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In Lovely Blueness / Anton Franz Hoeger

Changing the World
Through Words and Art

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Cover: In Lovely Blueness / Anton Franz Hoeger

In Avalon We Continue

Haolun Xu

No, I don't think I'm ready yet,

even with my body refusing to regenerate stating that this is a warning, a lamp lit against the cramped spaces of possibility,

Spring filled the air with the sound of infants. I forgot the shrillness, their bicuspid throats still those of a bicuspid. I think they are most realistically our parallel to dinosaurs. Blameless, pure, unable to grow hair.

I haven't forgotten the season of pollen, and they haven't forgiven me,

the pressure of both light and degeneracy tumbling into the smallest crevices. I can find the seedlings underneath my fingernails. I cannot exclude myself from the ceremony of earth.

But I can try. I shower five minutes later than the rest of my family. I sleep three hours more than the rest of my friends

(Only I can give myself the nickname Farmland, but just for today) I reflect on the decorum of the natural order. This is a new social rule, because I am not close to myself anymore, but I am formal.

At night, I peer out of my night-dark room, and into the blue lights of the world. I take my fingers and replicate the pollen. I pretend to weave honey to the dawn. When I wake up from this, I am legally purified, by an invisibility I dreamed visited me the day before.

Holidaze

D Fulford

We were never sans xmas quirks and messy like
Reverend Bob's passive aggressive requests for

root beer tale-telling of mountain crags and
spamming the night with German expletives

we just hoped he would never hug Mom again
ill-conceived boner package in tan polyester

all the pets snagged on Grandma's oxygen lines
while she beckoned us claws sharpened to whisper

a pithy reminiscence or insult, coaxing smiles
or telling me she hated my hair choices, tattoos

sometimes Pop would show up for a few minutes
soused weepy, feeling in the way needy and

Mom, then, never sat down the entire long night
bustling in gravies, chopping, sipping Coronas

the expensive bourbon or cheesecakes Casey brought,
and you, without question, would be late so

everyone would have to wait too long drinking a
little too much snacking showing off for each other.

You're gone, now, so it's easy to keep on feigning
we're all vexed your belated throws the evening

cadence into tailspin of memory and Mom sits too
much, Pop and Grandma died, Bob's German now

tucked into mothball-painted thrift store suits, Casey
still brings cheesecake cooks the ham and even though I

quit drinking years ago I'll raise up at 7:00 because
Mom sent your letter saying we'd think and drink

to you right now and instead of the dark place you
today live we all pretend you're late, as ever, but

we know you'll be there when you arrive.

They Say

D Fulford

They say that everyone who alights at life's doorstep
will somehow influence it—this takes varied forms
depending on who you are and what you need from

the moment and the other, too, who might blow in
discretely, supplicating or maybe they tiptoe across
your face in steel-toed stilettos of ardor and it will be
all you can do to tell them you need some time to think.

You, brother, never asked permission came screaming
into my life abreast your mellow twin and from the very
moment we met were akin but wildly dissimilar as

siblings habitually are, and though I did not enjoy the
inborn knowledge of your distresses roiling internally
your own twinges I also never assumed you would be the
one to knock everything down with a mere swipe of hand.

The Swimmer / Anton Franz Hoeger

Is This the Ritz?

Doley Henderson

Viv always said I was never the same after the crash. It was snowing like billy-o when we left the dinner party, we couldn't see a damn thing through the windshield. Wipers scraping back and forth, the old station wagon poking its way out onto the autoroute.

Big fat truck came out of nowhere, right at us. I sailed straight through the windshield—no seatbelts of course, it was the '50s—and came to, lying on the highway. Stockings in shreds but still had my shoes on so, thought I was fine. Jack was trapped under the steering wheel. Hours later, there I sat in the ER, holding my head with twenty-three stitches, while they rushed him to surgery. The great doctor needed all their attention. I don't know who I was supposed to be.

Now here I sit, parked with the old-and-sick-and-tired-and-stupid, waiting for I don't know what, the next bus, maybe. It's called Sunrise. Sunset, more like. The end of the road. I've been around the world. There's nowhere left. Jack's gone, Viv's gone, friends all gone. No more martini lunches, just the odd splash of wine. I think it's dealcoholized, no zizz. And they keep bringing new people to my table. The other day, it was someone from Winnipeg. "You two will have so much in common," said Matron. I took one look at the polyester leisure suit and got very busy buttering my roll. Winnipeg tried valiantly anyway. "How long have you been a resident?" Bla-bla. It's dullsville, where's the glamour?

Viv and I thought we were royals, handed to the wrong parents at birth. Meant to be leading a much fancier life. Twins we were, born twenty minutes apart. Spent our lives finishing each other's sentences. Had our own language, punished Mum for not returning us to our proper family. Poured milk on her newly waxed floor, then flour on her Oriental rug. Poor woman, couldn't keep up, four kids in three years, out there on the prairie, in a boxcar, while Father ran the railway. We were just as clever as the boys, older too but only girls, so they got the degrees and we dabbled in art and music. That's how it was. None of this women's lib business.

Those smelly, noisy brothers, always busy with their little science projects. We ignored them most of the time. One day, we found them burying the poor old cat behind the shed. Turns out, he'd been hit by a car, so Bob crossed some wires, started up the Ford, and euthanized him with the gas fumes. Then Tim practiced his dissection and suturing skills. He was set on being a surgeon but Father insisted on engineering. They both married beneath them, in the end. Bob got the butcher's daughter pregnant, just by looking at her, apparently, so that was him then, done like dinner. And Tim was snared by some dietician, who cooked his goose, I guess. Spent all that time measuring instead of tasting. Couldn't, for the life of her, produce a proper meal or kids. Said it wasn't her fault. Nonsense, it wasn't Brother's.

And poor old Viv had that nearsighted fellow all hot and bothered. He gave her a string of pearls and proposed. Mother put an end to that—not an RC, it wouldn't do. Never had another serious beau after that. Sad, really but then she had more time for my girls. "You spoil them with those sloppy kisses," I'd lob. "You mock them with those arched eyebrows," she'd return. Fifteen love, neither of us ready to concede. So, we shared them, just like everything else. I gave them life and color and she gave them love and cookies.

All those years, Viv did the running monologue, yackety-yack, life of the party, while I sprinkled the conversation with bon mots. Madly gay over cigarettes and cocktails. Players, in the blue tins. The girls used the empty ones for crayons. Crown Royal, in purple velvet sacks, with gold string. Made tidy ballet-slipper bags. The other dancers frowned behind their patent leather. Not their fault, their mothers had no imagination or style.

Formal ball season, those were the days. I was a vision in cerise satin, off-the-shoulder, cap sleeves, evening gloves, kid leather with pearl buttons. I'd scan the horizon for the smoothest dance partner. Jack had that boyish charm but two left feet, so that was a total loss. He was busy anyway, fending off the women who slid by, batting their eyelashes and wiggling their derrieres. I'd raise my cigarette for a light or wave my glass for another rye-and-water and see which handsome fellow would spring forward. The PM swept into St. Andrew's one year and asked me to waltz. Told him my card was full and he laughed. A lot shorter than I thought he'd be but quite light

on his feet. Devilish smile under that little Nero haircut. Smoked Gauloises.

Paris was our theme for the oyster party one year. I painted a Moulin Rouge mural. Everyone wore berets and the latest French styles. I was a broken-down ballet dancer in a black leotard and tulle illusion, Jack a bartender with fake moustache. Viv came as an artist's model, in a fur coat and bare legs. The girls sneaked downstairs, lured by the laughter and tinkling glasses, hid under the coats in the front hall. Their little secret, they thought. We pretended not to notice, then later Jack found them asleep and carried them back to bed.

Don't be shy, I'd say to the girls, always make a statement. With AY and the Group of Seven, we'd talk about having an eye, knowing when to add just a touch of color. Splash of orange in a sea of green, like a dash of curry on a bed of peas. "Stop before it's too late," I'd say to Mum, as she overworked her sad, little landscapes of Lake Winnipeg. Her only pleasure I guess, after years of nursing the Cree, finally saying yes to Father, and raising her own little hellions. We were cute though.

My eldest brought me this hideous blanket the other day. I loved the soft fleece but hated the shade, so I said, "Whatever possessed you?" She was all hurt. "But you loved that orange pillow at home. It's the same." "A hint of color, dear, don't overdo it." She quietly tucked it under the green one at the end of the bed, and slipped back out the door. She's gone all funny, living with that old coot. What was she thinking, shacking up with someone her father's age? He can be charming and funny, then suddenly, he's all depressed and angry. It was the war. PTS they call it. XYZ, for all I know. Wasting her life, could have been anything she wanted, I told her. She replied, "I am who I want." Like a Dorothy Parker line but not as clever. A wilting lily, that one. What's the matter with those girls anyway? Not a shred of me in any of them. One's with Methuselah, the next with another woman, and the last with no one at all, just her kids. Not a proper marriage among them.

I had strings of suitors, U of T and McGill, busy playing the field but Jack won me over, with his big grin and rugged profile. I slaved over his oil portrait in intern whites. Quite a good one, actually. Mum loved watching him gobble up her pies. His own *maman* was a

terrible cook and a hypochondriac but his papa was pleasant enough, a GP. It was wartime, so a simple wedding, then off to Quebec City, waiting for the call. Suddenly, there I was, pregnant and alone, himself shipped overseas.

We studied the newspapers for months and months, found the odd photo: trim nurses with wounded servicemen, everyone smiling bravely. How desperately far away it all seemed, as I spooned more pablum into Baby. Years later, I'd tell the girls, if they were ever worried, I'd say, "Stop your nonsense, it's not life or death, put on some lipstick, and press on regardless." People don't know how to cope anymore. No sense of perspective.

Jack was a medical officer, safe in England, I thought. Turns out, he was up to his waist in the Atlantic on D-Day, flagging down transport for the wounded on Juno Beach. Had to leave the rows of dead soldiers on the sand where they'd been mown down, fresh off the ships. Lost his tin hat and his LST, what with the tides and wind and chaos. Spent days crossing the channel back and forth, collecting the rest of the wounded. Seems to me, that's how he spent his life, taking care of other people's families, while I held the fort, easing the girls' pains with Midol and crushed ice. "The shoemaker's children," I'd say to no one in particular. His patients loved him, especially the little old ladies. A million friends all over the world. Never missed a reunion, medical, fraternity or D-Day. Chatted up the Queen Mum over there one year. Lovely smile, he said. Well of course I was jealous. The road not taken, so sure I was meant to be royal.

Jack's bedtime story about LST-541 crossing the English Channel, "up-and-down and up-and-down" was the girls' favorite. He would grab the mattress and roll it from side to side. They'd squeal in delight, afraid but excited, with no idea what he was really talking about. It sounded fun, a big adventure, not the living hell it must have been. His friend Bud was in *The Great Escape* camp. Wasn't chosen to tunnel in the end, but they consulted him on the screenplay.

The drama queen, my middle one, arrived for my birthday, alone, thank God. The staff sailed in with a big, fat, gooey cake. When I looked suspicious, she announced to the room that I was ninety-six. Well, I had to shush her that fast, before anyone turned up a hearing aid. "One never reveals one's age, my dear."

No manners. My pearls of wisdom, fallen on deaf ears, all those years. Must be that American's influence, the so-called "wife," she knows that grates on my nerves. No sense of restraint, those people, living their lives out loud. In my day, they were discreet. That hair! Looks like a mistake, shaven down the sides and floppy in the middle. "What's that supposed to be?" I asked her one day. She snapped right back, "At least I don't need a man to define myself." Viv said her sharp tongue was my fault. "You never picked her up when she cried." "Nonsense," I'd say. "Crying develops the lungs."

That all-girls high school maybe was a mistake. We thought it was the solution after that business with the math teacher when she was twelve. Grabbed her bottom, she said, so I raced down to the school. He denied it, of course. They say he was in the Navy. All those men in tight quarters. She did have an active imagination, though. Always so physical. Couldn't sit still for five minutes, constant motion from day one. Little legs, going like sixty on her tricycle, racing down the sidewalk. When she was really on my nerves, jiggling and rattling, I'd tell her to run around the block a few times. Jack would take her to the park and they'd smack a few softballs across the field or slap some pucks around the rink. Never had any trouble with the other two. Happy as Larry, they were parked at the kitchen table, squishing little sculptures from flour-and-water paste, with a dash of food coloring.

When I looked up, the inmates were all singing "Happy Birthday." A sea of white-haired widows, hardly a man in sight. We outlive them, of course. The one at the next table suddenly lurched to his feet, saluted me, then slid back down, muttering. Poor old soul, in his own little world, not a single visitor. They tried pet therapy on him, a black Labrador. Well, he shed and panted and drooled. Sniffed around my lap too, until I shooed him away. Revolting thing.

Jack could be a little unglued too, from time to time. He'd get all sad and serious when anything was broken or needed fixing. Neat and tidy to a fault, ever the dedicated surgeon in his OR. One day, I found him quietly sticking together chips from an old teacup. "Oh, take a small loss, why don't you?" I said. "But it was Mother's," he moaned. "Part of the Crown Derby." "Well, its little gold swirls don't line up anymore," I zinged and thought to myself, I'd be happy if the rest of the set broke, too.

Suppose I was hard on him but someone had to be practical. Too close to his mother, no siblings to share the load. She let me know I was never good enough for her one-and-only. A real piece of work, she was. Drifted around, all Sarah Bernhardt, hand to forehead, no focus. At least I did volunteer work. Years of running the Red Feather campaign and the women's auxiliary at two hospitals. In charge of the Christmas parties, up to my eyes in glitter and glue. Got high on the fumes, just like those hippies, I suppose, felt all queer. The Age of Aquarius, whatever that was. One day, I said to the girls, "I'd like to try some of those funny cigarettes, that marijuana stuff. Just to see what would happen." They looked alarmed and disappeared into the woodwork.

Mahogany it was. "Just sell the damn thing," I waved over at Jack's pride and joy, the Chris-Craft that never worked. He shook his head, hands at ten and two, turning the steering wheel back and forth, and grinned up at me. "She's a beauty, sleek and smooth, rides the waves so proudly. Just needs the right touch. Reminds me of you." Then he patted the red leather seat beside him and his big hazel eyes went all moony. There I was, left with a mouth full of teeth. It took me back, I must say. Quebec City, the final farewell, after so many false starts. Same sad eyes but the brave smile that said, "this is it." Donned his officer's hat, straightened his tie and jacket, and stepped out into the war.

Loved his boats the way he loved his girls. Didn't mind that I couldn't produce a boy, just three girls, after six attempts. When the son-and-heir died, seven months in utero, I was lying in a Catholic hospital bed, on Christmas Eve. Crosses on the walls, everyone tiptoeing, clutching their rosaries, praying to Saint this-and-that. I thought I'd never make it. Then, in marched Jack's best man, the six-foot heart surgeon, straight across the room, just like that.

He put his foot up on the windowsill and stared out at the snow, twinkling in the moonlight. "Oh, Holy Night," indeed. "Poor little bugger never had a chance. But you've got three healthy girls. That's more than most." He turned, and patted my blanket on the way out. Well, that was all the bedside manner I needed. Pulled myself together and never looked back. Besides, most sons of doctors never

amount to much. He might have been an artist, though, and that would have been something.

We could have painted together at the lake. It was Grand Hotel most of the time down there. Never a dull moment. Friends would come from the city for the weekend. Everyone dressed in old plaid shirts, let themselves go. Steaks on the barbeque, lots of clever drinks. Late one night, there was a huge racket in the hallway. The girls jumped out of bed. "It's all right," I called, "It's just Mr. Price falling down the stairs. Probably needed the bathroom and turned left instead of right." His wife hauled him back into bed and silence reigned once again. Next day, there he was, sleeping it off in the hammock, never the worse for wear. His *avoir du poids* must have cushioned the blow.

Well, those sailing races were something. Dotty, old Leslie was the Commodore, not quite up to Tuesday but he got the job done. We'd tow the Enterprise down the lake at half speed, the girls all nervous in the back seat. Who would win this week? That handsome fellow in the Y Flyer or one of the Brody family, as usual. The daughter was pretty swift at the helm. Everyone jockeying for position at the start. My hands would be all stiff and cramped, clutching the sheet. Those were the days before jam cleats. Jack would jibe neatly, just as the cannon fired and we'd slide out, ahead of the fleet. Our finest hour, his grin ear to ear, as we flew along the course, shrouds singing in the wind. "Always keep them guessing," he'd laugh, his tanned face and crisp, white collar profiled against the blue sail.

Nobody dresses anymore. The girls flew me to Toronto that time for Swan Lake, Karen Kain's farewell. It was gorgeous. There we were, front-row-center, tears streaming down, flinging roses onto the stage. I could have died right then, it was heaven. But we stumbled out into the lobby and the scruffiest people were standing around. Army boots and crinolines, jeans with holes, tacky little outfits. What's happened to a sense of occasion, basic black and a string of pearls? It's all gone downhill.

Viv would fit right in, with her funny little ankle socks and rubber soles. Lost her marbles, most of them, crazy as a loon, after that cyclist knocked her down. It was her own fault, jaywalking like that. Couldn't get her to smarten up. She gained all that weight, eating nothing but ketchup. They gave her those psych tests, asked her to

draw a clock. So, she drew a fancy Swiss one, said that was her flying over the cuckoo's nest. *Touche!* I tried to get her interested in walking again but she said she didn't like the wind in her ears. Made her nervous. "Well, you're not going to fly away," I told her, "besides, I've given away your broomstick." She looked at me all queer. Finally, she had her own head injury.

Well, my youngest came to see me, with this cloudy looking drink. I took one sip and almost gagged. "It's a London Fog, Mum," she said, "Earl Grey, like the olden days, in Nana's good cups. Remember, after school?" She's always so cheerful, that one, despite the sad divorce, a real Pollyanna. Everything's a nursery rhyme. And that hugging business with her kids, far too clingy. Surprised she could tear herself away from them long enough to visit. "Nonsense," I clucked, "milk and sugar ruin it." "I love you too, Mum." She smiled and squeezed my hand. "Not so hard, dear. Brittle bones." I'm forced to remind her that I'm not one of her workout pals. Looks like a racehorse, all sinewy and strained. "What happened to that nice round face?" I asked. "I finally lost my baby fat," she laughed.

I wasn't always so frail. All those years skiing in Switzerland. Then, suddenly, my bindings wouldn't release and I was sliding down the Jungfrau. They hauled me to the hotel in a toboggan, wrapped like a mummy, in some rough old canvas, couldn't understand a word they said, all in *Schweizerdeutsch.* Well, Chevrolet coupé was all I could manage. A shot of cortisone and back in the game, we used to say. Thank God, it finally kicked in when they taped my ankles. Jack insisted we fly home for x-rays and casting but I didn't want to ruin the party. Besides, every night, I was carried into the bar, in the arms of a big, strong lederhosen. Swiss fondue indeed. Best time of my life. Feet were never the same but who needs rotation? It's forward motion that counts.

Always walk into a store as if you owned it, I'd tell the girls. Holt's is the worst. Those little salesclerks, with their nothing salaries, sneering at me, in my Aquascutum and Liberty scarf. Just because I'm not wearing my mink today. I have a purse full of credit cards. can take taxis everywhere, and stay in a hotel, if I want, any night of the week. It's all those years travelling the world, one has a certain *savoir-faire.* Ne Plus Ultra—that was Jack's beloved whiskey—from the

Highlands. Humble beginnings, though, he'd remind me. Born in a small town, buried in a simple pine box. "No one is any better than anyone else," he'd say, "It's not right to put on airs."

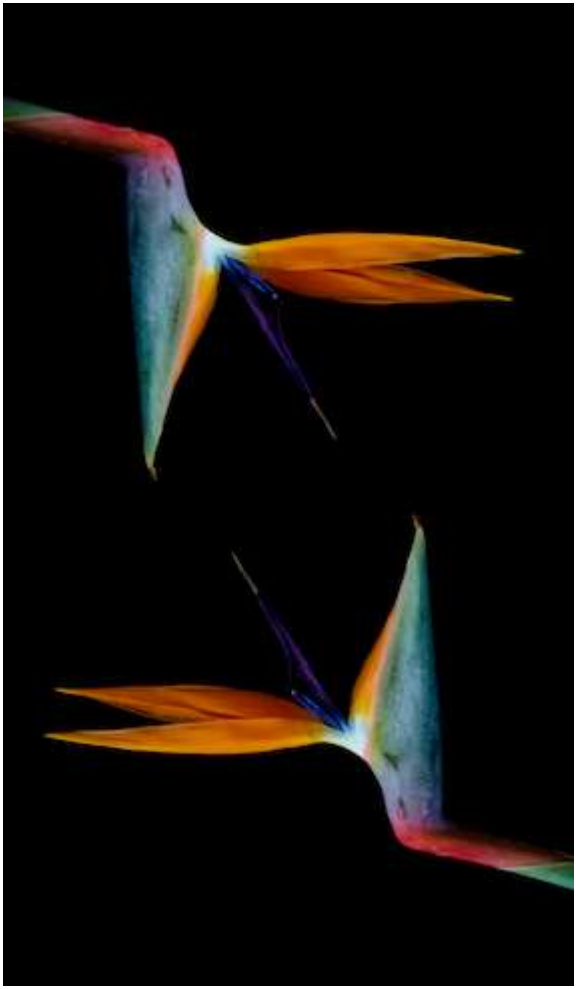
Even so, you must always show you're a lady. What's this dropping into a chair that you girls do? Letting go, as if you were cut off at the knees. Would it kill you to ease yourself down gracefully? You may well laugh but one day, you'll remember, especially with girls of your own. Let's see if you can do better. Don't tell them how gorgeous and smart they are. You don't want them all full of themselves.

They say I'm seventy-eight pounds. That doesn't sound right. I was always one hundred twelve and five-foot-two. What do they mean four-foot-eight? Maybe it's metric. I just don't seem to have the energy for meals. But I wouldn't say no to a dry martini. Tanqueray of course or Bombay Sapphire. Is this the Ritz? Well then, yes, very dry. Can you just pull up the blanket a bit? Not that awful orange one, the green. Where are those girls when I need them? Never visit, never phone, never write. They grow up and have their own kids and then they're no good to you anymore. That's it, right up over my ears. Hmmm. Yes, with a twist, on the rocks, lots of rocks.

After the Journey

Esther Sadoff

My hands are two pilgrims
praying and everything
becomes an oily skin of water.
When push comes to shove,
everything collapses into water.
Forgive my bones as I press
them back into the ground.
Forgive the ridge of my spine
floating in the side of a tree
downing sheets of rain.
The words in my head will
hum like bees without me,
tiny orbs of water tucked
behind their eyes.
This ship will sail on,
its captain crashing about
in the waves and never
knowing the journey is done.
Some days, a fleet of boats
will congregate like fish
in a column of light,
looking for a westerly wind,
and taking off again.
My smile, like the sun,
will hang from an
unbreakable string.



Paradises / Lara Chapman

The Point Is

Candice Kelsey

for Michelle McNamara

I sleep with
a knife under my pillow
fingers gripped on the camel bone handle
ready for anything
I sleep with that knife

perhaps you should have one
under your pillow too

we could be weird and knifey together
we could cringe when the housekeeper finds it
we could both feel safe finally

fighting each other's demons
protecting each other's bodies
burrowing each other's fears
like termites in the wooden beams
like mice beneath the floorboards

like cancer in the marrow

I know you probably won't but
still under my pillow sleeps a knife
that can speak for both of us—

Shine a light in my face at 3:00 am
Golden State Mother Fucker or some copycat killer
and you'll bleed the rage
of a thousand sleepless women

Shilo Inn

Tessa Ekstrom

If his breath didn't smell so bad
I could disappear into this moment
Turn this bed into the ocean
Try to drown in it.
I could get lost in the small parts of my mind
Where old memories reside
Or use the sharp edges of the blinds
To carve forgiveness down my spine.
Put my trust in a glass jar
Watch flowers and bees and
The secret life of your daughter
Rot beneath my feet,
Paint pictures with my menstrual blood and other fluids.
But his breath reeks with a liar
That begs me to build bonfires in his skull
A hymn so deep, deeper than my hymen knows
And I am wrung out by the fire,
A heat with the desire to determine
The roots of entire weeks of my life.
But the burn can only hold so many shots
Of whiskey before a quiet and retrospective
Fight or flight leaves nothing but the wish
That I was anywhere but at this Shilo Inn.

Untitled Zone Plate Photograph 1 / Robert Oehl

Untitled Zone Plate Photograph 2 / Robert Oehl

In Defense of My Stories

Roeethyll Lunn

Because of some of my works' subject matter and strong adult language, at first, I was reluctant to even submit some of my writings. I do not readily desire to "cuss" or include "nasty talk," as my family members say, in any of my work in order to attract attention to myself. I fear that this would have repercussions that would not be favorable to me. My desire is that my accounts will travel well beyond the realm of just a juicy or colorful story and that they will also capsulate a time, a people, a milieu and a cultural experience. I want to transgress the petition that stood between the black and white races of people during a time preceding that period which our federal government labeled as "Desegregation of the Southern Portion of the United States." I want to expose how days were spent and how lives were lived by a group of people that was "Jim Crowed" into living in areas that were sequestered on the far end of towns and on the back sides of rural roads in areas such as Grove Street, Black Street, The Bottom, Black Bottom, Sugar Hill, The Hill and Shanty Town.

A story to a writer is like a Tithe. It is a gift from God. But it is not for you alone. You are merely a steward. Therefore, you must cough it up! Put it away from you! Get that hallowed thing out of your house! If you ignore it or try to withhold it within you, it will curse you and your life.

My redemptive force came when I thought of a big, red woman from Johnsonville, South Carolina, named Mabel (pronounced "May Belle") Melvin. She told me that as she was driving home from work one day, she saw her husband riding a strange young girl in his car. She tried to catch them, but he outran her. Mabel said that she went home, got his pistol, and then drove straight to her husband's best friend's house. She placed the nose of the weapon to his friend's temple, cocked it and said, "Tell the story!—cause I know you know every word."

Sometimes I feel as if a gun, held by all of the "colored women" who had to endure, is cocked to my temple and all of them are saying to me, "Tell the story."

They were the colored women who: baked biscuits and sweet potatoes for their children when there was no meat; who fished all morning in a pond that they had walked miles to get to, and then sometimes had to fry fatback and make grits to go with it when they couldn't get a bite; who went into woods, wet with dew, in the spring, to pick huckleberries to sell by the quart to rich white ladies who lived in Southern small towns in houses that had sat for over a century on well-kept lawns or to the other white people who were the only ones selected to work in factories downtown; girls who gleaned field peas from between corn or cotton stalks in the fall because the crop "didn't do good" that year; the girl who cut her own umbilical cord when her twins aborted because there was no money to go to a doctor and because there was no one else around to help; the woman who, for the sake of all of her other children, said nothing all afternoon to the other field hands that she worked with, because she'd left her kitchen during noon hour (where she had been hurriedly preparing their meals) to go through the house to look for the knife that she liked to cook with, only to discover her husband, in his and her bed, molesting her oldest daughter, who was not his.

So with the encouragement of those girls, Langston Hughes, who left word to all aspiring black writers to write about the black man "and don't prettify it" in order to pacify a black or white reading audience, essayist/columnist Roger Rosenblatt, who told me that I was "a natural storyteller," and Poet William "Kit" Hathaway, who gave me a letter of encouragement on one of my worst days at Southampton College and told me to "try to have this story published" because that particular writing, in his opinion, can be compared to that of Zora Neal Hurston's. I will tell my stories. I will tell them in the voice of my youth and in the volume of my experiences.

Self-Portrait / Josie Del Castillo

Mom / Josie Del Castillo

The Other Margot at the End of the World

Zach Sheneman

On one particularly unbearable night in The Still, the other Margot admitted that the only reason she got clean was because it's impossible to find smack in the multipocalypse. We burned rubbish in an adjacent tenement, tried our damnedest to keep warm as a frozen tempest enveloped the streets. We shivered against the woolen fabric of the former occupant's Afghan. As the physics of the universe broke down—as reality morphed into impossibility before our glassy eyes—heat evaporated immediately into coldness, the shivering lick of warmth dying but a kiss away from my chapped lips. Untold months had passed since I'd felt anything more than cold; and yet, that same night, the other Margot peeled away, removed Chad's old UCLA sweatshirt, let the chill grace her bare shoulders.

"You're a fucking furnace," she said. "What is biologically wrong with you?"

In the feeble firelight, I saw the needle burns for the first time running up both arms. I didn't need to see the ones I knew ran down her legs to etch them with electric clarity in my mind. She spied me gawking, instinctively scratched the insides of her elbows. She ground her teeth, glared into our makeshift hearth, sniffed so hard the lone remaining stud threatened to dislodge from her flared nostril. She never took her hand from her arms.

I didn't know what to say. I settled on, "I'm pretty sure I ruptured my hymen when I was barrel racing at the Madison County Fair." It was an equivalent revelation in my mind. The other Margot stayed silent, lost in thought as she stared into the embers. I worried over how to bring her back from the wound I'd opened, but she wrapped back into the blanket, clasped my arm, curled into me.

"When you're dying long enough," she finally said against the crackling of the flames, "the strangest things start feeling like living." I didn't know what she meant and I didn't pretend like I did.

Later that night, she spoke about her addiction for the first time. She'd never had any illusions about what she was doing to herself Before. She'd started with the intention of never stopping. She thought

she'd die high and only came up short when every drug dealer in the entire city had succumbed to the Great Quake, the tsunamis, the Illuminati bombings, the Second Coming of the Multitudinous Christs. She thought she'd die, too, sweating out poison in her apartment all alone. She never explained why. I suppose she didn't have to. There was a darkness there, just beneath her punctured skin, slithering around her organs like a tapeworm. She was unnaturally experienced with endings. She knew more about death than I ever understood about life.

My mom was the first person I actually knew that became a victim of the multipocalypse. She didn't die; at least, not in the conventional sense. She was in the middle of a lesson on valence electrons—on volatile elements and inert gases and everything in between—when she, the janitor, and two dozen students disappeared in anticlimactic silence from their respective outfits. I was halfway through a shift at Kozlowski's Collections when my paternal grandma finally overcame the overburdened communications satellites. "Your mother has been Raptured," she said, an absolute accusation. She was, like my dad had been before he died, devoutly Christian Reformed, and had always viewed my mom's atheism as a calculated affront on the entire Christian religion. I pulled off my headset with my grandma still on the line, choking back sobs as I ran to the fourth-floor women's bathroom and wept openly on a tampon-clogged toilet. I stepped out an hour later, but only after I'd attempted to reapply my eyeliner with my hand shaking so violently that I came back to my cubicle looking like Marilyn Manson after a grand mal.

Back then, before shit *really* hit the fan, every loss was fresh, every death unparalleled. The Rapture took more lives than the coastal flooding before it, which killed more people than the sudden sinkhole pandemic had in the weeks before. After the Rapture, everyone lost somebody close enough to them that the calamity that followed felt almost tedious to endure.

All to say, then, that my mom would have loved and hated the absurdity that followed. It stuck to the script of any genre show I'd seen on Netflix—the armageddons both natural and manmade: innumerable comets on a crash course for Earth; the bees and the frogs

and the coral reefs and the Amazon all fucking off into the sun; Kashmir and North Korea and, quite inexplicably, Luxembourg, all disintegrated in a thermonuclear hailstorm. I remember one particularly bad strain of infectious disease that ran down the entire West Coast from Vancouver.

"What happened to Angela in HR?" I asked a coworker. "She was just here Friday. I borrowed her hair tie."

"She's gone," he shrugged. "Whole family came down with Ebola. Heard it was pretty gruesome."

I tried my damnedest to think about my fallen comrade, to focus on my ill-fated sister-in-arms, but all I could worry about was the prior Friday's hair tie. My skin itched the same way it did whenever someone talked about head lice. That was back when there were still jobs, still coworkers, still the thinning expectation that things were going to turn around. That was the moment I started becoming numb to all of it—to shock, to empathy, to every stab of grief.

With as strange as things became, I could only laugh that my mom, the lifelong atheist, rotted in someone's Heaven somewhere, apparently bare-ass naked. Not long after she started crashing on my futon, I asked the other Margot about where she thought her parents might be. "Court-mandated marriage counseling," she said reflexively, lashing black paint onto the easel she'd stolen from the long-abandoned art studio four blocks down on Lakeside Boulevard. The paint hit the canvas in razor-thin lines and spread out a smidgen, the paint bleeding out from each stroke as if she'd cut the canvas with a bullwhip. I thought about my scientist mom, long removed from this abused and lifeless lump of clay, and then I watched the other Margot make Jackson Pollack goth art with forty shades of darkness in my cluttered apartment. Mostly, I thought about valence electrons—about unstable elements—about colliding in the chaos and never coming apart.

The night we met, the moon exploded. It shattered in the way a Faberge egg might if dropped from a sufficient height—detonated into a trillion glistening shards of stale rock and 1970s moon rover parts. The nebulous cloud of lunar dust scattered a few rays of red light from

the dying sun across all of creation, drenching my corner of the apocalypse in ruby glitter like some sort of demonic disco ball. I faced the night sky a few moments into the mayhem and watched it fracture in silence. It should have been tragic, maybe even beautiful. I found it a bit underwhelming.

She stood at the foot of a weathered fountain at the center of Monument Park, the neighborhood hangout Before for drug dealers, hookers, and the homeless. For a moment, I saw her as a hobbit's shadow in the crosshairs of my flashlight, but as my eyes adjusted, I beheld her as she truly was: a four-foot-nothing Joan Jett wannabe comprised of an amalgam of punk haircuts, a face full of cheap metal, and absolutely no capacity to choose a single color with which to accentuate her black hair.

"Hey," I called across the way, wincing at the warbled sound of a voice I hadn't heard in weeks. "You going to kill me? I'm not necessarily against it, but I have a few ground rules about facial disfigurement and cannibalism we'll need to hammer out first."

Her gaze snapped from the murdered moon to my gangly Slenderman silhouette in the distance. She said nothing. As I shuffled closer, I watched as she held herself and shivered. I considered walking away, seeking heat in my bed under the fourteen blankets I managed to accumulate in my looting. Twelve months into the various ends of the world, it was both easier and safer to leave everything to die at its own speed.

"Hold on," I muttered, fishing out a strike-anywhere matchbook from my back pocket. "There's bound to be something to burn in this apocalyptic shithole."

I shone my flashlight around the park until I found an overturned trash bin still surrounded by a smattering of its previous contents. "Come help me with this," I grunted, struggling to lift the steel receptacle from the frozen dirt. "It's heavy. All five of my meals today consisted of Town House crackers, so, you know. Not a lot of 'go' power right now."

Tiny Joan Jett hesitated, sized me up as I cursed and kicked at the rubbish strewn about.

"Look, I'm pretty sure like, one hundred and five percent of serial killers are men, so I think the statistics are in your favor here."

I doubt what I said actually made any difference, but the child-sized woman shuffled over, extended her tiny hands, helped me to right the trash can. We tossed Five Guys bags and Styrofoam cups back into it, and I wasted fourteen matches as I futilely attempted to start the fire. I went to strike a fifteenth match, but the Monument Park vagrant held out an outstretched finger. Within seconds, she produced a Zippo, which she used to ignite an *L.A. Times* from eight months ago and dropped it into the fire. Through the sickly moonlight, flakes of snow started to fall, and I groaned.

"I told my parents I was moving out of Nebraska to get away from this nonsense." I shrugged as I blew hot breath into my hands. "To be fair, I'm pretty sure Nebraska is just the real-life *Hunger Games* at this point."

The stranger nodded, her shivering wracking her entire body. After a few minutes of thawing out, she peered across the fire and in my general direction. She said, "I'm Margot."

I sighed. "Me too." Somehow, even after a year of suffocating in absurdity, this implausibility irritated me more than anything. "What a crock of shit."

We huddled close to the fire, passing the time with awkward small talk and craning our heads to the heavens to watch the moon as it fell to literal pieces. Once the feeling returned to my exposed nose and cheeks, we left for my apartment together. In the world Before, I might have found it unsafe to bring a stranger home to sleep on my futon and eat my gas station candy bars and drink my hoarded Dasani. In the multipocalypse, though, we were likely amongst the select living few in a city that only months ago teemed with millions. *The world Before*, I mused as I waved the other Margot forward down the snow-kissed avenue. The wind whistled as we navigated the stairwells of my abandoned apartment building, the broken moon obscured by billowing snow. We didn't speak a word as we trudged across the newly minted tundra. The fire still burned when we left it to die.

It became apparent to me and any semi-rational human being in a short manner of time that the end of the world was not singular or anything less than positively ludicrous. It started with the Rapture, which most people in America at least saw as absolute proof in the

existence of the Christian God. Their self-assured spiritual swagger was short lived; by the end of the next day, every major news outlet projected live feed of the Norse God Odin in a brutal fistfight with Kalki, the tenth avatar of Vishnu, onto every television on the planet. This wasn't the two Monument Park Jesuses getting into fisticuffs over a pair of thong sandals, either. The two warring gods leveled city blocks with conjured magic. Civilians screamed as they shielded their babies with their bodies and then liquefied in their holy light. The desolation was shocking and appalling and absolutely total.

What had started as a sobering but natural reminder of the finite nature of life devolved quickly into a demonstration in supernatural absurdity as a groundswell of gods and goddesses materialized and terrorized the planet. Every god brought his diabolical and über-powerful foil to Earth with him, flooding the planet with countless demons and devils and trickster gods and titans. The mighty Ahura Mazda could level the entire Persian empire with a flick of his finger. Instead, he preoccupied himself with mud-wrestling his nemesis Ahriman, the Zoroastrian god of darkness.

I didn't know Sekhmet from Imhotep before I met the other Margot. When she began her occupation of my living room in my apartment, she brought with her the *Jeopardy!*-level trivia lodged in her brain from her community college World Mythology class. On the rare occasions we caught word from passing refugees about the most recent holy heavyweight to blight the region, the other Margot filled me in over a can of cold Chef Boyardee mini ravioli. She lamented that we never seemed to get lucky with a party god like Bacchus, that we were constantly showered in brimstone and sulfur and not wine coolers and dynamite sex.

I sometimes wondered what my heathen mom would have thought about this whole mess back Before, in the time preceding her abduction by my dad's God. I alternated on any given day between the hope of my making it into my own personal heaven and the despair of wondering if I could have gotten into a better one. In The Still, I asked the other Margot which god she was backing, what eternal life she most desired to achieve. "If everyone was right," she shrugged, black paint dry at her fingertips, "then everyone was wrong." I rolled my

eyes and left her to paint alone. She had a knack for ruining everything. I was also afraid her cynicism wasn't entirely off the mark.

She was the one who first called it The Still. After nearly two years of air inundated with screams and wails and smog-induced gagging, the pandemonium quite literally died out. Once the sandstorms stopped raging and the acid rain cleared up, the tumult ceased. At first, the silence was unendurable. In every moment, we anticipated something more sinister lurking around each corner, so we camped out in my apartment for a week straight, taking turns peering through binoculars from the balcony and surveying the desolate hellscape below. Once I finally found the stones to leave the apartment, I stalked the city armed with a Cutco knife, a piece of lead piping, and some brass knuckles I'd looted from a pawn shop. Not a mouse nor maggot had survived the total desecration of the world.

That first night out alone in the city we sat on the five, feet dangling over the edge of the concrete barriers on the overpass, eating spoonfuls of crunchy peanut butter and marveling at the other Margot's ability to see the gold flecks of the Milky Way for the first time in her life. The next morning, using old tube socks for mittens and wrapping ourselves in some of Chad's old Bruins sweatshirts, the other Margot and I sojourned out into the tundra of Southern California and laid waste to each other in a snowball fight square in the middle of Seventh Street. When the sun would set, we would watch the light glimmer off the powdered down, a crimson glaze shining off of the snowfields that stretched from the city to the horizon. We tore insulation from empty buildings and superglued the cellulose to our walls. Some nights we'd build a fire on the balcony and huddle together for warmth; on others, we would lie under a dozen comforters and tell stories about the women we were Before.

It was in The Still that I caught the candid whole of her in the wavering sunlight. I would wake to find her wrapped in blankets in her nest on my living room futon and reading de Beauvoir or Vonnegut, overgrown eyebrows furrowed as she squinted through the smudges of her glasses. The buzzed portions of her hair had grown out, the blue streaks faded to a twilight sheen over her sable locks. Tangles of dirty hair framed her slight face, curled toward cushioned

lips. In the preceding weeks, her paleness had dissipated as the drugs left her system. She'd also gained some weight, an inevitable result of a Hostess Donettes diet that fortified her frailness with substance. There was a fullness to her that wasn't present when we first spiraled into each other, a dimension gained from losing everything. The other Margot was unbathed, disheveled, wild—and, quite suddenly, the kind of beautiful that transmogrified me into an anxious idiot.

I resisted my growing attraction to the other Margot because I feared it to be a case of interest by proximity. It had been a fairly sexless multipocalypse across the board, and I longed to be caressed by hands and kissed by lips and desired by someone as desperate for attention as I was. I could sense the tension from her when we passed each other in the kitchen, when our glances collided from across looted convenient stores, when we huddled together for warmth under Princess Moana comforters. Eventually, I spent my time finding awkward excuses to stay as physically far away from her as possible without simply throwing myself off the balcony.

Perhaps sensing my trepidation, she leaned in one night during a game of Uno, her breath hot in my ear. "You look like you might need a little help," she whispered, inching her delicate fingers under my blanket and up the seam of my cotton sweatpants. I shivered at her touch, bowed my head, shifted on the futon as every muscle in my lower body seized involuntarily. My breath quickened as she leaned in carefully.

"This is," I managed, "new for me."

She pulled back, cupped an icy hand against my hot-blooded cheek, softened her gaze as she looked up at my face. In that moment, behind those endlessly dark eyes, she might have thought about it, too: about the lovely convenience of our closeness, about whether our chemistry was simply a product of supremest loneliness. She hesitated, started to pull away, and instinctively I pulled her face to mine—kissed it—caressed its contours in all of its glorious coldness—pressed against her so aggressively that I nearly knocked her incisors clear out of her mouth. That night, the other Margot pulled me under a half dozen blankets and would not come up for air until the whole of it was no longer new for me. I suppose that, even Before, love's always been more than a little about proximity.

Before the other Margot, there was Chad. Truth be told, there was a string of Chads preceding her, a line of utterly milquetoast and smarmy young suitors, each Chad in the progression slightly Chadder than the last. The final specimen, the ultimate Chad, was pleasant enough, someone I didn't have to be embarrassed about when I brought him around my girlfriends and inoffensive-looking enough to include in my social media pictures. We'd seen each other in some capacity on and off for two years but only knew each other in strangely superficial ways. He knew I could burp the entire alphabet, that my left boob was smaller than my right; I knew he was afraid of the dentist and had no concept of how to navigate a vagina. I dragged him on occasion to work parties and he coerced me into paying for us to see every unnecessary *Transformers* sequel. We settled for each other in blissful compromise, never demanding much of each other, orbiting each other in periphery and possessing each other so we each could have something to possess.

Somewhere between GMO-induced brain death and super-SARS, Chad wound up moving into my apartment. Initially, I didn't mind; as the looting and rioting proliferated, it felt like a good thing to have backup in an increasingly dangerous world. I quickly realized that our obligatory cohabitation was the greatest threat to our survival. No one had prepared me for the grotesqueness of living with a man—the pissed-upon bathroom floors, the body hair choking my sink, the inability to rinse a dish after eating from it—and yet we were trapped together in an apocalyptic Roach Motel. Chad appeared equally horrified to live with me, the audacious candor of my mere existence as an actual woman annihilating his shallow construct of the feminine mystique. His revulsion at my natural state—at my freedom from having to impress him for any reason at all—satisfied me in ways his dick never managed to.

We lived in discord until Jesus came. He landed a dozen time zones away in Jerusalem, but the infrastructure of the world still held on like the last tenuous stretch of skin clinging to a nearly peeled scab, so we still had internet. We watched the video postings every morning of whatever new lunatic had arrived in cataclysmic fashion while we slept. Up to that point, our newfound awareness of the existence of

lesser spirits and demigods had no effect on Chad, but the Lord Jesus got to him. As Chad watched the sandaled Son of God descend upon Golgotha to a cosmic light show that would make Pink Floyd blush, I watched something change behind his eyes.

The first few nights after the Second Coming, Chad simply didn't speak. It was enough of a relief that I didn't question the blessing. The dynamic shifted dramatically from bliss to discomfort when I walked in on him praying before dinner, which felt somehow more invasive than the time I opened his old apartment door to find him in a compromised position involving *Swordfish*, a gym sock, and a bottle of baby oil. After one night of scavenging, he brought back a copy of the NIV nestled between a carton of cigarettes and an entire dorm's worth of Ramen. Soon after, he stopped going out altogether. In short order, he started packing his bags for his last crusade.

"A few of the guys from the Y downtown heard that there's a flight heading out from Vegas in a week and they're taking everyone they can to Jerusalem," he informed me, stuffing a duffel bag full of hair paste and Listerine. "Please come, Margot. I mean, this Jesus thing is the real deal."

I scoffed. "We haven't seen or heard a plane around here for the last two months. You think I'm going to strap myself in for a mystery flight with poor man's Captain Sully and the cast of *Fury Road*?"

Against every one of my better instincts, I tried to get him to stay with me, but his mind was made up. I promised him that his "Jesus" was a false prophet, some standard-issue fraud taking advantage of circumstance, but I was wrong. He *was* the real deal, the actual son of actual God, and he performed miracles beyond the scope of my imagination. Unfortunately, Jesus was Catholic Jesus, and Chad grew up Baptist. Catholic Jesus was not kind to his Protestant followers, calling pillars of fire down upon the poseurs amongst his worshippers and turning an awful lot of people into salt. To further complicate matters, Baptist Jesus *did* descend from heaven to Earth, although he arrived some time between Eastern Orthodox Jesus and Presbyterian Jesus. I doubt Chad ever made it to Israel and, if he did, was surely destroyed with all the rest of those gathered in the supernatural carnage that ensued. By the time the videos stopped

pouring in and my internet sputtered out, a thousand Jesuses had been at war with each other for weeks, fighting over whom so loved the world the most.

I tried to hate him for leaving me alone, but I couldn't blame the man for acting in his own interest. Everyone placed bets when the screws came flying loose. Chad put all of his chips on the most familiar horse and rode it straight into oblivion. My theory was that the reckoning came for everyone but those that shared our name, that strewn across the husk of the world were a few thousand Margots resisting the march of time. When I told the other Margot my hypothesis, she just laughed. She believed our perceived invincibility had less to do with supernatural circumstances than it did with what those circumstances forged us into. We were nothing at all before we were poured together into the crucible.

In every end-of-the-world movie I'd seen Before, society went to shit within days of whatever disaster befell it. In reality, the cogs in the wheel kept turning long after the car had died. Some hardnosed blue-collar unknowns kept the generators running even through super-volcanic eruptions, through fracking-induced earthquakes, through Jörmungandr and Thor tearing each other into pink meat. For me, however, grinding on past the world's expiration date became psychically exhausting. I continued working at Kozlowski's even as the cubicles emptied around me and HR stopped trying to fill them.

Working for a collection agency was already the occupational equivalent of a botched spinal tap, but trying to collect on whackadoodles at the various ends of the world proved to be the epitome of fruitless. The fact that we still had cable at the office was my sole motivation for going to work after the assorted divine started climbing out of the woodwork. It was my window into the multipocalypse: the reports on the fissures and power plant meltdowns; the havoc wreaked by magnetic pole reversal; the sudden emergence of AI in Japan and the resulting conquest of Kyushu. The Large Hadron Collider begat a tiny black hole that swallowed all of Sweden. Millions succumbed to brain cancer developed over years of cell phone use.

The night the New York Financial District succumbed to the epidemic of the undead brought on by fluoridated city water, the power finally cut and the flat screen in the break room *fwip*-ped off. I thought about ending it then. There appeared no point in protracting the misery of loneliness any longer. I knew some horrifying and absurd death lurked around one corner or the next. I thought about raiding the nearest pharmacy and washing down the remaining pills with a fifth of vodka far above my paygrade before falling asleep. I studied the texture of the primer on the ceiling in my bedroom, stored it in the part of my mind that used to remember the face of everyone I used to know. By the time the red morning light shone through my frosty window, I was determined to see the cosmic freak show to its illogical conclusion. The multipocalypse was going to devour all of existence before it was over. I wanted to be there when it did. I wanted to perch at its maw and quiver at the darkness.

Underneath the surface tranquility of The Still, existence still careened toward the end of its tracks. Time itself grew sick. Moments repeated, skipped in place like a scratched CD, leaving the two of us stuck on the same line of a joke or the same snark in an argument or the same orgasm for what would normally register as seconds, minutes, hours. I woke up once with a tragus piercing and a bottom-shelf tequila hangover with no recollection of how I'd earned either. It was a day the other Margot couldn't recall either, despite the fact that she managed to paint a twisted homage to Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, using my gangly likeness as inspiration. Entire swaths of our lives went missing from time to time as if someone had hit the skip button on a literal universal remote.

While gathering supplies one frigid afternoon, we found the trash can fire we'd lit months before in Monument Park still burning. We crouched behind a dead palm tree, craning our heads to see who might have started it, but after finding the fuel comprised of the same carry-out bags and Styrofoam cups I threw in the night we met, it became apparent that our initial bonfire simply never died. It flickered in slow motion, tendrils of flame swaying in a wind that did not blow. I moved close to the rusted can, took off my makeshift sock-mittens, held my hand up to the blaze—but felt nothing save the chill of the

flurries falling from the sky above. The fire burned out of time with the rest of the world, and I could not feel its heat.

In the subsequent weeks, we noticed the desynchronization of time in all things. Tides waxed and waned on the hour; distant mountains ground to dust overnight; constellations burned out of the sky as we traced them with frostbitten fingertips. Scavenging became increasingly difficult as everything from food to tools dissolved in our hands. We awoke to find our clothes threadbare but the previous day's Cokes still carbonated. Life creaked on like that for some time, the two of us weaving in and out of time for seconds full of minutes, minutes full of days, days full of years. I fell asleep with her miniature body curled into mine and woke up with her a decade later. We stopped keeping track of time altogether as the laws of physics were purged in the great dumpster fire at the end of the cosmos; all the while, the other Margot and I made a home for ourselves, spending the prolonged days exploring what was left of the world and the endless nights exploring each other.

On one particularly tender evening in The Still—interlaced together in our bed, the other Margot's lashes fluttering against my neck, I murmured, "But really, how long have you loved me?"

"For at least a day," she said finally after a pause, "which is to say, in this place, maybe forever."

I knew something was wrong when I woke one morning to a painting hitherto unseen. With stunning luster and arresting beauty, the other Margot had painted my old farmhouse in Norfolk, a hand-me-down two-story gathering dust at the edge of the cornfield my grandfather had sold to the Murdochs decades before my father was a tax credit. I recognized the vantage point from a picture I kept on my bookshelf in the living room, a photograph faded almost beyond recognition from rapidly increasing age. Even with the source material diminished, the other Margot managed to capture the ripple of the cornstalks as a breeze raced through it. Her version of my childhood summers shot phantom sears of sunburn up my back.

"When did you paint this?" I asked when she entered the room with two fists of perfectly preserved rice cakes. "It's incredible."

"This last week," she said. "While you slept."

As time frayed, choice days ran slower for me than it did for the other Margot, only to snap back to the same pace further down the line. On unison days, time ran more or less equally for the two of us. Sometimes we lived in synchronicity for days, weeks even, reading books and scavenging the ruins and watching the moon grind to fine red powder. I suspected she hid many of the early days she spent alone to spare me the guilt. On shorter divergences, I caught her with a new cut on her hand or a freshly patched pair of jeans; on the longer jaunts, her hair was two or three inches longer than it was the day prior. When she sped forward, it was always while I slept. In The Still, I never lived a day without her by my side. The other Margot, however, lived an entire life away from me while I remained suspended in our bed, biding daunting swaths of time alone until I woke my very next day to see her.

In the space between my awakenings, the other Margot painted prolifically. Miraculously—perhaps mercifully—time left her paints and canvases untouched even as most of the world atomized erratically around us. On any given night, we kissed and clasped each other tightly and I would wake to find another painting, three paintings, twenty paintings of the world Before, each one exponentially more skilled and more staggeringly picturesque than the last. When she ran out of canvas, the other Margot crafted murals encompassing our apartment, the adjacent hallways, the face of the old brick building across the street. Her command of color shocked me, enthralled me, reminded me of both a world that once existed and a world that I'm sure never did. Time treated our slice of Armageddon more kindly than it did the rest of the world, save the other Margot—my Margot—who woke next to me with each passing morning more acutely grey and weary than the day before.

"How long were you awake without me?" I asked her one of my years into this exercise—at least fifty of hers—as I stroked the white hair away from her craggy worry lines.

"Three years," she whispered, voice hoarse, squeezing me as tight as she could with her feeble hands.

I stockpiled as many resources as I could when I was with her, knowing full well that I could not stock enough food for years at a time and that she could no longer brave the frozen desolation of the world

outside alone. I fell apart one night stacking cans of pinto beans in the linen closet, slumped to the ground as tears crept onto my cheeks and immediately started to freeze.

"It's okay," she said, pressing my blearing eyes into her gaunt thigh. Her voice was tender. "I mean it. You've done everything you could. We've lived longer than we had any right to."

Maybe if I'd grown old, too, I would have attained her level of serenity or achieved her sense of acceptance. Instead, I sobbed against her diminished body and could not find the strength within me to stop. "You can't just stop painting," I finally choked. "You're just starting to get good."

For the first time in what may have been years for her, the other Margot smiled. We huddled on the remains of our futon, tag-teamed a Twinkie, dreamt of where we might have traveled together Before. She said Nepal, or Bhutan, or some other place I could never locate on a map. I wasn't paying attention. I stared at her, searing her existence into every fold of my brain. We shivered against each other like that for one, two, ten nights. Eventually, I woke up and she simply wasn't there. Any note or trace of where she'd gone had blown to dust some unknowable amount of time before. I lied in bed for hours and listened to the wind whip across the barrens, to the waves of ice crush against themselves on the shoreline. Outside my apartment, the world died at a thousand different speeds, equally hurtling and crawling toward oblivion. Inside of it, I died at the same pedestrian constant I'd managed my entire life before.

While the rest of us dodged the wrath of Ishtar or extraterrestrial invasions, the other Margot spent most of the early days of the multipocalypse hallucinating on the sheets in her old apartment. It took two full weeks, she once claimed, for her to realize that the screams and the sirens and shelling of the world outside her bedroom window were more than a side effect of the heroin occluding her mind. Amidst the fever dreams of withdrawal, the other Margot occasionally experienced moments of blinding lucidity. She would wake in the cooling night, stagger between the abandoned rooms of her building, force down a spoonful of peanut butter, fight the sensation of it creeping back up. She said she'd wander to the courtyard on the roof,

stumble into the empty community pool, lie on her back and shiver under the starlight. Above the clamor of the world cannibalizing itself below her, she would stretch out a delicate, trembling finger and trace the stars, whispering the names of those she remembered as the poison licked at the edges of her consciousness.

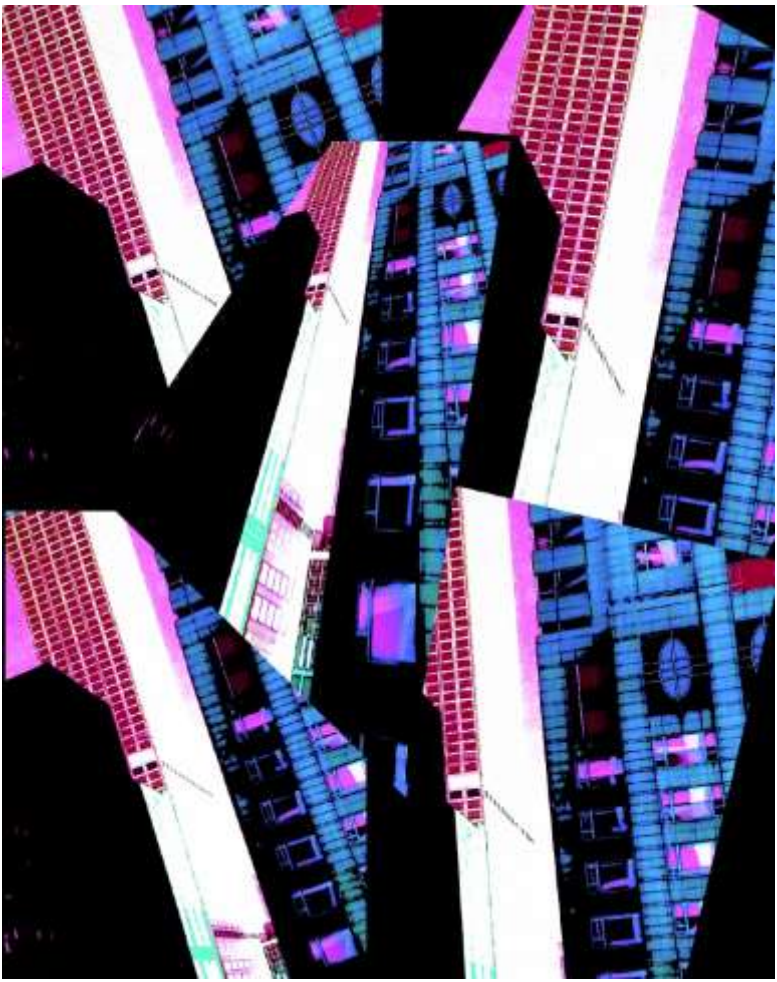
On cloudless nights in The Still, she would point a steadier digit at the heavens from our favorite perch on the freeway overpass. She announced the constellations as she drew them, dreamily describing the princess Andromeda and her vainglorious mother, Cassiopeia, her hand deftly swaying against the deepest blue of the night as if the sky were her personal canvas. She spoke of the Pleiades and the goddess Demeter as if she knew them personally in a lifetime where she very well may have. All the while, I absorbed her in her fervent glory.

"Chaos to cosmos," she murmured, galaxies inside her eyes.

In her absence, for a time, I traced the stars too, many of them still obscured by remnants of the broken moon. I invented names for them, connected the surviving stellar dots in the ever-darkening sky. I drew the lines deliberately, taking great care to sketch the other Margot as sprawling and megalithic and gorgeous to behold. In the twilight of existence—in my final act of worship—I painted the last goddess to grace the Earth.

On her longest stint alone in The Still, the other Margot took up a grease pencil and drew the two of us together in front of a new moon menacing at the horizon, her head nestled against my breasts and my face buried in her dark hair. The strokes were black and heavy—some smudged lovingly, others etched with violent precision. Last night, I pried the canvas from our bedroom wall, rolled it up, trudged the four miles up the road to Monument Park. The towering high-rises of before were mostly ash and dust, either pulverized into some misbegotten shape or standing hauntingly unmolested against the new skyline of decay. The avenues had disappeared, replaced only with fused layers of ice and snow. Comet and meteors cut vermillion gashes into the void above me, the heavens always one fracture of time away from erasing the Earth from the cosmic record. As I approached my destination, an anemic light appeared ahead in the obsidian darkness. The trash can fire flickered on at the heart of the park,

consuming the same debris I'd thrown in perhaps a thousand years before. Shivers wracked my body as I stood before its uniform, heatless light. I slid the drawing into the impossible flame. I imagined the canvas catching fire in another thousand years, the wind picking up its ashes and carrying it across the fields of the dead. When it became apparent that the sun was long past rising, I faced what I once knew as west and headed for the wintry coast. The fire still burned when I left it to die.



Bright Lights Big City / J. Ray Paradiso

Elected and Necessary

Valyntina Grenier

One woman operates the Da Vinci Robot
another woman oversees
its insertion and removal
from my body

They deliver my cervix
uterus
poly cystic ovaries
endometriosis

Irrational fear conceived
a still life continually
attempting to abort
primordial punishment
as crippling pain

I don't want to bear this
I can feel myself slipping
back to the day

another surgeon laid photos along the desk
from my laparoscopy
I received them with a sense of violence
like being slapped with the replicated objects
of my wounded organs

It was strange
being alone with him
shocked to see
inside of my body

I imagine being at the surface of my skin
My body doesn't know
my *psyche doesn't desire*
to make another person

I lay my hands over the most painful spots
to feel myself as the surface of a sea
minnows feeding on roots of pain/ healing
healing a healing body

My grinding figure
all those eggs
phantoms for a page
I blow my brain to bliss

I turn to face
lemon and butter cream
chrysanthemums and carnations

The yellow ribbon
tied around the waist of the vase
reminds me of shoulders
and evergreens

Out to See / Valyntina Grenier

Must Love Bernie

Kimberly Diaz

In 2015, I had two major goals.

1. To find a guy to partner up with for the rest of my life.
2. To get Bernie Sanders elected President of the United States.

But maybe not necessarily in that order, so I placed this ad on a popular dating site.

USER ID: MustLoveBernie

HEADLINE: I Love Bernie but I Might Like You

MustLoveBernie is a non-smoker with a thin body type, Libra with mixed color hair and a bachelor's degree, nonreligious and a free thinker. MustLoveBernie is looking for a relationship but seeking a man for dating. Interests: concerts, movies, tennis, dining out, traveling, bicycling and Bernie Sanders for President!

About Me:

Right now I'm really focused on getting Bernie Sanders elected but I like to have other kinds of fun too. And I really could not seriously hang with anyone who is not committed to voting for Bernie Sanders. In Florida, you have to be a registered Dem to vote for him in the primary. I will ask to see your voter registration. GO BERNIE!

First Date:

Meet for a drink, talk to the bartender about Bernie Sanders, if we hit it off, maybe dinner some other place, talk to the server about Bernie Sanders, etc. . . . For more information about Bernie Sanders go to www.BernieSanders.com. Or take me out . . .

Afterward, I received a few I love Bernie too messages, but mostly angry ones. Are you looking for a date or what? You're alienating half the men out there. That's okay, I said, I'm only looking for one.

Then the unthinkable happened—Trump in the White House, I took the ad down. Dated a couple of guys I met out in the real world. No luck there either. Now as 2020 approaches, I have two major goals.

1. Get Trump impeached.
2. Get Bernie Sanders elected President of the United States.

Go Bernie!

If I Were a Fish

Walter Weinschenk

If I were a fish (and it may yet come to pass),
I would consign my soul to the water
And wear it like a linen shroud
That moves with me in cool continuum.

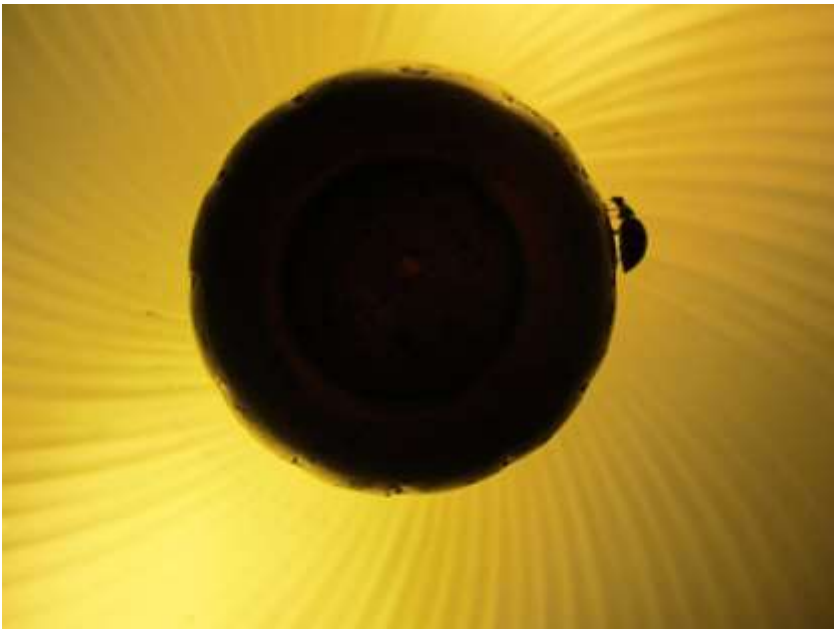
I would split the water with my lip
And, with my tail, I'd sew it up;
I'd venture forth as I see fit,
Silver in the morning,
Bloody gold at night.

But never would I break the plane
Of the silver ceiling overhead
(Unless, of course, a fly flew by,
Low enough to snap it up).

For if I were to pierce that mirrored veil
For more than just a moment,
I simply couldn't bear to see
A world that wasn't meant for me,
A world too cruel for piscine eyes:
I'd be overcome by the sorry sight,
Upon the shore, of elderly trees
Enslaved by wind, made to dance,
Their limbs pulled back and snapped
Like whips, and I'd see, as well,
The desperate flight of fathers and mothers
Along the beach, screaming names
Of sons and daughters,
Plucking up children on the run
Before the rains arrive.

Sea Vision Part 1 / Ernst Perdreil

Sea Vision Part 2 / Ernst Perdreil

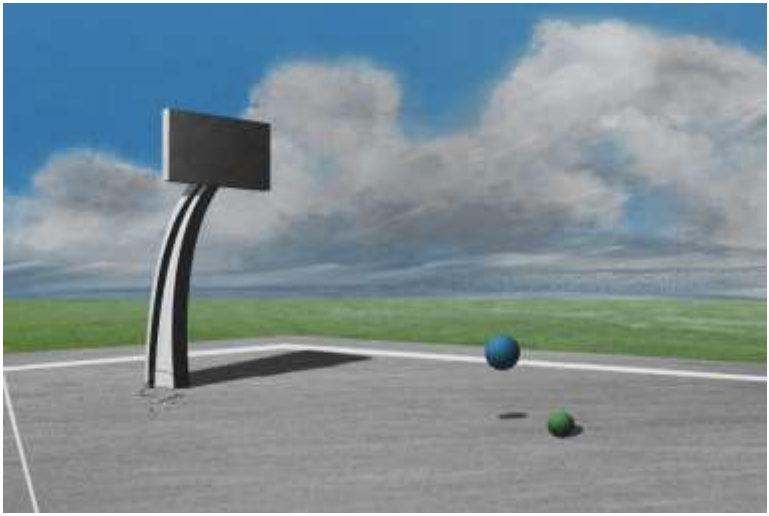


Ladybug Eclipse / Ernst Perdreil

Rumble

Pasquale Trozzolo

Like a ship at sea
She has a melody.
A low rumble
Echoing off waves
As if fog were in the air.
She pulses taking
Oxygen as she moves.
Barely glancing.
Hardly noticing.
As if alone.
First I was insulted, but
Who am I kidding?
This is meaningless
At its best.



Forever Dream / Ping Wang

The Eternal Shine Room / Ping Wang

Demolition

Lenora Steele

The filling station at Esplande and Inglis is coming down today. The one with the turret that doubled as a taxi stand. The one with the hardwood bench where a little girl waits for Daddy.

I am stood across the road with a little gang when the excavator's claw scrapes the cedar skin looking for a place to catch hold , a place to begin. Its end has come.

He had a Brownie, my father, so my first six years are documented with frills and frocks, gloves and curls; after he died no one could find it or no one wanted to. As if whatever was left would not warrant any pictures. The excavator slows; I hear a phone, stalled on the landing I hear my mother at the foot of the stairs. Something has changed.

Now!

The excavator lowers its bucket pulls back, quiets. I am six. I don't want to be in the way. I turn, go back to my room. Wait. But it takes forever, what's coming, so I am crouched now on the landing in a corner when the men come in. The scent of the oven's bread explodes when the draughts of January enter; the stretcher is catching in the door jam, a bitter cold is flooding the hall, the bread makes it smell like any other day.

The gang has grown to a crowd. Extras, cast for effect; they pull their breath in unison. The belfry made this place a landmark. They are telling stories. I move out of earshot. I can't bear their anecdotes.

I am alone as I watch the men struggle to get into Daddy's room, the place he hasn't left now in weeks except on Christmas morning when my oldest brother lent himself a human crutch and ferried him to the living room. And there it is, one final picture; my oldest brother is behind the lens so he is not caught in the frame. Soon, when it is over, he will quit his job in the woods and leave for Toronto. He will send money home. The brother between us will turn sullen. He will never reconcile the coming loss.

The motor fires up again. The crush of spectators stir as the operator levers the bucket this way and that until it catches hold and sinks its claws through a wall, razing a century's old labor. It's operator grows more sure of her target. The clapboards moan and like human skin after a burn, easily peel away. A part of the roof collapses, the people cheer. The shattering lead pane can be heard above the din.

Cancer left him with part-time jobs—A Fuller Brush case, filled with everything a wife could want and then some and he'd wink and to give my mother a break on her nerves my father would take me along. I remember the women at their backdoors; molasses cookies and milky teas and the way they smiled down on me like they knew more than they should. Their hands felt like tiny prayers when they patted my head. I loved those women in their aprons and their backdoors. I planned to be just like them.

And we kept hens. And gardens. Sold eggs and carrots. Charged with dusting the red soil off the root vegetables and collecting eggs, I grew important. I became necessary but then not really. When the time came, I was sent to my room. Goodbyes are not for little girls. There are no words small enough to fit. At the hospital, they said. Another day, they said.

The wrenching continues, the splintering wood, the breaking glass, the moaning hemlock timbers. The crowd swarms and the engine roars with resolve.

It had a crinoline, the dress I was wearing when the hospital called. There had been a mistake, only six, it could not be allowed. I have to say I love you I said but no one heard.

They said, funerals aren't for girls, little ones. Be brave, they said, for Daddy, they said . . . .

The operator, returned from a break, climbs up into her cab. The engine revs. The onlookers brace themselves, take pictures. They want to show their children, their grandchildren what it was like, what this corner was before progress took hold. How this town once held something different. How time cannot hold anything for long. They want to say, we were there. And so was I.

He drove taxis from here, my father and sometimes long into the night I would hear the back door open and my mother's rocker squeak as she moved to meet him in the entry. Some nights I would

creep down to the kitchen where they sat with tea and rice that he'd bring home from the Chinese restaurant right next door. Spoiled, my brothers said but I didn't mind for that made it so I could have some on a little Melmac plate.

The crowd flares up and the last standing wall is exposed and there along the spent wainscoting, on a battered hardwood bench a little girl, watches her Daddy lift his hat from the stand, wills him to turn, to notice, to wink.

And it's down. A ruinous pile of timber and glass. The crowd sputters and breaks apart. A bulldozer roars into motion.

There will be no taxis dispatched today.

HC1 / Alan Lyons

Slices of Life

Susan Bloch

I'd like to say it began with the magic of yeast. That sour aroma takes me straight back to my childhood in Johannesburg when I sat on the Formica kitchen counter watching Mom's nimble fingers rolling and folding the raw dough. She gave me a lump to work on too. I squished it and prodded it and stuck my finger into it. Soon I was talking to it. Telling it to behave itself.

Mom wore a pink-and-white checkered apron tied around her back into a bow; a sprinkling of flour dusted her black patent stilettos. She often leaned over to kiss my forehead. For days after those kisses, I didn't wash my face. That was when it all began. My relationship with food and love.

Decades later I realize that when I write about food, I'm hiding behind a facade. I'm really writing about love—wanting love, losing love, and simply loving.

When Dad, a partner in his accountancy firm, came home from work after days studying figures, he poured himself a glass of Ballantine's Scotch and sank into his green-and-ochre floral armchair. I sat on his lap breathing in the oaky fragrance. Ice clinked against the sides of his cut-glass tumbler. He opened a hinged cedar flat-topped box, cut the tip off a Bolivar Cuban cigar, slid off the paper ring embossed with a picture of a man wearing a blue jacket with gold epaulets, and placed it on my thumb. Snuggling against his chest, I giggled under a cloud of cigar smoke. As a kid, these were the only times I spent alone with Dad. Now, on those evenings I miss him, I pour myself a tot of single malt, inhale the aroma, and imagine Dad's arms around me.

In the kitchen, Mom allowed me to stand next to her on a stool with my own piece of dough to knead, smell, poke, and taste. I didn't know then that I was absorbing the unspoken secrets of baking—how to crack the eggs cleanly, separate the yolks from the egg whites, sift the flour to eliminate lumps and tiny mites, and knead the mixture to the

right podgy consistency—pushing and stretching, pushing and stretching, until my arms ached and the dough softened. I copied her every movement and measurement, learning exactly how thin to roll the dough; how much butter, sugar, and cinnamon to brush over the pale pastry; and how to twist it into a braid.

"Without the yeast, this would be like a brick," Mom told me. Her upper arms quivered while she worked. "The secret is to make the mixture elastic."

Mom would place the spongy lump of dough into a large bowl and wrap it in a blanket to keep it warm while the yeast fermented overnight. As if a magician cast a spell while I slept, the dough rose to a huge balloon, to be kneaded again. Mom showed me how to roll out the dough to exactly the right thinness, spread it with strawberry jam, and sprinkle cinnamon, raisins, and cocoa powder on top. We rolled it into a crescent shape, carefully lifted it onto a baking tray, brushed the top with beaten raw egg to brown the crust, and popped it into a four-hundred-degree oven. An hour later the aroma of a moist, sweet, brioche-like cake filled the house. We ate it warm with slivers of butter that melted on the pastry. The babka took hours to make and no time to vanish.

I had to eat all my breakfast before I went to school. Even though I showered teaspoons of brown sugar and dollops of butter on top of the oatmeal, the thick goo would stick to the roof of my mouth and refuse to slide down my throat. To Mom's despair, it sometimes took me half an hour to clean my bowl. Eventually, she gave up nagging. I got my way—munching Rice Krispies while I read the cartoons on the Kellogg's box. Snap, crackle, and pop tickled the inside of my mouth.

As a kid, my favorite birthday treat was to go to the Doll House Drive-in Restaurant in Johannesburg. When the waiter clipped a tray onto the top of Dad's window, I breathed in the aroma of a grilled cheese and tomato sandwich on white bread. My teeth crunched the crusts and the gooey cheese stretched like spaghetti in long lines to my lips. Dessert was mixed canned fruit salad layered with Wall's vanilla ice cream and decorated with swirls of whipped cream, chocolate gratings, and a maraschino cherry with a stem. Using a long-handled teaspoon

and my lizard-like tongue, I licked the tall sundae glass clean. Even though we had an abundance of fresh papaya, bananas, grapes, mangoes, and passion fruit in South Africa, it was the sugary syrup coating soft chunks of pineapple, peaches, cherries, and grapes that made me ooh and aah. Now my stomach sours when I think of eating that soggy, greasy sandwich, flabby fruit, and synthetic-tasting ice cream. But I continue to celebrate my birthday with a grilled cheese and tomato panini on focaccia bread—and a scoop of rum and raisin Haagen-Dazs on warm apple pie.

When Mom baked a chocolate cake, she always left some raw batter on the beater and in the bowl for me to lick and scrape. It was as good as the cake itself. Sixty years later when I bake, I stick out my tongue to lick the batter at the end of the spatula. I close my eyes and can almost breathe in her fragrance: Chanel N° 5.

My mother's babka recipe was famous in Johannesburg's Jewish community—and that was saying something. There was fierce competition as to who made the best apple pie, cabbage salad, and cheesecake. But there was no arguing that Mom's babka was the best. Now long gone, she is always beside me when I stretch and tuck the mixture, whispering her secrets.

"A little more water, just a drop . . . don't knead so hard . . . gentle as you flip the dough."

The dough sighs as I push it down. I hear Mom's voice again.

"Now leave it to sit quietly. It needs peace, time, and a warm place for the yeast to do its job."

I am the only one in the family who can bake babka as delicious as Mom. While I learned my mother's feel for the perfect dough—springy and alive—everyone else only has her recipe.

When I married, my husband and I moved to Israel. The lemon tree in our backyard gave us an endless supply of fruit. I made lemonade, lemon cream pie, lemon meringue pie, lemon soufflé, whiskey sours, chicken marinated in lemon juice and garlic, and I gave handfuls of lemons to neighbors. Now in my Seattle home, I have three lemon

houseplants that are full of blossoms and only one lemon. Just like the song, "Lemon Tree"—the fruit is very pretty but impossible to eat.

The onset of the Yom Kippur War on October 6, 1973, took the country by surprise. After twenty-four hours of not eating and drinking, family and friends gathered in my Tel Aviv home to break the fast at the end of this holy day. Guests whispered a little too loudly that the roast chicken tasted bitter and the turkey sweetish. While we complained about the mundane, the air raid siren shrieked. A few minutes later there was a loud knock at the front door. Without waiting for an answer, a soldier strode in and announced the names of army reservists. They were ordered to report for immediate duty. Husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers packed underwear, razors, shaving cream, and toothbrushes. We had no idea that Egyptian troops had already crossed the Suez Canal. Tanks advanced toward Jerusalem. Only four hundred miles away, we women laughed when we realized that my friend Abby had left the gall inside the chicken, and I'd sugared instead of salted the turkey.

Three days later, while children played hopscotch in a deserted street, we learned that one of our friends, Udi, had been burned alive in a tank near the Suez Canal while trying to block the Egyptian invasion. There was nothing left of his body to bury except for his identification necklace.

I baked a babka and took it with me as we sat shiva—a seven-day mourning period—with Udi's family. The room was silent. The only sounds were chunks of babka being ripped off the loaf and mourners swallowing. Eyes closed as if to shut out the bad news that trickled our way. No one spoke until we recited the Mourner's Kaddish, the prayer for the dead.

When my marriage dissolved, I moved to London where I met my second husband, John. I loved the smell of whiskey but only developed a taste for Scotch when John held a glass to my lips. I took a sip and my tongue tingled. Soon a glow filled my belly and I took another larger sip. We married soon after.

On vacation in Barcelona, John introduced me to Spain's famous salt cod dish. In a side street, in the shade of Gaudi's Crypt, he leaned in to smell the succulent fish resting on fragrant samfaina sauce, gleaming with green peppers, onions, tomatoes, courgettes, and aubergines. John took a mouthful of the delicacy, leaned back in his chair, kissed his fingertips, and chuckled.

To celebrate our first wedding anniversary, I prepared salt cod, hoping it would remind him of our weekend in Barcelona—the weekend he proposed. I followed the recipe in the *River Café Cookbook*, written by the chef of the one-star Michelin restaurant. After soaking the fish for twenty-four hours, I grilled it and placed it on top of the simmering sauce. The cod was tough, skin burned to ash, and it tasted like old shoe leather. I tossed it in the bin. Instead, we ate vegetable omelets filled with the sauce, along with a toasted baguette and French butter. We drank a jug of sangria made from a bottle of Spanish rioja, sugar, Calvados, slices of lime and lemon, and chopped peaches and apples. John's kiss tasted of tomatoes.

When John contracted mesothelioma, he took morphine to ease the pain. He lost his sense of taste. As asbestos fibers sucked and destroyed the pink linings of his lungs, it made no difference to him whether he was eating kedgeree, duck breast with cherry and port sauce, or day-old pizza.

John hardly ever complained. Not when he was in pain and not when the nurse bruised his arm, when she tried again, and again, to draw blood from his shriveled vein. But he did complain at his last supper.

The night before John died he asked me to prepare a special meal for him—grilled Dover sole with lemon butter, new season peas, and mashed potatoes with chives.

"The fish is dry," he said after the first bite. "And the peas are soggy."

He only ate a mouthful of his favorite dessert—mille-feuille from our local French patisserie—and pushed it away.

That night, I knew that he'd die soon. I died too.

For years I didn't bake a babka, not even when the kids begged and badgered. When I finally did, I was still overwrought and the kneading overthought. I hadn't realized I'd lost my sense of touch and smell.

A bruised Granny Smith apple, a moldy piece of cheddar, a can of Heinz ravioli, and a bottle of cheap Riesling became my evenings' staple diet. It didn't matter; it was hard to taste anything anyway. I struggled to search for a deeper meaning in my life, understand "what it was all for."

Unexpectedly, I was offered and accepted a job to work with a team to set up supermarkets in India. The local cuisine—chickpeas in tomato sauce, creamy black lentils, chapatti, curried vegetables served with grated fresh coconut, tandoori chicken, Alphonso mangoes, sugar sweet bananas, and salted lassi seduced me back to the pleasures of eating.

When I lived in Mumbai, I was invited to join Rabbi Gabi and his wife Rivka for the sabbath dinner at their home. On a warm September evening, we sat in the front courtyard and feasted on hummus, falafel, pita, finely chopped vegetable salad, and barbequed chicken seasoned with familiar Middle Eastern flavors: zaatar, sumac, garlic, and onions. Their two-year-old son, Moshe, clapped his hands and giggled as he ran around in circles. I felt at home—the language, the culture, the food. Under the light of a full moon, Moshe finally flopped asleep on his mother's lap.

The Mumbai Massacre began close to midnight on November 26, 2008. Earlier that evening I had dined at the Taj Mahal Palace hotel with my boss. Over a feast of potato samosas, lentil soup, curried vegetables, garlic naan, chili crab, saffron rice, and fresh coconut, we discussed the structure of the leadership team. While we savored creamy kulfi ice cream and drank spicy chai, a group of Pakistani terrorists edged their way on a dinghy through fishermen's boats and landed at a dock near Mumbai's commercial center. A few hours after we left the restaurant, the hotel's lush Persian carpets and ionic

columns were burning. From my apartment, I could see yellow and crimson flames leaping up into the dark sky and a charred smell filled the air.

What a difference a few hours could make.

Rabbi Gabi and Rivka Holtzberg, my new friends, were slaughtered by the terrorists. Moshe's Indian nanny, Sandra Samuel, lifted the baby boy off his dead mother's chest, ran down the stairs, and into the street. She saved his life. Moshe ate nothing for hours—no cookies, no ice cream, and even refused to sip chocolate milk through a straw.

Moshe's grandparents, Rabbi Shimon and Yehudit Rosenberg, came to Mumbai to collect their grandson and take his parents' remains back to Israel. The city was in lockdown, and the Israeli consul's apartment was filled with embassy folk sorting out visas, flights, and counseling support. I made cup after cup of Nescafé with UHT milk and an endless number of kosher canned tuna mayonnaise sandwiches on white bread. A fishy smell lingered in the hot, humid air.

Although I hated oatmeal as a child, I've learned to enjoy eating plain oatmeal for breakfast. To keep my glucose levels down, I add no sugar, no butter, nor honey. Yet I scrape and sometimes lick the bowl to get the last scrap. No one nags me to hurry up, or tells me I have to eat it all.

How my tastes have changed.

Intoxicated by its earthy scent, everyone loves the smell of my babka browning in the oven—the crust embracing the soft, sweet belly. Now three generations later, my kids and grandchildren have fun kneading their own dough in my kitchen. When freshly baked babka appears on our brunch table, chatter ceases as cinnamon bursts on our tongues.

Hands, big and small, reach for second, and sometimes third, helpings. Mom is there with us in spirit. I imagine John's lips on my cheek as he hovers, and when he thinks no one is looking, he snatches a slice.

Incomplete / Nam Nguyen

Tonight I Can Write

Diana Raab

(After Neruda *Tonight I Can Write the Saddest Lines*)

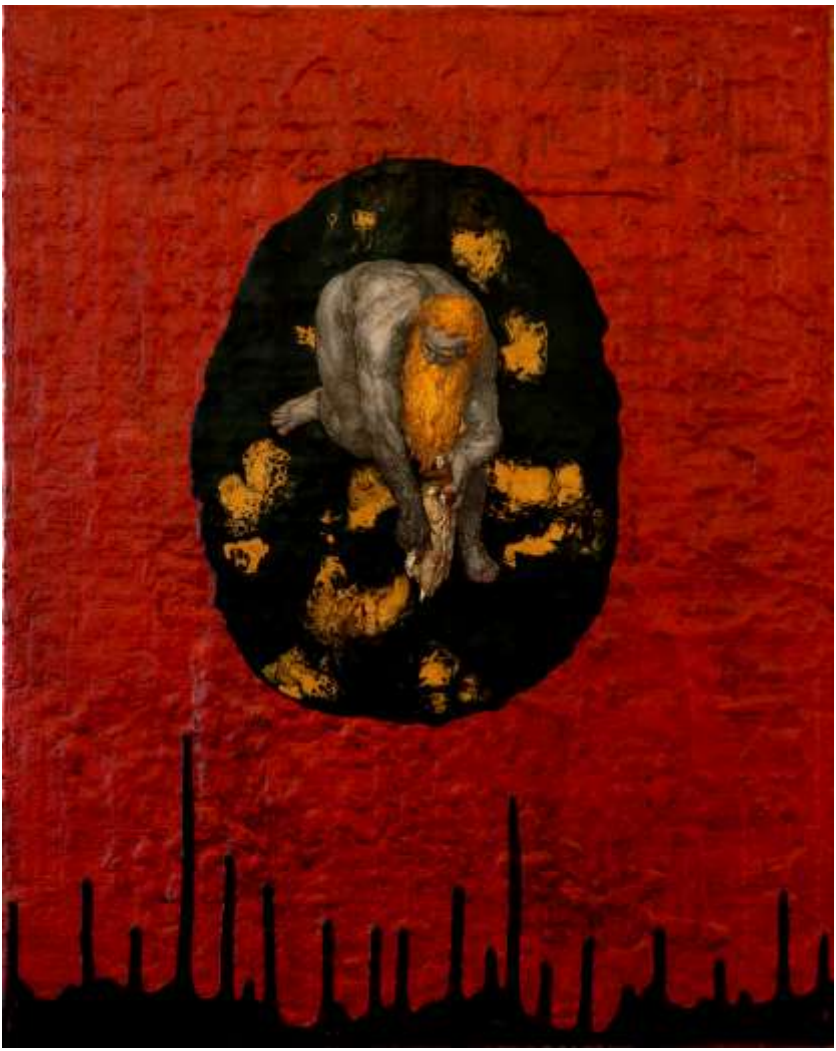
I thought he would be with me
until our end. I had to say goodbye
to him who rests, now, six feet above,
six feet below a night we only knew.

I wanted to be who he awakened to
each morning, not who he waved
goodbye to across our ocean
or those stars which lit only
our shadows.

He named me to her, his wife:
she tied his hands, in prayer
behind his back, resigned, exhausted
to what was to be his fate.

I am left an orphan by a love
which promised to give—
shattered now—rich only with
imagined memories, the oceans
and its stars my only light.

Afterimage Man / Silas Plum



The First Giant / Silas Plum

Leaving the Farm

Elizabeth Gauffreau

Maggie's house was the last building standing on a farm in Vermont that had not been worked since Calvin Coolidge was president, the barn taken down when she and Tom bought the property, the various outbuildings, afterthoughts to the barn, now gently collapsed onto their shallow foundations and covered with vines.

Across the road stood a small hay barn, open in the front and close to the road. For years, the barn had received no maintenance, its rough boards weathered gray, its tin roof streaked with rust, yet it had stood straight and sturdy all those years, keeping the hay dry through the winter. It was not until Tom's death that Maggie noticed signs of deterioration, boards coming loose, the tin roof peeling back at the corners.

No one knew she was alone in the house, alone and a widow. Her niece did not know, her neighbors did not know. None of Tom's family knew. Overnight, Maggie had become a different person, a person without Tom, a different person for the rest of her life and *no one knew.*

The coroner knew. He had come and taken Tom's body away. One of the men who came with him had stripped the soiled bedding and taken it with him to be disposed of, opened the windows to air the room. The windows were open still, two hours later, the dank November chill now settled throughout the house.

Maggie herself did not know how long she had been alone. She and Tom had gone to bed together at ten as usual, talked for a bit, read for a bit, kissed goodnight. He had died in his sleep. Peacefully, so she would say when she finally roused herself enough to make the phone calls, having no way of knowing it had been otherwise. If it had been otherwise, she had not awakened, and he had died alone.

She wondered if the house looked any different, now that there was a widow living in it instead of a couple, just as it would have looked different if she and Tom had been a family, with children and a large mongrel dog. Was the yard suddenly unkempt, chokecherry bushes covering the downstairs windows, the driveway overgrown with

weeds? Was the paint peeling, the wood rotting, the shingles on the roof tattered and useless against the rain? She herself must be different now, too, the unfathomable emptiness inside her manifesting itself in her face, her eyes, her legs, her hands. Would she recognize herself in the mirror now? Would she dare look in a mirror now?

She had to make the calls. There were so many people to call. It was not right to withhold Tom's death from them. But she could not call them now. How could she call them without knowing how Tom's funeral would be staged? They would ask about the arrangements, and if she had nothing to tell them, Tom would be disappointed.

Tom expected it of her, to stage his funeral for maximum impact, to stage it as he himself would have staged it, so that each person in attendance would take home only one image, the defining moment of the scene. The moment when all in attendance celebrate a life lived to its fullest and ended at a fitting time. The moment when the widow takes solace in the discovery of how many of his students' lives her husband had changed for the better. The moment when the widow realizes that she never really knew her husband at all. The moment when the widow acknowledges for the first time that she is truly alone.

Would the scene be melancholy, tragic, suffused with irony? Would the weather be sunny, overcast, raining? Would the defining moment take place in the church or graveside? Would the mourners be dressed in black or in their ordinary clothes? Would the casket be ornate or plain, open or closed? Would there be flowers? Would a wind be blowing? Would the mourners be leaning on one another for solace or standing apart in their grief? Would their heads be covered or bare? Would the minister have a deep voice or a reedy voice? Would he wear vestments or a suit? For that matter, would the minister be a man or a woman? Would there be music, poetry, elegy, eulogy?

She did not know. Above all, the funeral could not be ordinary. Tom would be so hurt if his funeral were ordinary.

B*etty Archambault guided her LTD slowly down Snyder Road, the tiny container of aspirin Norman had sent her out to buy at nine o'clock at night because his arthritis couldn't wait until the drugstore opened in the morning tucked into her coat pocket. The car felt unsteady on the icy road, and Betty*

drove with both hands tight on the steering wheel, the radio turned down to an indecipherable rise and fall of background noise.

Two feet of snow had fallen since morning, and the village crew had given the road their customary lick and a promise. While they had cleared the worst of the accumulation by noon, they had not put in another appearance until nearly four o'clock, when Johnny Erno roared past Betty's house in the village truck with his brother Jimmy standing in the back tossing out random sprays of dirt as he struggled to keep his balance.

The LTD skidded, and Betty sighed as she eased it back into the tracks left by the few cars which traveled the road. Even after living on Snyder Road for most of her life, driving it in the winter made her nervous. The snow leveled the landscape so that she could hardly tell what was road and what was ditch and what was her own front yard.

As Betty approached Maggie Sebastian's house, she thought she saw a light in one of the upstairs rooms. She looked up at the house as she passed it, but the car skidded again, and she could not be sure. Her rearview mirror showed nothing but the faint red glow of her own tail lights. By the time she reached her house with Norman's aspirin, she told herself it had been a trick of the light, headlights flashing against window glass. The Sebastian house was empty.

Maggie awoke with a feeling of anticipation so strong she had to open her eyes to ground herself in place and time. She was lying comfortably in her own bed, crystalline winter sunlight glittering through the bare windows of her bedroom, the house perfectly still. Her nose felt cold, and she took her hand from under the covers to touch it. As she slipped her hand back under the covers, its spotted skin and graceless shape quickly dispelled the sense she had had upon waking of being a young woman about to set off on an adventure—a young woman who, before the day was out, would have suddenly, inexplicably fallen in love.

Maggie was not one for summer romances. A summer romance was distracting for the participants, not to mention annoying for any unfortunate observers. Maggie had no time to be distracted when she played summer stock, not when there were lines to learn and props to obtain and, most of all, atmosphere to absorb.

Nevertheless, that summer, in the three short months before she was to begin a graduate program in drama in the fall, Maggie developed such a crush on the man who played George that she could not stand to be in the same room with him. Everything about him flustered her: his fine, handsome face, his soft, faded clothes, his lithe body, his sardonic humor. He had a beautiful speaking voice, an actor's voice, deep and warm and charmingly disingenuous. When it was her turn to paint flats with him, she would work with her head down, never taking her eyes off the brush in her hand, dreading the moment he would speak to her, leaning back on his heels and smiling.

The first time he spoke to her, he asked the usual questions: *Where are you from? What do you do? Where did you go to school?* and when she answered with three rudimentary facts of her life, he appeared as satisfied with her answers as if he meant to make use of them some day in a context which had nothing at all to do with her, his smile making creases in his face, just below the eyes, the muscles of his arm undulating beneath the skin as he passed the paint brush back and forth across the canvas.

The next time he spoke to her, to comment upon their director's infuriating lack of temperament during a rehearsal, she thought perhaps she had imagined it, pulling his wonderful voice from his throat herself, to linger warmly in her ear as she prepared for bed three hours later, wondering as she stood at her makeshift closet, three hooks and a clutter of wire hangers, if she dared wear her favorite outfit that summer, a peasant blouse, full skirt, and sandals, in front of him.

At the first cast party of the season, held at the pretentiously quaint cottage where the director was staying, Tom threw himself at her feet (she was sitting on a chaise lounge on the patio nursing a glass of rather bitter red wine and he plopped himself down on the foot of it) and announced, "I failed boilers." Maggie gaped at him and drew her feet up.

Tom reached for her hand and took the wine glass from it. "That's usually my best line. Piques their interest and all that."

Maggie tried to think of a clever rejoinder. "I'm not much interested in boilers."

"Neither am I. That's why I failed the course." Tom grimaced and handed the wine glass back to her.

"Oh." Maggie clutched the glass by its stem. Tom had made no move to change his position on the chaise.

"I changed my major to English," he said. "My father was terribly angry. He thought I would become a teacher. Those who can do, those who can't . . . you know."

Maggie inched her legs into a more comfortable position, a mere six inches from Tom's hand. "I tried teaching for a year after I graduated from college. My mother told me no good would come of it."

"No good would come of it," Tom intoned, his voice dipping low on 'good.'

"That's right. No good came of it. The children told their parents they were frightened of me."

"Why would children be frightened of you?"

"I'm not sure." Maggie paused. "They were too frightened to say!"

Tom threw his head back and roared, reaching forward to grasp her ankle, where his smooth burning hand remained, for a mere moment or the rest of her life, Maggie could not say.

Maggie lay in bed a few minutes longer, waiting for the feeling of anticipation to return. Now that the furniture was gone, the room had taken on a different smell, which in her exhaustion the day before she had been unable to identify. For forty years, her bedroom had had its own distinct smell of winter: a musk of cedar, wool, and furniture polish. But now, the room had taken on the smell of the house itself, of wood and plaster, the way the air outside took on the smell of bare trees before it snowed.

Having movers in the house had tired her terribly, and she had spent most of the previous day in bed, reading and napping, relieved at last to be left alone, free of the movers' questions *and this? and this? and this too?* and free of Betty's hustling her out of the drafts that swirled into the house as the movers carried out a mattress, then a bureau, then a cardboard wardrobe filled with summer dresses.

Maggie reached for her bathrobe and shuddered as she got out of bed. The room was painfully cold. She turned on the warmer light in the bathroom and chose wool slacks, a turtleneck, and a thick sweater from the closet. As she waited for the bathroom to become warm enough for her to dress, she stood by the window looking out at the beguiling radiance of sunlight on new snow.

Later, sitting on the window seat in the study with her breakfast, Maggie wished she could fix herself a nice fire in the wood stove. She had not built a fire since Tom's death, and the stove had remained cold, its stale smell of ashes fading as the weeks passed. Looking out the window to the end of her driveway, she noted without alarm that she was snowed in. Tommy LaRose would more than likely come to plow her out before the afternoon light faded. He generally did her driveway at the end of his regular rounds, after the others, the ones who had children to get to the bus stop and jobs to get to.

As she looked back into the room, the empty bookshelves gave her an unexpected jolt of sadness. She had not gone through Tom's books after he died, keeping them on the shelves where he had left them, until she went through her own when she made the decision to leave the farm, a few passed on to relatives, some donated to the College, most to the public library. The only book of hers that she held back for the remainder of her time at the farmhouse was a thick anthology of women poets.

The travel mementoes that had been scattered among the books were gone, too, given to the Sebastians—the kylix from Greece to Tom's brother, the bright wooden menagerie from Mexico to a grandnephew's son, the dish of mismatched pewter buttons of forgotten origin to Tom's sister. For a brief moment Maggie regretted having given them away. Their absence reminded her of all those summer trips abroad with Tom and her inability to stop herself from envisioning the forest reclaiming the farm because they weren't there to stop it. They would be standing by a lake in Switzerland or watching a play in London or taking photographs in Rome, and suddenly she would see before her eyes the approach to the farm as though coming upon it from the road, and the pasture would be gone, the meadow gone, their driveway gone, maples and pines and brambles

growing there instead, all access to their house blocked, the house itself unrecognizable, a lichen-covered mass under the trees.

Setting her breakfast tray on the floor, she leaned back and rested her head against the cold window glass as she looked out the opposite window, her vision unable to see past the for-sale sign hanging askew in her front yard, its painted yellow post having been barely driven into frozen ground.

The telephone rang, and she rose without hesitation to answer it. She was, she quickly assured herself, neither a misanthrope nor a dotard. If she could get to the phone without falling and risking broken bones, she would answer it. If not, whoever it was could call back.

"Mrs. Sebastian?" A female voice, ingratiating and overly familiar.

"Speaking."

"Mrs. Sebastian, Maggie, this is Carol, Carol Rollins. I've been trying to call you all morning at Brookfield Commons, but there was no answer. I had no idea you were still at the house. We have a prospect."

"A prospect for what?"

"For the house. A prospective buyer."

"I see."

"He's already ridden by the house with me, and he seems interested, *very* interested. He's eager to see the inside. I have every expectation that once he sees it, he will offer our asking price."

Carol, a thin blonde in her forties, struck Maggie as somehow feline, her voice in particular. As she gave Maggie a synopsis of the prospect's financial status, Maggie envisioned a cat with a dead bird in its mouth: carrying the bird into the house, laying it proudly on the carpet at her master's feet, looking up expectantly for praise—but meeting only revulsion.

"I'd like to bring him by today, if possible," Carol continued. "What time would be good for you? It's best to do it while it's still light; before three o'clock would be best."

"I'm sorry, I can't do it today. I'm right in the middle of something, and I can't be interrupted."

"Oh, but you won't be! You just make yourself scarce, and I'll show the house."

"Yes, of course, but today is simply not convenient. Why don't I give you a ring tomorrow to set up a time? Good-bye now!" Maggie hung up before Carol had a chance to say anything else and, shaking her head at how much of the morning had passed, made her way through the empty living room to the spare room.

This room was now filled with cardboard boxes, the packing tape peeling off, brittle with storage and age. Jack Archambault had carried all of the boxes from their storage places—from the top shelves of closets, from the shed next to the kitchen and the loft over the garage—and arranged them so she could begin at the door and work her way to the back of the room, going through each box and disposing of its contents without having to lift anything heavy.

As she stood in the doorway, she recognized some of the boxes, easily visualizing their contents and the day she had packed them. The others she would stumble into unprepared. She wondered if she would find anything of Tom's, throwing back the flaps of a box to reveal a jumble of wire, model train pieces, and chunks of quartz, the sort of junk a boy would keep in the bottom drawer of his bureau and a man would keep in a box in the garage so he would never forget what it had been like to be a boy.

The first box she opened contained fabric, some stained tablecloths she could throw out, and a picture her grandmother had painted. The fabric would go to her niece Gwen, even though Gwen hadn't sewn in years. Maggie packaged the fabric securely in brown paper and enclosed a note: The rose print is from Austria, one-of-a-kind, according to the shopkeeper we bought it from, Tom haggling in German out of one side of his mouth and grumbling in English *You don't sew!* out of the other. The red cotton is from Guatemala—it's vegetable-dyed, so it will bleed. The green gingham my mother Mary bought before the First World War and never made up—it is only thirty-six inches wide, so watch your layout!

The painting, a vase of flowers on white velvet, would also go to Gwen. Maggie's grandmother, Gwen's great-grandmother, had done the painting the year before she married: it had hung in her bedroom all her life. Maggie wrapped the package and addressed it without telling Gwen that for the last thirty years, the painting had remained packed in a box in a closet because it was not very good. It

was the sort of thing that young, well-to-do Victorian women did for lack of something better to do, and Tom in particular thought the top shelf of a closet was the appropriate place to keep it.

The telephone rang as Maggie was carrying the two wrapped packages into the kitchen. She hesitated only briefly before deciding not to answer it and returned to the spare room to break down the box she had just emptied before taking it to the shed.

When the telephone stopped ringing, Maggie thought she heard the sound of an engine straining. She looked out the kitchen window but couldn't see anyone at first, the smooth expanse of white snow unbroken except for the for-sale sign. The engine sounded close. As she continued to look out the window, she saw a jeep at the end of the driveway, pushing at the hard bank of snow the village plow had left. That would be Tommy LaRose coming to plow her out now that the snow had stopped. He seemed to be having a hard time of it, and she wondered why. He didn't usually have that much trouble, even after a big storm.

Looking more closely, she saw three people sitting in the jeep. She watched as it backed up and strained forward, making only small progress against the snow bank. As she continued to watch, the jeep finally broke through and quickly pushed the rest of the snow to the side. It backed up again and began inching its way up her driveway, clearing as it went. When it reached the study window, she saw who was driving: Jack Archambault. His parents were the two passengers, Norman in the front, Betty in the seat behind him, leaning forward with her hand on Norman's shoulder.

It did not surprise Maggie to see them. One of them must have seen her light on last night. She sighed. She should have expected it. Well, at least they had not brought the sheriff. And since they had come, she could ask Jack to take the packages for Gwen to the post office.

The jeep stopped, and the three Archambaults came stomping through the snow to the ell by the kitchen. Maggie greeted them at the door. "Well, hello. What brings you out today? You didn't have to plow my driveway. You know Tommy LaRose does it."

Betty peered anxiously into the room. "Are you all right, Maggie? What happened? I didn't mean to just up and leave you here."

Maggie closed the kitchen door behind Norman, who had lagged behind his wife and son. "You didn't. I have a few things left to finish before I move. It shouldn't take me much longer."

"But I thought you was leaving the day the movers was here. You had it all planned out."

Norman was looking uncomfortable, already making motions to his wife that he wanted to leave. "Is there anything we can do for you, Maggie?" he said. "Is there anything you need?"

She picked up the packages on the counter and held them out to him. "Why, yes, Norman, now that you mention it, there is." Jack laughed at this, but Norman stood impassive, his farmer's mouth set in a thin, firm line.

"What is it, Maggie?"

She opened a cupboard by the sink and took down her purse. "I just need these two packages mailed, if you wouldn't mind." She took a bill from her wallet. "Twenty dollars should be enough. Please insure the larger one for two hundred dollars."

Norman made no move to take either the money or the two packages.

Betty took the twenty-dollar bill from Maggie's hand and reached for the packages. "I'll take them when I go to town." She tucked the twenty-dollar bill into her purse. "Maybe you should stay with us while you finish your things, and I could help you."

Maggie shook her head. "No, thank you, that's lovely of you to offer, but I'll be fine."

Norman nodded once and cleared his throat. "We'll be going then." He opened the door, and Jack followed him out to the jeep.

Betty stayed behind. "I didn't mean to just leave you here. I thought somebody was coming for you. I had no idea there was nobody coming for you."

"There are things I need to do," Maggie said.

Betty nodded. She turned the collar of her coat up before reaching for the doorknob. "You shouldn't be staying here alone."

Maggie folded her arms across her chest as Betty opened the door and cold air scuttled across the room. "I know."

Standing at the window watching the jeep back out of the driveway, Maggie marveled at how easily and naturally the truth had slipped out of her.

Over the next week, the weather stayed clear, and Maggie was interrupted by at least one telephone call each day, sometimes two: from Carol Rollins, from Brookfield Commons, and of course from Gwen, pleading with her not to stay in the empty house alone in a misguided attempt to organize the past for the future. After the second or third day, Maggie tried leaving the receiver off the hook, but late that afternoon the sheriff appeared at her kitchen door. She invited him in, assured him that she was all right, and sent him to the post office to mail a package. Betty Archambault stopped by twice with casseroles, which Maggie gratefully accepted. Her task was taking longer than she had originally anticipated: after she emptied each box, wrote an explanatory note, packaged its contents, and took the empty box to the shed, there was another box to go through, and another, and another, and another.

Now she had found a box of silver—chafing dishes and candlesticks and serving spoons, wedding gifts to an untold number of long-dead brides. She had to carry each piece to the kitchen, rub off the tarnish, decipher the monogram, and polish the piece to a shine before she could decide who should get it and begin writing the notes and wrapping the packages. She had just begun working on her great-grandmother's serving spoon, the silver worn thin and fragile from years of use, when the telephone rang.

"Mrs. Sebastian, Maggie, I need an answer. We don't have any other nibbles right now. It's very difficult to sell during the winter."

Wedging the phone between her ear and her shoulder, Maggie reached for a towel and wiped her hands, staining the towel pink and gray. "You're calling about the prospect."

"Yes! Are you ready for me to show the house?"

Maggie took the receiver down from her ear and wiped the towel over it. "When did he want to come?"

"Any time, Maggie! We've just been waiting for you."

Maggie set the towel down on the counter. "I suppose you could come this afternoon. In fact, you probably should, before it snows again. We're due for another storm."

"That's wonderful!" Carol said. "Mr. Webber will be so pleased. Will one-thirty be all right? How's the road? I haven't been out there in a couple of weeks."

"The road is fine. You shouldn't have any trouble with my driveway either. I shall expect you at one-thirty, then."

"One-thirty it is!"

Maggie went back to the serving spoon and thoughtfully rubbed the bowl. The sale of the house was her biggest decision, and if she continued to put it off, someone else—Gwen, or more likely, Gwen's lawyer—would make the decision for her. Even so, she didn't know how she could bear another showing. The peering eyes, the mud tracked across the floors, the intense discussions of Williamsburg colors.

Maggie set the polished spoon on the counter. "Tom," she said aloud, "it's not our house anymore. Just remember that."

It was after three o'clock before Carol and the prospect pulled into the driveway in Carol's black Jaguar. Carol got out first, her scarlet coat bright against the snow. The prospect emerged from the car in a camel's hair coat, with a paisley scarf tossed around his neck. His head was bare, his hair carefully blow-dried. His fingernails, when he graciously extended his hand to Maggie in greeting, would be manicured.

Maggie stood at the kitchen door watching Carol gingerly pick her way through the snow in leather boots with three-inch heels, her gloved hand grasping the prospect's arm. When they reached the ell and stood stamping the snow from their feet, Maggie noticed that the prospect was wearing boots—rubber boots with leather tops from L.L. Bean.

"Maggie, this is Michael Webber from Hanover."

His pants were right, gray wool with a sharp crease, but to go with his camel's hair coat and fine wool scarf, he should have been wearing lawyer's loafers or wingtips safely encased in black rubbers.

"How do you do, Mrs. Sebastian?" He extended his hand and shook hers before she had a chance to offer it. She looked up from his

feet and withdrew her hand. "Fine, thank you, Mr. Webber. I'm glad you could come on such short notice."

He smiled. "Not at all. Thank you for having me. I've been very eager to view the property."

View the property? Who would call her house *the property*? Who would come to her house dressed like a lawyer with L.L. Bean boots on his feet? She flashed a look at Carol, the carrion real estate agent.

"Well, now!" said Carol. She took off her gloves, loosening each tight leather finger before pulling the glove over her knuckles. "Well, now! If you need to get back to what you were doing, Maggie, I'd be happy to show Mr. Webber the house."

Maggie made no move to leave. She turned to Michael Webber. He had loosened his scarf, she noticed, but he had not unbuttoned his coat any further than the top button. "This is the kitchen," she said. "The floor, the moldings, and the ceiling beams are original to the house. Everything else is not.

"All the appliances convey," Maggie continued. "Tell me, Mr. Webber, are you married? Does your wife like to cook? My husband and I used to cook lovely meals in this room." She took Michael Webber's arm. "And right through this doorway is the dining room. It has a built-in china cabinet"—she pulled the doors open and closed—"and a *delightful* view of the woods. You'll notice the patio through the French doors here—or maybe you won't—it's buried in snow. But once summer comes, you and your wife can dine al fresco on the patio and barbeque for your friends and colleagues. Or, Mr. Webber, are you more of a family man? With children, Mr. Webber? And what you're really looking for is a big eat-in kitchen and a den for the television and wall-to-wall carpet for the little ones to play on. Tell me, Mr. Webber, is that what you're looking for?"

She abruptly stopped speaking and looked out the French doors at the yard. The mid-afternoon sun cast a cold pink light over the snow. She felt light-headed and strange, as if she were no longer in her own body. Carol's voice buzzed behind her. *I'm sorry . . . so sorry . . .*

Maggie spoke as Carol continued her apologies. "If you will excuse me, I have work to do. I'm sure Mrs. Rollins can answer any questions you have about the house." She left the room as quickly as

she could, gathering up her silver polish and rags and taking them into the spare room, where she shut the door firmly behind her.

As she lifted another newspaper-swathed bundle from the box of silver and set it in her lap, she could hear Carol and the prospect leave the dining room and go back into the kitchen. A door creaked open and closed; Maggie had neglected to show him the pantry. Then Carol's heels sounded across the living room, each step leaving a tiny indentation in the hundred-and-fifty-year-old floor. The heels paused by the fireplace—fieldstone hearth, original mantle—and again by one of the windows—original muntins, original glass. They continued out into the hall, paused again by the closed door of the spare room, and resumed past the bathroom, up the stairs, and into the study. Maggie wondered why Carol was bothering to go through with it. She knew as well as Maggie did what Michael Webber was after, and it wasn't pine floors, built-ins, or fireplaces.

After she heard their footsteps creak up the stairs to the old wing, where the bedrooms were, Maggie continued to hear their voices, but no more footsteps. They must be discussing price. She reached for a clean rag.

Tom had found the house one hot summer night in mid-July. They had just gotten back from a trip to Scotland, and even with all the windows open, the air in their Hanover house was unbearably close. After changing their clothes and unpacking their bags, they ate a late supper and left town.

Tom drove with no particular destination in mind, crossing the river into Vermont. Coming on an unpaved road, which looked the same as the other unpaved roads he had already passed by, he said, "This looks good," and turned.

Woods lined both sides of the road, and the air felt cooler than it had in town. There was a smell of water beyond the trees, and they passed a sign for a summer camp. Cabin lights glimmered through the trees, and they could hear the distant sound of girls singing. Tom slowed the car, pulled as far off the narrow road as he could, and turned off the engine. The girls' voices sounded young and clear carried on the night air with the smell of trees and water.

"'Simple Gifts'," Maggie said.

"What?"

"'Simple Gifts'. The song they're singing."

"Oh." Tom leaned his head back on the seat, his angled profile sharp. "Yes, you're right. You must have gone to summer camp when you were a kid." He fingered his chin. "We all did, I suppose."

"Yes, we did." But not like he thought, not like that at all. Not the rented cabin in the Adirondacks, middle class cousins spending two weeks tanned and disheveled, wrestling on the grass, swimming at will, while their mothers fretted over lunch and their fathers sat on the porch with their shirt collars off and books turned over their knees, on vacation. "I went to Girl Scout camp."

"Girl Scout camp?" Tom's hand came down from his chin. "You were a Girl Scout? How Fascist of you."

"I know. I loved it." The uniform, the salutes, the songs, the pledges. "I loved every bit of it. I was an avid Girl Scout, a *fanatic* Girl Scout. I even won an award from the President."

"Of the United States?"

"Yes. I went to Washington, and he presented it to me. I have a picture of it, of Calvin Coolidge shaking my hand. Haven't I shown it to you? I was very impressed with myself."

Tom shook his head. "Uh uh. How about Calvin Coolidge?"

"Oh, he was impressed with me, too."

"I'm sure. I meant were you impressed with him?"

"No, not really. I think I made him nervous. I was bigger than he."

Tom smiled at that, and his hand went back to his chin. Even after twenty years of marriage, Maggie felt a quiver of insecurity pass through her. In middle age, Tom's body had turned tough and sinewy, while hers had softened, broadened. She had never been slender; even as a young woman she had had a healthy, sturdy body, with large breasts and thick ankles. Sometimes, in the summer, when Tom sat on the edge of the bed in his pajama bottoms before turning out the light, she would look at his belly for signs of thickening or sagging and feel a twinge of betrayal.

The girls were singing a different song now, one she didn't recognize. Tom said, "I wish I'd met you sooner, when you were still a girl."

"Why? Don't you know enough about me already?" The girls' song continued, high and sweet and out of reach. "I was very self-righteous. And athletic. It's a bad combination in a girl."

Headlights flashed in the rearview mirror just then, and Tom pulled back onto the road. After a few miles, the trees cleared, and Maggie smelled hay. It smelled good, strong and musty. Crickets chittered in the tall grass on both sides of the road. An owl hooted from an unseen tree or fencepost. There were no human sounds anywhere, no houses, no lights, just their car, the engine loud and steady, the tires crunching gravel, the heavy chrome bumper deflecting stones, the headlights cutting two small swaths through the immense summer darkness.

"There's a house over there," Tom said, slowing the car and pointing through the windshield. "Do you see it?" He eased the car to a stop. "Let's go look at it."

"How do you know no one lives there?" Maggie said. "You don't want to go nosing around some farmer's house in the middle of the night. You could get shot."

"No one lives there. No one's lived there for years." He opened his door.

Maggie got out of the car and slammed her door, loud enough, she hoped, to wake whoever was in the house so that he would not be taken by surprise. As soon as they had stepped away from the car and started toward the house, she knew Tom was right. There was no driveway, just grass and weeds. Her canvas espadrilles were soon filled with stones, her skirt wet with dew. When they were about halfway there, close enough to see broken windows—not all of the glass Carol had pointed to was original—and a collapsing front porch, Tom turned back. "I'm going to get a flashlight. So we can see inside."

Even in the dark, Maggie could tell the house had not been lived in for years. Tom returned and played the flashlight over mottled wallpaper, crumbling plaster, and a crust of bird droppings on the floor. When they had looked through as many windows as they could reach from the ground, Tom clicked off the flashlight, and they headed back to the car. "Let's live here," he said. "We can come out tomorrow in the daylight and find out what town we're in; then we'll check the

records to see if anyone owns the place. I'll bet we can get it for back taxes."

Maggie had agreed without hesitation. They had lived in the same house in Hanover for fifteen years, within walking distance of the College and the shops, the same house the other faculty lived in: three bedrooms, oak floors, kitchen updated every ten years, wallpaper and paint done every five. A box hedge in front and a clothesline in back, where the neighbors couldn't see it.

Maggie heard footsteps above her head; the stairs creaked. The footsteps came closer, followed by a rap on her closed door. She rose stiffly and opened the door on Carol's thin, satisfied face, Michael Webber standing several paces behind her, buttoning his top button and arranging his fine paisley scarf around his neck. "Did Mr. Webber see everything he wanted to see?" Maggie asked her.

Carol was drawing on her gloves. "Yes, thank you, we'll be on our way now." She drew Maggie aside and said in a stage whisper, "I should have an offer for you in a couple of hours."

Maggie whispered back, "Don't bother. I'm not selling."

"I'm ready to see the rest of the property now," Michael Webber announced.

Maggie frowned and said to Carol, "I thought you showed him the entire house."

Michael Webber interjected before Carol had a chance to respond, "Yes, she did, it's very nice, but I came to see the property."

Maggie gestured toward the nearest window. "There it is."

Michael Webber's smooth brow creased slightly as he turned to Carol. "You said this property includes fifty acres in addition to the three around the house."

"Oh, yes," Carol said, "it does. Wooded."

"I'll need to see the acreage before I can make an offer."

"Indeed," Maggie said. "And how do you propose to do that?"

He looked down at his rubber L.L. Bean boots with the leather tops. "Don't you have—?"

She shook her head. "Not in the winter. There's no way to get back there. You'll have to wait until spring."

Both Carol's and Michael Webber's eyes widened at the thought of their profit melting away in the spring runoff. "Don't you have—?" they cried in unison.

"There was an old pair of snowshoes in the shed," Maggie said, "but the movers should have taken them."

The three of them marched single-file into the shed. The snowshoes, simple bear paws, were still there, hanging on a nail on a stud. Michael Webber looked dubious. "Where are the bindings?"

Maggie pointed to two crumbling rawhide laces draped over the nail. "It was nice to have met you, Mr. Webber."

She went back into the kitchen, locking the door behind her. Standing at the kitchen window, she watched the shed door open onto the ell as Michael Webber tried to exit the shed with the snowshoes laced to his feet. When he had gotten himself to the driveway, he straightened his back, tucked his scarf inside his coat, and set off for the woods, blond hair whipping around his head, camel's hair coat flapping, arms and snowshoes flailing. Carol Rollins stood forlornly in the driveway next to her Jaguar waiting for him to return, his hands cold but still limber enough to prepare a purchase offer.

The following day, Maggie awoke at first light and could not go back to sleep. She tried closing her eyes and breathing deeply, but her irritating wakefulness did not pass. She could tell by the muted quality of the light in the room that it had snowed the night before. Waking to the dull light of snow had always given her an odd feeling, a kind of restlessness that brought with it the sense that something was about to happen if only she could articulate it in time.

She got out of bed and went to the window. An expanse of new snow stretched from her house to the edge of the woods. There had been another storm. The room was unimaginably quiet, as if the snow that encased the house were muffling its customary creaks and groans. She was snowed in.

Looking down from her window, Maggie felt her throat constrict, and she had the anxious feeling that she could not remember where anything was under the snow. Tom used to have a garden—a big one covering nearly half an acre with corn and tomatoes and zucchini and rows of herbs for cooking. The garden had gone to seed after his death, but, still, she should know where it was. She should be

able to trace the outline of dried stalks and withered vines and crumpled weeds which marked its place. Yesterday she had been so confident as she pointed out the patio to the prospect, Michael Webber, but now she could see nothing but the smooth snow, obliterating everything.

Beyond the patio was a swimming pool, its protective cover also buried in snow, its location evident only by the mound made by the pump house. She and Tom had installed the pool for swimming laps when they both developed arthritis. As she stood at the window looking at the pump house, remembering the sun sparkling off the clean blue water and the feel of the water under her and over her and against her skin, she knew she would never swim in the pool again; her body would never feel that way again.

She did not want to go. She spoke aloud in the empty bedroom. "I do not want to go." There, she had said it, and, she supposed, Tom had heard it. "I do not want to go."

It had been the sensible decision, to sell her house and move to Brookfield Commons. She was old, damn it, and there was no denying it. She was eighty-five years old, and although she did not feel as though her body were falling apart, it had lost its strength; there was a fragility in the core of her bones that she could sense with every move she made, whether walking across a room, or getting up from a chair, or turning over in bed.

Leaving the farm was the sensible thing to do, but she did not want to go. She would be living in town. She would never again have an unobstructed view from her window. There would always be something in the way: a telephone pole, a building, a parked car. There would be no fields, no woods; the air would be filled with noise, traffic and plumbing and querulous voices, and once she left her house, she could never go back.

She would have to take her evening meal in the common dining area. She would have an assigned seat. There would be planned activities: crafts and greenhouse gardening, poetry classes taught by some woman from the DAR. The thought was too much to bear. She turned away from the silence of her window to the silence of her bedroom. "How am I going to get out of this one, Tom? Can you tell me that, Tom?"

Tom gave her no reply, so she dressed and ate a little breakfast, still waiting to hear his voice, perfectly modulated and a little sardonic. *I'm afraid not. You've caught me fresh out of ideas, baby.* After a second cup of coffee, which she knew she shouldn't have, she went into the spare room to work, the absence of Tom's voice reverberating softly inside her head.

Maggie sat on the window seat in the study wrapped in a hundred-year-old Hudson Bay blanket. The blanket, still thick and tight against the cold, smelled strongly of old wool and, faintly, cedar. Outside the blanket, the air in the house was cold enough to stiffen the skin of her face. Outside the house, the temperature was twenty below zero, the bright snow immutable under the cold winter sun.

Maggie had finished going through her things, and the spare room was now empty, the door closed, the empty boxes carted away, the floor swept clean of the unidentifiable detritus which falls from boxes that have been stored for a very long time.

The tarnished silver and yellowed linens, smudged vases and orphaned lengths of tatting, which had seemed so meaningful two months before, were gone. The special things, the things with stories behind them, Maggie had mailed individually, to family members she thought might appreciate them, the stories, if not the items themselves. But some of the things, most of the things, while still usable, had no stories, no significance associated with them at all, and Maggie had boxed them all up together and called Gwen to come and get them, Gwen accepting out of a sense of obligation, Maggie supposed, to store them in her attic, until her two children acquired attics of their own. Gwen arrived in her large station wagon with her husband, clucking over the puddles of melted snow they left on the floor as they carried the boxes out to the car, exclaiming over the farm's isolation and pleading with Maggie to leave it at last.

Maggie did not know what to do, whether she should remain as she was, unmoving inside the blanket, conserving her energy, conserving her warmth, or whether she should throw off the blanket and move around, walk from room to empty room, to generate warmth herself. For the first time since she had moved her furniture out, her house felt empty and cold, all traces of Tom gone, and few traces of

herself left, just her winter clothes, some food in the refrigerator, and a thick anthology of women poets. She would leave no legacy, no recorded performances, no writing of any consequence, no plays, no poetry, just a few articles published in academic journals and hundreds of letters, if any of the recipients had bothered to keep them.

An odd feeling passed over her, like the shadow of an immense cloud overhead moving majestically across the ground, blocking out the sun where she stood, only to continue advancing, leaving her behind to stand in the sunlight once again. When the feeling had passed, she looked out the window, at the hard, packed snow of her empty driveway, the bare brittle branches of the trees which bordered it, the truncated piece of road which fronted it, the half-buried hay barn which faced it, and wondered if her staying in the farmhouse were indeed folly, as Gwen believed, the self-indulgence of an old woman who had the financial wherewithal to do as she pleased, regardless of the consequences to herself or her family—or, even worse, affectation. In Vermont, the beginning of February was when hard winter set in, when the Norman Archambaults took each armload of wood for the furnace warily, eyeing the woodpile with increasing trepidation, when the Betty Archambaults approached the pantry, the mason jars of tomatoes and green beans, with the same wary eye, just as their sons who worked construction watched their savings, praying the weather would break before the money ran out. And she knew none of it, nor had Tom during his lifetime, their relationship with the land only aesthetic after all.

The weather did not break for a week, and Maggie spent most of that time wrapped in the Hudson Bay blanket reading. It felt good to read poetry by herself in her empty house, and she marveled that she had existed for so long, days, weeks, months, years without reading the poem which at that moment she was reading.

At the end of each poem, she paused to look out the window and consider what had prompted the poet to write the poem, what experience, prosaic or profound, what feeling, fleeting or sustained, what image, intense or barely perceived, and to wonder how the poet had felt when she knew the poem was finished, to imagine her laying down a pen, cranking a piece of paper out of a typewriter, leaning back in her chair and exulting aloud to an empty room.

As she read, Maggie slowly began to feel herself again, to feel Tom's presence in the house again. The house did not seem as empty, the prospect of spring so unimaginable. Maggie heard the sound of a car engine in her driveway. She was not surprised to see that the engine belonged to Carol Rollins' black Jaguar. Maggie had not heard from Carol in days, after she had refused to sell her property to the developer from Hanover. She was in for it now, she supposed. Poetry was no defense against a real estate agent.

Carol's coat today was a blazing royal blue. The high-heeled boots were the same. The briefcase, a feminine white leather, was also the same. Maggie opened the kitchen door before Carol had a chance to knock. "Hello, Carol, won't you come in."

"I took a chance on coming out here without calling. I hope you don't mind."

"No, not at all."

Carol stepped inside, and Maggie closed the door behind her. "Let me take your coat," Maggie said. "We'll have to talk standing at the kitchen counter. I have only one chair."

Carol tugged off her tight leather gloves more quickly than Maggie would have thought possible and handed Maggie her coat. When Maggie returned from hanging it up, Carol had her briefcase open, a neat pile of papers on the counter in front of her, and a Mont Blanc pen balanced delicately in her thin, manicured hand. She looked up, smiling, as Maggie entered the room. Maggie stood next to her, also smiling, and ceremoniously placed her clasped hands on the counter in front of her.

"I thought now would be a good time to assess where we are with the sale of your house," Carol said, gesturing with the pen, "to see if you want to make an adjustment to the price or have any work done before the spring buyers come out. Although that's still a couple of months away, of course. Now, I believe Michael Webber is still interested in your property, if you would like me to contact him. I'm not sure where he would stand on price right now, but I would certainly be willing to discuss it with him."

Maggie nodded and said, "Nice pen. Mont Blanc?"

"Yes, it is, thank you. I received it as a gift. At a closing, as a matter of fact. Now, what do you think about my approaching Michael Webber?"

Maggie did not respond, watching as Carol fiddled with the pen. Then she said, "I wonder what kind of poetry someone would write with a pen like that."

Carol looked down at the pen in her hand, nonplussed.

"As for your contacting Michael Webber," Maggie went on, "it won't be necessary. I've decided not to sell."

Maggie watched as the pen slipped from Carol's hand and rolled across the counter and onto the floor, where it continued to roll until it reached the baseboard on the opposite side of the room.

"As you can see, the house has settled some," Maggie said.

Carol retrieved her pen from the floor. When she resumed her place at the counter, her face was flushed. "I don't understand. You've bought into an assisted living community. You don't even have furniture here. You signed a six-month listing!"

"True," Maggie said, "however, since I'm not going to sell the house, the listing is moot." Maggie picked up the pile of papers, straightened their edges once, twice on the counter, and replaced them in Carol's briefcase. "So! There we are. I'll get your coat."

After Carol had pulled away in the black Jaguar, the tires spinning petulantly in the snow, Maggie fixed herself a cup of tea and went into the study to sit on the window seat, where she could have a little chuckle with Tom and look outside for a harbinger of spring, however slight.

What would she have to do to get her furniture moved back to the farm in time for spring? she mused, blowing gently across the hot tea. And her clothes. She had to get her clothes back. She couldn't very well wear wool through the summer, now could she?

Come spring, she would plant a little garden, just a little one, a corner of the one Tom had abandoned, the corner closest to the house, with tomatoes and herbs and Bibb lettuce. She would have the pool cleaned, and keep it blue and sparkling throughout the summer. Although she no longer trusted herself alone in the water, she could sit out on a chaise by the pool and wait for the handsome young man who played George to throw himself at her feet.

Who would have thought it?

Epilogue

Maggie looked out the window at the leaves of a maple tree. From her propped position on the bed, she could see into the crown of the tree, where heavy black power lines twisted through the leaves and branches. Judging from the dark green of the leaves, she thought it must be summer, but she could not be sure. The window she was looking through did not open.

If it were indeed summer, Gwen's children might come around for a visit, with their spouses and young children, staying for an awkward half hour or so before escaping back to the suburbs whence they came. Maggie turned from the window and said aloud, "The suburbs whence they came." She listened closely, reconsidered the full stop, and said it again, this time with an ellipsis: "The suburbs whence they came . . . ." A very nice line. Tom could not have said it better himself.

Gwen came regularly, the last weekend of the month, her speech halting, her hands smelling of soap. She would not enter the room without something to leave for Maggie, a box of flavored teas, scented hand lotion, the latest *New Yorker*. Sometimes her husband came with her; more often he did not. Betty Archambault also came to see her once a month, until Norman passed away, when she began coming every week, after Sunday mass.

For quite some time, Maggie had been aware of a need to move her bowels, which she finally acknowledged as futile to ignore. She managed to get her legs out of the covers and sit up but was unable maneuver herself off the high bed to stand on the floor. She tried one last time, cursing herself for being so fearful of a fall, reached over to her pillow, and pressed the call button. Within moments, an aide appeared, who shouted as she approached the bed, "What can I do for you, hon?"

"For a start, stop calling me hon. I don't like it."

The aide laughed as she always did, and said, "Sure, sweetie, what can I do for you?"

Maggie sighed. "I need to use the bathroom."

"You want a bedpan?"

"No. I just need help getting off the bed."

"Okay, sweetie." The aide helped Maggie off the bed and led her to the bathroom, with Maggie trying and failing to shrug the aide's hand off her shoulder. "Okay, sweetie, there you go."

Maggie made no move toward the toilet. "Could you please shut the door?"

"Sorry, sweetie, can't. If you call for help toileting, I gotta stay with you. Sorry, hon."

"Please."

The aide turned around but left the door open. Maggie lowered herself onto the toilet and closed her eyes.

Once back in bed, pillows arranged, covers tucked, hand patted, Maggie heard a voice crying from down the hall. "No," it cried, "no, no, no!" The voice paused, gathering enough strength to shout, just once, "I don't want to!" before it resumed crying "no" once again. Maggie was unable to determine whether the voice belonged to a man or a woman. The voice was cracked with age and distorted by desperation, and her own hearing had dulled. There was no pattern to when the voice would cry out; it did not seem to be tied to any of the daily routines of the place, the giving of medications, the changing of bed linens, the serving of meals.

The voice stopped, resumed, then stopped for good. Maggie looked out the window as the leaves of the maple tree swayed to a silent, unfelt breeze. She had become accustomed to the tree's slow, random rhythms and could watch them for hours, the leaves' shape and movement evocative of pleasant things just beyond memory.

IN 204 / Nina Wilson

A Glimpse

Debbie Robson

I read once that a woman walking in
her local park encountered a pixelated
fall of light separating her from the other side
—the rest of the park, people and the houses
on the street. Suddenly miniature stars
imploded and fell, the filament drapery
twinkling and revealing a slightly different
but not completely other world.
Familiar houses in unfamiliar colors,
strange cars, the fabric of people's clothes
unrecognizable. People going about their
business in a completely natural way despite
her observation. Another dimension it seems.
But had she crossed over or merely glimpsed?

I'm glimpsing all the time. No torn curtain
just old houses that call to me and turn
their normally implacable faces my way.
Front doors, brick porches, windows, eaves
a grinning fenestration. Oh yes, my paint
wasn't always peeling. You see he's twenty-
one again, leaning on the porch with his
slicked back hair and tight jeans. Her skirt
ruffles as she leans to kiss him. Frangipanis
reappear in front yards, curtains billow
from paint stuck, card-boarded windows.
Young people, three abreast, run laughing
down that overgrown path to a backyard.
And my house on Cypress Street has
reappeared and with it a new alternative.

Chebyshev Spectral Overcast / Ryota Matsumoto

Recursive Topography of Uncertainty / Ryota Matsumoto

Review of *Idiot Wind: A Memoir* by Peter Kaldheim

(published by Canongate, August 2019)

Review by Neal Lipschutz

This readable memoir of being down and out (and eventually restored) in mid-1980s America has an unusual publishing history. As recounted in the book, its writing can reasonably be said to have been about thirty years in the making. Its appearance marks the full-length authorial debut for an enterprising seventy-year-old.

The moniker "Idiot Wind" is borrowed from a 1974 Bob Dylan song title and wailed refrain. To Peter Kaldheim, the idiot wind is a siren call to immediate gratification and a weakness of will. For him, it's a gust of addiction and self-destruction. It blew through his Ivy League education and promising start in book publishing. It knocked down a marriage and transformed him into a small-time New York City cocaine salesman, one so fond of his own product that it flummoxed any attempt at profit or even solvency. If Mr. Dylan's song lyrics more broadly nod to the misconceptions created by popular culture and the corrosive cult of celebrity, it's of no moment. Mr. Kaldheim successfully adopts the phrase for his own purposes.

The story told is of one man's fall and redemption, though Mr. Kaldheim concedes some guilt about past actions and broken relationships won't completely fade. Indirectly, it's also a paean to the vastness of the American road and the reinvention and second chances buried in those open spaces. Those opportunities may harken most to the collapsed with the already established skills and erudition enjoyed by the author, who understands his predicament and has a keen sense of the world around him. Throughout his travails, Mr. Kaldheim invokes the spirit of Jack Kerouac's "On the Road" as a cosmic marker to his own journey. He states his admiration of great writers known for their alcohol consumption as well as their art. "By romanticizing their excesses, I suckered myself into believing I could do the same . . . ."

After scamming a cocaine wholesaler in the winter of 1987, Mr. Kaldheim exited New York to escape the gangster's wrath, asking a Greyhound bus clerk in time-honored tradition to put him on a bus

as far as his meager dollars would allow. That's followed by his hitchhiking odyssey across the nation. The goal is to get to San Francisco, where an old friend has dangled a job in construction. When that opportunity fades while the author is already on the road, circumstance leads him instead toward the Pacific Northwest. There's a double past tense in this journey for the current reader. The US of 1987 was a far cry from the post-World-War-II years that set the stage for the highs and lows of Keruoac's "On the Road" characters. The saga of writer as down-and-out misfit with thumb in the air had by the mid-1980s already run its course, though Mr. Kaldheim does bring it new life as a next-generation fan of the beats. Read now, in an age of social media permanence and virtual as well as physical existence, the distance between coasts doesn't seem nearly as great and the ability to simply disappear and wind up three thousand miles away as a new person is seriously hard to fathom. One small example of the very different time: a homeless Mr. Kaldheim has to track down a place he can receive mail and then await references to arrive courtesy of the US Postal Service when he applies for a job.

Nothing truly outrageous happens to Mr. Kaldheim as he traverses penniless across America. That fact enhances the book. The path, while certainly difficult and at times scary, feels real. It's no doubt trying on his soul and his soles (he hobbles through most of his travels in ill-fitting boots). Interspersed with the road narrative are glimpses of the author's earlier life and a rehashing of another nadir, time spent in jail at Rikers Island that led to a split with his parents. But little is written about the author's inner throes as he shakes his previous constant thirsts for cocaine and alcohol. Once on the road, he doesn't seem tempted to indulge, even when in the company of regularly swilling down and outers. Except for a long ride with a judgmental Vietnam veteran (to whom the author is generally sympathetic and ready to lay blame on himself for the fraught relationship), Mr. Kaldheim is regularly the fortunate recipient of the good will of a fellowship of the road. Whether its advice on successfully hopping freight trains or managing the generous shelter and welfare systems of Portland, Ore., the author usually finds a helping hand. Even potential enemies—train brakemen and police officers—are less than heavy-handed. And then there's the American

West, in its natural beauty and boundlessness, offering an awe-inspiring landscape for the author's personal transformation.

Face to Face 1 / Jack Bordnick

Face to Face 2 / Jack Bordnick

Contributors

Susan Bloch's stories have won prizes in the *Traveler's Tales* Solas Awards and received notable mention in *Best American Essays 2017*. She has been published in a variety of magazines and literary journals such as *The Forward*, *Entropy*, *The Citron Review*, *STORGY*, *Pif Magazine*, *Tikkun*, and *HuffPost*.

Jack Bordnick's sculptures incorporate surrealistic, mythological and magical imagery—often with whimsical overtones—aimed at provoking experiences and self-reflections. He seeks to unbalance rational minds, and the predominant imagery deals mostly with facial expressions of both living and "non-living" beings, and things that speak in their own languages. The result is textural, metallic and mixed-media assemblages that have been assembled, disassembled and reassembled, becoming abstractions unto themselves. Bordnick invites you to come and enjoy their stories.

Lara Chapman is a fine art nature photographer, writer and university professor based out of West Palm Beach, Florida. Lara's photographs earned several awards and distinctions and can be found on the walls of galleries and museums throughout the East Coast of the United States as well as Florida's west coast. She has published three photography and poetry books to date. When she is not teaching or photographing nature, she loves to spend time with her husband, Patrick, and two children, Nathan and Benjamin.

Josie Del Castillo is a Brownsville artist pursuing her MFA from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. She has exhibited throughout the state, and most recently in galleries in California, Chicago, San Francisco, and New York. Del Castillo's work consists of a series of self-portraits as well as portraits of others whom she perceives as reflections of herself and a source of human inspiration. Personal and emotional connections are often symbolically made to capture the essence of her subjects. Self-worth and personal insecurities are common themes. Much of her work often deals with the subjects of mental health and anxiety, self-esteem, and growing up in the Rio Grande Valley. Instead of emphasizing the dark connotations of mental health issues, Del Castillo challenges and confronts these themes through vibrant and colorful depictions of her subjects. Many works include Mexican-American cultural iconography and people raised in the Rio Grande Valley.

Kimberly Diaz studied Creative Writing at Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida. Her work has appeared in the *Montana Mouthful*, *Eckerd Review*, *Fleas on the Dog*, and is forthcoming in a couple of anthologies. She is currently working on a collection of creative nonfiction and maybe a novel.

Tessa Ekstrom is an emerging poet in Portland, Oregon, who is pursuing a BS in biochemistry. Her work has been published by *Prometheus Dreaming* and *Blue Literary Magazine.*

Devon Fulford is a writer and English instructor at Colorado State University. While most of her prior publication history has been in educational writing, she has been honored with poetry, nonfiction, and fictional publication credits in *Aurora: The Allegory Ridge Poetry Anthology*, *Inklette Magazine*, *the Same* literary journal, *Handbasket Zine*, Foundpolaroids.com, and others. Fulford resides on the front range of the Rocky Mountains with her partner Levi and their chocolate Labrador, The Walrus. In pockets of spare time, she can be found hiking with her family and riding her Triumph Street Twin motorbike.

Elizabeth Gauffreau is the Assistant Dean of Curriculum and Assessment at Champlain College Online in Burlington, Vermont. Recent fiction publications include *Dash*, *Pinyon*, *Aji*, *Open: Journal of Arts & Letters*, and *Evening Street Review*. Recent poetry publications include *One Sentence Poems*, *Smoky Quartz*, *Medical Literary Messenger*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, and *Pinyon*. Her debut novel, *Telling Sonny*, was published by Adelaide Books in 2018. Learn more about her work at http://lizgauffreau.com.

Valyntina Grenier is a multi-genre artist living in Tucson, Arizona. Her visual art and poetry have appeared in *Lana Turner*, *High Shelf Press*, *JuxtaProse*, *Sunspot Lit*, and *Bat City Review*. She has poems forthcoming in *The Impossible Beast: Poems of Queer Eroticism* (Damaged Goods Press). Her double debut poetry chapbook, *Fever Dream / Take Heart* (Cathexis Northwest Press, 2020), features paintings from her LGBTQIA+ series Cloudshow | Utopia. You can find Grenier at valyntinagrenier.com or on Instagram @valyntinagrenier.

Doley Henderson is a Toronto writer of fiction and creative nonfiction. Her work is featured in *The Gaspereau Review*, *The Sunlight Press*, *The New Guard* online journal *BANG!*, *Blank Spaces*, *Prometheus Dreaming*, and *The Write Launch*. Her novel *Sea Change* has been accepted in The Writer's Hotel fiction conference in NYC, June 2020. Henderson enjoys telling a story with rhythm, texture, a strong voice, wit and grit.

Anton Franz Hoeger was born 1956 in Munich, Germany. Although mainly self-taught, his artistic roots go back to the *Wiener Malschule*, where he was taught by a master student of Professor Ernst Fuchs.

Candice Kelsey's debut book of poetry, *Still I am Pushing*, releases March 6th with Finishing Line Press. Her first nonfiction book explored adolescent identity in the age of social media and was recognized as an Amazon.com Top Ten Parenting Book in 2007. Her poetry has appeared in *Poet Lore*, *The Cortland Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, and many other journals. A finalist for *Poetry Quarterly*'s Rebecca Lard Award, Kelsey's creative nonfiction was nominated for a 2019 Pushcart Prize. She is an educator of twenty years' standing, and is devoted to working with young writers. An Ohio native, she lives in Los Angeles with her husband and three children.

Neal Lipschutz's book reviews have appeared in a number of publications. He has also published short fiction in several digital and print publications.

Roeethyll Lunn is a lifetime learner and educator. She has a BFA in Broadcast Media from Morris College, Sumter, South Carolina, and an MFA in English and Writing from Long Island University, Southampton, New York.

Alan Lyons is an artist from Scotland specializing in drawing and painting. Landscape, nature, and human involvement in it are of ongoing concern to his practice. The color and material of oil paints or acrylics allow him to explore their organic or inorganic makeup.

Ryota Matsumoto is an artist, designer, and urban planner. Born in Tokyo, he was raised in Hong Kong and Japan. He received a Master of Architecture from University of Pennsylvania in 2007 after studying at Architectural Association in London and Mackintosh School of Architecture, Glasgow School of Art in the early 90's. His art and built work are featured in numerous publications and exhibitions internationally.

Nam Nguyen is a multimedia artist who explores the unexplored.

Robert Oehl's art is very personal. He's tried to put aside vanity and intent, and let the photographs create their own subject and narrative. His diaristic self-portraits are self-deprecating, vulnerable, raw, humorous, and histrionic; they are, for him, self-examinations of identity, as well as raw material for a personal mythology. Oehl is a process-oriented photographer using a variety of rudimentary tools. He uses simple pinhole and zone plate cameras requiring long exposures. Images produced with these cameras are characteristically dreamlike, dark, softly focused (grainy), and seem better suited to a past era. In a predominantly digital world, Oehl's process is totally analog, employing film, paper, and chemical manipulation.

A confessed outsider, Chicago's **J. Ray Paradiso** is a recovering academic in the process of refreshing himself as an experiMENTAL writer and street photographer. His work has appeared in dozens of publications online and in print. Equipped with cRaZy quilt graduate degrees in both Business Administration and Philosophy, he labors to fill temporal-spatial, psycho-social holes and, on good days, to enjoy the flow. All of his work is dedicated to his true love, sweet muse and bodyguard, Suzi Skoski Wosker Doski.

Ernst Perdriel was Born in Montreal (Quebec, Canada) in 1974 and lives in Eastern Townships region, Quebec, Canada. Focusing on recycled art, designer and horticulture, Perdriel's mission of life is to transmit the passion of the cultural and environmental heritage through arts, lifestyle, and sharing of knowledge. The artist has created with the waste of human civilization since 1995. The scale of the creations goes from the 2D format to interior design and landscaping.

At age twelve, **Silas Plum** won the East Coast POG tournament. The prize was five hundred POGs, small collectible cardboard circles, each with an identical red and blue design on the front. From that moment on, he became obsessed with the question of value. Why were these important? How could anything not necessary for survival be worth more than anything that was? Does artistic sentiment have value? The POG's are gone, but the questions remain. Through assemblages of defunct currency, discarded photographs, and long-forgotten illustrations, Silas Plum challenges the idea of objective vs subjective value. He believes strongly in the tired old maxim that the true value of an object is more than the sum of its parts, that the gut is a truth-teller, and that the Aristotelian notion of learning-by-doing is the best teacher around. Judge his worth at silasplum.com.

Diana Raab, PhD, is an award-winning memoirist, poet, blogger, speaker, and author of ten books and over one thousand articles and poems. She's also editor of two anthologies, *Writers on the Edge: 22 Writers Speak About Addiction and Dependency*, and *Writers and Their Notebooks*. Raab's two memoirs are *Regina's Closet: Finding My Grandmother's Secret Journal*, and *Healing with Words: A Writer's Cancer Journey*. She blogs for Psychology Today, Thrive Global, Sixty and Me, and PsychCentral and is frequently a guest blogger for various other sites. Her two latest books are, *Writing for Bliss: A Seven-Step Plan for Telling Your Story and Transforming Your Life*, and *Writing for Bliss: A Companion Journal*. Visit: www.dianaraab.com.

Debbie Robson has been writing poetry since the 1990s and has performed some of her poems on radio, at Sydney poetry events, in the Blue Mountains, and more recently as part of the Women of Words project in Newcastle.

Esther Sadoff currently lives in Columbus, Ohio, where she teaches English to gifted and talented middle school students. She has a bachelor's degree from Sarah Lawrence College where she studied literature as well as a Master of Education from The Ohio State University. Her poems have been featured or are forthcoming in *The 2River View*, *The Bookends Review*, *River River*, *SWIMM*, and *Marathon Literary Review*.

Zach Sheneman obtained his BA in Writing from Grand Valley State University. He resides in Grand Rapids, Michigan with his wife and two sons. His work has been published in *The Pinch Journal*, *Glass Mountain*, and *Hippocampus*.

Lenora Steele's short prose and poetry have been published in periodicals in Canada and Ireland such as *Event*, *Cranog Magazine*, *The Fiddlehead*, *Room*, *Wow*, *The New Quarterly*, and *The Antigonish Review*. Other works have been reprinted in Monitor Books' *An Anthology of Magazine Verse* and Harcourt Canada's *Elements of English 11*. She lives where the tidal bore brings the sea upriver twice a day in Truro, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Pasquale Trozzolo is an entrepreneur and founder of Trozzolo Communications Group, one of the leading advertising and public relations firms in the Midwest. In addition to building his business, he also spent time as a racecar driver, grad school professor, and magazine publisher. Now with too much time on his hands, he continues to complicate his life by living out as many retirement clichés as possible. He's up to the Ps.

Ping Wang is a fashion photographer and art director based in New York. He graduated from School of Visual Arts with a Master's Degree in Digital Photography. Ping specialized in combining fashion and fine art with his unique aesthetics. His love for surreal and metaphysical art has inspired him to do special works. Ping's artwork has exhibited in the US, France, China, Japan and Australia, among other places. In 2016, Ping was awarded the Emerging Photographer of the Year by *Photo District News* after competing against tens of thousands of photographers worldwide. In 2018, his work was been awarded a Gold Winner of Fine Art Portfolio by the Tokyo International Foto Award.

Walter Weinschenk is an attorney by day but spends as much time as possible as a writer, photographer and musician. Until a few years ago, he

wrote short stories exclusively. Now he divides his time equally between poetry and prose. His writing has appeared in the *Carolina Quarterly* and *The Esthetic Apostle*. He lives in a suburb just outside Washington, DC.

Nina Wilson is a graduate of Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. She lives in Indianola, Iowa with her family. She loves history, especially early English history, photography, traveling, fishing, and camping.

Haolun Xu is twenty-four years old and was born in Nanning, China. He immigrated to the United States in 1999. He was raised in central New Jersey and is currently studying Political Science and English at Rutgers University. Transitioning from a background in journalism and activism, he spends his time between writing poetry and the local seashore.

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