THE UNDERGROUND MAN'- BPD'04

THIN AIR

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I Have Failed to Contain Myself

Rich Ives

The first body was found by a young girl in an abandoned playhouse behind the butcher shop that burned down when the bridge fire climbed the hillside and took two houses as well as the old gas station Joseph Stanley had converted for his two sons, hoping they might finally learn to provide for themselves, which then became no longer possible with the only vehicle access destroyed.

The body had been there a long time. The police found no evidence of burns or smoke inhalation and no sign of foul play. The body had been placed there, the victim having succumbed, the autopsy concluded, to "exposure" in a much drier location. The approximately twelve to fifteen year old white male with no distinguishing marks had not died in the playhouse and was dead before the fire spread from the bridge through the town.

It is not uncommon to find the blue eggs of foreigners in the same nests containing the less colorful eggs of inattentive native mothers, who frequently appear to be conveniently colorblind.

Follow along now because you will be expected to answer questions. It's not my idea. Life just does that.

Each spring the fecund moat that surrounds us slowly yellows with iris, pond lily, skunk cabbage. Water buttercups and even the blackbirds in the cattails begin playing variations on this same transplanted sunshine theme of brightness and warmth. As the yellow fades, the heat increases to an intensity that only the natives do not find unimaginable. The odor of change we have heard others refer to as "decay" is to us merely a companionable and evocative accompaniment to our awareness, and we consider it so steeped in our homeland's essence that it can bring tears to our eyes, even though the cause is generally misperceived by visitors, as our thick summer air begins to fill with the familiar rich reminder of the teeming progress of restless life, within which we must find our place.

I do not want to decide if the glass of warm water is half full

or half empty. So I drink it.

Are you waiting to see if I will ask for more?

The inhabitants can become annoyingly pleasant. It makes you dangerously agreeable. Sometimes you don't even feel your overly generous actions were your own idea.

Must keep this to oneself.

Tell yourself that.

We do.

Yes, it's true. People have to suffer far too many indignities. So let's not pretend. Let's just offer them all at once.

We remain poorly qualified for the positions we occupy. This keeps us well-suited for the indignities which frequently accompany them.

The man in front of us seems to be having some difficulty walking. He seems to be misunderstanding the relationship between his feet and the sidewalk. Perhaps his head has been disturbed by a blow to its available surface. Perhaps I have participated in his discomfort. Perhaps I have disengaged the space between the surface of his head and the bat I am carrying. Perhaps even considering such a possibility has caused the man pain.

When she screamed, she felt as if something had left her body. She thought it was refusing to leave the room, and she became frightened even more because she did not want to leave the room to get away from it.

She could not remember what it was that she had screamed until she heard the knock on the door. Then she remembered she had screamed.

"Don't come in."

And no one came in. But someone was still knocking on the door. The knocking continued, and soon enough she became calm. As if someone had always been knocking on the door and would never come in. And she had known this all along.

It was not until nearly the end of her life, after many years of wondering what her recurring dream meant, that she opened the door, but this time she was having difficulty determining if it was a

dream door or a real door. In any case, there was no one behind it and no indication of what it could have been that was making the knocking sound upon it.

I tried to quit knocking upon the door, and I imagined that my sister appreciated my effort although it apparently hadn't succeeded.

When you feel like that, taking a drink of water invites the ocean to swallow you. Walking up a flight of stairs can also transform necessity into a kind of physical rebellion. Kissing the back of your hand can become so lonely you might never speak again.

A toad's breath away from a miracle. That's how she described her temporary recovery.

Romantic, isn't she.

"Amush and amush with oversaturated earthly sustenance."

The poet who left us said that.

"Celebrated" is not a word I would use to describe this man's social position. Perhaps that's why he left. Others have stayed with less reason.

The police have found a photograph of the dead young boy. At least their initial speculations, based largely upon the positioning of a gold tooth, have led them to believe the body had indeed once belonged to the boy in the photograph. The photograph was found in a Tupperware container holding three pink dice and a pornographic key chain beneath an old rug in the trunk of a car that had apparently fallen through the bridge. The car had no fire damage, leading the police to suspect someone had attempted to drive it across the bridge while everyone's attention was on trying to save the houses, not realizing, or perhaps not caring, how much damage the fire had done to the bridge, which could no longer support the car.

But where was the driver?

Suddenly I felt inexplicably pleased with myself.

It's because I must punish myself that I tell you this.

A man sits in the bleachers watching Pee Wee baseball. He can't seem to sit still. He is excited. Or agitated. Perhaps both. He's wearing a dark suit in the hot sun, his knees propped too high, giving him a childish demeanor. He removes a small pink metal box from his pocket and looks in, long and slow as if it were very deep inside. He closes the box and opens it again.

Opens and closes, opens and closes.

Perhaps he has been there a long time.

The game ends and no one claims him.

I have failed to contain myself.

Bulrush and eelgrass. Pussywillows with yellow-headed blackbirds swaying from their broken brown heads like cotton spilling. The two old boats resting on the occupied surface could be my hands, and they idly pass through the water striders and impossibly green scum between the reeds. The sun is so bright I imagine it's burning out. I raise my boats and the dark water pours from them. A predator's two sets of claws replace them. They reach towards the darkened sky. They're drawing pictures in the distance behind the sun. They're shaping and caressing the air. They keep speaking for a long time. Suddenly, for a moment, they seem loud, rough with yelling in the sharp needlegrass. A cloud passes, and suddenly I can see the blood on them.

I decide that it's an amazing wound.

I didn't have a name for what I was feeling, so it didn't go away.

Let's call the young girl who found the body of the young boy "Faith," which is not as unusual as it might seem. It's easy to imagine, is it not, that there is a small group of Quaker descendants, or other similarly peaceful believers, on the island? Perhaps they are not a practicing or even very active congregation, and they do not hold to the lifestyle of their elders, who still live in New England and the old country, but the heritage given them by their parents and grandparents has not been completely abandoned.

There are those among them who believe that Faith's discovery of the body was a sign. The boy died of "exposure." Some people die of what they lack only when others reveal to them what they had grown used to living without. Perhaps that's why Faith had discovered the young boy's body.

The day after Faith discovered the expired boy, she found on the porch of her house a hen pheasant, head wrapped in orange peal, the sleeve of a purple velvet robe beneath the draped wings of his body.

I have frequently been drawn to the relentless sun and the timeless water. And to the silence between the cries of the blackbirds. I feel the muck of life beginning between my toes, and I step out into the thick green algae and the fecund murk. It coats my thirsty body, soothing the loss already clinging to the skin.

Sometimes I witness an augury of ascending owls winging the dark's future into my setting dream.

The boy had not been clothed. A bundle of white shirts were located not far away, perched atop a charred couch. Each shirt soft with use.

Except one.

I did not wish to fondle the stiff lip of the one clean collar.

Trouble because trouble is the body we live in.

Faith, inside me, as innocent as water, but not yet as full of life. Perhaps she never will be.

A sound like the grinding machinery of a donkey's voice.

And then a silence.

And in the silence, wedge-headed, waffling like some lantern-jawed blue mute grown used to the inadequacy of words, a heron wings the impossible load of his large body into the air and, against reason, it holds him as he crosses the obsidian water's darkly reflective surface, dawn climbing slowly out of the horizon's sharp bleeding slice of new life, spilling its healing wound across the opening sky.

No one knew that a pair of wet shoes had been next to the pile of white shirts. Except Faith. Faith knew. She told no one, but she put the shoes on and wore them till she reached the foot of the burnt bridge. Every step of the way her feet squealed in the wet interior of the boy's shoes, the soaked leather rubbing its complaint against her listening feet.

Perhaps she imagined the shoes were trying to speak to her own shoes, dangling suggestively from her fingers by their shoelaces as she walked. Perhaps she was imagining herself as the young boy, trying to make sense of what she had found in this place, in this life. Before she told anyone.

What might they have been feeling? Did she wonder what her life would have been like if she had entered it male? If she had come into life as that young boy?

When she removed the boy's talkative shoes at the bridge, her feet had already gone red, raw from listening so closely. She walked barefoot the rest of the way to the sheriff's office, her own shoes still dangling from her fingers by their knotted strings.

I imagine Faith, frozen in incomprehension as she tries to explain, the sheriff patient, avuncular with benevolent authority, not yet realizing the nature of her news. And then the words gushing forth like a pustule, yellow with fear. Faith blubbering. Faith ejaculating wildly until she comprehends that her meaning has been received.

I like to imagine that it was my tongue, my belief, which released her words from the bondage of her fear. It's something that happens when you live here. I needed that belief. I needed to be able to see Faith released.

Imagine the car askew like a surprised hat, its insides out, Faith asleep in the still water beside the bridge, asleep for a long time, fallen out of her life.

Was this before or after telling the sheriff?

Shoeless and for once, content.

The driver of the car was never found. I'm sure he lives here still.

Don't believe that Faith was a victim, not any more than you or I. Her life killed her, as it does, sooner or later, all of us, but it did not kill her as quickly as it might seem, and I can still see her elderly hunch and slow progress along the road from the bridge as she moves on in my memory, passing again and again the same long view of the swamp each day of her continued existence. I expect that she will continue to appear there as long as I am here to look for her.

Something rises from the water each evening, owl-eyed, hunting, which does not question why.

Pantoum for the Class of 2000

Meredith Devney

I am at my ten year high school reunion,
scooping spiked punch out of a bowl
when Devon Donnivan,
(my life-long crush) walks up to me.

Scooping spiked punch out of a bowl,
I'm praying for immediate intoxication as
my life-long crush walks up to me
and says, "I've loved you since second grade."

I'm praying for immediate intoxication as
my cup drops and red drips all over my dress
and says, "I've loved you since second grade,"
without me having to say anything.

My cup drops and red drips all over my dress
and he's grabbing napkins and wiping my breasts
without me having to say anything.
"If you love me," I manage to utter,

and he's grabbing napkins and wiping my breasts,
"I will try to love you more than my tablet of paper,
if you love me," I manage to utter.
And he stands up and stares at me strangely,

"I will try to love you more than my tablet of paper?"
And I nod my head and open my too-honest mouth
and he stands up and stares at me strangely
"I think I'll need a little bit more than that," he says

And I nod my head and open my too-honest mouth,
"That's a lot," I say, "for a writer."
"I think I'll need a little bit more than that," he says,
turns from me, and walks away.

"That's a lot," I say, "for a writer,"
when Devon Donnivan
turns from me and walks away.

Massacre in Pink

Elise Kaplan

On Thursday the streets filled with smoke. Not the billowy, cartoon plumes from a local blaze but the oppressive omen of a distant tragedy. Ash fell from the sky like a summer snowstorm and the foothills disappeared into a distant etching. It smelled like an incense campfire.

Sunday, I met my neighbor.

The air was quiet as if the whole town was holding its breath to protect its lungs. The sky pulsed an eerie yellow and the sun was a cigarette burn in the clouds.

Hal and I sat out on our porch feeling like the last survivors of the apocalyptic forest fire 200 miles away. We threw our beer bottles toward the recycling side of the yard and smoked a bowl. Hal ate some chips but these days I'm trying not to eat as much. Hal and I have been married almost five years now and there's nothing I like more than doing nothing with him. He doesn't talk much. But neither do I.

Hal goes to sleep early since he's the first shift cook at the 66 Diner. I watched his sagging bottom weave towards the door. He always walks as though he's wading through waist-deep water.

I knew I wouldn't sleep much that night.

New Mexico is a sun-dried desert bone. The earth is cracked and dusty, and you start to notice the way people get when it hasn't rained in too long. A betrayal of desperation in every twitch. Maybe that's why we all drink so much—the gripping dread that every liquid swallow will be our last. The fires don't improve anything. A state of people terrified of shriveling up doesn't take well to living in a slow roasting oven. Me, I kind of like it.

I'd just lit the last cigarette I'd promised myself I'd smoke that night when I heard it. A small yell, a karate scream from a movie in the eighties. And a whack whack whack.

I'd seen the neighbor to the south, but he kept weird hours and was quite a bit younger than either Hal or myself. All I knew about him was he played in a band styled after Primus, subsisted almost entirely on cheap red wine and smoked salmon (if his trash

can and the scents from his kitchen are anything to go by) and had recently ended things with an impossibly tiny girl with impossibly loud and opinionated lungs.

I thought his name was Lucas.

I opened our gate and stepped into the dusty alley that connected our two houses. The winds had stopped and the air was thick like the inside of a synthetic dollar store pillow.

When I reached his house I heard it again and pushed the gate open. His house is bigger than ours, framed by a yard cluttered with cigarette butts, old tree stumps and a one legged bench.

"Hi," I said.

His fancy suit jacket, shiny shoes and tight jeans looked up at me, teetering on the line between "fuck off" and the middle of the night desire to spill ones guts to a stranger. Then his shoulders relaxed and he nodded hello.

He'd lined up fifteen watermelons in a neat row across his yard—dirtpatch—and was systematically murdering them one by one with a heavy wooden bat. It was a warzone, a crime scene, an execution and a love letter.

He was four down and offered me the fifth without a word.

I grasped the bat from his outstretched hands and felt the splinters of old wood scratch against my palms.

And I screamed like I was taking revenge on the stranger who'd raped my kid sister in the alley behind the supermarket, on the missed opportunities requiring more money, time and brains than I possess, on the job that kept me underpaid and on my feet all day, on Hal's dirty boxers on the floor and food crusted plates in the sink, on my own body once thin and pretty and now a mass of cellulite, dimples and veins. Thick gooey strands of watermelon clung to the bat. My bare feet felt good against the rocks and dirt and bits of glass.

We took turns after that, not uttering a word as we passed the bat back and forth, turning away slightly to give the other privacy while we committed the crimes we wished we could commit.

Number fifteen was the bloodiest. I had the bat, and he darted in and out gathering the largest pieces and hurling them into the darkness. We stomped and smeared the pulp between our toes.

He brought out a BB gun, and we took turns shooting at the messy split summertime skull until the bangs weren't loud enough, and I pitched the gun towards his batting stance. An alley homerun.

When there was nothing left to destroy, we sat down in the seeds and rinds and dust and rocks and pink juice of watermelon flesh. I lit cigarettes for both of us, and he opened a bottle of wine.

"Hi," he said. "My name is Lance."

"Miranda" I said. "Are you ok?"

"I don't think so."

The cement marked my crossed legs, and my clothes were stained with bits of fruit and skipping stone smooth black seeds.

"Cheers to authenticity," he said and passed me the bottle.

Donation

Marjorie Maddox

Each month he jerks
life into a jar. It is not
romantic. But neither is love
with its same blank walls, shut door,
low voices, others waiting.
Too tired to scream, love comes

routinely, holds its own face
in its hands. Outside
embryonic flakes flutter
toward tongues, an almost taste.
He cannot hunch

enough to shake what replicates:
streets, snow, cells, sorrow. Ice-like
the city prisms what isn't. He watches
the children throw snow,
knows none of them.

A Trajectory of Blessings

Zachary Asher Greenberg

The compass lifted towards the moon, not moon,
what side of the rock are you on, must choose

sang John the one who dunked the river red,
marked Paul who went blind & saw God resurrect.

Making love to a loop of Hallelujah & Lilac Wine.
Making love to Coltrane's Compassion, always

startled by how violently it starts, but honey hang on,
this is only going to last for a song.

Out in the dark there is a skateboard kid
young & strong, riding ramp with a blue cast on.

Or was it helping my grandfather
hang portraits, genetically pleased to see him bend

& grip a hammer from beneath the bed,
nested there for protection as is mine,

as is the light
that humbles me, whispers Einstein to the Sunshine.

The songs between us have shattered down
to sand & glass, gone, more prone to gemstone,

glistening beneath a little moonlight, am I what came next,
or amethyst?

The Lobster Hunt

Derek Palacio

On weekends my father crawled
past the breakers and pinched
pounders from creels. He gathered them
in a canvas sack, hauled his catch
to the nearest jetty and smashed the lot
against barnacled rocks. My father

once stitched a trawler's
brow from inside the galley
of a moored lobster boat. The sauced
captain slid oily bills
into my father's palm and whispered,
Have your pick of the green buoys.

My father raced in the water,
and vanished for spells beneath
the silver surface. His surgeon-hands
fluttered over whitecaps, and my hungry
eyes tracked them like arctic terns.
He baked the azure lobsters in the sand

and split the shells for me.
The Atlantic's water walls
were always pushing my father back
to shore, and though I mostly remember
his going, I can recall the times
a lobster gashed his lengthy thumb

and he charged the pebbled coast
to dress his wound. Once
I dumped the sack he'd half-filled
and set free the lobsters in the tide.
They clamored back into the sea,
but my father only saw the bleeding

of his surgeon's thumb with his surgeon's
eyes. It was the look
he wore when spearing lobsters,
when cracking ruby claws,
when leaving the house to mend
a stranger's face at night.

were tossed from heaven,
their cherubic big butts
and bosoms swept out
by God's great besom
to fall to earth to stand
behind the bucking cars
on the back rows of drive-ins
like flickering silhouettes of saguaro.
Or to haunt the halls of cheap hotels,
ears pressed like doorknobs
to hear the grunting and grinding,
smiling and smacking,
leering us on through keyholes.
On back-country roads,
engines quenched, headlights doused,
they lay on windshields like
the scent of honeysuckle
with its stamen's tear of nectar,
and wipe away the steam to watch
the dance called the Beginning
of the World, cheer as
the come cries go up
like hallelujahs to the new
paradise: wafer of nipple,
chrism taken on the tongue,
a strumpet blows,
the pearly gate-legs of earthly
ecstasy open, and the Saintly
sinners go marching in.

BASIL

Leslie Pietrzyk

In the early 1980s, no one in the Midwest had heard of pesto. (Maybe some of the Italians had, but the Italians I knew were the kind who, like me with my weird Polish "zyk" surname, ducked their heads in embarrassment when teachers fumbled their too-many syllables during roll call.) I was at college in a Chicago suburb: a girl from Iowa dumped into this flock of preppies. Seriously, the only person who used the words "prep school" was my idol Holden Caulfield, and he was fictional. Now I was meeting people who talked about Choate the way my Iowa friends and I talked about weather, and I was perpetually lost: Was Choate better than Philips Exeter or vice versa (and was it Philips Exeter or just Exeter)? No one else thought saying "the libes" instead of "the library" or "rents" for "parents" sounded like baby talk? To cope, I wormed myself into a smaller, safer, world-within-a-world of work-study students and Midwesterners from similar middle-class backgrounds.

One thing that bonded us—and separated us from the others—was our pleasure at finding ourselves at this "Harvard of the Midwest." The preppies longed to have been accepted to the real Harvard or Yale or Amherst, a college I didn't even know was pronounced without the "h." In Iowa, we didn't imagine that we could apply to schools like that, so ending up where I had felt like a Very Big Deal. Did it matter that I was so lost? That valedictorians and class presidents conversed in cloud bubbles high above my head? That Miss Teen Michigan was in one of my classes? When the Thetas at sorority rush asked if my pearls were real, I laughed and said, "I wish they were." They shared my wish, apparently: no Greek letters on the butt of my sweatpants.

I was able to fool myself into imagining I fit in because I was a fast learner. Studying my freshman year roommate, I observed that collars were tucked inside the sweater, not outside; the Oxford cloth shirt sleeves were kept flat, not folded back as we had done in Iowa, and only a scant half-inch peeked from the sweater cuff; the wool—never knit—scarf was draped neatly underneath the lapels of the pea coat, though doing so left the cheeks, chin, and nose bared to the Chicago wind. But, no: we tucked up and tucked in—sartorial repression—and froze on our treks between South Campus and North Campus.

Eventually, I found a non-preppie boyfriend, and we lived together senior year, which sounds daring and rebellious and outré for a college girl from Iowa. While plenty of college couples essentially lived together, they maintained a parent-relieving semblance of separation: two addresses, two phone numbers, double rent checks. But my boyfriend and I literally lived together, sharing one address and one phone number, because we couldn't afford a double life. There was another roommate, whose name was on the lease. She and I needed a third person, and since she was often visiting her fiancé away in law school, it seemed practical to offer the slot to my boyfriend. Our place—the first floor of a house—was great for the price, with three bedrooms, an old-fashioned front porch, and electric-blue kitchen cabinets. The campus was a ten-minute walk, and the el train—for trips to Chicago—was just beyond the grassy back yard.

I thought I would get married to this boyfriend. Understand that he had done nothing to encourage this vision of our future. In fact, I believe that he may have actually said (more than once) something along the lines of, "I don't want to get married out of college." He may also have said, "I don't want to get married." I didn't let myself hear what he was really saying, and saying quite clearly: I don't want to get married to you right now. (Even now, I hesitate to type out "to you": I don't want to get married to you.) So I ignored him. I assumed I could change his mind. After all, we were living together, weren't we, and having a great time, playing house in our crazy, electric blue kitchen? We had been dating for more than a year, and I saw nothing beyond the two of us, together, together forever. I had my preppie sweaters, though anyone looking closely might catch that they weren't Polo and that my collar-up shirts lacked alligators. My Topsiders had been a thrift store steal at five dollars. And even though I now owned a strand of real pearls, they had been purchased at the jewelry counter at J.C. Penney's.

At this point, there is no graceful way to segue back to pesto, except to note that—shock—I was an English major, and I

had grown up devouring books in that way of the desperate, racing from one to the next with alarming need and deep desire, seeking answers, or was it escape? Armchair psychiatrist alert! So even in college, along with the syllabi-assigned Victorian novels, Ulysses, and hunks of Norton Anthologies, I continued to read for pleasure.

While I was living with my boyfriend one of the big best-sellers was Nora Ephron's Heartburn, a barely disguised fictional account of the end of Ephron's marriage to superstar Watergate journalist Carl Bernstein. He dumps her when she's seven months pregnant so he can be with, I believe, one of her friends. Ephron's stand-in character is a cookbook author, and I'm guessing that Heartburn may have been the first novel to include recipes. That concept's a yawn now, but back then, it was nifty, and I was intrigued by the recipes, which were classier than the frozen bagel-spaghetti-grilled cheese line-up in our kitchen. I decided to make something that I remember as "Basil-Tomato Pesto," though in thinking it through, that can't possibly be what she called it. But that's how it stuck in my mind all these years later.

Even back then, I wasn't a moron in the kitchen; I enjoyed cooking and had made dinner for my family in Iowa many times (Simple Spaghetti, from Betty Crocker's Cookbook for Boys and Girls was a favorite). But remember these words: Iowa, college, the eighties. Growing up in Iowa, "Chinese food" meant salty glop from a can on top of fried noodles from a can. For a solid year in the dorm, for lunch I ate only cottage cheese and potato chips every single day. In college, I worked in a take-out pizza restaurant, so a tremendous portion of my diet consisted of pizza; in high school, I had worked in a movie theatre concession stand, and a tremendous portion of my diet then consisted of popcorn and Junior Mints. I gained my "freshman ten" by walking to the ice cream parlor for a sundae after dinner. If that weren't bad enough, coming back, I stopped by the Burger King for fries. (I'll defend myself by claiming to be an early adopter of the salty/sweet combo that has led to today's delectable sea salt caramels at upscale candy shops.) Back then, no one ate well. And no one ate pesto, except, I guess, Nora Ephron, Carl Bernstein, and their fancy East Coast friends, and if the proper preppie sweaters were a world away from me, the lives of those pesto-eating movers and shakers were separated from mine by a universe or two.

It was a Friday night, so I must have been aiming for a special dinner for my boyfriend and me. And it was April—not the cruelest month as my English major classes had taught me, but the best month in the school year, the most hopeful, with blue skies and tentative green grass and Lake Michigan beckoning from ten blocks east. The clatter of the el train seemed less oppressive coming through our open windows in the spring, and the clouds were fluffy puffballs, not the usual gray layers pressing low and hard. Frat quads echoed with dozens of stereo speakers jammed against window screens; Frisbees cut through the air.

Graduation was six weeks away, and with graduation, my boyfriend and I were scheduled to part. He hadn't changed his mind. He was going on to our college's MBA program, and in the fall, I was moving to Washington, DC, for graduate school. We both had these very specific plans.

And yet.

I remained convinced that he would change his mind, that I would change it for him. Also, I was convinced that this would be a good thing, his changing his mind. The idea that I might one day wake up resenting that I had given up graduate school didn't occur to me. The fact that I had spent more than a year in self-imposed limbo—good enough to live with but not to marry—was also something I chose not to think about. No, no, it would all work.

Nora Ephron's recipe called for about three ingredients, starting with a lot of tomatoes. Now, I would only make a recipe with fresh tomatoes in the deep summer, using top-quality tomatoes from a farmer's market. But I blithely chopped up six or seven pellety grocery store tomatoes.

In my memory, parmesan cheese was next, so I would have pulled out the shiny green cylinder of Kraft. In case you're unfamiliar with this product, I'll point out that it's stored on a shelf, not in a cheese case, and that it can stay stored on a shelf for about a hundred years. In fact, my family in Iowa used this same powdery cheese to sprinkle on our spaghetti, and once I happened to read some fine print on the container: "Refrigerate after opening." We

never had, and we didn't even after that, and no one got sick, and the cheese's waxy flavor was eternally consistent. Easy to guess that this is not what I'd call "parmesan cheese" today; today, I would fuss if the hunk I bought from the cheese case was domestic, not true Parmigiano-Reggiano. Today, I grate the cheese myself. But then, in the early 1980s, I poured a quarter cup of this powder on top of the tomatoes.

The third main ingredient was definitely a cup of basil. I assume that Nora Ephron wrote her recipe correctly and called for "fresh basil." Obviously. Fresh basil is very, very different from dried basil; it's different in the way dinosaurs are different from lizards, and both are different from chickens, even though on some sort of evolutionary plane, they're all related.

I had never heard of fresh basil. Had never seen it. Now, I grow it in pots on my deck because I use it constantly during the summer. Now, fresh basil is de rigueur in the grocery stores where I shop, and at the farmer's market I frequent, and on the menus of the restaurants where I eat. But back then, I thought, "Herb section, baking aisle." I bought two jars, because as you can imagine if you've ever cooked, a cup is a tremendous amount of dried basil—dried basil is usually measured in teaspoons. There was also the matter of cost: dried herbs are expensive, especially for poverty-stricken college students. But this was a sophisticated, Nora Ephron sort of recipe, from a novel in which people jetted between New York and DC on the Eastern Shuttle; their dinner parties were filled with banter and wit and flirtatious glances and glittery dresses. Her marriage was shattering—yes, she was betrayed by someone she had loved—but see how funny and smart she was while it was happening? How could Carl leave her; how could he not change his stupid mind? (As it turns out, Nora—film director, best-selling author—has done exceedingly well without Carl, and I don't think he's hurting any either.)

Again, I have to insist on this fact: I didn't know fresh basil existed. I couldn't imagine that there was a possibility beyond the stuff in a jar, beyond the familiar basil that I had measured into my Betty Crocker's Cookbook for Boys and Girls spaghetti. Because I didn't know that fresh basil existed, I didn't understand that I could look for it or ask about it; I had no capability to notice or wonder if fresh might be different than dried; I couldn't imagine that smart, clever, funny Nora Ephron was trying to tell me something with that one word, fresh. That Nora Ephron and her book about life without her husband actually could have told me many things. But I didn't know, and I didn't know that I didn't know.

So into the bowl went a cup of dried basil. It smelled musty, like the farthest corner of a basement after six days of rain. I stirred everything together. I had followed the recipe, damn it. I had done exactly what I was supposed to do.

The mélange in the bowl looked like stuff you dump out of a vacuum cleaner bag. Or the gunk that gets caught in the bottom of the screen door to the deck. Or mulch. Or gutter scrapings. Or cigar ash-coated chunks. What it did not look like was dinner.

"Dinner!" I called.

We were to serve this pesto (which, as you can see, wasn't anything like true pesto) as a sauce with pasta, so I (over)boiled some spaghetti noodles, drained them into a colander.

"Looks...good," my boyfriend said, coming up behind me.

"It's a special recipe," I said, staring at my steamy, naked noodles. Something felt wrong. But I put the spaghetti into a bowl, and scooped the lumps of pesto onto it, scraping with a spoon trying to get every last speck of basil. There was no bottle of cheap wine to help wash this down; the stores carded, and wine, even cheap wine, cost money. If there was a salad, it was iceberg lettuce with bottled Zesty Italian dressing. The garlic bread would have been store-brand white bread (never pricey Wonder Bread) smeared with Lawry's Garlic Spread from the jar with the turquoise cap, same as we had back home in Iowa tucked on a shelf in the refrigerator door.

I put the plates on the table.

"I'm sure it will be fine," he said.

Because he said this—or something like this—even all these years later, I can tell myself that he really did love me, as much as a college boy can. If he wasn't actually a good person, he wanted to be; he meant to be. A glimpse into his point of view might be useful at this point, as might Carl Bernstein's in Heartburn—but Nora

didn't allow for that. (In her case, the fighting continued into the courts because Carl, furious with what she wrote about "him," sued her—a lesson in the power of point of view.)

The first bite. I gagged, but he gamely swallowed.

"There's a lot of, um…what is this?" He poked the dark flecks with his fork tines.

"Basil," I said.

"Basil," he said.

"I don't know," I said.

There was a silence where I probably avoided thinking about all sorts of impossible things. Where would I be a year from now? How did people wear their sweaters at my graduate school in Washington?

"I'm not sure this is right," I said. "This dried basil. This can't be right."

He shook his head. "Do you want to keep eating it?" He would have, he would have finished every last bit in the bowl because he didn't like thinking about hard things either. His father had been shot down in the Vietnam War, and he never talked about that except to mention it to me a couple of times in passing. We were an impossible match, or, perhaps we were perfect for each other then, living in our make-believe world.

I shook my own head, mirroring him. "It's terrible."

"It's the worst food I ever ate," he said, but it was funny how he said it, and we laughed and held hands and I knew, knew, knew he would change his mind. "It's so bad we can't throw it away," he said, "so let's bury it," and that seemed then totally like the right response though I can't say why, so we carried the plates out to the backyard of the house we rented, and in the gentle spring twilight, we dug a shallow hole in the far corner of the yard and dumped Nora Ephron's pesto into the hole and covered it up. I don't know why burying the pesto was preferable to throwing it away or grinding it down the garbage disposal, but we felt extremely satisfied with ourselves and ate pizza for dinner instead, and he changed his mind, sort of, so we spent the summer after graduation together before heading off to our graduate schools.

I never saw him after that, except once when I visited my

friend, our roommate in Chicago, during the following Christmas break, and he and I tried to resist each other and succumbed and hated ourselves for it and fought, and he has slowly disappeared from my mind—the wrong person to marry, now that I know what I know—and I was only reminded of this incident with the dried basil after a friend told me she was writing an essay about the worst meal she'd ever had. Being a foodie—again, shock!—the topic intrigued me, though I wasn't able to think of a specific "worst meal" until later that night, while cooking dinner.

I needed parsley, but the bunch in the crisper drawer was yellow and soggy, unusable. I had to rummage around the back corners of the cupboard to find the dried parsley flakes that I had scorned as an unacceptable alternative to real parsley. Still, my husband had insisted that we keep the jar, which was odd, since I do most of the cooking, and he does most of the throwing away of unnecessary items. So, there it was, emerging from nowhere, as if saved specifically for this moment, for this memory, for this place of glory in this essay.

I unscrewed the cap and sniffed, inhaled. The smell was dry, forgotten, sharp, like something you don't want to think about, but something that lingers nevertheless; a lot like dried basil, actually.

A tablespoon went into my healthy recipe jambalaya—made with turkey sausage and brown rice—not the half-cup of fresh parsley the recipe called for. The dish tasted fine, and perhaps even better for that smidge of sharp flavor.

The Blood Can't Run Much Longer

Eleanor Bennett

Bananas After Dark

Leslie Gottesman

The trials of one's century
all packed.
Okay,

drive the road and the moon.
Marbled tonic
drinks the crowd.

Walk the air.
Rotate its salty valve
in liplike hands.

Promise to insanity
your exclusive love.
Make the mistake.

Second Page of a Letter Dated March 7, 1983 (Found in an Old Bible)

Brandon Getz

me with a broken arm, and Ronnie with a concussion, too. I told the cop it was a sledding accident. He looked at our name like he knew, but you weren't there so he couldn't see your knuckles, and it was just my word he had to take. You were still gone when we got home. Put Ronnie to bed and turned on the twinkle lights. Set your mother's Perry Como record on the player, then plucked each red glass bulb from the tree and stepped on them one by one. I walked across the boxes, too, the packages I had wrapped in newspaper funnies that afternoon. Fell asleep on the couch, your bottle of bourbon empty between the cushions, and the next morning, I hid the bottle in the crisper with the pumpkin roll. When you asked, I told you Barney must have chewed up all the ornaments and smashed Ronnie's gifts. I blamed the dog and the full moon. Even when you took Barney out back and the shotgun woke Ronnie, who (and we laughed about this later) thought you shot Santa, I couldn't tell the truth. You never looked at me close enough to see the cuts on my feet.

But, baby, I'm sorry I ruined Christmas.

Love, Charlene

BLOOD IS SWADDLED IN THE MATERNITY WARD

Kirk Pinho

& three men in scrubs approach

the lamp-heated crib

with gifts of silver

nitrate dropped in blood's eyes

a clamp for the umbilical stump

an infusion of factor viii

then it's done that's it & the magi scatter like spores

while thinking *the lord has decreed disaster*

for you

& blood's mother is sedated in the ICU hypnogogic

sleeping like dirt

dearest blood what will you go home to she dreams

dearest blood your future is written in parchment

your future is written in Elysium

Life Work

Jannett Highfill

It's my life's work: a transparent sea capsule,
a circular platform, eight foot diameter
encased in a Lucite globe, eight feet above
the water line eight feet below. The thing is
no matter how heavy the sea is the globe
shifts with the waves, the platform staying
perfectly still. Gyroscopes. I won't tell
you how. Won't tell how many companies
are after me for it, oil companies, drillers,
salvage operations, a few pirates. But I've
built only seven of them, offer an excursion

for one of the better cruise lines. For 500
dollars I'll tender you out to a platform and
leave you there, alone. Take myself over
the horizon so all you see is water on all sides.
I give you a radio of course; you can talk
to me driving the boat anytime. Most people
stay about 15 minutes although you can stay
as long as your ship is in port. I get all ages;
the younger ones have slept in the pyramids
at Giza, the cave at Lascaux, the Creswell Crags
and talk about brain training and power.

Yes, the platform is steady enough for wheel
chairs, get a fair number of them. I always
sell out even though the cruise ship line
never advertises my excursion and I have

the same contract all its concessionaires do.
My bones are getting too creaky to run
the business much longer; can hardly bear
to think who my son will sell out to when he
gets the chance. But I can't leave it to anyone
else, or smash the mechanism, or burn the
plans. The young are hard to talk to
customers or not. The old ones visit with me
like nothing but horizon is an everyday
occurrence for them, or soon will be.

Flight

Paul Pekin

Take a sheet of paper. Hold it flat, let it fall; will it ever land where you aim? There is something in all matter, I say, that yearns for flight.

When I was fourteen the world was at war. I dreamed of flight. I knew all the airplanes, their beautiful shapes and their beautiful names, the Gloster Gladiator, the Curtiss Hawk, the Fiat, the Junker's 88, you remember that one, Hitler's Stuka. I tried to build them on a card table while my parents fought in the next room. Sometimes they stopped fighting long enough to laugh at me. "They won't take you in the Air Force. Not with your eyes."

I would go up on the roof of our apartment building and stare at the sky. Sometimes there would be a DC 3 overhead, slanting toward Midway. When I had stared long enough I would take off my glasses and stare harder. In movies, there were always plain looking women who could toss aside their glasses and become beautiful. So why couldn't I throw mine away and fly?

Even the models I built would not fly. Thanks to the war, the people who made the kits had substituted thin sheets of white pine for balsa wood. Too heavy. Too hard to work. My every attempt failed.

Japan conquered the Philippines, captured Singapore, overwhelmed the Dutch East Indies, even took Wake Island and Guam. Rommel marched through Africa, the German army drove deep into Russia; I prayed that the war would wait. Surely, if enough men were killed, the country would want me, need me, glasses and all.

Mine was a family that survived the great depression, but did not survive unscathed. My father was reduced to handyman work for many years, and only with the war found a job where the paycheck was steady. By then it was too late; he had lost all confidence, and my mother did nothing to help him regain it. Their quarrels were loud and bitter and led inevitably to two separate lives, each parent out of the house minutes after supper, each with a lover of his or her own, something I did not suspect at the time, and only accepted many many years later when my mother's lover, a man named Carl, died. She called me that night, weeping, and I finally understood.

When my sister was eighteen, she graduated high school, went to work in an office downtown and after that there was nothing my parents could say to her. "I'm a grown woman," she told them. "I take care of myself."

She would have moved out, I know she would have, but you couldn't find a place in those days. She could have married, she was asked often enough, but she did not want a husband overseas. She settled for new clothes and bright lipstick and cork-tipped cigarettes. She and Martha Mariner would be out dancing at the Aragon twice a week, meeting sailors.

Jack Welland who was in my class waited for me one afternoon after the eighth period bell. "Your sister's a slut," he said. He said it loud enough so the others heard, and I walked away. I couldn't fight him, and he knew it.

Was it true? Shirley came home with a different sailor almost every week. I met them all, shook their hands, wished them well when they departed. They were all kids themselves, 18, 19 at the most, fresh out of Great Lakes. They were away from home and scared and excited. Every now and then there would be an older one, one who had seen action, and those who were not too grand to talk to a girl's kid brother would sometimes call me aside and tell me about the war.

"Don't go," one of them said. "Don't matter what they do to you. Just don't go."

He had been on a ship that had been hit and he'd seen his best friend burn to death. But when he got his orders, he packed up his sea bag and went back. None of these boys were around long enough for me to know them well. Today, when I sit in my living room watching the History Channel, watching those old World War II ships in flames, I sometimes wonder if any of Shirley's friends are aboard, and do you know something—I hope she treated them right.

We'd been close, all the way up to her last year in high school, but after that she was fast and in the world and I was in my room making model airplanes that would not fly. She and

her friend Martha would poke their heads in from time to time and tease me. If Shirley was fast, Martha was fast and furious. I'd known Martha for what seemed my entire life, that's how long she and Shirley had chummed together. Shirley and I never called her Martha, we called her by her last name. "Mariner's on the phone," I would say. "Mariner and I are going to the Aragon," Shirley would say.

My parents had nothing at all to say except "God Damn You" and they said that to each other. I never understood why they fought so much. It's true, they were different, so different I never understood why they had married in the first place. There was a lot that I didn't understand in those days. My mother was big, stout, gregarious; she loved fun and men and laughter. My father was slender, quiet. He played the violin, can you believe it, and not at all badly, but my mother only jeered at that. Sometimes when they were at it, she would threaten to toss his violin out the window, but I knew she would never do it, for every now and then she would calm down and ask him to play. What do kids know about parents? Exactly nothing.

Let me tell you about this place where we lived. We had a five room apartment above a bank and our back door opened on a low flat roof. There was a metal ladder that led to the upper roof where we were never supposed to go, and often did. Our rooms were off the hall and tiny, but I had a place for myself, and my sister had one for herself. If the brother who had been born two years after me, the brother I never knew, had lived, I would not have been so fortunate, but we might have been friends. I will never know.

My parents had the other bedroom and slept together on a double bed. If they were home at all they fought all the way till bedtime and then closed the door, and I never once wondered what happened next. If Shirley wondered, as I am sure she did, she never mentioned it.

But most of the time they were out of the house. My father would carry off his fiddle to play in some bar where people appreciated him. He would play till closing time; you could be certain he would not be home before two. My mother did the same, but without the violin. She bowled some nights, and went dancing with her

friends at the Moose Lodge, and of course she had her friend Carl. I always thought that was exactly what they were. Friends.

On nights when Shirley was home, the two of us would sit in the living room and listen to the radio. I don't care much to listen to that nostalgia station they have today, but I thought those programs were pretty good then. Shirley and I would pull up the coffee table, deal out cards, and play 500 rummy while Fibber McGee and Molly opened that closet. Actually, it was only Fibber who opened it while Molly tried, always too late, to head him off; the sound effects man would do the rest. We tried to list all the things we heard fall out of that closet. Vases, steel bars, bowling balls, knives, forks, and spoons, even a banjo. Sometimes we made up new objects like a gimmicracker. "What's that for?" I would say, and Shirley would say, "That's for when you want to crack a gimmi."

But once she was out of high school she spent less and less time at home, and when she was home she had her boyfriends with her, and sometimes Martha Mariner would have her boyfriends over too. I got to meet a lot of sailors before the war finally ended. Only one of them ever suggested I could fly.

Well, what do you want? I was dumb. At school I did well enough, at the school stuff. The rest, the social stuff, nah. Worst of all were the girls. I was desperately hungry for a girl. I can't exactly remember how it felt anymore, but I can remember how desperate I was. I would sit in study hall and try to imagine myself with this one or that. I had my special favorites. Jane Tyler. She had straight brown hair I would have sold my soul to touch. Well. Actually, I would not have. That was part of the problem. I still had my religion and still believed in hellfire and still knew that impure thoughts would bring me there. But what would be an impure thought? Clearly it would be if you imagined yourself touching a girl in an impure place, or looking at her without her clothes. I got around that by imagining myself touching her hair. Or maybe rubbing my hand over her bare arm. Or even kissing her. The nuns had been hard against kissing, but they had never come right out and said it was a mortal sin. And they would have said it if it had been true. Vera Larkin. She was a red haired girl with freckles. To this day I get excited by freckles. Gina Angelina. She was tall and dark

and had large white teeth that would have been in braces today.

I looked, I lusted, and I knew I had no more chance with these girls than I had with flight.

My sister, now she was a good-looking girl, blonde and fair with the brightest blue eyes I have ever seen. She was like an angel, Mrs. Erft, the woman in the nextdoor apartment insisted. But she wasn't acting like an angel. As for Martha, well, she didn't have Shirley's looks, but she had something else and the boys all saw it and knew what it was. Even I could see that there was something special and dangerous about dark-haired Martha and her flaming red lipstick.

At night I would lie awake thinking about girls. I would imagine myself shot down on a desert island and somehow a shipwreck would produce these girls. They would all arrive, Jane, Vera, Gina, even Martha, and there would be no way out, we would be stuck together for the rest of our lives, or at least until I figured out how to build an airplane out of the palm trees. (I had to do something to show I was sincere.) Meanwhile, since there was no priest and no church and no place to practice religions, things got a little wild. We all wore out our clothes and had to wear leaves. I imagined myself seeing as much of those girls as a leaf and a good Catholic conscience would permit.

Once I fell asleep, the leaves fell, and the Catholic conscience fell with them, and my body could do what I was afraid to do with it myself. I wonder why my mother never saw the stains on the sheets, or never saw fit to mention them. For some things we can give thanks.

I had begun work on a plane called the Grumman Avenger. In those days you built a flying model from the inside out, starting with the skeleton of the fuselage, then the wings, rudder, and elevators, finally covering everything with a sheet of tissue before you assembled it. The structure very much resembled the structure of a real airplane, and if you were to see a World War I fighter, say a Spad or a Fokker D8, stripped of its fabric you would see exactly what I mean. We called them flying models because, of course, they were meant to fly with the aid of a rubber band motor, but the only flying models that actually flew well were the ones that were not

built to scale, or did not even follow the pattern of a real life prototype.

The Avenger was an especially unpromising design. Even with a balsa wood frame—and the white pine that came with the kit easily doubled its weight—it simply did not have the lift to leave the ground. At best I would have to launch it by hand and hope it would stay aloft so long as the propeller kept turning.

The real reason I wanted to build an Avenger was that the prototype carried a crew of three. The Grumman Avenger was a carrier-based torpedo bomber supposedly designed to cover long distances. In addition to the pilot and rear gunner, there was a navigator/radioman aboard and that was the role I imagined for myself. A navigator would not need sharp eyes, so long as he knew his math. I was not good in math, but I was working hard at it, and I meant to take every course I could, algebra, plane geometry, solid geometry, physics, calculus, the works. When the time came, I would be ready to take that seat between the pilot and the gunner and I would fly.

Meanwhile, Shirley had found a sailor who was actually stationed at the Lakes and not just passing through, a tall dark-haired boy from Baltimore who immediately declared himself madly in love with her. His name was Bill. Everyone had simpler names in those days. Bill, Bob, Dave, Dan. Bill managed to make it into Chicago every Friday and Saturday night. On Saturdays he and Shirley would go out together and stay out long after I had gone to bed, but on Fridays while my mother bowled and my father played the fiddle at Donahue's Tavern, they would stay in the apartment and sometimes Bill would give me money to go to the show so they could be alone. On this particular night that I remember so well, he brought along a friend for Martha. I had every reason to believe I would cash in double.

But right away things started off wrong. Bill and his pal arrived on time, which is to say they were there before Martha showed up. Bill did the introductions. "Chuck, this is Shirley, and this is her brother Pete."

"Where's the other girl?" Chuck said. He was shorter than Bill, very thin and wiry in his bell bottoms. He had short blonde

hair and the palest skin I had ever seen on a man. I didn't know it then, but I soon learned he had been in the hospital. "Where is she?" he repeated. "I thought you said there'd be a girl for me."

"She's always late," I said. "She's late for everything."

He turned and stared at me.

"Don't worry about him," Bill said. "We'll give him a buck and he'll go to the show."

"Yeah. Good idea. But where's this girl. You said there'd be a girl for me."

After a while Bill slipped me a dollar, but I hung around, waiting. I figured if it was worth a dollar for Bill to get rid of me, this Chuck sailor would be good for two once he saw Martha.

But he never saw her. About a quarter to eight she called, and the date was off.

Chuck did not take this well. What? He'd come all the way from the Lakes for nothing? He'd been promised a girl! Didn't Shirley know some other girl she could call? She tried a few calls, but it was too late on a Friday night.

He turned to me. "Well, what about you, kid? Don't you know a girl? Christ sake, I came all this way and no girl?"

I probably should have taken off for the movies right then and there, but I didn't, I opened a book and sat down on the couch, waiting to see what would happen. I may even have had the notion that I might be needed. I could hear Bill whispering to this new guy Chuck in the vestibule, and if they were friends, it didn't sound like it at all. "No!" Bill whispered. "She doesn't do that!"

And Chuck said, "Yeah. We'll see."

Parts of this aren't too clear to me these days, but I remember finally sitting on the couch with my book and Chuck in the room with me. Shirley and her sailor had gone into her room and shut the door.

"That's some sister you got, kid," Chuck said.

He paced like some hungry animal, slapping his palms together. At last he sat down next to me on the couch. 'Put the book down, kid," he said. "Can't you see what these people are doing to me?"

I didn't think they were doing anything to him and I said so.

"That's right, nothing," he said. "And I have to go back. Monday! I go back Monday and I ain't had no girl! Look at this!"

He pulled up his trouser leg and showed me a scar. It didn't seem all that large to me. "Well, I was three months in a bed with this," he said. "Three months. And as soon as you can walk, back you go."

So I told him about my bad eyes. If they were that hard up for people, wouldn't they want someone who really wanted to go?

"You want to fly?" he said. "Fly?"

"What's wrong with that?'

"Why, there's nothing wrong with it. Not the flying part." He seemed to change, to soften. "Oh God, you should see it up there!"

"You fly?" I said. The only boys my sister had brought around had been swabbies, as they called themselves.

After that he started talking about himself. It turned out he was a gunner on a PBY, a "Cat" he called it. I knew the plane. There was a model of one down at the hobby shop, a perfectly made scale flying model that would never fly because whoever built it had never intended it for anything other than show. It was one of the most beautiful things I had ever seen. A PBY—and I can see no reason why a regular person should know this—is a flying boat, a big twin-engine monoplane designed to land on both water and land. They were made by the Consolidated Corporation and nicknamed the Catalina, hence the "Cat." The idea that I was sitting next to someone who had actually flown in one sent chills up and down my backbone.

So I told him about the Avenger I was building and he said, oh yes, he knew that one, and did I know what had happened to Torpedo Squadron 18 at Midway? It was the first I'd heard of that and I was shocked. I'd always believed every American plane was technologically superior to anything the enemy put up. Oh, no, he said. I should see the Zero. What a beautiful plane that was, could turn on a dime and rise like a kite. He'd never seen one himself—he'd been flying patrol over the North Atlantic, but he'd talked to guys in the hospital who seen more Zeros than they had bargained for.

But flying over the Atlantic—he leaned back in the couch

and spread his arms out over the back cushions—that had been beautiful, the water gray and dark and cold as "a witches's tit," the skies all cast over until you got above the clouds, and then the sun would be as pure as gold and clouds below would stretch out as far as the eye could see. But mostly he had flown low enough to make out the whitecaps, and searched for U-boats which would dive, if they had a chance, and fight if they had to, and that was how he had been hit. "I was right in that front gunner position. There was nothing between me and him but a thousand yards of air."

So we were hitting it off pretty good, and I forgot about what my sister and Bill were doing together in her room, but Chuck did not.

Suddenly he stopped talking and looked me straight in the face. "Is he telling the truth?" He said. "Is your sister really that way?"

"What way."

"You know what I mean. One guy at a time."

I didn't know what to say, so I said, sure. I always wanted to think the best of her, and I still do.

He licked his lips. "Why the hell aren't you a girl?"

I had no idea what was coming.

"You'd be a pretty girl," he said. "Jesus, what a waste that you're a boy."

And then he took my glasses off me, just the way guys do for girls in the movies, and looked into my face. I held my breath.

While I was holding it, he leaned forward and kissed me directly on the mouth, and I let him do it. I'm not sure exactly what I felt, curiosity to be sure, I had never kissed anyone, and had never suspected boys kissed boys, well, maybe I'd heard something like that at school but it all seemed so far-fetched. I do remember wondering if this was a sin. The nuns had never mentioned such a thing.

After he kissed me he drew back. It was almost as if he had surprised himself. "You are pretty," he said. "You Jesus well are. You ought to be a girl."

"Well, I'm not," I said. I didn't like being compared to a girl, and being called pretty, but I did like being liked, oh, that is some-

thing we can all understand. So I waited for him to kiss me again and I did not have to wait long. This time it was a real kiss with plenty of tongue, as much as I could handle, and not just the kiss but an embrace that sprawled us both over the couch with our bodies tight together. I thought maybe I should do something of my own, so I put my hand on his head and ran my fingers through his short slick hair; he was wearing some kind of tonic. Although this may be a false memory, I would say it smelled like apples.

He shuddered, pressed his body harder against mine, and suddenly drew back.

"Oh Christ," he said.

Eventually I understood what had happened, maybe even right then and there. He sat up straight, took a very deep breath, and stared at his hands.

"Oh hell," he said. He got up and started looking for the bathroom. "At the end of the hall," I told him. I could hear him down there, running water.

My glasses had landed on the carpet next to the couch. I put them back on and the world returned to focus. I'm not really myself without my eyes, even such as they are. I wondered if he had planned to do what he had done, or if he had been surprised as I had been, and I still wonder about that to some extent. I've never found the world so cut and dried and easy as some folks seem to think. I wondered too exactly what it was that I had felt, nothing like what he had felt, I'm pretty sure of that. It had been so easy. This was what I could not get over. Here I was, eyeing those girls at school from behind my book, dreaming of them at night, never suspecting that what I wanted from them might be easy after all.

When Chuck came out of the bathroom he seemed a calmer person, older too. "Come on, Pete," he said. "Let me see that Avenger of yours."

I took him into my room and showed him what was laid out on the card table, the skeleton fuselage, and the beginnings of the wing. He shook his head, too heavy, too heavy, he insisted, and we spent the next hour sanding down the ribs and spars, and removing excess glue. "It's the pine," he kept saying. "The worst of it is, for all the weight, there isn't any added strength. You wouldn't think one

shipload of balsa wood would lose the war."

He had the kind of patience I saw I must acquire. Don't rush, he said. In an airplane every part counts. There isn't so much as one piece that isn't important. When you get to the paper, don't put it on with glue. He was adamant about the glue. Use banana oil, or dope, he said, and whatever you do, don't paint. Never mind the decals. And forget the landing gear. What do you want, a plane that lands, or a plane that flies?

No one had ever told me any of this stuff, but I saw that he was right. I did it his way and I didn't finish until three weeks later. By then he had been shipped back to the war and his PBY, and I had never seen him but that one time. The last thing he said before he left my room was this:

"Kid. About what happened. You don't want ever to tell anyone."

I kept my promise. Until this very moment.

I found it very interesting to eye up the girls at school the next day. I felt I understood them, maybe, a little better. Would they like it if someone called them pretty? Would they be pleased to know that someone wanted to touch their hair? I smiled at Jane Tyler when we passed in the hall. She smiled back. I sat next to Gina Angelina in the lunch room and asked her if she still went to Mass. Oh, yes, she said, and I said oh yes, I did too, and she smiled.

I began to have new thoughts before I fell asleep at night, and new dreams after I did. It seemed to me I was on the verge of something big. Meanwhile, I kept sanding down that Avenger and getting it right. I could see it wanted to fly.

The day before it was finished was my fifteenth birthday and my parents did not even stay home for that. My mother did have a cake at the supper table, and there were candles which I still blew out with a single breath, and there was a wish I made that soon enough came true. After dinner it was just Shirley and me together in the house until Martha Mariner showed up to help finish the cake.

There couldn't be sailors every night, and now that Shirley was going more or less steady with Bill, she was having a little less to do with Martha. Martha was growing more and more "wild"

Shirley told me. She was crazy about boys.

I'd always thought Martha was an attractive girl, but I'd also always thought of her as an older sister of a kind. It never occurred to me to look at her quite the same way I looked at, say, Jane Tyler or Gina, not even when I had her on my imaginary island. With her dark dark hair swept up like a movie star's, her bright red lipstick and nails, her casual angora sweater, and her perpetual heels, Martha seemed years and years beyond me, and she treated me that way too, little brother, she would say. She liked to tease me. You better watch out, Peter. Those girls are going to get you yet."

"Fifteen!" She ate a huge piece of my chocolate cake and wound up blotting most of the lipstick from her red lips. "You're almost a man now, Peter. I have a notion to kiss you."

"Yes, you should do it," Shirley said. "He's never been kissed."

Martha finished blotting away her lipstick. "What about it, Peter?"

I was sitting across the table from her. She was nineteen years old, slim, smooth, and pretty.

"I like you better without lipstick," I said.

"Oh really," she said. "Should I let my hair down too?"

"Yes," I said carefully. "You have very beautiful hair."

She whooped with laughter, and so did Shirley. But she did it, she took the pins out of her dark hair and shook it loose.

"Now you have to let me kiss you," she said.

"Not here," I said.

Shirley whooped again. 'I'll leave, I'll leave."

I stood up and beckoned to Martha. "Come on," I said.

I led her into my room. The Avenger was sitting on the card table, almost completely assembled. Only the rudder remained to be glued into place.

In those years, she was a bit taller than I was. I had to stretch, not quite to my tiptoes, but almost, in order to kiss her lips. We simply touched; it was hardly a kiss at all.

"So that's your first kiss," she said.

I took her hands into mine, and somehow willed her next to me on the bed. "Let's try that again," I said. I ran my hand through

her hair, pulled her to me, and kissed her as I had been kissed, with the open mouth and the tongue, pushing her backward on the bed and pressing our bodies together until it all happened for me, exactly as it happened in my dreams.

After that she pushed me away and sat up. "Where did you learn that, Peter?' she said.

"I read about it in a book," I said.

"You're a little liar," she said. She kissed me again, and then stood up.

"That's it," she said. "You're too young for the other stuff."

Thirty years and a whole lot of living later I met Martha again. I was between marriages; she was between marriages. She had been living in California, oh, for decades with an assortment of unsuitable men, but suddenly she was back in Chicago visiting her mom who was dying. My sister called me up and said, "An old friend of yours is back in town."

So I went over to Shirley's house and Martha was there. Her lovely dark hair had turned red. Isn't it wonderful how women, as they grow older, instead of turning gray as our mothers did, now turn red? She was still thin, almost hard thin, and still wore bright red lipstick and still smoked one cigarette after another. Poor Shirley who had stopped smoking long ago had to find a mayonnaise jar for her to use as an ashtray. When Shirley's husband came home—no, she never married Bill, she found a guy named John, a decent sort of fellow as they say, a hard worker, good family man—we all went out to a restaurant and had a pretty good time. Plenty of drinks after which, when all was said and done, I was elected to drive Martha home.

Her mother still lived in the same house on Union Street. I'd been in it once or twice with Shirley when we were kids. It was an old house and never had been modernized, the kitchen sink still stood on four legs, the ceiling lights had pull chains, the old wooden windows were held up by expansion screens. I came in with Martha and I obviously had in mind what I hoped we would do. The old woman was bedridden, or almost bedridden. I stopped in her room to say hello, but she had no idea who I was. After Martha had settled her down, we went into the living room and had a

drink.

"So what kind of a life has it been," I asked her.

"A lot of BS if you ask me," she said. "Men. You're all alike."

"Me too?"

"Yes. I know what you're thinking."

I asked her if she remembered that night of my birthday so many years ago. She laughed and lit another cigarette. "I gave you your first kiss," she said.

"You promised me more later," I said.

"I never make a promise I mean to keep," she said.

So we sparred around like that for a while, had another drink, and then without another word on the subject went into her old bedroom and took off our clothes. She had a good body, and she knew what to do with it. We probably had as good an hour of lovemaking as any two people are likely to have, but then it was over, and all that we had was our cigarettes. I put on my pants while we smoked.

"You want to know something?" she finally said. 'I've lost count of how many men I've fucked."

After the old lady died, she went back to California and I never heard from her again. Every now and then my sister gets a letter. Usually it's to tell her that there is a new husband, or lover, or whatever. Whatever Martha Mariner is, she means to be it to the day she dies.

I flew that Avenger model I built. I thought you'd like to know how that turned out. The day after my fifteenth birthday I glued on the rudder, balanced the model between my fingertips, and took it straight up to the upper roof. It was late in the evening and the sun was about to set. Cars on Western Avenue were already using their headlights, although I could still see the setting sun from the roof-top. I wound up the propeller. I assume you know how a rubber band motor works. After one hundred turns I stopped lest the tension collapse the fuselage, already weakened by Chuck's weight-cutting techniques. Standing at the corner of the roof, directly above the intersection, I aimed the craft toward Grove Street where there was no traffic. I knew this was going to be one flight and one flight only, something like the Japanese Kamikaze

bombers, only without a pilot. All that work, all that patience, I let her fly, and fly she did. For several exquisite seconds, too few to count, more than enough to make my heart stand still, my Avenger, white as a ghost for I had not even used colored paper, slanted over Grove Street. Then a gust of wind, so gentle I hardly felt it, turned the little craft on its side and banked it into a downward circle that took it directly into traffic. I held my breath. I hardly had time to imagine what might have happened had it startled some driver and caused an accident. A moment later it was little more than bits of paper and wood lying loose on a busy street.

There is a bad end to this story, and I know you are going to say it is contrived. So it is, at least to the extent that I arranged my telling in order to have this part come last. But you know that PBY of Chuck's went down too, somewhere, somehow. I didn't hear of it until shortly after the war ended when my sister got a letter from Bill. Poor Bill, he still insisted that he loved her. "I'm not going to answer this," she told me. And then she told me about the PBY. "Do you remember that sailor who was supposed to be Martha's date? The one Bill brought over here?"

I said maybe I did.

She reopened the letter, reread a few lines silently. "His plane crashed. Right after he went back."

"Crashed?" I said.

"That's what it says. Crashed. Somewhere in the Atlantic."

She told me no more, and I was somehow afraid to ask for a look at that letter. She held it over the waste basket, let it fall, and it swooped as if it hoped to escape. I watched her catch that letter as expertly as any boy, crush it into a ball, and toss it into the can. And that is the whole story, as much as I know to this day, and I am left to wonder as often as I wish to wonder if anyone got out of that crash alive.

And if not that, what a young man named Chuck might have thought about in that last awful moment when he felt himself suddenly and forever without the gift of flight.

The Line

Tihomir Tikulin

Phenomenology

Andrea Janelle Dickens

This is how I'll enter you Blue
notes corkscrew down your ear
canal Paprika caterwauls against
your smooth-shod tongue
as motes expand a thousand times
their size I will glom to your eyesight
as to Macbeth's hands leaving
stickyshadowed trails Barbeque
smoke lilacs and myrtles dip and bob
in the breeze lead you to a low
stone wall dividing me from you
My hands are a palimpsest rubbed
down for the next epic for the next
worker's ditty Pennies slip from
my fingers through sidewalk cracks
so songs explode from floorboard
jukeboxes But they sing in Hindi
with dancers in pink green yellow
silk following Three hands stuff
the ballot box Flashing teeth are too
experienced to be believed You can't
keep the world's cacophony at bay
But I'll try to enter you silent

Air France Flight 447

Jennifer Krueger

Two years later, at 3:15 pm, they called to say they found you.
Leave him where he lies, I said. Let him sleep under the millions
of pounds of cubic pressure holding him. Leave the wheel wells,
the luggage, the love notes. Let him sink a little deeper each night.
Let him drift with the Sargasso weeds that grow on one end and die
on the other. Let sea stars land beside him. Let him watch the sea
snow with pearls for eyes.

Gaps in My Resume

Susana H. Case

I spent fifteen years herding sheep.
They were limousine sheep,
in show business,
rather than the mutton trade.

Then I was too old for show business.
Don't you have to begin at eight?
I stayed home and hid.
Nothing to explain.
Honestly—I couldn't face it.

I couldn't get any face time
with the President and if that's the case
why bother getting out of bed?

I carved beds for dollhouses,
curled up in one, its pineapple finials.
Tick-tocks chided me;
I lost track of time.

For a long time, I wrote fortunes
placed inside cookies. I memorized them.
They were all I had for self-direction,

which is why I ended up here again.
I thought I was going to Cincinnati.

Home

Octavio Quintanilla

You still carry her silhouette
in your arms: The sweet taste of grapefruit,
her eyelids heavy like sand.
Impressive, this world you love,
        world you call by no name
but your own.
Stop saying you'll return, then.
        Keep looking for the forever
lost in the map of your hand.
Keep listening for the sound of her voice
like a brick breaking a neighbor's window.
And drown,
let water hoist the body
you give it.

Sister Says Damn

K. A. McGowan

You can't fool a woman
who has come back from the dead twice.

Can't tell her that some secrets
are best saved for the grave.
Or argue about tunnels and white lights,
the bliss of after-life,
the gnashing of stone and teeth,
or anything in between.

And though you might agree
the onyx fish around her neck
goes well with her dress,

you'd really have to ask
about her scorched heels
and the missing earring,
possibly jade.

Inadequacy

Danielle Shutt

Unless you want proof that something clearer than water
exists, you shouldn't watch a nurse drain spinal fluid
from a good friend's back. Or go ahead, if you're ready
to wait six hours in the cafeteria first, where you write a story
about a man who fucks his kitchen appliances (something like,
The garbage disposal alone had been spared). I'm telling you,

you want levity in the ICU, something you can use
to picture her tumor as a packing peanut or
an inner tube that will slide down her brain and pop
out of her nostril like the Cheerio did
in preschool. Miss Kirby was kind. She took your hand
like you take your friend's once she's out
of recovery and the night-shift nurse says, *She can't
get too upset; if she does, you'll have to leave.* Your friend rasps
a usual thing about morphine
and you promise to be there in the morning,

which is when it gets messy. She's never awake for doctors,
so they tell you about the *complication*: a useless word
that explains why seafoam- or periwinkle-panted minders
show up on the hour to tool around with the plastic bag
that lies on tile like the beached jellyfish you tried to poke
past small breakers on the Topsail sound twelve years ago.
Your friend's nose gushes washy blood

the first time she cries. You stop short of telling her
about Benjamin Oxenplante and his jealous toaster (the ex),
and this is how you learn the timbre of helplessness: her sobs
like those of an infant who expected to be born into yet another
womb, the demands on her behalf keeling over your tongue
like dogwood trees you weren't supposed to climb,

who knows why. You're moving
across the country in four months. You want to pack maps
made of thick glass, like the entry door's criss-crossed panes
that you break into state-shapes while your friend sleeps,
until the last shard is the key to the new apartment you'll need
to tidy up before she visits. *She's my friend*, you tell the crouched,
tinkering forms, *my friend you're doing that to.*

BLOOD'S SUMMER FLING

Kirk Pinho

& the crickets chirrup outside
& the katydid octaves make earfall
so blood is happy
to be blood
one balmy and cool september

as she kisses him like a piranha

as their tongues braid
(*SHH the munchkins can hear us*)

as she curls up like a dandelion on the couch

as she says one evening

i promise you're safe

i promise i'll keep you safe

here in the basement

my handsome hemophiliac

as her eyes open quick as parachutes

the next morning at the MER MER MER

of the alarm clock

groggy blood trips over a tonka truck on the stairs

bashes his nose on the banister
begins spurting liquid rubies

makes zombie noises at the kids

while walking through the house

his arms outstretched like two-by-fours

run run i'm already dead *munchkins*

don't let me catch you *munchkins*

& they laugh like three little bottle rockets

no hospital

just a bucket will do

alcohol *a needle* *some thread*

so a bucket it is already filled with mop water

as blood curls over it

leaking like a brake line

& she snaps

& jimmies the bone back

the bone hard as a tectonic plate

but blood sycophantic blood will soon be

the wormed apple

of her eye

blood sycophantic blood is not ambrosia

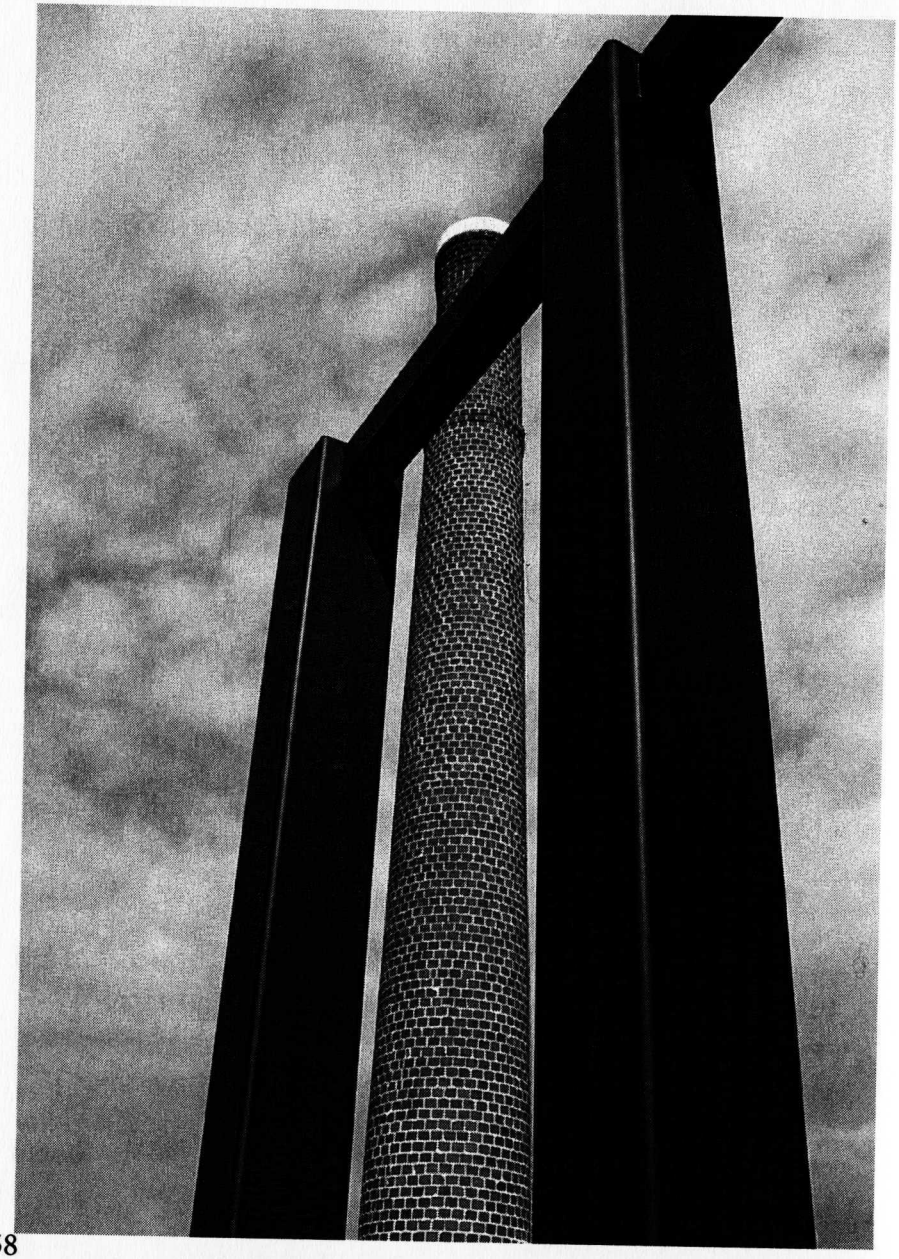
will not grovel

to make things last

forever

Smoke Stack

Duncan M. Hill



How to Properly Maintain Your New Aquarium

R. T. Jamison

There's your new neighbor, stooping and choring. You haven't met him yet, but you want to like him. You tell yourself that. Salt of the earth. In him you see what you want to see. And you want to see something good. Benefit of the doubt. And you hope he sees something good in you too. Nothing unfit, nothing unstable, nothing irregular. So you wave at him and he waves back and smiles and returns to his roses or daylilies or marigolds and you see him glance back your way as you climb into your car and brush the food wrappers from the seat onto the floor and check your makeup in the mirror and pull on your seatbelt and you wonder if he is still looking and he isn't.

At the fourth traffic light of nine you will pass through this morning you wonder how many other commuters have bothered to count the traffic lights and you think maybe something is wrong with you. Maybe things get to you more than they should and sometimes an argument is just an argument—a healthy emotional release, a quarrel, a spat—and maybe you shouldn't be so fixated on who said what and which path goes where and you should just deal with things as they come rather than trying to plan every little detail of every little action. And you check yourself in the mirror again and you wonder how many years you have left of looking like this, like you. You wonder how long you have before that mirror image will be your mother's, and you wonder about genes and genetic disorders and that aunt on your mother's side who, after the birth of her first and only child, slid into a bubble bath with a bottle of Smirnoff vodka and a razor blade. But you don't really know much about her because it happened when you were so young and now no one will talk about her or her husband or her son, your cousin, and you think about the cousin you never really knew because he went away to another town with your uncle and his new wife and didn't stay in touch and you tell yourself you'd never do that—never deprive a child of the company of cousins. You'd wait the appropriate amount of time, whatever that was, before remarrying, and you'd never move away from the child's extended family.

But you realize how unrealistic that is in this age of dual careers and job transfers and greener pastures and you think of unpunctual periods and the possible causes of false positives and the hormonal composition of urine (which the box has coldly informed you is human chorionic gonadotropin) as you shift in your seat and look over to the other drivers waiting at your fourth but what number light for them? And you see a couple arguing. Whatever they had—a carpool friendship or a first marriage or a secret life—it's over. But there they are stuck together at your fourth light. And there they sit, enraged or disgusted or betrayed, though you imagine they only want to walk away and disappear into a business park and leave their Honda Accord idling at whatever number light for them.

You reach the office, that sprawling corporate stage of your selfexpression and fulfillment and recognition, only to find your section of the parking lot closed for resurfacing and you remember the memo from Friday and drive over two speed bumps to Lot E and park far away from your building and check your makeup in the mirror and grab your coffee mug and non-BPA water bottle and laptop bag and smart phone and keys and ID lanyard and purse and bundle them all together the best you can and it annoys you, this mess. It bothers you that you have so many loose ends and you feel your life is beginning to resemble that aquarium you begged your parents for when you were twelve and they warned you not to neglect those delicate creatures and feed them routinely and clean their tank and look after them and they all died one-by-one in velvet green shadows because you did none of those things. This cold memory bobbing to the surface surprises you as you lock your car twice just to be sure and make your way to your building across swells of sticky blue asphalt.

Don't Call Me Bob (excerpt)

Rich Ives

1.

I'm thinking about
sipping tea among the orchids
full of blossoming pastel

there's a copper-haired peasant
the arrival of the forest's
reserve judgement to

be responsible
rooms of the sky
but most of it was not like

the young Emperor
a cold wet winter light
beards and

girl teasing
green tongue you'll have to
find the right entrance I can't

for the river the magnificent
can't be allowed we talked plenty
a dead animal can speak

I have always wanted to die this way though I don't know what it is

A Blue Shoe

Michael S. Morris

At last he made it to the Bodega Dunes
where the sea breeze that had been whipping
the road grasses all morning was, unopposed,
doubled.

Regardless, his eyes were now the very definition
of search itself, for eyes combed through every
grain of sand, as if pouring it through his
rough and spindling fingers.

When at last his vision lit upon that thing
he had been searching for, but couldn't have named,
he untied the pack and easel that were borne
upon an old, long traveled back.

It was a blue shoe. Vincent immediately saw the night:
the young people running down on the beach, imagining
a white veiled figure dancing in the moonlight,
losing a blue shoe.

Elegy for Jack

Danielle Shutt

North Topsail Beach, North Carolina.

Pelicans keep washing up, wings dulled by sand. Behind me
a fresh one, contorted as if in fitful sleep. A laughing gull nips
at its feathers, backs away in anticipation. I watch, then walk on, feeling electric
like I could speak in tongues. The sky in pastels. How much do I want
my grandfather to be a porpoise spading through the surf down shore?
Reincarnation—can I believe? I remember his shark's tooth necklace, lost here
years ago. How he waded in, sifted around. How I was sure he could find it. How
I have no stronger memory of hope. The man who always said he'd be dead soon,
died. Last time I saw him, he was cleaning his plate from a hospital bed, coughing
phlegm, skin puckered and flaking like parchment. He swore
there was no air. We pointed to the vent, the curtains' slight sway. *OK,*
he said. OK. Nothing a little salt air wouldn't cure.

Now the empty beach, no one but me for miles. My body against the wind, cold
sand lining my shoes. My face, the sun: both flush when it's time to
say goodbye. Maybe I'll dance, sing something defiant. Where is my wingspan?
A wildness in me, searching for flint, for spark, conceives of fire as so many have
before. A fire to shut up the ocean—all mouth and stomach, all wink and promise.

The Automated Suicide Hotline

William Greenway

Thank you for calling ASH. All of our counselors are helping other despairers/despondents, but we value your trust, so please stay on the line as long as you are conscious/alive.

In the meantime, help us help you by answering the following questions by speaking or pressing the corresponding letter:

1. Where are you calling from?
    a. down at the end of lonely street
    b. dock o' de bay
    c. Raymond Carver Rehab Unit
    d. middle of the Golden Gate Bridge

2. What are you most in need of?
    a. sexual healing
    b. sunshine, lollipops, and rainbows everywhere
    c. a gravedigger
    d. a life

3. What is your self-deliverance choice:
    a. gunshot to the head
    b. exhaust fumes
    c. jumping/diving
    d. pills/poison
    e. machete

4. What has prompted this call?
    a. d-i-v-o-r-c-e
    b. the prom
    c. rejection by the New Yorker, again
    d. open mic night

5. What best describes your current condition/situation:
    a. laid off
    b. drafted
    c. flunked
    d. dumped

6. Who would you like us to call with the bad/good news if your self-deliverance is successful?
    a. scumbag husband
    b. domineering father
    c. nagging bitch of a wife/mother
    d. Paul Muldoon

7. What might cause you to reconsider your decision?
    a. a higher credit limit
    b. true love
    c. a formal apology from all of the above
    d. the painful death of all of the above

8. What is your choice of afterlife?
    a. no opinion
    b. no hell
    c. 20 virgins
    d. another life

9. What is your greatest fear of the afterlife
    a. hellfire
    b. No Exit
    c. 20 virgins and impotence
    d. another life

Winter Birth

Andrea Janelle Dickens

We all drop headfirst, as orchard-born babies:
we'll peach-plunge, from moms standing tall,
gravity our only midwife. I fell, fruit-fall,
from womb's humus into the wind-dried world.
The old ladies study cold tea-dregs.
They read my birth's ochre stain, warned how
my plum-dark quiet steeped too long:
apple of Mom's eye, beam in Dad's eye,
keep an eye on that one—she's trouble.
(Toil twice—and still, only know trouble like me.)
They told how I'd fall further in life,
through sound. My ship lists: life arcs a lisp,
I live my days through fallen consonants.
In a tongue-jumbled land-flat world I traverse
seas of sticky spilled words, trolling for treasures
among rotten-fruit-ferment and spice-filled lands:
blackened atolls in a sun-struck, mud-mixed world.

Daughters

Tyler Heath

The cells starve and eat each other.
More of me in your lungs. I can grow
more of me in your lungs.
The fungus inside the ant brain,
drifting it from its colony
until it seeps from the head
and spreads. Unthread
your liver until the stuffing
leaks out. Chicken grease
gathers in the skillet. Suddenly
it's raining eggs. Stick out your tongue
and let your teeth
tear the shell. Swish
the yolk in your mouth and smile yellow.
Here are your daughters watching.
Your hair falls out. Here
is a bag they can put it in.

Dear Reader,

Kirk Pinho

Let's go back to just after the beginning of the universe, when we were nothing but cosmic chalk dust. Asteroids chasing their baby blue tails. Making infant fists. Gases salivating in the anti-matter. Back to long before the mud choir, incandescence on their slack skin, sang Hallelujah, Hallelujah, & Hallelujah. Back to before Barrabas told me, his teeth routed into flutes of stalagmites, Blood, you're one lucky son of a bitch. If you call, I'll come to get you in a jiffy.

Ode to a Lily Past Its Prime

Jackie Bartley

green slip of stem, all fluster and
fracture, yellow trumpet spilling

pollened notes. stunted recollection
of that first summer when our pride

at the simple placement of bulb in ground
was almost forgiveable. leaning forward:

more, please more of sun, of rain, of
dew drop, spider, nervous ant, curved,

curious bee. want and want again,
the same but different. stretched in our

beds dreaming the old dream. come night,
come empty terror, pride detached

from virtue, vice, the lily
and we are still here.

The Other World

David Dodd Lee

I can hear myself
Coasting after sleep—
The turning of a hundred

Wood spindles . . . Peppermint
Was the taste of her nipples.
The water, full of electricity-

Producing fish, circles
and laps at the legs of
My bed. The checks I used

To fill out bleed slowly
Out of the world via
The dark face of my computer.

The mailbox opens. It closes.
The budget is a paper
Boat made out of a Burger

King bag. I want to find a nice
Gravel road. Lose radio
Reception. Watch the crows argue

Over the top of one telephone pole.

Call Me Honeydew

Benjamin Seanor

she says she's not pretty
but a museum
I spilt soda on the carpet
outside the bathroom
when she told me
I could hold her
down and do
what I'd like
I am tomorrow's party
her car seats are dead
or dying
we are leaving town
I hunch gothic shoulders
she puts
sunglasses
over empty sockets
her scarf clings
to the air where her throat
used to be
now it's caught
sagging in a tree by the road
she picks
her heart from the cup
holder tosses
it out the window
stroking peach fuzz
my muscles mercury
I ask why she keeps a revolver
in the glove compartment

Piñata

Tyler Heath

I might be the formula in that old textbook
made of bird blood and plaster.

You might stand in line or go to the front.

It's up to you.

We might be the forks and knives my mother threw
at the piñata when it wouldn't break.

I might be the candy.

Or a wrench a baby chews
until it sucks lead poison.

You might have a discount beef factory
in your frontal lobe.

You might vomit again.

I might too.

Pile Up Houses

Eleanor Bennett

Contest Winner

Rich Ives is the 2009 winner of the Francis Locke Memorial Poetry Award from Bitter Oleander. In 2011, he is a Pushcart Prize nominee and a double Best of the Net nominee. The Spring 2011 Bitter Oleander contains a feature including an interview and 18 of his hybrid works.

Fiction

R.T. Jamison is a freelance writer living in Northern California. Born and raised in a small Idaho farm town with a prominent water tank, R.T. has subsequently lived in Chicago, Phoenix and Tokyo with a patient spouse and a dog or two.

Elise Kaplan is a journalism major at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. She loves to travel, bike, cook and meditate on the absurd nature of reality, not necessarily at the same time. She is currently working as a waitress to support a writing habit.

Paul Pekin is a retired police officer who lives in Chicago's Logan Square neighborhood. Before he was a cop, he was a writer; he's always been a writer. Paul published his first short story in 1965 and his most recent one last summer. His work has appeared in newspapers, literary magazines, and anthologies.

Nonfiction

Leslie Pietrzyk is the author of two novels, Pears on a Willow Tree (Avon) and A Year and a Day (William Morrow). Her fiction and essays have appeared in many journals, including Gettysburg Review, Crab Orchard Review, The Sun, and The Washington Post Magazine.

Poetry

Jia Oak Baker is pursuing a MFA in Writing and Literature at Bennington College where she is a recipient of a Liam Rector Scholarship. She is a former participant in the Squaw Valley Community of Writers Workshop and currently resides in Phoenix, Arizona.

Jackie Bartley's poems have appeared most recently in Pinyon, The Southampton Review and Hawai'i Pacific Review. Her third poetry collection,Sleeping with a Geologist, is due out this spring from Three Candles Press.

Susana H. Case has recent work in Hawai'i Pacific Review, Portland Review, and Potomac Review. She is the author of several chapbooks, most recently, The Cost Of Heat (Pecan Grove Press). An English-Polish reprint of her chapbook, originally published by Slapering Hol Press, The Scottish Café, was published by Opole University Press as Kawiarnia Szocka in Poland. Forthcoming is her Manual of Practical Sexual Advice (Kattywompus Press).

Meredith Devney received her MFA from Emerson College in 2006. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in Tar River Poetry, Coe Review, Poetry Quarterly, Et Cetera, San Pedro Review, Front Range Review, Evening Street Review, among others. She teaches full time at the high school level and adjunct at Marshall University.

Andrea Janelle Dickens currently splits her time between Oxford, England, and central Ohio, where she teaches composition and medieval studies.

After 5 months of drinking cheap wine in Buenos Aires, Brandon Getz is living in the Steel City drawing cartoons on loose cardboard. He has an MFA in fiction form Eastern Washington University. He's been published in Versal and Ghost Ocean Magazine.

Zachary Asher Greenberg has an MFA from Vanderbilt University, where he is co-founding editor of Nashville Review. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in The Columbia Review, Cut-Bank, Sleet Magazine, and The Greensboro Review, among others. Currently he facilitates writing workshops for cancer patients and survivors.

William Greenway's seventh full-length collection, Everywhere at Once (2009), winner of the Ohioana Poetry Book of the Year Award, is from the University of Akron Press Poetry Series (2003). He has published in Poetry, American Poetry Review, Georgia Review, Southern Review, Poetry Northwest, Shenandoah, and Prairie Schooner.

Les Gottesman's first published poems were in Ted Berrigan's C magazine in 1965. More recently, his poems have appeared in Juked, Beatitude, Harper's, and Antioch Review. Les has been a teacher in San Francisco for over 30 years. He received his MFA in Writing from California College of the Arts in 2011.

Tyler Heath is a senior BFA student attending Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in Poigod, Binnacle, and Real.

Jannett Highfill has published poems in The Iowa Review, Tar River Poetry, The Greensboro Review, RHINO, Fifth Wednesday, and elsewhere. Her chapbook Light Blessings Drifting Together is published by Finishing Line Press.

Rich Ives is the 2009 winner of thee Francis Locke Memorial Poetry Award from Bitter Oleander. In 2011, he is a Pushcart Prize nominee and a double Best of the Net nominee. The Spring 2011 Bitter Oleander contains a feature including an interview and 18 of his hybrid works.

Sean-Patrick Kinneen has been trying to write poems about three years and is currently a senior at California State University Fresno. His poem "To My Mother" has been awarded the Larry Levis Prize for Poetry from the Academy of American Poets.

Jenny Krueger has published over one dozen non-fiction books for children, in addition to her poetry and ghostwriting. After working in publishing, she began freelance writing in 2009. She lives with her husband and their son in Minneapolis, MN.

David Dodd Lee is the author of nine books of poems, including the forthcoming The Coldest Winter on Earth (Marick Press, 2012) and Things Superficially Not Unlike Us (Four Way Book, 2013).

Ross Losapio is a New Jersey native. Currently, he attends the MFA program at Virginia Commonwealth University, where he serves as the 2011-2012 Lead Associate Editor for Blackbird. His poems appear in or are forthcoming from Copper Nickel, the minnesota review, and The Emerson Review, among others.

Jeffrey H. MacLachlan also has forthcoming work in Southern California Review, Clockhouse Review, Compass Rose, and Anubium. He can be followed on Twitter @jeffmack.

Professor of English and Director of Creative Writing at Lock Haven University, Marjorie Maddox has published 8 poetry books and over 350 poems, stories, and essays in journals and anthologies. Co-editor of Common Wealth: Contemporary Poets on Pennsylvania and author of two children's books, she is the recipient of numerous awards. Her short story collection was a Katherine Anne Porter Award finalist. For more info and reviews, please see http://www.lhup.edu/mmaddoxh/biography.htm

K. A. McGowan was born and raised in Scranton, Pennsylvania. He now lives in Louisiana and teaches electronics at Remington College. His two chapbooks are Rubric (Pudding House Publications) and No Passengers (The Backwaters Press).

Ellen Birkett Morris's work is forthcoming in The Clackamas Literary Review and has appeared in Inscape, Alimentum, and Juked. She won top prize in The 2008 Binnacle Ultra-Short Edition and was a semi-finalist for the 2009 Rita Dove Poetry Prize.

Michael S. Morris was born in 1955 in Waterbury, CT. He attended Holy Cross High School and Mattatuck Community College. Michael has placed approximately 170 poems in over 80 journals. He is an Honorary Member of the IWA, and a current Pushcart Prize nominee.

Derek Palacio is an MFA candidate in fiction at the Ohio State University. His work is forthcoming in the Kenyon Review and the Los Angeles Review.

Kirk Pinho is a newspaper editor, political reporter and adjunct English instructor in Michigan. He received his MFA in poetry from the University of Alabama, and his recent work has appeared or is forthcoming in The Journal, The Chariton Review, Everyday Genius, and The Offending Adam.

Octavio Quintanilla's poems have appeared in Alaska Quarterly Review, Los Angeles Review, and elsewhere. He teaches English at Texas A&M University - Kingsville.

Benjamin Seanor is a living American person who lives in Florida and works in a public library. His poetry has previously appeared in A Bad Penny Review.

Danielle Shutt recently completed an MFA at Eastern Washington University in Spokane, WA, where she taught writing courses and served as a poetry editor for Willow Springs. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in DIAGRAM, Hayden's Ferry Review, Hotel Amerika, PANK, and Copper Nickel.

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