The Spectator

Spring 2013

Spectator

Spring 2013

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The Spectator encourages submissions from all members of the BB&N community. We accept poems, fiction, non-fiction prose, plays, and artwork. Submissions need not have been created specifically for a class. All submissions are considered anonymously, though we do not accept anonymous submissions.

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The Spectator Anual Writing Award

First Prize: Prose

A Vacuum Cleaner Who Wanted Some Limeade

"I will suck you you!" yelled Vroomvroombleepbop.

"As hilarious as vacuum puns are, I am not giving you limeade!" replied Little Jonny Boy Junior Jr. to the distraught vacuum cleaner.

"Give me limeade." Vroomvroombleepbop vented impatiently.

"No."

Blue and yellow lights flared around the crimson exterior shell of Vroomvroombleepbop. Vroom. The button with the somewhat faded design of a fan pressed itself in, and a whirlwind ventilated from the rump of the rusty appliance. Vroom. Not only was memorabilia inhaled by mistake but also a dead mouse and a box of staples jumped into the tornado. Bleep. The air swirled with immeasurable speeds and swept Little Jonny Boy Junior Jr. out of his seat. Vroomvroombleepbop's deep cavern became Little Johnny Boy Junior Jr.'s new home. Bop.

Vroomvroombleepbop was only a nickname. The vacuum's full name was actually Vroomvroombleepbopclunkploptrrhuhhmwarping. When given the choice of acquiring the surname "Junior" from his owners, he declined because he wanted to see if companies used machines to address and send mail. Surely enough, his mail was addressed:

", Vroomvroombleepbopclunkploptrrhuhhmwarping"

Machines do not always accommodate for special cases. The clear bubble on envelopes obscured "clunkploptrrhuhhmwarping" because corporations refused to shrink the font of names so the entire name was visible on the little address card.

Vroomvroombleepbop also detested the SAT's for they only require, only allow, the first eight characters of a first name to be filled into the answer sheet. He remained concerned that there was some being named Vroomvropfidudleheiman who also took the SAT's and that their scores would be mixed up. The SAT's also require test-takers to have a last name. If the test-taker filled out no bubbles in the "LAST NAME" columns, the machines would have thrown an error and probably not graded that test. Or so Vroomvroombleepbop thought. Vroomvroombleepbop wanted his SAT's graded.

His favorite part about his long name was that when he did something "bad," adults shouted at him exclaiming his full name to exert their force over him. One

day, Little Jonny Boy Junior Jr. had some friends over for a play-date and one of the delinquents spilled lemonade on the fresh carpet. Tired of the lemony zest that wafted through the apartment, Little Jonny Boy Junior Sr. activated Vroomvroombleepbop to dilute the mess with Vroomvroombleepbop's spray feature. Vroomvroombleepbop refused to ejaculate the strange solution with which he was filled, and an irate Little Jonny Boy Junior Sr. wailed, "Vroomvroombleepbopclunkploptrrhuhhmwarping." Vroomvroombleepbop, chuckling, unplugged himself and rolled away to attempt to get some limeade. He didn't get the limeade.

After 16 years of living in a closet, Vroomvroombleepbop seized the opportunity to free himself of Little Jonny Boy Junior Sr. Vroomvroombleepbop swallowed his few belongings as if he held an internal bedroll. His replacement nozzels bunched up uncomfortably close to Little Jonny Boy Junior Jr. who therefore said, "Plug it up, plug it up. I can't breathe."

"Can I have some limeade?" questioned Vroomvroombleepbop.

"No! You will short circuit. What don't you understand?" commented the bundled, dusty boy. In response, Vroomvroombleepbop activated all of his buttons causing harsh spasms. Sharp chips of red paint flung off of his coat and sparkled on the clean rug. He disengaged the useless, cosmetic buttons leaving the one with the fan insignia stimulated. An artificial breeze carried the bloody dandruff into the clogged chamber only to stab the idle Little Jonny Boy Junior Jr. Clunk.

Vroomvroombleepbop proceeded down the stairs. Worried that his vacuum cleaner was departing the apartment forever, Little Jonny Boy Junior Sr. stopped Vroomvroombleepbop in his tracks. Little Jonny Boy Junior Sr. exclaimed, "If you leave, how will I pay the rent?"

"Guess you you should have bought a talking toaster instead," sassed Vroomvroombleepbop.

"C'mon man, don't leave me in the dust."

Vroomvroombleepbop departed unamused. He pondered to himself, "Why do I even pay rent, I am only 16?" Little Jonny Boy Junior Jr. tried to jostle inside of the chamber to find the zipper that would lead to his escape. His hands caressed the rough fibers inside of Vroomvroombleepbop's storage pouch. An erect string stabbed Little Jonny Boy Junior Jr.'s backside and so he grabbed the string and yanked it. Suddenly, memories swarmed Vroomvroombleepbop's mind. He reconciled that even though he was only 16 in human years, he was 9735 in vacuum years so his owner made him pay rent because he was "of age." Also, he recollected a lecture from his teacher from elementary school:

"Vacuum cleaners are like dogs." The words escaped Ms. Turry's mouth with ease. "They are domesticated. They are barkers. They are available in a variety of breeds. And they are even carnivorous sometimes." She tried to be cute, but she eliminated any possibility of student laughter when she herself started to crack up uncontrollably: "Hyeah hyeah hyeahahaha." She sounded like a suffocating walrus. Teachers chatting and sipping their cucumber lemonade could hear her wailing from down the hall. A colleague of Ms. Turry's, Mr. E. rushed in the classroom, sporting a neglected bathroom scent, and holding a medical bottle in his sticky hands. After Mr. E. handed Ms. Turry the medication, Ms. Turry managed through her clamor to ask Mr. E., "Where did you find Xanax in this dump?"

Billy Bob Joe, a student, cried in a swift, high-pitch shrill, "What'shaXanaxsh."

Worried that the kids would grow up to abuse Xanax, Mr. E. trembled saying, "Well Billy Bob Joe, you see sometimes adults have a little too much limeade and get a little worked up, and they need something to calm them down."

Vroomvroombleepbop instantly extended his handle and yelped, "Can we have some limeade?"

Ms. Turry and Mr. E. contemporaneously answered, "No, Vroomvroombleepbop, you will electrocute yourself." Vroomvroombleepbop really wanted that limeade.

Now realizing that bars could legally admit him due to his rather old age, Vroomvroombleepbop decided to hydrate himself at his local pub, Bottles: You Can Drink Here. The damp aura of the shack disturbed Vroomvroombleepbop, but he overcame his struggles thinking that he could finally get some limeade. So, Vroomvroombleepbop walked up to the bartender and said "Can I have some limeade?"

The bartender said, "Sorry, we don't serve your kind here."

And the vacuum cleaner responded, "This sucks."

The bartender added, "Even if I gave you limeade, you would electrocute yourself."

Vroomvroombleepbop replied, "This blows." He was kicked out of pub. He gawked at the Bottles: You Can Drink Here sign and re-entered the bar. To gain more maneuverability, Vroomvroombleepbop detached his dust sack. Plop. Lit-

tle Jonny Boy Junior Jr., free, unzipped the bag of dust and ambled towards his new owner. Vroomvroombleepbop marched around the bar and fought everyone in passing. After defeating three civilians, Vroomvroombleepbop pumped out massive quantities of air, creating a state of deliria within the pub. The bartender proceeded to call 911. As the dust was raging, Little Jonny Boy Junior Jr., high off of the fumes from his confinement inside the vacuum, entered the bar. He was in the command of Vroomvroombleepbop now. The psycho MACHINE preferred decapitation to any other method of killing. Through Little Jonny Boy Junior Jr., Vroomvroombleepbop hit heads to the ground like novice tennis serves. A patron opened the vacuum's chamber bag to try to hide inside of it. His unzipping was successful. Trr.

Vroomvroombleepbop collected his belongings and drove out the back door. The patron chose to leave through the front door without second thought. The patron's life resumed its normal course. The heavyset vacuum, followed by his DELIRIOUS INFERIOR, however, ambled down Main Street to return to his birthplace, Duh Sto. He didn't remember his life before he was boxed, but his memories of Duh Sto were vivid:

He was product number 6148 located in the Appliances Department, subsection D, aisle 4, shelf 2, near the escalator. John Doe was the attendant of Vroomvroombleepbop's zone. He was a blue polo, red khaki in a realm of blue polos, red khakis. Shopping carts filled with mangoes and diapers and canoes and babies strolled by on an hourly basis. The constant questions about the locations of various products easily annoyed Vroomvroombleepbop. He became familiar with John Doe's script: "Hi, what can I help you with today? … Hardware is next to the produce on the bottom floor … Bathrooms are downstairs to the right next to the somewhat-large fruit aisle … Appliances are the only item on this floor sir/ma'am." Appliances are special.

Vroomvroombleepbop saw Little Jonny Boy Junior Sr. strut up the escalator one warm autumn afternoon through the mirror. As Little Jonny Boy Junior Sr. cleared the escalator, a baby stroller revealed itself. Little Jonny Boy Junior Sr. sauntered down the universe of Duh Sto's Appliances Department, subsection D, oblivious to his abandoned child. He passed by aisle 4 multiple times until John Doe finally came to Little Jonny Boy Junior Sr.'s rescue and directed him through aisle 4 towards his destination. Chainsaws, power washers, blenders, vacuum cleaners.

The automatic doors of Duh Sto let anything inside the warehouse. An elderly pigeon, abandoning his defecation, erred through the parking lot, puffing with poorly parked pickups. Spotting the giant washing machine statue on the floor above him through the glass staircase, the pigeon realized that his destiny was to poop on the magnificent display. He scanned his surroundings and concluded that the escalator was the easiest way to his throne. The numerous John Does scurrying to their niches proved not to be obstacles for the lumpy pigeon. Little Jonny Boy Junior Jr.'s carriage remained atop the escalator allowing the pigeon a spot to rest. Suddenly, a John Doe exited the escalator, pushing the carriage to his aisle: brooms and dusters and mops. The frightened coot darted away from Little Jonny Boy Junior Jr. and landed on his target. He tried to release himself from the traps that were set up to catch astray fowl but solemnly failed. He died. His round corpse fell off of the display and plumped on the ground. A John Doe ran to save the bird, but a big man came out of a dark room to the left and dragged John Doe away and replaced him with another blue polo, red khaki. Seizing the opportunity during this commotion, Little Jonny Boy Junior Sr. grabbed Vroomvroombleepbop from shelf 2 and rushed through random aisles to find a way downstairs. He found Little Jonny Boy Junior Jr. at the end of and added his son back into his collection of luggage. The automatic door let them escape with Vroomvroombleepbop, free.

Recognizing that plenty of fellow brethren dwelled in Duh Sto, Vroomvroombleepbop set out to awaken them all to aid him in his quest for limeade. Vroomvroombleepbop could suck anything up when he turned his 'fan power' to 'max.' He turned his 'fan power' to 'max.' This suction allowed Vroomvroombleepbop to defy gravity and stick to walls. Traversing the cold, wooden exterior of Duh Sto, Vroomvroombleepbop watched the people with their shopping carts, filled with mangoes and diapers and canoes and babies, as they turned minuscule. The top of Duh Sto was plain. A metal vent exhaled exhaust that created dark clouds over Duh Sto and Duh Sto's parking lot. Vroomvroombleepbop filled his chamber with this pollution and shot it out of him onto the roof of Duh Sto. After repeating this process multiple times, a hole was created through which Vroomvroombleepbop could enter the store. He plugged in his extension cord into an outlet of the roof and lowered himself down into the seemingly deserted storage room.

While hanging midway to the floor, a gigantic television caught his attention, not because of the terrific plasma display, but rather because Little Jonny Boy Junior Jr., no longer hypnotized, occupied the screen. The boy was doing an interview on live, national television. Vroomvroombleepbop was too late to hear Little Jonny Boy Junior Jr.'s testament, but he heard the news reporter's recap:

"So there you have it, folks. A vacuum cleaner who wants limeade. So what's the next step for America? Do we give him the limeade with the threat of explosion? Or do we conceal the drink from him even though his curiosity would run even wilder? What a tragedy. Back to you M—"

The big man from the door to the left shut off the television and dispersed the herd of John Does back to their work. Vroomvroombleepbop, worried that he would be spotted, expelled all of the dust he accumulated from the day's travels. Huhh. He elevated himself by coiling the extension cord. Aware of the height of Duh Sto, Vroomvroombleepbop devised a plan to jump off of the building safely: Duh Sto's awning.

Instantly after the news report concerning Vroomvroombleepbop, two campaigns sprang out of thin air. The first was the Pro-Drink Party that advocated for giving Vroomvroombleepbop limeade because, "it is every living thing's right to have access to fundamental desires." The opposing, subsequent party, the Pro-Vacuum Party, preached for Vroomvroombleepbop not to have limeade for, "death is not acceptable in any circumstance." The parties brawled at every street corner and held nationally televised debates. Envisioning high profits, Duh Sto began to sell Pro-Drink and Pro-Vacuum propaganda. An altercation brewed at Duh Sto one day, and a Pro-Drinker sprinted to the Liquid Department and purchased some limeade. He then hurried to the Appliances Department, subsection D, aisle 4 and unboxed a vacuum cleaner. Angrily, he poured the acid all over the machine. A fire roared immediately. Nothing could quench the fire. The realm of blue polos, red khakis turned into the realm of gray buttons, bronze zippers.

The metal exhaust vent atop of Duh Sto emitted smoke that Vroomvroombleepbop analyzed. Vroomvroombleepbop began to pray to Sweep, the divine street cleaner, for salvation. His prayers were unanswered, and the roof of Duh Sto began to burn and deteriorate. The plank Vroomvroombleepbop rested on started to collapse like a pendulum. The haste overwhelmed Vroomvroombleepbop's attachment efforts, the extension cord, at about twenty feet off of the ground. He fell with no control. Contact was safe though; he landed in the mattress department. Alive and on the ground, Vroomvroombleepbop congregated some dust and sealed himself tight. Mwar.

John Doe called the fire department to extinguish the fire, and the fire department issued the police to quell the riots and the police alerted the media when they saw Vroomvroombleepbop and the media attracted the government to decide what to do about Vroomvroombleepbop and the government ordered the army to handle the issue. Jets came. The sound of their turbines dissembled various parts of Vroomvroombleepbop. He managed to reassemble himself before the public noticed him. Ping. The public took their melee into the parking lot due to the annoying heat that radiated off of the ashes of Duh Sto. The leaders of the Pro-Drink and Pro-Vacuum party scampered to the arena and began to debate the fate of Vroomvroombleepbop. The news cameras swiftly took the spotlight off of the silent vacuum and directed their lenses onto the debaters. Rioters dashed back towards the newly established podiums, which included burnt parts of Duh Sto, and most of them shoved Vroomvroombleepbop in passing without an apology. A news helicopter captured a bird's eye view of the scene: a group of supporters on one end of the remains of Duh Sto, one group on the other end, some news trucks dispersed irregularly, and a lone vacuum off to the side.

The army began to intervene, which included the jets firing at disruptive protesters. A newly painted limeade truck pulled into the parking lot but it remained as isolated as Vroomvroombleepbop. A girl with her grandmother purchased some limeade and, after tasting the horrid beverage, threw it out at the trashcan down the block. A body appeared next to the limeade truck and also bought some limeade. Little Jonny Boy Junior Jr. retreated from the truck with said limeade and proceeded to move towards Vroomvroombleepbop. As the fire department quenched the harsh flame, as the police failed to calm the civilians, as the parties argued endlessly, as the news station broadcasted the debate, as the army shot foolish supporters, Little Jonny Boy Junior Jr. put down the limeade before Vroomvroombleepbop.

His seldom visited gravestone reads:

"Here Lies A Vacuum Cleaner Who Wanted Some Limeade
VroomvroombleepbopclunkploptrrhuhhmwarpingBOOM"

Judah Burstein

The Spectator Anual Writing Award

First Prize: Poetry

The Convocation

Before the wooden altar waits the mass
Of huddled subjects, meanest of our class;
And orators (the likes of whom would bring
Much woe to Cicero and bards who sing
Of days of old, of ancient godlings true)
The passing of the seasons bid adieu.
As our leaders damn those who would object,
We are commanded to give our respect
To those exalted beings in our midst,
To those who throw and to those who commit,
To those who wield the icy disk and staff,
To wondrous grain, set sep'rate from the chaff.
But hark! 'tis nearly time to call the roll,
So crane your necks, dear vassals, and behold:
Before us, now, our idols nobly stand,
Like figures bronzed, untarnished grails in hand;
These sphere and rod's captains here lay their claim
To immortality and ageless fame.
O! see the smiles, see the jubilation!
Hear the limp praise of our adulation!
Turn eyes, I beg you, to your congregation,
Who 'pon this hour hold little elation,
And see the heresy deep in their minds,
That festers within while they're here confined:
Watch each name read increase the dread of those
Whose lids on work cruel Somnus ere did close;
Lamenting time's footfalls, they sit and twitch,
To be away from this place is their wish.
Still others hear a siren's song demand
That victuals' succor should be near at hand;

But mired here, no quarter can be found
And a duet of grumblings shakes the ground.
Now cast your orbs to those along your side,
And see whose absence indicates no pride
In such dauntless accomplishments of play;
Pray tell, why must we never stay away?
When at last the long homily has ceased,
We wait on bended knee to be released;
But they approach the altar de novo,
To say (O God!), time for the picture show.
Cowed mass, for this offense we must not stand;
Rise up! throw off your fetters, and demand
Equality, at long last, what relief!
To wit, we must cause prelates of our fief
To cease idolatry, and laud the laity,
Who, 'stead of field, are masters of, say, poetry.

Jake Seidman

Dessert for Dinner

Sandy Li

Title?
This Is the Title

"What's your name?"
"Roach."
"Roach?"
"Roach."
"As in cockroach?"
"As in roach."
"First name?"
"Maddox."
"Maddox Roach."
"Yes."
"Place of residence?"
"Manhattan, New York."
"What street?"
"West 12th."
"Age?"
"108."
"Why are you here?"
"See Albert Camus."
"Favorite food?"
"Strawberries."
"Ultimate goal in life?"
"Don't know."
"Least favorite author?"
"Vladimir Nabokov."
"Any particular reason?"
"No."
"Date of birth?"
"January 7th, 1904."
"Time of birth?"
"12:04 a.m."
"Least favorite band."
"Motley Crue."
"Relationship and/or marriage?"
"None."

"Alive?"
"Yes."
"Do you think this gimmick effective for a creative piece?"
"No."
"Will people like it?"
"Who knows."
"Family?"
"Great-grandmother. That's it."
"Have someone besides her you love deeply?"
"Yes."
"Do you think the author of this piece will explore that point?"
"No, he's young and inexperienced and finds that task daunting, and besides, he's not a brilliant writer."
"Sex?"
"Male."
"Born that way?"
"Yes."
"Intend to die that way?"
"Yes."
"Sexual orientation."
"Straight."
"Race."
"Caucasian."
"Religion?"
"None."
"Friends?"
"Long story."
"Who am I?"
"Fuck knows, you're probably some indescribable, inexplicable, meaningless figure the author pulled out of the air for lack of any other ideas."
"Who are *you*, then?"
"Something similar."
"Occupation?"
"Referee."
"What kind?"
"Soccer."
"Nationality."

"American."
"Mental state?"
"I'll send you my diary."
"Will this be accepted?"
"I hope so."
"It's not a deep or thoughtful piece."
"I'm aware. The author's running out of ideas."
"That's unfortunate."
"That it is."
"Alma mater?"
"William and Mary."
"Graduate degrees?"
"MBA, NYU."
"Favorite activity."
"Soccer and wallowing in my lack of motivation and contemplating on the meaning of life and then realizing how silly I am for doing that."
"Do you think the author takes himself too seriously?"
"Yes."
"I mean, how does one even read a piece like this out loud?"
"One of many of this piece's faults."
"Do you think this kind of negativity and lack of self-confidence the author is projecting through this dialogue is helpful?"
"No. Again, he's not the Great American Author."
"Have you ever felt at all attracted to a man?"
"Yes."
"Preferred music?"
"Classic rock and alternative."
"Favorite city?"
"New York."
"Do you think this piece even has a chance at making it at this point?"
"Not likely."
"When does the piece end?"

Adrian Sands

French Paint

Annabel Smith

Seoul

You said you were going to go to Seoul to find yourself
"Because it's huge, and too easy to get lost"
They didn't say anything when you told them
They only laughed and hugged you goodbye at the airport
Like it was a joke, and like you weren't going to be missing from the dinner table that night

You looked small getting off the plane
Everyone was grabbing luggage and hugging friends
And you sat down and looked up
And realized it was actually a lot easier to get lost than you'd thought

You walked for two days straight
The toes of your shoes blew out
And the soles wore smooth
The only thing that changed was the sky
The lights were always on, always flashing too brightly

They weren't at the gate with open arms when you came home
It wasn't disappointing
It felt more like the first deep breath you'd had in forever
You bought a ticket for Marrakech the next day

Sawyer Ames

In Good Company

There've been enough rays through these old bones that they'll still be glowing in a hundred years. I met a doc on the last flight out of Calcutta. Yeah, he was a great guy. Told me too much flying would kill a man. But I'm not ready to fold on this life just yet. I hope he made it home after all that. Who? The doc, of course. No, I can't even remember his name. Guess he got all you get for being tied down; a wife and a couple of kids weeping over your hole in the dirt.

Another story? Well, my throat's certainly parched. It's as dry as the Sahara here and about half as pretty. I've been over once or twice, when the spooks out there needed a few more hands. You know, I probably haven't told anyone this much in a decade. Why don't you call another round and I'll think of something else to say.

But tell me, haven't you ever wanted to travel? To take those last few steps and hop on a plane? That's the brilliance of today. We fly from the stars to the stars; I've seen the tarmac lights grow and the real ones fade. If I'd been born a hundred years before, I'd have run away to sea, left all my demons on land. Now, though, they'll always follow me, those pesky devils. Funny thing is, they've almost led them to me, twice.

It's always in the desert. I've been to all of them, I think. One wasteland starts to look like another, after a while. But there I was, curled in the shade, when the heavens opened up, and angels fell in black helicopters. They say you can run but you can't hide. Turns out I couldn't do either. I'd tell you how I got away, but that's an old story, and I didn't live this long by letting the past catch me.

Another glass? Well that's awfully kind of you, son. What do you do around here, anyways? Now that's what I'd call impressive. You're another one of those young genii, whipping out all your fancy tech like some kind of digital age cowboy. I've seen the real ones in the saddle, you've got them beat. It's an intellectual world these days, and you won't find me riding my camels into town.

I promised you a tale, didn't I? There's one promise I can keep. They used to say I was an honest man. I might have eyes like ice, but they've been known to thaw. Well, maybe melt a little. What's my name? I've got three on my passports and two more on business cards. Names might not be a piece of your soul anymore, but those little paper squares will never fade. A man in Tokyo gave me his embossed in gold. I can't read it, but I've still got that soggy cardboard. I don't know why we can't all be empty shells, if we want to.

A few years back, I'd have had a face to go with each. I was a harlequin in a kabuki show; it was all a damn masquerade. Just the way I loved it. But the lenses pin us down. Ubiquitous, that's a pretty word for an ugly truth. Rolls right off the tongue. They're everywhere, aren't they? Fish eyed and bug eyed, but they certainly sparkle. I can't even stand London anymore. Capital of the world, and capital of those spying eyes. Once upon a time, I could fly on a smile and prayer. Now, I'm lucky if my bags clear the gate.

Really? You want to know how I did it? Sure, I'll tell you someday, when I pass this way again. But you've got to promise that you'll show me how you nail your boots to the ground. Every time I've tried to stand, I just drift away with the zephyrs. No? Well then; here's to us, a pair of fools if I ever saw one. In the dust we're born, and in the dust I'd still lie. Look up at the skies at night. I might just be one of those blinking lights.

Edwin Gavis

Hand Michelle Zhang

At Bay
~ A Dubliners Emulation ~

The wind rushed across the ocean, curiously lifting the flaps of Bran's jacket and swiping at his face. His footprints ran even, measured, straight along the beach behind him, crossed occasionally by a smaller pair. His son wandered ahead, bending now and again to examine a rock or piece of debris. The small figure of the boy was disproportionately swaddled in a woolen coat on the top, the sleeve of which the boy often wiped across his nose. Bran remembered this beach from the twinkling evenings of his youthful summers when, on a spare day before the term started, someone would suggest a ride out to Sandymount. Surrounded by high shrieks from the young ladies who teased the waves, he sat contentedly as the sun cast a final golden kiss over the party of earnest youth. No sun was apparent now, the steely sky dipped into equally matte water. Ahead the coast turned left and across the water Pigeon House huddled on the point.

The boy was cold but did not say anything. He dutifully peered at the small puddles left in the sandy ridges by the tide. There was nothing in the eye-shaped inversions except shallow water and his rippled face. They were the sole figures on the beach save for a man propped against the sea wall, whose shaggy eyebrows arched into equally shaggy hair. A faint breath moved his chest and marked him as among the living, dispelling any possible excitement. The boy stopped to wait for his father.

—Mhmph, Bran's head jerked up as he came upon the boy. Oh... Oh there you are...Have we missed lunch? Can you wait until we get home? Good. There should be a cab in town. Bran turned up the beach and onto the road, the boy hurried behind.

He closed the door quickly, but a puff of the evening air slipped through, and the two of them stood for a moment in the silent cold.

—Take off your coat and shake out the cold, Bran said, without removing his own.

—Oh is that you? Annie appeared from the kitchen, pinning up a wayward strand of mahogany hair. The boy ran to her, still in his coat. She deftly removed his jacket and sent him into the kitchen.

—It's a good thing I told Mrs. Mullins to start the potatoes when I did or they

wouldn't be near ready now. Did you have a good time? You forgot to mention when you would be back, dear. Are you coming in? Her smile accentuated the faint creases that converged at the corner of her eyes. Bran looked down the dark expanse of his coat, he was just beginning to feel the warmth of the house creep under the thick wool. The domestic rhythm chafed him tonight. Sitting down at the dark table to potatoes and perhaps beef or pork was too familiar and tame. For six years now he clerked at a bank on Baggot Street and dutifully came home at night. Even the holiday break he spent with Annie, attending social functions. She insisted he stay connected, but when the same people talked of the same subjects at each one he did not see the point. He was established as a clerk and referred to as such. He did not delude himself with some grand break from decorum. At the end of the night he would ride with Annie in weary silence back to the house. Tonight, however, fresh sea air permeated his lungs and he felt too stirred to sit at a glossy table and listen to the lush sweep of Annie's skirts on the ivy-patterned carpet as she carried their son up to bed.
—No, actually. I think I will go out. Mahoney is around... Yes, yes I will go see Mahoney. He turned abruptly and plunged into the cold.

As Bran pushed into the crowded air of Mulligan's, a small cluster of companions blossomed into easy laughter. Mahoney was central in the group, his bulbous face already red and shining in the dim light. He beckoned jovially as Bran approached through the thick bodies.
—McLory! Bran, it is good to see you, he said heartily, knocking Bran on the back. You made it out from the books I see. Ha ha. I never know how you spend all that time among those tomes, digging your own grave I say! Mahoney punctuated his wit with a generous laugh, turning to clap Dougherty on the back with ample appreciation.
—Welcome Bran, Jim Wallis grinned wanly. We've all bought our rounds. I say it's your turn now. You've got catchin' up to do.
—Another round! Mahoney's voice crashed above the din of lesser conversations. Now I was just recounting my days as a young ruffian for these fine men. Ha! I was a spirited tyke. You can tell them Bran, yes, you were there... What fun we had!

Bran fingered the whisky glass deposited in front of him. The times Bran was now being called upon to recollect he had long ago sequestered to the ill-

used tracts of his mind, deeming them unavailing in his life. Mahoney called again for a story. Bran began to tug at the distant times, pulling them into focus. He sipped the whiskey, letting the fiery spirit settle in the hollow of his stomach.
—Well now, there were those games we played... sieges, right? We'd storm the castle, shrieking and all...
—Ah! cried Mahoney. The Indians! What fun, oh it was great fun. He slapped the table emphatically, sloshing whisky.

Bran smiled with ill-ease, preferring to let Mahoney pick up the narrative. The men standing around the tall table were Mahoney's cohorts, men he knew only from the few times a year when Mahoney was in town long enough for word to reach him. Mahoney traveled around the country picking up crates of old books and silver platters. He was employed by a retired banker trying to build a collection of some importance, but as Mahoney put it, the old man was just filling his house with crumbling odds and ends and tarnished bits of old Ireland.

Bran embraced the raw air, stumbling forward as the company expelled themselves from the pub. He was warm with the heat running through his veins confronting the bitter air on his skin. The others disbanded but Bran tripped along behind Mahoney, who wove his way between the trembling light of the street-lamps.

The street was stiflingly silent as the low clouds began spitting snow. Mahoney scuffed his boots along the walk, kicking at the desultory flakes that puffed and settled again. Bran snorted at this puerile assault upon the snow. Mahoney grinned back in his unaffected manner and, glad of the audience, waltzed ungracefully to the corner.
—Well good friend, ha ha, we're at it once again, Mahoney's thick lips parted and his face shone even in the minimal light. What'd ya say we go to the docks again, search for a ship to take us to sea, eh? Mahoney did not wait for Bran's answer and charged down the road. Mahoney's breath soon became shorter and began to grate against his throat, emerging as a soft wheeze as Bran dug his hands deeper into his pockets, feeling the raw air licking at the warm haze in his body. Mahoney finally stopped, spotting the red glow of a bar half way down a small alley.
—Ah friend, I see where my fate pulls me, ha. His gaze was distracted, anticipating the warm spirits offered within. He turned back to Bran with a side-

ways smile, causing bunching in his right cheek. Come, friend, there's more to this night yet!

Bran stood a moment, feeling the cold settle on his shoulders, daring him to break the embrace. He shuddered to dispel the numbing tendrils inching past his coat collar as Mahoney trotted across the street with renewed purpose. Bran did not follow. Instead, his gaze caught on the murky distinctions of the last buildings on the street. He glanced at Mahoney's happy welcome into the bar and then hurried down the remaining solitary stretch as much to build heat as to quell impatience. He had presumed correctly and emerged on Wharf Road, walking slowly across the boulevard, devoid of activity at the dark hour. On the other side Bran stood above the Liffey. He watched the sable waters run to the right, to the harbor where the alluring ships lay, and beyond, to the point where no land could be seen. Little ripples jumped tamely into the glistening reflections of the few lights along the river, and his eyes traveled along the slender ridges of shadow. The icy cold encased Bran as he stood rooted on the bank. The heat was long gone from his fingers when the cold finally reached his core, expelling the last warmth. Grey tendrils began to filter between the buildings and he turned away from the river. Bran curled his collar up against the wind at the back of his neck and walked home, weary.

Blaire Hunter

Parrot

Michelle Zhang

Maggie

I saw my older sister Maggie throw up the spaghetti and meatballs she'd eaten for dinner in the toilet upstairs. I opened the door and just stood there in the bathroom doorway as she casually flushed three times until the stains and stenches were nearly gone. I watched as she splashed her face with water and brushed her teeth vigorously, spitting out frothy clumps of toothpaste as she stared into the sink. She didn't look anxious or sad or calm or anything, just cold. She looked really cold. I wanted to get her a sweater.

I didn't say anything the next evening at dinner, just sat and watched as my sister used the sharp silver knife to forcefully cut her slab of chicken into minuscule pieces. There must have been at least twenty morsels on her plate. I watched as she slowly lifted her fork to chew, her mouth moving mechanically. Sometimes she would raise her napkin to her mouth and pretend to wipe it.

I followed her into the bathroom, and she didn't tell me to stop. I watched as she grabbed her toothbrush and stuck it down her throat, silently gagged and threw up right into the toilet bowl. I saw it. She pulled out her ponytail and washed her face and scrubbed her hands and brushed her teeth and didn't look at me once.

"Please don't tell anyone," she said.

"I won't."

I never did.

Lydia Wang

Ten down, Twelve to go

Oh boy, my first choice university!
This tour will be affirmation for me
The tour guides represent the students here
This one is a championship skier
That one has found a cure for Alzheimer's
And is one of the debate team founders
I think I've heard this blue light speech before
At every school I've visited, but sure
Tell me about your great security,
And the school's stunning diversity
Did News and World Reports vote you the best?
Well then you must be far above the rest
Am I being jaded and cynical?
It is because this feels so cyclical
This tour, my tenth, has become a great bore
I'm trapped in the maze of the Minotaur
But no Ariadne to bring me string
On myriad tours to false hope I cling
Wishing the next visit opens my eyes
But perhaps this school I should not despise
This college could be the optimal fit
These happy students are enjoying it
Happy students on Sunday of all days
'Morrow is Monday, but they are not fazed
They must be so excited for classes
That they can't wait 'til the weekend passes
Or maybe they're eager for a reason crude
"You ready for Messed Up Monday my dude!?"
Yes, promise of inebriation has
Excited the students since Creation
At least I can cross *this* school off my list
And by me it will not be sorely missed
I can't attend where Mondays are profaned
Or Wes Williams' eternal shame I will have gained

Andrew Shifren

Regarde Le Ceil

Elizabeth Smith

Let's start with the facts. Numbers are always good, right?

I was born in a hospital directly across the street from our Boston apartment—forty-five steps measured in my mother's paces as she wobbled on red, bulging feet sixty minutes into labor. Sixteen hours later, she returned home with a dreaming baby cradled in her arms. This time the distance across the street was only thirty-two steps.

I stopped writing. Drumming the eraser of my chewed pencil against my desk as I thought, I looked around the classroom. The other students were hunched over their desks, frantically scribbling their essays. I was sure that most of them honestly believed that they could manage to record their entire life story in that one hour class period. I am still sure that a few actually did.

"Shhh! Some of us trying to work here!" Billy Moore hissed from across the room.

Freezing my pencil mid-beat, I whispered a quick apology and turned back to my paper.

I grew up curious. At some point—even before I knew how to walk perhaps—I found a way to climb into my windowsill, a tiny white box that overlooked the Charles River. Mesmerized, I would sit there for hours, the tip of my nose squished against the glass pane as if it were held there by a magnet. But the river's force on me was much stronger than any magnet I have ever seen. It was the best teacher too. The first thing I learned in life was the way my city danced. In the mornings, the shrunken businessmen strutted into the scene first, marching off to work while their swinging briefcases turned their arms into thrusting pendulums. Next the toy taxis criss-crossed the view, swerving around bikers and riled cars, horns blaring. My favorites were the timid crew boats that slipped by in the background, gliding over the water with oars like dragonflies' pulsing wings. For years, I hid in that windowsill watching the street flood and drain with energy, until a day when two sets of firm hands clasped my waist and yanked me from my perch. They plopped me down in a white clapboard house, with white spongy carpet, white looming rooms, and infinite white walls. I always imagined that after years of wasting away in monochromatic agony, those walls had long awaited my arrival. Surely they were seconds away from dropping to their knees grovel-

ing, begging for me to satisfy their ravenous desire for color. I had to fight hard against my fingers that itched to morph those walls into Crayola canvases.

I glanced at the clock; to my dismay, we were barely halfway through with the class period. After scanning what I had written, I crumbled my paper and walked up to the front of the classroom to throw it away.

"Is something wrong?" my teacher, Mrs. Baker, asked apprehensively, as she watched me from her desk.

"I don't have anything to say," I shrugged.

She stared at the ball of paper in my hands, looking as if she were trying to decipher a convoluted code. After a moment of reflection, she asked, "Have you ever faced a challenge in your life? Obstacles are always something interesting to write about."

I smiled. "Have you seen this town? You fall an inch and land in pillows."

"Write about it."

With a reluctant smile but sigh for effect, I flattened out my paper and returned to my seat.

I do not come from hardship or adventure. I was brought up in a neighborhood most would describe using words as "pleasant," or "comfortable," and far too often, "privileged." Manicured lawns, fresh cut flowers in the bathrooms on Sundays--and any day that guests were coming over for bunch, and a lonely, oak tree with troublingly perfect symmetry planted in the side yard complete with a tire swing for classic childhood play—these few interactions were as far as the natural world extended into my life. And the honest human world? I hope this example serves sufficiently. When we were not attending private swim lessons in our private pools or rehearsing minuets in C-minor on the piano at night, all of the girls in my town played softball. In the championship game one summer, our team's pitcher, Sarah-With-An-H, collided with a member of the other team while running the bases. Cherry juice blood spilled out of her nose, tangling with the tears cascading down her puffy cheeks. Mr. Cuffe—who in my humble opinion coached Little League Girls' Softball with an unwarranted gravity—furrowed his brow. Considering that I had never pitched a game in my life, it was only logical that I volunteered to take her place. The umpire had to keep pausing the game to remind me that in softball, the pitches must be delivered underhand, and every time, I informed him that I preferred overhand. He was not amused; we lost terribly. But worry not—we each received a gleaming trophy for even trying in the first place. My parents displayed it in our living room and talked of the award as if I had set an Olympic record.

Billy hushed me again. I had not realized that I had started to tap my feet. I thought that for my next in class essay I ought to investigate my inability to sit still. I looked back at Billy; his hand was flying across his third sheet of paper. I could not imagine that there had been anything in his life monumental enough to inspire such urgency, but who was I to judge?

Once a week, I went to Sunday school at Our Lady Star of the Sea. I only had one friend there, Billy Moore, who stared at me every class. One day he asked me out for ice cream. I replied that I could do no such thing, as I was a married woman. He laughed, but I was not joking. In fact, my darling and I were approaching our five-year anniversary later that same month. Weeks before my kindergarten wedding I had begun collecting nickels and pennies in a ballerina-shaped bank until I had a dollar and ninety seven cents—not nearly enough to purchase the two strawberry Ring Pops I dropped onto the counter at the Little Red Store, but the old cashier called me sweetheart and accepted my change anyway. I fixed my future husband with a bowtie decorated with glitter glue and colored with a black crayon that I had stolen from my teachers desk (as earlier that week my mom had confiscated all of my personal drawing utensils in a nervous frenzy after I had merely mused in her presence that I thought our walls would look nice with some color.) I sported a modish white veil that I had crafted out of paper chains. Our teacher found us under the table sitting "criss-cross-applesauce" and exchanging vows. She snatched our rings and tossed them aside, which later perished in the corroded trash bin outside. "Boys and girls aren't meant to be together," she told us. I still wonder where she picked up that understanding of love; it has confused me ever since.

"Time is up."

Sara Allan

Deliberation Laura Ancona

The Almost Success of J. Alfred Prufrock

Let us begin then, you and I,
When morning is ripe and ready,
And our head and thoughts beat steady.
Let us sort out this life of mine
From the fragments of thought swirling about my mind
Like the swirls of milk spinning in my cup
Turning and turning until they are swallowed up
Blending with the darker coffee, lost from sight
Diluted, diffused, disoriented
Like me.
But come, let's sit
And work through this bit by bit.

On the wall the hands tick away
The fleeting minutes of my day.

In this class,
Oh, this class...
This class is not for me,
Though I am in it,
Standing by the desk, about to sit
I have pen and paper and text laid out
And I assure you I can tell you all about
Last night's reading
And do fine on the quiz without cheating.

So why, oh why, even after all my nights spent
Poring over texts, hunched over and bent
Appreciating themes and symbols, plot and detail,
Circling and starring and bracketing without fail,
Why, when come class, when the discussion spirals on and on
Do I suddenly find that my voice is gone?

On the wall the hands tick away
The fleeting minutes of my day.

Outside the snow falls gently, slowly coating the ground,
But here, inside, the room is alive and abuzz with sound.
Voices, loud and clear,
Sounds not unfamiliar to my ear,
Surround me as I sit and stir my milk-laced coffee
Nodding here and there,
Appreciating the forum of thought before me
And trembling inside, excited.
I take small sips of my drink,
Sit back to watch and listen and think
But impatience plagues me;
I want to speak.

But dare I?
Dare I open myself to the world?

To contribute, or not contribute
That is the question
Every second that passes marks my cowardice
My incompetence
My fear.

This is the real me.

No, I can change, today
Today will be the day I speak
I can feel it already, a streak
Of blood-pounding courage
A shot of adrenaline, a flush to my face.
And the topic at hand—I know this!
I can already feel my thoughts transforming into words,
Words which dance at the tip of my tongue, wonderful words

That tumble and turn my thoughts to speech.
Jaw set, chin up, I open my mouth
And am cut off.

A classmate ejects a comment
—the comment I wanted to make—
And just like that my chance, my beautiful, wondrous moment
Disappears
Evaporated into air.

The period ends, but I,
I, smiling sadly at my ideas, my spirit broken,
I remain unspoken.

Elaine Dai

dress up

Tara Talland

Schätzchen

Elke Birnbaum beat her hands against her thighs. She coughed, spewing out hot, white air against a bundled fist. She shambled over to the counter and grasped the styrofoam cup with both hands. After a lingering sip, she lowered the liquid to her chin and inhaled. The steamy, spiced scent burned her nostrils, and defrosted her eyelashes as it wafted up the folds and crevices of her face.

"How much is this one?" A woman asked. Her index finger and thumb were wrapped around the smooth wooden figure's rotund belly. Holding a miniature stein in one hand, he perched on a small log. A thick, black moustache dominated his round face, and a pipe hung from his hollow, agape mouth.

"Sixty." Elke smiled. She remembered the long hours in her cellar workshop, sanding and rounding the Räuchermann's stout limbs, cutting, carving, and painting his top hat, his collar, his buttons.

The woman looked to the man next to her and touched his shoulder. Elke imagined the figure atop the mantel of a fireplace in their warm, comfortable home. As they would gather around the fire on Christmas Eve and open gifts with their beautiful, wide-eyed children, burnt fragrance would drift up through the Räuchermann's mouth and into the room in a thin coil of smoke. As time went on, as that couple grew old and generations passed, the scent would cling to the air, embed itself in the walls, the rafters.

The man nodded and the woman smiled. She turned to Elke and handed her two crumpled bills. The couple continued to the next stall arm-in-arm, her head resting on his shoulder. Shadows of the past flicked in Elke's mind: her hand entwined in Jörg's, the warmth of his cheek against hers as they whispered sweet secrets in each other's ears.

"I got you more glühwein." Her daughter's docile voice brought Elke back to the present. Lise Birnbaum maneuvered around a few shelves and handed her mother a styrofoam cup.

"Thank you, schätzchen." Elke lightly squeezed her daughter's cheek, then stroked it with her thumb. Her cheeks and nose were always bright red in the winter, like her father's.

Lise wiped her face with the back of her hand. She took a sip from her own cup and adjusted her wool hat, covering two pink earlobes. "So, I was won—"

"Oh, these are just beautiful!" A woman exclaimed in French. Her fingers

landed on a wandering Santa Claus, a pipe in his long, white wooden beard and a walking cane in hand. She lifted her head toward Lise and Elke. "Are they handmade?"

Elke gave the woman a smile, polite and encouraging, as Lise shuffled over to help. She watched Lise talk to the woman in French, show her other ornaments. She spoke easily, foreign words flowing from her mouth without hesitation. Her mother had never been one for languages; Lise had gotten that talent from Jörg. In Naples, St. Petersburg, London... Paris, Lise's father had been a master in the arts of speech and persuasion.

Elke remembered when Lise was seven. They had come home from a day in the park to find Jörg just returned from Italy. A bouquet of daisies lay across the kitchen table; Jörg's large frame stood at the stove, stirring and sautéing. The apartment smelled like basil and tomatoes; he reeked of cigarettes and shame.

He spent that evening playing explorer with Lise. Elke had watched as the two marched one after the other around the apartment; secret portals took them to China, India, Mexico. Lise's eyes widened as Jörg told tales of his journeys, filled with ship captains, princesses, and thieves. Together they walked like Egyptians, hiked the Himalayas, swam the Amazon. They marched with the same deliberate, confident steps, and their fair hair swayed in the same movement as they trudged through a sandstorm in the Gobi.

Jörg left the next morning, off to his next adventure. Elke had emerged from their—her—bedroom to find his bags by the door. He was in the kitchen once again, encasing a plate in saran wrap.

"For how long?" Elke asked from across the room.

Jörg turned and smiled. He put the plate on the table and reached his arms toward Elke. "Hey, good morning. Come over here."

Elke stayed still. There she was again, playing the fool. She wanted to punish him, to let the space between them linger like a foul stench. But he was leaving, and she could hear the seconds wasting away.

She inched towards him, but leaned against the counter a few feet away. "Where to?"

"Paris, indefinitely. I've got this gig photographing inner city youth." He dropped his arms. Silence. "Here, those are cannolis that I made. They're for you and Lise."

"Who taught you how to cook Italian food?"

He scratched the back of his neck. "Oh, you know... I just pick things up quickly."

"Yeah," Elke pursed her lips. "I sure do."

He kissed her forehead. "Oh," he reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a thick envelope. "I've got all these photos for Lise."

She forced a smile and took the package. "Great."

There wasn't much to say after that. Jörg took his bags and left.

Elke ran a hand through her auburn hair, then pulled at the strands. She flung the envelope out the window. The photos drifted into the street with gleaming flashes of ocean, brick, sun, and sky.

The cannolis followed suit.

She saw Jörg's spark in Lise, in her gray eyes, in her determination, in her childhood defiance. But Elke had extinguished it quickly, keeping her daughter close and protected. She had scraped away all that she could of Jörg, spent years sanding the rough surface, and she had succeeded. Lise was a good girl, an upstanding girl, a safe girl. She could barely see the spark anymore, but feared the day the flame would reignite and Lise would abandon her, leaving her trapped under a pile of ash and soot.

Elke inspected a few of the figures on the booth's shelves: moved the farmer an inch to the right, twisted the barkeeper's torso back to center.

"That woman bought one for seventy-five." Lise said.

"They just think they can buy anything, don't they?" Elke scratched a piece of dirt off a mushroom-shaped Räuchermann.

"Who?"

"The French," Elke spat.

Silence.

"So, Mom, I wanted to know..." Lise began.

A mother and daughter wandered into the booth. The girl's eyes widened at the Räuchermänner on the shelves, at their exquisiteness.

Elke smiled at them. "Let me know if you have any questions."

The mother smiled and nodded. The girl approached a shelf and peered at the figurines. They stared back, enticing.

"So, Mom," Lise continued. "I just wanted to let you know that my friends

Amalie and Lukas and Martin—"

"Who?"

"Amalie and Lukas and Martin," Lise sighed. "We're starting to plan a trip across Europe over vacation—"

"Stop right there," said Elke. She pulled at the ends of her hair. "There is no way—"

"—Or maybe to America, even. We want—"

Crack! The little girl's eyes began to water. At her feet lay the remains of an angel Räuchermann, the head severed and split in two on the frozen asphalt. The cylindrical base rolled across the uneven surface in circles.

"Scheiße!" The mother hurried to pick up the pieces and places them on the counter. Her daughter stood there, crying. "Hush, Sabine!" The woman shuffled through her purse. "I am so sorry. I can pay..." She looked up. "How much do you want for it?"

Enkle clenched her fists. "Do you have any idea what your daughter just did?"

"I know," the woman sputtered. "And I am so sorry. I know that so much work—"

"Yes, that's right. Work. Time." Elke took a step closer to the woman. "I make each of these things by hand. I spend hours, days, cutting and carving and sanding each and every individual piece that goes into every single one of these pieces." The little girl began to wail, but Elke just spoke louder. "And because your daughter couldn't keep her fucking hands to her fucking self, my hours of careful goddamn work just cracked open on the concrete!"

"Mom," Lise intervened and put a hand on Elke's shoulder. "It's okay."

"No, it is not. Don't you get it?" She grabbed the broken pieces and held them in her open hands. "I only make something once. I don't make duplicates. Even if I could put the pieces back together, it won't be the same. Even if I could glue—" She hurled the salvaged bits toward the ground. "—this piece and this piece and this piece back where it's supposed to be, it won't matter because she'll still have a fucking crack in her fucking head."

The woman stared. For a moment the two stared at each other, Elke breathing out white air into the woman's measured face, while the girl cried. Lise stood next to her mother, motionless.

Finally, the woman responded, her voice cool. "Ma'am, I am really sorry, I just want to know how much—"

"Get out."

The mother scooped up the little girl and scurried out of the war zone. Pedestrians peered into their booth as they walked by.

Lise turned to her mother. "What is wrong with you?! Do you have any idea of the scene you just started?"

Elke shook her head. "You're not going on that trip. End of discussion."

"What?! Why not?"

"You're too young, you're not ready. And because I say so." Elkie could hear her blood pulsing, the sound loud and deafening in her ears.

Lise looked her mother in the eyes. "Bullshit."

"Dammit, Lise, why do you have to ruin a perfectly good thing?" Elkie exclaimed. "This is our time. It's our thing. It's Christmas! We drink glühwein, we sell our Räuchermänner. We do it together, and now you want to leave! You want to ruin all of this!"

"This is not our thing." Lise replied. She lifted her hands above her head. "This? All this is yours. You make them, you sell them, and you drag me along! I'm my own freaking person!"

Tears welled in Elke's eyes. She heard it, the flick of a lighter, the crack of wood on concrete. "I know that, schätzchen." She reached out, but Lise pulled away. "I just... you know I worry. It's Christmastime and now you're rambling about going on some trip and you know my policy on boys..."

"Why can't you listen to me? Why can't you just understand what I'm trying to tell you? I need to get out of here. I've never gone anywhere or done anything." Lise grabbed an artist Räuchermann off the closest shelf and shoved it in Elke's face. "Jesus, Mom, you can't just put me on a shelf! Let me go."

Elke, tearful, stared at this thing in front of her. It's gray eyes shone resolute, dauntless, and bright.

Lise let the artist slip from her hand, turned, and left. The figure's arms split from the body as it crashed on the ground. Elke sniffled and knelt down to pick up the pieces. The Räuchermann's incense cone had broken, releasing small bits of scented ash across the asphalt.

Carolyn Curry

Galaxy Cow

Sandy Li

Commute Home

The end of school inaugurates my quest:
To voyage home while sunlight greets the west.
But several demons first must I appease
And these such rogues my patience always tease.
The first of foes: oh dreaded light, the boss
Of cars and bikes and all who wish to cross.
He flickers white as I approach his lair,
But swaps in red before I make it there.
Oh dev'lish fiend, that scarlet hand so bright!
He holds me fast and laughs upon my plight.
But even if his color he allay,
His kin (count three!) next waste away my day.
With hours passed I make it to their end,
But oh! New dangers next must I contend.
I speed along, my pace a frantic rush
The day is chilling - will I catch the bus?
But never was a dame more full of spite
Than she, the bus who saw and took her flight
From me, a haggard trav'ler, weather-worn
Just seconds brief 'fore I had reached her doors.
Oh wicked night creeps in across the east
His biting wind from me my heat has fleeced
And how I wish to travel home in peace!
But one more hour I'll have to wait at least.

Kate Berry

Barcelona Sawyer Ames

Promises

Rose Hensley raced down the beach, her small feet splashing in the waves. She stole a glance behind her as the figure's colossal steps swiftly overtook hers. Soon an arm locked around her waist and her feet were lifted from the sandy shore.

"Grandpa!" She shrieked with laughter. "Put me down!" Rose squirmed, writhing and twisting, but the grip of George Hensley's arms only grew tighter.

He playfully shook her from right to left. "Oh, is that what you want?" He let her drop a few inches closer to the ground.

"No, Grandpa! Don't drop me!"

"Alright then, Rosie," He breathed heavily. His heels sunk deeper into the cold, wet sand. "I suppose I can let you go." George placed her wriggling feet on the ground.

Rose's feet kept moving once she was free. With her short, childish strides she ran back in the opposite direction towards the gray-shingled home, looming over the dunes.

"Chase me! Chase me!" She yelled. The ribbons of her white dress and her long, dark locks trailed behind her in the air, tangling together.

"I'm coming!" George called, but he was done running. As he made his way back, he planted his own cavernous footprints next to his favorite granddaughter's.

Rose sailed into her Uncle Walter's arms in the home's living room. "Aha! I caught you!" His deep voice echoed off the two-story ceiling. He lifted her up and ran, making small loops around little Anna Hensley, who's engrossment in her copy of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory made her unaware of the ruckus. She eventually lifted her head and observed her daddy playing airplane with cousin Rosie. Even at eight, she wondered why her daddy never laughed like that when he played with her.

Walter put on a record. He and Rose were twirling now, her feet resting on his brown loafers as he stepped and twirled to Sinatra's smooth voice, reverberating off the white walls.

Rose clung to her uncle's button down as they whirled around the room. She looked up only once to find Anna intently staring at her. If Rose ever looked at grownups for too long they would look away and her mother would tell her she was being rude. But Anna wasn't a grownup, and maybe Aunt Irene didn't teach

Anna like Rose's mother taught her.

Just as Rose was about to look up again, the music came to a scratching halt. Walter quickly took a few steps away from his niece. Irene Hensley stood by the record player with her arms crossed. She wiped her hands against her green dress and shifted her gaze from her husband to Rose and pursed her lips.

"Why don't you keep your grandfather company in the library?" She directed.

Rose looked up at her uncle, who kept his eyes on the oriental rug. She opened her mouth to say something, to ask why Aunt Irene seemed so angry, but instead just followed the orders. As she left the room, she turned back. Uncle Walter and Aunt Irene were yelling, their arms gesturing vehemently, the creases in their foreheads and eyebrows deepening. Anna was still sitting cross-legged on the couch; she read from the book on her lap while she covered her ears with her palms.

George was sitting in his plush leather armchair, a book open on his lap. His thick-framed glasses perched on the very tip of his nose. He looked up at Rose without lifting his head, beckoning her to him. She climbed into his lap, scratching the leather as she gripped it for support.

George reached for the side table on his right. The ice rattled against the glass as he brought it to his face and tipped the liquid into his mouth. Rose didn't like the smell of it; she wrinkled her nose.

"You couldn't always drink this stuff, Rosie," George explained. "Only bad men made it, and only bad men sold it."

"Like B.B. Eyes?" Rose asked. She heard something shatter in the background.

"Yes, just like him." George brought her a little closer. "But back when I was young, like your daddy and your uncle, things were different. Even the bad guys weren't all bad because they had something called loyalty. They never abandoned their brothers, and they never broke their promises. They took everything seriously. Promise me, Rosie," he said, "that when you're old you'll never forget who your family is, and the promises you've made."

"I promise, Grandpa."

"Because no matter who you are, or who people say you are," he continued. "Your honor and your morals still matter. You might not understand this all now, Rosie, but one day you will. Respect matters."

"May I interrupt?" Rose's mother asked from the door. Her voice was more

timid than normal. She twirled a finger around her long, dark curls. "It's time for your bath, Rosie."

George huffed. "Go ahead." He barely looked at his daughter-in-law. "And mind you that she gets clean and stays clean— of everything."

Evelyn Hensley scooped and handful of lukewarm water and gently poured it over Rose's head. She hummed softly as she did this, over and over and over. Rosie babbled mindlessly about the fish in the ocean and the clouds and running along the beach and Grandpa and Frank Sinatra and Uncle Walter's feet and Aunt Irene's loud voice—

"She was angry?" Evelyn stopped, resting her hand limp in the bathwater.

Rose told her about the arms gesturing and the voices getting noisy and Anna sitting on the couch.

Something flashed across Evelyn's face. "Mommy?" Rose asked.

"It's okay, Rosie. Everything's fine." She began scooping the water again. "This sand in your hair..." Evelyn dipped Rose's head back in the water and scrubbed her scalp. It's just everywhere. It never comes out."

Rose sat in the bath and picked at her pruning fingers. "But I like the sand."

"Well the sand lives outside, and that's where it should stay: outside." Everywhere Evelyn looked she saw more grains: in her daughter's hair, underneath her fingernails, on the back of her neck.

"Mommy, can I be a sand monster?"

"No, you can't." She tried to wipe more grains off of Rose's shoulder. It was everywhere; the water was contaminated, and Rose was contaminated. "I just can't stand it that you're always going to have sand on you, and everyone's going to see it and the things they'll think..."

Later that night, Aunt Irene came to tuck in Rose and Anna. She sat on the edge of Anna's bed for a long time, stroking her flaxen hair and whispering doting, motherly things in her ear. Rose watched, curled up under her covers, as Aunt Irene kissed her daughter's forehead goodnight, stood up, and headed for the door without a glance in Rose's direction.

"Auntie, why are you mad?" The question cut through the quiet summer breeze rattling the shutters and the crickets chirping from the sand dunes.

Irene turned to her niece and stood there, frozen, for a long time. Rose could see her face from across the dark room, staring with hateful eyes. She spoke

sharply. “There are some things that only daddys do, that’s all. There are some things that daddys are just supposed to do, and some things that good daddys, husbands, are never supposed to do.” Her voice remained steady. “You’re lucky that your daddy is a good person.” She marched out of the room.

Anna’s hair hung in a perfectly straight braid down her back. She sat on the beach with Rose, who was dragging her finger along the tiny mountains of sand, drawing loops and swirls in the grains. Loud voiced echoed from the house, rolled off the dunes and off the waves.

“They’re mad.” Rose observed.

“It’s about you, you know,” said Anna.

Evelyn emerged from the house, carrying a tray of lemonade and glasses. She set them on the patio table and turned to her husband, who stood in the doorway, arms crossed and stance wide. Evelyn spoke for a while, her hands moving from her face to her hat, which she threw on the ground, to her hair. She reached out to him, grabbed his arm, but he violently threw her hands back at her and left, marching around to the front of the house. An engine revved and he was gone, his Rambler a turquoise dot that drifted farther and farther away until it disappeared, blending into the horizon.

“James!” Evelyn called. She stood there, fruitlessly screaming her husbands name until her voice gave out and she collapsed, sobbing, onto the cold stone. She took in air with ragged breaths, sucking it in with the same uneven gasps as the breeze.

After a while George stood in the doorway and stared down at his daughter-in-law. He said nothing to let her rough gasps fill the air. He picked up the tray from the table, stepped over Evelyn, and walked along the beach to where Rose and Anna sat, staring back at the house.

“Where’s Daddy?” Rose asked.

“He’ll be back,” George replied. He put the tray on the sand and slowly lowered himself to the ground. With a shaky hand, he filled up three glasses and handed one to each of his granddaughters. Anna dumped hers into the sand without taking a sip. She stared out at the ocean, watched the waves as they came crashing at their feet.

Carolyn Curry

Lobster

Tara Talland

Fuel

The virtual display in front of him showed a vast expanse of stars, cold white pinpricks stark against the inky blackness of space. Two six-clawed appendages reached forward, manipulating the hologram, and the 3D model twisted in on itself, zooming in on a small white star orbited by three lonely planets.

"M'Tor?" The voice of his mate-and-lieutenant Eressa made him turn away. She stood in the doorway, illuminated from below by the red lights set into the floor.

"Do you have a report for me?" M'Tor Seir asked. His eyes, all three of them electric-blue, noted the small data pad in her front limb. He also noted the way the side of her regulation black uniform bared a strip of pale flesh on her side—but such thoughts should be saved for in their quarters, after the day shift, when they were both off-duty and free to...indulge.

Eressa nodded, extending the limb and depositing the data pad next to Seir. "The mining team has been put into orbit. The drill satellite should be operational within nineteen *rafs*."

"Any trouble back on the homeplanet?" The captain swiped a claw across the screen of the data pad, eyes flicking over the text there. Schematics, status updates...all of it indicating that the equipment was functioning within normal parameters. As was to be expected at a routine stop such as this.

"The usual activists complaining about preservation and such." Disdain and annoyance mingled in Eressa's voice. "The viconsuls aren't very worried about it, but there's no denying that the transport boycotts can be irritating." It went without saying that such complaints were futile—the need for transport fuel called for mining, and in order to mine, certain measures had to be taken. If a few lesser biological organisms were obliterated in the process, it was a pity.

It was a pity, but it was necessary.

"What's the technological advancement level of this planet?" Almost instinctively, his four front limbs manipulated the display again, pulling up an image of a mostly green planet about a third the size of the homeworld.

"A four point seven. Barely aware of the usefulness of their planet's natural carbon deposits in the production of energy." Again, the female's voice was filled with scorn as she contemplated this greatly inferior species. "Not even close to being an exception to the mining process."

"When was the last time we found a planet with that kind of a rating?" Seir mused. "Our list of allies remains short." If a planet was found to be sufficiently advanced to achieve a nine on the Universal Advancement Scale (UAS), the homeworld extended an offer of alliance in place of a mining craft. Seir sometimes wondered what gave them the right as a species to use their own world as the measure of a perfect planet—a ten on the UAS.

But these were not thoughts that the captain of a mining vessel should ever dare to speak aloud. If one such as him were to voice such thoughts, the activist minority on the homeworld would use that to their advantage. He would lose his position in the political mess that would follow, and overall it just wouldn't have very *good* consequences. So all he could do was shut his mouth and follow orders.

Such was life.

"Fuel is more important than allies. Even our ship's running a bit low. This stop should give us enough to make it to the next assignment." Eressa shrugged. "If not, the next one will for sure."

On the display in front of them, the planet's surface seemed to flicker. A small black dot flashed red, a stream of data swirling from it on the holographic display. The mining setup was up and running.

"We're ready to go!" Eressa's voice was high with excitement. "Initiating sequence at your command, M'Tor."

"Go ahead."

Something small and yellow arced from the orbiting setup. On the dusty green surface of the planet a small red blossom grew, expanding from a space-dark seed at its center. Seir watched as it grew, spreading over the lush and verdant planet with incredible speed. The vivid color made the planet look like a red star, bright enough to illuminate the dark sides of the planet's two moons.

He gazed at the hologram as the shock wave met itself on the far side and rebounded, sending shudders and ripples through the world. The whole surface was now a roiling mass of red and orange and black. The light spilling from the display—far dimmer than what was actually happening, as full brightness would be literally blinding—lit his and Eressa's faces and bodies, casting long, sharp shadows behind them.

"Never gets old," Eressa finally breathed as the light began to fade. "It's like...like watching a sunrise and a sunset and a fireworks display all rolled into one!" In her excitement, she sounded like a young child. She must have realized it, because she flushed and cleared her throat awkwardly. "A-and. There are many resources here now that will bring glory to the homeworld."

Seir chuckled, patting her back. "It's all right to be excited, Eressa. It is quite beautiful." He'd been on countless mining expeditions, and the sight of the cleansing explosion that would bear the usable parts of the planet still took his breath away. But still...

It was beautiful before, too, something inside of him whispered.

"It is perhaps a pity that we must create such beauty with such destruction," he said, the words spilling from him before he had quite thought them through.

"What?" Eressa pulled away. "Don't you start talking like an activist, M'Tor."

"Oh, I'd never dream of it." Seir shook his head, trying to dispel these uncharacteristic qualms. "What's next?" His voice was perhaps a little louder than was normal. If she noticed, Eressa didn't comment on it.

"As soon as this planet's confirmed ready for splitting and harvesting, we move on to a planet thirteen light-years from here. Technological rating of five point eight. Orbits a yellow, main-sequence star along with seven other planets and various asteroids and dwarves. Its inhabitants call it Earth..."

As Eressa continued, Seir turned to the holographic display once more, claws skittering over the data display. There were a few requests for shore leave that should probably be taken care of the next time they stopped at a colony world. The chief medic needed more supplies—well, that would just have to wait until they made this stop.

"We'll move on as soon as this is done," he said, interrupting her—these were routine details, nothing he hadn't heard before. She nodded.

When Relatives Visit

On Sunday morning, I awoke, at ease
But foreign voices—relatives, no, please!—
Inquired "Delia up?" "Of course," Dad said.
I drew my blanket overhead in dread.

The stairs did groan in sympathy, in pain
As I attempted sleep again in vain.
Too soon arrived they at my closed room door
And wondered should they venture farther more.

With bated breath they prodded my door ope
And crushed my dreams of freedom, e'ry hope;
They peered into the depths of my dark lair
At carcasse after carcasse of worn wear
And smelled the female teenager's perfume.
They quaked at such ubiquitous room doom.
"Perhaps some bait would work?" one whispered soft.
And grandpa Fred procured fried eggs to waft.

One squeaked, "Good morning! Breakfast, sweetest child?"
I growl'd—how dare they treat me so—I'm wild!
"Perchance she'll follow should we leave," one tried.
They scampered off. Resigned to fate, I sighed.

I did descend, endured relentless hugs,
But smothered once too many, as though on drugs,
Exploded, sprinted for the door—alas—
Ensnared in kisses, taken by the masse.

Dilly Sanborn-Marsh

Daddy

You had promised me you would come home. Daddy, you promised. You stood in the driveway, held my face between your hands. Your calloused fingers felt rough against my skin. You looked into my eyes and you lied. You lied, Daddy. When you kissed me goodbye, your stubble itched against my nose. I was sad. I was not crying like Mommy was, though. I guess that is because I believed you. I guess Mommy had known something like this might happen.

You hugged me for a few seconds longer than a normal hug. I hugged you back and whispered into your ear: *When you get home can we play fort?* You

laughed and squeezed me harder. *Sure, Pumpkin. But for now will you promise me that you'll hold down the fort with your brother?* I glanced up at Charlie. Mommy was holding him, arms wrapped tightly around his little body, as if she was worried something might take him from her too. I looked back at you. *I guess so,* I said exasperatedly. *That's my girl,* you said as you ruffled my hair. I giggled and reached up to ruffle your hair. Although there had not been much hair to ruffle since you had had to get a haircut the day before you left.

I waited in the fort for you, Daddy. Charlie tried to come into it, but I would not let him. It was our fort, *our* fort, Daddy. Then the fort disappeared for a while. Mommy had to take it down so people could come and sit in the living room. They would always talk about you. Mommy was always crying. Why did you have to make her sad, Daddy? You could have just come home and she would not have been sad. You should have come home, just like you promised.

But you did not. Now every month we have to come to this place and see lots of other people crying. We come to this "monument," that is what Mommy calls it, and just sit. Mommy does not say much when we come. She just looks at the white marker. One time Mommy asked us what the marker reminded us of when we were with you. I said it reminded me of the clouds you and I used to watch in the backyard, except this one looked like a weirdly shaped gum-drop. Mommy said it reminded her of your shiny smile. Charlie said it reminded him of snow.

Charlie likes to stack the rocks next to your cloud, Daddy. I put some on the top of the cloud, but Charlie made lots of stacks around it. Mommy continues to stand there and look at your cloud. She does not cry. She stopped crying about twelve visits ago. I want to be more like Mommy, so I just stare at your cloud too. Charlie tries to be more like me and Mommy as well, but after a while he gets bored and starts to knock over the stacks of rocks.

A few months ago Mommy let me put the fort back up. I have to let Charlie play in it with me. Mommy said that since Charlie is the man of the house now, he has the right to play in the fort. I do not think Charlie is the man of the house, though. You are the man of the house. You always will be, Daddy. Charlie does not even understand what has happened. He asked yesterday when you were coming home. But I know what happened. I know what happened to you, Daddy, to us. And I miss you Daddy. I miss you.

Fiona McCarey

Amanda Ugorji

The studio

Crumbling to Dust: An Emulation of *All the King's Men*

As always, he had come home to my lifted cheek and a sputtering fireplace, and, as always, I had avoided his gaze as he kissed me. There was no need— never any need— to look. I'd memorized him since he was a tiny thing cross-legged on the rug beside the fire, a livelier fire, as the Scholarly Attorney in a Scholarly Coat leaned in to place a piece of chocolate in his outstretched child's palm and I watched from the kitchen. And he had raised his face up to the Attorney's shadowy figure and the flames had cast his features into sharp relief and transformed his baby bird nose into a crescent beak like a beautiful, awful hawk's, and then I had looked away for good because if I didn't I would never stop looking.

But there was something new this time in his kiss on the hollow of my cheek, something new and thinly veiled like an insult or a secret that isn't really a secret at all— those secrets that are inevitably discovered in the end, by you and him and all the neighbors, but you have to make the weakest attempt at hiding it, even just at first, so when it's all out and the veil's been ripped to shreds you can sink back into the shadows and say you tried.

As he pulled away from me, an impulse washed over me and I had to look into his face, because that was what the impulse commanded and I was a slave to it. I saw the eyes, pools of shadows beneath heavy eyebrows and a forehead like a shallow cliff, with the cruel beak—ravishingly cruel, the most magnificent piece of incriminating evidence in the world—jutting out as the Stanton girl's voice sang "Jackie-Bird, Jackie-Bird" in my head.

Then he stepped out of the light.

I should have guessed, I suppose, but by then my mind had already flitted to the polished new mirror hanging by the doorway—a mirror with engravings that curled like the tips of yellow braids and licked at the sides of the gilded frame. I had recently purchased that mirror at an auction to replace the older, wooden mirror, a mirror that I thought had been lying to me all these years. But I stared past my son into the mirror, and this one told the same story as the last. Surely, *surely*, they were both liars; surely I was staring at someone else's reflection, for that frail woman with the old, greyish face could not be me. The woman's eyes

were blue and glittered like the sea she used to marvel at every morning at dawn, but they were watery like the sea too, and her arms and legs were thin and paler than the house she had haunted for all those years. Her hair had turned from spools of gold to a less remarkable silver, and she had coiled it and worked it until the silver blended into the gold to form a bland yellow.

But her cheeks, the hollowed, famished cheeks were mine. Oh, the cheeks that had enticed droves of men—men who believed they could somehow fill those hollows with money or power or fame or youth. Sometimes I believed it too, bringing them home one by one until I tired of them and they tired of me and we tired of ourselves. Then I would replace them as I would replace a chair or a table or a mirror by the door, and I would get back into bed and wait until the next man came along, and the next, and the next. And finally, my dear Monty would call, but by then I would be too tired from waiting or too hollowed out or too married to respond. He never failed to call at precisely the wrong time.

And those memories flooded back, the memories of the precious few times when we would finally meet in the dark of night—memories of whispers among shadows, shimmering promises and the dim glow of firelight in shuttered rooms, and silent kisses beneath a silver moon—and threatened to drown me in sorrow and the regret of lost opportunity.

When I first met the Judge, I wore a gingham dress, two thick yellow braids hung down my back, and my little black shoes were covered in dirt from the path outside the Judge's house. My hand was nestled in the palm of the Scholarly Attorney named Ellis Burden who had stolen me from the steps of an Arkansas courthouse and brought me back here to Burden's Landing and had taken me to meet his good friend and neighbor, Monty Irwin. My gaze had met the Judge's and lingered momentarily, and I had taken in his big beautiful hawk's nose and his hair of metallic steel and he had admired my deep beautiful famished cheeks and my hair of metallic gold. And that was that, everyone thought it was over, but they didn't know about the whispers or promises or kisses or any of that, and they sure didn't know about the baby either.

Little Jackie with the baby bird nose. Little Jack Burden, who wasn't a fully-fledged hawk, but he wasn't a Burden either.

But then the Judge had married twice, to the invalid then the girl from Savannah, and I had married more than twice, to the Attorney and to the Tycoon and to the Count and to the Executive and then he wasn't married and I was married and I wasn't married and he was married. We were trapped in this rhythmic cycle and we grew comfortable in this rhythmic cycle, and then when the opportunity arose we ignored it because of the rhythm and the cycle and the comfort. We each had our own separate patterns by then— our own individual selves. Our lives were distinct spools of thread, unraveling parallel to each other; his was silver and coarse, mine grayish-white and frayed. They occasionally overlapped to weave stolen moments of dark shadow and orange firelight and the one constant, completed masterpiece that was our son, Jackie-Bird Burden.

And there we were, our lives about to overlap for the final time, because Jack stood on the carpet before me and before the woman in the mirror and he had come for the Judge. That night, I dreamt of hawks and silver stars winking furtively in the night sky, and I dreamt of the flourishing Roman empire and the empire's deteriorating ruins, layer upon layer of dirt and ash and sand, and I dreamt of all people and all places and all things emerging from dust and then inevitably crumbling to dust too.

I awoke at noon.

By that time, my son had already gone over to the Judge's house, and everything had happened and ended before my eyelids had even fluttered open. The silver thread had stretched to its limit under the opposing tug of corruption and honor and the strain of endless guilt, and it had snapped while I had dreamt of lifeless civilizations and the sensation of choking on ceaseless clouds of dust until the dust had invaded my lungs so that it was within me and without me and it *was* me. I had escaped one nightmare and entered another, because reality is just a well for your fears and ravaged hopes. A well where you toss in a coin and you make a wish and all you get in return is a bucket of sorrow and disappointment, and reality was one broken thread and another fraying, unraveling spool, never to embroider another kiss or furtive embrace again.

I was still in bed, blinking away the last fragments of sleep, when the telephone rang. Its chime mirrored the piercing caw of the hawk from my dreams—the

hawk, its proud head surveying the ruins of a once-great empire, its neck arched and its wings outstretched, soaring through the swirls of dust and sand and ash—the hawk that I had thought would be the one exception to the inevitability of death and destruction. But I was wrong, as always, and I let the telephone ring several times before I gathered my quilts around me and alighted on the edge of the bed, my feet dangling and barely reaching the ground. I felt like I had perched on the lip of a great precipice and I was staring down into the yawning mouth of a crater and preparing to leap. And then I leapt.

I leapt, and I stretched out my trembling fingers to pick up the phone, wrapping the cord tightly around my thin wrists, willing my blood to halt its serpentine path through my veins as the voice on the other line burned its unforgettable, wicked words into my eardrums. The dust had swallowed my noble hawk, just as it had swallowed Caesar and Alexander and Brutus and every other person who had ever lived and who ever would.

The scream, bright and silver as the moon and the stars and wedding rings and glittering promises, tore its way through my windpipes and hung suspended in the air. I began to moan uncontrollably as my eyes glazed over, and I could see the still form of the Judge, the only man I could ever truly love, sprawled on the leather chair among his library of precious books, a gaping wound weeping blood from his precious heart, a gun trailing from his limp, precious hand, and me, suddenly all alone but for the one piece of precious evidence that was our son. The last piece of evidence of our entire relationship—all of the secrecy and guilt and lies and ecstasy and elation, all of it—was Jackie-Bird Burden, who had gone over to Monty's house just that morning with a strange look in his eyes and a strange yellow envelope in his fist, and who was now framed in the doorway to my bedroom, his face engulfed in shadow and his eyes glinting from beneath the darkness, and that was when I really understood. The snow-white telephone clattered to the floor as I raised a quivering finger and aimed it directly over his heart like a weapon, and I could feel the anger and misery rise in searing waves to emanate from my famished cheeks and my manic eyes as I wailed, "You did it, you did, you killed him!"

His face froze, and he stepped out of the shadow, and I could see from his eyes that he knew, but he didn't know that he knew. The truth had always been

lingering over him, just waiting to be discovered; it had never truthfully been a secret, but only just a thinly veiled magic trick, the illusion of a secret, hidden in plain sight. He questioned my accusation because he didn't yet want to understand, but I continued to condemn him. My finger did not move an inch from his heart. I remembered the crisp white shirt soaked in blood, honorable blood, the blood of a Judge and the blood of a father.

My son, the Judge's son, had never even known his own indescribable significance and had unwittingly destroyed his own father in the name of his Boss. The irony of it all struck me as terribly hilarious and I began to laugh hysterically. He ran to my side and tried to grab me, to caress me or to suffocate me—in that moment I wasn't sure which—and I clawed at his face and his foolish baby bird's nose, which he had stuck into the pages of the past and which had guided him to the putrid stench of corruption, where he had dug out that strange yellow envelope and used it to turn his father to dust.

The laughter continued to well up from my core as I fought him off, and suddenly I was choking on my own hysteria. My gasps mingled with the high-pitched squeal of the white telephone begging to be replaced in its holder and suddenly I remembered my own yearning, a yearning that had lasted for almost my entire lifetime, a yearning that had drained me from a bright-eyed, golden-braided young girl to the ghost of a woman that gazed miserably at me from the mirrors of Burden's Landing. I remembered the yearning to be embraced and loved and cherished by the regal judge from the house next door, and I remembered the feeling of finally fulfilling that great desire, the scent of pine needles pervading our senses and the light of the moon softening our features until we were unearthly, passionate phantoms in the silence of the night.

By that time I was mumbling out loud, random snatches of words and laughter like the frenzied sound of bells in a storm intertwined into a stream of noise that bubbled out from between my pale lips, and, as usual, I avoided looking at my dear son's face for fear of choking again. But then sweet old Jackie-Bird, the son who had always been quiet and loyal and who had stroked my fine golden hair as I lay in his lap and who had kissed the hollows in my cheeks each time he returned home, that same sweet son of mine grabbed my shoulder and spat, "Shut up! Shut up!"

I turned my bulging blue eyes to his face for the second time in two days and the second time in countless years and finally noticed his terrible transformation: the once trusting, innocent eyes were wild and furious, and the sweet face of baby Jackie-Bird Burden had hollowed out and reddened to a color deeper than fresh blood and the blazing earth beneath a courthouse in Arkansas and hotter than rancid betrayal. His grip on my shoulders was firmer than his father's—too firm, too insisting, too violent—and the time had come for me to finally unveil the secret, pull back the curtains on the illusion, explain the magic trick that had only partially deceived him for all these years and cry "ta-da!" as he applauded.

"You killed him," I said clearly, my voice low and softer than a young girl's yellow hair. "You killed him."

"Killed who?" he hissed at me. But of course he knew.

"Your father," I responded. And oh, that was the truth, and the truth had finally stepped out from the gray shadows where it had been lurking all these years and the truth was standing beneath the harsh light, blinking innocently at us like a newborn child with its big eyes like bottomless pits. My son had killed his father. That was when I crumpled into a pile of frail bones and gray skin and filmy lace on the foot of my bed, and the only thing alive about me was the endless fountain of giggles and words like "love" and "murder" and "father" and "dust" that spewed uncontrollably from my dry mouth.

A lot of that time was dark and more terrifying than a nightmare—or maybe it was a nightmare, for who am I to distinguish between one reality and another? The funeral felt real; the black dress that flowed past my feet and pooled around my bare feet, and the collar that coiled around my neck and threatened to choke me felt as real as anything, and everything, else. The sight of my lover's body, his face in death almost as pale as mine in life, his beautiful hawk's beak now just a soft, transparent mass on an ancient face, and the ornate coffin, nestled beneath the oak tree coated in a thick layer of mossy down, felt real too. And finally, inescapably, the Judge was lowered into the churchyard soil where he would decay into dust like everyone else, for we are all equal in death no matter how magnificent or how repulsive or how just or how cruel we are in life.

In death, good and evil mesh into a single idea called "nonbeing." In death,

corruption and virtue both crumble at the same rate, and the decaying corpse of a great ruler is indistinguishable from that of his subject. The remains of a father, a governor, a doctor, a husband, a lover, a bystander, and an entire civilization intermingle, and, no matter where I run or where I hide or who I hide with, when I finally die—if ghosts can ever truly die—layers and layers of earth and sand and ash and bone will bury my frail body among the ruins of the great Roman empire and the ruins of the one man I ever loved.

We are all born of dust, and to dust we must always return.

Tarika Narain

Cami Fitzgerald

The Kettle

Hermionie, Lost and Found

"You *should* be women, you know, you girls know *knothing* about aknything. You girls call yourself knights but you are knot, you don't know aknything about real terror, real danger, real battle."

This is what Hermionie Weaslie said to the group of witches—some young, some old, some normal-looking, some sneezing into enormous cerulean-colored handkerchiefs whilst their wands formed figure-eights in midair—sitting in front of her.

It was only the 10th bi-weekly meeting of the Congregation of Courageous Conjurers, Charm-Chanters, and Witches (CCCCW for short), yet Hermionie, president and co-founder (alongside her good friend Jinny, who was currently taking maternity leave), already felt tuckered out.

A drum, a drum, was beating in her head, tediously, monotonously, this incessant pounding that didn't seem to be going away any time soon. *Thump. Thump-thump Thump. Thump. Thump-thump Thump. Thump.*

The greatest is behind, she thought sadly, in more ways than one, with a tint of nostalgia that she quickly reined in—lest the group catch her sniffling and think her weak. That would not look good for these witches gathered in front of her, who vowed on their first meeting to fight for the good of the Wizarding World 'til death do them part, and yet, there didn't seem much "good" to be "fighting" for.

That was the problem. Hermionie didn't know for what purpose she had formed the group. There was no evil to be fought in the world. Her one female friend, Jinny Pawter, had happily agreed to help out, but she'd just given birth to her second son on Tuesday. Hermionie had suggested Jinny use one of those new-fangled charms that washes a baby, feeds it, and changes its diapers at all times and during all hours of the day, in order to be able to continue aiding the CCCCW—but Jinny had given her a blank, piercing sort of look (it even seemed a little condescending to Hermionie, yet she didn't dare think of her dear old friend in that manner), then said coolly, "Oh thank you, darling, but I would much prefer spending *all* my time with our darling little infant. Best wishes with the CCCCW."

Hermionie had nodded graciously at the time, but on the inside she'd been seething. She began to think Jinny had only agreed to co-found (and co-preside, for the precious few days before she'd gone into labor) in order to humor her.

The pounding in her head continued. Hermionie's voice continued moving down the agenda typed up on the desk in front of her, while her mind continued to wander.

It seemed like *everyone* was just trying to humor her these days. Rawn, who only cared about Quidditch matches and the latest brooms coming out, would smile and kiss her when he came home, but Hermionie doubted if he even listened to her as she talked about her day. He nodded and grinned with a distant look in his eyes, then ran off to turn on the telly and watch Quidditch. Albeit, Hermionie admitted her days weren't very interesting—sitting in bed until noon (and casting spells in the direction of the staircase whenever she wanted a clementine or a tangerine [it changed day-to-day] and a piece of toast), typing up the next CCCCW meeting's agenda on her computer, and then sitting dismally in her daughter Rohse's bedroom until Rawn came home from the office. Rohse was away at a special boarding school for talented witches and wizards that Hermionie herself had once gone to; though at the moment she couldn't quite place its name. She thought it had something to do with hogs.

Anyway, Hermionie's uninteresting life as a middle-aged empty-nester seemed like a breath into the wind—though not in the usual sense. This wind reeked of happy, happy bliss, and Hermionie's breath was just a painful, useless cry against it, against problems that didn't exist.

There was no trouble in the world. Hermionie had nothing to occupy her time, nothing to fight for, nothing to fight against. Sometimes she almost wished for her old life, back when she'd quit going to that school that started with the word Hog, travelled around England with her male friends Hairy and Rawn (though Rawn had been absent for part of the time—Hermionie never found out why, even after she married him), and fought against the evil forces of U-Kno-Who.

Suddenly the pounding in Hermionie's temple grew even stronger. She felt an immense pain, and strange images of death flashed across her eyes.

Then she realized it was probably because she'd taken the wrong vitamin that morning.

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