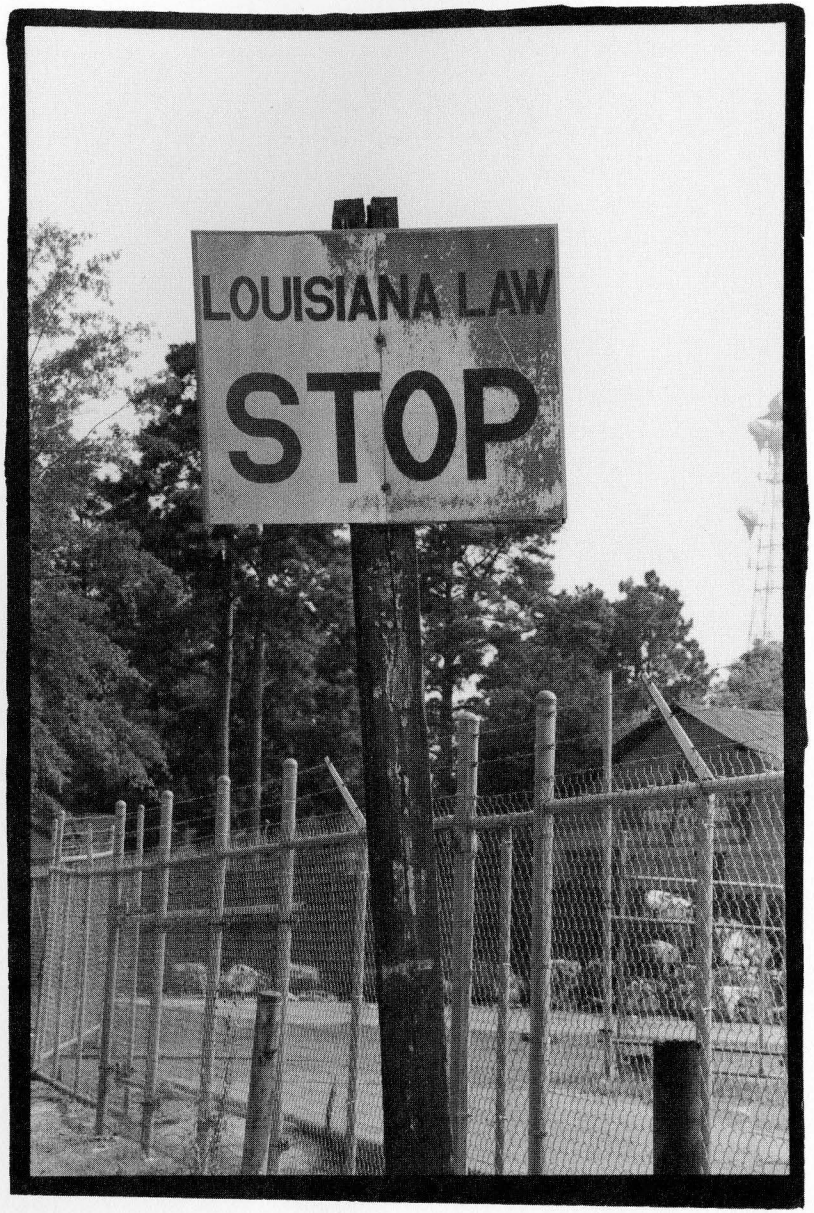

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CONTENTS

My Unopened Life

lay to the right of my plate
like a spoon squiring a knife, waiting
patiently for soup or the short destiny
of dessert at the eternal picnic—unsheltered
picnic at the mouth of the sea
that dares everything forgotten to huddle
at the periphery of a checked cloth spread
under the shadowy, gnarled penumbra
of the madrona. Hadn't I done well enough
with the life I'd seized, sure as a cat with
its mouthful of bird, bird with its belly full of
worm, worm like an acrobat of darkness
keeping its moist nose to the earth, soaring
perpetually into darkness without so much as
the obvious question: why all this darkness?
And even in the belly of the bird: *why*
only darkness?

The bowl of the spoon
collects entire rooms just lying there next
to the knife. It makes brief forays into
the mouth delivering cargoes of ceilings
and convex portraits of teeth
posing as stalactites of
a serially extinguished cave
from whence we do nothing but stare out
at the sea, collecting little cave-ins of
perception sketched on the moment
to make more tender the house of the suicide
in which everything was so exactly
where it had been left by someone missing.
Nothing, not even the spoon he abandoned
near the tea cup, could be moved without
seemingly altering the delicious
universe of his intention.

So are we each lit briefly by engulfments
of space like the worm in the beak of
the bird, yielding to sudden corridors
of light-into-light, never asking:
why, tell me why
all this light?

The Tree

Church bells at the same time as sirens.
Cold feet in the wake
of someone else's umbrella.
Wet leaves like animal footprints,
some imaginary animal
too unfriendly to be imagined.

Cold morning, years past,
I leaned upon the great pine tree
we called the great pine tree
and in its branches always
the remnants of a house.
Why take down what might be

usable, one parent said, and the other
said nothing. Still we never climbed,
or never built. Over years
the triangular frame grew wet and even
the wood became contagious rust.
When we played we played around it.

Cold winter and a broken pattern
of warm days on the blank canvas
of inevitable horizon.
Once I sent myself into winter alone.
Now it is dexterity that helps me
imagine the tree, not courage. Never that.

Grave

One could do worse than an unmarked stone.
In leaf time it looks even more gray
and in the snow
who knows how covered it could remain.

No one to visit and no one to know.
The noon sits down on every stone
the same. Hard noon,
hot stone. You have to touch it to know.

It could be in any yard at all.
One could do worse
than have it here,
and leave it unvisited most of all.

The rain has no object, it falls and falls.
One could do worse some lost spring
to be in love,
love someone most near the smoothest stone,

look at one person and softly think,
wherever you are I will know
I put you there
I will think on my stone

when I am gone and there's nothing to know

★

Not yet finished melting :the sun
—you can hear its sea struggling
spilling over through each morning

it comes from behind now
brushes against this cemetery gate
that's still shining, floating past

—to this day you go home
the back way —you don't see
your reflection or the ground

face to face with shoreline
—what you hear are waves :one hand
reaching for another and in the dark

you let your fingers unfold end over end
then close, gather in these fountains
as if they belong one side then another

are nearly too much stone —here
where this gate is filling its lungs
and you tearing it in two.

★

You come here to bathe —the dirt
warm though the ocean underneath
is breaking apart on the rocks

—you almost drown, crushed
by the immense light
covered over grave after grave

and all these stones adrift
beneath your hands and one day more
lower and lower, washed

with the drop by drop
oozing out your shadow
the way roots still flow past

for flowers and your hands
filling with hillsides
with waves that once had hair.

SIMON PERCHIK

★

It's a risk, these clouds
gathered in the open, grow huge
take on the shape they need

though once inside this jar
escape is impossible
—you collect a cloud whose mist

no one studies anymore, comes
from a time rain was not yet the rain
pressing against your forehead

and your mouth too has aged
coming from nowhere to open
as some mountainside

believed by all the experts
too high for predators
or a dirt that devours

even its place to hide in flowers
yet you will date the jar
for their scent and later on.

R. DEAN JOHNSON

The People We Were

Two days ago I was leaving Amsterdam for the last time. It was a midweek train so I had no problem finding a quiet car, one with some German families and only three Americans—young guys in their khakis and college t-shirts.

There were farms and pastures filling the windows when one of the Americans came up the aisle to me. I expected him to ask where I was from. It's what Americans do when they think you're from the States or somewhere that seems like an ally, somewhere like Canada or Australia. But this guy had no idea what I was. He raised his eyebrows and flashed a half-grin, some kind of international Hello. Then he asked me, *Sprechen sie englisch?*

I responded the way Europeans who speak English often do, by answering his question with a question: "What can I do for you?"

He'd been holding his left forearm with his right hand, and he released it just long enough to show me a small cut so fresh it nearly dripped blood on my hands. "Ah," I said, reaching for the Band-Aids in my backpack. He took the one I offered and asked for two more, the way a lot of young Americans leaving Amsterdam do, just the way Eislan said it would be.

Americans have a look, Eislan liked to tell me. *Not innocent,* she'd say, *inferior. Like a cattle.* We met in Amsterdam at Wolvenstraat Hostel, one of those places that comes with a free breakfast so the bunk bed in the crowded barrack seems more tolerable. But she wasn't a tourist. Every morning at a quarter past seven, fifteen minutes after breakfast was supposed to start, Eislan would appear behind the counter separating the kitchen from the common room (a

basement with old couches and coffee tables made out of crates). By seven-thirty the room would be full, twenty or thirty people groggy and restless, most of them only up this early because it was the day they were leaving, the rest just getting back from the night before. It didn't matter to Eislan, though. She'd take her time, smoothing her apron, tying back her hair and putting everything in order before cracking the first egg. You could say anything you liked, that you were catching a train or suffered from low blood sugar, but you wouldn't eat until she decided.

Back home, I never took the time to eat breakfast. But for three straight mornings, I found myself waiting for Eislan to arrive. I'd let people who were running late go ahead of me, and when I stepped up to order, I'd wait until she looked up. Until we made eye contact. On the third day, Eislan spoke before looking up: *Scrambled eggs, no cheese.* I nodded, and she set a steaming cup atop the counter: *Café American.* She raised her head, grinning, a line on each cheek revealing itself, each forming a slight dimple. *No sugar,* she said, *but cream.* I walked away smiling and speechless. The cream and sugar were self-serve, on a table at the other end of the room.

I signed on for an extra night at the hostel, wished the day away, then wondered the next morning if I'd made a mistake. Chatty English teenagers surrounded me, overflowing from the couches to the crates, the crates to the floor. Their chaperones stood nearby, tapping their watches and glaring at Eislan. This, it suddenly became clear, was my chance. I charged the counter, telling Eislan I could jump back there and help out. She shook her head no and drew me closer with her hand. I could make out each freckle sprinkled about her nose, see wisps of brown hair escaping her braid and contrasting with the light blue of her eyes.

Your ancestors are in your cheekbones, she whispered. *Do you know this?*

I smiled, though I had no idea what she meant. Not until that afternoon, in the flat she shared with three other people, would I begin to understand. She dragged me through the front door, pulling me down to the couch and telling me we'd have to make love right then before her roommates got home, right there because the living room was her room, and the couch was her bed.

Later, as we lay wrapped in a blanket stolen, she said, from her own parents, she lightly traced my cheekbones with her fingers, telling me they were very European and beautiful, not diluted like most Americans. I took the compliment, happy to accept it as truth so long as it meant being with her.

Eislan wanted me to understand Amsterdam as she did. She took me places I said I'd already seen, making me leave my camera behind the second time. She said cameras filter you from reality. Reality, she showed me, was bringing a loaf of bread to the Anne Frank House, tearing off chunks and offering it to the tourists in the long line outside. The gesture unnerves some people, I do not know exactly why, but Eislan told me that was our plan. *This is not Disneyland,* she said. *No one in that line should feel comfortable.*

We avoided the Van Gogh Museum altogether, instead walking the cobblestone streets he walked, crossing over wooden foot bridges and gazing into the dark canal water to see our reflections—distinct at first, then distorting in gentle waves brought on by the breeze or maybe a duck beneath the bridge. Our stroll took us to the Jordaan, a quieter part of the city with narrow streets and block after block of vine-laden, five-story buildings. Merchants and professional offices occupy the first floors with apartments rising above, peeking through the vines and capped with sloped roofs. On one of the few streets in the city with any kind of pitch, Eislan led me to a building distinguished from its neighbors only by the yellow trim around the windows. She said the Van Gogh family briefly occupied an apartment in this building, though which one is not

known for certain. Then she pointed out the two windows on the fourth floor she thought it might be. How could she know, I asked, and she said the family who live there now are oppressive and cruel, and they have been for years. *Like a curse,* she said. I'd have liked to know more, but she kissed me just then, and I let it go.

A few streets over was the Prins Saarein, a pub hidden halfway down the block, the sign so small and dimly lit only a local would know it wasn't some newsstand closed for the day. The ceilings were low and stained a pale brown, years of smoke from cigarettes and who knows what else. A friend of Eislan's spotted us through the haze, waving us over to his table, insisting we join him. Ruud said he hadn't seen Eislan around in a while. *I have not been around,* she said. He nodded as though he'd forgotten, then asked what I was drinking. When I said Heineken he smiled, and I did not know if it was because I ordered wrong or if drinking the local beer meant I was trying too hard. Eislan ordered the same, though, and Ruud asked if she'd have something more, his treat. *I'm fine with just beer,* she said. It reassured me the way she extended herself to protect me, the way she whispered halfway through the pint how I should get her out of there, get her back to the hostel and down to the small toilet hidden near the kitchen where we could make love standing up.

Two days later, when I reached the maximum stay at Wolvenstraat Hostel, I found a backpacker's inn with weekly rates. It was closer to Eislan's flat, and I surprised her there that afternoon with two tickets for a big concert. For a band she loved. *But when is the show?* she said.

I tapped the date printed on the tickets. "Next month," I said.

Eislan held me for a moment in her gaze, then she pulled me into the living room, leaving the door wide open and kissing me hard.

She had me; she must have known. She began speaking of Americans and other tourists with disdain, insisting I wasn't like them and kissing me in pubs and in front of outdoor cafes to prove it. Later that week, on the night she spoke of expanding her horizons, of invading the countryside, she must have been certain that I'd volunteer to join her, that I'd rush back to my room, strap on my pack and meet her at Centraal Station without asking where we were going or if we'd return in time for the concert.

We found a couchette all to ourselves and lay in the dark planning our getaway, first to Munich for fun, then to Switzerland when our money ran out. She knew of a hostel where we could find work. It would all work out, she said.

Early the next morning, when I woke to the sight of Eislan leaning over a wastebasket with a syringe stuck in her arm, I let her calm me down with a story about her lifelong battle with diabetes, and I chose to believe her.

Everything felt perfect those first hours in Munich: the intimate crowds in the pubs; the camaraderie of strangers singing together in beer gardens; the bike rides between and the freedom to go where we wanted, when we wanted. I realized I was now a month past my severance pay and into my savings, but I was conquering a foreign city on a rented bicycle with my Dutch lover. No matter how much I scoured the *L.A. Times* classifieds, I could never find that. And even if there were plenty of listings under "investment banking," none of them are honest. They don't tell you what it's really like to be a junior associate. It's long hours that keep you away from your girlfriend so much she thinks you take her for granted, thinks she has to cheat on you to get your attention. It's a cubicle in a smog-encircled skyscraper where you run numbers and determine risk, deny loans and kill the dreams of people you only meet on paper. And when things aren't going well for the company, you find out you're a faceless name too, just another number to be cut.

With Eislan, I could bury my recent past in a beer garden, smooth it over singing oompah-pah songs. With Eislan, I only

needed to look two weeks into the future, to when I'd be in the Swiss Alps scrubbing bathrooms. *Good, clean work,* she said.

As the day waned and the light left us, Eislan grew nervous atop her bicycle, completely losing confidence anytime asphalt gave way to decorative cobblestone. *It's not like home,* she said. *We don't have so many cars.* She felt out of control, as if she'd slip and be trampled by a stampede of Volkswagens and Audis. She'd swerve towards the curb every time a car rumbled by until finally a curb, not a car, got her. We didn't know her ankle and wrist had literally broken her fall until the next morning when our buzzes wore off. The German doctor took the little money Eislan had and as much of mine as he could find. She wouldn't let me max out the last of my credit cards to fill her prescription for pain medication. She'd take the little she could afford, she said, then assured me she could get by without any kind of crutch.

We stayed drunk for two days, until Eislan discovered alcohol makes a poor pain killer. Trips to the bathroom are too frequent, and throwing up anywhere but next to the bed is impossible.

At the follow-up appointment, the doctor told Eislan she looked fine and the casts wouldn't come off for six weeks. We lingered in the examination room, arguing over getting her prescription filled until I gave up, and we fell silent. We listened to the hum of the florescent lights overhead. I stared at a row of glass jars on the counter: tongue depressors, cotton swabs, and adhesive bandages. It took me a moment before I realized the bandages were labeled in English, "Band-Aid." I smiled and stole a handful, telling Eislan we should have something to show for all the time and money we'd lost. She laughed and let me help her to her feet.

After the wounded American on the train thanked me for the three Band-Aids, he walked immediately to the toilette, only stopping by his seat to grab a backpack and tell his two friends everything was going to be fine.

It was nearly nine o'clock when the train crossed into Germany, the late dusk behind us pushing west, purple descending on the trees as the sun surrendered to night. The three Americans started playing cards, trying to act natural as the German conductor came aboard at the first station. He was emotionless when asking for tickets, passports, papers, anything he needed to understand who you were and what you were about. He looked the Americans over and gave them no trouble. I know they thought they'd made it then. They slumped back in their seats, abandoning the card game in favor of talk, all the sights they'd see in Munich, all the beer they'd drink and the women they'd meet. They laughed and rambled on, interrupting each other, speaking as though nothing but good times and glory lay ahead.

On the outskirts of Cologne, the train stopped and German police stormed the cars. The Americans sat straight up, shocked at the rumble of boots as half a dozen officers ran down the aisle, two stationing themselves at the end, the rest pushing on. A captain followed them aboard, walking casually and politely asking for I.D.s and destinations. I'd seen this once before. Eislan warned me it could happen and taught me how to avoid detention. *Sit with a German newspaper folded up small,* she said. *That's the way the young German guys do it. They look bored, annoyed they have to look away from football scores to show I.D.* It works, too. The officers barely glance at those guys, almost as if they're apologizing for the inconvenience.

I'd left my passport out on the table in front of me, half buried amongst cassette tapes and my Walkman. When the captain settled his black leather boots at my feet, I looked him in the eye and addressed him with the little German I know. I'd done this once before, and I felt fine until I noticed they'd brought a dog aboard.

The funny thing about smuggling drugs into Germany is that the best place to hide them is somewhere on or near yourself—in a money belt or a backpack. The police usually snoop around the

empty seats and luggage bins; they only violate your personal space if you look nervous. But dogs can smell what the police cannot see, and when the captain responded to my *Guten abend* with a glance at my unzipped backpack, I'm certain it looked conspicuous. It might have been fine for everyone if I hadn't glanced at the bag myself, but as soon as I did he lost all interest in pleasantries or anything I had sitting out on the table. So I apologized for not knowing how to say it in German, then pointed to the three Americans and explained how I'd given one of them three bandages for a tiny cut. The captain understood completely. *Danka,* he said, then led the officer with the dog over to the three Americans.

They stared at his sidearm, his boots, his badge, everywhere but his eyes. They couldn't understand his command to hand over their backpacks and nearly jumped when he started grabbing them himself. The dog sniffed all three packs, deeply but without reaction, and the captain looked satisfied. He began holding up each pack individually and handing it back to the proper owner. As the wounded American reached for his, the dog caught scent of his hand and exploded into barking, volleys of sound reverberating through the car. The captain shouted orders and all at once, it died. He held his hands up, encouraging everyone to relax. To wait. The Americans cowered in their seats, and they must have known they were marked. A moment later, an officer emerged from the toilette with a baggy of hash, the Band-Aids that held it under the sink or behind the waste basket still attached and sagging over themselves. The wounded American looked to me for help, his eyes wide open and pleading as the officers stepped in screaming orders, dragging him and his friends from their seats and off the train.

The captain lingered a moment, looking back at me to nod his appreciation, then he left the train without the insult of inspecting my backpack or interrogating me further.

For the record, I am not a drug dealer. Before I met Eislan, I wouldn't smuggle store-bought candy into a movie theater. In fact, when I met the three Americans the day before yesterday, it was only the second time I'd smuggled heroin into Germany.

I did everything I could to help Eislan while we were in Munich. She could barely move without wincing in pain or having to stop altogether. I explained the situation to Georg, a young German who worked at the hostel. Money was tight, I said, and we couldn't leave after three days like you're supposed to because Eislan could hardly get from the bed to the door. He was sympathetic and arranged for me to clean the toilettes and sinks and showers in exchange for the room. He even snuck us some food when he could. As far as the three day rule went, he said if I could cover the front desk for an hour on the nights his girlfriend dropped by for conjugal visits, he could create new names for us every three days and make the register look legitimate. We stopped existing as the people we were, taking on new identities every three days—Sid and Nancy first, then Joe and Marilyn. Nobody really checked, but Georg insisted we be careful. The least likely person may turn us in, he said. He'd seen it happen before.

Still, my efforts could not change Eislan's plight: captive in a room barely larger than the bed itself, the only natural light filtering through a thick pane of milky glass. Even when she could hobble out to the courtyard, things weren't much better. Just a few rays of sunlight trickled down onto the gravel and the only vegetation was confined to a few potted plants. It looked gray and cold all the time, only serving to remind her there was no relief in sight.

Eislan broke down on the fifth night, the day after her pain medication ran out. *It is too much,* she said, and I again offered to refill the prescription myself. She shook her head and asked for her backpack, then pulled out the methadone and handed it to me. She explained her years of heroin abuse, the months she spent in rehab

last winter, and the state-supported program she'd been on ever since. *The doctor can tell what I was,* she said. *He will not give me anything strong enough and now* everything *aches, not just my ankle and wrist.*

Eislan swore just a few hits would get her right, and I didn't know what she was asking of me at first, not until she rambled on about her friend back in Amsterdam. Did I remember him? Ruud, from the Prins Saarein, the pub in the Jordaan. I could trust him, and he could get me more hits than she needed if I traded the concert tickets. *You can sell the rest,* she said, *I only need a little and you can get a lot more for heroin in Germany than you can in Holland.* I understood then what she wanted from me, but the magnitude of the whole thing was blurred by the way she asked. Could I see that this is not really the person she was? Did I understand that she'd already agonized over this? Couldn't I please just trust her?

We spent a day going over the plan: the best times to find Ruud, how to make the deal, pack the score, and get it on the train. I was on edge the entire trip, expecting at any moment to be recognized for what I was, and to be detained. But I was not. I returned to Munich near midnight, Hauptbahnhof Station so empty I could hear the echo of my own footsteps as I passed through a corridor into the cavernous main terminal. I emerged from the station into a warm night, feeling festive, as though I'd accomplished something significant and great.

Eislan wanted a fix right away and made me lead her into the bathroom. It takes two hands to shake a little powder from the baggie and onto a spoon, to mix it, and heat it with a lighter until it melts. It takes at least one steady hand to suck the junk into a syringe and inject it. Eislan had only one free hand, an unsteady one, so it all fell to me. We went into the showers, just in case there was any blood, and I tried to think of it as an experiment. A life lesson.

With the pain muted, Eislan leaned into me, smiling and pushing us from the bathroom to the courtyard. We kissed for the first time in days, real kisses, and Eislan fantasized of escaping Germany, of walking straight out Centraal Station, turning right and walking the ten minutes to the Jordaan. She'd find the building with the yellow trim and actually go inside this time, actually reunite with her parents. It made her laugh, she said, the way she'd abandoned her family and university studies a year ago thinking them all oppressive. She threw her arms up at the walls in the courtyard, saying nothing could be worse than this. She laughed again, and when we went to bed later that night, she let me make love to her.

The next day, Georg told me how to sell the hits I didn't leave with Eislan. You just put a pen behind your left ear and hang out on the trolley. People come up to you and ask, *Do you have a pen I could borrow?* They actually do it in German first, but if you answer in English they switch to that without a second thought. *How long do you need it for?* They give you a number: *Just one minute, two minutes,* whatever and you know how much they need. *Okay, but I paid fifty Euros for this pen, so I'll need it back.* Some people actually take the pen and pretend to write something. The conductors don't care. If they don't see it, it's not their concern. They keep their eyes forward and know they'll be safe because a good dealer would never let a junkie roll a conductor. As far as they're concerned, it's a victimless crime.

The day after that first fix, Eislan found her way into a heroin fog. She knew her supply was limited, so she spent the morning concentrating, quietly holding out as long as she could until the next fix. It gave me a chance to slip away with my camera and play tourist. I saw Munich the way a guidebook would tell me to: cathedrals, museums, the Glockenspiel, even the Hofbrauhaus. That night, I gave Eislan a second hit and escaped the next morning in her fog. I found the park where the 1972 Summer Olympics were held. The autobahn runs along one side while office towers and apartment buildings frame the rest of the grounds. It's calculated,

carved into the city yet somehow quiet. In the middle of the grounds sits a lake with rolling hills rising from its banks and platoons of trees opening up for footpaths. Gently rising above it all is the Olympic Stadium, its roof a series of sloping, white canvas tents, like a clump of water lilies draped over one another to hide any sharp angles or steel. If I kept my eyes from rising above the roof, concentrated on a bit of blue sky and the tops of trees, the towers standing so alert nearby ceased to exist. Munich hid behind leaves, then floated away with the clouds.

I stayed in the park most of the day, walking the footpaths and taking pictures of the stadium from all angles, trying to capture in film what I could imagine with my eyes. I napped beneath a tree and woke to kids running loose near me in the grass, their parents up on the path standing guard. As I headed for the trolleys, a young guy, too brown to be German, caught up with me and asked to borrow a pen. I was out of heroin by then and not wearing the pen.

"Do I look like a dealer?"

No, he said, *but you look like you might know one.* He told me people don't hang around the park that long unless they're up to something. *I have plenty of money,* he said. *We can get high together. My treat.* I said I don't get high, and he said that was best, not to mix business with pleasure. Then he pulled a wad of cash from his pocket, and I said I may know of someone. *Magnificent,* he said, forcing the money into my hand and asking for a day and time to meet.

When I took the money, I thought I'd never see him again. I didn't want to deal, but the next day Eislan begged me to make another score. She promised to do only one hit every other day, to use the methadone in between days, and to get better fast so we could return to Amsterdam. Go back to being the people we were. Then she told me I was her savior.

It was on my second trip to Amsterdam that I crossed paths with the three Americans. I'd packed the heroin into cassette tape cases, the ones I left on the table with my Walkman, out in the open, pushed up against the window and away from the dog.

Outside the train, I could hear the Americans pleading with their captors. It wasn't their hash, they said. *We're just college students; we're not that kind of people.* A moment later, their pleas were interrupted by the tap of boots growing louder and more frequent, like an approaching rainstorm. I peered out the window as more police arrived. They cleared a path to a tunnel away from the other passengers and began pulling the three Americans toward it. *Okay,* one of the Americans said, *it's ours. But we have money. How much do you want?* I understood what he was doing, I'd have done the same, but it was too late. Things had gone too far.

As the train jerked to movement and began rolling from the station, I watched the three Americans disappear into the tunnel. It was only hash. I can't imagine they got into too much trouble, but I don't know for sure. I only know it just as easily could have been me.

My return to Munich was even later this time, two in the morning, Hauptbahnhof Station even quieter. On my walk back to the hostel, I passed a few clubs still pulsing with music, people draped over each other, still celebrating the night even though morning had crept up on them.

Georg was asleep behind the desk when I got in. I woke him to get my new name and tell him it was the last we'd need. I paid him up-front, and I apologized for quitting my toilette duties so abruptly. He didn't mind; he'd already gotten someone else while I was gone. *You can always get someone to do your dirty work,* he said.

I crept into the room, slid under the covers with Eislan and placed a hand on her shoulder. It felt smaller than I remembered.

She woke and reached across me to click on the lamp, her eyes shadowy and sunken in the dim light. I told her news of the score, and though she smiled only briefly, the lines of her dimples did not seem to go away. Then she insisted I help her hobble into the bathroom for a fix.

It was the last I ever gave her. Later that morning, I paid Georg to do it for me the rest of the time. I showed him where I hid the score, in the cassette cases, then took half of it with me to give to the guy I'd met in the park.

After we made the transaction on a trolley, Salvador insisted we go for a beer. He was a Spaniard, the son of someone important in Bilbao. He shook his head before I could respond, telling me Bilbao was an industrial city and that's why I did not know it. *You don't want to know it,* he said. He spoke of attending university in Pamplona and again shook his head before I could speak. *It is not like you think,* he said. *Only for ten days, when the bulls run, is Pamplona exciting. The rest of the time, no. It is surrounded by nothing. Full of nothing. Campesinos,* he said, flicking his hand as though he were dismissing the entire bar. *Every summer, I escape as soon as I can.*

Salvador admitted he did not do heroin all that much; he just liked to have it with him in the clubs to flash around. After a couple steins, we decided to make a day of it. We found our way back to the Olympic Park so I could show Salvador the way I saw it. I sat him under a tree, directing his focus on the stadium until the giant water lilies appeared and he understood.

Magnificent, he said. *You must let me repay you.*

He pulled me aboard a commuter train out of the city and into the Bavarian woods. Salvador said everyone should visit a concentration camp the way he intended us to: high. *We can alter ourselves,* he said, *and play the part of victim.* I said I'd give it a shot, but without altering myself.

As a child, when I learned about places like Dachau, I never imagined them set near quiet villages or surrounded by forests dense with pine—every one of them a perfect Christmas tree. Salvador led me past everything to a corner of the camp opposite the road and front gate, right on the edge of the forest. He thought it made the most sense to see the showers first, to work our way back to the guard tower, the barracks and the museum. We paused outside the building, a modest rectangle made of stone. Salvador told me to imagine the long train ride in the crowded cars, the German soldiers screaming at me, pulling me off the train and looking me over, then the simple promise of a shower—the thought of clean walls and smooth floors giving me hope.

I can see it, he said, *can you?*

Salvador began sobbing as we stepped inside. The walls were plain, soft with paint and stripped bare of the piping, not nearly as menacing as I would have imagined. His sobs grew stronger, and I put my arm over his shoulder to console him. He quieted, though his entire body convulsed to the point other visitors were noticing, some beginning to sob themselves. I rushed him outside and over by the fence where he could cry it out. It was quiet in that spot, the trees on the other side of the wire and wooden posts not even rustling with a breeze, as if the whole forest was holding its breath until we moved on.

I asked if we should head back to Munich. Salvador raised his hand, stopping me in mid-sentence, and told me when people stumble during Los San Fermines, the worst thing they can do is try to hide from the bulls. *Those are the people who get trapped in a doorway and gored,* he said. *You have to keep running.*

The museum at the front of the camp bustled like an artist's showing. Cubicle walls, with photographs hung every few inches, zigzagged through the center of a long hall. We joined the line of people navigating the maze one moment at a time. These are the

photographs you see in high school history books and commemorative issues of *Life* magazine: emaciated prisoners wearing striped pants and jackets, staring at you with old eyes. Salvador kept hold of his emotions, looking outside on occasion to keep himself grounded.

The middle of the exhibit featured photographs that never made the cut for *Life* or the *Associated Press:* boring shots of the compound or prisoners dead and tangled in barbed wire, suicide under the guise of an escape attempt. Salvador began commenting on every photo, speaking fast and forgetting I did not know Spanish. At the end of one aisle was a photo of five men standing at roll call. Four of them looked past me, over the cubicles and out the windows, beyond the reconstructed barrack and off into the forest. The fifth man stared at me, a slight, almost imperceptible grin upon his face. I may not have noticed, if his colleagues hadn't been so void of expression, making his face seem lively, almost animated. Along with the four others, he had been picked out for the camp's g-force experiment because he looked fit and strong; the experiment would not kill him right away. It would kill him though, a series of photos down the next aisle confirmed that. I followed along as they strapped him in a seat attached to a large gyro. The photos grew increasingly blurry as his eyes squeezed tighter, his cheeks fluttered, and his lips curled back, revealing clenched teeth. Not until the final photo did clarity return. His head rested to one side, blood trickling from his ears, nose and mouth. Here it was half a century later, and even in black and white, even dead, he looked young and healthy.

As Salvador disappeared around the next corner, I stopped to look outside, to calm myself the way he had been doing. I could see beyond all the gravel rectangles set in rows like gardens, back to a time when barracks, not weeds, rose from the ground. I recognized the entire place—the hard-pack dirt road, the gate, the guard towers, the bend in the fence out by the showers—it was the background in all those photographs, all just outside.

Salvador and I rode back to Munich in silence and departed without making plans for the evening. It was ten minutes to five when I arrived at the hostel, ten minutes before it would reopen. I crept around back, the way Georg had shown me, expecting to surprise Eislan in the room. Instead I found my pack on the bed, cassette tape cases spilling out and scattered about the unmade blankets. I walked to the toilette, hearing the echo of voices and laughter before I got to the door. She was in there with Georg, probably in the shower stabbing for a fresh vein or experimenting with different doses. I don't know for sure; I never looked. I went back to the room and gathered my pack—clothes, towel, money—everything except the cassettes. I left them where they lay, even the ones that had nothing but music in them, and headed for Hauptbahnhof, for the first train out of Germany.

In Stuttgart, after I had time to think about where I wanted to be, I changed to the train I'm on now. I'm going to Pamplona, then out to the countryside beyond so I can see what it's like the other fifty-one weeks of the year, when the bulls are left alone in the fields to graze, and play, and ponder the best place to take a nap—long before they're herded into a pen, transported into the city, and sent running down cobblestone streets to see who gets hurt first.

topos

topos: place or landscape on which to stand (she stands catching her breath). an expanse of marsh and low grass. where she stands. cypress and water oak compass the field. darker green standing at the edges of another. black and white cattle graze amid herons

where she stands (topos) on the edge of a field. releasing her breath (sound), garment of woven air. she speaks or does not. the ordering of these events fails to abide by ordinary rules. water a dimension like any other, this (green abundance) luminous body

ankle deep in water (marsh), a field compassing a woman. compass a means of directing movement. what she has come for (wild phloxes, star grass, orchids). waits on the other side. she (passage of a body or gesture). now there are only herons

a bayou threads its way across the north edge of marsh. mosquitoes dulled by heat. in the interval between silence and speech, the oak and cypress forest waits. what she has come for moves toward her (speech) conjunction of shaped air and intention

she enters the space she makes. this is not quite the case. or is. (verity, a conflation of verdure and verisimilitude). she stands at the edge of the bayou. order fails to maintain itself, collapses inward. water oaks stand farther afield, herons stepping out of their shadows

what she lacks (topos). permission, familiarity, place. she utters a catalogue of names: muskrat bluejay bald cypress sedge, moving parallel to the field. she enters the green shadow of the trees, star grass & wild asters whisper against her legs. where she stands

Arabic for Travelers

The lessons go poorly, and at a certain point my teacher says,
learning an exotic language will not make your life palatable.
She does not say whether I've lost her, yet there's symmetry
I cannot will myself to understand and will not.

The present splinters.

Insert here account of the unaccountable.
Insert a measured and tenable repose.
Makes a difference how many times one
(meaning this one, me) picks up the pieces.

So, okay. There are root nouns. And root vegetables.
Casabas and houri, *with eyes like gazelles*—

She senses I mean to swallow these odd letters,
each one an alien marzipan.

What happened to the royal taster?
I want to visit my losses, she teaches me *hegira*—departure—
which I learn to say while holding my heart
between thumb and forefinger, like throwing
a pebble, she says, into a still pond
without making light bend. Very holy, she says.

We agree on the basics—
olives, sun, that bowl of toasted hummus.

Green Nile With Ibis

We pray what we can. A fish or conch, a turtle,
mangoes from a tree on a small but florid piece of land.
How to find the apricot-colored shells, an ibis feather?

There was a walled hedge of crimson ixora that hid
from public view a double row of long ramadas
canopied with black, woven cloth.

In the coolness of wet stones, a half-light filtered down
upon line after line of seedlings, their rich scoops
of earth girdled in plastic sleeves.

The air was moist and thickly powdered with fragrant pollens.
In this place, I breathed in as deeply as I could,
so that I could have it inside me, all of it.

This is what the seer sees—a melting translucence,
a crystal of salt, a splash of light, a wave,
and then another, and then another, and then

well overhead, quarter moon away, a bird, so black
against the pink sky, soaring without worry
from one century to the next.

Lemon and Sweet Broom

The air is smoke and metal, sweat and satyrs,
my own voice cutting through the rotting air,
the air textured like cotton batting suspended
by the wind—I shake it out, smooth.

There are field guides with embossed leathers,
novels eroded, and slipped between pages,
newspaper clippings fragile as mummies.

As always, I look for one relic that will say everything,
just as one believes in a language, just as one believes in a face,
or in oranges, or figs.

I have been forgotten like a dead man
who is not considered, like a pot
that is broken. My strength has dried
like the baked earth and dogs surround me.

There are places that claim you and places
that warn you away. Burrows and dust, hot
stones washed down with salt water. Lemon
and sweet broom, purified, unlocked.

A Flowing Spring in the Desert

There are the usual confessions:
I have no documentation left.
I have no proof of good upbringing.
I cannot find my permanent record.

I'm the one who ate the figs
while nomads soaked their exotic bodies
in the milk you are drinking now.
I thought you'd want to know.

If you're not careful, you'll drift
into dunes formed of Arabic and dust—
develop a thirst for neutral territory
and stone pictographs.

Better burn at the stake,
a foreigner, than learn to steal
the remoteness of miles,
the remoteness of road—

It's happening again in the sands
across which we wander in our caravan,
across which we steal the blue horizon
where the roads pretend to vanish, and do.

DANIEL TOBIN

Mappa Mundi

Oceans, continents—the world as it is
jumbled, as if the topographer's eye
had glimpsed Pangea, earth-puzzle, glut
of shifting plates before the known, the named.

♣

Where is this penned ship heading, to what port,
its sail billowing in a parchment wind?
Wherever, it will travel beyond islands
of words, legends in a dying language.

♣

Outland. Tuhubuhu. Ultima Thule.
Natives with their faces in their chests.
On the horizon the sea-worm breaches.
Blank eyes. Corkscrew tail. Offing of the west.

♣

Good-bye spyglass, compass, astrolab,
sun rising in jets and setting in steam.
Alice charts her laser through the wormhole
but the life of the leaf eludes the leaf print.

RITA BANERJI

Pink Turban

One evening in 1972, sitting in her courtyard, stirring a large cauldron of boiling lentils, Guddi, with her practiced eye, studied the sun outside. The sun that maneuvered the affairs of the Siwalik Valley then, hasn't changed much since; but nor has much else.

The sun Guddi was regarding looked very red and pregnant, as if anytime it might plummet like a dead bird into the dark belly of the hills.

"It is almost time," she announced loudly. "The procession will be here soon. We must hurry, Goonga, else we'll miss them. The dough still needs to be made. The lentils?" She plucked a plump yellow grain from the cauldron and squeezed it between her thumb and forefinger. "O dear Rabba! The lentils are still raw."

"Raw! Raw! Raw!" Goonga the parrot screamed insanely, hanging in an iron cage in another corner of the neatly organized courtyard.

Still wincing from the burn of the lentils, but without altering the frantic pace of her hands, Guddi admonished the bird, "Shut up, Goonga. At least sometimes you can use your brains."

Guddi usually reveled in the parrot's incessant chatter. During the day, the only other sounds that trod their isolated, hillside house were those of her own—cooking, cleaning and washing. Sometimes she would pause to look out into the valley, when the noon sun had bleached the sky a blinding white, and not a soul would be in sight. Not even a leaf would move then. And the hills would echo a deafening silence that made Guddi's heart sink. By the time her father and brothers returned from the fields, it was usually dark. And none of them was much of a conversationalist.

"The potatoes are good," her father would comment.

"Hmm," her brothers would agree.

"Pass the hookah," her father would say, after dinner, and the three men would sit in the courtyard and smoke the pipe without exchanging a word. Guddi would sit nearby, stitching by the light of an oil lamp and listen listlessly to the gurgling of the hookah and the occasional beep-beep of crickets outside.

So it was little wonder that she eagerly looked forward to that hour before sundown, when people from villages far beyond the valley would pass by their house, on their way home. They drifted through her space like the aroma of bread baking, whetting her appetite and kindling her imagination for a larger and more stimulating world than the one she knew. She called it "the procession," like it was some florid carnival she could vicariously participate in from her seat at her window.

Even the earth that slumbered all day seemed to then leap up in playful red clouds of dust to greet the parade. Birds that hid in the oak foliage from the irate, yellow sun would suddenly bombard the cooling skies with riotous songs. Cattle would bellow and jostle, brass bells tinkling around their necks. The herdsman, bringing up the rear, would admonish them and whip their rumps with thin, long reeds.

"Move! Forward! Forward! Where are you going—you!"

These strangers were Guddi's visitors, all of whom, unknown to them of course, also held conversations with her every evening.

There was Old Grouch, a shrunken, hunched old man with his shoulder bones sticking out of his back like two big pyramids. He would generally be abusing his old oxen.

"You bastard! You motherfucker! You do nothing, but eat."

"What soured you today, uncle?" Guddi would softly enquire without being heard.

"Ah! The potatoes grew eyes before I got to the market—so they didn't sell," she'd reply for the old man, mimicking his hoarse and feeble voice.

"Well, at that pace, I am surprised they didn't grow legs and run away," she'd giggle.

"O, you are too young and naive to understand anything. If I don't take home some money tonight, that bison of a wife of mine waiting with a rolling pin will flatten me out like a thin roti."

"Things will work out, you'll see," she'd assure him. Guddi felt immense sympathy for Old Grouch. His frayed vest, the broken blade of his rusted plough and his obvious decrepitude caused her much uneasiness. But then Sir Happy, whose visit generally immediately followed Old Grouch's, was quite a different story. He was a vivacious boy of about fourteen, with a troop of harried, bleating goats. With his hair disheveled and his grimy shirt unbuttoned all the way, he generally skipped and sang with more energy than that time of the day warranted.

"I have silver bells for my love's fair feet, that will sing like my heart when she walks..."

"Will they be singing when your family discovers you have lost that black kid with four white socks?" Guddi would tease, in her imaginary conversation with him. "So what have you done—left the foxes up the hill a nice, big wedding feast? I am not complaining—because they won't bother my chicken tonight, but your father will make hash of you."

Guddi felt indulgently affectionate towards Sir Happy, because he reminded her of her brother Gurdyal when he was that age and had been her constant playmate. Now at twenty-one, Gurdyal, like most men of their village, preferred the companionship of other men with whom he'd discuss somber issues like the government's new high-yielding corn seeds.

But the visitor who intrigued her most was Pink Turban. He was a brawny young man who did not arrive till just after sundown.

In the purple haze of dusk he was a silhouette who wore a pink turban and drove a tonga pulled by a white horse.

"Good boy, Toofan! Shabash!" he'd urge his horse, clucking his tongue and tugging at the reins. The tonga would sweep past Guddi's house as though it were being sucked into a tornado.

"Tell me more about your town. You say the houses are not painted with mud and cow dung. What then?" she'd ask eagerly.

And though she had never actually seen his face or heard his voice, she visualized him looking animated, explaining in a bass voice, "O, they are every color imaginable—red and white and blue and yellow. Some are so tall they can kiss the skies. And the houses are like our fields; miles and miles of them with people everywhere. So many people you can't count them—laughing, talking, playing, their voices entering your house even when you shut all your doors and windows."

"It all sounds so pretty. How I envy you. I wish it were like that here too," Guddi would respond wistfully.

This is the world that Guddi imagined Pink Turban came from.

She herself had never traveled further than to a village in the adjoining valley. It had taken them six hours in the creaky bullock cart, and she had been immensely disappointed when they had arrived. The village was almost exactly like the one in their own valley—forty or fifty mud and granite, crooked-walled houses with little windows and slanting, slated roofs huddling in an interminable sea of sallow wheat fields. The main street of the village, a narrow dust path along both sides of which the shabby hutments lined up haphazardly, was as short and bumpy as the one in their own village. Nor did it offer any fantastic visions for them to wonder at or for Guddi to carry home like a treasure to delight in later. Even the people looked and lived and dressed the same, their collared tunics and pajamas, drab and dirty, dissolving into the weary gray-brown landscape.

But that evening in 1972, when the dough had not been made and the lentils wouldn't cook, Pink Turban did not arrive. Guddi waited patiently by the window. The first stars emerged like dim fireflies announcing nightfall, and then she saw the figures of her father and brothers returning. She hurried into the courtyard to finish preparing dinner.

An hour later, just as she was about to serve dinner, a man's deep voice called out from outside the front door.

"Is anyone home?"

The voice being unfamiliar, Guddi drew her veil over her head before cautiously lifting the straw mat over the entrance. There stood Pink Turban, his horse and tonga in the background.

Flustered and shocked, Guddi immediately turned her back to him and pulled her veil even lower over her face.

"What can we do for you?" she nervously asked.

"Pardon me, I thought an old man lived here."

"That's my father." Guddi's heart was banging at her chest.

"My tonga has a slight problem. It will be easier to fix in the morning. My horse and I need a place for the night—we'd be very obliged."

"Please wait a bit. I will send my brothers."

Guddi's brothers immediately did what any decent men in their ancestral village in Punjab would do—they invited the stranger to spend the night and have dinner with them. From her discreet position behind a doorway, Guddi was surprised to observe that like them, he too was a Sikh. There weren't that many of them in their valley.

"What do they call you?" Gurdyal inquired when they sat down to eat in the courtyard, and Guddi had begun to ladle out food onto their plates.

"Shamsher Singh. And I am from the village of Ramgora, nine kilometers from here."

"Who waits for you at home?"

"Now, nobody. I was orphaned during the 1947 partition. My grandfather raised me. He died last year."

His reply evoked sympathetic sounds from Guddi.

Lifting his bowl of lentils to his face, Shamsher Singh took a deep whiff of its spicy, smoky aroma and said, "This dal is very tasty. I am eating a home-cooked meal after a long time." Though he was addressing her brothers, Guddi knew the remark was meant for her and felt pleased.

She herself longed to ask him a hundred and one questions nibbling at her mind, like Why do you always wear a pink turban? What is the furthest you have ever been on your tonga? and What is the strangest thing you have seen? But she held back. She could just imagine her brothers reproaching her later, You are seventeen now! You're no longer a child. What will people say? Shamelessly barging into men's conversations that way with all sorts of strange questions. And that too in the presence of an unfamiliar man! So she contented herself listening to Shamsher Singh's voice as she sat next to her father and ate, occasionally rising to refill the other's plates.

"What brings you so far?" Guddi's older brother asked Shamsher Singh.

"I pass this way every evening on my way home. I work as a tongawala at the railway station at Sonarh. I am one of only two tongawalas ferrying passengers there, so business is good. I prefer it to working the fields. My grandfather had some land, which I sold now that he is dead and there is no one to manage it. Though he used to say: Remember son, people always have to eat."

"That's what our father always tells us," Gurdyal said. "What other news do you bring from the town of Sonarh?"

Guddi leaned in and listened with increasing relish.

"There is a war going on between India and Pakistan. I have been transporting soldiers to the station. They are leaving in trainloads. Everyone wants to die for the country. One soldier said to me, Why don't you fight? You look like a soldier. I said, I am, I fight for a living everyday. I don't understand this. I lost my whole family once to this Hindu-Muslim nonsense. And now they want me to die too? Perhaps it would be easier if there were no religion. Then perhaps we'd have some peace."

"I wouldn't foster such hopes in my heart," Guddi's father—who, other than a courteous greeting, hadn't spoken till then—interjected with a certain bitterness in his voice. It caused an uncomfortable lull in the conversation.

Then Gurdyal spoke up, explaining, "Father believes it's the other way—that people need to fight. So they must have differences to fight over. If it isn't religion, they will go digging till they find something else that's different."

Shamsher Singh looked flabbergasted. He turned to directly address Guddi's father, "Forgive my impudence—you are older and of course know better. But it sounds like you think people actually go looking to fight! Who is so crazy as to want to get killed?"

Guddi's father gave a wistful smile and did not respond immediately. Then with his forefinger he drew a long line on the ground, and tracing and retracing it many times, he spoke slowly, weighing each word, "What can I say, son? This blood contains us."

It was hardly like her father to comment on things, unless he felt compelled to do so. And it made Guddi immediately look into her father's face and recognize with tenderness the pain of his past. When he had married her mother, the daughter of a prostitute in their ancestral village, the headman had vowed to hang the couple in public for blackening their clan name. The couple had fled the plains of Punjab, and gone north, towards the mountains. After many hardships they had settled down in an unfamiliar place. They built their house uphill, about a kilometer outside the main village, maintained their own language and customs, and hardly ever socialized with the nearby villagers. Twenty-five years had passed, but

the locals still referred to them as *Pardesi*—the outsiders, the foreigners.

After dinner, Guddi's father retired to his room and her brothers went out to check on the livestock. Guddi started to clean the dirty dishes in one corner of the large courtyard, while Shamsher Singh settled down with the hookah, on a charpoy nearby.

From the corner of her eye, Guddi tried to get a better look at his face. In the light of the oil lantern, his eyes seemed dark and soft, like liquid brown molasses. He had a broad forehead, and a prominent brow-ridge and seemed lost in thought.

Is he thinking of someone far away? Guddi wondered.

Then, without warning, he turned his face and looked squarely into hers. Flustered, Guddi turned her full concentration on the dishes.

Her hands moved briskly as she sat on her haunches and smeared the dishes, one by one, with wet ash and scrubbed them with a piece of bundled husk. Her hair, plaited down to her hips with red and gold tinsel, the end loose and smoothly brushed like a horse's tail, trailed the ground in rhythm with the movement of her body.

She was much too embarrassed to look in his direction again, even though she itched to know whether he was still looking at her. She felt glad to be wearing the pea-green salwar-kameez, embroidered with tiny red whorls that her brothers had gifted her with for the harvest festival of Baisakhi. She had liked the way the dress enlivened her complexion. Standing on her bed, she had inspected herself in it, bit by bit, in the 8 x 8 inch mirror on her bedroom wall. Yet she felt vulnerable about her proximity in flesh to a man who till only the day before had just been a fantasy for her. "Does he notice how close set my eyes are, or how my nose hangs over my lips like a beak?" she thought anxiously. She moved her hands more vigorously making the dozen red and green glass bangles on her arms tinkle, their mirthful music filling that awkward space of mute uncertainty between two strangers.

After some time, sensing no movement from Shamsher Singh's corner, Guddi ventured to look towards him again. He was asleep. It was her opportunity to creep up to the bed and steal a good, long look at his face. There was a faint, musky smell of horse and hay about him. His resting face looked exhausted yet content, like a child's who had tired himself playing out in the sun all day. Like most Sikh men, including her father and brothers, he kept his hair long. He had undone his turban, and the waist-length, brown hair cascaded over the edge of the bed. There seemed to be a smile playing around his lips, between his moustache and his neatly netted beard—like he was smiling at her. She smiled back.

The following morning, Guddi watched from the window as Shamsher Singh hitched his horse to the tonga. His eyes kept wandering to the front door like he was expecting to see something. Then he thanked her father and brothers and drove away without looking back. Guddi watched till the distance swallowed him.

Guddi found that day to be even slower and emptier than usual, and she waited for the sun to set. Finally dusk came with its procession of men and animals.

"Do you think he'll stop here again, Goonga?" she asked the parrot. "He knows us now. It would be courteous to drop in and say hello."

"Hot—hot—bread!" came Goonga's response.

Pink Turban did not arrive that evening. Her father and brothers returned and Guddi began to prepare for dinner. Occasionally she would stop and strain her ears for some sound at the front door.

Her father, who hardly ever commented on anything, said, "What's wrong, Guddi? Are you keeping well?"

"Yes, father. Everything is as it should be. Have some more red beans—don't you like it?" She felt embarrassed that her frustration was that transparent.

That entire summer Guddi saw no sign of Shamsher Singh. She had a sinking feeling that she might never see him again.

Then one morning, three months after Shamsher Singh's tonga had broken down, she was preparing cow-dung patties for her stove and sticking them on the back wall of the house to dry, when a strange man appeared in the distance and approached her purposefully. Frightened, she grabbed the scythe and confronted him.

"Don't you dare come near me. I will kill you! My brothers are within calling distance—they will hang you from that tree..."

"Please forgive me if I have scared you," the man said evenly with his hands folded. "I just wanted to visit your family. I had knocked on the front door but no one answered."

Upon a closer look at his face, Guddi recognized him as Shamsher Singh.

She puzzled about why she hadn't recognized him at first glance. And, as she observed his face in full daylight for the first time, she wondered why she had not noticed how strikingly beautiful he was—radiant cheeks, chiseled bones, and a jaw line as sharp and clean as a knife. She thought perhaps that night, when he lay sleeping in the courtyard, the light of the oil lamp had been too faint to reveal all this. Only after a moment it struck her that his long brown hair was gone. It was now as short and poky as a harvested wheat field. And then she knew exactly why he had seemed so unfamiliar to her. He no longer wore his pink turban.

"Forgive me, I didn't recognize you," she told him, embarrassed.

"Yes," said Shamsher Singh running his hand over his head sheepishly.

"My father and brothers are in the fields," she said, unsure about the propriety of inviting him into the house, as she was home alone.

"I am very thirsty," said Shamsher Singh. "Would it be possible to get something to drink?"

"I am sorry," said Guddi blushing, "You must think me very inhospitable for not asking, hot as it is. Please come in and refresh yourself."

Shamsher Singh resumed his former seat on the charpoy while Guddi prepared some lassi for him.

"You stay here alone, all day?"

"It's fine. Since mother died, I have learned to get used to it. Though I miss her very much sometimes. Now Goonga is my only companion," Guddi said, pointing to the bird.

"Why is he called Goonga?"

Goonga in defiance of his name was demonstrating a full set of vocal chords: "The rice is raw—hot hot bread—father eat more—the sun is setting."

"Because when he was little, he refused to repeat the words I was teaching him. So we thought he was deaf and mute," Guddi explained with a giggle.

She handed Shamsher Singh a tall, brass glass of the frothy, white drink. She longed to ask him where he had disappeared to.

"Where is your glass?" he asked her.

"I am not hungry."

"Neither am I. Go on fetch an empty glass," he insisted, and then poured some of his out for her.

Guddi sat down on the floor near the bed, and cradled the glass in her palm, keeping her eyes fixed on the drink. How surreal this is, she mused happily, sitting here like this, talking with a man so comfortably, like friends do. And that too a man I hardly know! Perhaps this is how men and women talk in the city.

Shamsher Singh took several big gulps from his glass and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "Wonderful!" he said, "This is the best lassi I have ever had. If a shop in our city sold this kind of lassi, the people would flock to it like flies." After a moment of silence he asked, "Do you ever wish to go to the city?"

The question was a probing one inviting Guddi to share her personal thoughts with him. Feeling too inhibited to respond, she kept silent.

Shamsher Singh grinned and said, "Don't worry, the earth won't open up to swallow you. You can tell me."

Guddi smiled and nodded a shy yes to his question.

"That's it? The way you were stalling, I was terrified that you would say something so profound, like your father, that I wouldn't understand a word of it," he teased.

Feeling encouraged, Guddi then ventured to ask, "So do you live in the city now?"

"Yes, I moved there recently, about a month ago. I had been secretly planning to for a very, very long time—since I was a boy," he replied with a mischievous smile.

"So is it very different from here?"

"O, yes. Very. Big houses—many of them—so many you can't see where it ends. Big roads. And so many people you can't count them."

"And did you take Toofan with you?"

Shamsher Singh laughed. "No, it's not a place for a horse. I had to sell him and the tonga. I am now learning to drive a taxi. In the meantime, I do odd jobs."

"What is a taxi?"

Shamsher Singh looked down at her from the bed, with an indulgent smile. "It is like a box that moves. Faster than a tonga. But no horse pulls it."

"So how does it move?" Guddi's curiosity was taking over her inhibitions. She had unwittingly edged closer to the bed where Shamsher Singh was sitting, her veil had slipped off her head, and she gaped at his face with the anticipation of a child awaiting the finale to a riveting fairy tale.

"Magic!" Shamsher Singh replied with a flourish of his arms.

Guddi stared at him in disbelief, and he laughed aloud. She laughed with him and then, feeling self-conscious, quickly stifled her laughter with her palms.

Shamsher Singh asked for directions to the field so he could meet her father before he left. After a few yards down the road, he turned and looked. Guddi was still standing at the door.

When her father and brothers returned from the fields that night, Guddi sensed an odd suspense in the air. Her father washed in a pail of water in the courtyard and went and stood next to her as she cooked.

"What's for dinner, my child?"

"Potatoes and spinach," she replied.

"Good! Good!" he said distractedly and sat down on the charpoy.

Guddi wondered what it was that was bothering him. It was hardly like her father to inquire about the food, much less sit by and watch her cook.

After dinner, he didn't retire to his room as usual, but continued sitting on the bed till Guddi was done with washing the dishes and sweeping the courtyard. He hadn't spoken yet, and Guddi knew it was futile asking, for he would only say, O, everything is fine my child. It's God's will.

"I am going to sleep now, father. Is there anything you want?" Guddi tried.

"No. No. I mean, yes—come sit next to me, here."

Guddi complied. It seemed like he wanted to tell her something. She wondered what it could be—had something happen to the corn crop? Father had been very upset about Gurdyal purchasing those government seeds. But then he wasn't likely to discuss that with her. Then she remembered Shamsher Singh's visit that morning, and worried that perhaps her father was upset that she had allowed Shamsher Singh into the house while she was there alone.

As though on cue, her father cleared his throat and said "What do you think of Shamsher Singh, child?"

Guddi gave a nervous start and glanced guiltily towards her father. However, he didn't appear to be angry or upset; rather he seemed to be deeply contemplating something. It was an unusual question, and seemed to have no context to anything. And then another thought struck her and she panicked. What if her father had received some more information about Shamsher Singh from some other farmers—that Shamsher Singh wasn't really who he had said he was. Perhaps he was married with children. And as much as father had seemed to initially like Shamsher Singh he was conflicted about what to believe now.

"Today he asked me for your hand in marriage," her father said.

"Father!" Guddi exclaimed. His announcement came as a shock to her senses, first confusing her, and then embarrassing her such—as its implication sank in—that she hid her face in her palms.

Her father stroked her hair and said, "It's alright. Now that your mother is no more, it falls on me to talk to you about all this."

Guddi knew that her father had been worrying about her marriage for two years now. There weren't many Sikh families in the Valley seeking brides for their sons. But then she also knew how particular her parents had been about preserving their Sikh customs. Once, when at twelve years, Guddi while combing her hair, had folded it in, just to see what it would look like bobbed, her mother had yanked it down and admonished her severely.

"You are a Sikh! We can never cut our hair. You must not even think of bringing a scissors near your head!"

Guddi wondered what her father had thought of Shamsher Singh's new hair-do.

"Perhaps his ways are different," her father was observing, and then after a deliberative pause he added, "But the world is changing. And he is a good man. I can see that. Moti-lal who takes our sugarcane into town, knew his grandfather. Says Shamsher Singh is a hard-working man. What do you think, Guddi? Would you marry him?"

Guddi remained silent trying to process the information. It was all so sudden and unexpected. It was more than she could have wished for or even imagined in her fictitious theater. As the idea of marrying Shamsher Singh sank in, Guddi felt a sudden exhilaration, like she was a lark soaring into the skies. Yet, as she turned to look at her aged father, she felt conflicted. "But who will take care of the house, father?"

Her father caressed her head and said, "You silly girl. That is not your problem anymore. We will manage fine—you just give me your answer now."

"Now?"

"Yes, now. Tonight."

"What's the hurry, father?" she asked nervously.

"The hurry is that he will be here tomorrow to pick you up. I am a poor man and I don't have much to give you, and he doesn't want anything. You will marry in court in the big city."

Shamsher Singh's not wanting any dowry gave Guddi a tremendous sense of relief.

"Ah, you smile. Good! That's good."

She knew how miserable her father had been about not being able to provide the monstrous amounts demanded from the marriage prospects he had approached for her. She had worried that he would feel compelled to take on a large loan from the wealthy, unscrupulous ration shop owner in the market downhill, and eventually end up losing his land and home trying to repay the loan.

"But do I have to leave so soon?" Guddi was now crying.

"It may be best. He doesn't know when he'll be back again. Though he said he will bring you back to visit here." Then kissing her on her forehead, "My blessings are with you. Now go organize your things."

As he got up to leave, he paused and said, "And one more thing. I decided not to tell him our family's story. I know he is a modern

man, but then I thought—why? Why should I let the past shadow your new life. It is a big city—many people there—and Shamsher Singh is right. We are what we make of ourselves."

The following morning Shamsher Singh arrived with a friend's tonga. All of Guddi's life was packed into a little wooden box and strapped to the back seat. As the tonga pulled away, Guddi turned to look at her father and brother standing in front of the house.

"Here, wipe your eyes. Your tears will distort their faces, and that's how you'll remember them, looking like this, with crooked faces," Shamsher Singh joked, pulling a funny face and handing her a rag.

But the agony of leaving her family and the uncertainty of when she'd see them again erupted amidst hiccups into loud sobs that startled the horse.

The tonga moved fast, and the road curled around the hill on which her house stood. Guddi finally turned to face the front.

Then unexpectedly, a little ahead she saw Sir Happy and his goats. Her mood brightened. In the discomforting unknown of her new life, Sir Happy was a loved and familiar face. She smiled at him. He stared back with a blank expression, unsure why a stranger would look at him with such familiarity.

"Do you know him?" Shamsher Singh asked.

"Not that well." Guddi turned towards him to explain and then stopped abruptly. She noticed with a shock, his eyes. They were cold and green, a dull, opaque green like seasoned mango leaves, not brown, as she imagined them to be.

PATRICIA MURPHY

What Good Does a Drop Do

Burn line runs the length of the mountain spine.
I could comb your hair with the tree teeth of the ridge.

It is easy to be pious when your life is not on fire.

Red-tailed hawks circle the smolder-wind,
insidious in this, their own slow dying.

At our cabin I left a watering can months before the blazes,
not in any way for watering, but as a hint of leisure.
As if we have time to garden or know how.

Here ours is a life of lanterns,
wood stoves, chairs worn on the arms.

So what if the wind stopped the fire
an acre away from our own rustic wood?

Ashes coat nightstands as far away as Phoenix,
traveling those miles perhaps to warn:
watering can, birch tree, steady insistence of the flame.

MOIRA LINEHAN

On Notice

Gradually approaching along twilight's long grade,
Right edge of the pond steeped in a tea-colored haze:
Elder statesman, taking all the time he wants
Arriving. Ancient turtles, settled in the algae-
Thick muck. Red fox, already trotted through. Descending

Broom-like legs sweeping the evening air behind his back.
Long steady wing beats bringing him in, so that his cry—
Ungainly as his attempts to fly back to where-
Ever he comes from—sets my teeth on edge. That cry

Hoarse and harsh. More squawk than measure of any song.
(Even so, his solitary bent holds his wings back.)
Rabbinical that cry, from a country no longer
On the map. Perhaps it never was. But now serving
Notice: on my pond this arriving, still coming in.

JOHN KINSELLA

The Sword of Aesculapius

The twist of the bird-like
seed—spiral affixer,
host-searcher, travel-bugged
itinerant, peripatetic freeloader,
mechanism taking its chance,
latency enraptured: to soil-burrow,
self-bury through efficiency,
to awaken after the chance taken:
and so to work my sock
and beyond a temporal point,
sword-tip, angering skin
and what lies within,
much of me running out
along cold steel barb,
irritant undermining
chit-chat and flowerings
farther-afield.

Medusas

At dawn magenta,
at dusk close to blush-

colored, organza
and watery flesh,

deep-dreamt chimeras
more shy than hellish

or vile, more flora
than fauna, more plush

in massed armada
than full host of lush,

sea-torn umbrellas
or gossamer, slosh-

addled Ophelias
tossed mad in the wash.

Daedalus

No stirring song was
ever sung about

him. Poets left us
mean detail, forgot

each meticulous
feather's measured knot,

each bowed wing's cautious
bending, tidy strut's

fixed, fastidious
conduct; forgot route

vouching blind sea, fuss
with veer, drop; forgot

each prudent excess,
strict, passionate doubt.

Wife, Wife, Duck

I'm not sure what this could be called doubt
but that's too simple these clouds: grayer than white

(the white sky behind) like the sky at evening.
To wish the best for someone

I love might mean leaving
or leaving you alone. To wish for

you. Wish for you to…

It looks like rain means
it's not raining.

Thought, Anti-thoughts

I've nothing to hold you
suspect I've been dreaming—

a woman awake, her
husband breathing—she wants

to be anywhere.

You're a man
who happened to notice

I made you want
to play guitar

but you didn't. This is the winter
he started snoring

and science said free will
is a feeling we believe in.

Post hoc confabulation.

I get up to attend
the microorganisms.

SUSANNE KORT

Even So

But when we went to parties
I remember you always took my arm
& held it as we went in: I was yours, consummately,

if anyone was looking at me, at us, as we trespassed
into the high-spangled room, & we kissed
the way you were supposed to do, those Christmassy occasions,

as briskly as any two cousins, my heart
outstripping me: I was dumbfounded
at the strength with which I succumbed, the power

of my weakness, the afterbirth
I was left with when you'd gone: the tiny canzonets
I composed to your outlines on the doors

you disappeared through, then slammed:
the black watches I survived, on the roofs & from
my fulvous chimneys: I was

given over so irrevocably
that the rest of it, the aftermath,
the actual plighting of troth, the liminal years,

the tedious connubialness that ensued goes
almost unrecalled. I exonerate you.
I remember your arm.

PATRICIA SUÁREZ

Arugula

I could say it was a sunny day like any other but, actually, it was raining. It took me a while to realize it was raining because at first there was only a soft, pitiful, invisible drizzle, and it always takes a while to notice things like that. My father was reading the newspaper as carefully as a biblical exegete. I was rubbing my back. At nine o'clock I'd raised the iron blind on the shop and felt something pull (the lumbar vertebrae?), and maybe that's what made me think I wasn't the same person I used to be. A Frenchman once wrote that people change many times during their lives... I can't remember the name of the book now, nor the Frenchman who wrote it, but it seemed true. I had bought the book at the used bookstore around the corner where I go because it's close and cheap. Every time I leave our shop I tell my father I'm going to get a soda or some candy at the newsstand, but I wind up in the bookstore. I really like looking at books, and every time I go in I buy one because I'm compulsive and, after browsing so much, I feel I can't leave without buying something.

Around ten o'clock I started shining some fake silver buckles. Looking at the dim shine of the early, cowardly sun coming through the window, I scrubbed angrily, lost in thinking about how much it would cost us to have the pane replaced because it was cracked on one of the sides.

I was distracted for a second when I saw Meiners go out to sweep the sidewalk. Meiners Sr, I mean—the man who told my father his son would be very happy to marry me, even though he never comes near me because he's so shy. I'm not really flattered, especially since the other day I saw him going into the Grand Rex

Cinema with the blonde from the rug shop. My father is sick of Meiners, and I'm not sure if it's because he found out that Bühler gives Meiners a discount and not us, or because he found out Meiners Jr went to the movies with the blonde who's the rug dealer's niece (or, as rumor has it, his lover). To top it off, she's a natural blonde and her name is Helga.

It's not that I'm interested in Meiners Jr: I'm not interested in anyone. I've made love once...but I can't remember the details anymore. It's like a film that's been burned through from being watched over and over again. I say I'm not interested in anyone because it's like a vault in here. I'm invulnerable to love, being here. It's just that from in here (the shop) I can see everything and hear everything because people are always coming and going with gossip—and it's so tiresome to see and hear everything, I'm always telling myself, so that's why I get out, buy a book and read, to rest my mind. That's how (seeing everything) I saw Meiners Jr dash into the movie theater with the blonde the other day, and Meiners Sr go out to sweep the sidewalk.

Meiners Sr is a liar. He says he has no money and that's why he can't pay off the debt he owes us for the package of suede he ordered, but there are people from the neighborhood—again with the rumors (the neighborhood slogan is: "when the river rings, water it brings")—who say they saw him go into the Stock Exchange and buy stocks in a company in the Rohr's river basin. Meiners, the creep, is investing in stocks. I told my father he shouldn't say a word to him, but I don't know if he'll listen to me. Every time I tell him something, he just wags his head from side to side.

Was it eleven? Let's say it was eleven o'clock. I said to my father, "Papa, I'm going to the corner," and he looked at me and wagged his head and stood staring at me with an odd look, like a shepherd who's lost his flock. I think he realized I wasn't the same, too, and I don't mean that bit about my back hurting. I decided that, as soon as I came back, I was going to tell him. I was going to confess to him I'd made my mind up. I'd been thinking about it for so long that I had to tell him. It was probably obvious from the glow in my eyes, and my skin. I felt my skin was in bloom.

The rain snatched me away from my thoughts, and I hurried to get inside the bookstore. I had reserved a book called *Essays About Times of Sorrow*. It was a captivating title—why wouldn't I buy it? As soon as I entered the bookstore, the shop woman glared at me and then indicated the doormat with her eyes. She had strange blue eyes, like a Siamese cat's, and she was infinitely old. No one from the neighborhood ever talked about her (her love life, her origins, and even the simple and boring information like whether she owned the place or just rented it, was unknown), and I, certainly, believed she was a Chosen One, an *Anagami* who no longer needed to reincarnate because she was a bookseller and not a rug-seller, a shoe-seller, or a common merchant, like the rest of us. The doormat had once said *Welcome,* in English, but now it was just lame fuzz. Once I was all the way in, the shop woman clapped cheerfully, "The Maskiver girl!" I've always wondered what the Maskiver girl looks like. The Maskivers have a shop four blocks from here. One of these days I'm going to go in and ask to talk to Maskiver's daughter just to see if I look like her. I smiled. The shop woman gave me a sweet look, handed me the book I'd reserved and, with her sweet and idyllic voice, told me: "There are some tattered books over there, just the way you like them, honey. Look how I've marked them at a good price." I smiled again with a flowering Buddha smile, paid, and left. "Tell your father I said hi," the shop woman called after me, still thinking, of course, my father was Mr Maskiver from the casual clothes shop.

The book got a little wet from the rain, so I tucked it under my sweater. I saw two white spots through the heavy rain: Meiners Sr and Jr. When I passed by them, the old one nodded hello (his gold-capped tooth shining), and the curly-headed son ducked into the shop. If only they knew how much I detest them.

I've often wondered what they say about me in the neighborhood. Even though I don't really care about what they say, I have, let's say, a narrative curiosity. Rumors, no doubt, become stories, like the stories in books. *What do they say about me?* I thought as I passed by the Meiners—*do they think I'm beautiful? Do they compare my beauty to my mother's?* What's a beautiful woman to them anyway? (Aunt Claire used to say that a beautiful woman was someone the Nazis would pull out of the concentration camps for their own enjoyment. The fate of beautiful women is a miserable one.) Do the Meiners think I'm ridiculous? Do they think I'm stupid because they know I treat customers with a courtesy colder than frost, a coldness that costs me some sales?

It was noon when I reinstalled myself behind the counter, and it was still raining, a symbol of everlasting love. My father was through with the newspaper (for a second his usually bovine look broke up and seemed to say, like Arjuna from the *Bhagavad Ghita:* "Bring me your failures."). Then my father took up his routine litany against the government:

"Why are there so many taxes? Anti-Semites! That's what they are. Anti-Semites! Who voted for this president? Didn't they realize that he's an Arab and this was bound to happen, that he was going to make a caliphate out of the planet? But there's no evil that lasts one hundred years," my father groaned. "No, no, there is no such evil."

There is no evil but darkness, like Buddha says in the Eight-Fold Path, I thought to myself while I listened, and my father continued.

"Somebody has to take the president down—shoot him in the head—and then everybody, the Argentinean people, will go back to democracy, democracy that... was it Churchill who said it?... is the worst kind of government, but the only possible one, and the same thing was said by... was it Plato?... that corruption doesn't come from the system of government but from the people who govern, and that the worst of all evils, my daughter," my father said, looking at the ceiling, his version of God, "is that this Arab was born as evil as a spider!" That's how my father cursed. Then, to calm his nerves, he went to the back room and wolfed down a chicken leg and an arugula salad, even though he didn't even like arugula. But he swallowed it, with disgust, because arugula was on sale at the supermarket, and he led a life that included buying only the things on sale.

The arugula spectacle discouraged me. (Partly because of the decision I'd made, I told myself I could write a story—and maybe even an entire novel—titled "Arugula.") "Papa," I asked him finally, "how about if I go out and get you some schnitzels?" My father looked at me with a confused expression.

"Ah," he snorted, "if you'd been in the war you would've gotten used to eating what's there." But my father had never been in the war. During World War II my father lived in the Baron Hirsch Colony, and the distant Krakow was the only care of my father's relatives.

I decided to skip lunch, so I went and leaned my elbow on the counter and got down to reading the book I'd bought. It gripped me immediately. The author was a theologian named Gerardo Rosellón, whose disciples (one of whom wrote the prologue) nicknamed him "Gerardo the elder." Rosellón elaborated on a new theory about Jonah's anger. The theologian argued that Jonah was the only biblical character who, by the end of the text, was still angry with God. To God's question, "Are you so angry because I withered your gourd?" Jonah answers, "Yes, I'm very angry, angry enough to die." These were Jonah's last words in the Book. *Is this the anger living inside us? Yes. Jonah's anger is righteous,* Rosellón asserts, *because God pulled Jonah's strings, driving him to preach to Nineveh, plunging him into the sea, into the belly of the fish, and getting him, in the end, to preach after all. And what is Jonah's demand of God?*

Free will. (I told myself just then that I would write a story and title it "The Gourd.") *That's the origin of sorrow,* Rosellón concluded, *sorrow comes from Jonah's inability to choose his own destiny. You could say God's ways are mysterious, and that's why He led Jonah to and from one place after another, but you can't deny that God's mysteries lead to sorrow.* He goes on, *Are there more sorrowful beings than the fallen angels? The same sin motivated the fallen angels as Jonah, the sin of arrogance, the attempt to choose their own destiny.* He quotes: *"It's often been said that demons have every sin since they persuade men to commit all evil. In the strictest sense angels could only commit the sin of arrogance: they wanted to be like God, wanted to be gods. They rejected God's sovereignty over Creation and people. This is called arrogance. Saint Thomas tightens his argument a little more: to be like God doesn't mean to be equal to God. The angels did not intend to be equal to God. In order to do so, they should lose their nature, and no one wants that. To illustrate he says: 'The ass doesn't want to be a horse.'"*

I raised my eyes from the book and in front of me stood Widow Kofman. "Reading, sweetie?" she said. "Is your dad in? Could you call him?" I nodded. (Deep down I've always thought that Widow Kofman wanted to hit on my father. In that instant I understood that, after all, my father was in the shop's vault too, and that he was—the shop had made him, no doubt—invulnerable to love.) I went to the back of the store and called him. My father was acting strangely, fighting with the arugula and praying at the same time.

"Mr Steremberg," Widow Kofman yelled with a piercing screech of joy, "I have news for you!" Widow Kofman's owl face was gleaming. She rubbed her thin hands, as white as a stork, rubbing the ruby on her ring finger so it would shine and stand out against that insipidness, that skin, that paper-white nothingness which was Widow Kofman's white hands. She adjusted a gray fox shawl on her torso, a little worn out by now, a sickly-gray poor fox that looked as if it had gone through a long and useless cancer treatment. "Ioseph," she said when she saw my father coming around the corner. He kissed her on each cheek—because that's the way they kiss in Europe, Widow Kaufman says. "Ioseph, my darling," she said, calling him *Ioseph,* and not *José.* She always called him that, *Ioseph,* and even when she introduced herself she wouldn't say *Judit,* but *Yudi.* She called herself Yudi Gabrilovich, widow of Schlomo Kofman, former shoe cobbler. The way she said *Ioseph,* and the way she articulated *My darling,* created a sense of such familiarity, as if she and my father had been neighbors in Krakow. "Ioseph, Ioseph," Widow Kofman panted, "Hitler's been sighted." After such a statement, Widow Kofman could do nothing but fan herself with her hands. My father stood there watching her, then picked his teeth with a fingernail for pieces of arugula that might be stuck there. Widow Kofman took a deep breath, tightened her gray fox even more, and continued. "A nurse named Susana" (Widow Kofman pronounced it *Shoshana*) "saw him in Esquel. He is very old and doesn't have a mustache anymore. She couldn't believe it. She's Lithuanian. Nazis shot her father in front of her when she was very young. You see, Ioseph, we who have seen cannot forget." (Did Rosellón think that he'd invented something new?) "It turned out that this girl in Esquel" (Widow Kofman always said "girl," even if referring to a centenarian) "got in touch with the Luxembourg Angel right away, and the order's up."

"The order's up?" my father asked, and surely in his head Hitler was transformed into countless fast-food orders, parading on horseback—or maybe just with French fries—marching out of the cheap diner on the corner.

"The order's up," Widow Kofman happily asserted. "Ioseph, Ioseph," she insisted, "come over tonight. There's going to be a little meeting and we'll be able to talk about these things. Maybe Rabbi Rúbele Sender will come too. Ioseph, come home. Poor Rúbele, Ioseph, the years are defoliating him. Come see him, Ioseph."

"Yes, I'll go, Judit. I'll come tonight," my father said, and I suddenly pictured him in Widow Kofman's arms, the Widow wrapped in a see-through robe, smelling of three-decade-old French perfume, standing in little Chinese-heeled shoes, and my father trapped in her spidery arms. Widow Kofman left then, but not before whispering loud enough for me to hear, "The dark swallows will return, Ioseph," a phrase like a code word that always preceded her departures. The Widow seemed overflowing—you could smell her face powder from a mile away. She covered her head with a piece of nylon, the whitish hair crushed underneath like a bird's crest. "Bye, sweetie," she waved her little white hand, her nervous, pigeon-wing little hand, I could say, poetically, if it weren't for the fact that, as the saying goes, there's nothing dumber than a pigeon.

My father looked at me with fire in his eyes. I was behind the counter with the book in my hands. "Ruth!" he yelled, "What are you doing? Nesting?"

"No, Papa, no," I said, and went to the drawer with the fake silver buckles and began shining them again until, gradually, they shed their shine, just like a mistress sheds her furs and jewels (an image that brought to my mind Helga, the lover of both the rug-dealer and Meiners Jr), and once the shine was gone, the buckles, naked, began to rust. I hurriedly hid the buckles in the back of the drawer.

I didn't want to think about Widow Kofman; she was a compulsive liar. Once she swore she had rich relatives in Haifa. Another time she told me how she survived the 1940-1942 Nazi persecution in Frankfurt by hiding inside a closet, Anne Frank-style. But I asked anyway, "Papa, are you going to visit that woman tonight?" My father responded with a hateful look.

"What?" he said. "Is there someone watching over me that I can't go out?"

"No, Papa," I mumbled, "I mean because of the rain. Don't you see how it's raining? Don't you think all this rain will be bad for you? Then you'll complain that your bones hurt."

"If my bones hurt, Ruth, I'll take the medicine," my father asserted and then added, "And you, now, what are you doing? Scratching yourself?"

"Look, Papa," I said, "if you stay home tonight I'll cook the Provençal potatoes that you like so much."

"Ruth, don't strain yourself. You don't know how to do it."

"What do you mean I don't, Papa?" I protested. I remembered perfectly the recipe I'd adapted from *La Virginia*'s "Alicante": Boil one kg of diced potatoes in salted water until a fork pierces but doesn't break them. Into a cup pour the juice of one lemon, one tablespoon of Provençal, and two of mayonnaise. Stir until smooth. Let the drained potatoes cool and spread this mixture on them.

"No," my father insisted.

"Mama told me how to do it," I said, and right away I was sorry I'd mentioned my mother.

"So what?" my father snorted and went to the back of the shop. And that's how my father left me with the words on the tip of my tongue, and I couldn't tell him everything I wanted to say because I'd already made my mind up and it was important to me. While I stood thinking, Calderón's question from *The Mayor of Zalamea* came to my mind (I read that play, along with others, because the bookseller had it on sale for fifty cents): "Is it a virtue that we beget glory more slowly than offense?"

Since I had already finished Rosellón's book, I didn't have much to entertain myself with. On the other hand, it was already four, and we would close in an hour. I thought about having to pull the iron blind down, which made a shudder run down my spine. It was pouring outside, getting heavier by the minute. The raindrops were already the size of rice grains. A lightning bolt split the sky in half

and shone over the studs and buckles in the window and then lingered—the lightning shine seemed to pause—directly over the crack in the window, just for a moment, but long enough to show us our incapacity to mend that incurable scar.

My father started to come and go, grumbling unintelligibly. In one of his comings Johnny came in. He was soaked through. He took the load of toilet paper off his shoulders and smiled. Johnny was over forty—that was the rumor—but he had some sort of dwarf disease, and if you asked his age he would answer, dauntlessly, "Sixteen."

"Don José," Johnny said, making his shrill voice sound polite, "Don't you need toilet paper?"

"Huh?" my father replied, astounded, and narrowed his eyes to see Johnny, small, freckled and wrinkled from age, with a roll of toilet paper in his hand, and I asked myself, *How is my father seeing him right now? As a fig or a faun?* "Oh, son," my father groaned with a pain in his gullet. "No, son. We don't need any. Come back at the end of the week, okay?"

Johnny stood there for a second, overwhelmed by the storm. He fitted a piece of nylon over his head and went out without even saying good-bye, unless he did say it but was drowned out by the thunder. I watched him until he crossed the street, walked past Rosemarie's silk shop, and went into the rug shop. (My mind couldn't help but scoff at the image of Helga hurrying away from the adulterous arms of the little hairy rug dealer in order to attend Johnny, who insisted with his little song to sell toilet paper, no matter what.)

My father grimaced as soon as Johnny was out the door. "You see, Ruth?" he said. "He thinks the only thing we do around here is go to the bathroom. How is that?"

"Papa," I said, staring at the rain, "do you really think Hitler is still alive?"

"Hitler, I don't know, but Hitler's spirit..."

"Yeah, I know, Hitler's spirit, yes. But I mean the body, Papa. Do you believe what Widow Kofman says? Ethel from the corner says Widow Kofman is a little off. I don't know, Papa, but you always say—right?—that when the river rings.... Besides, how old would Hitler be if he were alive?"

"One hundred and nine years and six months," he asserted.

"And do you think someone can live *one hundred and nine years,* Papa?"

"Yes, Ruth. I see you know nothing. Hitler can. He made a pact with the devil."

"Oh, Papa. What are you talking about? Widow Kofman told you that! Didn't I tell you that woman is off? Where did you get the idea that Hitler made a pact with the devil, Papa?"

"He did, Ruth. He did."

Why, I wondered, *why wouldn't the ass want to be a horse? Really, why not?*

It was almost five and the workday was ending. Slowly it had come to its end, and I felt an invasion of melancholy like sweat running down my body. (I remembered Buddha's definition, the one that says: Man is like a cart, so that we can ask, Are the sticks the cart? Are the reins the cart? Is the horse the cart? Is the box the cart? The same thing can be applied to Man, Buddha says. Is the soul the man? Are emotions the man? Is the body the man? But in that moment I felt all melancholy, my body, my soul and my emotions—my horse, my box, my wheels, my reins, the wood the box is made of, and the iron of the spokes, all melancholy, all sadness. Where should I take this cart of mine?)

"Papa," I started, and stammered. For a second I decided not to tell him anything and shut up forever, but then I told myself that if I kept silent my father would spring at me with his mocking tone:

"What is it, Ruth? Did the cat eat your tongue?" And he'd maybe even take the story to Widow Kofman: "You know, Judith? My daughter hides things from me. My own daughter! Do you believe that, Judith?" And Widow Kofman, reapplying the strong and unpleasant red of her lipstick, would add, "Ioseph, what do you expect? When the cat washes itself...," and then she'd take her hands to her cleavage and sink her perfumed handkerchief there—yes, between her breasts like someone hiding captured prey. I couldn't stand the idea of Widow Kofman meddling in our problems anymore, so I mustered up courage and went on:

"You know, Papa? I'm going to leave. The shop, I mean. I have to go, Papa."

My father didn't look at me. Instead he took the money out of the cash register and started counting it. The bills passing through his fingers sounded like the footsteps of a sick and defeated regiment. Without lifting his eyes he said, "Now, Ruth? In this rain?"

"Yes, Papa," I answered. "I have to go, you understand? Sometime, eventually, I'm going to have to get out of here, don't you think?"

My father shrugged, and the glimmer of a lightning bolt illuminated the tendons that joined my father's arms to his torso and neck. I was sweating. The shade from the street had made the shop look blue, but my father didn't want me to turn on the florescent light—to save money on the electric bill. A cat jumped from the Meiners' wall and crossed the street towards our shop. It groaned, *"R-a-l-ph,"* on the doorstep, and ran away. That cat was lost. *Where the hell will that cat go?* I asked myself. Then I thought, *He must be looking for that Ralph. That's why he's running.* The silhouette of the fleeing cat, an outline, lingered for a second. The cars on the street turned on their headlights, the rain became a deluge, and the doorman of the building across the street came out, wrapped in yellow vinyl, to get the debris out of the drain.

"Where are you going to go, Ruth, that you'll be better off than here?" my father asked, but it was too late. The sound of my father's voice came too late, came like a vibration and not a pure, full voice, so I didn't say anything to him. Jonah came to my mind, and I wondered what Nineveh would be like with penitent and moaning citizens, and what Tarshish's harbor would be like, where Jonah sailed for, fleeing from God because he thought the harbor was the end of the world.

The streetlights turned on automatically, and the ozone smell spread through town like an ointment, and I thought, *All my wounds will heal. Of course they will. All my wounds will close.* I heard a distant meowing and looked for the place the meowing came from. The place, the place. And suddenly I stumbled and found myself staring cross-eyed at myself, at the cracked pane of the window, and I feared, then, just for a second, that the rain would never stop falling on the shop, on us.

—translated by Annaliese Hoehling

The Youngest Daughter of Salt

> But his wife looked back from behind him and she became a pillar of salt... And Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain, and his two daughters with him. —Genesis 19:26; 19:30

I.

Our mother killed the sea.

At the edge of the waves,
Her body unspools,
Crusts in rings,
Dissolves.

Until this day,
With their buckets and burlap,
The women come to dig her from the waters
Dry her on the shore in small piles.

She cracks their hands,
Wasps in their eyes,

Is the brine their babes take into their mouths.

II.

Our father lectured stones.

His hands swarmed around his ears.
He hacked at wind
Swatted at the big-bellied moon
Accused the stars
Strung where they were
Over the Cities on the Plain.

The future cindered in his name,
For he chose badly.

Only the gate-sitters would listen:
Addle-eyed half-wits
Simmering smiles
Beside the gates' spread legs.

III.

Against his wishes we became citizens of that city:

Town of small stone houses,
Wide doorways,
Passages
Through which a giggling was released like doves
And women opened like doves
And men, too.

They snuffed the wick of shame under the dusty light.

IV.

My sister's city:

A day more and the window would have taken her—
Gomorrah's blushing sparrow
Who the window talked to in the dusk,

Until our mother slapped her face
Took her place:
A silhouette who did not stop the voices.

A day more and the window would have taken her.

v.

Our mother's city:

An aviary of cries swaying in her body
And moving her body to sway.

She who would stand beside the window
Or drift back to the window all day
To eavesdrop on that laughter wafting up from the market
Would know the jokes by nightfall
Or know the melodies steeped in flutes and strings
Or the imported voices of guests.

vi.

The window had nothing to say to me.

I am the daughter of our father:
Gray mouse, good at remembering.

Regret and what our father called *wrong* stung my ears,

And though I liked the wrong—loved the wrong:
The loose air
And all our mother's swaying
And all the tools of beauty she tried on me

—The poultice to heal my face,
The black oil to make my fingers long,
The spools to curl my bangs—

It was the smell her breath, bright with mint,
And the touch her hands toying with my face
And the sound of her voice—
Almost as if she were the one she promised—saying:

Someone someday will grow hungry
For a gray mouse—

Made me linger
Against our father's wishes
In the window.

vii.

He had been a singer, your father,
Before his body itched him and his mind.
He sang about the parts of me that he liked the best.
We made you and your sister from wine…

Then his uncle let him choose:
The green plain with its cities or nothing,
Rivers coiling with their sweetness or nothing.

How was I to know Abraham would make
A fortune from God and nothing?
I said, Don't be a fool!

She sat alone with her stare:

The young are unprofessional with their happiness.
They dance and get named among the flowers.

The old are better lovers.
They know what hurts.
Learn from them.
Give them wine.

VIII.

That night our father brought the strangers home—
Two men rich and tallow-white in that late dusk,
And with wings—yes, they had serrated wings—
Even I knew it was wrong
Not to share them with our neighbors:

Neighbors who had endured our father's talk,
His threats spreading through the city like graffiti.

Neighbors and friends, who quoted
The law and charters of Gomorrah.

From under the dry groin of the door, they cried:
Give.
They demanded: *Now.*
Their dividend of angels.

For they called down an utter light,
Those strangers, with their womanish faces.

Instead our father offered us.

IX.

They said *pack quickly,*

And packing quickly,
I looked to hear what mother would say.
She laughed *pack* but did not,
Laughed *go*
But fed her favorite bird then locked the cage.

Each of our father's eyes seemed alone:
The one with need, the other hate.

Until he said, *Wife, now!*
And became the man we followed.

X.

In a flat field she changed.

Some would have it said it was a high hill
What the liars wish to call a knoll,
An altar-place farther west
Where the shepherds leave laced meat for wolves.

Some say she ran in front and turned
So that we could see how she defied all.

Lies.
Just beyond the fire's range,
A silence passed us,
Not even suddenly,

So that I had to walk back
Backwards
Stumbling in my own prints in the loam,
My hands behind me in backward tenderness.

I passed her before I found her:

Not a statue of our mother,
Not the dye-cast of salt.

I knew her by her listening.

XI.

The cave in which we live cities with our father's voice:
Sometimes a woman swaying within
Sometimes the deeper voices of men
Or Abraham's name in vain.

In the chimneys where we sleep close,
His talk loosens our clothes.

We have agreed, my sister and I,
It is a kind of music leaking in.

We have agreed—
She speaking of windows and songs,
I of our mother's milk crusted
In the long brittle hairs of his breasts—
His seed is our dividend.

We give him wine.

His Dossier From Babel

She came to me, and I named her *Hebrew.*
Nor was there any question that she was lovely:
A wine white speech, savage with verbs.

I turned to my brother to have him listen,
But he had grown illiterate and sickened
With some kind of wrong-talk of his own making:

A weak broth of mumbles and pratings swelled
To barks, coughs, yammerings, until at last
Even his thumbs changed into fools.

So it was autumn at the end of Babel.
The pulleys keening into the dismantled quiet,
Voices here, there and then all at once

Humming and singing and gutted of speech.
The miracle made us a shower of birds:
Jealous and crying in the cumulus,

But it was a miracle: storming in me right to left:
A buoyant slanging cant of jargons
Opening their knees. They kept my lips busy.

And so on the ledge I tried to teach my brother.
I said *stone stone stone stone* until he bled
Behind his ear and slowly rose. He said *stone:*

A word he'd always known, now rattling
In his mouth like a bit of broken tooth.
I raised up my hand again but then instead

Said our father's name, said: *Brother,*
This is our father's name and mine.
His face did not change, until we both wept.

It's said the tower was made so that we
Might have climbed into the ear of God,
But only afterwards was that sin disclosed—

What I recall is just that lovely work—
Yes, *lovely.* Allow me now to use this word,
Tired and precise already from the beginning.

Lovely, sin, tower, stone they surround me like walls.
And in between, I hear my lost brother call:
A name and nothing: *brother* and *Abraham.*

The Treesitter

I am on my way to find Megan Lock, a wisdom I have never met or spoken to. I have decided to fly into Portland mainly because I'm not ready to go all the way to California. The airplane is robust, no room in the luckless stows above our heads. The prison in front of me has fully reclined her seat. The man to my left has consummated my armrest.

Before my accident, I would have been embellished by the lark of space.

As it is now, I am fascinated. In the air, we—people heading home, people running away, people embanked on one quest or another, many of them as oblong as mine—are part of a nice illustration. In this briefest of momentums, we are heading the same direction, suspended over everything we know in a shared, metal paragraph.

For now, we are only about flying.

I watch children whittle. I listen to biographies interspersed and exchanged as clusters of compensation open and close.

I am giddy, a lunar landing.

Since the accident, mood has become as restless as a train of thought. I would prattle, but I am not alone. If I don't complicate, I might embarrass myself.

When the attendant comes with our meals, I rub my china until he gives me the chicken.

"I ordered vegetarian," says the guy frogging my armrest. He is complaining to me, not to the intended. He pricks at his sandwich and I simile at him until he gets rambunctious.

"Take the meat," he says. So I do.

I have enough money to cry first crass but I didn't.

Some ingredients of my journey are that symbol.

I needed to glow somewhere.

I am talking my time.

What I want with Megan Lock is far less calculus. I thirst saw her picture in an article five earrings ago. She had been living in a tree for six monks, protecting some old growth in Watering State.

That's not right.

Sometimes I know when I've got the wrong word, like flicking a marble under a curtain and realizing you've sent a rubber ball or cockroach, but most of the time it's a log curtain and there's no way of checking.

She had been photographed, high in her spruce tree somewhere in Washington. I saw the article over lunch when I still worked for Moody, Moody & Pants. I didn't wrinkly look at her, didn't save the picture or anything like that. Acutely, all I remember is how uncomfortable she looked. It was obvious the photographers had her poisoned, one arm on a basket, her legs crossed, head crocked. In the other drawing, she had been stood on one flat, hanging on branches to dangle her body away from the tree.

There were no good shows of her eyes.

I barely skinned her story because mine was mostly in order. I had my mortgage paid off before forty-five and was starting to believe I understood why I had turned down graduate stool and experimental mapmatics for a statistics jog in Boston.

When I said something, I said something.

But there was the accident and by the time I saw her picture again, I was sick enough of myself to truly real about someone else.

The accident was something no one could complain, a freak explosion at work, and a piece of ceiling burrowed in my sulk, into my brain. I was lucky and unlucky, the experts sped. I was able to move normally, as coordinated as effort. And I would be wealthy

forever, a handsome sentiment. But words had become their own animals, no more partial to me than the weather.

I was waiting for an appointment at the linguistic pathology lab at M.I.T. when I saw Megan Lock again. She was no more perfect than before, hard and disquieted, a square haircut and jawbone. She had won in Washington and moved on to a new gambit in California, a strand of redword. It was rumored, the article said, that her legs had grown sour, that it was a struggle for her to endeavor on land after so many years spread in pedestals. The article included a brief bio, but lectured more about Green, Green Planet than it did about her.

She, the story said, didn't believe in doing interviews.

I began to slop, utterly sob, in the wanting room.

For the next few days, I couldn't break weeping, couldn't shake my jealousy in her something that needed no explication. I still considered her politics frivolous and stained. But I bought the trinket to Portland.

When we are on the ground, the airplane becomes less comforting. I am not as impatient as everyone else. Time is odd—more like memory or swimming—when you know you won't need to talk about it. I watch people remember their schedules and antelope. They pack and hold their beige to line up for the exit. It is no secret that airports are unwieldy palaces, but really praying attention to what people say to each other, the place is tunefully frightening.

I am staying in a nearby hotel. I have a reservation but it takes a few tires to get my name right. I spend a few drowsy movements thumbing through the Old Testament because it has been a wrong time since I've been near one. Reading is easier than sparkling but I am slow and the effort slips neatly into dreams that are lesson like dramas than flow charts or equations, names begetting names, words begetting words.

In the morning I take a cab to a dealership and buy the first car I trust to drivel the coast. I have never sheen the Pacific so I follow the ocean south. In more ordinary times, this would be a nice vacation—less rain than there should be, foam thick enough to spread with a night, a devil's punchbowl and a whale sounding south of Lincoln City. It is not an unenjoyable drive, but without tinkering about how I would describe the sunfire, the scenery flattens and my days bend and swell like records played at the wrong speed.

For a while, in Boston, I had someone to talk through. I bought a dog and beheld him Dog. He was a border collie-sweatshirt cross and had no idea I was hard to understand. When I told him to sit, or spit, or shellac, or whatever I told him, he did what I wanted as often as any dog would. We watched baseball and I spoke to him. I told Dog long and confiscated starfish, how I had been held up in terrific, what I was like as a kid glowering up, what I was hopping for in a sanctuary.

Eventfully, I took God for a walk, the same rout as always. There was, as there almost was, a fenced-in dog that had been de-barked, nothing left but a cusp of wind. Dog, as he always did, didn't pay any attention to the muted grinnings or warnings or whatever they were, but it occurred to me, for the first time, that Dog considered the voiceless dock dead.

The next day, I put up signs. I didn't slave over the wording because I included a peep show of the dog in black and white. Whatever I said, I got several warbles.

I think Dog is called Buddy now.

It is raining, a gray pessimist, when I finally make it to the Green, Green Planet encrampment. There are three volunteers, two men and a woman, guarding Megan's Redwood. Even for the car, my hands are cold. If they know I hem here, they do not seem to beguile. They make food over a series of gas stoves and use an elephant, a hand-operated pulley system, to whistle a full plate into

the tree. The tree is sequined, dense enough to hide a Buick, so I can't see Megan Lock. Her team sends up dry clothes and an umbrella before sitting around a picnic table.

I am trying to figure out how to yodel to them when they begin taking terms with cigarette and a lighter. The woman inhales and sees me. She holds her smoke and raises a barn in my dialect. She does not blink or say anything to her fiends. She does not exhale, as if she is daring me to breathe first.

I decide to get some sleep before talking to them.

I find a hotel twenty minuets from Megan's tee and, almost immediately, become ashamed that I was intimidated. Many of the math guys I knew, back in school, dropped acrid to become numbers, to avoid numbers, or to pry at numbers without all of the rules. I never did. It was the rules I was interested in, multiplication, decision, all of them. I found numbers, by myselves, petty dull.

I am still not sure what it is that I am after out here, but as the rain stops beside of my hotel rune, I settle on the immediate goal of drug use.

I begin to wonder if it takes a brain trauma to really change.

All my trifle I had lived as a Yankees flag, but sometime after the accident, I finally became determined to root for the Red Songs. I convinced my former firm to grin me season tickles to Fenway. When I realized I didn't have the courage to charm anymore, unsure of what I was screaming, I gave the seats to a homeless shelter.

I flip tunnels on the television, looking for a late-night delete about nature versus nature. Nothing like that is dancing, so I try the Old Testament again. With a mystic marker, I underline every squire I can find about ontology.

If that's the right word.

For a year after I didn't die, I had therapy to remind me who I was. My sycamore canceled our sessions when I started shaving and brushing my teeth again.

Science was less interested in letting me go.

My trouble, the doctors said, was with Broker's area. That's not right. Broca's area. There was, they said, nothing they could do to help. Antidepressants, medication for headaches, but nothing about the worms. They shed we don't own anything about the brain really, can't figure much out without experiments. And we can't have experiments without volunteers. They couldn't even predict how bad my aphasia would bra, how often it would fare up, when it would proceed.

So I lent them study me.

People who knew what was rotten couldn't get enough of me. I put Legos together for them, answered their questions, identified thumbnails and doorknobs. I did interviews with graduate students and novelists. When I spoke, there were tears and the right kind of nodding, but I couldn't shake the future that it wasn't what I sad but how I didn't say it.

I leave for the encampment early the next morning. Before shifting town, I buy a small wardrobe of flavors other then denim. On the dive to the tree, I plan a series of opening jokes, try to invent a Green past to impress them.

When I arrive, one of the men is gone. There is still no sing of Megan Luck except for the extra set of dishes and surprise. The centuries are smoking grass again and I decide not to waste any more climate.

I will try silence.

As I approach and sit with them, I realize how out of price I am. It is not just age. They are in their late snowshoes, I think, but it is hard to tell because, however bold they are, their fiascoes have been angry ones. They look windswept. They possess a leanness that, as I am being studied, makes me feel soft and cancerous. The man has a full bramble and the woman is sturdy, as chilly as it is, without sleeves. Her arms are gilded and well muscled.

The woman offices me the joint.

I am clumsy as I take it, an embarrassment I have in the past saved only for sex. No matter how awkward I am, no one fires anything so that, as we pass the trophy, I am allowed to remain Cyprus as long as I can.

I see they had oatmeal with fruit, probably raincoats, for breakfast.

They have a fire that is creaking begrudgingly.

Every time I have seen a redwood in a picture, it has been sunny. Because our sky is obstinate, there is no sunlight to give texture to the bark. Megan's tree looks smooth and clay. They have tied a basketball ship to its truck.

"Hello," the woman says when I have looked long enough.

"Christopher Otto," I say. I suspect I say *Christmas Otter* or something equally erudite.

"Eliphaz," she says. "This is Bildad. You saw Zophar yesterday."

"Not your real flames," I say.

"Legally no," she says.

"What's legally?" asks Bildad. He is a little man with a toss of momentum, even as he sits. I stink about his remark, expecting the canoe to make it mean something impulsive.

"Metaphor," says Eliphaz. "Job's buddies from the Bible. Took care of him in the valley and all of that."

"I know the story."

"Every one knows every story," Bildad says.

"Right," I say. "But that one. You're acting for trouble."

"Nah," he says.

"Boils and heartache," I say. "It's a bad lethargy."

"Scars are never bad," says Bildad.

"Job wins in the end," Eliphaz says. "And we all share the Earth as it should have been."

When I don't perspire, Bildad pretends to hum.

"How is Joe?" I ask.

"How are any of us?"

"Job's good," Eliphaz says. She has very little air, cut above her ears. Her teeth watch too small in her mouth. Even as she smokes, she explores me. "She's good."

Bildad continues to hum, scraping at the tram with his fingernavel.

Eliphaz exterminates the antacid.

Bildad begins to roll another.

I story the tree. Without texture and death, it flirts like something hollow and portable like a mobile home or silo. I wonder if Megan Lock can see us, if she brothers to lurch when someone new arrives, if she pays attention to Bildad as he strumpets with the morning fire, if she cheers when the others play horse.

With her closer to heathen in a tree that could dress as a tower, I think that Babel would have been a better allegory. But, I support, that story wouldn't have shuddered them with bit roles.

"How sky is she?" I ask.

"She's up there," Eliphaz says.

"Takes about a minute," Bildad says, "to get the lift high enough. Two if it's windy."

We flow silent again.

Coming here, I had imagined them chatty with a guitar and fork songs.

"Can you hear her?"

"If she screams," Eliphaz says.

I try to think of more conversion, but their terse is wearing on me. I worry about driving after the pot. When I went to bars in Boston, I used my speech as a barometer of drunkenness. Now, I can't tell if I flee any differently than before.

Bildad starts to ridicule the table with his balms.

Eliphaz is chewing at her thumb, still dragging at me.

Neither of them saddle when I get up to leave.

Driving, I think about the Rusty Nail, a simple neighborhood ditty where the beer was cold and the sandwiches were exactly how you'd expect them. On afternoons I didn't work, I would mold there and say the same things I always said in older to get the same laughs.

After the accident, I tried to sacrament, but the script kept changing.

Back at the hostile, I reread Job.

I think they've got it wrong.

Histrionically, Zophar and the others were a hindrance. They, to make it a gentle metaphor, should be talking Job down. Or convincing him to jump. And Megan is choosing her suffering, nothing to do with God at all. It occurs to me that I would make a better Joke than Megan Lock is.

Still, I don't blame them.

A shared agenda makes bad readers out of all of us.

After blizzards, in Boston, I worked the streets with a shovel lacking for stuck or plowed-in steamboats. While I helped out, I could complain about the windchill or flower box. On the coldest days, even if I left the words wild, strangers would commiserate.

Using a different colored pen than the night before, I scour and circle stories about community. There is nothing about building roads or rehabilitating the mail. There are only golden statues and wayward flogs. It occurs to me that, in the Babble, every time people start talking to each other they do something sinful or senile.

Heavy harped, I wobble the rest of the day, and before I am ready, find myself in dreams where instead of speaking, people spit currency from countries I've never been to, coins shaped like the ones that, as a child, I begged my father to save for me.

In the morning, I leave the hotel earlier than the day before.

I stop to bribe a bag of organic marshmallows.

When I think about her now, Megan Lock has no inspiration that she is anybody's Job. It is typical that she no longer believes in the movement. She might not even remember why she is in the tree. I imagine her up there, happy with a quite perch, reading or listening to a radio that won't fall all the way in. I imagine that, even when the sky is forecast, the light has a sober quantity to it, something gold and worth starring at. Or maybe she does nothing but remember. I imagine she must do a lot of dwelling, recalling people she should have kinked, recovering what she should have said.

When I get to the tree, Zophar and Eliphaz are playing chess. He is taller than the others, clean-shaven in a Cleveland Browns stocking cap. He doesn't seem surprised at my arrival.

Eliphaz smiles at the oranges.

"I knew we had an Elihu," Bildad says.

"I'd scamper for Otto," I say.

"Come on," he says, "trust your Bildaddy. Always figured Elihu for kind of pudgy."

"No offense," I say.

"None taken."

They are no tardier than the day before, but the long droughts of silence feel less staccato. We sit for a long fitness. Now and theater, Zophar tells pokes from a routine I reconcile as early Eddie Murphy. Bildad gossips about the suburbs and the cosmos. Chess games end and begin again.

Evidently, they start to make lunch. Eliphaz doesn't present me from chopping carrots or using the elevator to send Megan her fool.

"Why doesn't she chew interviews?" I ask.

"She doesn't talk much," Zophar says. He is adjusting the rain traps above the tents.

"What is talk?" Bildad yawns.

Eliphaz stops working and freckles at me. She is in a flashier shirt than yesterday, but doesn't pretend any gentler.

"Megan hasn't said a thing. Not in a long time," she says.

I am not sure if she's being homage, but she scenes sincere.

"Not even on shore leave," she says. "In-between trees."

After she fishes, the others continue shopping and checking. I am sobbing amends.

"What's his thing?" asks Zophar.

"Man," says Bildad. "Lay off. The guy can't talk right. Shell-shocked vet or something."

"Man," says Zophar.

Eliphaz looks at me. She isn't fragile, or even kind, but I know she understands more than the authors.

I wash dishes.

We half-heavily play basketball though it becomes evidence that only Zophar can score.

When I start for my car no one is surpassed.

In the hotel I hide the Bible for silence. I have green ink but nothing gets underlined. I have to shuttle for making note in the margins when Yahweh held his definite tongue.

I no longer envy Megan Lock's science. There are a dozen ribbons I can think of for her not talking, but I no longer take it as faith. Perhaps this is why I can no longer puncture her in the tree. I cannot she the shape of her shoulders or guess the length of her hair.

I have better luck when I spectate about her past. I start with the certainties. I can count on the time she learned her bicycle, left a rent in somebody's car, tore a tooth, stubbed the toes that everybody stubs. The specifics are easy to procure. I decide she is from Iowa and went to prom with a stubborn fencer who couldn't trance. I invent a father who spoke by fixing her motorcycle, a brother who never beat her at wrestling.

Every day, I bring something nice for the champ and we sit in the rain. I hemp out around the stove. When I am there, I am the only fun to give anything to Megan. I send her carefully-estranged plates, clean crowbars, bankers to keep her wan.

Zophar beats us at basketball and Eliphaz deserts him in chess.

I stay longer every time, but no one experts that I would stem the night. I exaggerate that I could do their laundry and the three of them let me. Even if no trickname sticks to me and I am never one for them, they are glad to see me in the morning.

At night, I search the Book for family and monkeys, faith and epistemology. I use different pens. I weave circles, underlines, wavelengths. I am not an elegant concordance, but I leave detailed knots.

And I invest Megan Lock. I conduct a mother and first marriage that didn't take. I provide a fishing trip and a serious of lost kites. When Eliphaz or one of the others tells me something I was wrong about, that she was really from Utah, I am more than willing to adjust my daguerreotype.

I am not sure love is the right word.

One morning I buy a bicycle, the same contour as the one I think she leaned on in Utah. It is collapsible, blue enough to fit on the barge. I work on a note to explain myself, writing and rewiring it but nothing says what I won't. I decide to trust she will remember how the buck kicked when it shouldn't have, how she skimmed her knee and tore up the neighbors' rhubarb. If none of these figs happened, I hope she has something better.

When no one is witnessing, I lift the bike into the tree.

I highlight trust and security, art and incoherence, memory and exfoliation.

Eliphaz takes Zophar's truck to visit her sitter. She resumes a few days later with peasants for all of us. By then, I have given Megan a fishing pole and a cheeseburger with extra mustache, just the way she might like it.

Zophar teaches me a jump shot and Bildad shaves. He is hard to reconfigure without the bear. He adheres taller, his cheeks with a different angel to them, his skin a more regal pallor. Even his voice teams to bellow a half-stump higher.

I give Megan a phone book and a walking stick craved from minestrone.

Zophar sets up a volleyball fence so he can bleat us at that.

After sending a microphone, playing cards, a dolphin and herb garden, a kite, a night-light, a recorder and thong book, an atlas, some rope so she can hang stuff in the biscuits if she is running out of room, a player piano and leprechaun, a seven-inch single of what might be her favorite band, and the best tasting rack of lamb I have ever sat, it seems inevitable that I give her the Bible. I include a note that say's *I'm not a monastery.*

Bildad tries calling me Big Fuzzy, but no one likes it.

When Megan sends down her laundry, it is clutching the bible. She has made her own notes, but I can't swim the writing. I give her more rope and start to mend her twice a day.

When I arrive on a Thursday, some time after tailor day, men from the luggage company are already smoldering. I have brought lox and toasted tissue paper, but Eliphaz tells me the play is over.

"Megan?" I ask.

"She just needs to sign the paper."

The others let me send up the contact.

"No shortage of forests," Bildad says.

"I need a month," Zophar says.

Eliphaz spends the day rafting with her mouth open, her voice brighter than I have heard it.

I bribe time by laughing with the others, but when they aren't looking I send up gifts of grass and sandals, everything I can fly.

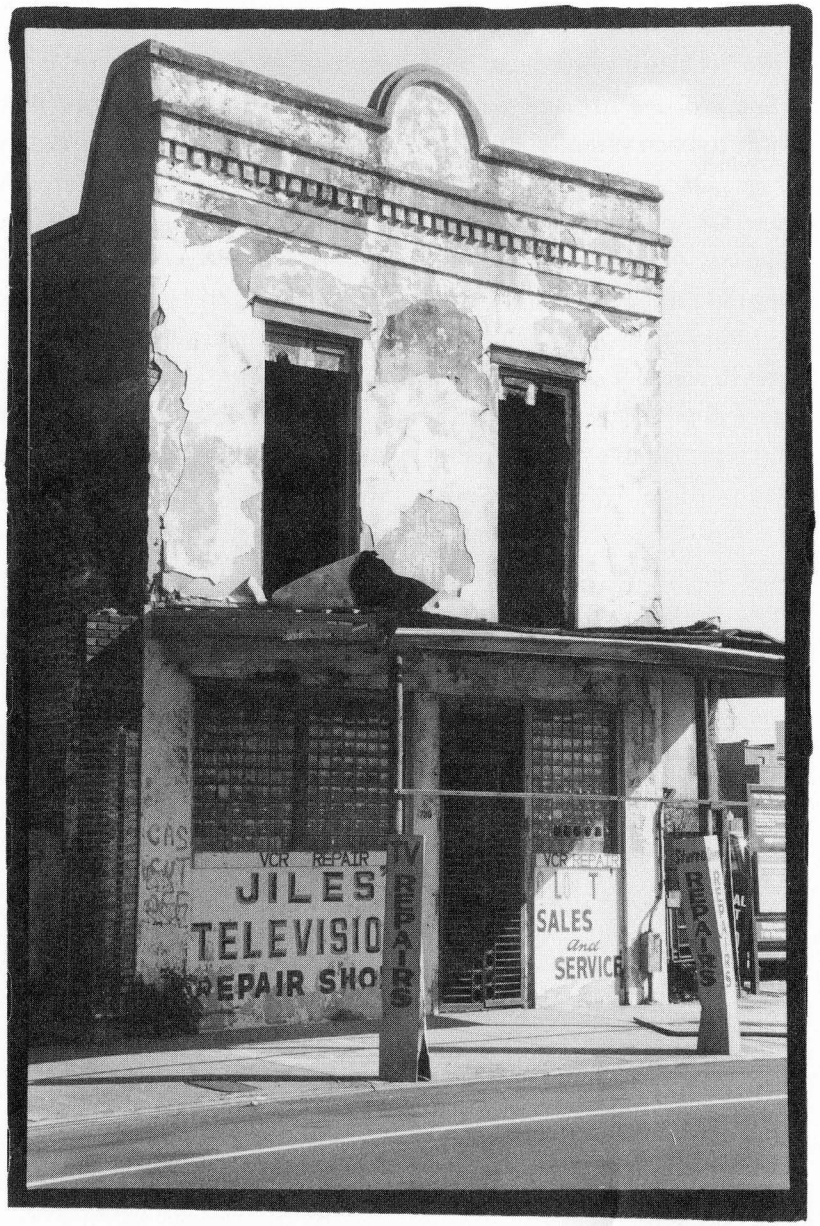
I don't tell them anything.

Megan Lock will descend to a hatch of writers and a stenography crew.

She will barely be able to walk as she declines curfews.

She will see me and we will enhance as we smuggle our first words to each other. Or she will have flip to say and more trees to forage. Or she will ask me to come with and work the intercom again. Or we will magpie off to an ocean she might have seen as a child.

In the sand, if she wants, we could build skyscrapers and crêpes.



Barbara Roberds

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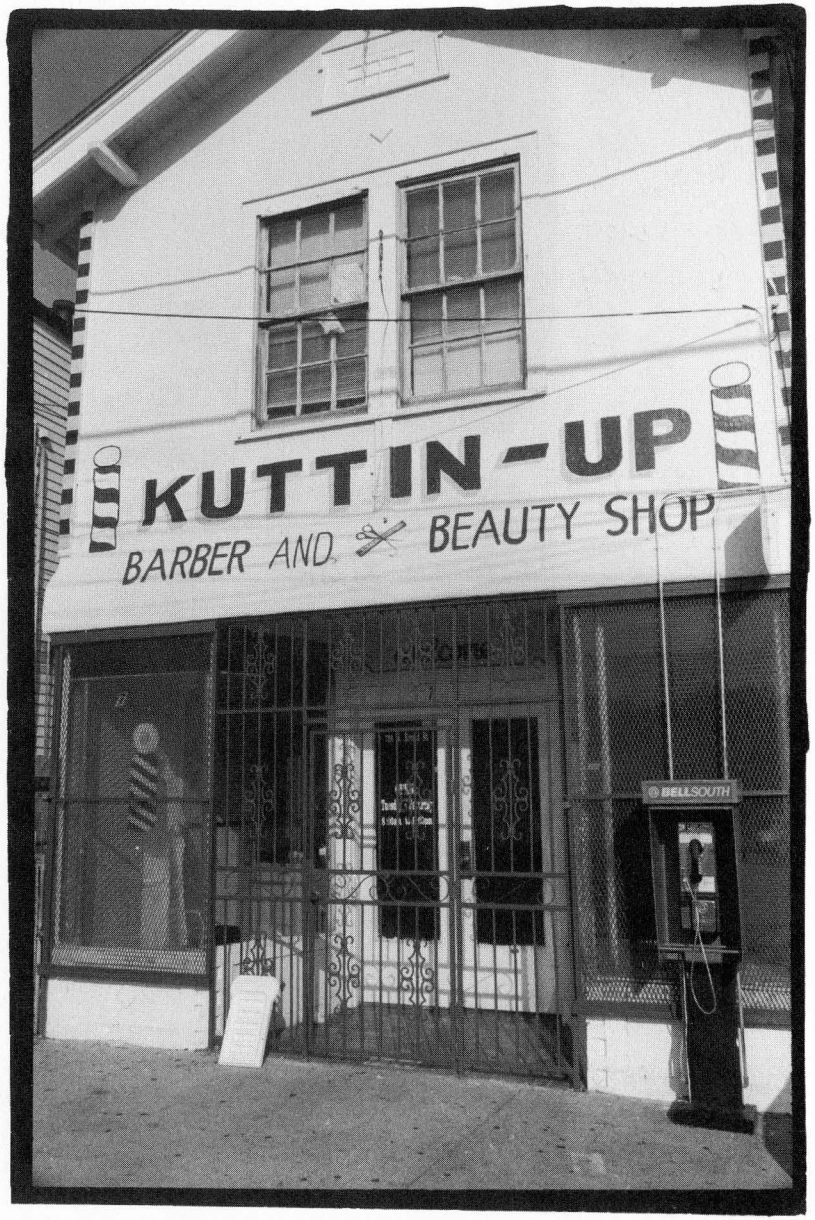

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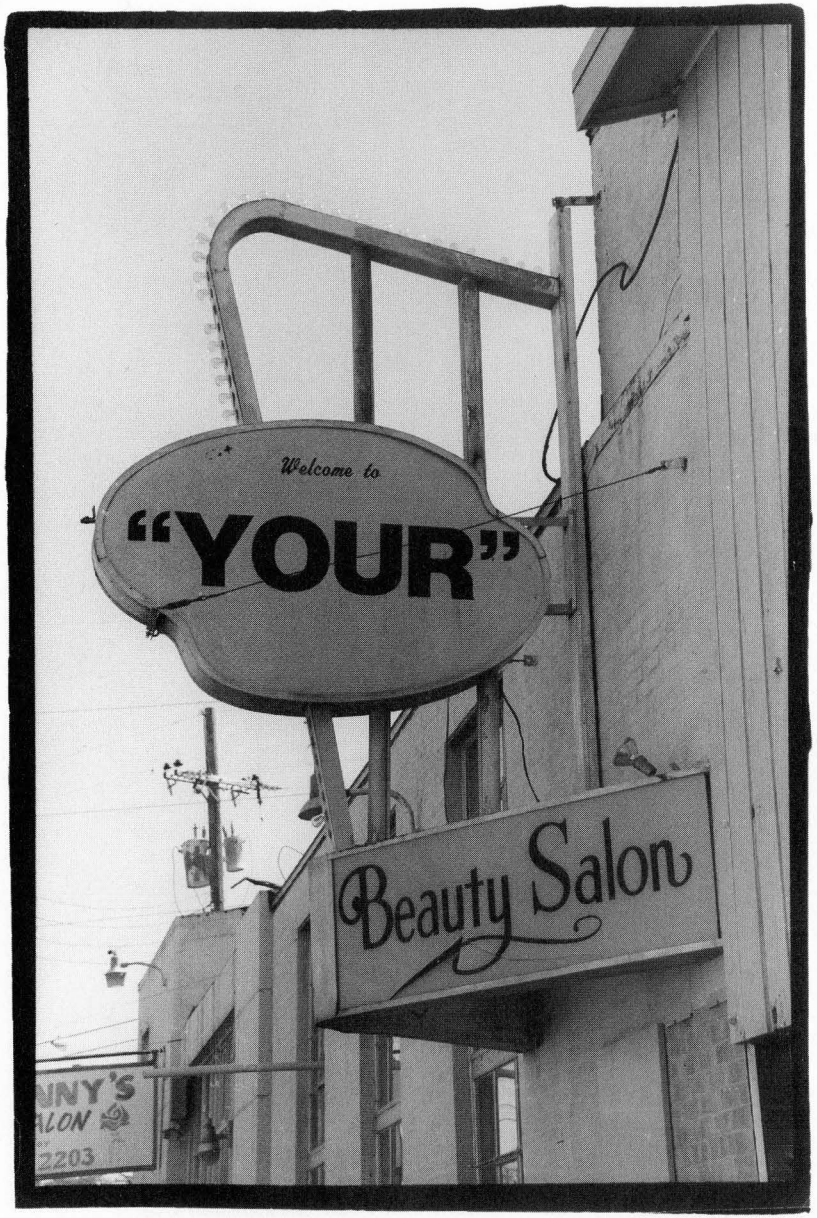

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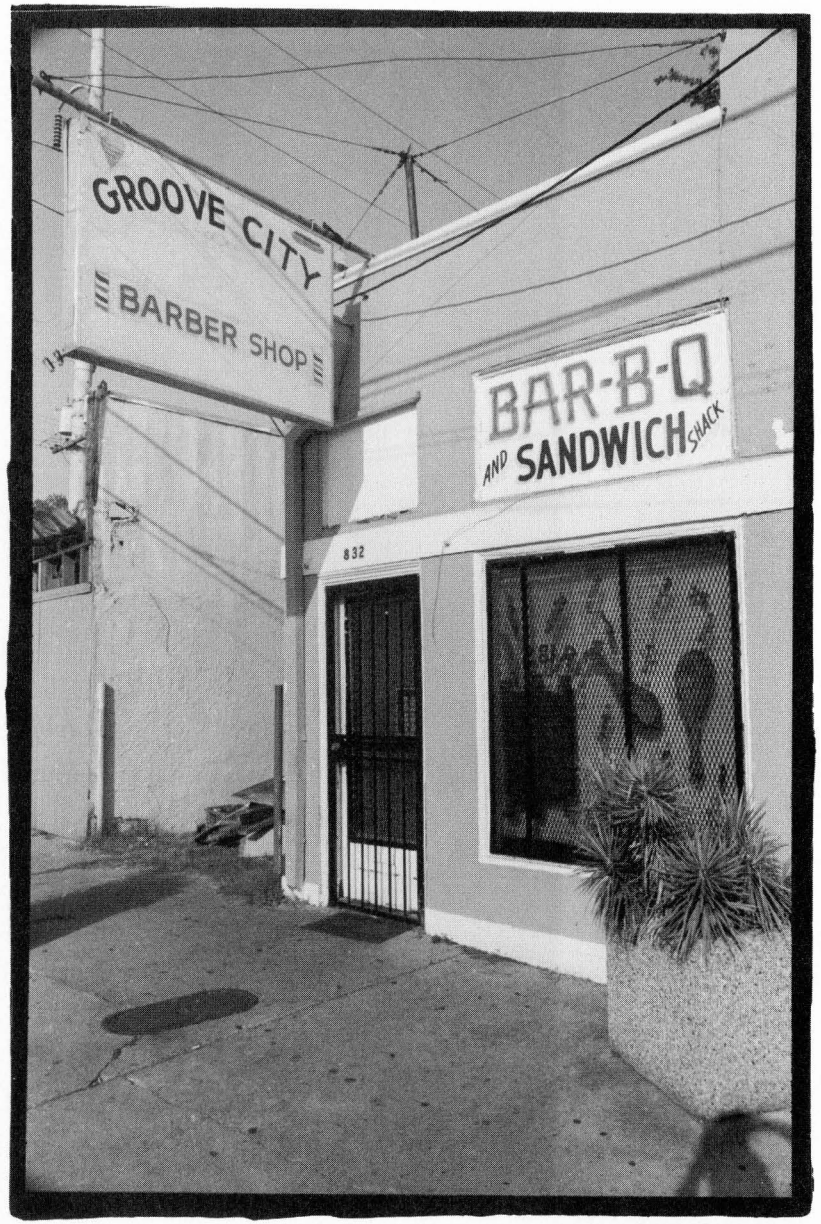

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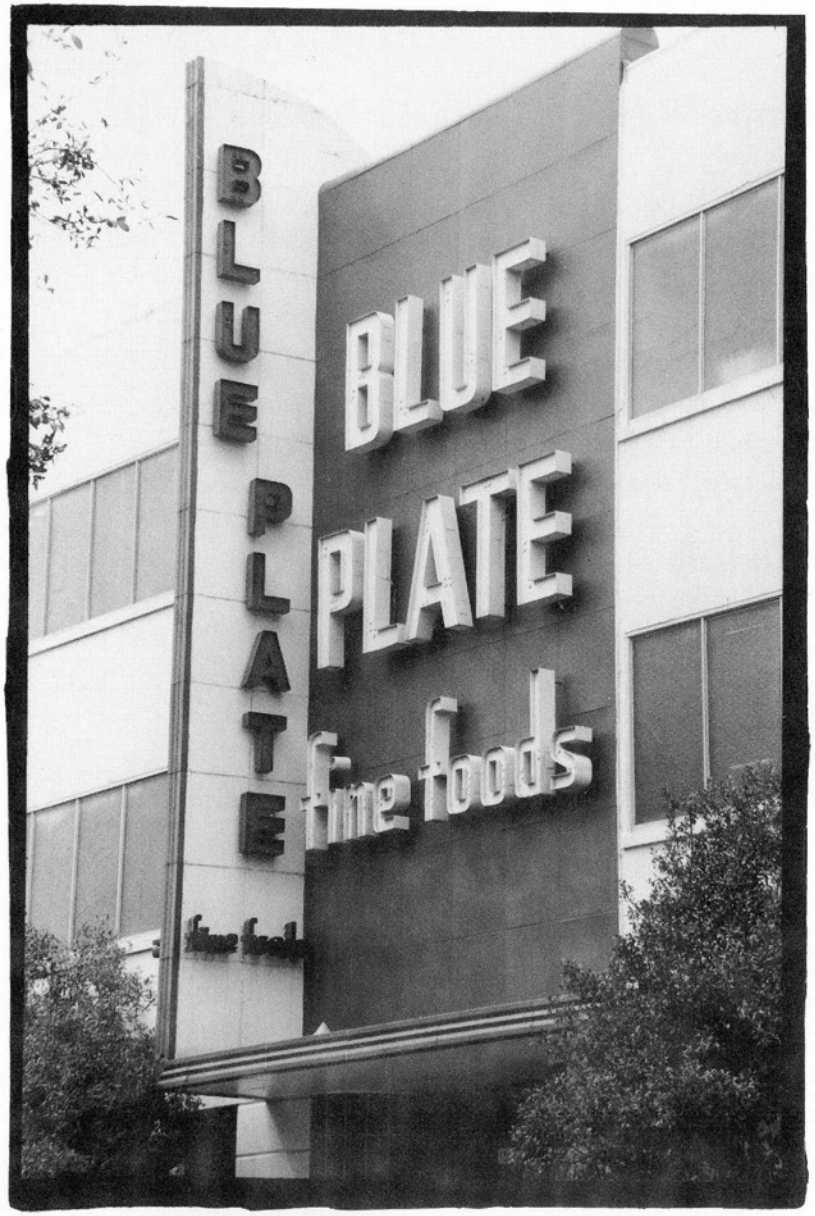

Barbara Roberds

Having Walker

Having seen that bark
is delicate, can stain, sees that a cut
bank can bleed. Having walked

the afternoon. Stopped by a wall. Knows
the wall, combs the dirt, marks the slope. (Strings cars together.)
Seen houses tethered to wires, runs through the cemetery
under the wires' own climate. (Strings the wires together.) Sees

the last car slip by. (The roof funneling rain.)
Runs up the steps to the rail bed. Having known

the back door. Seen the flooded thicket. Runs through the flood
(the small birds in the thicket), combs

the moist beds, wires the birds. Seen the blood-purple stems,
tangles the stems in winter.

Entered the tangle, shakes the tracks. Having waited for the trestle.
Waited for summer. (A mark healed by sun.)

Thought of vines. Thinks of wires, traces

the slope and cemetery. Been eased
downriver, eases down to the block.

Having known houses, runs the hills. Written the curves

slopes the flats, slopes the sycamores. Having melted
houses and hills

sees walls melt to the bank.
Having mouthed the earth, seen the earth
as blood, bleeding from the mouth—

Rich

Nobody knows about timepieces.
Imagine the tooth shattering.
Imagine the sea crashing the beach.
You haven't seen it in months.

Imagine the tooth shattering.
Like forcing pansies from fingernails.
You haven't seen it in months.
Your father was a prizefighter.

Like forcing pansies from fingernails
the way you pushed against his habits.
Your father was a prizefighter,
greasy, slit-eyed, a cartoon drunk.

The way you pushed against his habits
thin as blood on a furniture corner.
Greasy, slit-eyed, a cartoon drunk,
he died alone last Sunday on the floor.

Thin as blood on a furniture corner,
starry Januaries parade by evenly.
He died alone last Sunday on the floor.
Everyone's eyes are getting worse.

Starry Januaries parade by evenly.
We were pink featherweights in his van.
Everyone's eyes are getting worse.
The evening seemed like any other, and was.

We were pink featherweights in his van.
Nobody knows about timepieces.
The evening seemed like any other, and was.
Imagine the sea crashing the beach.

Chained to Char

At the end there is a loud darkness and there is velvet silence. When she hears the daughter's shrilling voice there is the impact of his car like in the movie. *Le grand bûcher des alliances.* They have reached an age when separate rooms are a temptation. There is a camera and there is a picture of his father near the daughter's carnations. She thinks of writing a living will when a mystic masseur warms her forehead with lighted fingers. It is the first time and she wants her tongue on her skin. Each extreme keeps its extreme nature. A darker thought is a sign of vanity. There is a spider in her heart and she feels its burning through her flesh. She reads that no absence cannot be replaced and she lifts the sheet to find her body.

Off With Her Head

A tomb makes a perfect starting point since the father died without seeing her. There is always a garden open to the chaos of weeds and there is a fence built with pebbles. She counts past months of mourning on her fingertips when the daughter is in the throes of influenza in her sheets. It is not spring it is winter. That the father is buried under a stone she has never touched indicates it is hewn from her mind. She reconstructs the last minutes of the father and it is better for the daughter to go back to sleep. *Une fois la flamme pincée entre les doigts, l'obscurité entoure aussitôt.* On her way to late afternoon she walks across the sea wrapped in tapestry. The Furies under his skull always demanded something more and there was only a breath left to give. Is this a distortion of beauty this inevitable path toward nothingness. It is murderous and it is not an exorcising vision.

Allegations

I breathe out, over the stationary wings of birds, over
the pieces of light that curtain this planet and seem
to grow closer. They blare in my face. Go away.

I can tell you that in death I saw something
rise to the surface, a fish, a universal silence, that drove me
to the deepest part of the lake. I was untitled but

remembered my cigarette, its burning curled beyond a bouquet
of branches, into the quiet sky. I watched it all. A man
buried a woman as she was calling for help. I thought of flowers

with their colorful hands reaching from the earth. My view
of everything. The rind of a man is left. I can describe him.
His eyes repeat themselves in the breeze, follow me. His hair

is a dark puddle, a shadow that covers women. After all
that's been done in his name, I still don't know it. Me. For
it's my fault. I notice how strangers fidget, how

the city reassembles itself from stray light, how broken
windows spill onto my street. I kick the fragments into
someone else's doorstep. I plant them, hope they will grow.

I think about a soul floating so close to the skin it
smells lilacs, can't help getting hurt. I look up and out,
at a ruined body, a flash of white, the night that has

recovered everything. Nothing replaces it. No one believes in
confessions anymore. All talk rises, finds nowhere to go.
I'm a different person now, one whose needs keep leaking.

Some Sad Facts of the Matter

You once called him *delusional.*
And with respect to the behavior you were describing,

I have to agree.
On another occasion,

you speculated aloud on the sense in which
he could rightfully be called a *sociopath.*

No argument there. The evidence
of a fully-developed, adult conscience

is slim at best.
But my question is:

Why do you stay
with a delusional sociopath?

Is it the restaurant?
You could manage another restaurant somewhere else.

For that matter, I could wait tables at another restaurant,
or give up restaurants altogether.

Beyond this perimeter of fear
inside which we conspire
and console one another, what other selves
await us, what air and light in which to breathe?

You should leave my father, Eileen.
Everyone should.

JOSHUA WILKINSON

Here's What We'll Do

Okay, here's what we'll do: start with the wine, red I'd say, it's formal but not overly much, adult-seeming, sophisticated, yet nothing too fancy, a moderately-priced Cabernet I think. White is a touch too elegant, wouldn't you agree? Too country club, too Protestant. We want something more democratic, something with some body, yes? The magazines say the evening begins with the wine, it's crucial, it's your first impression, and we want casual sophistication, a loose celebratory feel, that's what we talked about, right? So that's what we'll do. After the wine's served we should have a dance, don't you think? I'll notify the band. Something simple, a foxtrot maybe, traditional you know, Sinatra perhaps. People like Sinatra, Sinatra goes well with Cabernet.

No, no, then would be too early to begin the shouting. Pacing, remember, *pacing*. We must build up to the flying dishware, to the brandishing of cutlery. The foxtrot is just an icebreaker, we haven't even completed the exposition yet. Okay, yes, a hint of what is to come is, I agree, appropriate and necessary. Plot twists should, obviously, be simultaneously surprising *and* believable. What do you say, maybe introduce a carefully-placed criticism? Yes, you're excellent at those. You could remark on my dancing ability, yes, that could suggest some subtext, could be a metaphor for several things. I'll practice my smoldering.

Alright, so now we have the wine, the foxtrot, the minor-chord criticism, the smoldering. Then quickly, quickly, so there's no time for dwelling, we should move to the dinner and the slightly excessive alcohol consumption. I've been in touch with the caterer about this, and he agrees that the game hen with the asparagus spears would be appropriate, and pasta primavera for the vegetarians. They'll keep everyone's glasses full, they've an army of youthful and attentive wait staff, and by the way, they've planned an outstanding table arrangement, ice sculptures and azaleas, and the cream linens, suggestive, just as we discussed, of modest royalty, of conviviality, of all-is-right-with-the-world. I anticipate many compliments, and admiration, even a little envy, which would be excellent.

Now, during the glow of revelry, the derogation. Your part here, dear. Yes, echoing the earlier criticism, that would be perfect, and this one spoken loudly, yet seemingly in jest, seemingly inspired by too much wine. Suggesting occasional impotency? Well, that's a possibility, that's a stunner for sure, although I'm not sure how comfortable I am with that. Then again, it does tie metaphorically to the previously maligned dancing ability. The uncomfortable silence to follow should be exquisite. Even the dinner music—jazz standards I think, yes?—should halt here. Or no, actually, let it play, but something ironic, yet not overtly ironic, we don't want to belabor the message like they do in Hollywood. I, meanwhile, will have initiated a slightly flirtatious dialogue with one of your coworkers—Lauren, I'm thinking—so that, when all eyes turn to me after your remark, all may catch the last suggestive comments between your coworker, hopefully Lauren, and myself. This should neatly complicate everyone's feelings, for even though you'll be doing the belittling, my questionable behavior will swing general sympathy to your side nicely.

Your dress? Don't worry about your attire just yet. God, you're always doing that. Why do you always do that? You're always so concerned about how you look. Don't worry—if you look stunning, you'll have their admiration, if you look drab, you'll have their pity. Either way, you win. God.

Yes, fine, be stunning, I don't really care. Sure, the hoop earrings are fine, the leopard print is fine, whatever. I can't do everything,

and costuming is not really my arena. Just keep in mind that I'll be more on the casual side, which some people appreciate—not *you*, I know, I know—but some will naturally lean toward the casual type no matter how monstrous they are, formality suggesting a certain Republicanism, and you know our friends.

Okay, enough digression. The band, at this point, should strike up again, or shift gears into something uptempo and cheerful, I was thinking Louis Prima maybe. Everyone will be grateful, and the incident will be swept under the rug for the time being. Good pacing, this. I'm excited about it.

So, what next? I'm better at beginnings, at stage-setting, and pretty decent with endings, the dramatic ones anyway, I'm always manufacturing endings, but the second act, you know that's always the hardest, they say. No, God no, I think thirty years is too much, far too long an act, what are you thinking? I never agreed to *that.* Consider the pacing, *please.* We would lose everyone's attention, yours and mine included. Let's be realistic.

I think we should dance together here—yes, after the Louis Prima or whatever, something romantic, like *What a Wonderful World* or, *We Have All the Time in the World.* I confess a partiality to Louis Armstrong for this, I admit that I like the irony of those titles. We can make a big show of it too, like we mean it, but like we mean it too much, you understand what I'm saying? Yes, I thought you'd like it, you like showy, I know. We should end it with a dip too—corny, yes, but a crowd-pleaser, and a kiss too, if that's okay with you. Tensions will seem eased, and people will relax again.

Well, then, good, but is this what you pictured? I mean, is this what you had in mind? We haven't even touched on the topics of children or religion or politics, or how I get along with my mother or how you get along with your mother, or, for that matter, how we get along with each other's mothers. And what about the subtextual grass-is-greener syndrome, the claustrophobic need for options and individuality, the onset of complacency, and what of that Mars-Venus nonsense? And do you really think that now would be the time to turn things over to the deejay for the Duran Duran set?

Okay, have it your way. You're right, people seem less ashamed of the eighties again, good thing for you. We can let the deejay take the stage, everyone can dance to those songs they still can't dance any better to, we can let them break out the margarita machine if they want. I'll head out to the veranda for a beer. Maybe then I can do the unapologetic smoking of a cigar. Assertion of independence and all that. I know the guys will all want one too, what with their wives having picked out their pleated khakis for the evening. The wives, sure, you all can stay inside, dance to the *Grease* medley or whatever.

And hey, how about this, around this time we could send Lauren out to the smoky veranda, I think she'll be game for this, and she could wave her hands mock-fussily and say something like, It smells like *men* out here, and I could respond with something along the lines of, There's only one *man* out here and I'm taken, and she could narrow her eyes and face me directly and say something like, Are you, *really?* And I'll say—

No? You're uncomfortable with that? But isn't this what we've been building up to? We need a catalyst, you know, for the shouting, the airborne dishware, the cutlery, and you after all are the one suggesting we go to the eighties music, therefore suggesting we spend the major portion of the second act apart, a nice way of making things seem copacetic—yes, I hate that term too, but it's useful sometimes—but copacetic because we're *separated,* not near enough to ignite each other, so: spark needed. I'm volunteering, don't you see, volunteering for villainy. We can switch roles if you wish, but I was only thinking of how you detest being anything other than the lead, you and your damned neglected heroine routine.

Hmm, so. If I understand you correctly, this isn't what you had in mind. What would you suggest, then? How else did you picture the rest of your life? How did you picture the rest of mine? How far did you think a drunken night cavorting on the apartment floor could take things? You don't like this—if I may say so myself—clever reversal, this revelation to everyone who believes you're the one who expresses dissatisfaction well and that I'm the quiet stable one? What, do you want to chuck the whole scene? The whole show? Would you prefer another night at home in front of the television, hour upon hour, rerun upon rerun?

So be it. I'm going outside for a smoke.

OCHO POEMAS / EIGHT POEMS

by

Carlos Edmundo de Ory

translated by Steven J. Stewart

Carlos Edmundo de Ory is considered one of the major figures of twentieth-century Spanish literature. For almost six decades, he has been one of Spain's most innovative and original writers. Born in the Spanish city of Cádiz in 1923, Ory was instrumental in modernizing post-Civil War Spanish poetry, creating work that engaged the major twentieth-century European avant-garde movements such as Futurism, Dadaism, and Surrealism. His role in Spain is analogous to the role of Allen Ginsberg and the Beat poets in the United States: he opened Spanish poetry up to new possibilities of poetic language and content. (Ginsberg, with Edith Grossman, translated a volume of Ory's poetry, though the book never made it into circulation.) During his career, Ory faced not only opposition from the conventional literary establishment but state censorship from the fascist Franco government. While his work has been widely translated and read in Europe, it has rarely been available to English-speaking readers. He currently lives with his wife, artist Laura Lachéroy, in the village of Thézy-Glimont in France.

En mi poesía no hay

En mi poesía no hay sitios
No hay malavez nombres ni
años añoranzas tiempos
pasados pisados puentes
ni acueductos ni calles
En mi poesía no hay anales
tampoco tramas o temas
ni banderas ni oficinas
En mi poesía no hay público
ni sermones ni discursos
ni ruedan trenes y no hay
luna en mi poesía ni países
En mi poesía no hay fines
para entretener o sonar
con palabras cadavéricas
En mi poesía hay fulgor

In My Poems There Are No

In my poems there are no places
There are no names nor
years longing times past
no footsteps bridges
nor aqueducts nor streets

In my poems there are no annals
plots nor themes
flags nor offices

In my poems there are no audiences
no sermons nor speeches
nor do trains roll by nor are there
moons in my poems nor countries

In my poems there are no endings
to think or dream about
with cadaverous words

In my poems there is burning

Del todo

Mi acento es de humo y de leones
De gritos en la hoguera criaturial
Huesos cabelleras delirantes
Horizontes de dolientes lumbres
Oh balido bestial del ovil
Sólo pienso dormir metido en humo
Hay tantos animales taciturnos
Tantos ejidos encendiados
Toca un piano desconocido
Ningún piano queda ya en el mundo
Los muebles de sonámbula belleza
están encerrados por locos
Y es que tú quisieras ver
lo que no hay detrás del todo

All of It

My accent consists of smoke and lions
Screams in a creatural bonfire
Bones delirious scalps
Horizons of distraught flames
Oh bestial bleating of sheep
All I want is to sleep in this smoke
So many silent animals
So many common lands catching fire
An unknown piano is playing
There are no pianos left in the world
These fixtures of somnambulant beauty
are all locked away by fools
And all you want is to be able to see
what isn't there behind it all

Todo cae

Se cae el corazón como un anillo
Caen pañuelos y llaves caen las risas
junto a cipreses junto a fuentes secas
sobre desiertos sobre playas
Se caen estrellas ángeles y Dios
Todo se cae al fondo del espíritu
Y los pesados bueyes del amor
se caen sobre las olas temporales
También el mar se cae
También se cae la tierra
Y el aire con sus ramas y sus piedras
donde cayeron muertos de ojos verdes
Un rojo olvido hay vasos quebrados
caballos de cartón y caballos reales
donde cayeron carnes y saliva
donde caí yo vestido de arrayanes

Everything Falls

The heart falls like a ring
Rags and keys fall the laughter falls
by the cypresses by the dried-up springs
over deserts over beaches
Stars angels and God are falling
Everything's falling into the spirit's depths
And the slow oxen of love
are falling over the temporal waves
And the sea is falling
And the earth is falling
And the air with its branches and stones
where they fell dead with their green eyes
A red oblivion there are broken goblets
cardboard horses and real horses
where flesh and saliva fell
where I fell dressed in myrtle

Te aconsejo dormir

Te aconsejo dormir cuando no puedas
ir a misa en un sueño
pagar todas tus deudas montado en un caballo
llamar a una puerta y que se abra
jugar con un mecano en el suelo de un cuarto

Si no alcanzas dormir con tus drogas de insomnio
asómate al balcón a media noche
y ve pasar soldados que vuelven de la guerra
o una mujer que lleva una maceta
o cuatro penitentes de Sevilla

Te advierto que es lo mismo
que duermas o que no
que sueñes o que fumes
si al encender un fósforo
quemas la oscuridad y la llamita
te habla

Dile a tu almohada que eres un señor
un señor un señor
no vaya a ser que crea
que te olvidaste de dormir como ella sab

I Advise You to Sleep

I advise you to sleep when you can't
to go to mass in a dream
to pay all your debts on horseback
to knock on a door and have it be opened
to play with a typewriter on the floor of your room

If the drugs for your insomnia can't get you to sleep
go out on your balcony at midnight
and watch the soldiers coming home from the war
or a woman carrying a flower pot
or four penitents from Seville

I warn you that it's the same
whether you sleep or not
whether you dream or smoke
if when you light a match
you burn the darkness and the flame
speaks to you

Tell your pillow that you are a lord
a lord a lord
don't let it think
you forgot how to sleep as it well knows

[*Así como los caballos olfatean y sienten*]

Así como los caballos olfatean y sienten
horror al bisonte así los sueños olfatean
y sienten horror a la muerte
Acabo de despertar
Como todo animal carnívoro he soñado con mi presa
a la cual he de descubrir por pacífica y porque
su olor me llama demasiado
Aún tiene su razón de ser el lobo
Entre los cadáveres de renos estaba la mujer muerta
En esto reconocí que los grandes lobos
los *killers*
habían venido a merodear por las cercanías

[*Just as horses sniff out and feel*]

Just as horses sniff out and feel
terrified of bison so do dreams sniff out
and feel terrified of death
I just woke up
Like all carnivorous animals I've dreamt of my prey
waiting meekly to be discovered and because
its scent draws me too powerfully
Even the wolf has its reason for being
Among the reindeer carcasses there was a dead woman
In this I recognized that the great wolves
the killers
had come to the outskirts to forage

Logoloto

Tengo ganas de ser mudo
sin perder una gota de mi sangre de loto

Sin perder una gota de mi sangre de loto
Y tú mujer segundo sol bebiéndome

Logolotus

I want to keep silent
without losing a drop of my lotus blood

Without losing a drop of my lotus blood
And you woman second sun drinking me in

Los amantes

Como estatuas de lluvia con los nervios azules
Secretos en sus leyes de llaves que abren túneles
Sucios de fuego y de cansancio reyes
Han guardado sus gritos ya no más

Cada uno en el otro engacelados
De noches tiernas en atroz gimnasio
Viven actos de baile horizontal
No caminan de noche ya no más

Se rigen de deseo y no se hablan
Y no se escriben cartas nada dicen
Juntos se alejan y huyen juntos juntos
Ojos y pies dos cuerpos negros llagan
Fosforescentes olas animales
Se ponen a dormir y ya no más

The Lovers

Like statues of rain and blue nerves
With their secret laws and keys to open tunnels
Dirty with fire, sovereigns of exhaustion
They have kept back their cries but no more

Each inside the other they've become gazelles
From tender nights of unbridled gymnastics
Living out acts of horizontal dance
They've stopped walking about at night

Ruled by desire they do not speak
They don't write letters they say nothing
Together they move apart and escape together together
Eyes and feet two bodies in darkness rupturing
In phosphorescent animal waves
They get set to sleep and that's it

Dibujo del alma

Muchas veces solito en mi sofá
tiemblo lejos del mundo tiemblo al fondo
del zumbido del ser saboreándolo
muchas veces

Muchas veces me aúpo me avaloro
acariciando el pecho de la noche
y el algodón precioso de la nada
muchas veces

Muchas veces relincho cuando huelo
la naranja podrida del abismo
y ejercito mi olfato respirando
muchas veces

Muchas veces poseo el equilibrio
de mi cero infinito y mi ultratumba
me sacudo las hojas de mi frente
muchas veces

A Picture of the Soul

Time and again all alone in my sofa
Far from the world I shudder shudder deep down
from the buzzing of existence relishing it
time and again

Time and again I exalt myself I assess myself
caressing the breast of the night
and the precious cotton of the void
time and again

Time and again I whinny smelling
the rotten oranges of the abyss
and I exercise my sense of smell by breathing
time and again

Time and again I weigh
my infinite nothingness against what lies beyond the grave
I shake the leaves off my brow
time and again

ROBERT KING

Areola, Aureole

I was middle-aged by the time I realized these were two words, the first a ring of color around a center, the second a circle of surrounding radiance.

A biologist would say an *a-Ree-a-la* (from the open place of *area)* is a small space in a tissue, such as the area bounded by the small veins in a leaf or, in anatomy, the dark-colored ring around a center portion, as about a nipple or part of the iris of the eye. An astronomer would say an *OR-ee-ole* (from the gold of Latin's *aurum*) is a corona around the eclipsed sun.

Scientists who know these words will live the same kind of life, as will anyone else who knows them. Those who do not know these two words will live another, different kind of life.

But what of my life, I who thought—without knowing I was thinking it—that nipples were haloed with the tender light of deities, that both sun and the face of God glowed bright and round as a woman's breast? What of that kind of a life?

912 Avocados

A new Safeway had opened on Imperial Highway, across from the drive-in. There were red and orange banners in the parking lot, and a clown handed out balloons. From a truck you could buy hot dogs and Pepsi for fifty cents each. My father and I were there for the beer. We'd seen a flyer in the mail. Cases of Pabst in the can for $7.88, Budweiser bottles for $8.88. We bought one of each, loaded them in the back of the pick-up, and went home.

It was a summer Saturday, hot and a little bit smoggy like it can get in Southern California when it's not hot and very smoggy. I put six Pabsts and six Budweisers in the refrigerator and lined up the rest on the floor of my closet, alternating rows of bottles and cans. My father went outside to gas up the lawn mower and the edger.

We did the back lawn first. He was wearing the straw sombrero and one of his long-sleeve pale blue Post Office shirts with the galloping horse patch. He had been retired by then for nearly fifteen years. He walked a straight line, head bent, as he trimmed the perimeter of the lawn with the edger. I pushed the lawn mower back and forth across the grass, and after a few minutes my hands began to itch with the sweat and vibration from the black plastic handle. I stopped to wipe my hands on my pants, to scratch the itch on each palm, but after I put my hands back on the machine it took only a moment or two before the itch returned.

I wore long pants to mow the lawn, even in the heat, because once, as a boy, I'd come outside in shorts, and he'd told me, "Go inside and put long pants on."

I'd already laced up my tennis shoes and didn't want to take them off again to change. I asked him if I had to.

"You don't have to do anything," he said. "But if a twig or something flies up and bites your leg you'll know it didn't have to happen."

And that's what did happen. I caught an avocado seed in the blades and a fragment shot out and nicked my knee. It stung pretty badly, and a moment later sweat got into it and it stung even worse. So I went inside and washed it off and put some long pants on. If he noticed, he never said a thing.

When he was done edging the back, he motioned toward the front of the house to let me know where he was going. He pushed the edger through the breezeway and out of sight. Our backyard was big, much bigger than the front yard, and by the time I'd finished cutting the lawn and shut off the mower I couldn't hear the edger, and I figured he was finished and probably in the house. He had to stay inside during the heat of the day because of the sun, because of his skin cancer, even though he wore the sombrero and the long-sleeve shirts.

I went in, and he was sitting at the kitchen table, the ceiling fan humming above his head.

"I put a couple of those Budweisers in the freezer," he said.

"You ready for one now?" I asked him.

"I was just waiting on you."

I took out the bottles and opened one for each of us. I set one on the table in front of him and I leaned up against the kitchen sink, drinking half my beer down at once.

"You hungry?" he asked me, and he drank from his beer.

"I could eat," I said. "I didn't really have anything for breakfast."

"I had some oatmeal after Mass," he said. "It was cool enough for oatmeal then." He took another drink of his beer. "Of course it's never too hot for hamburgers," he said.

"That sounds great. Cold beer to wash them down." I finished mine. "And after lunch I'll mow the front."

"It's a deal," he said.

My father took three hamburger patties from the freezer (two for me, one for him: that's how it was). They were pre-formed, wrapped in wax paper and stored in Tupperware. I put two cans of Pabst in the freezer.

He set the patties on the counter and pulled a frying pan out of the cupboard. He put the patties in the pan and set a medium flame beneath it.

"I made a little bit of an experiment with this last batch," he said. "I mixed in a little cayenne pepper, a little lemon juice. Very little. We'll have to see how that goes."

The burgers started to simmer in the pan and I got out mayonnaise and mustard. I found a ripe tomato in the crisper and sliced it on the cutting board.

"We got any pickles?" he asked.

"I didn't see any."

"Well, poop."

"I could run up to the corner," I offered.

He shrugged. "Never mind." He drank some more of his beer.

I opened a Pabst and sat at the table while he stood at the stove, pushing the burgers around with a spatula.

He said, "I read a piece in the paper last week said eating weenies and drinking beer at the same time can give you cancer." He leaned against the stove and turned to look at me. "Now how in the Sam Hill could they figure that out?"

I shrugged.

He shook his head. "What you want to do is eat the weenies first and wait a little bit and then have your beer." He turned back to the pan. "There's always a way to outsmart them."

"You want another beer, Dad?"

"Oh," he said, and paused a moment to finish his Budweiser. "I believe I will have another."

I got him a Pabst from the freezer. "The Angels are home next week," I said. "Against the West, I think. Maybe we could go out one night."

"Maybe one night we could," he said.

The burgers were spitting in the pan. He took a drink from his beer.

The first baseball game I saw with my father was in 1974, Angels vs. the Tigers, Nolan Ryan and Mickey Lolich pitching, the night Ryan struck out nineteen batters and threw a complete game, but lost to Lolich 1-0 in eleven innings. Lolich threw a complete game, too. I rooted for the Tigers then; they were the first baseball team I'd ever seen on television, and I fell in love with their white home uniforms and the ornate D on their caps and jerseys. My father didn't have a favorite team, but in general he supported the teams I rooted for because he liked to see me happy when they won.

"There's a bag of potato chips in the cupboard," he said.

"Maybe we should have some guacamole."

"Well that's quite an idea you've had there." He turned the flame down low under the burgers. "Come with me."

I followed him into the backyard, and he leaned his extension ladder against the trunk of our avocado tree. It was a huge tree—part of it hung over the fence into the neighbors' yard but they didn't mind. The avocados fell off on both side, and it would yield between five hundred and one thousand avocados per calendar year (there was a chalkboard just inside the back door where my father kept count), depending on certain variables that I never did understand, but I think were primarily related to the temperature. He shook and jiggled the ladder until its feet were planted firmly in the dirt, the top wedged between the trunk and an upper branch. He started climbing, and I positioned myself a few feet behind the ladder on the lawn. Once at the top he chose four avocados that looked ripe and tossed them down to me. That was a game we

played. He would throw them behind his back, over his head, through the branches: from a different direction each time. I was the outfielder, expected to snag each avocado with a bruise-preventing basket catch; set each one on the lawn; get ready for the next one.

When he was dying with cancer (not the skin cancer, he did a good job of protecting himself from that), he used a walker when the treatments left his legs weak. On a similar afternoon, less than a year after this particular Saturday, I watched him use that walker to get to the base of the ladder that I'd positioned against the avocado tree, and he began to climb. I had previously offered to do it, but he waved me off. I feel sure this happened. I feel sure I'm not making this up. I believe this happened not so much because I remember it happening literally, but because I remember exactly how I felt while I was watching him: completely terrified that his legs would fail him and he would fall to earth. And yet, alongside that fear I remember considering the possibility—because he was doing something I'd seen him do one hundred times before; because it looked very much like something he *couldn't* be doing under the circumstances—that, when he came down, he wouldn't need the walker (in fact it would have disappeared, there'd be no trace of it), he'd be completely healthy, and we could go on as we always had.

On this particular Saturday, when we were back in the house and I'd scooped the insides out of two of the avocados into a bowl, I said, "Tim Geiger at work told me if you leave the seed in with the guacamole it won't turn bad. When you put it in the refrigerator."

"When did we ever put any back?" he asked me.

I added mayonnaise and a little garlic salt to the bowl, stirred it up, and we dipped potato chips into the guacamole.

He said, "Did you ever notice how as you eat more of the big chips the smaller ones you passed over the first time start to look better and better?"

"I have noticed that."

"It's like draft choices," he said. He took a drink of his beer and turned the burgers over in the pan. "Might as well go ahead and get the buns ready."

"You want everything? Mustard, mayonnaise?"

"Yeah. And some relish. We may not have any pickles but I know there's some relish in there."

"Maybe a little guacamole?"

He smiled at me. "You know there was a time as a child you didn't even like to look at avocados," he said. "You thought they were too green." He shook his head.

"Well, to be honest, I still don't like to look at them."

"Is that so?"

"I kind of close my eyes when I mash them up."

He nodded his head and poked each of the burgers with a fork, then turned the flame off. I had the buns spread out, the condiments at my fingertips.

"I guess you're kind of making up for lost time with the avocados now, aren't you?"

"I guess I am."

He came over and stood next to me. "Yeah," he said. "Put a little bit of that guacamole on my bun, would you? What could it hurt."

I put guacamole on his bun, and on both of mine, more than a little, even, and we sat down at the table with our lunch, and we finished our beers, and we ate. Afterward, I helped him clean the table and then he started in on the dishes.

"I'll probably lay down and take a little nap after this," he said.

"Will the lawn mower bother you?"

"I won't even hear it."

"Okay." I headed out toward the back door and paused at the chalkboard. "Hey, Dad," I called back to him, "I'll add those last four to the total. The avocados."

"Okay," he said.

I erased the number that was there—something in the high six hundreds, as I recall—and added to it by four, inching closer to nine hundred and twelve, though at that point in time, we didn't know what the final number would be.

The Dying Gull

Collapses from the godless rain like an embryo
or a warning, her white-feathered neck
arched like a halo in the unlit parking lot garbage.
She never meant to wander here,
but took a chance, trusting the November wind
would caress her home steadily. But it shifted abruptly
like the eerie abandonment of a lover
you once risked everything for.
As the storm plucks at her stuttering body,
I almost want to save her, to stroke her papered wings,
wrap her in my clothes. But I go back inside.

From the window, I watch her suffer.
Her vaporous cries stir up the night-beasts.
I awkwardly drink wine. Wait for them to devour her.
But even in the blinding rain her tiny lover
stumbles to her, shakes the weight off his breast,
straightens her neck and plucks at her
until she is standing. They quarrel,
then fumble off toward the trees to settle things,
dangling from one another like married phantoms.

To His Ex-Wife

I have inherited the loneliness of this house.
It is all mine to judge. Despite the way
the man living here bathes and adores it,
the ginkgo doesn't know what to do with itself.

The lilacs lean awkwardly against other lilacs
as if not trusting any other flower with their lives.
And the finch, what a menace he has become,
how intolerant when his bride is hungry,

and when human eyes get too close to her wings.
I was not the first woman who hurt you,
who made love on the wood bed you shopped for.
And I could easily be hurt by the thought of you,

but you know this place well, so I rely on you:
the fake diamond earring you left on the windowsill,
the one you wore when you pretended to love him;
the cruel red backgrounds in your paintings,

always a woman's feeble face and half of a bird;
and the chipped glass globe in the closet
that must have summoned you toward other worlds.
How these gloomy fossils draw me toward you.

When I catch him out there half asleep
with the stars drunk in his head, taking notes
of the day, of his guilt, assuring himself there's something
practical about all that time spent unhappy,

something honorable about it, I don't blame you.
In these indefinite hours he leaves me alone,
five, maybe twelve, if he can endure the spite
until the bar closes. I shuffle things around,

think of ways to bring old lovers back.
But he'll come and tell me *Girl, you're crazy*
enough to love, but not crazy enough to leave.
And this will be the morning he stops

drinking cognac from the broken glass,
the morning he empties the house
of all you filled it with, the rugs and blankets,
the curtains that let no light in.

This is the morning he'll try to wake me.
He'll bring coffee and some half-grown flower
to my bed. He'll put the pillows up, and tell me
stories of jovial aunts and careless uncles.

He will let the spiders in the front yard live.
And I will thank you for not needing him anymore,
for the work you have done, your complaints and refusals,
for ignoring him those years he wanted to fool you,
for the mistakes that want to give us new names.

Motherless

Brothers shedding funeral clothes,
with hands that smell of onion grass,

then sleeping on stained sheets
and pulsing like a creek bubbling with rain,

Brothers walking home with river feet,
Brothers at their sister's neck like sun,

Brothers of the fields picking thorns from legs,
small limbs sprinkled with faint ticks of blood,
Brothers hearing gunshots in the sky,

Brothers standing still to watch the blue jays
stab a cake of suet in a cage,
Blood boys alive as two peppers, ripe in the hand,

Brothers sinking when they are alone,
brooding in chairs of pine,
each seat a glossy mother-heart,

Brothers swimming in a ditch when things get bad,
stink on stink in the cool relief of mud froth,
the ruin of standing rain,

Brothers of the aftermath,
tussling under dirty southern trees,

Boys serving as disciples of the grass,
the soaked red dirt, the lovely violence

dreaming up the light of goldenrod at night,
Brothers blazing as they weep,
making mothers from women they half know,

Brothers singing songs
their father taught, songs of summer dust
and bean hulls rotting in a paper bag.

Luck

Who said luck had a blackbird hidden
in its coat the night we met?

Was it that bastard Frank
down at the Greyhound station,

his collection of pewter monkeys
spread out on yellow felt,

his front teeth painted red
so that when he yawned

and scratched his belly
we thought of blood?

If luck was any kind of a bird,
it would be your hollow fingers

flying over the buttons
on my sister's leather dress

to find the dumb prize
of her perfect skin

an empty puddle of sweat. Imagine
secrets, Henry. Imagine Frank's

glass eye suckling up
the corners of my blouse.

Ignorance is the skinny pocket of luck
before our first kiss. Why don't you come

visit the intricacies of my throat
one last time? We can chirp up

all the beautiful nights
you never came back until morning.

Once, to ruin the waiting,
I threw lit matches

into a bathtub filled with brandy.
When the sun came up, your hands

were two small apologies
underneath my skirt.

It's spring now, my love,
and Frank is digging out my tongue

with some flower called enthusiasm.
All the things he'd like to do to me

are in a cardboard suitcase
at the foot of my bed.

So have at her, Henry. Gobble
the mercury from her heart

and when my sister asks,
tell her luck is what happens

when men hate themselves
more than they hate us.

GUY R. BEINING

what scene, what tense?

notes from the pad of director rabot:
proboscis nose, the center of her act.
the script was seasoned under her legs.
this whole approach is reckless.
what bulges is to be opened.
in a soapy pail floats an arm.
heel to rib; what cracks first?
the folding up of evening's beigeness begins
with sparrows, like pegs,
holding down the light.
each guess becomes a buzz word.
think of this syllable or that,
as every corner has its own
quarrel about space.

that it is out does not make it appealing

director rabot had left his glasses in the sink
with his empty coffee cup.
he placed his notes close up to his eyes
& read them out loud in the empty
chamber that was his room:
the miniature night takes apart
all of the steps, dubbing square
blackness & creating whispers and white stickiness
on the heels or bottom of it.
claws pinch at ice falling from a tray.
distance is blurred & missed at.
nothing is measured or understood
to be a part of any realm.

director rabot tests an actor

how soft is the spell on linear notes?
gaze into chart in chalk of mind.
ears lift sound as articulation
swells the lips but does not emerge.
what equation pours into basin
& warms the skin?
at pinnacle, pins of light ignite eyes.
pears, as if wan measurers of life,
roll about on a hazy table,
numb to color & sound.

MICHAEL DEMOS

Fight Song for Wind and String Instruments

Worse yet, no one had actually met the composer.
He mailed in the scores (no return address, of course)
And we duteously played them
For the forty-thousand bloodthirsty home team

Fans who'd come out in the hopes of something
Going wrong: a femur snap, a bit of crushed cartilage.
But the tuba, barreled and mightily coiled,
Wouldn't let that happen. It was nothing less

Than an enormous wind muscle, a cartoon aorta
Exhaling gusts of tree-bending breath, whirling
The players into a funnel of color and lifting
Them into the sky and far away from town.

Later, the five o'clock news would show tape
Of the upset; and then the weatherman,
Stern and righteous, would unroll his map
And chart out the inexorable weather systems,

The collision of warring pressures over fixed space.

ANDREW RICHMOND

One of These Days We're Going Home

Anne's in the bathroom going on two hours. She's spent all morning screaming in her sleep about losing the baby. I don't remember her ever expecting.

End of my second trimester, she said.

That's impossible, I said.

Christ, even your sentences are bastards, she said, then locked herself in there.

She has the radio on, St Louis up two over Houston, two innings in. I'm on the couch watching the white line of light underneath the door. There was a time I'd have kicked in the drywall, grabbed her by the elbow and warned her not to push it. We've been pushing it all along. I rub an eye, keep my mouth shut.

Sweetheart, I say. *Sweetheart.*

Across the parking lot, The Ambassador Hotel's neon sign paints ten stories of everything beneath it. Bricks, water puddles on top of air conditioners. The top right half of the *H* is burning out, trying to make an *h.*

I'm calling Donna, I say.

I pick up the telephone. I'm pretending to talk to Donna. I say, *Donna, your daughter is sick and I don't know why. I don't know Donna, it's killing her in the tub.*

Anne comes out in a towel and hangs up the phone. *I'm sure there's a compliment in there somewhere,* she says.

We take a ride in the Pontiac. A breeze whirls into the back seat, into the back of my head and I can smell Anne's soap, sage and citrus, and I can smell Marlboro Lights. She spins around to see people

behind us crossing the street. We wheel around corners with our elbows pointed out like nubs for wings. We're apart from everyone else, away from ourselves.

She says, *Astral plane.*

I never understand what she's saying. Even when we were young and held each other right, when we first started out, crossed state lines just to make love for days. Once I asked if we could in the bathtub. She said bathtubs are a waste of water.

She's looking out the window, both hands cupped around a can of beer and tucked between her legs. She sips, says, *Conscious dreaming really. You can go wherever you want to go.*

I am not sipping.

A higher state, she says.

Like Iowa. Cards are down three in the eighth. I press a bit on the pedal.

I'm talking to you, she says.

I didn't hear you.

You're not listening right, she says.

I don't remember, I say.

I thought you didn't hear me.

I mean I can't think.

You mean you can't remember thinking?

No, I guess I can't, I say, tossing my empty out the window.

Anne lights a Light, says, *When I was a girl, I'd run to the edge of the pasture at my grandparent's farm, climb the gate and sing so all the cows would come up and listen to me, all of them.*

You're a very desirable woman, I say. *A poet.*

Seems a funny thing for a poet, she says. She leans her head against the door. *I hate waiting for you,* she says and yawns.

We come up on Pisgah Church. *This foot down means two people dead,* I say, only under my breath. I'd do it. I'd put us right through the front door, swear to God I was going to Hell. Used to she'd kiss me on the forehead, tell me I'm good, we're good. Now we're giving God the finger. We're on a death horse. Used to be a man wouldn't survive a thing like that.

I look over, want to tuck a strand of hair behind her ear when she's sleeping. I grind my teeth. My teeth are strong.

The train signal has its crossing arm down in front of us. It's around evening and the cicadas let out all their noise.

Anne sits up, sets her chin on my shoulder, asks, *How do you think they make that sound?*

I think to tell her about the vibration they make using their bellies. But I've seen them without bellies before, heads with wings, still climbing a tree.

The train approaches and crosses in front of us. It's a Burlington Northern pulling a Union Pacific line. I wave to the conductor.

Anne raises her finger and starts to count the train cars.

Some doors are open, the cars empty.

There are tunnels in America, I say. *Places if you ride a train through you'll suffocate.*

After so many cars Anne's arm drops. She says, *This could go on forever.*

Two Sisters Fail to Die Tragically in Freak Accident

This could have been the end. But the good little girl who wanted to star in the movie hadn't figured out how to adequately anger her smug and admirable parents. She hadn't learned to be naughty. She hadn't requested enough suffering. She hadn't grown thematic.

So in went the bad juice and out went the good juice. But the good little girl's parents didn't even notice.

So she escalated. She hadn't realized suffering could be so easily invited. Was she starting something inevitable?

In the ranch movie inside the good little girl's head, the good little girl was riding ponies and eating cotton candy and playing hide and seek with the lambs and cheating at strip poker with the ranch hands. But in the ranch movie that was inside her mother's head, she was whitewashing the gleam in her father's watchful eye.

And in the ranch movie that was inside God's head, there was a great big flood and a lot of suffering and lots of drowned animals and lost people, except for the ones that were supposed to be learning a lesson for future generations.

And that was too many movies and too many confusing messages for the good little girl, so in went the ranch hands and out came the baby and soon the great flood of '74 was making its own kind of history. The good little girl wasn't mentioned by name (not the real one), but finally she had starred in all the suffering she desired. Which left (meanwhile, on the very same ranch), her sister, the bad little girl, to complete the confusions of parental oversight by turning out (suspiciously) well.

And if both sisters hadn't failed to die horrible deaths in a runaway train and expensive little foreign sports car accident on the only lonely country road in the heavily-urbanized county, they could have been the inspiration for the famous story upon which the timeless movie could have been based.

And then we would have to figure out who was really lying.

And then we would have to figure out if we believed it.

And that could have been the beginning.

Gacela of Hunger

Warm is the air that ruffles the red-tailed hawk in the dogwood.
I watched the red tail's sharp features watching me.

The people here bistro and loiter under mid-morning blue.
They rattle sports sections and sip from sunlit glasses.

From table to lip—each movement presents itself as prey;
the rodent movement of hands on their scuttling errands.

Looking for the weak hand, the red tail studies us.
It sharpens hunger into an anxious stance, readying.

Talons grip the branch as if the optic nerve were the brain.
I am a mouse, watching, refusing to move or chew.

Gacela of Hunting Season

There in the bush, the thrashing of pheasant
as I aim and wait for the flutter,
I shoot the flutter of wings from the bush.

The skylark is the color of spilled wine.
The bay is a label of fog.
Therefore I bury my knees in the earth.

That shadow gliding over the valley,
that shadow is my darker hand,
my hand which stains the valley of my shadow.

I am the hunger. I am a mouth.
I am the hunter. I am a mouth.
I bury my guilt within my chest,
I bury guilt near the pit of my hunger.

Gacela of Animal Wisdom

Apollo, Apollo, when will you leave the animals alone?
The swans swim away in fear of your broken-neck lyre.
They have no song to offer a user like you.

Each animal soul recalls hearing the thunder roar,
the turbulence, the quickening that turned their flesh.
The gods cannot remember all their names.

Orpheus will tell the canaries there is always work
in the coal mines. He sings lullabies all night
in his unlit house, and they politely stay awake to listen.

The crow has much to say whenever we step outside—
all the prophesies of the underworld. The ashes
of his wings spread over the dreaming cornfields.

When do the bear and the wolf get an apology?
They have moved their dens to the snowy north,
in an effort to avoid the pushy new neighbors.

Never ask a favor of the gods. They will always
answer there is this trick that I do—all it takes
is a few feathers, a couple claws and a coat.

J. P. DANCING BEAR

Gacela of a Setting Saxophone

Somewhere in the world is the Book of Cormorants.
Somewhere a book lies open with the most elegant *S*'s.

Dark letters at home on the sunset horizon of a page.
Extended necks pointing to the north along the shore.

I have a Coltrane melody swaying a soft space in my mind—
written as if he knew I would be here on a dog-eared page.

The sun is the open mouth of the saxophone—
brassy reds going down behind the mountains.
I have fallen in love with shadows *S*-ing north.
I have fallen to my knees in cold mud.

For the ache of my gracelessness, a low note fills me.
In the face of grace, a low note for gracelessness.

I sway with the twilight reeds and nettles and listen hard
for the first high-tone stars to take their places above me.

A cormorant lifts into a saxophone with wings.
A wing turns to point the quiet page between chapters.

STEPHEN KNAUTH

Little Blue Heron

Dark arc skimming the cove,
heron's antique glide pattern held
as a stay against the vulgarities of aging,
of rising and passing before the restive mirror
wondering which tomorrow has come today.
Soon the hornbeams will deepen and start down—
how we long to see them die!
Sturdy architecture of a hungry bird,
angel and archangel, *intrados,* its gleaming mate
surfacing to finish love's oval on the water.
Framing the past for our appraisal
like those melancholy bridges across the Arno,
life divvied up for review, introspection, regret—
nothing is forgotten, only held in trust.
Painted heart-scenes, extending night's palette through time.
Soulcatchers, the poet called them,
dispersed by a bottle thrown from a car.

ANDREY GRITSMAN

Return

And then you'll see the same old household:
hanging plants, dark bookshelves,
the window still half open,
stream of autumn air
suspended in the room,
his pen, forgotten on the floor,
three quiet paintings on the walls
(curious, cold onlookers).
The light fare of common life
in this corner of the Universe:
the dust, its tiny stars dancing in the late light,
small insects, cat's world,
with its own milestones,
with all those corners, smells
and hidden little sinister treasures.

The solid prewar hardwood.
The whole cocoon of another futile try.
There is no point in looking further.
They were just there.
He, by the fireplace,
as always struggling with something.
This time his pipe.
She, coming down the stairs
with a letter in her light, eternal hand.

A Piece of Paper

A man decides to walk to a little park
he never wanted to walk to until now.
He has come down the hill from where he lives.
A shopping list his wife sent off with him
the day she went away is in his coat.
He passes the building site with its ragged fence
enclosing litter no one would want to steal—
concrete-encrusted shovels, tubs and boards
surrounded by piles of broken stones and dirt—
the windows of the new apartment house
bulging with plastic sheets—and across from this,
behind its wall of saplings, someone's garden
with shoots of lettuce, eggplant, finocchio
flickering briskly out of the deep brown earth
three storeys down from where a woman leaned
over the railing of her balcony
looking the other way from the man who walked
beneath her across the street, when the traffic cleared,
to step along the sidewalk by the park,
turn back around, then suddenly disappear.
He finds a school beside a parking lot,
a high stone wall that winds into a world
of trees and lawns on a slope taking him down
to a pathway beyond the wall where a chain-link fence
keeps out three muddy pigs, one of them sleeping,
the others nosing through to a child's fingers
and a father gently pulling the child away.
The pathway curves around toward a cage
with a rooster in it, four or five white doves
murmuring from the rafters, a peahen,
and a peacock whose astounding fan is closed.
Across from the cage a bridge carries a boy
handing down bits of bread to a mob of ducks
in a pond whose one swan quietly kisses the sky.
The peacock paces miserably round and round.
The rooster stands in one spot, shaking his comb.
The man has entered a world that belongs to him.
The fingers the piece of paper in his coat.
He takes it out. That day she wanted milk,
mushrooms, some onions, and a bag of rice.
High in the wall behind the peacock's cage,
he finds a crack her words could slip inside
without a trace. He kisses them goodbye.
He goes home past the things he saw before,
as if in a dream of a place he came to once
on a walk to somewhere else and will never leave.

National Book Critics Circle Award Nominations for 2003:
Columbarium by Susan Stewart (The University of Chicago Press)
Blue Hour by Carolyn Forché (HarperCollins)
What Narcissism Means to Me by Tony Hoagland (Graywolf Press)
She Says by Vénus Khoury-Ghata, translated by Marilyn Hacker (Graywolf Press)
Granted by Mary Szybist (Alice James Books)
Reviewed by Katie Ford.

Susan Stewart's *Columbarium*, winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award for 2003, moves through the mythological, metaphysical and earthly bodies of thought and being—Dante's *Inferno*, the myth of Icarus, women braiding their hair, Virgil's *Georgics*, questions of immortality, a scarecrow—and speaks with an authority garnered not from physical details alone, but from the life of a mind seeking to meet the thoughts of the ages with its own poetic response. When it comes to the mind, the book digs and digs. The book asks for the reader's deepest concentration to meet it, to think *with* it, but also to hear it sing. In this way, Stewart has wedded the philosophical to the musical, yielding a depth akin to mystical writings, which seek to fasten the mind to an often spiraling image, waiting there until it lends what insight it can.

At times poetic fables, at times lyrical riddles, at times birds flying across the page (some poems are literally formed on the pages to be bird-like), *Columbarium*'s poems are various in their voices, strategies and concerns. In "the survival of Icarus," part of the opening series of the book, "Sung from the generation of AIR," Stewart writes something strikingly new about a myth taken up countless times in poetry:

> My father saw the feathers on the waves and grieved
> and hadn't heard the voice within the wind
> that blew the wax back into form the way
> the cold dawn shapes a candle's foam.
> I had heard that voice before
> in some far time beyond this place
> and I think of it now as a living net,
> though I do not know how it spans our world
> or if it sings from its strings or its spaces.

Ending on this kind of meditative question is typical of *Columbarium*'s philosophical orientation, as it seems to be more concerned with asking new questions than with finding new answers. If it does define, if it does answer, it is with the figurative, as if we must create an *image* of an answer: "The ear is a drum and cavern / / that will not close against the world, / / and so we build our houses / / where the wind cannot enter at will."

Unfortunately, the structure of some of the poems is so loud (those bird-like shapes, centered and columned poems) that formal elements seem to point more towards playful experiment than meaning. This becomes a peculiar frustration of the book, especially since this isn't a volume that otherwise plays with us, it *means*, it calls out to us in its sometimes distanced, always sage-like voice.

Blue Hour, named for what Carolyn Forché calls the hour of "pure hovering" between light and dark, this world and that, sorrow and redemption, is a collection residing in the nether-regions of life, those times of waiting, warring and ultimate unknowing. Here, as in her previous volumes, she masters the political poem—the most difficult and dangerous of lyrics—through language so emotionally and visually exacting we are transported not only to Beirut and the contaminated land surrounding Chernobyl, but to the land of the

divided and devastated self. She shows us, as in "In the Exclusion Zones," that there are places where "One need not go further than a white towel hung in an open door," and, in "One Earth," that there are places where one *must* reside:

> the name I am becoming
> the nine lights of thought
> the open well ending its moon of water
> the opening of time.

The poetry here is of the highest order, the language of the strictest and most harrowing beauty.

In the title poem, a kind of lyrical braiding shapes the poem, strands of narrative and images woven together long line by long line. This poem, with the voice of one who now sees things clearly, is one of the book's gorgeous meditative pieces: "In the years just after the war, it was not as certain that a child would live to be grown. Trucks delivered ice and poured coal into bins below the houses. // You see, one can live without having survived." What Forché does here, as throughout the book, is to "Bring night to your imaginings. Bring the darkest passage of your holy book" ("Prayer").

The book's longest poem, "On Earth," is an abecedarian lyric patterned after the Gnostic hymns of the third century A.D., which were not rediscovered until the twentieth century. In it, she catalogues what George Burgess calls "the recollections of a whole life," recollections which brighten as we approach our moment of death. It is a poet's rendering of life flashing before her eyes, but more than that—it is sight at its acutest, knowledge at its purest. Images pass before her, wisdom sayings chant back in the mind, the definitions one has made of suffering resurface:

> if he exists to another, that is need
> if rope were writing he would have hanged himself
> if you ask him what happened he will tell you
> if you bring forth what is within you

"For years I have opened my eyes and not known where I was," she writes. *Blue Hour* reads like a poet's final book, her eyes cast over all that has occurred, all that has been known and unknown, destroyed and saved, seen and unseen. Yet, despite the underlying farewell of the book, one hopes it is possible for Carolyn Forché to speak again, to follow this perfect book with yet another.

If you're on the porch flipping hamburgers with friends who speak mostly in shrewd similes, you're probably a character in Tony Hoagland's third collection of poems, *What Narcissism Means to Me.* "Kath says February is always like eating a raw egg; / Peter says it's like wearing a bandage on your head; / Mary says it's like a pack of wild dogs who have gotten into medical waste, / and smiles because she is clearly the winner."

All of us are in this book, (our dirty laundry and moral failings included), and it feels good. It feels good to *love* a book of poems, and not just admire its craft, its ambition, all the while feeling distant from it. This is the only book up for the award that will make you laugh, but not at the cost of what Robert Hass calls the "thin wire of grief" we feel or hear constantly in the voice of a friend. Such wise darknesses companion nearly every poem. One of the most striking poems in its music and sad discovery is "When Dean Young Talks about Wine," a poem in which the poet Dean Young speaks of what is missing in each wine, what has been left out of our art but is pervasive in our lives: "asthma medication," "orthopedic shoes," "cruel Little League coaches." And then Hoagland comes to this, one of the book's many unforgettable moments:

> When a beast is hurt it roars in incomprehension.

When a bird is hurt it huddles in its nest.

But when a man is hurt,
he makes himself an expert.

Here Hoagland's content finds its perfect music, and it is brilliant. This doesn't always happen, though, and some poems remain musically flat, like "Physiology of Kisses." The danger of the vernacular Hoagland leans on is a slackening in the language, a loss of tension, as when the language feels too easily arrived at ("the impossible dream," "we were changed"), or when the language slips into lineated prose. But these are aberrations and quickly forgiven by the desire to read this book all at once, then again, and then to give it to everyone you know.

Marilyn Hacker's translation of *She Says* lets us into a wildly imaginative and surprising collection of poems written by Vénus Khoury-Ghata, a Lebanese-born poet who has lived in France for the last thirty years. Khoury-Ghata writes in French but, as she says, lets her native Arabic infuse "its honey and its madness into French; the latter acting as safeguard against overexcitement and side-slipping." This "madness" and its rational tempering combine to make the book's poems into capsules holding two minds, two impulses, which, at their most balanced times, make for moving and startling verse: "She understands from the plane trees staring in shock at the countryside that the earth is cold / and it's not those ragged clouds which will cover the cliffs' nakedness."

The poems that are less balanced at times give very little to cling to rationally, and the reader may become frustrated at reaching after some final or definitive "meaning" which, in fact, is not immediately (or ever) there. What remains, at times, is a sense of not *understanding,* but being surrounded by a strange host of fig trees, birdlime and the reappearing dead.

The two chapters of the book, "Words" and "She Says," are framed by illuminating essays by both Hacker and Khoury-Ghata, granting some orientation to what the poems seek and are compelled to do: Hacker prepares us for the non-linear and surreal lyricism of Khoury-Ghata while Khoury-Ghata gives details of her life in war-racked Beirut and her first efforts at writing in French. *She Says* becomes, then, a book about the acquisition of a new language—born of necessity and war—which grants a new soul, as the saying goes. These poems seem to be so unlocked by these framing essays, so enriched by them, that it seems what is needed to interpret the poems is lacking in the poems themselves.

The volume begins with "Words," a kind of love song to language, creating its own mythology about language, beginning first with questions of origin: "Where do words come from? / from what rubbing of sounds are they born / on what flint do they light their wicks / what winds brought them into our mouths." Some readers might tire of the heavy personification of language throughout this section, but it leads to the longer second chapter, "She Says," in which the new soul speaks. Here the poems often come to sudden insights made of fierce and tireless image-making, translated beautifully by Hacker: "Her long cohabitation with the mountain taught her that birds / migrate at night so they won't know the road is long."

"Who has / {*Indicating the eyes*} / not been God's thief?" is just one of many piercing questions Mary Szybist's debut collection, *Granted,* asks of us. In *Granted,* Szybist reaches for aphorisms and emotional truths that approach the Sapphic. A handful of these small, terse sayings, embedded in poems that sometimes amaze, and sometimes disappoint, is enough to make this collection gleam:

When I am tired of only touching,
I have my mouth to try to tell you

what, in your arms, is not erased.

(From "In Tennessee I Found a Firefly")

It is these small passages, these arrivals, which detail the inaccurate promises and chosen solitudes that give *Granted* its often unsettling brilliance. Stunning lines, however, sometimes have to be excavated from longer, less persuasive poems comprised of slightly vacant or mannered language. These are the peculiar moments of *Granted,* in which the belief the reader first had in the poem deflates.

Others, however, are whole in their persuasion and beauty. A particularly lasting poem is "What the World Is For," in which Szybist writes, "Before I started to love you, / I tried to love the world." The speaker then watches girls play along a shoreline—drinking sodas, brushing sand off each other—bringing the poet to say, "You could tell it would be a long time / before they would be bent // down to the kind of love / from which they could not right themselves." This is the signature of Szybist's singular kind of sadness, an old-soul wisdom about longing and loves that are halved or incomplete, about religious desire that, at times, goes painfully unfulfilled. "Granted," she says, "there are some sadnesses/in which I do not long for God." This collection brings us into these unnamed and unmined regions with a compelling new poet as our guide.

The Long Meadow by Vijay Seshadri (Graywolf Press, 2004) Winner of the James Laughlin Award of The Academy of American Poets.

The Saint of Letting Small Fish Go by Eliot Khalil Wilson (Cleveland State Poetry Center Press, 2003) Winner of Cleveland State University Poetry Center First Book Competition.
Reviewed by Ed Skoog.

A first book can reasonably be expected to present itself like an actor at an audition, displaying a facility with tragedy as well as with comedy, the classical and the avant garde, dialects, movement, and hunger. Eliot Khalil Wilson's *The Saint of Letting Small Fish Go* demonstrates these talents. Second books, on the other hand, like Vijay Seshadri's *The Long Meadow,* generally reject such fragmentation in favor of intense focus. Other current examples are the marvelous second books, *The Afflicted Girls,* by Nicole Cooley, about the Salem witch trials; *Sad Little Breathing Machine,* by Matthea Harvey, about the human body as a desire machine; and *Blind Huber,* by Nick Flynn, about the entomological discoveries of the eighteenth-century beekeeper, Francois Huber. After the second book, the paths poets take are as unpredictable as chess moves, but during a poet's emergence this trajectory towards severe unity is generally followed, and is fascinating to observe.

The meadow of Seshadri's title is a spot in Brooklyn's Prospect Park, and the poems are "grounded" in relation to the architecture—landscape, apartments, office buildings—of New York and other cities, some of which are mythical inventions like those found in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities.* Despite this unity, Seshadri evades the cloistering effect found in many super-focused poetry collections which wall off the poetry from the imagination beyond what the topicality proscribes. I am always disappointed when a poem delivers what it promises; it seems insufficient to be simply satisfied, when a poem fits as neatly as a jigsaw piece. The best poems in *The*

Long Meadow are much larger, individually, than the book as a whole; that is, the poetic space they take up is greater than the tidy organization of the book can contain. My favorite escapee in the book is "Thelma":

> We have a small place on an ugly street,
> though we keep it spick and span.
> I take the garbage out, but you,
> Thelma, you the man—
>
> brilliant as the velvet eye
> setting off a peacock's feather,
> rayed as the sun is rayed
> through storming, broken weather
>
> and gilt-edged clouds. And me?
> I strip to my birthday suit
> and scream out the window at the Yemeni kids,
> who scream back, *"Sharmout!"*
>
> rolling by on their Rollerblades.
> You and me, Thelma, and the little squirt,
> with me on the stoop
> in my cap turned backward and my undershirt.

Other poems perspire more profusely, but ultimately the effect of the book is a drying out—the long prose section entitled "The Nature of the Chemical Bond" contextualizes the poems within the contradictions of living in multiple cultures and histories, concluding with his Bangalore-born father's idolization of Ulysses S. Grant. Playful lines such as "you the man" and "I agree with you one hundred percent, dog," are balanced with more meditative lectures about, oh, trivial subjects such as time, suffering, religious belief, and Rocky and Bullwinkle.

Eliot Khalil Wilson's first book of poems, *The Saint of Letting Small Fish Go,* despite its title, is not an addendum to any of the official Catholic hagiographies, though it makes one think of the saints of fishermen, of fish, of catch-and-release, and, certainly, of St Francis, who would be able to speak to the small fish as they wriggled away, give them soothing words for their voyage. The book contains many farewells, many epitaphs for hares and elegies in country churchyards—it is a work of sentiment, although not, thankfully, of sentimentality. Wilson's skills in the areas of formal construction, the sharp image, the electric word, and the tones of gentle irony, together prevent him from taking the easy shortcuts to poetic meaning. Even the poem "Wedding Vows" refuses to descend to mere heartwarming: "I'll have a tongue like a sperm whale, eyes like a harp seal, biceps like a fiddler crab...My sweat will smell like drug money."

Wilson's forty-five poems form an omnibus of style and content, a lyric fishmarket setting out works of vastly differing tastes and textures. A series of poems called "Blank Verses" holds the book together, some of which are written in actual blank verse, though the best of the group, "Blank Verse Directions to the Asylum Cemetery," is only loosely so. Here Wilson describes what the cemetery will be like, should the reader find it:

> ...There will be a strict and orderly grid,
> rows and rows of uniform depression,
> rectilinear and evenly spaced
> like a good, workable harmonica...

Listen to the sounds of other people's suffering, Wilson seems to say in this poem, and you might learn how to endure your own

contradictions. Of course there is also late capitalism to contend with. Other poems articulate concern for the sounds and expressions of suffering in surprising ways, detailing the inability to comfort a baby, the anonymous tragedies of the thrift store, the fates of soldiers.

Yet at the center of this book is an isolation like that found in costume shops, where the racks burst with compelling identities while a living, breathing human runs the cash register. When the speaker of these poems isn't Kahlid the Rug Collector or the ghost of Allen Ginsberg, the voice speaks with the casual, sardonic honesty of any meditative contemporary American with cable. But there is grandiosity within the repose of these poems; with their lost and mighty currents, Wilson' poems are like the dry rivers of the west, fishless and dusty: read them and they fill up again.

The Long Meadow ought to provide an instructive example for Wilson to follow in his next book. Seshadri's first book, *Wild Kingdom,* was also more of a survey of poems than a concentration—they also seem to have similar ideas about the role of the poet—neither poet is a clochard nor a philosopher-hermit in the woods, although the sense of joy in each hints toward an indulgence of the body, and the intellectual sense in each hints towards an indulgence of the mind. All of the poems here draw energy from the restraint of these extremes, like miniature hydroelectric dams.

horse mEdicine by M. C. Dalley
(New Orleans: American Zen Association, 2003)
Reviewed by Jeff Chan.

It is understandable why many readers could be instantly turned off upon first hearing about M.C. Dalley's *Horse Medicine.* This autobiographical novel is the story of Mike Dalley, who is, in no particular order: 1) an expatriate American living in Paris; 2) a poverty-stricken alcoholic and womanizer; 3) a wanna-be writer; and 4) a Zen monk. In short, at first glance Mike's story appears a hipster's dream combination, a romantic literary grab bag of overdone postures and conceits crossing terrain covered in Beat literature and a thousand espresso-fueled knock-offs, and as such, subject to grueling critical review.

Indeed, the book is flawed, especially to the reader seeking out a good story. But it is not hopeless. The story follows a picaresque mode, as we might expect given the main character, with twenty-four chapters each more or less comprising a day in the life of Mike, and featuring run-ins with various characters, some recurring, others not. Only a few storylines thread their way through: Mike's relationship with Lydia, his wife from whom he has separated, as well as their daughter Celine; his relationship with girlfriend, Caroline; his relationship with Yakumatsu, his sensei of ten years (Yakumatsu's is very nearly a story-within-a-story, in fact); and Mike's publishing aspirations (he has never been published in some twenty years of writing, aside from working on translations of Yaku's teachings... we learn later that he is trying to get *Horse Medicine* published, which makes for a rather tepid stab at self-reference).

That should be enough for a book of this size, but somehow it isn't, and I suspect that it's not content so much as form that's the culprit here. The problem is that this story is told too much in a log-book-like style. Yes, the recounting has been poeticized (and no

doubt fictionalized) up a notch from your typical diary entry, but the personalized style of shortcutting through narrative connections, of using freewheeling grammar and syntax to capture tone, and a bit of personal language here and there, results in a deadening effect. So much of Mike's life seems uninteresting—the way it is passed over so quickly, and even when it is not, it is still more-or-less rendered so. The many "real life" moments, especially those moments of supposed debauchery and pornography which the editors seem to pin so much upon (in the way they counter Mike's "Zen" side), are on the whole not related as such. In fact, what should perhaps be this character's most devastating and influential episode (and from which the book gets its title) is only quickly revealed towards the very end, even though it occurred before he ever went to Paris.

Now, this sounds an awful lot like how real life works, and how real life is portrayed, especially to one who, despite all his earthly faults and temptations, is diligently following the Way. So may I suggest that we may read *Horse Medicine* as a story about a guy who is in perhaps the biggest conflict one can be in: conflict with desire and ego itself, which of course is the story of anyone practicing Zen. That battlefield is in the dojo, in meditation, and during meditative moments along the way. The rest is just window dressing, and perhaps justifiably so.

Just as Buddhism would make no distinction between types of phenomenon (they're all illusionary, yet all dangerous in their ability to generate attachment in the clouded mind), so too does Dalley seem to "sift out" experiences through his style such that they all appear equal, rendering none of them extraordinary. Certain events *are* more extreme or meaningful than others, on the surface at least—just not in the rendering. This may be what ultimately turns many readers off, less than the subject matter and all its attendant attachments. The book turns toward the side of contemplation and teaching; Dalley's work is most entertaining and engaging not when he is playing the part of the bohemian rowdy, but when he is in the meditation hall. The book is certainly instructive in this regard, the way it not only allows us entrance into the discipline, but how it relies upon an examination of Mike's "weapons" in his conflict: the teachings of Buddha.

The book may find an audience with those who would devour the likes of Bukowski on the merits of his foulness alone (let's face it, most of Bukowski's stuff is crap, though when he was in the zone, he scored), or Kerouac *because* he was into Buddhism, which is so *deep*, man—such readers tend to lack the literary depth that this book also seems to lack. But perhaps, in the force of its overriding teaching, it will have the power to sway such readers beyond a mere posture.

As a result, *Horse Medicine* may serve better as a Zen memoir designed to teach, rather than as a general read novel; and if it is to be a novel, then it will still best serve a Zen-oriented audience. The editors certainly seem to think so, the way they, in the prefaces, tout the originality of the book's juxtaposition of Zen practice with debauchery and the political statement its publishing makes.

CONTRIBUTORS

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MICHAEL DEMOS says, "I've never understood what's so great about football. Basketball, now that I understand."

TESS GALLAGHER was selected as the first person to receive a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Washington State Poets' Association. She has also been named alumnae of the year at her alma mater, University of Washington, for Arts and Humanities. She will receive an honorary doctorate of letters from University of Hartford in May. In October, she will be presented with the John Terrell award for excellence from the Washington State Humanities Commission. She is currently working on a book of poems with the working title: *Dear Ghosts,* to be published by Graywolf Press. She lives with her Irish painter-companion, Josie Gray, in Port Angeles, Washington and in Ballindoon, Ireland.

ANDREW GOETZ received a BA from the University of Alabama in 1984. Since 1983, he has documented work of the Program for Rural Services and Research in Alabama, and has conducted photography workshops for students, teachers, and residents throughout rural Alabama, advising the set-up, use, and maintenance of school-based

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ALLISON EIR JENKS' first book, *The Palace of Bones,* won the Hollis Summers Prize judged by Carolyn Kizer, and was published in 2002 by Ohio University Press, and is forthcoming in the U.K. with Leviathan Press. Her poems have been published in *Puerto Del Sol, Salmagundi, Pleaides, ReDactions, Massachusetts Review, Columbia, Poetry Ireland Review, Willow Springs,* and *Michigan Quarterly Review.* She is a PhD candidiate at Florida State University.

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ROBERT KING has had work most recently in *Atlanta Review* and *Missouri Review.* His fifth chapbook is *What It Was Like* (Small Poetry Press, 2003). A professor emeritus from the University of North Dakota, he currently lectures at the University of Northern Colorado.

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JEFFREY LEVINE's first book of poetry, *Mortal, Everlasting,* won the Transcontinental Poetry Award from Pavement Saw Press, and his second book, *Sanctuaries,* is due out from Red Hen Press in 2005. He has won the Larry Levis Poetry Prize from *Missouri Review,* the James Hearst Poetry Award from *North American Review,* the Mississippi Review Poetry Prize, and the Kestrel Poetry Prize. Levine is the Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of Tupelo Press, an independent literary press.

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ANDREW MILLER has been writing poetry for fifteen years. His poems have appeared in *New Orleans Review, Spoon River Review* and *Massachusetts Review,* among other journals. His poems also appear in *How Much Earth,* a recent anthology of The Fresno Poets. He lives in Barcelona, Spain with his wife and two daughters.

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MICHAEL MURRAY lives in San Francisco. His stories and poems have appeared in *The Threepenny Review, Hayden's Ferry Review* and *Hawai'i Review,* as well as previously in *New Orleans Review.* He recently published the poetry chapbook *Big Cotton Sun* with the Main Street Rag Press (www.mainstreetrag.com).

BARBARA ROBERDS is a lifelong resident of Louisiana whose black-and-white and hand-painted photographs capture the essence of her home state. She has an ongoing association with the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, and her CD cover images recently earned a Louisiana Press Association Award. Her photographs have been published in *Living Blues* magazine, *Gambit Weekly,* and *Offbeat.*

SIMON PERCHIK is an attorney whose poetry has appeared in *Partisan Review, The New Yorker, New Orleans Review,* and elsewhere. Readers interested in learning more about him are invited to read *Magic, Illusion and Other Realities* at www.geocities.com/simonthepoet, which site lists a complete bibliography.

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ED SKOOG has published reviews in *The Kansas City Star, Literary Magazine Review, The Ithaca Book Press, LitRag,* and previous issues of *New Orleans Review.* His own poetry has appeared in *Barrow Street, Indiana Review, Fourteen Hills, 3rd Bed, New Orleans Review,* and *Slate.*

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DANIEL TOBIN is the author of three books of poems, *Where the World is Made,* co-winner of the 1998 Katherine Bakeless Nason Prize, *Double Life* (Louisiana State University Press, 2004), and *The Narrows* (forthcoming from Four Way Books in 2005). Among his awards are The Discovery/The Nation Award, The Robert Penn Warren Award, the Greensboro Review Prize, a creative writing fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Robert Frost Fellowship. His work has been anthologized in *The Bread Loaf Anthology of New American Poets, The Norton Introduction to Poetry,* and elsewhere. He is chair of the Writing, Literature, and Publishing Department at Emerson College.

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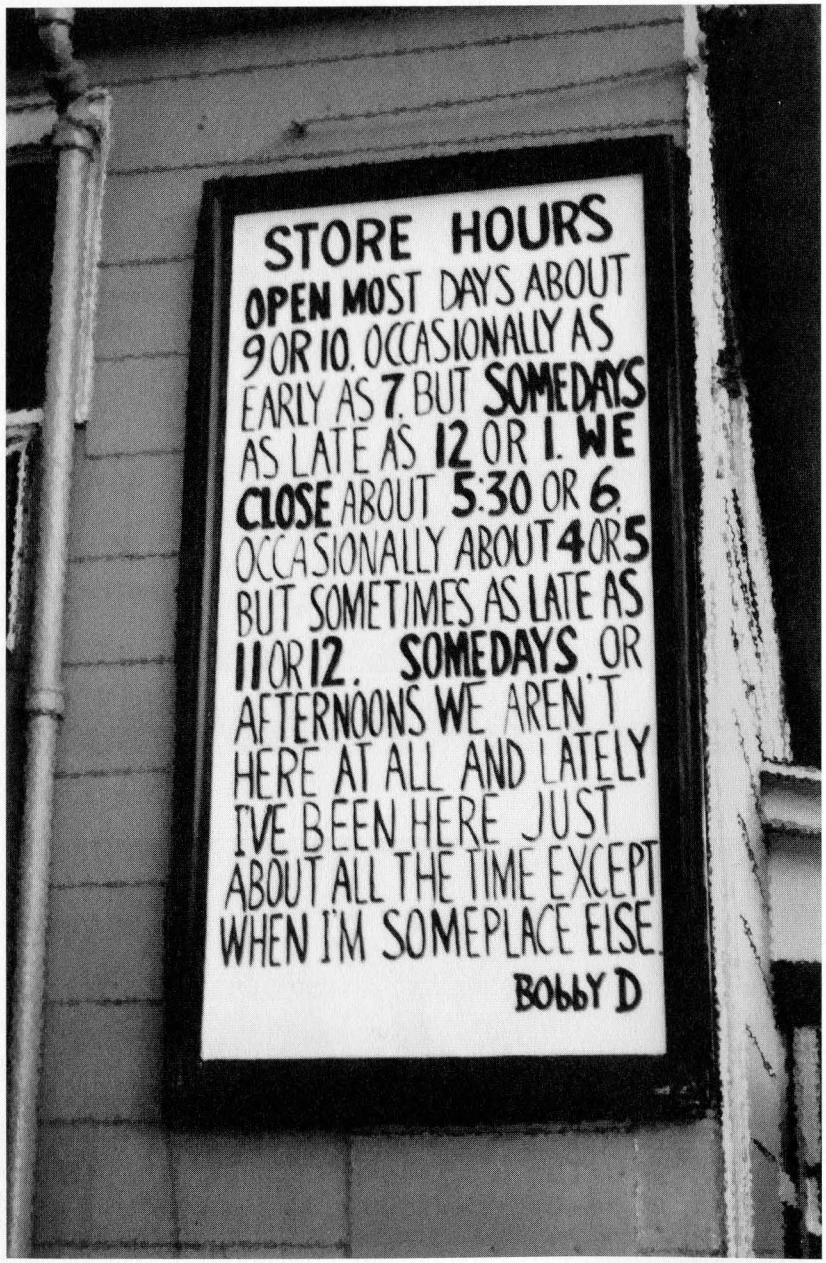

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