

HOLLY ANDERSON
KAJ ANDERSON-BAUER
ERIC ARNOLD
JAMES BEST
DELICIA DANIELS
MICHELLE DEARDORFF
OKLA ELLIOTT
STUART FRIEBERT
MELISSA HENDERSON
AMORAK HUEY
TIM KERCHER
LEN KUNTZ
JESSICA LAKRITZ
ANDREA LEWIS
MARY ANNE MOREFIELD
CHRISTOPHER MULROONEY
KORKUT ONARAN
JONATHAN H. ROBERTS
CHRISTINE SIMOKAITIS
MATTHEW J. SPIRENC
SARAMANDA SWICART
CARMEN TOMFOHRDE
BROOKE WONDERS
RACHEL M. ZEIDERS

THIN AIR MAGAZINE

THIN AIR MAGAZINE

17

ISSUE 17

WINTER 2011

eked Skirt
More online.
Opaque Tights
More online.
Necklace

THIN AIR MAGAZINE 17

WINTER 2011

NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY

THIN AIR MAGAZINE

MANAGING EDITOR

LYDIA PAAR

FICTION EDITOR

ERIN RENEE WAHL

NONFICTION EDITOR &

LAYOUT AND DESIGN

MATT WILSON

POETRY EDITOR

KHARA HOUSE

WEB DESIGNER

NICK KRAFT

FACULTY ADVISOR

NICOLE WALKER

SPONSORS

DIANA GABALDON

THE NAU ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

STAFF

BRIAN ANDERSON

MICHAEL BACON

KRISTIE BENEFIELD

JESSICA CLARK

LINDSAY DRAGAN

KEITH FELBERG

MICHAEL JOHNSON

ROBERT KEEGAN

MATT LARRIMORE

BEN McCLENDON

CLAY NICHOLS

JESSIE NORRIS

LAUREN PATRIDGE

ROLLIE RATHBURN

ERICA SCHMITT

WHITNEY SHERWOOD

JASON SLATER

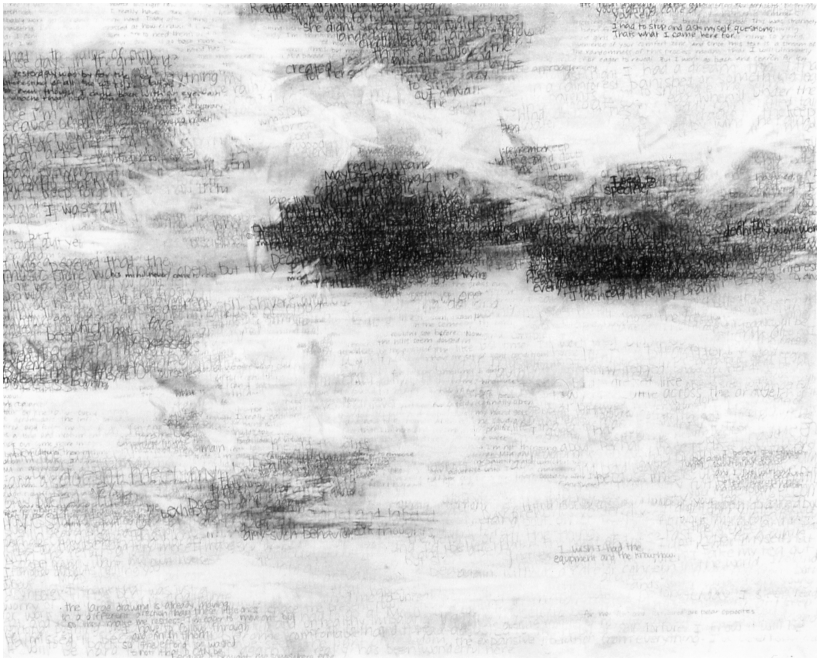
PETER TIERNAN

Cover art: *Urban* by Rachel M. Zeiders

*For submission guidelines and issue ordering, please visit www.thinairmagazine.com

Copyright 2011 Thin Air Magazine (ISSN 1099-0380). All rights reserved. No part of this periodical may be reproduced without the consent of the publisher. Thin Air is published annually by graduate students in the Department of English with support from private donors and the English Department.

Thin Air Magazine, Northern Arizona University, Box 6032, Flagstaff, AZ 86011.



WRITTEN SKY II
CARMEN TOMFOHRDE

CONTENTS

FLYING HIGH: BETTER WRITING THROUGH SIMPLE FIXES FROM K. HART UNDERTWIS	7	ANDREA LEWIS
UNBIRTHDAY	23	BROOKE WONDERS
SUMMER IN THE LAB	34	CHRISTINE SIMOKAITIS
13 STORIES ABOUT MY FRIENDS	42	KAJ ANDERSON-BAUER
LINES COMPOSED ON THE CAMPUS OF ORTA DOĞU TEKNIK ÜNİVERSİTESİ	47	AMORAK HUEY
LISPED IN NUMBERS	49	CHRISTOPHER MULROONEY
KANSAS POINTE	50	ERIC ARNOLD
THIS IS GEOLOGY, NOT LOVE	51	JESSICA LAKRITZ
BRICK ROOM	53	LEN KUNTZ
ONE DAY A FELLOW SUMMER SCHOOL STUDENT BROUGHT A QUICK END TO A PICKUP GAME OF BASEBALL	54	MATTHEW J. SPIRENG
ON THE FIRST DAY OF SPRING, OUT EARLY	55	MARY ANNE MOREFIELD
THE IDIOT'S FAITH	56	OKLA ELLIOTT
LONESOME WATER	57	STUART FRIEBERT
TBILISI SWEEPERS	58	TIM KERCHER
SOUNDS LIKE HOME	59	DELICIA DANIELS
NO CATERPILLARS	60	JAMES BEST
INTERCOURSE	61	KORKUT ONARAN
FIRST, SOLE, THUNDER, AND STITCH	64	MELISSA HENDERSON

STILL LIFE WITH MOON	71	SARAMANDA SWIGART
REMBRANDT AND THE BOY IN THE STREET	79	JONATHAN H. ROBERTS

ART

MAYBE I'LL STICK TO CHEERLEADING	40	HOLLY ANDERSON
SUSPENDED	39	MICHELLE DEARDORFF
WRITTEN SKY II	3	CARMEN TOMFOHRDE
WRITTEN SKY I	62	
DYING MAN SKETCH	21	RACHEL M. ZEIDERS
PROPOSAL	22	
PHOTO #3 ("SUTURE ME" SERIES)	41	
URBAN	63	

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES	92	
-------------------	----	--

SHADES OF GRAY

This year, we at *Thin Air* thought about genre boundaries, conventions, why they exist, and how the academy speaks often of bending them to rearticulate parts of the world that exist outside/beyond them: poetry that reads like prose, fiction that reads real, and work that takes the term “meta” to a new level, circling around on itself in layered and complex ways.

But why talk about the importance of blurred genre if it is not rewarded when people write it? For this year’s issue, we asked readers to send us their best work that blurs conventional category and show us just how many unique, uncoded ways there are to see the world. Our contest winner, “Flying High: Better Writing Through Simple Fixes from K. Hart Undertwis” does just this, and many of our other standard submissions do too.

—LYDIA PAAR

Who doesn’t yawn, metaphysically at least, when faced with one more free verse lyric about somebody’s dog, cat, or mother, one more grittily realistic short story about pretty good people down on their luck, one more earnest essay about cancer or caves? Conventions have their uses, but real writers have always tested, resisted, subverted and even smashed them. Is *Moby Dick* to fiction as Emily Dickinson’s explosive stanzas are to poetry, as *Walden* is to autobiography? Not exactly—and that’s the point. Genre is comforting, but sometimes comfort is the last thing we need.

—DR. JEFF GUNDY
2010 GENRE BLUR CONTEST JUDGE

—FLYING HIGH—

BETTER WRITING THROUGH SIMPLE FIXES

FROM K. HART UNDERTWIS

Winner of Thin Air's 2010 Genre Blur Contest

Does your writing taxi to the end of the literary runway but fail to take off? Is your prose stuck at the gate like an overbooked commuter flight to Utica? Do you write well yet continue to pull from your mailbox limp, flaccid envelopes holding scraps of pastel paper from publications whose “needs” you have not met? It’s time to transform your prose from a broken-down turbo-prop to a sleek-bellied SST. Try these simple fixes for common writing mistakes—mistakes my university English students make every day—and soon your writing will fly high.

Let’s begin with...

CLICHÉ

Cliché is the monkey wrench mediocre writers throw into the gears of their prose. Here is a paragraph with clichés shown in italics:

Truth be told, Yosemite was his idea. Yosemite was his *dream come true*. His wife and daughter wanted *more than anything* to go to Orlando, but everything about Orlando *rubbed him the wrong way*. The three of them fought *like cats and dogs*. He won, but he *learned a valuable lesson: be careful what you wish for*.

Now let's rewrite that passage using detail and vivid language to eliminate cliché:

His wife and daughter wanted to go to Orlando and be entertained by sanitized Disney experiences. He wanted to go to Yosemite National Park and read Thoreau and sit by Bridalveil Fall and become submersed in observance of nature. He did not want to go on an endless Disney jungle ride with vinyl boa constrictors dropping out of imitation jacaranda trees and recorded macaque cries echoing through the temperature-controlled air and plastic parrots screeching their high-pitched repetitive shrieks and an improbable boat pilot shooting his pretend pistol into a polypropylene hippopotamus rising out of the temperature-controlled water to yawn his jaws open and display his polypropylene epiglottis. He won the argument, but he did not foresee the potential pitfalls of Yosemite park rangers.

Now the reader understands the wishes of the writer, because the true horrors of Orlando are elaborated and enumerated, not simply alluded to with clichés.

SHOW. DON'T TELL.

Here is a paragraph taken from one of my student's short stories:

The professor was lonely. He acted smart. He would show off by using big words. He carried around a gigantic ugly maroon briefcase that supposedly held his novel-in-progress.

Just about everything is wrong with this paragraph. Don't *tell* me "The professor was lonely." *Show* me. Use details, such as:

After the professor's wife left him for a

Yosemite park ranger he was forced to live alone in a shabby apartment with Bangladeshi neighbors who cooked curry at midnight because his alimony and child support for an ungrateful daughter named Phoebe with a silver skull in her navel were too high and the judge was herself a divorced woman who hated men.

Dig deep, imagine, and *show* your characters fully.

“He acted smart.” This writer is *telling* but not *showing* how the professor acted. Try:

He had a certain indefinable sophistication.
He was clearly far too talented to be teaching
freshman English.
He had so much knowledge he wanted to impart,
but we were Philistines.

Any of these would be better.

Notice the reference to “big words.” Here is a perfect opportunity to *show*. Are they words like hyperbole? Epiphany? Onomatopoeia? Or words like Machiavellianism? Unlikelihood? Tenure?

METAPHOR AND SIMILE

One of the best ways to show without telling is to use metaphorical language. Metaphors and similes will lift your sagging 747 of a story up to cruising altitude. For example, you might write a sentence such as:

He wondered if he had wasted his life teaching.

That’s boring. What about something like:

He had been eaten alive by the jaws of academe.

When you use “eaten alive” and “jaws of academe” as metaphors, you imply the entire painful scenario of a voracious beast of a pointless job at a soulless institution that can swallow a person up so that twelve years pass in the blink of an eye and now all his clothes smell like chicken tandoori.

“Jaws of academe” is an example of an *abstract metaphor*, which illuminates a concept. Another type of metaphor—the *descriptive metaphor*—helps to show more vividly a place or a thing or a person. Instead of saying, for example,

The house fell into disrepair.

create an image by saying:

The house was an aging, beat-up alley cat
crouching in dandelions because his ex-wife re-
fused to pay for repairs.

Notice how this metaphor not only creates an image of a poorly maintained house, but the alley cat idea, with its implications about the ex-wife, does double duty.

A *simile* is a type of metaphor that compares two things using “like” or “as.” Examples:

Thanks to her overly permissive mother, Phoebe
dressed *like a prostitute on a pirate ship*, with
her black jeans low on her hips and a silver skull
glinting from her pierced navel.

Some single-ply toilet paper is as scratchy *as sandpaper*.

Notice how comparisons using “like” or “as” give more of a picture—more of a feel—for what the writer is writing about.

Avoid *mixed* metaphors or similes. Let's say you begin with a simile such as:

His ex-wife's acrylic fingernails were like the talons of a raptor.

That is a perfectly serviceable simile. But in the next sentence you would *not* want to say:

Her new eye makeup made her look like a raccoon.

Now the reader is confused, because you have used two very different animals metaphorically. One solution might be:

His ex-wife's acrylic fingernails and heavy black eyeliner made her look like a raccoon, a grasping, greedy animal that scavenges with its pointy fingers for everything it can get, consequences be damned.

Or, if you prefer the image of the raptor:

Because his ex-wife's acrylic fingernails were like the talons of a raptor and her disgusting black eye makeup made her eyes even beadier, she looked like a crazed eagle, constantly seeking prey, constantly circling for a limp, flaccid animal she could swoop down upon and devour.

The two metaphors above are powerful because the writer has *extended* them to intensify the image. Extended metaphor is a useful device. Let's go back to the sentence, "He had been eaten alive by the jaws of academe." That is such a good metaphor, it is worth extending:

He had been eaten alive by the jaws of academe. In the Roman Coliseum that was the English Department, he felt like a naked gladiator with only

a gigantic maroon shield and a small sword to defend himself against the lions. Even a simple question such as “Why have we gone to single-ply toilet paper in the faculty restrooms?” or “When will the tenure committee be meeting?” would receive a thumbs-down from the Emperor-Nero-like departmental chairman.

Notice how “lions” resonates with “jaws of academe.” Notice how “Emperor Nero” extends the image. You would *not* say “Machiavellian departmental chairman,” even if it were true, because that would mix the metaphor.

PARAGRAPHS – THE TOPIC SENTENCE

Writers hate hearing about “the topic sentence.” It reminds them of junior-high teachers who may have worn stiletto heels or may have shown too much cleavage while yammering away about theme papers. Sorry, but those gals in those inappropriate outfits were right! The first sentence of any good paragraph signals what that paragraph will be about.

Let’s say my topic sentence is:

Yosemite National Park employs 978 park rangers in the summertime.

What does that signal? It signals that I am going to write about Yosemite park rangers, perhaps their responsibilities, their job descriptions, their ugly olive-drab uniforms, their stupid hats, their code of ethics or lack thereof. I am not going to go off on a tangent about any one park ranger, about how he might meet this or that park visitor and show off his unnaturally white teeth, about the gadgets such as bear spray and stun guns and GPS devices hanging off his big leather belt, about all the spare time he has to stay in shape, about how his uniform and his gadgets and his white teeth seem to signal protection to women and girls. Not unless I start a new paragraph with a topic sentence such as:

Some of these park rangers have hidden agendas.

That sentence signals that the paragraph will be about the actions of a specific ranger or rangers. So, for example:

Some of these park rangers have hidden agendas. They are not preventing forest fires nor giving informational lectures about flora and fauna, they are hunting for a mate, like a sex-crazed grizzly crashing through the woods. They are abusing a position of responsibility by pretending to help women down off boulders, grabbing them around the waist, and letting their hands linger there. They are ostensibly educating youth by demonstrating GPS devices to young girls while secretly looking at the skulls in their navels. They are humiliating husbands by sniffing the air and saying, "I'm afraid Old Spice is an ursine attractant."

The paragraph's topic sentence not only conveys the subject matter, it makes you want to read on.

PASSIVE VOICE / ACTIVE VOICE

Wherever possible, writing should be done in the active voice. Do you know the difference between passive and active voice? Here's a quiz. Which paragraph is active and which is passive?

- a. After the Yosemite vacation, lawyers were engaged. A shabby apartment was rented and his meager belongings were transported to it. Plans were made by the park ranger to move to New Jersey. Eyebrows were pierced. Tenure was denied. His house and his life were encroached upon by a state of disrepair.
- b. His wife hired a barracuda in tasseled

loafers to wring every last dollar out of him. Without rancor, he leased a small but dignified apartment alongside hardworking, valiant immigrants, with whom he felt a strange kinship. The park ranger relocated and moved into the falling-down house with the ex-wife and daughter. In an obvious acting-out gesture, Phoebe pierced her eyebrow and inserted a Hello Kitty bobblehead there. The professor met with the tenure committee to no avail, but secretly thought, “Just wait until my novel is published.” As if in sympathy with his travails, the gutters of his former house clogged, leaked, and fell off.

With a side-by-side comparison like this, you can see that paragraph a. is in passive voice and paragraph b. is in active voice. In passive voice, things are acted *upon*. In active voice, people (or gutters) *perform* actions. The verbs—wring, balked, pierced, clogged—are interesting verbs. We’ll discuss interesting verbs in a moment, but first let’s explain...

ADVERBS

Adverbs are perennially misused. One of the most common mistakes is putting adverbs in dialogue attribution:

“I’ve got less pierces than most kids,” Phoebe said snottily.

“Dad, haven’t you heard of match-dot-com?”
Phoebe asked impertinently.

You see what I mean? When the speaker is a twelve-year-old girl who lives with her too-permissive mother and has a pink cell phone that cost more than a month of her father’s rent, we can guess that every word out of her mouth is snotty and impertinent and simply leave off the adverbs.

Let's look at adverbs in other contexts.

He met Monica online. On their first date she willfully hid her true nature.

You might be tempted to use “willfully” (or “deliberately” or “demonically” or “fiendishly”) to modify “hid.” Remember: most such modifiers are unnecessary. Most readers understand how wickedly duplicitous it is for someone to hide their true nature on a first date, and your sentence will be stronger for not over-explaining something that is fairly well known in today's world where online thieves make millions pretending to match you with your perfect counterpart and their way-out-of-date photos, so just eliminate that adverb.

Another example:

On their second date, he went unwillingly to a Japanese restaurant.

When you find yourself using a phrase such as “went unwillingly,” eliminate the adverb and find a better action verb:

On their second date, Monica dragged him to an upscale Japanese restaurant.

The verb “dragged” says so much more. Which brings us to...

INTERESTING ACTION VERBS

Action verbs will catapult your sentences into the wild blue yonder.

Because he once vomited all night after eating awabi, he spurned the entire sashimi side of the menu.

This sentence uses strong action verbs. They are not limp, flaccid

verbs, like “got sick” or “ignored,” but vivid words like “vomit” and “spurn.”

Monica hurled epithets at him—Wimp! Coward!—
but they bounced off him like rubbery wasabi squid
balls.

“Hurled” has so much more force than, say, “yelled” or “shouted.” “Bounced” creates an image and is much stronger than phrases like “rolled off” or “missed their mark.” Note also the apt squid-ball simile.

By now you can see the difference between a sentence such as:

He tried to kiss her, but Monica slipped into her apartment.
and

He lunged for her, but Monica slammed the door in his face.

Use the stronger verb wherever possible.

APOSTROPHES

Who among us has not picked up a menu that screams:

Special of the Day: Panko-Fried Halibut Cheek’s!

Or received an email that screams:

Please do not send me any more message’s!

As these examples show, plurals are not made with apostrophes. Plurals, of course, are made with a simple *s* as in cheeks or messages, or with *es* as in witches or tigresses. Of course there are many exceptions, such as she-wolves, harpies or hippopotami. When in doubt, consult your dictionary.

The *possessive* is the form that takes an apostrophe, as in:

He had worked for years on his novel's sensitive web of sexual intrigue.

and

His agent's queries went unanswered.

Confusion arises when the possessive applies to a word that is already plural. For example:

He refused to cater to publishers' whims.

shows how to indicate a plural possessive.

Other problems arise around *it's* and *its*. Remember: *it's* is a contraction of "it is" and *its* is a possessive. The passage:

"It's a novel that is ahead of its time," his agent insisted. "It's too bad the publishing world won't come to its senses."

demonstrates the correct usages.

REPETITION

Perhaps you recall a high-school teacher who used a cruel red pencil to cross out a word you repeated over and over in an essay. Perhaps she wrote cruel notes, such as "There are plenty of words besides 'Machiavellian.'" True. But don't be afraid to use repetition consciously to good effect in certain situations:

As a child, he was gravely affected by his fear of roosters. Roosters crowed him awake. Roosters crouched in the henhouse. Roosters planned ambushes. Roosters rarely roosted; they stalked, they mocked, they cock-a-doodle-dooed. Roosters pecked him, heckled him, haunted him. His nights were filled with rooster nightmares. His days were filled with rooster avoidance routes. One rooster in particular, named Banzai, would

fly at his head like a barnyard kamikaze, talons first, feathers flapping, beak bloodying his sunburned scalp. His mother pitied this rooster neurosis, but his father could not abide his chickenheartedness. His father pooh-poohed his rooster fear, forced him to feed the fowl, gather the eggs, and face his rooster phobia.

Note how incessant use of the word *rooster* depicts the pervasive nature of the boy's fear.

COMMAS

Some of my students sprinkle commas over the page like a waiter grinding a two-foot pepper mill over a Caesar salad. Commas are not a condiment. They have specific uses. Remember three simple rules:

1. Commas between independent clauses:

His agent was as tenacious as Torquemada in a torture chamber, and his novel eventually sold.

He was granted tenure, but the toilet paper problem persisted.

The comma is correct before *and* or *but* when separating independent clauses.

2. Commas after a long introductory phrase or clause:

Because there were no nail salons in Yosemite and no grizzlies in New Jersey, his ex-wife and the park ranger called it quits.

Having won tenure and repaired gutters and secured a book contract, he was received back into the bosom of his family.

When long phrases like these precede the subject, they are set off with a comma.

3. Commas setting off parenthetical information:

The Bangladeshi neighbors, whose food he had come to love, threw him a going-away party.

His daughter Phoebe, dressed modestly for a change, came to the party and met a boy named Ravi.

The clause or phrase that is set off by commas, while not necessary to the logic of the sentence, adds information.

SYMBOLISM

I will close with a brief word about symbolism. If you are new to writing, you may think symbolism is a profound concept you dare not tackle. But the simplest things can be symbols.

When they married, his new bride gave him a very ugly, very large briefcase in maroon leather, perhaps not knowing he did not care for maroon. “This will hold all your novels,” she said. “All your works-in-progress.”
“It’s so big,” he replied.

At first glance, this may seem like a simple, touching scene, but think about the briefcase. It symbolizes the couple’s hopes and dreams, their future. It is empty, but one day it will be full.

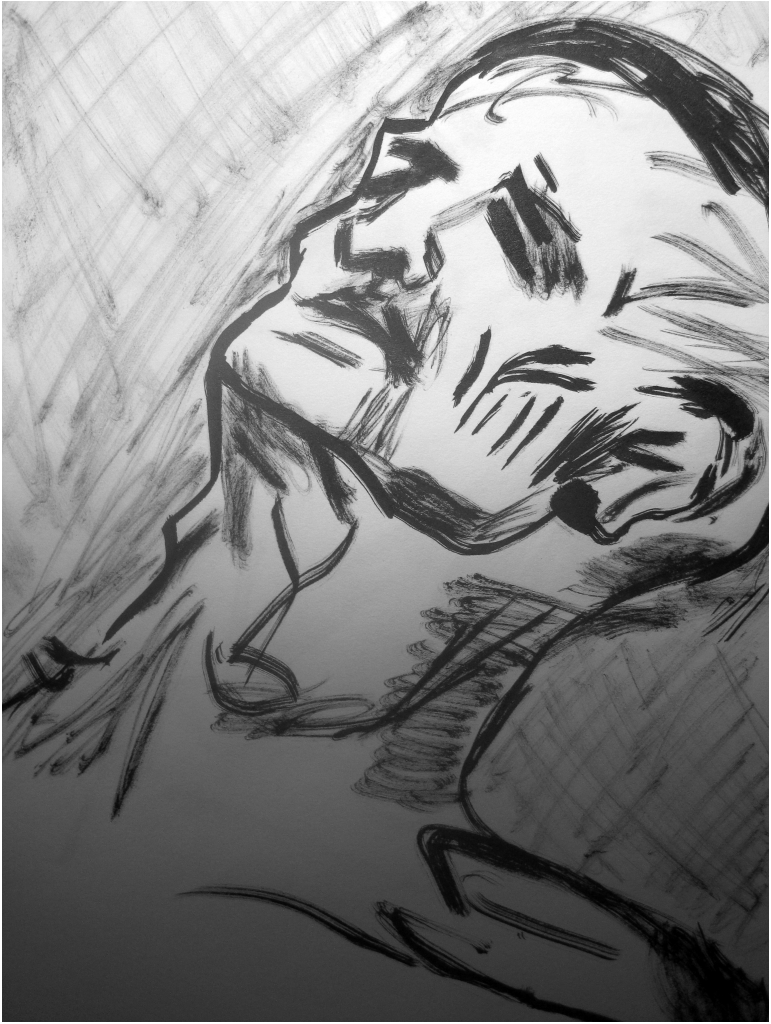
Let’s look at one more example of symbolism:

At last he took his wife and daughter to Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida. While his daughter texted Ravi and his wife had a Magic Kingdom Manicure, he strolled a main-street

fantasyscape that could have been designed by Engels on Ecstasy. The buildings looked like five-tier wedding cakes. The grass was lime-Jell-O green, every blade matching every other blade, every edge trimmed to Tinkerbell tidiness. The symmetrical parks held symmetrical gazebos that held brass bands that played Sousa marches that implied protection and security imparted by an unseen, benign, semi-military presence. It was all as fake as the inflatable dolphins in the gift shops, yet it soothed him. He hopped onto a streetcar that glided silently down a track, powered by invisible Disney technology. He rode around and around and around the town. Around and around.

The utopia described in this passage symbolizes something about the character's state of mind. The writing flies high, and the character soars. The setting symbolizes his euphoria and empowerment, which may or may not be based in "reality," but are nevertheless satisfying and complete.

About the author: K. Hart Undertwis has written three novels: *The Briefcase* (a New York Times 2006 Notable Book), *Rooster Days* and, most recently, *Yosemite*, which is due out this spring from Hippopotamus Press. He teaches writing at Princeton University and lives in New Jersey with his wife and daughter.



DYING MAN SKETCH
RACHEL M. ZEIDERS



PROPOSAL
RACHEL M. ZEIDERS

UNBIRTHDAY

Winner of the 3rd Annual Northern Arizona Playwriting Showcase 10-minute Play Contest

Characters:

TOM: He is tall, slender, handsome. He is persuasive, teasing. They love each other.

ANNE: She is attractive, playful. She is righteously irritated. They love each other.

(Lights up on ANNE. She sits disconsolate at a kitchen table set with four chairs. Balloons are scattered around the floor. In each chair sits a stuffed bear. She places party hats on the bear, then puts a hat on her own head. She checks her watch, gets up, paces anxiously, kicks a few balloons, sits back down. TOM begins speaking offstage.)

TOM: *(Entering.)* Sorry, sorry, darling! Work was awful; I barely made it out of there alive. Then I hit rush-hour traffic on the interstate, and then...

(She pulls a party horn from her pocket and blows it long, interrupting him; the sound trails off.)

ANNE: The man enters. He is late forties, tall, slender, handsome. He is also late. She glares at him balefully.

TOM: I take it you're displeased.

ANNE: It's ten to midnight. I thought you'd forgotten about me entirely.

TOM: No!

ANNE: If you don't convince me you love me in the next ten minutes, I'm leaving you.

TOM: (*Horrificed.*) Why?

ANNE: Dramatic tension. (*She puts a party hat on his head.*)

TOM: And here I thought it'd be because you thought I'd forgotten your birthday.

ANNE: (*Hoping against all hope.*) You didn't?

TOM: No, I didn't. I got you something.

ANNE: (*Surprised, wary.*) Really? Like, an actual something?

TOM: Well...sort of.

ANNE: Oh dear.

TOM: I got you a Big Idea! (*He is terribly enthused.*)

ANNE: (*Crestfallen.*) Oh. A big idea. Again? (*She begins hanging streamers haphazardly around the teddy bears, the chairs, the stage. He follows her, winding the streamers back onto their roll.*)

TOM: What, you didn't like my last present?

ANNE: When we got in a fight, and afterward, to make up for it, you got me Passive-Aggression? You wrapped it up like it was Caretaking, but when the paper came off, it was definitely Passive-Aggression.

TOM: Okay, so that was a bad choice.

ANNE: All I really wanted was flowers, maybe a Sincere Apology or two. *(She wraps streamers around his head, the audience, wherever she wants. He keeps following her, apologizing under his breath to audience members.)*

TOM: *(Affronted.)* I don't just hand out Sincere Apologies. *(To audience as he cleans up after her:* Sorry, sorry, she doesn't mean anything by it. At least they're festive!) They depreciate in value if you chuck 'em around haphazardly.

ANNE: And what about that Valentine's Day fiasco, when you got me Depressive Melancholy, and tried to pawn it off as ordinary Sadness? I mean, I understood; you'd had an awful week at work, but I'd hoped for a...cheerier Big Idea. Maybe Self-Reflection, or Personal Growth, or god forbid, Forward Motion...

TOM: Look, I do the best I can. I always get you the very best idea I can afford.

ANNE: They're not particularly pricy. Ideas.

TOM: You have no idea! Meditation cost me a fortune in yoga classes, and so did tithing for Organized Religion. Big Ideas cost a pretty penny.

ANNE: What do I know? I'm no philosopher. I shouldn't complain, I suppose...ideas aren't so bad. When we first started dating, you used to bring me broad themes—remember? We went to that all-you-can-eat buffet, and you gave me a leitmotif. I had look up what the word meant.

TOGETHER: A term used in music, literature and the theatre, referring to a recurring theme associated with a particular person, place, or idea.

ANNE: Did you get that off Wikipedia?

TOM: Of course not. I got your leitmotif from an old college textbook—Literary Criticism for Dummies or something. Leitmotifs were all the rage; everyone wanted one. I got you a blue one, because you like blue. They came in different colors. I'd hoped you might collect all four.

ANNE: One leitmotif was plenty. And then when that didn't work out, you got me a zeitgeist. It was very...thorough. Where'd you pick up that one?

TOM: German Wikipedia. Hey, there's a big idea! I could get you Technology Saturation, or the Internet Age.

ANNE: (*Deadpan.*) I'd only use it to download porn.

TOM: I don't believe you. What about Social Networking?

ANNE: Too time consuming, and it's not real human contact.

TOM: Podcasting?

ANNE: People who like to hear the sound of their own voice.

TOM: *The Unbearable Lightness of Being.*

ANNE: Now you're just stealing other people's ideas.

TOM: (*Triumphant.*) Plagiarism!

ANNE: No. I don't want it. It has to be a really good idea, or it's not worth anything.

TOM: How about...Love at First Sight. Remember when we first met? (*He pauses her in her streamer-hanging, spinning her to face him.*) That was nice, wasn't it? We liked each other then. We were happy.

ANNE: (*Hopeful.*) Did you get me Happiness? I'd like that.
(*She lets him take the streamers from her.*)

TOM: Damn it! No, I didn't even think of it. It's been a rough time at work.

ANNE: (*She sits, despairing.*) You're at seven minutes to midnight and the countdown is on. I'm losing patience. You gave me some wonderful themes back in the day, but they don't make up for the theme of this evening: Willful Abandonment. And in your defense, all you can talk about is work. Ambition. Success. Stability.

TOM: (*Defensive.*) You said we already have more than enough of those. And I thought you *liked* them. You told me you liked them, when I first got them for you.

ANNE: No, I did, honestly I did. I still do. It's just...Success and Stability aren't enough.

TOM: Honesty. That's a good one...but not as good as the present I got you for today. (*Excited again, earnest.*) I worked at it this time, ran it past a couple of friends for advice. Your sister was great; she told me what *not* to get. I was originally going to get you Truth.

ANNE: No. No, I definitely don't want Truth.

TOM: Why not? It's a lovely Big Idea; my last girlfriend adored it.

ANNE: No, Truth's a little too flimsy for my taste. It's diaphanous.

TOM: Diaphanous? Truth?

ANNE: It's just...fluffy. Inconstant. I mean, would you get

your truth or my truth? And what if you found out that your truth came from JC Penney's, but mine was from Walmart? You'd *judge* my truth; how could you not? Truth's not something to just give away all unthinking. It's more of a wedding present. Better yet, a silver anniversary. Birthdays aren't supposed to be so serious.

(She unfurls a pin the tail on the donkey poster and pins it to the wall. He blindfolds her. She spins several times, then delivers the next lines while feeling around the stage. He keeps ahead of her, moving objects out of her way before she can trip over them.)

TOM: *(Huffy.)* Well, it's good I ix-nayed truth, then. Then I thought, why think small? I almost got you Materialism.

ANNE: But I don't *like* Materialism.

TOM: All that stuff? What's not to like? I was going to get you an idea bigger than the Jones's ideas, the sort of idea that spawns large multinational corporations. You could have done *anything* with it. You could have retired to Fiji with it.

ANNE: But it wouldn't have made me happy.

TOM: Well yeah, there was that. Your sister pointed that out too. Then I suggested that if she didn't lay off me, I'd get her Unwarranted Negativity when her birthday came around, or maybe some Bitter Cynicism. That's when she stopped helping me shop for you.

ANNE: She's not a fan of big ideas; she's into simplicity. She got me a wool sweater that she knitted herself.

TOM: Well, I'm not much for handmade gifts, or Simplicity. So you'll just have to make do with Success. *(He guides her hand to the exact centerpoint of the donkey-bullseye.)*

ANNE: No, no, I didn't mean to criticize. (*She takes off the blindfold.*) You've gotten me all sorts of lovely things. You get me Desire every day.

TOM: Really? Still? After all this time?

ANNE: Oh yes. Wait, is there nudity in this play? Sexual tension seems to be a clear thematic element.

TOM: (*Looks over the audience.*) It's a family-friendly crowd; I think we're safe.

ANNE: Damn. (*She snaps her fingers and he freezes mid-movement. She steps forward.*)

ANNE: You don't know him, not yet. (*She looks over at TOM.*) He's the sort of man who doesn't notice when people hit on him because he's too busy contemplating the vast unknowable universe. When I first saw him, he was at the bar, sitting up straight as a meerkat. I didn't want to startle him, so I moved very slowly over to him. Then some woman crashed into him before I could get there. She was drunk, almost fell on top of him. She grabbed his cheeks and said "You look like someone famous. You're probably arrogant, and inside, you don't know who you are." He looked hurt and confused, which is how I knew he wouldn't be any of those things. I liked him on the spot. (*He moves, closing down the soliloquy.*)

TOM: Soliloquy, huh? What's the big idea? Identity? Drunk people in bars? Small African mammals?

ANNE: Beauty. A brush with fame, maybe.

TOM: Those aren't the sort of gifts *you* pay attention to. I've gotten you Beauty before, a whole bunch of times. I doubt you'd remember. I always put it in a very small box.

ANNE: I pay attention to Beauty! I pay attention to you.

TOM: And Fame? What if I'd gotten you Fame?

ANNE: Can you get someone else Fame? I don't know if that works out.

TOM: *(He snaps his fingers and she freezes mid-movement. He steps forward.)* You don't know her, not yet. *(He looks over at her.)* She's the sort of person who names her stuffed animals after major literary figures. She throws unbirthdays parties for the joy of it. When I first met her she was auditioning for a play, a Christmas play of all things. We're both Jewish. We were cast anyway. We got to share a stage kiss, except that every time we went to practice she'd whisper "I'chaim" in my ear and we'd collapse into a fit of giggles. Opening night, we still weren't sure we'd make it through. Anyone you can laugh that hard with has to be the right one, no? *(She speaks, closing down his soliloquy.)*

ANNE: So what's the big idea? Religion? Theatrics?

TOM: How about laughter.

ANNE: Laughter's more an action than an idea.

TOM: That's fair.

ANNE: I want another soliloquy.

TOM: Have at.

ANNE: *(He freezes; she steps forward...but this time, within the freeze, his face reacts to her words.)* There was this one time when we didn't laugh together, because you'd forgotten my birthday, because you were caught up with work. This one time, I was hurt. Is that a big idea? Hurt? *(She throws a balloon at him, defusing tension. Over the course of the next few lines, they throw balloons at each other. He mostly ducks and dodges.)*

TOM: Sure, but it's not a very good one. How about Empathy for a Partner Who's Overworked and Underpaid instead? Maybe simplify it down to Forgiveness.

ANNE: Forgiveness?! (*She's getting angry now.*)

TOM: Yeah, that's a good one. I'll have to put that on your birthday list for next year.

ANNE: If you make it through this one. You've given me nothing but Detachment, with a side of Absenteeism. You have three minutes until I throw your workaholic self out the front door.

TOM: Are you really going to follow through on that ultimatum, or did we just need more rising action?

ANNE: I haven't decided. Either I'm raising the stakes, or you really messed up this time.

TOM: (*Annoyed right back.*) Well, I could have gotten you something much worse. I looked at Despair. Pulled it right off the rack and shook it out, even tried it on. Then I realized it was too tight across the shoulders, and the color was off, faded in places. I put it back.

ANNE: I'm glad you did. I already have Despair of my own. I took it out of the hall closet about an hour ago, once I realized you weren't going to be home on time. (*Giving up.*) Look, it's late; I'm exhausted. I just want to go to bed. Is that the climax? Despair? What a depressing big idea.

TOM: I told you, I didn't get you Despair.

ANNE: (*She loses it.*) Well, what about Rage? There's a big idea we haven't covered. And isn't Anger the ultimate climax? Every plotline devolves into one of the two big effs: fucking or fighting. You know which one *won't* be happening tonight.

TOM: I didn't get a fuck you, and I didn't think I'd gotten you a fight, either.

ANNE: Well, you did. What about War, Famine, Death, Destruction—you haven't even touched those ideas, and they're enormous. Or perhaps you have, perhaps you considered them all, because all that stays in your head is big ideas, abstractions, intangibles. But what you can't remember, what you can't cog-nize, is the very important fact that it. Is. My. Birthday. (*She pops a balloon.*) You have one minute left. (*TOM holds out an envelope.*) What's this?

TOM: (*Chagrined.*) It's...well, it's the climax. For real this time.

ANNE: It's a card.

TOM: Yes.

ANNE: (*She opens it.*) "To my always and forever love, on her birthday. May we celebrate many more together." That's... that's awfully silly of you. (*She is touched, and rather embar-rassed.*) What's the big idea?

TOM: I thought at first, maybe something simple: Devotion, per-haps. But then that didn't seem like enough for you; you de-served a more cosmic idea, something unstoppable and all-encompassing. So I also got you this. (*He hands her another envelope.*)

ANNE: Wait, an actual present? Not just metacognitive postur-ing? (*Confused.*) You shouldn't have.

TOM: Metacognition! (*Smacks forehead.*) I knew I forgot something. I should have gotten you metacognition instead. Too late now.

ANNE: *(She pulls several gift certificates from inside the second envelope.)* A night at a fancy hotel. And a nice restaurant date. And tickets to see a play. These are real presents. *(Quick skeptical look.)* You sure you didn't chicken out and get me Materialism?

TOM: No, that's not it at all. I wanted to get you...Time. I miss you. What with work, I feel like I never see you anymore.

ANNE: Time, huh? With you? I'll take it. *(Beat.)* Actually, I love it. *(Clock chimes twelve times.)* It's midnight. You're just in time.

TOM: Lucky me.

ANNE: I suppose I'll keep you, and your crazy big ideas.

TOM: Good. Is that the Denouement?

ANNE: I feel resolved. You?

TOM: You're staying; of course I do. Happy birthday.

ANNE: Thank you.

TOM: She kisses him, knocking off his hat. *(They kiss; she knocks off his party hat.)*

ANNE: They exit together, arm in arm.

(TOM and ANNE exit together, arm in arm. Lights down.)

SUMMER IN THE LAB

The thing about scientific experiments is that you have to follow directions. You have to know the terminology and pay attention to detail. You have to pay attention. I don't understand much about how to do the experiments in this class because I am not paying attention. I don't really know that I am not paying attention, though, because I look right at the teacher when he's talking, but it's like all the information just slides right off the sides of my brain instead of getting inside it.

There are certain places within the classroom that you have to go to get the lab materials and if you haven't paid attention to know where the different materials are, you will get it wrong. You can ask people but sometimes everybody else is so busy paying attention and getting materials from the appropriate places in the classroom that they will not answer you. Besides, I don't know anybody here, and these days I'm really not in the mood to "make an effort."

When you do experiments you look at things under microscopes and you have to have cross sections, and if you don't know which way to cut the specimen it doesn't work or if you don't have a good sample it doesn't work. It's hard to know if you don't have a good sample or if you have done it wrong, but either way you do not get the right result. Even though it is an experiment and you're not supposed to want it to be a certain way, if you don't get the right results you get it wrong. You don't get credit.

This is not my regular school. During the year, I go to a private school on the North Shore. This is the public school down the street. I am only here because if I take Advanced Biology II in the summer, I'll be able to cram in more credits to put on my transcript. I can get ahead, which is what I'm supposed to want to do, so I can go to a good college, and I'm supposed to want to go to a

good college. I'm supposed to care. I'm supposed to keep getting the same A's I've always gotten, even though now it seems like I don't know how to think.

I ride my bike here in the mornings and wonder what it would be like to go here all the time. This is the school I always thought I would go to but then things happened, so now I go to the private school. Since I can't drive yet and my regular school and friends are far away, I feel like I'm living this completely different life. I could be anybody.

I don't have to wear a uniform here, so instead I wear camouflage pants with a ripped tank top and a leather bracelet with one-inch spikes to class, or I can wear my neon orange mini skirt and 15 rubber bracelets and one of my brother's t-shirts with the ribbing around the neck hole torn so the shirt hangs off one shoulder. My hair is short in the back and on the sides, and longer on top. Some days I spike it with Dippity-Do and some days I curl it. Most days, I wear black eye-liner, and when I feel like it I wear black nail polish too.

The other kids ignore me, which is fine since I'm not here to make friends or hang out or anything. There is one guy, though, who kind of teases me about my clothes and calls me Madonna or Scary Punk Chick, depending on which outfit I'm wearing. I ignore him—his name is Eddie—because he clearly doesn't get it, what the clothes are all about. Besides, he's obviously here because he failed the class.

I guess at this school Eddie is like Mr. Popular and all the girls want to go out with him, which is funny to me because he doesn't listen to Euro imports and has never heard of Haircut 100 or Souixee and the Banshees, and he really doesn't seem to be interested in how much things cost. He drives this old Camaro and listens to Led Zeppelin. He's funny in this goofy way that makes me laugh. Plus, he's a good kisser, which I found out when we went to see "Sixteen Candles" at the second-run theater, and we made out in the lobby.

One time, we stop by his house so he can get some money before we go out. There's a big plaster fountain on the front lawn with swans. His sister is retarded and he introduces me to her like she's a normal kid. I say hi and Eddie chases her around the yard

and then runs real slow when she chases him. When we leave he gives her a hug and does this thing that's like a secret handshake that makes her laugh. She waves at us when we're in the car and I wave back. I look over at Eddie, thinking he might say something or explain but he's just driving.

Sometimes, I think about what it would be like to actually date him, about how easy it would be to just be this, all the time, and I think about what my friends from school would say. In some ways, Eddie is who I'm really supposed to be going out with. He's more like the guys I grew up with, the public school kids who are not Super Rich. People around here are maybe a little rich, but everyone at my new school is Super Rich, and I always thought I wanted to be one of them, because who doesn't want to be Super Rich, but I'm so clearly not one of them, and it's a lot of work trying to figure out what's what. Being with Eddie is like where I'm supposed to be, which is maybe why it seems easy, but I'm still not sure it's really what I want.

There is an aide in the class. I don't know what to make of her because she is a kind of woman I have never seen before. In some ways, she is almost invisible, but at the same time, I feel like I can't stop looking at her. It's not that she's ugly—she just wears ugly shoes. But she's not like girls who don't know their shoes are ugly or the ones who have no choice but to wear ugly shoes. It's more like she chose these shoes, knowing that they are ugly. I can't get over that. And she has long blond hair, but it's not "long blond hair" in the way that usually sounds. Her hair just happens to be blond and it's long because she doesn't get it cut. Sometimes it is in a braid but it often hangs down her back in thick clumps. When she bends down to look in someone's microscope, she has to straighten part of the way back up again and kind of toss her hair back so it won't be in her face. In those moments, it almost seems like she's aware that she has "long blond hair," but then if she's aware of having long blond hair, why not get it styled? And her face isn't ugly, but it's plain. There are girls who don't wear makeup, especially to school, but it's all girls so what's the point. But I don't get why she wouldn't just put on a little mascara or some lipgloss or something so that someone might notice that her eyes are a pretty blue. It's like she's totally fine with everything

just the way it is.

She talks about these things in class, the cross-sections and specimens and cells, and you can tell she is really into all of it. Like being here in this class is what she has always wanted. You can tell there is something that she wanted.

The other thing about the aide is the way she looks at people. Sometimes I think she's not really looking, or seeing, because one day she saw me copying answers off someone else's paper during a test and she didn't say or do anything. But at the same time, it's like she sees everything, because the way she looked into my face, it was like she was looking right at ME. Or, like the day she saw Eddie and me making out in the hallway, and I felt strange the whole rest of the day. If anyone else had seen us, like the teacher, I would not have cared, but with the aide, it's like she's looking right at my bones and organs or something. But it's not like she's busting me for something or telling me to shape up or not be slutty. It's more like she's studying me, like I make her curious, or maybe like I'm a specimen.

She says she remembers me. I came to this school for an open house once, back when I was still making choices and before everything else happened. She says it took her a while because I look so different now but she remembers that she talked to me at the open house about the advanced science track and that she told me that I had a lot of promise. I tell her I don't remember anything like that when she brings all this up right in the middle of class when she's making her rounds during a lab.

Later, when we're driving around in his Camero, Eddie says he thought I showed a lot of promise too. He's reaching his hand up my mini-skirt as he says this and I tell him to just shut up, but I let him keep his hand going where it's going.

During the last week of class we take a field trip. We go to the Dunes. There is sand and tall grass and we ride the bus and on the bus Eddie has a cooler full of beer. He starts passing around the cans as soon as we are on the highway.

It's hot. The grass is itchy on my legs. There may be swimming or not. What we are doing here is very unclear. We might be gathering specimens or looking at the way the earth changes from lake to land to dune. Or we might be talking about

things that can grow in sand. What matters is that we have gotten drunk on a bus, and now we're in the hot sun. My head is full with alcohol and with the not knowing what is going on or what I'm supposed to be doing. I am ready for this class to be over. I have to pee from drinking so much beer, and when I go to the bathroom I realize I have started my period. I don't have any tampons. When we are all back on the path together, I ask one of the other girls in the class if she has any tampons. She looks surprised that I am talking to her and then shakes her head. Everyone is starting to branch off into separate groups to conduct whatever the field work is that we are supposed to be doing. Kids have notebooks and pens. I only want to find a tampon because I can feel things really starting to flow down there. I'm walking up a small hill in the woods and I'm actually kind of stumbling from the beer, and the aide is coming up the other side of the hill and we meet at the top. She looks at me and I ask her if she has a tampon, and I can smell beer on my own breath. She digs into the outside pocket of her backpack and hands me a small bullet in plastic, the kind of tampon with no applicator. I've never known anyone who uses these, and I'm not sure I will know what to do, but it's all there is and I say thank you.

She looks right at me like she is trying to tell me something but I don't know what it is. I want to know what it is now, but she just gives me this sad kind of smile and says, "Careful."

On the way home, I am stretched out on the back seat of the bus, my arm hanging into the aisle. I am sick from more beer on the beach and the sun. "King of Pain" is playing on Eddie's boom box. I'm so sick of this song. It's putting me in a mood. I want to tell everyone about how I liked The Police a long time ago, before they became popular with this song that they play all the time on the radio. This isn't really them anymore. They have sold out. I want to tell everyone, but I don't because I'm so tired, and besides, it doesn't matter.



SUSPENDED
MICHELLE DEARDORFF



MAYBE I'LL STICK TO CHEERLEADING
HOLLY ANDERSON



PHOTO #3 ("SUTURE ME" SERIES)
RACHEL M. ZEIDERS

13 STORIES ABOUT MY FRIENDS

Emily

Emily lost her virginity to this guy named Johnny on New Year's Eve. She didn't tell me about it. I heard about it through the grapevine. I wonder if it could have been me. Not that I'm interested in Emily, but they say this Johnny character looks a lot like me. It got me thinking anyway.

Ethan

That week, Ethan's boyfriend Jamal confessed to being straight and dumped him.

Ethan took it pretty hard. He hadn't expected it at all. I decided to walk over to his house to console him. He said that he didn't understand how two days ago he could hold hands with Jamal at the grocery store, and today he couldn't even call him on the phone.

"I just need to cry right now," he said. We fucked later that night and I haven't spoken to Ethan since.

Mina

That was the winter that Mina became an Internet sensation. She knows how to float one inch above the ground. She's become sort of famous from the YouTube videos. I think floating is a real turn on. I got her drunk one night so she would show me how it works. Once I got the hang of it, we played floating soccer in her living room.

The next morning she made me promise not to tell anyone, but I've been dishonest.

Greg

A hungry ghost moved into my friend Greg's house toward the end of February.

During the day, it marched around his living room, parading its little potbelly up and down his coffee table and drooling. Greg tried to feed it an egg sandwich, but it wasn't interested. It said that it only liked chicken. Greg is a vegetarian. At night, it sat on Greg's bedside table, crying into its little hands. "It says it's hungry but it won't eat," Greg told me. "I bought it some chicken wings, but now it isn't hungry for anything.

Maybe it likes being miserable." A few days later, the ghost floated away.

Paul

In February, my friend Paul killed himself. I say he was my friend, but we only knew each other from high school and we hadn't stayed in touch very well. I got a call from Alex, who got a call from his friend, who heard about it from one of Paul's brothers, so my version of the story isn't entirely reliable. I heard that when he blew off his head, the blood and brain matter on the wall behind him looked like a map of China. That's what Alex said anyway.

Monica

When Monica heard that Paul blew his head off, she was at work, so it didn't really register. Later that night, when she was sitting at home with her boyfriend, she realized that Paul was the first of her friends to die. They hadn't been close in years, but it stunned her nevertheless. She told her boyfriend about it, but he's not the emotional sort.

Priya

Priya found the hungry ghost in her office playing spider solitaire on the computer. She told it to go away, but it didn't. It just coasted around the office on its little potbelly, knocking things over, shredding paper, making gargling sounds—normal ghost stuff—so Priya said some nasty things. She didn't tell me what she said, but I bet it was terrible—Priya has quite a mouth on her. The ghost turned brown and began to cry.

She tried to say something nice after that, but all the ghost could do was blubber about spider solitaire and chicken wings. After a few minutes, she ignored it again. She asked me to come over the next day. She seemed to think I could reason with it, but when I showed up, the hungry ghost had already left.

Jamal

Over Easter, Jamal got a little too drunk in front of his new girlfriend's parents. He was sure he'd only had a few beers, but then he remembered that he'd lost weight in the last year and he couldn't hold his drink like he used to. When his girlfriend's dad asked about his job security he replied, "Who needs job security when you've got one of these." Then he wiggled his butt like the bumblebee in a school play. Later, he was so ashamed that he wrote his girlfriend's dad a note, which he never had the courage to deliver.

Ursula

In June, Ursula met the perfect man at a rave. She was rolling, and she thought he was floating an inch off the ground. When she took him home, it turned out he did float. He couldn't stop doing it, he said—he couldn't work out how to get back on the ground.

Ursula didn't like that. It's a shame because he was perfect in every other way. Ursula admits that. But floating is a deal-breaker for her. I understand that. Everyone has their thing.

Noah

The hungry ghost showed up again in August. It was Jordan's birthday, and a bunch of us were drinking at Noah's house. Noah offered it a shot of tequila, but ghosts don't handle alcohol very well, and it got pretty drunk. At one point, the ghost got emotional and threatened to jump from Noah's balcony, just to get attention. None of us tried to stop it, and in the end it didn't try. It turned a deep shade of brown and hid in a closet. Noah said it stuck around his place for a few days after the party. He didn't give it any food or anything. Eventually, the ghost got the message and left.

Alex

Late that summer, Alex received a phone call from Paul's mother, asking him to come and pick up some of Paul's old things. Lots of his stuff was just as he left it—she never cleaned his room. She gave him one of Paul's chairs and his old Nintendo. Alex and I played Duck Hunt the next day. We didn't think about Paul at all.

Johnny

Around Halloween, I had a conversation with that Johnny, the guy who looks like me. He invited me over for a beer. I didn't want to go, but beer is beer. Johnny has a nice place. He directed me to sit down on an expensive looking couch, but I didn't want to. Johnny is better looking than I am. We look quite similar, but he has something I don't. It was an unpleasant visit.

Anne-Marie

The hungry ghost visited Anne-Marie on New Year's Eve. She was on her way to a party. She found it floating an inch above her passenger seat. The ghost looked thin, and Anne-Marie told me that its body had become completely transparent.

She almost didn't notice it in the dark. She said that it was probably starving. Anne-Marie asked if it wanted to stop by a drive through or something, but the hungry ghost just stared at her with its transparent eyes, its thin little transparent hands quivering from the cold. After that, Anne-Marie stopped looking at it, and she tried really hard to think about something else. By the time she got to the party, it had become completely invisible.

LINES COMPOSED ON THE CAMPUS OF ORTA DOĞU
TEKNIK ÜNİVERSİTESİ

Day's ends leave us alone in our room working to make sense
of all we've experienced. This, at least, no different from anywhere else.

Ignorance of place & language is written on our faces
& jitters overhead, flag in April breeze. We are tiny island nations

in someone else's sea. Last week, fifteen sailors from one country
were imprisoned by the army of another, a dispute over territorial waters,

as if water were small & still & could be taken with us. My water,
your water, the way our two-year-old son constantly claims –

my rock, my flower, my bed – he is a tiny, insistent Alexander,
the world still marble-small & fitting neatly in his pocket,

as if we had right to any of this. These words belong to *me*,
do not read them. We learn Turkish in fits and blots,

unchained from grammar, words we need when we need them:
Taksi. Misafarhane. Havlu. Lütfen. Tuvalet. Merhaba. Teşekkür ederim.

They tell no story, complete no sentence – they do not laugh
from our tongues all warm & thick & rich like melting chocolate,

they stumble like drunk from bar: night dark, fog so close and wet.
American sitcoms air in English, our familiar evening anchor:

unsubtle jokes about marriage, easy misunderstandings, happy endings.
Turkish subtitles teach us more essentials. *Seks. Kanser.*

This covers it in any language, all other words somewhere between.
We sleep poorly so far from any place we've called home.

The children rest more easily. Water in dreams is ours alone.

LISPED IN NUMBERS

but it cannot have wrought any good sense
though you did place a good construction on it at the time
the desert fairs with buggies and the whip

the shifting dunes that fall apart and remake
like combing the hair and tossing it back

like a seawave's broken back
like an allegory on the banks of the Nile
like anything you wish
a simile

KANSAS POINTE

So it's 6 PM and they are no longer coiling around the
Methadone clinic as we drive by for the eighth time.
The clouds, battleships on the horizon, big dissolving
Cumulonimbi,
And your cheeks in this light bore the sheen of twin panes
Of grapefruit meat.

Where do we winter this year? We winter right here, you
Say, wringing courage out of our timid, cold hearts.
The old seaweed tattoos from your riding days jump in
Your neck, lips wet for once and there is a hint of
Sex in your muzzle.

You wrote on my mirror in permanent marker:
Eat shit today?
And I was supposed to answer no, no. Not today,
Not tomorrow. Each of your fingers is a warm,
Moist prong, wrapped in callous.
Touching my knee, turning off the radio.

How are you gonna die? You might have asked. And I
Was supposed to say I'm not. I'm not.

Now you're quiet and your lips are wet for once,
Counting out the miles to Denver.

THIS IS GEOLOGY, NOT LOVE

that we've been talking about.
Why is your igneous in my

esophagus, and where are your fault lines
hiding in safety under the tide

until it falls back too far? Or maybe magma
pumps hot through the veins

of our house, a clever form of love
making. If it is hypothetical

maybes we're after, maybe a river
ran through my spleen, deposited you instead

of sediment. Tectonics between us
are convergent these days,

you live in my lithosphere
I live in your trench. We're not

vibrating on impact, our earth
emerging up, up, clean

and unmarked and given important names
like Himalaya or Appalachian. Instead,

we buckle over
each other. We used to care

about topography—exploring
you ran

your hands across the skin
delicately hiding the ribcage

of Wyoming, unconcerned by the sleeping
catastrophe beneath. But this is fucking

geology: erosion
and rock cycles. Hot spots

include Hawaii and Iceland
in addition to Wyoming—

not my vagina, especially not
my heart. Ring of Fire means

the Pacific Rim, twenty-five thousand
miles of ruthless earthquakes

and volcanoes
that have destroyed cities, whole islands,

killed and killed and killed,
a direct result

of plate tectonics, not love, not even
what happens after. To be fair,

acts of nature don't have will, can't
truly be ruthless.

BRICK ROOM

She says, "But I'm a bleeder."
Her eyes are alarm clocks blinking.
Her knees bounce.
These places are so white and wide open.
The woman coming up to us
is not a nurse but her voice is soft.
She says they're ready for my daughter now.
Walking down the white-walled hall I hear her
tell Amy not to worry, that there's still time, that she made the right choice.
Amy lifts her rag doll head at that,
a thin smile parting open,
looks over her shoulder at me and says,
"See Dad, I'm not a murderer."

ONE DAY A FELLOW SUMMER SCHOOL STUDENT
BROUGHT A QUICK END TO A PICKUP GAME OF
BASEBALL

when, running out a single to right,
he stepped on the square of cardboard
we'd put down for first base
and slid like someone suddenly
out of control on ice; we watched
the slow-motion show, how
for those six feet or so the cardboard
skidded across the grass he
waved his arms like a tight-rope walker
catching the air to stand straight again
on the rope, except he fell backward
hard on one arm, the new joint
where it bent wrong swelling
against the skin, and we ran to him
as he cried out in pain, pal, buddy,
friend, sudden center of attention
with one oddly shaped arm
he held with the other like a baby
gently cradled, as if to keep it from harm.

ON THE FIRST DAY OF SPRING, OUT EARLY,

lace up your hiking boots,
walk in the chill of morning into the mountains
naming the flowers as you go:
Brittle Bush, Indian Paint Brush, Chuporosa.

If you've forgotten last year's names, rename them:
Royal Princess, Nodding Head, French Knot,
Dimity, Seed Pearl or, simply, Orange Flower.

You are Eve. This is your garden.
Give names to your birds:
Feather Head, Startle Me, Flash of Red.

Fling your mittens by the trail.
Watch them burst into bloom amid lupine.

Free of winter, walk higher
until everything is sky and golden poppy.
Let yourself be air.

THE IDIOT'S FAITH

Three lanterns floated in the dream she told him, but he didn't want to hear about lanterns. He wanted factories unbuilt, windows smashed open. He wanted libertine wailings. She denied being a builder of factories, but he knew her reputation. A wind blew in from Montreal, or she said it was from Montreal, said she could smell the bars of Rue St. Laurent. He was skeptical but didn't want to argue. What good are arguments on a Saturday night? What good are arguments at all? She told him again about her love of the French language, and he thought maybe they were getting somewhere. The modern sunset outside her window was spilled wine tinged with pollution. They went down the mountain to town, found the trouble she had decided they wanted. She called a homeless man a fallen Chinese god, and they mourned his sad descent, forgetting (almost) their own. That is the power of generosity, one use of our idiot faith in human love.

LONESOME WATER

Drink it and back you go, sometimes
as far as your childhood home, to die.
Gravels clear it, willows dapple it, while
your thoughts turn to changes for the worse.

It's more and more possible for your
parents to bring evidence against you.
They dance around your bed, pull at
your flesh, crack nasty jokes in a state
of near frenzy. Will it be over soon,

you ask, your voice running down,
your fever spiking. Maybe they are
in love with you in their own fashion,
maybe they're merely saving you from
terrible secrets, you think at last, while

out in the woods, the stream's filling
with water again after years of drought.

TBILISI SWEEPERS

With the sway
of hand-strung brooms
wielded by black-skirted women
in bright-orange vests, the early
morning streets scratch back
the dirt, the dust, the days
of the week, and trash expelled
from the windows of cars,
all that the wind has scattered, making
their own tiny storms in the spaces
between broom straw and ground,
this canyon they've made of the road
from erosion caused by the river
their lives have become, these women
from Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey,
in their minds a map of Kurdistan
superimposed on where they no longer live,
these women without a home sweeping
streets for others, energy
spent pushing back these layers
of pollen and leaves, this impossible
swinging back a buildup of years
on streets that don't lead home.

SOUNDS LIKE HOME

Abidjan
on his breath

along parts of me
traveling terrain

between i and
you in quiet ways

receiving
this space: a song

when Ames and Tallahassee
move closer

suggests more is there
overflowing supple walls

the way we language lust
again and again

NO CATERPILLARS

The next morning was a morning of no caterpillars.
And so no cloud sun cloud.
Just a stretch of bottomless sky.

No one bit into a fruit they didn't want to finish,
no coffee cups left on the roofs of cars,
no egg shells in pans.
There was not a morning confrontation we rehearsed all day,
there was no reason and no confrontation.
No kittens asleep on cooling engines.

The air felt like a cold Coke in the throat,
and infomercials seemed full of people wanting to better your life.
Every bird that died did so in the air like it wanted.
A home with no one home disappeared into a sinkhole,
like a magic trick, like reclamation.
A gravedigger took the morning off for someone to dig his plot.
A morning of no static, no ants in the sugar, no locked keys.
Not a morning of searching for the right words, instead
reciprocate, *waffling*, and *value proposition* arrived like a train on time.

That morning we didn't think of WMDs or calories.
Even hangovers seemed light and bearable.
This morning was a morning everyone remembered dreams,
and we told them to each other like bed time stories,
and dwelt all day on them like a past life recurring to us.

And the morning after the next morning was caterpillars again.

INTERCOURSE

There is a Mediterranean in me
and an almond tree grows
in my unconscious ever so slowly.

A rare vocabulary of shapes
is compiled on your body.
I name them

and they glow
on the walls of my psyche
like corals in underwater caves.

Then I touch you.
I, the needle on the record
deciphering the vibrations of the present!

And the weight
of your presence warming my soil,
I grow.

I grow a cloud of white flowers
into the light you keep
in your mind.



WRITTEN SKY I
CARMEN TOMFOHRDE



URBAN
RACHEL M. ZEIDERS

FIRST, SOLE, THUNDER, AND STITCH

First

Cinder block walls painted mint green. No windows. A few empty stretchers between me and the door, swinging open and shut and open again. In the center of the door, high-up, a little round window, like you'd see on a boat. I felt half under water. It was a day spent slowly surfacing.

Uniformed bodies sauntered by. I could hear faint voices in the background, involved in some dance of pinch, pull, wincing—but not for me any longer. I was resting. I know that much. I couldn't tell you the time of day because there were no windows, save for the portal in the door that led only to a hallway with the same green walls, the same florescent lights.

In the wake of a body passing through, the door swung open again, and there he was, standing on the far side looking in: the boy in the Indian costume. He wore a brown band around his head with red and blue feathers poking up in back, their cobweb-thin edges swaying in time with the door. Fringe lined the under-arms of his brown shirt, the sides of his legs. He stood statue still. No smile. No frown. Instead, a long steady studying of me, then a moment of recognition: *It's you.*

I must have been in someone's arms, but that, I don't remember. Only those eyes filled with the pitch dark of a new moon.

Impossible, I've been told. But I remember my first day with the roots of my heels, my pillar of spine, my fingernails and eye teeth. I was born fluent in a language people spend lifetimes unlearning, into a world where my first words were *no no no no.*

Sole

I wake first that morning, crawl to the bathroom, puke, and think about making some ramen noodles. But the sole of my right

foot distracts me. It's tar black, unmatched by its mate.

"One of my feet is black," I say as I crawl into bed and fit our bodies together like spoons.

"You lost a shoe," he tells me. "That's why I carried you."

The day before, we went to Charlie's at an unprecedented hour.

"The way to get a good seat at the bar," he told me, "is to start drinking in the afternoon."

He held the door as I stepped inside, blinded for a moment as my pupils opened up to let the low light in. Outside, we left behind the full sun of Missoula in June.

He ordered us Bloody Marys, and, I'll admit, I felt special sitting there with the day drinkers: men with sandpaper hands and darkened teeth. Black and white headshots of the regulars lined the walls from baseboard to crown molding. The ones with gold stars were dead. Over our first round, we discreetly matched portraits to patrons.

After a few more drinks, we started making out. I couldn't help it. I'd met him in this bar nine months ago, and here we were: still together, sharing a one-bedroom house. I ran my fingers through his shoulder-long beard and buried my nose in his sideburns for a moment. I've always loved that smell: sweat-dried skin and the ghost of old shampoo.

"Get a room!" One of the regulars shouted. The bar owner, Charlie, bought us a round. Maybe we were good for business.

"We're good for each other," he said over a game of pool after dark. The crowd was growing. I was surely drunk already or I'd never have played pool in front of so many people. I have a habit of missing the white ball, streaking blue chalk on green felt.

We played and drank and befriended a man from Switzerland touring the states by Greyhound bus. Then we found Clint, a serious Hoover salesman. There was a science to selling, he said, and he practiced his pitch on us. I was sold.

I told everyone my brother had lightning bolts tattooed on the sides of his penis. Then I told them again. Soon, I couldn't stick to the barstool. My spine kept wilting like a stalk of asparagus cooked gray.

He was disappointed that I needed to leave before closing time. Some of his friends had just walked in, but he went with me anyway.

“It’s okay,” he said. “I love you.”

“I want fried chicken,” I said, “and a burrito.”

On the walk home, a Labrador puppy on a leash lunged at me—half threat, half play. The owner—a dreadlocked girl wearing a bandana as a top—yanked the dog back down to earth.

“Oh my god,” she said. “I’m so sorry.”

“I understand,” I assured her. “My dog does that too. She looks scary, but she’s really a teddy bear.”

We agreed to a dog playdate. I wrote my number on a piece of paper and took off at a run.

Sadness leaked through me. My dog. I wanted to bury my face in her fur, pull all 90 pounds of her into bed with us and sleep the next day through.

Run run run FALL.

He tried to keep up with me, but I was too fast. The third time I fell, my skull thunked dimly against the asphalt and a new sky of stars eclipsed the others.

“Ow,” I said.

“Careful.” He held out his hand.

In the early afternoon, I wake again to the sound of my dog whining. Her neck cranes downward to rest her muzzle on the bed, inches from my face. When my eyes open, she wags her tail wildly and licks my face.

I look around the room. The thought of our sheets damp with beer sweat makes me want to burn things. Add to that the piles of dirty clothes, old dishes, the unexplored job ads. The room spins a little and I sink my head between my knees, run my finger over the goose egg on my scalp. My dog lowers her ears, rolls belly-up to lick my face.

After water and medicine, I reach in my backpack to take out the graduation check my parents sent. All I find is a ripped envelope with my mom’s debutant handwriting on the front and half a check inside. When the dog girl calls about our playdate, I let the machine pick up. I can’t bring myself to call her back—not even

for three hundred dollars.

Eventually, I find the mop bucket and fill it with warm water and soap. My head throbs like a giant heart flooded with wet sand.

He sits beside me, guitar on his knee.

“I’m sorry,” I say.

“For what?”

“For running and falling and puking and doing other stuff I probably don’t remember.”

“It was fun. You were fun. It’s nice to see you have a good time.”

A good time.

“Wow,” I say. “You’re going to love my family.”

I slip my foot into the crackling bubbles and start to scrub.

Thunder

It’s unfair, I know, but I won’t let my husband turn on the TV tonight. I can’t bear it. The laugh tracks on the evening sitcoms curl out like a long, venomous tongue. It’s a fucking insult, and I won’t have it.

Just last week, I got the call, the one I’ve dreaded my whole life for what I thought was no good reason.

“It’s your brother,” my dad said. “Matthew shot himself in the head.”

We’d been Texans for only six days.

I took a deep breath, set the phone down because I could not hear more. My chest, a quarry full of blasted rock, it was all I could do to step out into the 90 degree night and fix my eyes on those famous Texas stars.

I spent the rest of the week in Georgia. We cleaned out his trailer, settled things with the police, and identified the body. I drove his cherry red ‘79 Ford pickup back to Texas, his overweight cattle dog riding shotgun. People have died and left less, you know, though I couldn’t find my way to feeling lucky.

Luck. Turns out he won five grand in the lottery the week before he died. Never even cashed in the ticket, but it’s enough to cover funeral costs. My folks say there won’t be a funeral, but a memorial: a service in which we will all remember my brother, the

one person I'm trying so hard to forget.

But tonight, my husband paces up and down the living room as I sit and inspect a box of my brother's old things: a mix tape, a baby tooth, name patches ripped from old work uniforms.

"It's okay to feel good," my husband says, in defense of me or the television—I can't tell which.

I want to open up my ribs and watch the shrapnel spill out between us.

"Go read a book," I tell him. "We have two thousand."

It is then that we hear it: thunder rolling through the vacant field in front of our house. We let our words evaporate, uncross our arms, open all windows and doors. The dusk light dims to yellow-green, the color of the sun held half hostage by night, and the air cools for the first time since we moved here.

There are no thunderstorms like this in Montana, and I've been a decade there; my husband, his life.

I look over at him, his face a constellation of wonder and concern.

"It's okay," I say, taking his hand. We step out from under our front porch, and the sheets of rain pour in to meet us. Lightning rending the sky, thunder cracking the head of night before us, and me: palm-up to the black-bellied clouds.

Stitch

"Grammy has sixty stitches in her head," my son tells his father as they construct an elaborate track on the train table.

Actually, ten were stitches, right behind the ear. The other fifty were staples laddering up the C-shaped incision from ear to temple, some sort of Frankenstein crescent moon eclipsing the freshly shaved head of my fifty-five-year-old mother.

I took the kids to stay with her for a month after the fall. When she was still in the hospital, we thought her hallucinations might be brain damage. She spoke of visitors who had not been alive for years. She petted her absent dog, clawed at her skin, pulled out her IV and other tubes and tethers until they had to strap her in restraints like some wild and delicate bird from a Tennessee Williams play. Anything for a glass of Chardonnay. "Antioxidants," she'd often say. "Good for the heart."

But apparently not the brain. Not when it's been smashed against the skull, left bleeding on the inside, imploding like a burned out sun.

"Alcoholic," I said to the doctors, her sisters, my father, the many friends. "Alcoholic," I said again and again until, finally, she cast her eyes toward the window, studying the noontime traffic on I-65, and nodded in vague consent.

"Grammy," my son continues, "My Grammy cracked her head open." He smashes his five-car train into the back of his father's train and laughs at the fallout from the collision.

My husband nods. There is not much more to say.

I run the purple fabric of a new dress under the foot of my mother's old Kenmore. My girl is just seven months old, but this is the third dress I have made for her. Right now, she's pulling up on the train table, next to her brother, reaching for a piece of track.

"How is she?" my husband asks.

I look at him and shake my head.

"I thought she was better," he says.

I press the hem under, inhaling the white-hot scent of iron on cotton, watching the way the heat darkens the purple to the color of a deep deep bruise.

"She's relapsed," I tell him. "Her head is infected and now she's in for three more surgeries." I glance at the boy and he stares back, listening. There is not much more to say.

I stitch the hem, press it again, and hold the finished dress up for my family to admire.

"Why are you always just sewing?" my son asks.

Because I can't stop.

"Your sister needs some new clothes," I say, the lie coming so naturally I almost believe it.

I take a deep breath and pull my thoughts back to the room, where the May morning light cuts through open blinds, and my husband holds our kids in his lap, all of them looking at me now. At a loss, I pull the purple dress up to cover my face and wait three seconds, then lower it.

"Peekaboo!"

The baby laughs and claps, her pure delight bubbling

through me. I do it again, again, again. Each time, she laughs harder. At seven months old, she's learned the truth of the trick: object permanence. Her mother is there even when she can't see her.

“Peekaboo! Peekaboo! Peekaboo!”

My son stares back at me, stone-faced, his brow tight with concern. Two months shy of his fourth birthday and it seems he's learning the harder truth, one that renders this game scary at best: You're only here until you're not.

STILL LIFE WITH MOON

Isis can chart whole sections of her life by smell. For instance, there was the sandalwood era of childhood that was blended with a light bitter orange and something more flowery and low to the ground, jasmine perhaps, because that's the kind of perfume her mother wore at the time. Not a spray, it came in a tiny glass bottle and she applied it to her wrists and neck and on the inside of her knees, saying, "This is what *French* women do," breathily, with a little laugh. Springtime; a rosy tilt to the air, each day like turning the pages of a worn and beloved picture book. And that peach tree in the back yard; Isis could tell when the peaches were ready to eat without having to feel for softness; they smelled sweet and round and she knew just when they would be a sweet eruption in the mouth. This was a spring of new handbags, large ones with the earthy smell of leather that her mother hoisted onto her shoulder when she took Isis to bars. She ordered Isis Cherry Cokes, while she talked to the bartender, or to other men.

Isis liked the smell of bars. They smelled of home: muscular, sour and wet. They smelled of cigarette smoke and sick-sweet whiskey and thick, polished wood of counters, and the burnt-sugar smell of heartache. The sounds of music and low voices and glasses and ice were a kind of poetry written on the nerves. Christmas lights flickered on surfaces like oil slicks. The faces of the patrons were dewy: quick to tears and laughter, throats congested with love songs, words released into the cozy space. People were friendly to Isis in bars in a way they weren't outside; they showed her tricks and laughed when she said things that were funny and paid close attention when she said things that were serious. They clapped and whistled when she learned to yo-yo; when she got roller-skates they watched her careen from one wall to the other. Their breath had the jolly, happy smell of beer, or the fruit-gone-bad smell of whiskey, or the wintergreen smell of gin, or the

icy, nearly invisible smell of vodka, which was what her mother's breath always smelled like. Isis learned that even bad smells could provide pleasure and comfort.

In bars her mother would snake an arm around her shoulders and say, "Isis turned out so *gorgeous*. She's seven miles out of *my* league!" and her high-heels would click against the leg of her stool while her skirt, short and brightly colored, would ride up her leg and Isis would shake her shiny blonde head and men would laugh indulgently and say, "a knockout, alright!" Her mother's smell always filled a bar completely. It bewitched, niggling into every corner, like a snake-charmer's music. Men waited breathlessly for Isis' mother to speak. They came up close to her and smelled the air around her reverently, with their eyes closed.

Isis could ask for anything in bars and her mother would give it to her. "Can I wear your shoes?" Isis would ask, and her mother would give her an alligator smile and take off her shoes and hand them to Isis. They smelled warm and sour and familiar and she would put them on and shuffle around the bar in them while men laughed and said jokingly, "What's your sign, doll?" Isis could say, "Can I have money for the jukebox?" and her mother would give her five dollars and she would go to the jukebox and put on the songs her mother liked. She knew all the words, and everyone clapped while she mouthed them into an imaginary microphone. The only thing Isis couldn't ask in bars or any other place was about her father. But sometimes very late she put her head down on the bar, closed her eyes and sat very still—very still—and her mother said little things about him, like she was dropping crumbs of food to an obedient dog. She'd say, "She's just like her dad; so serious," or "I don't know where she got that blonde hair. Her dad's dusky," or "I just don't know how her father can live in that god-awful city."

Every night after the bars, before she went to sleep, Isis' mother asked her, "What does the moon smell like tonight?" and Isis would lean her forehead against the glass of the window and inhale deeply through her nose and say, "like oranges," or "like wool when it's wet," or "like outer space," or "like candles in church." Isis couldn't remember when this tradition started.

"Isis," said her mother, "what does the moon smell like

tonight?”

“Like the inside of trees.”

Isis looked at her mother and her face was beautiful, round and milky as a moon. One of her canines stuck out a little, but otherwise her teeth were very straight. She smelled of perfume and vodka and summer. Her hand rested on Isis’ arm, a slim, lovely hand, with pale, oval nails.

“We’re goddesses, Isis.”

“I know, mom.”

“When we die, we will be constellations in the sky. We’ll always be adored!”

“I know.”

It was sometimes just the two of them, but there was usually a man around, a succession of men. They were agreeable or they were easy to ignore.

When they moved to California they entered the period of eucalyptus: the pale, medicinal folk-healing smell, the rubbed-away smell. Her mother started wearing a different perfume. She watched her mother spray it into the air in front of her and walk into the mist it created. The bottle was shaped like a cone and was too big to fit in her new purse, which was a fuzzy jungle print and had a silver chain and smelled like tobacco scraps and rubber. “Do me,” said Isis and her mother sprayed the air and Isis closed her eyes and walked into the scrim of fragrance, light and heady with a sting of citrus.

There were new bars in California, but bars always smell the same and they were like home. Isis shook her head, swiveling back and forth on her bar stool, so that her hair released the smell of her mother’s perfume. She showed a man who smelled like soap and spicy deodorant how she could French braid her own hair. “You better show me that again,” he said, “looks pretty complicated.” This was a man who would have breakfast with them the next morning, who would cook pancakes with frozen blueberries in them, wearing one of her mother’s robes, and would heat up the maple syrup until the whole house smelled thick with it, but Isis only liked these men when they were in a bar. In bars they were almost fathers: jovial, attentive, rushing out to get Band-Aids if she scraped her shin on an exposed splinter, reassuring her if she

accidentally broke a glass. Bars were timeless; nobody wanted to be anywhere but there. Mornings were just the impatient dead time before everybody made their own way into the stunned day that smelled sun-drunk, like eucalyptus and leaving.

Isis knew her mother was sick before her mother did. It was a smell, a gnarled, hard, wooden smell that solidified beneath the fresh skin-smell and the shampoo smell and the new gardenia and tea rose perfume her mother had recently switched to. Isis grew taciturn and angry. The smell made her afraid when she drew near her mother in that sudden, horror-movie way, like when you grab a fruit and realize that it's too soft, rotten inside, worms in it. This was when Isis learned that not all good smells are pleasant and comforting; ever after, the smell of gardenia would be associated with panic. Her mother squatted next to her bed and said, "What does the moon smell like tonight?" and Isis smelled her mother's perfume and her cotton dress and her familiar sweat and also this other smell, this mushroom smell, the disorienting, malarial rotten-wood smell and she turned to the window and looked at the frightened fish-belly moon and then back at her mother like you'd look back at a mirror when you're afraid someone's behind you, and she said "It smells sick." Isis' mother looked out the window too and her eyes glassed over with fear. Four months later a doctor showed her pictures of the tumor growing in her stomach.

Then there was one airport, and then another. Isis always had a window seat, and when she put her hand to the too-bright window it was very cold to the touch. Planes smelled singed and synthetic and old, like coughs and wrinkled clothes and aerosol and too much time and too little space. It was a smell Isis would come to associate with loneliness. Loneliness was becoming an entity instead of an abstract concept or even a collection of behaviors, a thing that is wrinkled in a jar on a top shelf somewhere, or a shadowy figure that waits and waits at the door of an airplane lavatory, looking at the navy-and-burgundy floor. People always talked to her on planes, but they weren't nice like men in bars, they were over-nice, with huge smiles and white oleander teeth. A man next to her asked, "Why are you traveling all alone, kid?" and Isis looked at his mile-long smile and imagined raking her fingernails down his face, the blood from his cheeks staining his white teeth.

She turned toward the window and laid her hand flat against it. She was hurling through space in a giant aluminum tube, heading nowhere at all, just further and further away.

Then came the interval of fathers, with their square, masculine smells of aftershave and acidic sweat and leather cigar boxes and Pert shampoo. Isis, it turned out, had a father who lived in an apartment in a big city that had floor-to-ceiling windows that faced a polluted river and a mysterious windowless brick building at the end of a pier. “That’s for ventilation,” said her father, “for the tunnel,” and Isis nodded shyly as if she understood. They stood very stiffly next to one another, facing the windows. “How old are you?” said her father suddenly and Isis said, “Nine,” and her father said, “Nine years and she never told me I had a daughter,” and he awkwardly reached out a hand and rested it on her shoulder and she looked at him mutely, face hot with the effort of not crying, and the air was full of the smell of pitch and rotten water from the open windows and the old-book smell of the apartment and a cooking-onions smell coming from the hallway and Isis knew that this confluence of smells would always be the smell of ambivalence.

It was summer and summer in this particular city smelled like urine and fish and a very busy human smell. Isis did not consider it wholly displeasing. The peaches in the market were hard as little tumors, completely inedible. The water of the river was almost toxic; when her father took her to the pier and she reached her hand toward the surface, he grabbed her wrist and laughed, saying, “That’s a bio-hazard. Once I saw a dead dog floating down here. Don’t touch it, seriously.”

Sometimes she accompanied her father to the warehouse in which he worked. He ran the local trucking department of a company that moved pieces of art from one place to another and sometimes stored them in giant vaults. The warehouse was in a section of town that was full of warehouses and when Isis went to work with her father she read books in the cool, sunny atrium or walked through the countless storage rooms touching artwork with her index finger, even though she knew she wasn’t supposed to. Or she wandered into the galleries that were sprinkled around this section of town. She liked the smell of galleries; they smelled like quiet and dust and furniture polish and reverence. She liked the

way sounds that were usually neglected became amplified in galleries, like the sound her footsteps made, even when she had rubber-soled shoes on. A little cough was a great, resounding grate; a snapped finger was a commanding clap that existed long after the fingers stopped moving. Isis could hear the rustle of her clothes and believed that she could hear the internal machinery of her own body. She thought about her mother's illness, which she conceived as a hard, malevolent stone growing in her belly. Isis listened within her own body for such treachery, for if she were sick then surely providence would even the scales and make her mother well. Surely one tragedy could be used to circumvent another.

On a very, very hot day that smelled like old lightning, or like something burning unseen behind a tannery, Isis' father held her hand and led her through blazing ripples of air down to a park where people roller-skated and walked their dogs and kissed each other on benches. They leaned on their elbows against a railing. On the other side of the railing the foul river slugged past. Isis' father said, "Isis, your mother was loving and beautiful but... untamable. I was a trap to her. Eventually she escaped, of course." He turned and looked into her eyes. "I didn't know I was a father. If I had, I would have been a good one. I would have tried to be a good one." He stopped and the sunshine around them was as fragile as glass. "She should have told me." Isis didn't know what to say. She knew there were landmines in this territory. The air smelled like lust and algae and sunburn and it was the smell of suspicion. She said nothing, so he said, "I loved her, you know. Everyone loves her. She broke my heart," and Isis loved him suddenly and said, "Can we go to a bar?" and he looked at her, stunned.

"You want to go to a *bar*? A *bar-bar*?"

"Yes."

"I don't think they'll let you into a bar."

"They *always* do."

"You and your mom go to bars?"

Isis nodded her head very seriously.

They walked to Barney's and her father bought her a green dress with an empire waist, and she twirled, watching the skirt rise up her legs as he bought himself a sport-coat. Then Isis led him to

the perfume counter and he bought her a little bottle of body moisturizer called “love’s melody.” When they were secured in an uptown taxi Isis applied the moisturizer to her hands and arms and smelled her fingers. They smelled adolescent; fresh and romantic, like lilac or sweet william. It was a younger smell than her mother-smells, and she leaned back comfortably into the cushion of childhood. The cab deposited them in front of a tall building in the middle of the city and they took the elevator up several dozens of floors. “This is the Rainbow Room,” said Isis’ father as they emerged into a huge room with little tables and wrap-around windows and the smell of linen and alcohol and money. Isis had never been in a bar like this. A maître d’ sat them at a table next to a window, and Isis could see three bridges with scalloped lights like strands of pearls from an old film, and the lights of buildings all bunched up together as though the city was very small and compact, like the inside of a computer, as though it was navigable only by a forefinger. She touched the wall of glass and imagined poking her fingers between the buildings and tipping them over, one by one.

In August Isis turned ten. Her father said, “That’s all we need. Another *Virgo* in the family,” and he laughed and Isis looked up at his face, which had wrinkles around the eyes and blotches of pink at the cheeks, and fine, feminine brown hair with little bunches of gray over the ears, and two teeth that overlapped in the bottom row. She smiled hugely to make him talk more.

“Mom is, too,” she said.

“She is,” he said thoughtfully, “and so what do you do for your birthday?”

Isis considered. “We go to a bar. People sing happy birthday.”

He shook his head, his hair quivering. “Your mother,” he said. There was a smell of resignation, of loneliness about him. It was a smell that also contained its opposite: excitement, anticipation.

He had bought a cake and put ten candles in it and he handed her a flat wrapped gift. She opened it and inside was a serving-platter-sized painting of a girl in stylized Egyptian dress, standing in a window, hands raised in supplication to the full moon.

“One of our clients painted that for me, for your birthday.”

When the summer ended she and her father flew to California. She sat in the middle seat, between her father and a young man in a blue sport coat with brass buttons. He gave off a hesitant, airy smell, a smell like a field of dry wheat, and talked to her father over her head, and she felt the feeling like sitting between two men at a bar. She closed her eyes, not wanting the flight to end.

Isis lived with her mother and father in California for a handful of months. Her mother wasn't home most of the time. She grew very thin, and a dry rash erupted all over her chin and crept slowly up her face. Isis couldn't stand her smell. She smelled like bad water, like the inside of something that wasn't supposed to be opened up. When she was home and came into Isis' room and knelt with difficulty by her bed and asked, “What does the moon smell like tonight?” Isis would stare mutely at her face with its continents of rashes. She did not look out the window.

REMBRANDT AND THE BOY IN THE STREET

“Why do so many writers write about writers?”

I don’t bother to look up when I answer:

“Why do so many painters paint self-portraits?”

Ivy is leaning in the doorway. “Fair enough,” she says, and then asks, “What’s all that?”

I can only assume she is referring to the pile of papers stuffed in the wastebasket. I’m trying to find my cigarettes, and don’t have time to explain it to her. I answer briefly:

“Feces. Two-hundred pages worth.”

“Double-spaced?”

She’s clever, much more than me. Every round of banter is decided in her favor. I only argue with her anymore to pick up brilliant lines I can later pass as my own. I don’t answer this time, though. I’m in a rush.

As I leave the room, she enters, and I hear her retrieve my novel from its grave. I thank God every day for her. Despite my gratitude, He continues to test me.

* * * * *

I’m heading to town to get the mail. There should be a check in P.O. Box 1126 for a short story I managed to unload a few months back. I fumble to get a cigarette lit, and narrowly miss hitting a deer during the distraction.

Why did we move to the country?

It’s supposed to be relaxing. It’s supposed to be friendly. It’s twenty minutes to the Post Office, thirty-five to the nearest decent grocery, and an hour anywhere else. That’s what the country is.

Ivy grew up around here, and her family is still going

strong in these woods. I'm an outsider, and content to be so.

* * * * *

When I finally make it down to the little village, I'm shocked by the sight of three county sheriff's cruisers, all with lights flashing. I can't imagine what could have happened to draw this kind of attention. My first thought is that all of the officers must be lost. Lost, and careless with their sirens.

I reach the post office and find it abandoned. I see the employees—both of them—standing over by the commotion. Most of the buildings and homes in the tiny hamlet, which is really no more than an intersection guarded by a four-way stop, have emptied into the street, the varied inhabitants assessing the situation.

I check my box, find it empty, and curse quietly. A sign posted at the counter reminds me that Mother's Day is less than a week away. I curse again, and head back outside. I debate whether or not to join the gawkers. It can't be anything too spectacular, but I'm not above curiosity.

I walk over, lighting a fresh cigarette ("When will you quit?" Ivy says in my head) with the last match I have. I shake the blackened twig and toss it accidentally into the open window of a parked car. I consider trying to fish it out, but decide against it.

"Folks, folks, come on now," one of the officers is saying when I reach the scene. "We need you to all just back up." I step past a few locals, their jaws hanging low, and peek over the top of one of the cruisers. There, in the street, surrounded by the tan cars with sparkling tops, is a bewildering sight:

There is a slain colored boy, no more than ten years old, lying on his side, a small pool of blood beneath his head. Beside him, in an ornately carved frame, is Rembrandt's *Aristotle Contemplating a Bust of Homer*. I assume it's a print.

* * * * *

Back at home, I describe the scene to Ivy. She is in the middle of making a wedding cake, a business she runs out of our home, and has little time to express much of any opinion. She is

upset to hear about the child, says it was probably a hit-and-run, and acknowledges the painting as a curious detail. Then she is back to wrestling frosting into a pastry bag, and the conversation is over.

I walk upstairs to my office and sit down, an unlit cigarette ready for action between my fingers. My novel is back on the desk, ashes smeared on some of the pages. I'm less interested in it now than I was this morning. I almost push it back into the trash, but decide to save Ivy the trouble of digging it out again.

I spend the rest of the evening trying to think about my work, my wife, anything, but the boy continues to wander through my mind. I watch the local news, but there's no mention of the death. I fall asleep a little after one in the morning, still hypothesizing.

* * * * *

Morning comes, and I'm up before Ivy, as always. She sleeps late. That's why we both wanted to work at home—so we'd never have to set the alarm. I still wake up by eight every day, some leftover reflex from when I had a real job.

I sip my coffee on our back porch and stare out into the woods behind our house. I can see a doe with her two fawns cutting through to the stream at the bottom of the hill. I see them every morning. I don't know if they see me, but if they do, they don't seem to mind my presence.

I watch the mother herd her young along, and immediately the previous day's excitement flashes through my mind, consuming me again. Without even thinking about where I'm going, I exchange my robe for trousers and a shirt and head to my truck. Ivy is still asleep when I leave.

* * * * *

I'm at the post office just after it opens. Only one of the two employees, an older woman with bluish hair and inch-thick spectacles, is in. She's at the counter, motionless. I wonder for a moment if she's even real, or just a dummy they prop up to dis-

courage break-ins.

I go to my box and open it, though I know nothing has been deposited there since my last visit. I cast a sideways glance at the woman, and then pull out my wallet. I have a few bucks, enough to buy some stamps.

“Morning,” I say when I reach the counter.

“Good morning,” she says. There’s something odd about her now that she’s moving. Animation doesn’t look right on her. “What can I do for you?”

“Uh, book of stamps, please.”

“Flags or flowers?”

“Roses?”

She looks down. “Uh, no.” She holds up a book at arm’s length and peers through her frosted-glass lenses. “I think these are poinsettias.”

“That should do.”

“They’ll look nice on a Mother’s Day card,” she remarks, and points at the reminder I noticed yesterday.

“Right, right,” I mumble, and acknowledge the sign with an acidic glare.

I lay my money on the counter as she stabs jerkily at the buttons on the cash register. I watch her for a moment and then ask:

“So, what ended up happening yesterday?”

“I’m sorry?”

“The boy in the street. Yesterday afternoon.”

“Oh,” she says, and counts my money. “Ambulance came and took him away.”

“Did the police say anything?”

The woman looks up. “About what?”

I try not to seem incredulous. “About who he was, what happened to him.”

She pushes the stamps and my change across the counter to me. “Looked like he got hit by a car. I don’t know who he was. He wasn’t from around here, I’ll tell you that much. None of them live around here.”

I almost ask who she means by “them,” but realize it’s a stupid question. I gather the stamps and money, thank her, and re-

turn to my truck. Once inside, I realize she has shortchanged me. I don't bother to go back.

* * * * *

Later that morning I call the county sheriff's office, a concerned citizen inquiring about happenings in my town. I am told the boy was struck by a vehicle. They won't tell me who he is, won't tell me if they even know who he is. It's been ruled an accidental death, but they're keeping an eye out for the vehicle responsible.

Case more-or-less closed.

I drop the receiver into its cradle and chew my bottom lip. I want a cigarette, but they're in my office, and I don't feel like walking upstairs. Ivy calls to me that lunch is ready, and I wander into the kitchen, lost in thought.

"Where did you go so early this morning?" she asks.

I sit down at the table and look at the egg salad sandwich and potato chips on my plate. My stomach is not overjoyed by the sight.

"I went down to the post office," I mumble, and eat a chip.

"Before nine? Why?"

"I wanted to see if there was any news about that boy they found yesterday."

"Oh," she says, and takes a bite of her sandwich.

We sit in silence, except for the crunching of potato chips, and both stare into space. After a few minutes, she asks:

"Have you worked on the book anymore today?"

I grimace and shake my head.

"I noticed it wasn't back in the trash," she says with a smile. "Thanks."

"Thank *you*."

"So what did you find out about the boy?" she asks.

I shrug. "Not much. They're thinking it was a hit-and-run, an accident. I don't get the feeling they're going to spend too much time looking for whoever's responsible, though."

"Probably not," she says absently. "Some of these people around here—it might as well be a hundred years ago." There is

no judgment in her tone.

“Yeah.” I poke at my sandwich with a chip, watch a bit of egg and dressing ooze out the side. “I’d just like to know what happened. And what was the story with that picture, you know?” I shake my head. “It doesn’t make sense.”

“Not really,” she agrees, and we finish the meal without further comment.

* * * * *

I watch more news programs that night than I have in a year. I learn the scores from every game in every sport, none of which mean anything to me. I find out from five different reports on five different channels about five different organisms in my drinking water that could be feasting on my internal organs right now.

But no one says a word about the boy in the street.

* * * * *

The next day we drive to the nearest town of any size. It’s still not a big town, but there is a specialty cake shop there, and Ivy wants to look at a few things. She doesn’t like to order online—though that’s how *her* business is run—because it’s not three-dimensional enough for her. That’s what she says. I think she just likes to play around in the store, like a kid at Toys “R” Us.

I follow her for a while, looking at pans and tips and stands and spreaders and on and on. I tell her I’m going to go outside and have a cigarette, and then I give her a kiss to make it okay. She shakes her head and turns her back on me.

Outside, it’s overcast and balmy. The sky has been whispering to me all day that it’s going to rain, but I suspect it’s been waiting for me to step out for a smoke. I lean against my truck and drag away.

As I’m standing there, I see two colored men walking along my side of the road. The younger of the two is wearing coveralls and work boots and a knit cap, heavy clothing for the weather. The other man is much older and emaciated. He’s wear-

ing a stained and torn white tee-shirt, grease-spotted slacks, and loafers with no socks. He appears to be carrying a car battery.

As they draw near, the old man asks me:

“Canna bumma smo’?”

“Certainly,” I say, and offer him the pack.

The younger man doesn’t speak. Sweat rests in a million beads all over his face. I wonder why he doesn’t at least take the cap off, but I don’t say anything. The old man sets the battery down, takes one of my matches, and lights it with a flick of his thumb, a trick I’ve never been able to pull off.

He introduces himself. His voice is thick and nasally. I tell him my name and make an inane, barely humorous comment about the weather. He agrees and trades a joke of his own. When he laughs, I see he’s missing most of his teeth.

A minute passes in silence, both of us smoking and looking at our shoes.

“D’jew hare bow dat boy?” he asks.

I stiffen slightly. “What boy?”

“Gaw kilt day befo’ yesserday. Over in...uh...shoot...”

He fumbles around, trying to think of where it happened. I offer the name of my town, and he seizes on it with delight.

“Yessir, yessir, dass it. So you hared?”

I nod.

“Ain’t dat turrible? Lil boy like dat.”

I agree and then clear my throat. “How, uh...how did you hear about it?”

The old man looks at his companion and then back to me. “Well, you know...dey’s not too many colored folks roun’ hare.”

“Word spreads fast,” the younger man says. I didn’t even realize he was listening to the conversation. He’s just been staring further down the road. Now he’s looking at me with something like hate in his eyes. “I don’t guess they know what happened.”

I’m suddenly very uncomfortable. “Uh, they think it was a hit-and-run. They’re looking for whoever did it, but they, uh...they think it was an accident.”

The younger man snorts a laugh through his nose and returns his gaze to the street. He pulls his hat off and wipes his brow with it. There is a bizarre spattering of scars on his bald head. He

puts the hat back on and leaves without a word.

The old man watches him and says:

“Dat boy and him...dey was cousins.”

I ask if anyone knows what the boy was doing there, and the old man says he told someone he was going to get a present for Mother’s Day, but no one knew where he went. They didn’t miss him until dinner, and called the county police once it got dark. That’s when they were able to connect him to the boy in the street.

When Ivy returns to the truck, I’m inside, and a gentle rain is falling. She climbs in and places her pack of purchases on the floor.

“Why don’t we go get something to eat?” she says.

“Why don’t we go to the antique store?” I reply.

* * * * *

The antique store I was referring to is two doors down from the Post Office in our town. It’s in a red brick building with a fading façade, and houses an immense collection of dusty, rusted relics. I have only been there twice, never finding much of anything, but it occurred to me, while talking to the old man, that the Rembrandt print could have come from there.

Ivy sees some merit in the theory, but says if we’re not going to get anything to eat, I have to make dinner when we get home. She then starts to show me what she bought at the cake shop. I want to ask her why no one seems interested in this boy, but I don’t. If there’s an answer to that question, I probably don’t want to hear it.

When we get to town, Ivy says she’ll go check the mail and leave me to ‘snoop’ around the antique store. Before going inside, I walk out into the street, to the spot where I first saw the boy. There’s a stain on the pavement, but there are stains everywhere. It could be his blood; it could be motor oil or an ancient asphalt patch.

Who knows?

I shake a chill out of my limbs and walk back to the antique store. A bell dangling from the knob heralds my entrance, and a voice calls from nowhere:

“Hello.”

“Afternoon,” I reply, still not seeing the source of the greeting.

The shop is dark, with blades of light stabbing through here and there, bursting out between stacks and shelves of miscellaneous junk. Particles of dust and detritus float in the light and disappear into the shady gray backdrop. I can feel my lungs tightening, and suddenly I think that maybe I *can* quit smoking.

A middle-aged woman appears in the aisle before me. She is a ferret’s head mounted on the hulky trunk of an armadillo, a truly odd looking woman with curious whiskers and a head cold. She holds a soiled tissue in her hand, and periodically dabs at her pointed nose.

“How are you doing today?” she asks.

“Oh, not too bad,” I say, forcing a smile to my face. “Just looking for something for Mother’s Day. I always seem to put it off until the last minute.”

She returns the smile and asks, “What did you have in mind?”

I shrug. “Not really sure. Maybe a wall-hanging of some kind. Clock or picture or something.”

The woman nods and disappears. She calls to me, “I have some beautiful nineteenth century portraits. Some watercolors. Let me think, let me think...”

“I was wanting something...unique,” I say. “Maybe a classic print.”

I hear that she has stopped walking. After a moment, she asks quietly from somewhere I can’t see:

“A print?”

“Yes,” I say as nonchalantly as I can. “My mom’s especially fond of Rembrandt.”

I get no response and must go looking for my muted host. I find her frozen in an aisle surrounded by stacks of chipped dishes and Buck Rogers lunchboxes. She looks ill, more so than when I first saw her.

“Do you have what I’m looking for?” I ask.

She stares at the floor and shakes her head.

“Do you know what I’m looking for?”

Her eyes rise slowly to meet mine, and she tells me.

* * * * *

The boy came into the store late in the afternoon. The bells announced his entrance, and she went to cheerfully greet her newest customer, but was halted by the surprise of seeing a person of color in her store. She made little effort to cover this.

“What do you want?” she asked.

The boy looked exhausted. There were dark rings in the armpits of his faded orange tee-shirt, and his face was visibly damp. Through the glass door she could see an ancient bicycle leaning against the building, and deduced he had ridden quite some distance to get there.

“Hello, ma’am,” he said politely. “I was looking for something for my momma. You know, for Mother’s Day.”

Something in his voice touched her, but she still wanted him out of her store before someone else saw him there. She hurriedly asked, “What did you have in mind?”

The boy shrugged. “Something nice. I’ve got fifty-seven dollars and thirteen cents.” He pulled a sweaty wad of bills from his pocket, dropping a penny in the process. The coin rolled down an adjacent aisle, and the boy gave chase.

“That’s a lot of money,” the woman remarked.

“I’ve been saving,” the boy called over his shoulder, and slapped his foot down on the penny. He looked up from where he was standing and was immediately enthralled.

“How much is that?” he asked.

The woman came up behind him and looked at the picture. “That’s ninety-five dollars.”

The boy reached up and traced the etching of the frame with his finger. “Who is it?”

“The painting is *Aristotle Contemplating a Bust of Homer*. It’s a Rembrandt.” She looked down at the boy. “Do you know who Rembrandt was?”

The boy shook his head. “I like it, though. I bet my momma would like it, too. It looks so *old*.”

The woman laughed. “Well, the actual painting is much

older than this.”

“Would you take fifty-seven for it?”

The woman actually thought about it before answering, “I’m sorry. I might be able to knock a little off the price, but not that much.”

The boy looked at the money in his hand. “What if I give you my bike, too?”

“Your bike?”

“Yeah. It’s pretty old. It was my uncle’s. But it’s in real good shape.”

“How are you going to get home?”

“I can call someone to come get me.”

The woman agreed to take a look at the bicycle, and found that it was actually a collector’s item. It was in excellent condition, and worth a good deal more than the forty dollar difference it was supposed to cover. It was her lucky day.

The boy seemed to think it was his lucky day, too. He gave his fifty-seven dollars to the woman, and walked his bicycle to the back of the store. He asked to use her phone, but the woman gave him some change and told him to use the payphone across the street. The transaction completed, she was once again anxious for his departure. The boy thanked her again, and the bells signaled his exit.

Seconds later, she heard something calamitous from the street outside.

* * * * *

“Did they even *try* to stop?” I ask.

“Who?” she says absently.

“Whoever hit him.”

She works her jaw for a moment, but there is no sound. Finally, she squeaks out, “I’m sure they did. They’re not the kind...they wouldn’t...”

My eyes narrow on her. “You *saw* who did this? You *know* them?”

She nods, and is once again unable to look at me.

“Did you tell the police?”

“No one asked me anything,” she whispers.

I feel my stomach turn, and I leave without another word. On my way out, I see a bicycle leaning against a wall. It has a two-hundred-dollar price tag tied to the handlebar. I don’t know if it was his or not, and I don’t want to know.

Nobody wants to know.

* * * * *

I do what a responsible citizen should do, and call the county sheriff’s office when I get home. I tell them everything I learned, tell them someone needs to go talk to the proprietor of the antique store. The voice on the other end of the line verbally nods through my story and then tells me the matter will be looked into. Somehow, I know it won’t.

That night I sit in bed with Ivy and complain. She is reading a baking magazine while I’m trying to decide what to do. I’m exhausted and discouraged, but insistent that things can’t be left like this.

When there’s nothing left to say, Ivy asks me:

“So are you going to change the world tonight?”

I give it real thought before answering:

“No. Not tonight.”

“Then let’s go to sleep.”

We kiss and turn out the lights. Just before I slip into a heavy sleep, I have an idea about where to pick up with my book in the morning, and the boy begins to fade from my thoughts.

CONTRIBUTORS

Holly Anderson is a mom of 4 boys and a princess. Holly is a pastor's wife who enjoys photography, music and writing.

Kaj Anderson-Bauer is twenty-five years old. He lives in Arkansas.

Eric Arnold grew up in North Texas and has since lived in both New and Old England. He now lives with his wife and son in San Francisco where he's trying his hand as a psychiatry resident. His poetry and short fiction have appeared or are forthcoming in several print and online journals, including *New York Quarterly*, *Elimae*, *Opium*, *Segue*, *Rumble Magazine*, *Porchlight Magazine*, *Otoliths*, *Bateau Press*, *The Labletter*, *Rust+Moth* and *Saint Ann's Review*.

James Best is currently gathering his first book of poems. He has poems published or forthcoming in *Cold Mountain Review*, *RATTLE*, *Comstock Review*, *South Carolina Review*, etc. He lives in Brooklyn with his wife Valerie and their host of dying plants. His indifference to their plight gives him more time to write.

Delicia Daniels is a poet, essayist, and biographer. She received her BA in English from Dillard University and her MFA in Creative Writing from Chicago State University. She is the founder of *Dark Symphony*, the new literary journal at Wiley College. Her publications most recently appear in *WarpLand*, *Reverie*, and forthcoming *Callaloo*.

Michelle Deardorff is a photography student at The Art Center and Design College in Tucson, Arizona. She comes from a big family of photographers and loves going out and exploring different places, and capturing the world around her.

Okla Elliott is currently the Illinois Distinguished Fellow at the University of Illinois, where he studies comparative literature and cultural theory. He also holds an MFA from Ohio State University. His drama, non-fiction, poetry, short fiction, and translations have appeared or are forthcoming in *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Indiana Review*, *The Literary Review*, *Natural Bridge*, *New Letters*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *A Public Space*, and *The Southeast Review*, among others. He is the author of two poetry chapbooks—*The Mutable Wheel* and *Lucid Bodies and Other Poems*—and he co-edited (with Kyle Minor) *The Other Chekhov*.

After 15 years as a reporter and editor, **Amorak Huey** recently left the newspaper business to teach writing at Grand Valley State University in Michigan, where he is also managing editor of the new online journal *Wake: Great Lakes Thought & Culture*. His poetry has appeared recently or is forthcoming in *The Southern Review*, *Oxford American*, *Poet Lore*, and many other journals.

Stuart Friebert has published a dozen books of poems, most recently *Speak Mouth to Mouth* (David Robert Books), eight volumes of translations, most recently *The Swing in the Middle of Chaos: Selected Poems of Sylva Fischerova* (in co-translations with the author), stories, memoir pieces, and several anthologies.

Melissa Henderson earned her BA from University of Montana and her MFA in fiction from Texas State University. Her work has appeared in *Cutbank*, *Other Voices*, *The Chattahoochee Review*, and *Fringe*. While not playing Legos with her son, or keeping her daughter from eating said Legos, Melissa has taken to writing a collection of memoir shorts about growing up in Indiana.

Tim Kercher now lives in Kyiv, Ukraine after living in the Republic of Georgia for the past four years, where he has been editing and translating an anthology of contemporary Georgian poetry. Originally from Colorado, he teaches high school English

and is working in his fifth country overseas—Mongolia, Mexico, and Bosnia being the others. His manuscript, “Nobody’s Odyssey,” was recently selected as a finalist for the John Ciardi Prize for Poetry. His poems and translations have appeared or are forthcoming in a number of recent literary publications, including *Atlanta Review*, *The Dirty Goat*, *Poetry International Journal*, *The Evansville Review*, *Upstreet*, *Guernica*, *The Minnesota Review* and others.

Len Kuntz lives on a lake in rural Washington State. His fiction appears widely in print and online at such places as *Camroc Press Review*, *Ramshackle Review*, *Elimae* and also at lenkuntz.blogspot.com

Jessica Lakritz recently graduated from Eastern Washington University with an MFA in Poetry. She has work published in *cream city review*, *Shady Side Review*, and *Touchstone*. Currently, Jessica is living in Buenos Aires, Argentina, writing poetry as if it were a real, paying job. Aside from that, she spends most of her time honing the art of Argentinean cooking and playing with her dog, Luna.

Andrea Lewis writes short stories and essays from her home on Vashon Island, Washington. Her work has appeared in *Harpur Palate*, *The MacGuffin*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *War/Literature and the Arts* and elsewhere. She is a co-founder of Richard Hugo House, a center for literary arts in Seattle, Washington.

Christopher Mulrooney has written poems in *San Diego Poetry Annual*, *West Wind Review*, *10x3 plus*, *322 Review*, *Paragon*, *Rhythm*, *Burning Houses*, and *holland1945*.

Mary Anne Morefield writes from Penn’s woods and Arizona’s desert. Her poems have been published or are forthcoming in *Green Mountains Review*, *Poetry East*, *Chautauqua*, and *The MacGuffin*.

Korkut Onaran, originally from Turkey, lives in Boulder, Col-

orado, and practices architecture and urban design. He received the First Prize in the Cervena Barva Press 2007 Chapbook Contest and Second Prize in the 2006 *Baltimore Review* Poetry Competition. His poetry has been published in journals such as *Penumbra*, *Rhino*, *Peralta*, *Colere*, *Writer's Journal*, *White Pelican Review*, *Crucible*, *City Works Literary Journal*, *Water~Stone Review*, *Atlanta Review*, and *Baltimore Review*.

Jonathan H. Roberts is a prolific writer of unpublished fiction, though a handful of his stories have found their way into various magazines, literary journals, and anthologies. He lives outside of Indianapolis, Indiana, with his beautiful wife Andrea.

Christine Simokaitis received an MFA from Goddard College in 2001. Her work has previously appeared in *Calyx*, *Natural Bridge*, *Alligator Juniper* and other journals, and the anthologies *Are We Feeling Better Yet?* *Women Speak about Healthcare in America*, and *Mourning Sickness*. She is the author of *Into the Wilderness*, a memoir of motherhood, and is currently working on a novel. She lives in Chicago.

Matthew J. Spireng's full-length book manuscript, *Out of Body*, won the 2004 Bluestem Poetry Award and was published by Bluestem Press at Emporia State University. His poetry collection, *What Focus Is*, is forthcoming in 2011 from Word Press. His chapbooks are: *Young Farmer*, 2007; *Encounters*, 2005; *Inspiration Point*, 2002, winner of the 2000 Bright Hill Press Poetry Chapbook Competition; and *Just This*, a signed and numbered limited-edition chapbook of his poems and photographs by Trey Price, on which the poems are based, Hampden-Sydney College, 2003. He holds an MA in creative writing from Hollins College.

Saramanda Swigart recently received her BA in English from Columbia University after a 15-year hiatus during which she worked in a kitchen in Italy, for a New York fashion designer, as a copywriter for a San Francisco advertising agency, and for a consulting firm in Dubai. She is currently applying to MFA pro-

grams and is beside herself that fiction writing – her lifelong passion – will henceforth be her primary focus.

Carmen Tomfohrde is an artist and writer based in Hong Kong. Her bachelor's degree from Minneapolis College of Art and Design included four months at Burren College of Art in County Clare, Ireland, and she is now pursuing a master's degree at the University of Hong Kong. Her writing and editing has been published by *Rain Taxi*, martists.org, Star Gallery (Beijing) and Para/Site Art Space (Hong Kong).

Brooke Wonders is currently pursuing a PhD at the University of Illinois at Chicago in the Program for Writers. Her fiction has appeared previously in *Thin Air*, and she has a nonfiction piece forthcoming in *Brevity*.

Rachel M. Zeiders, an avid reader and freelance writer, has a BA in Art History, a BA in English Literature, and has completed advanced studies in Studio Art. As an artist, Rachel experiments through the collaboration of mediums and techniques, often using charcoal, pen & ink, and collage in her work. As a means of creative inspiration, she maintains an online publication site, posting updates and reviews of her artistic endeavors. You can follow her at SprechenZ.blogspot.com.

THIN AIR MAGAZINE

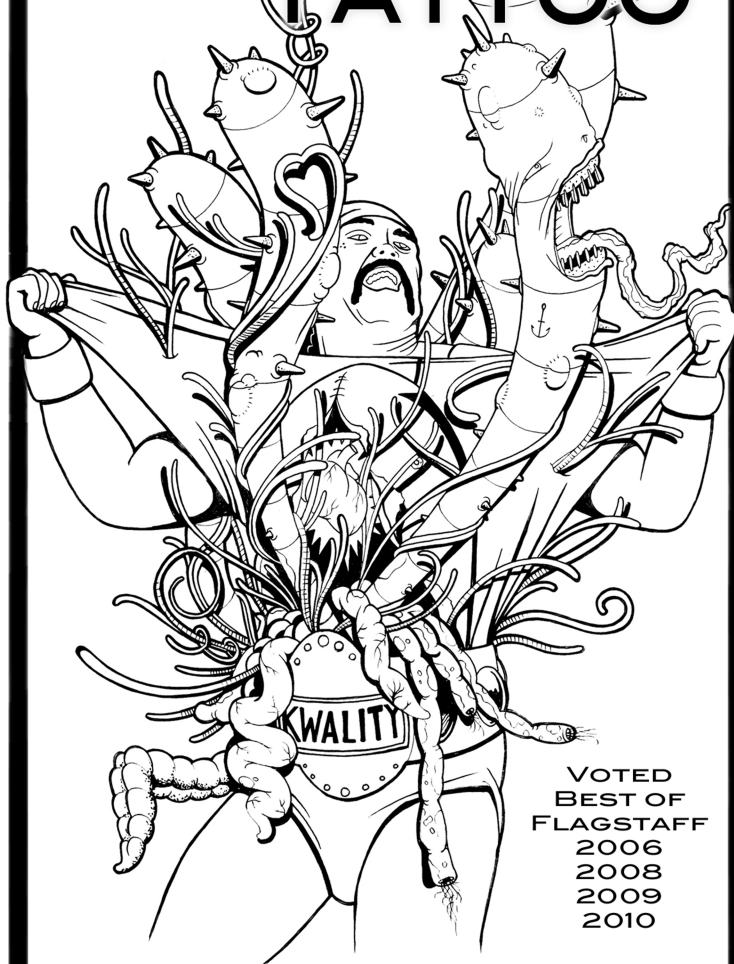
WOULD LIKE TO THANK...

Diana Gabaldon
The NAU English Department
Dr. Nicole Walker
Beverly Cleland
Cindy Knoll
Dr. Jeff Gundy
Brent Webster

Most of all, we'd like to thank our outstanding authors,
poets, artists, and photographers.



BIRCH AVENUE TATTOO



VOTED
BEST OF
FLAGSTAFF
2006
2008
2009
2010

WWW.BIRCHAVENUETATTOO.COM

928.774.3646

111 W. BIRCH AVE. DOWNTOWN FLAGSTAFF, AZ



NORTHERN ARIZONA
UNIVERSITY
College of Arts & Letters

Master of Arts in English: Creative Writing Emphasis

Write with *Altitude* at NAU

- Live and write in Flagstaff while working on your Master of Arts in English
- Creative Writing Emphasis
- Focus on poetry, fiction, or creative nonfiction
- Intensive instruction with dedicated professors
- Selective admission ensures small, high-quality workshops
- Applications reviewed year-round
- Graduate assistantships and tuition waivers available (selection begins in early February)

Barbara Anderson, M.F.A. (poetry)
Jane Armstrong, Ph.D. (nonfiction/fiction)
Ann Cummins, M.F.A. (fiction)
Allen Woodman, Ph.D. (fiction)
Nicole Walker, Ph.D. (nonfiction/poetry)

Ranking second in *Men's Journal's* list of Best Places to Live and 9th on *Outside* magazine's Best College Towns for Playing Outside, Flagstaff is surrounded by pines and aspens and is dominated by the majestic San Francisco Peaks. It is close to the Grand Canyon National Park and many national monuments. Its elevation, over 7,000 feet, clean air, four-season climate, and numerous coffee houses make Flagstaff a good place for writers. Creative writing students have the opportunity to work in various editorial roles with *Thin Air Magazine* and read their work at several area venues.

Need more information or an application form? Visit us on the web at
<http://www.cal.nau.edu/english/>

Or contact Dr. Allen Woodman: English Department, Box 6032,
Flagstaff, AZ 86011 • allen.woodman@nau.edu • 928-523-5651

For information about the application process, teaching assistantships,
and tuition waivers, please call 928-523-6842 or 928-523-4911.

