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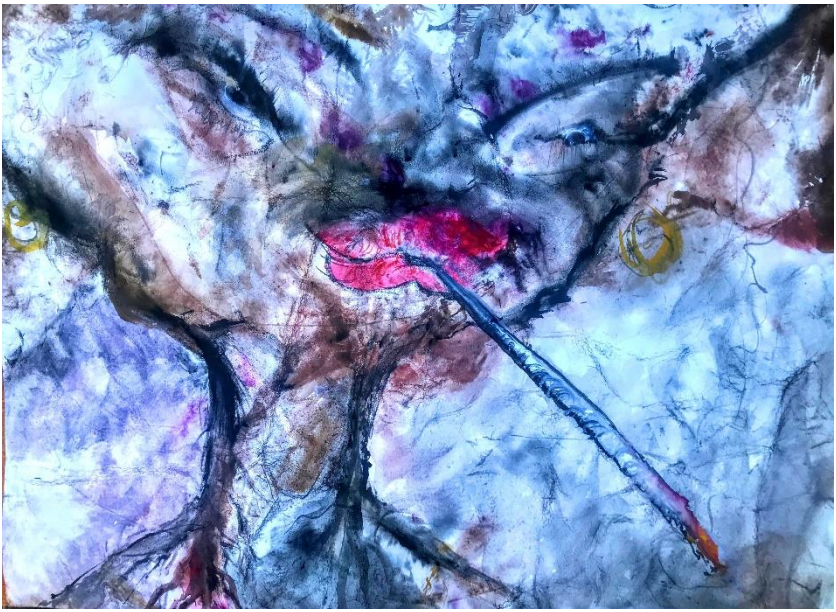


Changing the World
Through Words and Art

Table of Contents

Three Poems from *The Horse Fair*

Editor's Prize

Three Poems from The Horse Fair, *poems on the life and art of French animaliere Rosa Bonheur (1822-99). Part psycho-biography, part speculation and intuition, these linked dramatic monologues probe themes of gender, class, and artistic genius against the background of 19th Century Paris and environs.*

–Jana Harris

How to Draw

Paris, 1843

Jana Harris

(Rosa Bonheur, b. 1822)

The Hotel Lambert,
at the tip of the Ile Saint-Louis,
the Seine's inscrutable waters
like a moat around it.
Even in winter the walled
garden bloomed beneath
a palm tree as if
I'd stepped into French Algiers.

Inside the behemoth residence:
two schools, one for boys,
another for girls, conducted
only in Polish.

It was hoped that drawing lessons
would help Princess Iza with
her embroidery, her mother's famous

needlework auctioned to aid
emigres from the failed insurrection
flooding the streets of Paris.

In the grand hall
—The Gallery Hercules—
I positioned an easel,
the parquet floor lacquered
to luminance, the leaded
many-paned windows spilt
the light into rainbows thinning
to watercolor.

Above us,
in the ballroom, frenzied
piano chords vibrated down
through the ceiling.

From one end of the gallery,
the Cabinet des Muses,
soft tones of another piano;
at the other, the Polish library.

Walking between, a great migration
of exiled diplomats, their strange language
and an even more foreign tongue,
Russian, but uttered only as curse words.
Princess Iza spoke perfect French,
Polish, even Russian, so explained,
though she was forbidden
the language of the invaders.
In her homeland, her native tongue
was punishable by lashings
or worse—her brother Withold
forced to walk to Siberia in chains.

Iza's squirrel-paw hand
struggled with line quality, shading;
a new set of pencils sharpened
by her lady-in-waiting.
We moved on to variance
of line weight, practical textures,
shapes, realistic shadowing,
proportions, perspective.

Our progress inspected by her mother
who held up Iza's latest embroidery;
a disappointment, she said,
removing the stitches.

What a strange contraption:
a piece of canvas overlaid
by geometric patterns cross-stitched
and chain stitched in red wool and
metal fibers. Two little sails jutting
out at the top: *Que c'est?*
A fly mask for her brother Wladyslaw's horse—
we had a love of *les chevaux* in common.

When her mother, Princess Anna Zofia
was otherwise occupied,
when the ladies-in-waiting
were sharpening pencils;
when the diplomats congregated in the library
closed the vast double doors,
when Wladyslaw was away drilling
with the French cavalry,
when the warring Polish pianists
were composing in the Cabinet des Muses
and the grand ballroom upstairs, both
rehearsing for the annual Polish ball
attended by Balzac, Delacroix,

and that aristocratic lady author
who went about in masculine attire—
patron of the wan, pale-haired pianist...

When all were occupied,
when the coast was clear,
Princess Iza and I put down our pencils,
took off our slippers and slid
in white-stockinged feet, up
and down the Gallery Hercules,
attaining speed, careening, falling
or crashing into a wall
or over each other in a heap.
Stifling hysterical laughter,
we lay upended,
my white drawers, her white pantalettes,
Turkish trousers, white leglets with lace
trim buttoned on the bottom;
like two snow mounds,
our nethers immodestly presented
and, according to the Princess,
airing to prevent dampness.

Her undergarments
embroidered in bright silk thread
with the Czartoryski coat-of-arms.
A deterrent to some, she said; but
no impediment whatsoever
for the Imperial Russian plunderers.

Though Princess Izabella hadn't a gift
for embroidery, she had a genius
for the shades and variance of practical horseplay
that modesty—and language—disallowed.

Mademoiselle Nathalie Micas Decides to Change Her Hat

Paris, 1860

Jana Harris

(Rosa Bonheur, b. 1822)

Optimistic or full-tilt harebrained?
Le Chateau de By; a country house
on the edge of Fontainebleau Forest
once bequeathed to the royal beekeeper:
chapel, garden plot, carriage port, barn
for the menagerie.

I'd won so many medals;
when I put them on,
they weighed more than armor.
My paintings—oxen plowing, sheep grazing,
imperial horses—hung on palace walls.
Still, the critics' venom
had a painful sting: Good brushwork
for a woman, but is it art?
Soot-heavy clouds pressed down on me,
the dingy Paris air seeped into my skin.

Looking into Nathalie's eyes,
all I saw was dead leaves.
She was like a horse, spooked
by sudden stirrings, loud noises,
being backed into a corner.

When she changed her hat,
I took it as a bad sign.
Hat after hat—fanchon bonnet to high-
brimmed spoon to straw boater—
until she came loose from her moorings.

I feared the tide would take her out.

Worse, in the kitchen,
when Mother Micas moved her lips,
nothing was heard, neither
cursing nor praying.

A heavy melancholy settled about us
like mist on the Seine.

When I signed the deed,
all my "what-if" terrors convened
like crouching cats to witness;
I wouldn't say there wasn't a smear
of indecisiveness in my hand.

I resigned the directorship
of the drawing school;
we sublet the Paris house.
A two hour train ride to meadow rue,
juniper, native geranium, thousands
of hectares of scots pine.
When we alighted, a breeze
toyed with loose tendrils of our hair
and the sun tricked us
into feeling warm.

I set up my studio
in the third floor billiard hall,
a fireplace large enough to stand in;

Nathalie claimed the sunniest room.
The glitter in her eyes awoke.
Medical bag in hand, she refused
to tend the menagerie hatless.
She donned flamboyant headgear,

a mousquetaire, with black and red
feathers atop an upturned brim.

In the kitchen, Mother Soup cooked
wild mushrooms and ceased breathing
through her teeth.

I smoked, wore trousers, tramped
through the forest: swirling leaves
clamored excitedly at my heels,
warblers dove from the sky. Before
a porcelain chip of moon came up,
a stag crept to the pond to drink.
As the grass whispered assuringly,
I made a mental sketch of his head;
I could feel him thinking, saw
a thought run through his mind.

As I watched, I was feral,
unfixed in time.

Painting Lions:

***Pierrette**, oil on Canvas, 1872*

Jana Harris

(Rosa Bonheur, b. 1822)

I owe it to Nathalie,
all these studies, sketches of
bone and sinew; the way
Pierrette's fur folds
into her mane, her abridged neck, the curl
then unfurl of her meter-long tail
and the flick of its end-tuft.
Pierrette is always in costume.

We had received an invitation,
—more of a summons—from her owner.

Churlish boars, volcanic bulls
a mercurial horse kicking at
its groom; calming them
is in my heartstrings.
But this African Lioness? The retired
cirque owner reassured us
she was bottle-fed as a cub.

I faltered at the snarl,
no matter how benign;
she of the rush and leap,
those elongated teeth
closing in a strangulation hold with
one black freckle dead center
in her broad, cherub-colored tongue.

Atop the acacia
she reclined beneath, a hawk
let out a warning cry.

Nathalie, tall as a tree,
strode directly toward her.
I hung back at the gate where
dry weeds leaned
through the iron fence
reaching out to anyone
who strayed too near.
Pierrette, do you think
I am Mlle. Micas's timid cub?

Natalie ran her hand
down the lion's spine.
I held my breath,
Pierrette preened
beneath her palm and
began kneading the ground.

I took a step closer.

But once I touched her fur,
got her flesh and skin between
my fingers, felt the magnificent muscles
of her shoulder, inhaled her
great cat aroma,

I could not get enough of her:

A curative for the Prussian war,
the siege—two-thousand slain
in the Paris streets—my age
(50!), my knee injured
in a riding accident, my arm

injured in a riding accident;
my total lack of ferocious
predatorial might.

And there you lick and groom
your massive forearms,
extend, contract, extend
the black crooks of your claws,
always a ready assassin.

I began to feel your power in my brush:
your Tuscan eyes and amber face,
your soft paws, your ears
pricked, spaced on your crown
like a stallion's, but with rounded tips;
the hinge of a jaw that knows
no mortal equal.

Oh my Sun Goddess,
lend me your heart and cunning;
you are even more
glorious than Delacroix's horse.

I pencil you in.
I paint you. I paint you.

I become you.

Will Be, Will Be

Garrett Candrea

Part I

It was one of those nights without much talking when Dan told him. He began by saying his name.

He said, "Nick."

Nick said, "Yeah." He said it distractedly. He was sitting in his room some five hundred miles away with his hands positioned keyboard and mouse and the 3-D world wheeling in his monitor. He moved his avatar from here to there. He purchased sundry items from a merchant. He killed a creature and looted its corpse and it was still a while longer before he realized that Dan hadn't said anything else. That was all right. He didn't mind the silence. He could hear Dan breathing in his headset and that was enough. After nine years it wasn't so much about the sound of their voices as it was the sound of each other, the body presence living in each other's headset. On their private voice server Dan had his mic set to be open all the time, always transmitting, and it was his breathing that Nick could always hear. It was more than a white noise. There was a warmth to it, or associated with it, a sensation the brain conjured up to perpetuate the subliminal hum of body heat. This is what was important to Nick, what he relied on at the end of the long day when all its thousand little pixelated disappointments resolved invariably into a composite weariness and dread. He worked in the regulatory reporting department of a mid-sized consulting firm, a stoop-shouldered guy nearing thirty who stared into a screen while phones trilled about him in a pitch of rote. There were the benchmark reports for companies X and Y. There was the sound his boss made when her mouth was moving. There was the subway ride home to his six-story walkup in Queens where he'd become faithfully committed to routine, microwaving day-old takeout before logging on to the Game to commiserate with Dan about this or that while their avatars embarked on some small adventure.

Dan said Nick's name again. He said it oddly, experimentally, as if it were a foreign word he'd just learned.

"Yeah," Nick said.

But there was nothing else save Dan's breathing. Then Dan made the pterodactyl screech. It was a noise they made sometimes after a long period of silence to let the other know he was still there.

Nick echoed the screech, smiling briefly, and went on playing the Game in the dark.

Then Dan said he had cancer.

Nick was not sitting in the dark by choice, like this is what lonely people do, come home from their ten-hour workday in a grayscale cubicle to sit in the dark. He was sitting in the dark because the bulb had blown out the week before and he'd yet to go for a new one and he very much wished he had. His first reaction was to turn in his chair, to swivel around halfway and stare at the light switch on the far wall because he wanted to turn it on. As if that would have changed something. As if it were too dark to have heard him correctly.

He'd met Dan on the Game almost a decade ago. Dan had only been an avatar then by the name of Flophouse, a panoplied paladin standing in a clearing among the bloodless corpses of several polygonal pumas. From across the virtual slaughter they had at first simply waved to each other, a robotic gesture as rendered by their humanoid avatars. Then Dan had sent him a private whisper: *You doing this quest?*

Now Dan said in his ears, "Nick. Did you hear me?"

"Yeah," Nick said. But he kept his mic closed, on push-to-talk, and he'd not pressed the button and so this word drifted off unheard into the semidarkness.

Then he pressed the hotkey. "Yeah," he said. He couldn't think of anything else to say beyond this perfunctory remark. The words were careening back through his brain. *Cancer. I have cancer.* Or looming outsized, the silhouetted meanings and unmeanings. In truth the first thing they had done was target each other. They had dragged their cursors over their screens and targeted each other's avatar and hit Enter and typed out /wave and hit Enter again. You wave at Flophouse. Flophouse waves at you. This was the system-generated text that had appeared on Nick's screen nine years ago. On Dan's screen it would have said Pandiculate. For the first year of their

friendship they called each other only by their pseudonyms: Pandiculate, Flophouse. Or Pan, Flop, Floppy, Flap, Dickle, any number of corrupted nicknames. Then one day Flapjack had asked Pandle what his real name was.

Dan said, "I probably won't be coming on much anymore."

Whatever will be, will be. He would sing that now and again, Dan would, que será será, in a lilting mock-baritone. It was a kind of rueful mantra belted out following some unfavorable event within the Game. Or *obladi oblada*. Or *dippity-doo-da*.

"Nick," Dan said.

"Yeah," Nick said. He said this to himself. There was a stupid little *blup* sound that played whenever the hotkey was pressed and he didn't want to hear that right now.

Then Dan burped. It sounded stifled but it was a burp and it made Nick think of Dan's rants and musings, the occasional booze-garbled sermon yammered out among warped burps and how he button-mashed with piston frenzy. Nick could always picture Dan sweating when he was drunk, could hear him sweating, the mannerisms and quirks alluded to by sound alone. It was all there in the lumbering sentences and slurred renditions of old songs or viral songs or singing muddled lyrics of his own composition. Sometimes Nick would hold down the button patinated with finger gunk to sing along, improvise a measure or two. There was no one else who could draw him out of introversion like that.

"Nick," Dan said. On the screen Dan's avatar was jumping around Nick's where it stood dumbly on a cobbled road. Nick could hear Dan pressing his spacebar. Then he heard Dan burp again and he realized that stifled was the wrong word. It sounded painful. He wondered if they caught it early. Did he say they caught it early? Or he just found out? Did he say terminal? He rose from his chair and stepped to the window and opened it, he didn't know why, the answers to these questions were nowhere out there. He held his hand against the screen to feel the breeze, warm summer's breeze with a slight dampness to it.

Serendipity. This had been one of Dan's drunken tangents, asking who the hell came up with the word and how ridiculous it

sounded. Serendipity. Dipity. It has the cadence of a children's singalong, he'd said, because you'd need to be a child to believe in it, some magical *dipity-doo-da* whatever going on in the background that brings everything together.

Dan said, "Hello? Are you there?"

Nick sat down. "Yeah," he said. When he took his finger off the hotkey it made a sound like bloop.

It was a long while after they'd first met before Nick finally allowed himself to see a picture of Dan. He didn't want to put a face to the voice. He was afraid it'd be like going to see the movie adaptation of a book you liked where the lead actor cast for the role is so at odds with the mental image you've already constructed that it irks you to watch the thing and the book is ruined forever. But he thought the face matched the voice quite nicely.

"Well," Dan said. The voice was deep and rounded, ballasted with a slight gravelly texture. This was Dan. "I guess that's it," he said.

Nick wanted to know when his last day on the Game would be. Dan said he didn't know how to answer that question. He said he would be on tomorrow. He said he would be on at the usual time or try to. He told Nick he would text him when he left work. Nick wanted to ask why he was still going to work but didn't. He wanted to ask how much time he had left but didn't.

Dan said, "I'll try to tell you when my last day online will be. I will tell you. I don't want that day to come out of nowhere."

Then Nick did ask. He said, "How long?"

"How long what?"

Nick didn't answer. He knew Dan understood.

Dan said, "Six months. Give or take."

Their private voice server was named The American Puma Society, a designation made in tribute to that long-ago moment when they'd first bumped into each other while sitting some five hundred miles apart. Upon its creation the server had a single default voice channel labelled General. This was later renamed to The Great Loin Cloth Tour following a drunken gaming session during which they had stripped their avatars down to their pixelated undergarments and run from one end of the Game's continent to the other. There was a

lot of dying at the hands of high-level creatures and the odd enemy player and they'd gone through a six-pack each by the end of it.

Nick said, "You want me to come?"

"To come," Dan said. "You mean here? To Maine?"

"Yeah."

Part II

This was all new to Nick. He'd seen Dan smiling before in photographs but he'd never seen Dan make a smile, the way the mouth corners curled up, the way the ears shifted back ever so slightly, the way the cheeks went plump and the eyes how they went narrow, the noticeable change of light in them, grading the shades of excitement. The face was still pudgy, still bearded, a thickset guy in faded jeans and wrinkled field jacket standing beside a car rental ad among the flurrying bodies in this dimly lit baggage claim.

And there were words formed in real-time: Hey, bud, you made it. And the arm extending outward, the hand opening to accept his own, clasp and embrace, two strong pats thumped out against his back.

They exhausted the stock conversation about airports and travel during the short walk to the lot where Dan had parked his car and there was little talk during the hour's drive over to Kineo. An old blues tune fringed with static played on the radio while Nick looked out the window, watching the trees and meadows go scrolling by, the outskirt homes with rotted screen doors and scrap-metal chimes. Nick didn't ask about the cancer directly but questions that edged the topic of it. When do you think you'll put in your two weeks'? You have anything planned for after? Any trips? Dan said he hadn't really thought about it. He said he mainly wanted to hang out, relax, maybe play the Game.

"Maybe," Nick said. He smiled at the mountains in the distance.

The car was a silver Corolla from the early nineties time-buffed down to a faded gray, nylon upholstery and a tape deck, peg locks, window cranks. Dan told Nick he was free to roll down his

window but Nick told him he was fine. Dan leaned and rolled down his own, wind sputtering in the gap. He drummed his fingers on the steering wheel, hummed along to the radio. They passed a lumberyard, a cemetery, a large hangar with its corrugated flanks painted bright cherry red and the words Big Red Barracks bolted over its lancet door.

"Dance hall there," Dan said.

"Yeah?"

"Always wondered what it's like. Like what kind of people really go there? Used to be a tire depot."

Nick made a small sound to communicate interest. He tried to think of something to say to stave off the droning quiet. He understood that Dan's comments were nudges at conversation but he was still struggling to acclimate himself to this, sitting here next to Dan, who now began scatting to himself, beatboxing, breathy bilabials together with a few hissing sounds strained through his teeth.

But then Nick thought this was normal. Forget this two-lane state road flanked by woods and overgrowth. They were two guys sharing a silence and saying nothing much. Dan turned onto a narrow road marked by a canted sign and Nick watched mailboxes on wooden posts flick past in the window. A car for sale. A basketball hoop. No, there was nothing strange about this at all. It was Nick watching scenes within a frame while he listened to the Dan noises in the background.

Finally Dan pulled into a weedy drive and cut the engine. "Here we are," he said. A modest rambler of vinyl siding streaked with mildew, branches jutting from the gutters.

Inside Dan told Nick to put his stuff down wherever. "You'll be there on the couch," he said. "It's a pullout."

Nick had set his duffel down near the door and was standing beside it, watching Dan go around the room pulling on the blind cords, pale daylight fanning out to efface the gloom. There was a couch and coffee table and a small flatscreen TV on a crude media unit composed of cinderblocks and a raw plank. The air had that vague odor of someone else's habits, somewhere between musty and sour. For some reason he found himself looking for a fish tank even though Dan had never once mentioned owning a fish. The couch had a floral print cover

that he could not imagine Dan sitting on. He thought it was something Dan had perhaps claimed from the estate of a dead family member. And who had helped him bring it in? These were matters so far outside the context of the Game that they took on in his mind the charm of folklore.

Dan yanked down on a final cord and stood there by a Formica table in the kitchen. He asked Nick what he wanted to do.

Nick wasn't sure. He made a sound analogous to a shrug and stood looking at the floor. It was hardwood and then it was linoleum.

"What do you have planned?" he said.

"I don't have anything planned."

They ended up in Dan's room. It was a template room with stock furniture and white walls. But there was something a little off-kilter here, a kind of visceral disorientation, and it took Nick a moment to understand what he was doing, standing there at the threshold of the room and trying to reconcile the configuration of the furniture with the image he'd been carrying around in his mind for so many years, a kind of presumption pieced together out of all the conjectural details gleaned from the open mic. How the room was smaller than he'd imagined and how the bed was there and not here and how the light came in from that way, not this way, slatted light from the aluminum blinds.

"You'll be on the potato," Dan said. By potato he meant his old crappy PC. He'd crossed the room to a closet and disappeared behind the open door and his voice came out among several things shifting and crinkling within. "Just looking for the ethernet cable," he called out. "Took my old rig out last-minute thinking I'd get you set up before I got you."

Nick said, "My life is potato." He gave a stunted laugh and stood there by the doorway grinning dumbly, waiting for Dan to register the joke. It was from an old meme Dan had posted in the voice server long ago and it was a second before Dan paused his rummaging just long enough to deliver an onomatopoeic acknowledgment.

"Hah," he said.

But Nick couldn't quite read the tone, whether it indicated impatience or preoccupation. There was a little more depth or breadth

to Dan's voice here in the starkness of his room, uncut by all the technical protocols that had always ferried his voice the five hundred miles into Nick's ears. He stepped into the room and listened to Dan rifle through the closet. There were DVD and CD cases arrayed on a shelf. These were largely documentaries and blues albums and a few steelbook cases of certain games. He didn't need to verify this. Dan had talked about them before, his collection. He'd even mentioned the shelf, which was not a plank of splintery wood hanging from the ceiling by two lengths of chain as Nick had always imagined but a standard prefinished shelf supported by standard brackets.

There was a last shove of something from within the closet followed by an object or several tumbling to the floor among a muttered curse. Then Dan stepped out holding a tangled skein of orange cable.

"Let's get you set up," he said.

They played the Game largely in silence, sitting at the same desk and listening to each other mash their keys, drag their cursors. They drummed out impatient ditties during loading screens. What speaking they did was all laconic phrases delivered with neutral inflections that took on the form of litany. You get that quest? Yeah. You loot that corpse? Yeah. You coming? Yeah.

This was normal. Nick sat there comfortably behind the twenty-seven-inch flatscreen monitor and followed Dan's avatar through a variegated hinterland. The trick was to keep his eyes on the screen. The desk was a large one of wood vinyl on caster wheels and they were seated diagonally to each other with Flophouse moving in the screen and Dan on the other side of it and it was the immediate duality of this that was still too surreal for Nick. He found it easier to look at Flophouse, talk to Flophouse. When Nick made the pterodactyl screech, it was the virtual Dan who screeched back.

I have to hand this quest in. Okay. I'm on the flightpath. Okay. I'm selling my junk. Okay.

Then Flophouse stopped moving and Dan rose from his chair and left the room without comment. He came back a moment later

with a glass of water and went over to the nightstand where he opened a drawer and rattled out a pill from a prescription bottle. He didn't say what the pill was for and Nick never asked.

They went on playing the Game all through the evening and into the twilight hours. It was Dan who wanted to go out, get some food, and he had to make it clear to Nick that, no, he was not going to have chips for dinner.

They went to a roadside tavern on the other side of town and sat at a booth. The bartender came over with a pad and jotted down their orders and walked away. Nick looked around. The dim lighting of this place, the stained-glass lamps branded with beer logos and the neon signs hanging on the walls among framed portraits staring out from monochrome pasts. What else was there? There was the idle drumming upon the table and the blank thoughts huffed out in raspy spurts because out with Dan was uncharted territory and Nick didn't know how to behave.

Eventually there came the staccato talk about plans for the weekend, maybe hiking, sure, or something else, whatever, trite comments to fill the gap of time before their beers were set down before them, brown ale in nonic pints.

They ordered a second round before the burgers were brought out. Then a third. Nick made a derisive comment about the service. Dan told him to relax, that he wasn't in New York anymore, using a stereotypical Brooklyn accent. Nick grinned and called him a certified dumbass. They were looking at each other now, talking louder than was necessary. Nick could feel his teeth going numb between cold swigs of country mud juice, he was calling it, and bringing up old inside jokes and heeling with laughter, the two of them, clapping, pounding on the table, Dan leaning in low and making some hybrid pterodactyl-puma squawk. It wasn't too much longer before he was slurring on about some metaphysical posit, making dumb marionette poetry with his hands and beating out his argument upon the table in anaphoric cadence—there is no this, there is no that, there is no other thing. Nick had heard this tone before, earnest, dogmatic, the foundered sentences and flotsam thoughts that wash up soon or late. It all aligned nicely with the ruddy face before him, groggy-eyed and

sweat beading on the forehead, telling Nick to think about it, to imagine, rigging up improbable or paradoxical scenarios between mouthfuls of his burger, which had at some point appeared on the table.

Then there were just the fries left and then those too were gone. Another beer, a shot of whiskey, and how silly Nick felt to have needed liquor to open him up to the person he'd known as his best friend for so many years.

Dan rose and fed a dollar to the jukebox and came grooving back to the table, smacking his knee in time to a shuffling rhumba blues tune. He fell back into his seat laughing and they talked loudly between verses they felt compelled to sing aloud. They chucked back a few more shots. They had their run of the jukebox, tottering up the bar floor and back again and finally out along the dark roadway singing rude verses of their own composition, *old fuck barkeep gone took my keys tonight*, in a lumbering twelve-bar blues. A car lurched by with the horn going doppler in their ears and they cursed at the receding taillights through improvised bullhorns fashioned up out of their cupped hands. The car stopped. They cut through a field. They staggered through an overgrown trail using their phones as flashlights, through a backyard, more of them, trampling flowers in garden beds, straining their bodies through scratchy hedges. Dan roared like a puma. Nick joined in. A windowlight snapped on in an upper floor. They ran, the night heaving, hurtling past.

They made it back to Dan's house where he wrenched at the knob and told it to fuck off and tried again. The door gave way, they stumbled through.

They sat on the couch in the dark and stared at the blank TV screen. They burped each in turn. Then Dan farted. Nick said nothing, staring on with a bovine stoicism as a rancid stench filled his nostrils.

"You ever take solace," Dan said, "that in one universe, you're successful."

Nick turned his head and peered out his bleary eyes at Dan's profile. There he was. He hiccupped.

"I want the one," Nick said, "where I'm not about to vomit."

Their laughter guttered out and there was just the refrigerator thrumming softly in the kitchen.

"There's also one," Nick said, "universe. Where we never met."

Dan looked at him. He raised a hand and let it plop onto Nick's back. *Pat pat.* He said these words, and patty pat. Then his hand slid off and fell to the cushion.

"Que será será," he said.

Come morning Nick was standing outside Dan's bedroom feeling sluggish and a little woozy. He could hear Dan stirring drowsily about in his room and he rapped the door and asked if there was any Advil. Dan told him to check the bathroom.

It was a normal bathroom with normal bathroom things. He found the Advil in the medicine cabinet among some antacid chews and a depleted tube of prescription acne cream. He stood looking at that. Then he reached in and took it. The name on the tube said Daniel Kaplan. He didn't care about the last name. He was wondering who Daniel was. He stood staring at it, the Daniel, with a dull pain pressing up against the back of his eyes. Did Daniel know about the Great Loin Cloth Tour? Did Daniel know how to make the pterodactyl squawk?

Dan was Flophouse. Dan was the person in the other room, asking Nick if he found the Advil.

Nick didn't answer. He said, slowly, beneath his breath, "Daniel."

Dan was born in Maine, went to college in Maine, dropped out of college. Dan hauled boxes around a distribution center two hours away by car. Dan had bought his car at a seized vehicle auction. Daniel probably owned a luxury German driving machine that he waxed weekly in his perfectly paved driveway. Daniel was the stranger. Daniel had acne. Dan had cancer.

He heard Dan's bedroom door open and he put the tube away and closed the medicine cabinet. He stepped out into the hall and asked Dan if he wanted to play the Game, maybe do some dungeon runs. But Dan wanted to get his car. Nick told him his car wasn't going

anywhere and they should get in some dungeon runs before the weekly reset. But all Dan said was that the Game's not going anywhere either.

It was about a twenty-minute walk to the tavern, slogging along the dusty roadside with the sun harassing them between blots of shade and the way before them heaving slightly inside swells of vertigo. They stopped beside a road sign where Nick watched Dan stoop over hands on knees to make strange hiccup sounds at the asphalt. He wondered if this was the cancer at work or just the hangover but didn't ask.

They reached the car before noon with his head still throbbing and their shirts clinging damply to their skin. Dan reached under the driver-side wheel arch and took the keys off the tire where the old barkeep had said he'd leave them. He unlocked the driver door and sat in the car with one foot in the gravel lot. Nick said they should hurry back and try to get a few raids in as well. He reminded Dan that he needed that shield. Dan said he wanted to get breakfast. Nick said he'd be fine with some cereal if Dan had any back at his place. He told Dan that the shield and the breastplate were the last pieces he needed to complete his armor set. Dan reached over the console and unlocked the passenger door and told Nick to get in. He told him there was a diner not far from here. Nick told Dan that once he completed the set he could finally drop enchanting. He said he might pick up weaponsmithing and get in on the dagger trade. Then Dan told him to stop talking about the fucking Game.

Nick stood there. He wondered if mood swings might be a side effect of the pain medication. He wondered if this was Daniel speaking. There was the numb whirring of insects in the field and the warm wind blowing through the trees and Nick wanted to ask Dan what the hell was his problem but instead just stood there sweating in the sun. Then he got in the car. It was all stifling heat in there and Dan was still sitting with his left foot hanging out the open door. He put the key in the ignition but didn't turn it.

"You were the first person I told," he said. "I told you before I told my parents."

He'd yet to look at Nick and seemed unable to do so. He shifted his head slightly but could not manage even a glance and it all seemed

so false to Nick, so untrue to Dan's character that it scared him a little. He didn't know what to say. He didn't know if he should say anything at all. He waited for Dan to continue.

Then Dan said, "Let's just head back."

That night Nick woke to an awful sound. He lay on the pullout listening. It was Dan retching long and hard behind the bathroom door. It sounded raw and painful and Nick raised up on an elbow but that was as far as he got, holding there like a piece of fallen statuary. In one of the windows an old air conditioner rattled and throbbed and just below this sound he could hear Dan gag and hiccup and spit. The spitting sounded a desperate thing all its own, something dire about it. It sounded as if he were trying to spit the cancer right out of him.

Nick didn't get up and he wasn't going to. He could not bring himself to confront this Other-dan retching into a toilet or a sink. He eased back down against the pillow. He listened to the awful sounds straining out from his friend's mouth. He tried to convince himself that it was just a perversion of the pterodactyl screech. He wondered might these be the sounds hidden away in the AFK channel, the Orb of Immutable Loneliness, where mics go mute by default.

After a while the toilet flushed and the door opened. A deep silence settled as the pipes stopped hissing in the walls. Nick lay on his side with his back facing the hall, feigning sleep. He could sense that Dan was standing there in the hallway contemplating some action. It was all there in the humming tension of the modulated air and the light from the bathroom doorway how it cast faint shadows in the room. Then Dan turned off the light and walked away.

They were sitting at the kitchen table the next morning when Dan looked up from his cereal and told Nick that he deleted Nick's character. Nick stopped chewing briefly, then smiled and spooned up some more cereal. Dan told him he wasn't kidding. Apparently Nick hadn't bothered to actually log off when he'd finally gone to bed at one in the morning. Dan told him to go check for himself. Nick sat there

with the spoon halfway to his mouth. He sat there waiting for Dan to smile. Then he put the spoon back in the bowl and got up and hurried off toward Dan's room. He came back a moment later and stood glaring from the edge of the kitchen.

Dan told him to calm down. He told him he could call customer service to have his character restored. He told him to look on the bright side. "Now we can actually hang out," he said.

Nick didn't understand what he was talking about. He called Dan an asshole. He told him he was out of his mind. He asked him what the hell have they been doing the last two days if not hanging out.

Dan laughed at that but there was no humor in it. He said, "Why did you even come here?" The question was blunt in a way that might have been intended to knock some perspective into Nick's head. But Nick just stood there staring at Dan as if he were something far away.

"I go to work," Dan said. "I come home. Go to work, come home. Play the fucking Game. For nine years I do three things. Make it two things. Work and the Game. And now." He stopped there, letting the thought float away toward the ceiling.

"And now, what?" Nick said. "And now you're dying." He felt mean as ever to put it out there so bluntly but there was no helping it. "We both wasted nine years on the Game," he said, "So what? I don't regret any of that." There was a pause here, a moment where things left unsaid drifted through the space between them. It wasn't simply an avatar Dan had deleted. It was all the private anecdotes and inside jokes and the drunken rants and screeches and the breaths rustling into his ears.

"You could've done whatever," Nick said. "But you didn't. One day you could've just not logged on, ever again. And that would've been it. You could've been off doing whatever it is you apparently wish you'd done."

Dan sat there listening to all this and in the end he looked away and shook his head. He shook it slowly and sadly as if to say Nick would not understand. Then Nick walked over to where Dan was sitting and punched him in the face. Dan lurched back in his chair and

settled and sat looking up at Nick with the last few seconds gathering into his stunned eyes.

Nick stood watching. He himself looked startled. In truth he didn't think he was going over there to punch Dan but to sit and talk this thing through. His hand was throbbing slightly but the pain was still back there with the strike. He asked Dan if he was okay. Dan lunged at him. He knocked the table cockeyed and tackled Nick to the floor where they writhed against each other all stunted words and strained breath. They knocked over one of the chairs. Milk was spilling onto the linoleum and pooling in the cracks. Through gritted teeth Dan kept asking why he fucking came here. One of his flailing fists caught Nick in the ear. Nick kept saying variants of the word fuck. Fucking. Fucker. He was trying to grab hold and restrain Dan's arms. Instead his knee lurched up into Dan's stomach and Dan shoved himself away and clambered off a short distance where he gagged and retched on his hands and knees. Nick watched him from where he lay. He asked Dan if he was all right. Dan didn't answer. He rolled over and they lay there together panting on their backs.

Eventually Dan called Nick a dipshit. He told him he didn't even delete his character but just changed the server he logged in to so it looked like it.

Nick's ear was still ringing. He touched it and opened his mouth in a faux yawn. He called Dan a certified jackass.

Dan grinned. Even amid his panting he had a laugh that was all goofy horseplay, a quality of cartoon scuffledust, and Nick couldn't help but to join in.

It was quiet again once their laughter died out. Nick lay there listening to Dan breathe while he traced a crack in the ceiling with his eyes. It ran through the plaster from one corner to the other and when he reached the end he hauled himself up. He held out his hand and helped Dan to his feet and asked him if he'd meant all that stuff he'd said.

Dan righted the overturned chair and sat. He seemed to be thinking it over. There was a kind of shadow movement at the corner of his mouth, an inward smile.

"I think you don't want anything to change," Dan said. "But it's going to." He'd been contemplating the soggy bits of cereal on the tabletop and now he looked up, glanced up, a slight tight-lipped smile that Nick chose not to interpret.

He pulled out the seat adjacent and they sat there together for a long time, each staring at an arbitrary spot in the room while milk dripped off the table.

Then Nick looked at Dan and said, "Daniel."

That night they drove back to the airport without much talking. Nick wished he could stay longer. He didn't want the last few stilted hours to be the coda of his time with Dan, but a three-day weekend was the best he could do on short notice. Someone from his team was already out on vacation. He'd told Dan that he could take a full two weeks in a couple of months but Dan had said that there was no way to tell how he'd be feeling by then. There were no streetlamps along the road and the headlights bored through the darkness. The needle on the speedometer was creeping toward sixty. Radio music rattled in the speakers and the wind was flapping loudly in Dan's open window and he said something but Nick couldn't hear him. Before he could ask Dan cut the wheel and they were off the road and in a dusty lot among cars and pickups and a corrugated hangar painted red. Music was throbbing from within. The words Big Red Barracks burned above the door, the brightest lights for miles.

Nick wanted to know what they were doing here. He reminded Dan about his flight.

"There'll be another," Dan told him. Then he parked the car and got out.

Nick watched him go. He thought he could call Dan's bluff by sitting here in the car amid the engine clacks and dashboard dust. But there was no bluff.

Inside it was loud and hot and dimly lit. The air smelled of sweat and spilled liquor and Nick stood at the edge of the dance floor watching all that untamed movement, the people spinning freestyle over the scuffed boards amid yips and cries and the band how they

rocked the platform, the basskick thumping beneath plosive mouth harp whoops and the fiddle notes skittering crazed in triple time.

Then Nick saw him there amid the stomping feet and whirling bodies, Dan, one of them, doing some strange country rhumba and shouting, hollering, scrawling out in the air a helical slang with his big hands, clapping and sweating and how he shuffled his way through the crowd with his big grin stretched taut across his face and the music pulsing underfoot.

He came and hooked arms with his friend and it was Nick and Dan out there wheeling amid the body heat, howling, roaring together in the heaving crush.

Part III

Obladi oblada.

He barely played the Game anymore, logging on now and then to stand in a city square and watch polygonal strangers drift past in the screen. He'd get bored quickly and log off. In his friends list the name Flophouse was grayed out, with a system-generated note attached: *Last online 3 months ago.*

Then one day after work he booted up the Game and did a few circuits around the capital city and logged off and canceled his subscription. He did it without ceremony and then sat there for a while starting at his monitor trying to figure out whether he wanted to masturbate or take a shower. The voice server was minimized and he clicked it up from the taskbar as if seeking its counsel on the matter. It was late February and the days were cold and brittle and Flophouse was still there in the AFK channel. Nick would not disconnect from the server for as long as he remained there. He checked every day after work, turning on the bedroom light he'd finally replaced and crossing to the desk to wake the monitor. Pandiculate, Flophouse, together in the Orb of Immutable Loneliness.

It was Dan's sister who had eventually delivered the news. He didn't even know Dan had a sister. The number had come up in his phone's screen as an unknown contact, ten digits from Greensburg, PA. Her name was Courtney and he'd learned about his best friend's

death in the voicemail she'd left for him. He was invited to the funeral, up in Maine, but he didn't go. It was a week after the call when Flophouse at last disconnected from the voice server, only Nick knew it wasn't Flophouse but his sister or whoever turning off his computer, or the electricity had been cut, or the internet had gone out.

Then the mementos came. They came in a box. Dan's documentaries and steelbooks and blues albums. The question of how or why never fully crossed Nick's mind, perhaps an executor fulfilling some notarized wish. There was no note, just the items crammed together in a box branded with the logo of a popular paper towel company. A few days had gone by before he decided to sort through them, dragging the box out from beneath the desk where he'd stowed it and lifting out the items one by one.

He had not thought about it then, that the last time he would see Dan would be in the car outside the airport, a clumsy embrace over the gear shift followed by some parting words, something generic, he couldn't remember.

Eventually Dan's sister called again, asking if he'd received the package, Dan's things, he wanted you to have them, she'd told him. And how she'd heard a lot about him, how Dan had talked about Nick all the time whenever he'd call her, now and then, just to check in.

What he did remember was Dan's grin, the goofy look of it, not in the car but on the dance floor, grinning like a fool amid the heaving bodies and hard-driving music and the two of them hooking arms and wheeling in that shapeless freestyle crowd, roaring like idiots.

The documentaries were on war and crime, economics, generational ethe. He inserted one of the blues CDs into his computer's ROM drive but the disk was too scratched to be read, almost all of them were. Some of the cases had no disk at all or had the wrong disk. He found a country album and a top forty compilation album hidden away like guilty secrets in a Sonny Boy Williamson II discography set.

In the end the day did come out of nowhere. It happened under the pretense of routine. They were talking and then they weren't and after a long interval of silence that was not so irregular Dan entered the AFK channel and never left. Nick didn't think it was Dan's

intention to leave him in limbo like that but that he'd entered some stage in the horrible process of dying against which a person's will is no match.

I didn't even know he had a sister. This is what Nick had told her, the second time she called, when she was checking to confirm receipt of the box. He never mentioned you, he'd said.

Eventually he came across a blues CD that was still readable. The first track struck up in the speakers, distant voices suspended in a staticky prelude, breathing, warm-up chords softly stroked.

There had been a deep silence on the other end of the line. Then she said, Well, that's Dan for you.

The blues track was an old thing or sounded old, grainy and a little sloppy, a sense of improvisation, of musicians gathered in a room by coincidence alone, with mouth harp roars to startle them, voices galvanized out of the backdrop static along with laughter and handclaps.

He'd apologized for not attending the funeral and offered a boilerplate condolence to which she reciprocated, neither becoming undone by this, just the perforated phrases uttered into a mouthpiece.

He'd uploaded the blues tune to his phone and had taken to listening to it on repeat. Folding laundry, eating leftovers, standing in fusty railcars among the snuffling Gore-Tex throngs on his way to work and back. Consider now all your frottaged notions of those around you. This sounded like something Dan would say. There was something in the raw sound of the piece, in the dusty niches of the meter, that was oddly reminiscent of some crude Danism. At work he began to repeat some of the stuff Dan had said over the years, swiveling away from his keyboard and scooting back over the monochrome carpet to whisper amid the whirring stress some tchotchke phrase to the back of his cubemate's head. None of it changed anything and after a time he reverted to his introverted self. It was the moments between the notes that he liked, the rests. In the rests he could hear coughing, he could hear a throat being cleared, garbled banter. In the rests he could hear breathing.

It was a quiet evening on the cusp of spring when she called again, left a voicemail that said, Hey, it's Courtney, Dan's sister.

Nick sat on the edge of his bed staring out the window, watching a bird preen on the fire escape while he listened to her voice. It sounded like she might have been driving at the time. There was a low thrumming. There was a metronomic clicking. She would be in New York next week, in Manhattan, on business, and was wondering if, maybe, would he want to meet up. We can grab some lunch, she'd said. I could go for a New York slice. And she laughed dumbly to herself and there was the measured clicking of a blinker in the background. Let me know. The bird stopped and looked at him and flew away.

He called her back the next day between meetings and they arranged a time and a place, a little pizza joint in midtown.

He knew who she was even before she pushed in through the creaky glass door. It was her profile that gave her away, walking along the facade window. Nick could see the resemblance. The parlor reeked of garlic and sweat and when she entered he rose from the booth and raised his hand, gave a small wave.

Soliloquy of a Woman Silenced at the Foot of a Mango Tree

Nicole F Kimball

And there will be times our name sounds porous to them. Wrapped in the greensleeves of barren winter, where we go to undress our people; those ones that keep us up. In the night; the body asks for courage. Things we have done to get through man's clear eminence. Even the creatures unquiet in the forest do not wish for the great roots of the tree, or the just barely crawling plants. There will be times we come to reconcile the throbbing of the womb, the divine feminine we shed, sink, and recreate for. Recreate the way men say "god" or maybe how the stars cast spells on the numbness of our planet. We lose children as heavy clotting out of our mouths. Our legs spread like fall's evolving through to spring and then our breed slips out. Onto concrete and bright red sac, bundled pools of our body breaking her ribs, her heart, her almost human footprints. Now we are silenced as were the Queens. We must be hysterical for rolling sourly inside the intestine of lament. And what a feat it must be, to hear words like " reason, time, and purpose" and then still breathe on to recreate. The baby belonged elsewhere is only a metaphor to shush the irrevocable noise. That roaring satire they make for you may not be your time to unravel or even consider the place for mankind. For woman, for women who bury that red pool growing against the dirtiness of soil. There will be times they call that thing dead, that haven inside of us dead. That red is the color of the unborn and the shrivel. Aging of uterus, our orbits of lights within the body we rent. Birth becomes medicated & so ugly & so fowl. Pills conceal the huntress we spend a lifetime inventing. Humming of placenta and ripe mango trees; clay tail twisting, convulsing underneath begins the story of simmer broil knot to fissure wither mother-breast un-jeweled unearthly right of passage-hold this birth and every birth because there will be times we are told we are not women. Do not let them tell you about dirty aliens clumping at the feet of those mango trees. Do not let the sleeping be alone in your waking, or the fat sabbaths of June near

those fat seeds you planted. Some kind of language it is, how belly buttons grow. Sublime intervention and how we say resurrection. Of this love, of another life. Watching-screeching dry their throats, watching fire burn.

Dear Diary,

Muhammad Saleem

Dear Diary,

2004: 7 years of age. A memory. A place: the school stage. A prince kissing a boy to wake him from eternal sleep. A taboo broken: fear, laughter, confusion. Embarrassment, humiliation. A closing, remorse, an exchange: the prince sleeps.

2007: 10 years of age. A page, then nothing. A rupture; of time, of self. Survival through forgetting. *The memory will come back when you are ready, don't crush your heart.* Sleep.

2010: 15 years of age. A line is a page. A boy's name: Areeb. A talking too much, too fondly. An accusation: gay. A denial, a justification: friendship, admiration, wonderment. A heartache. A forgetting. An oblivion, an obliteration.

2011: 16 years of age. A piling of fragmented words and thoughts; sex; desire; gay. A sin, a sin, a sin. Repent and abstain. An absence of explanation, comprehension. An abundance of fear of Hell fire: Everlasting Torture.

2012: 15 years of age, a correction. A farewell, a realization, a rejection: dissonance, disassociation. A dream, a desire; Areeb; skin; touch. An admission, a denial. A contradiction, a paradoxical existence practicing self-erasure: survival. A heartbreak. A forgetting. *The memory will come back when you are ready, don't crush your heart.*

2013: 16 years of age. A loneliness, a void, an estrangement. Inhabiting a liminal space, drowning in self-hate. A chance encounter, an unfurling, a new friend: Ahsan. A resurgence of

joy, a fear of life. A story rewritten, a desire reexperienced: *Ishq ka Ain, Ahsan ka Alif.*

2014: 17 years of age. A joking confession. A silence, a withdrawal, a refusal to acknowledge. A spiral of self-doubt and hate. A desire for equilibrium, a loathing for being left on read. A void threatening to form, threatening to consume. A denial losing its hold. A truth breaking free. A dread of drinking from the well-spring of desire found within. An infatuation that persists through it all.

2015: 18 years of age. An introduction, a conversation, an acceptance. A community: a bond of flourishing. An impossibility of weeding shame and guilt, an assurance of its occurrence. A contradiction: a source of comfort, an opening of possibilities. A bubbling of memory, and then, a dam breaking; a flash flood of emotions and scorching self-rapprochements. A voice, a tender embrace, a soothing of a child's cries. A sharing of pain. An affirmation: your heart is a beautiful thing. *You are ready.*

20XX: A happily ever after: a community of queers.

Pulali

KC Pedersen

"We live in a beautiful, sentient universe that yearns for you to tell the truth about it."

—Carolyn See

"You are going to feel like hell if you never write the stuff that is tugging on the sleeves in your heart—your stories, visions, memories, songs: your truth, your version of things in your voice. That is really all you have to offer us, and it's why you were born."

—Anne Lamott

Origins

For a graduate workshop, I entitled this "Essay in Twelve Genres." Feedback: The word genre is phony, unnecessary, and insufficiently ironic, a pretension by someone fancying herself intellectual. I was, they suggested, using genre to seal myself up and be safe.

I too was concerned by the word, but it is the idea that disturbs me. When I try to write about Pulali, I grope for a form that captures my birthplace, my home. I attempt essay, dream, play, story. Word made manifest. Word made flesh.

A teenaged boyfriend's song, "Pulali Woman Made a Fish out of Me."

Shortly before said teenaged boyfriend went off to war where his head blew up, was patched back together, and he no longer makes songs.

But no matter how I attempt to capture Pulali, she's the doe that just swam past in the bay, driven off the cliff by a predator.

Pulali plunges out ahead, eluding my net of words.

Perhaps Pulali can't be captured. I grew up hearing my father say this thin slice of sea and land we call ours was appropriated from those who lived here for thousands of years. The original people, he

said, did not believe land could be owned. We are, he said, Pulali's stewards, protecting her shoreline and uplands as best we can.

Burial Grounds

Pulali Point sits pretty much in the middle of the Olympic Peninsula and is itself a small peninsula jutting into Dabob Bay, Hood Canal, and Jackson Cove. The geological formation itself dates from the Eocene Era, and is about forty million years old.

For ten thousand of those years, The Klallam and other indigenous people frequented the area. According to David Brownell, Cultural Resources Specialist for Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe, "The nəxʷsƛ̓áyəm̓ or S'Klallam (Strong People) are today comprised of three Tribes, the Jamestown S'Klallam, Port Gamble S'Klallam, and Lower Elwha Klallam. At the time of European arrival around 1790, the S'Klallam were one people whose territory stretched across the northern Olympic Peninsula and across the Strait of Juan de Fuca to Vancouver Island. They continued to expand this range into the historic era, occupying Port Townsend and the lower (northern) reaches of Hood Canal and the new mill town of Port Gamble by the mid-1800s."

Other indigenous people who lived and still live along Washington State's Olympic Peninsula include the Hoh, Skokomish, Suquamish, Squaxin Island, Quileute, and Makah. The Tulalip people and others may also have visited from more far-flung parts of the Salish Sea.

Around Pulali Point, the original people used the spit in front of what are now the unincorporated village of Brinnon and the coves of Pleasant Harbor, Seal Rock State Park, Jackson Cove, and other areas as summer camps for salmon and shellfish harvest and berry gathering. As with Pulali, some place names reflect the original Indian languages. These include the Anglicized Quilcene, Dabob, Duckabush, Dosewallips, Hamma Hamma, and Lilliwaup.

According to homesteader Ray Lindeke, Pulali Point, with its commanding view of waterways and Mount Rainier, was a location for ceremonies to send off the dead. In earlier times, he was told, bodies

were placed in canoes with gifts to accompany the spirit onward, then set into the trees. Later, due to plunder of sacred places by early settlers and death from disease introduced by traders and settlers, the Indians adopted the European custom of burying their deceased.

Family

To me, Pulali was the commune I was born into, which the founders preferred to call a cooperative and what might now be called an intentional community. My parents, John Pedersen and Marilyn Sutherland, met at my mother's going-away party in Seattle. After completing a summer journalism internship, Marilyn was returning to Evanston, Illinois, to marry her long-time fiancé. My mother's photographer, Jack Keerl, knew John, my artist father, who lived in a longhouse in the Olympic wilds. Keerl suggested John attend the party.

According to family legend, John and Marilyn talked late into the night. "I want to show you Pulali before you leave," John told Marilyn. They took a ferry to the primitive site with the Olympic Mountains rising behind, Dabob Bay in front. For two years, John had lived on the land while he and the other communards cleared a one-lane driveway from the nearest county road, hand-dug a thirteen-foot well, put in deep earthen stairs to the beach, and planted organic gardens. They hauled stones and split logs and cedar shakes to build an eight hundred square foot cabin called the Big House.

Three days later, my father's Danish immigrant parents, Kirstine and Hans, and my mother's Irish mother Mary as witnesses, John and Marilyn were married in the Seattle Arboretum. They spent the first year of their marriage milling logs and splitting shakes for their own three hundred square foot log cabin a short distance through the forest from the Big House. A one-room affair, with bunks lining the walls and a pull-out bed for my parents, in ten years, they filled what we called the Little Cabin with six kids.

Legend also has it that when Mary Gilligan stepped off the plane, she took one look at my full-bearded long haired father, said, "He's an alcoholic," and fainted dead away on the tarmac.

Intentional Community

Prior to World War II, my father and his best friend Jack Anderson, recent graduates of Seattle's Cornish School, pursued commercial art in Manhattan. They snagged some big accounts and attended rent parties where world-class musicians played. When war was declared, an art school mentor told John about a special unit in the Aleutians. He and other artists and writers in his unit never saw combat, instead living in bunkers where they decoded enemy messages. Afterwards, John returned to New York, but commercial art no longer commanded his heart.

John and Jack decided to drive around Mexico to study the great muralists. They were drawn by the idea of the artists' belief that art should belong to the people. One afternoon, while sitting on a hillside near Patzcuaro, they watched peasants construct stone walls. That, they decided, was the real art. "We need to be on the land, Pete," Jack said.

They headed back to the north, where they met up with brothers, raised like them in West Seattle, Allen and Norman Jones, who were married to sisters Rosetta and Violet. As a union activist, Allen had been blacklisted. Allen always said they were all "parlor pinks," never carrying a Communist card but believing in Socialist ideals. Along with several other buddies who soon abandoned the rough rural lifestyle, the men pooled their savings to purchase a slice of undeveloped land bordering a wild rocky shoreline.

John built a longhouse based on the dwellings of the Klallams while Jack designed the eight hundred square foot Big House with its two closet-sized bedrooms on the ground level and a tiny room tucked into the eaves facing onto an open kitchen and living area with a floor to ceiling fireplace and stone chimney. A nearby Norwegian homesteader, Eivind Hjelvik, loaned the young men a portable mill and taught them how to split thick cedar shakes and line the inner walls with burlap. Jack and my father constructed the stone walls they'd admired in Mexico, topped by milled logs and fashioned the

door from huge cedar slabs. They harvested clams and oysters from the beach and wild blackberries from the forest's edge.

Jack, a merchant seaman, periodically dried out by catching a ship. Back on land, his drinking would again spiral out of control. When I was six, Jack, drunk, walked into traffic in the middle of the night. John never got over Jack's death. "In dreams, he's always calling me to join him," John said. "He says, 'Come on over, Pete. The water's fine.'"

Family Council

In middle school, I sometimes attended John's night classes as he pursued a master's degree. I read the assigned books, and we discussed them during the hour-long drives. The professors acted as if it was perfectly natural that a child join a college class and treated me as if I were an equal.

Then, in an education course my parents took together, they learned about R. Dreikurs Family Council. Based on similar ideals as the Pulali Cooperative, Family Council supports respectful communication, equality of all, and consensus-based problem-solving. John placed a large bulletin board in the kitchen, and any of us, from then five-year Brynne to the teenagers and adults, could jot issues we wished to discuss. At scheduled weekly meetings, we gathered around the kitchen table. Visiting friends were included. The roles of chair and scribe revolved weekly. Over a ten-year period, the handwriting and styles of eight very different individuals filled three spiral-bound notebooks.

For their final project, my parents brought all six kids into class, and we held our regular meeting. In my father's elegant artist handwriting, the main item that happened to be on that week's agenda was that my eighth-grade friends and I had stolen my father's work truck and abandoned it a mile or two away. One of the Dreikurs' concepts is that behaviors have consequences. As everyone in Family Council had an equal vote, it was easy for me to propose that I had learned my lesson, would never do it again, and should have no

consequences at all. After some discussion, mostly dominated by me, we voted. Results: Six in my favor. Two opposed.

The professor was appalled. "You'd better watch out for that eldest daughter of yours," he warned my parents. "She's headed for big trouble."

The professor, of course, was right. Reading diaries from the time, I see that overdosing on drugs and alcohol and arranging my body for my parents to find was my way to escape my high school crowd. My consequences were that I returned to Pulali's summer embrace. I slept in the Big House when the other owners weren't there, and in lieu of alcohol, binged on reading and writing. I forced my parents and siblings to assemble on the beach and listen to what became my first published story.

Burning

After they completed teaching certification in night school and taught for a few years, my parents gained some minimal financial security. Which for them meant they "splurged" on a polyester area rug and curtains for the cabin. On New Year's, we had gathered for our usual ritual of writing resolutions for ourselves and for our parents and siblings. We tucked these into a jar in the eaves to pull out and read the following year.

The weekend of the fire, though the elder kids were away at college, the younger three in the city with friends. John and Marilyn and their rescue dogs were on their own. John hung the new rug on a line rigged above the woodstove. It fell onto the burner of a hotplate where he was brewing coffee. In those pre-flameproof-mandated days, the rug went up like a torch and ignited the curtains and the tinder dry log cabin and shake roof.

John and Marilyn escaped in their pajamas and pushed the family van away from the flames. They flagged down a passing boat, but by the time the volunteer fire crew arrived, they could only keep the flames from spreading into the forest.

My sisters and I had taken some kind of workshop related to thought transmission. It's the kind of stuff we girls, as we called

ourselves, believed in. Our parents never discouraged us, and Marilyn in particular simply assumed such communication was real. One sister was paged out of an art class. Your parents' cabin burned down, someone told her. They're okay.

From our far-flung locations, my sisters and I called each other. My parents, of course, had no phone. We weren't sure where they were, or if the van had burned along with the cabin. The only thing to do, we determined, was to pick a time and send our parents a thought message, some kind of dream or vision.

The following day, my phone rang. "We got your message," Marilyn said.

"What was it?"

"Last night, Daddy and I were curled up in bed in the Big House where we've been ever since the fire. We didn't know what to do. Then we heard a message."

We girls hadn't articulated a particular message. We just focused on some vague notion of healing energy.

"The words were really clear. 'Don't look back.' For the first time in three days we felt peace. We dressed in some old clothes of Allen and Rosetta's, drove into Quilcene and ate breakfast. Now I'm calling you from the phone booth!"

When they returned to the cabin's burnt core, the dogs ambled in from the forest.

My boyfriend and I drove and ferried and drove some more to meet my parents at the site. For days, we filled bags with debris and hauled it away. I was stunned by how much detritus a tiny cabin leaves behind, only the woodstove left standing. In the spirit of not looking back, Marilyn wanted a new location for rebuilding. She had never liked being so close to the Big House or tucked back into the trees without a water view. The four of us walked to the far end of the long strip of land, past where John's longhouse had stood and where the organic gardens still grew. We pounded in stakes for the corners.

Over the next three years, on weekends and summers, John and Marilyn camped in a tent on the new location. Using a kit, they constructed a cabin from the ground up.

We kids helped when we could. I learned how to wire a house and install outlets. We learned that Pulali was more than buildings constructed from wood.

Dream

In dreams, all paths lead to Pulali. Pulali forms my life's heart. In one recurring dream, my mother and I climb the tallest tree overlooking the bay. From there, we can see everything. Starting when I was three or four, I had another repeating dream. George the road man drives his huge grader down the mile-long dirt road etching through the forest to our cabin, as he often did to drink coffee with Marilyn on his breaks. He jokes he is going to steal me away. The grader is filled with gifts. I am terrified. The pulsing of the grader is my blood pulsing, the waves crashing against the cliffs.

Memory

My early memories are as clear as if etched in my skin. Someone places my crib outside the Big House kitchen so that Rosetta can watch me. Wrapped in towels, John and Marilyn descend the wide dirt stairs to the beach. As they vanish from sight, it is as if they vanish forever.

My grandfather and father helped build a dome-like auditorium to add to the four-room Brinnon schoolhouse. My elder brother's pre-school is there. As we still have no electricity in our cabin, I've never seen a television or film. Images flicker on the screen. Images flicker on the screen, but I don't know what they are.

The day my twenty-eight-year-old Aunt Lucille dies, I am eighteen months old. Someone knocks on the thick cedar slabs that form our cabin door. A tall stranger says something that makes the room contract in pain. Later, lying between John and Marilyn in their bed that folded down at night, my father sleeps with his mouth open, his eyes strangely soft without his glasses. "Is he dead?" I ask.

"Just sleeping," Marilyn says in her soft way.

She often walked my brother Hansi and me, with baby Lisa in the big buggy, up the driveway to visit the people we called Grandma

and Grandpa Lindeke. Like Eivind Hjelvick, they were early white settlers who reached out to the young Pulali communards. The Lindekes lived in their own log house, always warm from the wood stove, smelling of cookies and Beauregard, their dachshund pup. As we walked the half mile from our cabin to theirs, Marilyn showed me tiny purple violets pushing up beside a stump blackened by a forest fire at the turn of the century.

"Those are Johny Jump Ups," she said. I imagined the little buds were my father pushing out of the earth.

We played in a sandbox just outside our cabin window, where Marilyn could see us as she washed dishes. Hansi wore sandals and Lisa a bright yellow sweater. I did not like the word sweater. Already, words produced a physical reaction: *dead*, *Johny*, *yellow*.

When I was four, John found temporary work as a carpenter in Home, Washington, a former Socialist commune. We lived in a house on stilts, and every day while John worked, Marilyn took Hansi, Lisa and me to visit an old man who fed us prunes. When John finished that project, we returned to Pulali. But although John tried to make a living through art, brush picking, logging, oystering, and other random jobs, and my mother wrote for *Sunset*, we could never quite make it. Grandma Pedersen found an old run-down farm south of the Seattle airport, and John started a concrete business, bidding on sidewalks, basements, stairs, and foundations for houses on the Alki cliffs.

The day we moved from Pulali, our tabby, Mother Cat, gave birth to four kittens at my feet. I watched each damp form emerge, and how the mother licked them dry.

Theatre

John: "I walked to the doorway of the house where Keerl had told me her going-away party was being held. I was late. For the past two years, I'd lived in the woods. I hadn't seen many people. Suddenly, I felt very shy."

Marilyn: "He's wearing a black turtleneck. He smokes a wooden pipe. He has a full red beard, and his hair, bleached blond by

the sun, grows down over his neck. He wears the turtleneck and long hair because for the years he's lived mostly alone in his longhouse in the forest, he's had poison-ivy. It's so bad his neck is deeply cracked with open wounds."

John: "I knock on the door of a mansion on Capitol Hill overlooking the University of Washington campus and ship canal. Marilyn rented the upstairs, and a wealthy Seattle family occupied the rest. But for her going-away party, the family let Marilyn use the entire house. She opens the door. She is the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. She wears a white blouse with full peasant sleeves and a full white skirt with Mexican embroidery on it. She has dark hair with auburn light in it. Her hair reaches past her shoulders in great thick waves. She tells me to come in. I am in a trance and must force myself to move up the steps and through the doorway. Inside, everyone is drunk. Most are passed out here and there around the huge house. One is lying on the stairway crying 'Lindy, Lindy.' That was her nickname in college because her stepfather's name was Lindenmeyer. 'Lindy, Lindy' he moans again and again throughout that long night. She is cooking dinner in the kitchen, though no one present is capable of eating it. That does not matter. I chop onions and celery. Lindy boils a pot of water for pasta, makes a huge green salad. Neither of us drinks. We talk. We talk until the light is rising and I need to go. I want to leave something with her. I give her my copy of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.*"

Marilyn: "He tells me this book will explain him to me." Marilyn and John are telling my siblings and me the story while we drive four hours from Pulali to Sol Duc Hot Springs and the trailhead for the High Divide and Seven Lakes Basin. The Courtship Story, we say. We love the story. Their telling takes us from Pulali to Sequim, from Sequim to Port Angeles, along the treacherous stretch of highway where logging trucks won't hesitate to rush at you headlong, and past Crescent Lake to the turnoff for Sol Duc. "Then he leaves. I write in my journal that I have just met a man like no one I have ever known. When I think that I will never see him again, I cannot imagine living. Yet Gene, my fiancé, is waiting for me. I am supposed to fly out that day to meet him. Friends in Lake Forest, where I grew up, and

Evanston, where I graduated college, awaits the festivities postponed and promised for three years. Just as I finished writing these words, I heard a tap on my window. I climbed out of bed. There was John. Somehow, he had climbed the lattice and was tapping at my window. "I came back," he said. And I knew I would never let him out of my sight again."

We start the switchback climb from Sol Duc to Heart Lake. Brynne, the baby, carries her doll. "The high point of my life," my father said later of our three-day climb. "I ask nothing more than this."

Later, in Family Council, Brynne said, "I'm going to be the normal one in this family."

History

At around nineteen or twenty, I completed an independent study researching the communal movement in Washington State, including Socialist communes like Home. As part of the project, I attended a three-day writer's conference where I met a variety of Northwest poets and writers, including Duane McGinnis (*After the Death of an Elder Clallam*) and Carl Cary, (*Salish Songs and Other Rituals.*) I used old records, interviews and letters, lost when I was in graduate school and stored them in the basement of a professor's house. As, in graduate school, I too was lost. I was searching for my roots. I was searching for a Pulali of my own.

In the middle of a dark night, drunk in a college cafe, I confided in a waitress named Grace. "I need to find my home," I told her. Grace held a real estate license and offered to show my boyfriend and me places around the college town. "Your love nest," she crooned as she showed us properties completely unlike my dream.

Submarines

I grew up in the shadow of nuclear annihilation. In grade school, children huddled on our hands and knees in the hallway or beneath our desks, hands tucked over our heads. Or we were told to "walk awhile run awhile" to somehow arrive home before enveloped by

radiation. My first paintings featured explosions. I created elaborate games to hide my younger siblings when airplanes flew low from the nearby airport.

To me, Pulali was safe, far from these drills. Then the U.S. Navy, long a nearby presence, commandeered the deep bay for Naval Undersea Warfare testing. World War II subs cruised and dove. Manned installations appeared on the cliffs, including the tip of Pulali Point. The Navy suggested the communards donate their land as patriotic service. If we strayed too far in our kayaks, patrol boats escorted us home.

The summer after ninth grade, I was on our beach reading *From Here to Eternity* by James Jones. Every day, Marilyn and my younger siblings would sprawl along the beach beside me. That day, though, they were still descending the broad dirt stairs when a torpedo emerged from the water, landed on the beach and split into two pieces, missing me by less than a foot.

"Sorry, Ladies," said the first of the hoards of enlisted men to arrive on our beach over the course of that day. "We misfired. You can go back to your sunbathing."

My mother's journalist friend Ruth took a picture of me in my spotted bikini with my book, and the local paper published it. On my first day of high school, the image was on the bulletin board of my home room.

Word

I asked Professor and linguist Timothy Montler, who created an alphabet and dictionary with Klallam elders who still spoke their original language, what Pulali might mean. "Pulali does not look like a Klallam word," Professor Montler emailed. "Klallam has L sounds in only a few words that come from English or French or another language. The word 'Klallam' comes from the Songees language. Pulali (like Dabob, Dosewallips, and Duckabush) may be a Twana or possibly Lushootseed word."

When I queried via the Tulalip Tribal website, educator Michele Balagot, Lushootseed Department Manager, responded,

"Looking in our Lushootseed dictionary -ali actually means place where something is kept, place where something is typically located. The pulali was not in our Lushootseed dictionary, but we did find a similar word in the Chinook Jargon dictionary. The word we found was spelled polallie and it means powder, dust, or sand."

Bean Soup, or A Lesson in Time

C. Adán Cabrera

Rigel 2021 Winner

for R.E.C.

You're seventeen years old and you're having a bad day. Well, it's actually another bad day, in a string of rotten months, in what is turning out to be a terrible year. But you don't want to talk about it. You never want to talk about it. Not anymore, at least.

Your mother doesn't take long to notice. She motions for you to sit and scoops out some uncooked pinto beans from the reserve she keeps in a white plastic tub with red handles, the same one from your childhood that once contained a gallon of Neapolitan ice cream. The plastic is still stained pink and chocolate brown.

She announces that she's going to make bean soup and pours the hard *frijoles* onto the kitchen table. Some scuttle across the chipped wood, others lodge themselves in the webbed and yellowed doily. She then grabs one of the cast-iron pots that she keeps beneath the sink, next to all the knotted up plastic Walmart bags, brand new pink sponges, and half-empty bottles of cleaning liquid. (Twenty years later, when you have your own mortgage and a little girl and a husband, the area under your kitchen sink will be almost identical.) After rinsing and dabbing the pot with a paper towel, she sits down across from you.

She puts on her glasses—the pair she'd reluctantly bought after several fights with your father; *aún no soy vieja*, she complains—and lets them rest on the tip of her nose. And though the process is something familiar to you, your mother explains it anyway.

Before you cook them, you have to examine the beans, she says to you in Spanish. *Pick out the pebbles and any beans you can't eat. Take only what is useful.*

She grabs a handful of the uncooked beans and places them in front of her. You watch silently as she uses her ring finger to separate one from the rest. She examines it for a moment before she places it in the pot. She does the same with three or four beans, and turns to the rest of the pile. They each clang in the pot when she deposits them.

Your mother picks up speed as she works. In fact, she's been practicing all her life, ever since she was a little girl in El Salvador. She sees a jagged, rust-colored pebble and separates it from the rest of the beans, continuing for a moment before speaking again.

No rush, your mother says in English. She pauses to remove another pebble. This one is bigger than the rest she's pulled out so far. She switches back to Spanish. *Otherwise, you might lose a tooth.*

Though you know the story about how your *abuelo*, the one you've never met, lost his right molar—one day, one of your *tías* in San Salvador made bean soup without checking the beans first and, while eating it, your grandfather suddenly stood up from the table, clutched his jaw, and spit a bloodied pebble onto the kitchen floor along with part of his tooth—your mother tells it again anyway. Right then, you couldn't possibly know that in less than ten years he would be dead, his funeral in a hot and crowded church becoming the first and the last time you would ever physically see him. But you feel something shift inside of you this time.

Your grandfather's memory will forever be tied to a dental deformity. Similar to when he suddenly cracked his tooth—you imagine—the feeling catches you off guard.

You listen quietly and grab a small pile of beans. You start sorting through them as well. Out of the twelve beans you've picked up, nine are fine, which you deposit into the pot, but three are discolored, almost rotten. You hold them tenderly in your palm and inspect them in the fading light of the weak December sun. What happened to these? you wonder silently. Where there should be dark brown speckles, there are what look like burn marks instead; one has a hole the size your pinky nail. You cast them aside.

No rocks, your mother says. She has been watching you. *Imperfect, but still good.* She motions for you to put them in the pot.

You grab another handful. Another twelve. There are two rocks this time, and nearly four of the beans are inedible. You pick out the rocks and the misshapen beans and toss them in the pile with the rejected ones. You hear your older brother's hatchback pull up in the driveway. After getting fired from yet another job, he is living at home again. He's twenty-one, four years older than you. In two years, he will be locked up in the county jail for robbery, and though you know it wasn't entirely his fault, that he was so fucked up on meth that he couldn't tell his right foot from his left, much less *right* from *wrong*, he will stare at you and your mother from behind the plate-glass shield, telephone cradled against his ear, and say nothing when she asks him to explain himself. He will just stare down at his orange jumpsuit, tracing the seams with his free hand, not making eye contact once. Your father will disown him and refuse to speak to his namesake for years after he's released from jail. So deep will be the shame. But your father will eventually come around, after your brother gives him his first grandchild.

You will swear to yourself and to your parents that you will never touch drugs, that you will never take a single puff of weed or feel your nostrils burn in anticipation of that high. You will, of course, not keep this promise, and a year after your brother is locked up, you will find yourself trudging up his old dealer's stairs in Pico-Union to get your next fix. You will fall for a junkie then, some white boy a decade older than you. He will call you beautiful and you will believe him and he will kiss you between hits of ice, blowing clouds into your mouth, crystallizing your fantasies of a life with him. All of which will break all too easily. The time you spend together will be a rite of passage. You will learn by being cast into the fire and learning how to crawl out one step at a time.

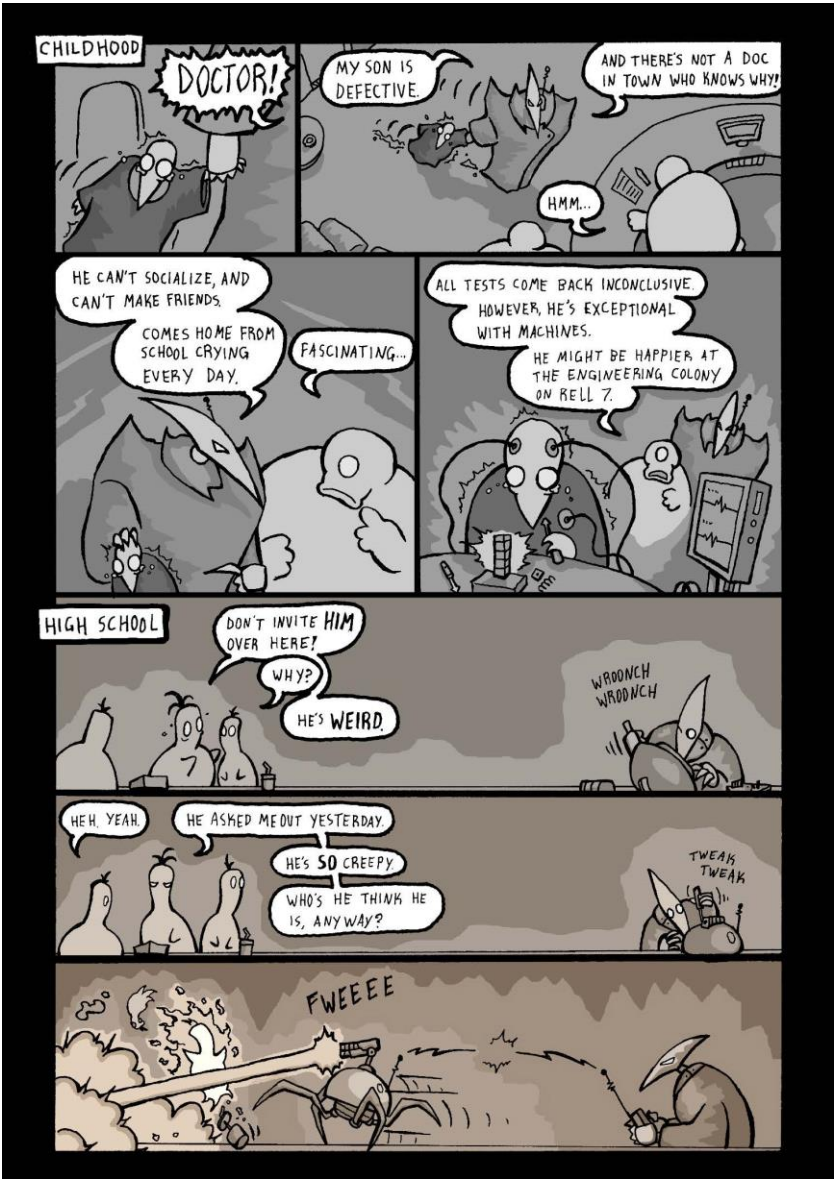
But right now, you're still seventeen and you're still sitting in your mother's kitchen. Right now, it's just bean soup and those punk asses calling you a faggot that have you all worked up. You and your mother work in silence, each of you taking a handful of beans and separating what is useful from what must be discarded—what will nourish you from what will only destroy you. You're on the brink of adulthood, learning that some days and years will be better than

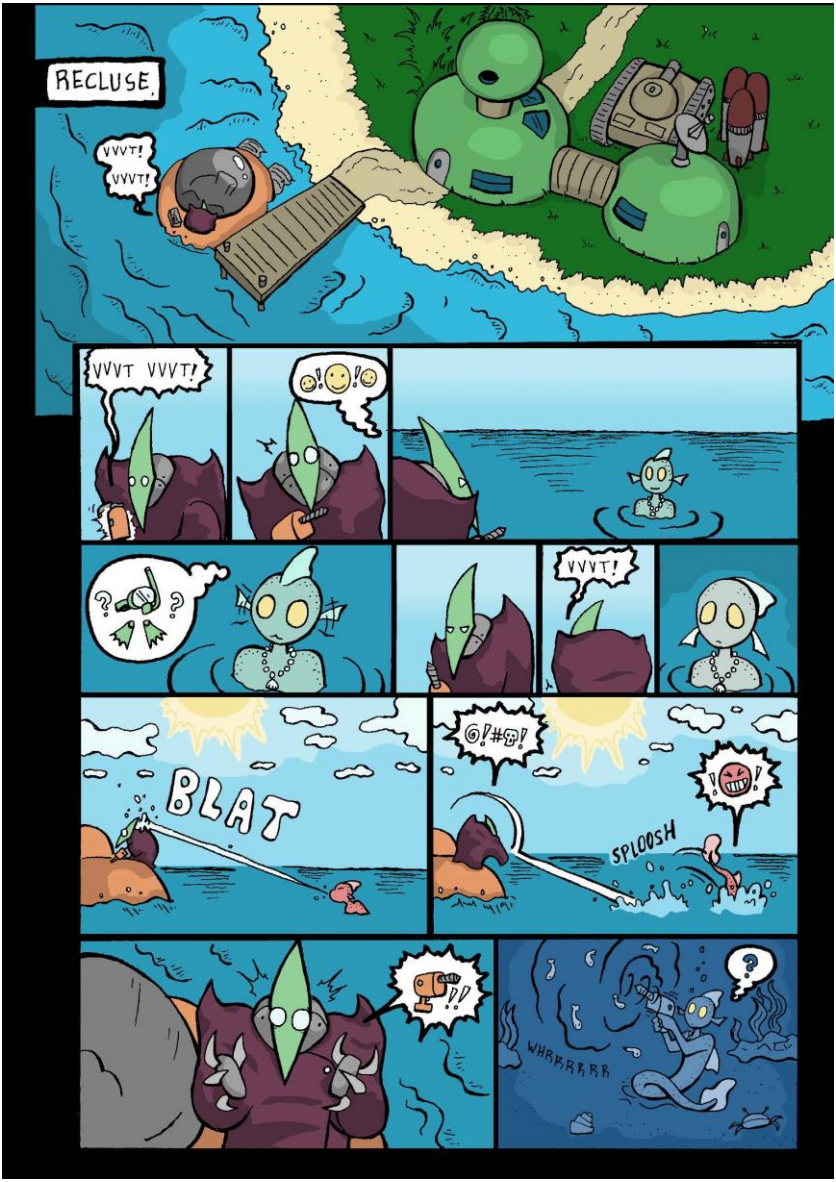
others—that some disrupt the flow of time and remain lodged forever in your memory, while others will allow time to pass, peacefully, on its mad rush to oblivion.

First Image from "Facing It Together" Series / Jack Bordnick

Rigel 2021 Runner-up

Rigel 2021 Finalist


CHILDHOOD
DOCTOR!
MY SON IS DEFECTIVE.
AND THERE'S NOT A DOC IN TOWN WHO KNOWS WHY!
HMM...
HE CAN'T SOCIALIZE, AND CAN'T MAKE FRIENDS.
COMES HOME FROM SCHOOL CRYING EVERY DAY.
FASCINATING...
ALL TESTS COME BACK INCONCLUSIVE. HOWEVER, HE'S EXCEPTIONAL WITH MACHINES.
HE MIGHT BE HAPPIER AT THE ENGINEERING COLONY ON RELL 7.
HIGH SCHOOL
DON'T INVITE HIM OVER HERE!
WHY?
HE'S WEIRD.
WROONCH WROONCH
HEH. YEAH.
HE ASKED ME OUT YESTERDAY.
HE'S SO CREEPY.
WHO'S HE THINK HE IS, ANYWAY?
TWEAK TWEAK
FWEEEE


RECLUSE
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BLAT
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NEIGHBOR
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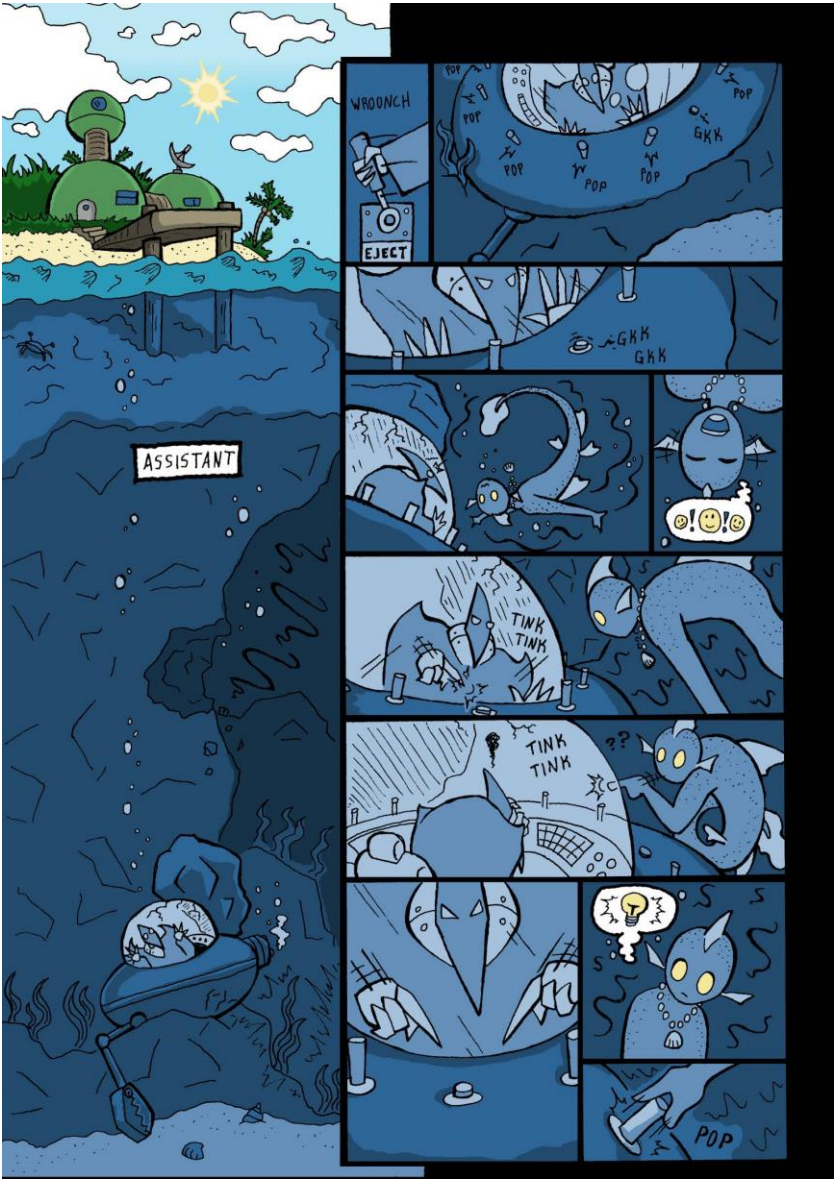
ASSISTANT
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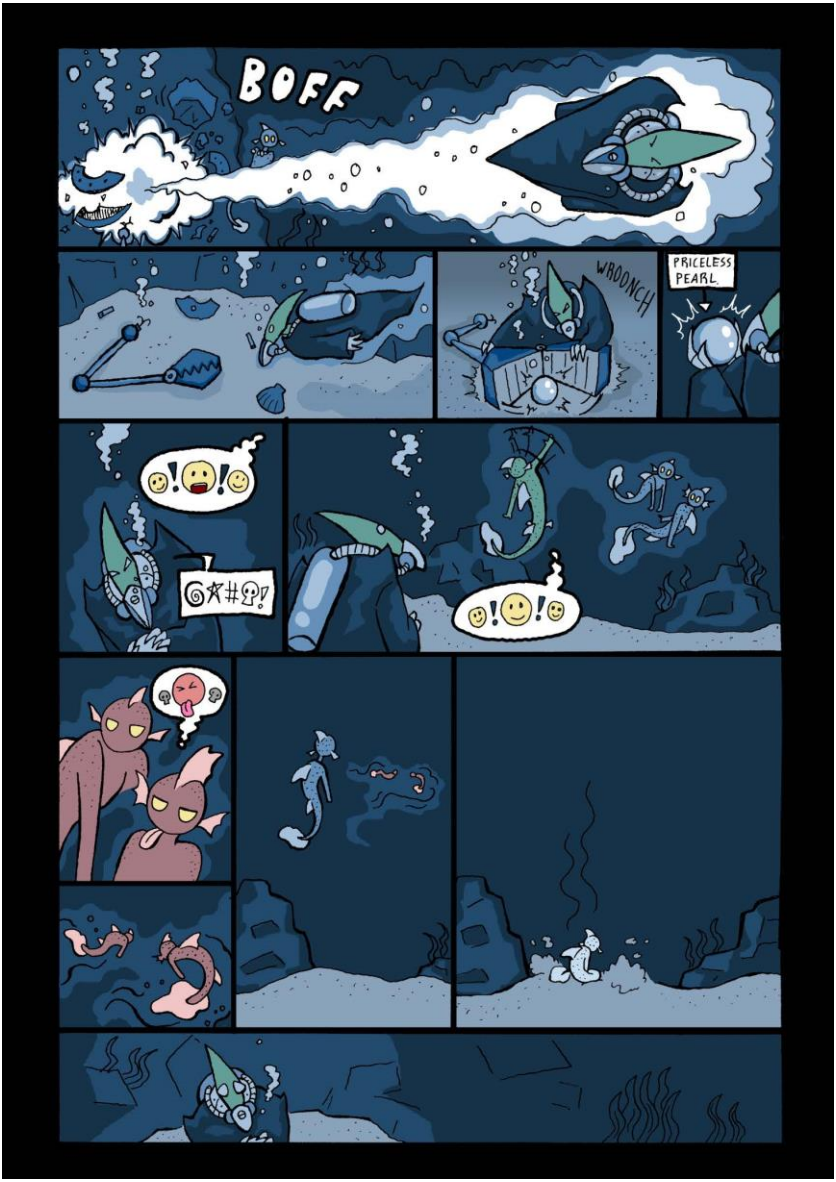
BOFF
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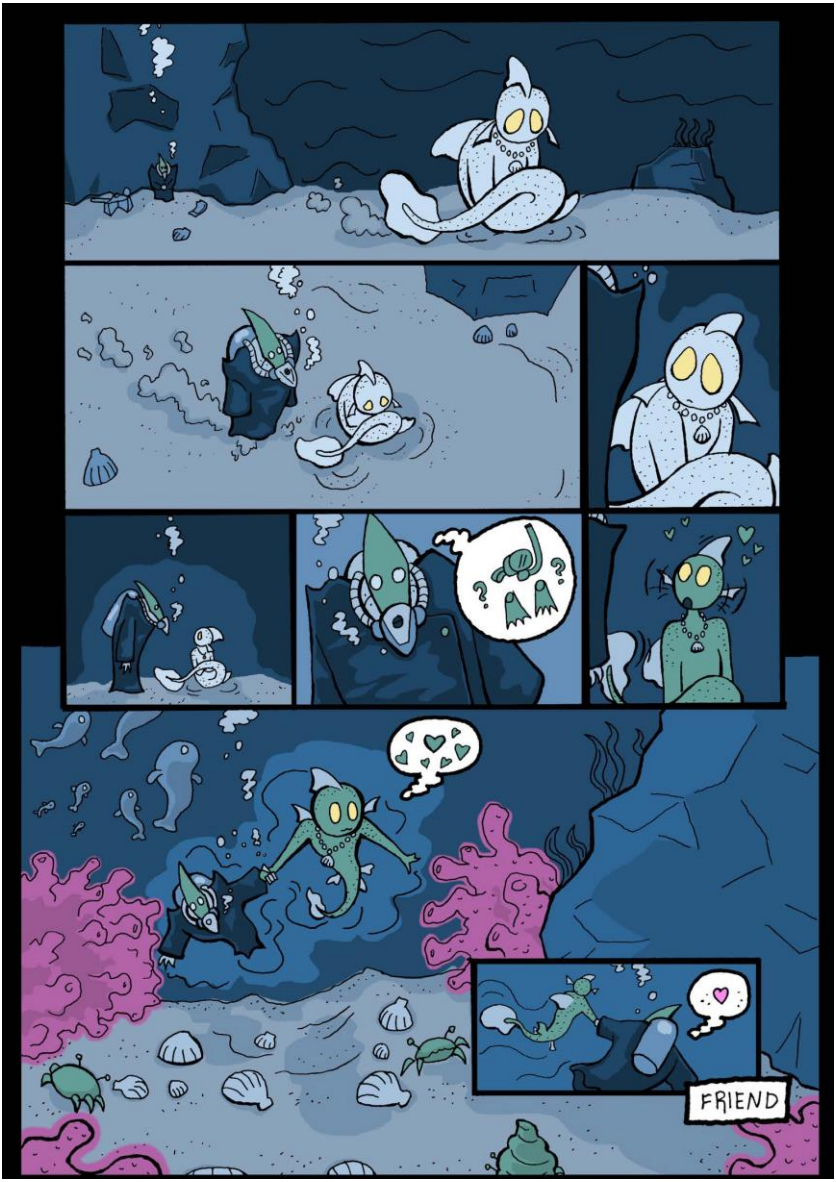
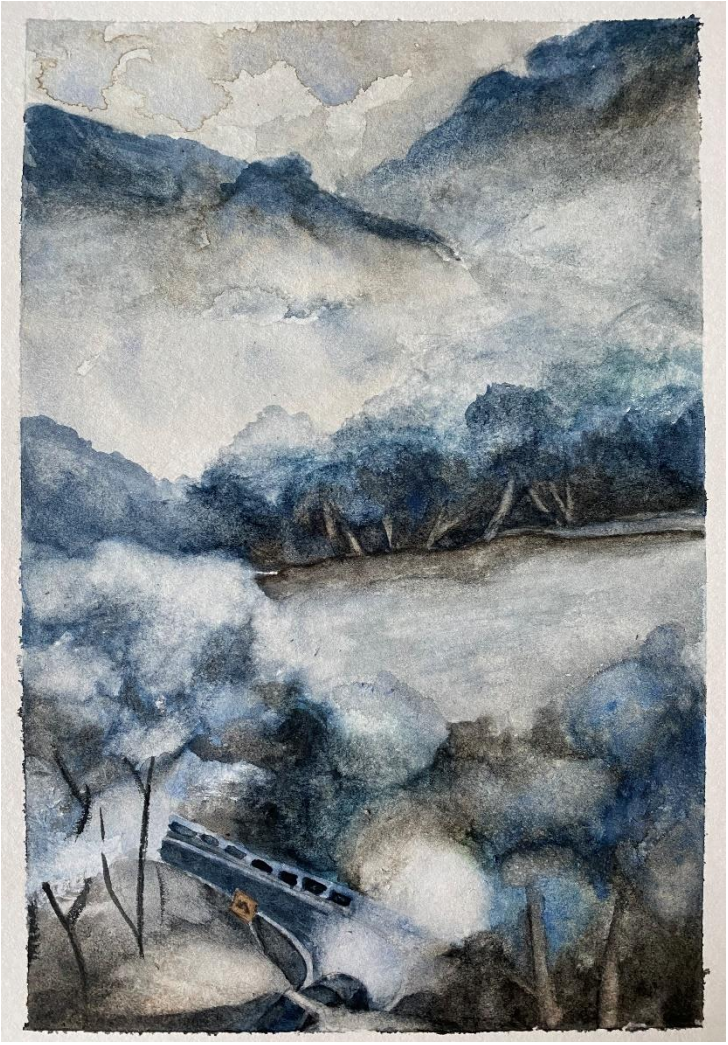
PRICELESS PEARL
@★#@!


FRIEND



The Coast / Vernon Shipway

Rigel 2021 Finalist

The City of Dreams

Ainhoa Palacios

Rigel 2021 Finalist

> **T**he only thing I could think of that morning was the way my mother told me things written in red were bad luck. A omen of something dark. *Corre pal otro lado*, she'd say.

1.

From what I can remember about the summer of 1980, it had only been two months since Tati's departure. Still, I could not—despite my best efforts—recognize my dear friend planted in the entryway of our village train station. There was the empty platform and lack of disembarking bodies, both typical of our station (if that's what someone chose to call that dilapidated metal shed), and yet I squinted and strained and still found her outline inconceivable. Maybe it was her newly upright posture. Her chin tilted skyward. Her jet-black hair let loose instead of in a pristine bun. Maybe, it was her smile that seemed to have grown larger in a way unrelated to size. Showier like it was waiting to be approached, waiting to spill forth with stories of her adventures.

That night I boiled the kettle while my dear best friend unpacked her suitcase right on the kitchen floor. *It's the future Mari!* She'd relentlessly dragged on with the same enthusiasm since our walk back from the station. *You just won't understand it until you go, you simply can't.* She was nearly shouting at me as if I'd tried to dispute her when in fact, I did believe her and needed no convincing. *It's like a whole city has just sprouted up from beneath the ground. Like it has been there all along and it's just now being dusted off. Overnight I'm telling you. Overnight!*

Over the next two hours, Tati would describe ad nauseam her two months living away. She would explain the intricacies of one's home city, or rather lack thereof, and its irrelevance. How nobody was a native, and 'transplants' was the word they used for one another even if one was only there for a short time for soon they'd undoubtedly make

their return again. Why would anyone stay away? How could they? For once, a city flush with jobs. Anglers, phone assemblers, construction workers. A legion of construction workers because how could there not be if on every block something splendid and towering was being built.

Months later and before the first snow fell, Ms. Lupe's son returned to our same dilapidated metal shed of a train station. Wide-eyed and with a cheerfully spooked expression that was beginning to seem to be a side effect of The City of Dreams. That's what people were calling it. Ms. Lupe's son, if memory serves me right, was a pompous lad of 25 who could not help from spouting off about the new high rises appearing every three days. Once again, we had to see it to believe it. What I never did understand, even all these years later, was this incessant need to convince, as if we, their listeners, were set on disbelieving.

2.

It was over dinner that I finally collected and mobilized what little courage I may have carried inside, sucking my belly close to my spine and withholding my exhale, reciting to myself *wait, wait.* Wait until mother was ladling arroz con leche onto father's bowl. I must've hoped the purple potatoes and choclo lulled them a bit, left them with the same sleepy docile haze of the village cows after they'd grazed.

I must explain to you that I, Mari, at twenty, was meek and small-framed and knew no other way to assert myself than let the unrehearsed words barge out of my mouth. *I want to go,* I said like a child lacking vocabulary. As if the location of my sentence was a given.

I expected gasps from mother and aggressive frowning from father's eyebrows, the way they both did when they did not agree. I expected a disregarding of my foolish ideas yet none of this could've stopped me for I was convinced this was my fate.

3.

My entire life, all pitiful twenty years of it, I'd accepted, even welcomed the idea of a struggle. My mother's lessons—*You are given what you are*

given, and *Ese es el mundo Mariana*— reverberated inside me anytime a less than grateful thought arose in me.

I spent my childhood listening to stories of my grandparents who'd struggled yet still gave thanks for their small room which provided *no relief on mosquito-ridden nights*. And I knew mother and father's story as if I'd been there myself. Born into a generation whose land was abruptly and unjustly no longer their own. Working tirelessly for hacienda owners who gave them little to feed themselves. Members of a village burying starved infants every other month, and when the protests began the only thing gained was the fear to sleep at night. But still, they gave thanks.

So why would my life be any different?

It was on that train ride, hidden in a back corner of the cart and compressing myself against the fogging window, that meek Mari finally dared to indulge that little girl who'd been aching to dream. Dare to dream in The City of Dreams. Cliche I know.

It wasn't that I dreamt of peasant turned millionaire. The word millionaire had little meaning for me. I didn't even dream of being an owner, a boss. No silly title allured. Not yet anyway. What I wanted was rather uncomplicated and unassuming— a life I'd decided on with something to strive for. Whatever that turned out to be.

The train ride was ten hours long, all which flew by for a young and fascinated woman like myself. I, who'd never been outside my village and once tried to measure its length using only my 6-year-old feet, didn't fight collapsing eyelids like the man sat beside me. I was pleased, no, thrilled to witness each sight. I wanted to absorb every river and lake and patch of open land my memory could hold.

The train was headed south, the direction my father told me I'd be traveling. He said mountains would begin popping up. Lush green mountains, jagged and uniform like a tiger's mouth. I decided then that was my favorite part and it remained so until the light blue billboard appeared, glimmering and sparkling:

"Everyone who comes to The City of Dreams belongs here."

4.

The City of Dreams turned out to be the city of magic, the city of hope with air so crisp it tickled your nose. It was grandiose and frightening, something like the thunderstorms back in the village with lightning bolts drawing you near, beckoning you closer than what father said was a safe distance, prompting you to ignore your racing heart.

I meandered through the streets— streets three times, four times, five times bigger than the ones in the village— with a slacked jaw. I inspected the shade of each edifice as if I were shopping for paint. My favorite was a cobalt gray like my mother's only winter coat. Others had no real shade but rather a shiny metal that reflected my image more times than I'd ever wished for and yet I didn't mind. I came across bamboo stems threaded together, magically tied at their meeting points only to pause and watch the men sat like schoolgirls on the beams. Feet dangling naively. How confidently they hammered and drilled, shirtless, unprotected, and unafraid of the falling debris. I could see the pride in their eyes, up mounted so high on their altars. Their orange hard hats serving as lanterns to the daytime sky.

Tati had given me one name: Ayacucho. This is where you'll find housing. An urban village, she called it. What I came upon was a stone wall so statuesque and smooth and magnetic, I entered without hesitation, and when I crossed the stone archway, what I found was a future full of possibilities.

Just beyond the cobblestone view were hundreds of buildings the color of weathered works of art. Light pinks, and yellows, lilacs, blues, patches of missing concrete. The only path veered right and down an alleyway so thin, I could spot neighbors exchanging gossip through the metal safety bars outside their windows. Later, I'd learn the jargon of the locals. Handshake houses and kissing buildings.

Outside a fruit shop where papayas ripened beneath the city's sun and *platanos* wafted their sweet tang through the air, I met a sturdy old woman whose smile outdid her size, one whose name would become so entangled with The City of Dreams, I would never dare to imagine one without the other. A lifelong friend, a second mother, who on this day must've taken note of my timid smile and my sunken eager gaze because she proceeded to reach out with a tray of cherries.

Try one, she smiled.

I hesitated but she cut my pause short. *They were just delivered this morning, go on.*

Thanking her for the single cherry, I plucked it from its stem with my teeth and held it in my mouth for as long as the pit yielded any hint of sweetness. Even the fruit tasted sweeter in this city!

I don't recognize you. What are you looking for here? she asked. Before I could get further than the word apartment, the woman was reaching for her purse from behind the counter. Follow me she commanded leading the way down the bends and loops of corridors. She explained the manager of some of these buildings didn't live far off. Just a few blocks down, plus she was certain there was room in her building. She was sprightly for someone with a hobble, speaking at the similar speed of one of those sports announcers. *How old are you? Do you have a husband? Are you also following the great migration?* It was a rapid-fire of questions requiring no response because finally, she settled on, *Oh yes, everyone is welcome in Ayacucho*, and the questions stopped.

Her name was Adelita.

5.

To my delightful surprise, both my dear friend and Ms. Lupe's son hadn't exaggerated when they said the city was brimful of factories.

My days began at four a.m.

Four a.m. was the only way to squeeze in the hour bus ride to a factory sitting in the outskirts of the city where I would begin twelve hours of sewing and stitching, and unstitching, and trimming lace fabric. Me and the fifty other women who did so with glee. Under fluorescent lighting, and sat with our sewing machine, scissors, knives, tape measures, pins and pincushions, tools I'd yet not learned the name of. Surrounded by circular padding meant for women's brasiers. Lace and satin. Pink fabric one week. Black another. Who would have imagined it? Me! A seamstress!

6.

Besides Adelita's fruit shop was Mr. Camilo's everything shop bursting with so many everythings a person could only fit inside if they walked laterally. He himself called it a junk shop. Plungers, pots, notebooks, mirrors, kettles, pens, hairbrushes. No one item ever displayed a price tag yet Mr. Camilo knew the price of each item through memory alone. It was never a made-up-on-the-spot number, something I'd first assumed until I began to test him. Asking the price of something in particular, writing it down, and waiting one month before asking again. His answers were always consistent.

Across from Mr. Camilo's everything shop was Sofi's flower shop. She and Mr. Camilo often sat playing rummy late into the night when surely nobody would visit either of their shops. I always did love to stop by Sofi's after work just to scout out any new flowers. I'd ask their name and write them down in my notebook, but mostly, I stopped by to see the brightest smile in the neighborhood, Mario. A shaggy-haired big-brown-eyed boy of four who, every morning, stood inside a red bucket bathing himself and splashing water on the stray dogs napping nearby.

7.

Every other Tuesday was my day off, and on those days, I purchased two *licuados* and a bag of *picarones* which I carried to Mr. Camilo's door, where I knocked, in the same manner, every time—two consecutive and delicate taps, a pause, and then a calling out of his name. Mr. Camilo always shouted back, *it's open.* Once inside, I'd slip my sneakers off and he'd offer me a cup of coffee which I never accepted because I knew he never kept milk around.

Without exchanging any more words, I left one *licuado* on the door-side table, carried the other to his blue-stained rocking chair, nestled down, and tucked my knees tight into my chest. The phone always rang six times before Flor from our village's post office answered. *One second Mari, they're right here.*

Hi father. Hola Mari. Your mother is right here. Hi mother, cómo están?

Our conversations were like a script we'd committed to rehearsing every week. Seldom did anyone forget their lines, much less miss the pauses indicating we were about to move on to the next question.

How's your job mija?

It's good. Tiring, pero estoy contenta.

And when will you return?

'Soon' was always my answer. Though soon was in fact not soon, and we all (father, mother, and I) understood it to mean never which must be why father always followed with *apúrate niña, that city is not your home.*

I always did agree, nodded my head as if father could not only hear me but see me. As if by agreeing with him I could convince myself against my own truth, a truth I decided the day I dashed past the light blue glimmering billboard.

The City of Dreams was my home, and I don't think I would have ever given that up.

8.

When I first told Adelita of my idea she was unboxing grapes and picking out the battered ones.

An underwear shop! I declared.

Adelita stopped her search for bruised grapes and looked at me with luminous eyes. The corners of her lips expanded to let a joyous laugher out.

For the last ten years, I'd watched as Ayacucho grew to become a small city of its own with its fruit shops, massage parlors, fortune tellers, flower shops, nail salons, shoe repairs. Everything one needed sat inside our fortress walls and finally, it occurred to me, it was my turn to join the story.

Plus, after all the cutting and stitching and sewing, and years of gazing onto cardboard boxes and their logos, I knew who could provide the fabric. If they were any good for business. If they were cheap enough. I'd grown to be an expert at manufacturing brasiers.

How thick a strap should be, how many clasps, the cut of a cup for the cut of a woman.

At first, my shop had no sign, no way of differentiating itself from the others but slowly it came together. I hung a fluorescent pink sign reading Mari's Collections. I painted the rolling garage door a peachy pink, and its inside a bright white. There was a small changing room behind a satin black curtain and an even smaller room where I could take measurements in private if someone wanted a custom order. And boy, were there custom orders. All of the women in Ayacucho came to me!

9.

The only thing I could think of that morning was the way my mother told me things written in red were bad luck. An omen of something dark, *corre pal otro lado*, she'd say. And there was the word demolish written on the garage doors of my eight-by-six shop.

The letters dripped like blood. Casually. Leisurely as if demolish was a slow process and not as swift as a 13,000-pound wrecking ball. Adelita stood silently, head bowed the way she did when she visited her church and prayed to her saints.

When did they write this? I asked and she shrugged. Her shop hadn't been marked yet, but we knew it would be soon for The City of Dreams hadn't stopped. Not in forty years. In fact, in that time it had grown to be 38 million people's City of Dreams.

The term the world used now was Dream speed. Birthed from the quickness with which buildings were demolished and rebuilt, built to be demolished, planned, and executed in this city, people in those days liked to use phrases like: I'll be there in dream speed.

10.

***I** am now standing in front of Ayacucho Village.* I hated that reporter. *One of the original villages in The City of Dreams. Here live the modest workers who some call the heart of the city. Today, the most historic parts of this city*

face being demolished as the city's mayor announced new plans for these notorious handshake houses.

I remember those sentences like I do Hail Marys.

She was lean. Wore a sleek tidy bun, a pencil skirt, and patent leather pumps. Her steps were the length of a toddler's because I could only assume she feared stepping in the cracks between cobblestones. She'd marched right into our home a few weeks after the construction company came to hand us our notice. She pried and snooped, insisting on interviews with a stiff smile painted on. Insensitive bitch she was. She probably lived in one of those towering buildings beside us, one of the ones that would be built atop our shops to house more people like her. More insensitive bitches.

Adelita was kind to her from the start and she pushed me to do the same. *It may be our only chance at surviving*, she said. If people knew, if they cared, maybe the government would listen.

They wouldn't.

Since The City of Dreams had begun its rise, the number of suburban villages in the city had decreased from 2,000 to us. We were the last standing and so we knew well, from hearsay, there would be no reparations. At least not for the renters. For the lucky landlords, to be demolished was to hit the jackpot. They would be paid millions of dollars for their run-down roach-infested buildings with which they could easily purchase any number of extravagant apartments in one of the thousands of new skyscrapers The City of Dreams had erected in its short history.

We, however, were given two months to evacuate. When we asked where should we go, the landlords said, home.

11.

Soon it will be The City of Dream's fortieth anniversary. The whole city will celebrate. Families of all ranks—the rich in uppity restaurants, the poor in the unadorned and simple. Every bar will be bursting, swarmed with people, shots of Pisco passed around.

The city's most beloved park will be the place to go for the display of lights against the tallest skyscrapers. I will stand bearing

witness to the bursting pixels of ruby red and fiery orange on the towers. Images of families skipping through hills, the outline of kites—pictures that rang truer to me many years ago. Patriotic pan flutes will resonate down streets whilst fathers hoist their children on their shoulders and mothers sob with pride. Our city.

On this day, I will no longer be a meek 20-year-old, but rather a decaying 66-year-old woman who has made her last trip into The City of Dreams. I will be carrying Adelita inside a golden locket and thinking of Mr. Camilo, and wondering where Sofi and Mario are these days and if I'll ever see them again. I will, for the last time, look upon that glimmering blue billboard which will no longer glimmer the way it once did for me for I know it will soon be taken down. Replaced with one that's sleeker, bigger, shinier. What will this one say?

And I will feel the pang of longing for a past I cannot recover. For a city that once wrapped me in acceptance, welcomed me like a mother does her newborn child. A city that once stood so beautifully, yet on this day, monstrously. For a city that won't forget who built it. A city I once belonged in.

Contributors

Jack Bordnick's interest is to create artistic, meaningful works of art that can be enjoyed by all peoples and cultures. Being a designer and sculptor has allowed him to share his professional experiences in a beneficial way for both business and community projects. He has been a successful designer and has over twenty years of experience in design. Jack is a graduate of Pratt Institute in New York. Living in New Mexico has allowed him to have a deep understanding of the culture and environment, which has influenced his artistic interpretation and creative solutions.

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Garrett Candrea grew up in Eastchester, New York and currently lives in Astoria, Queens. He holds a bachelor's degree in computer science from Fordham University. His work has appeared in *Sunspot*.

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Nicole F Kimball is a twenty-three-year-old Jewish mother, poet, and musician from SLC, UT. She holds an A.S. in Writing Studies, and loves to express herself through words. Her works have most recently been accepted into *Bear Creek Gazette*, *Trouvaille Review*, *Book of Matches*, and *The Hearth*, as well as being a featured writer in *THE POET Magazine*.

Mike MacDee is a veterinary technician and an author of comics, books, and games, who can't seem to find time to sleep. He is always eager to pet a dog, smoke a good cigar, or share amusing stories with likeminded weirdos.

Ainhoa Palacios was born in Lima, Peru, and moved to the US at the age of six. She grew up in Florida with her mother and sister, as well as her grandmother, who occasionally visited during summers. She graduated from the University of South Florida with a B.A. in journalism, but soon after remembered it was a different kind of storytelling she loved. Since then, she has completed a novel and countless short stories, one of which was recently long-listed in Fish Publishing's Short Memoir contest. Ainhoa lives in Shenzhen, China with her dog Mambo.

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