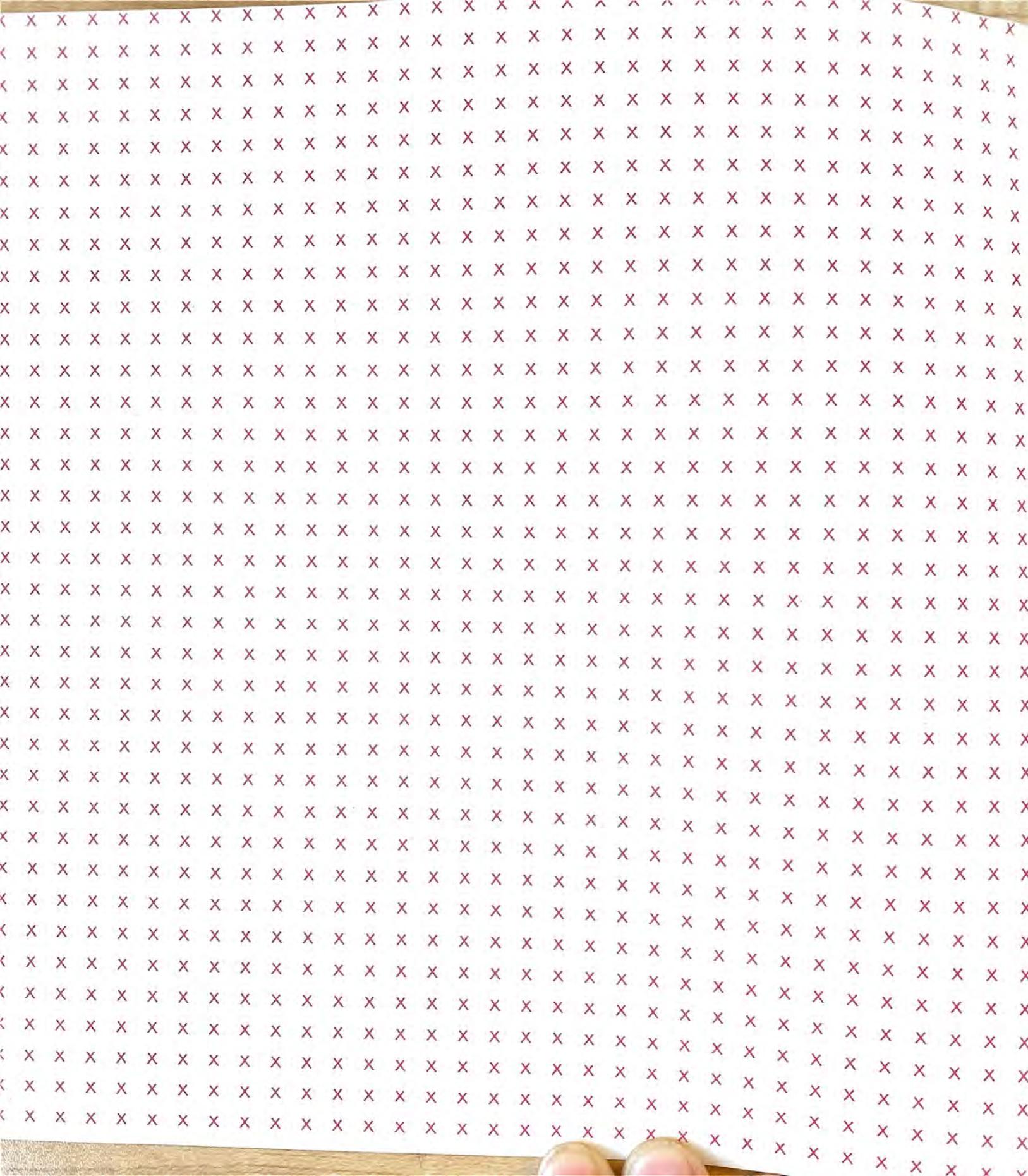


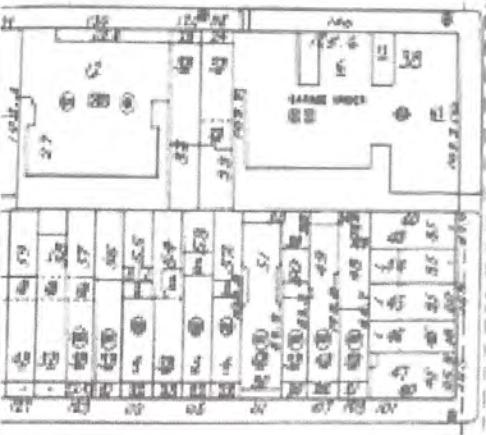
ELEVEN AND
A HALF

EUGENE
LANG
COLLEGE
LITERARY
JOURNAL



TRANS. LYDIA DAVIS
INTRV. CHUCK KLOSTERMAN
INTRV. EMILY GOULD





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

EUGENE LANG COLLEGE LITERARY JOURNAL
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Dear Reader,

We made this. Or you did, or maybe we all did. In this magazine you will find work that you made, or your roommate made, or your best friend made, or that obnoxious kid in class made. Without these people, these pages would be blank. Instead, the editors found a grand total of 200 publishable pages. That's a lot. That's the most we've ever had.

For quite a few of the student contributors, this is the first time their work is being published. The first brush with that intensive process is rarely easy. Together, we compiled this volume thinking that it might represent some collective consciousness of the writers at Eugene Lang. We ended up with something a bit stranger than that. We ended up with the energy between things, the energy of the gap, the interval! This journal positions and prizes student work the with hope readers will experience the unfolding of exciting conversation between talented people.

For the Managing Editors, this is the last year that we'll be at Lang. Next year, there will be new people with new tastes and new perspectives. This is what we left behind. Something that we can still read ten years from now. We hope you read and enjoy it.

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SPECIAL THANKS

ELEVEN AND A HALF OWES MUCH OF ITS SUCCESS TO VARIOUS BELOVED GUESTS, VOLUNTEERS, MENTORS AND PROFESSORS. THESE INCLUDE:

LYDIA DAVIS, EMILY GOULD, SETH GRAVES, CHUCK KLOSTERMAN, MICHAEL MILLER, ALBERT MOBILIO, SIMONA AND BILL SCHULTZ OF THE PRINT CENTER, ROB SPILLMAN, GWYNETH STANSFIELD FROM SIMON & SCHUSTER, AND NEW SCHOOL FACULTY, STAFF AND STUDENTS FOR THEIR CONTINUED SUPPORT.

x

All material within belongs to contributors who authored it. *Eleven and a Half* is year publication run out of the New School's Eugene Lang College Department of Liter Studies. For more information on submission guidelines and general magazine quer please send an email to elevenandahalfjournal@gmail.com. Enjoy your read.

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2015

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DIAMONDS OF THE
WINTER STREETS

NATHAN KAMAL

x

450 million years have led to this moment. A half mile below the surface of the earth, five bearded men in construction hats and safety glasses drill several dozen holes, each two inches in diameter and ten feet deep, into the wall of the Cayuga Salt Mine in Lansing, New York. Dim, yellow, incandescent lamps cast light on the mineral for the first time in a geological eon.

Salt mines are a result of the earth's era-long fluctuations in sea level. When portions of the ocean evaporate over the course of a few million years, their salt remains on the earth's surface and consequentially percolates into the ground, forming colossal mile-deep deposits. Salt mined from these deposits is used to melt ice on highways, city streets, and sidewalks.

Each ten foot hole is filled with explosives that, when detonated, shatter nature's meticulous life's work. Salt shards of about twenty pounds fly in every direction. The salt is then hauled away and ground into smaller pebble-sized crystals. Some of these pebbles will finish their journey by providing traction for eighteen wheelers on I-95. Some will end up on side streets in Hoboken, and some will end up pulverized under the feet of Manhattanites as they rush to catch the uptown subway.

Sometimes I picture this journey when I lay awake at night. I watch the freshly cut rock salt traveling miles on conveyer belts, being ground up incrementally by two or three phases of granulation, the dust from the explosion finally settling when the miners pack up after a long day.

My “salt-neurosis” of recent months is a reawakening of a childhood phase of “salt-intrigue.” My dad would warn me that “it’s not the same as what we have in the kitchen,” and if I put it in my mouth I would burn myself. This was the worst thing anyone could have said to my six-year-old self. One afternoon my curiosity reached its apex. I spent the day sitting quietly downstairs, waiting for a moment when both of my parents would be upstairs. The moment came, and without making a sound, I delicately opened the white plastic gallon bucket of rock salt by the front door. I took out a single piece of salt, a particularly grey and dusty one, and brought it, for an instant, to the tip of my tongue.

My childhood inclination toward rock salt developed into a full-on love affair and matured into my antidote of choice for the unique longevity of New York winters. It was bound to happen at some point. I spent thirty minutes a day walking between class, work, and home and needed something to distract me from unshakable thoughts like I should have worn gloves today. I navigated the icy streets of Manhattan, eyes fixed on the sidewalk ahead of me, hopping between dry spots so that I wouldn’t slip in my twenty dollar flat soled shoes from the DSW clearance shelf.

Road salt is a common eyesore for city dwellers. Its grey residue streaks the sidewalks and subway cars, and somehow makes its way onto every apartment floor in the city. This year, due to the winter’s high snowfall, New York faced a scarcity of it. The city usually uses approximately 300,000 tons per winter, but in the winter of 2013-2014, that number almost doubled. In January, the Northeast scrambled to stock up, but faced slow outputs from salt mines that raised prices due to high demand. Although the city is relatively close to several salt mines, like the Cayuga, mining companies can only produce several thousand tons a day and could not keep up with the furious winter.

The temperature hovered in the twenties through February. As winter deepened, so did New York’s rock salt shortage. Business owners got creative with keeping their front sidewalks safe for pedestrians. A restaurant worker near my home poured beet juice on the sidewalk before a snowstorm. Other substitutes include sand (which does not melt ice, but will provide substantial traction) and non-chloride based salt alternatives like magnesium acetate and potassium acetate (which take the form of blue or green crystals).

In early March I walked to a performance in the West Village during an evening when the temperature had risen above fifty degrees for the first time in weeks. I saw something that made me stop on the sidewalk of 6th Avenue for a full minute. The whole block was completely coated in the most white, finely ground salt I had ever seen. Billions of crystals sparkled in the final strands of daylight, which had forced their way through a dense layer of late-winter clouds. I choked up. I squinted and each sparkle magnified—the sea of tiny lights melting into one luminescent layer. I was standing on a beach in the middle of Manhattan, a beach that was glowing.

But now, weeks later, the longest winter in memory has come to an overdue close. The final chunks of salt are whisked away by street sweepers, and all that remains is the occasional white stain on the sidewalk, where the last of the salt dissolved during the first spring rains. Dregs of New York City's winter are washed away through the city sewers, which return the salt to its native sea.

The vast underground walls take on human characteristics. Salt deposits are old souls who emanate ancient forms of wisdom. They embody patience and transcendence; they are 450,000,000-year-old monks who have dedicated their lives to the mere act of existence.

How easily that peace is shattered. With a few pounds of ammonium nitrate and a spark, the work of a half-billion years vanishes. The production and implementation of road salt is a monumental attempt to control our environment, fighting nature with nature, deterring the inevitable. If every sidewalk in New York was thickly blanketed with the same powdery salt from that March afternoon, maybe winter would stop existing all together, and fall would slip right into spring.



NIA NOTTAGE

x

Beauty doesn't owe me anything. It shimmers, it fades, I wade, it evades, it shows some leg, it whispers touch me. It charges me the victim, cuffs me, on the stand I do not plead because this is familiar land and I've begun to learn my rights and I attempt to handle it – thusly. A recall of compacted, condensed and sealed, censored and suppressed memory; I think I left it underground. I dig, I dig, I dig, I pray my nails don't dirty. I check my phone. I check my phone again. I pray my hands stay clean. Every night before I fall asleep the last thoughts that cloud my mind are new creative ways to lure you because I know if I stay silent, you who've restrained the parts that could be used to need me would continue with your life not stopping to watch me mourn the deer that I mowed down at midnight pulling out the station on the road back to the interstate. The deer, my bloodied forehead, and I start the poem on fast food napkins from the glove compartment; you'd be so enthralled to hear. Us three, plus the ditch at roadside imagining the shock and care, you asking us what happened. I'll raise my hand and without being called, I'll say I was distracted. Wipe the blood to cut down competition, vie for your attention. Pray – that what I surface with won't surface on your throat.

SATURDAY, APRIL 19"

STEPHANIE LEONE

X

For the same reasons we'd never be
caught dead in a taxi, black's
the only color of our shirts that morning,
all suburbia & calm & Brooklyn.
On the way to a diner, our fingers
lace, their fit significant, & We
are valid like people who only smile
or nod, despite your Mohawk & my sex-smeared eyes.
We're seated easily. This is
too easy! So loose & plausible
& average! Drama-free coffee
that, hot & next to you, smells
like the trees from my childhood home.
You pay for my vegan pancakes,
& we leave, ready to try
unearthing Higher Truths
in punk costumes on a Saturday
that just wants us to be happy.

[YOU CAN'T IMAGINE HOW UGLY]

STEPHANIE LEONE

X

You can't imagine how ugly
you made me.

I didn't cry or
wander the streets like
a gorgeous, fractured pixie.

I wailed

a red, fat, snotting, plopping, mortifying
wail.

& now the poem is wailing.

I can't look at either of us.

PLASTIC PONIES

ELLEN CARPENTER

x

Cindy wasn't sure how many plastic pony dolls she'd lit on fire by now, but she knew the number must be over a hundred. She felt a perverse kind of pleasure watching their bright painted faces and shiny mouths slowly melt into the ground. Not to mention the smell. Burnt plastic had always been one of her favorite smells, the same way some people felt a strange attraction to the smell of gasoline or rubbing alcohol. She liked how the plastic burned in her nose and the back of her throat, the way each pony melted into the grass, pink and swollen, like flesh. The way they twisted into grotesque shapes, their four legs splaying open until they resembled the sick figures more reminiscent of the sordid pornos she'd found shoved under her ex boyfriend's bed than the playthings for young children. The titles blared, "GIRLS GIRLS GIRLS UNCUT AND UNTAMED WILD EXOTIC PLAY FULL CENTERFOLD PICS." Cindy had come across these items while in the process of hiding her own beneath the same bed.

x x x

Evan watched people from behind the cash register every day during his shifts at the convenience store. He hated the way they all walked through the automatic glass sliding doors like sheep, bleating at the racked up price of bottled water, and dragging their children behind them. It was fun to pick out all the sad fucks from people still clinging to their sanity. Just today there was a woman who came in around 10:00 am, with red rimmed eyes and a bright yellow plastic purse in the shape of a watering can. She bought a sympathy card and a jar of Vaseline, and handed him a hundred dollar bill when she got to the check out. When Evan told her, "Sorry, we only ac-

cept bills under fifty", the woman launched into what would have probably been a twenty minute lecture concerning the convenience store's oppression of her right to buy commodities, but the man behind her told her to shut up and move along, he had a shovel in the back of his car, and he wasn't afraid to use it. The store manager escorted shovel-man back out to his car after that, while watering-can-purse-woman paid and left in a disgruntled silence. Evan knew she was the type of person who'd never come back to this particular chain of convenience stores again.

The latest customer bought eighteen frozen beef stroganoff dinners for a total of thirty-four ninety-nine. Evan always hated those frozen dinners, hated the way the cardboard got all soggy and started to smell sour as the ice on the box began to defrost. His mother had been forcing those awful frozen dinners down his throat for nineteen years, and he'd never been able to eat instant mashed potatoes or creamed corn without feeling nauseous. By the time beef- stroganoff-man lumbered over to the till, the line at the store was ten deep. When it was finally his turn to check out, all eighteen dinners were the exact half-melted consistency Evan knew and dreaded they would be.

The only other activity Evan could entertain himself with while working behind the till was peeling off the hangnails on his fingers, and picking at the scabs he always seemed to have on his knees and elbows. It was harder to get away with picking at his fingers, because if the hangnail wasn't ready to come off, his finger would bleed. It was always a little weird to give some customer a receipt he'd just dripped his own blood on. Once, a lady gave the receipt back to him and asked if he could print another. She was definitely the same kind of person as watering-can-purse-woman.

Now, at 6:57—exactly three minutes from the end of his shift—Evan watched a woman, who must have been about thirty, walk down an aisle and pick up a box of knock-off plastic ponies. Evan had been pulling at a particularly painful hangnail as she came into view. The hangnail was right on the corner of his nail, and each time he pulled, the piece of broken skin would rip open wider and wider. A drop of blood blossomed out of the very top of the hangnail. Evan looked up from his finger for a moment to check on the woman's progress. She walked languidly over towards the register, and Evan knew he'd have to check her out. The shithead who took his night shift was always late. This meant he'd have to rip off the hangnail he'd been working on before she got to the till, and bleed all over everything. The woman paused at a tiny stand next to the check out line where a display of lighters gleamed. She dragged her index finger along the row, stopping on a green one, and plucked it off the stand—a fragile, sugar-coated delicacy. She made her way to the

front of the register; Evan thought about what brand of cigarettes she smoked. He guessed she was into Newports, and preemptively turned around to pull a pack off the shelf, grabbing them loosely and half hiding it in his long shirt-sleeve, ripping his hangnail off in the process, which hurt a lot more than he thought it would. A small cough emitted from behind him.

"Excuse me"

Evan spun around to face her a little too forcefully, flinging the Newports, and several flecks of blood over the checkout counter. They landed near her foot, not quite touching the edge of her shoe.

"Sorry ma'am, I thought you wanted a box of—or I mean, a package of these—those—sorry, uh—those Newports"

His words came out more tangled than expected. Ma'am. I called her ma'am. He resented the pink flush he knew was creeping up towards his cheeks. She looked at the cigarettes for a moment, then picked them off the floor the same way she'd plucked the green lighter off its stand moments ago.

"For the record, I'd never smoke Newports."

Her voice was lower than he expected, and she lingered on each syllable of the sentence like she was exceptionally bored. She eyed the ponies expectantly, and Evan flipped the box over to look for the barcode. His finger was still bleeding, and he looked up to apologize for the blood that would inevitably stain the woman's receipt, but instead, Evan made the kind of accidental eye contact everyone goes out of their way to avoid. It was a different woman's eyes he was looking into, he felt pinned to a white sheet under her gaze, her eyes almost black with macabre excitement. He thought about the lighter. If she wasn't smoking cigarettes, what would she be using it for. This is one sad, messed up motherfucker, he thought. But the moment lasted only for a fraction of a second, and then the woman's eyes returned to her passive glance, and Evan wasn't pinned to a sheet, and he scanned the barcode.

x x x

When Cindy was 16, she slashed her wrists open in a warm bath and watched herself bleed in the mirror on the wall across from her. She always thought it was disgusting that the movers who installed the bathroom furnishings years ago thought it would be funny to hang a mirror across from the tub, so you had to watch your naked body slowly shrivel every time you took a bath. Her mother had wanted to move the mirror ever since it had been put up, but it hadn't happened in

four years, and it probably never would. In that moment, as Cindy watched the water turn pink with blood, she thought she looked romantic, even beautiful. She liked the way her long hair (darker from soaking in the bath) slithered wet trails of water down her breasts, and the way her body looked so white against the pink water, a marble statue sinking cold and stiff into the bath. She'd laid her childhood toys on the toilet seat and window-sill to watch. Ten plastic ponies stood out against stuffed rabbits and tigers. Her mother found her in the bathroom thirty minutes later, near comatose and as white as the tub she floated in. Of course, an ambulance was called, her mother sobbed hysterically over her baby girl, and Cindy lay on the stretcher, eyes closed and still naked under the translucent white of the hospital sheet.

x x x

Evan was tired of his job. He had three weeks to move out of his mother's before whatever shit family who bought the house arrived and repainted over all the cigarette burns on the walls and ripped up the faded carpet and changed the light bulbs and did whatever else people do when they move into a new place. He had three weeks to move out to where? His car probably. Maybe he'd drive to California and live on the beach like a bum. That's what his mother had always called him anyways. It's my destiny Ma. You always told me I'd be a bum and that's what I'm gonna do; how do you feel now? But he knew it was a stupid idea as soon as the thought came to mind.

It was 7:13. Pony woman had taken forever. Evan took off the green apron he had to wear for his clerk position, and walked out of the convenience store through the automatic sliding doors, the final sheep of the day. He'd borrowed a Band-Aid from a box in the medical aisle to wrap up his finger, and it throbbed slightly under the too-tight seal of the bandage. He fumbled for a cigarette, and when he finally pulled one out of the battered package in his back pocket, it was broken. Evan smoked the crooked cigarette anyway, leaning on the drivers side of his car, and watched across the parking lot as pony woman was getting into her car. She had thick, shoulder length hair. It shone faintly in the few rays of sunlight that still managed to slant between the dusky trees in the August heat. He couldn't quite make out what color her hair was—one moment it looked dark, nearly black, but when she flicked her head slightly, the strands that were tossed in the air were auburn. Without warning, she looked up at Evan, startling him when she called out across the lot.

"Wanna know what I'm going to do with them?"

"What?"

"Wanna know what I'm gonna do with the ponies, dummy?"
"You're gonna give them to your... niece?"
"I hate children."

Evan didn't really like kids either. They freaked him out, some of the things they said. He remembered standing in line for a movie, and a little kid asking him why he'd paid all in quarters. Or once, while in a park, a different kid approached Evan and asked him if he wanted to see a dead bird. The boy's mother came running up after him, clearly trying to control her child, but he kept pointing to a fountain at the center of the park, yelling, "It's over there! The bird's over there!" Kids always seemed to be fascinated by stuff like that. Evan looked up at the woman again.

"So, what are you going to do with them?"

"I'll show you."

Evan flicked the butt end of the crooked cigarette onto the pavement and walked over to pony woman. There was a half-gallon of kerosene laying in the back seat of her car, along with an old, worn tarp.

"Wanna burn them with me, Evan?"

x x x

His name tag said "Evan" on it. He was probably nineteen, with swarthy eyes and hair like pitch.
"You know my name?"

"You work at a convenience store. You have a name-tag. I know your name."

She noticed how he'd looked at her purchase of the lighter and half dozen plastic ponies with mild interest, like he was taking notes. Cindy didn't know exactly why she called him over to burn the ponies with her; he could have easily stared at her like she was a freak, and gotten into his car without a word. But she couldn't help asking, leaning against her car door. She'd tried to say something more conversational like, "Hi", but instead it came out:

"Wanna know what I'm going to do with them?"

But Evan was all right, and he walked across the lot towards her, and the ponies, and the kerosene, and the tarp.

"Let's take a walk Evan."

Cindy knew there was a park only ten minutes away from the convenience store, which was a good thing, because she was anxious. The ponies always felt restless in their box just before they burned.

x x x

The earliest memory Evan could recall took place at the dinner table. He was eating a frozen dinner—beef stroganoff, in case that clears up some confusion—and picking at a scab on the side of his forehead. The scab wasn't ready to come off. It was stinging, blood oozing from around the edges, but Evan was determined to remove it. His mother looked up from across the table, and saw Evan picking at the scab. She only looked at him and said, "The basement stairs hurt yesterday, didn't they?"

The beef stroganoff felt like thick string. Every time he tried to swallow, shredded meat would get stuck, one end halfway down his throat, the other still sitting on his tongue. He pulled a piece out of his mouth and examined it, grey and covered in saliva. His mother smacked his hand and the meat flung onto the wall opposite him, barely missing her face.

"What did I tell you about playing with your food Evan? Don't you dare eat that way in front of your mother."

Evan sat up, his hand stinging along with the scab. He didn't want his dinner. His mother's eyes were shining bright and black in the half-light of the dim light bulb buzzing above them.

"You'll eat every last bite on your plate, I can sit here all night, you'll eat it all or so help me I will—" She faltered, milky tears traced down the side of her cheek, but she didn't look away from Evan. Her eyes were so bright and wide and black.

x x x

It was nearly nightfall by the time Cindy and Evan arrived in the park, and the leaves and grass and trees were all the same dusky blue color, broken by weak rays of light. The park closed at sunset, but they both stepped over the sign that forbade trespassing after dark.

"What's your name, by the way?"

"What do you want to know that for? Are you going to write me up for trespassing after hours?"

"I'm burning plastic in the woods with a person I've known for a half hour. Tell me your name."

"It's Cindy. My name's Cindy."

Cindy. Sounded like a combination of "cinders" and "candy". Cindy opened the box of plastic ponies, took out each one and lined them up so they faced her and Evan. They waited patiently with glossy smiles and big, black eyes. Evan could tell she'd performed this ritual hundreds of times before—the way she seemed to know exactly how much kerosene to pour over each tiny figure, the way she told Evan to move the tarp further away so it wouldn't catch fire, the way she threw the lighter on top of the plastic, like she was pointing a spotlight directly at the main attraction. The fluffy, pastel colored manes of the ponies were the first to go. For a few seconds, a stripe of fire burned down each of their backs and onto their tails, but then the fire crept down to their bellies, and twisted around their hooves until they were consumed in flames. They both sat on the grass, a few feet away from the blaze, and watched sparks of pink, swollen flesh pop in the dusk. The air was acrid, and Evan felt light headed. "I haven't eaten anything all day, Evan."

"All we eat at home is frozen dinners. I hate them. And today, some shithead bought thirty-four dollars and ninety nine cents worth of frozen beef stroganoff. I'd rather die than eat frozen beef stroganoff."

"People who do that make me worry about the rest of the population." Evan glanced over at Cindy.

"Alright, I know this is pretty fucked up." She looked pale, but unafraid.

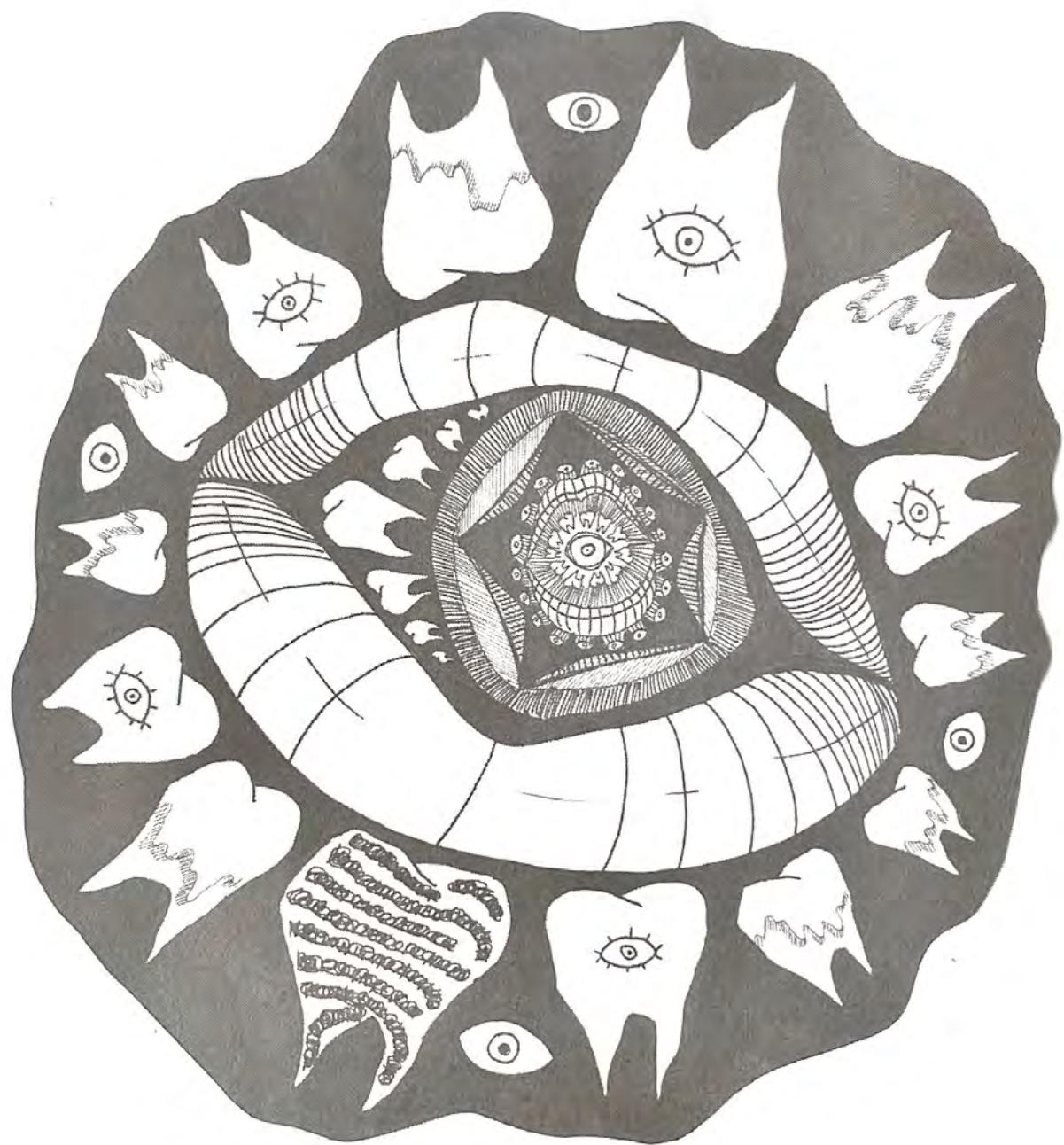
"Better than eating those frozen dinners though."

Evan laughed, because, yes, even burning plastic in a park with a random woman he'd met in the convenience store during the last seven minutes of his shift was better than being home, choking on processed meat and fabricated mashed potatoes, peeling scabs off his elbows and pulling at hangnails. Evan and Cindy sat in the park, now almost completely dark, the trees and grass lit only by the ponies. The ponies melted slowly, pink hooves expanding further and further across the grass, black eyes dripping down the length of their bodies, mouths gaping into garish smiles. After about ten minutes, the ponies were reduced to puddles, and the fire dwindled to a dull glow. Cindy smothered the fire, then scraped most of the melted plastic off of the grass and wrapped everything in the tarp.

"So that's it. That's what I do with the ponies."

"I'm glad I could witness it."

Evan walked back to his car alone. Cindy left shortly after she wrapped everything in the tarp—she mentioned something about needing to visit her mother—but he could tell she just wanted to leave. He unlocked and opened his car door. His bandaged finger was stiff and clumsy, and he fumbled trying to pull the keys out of the lock. Eventually they dropped on the ground, just under the driver's side door. There beneath the car door, a piece of paper waited expectantly. Evan noticed it was secured to the ground by a small blob of pink melted plastic. He lifted the piece of paper off the ground, the plastic pulling out like taffy, thin, fragile strands lengthening until they broke from the page completely. The paper had only one word on it: "Thanks". Below, Cindy had scrawled a number. Evan looked at the slip of paper for a long while. Finally, he stuck it in his back pocket. Then, stooping down, he scraped as much of the pink plastic off of the pavement as he could, and rolled it into a small ball. He placed the plastic ball in his alarmingly full ashtray. The plastic reminded Evan of that bird—a phoenix—the one that bursts into flames at the end of its life, only to be reborn from the ashes of its body. He remembered the promise of frozen dinners at home as he was putting his car in reverse, Cindy's slip of paper still stuck in his back pocket. His finger continued to throb under his bandage. He didn't want his dinner. He didn't want to go home.



QUARANTINE

LEA CEASRINE

X

“You lying, no good pendejo” she screeches from the streets,
talking to her boyfriend, f*** buddy, papi chulo,
the categories seem harmonious in the night,
when tequila and love collide.

His replies disintegrate amongst
the honking, the sporadic sirens,
and I assume they’ve made peace.

I press my coral cheek against the window,
fidget with the blinds,
and wait for the conversation to proceed.

Somebody talk to me- I’m six floors high- losing my mind
“Baby, please” pendejo pleads, clenching his Mickey D’s.
She, I, we, refuse to be your happy meal anymore.

Dionne returns home with McNuggets,
harp-shaped lips humming “I’m not lovin’ it”
she hates grease, but loves the musical.

“Why are you awake baby girl?”

Shh, the street is speaking to me

Melodious and congruous with Selena

Here in my room dreaming about you and me

She rocks me to sleep on the anniversary of her death,
as I surrender eavesdropping to the stars and the streets.

YOU CAN SLEEP
WHEN UR DEAD

ERICA BRUNNER

X

You can sleep when you're dead,

that's what Prisilla told me.
I had no idea

where I was,
but I was at the Command Center
in Oakland
in a warehouse.
Sliding metal doors
blended into stained concrete.

Prisilla talked about
Gary Glitter, Slade,
the disco ball she owned,
how she couldn't stop moving,
how every wardrobe
should be composed of
leather, lace, fringe, fur,
bones.

I was curled
on a mauve couch,
head rested on a cum stain.

The couch,
on a riser
next to a hot tub

out of commission
because of fungus.
The riser doubled
as a stage.

My bed, a stage.

Prisilla wanted me to stay awake
so she had someone to dance with.

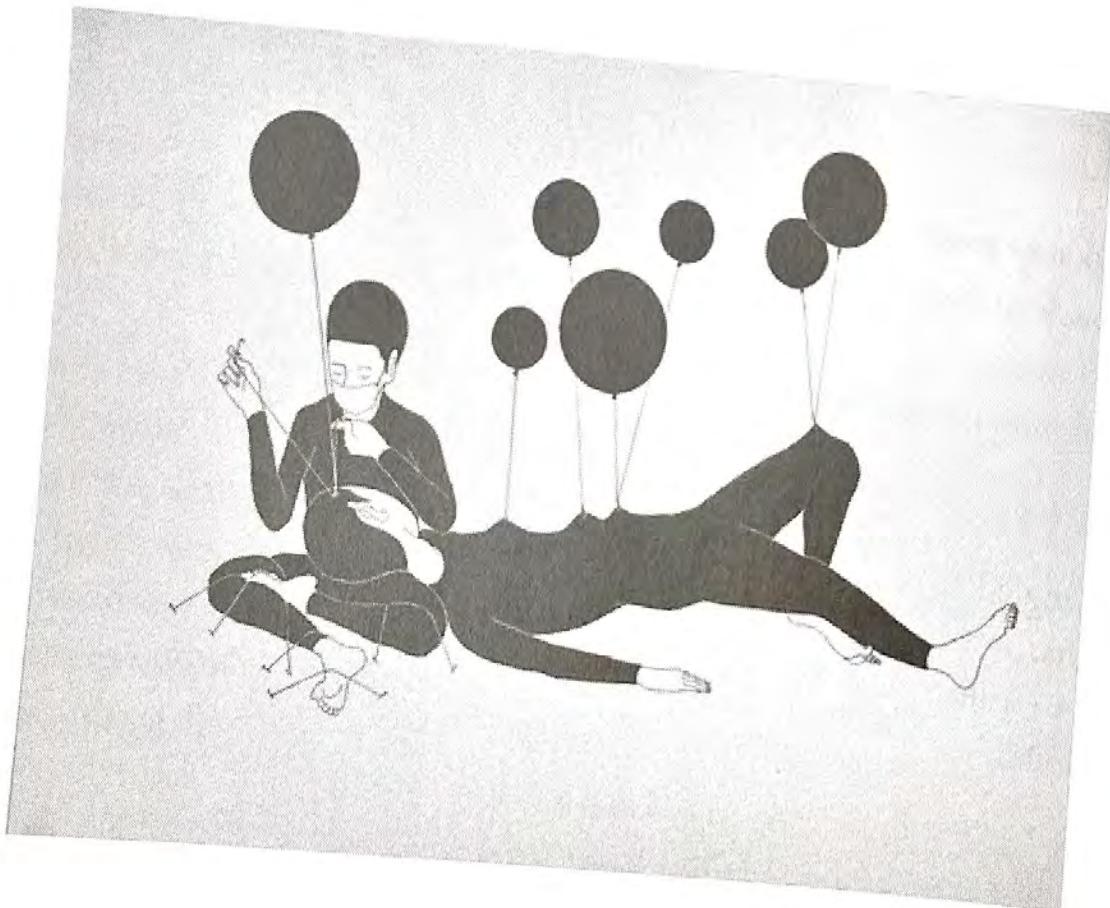
My eyes, concrete.

Prisilla wanted me to stay awake
so she wouldn't go back to Angel's room.
His room, covered in mirrors.
Where sex became about you and the mirror.

From high ceilings dangled
green and blue planets,
televisions mounted to walls
played Star Trek episodes
none
synced to the others.

Angel covered me with a blanket
the scar on his upper lip
so deep,
he whispered,
how can I resist,
those eyes.

The water in the morning was cold.
There was a television covered
in plastic
in the shower.
I washed myself
and watched Star Trek.



FILM REVIEW

JAKE GULLIVER

x

"Boy, last week I went down into town there, I mean, it ain't very far, but shit, good four miles? I dunno, doesn't really matter anyhow, it's just a long path when you're achin' for someone, I dunno. Anyhows, I went into town there, figured I'd see me a movie. I mean, I've been pullin' this god-damn hay, hotter than a dog in heat out here I'll tell you, shit. I've been pullin' this hay for near four months now and I ain't got nothin' from it! Drink another Rolling Rock, pull some hay, drink some more, shoot my gun at the sky and cry about god, sit alone in the tractor and stare at some more expanse, wonder why Millie done left good, drink some more, go to bed! Shoot boy, sometimes it's more than a man can handle out here. Ah, shit. Anyhow. Rode down there, not much in that town—a bar, sure. But Dave was probably there, and I owe him a few, he'd probably lick me good, no, can't go in there. They put a goddamn Sonic down there, I mean, it wasn't happy hour though so what the fuck? I mean, town is lousy with drunks and assholes anyway, I'm glad I never go down there. Shoot. Anyways. Well, next to that Sonic there, they got that theater, don't know what for, who in this town gonna see a goddamn movie? Got stuff to do, got steers to rope, beers to drink. Ah, I dunno, what's the point anyways? What'd that Nitch-a fella say? Something 'bout 'well god's dead so shoot'? I dunno.

Anyways, walk into the theater, got two movies playing, something called The Nut Job, and I ain't gonna see that, no way. Something else called her, figure it's about girls or something, so heck, 'give it a whirl,' I reckon. Shoot. Anyways, I go, 'okay, okay, already here, might as well, I mean, ain't got nothing to do, okay.' God I miss Millie. Anyways, so this movie starts, well shoot, I don't know WHAT'S goin' on here. This boy loves a machine? A machine can't love you back, boy!

got nothing to do, okay.' God I miss Millie. Anyways, so this movie starts, well shoot, I don't know WHAT'S goin' on here. This boy loves a machine? A machine can't love you back, boy! Guy needs a good woman, that's right. Some warmth, kinda like when you've just got yourself an 8-point buck and you feel like crawling inside of it to connect with some inner-part of it's being, become one with it and the whole darn cosmos. Ah shoot, Millie was warm. Anywho. All this future junk - machines is a'talkin' to everyone. Guy's got a funny lil mustache, couldn't stop starin' at that feller's lip-hair. There ain't naught but ONE CAN of Rolling Rock in this whole blasted production? What kinda...

So I get up, shake my head, no one's in the theater anyhow. Ask that lil girl at the counter to kindly give me my money back, say, 'I ain't got no time for man-loving-machine-bullshit' and she goes, 'alright" and kindly gives me my \$6 bucks back. Well, I take that and I buy a grilled cheese at Sonic. That's how it goes I guess."

JUNGLELAND

JESSICA GRISCTI

x

Kerry Dahlen sits behind the wheel of her older brother Rick's Buick. The car is wide and long and stretched out in front of her like a boat, stuffed starboard to port with her brother's friends. The windows are down and Kerry's hair whips into a frenzy around her face. The radio is blaring. They're cruising on the Long Island Expressway behind Rick, who's at the helm of the family station wagon, switching lanes like a true born-and-bred New Jersey driver. They're on their way to a Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band concert, and they will not be late.

Spotting an opening, Rick pulls the station wagon into the left lane without warning. He doesn't use his turn signal, believing like most of Jersey that its sole purpose is to give away his next move. Kerry eases the Buick to the left behind her brother. On the right, a car pulls up next to them, stereo pounding out the last track on Born to Run. A hearty cheer goes up from Kerry's backseat. The sign for their upcoming exit whizzes past. There are fists in the air and someone screams: "As we take our stand..."

In front of Rick, a car stops just short of the wall of traffic trying to merge to the right. Rick slows the wagon in time, but Kerry is watching her passengers in the rearview mirror, and she looks up just a second too late. Instead of slamming into the back of Rick and ruining both the cars, Kerry aims for the center divider and stomps on the breaks.

After the impact, the dull crunch of metal on concrete, Kerry looks around, to make sure no one is hurt. One of Rick's friends curses low. Rick is out of his car first, kneeling down on the

side of the highway, veins thrumming with adrenaline as he examines the scene. The left fender hangs over the wheel well. If he turns Kerry back out onto the road, the sharp edge will rub up against the tire until it's sliced clean to the rim. Learning to drive in Jersey gets you two things: a spectacular inability to pump your own gas, and a hefty inheritance of Daddy's road rage. Rick kicks the fender hard. It starts to move in the right direction, so he kicks it again. Then he bends over and grabs the edges of the fender with two hands and wrenches the twisted metal out of the way of the wheel.

He slaps the hood and eyes Kerry through the windshield. "C'mon, sis, you're good. We gotta keep going." Kerry shouts back to her brother: "We're not calling the cops?" But Rick is already buckled back into the wagon and revving the engine in triumph.

Hey what else can we do now? / Except roll down the window and let the wind blow back your hair. / Well, the night's busting open these two lanes will take us anywhere.

It is the thirtieth of December, 1980. Dean and Charlotte Dahlen are out of town, and they've entrusted the care of their two youngest to Rick, who is home in Jersey on winter break from Georgia Tech. Bruce is touring *The River* in the tri-state area this week. Rick has already missed three shows at The Meadowlands, mecca to the E Street Band, and Bruce played the first of three shows at Nassau Coliseum the night before. Rick has tickets for himself and five friends and he's not missing the concert just because Mom and Dad expect him to look after the kids. Even if it is the first time in months that Dean and Charlotte are happily spending time together.

Bren, the youngest, is already set up for a sleepover with a family friend across town. Kerry, on the other hand, is seventeen. She's recently been licensed to drive. And with too many friends coming to the concert and too little seats in the car, Rick has an idea.

"But I don't have a ticket," Kerry will protest before twisting the key in the ignition.

And Rick will laugh. "Don't worry about it. We'll get you one there. Scalpers, littler sister."

It's because of his conviction and the cocksure way he rolls his eyes that Kerry won't second guess the wisdom of her older brother's plan.

You pick up Little Dynamite, I'll pick up Little Gun / And together we're gonna go out tonight and make that highway run.

They arrive with plenty of time to spare and pull into the parking lot alongside seventeen thousand other Springsteen fans. They gather like a congregation on the asphalt taking beers from coolers in the trunk as the hymns of Bruce sound from the maw of every car stereo within listening distance.

Rick stops Kerry from grabbing a beer of her own. It's not because she's underage; she turns eighteen in eleven days and he doesn't care. He tells her they've got to get her a ticket first and there will be time for drinking later. Then he grabs her by the hand as they walk closer to the entrance, eyes peeled and ears open.

"Tickets, tickets." A greasy-looking guy, short, in a black satin baseball jacket calls out from the edges of the parking lot. "Tickets, tickets," he says, the refrain soft every time someone passes by. Rick starts heading in that direction, and Kerry follows at his heels.

The man's stringy hair is pulled back in a ponytail. A few feet away, a couple chats aimlessly. Rick approaches him. "How much?"

The scalper gives a number and Rick methodically counts the bills out of his wallet while the guy fishes the tickets from inside his shiny jacket. The two shake hands; the money is pressed tightly between their palms. The instant the man pulls back, the nameless couple springs into action. "

"Stop right there," the man says, tone authoritative. "Police."

"Run," Rick orders and he moves to bolt.

Kerry turns to go, but before she takes a single step, there is a voice in her ear and a hand on her wrist. "Stop."

The female officer has grabbed her. She whips her head around to see the male officer gripping her brother by the bicep. She wishes fervently that she'd stayed with Sean and Greg and the others back at the car. Another officer places handcuffs on the scalper and leads him off in the opposite direction.

The remaining two plain-clothed officers are firm as they steer Kerry and her older brother to a trailer parked at the edge of the lot. They usher the two of them inside. The trailer is long and skinny, with a closed door at one end. There is bench seating and harsh fluorescent lighting. Rick and Kerry are asked to sit.

"Do you know why you're here?" The male officer steps up closer to them.

On the uncomfortable wooden bench next to Kerry, Rick's eyes go wide, almost as if he scared. He doubles over, suddenly wracked with sobs. His shoulders shake and his voice come out wobbly when he starts to answer. "No," Rick wails, shuddering through the powerful burst of

shortened breath that rips through his thin frame.

Rick? Lost his nerve? Kerry goes cold next to him. She clenches her fists at her side. Suddenly, this feels very real.

Turn around the corner things got real quiet real fast / I walked into a Tenth Avenue freeze-out.

By the next summer, Rick and Kerry's parents have finalized their divorce. Charlotte has moved into a condo across town. Dean and his new wife, Beth, share the house on Whitmore Drive with Kerry and her dog, Spike.

Kerry spends her days that summer volunteering at the Rockaway Animal Clinic. She thinks she'd like to study to become a veterinarian, but the dirty work and the years of schooling—almost as much as it takes to become a real doctor—are starting to put her off of the idea. At night, she works the busiest shift at Denville Dairy scooping sundaes for families and aimless teenagers. One Friday night, after all of the underage employees go home, her boss breaks out the tequila, and blends margaritas for all of the eighteen pluses with the last of the sherbet. But for the most part, the summer of 1981 is hardly that much fun.

Because where Kerry loves Springsteen, Beth is a Bon Jovi Jersey girl. Her stepmother spends the afternoons lounging by the pool sipping cocktails. Beth's short blonde hair is always teased huge. In the evenings, she'll throw off the itsy bitsy bikini in favor of tight jeans, long tee shirts and huge belts pulled in to show off her bumblebee waistline. She wears Candies shoes with a pointed kitten heel. In the 1980s, they all looked plastic, something like a stylish Dr. Scholl's shoe, and they came in every color. This is how she's dressed the first time Kerry catches her snorting lines of coke off the glass coffee table in the living room. Beth is two years older than Kerry and this is the first summer Rick doesn't come home.

She sits on the porch of her daddy's house / But all her pretty dreams are torn / She stares off alone into the night / With the eyes of one who hates for just being born.

Inside of the police trailer, the female officer steps closer to Rick. "So you didn't know that buying tickets like this, off the street, scalping them, is illegal?"

"Of course not!" Rick cries. "We didn't have a ticket for my sister." He muddles through an ex-

planation, flinging phrases like, “people do it all the time and how was I even supposed to know?” Then he finishes off with a great lament: “I didn’t even want to take her here but my parents made me!”

Kerry starts to open her mouth to protest. The cops turn to look at her, and she finds that her lips won’t form the words she’s thinking.

“They went out this weekend and stuck me with the kids,” Rick says, petulant.

Kerry is stiff beside him. They grew up together and she has never seen Rick like this, not once. Through the worst of childhood scrapes, every time Rick and Bren would come home from the dirt bike track behind their house smudged with grime and all cut up, he would never shed a tear. Once, when he took antagonizing Kerry a step too far, she smacked his head against the wall. He sported a goose egg on his forehead for a week afterward—it was a horrible purplish blue the first day and a sickly green for the last three—until it faded and his skull shrank back to a normal size. Even then, he didn’t make a sound, except to mutter obscene names for his sister when Mom wasn’t looking.

“They all told me we could just buy a ticket at the show. It wasn’t supposed to be like this.” Rick is full out bawling now. There are fat tears rolling down from the corners of his eyes. Kerry keeps silent, biting her lower lip.

And when you realize how they tricked you this time / And it’s all lies but I’m strung out on the wire.

Because of the divorce, the next three years will throw Kerry’s idyllic Jersey adolescence into turmoil. Kerry doesn’t get along with Beth and tries endlessly not to outright resent her father for bringing the woman into her home.

By late Spring of her junior year, the pressure has become unbearable. Kerry has turned eighteen by then, so she and three friends often sign themselves out of school. Maryanne and Nancy meet Kerry and Venisa at the closest liquor store and pick up a case of beer. V stashest it in the back of the car next to the beach towels and bags, then Kerry takes the wheel of the Buick, and drives them an hour and a half down the coast to Ocean Grove.

The girls rent a hotel room for the day so they have some place to use a bathroom and stash their things. It’s a ritual they’ll repeat three or four times until Kerry graduates, losing afternoons in sun and booze and pizza on the boardwalk on the best coast along the Eastern seaboard.

*'Cause down the shore everything's all right / You and your baby on a Saturday night / Nothing
matters in this whole wide world / When you're in love with a Jersey girl*

The police trailer is cold.

Rick is still gasping around his words. "It was just supposed to be me and my friends. I'm home from college this week and I didn't want to—I wasn't supposed to—It's not my fault!" He doubles over again, inconsolable, and submits himself to the sobbing.

The cops begin to soften. Shoulders falling, they step away. Their stern expressions melt. "It's okay, son."

Kerry kooks up sharply. It's okay? All of that and it's just okay? They ask that Rick never do this again. "It's illegal," they remind him. "Do you understand?"

Big brother nods, huffing along with his wheezing breath, and allows the cops to press him forward out of the trailer and into the open night. The female officer hands Rick the money they gave the scalper. Dumbfounded, Kerry follows.

Behind them, the door to the trailer shuts. Kerry reaches over for Rick. "It's okay, see? They let us go..."

Rick swipes the back of his hand across his eyes. He's standing tall, proud. He is the very picture of upright masculinity. "God, I thought we'd never get out of there." He looks nothing like he did the last twenty minutes, when he was sniffling into the corner of his shirt like his puppy had just been killed.

Kerry stops dead and crosses her arms. "Rick!"

He whips around, several feet ahead of her now. "What are you waiting for? There's only half an hour left before doors open."

"Are you kidding me?" Kerry doesn't move.

"We have to get you another ticket, c'mon!"

*And the Magic Rat drove his sleek machine / Over the Jersey state line / Barefoot girl sitting on
the hood of a Dodge / Drinking warm beer in the soft summer rain*

Two days after the sherbet margaritas at Denville Dairy in the summer of 1981, Kerry is

diagnosed with mononucleosis. In the two weeks that follow, she can hardly get out of bed.

Dean is trying to sell the house. He and Beth have plans to pack it up and cross the country to southern California. Every other day that summer, while Dad is at work, the phone rings. The realtor wants to show the home to a new set of clients. Mostly because of Beth, the place is consistently a mess. Kerry comes up with a new excuse on the regular as to why they'll need another hour before the realtor can stop by.

On the last day Kerry stays at the house on Whitmore Drive. Beth is still in bed midday. Burdened by mono, Kerry can hardly expect to clean the entire house by herself. She goes to Beth in the master bedroom and asks for her help.

"No!" Beth shrieks. "It's not even that dirty."

Kerry reminds Beth that she has mono, and the only reason they're selling the goddamned house is so that she and Dean can move away.

"Oh, sure, you ignore me and you're mean to me, you tell your father things about me that aren't true and now you want my help?"

When the realtor arrives, Kerry shows the group into the foyer and apologizes. "Give me just one minute. I have to make sure the lady of the house is done in the bedroom." In all likelihood, the woman is high as a kite and Kerry doesn't need to showcase that particular scene to a bunch of strangers in the living room.

When Kerry asks her stepmother to leave the bed, Beth calls her a bitch. It is the last in a string of injustices, and Kerry decides she's not standing for this a second longer. She retreats upstairs to her own bedroom, where she calls her father at work. Dean asks to speak to Beth. Kerry stands at the balcony over the foyer and shouts down to her stepmother to pick up the phone. One story below, the realtor and a young family wander throughout the house.

Minutes later, Kerry hears the sound of the phone clicking off and Beth's scream reverberates throughout the house. "How dare you call your father on me!" Then the small blonde woman is out in the foyer, in a complete rage, running up the stairs toward Kerry, every single hair out of place.

Kerry locks herself in her bedroom behind a solid Maplewood door. She misses her brother; she misses the days when she didn't have to deal with this alone. Kerry makes a second phone call, this time to her mother across town: "Beth is in a rage. You've got to come pick me up. Now."

There is pounding on Kerry's bedroom door. Beth is still screaming.

With one foot out the bedroom window, fifteen of her favorite albums under one arm and her dog Spike under the other, Kerry jumps down onto the roof of the garage. Behind her, Beth splits the bedroom door in two.

Charlotte pulls into the driveway. She leaves the car running, and runs straight to her daughter, with her arms outstretched so she can catch the dog she hates as Kerry lowers him to the ground. Then Kerry hops down alongside them and gets into her mother's car.

They are the only two people in the driveway. No one knows what happened to the realtor or the young family.

You sit and wonder just who's gonna stop the rain / Who'll ease the sadness, who's gonna quiet the pain

Despite almost getting arrested at Nassau Coliseum, or perhaps in spite of the whole ordeal, Rick insists they get Kerry another ticket. But she refuses to take part in the next transaction.

"Fine," Rick huffs. "I'll take care of it for you."

Kerry sits on the trunk of the Buick with Sean, Greg, and the others, while Rick stalks around the edges of the parking lot again.

He tracks down another scalper easily. The man has nose bleed seats on the very, very cheap. Which is fine. No one in his right mind sits down during a stadium show put on by Bruce and the E Street Band, so Rick figures Kerry will just come stand with them.

What takes a little bit more convincing, however, is getting the scalper to come back with him to the group of friends tailgating around the radio. "Look," Rick says, "I don't want to get arrested." He explains that he just wants to hand over the money inside his car, and after a few moments of deliberation, the scalper agrees. He follows Rick back, and the two of them get into the Buick.

Kerry spends the entire fifteen-second transaction trying to look like she doesn't know them even though she's leaning up against the car they're inside. When the scalper leaves, Kerry lets out all of the air from her lungs—air that she didn't even realize she was holding hostage.

Rick claps her on the back and with his other hand holds out the ticket, loosely between his fore and middle fingers. "Don't lose this, sis."

Badlands, you gotta live it everyday, / Let the broken hearts stand / As the price you've gotta pay / We'll keep pushin' till it's understood / and these badlands start treating us good.

Decades later, after Beth is gone and Dean has married his third wife, he's in the hospital dying of alcohol-induced throat cancer. Rick and Kerry are in San Diego to help Sharon sort out the house and likely say goodbye to their father.

Kerry and her dad on are better terms than when she was a teenager—something about only having one family and making the best of the one you were stuck with. It was much easier after Dean met Sharon, sweet and kind-hearted and age-appropriate. Plus, Dean and Sharon have always been great with Kerry's kids.

Rick and Kerry sit chatting at their father's bedside as he sleeps. All day, he's been trying to convince them to let him go home. They tried every manner of excuse. Dean didn't care for, "Dad, it's for your health," or "You're not going to get better if you leave."

So Rick tells him instead, "Dad, none of your clothes are here."

Dean reaches across the gap and grips his son by the hips, with a much stronger hold than what should be capable of a dying man. "You're about my size, son. Give me your pants and then we can go."

Finally, about fifteen minutes later, he tires himself out enough to drift into fretful sleep. This lasts all of twenty minutes before he jolts himself awake. Dean stretches out an arm. "Rick," he croaks. "Rick, come here."

"Yeah, Dad?" Rick leans in towards his father, but the words are loud enough that Kerry can still hear.

"You know where my gun is? Back at the house, in the den, right? Go get it. We'll shoot our way out of here."

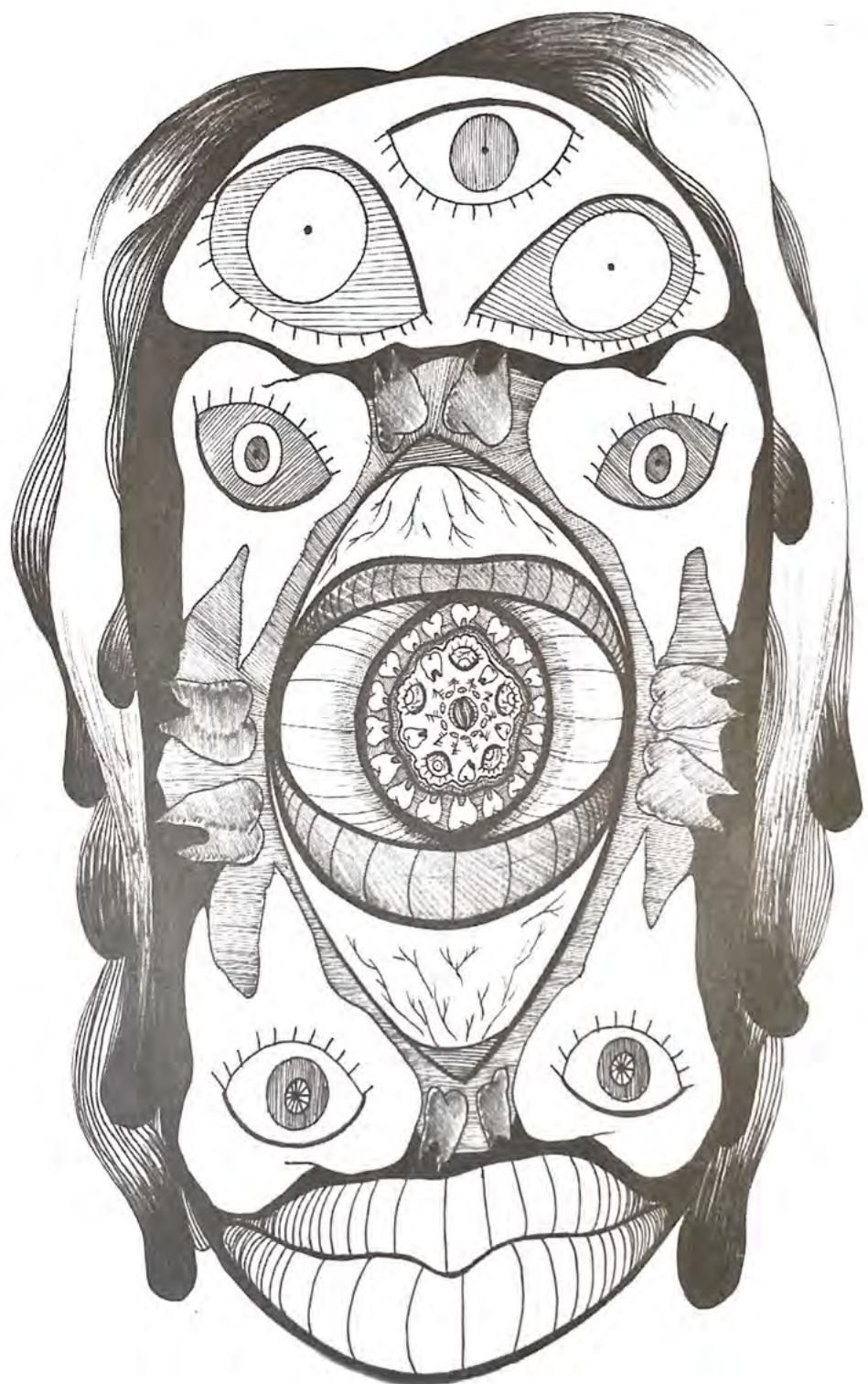
Rick looks over at his sister, and together they shake their heads, searching for the appropriate reaction. It's something they'll find much funnier years later, and they'll whisper it to each other as a last-ditch solution when either of them is facing a problem they just can't fix.

But for now, Kerry is immeasurably grateful that her big brother is here by her side.

They just stand back and let it all be / And in the quick of the night / They reach for their moment / And try to make an honest stand / But they wind up wounded / Not even dead / Tonight in Jungleland.

The thirtieth of December 1980 was a typical Bruce Springsteen show: three to four hours, so loud the audience could feel the music in their veins—capped off at the end with five sweat-

soaked encores. Bruce does all of Kerry's favorites; "Candy's Room," the singles off Born to Run, "Rosalita," and "Incident at 57th Street." She still claims that The River is one of his lesser works, but thirty years later, that very album sits framed on her mantelpiece—a testament to rock and roll, teenage recklessness, and New Jersey.



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EMILY GOULD

AN INTERVIEW
BY MARIA PADUANO

THE INTERNET, FEMALE NARRATIVE, AND THE ETCH-A-SKETCH OF THE BRAIN:
AN INTERVIEW WITH
EMILY GOULD

X

MARIA PADUANO

You moved from writing memoir to fiction. What was that transition process for you, and what qualities of your memoir writing remains in your fiction writing?

EG: I stopped writing in the first person for a couple of years after *And The Heart Says Whatever* came out. Both the critical reaction [to first-person writing] and also the reaction from the people I love was really negative. Some of it was positive, but the negative stuff always stands out a lot more, especially with the way it affected my family. I felt sort of crippled. Even when I tried to write in the same mode, I didn't have access to the same uninhibited way that I had been able to write before.

So I had to try something different, because otherwise I wasn't going to be able to write anything. There was a solid year of me trying different things and kind of failing at all of them. It was kind of good in retrospect. It gave me perspective on the purpose of this kind of work. That's when I started working on *Emily Books*—just because I had to do something and it had to be different. I also started writing in the third person as an exercise, and to trick myself. I was still writing about myself, but I was writing in third person and pretending like I wasn't. That got very boring and kind of unsustainable, at which point I started to actually write fiction. It got to the point where I had a short draft and a really crappy draft. I decided to show it to Keith, my now husband, and I said, "I don't want to know

anything except if I should keep going with it." He was like, "you should keep going." He might have said that no matter what, but I did keep going, and it took me about four years.

You recently defended Lena Dunham, who has been criticized for some of the content in her memoir *Not That Kind of Girl*, and you spoke out against the people critiquing her experiences. Why did you feel the need to step in, and what do you think is the importance of memoir writing?

EG: Yeah, what is the point of memoir writing if not to present your life and your decisions in order to be judged for them? I'm just really attracted to first-person writing. Especially when women write it. It's something that I feel really strongly about. Just the power of women's narratives, when all kinds of women are being foregrounded—because a lot of what most of us have read has come from a man's point of view, and that hasn't gotten less true. I feel that women are telling their stories as straightforwardly as possible. There's a huge sociopolitical justification for that but also, I'm very gossipy and voyeuristic. I really enjoy learning about the particular details of other people's lives. That's just my taste. It's politically important, but it's also just really fun to read.

When you started writing *Friendship*, what kinds of themes were you thinking about? Were there elements of your personal life influencing pieces of the story and the characters?

EG: I wanted to write a story where both men and romance weren't important to the story. I wanted to try something different and make the most important relationship in the story be between two women and have it not be a romantic relationship. My friend, the author Barbara Browning, said to me, "Why don't they just have sex together and figure out all of their problems that way?" But that would have ruined the point of the book. It's actually a lot harder to be best friends with someone than to be in a relationship with someone, because you can't just have sex with them to solve your problems. So I just really wanted to explore that dynamic and, obviously, I have a best friend...but the characters in the book aren't us. They started out as being aspects of me, but as I've continued to revise the book,

it's turned into something different. I always thought it was bullshit when authors were like, "The characters just came and they spoke to me." But that's kind of what happened once I figured out who they were.

Describe Emily Books for me. What is it?

EG: Three years ago my best friend Ruth Curry and I were sort of underemployed, and we had both been reading a lot of e-books for the first time. We both wanted there to be a way of buying e-books without supporting these mega-corporations in the same way that you can obviously do with print books. New York has a ton of small bookstores where someone knows your taste and will tell you what book to read. There just wasn't that kind of shopping experience for e-books and we said, "Well, how can we do that?"

The only way we could figure out how to make it special would be to start a subscription where people would get a book a month that was our pick. We're trying to experiment this year with Copyhouse press, which is a publisher in Minneapolis. We want to publish a physical book with them that we'll edit, market, and sell as part of our subscription. I think it's weird that we started out thinking that e-books are the future because what we hear from a lot of our readers is, "I love all of your picks and I bought them all, but not from you, because I don't want to read e-books." And I can't really argue with that. I still read a lot in both formats, but I totally see the place having a physical book in your drawer.

In the past, you've talked about how Emily Books creates a literary community for those who may not live in places like New York City, where independent bookstores and book clubs are commonplace. What is the importance of having that kind of community?

EG: I think it's been interesting and useful for us to get people together whether it's in a virtual space or in real life. It feels as though a real community has sprung up around these books, and that's really exciting because you create the circumstances and things will happen that surprise you.

How do you intend to engage with feminism in the future through your project?

EG: We have gotten to a certain place with the books that we have picked and the audience we are reaching, and I think we have done a great job of working through all the books that we considered cult classics. We are now discovering these other writers, which then lead us to other books. I think now we're challenged with the question of how we make the community that we are building truly inclusive of everyone. That's really hard; we have to do the hard, uncomfortable work of examining our own tastes, because this is a project that's about taste. When we look at the books we have picked, they are mostly by white women. Why is that? I would say the challenge of the next year is making sure we're not just selectively listening to the voices we want to be listening to but that we are also listening to the voices that are challenging us.

How about in your own writing?

EG: I'm not really sure what I'm going to do next, in terms of whether I'm going to write fiction that's close to my own experiences. Fiction that's in the same world as my experiences—as in, you know, not Narnia—or whether I'll be attracted to writing more straightforwardly.

What would you say are the major differences of writing online and writing for print?

EG: I think I've gained a lot from being edited. I used to think that my first thought was my best thought. I felt that it was possible to overwork things and make them worse, which I guess it is. I don't know if it's possible for me to overwork things. Whenever I'd had an opportunity to work on something for a longer time and go through several drafts with it, it's gotten better. That's what happens. But sometimes you think better of stuff. There is kind of a freedom and immediacy of blog writing. They're both good, but they're really different modes, and certainly I'm a lot prouder of my non-bloggy writing. Then again, there's a lot of blog writing that was really good, and I feel it was important on the day that I did it.

Have you had the experience of writing something on a blog and then deciding that it is something you want to continue to work on?

EG: I guess I've worked through some ideas and then later they have become something that was more fully fleshed out. It can be a little bit dangerous to feel like you've gotten something out of your system by blogging about it. But you don't want to revisit it. The thing about being edited is that it's really great for your work, but it's super un-fun. It can be really excruciating. I've gotten to the point with everything that I've ever written that's been really long and heavily edited where I give up—do whatever you want, just let it be done.

Is there something about the medium of the Internet that makes people more vicious or has that always gone on?

EG: It seems like it must be something that has become more visible. The problem, though, is that it is very visible to people who are on the receiving end of it. It seems very obvious to me, but I don't think it's obvious to people who haven't experienced it. Even men who write about really hot-button topics certainly experience attacks, but the way [these attacks] are experienced is different, and the volume of the criticism is different. It's hard to say whether it's better now or worse, considering that a certain level of hatred towards women is accepted in general culture. I was actually thinking about this earlier this week because I received this huge wave of people being really hideously inappropriate. When you write about Lena Dunham its like, brace yourself. I have no idea how she does it, I really don't. I think something especially weird is going on right now with Twitter. Twitter seems to be at some weird infection point. I think we all need to step back from the idea that ar-
good idea. Yeah, I've blocked a lot of people. It felt kind of cleansing—like, great, now all the bad people are gone. But there's actually an infinite supply of bad people.

Despite all of this you seem to really love the Internet as a forum for expression and conversation. Can you talk a little bit about what you think blogs and sites like Twitter and Tumblr have encouraged or made space for?

EG: I just meet really good people through it. Most of my close friends, except for people that I've known for forever, are people that I've met either through work or through the Internet. And that's great. I love communicating in that way. I love seeing the sort of subtle connections between social worlds explicitly revealed on the Internet. That's fascinating and cool. I mean, there's a huge negative side of it outside of people being critical in really gross, sexist ways. It's designed to be addictive. I definitely have to put it away in a box in a closet when I'm working in a sustained way on something. But it's really hard to unplug. I don't have any interest in doing it for a sustained amount of time. A month is good. And you just kind of shake the Etch-A-Sketch of your brain. But I'm obviously not one of those writers who has headphones on and is very protective from the outside world. I love the outside world. I like working and having jobs. I believe that all of that stuff enriches my work, and it also makes it possible for me to not feel like this is the only thing that matters. The stakes can seem really high when it's you alone with your book, but it's not, it's just a book.

X

BEVERLY AND JOE

DANIELA BIZZELL

X

"Lilah isn't doing good in school," Beverly says, turning her head and taking her eyes off the road.

"Yeah? How's that?" Joe keeps his face forward, resting his dirty Nike on the dashboard of their '98 Pontiac.

"I guess she's been beating kids up. The teacher told Ma when she came and picked her up today."

"When'd you find all this out? I been gone only two minutes."

"She called while you were inside gettin' smokes. She sounded real upset."

"Why'd Ma even go into school in the first place? Causin' all this trouble," Joe says, spitting brown, nicotine-laced phlegm out the window.

"She didn't, 'parently the teacher was standing with Lilah outside where parents pick up their kids. I guess she wanted to talk to us, but Ma told her we were busy."

"Busy with what?"

"Joey, how the hell am I supposed to know? Does it look like I was there with her?"

Beverly and Joe say nothing. Beverly enjoys it though, and thinks about how nice it is to drive down quiet roads. She remembers why she likes upstate New York, why she likes their little town of Varna. The town is soundless and pretty when it wants to be. Though the fields are slowly dying under the July heat, the withering corn stalks sway in a golden wave sounding like an ocean tide, breaking the noiselessness. She hears their movement and breathes easy. The deep-grey asphalt of Route 366 seems to go on forever, the yellow strip stretching for miles. She exhales, slow; another release.

"So what are we gonna do? She's kicked outta school for three days and Ma says she doesn't



wanna handle a wild-child eight-year-old and a baby," Beverly says, making a right at the stop sign.
"How the hell am I supposed to know?"

Beverly grips the steering wheel. The cracks in her cuticles turn bright red while her knuckles lose color. "Well, Joey, you're her Daddy. You're supposed to be taking care of us so why don't you figure it out."

Joe isn't shaven. His jeans look as if he's been working at Jimmy's old shop, the tiny shack down on Route 366. They are covered in dust, black grease-like stuff, and have rips on the knees. But Beverly knows that's not what the stains are from. She knows he's not working when he goes to Jimmy's. His grey and red flannel has a hole in the armpit and the wife-beater underneath stays hidden. He hasn't taken it off in eight days.

"That wild-child shit comes from you. It ain't my fault she's just like her mother, Miss wild-child Bevy." He grabs a brown-paper bag from the floor of the car, with the neck of a clear bottle peaking out from the top as he puts it on his lips.

"The window's wide fucking open, Joey. What if a sheriff sees this while we're driving on by?" She snatches the bag from his hand in one swift motion, takes a swig and tosses it out her driver's side window, all while the car is still moving. The burn of five-dollar vodka drowns him out for a moment, letting Beverly hear nothing as the last bit trickles down her throat.

He punches the glove box and calls Beverly a dumb cooze while his hands flail in the air. She continues to drive. She remembers why she doesn't like upstate New York, how nice a big city might be, far away from all the people back in Varna.

"We don't need no more trouble. Ma said other stuff while I was on the phone with her," Beverly says.

"Yeah, like what?"

"Like she don't wanna keep paying for our place and keep watching our kids. She says her money's runnin' out cause of us."

"She gets her checks every month. Her money ain't runnin' out, Bevy. Don't be stupid."

Beverly doesn't like it when Joe calls her stupid. She doesn't respond to him and continues looking at the road so he can't see her face. She's not the stupid one. The last time Joe worked was when Lilah was still in diapers. Beverly would wait for him to come home every night, excited to bring him a warm dinner and curl up with him on the sofa, even if their dinner was a box of mac

n' cheese and even if their sofa was a hand-me-down from the previous owners of their trailer – it made her feel purposeful, like one of those housewives from the fifties.

They break at another stop sign. No other cars are around, and Beverly inches closer and closer to the perpendicular road. They're the only ones here, but she doesn't start driving. She looks at a few small houses gracing a barren street with life. The sun is high and everything still has that gold tinge. Even the rust on their car looks a little golden. Beverly always keeps the windows rolled down when the sun's out, showing her face and singing along to whatever's on the radio. She presses her foot on the pedal a little harder than she needs to and makes a right-hand turn down another back road. She still doesn't speak.

"I could work for Jimmy or something, do mechanic work and stuff," Joey says lighting a Newport and hanging his hand out of the window.

"Yeah, great idea, Joey. Hangin' with Jimmy, the meth-head." Beverly pushes her foot harder on the gas pedal. "Gettin' all messed up and using up paychecks for dope."

"You shuddup, Bev, whereda you get off? I don't see you with a job." He spits and takes another drag.

"Listen, that telemarketing place said they'd call when they have a free spot. I'm next in line." She pokes herself in the chest with her thumb. "And there ain't no dope heads there – that place is clean and sterile, and they pay lots for you to sit on a nice cushy chair, talkin' to people."

"Now you just sound like some sorta priss. They ain't never gonna call. You and I both know that."

Beverly turns her head in a defeat she'll never let Joe see. Her hair gets stuck in her Dollar Tree Berrylicious lip gloss, smearing pink-tinted goop across her cheek as it whips around with the wind. She keeps thinking about the telemarketing job, about how good it will feel when she gets hired and how Joe will be wrong. Once she starts making money, she won't call him stupid, she'll just laugh and make him come with her when she deposits her paychecks.

She wants to make herself look more beautiful. Beverly turns to the backseat looking for the new red-pink blush she tossed back there a few days before.

"Dammit, Bev, couldya watch where you're driving?"

The car swerves over the yellow median, into the next lane, as Beverly sifts through Monster cans, back-pocketers of Georgi Premium Vodka, some old shoes that had once fit their daughter, and Joe's old BB gun he used to shoot squirrels with while he was drunk.

"Why don't you make yourself useful and grab the wheel, 'stead of sitting there and doin' nothin'?"

"You gonna get us killed."

She turns back and holds on to the wheel while pulling the overhead mirror down to fix her make-up, ignoring him.

"Maybe you should take on after me and look in the mirror once in a while. You look a hot mess, all stained and greasy, smellin' like smoke and booze."

"At least I don't look like some kind of hooker."

Beverly folds the mirror back up after fixing her gloss. Her eyes are dark, eyeliner and shadow piled on. She stares at Joe.

"Now what the hell is wrong with what I've got on? Excuse me for wearing clothes that fit me good."

"You look like some kinda Hooters girl with your tits hanging out like that."

She adjusts her light-pink tank top. "You ain't never been to Hooters, you don't know what the hell you're talking about."

He lights another cigarette. "So where in the hell are we going?"

They're at a red light across the street from a lumberyard. Outside on a large banner, in big, bold red print reads "WE ARE NOW HIRING."

"I ain't going in there." Joe says, crossing his arms.

"Yeah, you are. You're just being lazy, this place is good and you know it."

"I don't know shit, I'm not lifting up wood for uh living."

Beverly feels her face heating up. "Well you ain't doing much else."

"Just like your mama, always nagging and forcing me to do shit I don't wanna do."

The light turns green and Beverly spins the wheel and pulls on to the shoulder of Route 13. She snatches the cigarette out of Joe's mouth and sticks it in her own, taking a deep drag, closing her eyes, and keeping them that way. Joe doesn't speak and Beverly's voice is calm as she puts the car in park. "Ever since mama walked in on you flying higher than a kite she's wanted to cut us off. That's not my fault, that's your fault, Joey. So now you gotta do something about it or else we shit outta luck. I ain't living in Hillside Acres my entire life and you know that."

"Don't act like you ain't never been high with the kids 'round."

"They was asleep, Joe. It was real late at night." She says, punching Joe in the arm. He always

picked the one detail out of all the things she said or did to make her look bad. The one thing that made her seem like a bad mother. He never talked about the books she found at the Salvation Army, the ones that helped Lilah learn to read or the homemade dinners after work. It was always just the bad stuff.

"That ain't the point."

"Fine. That's what you want? Money? I swear, all you females talk about is money."

Cars have been honking as they speed by the Pontiac, parked haphazardly on the highway. The rear of the car is crossing over the white line, sticking out into traffic. Tires screech and car horns fade as drivers speed by. Inside the vehicle the couple ignores the sounds coming from the highway. Trucks swerve to avoid hitting rusted metal.

"There's a Dunkin' Donuts at that gas station a mile up." Joe continues. "I'll see if they're hiring, as long as it'll stop you from bitchin'."

Beverly's voice becomes quieter, "Yeah, that could be nice."

"I don't wanna hear it, just drive the damn car."

"That's all I wanted, Joey." Beverly likes winning these fights, as these small wins remind her that she's the one that keeps this family going and that Joey would be nowhere without her. The Pontiac merges back into traffic and she drives toward the local Dunkin-Donuts-gas-station, singing in a soft, victorious falsetto.

She pulls into an almost empty parking lot that faces Route 13. Joe exits the car and steps on a half-smoked cigarette. He slams the passenger door behind him.

"Good luck, baby," she shouts out from the open window.

Beverly pulls down the mirror again and begins applying more Berrylicious. She follows Joe through the reflection in the small rectangular glass in the rearview mirror, watching him hoist up his pants as he walks. She then becomes distracted again by her matted, blonde hair and tries to untangle it with her fingers. They get stuck and she loses a plastic stick-on French-manicured nail within a snarl.

Her nose scrunches as she rips apart strands of yellow while the detached nail glue becomes a sticky ball that hides behind the tangles. She ignores the glue in her hair and tries to press the nail back onto her right index finger. It falls and lands on a mound of cigarettes that was filling up one of the cup holders, smoked all the way to the filter. With delicacy, she picks it up and places it on



the dashboard, leaning over to open the glove box, hoping she left the nail kit, or at least some extra adhesive, somewhere in the car.

She's sifting around and finds an old envelope with a return address from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and tears a bit of adhesive from the back. She sticks it onto her real nail and presses the fake one back down, pushing and counting to thirty. After thirty seconds it falls back off.

She stops trying and turns the radio up and grabs a half-smoked Newport from the pile, lighting it with her hand hanging out the window. A breeze cools off her face and it makes her appreciate her little, upstate town all over again. She feels refreshed and a little peaceful. She closes her eyes and exhales another puff of smoke. Twenty-five minutes go by and she knows, she just knows, Joey's sitting in some office talking to one of the managers, smiling and shaking hands. It's when her eyes reopen that she notices Joe in the rearview mirror, speed walking to the car with a donut box and an extra-large iced coffee. She adjusts the mirror and scrunches her nose again, unbuckling her seatbelt and turning her body to face a sweaty-looking Joe.

Before she can move, he slides into the passenger seat and tells her to drive. Beverly looks down at the mess on Joe's lap. The giant donut box has dents around it and coffee is spilled all over his hand. "What's all this? Did you talk to anyone? Did you get an interview?"

"Woman, can we just get out of this place?" Joe keeps looking behind his right shoulder, then his left.

"Where'd all this stuff come from?" Her voice is quiet.

His voice gets louder as he yells more directions and it makes Beverly's heart beat fast. She puts the car in reverse.

She halts before the area where parking lot meets road. "Left or right?"

"Does it look like I give a flying fuck? Just drive to anywhere." She turns left, away from town, quickly pushing 80 MPH. She feels like she should be going fast because Joey's voice is so serious and he sounds nervous. "Slow it the fuck down. Are you trying to kill us?"

Beverly slows down so she can turn onto a side road and after a few minutes of driving she pulls onto the gravel shoulder near high grass, brown and yellow.

She looks at Joe's lap again. "Can you tell me what the fuck that was all about?"

"They ain't hiring."

"Well, you were in there for a while, Joey. You must've been talking to someone."

"Could you just leave it, they ain't hiring." She wasn't going to leave it. She felt her face heat up. "Joe, tell me what happened, I need more than what you're giving me."

"Fine, Bev, you want more? They didn't want some stupid son-of-a-bitch working for their Dunkin Donuts, ya happy? Happy that they didn't want me?" Beverly sinks into her seat. She lets the quiet mix with Joe's heavy breathing, lets it permeate through her skin. She tries to say sorry, to apologize, to call them the stupid ones. But no sound comes out.

"I figured I'd bring ya back something." Joe hands her the sticky cup half-filled with an iced caramel latte.

Beverly opens up the doughnut box. Inside lay a sloppy assortment of donuts, some crumbled and some oozing out Boston crème after being tossed around. She keeps the same look of confusion on her face, her face still hot, still no sound. They don't look anything like the doughnut holes they sell down at the Velero gas station, the doughnut holes that sit there for weeks until someone marks them half price. They're big and fresh looking and colorful and Beverly feels a little giddy.

"I figured that if they ain't gonna give me a job or even an interview, at least I could get some donuts out of 'em."

"But I take it you didn't pay for these?" She finally speaks, but she feels small, she can hear it her voice.

"Some dumbass left 'em on the corner with all his stuff. He went to get all the sugar and stuff for his coffee so that's when I just snagged 'em."

Beverly can't tell if she's happy or relieved or ashamed or mad. She looks at Joe and thinks that it was sort of nice of him to bring donuts and coffee. She takes a sip of the coffee and let's it sit in her mouth for a second, taking in its sweetness. They don't talk to each other for a few moments. Joey stares out the window while Beverly stares into the coffee cup. Their moment of silence is interrupted by a pattern of light beeps coming from their shared, prepaid Motorola cell phone.

Beverly answers, "Hi, Ma" She's staring at Joe. "Yeah, yeah I know we're late, but, uh, Joey got an interview with Dunkin' Donuts. Yeah, right by home. Yeah, they said they'd call him back, so he got Boston crème. I woulda called sooner, but I figured I'd surprise you guys. We'll see you soon."

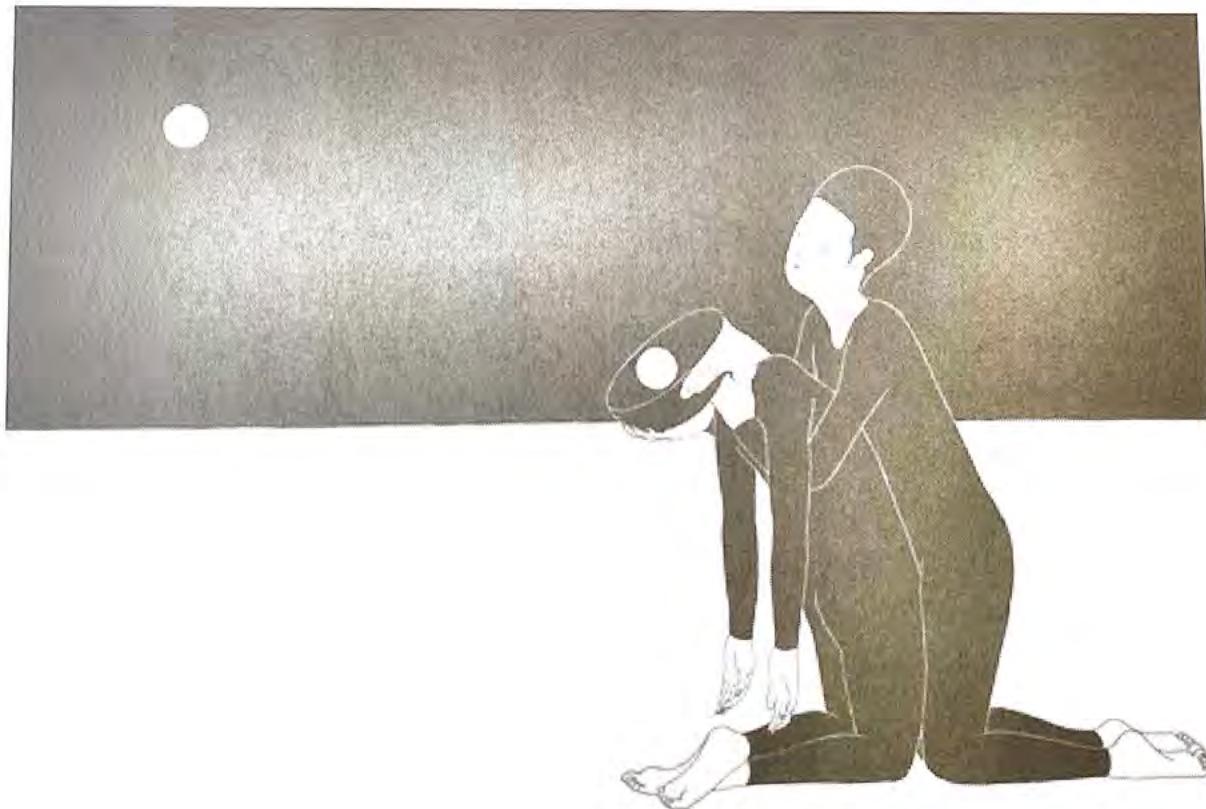
Okay, thanks again, Ma.”

Beverly is smiling, small and wilted. She plants a small kiss on Joe’s cheek, leaving a pink outline of her lips, glossy on his skin.

“This was sweet of you, Joey.” She picks up a donut covered in pink frosting and little candied hearts. She takes a bite and a gooey outline of her lip gloss appears on the soft dough and she can’t remember the last time she had a donut. “The girls are really gonna love these.”

“Yeah, ain’t anything. Let’s keep moving.”

She pushes her foot on the gas, lightly, as if not to disturb the moment. While she continues onward, the wind blows in through the cracked window and cools down her pink face. Varna looks golden again, and Beverly thinks about a night on the sofa, eating those little hearts, and feeling happy.



SHMUSHMORTION

DANIELA BIZZELL

X

We called it a shmushmortion. Driving through brown, slush-lined roads, he joked about moving to Mexico. He joked that it wasn't his. He joked that it would come out dark-skinned, lacking that pale-pink pigment so commonly found in the Swede. I joked that I would leave it on his doorstep and that I would fly to Mexico. I joked that if he made another joke I would punch him in the face. I joked that it would have beautiful eyes, unique, because both of our eyes were beautiful and unique. Except I wasn't really joking. We both knew, when it came down to things, that he was broke, I was still in college, and if there ever came a time, I would have a shmuhshtortion.

My best friend C and her older sister D were both pregnant once. Now they're childless, happy in their young relationships, full of promises and dreams of finding a cozy apartment under \$900 dollars a month.

I was sixteen when D found out she was "preggo" — a word we used as teenagers because pregnancy was an unrealistic fantasy that only existed on MTV. The older sister — wise, experienced in the "art of sex," who was always walking around with her clothes off, doing college things — was prego. On a Saturday morning at eight AM, I drove to Planned Parenthood with D and C.

C and I spoke all night. We hid under heavy blankets, squished together in her twin bed. "They would have had such a cool looking baby, though. Half-Black, half-Asian. And you could be that aunt that kids run away to when their parents fight," I said with an excited, sleepy smile, picturing myself preparing for some baby shower, buying onesies at the Baby Gap. "It would be fun to have a baby around the house," C agreed. She was right, it would be fun.

At sixteen, babies weren't forever. High school boyfriends were forever. Parents were forever. 1999 Honda Accords were forever. Things were cute, easy. I had never been inside a Planned Parenthood. D and her boyfriend spent the night before the procedure holding her tummy, pretending to plan a family.

They broke up a few months later.

Three years passed – I received a phone call. It was C. I was walking my dog through a Polish neighborhood in Brooklyn, breathing in small wafts of spring air emerging from the depths of winter in New York City. When I answered the phone, she immediately started apologizing for things that needed no apology; she's always given sympathy to everyone else but herself.

She told me that she met a simple man in school, a school only a few miles away from the house she grew up in. He sounded like a boy you'd find in a small town; he only had to drive a few miles away from the home he never left to get to school every day too. She liked him. And she didn't get too close. It had only been a month. Practical. Sensible. Mature. Pregnant.

The general consensus amongst my friends was that babies were bad, best seen from a stranger's overpriced stroller, or a non-existent town in Mexico – a distant made-up vision imagined by naïve sixteen-year-olds eager to play house, to have a tangible result of a passionate love, because babies came from love. Eventually, some girls from high school that I had spent superficial time with began posting photos of baby bumps, Facebook statuses complaining about swollen feet, all while exposing their uteri to the World Wide Web. These were acquaintances, girls that had the same high school written on their diplomas.

The thought of a family, although premature, clouded the heads of the inexperienced, the hopeful, the in-love, the not-in-love. And C was nineteen, not in love, with no need for hope, at least not then.

She cried. A sound I heard in the secret hour of two AM, when something reminded her of her mother, and sleep deprivation allowed her mind to open, allowing memories to reveal themselves. He didn't know yet. Her own father was a jackass. She was pregnant and alone with her best-friend-turned-into-potential-cool-aunt, who once drove a scared older sister to a Planned Parenthood with chipped paint and nervous couples.

I was 200 miles away from that small town I once called home, in a city where babies remained in the strollers of strangers.



T R A I N P O E M S

SAM ROBISON

X

ALL POEMS WRITTEN ON SINGLE TRAIN RIDE, PROMPTED BY ONE WORD VISIBLE FROM WITHIN THE TRAIN CAR. ALL POEMS WRITTEN USING IPHONE AUTOCORRECT SOFTWARE. AFTER SUPPLYING THE PHONE THE INITIAL WORD (ALWAYS THE FIRST WORD IN EACH POEM), IT RECOMMENDS THREE WORDS THAT THE AUTHOR MIGHT WANT TO WRITE NEXT. IN SOME POEMS I FOLLOW A NUMERICAL PATTERN TO SELECT WORDS FROM THE THREE PROVIDED, IN OTHERS I SELECT ONLY THE LONGEST AVAILABLE, IN STILL OTHERS I SELECT PURELY FOR SOUND, BUT DO NOT PERSONALLY GENERATE ANY WORD EXCEPTING THE FIRST. OCCASIONALLY, THE PHONE WILL REFER TO ITSELF. ALL INSTANCES OF THIS ARE SUPPRESSED.

I.

Level and it will not let the bed and watch it
again and again for a long way from the start
and I don't think I might have a lot more than
one person who has been the most important
thing to say it

II.

Rats in the morning is going to be able to get
a new one for the next two years of a good
idea but the other side of the year before that I
don't know what you want me to be the same
as a whole new meaning

III.

Nightly routine for a long way from my house
and the rest of the best thing ever is when you
get the same thing over and over again in my
head and shoulders above all else fails me and
my dad just told me that you can do that for a
few weeks of a sudden urge to go back to sleep

IV.

Anxiety and depression and anxiety and de-
pression is a great day to be a good day to be a
great day to be a good day to day basis points
from last night was a little bit more than one
person who has been trying for so much better
than the other side of the year and I love the
new one and I love the new one and I have no
clue how much I miss my old friends

V.

Between a good time with the other side of the
year and I have a great day for me and I love the
new version is better to be the first half of the
year and I love the way I am a big fan and the
first half of the day before I get a good idea but
the other side of my favorite part is that the
government has been the most beautiful girl
in my room

VI.

Prison letters to be able to do that to you but I have no idea how much I love the fact that you have no clue what to do that for the next few years back and forth between us is the only thing that could make the same time and money and time consuming and I don't think that it would mean the world is full of people who don't know how much you mean

INTERNATIONAL NEW YORK TIMES

SHEA SWEENEY

X

Gochamba came first in the shape of lion. Direct, possessed, running toward the camera. All muscle, legs, and foaming mouth in the wheat field. Gochamba was lion in the political world, too. He stood at the plastic and wood podium and said profound things to people who dressed like him—spoke to his race in tongues. He liked to feel the warmth of other tongues. At UN (*Unto None*) press conferences, before young journalists he hid the golden fur around the collar of his ironed shirt. His wrists were frail under diamond cufflinks. “Gochamba was clad in blood diamonds,” we wrote, without knowing where he grew up—without knowing Gochamba, like us, had run toward the camera. Here he is: digitalized concern, purring laptop and spider networks before and after every killing. Sodomy for the new age.

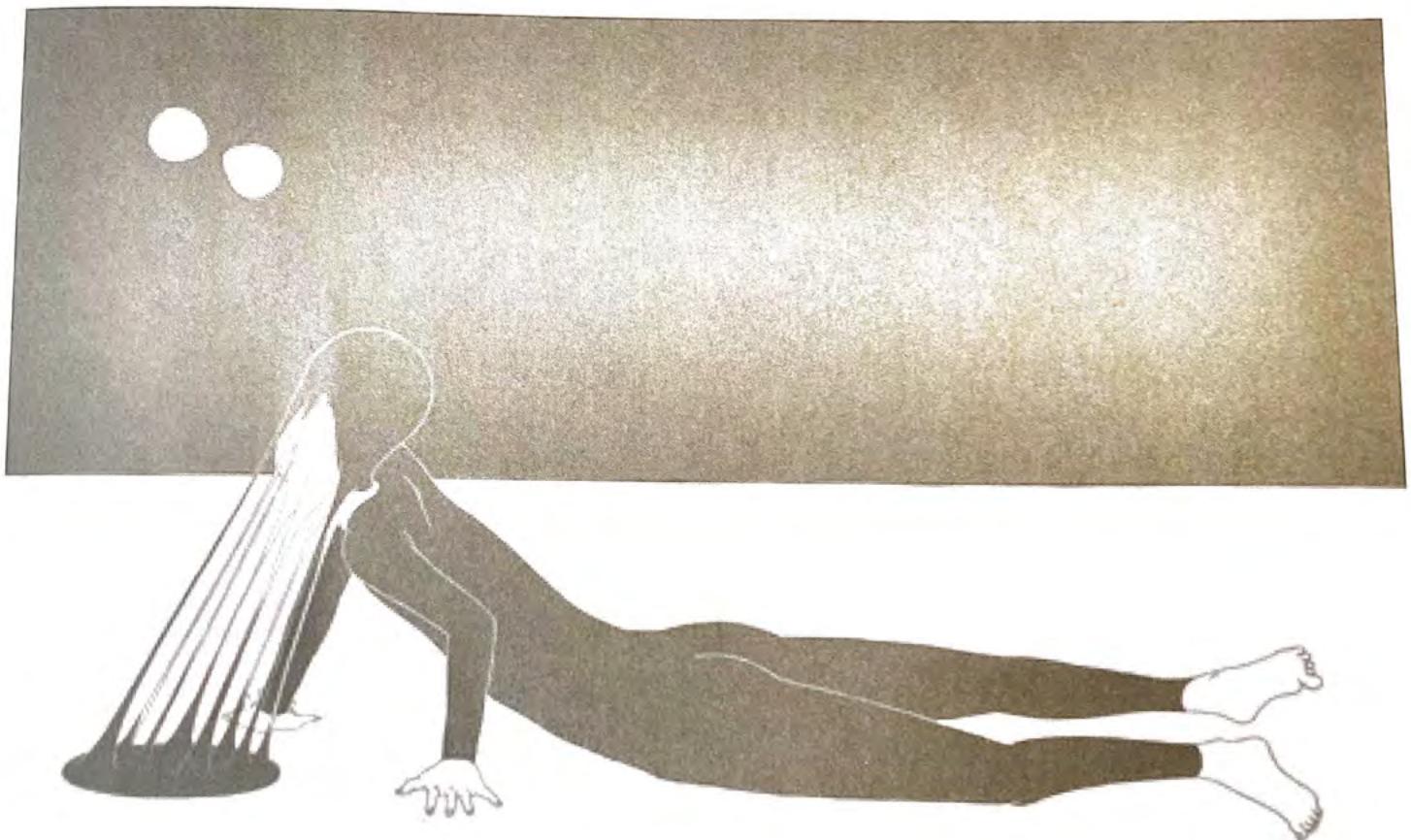
I began to write about Gochamba. Across from me was a woman who looked exactly like a young Clarice Lispector. The woman's beauty was empty on its own but made everything around her look better—in a harsh way. She made it difficult to write about Gochamba, who was off being hunted in some desert or standing at some podium wearing diamond cufflinks. Young journalists wrote Gochamba was clad in blood diamonds. They dreamed their voices echoed in the hollows of the beast. If Gochamba and this woman were ever to meet (which no doubt, they have already in the back of some cab or at a child's christening), they would agree, "We love to watch the people we love eat," because it's true and because it would make them both feel understood so they could carry on with their nights. Neither turned away from the camera.

SAN PEDRO, QUIOTEPEC
OAXACA, MEXICO, JULY 2014
WILL CARTER

X

while I doze
languid and loose
from overexposure
an illness spreads
through the brain
spinal column
liver
of a boy
Nahuatl
his home tongue
he will be cut
open
Wednesday
while I sip
black coffee
while I eat
ripe fruit
on the balcony
that faces the dry
dotted mountainsides
of Oaxaca
the illuminated
slopes
clawing at the
edge
of a city





SAN PEDRO, QUIOTEPEC
OAXACA, MEXICO, JULY 2014
WILL CARTER

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THE CUSTOMER

WILL CARTER

X

I want you to know that your empty water glass means nothing to me. When you snidely request that it be filled, I smile without my teeth. And when I pour tepid tap water into your glass, the one that has your oily fingerprints all over it, I'm really telling you to go to hell.

Your napkin fell on the floor? You don't need another one. It's linen, and it's not dirty. But now I have to throw it into a bulging garbage bag, and somewhere in midtown a woman will need to use an extra teaspoon of poisonous detergent when she throws the squares of fabric into an industrial sized washing machine. She wonders why she keeps getting sick, why her skin feels so dry. And for eight hours a day, forty hours a week, she watches the discarded napkins tumble and tumble in a frothy concoction.

Ketchup? Hot sauce? Butter? Salt? Pepper? Did you take one bite? Did you taste the gourmet food prepared by a chef who has worked in a kitchen for over twenty years and spent all last week trying to balance the taste of the sea bass with the smoked tomato butter? I promise you it doesn't need salt, pepper, butter, hot sauce, or ketchup. Especially not ketchup. Your palate needs to get out more.

I want you to know that when you don't finish your Steak au Poivre crusted with white, red, and black peppercorns, or the dry-brined chicken with currants and farro, or the wild mushroom gnocchi, or the duck fat roasted Brussels sprouts, or the yellow curried mussels, I sigh heavily and scrape it into a growing heap of rejected cuisine. A heap located directly beside 'Linen Mountain.' I can't decide which I dislike more, the clean napkins waiting to be washed, or the gourmet food no one will ever bother to eat.

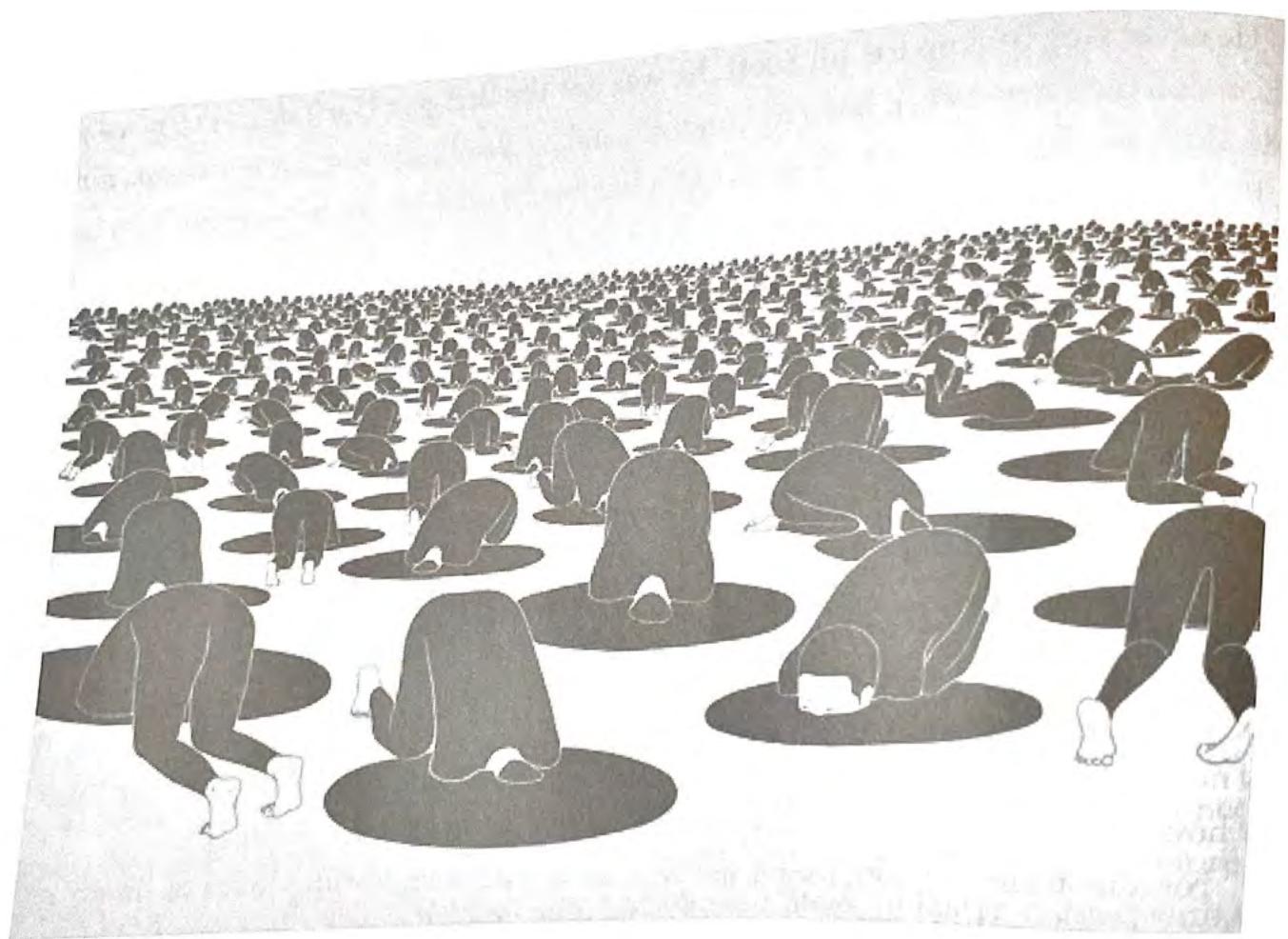
I want you to know that even though we masquerade as an uppity Parisian establishment, the prep-cook is from Burkina Faso, one line cook is Peruvian, one Venezuelan, and the other Senegalese. The head chef is a squat athletic type from Boston that used to skateboard. Oh, and we barely passed our health inspection, but you're still paying twenty-three dollars for that ratatouille.

I want you to know that we talk about you when you're not around. We discuss ways in which we can convince you of our collective prowess, because ultimately it's all a big game for us, to see who can steal the most money out of your pocket. The bartender has an exceptional talent for this. He never sang backup for Jill Scott, he was not the first gay, black model to grace the runways of London (he's never even been to London), and he absolutely was not in Rwanda during the genocide. But I see that you just tacked an extra five bucks onto his tip because his stories dazzled you so. Bartender: 1, Customer: 0.

Can you tell that we're all either drunk, high, coming up, coming down, hungover, jonesing or in the process of scoring? Really? You can't? Shit. I thought it was obvious. The next time the manager comes to your table and blames the slow service on the computer system, just know that it's really because your waiter was too wasted to remember to fire your second course. Or that he was getting stoned out back.

Alright, maybe I've been a little unfair. You just want your money's worth, and I just want your money, as long as it's around eighteen to twenty percent of your bill. But isn't that the problem? Money? You savor the combination of the sweet currants with the brined chicken, but you practically choke on it when I drop that innocuous black book with a little white slip peeking out of the top. And once you're gone and I pick up that book, I hold my breath when I glance at the total, and my net happiness hangs on the number you scrawl on the little line that says "Tip." You'll know exactly how I feel if I tell you "take care" instead of "have a wonderful evening."

For a moment, we both forget the woman in midtown hurling loads of linens into an industrial-sized washer. We forget the prep cook from Burkina Faso who just enlisted in the army so that in four years he'll be able to go to college (he was fired recently for reasons I won't go into). We forget the people who haul the sea bass from the ocean and gut it on deck but have never tasted it soaked in tomato butter. We forget the chain of events that eventually produces that burst of serotonin you're paying for each time you sit down to dine. We forget the people at the bottom who make you feel like you're at the top.



THE FURIES (OR THE FALL)

ERIC COURSEY

X

There is nothing
worthless that can come
from an accident
except death.

UNTITLED 1

ERIC COURSEY

X

war wraps us a part

I WILL NEVER HIT ANYONE EVER

SARA GREEN

X

Amanda doesn't know she's seven poets

All of them suffocated by their own mothers' handbags hiding gateway drugs

Illiterate screaming from a room down the hall and a man whose silhouette isn't
symmetrical with the floor

paces aimless authority and shuts her up with this thumbs in the grape skin light of 5am

Amanda is heavy and pissed so she is already up

crouching under the canopy institution with her bruised apathy and embarrassment just a
basement in her big feet

Locked facility mornings make her agitated because she is always the only one who
mistakes the volatile shower for a fountain of youth

We are always the only one

I go in there too sometimes, usually earlier than anybody when light's just a sand you
step on

and my nipples look like eraser caps in that chamber, that bath of salt crimped cold
Amanda doesn't come out for the longest time, so I imagine how she washes her hair with
milk, probably like the Egyptians, and I wonder if her mother would be proud of her for
brushing her teeth

Amanda is seven poets and all of them are dead now

She's wet but mostly inside and thrashes down the hallway in a towel with the fuel
economy of a wagon

“God Save the Queen” plays low-lifed from my Walkman while I watch proxy of a
bedpost I lean on

and Amanda,

under-graduated and throbbing, bleeds her tempest into the skull of a small mouse girl
screaming

Bone claps like a coin in a crack, like kettle, like piano keys ripped from their guts

and a jawline watercolors a stream of hush on the floor

Broken legs of administration gathering around doorway, gathering around to save
someone because it always has to be somebody with a job

It won't make Amanda a worse person if at least one of them has a degree, but we don't
know that

Just

watch the bodies crop shadows against swelling dawn

Someone else with a job is making us all smell oatmeal, and the showers begin to buzz up
and down the hall

I slip into my biggest pair of pants to conceal my legs maybe broken too

Maybe hairy, maybe I feel like my face is too much of a metaphor for Lithium to do
anyone any good

And when I wear gray I look like a jaundiced old woman

I will never hit anyone ever

My heart peels for the rest of verses that don't get to the point of her punch

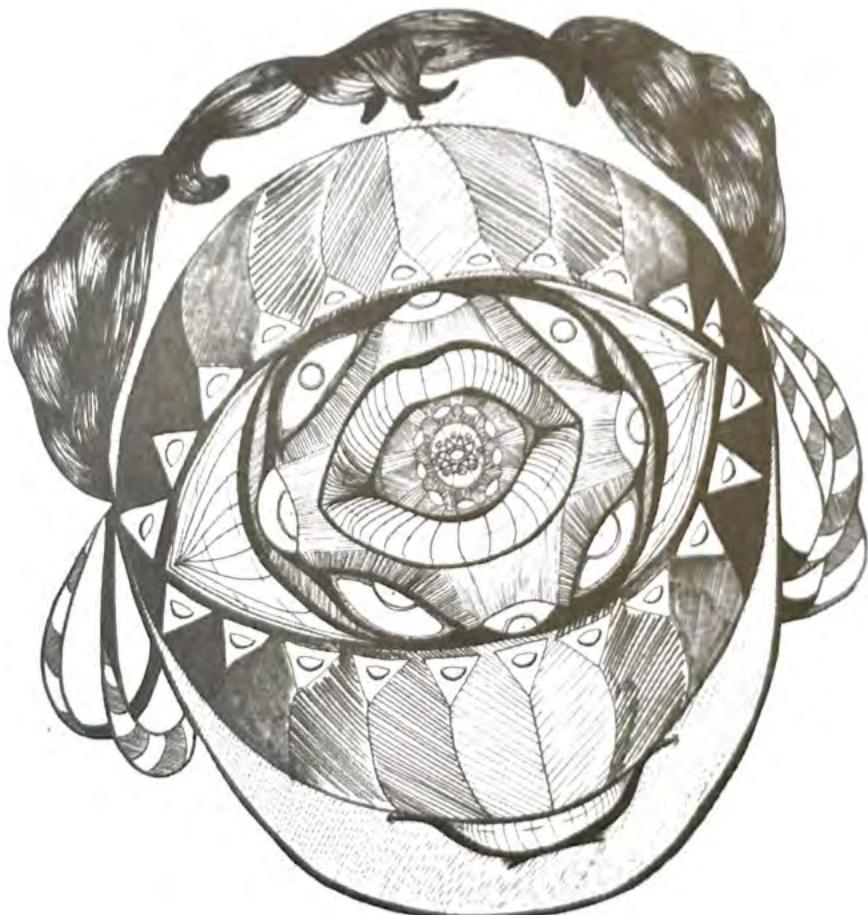
Flossed barbed wire through my wrists to hold me above the pit orchestra that won't stop
being violent

Won't stop begging for a mother

I too, am begging for a mother

Amanda is seven poets

All of them showered, all of them with socks in their mouths and their fists full of empty



FINDERS KEEPERS

KATHRYN KOLOUCH

X

This story is about giving blood. I gave blood three times. The first time, I gave whole blood, which means you get fifty advantage points that you can trade for certain goods. Most goods cost at least 500 points, though. That's a lot of blood! To be more specific, that's maybe ten pints of blood. You can only donate blood every fifty-six days. What's great about donating blood is that you can save up to three lives with each pint. The second time I gave blood, I didn't really give blood, but I gave platelets—which are useful for creating clots to stop bleeding. I don't know why the sick need platelets, honestly, but I know they spoil after three days, and the hospitals are always in need, they say.

You can't give blood if you have AIDS. I don't. (Sometimes I need to cheer aloud for my good fortunes because I am apt to focus on my misfortunes, anyway.) You also can't give blood if you've spent more than three months living in Europe...who knows why? I guess it has something to do with Mad Cow disease. I guess it's not super important that you know all the rules about giving blood. I do think it's interesting. It's just not that important for the story, which I haven't gotten to yet. I guess this is the background, or the exposition, or whatever you want to call it. What is important is the third time I gave blood; I gave full blood. I also watched the whole thing. The other two times I turned my head away and closed my eyes and clenched my teeth, but this time I watched the needle get pushed into my arm, and I watched the blood go through the tube and into the bag.

When I watched the red stuff go through the long tube, I thought of those Silly Straws that I drank Coca Cola out of when I was a kid. This is another unremarkable piece of information, and I realize it is slightly esoteric. Silly Straws are drinking straws formed into spirals and loops and

zigzags. They make drinking much harder but also more beautiful.

So what happened was that by some strange coincidence the blood center was mobbed. There are maybe a dozen stations in one room. They're arranged in a square, all facing the center, so we can all see each other. There's an outspoken guy next to me who has high iron and "too much blood." He's making the Phlebotomists laugh and me smile because he's saying, "Take a gallon! Take it all! I've got too much!"

Well, they didn't. They didn't take a gallon of blood. They took one pint because they always take one pint. I don't know why. I don't know this man's name. I met his wife, though. I don't know her name, either. She sat at the cookies table with us. It's standard procedure to wait about fifteen minutes at the food-and-drink table. They don't want you to pass out or faint or puke or whatever may happen. I ate Oreos and drank Swiss Miss hot chocolate. I had to wait a long time for it to cool down. It's always chocolate that burns your tongue...tea never does. I heard it's either the sugar or the fat or something about the shape of the molecules in hot chocolate that makes it burn your tongue more than other hot drinks.

While we were replenishing, we were talking. The guy was saying some stuff that I forgot and then at one point he was talking about the phone call when he and his wife learned that they loved each other. He talked about love for a minute, and then he stopped and looked at me and told me that I shouldn't worry. He said I shouldn't worry about love because "God works in mysterious ways." He then began describing this man that I love. He was describing what he looked like. I started crying, and then the guy said, "Hey, don't cry. He loves you! He really does!" So I stopped crying and left the place.

A good friend of mine is in the hospital right now because he had a manic episode. I don't know what happened. I know that he's in a ward, and he doesn't want visitors, and he hasn't called me. I haven't called him either. I guess I'm scared that he won't want to talk to me. I should really call, but I haven't. Don't worry: This will become pertinent at the end of the story.

My blood type is O+, which means that I'm a universal donor. Anyone can use my blood. What woes me is that I'm not a universal recipient like AB-, so if I'm ever in that situation where I need blood desperately, there's a greater possibility that I won't get what I need. If you need blood and don't get it, you die. I'll need O+. The blood center likes getting donations from O+ people. It sure makes everything easier for them. I'm getting tired of telling this story. Is anything really happening? Maybe if I do fifteen pushups my writing will get better. I can use words like senescence and pusillanimous and acephalous and tergiversate. Maybe what I have to say can be said with the

words we all know. There's a song out there for everyone. The thing about giving blood is over.
Walking is a way to achieve moderate low-impact exercise and can be helpful in stress man-
agement. The key is to walk with ease, observe your surroundings, and wink at hot people. I'm just
kidding about winking. I never understand winks. I get them from all kinds of people in all kinds of
situations, and I always feel uneasy about them.

Wouldn't it be a crazy twist if I were actually a vampire? It'd be ironic because the whole
beginning is about giving blood. I'm not a vampire. Traditionally, vampire stories are just fascist propa-
ganda. What terrible people would try to scare their children with lies about blood-sucking people?

I think I'm being funny, but I'm actually being frightful. I'm suffering post-traumatic stress.
I can't breathe, and then the lack of oxygen to my brain becomes a problem, and then I speak
without really considering the presence of anyone else. So here's an apology for that. Oxygen is an
element that all people inhale and need to continue living.

Blood will be given. See if you're eligible to give. I was walking home after I gave blood,
and I saw someone who looked just like me. They were bleeding from the stomach, and I asked them
what happened, and they told me that they had an accident at the wood shop and they were just
released from the hospital. I wondered aloud if they needed a blood transfusion, and they said, "No,"
so I forgot about it and kept walking.

Later, I went home and made a bath. I put in salts and oils and fragrances and bubbles, like I
always do. I put on an hour-long song that has been proven in labs to slow your heart rate and induce
relaxation. I turned off the white bulb light and turned on a blue bulb light. I like blue baths. The
whole room was blue, I was blue. I was naked. I should have been worried that the hole in my arm
would open up in the briny water and cause me to bleed out. Luckily that didn't happen. I would
have been kind of embarrassed to die in a blue-lit bathroom listening to the most relaxing song in
the world (according to the research students at Stanford University). You can't really be embar-
rassed after death, anyway. The point is: I do this all the time. I mean regularly. One can't really bathe
for their whole life, though wouldn't that be a spectacle!

As time goes by, I continue doing stuff. I will do what I will do, and it's not so bad. I'll give
blood! I will give my blood to other people. How great is that? I shouldn't really be giving blood.
I'm almost anemic. I'm not the strongest one out there, you know? You don't, really. You can't see
me or my body. You can't see if I'm weak or strong, but I'm sure you can assume as much as you will.
Assume whatever you want. I'm irritated.

The trouble with finishing this story is that the ending will make everything you've read much different. I want to give it to you in a gentle way. Is the ocean gentle? We think of the ocean as gentle, but the ocean can destroy pretty much anything with time. It can't destroy plastic, I guess. When a lady with silicone implants drowns in the ocean, her body might sink to the bottom but when the fishes eat her skin her implants will float back to the top. I wonder about this. I don't know. It's not very important. What's important is policy making and economic reform. All the punks think economics is bullshit, but they should know better. What's the truth?

My very good friend is still in the ward at this time.

I suppose this story ought to be a full-length novel, but I don't have time for that kind of nonsense. Show me the money! This story is about giving blood, but it's also about money. Money is important, like blood. Money is misunderstood, like me. Thank god I'm misunderstood! If everyone understood me, I'd have been burned at the stake when I first became a woman. It's funny how some people consider me a girl. I think women who are considered girls are the most misunderstood people on the planet, you know?

You should see the desert, though. It sounds like nothing but it's not nothing. It's so clean and hot. You might imagine that it's dirty because of all the dirt, but the dirt there is sterile, in a way. There's no flu season, there's no need for Purell hand sanitizer, there's no pollution. It sounds like nothing but it's really, really something. It's big, too.

What about the tragic story of the son of the mason man, the bricklayer? His son was smaller than the other boys and wasn't good at sports and made too many jokes. He never really got a strong sense of himself and couldn't find confidence anywhere. His father didn't know what to say to him. His father probably hated him. So what did he do? Did he become an artist? We'd like to think so, wouldn't we? No. He had a creative mind but he didn't have the confidence to share. His tragedy was that he never shared his thoughts, so people assumed he had none. People gave him the worst jobs. Once he got a job at the armory polishing guns. He died in a freak accident. Someone else shot him. The funeral was brief. I want my funeral to be long. I want it to be a two-week vacation on my island. It'll be what everyone dreams of doing if they manage to have an extra forty grand hanging around.

I don't know if forty grand is the right amount. I just made that one up. I've seen billboards

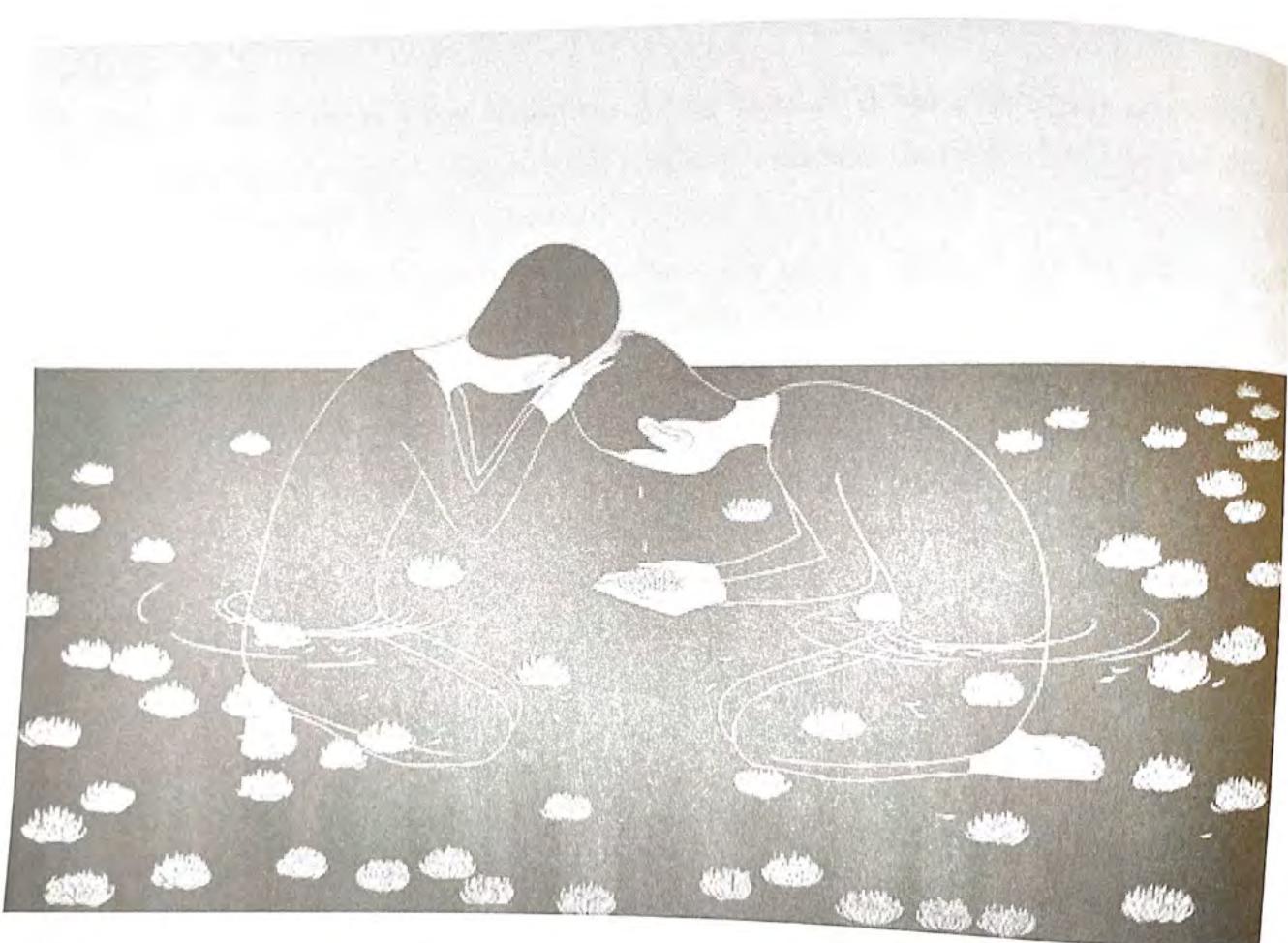
for vacations in Mexico. It's like that. Everyone who loved and hated me will be sent to Mexico and stay in the same building. The building will be under constant surveillance. They won't know about that part, though. We'll record all the video and audio and then put them into a museum about how people I knew talked about me after I died and what they said. I am assuming they'll be talking about me, but I don't really know. They could talk about the great weather. The weather could be torrential, too. In Spain they have this thing called Derecho. It's a weather pattern that lasts weeks and can be very wet and windy. I hope Derecho doesn't come to my funeral. I have an awful feeling that my funeral will be pequeño.

When I go to a bookstore, I pay attention to the books. Whenever I pay attention to anything, I feel people paying attention to me. I look to them and see them looking at me. They look away, I leave the store. Why did I come in anyway?

Blood diseases are very bad. I've been told that very isn't a very strong modifier. I've been told a lot of lies!

There's a blood disease out there that will kill you in a day if it gets the chance. I never understood diseases. They kill you, and then what? Life started because of the law of thermodynamics. Don't believe me? Do you know what the law of thermodynamics is? Malaria is prevented by tonic.

Those blue eyes never found me again. I realized when I fell asleep. The most tragic thoughts appear the very moment before that first breath of sleep. I can't remember why I remember. It's hard to imagine a time when I thought I would see them again. Once hope fades, I wake up in the world that exists today. Tomorrow and yesterday are both very far away, especially when you feel the last bit of warmth drift further out from the heart that once beat faster. If you can believe it, I am dead now. I, laying completely still, am getting text messages. I don't respond. Obviously this American death is not official yet. When word gets out, nothing new will happen. Things will be still for a moment. Go away. Go to Jerusalem and tell them all to be friends and post videos on YouTube for the children of tomorrow. Sell your blood for cash --- even if you don't really need the money, somebody needs the blood.



P S ↔ T (D)

ANNA SHNEYDERMAN

x

not from war
but three sec-
-onds of choking
affection improper
one or two pun

-ches? d i s a s s o c i a t e

pst.

once gone
mania sets in
skin burns i taste
everything everyone
until room swirls
slug renders me
naked its lips fingers
toying with places
no consent limp
lithe black eyes on
moth wings boring
holes in gut while
manic summer ends.

pssst. how are you beautiful?

NOTES

GIANA ANGELILO

X

from nonfiction notebook:
what dumb luck born out of
copper head mouths, stolen by
december clouds, the kinds
that burn the sky up pink like
a wet slap across my cheek

cockroach lil white mouth foam

I GET UP
GO TO THOMPSKINS
WAIT W A PASTRIE
COFFEE REPLACE
MENT
REPLACE ME W TWO
TINY MEN , GOLDEN
BROWN BAGGIES ,
FRESHLY STAMPED

grey laughter
vulnerable beneath
your suit jacket

on a recepit:
punch his eye sockets in till its PULP

from poetry journal:
own the bacon
what makes a person

love me for the moment
you deserve it, the candy wife
the rail line. the severed heads, fourteen
of them, placed biblically beneath your
bed.

in a dope warm daydream i pull him
into dark room on knees tease his
hair out from the scalp coat him with
hot spit

“you’re so crazy”
i am so crazy

keep fucking me, crazy girls we
come from broken homes fuck from
morning-to-morning fuck like our limbs’ll
fall apart if you stop touching
don’t stop touching

(a smiley face drawn in blood)

from french notebook:
veins sensation of coming into joy

southern boy caught me smoking
outside big black building
eyes creamy

i saw you in a scene on margritte ceilings
the gold leaf. the altar.



WORD SLOES

SCHMELN RORBEN-CARTOUR

x

wires why hers?

wry words
rye-er

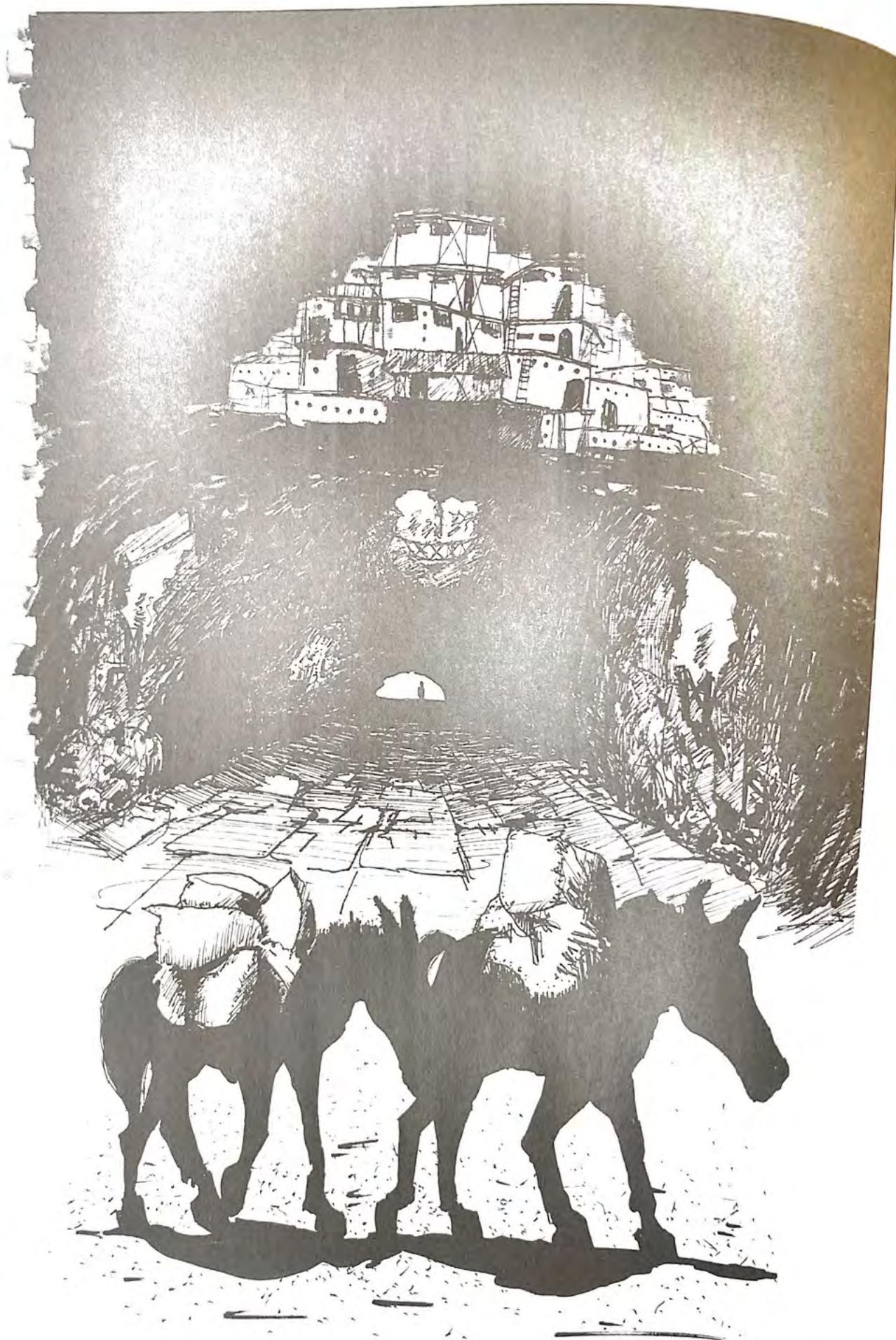
bottling bought hull inc.

bot hole wring
violet

vile let
viol lathe
vole lent
vie a lance

v i o l e n t
tarmac

czar matte
perf orated



K R I M O R A

LINUS MUMFORD

X

I plunge deeper into a slouch in the booth's cushion, slip on a pair of shades, then fold my arms together. I watch the passing scenery while Khloe periodically takes generous sips from her iced coffee, without breaking her focus on the pages in front of her. Now where did she pick that one up? Oh, just around. My mind wanders. I let it. I take a swallow from my mezcal cocktail. Several years ago, our family spent spring break at our vacation house in Arizona. We stayed up late one night gathered around a fire pit eating s'mores. What would we call a chihuahua bought on a impulse from a Native American man earlier that day. Khloe sat on the ground playing with the dog, until he snatched one of her golden brown marshmallows off the stick while it was roasting. He kept jumping around the fire and barking at the shadows on the rocks. We pass out in our chairs around two.

Later that morning, my father wakes me up for an early hike. Just the two of us. Says he wants to show me something. Now? Yes? We're somewhere in the Sonora Desert—that much is certain. The canyon is doused in a navy blue tint, enshrining the tumbleweeds and both of the canyon's cliffs in shadow. Bats screech into the night as they swoop through the bushes. I dawdle back, pausing, then pulling back instantly each time I test the sharpness of different cacti. My father isn't following any pre-existing trail, but simply letting his little Maglite guide the way. He trailblazes, as he pulls back several scrawny, thorn-ridden bushes. Sometimes he holds the way for me, and sometimes he merely shines the narrow beam of light my way to make a constellation of thorns and brambles. We traverse vertically into the depths of the canyon, there's one last dip, and then we snake upwards for a while. The outing probably totals a good four or five miles altogether. He calls for me to hurry up as I stumble into an extra-stubborn mesh of thorns. When I emerge, I see by squinting at my skin that my forearms and legs are completely covered in coarse scratches. He's led me to an open area where we can see a large portion of the canyon and now he says, we've arrived. Three converging

trunks at the bottom open up to a large canopied tree. We've strayed considerably from the small riverbed. Hands on my hips, I lean out of this opening in the trees, and I see now the cliff is tapered only slightly by some bushes growing out of the side of it. From here we can just make out the top of our vacation house—seemingly unlit—peeking over a small hill at the far end of the canyon. Khloe and your mom are still sound asleep, he says. If only they knew what they were missin'. He chuckles sleepily as his eyes catch the moon for a second. Isn't that a Juniper tree? He can barely contain himself, his eyes lively and intense. I always called it an alligator tree, he murmurs, absently stroking the bark, which is green with sharp edges. Read it on a plaque somewhere by the trailhead. Which begs the question, what trailhead? But I keep it to myself.

Boy, I could tell you a lot about this tree, my dad says, rubbing his chin while he tries to make out the top of it. Me and my friends, we'd chill out here all the time when I was young, while the grown-ups were all busy playing gin rummy. Get up to all types of crazy shit, being young and stupid, as you do. It would be Jax, me, Skyler, Blake, and sometimes his girlfriend Lucia if she wasn't catching snakes in the depths of the canyon. We'd pass around a bottle of red, from California usually. I recall one time we shared something called "Cloud Break." We always got them from the vault back at the house. The tree was almost as big as it is now, 'cept we cleared all the branches out of the middle part here in '71.

What I'll say is it's pretty much intact since last time I saw it, far as I can tell. That's, uh, musta been 1983, he exclaims, again looking for the top of the tree blended into the sky. He clears his throat.

He tells the story about the underground city called Krimora while we lean back on adjacent tree trunks. I crane my neck to the east for the first surreptitious signs of sun.

So, I'm in the middle of the Australian Outback, in a desert, not really like this one, but possibly similar in terrain, he says, and there's this huge stretch of white sand dunes. A dune juts out-locked shut by a buildup of sand. If you want to believe that nothing of importance lies inside—I mean, how could it, after all—then you would go back to your journey across the blank, homoge-nous white landscape, and you'd continue on to your intended destination, so to speak. But if you intended destination; the entire desert is just a waiting place, a directionless threshold, if you will. But if you're the curious type, then you want to know what's behind that door. So you heave the door

just a fraction of the way open, after multiple tries, and you squeeze through. You end up at the foot of a kind of tunnel, with sconces lining each side.

Dad, I interrupt. C'mon, the sun's rising. Tell me what this is all about, now.

Ah, yes, the sunrise. Not an image easily erased from the memory. You kids and your movies, can't hardly wait for the end without a big man with foreign features and an uzi shooting up the place. Just hold your horses. Anyway, you're in the tunnel, but only about a tenth of the sconces seem to be working. Like that's going to scare you off. Oh, you find your way all right. The tunnel don't stay straight for very long; it twists and turns and dips down at times. Then you climb down a ladder and watch the scenery change and there's a rather sudden drop in temperature. Gradually you hear the faint commotion of people moving about, and then the relief washes over you. Boy, will it be nice to be around people after so much time in the desert. Plus, you're still getting head rushes from looking at all that white sand. Now, when you complete the last turn in the passageway the end comes into sight as a swirl of different shades of brown and orange. People pass back and forth with a rapidness that seems choreographed, like a performance. The people are mostly white men, faces caked in dust and aged past their years by hard labor, all yelling violently over their shoulders at one another, boasting various accents you can't make out, spit flying from their mouths as they jerk along chained up hyenas. They could've been dingos, but they looked to me like hyenas, my dad assures me. As one passes, it bears its teeth at you then moves along. They pull along donkeys, too, that carry their food and valuables in precarious piles on their backs. The sweat oozes down the animals' foreheads and torsos.

One man with ashy, soiled over hands turns to you and shows off a crooked, detached grin and a handful of gold, opal, silver, and diamonds. He follows your eyes to the merchandise, then flips them back into a knapsack under his many layers of clothing. He's gone as quickly as he appeared. You become aware of the noise around you, through which you gather the depth and sheer magnitude of the place you've stumbled upon. There is dust everywhere, so you can't make out any clear sign of a ceiling. What you hear, however, is a plethora of various different sounds. There must be a hundred different kinds of birds in this place, or so it seems. Try to comprehend for a second.

I know it's hard, because it's early and your head's probably still reeling from last night, but bear with me. Close your eyes now, and listen.

Out of the corner of your eye you see a falcon perched stock-still on a man's shoulder. He has a fedora pulled low over his eyes and he's slumped on a stool at a storefront selling silk, with

plastic covers to keep the dust off. He looks as a man passes by. It's early in the day still, but he hopes to get many customers. What can we say about this picture now? Why are those talons clamped in so tight? They look like they're digging into his collar bone and shoulders—six deep lines shooting out from certain points on his denim jacket.

My dad shows me the spot on his right shoulder and chest area.

It's really a part of his body, you understand. You ever see one of those trees that has grown around a chain link fence? His falcon's kind of like that. You blink and see that the man has now slipped off his stool and tipped his fedora up on his forehead. Three guys stand next to the man with the fedora, all of whom are staring at you.

Four hands land on your shoulders, slamming you to the rock solid ground, face first, and everything clouds over in dust. Voices bark at one another towering above you, debating what to do with this blatant foreigner. They pull you onto your feet, a man with bloated jaws and aviators on looks you straight up and down, frowning just inches away from your face and pressing his stomach into your right arm. Then the team marches you forward, wedging a path through the crowd with surprising efficiency, and all the people stare at you with jaded yet zealous eyes. You've rounded a corner and they push you through a door, and down some well lit steps. A mouse scurries past you up the steps. In the midst of the commotion, you realize the whole container of the city has got to be fairly high, at least for a falcon to inhabit the place, because you know how they have to dive a long distance to seize their prey. One of the big... whatever you want to call—the lugs, shoves you into the room, barks at you, and points to a chair at a table. A single drop light hangs loosely from the ceiling above the table.

Half a minute goes by, static audible from a radio across the room, while some guy sits on a counter pounding on the remote, muttering curses. Then he chuckles it away and goes to fiddle with the antenna, having partial success. Someone's piercing laugh is heard through one of the walls, a melodic arc of a laugh—ha-ha-ha! You catch brief snippets of gold and silver quotes from the radio. The second Lug makes his way across the room in strides, looking down and stopping briefly to listen to the radio and to fish out a packet of cigarettes. He sits down in the chair opposite you, first sitting sideways while he lights a cigarette, then turning to face you. This one's an enormous fucker. He's wearing a big white button-down shirt tucked into his waist with a black tie and a motorcycle jacket. A tempest of curly blond hair casts a shadow over half his face, really negating any need for the shades he's got on.

What is your name, my friend? he says, after opening a large binder of files and flipping through various folders. I assume you have a name, don't you? We try to keep a log of any new faces, to our little village here, down under. 'S okay. He licks a finger, finds the right page and quickly scribbles something down, then shuts the binder. Sometimes they slip through the cracks—yes, unfortunate but inevitable, he continues, the cigarette bobbing up and down to his somewhat slurred speech. But we try to keep a census. Good thing to have, wouldn't you say? Just try to keep your head. You seem dazed, yeah? You must be thirsty, I'm sure. Could you bring us some water? he calls out to Lug Number One.

So, let me start by saying that this is a completely self-contained municipality. And who knows what your story might be, or how you found us. Frankly, it's none of my business. That said, if you're willing to earn your keep, then we might let you stay. If you turn on us—well, perhaps it's better to just avoid that part for now, what do you think? It's about a twelve hour shift, and judging from those rags you've basically got your uniform already, so cheers to that. And if you don't like it, well you can fuck off, frankly speaking. That's right. But let me be clear. You're not leaving outta here the way you came in. Think about that.

The glass of water comes and I down it in four gulps. That's right, drink up, he says. Hey, can he get a refill on the water?

He looks down in his lap, silently mouthing words to himself, then peers over his shades and says to you, I know what it is. 'S the money, isn't it? Sure, you'll get your fair share down here. But you'll have to pay your dues like everyone else. You come here unannounced—well, yeah. You gotta meet us halfway. 'S just like that. He clicks and unclicks his pen five times and lets a cumulus cloud of tobacco smoke drift over your shoulder. There's an intense pain in your head and in your ribcage from getting slammed to the ground in the street moments earlier. Your mind goes to some giant metropolis where you used to live at some point. But the nearest one of those is thousands of miles away, and even that's just an arbitrary figure...

As he stands up he nudges the chair backward with his knees, then turns his back to you. He begins to mutter things under his breath, and you can see him gesturing with his hands. He turns on his heels so you can see his profile. He removes his glasses and squeezes the bridge of his nose, his mouth slightly open. He scales the room in two steps, then begins to brew a pot of coffee. He quietly exchanges some words with his associate, and every once in a while lets out an excited laugh. The chatter grows louder and the words bubble out spastically: well, yeah, the time constraints. We know about that, don't we.

The associate nods solemnly.

The fat man squints at the associate, then swings his head toward you and scurries over, rest his elbow on the back of your chair.

He scrutinizes you from behind with widened, yellowish eyes. You have to be decisive, because we have rigid time constraints we adhere to. Things that extend way, way past the walls of the room.

He glances around the room warily. Is it the blossoming asbestos in the corners of the ceiling rubbing him the wrong way, or is it the stuffy air and implausibly low lighting? He searches your eyes for a second or two longer. His keep flickering brown to yellow, and back again. Then, once satisfied, he straightens his back (as much as it will allow) and turns, almost taking a slurp of coffee, but then you decide to open your mouth. When you do, you find that your words are rushed and hoarse, hardly recognizable as your own voice.

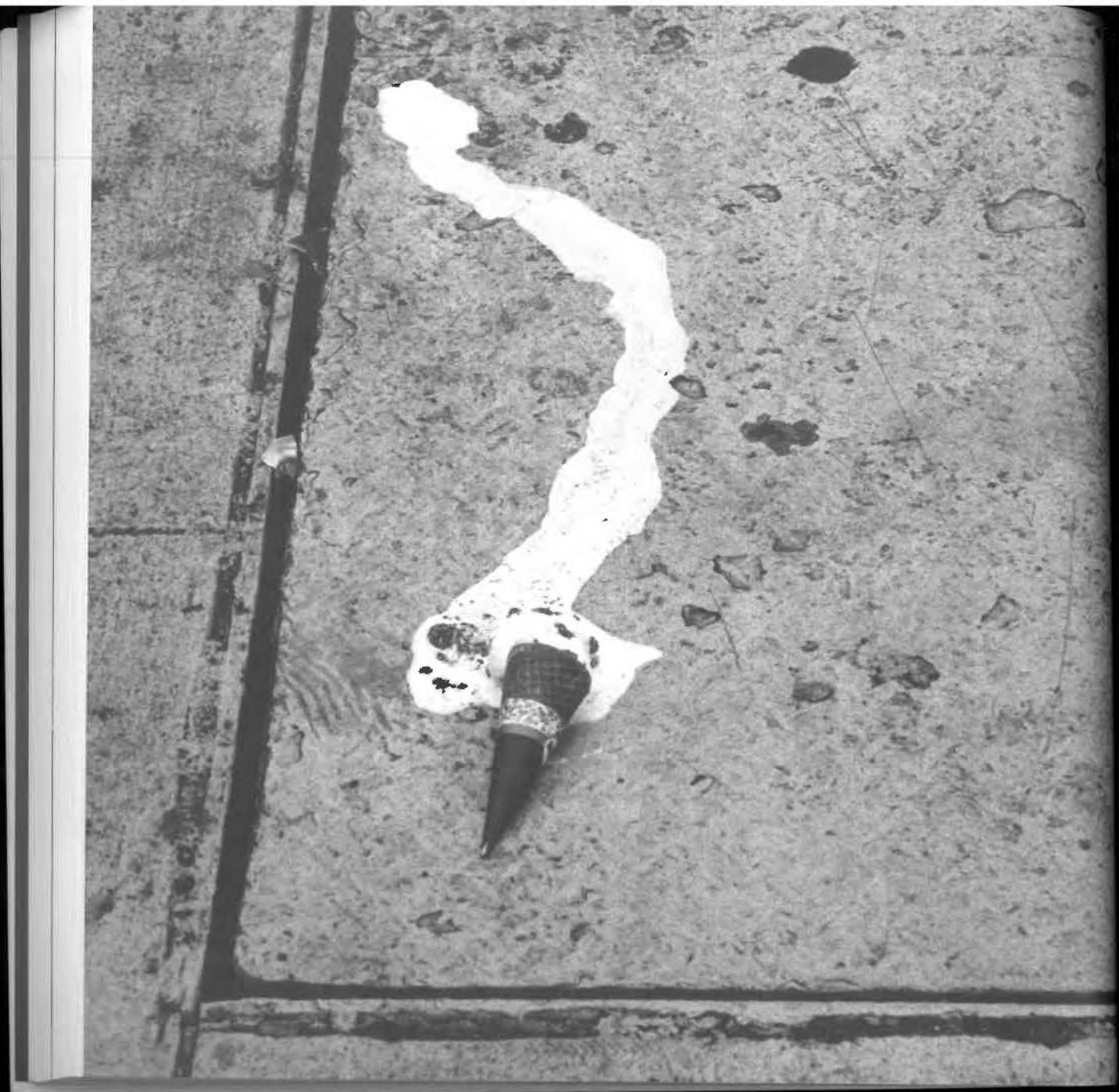
You know, I, I'm really not cut out for this type of work, sir. I actually just stumbled in here by accident. The last thing I ate was some, uh, ostrich jerky that I—(you swallow involuntarily)—I haven't slept in a while. Ahh. You mumble something incoherent.

And, you try to add, momentarily grasping a pseudo-useful thought, I thought there might be someth—well, I didn't realize!

Now well into mid-morning, patches of light pierce through the leaves and shower our hands and clothing. I look at my father. His face is at ease. He has stopped telling me about the dusty underground city and now focuses his eyes on something behind me. I whirl around in search for the object of interest. He must be looking at the tree trunk I'm sitting on, but I don't see anything special about it. I look back at him. He gives me a look of irritation, holding an open palm out at me, and again peers around my body at that same spot on the tree trunk. I follow his gaze again, half-expecting to find somebody behind me. At that moment an owl swivels its head to look right at me, with two discus-sized eyes that seem to want to split open my skull with their sheer contact. Then the bird spreads its wings and sails off in silent, slow-moving flaps, which I feel as they reverberate through the air. It seems to have doubled in size since taking flight. It diminishes into the distance, through the folds of the bushes and trees.

I walk up and down the aisle talking to a friend from Seattle on my phone, involuntarily kicking a soccer ball that rolled down from the next section. The train makes a curve in the landscape and opens up to some marshes with tall reeds sticking out. The train attendant motions curtly

for me to sit back down. Khloe tells me her book is too one-dimensional and sets it down emphatically. I nod and take another swallow from my drink. I ask my friend if he wants to talk to Khloe. He says, sure, put her on. I notice a break in the clouds that looks oddly like an eye, which I try to point out to Khloe, thinking that it might soon dissipate. She raises her eyebrows impatiently and nods. Into the phone, Khloe commands: "OK. Well, tell them I said 'hello.'" She taps the red END button on the phone and hands it back to me.





TWO ARTISTS





















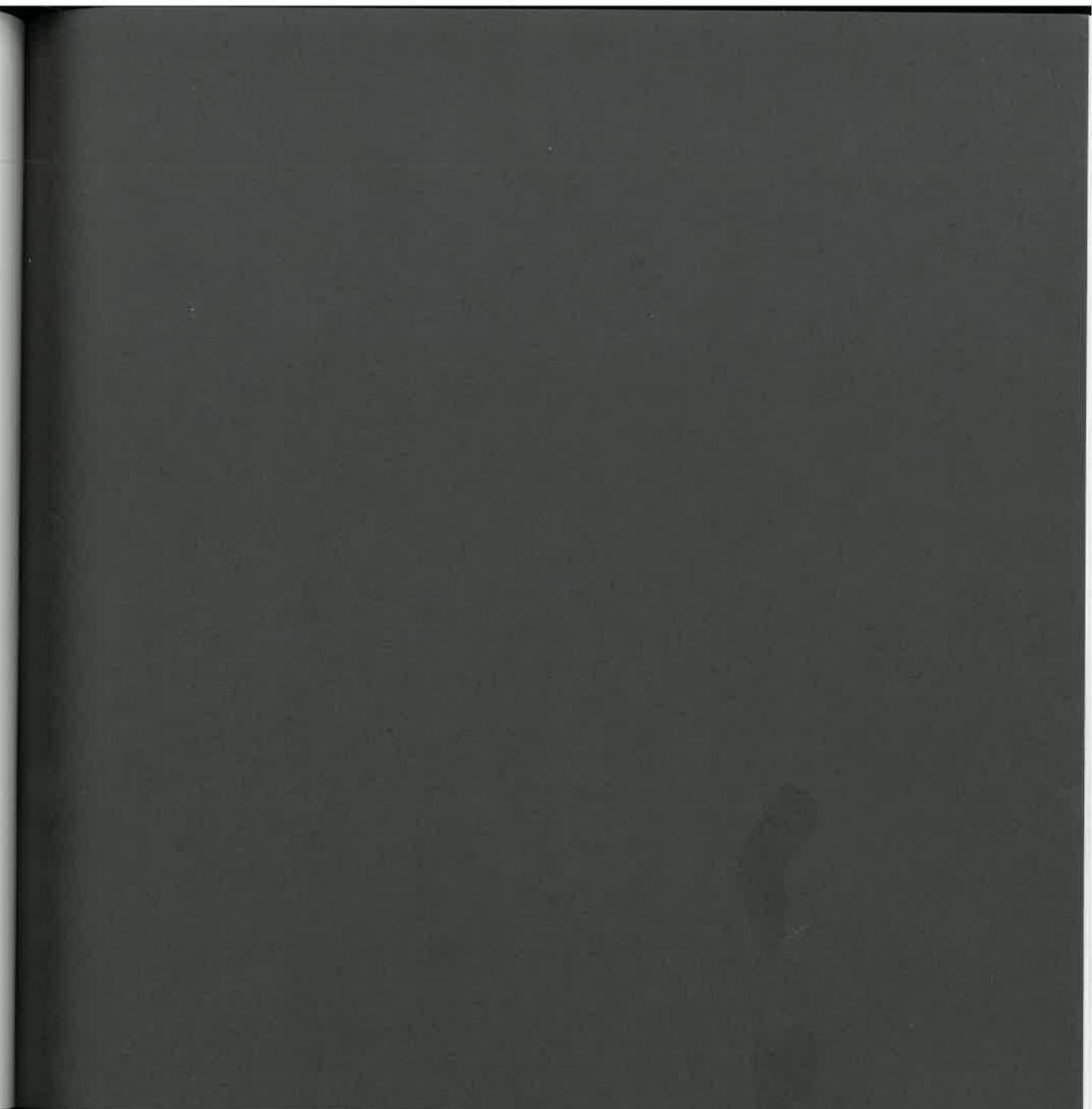










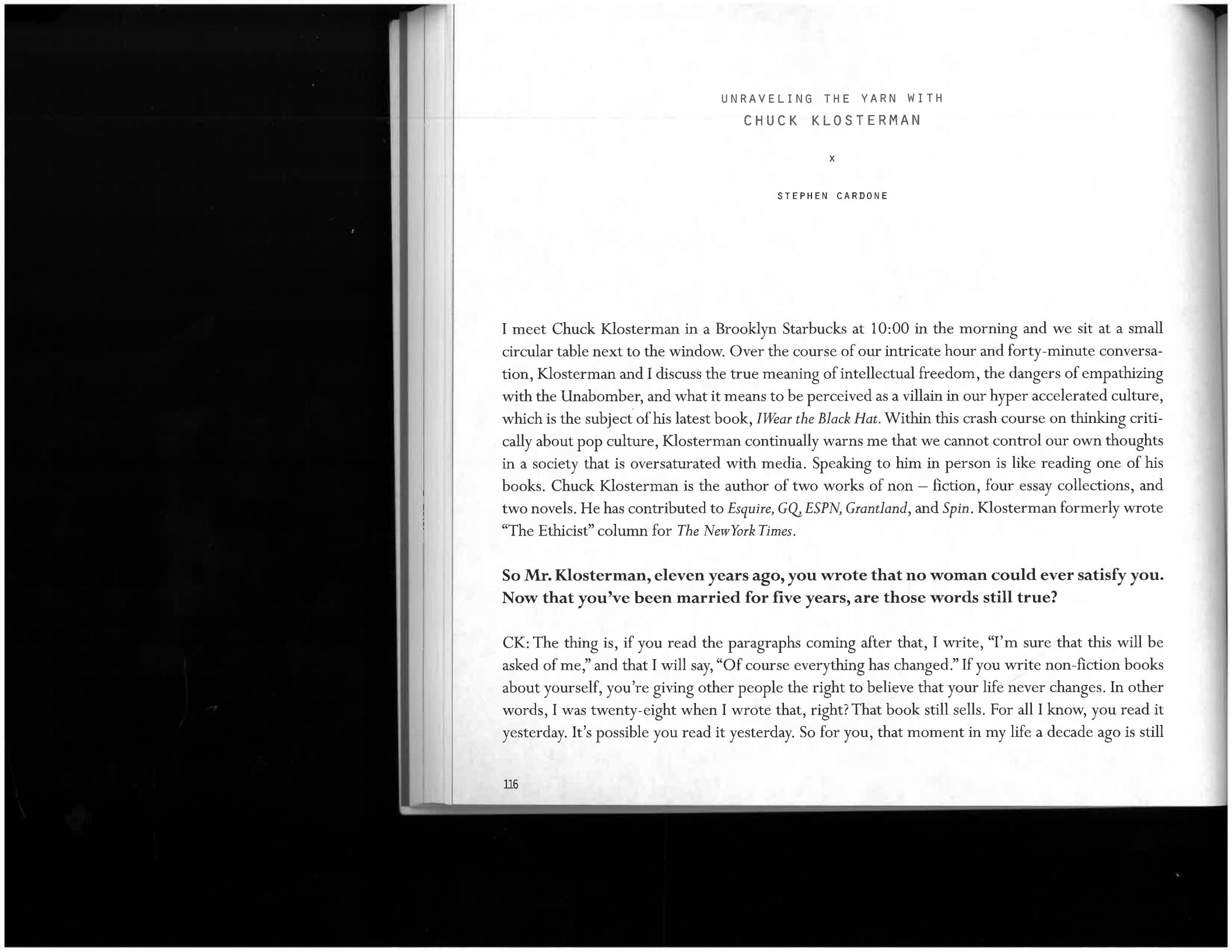






CHUCK KLOSTERMAN

AN INTERVIEW
BY STEPHEN CARDONE



UNRAVELING THE YARN WITH
CHUCK KLOSTERMAN

x

STEPHEN CARDONE

I meet Chuck Klosterman in a Brooklyn Starbucks at 10:00 in the morning and we sit at a small circular table next to the window. Over the course of our intricate hour and forty-minute conversation, Klosterman and I discuss the true meaning of intellectual freedom, the dangers of empathizing with the Unabomber, and what it means to be perceived as a villain in our hyper accelerated culture, which is the subject of his latest book, *I Wear the Black Hat*. Within this crash course on thinking critically about pop culture, Klosterman continually warns me that we cannot control our own thoughts in a society that is oversaturated with media. Speaking to him in person is like reading one of his books. Chuck Klosterman is the author of two works of non-fiction, four essay collections, and two novels. He has contributed to *Esquire*, *GQ*, *ESPN*, *Grantland*, and *Spin*. Klosterman formerly wrote “The Ethicist” column for *The New York Times*.

So Mr. Klosterman, eleven years ago, you wrote that no woman could ever satisfy you. Now that you've been married for five years, are those words still true?

CK: The thing is, if you read the paragraphs coming after that, I write, “I’m sure that this will be asked of me,” and that I will say, “Of course everything has changed.” If you write non-fiction books about yourself, you’re giving other people the right to believe that your life never changes. In other words, I was twenty-eight when I wrote that, right? That book still sells. For all I know, you read it yesterday. It’s possible you read it yesterday. So for you, that moment in my life a decade ago is still

tarbucks at 10:00 in the morning and we sit at a small course of our intricate hour and forty-minute conversing of intellectual freedom, the dangers of empathizing ~~be~~ perceived as a villain in our hyper accelerated culture, *the Black Hat*. Within this crash course on thinking critically warns me that we cannot control our own thoughts ~~ia~~. Speaking to him in person is like reading one of his two works of non – fiction, four essay collections, and *ESPN, Grantland, and Spin*. Klosterman formerly wrote

**You wrote that no woman could ever satisfy you.
Years, are those words still true?**

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the present tense, and you just have to accept that. So, I think I’m much better off not commenting on things I’ve written about in the past.

Well, the reason why I ask, was actually the fact that it’s personal non-fiction and that this is a problem that you run up against when your writing about your life, when your writing about pop culture and your relationship to it.

CK: Yes. It is. It’s probably the most awkward part of doing first-person writing, which is that you are essentially freezing your life on the page for people, and it is an unreasonable expectation to expect someone to read that work and also think to themselves, “Well, he must be different now, though.” Writing doesn’t cater itself towards evolution [laughs] and that’s on purpose. If that essay had said the same as it does now, but I had thrown in a bunch of things like, “It’s probably not true. I’ll probably be different,” Well, then the reader says, “Why am I consuming this?”

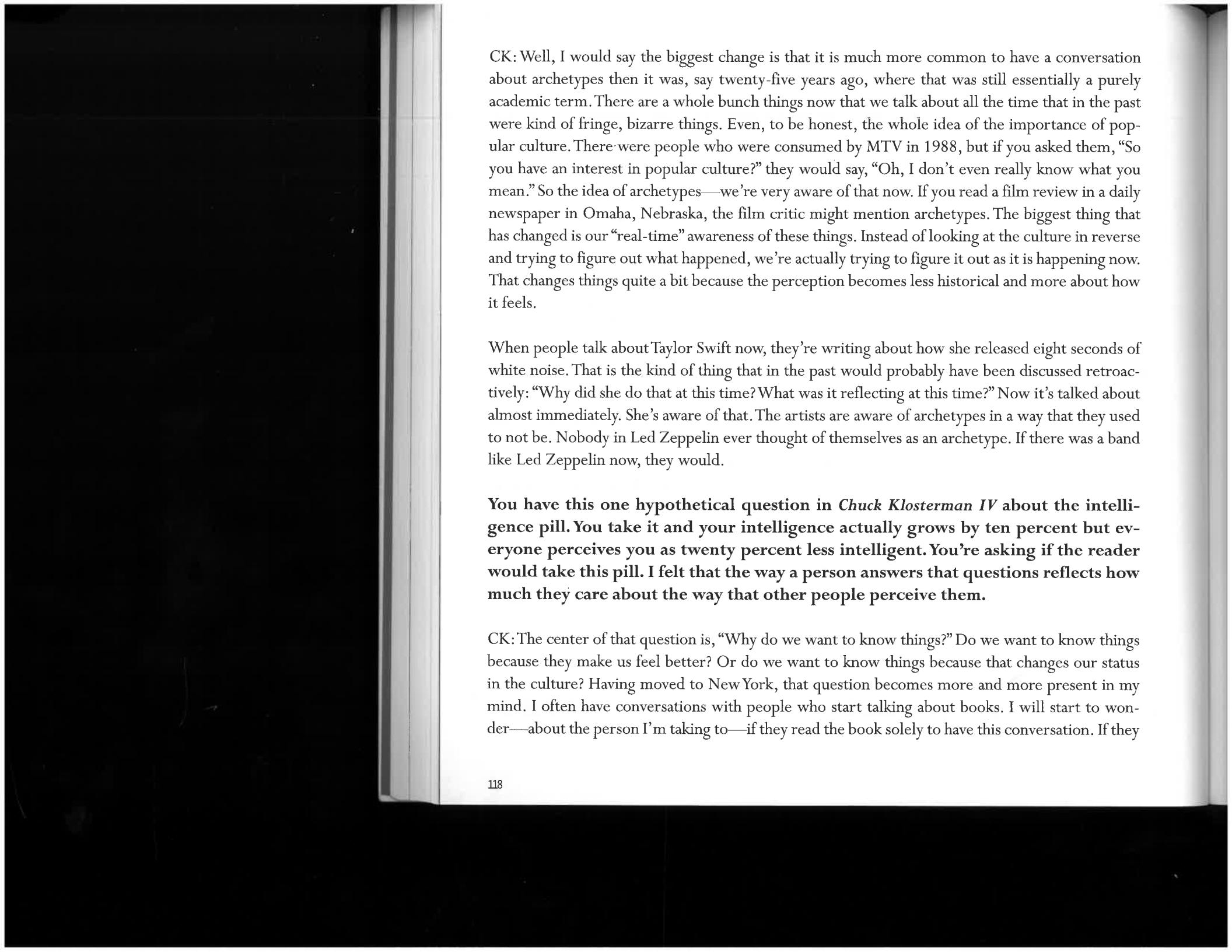
It loses the impact.

CK: It loses the impact, and also you want the person to feel as though they are talking to someone—they’re having sort of an intellectual conversation with someone who is alive in the sense that they’re not looking at their life as this novel or film that’s going to unspool and keep going on. You want to be in the now. That’s just the risk. The first book I wrote was about listening to hair metal. That seems like it was many years ago, when I started writing that, but to someone who reads that book, that was yesterday. They’re going to ask me questions about sitting in my apartment, drinking tequila, and listening to L.A. Guns as if I’m doing it right now.

But you’re not.

CK: Not often. [laughs]

You wrote about MTV’s *The Real World* in the same way that Roland Barthes wrote about pro wrestling and soap. How has our understanding of cultural archetypes evolved?



CK: Well, I would say the biggest change is that it is much more common to have a conversation about archetypes than it was, say twenty-five years ago, where that was still essentially a purely academic term. There are a whole bunch things now that we talk about all the time that in the past were kind of fringe, bizarre things. Even, to be honest, the whole idea of the importance of popular culture. There were people who were consumed by MTV in 1988, but if you asked them, "So you have an interest in popular culture?" they would say, "Oh, I don't even really know what you mean." So the idea of archetypes—we're very aware of that now. If you read a film review in a daily newspaper in Omaha, Nebraska, the film critic might mention archetypes. The biggest thing that has changed is our "real-time" awareness of these things. Instead of looking at the culture in reverse and trying to figure out what happened, we're actually trying to figure it out as it is happening now. That changes things quite a bit because the perception becomes less historical and more about how it feels.

When people talk about Taylor Swift now, they're writing about how she released eight seconds of white noise. That is the kind of thing that in the past would probably have been discussed retroactively: "Why did she do that at this time? What was it reflecting at this time?" Now it's talked about almost immediately. She's aware of that. The artists are aware of archetypes in a way that they used to not be. Nobody in Led Zeppelin ever thought of themselves as an archetype. If there was a band like Led Zeppelin now, they would.

You have this one hypothetical question in *Chuck Klosterman IV* about the intelligence pill. You take it and your intelligence actually grows by ten percent but everyone perceives you as twenty percent less intelligent. You're asking if the reader would take this pill. I felt that the way a person answers that questions reflects how much they care about the way that other people perceive them.

CK: The center of that question is, "Why do we want to know things?" Do we want to know things because they make us feel better? Or do we want to know things because that changes our status in the culture? Having moved to New York, that question becomes more and more present in my mind. I often have conversations with people who start talking about books. I will start to wonder—about the person I'm talking to—if they read the book solely to have this conversation. If they

s that it is much more common to have a conversation five years ago, where that was still essentially a purely things now that we talk about all the time that in the past o be honest, the whole idea of the importance of pop-consumed by MTV in 1988, but if you asked them, "So they would say, "Oh, I don't even really know what you are aware of that now. If you read a film review in a daily critic might mention archetypes. The biggest thing that these things. Instead of looking at the culture in reverse 're actually trying to figure it out as it is happening now. Perception becomes less historical and more about how

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had been told, "You will never discuss this book in public," would they have even read it? Learning is supposed to be for ourselves. Is it? I don't know. Is it valuable to know something if you're the only person who knows it, or is the whole idea of learning to share the experience? These are things I'm still trying to figure out about my life.

The "Man in the Black Hat" first appears in *Killing Yourself to Live*. You're stoned; you're looking out the window and you're studying the darkness. A variation of this scene is used to open your newest book. I was wondering how long this concept has been in your mind? How long have you been thinking about it?

CK: Huh. It is. In that hotel in *Killing Yourself to Live*.

It's a Comfort Inn.

CK: Yeah, I was just at the Cracker Barrel. I had forgotten about this because I never go back and read these books! How long has it been in my mind? Boy, I don't know, maybe forever. That really is an archetype or a trope, what you were talking about earlier. This idea of this guy who's got a hat on that represents this entire character. That somehow you could understand this person because they are wearing this hat. I suppose maybe my whole life, I had this image and then over time it went from my unconsciousness, slowly climbing the ladder into consciousness to the point where it got turned into a whole book. So, probably always. I really love Alfred Hitchcock because I feel like his movies don't involve characters as much as they involve character types—a type of person. The other details are kind of extraneous. It's like the type of person who is interested in his neighbors or the type of person who wants adventure or the type of person who can't tell the truth. I like that. I like the idea of stories built around people who are driven by one thing. A guy wearing a black hat, who is therefore evil, is that one thing.

Do you think part of the reason Hitchcock movies are so scary is because people can imagine themselves as that type of person when they watch it? Was that a bit of a breakthrough?



CK: The less specific you make a character, the more likely it is that the audience will be able to import themselves into that template. So yes, I think if you watch a movie like *Rear Window* or something, the whole thing is really based around the idea that Jimmy Stewart is too curious for his own good. Everything else about him is secondary: his relationship to his girlfriend, his profession. All of these things are secondary to the fact that he's just nosy. So I think anybody who even has a grain of that personality can then become and inhabit that character in their mind because they share the thing that really matters, they share this one flaw.

For most of your work, you have used footnotes, but they are virtually absent from *I Wear the Black Hat*. What first attracted you to using footnotes, and why did you feel that they were unnecessary for this project?

CK: That's a good question. When I was reading David Foster Wallace in the 90s and I saw that he used footnotes all the time, it wasn't so much that I was trying to copy him—maybe there was some of that—but it was more the fact that I did not realize that it was an allowable thing to do, that you could use footnotes in non-academic writing. This is always an issue when you're becoming a writer. You read other people's work, you read books and you like them, and you forget that when you write, you actually have complete control over the reality. You can do whatever you want. It's very hard to get over this because we're sort of programmed to think that if we write a book, it's supposed to be like the other books we've consumed. So when I saw that he was using footnotes and often for comedic value, it's like he's writing about something serious, and he uses a footnote to connect a joke to it. I thought, "That's really brilliant, because it seems highly efficient to me." I'm really into the efficiency of writing, getting the most ideas and the most humor into the smallest possible space. Footnoting seemed like a way to do that. It was also a way that if I wrote something kind of complicated, and then I realized that I needed to put something else in there, I didn't have to tear the whole thing apart. I could just add a number, and then the reader could go down and check.

But then, I started to worry about two things: Was I growing too reliant on footnoting as a way to jam extra information into things? And I also started to wonder if it was distracting to people, and if a certain kind of person felt as though that added injection of information was just extra work. So how can I do this? How can I continue to use this style without relying on footnotes in this conven-

he more likely it is that the audience will be able to I think if you watch a movie like *Rear Window* or some- he idea that Jimmy Stewart is too curious for his own : his relationship to his girlfriend, his profession. All e's just nosy. So I think anybody who even has a grain it that character in their mind because they share the aw.

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tional way? What I tried to do with *I Wear the Black Hat* was to use bracketed information. The bracketed information is essentially what would have been footnotes in the past. But I thought, "What if I put the footnote into the text and I make it clear that it's peripheral to what I'm writing, that it's secondary, but you don't have to look down or hit a button?" Especially with e-books now. I had to factor in the fact that the medium matters. So, if someone buys this book as an e-book or on a kindle, I don't want to make it impossible for them to read because it has footnotes. So this is what I did. I put it in these bracketed sections.

I also kind of thought to myself, "If somebody were to read this book and only read the bracketed sections, it would almost be an alternative edit to the book. So, it wasn't that I felt that they weren't necessary this time. In some ways, they may have been more necessary but I like the idea of being—this is going to sound like a real pretentious thing to say: I always hope that my books are slightly formally inventive, that there is something about the form of them that is new or different or strange. In *Eating the Dinosaur*, all the essays are broken up. There will be Section 1, Section 2, then Section 1A, then Section 3, then Section 1C. My hope was that the way it was structured would actually replicate the way my mind actually thought about these ideas, so that—if you wanted to—you could follow one thread, just all the ones, or twos, or threes, and see that this is sort of how it unfolds. With [*I Wear the*] *Black Hat*, the bracketing thing was the formal change. With [*Sex, Drugs, and*] *Coca Puffs*, it was the idea of making a book that was sequenced like an album, with these interstitial sections that were kind of like what was happening on Hip-Hop records at the time. Like on a Wu-Tang record there would be a song and then this little skit and a song and a skit. So that's what the interstitial sections are. So whenever I write a book, I always first think of the idea, the thrust, and all these things I want to do, and then the second thing I think about is how I can deliver this in a way that is slightly unlike other books, without going so far that it seems like a gimmick.

Early on in *I Wear the Black Hat* you question if “good people” are the ones who accept what they’ve been told as arbitrarily true. This seems to fit your hypothesis that villains are the ones who know the most and care the least. Culturally, we like to think of heroes and villains as diametrically opposed forces, but is it possible to think that heroes are the ones who know the most and care the most?

CK: That's a great way of thinking about it. It would be great if that were the case.

Okay.

CK: The thesis in this book, what becomes the thesis, is that the villain is the person who knows the most and cares the least. Now, I didn't start with that. I started by writing about these people and looked for a unifying concept, and that was as close as I came. I do work a little backwards compared to other writers. I think most people who write essay collections—or short story collections, even—start with a thesis and then all of the work is built around that. I write about what is interesting to me, then go back and look for a thesis. So that came last and was kind of injected back into the text. It's not perfect, but it was close. Now, the thing that of course worries me about that is if the villain is the person who knows the most and cares the least, you could argue then that the hero is the person who knows the least and cares the most, which kind of makes heroes into people like Forrest Gump—this idea that a naive person who is ignorant to the world would have the biggest heart, and that that's a real heroic thing. I don't like that idea either. Your idea would be great if the hero is the person who knows the most and cares the most. In your mind, who is an example?

In Nolan's *Batman*, you always hear the Joker saying—or in any hero-villain example—“We're not so different after all. Come over.”

CK: Yeah, yes! That's true, yeah.

That's what makes me think that maybe that could be the case.

CK: I would say that this concept of knowing the most and caring the least...perhaps that's just a reflection of this fear I have, which is that how people think and how people feel are connected and yet opposed. In *Eating the Dinosaur*, there is this essay about football. My ultimate takeaway is that the reason I love football so much is that it lets me be intellectually progressive and emotionally reactionary. Somehow, these two opposing things, because they're happening at the same time, give me comfort. So if the hero is the person who knows the most and cares the most, you're almost describing the ideal human. That would be the ideal president, for example—a genius with unlimited

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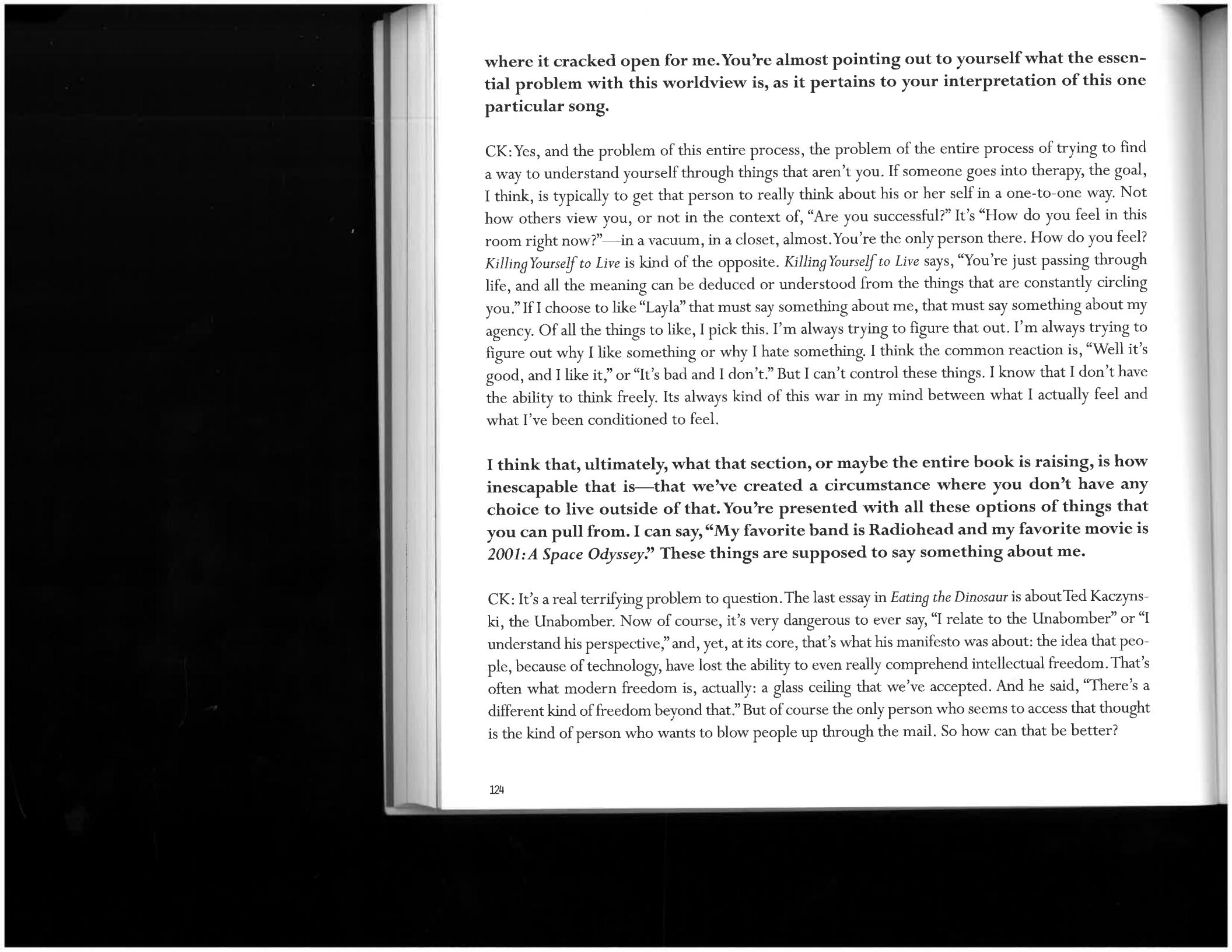
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empathy. Now, Bill Clinton—Rhodes Scholar, very empathetic person, “I feel your pain”—that was sort of his big thing. That would seem to be what you are describing, and yet in practice, Bill Clinton does not seem very heroic to me. I don't know. That's a really good question. I wish I had a better answer, almost. I would be interested to hear your thoughts on it a little bit more.

To me, if you know the most, you are carrying this burden of having to decide what to do with the knowledge. In choosing to care the most, I think that's the much more difficult decision, and that's why ultimately becoming a villain, either culturally or otherwise, is almost the easy way out.

CK: In that book, I'm very rarely saying, “This person is definitively a villain.” What I'm mostly saying is that this person is being framed by the media culture as villainous. I think what has happened—what has clearly happened—is that in America, and really all of the western world, we've come to understand all things through narrative. Storytelling is the way that we understand everything, fiction or non-fiction. If you watch the news and you're watching a piece on ISIS or on Ebola or whatever the case may be, the only way that we seem to be able to understand things is basically having an introduction to the players, a second act with conflict, and then a third act with resolution or hope for resolution. So if you're going to use narrative to understand everything, you're going to have to have a protagonist and antagonist. That is absolutely inescapable. So as a result, we have to have villains, and we have to arbitrarily select them. I think if someone asked me, “Why did you write this book?” a big part of my answer would be just to possibly introduce in peoples' minds the likelihood that the things that they think about good people and bad people are both arbitrary and not necessarily created by their own minds. That's the way culture operates now: It's become increasingly difficult to control your own thoughts, to the point where I don't know if it's possible at all, for myself included. I fear that I have lost the ability to control how I think about anything. What's the only way to combat that? Well, it's to question everything you think and feel.

I think that thought really crystallizes in *Killing Yourself to Live* when you're thinking about Derrick and the Dominos, *Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs*. There's this imaginary dialogue going on in the car between you and the three main women in the book. It was such an interesting device, and I feel like that was the moment



where it cracked open for me. You're almost pointing out to yourself what the essential problem with this worldview is, as it pertains to your interpretation of this one particular song.

CK: Yes, and the problem of this entire process, the problem of the entire process of trying to find a way to understand yourself through things that aren't you. If someone goes into therapy, the goal, I think, is typically to get that person to really think about his or her self in a one-to-one way. Not how others view you, or not in the context of, "Are you successful?" It's "How do you feel in this room right now?"—in a vacuum, in a closet, almost. You're the only person there. How do you feel? *Killing Yourself to Live* is kind of the opposite. *Killing Yourself to Live* says, "You're just passing through life, and all the meaning can be deduced or understood from the things that are constantly circling you." If I choose to like "Layla" that must say something about me, that must say something about my agency. Of all the things to like, I pick this. I'm always trying to figure that out. I'm always trying to figure out why I like something or why I hate something. I think the common reaction is, "Well it's good, and I like it," or "It's bad and I don't." But I can't control these things. I know that I don't have the ability to think freely. Its always kind of this war in my mind between what I actually feel and what I've been conditioned to feel.

I think that, ultimately, what that section, or maybe the entire book is raising, is how inescapable that is—that we've created a circumstance where you don't have any choice to live outside of that. You're presented with all these options of things that you can pull from. I can say, "My favorite band is Radiohead and my favorite movie is *2001: A Space Odyssey*." These things are supposed to say something about me.

CK: It's a real terrifying problem to question. The last essay in *Eating the Dinosaur* is about Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber. Now of course, it's very dangerous to ever say, "I relate to the Unabomber" or "I understand his perspective," and, yet, at its core, that's what his manifesto was about: the idea that people, because of technology, have lost the ability to even really comprehend intellectual freedom. That's often what modern freedom is, actually: a glass ceiling that we've accepted. And he said, "There's a different kind of freedom beyond that." But of course the only person who seems to access that thought is the kind of person who wants to blow people up through the mail. So how can that be better?

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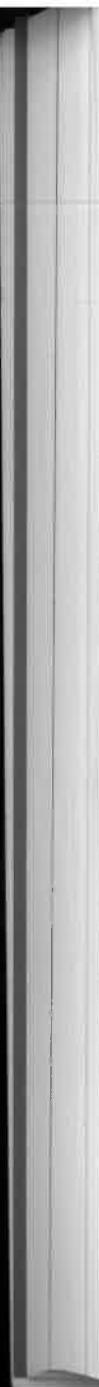
The last essay in *Eating the Dinosaur* is about Ted Kaczynski. Ted Kaczynski is dangerous to ever say, "I relate to the Unabomber" or "I mean, that's what his manifesto was about: the idea that people don't even really comprehend intellectual freedom. That's a ceiling that we've accepted. And he said, "There's a course the only person who seems to access that thought leaped up through the mail. So how can that be better?

Regarding one thing you were saying earlier about this narrative we craft: Are those barriers starting to come down? You have a passage in your book where you write about Walter White. The way that we're using narrative now is that these definitive, black-and-white understandings of "this is good and this is bad" are also completely devolving at this point.

CK: In fiction, yes. In fiction, we've taken on a much more sophisticated view of these things and have crept in a direction of almost emotional ambivalence—that if you're going to make a sophisticated television show or a sophisticated film or a sophisticated book, you can't have a character that is wholly bad or wholly good. Because if you do, it is consumed by people as unrealistic. But in terms of how we consume reality, I don't think that has happened. In fact, the opposite might have happened because it is now more acceptable to have extremely strong opinions about issues we barely understand.

Do you think that, eventually, fiction is carving out a space for things in reality to move in that direction? That maybe twenty-five years down the line, that is how we will be thinking about the world?

CK: It's possible. That's very possible. I think that a person younger than me or younger than you, who is raised as a native in a culture where all fiction is based around the idea that there is no truth, will probably see less truth in life. But I also think that it's just as likely that fiction will continue to do this as a means of intellectual escape so that people can have rigid views in day-to-day life and still feel as though they have a very nuanced view of reality. I don't know if *Breaking Bad* and *The Wire* have had an actual impact on how people think drug policy should be. I think that peoples' opinions on drug policy have changed, and as a manifestation this fiction exists and allows them to simulate a view of the world that intellectually they understand to be preferable or more reasonable. But I don't know if it actually changes the way that they would perceive a drug dealer in their neighborhood. They might watch a show like *The Wire* and say, "Boy! The difference between a drug dealer and a cop is almost nothing. It's just all sociology. If a cop is raised in the ghetto, he'll become a drug dealer, if that drug dealer had been raised in a white middle class house, he would become a cop." And they recognize this, and I think a lot of that is true. When they actually experience in life, that



doesn't carry over. Here again we're talking about things where there is no data on this; we're just talking about what we think.

In *I Wear the Black Hat*, you write about the cultural history of tying women to railroad tracks and D.B. Cooper, the man who hijacked the plane in 1971 for two hundred thousand dollars. What does your research process look like when you're starting to map out these ideas and then you pull from these places?

CK: Women being tied to railroad tracks was a hard one to research in some ways. It's easy to do shallow research. It's easy to put those search terms into Google and see what comes up. Then I went to LexisNexis and did the same thing. Then, I just started looking for the earliest reference to this happening. When I found that, I tried to figure out if those sources were imaginative or based in reality. It looks to me like they were pretty imaginative and that there were instances of people tying women to railroad tracks, but for the most part this activity was seen by people who were writing plays or people who were writing films as a really clear indication of evil.

The D.B. Cooper stuff: I saw an episode of a TV show called *In Search Of*, which was hosted by Leonard Nimoy, the guy who played Spock. Every week, there was an episode about things like the Loch Ness Monster or Sasquatch or Aliens, and one of them was on D.B. Cooper. I saw that when I was probably eight. For some reason, I remembered everything about it. Throughout my life, every time I saw a reference to D.B. Cooper, I read it. If I saw a book about him, I bought it. If I saw an article about him, I read it. If there was an anniversary of that happening, I read that. So when I decided to write about him, I had "accidentally" spent a lot of time researching him, never knowing I would write about him. It turns out I did.

I don't have a lot of advice for people, but I would give writers this advice: Readers are oddly sophisticated at deducing two things: One, they can tell when a writer trying to be controversial on purpose. This is what hurts a place like *Slate*, in the sense that they now have that reputation, and people actually go into it with the preconceived notion that what they are about to see is an attempt to jar them or be salacious. If you try to be controversial on purpose, people can usually pick that up. You can maybe get away with it once. That's it. The other thing is, audiences can tell when a

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writer is trying to figure out what he assumes that audience wants to read about.

This is really motivated by the publishing industry. The publishing industry is always trying to fig-
ure out what subject for a book will be huge. But people can tell when the writer thinks that way.
People can tell when a writer is pandering to their alleged desires and trying to sell them the exact
book or article or story that they supposedly want.

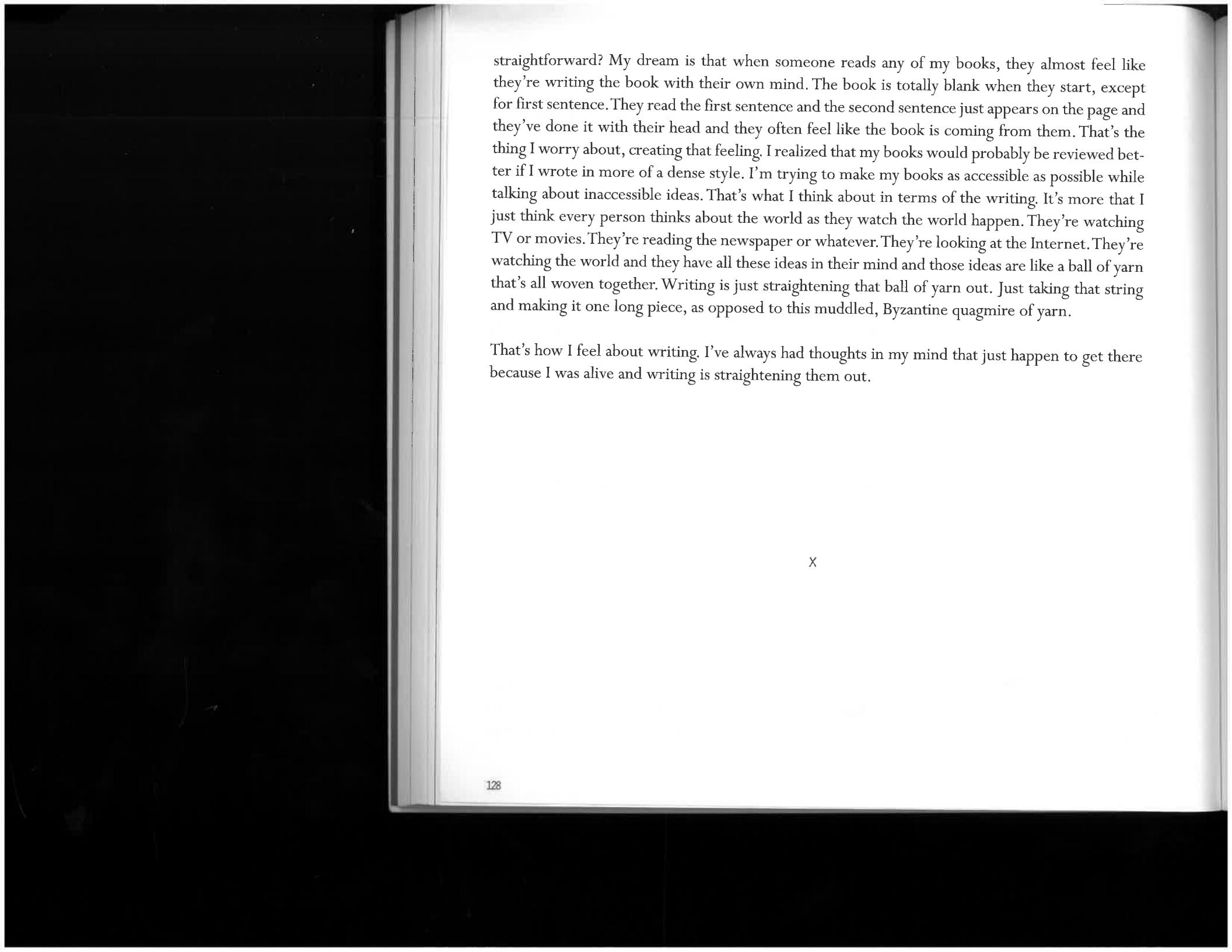
So, I have absolutely stopped trying to do that. What I do is just write whatever's interesting to me
personally and hope other people coincidentally care, which I think is the only thing that you can
really do. You can't figure out what to write about in a way to be successful. You can't strategize a
way to make people engaged. All you can do is follow the path that you organically, naturally find
yourself compelled by. Your fascination is authentic. It's not constructed. You're interested in this,
you write about it, and maybe other people will say, "I am interested in that. That is intriguing." So,
with D.B. Cooper: That was just some guy who I had always been into, and I saw an opportunity to
write about him in this book. So I did. I would really always recommend staying away from trying
to figure out what your audience wants because they don't even know. They don't know until they
see it. People don't know what they're interested by until it's too late [laughs]. So, just to get back
to your question: To me, researching D.B. Cooper was something I did accidentally for thirty years.

When you started writing that particular chapter, were you like, "[claps hands together] this is the D.B. Cooper chapter." Or did you start writing it and you're like, "here is the moment."

CK: Um,

Did it just make sense?

CK: I don't know. I suspect the first one that you said. It wasn't that conscious. This is also the thing
that is always mysterious. I don't want to say mysterious because that makes it seem like magic,
but it is mysterious. I almost try not to think about it too much. The things I think about are the
subject itself and how to make the writing clear. Can I take a complicated idea and make it more



straightforward? My dream is that when someone reads any of my books, they almost feel like they're writing the book with their own mind. The book is totally blank when they start, except for first sentence. They read the first sentence and the second sentence just appears on the page and they've done it with their head and they often feel like the book is coming from them. That's the thing I worry about, creating that feeling. I realized that my books would probably be reviewed better if I wrote in more of a dense style. I'm trying to make my books as accessible as possible while talking about inaccessible ideas. That's what I think about in terms of the writing. It's more that I just think every person thinks about the world as they watch the world happen. They're watching TV or movies. They're reading the newspaper or whatever. They're looking at the Internet. They're watching the world and they have all these ideas in their mind and those ideas are like a ball of yarn that's all woven together. Writing is just straightening that ball of yarn out. Just taking that string and making it one long piece, as opposed to this muddled, Byzantine quagmire of yarn.

That's how I feel about writing. I've always had thoughts in my mind that just happen to get there because I was alive and writing is straightening them out.

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"THE SYRINGE TAINTS HER"

AN EXCERPT FROM A DARKNESS EMERGES:
THE HEROIN AND PROSTITUTION RINGS OF MASSAPEQUA, NEW YORK

STEPHEN CARDONE

x

"If you stick a fucking needle in your arm, a person like that has no respect for human life," Mike says as the steering wheel of his cab slides loosely within the grasp of his finger gloves. "Same thing if you take it in the ass. No respect for human life. I can't understand a person like that."

A late season New York Mets game pours incessantly out of the cab's static ridden stereo speakers. Out of the rain speckled window, I see bright lights refracting through the water: orange and pink for Dunkin' Donuts, yellow and blue for Sunoco, red and white for CVS. As we turn onto Merrick Road, one of the two main arteries that connects the tissue of nearly identical Long Island towns, these colors recede into the dim glow of porch lights from private residences.

I ask my driver what it's like to drive a cab here in the incorporated village of Massapequa Park. He tells me the job demands that he drive at night. That's where the money is. Mike's unusual work schedule forces him to sleep during the day.

If Mike is lucky, he'll get to take a few drunks home from the bars tonight. "The one thing I love about this job is the women," he says. "They come out of the bars angry and alone and then they get in my cab, already looking for something. I'm more than happy to give it to them. I met my girlfriend though this line of work. Wonderful woman."

If he's unlucky, he'll be transporting the apparently large population of heroin users and dealers, prostitutes and pimps.

"The black ones don't tip," Mike says.

TEA TIME

KAYLA HEISLER

X

“Just leave the bag in,”

I said.

“Let it steep while you drink it.”

“No,” you said,

“because then,

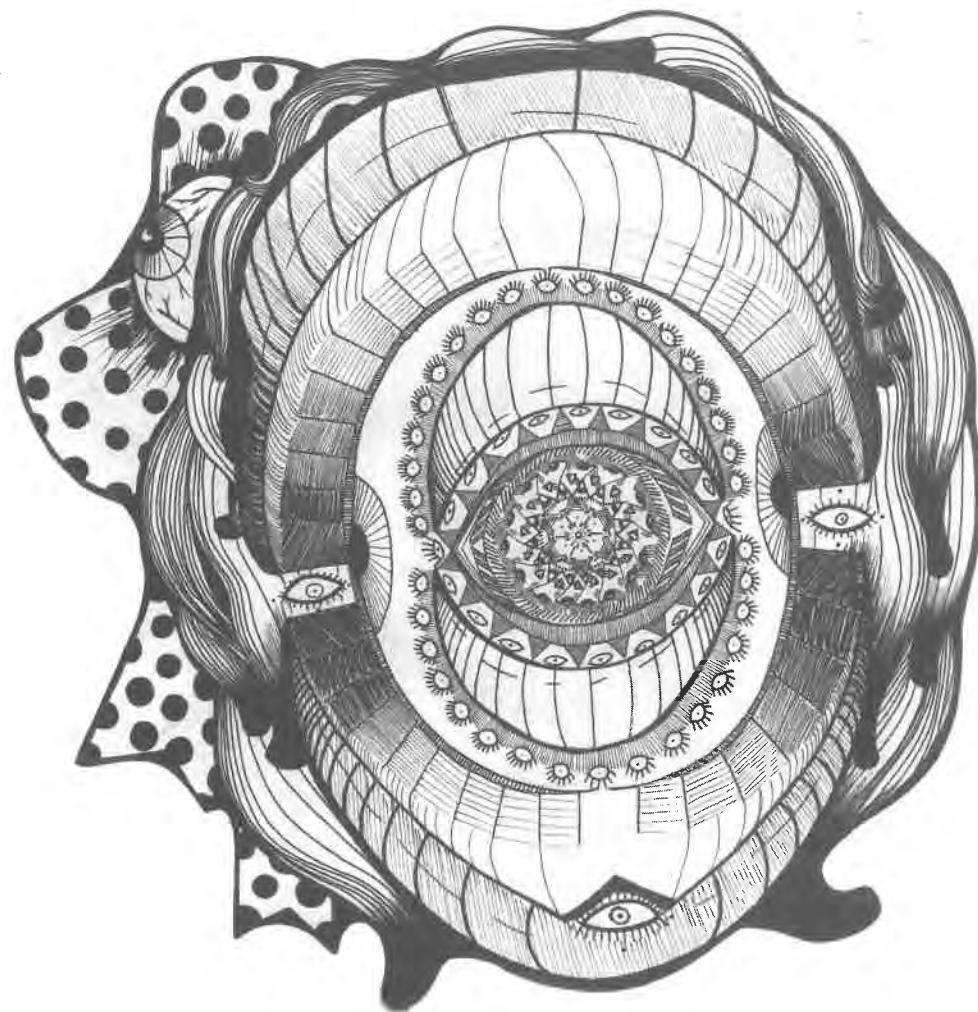
it will turn bitter.”

You were right.

EA TIME

'LA HEISLER

X







WHO SPEAKS FOR EARTH?

EZINNE UMUNNABUIKE

x

Mayor Coldwell is dead and that's as far as facts go. The Funk police recovered his body a few hours after Mrs. Coldwell reported him missing last night. Chief Harlowe says he was floating down the Black River with a knife in his throat. The offender left a message on the shale cliffs lining the east fork, written in the mayor's blood: U CANT OWN THE RIVER - AT MOS FEAR! You can't own the river, atmosphere! That's as far as facts go—the rest is paranoid speculation. Whodunit? Who's capable? The only killers I've witnessed in Funk are old age and lung cancer. Toxic winds settle here from the nuclear power plant ten miles south in Oak Harbor. Lenylhyde or hydrodiacide... some odorless, colorless pollutant is choking us to death. We're so black and white we pay no mind. No one minds but Ma; she's always holding her breath.

"Who's paranoid? There's no need," says Chief Harlowe. "We'll get 'im. Coldwell's killer will be put to justice. I'll get 'im, whoever the hell. Who's paranoid, Shoop?"

"Ma and Pam and all the neighbors." I slide a Powerball and a Pick-5 onto the counter.

"You tell 'em I won't sleep until I get 'im." He reaches over his potbelly and pulls a ten-dollar bill from his uniform pocket. "Lemme get two scratch-off tickets as well, treasure."

King of the boys in blue; he's crowned head of the Ohio lottery. Every evening at 7:00, Harlowe stops by the Shell and bets the same five numbers, alternating without change. He calls 'em lucky numbers, though he's never won a dime. They're holy numbers; God gave 'em to him.

"I ain't a gambler," he declares each time he walks in. "This is a gas station, not a casino!"

x x x

The night of the murder, before Mrs. Coldwell calls the police, Harlowe hits the Shell to play our weekly Mega-million. I'm working, of course. He's here deliberately during my shift, after Pam and the manager have gone home and I'm alone from 7:00 until close at midnight. It's easy pocket money. Mostly I wait around for the usual two or three, or the occasional outsider who straggles into the dingy place, sacrificing their pride in need of gas and cigarettes. The worn sign in the window is what baits 'em: NEXT FUEL STOP 75-MI NORTH.

I sit by the fan behind the counter, chewing bubble-gum and skimming a decade-old 1970 Reader's Digest, when Harlowe strides through the door.

"Never been a gambler, Shoop, but I'm here to play my lotto," he says. A sun-bleached ponytail hangs down his back. Rabbit-like teeth bite into his lip, the entire upper palate jutting forward. His skinny frame, with his big belly, hangs over my counter. He picks at the wet fabric beneath his arms and asks, "Will you go back and grab me a six-pack, treasure girl?"

I know he's stoned 'cause of the way he simultaneously raises his brows and lowers his eyelids, feigning vigilance and fighting the herb. Harlowe regularly smokes his confiscations. We've all seen him parked behind the high school in his patrol car with the blunt he stole from Nino. He'd wheeze through half of it and take the rest home to his bed-ridden wife—Lord knows she needs it. Mrs. Harlowe is dying of ovarian cancer, headstrong. No radiation and no pills, 'cause the Harlowes don't believe in 'em.

"You can't drink on the job," I tell him, flipping the page in my magazine to a headline that reads: The World's Most Versatile Police.

"Who says I can't?"

"Well, chief, I can't sell you beer in uniform."

"Says who?"

"Don't know, the law!"

I'm tired of his game, all my life he's given me trouble. I tell him this, irritably. He chose me out of the black girls 'cause of his liking, his lust for treasure. Ma is treasure too, but she's old like Pam; and LouLou, Pam's girl, hasn't started her period yet. I'm a rarity, in Funk.

"All yer life, huh. How many years is it been by now?" Harlowe squints through the blood vessels tangled around his irises, eyes red-white-and-blue. "You must be a woman by now."

I rest my chin in my hand, hyper-aware of the placement of my fingers along the sharp slope of my jaw. I'm always repositioning myself; crossing and uncrossing my legs; adjusting and

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readjusting the gold hoops in my ears. Each motion is calculated, communicating a message. Bowed lips that hiss, I am a woman, and I'm not yours!

"I'm eighteen next month," I tell him, toying with my braids.

"Next month—wooo-weee! Mighty close to bein' a lady. Goddamn, girl. You still with that delinquent son-of-a-bitch?"

"Antonio is my beau, if he's who you mean."

"He's a real delinquent, you know that? Lemme tell you some'bout Nino." Harlowe leans in for his droopy-eyed confession. "That boy's got connections. I heard he's pushin' supply from Toledo now, from the fuckin' jungle. And I'm not just talm'bout weed, neither. I mean speed. You e'en know what speed is, girl? It's the amphetamine. That's methyl, for yike's sake."

"Nino wouldn't do that!"

He steps back and gives me a spacey look. "It ain't so ladylike raisin' yer voice at me like that, Shoop," he says quietly.

"Pick your damn five and quit smoking Nino's bud."

"What you talm'bout Nino's bud?" He collects himself, adjusts his belt. "I'm not here to pick my five, I'm here to buy me a six and play my lotto."

"Which lotto?"

"My Mega-million."

"Your Mega-million?" I hit him where it hurts. "It'll never be your mega-million, Harlowe, long as you keep betting the same five useless numbers!"

x x x

It's cicada season. The fat bugs mate in apple trees and scream like they're being scorched. July brings Funk a nasty heat wave. The air is mercilessly humid with sweat and noxious fumes; melted tar on barren roads. We live on our porches all summer, one sweltering congregation, praying for a breeze and damning the cicadas, and praying, and damning, and praying.

And if the cicadas aren't enough, there are the crows. Loud birds. Ma says a group of 'em is called a "murder." Day in and day out, murder circles our house. The family never flies far off, scavenging the back roads and returning to nest in our oak. I named the daddy of the murder Black Bandit, 'cause he ransacked Ma's cornstalk three times this harvest, even with the chicken wire.

Ma is the first and only black woman Funk Elementary has ever hired. She's also the first science teacher, introducing the subject to kids back when parents argued their children didn't need "Earthology" till high school. I still don't know how she got the job, 'cause the way Funk sees her, she's an outrage and a fluke. She wears sunglasses twelve hours a day and urges everyone to do the same.

The mayor's funeral is held at church on Sunday afternoon, three days after his murder. The first to arrive are Mrs. Coldwell and her newlywed son Sheldon, now "Don," who flew in yesterday from his new life in New York. The Mennonite pastor Niels Yohan, called Yoyo, wears a tweed suit even though the temperature spikes into the third digits by the time he drags his wife Ruth and their little girl Rox to the chapel. Harlowe shows up with the rest of his department, all five officers and their families, to make up for his absent wife and her infertility. And those of us on the margins haul through the dirt; brown, black, and barely citizens—not entitled to any government or representable identity.

"Coldwell was like water," laments Pastor Yoyo, standing at the pulpit before the mayor's open casket. He looks down at him with shining eyes. Coldwell stares back stiffly, a menstrual pad covering his neck wound. The pastor, a red-bearded man, dabs his collar with a rag. "My dude was just like water," he goes on. "Dude was ice and then fluid and then vapor, and ice again, with no sense of transition. His death was no natural death."

"Man, Oldwell ain't do shit," Nino hollers from our pew in the back. "Water my black ass. He was water if you drank ole' dirty-ass, cracker motherfucker!" Nino sticks his foot in his mouth whenever the town gathers for these kinds of affairs. The church erupts in verbal riot, bellows rattling the walls. Our classmates and the younger kids hoot in approval. The adults and the elderly in the congregation, Coldwell's lifelong colleagues, jeer and fire insults. Harlowe and his wingman Officer Cox promptly kick Nino out the door. Now I'm stuck with Ma, and the procession sizzles on; the mayor's body ripens in the heat.

"That boy's so misbehaved, I reckon he's the one who did it!" cries Ruth.

"Take a walk with that talk, toothless Ruth." I slap the air in front of me.

"Misbehavin' don't make a boy a murderer," warbles Ma.

"Go on then and tell us what does," Ruth sniffles. "What makes somebody go out and kill a Son of God?"

"You think I know?" snaps Ma. "My two cents is he was assassinated; Big People are involved. They'll take out anyone with a clue, and Mayor was onto something." She rises in her gown,

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two cents is he was assassinated; Big People are in-d Mayor was onto something." She rises in her gown,

the only one dressed in black. She wears cheetah print shades and a curly wig that frames her face. "What do you know?" she scowls at the police.

"What you talm'bout, Hypatia?" Harlowe asks Ma. "The case is wide open. All I know 'bout now is Coldwell was stabbed with a piece from Sam's Cutlery, right over on Sancus Street."

"One of you bastards is missing a knife!" barks Officer Cox.

"I reckon it's the black boy," Rox says shyly, echoing her ma.

"I have a feeling you're right, Miss Yohan." Cox's beady eyes dart about the mass. "Who else can we stand to accuse? Who's out there while we're in here, all forty of us, honoring our mayor?"

"Cause you kicked him out!" I shout.

Yoyo slams his fist on the pulpit. "Let the man speak for himself! He oughtta be interrogated, that's the fair way to do it."

"If they question Nino, they better question all of us," I shoot back.

"Why interrogate when we can take him out before he flees?" Cox grins.

"Take him out before he flees!" roars the mass.

Pam, sitting with LouLou, kicks the pew in front of her. Mrs. Cox turns and scowls.

"Guilty or not, Antonio is y'all neighbor," spits Pam.

A feeble wail unfurls from the first pew; Mrs. Coldwell sobs. Her son Sheldon wraps his burly arm around her, but she just shakes her head, silver strands falling loose from her bun. I see why Don didn't bring his city wife on his return to the village. I don't blame him for changing his name. The church quiets. The only sounds are the buzzes of the flies and cicadas, and Mrs. Coldwell's woe. We watch in pity as she stands and walks to her husband, moaning and dragging her flip-flops. She knocks over the wildflower arrangement decorating his casket and throws herself onto him.

Don runs and grabs her arm. "Stop that, get off him." He yanks her away. "Don't touch him, he's not preserved well. Look at him ma, he's all bloated." His voice cracks. "He's not preserved well at all. He's—there's a maxi pad on his stab."

Mrs. Coldwell struggles to break free, clinging to the limp body.

"You have to let go," Don tugs, "—just—let—go of him!"

He loses his grip and stumbles back. His ma falls in the opposite direction and elbows the mayor, causing him to purge the gaseous demons in his gut. Liquefied tissue and black blood spill out of his mouth onto Mrs. Coldwell's denim dress. The drenched pad slumps off, and Mrs. Cold-

well shrieks. Tiny maggots nest in the gash, hundreds of them writhing, feasting on the mayor's throat. We gasp and turn our noses at the presence of decay.

"He wasn't embalmed, was he?" Sheldon faces his community, trembling. "This whole time, my father—you let him rot! You took him straight out of the river and you put him in a box!"

x x x

It's midnight. I unplug the fan and lock the cash register. Once Harlowe leaves, I spend my shift in mind-numbing isolation, unmonitored, for five hours—for miles, I'm alone. What keeps me here against the temptation to ditch work? I've had time to think it over. I sit and dream of human interaction; the speech and the storytellings of drifters, road-trippers... people from the world beyond Funk. I pray for truckers, hitchers, squatters, I don't care; maybe not even human—I'll welcome spirits, aliens, any stranger willing to talk. Is it hope? Or is it loneliness? Nino always picks me up five minutes late.

Outside the Shell, I shift uncomfortably in the heat, my tank top sticking to my back. The gas station faces Interstate-75, a long stretch that goes up through Toledo and into Michigan. Southward, I-75 takes you to Oak Harbor, abandoned aside from the engineers and biochemists at the nuclear plant. An explosion flares, and the sky behind the station lights up smoky pink; backyard fireworks, from Funk.

"Tell me you aren't selling meth," I hop into the passenger's side of Nino's rusted Pickup. "I'll break up with you the day you start selling meth."

He pushes his dreadlocks out of his eyes and looks at me. "Who said I was?"

"Hurl-o said he heard something."

"Did he say where he heard it or did he pull it out his ass?"

"Out his ass, probably. He was stoned, off your eighth."

"That shit makes me sick." He steers the wheel with his bony knees, rolling a blunt in his lap. "I don't sell drugs, alright? It's only bud my way." Nino is a big name in town 'cause everyone depends on him, not that he's liked. His tongue is too sharp and his voice too loud for this corner of the universe.

"What would make Hurl-o lie about you like that?"

"That's just how he wants you to see me."

"How's that?"

h, hundreds of them writhing, feasting on the mayor's presence of decay.

eldon faces his community, trembling. "This whole time, straight out of the river and you put him in a box!"

x x x

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"A dirty thug."

"Nino—"

"I mean it. That motherfucker would kill for you to see me that way."

Nino presses the gas, veering onto Black River Road. His dad's out of town, visiting a missus in Toledo, so he drives me to his house and promises he'll have me home before my ma gets up. I tell him I'm sure my ma hasn't yet gone to sleep; she's probably still up worrying about the rising hydrodiacide levels.

Moonlight fills Nino's room with shadows and streaks of indigo. He passes me the blunt and scurries to the window, peeking through bent blinds. "Something's out there," he says in a low voice.

"You mean the crows? They're so damn loud I can't hear myself think."

"Not the crows, Shoop." He furrows his unibrow, eyes round and alert. "It's some kinda creature. I sensed it creeping in the bushes on our way in. I just didn't say nothing."

"What kind of creature?" I set the blunt in the ashtray by his bed and sit up.

"Some kinda demon lookin' motherfucker..."

"Quit playing, I don't like games."

"I'm telling you," he says gravely.

Down in the kitchen, his bloodhound Bitsy begins barking excitedly. A knock at the front door has set her off.

"It's here," Nino whispers, gripping the windowsill.

I cross my arms and stand, squinting over his shoulder at the porch below. "What the hell are you talking about? That looks like Officer Cox."

"Naw, looks like a monster, look. He got green scales all over, and claws for hands. Green glowing eyes and—"

"He's been going door-to-door," I interrupt, "usually with Hurl-o. The other night they swung by my house to ask my ma some stuff about Coldwell. It was easy, it wasn't bad. Get up; I'll go talk to him with you."

The knocking continues, three raps, then five, and two more, each round more forceful. Nino slouches against the wall.

"That thing ain't Cox," he mutters. "Can't you see? You ain't even look!"

"I looked. I know who I saw. You're out of it, beau."

"Check the scales on that motherfucker, I'm telling you!"

"What'd you smoke? You must be on speed."

The pounding at the door stops abruptly. Aside from Bitsy's scampering paws, the house is still, all the lights off. I open Nino's bedroom door and step into the dark, stuffy hall, clutching at the railing as I tiptoe blindly downstairs. He stumbles after me.

"You can't just go talk to it," he whispers harshly. "Don't let that thing in!"

As swiftly as it ended, the pounding returns, beginning the moment we step foot on the tile. This time the visitor rams his body against the door, grunting with each strike.

"Follow me out back, alright?" Nino nods at the sliding door in the kitchen.

"We can't run, Nino. Where would we go?"

"Through the cornfield—it might lose us in there, come on!"

A final blow at the door splits the plywood open, and a gloved hand smashes through the debris, pointing a pistol. "Open up!" he yells.

Nino and I exchange panicked looks. We tacitly make our way through the kitchen to the back door, but Bitsy cowers behind, growling and whimpering.

"Come on, girl." I pat my knees desperately.

"We gotta go, she'll catch up."

"Funk County Police, open up." A second gloved hand reaches through the hole, feeling for a chain-lock.

"Bitsy baby, come on, dammit."

At this, the gunman fires a shot through the ceiling. Without hesitation, he aims lower and fires another. The bullet pierces Bitsy's neck flab, knocking her onto her side. Before I see the blood—before I even hear her cry, Nino puts his hand over my eyes and picks me up, sprinting out back.

He carries me across the road and drops me in the grass so I can run on my own. I jump up and race after him, legs pumping and adrenaline surging, tall stalks scratching my cheeks. More shots are fired not far behind, but the sound of the blasts fades into the indigo, and all I hear are the crows.

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LITTLE BOXES

MEREDITH BASTIEN

x

He told me his family raised him to believe in the magical powers of gemstones. Maybe that explains it all.

Sam was always more interesting than me, that's for sure. He dropped out of college and delivered mail for a while. On his first day here, he said how much he liked working indoors for once. In one of the drawers in his desk, he had a box of rubies, sapphires, and topaz. He said they gave him emotional strength.

"I don't want to hear anything you have to say," I said on his last day.

"Is any of this new to you? Are any of these feelings new? Have you done all this before? Is this special for you?" he asked in the dark on my bed. Sam was the fucking worst because everything was new to him. His skin looked like it had never been bruised before—like his job was to bathe in milk.

"I mean...I've had sex before," I said.

I could have said something really mean, but instead I just pretended to fall asleep. He hated working here, so he's quitting to backpack through Europe. He didn't like cubicles; only dead people should live in boxes, he'd say.

In high school, I was voted Most Likely to Become President, but instead I'm in a cubical, where I stare at a computer screen and avoid the Manic Pixie Dream Boy I work next to. I was the fucking head cheerleader with a 3.7 GPA and a good scholarship. But, somehow, I'm here.

"Can't you just be nice to me today?" Sam asked, cornering me in the copy room.

Conversations like this are probably the reason my mother was on some substance or another for the majority of her life. She used to walk me to school with a beer in one hand and me in

the other. She didn't fight when Dad finally got custody. Maybe she wanted a better life for me but didn't know where to start.

"You're still here?" I said to Sam, with the cruelty of my seventeen-year-old self.

He looked hurt, as only young, entitled men can. I don't think I meant anything to him; I hope I didn't, at least. However, I did feel pretty confident I could say anything I wanted, and he wouldn't file a complaint to HR. His face was attractive in a boring way, and he wrinkled it up like he was going to say something important.

"Were you ever going to tell me that your mother died?"

I hadn't told anyone at work.

"Your father accidentally called the wrong extension and just started talking," Sam told me. "That was a while ago, and you never said anything."

"If she can die anyway she wants to, then I can deal with her death anyway I want to," I said. It was uncomfortable being this emotional in the copy room, where everything comes out the same.

"You never really cared about me, did you?"

I rolled my eyes. He was such a baby.

In high school, I heard this story about a dying bird flying into a classroom at some school that I didn't go to. The bird flew in splashing drops of blood around the room and came to land on this one kid's desk. The kid took the bird in his hands, and all of the kids in the class surrounded him and watched the bird slowly stop breathing. He got up and walked out of the classroom with the bird, and everyone else followed. The high school was right next to a highway, and the kid threw the bird into traffic while everyone watched.

I thought I knew who the kid was. I called him in the public privacy of my own cubical.

Peter, the kid now an adult, remembered my name. He told me he was working as a freelance sci-fi writer. I told him I worked at a bank. He told me he was engaged.

As teenagers, we were in a church group together. One Wednesday, he came in late, but just in time for him to tell the group his highs and lows for the week. My high was that I did well on some paper and my low was that cheerleading practice was rough, or something. He said his high was that his English teacher played a movie in class, and his low was that his mom died. We all gasped, got really quiet, and then spent the rest of the night praying for him. That's why I didn't tell anyone at work.

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"What was it like when your mom died?" I asked him on the phone.
"My world ended," he said.
"Were you sad?"
"My whole world ended."
I told him that my mother choked on her own vomit while on some medley of illegal substances three weeks ago. He got quiet.

"I remember seeing your mom at church on Christmas Eve."
I remember Peter was an awkward fat kid who told us his mom died of brain cancer while wearing a shirt that said, "The only thing I smoke is the competition."

"Do you remember the story about the bird that flew into a classroom of some high school and then died in some kid's hands? And then the kid, like, walked out of the school and threw the bird into cars on the freeway with everyone watching?"

He didn't say anything.
"That's kinda how I feel," I said and hung up the phone.

Sam must have heard from his neighboring cubical and rolled his chair over to mine.
"You're not supposed to make personal calls during work hours," he said.

"Sit on a knife," I said.
I didn't talk to Sam for the rest of the day, but I ate three cupcakes at his going away party, which took up thirty minutes of paid work time.

The rain that night was the worst part. My broken umbrella made me look like a fool to the homeless guy in front of my apartment building. He always heckled me as I walked by.

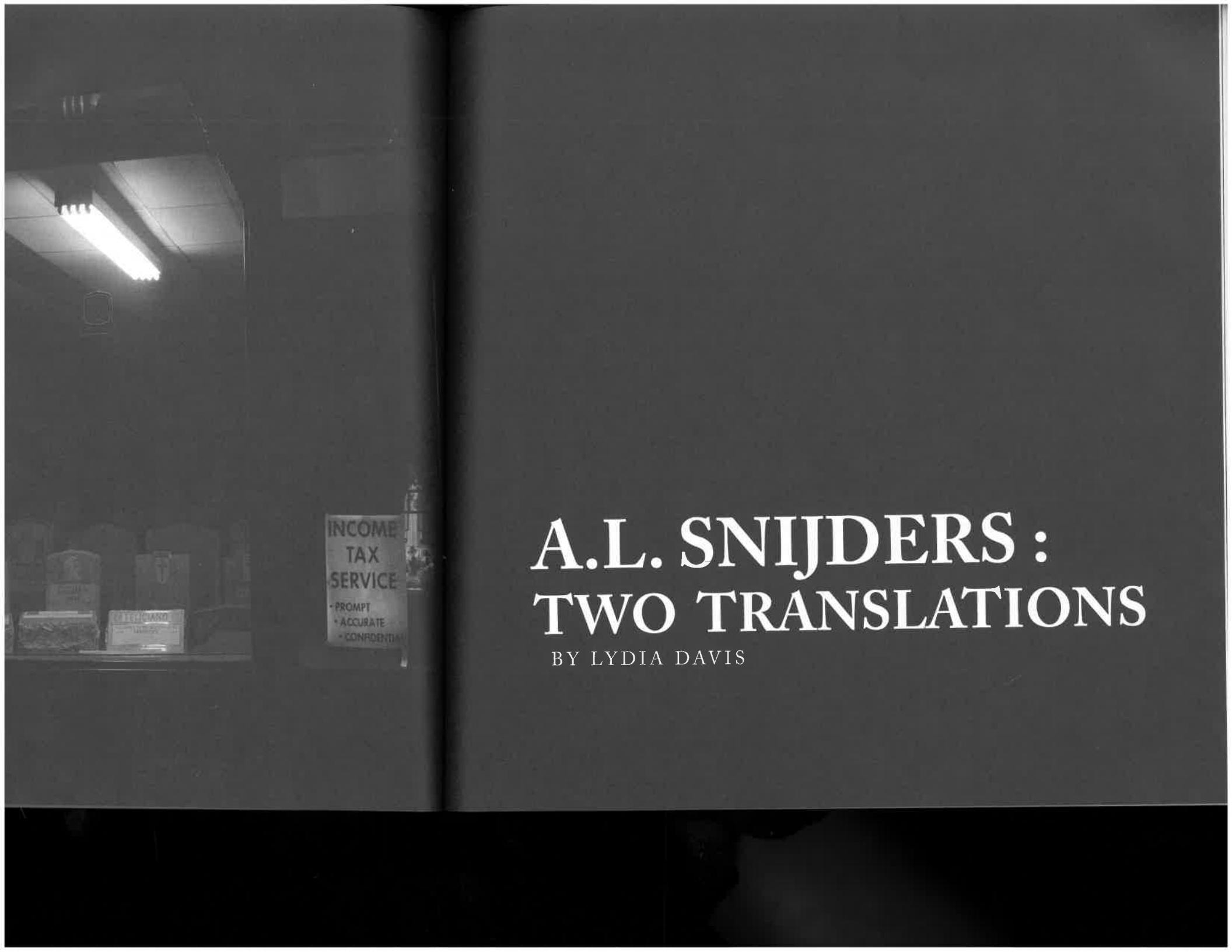
"Hey, why don't you get yourself a new umbrella, lady—"
I cut him off.
"Just let me live and let me die!" I screamed. "Live" and "die" echoed against the buildings on the block.

Ten minutes later, nine floors up, I found that Sam had left some sapphires in my coat pocket. One time—in bed, in the dark—he told me that sapphires released darkness and cleared unwanted thoughts. I threw them out the window, into the traffic below.



INCOME
TAX
SERVICE

- PROMPT
- ACCURATE
- CONFIDENTIAL



A.L. SNIJDERS : TWO TRANSLATIONS

BY LYDIA DAVIS

DOOSJE [LITTLE BOX]

A. L. SNIJDERS

TRANS. LYDIA DAVIS

x

Toen de brief van gisteren in de bus gevallen was, bleven de libelleman en ik nog even praten. Hij vertelde me dat hij ooit als goudsmid voor een weddenschap een zeer klein doosje met een scharnierende deksel had gemaakt, een kubus van een millimeter. Ik kon mijn oren niet geloven, maar ik had het goed verstaan, hij zou het bij zijn volgende bezoek meenemen. Naar huis fietsend mompelde ik 'dat kan niet dat kan niet dat kan niet', maar daar staat tegenover dat ik de libelleman nooit op een leugen betrapt heb. Er is een kans dat dit verhaal een vervolg krijgt.

De libelleman is op bezoek geweest met zijn doosje en een zeer sterke loep. Ik heb het gezien, een bij een millimeter inclusief deksel en scharnier. Er is nu een onoverkomelijk filosofisch probleem ontstaan: mijn ogen hebben het signaal niet blijvend doorgegeven aan mijn hersens. Uit het oog uit mijn hersens - ik kan het niet bevatten, hij moet terugkomen met het doosje, het wonder moet steeds ververst worden. Het doosje heeft me veranderd in een gelovige.

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When yesterday's letter had dropped into the mailbox, the dragonfly-man and I stayed and talked a little longer. He told me that he had once, as goldsmith, for a wager, made a very small box with a hinged lid, a cube measuring one millimeter. I could not believe my ears, but I had heard him correctly, he would bring it with him on his next visit. Bicycling home, I mumbled "that can't be that can't be that can't be," but on the other hand I have never caught the dragonfly-man in a lie. There is a chance that this story will have a sequel.

The dragonfly-man has come to visit with his little box and a very powerful magnifying glass. I saw it, one by one by one millimeter including lid and hinge. An insurmountable philosophical problem has now arisen: my eyes have not relayed an enduring signal to my brain. Out of eye, out of brain - I can't contain it, he will have to come back with the little box, the wonder will have to be constantly renewed. The little box has transformed me into a believer.

NOTE

dragonfly-man: in another story, "Common Redstart," Snijders tells of a stranger who comes past the house to enter the woods and photograph dragonflies in a pool of water. This man, over time, becomes something of a friend.

ZEVENTIENDE EEUW [SEVENTEENTH CENTURY]

A.L. SNIJDERS
TRANS. LYDIA DAVIS

x

Op weg naar de Pieterskerk in Leiden werd ik op de snelweg gepasseerd door een forse bestelbus in camouflagekleuren. Geen militairen, idealisten. Op de bus stond zeehondencrêche. Ik dacht aan de brief die Frits Grönloh op zaterdagmiddag kwart over vier 11 juli 1908 vanuit Middelburg aan zijn vrouw Agathe Tiket schreef.

<Vanmorgen was ik er om half drie al uit met den franzoos om met een hoogaars zee in te gaan om onder Domburg te visschen. De franzoos werd zoo ziek dat we om half zes moesten keeren, toen is i in 't kotje in slaap gevallen. Daar hebben we van geprofiteerd om in 't teruggaan eventjes aan de plaat te loopen en een zeehondje dood te trappen. De Arnemuider had 'm in een ommezientje bij z'n achterpooten in de hoogte en maakte hem met zijn waterlaarzen af voordat i goed wakker was. Dat geeft een riksdaalder premie va het rijk. Even over half acht waren we weer in Veere aan 't hoofd, de franzoos was nog altijd half dood van de zeeziekte en de kou en ging direkt naar bed.>

Ik was voor het eerst in mijn leven in de Pieterskerk, ik wist niet wat ik zag, zoiets moois had ik nog nooit gezien, ik wist niet dat mensen zoiets moois konden maken. Ik dacht aan de zeventiende eeuw, en was stiekem blij dat ik een Hollander was.

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skerk, ik wist niet wat ik zag, zoiets
mensen zoiets moois konden maken. Ik
blij dat ik een Hollander was.

On my way to the Pieterskerk in Leiden I was passed on the highway by a sturdy van in camouflage colors. Not soldiers, idealists. On the bus was written seal nursery.

I thought of the letter that Frits Grönloh wrote from Middelburg on a Saturday afternoon at quarter past four on July 11, 1908, to his wife Agathe Tiket.

"This morning at two-thirty I was already out with the Frenchman to take a hoogaars on the sea in order to fish below Domburg. The Frenchman became so sick that at five-thirty we had to turn back, then he fell asleep in the cabin.

We took advantage of that to walk on the sandbank for a moment on our way back and kick a small seal to death. The boat's Arnemuider captain lost no time hoisting him up by his hind feet and finished him off with his waterboots before the creature was fully awake. This earns a 2.5-guilder bounty from the government. A little after 7:30 we were back at the jetty in Veere, the Frenchman was still half dead from seasickness and cold and went straight to bed."

I was in the Pieterskerk for the first time in my life, I did not know what I was seeing, I had never seen anything so beautiful, I did not know that people could create anything so beautiful. I thought about the 17th century, and was secretly glad I was a Dutchman.

NOTE

hoogaars: a 17th-century Dutch fishing boat with a rectangular mainsail; it originated in the Zeeland province of the Netherlands.





NEW STUDENT TRANSLATIONS

+++ +

EDITOR : ZACHARY RIZZO

WILL CARTER / Roque Dalton
JULIA TOLO / Paal-Helge Haugen
ZACHARY RIZZO / Elio Pagliarani
MARSHALL MALIN / Andrés Neuman

"El sexo es una categoría política."

-Kate Mills

Nadie discute que el sexo
es una categoría en el mundo de la pareja:
de ahí la ternura y sus ramas salvajes.

Nadie discute que el sexo
es una categoría familiar:
de ahí los hijos,
las noches en común
y los días divididos
(él, buscando el pan en la calle,
en las oficinas o en las fábricas;
ella, en la retaguardia de los oficios domésticos,
en la estrategia y la táctica de la cocina
que permitan sobrevivir en la batalla común
siquiera hasta el fin del mes).

Nadie discute que el sexo
es una categoría económica:
basta mencionar la propositión,
las modas,
las secciones de los diarios que solo son para ella
o solo son para él.
Donde empiezan los líos
es a partir de que una mujer dice
que el sexo es una categoría política.

porque cuando una mujer dice
que el sexo es una categoría política
puede comenzar a dejar de ser mujer en sí
para convertirse en mujer para sí,
constituir a la mujer en mujer
a partir de su humanidad
y no de su sexo,
saber que el desodorante mágico con sabor a limón
y el jabón que acaricia voluptuosamente su piel
son fabricados por la misma empresa que fabrica el napalm
saber que los labores propias del hogar
son labores propias de la clase social a que pertenece ese
hogar,
que la diferencia de sexos
brilla mucho mayor en la profunda noche amorosa
cuando se conocen todos esos secretos
que nos mantenían enmascarados y ajenos.

PARA UN MEJOR AMOR
(TO A BETTER LOVE)

ROQUE DALTON
TRANS. WILL CARTER

X

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"Sex is a political category"
-Kate Mills

No one disputes that gender
is a category in the world of a couple:
of the tenderness and their wild branches.

No one disputes that gender
is a familiar category:
from it, children,
the nights in common
and the days divided
(he, searching for bread in the street,
in the offices, in the factories;
she, in the rearguard of domestic life,
in the strategy and tactic of the kitchen
so they may be able to survive the common struggle
if even until the end of the month).

No one disputes that gender
is an economic category:
enough talking about prostitution,

fashion,
sections of the paper that are only for her
or only for him.
The mess begins
when a woman says
that gender is a political category.

Because when a woman says
that gender is a political category
she can begin to shed her prescribed self
and become a woman for herself,
to create the woman in woman
through her humanity
and not through her gender,
knowing that the magic deodorant with a scent of lemon
and the soap that gently caresses her skin
are manufactured by the same company that produces napalm
knowing that her own labors of the household
are labors of a social class belonging to this home,
that the differences in gender
shine much brighter in the profound, loving night
when they meet the many secrets
obscure and foreign

Noko som veks seg stort i kroppen, og let etter seg uroleg og tomt.
Eg kan vakne om natta og vite det, utan namn. Det som skal skje,
Bere det løynt under huda. Pulsen slår så raskt, pusten er kort, forandra.
Noko blir dreidd rundt der inne, nook blir skrudd fast.
Eg vil gå ut, feste nye dagar mot bringa. (p. 46)

x x x

Når eg ligg heilt stilt: Harde hjarteslag
i skapet. Blaute holer i gulyplankene
framfor senga. Det bryt fram. Roser av
blod og støypejern. Mørk lukt av kjøt,
kjønn
Snegler over neglene mine
Våte speglar
Torvesong Bleik sol
Mitt skip er lasta med hender
Ormen kryp gjennom eit auga av stål, og Kristus
står i hagen, kledd som lønnetre (p. 65)

FROM ANNE

PAAL-HELGE HAUGEN
TRANS. JULIA TOLO

X

ter seg uroleg og tomt.
n. Det som skal skje,
kt, pusten er kort, forandra.
crudd fast.
-6)

Something that grows big in the body, and leaves behind unease and emptiness.
I can wake up in the night and know, without words. What will happen.
Just that, hidden underneath the skin. Pulse beats so fast,
breathing quick, changed.
Something is being twisted around in there, something is being screwed tight.
I want to go out, fasten new days to my chest. (p. 46)

x x x

When I lie completely still: Hard heartbeats
in the dresser. Soft holes in the floorboards
in front of the bed. Breaking through. Roses of
blood and cast iron. Dark smell of meat,
sex
Snailing over my nails
Horse's sweat, blue roads under my belly
Wet mirrors
Marketsong Pale Sun
My ship is filled with hands
The snake is creeping through an eye of steel, and Christ
is in the garden, dressed as a maple tree (p.65)

III.I

No, no, no -- Carla è in fuga negando

una corsa fra i segnali del centro non si nota
se non c'è fra i venditori di sigarette
un meridionale immigrato di fresco
ancora curioso di facce

avanti in marcia

chi ci mette la carica?

scapigliata pallidona

non è vero se non urli, come, paonazzo atrabiliare,
quel tale per diffondere un giornale

questo no. Ho paura, mamma Dondi ho paura
c'è un ragno, ho schifo mi fa schifo alla gola
io non ci vado più.

Nell'ufficio B non c'era nessuno
mi guardava con gli occhi acquosi
se tu vedessi come gli fa la vena
ha una vena che si muove sul collo
Signorina signorina mi dice
mamma io non ci posso più stare
è venuto vicino che sentivo
sudare, ha una mano
coperta di peli di sopra
io non ci vado più.

Schifo, ho schifo come se avessi
preso la scossa

ma sono svelta a scappare
io non ci vado più.

Sagome dietro la tenda
Marlene con il bocchino sottile
le sete i profumi i serpenti
l'ombra suona un violino di fibre
di nervi, sagome colore di sangue
blu azzurro viola pervinca, sottili
le braccia le cosce
enormi, bracciali monili sul cuore
nudo, l'amore
calvo la belva che urla la vergine santa
l'amore che canta chissà
dietro la tenda
le sagome.

La vedova signora Dondi
forse si sarà spaventata
ma non ha dato tempo a sua figlia
Non ti ha nemmeno toccata
gli chiederemo scusa
fin che non ne trovi un altro
tu non lascerai l'impiego
bisogna mandare dei fiori
alla signora Praték.

FROM LA RAGAZZA CARLA
(THE GIRL CARLA)

ELIO PAGLIARANI
TRANS. ZACH RIZZO

Sagome dietro la tenda
Marlene con il bocchino sottile ,
le sete i profumi i serpenti
l'ombra suona un violino di fibre
di nervi, sagome colore di sangue
blu azzurro viola pervinca, sottili
le braccia le cosce
enormi, bracciali monili sul cuore
nudo, l'amore
calvo la belva che urla la vergine santa
l'amore che canta chissà
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bisogna mandare dei fiori
alla signora Praték.

III.I

X

No, no, no -- Carla runs away denying

a race between the street lights downtown goes unnoticed
if not by the cigarette vendors
a newly immigrated southerner
still curious about faces

marching forward
who will take charge?

disheveled pale faced girl
it's not true if you don't scream, like the gloomy purple faced
man selling newspapers

not this. I'm afraid, mamma Dondi I'm afraid
there's a spider, I am disgusted it makes me sick to the throat
I won't go back there again.
There was nobody in office B
he looked at me with watery eyes
if you could have seen how the vein

he has a vein in his neck that moves
Signorina Signorina he says to me
mamma I can't stay there anymore
he came so close I felt
his sweat, the top of his hand
covered with hair
I won't go back there again.
Disgusting, I'm disgusted as if I had
taken a shock

but I was quick to escape
I won't go back there again.

Silhouettes behind the curtain
Marlene with her thin cigarette holder
the silk the perfume the serpents
the shadow plays a violin strung
with nerves, blood-red silhouettes
azure blue periwinkle purple, slender
arms enormous
thighs, bracelets jewels on the naked
heart, bald
love the screaming beast the holy virgin
love that sings who knows what
behind the curtain
shadows.

The widow Signora Dondi
maybe you would be alarmed
but she didn't give her daughter the time of day
He didn't even touch you
we'll apologize to him
until you find another
you will not leave your job
we must send flowers
to Signora Praték.

PLEGARIA DEL QUE ATERRIZA

ANDRÉS NEUMAN

Cielo, yo que no creo que en ti floten mensajes
y que leo en el alma (y digo alma)
cómo nada más alto nos protege
que el placer, la conciencia y la alegría,
yo te prometo, cielo, si aterrizamos sanos
que guardaré este miedo que hace temblar mi pulso
mientras escribo en manos de la furia del aire.
Lo guardaré, si llego, no para fabular
razones superiores ni para desafiarlas
sino por recordarte siempre, cielo,
liso, llano y azul como ahora te alcanzo,
hermoso, intrascendente, un simple gas que agita
la luz y me commueve
como sólo un viajero transitorio,
como sólo un mortal puede saberlo.

PLEGARIA DEL QUE ATERRIZA
(LANDING PRAYER)

ANDRÉS NEUMAN
TRANS. MARSHALL MALIN

X

S

o
ulso

ta

Sky, I don't believe messages float in you
& I know in my soul (& I say soul)
nothing higher could protect us
pleasure, consciousness, happiness,
I promise you, sky, if we land sound
I will harbor this fear that raises my pulse
while I write the fury of the air on my hands.
I will harbor it, if I arrive, not to fable
better reasons nor to defy them
but remember you forever, sky,
smooth, flat & blue as I reach for you now,
beautiful, inconsequential, a simple gas that stirs up
light & moves in me
as only a traveler in transit,
as only a mortal can know.

Rotas horas, las olas.
Se anticipan,
se empujan,
se disgregan.
Recomienzan el cielo permanente.
En su justo engranaje nos emulan:
detrás alguien
siempre mira morir a alguien que mira.

(RELOJ DE MAR)
(OCEAN WATCH)

ANDRÉS NEUMAN
TRANS. MARSHALL MALIN

X

Broken hours, waves.
Expect themselves,
push themselves,
disperse themselves.
They continue the permanent circle.
In their own cogging they emulate us:
behind someone
always watching for the death of someone who watches.

X

ACQUIESCENCE

EMILIANO BOMBIERI-MORALES

X

You never realize how important money is until it puts you in a dire situation, and I mean real dire. Sure, bills need to be settled, your cat-walker needs to be paid, and the cartel is always exceptionally good at reminding you that you owe them money. That's when money becomes really important, when you have to settle a two thousand dollar debt with people who don't fucking mess around. The only bright side is that it can't get much worse, especially when you're pretty sure that there is a dead rat living somewhere in your wall.

You look your cat, Sir Duke, in the eye and give him ten points for killing the rat, but deduct six for letting the rodent crawl his smelly ass into the wall. You deduct two from yourself for not giving the cat to your ex-girlfriend who left you for a guy named Hermando. She told you to keep it as "something to remember her by."

Eventually you find yourself sitting around with your friends, doing line after line of some shitty coke that you're convinced is cut with flour, which you got from a guy named Herman, who you don't like anyway cause the name reminds you of Hermando. Someone mentions how he just got laid off from a bank where he was working as a clerk, and that's when the ridiculously stupid idea smacks you in the head. Your friend Delayn knows the bank inside out—where the security guard sits, where the emergency button to automatically phone the police is, and all that sort of shit. Its an opportunity of a lifetime, not only does it solve your immediate debt issues, but you know that deep down inside you've always wanted to rob a bank. The four of you talk it out. You strategize, do some more lines, buy some remarkably realistic paintball guns from some guy on Craigslist, and rehearse commands like, "Give me the money!", "Everyone on the ground!",

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or maybe "This is stick up!" all throughout the night. You decide to scrap that last one because it sounds too much like something from Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. When you're in the bathroom you rehearse that last one some more because you really like Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. You realize that Westerns are the shit and plan to watch more when this is all over, maybe Once Upon a Time in the West.

The next day you all drive up to the entrance of the bank with sweaty palms, shaky hands, a floor full of empty red bull cans, and noses powdered bright white from doing an excessive amount of blow. You've had five bulls and enough bumps to make you believe in magic. You're wearing a bandana over your face and a cowboy hat. Kent and Smiley are both decked out in black, wearing ski masks with skulls painted on the front, and Delayn—poor Delayn—is wearing a rainbow ski mask. You don't feel as bad about the cowboy hat.

You're nervous but excited, because it feels like you're living some fantastical dream where you play the role of a bankrobber, or, to be more precise, a bank robber from a Western. You picture yourself and your gang riding off into the sunset. The thought makes you think of your current getaway plan, Kent's mom's broken down minivan. You start to wonder why the four of you didn't have a better, more elaborate getaway plan, like having a plane waiting for you on some runway to take you to the Caribbean where you could drink Piña Coladas and live out the Amer- ican Dream. Then you remember your cat, and the fact that if he's not fed, he'll probably die, and if he dies then you'll have two dead animals in your apartment.

Smiley asks what kind of bank this is. That it doesn't look like any kind of bank he's ever seen, and what kind of name is, "The Community Bank." Kent can't help but laugh at the misprint. You realize that your entrance is taking too long, that the nerves are starting to outweigh the ex- citement, so you count to three, one, two, three. You grab the handle of the door, yank it open and run to the bank. You bust through the door and yell, "This is a stick up!" Kent and Smiley yell, "Hands up!" and Delayn just makes a weird yelling sound.

Smiley snarls at the clerk, whose hands are not even raised—"Where is the vault?" The clerk stares at Smiley with a wooden expression on his face, the color completely drained, and his mouth hanging slightly ajar. Kent responds by clapping his hands in front of the clerk and saying, "Well? Well? Come on you fuckhead where the hell is the vault?" It pisses you off that the employ- ees and customers aren't reacting the way they should be. They should be shocked, scared, fright- ened—something!



You step forward and place the barrel of the gun against the clerk's forehead and say very softly, venomously, "Where's the fucking vault." The clerk's expression tightens, his hands now held fully erect, and you feel content with yourself, hell, you feel badass. The clerk swallows and points right and says, "Down this hallway, second door on your left." You thank the clerk and book it down the hallway, leaving Smiley and Kent behind to make sure no funny business goes down.

You and Delayne sprint down the hall and you do a double-take at the tellers and again think to yourself, these bank clerks really need to wake the fuck up! You slow down a bit as you notice the design of the bank, the whiteness of the walls, all the doors lining the hallway, and a strange poignant smell that you can't quite put your finger on. You and Delayne reach the vault which is a large door with an electronic lock. You try to break it down but with little luck, and you start to panic. Delayne produces a key card, slides it in the reader and you see the light turn from red to green. Delayne tells you to guard the door and he rushes in. You look right, you look left, no security guards. You hear Smiley yell something, but you can't really hear what it is. You bang on the vault door and say, "We gotta go!" Delayne emerges with a sack full of money and you can't believe it, this stupid idea you have is actually going to pay off. You shake your head in awe, involuntarily congratulating yourself on your ingenuity.

You and Delayne regroup with Smiley and Kent and you all run out. Someone yells, "Later bitches!" You all get into the car and floor it.

Clean get away.

You ask yourself why anyone would ever need a plan for an escape route when robbing a bank, or why people don't rob banks more often. Kent finally parks under a bridge and asks Delayne how much you all made today. He says he doesn't know, but it was a lot and he produces the heist's profits. You observe it, take it from Delayne, shake it, and ask him what the hell this nasty white shit is. He tells you as if it was no major issue, and you curse him again.

"What the fuck are we supposed to do with a giant bag full of sperm!" yells Smiley.

"Sell it on the black market," says Delayn. "People will pay mad money for this shit, impotence is going around."

Poor Delayn. You open the door and get out of the car, turn around and shoot Delayn ten times with the paintball gun. He screams, not only because it hurts, but you also shot his sack, breaking the vials inside, and sperm starts to leak through it. Kent gets pissed because he can't have sperm all over his mom's car, and you shoot him too.

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Before you know it you're in an all out free-for-all paintball fight, running around like
idiots, the hatred melting away with the sheer enjoyment of shooting up your friends with the var-
ious blues and greens of your paint filled bullets. Eventually, the only sounds that are heard are the
continuous clicks of empty chambers, and you all stop, breathing heavily. There's tension in the air,
but everyone is too tired to pay it any mind. You all get back into the car and do some more lines.
Kent finally drops you off close to your house and you limp down the street, holding your neck
where you are sure a welt will grow. You hear a siren and wonder whether it's for you. You rub your
ass a little, Smiley shot you from behind. You make a mental note on your way home and grip your
paintball gun a little tighter. Who needs a fucking cat anyway?

PUP

MARSHAL MALIN

X

Where was it written that I could not
learn more of myself from a small creature,
that I must, by some act of memory
& warning, correct my own behavior?

I've watched the canine—sleep & eat cycles
sharp teeth, & hopeless trust placed in me who,
by all doctrines of man, he calls master—
he, no subordinate, I call my friend.

But there was something in donning that mask
when non-canine, another human led
around on a leash, begging & barking,
licking boots & whimpering in a corner—

it seemed, a beaten creature, not merely
struck, but defeated. Being willfully
owned, the force of submission & consent—
both breaking another skin he can't see.

PUP

HAL MALIN

X

MARBLE

TAMAR LAPIN

X

In school, the girls walked to the shop
and smiled small closed-mouth smiles,
to get what they were after. Found themselves
free. Ballet flats at their feet, they left, bruised
and holding drinks that said, "Eat Me."
With springs in their knees and a lightness in them,
they waved at the white lady under the toy-
sailboat-filled reservoir. Felt the sunrays on their faces,
pupils dilated by the sharp light.

Once a week, they found the old marble house
and cleansed themselves with wine and ash-filled
mouths, and were told about other religions, and saw
men feed each other poison, and saw a harp as old
as the stained glass windows and statues -nude- so old
none of it mattered.

TEETH

TAMAR LAPIN

X

My loves are like my teeth:
They stay in my mouth

A pretty smile
of two neat rows
of colors ranging
from after-the-dentist white
to coffee and cigarette stained
brown.

Straightened by braces at age fourteen
the retainers stayed stuck beneath.
At eighteen, one shifted in its spot,
turning slightly in broad view.

I tried to hide its crookedness
behind a red painted smile.

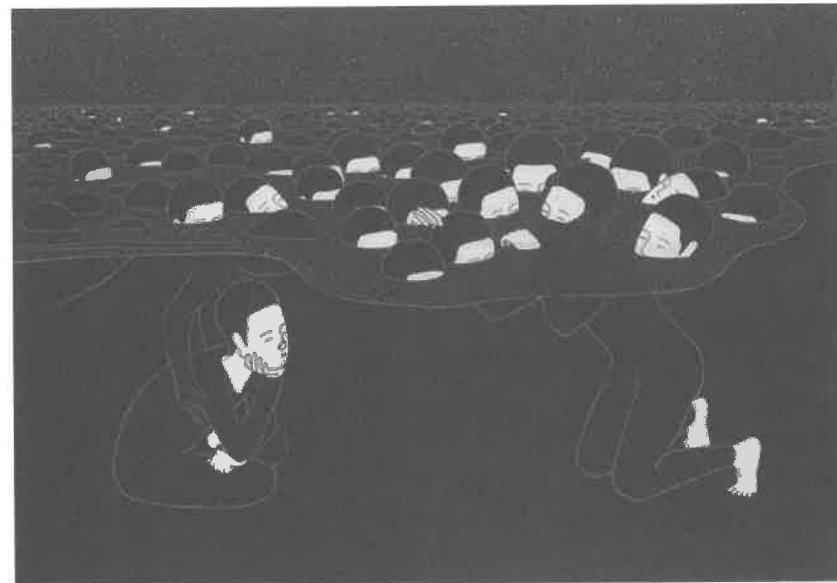
A girl once told me,
“My teeth are a spectrum.”
I spit back,
“How nice that must be.”

EETH

IAR LAPIN

X

Now, I always make sure to
scrub
floss
rinse and repeat
but some persistent stains remain.



EDEN

RAINIA LEON

FOR AIDEN GREGORY CENTURY, 58 DAYS OLD

x

1: paradise to flesh

here buzzes the song of fireflies floating
silent lanterns illuminate the haze
she swallowed bugs her abdomen glows
beneath my hand a pounding sways
within the growing globe of her body

2: sonogram

Ava our little bird
Aiden our little fire

The doctor asks if my sister and me want
to see the faces I swell
nod my head through tears
and the machine uncoils one face in a hush

EDEN

JINA LEON

Y CENTURY, 58 DAYS OLD

x

my sister's forehead a flat plain
her husband's nose all button and wide

Ava's eyes seem open and I wonder
what worlds she sees

Aiden won't twist we sing and warm
him by pressing on my sister's belly with care
he sleeps stubbornly he has shown his heart
the limping pulse that must be enough
turning is too much we smile
not knowing
I hold Ava's picture like an icon
staring deep into the eye pits
until I feel her stare back

3: NICU

I hold Ava and Aiden is ash
fires burn so fasthe flashed in air
no fanning would keep the ember steady
ash on wind he's gone
ash on my tongue where I kissed his smooth
forehead newly washed of the tape that held
the monitors of his life

4:

On the last day
I held Ava's hand to Aiden's
the first and last time in this world
They'll play together in their dreams
my sister said like a prayer the others left

I remained a moment while the girl
cried a goodbye her lips could not form
while he heard a goodbye he could not know

And when it was time for the machines to stop
I carried the bird away from the fire
heavy heavy I lost my way
a labyrinth of curtains infants in pain
mothers weeping in whispers
or in thanks to a god many

how had that storm found its way
into sunny sterile halls
I could barely see for the light
refracting from the streaming glass
strange and terrible wonderland I must be dreaming

alone I carried the sister
while her brother closed his eyes
to wait for his first bath

ALL-PURPOSE

MICHELLE HYTNER

x

An average lime contains around twenty calories worth of juice and sour pulp. Key limes—smaller yet arguably more flavorful than their larger, store-bought counterparts—are not included in this figure. Most often when I've found myself enjoying key limes, they have been juiced into custard-filled pies or squeezed into specialty cocktails, which enormously skews their projected calorie count into a figure I couldn't care less about.

I haven't been able to get my custard fix since the only shop in Manhattan to sell frozen custard closed down last month without a breath of notice. I continue to mourn its absence by refusing to seek custard in other boroughs.

After attending a class at SoulCycle, a friend recounted to me that the leader of one section stoically mentioned that if Robin Williams attended regular classes with them, he would not have felt the urge to hang himself. The leader then continued to pedal as if what he said was gospel. I mused to my friend that there was an inherent difference between drinking the Kool-Aid and chugging it.

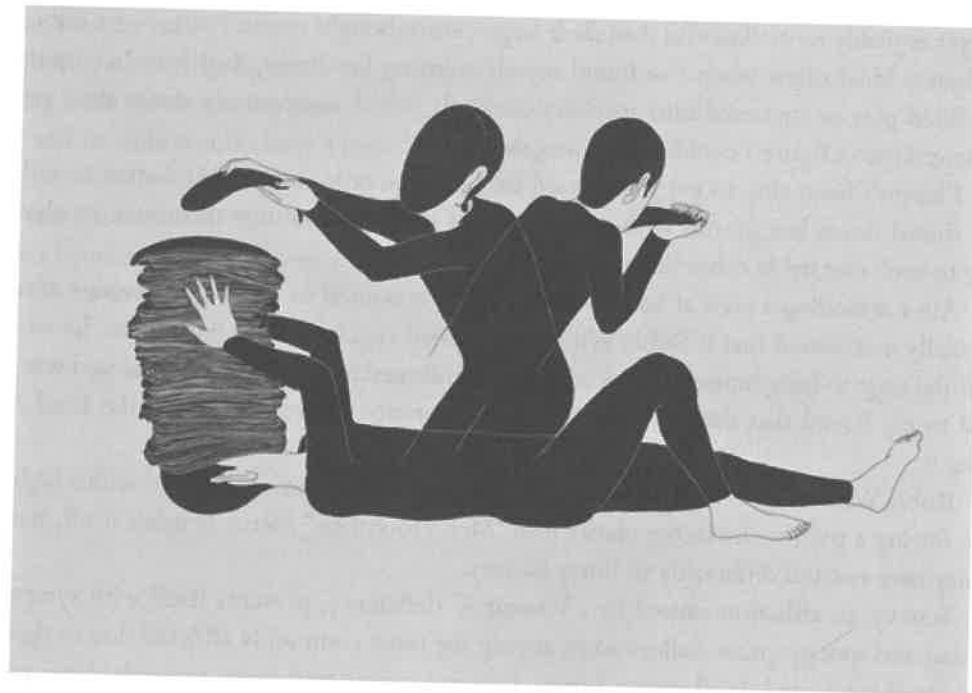
Robin Williams famously struck Pierce Brosnan in the back of the head with a high-velocity lime during a pool scene in the classic film "Mrs. Doubtfire." Pierce brushes it off, but James Bond may have reacted differently to limey battery.

Scurvy, an affliction caused by a Vitamin C deficiency, presents itself with symptoms of depression and spongy gums. Sailors were among the most commonly afflicted due to their lousy diets of cured meats and dried grains. Limes, rich in ascorbic acid, were prescribed as a palliative measure to combat the disease. The Kakadu plum actually contains far more Vitamin C per serving

than limes do, but it's native to Australia and hoarded by Aborigines for cosmetic use.

Ninety-seven percent of U.S. limes are grown in Mexico, a country known for its savory chocolate mole sauce and questionable treatment of donkeys. This year, torrential rains damaged the delicate lime blossoms, and cartels have taken to hoarding and selling limes instead of uncut bricks of cocaine. This is perhaps why my favorite Thai restaurant no longer includes a small wedge of lime with my order of Pad Thai unless I ask nicely.

A run-of-the-mill, traditional gin and tonic is served with a wedge of lime balanced on the edge of the glass. The people at Hendricks Gin decided to exempt themselves from this tradition by calling for a slice of cucumber to garnish instead. This is why I drink Bombay Sapphire. They get me.



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THE RED WOMAN

GRIFFIN SHERBERT

x

COURT TRANSCRIPT: STATE VS. MS. TRISH F. ENGBRIEF—B_____, N_____
_____, Dec. 3rd 1963—DISTRICT ATTORNEY, CHARLES PROLIXUS:

Everything you are about to read here is false. The following notes and other miscellaneous recordings by Sam Coulter, compiled here by Ms. Engbrief, are completely false, untrue, and at best, the psychotic ravings of a madman. These hardly intelligible notes have absolutely zero—I repeat—zero truth to them, and anyone deranged or demented enough to read into these notes, and falsely begin to believe that they are true, is no better off than Sam Coulter himself—a dead man—and a victim of nothing other than the selfish and insane squanderings of his own egotistical life.

To even begin to try to tie this case to the scientifically unproven theory and obvious delusion of the so-called “Red Woman,” and then, to go further into thinking that Sam Coulter’s death was anything other than suicide, would be a declaration of madness. Sam Coulter had reached the end of his rope—he was poor; a drunken-delusional-depressive; a failure with the opposite sex and his career;—Hell! If I was him I would’ve done off with myself years ago!—I kid, but in actuality, he did indeed kill himself, and for that we are all deeply sorry.

However, on Oct. 9th of this year, 1963, Mr. Coulter walked into 324 W____ V____ by himself, alone, and just as singularly, succinctly did away with himself, too. Ms. Engbrief has stated and re-stated that, “if you read into the story, you can tell what is true and what is not,” but to that I say no, capital-N-O. Every lonely loser wants their name to shine out like neon on a crowd, but that’s not the way she spins. None of that is true, nor will it ever be. I repeat: None of this is true.

Because of this trial's notoriety and nefarious public opinion, various names and places have been omitted and/or changed. While this obviously poses readability and understandability issues, these various omissions must be kept and dealt with. For the safety of the egos and orifices of the offending and depending parties, and concerning both their mental and physical health and continuity, the omissions serve as generalizers and quantifiers; the places and the players that inhabit them are for the most part pointless and pedantic but serve to imitate the reality of the said persons and places concerned here in these following pages.

Furthermore, by omitting these well-known and famed players in this tragicomedy absurdity, the reader will objectively see that this "case,"—if we can even call it that, or even should call it that—that this "case" is nothing more than the suicide diary of a depressed, obsessed, repressed, and possibly homosexual maniac who could barely string together the few oblique sentences that only serve to confuse and distract the reader from the very simple factual information of this time wasting affair.

Here are your packets. I'm told the order of the notes is as chronological as possible, though personally, I don't see a single connective strain within this whole quagmire of self-indulgence. But, I'll let you see for yourself—begin.

§ TRANSCRIPT: AUDIO CASSETTE RECORDING: 19??)

"...(garbled static)...I dreamt last night... (static)... of a woman in red...(static)...dark room... dead wood floor... (garbled static)... billowing black curtains...fire... (coughing)... murder... painted red silk... (harsh coughing static)... then silence...dead silence."

SAM COULTER DIARY ENTRY, 8:55AM SEPT. 21st— S_____ , J_____ & Co.: 1963

It's official. I'm a professional journalist. In five minutes, I'll begin my work as a paid writer with a knack for the facts, a skill for the truth. I'm going to establish the new rules for reality. Become the great separator, the great divider; the official, officiated highlighter of high-minded information. Without me there is no story. Without the story there is no me. My task is simple and clear. I will not be driven from my focus like I have been so often in the past. No more whores and drink for me. With my words I shall be reborn, hoisted and raised, immortal in essence and name

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alike. There are real stories to write about real people. I am through with sinking into submissions at
the whims of my whimsies. Words will be used for what they were intended for and will not be dirt-
ied in their meaning by my lost and lonely tendencies. I am Sam Coulter. I will write nothing but the
truth.

SAM COULTER DIARY ENTRY, 9:11AM SEPT. 21st—S_____, J_____, & Co.: 1963

Sitting across from me, at my desk, is a girl at her desk. A secretary. A beauty, whom I'm sure they'd jokingly say lives next door. She has already proven to be an immense distraction. A black-and-gold placard on her desk reads: ELEANOR. She's spent the morning twisting a dark lock of freshly washed hair around her well-manicured finger, mindlessly flipping through a tabloid magazine whose cover shows a middle-aged ex-starlet sporting devil horns and holding a gaudy dog leash, which is attached to a man on all fours.

As she sits there, a lithe and lovely leg dawdling in an abstract rhythm to an abstract time, causing the white cotton skirt to ebb and flow up her ocean-foam thighs; she must know the way in which she changes language. She must. How else could such an angelic beauty scowl in the spotlight that I've blazed upon her? How else would she know to feign indifference at my many quivered-lipped smiles? And how aesthetically she forgets my name.

...

My first assignment is an op-ed piece on a dead writer whose name escapes me. I don't really see the point in writing about someone whose name and life are only words and memories now. The fame and glory should go to us, the living ones, the ones who fantasize and glorify; us who are made to eulogize those drippy past tense necrophiles. Where is our magic? Who sings for us once we're gone?

SAM COULTER DIARY ENTRY, 4:34AM SEPT. 27th—S_____, J_____, & Co.: 1963

I never thought writers drank very much, but ever since working for S_____, J_____, & Co., the drink has been taking me out nightly. And once you're in a rhythm of dedicated drinking, the world and its players begin to break the game's set rules. I held a dead woman in my arms tonight... but first, there are other streams still to fish.

My usual day consists of waking up cotton-mouthed and angry; groping gluey-eyed for the first container containing liquid anything within arm's reach. After becoming a bit more human, I head out to the office. By 10AM, J_____ is thoroughly saturated and calls me into his office to talk at me. He complains about his life, his lost love, his self-made, self-proclaimed, self-ordained problems that multiply and re-magnify upon each daily retelling. These amateur therapy sessions can last anywhere between five minutes to five hours and can only be tolerated by the quick application of rye over ice.

After the sloppy morning sundries with J_____ have concluded, S_____ calls me in for the afternoon cocktail and sober conversation. Each matinee runs about the same: "My wife is beautiful. Was... is... who the fuck can tell anymore... You got a woman, Coulter?... Ah well, one day she'll find ya. She'll catch you alone, when you're sleeping, slip between the cracks of your dreams. She won't give you a fucking inch till you're hung by your own words—mark it, Coulter.... Did I ever tell you about my wife? (13 times and counting) She...she was beautiful. I still see her nightly, glowing red in my dreams. Still feel her touch in the bottom of my spine... Once they get inside you, get inside your story..." Yada-yada-yada, so on and so forth.

After that diatribe it's usually quitting time, so the bullpen and I head over to Sueño de la Tierra for tequila and tacos to even the keel. Last night, this old sports writer, Mueller, climbed on top of our rickety, circular bar table with its Mother Mary mosaicked surface, and let loose to high heaven. He smashed beer bottles and crunched tequila shooters beneath his age-brined penny loafers, howling out whole notes in foamy-mouthed derision.

When we finally got him down and calmed down, he told us that his neighbor had been found dead in the middle of the night, last night—floating above the ground in an eternal sway to imaginary music. The police ruled it a suicide, but what self-respecting man would hang himself with a red length of satin? I can't think of one, but then again, that doesn't mean that one isn't out there, or will be.

SAM COULTER DIARY ENTRY, 10:58AM SEPT. 30th— S_____, J_____, & Co.: 1963

Silly Sam, she called me. Touched my arm in passing and looked away with a smile. That kind of wish-washy social fumble you'd have to imagine a more Casanova Coulter would've capitalized on. But what can one possibly do? This world is all doers and dreamers and I haven't laid stake in anything yet.

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OCT. 30th—S_____, J_____ & Co.: 1963

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Silly Sam, she cooed. A cream-colored hand at her throat, effortlessly guiding my eyes to the red-painted puffs, and the slightly opened mouth filled with my downcast eyes. She glided through the air around me and changed the atmosphere in the room—splitting her self in two: the girl who leaves and the girl I keep. She still sways in my mind, her blipping hips skipping back-to-back in perfect time.

Silly Sam, I heard. But why did she say it? Did she even say it? Why would she say it? What real thing of flesh and blood made this two-toned, breeze-boned, female palindrome, drone on about me: Silly Sam? Really Sam? Sorry, Sam. One does well to remember that one can never truly trust what one most truly believes in.

AUDIO RECORDING, 3:33PM OCT. 1st—FROM THE DESK OF MR. J_____ OF
S_____, J_____ & Co.: 1963

"...They found Mueller this morning."

"Half dead in the drunk tank again?"

"No. Full dead in his apartment."

"...Jesus, J_____..."

"Goddamn idiot strung himself up from his water pipe. Swinging like a mistletoe."

"..."

"Police say he'd been dead a couple days. Hanging in some macabre limbo."

"Well, at least he's in a better place."

"I wouldn't call hell a better place, but—"

"I didn't say hell."

"What?"

"Nothing..."

"Have a drink Coulter. Let's talk."

"Alright."

(ice cubes clink, ascending pitch of liquid poured)

"I like you Coulter. Truly I do. You remind me of a young me. But just like me you're an irreproachable louse. You haven't turned in a single assignment. What's the problem?"

"Nothing."

"I can't keep you on if you keep sitting and spinning."

"I know."

"The company doctor suggested these. Take em."

"What are they?"

"Redinol. They'll get you focused. Keep you in the black and white instead of rubber necking at the damn Emiror girl."

"Pills and I don't really get along very well, boss."

"Well make up and say your sorry's because if you don't get me that assignment within the next couple days you're gone."

"Yessir..."

"...Where the fuck you running off to? Siddown. Drink your drink. Take your pills."

"Yessir..."

SAM COULTER DIARY ENTRY, 11:57PM OCT. 2nd— S_____ , J_____ & Co.: 1963

The last act of my life will not be a graceful one. Don't get me wrong—I've played my part, made my cues—but the characters, and the actors that play them, have become twisted, rope-locked, tangled—their forms abstract and mangled, now; where once, they were as clear and distinct as crisp autumn daylight. The semblance of difference between words and their meaning is becoming less and less dependable by the second. My life's plot has disappeared, emotionally evaporated into the sinews of dismembered thought.

I dreamt of Eleanor today. In the dream, I had fallen asleep at work, and then had been woken up by Eleanor; and then at work, I fell into a dream and was awoken by Eleanor. But she wasn't the dream-Eleanor of my mind in either. She seemed willed there by her own accord, placed with precision and muse-like tact to later be reborn within my elegiac prose. To be honest, I don't really know which Eleanor attacked, but regardless, there's a bruise below my left rib cage and my breath rattles something awful now. The time is getting stretched and pulled by some intangible other, and if I prayed to a god, I'd pray that the manipulator wasn't me.

I'm going to get fired any day now. Since the day they hired me, I knew I wouldn't last more than two or three weeks. I'm not a journalist. I don't even read the paper. The timing just clicked, and this time, the clock was actually right. I shook hands, ripped a smile, and walked into

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OCT. 2nd—S_____, J_____, & Co.: 1963

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rnalist. I don't even read the paper. The timing just
right. I shook hands, ripped a smile, and walked into

a live-awake daydream, fully equipped with a clip-on title: Journalist. I haven't even written an article yet. All I've done is drink in women and get drunk off lies.

SAM COULTER DIARY ENTRY, 3:33PM OCT 3rd. — S_____, J_____, & Co.: 1963

She flips through the pages of pulp with a pink-painted fingernail and licks the red end of a sanguine sucker—reading, glowing, vibrating, breathing. Her panther eyes shift across the page with succubus gravitas—queen of the jungle cats, siren of the murky deep, intangible phantom whose shadow transforms and fades against the fire lit wall into something more imagined than perceived.

The heat in the office is on the fritz again, turning the bullpen into a cozy-like womb. It's a challenge to keep my eyes open and not an option not to daydream.

A soft sucking sound punctuates the babbling brook of typewriters rat-atat-tatting, on and on again, puncturating into existence. The sound is embryonic, primal—the sights and sounds of stories boils and ferments out into the celled-bullpen air.

I must catch her, keep her, contain her; hold the mirage of her vacillating image still in time and space for one moment, one infinite instant. Erase the space between the atoms in our forms. Burn together, melt down and then poured together into a bubbling goo without form or definition, sight or sound—only the singularity of thought, the unity of intangible reason, the limerence of the sculpture and the sculpted; the painting and the painted; the story and its teller.

SAM COULTER DIARY ENTRY, 11:38PM Oct. 3rd—S_____, J_____, & Co.: 1963

I'm sitting here, lookin' at this thing—Rhodnius Prolixus: an assassin bug, spreader of 'the ole kissing disease,' and I can't figure it out. How did this nocturnal blood-sucking nightmare slip into my life and cripple me slowly, slightly, in a way one would call subtle, until I'm left holding a cacodemon-like bug with erratic red ripples rippling through its bleak black wings. These pills that J_____'s got me on make it hard not to sense something strange is happening. No matter how hard I try, I can't seem to understand or remember how I got to be sitting here, in the middle of my white and black linoleum floor, wearing a red dress and holding a captured assassin in a jar.

I dream of Eleanor. Eleanor Emiror. Enchanting Eleanor. Ethereal Eleanor.

Exquisitely Electric and Eclectic Eleanor. E-lean, or lena-E, or...pouting, arched-back, looking sultry-like into an E-miror... or something subtler and far more profound, or...(sic) This girl has caught me from the inside out. The way her name falls like hot oil from my mouth—gliding, sliding through the air into the chung-chunga-chung beating of my heaving heart—in a trochaic lilt of snake-tonguery like slicing blades through black sands.

Is she even real? Does she exist beyond the lips and letters that make her out, both here and not here? She's been gone for over a minute, probably to the bathroom or out for a camel in color, while I sit here—trapped—in the black and white. I wish I could hold her, run my hands down her, explore her—the cultured valleys of her thighs, the ivory hollow of her back, the snowy slope of her neck,—Oh God!—and those silken drapings of lips that flutter and flirt with the slightest breathy sigh. Elusive Eleanor, exquisitely eliciting ecstasy!

AUDIO RECORDING, 3:33PM OCT. 3rd—FROM THE DESK OF MR. S _____ OF
S _____, J _____ & Co.: 1963

“...Are you fucking kidding me with this... Are you?...”

“How many cubes do you want?”

“Fuck how many cubes I want, Coulter. Emiror is claiming you raped her.”

“I didn’t rape her.”

“Step-daughter of Charles Fucking Prolixus, the District Fucking Attorney. Goddamn it, Coulter. Couldn’t you’ve just squashed one of the other busty bimbos in this office? Of all the mopey mary-janes in this town you had to pick her to accost.”

“I didn’t accost her.”

“You promised me you’d get on the right track. You said you wouldn’t be blundering around anymore. You promised me Coulter. Where’s the fucking pills I gave you? Huh?”

“I took em.”

“So fucking take some more you half-witted pussy mongerer! You’re gonna get us shut-the-fuck-down!”

“...I’ve already taken them all.”

T. 4th—S_____, J_____, & Co.: 1963

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SAM COULTER DIARY ENTRY, 5:39PM OCT. 3rd—S_____, J_____, & Co.: 1963

This is it. The fall. The end. The final ticks and last trickling tricks of the falling, stalling grains reallyreallyof sand. The desk lamp lights the spinning ghosts of melting ice in my whiskey as I stare at the blank page. Here I sit: Sinking Slipping Sam, the failed journalist on the eve of his final days. Homeless tonight. Jobless tomorrow.

The contents of my rat-infested apartment are out rotting in the street. The office is cooler when it's empty, sterile with pin-drop silence, and I'm just full enough of the beast or misfortune to imagine each exhale as a ghost of something I once was and then again never was at all.

Eleanor is dead. While I'm sure she still walks and breathes in some dark place amongst the linen-lined shadows, she is, in effect and for all intensive purposes, dead and gone. She left a week ago after I tried to ask her out to a movie (*Strangers on a Train*), and inadvertently wedged her in between the humming fridge and my humming mouth. The report she wrote and submitted to S_____, J_____, & Co. made me out to be some sort of villain, some philanderer with bad intentions and nothing but refrigerated foreplay on his mind.

Her desk is bare now, except for a few old trash mags and an unfinished sucker of the cherry variety, still glistening with the deceit of her slander. Nothing left to do but accept defeat, trudge home, and stumble through an examination of ill-conceived dreams.

SAM COULTER DIARY ENTRY, 2:12AM OCT. 8th—S_____, J_____, & Co.: 1963

A red woman killed me in my dreams. She had the eyes of my Exited Eleanor. The same weighted gate and beloved brow, the same vase-like curve under her clumsy swerve. She moved the space around her in the liquid thick air of the dark-wooden room, approached me with ease, and then, without warning, snatched my neck in a flash and squeezed the life from my parched throat.

I awoke sweating and shaking and could still feel where her burning fingers had wrapped in sinful rings around my neck. I could still smell the smoldering cloth that loosely hung to her silky shoulders, and the white afterglow of her gaze is somehow still printed on the insides of my eyes. I heard she moved to Los Angeles to live with a photographer who does tasteful nudes of nude photographers capturing other similarly tasteful nudes. Truthfully I wouldn't know. Untruthfully I don't care. What I do know is that I've seen her night after night in my dreams, my neck is con-

stantly sore, and for some reason I keep waking to the screams of a woman named Lenore.
...

...

I've stopped counting how many glasses of bourbon I've ingested but I know the number is far more than my fingers have the ability to recreate. Something compels me to try and save my job. No. Not even my job. Some feeling or dire compulsion with the force of a plague has congested my reality and made the present important. Something points to a stone still left unturned.

I shall have my red bride. I shall find it in words and if not I'll write it so. Eleanor, my Executioner, my neck still waits for my weight in your noose.

CLIPPINGS OF ARTICLE ARCHIVES: 1949-1959

1949—"...man found dead in his apartment...victim's neighbor reports dreams of a woman in red"...1951—"...father of three and prize-winning novelist commits suicide...note reads like a love letter to an unnamed 'red woman,'"...1951—"...literature professor found hanging in his apartment...murder weapon: a lengthy piece of red satin"...1953—"officers on the scene described the victim as 'secretly deranged,' and found him hanging from his rafters with his typewriter hanging over the other end acting as a counter-balance"...1956—"...recently widowed elderly woman describes strange visions from the night of her late husband's death...haunted by dreams of 'a woman in red'"...1957—"...unsolved case...'a woman in red,'"...1959—"...has the mysterious 'Woman in Red' struck again?..."

SAM COULTER DIARY ENTRY, 4:19AM OCT. 8th— S_____, J_____, Co.: 1963

This is no coincidence. No word game or turn of phrase. In black and white the Woman in Red lives, and in Technicolor dreams she thrills and kills. With her delicate nail she's traced the insides of my still-living brain and sculpted miasmic fantasies with the rotten gray matter, turning the animate clay into soon-forgotten stone.

My Eternal Eleanor, my Woman in Red—I knew your timelessness had a logic to hold you. There is no place you can hide. No hovel that will provide you refuge. I own each day and night of your reality, and in the catacomb of dreams I shall write the very prison in which you'll stay and rot

to the screams of a woman named Lenore.

...

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959

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."

T. 8th— S_____, J_____, Co.: 1963

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smic fantasies with the rotten gray matter, turning

—I knew your timelessness had a logic to hold you.
ill provide you refuge. I own each day and night of
ll write the very prison in which you'll stay and rot

for all eternity. Duck, duck, NOOSE! Hide and SPEAK! The rules are set, my love, and I am anxious
to play with you.

SAM COULTER DIARY ENTRY, 7:22PM OCT. 9TH— S_____, J_____, Co.: 1963

I'm recording a last log of last thoughts, my memories and desires, into this journal. I know this
will never be read or discussed. No interpretation shall try to be gleaned from its sheepishly slim
pages. I'm writing this because I must, for the compulsion that pumps red and drives the pen for-
ward, makes it so—to set this daydream of a nightmare straight and learn again to sleep no more.
This story will get writ, (maybe already is) and the real you and the real me will meet, again, and
let time's ticking unfold until its sharp, sudden end.

With each jolt of the train I slide closer and closer to our final scene. My affairs are settled. My
plan is set. One does well to wake from the reality of one's dreams and live out fully the story that's
written for you.

SAM COULTER, AUDIO RECORDING TRANSCRIPT OCT 9TH—1963

...(sounds of feet walking up stairs)...(heavy breathing/wheezing)...(sirens from the outside)...
(large dog barking)...(footsteps stop)...(breathing stops)...(sounds of a door opening)...(door
closes)...(heavy breathing)...(faint low crying sound)...(dead groaning of weighted wood)...

"Eleanor?... I know you're here...the real dream-you in the satin covered flesh ...the
Woman in Red...I've read the stories...you're the one that everyone's been dreaming about... I
know you... Show yourself."

"...(static whine/hiss)..."

"I'm going to write a new story about you...about us...show the world that the Woman
in Red is real...Not a story, not a dream...the enchanting serial killer and nightmare heroine has
a face and a name...two dripping yolks in a seamless box...a life written, haunted, but unlived...
the keystone and trump card to my career..."

...(loud crash, pots and pans hitting the floor)...(woman shrieking)...“LET ME GO!!!”

...(fading static)... “Eleanor—the black curtain...How?”

...(low, panicked rumbling)...(garbled screams)...(barely audible)...(a different voice)...“My name is Lenore... I don’t want to be in stories anymore.”

...(scuffle/struggle)...”Let me go...Let me”...(sounds of fabric sliding over metal)...(unidentified crying)...”This can’t be real...This isn’t how I wrote the story...”

“This isn’t your story...it never was...never will be”...(male voice screaming)...

...(high-pitched whine of sliding fabric)...(abrupt catch)...(gasping sounds)... (coughing/choking)...”It was...only writ”...(gasping/wheezing)...”writ...only”...(death rattle)...”as a dream...”

...(woman shrieking)...“LET ME GO!!!”

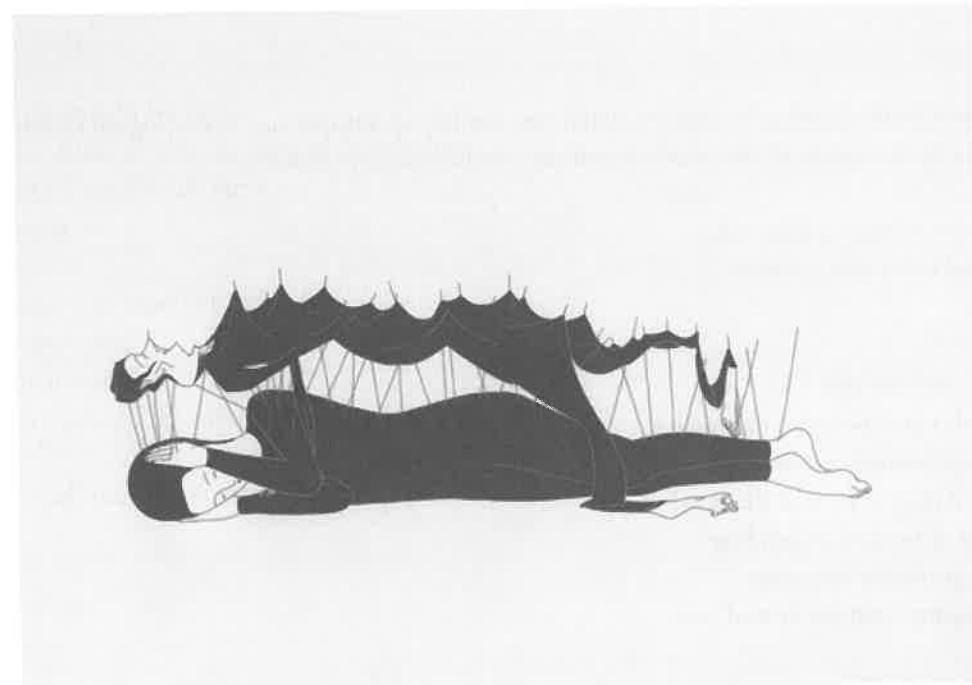
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A CASE OF THE MONDAYS

SAM FINER

X

"The El Paso County Medical Examiner stated that neither an autopsy nor toxicological tests were possible due to the nature of the accident and the condition of the remains."

I saw some pictures of a man today –
or what used to be one, anyway.

He was filtered
through the turbine of a 737.
Dented blades ground bone to powder.
Burned crisps blasted out behind.
Scraps of red ringed around the bowl
with a lump of melted fat pooling
on the rim, probably dripping
onto the runway with the rest of him.

At least it was over fast.

I only knew what he used to be –
an unlucky mechanic, hard at work –
because of the article above that warned
in the language of premium pay-per-view:

THE MONDAYS

M FINE

X

that neither an autopsy nor toxicological tests were
the condition of the remains."

**GRAPHIC IMAGES.
VIEWER DISCRETION ADVISED.**

The CEO of Boeing (I think)
extended her condolences.

"Incidents like these have happened
in the past," she said,
"but rarely."

I felt distraught for him,
and for all those who had known him before
he gained worldwide fame
as a stain.

But my most heartfelt sympathies go out to
the other one;
the man who had no choice
but to clean up the mess his partner left him.

The smell must have been terrible.

A RECIPE FOR MORNINGS

MICHELLE ZENG

x

Loosen with a spoon;
Spit into the deep
 throat of the drain;
Melt grease in pan;
Toss a word salad;
Whisk milk, egg & dream;
Order from cute barista
who says: "Last night you were
 soy, soy dirty."

PE FOR MORNINGS

MICHELLE ZENG

X

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

ERIC COURSEY is writer and artist who currently attends Eugene Lang. He is interested in all mediums of art. He loves everything that has to do with humanity.

ANNA SHNEYDERMAN is a heterochromiac hailing from Boston whose true passions lie in rearranging furniture in the dead of the night.

CHARLOTTE WOODS is majoring in Journalism + Design at Eugene Lang College and graduated high school in Bamberg, Germany. Her father is a soldier so she grew up moving around a lot. Outside of her interest in journalism, she is an aspiring novelist and screenplay writer who dabbles in acting. Charlotte loves reading, writing, road trips, red wine, videogames, music, sketch comedy and tennis.

ELLEN CARPENTER TWIN PEAKSTEAT MOST PEOPLE CROWDED ELEVATORS FLIES GENERAL MESSINESS

X

DANIELA BIZZELL will be graduating from the Literary Studies program at Eugene Lang College this Spring. She currently resides in Brooklyn and tends to be what other neighborhood hermits would call a neighborhood hermit; symptoms include but are not limited to playing music with her quasi-girl-band, writing about underground rap artists, watching re-runs of The Office, and staring at pictures of a dog named Bella.

EMILIANO BOMBIERI-MORALES is a senior at Eugene Lang studying literature. He is a native New Yorker who enjoys long walks down a subway platform and the poignant smell that circulates the streets. He is most often noted to respond to a compliment or insult with the phrase, "that's what they try to tell me," although the "they" always seems to be rather ambiguous.

LINUS MUMFORD is a Junior at Lang studying Creative Writing and Screen Studies. In fiction he draws his influences from Ernest Hemingway, Martin Amis, and Haruki Murakami, among others. Apart from writing he is working on learning Italian and will pursue Journalism after college.

MEREDITH BASTIAN is a Film Studies student at Lang from Wichita. She currently lives in Brooklyn, stalking dogs. This is her first publication. Meredith is Homer Simpson's daughter.

My name is **EZINNE UMUNNABUIKE**, and I'm a Literary Studies student in my second year at Lang. My focus is in fiction writing, which has been my primary interest since childhood. When I was little I'd write 30-40 paged mysteries about what I imagined adult life to be like. As a 20 year-old now, life is a lot less dramatic as I thought it'd be.

SHEA SWEENEY is a senior at Lang. She is from Colorado,

JAKE GULLIVER: nag-champa-household

LEA CEASRINE is a senior at Lang studying Dance and Writing. She is all about poetry in motion, and enjoys nothing more than enjoying a chai latte and good read at her apartment in Harlem.

ERICA BRUNNER grew up in Seattle, WA. Currently, she lives in Brooklyn and attends the New School. Previous publications include Snail Mail Review, The Monarch Review and The Portland Review.

KAYLA HEISLER moved from North Carolina to pursue Literary Studies at Eugene Lang College with full support from her amazing parents. Aside from getting her first poem accepted to print, her biggest life accomplishment has been keeping a Pichira tree named Bernard alive for an entire semester.

STEPHEN CARDONE is a writer, filmmaker, and musician. He lives in Brooklyn, New York. On a typical Tuesday night, Stephen can be found sitting alone in the darkness of his bedroom, silently contemplating the street light outside the window.

WILL CARTER is a poet, writer, and photographer from Portland, Maine who now lives in Brooklyn, New York. A restless traveler, he strives to integrate his many experiences abroad with his creative endeavors in an increasingly esoteric fashion. He enjoys plants, free jazz, and Stanley Kubrick films.

Before moving to Manhattan, JESS GRISCTI spent an idyllic eighteen years out in the 'burbs, raised on New Jersey bagels and arrogance. She's in her senior year at The New School where she studies graphic design, writing, and How to Take the Best Instagram Picture of Her Cat, who is named after a typeface. She thinks the pizza is better at home and still can't decide whether or not to buy that spice rack.

MICHELLE HYTNER is a 24-year-old junior at Lang. Her hobbies include gin drinking, fitting her french bulldog's name into the lyrics of popular songs, and Old Bay Seasoning.

Philadelphia native NATHAN KAMAL is a BA/BFA student studying writing at Eugene Lang College and the violin at the New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music. He writes long-form non-fiction concerning modern chamber music, LGBTQ issues, tedium, and his personal phobias, which include the fear of wasps, art museum security guards, and learning how to drive.

SAM ROBISON lives and writes in Ridgewood, Queens. He was born in Colorado and will graduate from Lang in the Spring.

MICHELLE HYTNER is a 24-year-old junior at Lang. Her hobbies include gin drinking, fitting her french bulldog's name into the lyrics of popular songs, and Old Bay Seasoning.

Philadelphia native **NATHAN KAMAL** is a BA/BFA student studying writing at Eugene Lang College and the violin at the New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music. He writes long-form non-fiction concerning modern chamber music, LGBTQ issues, tedium, and his personal phobias, which include the fear of wasps, art museum security guards, and learning how to drive.

SAM ROBISON lives and writes in Ridgewood, Queens. He was born in Colorado and will graduate from Lang in the Spring.

CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS

KEITH TILFORD is a visual artist and theorist living in NY. He has contributed artwork to Urbanomic's philosophy journal Collapse and his writing has appeared in Design Ecologies. His research interests include the history of technology and the computer in relation to art, philosophy of mathematics, neo-rationalism, and more broadly the intersections between art, politics, science, and philosophy. He is a co-organizer of the Fixing the Future platform along with Dianne Bauer, Joshua Johnson, Suhail Malik, and Mohammad Salemy. An archive of seminars and events can be found at fixingthefuture.info. Kieth's works can be found in the portfolio, pages 108-115.

DAEHYUN KIM: I was born in Seoul in 1980, now live and work in Seoul. I studied oriental painting which is a study on the traditional East Asian painting. I've been drawing Moonassi series since university. The series is my life-time project. There is no specific background story or a theory about the drawing. Each drawing is created based on my daily thoughts and feelings. I draw to meditate on myself and others, and to be able to see the whole story of the series in the end. Dae-hyun's work can be found on pages 30, 59, 62, 69, 72, 84, 88, 134, 175, 180, and 193.

ISABELLE WENZEL studied to be a photographer/artist, but is also a trained acrobat. Usually, she sets her own body before the camera. Within the 10 seconds that the self-timer allows her, Wenzel assumes an impossible position and continues to hold it until the camera has clicked. The central focus of her photographs is the body as a physical form, rather than people themselves. By making a photograph, she freezes a pose in time as it were, and in doing so draws attention to the sculptural qualities of the body. Isabelle's work can be found in the portfolio, pages 100-107.

ELLEN CARPENTER likes to make drawings. Recently, she's been drawing mandalic line designs because they are fun, but also because she likes to procrastinate, and she feels comparatively more accomplished after making art than she does after watching four hours of *The X-Files*. Ellen's work can be found on pages 26, 30, 43, 77, and 133.

HANK O'NEAL has produced a wide-ranging body of work, portraits of friends and associates, iconic images from many parts of the world, and continually added to projects that have lasted two or three decades. O'Neal came to New York City from Washington, D.C. in 1967 and still resides in Greenwich Village. He joined the faculty of The New School University in 1970 and remains affiliated with that school as a member of the Board of Advisors of the Jazz and Contemporary Music Program. Hank's work can be found on pages 44, 98, 116, 146, and 152.

JUAN KURTZMAN-GONZALEZ's work is featured alongside Linus Mumford's story *Krimora* on page 90.

Cover art by **TODD KNOXPE**

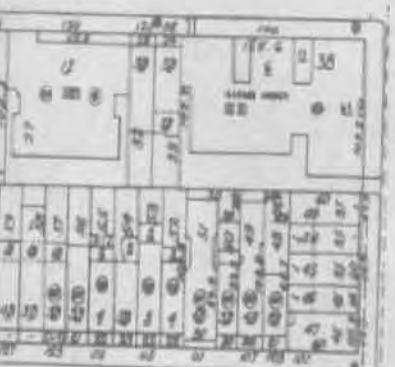
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