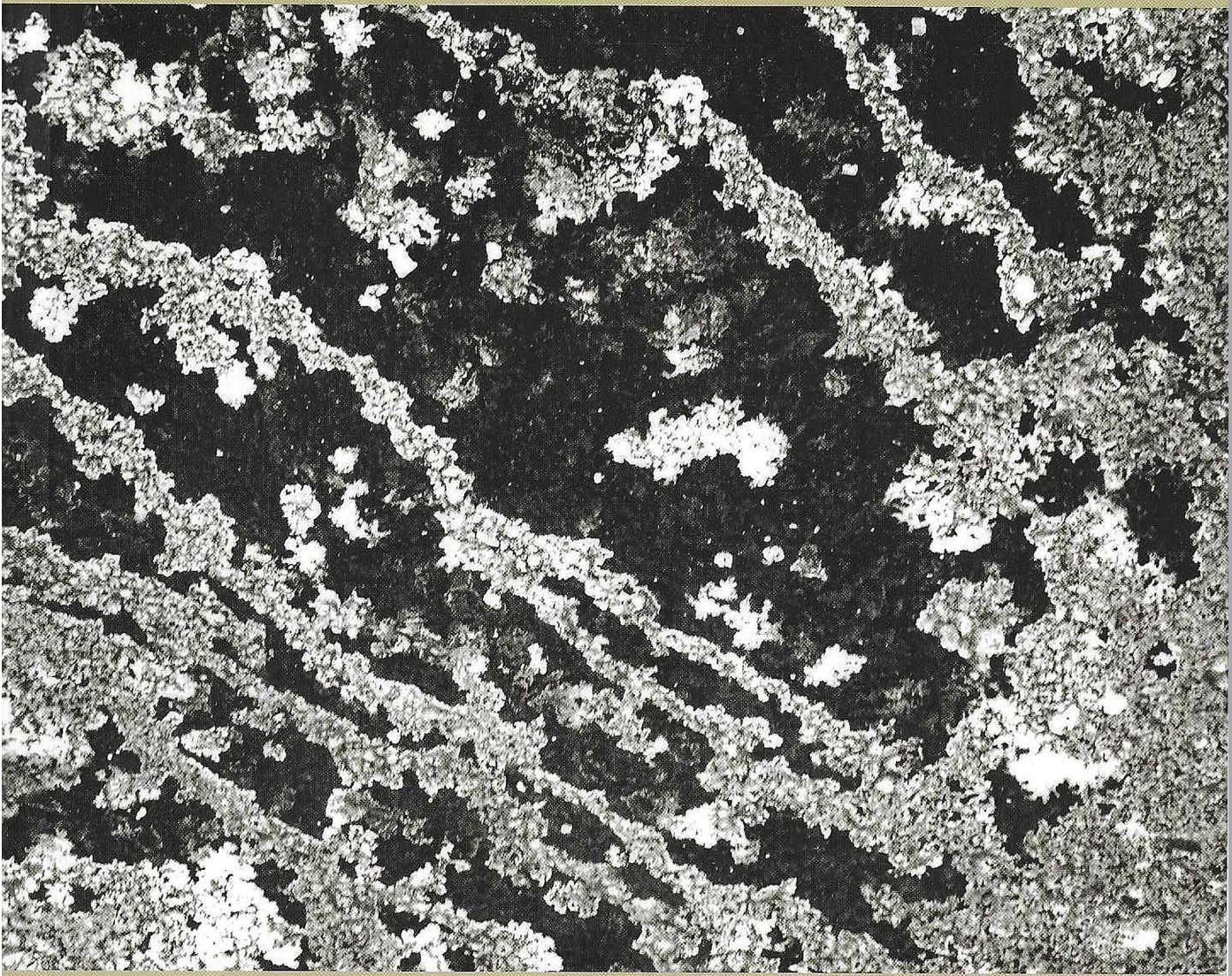






E L E V E N A N D A H A L F

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2016

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Hudson River R.R.

Twenty Fifth

Ninth

Twenty Third

16

Third

Seventh

Twenty First

First

5th Ave

Hotel

AV

Madison Sq

Free

Academy

Twenty

18

Twentieth

Eighteenth

Sixteenth

Fourteenth

Nineteenth

Seventeenth

Fifteenth

Thirteenth

Eleventh

Twelfth

X

Tenth

Ninth

Chilton

Waverly Pl

University Pl

Grace Place

Mercantile University

Store

Bowling Green

Tryon

Union Place

Ganessport
Holladay

Jane Troy

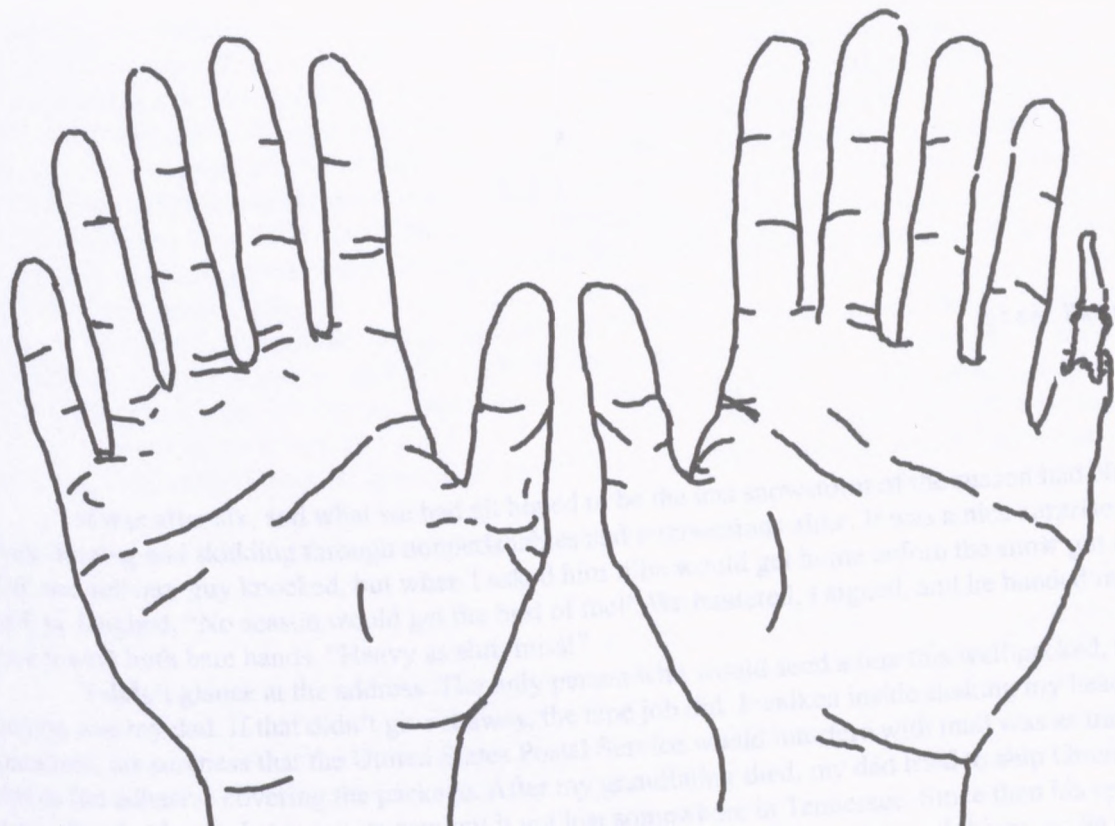
Bethune

Bank

Hammond Perry

Greenwich Avenue
Epworth
Factory

BRUNNEN SOLD



It was after six, and what we had all hoped to be the last snowstorm of the season had New York limping and skidding through nonperishables and intersections alike. It was a nice surprise when Erik the delivery guy knocked, but when I asked him if he would get home before the snow got too bad, he laughed, “No season would get the best of me!” We bantered, I signed, and he handed me the parcel with both bare hands. “Heavy as shit, miss!”

I didn’t glance at the address. The only person who would send a box this well packed, this heavy, was my dad. If that didn’t give it away, the tape job did. I walked inside shaking my head: his paranoia, his sureness that the United States Postal Service would interfere with mail was as transparent as the adhesive covering the package. After my grandfather died, my dad tried to ship Grandpa’s legendary leather jacket cross country but it got lost somewhere in Tennessee. Since then his apprehension toward the USPS has remained at a steady high. But he still likes to mail things, so he opts for the twice guaranteed flat rate boxes wrapping them in so much packing tape that boxes start to look like models of geological strata in canyon country. As if tape will save something from getting lost. The flat rates mean no unwelcome surprises at the Post Office too: he knows that no matter how much he stuffs into in an 8 by 11 by 4 package it’ll always cost \$12.96. “No surprises, no mistakes,” he tells Shirley, the USPS worker he’s crushed on since the divorce, or maybe before. She usually takes a good look at the laminated package, lifts it up and down to test the weight and, humoring him,

says, “Whaddaya got in here, gold, Mr. Brenner?”

“The weight of ideas,” he corrects. I’ve never heard Shirley answer that with anything other than “12.96.”

My dad takes pride in the boxes he sends. They’re shipped to all of the close people in his life: his mother, Ed the college buddy, and me. He spends the month curating the boxes to the recipients. This is an introspective and laborious activity, but he absolutely savors it. He says that there’s comfort in ritual, and this ritual is, I guess, so comforting that it takes up most of his time.

At the beginning of each month he pours over leftist magazines, socialist newspapers, and environmental newsletters for a week. Using a ruler and an x-acto knife, he extracts the articles he finds most informative, takes them to a copy shop where he gets “Xeroxes” of each article. Throughout the month he visits the copy shop to duplicate photographs, cartoons, and self-help printouts to add until the stacks tower over the dining room table. Only when the piles reach Jenga architectural impossibility does he disassemble each one, arranging the reading material in careful order of “political to personal.” He places the articles he thinks would serve the recipient best on the bottom of the stack. But really, they aren’t for the recipient; they’re the way he communicates. The bottoms of the boxes are what make them so dense.

My dad is a soil engineer, so after years of close proximity to the guy I’ve learned a great deal about what most people call the ground. This knowledge that he’s bestowed upon me has been so dry—strata? soils?—that to keep myself engaged through his longwinded points, always with a handful of dirt being ground through his left hand, I programmed myself to find my own meaning in his lectures. Although I’ve never cared about soil the way he did, I internalized everything he taught me. And this is why I liken myself to the soil expert that I’m not.

Because of his educational regime, I was able to proudly identify instances of erosion at age four while being driven along weather beaten logging roads. I’ve known the definition for as long as I can remember: erosion is a process by which water or wind removes topsoil from the earth’s surface. It’s the nonconsensual shedding of a necessary protective layer called “dirt” that exposes hearty, mineral-rich soil.

Whenever I dig through a package, I’m aware of these layers, of the fluffy, meaningless sediment and of the clay that sits solidly underneath. By the end of each package, the layers have been rinsed away, the mineral soil rendered vulnerable and unprotected. At the bottom is often a letter of condemnation for the way I conduct my life, a short story that’s supposed to induce guilt for the way I treat him, or don’t treat him, or a plea for the attention that I as his daughter can’t give. Every time I get to the bottom I’m made aware that I am and will always be insufficient. This is the mineral in our soil.

I know from soil lessons that in order to understand the material's structure I have to stick my hands in it, this core of our relationship, and analyze the residue that it leaves. Then I have to wash it off.

x

My dad grew up in Flatbush, Brooklyn. He's the child of Polish immigrants. He was to be the vision of American success, proof that any nice Jewish boy could make it, could be part of this dream of progress and expansion and productivity and plastic. My grandparents were thrilled when he got into Syracuse to study engineering, so he could manipulate the material world to suit the demands of the consumer. He would be the middleman between the product and the buyer; he would transform element to capital, be a glaring skyscraper in brooding Manhattan. There is something to be said for parental expectation.

Somewhere during his own transformation in the late sixties, he realized that his fate lay in the reversal of this process: he wanted to deconstruct the principles of his family and this era of progress and efficiency and petroleum. He wanted to become a forester. This was the downfall not only of the family, but of the dream they had trusted for years before immigration. Why isn't this dream enough for Michael, they asked. How could trees make a living, how would he carry on the family name with no money to this name, what about our sensibilities did he not inherit? Michael Brenner betrayed his family and moved west to pioneer in the field of preservation, to save the forests.

x

There are a lot of things that appear to have substance and value, but don't really: paper money, precious stones, old texts, names. Their value is gained over time through historical significance, cultural conditioning or necessity, but the value isn't intrinsic. I'm fascinated with this process, the lengthy accumulation of associations and emotion that render something immaterial or useless precious.

Preciousness is the value of a thing that gets so close to your heart that if the thing nicks it, you die. But if it gets any further away, it's outside of you and too far to not miss. There's a small gap in which this thing can exist where it isn't either dangerous or distant.

There's a gap between the high mountains that separate Italy and Austria. Over time the names of the bordering regions have changed with the whim of the inheritor, but Brenner Pass has been Brenner Pass since the 13th century. This place is the geographical origin of the family name but at what point "we" were settled there is beyond any living person's memory. Its primary meaning as a

surname indicates an occupation: the one that clears forests by burning them down.

x

I sat down with a kitchen knife and tried to dent the tape job, but as I did so an old anxiety about what was at the bottom caught me.

I remembered one particular package I got after I left for college, a few weeks after my dad turned sixty. It was a care package: nonperishables and bars and beef jerky and applesauce. A twitch of the empty nest reflex, I thought. Under this year's worth of indestructible food, there was a check for \$18, the Jews' "good luck" number, taped to a piece of paper that read: "Keep digging."

I dug past the leftist stuff I already agree with. At the bottom of that package was a somber manila envelope that had my name stamped on it. Inside was my dad's last will and testament. What the fuck? If his recent birthday had prompted him to consider his expiration, something so far out for a healthy middle aged male, then why did I need this document? Why did he send it? Was he sick, dying, dead? Was it a passive suicide note? Provocation that I should treat him better because he would or could die any day? This was a big step from the short story about a divorced father falling into depression or an article on the lifestyle of millennials.

Those pages in the envelope say that I am his sole heir. Even though all the packages that came before screamed that I wasn't enough, wasn't doing my job as daughter, this one says I will inherit everything he possesses. Morbid as this document is, it's proof, recognized-in-a-court-of-law proof that I am enough to be his daughter, or at least his inheritor. This is what has become obvious: I am his inheritor in life and his daughter in death. I am the idea of daughter, a position filled. I'm reduced to a name on this document, some words that represent who I'll be when he dies. For now, though, I am his inheritor, and I remember thinking, what is it exactly I'll be inheriting?

x

Michael Brenner eventually settled in Nevada City, California, my birthplace. Nevada City was the capital of California for a short period of time. John Sutter discovered gold thirty miles away, and soon after the world couldn't wait to get its hands into the shining soil of the Sierras, each migrant convinced that they'd be the lucky one, sure that they would barely have to dig. The more hands that blasted, panned, and dug, the more the mineral was depleted and the further down they had to go. Industrial mines excavated massive mine shafts that plunged into the earth, but once these were too dangerous and their maintenance too costly for the little profit they yielded, the pioneers turned to the landscape. They clear cut the pine forested hills then blasted them with water, where muddy runoff

would filter through an elaborate runoff system and out would trickle the smallest nuggets of that highly assessed substance gold. The landscape of Nevada City remains mutilated from the hydraulic mining of the 19th century. Water sources are still polluted with the poisons dredged up in the runoff. Fish still inadvertently enter these mercury-infected pools and end, melodramatically, belly up. It's not unusual for new homeowners to find arsenic traces in their freshly dug wells.

It's always been a doomed territory. It was haunted by the wealth it hid under its fragile crust. What else could these miners do but destroy the land that refused wealth and fulfillment? This history of well-intentioned destruction is the nugget of my history, my inheritance, my precious stone. I can't even start digging, or the very dirt my hands are in will poison me.

x

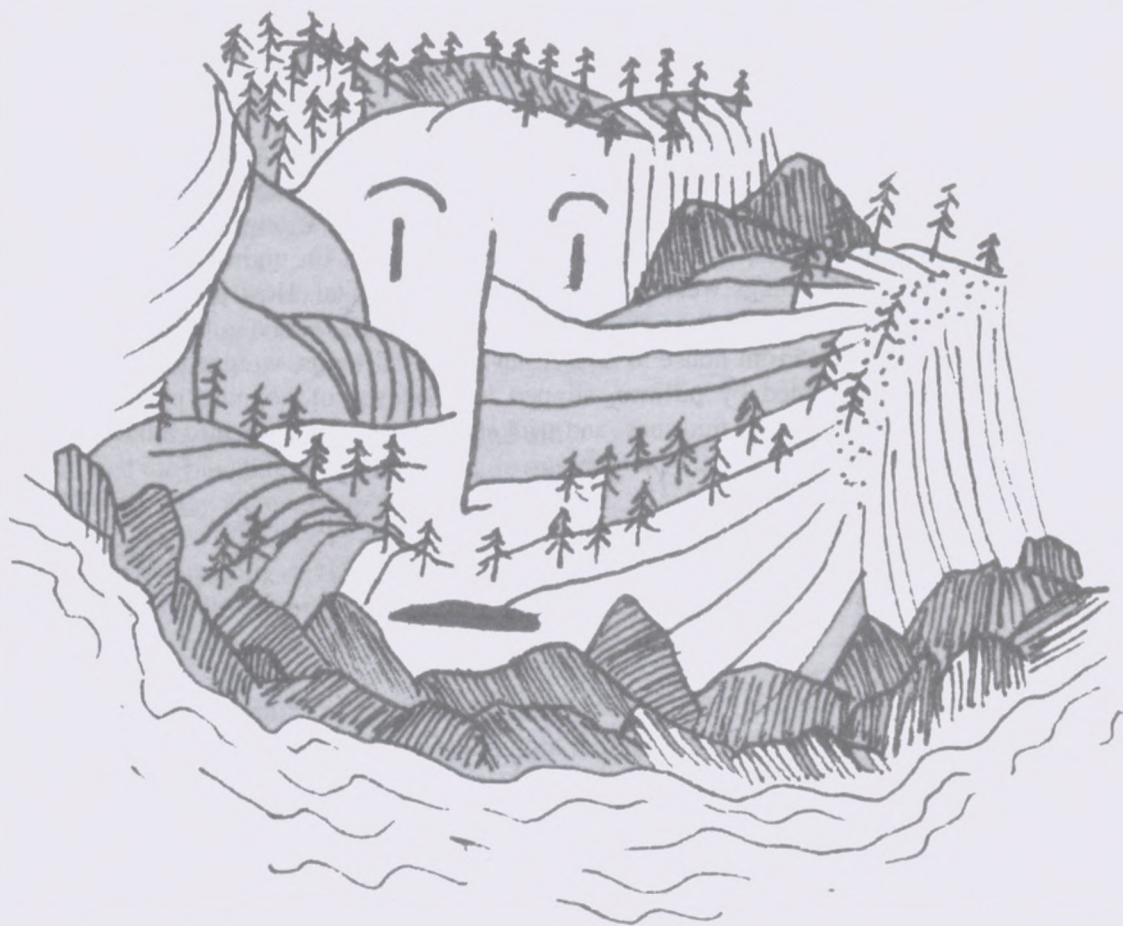
I wrestled the tape off the package, assuming that whatever was in this package would be gotten over like I'd gotten over the contents of innumerable other packages. The first layer was the soft sediment that coats riverbeds that squelches between toes and cushions the edges of the rocks underneath. Political comics. Next were the requisite nonperishables and gifts from California— mandarins and avocados. He made a valiant effort to send some of these fruits to me, wrapping them in newspaper to protect them against the inevitable USPS abuse, then in plastic bags to protect against potential leakage. My delight at seeing these reminders from home faded when I saw how each of them had developed mold on the underside of their rinds. I let the fuzzy blue citrus roll onto the counter, where I could see clearly the numerical symmetry of nine avocados and nine mandarins. Eighteen symbols for luck and health, rotten. The exoskeleton of tape I had peeled off the box sat there, contorted and useless, wasteful. No matter how much tape gets used, the contents aren't protected.

x

Last November, I watched the winter set in from my couch while reading Chaucer. I was revisiting a favorite, "The Knight's Tale." A pilgrim tells the story of Arcite and Palamon, two prisoners of war. They spend seven miserable years confined in a high shadowy tower that overlooks a garden. One day, when gazing upon the grounds they're not allowed to walk in, Palamon spies the sun-lit Emelye. When he sighs out of love, out of hope, out of desperation, the sigh is taken up by Arcite, who, having seen Emelye has also fallen in love. Arcite is eventually released from the tower, but exiled. Years later, Palamon too escapes from his tower, but when fleeing through a field, hears recitations of love coming from long-exiled enemy in love, Arcite, who has returned to woo Emelye. Arcite says, despairingly, almost whiningly, "Love hath his fyre dart so brenningly." The footnotes of

my edition read: "2. brenningly: burningly."

Cupid, Eros, nasty little bastard of affection, shoots from afar and pricks deep. The arrow doesn't burn, doesn't burn like my child skin learning to build a fire, it burns because it cauterizes. The skin is split and melded together again, but the arrow's dart is imbedded far below the epidermis and the shaft juts out from the chest. You look like an idiot with an arrow in your heart. So brenningly do we carry these wounds, we can't put a shirt on for the arrow's protrusion through our chests. We walk around naked, bare for the pains we've taken to heal the skin around the arrow, hoping to god our bodies expel this humungous splinter in time to live. There's nothing cute, nothing convenient about love, any kind of love. It's agonizing—it's Arcite in the field, rehearsing a dead monologue he worked on through years of imprisonment and exile, but still doesn't have perfected. There are no words to soothe it, to take out the stiches or repair the wound. We aren't bloody, though, because Eros is too proud to make a mess. There is nothing to wash off.



HEIRLOOMS

X

MORANDA BROMBER

We are the collectors of things. Unnecessary things, small things, round things. Things painted red and draped in gold leaf, glass things, tin things, ceramic things. We placed our things high up on shelves, arranged carefully around the wine glasses, holding up our books, scattered on nightstands and coffee tables. Some things were lucky and some sentimental. How precisely a moment could be conjured by a thing. Smooth or ridged. Heavy in the hand, or light in the palm. From house to house, our boxes of things, wrapped neatly in tissue paper, padded by pillows, slipped into sleeves of popping plastic. Knick knacks, tchotchkes, figurines, and trinkets. Things to decorate, to adorn, to bring hope. Familiar things. Whole things.

HOME STILL AND STAGNANT

x

MORANDA BROMBERG

your letter melted beneath my mug of tea.
the light on the porch went out but I was not
tall enough to change it. stood on a shaky chair,

broke through it with my heavy foot, shattered the
bulb on peeling boards, cut my finger on the
shards of glass, used your shirt to blot the cut

shuffled through the cabinet for a band-aid
ruined the blue button up, lay down on the bed,
felt as if they were not my sheets to climb into

found the painting on the wall unrecognizable
wondered whose clothes hung in the closet
could not hear a common creak, flattened the quilt

waited for the turning of gravel under tires
woke at sundown, footsteps on stairs, light in the hall
turn of the knob, crawl under the sheets.

NYLON RECORD

x

LINDSAY BECKER

When my eyes are closed, it's never black that I see.

I googled "quotes on memories" and didn't come up with anything interesting. Most of the quotes were about the specialness of memories. I lingered on, "The best part about memories... is making them." It was written in a Hobby Lobby-happy cursive.

I might have blacked out after I hit the brakes. Things were white and very quiet. R said, "The car is still moving. Put your foot on the brakes." My feet seemed a mile away, if I ever had any. He also suggested that things went white because the airbag was white.

If I were sitting with you now, I'd gesture with my arms to show you how the driver's side curtain airbag on our rented 2014 Toyota 4Runner was like a wing that I had to crawl out from under. I'd show you with my left leg how I had to kick the door to get it to open.

R and I put a star at the top of the Christmas tree, never angels. Why did you prefer an angel every year without exception? There was only one, I think. Her dress was a warm cream satin with gold sequins around the skirt. The shoulders of the dress were puffy, like your dresses, like so many

I don't own Eugene,
I'm not saying
I look like him either.
He thinks
we are similar
in appearance.

He is verbally lacking
on this silent Sunday
with the street noiseless outside
which means
he is thinking
of what to say.

We sit
and silently stare
at each other.
I wonder
what he would say
to me
if I asked him

about
the coal miners in China
or the war in Syria
the bombs in Pakistan
or the guns in America.

Maybe we'd just talk
about simpler things
stuff that doesn't change
the way we think,

EUGENE

x

JOEL URITESCU

Eugene
is a plaster gremlin
that lives
on a table
I like to work at.

Every day he sits
with his chin on his knees
his arms wrapped
around his legs

no fangs showing
or face dipped in pain,
he looks like a dog
maybe a corgi.

If you look at dogs
and their owners
you can sometimes see
a strange
resemblance

I don't think
I look like a corgi
but I think
Eugene does.

I don't own Eugene,
I'm not saying
I look like him either.
He thinks
we are similar
in appearance.

He is verbally lacking
on this silent Sunday
with the street noiseless outside
which means
he is thinking
of what to say.

We sit
and silently stare
at each other.
I wonder
what he would say
to me
if I asked him

about
the coal miners in China
or the war in Syria
the bombs in Pakistan
or the guns in America.

Maybe we'd just talk
about simpler things
stuff that doesn't change
the way we think,

comment on the weather
or the way
the light hits our faces

I'd pick up
the ripe avocado
resting in the bowl
next to him

and start to talk about how avocados
are the butter of nature
or at least
what I mean is that
they have a lot of fat
for a vegetable.

Eugene tells me
That I shouldn't worry too much
it's just an avocado.

I say I won't
but I do, wonder
where it came from,

I look on the tag
it says
Product of Mexico

I wonder why
Product is
capitalized

then I turn off
the lights

because
it's daytime
on a sunny day.

Then I wish
that I turned
the lights off
because I thought
about the miners in China

not lessening
the number
on my bill
every month

and think,
what if the person
who wrote Hound-dog
the one Elvis stole from
was alive when he took it

what if he was singing to himself
every time he sang it
and a light bulb went off
hearing his conscience
instead of popularizing
the fact that

once the rich
take something
for themselves
the poor have to find
something else

because being poor is cool,
and the way
to have privilege
is to pretend
like you don't,

because if I pretend
like I don't see
color
then it isn't
really there.

I can live
with the benefits
not worrying
about
someone's
daily consequences
Eugene will say
not to worry about it

I'll say
I don't have the time

He'll say
he doesn't have any cash

I'll think
just keep walking by.

It seems
the life
the two of us lead
is complicated

muddled, things are hidden
taken out of view
the human sight
consists only
of what we can see.

The poem
is only part
of that sight,
it is the world
where the writer
makes
and shares
the rules.

If I could
make the rules
I wouldn't know
what to change

how to make
this world better

but if my world
exists only
because someone
else knows
my narrative,
that means
we are responsible
to make
each other's worlds

a reality.

There were
16 miners killed
on October 25, 2014
in China.

On August 2, 2014
the death toll
in Syria
was more than
191,000 People.

60 people killed
more than 110
injured, stuck
in a suicide blast
in Pakistan
on November 2, 2014.

Missouri National Guard
activated
in anticipation
of the Ferguson
riots
on November 17, 2014.

Eugene and I
are part of
our own reality
which involves
only us

in a room

at a table
silently staring
waiting for the other
to speak.

I can think of
all the stories
in my brain
as many times
in as many ways
as I have breaths.

Eugene has said
it's what we do
with those stories
that makes us
humans.



BRINDA
ASHES BY JACKIE FARRELL

BY
JACKIE
FARRELL

SOMEONE'S TRYING TO REACH
ME.



A WEEK AGO I WAS AWAKENED FROM ANAP BY A FIRE. A FEW MORE HAVE POPPED UP SINCE THEN.



DAMNIT.

WHAT'S THE MATTER, DEAN?

IT'S THIS CAPITAL
ISM AND ENVIRO-
NMENTALISM
PRESENTATION

I'VE READ THIS CHAPTER OF
THIS CHANGE EVERYTHING
FIVE TIMES NOW AND I
STILL DON'T GET IT

WAIT.

OH GOD I HOPE THIS WORKS
GRANDMOTHER
COME ON COME ON
KEEP IT TOGETHER I NEED
SILVER YOU GOT YOUR FOCUS FOCUS
THIS THINK THINK THINK HELP

CALM DOWN
CHILD
EMPTY
YOUR
MIND

YOU CAN HEAR ME? OH THANK
THE GODDESS. YOU ARE
ABIGAIL ABHEST?

YES. AND THIS IS MY
GRANDDAUGHTER,
AMBER ASHER.

IM SORRY TO BOTHER
YOU GRANDMOTHER,
BUT YOU'RE THE ONLY
ONE I CAN ASK

WHAT'S WRONG?

IT'S THE
FORREST

THE ANIMAL LIFE HAS BEEN DISAPPEARING. THE PLANT LIFE HAS BEEN DYING.

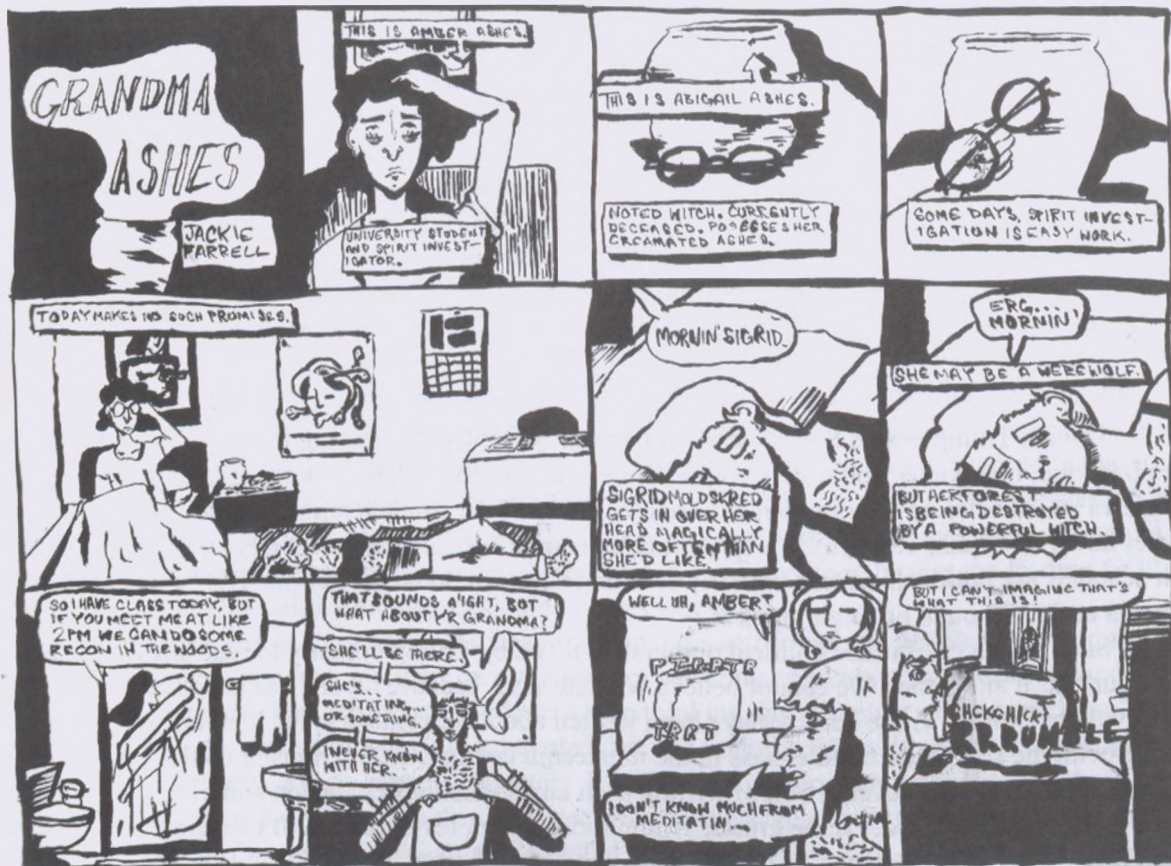
ONLY A WITCH CAN BREACH HER DEFENSES. YOU'RE MY LAST CHANCE TO SAVE THE FOREST AND...

...AND
RESCUE
MANDY...

I ASKED MY FRIEND MANDY* FOR
HELP BUT... SHE HASN'T RETURNED

SEE NL-STAR SCOUT #1 - ED

PLEASE GRANDMOTHER.



COMMODIFICATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL: TRUMP AND CHEKHOV (AND DRAKE)

x

DILARA O'NEIL

Donald Trump hosted Saturday Night Live on November 7, proving that he is in fact, a joke. Trump is loud, obnoxious, and rudely conservative, and his long celebrity past predates his candidacy. His views are so extreme they're comical—and lack any of the subtle nuances that his fellow candidates have; Jeb Bush, Ted Cruz, Carly Fiorina, or Chris Christie may be equally conservative, but their scandals are political. We can be fairly sure that Cruz would never call his wife “a piece of ass” to media outlets (though he might think it.)

Such practices of inane political outbursts utilized by Trump not only toe the line of the social norm, but blur it altogether. We cannot believe what he says, because no one has had the audacity to ever say them. Norms within society have been written about for centuries; the literature of manners took off with the rise of the middle class in the nineteenth century. Trump himself could be a literary character; Austen would never dream of writing such an ostentatious character, and Flaubert's villains are too human and civilized. Of the greats, Trump most resembles a creation of Chekhov, a writer of bourgeois critique and the master of plays. He does not exist within the psychological novel, only the stage. The social confines in Chekhov's plays, harsh confines created by class, restrict their characters to social norms with only occasional outbursts the same way characters in classic novels acted. Manners matter, and it is only in these outbursts and subtle intonations that we are exposed to a character's true self. Trump is the exact opposite in a world of appearances, and we often question: Is he real?

“Why do you wear black?” Medvedenko asks in the opening line of Chekhov’s 1896 play, *The Seagull*. “I’m in mourning for my life, I’m unhappy” (67). Masha replies, invoking the image of the tortured artist, stereotyping herself in her aesthetic vision of sadness, conveying her mourning outwardly, and a bit dramatically. The essence of outward projection and simplification is where we find Trump.

Trump said in a now infamous interview with Stephen Colbert, “I will build a great wall—and nobody builds walls better than me, believe me—and I’ll build them very inexpensively. I will build a great, great wall on our southern border, and I will make Mexico pay for that wall. Mark my words.” Here Trump invokes a trope as well, that of the bumblingly accessible American and the Ayn Rand-ian business exec in the same sentence. Does he lack any nuanced knowledge of how American politics works? Better yet is his social media presence. “I have never seen a thin person drinking Diet Coke,” he once tweeted, with over 21,000 retweets and 18,000 favorites. His tweets include a brief obsession with the relationship with Twilight actors Robert Pattinson and Kristen Stewart, as well as Katy Perry’s love life, and interacting with internet trolls. He types, or performs, to thousands of retweets and 5.6 Million twitter followers proving that we do, in fact, buy into his absurdities, at least for the sake of a laugh.

In Chekhov, their own lives are dictated by far-away artists and become a mere aesthetic grouping. Life imitates art. “After Tolstoy or Zola you’d hardly care for Trigorin,” Treplev says in *The Seagull*. In other words, one must aim for the highest form of art in order to succeed, in the true Machiavellian sense. Trump will never be our Alexander, or our Tolstoy, and he does not want to be, he is our low-brow punching bag, simple enough for everyone to understand, accessible enough to share on Facebook for a cheap laugh, at least to liberals. As of December, he was the leading GOP candidate, making his politics another example of class warfare.

The characters of Chekhov’s *The Seagull*, bourgeois self-important people, have stepped outside themselves, able to enjoy their own aesthetic of suffering as an object to be viewed and witnessed. “Some people have obsessions and can’t help thinking day and night about something like the moon. Well, I’m a bit moonstruck too, haunted day and night by this writing obsession. I must write I must,” Trigorin says to Nina passionately. It is a humorous moment, poking fun at the character’s dramatization. Does Trump’s display come from a similar place of unrest? ‘I must perform,’ Trump is telling us. ‘I must sell.’ What is he haunted by? “Takes snuff. Drinks vodka. Always wears black. Loved by schoolmaster,” Trigorin writes and mocks of the artist in his notebook. ‘Insult women, be racist, sell everything,’ Trump may as well have written in his metaphorical Moleskine years ago. Both lack any nuanced sensitivity; they are both tired tropes.

‘Buy me, retweet me,’ he seems to be saying. ‘Write me, objectify me,’ Nina is also saying.

In a recent New York Times article, Jon Caramanica considers the music video that accompanies hip-hop artist Drake's 2015 single "Hotline Bling" as an internet phenomenon. Caramanica writes, "No celebrity understands the mechanisms of Internet obsession better than Drake. Online, fandom isn't merely an act of receiving—it's one of interaction, recontextualization, disputed ownership and cheek" ("Drake: Actor, Rapper, Meme," Oct. 23 2015). Drake, a real person, has become a meme: a broad term that can be applied to any humorous video, image, or piece of text that circulates the internet. In an ironic twist of pop-culture phenomena, Trump dances to this very video in his recent appearance on SNL, transcending Drake, and himself, disappearing into a cloud of cheap irony along with The Kardashians, Twilight, and YOLO.

"You don't meme Drake; Drake memes Drake," Caramanica concludes. Is he so different than Trump? Not at all. Trump is not merely a comedian, but a parody of himself, not the writer but the responder and actor. He is Nina with more agency. His identity is entirely contrived of spectacle in the world around him, re-appropriating it for himself in exaggerated fashion. He is the image of the white man to extreme, fragmenting his image into singular absolutism. Immigration? "Build a wall!" Negotiating debt ceiling increase? "Be unpredictable!" Free trade agreements? Break 'em! There's a grave catch in all of this, which is the American's capability to re-contextualize Trump, which is exactly what they have done; this includes an endorsement by KKK's former Grand Wizard and vicious attacks on people of color in the name of Trump.

"I'm a seagull. No, that's wrong, I'm an actress" says Nina (Chekhov 113). I am one thing and not another, accept me not as artist but as muse. Accept me not as politician but as idea of what America is: "Make America great again." What's at stake for Trump's politics, the Republican Party? Not much. He'll leave the dead seagull at our feet, a cheap homogenization of American ideal, after having shot it himself, leaving another candidate, Bush or Carson perhaps, to dignify the remains (if they can be dignified.) The creator of the commodity washes his hands of it, and the play lives on. But what's in it for Trump himself?

Re-contextualizing the individual in the age of the web opens dialogue between performer and spectator in a way that Chekhov could not. We are all directors in Trump's performance, and he wants us to watch; as seen from his constant dialogue with fans on his Twitter page. It would only make sense that Trump, the world's biggest businessman, would sell the last thing he can: himself. We saw it on *The Apprentice*, his self-created reality show, and now he takes it to the main stage. Chekhov's characters as actors are tied to the stage they inhabit; Trump is boundless and very, very real. He is real in a vulnerable time for politics; the middle-left has failed us and we are being pushed towards extremes. Democrats have Bernie Sanders's cautious socialism, Republicans have Donald Trump's outright fascism. He has transcended the joke.

Chekhov's Irena proclaims in Act One, "Now, I don't mind listening to rubbish for a laugh but doesn't this stuff claim to be a new art form, something epoch-making? Well, I don't see any new art form here, just a display of bad manners" (76). Is that not what we see in Trump? His lack of dignified doublespeak breaks social codes into something of a spectacle—an element that can exist without true plot of character, in the Aristotelian sense. We are shocked and appalled, like Irina, yet we participate just as she does. The same themes emerging in the time of *The Seagull* are still evident now; our social alienation and ironic detachment brought about by the void of excess materialism in privileged circles makes Trump's frightening political philosophies humorous, while to those not graced with the advantage of class and education do not laugh, they believe. People did not hesitate to make parody memes of Drake's 'Hotline Bling' video after it came out. Some also are not hesitating to parrot Trump's fascist views, making racist intolerance the new meme of 2016. But people like Drake, and some are liking Trump. His mark is permanent. While Treplev shreds his manuscripts at the end of the play, Trump's will live on.



NEON

X

HANNAH MACLAGGER

Grubby girls, garbage girls,
girls--every molded eye-
brow raised. Movie theatre

bathroom girls grotesquely
groomed in colored min-
eral paste. Girls who stomp

through grottos, growling their
gurgling manifestos.
Girls who do not submit

to evaluation.
Gangly girl children ex-
perimenting with sex

and moonshine, each other,
who squirt toothpaste into
open wounds. Girls with fa-

cial piercings and mustach-
es and lower backs stam-
ped with pentagrams and

diagrams of their fav-
orite insect. Up, up,

Ophelia, up. Rise
up from your water grave,
heavy with the smell of

every girl spider who
has given herself to
the sea in your name.



CUBIST

x

CAROL BROWN

cubist portrait of two lovers, TV movie still playing

sputtering
flickering
abstract portrait
black and white movie
limelight
we are stars
shattered
on earth

playing jacks
not alone
on my bedroom floor
smooth steel
caressing
the inside of my palm
anticipate
the smack of rubber
fist

wet clay
raw steak
juice of a pomegranate
maroon tips of my fingers
listen, blueberries crushed
smack of gum
smack of gum
summer rain

convulsion
not seizure
rocking chair
not blow-up mattress
word
not tremble
stomach
not fist

full moon
not benevolent
learns the power
of her voice,
finger nails
ripping through
cloth
this is how you know it's done right

stalactites drip wet
paste of mud
blood
coating the walls
oozing
slimy, slick
underground lair

There's a knock at my door. I reach for my phone and see that it's 3:17 a.m. I haven't moved from the couch since I let the images on the TV pass through, the sounds filling my belly, until I fell asleep. I recognize that knock: slow and hard and always hitting the upper left edge near the door frame. I always open the door after I put on my Nars Russian Red lipstick, his favorite, but I hate myself for doing this.

He knocks again. I open the door but don't undo the chain. I tell him it's late, and he calls me baby. Sonny calls everyone baby, even the squirrels in the street, but I like to think he really means it when he says to me.

"When does your flight leave?" I ask. I let him inside; he won't stay long.

"Eh, about an hour or so. I've got time."

"Oh." I look at his bloodshot eyes and can smell the whiskey through his skin. There is no suitcase.

"Do you want the key to my place? I could use someone to look after it while I'm gone."

"Sure." I know this conversation. He has no keys to offer.

"But you can't invite any guys over. Just girls. Girls are okay."

"Okay, no guys."

"Hey, I opened a gym." Even with just the street lights pouring in through the curtainless

window, I can see Sonny's skin is leathered from passing out in city parks, and it's red and pulsing as if he just came out of the sun. He pulls it off somehow; Sonny's always been so handsome. His soft, brown eyes are deceitful but kind. His potbelly hangs low.

"Did you?"

"It's called Sonny's Gym. It's in Miami. Fancy, eh? Getting all of those bikini girls in there working on their Brazilian butts." He always had these big plans of opening a gym. I let my mind go back to when we would stay up at night and talk about how great it was going to be: the juice bar, the rooftop swimming pool, the sauna.

"Good for you, Sonny." I sit next to him on the sheet-covered couch as he puts his feet up on the coffee table, just like he did six months ago. Bits of caked mud flutter off, and it's oddly comforting. There's something of his in this apartment again.

"And we're opening one in L.A."

"Wow, that's something."

"It's a lot of work, though, you know, running a gym. I work 12 hours, 24 hours. I work a lot. Round the clock. You know, long days. Something's wrong and you're the boss and you gotta take charge. Everyone's watching you. You gotta be on."

I remember when he actually used to work long days, and he would come home, get straight into the shower, and never look me in the eye until the next morning, when sleep had cleansed his guilt. "How's Sara?"

"She's good."

"Are you two still together?"

"Well, you know, we're both so busy with our own stuff. I got the gym..." Sonny trails off then gets a surge of energy to push out the next thought. "She's in Europe working a movie. She's got two Emmys now." He clears his throat, low and guttural, and puts his hand on mine. It's calloused, but it feels comforting.

"Really? I had no idea." I move my hand out from under his and stand up to walk into the kitchen. "Coffee?"

"Why aren't you a blonde anymore?"

"Just wanted a change." I squint when I flip on the kitchen light. I turn the stove on, pull out a turquoise mug, and set it on the counter. The mug is glazed clay, and its design protrudes like small hills. The chips on the side are a reminder of yearly moves around the city during my twenties. The handle curves out like a dancer waiting to be held. On the bottom, it reads "Handmade in Turkey," but there were dozens of others just like it at Pier One. I like telling people it was an antique passed on to me from my great grandmother.

"I only date blondes with nice smiles. You know me."

"Well, clearly you and Sara weren't meant to be." Sara is shorter than Sonny, plump, a red-head with limp hair and jagged teeth.

"Yeah, what are you gonna do though? Hey, do you know where I can find a nice blonde girl?"

"I don't know. You've just got to get out there, start dating." I tell him this, but I really hope he never does.

"I can't do that."

"Well, I don't know what to tell you then. It sounds like you're too busy to be dating now anyway." I take out a box of tea and look over at him as he eyes my place.

"Yah, got a lot on my plate. I'm bicoastal, you know. I live on both sides of the country. Beverly Hills and New York. Livin' the life."

"That's a nice way to live, Sonny."

"And I have two phones, too. One for the federal agents and one for you guys."

"Us guys? Who does that include?" I get a sinking feeling that maybe he's pulled himself together enough to have had at least a few flings. I can't stand the thought of him waking up next to someone else, that there could be someone who gets to see him first thing in the morning—his slow, sleepy eyes.

The kettle screams too loudly for this time of night and forces me to think about the water getting too hot. I don't like to boil it because it always burns my tongue. I pull the kettle from the stove and pour the water into the mug. Steam swirls up toward the recessed light.

"I train the agents, and they have their own number. And the other is for you, my girl. Not you guys, just you, babe."

"I've got my very own phone, huh?" I look at the clock, a generic kitchen clock with roosters and wine bottles on it from Target. Ten minutes have gone by.

"You eat fast food?" Sonny is looking at my stomach. I instinctively put my hand over the fleshiest part, suddenly aware of my faded sweatpants and grey-tinted shirt.

"What?"

"Does my girl eat fast food?"

"No. No, I don't." I'm pleased he still calls me his girl. I hope he doesn't ever stop.

"Subway is fast food, too, you know. Now don't lie to me. Do you eat fast food?" He is unlacing his tennis shoes, bending his toes in freedom.

"Sometimes."

"Don't you lie to me."

"Sometimes I eat a sandwich."

"How much?" I can see his coarse hair graying in tiny tufts by his ears. It should make him look more refined, but it doesn't. His eyebrows are still intensely black strokes of a paintbrush trying to intrude on his watery blue eyes.

"I don't know. Every few months, I guess."

"Don't lie to me. Tell me, babe."

"Every six months." I look at the food bag, grease seeping through, and the empty sweating cup that held an Oreo shake on the counter—a reminder of tonight's dinner, alone, in front of the TV. I think about telling him that his plane took off fifteen minutes ago.

"Okay then."

"All right," I say. He is oblivious to my rounded belly, the way my thighs smoosh out when I sit back down next to him with my mug. I pucker my lips to take in the hot tea. I feel wholesome, even though I know I'll binge again right after he leaves.

"Good. Good." He takes his hand and rubs it over his face like a paw pulling down on his skin. It turns pale for a moment, then goes back to that purplish color when the circulation returns. Sonny's mouth always reminds me of a monkey, the way his top lip rounds out below his nose. His yellowing teeth rarely show since he doesn't like to smile. Sonny is 46 years old, but he can't sit all the way back on the couch unless he wants his legs to stick out like a child in a stroller.

"I taught you well." Sonny pauses. "You never call, baby." He picks at his sweats, the same pair that used to be on the bathroom floor every morning—the ones I would complain about with the hole near the knee and the paint specks from that time we redid our kitchen table together.

"Neither do you."

"Are you going to call me now?"

"Yeah, I'll call." I put the mug down in between us on the stained coffee table. He always complained I never used coasters. I still don't.

"Don't lie, babe. You're going to call?"

"Yeah, I'll call," I lie.

"All right then." His socks have lost their elastic, but one part is sloppily stuck in his pant leg.

"Are you going to your meetings?" I ask.

"Are you?" Sonny laughs. He shoves his feet back in his shoes and stands up without tying them.

"I just want to make sure you're doing okay." I know this never works, and he won't answer me.

"You hear it's going to rain tonight?" He is passively surveying my place. I follow his gaze to

my trail of evidence of where I've been tonight, leading to the kitchen and bathroom.

"Yeah. Hope it doesn't delay your plane." I wonder if he'll get a decent night's sleep.

"Yeah. Me too, hon. I've got some big meetings over there in the City of Angels. Trying to get Dwayne Johnson to endorse my new gym."

"It was good seeing you, Sonny." He doesn't recognize the melancholy in my voice. He never has. I stand up with my mug of tea. "Goddamn it, Sonny, why can't you just work the damn steps like you're supposed to?" Blood pounds in my chest, and my eyes narrow.

"Hey, calm down. It's too late to be talking about that kind of stuff."

"Yeah, well...it's always been too late to talk about it."

"That's not a nice thing to say. You always were such an ugly bitch, you know that?" He pulls at his nose and breathes in deeply.

"Do you know what kind of life I had before you? Ever since I met you, my entire life has gone to shit." There are photographs on the walls of my apartment, pictures in frames—of me standing alone in front of the Eiffel Tower, of me on top of an elephant—photos that look like they came from a magazine. I was alone, but I was happy.

"Ever think it was because you got fat?"

"Fuck you."

"Ahh, come on, baby. Relax. It was a joke." He looks at me for the first time tonight. He reaches his hand to my face. I let myself relax into the familiarity.

"I can't keep doing this," I say slowly. "We keep trying to make it work. But it just doesn't."

"Remember that time we went paddle boating? You were wearing that pretty dress with those little straps, and your hair was down."

I purse my lips together and swallow hard. My eyes burn with tears at the memory. It was the weekend he made me breakfast in bed and said he wanted us to take a trip together to see his family. "Not really. Look, I've got to be up in a couple of hours."

"Yeah, me too. Remember I told you about all my meetings? I've got big things coming up. But it's nice to think about us sometimes."

"That was a long time ago."

"It doesn't have to be," he says. "I think we're good together, you and me."

"Yeah, we are good together. We're both liars."

TWO MONTHS LATER

x

TAMAR LAPIN

"Attention without feeling is only a report"
says Mary to me when I can't

feel

the food I am shoveling
into my intestine.
It's four o'clock somewhere

(here)

and I haven't felt hungry

since.

None of the 30something girls on the subway
have the --- hunger
just that sheer
--- terror

clutching their pizza boxes and professional clutches.

Howling at no moon
how

how

howl

staying on level low

waiting, grinding, growling
circling
none are hungry,
just scared.



GRANDMA
ASHES

JACKIE
FARRELL

"I JUST HOPE SHE'S OKAY."

GRANDMA? I SNAP OUT
OF IT! WHAT'S WRONG?

HAS ANYTHING LIKE THIS EVER
HAPPENED BEFORE?

WELL OH MY
WORD...
GRANDMA
TALK TO
ME!

WHAT'D YOU THINK
IS HAPPENING
IN THERE?

I DON'T
KNOW...

WE NEEDED TO TALK

I HAVE NO DESIRE TO TALK
TO YOU, ABIGAIL.

YOU HAVE GIVEN THEM LITTLE CHOICE. IS IT
WORTH THIS TO SETTLE AN OLD
GRUDGE?

FOR ONCE, ABIGAIL...

THOSE WHO SHOULD
NOT BE INVOLVED
IN WHATEVER YOU ARE
DOING, ARE

THEN THEY SHOULD NOT
HAVE INVOLVED THEMSELVES.

THIS ISN'T ABOUT YOU.

GO ON IT.





MILKPOEMS

x

ELLEN "THE MILK MAN" CARPENTER

In the summer, I suffer from Milk Paranoia. Milk Paranoia, in its simplest definition, is the almost phobic fear that the milk has spoiled—unbeknownst to me—as I pour it into my cereal or coffee. Milk Paranoia strikes worst in summer because I drink milk less often, and thus the milk sits untouched in the refrigerator for longer periods of time. I feel this "sitting period" expedites the spoiling process.

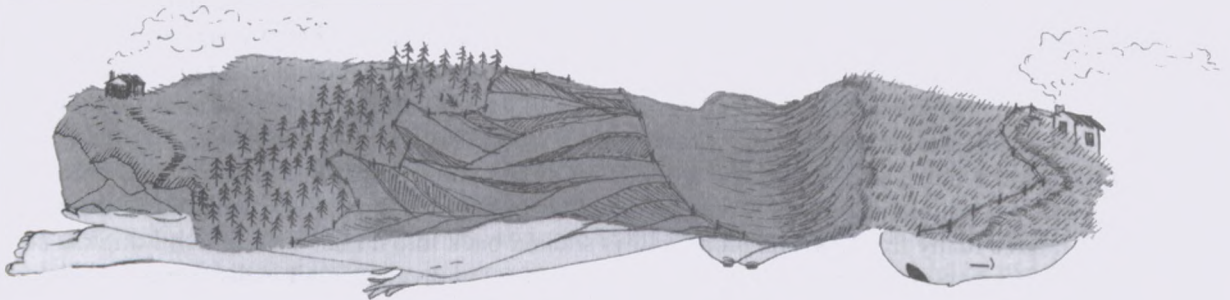
The Milk Paranoia ritual begins when I have made coffee. I open the carton, and inhale deeply. *Has it gone bad?* I think to myself. I decide to pour a very small amount into a glass and test it. Often, as I pour the milk into the glass, I imagine a large curdled lump plopping out of the carton and into the bottom of the glass. I take a spoon and scrape at the bottom of the cup. Nothing.

I sip, tentatively. The supposed curdle was only an air bubble; the milk tastes fine. Milk Paranoia recedes for the time being.

I begin to buy milk very late at night.
My late-night milk-buying endeavors
are attributed mostly to my cereal consumption
during the hours between
twelve and one o'clock. I finish the pint
of milk before I realize I will not have
enough for coffee the next morning.

I know I
will be tired
tomorrow, and I will
probably be late, and I will not want
to buy milk for the
coffee then.

I buy milk from the H&H
at the end of our street around one thirty,
and the man who rings me up tells
me I remind him of his daughter.
It is not the first time he has told me this.



OKCUPID: A LOVE STORY

x

CHRISTINA BERKE

I see Kali sitting near the bar at one of those small cafe tables where they place you if you don't want to wait two hours for a real table. I'm annoyed he didn't think to make a reservation, but remember this place is too popular to even take reservations, and I'm just glad he has this little spot. How intimate. How romantic.

"Taylor?"

"Kali?"

He stands up to greet me and I notice that six-foot-two in person is much, much taller than online. In theory, six-foot-two is perfect. I've always wanted to date a man taller than me. But I think Kali is just a little too tall for me. Or maybe it's because he's too thin. Or maybe he's not thin, but he just has long limbs. Maybe if he were a bit shorter, he would be better proportioned. But not too much shorter because I want to be able to wear heels and still feel dainty and girly and petite.

"Wow, you are much prettier in person than in your pictures!" he says. I'm trying to get over his absurd height and remember what I saw in his photos. His profile pictures were all of him surfing in Hawaii or precious shots of him and a child, and if he hadn't written the caption: "Me n my beautiful niece!!!" I would have figured it was his daughter from a first wife. He's really tan and surprisingly doesn't have many freckles. His blond hair is slicked back into a man-bun, which I think is such a sexy trend. Every man would benefit from sporting one. But up close Kali is distractingly tall and not

so handsome. Should I tell him he looks better in photos than he does in person? Is that mean, or is that just practical advice from a friend? Because clearly we could only be friends. I could never date someone this tall. Imagine our photos: They'd look completely disproportionate, and no one would be able to crop anything because they would either cut out my head or his.

Shit. Are my photos keeping better men away? I text Gwen under the table: "Are my photos awful? Are they keeping me from the last of the decent men out there?!?! I need you to log into my profile immediately and delete any unflattering pics!"

But what do I need to change? Is it the lighting? Do I need to add some active shots in there? Me, relaxing at a beach. I'm laid back and carefree. Me, on top of an elephant. I'm spontaneous and worldly and love animals. Me, catching a football (pretending to catch a football). I'm sporty and active.

"I didn't mean that in a bad way," he says, and I realize I haven't responded.

"Oh, I know! Everyone looks different in person." I squeeze back the urge to ask him what exactly about my photos is unappealing. And if they were so unappealing, why did he bother to message me? Is it a good thing to look ugly in your photos and blow your date away in person? No. No, that can't be right. I would never get any dates like that.

The waiter comes by our table, which really is only big enough for two drinks, so I keep my clutch in my lap. It makes me look like I'm not going to stay long, but that's okay because I'm not planning to, which is exactly what I'm texting Gwen when I literally do a double take, just like in those cheesy cartoons and the cat goes, awoooagahh! The waiter is actually gorgeous, and really more my type. He's tall, dark, and handsome, and he's got just enough facial scruff to be sexy, not like a sloppy lumberjack. I notice some absolutely adorable freckles, which splatter down from his left cheek and lead past his black collared shirt. I think most people would call them moles, but I really hate that word; I always associate it with ugly witches and old people.

"We'll take some macarons," the tall creature speaks. With complete ignorance of any social grace, he leans into the table and says to me, "I mean, if that's okay. I remember you like them. And this place is known for them. Do you want them? I mean, we can get anything you want. Are you hungry?"

Jesus. He's one of those overbearing mother-may-I lofty beasts. "Wow, you really read my profile. Yeah, macarons are great. And a vodka soda." I smile at my waiter and hope he can tell that we are not a couple, that we are not even really on a date, that this isn't going well, and if he slipped me his number, I wouldn't mind. Not one bit.

"Anything to drink for you, sir?" So dignified and respectful. Sir. My waiter's hands are broad and thick, and I notice his veins bulging in ridges above his tanned skin. And he has spectacular

nail beds. I can't see a single stray hangnail, and his nails have been trimmed short with just enough shine to show they've been carefully buffed (and, thank God, not polished). So respectable. People think it makes men less masculine, but think about it: No one wants dirt-caked nails involved when they're being served their food, much less trying to get it on.

"No drinks for me. Water's good." He doesn't drink. Great. What a bore.

"Thank you so much..." I draw out the last word, fishing for his name.

"Brad."

"Brad! Thank you so much, Brad." What a perfect name. Brad. Like Brad Pitt. It's a strong name. Maybe his full name is Bradley. Like Bradley Cooper. Or maybe he's a junior, or the third, carrying on an old name in honor of his family. I could marry into a long line of Bradleys. "He was really nice," I say to Kali, my eyes still on Bradley's retreating back. I hope Kali at least plans to give him a big tip.

"Yeah, he's cool. So you grew up in Portland? What was that like?"

"I did." How does he know I grew up there? Damn. My profile. I never know how much to reveal about myself on there. What's left to talk about in person, then, if all he's going to do is fact check me: "Yes, yes, no, kind of, yes, that's right." I am trying to remember where he grew up but all I can think of is Bradley The Third. Where did he grow up? Maybe he's an actor, since I'm sure he's not really just a waiter. And with a face like that it would be selfish to not want to show everyone how handsome he is...

"How did you like it?"

"Portland? It was great. Really nice there."

"And what brought you out here?"

"The weather. It's always sunny here. Who wouldn't want that, you know."

Bradley is back with our drinks and macarons. He's so efficient! "Here you are, miss. Vodka soda. I put the lime on the side in case you want it." He is so considerate. Kali never asked if I took my drink with lime. He probably doesn't even know how to make a good drink. "Can I get you two anything else?" I'm embarrassed he referred to us as "you two."

"I'm fine," I say.

"We're good, man. Thanks." Leave it to Kali to keep us in this loveless arranged marriage. He picks up his water glass and tilts it towards me. "Cheers."

"What are we cheers-ing?" I ask.

"To getting to know each other. To me getting so lucky with having a beautiful date."

I push my lips back into a tight smile. "You're not supposed to cheers with water. Bad luck." I take a long gulp of my drink.

“So which macaron would you like to try first?”

“Oh, they’re all the same really.” I really fucking love macarons, but all I can think about is Bradley, and I don’t want give any sort of impression that I’m enjoying myself in the slightest.

“I’ve never had them before.”

“Oh, well, then you should eat them! Enjoy!” I take another long sip of my drink and dart my eyes around the place. There are so many dressed-in-black waiters dodging through the cluster of diners that it’s hard to find him. But I do. There he is. Bradley, being so polite and warm with his customers.

“I need to use the restroom. Excuse me.” The restaurant has really great lighting, and the open stone fire they cook the pizzas in would be the perfect spot for me to run into Bradley, swish-swish-swish right past him so he can appreciate the back of my sexy-yet-classy dress and shiny hair.

I stand up and walk my swishiest walk towards Bradley. But he must have not seen me because he is heading into the kitchen. Unless he did see me. And he’s hoping that I am bold enough to follow him in there. Then we’ll secretly profess our love. And he’ll make sure to check on our table frequently—but rush out the bill. And I can wait for him outside after he’s done with his shift tonight.

I am indeed a bold Leaning In woman, but the kitchen is a little much for me tonight. And I haven’t even finished my drink. So I head to the bathroom. I pull out my phone to text Gwen again. “Ughhhh, this date is a disaster! But potential new bf. Working on it! Will keep you posted xoxo!!”

I stand in front of the mirror. I look perfect. I’m just glad I look as good as I do. I mean, they say the universe works in mysterious ways, and here I am thinking I was going to meet my soul mate tonight, thinking it was Kali, but he was just a distraction. I knew tonight was the night I would meet my future husband. But I’ve got to figure out how to get out of my date with Kali and smooth things over with Bradley. I hope he’s not mad at me. I hope he knows that I would never, ever cheat on him. I’m a good person, and an even better girlfriend. I wrote that on my dating profile, actually. It’s true. I mean, no one has ever actually told me these things, but I think it’s when people don’t tell you that it’s really true. Like, it’s so obvious that people don’t want to bother telling you so they don’t annoy you.

I head back out into the bustling restaurant in hope that it will be perfect timing to run into Bradley before I get back to that suffocatingly tiny table with that huge ogre. But I don’t see him.

“Everything okay?” Kali asks. He is sitting with his legs splayed open, probably because he can’t figure out what else to do with those ridiculous giraffe limbs.

“Yeah, everything’s fine.”

“I tried the macaron. It’s really good.”

“See? I told you!”

“You should try one.”

"Oh, that's okay. I'm actually kind of full. And it's getting really late for me."

"Yeah, I've got to get up early tomorrow, too." I know he surfs and all, but I really don't think getting up to surf qualifies as something you have to do. Like, I actually have a job that I really have to do. I mean, what does this guy do for a living, anyway?

"It was really nice meeting you," I say. Where is Bradley?!

"Do you need a ride home?"

"Oh, no no no. I'm fine. Thanks though."

He stands up as I do, all willowy and intimidating with all those feet of height. He comes in for a hug. I let him wrap his arms around me as I look for my man.



SIX ARTISTS

X

SIXTEEN COLOR PAGES
A MIXED MEDIA PORTFOLIO

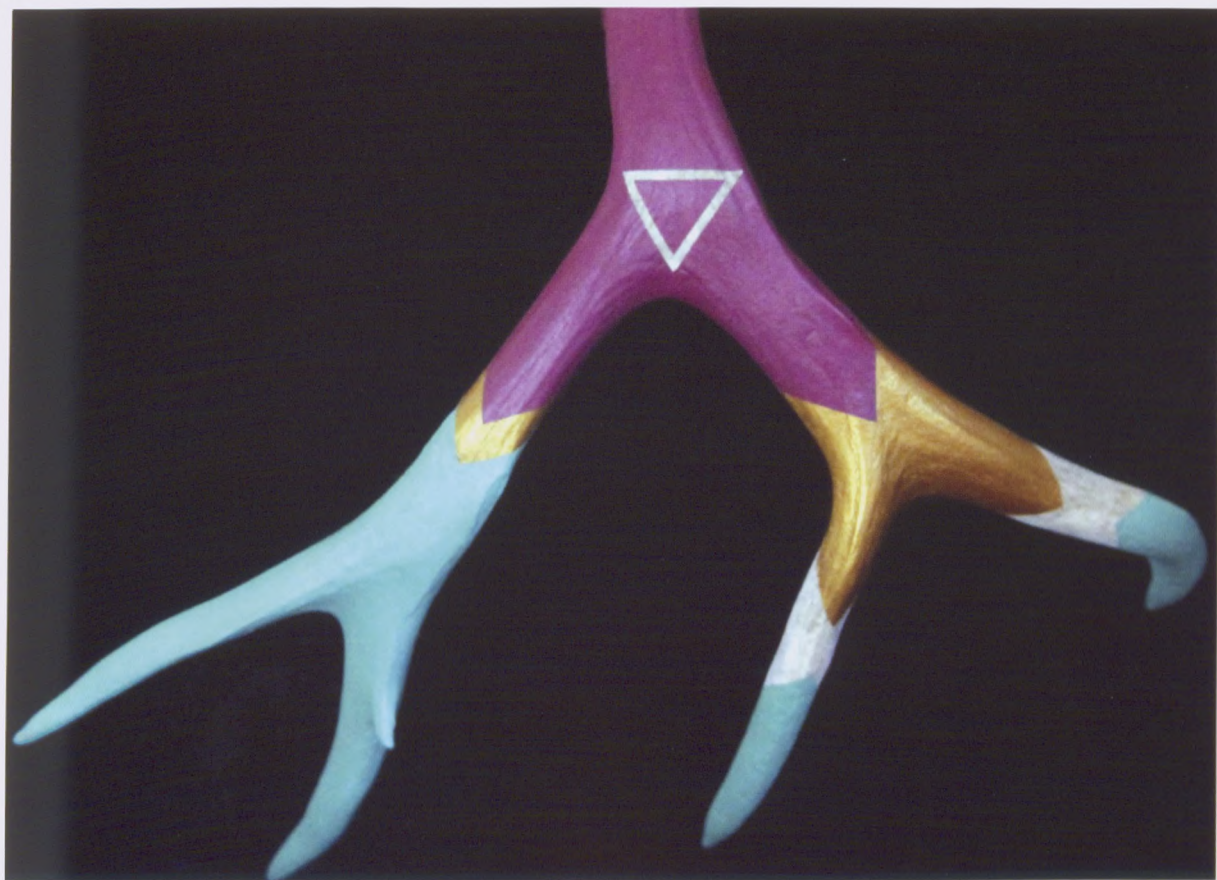










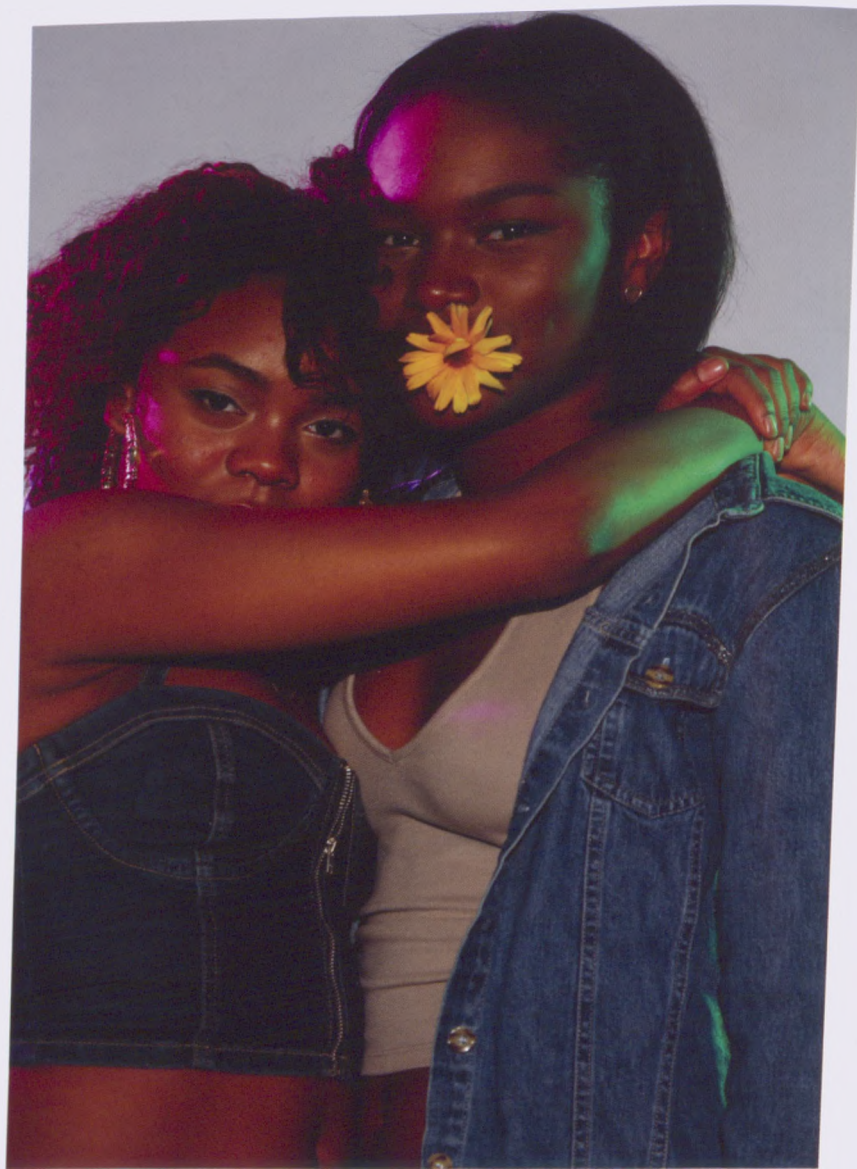


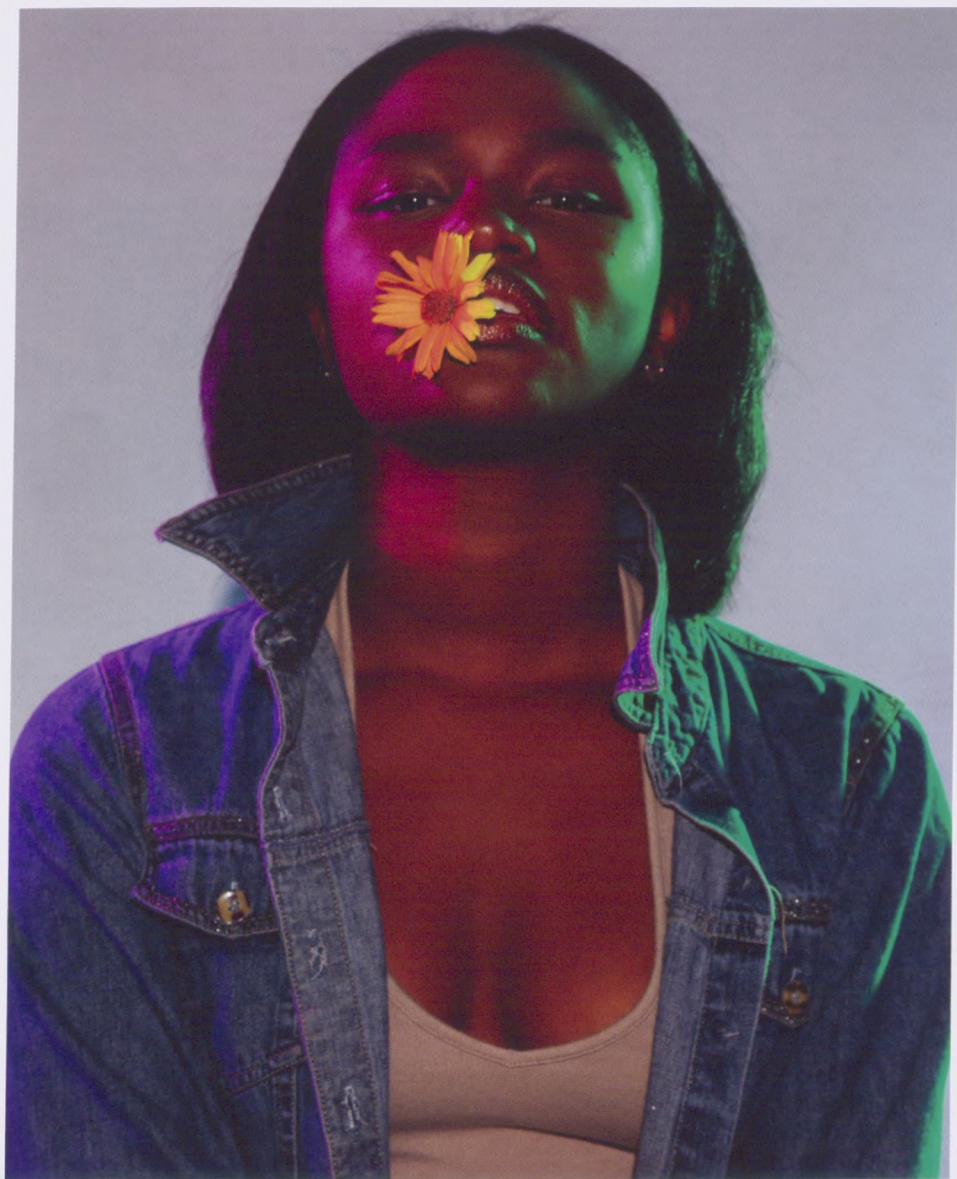






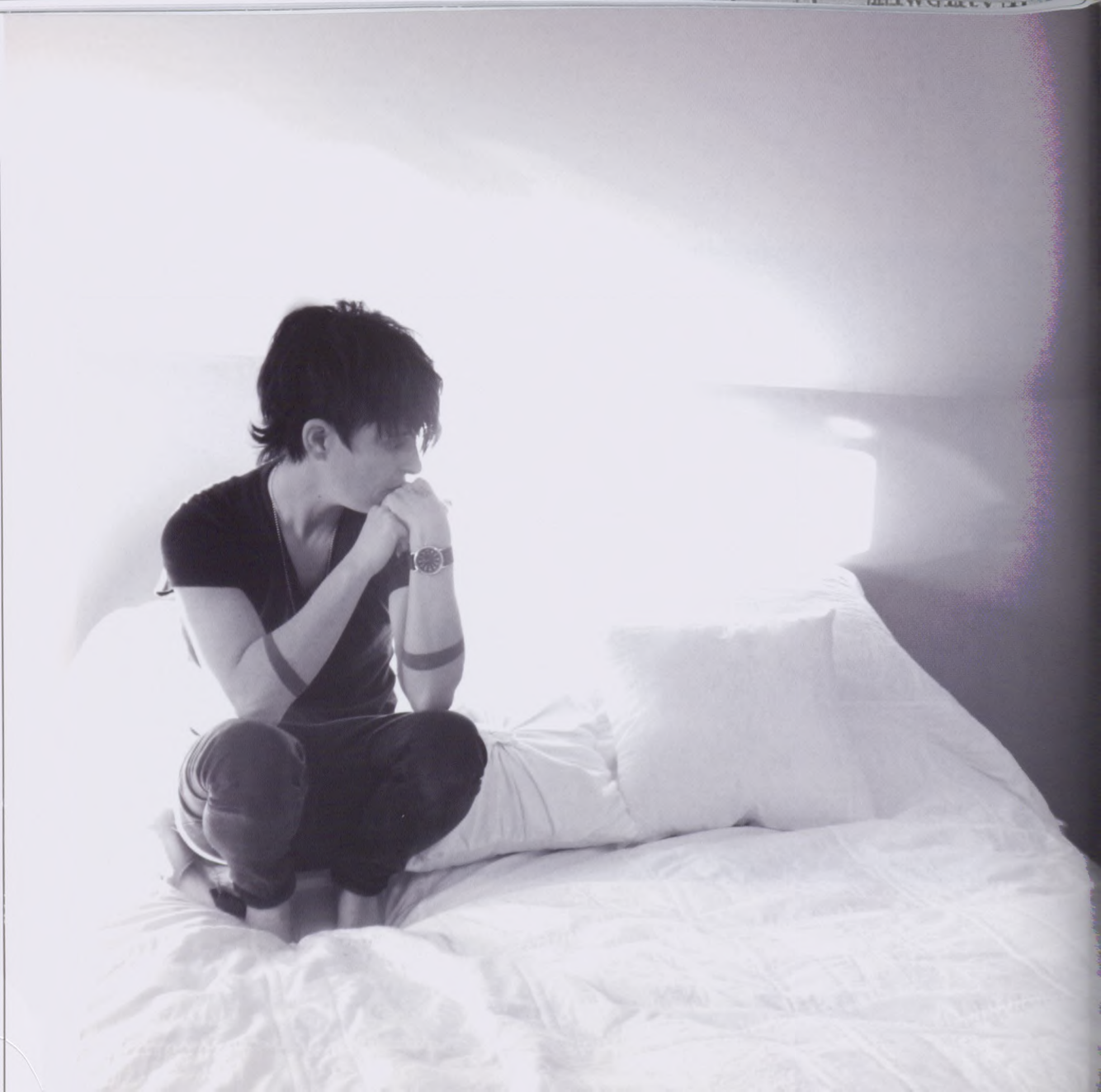












ANDREA GIBSON

x

AN INTERVIEW
BY MAXIME GARCIA DIAZ

X

ANDREA GIBSON IS A SPOKEN WORD ARTIST, POET, AND ACTIVIST. BORN AUGUST 13, 1975, THEY HAVE BEEN WRITING AND PERFORMING SINCE 2003, PUBLISHING SIX ALBUMS AND THREE BOOKS. THEY WON THE FIRST-EVER WOMEN OF THE WORLD POETRY SLAM IN 2008. THEIR MOST RECENT BOOK, PANSY, WAS PUBLISHED MARCH 2015 AND DEALS, LIKE ALL THEIR WORKS, WITH THEMES OF LOVE, GENDER, POLITICS, ILLNESS, AND HEALING.

X

ELEVEN AND A HALF: At recent shows, you've mentioned Vox Feminista's motto, "comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable". How do these two ideas interact with each other in your work?

GIBSON: You can comfort the disturbed simply by telling the truth. Likewise, you can disturb the comfortable simply by telling the truth. So my hope is to speak the truth in a way that reaches the hearts of people and sparks healing. Sometimes that healing will come from stirring outrage and sometimes it will come from a soft reminder that none of us are alone in what we are feeling. My poems and performances search for a balance of both.

EH: You're currently on tour--do you think performance poetry is gaining more of an audience?

G: Absolutely. I dream of spoken word poets filling music venues and theaters all over the world and I see that beginning to happen. It's an inspiring thing to witness and to be a part of. I remember when I first started reading poems in public there were rarely people in the audience who didn't identify as poets themselves. Now people come out to poetry shows even if they don't write, in the way that people will go out to see live music even if they are not musicians. It's really exciting.

EH: Since 2003 you've published 6 albums and 3 books: how do you think your style and voice has evolved between your first album, *Bullets and Windchimes*, and your most recent work, *Pansy*?

G: My early writing had very little nuance. I wrote a lot of political rants that were essentially saying "Their way is wrong, and our way is right." After a number of years of doing that it stopped resonating with me as a way towards a more compassionate world, and it stopped resonating with me as a way to mend deep cultural wounds. At some point in my writing life I began focusing on the places we all meet, and how to recognize that place, and root our conversations there.

EH: Who were your earliest interests or influences?

G: Mary Oliver. Toni Morrison. bell hooks. Adrienne Rich. Leslie Feinberg. Kate Bornstein.

EH: Have you always written exclusively spoken word or performance poems or did you ever write poetry that was more geared towards the page?

G: I never wrote poetry for the page. I admire poets whose work lives on the page as well as it does on the stage, but that has never been me. I write out loud, similarly to the way someone might write a song. I'm very sound focused. I know the sound of a poem before I know the words.

EH: You've talked about your stage fright: have you ever faced an unreceptive audience, and how do you work through this?

G: I can't say I've been in front of a ton of unreceptive audiences throughout my career, and to be honest, that's probably a failure on my part. I'd like to be spending more time reading poems to people who disagree with my perspective. Those people, after all, are who I am writing most of my poems for. But in terms of stage fright, an unreceptive audience doesn't worsen my stage fright, unless the audience for some reason becomes aggressive, and that has happened, and it scared me for sure. I get stage fright mostly because I struggle with anxiety in nearly every moment of my life, and the stage is my life magnified. I deal with it by being transparent with the audience. When I'm scared I say I'm scared. It's the hiding of the fear that makes it unbearable.

EH: What new poets or poetry have you found that you are excited about?

G: Danez Smith. Franny Choi. Sam Sax. Melissa Lozada-Oliva, Hieu Minh Nguyen.

EH: What advice do you have for young or beginning poets?

G: Read read read, listen listen listen, read read read. Feel everything.

SOUL FOOD

x

LATROYA LOVELL

What if it's more than that?
The forthcoming of fathers
a nonevent
nostalgic of the times, men on the
islands could swim
stories of being free,
surrounded by water
a blue deeper than affliction
meeting the sky, tricking you
into a two dimensional world.

Babies born by the same sea
dangling plantain fed,
pepper sauce ankles
smiling, already with teeth
mal de mer seizes the fathers
on landing.

We are in a two story house
at 228th street in the Bronx
lighting one working pilot
with candle and brown paper bag
sending Jafalya to the store
for cassava and curry.

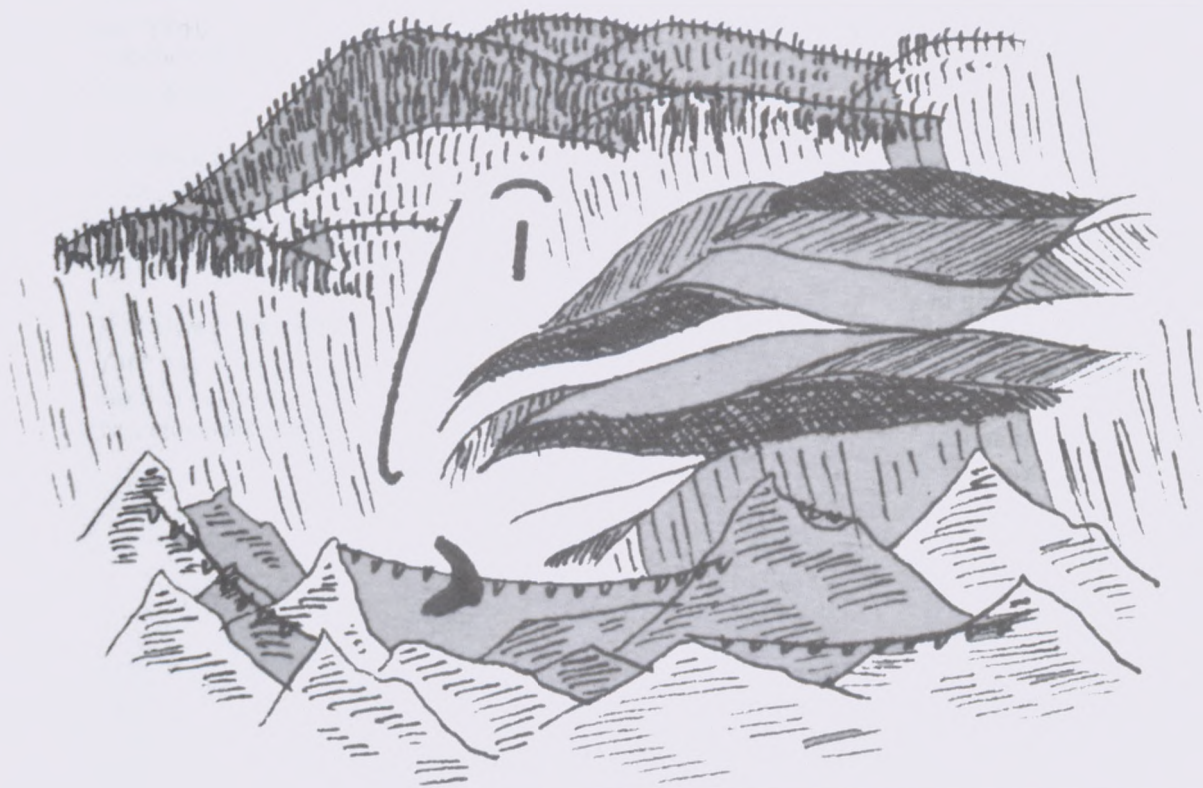
SHRIEK

x

MAXIME GARCIA DIAZ

I saw the best girls of my generation destroyed by madness, starving, hysterical, naked,
dragging themselves through the macho streets at dawn looking for a way to live,
trying not to be an angry bitch, tip-toeing around the word feminist, afraid to offend someone,
tight-laced dainty daughters burning for the ancient hellish connection to the phallic dynamo
in the machinery of the world,
who angel-faced and corseted and dutiful and pained sat up straight-laced in the supernatural
darkness of femaleness floating across the tops of cities contemplating their own ass,
who bared their breasts to Heaven and saw patriarchal demons staggering on tenement roofs
illuminated,
who did not pass through universities with radiant cool eyes because they would have gone
mad like so many of Shakespeare's sisters and committed suicide,
who weren't even allowed in the academies for girly & bleeding from between their knees,
who passed through universities with sad warm eyes looking at all the male names and faces
on the walls, being told not to complain, being told please to abstain from the F-word because
your university really doesn't want to exclude anyone, you see,
whose Facebook groups were deemed unacceptable and invaded by stunted little boys who
are going to be the future leaders of the world,
who were sorry for needing a private space for tampons, sorry for always being ashamed of
tampons, always being shamed for tampons,
who at nine years old were called devils for going through puberty in Salem,
who at fourteen years old had archangel visions and heard divine voices and led the French
army but were still burned at the stake,
who at fifteen years old were shot in the face on a school bus and still would not let go and
still would not give up,
whose bodies were war zones, who had to save themselves in bars all over town, walk the
streets armed with keys for knives,

who listened continuously seventy hours from park to pad to bar to bed to Bellevue to museum to the Brooklyn Bridge,
who ducked their heads together and whispered in each other's ears the witchcraft needed to survive,
who fucked girls so they didn't have to be one,
who wanted to be not just Mary but Jesus too, who wanted to be Dean Moriarty and not just Marylou,
who wanted to hear Lolita's side of the story and for Humbert to shut his pedophile mouth and let the girl talk,
who puked and puked and puked, starved and starved and starved, who turned their bodies inside out trying to exorcise themselves,
who went dizzy counting calories and masturbating silently,
who were ignored as soon as the topic turned to politics,
who wore shorts, who wore skirts, who wore tight shirts and high heels, who wore no bra,
who wore nipple piercings, skirts so tight they couldn't sit,
who wore nothing and still were not asking for it,
who were called whores as soon as they dared ask for it,
who never hated their fathers, their brothers, their sons, boyfriends, husbands, friends, never hated their brothers, never hated you, never hated their cellmates just because they got the sunny side of the room, but who hated the prison,
who could not howl, who were not allowed to howl, whose howls were heard as shrieks because they were only allowed to be banshees, not allowed to be wolves, allowed to bleed under the moon over and over again but never talk about the blood, never call themselves warriors despite going to war every day,
who were not allowed to howl but sat down, turned to a blank page, and howled anyway.



SMOKESTAIN ON A WHITE CEILING

x

JOEL URITESCU

You're in a
white room,
one large window
faces the open ocean.

The room floats.
You're sitting in a
black leather
arm chair—

square, practical.
It took You
time to
get here.

It takes
time for
You to
burn.

The smoke from
Your hair
reveals a
male shaped figure

who must have been

following You all
to this room
he looms over.

You sit, paralyzed
painless as it is.
No words
ricochet off the
clean walls.

Nor does movement
exist, You
smell the scent of
burning hair,

You always thought
Your hair was
too black, now
You can start again.

Grandma Ashes

BY JACKIE
FARRELL





WALKING EXPERIMENT

x

HENRY CHUAN^G

stepping intentionally, i attempt to place every horizontal line bordering a block of pavement between ball and heel of my foot. the first noticeable change caused by this experiment is a lot of looking down but shortly after my steps become irregularly timed and, by comparison, much smaller than what i am used to taking.

after some blocks, i observe that the task of placing a line in the middle of your foot becomes much easier just by increasing the frequency of small steps. however, by relying on this technique, my accuracy skyrockets and this feels like too easy and immediate of a solution.

out of the need for a different approach, i take longer strides. it is at this point in the experiment that i realize: with larger steps, one also must put forth more planning and focus in regards to what is ahead of what is ahead of you.

but, in the repeated action of taking larger steps i notice i have fallen into another rhythm. as with the taking of smaller steps, the task, again, becomes increasingly less difficult. i am now only using one foot to touch the lines and this pattern is both strange and easily determinable.

by the time i've reached my destination (inadvertently ending this experiment),
i have begun to miss touching the line with my other foot.

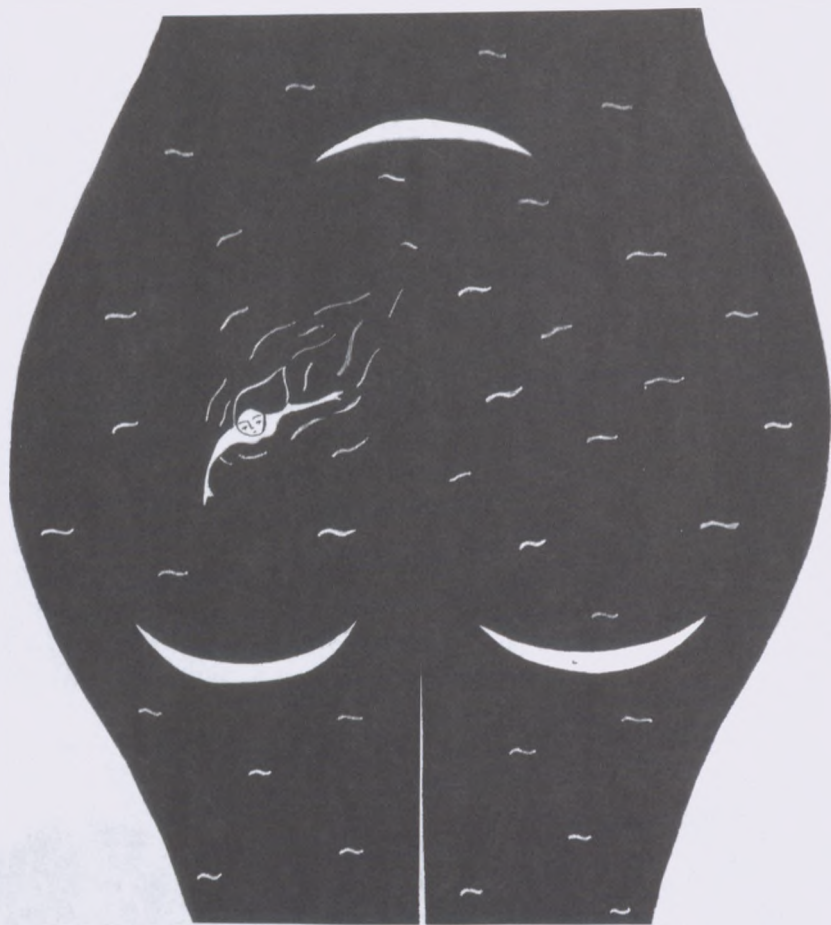
SITTING EXPERIMENT

x

HENRY CHUANG

high resolution
low insistency
tree in the city





TINDER IN NYC

X

MONICA AXLEROD

MONICA | 22

HEY UMMM NOT SURE WHAT TO WRITE HERE...

JUST LOOKING TO MEET PEOPLE

LOL WELL I'M 22 (BUT I FEEL OLDER/YOUNGER/DEAD)

AND LIKE PIZZA, WHISKEY, MUSIC, ART, MYSELF, AND
CATS!!

NOT LOOKING FOR ANYTHING SERIOUS...

COLLEGE STUDENT, ENFP, LEO, WINE ENTHUSIAST, DOG
LOVER, TERRIBLE

5'2 ½" (YOU SHOULD BE TALLER!!!)

***NOT JUST HERE FOR A HOOKUP

We all go into Tinder dates looking for different things: love, sex, drinking buddies, or sometimes a weird, undefined amalgamation of the three—though they hardly seem to end in anything other than the inappropriate mourning of a non-relationships. No matter what we're looking for, Tinder users spend too much time desperately denying—to our friends, our dates, and usually ourselves—the fact that we're even using the app. I actually take this denial a step further, and when people mention it I say things like, "Oh, Tinder? Isn't that the cellular telephone-based web application that connects friends...wait it's an online dating website, really?" Sometimes I hate myself.

For a while I was terrified of sending a first message. There was nothing more terrifying to me than the possibility of rejection—or worse, of starting a conversation. After my many expert months replying to messages, I decided to test out my ability to initiate a conversation. I found the perfect guy, a 25-year-old garbage human who was frowning in all of his pictures.

He wrote a list of maybe five or six things he loved in his about me. Of these five or six things he included both Kurt Vonnegut and dogs. So I thought we were soulmates, swiped right, and we actually matched. I thought it was time to make my move.

hey, I think it's important for you to know that my dog's name is Kilgore Trout

To which he responded *what does that mean?*

To say that I was crushed would be an understatement. What the fuck do you mean, “What does that mean?” If you’re a Vonnegut fan, you know who Kilgore Trout is. People who haven’t even read Vonnegut know who Kilgore Trout is. If you’re even vaguely familiar with Kurt Vonnegut, you know who Kilgore Trout is. Fucker.

The first boy I had a Tinder date with in New York was M, a somewhat reformed bad boy, covered in tattoos with a brain full of pop-sociology—if such a thing exists. But most importantly, and most surprisingly, he seemed to really like me. Not in an overt way either. M just seemed to really, genuinely appreciate my thoughts, my opinions, my Luanne from *King of the Hill* impression. Not only did M appreciate me, he was exactly what I go for—and I don’t mean my type, I just mean the kind of guy I always end up with.

One drunk night, my friend L and I decided to come up with three words to describe the guys we tend to date—mine were *sad, weird, drug addict*. It could have been worse. I don’t remember the third, but two of L’s words were *small* and *potato*; I might go for garbage humans, but at least I don’t go for small potatoes. Anyway, M surely fit my bill. He was a recovering alcoholic and I think, maybe, a part-time heroin addict—recovering heroin addict?—with a strange melancholy to him that I don’t think he’d yet admitted to himself. I didn’t know it at the time, but M was indeed weird. And I don’t mean run-for-your-life, the-killer-is-coming weird—I mean to say that M, like most every other boy I’ve gone out with, had a certain sexual kink.

My favorite things about M were the same things I see in every boy I date. He was a pot dealer who didn't smoke pot, was a feminist who wasn't sure he could call himself a feminist, was less attractive than me, and was a total piece of shit. I just love pieces of shit! I don't seek them out, but I always end up attracting them—the losers, the degenerates, the high school dropouts, the boys who've had a few too many—of what I'm not sure, but they've had enough, and now can't have any at all. I'm not sure if I attract these lowly, depraved men, or if I seek them out—but I suppose I'm young enough to keep doing this—at least, that's how I justify it to myself.

Still, I wanted him. M walked me home in the rain. The whole way we talked about the difference between concepts of “basic” in people, which involved quite a few *Broad City* references. When we got to my doorstep M grabbed my waist and pulled it into his, kissing me—gingerly at first, then as aggressively as I'd ever wanted. After a minute of kissing and junior-high-style body pressing, he broke the kiss:

You should totally invite me up to watch Broad City.

Confession time—this happened mid-August and I hadn't had sex since March. This was mostly by choice, partially because I lacked options, and absolutely because the more time passed, the more afraid I was that I'd forgotten how.

Also, I was on my period.

So I told him that my roommate and I hadn't had the talk about guests yet—and that was true, we hadn't. But really I felt gross and unprepared—although I would have loved nothing more than to fuck this guy, my insecurities took over.

Fast-forward two days, three granola bars and a few cocktails later, I ended up walking the 21 minutes to M's house in a less-hip, somewhat-scary part of Bushwick, all the while manically texting my friends about whether I should tell this recovering alcoholic I was a drunk girl on her period. When I walked into M's room he was doing something that swept me off my feet: he was weighing out his ounces and ounces of weed. I don't smoke weed, but I love the boys who sell it.

While M was weighing everything out, I put on Portishead and laid on his bed trying my

drunk best to look seductive. Eventually we started kissing and when I felt him reach toward my skirt I stopped him.

Before anything else I think it's worth mentioning to you that...

He looked terrified.

...I'm kind of on my period.

M replied so quickly and looked so relieved—he told me that it was perfectly fine and he totally didn't mind at all. In fact, he said he actually would have asked me to hold off showering for a few days—if it wasn't such a presumptuous request.

I mean this guy was nasty—M was smelling and kissing my armpits, he was covering his face in my blood, and then he made a really bold request—he wanted to bury his face in my ass. I told him no and we started cuddling for a while and after a few minutes I giggled mhmm without realizing what I was saying. I guess M took that as the go-ahead to bury his face in my ass. But it wasn't just burying, and it was more than eating—what started out as devouring turned into inhaling. Like breathing in and out of my asshole. It felt good and everything but it was all so silly—I was on all fours and he was kind of laying down inhaling my asshole and furiously jacking off.

And then he came on my thigh.

I never talked to M again.

So it goes.

THINGS WITH ME

x

EMILY HIRSCHTICK

We sat atop a little paradise called Stonehenge, and buried our favorite rocks behind a bigger one in a rusting tin box we found. You smoked your cigarettes and I took pictures, knowing they'd become clichés. Understanding that clichés are common for a reason. I began to recognize my namelessness in these moments. The photos were always of you, never of me, and I felt like I was there to tell the story rather than to be a part of it. So I became the messenger.

"If you want to bake an apple pie from scratch, you must first invent the universe." Carl Sagan said that, and I read it in a book, and I recalled it as you beat crepe mix in a silver bowl the morning after the fourth of July. You said it was the only thing you remembered from your French classes. A thousand dollar crepe recipe, your mother called it.

We became more recognizable messengers of greater circulating information, of thoughts that were not ours but interesting. Art that we wished we'd thought of first. Ideas we could not claim to be our own, but could agree with as premises. Our personal compilations of other people's concepts built and shaped our personalities.

My skin turned pink in late September after a summer of perfect tan. In July this would have

felt fit, perfectly balancing happy days at the beach with a stinging spot. But in autumn it almost felt unfair. I had hidden away my sunscreen and the cool green gels that would soothe the peeling. It felt so wrong for my skin to change colors in fall—a privilege reserved for the leaves and skies. But I saw the color fade and change and draw back. I stopped wearing shorts that made the lines so prominent.

I took a class that made me question greater, abstract concepts. I will never agree with the way people view math as solid and art as fluid, interpreted, changeable. There is structure and visibility to words on paper and the movement of pencil, such uniform rules to creation, at least to the base of it. There is no explanation for quantity or a visible way to perceive it. There is no way to see a million things and know for sure they're there.

I brought negatives to the dark room and wondered about form. Why was there "too dark"? He printed portraits of his girlfriend with the skin all wrong on purpose. He argued with our teacher who insisted on the traditional. Who came up with these rules? Who decided on ten numbers? I didn't know if I agreed.

The director cast me as a butterfly in the school play, and I settled into uncomfortable lines. It was about rape and degradation. A year before, a similar play had been performed, and the actors called a meeting to discuss its language. This year the addition of a butterfly and the subtraction of a human evened it out, muted the discomfort so nobody seemed to notice. So people laughed.

The girl who worked mornings at the gas station Dunkin Donuts began to know me, and say "See you tomorrow." I shifted from iced to hot coffee as the mornings got darker and slower. The nights became too dark too quickly, and the tall grass seemed thicker than it had in sunlight. Time felt more valuable as we would spend less than an hour in the Jeep together, remembering the days we'd walked aimlessly through summer. My favorite Wednesdays we would wait in the drivethrough to get vanilla ice cream and fries, sharing what information we had gathered since we last shared information. Our lives became interesting and different again, and weeks began to take form. We settled into our respective routines.

Last summer there were lightning bugs at Stonehenge and we'd sit in silence looking at them. The day before I left, you opened bottles with your teeth but the field was dark and quiet. So we lay back in damp grass to look out at blinking stars.

I thought you might still be awake, so in the dark I tapped your shoulder. You rolled over, and I asked you what your birthday was. I wanted to make sure you weren't a Gemini.



PRINCIPIO DE LA CARNE

x

ANDRÉS NEUMAN

Necesito la carne para amarte,
la carne enamorada, pero no
más allá de la tumba sino contra la tumba.
Tendido entre nosotros el temor
ha vencido su insomnio y se remansa.
¿Qué pensará la muerte ante la fiesta?
¿Pierde la compostura, suspende sus trabajos?

¡Antídoto, entusiasmo, derribale las leyes,
ofrécele estos pechos de artesana
que señalan el norte y piden viaje!
Es lógico perderse, los guías se equivocan.
A veces el destino es blando y tibio y mueve
dos remos terrenales
que remontan la risa hasta el principio,
hasta el punto final de los comienzos.

INCEPTION OF FLESH

x

TRANS. MARSHAL MALIN

I need flesh to love you,
enamored flesh, not
beyond death but against it.
Between us, fear has conquered
its insomnia & pools there, hanging.
What will death think before celebration?
Lose its composure? Cut short its work?

Antidote, enthusiasm, demolish the laws,
offer these artisan breasts
that show us north & request voyage!
It's logical to lose oneself, the guides misleading.
Sometimes destiny is tender & tepid & moves
two earthly oars
that row laughter to the inception,
to the final point of beginning.

TELEVISIÓN

x

ANDRÉS NEUMAN

¿De qué lado del mundo quedamos al mirar?
¿Cuánto tienen de casa las imágenes
y cuánto nos exilian?
Los fugitivos rastros parpadean,
se apaga lo que vive, lo que veo
y mis ojos, mi piel y mi costumbre.

Miro y por más que miro
no sé si duro más o duro menos.
En el mundo al alcance de la mano
un enroque veloz nos escatima
el tembloroso tacto ocasional
por un resbaladizo verlo todo.

TELEVISION

x

TRANS. MARSHAL MALIN

Which side of the world are we watching?
How much do the images show home
& how much do they exile us?
The fugitive trail flickers,
turns off what lives, what I see,
my eyes, my skin, my tradition.

I watch & the more I watch
whether harder or less I do not know.
In the world at our fingertips
a quick castling spares us
the occasional trembling touch
for a slippery attempt to see it all.

EMOCIÓN BISTURÍ

x

ANDRÉS NEUMAN

«La belleza es secreta y que nadie la piense».
Esa es la advertencia del fanático.
Pero a mí me enseñaron que la curiosidad
es la segunda fiesta del misterio,
un impulso que asalta lo sublime:
asomarse a los pliegues y volverse
cómplice del asunto.
Me emociono entendiendo, me emociono.
Hagámosle una autopsia enamorada
a la Venus de Milo, que se aburre.

EMOTION SCALPEL

x

TRANS. MARSHAL MALIN

'Beauty is secret & no one thinks it.'
This is the warning of a fanatic.
But they taught me that curiosity
is the second celebration of mystery,
an impulse that attacks the exalted:
to emerge from broken off pieces & to become
complicit in subject.
I am moved, understanding.
Let's lovingly autopsy
this bored Venus de Milo.

OCEANO NOX

x

VICTOR HUGO

O combien de marins, combien de capitaines
Qui sont partis joyeux pour des courses lointaines
Dans ce morne horizon se sont évanouis!
Combien ont disparus, dure et triste fortune!
Dans une mer sans fond, par une nuit sans lune,
Dans l'aveugle océan à jamais enfouis!

Combien de patrons morts avec leurs équipages!
L'ouragan de leur vie a pris toutes les pages
Et d'un souffle il a tout dispersé sur les flots!
Nul ne saura leur fin dans l'abîme plongée.
Chaque vague en passant d'un butin s'est chargée;
L'une a saisi l'esquif, l'autre les matelots!

Nul ne sait votre sort, pauvres têtes perdues!
Vous roulez à travers les sombres étendues,
Heurtant de vos fronts morts des écueils inconnus.
Oh! Que de vieux parents qui n'avaient plus qu'un rêve,
Sont morts en attendant tous les jours sur la grève,
Ce qui ne sont pas revenus!

On s'entretient de vous parfois dans les veillées.
Maint joyeux cercle, assis sur des ancrs rouillées,
Mêle encor quelques temps vos noms d'ombre couverts
Aux rires, aux refrains, aux récits d'aventures,
Aux baisers qu'on dérobe à vos belles futures,

Tandis que vous dormez dans les goémons verts!

On demande:-Où sont-ils? Sont-ils roi dans quelque île?

Nous ont-ils délaissés pour un bord plus fertile?-

Puis votre souvenir même est enseveli.

Le corps se perd dans l'eau, le nom dans la mémoire.

Le temps, qui sur toute ombre en verse une plus noire,

Sur le sombre océan jette le sombre oubli.

Bientôt des yeux de tous votre ombre est disparue.

L'un n'a-t-il pas sa barque et l'autre sa charrue?

Seules, durant ces nuits où l'orage est vainqueur,

Vos veuves aux fronts blancs, lasses de vous attendre,

Parlent encor de vous en remuant la cendre

De leur foyer et de leur cœur!

Et quand la tombe enfin a fermé leurs paupières,

Rien ne sait plus vos noms, pas même une humble pierre

Dans l'étroit cimetière où l'écho nous répond,

Pas même un saule vert qui s'effeuille à l'automne,

Pas même la chanson naïve et monotone

Que chante un mendiant à l'angle d'un vieux pont!

Où sont-ils les marins sombrés dans les nuits noires?

O flots! Que vous savez de lugubres histoires!

Flots profonds redoutés des mères à genoux!

Vous vous les racontez en montant les marées,

Et c'est ce qui vous fait ces voix désespérées

Que vous avez le soir quand vous venez vers nous!

LOST TO THE WAVES: A CREATIVE TRANSLATION

x

TRANS. MARSHAL MALIN

Oh! how many captains and crews full of braves
Who set out with joy for a voyage on the waves,
Past this dismal horizon were sadly marooned!
How many were lost, hard fortune of fright!
In an endless sea, on a moonless night,
And are forever within the blind ocean entombed!

Oh, how many skippers have died with their men!
The storm of their lives gathered every last page
And then with a breath scattered all in a rage!
Their ends known by none are plunged deep in the void.
Each wave as it churns seizes some of the freight:
While one takes the sailors, the next takes the skiff!

No one will know your fate, poor lost heads!
Along the shadowy stretches you roll,
And knock your brow on reefs unknown.
Oh! so many old relatives, with no more than one wish,
Died awaiting on the shore all those days
Those who did not return!

/ / / /
/ / / /
 / / /
/ / / /
 / / /

BLACK BLOC

x

JOSEPH GIACONA

There's a black bloc in a celebratory parade for the marriage equality decision. There's a black bloc in the pride parade, now that queer/trans is getting pushed into the mainstream. There's a black bloc in the audience of RuPaul's drag race, menacingly silent. In the St. Patrick's Day drunken slog there's a black bloc wolfishly eyeing the Patrolman's Benevolent Association. There's a black bloc on Bourbon Street for Mardi Gras, throwing out black beads. There's a Black Bloc in Rio on Carnival with a killer dance routine. When the pope visits they half-jog behind the popemobile, solemn under their masks, the communists with little patches of red safety-pinned to their backpacks in case the street fighting takes a fractious turn, whenever it finally occurs. They hold the piñata rope at quinceañeras. And then the cops rush in. Not to beat 'em up, but to set up barricades, "Keep it movin', keep it movin'," they're paid overtime and they're content enough, waving the bedecked and many-flagged youngsters along, who are having a hard enough time keeping everyone on the banner stepping at the same pace, so no one is fighting, just kind of roaming around awaiting the eschaton. They take the Staten Island Ferry, hike the Appalachian Trail, take the Amtrak, get stuck in the Atlanta airport together; the whole scene, pushing barricades and shouting insults, phones out, hands on holsters, visiting the Grand Canyon and the Painted Desert, holding barricades across America. There's a black bloc there when you lose your virginity, and when he came she was frightened that the body beneath her had relinquished its hard anxiety and all turned into goop and relaxed, though

a little disappointed in his performance, and she yelped a little, startled, which spooked a paranoid among the cops, who rushed in to begin effecting arrests while the eco-terrorists wailed in ecstasy/agonny and a street kid swept up in the hubbub chucked a bottle that clattered onto the sidewalk not even shattering, but the kid got dearrested and the barricades were reasserted and the theatre continued on as a roving troupe across the great open palm of America.



THE OREGON TRAIL

x

CHARLOTTE WILLIAMS

you drive us 80 miles out into the ocean,
through thickets of douglas firs and open sky.
“the air’s cleaner out here, isn’t it?”
i’ve never seen a forest like this. so tall and green,
it feels like outreached hands.

the pacific baptizes my toes, painted blue,
and madeline traces words in the sand with her little big toe.
you sit on the blankets and watch us.

hoist us up the wispy mountain tops
to see the great brown rocks on the flat white shores.
“i’ve never seen anything like this.”
i’ve never seen a washington license plate.

one egg white omelet and two soggy pieces of toast later,
we head back for the airbnb.
your fingers are trembling,
i worry your wedding band will fall off.

the worst moment of my life
is when you pull the rental car to the side of the highway,
tongue tripping over choked out apologies and sputtering prayers.
madeline rubs your back in circles
while the ocean crashes against my face.
hands trembling, you think your wedding band will fall off.

"nobody's going to love me anymore."

mother hen,
protect your chicks.

there's only so much they can do
to protect you.

A LIGHT IN THE ATTIC

x

JULIET KLEBER

A river is a festive body
at 21,400 cubic feet per second.

Here, at her second widest swell
the Hudson is not the clean blue

tear she once was, but a green
dance of salt and sediment.

Turn on your light, in the evening,
in the winter, in the house on top

of the hills born with her by the
Triassic shudder of the earth –

cleaved that vital spine between these
low and gentle shoulder blades–

she will take your pink sun and shadow
and cut them to confetti thrown south.

When the leaves fall to open the horizon,
the hill, the house, and you will stand

all on tiptoes, leaning off the balcony
to see her floating barges of oil, grain

and gypsum on the broad back,
rippling with wave and tide as if

to shake off a fly. For years,
I have written love notes

to the banks and beaches, rock bass
and rose pogonias of this river

and still cannot translate the word
of her open, rushing mouth, but

turn off your light, in the attic,
in the early dark and watch her

take the lights of your bridges,
your stars and cities, catch them

like the bright tips of matchsticks
and carry them away.

SARATOGA COUNTY

x

JULIET KLEBER

You were rolling through
the battered landscape
of post-industrial upstate
New York, on the Northbound
Trailways, the first time

in ten months since
renouncing this county.
At Cohoes, its gateway—
grey asphalt road, mills, sky
all salved with the breath
of exhaust-pipes from

Freightliners on I-87,
and you told yourself
you were not coming home.

You were puttering along
on the great grey ribbon wound
through the cornfields— fall gold,
bristling and parting around
the flushed barns, always
leaning into shadow and
in the bright ache of this
familiar farmland

you told yourself,
you were not coming home.

You were coming through
the hills that started rising
into the great green Adirondack
that you, for good, for a new life,
left behind, as the exit names grew
lovelier— Watervliet, Malta,
Burnt Hills, Round Lake— you told yourself

you were not coming home.

You were curving through the state park,
Route 50, Circular,
Grand Ave, Pine Alley, leaning
into the bends and riding
the street angles again as the
mountains stack up
on the skyline—
purple geodes
tessellating
into form

behind the thinning fog—
again, and the grass trembles like
the fur of a rising animal
and there, looking up
again at the sight of

the bare legged spindles
of tall pines
and the birches
clothed in red vines

—tell yourself—

you are not coming home.

SCAFFOLDING

x

ALEX LUKE

She's taller than him but she holds herself like a child. He's surprised how much of a difference that makes.

I'm Cecilia, she informs him in carefully articulated German, trying too conspicuously to mask the foreignness in her accent. I called you earlier – about the room?

He must have, what, forty years on her, but she uses the informal 'du'. A gesture of friendship? A foreigner's mistake? Either way, even with the purpose she's injected into her voice and handshake, he knows she's out of her comfort zone. She hasn't learnt to talk to adults as equals; she sees him as a grown-up.

Cecilia is soft and pale and downy. Her outlines are rounded like a teddy stuffed too full of fluff. He's never touched a body that looks this way, so he can't help but wonder, if you pushed something sharp against it, would she pop and burst open? Or would the sharp thing be buried in her softness? She trails behind him and he bounds through the apartment, energetic as he explains the kitchen window that gets stuck when it's cold, and the broken tile in the bathroom, and how the shower works. She walks with her toes pointed inwards and her thighs pressed tightly together; an apology for what's between them.

x

He's been here almost his whole life, watching as each new community works its way

through the cracks of the neighbourhood, first in a trickle and then a sudden rush, leaving only traces of the one before. German-owned betting shops and bars turned into Turkish döner houses and internet cafes turned into English-language bookshops and quirky cafes with mismatched furniture. For years he hovered at the fringes, unsure whether to cling to what he knew or plunge into what he didn't. Then the accident happened, and he retired early, and he couldn't find anything much more to cling to. He left the flat less and less, and then he left it never.

Around this time his sister wrote to him. We ought to let bygones be bygones, she said, we really ought to catch up after all these years. The letter was typed, and the font's hard symmetry made her sentiment seem somehow less genuine. Printed on a separate page was a photo, postcard-sized and pixelated on a blank expanse of white A4 copy paper. Two ruddy, red-faced little boys took up most of the frame, squirming and giggling on an anonymous lap whose head didn't make the shot. Her two little boys, gleeful and ugly. He didn't reply.

Instead, he painted the walls of his bedroom a deep, thick, beetroot red that should have looked regal but ended up raw and bloody and smothering like the inside of a womb. Inside this heavy redness he forgot about the world without him still morphing and changing and growing and dying. Inside this thing he swallowed himself whole and lost what weeks were, felt time stretch and lose shape and him stretch within it.

Then, in a flicker of lucidity, he felt a craving in his bones: the steadiness of a human he could measure himself up against, who would eat and clean and sleep and shit and work and shop, and maybe he could forge a routine out of theirs. One new structure to support another. Scaffolding.

He placed an advertisement in a local newspaper: room for rent, 9 by 9 square metre living space, fully furnished with a single bed, desk and small TV. Own landline, and, of course, internet connection, though not wireless.

This was the ad that the whore responded to, and, now that she's gone, it's the ad that Cecilia has responded to. Both times he read hundreds of applicants' emails before making a decision. Neither girl knew how lucky she was to have been chosen.

The whore was young too, but she came to him fully-formed; hardened and cynical and dirty. She'd ignore him pointedly if they crossed paths in the kitchen. He'd find her pubic and armpit hairs, spiky and black, lining the plughole and clogging the razor she left on the side of the bathtub.

This place was never meant for such severity. There's a warmth to the apartment, a moistness that almost seeps from the walls; it's a place where things can grow. Cecilia has soft blonde fuzz on the backs of her arms and the traces of past bruises still glint green underneath. She needs this warmth, he thinks, with a rush of giddy enthusiasm. She needs a place to grow.

He tells her: I've had a lot of interest, you know. New viewers every day this week.

Cecilia smiles and nods. She responds to his questions with noises or facial expressions more often than words. She likes to carefully construct her sentences in her head before speaking.

x

They should eat together the evening she moves in, he insists—a ‘housewarming’—on him, of course, this was his treat, his pleasure. He spends the afternoon rummaging through takeaway leaflets searching for somewhere classier than Pizza Prinz or Star Gemüse Kebab, somewhere he can get a bottle of wine with his order (white, sweet, he checks her preference via SMS). In the end he picks a safe option, an old favourite. Set meal for two from Thai China Bistro. Normally he over-orders and eats the leftovers for breakfast; towards the end of the month he can make each meal stretch for days, but tonight he knows he’ll indulge, he’ll eat past his fill.

Cecilia has finished unpacking by the time the food arrives. She sits at the kitchen table while he fusses with plates and glasses and cutlery. The countertops are bumpy with dust on hardened grease, but he’s cleared all the surfaces and the sink is empty.

He doesn’t generally have the patience for cooking, he tells her, but when he’s in the right mood he’ll admit there’s a kind of satisfaction to be had in the creation that comes before the consumption. She takes a moment, as though contemplating this, watching him unwrap layers of foil from steaming plastic tubs. She offers, cautiously, to cook for him sometimes, if he wants. Back in the States she’d make huge three-course dinners for her parents and cousins and fussy little brothers. She’d work on recipes over and over again until she got them perfect, so she’s used to mealtimes being a real event. She misses the extravagance of it all, but it seems silly putting in all that effort just to eat alone. He doesn’t mind vegetarian food, does he?

She sees him struggling with the corkscrew in the bottle and grabs it from him with a soft, clammy hand. He decides, after some thought, that she’s lying about her diet. She must be anxious to impress him. There’s a podginess about her that you can’t get from only eating vegetables.

x

The whore had never tried to impress him, never needed him at all. He could not build his life around hers. He could not even share his space with her, but he didn’t realise this for some time. When she moved in, she told him she was an artist, and perhaps at first he was too much in awe to really objectively judge her character. The people he knew were builders and truck drivers and postmen. Over time he grew fearful of her, but this happened barely noticeably, bit by bit. Once she huffed, ‘but

what do you, like, do all day?’ and he hadn’t liked her tone, hadn’t been quite sure what she was implying. Once he noticed a towel of his missing from the hook on the bathroom door, and the thought of rough cloth on his skin then hers then his again made him nauseous and excited. Once she brought a man home, a Turk, and they ate together in the kitchen, too far from the old man’s bedroom for him to hear anything other than the clang of plates stacked up and set down heavily on the counter, the sputter and gush of tap water, their muted giggling.

Some days she was gone for hours, others she spent holed up in her room listening to music of a genre he didn’t recognise. On these days he’d sit on his bed, leaning against the wall between their rooms, soaking up the dull buzz thuds of bass that steadied and drowned out his pulse. When she was on the phone he’d mouth the muffled words he could make out. She laughed a lot, with whoever she spoke to. After a while he found he’d let the tension stiffen and set in his limbs and he physically couldn’t leave his room when she was in the apartment. For weeks he saw only traces of her: dirty dishes in the sink, the month’s rent in cash in an envelope on the kitchen table. The black spiky hairs in the razor and the plughole.

When he heard the front door click open and slam shut, something loosened a little inside him, and he’d feel for the first time in hours a low gurgling in his belly, or the strange pleasure-pain of his too-full bladder. He’d shuffle through the spaces that used to belong to him but didn’t anymore.

In her room, cigarette butts floated in almost-empty mugs of coffee. The curtains were always shut and worn clothes were strewn across the floor and furniture. Everything was half inside-out like it’d been ripped from her body in a frenzy. He sat on the unmade bed and picked at crumbs on the sheets. He opened the top drawer of her desk: condoms, more cigarette butts, bundles of cash, an empty sketchbook. He breathed in everything. He’d never left the apartment for long enough to know his own smell, but the whore was a foreign object in this place, she carried an alien scent and he could taste it. There was the sweet sweat and deodorant from the clothes on the floor, and the dust and smoke and sugary perfume in the air, and something else too, something he knew he’d find intensely if he placed his head on her bony chest and inhaled at the crook of her neck.

Later, he’d forget exactly what it was that planted the idea in his mind, but it was probably this smell. It made him crave and hate her, and suddenly the condoms and the cash and her nastiness made perfect sense. From then on, whenever she left the apartment at night he dizzied himself with the thought of that sharp body bending and spreading to be taken by men, and men, and men.

Cecilia is different though. Cecilia needs him. He is steady and in control and he guides the conversation over dinner.

‘I lost the use of these two fingers in an accident at work. I used to be an electrician.’ He

holds out his gnarled hand to show clearly what she's probably been trying to sneak glances at since she arrived. The smallest two fingers are jammed tightly into his palm like un-sprung coils, curled in on themselves. He tugs at one gently to demonstrate and it pings back into place; a snail ducking back inside its shell.

Cecilia nods politely, probably repulsed, probably fighting the urge to gag. He lost his teeth in the accident too, he wears dentures, but he won't show her that.

When he tells her about the whore he embellishes the story a little. He tells her how she moved in talking about art school and exhibitions, and he'd been so excited to have someone young and creative in the apartment. He retired a little while ago, he explains, but he doesn't feel old. He likes tenants who bring a kind of energy into the home, and the whore seemed to be buzzing with life. He doesn't think of himself as a naïve man, but it took him a while to recognize that something was off. The nightly disappearances for hours on end, the refusal to talk about her work, a certain smell on her person when she brushed past him in the narrow corridor. He never saw any sign of her 'art'.

'I mean, I'm a reasonable man, but I can't have that kind of person living under my roof.' He says.

'Oh—of course! I mean—you couldn't be expected ...'

Her agreement is almost gushing. He feels a hum of satisfaction at her reddened cheeks. Cecilia.

That night he sits in bed, leaning against the wall between their rooms and listening to the creak of the floorboards as she potters about next door. For a while she talks to someone on the phone, but it's barely audible over the sound of her footsteps, and judging by the speed and tone of her voice she's probably speaking English. He's always struggled with English.

The acid warmth of a belch fizzes up in the back of his throat, and the old man thinks of spiky black hairs in the plughole, and flashes of pink skin and wet footprints in the hallway as she'd pad back to her room in the borrowed towel.

He wakes with a jolt the next morning, instinctively listening for movement, but Cecilia's not up yet. He presses his ear against the cold hard womb-red wall and waits for the day to begin.

PARACHUTE MAN

x

JOSEPH GIACONA

A skydiver opened his parachute too early and was caught by an updraft and sent into the swirling vortices and invisible eddies of the lower troposphere. He sailed above the quilted fields and the rivers which seamed them. He peeked into the virgin bushes of forest canopies where only eagles had spied and he marveled at the constellations of cities at night, grids of ten million candle flames which cut off suddenly at the void of the sea. He danced on clouds like a cherub and pissed on the backs of gulls. Soon he became thirsty, but could draw no rain from the thunderheads to sate himself.

There he expired, couched in a harness aloft on the high winds. When they sighed and brought him low, the birds tore his flesh. When he was lifted up then the sun bleached his bones.

The local weather broadcast would track his perambulations when he was near your hometown. Residents waited with droll excitement to see this unfortunate skeleton and his multicolored parachute sail above their homes. People took selfies with the limp corpse hanging over their shoulder in the sky while they smiled dreamily. Young people sat on rooftops to watch the corpse traverse the sunset and kissed each other for good luck when he was a slouched silhouette at the center of the disc. From the Pacific Islands to the Amazon brown naked humans marveled at his passage, and wove the wayward man into their stories about demigods and transmigration. Everywhere, young, babbling children with no knowledge of death saw the man in his crumpled orange jumpsuit and waved him salutations.

INFERIOR MONOLOGUE

x

KAYLA HEISLER

See, the thing is, I've recently learned I am more than second-generation trailer-trash blowing along hot concrete. I've figured that if nurses want to keep questioning who I am (brown) to be holding my mother's hand (white) for hours while they violate her with needles, well, I suppose that's none of my business anyway. Biting back bile, I repeat the word 'daughter' (daughterdaughterdaughter) and never say 'fuckyou' or *handmotionfor'upyours'* or 'no,Idon'tknowher' or 'I'mjustheretostealherwallet' or 'fortencentsyoutoocanchangeachild'slife.' To let them trip out into the air would serve only to prove the point I've managed to suppress. Yes, I am second-generation trailer-trash blowing along hot concrete.

FAKING IT

X

KAYLA HEISLER

There's an insidious epidemic that is acting as a fence, restricting many from this country from reaching their fullest potential. Then, once goals are met, earned fairly, rightfully, the afflicted continue to feel they have only pretended to succeed. It is as if they are occupying a life not meant for them. The name of this state is Impostor Syndrome. I offer the first definition I saw, courtesy of the Caltech Counseling Center, below:

Impostor syndrome can be defined as a collection of feelings of inadequacy that persist even in face of information that indicates that the opposite is true. It is experienced internally as chronic self-doubt, and feelings of intellectual fraudulence.

Essentially, Impostor Syndrome is a condition that occurs when a person feels like they are pretending to be more capable than they really are. Though some men are afflicted, the Syndrome is far more prevalent in women. A study by Pauline Rose Clance and Suzanne Imes attempts to explain the phenomenon. In their co-authored research paper *The Impostor Phenomenon in High Achieving Women*, they state, "Given the lower expectancies women have for their own (and other women's) performances, they have apparently internalized into a self-stereotype the societal sex-role stereotype that they are not considered competent (see Broverman, et al., 1972; Rosenkrantz, et al., 1968). Since

success for women is contraindicated by societal expectations and their own internalized self-evaluations, it is not surprising that women in our sample need to find explanation for their accomplishments other than their own intelligence -- such as fooling other people."

Lower expectancies. Societal expectations. Sex-role stereotype. All pieces of the puzzle that lead to the complete picture of Impostor Syndrome. And we are taught these things are inherent and harmless.

Confession time: I am a bit of a hypochondriac. It is important that you and I both acknowledge this before moving any further into this essay. Because of my propensity toward exaggeration, my instinct to be painfully empathetic, I understand that any connection I find between myself and this phenomenon certainly could be an unjust correlation. So even after noticing a number of common symptoms present in myself (frequent procrastination, generalized anxiety, aversion to asking for help) I recognize that the seemingly common forces at work in our culture for girls and women (Lower expectancies. Societal expectations. Sex-role stereotype.) are of course likely to leave some mark, even if not the full-blown phenomenon.

Though the concept of Impostor Syndrome is still relatively new, instances of it have crept up in numerous places in literature. Sylvia Plath's semi-autobiographical *The Bell Jar* is rife with passages detailing an unexplainable weight of inferiority that plagues the main character Ester Greenwood throughout the novel. Winning internships and scholarships and publication never feels deserved, and despite Ester's obvious intelligence, she never seems to truly trust in it, and is often wrecked with self-doubt. The passage below from the novel demonstrates this:

"What do you have in mind after you graduate?"

What I always thought I had in mind was getting some big scholarship to graduate school or a grant to study all over Europe, and then I thought I'd be a professor and write books of poems or write books of poems and be an editor of some sort. Usually I had these plans on the tip of my tongue.

"I don't really know," I heard myself say. I felt a deep shock, hearing myself say that, because the minute I said it, I knew it was true.

Impostor Syndrome says more about our culture as a whole than it does about the individuals inflicted with it. What does it say that millions of women feel they should fade into the background, to bow out gracefully and let someone more...more what? More qualified stand in the sun?

Imagine: sitting at a desk staring at a wall indefinitely, yearning to confess your sin, but being unable to identify exactly what your corruption is. I'm a fraud. I'm a fraud. I'm a fraud. The recursive

sentence sears into your brain—yes, they will find you out. Who? All. Parents, colleagues, friends, professors. The weight of the secret looms largely over every aspect of one's life. Success is a fluke. Failure is proof of the fraudulence. There is no winning.

The condition stifles. Rather than share ideas, one afflicted may often hold her tongue because she feels sharing her ideas will be met with either

1. Flattery—her idea is silly, stupid, incorrect, but the person she is speaking to will appease her to keep her from feeling poorly about herself. Or,
2. Ridicule—her idea is silly, stupid, incorrect, and the person she is speaking to will confront and mock her.

Impostor Syndrome—do I have it? I know I've already admitted to my own hypochondriac tendencies. It's hard to say, considering the fact that Impostor Syndrome is not an official diagnosis listed in the DSM. But one impact that reoccurs in the definition is the aversion to apply for opportunities. Many scholarships have gone unapplied for, contests unentered because of my fear of mediocrity. No—I'm sure I don't have it. At the end of the day I know what I have earned is rightfully mine. At least I know it most of the time. Like I said, this Impostor Syndrome, its signs and symptoms are not set in stone.

Still, I never wanted to ask for help, always assuming that that would show off my incompetence, believing that other people who went to better schools and had more money or more God-given talent and intelligence were destined to have more success. The constant questioning can lead to steady procrastination—why rush to complete the task that could expose you as a fraud?

When I procrastinate, what did I find myself thinking about?

Mostly about grad school, if I could get into any grad schools. Then where I would get my Doctorate. All lines of thought eerily similar to that of Ester Greenwood.

To live with Impostor Syndrome is to live with fear. The brain says you're lying. Impostor. You will be called out. Fear of confrontation. Starved of elation. Fear settled in where there should be pride. Feet dragging, stumbling, where they should stride.

The idea that the top is lonely is a sentiment often echoed, but in the case of Impostor Syndrome, the top is more lonely because once one afflicted reaches it, they sit waiting to fall.

It haunts me to think that this is standard. For women to work and toil and study and still continue to feel less-than. Less than deserving. Less than intelligent. Less than the person who 'should' be standing in their place. Is inadequacy so thoroughly burrowed into ourselves (You throw like a girl. You cry like a girl. You run like a girl.) that accepting that we are ever up to par is nearly unthinkable?

DIEGO

x

LATROYA LOVELL

He was the kind of person who
stood in the sunlight
fists balled, begging to be
scraped off the sidewalk

back facing him
his voice was melodious
and clementine
facing forward, his teeth were rotten
and august like tiger's eye

he carried himself
beeline, able bodied, forceful
mocking the past lives of words

but it looked more, weak
his spine was a trickle
from an old faucet

in the evenings he pulled himself
up five stories
midway, men came shuffling down
past him, zipping their flies

Door swinging open
his sister is laying on the couch
sweaty and glorious and grinning
thighs sticking to the leather
twirling her ankles.

DINER

x

LINDSAY BECKER

You threw a chair at your primary school teacher.
Your mother wore Chanel suits.
With your brother, you threw rocks at the Nazi soldiers.
Your hometown in Holland starts with an "S."
Your father was smart, he got everyone to Indonesia.
You threw fits when the silk bow on top of your young head was not stiff and clean.
You had a summer yacht and a privileged tan you weren't proud of.
You almost went to the Olympics, a real Dutch swimmer.
You never learned to cook or clean; you had servants.
You weren't supposed to go to college, you were supposed to marry.
You married a poor American who was handsome and all wrong for you.
You were too young for the rest of your life.
You smuggled his handgun back to the States, strapped to your inner thigh.
You had three daughters before you were 21.
You weren't a good mom, but your daughters deified you.
You cheated on my grandfather; he cheated on you.
You loved classical music -- a great relief from my mom's Beatles fetish.
You never felt you could get a divorce, but also never tried.
You made desserts, and cleaned your own home, and refused nice wine and good coffee.
You talked to me, you let me talk to you.
You called Pappaw, "Daddy," and I think you were addressing two men you loved.
You never said whether you knew about my mom; no one else did either.
You beat her bedroom window with the soft part of your fist on wine-soaked mornings.
You let Magic pee on your leg once because he didn't know any better.
You raised me without my knowing it.
You told my mom and her sister that they were too old to wear denim.

You loved long walks; you took me on so many.
You broke a hip, some toes, a knee, and an arm.
You hid the blood you coughed in our bathroom sink but I saw you in there.
You said you didn't like closed doors.
You got cancer years before you told us, I believe that now.
When I brought my boyfriend to Rachele's wedding, you wouldn't look at him.
You believed some things that weren't true.
You collected recipes like antiques.
Your handwriting was elegant, even while your knuckles swelled and froze.
You witnessed my mom, your baby, in all of her darkness.
You didn't admit to sharing that with me.
You and I didn't speak much after that.
You and I didn't speak much after that.
You and I didn't speak much after that.

And then, our last day, I think.
On the way home from the diner, we sat in the backseat of your Lincoln,
Arguing lightly, longingly, as I tried on your heavy topaz ring.
This will be yours one day. My finger flinched.
Were the seats we leaned into tan or maroon?
Was it bright outside so that we squinted?

FARMER'S SON

x

MALAHNI BANTA

Alixander says, The earth is trying to eradicate the human race.
Not long after this bold allegation, he's teaching me how to slaughter a pig.

You pick your pig.

This pig—this fat, sticky, 212 pound pink and black mass of obliviousness—has the distinction of being the last pig in Alixander's pen. This pig is Pig 22. Any further effort put into Pig 22's name would be building an unnecessary bridge of intimacy—a bridge Alixander doesn't like to build or cross all too often.

I ask, What happened to pigs 1-21?

He asks, What happened to the black rhinoceros? The passenger pigeon? The Tasmanian tigers.

I nod.

You stun your pig.

When we find Pig 22, all fat and ignorant and distant, he is soaking in a bath of mud and water. His eyes are lifeless as Elias opens the fence and kicks at Pig 22's behind, causing him to squeal and whine as he charged toward the opening. He bumps into my leg on the way out, smearing dirt and grime on my pants.

Alix goes right for the kill because, he says, it's quicker that way. He pulls his pistol from his waist and aims it at Pig 22's head, pulling the trigger before I can even understand what's happening. I jump. He blinks at me, blank and distant, then turns his attention to the bleeding pig carcass lying before the two of us.

I wonder, Do other animals have the capacity to feel relief?

Do they see the face of death and pass on someone else's name in exchange for a few more weeks on earth?

Do they lie?

You bleed your pig.

He slits Pig 22's throat and allows the animals blood to spill over his work boots.
I watch this.

You bleed your pig.

In the old barn where he keeps tools and boxes and things, a metal chain hangs from the rafters. Attached to the end of the chain is a double-edged slaughtering hook, shiny and silver and inviting, that turns in a slow circle. It swings back and forth, and Alix drags Pig 22 right to it. I follow him, wanting to see the spectacle, wanting to come to terms with the fact that I am an awful person. I stand beside dead pig 22, staring down at it with great condescension and gratefulness.

Alix takes the hook, sticks it into Pig 22's hind legs, and begins yanking on the other end of the chain until pig 22's carcass dangles in the air, fat and lifeless.

Blood drips out of the hole in Pig 22's head, pours out over the barn floor and over Alix-ander's rubber boots. To speeden up the bleeding process, he slits Pig 22's throat as well. After, he stands there with his fingers twitching beneath his black leather gloves. He glances back at me and says, The leading cause of death, globally, is not cancer or heart disease or D.D.T. trucks, or whatever bullshit they tell you in health class, but the human race itself.

Think about every way in which a person can die, he instructs me, and I guarantee you it can be traced back to another human being.

Humans are the ones producing the knives, the ropes, the guns, the scissors, the fast food, the recalled cars, the defective baby cribs, the matches, the drugs, the cancer causing chemicals, the nuclear weapons, the wars.

He says, We're wired to kill one another, to manufacture causes of death, to set fire to our own homes. Human nature is anything but beautiful.

A person is a human is an animal.

The earth made sure of that.

The barn floor is covered in Pig 22's blood. Neither of us so much as blink.

You scald your pig.

Alixander tells me that most people boil the pig, but that he doesn't like to because it's boring and it takes too long to do. Not to mention, it's not nearly as fun as setting the pig on fire—dragging a flame across Pig 22's skin and burning the hair from its scruffy, chubby body. While I stand guard of Pig 22's body, Alixander goes off somewhere in the barn, hidden behind crates and boxes and things, and returns with a blowtorch. He hands it to me and asks me to hold it while he gets Pig 22 ready. He drags Pig 22 out to the middle of the floor, lays him there, then walks over to retrieve his weapon of choice from my sweating, shaking hands.

Don't be so scared, he whispers, smiling.

The maximum temperature a blowtorch can reach is 3623 °F.

I ask him how he knows this.

He asks me why it matters.

You gut your pig.

The incision is a long, thin slit down Pig 22's abdomen, and before Alix is even finished drawing the line, Pig 22's body begins to expel its own internal organs. Alix catches them in an old, metal bucket, which sits at his feet, allowing the organs to gain enough momentum to make a sound I'll never forget in my life.

He reaches into the slit and shimmies around in there before retracting his arm and pulling Pig 22's heart right out of Pig 22's chest. He holds the heart out for me to look at, asks, You ever been in love before?

This is what it looks like.

Love is a pig's heart.

I ask, If that's love, then what is hate, and he says, I suppose it's standing there watching me rip love out of another creature.

I don't say anything else.

He smiles and drops the heart on the floor between us, just before he begins to saw Pig 22's carcass in half.

It occurs to me then, watching him tear apart Pig 22, watching him destroy life with his bare hands, watching him not even flinch at falling organs and bloody boots, that Alixander does not know my name.

I ask, What are you making with the pig? Bacon? Ham?

He says, Me? Nothing.

Alixander is a vegetarian.

You chill your pig.

FRIDGE POEMS

x

JULIAN E. CARDER

hide between decorate

ceremony

our brother always was

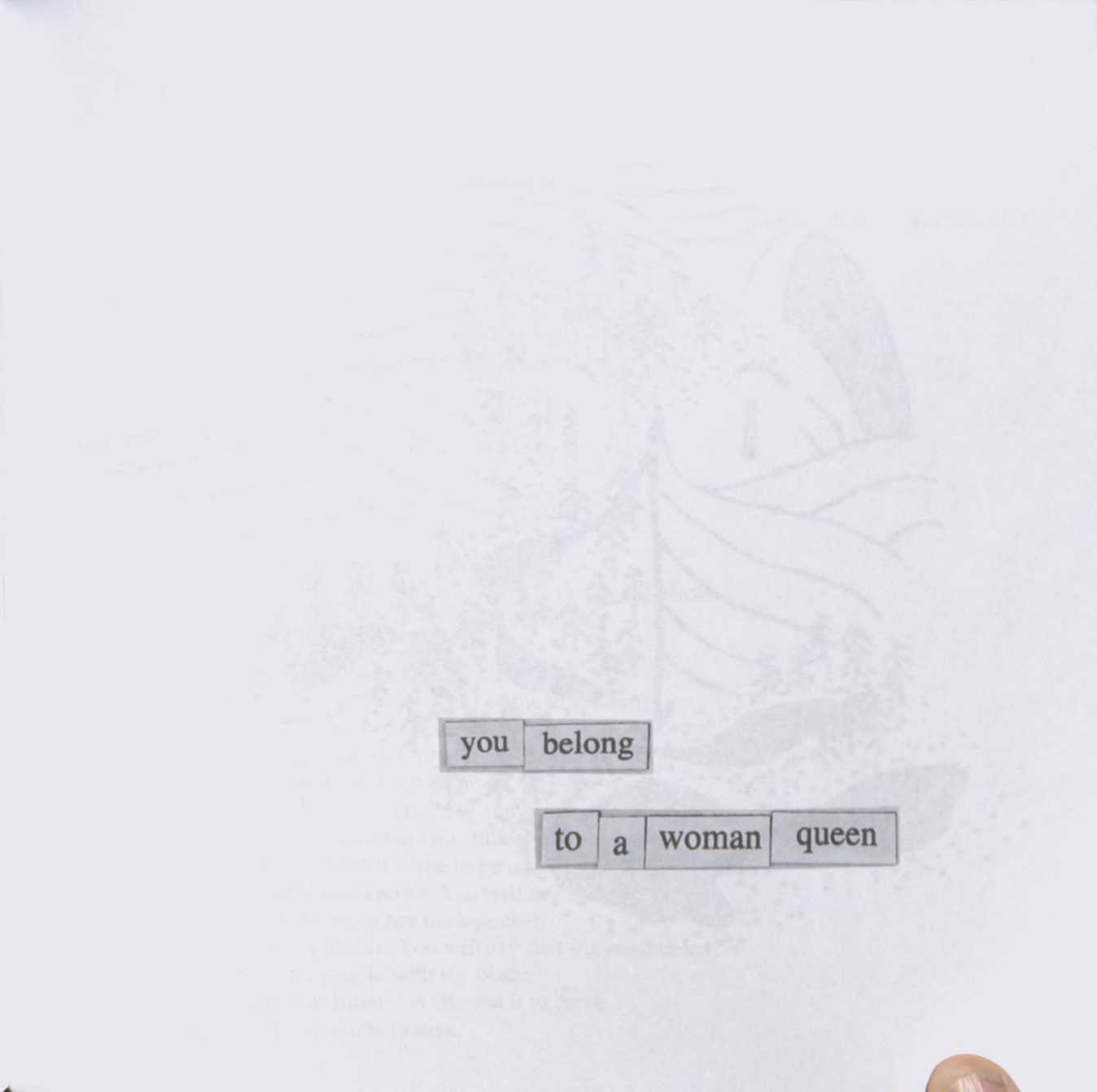
he drag s his skin through dream clothes

we blow him up together

discover	e	d	an	intimate	bar
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with	lavender	people
who	dance	in flame

they	touch	my	body	open
	laugh	my	world	yes



you belong

to a woman queen



THINGS WE USE OUR BODY PARTS FOR

x

ANNA SHNEYDERMAN

Juliet braids my hair.
She whispers secrets like snowflakes
melting in my ear and her wet breath reminds me of you.
A man used to call the house phone a long time ago.
He used words like shovel and francophone and mustard.
Will you become a shovel if I ask you nicely.
It will only be for a minute or longer.
Now Juliet braids my eyelashes. Later I will braid hers.
Can I braid your eyelashes someday.
Mother wants me to come home but she is dead
along with our second family cat and I wonder
if shower curtains are replaceable.
Juliet has long fingers and nails shaped like thin pizza slices.
There is a boy Juliet wants to kiss except for that
he has no lips. The boy says there are
plenty of other things to do besides kiss.
He says this in a windy mumble out of his left nostril.
The right one is all blocked up.
You are so far away and so tall up on that hill.
If you roll down and meet me at the second tree we can
talk and trace each other's jawlines and plot violent crimes including
sabotage and acts of communism. Juliet has run out of things to braid.
You'll never know what it's like to be a pirate and neither will I.
You will say that Juliet knows. You will say that she
carries a curved sword in her back pocket
that is not made of plastic. You will say that she sometimes
slashes leaves and people with the blade.
You will suggest to Juliet that she use it to carve
lips on the boy she wants to kiss.

CONTRIBUTORS

x

MONICA AXELROD New girl in town, swiping her way through the city.

MALAHNI BANTA I write about 'sad' things, usually, and am currently writing a book about two mentally ill lovers on a quest to the moon. While trying to complete said manuscript, I've been living almost exclusively off of Twizzlers and ginger-ale. I promise the book is better than this piece.

LINDSAY BECKER I read on the internet that time is a flat circle. Maybe I saw this on TV. I want to ride in slow cars and never visit the sea.

CHRISTINA BERKE Reader. Writer. Traveler.

LISA BRENNER @lisajillpickle

MORANDA BROMBERG As a poet and writer I draw from the deeply personal and the collective feelings present in childhood, innocence, loss, and exploring nature. I am interested in the cavernous imprint childhood leaves on our adult psyche.

CAROL BROWN is a trope - i.e. she lives in Brooklyn, writes an obnoxious amount and pretentiously calls herself a poet. She is a connoisseur of books and inventive ways of shelving them in small New York apartments. Carol really likes butterflies and the color purple.

ELLEN CARPENTER studies Literature in New York but is actually from Connecticut. She is an owl. Milk-poems are based on true events.

HENRY CHUANG I'm trying to practice writing poetry in a way that organizes the thing(s) at hand, but also opens the thing(s) up for discussion. What else...I'm Chinese (Taiwanese by association,) and my first language is English. I like experiments.

MAXIME GARCIA DIAZ I'm a third-year literature student on exchange at Lang from the Netherlands. I feel pressured when people say things like "feel free to be weird" to me. God Bless America & Happy Halloween.

JOSEPH GIACONA is an economics major at Eugene Lang whose goal in life is to avoid all work. A selection of his writings can be found at holidaysintheunitedstates.tumblr.com.

KAYLA HEISLER attended her first NASCAR race at age five and her first poetry reading at age nineteen. Her parents are her favorite people in the world. Though things looked grim for a while, she has kept a Pichira tree named Bernard alive for over a year.

EMILY HIRSCHTICK People say I collect things and that's true.

JULIET KLEBER Girl, jellyfish, friend.

TAMAR LAPIN is a writer living in NYC. Her first poet crush was Charles Bukowski and she now thinks that trying to write like him may have been an egregious mistake.

LATROYA LOVELL is a fiction, memoir, and poetry writer; born and bred in Harlem, New York. Her writing is centered mainly around personal identity, minority issues, woman experiences, and origin. When she is not writing she is chasing after her two Siberian Huskies and her two year old Jerald.

HANNAH MACLAGGER is a sophomore writing major at Lang. She likes to write about girls getting gross and everyday voyeurism. She is from Rochester, New York.

MARSHALL MALIN I am a student at Eugene Lang College of the New School University in New York City. Previously published in the journal Eleven and a Half and 12th Street Journal.

ANA MILJAK likes dogs, caffeine, internal screaming, and excessive punctuation. She can usually be found live-tweeting her life crises or waiting for the M train. She won't rest until she's complained about everything.

DILARA O'NEIL is a literature student living in Brooklyn. Her interests include Western Marxism, The French, and , of course, The Internet.

ANNA SHNEYDERMAN has different colored eyes, maybe mafia ties, and is a poet who knows it. Previously published in Eleven and a Half and Lilith Magazine.

MARK SUCIU Junior transfer student coming from Philadelphia. Weighing what it means to be son to my parents and brother to my brother.

The third out of four, JOEL URITESCU likes to make sexual jokes around his parents to make them feel uncomfortable. To hell with the untrustworthy narrator, we're all a little lost and appreciate help whenever we can get it.

CHARLOTTE WILLIAMS some poems I wrote in high school, after high school, and a few hours before this submission was due.

CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS

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ARTA AJETI Pen, in sketchbook. Arta's work can be found on pages 55, 92, and 115.

ELLEN CARPENTER made these drawings using an old tea bag and a very small pen. Ellen's work can be found on pages 15, 27, 33, 35, 43, 47, 81, 87, 95, and 138.

HING YIU CHU To be nurtured in Hong Kong yet born in China, is like having my skin to reject my veins; like waves collide into oceans; only to ask one desperate question: "where am I from?" Hing Yiu's work can be found on pages 56, 96, and on the front and back inside covers of the magazine.

JACKIE FARRELL alone survives from the silent era. Like the gods of antiquity who after their downfall lived on as puppets, bugbears and other minor ghosts, haunting centuries which no longer believed in them, Jackie is a residue of the past, an exiled comedy god condemned or permitted to act the part of a mischievous hobgoblin. Jackie's Work can be found on pages: 28, 29, 44, 45, 84, 85, 108, and 109

KAREN HSIUNG

grasp |grasp|

verb

- get mental hold of; comprehend fully
- act decisively to the advantage of (something)

noun

- a person's power or capacity to attain something
- a person's understanding

Karen's work can be found on page 7.

JEANA LINDO Inspired by the work of Philippe Vogelenzang. Digital photography. September 2015.

SIDNEY LAW

ANA MILJAK's work is featured on the back outside cover of Eleven and a Half.

ANA SOFIA REMIS Paper Collages
2013.

JULIA ST. CLAIR He only wants to be a real boy.

KAYLA SHIFTER Pen for hire. Antler enthusiast.
Midwest transplant.

TALON WALDRON I am an aspiring photographer, whose main focus is abandoned buildings. I find them so intriguing. There are so many stories that are ready to be uncovered. Talon's work is featured on the front cover of Eleven and a Half

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