TLR

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WOMEN'S STUDIES
Not by the book

THE LITERARY REVIEW

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FAIRLEIGH DICKINSON UNIVERSITY

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TLR

WOMEN'S STUDIES
FALL 2014

A PLURALITY THAT CANNOT BE INTEGRATED INTO UNITY IS CHAOS; UNITY UNRELATED TO PLURALITY IS TYRANNY. —BLAISE PASCAL

EDITOR'S NOTE

Women's Studies when I was in college was a fairly straightforward, interdepartmental major that, at my school, emphasized continental literary theory and its blunter-edged cousin, identity politics, as well as (interestingly enough) health care from a social-historical perspective. Other colleges, like the one I briefly wanted to transfer to in sophomore year, folded women's studies into the cultural theory departments—like film crit and pop culture. Across town in one direction, Mary Daly was teaching feminist theology—a radicalized approach that seemed to rely a great deal on genderizing the Godhead. A couple of miles north, Carol Gilligan was studying psychological development and reconceptionalizing the idea of gender inequality into theories of difference. It was a brilliant moment in academia. Naomi Wolf was thinking about Barbie and the Beauty Myth, Jean Kilbourne's documentary *Killing Us Softly* was showing us the shackles in the mascara ads. My stepmother, a musicologist, was giving papers on the sonata as a feminine form. And linguists at Berkeley were running speech pattern analyses to demonstrate that women had submissive behavior built into their syntax—you know, that inability to just assert something without intimating a need for approval, or seconding? Everything women said ended with a real or implied question mark, didn't it.

It was in so many respects a thrilling time for feminism—brainy, creative, political, well funded, totally engaged. Second-wave was giving way to third-wave and post-structural feminism. People were debating language and action, history and policy. Camille Paglia, the Joan Rivers of feminist theory, filled to capacity our 500-seat theater in Alumnae Hall. And we were feverish with excitement. We cheered her for talking

sense about shoulder pads and lipstick and booed when she was glib and dismissive about problematics we had dedicated entire semesters to analyzing. Everyone walked away with a debatable opinion. She might have been half wrong about almost everything, but she said it loudly enough so that everyone heard her. It was ballsy; she made celebrity into a feminist issue. Really, once you allowed that gender dynamics permeated everything, you could argue, interpret, and justifiably study anything. I, for example, incorporated all of my women's studies into a frame-by-frame analysis of Michelangelo Antonioni's films—the ones with Monica Vitti.

Over the last few years, feminism has taken another shift—or rather, churned itself forward into new arenas. There is a great deal of community building facilitated by social media, which seems like a low-commitment, high-yield strategy for action, and to some lesser extent, maybe it's an action itself. There is a new polemic around the word "rape." There is a sea change in the world of gender identity, lines being blurred and/or politicized in a way that was embryonic only a generation ago—and this momentum is introducing fascinating new variables and nuances into all brands of equality theory. And lastly, there is a formidable new force for clarity and change in the unsexy field of statistics.

Later in her career, the groundbreaking feminist Betty Freidan somewhat controversially turned her attentions toward building institutional support. Her advocacy turned extremely practicable, and she became interested in day care and family flextime. These battles must have seemed so mundane after having won the war against the housewife's suicidal contagion, "the problem that has no name." And yet she was prescient. According to the American Association of University Women, the most tangible demonstration of residual gender inequity (in the US) lies in a statistical gender wage gap that grows prominently during the years that women have babies and parent small children. Notably, the Wellesley Centers for Women take pains to include full-time fathers in their research on work-family balance in labor law. When I heard that last point brought up in a presentation last spring, I realized the remarkable capacity that hard data has to introduce nuance into a sledgehammer issue.

Data was in fact the inspiration behind pulling together a themed issue on women's studies. For years it hasn't seemed interesting or pertinent to think about feminism broadly. Everything, to me, has seemed too resolved, too quirky, or too much about personal agency—not a movement—fallow ground. But data forced the subject up through the soil. From spreadsheet surveys of women's presence in literary magazines to new research on breast cancer prevention: statistics, hard data, gorgeous immutable information. Information that determines ideas, rather than vice versa. What would those ideas be? Anything like what we used to think? I'm no good with numbers, but I did suddenly want to know what women's studies might be about now that twenty years have passed since its heyday. And that is the theme this issue meditates on. This was an agenda-less issue. The work included here is entirely exploratory, wildly diverse, gleefully inconclusive. Think of it as a straw poll.

Nuance is typically the province of literature. But I've come to understand, in thinking about where feminism was and where it is, that numbers are encroaching on the exclusive claim to subtlety.

Minna Proctor

EDITOR EMERITUS'S NOTE

We regret that Lane Dunlop, a *TLR* advisory editor for close to three decades, died on August 31, 2014 in New York at the age of 76. His specialty was translating Japanese fiction, contributing a number of stories to this magazine between 1980 and 2002. He also served as guest editor of the Winter 1996 issue (Vol. 39:2) devoted to English versions of Japanese writing.

Lane's translation of *A Late Chrysanthemum* won the Japan-United States Friendship Award for Literary Translation. In 1997 the American Academy of Arts and Letters presented him with an Academy Award in Literature, praising the "assertive mastery that is evident not only in his fluent translations but also in his choices of texts." Other books include *The Paper Door and Other Stories*, *Palm of the Hand Stories*, *Autumn Wind*, the novellas *During the Rains* and *Flowers in the Shade*, and the novel *Floating Clouds*.

After his graduation from Yale in 1957, Lane began his literary career as a translator of works in French, then studied Japanese and turned to concentrating on pre-1960's Japanese literature. We considered that time period suited to his sensibility because his contributions arrived on pages from a manual typewriter and our exchanges were always by post because he did not have email.

We are thankful for Lane's long association with *TLR* and for his ability to make important Japanese writing available to English readers.

Walter Cummins

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and settled in the distant rim
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                imperative:
            put yourself to sleep

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some of them automatic-
writing)

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    and the mound

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there was
an awkward pause

it cleared its throat
caught

the condescending air

STORY

Kelly Cherry
Famousness

Georgianna Starlington had won Miss Fried Okra, Miss Yoknapatawpha County, Best Sandra Dee Lookalike, and Miss Delta Deltoids before she was out of her teens. She would never be Miss America, but she had been Miss American Pie.

She had always thought she would take the state title, and when she didn't, when she came in First Runner Up instead, she began to diss Miss Mississippi. "Her hair looked like it was spray painted," she said. "By a hairdresser with palsy! Her boobs were held up by so much wire you could have called long distance on them. And those fish lips!"

She was hurting, and angry, and in what she vaguely considered revenge, she quit the pageant circuit and took a job as a photographer's glamour model—but she found little glamorous about it. (There was nothing glamorous about it.) Seeking a little dignity, she called herself a photographer's model on her business cards.

Her face and body were now on flyers and in the back pages of free newspapers all over Mississippi. The ads she appeared in were for gentlemen's clubs, escort services, massage parlors, adult video stores, outfits with ampersanded names like Naughty & Nice and Hot & Wild and sex aid stores. She was on billboards and calendars. "I am darn disgusted," her father said. "What the hell are you thinking?"

At first, her failure had felt like an asthma attack: It made it hard to breathe, blurred her vision, forced tears from her eyes. She knew she ought to sit down and let the feeling pass. Then she'd be able to make a reasonable decision about what to do with her life. But she couldn't sit down, she was too hurt and angry and agitated, and all she could think about was the judges, the fat-ass judges who couldn't tell

silicone from saline from honest-to-god tits, which were what Georgianna had, no artificial sweetener in her goddamned coffee thank you! So she had wept and made an unreasonable, despairing decision, and now, five years later, she was a model for sleazy enterprises. An "artistic" model. An artistic model who would soon have enough bucks saved to go to Los Angeles and start her movie career, an artistic model who refused to take off all her clothes for the camera, but an artistic model all the same, with see-through tops and panties that never quite covered her ass.

The worst of it was, the hurt and anger were still there. They had settled in her chest like an unshakable cold.

One weekend in June she borrowed her parents' cabin to get away from the rat race in Jackson. She stopped in at the general store on her way out there. Boxes of Wolverines and open-stock overalls lined the shelves. There was bait and tackle, ammunition, chewing tobacco, and *USA Today*. She bought toothpaste and a box of 30.06 ammo.

Georgianna had tucked her platinum hair under the elastic backstrap and bill of her Yankees baseball cap, but some of it had escaped, especially in the back. She wore a black tee-shirt in a size large, but her breasts were still very, very evident. She had on jeans and hiking shoes, which only made her look even *more* like a girl.

At least, Hodder had no trouble recognizing her as a girl as she drove up the dirt road.

He was in the woods behind her cabin, where he'd come because he'd picked out a particular tree for the particular task of hanging himself. He was worn out from bad dreams and bad memories. He'd set an overturned thirty-gallon metal garbage can underneath the limb of the sweetgum, looped a rope over the limb, and knotted the rope around his neck. All he had to do was kick the garbage can out from under him. He took a last look at the world, a hawk circling in the sky, sun setting its wings on fire; a black snake rippling like water over the ground; and Georgianna in her Yankees cap in her pickup, tearing up the dirt road, her breasts bouncing with every rise and rut.

She was a girl who just looking at her could change your mind about calling it quits.

He yanked the rope off, undid the knot, and jumped down from the garbage can.

He wanted to meet her, but he was too shy just to go up to her and introduce himself. What would he say? "I'm Hodder and I think you're the prettiest thing I

ever saw and on account of catching sight of you I ain't gone kill myself"? If she didn't spit in his eye, she would shrug and turn her back on him. But he took notice of the license plate on her pickup.

Georgianna had been a good shot all her life. Her dad had taught her. He had started her with a BB gun. From the first time she pulled the trigger she could drill the slender metal posts holding up the garden fence. Her mother said, "Look at her, Millard. Take a real good look at your baby girl. She looks like Sandra Dee or Fawn Hall, somebody like that. Why does she have to shoot a gun?"

"All the more reason," he said. "Kid needs to be able to protect herself."

Her mother had already entered Georgianna in the Little Miss Five-Mile Creek Beauty Pageant. Her plans for her daughter included the state title, followed by stardom on stage and screen, followed by marriage to a doctor, lawyer, or movie mogul. Georgianna didn't know if she wanted to be married and she didn't care about doctors and lawyers, but she loved playacting and being in school plays and daydreamed all the time about what life would be like when she became a movie star. Sometimes she could *see* herself, as if there were a movie screen flitting in the air right in front of her and she was watching herself on it, and she imagined what it would be like to be loved by an audience, to know she was offering the audience something that was missing from their own lives, to be the special thing they were all looking for. At such times she knew that being beautiful was what made her special, that this was what she could do for the world and what the world would thank her for. Besides, it was a blunt fact: How she looked was her only possible ticket out of the Delta.

So Georgianna tried to please both her parents. Her father moved her to a single-shot .22, safe, he said, even for kids. He had her hit cans on posts from farther and farther away until, after a couple of years, she could hit the cans when hardly anyone else could even see them. By then she could shoot a fly on a counter with a BB gun. She *liked* it, and she liked pleasing her daddy. It made him feel less left out, she thought, from all the beauty stuff. He had been a legendary shooter in his day. "I used to could shoot flies out of the *air* with a BB gun," he said, letting her know that if she was good, she could still get better. Eventually he taught her to shoot a shotgun, a .410. When she got older he moved her up to a 20-gauge and then a 12-gauge and then started her on high-powered rifles. He even taught her how to strip an M-14, a gun he'd used in the Vietnam War. Not the same actual gun, but

the same kind, which could tear off a man's arm if he was hit in the shoulder.

When she raised her 12-gauge to her shoulder to bring down a duck she moved as smoothly and effortlessly as the river itself.

The beauty pageants included talent competitions. Her talent had been field stripping the M-14. She could take an M-14 apart and put it back together in nothing flat. Blindfolded. In a beauty pageant, this talent was piquant. The male judges thought it was cute. The women judges thought it was a talent that they would have found rewarding, if only they had it. Tap dancing, everybody was tired of tap dancing. Everybody was tired of harpists.

Hodder didn't want to scare her any. He was no stalker. It was just that he had been struck down by love, and he wasn't going to be able to go on with (or end) his life until he declared it.

Hodder made his living fishing the river. He also did a little truck farming. He didn't need much, which worked out well, because he didn't have much. He had a real mattress and springs, bought from the Salvation Army, but no bed frame. He had a refrigerator and a hot plate and an electric coffee pot. He had indoor plumbing and a mirror over the sink, and he had a wood-burning stove to keep warm by in winter time. He had all of his hair. Two of his teeth on one side he had lost in a fight, but he'd put the cocksucker who started it in the ER and the empty place didn't show unless you were looking deep inside, and who was going to do that? He weren't no horse up for sale.

In fact, he had his fair share of brains, and he knew he was not a man a woman like her would look at twice, or even hearken to once, but he wasn't expecting his love to be reciprocated. He just wanted her to know about it.

A man cannot experience such emotion mutely.

He ran his comb under the faucet and raked it through his hair, making tracks in it. His hair was going gray at the temples; in fact, he thought—and it was a thought that made him wince—he was beginning to look like his daddy, may the son of a bitch rest in pieces. He attacked his stubble with a razor, nicking himself twice. He stopped the bleeding with toilet paper, and with the toilet paper still stuck to his face, he put on his cleanest shirt and pants. He remembered to peel the toilet paper over his lip off before he left but forgot about the piece on his jaw, which clung there like a moth on a lampshade.

When he arrived at her door, he was carrying a plastic container of stew.

*

She was around the back of the cabin, staying sharp with a bolt-action 30.06. As he came around to the back, she pointed it at him, sighted down the barrel, and asked who he was.

"Hodder," he said. He paused a second and added, "Miss," to be respectful.

"That your front name?"

He shrugged. "It's what folks call me."

"What do you want?"

He held out the container. "I brung you some stew."

She kept the gun on him. "Do I look hungry to you?"

"Just bein' neighborly," he said.

"How do I know it's not poisoned?"

"Poisoned?"

"Poisoned."

"Why would it be poisoned?"

"I don't know. Maybe you're the kind of man who would poison his neighbor."

"I ain't."

She lowered the gun, slung the strap over her shoulder, and pried the lid off. "Brunswick stew?"

He noted that she had not turned the safety off, and that she had a pistol in her holster. "Made the *real* way, with squirrel, not chicken."

"I don't like squirrel." She handed the container back to him and raised up her rifle again.

"Oh." He'd not considered that she might not like squirrel. What was he going to do with it now? He'd have to stand there holding it, looking like a damn fool. "Oh now. I didn't know that."

"How would you? Say again who are you?"

"Hodder."

"You cut yourself shaving, Hodder." She reached out her hand and flicked the toilet paper off his jaw with a fingernail. "What do you want?"

Hodder cleared his throat. "I saw you driving up this way yesterday. You're the prettiest thing—"

"Are you some kind of a pervert?"

He could feel his face getting red. At the same time, he admired her directness. "No, miss."

"'No, Miss Southern Comfort' to you."

Hodder was surprised. She didn't look like a drinker.

"Miss Okra," she continued. "Miss Fucking Junior Miss. Miss I Must Have Been Crazy to Think I Could Ever Go Somewhere."

"Where was it you was fixing to go?" She still had a bead on him. He kept both guns in the corner of his eye just in case she was the rambunctious type.

She started to say Hollywood. Instead, she said, "Where I want to go, it's more like a state of mind. Someplace where I'll know I'm somebody. That's where I want to go. Now get along before I blow your head off."

Where I want to go, it's more like a state of mind. Someplace where I'll know I'm somebody. That's where I want to go. Now get along before I blow your head off.

He felt he could understand why she might do that. Here he was, and she must think he was the world's biggest dope in addition to being a stalking pervert. His arms felt too long for his sleeves, his legs too long for his blue jeans, his hair too long and scraggly for polite company. He'd been in the Army and afterwards he swore he'd never let a barber at him again.

She had green eyes, at least they looked green in the afternoon sun, and strands of her white-gold hair blew against her cheeks. Her nose was short and straight and her lips turned up so that she looked like she was smiling even though she wasn't. Admiringly, with his heart like a stampede in his chest, Hodder said, "Hey, now! Ain't you sumpin'! I do truly think you're sumpin'!"

"What would you know," she said. "You're clearly some kind of a pervert."

Hodder left, but hung around just out of sight. He stood behind a grove of thick-trunked pine trees and watched her shoot. She had hung strips of masking tape to the clothesline and stuck pennies and dimes to the tape that she proceeded to knock the pennies and dimes off of from better than fifty feet away. She brought that small change down bam, bam, bam, just like that, each bam followed by a ping when the bullet hit its mark. Ping, ping, ping, just like that. He'd never seen such shooting. No one he ever met in the Army would have been able to match her. But he was ashamed of his time in the Gulf and wouldn't mention it to her. The Gulf War had been more about bombs and airplanes, and next to the Iraq War, it weren't no more than a blip. The sun pinged off the clay pigeons and she lifted the shotgun to the sky like she was aiming straight for God Hisself.

He did not think that she was being mean to him; she was just looking out for herself, as a girl who looked like that had most likely found she had to do.

He'd always thought of the cabin she was staying in as the old Stillwater place. It took him a while, keeping his ears open at the filling station, to figure out that old Stillwater had been her mother's brother. Seb had hanged himself from one of the cypresses that loomed up out of the dark, turbid swamp bordering the river. That was how he'd got the hanging notion. On foggy mornings, with the Spanish moss on the black limbs, and crooked knees made to dance by shifting light and sluggish water, you could think he was hanging there still.

Cattails poked up at the edge of the still water. The riverbanks sloped up to where reeds got a foothold and then honeysuckle and creeper vine, and finally the pines. There was space between the treetops where you could get a good look at the stars at night. It was good bottom land for growing things, visited at night by owls and gators and coons and all manner of mysterious life, and over at his place Hodder grew corn, peas, lettuce, tomatoes, collards, cabbage, beans, squash, and watermelons. At night a gator's eyes would glow red when you shined a flashlight at them, but it didn't bother you if you didn't bother it.

To bail free from his father, Hodder had dropped out of high school to join the army—and wound up in the Gulf War, with its stinging sand and scorpions and insidious chemicals, and when he got out what he wanted most of all was to be left alone. He liked to look at seed catalogues and kept them in a row against the bottom of the wall. If he needed to learn something, like how to shore up a cracked foundation, he went to the library or Barnes & Noble in Jackson. He'd found this shack sinking into the earth and pulled it back up and made it livable, if just barely. Life in a shack had been educational. He knew bird calls, frog calls, the river and weather. His hearing grew acute: the least sound of a deer picking a path through undergrowth or a coon at the window and he was awake and listening. Some nights the only sounds were ones he dreamed, a soundtrack for the moving pictures in his head, every movie a horror show. Some nights the war and his father got mixed together like laundry and went round and round till he woke up feeling like it was him in the machine. When he woke up, the quiet would come as a shock, but he liked the quiet. He liked the smell of the country. The river and the dirt. The dirt was black and crumbly, and unlike people, it didn't wear a watch.

Time was what he had plenty of, so he took to spending a part of each day watching her from out of sight. And no matter how good a shot she was, she was a girl. One day he watched her struggling to open a stuck window. Finally he couldn't stand it

any longer and emerged from his hiding place and went back up to the cabin. "Can I help?" he asked.

She tucked a lock of hair back under her cap. She was wearing one of those tight tops girls wore these days that looked like somebody forgot to sew on the bottom half. He saw that she had an outie, then quickly looked away as if he'd seen something he shouldn't have.

"I thought I told you to get lost."

"Yes'm," he agreed. "You did."

Hodder stood there, silent, his hands hanging slackly straight down by his pants, his face glowing.

She stood back from the window, which she was on the other side of. She was looking at him and considering. He saw her deciding he was harmless. "Hold on a minute," she said, and went to let him in, but when he was inside, she stayed close by the door.

The window frame had swollen in the humidity. It didn't come up as easily as he would have wished, but he tried not to let his face show it. "There you go," he said.

"How did you know I was trying to get the window open? If you were watching me from that clump of trees"—he was impressed again by her smarts—"you know by now how good I am with a gun."

"Yes'm," he said. "I seen."

"I could shoot you dead from half a mile away. More."

"I know."

"I could take your ear off at a hundred yards."

"I believe you could."

"Just so long as you understand that."

"I do."

"Well, all right then."

"Is it anything else you need getting done?" he asked. "Neighbors got to help one another, what I say," he clarified. Then he added, "I knew your uncle."

"There's a leak in the roof."

"Won't be for long," he said. He looked up and studied the ceiling, as if he could see the roof and its leak right through it.

"Who was my uncle?" she asked, testing him.

"Seb Stillwater."

"You just heard that at the store," she said.

He *had* heard from the fellows at the filling station that Seb's sister had married Millard Starlington, a loom technician and a sharpshooter with many blue ribbons who had taught his daughter to handle a piece.

Hodder kept his shack neat. He had learned neatness in the army, not from his old man, who had usually stunk of piss and booze. Maybe if Hodder's mother had stuck around—if she hadn't run off with the meter reader—things would have been different. His dad might have taken a bath now and again. Might've tucked in his shirttails, waited for company to leave before he scratched and shifted his balls. Might've hesitated before hitting Hodder with the two-by-four always within his reach. With a pig, a sloth, and an ape for a father, Hodder was proud of his hospital corners, the swept floor, his clothes hung from nails hammered into the wall. He had been four when his mother left, and he couldn't remember anything about her except that she had brown eyes. He didn't even remember exactly what they looked like, only that they were brown.

Someone had asked him once if he ever wondered why his mother hadn't taken him with her, but there were so many answers that it was foolish to fret about them. She needed to save herself. The meterman didn't want or require a son. His mother saw his father in him and was repulsed. Of course she was. He had repulsed himself until he shipped out.

He kept his keys on a nail just inside the front door. There was a small table for mail, which he did not get much of. His fishing rods waited in a corner.

As the days and then weeks went by he helped her out a lot, and it seemed to him that she had gotten used to his presence. When she closed up the cabin and went back to Jackson, he left the river and fishing behind and went too, by bus, though he didn't tell her he was going. He paid nine dollars and got her address from the Department of Motor Vehicles, using her license plate number. The next thing he did was knock on her door and offer his help.

He watched her face play through a repertoire of reactions before she settled on one. He could have stood there and watched her face all day long.

"You *are* a stalker. I'm calling the cops. I'm going to take out a restraining order against you."

As quickly as he could, he told her how his shack would get too cold in the winter (and it did get cold, though he had spent many winters in it) and that he had thought he could be her handyman in Jackson.

She sighed.

"Besides," he said, somehow managing to hold his breath while he said the words, "I was worried you would miss me." This was a risk. Would she admire his wit or be ticked off by his presumption?

She smiled. Not a big smile, but a smile all the same.

If he could have pressed her smile into an album, like a flower, he would have.

"Don't go getting any ideas."

"The only ideas I ever get is the ones I turn up at Barnes & Noble," he said, feeling proud of being witty again, and then instantly feeling like an idiot for explaining to her that he *was* an idiot.

In Jackson Hodder kept a low profile, because Mr. and Mrs. Starlington might not countenance his presence in their daughter's life.

Which was now regular and steady, almost like showing up for real work, except that being around Georgianna was never work in Hodder's mind.

In Jackson Georgianna lived in an apartment over a garage. Sometimes it seemed to her that her landlord roared in and out underneath all night long, but the rent was low.

She perched on a stool at her kitchen counter and punched a number into her cell. She took a deep breath. "Pop, hi," she said, when her father answered. "Happy Father's Day, Pop."

"What have I got to be happy about, for god's sake?" He had still not forgiven her. "In my own state!" he'd said. "My *cohorts* see those ads."

"Don't start, Pop. Please."

"You want me to say it's all right for you to show yourself the way you do?"

"I'm not doing anything bad. You didn't object when I wore a bathing suit on stage."

"That was different. A bathing suit is not the same as the filmy stuff you wear that you can just about see through, for chrissake."

"It's not—"

"Different," her father said, "and I only went along with it because your mother wanted it."

"Hey, Pop, why don't we do some target shooting together?"

"Not today, George. Some *other Father's* Day." He hung up.

Georgianna drank a glass of orange juice. She had a theory that her father called her George so he wouldn't be bothered by her girlness. Or, she sometimes

thought, frightened of it. By the time Hodder got back from the dump, she had a big smile on her face, the kind you had to have even when—especially when—you were losing. The first runner-up smile.

Georgianna found Hodder more and more useful. He did errands and took out the garbage. He was sweet and attentive and a little moony about her, but she didn't have to doll herself up when it was just him around. He was a good listener, too. She had wound up telling him more about herself than she intended, but she found it didn't bother her that he knew what he knew, so she went ahead and told him even more. After all, she told herself, he had known her uncle.

She watched him wince. It was easy to make him wince. She did not know why she liked to torture him like this: She did not hate men in general.

She told Hodder how, having won Miss Magnolia of 1993, she had been invited to make a guest appearance at the 1994 festival to compete against a Marine champion in field stripping an M-14 and whipped his sorry ass hands down.

Didn't she date in high school? he asked. Didn't she ever go to the mall with her girlfriends?

She told him about the plays she'd been in at school and during the summers and that she was going to be an actress, about the crowns she'd won and the contests she'd lost, her dreams and fears, that her favorite ice cream was pralines-and-cream and that when she had enough money saved she was going to strike out for the big time. "That's why I've never done nudes," she said. "The suits in Hollywood think there are two kinds of women. Women who act, and women who—" She stopped, finding herself embarrassed to say the word in front of Hodder. She had learned about "suits" from TV movies.

She watched him wince. It was easy to make him wince. She did not know why she liked to torture him like this: She did not hate men in general, and she had grown fond of him, at least as fond as she would have been of a dog. "I'm sorry," she said. "I know you don't like language like that."

"You don't got to apologize to me," he said.

More than a dog. He was soothing, made her feel like she had a partner. They played Monopoly, watched rented movies, and told each other things they'd never told anyone. She told him how she had wanted to be in movies ever since the third grade, when she played Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. "My red shoes were Nikes. I

sprayed them with glitter." She told him about how bad she'd felt not winning Miss Mississippi.

"Them judges must of been blind."

"The girl was a D-cup."

"Size ain't everything," he said. "Personality counts for a lot." He wished she'd stop worrying about winning every damn thing. It didn't seem to him that there was anything special in a trophy. But if she wanted to be a movie star, he hoped she'd get what she wanted.

He did not tell her that he was living under an overpass, eating only when he was at her house. She had thought about asking him where he spent his nights but imagined that he might interpret her interest as an invitation. Though she also kind of wished he'd invite himself.

Sleeping under the overpass, he dreamed about the vegetables in his garden by the river.

Before long, however, he was doing the cooking at her place and they dined together, both of them peaceable and absorbed at the secondhand table under the bright overhead light in the kitchen. Sometimes she dried the dishes.

Sometimes she was gone to a modeling gig, and she kept stacking up the dollars in her Hollywood fund.

Every so often she'd sit down to calculate what to—and if necessary back from—L.A. would cost, with the impossible-to-guess-at length of time it would take for her to break into movies. But where would she start, once she got out there? Where would she stay? She was talking to Hodder about this when he said, "Well, in the library they got phone books from all over. We'll look up numbers and addresses."

"Whose number? Whose address?"

Still, his straightforward approach got her thinking that she should just pick up and go. Once she was in Hollywood she'd find out where the library was and scope out the numbers to call for everything. She told Hodder.

"I'll come with you," he said.

He was sitting on the couch in her apartment, his big rough hands splayed on his knees, and the lamp at the end of the couch made what looked to her, standing in the kitchen, like a halo around his head.

"I don't want you to come."

"But I want to. You'll need takin' care of out there. It's a hard place, Hollywood. I see TV. I know what goes on out there. It's a city of broken dreams." There were these words that came out of his mouth from time to time, and they always caused her to ponder. She watched him working his hands, rubbing them, then cracking his knuckles, then drumming his fingers on the couch, then untying and retying his shoes, then smacking his fists on his thighs as if kneading dough.

"I'll be all right, Hodder. You know me. I can take care of myself."

"But I want to—"

"No, Hodder," she said. "I need you to look after things here." She told herself that it wasn't that she would be ashamed to be seen with him, nor that she thought he would hold her back, but he wouldn't fit in there. He wouldn't be happy. He wasn't suited for urban life.

She knew he wouldn't do anything she didn't want him to do, but she felt guilty about not letting him go with her, so that night she let him stay. They didn't do anything, but he put his arms around her. She slept in the curve of his body. The landlord roared into the garage, and she pushed herself deeper into Hodder's arms.

Hodder couldn't tell whether she wanted him to make a move or not. He put his arms around her, but she was asleep in a minute or two. He *wanted* to make a move but somehow it seemed wrong, now that they were kind of like friends. He stayed awake most of the night but at some point he fell asleep and was crawling around in the desert, sand biting into his face like shrapnel. The sand turned into sand flies, landing all over him and digging in; it felt like they were inside his skin and no matter how hard he scratched, he couldn't get at them. "God," Georgianna said in the morning, "were you ever tossing and turning."

"Naw," he said. "You imagined it. You must of been dreamin'." He had gotten his shirt on before she woke up so she would not see the welts and scabs and fresh scratches on his arms.

Georgianna had been surprised by how nice it had felt to sleep next to him, despite the tossing and the turning.

That evening he was getting ready to head back to the overpass when she asked him to sleep with her**.** She pulled her tee-shirt over her head, pulled down her jeans, and stood in front of him wearing nothing but her thong. "What do you think?" she asked.

This had happened so fast that Hodder felt faint. He was afraid he might keel over. He *almost* wished she'd put her clothes back on. He tried to keep his eyes

averted, but somehow he kept seeing her out of the corners of them. Finally he turned himself away from her and looked out the window, where he saw the landlord driving up.

"You got an outie," he said.

"You know you want to."

He couldn't argue with that.

"Just once, for the road." She felt she was giving him a going-away present, her beauty-contest-winning body. It would make up for not letting him go with her. Also, she had to admit she was feeling frisky. No, downright honky-tonk. Wait—like a she-cat in heat.

"I ain't never seen anything as beautiful as you, Georgianna. You oughtn't take yourself so cheap."

She went over to him and turned him back around.

"I want you to make love to me," she said.

She brought her mouth up to his, which meant she had to stand on her toes and lean forward, and that meant her breasts were touching his chest. He thought he'd die.

She wanted sex without obligation, a pinwheel of love, a quick whirl through outer space and a safe return to earth.

He wanted to marry her.

After they'd had sex (several times, because having it made her want more), Georgianna ran her fingers over his scratches and bruises. "Poor Hodder," she said. "What can the war have been like, if this is what a dream about the war looks like." He was going to say it was nothing, just a stupid habit, but something stopped him.

Georgianna started calling him "babe." She'd say, "Babe, we're out of cereal." Or, "You wait, babe, my parents are going to be so fucking proud of me that they'll tell their friends *Oh yes, she did some risqué modeling once upon a time, but that was just to get her start*."

"I'll keep an eye on things here," he said, as she was packing her bags, which Hodder lifted into the bed of her pickup. "Just remember you already got a star in your name."

In Hollywood Georgianna answered an ad that said two girls were looking for a third to share their apartment. They looked her over while she looked at the studio apartment, and then they showed her where she would sleep, which shelf of the

refrigerator was hers, and gave her a key. Vera had a small role in a theater troupe and was gone at night. Marilee waited tables at a restaurant in Brentwood. They both took acting lessons, dancing lessons, singing lessons. They told Georgianna she'd better take elocution lessons to rid herself of her Southern accent.

"An agent could fall asleep before you finish a sentence," Marilee said. "And wake up and fall asleep again," Vera said. "Don't get us wrong, you're not boring, but it takes a long time for you to get a sentence out." At an internet café Vera told her about, Georgianna looked up agents' addresses. Her roommates had warned her about the scams and fronts. She read the notices in *Variety* and showed up at cattle calls. Despite all this, no one offered her a part in a movie.

She didn't understand it. She was at least as pretty as Michelle Pfeiffer. Her figure was a million times better than Bridget Fonda's. But everyone in California was pretty. Even the men. It occurred to her that trying to break into the movies meant feeling like a runner-up every single day. Finally, one of the directors she lined up for gave her a short screen test, before taking her aside and saying, "Listen, it's not you, it's the camera. The camera just doesn't see what I see when I look at you."

"The camera likes me just fine. I'm a photographic *model*." She used the smile.

"Those are stills. This is a movie camera."

She didn't want him to know that his comment was like a boot in her face, so she gave him her profile and stared at the movie posters on the wall. Lately she'd begun to have thoughts of a kind she would never have suspected she could have, and she had one now. *California dreaming, my eye*, she thought. Dreams were for girls living in small towns in the South. L.A. was strictly broad daylight, carcinogenic sun glaring down on a city full of accountants totaling the week's box office. She went to the next interview, leaving one of her business cards on the director's desk.

"You're a bit old to be starting out," this fellow said.

"I'm only twenty-five. And I look twenty!"

"Honey, when your face is five feet tall, everything shows."

She left another card.

She was too short for glossy-magazine or runway modeling.

"I'm beautiful," she said, timidly belligerent, to an agent who had gotten her hopes up by agreeing to see her. If only she had an agent, he would send her portfolio to people who would actually look at it.

"So what. There are a lot of beautiful women. Beautiful women are a dime a dozen."

She slapped down a card.

"Sorry, sweetheart," the agent said, handing her a tissue from the box on his desk. "It's a lousy business. I'd take you on if I could, but it's better to know the truth. Go home and find a nice guy."

She thought about the nice guy at home. That she missed Hodder, the steady reassurance of him, was something she hadn't anticipated. She worried about him, but she didn't call because she didn't want to lead him on when, if she ever snagged a part, she was going to stay here. And would she give up so easily? No. By god, no.

Sure that she did not need an acting class and running out of money fast, she enrolled in one because Vera told her it would "keep her in the loop." Notices of casting calls were push-pinned to a bulletin board. She followed up on all of them—only to hear someone say "No."

Or, "You're not right."

"Your skin's the wrong shade for the shot."

"Go get some experience." *Where?*

"Not pretty enough."

Even, "Too pretty."

At some point, she found she was numb. It was as if someone had injected her brain with Botox. While Marilee and Vera were out, she hung around the apartment, wearing her bed socks and pajamas, and trying to think but her Botoxed brain wouldn't cooperate. She sat down at the tiny kitchen table to drink a cup of hot tea, leaning over the steaming cup to give herself an impromptu minifacial, fanning the steam from the cup back onto her face. The steam prised open her throat and she breathed a breath in all the way down to her chest and oh! she fell apart and cried and cried.

In her early enthusiasm, she had gone to Grauman's Chinese Theater, walked on the sidewalk of stars. She'd even gone to Frederick's of Hollywood, whose lingerie ads she'd seen for years—it turned out to be a seedy mob scene, with merchandise grimy from customers' hands. There were edible panties, peekaboo panties, and G-strings and all of it looked dingy and touristy, while outside the sun exposed the essential shabbiness of life, how it was all dog-eat-dog, everybody butting heads against everybody else. Sometimes a limo would glide down the street and it would seem to be gliding in a bubble, like the Good Witch Glinda, but then it turned a corner and the bubble burst, revealing the city as a collection of claws, all of them trying to climb up.

And among them herself, kicking and scratching and clawing for a foothold. It was, she realized, a kind of pageant, but there was nothing beautiful about it.

Something seemed to have gone out of her, like a sigh: the self that had believed in the importance of success. What did it matter if she failed? What did it matter if she stopped trying? She could go back to Hodder. If she couldn't make her own dream come true, she could fulfill *his*. There had to be *some* honor in that, some merit, something relatively pure.

She missed real trees like mayhaw and tupelo and silverbell. She missed longleaf and slash pine, and live oak. Palm trees were a poor substitute. She missed rain. Back home, the humidity had gentled the heat; here, where traffic was always stalled, the heat was mean, a glaring thing that scratched at your eyes, not at all like the caressing aromatic languor of medians planted with azalea or pear trees, hibiscus or bougainvillea. She missed the deep and dappled drowse of southern streets at noon.

She missed having someone to play Monopoly with.

When she called Hodder, he wanted to go to her, or her to him, whichever was faster. He wanted to wrap her in his arms *this minute* and tell her what he'd known all along: that fame wasn't real. It was about image, not the self. The self went right on having dental appointments and using deodorant while the image played itself out on screen and in magazines. There was no such thing as fame. The closest to it anybody could get was famousness.

Where were the words he needed to say this? He pulled a piece of paper from his pocket and read his speech to her. "I wrote it out at Barnes & Noble," he said. "Do you know what a chimera is?" He told her that her dream was a chimera. "And how do you know that?" she asked. She couldn't resist a little dig. "It's not like you're famous yourself, babe."

"Sugar Foot," he said, "I've been thinking about it all this time because I want you to be happy. You know by now I ain't a idiot."

"I guess I do," she said.

But Vera said, "Don't quit now! Here, try this place," and handed her a card with the name of yet another agent on it. Georgianna punched in the number and was told to send a photograph and a résumé. The agent called and asked her to come in. It wasn't even an audition, and she had another of the "bad thoughts," as she had decided to call the self-defeating side of her. *Pop would say I got too big for my britches and I guess he was right. I am going home in disgrace.* Her money was running out.

"Great name," the man said. "Have you done any acting?"

"I've done a *lot*." She listed her credits for him: plays in elementary, junior, and high school. A youth group that staged something or other every summer.

"Nothing professional?" he asked her, almost as if he were pleading.

"Beauty pageants. A lot of pretending goes into that."

"Well," he said, after a pause, "what makes you think you can act?"

If she couldn't make her own dream come true, she could fulfill *his*. There had to be *some* honor in that, some merit, something relatively pure.

"Can you give me five more minutes?"

"Sure," he said. "I'm in no rush."

Not in a rush! She wanted to kiss him on the cheek.

She got up from her chair and gave him Maggie from *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. She knew the speech by heart from the senior-class play and Maggie was still in her. She let it come up out of her body as if she were the cat, and she *was* the cat, claws and all, the soul of feline fury yowling against rejection. Her father wanted her to be a boy? Her mother wanted her to be an Ur-girl? She was done with marauding and seduction, she would blast them into space with her ray gun.

For Maggie, she threw away everything she'd learned in the damn elocution class. If Maggie didn't have a southern accent, it would be like she'd been fixed.

When it was over, he said he'd be in touch.

"I can field strip an M-14," she said, "if you get a part for a woman GI."

"I'll keep that in mind," he said, shuffling her card into a deck of them in his inbox.

The agent didn't call, and when her money had nearly run out, she spent the rest of it on gas and motels and greasy-spoon food back to Jackson. On the way home she began to think on Hodder and the closer to home she got, the gladder she was that he would be waiting there at the bus stop. She could imagine his high spirits, how he'd act like a puppy dog with his tongue hanging out and his paws on her blue jeans but in an amiable way.

He barbecued ribs for dinner, had gotten pralines-and-cream ice cream for dessert. He sat at the table, watching her eat. It tore his heart apart to think she was so unhappy. "There ain't nothin' I wouldn't do for you," he said, like taking a vow.

"I know," she said. "I know that's true."

"Tell me," he said. "Just tell me what to do."

Her voice was low, sarcastic, unaccented. "You could kill Miss Mississippi, I guess," she said.

He knew she meant the one from the year she had lost.

"By god," he said, "if that's what you want, that's what I'll do. Is that what you want?"

"Don't be silly." Her voice softened. "It's not her fault that the camera doesn't like me."

"It was a painful long time you was away," he said.

"Yes," she said. "It was."

He thought they would carry on where they left off and be sleeping together again. He hung around after dinner, waiting to be invited to bed. When she didn't say anything about it, he grabbed her and kissed her. She put her small hands on his chest and held him off. "My god, Hodder, you got to let a girl catch her breath now and then!"

He wondered if he would have to go back to the overpass, when he'd been here for months in her absence.

"I'm depressed," she said. "I can't help it that I'm depressed."

He took her by the hand and led her to the bed. When they were in bed he gave her a deep, slow kiss. "Have you got your breath now?" he asked, and then he made love to her. She didn't seem all that involved, and when it was over, he asked, "Why did you let me do that if you didn't want it?"

"You're a nice guy, Hodder," she said. "You're not a pervert at all."

"I love you, Georgianna."

"I know."

"Can't you be just a little bit happy about that?"

"I am," she said. "I am just a little bit happy about that." It was not the same as having the world fall in love with you—he was just one person, and one that was screwed up, a run-down raggedy loner hiding out from his past—but he was a nice guy. "I think we should move into the cabin together. I'll tell my folks I want to quit modeling. They'll be pleased and they don't have to know I'm living with someone."

"I'm not just someone. I'm me."

"Yes, of course, babe," she said.

She hung curtains in the cabin.

He could not believe his luck and thought maybe with time she would learn to be as happy with him as he was with her.

But—it was strange, but—she was slowing down. Way, way down, as if the batteries in her were dying. With her dreams of Hollywood behind her, she couldn't think of anything to do. She even spoke more slowly, because getting words out of her mouth was really hard, they weighed so much, boulders clamping down her tongue. She had mostly quit eating, too. Getting something out, getting something in, it was too much effort in either direction. Hodder said, "Let me take you to a doctor, I think you need to see a doctor," but she hardly had the energy to shake her head.

"Stop feeling sorry for yourself," Hodder said, trying a different tactic. "It's lots of folks worse off than you. How many girls ever get to be First Runner Up?"

Her eyes filled up at that. Green eyes inundated by tears.

"You think I don't know that, Hodder? You think I'm not disgusted with myself? I know you'd be better off without me. The *world* would be better off."

"Hush," he said. "Don't talk like that. I won't allow it."

He began to think half seriously about locating the Miss Mississippi of the year she had lost and shooting her dead. He tried to convince Georgianna that being Miss Mississippi wasn't so important. What did you get if you were Miss Mississippi? You got a tiara, which when would you ever wear it again? You got a ribbon. You got to walk the walk. For a year you were in the news every now and again and maybe people thought you were special but then the year was over, just the way every year was over when it was over. But he wished she had won, just because she wished she had won.

"You won't allow it. Oh, babe," she said, "there is nothing you wouldn't allow me to do, is there? Nothing. If I said I wanted to sleep with ten men right here and now, with you standing right there, you wouldn't move from that spot. I could cut my wrists and you would think I was doing it to be sweet."

"That ain't true," he objected. "I'd stop you. If I had to I'd kick the shit out of you."

"Yeah? Well, do it then!"

He gave her a long look and left the room.

He wanted to get rid of the guns. He was afraid she might harm herself. "No," she said. "Don't you dare take my guns away. I might want to shoot again sometime."

Georgianna had decided that she was ugly, stupid, and a nuisance. She looked in the hand mirror that had belonged to her grandmother and sought to see what it was the camera saw, but all she could see was what she saw. She saw a woman who was never going to be anything more than a model for strip-club fliers.

It amazed and even awed her to look back and follow the trail from when she was winning beauty pageants to now. It had seemed like a long time, but actually it had happened so fast. So fast! That was life for you, she told herself, wanting to shed all sentimentality and deluded hope: A person had a dream, whatever it was, and then it was over and you woke up, and then you were awake for the rest of your life and the dream was gone forever. She did not see how she could bear to be awake for the rest of her life.

She watched television news all day long. The politicians were just like prostitutes, selling themselves to this lobbyist or that, anything for a buck or a vote. This was what it meant to live in America, she thought. It meant selling yourself to somebody or something. What if no one was buying, what if what you could supply wasn't in demand?

Came a day, in the fullness of time, she turned off the television. Hodder was running the mower, the drone constant but distant. Bluebottle flies bounced off the screens like off of trampolines. A huge bee was fumbling at the windowsill. The pines made long black shadows that flowed across the yard as if they were water. A red-tailed hawk swooped toward some prey on the ground. The willow tree seemed to have been lightly sketched against the sky in green pencil**.** A long white cloud fringed on both sides looked like an enormous feather. The world wasn't going to stop being a world. She told herself to get off her duff and look for work. Hodder needed her help around the place.

She went back to the photographer who had used her before. "I'm back," she said, smiling to show her white teeth, her friendly mouth. "Hi, everybody." Billy Lee invited her into his office and shut the door.

"Well, now, Georgianna. It's good to see you again. You're looking lovely, as always. Where've you been?"

"Here and there," she said. "I was just traveling to see what's out there in these United States."

"We missed you."

"And I missed y'all," she said. "In fact, I'd like to come back to work." As definite as she was aiming to be, her voice wobbled a bit on the words "come back to work."

"The thing is," he said, "I've got another girl now."

There was a pause while she tried to find her footing. "I'll teach her the ropes, Billy," she said. "There's enough work for both of us."

"To tell the truth," he said, "I've got a couple of other girls now."

He was looking at his fingernails. (She had a view of his scalp. He'd had plugs put in.) She wanted to say, *Look me in the eye when you say that*, but she didn't. Then she did. It came out exactly the way she had thought it. "Look me in the eye when you say that," she said.

He drew his hands behind the desk and looked her in the eye. "This gentleman's club"—he brought a business card out of the drawer and slid it in her direction over the desk—"is looking for dancers. Why don't you try there? I'll say I sent you."

She had tapped all the bounce and oomph she had on hand daring him to look her in the eye. She picked up the card and closed the door on her way out.

It was twilight in the parking lot at the club. The blue neon lights were the color of the sky. A neon woman in a red neon bikini bottom flashed on and off. The neon woman would be hugging the pole up high one moment and down low the next. Georgianna started to climb out of the car and then got back in, floored the pedal, and roared out of there, the neon tubes behind her flickering like hellfire.

"Lap dancing," she said to Hodder. "He knows me better than that!"

Hodder let her blow off. It was good that she was angry. Better than being depressed.

The phone rang.

"Maybe he's calling to apologize," she said, picking up the receiver. "You better believe he knows he damn well should."

It was the agent who had listened to her Maggie. "It's three minutes," he said. "You could end up on the cutting room floor. But it's a foot in the door."

"I don't have any money left."

"I'll advance you the airfare."

While she was still on the phone, Hodder slipped outside.

Would she have stayed in Mississippi if he had asked her? He thought she might have, but she might not ever forgive him for it. He waited until the plane took off, just in case she changed her mind at the last minute.

Driving home in her truck, he thought about moving back to his shack, but the vegetables would be either dead or rioting, the hot plate and his few rickety pieces of furniture covered with dust.

He stayed where he was and kept it tidy. He changed the bed sheets once a week, in case she showed up suddenly. She could do that; she could show up suddenly.

He went to bed thinking about her, and fell asleep thinking about her, but when he woke up in the middle of the night it was always because of the war. Sometimes he'd find himself on the Highway of Death, trying to get across all those dead Iraqi soldiers missing heads or legs and burned black. They sat stock-still behind steering wheels or were draped like fallen flags on the tops of tanks they had been trying to get out of when the bombs fell. The ones who did get out were no more than scattered bits and pieces and crows and feral dogs and suchlike had found them. They had been told they could safely retreat and then American airplanes had strafed the road with explosives and machine guns. He had been deployed after the fact, assigned to the job of checking vehicles for survivors. But the Iraqis were all dead—hundreds, thousands. In the dream, getting across them was a problem, because if he so much as brushed the sleeve of an Iraqi corpse with the hem of his pants leg he would die, infected with death. Sometimes he dreamed about venomous spiders, or rats the size of rhinos.

He woke up in a sweat. He had trouble concentrating, not all the time but often enough. His head would be fuzzy with stuff he couldn't quite remember but that he knew had been there in his sleep or even while he was awake but not thinking about being awake. Minutes would go by and he'd be somewhere in his mind—he had to have been, didn't he—but goddamn if he knew where.

Every so often there was a postcard from Georgianna. Once she phoned, but it was hard to talk on the phone. She sounded like a whole new person, different, and in a way deeper than just a change in accent. He had so much to say to her but when the pressure was on like that he couldn't help clamming up.

A year went by. The movie came out. She called to tell him she was letting the garage apartment go. "You can stay in the cabin," she told him, hoping to ease the shock.

"When are you coming back?" he asked, fearing that just asking the question was to jinx the answer.

"I don't know," she said.

He didn't ask if she was going to stay away forever, but probably part of him knew it. He loaded the pickup with their belongings, which were mostly her belongings, and drove them to the cabin.

Georgianna's three minutes had grown to five, the director liked her so much. The movie was called *As It Is*. When it finally came out Hodder took the truck to Jackson to see it. He was so full of pride that he thought he would explode and

wished there was someone he could talk to about her. She wrote him that her scene had brought her another job, in a movie starring Sandra Bullock. They would shoot in Montana. Georgianna was excited by this because Sandy (as she wrote) Bullock had previously played a beauty pageant contestant. She wanted to tell Sandy that they had something in common, her card said.

Drinking coffee with one of those morning talk shows on the radio, to which he was paying not the least attention, he heard the front door opening and jumped out of his chair, hoping with every bone in his body that it was her. It wasn't. "What are you doing here?" the man said.

"I live here," Hodder said.

"I own this place," the man said. "My name is Millard Starlington. This here's my wife, Serena. You're going to be gone before the day is out, mister."

"Hodder," Hodder said. "I been living here with your daughter, Georgianna."

Millard looked him over, looked over the room. "Georgianna don't live here," he said. "She lived in town. And now she's out of town."

"She let the town place go and I come out here to—to wait for her, and see to things. And, um, and—"

Mrs. Starlington tugged at her husband's arm. "Let's go," she said.

He shook her off. "I want to hear more about why this man is living in my cabin."

"Sorry, sir. Georgianna thought it'd be all right."

"She did, did she? And what might your relationship to her *be*, if you please?"

"I want to marry her," Hodder said.

He watched as Millard Starlington made a big show of hooing and hahing.

"Son," Starlington said, "you are *dee*-lusional. George is never coming back to Mississippi. She's got another life now, and whoever you are, it don't include you."

Hodder didn't know what to say. "I knew your brother, ma'am," he said to Serena.

"You knew Seb?" Her voice more like a shadow than a real sound.

"She sends me postcards," he said, speaking to her husband again. "I can show you them."

"Show away," Millard said. "She's practically a movie star now, and she ain't coming back to Mississippi and we're selling the cabin. Real estate agent's got somebody to look at it next week. Don't even have the sign up yet."

*

So Hodder moved back into his shack. It was a mess, inside and out, and the rainy season was upon it. Thunder crackled like pig skin and then settled down to grousing like a chronic complainer. Lightning lit up the sky like scud missiles and brought down the big hackberry tree.

He took her guns with him, all of them—rifles, shotguns, and two pistols, for safekeeping, and her Yankees baseball cap. If the old man wanted them, he'd have to fight him. He hung the cap on a nail. He put together a gun rack and affixed it to the wall and every gun had its rightful place on the rack.

At first he tried to get back into the habit of fishing, but he didn't really feel like fishing. In the shack he paced back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. The sameness of the pacing calmed him. He could spend an entire morning sitting on the mattress and staring at the pile of her clothes that he needed to buy hangers for.

As the leaves fell he took long walks and sometimes he'd swing near the cabin and see what the new residents were up to. The curtains Georgianna had hung—a long time ago now—stayed for a while and then were taken down and replaced. He never got near enough to be seen. All winter he kept to himself, stoking the wood stove, thinking about her. He slept a lot, as if he were part bear and hibernating, but there wasn't much else to do in the winter. The days were short. It didn't snow but now and again ice glazed the branches in the mornings, and in the early evening, when their coats blurred into everything else, deer stole out of the forest to forage in the garden, but the garden had gone to tangle and rot.

All winter he thought about what he could have done different. Lying in bed, he realized there were a lot of things he wished he had done. He wished he had tracked down Miss Mississippi and shot her dead. He wished he had gone to L.A. so when men told Georgianna that the camera didn't like her he could have at least beat the shit out of them. He halfway wished he had shot Millard Starlington. He all-the-way wished he had shot his daddy before he died and made that impossible. He had got himself a blue tick hound and at first she slept outside, scrabbling dirt as she made her bed, but after a while he let her in, and before long she was sleeping on the bed with him. Sometimes she'd butt her muzzle right into his face. He'd scratch the top of her head for her. They kept each other warm through the cold nights.

He took to talking to her. She paced with him, back and forth, back and forth. He had named her Georgie and sometimes he forgot she was a dog and thought he was talking to Georgianna. Sometimes he'd catch himself talking to his army buds.

*

Sometimes he thought about his prick father, and once he could have sworn he'd seen him standing right outside the door. Just for a second, but it scared him. He wondered if he was going crazy.

On a night past the coldest time he woke up from a dream filled with dead men. Still in his long johns, he pulled the blankets from the bed and carried them outside, spreading them out flat on the ground. He went back inside and came out with Georgianna's 9-millimeter pistol. Georgie had followed him, looking at him wonderingly as he wrapped himself in the blankets on the ground. "Come on, girl," he said, patting the blanket beside him. She curled next to him and he pulled the blanket over her, too.

He lay there, looking at the stars and thinking that Georgianna would have her own someday. Once he said, out loud, "My darling." He had never before used the word *darling* and it sounded foreign on his tongue, stiff, but right. Georgie's ears pricked at the sound, but her eyes didn't open.

After a while he picked up the pistol, put the barrel in his mouth, and pulled the trigger.

His body wasn't found until someone recognized Georgie rooting in an overturned garbage can out by the general store. Reckoning that Georgie was lost and Hodder would be wanting her back to his place, he took her there. She began to whine as they approached the shack.

Georgianna heard about it first from her mother, who waited until Millard was out of the house to call her daughter.

"The police are going to be calling you. They asked me for your phone number. You don't have to talk to them if you don't want to. Honeybunch? Are you there, honeybunch?"

It wasn't until this point in the conversation that the news got past her ears and through to Georgianna's heart and a sense of loss engulfed her so completely and so deeply that she felt like the lowest of the low, a blind creature on the bottom of the ocean, a speck of worm shit. What had she been thinking? What had she been *doing*? "I might just as well have killed him," she said, thinking, *With my gun and my traitorous ways*.

She remembered Hodder's kisses and his pride in her. She had been nothing to be proud of.

She remembered his laugh and that he always helped and never harmed her, even when she did things that must have hurt him. "Hush," Serena said, and her

voice had gone guttural and harsh while Georgianna's was pale and hollow and unsouthern. "Whatever you did, whoever he was to you, the man killed himself. You can feel sad if you want to, but don't go getting worked up over it. You've got your life to live."

Her mother rattled on, but Georgianna was no longer listening. She turned the cell off and walked to the window of her motel room. In her head she was saying *Hodder, Hodder, Hodder,* over and over. She hadn't been in love with him, but—but what was love? What if love *was* that companionability and easygoing affection they had had? What if it was the feeling of having a special place in a certain bed where you and your loved one lost yourselves in each other? And the world stayed outside through the night. And your dreams were harmonious. What if?

There was a knock on her door. She opened it. Some of the crew were there, wanting to know if she was joining them for dinner.

She had a small but real part this time out. When the movie was released six months later, she was noticed, as she had not been before. Critics applauded the newcomer's arrival. She herself had watched the rushes and saw that shame and a stinging sense of fallibility had transfigured her face. They refined her features, gave her a hesitancy that was gentle and grave. The critics and directors could not put their finger on what was different about her, how she was unlike other actresses; shame was not an emotion with which they were familiar. Fallibility they dreaded to recognize, of shame they said not a word. But they knew she was box-office gold. They knew she had something.

Valerie Sayers
The Last Days of Peace and Love

The first time I saw this chick in a skin-tight micro-mini, I knew her. She was everything my mother had spent a lifetime warning me not to be: fishnet stockings, skirt barely covering her crotch, so much dark eyeshadow she looked like her boyfriend had popped her in one eye and then the other. The other typists wouldn't have dreamed of showing that much flesh—they wanted to get home on the subway without getting groped—but maybe this one hadn't heard that the Sixties were over. She was on her way to the ladies' room, thrusting her pelvis out in a kind of runway walk crossed with a *keep on truckin'* slouch. When she spotted me, she gave a little wave, as if she'd figured out who I was too.

I was an actor—I guess in those days I said *actress*—so I knew how to look like I hadn't been staring. This was only a three-week gig, at a structural engineering firm: I was the receptionist at the front desk, answering the phone in my best Judy Holiday voice. The typists were hidden away in back, and once I saw her, I knew why.

The Seventies were just the Sixties dribbling away: the war was finally over, but Jean-Paul and I were still nostalgic for demonstrations and street theater. We spent so much time in acting class, or posing for glossy 8 x 10s, that we hardly knew who we were in real life. *Married?* What was that? Our apartment was so small we had to wedge ourselves into the single bed Jean-Paul brought from his parents' place.

So the next morning, when the Sixties chick stopped at the front desk on her way in, my nerves tingled all over again. She took her sweet time and leaned over

my phone console in such a seductive slouch that I wasn't even surprised when she batted her eyelashes at me. "Didn't you used to go to the Fillmore?"

"Sure," I said, "sometimes." She was certainly alarming. Now she was wearing a floral scarf in a gauzy material tied tight to form a halter. Jeez, nobody wore a halter to work in an office like this, much less a scarf pretending to be a halter. Where'd she think she was, Altamont?

"I think maybe I danced with you one time."

I gave her a noncommittal smile. Her nipples were tight little corkscrews poking through her gauzy top.

"Wanna go to lunch later?"

I couldn't afford to go to lunch—I always brought a yogurt and passed myself off as a starving artist—and I didn't know where to look when I looked at her. "Sure." I was mesmerized, and besides, she was as sweet as a puppy. Her name was Lorraine Straveski. Sweet Lorraine.

When we walked out on Broad Street that noontime, Sweet Lorraine Straveski linked her arm through mine so that all the men ogling her perky breasts, bouncing along under her yellow daisy scarf, had to glance at me too. I thought I was playing a grownup—I had on a thrift-store Christian Dior jacket—but next to her I probably looked like a nun. Her crazy ringlets were streaked with gaudy yellow, and my mother would have pointed to her dark roots as the definitive evidence: She was a slut, all right.

Somehow Sweet Lorraine picked up the mother vibes right away. At lunch the first thing she said was, "What's the worst way your mother ever humiliated you?" and I was so freaked by her mind-reading that I drew a blank. I wasn't a big confider, the kind of instant girlfriend who could tell the story of my life to someone I'd just met. She had mossy green eyes, lined with brilliant blue, and teeth that protruded ever so slightly. When she took out her aviator glasses to read the menu, I could see her at forty, ruling the typing roost in a peekaboo blouse. If I really wanted to tell her the worst thing my mother did, I'd tell how she wouldn't let me visit when my father was diagnosed with lung cancer because I was *living in sin*.

"Let's see. She used to come tearing down the driveway when my boyfriends brought me home late." I heard myself giggle.

"Ha," she said, just like that: *ha*. "Mine took my favorite bikini and shredded it with her toenail scissors. Her *toenail* scissors."

*

I liked her. My family tensed at touch—my brother was ten years older and tried not to touch me at all—but when Lorraine came up behind me to knead my shoulders, I felt us both melt away. "I've got tits," she said the first time we hugged, "but you've got *boobs*."

When the job was over and I scored a bit part in a domestic comedy working itself out at the Playwrights Workshop, Lorraine made sure we got together on Mondays, when the theaters were dark. We went to happy hour at one Wall Street bar or the other. My girlfriends had drifted away since college—well, maybe even before then, maybe since I got married—and I liked hearing Lorraine chatter, liked the sample bottles of perfume she got from who-knows-where, liked sitting under the gaze of so many eyes, even if they were gazing at her and not at me.

Once Jean-Paul married me, my mother forgave me, but now my father was dead and I was nineteen and married and I wasn't so sure I forgave her.

She told me she didn't speak to her mother in Dayton anymore, not at all, and maybe I liked the sound of that too. Once Jean-Paul married me, my mother forgave me, but now my father was dead and I was nineteen and married and I wasn't so sure I forgave her. Lorraine said Oscar, her shrink, advised her to cut her mother off cold. What kind of shrink would advise such a thing? She said Oscar was SAI, for Self-Actualizing Interpersonalist, and all her roommates were too. They all lived in single-sex apartments and slept with each other as often and variously as possible so they didn't get "y'know, all hung up on somebody." We were in a smoky bar when she told me about sleeping with as many guys as possible and then blew Marlboro rings, wondering whether she'd shocked me.

I put on my Jeanne Moreau face and aimed for unshockable. "SAI guys?"

"Mostly. Once I had, like, three dates in one night? And I put in my spare diaphragm by accident? I mean, on top of the other one. Six months later I go to the ER and they tell me it's like a petri dish in there."

"Oh man." I probably blanched. Okay, so I was no Jeanne Moreau. No matter how much sex talk you heard back then, somebody was always upping the ante: I mean, the whole concept of a sexual revolution was still pretty new to me. I'd slept with a few too many boys before Jean-Paul, but how many guys could you fit in by nineteen? This talk of back-to-back men was like news from an exotic country I'd never get the chance to visit now.

"So what do you think?"

I thought this SAI thing was like Amway or Scientology, and Lorraine needed to find new members. I smiled mysteriously. I had about twenty-five smiles in my repertoire: This one was my Jeanne Moreau special.

After a while, Lorraine started slipping complaints about the Self-Actualizing Interpersonalists into our Monday nights. They made her feel like shit for skipping out on college. They were always telling her how much she didn't know. They picked on her at their weekly critiques. She made life among the SAIs sound like Vietnamese re-education camp.

One night she lowered her voice as if there might be self-actualizing spies all around us. "I have to get out of that apartment. It's just, like, where do I go?" She looked as miserable as I'd ever seen her. Jean-Paul and I had just rented one of those huge apartments off West End Avenue and the only way we could afford it was to get roommates, but I hadn't mentioned the move to Lorraine—I could imagine doing all kinds of things with Lorraine, but living with her wasn't one of them.

She drummed her fingers on the table hard enough to make my ice clink. "Oscar says yeah, move out, but that's only 'cause he wants to get his hands on me." How did a typist pay for a shrink, anyway? And how about Oscar getting his hands on her? Was that literal? It was enough to bring out my own maternal side, and the Kahlúa—Lorraine's drink—brought out my bad judgment. I told her about our apartment after all.

"Yeah?" She did her best not to look too eager. "A commune? Is it gonna be, like, political?"

"I guess we're mostly looking for company." It finally occurred to me—I can be a little slow in the insight department—that I hadn't mentioned it before because of course Jean-Paul would look at her the way every other man did.

"I can't believe it! It's like the answer to my prayers."

Somehow I couldn't imagine Lorraine praying among her interpersonalists, and I had a bad feeling. How could Jean-Paul help looking at her the way every other man did?

I hadn't lied to Lorraine: our ersatz commune wasn't political in the least. We had a freelance (meaning unemployed) journalist, a snarky M.F.A. poet back in the maid's room, and an *Oh wow* sociology grad student we called Sosh in the dining

room. You had to pass in and out of his room to get to the kitchen, but Sosh said: "Hey now, good people, I sincerely enjoy interacting with you on a regular basis."

Anyway, aside from disturbing Sosh's studying on our way to make a cup of tea, there wasn't any interacting. Lorraine asked about house meetings, like the ones the Self-Actualizing Interpersonalists had, but we weren't the meeting type of commune, either. We had three bedrooms on the other side of the dining room: us, the journalist, and now Lorraine. We could go for days without laying eyes on anyone but Sosh.

The first week she moved in, Lorraine knocked on everybody's door and offered up a joint. Nights, a string of boyfriends came to see her. If the guy went home early she stood in our doorway, semi-clothed and reeking of sex, asking us in that bouncy Midwestern way if we'd gone on any auditions. "Meet any famous people today, guys?" She thrust out her bony pelvis while she looked at Jean-Paul with a *Here I am in the next bedroom* look. Once she actually stroked her own nipple, right through her camisole, and we both stared in fascination.

When I pointed out that she was trying to seduce him, Jean-Paul said, "No more than she's trying to seduce you." Well, yeah, I told him, I knew what she was doing with the shoulder-kneading—even Ethel Feeney would have known what that meant.

Sweet Lorraine professed awe at my married state: "I never thought I could be okay with, you know? One person? But Jean-Paul . . ."

I tried not to bristle. By then Jean-Paul had the lead in a new translation of *The Lower Depths* at the Desperado Theatre Cooperative (no, really), and even if Lorraine hadn't been doing her best to get him into her bed, his dubious triumph on Avenue C already had me plenty jealous. I hadn't scored a single bit part since that crappy comedy, but Jean-Paul had landed two off-off leads, in plays I loved. He was a great actor, brooding but not too, fearless about blazing away with his dark eyes. And maybe he was on the short side, but that didn't stop avant-garde directors from casting him, or women from coming on to him. It sure didn't stop Lorraine.

Jean-Paul smoked dope with her late into the night, listening the way he listened to other actors. He specialized in rescues: He'd rescued me from my mother's fury, hadn't he? Lorraine told him she'd always wanted to go college, so every few days he gave her a new book, Castaneda or Wittgenstein or Stanislavsky, and she curled up with it for a good three minutes before she abandoned it for a *High Times.* I lay awake till two, three, four in the morning, listening to his good deep voice in the next room, explaining Wittgenstein, rescuing her.

"Why doesn't she just take a class at the New School?"

"She needs to build up some confidence. She's got some good ideas."

"Oh yeah? Such as?"

He grinned at me in his raffish avant-garde actorly way. My mother said Jean-Paul was naive, but I didn't think he was, not for a minute. "Anyway," he said, "maybe I can give her some good ideas."

One night she stood in our doorway and made an alarming screeching sound. I followed her to the bathroom, where she sat herself down on the cold tile, gestured to her closing throat, and suggested that maybe she was losing her mind. I was terrified, but I played it as if she were just being melodramatic. "Want me to call Oscar?"

She drew a finger across the throat, meaning, I guessed, that she would rather slit it than speak to Oscar. So I sat there on the edge of the tub, panicking right along with her. I hadn't understood that she was on the brink. She was always so smiley at work, so touchy-feely.

"Oscar said professional standards were guidelines." She rolled her head in an alarming way. "Do you hear that buzzing? Oh God. Is the floor tipping?"

"Does this guy even have a license?"

And she launched in again. "License! Oh, man. I'm having some trouble swallowing." She sobbed and hiccupped for a while, then slowed down and became very formal. "When I was a little kid, I couldn't ever like sit still, so my mother would strap me to the kitchen chair with belts. And like the more I struggled, the tighter she tied. Sometimes she left me in the kitchen for hours." I wasn't entirely sure whether this was a factual history—she was pretty spacey by then—or some kind of control-and-punish metaphor, but I let her talk and talk, and when she finally fell asleep on the cold tile, it was almost midnight. I tucked a towel-pillow under her head and was covering her with another towel when Sosh showed up.

"Never mind," he said, blushing. "I can hold it."

In the morning she was in her own bed, but that afternoon she waltzed into the kitchen, naked, singing "Honky Tonk Women" so slowly she sounded like a dying turntable. I stood there transfixed: Her hips curved as neatly as a nice cheap bottle of Mateus. By then Sosh, who'd been reading when Lorraine passed through—that must have been a vision—stood in the doorway. Even he could see what was going on this time.

"We've got to call her people," he whispered, but we were her people now—her ersatz people—and I hadn't guessed what it would cost her to leave her other people, or what it would cost us to nurse her through this. I walked her back to her room,

feeling like a hospital orderly, and got her to confess that she'd taken a whole lot of pills since she got up off the bathroom floor.

"You mean your Valium?" She didn't appear to understand the question. "Reds? Bennies?" She finally settled dreamily on ludes, but that was just to make the questions stop, and anyway she didn't have a clue how many. I walked her up and down to keep her from passing out. Jean-Paul was due home any minute, so I pulled one of her silky nightgowns over her head, and that was what she was wearing under Jean-Paul's camouflage jacket when the two of us coaxed her all the way to the ER.

We waited up all night, praying they'd check her in. But she wanted to go home, so they pumped her stomach and released her to us, her ersatz people leading her from St. Luke's through the Upper West Side in a negligee and cowboy boots, Jean-Paul's jacket barely keeping her decent.

She liked to leave her door open, so sometimes I could see her staring out, grinning in an eerie way. It unnerved me that Lorraine and I both spent so much time alone, time I spent running lines with myself for the roles I fantasized playing when I was a grande dame of the theatre: Winnie, Mother Courage, Sabina. What was I thinking? I couldn't even get a walk-on. Most of the roles I *had* played, even back in college, were dumb new comedies that required me to take my shirt off. Jean-Paul was out discussing inflectionless readings with avant-garde directors and I was reading *Backstage* as a bedtime story.

My torpor grew in inverse proportion to my sense of my future as an actor. I could make them sit up if they let me play the whole scene, but lately their eyes glazed over before I even started to read. Once I'd seen Lorraine's slinky body naked, I found my own boobs maternal, though up till then I'd kind of believed they were the assets Jean-Paul joked about. I couldn't even afford classes anymore. The temp jobs were drying up.

The air on West 100th Street started to smell rancid, fetid. Inside, it was Lorraine's smells that got to me: Kahlúa and dope and Marlboros, Shalimar and damp rayon panties. She'd quit typing and found a gig hostessing downtown: the way she went off to work now, in lowcut black, I figured it was a dicey lounge, maybe a strip joint. She stumbled into the living room with strange guys: mostly just business guys out tomcatting, but every once in a while a biker or a hardcore stoner. We all started locking up our possessions. Finally, when the last stoner stayed for three days and poked around the whole apartment, we convened an official ersatz commune meeting.

We all sat in Sosh's room on crates, bummed and silent. After a long while the journalist said: "We don't want to, um, interfere with your private life but we really don't like so many strangers coming in." He didn't even look at her. Lorraine was smoking a fat joint, blitzed out of her mind for a meeting she knew was called on her account, but after the journalist her head hung low.

"We just want to make sure you're all right," Sosh said in his gentle unironic way. "We're *worried* about you." Lorraine looked up—she made eye contact with me first, then Jean-Paul—and beamed a betrayed smile around the room before she rose.

My torpor grew in inverse proportion to my sense of my future as an actor. I could make them sit up if they let me play the whole scene, but lately their eyes glazed over before I even started to read.

In a while we heard the shower running and the sound of her singing "Gimme Shelter." I pictured her in there slitting her wrists, but she came out wearing lowcut black and smelling of Shalimar, and off she went to work, same as always. We heard her coming in, alone, sometime before dawn.

I developed such an aversion to the sound of Lorraine's singing, the sight of her stroking herself, that I began scurrying away whenever she was home, but one morning she showed up in my doorway, wearing a man's unbuttoned dress shirt. I gave her my fake friendly Judy Garland smile. It was hard to believe we'd ever been friends, but she was still running her hands down her hips as if to say, *Well, if you won't give me a hug I'll just have to do it myself.*

"Guess what? I'm dating a record producer," she breathed. Did she think we were still two hippie chicks sharing boyfriend stories?

"That's great." Even I could hear the chill in my *I-do-not-want-to-be-having-this-conversation* voice, and Lorraine heard it for sure. Before I slipped past her, she got even.

"I just hope Jean-Paul doesn't get upset when he hears about it."

What else could she mean? It was what I'd been suspecting for months, but for the first time I gave her a hint of my fury: I slammed our door as hard as I could, and then I turned the lock we had installed against her stoners. It gave a cold click, but I could still smell her standing there, warm from her bed. Did they meet after curtain and get a room? Have hot and heavy quickies in the kitchen? Through the door I heard her say, in a voice from some bad trip: "It's not like he pays me."

THE SLUT. Jean-Paul and I had never once discussed fidelity. It seemed, I don't know, uncool: his folks were *French*. We were children of the sexual revolution. Love the one you're with! We'd always treated marriage as a big fat joke*:* a joke like living in an ersatz commune to cut down on the rent, to cut down on the strange loneliness of living with another person. I thought about it all the time, didn't I, what it would be like to give off available vibes to directors who saw me walk into the room with my cheap wedding band and stopped listening then and there. I could hardly breathe. Oh sweet Jesus. Had she been turning tricks in this apartment? Were all those skeevy men *johns*?

I did my deep-breathing warm-ups for as long as I could focus—about twelve seconds—and then I fell face down on the bed. After a beat, I crawled up and grabbed a jacket. Let her come after me if she dared. In the elevator, I pounded the panel till the whole car jumped. Outside, I had no idea where I was going, but I turned south on scuzzy Broadway. Every panhandler and junkie and crazy I met set off my mother's voice: *The city! Believe me, the filth and degradation will get old fast*. And in the other ear, Lorraine: *I hope Jean-Paul doesn't get . . .*

I tramped my filthy degraded city all afternoon long. By the time I turned west, I was nursing a blister and the winter sun was setting over the Hudson. My fury wasn't spent, exactly, but it had transformed itself into the same kind of detachment I could work myself into before a performance. On the elevator I recited the lines I would say to Lorraine, because even after all my hours of walking I still hadn't worked out what I would say to Jean-Paul.

But when I let myself in, the apartment had a weird empty vibe: no perfume or dope or incense, no light above Sosh's desk. I retreated to our room and lay on our bed, practicing how calmly we would work out who got stuck with the ersatz commune and who had to move out—we'd both signed the lease. In a terrifying flash I saw myself back in my old bedroom, my mother's holy cards tucked into every mirror. I must have drifted off finally.

I woke to the weight of Jean-Paul's hand on my back and the thick sweet smell of his breath floating toward me: Kahlúa. "Feeney, you awake?"

I didn't know whether I was awake, or where I was, or why Jean-Paul was giving me a blow-by-blow of some adventure he'd had with Sosh: a baseball bat, a doorman, a sprint from East Village to West. "Where've you been?"

He laughed into my ear. "Decking Lorraine's pimp."

The strangeness of that, or maybe the sweet puff of his laughter fluttering in my eardrum, had a curious effect: I fell back into a skittering sleep, and dreamed of

Lorraine, that slut my mother had always warned me I might become. She paraded past me in tattered fishnet stockings, in red satin bustiers, in nothing but her corkscrew nipples. Sweet Lorraine: not just a slut but a whore, and not a metaphorical whore but a real live whore, the only whore I was likely to ever meet. She lived with me! She was my friend! Or once upon a time she had been my friend. I could feel her hand on my shoulder, where Jean-Paul's rested.

"Sosh said he'd get her money . . . just riding shotgun . . ." He still sounded euphoric.

Jean-Paul rode shotgun in a mobster's sedan. It was a lucid dream: I must have drifted off again, which made its own kind of sense. I'd been drifting off for the last six months, hadn't I, floating along on the little-enough money Jean-Paul made loading trucks, not sure how much he resented carrying me, or being married to me for that matter. I'd locked my dreamy self into a lonely bedroom in a lonely apartment in a dirty degraded city where your last girlfriend turned tricks.

In the morning I didn't even know if I'd dreamed the story or Jean-Paul had told it in voiceover, but in my sleep I'd learned it by heart. The pimp was only a kid from Brooklyn with a braid down his back. He'd sized up Jean-Paul and Sosh and laughed in their faces. When Sosh demanded Lorraine's money and the guy came at them, Jean-Paul summoned his stage fight training and landed a sucker punch. Then, having destroyed Lorraine's livelihood, they hightailed it out of there and ran all the way to the Lion's Head, where they drank themselves silly on her sweet drink.

That was the story. It could have happened, or parts of it could have happened. And I could have dreamed it, and Jean-Paul could have made it up. In the early light he drooled onto his pillow. I remembered one of his lines for sure: *She'd show up at the Hilton and let some accountant from Cleveland handcuff her to the bed.* I stared down at my husband—*husband*—and imagined asking him the true story. I'd watched her stroke her nipple. I knew I'd never ask.

He sensed me and stirred miserably in his own dreams. The Rescuer. The Defender. I whispered: "What's she going to do?"

He groaned like a man in the clutches of a head-splitting hangover, or maybe a serious case of guilt. "You mean," he said, "what are we gonna do." It was an uninflected reading.

We don't even know who told us to look in Brooklyn: We only knew it was as far away from the Upper West Side as we could imagine. We took a couple of long subway rides, checked out signs in brownstone windows. Give me a month, the landlord said.

I found I could worry about Lorraine again, now that we were leaving, and she gave me plenty to worry about: One morning I found her passed out on the kitchen floor. They let me ride in the ambulance with her, and after another stomach-pumping, she let me talk her into a week on the locked ward. I was her only visitor. I had so many questions. I don't mean the Jean-Paul question—the only way I was going to get out of the ersatz commune was to forget there even was a Jean-Paul question—but the kind of questions Ethel Feeney's daughter would never breathe: *Handcuffs? What if they took too long? What if you couldn't get, you know . . .*

Lorraine came home from the hospital a whipped puppy. I could already see the blank wide-eyed look she would give me through her aviator glasses when I told her we were moving. Even Sosh was looking for a new place.

Face it, we were leaving her, just sprung from the psych ward, to fend for herself. This was serious bad karma. If Ethel Feeney had known, she either would have said we were well out of there, or she would have said we were committing a grievous mortal sin, and I didn't even know anymore which one she would pick.

On moving day, bouncing along the Brooklyn Bridge, Jean-Paul pointed out the Statue of Liberty as if he were a sightseer, not someone who'd spent his whole life in this city. "She'll be okay." He veered along the decrepit roadway in our rented truck, grinning obscenely at our liberation. What a tidy story he'd told me, complete with sucker punch. He made soothing sounds as I wept, his cheerful new patience as suspicious as the cheap new Brooklyn rent. I could see whatever happened between them looming over us as we tried to hang on: to acting, to the city, to a marriage made too young.

And I could see an afternoon when the sun was just going down over the Hudson and Lorraine, wearing a shrunken *Sticky Fingers* tee shirt and her pointy tooled cowboy boots, curled up in the bathroom one last time. The hairballs blew around her like tumbleweeds, and I sat on the closed toilet lid, helpless, looking down on her as she alternated full-body trembling and sweet giggling. Was I supposed to take care of her? I couldn't even take care of getting myself one good role, much less take care of Sweet Lorraine Straveski.

I can't believe I could get so freaked out with you guys around. She started to choke. I wanted to get down and give her a good shoulder squeeze like the squeezes she'd given me, but I couldn't figure out how to get close to her on the floor. I stood up, sat back down, prayed we wouldn't have to go to the hospital again, seriously

considered running away: from her, from Jean-Paul, from New York and all its sorrows. She looked up at me with those crazy green eyes.

It's okay, she said, as if I were the one in trouble, as if I were just like her: an angry mother's daughter, lost in the city she thought would save her.

Claudia Keelan
In the Primer of Primary Things

In the primer of primary things
The inner life got left in the rain
Thereafter and further
She's called wet, and Wet
She lets fall your first name

In the Primer of Sorrowful Things

There'd been life in things
the morning glory one blue flower
and then others
through winter

The books leaning, collapsing, toward her
Wanted to break the shelves

But what were things
and what passed for life

She isn't talking to anyone now
though her lips move

She had made the hands and feet
on the sculptor's famous bodies
and stopped there

Led strangers to the new world
and seen the world die

She is sold now in Las Vegas
There are many of her
Seven, twelve, seventeen years old
Stolen from every part
of the old world
which has not died

Where she is

The remnant talking
remnant spiritus mundi
the glorious mathematic
stalled in proliferation

No more births

Our animal lives in a box
Fish smile from the sides of their eyes
wet in the filthy water

ESSAY

Anzhelina Polonskaya
Sylvia Plath's Room

Translated from Russian by Andrew Wachtel

Last night an icy rain fell, and in the morning it got cold. I wake up at six fifteen thinking about the cleaning lady, who is supposed to come at eight. Wednesday is my day. According to the shiny paper schedule hanging in the front hall, at quarter to eight you're supposed to open your door, thereby letting her know you're ready to have your room cleaned up. If you don't, then changing the sheets, taking out the garbage with the banana peels sticking to the sides of the bin, cleaning hair out of the sink and washing the floors becomes your problem. I suffer from chronic insomnia and every time I have to get up early the night becomes torture. I can't help thinking about it. Rolling around in bed, I listen to every nighttime noise, trying to guess how much time I have left before the alarm clock goes off. I observe the outlines of the breaking dawn with a kind of schadenfreude—there's the first bird song, now the sky is brightening through the tree branches, and now the streetlights have gone out. The more I try to hang onto the last shreds of sleep, the more pitilessly the eyes in the white ceiling stare down at me. Sometimes, especially during the winter, I can feel time with my skin to the minute.

Someone upstairs has flushed the toilet, and then slammed the door. Another one. "Wouldn't it be possible just to close the door? Quietly let it shut." It wouldn't be that hard—just hold onto the closing door with your hand or hold it back with the toe of your shoe, to avoid twisting everyone else's insides around. Unable to wait any longer, I fly out of the warm bed into the cold night air, shivering from too little sleep. While the house is still waking up, I need to sneak silently out into the hall and turn the dial on the wall thermostat to get the heat up. This is an invis-

ible contest. The thing is, I have a big room here at Saratoga Springs, with an office and a large bedroom. When it's cold out, the temperature needs to be set at no less than seventy degrees if I want to get from my bed to the bathroom in my pajamas without turning into an ice cube. But by the time my rooms have warmed up, those of my neighbors, which are the size of a closet, have turned into the ovens of hell. Coming back from dinner, as if fearful of being caught committing some kind of crime, I turn the wheel of our ship sharply toward the sands of the Sahara, whose sun-drenched arid landscape is so dear to my soul. For I am a woman of the desert. But some kind of unknown power turns it back a single twist, toward the kingdom of permafrost, where a bunch of gray corpses in their ripped tents lie on the slopes of Mount Everest. We are enemies. My neighbors and I. Though we eat the same bread and share the same wine. It is true that a ship can only have one captain.

The heavyset, middle-aged woman asks me if she can come in, and I can't figure out what I'm supposed to do with my body. One idea is to go to the kitchen and make myself a cup of coffee with cardamom, but the thought that I might meet someone there who would greet me with a life-affirming smile, energetic and squeaky clean, forces my body to collapse onto the revolving chair in the study while listening to the happy streams of water splashing behind the partition. Outside, there's a depressing December darkness, with a bluish tint. It's seems as if the trees are just about to walk inside, but even if they do, I'm not moving. My skin seems to have been covered in glass shards, my eyes sprinkled with sand. I don't go to breakfasts. In the mornings, at the communal table, I feel like an idiot. I simply don't have the mental energy to sit there and make empty small talk. It's as if you're blowing soap bubbles. You sit there, head in a book, not understanding a single word, just to avoid seeing how pieces of food drop into the black maws of mouths.

My dream has always been a solitary bathtub in the middle of a room, as happened once in the mountains when a nameless person poured whiskey into my glass as I luxuriated in a tub of hot sudsy water after a day of swimming in the sea. I trusted him too much—stood straight up, completely naked, rather than hiding beneath the protective water and merely holding out my hand with the glass. I showed every cell, vibrating in the twilight. What could I provide? Authenticity. It's the finest alloy, harder than any diamond. Like an insane mathematician who searches for the one possible solution, I searched for wholeness in everything, perhaps in order to give it away to someone else. But that person said, "I don't need your words, you don't know how to live." And the crystal sounds of Cyrillic beads rolled away, crackling underfoot. I said, "That's cruel," and nothing else. I wouldn't even

have said that had he not known that I was naked in front of him. But he'd heard my monologue for many years, and he hit right on the mark. I was retching like a pregnant woman, throwing up an endless flood of words, ugly, dwarfish, and preterm. But these dwarfish and unnecessary words, conceived in baseness, demanded their place in the sun. And when nothing but bile remained, a quiet and vibrating pain arose within me, flapping like an empty window frame in the wind. It merged with other sounds in the world. It is said that pain is protective, otherwise we would die from a simple burn, but that's not right. Pain leads to slow death, and there's no antidote for it. Or it turns up too late.

When Daniel showed me the room where I would be spending two months, he said: "I love this room; by the way, this is where Sylvia Plath stayed." A kind of ambivalent feeling came over me—the room was truly wonderful, but everyone knows what happened to Plath; I'm not superstitious and, even more to the point, her self-destructive tendencies were already apparent when she was a young woman, so it isn't obvious what role Hughes' leaving her alone, face to face with death, even played. Still, it would have been better if Daniel hadn't mentioned this. Standing by the window, I'd start to think: "Did you stand here just like me, half concealed by the blind? Did the streetlight's beam shine on your face? Did some casual passerby, attracted by the light, turn this way to see the figure in the window? Looking through the panes, what did you see? The trees of the desolate winter forest from which some otherworldly silence emanates, or did your eye alone perceive something shooting through the scattered fragments? Did a deer run across the field and suddenly freeze, its dainty leg raised? As you walked by the lake did you shiver at the sound of a twig broken by a squirrel? Alone or *with him*. Questions and questions, but not a single answer. I kept up my mental dialogue with Sylvia, trying involuntarily to sense our shared blood, as often happens with people who share an occupation. I would lie down on the sofa and imagine another woman stretched out there, perhaps paralyzed by terror. The liminal poetic state, just before a verse comes to you, is like a feeling of despair, which takes away your will. And your will returns each time you get a salvific line down on paper. Even if it isn't perfect. But it has to be that way. If even once, before you begin, you weaken then you might not find your way back. I think about how Sylvia walked around the room in search of lost meaning. Was the same arabesque on the chair's upholstery then? The same old-fashioned desk with hidden drawers for writing tools. A few old ink blots. Did she rip up the pieces of paper she wrote on? Or did the poems come one after another, the words simply laying themselves out in the right order. Did she take

up a knife to peel an orange, nervously swallowing the sections with their tender membranes, not wasting the energy to separate them from the fruit; did she lean up against the wall of the house, a tree trunk, panting from a sudden desire, waiting until the wave passed?

"Who can tell me what desire means?" Whiskey shaking in my glass. Rational action, which my lover brought to a level of automatic perfection somewhere in a provincial hotel room, effectively hidden from the world. To prevent the world, in the person of some accidental acquaintance, from screaming out: "Look, *she* exists!" When the metal belt buckle opens and you know what will happen down to the final chord, but you still continue like Breughel's blind man. Into the pit of all-encompassing indifference. And not for a little while, but for years. No, it was not I who didn't know how to live. Life itself was mendacious. With its splinter, dug out of my foot with a blazing needle prepared in advance. "Why bother to dig out a splinter when there's a hole in your chest the size of the entire world?" Made by someone whose best years had already passed. Glass beads in exchange for precious stones. Tinfoil rain watering heads driven crazy by cheap happiness. Sometimes a person in ties and pins turns back into the poor sap his mother once brought into the world. Into a state of spiritual poverty worse than that of the bums by the station fence. Into mediocrity.

Maybe I'm totally mistaken, Sylvia; perhaps these are just my personal thoughts and you were as happy here as you ever were with your Ted. And there was no emptiness, no terror, no half lies, no narcotic dependence on a man who, in the end, would betray you. Trade you for glass beads, perhaps, he would have dared. But both then and now, beyond this door, I hope that you knew desire mixed with mutual love, the reality of that jeweler's mark saved only for the chosen. "I don't know anything about you." I'm just trying to paint the room in bold strokes, slapping down some of my own paints on canvas. "What do you say, Daniel?" Daniel remains silent. He doesn't know either.

It's almost Christmas. The village is lit up. The silvery figures of reindeer that have galloped in all the way from Lapland are blinking in the yards. The streets are quiet, and the store windows are laden with more things than anyone could use in an entire lifetime. The most trivial thing, a rag, will outlive its owner by centuries. I love American Christmas—it's mysterious and melancholy. Every real holiday contains some sadness. Daniel in his flat cap, the kind that the party secretaries in the USSR used to wear, has left long ago. I also begin slowly to pack my things, as my flight to Moscow leaves in a few days. They're waiting for me at home. Running

ahead—it will be my last New Year's with my family. It will remain in my memory separated from all the previous ones. The last.

I've written a certain amount. With luck, some lines will remain. About something very important. About the sun. I always wanted to say that nothing is more perfect than the sun. Maybe the sea? But what would the sea be without the sun? And a conversation never works out quite the way you expect it to. Which means it makes no sense to wait for a perfect poem. The spaceship in which you get as close as possible to the stars—some well-connected words. And the search for them is what life is about.

On the twenty-eighth in the morning I go to the kitchen to pick up my sack lunch. There are two sandwiches, a bottle of water, and two apples. On the lid of the Thermos from yesterday's meal you can still see a tag with my initials. A taxi picks me up along with a random fellow traveler. En route the driver asks: "Where are you from? I can hear you have an accent." I don't want to tell an overlong story so I make a noncommittal gesture with my hand. He understands and laughs. Coldly. We stand waiting for the train to New York. With horror I think that I'm going to have to listen to the chatter of my fellow passenger for the whole four-hour trip. But fortunately the train cars are packed and we get separated. I happily nod to her from my seat. The train shudders and slowly begins to move. The landscapes out the window change, station after station. And Sylvia Plath remains standing behind me.

Anna Swir
Night Watch

Translated from Polish by Piotr Florczyk

At night
we stood together on guard,
shivering from the cold, a young soldier and I.
The whole tenement was asleep,
some eighty people sleeping like the dead.
Across the street—
Germans.

At night
we stood together on guard,
ordering our hearts not to beat.
So we could hear
the hearts of our enemies
beating in the dark.

Forgot About His Mother

She was dying in the basement,
on sacks of coal,
crying for water,
crying for her son,
no one was there.

The son forgot about his mother,
the son was cleaning his rifle.
He was counting bullets
ahead of the battle.

Only Sand Survived

All week
they hauled sandbags night and day
to the gate, to the windows.

Facing the Germans,
our house will be a fortress, we'll survive.

At dawn on the seventh day
a plane flew low
over the roof.

And only the sand survived.

A Girl Scout's Dream

When they execute me,
not everything will come to an end.

The soldier
who shot me dead will approach
and say: as young
as my daughter.

And he'll lower his head.

Sophie Summertown Grimes
Manmade Shapes

Desk, chair, table. Envelope. Sheet, bed, quilt.
Towel, napkin—unlike the calf, the knee, the kidney—
parts of pants and shirts. Front pockets, wallets, plastic
cards, cellphones, compacts. Glass pressed pictures
in frames along segments of wall. All the windows
in all the buildings, elevators, and backs of books
lit up in windows with those tedious desks, chairs,
envelopes. Ceilings, their ducts. Air conditioners.
Acres seen from the plane—suspended against that blue
vault with supple clouds—in many shades of green
or white depending on season. Manuals, screens,
red bricks—unlike the shape of embraces, your eye
or cheek—a goat's pupil. A deep blue painting of a square's
edge which is unlike the edge of a tree, swaying, seen
from a sixth floor window, which is not round—a face,
an exclamation of "oh"—the sounds of locks,
of door slams, cardboard boxes, cereal boxes, black cases
—please soften this city—cages, and the doorways
that draw us through them. Doorframe, doorjamb.

Describing the Texture of Dreams to You

The bus is the same.
It eats the dollar and the dollar gets jammed

and the driver is annoyed in the same way.
But he drives to a place

familiar only the way some scents are familiar:
tentacles gripping the air, without owner or origin.

The air absorbs the bus light
so everything's lit like under water.

The factory lacks detail
like a model of a factory.

The workers in the windows are dim, sharp,
and faceless. You can see the patterns on their shirts

if you look at them sideways.
I'm always losing things in my dreams. This time it's a black bag

filled with I don't know what, but something important because I'm hysterical
lying on the ground in a park, next to a silent pool.

What is it about that bag?
What's in it?

In our sturdy world, logic structures
buildings, the itineraries of journeys.

Logic in this other land is pigs
and blind cows behind black, glass doors.

They do not make any sound,
and no one eats them.

But they are slaughtered and their empty skins
scatter, like rugs, on the yellow hills,

where birds are pasted on the sky. The oven was on all night.
I put on some perfume. I cross my legs. Do you desire me now?

I Am Not a Photographer

Ha ha ha, says the fat woman.
She is in love. She jiggles.

Plastic bags in a tree—a bunch—
all blow in the same direction:

shifting bonnets, plus
one wannabe balloon.

The prairie in the parking lot
island has yellow grass with poof-tails.

Hear the shopping carts?
Here, a *Clang!* for clarity.

The flags flap in this order:
U.S. – Pepsi – U.S.

Below, the umbrella is
all elbow and wonky wing.

The cars are so well behaved!
All lined up under the red light.

Vibrating, and—again—poof-tails
of exhaust at their pipes. In one window

a couple head-bangs, and in another, perhaps,
a man pops bubble wrap, bubble by bubble.

Sure, a little river is charming frozen,
but how much more dazzling

to have it gurgle forth, squirm
there in the brain canals, and ear curves,

the ducks sliding on it, quacking
like men enjoying a dirty joke.

Brenda Shaughnessy
But I'm the Only One

who'd walk across a fire for you,
growled Melissa. That song
blared out from all four of
our bedrooms' tape decks,
often simultaneously, as if
that song was the only one
we all loved, the only one we
could agree on that summer
in the dyke loft, just when it
all started to change. Catherine
was moving out, to SoHo to
live with Melanie. So Shigi's
girlfriend DM took her room.
But not for long; they broke up
and Michelle moved in, shortly
after Cynthia came. *Tonight you*
told me that you ache for something
new. This was way before we'd
even dreamed we'd have to rent
out Shigi's office to Erin as a fifth
bedroom. Without Catherine we
couldn't afford the loft, but we

didn't know that yet. At the time
we thought everyone was poor
like us—we weren't the only ones.
We all smoked constantly, anyone
could afford to smoke back then.
Catherine bummed my last butt
but I know I saw her new carton
in the freezer. She didn't want
to open it yet, was trying to
cut back. This was before we
almost got the gas cut off, before
we lost electricity the first of
many times. After Justine had
been bullied out with her three
cats but Kristen—whom we
suspected was asexual and not
really lesbian—was still hanging
on even though she adopted yet
another cat into the loft without
asking. It was only one more,
she reasoned, but we already
had Seether, Amber, Balzac,

Gigli, and now Eva Luna.
Anna and Jackie came by,
they were friendly to me, but
Tjet and Julie weren't. T and J
were Clit Club. A and J were
literary. Then Michelle and
Shigi secretly slept together,
a disaster, and Cynthia got
kicked out for being bi and
then bringing a guy to the loft,
but that summer before all that,
just after I'd been dumped by
the girl I'd moved to NYC
to be with, and just after I'd
invited my first college girl-
friend to come visit me
(not sure what I expected
but she was the only one
who was willing to fly out)
but before I met Natira.
Our month-long affair
wasn't great but still pretty

damn good, she was the only
one I'd liked in a long time. I
hadn't met Sayeeda yet, at
Jackie's book party—Jackie
and Anna I think were broken
up by then. After Stefanie
but long before Tina, before
Jamie had even met Tina,
this song played everywhere,
every day, ceaselessly, so it
started to seem that *we* were
Melissa, that Cassandra,
foretelling in a ragged voice:
"*And I'm the only one who'd*
drown in my desire for you."
We meant that we too were
willing to do anything to
prove we were the only one
for someone that one summer.

Justin Mundhenk
River Get Down

Alexandria Point marks the confluence of the Ohio and Scioto Rivers. From a park bench you can watch the two curl, like fingers, into one another. The waters remain muddy all year round, staining clear monofilament the night-fishermen throw out in search of shovelheads and blues and yellows. Sometimes it rains too much and the bloated waters swallow up soybean fields and the floorboards of doublewides. They recede on their own time, leaving behind the spit-up of driftwood and detergent bottles and hollowed-out refrigerators. While familiar in shape, the detritus looks strange. Tree limbs are the femurs of giants, their bark scrubbed clean. Bottles are washed of their logos.

In the spring of '97, I watched my grandfather row a johnboat across a section of US Route 52 that had been consumed by the Ohio. My grandmother, in the bow, clutched her purse like a kitten. She waved to those of us on dry land.

The waters had carried away their outhouse, and for days they had to piss and shit in a bucket. They had no electricity. The kitchen faucet, the house's only sign of indoor plumbing, spewed water brown as the river. My grandmother looked happy in the boat. She was a woman being saved.

Fourteen years later, in the yellow walled room of a nursing-care facility, my grandfather lights up her catheter bag with the beam from a pocket flashlight. Ohio is on its third day of rain, the sky outside a gray, dead skin. The bag of piss is a beautiful gold—the sediment at the bottom the most wonderful amber honey. I expect my grandfather to shake the bag and loosen the sediment. When he does, the sediment will kick up like dust and fall back down in a fine mist.

Instead, he holds the bag up for a nurse to see. "I know a thing or two about the way water works," he says. "This thing isn't draining."

The nurse says things are draining just fine.

"It's junk," he says. "Cheap China junk."

I apologize to the nurse with my eyes.

After she leaves, my grandfather keeps repeating the phrase, whispers it actually. His own little four-syllable prayer.

Where I grew up in southern Ohio, there's plenty of water. Creeks run out of the hills only to meet up with larger creeks before they finally empty into the Ohio. And if you spend enough time around water, you begin to know it like unmarked gravel roads that shortcut through the hills. Roosevelt Lake, for example, is a man-made lake on Mackletree Road. I've fished private ponds bigger than Roosevelt, and I know its every shoreline. I know crappie prefer the northern shore, where they school in the lattice of submerged trees. On a good day, you can leave the lake with a stringer full of crappie twice the size of a human hand. You can throw Jitterbugs, poppers, or buzzbaits along the spillway in the evenings for bass. Sometimes the bass take the lure in their mouth like a child might reach for candy they're not supposed to have. Other times, though, they leap with excitement out of the water, and you miss setting the hook altogether. I prefer top-water fishing the best. Every chug of a popper is an invitation to all that swims beneath the surface. Urging them to appear. Come up. Surprise us, please.

Home is like this. Buildings are always being razed, as if the ground has opened up and swallowed them. There are entire city blocks of craters. Eventually, the skeleton of another building grows in its place. The funding falls through and the skeleton remains. People talk about the past as if it's the future because it's the brighter of the two. My grandfather talks fondly of the fried chicken and bread pudding at Ma Perry's. "Remember that?" he'll always say over the phone. We talk about the bean soup at Hamburger Inn. How they served food on wax paper and the ice they used was the best in town. No one considers ice as a fundamental ingredient to fountain soda. It should be small, pebble-sized, and crunchy. Ice that fractures when you bite down is no good, nor is ice that's so hard you have to suck on it for a while. This is how we talk. Memories substitute for other things, like my grandmother. When we do talk about her, it's always in the past.

"Remember Granny's scalloped potatoes?"

"Remember how she used to tickle your feet?"

"Remember when you were a baby, she used to bathe you in the kitchen sink?"

"Yes," I say. "I remember all those things."

I remember the time she and I stood on the back porch of their house and watched gar feed on schools of minnows in the floodwaters. I imagined my grandparents were wealthy and they lived in one of those neighborhoods where everyone has lakefront property.

She was wearing a dress with very fine patterns of flowers, the kind she always wore. If we talked, I can't remember. She called me baby. I know that because she always called me baby. I was imagining myself in a bass boat, flipping a half-ounce jig with a pork rind attached. I could see the lure bump against stumps and jump through the tangles of branches. There was a bass lingering above the rock my lure had just danced over, and he considered the jig with patience. He watched the pork rind ripple like a tail.

My grandmother was thinking back to Sarasota. She was standing on a beach, staring out on the Gulf of Mexico. It was just my grandmother and the three girls because her first husband had left the year before. He had already remarried and lived somewhere in Texas. Earlier that week she'd lopped off the head of a coral snake the girls found while playing in the backyard. She would always have danger to worry about—the girls drowning or smoking or marrying a man like their father. But she looked out on the Gulf and was surprised that something like water could go on and on out of sight. It was a feeling she'd want to remember, because there was no harm in imagination. There was no harm in wondering what would happen if this moment kept on going like the water.

It got dark and my grandfather turned on the porch light for us. I could hear his socks brushing across the kitchen floor. Beyond the edge of light, in the darkness, the gar continued to feed. Their bodies slapped the water. Frogs chirped and I awaited a whip-poor-will's frenzied call. The night promised endless sounds. Tomorrow, the river would start to recede.

Two days after my grandfather held high my grandmother's catheter bag, he loses the flashlight he'd lit up her piss with. The flashlight had belonged to my grandmother. We stand in the parking lot of the nursing-care facility. Pools of water form in the places where the asphalt has cracked and collapsed. His arms are limp and his pockets turned out like a child supplying proof of innocence.

"I've looked *everywhere*," he says.

I offer to buy him a new one.

"It's just that it was *hers*," he says. "Mamaw's."

My grandfather is persistent and stubborn, and has a peculiar affinity for looking someone in the eye when paying a bill. He refuses to mail checks to the insurance company. Instead, he will drive an hour, sometimes two, just to hand a person a check, just so he has the reassurance that an actual human being has taken on the responsibility that is no longer his. So I have no doubt that my grandfather searched everywhere for that flashlight. He went through closets and drawers and dirty clothes. He emptied out the glove compartment of his car and threw the floor mats into puddles without any care. He tore off couch cushions and stuck his hands into the crevices and corners.

Then it's just the two of us lying beneath a semi weighted down with timber. My grandmother is in the car, laughing, but I can't hear her. All I can see is her mouth open with joy and pleasure.

I see my grandfather remembering the flashlight—its rubber grip worn smooth from my grandmother's touch, the soft button at the bottom to turn it on and the many times it felt the scratch of my grandmother's fingernail. So many minutes of our days go unwatched. I can say with complete certainty that, at this very moment, the Scioto is taking the hand of the Ohio, and soon, a barge will pass. I have seen that barge before, but not today—not in a while. That's what my grandfather thinks about. He thinks of the things he hasn't seen in a while and the things that have occurred just out of sight. Little ghost memories.

There's my grandfather and me wading Turkey Creek in search of crawdads. I lift up a rock to discover a rattlesnake, coiled up and poised to strike, only to find the lower half of its body gone. No skin, no muscle or organs. Just thin white ribs like the many small legs of a centipede.

There's the three of us—my grandparents and me—on a road covered in water. The creek has flooded and water leaks into the floorboard. My grandfather is certain we can make it. I cry and say we can't. My grandmother says, "Duane, turn back." And we do.

There we are again, the three of us, in a pull-off waiting for my parents. There's been an ice storm, and as I step out onto what I think *should* be solid ground, I lose my footing and slide beneath the belly of a tractor-trailer that has parked for the night. My grandfather, in an attempt to save me, falls too. Then it's just the two of us lying beneath a semi weighted down with timber. My grandmother is in the car, laughing, but I can't hear her. All I can see is her mouth open with joy and pleasure. It's so quiet and cold that even the running car sounds like a baby breathing.

There's the last time I hear my grandmother speak, over the telephone, fourteen hundred miles away. Her "I love you" sounds like she has a mouthful of water. The next time, she can only press buttons on the phone, yet the sound comes through so clearly.

When the rain comes in the spring, the rising rivers go unnoticed. You go to bed one night, and the next morning the land is covered in water. We ask ourselves, half joking, how this could happen. Where did all this water come from? We know the answer, of course. We've grown accustomed. And if it floods in December, we're not surprised. We wait for the water, and then we wait it out.

The fluids in my grandmother's body have started to build up. It's only a matter of time, we're told. We're told her skin will take on another color in the final moments—purple. It will happen overnight, they say. One day drastically different from the last.

My grandfather finds the flashlight wedged beneath the driver's seat of his car. He's holding it up and smiling.

"Who do you think put it there?" he says. "Tell me. Who do you think?"

I tell him I don't know.

"Come on, baby. Who?"

I don't have the heart to tell him I don't believe in miracles, that things just have a way of surfacing, just as they have a way of disappearing. Flashlights lay dormant in seat cushions and junk drawers and toolboxes.

Still, the flashlight becomes something of a miracle, and later he talks about it the way we talk about my grandmother.

"Remember the time I lost the flashlight and He brought it back to us?"

"Yes," I tell him, "I remember."

Some spring mornings the fog comes on unexpected. It's always at its worst when the bottoms on both sides of 52 are filled with water. The fog muscles its way into every corner until it's impossible to see five feet in front of you. Sometimes headlights peer out for a few dulled seconds, and then they're gone. Whitetail deer flash by. It gives one the illusion of being smothered by a soft, warm blanket. Eventually, the sun burns away the fog, and for a moment, we're shocked to see the water in all its fullness. Then something floats by, let's say a basketball, and we're reminded of what the rivers will leave us.

Karen Wunsch
The Super's Son

EARLY SPRING

When Suzanne rang the super's bell to pick up a package—his widow, Carmen, still lived there—Carmen's son Eddie opened the door. In his mid-twenties, he was tall and thin, with dark eyes and very dark hair that was on the long side. Although it was still cool, he wore cutoff jeans and a tee shirt. He looked as if he worked out. Every time Suzanne saw him she'd think that he was really very attractive.

He looked at her belly pushing out her flowered maternity dress—four months pregnant, she was so thin and small-boned, she'd started to show almost immediately—and gave it a thumbs-up.

Suzanne asked about his young son.

"He's great!" Eddie looked happy at the thought of him. "He's in the Bronx with his mom. I'm back home for a while." They lived in a small apartment building on the Upper West Side of Manhattan.

Suzanne couldn't remember if he'd been married. "You're still going to college?"

"I want to teach history, hopefully in a middle school."

"I used to teach high school. English." She didn't mention that she'd hated it and, with her husband Marc's encouragement, had recently quit.

"I'm also working nights as a waiter. You have a package, Suzanne?"

She'd always liked it that unlike Carmen, Eddie called the tenants by their first names. As she waited she thought about how their apartment often smelled

as if Carmen were cooking something delicious. Now it was garlic and a spice she couldn't identify. She felt a little light-headed and realized she hadn't eaten lunch.

Eddie came back with what looked like a shoebox. Marc must have ordered shoes. As Suzanne took the package, it slipped out of her hands, and the next thing she knew she was stretched out on a large sofa and Eddie was bending over her looking worried.

"Are you okay?"

"I'm okay." His face was close to hers, his dark hair fell on his forehead, and she wanted him to barely touch her nipples, then lift up her dress, pull down her panties—she'd help . . .

She moved to sit up and he backed away. "I'm okay." She wasn't dizzy anymore, but felt disoriented and guilty.

He still seemed worried. "I'm gonna get you some juice."

She told herself that Eddie couldn't have been aware of her desire for him.

She hoped she didn't look too bad: She was pale under the best of circumstances. She touched her thick dark curls, which got limp and lusterless when she was sick. They felt all right. Her hormones must be all over the place. She and Marc hadn't had sex as often as they used to, mainly because he seemed inhibited, as if somehow, despite her assurances, he could hurt the baby.

She looked around. The apartment faced the back and didn't get a lot of light, but the living room was large with high ceilings. There were several tables and large, comfortable-looking chairs. Music played somewhere, so softly that she couldn't tell if the words were Spanish. She saw a small bowl filled with hard candy on the coffee table and was about to take a piece when Eddie came back with a glass of orange juice and a plate of Saltines.

"Here you go, Suzanne." As she ate the crackers and drank, he didn't take his eyes off her.

"I don't know what happened. I usually snack all day long." Her hands were on her stomach. "I'm really fine." She stood up.

He'd reached to help her, but she'd been too quick. He insisted on accompanying her upstairs.

An electrician was high up on a ladder in the middle of the lobby, fixing a chandelier. As she and Eddie waited for the elevator, they didn't speak. She was glad that none of her neighbors was going in or out of the building. Eddie was holding Marc's package—she'd forgotten about it.

In the elevator she couldn't think of anything to say. She looked at his black sneakers. Apparently Eddie couldn't think of anything to say either. It was like the end of an awkward date.

When they got to her apartment, she murmured, "Thank you *so* much!" although whenever she heard herself (and other women) in cafés and restaurants saying this to waiters and waitresses, it sounded effusive and phony. She was about to open her door when Eddie said, "Not so fast!" and handed her Marc's shoes.

Marc had chosen estate law because it was less pressured than litigation, but he rarely got home before eight o'clock. Suzanne usually enjoyed those early evening hours waiting for him. She'd eat popcorn or pretzels and make herself a decaf coffee, instant and in a glass the way her mom did it, even though she and Marc had an espresso machine. She'd lie on the tufted velvet chaise longue, which Ben and Ruthie, Marc's parents, had given them because they actually had another one. Sometimes she'd read. She was trying to finish Proust's *Remembrances of Things Past* before the baby came. Marc recently bought her an expensive camera, and she was still studying the manual. Tonight, though, feeling vaguely that she didn't deserve the chaise, she sat on a chair. She couldn't concentrate on Proust, and didn't even try the manual. She'd had lovers who would have been excited if she told them what had happened with Eddie, but Marc wasn't like that. When they'd started dating he fell in love with her almost right away, but she'd had more affairs than he, and wasn't so sure. He was preoccupied with his job, complained a lot, and was a bit of an alarmist about health issues. His intensity could get on her nerves. He listened to talk shows on the radio in every room he was in; it seemed like there was always noise when he was around. "I need you!" he'd tell her, and although she didn't quite see why he was so needy—he came from a loving family and had a good career—she came to enjoy making him happy. And then slowly, for her, she fell in love with him. But even after they were married, she'd sometimes have doubts. After he was made a partner he'd sworn he'd cut down on his hours and for a while he did, but soon he was back to his old ways. When she couldn't get pregnant she'd thought about leaving while she could. Then she got pregnant and, perhaps because they'd gone through so much worry together, her doubts seemed to disappear.

Uncomfortable in the chair, she wondered if she was old enough to be Eddie's mother; he had to be at least twenty-three, so she would have had to have him when she was twelve. She thought about calling a friend and telling her what

had happened, but she didn't move. She wasn't even sure she'd tell Marc about fainting: He'd just worry. Wondering if she'd felt the baby kick or if it was just gas, she fell asleep.

Then Marc was there, turning on lights all over the apartment the way he always did when he came in, muttering, "Why is it so dark in here?" It was their routine: She'd wait for him with just one light on, in the room where she was; he'd tease her for being "small change"; she'd feel—especially since she'd stopped teaching—that he was bringing her the world.

"I must have fallen asleep." She shielded her eyes from the light.

"Is everything okay?" He fingered the spot on his head where his new hairdresser had recently told him he'd have a bald spot one day. Although the dermatologist he'd consulted afterward hadn't been able to see it, and neither had Suzanne—"I love your silky hair," she kept saying—he believed the hairdresser.

"Everything's fine. Your shoes came." She remembered Eddie's black sneakers.

"Oh, good."

As she got the dinner ready, she could hear a man's voice on the radio in their bedroom. Stirring soup, she missed her wooden spoon, which she'd bought for her first apartment. Marc had decided it was unsanitary. "You have a responsibility for the baby now."

"Do you think I'm going to get sick and vomit up the baby?"

He'd laughed, but she'd stopped using the spoon.

Suddenly annoyed because she couldn't tell him about fainting, she was tempted to look for it. "The wooden spoon rebellion!" she thought bitterly. But even if Marc came in while she was using it, he'd probably be too preoccupied to notice.

They ate at their big dining-room table.

"Soon we'll have a little person joining us." The thought cheered her up. "Does this soup seem salty?"

"Not particularly."

"I bought it at this new place your mom told me about." Ruthie was always recommending takeout that Suzanne usually found too salty.

As Marc complained about a demanding client, Suzanne tried not to look bored. She was grateful that he worked hard so that she—and soon their baby—didn't have to "think about," as he put it, money.

She'd roasted a chicken and made a salad. He ate quickly.

"Slow *down*."

He took a deep breath. "That's better!" But he didn't put down his fork.

While she loaded the dishwasher he came in to tell her something annoying his secretary had done. In the middle of his story he abruptly stopped, as if he knew he was being tedious. He could do that sometimes, and she found it endearing.

His mom called—Suzanne could always tell who it was because he'd sound relaxed. Suzanne had always liked Ruthie, and now she was grateful because Ruthie and Ben had paid for her fertility treatments.

When Marc hung up he asked if she wanted to call her mom, who lived in Cleveland.

"Not tonight." Her mom cried a lot, not only when she was sad or moved by something but when, say, someone tried to get ahead of her in line and she just wanted to calmly point out that she'd been there first. Suzanne's father had died young and Suzanne had felt close to and protective of her mom until, in her teens, she'd grown impatient. Marc would tell Suzanne that she was too hard on her. Sometimes this annoyed her, but it also pleased her that he really seemed to care about her mom.

As if he sensed Suzanne's having been attracted to another man, he wanted to make love, even though it was what he called a "school night"—he had work the next day.

For a change she wasn't in the mood. She let him assume it was because of her pregnancy. "*Sorry*."

He kissed her cheek and turned on his bedside radio.

"You know," she hesitated, "I'm not sure I'm really a photographer." She'd always enjoyed taking pictures, but with a simple camera and then with her smart phone; before Marc encouraged her, she'd never thought of doing it full time. "And I feel guilty that I'm not working." Growing up, she'd always had some sort of job.

"Being a photographer isn't work?"

"I haven't even really learned to use the camera yet . . ."

"Give yourself time." He was almost asleep.

Wide awake, she turned off the radio and went into what would be the baby's room. Rocking in the chair Ruthie had used to nurse Marc and his sister Nina, she wondered if Eddie had carried her to the couch. He obviously worked out, but wasn't too muscular. She worried her skin had felt clammy. Eventually she fell asleep. Toward morning Marc came looking for her and led her back to their bed.

*

Although Suzanne was often in and out of her building and would occasionally see Carmen—short, overweight, polite but reserved—cleaning the lobby or hallways, she rarely saw Eddie. Once she was coming into the lobby with a grocery bag when he opened his apartment door and looked pleased to see her. "Let me take that up for you."

"It's really light. How's school?"

"School's good."

"How's work?"

"Work's work." He smiled. "How's baby?"

She realized her hand was on her stomach. "Nine more weeks." She couldn't think of anything else to say. She had a feeling that he wasn't usually so reticent, either, especially with women. She couldn't tell if he found her attractive.

Once near the playground across from their building, she saw him with his three- or four-year-old son, who had bangs and wore a Yankees cap. She took their picture, and although she was often critical of her photos, she liked it and put it under Carmen's door. A few days later she was coming in with Marc as Eddie was going out. "How's it going?" he asked without slowing down.

Marc nodded in his usual preoccupied way.

"He's a nice young man," Suzanne said as soon as the elevator door closed.

"He seems to be."

She could tell he was thinking about work.

In early July she was waiting for the elevator when Eddie came in the building. She wore a clingy jersey dress. Eddie looked at her basketball-like belly and sort of saluted it. They talked about the heat. She couldn't remember his son's name. "How's school?"

"Since you asked, when I decided to do this thing I told myself that I'd get all A's. But I just got a B."

"I seem to remember getting a few C's." She couldn't believe she'd said, "seem to remember"; she sounded like a little old lady.

"Anyway, I'm going to have to work more hours. I'll probably take off the fall semester and go back in the spring."

She wasn't sure what to say. Then the elevator was there

"See you, Suzanne. Take care."

"See you." She realized she felt shy about saying his name.

Occasionally she'd hear him in the small courtyard behind their building, playing ball with his son. She'd wonder if Marc would play ball with their child. He said he enjoyed tennis, but he never played.

Every time she and Marc approached whatever restaurant they were going to, she'd worry that Eddie worked there: She didn't want him to wait on her.

When Marc left a shirt with a fraying collar on top of their garbage so one of the workmen in the building could see it, Suzanne worried Eddie would take it and she'd hate seeing him wear it. She was about to stuff it in the garbage when she remembered how much taller and thinner Eddie was.

She'd catch herself having fantasies about him. They'd be in the elevator and it would be packed to capacity (this had never happened): Eddie would be pressed against her belly, baby would give a big kick, and he'd laugh.

She'd catch herself having fantasies about him. They'd be in the elevator and it would be packed to capacity (this had never happened): Eddie would be pressed against her belly, baby would give a big kick, and he'd laugh; the other tenants would look at him inquiringly, but it would be his and Suzanne's secret. He'd be patiently listening to a woman in the building endlessly complain about something in her apartment when Suzanne, passing by, would inform her that Eddie had schoolwork to do (the woman would never speak to her again). Marc would be at work when she went into labor, and she'd be hailing a cab to take her to the hospital when Eddie would come out of their building. He'd insist on going with her and waiting until Marc got there; the next time Marc saw him he'd try to give him a big tip, but Eddie would angrily refuse to take it. Leaving the baby with a sitter, Suzanne would be on her way out when she'd see Eddie, and as they made small talk her milk would let down, soaking her shirt so he couldn't pretend not to notice. What if she needed drugs in the delivery room and she told Marc—and whoever else was around—how she'd been dying to have Eddie fuck her?

She more or less mastered her new camera, but didn't take many pictures. She liked to photograph people, and while it had been easy to hide what she was doing with her smart phone, now her subjects were aware of her camera and usually didn't like it. Marc explained her legal rights, but when someone objected she'd sympathize. On hot days the camera strap, damp with her sweat, irritated her neck. More and more, instead of taking pictures she'd go out for coffee or

lunch or an afternoon movie, usually alone since most of her friends had full-time jobs. Or she'd lie on her chaise with the air conditioner blasting and feel guilty because Marc worked so hard and her mom, in her sixties, was a full-time secretary. Sometimes she'd worry about what kind of job she'd get when her baby went off to school.

It was a strange time with Marc. Although by unspoken mutual agreement they had sex less often, they were closer. When she got home after taking or not taking pictures, she'd put on his gym clothes, which now fit her. The wait for him seemed longer and lonelier.

After dinner they'd sit side by side on the sofa and he'd keep his hand on her belly, patiently (for him) waiting for the baby to move. He kept telling her how grateful he was that she'd persuaded him not to find out the baby's sex. He mastered her camera and took arty pictures of her naked. One night as they lay in bed talking, he told her about the summer when he was interning in Washington and had an affair with another intern "who happened to be black."

Suzanne was surprised he'd never told her. "Was she pretty?"

"She was. She was a little taller than me and skinnier than you, and her hair was like those halos on Madonnas in those medieval paintings. Anyway, she had a boyfriend in Pennsylvania and it didn't last long. Are you shocked?"

"No. Maybe a little surprised." She smiled.

He looked pleased with himself.

"Do you think you would have ended it if she didn't?"

"I can't answer that."

"Don't talk like a lawyer."

"Who should I talk like?" He seemed almost wistful.

It was a school night for him and getting late, but they made love.

Another night she talked about her lover Steve. Although Marc knew that he was married and probably an alcoholic, she'd never told him about how, after she'd left him, he'd been in a car accident that was probably his fault. "He kept calling from the hospital, but after I found out it wasn't serious I didn't want to go see him. But he kept begging and finally I went." She tried not to cry. "He looked grizzled and gray. The worst thing"—she felt the tears come—"the worst thing was that one of his eyelids no longer stayed closed, so at night, to this day, he has to use this special tape to keep it shut." She covered her face with her hands, partly because she was crying, but she also had a feeling that Marc would look squeamish, and she didn't want to see that.

Several weeks went by without her running into Eddie. Once she came home to find that he must have left a package for Marc outside their door. Then a neighbor told her that Carmen had breast cancer and needed chemotherapy. Eager to ask if there was anything she could do to help, Suzanne began lingering in the lobby, slowly going through her mail or prolonging small talk with neighbors, but she didn't see Carmen or Eddie.

Marc was late for their childbirth class so Suzanne was paired with Linda, a single parent who usually worked with the instructor. As they practiced massage techniques on each other, Suzanne liked the feel of Linda's hands, smaller than Marc's, but more confident. And she liked massaging Linda's body and trying to ease its tension. When Marc rushed in, shrugging off his expensive suit jacket, Suzanne was disappointed.

After class they usually had dinner at a nearby restaurant that happened to be the same one where, before Suzanne had even met Marc, she'd taken her mom for her birthday. She'd had to budget for weeks to afford it. Her mom, her dyed brown hair too vibrant for her pale face, had been so excited, and grateful, she'd cried even more than usual. Other diners didn't seem to notice, but Suzanne had been embarrassed. Now when she'd go with Marc she'd remember that night and feel almost disoriented.

Since the class met on a school night, when she and Marc ate there he'd try to choose a dish that wouldn't take too long. Although Suzanne wouldn't say anything, it bothered her to spend so much on a meal they rushed. "Let's go somewhere else for a change," she said after class. She'd noticed a Cuban-Chinese restaurant a few doors down. "Let's go there!" She expected him to object because he usually chose the restaurant and this was humbler than their usual places, but he agreed.

As they walked in Suzanne realized this was the first restaurant she'd been to where she didn't automatically look for Eddie; it was also the first where he could conceivably be a customer, too, although since it wasn't in their neighborhood, she doubted it. Still, she looked for him.

The booths were large and the padded leather benches were comfortable. She wished she weren't pregnant and could have a glass of wine. When their waiter asked if he wanted white or yellow rice, Marc looked at Suzanne. "Which one do I like?"

She shrugged. She no longer found questions like that flattering.

He ordered a Diet Coke. This used to depress her, but since she'd been pregnant she'd gotten to like them.

There was a lot of food. Marc ate quickly, complaining about a client.

Suzanne pointed out a table of attractive young women all sipping pink drinks from oversized cocktail glasses.

Marc was always grateful when she'd point things out to him.

He'd finished eating and was jiggling his foot. When she first met him she'd thought that meant he was madly attracted to her.

They talked about ways they'd be like and unlike their friends who had children. As Suzanne swore she wasn't going to get a jogging stroller—"When I'm with my baby, I'm going to be with my baby!"—she had a feeling from his expression that his parents had already bought one. She remembered the night when they were on their honeymoon in Paris, and the concierge had given them a gift certificate from his parents to a three-star Michelin restaurant. The meal was the best she'd ever had, but Suzanne kept wondering if Ruthie had made the surely hard-to-get reservation before they were even engaged. "And I'm not going to take a million baby pictures."

Marc promised to get home earlier. "I know you don't believe me, but you'll see."

He'd finished eating and was jiggling his foot. When she first met him she'd thought that meant he was madly attracted to her.

"Give me a minute." He took out his Blackberry and called a young associate who'd been doing research for him.

Suzanne decided to call her mom.

She sounded teary with happiness at hearing Suzanne's voice. "Five more weeks and then you'll have this wonderful new person in your life . . ."

Suzanne knew her mom wasn't trying to make her feel guilty for not being in *her* life, but she felt guilty. "You're going to be the first one Marc calls," she promised. They talked about when she'd come to see the baby. She'd been saving her vacation days. "By the way," Suzanne said, "has Martha's son put away those boxes yet?" It had been almost a year since her mom moved to Martha's house. Martha had multiple sclerosis and in exchange for free rent, had Suzanne's mom there in case she needed help at night. So far this hadn't been a problem, and her mom

liked Martha, and her room was big and sunny, but in one corner there was a pile of Martha's boxes that were supposed to have been moved to the attic. It bothered Suzanne that her mom had to look at them every day. "If you don't want to ask him, I can make an excuse to call him, and then I can casually mention it . . ."

"They bother you more than me."

Their waiter appeared and Marc, still on the phone, scribbled in the air to indicate that he was ready for the check.

"Gotta go, Mom." Putting away her phone, she felt guilty.

When the check came Marc was impressed by how cheap the meal had been. "The food's pretty good, too."

"Rice and beans. It's comfort food." Her hands were on her belly. "Would you come back?"

He smiled. "Probably not." He touched the spot where he worried his bald spot would be.

She realized that when the baby came he'd get home early for a week or two, and then he'd be later and later. And then when he finally came, he'd worry about every little thing with the baby. It would be like she had *two* babies. She wondered if she loved him. She loved her mom, but she could barely stand to talk to her. She knew one thing: She'd love her baby.

EARLY FALL

Marc's parents had a big "goodbye-to-summer" party on the roof of their apartment building. They'd hired a waiter, a bald young man who resembled Eddie. As Suzanne watched him circulate with his big tray of hors d'oeuvres, she realized it *was* Eddie. At first she was upset because he was so much less attractive without his hair, but when she realized that he must have shaved his head for Carmen, who was probably losing her hair, she was moved. "I *knew* you were a good person!" she'd tell him. Actually, she hadn't known.

When he came over to her she didn't look at his tray. She touched her own head. "Nice!" she murmured. "What a wonderful thing you did for your mom."

He shrugged.

"How's she doing?"

"The chemo hasn't been as bad as we thought. She's feeling pretty good. How about *you*, Suzanne? " Instead of indicating her belly as he usually did, he looked into her eyes. "Pretty soon now, *Mami!*"

Ruthie came up to them, with Marc's younger sister Nina, in from Chicago.

"Are those miniature *lobster* rolls?" Nina took two.

Ruthie said she'd sampled too many.

Suzanne quickly shook her head, and Eddie moved on.

Suzanne decided not to explain why Eddie was bald. She didn't want it to be party chitchat.

Ruthie, a psychologist, wasn't particularly attractive, but she wore a lot of bright colors and was so vivacious, she seemed better looking than she was. Nina had very black hair, wore very red lipstick, and was very pretty.

"I can't believe you convinced my brother not to find out the baby's sex."

"For a while he worried he wouldn't be able to stand the suspense so he was going to find out and not tell me, but he changed his mind pretty quickly."

Ruthie liked to tell Suzanne "Little Marc" stories. "This was when he was about five. We'd taken them to Coney Island—Nina wasn't even walking yet—and we were on our way to Nathan's when he saw a dwarf. He was just standing there smoking a cigarette, but Marc got so deathly pale, I thought he was going to faint. After we explained what a dwarf was, he didn't say anything for a few minutes. Then he told us, '*I'm* not a dwarf!'"

Suzanne secretly thought that in some of Ruthie's stories Little Marc wasn't very appealing, but she liked this one.

Ruthie went to greet a friend. As Suzanne chatted with Nina about her latest boyfriend, the baby started moving. "Do you want to feel?" She put Nina's hand on her belly.

Nina was thrilled. "Did my mom buy you that?" She indicated Suzanne's daisy-strewn maternity dress.

She hadn't, but Suzanne wondered if Nina knew that her parents had paid for her IVF treatments. She'd asked Marc once and he said he didn't know. She hadn't been sure he was really listening, though.

Nina drifted away. People kept coming up to Suzanne with good wishes. Remembering the engagement party Ruthie and Ben had given to introduce her to their friends, she realized that she finally knew who everyone was. But after a while all the attention started to make her uncomfortable, and she went to the edge of the roof to enjoy the view and get away. Looking at the boats on the Hudson, she wondered if Martha's son had moved the boxes out of her mom's room.

There was a commotion and it turned out that someone had knocked over a bowl of guacamole. Suzanne wished she could help Eddie clean up the mess. As

she'd crouch beside him—the skin on his sweet scalp would look soft and new—Marc would see them and, worried about the baby, he'd shout at her, "What in the hell are you *doing!*"

"Hey man," Eddie would tell him, "watch your language!"

Suzanne felt something she was sure was a contraction.

When she rushed to tell Marc, he was surprisingly calm.

"Don't tell your parents. Just tell them we're tired. Say you're tired." She worried that if they knew, there'd be champagne and flowers waiting in her hospital room; she wanted it to be just her and Marc and the baby.

The obstetrician on call said it was too early and sent them home. Marc kept asking her to rate her contractions on a scale of one to ten; he'd ask if she wanted any of the various things that their birthing instructor had suggested. "Are you sure you don't want to call your mom?"

"You can do one thing for me."

He was jiggling his foot.

"Turn off the radio."

Fully dressed except for their shoes, they lay on top of their bed.

They talked about the party. "Do you think Nina knows that your parents paid for my treatments?"

"No idea."

Her contractions seemed to be diminishing. "I thought that was so nice, Eddie's shaving his head for Carmen." She waited for him to say something. "Would you do that? For me? Shave your head?"

He didn't say anything.

When she'd asked, she hadn't thought much about it, but now she was uneasy. "If I had chemo and lost my hair, would you shave your head?"

"Why are we talking about this? You're jinxing yourself. And you're jinxing the baby!"

"Don't give me that."

He didn't say anything.

"*Would* you?"

"I don't know."

"You don't *know*?" She felt like a lawyer.

"I'm not sure."

"Because of your clients? You wouldn't show your support for your wife because of the greedy little shits you work for?" That was it! She never should have married him! "I'm out of here!" she'd tell him. She'd said it to other men. She and Marc could share custody. Of course he—and his family—would be vicious. Her contractions were definitely weakening. What if the baby never came out? She told herself that was just the kind of stupid thing Marc would think!

"It's not my clients," he said softly.

"You're mumbling."

"It's not my clients, my clients can deal."

"Well?"

"Don't be mad, but I'd be worried about my bald spot."

"Your *bald* spot? You don't *have* a bald spot, I *told* you, what is the *matter* with you? And what does your bald spot have to do with it?" She sat up so she could look at him, but he was biting a cuticle.

"What if I shaved my head, in some sort of solidarity with you, and then it never grew back in that spot? Like a kind of reverse stimulation."

"Are you crazy? What are you *talking* about?"

"*Your* hair would grow back, you have a *lot* of hair. But *I'd* have a bald spot for the rest of my life! Anyway, can we stop talking about this?"

She was about to ask, "Would you do it for the *baby*?" But she knew that even if he didn't know it now, he would. She made herself take deep breaths, and after a while she calmed down. "I don't know whether to laugh or cry." It was getting dark. The next time she'd be in bed at twilight, her baby would be with her.

She'd imagined that when her water broke she'd be in the lobby chatting with Eddie about something like the weather. When it actually happened, though, much later that night, as her contractions intensified and she and Marc raced through the lobby, hand in hand, Eddie was so far from her thoughts that it was as if he'd never even existed.

Kelly Forsythe
Espresso

The woman kept commenting on my skin
20s be more magnificent
be able to have
a stake in magnificence

& the whole time
I want my foot to be braced
behind your calf
I'm hunting you

discipline I'm hunting for some
way to press
against you

& I wore this tank top
to contrast my complications
the inferno the vibration the blonde bright bright white
I'm almost aware of your cheekbones, the woman says.

Your stare across the table
it is now intricate
& drunk
it is okay to move away from
me it is
what happens
in my throat stepping back
it doesn't make you want any less
to know what my body could take
if it was yours
if hair and palm
if that heat

Rusty Morrison
Throw Fallacy

you try again; ball up your fist, the hand with a tiny dove carved from marble cupped in your carved-marble palm; its curve of as-yet-unused girl-hand frozen in the want

to be offering whatever it has; you're too old, throw that;

directing your flashlight beam, ball that up; the increment you need won't be what it's pointing at; no one points fast enough, dark's still your best history lesson;

your art may feel time-sensitive

in whatever you set out to investigate, but every avoidance will attach; will be carried, sucking its placenta, to term; just try throwing that; the good news, all you've missed,

mangled, ruined, mis-rhythmed and their serious hair come back—

Alejandra Pizarnik
The Only Wound

Translated from Spanish by Yvette Siegert

What beast, fallen from astonishment,
drags itself through my blood now
in hope of its own salvation?

Behold the difficult thing:
to walk along the streets
identifying heaven or the earth.

Exile

FOR RAÚL GUSTAVO AGUIRRE

This mania of knowing myself an angel,
without age,
without a death in which to live me,
without piety for my name
or for my bones that sob as they wander.

And who doesn't have a love?
And who doesn't delight in a field of poppies?
And who doesn't possess some fire, some death,
or some fear, something horrible,
though full of feathers,
though full of smiles?

This sinister delirium of loving a shadow.
The shadow doesn't die.
And my love
only embraces the thing that flows
like lava up from hell:
a quiet loggia,
ghosts at sweet erection,
priests made of foam,
and above all, the angels,

angels beautiful as knives
that rise up at night
as hope's devastations.

Only a Love

My love is expanding.
It is a perfect parachute.
It is a click breathed out and
  its chest becomes enormous.
My love doesn't rumble
        doesn't cry out
        doesn't beg
        doesn't laugh.
Its body is an eye.
Its skin is an atlas.
My words perforate the
      final sign of his name.
My kisses are eels he's
      proud to let slip away.
My caresses are streams reminiscent
      of music above the fountains of Rome.
No one could flee its emotional territories.
There are no routes nor folds nor insects.
Everything so terse that my tears have revolted.
My creation is all sanctimonious next
      to its own blonde boat.

At times like this the inkwell takes flight and
    makes its way to the inextinguishable borders
    where mosquitoes are making love.
There goes the fateful sound. I won't be back.
It is my love that is expanding.

I Am . . .

my wings?
two rotting petals

my reason?
shots of briny wine

my life?
a well-conceived void

my body?
a fissure in the chair

my moods?
a child's gong

my face?
a zero in disguise

my eyes?
oh, pieces of the infinite

Immobile Dance

Messengers came at night to announce what we hadn't heard.
Something sought beneath the howling of the light.
Something that wished to restrain the gloved hands
intent on strangling innocence.

And if they hid in the house of my blood,
why don't I just drag myself up to the beloved
who is dying now behind my tenderness?
Why don't I flee
and chase myself with knives
into delirium?

Every moment is stitched with death.
I devour fury like an idiotic angel
who is so riddled with sores
he has forgotten the color of sky.

But they and I all know
the sky is the color of childhood once it dies.

Christine Rice
Exacting Revenge

Edwina Godrich has become obsessed by tragedy: *Othello* and *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, of course. But her favorite is *Hamlet*. She hasn't read Shakespeare's later work. But she will because she's smart and has loads of time on her hands since she doesn't go out much. That's because of what happened under the bleachers last fall. It's been a year but she still can't put words to it. Maybe that's because she doesn't quite remember what happened after all that whiskey. She does remember the ache between her legs, what boys catcalled after her the following weeks at school, some lurid stick drawings in the girls' bathroom, and the embarrassing fact that, when the school janitor responsible for locking up the field found her bloodied and naked behind that pillar, she had shit her pants.

Instead, she focuses on two real-life tragedies in New Canaan. The first occurred on the sprawling, inland lake where she lives with her grandfather, and the other at a school long since razed where her grandfather's twin brothers died. Both tragedies happened in the 1920s, nearly fifty years before she was born. Decades before her unwed mother dropped her off with her widower grandfather and never returned.

Regardless, Edwina spends her time pen-and-inking what she sees in her imagination. She's strung the drawings on dozens of clotheslines across her grandfather's enormous unfinished attic. There are hundreds of them so that, when she opens both windows, the lake breeze animates them—like fluttering sails—toward the back of the house.

The first set of drawings shows five troikas drafting a house across the lake one winter morning. She painstakingly researched the event at the local library, found

photos and eyewitness accounts in the local newspaper. She took great care penning the center horse in shafts flanked by horses hitched on either side pulling a makeshift sledge, the home's Victorian gingerbread fretwork, turrets, and front sitting porch. Those drawings took time but not as much time as the drawings depicting the house breaking through the ice at the deepest part of the lake, swallowing the horses and less significantly, according to Edwina, thirty men into the lake's icy depths.

The next series of drawings begins with a gaunt, hard-looking man gazing down at his bedridden, morbidly thin wife. His name's Keck. He's a farmer but also an electrician for the young, growing city of New Canaan, where he has been commissioned to wire its brand-new school building. His wife's been sick for years, though, his debt to doctors and hospitals has piled up, his farm has not been successful, and now, on top of all of that, he's being taxed for the damn schoolhouse. Something snaps in him. In addition to wiring the school for electricity, he wires it to explode magnificently.

Edwina sketches the events in painstaking detail. The first shows Keck placing stacks of dynamite in the school's basement. The next depicts Keck connecting the explosives to homemade wires. Another shows children filing through the heavy oak doors of their new school building while, in the foreground, Keck leans against the dusty front fender of his Olds. Two of those children are her grandfather's twin brothers. They hold hands because they're just little guys, the youngest of twelve kids, her grandfather being the oldest, and this is their first day of school.

The previous night, Keck placed stacks of dynamite in the school's basement, connecting the explosives with homemade wire, threading the wire through a basement window, and hiding the tarry wreath behind a shrub. That morning, he simply fetched the wire, ran it to his car, and attached a coil. The rifle shells, loose and jangling in his pocket, served as fuses.

The last drawing shows the schoolhouse leveled and ablaze and a man leaning on Keck's car, his face sooty, a bloody gash on his forearm. Edwina captures the terrifying moment when the man realizes that Keck isn't helping, the instant just before Keck reaches through the Olds' open window, plucks up his rifle, and, before the man could stop him, fires into the boxes of explosives piled high in the backseat.

Edwina moves through town and school like a ghost. She doesn't speak and isn't spoken to. At those times, she's not convinced she exists at all. Her grandfather, Cyrus Godrich, says, "You're an old soul, Edwina." She has the old-fashioned beauty

of a young Gene Tierney with her wide forehead, arched eyebrows, apple cheeks, and bowed lips. A spitting image, he says, of all the Godrich women.

She absolutely adores her grandfather. And he Edwina. He loved his wife and daughter but admits that he pushed them too hard. He sees, now, that they weren't as driven as he was, as focused and single-minded. And all those miscarriages took their toll on his wife. Why couldn't he see that she couldn't keep up with the demands of the farm? After she died and his daughter left, he sold everything—lock, stock, and barrel, as he said—to the neighboring farm. Said he wanted to wake up every morning to hear water lapping the shore, walk fifty feet to the dock, hop in his Chris-Craft, and go fishing.

So that's what he did.

One snowy November morning, as Cyrus sits at the Big Boy counter drinking coffee and reading about Brezhnev's death in *The Journal*, Billy Vance, New Canaan High School's tall, gaunt janitor, settles next to him. Cyrus slaps Billy on the back and the younger man marvels at Cyrus's strength. He shouldn't be surprised, though, because Cyrus is a solid mass, like granite, known for bringing men to their knees with his handshake. Billy has known Cyrus since he was a boy, when he and his brothers picked sugar beets on the farm. Out of all the boys who worked on the farm, Billy's always been Cyrus's favorite.

Billy apologizes for bothering Cyrus but, really, he's apologizing for not bothering him sooner. He begins, haltingly, to recount the events of that night: how he found Edwina long after the stands cleared, helped her to the bathroom, drove her home, phoned Principal Bunch, and, after nothing happened, visited the superintendent's office that next week. Still, nothing happened.

The coffee and Danish sour in Cyrus's mouth. "So, you're telling me nothing's been done. They didn't call the police. Or me. The boys weren't punished." He recites it like a poem he'd learned long ago.

Billy shakes his head. "I should have called the police but Bunch promised he'd take care of it. And Edwina said she'd die if you knew. I'm sorry, Mr. Godrich."

Cyrus looks at Billy with cool blue eyes and runs a hand through his thick, white mane, "It's not your fault. But I suppose, now that I know, something's got to be done about it."

Her grandfather has been so sad lately. The spring of her junior year, he's been quiet and especially gentle with her as if she's suddenly turned to bone china. He's

stopped watching *Dallas* and reading Clive Cussler novels. Instead, he's been spending a lot of time at school-board meetings or down at the Big Boy having lunch with Principal Bunch and Superintendent Gerald. When she asks him what they talk about, he says, cryptically, "Fishing." When he comes home, in the afternoons and evenings, he stays in his library or in the pole barn tinkering on the only other thing, besides Edwina, he truly loves: his Chris-Craft cruiser.

It's strange, though—her grandfather's newfound interest in getting involved. He'd never been a social man, aside from meetings at the VFW the first Tuesday of the month, and had performed his duties as her caretaker—teacher conferences, band concerts, plays—with a certain resignation.

Edwina is nearly done revising the series of school drawings when it hits her: He's upset about the upcoming anniversary of the bombing. Why not invite a relative of Gideon Keck's to come and talk to her grandfather? Because, even though she's asked a hundred times, he won't discuss anything about his baby brothers' deaths. Maybe he needs to talk to someone, connect, come to some kind of peace. This idea strikes her with such resounding force that she feels giddy.

She finds Harry Keck, alive and living in New Canaan. She writes him a letter, signs it from Cyrus, and invites him to dinner.

It's a spring for the record books: cool evenings, steady precipitation. The fragile, milky green of new life takes Cyrus off guard, as if he'd never seen a Midwestern spring before. The lake is high and smells of thawing ice, and that green weediness he's come to love, when he takes Edwina out in the Cruiser for the first ride of the season.

It's something they've done for as long as she can remember. This Saturday morning the air bites her bare hands and face as they cruise east toward the flicker of sunrise tipping a glowing wick over the horizon. No one's on the lake yet, not even the fishermen, and it's one of those calm, magical, windless mornings with the Cruiser cutting the water like skating across ice.

Cyrus stands at the helm with his right hand languidly resting on the side window. He wears a Tigers' baseball cap and red windbreaker. His face is splotchy from the biting wind. He's tall and solid, with smooth skin like the elms by the shore. His hands and shoulders are thick, his back stooped and eternally sore from decades of hard work. He looks to the northern shore and points to an eagle circling high above a pine copse.

From above, the lake resembles a bulging bag cinched at both ends or the outline of a fetus with a large head, bulbous body, and small feet. Edwina knows

this because there's a map of the lake hanging above the couch in the living room. Cyrus bought it when Annie's health started failing, promising this would be their escape from the constant demands of their land.

The last drawings show Billy Vance hovering over a girl, covering her nakedness with his own jacket, lifting her like a wounded soldier and walking away.

He bought the Cruiser in 1963, the year Edwina was born, from the original owner, who babied it for thirteen years. He spends most winters tinkering with the inboard (which he knows intimately), repairing upholstery, varnishing the cedar decks and double-planked mahogany hull, and hiring a buddy to touch up the golden arrow running along her sides.

"She looks good this year, Pops." Edwina huddles on the red leather bucket seat and tries to act like she isn't freezing (which she is) because she loves this moment, every year, with him.

He considers changing his plan. But then remembers, with a thump of guilt so powerful it nearly crushes him, that he stood by dumbly as his daughter fell into heroin, as Annie wasted away. He wouldn't let the men who should have done something about his granddaughter's rape go unpunished. Since Billy Vance told him, he's been planning, researching, working for months on the explosive device and remote he'll put in the Cruiser, buying everything with cash (on a road trip to see his sister in Ohio), staying up nights considering every detail. He's bought Bunch and Gerald lunches, beers, engaged in their inane conversations, and finally lured them with the promise of revealing his favorite, secret fishing holes.

And there's another thing. One day when Edwina was at school, he'd made his way, slowly and painfully, up the stairs to his attic to retrieve something or other and found Edwina's drawings of the bombing hung like freeze frames of his nightmares. He'd spent hours looking at them, the horror of that morning again fresh in his mind, wondering at the detail and accuracy of her work.

In the far corner of the attic, a stack of smaller, detailed ink drawings sat on an old trunk. There were no captions, only images. The first few were drawn as if Edwina hovered above three girls and three boys, all wearing puffy coats, hats, and mittens, sitting in a circle. One girl drinks from a bottle while the others throw their heads back, laughing. Edwina sits apart from the group, her eyes wide and bemused. She is not laughing. The next, from a lower angle, shows Edwina with the bottle. Edwina drinking. Edwina making a funny face. Others laughing. A repetition of

this scene—only smaller drawings—five times. And then, one dark, dreamlike frame from Edwina's vantage point, of the two other girls huddled, arms around each other's necks, looking at something. And the next of those girls turning their heads. Another of those girls stumbling away. The last drawings show Billy Vance hovering over a girl, covering her nakedness with his own jacket, lifting her like a wounded soldier and walking away.

Sure, he considers changing his mind. Who wouldn't? But then he looks at Edwina, his quiet, gentle granddaughter, now standing next to him with her face pointed into the wind, hair streaming behind her, and decides it's the only way.

It's the Friday night before the Saturday morning Cyrus has planned to take the men fishing and Edwina has been cooking ever since she got home from school. She bought steaks and broccoli and potatoes and tells Cyrus she's cooking him a special dinner. Cyrus knows it's prom night (because Bunch and Gerald have been talking about it) and figures it's Edwina's way of taking her mind off the fact that she's not going.

Cyrus is reading his newspaper and drinking the one beer he allows himself every night when the doorbell rings. Edwina flashes by in a print skirt, red top, and low-heeled pumps. Because she wears her mother's clothes (she's the size her mother was when she left), Cyrus has that relieved feeling that his daughter just flew by, that's she's back and safe.

Cyrus is just pushing himself up from his worn recliner when Harry Keck walks through the door and practically fills the entry. For a moment, Cyrus thinks this could be Edwina's prom date, but as he approaches the enormous, redheaded figure dressed in faded jeans, a white shirt, and lopsided tie, he realizes this man is much older than Edwina. A savage feeling rises in him.

"This is Mr. Harry Keck, Pops."

Harry keeps wiping his palms on his thighs, pulls his shoulders around his chest, and seems afraid to straighten to his full height. It's as if he's bowing or folding in on himself, apologizing for being so big.

Cyrus doesn't take his eyes off Harry until Edwina, happier than she's been in a very long time, says, "Harry's great uncle was Gideon Keck."

And that's when Cyrus realizes what's going on.

She adds, quickly, "Well, dinner's ready. Let's eat."

Cyrus tries to make the best of it. He realizes, from the stricken look on Harry's face, that the poor guy thought Cyrus had invited him. And even though

it's a cool spring evening, poor Harry's forehead drips with perspiration. He dabs his face apologetically with the cloth napkin Edwina ironed to perfection and keeps dropping his fork. He doesn't say much until Cyrus mentions the trial of John Hinckley Jr. and, from that point on, Harry loses some of his self-conscious bumbling and begins to talk.

After dinner, Edwina makes a big deal of serving tea, settling them into the living room, and lighting a fire.

Harry sits on the camelback sofa with his feet planted firmly in front of him. His legs are so long that they get in his way when he leans over to pluck the delicate china teacup off the coffee table.

He's started perspiring again and looks comical holding that teacup with the rosebud pattern. Finally, Cyrus says, "I didn't know what Edwina was up to."

Harry nods and looks up from sipping his tea. He's cradling the teacup with both hands like he's holding on for dear life. Sweat trickles down his temples. "I didn't know what to do. The letter was signed by you. Said you wanted to discuss a few things, put a few things to rest. I didn't want to be rude."

Cyrus nods. They sit in silence for a few more minutes until Cyrus gets up to throw another log on the fire. He pokes the lower log with a long iron hook and sparks fly into the chimney.

Harry clears his throat. "I didn't know Keck was related to me until I was in high school. My folks never talked about it."

"How are they?"

"Good. They're good. Moved to South Carolina after retiring from GM."

"Send them my best." Cyrus continues poking the fire. He's thinking about what he's about to do. About the intricate plan he's devised. Now, with Harry here, he's thinking about Edwina's drawings and connecting the dots between himself and Gideon Keck and realizing that the reverberations of Keck's actions keep unsettling things, keep rolling across space and time and generations. This poor kid had nothing to do with what happened, and yet he's paid a price.

Bunch and Gerald have families, too. But they didn't give a damn about Edwina. Why should he care about their kids?

"It doesn't stop, does it?"

"What's that?"

Cyrus turns to Harry. "Even if you do what you think is right. It doesn't change much."

Harry sets down his teacup. "Millage rate goes up every year. That's for sure." He nods. "But you gotta do what you think is right, I suppose. As long as you're reasonable about it."

Bunch's and Gerald's kids are young. In grade school, maybe high school. Cyrus was eighteen at the time of the bombing. His little brothers had just turned six. Burned beyond recognition. After sixteen hours of moving rubble, they finally uncovered their classroom. It's something he's tamped down—hard—his entire life. But he can't forget it, of course, and now, at this moment, it hits him so hard that he feels around for something to steady him.

Harry is up in a flash, stepping over the coffee table, grabbing Cyrus by the elbow, bracing him with a thick arm around his back.

"I'm okay." Cyrus points to his recliner.

Harry settles him into his chair and stands awkwardly next to him. "It haunts me, though. Me and him being related. But I got a taste of killing in the service. And I didn't relish it." He shifts his weight from side to side. "I'm awfully sorry for what happened to your brothers, Mr. Godrich. I should get going now."

Cyrus wants to cry. Instead, he stands to shake Harry's hand.

Edwina appears as they make their way toward the door. She looks from her grandfather to Harry to decipher their moods. They're smiling, which she takes as a sign that whatever she'd hoped for might just have happened after all.

Bunch and Gerald arrive the next morning in the dead, eerie twilight before sunrise. Bunch reminds Cyrus of a series of puffy orbs stacked atop each other: pudgy legs, doughy stomach, round, bald head. He has forgotten to remove the price tag from his new fishing vest and walks unsteadily down the dock in front of Cyrus. He responds absentmindedly to what others say with, *Well, that's just excellent. That's fine.* Or, *Good thought.* Gerald is spindly and walks with a physical lilt. He walks confidently ahead of Bunch, ahead of everyone. He's a leader, after all. That's what he does: lead. And even though his staff makes fun of him—he boasts that he's descended from the Vikings, that his collie with a severe overbite was sired by Lassie, and that his son's IQ is forty points higher than it actually is—he is convinced they revere him.

Bunch and Gerald stand at the end of the dock while Cyrus removes the boat's cover. It's supposed to be clear and sunny, one of the first pleasant days of spring. Perfect fishing, Cyrus says, because the sun will warm the shallows. The two men

turn to see Cyrus lowering himself into the boat. He stumbles, though, and grabbing a seat, leans over in pain.

The two men rush to him but Cyrus holds up his hand. "Just tweaked my back a bit. Been giving me a helluva time. It'll be fine, here, in a minute."

Cyrus tries to straighten but winces. Bunch and Gerald look stricken, as if their trip to the circus is about to be cancelled.

"Well, for godsakes. Of all the times for this to happen." He lowers himself into the captain's seat. After a few minutes, he tries to stand, again, but can't.

Bunch is the first to speak. "Don't worry, Cyrus. We'll do it another time."

Cyrus wants to cry. Instead, he stands to shake Harry's hand.

"But you were looking forward to this. Damn it. Of all times." Cyrus shakes his head. "Of course, you don't need me. You could take her out yourself. Might not find my fishing holes but you'll still have a good day on the lake."

Gerald pipes up. "I'll drive."

"That's the ticket." Bunch nods vigorously.

"Ever drive an inboard? Know how to start her?"

Uncertainty flashes across Gerald's face but he recovers quickly. "How hard could it be?"

Cyrus blows out the engine and turns the key until the Cruiser responds with that deep, throaty growl. He methodically explains each gauge, reminds them to untie her from the cleats, demonstrates how to blow out the engine, engage the throttle, back out of the slip, turn her around, and give her some throttle only after they pass the sandbar. But most importantly, after you drift for a while, don't turn that key until you've blown out that engine because those fumes will spark and they'll be blown to kingdom come.

It's brightening to daybreak, a bluish tint to the air, as they help Cyrus up to the house. As they turn to leave, Cyrus warns, "Remember. Take her out nice and slow until you pass that sandbar."

From his picture window, Cyrus watches them fumble around the boat. Bunch settles himself in a seat until Gerald orders him to untie the cleats. Their laughter travels up the bank and through the screen door a few feet from where Cyrus stands. He leans over and carefully removes the remote control from the cabinet. He'll have only a few seconds before the boat is out of range. Gerald dons a floppy

tan hat to protect his girlish, fair skin while Bunch waves at Cyrus; his open palm moves in exaggerated half-moons.

Cyrus waves back. The explosion will be spectacular but not spectacular enough to arouse suspicion. Everyone knows these engines can explode if you don't blow them out properly. And that's what he'll say happened. He extends his arm, aims the home-made remote like a gun at the back of the boat, and is about to press the button when he feels a hand on his shoulder and the sweet, quiet voice of his granddaughter asking him what's going on.

Lisa Hiton
Reaction Wood

Lissome at every joint and still
his fucking her was banausic

was a chronic blockage, comfortable
as a ragweed allergy coming out of

April. In Brussels, on drugs,
he was more confident

and sporadic
like the figures milling about

Breughel's paintings
that they had gone to see.

Stoned, she wanted to talk about the snow
and the mini ice skates on the mini

children. *It's like they're moving*
only they're not moving

at all. The glaze of waffles
covered in sugary delights hung

on his teeth back at the hostel.
Resplendent as art she would slink

out of his arms and the twin bed,
topless, wash her face and shake

her hair down—a private show for him.
She stopped letting him slug

his tongue in her mouth
so they could talk dirty at climax.

He didn't like that. He didn't fucking
like that. *At all*. Rive

for rive. The evenings always
splitting in two.

Natalie Shapero
Monster

Eight women in this class, and me the lone

one refusing to say which name I've chosen. Isn't anyone else convinced
of curses? And regarding being asked to state my greatest

fear about having a baby, it has of course
to do with one of the outfits I have been gifted, snap-around swaddle all

crammed with dull-colored rabbits, except for one rabbit that's
speeding-ticket red. Why just one? I would have to be a monster

not to be put in mind of *Schindler's List*, which is filmed of course in black
and white, except for the one red jacket worn by a child

in the Warsaw Ghetto, then later seen draped
on a pushcart laden with bodies. My greatest fear

is the ongoing nature of history, its verve and predation and oceanic rage.
Or am I supposed to fixate on finer points? I'm frightened of injury

and the doctor's sneer? I recall with ill feeling the curator, viewing a meager tribute with disdain: CAN'T CALL YOURSELF A HOLOCAUST

MEMORIAL UNTIL YOU HAVE A TRAIN.

Beauty School

In the wraparound

glass of the beauty school, a student twists and pins the hair
of a dummy head up into a nice chignon. EVEN THE LIFELESS

HAVE THEIR INDULGENCES, I once said as I watched an untenable
person eat a whole fish melt in a single shove. I remembered him

bragging how ugly he was and how keenly
he hated his face, how he avoided its gaze in restroom mirrors

and turned away when he knelt to the black-front oven. I am sorry
to bring up Hitler, but you know what people sometimes say

about Hitler—he was rejected from art school not on account of any
portent of horrors, but simply because he couldn't paint

realistic-looking faces, only things. And was this because
he was blind to human fullness. And what does it mean when we

can't tell each other apart. I had worried I wouldn't be able
to pick out the baby from a crowd, though really I never

encounter a whole crowd of babies. They exist mostly just
alone, looking off, trundled up in a basket or expertly folded

into the dark-checked sling that could just as soon be a driven well,
the kind I can't help but imagine myself shouting after

her into, unseen.

Jillian Weise
Cathedral by Raymond Carver

This poem imagines the exchange on audiotapes from "the wife" to "the blind man" in the story "Cathedral" by Raymond Carver. The story is typically taught and discussed as if the blind man's relationship with the wife was entirely platonic and noble, even though the original story suggests otherwise.

Polyester is his favorite, second to snakeskin
and he has taken to pairing them, so you judge

for yourself what kind of impression we make
at the Officer's Club. We go there Fridays,

which is, consequently, the only night he's up
for making love, because he gets drunk

and I'm tipsy too, but not as drunk as he gets.
Our bedroom backs up to the road, and so I listen

to the traffic, though it's late by that time,
by the time we get around to it, so it's one car

every three minutes. I'm on the side
by the window and the alarm clock, so take this

on good faith: it's one car every three minutes.
I miss driving you everywhere. With Lenny,

I sit shotgun. I sit shotgun because heaven knows
he's got to do all the driving. He always did.

He turned sixteen first, so by default of birth
he does the driving. When I offer to drive,

he acts as if it undermines everything.
"You want to drive?" "Yeah, I want to drive."

"Why?" "You always drive." "I like to drive."
"Okay." Most conversations end with me saying,

"Okay." No wonder, with all the time I spend
in the passenger seat, I want out the window.

We see Frank in his garage. He runs marathons.
He'll never go anywhere. He'll always be

six credits short of a Master's degree:
a fact Sara reminds him of, right in front of us.

The Mendozas, next house down, keep their garage
and shutters closed. They never wave.

I hardly know them. If I'm lucky, and it's not
a Friday night, we go through security, and then

we're off base, which feels like a privilege.
I miss driving you places and not just because

of what you did while I was driving you places.
Though you were very good at what you did.

I never felt like you were doing it just to get
the job done. Though your professionalism

is commendable. You're an expert.
Your hands were made for there, while Lenny's

hands were made for, I guess, F-22 Raptors.
You're very good at it. You know you are.

I can't say it on the tape. I can't say *that*
on the tape. When you say it, it sounds good

but you can't expect me to say *that* on the tape
and then go on talking about Lenny. You gotta ask

one or the other thing of me, Robert.
I'm going to stop because it's five o'clock

and frankly, I don't want to say anything else
about Lenny and me, and I don't want

to hear anything else about how *inseparable*
you are with Beulah. If you're so *inseparable*,

where is she when you make these tapes?
I'm going to say goodbye now. It's five o'clock

and I've got to put the casserole in the oven.
Otherwise, we'll just starve.

*

Robert, Robert, Robert, oh, oh . . .

*

How was that? Did you like that? I feel silly
sitting in my apron on the edge of the bed

with the tape recorder and Lenny in the next room
watching *M*A*S*H*. Pretty silly. I feel like

it's a lot of work between us when we could
meet up at some hotel like I was telling you.

I could be in Seattle easy since I have friends
living up there. Let me think. Who have you met?

You met Martha, didn't you? Martha thinks
you're using me. I don't tell her everything,

just some things, and she thinks you're using me.
"What does the blind dude want with you?" she says.

"Maybe I'm using him." "What would you do that for?"
"Maybe I like him or maybe I like being used by him

or maybe I can do whatever I damn want."
That's how it goes with liberated Martha

and her liberated mouth. I don't care if you are
using me. I've got Lenny. Besides, if I hadn't met you

I'd still be looking for my yoohoo inside my body
when it's right there on the outside the whole time.

I went to the gyn and asked about it. I said,
"Dr. Jacobsen, mine is located on the outside."

And he looked at me like I was crazy. "Well yes,"
he said. "Everyone's is." So I said, "No wonder

I don't. The button is on the outside." And he said
ninety percent of women don't. Did you know that?

Ninety percent. “They do it anyway,” he said.
They do it looking at clocks and counting cars.

They do it clear through Friday into Saturday.
I don’t have to tell you about it. You know

right where it is. How do you know about it?
Did some gal take your hand when you were

a teen and point it out? Don’t tell me. I don’t want
to hear about any gals, and certainly not *the* gal.

Martha is still living there near the train tracks.
She got knocked up by that guy from her work

so I’m not sure why she’s passing any liberated
judgment on me. She had the baby last June

and I haven’t seen it yet. I’m the godmother
and I haven’t seen my godson yet.

You see how easy it would be to tell Lenny
I’m going to Seattle for the week to spend time

with my godson. There’s your situation to consider,
Robert, and how you’d work that out, I don’t know.

You said last tape that you’d do anything
to have a visit from me. Well then, do anything.

*

Of course I love him, we grew up together
so I thought we’d grow closer. I thought

I wouldn't be able to tell me from him
but I can definitely tell me from him

though I can't tell him. I don't know when
it happened. I don't know how you can grow

apart from someone when they're right under
your nose and grow closer to someone when

they're three thousand miles away. I don't like
living in Alabama, and I don't like being

an officer's wife, and I don't have friends here.
Yesterday we lost hot water. The hot water

went out at our place while I was in the middle
of a shower. I thought and thought of who

to call. I must've spent half an hour walking
around in my towel thinking of who to call.

There's no one. I don't have anyone to call
when the hot water goes out. I'm not trying

to be sexy here, Robert. I'm being serious.
I'm friends with Lenny's friends, sure,

I know their names when they come over
to eat dinner, play poker, watch football,

but it's not like I can call Frank and ask
to take a shower. Believe you me:

that would not look right. I'm not friends
with the wives. Lenny tells me I haven't made

enough effort. He tells me I have to put myself
out there. You know how I am.

I don't like putting myself out there.
I'd no more like to put myself out there

than step in front of a semi. You put yourself
out there more than I do. You put yourself

out there a lot for a blind guy. And why
should I make friends with the wives

when I'm not going to know them in a year?
Lenny's got an assignment in Sacramento.

The wives flocked around me when they heard
about California. "Ooh la la, Sacramento,"

they said. You'd think we were moving to Paris.
They said I'd have to get highlights and

I'd have to go tanning and I'd have to join
a gym and they got me so bent out of shape

over California I about cried. Anyway,
I'm going to leave Lenny. We need some time

apart and maybe we need eternity.
I'm coming back to Seattle. I know you don't

need a secretary now. I wish I had left Lenny
back then, like you asked, but how was I

supposed to know? If I had known the next
gal that walked into my position

would become your wife. If I had known
you were serious about me. How was I

supposed to know? I thought I had to marry
the first man and Lenny was the first man.

I know you don't believe me, but he was.
I wasn't used to anything other than

the regular yoohoo until I met you.
Why do you think it scared the bejesus out of me?

Now listen, I'm sure she's a good secretary,
and maybe a good wife, but you're full of shit,

so maybe if you love her so much you should
tell her you're full of shit. And if you don't,

then go ahead and keep on keeping on,
but I don't want to hear any objections

about me moving to Seattle. I'm calling you
when I get to town and I don't want to hear

any business on how we'll never work.
I'm not asking for work.

*

I understand now why you didn't want me
to come to Seattle, Robert. I get it.

Sometimes when you were talking on the tape
about illusory things, I guess I didn't pay

much attention. I didn't realize I was one
of the illusory things you were talking about,

and frankly, I had to look the word *illusory*
up in the dictionary, and I was none too pleased

to see what it means. I don't think I'm unreal.
I don't feel very unreal. I've never felt more

real before anyone in my entire life. What is it
about her? What do you like about her?

Is it how she cooks? How she smells?
If you could see her, I know that's a low blow,

but if you could see Beulah next to me,
I know you'd pick me. It's a good thing you can't see.

She's so boring to look at. She doesn't know
what to do with her hair. Even I know about hair,

like you got to wash it, comb it, dry it, and do
something with it. She dresses like a grandma.

She has nothing to say. She repeats everything.
I guess a man like you doesn't need a woman

who has things to say. I guess a man like you
doesn't need a hairdo. I guess a man like you

just wants someone to stick around. Help you
cross the road. Guide the cake to your mouth.

Well, you got it. Beulah will never leave.
No one else would be blind enough to want her.

STORY

Katherine Hill
Scarlett

More than a few people have told me I talk like Scarlett Johansson. I have a low voice, I guess, which sounds funneled through fleshy lips.

I was with a man once who was obsessed with the resemblance. I mean he really got off on it. He liked to close his eyes and have me talk to him. It didn't have to be anything sexy. I could say, "The bread is on the table," and that would be enough.

"The bread is on the table."

He'd sit there with his eyes closed and see my lips swell to Scarlett-size. I'd grow shorter—or so he told me—and my breasts filled a much larger bra.

"The bread is on the table," and I *was* Scarlett. "I bought it fresh this morning."

I'd babble on like this, and he'd smile and take my hand, and sometimes he responded to whatever I was saying, but mostly he just let me talk. I tried to keep it neutral, because I didn't want to distract him. No complaints, no dilemmas, nothing relating to literature or politics or religion or war. Just something pleasant about a dog, or the weather, or some bread.

Sometimes it got too pleasant. He'd get so comfortable that he'd forget, and open his eyes, and Scarlett would disappear. It would just be me sitting there, rattling on about buttercream frosting, and I could see it in his face, how disappointing that moment was.

But one evening when he was holding my hand and listening to me talk about a tree, he opened his eyes and continued smiling. "Go on, Scarlett," he said, and it was clear he was still seeing her.

I went on. And he went on calling me Scarlett, playfully, until it was time to go to bed.

The next morning when we awoke he called me Scarlett again. And later, at work, he wrote me an email. "Scarlett," it said, followed by a comma, followed by something about the car we shared.

I wrote back about the car, and made a crack about my job, and then, for a laugh, signed her name instead of mine. "Love, Scarlett," I typed. I liked the way it felt.

Before long he was addressing all my emails to Scarlett, and I was signing them all Scarlett in return. He called me Scarlett at home, and at dinner with friends, so that eventually they, too, called me Scarlett, and I had no trouble responding. Soon enough, the authorities got wind of the situation, and my bills and magazines and paychecks began coming to Scarlett Johansson, and all the cards in my wallet bore her name.

It was pretty easy at first, being Scarlett. I never had to pay for a thing. But after a while, it got to the point where I would hear on TV that Scarlett Johansson was going to be appearing at such and such premiere, and I would think, "Oh no, why did no one tell me?" and I would hurry upstairs to change into something decent and grab some long-lasting gloss for my lips.

It was intense. There were shots to set up and lines to read. I had to be neutral all the time.

At the hundredth or so premiere, long after I'd split with that man, when I was more famous than I'd ever imagined I'd be, I encountered a novice reporter, hanging back from the herd with his mic. He seemed nervous and somewhat embarrassed to be questioning me on the red carpet.

"You're not how I thought you'd look," he stammered, in a manner that was actually very sweet.

I laughed, of course, but he was not put at ease, and all at once I remembered my past. "What did you think I'd look like?" I asked him.

"It's really stupid," he told me.

"I'm sure it isn't," I insisted, now urgently wanting to know.

"It is, Charlotte," he said, using my long-forgotten name, which sounded so much like hers. "It's impossible."

"Because I look different," I coaxed him. "Because I don't look the way I sound." I recalled another life with a car and a computer and a man who liked to close his eyes. A simpler life, before I became Scarlett Johansson.

"That's right," he said. He seemed almost relieved. "I thought you'd look like a loaf of bread."

Paisley Rekdal
Once

white field. And the dog
dashing past me
into the blank,

toward the nothing.
Or:
not running anymore but

this idea of him, still
in his gold
fur, being

what I loved him for
first, so that now
on the blankets piled

in one corner
of the animal hospital
where they've brought him out

a final hour, two,
before the needle
with its cold

pronouncements,
he trembles with what
he once was: breath

and muscle puncturing
the snow, sudden
stetting over the tips

of the meadow's buried
grasses after—what
was it, a rabbit?

Field mouse? Dashing
past me on my skis,
for the first time

faster, as if
he had been hiding this,
his good uses. What

a shock to watch
what you know unfold
deeper into, or out of

itself. It is like
loving an animal:
hopeless, an extravagance

we were meant for,
startled,
continually, by the depth

of what we're willing
to feel. The tips
of the grasses high

in the white. And the flat
light, drops of water
on the gold

coat, the red, the needle
moving in, then out,
and now the sound of an animal

rushing past me in the snow.

William Farquhar's Natural History Paintings: Malay Peninsula, 1803–1818

The discovery of the Malay flying dragon
depends in part on our desire
for its existence, as its first image
in Farquhar's book depends on the Chinese
artist anonymously commissioned
to paint it in Farquhar's name.

Both acts being opportunities to claim
what was once fleetingly
dreamed of: the pink
lace umbrella wings and shock
of blue underbelly suggesting
all things possess a quality of spirit

we struggle to capture.
The more accurate the drawing, the less
our needed faith. And yet,
isn't half of accuracy predetermined
by our appetites? Do we want before
or as soon as we can see?

Farquhar persuaded Parliament
to take control of Singapore
by presenting it its map, and "We try
but can never enter the same
woman twice," a man I mostly admire

writes on the back of a photo of me, meaning
any image is conceivable
as invitation, the boundary of one's legs or face
as immanent, as shapeable as a river's.
Why shouldn't there be a dragon

if I wanted one? Why couldn't I make its tongue
be such a brilliant shade of green?
Something shimmers in the pink
mailed carapace, like a name

wiped partly clean: a smear
echoed in a corner of Farquhar's painting
of the colony's Bombay duck, which,
if his Chinese artist's renderings are true,

is neither fowl nor from Bombay, but a channel fish,
with fins like black fanned knife blades
and a belly the color of roasted pumpkin.

Matthew Cooperman
Bouquet

I.

fleur a word taken from the road
the road answering flipside's
  inevitable black line
    fragile travel
  in winter's vest trying
trying to get home

or 43 miles to Keane a comfort in
"I'm gonna love you 'til daybreak"
blue bells or daylilies or the lilies
on the sheets love

a picture taken from the road
the road a line of corn memories
window's toes meaning my heart
in pictures delirious vacation of flowers

this vast circuit of exhalations
shockingly different every day “hello!”
  a different meaning meaning
fragile the snowflakes unevenly

driving white line of attention
season sung a vast circuit
a flower taken from the road

II.

tassel-view turning bloom day
turning the day on

if it is day that sings sings like a voice
full of sunshine pollen
  and something catches

advancement of rays all hooks
it will be sun
in your eyes over the roaring prairie

dinosaurs to the left of you golden buffalo
to the right Ho! there will be more
    telluric objects
the same fine dumpwork of space

lilies a light cosmic deposit
the local hill giving way bloom to a turning
brown scour of wind the direction
of wind

if you watch the sun golden
  do not watch the sun turning away
what I've told you

gambling's good a million lbs
days and the sun and we still
watch gambling on space

*

  there is money in vision

III.

a red I can trust
and the need for red

watering can chirring
a rain of attention

abstract solid sound a thing
in the contour of specific air

  but it shifts
like say a hand guitar!
you see it there
longitude grain with a strum

red strum slowly sunseting wind
beams directly flying
our enormous speed

not red at all but bruise
at rest or a metal object
rusting away

we trust color
to be the measure of things

words as colors contours
the distance growing growing near

I color trust in a whitening room

blues I am fearing
taking shape in air

IV.

run yellow dream how the flower was
  the imaginer portal
by pistil a built up bloom

condensery of light and fragrance
there was so much fragrance
the bright side life of

what west the world its animal
treading spore

smells everyday reasons
  heliotropics
beds and paths

this dream imaginer tends
portal to fall through
and plant and paw

*

until the animal is seen

under the bright side life

even the world is dark

v.

The geography of darkness aloud
who doesn't love the country
country a song
taken from the road

beyond the hedge a gun a dark
symbolic continent

containment
        Bouquet—

the little people peopling the big
human machinery what passes
for gestures home

landfill landfill landfill
this is a song under a white tree
anthem aloud
chorus of piles sells

for a time a roadside attraction
improvements new ducks
gold derricks minting streams

the markings of progress
by hook and drive the little hands

the little hands stitch new flowers

Paula Bomer
A Private Revolution

The baby was crying, really crying, but GraceAnn didn't know what to do. She dumped the little boy, kicking and screaming, into his crib and closed the door to the nursery. Her arms and neck were stiff with rage. That damn woman! Lord, please forgive me for cursing, thought GraceAnn, even though she had said nothing, only thought it. She had tried holding the baby in her arms and gently rocking him, singing him lullabies, which used to work all the time. Now he just struggled and screamed. She had tried giving him a bottle, which he just pushed away. He was nine months old and he had some teeth pushing through. And lately, he'd just wanted his mommy. Every morning at seven-thirty, GraceAnn arrived, and little Sam would be happy to see her, at first. Then, as Suzanne finished getting ready to go to work and her departure became more apparent, Sam would start fussing. Suzanne's behavior didn't help, either. She took longer than necessary to get out of the house, whining about having to leave, talking in a high baby voice to her son. It just made it harder on Sam. Once GraceAnn had said to her, "Don't say goodbye forever. It makes it harder. Just go." Suzanne gave her that look that she often gave GraceAnn, that how-dare-you-talk-to-me-that-way look. That I'm-your-boss look. But it helped a little. Speaking her mind like that. Suzanne made an effort to cut back on her lengthy goodbye routine. For a while.

When GraceAnn first started working for Suzanne, Sam was just two months old. Suzanne and she had gotten to know each other and GraceAnn liked her all right, even though she was Jewish. And even though, while nursing Sam, she'd bring out her large white breast, with its wet, pink nipple, and breastfeed him

shamelessly in front of GraceAnn. As if she weren't even there. As if she were invisible. One morning, maybe two weeks ago, Suzanne walked out of her bedroom in her underwear and bra and then lifted her veiny breast out and nursed him there in the kitchen where GraceAnn was cleaning up the breakfast dishes, nearly naked, her thick, wiry pubic hair hanging down her thighs for everyone to see. The baby's nursing noises filled the room, the sucking and grunting and slurping. He let out a big fart. Suzanne—rich, white Suzanne—in her shiny, burgundy underclothes, laughed and stroked his hair. And as if that weren't bad enough, she asked GraceAnn to bring her a glass of water. Shocking. Insulting. She felt like a slave.

But if she compared Suzanne to her friend Lily's boss, she felt lucky. At least Suzanne paid her decently and came home when she said she would. And these white women's breasts were everywhere, all over the Upper West Side. There was no getting away from them, but GraceAnn just couldn't get used to it. All these women whipping out their breasts, even nursing two- and three-year-olds, in the playgrounds, in the coffee shops—everywhere. Long tubular breasts hanging out under loose tee shirts, round, rocket-like breasts poking out of the tops of stretchy blouses. She'd seen a woman at Sam's baby gym class roll up a clingy number, rolled it up right above both of her enormous breasts, so that her two-year-old could go from one to the other, fingering the one that wasn't being sucked on. Where was the dignity? They were not in heathen country, for goodness sake. How could it be that the poor of Jamaica had more class than these rich white Americans? GraceAnn chalked it up to a lack of Christianity. These white women were sensualists. They didn't know the Lord. And so Suzanne nursed Sam, even though she was back to work full time, even though he was nine months old, even though he ate noodles, carrots, and peas, as well as took two bottles of formula from GraceAnn during the day. No matter, Suzanne, upon arriving home around seven in the evening, immediately undid the buttons on her blouse, even before taking off her shoes, and offered her breast to the boy. GraceAnn had nursed Simone for only two months before leaving for New York. She remembered that her mother said Simone had the milk fever for a while, after switching to cow's milk, but she came through. She came through.

If she'd known that witnessing Suzanne's breasts every day would be a part of her job, she mightn't have taken it . . .

Well, that wasn't exactly true. Her first job had been cleaning houses. That had been backbreaking work, and it took her nearly two years to find a nanny job. Working as a nanny for a wealthy white couple in Manhattan had been her dream.

Regular, long hours, much less hard work, and a baby all to herself. Her own baby, Simone—now almost three! she'd seen pictures—was back in Jamaica with her mother. At first she thought about her girl all the time. While cleaning houses, she'd distance herself from the disgusting work she was doing by getting lost in thoughts about her daughter. But after a year or so, she stopped thinking so compulsively. She still sent her mother money every month, and she still talked to them both on the phone quite regularly (although Simone couldn't talk on the phone so well; she was, after all, not quite three). But then, while wiping off toilets seats or mopping kitchen floors, GraceAnn began thinking mostly, if not entirely, about her life in Brooklyn: her friends, her church, and for a long time, how on earth she was going to get out of housecleaning and into babysitting.

But nothing she did was making him feel better! He just wanted those breasts. It was Suzanne's fault. She'd taken all of GraceAnn's power away with those breasts.

Growing up in Treasure Beach, on the southwestern part of the island of Jamaica, GraceAnn had never imagined that this would be her life, this big city, with its crowds and evil everywhere. Treasure Beach was a rural and remote area, an over-two-hour drive from either Montego Bay or Kingston. The largest nearby city was Black River, which was still primarily a fishing town. The brownish sand on the beaches and coves as well as the distance from the airports made for less tourism than other areas. People still farmed and fished and the quiet was often so fierce that GraceAnn, looking back, realized that her mind would roar with it. Like much of the population of Treasure Beach, GraceAnn had reddish, light skin with freckles and blue-green eyes. The standard, textbook theory was that a Scottish fishing ship had crashed on the shore in the seventeenth century and the sailors stayed and intermarried. GraceAnn's theory was different. She believed the sailors had raped the women relentlessly for years and years, and then they forced the Jamaican men, at gunpoint, to build a new ship so they could return to Scotland. She'd told her mother this theory once, when she was still a student, when she was maybe fourteen and was learning the history of Treasure Beach. "You're morbid, girl," her mother had said. "Don't say such horrible tings. Keep that stuff to yourself. Who gonna talk to you if you say stuff like that? Watch yourself."

GraceAnn's light skin had made it relatively easy to get a job babysitting. "White people like light-skinned girls better," Lily had told her. She'd met Lily at church.

Between cleaning jobs, GraceAnn would visit with Lily in the playground in Central Park, and this is how she met Suzanne, her new employer. Suzanne was friends with Ellen, Lily's boss. Lily watched Ellen's two children, a little three-year-old girl named Sophie and a baby boy, Sam's "friend," named Eli.

The interview had gone like this: Do you smoke or drink or use drugs? Do you know infant CPR? Where do you live? Can you read and write? Write your full name, address, and phone number here then. You know my baby is the most important thing in my life? Do you have references? I like Lily, and she's your friend. That makes me feel good. Are you married? Do you have children of your own? There is no yelling or spanking in this house, do you understand that? Can you use the baby food grinder? I don't like processed foods. If he cries, you pick him up. Never let him cry in his crib. We don't do that here. I pay two weeks' vacation and any other days *I* decide to take off, I'll pay you. But I don't pay sick days, since I have to stay home with him on those days and my job doesn't guarantee me pay on days I take off.

Suzanne paid for GraceAnn to take an infant CPR class after hiring her right away. GraceAnn didn't tell her about Simone. She decided it was none of Suzanne's business, since it wasn't like Simone was here, living with her. That's what she wanted to know, whether or not she'd be worried about her own kid, or miss days because of her own children. GraceAnn wouldn't be missing days because of Simone.

She had felt so lucky at first. Three hundred and fifty dollars a week for working seven-thirty until seven, five days a week. And seeing Sam, holding Sam, having him smile and squeal at her, had made her so happy. That little boy loved her, she knew. And now he was screaming in his crib. She actually never let him do this. She never ignored him like this. But nothing she did was making him feel better! He just wanted those breasts. It was Suzanne's fault. She'd taken all of GraceAnn's power away with those breasts. He was just too big now to be fooled by the bottle. He now knew the bottle wasn't the real thing. She couldn't stand the sound of him screaming in there. What could she do?

If no one who knew Ellen was around, Lily ignored Sophie and Eli. When Sophie was just two, she was constantly falling off of playground equipment because Lily was too busy sitting and talking with her friends to get up and spot her. And the baby, why, that baby got a bottle thrown in the stroller at him, that about summed up the attention he got. GraceAnn didn't want to be like that. She liked Lily, Lily was a good Christian, but she was so bitter and hateful toward the family she worked for and she took it out on the kids by neglecting them. GraceAnn hadn't wanted to

be that way. She had wanted to be *happy* with her job. She had wanted to be *good*. *Grateful*. She had wanted to be better than her friend.

She decided to pack the diaper bag and get the stroller ready and take Sam out. Some fresh air would do him good. She filled a cup of juice and put some Cheerios in a Ziploc and made sure she had diapers and wipes. She plucked the grocery list Suzanne had left for her off of the fridge. Then, steeling herself, she went in to get him. He had pulled himself up in his crib. He stood there, wobbling, his mouth open, snot streaming down his face. When he saw her, he threw himself face down on his mattress and wailed. She wasn't his mommy. GraceAnn felt ashamed. How was she going to leave the apartment with him screaming like this?

She shoved him into his snowsuit, then into the stroller. Then out the door, quickly. GraceAnn just put blinders on, deciding to ignore anyone she ran into in the hallway. What do they know? And only a minute later, as soon as they got to the elevator—Sam loved the elevator—he quieted down. The lit-up buttons, the dinging at each floor. GraceAnn felt her neck relax. Sam squealed and tried to reach for the buttons.

It was a cold, dark day. The playground was out of the question. There was no baby gym class, no baby music class today. She should have tried calling Lily before she left. Too late. She couldn't stand going back to that apartment. She decided to go to Barnes & Noble. It was a place they all met on days like today—Lily, herself, and other babysitters in the neighborhood. Where else were they to go? They weren't allowed, for the most part, to invite each other over to the apartments where they worked.

Hours later, when she finally got back to the apartment, Sam was asleep in his stroller. GraceAnn managed to gently lift the little boy into his crib without waking him. She walked quietly into the living room and pulled out the Good Book. She put her socked feet up on the coffee table—her sneakers neatly lined up by the door—and she started to read; "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit."

Suzanne came home, yelling, "Sammy, Sammy, Sammy! Mommy's home!" GraceAnn had Sam in the tub. She'd fed him dinner already and they'd had a nice evening. He was such an easy boy most of the time, a sweet, complacent little thing once the day got going. She'd put off the bath until very late as a new strategy. If Sam were in the tub, how could Suzanne nurse him? Suzanne came barging into the bathroom, shoes still on, her blazer still on. "Hey GraceAnn! Sammy, Sammy,

Sammy! How's my little boy! Hi sweetie!" Sam nearly jumped out of the bath at the sight of his mother.

"Come here, bunny, come here, sweetie." Suzanne reached past GraceAnn and lifted him out, dripping water everywhere.

"He hasn't been washed yet," GraceAnn said.

"That's okay. How dirty could he be?" Suzanne wrapped him in a towel and took him out of the bathroom. By the time GraceAnn hoisted herself up and went into the living room, Suzanne was nursing him.

"He doesn't have a diaper on. What if he pees on you?"

"He's still in a towel. And I don't care." Suzanne looked at GraceAnn for the first time since she'd arrived as she said this, and GraceAnn registered the annoyance in her gaze. Suzanne was a pretty woman, tall, with bleached-blonde hair and big blue eyes. Gold jewelry in her ears, around her neck, and on her fingers. She looked like a movie star, or something like that. Sometimes GraceAnn felt pride in working for someone so pretty in that movie star way. Sometimes she hated her for it. "Can you work late tonight? I thought I'd meet Adam for dinner. If you could do it."

"I can do it."

"Great!" She turned her head back to her nursing son. He was sucking on her like his very life depended on it, both hands cupping her breast. "Oh baby, oh sweet baby," cooed his mother. Heat poured into GraceAnn's face. She felt dizzy. She went into the kitchen and started boiling water for the bottle nipples. She looked inside the refrigerator. She was happy to work late tonight. She could always use the extra money. But why did Suzanne have to make it so hard for her? Sam would throw a big tantrum when Suzanne left again. She knew it. Her heart pounded. She went back into the living room.

"You know he threw a huge fit when you left this morning."

"I know, poor thing. He's going through separation anxiety."

"Well, nursing him like this makes it hard. He's gonna throw another tantrum tonight."

"Ellen doesn't nurse Eli and he still throws tantrums when she leaves him. It's the stage of separation anxiety. It's normal. It's healthy in fact. It just means he's properly attached to his mother, that's all."

"Well, I think the nursing makes it worse." There. She was saying what she wanted to say.

There was some silence. Suzanne put Sam on her other breast, leaving the other, spent one out for GraceAnn to see. It hung there in her open blouse, pale and

smallish. She had less milk than ever, this was for sure. Her breasts were shrinking. It wouldn't be much longer. It couldn't be much longer until there would be nothing left for him.

"I'll leave you extra money for takeout. You can order from the menus in the kitchen. Do you know where they are?"

"Yes, I know where they are."

Suzanne, with her baby cradled in her arms, went into the nursery. Forty minutes later, she came out. "He's asleep," she said, smiling as she shut the door behind her. Then she disappeared into her room, emerging minutes later in high heels, a slinky skirt, and a new blouse. In and out, as if magically, from one place to another. One minute she's the all-giving mother, the next, she looks like a high-class whore. There was something so swift about her, so transforming. Who was this woman she worked for? GraceAnn recognized something in Suzanne, dressed as she was for sex. She, too, had donned that look before, although it wasn't so sophisticated. Not that being a sophisticated whore was any different than being a poor one. A whore was a whore, especially once the costume came off, which was the whole purpose of it, wasn't it? That it would come off. "We'll see you later," Suzanne called as she, again, shut a door behind her.

And GraceAnn hadn't even been able to put the boy to sleep. No, the minute Suzanne arrives, it was as if she disappeared.

She wished she could call her mother. But she only called her the first Sunday of the month, when her mother would take Simone to the one house that had a phone in her area. She'd like to hear her daughter's voice tonight. "Say hello to your mother," her own mother would sternly say and the little girl would get on the phone. "Hello maddah," she'd say, her tiny nasal voice still learning about words. And what did "mother" mean to Simone? Did it mean something important, or did it just signify that moment when her granny made her talk on the phone? It had been so long. But children know certain things, regardless of their circumstances, no? She had friends with mothers around. She knew what a mother was.

GraceAnn then realized that her mother and Simone were probably in Kingston right now anyway, visiting her mother's sister, Anna, after whom she was partly named. Her mother had told her they'd be there at this time. When GraceAnn had been a little girl, she loved those regular visits to Kingston. Her mother brought baskets that she'd woven to try and sell them there. The crowds! How she loved the crowds then, even in the slums, in Trench Town, where Anna and her family lived. She didn't love the crowds anymore. But it had been exciting then,

as a little girl from the sleepy countryside, and yes, as a blossoming young woman later on.

That's where she'd met Simone's father. Her mother had gone to sell baskets and she'd stayed back. How could her mother have let her stay back? Didn't she know there'd be trouble? Anna's son, her cousin, a boy her age, just sixteen, took her out walking around. He was doing well now. Studying at the University of the West Indies in Kingston, so she heard from her mother. But back then, he'd been some trouble. That was normal for a boy, being some trouble at sixteen. And there were no consequences for him, for boys causing trouble.

One minute she's the all-giving mother, the next, she looks like a high-class whore. There was something so swift about her, so transforming.

Her light skin and freckles made people look twice at her in Trench Town, whereas in Treasure Beach everyone looked like her. Not that there weren't other light-skinned people there—her aunt Anna was light-skinned—but there were less, for sure. And she stuck out as a country girl. That, too, brought looks, laughs, attention. The attention! She loved the attention. How she'd changed. How that visit changed her. She loathed attention now. She'd learned her lesson.

"Your ancestors been raped by the white man," he said to her. His skin was black like coal. And he said just what she had told her mother not two years before! His hair, dreadlocks, piled high in the black, red, and green knit cap. He smelled strongly of ganga, of something else earthy—was it from his hair? Simone, Simone was light like her, but not quite so light. She had some of her father in her.

"I'm a Christian," she'd said, but her heart was full of lust. Her breasts heaved at this man, and she wanted to give them to him. She wanted his dark fingers, with their white crescent moons, on her.

"You pray to a white man's god, woman!"

Woman! No one had called her woman before.

"'Because the poor are despoiled, because the needy groan, I will now arise,' says the Lord," she'd quoted at him, trying to impress him. Why? Why this man? "Christ is our salvation. He'll return to free us."

He pulled a huge toke from the joint he smoked and passed it to her. She took from it. The dizziness, the disorientation. Where had her cousin gone?

"I could teach you things that would free you. Ethiopia is the promised land. Haile Selassi is the real Jesus. The Jesus you pray to isn't the real Jesus. The whites be the devil, you see, and they make Jesus out to be a European, a Jew, to hide you from your true dignity. To keep you down, woman."

"That's blasphemy," she'd answered, shocked, truly shocked, but intrigued nonetheless.

"God is black, woman. Blackness is holiness," and then he'd laughed, laughing so as to show his white teeth. Where was he now, this man? Studying with her cousin at the university? Most likely not, he was older, for sure. But then the memory was so vague, her shame had been so great and she'd never tried to contact him. To find out who he was. No one had asked, either. Not even her mother.

She thought of little Simone in Kingston, enjoying the crowds, enjoying all the bustle after the quiet of Treasure Beach. Anna had some grandchildren around. They would play, the cousins. But what of later? What of all that lack of talk? That lack of things said?

This line of thinking made GraceAnn feel cold and sweaty, thinking of her daughter's future. But that was, supposedly, why GraceAnn was here, taking care of Sammy, to ensure her daughter a different future. Supposedly. Who knew, really, if the plan would work. One thing was certain, GraceAnn wanted her daughter to know things. She wanted Simone to have knowledge, so she could prevent bad things from happening; she wanted her to know about consequences. Everyone made mistakes and no matter how much money she sent her mother, there were no guarantees in life. Here she was, working for white people, thinking only of money, and yet she had had these ideas once, these dreams. She had been young, only a few years ago, she had been young. How long would Simone's youth last?

She wanted, most of all, to talk to her daughter.

Suzanne and Adam came home late, smelling of liquor and cigarettes. Adam walked right past her there on the couch, without saying anything, and went straight into the bathroom. Could she hear him urinating? Did he not close the door? GraceAnn's mind was foggy. She'd been asleep, the Bible in her lap. She had read, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want," but found herself wanting anyway. And then she'd slept, lightly, listening out for the baby, half awake, half asleep.

"Oh, we had so much fun tonight! Thanks sooo much for babysitting!" Suzanne was drunk. She talked too loudly. "We went out with old friends of Adam's

from college—they live in Connecticut—and we never see them anymore! It was fun, although I would never want to live in Connecticut! It's all white people! I don't want to live where there's only white people! Not that we have tons of black friends or anything, but just to be exposed to that diversity, to walk down the street . . ."

"Suzanne?" GraceAnn interrupted her. What would she say? What did she want to say to this woman? And she wasn't awake yet, not really.

"What? Did Sammy wake? Is Sammy okay?" Suzanne's drunken face looked distorted with worry. She held her hands to her breasts.

For a moment, GraceAnn felt the remnants of a dream. Her daughter on her knee. The rustling noise her skirt made on her nylons as Simone slid to the floor to go across a thick, blue rug that cushioned GraceAnn's sore feet. And then her eyes—adjusted now to the soft light of the room she was actually in—rested on the woman before her. She'd been wrong to interrupt. She was not really awake. She was confused, because she had nothing to say to her.

Nickole Brown
Crisco

1.

A brand in a can and, later, conveniently in sticks, but also a word—*crisco*—
applying to any shortening, any oil teased from its natural state to stay solid

at room temp. Used with a peppering of coffee grounds to fry chicken,
or with ice water to roll flat a pie crust, or in her cornbread, made the only right way:

with buttermilk, in a skillet cured and cast iron.

2.

Crisco, the first shortening made from plants, mostly cottonseed up from Delta
labor and heat, the first shortening entirely free of slaughter, the hog she remembered

hung upside-down, the six-inch stick knife that made an animal
flesh, the come-along jack that hoisted what was now carcass

into a cauldron of boiling water and lye, the bell scraper that teased a body from
its own bristle, teased it right out of its own skin.

3.

A Depression-Era cure-all—for ashy elbows, for rusty skates, for squeaky hinges and cracked heels and cuticles and psoriasis and hemorrhoids and bicycle chains.

Back then, there wasn't much Mama could afford, so her mama bought Crisco for most anything that needed attention, a bit of moisture, a dab of grease.

4.

Crisco, because Fanny says you have to wear your husband out, and sometimes you might be counting flower petals on wallpaper, but you best pretend,

Just put a little shortening up there, she said,
he'll never know the difference.

5.

Monroe said to her once: *Fanny, what do you think a man*
thinks about all day? Beans and cornbread?

For her, Crisco popped and pocked tiny round burns
down both arms, Crisco sizzled and melted

and started a full-on grease fire only
salt could put out.

Crisco clogged her pores and dulled the walls;
Crisco slowly filled the delicate tubes leading in and out of

Monroe's heart.

But for now, say it is evening, the kids are outside playing
kick the can, the floor mopped, the dishes done,

she is bone-tired, ankles swollen, but he waits
upstairs. She opens the tin, uses two fingers to slide
a dollop in.

Kathleen Jesme
[If the rain is everywhere]

If the rain is everywhere and it is we will soon
be taking to the boats and carrying with us only
our most precious and lightest things: the birds,
in pairs or in large flocks, two or three photos,
the complete poems of Dickinson, the young
dog and the old dog, and the air around
us and in us, which contains all that we are
and everything we can hope to recollect.

[Down the street there is no]

Down the street there is no
street just field and some
trees put there to keep
the street from continuing

There are few wild places
in the city except the ones
we make in the backyard
or in the inner one

To draw in wild things
one must make a mess
of things and let them run
carefully to ruin and tangle

Katy Lederer
Love

We wanted to believe in something powerful and true, like love.
We wanted to believe in something powerful and true.
We wanted to believe in love.

And so we raised our heads above.
And so we were a me and you.
We wanted to believe in something powerful and true, like love.

And when the push had come to shove.
We had to work to make it through.
We wanted to believe in love.

We didn't wear our socks or gloves,
our toes and fingers turning blue.
We wanted to believe in something powerful and true, like love.

Until we could be rid of
pain. Until the others got their due,
we wanted to believe in love.

It was of
truth, by truth, we were seduced.
We wanted to believe in something powerful and true, like love.
We wanted to believe in love.

Mortalism

Help us, help us! How we howled. It wasn't poems that we loved,
or breeding, or the clouds above, in which we could read shapes
and little runes we interpreted as signals of our love. No, it was

the applesauce and hotdogs and delicious ice cream sundaes
that our mothers used to buy us in the clean and tidy park.
But now the park was gone, our mothers dead. Who had

they been? Their big brown eyes bulged out, their lips, we saw
were painted red. What had existed there, beneath those smooth
blood lines? Their clean flesh suits had hidden hearts made out of

leather pumps, had hidden lungs made out of stumps, and brains
galore they hid from us. Had they been strangers? No, they were just
like us, except they could not fly. We never asked them why.

Jonathan Cohen
Introducing Waldeen's Neruda

Waldeen von Falkenstein (1913–1993)—known professionally by her first name alone—achieved fame during her lifetime as the founder of modern dance in Mexico during the 1940s. She has yet to receive the recognition she deserves for her work as a translator of Pablo Neruda's poetry into English. Her translations from his epic *Canto General*, published in the early 1950s, introduced Neruda and his image-driven poetics to many of the generation of post–Second World War poets, in particular those looking for alternatives to the prevailing formalist mode of verse.

Waldeen and Neruda became friends in Mexico City when he was there as Chile's consul general (1940–1943). She translated poems that formed part of *Canto General*. He was so deeply moved by her translations that he told her: "Waldeen, thank you, for your poems of my poems, which are better than mine." He gave her his formal permission to translate the entire epic. An astute observer, Neruda recognized the challenge of translating his poetry into English, saying that translators of it succeeded in conveying its meaning but not its atmosphere.

Waldeen, however, succeeded at conveying both meaning and atmosphere in her Neruda translations. A poet in her own right as well as a dancer and choreographer, she understood the essential relationship between poetry and music and their common root in dance. This was her secret. Although Waldeen translated about one third of *Canto General*, she published only a few of her translations. The aesthetics of the New Criticism and the politics of the Cold War conspired during the 1950s to block her Neruda from gaining a wide readership here in the North.

A couple of years before Waldeen died in Mexico, where she had lived most of her life (she grew up in California), she sent me her unpublished translations. At that time, I tried to publish them on her behalf, but magazines rejected my many attempts, telling me variations of "We have already done so much Neruda" and "Waldeen *Who?*" I recently opened the drawer where I had put these translations and, after reading them again, was moved by their beauty to try once more. This time with better luck.

Can we have too much poetry by Neruda? Absolutely not. At his best, it is poetry at its best. Especially when the translator, unlike many of his translators, renders him in a way that is true to his Spanish—to the lush imagery and music of it, and to the dance of the language. Here is Waldeen's Neruda, his "Coming of the Birds," from the opening section of *Canto General* titled "Lamp in the Earth," in which the poet celebrates the creation of South America.

Pablo Neruda
Coming of the Birds

Translated from Spanish by Waldeen

All was flight on our earth.
Like drops of blood and feathers
the cardinals bled
the dawn of Anáhuac.
The toucan was an adorable
casket of lacquered fruit,
the hummingbird retained
sparks of the first lightning
and its diminutive bonfires
blazed in the motionless air.

Illustrious parrots filled
the leafy forest
like green-gold ingots
newly cast from the clay
of sunken swamps,
and from their circular eyes
stared a yellow ring,
ancient as minerals.
All the eagles of heaven
nurtured their bloody lineage
in the populous sky,

and aloft on carnivorous wings
the condor soared above the world,
kingly assassin, solitary friar
of the sky, black talisman of the snow,
hurricane of falconry.

The engineering of the ovenbird
made out of fragrant clay
small resonant theaters
where he appeared, singing.

The *atajacaminos*[*] emitted
his dank cry by the edge
of cavern pools.
The wild Araucanian pigeon
made stinging nests of nettles
where she placed her regal gift
of indigo-blue eggs.

The starling of the South,
sweet-smelling carpenter of autumn,
displayed her starry breast
in scarlet constellation,
and the austral song sparrow
tilted up its flute fresh
from the eternities of water.

Bedewed like a water lily
the flamingo opened wide its doors
of rose-hued cathedral,
and took flight like the dawn
far from the sultry wilderness
where hang the precious jewels
of the quetzal, who suddenly awakes,

* Nighthawk. —JC

stirs, glides and blazons,
its virgin live-coals on wing.

A marine mountain soars
toward the islands, a moon
of birds that flies Southward,
over the fermented islands
of Peru.
It is an alive river of shadows,
it is a comet of small
innumerable hearts
that darken the world's sun
like a dense-tailed morning star
pulsing toward the archipelago.

And at end of the wrathful sea,
in the ocean's downpour,
arise the wings of the albatross
like two systems of salt,
establishing with spacious hierarchy
in the silence
between torrential gales,
the order of solitude.

Diane Mehta
Remember You Must Die

When Charmian, the senile novelist in Muriel Spark's *Memento Mori,* picks up the phone and hears, "Remember you must die," she cheerfully says yes, she does remember. The other elderly people, who also field similar phone calls, perceive the phone calls as a threat or an accusation. But Charmian has enough craziness and imagination in her to see its practical value. It is, of course, Death calling. The novel, a darkly comic horror story, is also a stark look at the ways in which we navigate our final months.

Sherwin Nuland, a surgeon and the author of the bestseller *How We Die* and several other books on aging and illness, died last winter. He unhinged our collective belief that dying could be managed with ample dignity and exposed the dreary messiness of life.

Spark rids us of the illusion that any of it is pretty. Charmian and her husband, Godfrey, get letters from their son expressing how he loathes them. The other elderly people in *Memento Mori* are petty: They harangue, contemn, and undermine one another, and their goals are getting money and managing their personal care. After an injection, an elderly patient in a medical ward reflects: "The arthritic pain subsided, leaving the pain of desolate humiliation, so that she wished rather to endure the physical nagging again." Eventually the woman resolves to take charge of her suffering. "She complained more, called often for the bed pan, and did not hesitate, on one occasion when the nurse was dilatory, to wet the bed as the other grannies did so frequently." Letting go of the shame of suffering was her way of recovering her dignity.

Nuland says that just as we are unique in life, we are each unique in how we die. But what's curious to me is the ways in which we are not. We die in a variety of ways, but we unravel in ways that are much the same. Our organs shrink and deteriorate, and we lose our ability to generate, as Nuland says of our biological mechanisms, "new spare parts." We become lists in hospitals, followed around by our medical histories with annotations about medications and treatments, and eventually we join the long list of the dead. But if we use Nuland as a guide, perhaps we can put aside the desire to die with dignity. Dying badly is simply the nature of what kills you, he explains, emphasizing that death doesn't often occur as you wish it. Most people, he says, would prefer death to be a coda to a brief, anguish-free illness.

Several months before my mother died, she told her health care aide about a dream in which she was asked to sign her name in a big book.

Memento Mori ends jarringly, with a two-page death list of the elderly characters we lived with for 200-some pages. One woman gets murdered, and others kick off in ordinary ways (pneumonia, uraemia, coronary thrombosis, carcinomas, myocardial degeneration). Time presses on. There is no character development, no grand denouement. The book ends as if the characters have already been forgotten.

Books of the dead are useful for the living. The ancient Egyptian book of the dead, a catch-all term for all kinds of illustrated funeral texts, functions as a guide, with spells, to help get you to the next life. They were written on the walls of burial chambers or on coffins. Buddhism has a book that bridges the afterlife; the Tibetan Book of the Dead appears to have some useful tips, like how to transfer your consciousness at the moment of dying. (You are on your way to enlightenment.) If not, you suffer the fate of living again, that cyclical existence from which Hindus and Jains want *moksha*, or deliverance. Dante, of course, similarly tackles the soul's trek through the Christian afterlife.

Only Judaism has a book of life, though it exists in concept only, not on the page. It occupies the same mental space as death books in how it confronts repentance. It's said that on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, God decides who has properly repented for their sins, then writes and seals those names in the book of life. It comes from Exodus chapter 32, verse 32, which, in the King James edition of the Bible, says, "Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou has written." God blots the sinners out of his book.

Are we righteous or are we not? Just as in Jainism, the religion of my father, Judaism also requires us to be accountable. Setting aside the various cosmologies and what you get in response to living a good life, the structure of this religious concept is poignant because it gives us occasion to reflect.

Several months before my mother died, she told her health care aide about a dream in which she was asked to sign her name in a big book.

"What does it mean," she asked the woman, knowing very well, I'm certain, what it meant. It's probably no coincidence that she was Jewish and was signing a book of life, a recognition that she had reached a point of forgiveness and ease—past suffering, humiliation, and dementia. The book of life, like the books of death, records the fact that *yes*, you lived. It is also a bookish kind of cemetery in advance of the real one.

When we buried our mother, I looked around to see who her plot was next to. There were my grandparents, their names etched in the tombstones. I looked around at the Jewish names in every direction, the tree my mother would be under, and appreciated the shade and shape of it. My mother drew trees in charcoal for many years. Here was her tree of life above her freshly new life of death. The terms become interchangeable. What is a cemetery if not a book of death? Tombstones record some aspect of people: whether they died young and whether they had children, whether they were housewives or whether they had professions.

"This graveyard is a kind of evidence that other people exist," says an elderly woman in *Memento Mori*, looking back on middle age at the time she walked through a graveyard and stooped to read the names on the tombstones. Names are not unimportant. In her biography of Jane Franklin, the sister of Ben Franklin, Jill Lepore uses Jane's book of the dead to reconstruct her life. This incredibly smart, uneducated, married-with-a-dozen-children woman lacked the opportunities that her prolific brother had. All she produced was this sixteen-page book, or pamphlet, a list of dates and names of family members who died. Lepore makes much of the book and its timeline, for it recorded the people around whom Jane's life revolved.

Hindus also have a book of death. Hindus take the departed's ashes (known as "flowers") to religious towns around the Ganges, where priests keep books on generations of every Hindu family. The family priest performs a ceremony and then asks the family to sign the book of death before he pours the departed's ashes into the river. When a priest records a death, he also records new additions to the family, such as babies or children-in-law. The records go back hundreds of years. When my father's friend Kris's father-in-law died, he and his wife went to a town called

Haridwar ("God's door") to see her family priest. When Kris found his own family priest, he discovered that the priest was computerizing his records and had taken it upon himself to add the cause of death, a modernization that the priest hoped would help predict hereditary illnesses. Of course, you cough up money for this: Death is not free.

A few months ago, when my dad had his sixth stroke, I asked my sister for our mother's book of books. She had kept a journal, since 1974, of the 481 books she had read between 1974 and probably the mid-eighties. She didn't produce much. She had some essays and articles she had written early on in her marriage, a sheaf of letters she sent to her parents from Europe, recipes she collected or which she typed and scribbled notes on from her time living in India, and her book of books.

I scanned the list of books with admiration. It starts with *Last of the Just*, a novel about Jewish persecution in England, and ends with Susan Cheever's biography of her father. She read a ton of Bernard Malamud, Saul Bellow, Stefan Zweig, Graham Greene, John Cheever, James Dickey, Joan Didion, Yasunari Kawabata, Jean Rhys, Pär Lagerkvist, and everything by Thomas Mann. And there were the Brontë sisters and Jane Austen, who I remember her rediscovering in her fifties. In between the literary fiction was evidence of confusion: *Women & Anxiety*, *The Wonderful Crisis of Middle Age*, *The Will to Live*, *What to Do with the Rest of Your Life, Alternatives to Teaching*. Countless books on back pain fill in the blanks. Lists tell a story. It's clear what kind of writer she would have been, if she had put her mind to it. Her description, at seventeen, of seeing England from a steamer for the first time, in a letter, was akin to the excitement she expressed to me in a letter during my first trip to Europe, when I was eighteen. Her fifty pages of letters were full of elation. My mother documented the things that had made life bearable despite her health problems and her many varieties of despair. She may not have died in a dignified way, but that doesn't matter.

"A good death doesn't reside in the dignity of bearing but in the disposition of the soul," says Mortimer, the elderly cop, in *Memento Mori*. This struck me as the main point of the book. It resonates when I think of my mother's death and my father's recognition, during his recent illness, that time was running out.

"The conditions of my illness may not permit me to 'die well' or with any of the dignity we so optimistically seek," Nuland said. My mother died an anguished death, miserable nearly to the end. For a long time, I resented her for it. Why couldn't she have cleaned up a bit in the hospital? Unlike my father during his

recent hospital stint, she was not stoic. On the other hand, she underwent years of pathological depression, terrible pain, heart disease, colitis, and the loss of most of her faculties. It took me a long time to recognize that I was the fool with respect to my mother's dying days. It was I who was undignified to assume that she should die the death that *I* admire according to the going rate: our collectively inadequate, cleaned-up version of our unraveling. "Death belongs to the dying and those who love them," Nuland said. You suffer and grieve, and good for you if it's not messy.

"If I had my life over again I should form the habit of nightly composing myself to thoughts of death. I would practice, as it were, the remembrance of death. There is no other practice which so intensifies life," says Mortimer in *Memento Mori,* trying (barely) to find the perpetrator of the macabre "*Remember you must die*" phone calls. "It is poets and philosophers who tend to think clearly about death," Nuland says. What if we all did that?

Morgan Parker
Interview with Eileen Myles

Eileen Myles is not a woman poet. She is not a rockstar. She is not a badass. She is not a Catholic. She is not a politician. Eileen Myles is not a New Yorker. She is not a nature poet. She is not cool. She is not a novelist, a Buddhist, a punk. Eileen Myles has been ducking and dodging labels for decades, since she fled humble Boston upbringings for creatively flowering 1970s New York to find her footing as a writer. In place of fixed labels, she has accumulated several books of fresh, powerful, meditative, and genuine poetry, stories, and essays, a libretto, a novel, global acclaim as a performer and teacher, and multiple awards including a Guggenheim Fellowship. I met her at her longtime, rent-controlled East Village apartment to talk about her most recent double book from Wave, Snowflake / different streets. *Both books, varied in tone, are deeply reflective in their exploration of place, journey, identity and the discomfort and distrust of the idea of self. —MP*

Morgan Parker: Start at the beginning. Do you remember the first poem you ever wrote?

Eileen Myles: I think there was a little religious poem I wrote when I was a child to manipulate my mother or the Catholic school. I knew I could do this thing. I knew I could do rhymes. And I seem to remember thinking that this would bring me something or another.

MP: How old were you?

EM: Around ten—I think?

MP: That sounds about right.

EM: Yeah, and then there was also some poetry I didn't write. There was a poem by A. E. Housman : "Terence this is stupid stuff / you eat your vittles quick enough . . ." My brother was a chubby kid, and I saw this as an opportunity to mock him. I would chase him around the house reciting it at him. I definitely think there was some way I thought of poetry as being magic.

MP: As a tool?

EM: Yeah, yeah. With power.

MP: Did you have a lot of books in the house growing up?

EM: My family, we're readers. Everybody went to the library, and bought books, but nobody went to college. We weren't educated people, but we were great lovers of reading. And my mother was a really good reader of stories at bedtime. There was a whole thing around storytelling, and we memorized the stories that she told us and started to pretend that we were reading and then started to identify . . . so we learned to read before school, as a lot of kids do, I think.

MP: Thinking about your journey here, and writing as being "the thing" in New York, how did that happen? What was the impetus to leave your home?

EM: I had tried to leave Boston a ton of times—I went to Europe and hitchhiked around after college, and I went to California and tried to live in San Francisco a little bit, when I was twenty-two. I kept coming back to Boston, feeling like whatever it was I'd expected to happen didn't happen. But there was always this thing—New York was 250 miles away from Boston, and I had this funny thing, a feeling that reality was here. And then when I got a little older I had some friends who lived here in New York. It was right around the time I was trying to leave Boston, and they lived on the Upper West Side. I'd go visit them. And my friend's boyfriend was from New York, and he kind of showed us around a bit and I was like, wow, Andy Warhol lives here and Bob Dylan came from there and all this art and culture was actually happening here. I was very slow to actually get that it was now. It was like Paris in the 30s . . .

MP: Right, all these things from the past . . . . When did you realize that you were part of something? Or did you at the time?

EM: I think I wanted to . . . I remember wanting to be a part of something and coming here and very consciously trying to be part of the poetry worlds—I didn't know which one was the real one, there were so many.

MP: Of course.

EM: And there are always men pushing you toward a certain one and pushing you away from another one. But by the time I was in my mid-twenties, twenty-five, twenty-six, I had gravitated toward St. Mark's Poetry Project. They had these free writing workshops, and you just floated in on Friday night with your beer can and there was Alice Notley teaching a workshop and it was great. It was amazing. Already there was a certain culture around St. Mark's writers, and they were the writers I was excited about. Soon I had a gang, we were young writers in our twenties and we were starting to publish each other and hold reading series and all that, and there was an Us. And that was when I thought, 'Okay, I think I've done it.'

MP: What's the role of performance in all of that, relating it back to reciting things when you were young? How do you think that performance fits into your work?

EM: Well I didn't ever want to be a poet, per se. It was something I sort of fell into, but I always wanted to do something with my voice. In school, the nuns would have you stand up and read aloud, and if you were a good reader you never got to stand up long enough, you know, it was always the bad readers that got to stand up there and be stuttering and you were like *arhhh!* I had a girlfriend in college who had a friend who was a DJ at a radio station in Boston. And I remember going there and recording and just loving it. I had a huge desire to play music, and you know, like, be a singer or something when I was a kid. But there was no way.

I feel I was kind of messed up. My parents, they were sort of frustrated people, full of desire, they wanted to *be* things. I mean, we went to museums and the opera, which was sort of working class, and to the right. And there was a love of art, and film, and all this stuff. But the part about getting from here to being someone who was known . . . . They were not even encouraging in terms of education or making us do our homework or aspiring to go to a good school, or even going to college—none of that. My mother didn't get it, my dad died when I was pretty young, and there was just no sense of how to make it happen. So, Cambridge and Boston, you know, because there were all those colleges there, there was always a great music scene—mediocre in every art form except for music. Clubs and folk music and rock and jazz.

MP: So many rock bands came out of there, which is great.
EM: Because you could play . . . . There were so many schools that would support a band, and you could make a living in Boston. It was like, get out of college and start a band or, there were great radio stations, and it was also that moment of the singer-songwriter, like Joni Mitchell and James Taylor . . . . There was kind of a lyricism that was individual.

MP: Sure.
EM: You know, and the lyrics were kinda good.

MP: Absolutely.
EM: I wanted to be one of those people. There was a poetry group that met in Harvard and there was this woman from New York who wore all black and had a medallion and was sort of Goth looking [*laughter*]. This was 1972 or three, and she talked about Frank O'Hara and the New York rock poet Patti Smith.

MP: That's so great.
EM: And I was like [*whispers*] *rock poet?*

MP: What is that, even? [*laughter*] That is such a great label.
EM: As soon as I got to New York I got my friends to go with me to see her play, and that was amazing. But by the 80s it was not cool. By the 80s, it was performance art, and fiction, and culture was already becoming more commodified, more interested in money and being a wealthy, successful, high-power artist. A lot of my poet friends were starting bands; it was a way to be credible then, not to be a poet rocker, but to be in a band. But I was really resistant to that, and I think part of it was that I experienced myself as sort of a fuckup. And I knew that I had gotten this little thing going: I was making poetry work, and I had a little poetry magazine, and I had a little scene, and I kind of knew that. I was drinking very heavily and doing lots of drugs and stuff, and I kind of knew that if I went beyond what I was already succeeding in I would probably not do anything. I would probably mess it all up. I had very superstitious, caste-like feelings about what I was allowed to do.

MP: Those stay long, don't they? [*laughter*]
EM: Were you brought up Catholic?

MP: Yeah, super Christian. I was reading the Book of Revelation at age nine. It's very scary [*laughter*]. You know, but those things, they stay.
EM: So I felt like it was amazing that I could be allowed to be an artist but had to be invisible, and had to be small, had to not ask. You know, I asked for plenty when I got up at the mic and when I read, but I felt very superstitious about what my lot was.

MP: Right.
EM: Until I stopped drinking; then it changed. But in the beginning there was an identification with music and yet, I was being minimal about it.

MP: Almost like not trusting yourself about it?
EM: Well, I think all the music that I could have was in my voice.

MP: Did you ever want to start a band? So many of us become poets because we can't be like rock stars [*laughter*].
EM: I didn't want to start a band, but I sort of wish there had been a band there.

MP: Right. [*laughter*] That's interesting, because you have such a reputation as this rock star poet.
EM: Right, right.

MP: And how do you feel about that?
EM: Mixed. Because that term "rock star" has sort of evolved, even in the past ten years. And, you know, the poetry world is very funny—having too much of anything, other than poetry, has a way of making you somehow not a poet. I was walking to this reading in Brooklyn and somebody sent me a bio for something I'm doing in the fall, and it was exactly the kind of bio I hate so much. I was with a friend, and we were laughing. It was like, if I get called a badass one more time . . . . It's so classist. It really means that she's not right . . . I felt this sort of hidden homophobia . . .

MP: Sure.
EM: Hidden sexism . . .

MP: Absolutely. It's so encoded, it's so encoded. I feel like it's a larger issue. And it's something that I talk to a lot of my other women poet friends about. The sexism in particular. Like, how do you respond to male commenters of your work?

EM: The one thing about male critics, for instance, when they write a bio about my work, or a lot of women's work, if there's a kind of daily-ness, or kind of existence in, and if it's a female existence, they it put down as boring details, a kind of shapelessness.

MP: Like Frank O'Hara never 'existed' [*laughter*] or something.
EM: Well, Frank O'Hara was making art, but a woman, like when a woman does it, she's just talking about herself. The peculiar thing about a female existence is that it just adds up to female existence. Whatever that transcendent thing is that is extended to a man is kind of withheld. Unless you're like Kathy Acker, somebody who was really in your face about the transgressions—she made sure everyone knew that she was appropriating; the tools were right there. Otherwise it's like, you're a girl just talking about yourself.

MP: Yeah. This relates to thoughts about class and gender that enter your work—specifically content-wise, but also performance. Men writers can take up space both in person at readings, almost to the point where you can't breathe, they're breathing all the air. And also on the page. I'm thinking about that in relation to your use of really short lines. They're short lines but it's not like they are shrinking away from anything. I think that's a danger that women poets fall in. Do you think about content and form as going together or pushing against each other in relation to your particular perspective class-wise and gender-wise?
EM: They seem so organically connected to me. Form is an extension of content, I think. Because I've had subject matters that I've wanted to write about for a long time and I've had to wait for the rhythm, I've had to wait for a way to gear it. Because if I couldn't hear it, I couldn't write it. When I was writing *Inferno*, I wrote the first chapter [*snaps*] like that, just like that. And then I thought about what the next chapter was and this character, what did she do next in her life, and I didn't have the information for that. And I started to try and write that and it was just a pile of stuff. I know when I'm just writing stuff and it doesn't sing and it isn't animated. But that's not what I'm doing. Like, every time I get compared to Charles Bukowski . . .

MP: That's so offensive [*laughter*]. Like the opposite type of human being.
EM: What happened in the writing of that book was that I had to literally wait a few years until I left New York, got a job teaching in San Diego, came back to New

York, and we were interviewing people for jobs in a hotel where I was sort of, like, a failed sex worker. I thought 'Oh God, that same hotel,' and I came back here, and my landlord was gutting the building and harassing the present tenants hoping that everyone would leave, and it was cold as hell. And my girlfriend at the time was a young academic on the job market and we were freezing our asses with the cold, and then I wrote the next chapter of the book. I literally had to wait. What I'm saying is that there is something very generative and formal about my process that I'll know what it's about but the *how* is the thing that I'm waiting for. And sometimes it's visceral and sometimes it's historic, but I've got to find it, and that's my search. It's very animal. You kind of find it with your body in a way. The writing is a cerebral act, but the way is kind of visceral. I think there's something divine about writing, it's kind of old fashioned.

MP: Absolutely.
EM: I feel like I'm courting something.

MP: There's such a sense in your work of being inside your own mind, which I love. But at the same time, you know, so present in the world.
EM: Other poets, like Philip Whale and Gary Snyder, whose work has been interesting and important to me, they have thought about that . . . attention is what they're talking about. When I first saw his poems in my early twenties, it just changed everything. There was something about the pacing of his language and his laying it out that was so beautiful. He's totally a master for me. I've heard horrible things about him as a man.

MP: You know that's bound to happen [*laughter*]. I love that about your work. That kind of attention, it's sort of a meta thing that happens. It's inside your mind but also in the world. I guess I'm wondering, you know, it's one thing for a Gary Snyder who takes time to be in nature a lot, but you're reflecting on cities.
EM: I do nature, too.

MP: Of course. But thinking about how important being in cities is to your work, and how New York has almost become a character, and in *Snowflake* San Diego is there also.
EM: It was such a challenge, for years living in New York, people in New York would say, Don't move to California, it ruins your writing. Everyone who goes to

California gets a little light-headed. When I got there it was quiet, it was different, there were so many fewer people and so many fewer encounters and collisions and conversations, the things that made me be a writer. So I had to learn how to write in that, and of course when I came back to New York, the new dilemma was how do I get this back? How do I find this? I think I was still living in California when I wrote my Iceland essay. And that essay in some ways was really about how environment creates sound, how a music comes out of a place always, and we come to find it.

MP: Absolutely. I mean, do you feel like you're in a relationship with New York?
EM: I do, I do. I think about how it feels today. And I love it. I feel like I'm myself here in such a deep way. I can't imagine ever letting go of it. I mean we all love to hate it, too.

MP: Of course, that's part of it.
EM: But it's got a lot of character to me; it's organic. And all the ways, as a New Yorker, all the ways that the city has gone through a change, like the gentrification and all that. But the ones, the big ones, like 9/11, the blackouts, there was one in the 70s, and Sandy, you know, it's sort of like, being in New York when these big crises happen, seeing all of it act like an organism. New Yorkers have a very particular way of dealing with a crisis, together. And seeing each other and becoming more open, every time it makes me so astonished. You know, it makes me feel connected to something, it's so spiritual. And everybody I know who is a New Yorker but wasn't here for 9/11, it's like 'I was hurt and I wasn't there.' It's intense.

MP: Do you think that that's what was missing for you in California?
EM: I guess so. I mean, San Diego is a weird place.

MP: It really is.
EM: I mean the history of it. I read the history of San Diego called *Under the Perfect Sun*. The author is a Marxist who writes about places and his history of San Diego was really intense because it's so right-wing all the way back, full of hate, full of racism, full of paranoia, full of anti-Semitism, and it's just a small, mean little city. It's on the border, and I guess because of its location it became a naval base and an air base and all the military and all the scientific . . .

MP: Which then just like fuels that whole thing.
EM: Yeah, yeah, and in a way it developed as an urban space to make bad decisions one after another and destroy its own environment and make bad choices and there's that convention center on the coast, blocking your view of the ocean.

MP: Oh, it's so ugly.
EM: Who would do that? There was something soulless about San Diego. And then there is this funny university in the midst of all that—and it was a pretty radical and pretty smart, small gang of people, but there just weren't enough people and enough friends and enough conversations and faces. I had heard this myth about how you come to New York to be a writer and then you have to leave New York to be a writer. So I thought I was doing that, but of course within less than a year my relationship broke up and then suddenly I was in this house with my dog who was dying . . .

MP: I was so intrigued about how San Diego came up in the last books, because I feel like you're using place in this way that you're used to using New York, but you're not there, so you're reflecting on where you are and there's a skepticism and distance there.
EM: You know, it's funny that I wrote *Inferno* pretty much completely in San Diego.

MP: Oh, really?
EM: It was like I had to leave New York to write about it in a particular way, and so now, this new book I'm working on is about San Diego. I mean, in a way it's about this dog, but it starts in San Diego with the dog dying. I'm very mediated, and there's something I'm trying to learn to not do anymore, because I can have more of what I want now. Why do I have to keep trying to figure out what it is you want so I can decide what I can have? You know what I mean? I'm sixty-four years old, will I live until I'm ninety-four? Seventy-four? Or sixty-five? I don't know. So I feel like I need to take this time on as space, and space in which to have my own vision and my own practice. I'm beginning to challenge some of the ways I've fit into the scheme of things. I feel like I'm becoming more introverted. Even, on a corny level, I've been thinking privately that I'm ready to Beckett. You know, I think of him as this sort of strange guy who called his own shots. That's who we think of when we think of Beckett. And I think, I want to be that now, and even if I decide that I'm just living in New York and sitting here, it doesn't mean I have to fill my day with what I don't want. I can live a very private life right here, you know.

MP: It's so cool that you're talking about this, because when I was rereading the newer books, I was noticing this search for identity. Your work is always so confident, but in this work there were more questions than usual. And I liked that. It was vulnerable and true. But it was surprising to me, I think. I found something really lovely about the idea of getting older and then figuring, 'Who am I? Wait a minute,' and then even just the use of the word snowflake and the individuality of that. The uniqueness.

EM: And the fleetingness of the form.

MP: Exactly, and using your name so much. What were you thinking there?

EM: Part of the joy of coming to New York was realizing that you could make a shape, you could make a mind, you weren't necessarily going to be challenged. It was sort of like the self as a performance.

MP: Oh yeah.

EM: I read *The Bell Jar* when I was pretty young and I remember her talking about being at lunch with a famous poet and watching the famous poet eat their salad with their fingers and her concluding that you can pretty much do anything if you act like you're supposed to be doing it. And I really took that to heart because my mother was an orphan, and I only realized recently that, when we used to go out to dinner, she would often act really humiliated by our manners. But the thing that was so puzzling about it was that she had never taught us. She had not taught us any of these manners, she simply acted, and was shamed and humiliated by our behavior. And it was only recently that I thought, 'She wasn't taught.'

MP: No, she didn't know.

EM: Both her parents were dead by the time she was eight, and so she was just passed around, I'm sure she was sexually abused, I'm sure bad stuff happened, because my mother carries all those things. So what she did instead of teaching us, she just treated us the same way as she was treated. She treated us like we were embarrassing her, like we were these terrible little orphans. Because that's the only way she knew how to be a mother.

MP: Right.

EM: So when I was younger, I was trying to see what the limits were. If I acted like I was a self, would you believe I was a self? If I was quiet and I didn't saying anything,

would you think that I was smart? I love figuring out how to let the whole process show now. For example, I used to hate people who included dreams in their writing. I thought that using a dream sequence was a manipulation of what you want to say. But now I'm like, of course dreams are fascinating. It's like an object that is vanishing as you're trying to describe it. The practice of trying to describe a dream is coping with loss. And that's exciting to me. To try and transcribe one's own thought process is incredibly beautiful now to me. It didn't used to be. It's as interesting as the world, it's not being the world.

MP: Do you think that . . . describing or wrestling with the idea of the self is the same as coping with loss?
EM: Sure. I think it's sort of like, what part of it are you going to hold? And how are you going to describe that holding?

MP: What are your impulses when you're writing? What jumpstarts a poem? What are you obsessed with?
EM: You know, usually just a good sounding line, a line that I think literally holds something. I like it to sound really obvious and simple, but for it to be kind of shaky, and for me to know there's something underneath. I'll use that line to shake out the rest. I love the notion of bait-and-switch, you know, putting something out and it turning into something else. And I think we all know that, especially for women and may I say people of color, any of us, queers, anybody that isn't necessarily part of the story that whoever they are is telling. It's sort of like, you walk into a room thinking you know who you are, and what you're selling, and by the way they treat you, you realize they're taking you to be something else. And you're being treated like that other person. I remember that as a young female poet, that I came in with my poems and I realized I was being received as a piece of ass. And it was like they were waiting for me to do my little dance with my poet's poems so they could figure out how to fuck me. Wow, the world was baiting and switching me all the time.

MP: So how then do you turn that?
EM: Exactly. Formally, this is my response: You shall feel what I have felt.

MP: Almost . . . disorienting?
EM: Manage your own disorientation and turn it into theirs.

MP: Right.

EM: The thing I find most unpardonable in readers, or people who have power over the experiences of readers, is the way they want to make them feel safe at all times, and not know what's going on. I feel part of reading a text, or part of entering a room, or part of riding on a train or sitting in a movie, is to not know what is going on. And then you get it and then it changes, and then you get it again, and then you don't know. Sort of like looking out of the train window and realizing that some of this landscape, I know what this is, and some of it I don't know what it is. And that is not disorienting. That's just the experience of being in the world. And yet, with text, we're being compelled all the time to make it really clear for people.

MP: What do you think is the biggest distraction for women poets today?

EM: I want to say their beauty. It's what people want us to be. You know, or our own sense of whether we're there or not.

MP: Right.

EM: I see it in younger, female poets. Sort of like, 'Oh, you're leading with that.' And I certainly think that I did too. And, you know, not everyone in the poetry world is particularly good looking. But sometimes peoples' perceptions of how you look is why you've been allowed to be around. Or your own pleasure in how you look or your manipulation of it. And the aging process is so strange, I think, for all women, because whatever that story was, you're someplace else now. And everybody's always letting you know where you sit on the shelf. Like when I was going through menopause, it's so strange, because I was going through this profound experience and yet, if I wrote about it, I got very weird responses. People were like, 'I don't get that,' 'I haven't been through that yet,' 'I don't know what that is,' 'oh, my mother should read this,' 'you should do an anthology.' I had this essay in *Inferno* in Iceland that I could not publish because it was about the fact that I had this old, funky car that's air-conditioning and speed were fucked up, and it would speed up and slow down and there was something really wrong with the electronics of this car while I was going through menopause. And these two things were very funny and and nobody would let me write about it. The piece finally ran in the shittiest little Bay Area gay newspaper and even they had to make a joke and the banner was like 'raging hormones,' I just wasn't allowed to be . . . me?

MP: Honest?
EM: It had to be a joke. And that's the thing I find so strange about being female, is that you're making a joke and people have to make a joke on you and silence you with their joke, which is less good. You're being dumbed down all the time.

MP: Right, right.
EM: Like you're being castrated, basically. Where a man's joke is always, 'Oh, what a good joke,' you know?

MP: I think that's true, when you're talking about using your humor. I'm so interested in that in writing, but I often feel like there's such a disconnect with laughing with you or at you. And you have to be hyper aware of it. Like, if you're writing a joke you almost have to be making two jokes at once to be on top of the scale, you know?
EM: Yeah. And if it's discourse, if it's out loud, if it's a public situation, it's like playing ping pong. Because you make a joke and they are so ready to make a joke of your joke and take power and you have to be so lithe to keep it your story.

MP: It's hard work to be thinking of two minds at the same time.
EM: People are always ready to undercut a woman. I mean, I ran for president in 1992, and I'm proud of it and it was an interesting thing to have done, but people always put it in my bio as a laugh line.

MP: I was going to ask about that. I was a small person then [*laughter*] so that was not part of my experience of you. But what was that like? What were the responses? Because I do notice it in your bio, but it's always placed strangely.
EM: Because there's no *right* place for it. In the 80s I was reciting poetry as a way to make a living as a performer because poetry wasn't a performance art. I was just memorizing my poems and presenting them in a performance context, but I didn't have the capacity to move, I didn't have the body language, and I didn't want to become an actor. I was sober by then so I was going to AA meetings and I had learned slowly how to speak . . . because, you know, it used to be that I could only really talk when I drank. I liked Spalding Gray, and I thought, 'Well, I'll try improvisation.' And the Women's Theatre Company invited me to speak at their 20th anniversary, and I told the story of being raped. I would tell it like it was going to be

funny, pleasant, and you could see the audience go, 'Oh my God,' and I would just keep talking, you know. I realized there was this amazing political power to speech. And that's when the 1991–92 election began. George Bush was giving a talk about how activists, women, minorities, queers, anybody that didn't like the way things were and complained more than once was the real danger to freedom of speech. And that's when they took that left-wing language, you know, "politically correct," and used it in a right-wing way. When I read that I just remembered thinking—I was forty at the time, or forty-one—I remembered when I was a kid and John F. Kennedy was president and everybody was like, 'He's so young' because he had a head of hair as opposed to bald Eisenhower. But I was a kid, so forty was not so young, he's an old man, you know, why is he so good looking? But I realized that you have to be what, thirty-nine or forty to run for president and so I thought, I'll be a young presidential candidate.

MP: Perfect.

EM: I had already written this Kennedy poem. And it was like the only poem I had written that took on political content in a real, in-your-face way, and it was exciting and I memorized it and I would perform it a lot like my hit poem. I didn't know what to do after that in terms of politics, so I would do improvisations, and they would be my speeches, and I would talk about politics. My oath from April of '91 was that until November of '92, every public event I am invited to take part in, I will turn into a presidential opportunity—group readings at the café, memorial service, just, like, a panel, anything, I was just going to talk. But then I quickly realized that all I was doing was announcing it again and again, and I said, 'I've got to get past this.' At the time I had a mailing list of 400 people, so I got some friends to help me and I sent out a letter explaining the issues and why I was running, and asking for a small donation and they would get a button, and they would get a bumper sticker and they would get these monthly mailings. And it went like wildfire; I was on MTV, I was in these magazines, and I toured in 28 states. Even though it was sort of like, 'Haha, you're running for president,' people were excited by it, and so they were telling me things that they thought: 'You're the only presidential candidate I'll ever know, so I'm going to tell you this.' And then I also realized that this is what it's like to be a public figure, it never stopped. It never stopped. Every place I went people were inviting me to dinner, and they would say, 'So, let's hear about the campaign.' And I didn't want to do that, but I couldn't say 'I'm feeling kind of depressed, I don't

want to do that.' So I started to make things up like being depressed being part of the campaign. I'm going to tell you exactly how I'm feeling while I'm running for office. So it was PMS, and depression, and weird things in my building, and it was like an amazing experience, and it was very deflating when it was over, too, because it was like, who am I now?

MP: Why do you think people were so excited by it?
EM: Because we're so cut off by the system, I think. We're so alienated and we're so powerless, and I did not feel powerless during that time.

MP: To have it close.
EM: Yeah. And I realized all you had to do was apply the same logic you have in your life. Corruption is why it's so hard. It doesn't take much to figure out that you would reverse the defense spending and the domestic spending. you know . . .

MP: What are your thoughts about politics in your poetry? And how do you balance that with your opinions based on your personal life and kind of surreal moments?
EM: I think it's like anything else; if content becomes too heavy then it's just a holder of information rather than a sensuous thing. There's a seduction in writing, and we all have these rhythms, and it's sort of like, 'If I want something, I'll say it this way, I won't say it that way,' We all have different mixes. Politics is just another one. I'm excited when I can use politics in a poem. But it still feels like it needs to be held by a kind of embodiment, or *something* that makes it something other than pure information.

MP: So that people will hear it.
EM: I don't want it to feel disposable. I want it to be as installed in the poem as the flower would be. In the world of gay poetry, I realized that there's sometimes a tendency for the most successful poets to be writing metrics. And I don't blame them, but when I look at their success, and I look at their sexuality, I think, does that normalize homosexuality for people? We can celebrate these queers because it almost makes the sexual removable, it's just content. The form makes the content safe in a way. And that's not what I want to do with politics. The poem makes the politics, the poem validates the politics in a way. Almost by its aimlessness, its surprising quality to have that in it, then that must be real.

MP: It doesn't feel like, 'Imma sit down and write a poem about this;' it just enters as it would a life.

EM: Exactly. And I like that.

Darcey Steinke
Sister Golden Hair

By Jena Salon

Over the last several months, it seems, the internet has been exploding with issues about women's health and well-being, issues of inequality, issues of gendered violence. There was a month in the summer when it seemed celebrities were lining up to either declare themselves Feminists, or Not Feminists, and where the media responded with articles about The Dreaded F Word. Advertisers suddenly began trying to sell positive body image as a commodity, toy companies started making engineering toys for girls (pink! to build a doll house!), and viral videos depicted what it was like for women on the street being constantly catcalled. And then there was the beautiful, if not too quickly fizzled, #YesAllWomen campaign on Twitter. It seemed the time was ripe for national dialogue—a recognition in the mainstream that the women's movement had not achieved all it had set out to. As someone who dedicates so much of my time to women's health and safety, coordinating my town's self-defense programs and volunteering as an advocate for a domestic violence helpline, I think one of the most important aspects to these conversations is that there is no way to separate the objectification of women, and lack of equal pay for women, and restricted access to healthcare for women, from physical violence against women. They emerge from the same societal attitudes. And therefore, the crimes perpetrated against women are—for the most part—perpetrated against them precisely because they are women.

This is the world in which I began reading Darcy Steinke's new novel, *Sister Golden Hair*. Although the world of the novel—1970s Roanoke, Virginia—sucked me in quickly, and despite the thorough job Steinke does of weaving in historical

markers like the *Apollo 15*, and 45s, and the *The Mod Squad* and Nixon resigning, despite the haircuts and the clothes and the cars, it was impossible not to notice how very similar the world of this novel is to the world of today—at least in terms of the landscape, for women. This is a coming of age novel, but also, more specifically, and more interestingly, a coming of womanhood novel. Through Jesse's journey, Steinke flawlessly captures the twisty and merciless meshing of sex, violence, and magical thinking that tosses adolescents back and forth between childhood and dawning comprehension of the adult world. Early on, Jesse and her brother are outside at night alone, watching the fireflies and "Phillip got his Wiffle bat and swung at the bugs until he had a patch of glowing tails struck to the plastic. He smeared the tails over his forehead so his skin glowed." It is the perfect entwining of Jesse's liminal worlds, at once iridescent and beautiful, otherworldly even, and yet fragile against the whims of destructive male violence.

Jesse is twelve when her father is asked to leave his post as minister for a Methodist church in Philadelphia and decides to move the family to Roanoke. Their new home is in a development which is half-unfinished, abandoned by the builders, and the "tree line was scattered with stuff people dumped: a television with a smashed screen, a plastic bag of clothes, a broken down playpen." Not just everyday incidental trash, but lives. And the blatant disregard for what is being dumped—and presumably escaped—and for who has to look upon the detritus of these failed experiments in life, leaves Jesse adrift in both a physical and mental world. Her parents meanwhile are struggling to define themselves: her father, because there are "not many jobs for a defrocked minister" and her mother because she is "unhinged," constantly roiling with regret for having not achieved the life she felt she deserved. She tells her children "how sad it was the Jackie Kennedy had lost two babies" as if she should have been part of that inner circle.

When her father pulled back from the church, Jesse's entire lens for understanding her world was removed. She says, "We were in the center of what I thought of as THE HOLY, and our every move had weight and meaning. But out in the world away from the church we floated free." The lack of parental guidance or emotional connection, and the lack of spiritual grounding, collides with her preteen mentality.

Although there is a part of Jesse that is uncomfortable with gender differentiation and although as a child she believed she "could go back and forth between girl and boy," Jesse is "drawn to the objects of womanhood" which for her mother were "secret symbols," each translatable and decipherable. "A turquoise ring meant one thing worn on the index finger, something completely different on the pinkie." And

Jesse looks to them, in a way, to fill the spiritual void created when her family left the church. She craves rituals and holy objects. She craves both guiding principles and indisputable answers. Partially because of this void and partially because she is just leaving the clutches of childhood, where magic and imagination reign, Jesse imbues puberty with magic and worries sometimes that she will develop werewolf hair and wonders why if her chest can "puff out why couldn't my forehead develop a horn?" Lacking any real guidance, she turns to the only texts she can find which will save her from the dangers of these shifts. She pours through fashion magazines—*Mademoiselle*, *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue*—and studies them "until my legs were numb . . . . From scrutinizing the pages, I narrowed down the types of women I was interested in emulating."

In the 1980s (a decade after Jesse pores over those glossy magazines), her magazine devotion would come to represent—for feminists—all that is wrong in society. That kind of attitude continued on through the 90s when I was going to college. I was reading Mary Daly and Camille Paglia and the definition of feminism seemed to be rooted squarely in a rejection of men—even though there was a lot of big talk about equality. In *Outercourse* Daly writes of patriarchs:

> This pillaging of [women's] energy was a necessary condition of their production of monstrous distortions, and the distortions themselves were designed to sap women's energy—by depleting our Self-esteem and killing our memories, our hopes, our confidence, our courage. I realized that by distorting and erasing women's Past they had ravaged and purloined our Present and Future.

I spent a few weeks seriously considering how to be heterosexual and feminist, and noting all the ways in which I was persecuting myself. My senior thesis—and anthropological ethnography of Christian Science—focused on how the feminist doctrine of a Mother-Father God in a church started by a woman stood side by side with the everyday misogyny practiced by the believers. Suffice to say that in this world of academic feminism there was no room for beauty or frivolities like home decorating. Now, fifteen years later, magazines are still pretty consistently outed constantly for manipulative airbrushing and rail-thin models, but fashion is okay from a feminist perspective. Not to say the relationship isn't *complicated*. When Alyssa Mastromonaco transitioned from serving as Deputy White House Chief of Staff for Operations to contributing editor for *Marie Claire* magazine, she reports that men (her peers) were outraged at the decision. She wrote in her *Washington Post* Op-Ed, "dated arguments assume that women are incapable of being both informed and fashionable, that to be a woman of substance and gravitas, to be the

taken seriously by her peers, she must subordinate her appearance and interests outside the office."

In this new world, feminism is still hotly contested and the definitions debated, but now there is a recognition that to be feminist does not mean the rejection of all things "girly" but rather a rejection of the idea that these are the *only* things that appeal to and matter to women. Furthermore, "girly" things don't have to appeal, nor do they indicate a weakness if they *do* appeal. The online magazine *Jezebel* writes a version of this same sentiment at least once a week. Amazing how often it needs restating.

In the 1970s, though, Jesse is in the beginning of this feminist awakening—nowhere near considering whether or not she should be looking at fashion magazines if she wants to be a strong woman. Over the next four years though, she senses as she looks at the types of women in the complex around her, that there are scores of divergent possibilities of womanhood and that not all are equal. There is Mrs. Smith in a housedress and curlers, standing on the front step—clearly a direction Jesse does not intend to follow as it too closely reflects her mother on her worst days. There is Sandy, a sexy, unsophisticated woman, who lies on a "lawn chair in the front yard in a leopard print bikini." She listens to Lynyrd Skynyrd on the transistor radio, drinks a can of beer, and tells Jesse—inappropriately—that since her boyfriend is never going to marry her she doesn't "know why [she] keep[s] fucking him." Jill lives in a "hippie crash pad" with a mostly AWOL mother and has "the spark and intensity of a downed electricity wire." She has a dark imagination and believes in past lives. Julie is a former Miss North Carolina who owned a dance studio. She furnished her house with "chrome lamps, a crystal champagne bucket, a sheepskin rug" all of which were over the top, but intriguingly expensive. She is a woman of taste. Finally there is Sheila, who is popular and moves "among a flock of shiny-haired girls in colored corduroys, cheesecloth shirts and Earth shoes. They were like jewels dropped in the middle hallway waters, with their bright fingernails, glittering eye shadow, and peacock-feather earrings."

In less skilled hands, the girls and women who fill these pages could seem one-dimensional, present only as representations. But Steinke is sensitive and thorough, and Jesse does not just have the job of desperately categorizing each of these complicated women around her, but also reconciling them with the opinions of men who tell her that "the ladies in Bent Tree are sometimes a little crazy." Women still struggle to define themselves within our present, enlightened world.

This is because no matter how strong women are, they still have men to contend with. In the best part of the recent conversations about solving the problem of

campus sexual assaults people have begun to realize it is not enough to educate the women, or even to also educate the men: a belief is growing that men must be taught to actively resist the culture of sexual aggression against their female classmates. Being a bystander is not ok. Being an 'accidental' misogynist is not okay. And just in case they needed to hear it one more time: You don't have to be wearing a ski mask to be a rapist, and being a rapist is not okay. This kind of education is just barely breaking into the discourse now, and the men in *Sister Golden Hair* barely recognize sexual assault and coercion. They are: Jesse's eventual boyfriend, Dwayne, who she doesn't much care for, but he is "trying to do better" despite being "clueless and pathetic." He seems to genuinely like her, except when he's ignoring her in order to continue talking about his own interests; there is Dwayne's father who gets drunk and swears in front of kids and then shows them a porn flick; there's Glen McCabe who comes pretending to be a casting agent so he can see women naked; and finally there is Mr. Ramin the high school teacher having sex with students in the AV room.

And then there is Walt, who brings with him the most stomach-churning scene in the entire novel. Walt is a guy's guy, and as he becomes more of a fixture in Sheila's mother's life, he begins to expose Sheila to the world of *Playboy* and Hefner's bunnies. After Sheila and Jesse become friends, Jesse discovers that Walt encourages Sheila to dress like a bunny-in-training with black leotards, white cuffs they'd "cut out of poster board," "a pair of satin ears" and a homemade yarn tail. The mix of adolescent arts and crafts with "sexy" is disgusting enough, but after weeks of practice Sheila and Jesse finally present themselves to Walt for critique. Sheila flops herself into Walt's lap and he "moved his arm around her in a way that was not at all fatherly. 'You, doll,' he said, pressing his lips to her forehead, 'are perfect.'" She's told she's doing a good job, and it is heart-wrenching, because we know that this is just the beginning of the times when she—as a female—is going to be treated this way by men. She's being indoctrinated in this very moment to be proud of how pleasing she is to him—how successfully she's removed her identity and become a fantasy—and she is bolstered by this inappropriate contact from a man who is both too old for her and involved with another woman (her mother).

When this happens it is impossible to ignore that fact that, in the world of this novel, inhabiting a female role comes with real danger. Even Jesse in her naiveté sees that "once my body flooded with hormones I'd become vulnerable to the whims of men." In fact, the parts of society that are trying to teach girls how to be female are also putting her in danger—they are not teaching how to be a woman as an indi-

vidual but rather a *woman* there in the service of men. There is the man in 3B who "might offer to take [girls] pictures." There are dead girls who "lived at the bottom [of Tilden Lake] in a cave made of amethyst" and other girls found in ditches. There are depressed girls and girls "held captive by men" and girls sold into "sex slavery." Jesse thinks, "I figured the sooner I became a woman, the sooner an ex-husband would be threatening me with a knife."

And when Sheila's father abandons her and her mother to come out as gay and all her friends at school turn on her, she gets back her control in two ways: on the one hand by aggressively pursuing the posture of a sexualized older woman by pretending to be a Playboy bunny, and on the other by befriending Jesse, basically just to control and degrade her by forcing her to say and do things which make her uncomfortable. Jesse accepts it because "Ever since Sheila had started to lock me in the closet, she'd begun acknowledging me at school." And the tradeoff is worth it to Jesse. In other words, Sheila oppresses herself and another female. Jesse lets her. Which is how females have been kept in check for centuries.

The terrifying state of the novel is that everywhere girls are in danger—put there by both men and other women—and no one comments on it. Not as a notable trend. Instead Jesse says of her boyfriend, "I had decided to let Dwayne do whatever he wanted to me. He could even kidnap or rape me if he wanted. He could handcuff me and tickle me with a feather or give me an indian handshake." Which snuggles us in nice and close to today. We notice particular girls being violated, but society defines them, and circumscribes them, and explains them, so that when we—especially as women—try to talk about violence against females, it is seen as a melodramatization of imperfection in the world. The media reports on a man killing his ex-wife when he's supposed be picking up the last of his belongings, and it is called murder–suicide. It is never called Domestic Violence. People say he went crazy. The media doesn't say how he'd been abusing her for years. And certainly no one notes how this is predictable because the *most dangerous* time for a woman in an abusive relationship is when she leaves, because in a relationship about control, the man will do anything to gain the upper hand. *Why didn't she leave?* Someone might wonder. Or, *I wonder what she said to provoke him?*

Throughout the four years of the novel, as Jesse grapples with what spirituality and ritual should look like for her now that her family has parted from the church, she develops an obsession with a text on funeral rites, where she reads about "the laying of coins on the dead's closed eyes, the filling of their mouths with instant rice." It

grounds her spiritually, to be sure, and it also fills the dark and morbid fascination that adolescents so often flirt with. But for Jesse the funeral rituals are about the intimate moments when families take care of their loved ones—something she is desperately in search of for herself. She says, "I wanted people to love me and I wanted to love them back."

In my work with victims of domestic violence, I hear horrific stories about how women and girls are treated at the hands of those they love. I run self-defense classes too and teach women and girls to be safer—sometimes from strangers, but also from those they love. It's not hard to draw a line between this violence and male entitlement and the general culture of misogyny. Even though Mary Daly, et al. could be extreme, they did have a point in the idea that your sexuality—if you're a heterosexual woman—does equal danger. This is true in our world, and true in Jesse's world. You hope for Jesse that she can find intimacy, but after squiggling around between the real world present day and the novel's world, it's hard not to feel cautious about even wanting that for her.

Contributors

Priscilla Becker's (poetry 11) personal and poetic style are
indistinguishable—spare & abstract, non-linear, unsentimental, like a lonesome antelope.
[spare: poetic—few words, no adjectives
spare: personal—few accessories, no decoration
abstract: poetic—independent of concrete reference
abstract: personal—independent of visual reference
non-linear: poetic—no story
non-linear: personal—color coherence but incoherent patterns—as though the torso & lower body have parted ways
unsentimental: poetic—emotionally non-manipulative
unsentimental: personal—proportionate & critical]

Paula Bomer ("A Private Revolution" 150) is the author of *Inside Madeleine*, *Nine Months*, and *Baby and Other Stories*.

Nickole Brown (poetry 160) was the editorial assistant for the late Hunter S. Thompson. Her first collection is *Sister*, and *Fanny Says* is forthcoming from BOA. Currently, she teaches at University of Arkansas–Little Rock and is the editor for the Marie Alexander Series in Prose Poetry.

Kelly Cherry ("Famousness" 17) is the author of twenty-two full-length books, nine chapbooks, and two translations of classical drama. Her most recent title is *A Kind of Dream*, a collection of linked stories, selected as a Best Indie book. *A Kelly Cherry Reader* is forthcoming.

Jonathan Cohen's (essay 168) latest book is his edition of William Carlos Williams's translations, *By Word of Mouth: Poems from the Spanish, 1916–1959*. He is the author of the first and only major biography of poet-feminist Muna Lee, *A Pan-American Life*.

Matthew Cooperman (poetry 140) is author of the text and image collaboration *Imago for the Fallen World* (with Marius Lehene), *Still: of the Earth as the Ark which Does Not Move*, *DaZE*, and *A Sacrificial Zinc*—winner of the Lena-Miles Wever Todd Prize—as well as three chapbooks. A founding editor of *Quarter After Eight* and co-poetry editor of *Colorado Review*, he teaches in the creative writing program at Colorado State University. He lives in Fort Collins with his wife, the poet Aby Kaupang, and their two children.

Piotr Florczyk (translation 64) is a poet, essayist, and translator of six volumes of Polish poetry, including *The World Shared: Poems by Dariusz Sośnicki* (co-translated with Boris Dralyuk) and *The Day He's Gone: Poems 1990–2013* by Paweł Marcinkiewicz. He lives in Santa Monica.

Kelly Forsythe (poetry 96) is currently living and writing in Washington, DC. Her poetry has appeared in *American Poet*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, the *Minnesota Review*, and elsewhere. Her book reviews have appeared in *The Huffington Post* and the *LA Review*. She is the director of publicity for Copper Canyon Press and teaches at the University of Maryland.

Sophie Summertown Grimes (poetry 68) has had poems published in *Spoon River Poetry Review* and *AGNI Online*. Author of the chapbook *City Structures*, she lives and works in Oberlin, Ohio, and writes poetry reviews for *Publishers Weekly*.

Katherine Hill ("Scarlett" 131) is the author of *The Violet Hour*, a novel. Her fiction, essays, and reviews have appeared in *Bookforum*, *Colorado Review*, the *Guardian*, and *n+1*, among others. She teaches fiction in the MFA program at Arcadia University and is an assistant editor at Barrelhouse.

Lisa Hiton's (poetry 116) poems have been published or are forthcoming in *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Linebreak*, *THRUSH Journal*, and the *Cortland Review*, among others. She has received the Esther B. Kahn Scholarship from 24Pearl Street at the Fine Arts Work Center and is a Pushcart nominee.

Kathleen Jesme's (poetry 163) latest collection of poems is *Albedo*. She is the author of four other collections of poems, including *Meridian* and *The Plum-Stone Game*.

Claudia Keelan's (poetry 56) sixth book of poems *O, Heart*, was published this year. A book of translations, *Truth of My Songs: Poems of the Trobairitz*, is forthcoming in spring 2015 from Omnidawn.

Katy Lederer (poetry 165) is the author of the poetry collections *Winter Sex* and *The Heaven-Sent Leaf*, as well as of the family memoir *Poker Face: A Girlhood Among Gamblers*. "Love" and "Mortalism" are from a new collection titled *The Engineers*.

Diane Mehta's (belles lettres 173) poems, essays, interviews, and articles have appeared in *Slate*, *Prairie Schooner*, *AGNI*, *The Believer*, *BOMB*, and many other publications. She lives with her son in Brooklyn and is writing a novel about mixed-race parents in 1946 Indiana.

Rusty Morrison's (poetry 98) new letterpress, limited edition chapbook from speCt! is *Reclamation Project*. Her books include *Beyond the Chainlink*, *Book of the Given*, *After Urgency*

(which won the Dorset Prize), *the true keeps calm biding its story* (which won the Sawtooth Prize, the Academy of American Poet's James Laughlin Award, the Northern California Book Award, and the DiCastagnola Award from Poetry Society of America), and *Whethering* (which won the Colorado Prize for Poetry). She is the co-publisher of Omnidawn.

Justin Mundhenk (essay 77) lives in Ohio with his wife. His fiction has appeared online with *Granta*. He is at work on a novel.

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973) (poetry 168), widely considered one of the greatest Latin American poets of the twentieth century, received the 1971 Nobel Prize in Literature.

Morgan Parker (interview 178) is the author of *Other People's Comfort Keeps Me Up At Night*, selected by Eileen Myles for the 2013 Gatewood Prize, and *There Are More Beautiful Things Than Beyoncé*. A Cave Canem fellow and poetry editor for *Coconut Magazine*, she lives in Brooklyn.

Alejandra Pizarnik (1936–1972) (poetry 99) was a leading voice in twentieth-century Latin American poetry. Born in Argentina to Russian-Jewish immigrants, Pizarnik studied at the University of Buenos Aires and the Sorbonne. Known primarily as a poet, Pizarnik also published reviews, translations, theatre, and short works of experimental prose, and left behind a literary diary that reflects her debt to Kafka, Artaud, and Michaux. She died of an apparent drug overdose at the age of thirty-six.

Anzhelina Polonskaya (essay 59) has been a member of the Moscow Union of Writers and the Russian PEN-centre. She has published translations in *World Literature Today*, *Descant*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *The Iowa Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *AGNI*, *New England Review*, and *The Kenyon Review*, among many others. In 2013, *Paul Klee's Boat*, a bilingual edition of her latest poems, was shortlisted for the 2014 Best Translated Book Award and for the 2014 PEN Award for Poetry in Translation. Polonskaya continues to live and work in Malakhovka as a poetry editor for *Russian Switzerland* magazine.

Paisley Rekdal (poetry 133) is the author of a book of essays, *The Night My Mother Met Bruce Lee*; a photo-text memoir that combines poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and photography entitled *Intimate*; and four books of poetry: *A Crash of Rhinos*, *Six Girls Without Pants*, *The Invention of the Kaleidoscope*, and *Animal Eye*, which won the UNT Rilke Prize. Her work has received the Amy Lowell Poetry Traveling Fellowship, a Guggenheim Fellowship, a NEA Fellowship, two Pushcart Prizes, a Fulbright Fellowship, and various state arts council awards.

Christine Rice's ("Exacting Revenge" 106) novel, *Swarm Theory*, was shortlisted in the William Faulkner–William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition. Her stories have appeared in *Rusted Radishes*, *Bird's Thumb*, the *Chicago Tribune*, Detroit's *Metro Times*, and *The Good Men Project*, and her radio essays have been produced by WBEZ Chicago. She's a ChicagoNow blogger, the managing editor of *Hypertext Magazine*, and director of Chicago's HYPERTEXT Studio writing collaborative.

Jena Salon (books 194) is the senior editor of *The Literary Review* and outreach and communications coordinator at Domestic Violence Services Network.

Valerie Sayers ("The Last Days of Peace and Love" 44) is the author of six novels, including *The Powers*. Her many stories, essays, and reviews are published widely. She is professor of English at Notre Dame.

Natalie Shapero (poetry 118) is the author of *No Object*, and her writing has appeared in *The Believer*, *New Republic*, *The New Yorker*, *POETRY*, *The Progressive*, and elsewhere. She lives in Columbus, Ohio and works as associate editor of the *Kenyon Review*.

Brenda Shaughnessy (poetry 73) is the author of three collections: *Our Andromeda*, *Human Dark with Sugar*, and *Interior with Sudden Joy*. Her poems appeared in *Best American Poetry*, *Harpers*, *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, and elsewhere. A 2013 Guggenheim Fellow, she teaches at Rutgers University–Newark and lives in Brooklyn with her family.

Yvette Siegert's (translation 99) poetry and translations have appeared in *Circumference*, *Guernica*, *Chelsea*, *Stonecutter*, and *Aufgabe*. She has edited for *The New Yorker* and the United Nations, and taught at Columbia University and Baruch College of the City University of New York. She received a PEN Heim/NYSCA Grant and a Literature Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts for her translations of the collected works of Alejandra Pizarnik.

Born in 1909 in Warsaw, Poland, **Anna Swir (Świrszczyńska)** (poetry 64) is widely considered one of Poland's most distinguished poets. Profoundly marked by World War II, especially the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, during which she volunteered as a nurse, Swir explores in her poems the joys and horrors of human nature and the female body. She died in Kraków in 1984.

Andrew Wachtel (translation 59) is president of the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Previously he was dean of the graduate school and director of the Roberta Buffett Center for International and Comparative Studies at Northwestern University. A fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, his interests range from Russian literature and culture to East European and Balkan culture, history and politics to contemporary Central Asia. His most recent published books are *The Balkans in World History*, *Russian Literature* (with Ilya Vinitsky), and *Remaining Relevant After Communism: The Role of the Writer in Eastern Europe*. He has translated poetry and prose from Russian, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, Bulgarian, and Slovenian. Currently he is working on a project relating to cultural nationalism in Central Asia, particularly Kyrgyzstan.

Waldeen's (translation 168) previously published Neruda translations appear in his *Let the Rail Splitter Awake and Other Poems*.

Jillian Weise (poetry 122) is the author of *The Amputee's Guide to Sex*, *The Colony*, and *The Book of Goodbyes*, which won the 2013 Laughlin Award from the Academy of American Poets. She teaches at Clemson University.

Karen Wunsch's ("The Super's Son" 82) stories and essays have appeared in the *Beloit Fiction Journal*, *Hotel Amerika*, *Epoch*, *Ascent*, *Confrontation*, *Willow Springs*, and many other publications. A recent essay was selected as a Notable Essay of the Year in *Best American Essays 2014*.