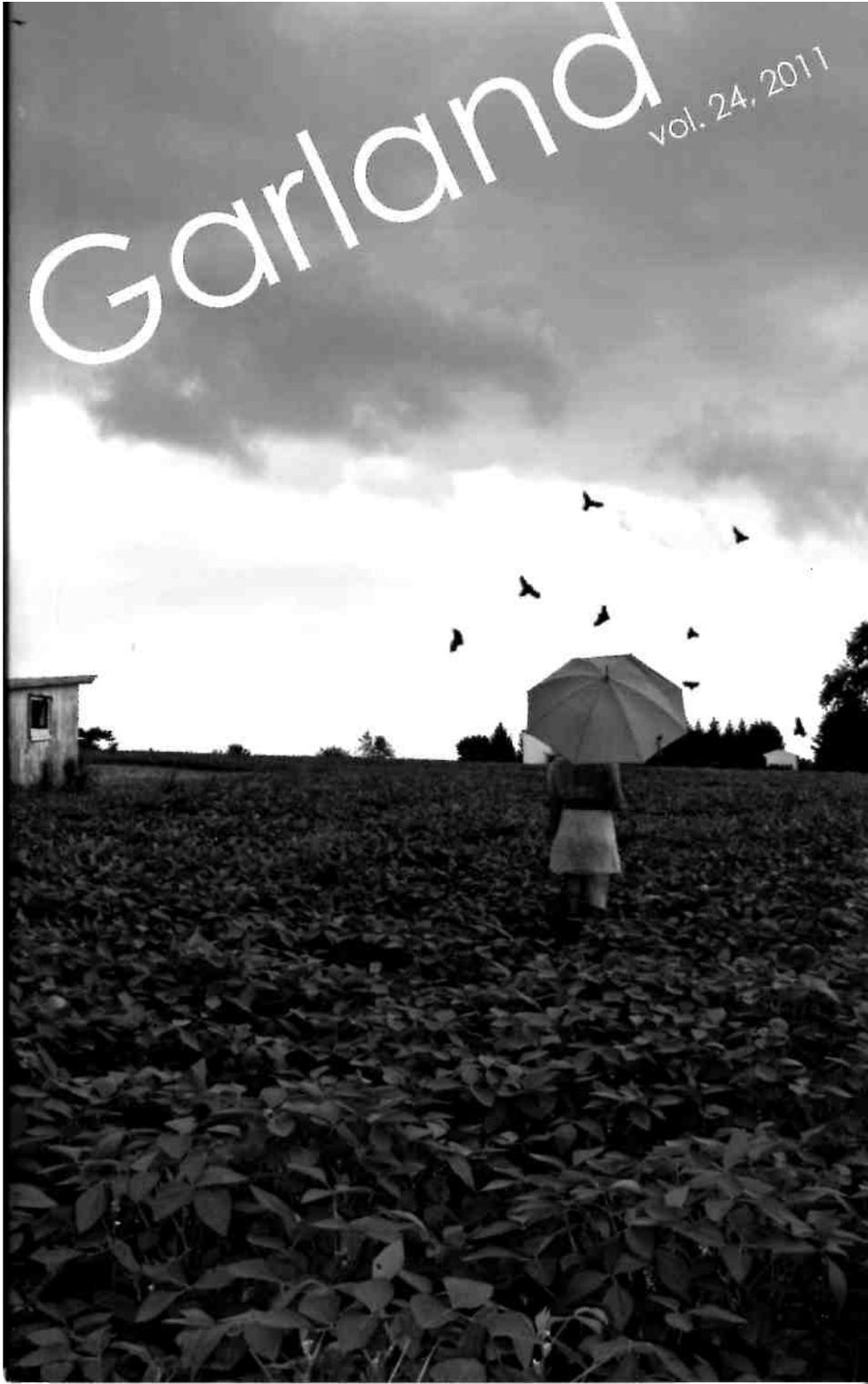


Garland

vol. 24, 2011



Garland

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Editor's Note

Recently, a writing professor asked my class, "Why do you write?" A spirited discussion ensued. We gave thanks for the books, teachers, relatives and friends who encouraged our habits of scribbling. We wondered collectively at the ways writing helps us to think, to feel, and to live better lives. We concluded that we write because we must.

Yet, writing is hard work. Writers, moved by some impulse—the beautiful, the tragic, the simple, the complex—to put pen to paper, must expend energy and patience as they sculpt and shape, push and pull words together and apart to create the final piece. In this year's edition of the Garland, the students at Loyola University Maryland have presented you, after much labor, with a treasure chest of wisdom, humor, grief, and wonder. We hope you enjoy its beauty and its value.

I'd like to thank the staff for their enthusiasm and commitment to our project. This journey would not have been nearly as enjoyable or productive without you! I'd also like to thank our faculty moderators, Ron Tanner and Jane Satterfield, and my fellow editor, Jen Nordmark, for their support and encouragement along the way. Most of all, I'd like to thank the writers for their honesty and dedication to their stories and their craft. We are all better for the way you have answered the call to write, to create, to truly live.

Let us celebrate together the hard work of our classmates, students, and friends.

Catherine Wisniewski
Editor in Chief

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The cover photograph, entitled The Crows, is by
Nicole Ferrari.

Poetry

Abby Wagner |

The Magician

He owns glazed eyes,
Eyes lacquered, like there's a film of dust covering each iris,
 Like the magic left a long time ago.
The caption says he's a magician, relying on his hat
(A haphazard collection
Of buttons and coins and shells)
To attract the crowds.
I imagine he used to boldly announce himself
With a smile,
 With eyes that drew in even the cynical.
 The caption doesn't mention his eyes.

The magician does not look ready to tell you something:
 Everything he's said and worked for is outdated.
He's already run through every card trick,
Performed for every dollar,
Made every appeal left in his heart
 For magic.
Magic—forgotten, so antiquated.
 An old word, coated in modern Indian dust.
 Modern India, with skyscrapers and manufactured miracles.
 Modern India, with modern magic.

I hear the magician's heavy breathing,
The echoes of tired sighs amongst strangers:
 The deep inhale of a lone man
 Still performing, still resigning himself
 To the death of his trade.
I wish this photo showed the shaking, wrinkled hands,
 The hands that made magic.
There's a beard, knotted,
Some bright beads,
The hat of course.
 And then, the magician's eyes,

Filmy, exhausted, and unforgiving
Of a world that forgot magic—
Or changed its definition of the word.
I think, if he could, the magician would walk away,
(Slowly, and never turning back)
Walk off into the rice fields beneath the sticky Indian sun,
Raise his arms quietly above his head,
Clap,
And shift into magic dust.

Abby Wagner |

The Pigeons

A violet gleam on the thick feathered neck,
Two darting black eyes, sharp
As a pencil point.
Orange razor beak pressed to the window glass,
Your profile changes by degrees
As you cock your head,
Mechanically.
Stare me down, strut off:
A perfect pigeon dance.

Then you alight,
Scoop the sky downward
And rise to the nearby rooftop
To point those dark eyes
Toward the treeline, the clouds, back at me.
Eyes narrowed, always.

Restless spindles, your legs click with each step.
You look casual at first,
Walking towards your fellow,
Another pigeon set on the edge of the brick precipice.
Then your beak shoves
Into the soft grey of the other.
A rapid, fierce gesture
That urges him off the brink of building.

Again and again,
You drive him back
Until
For a moment,
He falls,
Slips
Downward
Before feathery fingers spread horizontally,
Hitch onto the breeze
And pull him to a nearby branch.

I look back at you,
Squatting silent and proud.
A plumed mass before bright skies.
Almost looking as if you would have pushed anyway,
Had your brother not had wings.

Lauren Keller |

Lightning Bugs

Summer never stops moving,

even at night.

It's restless, too, you see,

the promise of adventure

wakeful, pressing.

If you close your eyes quickly enough,

the fireflies form tendrils,

lazy, delicate.

They're sparks rising from

trimmed green flames.

Trick candles,

but more romantic.

Quick! Finish the jam!

I need to light my way

into morning.

Cathryn Dutton }

If You're a Fish, I'll Catch You

When you died and I hid behind blackberry branches
Staining my white t-shirt with purple blood and tears,
She told me that it would be okay, that there were other fish in the sea,
Because we were seven and it seemed like the right thing to say
But it wasn't and after I pushed her to the ground,
Throwing piles of dirt and blackberries on her,
Breaking the silence with my strained screaming voice,
Crying over and over, "He's not a fish, he's not a fish!"
Our mothers found us, mine pulling me off her
Hers telling mine I was unstable, a harm to myself and others,
That I should go home and rest and process what had happened,
Process that my best friend had been crushed by a disease so brutal
That he would never be able to lie out under the clouds with me again
Eating blackberries and watching puffy white fish swimming in the
summer sky,
And later as I lay in the wet grass, I looked for you in the blue ocean
above.

Cathryn Dutton |
The Fall

She fell hard
With outstretched hands to catch her
Scraping palms,
Painting gravel red,
And ripping jeans like it was a fashion statement.
The bridge of her nose caught a lip in the pavement
Cracking like stained glass,
Sharp against the incandescence of the hit.
Her mouth filled with copper as
Tearful eyes boiled over.
Hot dirty hands groped for air,
Lifting herself up.
Pain, embarrassment, fear
They pulsated through her body like warm mercury.
Time ran circles
The earth spun
Hurling past faster than a cannonball
So many people yelling, running, laughing
She stood stagnantly solo among them
Feeling less than real
And wondered

Past swing sets and jungle gyms

And the round red kickball that caused her demise,

Where is she?

Where's my mommy?

Christian Rees |

Salaryman (Pens)

He pressed the pen to his arm
inking the skin, stopping just at the wrist,
letting phrases curl and fall
as leaves from his palms and
fingertips. It was some sort of daily
planting, quick to Spring, words blooming
and rendering, but soon blighted, the fading
letters wilting, waiting to be washed
clean moments later in the scalding
rush of morning
preparation. Everyday he did
this. Everyday the pen left
his arm and each day
he watched ink stream into runnels
at his feet. But everyday
the water left a vine behind;
no more than a dot at the beginning,
then a line and then letter until phrases
played themselves across the skin,
in black trailing fibers.

And soon not even the showers
and scrubbing baths could lift
the words from his skin. After
a year the letters even left him,
replaced by a solid stand of black
embedded ink. And the volumes of
senseless phrases spread up to his shoulder
and down his chest, spilling creepers
of penned lines across the whole of his
body. A year after that he stooped halfway
through his morning ritual to pluck
some piece of caught hair from the drain
and drew instead a coil of skin
that twisted around a hundred thousand times
to pile the remains of what was once
his flourishing body. In the mirror
as he wiped the fog away he saw
that he was no longer there and all
that remained was an inked man,
his skin whispering with the fluttering
leaves of tightly grown words.

Christian Rees |

GOD-WRESTLING: *for the
'Unholy Seven' & all these years*

That day you and I wrestled,
rolling and kicking and pulling
up grass and packed,
black handfuls of earth,
it was as if a mountain
had crashed from on high
and pinned us,
beetles, to the dirt.

how could thoughts rumble
in our brains? There was no room
except for the exultation of the July
of other things
children might wonder at; ants
sprung fresh from their hills,
stormed out among the blades
to crawl up our shuffling feet.
They found purchase

there on our trembling heels
and climbed before we lifted once again
to jab and throttle. Brothers tumbling
over the slowly spinning earth,
our feet grasping at the sky
and trees and ground and back around again
at cirrus clouds and full-bloom pines and
crab grass and again toward each ant
making way along our calves. Our eyes
keenly focused on each and every thing,
for no more than a moment at a time.

Christian Rees |

Cosmetics & a Thorazine horizon
(to Dr. Walter J. Freeman II and his 3500)

Sometimes I would do five or seven in one sitting, the proper way, of course, and the proper way to do it is quite simple; with the thin steel pick pierce the right tear duct, angle slightly upward, until the pick stands out and gently up, a straight, standing tear, and then tap it firmly into the prefrontal cortex- repeat on the left eye, quickly, within seconds of the first, to make it as efficient as possible. In my gauze mask and baggy white medical shirt, cotton and full of medicinal notions, I would sit, the California air pressing in against the waiting room, slipping through the cracks between widows and their cills, brushing up against husbands and their wives in paper dresses, with yellow helpers in their purses and the appearances they are constantly reminded of, I would sit on my stool with the single field of a medical cot at my knees and roll up my sleeves. They would lie, angled up, and I would gently touch their chins and then their throats, to guide their heads back and against the pillow ... I would do a handful of these sets of sevens or fives, dozens waiting and huffing California air and thorazine off of the horizon, before my forearms would tighten sharply in cramping... the action took on a facile defect, a simple kink so I would switch hands to make a game of it, to take a census of my right brain, to remedy my professions evolving ease... a double tapping, a pair of blood bruised eyes and a complimentary pair of drug-store shades; tap them out in an assembly line while the nurses, they call me a Henry Ford... this way cost me a license and this way gave way to the West Coast, to my modern office filled with modern ideas on how to get through the day. They can attribute the whole of a New York neighborhood (thousands!) to my work, to this way, all those bodies for medicine; but after all it was a choice, something they chose, and I had no say, only my professional opinion... I would take a break between groups of five or seven, smoke a Winston or read an article from LIFE, seventy long low breaths, a soft squeeze of my hand, then back to the stool and my nurses and the women in their lines and their paper dresses... I have adapted to these days now that I am out of the hospital, now that I am private practice, now that I see only housewives, treat in cosmetics, for appearances, to numb them and cut a cognition or two... valium and more drastic methods grew quickly, but they're not for me, I will

wash my steel picks and lay them in their case and sit them on my desk, to recline... the woman's membrane will fuse, first the outer and then the inner, and tighten into pinhead cultures of scar tissue and my nurses will place dime-store sunglasses on her nose and send her on her way...

Lisa Scott |

Perched

I remember that time when I opened the window. Next, the screen. I climbed out onto the roof of the third floor. I let my feet dangle breezily, just over the boundary of the window's frame. I wasn't going to jump or anything, I just wanted to sit.

It's not like three weeks ago when you explained poetic suicide, and how you studied your face, your dark features, your alcoholically leathery skin, your bony cocaine induced shoulders, on New Years' Eve, alone, and ruminated on the idea that maybe you should just kill yourself.

You went to see Chuck Berry and tripped on ecstasy anyway, but I suppose that is irrelevant.

Did I mention that it's not like that? Why? It's not like that because I only do cocaine bi-monthly, and drink tri-weekly. It's not like that because I tripped on ecstasy on New Year's too, but I thought of the shuddering of the moving stars as I stood supplanted on the wooden balcony, I thought of the expanse of the reverberating sky, I thought of the resulting warmth of prickling MDMA coursing throughout my veins, but not once did I consider the poetic nature of suicide. Did you hear me? I said, not once.

And I can speak candidly of New Years and that time as a child on the roof because as I look into your deep blue eyes, I see darkness that I do not see in my own.

It was you who barged in my room and saw me perched there; it was you who cried as you held me, warm tears of desperate concern streaming steadily down your impressionable face, as I repeatedly insisted upon my normalcy.

And I know I will see your smiling face in a few minutes, but will you see my desperate concern? Will you too insist upon your normalcy and my trivial over reaction?

Perhaps, no.

Perhaps a decade more will pass, where I will know, as you did, the darkness of my soul, as the idea of poetic suicide reeks from every pore in your body.

I will wait, as you did, for intangible time to heal us both.

Sylvia Fox |

When you exist only in photographs

Now that the moment is over,
I don't imagine the cruel, persistent beeps
Of some cold machine counting down:
T-minus 10 seconds until...
That's been erased, replaced by
Serene silence in a sterile room
A last moment to hold onto.
The sound of half a breath.
Inhale--

Arianna Valle |

Mondays

There's a man in the back corner of the café.

Nestled between the shelves, with spines of books bent and tattered,
dangling

from the wooden precipice.

If he's there, I know it must be Monday.

The coffee is always extra strong on Mondays, the barista's small
gesture of charity to the loyal customers.

He sits quietly,

always alone.

My breath catches each time the small bell on the door signals
someone entering,

I hope that they turn past the counter and join him.

His eyes look tired, the eyes of an old man sunken into the face of
someone

Who should not look so fatigued.

I wonder what his story is,

The question "how are you?" caught behind my teeth,

never uttered.

Monday after Monday I hesitate as my hand wraps around that warm
cardboard cup (bad for the environment, I know, but those reusable
ones are always forgotten in the backseat of my car.)

I hesitate for a moment, look at him... his brow furrowed intently at the
novel in hand, shake my head,

and walk out the door.

Then one morning the obituary reveals the death of a man,

And the sight of that name causes me to weep into my strong Monday coffee.

The man in the corner

Comes over, and offers me his handkerchief.

A sympathetic smile flashes over his face, offering an "Are you okay?"

along with his checkered piece of cloth.

A forced smile and a nod of my head is his cue;

The chair squeaks as he settles back into comfortable routine.

I offer a small wave as I exit, clutching a damp fragment of proof

that humanity isn't dead.

Mary Heneberry |

Skeletons in My Closet:
for the abused

I pass the dark closet and feel
almost nothing today of the old
history it houses.
The haunting memories of a beaten child threaten
my sanity should I live a lifetime,
but I can't dispose of the bruised bones
I've piled so high.
I am callused, having mutated
enough defenses to thwart
off someone like you—tougher than my closet's old,
splintered doors—I feel safer. These memories,
never abandoned like most decaying bones.
Instead these skeletons lie waiting
and undeveloped as the muted
child I once was; isolated and preserved, having no time
to build immunities against the threat
of trauma, against the tormented feelings

and abuse bestowed by an enraged adult. A mutant
I am, distorted by the boney
knuckles that have mangled my soul.

Charity Smith |

The Castro

Adolfo had it first, only he didn't know it. No one did. Back then we didn't even know what "it" was that loomed as the object of our ignorance. Still, something stalked us in the throes of the nightlife—dragged us, weighted, through our days, latched on to us as a cough that just wouldn't shake loose. It took hold as the silent, silent partner. Then the news broke: ABC, CBS, CNN....before the advent of reality TV, network news anchors birthed our reality from the soft-glowing wombs of tele-prompters. From Koppel and Cronkite and Jennings, we suckled the knowledge of Adolfo's terminality and our own, incurable actuality.

In the streets, as word of this new infectious acronym radiated from the ground zero of our own backyards, they protested. Assembling outside our clinics, our bars, our churches, our homes, Fear came bearing picket signs. At us they slung their colorful epithets turned epitaphs. To them we were Radicals, queers, or faggots—Yellow-bellied, Gay-ass mama's Boys, Infested with every manner of Venereal disease possible. Freaks that would reap what they had sown. But even as they advanced, we held our ground, reminding them that our blood was thicker than their resolve. Terminality protected us, the marks and sores of our disease kept us safe.

Daily we watched as the death toll within our sickly hamlet grew. Outside, the body count that steadily tallied our lost Family of fighters, climbed higher and higher. While quietly, on the inside, our T-cells nose-dived lower and lower. Despair set in. Friends grew scarce, jobs were lost, hope followed suit. Betrayed by our bodies and our families, as both dwindled down to the skeletal remains of an idea. Ourselves became conceptual, our cells—abstract. With no one to have traversed this road before us, we existed only in the diagnostic theoretical. We were all relative.

Science fought to keep up, to quell our fears, to put an end cap on our mad dash to the finish line. And we fought, too—fought to keep our hair, our nails, our names out of the papers, pneumonia out

of our lungs. With fever, we fought our veins in vain. But we knew. No longer did we take to the streets, banners high, flags flung, leather boys hung. We traded in parade routes for paper gowns, drag queens for morphine, Eros for Thanatos. Until one day we just knew. It was time. And so we went, one-by-one, from the receding, war-torn hands of The Castro to the waiting arms of Adolfo.

Tucker Brown |
Sabbath

Our world is bent weary

and bleeding broad

On us, our backs

a burden carried

long

in the day

in the cold

in the chaffing wind,

as cracked, worked flesh

mimes

fissures of earth

deep chasms

And we toll

on and on

We toll to each other the mortal costs of our loads

decaying

Hatred becomes us

Violence becomes us

Death bears bones' dust

ground to chalk

Yet remains the yoke

of our funeral rhythm

We worship though it were God

the idol of our killing pace

Here, now

To free and to save

A birth brings kindling

Out of which the true God

Spins these

We,

wild beings

into the world and still spinning

Our redemption is a seed within the doom we carry

April Nicotera |
Sunflowers

They are sun worshippers.

They stand by the hundreds,
pretty heads turned up in awe
of His beauty.

Their ritual is sacred.

Pious.

Unchanging.

Their vigilance only pauses for
a brief moment when the sun
disappears to light the other
hemisphere.

They keep their thin feet
crusted in warm soil.
They do not move from their
Holy Temple.

If He allows rain, they will drink.

If He prescribes famine,
they will starve.

It is His way, or no way.

They grow in flocks -
families beget others
and others beget still more
and their seeds are all over the
green-and-gold earth.

They have captured every field
for their worshipping.
They sit in silent prayer
meditating and sucking in
some sort of cosmic energy.

When the Outsiders come,
they all laugh.
They laugh because these Worshippers
are naked and starving themselves,
faces pressed into the glare of
a golden smudge that

galvanizes each morning.

There are those who stray.

Those who grow weary of the constant
gleam, the constant vigilance.

They turn baked faces down in defiance,
golden hair casting shadows over
once-pious faces.

And they will die.

The Sun has mandated it.

If Jezebel does not learn
to stare into His gaze lovingly,
she will burn from the nape of her
ungrateful neck down for her sins,
He says.

Jezebel dies and becomes an example.

Withered and brown and fragile,
she is a heap of mulch in the earth,
feet still crusted with soil.

The others scorn her
"See what becomes of those who
do not trust in Him?" They whisper.
And for a while, no Follower strays.
Everyone keeps faces peeled on
A blinding orb of UV rays.

Time passes.
Even the purest begin to wilt;
the infinite heat is too much.
Chastised for their hatred,
the pious slowly fall and begin a
sweet and gentle decay.

Meanwhile, a young Follower is
turning her head to watch these
slow deaths.
She is prying her eyes from His glare
Forgetting to fear His burning wrath
In her brief knowledge of the world.
And the cycle continues.

There will always be a Jezebel.

Kelly Hatter |

On Moira's Autism

Perfect ringlets shine,
strands coated in glass.
Expressive eyes meandering,

for what?

A pair of fragile lips moves,
struggling to give reason to the clamor upstairs.
The words are strained by the barricade--
the wall confining the brain, regulating the mouth.

I wonder if the heart
longs to thrust its contents,
to spill itself forward,
to make itself known.

The lack of explanation befuddles bystanders
who know not what it all means.

Kelly Hatter |

On the Swings at the State Fair

The top of the ferris wheel is aglow with mostly pinks, some neon greens, vibrant oranges.

Its passengers are 8th graders, who are probably kissing.

I can see the tops of peoples' heads, some are bald, some wear hats, some have long hair that has clearly been styled, but is now becoming frizzy from the humidity in the August air.

I am spinning so quickly, I cannot tell if they are acquaintances of mine, or simply look like kinds of people I would know.

The skyline is black, the brightness of the fair's lights rendering the stars invisible.

Adrenaline is pumping, the speakers are blaring pop music, young hearts are beating rapidly, older hearts are fond and reminiscing.

I see bright booths that sell fried foods, smell the salt and sugar.

I swing past the tent which houses "The World's Smallest Lady."

I feel as though my feet may touch the roof. My stomach hurdles.

My brother says she isn't that small--it's a rip off.

I see buildings in the distance, but my eyes strain to read the signs.

I crane my neck to see what is behind me: my friends faces are priceless, hair blowing from the momentum, we are weightless like the summer itself.

Photography

Nicole Ferrari

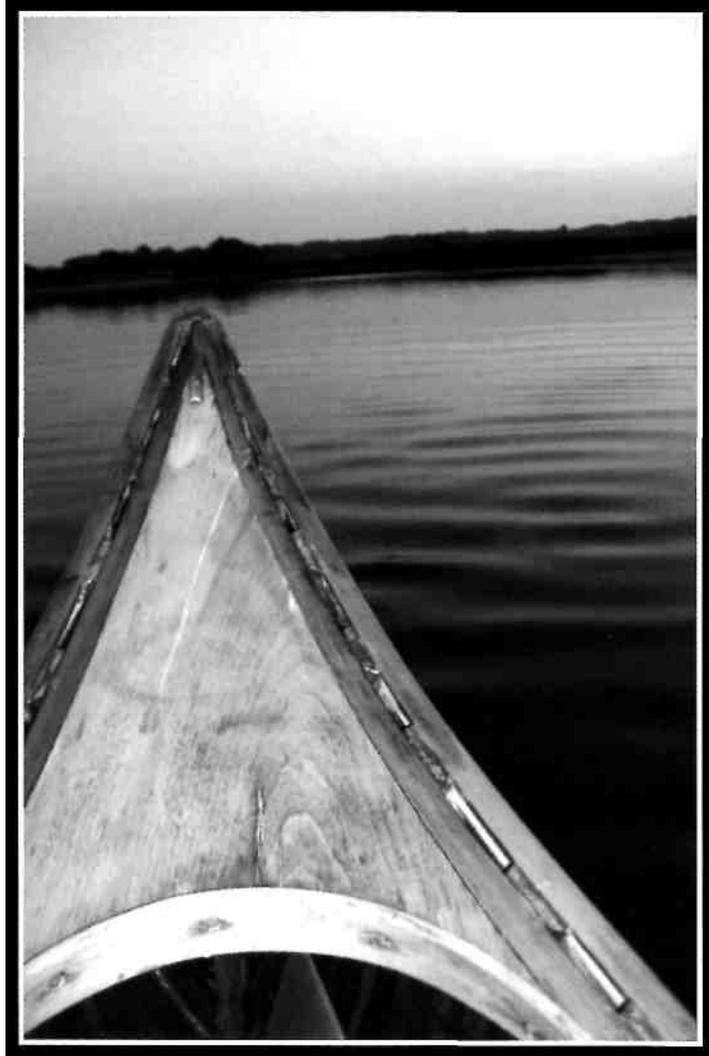
Yellow-Leaf Trail



*Meat Slab, Pumpkin
and other Offerings*



Nate Thibeault
Mickey Finn



Spurwink



Megan Toth
Christmas Concert Hall



Lone Bug



Arianna Valle
Rainbow Road



Silly Lucas



Fiction

A door opened and closed behind me. I fought the urge to turn to see that he was actually there, and looked down at my magazine.

"Better late than never," I sighed, so that he wouldn't know I was worried. "Care to tell me why you're home so late?"

Davie must have thrown his book bag against the wall just inside the living room; a thud reverberated into the kitchen. Even Gus, his fish, whose bowl was situated on the counter beside me, jumped at the disruption.

"Frank wouldn't let me leave until I finished the thirteenth level," my seven-year-old finally replied, as he stomped up to the refrigerator and opened the door.

"Gross," he grumbled. He must have seen the pesto on the second shelf. It was at his eye level. Just as he closed the refrigerator door I looked up from my magazine to see that he hadn't deprived the shelves of any of their contents.

"Kitchen's a little messy," he commented after he had taken a look around. Lifting my glass of water to my lips to hide my smirk, I regarded him calmly after I regained my composure.

"Mommy's been a little tired."

Nothing surprised me more than his observational skills—he snatched any opportunity he could to mention how to improve the cleanliness of a space. Oddly enough, I've never been bothered by it; I guess I've been too enchanted by his spellbinding personality to mind. Perfect is as perfect does, I thought to myself, as he took the seat across from me.

"Question," he stated, out of the blue, as he rested his chin on his fists.

"Remember that day two weeks ago when you told me I had to go to Frank's and I stayed there for a really long time?"

Suddenly, my heart, which hadn't skipped a beat since the diagnosis, thumped hard against my chest; my secret, kept just out of his reach for several God-given months, threatened to crumble. That Saturday, at nine in the morning, Trish had picked him up so that I could get my round of chemo. Usually

it only took a few hours with the wait, but the treatment center was ridiculously busy that day. I nodded avoidantly, and licked my finger to turn a page in my magazine.

"Veteran's Day," I replied, but corrected myself to respect his teacher's request that we speak in complete sentences: "I remember that Saturday was Veteran's Day."

"Well, I want to go with you next time... to the hospital," he said confidently. He nodded after a moment, as if to confirm his decision, and he hopped off the chair, took a box of pasta from the bottom cabinet, and reopened the refrigerator door. X chromosomes didn't carry knight-in-shining-armor genes, I remembered, as I looked down to my magazine and bit my lip to hide my quivering smile.

"You only have to boil the water for me Mom, okay?" Zippered bags of pesto found their way onto the counter.

Abby Wagner |

Saving Finches

Well, this is certainly different. I've already begun to regret my decision to come here as soon as one brown leather shoe hits the tile floor of the restaurant. But I am registered. I've paid the fifteen dollars, a measly fee I'd be willing to lose, but it occurs to me that they probably need even numbers of men and women for this type of thing, and I'm registered, so here I'll stay.

My initial causes for trepidation abound before me in crisp, stylish clothes and carrying about them an odor of expensive cologne and youth. I touch the hem of my brown tweed suit cautiously. My blue bowtie feels tight around my neck—it seemed to have fit so well in the store. I mostly bought it because the sales lady had said it looked nice. The way she doted on me over something as frivolous as what to wear around my neck had made me wonder for a moment, until I caught sight of her wedding band. It was a shame; she certainly was gorgeous.

The other men are mostly in blue jeans and button down striped shirts or sleek fitted sweaters. Some of them have hair that falls over their ears and grazes the tops of their eyes. My old pals in East Baltimore wouldn't have had a thing to do with me with those long locks. And Charlotte certainly wouldn't have given me a second glance. We all had crew cuts, and I still do, even in my 70s. As I rub the back of my neck with my hand and feel the freshly trimmed grey hair, I watch the other men here size each other up, like roosters or peacocks. This is slightly amusing. However, I return again to the fact that I am clearly over-dressed, pitifully unaware of the current fashion trends, and just so old, utterly and embarrassingly old. The women are young too, and look so put together and light and airy, almost ethereal, so graceful and spritely.

The restaurant is dimly lit, I suppose to induce a romantic atmosphere. I worry for a moment that maybe there is food caught in my teeth, but that's probably impossible, seeing as I brushed them three times before coming here. I even brought out floss for the occasion. There's music playing, and I tap

my foot for a moment, humming along to Duke Ellington, until a wailing female voice comes out clear over the radio and I realize that they aren't playing jazz at all. Adjusting my thick black glasses that look decidedly less sleek than the thin dark rims of the greasy Clark Gable type nearest me, I check my watch. It should be starting any minute. The suspense of the breath before the plunge has always struck me as far worse than the plunge itself. It was that way the day I asked Charlotte to go with me, when the nervousness got to me and I blurted it out so quick that both of us flushed. I remember the way it felt standing on the doorstep of her rowhome, and how her hair was pinned up, and the way her eyes looked when she smiled.

A woman parts the crowd and approaches the front of the restaurant, ringing a small bell. "Alright everyone, we are going to begin in just a moment," she tells us. "Please check in with me or Martin, and happy speed dating!" She looks like the kind of woman who always knows just the right person to set you up with. The times may have changed, but a busybody's still a busybody. In fact, it was that old busybody neighbor of mine who told me about this speed-dating event, and for once, I decided to listen to her. Ever since Charlotte passed, I'd been half-hearted with my attempts to find someone else, even after decades of being alone. This seemed like the forced dating situation I needed.

The hostess and Martin are working their way through the crowd, everyone's still sizing each other up, and the men seem to be enjoying the opportunity to slyly examine women who are busy giving their names to the coordinators. I can't help staring a bit as well, but I believe that Clark Gable leers a bit more than I do. I imagine a time when I might have slugged a guy for looking with such indiscretion at Charlotte or my sister. He's leaning back against the bar, guiltlessly looking every girl in here up and down. I watch him tap the shoulder of the guy next to him and make a lewd gesture in reference to one of the women, laughing it up.

Suddenly, Martin jovially shoves a beer into my hand. I haven't had much to drink in a while, though I used to have a few beers with the guys all the time. And when Charlotte and

I tied the knot, the champagne flowed at our reception. She did look beautiful in that white dress, with the lace sleeves and the hem that swung around her calves as the big band played all our favorite songs. I felt like Fred Astaire that night, I smile a little to myself, and then realize that Martin is looking at me quizzically.

"Alright, now, what's your name?" he asks again, and I reply.

"Ok, Sean, you're starting at table 11," he tells me. "Here's your Match Card. Got the gist of it?" I wonder if he has asked everyone this, or if he is more concerned for me. I can't completely blame him. He probably first assumed that I wandered in mistakenly, late for the early bird special, or that I am just completely senile. I assure him, nonetheless, that I understand the basic concept of this spectacle.

There is already a woman at table 11, with long dark hair and a red dress that shows off some amazing gams. I slowly approach, beer in hand, and sit down across from her. The relief from all the pressure of standing on my knees is unbelievable, but I try not to show this. She smiles at me, and I feel awkward once more. I realize I am not who she had in mind for tonight. I fiddle with my bowtie.

The bell rings and our hostess cries, "Alright everyone, let the dating commence!"

I look across the table and push my right hand forward through the air as I introduce myself. For a half a second, I want to pull it back, wondering if shaking hands is the correct etiquette. I have no idea, but whether because it is correct or just out of pity, she takes it, shaking it firmly and saying with a slight hispanic accent, "I'm Raquel. It's nice to meet you, Sean." She smiles again. My stomach twists but I am slightly reassured.

"So, Raquel," I say, pausing to take in a deep breath. But apparently it was too deep a breath, because now I am coughing uncontrollably, one of those deep coughs that takes me by surprise now and again. I pull the monogrammed handkerchief out of my pocket and continue coughing, hoping I am not attracting too much attention. Do people even carry

handkerchiefs anymore? Raquel looks slightly concerned, but also as if she is trying to act as if this isn't completely out of the norm. As my coughing eases, I frantically race through my mind for some topic of conversation.

"Pardon me," I manage while still gasping for breath. "So, Raquel, what do you do for a living?"

"I'm a dental hygienist," she answers. She smiles again.

"Ah, well, that's lovely. You certainly do have nice teeth!" Damn, that sounded moronic. She is laughing though, as she replies "Well thank you, so do you!" and so I join in and laugh as well.

We talk more, with a few blunders here and there. I try to relax. This is only the first of these little dates, and I'm sure to get into the swing of things soon enough. I find that saying that I'm retired makes me feel and sound ancient, and make a mental note to speak of my past career in the present tense on the next date. I realize how much I used to rely on Charlotte's way of easing me into conversation and dispelling my nerves on our earlier dates. Six minutes is up, the bell rings, and I stand, since the men move from table to table in these things while the women stay seated. The cycle continues and I am captivated by the wonderful youth, these graceful little sparrows, the way they flutter as they shake their hair, how they perch on the chairs, the flight in their eyes. I wish I didn't feel so much like a scarecrow in their presence.

As I approach Table 2, I pass Clark Gable, who runs his fingers through his thoroughly gelled hair and brings over a large drink for his future date. My current date is stunning, a slight thing with reddish blonde hair and dark blue eyes. We shake and introduce ourselves. We talk about what we do, and if we like it. She talks about her volunteering, her love of kids, and her dog Ralph. She is captivating, and genuinely kind.

I notice that she seems almost as nervous as me. Her movements are swift and light. I ask her about Casablanca and The Maltese Falcon and we share a few moments talking about our shared love for those films. She smiles, and something about her eyes looks just like Charlotte's eyes when

she grinned or laughed. They squint up just a little, and the eyelashes meet in the corners, and the tiniest lines appear at the outer edges. She seems genuinely interested in me, and for a moment, I have hope. Then, inevitably, the conversation dies down. She asks me about my interests.

"Well, I'm a bit of an ornithologist," I say proudly. She looks a bit confused. "A birdwatcher," I clarify, and the light comes back into her striking blue eyes. She emboldens me enough, in fact, with her interest (or semblance of interest) to enter into the story of the cowbird's egg I had found in the purple finch nest in the wreath on my front door. "You see," I explain, "cowbirds leave their eggs in the nests of other, smaller birds, like finches. The cowbird egg hatches earlier than the finch eggs, and the cowbird baby is bigger than the finch babies. It pushes the baby finches right out of the nest or takes all of the food brought by the parents. Often, the cowbird is the only bird in the nest to actually survive."

By the end of this, though, I can tell I am losing her. And I haven't even told her about the fact that I had taken the cowbird egg out of the nest, deciding to save my family of purple finches. McKenzie's eyes are already fixed on the greasy Clark Gable I had noticed earlier. She sips on her cocktail and watches him. My position seems hopeless. But McKenzie is so beautiful and soft and sweet, and this guy seems, well, like a regular ass. I even notice his hand slightly graze the bare leg of the woman across from him as he smirks and offers to get her another drink. I let out a groan, and McKenzie looks at me.

"Are you okay?" she asks. She's probably thinking I need to be taken to the hospital, or, at my age, maybe straight to the morgue. I look at her and how utterly beautiful and young she is, thinking how those days probably are lost to me now, and how this will probably ruin a chance that I probably never even had. But I plunge.

"Really? Him?" I say with a slight incline of my head towards Gable. McKenzie's face flushes, the sweetest twinge of pink entering her cheeks. "The guy seems like a jerk. I'm not trying

to tell you what to do or anything, but he hasn't taken his eyes off this woman's, well..." I stumble, then move on, "well, cleavage, long enough to even know what her face looks like."

I think I might be sounding seriously old right now. But I somehow no longer care. McKenzie's mouth opens slightly, then closes again. The bell rings, and I give her a slight nod, stand up, and move to the next table.

After surviving the final rounds of speed-dating, I am utterly exhausted and impatiently sitting through the explanation of the website where we can see our matches and meet up with people we connected with this evening. The whole explanation seems superfluous in my case, and computers have always been unnatural and perplexing to me. I wait until the crowds dissipate a little, giving my knees a bit more rest time, then stand to go. As I step outside, I notice Clark Gable grabbing a girl's thin wrist. He helps her to stand as she staggers, and her loose arm flits through the air. I notice the strawberry blonde hair and when she turns, I confirm that it's McKenzie.

"You've got to have guys lining up left and right to date you, huh? You were my first pick in there right away," oozes the slick, greasy young man. McKenzie giggles. "Urn, really?" she manages to get out before giggling again. The scene makes my skin crawl, but there's not much I can do. It's clear that I am too old for McKenzie, too ancient to persuade her to choose me over him. I am obsolete; I have no place interfering.

Still, though, I find myself standing on the sidewalk, watching. He holds her tightly, too tightly and too close to him it seems. I see her try to push away from him, saying, "I should really get home." He eagerly offers to take her, and she looks unsure. She stumbles a little once more, and for just a moment, her eyes alight on me and we look at one another. I do not read any particular message in her eyes, or even recognition, but just the sight of those eyes, those eyes just like Charlotte's, is all I need.

I approach them, not sure what exactly I'm doing, just as a cab slows down. "Is everything alright here?" I ask. I hear McKenzie utter "Sean?" as greasy Clark pushes the small of

her back toward the taxi. "Yeah," he assures me, "it's all good. No worries."

"I don't know about that," I begin, "I'd just really feel more comfortable—"

"Listen," he returns with an artificial smile as his eye flashes, "everything's fine." He forces a laugh. "It's all good," he repeats. I look at McKenzie once more and adjust my glasses. Then, Gable gives her another push toward the cab, and she turns around to face him. She looks uncertain.

"McKenzie, what would you like to do?" I ask. Suddenly, Clark is in my face.

"Listen, man, she wants to go home and I'm taking her home. What is your problem? Is that such a big deal?" he says loudly and quickly. I stand my ground, staring him in the eyes, thinking how me and the fellas would have thrown him out of the bar. Then, McKenzie steps, or, rather, stumbles in between us. I am utterly shocked to see her turn to Gable, saying, "Maybe you'd better, you know, go. Like, go home. I'm fine."

Greasy Clark Gable gives one last fake smile and attempts to act as if he is unfazed by this latest development, but the rage of being rejected gets the better of him, and he glares at us before jumping into the taxi and slamming the door.

I stand there a moment, amazed. McKenzie turns to me, cocking her head slightly to the side like a sparrow. I'm not completely sure what to do, but she smiles at me with those eyes, eyes like Charlotte's, as I take in deep breaths, fuller and deeper than before.

"McKenzie, do you want to get some coffee?" I say, pointing across the street.

"Yeah. Yeah. But Sean, I can't date you. You know that, right? I just...can't." Her words are a little slurred, and she staggers a little closer to me as she says this.

"I know," I reply. We look at each other. "Do you still want coffee?"

"Yeah, yeah I would," she replies, as I put my tweed jacket over her tiny wingbones and thin shoulders, since she is shivering in her small blue tank top. She grabs my arm for balance, and we weave across the street to the diner.

Mackenzie Winebrenner |

A Bird's Eye View

I found her in a bush. Slumped against the abrasive brick wall of my neighbor's basement, my best friend Jess lay alone in the dark. Silently, I dropped to my knees beside her, crawled into the shrubbery and began picking leaves out of her hair. I did not scream for help or try to move her. Instead, I joined her; together, we lay silently in the deep black of a country night, ignoring the pokes of the branches in our sides and the ants crawling around our ankles. She wasn't dead; we were hiding.

When my fascination with flashlight hide and seek peaked, I was far past my elementary school years of naive backyard play. Instead, on Tuesday, November 3rd of my senior year of high school, I'd met my father after school, silent, posed, cold and dead in a funeral home. There was no goodbye, no poignant moment where I watched him breathe his final breath.

"Have a great day, I love you," were his last words to me. He left my mom, younger brothers, and I with a home, a loving community, and the memory of his eternal passion and enthusiasm for life, but he didn't leave enough for me to feel secure.

I spent the year constantly tracking expenditures on dinners out, while remembering his boisterous toasts to health and happiness at the same restaurant months before, sitting at my laptop in the nighttime silence of my house sorting through files of videos and pictures that would remind me of his howling laughter, and crawling into his closet, donning his Raven's football jersey, and cuddling his scent to sleep. I continued to excel in my academics, bite my fingernails, and eat our favorite food, buffalo chicken dip. However, though I acted the same on the surface, underneath my blanket of typical behavior I obsessed over the details of his body being burned in an incinerator. I recorded how many times I struggled to decide which tense to describe my dad when I spoke of him, and rummaging through his car, office and closet to find any last note, receipt, or McDonald's cup to remember him by.

For the nights I ran, eighteen and finally free from the SAT

scores, the group therapy appointments, and the tiny white anti-anxiety pills I swallowed every night, the moments I spent playing flashlight tag quickly multiplied to become an escape from my normal life and a weekly therapy of its own: a type of therapy that allowed me to express my fear of the unknown by hiding in and conquering new places, to release the power of my grief in my pounding footsteps and throbbing heart, and relive the memories I spent with my father: behind the yard where we threw lacrosse balls, beside the grill where he barbecued all summer, or in the shed where he stored his tools and gasoline for the lawn mower.

The summer after my senior year allowed me to stop thinking about; all of the directions I was thinking of steering my life, replacing the parts of my world I knew were missing, and worrying about how I could have prevented his death, and finally simply live it- my life, in the moment, alive, in my back yard.

We started a sort of unofficial league, a spontaneous meeting held always at my house, where the slope of two hills, laced with fences, trees, driveways, sheds and parked cars created our battle field. One of my friends would retreat to my basement, counting to some number or other, while the rest of us greedily stole the best spots to hide.

One night I lay behind a retaining wall at the perimeter of the yard, rocks leaving jagged imprints in my back. I saw stars, and I thought of how there were no boundaries within the universe- no brick wall surrounding the galaxy, no cap on my potential to succeed, no "end date" of my father's life like the one that adorned a dove ornament on our Christmas tree. I could look up in any direction I chose, swivel my head in a thousand ways, and no matter where I ended up, no matter if I planted my feet in China or Ghana or Mississippi, there was no end to what I could see. The sky went on forever, the stars limitless, uncountable, eternal. Was there an attainable heaven up there? How long until the very body I felt, breathing and sweating that very moment, would shut itself down and die? Had my own father thought about me in his last breath: the one

I didn't get to see?

I had questions; I had so many questions. Questions which probed why he specifically had died, and not my mom or grandma, what the blood clot looked like, how long we had to wait to throw his toothbrush away, if it was psychotic to want to keep the exact outfit he had worn when he died? As much as I wanted them answered, I mostly wanted to be able to stop asking them. I wanted to be 18 again. My body was tired, from waking up at 6 am to help get my brothers ready for elementary school, spending a full day at school, then going to work until night when I would drive forty-five minutes to therapy where, instead of contributing to the discussions, I simply wanted to eat dinner and sleep until life slowed down. My mind was weak too, from worrying about my mom's acclimation to a new job, from planning how to illegally leave school early to watch my brother's first football game, and from trying to be a parent and spouse to my brothers and mom when I wasn't. And so, desperate for any escape from the pressure and exhaustion I felt, I hid from everything.

Finally, I found a spot where my mind couldn't invade my freedom to run and play as I did as a child. The giant bush, the back of the shed, under the deck: all of the good spots had been used, predictable now. It was time for something new. I could get hurt, or fined, or scolded, but I'd discovered my spot, I knew.

I waited for the next round. We formed an anxious circle, each person ready to bolt for his favorite spot. As soon as I heard the familiar distant counting, I ran in the opposite direction as the rest. Once I reached the front of my house, I threw open my front door, bolted up the stairs and startled my mother who lay in bed with my two brothers, visible only by the soft glow of a muted TV.

"Don't worry, everyone's okay, I'm just...doing something really quickly. I'll shut the door. Love you!"

That was all she heard from me for a few minutes while she waited for me to run back down and into the game. She would have to keep waiting, for I was not going back

downstairs. Instead, I tore out the screen of my brother's bedroom window and climbed out onto the roof, which felt like sandpaper chafing against my tanned thighs. I smiled, sitting cross legged on top of the world, relishing in the success of finding a spot exclusive to me. I was lonely, but my perspective was quiet and calm, and I didn't want to run back into the screaming and running and worrying and hiding and panicking of the game. I didn't want to lose the peace I'd finally found.

I watched with a sense of accomplishment as minutes went on and my location remained a mystery. They looked under both cars, inside them, behind the mailbox, and then back to the cars. They looked, and re-looked, and then looked again. I was satisfied.

And then one saw me. He pointed and omitted a muffled laugh as his mouth dropped to form a perfect "O." With an arm thump to his partner, a quick upwards gesture towards me, and a knowing smile from both, I heard the door swing open once again and more feet pound up my steps. I smiled as they climbed onto the roof with me. There was no talking; we didn't need to.

It was power to me, a power I craved in my uncontrollable world, I was above everyone else, I knew things they didn't know, I was superior. I had found a place to hide from everything, friends included; on my roof, perched above the streetlights and the chaos of life, but below the power of the galaxy and all its impossibilities. I was only me, and nothing ventured out to reach me. I had no questions, or responsibilities, for what was left of my family lay asleep inside. I was neither child nor adult, student nor teacher, friend nor daughter. For the moments I waited to be found, the glow of vibrant stars creating an invigorating solitude, flashlight tag was bliss. I was free, and powerful, and for those moments, I did not need the answers. The tiny ants navigating their way through the maze of cracks in my driveway assured me that even while in the chaos I'd escaped, I could always find a new perspective to regain my peace and find my way.

Maria Handy |

Reading Between the Parentheses

As I sit on top of the pink, green and orange-spotted, fluffed-up comforter that decorates and covers my snow white bed sheets, which have just recently been bleached and made clean (probably too clean for my own liking judging by the fact that if I were to pull back the comfy comforter on which I comfortably sit, my legs would most likely be attacked by the itch of the annoyingly uncomfortable, highly irritating, and overall most terrible itch that anyone could possibly be forced to endure at one single, solitary second from that cheap dish soap that they-- and by 'they' I am referring to the obnoxious detergent companies, claim will leave me with soft, relaxing, wholesomely delicious smelling, clean sheets-- to whom I say, "Save me your countless lies, silly salesmen, and don't take me as a fool, for I am most definitely not a fool even though I have been, in retrospect, fooled, duped, coerced, and shanghaied into wasting my own hard earned money on buying your ridiculously overpriced, nonworking 'detergent' as you so dignifyingly rename the crap which you put on the shelves, and in all honesty, I, being allergic to most things myself, do not appreciate adding another item to the list of innumerable products that give me hives, make my skin tingle with a nauseating rash, and that I just want to destroy with every fiber of my being because of how pointless and useless they are") and are now tucked, safe and snug and sound, around the edges of my hard, yet surprisingly springy mattress, and my polished, oak and maple, blended-wood bed stands sturdily underneath of me (actually, the bed has maintained its posture well over the years and I am quite surprised that the frame itself has not begun to bend at the unfortunate growth of my waist that most unfortunately can be associated with the passing of time), I find that I cannot help but ask myself why I have spent the entire dreary, dull, boring, uneventful, mind-numbingly slow, incredibly lame and overall pitiful day in the way that I have spent it: sitting here, staring at the lit-up monitor screen of my expensive, brand new, silver HP Precision laptop with a built-in mouse and surrounding speakers, instead of

doing the chores around the house, which I know that no other hands will attempt (because "If the shelves are dusty and the pots don't shine, it's because I have better things to do with my time," seems not only to be the motto of my crabby, middle-aged, and bordering on a mid-life crisis husband, but also on my impressionable, young, and irresponsible children, of which there are five: Jimmy, age seventeen, blond hair, blue eyes (he looks just like his grandfather before the war!); Caroline, age seventeen as well, she's the younger of the seventeen-year-olds (I do not feel the need to mention that Caroline is Jimmy's twin sister because I feel that the fact that they are both my children and they both share the same age seems to imply the fact that they would, naturally and obviously, be twins (unless of course one of them was adopted, which sometimes Caroline speculates she is because her strange dental calamities, also known as bucked teeth, numerous freckles, and red-blond hair do not correspond, or resemble in any way the large, overcrowded, identical-looking and tight-knit family that she is a part of (and I cannot say I don't blame her for feeling like an outsider in our family because she does tend to be quite abnormal and strange in comparison to the rest of us))); Timothy, age fifteen, who is highly excited that next fall, when he turns sixteen, he will be able to apply for his permit in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, or, if you would prefer that I be more descriptive, his driver's license permit in the "Key-Stone State", the birthplace of the original Declaration of Independence (back when the capital was in good old Philadelphia, "The City of Brotherly Love") and the site of the prestigious George Washington's harsh encampment during that cold, dark winter of the Revolutionary War; Justin, named after his father (why we did not name our eldest son after Justin, my husband, I will never know; it seems odd that we would not name our eldest after his handsome, attractive, stunning, beautiful father, but instead honor our fourth child with that name), of whom there is not much to say other than that he refuses to wear his shoes at the dinner table and so help me- if I enter his room one more time and find another worm, frog, toad, snake, rat, pigeon, or pigeons, rather, similar

to the ones that I have found in that ten-year-old's room in the past, I will pull my hair out from the roots, stomp my foot on the ground and, with a stern face and a most un-Mary Poppins-like disposition, be unable to contain myself from shrieking out in horror and reprimanding him for bringing such fowl, dirty, and unattractive creatures into the house (not to mention for allowing them entrance with the incredibly disgusting smells that they track in with them from their wild, winding jungles of origin); and lastly, my youngest daughter, a pink, little girl named Emily Addison Alyssa Rose Christina Genevieve Rachael Abigail Amanda Wilhelmina, who is named for her grandmother, aunt, step cousin twice removed, and great aunt on my side, in addition to her grandmother, first cousin, uncle's wife's daughter, and aunt on her father's side, as well as after our next door neighbor and my maid of honor (comically, my roommate, Wilhelmina, also shared the same forename with my best friend growing up (my best friend, not my roommate, was my maid of honor when I was married to my husband twenty long years ago) and the three of us always thought it was so peculiar that two random strangers would meet and happen to have a name as obscure and as off the cuff as 'Wilhelmina', and when I had announced that that name was, in fact, my middle name, which indeed it is, a wave of giggles flowed through each of us and we were an inseparable threesome, a 'Peter, Paul, and Mary' if you will, from that moment onwards), whom although I haven't seen in a few years since she moved out of state in search of a new job and with that, a new and better salary, still is held tender in my heart, and whom I hope that one day will get to stare, gaze intently, or simply look at the magnificent child that has been named for her, and at two years old, Emily Addison Alyssa Rose Christina Genevieve Rachael Abigail Amanda Wilhelmina is the most adorable, bubbly, cute, delightful, eager, fun, gleeful, heavenly, innocent, joyful, kittenish, lively, marvelous, nice, outgoing, peaceful, quiet, responsible, selfless, ticklish, unbiased, valuable, whimsical, xylophagous (my husband will back me up when I tell you that she is obsessed with chewing on the oak of her fifteen-thousand dollar crib that mommy bought on sale from

Costco because Costco, unlike other places (I will not compare Costco to Walmart), has what the customer, in this case, a happily married, aging, but still youthful housewife, is looking to buy for her two- year-old ball of one hundred percent pure sunshine), yummy, and zany toddler that anyone in the history and future of the world has or ever will encounter in their entire life); because no one in the house besides myself cares to make any effort to change the horrible positioning of the damp, peanut-butter-smelling, no doubt germ infected clothes that litter the grimy, bare-foot-trodden-on carpets, or the cookie crumbs that clutter the kitchen counters, or the muddied up Volvo in the driveway, which could be easily scrubbed clean if the team made any effort (well, unless of course the team uses infertile detergent soap to do the job, then I am most certain that they would be destined to spend hours on end working outside in the hot sun to no avail), is exasperating and peeves me to no end (how unattractive the repetition of similar cliché's sounds), so I might as well get off of the computer and stop looking up pictures in various sizes, shapes, colors, and sparkles of Robert Pattinson, a stunning British actor and vampire, and do some real work.

Jen Nordmark |

Shark Food

INT. SHARK TANK-DAY

Small fish scatter as a shark, CHOMPS, slowly rises from behind a coral reef. His dark eyes are focused on his next meal. He charges forward with instinctive precision. Nearing his prey, his massive jaw opens.

BANG! Chomps hits a thick pane of glass.

INT. AQUARIUM - DAY

The shot widens to show a shark tank in a large aquarium. Chomps is in a large tank at one end of the room. It is lit with neon waves.

Corny posters for dolphin show times, aquarium events, and conservation efforts cover the walls. The dolphin pool is at the opposite end. On either side, tanks for fish, turtles, snakes, and frogs line the walls.

A MOTHER scorns her CHILD for licking the glass of a fish tank. A TOUR GROUP passes through the room. TURTLES lazily gaze at the crowds walking by. Elevator music fills the room.

Chomps stares angrily at his intended prey, a short, rotund TOUR GUIDE. As she speaks to her young tour group, the children stare at Chomps in drooling awe.

A plaque next to the tank reads "HERE IS CHOMPS, A TIGER SHARK. HIS FAVORITE FOODS ARE FISH, SEA TURTLES, DOLPHINS, AND EVERY NOW AND THEN...HUMANS!"

Chomps hovers, mouth wide open, behind the tour guide from inside the tank as she talks to her group. All Chomps hears are muffled, distorted voices.

His eyes are fixed on the tour guide, who keeps delivering an overly energetic lesson to the children on the tour.

As he stares, the squat tour guide transforms into a succulent stuffed swordfish on a silver platter that.

Chomps continues to stare, unamused.

The tour group continues on. Chomps glances around at the other animals in the room.

An OCTOPUS wraps his tentacles around a beach ball. A TURTLE nudges a tennis ball. DOLPHINS flip enthusiastically through hula hoops. Chomps has nothing.

A CLOWN, wearing a polka-dotted suit, matching hat, and red nose, stops in front of the tank with a rolling cart of balloon creatures.

He blows up a long, grey balloon and contorts it into the shape of a shark.

Chomps watches as the clown mockingly makes the balloon shark swim along the outside of the tank until POP! The clown sticks the balloon shark with a needle.

The clown laughs, but Chomps can only hear a muffled, obnoxious squeaking from behind the glass.

INT. AQUARIUM - LATER

Chomps spots another potential meal. He sees the group of dolphins splashing merrily at the other end of the room. He sprints towards them, looking hungrier and hungrier as he nears.

BANG! Chomps hits the glass again. The dolphins continue to play, unaware of the ravenous shark.

One DOLPHIN leaps into the air. Time seems to stop as Chomps imagines the dolphin in the middle of a large sub sandwich, surrounded by lettuce, tomatoes, bread, and held together with a toothpick.

He shakes away his hunger mirage as he sees the clown enter the room, holding an enormous hot dog. The clown stops in front of Chomps and takes a large, taunting bite.

Chomps is furious.

INT. AQUARIUM - LATER

Chomps loses energy. He drools watching the delicious passersby, but doesn't try to eat them.

A bucket of unappetizing, chopped up bits of grey fish is emptied into the tank. Chomps reluctantly swallows a piece of fish.

The other animals in the aquarium continue playing with their toys joyously.

Chomps, gazing at the other animals, is interrupted by a terrible pounding noise.

The clown is tapping loudly on the glass of Chomps' tank. Suddenly, the clown transforms into a giant turkey, still wearing the clown's hat and red nose.

INT. AQUARIUM - LATER

Giving up on the delicious aquarium guests and employees, Chomps turns his attention to the coral in his tank.

With his teeth, he carves a piece of coral into the shape of the clown. He takes a moment to admire his work, then furiously bites the sculpture to pieces, starting with its head.

INT. AQUARIUM - LATER

The clown sits on the top ledge of Chomps' tank, eating a bag of chips. Each time before he takes a bite, he dangles a chip in front of Chomps, then places it in his own mouth.

Chomps gets an idea.

He backs up to the opposite end of the tank, and readies himself.

He starts charging through the tank, not at the clown, but at the glass right beneath where the clown is sitting.

BANG! Chomps hits the glass and shakes the whole tank.

The clown is thrown off-balance and falls into the tank.

INT. AQUARIUM - LATER

Patrons of the aquarium go about their business. Kids run around, pressing their noses to the glass of different tanks. Tours pass through. Other animals play with their toys.

The tour guide brings a group past the shark tank, and children begin tapping on the glass. Chomps is unperturbed.

He swims in carefree laps around his tank, no longer paying attention to passersby.

Above him, the clown's red nose and hat bob at the top of the tank.

Patrick Madden |

I Don't Like Your Diction

Ros: What are you playing at?

Guil: Words. Words. They're all we have to go on.

-Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead

Tom's pale face only looked paler for the deep purple matte that was suffused from below his hopeless eyes. The contrast between his face and black-lipped orbits washed out the scarified grain of his skin. He had bright, miserable eyes. The dark brows hung slack and lethargic, but were pinched in the middle, about a third the way up his forehead. They gave the appearance that he was constantly, slightly, yet unexpectedly, being hurt. He had his head slanted thoughtfully towards a weathered American Psycho. He scratched the margins up with useless remarks, like "lucid" or "a damning indictment of our times and society."

Allen sat across the booth and looked disapprovingly through the currents of people that drifted around from one platform to another, a few clustered uncomfortably, waiting for the guy in front of them to finish up with the stupid machine. He kept looking in one direction but wasn't really thinking about anything. He was just waiting. His eyes pivoted towards Tom, who closed the book and bit into a cruller.

"You see the movie?" Allen asked, motioning to the book.

"The movies never do the book justice," he said on instinct, without really pausing to think.

"Well, I did. I didn't really get it," Allen said, unconcerned. After a moment: "It was pretty graphic..."

"Well obviously, it is a motion picture," Tom emphasized, smirking. He thought he was clever. Allen didn't. Another moment.

"Because everybody misuses that word, 'graphic' It means either relating to pictures or saying a piece of art is detailed or full. Well-limned. Of course a movie would be graphic in at least the first sense of the word. It doesn't actually mean that,

the way you used it. It's a fairly common mistake."

Allen went back to staring off in the direction of the trains, and Tom looked to him, slowly losing hope in any sort of response. He waited and picked the cruller up again.

"At least—"

"You knew what I meant," Allen said without turning his eyes but not with any sort of bitterness.

"I can understand you, yes, but you were speaking incorrectly. I know everyone uses it that way, but it's not the true definition."

"Actually it is."

"But the definition—" Tom pulled his hand back to get his cell phone.

"The definition is outdated. 'Graphic' means grisly or violent or whatever because that's what everyone means when they say it. 'That was a graphic movie. You can't let the kids read that. It is really graphic'. Instant comprehension."

"But their saying so does not make it any more true, necessarily. Everyone uses the word 'graphic' to convey that idea, but that doesn't mean it makes sense."

"That is exactly why it makes sense. That is actually exactly how languages work."

"If we can't learn to speak English correctly—"

"If we can't learn to speak Anglo-Saxon correctly—"

"What?"

"Languages change all the time. You can't just say that the rules that happen to exist when we're born are the permanent ones or that we stop now. Language is going to continue evolving..."

"So where do we draw the line? If we just toss words around haphazardly, and let all the synonyms on dictionary.com slowly blend together through continued abuse, we lose all precision, all coherence in the language."

"Eh."

"You can't honestly expect me to think you believe that."

Whatever I say is totally passable? Then why you yankin my chain, dawg?"

"Please don't do that."

"I'm making a point."

"Painfully."

"Still!"

"Well, it has to be understood by society at large. If there's only a group of people that can comprehend you, you're not changing the language - you're speaking nonsense. If people with two different accents can't understand one another, one or both are speaking incorrectly because the same language should be understood. Unless one group becomes isolated to the point that they and the outside world can't communicate anymore - in that case, they'd have a new language. That's how it works. And everyone says graphic, meaning grisly or violent."

"So if everyone talks like on 'Jersey Shore', that'd be the correct way of speaking, according to you?"

"I never said it was pretty."

Tucker Brown |

Yessir

Johnny sits on the fallen log that stretches from bank to bank across the slow creek. Rock, his dog, splashes in the water nearby, chocolate fur dripping wet and matted with silt.

Johnny skips stones and pauses between tosses to take in the murmur of the woods: the creaking of the loblolly and pine, the birds' whistle. Johnny is at home here. Rock his companion. The strangeness of the woods stirs.

He hears footsteps behind him, soft and nimble. Sissy. Johnny straightens and asks Sissy if he's home. Sissy says yup and tells Johnny to scoot. Johnny says yup and chucks a palm-full of rocks into the creek—PLOP—and searches his pockets for more, throws those in as well and closes his eyes. He feels cold, stiff. He relaxes, eyes still closed, and hops off the log onto the bank nearest the path home and lumbers up the hill out of the woods and towards his father who stands on the porch, staring vacantly across the tobacco fields. The evening call of the night critters starts softly, slowly swelling into a collective hum, sighing momentarily and then enveloping the fields, the farm, the woods. Johnny is walking up the path to meet his father.

Pa says, hey, and tells Johnny they're leaving. Johnny asks, where to, and his father says, somewhere, and Johnny says, yessir.

Johnny slides past his pa, swings open the screen door, and shuffles into the kitchen. Sissy is at the stove boiling peanuts. The Spanish kind. The salty, earthy air stings Johnny's nose. He tells Sissy he and pa are going out though he's not sure where. Sissy asks about supper and Johnny shrugs. She hands him a few biscuits. Johnny takes the food reverently. He hears his father's pacing on the old porch floor boards, wizened from nights of melancholy and contemplation. The creaking, like spectral moans, beckons Johnny. He runs to pa with the biscuits in hand. Time to go, pa says.

The doors of the car are swung wide and Johnny runs around to the passenger side, hopping into his seat, warm and sticky. He dangles his feet and swings them to the lip of the

dashboard. His father turns the engine. The car hums.

Pa reaches across to open the glove compartment and pulls out a bottle. He slumps into the folds of the driver's seat. He unscrews the top and brings the bottle to his lips, resting it there as if it were the source of breath itself. He takes a long pull and Johnny watches as the brown elixir disappears, drained.

They drive a while in the cooling though humid night and Johnny drifts in and out of sleep. His head resting on the passenger door. He feels his body slacken and mold into the contours of the car. He dreams.

Pa turns sharp down an unmarked road made visible by a break in the stand of pine trees. Johnny sits upright as the car slows to a crawl. He cranes his neck to see above the dash and notices a wooden shack, dimly lit by a pale light set above the front door. He turns to his pa who's cut the engine. Pa says, sit tight, and leaves the car. He enters the shack. Pa is gone.

Johnny keeps awake for a time, alone in the car amid the night critters and curious sounds sneaking through the rough-hewn planks of the hovel before him. He eats the biscuits. He daydreams of Rock and Sissy, of sneaking off to play with the sons of sharecroppers whose black skin got him whooped the week past. Johnny begins to drift again. He dreams: the flowing creek, Rock splashing in the water after crawdads, and Sissy standing atop the hill leading home, calling. Pa is coming. Pa is coming. Pa has come.

Johnny wakes up and Pa is on top of him. Passed-out drunk. Sweaty and shirtless. Johnny can't move or breathe. He's pinned down by pa's weight. Johnny's got to get free. And for the first time he thinks about killing his father.

He feels around and finds the smooth surface of the emptied liquor bottle. He tells himself that if he strikes hard enough, right where he'd seen his grandpa hammer a bull the summer before, he might kill pa. He grips the bottle tightly and feels his blood rush and his heart pound and binds himself to this final, mythic act. But Pa stirs and somehow through the drunkenness recognizes in his son the archaic craze he had seen before,

abroad in the Great War. Pa is staring at death again and becomes the monster reflected in the image of his son's eyes.

Tony Levero |

The Wisdom of the Buck

He looked at the rub marks on the tree. They were fresh from that day, and he noted large gouge marks near the base of the rub. He knew that distinctive scar. The buck he was hunting must have a large and distinct hook near the base of his right antler. The pattern of the scars suggested several years of wear. The same buck had marked that pine for at least three or four seasons. It was an old and experienced veteran he was hunting. By the height of the markings he could estimate that the deer was around four feet at the shoulder, meaning he probably weighed in excess of three hundred pounds. A buck marks a tree from the direction he approaches it, meaning this one was working its way north, perhaps to one of the beddings it had set up for itself.

The snow was falling fast now as dusk settled, and any tracks leading from the tree had since been covered.

He returned from the bathroom, and she was sitting on the edge of his bed holding his phone.

"Is this your wife's picture in here?"

"Yes."

She stood up and headed for the door. "I'm pretty hammered, but I'm not stupid. I thought it was really weird that you pick up a stranger at a bar and take her back to your apartment and not expect anything out of it. Of course you're married. I got to stop doing this to myself."

"It's not like that. She left me three weeks ago."

"Let me smell your breath. For fuck's sake, you haven't had anything to drink have you?"

"No."

"So let me get the details. You're three weeks out of marriage. You go to a bar and, sober, pick up a stranger. You take her back to your apartment and want to cuddle. That's a typical night for you? That's what gets you off? That's a type of pervert I haven't heard of before."

"It hurts too much to spend the night alone. I know it seems screwed up, but it made sense to me at the time."

"See if this makes sense. Don't try to contact me. I have three brothers who love nothing more than to kick the shit out of sick freaks like you."

What the psychologists were discovering in their studies at Palo Alto was that caretakers in relationships or families became just as dependent in their role as caretaker as the person receiving emotional care was on them. If anything in the situation changed, like the care recipient getting better or leaving, the caregiver, robbed of their role deteriorate emotionally. They benefited from the same structure they had provided. They would attempt almost anything to fill that void. -Dr. Maiers: Relationship Therapy Concepts and Methods, p. 378.

He treaded lightly along the trail as hoof prints in the snow became visible in the moonlight. His father had taught him how to hunt as a boy. Somehow it became cathartic to him in his adult years. As a psychiatrist it was his duty to rebuild, mend, and make things more stable. He became an arbiter in the lives of strangers. To hunt a deer was to destroy something. He was the arbiter of the deer's life, and he could choose to end it.

Sometimes he would suggest that a particularly anal retentive patient try coloring outside the lines of a coloring book three times a day. Sometimes this helped them embrace a small amount of disorder. The parallel between coloring books and deer was not lost on him.

He saw her in the corner of the bar, alone and crying. Sam had lived on his floor one year when he was an undergrad. He'd remembered her as all the guys remembered her: careless and free. She slept around, true, but she was so smart

that it wasn't like she needed to for fulfillment. She wasn't a slut.

She was a short, cute brunette but had that inexplicable quality some women do that makes them more desirable than the sum of their parts. She was dry and sarcastic, cool at times but always funny. She could hustle any guy at pool, and they gladly let her take their money just to see how she was going to do it. Nobody could honestly remember her confiding anything in them. No one knew the slightest thing about her but didn't question it because they had so much fun when she was around.

It wasn't the same Sam he saw that night. It was a sobbing, makeup smeared husk that the Sam he'd known must have molted. Had he seen her dancing and surrounded by friends like in college he would have walked right on by her. He would have still been attracted to her but didn't need that in his life. He was finishing grad school and seeking stability. He was however, drawn to broken things.

She never finished college. The friends she kept were the ones that asked the fewest questions and cared the least about her. The ones who'd been with her that night were tired of cleaning up her messes. They'd left her there to implode, maybe for good.

She and David caught up on old times and she listened to everything he'd been doing since. He took her home, and they lay in his bed and talked like best friends until the sun came up. She found it hard to believe that he hadn't brought her home for sex.

Somehow, this wasn't a red flag for him. Rescue fantasies.

He came across the deer's bedding. It was freshly turned but empty. The buck had visited it and decided not to stay for the night, almost as if it knew it was being tracked.

He roiled over in his bed a week later and was compelled

to check his phone. It was 4:30 a.m., and he tried to dismiss the urge. Finally, he couldn't sleep and turned it on. He had a voicemail:

"Hey David, I don't know why I'm calling you. It's 4:03 right now. Look, I've taken what's probably enough Tofranil to kill someone three times my size. Don't take this as a plea for attention or anything. I really meant to die. I don't know why I'm leaving you this voicemail, I-I'm so stupid. You're asleep, and you're doing so well with your life. I just want you to know when you wake up tomorrow morning, and I'm dead that you were the last person I feel like I had a human connection with. I've been hurt by a lot of people in my life. You didn't use me, and when the sun came up that morning I honestly could see myself being happy with you. After things that I've done, I don't deserve a guy like you. You're probably better off without me. Take care, David."

He'd seen several patients prescribed Tofranil for severe depression. He knew the dose she'd taken would have had to have been at least ten times the normal dose. It might be causing heart murmurs by now, but it was far from too late.

He sat in the hospital waiting room and wondered how he'd ignored the signs of abuse. He could ride a subway and pick out victims simply by the pain and detachment in their eyes. This sort of intuition is un-teachable. It was one of the reasons he was pegged to be such a successful psychiatrist.

Something about her had made him stupid. Her self-confidence and aloofness could mask the usual indicators. He'd ignored his best instincts and vowed never to let it happen again.

He paused by the river where the tracks had led him. He adjusted his jacket. He checked his Remington Model 700 to make certain of the scope's fittings. Then he saw the buck, even bigger than he could have imagined. It cut a silhouette

in front of the moon at the top of the hill he had come from, as if it had blocked off his return path, knowing it had been followed. He drew his gun up, resting it against his shoulder. He adjusted the scope and aimed with shallow breaths. His crosshairs settled on its shoulder, behind which the lungs and heart were housed. He drew a deep breath, exhaled halfway, seeing his breath against the snow, and applied gentle first pressure to the trigger...

Things moved quickly for the young couple. They dated while he finished school, and then they married. She took culinary classes to become a chef, and he worked hard to provide for them. He quickly became one of the best regarded in his field. One day she told him that she was pregnant. David and Sam prepared for their baby.

As he exhaled fully and pulled the trigger he pulled up slightly. Something he had smelled in an instant had created a conflict in him. Sometimes a scent can trigger a loose memory in the mind, a thought that flashes so quickly in the subconscious that its significance to the present situation can't be explained. The shot cracked across the valley and the recoil muffled against his shoulder. The bullet passed just slightly above the buck's flank, not even grazing him.

It is not uncommon for a child to not understand that abuse is abnormal. Sometimes only in adolescence does the true abnormality become realized. This often manifests itself in a guilt (not realizing themselves to be blameless) that complicates future relationships in adulthood. These relationships can be self-sabotaging. Dr. Byron, Relationship Therapy Concepts and Methods, p. 457.

"Mr.... Er... Dr. Reynolds, your wife opted for the procedure that would save the child. Pulmonary hypertension. It's rare but not unheard of for someone of her age. Prenatal tests never would have come across it. We were unable to contact you earlier, and I apologize. She's conscious but under a heavy

dose of morphine, and she feels nothing. She only has until that dose wears off, perhaps a half an hour. She wants to see you."

He walked in and saw her for the last time. She was a husk again. He sat down by her bed.

"David, I'm sorry it happened like this."

"You made a brave decision. It's going to be tough to accept, but when our son is a beautiful young man I know he'll thank you."

"No, David. Our baby, my baby, isn't yours."

"Sam, you've got a lot of morphine in you right now. Think about what you're saying..."

"No, it was at your conference in Ann Arbor."

"Who?"

"I didn't know him. It was the night you went out with Stephen and Tyler. I meant to get pregnant, David. I was going to tell you and then if you still wanted to be with me and the baby then, I don't know. It made sense to me. It really did. I don't deserve a guy like you. Sometimes I thought you were only with me because you'd saved my life and felt responsible for me not destroying myself even more. I thought this was how I was going to know for sure that you loved me. I'm so stupid. I'm so sorry. Just leave me here if you want."

David didn't leave her. He held her hand in silence, but she only lived another seven minutes."

The buck charged him. It picked up momentum downhill and his back was to the river. His hand remained frozen on the bolt of his Remington, not bothering to slide it back again, not enough time. For reasons known only to the deer, it stopped right in front of him. It stood on its hind legs, revealing a tower of antler, hide, and sinew, it raised its hoof and delivered an organ-rattling blow to his chest and then leapt over him and easily cleared the river. He lay in the snow, shaken but whole, and wondered what possessed the buck not to gore him.

"Dr. Reynolds, it's not uncommon in a situation like this for the man to take custody of the child, whether or not it's biologically his. It is your decision however. You have no legal obligation one way or the other."

"What happens if I don't?"

"Take custody? Foster homes. Adoption is possible but not always likely to happen in the first several years."

"I need time to decide. My mother will take care of him in the meantime."

He trudged to the top of the valley as the sun came up and with binoculars looked down on where the buck had leaped over him. Snow had already covered both their tracks. The whole valley when it snowed was a virgin canvas, a new beginning. He thought of how his father would have laughed to hear about the deer who'd taken pity on his hunter. Then he thought about how his father had taught him how to exhale halfway before he put pressure on the trigger.

Would a foster home teach the boy how to hunt?

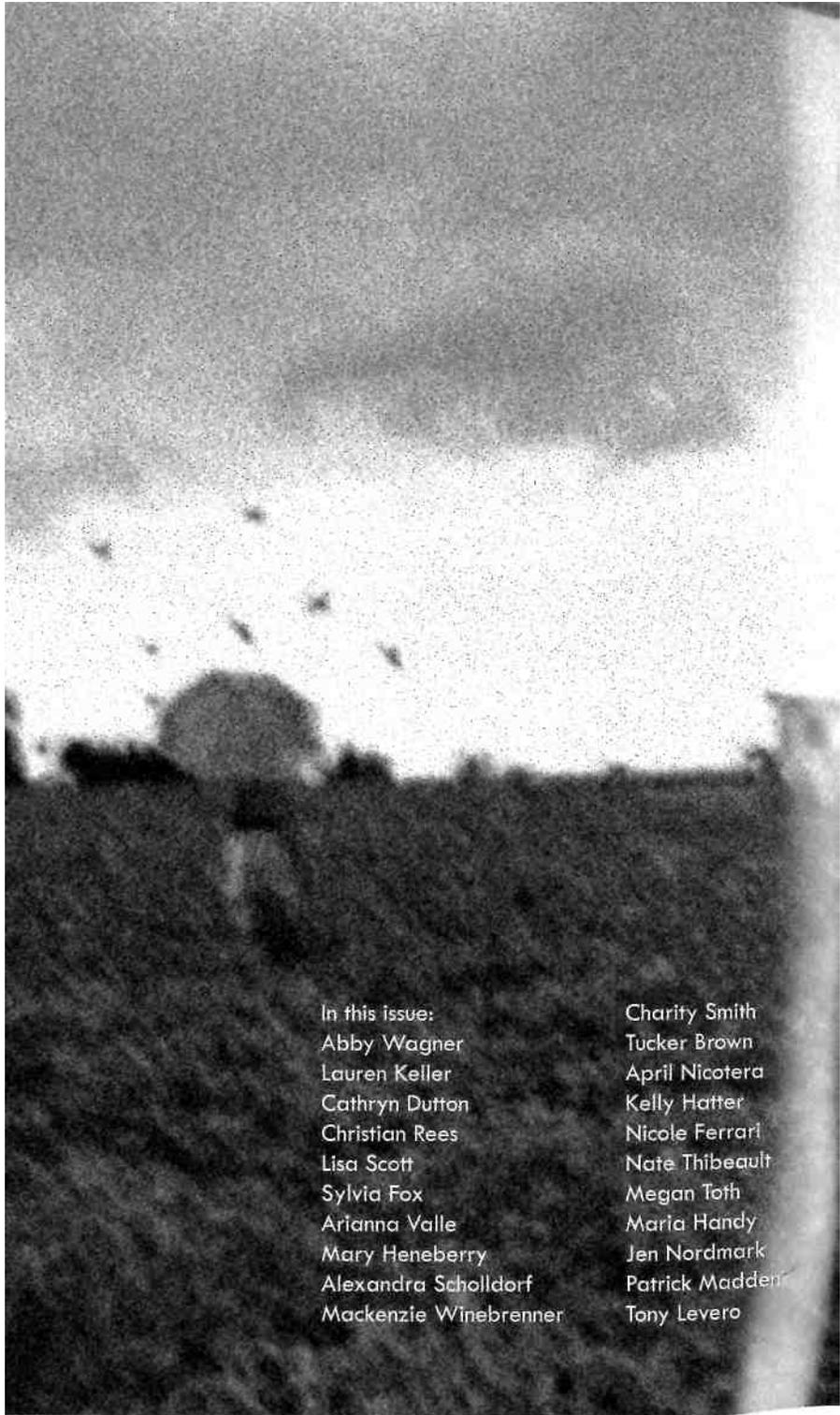
He realized now that if he took custody, it would be nothing like taking on someone like Sam or one of his patients, for the victim's sake, to repair. Their child was a new beginning and this was something he would undertake for himself, not for someone else. His own father, somewhere, was witnessing his son's first true decision as a man.

A Note on the Type

Poetry in *The Garland* is set in a 9-point Helvetica typeface. All fiction in *The Garland* is set in a 10-point Helvetica typeface.

Titles and page numbers are set in Tw Cent Mt.

The *Garland* title on the cover is set in Century Gothic.



In this issue:

Abby Wagner
Lauren Keller
Cathryn Dutton
Christian Rees
Lisa Scott
Sylvia Fox
Arianna Valle
Mary Heneberry
Alexandra Scholldorf
Mackenzie Winebrenner

Charity Smith
Tucker Brown
April Nicotera
Kelly Hatter
Nicole Ferrar
Nate Thibeault
Megan Toth
Maria Handy
Jen Nordmark
Patrick Madden
Tony Levero