," the voice echoed back.

"Who is this?" she asked, clearing her throat

"Who's this?" the voice demanded.

"This is Janie," she said annoyed, "Who are you?"

"Is anyone there?" The voice sounded concerned. "Hello. Hello?"

Janie heard a click.

"We should talk like this more often," she said perturbed, slamming down the phone. She thrust her head under her pillows and screamed. Eventually she fell back asleep, mumbling about what kind of crazy person would call before eight.

Emmy was asleep when Janie stopped by to see her. Just looking at her, peaceful and in bed, Janie felt some sort of relief from what was eating her from the inside out. Emmy was a resident of Shady Hills Retirement Community, where Janie worked. She had first seen Emmy screaming at one of the head nurses; something about wanting more rice pudding. She was a fiery old woman with big hair and big breasts who only let people she liked call her Emmy, instead of Emily. Janie had watched with intensity as the old woman took charge of the situation, despite being in a wheelchair. She liked Emmy right away. She liked Emmy a whole lot.

Later that evening, during a break, Janie had found her room. Emmy had been anything but cordial, arguing that Janie's present of extra rice pudding was a sympathy gift.

"I am not dead yet," she had barked at Janie, "so don't think I need pity from the likes of you." Emmy planned everything, and death wasn't in her calendar any time soon.

Janie began to eat the rice pudding, dipping her index finger into the container and then sucking the pudding off with a loud, slurping noise. She was hoping to annoy the crazed bat in front of her.

"Look, you don't want this. Fine. But if you don't calm down, I'll tell that nurse you were yelling at today that you stole it," Janie said calmly, smirking at Emmy as she stuck her finger back into the pudding. If she can't accept someone being nice to her, that's her problem, she thought.

"Blackmail?" Emmy questioned, astonished. She liked this girl. She wasn't like the rest of the idiots working at Shady Hills.

Janie nodded confidently, "I'm not getting in trouble for missing rice pudding."

Emily was silent for a moment and then pointed at her top desk drawer. "There's silverware in there. Get two spoons and for the love of God, stop sticking your dirty fingers in my dessert," she commanded, warming up a bit. "So, what's your name?" she asked. Janie told her. "Janie," she said it out loud to herself, "well, it will have to do. You call me Emmy, okay?"

Peter was here, in her cramped apartment. It wasn't as nice as the first one Janie had rented. But when her photos stopped selling she was forced to move. They began arguing while she was showing him some new photos she'd developed and they were arguing still, while they did the dishes. She hadn't meant to start a fight; it was only supposed to have been a hypothetical question. She needed to know how he'd react if she made their *we* a *you and me*. But she knew, before that occurred, she'd have to find the courage to be alone again. To start over by herself.

"You know, I met this boy at work today. Mrs. D'Angelo's nephew? He asked me out on a date." There had been no boy and she didn't know any D'Angelos.

"Oh," he said, handing her another dish. "That's nice. Will you be going?" Peter was worried, unable to figure out why she was being so casual about this. This was the woman he was leaving his wife for.

Taking the dish, she replied, "I was thinking about it. Do you think I should go?" She couldn't believe how calm he was being, considering he was leaving his wife for her.

"I think," he looked at her from the corner of his eye, "you think for yourself and you'll make the right decision." He wanted to wrap his arms around her and tell her to say no. But if there was one thing he'd learned about Janie, if someone tells her not to do something, she'll want to do it even more.

"Is there a right decision?" Janie took the stack of clean dishes and put them in the cabinet above the oven.

"Isn't there?"

She sat down at the kitchen table, the wicker chair creaking under her weight. "So, hypothetically speaking, what would you do if I said yes?" She was digging for an answer, almost hoping he'd blow up.

"Hypothetically speaking?" He threw a towel over his left shoulder and looked at her.

"Is there any other way?"

"I'd say I'd feel betrayed."

She crossed her arms and snorted. "I think that's a load of hypothetical crap." She was annoyed at his lack of concern but was even more agitated by the "betrayed" comment. Betrayed, to Janie, inferred some sense of loyalty. *What am I? A dog?*

Peter went into the hallway closet and pulled out a long gray raincoat and golf umbrella.

Janie called from the kitchen, "Can I ask you another hypothetical question?" Her pride had been stung and she wanted to kill the bee.

"Could I possibly stop you?" He called back. This was getting out of hand. She was starting to remind him of the girls.

"Good form, ol' chap," she laughed in her best Cockney accent. "What would you do if I sent a videotape of us to your wife?" Despite the divorce, he still hadn't told Carol he was sleeping with another woman.

His face hardened for a moment and then relaxed. "You don't have a videotape." He slid on the raincoat.

She walked out from the kitchen with his briefcase: "That's why it's a hypothetical question, stupid."

"Janie, where's all this coming from?" He wasn't just referring to this argument. She'd been acting strangely for months: the clothes, the photos, everything.

Truth be told, Janie didn't know herself. She'd never meant to get involved with a married man. But then that's like an alcoholic saying "I never meant to be a drunk." Who grows up with Jim Beam as their hero?

The two stood in the hallway staring at each other. Peter in his raincoat and Janie in her pj's and fuzzy bunny slippers. They really were bunnies. They had pink satin ears and cotton tails behind the heels. They stared at each other for a long time not speaking. She watched him glance at his watch, knowing what would come next.

"Janie." He was glad to leave, never having been very good at dealing with problems.

"I know. I'm still only second concubine. Go, okay?" There was no way she was putting up a fight tonight, she was too tired.

"You're beautiful. You know that?" He held her chin up in the air, analyzing her face from all angles like he would one of her photos.

She wriggled free. "So I'm told."

He kissed her on the cheek and mumbled something about his calling her.

She watched him leave and as he opened the door to walk down the stairs he turned, "Oh, and Janie? Why don't you try wearing something other than black. Okay?" He whisked down the stairs to his other life. "I have on red socks." They were Christmas socks her mother had sent her in a care package last year. She couldn't understand why he was angry with her for this. She thought she was being practical. It's not like Christmas socks can be worn every day. She closed the door, trapped. She was having trouble leading one life. She couldn't fathom leading two.

It was true. Janie had taken to wearing only black. Maybe brown or navy on an adventurous day. It had begun by shying away from the skirts and tight pants in her closet, opting for black jeans and oversized sweaters instead. She wanted to hide herself, figuring that if she couldn't see her body,



April Iommazzo

nobody else could either. She wouldn't attract any more fathers. So she gave almost all of her brightly colored clothing to the Salvation Army. Closing the door, Janie stopped and stared at herself in the hallway mirror. Her body was wilted. Her stomach withdrawn, concave. Her arms reminded her of tentacles — long and limp; hanging at her sides. Her collar bone jutted out of her skin. She poked at her sunken cheeks and softly sang, "Peter, Peter, pumpkin eater." She knew he was worried about her. He would grow quiet and sullen, furrow his brow, and eventually moan, "Oh, Janie. What are you doing?" "How sweet," she would sigh, kissing him quickly on the cheek and then fluttering away "you love me. You really love me." And he did.

"You know what you are? You're a home wrecker. And I am not friends with any home wreckers," Emmy said angrily, looking out the window.

Janie whined, "Aw, Emmy. Come on."

"No. I won't come on," she stumbled, "you're a beautiful girl. You're a talented girl. I don't know what it is that you're getting from him, but whatever it is, it's not any good," she raised her voice, "and I don't think you should be a part of it. You know what I always say..."

"I know, Emmy, I know," she interrupted, bored by the nagging. And they said in unison, "Sometimes the princess would be better off saving herself."

They were both quiet for a moment, holding each other's hands; intertwining smooth, milky flesh with wrinkles and veins. "Emmy," she asked quietly, "what if the princess can't save herself?"

Emmy stroked Janie's hair and replied lovingly, "Then she comes here and we talk about it over rice pudding."

Janie was erasing another prank message from her answering machine as she looked through her mail which was sitting in a pile on the wooden, antique table by the front door. There was a postcard from her mother in Malibu.

Sweetheart,

Having a blast. Wish you were here. Hope everything is going well with Peter. Why don't you two come out for a while and join me? We haven't seen each other in so long. I miss my Tweety-bird.

Love,

your mother

"I miss you too, mom," she sadly replied back to the postcard, waiting for it to speak. She was glad her mother was well, but wished they could talk. Really talk. She'd even settle for one of those horrible bedtime stories that used to make her purple-painted toes curl under her covers. Or better yet, she wished she could sit in front of the television watching soap operas, as they used to do. Her mother playing with Janie's hair; picking it up piece

by piece and letting them fall back down, creating a calming effect of pins and needles all over her scalp.

Janie decided to take a walk, hoping fresh air would help the sharp pain behind her eyes. When she returned back home there was another message on her machine: "Hello? I know you're there. Pick up. I know you can hear me. Pick up. Why won't you pick up?"

She began gnawing on her cuticles. She'd only acquired this habit a few weeks earlier. As she ripped off the dead skin with her front teeth, she wondered who had called. This wasn't the first time the voice sounded desperate, lost. What if this was someone in trouble, needing help? She stalled imagining all kinds of crazy scenarios, women held captive in a harem or long lost children trying to find parents. *But*, she thought, crunching down on the dead skin in her mouth, *the voice sounded so familiar*. She remembered her father's voice for a moment. How low and thick it was and how, after he would whisper goodnight or tell a joke, she would feel her ear tickle for what felt like minutes; the deepness of his voice still vibrating inside. Janie rubbed her ear and swallowed, trying to make the low pitched ringing stop. "Sure, Janie," she said to herself laughing, "collect call from the other side, will you accept please?"

She'd been sleeping more than usual lately. It was mid-afternoon by the time she woke up to the phone ringing. It was Peter.

"Shouldn't you be at work?" he asked.

She paused, ignoring his comment. "I finished a new series last night," she yawned, spinning the cord like a jump rope, "you should come see it." Her photographs were becoming even more abstract. Objects were indistinguishable. Faces distorted. Some photos had been blown up over and over so that the pictures became a smattering of gray and white dots. In other pictures, she superimposed rats and babies.

"We'll see," he said, "Why aren't you at work?"

. She hadn't told Peter yet, but Gow was threatening to fire her. He was threatening only, because the residents loved Janie. Everyone loved Janie. She'd sneak them in candy bars and give them pictures she'd taken. The women loved her because she made them feel beautiful and the men loved her because she was beautiful. Yet, as of late, she'd begun crying when she'd see pictures of elderly women at their eightieth birthday parties or dogs dressed up in sequined ballet tutus. She couldn't control the tears; they just came. And came and came and came.

"No tears at Shady Hills," Gow had reprimanded, sure she was crying over Mr. Schoenfeld's newest ache; Janie, not very sure at all. "Shady Hills is happy, happy, happy." He'd told her to leave early and re-think whether or not she could handle this type of work. Although he wondered if she could handle very much of anything at all. She kissed Mrs. Rothenbach good-bye, slipping her an extra pack of tic-tacs, and left Gow standing stiffly with his

arms crossed, a block of marble waiting to be sculpted.

"Hello? Janie? Are you there?" Peter was annoyed. She knew he was rolling his eyes at her. "Janie. Could you come out of La La Land for a few minutes and talk to me? Why aren't you at work?"

But she couldn't hear him any more. She was too busy trying to make the room stop spinning.

Whoever had the apartment before Janie had left magazines along with a few photographs and some silverware. She'd tried to contact the man, but her landlord didn't know anything about where he had moved to. She was afraid to throw any of the objects away, feeling like she was disposing of a dead body. Instead, she bought a handful of cheap frames and placed the pictures in her hallway. By now she had names for all of them. They were like family. She'd spent most of today reading useless facts and stories from the mildewed Reader's Digest she'd stored in her bedroom closet.

She read of a Peace Corps volunteer who went insane and started making donuts. And she kept making donuts. For days. She filled her shack until she couldn't sleep in it anymore. *Death by donuts*, thought Janie, *how yummy*.

She read about a man who needed a heart transplant and received the heart of a pig. She wondered if the man ever had the urge to oink.

She read about another man, an older man, who survived a near-fatal plane crash. He hadn't been expected to recover. Yet, after months in the hospital and countless surgeries, he was finally well enough to be discharged. That same night, during his welcome home dinner, he choked on a chicken bone and died. "All that work," the doctor had been quoted, "wasted."

Reading about the donuts made her hungry and she searched for some food in the cabinets and found a bag of cream filled cookies. After twisting one apart, she licked at the cream filling and tossed the plain half into the trashcan. Her father had always eaten them so they wouldn't go to waste. At his funeral, instead of throwing a handful of dirt onto his coffin, she threw his half of a chocolate cookie. Since then, she'd found herself repulsed by the thought of eating a cookie by herself. How could she eat the plain half? It was his. It was him. *Cannibalism*, she thought.

She hadn't expected Peter to show up. He hated surprises, both getting them and giving them. He began interrogating her again. He said it was out of concern, but she was tired of his questions. This concern was drowning her, pulling her to unknown depths.

"I miss you," he said, "you're scaring me."

Janie thought, *where have I gone*, and slumped down onto the ground, unfolding against the wall. Running her hands over her face, she stretched her skin downwards, showing the red under her eyeballs and where her lower lip was attached to her gums. She began humming to herself,

"Peter, Peter, pumpkin eater." Pulling her knees up to her chest, she wrapped her arms around them. She saw Peter's face. The fear that lay behind his eyes, white and electric. "Oh, Janie." He could barely push the words through his lips.

He swallowed her up in a hug. Her cheek was pressing into a zipper. And she couldn't shut her left eye. She was eating fleece. He eventually loosened his grip, but not completely. "You are beautiful," he said running his hand over her smooth cheek.

"Nothing's beautiful anymore," she replied, lowering her eyes. He could only see her outside. Inside, she was a mess.

"According to whom?" he argued.

"According to me," she said definitively.

"You are not me. And I say you're beautiful." He was now cupping her face in both of his hands.

"Is that all I am?"

"You're so much more." They were kneeling together in front of her corduroy sofa.

"Can you prove that?"

He threw hands up in the air, out of frustration. "What could I do?"

"If it can't be proven, then it doesn't exist," she needed more than opinion.

"Are you saying you don't exist?" That was a good question.

"That all depends on you." Janie felt she was slipping away, but she wasn't sure where to.

"If you didn't exist than I couldn't do this." And he softly kissed her with conviction on her lips. He was always kissing her at the wrong times. There was only one way this would end. He would pull her into the bedroom now and they would make love. Rather, he would make love to her.

They lay in bed. Peter asleep; Janie only pretending to be. She watched him sleep, studying his face: the creases around his mouth, strong nostrils, intelligent brow, curly brown hair, a flesh covered scar across his upper chest. He was all together delicious. But this wasn't reason enough to keep him around. He would have to go. And she sighed longingly as she ran her finger across his chest. *Oh, but I'm going to miss that scar.*

Peter was fumbling around in the dark, getting dressed. The clock's bright, red, flashing numbers told her it about three in the morning. Closing her eyes, she decided she wasn't going to work today. Gow wouldn't care, he was looking for an excuse to fire her. She listened; the door clicked as it closed behind him. She hadn't really been asleep anyway. This wasn't unusual any more. She'd learned to adjust, though, by sleeping more during the day. *So I'm a little backwards right now.* It wasn't that big a deal, but she felt Peter shouldn't know. That he might start acting on this insane worry over her well being. *Besides, some of my best ideas come after one.*

Another postcard came from her mother the following afternoon:

Dear Tweety-Bird,

Don't they have mothers out there in the Big Apple? Or you having too good of a time to write me. ? Malibu is not the same without you. Have you sold any pieces yet? Did I mention I'm learning to surf?

*Love,
Mom*

She couldn't fight off the urge to hear her mother's voice any longer — she needed a little piece of home. She called and listened as her mother babbled on and on about her golf swing, how nice the new home is, but what a pain that Jewish woman, Mrs. Rosensomething is and how she never closes her mouth. "She'll drive me to drink," her mother bellowed into the phone. And the two laughed and giggled like gossipy Catholic schoolgirls. In between her snorts and chuckles, Janie wondered what would happen if she told her mother she wanted to leave the city. Get the hell out and come home. She'd never been good with change. She wanted to scream that she needed money, that no one was buying her photographs, that she hated Shady Hills, that she was stealing a father just like someone had stolen hers. But she knew she couldn't say anything. If she did, her mother would start getting agitated and probably have to go back on her medicine all over again. Instead, she cut the conversation short, said good-bye, and hung up the phone.

Janie watched television whenever possible. And that was a lot of the time. It didn't matter what was on: music videos, Sunday matinees, documentaries, re-runs. It helped her to forget. Thinking was becoming problematic lately. It brought on headaches. Peter once had to remind her she was out of food and take her to buy groceries. She'd been living off powdered chocolate and Ritz crackers for two days. Janie hadn't been outside in days. "I've been working," she hissed. Peter coerced her to come to the park. Her sunlight starved skin seemed translucent against black clothes, a chiaroscuro oil painting in the flesh.

She tried to see into the future, knowing she was going to have to make a decision soon. She tried to consider what she would do but couldn't think. "If only that pounding would stop," she whispered painfully.

There was to be a meteor shower. Peter hadn't wanted to go home. Janie didn't want him to stay. They were watching the ten o'clock news, muted, while he argued with her, blue flashes bouncing off his face. She thought he should be with his kids.

"Baby," he was trying to act cute in order to win her over, not realizing this had stopped working weeks ago.

"I am not your baby," she contested. She hated babies. Fat babies, thin babies, black babies, white babies. They weren't cute and they weren't adorable. They were horrid. She couldn't understand why anyone would

want one, choosing to ignore that she had ever been one: her memories never earlier than the age of four. Peter had babies. Two of them. Two girls. She hated when he would come over after playing with them, giving off a toxic mixture of Play-Dough, grape gum, and bologna.

"I am not your anything," she continued.

She crawled into bed after he'd left, stripping off the oversized t-shirt she had on. She lay naked for what seemed like hours. The meteor shower had already begun when she felt the urge to watch.

On the roof of her building, she stood, her blanket wrapped around her. *Janie in a blanket*, she laughed and pulled the blanket tighter around her tiny frame. She could see bright flashes streaking across the sky and she thought that she could somehow smell them. It was a strange mixture of ammonia and cotton candy, acrylic and roses. And she watched the flames fizzle out over skyscrapers and apartment buildings, reminding her of sparklers. She remembered how every fourth of July, the smell of burnt hot dogs clinging to their clothes, she and her father would dance wildly in their backyard, a sparkler in each hand, making fiery circles and squiggles in the air. And they danced and danced until they were out of sparklers and their fingertips were red and raw. She realized she was smiling, a grin so wide that she felt if someone in the apartment across the street was to look out the window, only her smile would be visible. Unfolding her arms she released the blanket, exposing her naked body, and it fell around her ankles like ribboned icing. Raising her arms, she began to dance, swooping up and down in great circles. Spinning and spinning until all she could see were blue and white streaks. Then she stopped, and for one moment she saw herself as the center of the world as it flashed around her. And she thought that maybe she was in control after all and she extended her hand to touch the yellow spots in front of her. And she couldn't help but think that she'd just been given a gift. A gift in the best sense because she hadn't known she needed it or wanted it until now. And she thought this must be what it's like to touch fire and live unharmed by the flames. And she began to dance again, thanking its sender, secure that after she'd stopped and the spots had vanished and all the rest of the city had gone inside to bed, the sky would still be glowing. For her and her alone.

The Centerpiece

I worm across the floor;
the invertebrate little sister
scurrying like a centipede over coarse carpet
while you, the calm child, sit noiselessly
hoping each fiber is a sandpaper strand
tearing at my tiny knees.

I reach your toes
and with putty-fingers
violently pluck them and suck them
like ripe raspberries
my mouth spilling joyously with their salty sting.

Your brow creases in horrified question
as Mother dips her arm
to scoop her baby from the floor.
Glaring at me,
the centerpiece in her lap,
you clutch your raw, drippy toes,
but my eyes shine to avoid a scolding,
and without a whimper from you, daughter,
I remain pissing and teething on Mother
reveling under
the scowl that scars your face.

Katie Resch



Hilary Flint

Mother's Bones

I see you through a needle's eye
and am fed just a thread.

You give me a hair-thin glimpse of history,
strained through water,
then slip behind a censor,

like the face scabbled on the screen.

You become a purified reflection,
a porcelain shadow that
vanishes when light threatens to shatter.

Your charnel house is tightly latched.
I try to exhume-
a glass pressed to the wall,

I hunt for a breath, a heartbeat
Were you ever alive?

My eyes squint at the keyhole,
but you stitch them blind,
silence sewn across my questions.

So I take a shovel, mother,
and sow myself when digging up your bones.

Katie Resch

In the Living Room

I miss the coffee table in my mother's yellow house.

Nobody uses it for coffee.

Nobody reads the coffee table books.

Nobody asks (or ever will ask)
why the legs are the paws of a lion.

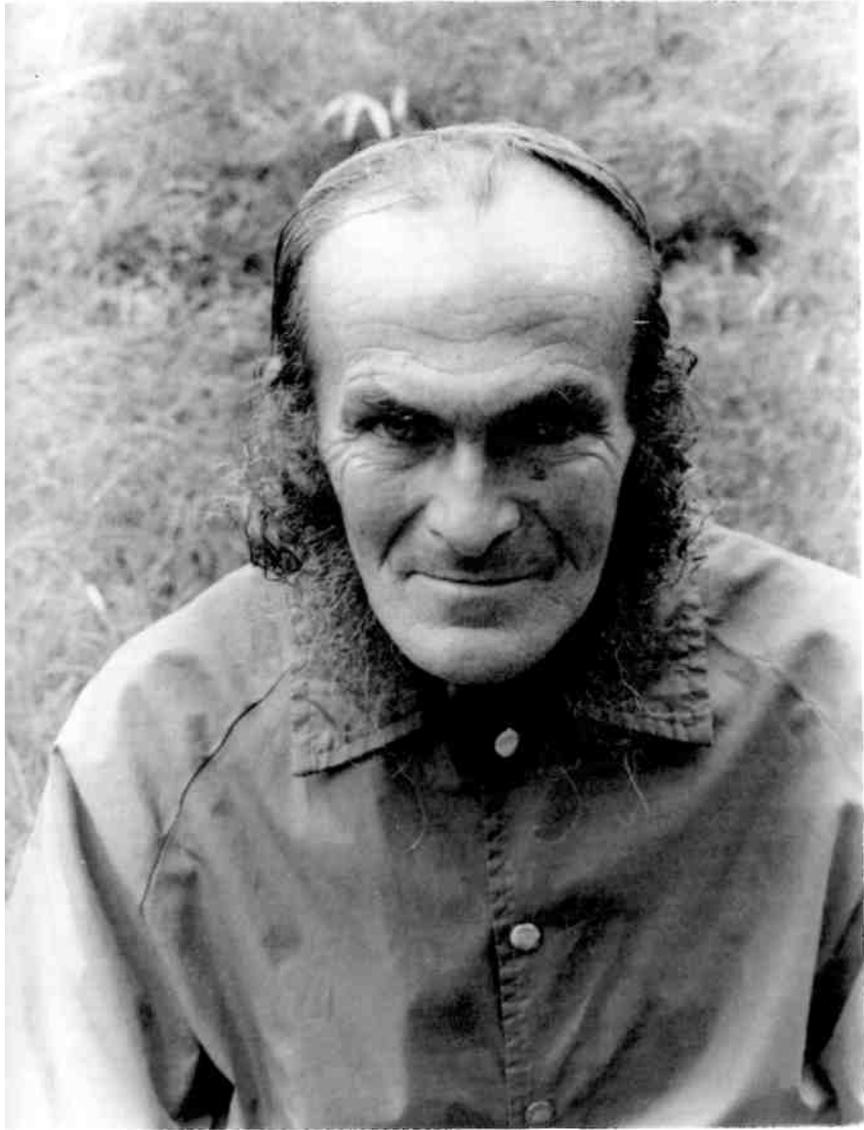
Nobody ever --

Dear Mom:

Insert this
inside
a book
on that table
in the room
where nobody lives.

That should just about do it.

Sean Flanigan



Andrea Swann

Listen

I could live this life without a language.
With only some pants, a shirt,
maybe something
to smoke, to eat, to drink.
The rest is just too heavy,
and I have no interest in a profession.

I could know you without speaking.
You could know me without talk.
If I spit in your face
you would know my mind.
You could read me in my knee jerks.
Closing my eyes to let you know that
I was not then, and will not be now,
or ever again,
just listening.
My pockets are filled with my own imaginings:
I have cut open a hole for the words to fall through.

Is this unkind?
Is this failing to understand the world around me?
I do not care to wonder anymore.
When I had the language
and will to speak it
we talked the great anything, for years
about everything--
nothing was ever said.
Not even this.

Sean Flanigan

You Have Been There

Scott Berkley

You had been lovers for less than three months when you decided to live together in Amsterdam. You were both twenty. You flew over from America together and found an apartment on the third floor of a row house. It had a big window and overlooked a street and a canal. You studied art and history, she studied languages. You're impressed that you did this but you are young and still confused about love and life. It's the end of summer now and your year-long stay is almost complete.

Long ago, on your first day of classes, you passed by something that confused you. You didn't have time to stop and investigate. On the opposite side of the canal was a building like every other building. The old bricks, beautiful mortar and the big windows. Coming out of an ordinary doorway was a long line of people stretching back almost a block. Later you would stand in this line yourself. You would enter an annex by going through a doorway disguised as a bookshelf. This was Anne Frank's house during the war. You didn't realize she lived in Amsterdam. Not that she really lived in Amsterdam those last two years of her life... she lived in those tiny hidden rooms with all those other people. You're in awe of this quiet, fascinating place. You've come here three times and spent the longest time in the one doorway where the children's height was measured. You notice how Anne grew about an inch and a half hiding up here. When she died you estimate she was four feet and three inches tall.

This summer you went to Italy and then to Spain. You're back in Amsterdam now but your mind still cannot settle from all the experiences you've had. You can't process all the things you've seen, all the things that have happened. Traveling is hard on one's mind. There is so much going on, and so much to do, and so little time to stop and think and understand.

You only have two weeks left before your flight back to America. Your lover is out getting some supplies for your last trip: backpack foods, toothpaste, etc. You walk down the block past Anne's house and turn towards the center of the city.

You stop in at a "coffee shop," buy some of the good marijuana and sit at the table near the window. You take your time rolling the joint, carefully taking out all the seeds and stems. It's ten o'clock in the morning and no one else is in the small room. The guy who just sold to you has disappeared as well. You take a deep breath and watch an elderly woman walk down the street with her groceries. Then you light your joint.

You think about all the wonderful moments, that dinner, that sunset, and her laugh as you stood in that sprinkler in that hot garden in Italy. You think back to the small fights over nothing, the tears, and the moments of silence. You think about how young you are, how deeply in love you feel, and how much this scares you.

As that old fear sets in you start to think about your new one. You start to think about your last trip. You could go anywhere but there is only one place you will allow yourself to go. You don't want to go there. You are trying to understand what it is inside yourself that makes you feel you have to go... The joint is almost gone now and your thoughts are getting tangled. All you can come up with is the fact that you are human and because you are human you must go there.

You start walking, following your favorite canal and enjoying this odd city for one of the last times. The red light district is always strangely beautiful in the morning. You walk by one of the 24-hour hotels and see an older Asian woman sitting in the window wearing a thong and bikini top. You think you saw her once before in that same spot. You wonder how often she stands in that window. She is not at all attractive to you and you feel pity and a bit of awe.

This city makes you think. Near the train station a woman of about thirty with heavy makeup is dancing quietly and crying. On the next block a young man with dreadlocks is yelling angrily at a wall. This is where all the tourists come in and this is where they are preyed upon. One man asks in English if you want a very nice hotel room near the action and you say, "Nee, Dank U," and he turns away from you looking for a tourist. They can still pick you out as an American but at least you know how to respond.

A few blocks and canal crossings later you pass a small park with young brightly clothed children. One small child runs towards you. He's not looking where he's going and he doesn't seem very stable. You lean down and catch the little bright boy as he falls into your legs. He giggles and runs back towards his mother. Nobody noticed this except for you and this makes you very happy. It's amazing how something as small as that can put a smile on your face for the rest of the morning. It feels good to be alive and you begin to think about the future. You think about your young lover and what your children might be like. Suddenly you realize what you are thinking about and mentally jump.

Before you go home you stop at the flower market and get some tulips for your lover. They always have tulips in Amsterdam, even in the summer. She didn't have a favorite flower when you arrived but now she says tulips are her favorite. You like the idea that even if things don't work out she might always love tulips.

The next day the two of you walk slowly to the station with your backpacks as the last light of day makes long shadows. You are getting on an overnight train to Berlin. You each have a hard bed that pulls down. There are six such beds in the compartment and you get the top two. Four strangers sleep below you. You can't stop thinking about where you are going. You curl up into a ball under the thin blanket and hold yourself to try to stop the shivering. You reach across the divide and hold her hand for a few long seconds, then you lean across and kiss her on the forehead. You are not cold but you're still shaking, thinking about where you are going.

You wake to the sound of German voices. The strangers below you are awake and putting on their shoes. You are instantly up. You only have three min-

utes between connections. A few minutes later out in the hall you try to hurriedly open the door and can't do it. Eventually the man behind you opens it and you thank him over your shoulder as you run to make your train. You climb on just in time and begin the second part of your trip.

The Polish train seems older. It is dirtier and not as modern. The train has an aisle down one side and then small compartments. Your compartment has three seats facing three seats. You have been assigned the two next to the window across from each other. There is a man already there and he tries to speak to you in Polish and then German. You smile and say you're sorry you can't speak either. He smiles widely showing his bad teeth and says, "No English." You're going to be on this train for the next twelve hours.

It doesn't take long to reach the German-Polish border. A man with a holstered gun asks in Polish for your passports. He looks at them for a long time and you wonder if he has been doing this for years. You wonder if it's strange for him now to see, let alone accept, American passports. You wonder what would have happened if you handed him those ten or fifteen years ago.

You are trying not to think about your destination, but at this hour of the morning your thoughts always wander. You try to think about how they wouldn't have used this track. They would have gone a different way fifty years ago. You look out the window and wonder if they could see out of those cattle cars. The land is strange, farmland interspersed with factories. The soil here is sandy with evergreen trees in it. They wouldn't have been able to see this, you say to yourself. You are going to Krakow. You are going to Krakow. You are going to Krakow. You repeat. It's a beautiful city, it wasn't destroyed in World War Two, it has history, architecture, art. You say all these things to yourself but in your heart you know that you are going to Auschwitz.

The man with the teeth gets off after about two hours and for about an hour you have the compartment to yourself. It starts to get hot, so you open the window and the air blows in strongly and blows her hair around her face. She continues to read with one hand on her head, holding some of the hair out of her eyes. You watch her and think she is beautiful. Your feelings for her are overpowering and scare you. It is almost noon and you take out the crackers and the cheese and the red wine. You pour yourself a glass of wine and she declines. You drink the wine and eat a few crackers and watch the country go by. You see farms and farm houses with low overhanging roofs. You're thinking about numbers- the miles or kilometers traveled, the days it took them in the train, the number of people in a cattle car, the millions. You can't stop thinking that their eyes might have looked at what you are looking at now, that they might have traveled over this same track. You have another glass of red wine.

Soon two boys, a woman who could be their mother, and a woman who could be their grandmother join you in the car. You smile and the boys speak to each other in rapid high-pitched German. You offer the wine to the women next to you and they both decline. The ten year old boy across from you then reaches into his backpack under his seat and points the open end of a candy bag at you and your girlfriend.

"Thank you," you both say, speaking the only words you know in German. The hard candy has a strange spicy taste.

He says something quickly in German to you.

"Sorry," you say, "I can't speak German."

"Oh, English" the young boy says with a big smile.

"Yes," you say, smiling back, "can you speak English?"

"Uh...What is your name?" he asks.

You laugh impressed that such a young boy can speak English so well. You tell him your name and then ask what his name is.

"My name is Stephan," he says, smiling and looking at the other smiling boy.

"My name is Henrik," says the blond-haired one, "do you have any pets?"

The older woman says something quickly to them in German before you can respond. Then she turns to you and says, "I'm sorry... they are bothering you?"

"Not at all," you say, "I used to have a dog," They nod. "... Do you have any pets?"

"Yes," they say, looking at each other, "we have two dogs"

"... and two bunnies... and a..." They say something to the older woman in German.

"A goose," the older woman says, smiling for the first time.

"A goose, yes," the boys say emphatically.

That is about the extent of their English but you've made friends. They show you their comic books, *The Simpsons* in German. Your girlfriend can understand some German because it is so close to Dutch and she can try to speak it. She points to them and says, "You are boys," then she points to you and says, "He is a girl." They laugh and you raise an eyebrow at your girlfriend who is also laughing. Soon after the boys decide to explore and go for a walk in the corridor.

Now you notice the older German woman and decide that in a way she looks like your grandmother. She is chatting with the younger woman and pointing out a floral arrangement she particularly likes in the magazine she is reading. You cannot stop wondering if as a teenager she was one of those girls who screamed in pleasure as Hitler drove by.

You have read that only recently were children under thirteen allowed into Auschwitz as visitors. Of course thousands or hundreds of thousands were allowed in to be killed and experimented on. You wonder if this group of young Germans are going to Auschwitz.

You ask the younger woman if she is going to Krakow.

"Yes," she says, "we are part of a church group, the children they are all... how do you say it... they help with the ..." She makes hand motions, like drinking then points to your wine.

"Oh, like altar boys..." you say.

"Yes."

"Oh I see." "You say, then ask, pointing towards her guidebook, "What are you going to see there?"

She shows you some salt mines with a carved-out altar hundreds of feet underground, and some museums. You thank her and have your answer. They aren't going to Auschwitz.

It's getting unbearably hot in the compartment. You squeeze your girlfriend's hand, then walk out into the corridor and stand at one of the open windows. Someone is standing at almost every other window. The breeze feels so calming and you finished that bottle of wine just before coming out here. It's been a long time since you've been in such a rural area. Some of the land is still overgrown, natural. Everything in Holland has been cultivated. All fields are planned, almost all of the trees are in neat rows on both sides of the street. Even the canals, as beautiful as they are, have started to bother you with their manufactured organization.

Suddenly a coal train flies past going the opposite direction. The tops of the coal bins are open and a bit of coal dust flies into your eye. You start to rub and blink and spend a few minutes getting your vision back. You realize you're getting closer now. This part of Poland is known for its heavy industry. The communists thought it was the way to economic prosperity. The heavy mining and smelting helped create one of the biggest environmental disasters in Europe. You remind yourself not to drink the water.

You're thinking about the ovens you will see when a nuclear power plant comes into view. A cloud of steam is rising out of its huge chimney. It's steam, only steam and you try to think of this as a societal improvement. Back in the compartment you are barely settled in your seat when a man speaks quickly over the intercom in Polish and static.

"Sprechen sie Deutsche!" shouts Stephan. He laughs and looks at you and you don't smile. He will say it again to the man with the snack cart, and he will ask if he speaks English too. He is nicer the second time, more like an innocent kid, and you start to wonder if you're looking for evil. After this thought you decide to open the second bottle of wine. Your lover accepts your offer this time and helps you drink it. You will do a few card tricks for the boys before it's gone.

The old woman eventually left the compartment to be quickly replaced by another boy. He is wearing a Cleveland Indians baseball cap. You start to wonder if this is real. The big smiling blood red face and red feather. You can't take your eyes off this cross between a Native American and a clown. The wine has something to do with that but you also feel like you're learning something. You just don't know what it is.

The last thing to happen on the train ride is that Stephan and Henrik will punch and yell at the other boy who then leaves the compartment. As you go to the bathroom you will see this overweight boy sitting in the hall crying and you will know he didn't deserve it, but you won't say anything to him. You don't even know if he knows English, you will tell yourself, but you will know that he was the one you should have done the card hicks for.



Stacy Judice

When the train comes to its final stop Stephan reminds you of the shirt you hung behind you and almost forgot. Then, after you're on the platform, he says, "I want to thank you for a fun train ride with you."

The next day you wake up in an old communist hotel. The tiny room is rectangle shaped with a door at one end and a window opposite the door. Near the window is the bed and an old radio. Near the door is a sink and a cabinet. The bathroom is down the hall and the shower is down the hall and around the corner. You try to get out of bed quietly and without waking your lover. She wakes anyhow and calls you to her for a morning kiss.

That day you walk into the main part of Krakow. You see a lot more poverty than you thought you would. Several small children are playing musical instruments for money. Old women are holding out cups. You give all your change away.

The city square is beautiful, with a medieval church and pigeons and wonderful outdoor restaurants. Capitalism's recent arrival makes everything fairly cheap and you buy souvenirs. You go to the oldest part of the city and see the ornate Catholic church where John Paul presided before he headed to Rome. The dome is gold covered and inside are candles and golden busts of dead rich men. Just outside of the doorway hang the bones of the Dragon of Krakow. The city was named after this dragon named Krac. The legend says that the church will not fall as long as the dragon's bones remain. Scientists say the bones are actually a woolly mammoth's thigh and the jawbone of a whale.

Inside the museums you see the present Pope's former shoes, armor taken from the Mongol invaders, and a mummy. The mummy is preserved whole under glass. Other displays show an unwrapped dried foot and part of a hand. Walking down towards the river you walk by the large metal dragon. Children climb about its feet and scream every ten minutes when the tiny bursts of flames come out of its mouth.

You walk back now, towards the center of town, detouring through the old Jewish section. It is no longer Jewish. There is a wailing wall here, made up of the remains of a cemetery the Nazis destroyed.

You stop on the way back, very tired and eat kielbasa in a tiny snack place. You drink a Pepsi from an old glass bottle. That night you have a great dinner at one of the restaurants in the square. Next to you an American man will talk to his Slovakian business partner about his recent divorce after twenty years. He will say he doesn't care, and that he never went home anyhow, and he will unsuccessfully try to get the young waitress to sleep with him. He will brag about all the places he needs to travel to all over the world in the next month, and he will tell a story about a woman whom he dated twice who then said she loved him. His business partner seems to find the story very humorous.

That night in bed you don't make love. You hold her close and she quickly falls asleep. Later you look out your one window, down at a bus stop. Two drunk men start to fight. They both look ragged and possibly homeless. One of the men throws a bottle at the other and it breaks on the pavement near a woman who quickly moves away. A man wearing a tie steps between them

yelling. They stop right away and walk quickly away in different directions seeming embarrassed.

The next morning you get on another train. You both are nervous, and don't say much. The train stops and you get out at a tiny station with weeds growing between the rails. The sign reads Oswiecm. You both try to decipher the bus sign and then decide on a taxi. "Hello?" you say, as you open the door.

"Auschwitz?" he says.

"Yes" you say.

When you arrive you pay the man and give him a good sized tip. You take out your wallet but you don't have to pay. Vaguely you realize that is ethically correct but most of your concentration is on making your legs go forward. You walk through an entrance corridor, get a map and go outside.

Everything seems horribly bright and fragile to you. You feel like the sight of something might break you. Your face feels like it does at a wake when you're not crying.

At gate a sign reads in German, "Work makes Free." You notice someone getting his picture taken in front of it. As you enter on your light you notice a picture of the "orchestra" composed of prisoners. Then you see the gallows, which have been rebuilt. You think it's strange how nice it seems here. There are trees. There are big brick buildings. It's a bright sunny day and while walking down the "street" between the buildings you hear someone laugh. You look at your girlfriend to see if she heard that too. The two men walk towards and then past you without noticing your stare. You stop and turn and watch them walk away. When she touches you it shocks you. There is no comforting here.

Inside one building is the hair. You were ready for this, you knew about it and had prepared yourself for it. But the room is about twenty feet long, and the hair is piled up and rises back until it would be over your head. You weren't prepared for the massive volume or the pigtailed. One blond pigtail, in particular catches your attention. You don't want that to be all that is left of that young woman.

In one room they have hundreds of framed pictures of the prisoners. Behind the corner of one picture is a tiny dried flower. Near the exit is the gas chamber. Just before you enter the dark doorway you see a little girl poke her head out of the doorway. She's about three and she's smiling.

You enter a room in which people were killed. You feel insane in here and you touch the walls where they touched them as they died. You look for their claw marks in the cement. Through a small side doorway are two ovens. In that room you see two separate men videotaping. On their cameras little red lights blink on and off.

She takes your pita bread and peanut butter sandwiches out of the bag. She speaks very softly when she asks if you want one. You sit with your back against a tree in the grassy area outside and eat a few bites. Not far away someone plays a harmonica. You reach out to her slowly, gently touching her leg. By some mutual force, by some respect for where you were, you have hardly touched each other all day. Now it seems ok, but still, you are careful, gentle.

She sits between your legs and you hold her.

Eventually, you decide to walk to the second part of Auschwitz. This area is known as Birkenau. During the three mile walk neither of you speaks. You hold hands. At one point you look to your right over a fence and a missile is driving by. It's a small military base. There is a red star on the top of the missile. You walk by some carpenters without their shirts on, their backs glistening in sweat. You hear their voices. You wonder what it must be like to live in this town. At one point you pass by a nice house and watch an old lady cut some flowers off her bush. Then as you round a corner the railroad tracks cross the road and head through a short tunnel into a gigantic prison system. On your left a fanner is actually driving a horse drawn cart through a field.

If you look through the camp towards the horizon you see nothing but camp. As far as you can see. The Nazis burned most of the barracks but you can still see their remains and their chimneys. Not quite a third of the barracks still stand. The brick buildings and the entrance building look almost new. You realize these buildings were not built long ago, that this is barely history. You knew all of this, you read it but you will walk miles here, and you will walk them again and again.

Throughout the concentration camp are photos taken by members of the S.S. Near the center of Birkenau a photo shows prisoners getting off a train and being separated into two groups, one to die and one to work. The picture is of the place you are standing. Fifty years ago on the spot you are standing, a woman glanced up at an S.S. officer taking a picture. She is in the group going to death.

Your lover is tired and doesn't want to walk all the way to the pits. You ask her if she is ok and she says yes, just that she needs to rest and that you can go on. Something in you has to see every part of this, has to see everything there is to see, learn anything there is to learn. You leave your lover sitting on a small bench and walk down a dirt road.

During the early stages of the Holocaust the Nazis buried their victims in mass graves. Eventually the rotting stench overpowered them and they forced their prisoners to dig up the mass graves. They then torched these mounds of bodies. The dirt road leads through a wooded area. It is similar to a nature trail. Just outside the perimeter of the fence two young boys ride by on bikes. The path opens and it looks just like any other field. Green grass and wildflowers grow on the human remains.

As you walk back towards the one you love something floats past you. It is one of those puffs of nature, soft and white with a seed in the middle. You catch it and lean against a tree. There is no one here. You are completely alone. You let it go and it floats away. Watching this beautiful seed hurts and bothers you. Images of fire and bodies flash in your head and you can't seem to stop them.

Your lover gives you some water. You realize that just being around her helps calm you. You start to walk again together, past the pond where they dumped human ashes, past the dynamited crematoriums, past an open wooded

area. You stop here to look at another S.S. picture. This is where older women and children waited when the gas chamber /crematorium was MI. This is where they waited for their death. They look so real in these pictures. You can imagine them walking the streets and the neighborhoods you walked in the day before. They weren't perfect, they had their faults, their hates, their jealousies. This is perhaps your worst and best thought of the day. They were so fucking human.

"They were so fucking human" you say to her. This stops you. You can't walk anymore. You can't abstract the millions when you have to look at each face, each imperfect person. You could be in the picture, you could be waiting. The tree you are leaning against was once leant against by a small child who minutes later was poisoned to death, over there. In the ruins of that building and then his ashes were dumped in that pond...

Your lover is crying. You can't cry, your face is hardened and your eyes are twitching. You wish you were a Neo-Nazi so that you too could pretend this never happened. You hold her but neither of you wants to stay there long.

You walk back towards the entrance. You've been walking now for five hours. As you walk back towards the entrance you see a man lining up a picture. He's trying to show how many buildings there were, he wants to get the right angle, so he can show his friends. Part of you thinks that is ok, but mostly it disgusts you. You see another man leaning on a sign, posing in front of a barbed wire fence, waiting for his friend to snap the memory.

You look up at the watch tower that guarded the enhance the train came through. Once it was filled with machine guns. You look almost expecting to see them when something shiny actually does pokes out. Then it focuses and zooms. Trying to get the best shot.

She rests here and you go to look at one last area. You have to see everything. You walk outside the fence and notice again a strange concrete structure in the ground. You realize now that it's a machine gun pit, pointed at the fencing. It's late in the day now and as you approach tire women's death barracks there is no one around. The grass has grown high here and there are wildflowers and crickets. You are alone and you think that perhaps you will scream when you enter the barracks. It would be appropriate you think.

As you enter the silence drowns your scream. It is a large room with fifty or more wooden bunk beds. This was the worst area of Auschwitz. These were death barracks. Something makes you walk back, down the aisle. The only English graffiti you have seen says, "Fuck the Germans." You keep going, into the darkening shadows, towards the last bunk. You crawl in. You close your eyes.

You leave breathing as if you've just run a fast mile and walk quickly through what you think will be a shortcut. The grass and weeds scratch your legs. You stop in the middle of overgrowth, looking up and down these endless rows of barracks. You crouch down low and breathe deeply for a few minutes. Now you walk slowly, listening to the crickets, noticing purple and yellow flowers, allowing the beauty to hurt you.

You come out on the path behind a family. They don't notice you. A man has his arm around a woman and a young boy runs ahead of them. The man has a video camera around his shoulder. As they walk towards the gate he slides his hand down to her waist, then to her ass. He squeezes it and massages it and then pushes his hand into her for a few seconds. You walk up quickly behind them hoping to embarrass the man. Part of you wants to beat him or yell at him but you're too tired. You can't bring any more violence to this place. You realize that you would have been one of the ones to go quietly and without a fight.

There was a long wait in the train station before you could get back to Krakow. You tell her about the man and she tells you about the American family. The father said, "Here's our next hotel." They took a few pictures and drove off after five minutes. This is the first real conversation either of you have had today.

You are both exhausted that night. You walked for probably seven straight hours today. You eat at the hotel restaurant, and after hot showers, you hold her from behind and fall into a deep sleep. The next morning you awake to her bringing you coffee. "It's a beautiful day," she says. You spend the morning shopping for your family and friends back home. You buy some hand carved wooden boxes, a glass Christmas ornament, and a tee-shirt that says Polska. You eat a kielbasa from a vendor on the street and then you eat another one. You walk through some parks and give some money to a man who asks you for it.

That night you eat dinner at a nice restaurant, then stop at another place for a beer. This is your last night in Krakow. You walk back near your hotel and sit in the closest park. She decides to go home and shower. You sit there and watch the people walk by. You watch an old man walk by with Ms dog, and then see someone wearing an Iron Maiden shirt. Then you watch a young woman with blond pigtails walk by and you put your head in your hands.

When you open the door to your hotel room she is waiting for you in bed. She is naked and warm and her skin smells like hot water. At that moment you lose control like never before, sobbing, weeping... She helps you take off your clothes and holds you and cries with you. Your body tightens and releases until it breaks and you pass out.

Later you will realize that you never heard anyone scream or saw anyone cry in Auschwitz but that twice you heard people laugh. When you get back to America people will ask you why you went. They will ask if you are Jewish and they will say things like, "The Holocaust doesn't do anything for me."

They will wonder why they should respect Auschwitz... Why shouldn't they laugh, take pictures, push their fingers into their wives? You'll try to remember that they are just humans as well... fucking humans.

You are both packing up your things in your apartment in Amsterdam because tomorrow you are going back to America. Her hair is tied back in a bandanna and she is dirty from cleaning the old apartment.

As you shut the cardboard box a staple you didn't notice cuts deeply

into your finger. She is applying pressure rushing you towards the sink. You try to tell her that it's nothing, that it's just a bad paper cut. You try and laugh at how vulnerable your skin is. Your blood is dripping into the sink and the water is washing it down. She's rushing to get bandages and you're watching her. Smiling, you imagine what she will be like in fifty years. You imagine her beautiful children and decide that if you are lucky enough to be their father, they will not be allowed to have pigtails. For a moment, this thought comforts you.



Andrea Swann

Flat

I thought I heard her typing
A holiday letter
maybe with directions to our empty home
Folded with a seasonal postage stamp that faked joy.

I embarrass my brother
As I pace circles
And ask if he heard the clicking.
He says he is sorry.
She is still gone.

I walk slowly to the park
And wonder if loss will ever dwindle
And if a bird's reputation of enjoying solace is truth.

In the sand
I draw triangles with my feet
In front of a drinking fountain that never worked
And a baseball field of mud.

Crista Dillon



Kathleen O'Shea

Father

Beyond heavy doors someone is taking him apart
Like the way addiction pulls you under and deconstructs
as you wait
knowing but not knowing because you are always sedated.

Between visiting hours I go to the window and look out.
At the end of a long hall the glass is like a porthole that does not
open
But the window makes me think I am sharing
The waitless, cool breeze of those living beyond this hospital.

Sit in a waiting room- that's what I do
And trip over sounds born beyond stuffy space of faces and
shoulders that lean to a floor
Caught between the beeping elevator and squeak of rubber soles lipping a
mopped corridor.

A book that is just pages of bold letters strung together on the left and
the right stares at me
And I think of how one season is evaporating into another
But I cannot fade into either
Because my feet are slipping between keys on a piano.
The black keys raised in repetition, two and three and back again
Cause my stumble into the other, the quiet ivory.

I feel closer to the tall figure in a green mask that bends over and opens
life that is not my own
But somehow the wounded man belongs to me. Doesn't he?
The surgeon- we treat him like a savior.
Maybe he wonders about those things that can save us but right now
we have something in common
other than awkward silences.
We are looking for something to find.

Crista Dillon

Moments in Mind

Crista Dillon

Certain things remain as norms. When one is in an elevator they look up they look down, they clear their throats, cough gruffly or shift their feet, but never lock a simultaneous glance with a co-habitant. Our partners in the metal box are always shifty visions that we dismiss as something other. Tentative, we hesitate to comment on anything but the weather as we focus solely on the destination dial as if it clocked real time. The school days' imagination, never outgrown, plants the new subject as a puppet in a bizarre role that we have directed in short seconds, sharing breathing space. Absurd diversion sustains our foot tapping and gum chewing as we wait for the blink to signal our debarkation.

Worse than our habit of dissecting an elevator partner's blurred existence and its minute stain on our own, is their contrived tale. The fact is that we aroused suspicion. We, my new love and myself, suspended in an elevator with a grandfather neither of us knew. Another generation with the daily news tucked under his arm and doubt smeared across his forehead as he measured the strength of future, a shadow in the opposite corner.

Camel Lites spastically flew from my grip to the metal floor birthing a distinct "thud." Finally, something we could all look at without looking at one another. The "thud," then the instant return to silence. The same type of silence that evades comfortable space after a son tells his father that he prefers the company of men. Cigarettes on the shiny floor, alone with six feet. I knew he was a member of the "You are making a mistake" clique, anxious to preach about blackened lungs. A dirty smoker, a backwards gay, a charming thief, equivalent in his pile of judgment coupons, stacked high and distributed without request.

I scratched my knee through the hole in my Levi's. It wasn't that my knee particularly itched, I just needed to move on after the box of cancer sticks plummeted like a single, colossal raindrop. The tear had stretched since I rarely washed my jeans, or even altered pairs, preferring the "lived in" feel. I could get a solid scratch with four fingers at once. Grimy jeans, an exposed knee, an adolescent wolf with a goatee staring at my flesh and cigarettes. I suppose I fell out of the "nice girl," "she won't let him have her until after the ceremony and vanilla coconut cake" club in the eyes of the old Square across from me. I could feel him measuring me with darting glares, thinking that if I were his granddaughter, it would be time for a Sunday chat. The kind that start out sounding like a story you don't want to hear and certainly never asked for, then smack you in the face as they target the bull's eye of malady: your life.

I think the silver crate shook when Jev, my boyfriend, sneezed. Two,

three, five, in a row. Old Square shifted his shoulder as to cover himself from flying germs. Jev casually pulled a gray bandanna out of his back pocket to dab his watering eyes, then adjusted his earring. My prince of 140 pounds, proudly stubbled. Our fellow inmate of the silver cell looked down from his glasses, rimmed heavily with an "I know more than you ever will" expression. I understood that he was likely to repeat things out loud, simply to hear himself, such thoughts as "...welfare folk need to stop having babies and get to work." But, all that I could think was that he couldn't remember the last time he consciously made it through the 11 o'clock news in his teal recliner without his head dropping forward, and Shirley, his wife, tapping his arm saying, "Honey, come to bed; you're snoring again." And I am sure he has lost his taste and memory for what it feels like to kiss so long that your lips chap and your appetite soars but you don't need to eat because you are flying.

The fact is that we were the Now, the privileged recipients of his struggles and sacrifice. He scorned us with a dour pout and heavy sigh. Shaking his head at his brutal mistake to have procreated in the back of a truck on a night he pretended there were stars to see and in his mind it was okay to just "practice." He tries to remember that things must have been different then. He was just older than we ever were at such an age.

Let me translate, and justify the old man's disdain. Fresh, we dived into passion, into long walks, into deep ideas and tomorrow, while he lived in yesterday beside a river of old, cracked sand. What happens when we are us is like the rising of a red balloon that can only float higher and leave the grounded, the practical, the daily news readers, behind. He was inconsolable to us because he was a nonbeliever. Devoid of compassionate notions from years of burning. Burning to build that which crumbled. That which is now false.

What led us there was chance. The risk of losing, driven by the extinguishment of the fear of no longer knowing. We were lucky enough to be our own puppets, masters of our own strings.



Arek Rusek

Self Portrait

Michelangelo came close,
If watched long enough
I was convinced his marble
Madonna could be caught
Stealing a breath,
Or letting one go--a sigh perhaps,
But she only stared at her son,
Or at the veined floor beyond his head.

Surely it must be a gift of the gods,
To bring life to the inanimate,
Meaning to symbols
Which can do nothing but *be* regarded,
Like light through the spaces between trees,
Identity floats, suspended
In some castaway ink
Where the equation of
Experience and language
Remains infinitely wrong,
A frightened two-dimensional ghost.

Leigh Rende

Galatea

It has nothing to do with
The way your finger traces the lines
Of my ear or the slow slope of my shoulder
Night after night.
You work better with your eyes
Closed, trance-like,
Locked in that room
Lined with forgotten slabs of
Marble, still rough from the quarry.
I wonder if you can feel the warmth
Of my body beneath *your* callused
Fingertips--layers of skin polished
Like the hands of a blind man.

Not quite the lover's caress,
Your hands press hard enough
To learn my curves until
The angles are memorized
Well enough to be re-created.
You leave in the morning
And I will not see you for days,
Perhaps months.
Illuminated by a few panes of glass,
There is just enough light
To catch the polished features
Carved to life from veined blocks—
A leg breaking the surface of one,
A torso emerging from another.
Abandoned for their imperfections,
Eternally trapped in stone,
These mutant reliefs are
Forever between worlds.

And in the center,
A monolith with *my* ear
Descending into *my* neck.

Leigh Rende



April Iommazzo

Champlain

The boathouse was hopelessly overstylized,
but no more than expected on a holiday weekend.
The shop stood in the middle of two rows of docks,
as I remember, presiding over both
and my father was the only one who ever went in, disappearing over the
lake as we labored ahead.
The barrels under the dock sank deep, shifted weight,
mimicking our movements as we passed, rippling its boards.
We tried to move about the deck with confidence as we pulled away,
people always watch.

The other boats swayed in unison, one deep movement following the next,
eyeing us quietly, like their owners on board.
Everything is gone but water, turning white just as the surface
splits, opens up, and closes, letting us pass, and the cabins balancing on
ledges surrounded by trees.
The cottages, it seemed, were watching too,
as we climbed through the wind to the upper deck.
Slowing down, the sun was warm as we laid in our bikinis,
feeling naked, so high above the lake
imagining air splitting like water when we passed.

Megan Casey

Tracks

We all dressed the same, as if from fictional cardboard houses,
walking together, a sky liquid line, moving.
Everything seemed blue, the calming color, someone said,
and our jumpers matched the indigo ribbons I had
finishing off my blond braids,
appearing on others, too
that marched together,
and even the nuns were a true ocean of navy,
swaying quietly with tiny suggestions of genuine hair escaping their habits
and I remember sitting at my scaled down desk, looking at the cursive
on the board, not knowing how to read
the swooping, lacy lines that suddenly moved within themselves
like water-filled tubes holding colors;
back when my imagination lived
and so did the ice outside hanging itself from the sill and the snow-drips
slid and clung
like the oily blot left from the pen I shouldn't have been using.
Seriousness is a valuable virtue.
My father was serious, in his stories, too,
all of which I believed because the snow outside
was the same snow when he was young-somehow, and
I still look like my father when he was younger.
Fluid motion and ragged, a lone blot in the white
blowing toward the schoolhouse to start the Franklin stove
and to wait for the rest, looking back at his tracks in the lake of drift
thinking seriously of time, that continuum,
then a rushed realization the we were just a momentary pause and
my father did live like me.

Megan Casey

Shopping

Julie Anderson

Two weeks ago I went grocery shopping at the Food Rite on West Street, the one that's open 24 hours. It was late. After 11 because I never have time to go during the day with work and everything. I have a crummy underpaid job in a psychiatrist's office as a secretary or editorial assistant or something. I don't really know what my official job is, just that it involves doing a whole bunch of lame stuff like making 4,000 copies a day and sitting in front of a computer looking for misplaced commas and doing a lot of dull medical writing that I never get any credit for. The office is windowless and pukey-yellow and depressing. It's in a building with a bunch of other climate controlled offices. There is a fake potted plant in the corner and I hate it. To save myself from going blind from the lack of visual stimulation I taped clipped magazine pictures of Ziggy Stardust and dinosaurs to the printer and set a small plastic baseball player I found on the sidewalk on top of my computer. They keep me sane.

You know those stupid criminal stories? The ones you hear on the news after they've told you about all the real news and real crimes and stabbings and people getting shot in the street? I guess they're supposed to lighten the mood and make you laugh after hearing about how a city bus ran over an eight year old kid on her way to school. Like there will be a guy who holds up another guy while wearing a nametag with his first and last name on it. Or someone will be dumb enough to leave their wallet on the table of the house they've just robbed, then they'll go back to get it an hour later, after the family has come home to find all their major appliances missing. My friend worked at a bank once and there was this guy who came in to cash a phony check from his job. The check was typed out for \$50 but he had added a comma after the five and two extra zeros onto the end of the number in blue pen, so it read \$5,000. She was like "I'm unable to process this transaction for you, sir." He was like "Why the hell not?" So she told him that she wasn't allowed to cash checks that weren't officially issued by the employer. He was like "Well why don't you just call my boss and verify it." But she told him she was calling the police instead and he said "Good, we'll just see what they have to say about it," and he actually sat there and waited for them, and when they got there he tried to make a complaint against her. This is kind of like one of those dumb criminal stories.

When people hear that I work for a psychiatrist they always say things like "Wow. That must be pretty interesting." And I'm like, "thrilling." But he's 78 and doesn't see patients anymore so I don't even get to meet any weird, screwed-up people. "We" are writing an unnecessarily large encyclopedia of medical terms that is never quite finished and forever being delayed for publication. I walk in mornings as quiet as I can, hoping he won't hear me and will let

me have two minutes of peace at my desk before he calls me into his office and starts things off with "We've got a very busy day today." An overly serious look slapped on his face: "We've got a very busy day today." Then I'm supposed to get all revved up and excited about all the important copies to be made and commas to delete. After that we play this game where he tells me about all his health problems and details his abundant aches and pains and describes how he was only able to sleep for 3 hours and 23 minutes the night before and I pretend like I care. His desk is a complete mess of papers, letters and ripped out journal articles and it takes Mm forever to find anything, so I have to sit there and try not to fall asleep while he digs for something for me to edit. The same thing every day.

Among his multiple annoying habits is a weird breathing thing, like whistling without sound, that he makes whenever he is reading to himself or thinking something over. Every syllable gets a little puff of air. I can hear him from my desk in the outer office and it makes me totally nuts. At lunch time he eats things that his wife packs in plastic baggies, generic cookies and white bread peanut butter sandwiches and some kind of fruit. All the food groups represented. Those plastic bags and the way he chews with his mouth open, making a spitty, sloshy noise, drive me crazy, too.

Thank God he is sick because that means that he leaves early almost every day to go home.

"I hope you're feeling better," I hear myself say sympathetically as he trudges from the office.

"So do I, so do I," he sighs, buttoned into his tweed jacket and dorky hat.

Then I stop working immediately and play solitaire on the computer or read the paper or use his professional letterhead to write letters to people I know. I put a "Dr." before my friends' names on the envelopes and take them downstairs to the front desk and get them posted as his official mail. He owes it to me. If I feel like it I do some actual work on the encyclopedia because I get a kick out of the fact that if it was ever published, real doctors would be using it to diagnose their patients even though it was written by a kid who has absolutely no medical training or college degree. The only thing I do know are the words and their corresponding definitions. Its a whole different language. The terms swirl around in my head constantly. Fluoxetine, bupropriol, zimovudine, akathesia, tardive dyskinesia, pica. They're always rolling up there as meaningless sounds. Before work in the morning I wash my face and say to myself "sertraline, monoamine oxidase inhibitor, extra-pyramidal side effects" and "frottuerism, cogwheeling" in the shower and in the car on the way to work: Aparoxetine, paroxetine, paroxetine." Like when babies are learning how to talk and they fix on one word and say it over and over. Then everyone thinks their kid is a genius even though they're only repeating noises their parents mouth into their faces.

The Tuesday I went grocery shopping had been particularly intolerable. I heard my boss whistling before I even walked into the office, and we had such a "busy day" that we had to work through lunch, which meant eating in the same room, balancing my instant cup-o-noodles and nodding with an interested look

on ray face. Then he wanted to dictate some letters to me so the blowing noise was up close and in MI effect and he had slept 5 hours the night before instead of the usual 3.something, so he stayed all day. I drank a lot of coffee and made frequent trips to the bathroom where I spent a long time flushing the toilet and grimacing at myself in the mirror.

At the supermarket everything was lined up even and neat on the shelves. All that well organized food. After a crappy day the humming fluorescent lights can be really soothing, and the floors are clean, white and shiny. It's like an elementary school classroom, when you had to stay after because you'd done something bad, and the teacher asked you to put your head down on the desk and think about what you'd done, and you sat there and listened to the lights and felt your body get caught up in the humming noise and your head and eyelids got really heavy. Some nights they play elevator-music versions of oldies over the intercom. Usually the stock kids are putting cans and boxes on the shelves, so there are these big rolling racks set up blocking the aisles and you have to squeeze through them. Sometimes something you need is behind one of the carts and you have to roll it out of the way. The store feels like it's closed and only you're allowed to be there. Like being in a museum after hours.

Plus if you go in the middle of the night there's never anyone in the checkout lines so you breeze through real quick, and they don't care if you cheat the ten items or less line even if you have something like 20 items. If you want cheese or potato salad or something from the deli then it's better to go during the day, because the slicing and specialty salads, that all closes around 9, so you have to go for the prepackaged stuff, which is easier anyway and it's usually just as good. You can buy tampons or condoms or laxatives and not have to worry about the guy behind you lifting an eyebrow at your display jerking along on the conveyer belt. You can get in and get out and there aren't fifty screaming moms fighting over the last pizza Lunchables.

Of course it's mostly insomniac old people, lonely people and social invalids that go shopping in the middle of the night. People who no one cares about that much, or who don't have that much to care about themselves. Those people love to shop at night. Once there was a balding guy waving a stalk of celery around in the produce section like it was a wand, tapping different kinds of fruit like Cinderella's fairy godmother. He had a big, full beard and a shirt and tie on but he was wearing a really gauzy pink and purple skirt. A clear case of misplaced identity with transvestite and possible homoerotic tendencies. The hem of the skirt was halfway between his knees and ankles, and it was see-through enough to see thick, dark leg hair. That's fine and all, but people who are going to be wearing a skirt should really shave their legs - it doesn't matter if it's a man or a woman - nobody wants to look at that shit. Another time there was an old woman trying to wash her hair in the hair care/feminine products aisle. I have no idea what her problem was. She was using a bottle of Sprite to work up a lather. She bought both items so in the end it worked out okay and no one had to approach her about it. Besides, she wasn't hurting anyone, although she did make kind of a sticky foamy mess on the floor. When it's late, people

are willing to overlook certain things. We understand each other.

Sometimes when I go I wear my Halloween costume from three years ago just to fit in with the other crazies. It's a fairy dress. Blue velvet bodice with a fabulous shiny blue skirt. There's a mesh layer underneath the skirt that makes it stick out all around. A second grader would sell her whole Barbie collection for such a find. Three years ago there were matching blue shoes and wings but I never use the wings anymore because they're a little much for a nighttime food run, and I wear it with sneakers. Such a good dress and there's no place else to wear it.

So two weeks ago happened to be one of those nights when I was shopping in my costume. When I pulled into the lot I cut someone off and pulled into his spot. It was raining pretty hard and the wipers were going fast so I didn't really see the guy. But he just waited there, not moving. So I waited, not wanting to get out of my car if he was going to yell at me or something. Then I was like, "whatever, there are fifty hundred other spots in the goddamn lot, find one," and I pulled my keys out of the ignition, got out, slammed the door and ran with my head down toward the Food Rite. The guy was still waiting like that when I walked into the store. The automatic doors zipped open and closed. "Get over it, asshole," I muttered. It's all freaks at night.

Frozen peas, a liter of 1% milk, yogurt with that crashed granola on top, kiwis, baking soda toothpaste. Those were the things I could remember. My list was on the kitchen table again. They say "never shop without a list, you'll buy more than you need." It's incredibly true. So far the basket had pretzels and hot dogs which were not on the list, plus the milk and peas.

I was in the aisle with all that international food when the guy came in. There's some weird kosher shit in that aisle, all kinds of things in jars that look like they should be in a fourth grade science room. Onions and pickles and dough floating in watery stuff. It's good to check it out sometimes, see what other people eat. Nyafat, shav, kishka, falafel. Some rolling racks were partially blocking the way and there was a fat woman on the other side, trying to get past. She was really big, she must have had a traumatic childhood or something, and used food as a security blanket to compensate for her lack of strong personal relationships or to repress her inner emptiness. She turned sideways and got through okay and looked up at me and I smiled. It must have been almost one then, 12:40 the police report said.

Nothing unusual happened up front when he walked in. No one screamed or anything. The song on the intercom was a schmaltzy version of "California Girls" and it cut all of a sudden and then this guy's voice came on asking us all to come to the front immediately, he had a gun and "was prepared to use it," and blah blah, just like they say on t.v. when they're holding up a place. I looked at the fat lady. She was looking at me as if she was deciding whether or not she would go to the front of the store or not. She bit her bottom lip and looked at the nutrition information on the box of oatmeal she was holding, wondering if she would get it. Her teeth were all fucked up, not brown or anything, but she must never have had braces. She looked at me again like she was very



A. Navarro

bored with the whole thing and I shrugged my shoulders. She dropped the oatmeal into her basket and we walked to the front.

About ten of us, including the cashiers and stock boys, were lingering at the front of the store, between where the rows of food end and the cashier lines begin. The guy who was holding up the Food Rite was in his mid twenties, not much older than me. Boring. He wasn't even wearing a ski mask or pantihose over his face. He was a dark haired kid with jeans and a long sleeved red tee shirt and sneakers. Normal looking, clean shaven. They'll give a gun to anyone. The cashiers stood next to each other and looked at the ground, terrified in their red smocks and polyester pants. One of them looked like she was going to cry, she had her hand under her nose, and the other one was holding that one on the back of the arm.

"Now everybody just chill, I'm not trying to kill anyone, I just need you to sit on the floor and chill, and you, lady," he waved the gun at the cashier who was holding the other one's arm "are going to get all the money out of all the registers, and you," he waved the gun at the crying one, who winced and fluttered her eyelids, "are going to relax. Alright so just sit." He talked the way a first grade school teacher talks, slow and low, like you talk to stupid people and kids.

He gave the cashier a plastic Food Rite bag and she went to the 10 items or less register and got the money out and started working her way down. No one was sitting.

"Okay" said the guy.

When he said okay he said the "kay" part higher than the "o" part, kind of like he was singing it, "I said sit." He sang the sit part too: "si-it." So we sat like good dogs.

The fat woman had a deadpan look on her face. Situational denial.

"Amateur." She said under her breath. I checked out what she had in her basket. Oatmeal, diet Coke, a pineapple and an Entenmanns' strudel. I looked at my own basket. I hoped Mr. Rookie Grocery Store Robber was going to speed things up because my peas were melting. It was stupid to get the cold stuff first. I certainly was not going to buy vegetables all melted and congealed in a giant hunk of ice. I glanced at the fat woman.

"How long can you keep milk out of the fridge before it goes bad, do you know?"

"I don't know, an hour, an hour and a half?"

"Well, are you sure because I was watching this thing on television, it was one of those news things where they talk about how we don't know how what we're eating can be really bad for us and stuff and it said that people think they can leave milk out for a lot longer than it can actually, safely, be left out, did you see that?"

"Oh? No I didn't know that. Was it on channel 6?"

"Yeah."

"Ah. Hmm. No I didn't see it."

Amateur decided to get in on the conversation.

"Wait. Did you hear me tell you you could talk? Because I really don't

remember saying anything like that. Does anyone remember me saying anything like that?"

Did he expect someone to answer? From the floor I looked up with this "were we talking to you?" expression, so he started in on the dress.

"What the fuck are you wearing that for? Where the fuck do you think you are, the 1978 senior prom?"

I was pretty sure he wasn't going to shoot me, so I glared at him and rolled my eyes.

"It's a Halloween costume." More eye rolling. A bad habit. Teachers always used to yell at me about it. They just couldn't appreciate a dramatic flair. I remembered walking home from the bus stop in my God-awful Catholic girl's school fall uniform. A brown, green and yellow plaid skirt, pleated, exactly two inches above the knee. An "Our Lady of Mercy" shirt tucked into the elastic waistband, from where I promptly untucked it exactly as the last bell rang. My fairy dress at the Food Rite was a statement against all those years of wool blend.

"Well in case you didn't know, Halloween was last month."

"Well in case you didn't know, I don't give a fuck."

He just stared at me then, squinted his eyes a little and looked, then glanced over his shoulder, looking at the cashier getting the money out of the boxes. She was on register eight. Four more to go. Of course she had pushed the magic emergency button by then. He should have figured that out. He should have known about that button, everyone knows about it, but he didn't.

"How are you doing there?" he asked her.

She was putting bills into the bag. Then she reached in and scooped up a handful of pennies.

"Not the pennies! Not the pennies, Jesus!"

She looked up and nodded at him but she didn't say anything.

"Okay?" He asked her. "Everyone cool?" He looked around. No one said anything. A throat cleared behind me. The guy looked down again with a serious "I've just had a revelation or something" look on his face.

"Are you the bitch who cut me off in the parking lot?"

"No."

"Yes, you are the bitch who cut me off in the parking lot."

"Oh. Alright." I said.

"That was not cool."

"Sorry. I bet it was really hard for you to get another spot."

Really, I wasn't in the mood. Being held up at the grocery store by a guy who didn't even know to put women's hosiery over his face was pushing my tolerance threshold, and listening to him whine about parking was well over it. The cashier came over with the plastic bag. "Janet" said her name tag. He threw the bag into a shopping cart.

"Get up," he ordered, "we're going shopping."

I was like, "what?"

"Get up," he insisted.

The bastard wanted me to push his cart around while he threw stuff in.

I guess he couldn't hold a gun and do his shopping at the same time. He Wasn't going to be shooting anyone, that was obvious. He probably didn't even know how to really use a gun, and no one was going anywhere anyway, so I stood.

"Everybody up," he repeated, "I don't want any of you to get lonely up here by yourselves. Everybody up."

Everyone stood up, with that seventh grade, co-ed square dancing "do we have to?" attitude. The crying cashier wasn't sniffing anymore. She looked confused. This hold up was not living up to her made for t.v. standards where everyone is supposed to be bound and gagged on the floor and at least two people are sprawled out dead in their own puddle of blood. The fat woman pushed her sleeve up, looked down at her watch and exhaled. The cart went down the yogurt, cheese and lunchmeat aisle and he tossed some bacon and processed yellow American cheese slices in. Nine people dragged along behind. The fat woman picked up some honey baked ham slices and put them in her basket.

"What's your name?"

"Ray. What's yours?"

"Irene." I lied. It was a pretty good name.

"Yeah? That's my mom's name." He pushed a rolling food rack out of the way.

"Fantastic."

In went Frosted Flakes, Trix, a box of strawberry Pop Tarts.

"She hates for me to eat this stuff, sugar cereal, you know? But its fortified." He must have had issues with his mother. An Oedipal complex, inability to assume his own identity, something along those lines.

"Uh-huh."

The soda and snack aisle. A two-liter bottle of Coke, a six pack of orange Crush, a box of microwave popcorn. The canned food aisle. Corn, two cans of Campbell's chicken noodle soup that he switched for the generic sale brand, beets. Nine people still behind us, an occasional cough or sneeze, the fat lady continuing on with her shopping, me pushing the cart like we were married. Couples do it all the time, walk down the aisles together, she rolls the cart and he holds something up for her approval, then drops it in the cart. They go home and cook dinner together and she holds a spoonful of sauce to his mouth for him to try and he tastes it and nods his head yes, yes, it's very good honey. There Would be candles and placemats, really nice. Except my husband had a semi- automatic weapon and no common sense, and I had no plans to cook him dinner any time soon. Maybe with some combination risperidone-flouxetine drug therapy and a few years of psychological counseling. Maybe.

My husband never made it into the frozen food, never got to choose between curly fries or hash browns, because naturally the police skidded into the parking lot by then. Ray wasn't very smart about the whole thing. He hadn't watched enough television to know all the tricks. He was supposed to put the gun to my head and scream "don't anybody move!" then take me out the back way where his car was waiting and we would fall in love or something and head to Mexico on the lam together.



Stacy Judice

Three cops came up from behind, through the pissed off customers, and two peeked around either side of the end of our aisle, pointing their guns before they put their heads out. Those cops were ready for action, bullet proof vests, walkie-talkies, the whole nine yards. Ray didn't look surprised really, and he must have forgotten that he was carrying a gun because he dropped it into the cart with a box of chicken flavored Rice-A-Roni.

"Fuck," he said. "Shit." He didn't yell, he just said it the way you would say, "Oh. I get it now."

I wanted to help him out. I wanted to say "stop everything," and everyone would freeze where they were, "this is how you do it," and walk him through the whole thing, I'd show Ray about the stocking mask, the alarm button, and explain that stealing and shopping are usually most effective as two separate trips.

But the cops took him away. Ray was handcuffed under the "Thanksgiving Fixins" banner and taken through the sliding doors and put in a car that was lit up and idling out there in the rain. Then the rest of us had to stick around forever, the whole bunch of us, until the police got the story put together right. They had to talk to all of us alone, and then all of us together, and it was a huge pain in the ass.

For some sadistic reason they had us in a refrigerator aisle, and I was chattering away in my skimpy dress so the fat lady lent me her huge brown sweater. Eight girls my size could have fit inside that thing, but I wasn't complaining. I got nice and comfortable on the floor beneath the frozen orange juice and watched the show.

The crying cashier was not going to miss her life's single opportunity for excitement and she went on and on and on about how scared she was and how she didn't think she was going to make it out alive, thank you Jesus, and how the kid should be locked up tight for the rest of his life.

"I knew you were coming, I just knew you would be coming any minute, we all just had to hold on," she blathered.

"Okay ma'am, but did the suspect make verbal or physical threats of any kind?" Even the police were getting bored.

"Well he had a gun, didn't he? He pointed it at me once, too, everyone saw it, I swear I thought that was the end."

"But he never threatened you?"

"Well he had a gun, didn't he?"

The fat woman answered everything yes or no. Yes she was already in the store at the time the suspect entered, no she did not feel threatened at any time. Yes, no.

The cops got tired or merciful after a while and left, and the rain kept on outside but the sky was lightening. The fat lady jolted out of there as soon as she could.

"Lord," she sighed, "this has been a five-martini night," and she tied one of those clear plastic hood-like things around her chin, patted herself on the head and walked out with the grocery bags bouncing against her beefy legs. She

would get home and fix a strong drink, smoke a cigarette and call her sister on the phone, starting off with "Honey, you will not believe...", her K-mart sweater still swallowing me by the frozen juice, where I sat waiting for someone to tell me what to do. Weren't we supposed to exchange phone numbers or share our feelings or hug or something? I felt cheated and decided to eat something greasy and mope. A stock boy looked the other way as I bagged some fried chicken nuggets and maraschino cherries. On my way past the check out lines I shoved a trashy girl magazine with a horoscope special and a pouting anorexic on the cover into my bag, then dragged out of the store without paying. They owed it to me.

The rain was still dripping down in the empty parking lot, slopping into oily puddles. Wrong. It should have cleared up the minute the cops took Ray away. The birds were supposed to be noisy; it was supposed to be April and not November. Being held up would have agreed with me, infused me with that survivor glow. Handsome men milling about the parking lot would say "Hello, you're amazing; very brave. How about some breakfast?"

The car would have started right away, without needing a good smack on the battery with a snow scraper. I glanced in the rearview mirror: my eyeliner bruising a half circle under one eye, my unbrushed teeth. The dress had black water steaks running down it, the cheap fabric ruined forever. I blew a kiss at my reflection and drove the six blocks to my place, and just as far to find a spot nowhere near my door. Men with briefcases and umbrellas and ties and women in suits and sneakers brushed past on the sidewalk, hurrying to catch the morning bus to work. The same thing as usual. The same thing as every weekday morning, except that day I was a homeless-looking fairy freak going in the opposite direction, running towards the bathtub and ajar of maraschino cherries.

"I've just been robbed! Let me explain!" I wanted to scream, "I was held at gunpoint! That's why I'm like this!" My hands waving in the air for emphasis, "I'm not crazy!" But I was a dirty young woman wearing a Halloween costume in the middle of November with a brown plus size sweater that reached the knees. So I hiked my skirt up and ran the rest of the way, past the sane, dry business people, up my steps.



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