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BLUE RIVER

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Table of Contents

<i>Dallas Woodburn—Snow World</i>	4
<i>John Gallaher—Fevered Alps</i>	14
<i>John Gallaher—Gameshow</i>	15
<i>Maddie Murphy—Law</i>	16
<i>David Starkey—The Piano Tuner</i>	17
<i>David Starkey—Eldorado</i>	18
<i>Luke Rolfes—Confidence</i>	19
<i>Al Simmons—A Man Rose from Deep Sleep</i>	25
<i>Brad Johnson—The Factory</i>	26
<i>Michael Chin—Yelling</i>	27
<i>William Snyder, Jr.—The Joys of Parenting</i>	42
<i>Thomas J. Erickson—The Providence of the Fall of a Snowflake</i>	43
<i>Caitlin Woolley—Teeth</i>	44
<i>Kevin Brown—Sign Broken; Message Inside</i>	50
<i>Richard Sonnenmoser—Touring the Glore Psychiatric Museum</i>	51
<i>Wendy Mitman Clarke—August</i>	65
<i>Wendy Mitman Clarke—On Watson Road</i>	66
<i>William J. Cobb—The Looting</i>	67
<i>Charly Santagado—Meta-Documentation</i>	80
<i>Kathy O’Fallon—Trimming the Rose Bushes</i>	81
<i>David M. Harris—Making Charcoal</i>	82
<i>Laura Madeline Wiseman—Mythical Birds of the Sun Paradise</i>	83
<i>Ryan Borchers—Review of Erin Belieu’s Slant Six</i>	85
<i>Contributors’ notes</i>	88

Snow World ~

Dallas Woodburn

THAT DAY, Katie awoke with excitement sparking in her belly like Christmas tree lights. It was the third Saturday of the month, which meant her father pulled into the driveway at noon to sweep Katie and Sammie into his orbit. He walked up to the front door as he always did, signifying his presence with his clomping work boots and smoker's cough. As always, Sammie yanked open the front door before their father pressed the doorbell.

"Dad, Dad, come look at our tree!" Sammie reached for his hand, dragging him towards the living room.

"Wait just a second, bud—let me say hi to your sister first." He bent down and gave Katie a hug, the brim of his frayed Dodgers ball cap bumping against her head. Katie hugged him tightly and breathed him in—smoke, aftershave, chewing gum, Dad. He pulled away and gently tugged her ponytail. Tug, tug. His hello ritual. "You're taller every time I see you," he said. Katie smiled, pride and sadness mingling inside. Her father used to mark her height with pencil on the door of the downstairs bathroom.

"Da-ad! Dad, come look!" Sammie whined, tugging their father's hand. Katie followed them into the living room. The Christmas tree sparkled in the corner, the shiny red, purple, and blue orbs their mother had bought on sale at Target gleaming like something in a play. What Katie thought about as the Real ornaments, the pre-divorce ornaments, had been destroyed by rats in the garage a few months before. The corners of the box were chewed through and what looked like little black grains of rice were scattered across the cold cement floor. Their mother had shrieked and told Katie and Sammie to go back inside, and the next day an exterminator came and set traps in the garage. Gary, their mother's boyfriend, carried the box outside to join the garbage waiting on the curb for collection.

Katie had wanted to look through the ornaments, but her mother wouldn't let her.

"We'll get some new ones, okay?" she said. "We don't want those rat-chewed ones."

That night, in bed, Katie dreamt of rats chewing holes in the Snoopy ornament her father had bought her when they went to Knotts Berry Farm as a family. Sammie got a Charlie Brown ornament, and their mother got Lucy. Try as she

might, Katie couldn't remember what ornament their father had bought for himself. The next morning, before school, she ran out to the curb in her bare feet, but the garbage truck had already come and left. The box was gone, as if it had never been there.

In the living room, their father admired the tree.

"I did the tinsel," Sammie said, and their father said, "I think it's the best tinsel tree I've ever seen." He turned and asked Katie if she helped with the tinsel, too.

"A little," Katie said, even though that was a lie. She had claimed a stomachache and retreated up to her room while her mother and Gary and Sammie decorated the tree with the new ornaments. Her father smiled at her, and she looked down at her feet, thinking of her cast-away Snoopy, wondering if her father knew what had happened to all the mismatched ornaments they had collected as a family.

Since the divorce, Katie didn't think of her father as part of their family anymore, at least not part of the family that included her mother. It was like she had two families that were planets orbiting in entirely separate atmospheres: she, Sammie and their mother, and sometimes Gary, in the house she had lived in ever since she could remember; and she, Sammie, and their father, in slices of weekend afternoon time, driving around to fast food restaurants and bowling alleys and mini-golf courses, what her father called "Fun-with-a-capital-F" places that caused Katie's throat to tighten with every minute slipping away, because when afternoon melted into evening and the streetlights blinked on it would be time for their father to take them home and then drive away. He used to take them to the same fast food restaurants and bowling alleys and mini-golf courses and then drive home and stay because it used to be his home, too. Last Christmas, it had been his home too.

Their mother came down the stairs, her hair damp from the shower. "Oh," she said when she saw their father. "You're early." She didn't look angry, just surprised.

"I hit all the green lights," their father said. He opened his mouth as if to say something more, but didn't.

Katie hugged her mother goodbye and her chin came up to her mother's shoulder. Her mother had always seemed taller.

"You guys be good," she said into Katie's hair.

Their father smiled tightly, the same smile he used to put on when their mother's friends were over. Katie realized their father didn't usually come inside the house. Usually he stood on the front stoop, his hands clasped behind his

back, rocking from his heels to his toes, while their mother got Katie and Sammie into jackets and waved goodbye from the doorway, the screen door making her a blurry outline if Katie turned and looked back from the car window as they drove away.

“Dad wanted to see the tree!” Sammie exclaimed. He was still holding their father’s hand and he swung it forward and back.

“It’s a great tree,” their father said, looking down at Sammie. “Did you pick it out yourself, bud?”

“No,” Sammie said. The silence stretched. Their mother broke away from Katie and fluffed her damp hair with her hands. After the divorce, she had cut her hair boy-short; now she was growing it out again. She used a straightening iron to flatten it every morning before going to the realty office where she worked as a receptionist. She wouldn’t let Katie use a straightening iron on her hair; she was too young, her mother said. Too young for make-up too. People told Katie she had inherited her mother’s looks, but now Katie’s hair was curly and her mother’s hair was unsettlingly straight.

“Gary brought the tree for you, huh, kids?” she said, and Katie hated her. “We’ve just been so busy. We didn’t have time to go pick out one together.”

Later that night, Katie will tell her mother that her hair looks ugly. Straightened, the texture is different—thin and stringy, like paintbrush bristles. Nobody could think it looks good, that paintbrush-bristle hair, Katie will say. Except maybe Gary, who is stupid and ugly, too.

“How’s Gary?” their father asked, glancing at the stairs as if expecting him to appear on the landing, trailing their mother around like a droopy-eyed golden retriever.

“He’s fine. He’s working today. Putting in extra hours at the office.”

“Good, that’s good.” Their father cleared his throat.

“He got the Christmas tree at Big Wave Dave’s,” Sammie announced, as if it were something to be proud of. Big Wave Dave’s was the only Christmas tree lot in town, materializing the day after Thanksgiving in the otherwise empty square of land where Cartright’s used to be. The bus route took them past it every day on the way to and from the elementary school. Katie and Sammie had begged their mother to take them to pick out a tree, but she was busy stirring pots in the kitchen and talking on the phone to Aunt Janice and resting quietly in the dark of her bedroom (“Just let me be for a little bit, okay?” she’d say. “Go do your homework. We’ll get a tree tomorrow”). They didn’t get a Christmas

tree until Gary came home lugging one under his arm, its branches uneven, dripping pine needles all over the carpet. Sammie had been immediately overcome with excitement, dancing around the room and throwing tinsel up into the air so it rained down upon the furniture and the braided rug and their sleeping dog, Joey, who was older than both Katie and Sammie and didn't even seem to notice the clumps of silver growing all over his body.

Watching Gary heft the tree's bulk into the red-and-green Christmas tree stand her mother had filled carefully with water from the kitchen sink, Katie had felt a strange disappointment. Because the Christmas tree itself wasn't the point. The point was going to Big Wave Dave's together, and walking together along the uneven rows between the trees, the air smelling of winter even though it was sixty degrees and sunny outside. The point was inspecting branches for insects and gauging heights for what would be closest to grazing the ceiling of their living room while still leaving room for the angel on top, the angel Katie had saved up her allowance money to buy last Christmas (though it didn't keep her parents from fighting, her mother physically pushing her father out the front door, his shoes only half-on, his head banging against the doorframe—Ow, Katie had thought, watching it from the stair landing—but her father hadn't grimaced, hadn't said a word, just walked out the door as her mother yelled and yelled about some woman Noreen, a name Katie didn't recognize.)

Their father bent down and rubbed Joey's ears. "Big Wave Dave's," he said, addressing the dog. "That's fun."

"Fun for Gary maybe," Katie said.

"Katie, please," her mother said. "Not now."

"What? I'm just saying, picking out the tree is the fun part. Right, Dad?"

Her father scratched Joey under the chin. "I'm sure your mother was just trying to give you a surprise," he said, not looking at her. Katie felt the excitement in her belly flicker and die out.

"Whatever," Katie said. Didn't her father realize she was on his side?

"Da-ad," Sammie whined. "Where are we going?"

"It's a surprise," their father said. He met Katie's eyes and winked, an apology. Katie focused her attention on lacing up her tennis shoes.

"Well, you guys have fun," their mother said. She looked small and alone, standing there on the stairs with her damp hair.

“I’ll have them back by six,” their father said.

Their mother walked them to the doorway, but she didn’t wave goodbye through the screen. When Katie looked back, the front door was closed, like the hard shell of a turtle protecting itself. Through the living room window, the Christmas tree blinked on and off, on and off.

•

“WHERE ARE WE GOING?” Sammie asked.

“It’s a surprise,” their father said. No matter how many times Sammie asked, that was all their father would say in response. He drove them through town, past the mini-golf course and bowling alley and laser tag, past the McDonald’s and Wendy’s and Burger King. A red light stopped them beside Big Wave Dave’s. Katie looked out the car window at the blur of tree branches and thought about Cartright’s, remembered how they all used to go there together, she and Sammie and their father and mother, back before it burned down. Cartright’s had been a taco restaurant painted bright yellow with yellow booths made of hard plastic. They served the tacos in wire baskets shaped like boats and they made their own corn tortillas in the kitchen. One time, Mr. Reynosa let Katie and Sammie go back to the kitchen and try a tortilla fresh from the stovetop. Mr. Reynosa had smile-wrinkles that made his face open up like wrapping paper unveiling a present. He wore an apron with the Mexican flag stitched across the front and he kept small brightly wrapped candies in a bowl by the register. As their mother threw away used napkins and their father counted out bills from his wallet, Mr. Reynosa would ask Katie and Sammie, “Are you being good kids?”

“Yes,” they would say, solemn-voiced.

“Have a candy.” Mr. Reynosa’s eyes would squint into the folds of his smile-wrinkles, and Katie and Sammie would carefully pluck candies from the bowl, one piece each, which they would savor slowly (Katie) or chomp to bits (Sammie) on the drive home, the windows down, their father whistling along to the radio, their mother tapping her fingers to the beat.

But that was a long time ago—two, maybe even three years had passed since the building burned down. Looking out the car window, Katie tried to remember the details of Cartright’s exterior, but her memory of it had grown blurrier the more time passed. Was the parking lot on in the front, or the back? Were there bushes planted along the walkway? What color was the sign? She couldn’t remember. Just her parents sitting on the same side of the bright yellow booth

and the hard smoothness of the candy against her tongue, before it melted away to nothing.

“Dad, where are we going?” Sammie asked again.

“It’s a surprise,” their father said. He didn’t look at them in the rear-view mirror the way he usually did. The light turned green and they drove on, through the rest of town, onto the freeway heading north. This was the section of the freeway Katie loved most—the ocean on one side, the mountains on the other. The ocean was on Sammie’s side of the car. Katie looked out her window at the mountains, their grassy coats a tentative green instead of the usual brown. It had rained a good amount since Thanksgiving, enough to keep the wildfires at bay, and Katie was happy because rain meant colder weather and colder weather meant it felt more like winter, more like Christmas.

They drove for what felt like a long time, past the beach house shaped like a castle, past the little town that had been half-buried by a landslide a few years before, past the exits for Santa Barbara, where their parents used to live a long time ago, before even Katie was born. Katie had only been there a handful of times, on field trips to the zoo or the art museum. To her, Santa Barbara seemed pretty much the same as the town they lived in, but her mother acted like it was worlds away. “Now that,” her mother would say, her eyes far away, “is a nice town. Classy people. Best place I ever lived.”

“Why’d you move, then?” Katie asked once.

Her mother was folding laundry on the couch. “Things happen,” she said. “Life happens.” She looked down at one of Sammie’s shirts, folding it carefully in half, like a mirror image pressed against itself.

“Seems pretty dumb to move away,” Katie said. It was a Saturday evening, after her father had dropped them off and waved goodbye, and she was feeling mean and pent-up and broken. She pressed on, wanting her mother to look up, wanting to see hurt in her eyes. “I mean, if you loved it so much. It sounds like you just didn’t love it enough.”

“Yes, I did,” her mother said in a soft voice. “I loved it there.” Years from now, Katie will learn that her parents had moved out of Santa Barbara because her father lost his job, and her mother couldn’t afford to continue attending classes at the City College, which was the whole reason she had moved there in the first place. Katie had not known her mother ever attended college. She didn’t know her parents’ settling down had been, for her mother, a form of settling, the kind of happiness that leaves a bitter aftertaste.

Past Santa Barbara, on the outskirts of Goleta, their father flicked on the turn signal and they eased off the freeway, onto a residential street edged with palm trees.

“Where are we going?” Sammie asked. “Are we almost there?”

“Soon.” Their father glanced at the map printed out from the computer, directions angled towards him on the passenger seat. Katie watched the palm trees bob their heads in the breeze.

Their car pulled up to a large park, soccer and baseball fields stretching as far as Katie could see. They drove through the open yellow gate, along a well speed-bumped road—Sammie bouncing gleefully in his seat with each bump—past a community swimming pool and tennis courts. The next parking lot they came to was marked with a big arrow and a cardboard sign: SNOW WORLD PARKING HERE.

“Snow World?” Katie asked. “Is that where we’re going?”

“Snow World?” Sammie said. “What’s Snow World?”

Their father pulled the car into a spot and cut the engine. He turned around, his smile proud. “I told you I’d take you to the snow, didn’t I?”

And it was true, he had told them so—earlier that year, in late spring. Sammie had gotten into trouble at school for leading a group of fellow second-graders in jumping off the jungle gym, working up higher and higher until a teacher stopped them. Their mother told Sammie not to play that game anymore, that he could get hurt, but Sammie was stubborn and wouldn’t listen. So over soda and pizza at the bowling alley, their father told them about the time he broke his leg when he was a boy in a small town in Ohio, sledding with his brothers down McArthur’s Hill.

“Let me tell you, son,” their father said to Sammie, leaning close over the soda-sticky table. “Breaking your leg hurts!”

Sammie nodded, biting his straw.

“No more jumping off the jungle gym. Okay? And stop chewing on that straw.”

“Dad,” Sammie said. “What’s snow like?”

“Snow? Well, it’s fun to play in. You can go sledding. Have snowball fights. Build snowmen.”

“Like in the Christmas movies?”

Their father laughed. “Yes, like in the Christmas movies. We’ll go to the snow sometime. How’s that sound?”

“Yeah!” said Sammie, and Katie nodded, smiling fully, forgetting that she didn’t like the crookedness of her front

teeth so she only smiled with her lips closed. That night, she dreamt of making snow angels on the front lawn. The dream-snow felt like feathers brushing against her back and shoulders.

Katie and Sammie climbed out of the car. The sun was hot on the tops of their heads, and heat rose up from the black pavement of the parking lot. Sammie wriggled out of his jacket, but their father insisted on bringing it with them. “You’ll want this,” he said. “I don’t want you to get cold playing in the snow all afternoon.” Katie kept her jacket on and, as they walked towards the park, she could feel sweat gathering on her skin, dampening her T-shirt. Snow, she thought, unable to curb the rising excitement inside her. Real snow.

They followed the arrows to a giant banner reading SNOWWORLD that was strung between two trees. At the entrance a folding table was set up, where an old lady wearing a puff-painted Rudolph shirt took their father’s money and handed them three construction-paper tickets taped to mini candy-canes. “Have fun!” she said, waving at them, the bells on her sweatshirt jingling softly. Sammie tugged on their father’s hand, leading them under the banner, into an area of the park marked off by plastic fencing. Icicle lights were strung along tree branches, the tiny bulbs dull-looking in the brightness of the sun. Christmas music blared from loudspeakers.

Katie did not see any snow. Just grass, dirt, trees—just a regular park, decorated with Christmas lights and cut-outs of Santa Claus and elves and reindeer. Giant candy-canes sprung from the grass like strange flowers. Groups of kids ran by in T-shirts and shorts. Most of the kids there looked Sammie’s age or younger. Katie wished she could roll back time and make herself younger, smaller. The older she got, the more unwieldy and wrong her life felt. It scared her—the way she could only go forward, never back.

I’m moving forward, Katie had heard her mother say on the phone to Aunt Janice shortly after the divorce was finalized. Sometimes, Katie would cut class and walk home, slipping into her own backyard without her mother knowing. She would sit on the grass, back pressed against the wall underneath the kitchen window, and braid dandelion stems together. When the window was open, she could hear her mother talking. He made his own bed. And you know what they say—it’s a symptom of a larger problem. We’d been having problems for a while. The next week, for Valentine’s Day, their mother went on a double-date with a woman from work, and that’s how she met Gary.

“C’mon, Katie!” Sammie called. He was a few feet ahead, dragging their father towards a hill at the far end of the park. “Sledding!”

Katie followed, glancing into an area marked “Snow Play Zone” as they walked past. The ground was muddy, the grass stomped flat by the zigzag footsteps of running children—yet there, in the middle of it all, was a knee-high lump of snow, gleaming. She wanted to run over and press her fingers into it. She wanted to feel snow melting under her fingernails. And then she wanted to step on it, crush it—feel all the snow turning to mud under her tennis shoes.

At the bottom of the sledding hill, Katie joined her father (frowning) and Sammie (bouncing). “Hmm,” their father murmured. “There was supposed to be snow.” It looked like there had been snow at one time, but most of it had melted. Kids slid down the hill, their sleds leaving trails of mud in the grass and slush. The sleds were bright green and made of a flimsy plastic that reminded Katie of her school binder. Sammie held his in one hand and waved his arm up and down so the plastic wiggled. “Cool!” he said. “Dad, look!”

“That’s neat, bud,” their father said. His face looked caved in.

Their father had moved most of his things out of their house while Katie and Sammie were at school. He’d left a note propped on Katie’s dresser, a folded piece of paper that said, simply, I love you. I’ll see you soon. Her name was on the front—K8, her father’s shorthand, her lucky number. When he lived with them, he had given her eight quarters for her allowance every week. Her chores had been helping her father with his weekend tasks—mowing the lawn, trimming the bushes, washing her mother’s car. Her father drove a mud-splattered Jeep that they never washed. He told her the guys would make fun of him if he drove up to the construction site on Monday with no dirt on his Jeep.

Now, her father stared up at the muddy hill, his eyes squinting in the sun. Katie picked up her green plastic sled from the soggy grass.

“It looks fun, Dad,” Katie said. “It’s still sledding. It counts.” She took Sammie’s hand and they trudged together up the hill. Their father stood at the bottom, watching them. When they got to the top, they waved. Their father seemed far away. He waved back, still holding Sammie’s jacket in the other arm.

“Ready?” Katie asked.

“Yeah,” Sammie said.

Later—after they built a small lopsided snowman and

ate Sno-Cones and returned to the big hill, where Sammie purposefully veered his sled into a tree and sprained his wrist; after Katie entered middle school and began grazing a razor blade against her thighs; after their mother married Gary and withdrew even further into herself; after their father slammed his Jeep head-on into a telephone pole on a clear-skied February morning—later, when Katie would think back on Snow World, she would think about that moment when she and Sammie first sat down on their bright green plastic sleds at the top of that hill, looked at each other, took a deep breath, and pushed off, sliding down in the slush and the mud, faster and faster, more thrilling than any roller coaster. She'd remember her breathlessness and the pure glee in Sammie's shrieks. How they both skidded to a stop at the bottom, and without a word picked up their plastic sleds and raced to the top—eager to capture the magic again, and again, the thrill of barreling down the hill towards their father and knowing he would be there, squinting in the sun, waiting for them.

The Fevered Alps ~

John Gallaher

Zahi Hawass digs up a fragment of a statue
(the face parts), and he thinks awhile.
It might be from a statue of Mark Antony,
and why not? They cut quite the figure
against the sky, the kind of cinematography
that went out in the 70s, and then they too go off
stage left, perused by the Sustainable Happiness
Footprint Chart you can use to help in this,
if you want your progress toward happiness
to be codified. That's Step Two: To Codify,
as in "We Miss You, Cat Man," what a six-year-old
said about Rick, who volunteered
at the human society before moving to Colorado.
And then it's "We Miss You, Cat Man" for any
track I get off of and then back on. Noah
was going to burn down his beach house
and we all showed up to help, two by two.
It's classic rock day at the Parkdale nursing home.
And you're just a baby now in any picture
I've ever come across, two women in front
of a tract house, 1947, Kansas City, Love, Lisa,
any book on my bookshelf I've ever opened
after years, and had a note or receipt
or nothing fall from it, freshman year defenders,
left to right, half priced books. It's the fact
of the book or the fact of my sock being bunched
funny, so no, this isn't a limp. It's the fact of anyone
having been anywhere in the first place,
to do something other than stand here
like someone who's just realized they've boarded
the wrong train in a foreign country,
where everyone looks like someone you knew once,
but younger, and not making eye contact
beneath the vast autumnal carapaces of Lucerne.

Gameshow ~

John Gallaher

So I walk out onto my roof, spreading my arms
like I'm going to fly, only I can't fly, see?
And so I either fall into the flowerbed
or else I make it a joke, like I never really meant
to fly, only caw a bunch and wake people up.
What was Marie wearing that day? Something vintage
that collectors know the truth about, doubtless.
In the way spell check is always there, checking,
there's always someone there to acknowledge you
with some sideways glance in the superstore
over a rack of clothes. Who was that? Look,
there they go again. It's a monstrosity,
if I'm allowed to use such language. I never really know.
No one tells you the rules, but you can hear
the shouts nightly of the ones they drag away.
Is this where we double down or pull back? Do I go
for the jump or operationalize the supply chain?
I left my notebook at work. How am I
to remember this? Maybe there's nothing to remember.
In the way that candidates can sing along
with any song over the sound system, so too, their chil-
dren can be found in a hotel room with an earpiece
in their ear. Where else would they have an earpiece?
you may well ask, but that would be telling
and these days all I know is the roofline.

Law ~

Maddie Murphy

MY FAVORITE MEMORY of my mother was the first time she attached my Cables so I could go outside. Lovingly, she clipped the leads to my harness, brand-new save one dark scuff. She pulled my T-shirt down over it, and secured my Air Hat. She sniffled as she worked, and, at the time, I didn't understand why.

Signs litter every corner, warning:

REMOVAL OF CABLES IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED!
ANYONE FOUND GUILTY IS LIABLE TO A MAX-
IMUM OF 48 YEARS IMPRISONMENT — EFFECTIVE
IMMEDIATELY

They feature an almost comedic symbol of a faceless entity drifting off, passersby staring up at them, arms raised in horror.

“I'm sorry I let you down,” I whisper, unlatching my weathered harness, and watching my childhood home disappear into the mass of metal and red dust.

The Piano Tuner ~

David Starkey

He opens the little case and sets out his tools like a
dentist laying out his instruments before filling a
cavity: screwdrivers and damper regulators, key
spacers and rubber wedge mutes.

The child, hardly a prodigy, peeks around the corner,
glowering. She prefers wild, untuned pianos, which
remind her of dogs without collars shooting out
the front door, uncatchable.

Nevertheless, he settles the strings until the pitch is perfect.

She calls then on God to thwart him, and suddenly the
A above middle C won't fall in line. Frustrated, he
hits the key harder and harder, like someone trying
to get a dial tone on a rotary telephone.

Overhead, a bluesy, boozy chorus of archangels sings
"Boogie Woogie Baby," accentuating the devil's
interval.

Eldorado ~

—after Poe

David Starkey

The poems he wrote
In wild, full throat
Were paeans to the shadow.
He drank, he bet,
He ran up debt
Searching for Eldorado.

Infrequently,
His peers could see
Some virtue in his shadow.
With mixed success
And no finesse
He strove for Eldorado.

Obsessed, depressed
And dispossessed,
He bargained with his shadow.
He lost his bride,
Tried suicide
In route to Eldorado.

In Baltimore,
He washed ashore
And disappeared in shadow.
At last earthbound,
Perhaps he found
Something like Eldorado.

Confidence ~

Luke Rolfes

THE WORST LIFEGUARD in history is named Tippy, and she left me and my friend Luke Andrews unsupervised in the YMCA pool for fifteen minutes at a time so she could talk to her boyfriend on her cell phone. To be fair, Tippy was diminutive, sixteen years old and ninety pounds soaking wet, and Andrews and I were durable swimmers—we could swim a mile without stopping. We were two guys who just so happened to be named Luke, and we were the only pool patrons during the 8 to 10PM shift in the summer of 2007. If one of us actually needed saving, we would much rather rely on each other. Not Tippy. Not unless things got really, really grim.

We played dead one time, floating face-down and motionless in the deep end. Tippy giggled when she returned to the aquatic center, but then her buzzing phone sent her trotting outside. Andrews looked at me. I shrugged and he shrugged back. We started swimming laps again.

Swimming presented an isolated form of togetherness. In the water, sound disappeared. I could usually see my friend's bent fingers cutting through the edge of my peripheral, goggled vision. When he pulled ahead, I could feel the wake of his flutter kick bubbling against my face. If we were off each other's pace, we saw each other once a lap, our bodies fizzing and aerating in the chlorinated water. He kicked me in the head once, and I punched him in the jaw—both flip-turn accidents. We burst from the water, as if jarred from catnaps, one of us swearing and one of us apologizing. Tippy never looked up from her texts.

Later in the locker room, I stuffed my swimsuit into the hyper-dry, holding the lid down while Andrews pissed into the shower drain. I thought it a little odd—there was a toilet right there—but he preferred urinating in the darkened showers instead of out by the lockers in the harsh, incandescent light. He also liked to twist three spigots toward his back and let all three showers rain down on him at once.

We both weighed ourselves on the doctor's scale. Then we went to Hy-Vee, bought an orange juice, and drove home. We chewed the fat. Tomorrow, we would go to our shitty summer jobs, and then we would do the same thing all over again. Tippy included.

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IN OUR FORMATIVE junior high and high school years, An-

drews wore *Star Wars* tees as uniforms. He tucked the shirts tightly into his jeans. A C-3PO PEZ dispenser stuck out of his front pocket. We would relentlessly demand of him candy, and he would oblige. His hair was impeccably gelled, his skin pore free. He wasn't athletic yet, or self-assured. We were both terrified of girls. He played the saxophone, and I played the trombone in the marching band. On weekends we entertained ourselves with card games like *Magic: the Gathering*, or practicing for our group improv speech competitions.

He and I weren't invited to the cornfield parties where the cool kids drank copious amounts of beer and ran from the flashlights of cops. We rarely mingled with the opposite sex in school, or talked much to them outside of mandatory class participation. When monumental events like the Homecoming Dance or the Winter Formal arrived, we pretended datelessness was cool. The truth is we never developed the nerve to ask somebody out. Yes, there were girls we liked. Of course there were. We thought about them constantly. We discussed them as if they knew us, as if one day, out of thin air, Renee, or Amy, or Christine would be waiting for us at our locker, pensively biting their lower lips and asking us if we wanted to accompany them—not take, gentlemen accompany—to the upcoming dance. The dances came and went. Andrews and I stayed at home.

He handled being single better than I did. Sure, the loneliness bothered him, but you never saw a flinch. Never was he a slave to the high school's expectations. We'd be at marching band practice, roll stepping in our white Drill Master shoes, instruments held at ten-hut, and I'd see the cool kids in the parking lot staring. I'd see their mouths moving, and I knew they were making fun of us. I knew they were pointing out how much we sucked and they didn't, and I wanted to disappear; I wanted to drop my trombone and walk right into the surrounding cornfields, but Andrews was there in my face, his helmet plume menacing me like a rhino's horn. He snapped his fingers and locked his eyes dead onto mine.

“Look at me, damn it,” he said. “Concentrate.”

I thought for a moment he was going to punch me.

“I want you to march like a man,” he said. “Like a fucking animal.”

•

THINGS STARTED TO CHANGE, almost naturally. As he aged, Andrews gained an edge, a sharp tongue. He could criticize with the best of them, but even the meanest things that came

out of his mouth always somehow felt lighthearted. At one point during our junior year of high school the marching director reprimanded him for harassing other band members. “Flutes,” as Andrews called the emotionally-wrought flutists who all seemed incapable of marching and playing simultaneously, didn’t need to practice because “flutes” shouldn’t be heard over real instruments that actually kick ass. And, another time, he insulted all the girls in Spanish class who burst out of their seats when Senora Davis brought in just enough tacos for half the class. Andrews and I sat way in the back, which meant no tacos for us. In his frustration, Andrews lost his mind. “Girls,” he said, his voice bouncing off all four walls. “It’s not like you need more food.”

Looking back, I wonder if high school is not really about what you did but more about the attitude you developed. Andrews became the type of guy who would do countless pushups and sit-ups while listening to the Jennifer Lopez song “Waiting for Tonight” on repeat. In the span of a month, he went from scrawny kid in *Star Wars* gear to a full-grown man-child in clinging white T-shirts. I was changing, too. I started spiking the front of my hair, wearing khaki pants, and trying desperately to run 3.1 miles in under eighteen minutes.

Our priorities shifted as we transitioned from juniors to seniors, and our paths took a circuitous route. Let’s start with me. I thought I was in love, and when a seventeen-year-old suddenly thinks he’s in love, he makes all kinds of strange decisions, the worst of which was becoming a bad friend. I admit it freely. Andrews would call me, and I would choose my girlfriend, who treated me like yesterday’s news, every single time. When you are in high-school-love, you ignore the people who matter. You grasp at straws because that straw might lead to a life of happiness with a killer job, a devoted wife, and bright children; or something like that. I don’t know why I did the ugly things I did. I may have, on more than one occasion, told Andrews to leave me alone, let me be, maybe even back off because he was trying to take me away from my love. Yes, it’s all true. I am the kind of friend who accuses another friend of encroaching on his girlfriend time. I’m the guy who on his eighteenth birthday refuses to hang out with his best friend, because this love of my life wanted me all to herself. In short: I had gone to the dark side.

Andrews changed, too, but his slip was more subtle. This was after the arrival of muscles and tight V-necks. He said the fateful words one afternoon, almost like an afterthought

to a conversation. “*Star Wars* Boy is dead now. He’s never coming back.”

Insignificant words at the time. After all, I was in love, and Andrews was in the process of finding his first girlfriend. We couldn’t recognize the changes taking place. We were distracted, too close to the issue. I remember nodding when he said it, maybe, or shrugging my shoulders. On the surface, his statement was one hundred percent accurate—C-3PO PEZ had been retired, his *Star Wars* tees folded in the closet—but later in the day, the words dug deeper. The acknowledgment of *Star Wars* Boy’s death was an acknowledgment to the world that we were stepping in line, that we were letting people get to us, even a little bit, because, when it came down to it, loneliness was winning. We were dying to hear the three words that teenage boys like us were dying to hear. And they weren’t something crude like “I’d do you” or something lame like “I love you.”

It was more generic than that. We wanted to hear somebody say, “I want you,” and it didn’t matter in what sense they meant it. We just wanted to hear it.

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ANDREWS ISN’T ATHEIST, or Christian, or Scientologist, or Agnostic. He’s not Jewish, or Born Again, or Krishna, or any of those things. He calls himself a Secularist, but that’s not actually what he is by definition. He’s decided, after much deep thought, that he doesn’t need religion to be happy. He’s made a conscious decision not to take a stance. He doesn’t need to worship a god, or think about a god, or do things for or against religion. He wants to live his life without those thoughts; he seeks happiness in other venues, mostly through his interaction with people.

It suits him because deep down he is a gentle soul. We both are. You can hurt us easily. Take fourteen years ago as an example. We had just finished our first year of college, and, as often happens, life became complicated in a way that seemed important at the time but really didn’t matter down the road.

Nineteen-year-olds are unique. Boys, at nineteen, experience heartbreak differently. We grieve differently; we purge differently. We’re pathetic in different ways. We rely on outside forces to make us feel alive, or understand ourselves as adults, or allow us to believe that we could, in fact, be loved. After our first year of college, Andrews and I experienced heartbreak concurrently—him in the Southwest, me in the Midwest. Imagine us on a split screen: nineteen years old, each standing in the driveway of a girl’s house in a different

part of the country. Each getting dumped by the first girl we ever loved.

We stood in our respective girl's driveway because we weren't sure how to define what was between us and her, because we were tired of pretending something wasn't there, something important, and she didn't give us the answer we were looking for, because, after all, when you are the one pushing for something nonexistent to exist, you already know the answer; you just need to be told to your face. You need to hear it with your own ears—this isn't happening. There's nothing left. Andrews had a hard time hearing it, so he made her tell him twice. I needed at least three times.

Imagine us (again on the split-screen) tearing away from these girls' places in our cars. It's twelve hours of straight driving to get back home for him. For me, it's only thirty minutes. It's 2:30 in the morning; it's 10:00 at night. We start to drive, anyway, because the semester is over, we are young and hard-wearing, and we think this might be just what we needed: a road in front of us, the windows down, music in our face. Maybe a drive would help things get better. Maybe this Dr. Pepper she gave us on the way out the door is all we need to eat or drink for the next twelve hours, because we aren't dramatic—we truly aren't—but we allow ourselves this small lapse. We do something rash because we haven't done so before, but in this moment our excuse is legitimate.

And now we're back to a singular screen. The two Lukes together again. I knew something was wrong when Andrews burst through the door of my parents' house. He gave me the briefest of hugs and admitted, yes, he was glad to be out of Arizona, glad his first year of college was over, and, above all, he was glad to be in his hometown, a place where things made sense.

I listened to everything he had to say, and he heard my sad story. We nodded our heads and said something to the extent of "man, things sure do suck right now," and then we went out for burgers and milkshakes at our favorite drive-in. We laughed about stupid things and pretended we were too strong to hurt. We fell right back into the old rhythm. We said, "The more things change, the more they stayed the same." All of it lip service.

Both of us nineteen, we didn't talk about our real worry. Neither of us dared to admit the fear that we were, in fact, regressing to the junior high version of ourselves—the version that was unsung and unnoticed by all the girls for whom we carried a torch. That lonely stage was still fresh in our minds, and we didn't want to go back there. We'd already come so far.

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I LIKED *STAR WARS* BOY. Andrews liked him, too. He was my best friend, and I didn't care if girls never wanted to sleep with him. *Star Wars* Boy was an important part of who he was, who we were, and when Andrews declared *Star Wars* Boy dead, a little bit of our shared past died. *Star Wars* Boy was the guy who begged on his knees for me to give him the original Bobba Fett my mom bought at a garage sale. *Star Wars* Boy was the guy who would trickle Diet Pepsi into a glass for ten minutes at a time until I couldn't take it—"Just pour the goddamn thing already." In our creative writing mockumentary, *Star Wars* Boy played the character dressed as a ninja who we made lay in a thicket of poison ivy underneath a bridge so we could simulate his fall with a life-sized dummy.

Little did Andrews know that *Star Wars* Boy couldn't be killed by conventional weaponry. He, like the version of me who ventured into the dark side and became a terrible friend, never died. We just became overwritten—revised perhaps. Some might say we transformed into watered down versions of ourselves, but I like to think of our new iteration as a battle-tested version—the version that can adapt when need be, and learn from its mistakes. The skin grew back tougher. Andrews and Rolfes Redux.

I don't want to say something edifying and quaint like "We grew up." Andrews and I don't grow up, at least not in a linear way. It's more like we suddenly looked at each other and said, "Shit, we're older now." This is how we deal with it.

A Man Rose from Deep Sleep ~

Al Simmons

The man woke in a field of green, slid off the divan and approached the window. Experienced the entire universe before him. He never gave much thought to dying before he died, the act of dying always in the way. But, once dead, he realized something was going on. He knew that moment he opened his eyes and witnessed the possibilities. Light is everything. Light is life. He saw every wavelength in the vast field of vision before him. How many billion lifetimes would it take to count them all? Where would he put them if he could hold them in his hand? How many drops of water fills the sea? How many memories to complete a life? What to do with all the music? Now, he knew why he went to all those concerts. Now, he knew. Death is 11 dimensions where life on Earth is only 3. Light is the medium, the key. He is surrounded by light, in gas form and liquid light, every bit, every wavelength is every life ever lived, every face he's ever known, every word ever spoken. No editing here in the big picture. Eternity is more than timelessness, eternity is all of time at once, where time lives, is home, built on lives lived, the building blocks of his universe, this castle of all time. Drunk on happiness even death seemed glorious, such competition to live, so many lives. He counts, thinks he must have died a million times to have so many lives, to know death so well. Death is luxury. Death is what you take with you. The best die young from overwhelming desire to do it again. Takes note, next time slow down and live.

The Factory ~

Brad Johnson

Rachel shows me the Brillo box snow globe she bought from The Andy Warhol Museum gift shop last time she was home and tells me they had a Velvet Underground room that closed due to little traffic and lack of interest which is why I think Warhol left Pittsburgh for New York in the first place, to deliver himself from that repressive Midwestern provincialism in order to surround himself with people who valued his vision, his replication of American things like soup cans and Brillo boxes and Elvis that were not soup cans, Brillo boxes or Elvis.

When President Trump tweets about being president of Pittsburgh, not Paris, he's referring to the Pittsburgh of the 20th century, of smoke stacks and steel workers and coal mines where I got mugged at 2 am outside the Greyhound station escaping Detroit for Baltimore circa 1990. The president's not talking about governing today's Pittsburgh with its craft beer houses, vegetarian restaurants and dropping crime rate.

It's impossible to know which Pittsburgh someone's referencing when they mention it which must have been the same for Warhol's parents who, when they read about their son in Time magazine back in 1967, must have been so proud to learn Andy was making an honest, Midwestern living working long hours in a factory of his own making.

Yelling ~

Michael Chin

THE FIRST SHOUT came like something out of a dream. “Do you have any sense how much a skirt like that cost her aunt last Christmas? Her mother’s gonna be up half the night trying to salvage it. Someone oughta punch your lights out.”

Janie lay on a sinking air mattress; when she turned, it threatened to flip over completely. Her daughter had her own cot, and the same faded Mickey Mouse sheets Janie had slept on as a girl, marred with age-old drool stains. Emma was already blinking away sleep, a confused look on her face, her eyes dull. Janie remembered a point when Emma was littler and had the brightest irises she’d ever seen—blazing blue with little green swirls when the light caught them right. She lay there, just like she had the night before when Janie woke her, spooning a stuffed zebra. Emma’s favorite toy. Janie never liked him—particularly the way his stripes met over his eyes at a downward slant.

But there they were, five in the morning, a suitcase at the foot of the cot, stuffed with armloads of clothing. Work clothes. Enough for a few nights, maybe weeks. Maybe the rest of her life. She’d thrown in some of Emma’s clothes, too. But did she remember socks?

“Don’t you have any goddamn recollection what it’s like to be that girl’s age?” Her mother’s voice had the same tinny resonance with which she would wake Janie all those school mornings, but her voice crackled with age. And anger.

Janie cupped her hands around Emma’s ears. “Let’s fix breakfast.” She kept Emma’s ears covered to obscure the next round of expletives. They opened the door and stepped over Dot’s cat. Milford followed them, darting between and around their legs, threatening to trip them before Janie gave him just the littlest kick. At least there was only the one cat here—as opposed to the two at her own house, plus Gooby the Golden Retriever. Russell loved his animals, and, in the beginning, it was a part of why she loved him. He’d had a brainstorm—an animal hospice center—and repurposed all of the money his uncle had earmarked for his college education. Janie put in the money from her graduation party, too, for cages and feeders, the down payment on a new truck. But the customers didn’t come. Then there were the state laws. The town zoning laws. The first in a long line of failures between them.

Emma laughed at Milford and stooped to the kitchen floor to rub behind his ears while Janie ran the garbage disposal and then the coffee grinder. Anything she could think of to drown out the yelling. It had been easier the night before, in the car, when she turned up the radio and stared right ahead and could imagine Russell wasn't yelling after her or chasing the car. Bob Seger blared from the speakers until after Russell fell out of sight and after Emma had started crying and covering her ears just like they she did at the Fourth of July fireworks because they were too loud, Mom! Too loud!

Janie was pouring the third glass of orange juice when the yelling stopped. In the sudden quiet, she heard the fan blades whirring inside Dot's refrigerator, even the ticking of the grandfather clock with its tiny clicks—exactly sixty a minute. Emma slurped at her juice and a trickle escaped from the corner of her mouth. She set down the glass a little too hard on the old maple counter—hard enough that Janie was afraid it might fracture. "You're not getting any more," Janie warned. "Take your time with it."

It still seemed impossible, being there. Just twenty-four hours ago, she'd been looking forward to date night. Dinner out. No talking about Emma or work or money. Janie had read these "suggested rules" in an article online.

There was no need for rules, though. They barely spoke at all.

Janie put a frying pan on the stove and turned on the burner. She hadn't realized how much she'd missed the old kitchen, her mother's stove, unlike the electric burners at her own house that went from cold to burning without that measured tick before the flame caught. She cracked six eggs into her mother's old wooden bowl, poured an arabesque pattern of two-percent milk between the yolks, and whisked the concoction into a pale-yellow blend.

Dot appeared in the doorway, wearing in a navy-blue terrycloth robe and a pair of fuzzy pink slippers with the soles detached from the bottoms so they flopped with each step. "Good morning, lovelies." Dot bent gingerly to kiss Emma's cheek. "Have any good dreams?"

"I dreamed I was riding a horse," Emma said.

"A horse?" Dot mustered more gusto for Emma's dreams than she ever had for Janie's accomplishments as a child. "What color horse?"

"Black. His name was Steve. He told me he would take me to Paris."

"To Paris." Dot raised her eyebrows. "That would be some trip."

“Better hope that horse is a strong swimmer,” Janie said. “I hope you’re hungry, Ma. I’m making eggs for everyone.”

Dot gulped down her orange juice, just like her granddaughter. “I’ve had the same breakfast every morning since I raised you. Buttered toast—”

“With strawberry jam.” Janie had spotted them when she fetched the mixing bowl—a dozen industrial-sized jars of store-brand strawberry preserves in the cupboard. The jam wasn’t new, but the stockpiling was. “I thought I’d fix you something heartier.”

“Toast will be fine.” She opened the plastic breadbox and removed two of the last four slices of white bread to plug into the toaster.

“Mom,” Janie said. “This morning—”

“I’m sorry—did I wake you?”

“You did. And that’s OK. It’s your house,” Janie said. “But I was confused.”

“I was yelling,” Dot said.

“Was there someone there?”

Dot fetched one of the jars from the cupboard. “I’m not crazy, sweetheart.” She kept the open jam all the way to the left. Anytime they kept more than one of something in the house, that’s how she organized—old on the left, new on the right. Salad dressing. Home videos. The skirts Janie wore in rotation as a girl, twice between washes, worn once all the way to the left of the closet, fresh skirts to the right. Drilled it into Janie’s skull, Like the way you read, left to right. Left to right. “People hold onto things too long. I did, you did. We don’t say what’s on our mind, and it rots us from the inside.”

“Who were you yelling at, Ma?”

Dot’s wrist tensed with effort before the cap gave way to her twisting. “I yell at everyone.”

“Everyone,” Emma repeated and smiled. She was missing a baby tooth from the upper row, behind one of the incisors.

Janie wondered if she ought to cup her ears again. Had she been a fool to bring her daughter here? Why would she expect her childhood home to be some sort of sanctuary when she couldn’t keep her own house safe?

“They’re here.” Dot tapped her index finger against her temple. “I see all the people who wronged me. Bullied me. Cheated me. I see my father when he pushed me into the mud outside church because he thought I was preening for the boys in my Sunday best. I see the teacher who gave me a week of detention for the spitballs the boys were shooting at the chalkboard.

“I see all of them.” Dot pressed her fingernail into her

skin. “And I tell them off. Tell them all of the things I wish I could have said when I was too small, or weak, or didn’t think to. And I see a younger version of myself right beside them. That’s the version of me that needs to hear those things said.” Dot put her hand down and picked up her spoon to ready a scoop of jelly. “The healing ain’t pretty, but I’ll be damned before I go to the grave with any kind of hurt left on me.” Dot leaned in toward Emma. “Would you like to try yelling?”

Emma leaned forward, hands spread open as if to accept a gift.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea, Mom.” Janie planted her hands on Emma’s shoulders.

Dot shrugged. “Maybe tomorrow.” The toast popped up and she took each piece in her fingertips, expertly flipping it down to the plate. “Last night, I dreamed I was in Hawaii. There was a pig roast. Everyone sipped piña coladas and the men all had their shirts off.”

Janie didn’t remember any dreams from the night before, though at some point her imagination might have wandered into sleep. She kept seeing Russell in the car with the babysitter, Claire Weissman, in a cloud of cigarette smoke. He was touching her leg and telling her she was beautiful—Janie couldn’t remember the last time he’d said that to her. When all else failed, when Claire didn’t want a drag on his cigarette, and when she wouldn’t kiss him back this time, he had grazed her forearm, just a little bit, with the tip of his cigarette. It was nothing, he swore, but she freaked. I mean, she just flipped, he’d told Janie back at the house, tears in his eyes, running his hands through his hair. I’m telling you everything, Janie, because it was a mistake and I’m sorry. Janie opened her eyes just barely. Watched the ceiling through her eyelashes and saw cigarette burns swell to the surface.

Janie sent Emma to shower ahead of her. “Five minutes, baby, and you’re out. Rinse, soap, rinse.” Without directions that explicit, there was no telling how long she would take. Emma had developed a fascination with watching her skin prune, particularly her fingers. Left to her own devices she’d wash her hands for fifteen, twenty minutes and stare in awe at the shallow grooves that took shape. It was probably just a phase—Janie told herself Emma would grow out of it—but when her daughter gave her that new distant stare, a little chill came over her.

“How about you? Want to try a shout?” Dot nursed her second piece of toast. “She’ll barely hear you over the running water.”

Janie rolled her eyes and retreated to the guest room. Laid out on the cot clean underwear, a yellow T-shirt and jeans for Emma. Badly wrinkled, but eight-year-olds didn't notice that sort of thing. Milford tried to join in the process. He jumped on the bed and stretched over the clothes like he meant to plunk himself down before Janie picked him up and set him on the floor. He gave her a malevolent look. Russell had tried to show her how to guide animals out of her way—with a “cuddle-coax,” but she was always in too much of a hurry to give it much thought, much less practice.

Janie put down her own skirt and blouse. Just as wrinkled. The senior partners would ask her, jokingly, if she'd had a rough night and she'd smile and shrug.

No time to iron. She brought the clothes in the bathroom with her and snatched two bath towels from the hallway closet. Draped the skirt off the back of the toilet. Hung the blouse from the hook inside the door, to steam out what wrinkles she could. She didn't bother turning off the water, just pulled back the curtain and touched Emma's shoulder. “It's time to get out now.” She waited for Emma to retreat to that far side of the tub, so the water spraying down only hit her ankles, and draped a towel over her. “Dry off and get dressed in our room, OK?”

Janie showered quickly and threw her clothes on. Ran the hair dryer but didn't give it time to really dry anything. Why were they always in a rush, always late, no matter how hard she tried?

And Dot—she was still nursing her toast, a gob of strawberry on her upper lip. Oblivious or saving that extra bit of sweetness for later, there was no telling. “Should I pick up Emma after school?”

How did Janie not think of these things? That if she shut Russell out of her life, she couldn't expect Emma to ride the bus home to him. The school made such a fuss about children getting off at different stops these days, let alone riding a different route. “Could you, Ma?”

Dot pointed the scrap of toast at Emma. Approximating a magic wand, or maybe a dagger. “I'll see you at three o'clock.”

“Three-fifteen,” Emma corrected her and scurried ahead to the living room, backpack already on, ready to go.

Janie beamed. The counselors who thought Emma was slow should have heard her then.

“They keep children longer every year, don't they?” Dot asked.

Emma balanced on one foot, then the other to tug on

her tennis shoes, and then looked out the front window and said without excitement, but also without fear, “Daddy’s here.”

Janie hurried to her side. Russell was standing at the end of the driveway, sweating through a red and black checkered flannel, poised over his ten-speed. His chest expanded and contracted at a steady rate. He’d had time to catch his breath, so she knew he had been out there for a while, waiting for them.

The wind was just as cold as the night before, when Janie had arrived at her mother’s. She hustled Emma ahead of her, into the car. She opened her own car door again, and just like that, the reprieve of her mother’s house vanished like a dream; her life took on its old shape. She was right back in the night, in the argument at their house. She’d demanded to know where Russell had been for the last forty-five minutes when he was supposed to drop off Claire at home, not five minutes away. He told her he used to give Claire cigarettes, but she didn’t want one tonight, and how one thing had led to another and she said they shouldn’t kiss anymore, and he shouldn’t have been kissing her in the first place. Janie told him she ought to call the police for child abuse. Burning a teenage girl. That’s when Janie started packing, telling Emma to pick one toy. As they were getting in the car, Russell had the gall to say that he should call the police. He’d report her for kidnapping. Janie punched him in the chest as hard as she could, so hard that her knuckles still ached. Emma watched all of this, her mouth open a little but not speaking a word.

Now, Russell laid the bike on the ground—the kickstand had been busted for months—and walked toward them. “Janie—”

“We’re running late.”

“Janie, we need to talk.” Even after a bike ride, he smelled of smoke.

“Later.”

“When?”

“I don’t know.”

“Emma.”

Emma stopped. Janie took her by the backpack, guiding her around the car, away from her father. Good girl, come along.

“Emma.” Russell circled and turned past Janie, the old basketball player’s footwork, all fakes, and grapevines, and turns, designed to work around bodies. He knelt down in front of Emma and hugged her tight. “Emma, Emma, Emma.”

Janie opened the car door right into his elbow, closer

than she liked to Emma's side. Not hard enough to break a bone, but fast enough so he knew she meant business.

He reeled back, holding his arm. Janie got Emma in the car and closed the door.

"Janie, when can we talk?"

"Leave us alone."

"What about the open house on Wednesday," he said. "I'll leave you alone until then, but we both have to be there. For Emma. And we'll talk there, OK? We'll work this out." He pressed his hands to the hood of the car as she opened the driver's side door and climbed inside.

"Fine." She was instantly sorry for agreeing. "Wednesday."

Russell stood up straight. Hands up. Backed up from the car. She turned the key in the ignition, put the car in reverse, and fixed her eyes on the rearview. After she put it in drive, she looked forward. No looking back, no looking back. Just like she'd told Emma the night before.

And just like the night before, Emma craned her neck and kept her eyes on her father.

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THE TELEPHONE'S RING roused Janie from some space between daydream and actual sleep. "Sherbert and Associates," she said. "How may I direct your call?"

"Is this Ms. Pendry?"

Mrs. Pendry, Janie thought automatically. She never got calls directed to her. Personal calls came through her cell phone. No one had any business with her aside from asking her to make coffee or forward an email from the general account. "This is she."

"I'm sorry to bother you at work. This is Michael Weissman. My daughter Claire babysits for you. She wouldn't give me your cell phone number, but she'd mentioned once that you work there, because Dick there is an old buddy of mine."

"Wonderful." Janie's hand shook. She watched her reflection in the glass door, broken and scattered by the letters painted in reverse, and tried to remain steady. She heard the implication loud and clear. Administrative assistants were replaceable and as soon as he told Dick that Janie's husband had burned his daughter—accidentally or not—he wouldn't hesitate to nitpick all of the little things she'd done wrong until he could justify firing her.

That, or maybe he'd kill Janie and Russell with his bare hands, and all she needed to know was that he would have a team of lawyers at the ready to get him off the hook. The bastard kissed my sixteen-year-old daughter, and then he

burned her with his cigarette.

“We had some concerns about last night—about Claire. And, well, about your husband. We aren’t angry, but we wondered if the two of you might stop at the house for coffee so we can talk after work tomorrow. Say around 5:30?”

It was a trap, of course. If he didn’t kill them, at the least he would scream, and he’d have every right to. And what could she do but sit on his couch and cry and beg for forgiveness. All of that, for Russell’s fuck up. When she herself hadn’t done anything wrong.

Janie had driven the sitter home once. Seen the house, two stories to Janie’s one. White picket fence. Mown lawn and rhododendrons flanking the front porch.

Janie had marveled that a girl from such an immaculate house would set foot in her own, with its mismatched paint and ratty, floral-patterned carpeting. She imagined the Facebook posts—How the other half lives... and Do you want to call Child Protective Services or should I?

If Russell met with the Weissmans he would mess it up. Janie wouldn’t know what to say herself, but she felt certain he would make it worse. Either engage them in a stupid, completely unjustified argument, or admit everything he had done wrong and come across as a monster or an idiot. She took a deep breath. “5:30 tomorrow,” Janie repeated, as if she were confirming an appointment for one of the attorneys. She even pinned the phone between her shoulder and ear and poised her hands over the keyboard. “I don’t think Russell can make it, but I can.”

A pause. Then, “We appreciate it. Have a super day.”

He hung up before Janie could say anything in return. Like the men in the office who he probably played golf or big money poker with. Big-city people escaping to a place with lower property taxes. People who would never have to retreat to their mothers’ spare rooms. People who had super days.

•

THE DAY PASSED. No call from Dot that she couldn’t pick up Emma. No call from the school about Russell showing up and making a scene. No word from Russell. Janie tried to stay busy but in the afternoon lull, when she was always groggy and didn’t have much to do while she waited for a new pot of coffee to percolate, she considered every contingency for the next day’s meeting with the Weissmans. That she shouldn’t let Mr. or Mrs. Weissman get between her and the door in case she needed to escape. That, if need be, she need not hesitate to throw Russell under the bus. I’m leaving him

for good, she would say.

The next morning, Janie woke to Dot's yelling again. The routine to follow was smoother, though. Getting Emma ready and out the door. Getting to work herself. Getting through the day until five o'clock hit.

The Weissman house looked just the way Janie remembered it, with the addition of a hammock to one side of the front door, a porch swing on the other. She envisioned Mrs. Weissman snoozing in that hammock while young Claire read for school on the swing, feet up, back against Mr. Weissman who bore the weight of her thin frame against his side.

Mrs. Weissman met her at the door. "We're so glad you could make it." She swung the screen door open wide and towered over Janie, hugged her with the other arm as she maneuvered past as if they were old gal pals. She was strong, slim. Clad in a T-shirt and shorts that suggested this conversation was the last step before an evening jog and a casual but home-cooked meal.

Inside, an oversized fish tank stood to either side of an enormous flat screen. Mr. Weissman carried a silver platter with three cups of coffee, a tiny pitcher of cream, a bowl of cubed melon. "We appreciate you taking the time, Ms. Pendry."

"Call me Janie." She couldn't spot a speck of dirt or a single piece of lint on the off-white carpeting, and, oh God, should she have taken off her shoes?

Mr. Weissman set the tray down on the coffee table. A minor epiphany struck, and Janie realized why they called it a coffee table. These occasions when adults might sit together and sip from exotic roasts. The coffee table in her own home—really just an ottoman—was littered with junk mail and candy bar wrappers.

The Weissmans sat on either side of her, the coffee table in front of her, boxing her in. Mrs. Weissman gave Mr. Weissman a look—a cue that it was his job to start the conversation.

He sipped his coffee black and crossed his ankles delicately. "Janie, I'm going to cut to the chase. Claire told us about the accident—your husband burning her with the cigarette two nights ago."

"I'm so sorry." Accident was good. If Claire had spun it all some careless mistake and that's all they knew, it might save all of their necks. "And I'm so upset with him—"

Mrs. Weissman put a hand on Janie's forearm. "It gave us a scare, but we're fine. We iced it right away, and it shouldn't scar. These things happen."

“The truth is, our bigger concern is that your husband was smoking,” Mr. Weissman said.

In the left tank, a big fish flecked in shades of silver and gold, swam through clear water, perfectly at peace in a silent world that might as well have been on another planet. Russell had burned Claire, and her parents were talking about smoking. What planet were they on?

“Our daughter is an honor roll student,” Mr. Weissman said. “She runs track, too. All of that besides babysitting.”

“We don’t believe in talking around problems, or avoiding issues.” Mrs. Weissman gave Janie’s elbow a squeeze. “We’re just not comfortable with Claire babysitting for you anymore as long as you and Russell are going to be smoking.”

“I don’t smoke,” Janie said quietly.

“But we know that your husband does,” Mr. Weissman said. “And we know the risks of second-hand smoke.” He took a silent sip of coffee. “We hope you understand.”

Janie nodded slowly.

“Now please, enjoy your coffee.” Mrs. Weissman finally let go of her arm.

Janie forced a smile. “Right.” She picked up her cup, cradled in both hands. It smelled wonderful and rich. Tasted so bitter.

“Would you like any cream? Sugar? Stevia?” Mrs. Weissman asked.

“That’s fine.” She never drank her coffee black, but she couldn’t imagine lingering long enough to fix it right. She tried not to slurp or to spill. Tried to sit up straight. Reminded herself that this visit would end. That in thirty minutes—forty-five minutes, tops, she would be back at Dot’s house, back with Emma, and with any luck at all she would never see Mr. or Mrs. Weissman again.

•

DOT’S MORNING YELLS were becoming routine to Janie. “Why do I have shit water all over the bathroom floor? Can’t you smell that? You’ll fix it and I’m not paying another goddamned nickel!”

Janie ushered Emma into the bathroom to get started on her shower. Another routine: Janie had found that if Emma showered first, Janie could get breakfast ready while she was in there, and it gave Emma an extra minute or two under the water to make her happier.

“Don’t bring her into this,” Dot growled, not as loud but twice as sharp. “Don’t even say her name. You want to break up this family and I’ll be damned if you ever get to see her again.”

A different fight. Janie had learned not to expect linear yells, but to hop confrontations between whatever connections Dot's mind made. Janie recognized this argument. She had known for years that her parents didn't really get along, that a quiet tension had built up over the years between her father coming home later from work and Dot sleeping on the couch and the two of them never seeming to talk with Janie at the same time. Dot hadn't cried after he left the house, hadn't even seemed rattled. Just went about baking a batch of peanut butter cookies for the school bake sale and let Janie lick the extra dough off the big wooden spoon.

Janie started the coffee maker. Poured the orange juice. They were out of eggs, so she supposed it would be toast for everyone that morning.

"But I'm an adult. I was honest with you. I never told you a lie, and if you want to leave me, then you're the cheat! You're the scammer!"

The coffee drizzled down, made its choked sounds and fogged the sides of the pot.

The windows of the car would have fogged like that. Claire. Young and long-legged. That same innocence Janie had when she and Russell first held hands in Russell's truck, a hand-me-down from Russell's father to his older brother to him that crapped out as often as not.

"You'd think you'd have a little compassion," Dot shouted. "I try to work a job. Do my share to provide, and it doesn't work out. And whose side do you take? Never mine!"

Russell smoked then, too; swore he was going to quit. And now the money she made at the office was supporting the habit. Feeding three mouths. Putting a child through school. And buying his cigarettes. Cigarettes he shared with a high school girl. Cigarettes he burned her with.

"You selfish cretin!" Dot yelled from her room. "Go to hell!"

It was Janie's turn now. She took a deep breath and picked up where her mother left off. "Go to hell! You say you have this dream! Well do something about it. Read a book. Figure it out! But in the meantime, get a job!"

"I can't believe I wasted the best years of my life on you, you miserable turd!" Dot cried.

"And if you think I'm going to tolerate you running around behind my back, you've got another thing coming!" Janie said.

"Fuck you!"

"I ought to go back to the house and burn the whole thing down. Burn it to the ground with you inside and watch

you choke on the smoke. Watch you burn.”

“Janie.” Dot was there, in the kitchen now.

“Because that’s what you deserve! To burn in hell!”

“Janie, Janie, Janie.” Her mother was there. Holding her while she cried. “That’s a good girl.” She rocked her slightly, the way she did when Janie was a little girl, but now the proportions were all off. Janie was taller than her mother and stronger, and, up until a couple minutes before, the more stable of the two. How many times had this scene played out in this kitchen? Janie upset about something or other, her mother the caretaker. “Don’t stop now,” Dot said. “Keep yelling.”

Emma was there, too, then, eyeing them suspiciously, towel wrapped around her in a makeshift toga, still dripping wet. She didn’t reach out for them or say a word. The shower was still running in the bathroom.

“You’d better get dressed,” Janie forced out in a single breath. When she inhaled, the air caught in her throat, ragged. She swallowed. “We don’t want to be late.”

•

JANIE AND EMMA ARRIVED at the school fifteen minutes before the open house was scheduled to begin. Janie had never arrived so early. She and Russell were the same in that regard; he was late to any job he had ever worked—tending bar, a brief stint cleaning cages at a pet store before he quit, telling Janie it broke his heart to see all of the critters confined in the prime of their lives.

She saw Russell, waiting outside the classroom already. To keep from making eye contact, to keep from having to say hello any sooner than she absolutely needed to, she studied a construction paper caterpillar that lined the wall, segmented in green construction paper circles, each taped to the one before it and behind it, each with one of the students’ names written in childish script and a fact the child had researched about caterpillars. Like caterpillars are herbivorous and caterpillars can grow to ten thousand times their size in less than three weeks. Emma’s: Caterpillars make butterflies.

“Janie! Janie! Emma!” Russell dashed to them in four or five long strides, hair still wet from washing, combed back neatly enough that he must have brought a comb with him and gone to the boy’s restroom to tidy up. He had on his red polo from the Indian casino, his charcoal blazer over it, and a pair of dark jeans that nearly matched. “How are you? My girls.” He reached for Janie’s hand and when she didn’t give it to him, put a hand on her shoulder, the other on Emma’s head. He looked as though he were fighting the urge to mess

up her hair like he would at home.

Ms. Shelly met them in the hall. She was a young teacher, not like the one Janie'd had for second grade, a broad old woman with close-cropped hair who glowered at students and tapped her fingernails together, one by one when they gave wrong answers. Ms. Shelly was all smiles. Shoulder-length blond hair, and she still wore high-heeled shoes, and a skirt that one could argue was too short for a school. Janie wondered if Russell looked at her anything like the way he looked at Claire. "Mrs. Pendry, it's so good to see you. I'm glad you could both make it early." She paused and looked down at Emma, smiling widely and artificially. "Hi, Emma. How are you?"

"Good." Emma held out the oo sound and hugged Janie's leg.

"You're well," Janie corrected her.

"Since everyone's here, I thought I might show you all something early," Ms. Shelly said. "Follow after me, please." She led them down the hall until they arrived at a space with windows all along the top, paneling beneath it to enclose a space full of exercise balls and toys—an oversized stuffed panda bigger than Emma, a train set, piles and piles of blocks with letters on them. "We call this the Resource Room," Ms. Shelly said.

It wasn't the first time Janie had heard of the Resource Room. Ms. Shelly had told Janie and Russell all about it in the spring, talking about how the teachers there could give special attention to students for hours at a time—even whole days in some cases, and it was such a fun learning environment, unlike anything they would have grown up with.

All of that was a lead-up to Ms. Shelly explaining that she thought Emma could benefit from working there.

Janie had replied crisply that her daughter wasn't special ed.

Ms. Shelly's dopey smile held. "If we don't take advantage of opportunities for her to grow, I'm afraid we'll have to keep her back a grade to catch up with her classmates. And there's no guarantee that going through the year again will bring her all the way up to speed."

"Maybe we should give it a try," Russell said.

"No special ed," Janie repeated.

And yet here they were. She could imagine how the teachers must talk. Don't just tell the family about the Resource Room. Show it to them—then they'll give permission. But when they got to the door, Emma ran ahead and made a beeline for the panda, hugging his big soft body, burying her

face where no doubt dozens of other children's faces and hands and feet and butts had burrowed before.

"She loves Peter the Panda," Ms. Shelly said. "She likes her teacher, Lainey, too."

Lainey. Not even a cursory attempt at a Mrs. or Ms. A place so non-academic, so non-traditional that such formalities were unnecessary. She wore a blue dress with a floral print that would have been better suited to a set of drapes. "You're Emma's parents," Lainey said. "It is so, so, so good to meet you. I've had a ball working with her this past week and I think she's making some real progress."

Russell shook her hand and grinned back, happy to play the willing dad.

"You've been working with her," Janie said. "The way Ms. Shelly explained it, our daughter had a choice between repeating the grade or going to special ed classes."

Lainey's face darkened, but just a little. "We don't call it special ed—"

"Mrs. Pendry," Ms. Shelly cut in. "We have the best interests of your daughter at heart."

My daughter isn't retarded. Such an ugly word, but Janie had grown obsessed with it, the way Ms. Shelly must think it.

In her peripheral vision, she saw another family come in the doorway and stop. Holding their own child by her shoulders, probably to keep her, too, from running to Peter the Panda.

"Janie, maybe we ought to step back for a minute." Russell had a hand on her elbow.

Janie swung her elbow free. Just barely stopped herself from hitting him with it. "Emma, get over here." She reached out a hand to her.

But Emma was positively rolling in Peter the Panda, her back to his belly, cheek to his shoulder, clutching the dirty fur in her hands.

"Come on." Janie motioned her over.

She came. Slowly.

"Janie—" Russell had the most feeble, dim-witted smile on his face. Like when he got the cease-and-desist letter from the town, saying he'd have to close this failure of a business, and tried to explain how it would all be OK, and Janie knew she'd remain the breadwinner for this deadbeat family as long as she was with him.

Janie remembered what her mother had told her about needing to yell so that little girl inside could hear someone stand up for her. But what about the little girl in front of her? "Emma doesn't deserve a father who runs around or a

teacher who doesn't believe in her."

"We believe in her, Mrs. Pendry," Ms. Shelly said.

"You shut your goddamned mouth," Janie said. "Don't you have any recollection at all what it's like to be that girl's age?" Her voice had felt tired, raw from the morning's yell. And yet, as she grew louder again, the yelling felt easier than speech. "Someone oughta punch your lights out." Janie took Emma's hand. A few stray white hairs from Peter the Panda's belly clung to her lips. Janie squeezed, maybe a little too hard. I'll never let go and I'll always believe in you. "She's too good for any of you. And we're leaving."

Janie started to lead Emma out, but Emma stayed for a second, hand stretched out and waving. To the panda. To Russell, who'd lost the foolish smile and looked frozen in place, at a complete loss for what to do or say. Janie cradled Emma's head and hugged her to her hip to lead the way out of the Resource Room, past the gawking family, down the hall and back to the parking lot.

They'd drive far away. Anywhere they wanted.

Janie looked at Emma, expecting to see her blue eyes shining back.

But they were glassy. Cheeks streaked with tears.

Janie reached across her to buckle her safety belt. "Everything's going to be all right now, sweetie. No more yelling. You and me, we're going to be fine." She drove east. Maybe they'd make it to the coast. Find some sleepy beach town with a boardwalk on its last legs from summer. Find Emma another panda bear to love. Win it for her. Win it all.

Janie steered with her left hand and rubbed Emma's shoulders and neck and back and tummy and the top of her head with the right. "We're going to be fine."

If only Emma would look back at her. But Emma only looked down at her hands, where she seemed to be thumb wrestling herself. Janie worried she was going to bend one of her fingers back too far and thought to stop her. But maybe she wasn't fighting. Maybe she was just playing and maybe she'd know when to stop. Janie could trust her with that, and anyway, she didn't have time to slow down and explain. They pulled to a stop at a red light. There were no other cars, just dark blue sky ahead, fading into black, a great big gray cloud stretching above them. The promise of rain and squeal of windshield wipers that made Emma cover her ears—shouldn't she have outgrown that by now? No matter, Janie checked each way three times and let her foot off the brake so they could keep on moving right on through the red.

The Joys of Parenting ~

William Snyder, Jr.

There it was, a robin's nest on my
back porch light. Brown twists
of grass and twigs, but neat around
the rim, and smooth, like
the lip of a lacquered bowl.
And they'd even left a bribe so
I'd keep it there—robin corruption—
a pennant of Christmas tinsel
woven in. And inside the nest,
when I balanced up on a plastic crate
to look—four blue eggs.
These birds that had flown here
from Whoknowswhere
had cozied up to me—human
and tame. No wings, no beak.
Or feathers. Except the fluffy ones
in my head. Like the way I
changed my ways that May—
using the front door only,
hauling grocery bags around
from the back. I abandoned
the Times, the P.D. James, the annual
Ulysses ambitions. And I didn't
sweep, didn't weed, didn't clip
the hedges—just sat at the window
and watched the feeding, the fluttering,
the brand new feathering out.
And when the chicks began
to leave the nest—when
they flew—I felt excitement inside.
And a certain gravitas. Satisfaction
too, that we'd done our jobs, that
we'd done them well.

The Providence of the Fall of a Snowflake ~

Thomas J. Erickson

On the Saturday night before Christmas,
I take the dog out for her last walk before bed.
The snow shimmers through the ambience
of the street lights like a slow-motion silver rain.

Hillocks of snow are capping the posts
of the picket fences. The frosted birdhouses
sway in the wind.

The dog leads me through the neighborhood,
past the quiet houses, the lights of the Christmas
trees warming the darkened living rooms.

Close to home, her back paw freezes up
and she starts to limp. I take my gloves
off and hold her paw in my hands for awhile
and tell her she's a good girl and on we go.

It takes me a moment to realize the power
is out when I get home.

You've lit a few candles and put another
blanket on the bed. It's easy to crawl
in next to you after another journey.

Teeth ~

Caitlin Woolley

I ONCE knew a girl who didn't have any teeth. She sucked on butter and drooled down her chin and swirled her tongue around her wet lips. It's too dark in this mouth, she complained. Too puckered. Too slick. Too red.

I don't know how you can eat all those cakes, she would say to us as we gorged ourselves on the soft confections our mother baked. I licked lemon icing from the corner of my mouth. Oh, but won't you try them, we pleaded. You'll like them. They get so spongy.

She watched us, and the kitchen would fill with the damp sounds of our sucking and slurping, saliva dribbling down our necks. Eventually, she would have to look at something else.

But we always wished she'd eat cakes with us.

The rest of us ate nothing else. Well, and oats, for nutrition, or sometimes other soft things, like macerated fruit or melty cheeses. The girl would eat these, too, but never the cakes. They were too sweet for her, and she said she would be sweet-less.

We could not persuade her. She would not let herself be persuaded. She simply watched us eat cakes while we watched her sip milk from a spoon.

•

I SHOULD NOT SAY that it was unusual, that the girl had no teeth. None of us, not one of us in this whole house, have any teeth. Except for Mother.

But that is not to say I never had teeth. I had them once. Mother took them from me when they came in. She cupped my face and pulled them out with pliers, one at a time, kissing my cheeks. You're safe with me, my mother cooed; you don't need teeth like these.

•

MOTHER KEPT ALL the teeth she pulled, plaquey bicuspid and discolored molars (her room was filled with a rotten-sweet organic smell). She gave me cake when it was all done, when my gums were safe and clean. Then I looked like all the rest of my brothers and sisters who, like me, suffered the soft hand and the rusted pliers.

•

MAYBE YOU WONDER why our mother took our teeth, why we lived in her house and ate her cakes and believed ourselves to be her babies. It was because we were her babies. It is dif-

difficult to explain. The forest where Mother built her house is not a forest you get lost in, but it is the place, the sweet dark place, where each of us found ourselves somehow, friendless and unwelcome.

They say that if you abandon a bundle at the edge of the long road by the thick trees, a woman comes and takes it and keeps it as if it were her own. They say she shows these bundles such interminable love. They say she does not mind their disfigurements, that she does not miss their missing bones. These babies will have everything, if only—if only they will not leave her.

She will make them all feel loved and wanted and so, so beautiful, if only they will let her.

•

I HAD ONE YOUNGER SISTER, and only one. She did not eat cakes. But that was not always true.

One day, my favorite brother and I were pulling weeds from our mother's garden while she was away. My favorite brother was toothless too, but he never had any teeth in the first place, so when Mother found him, she took his ear instead.

We stopped pulling weeds when we heard rustling.

A little girl in a tattered red dress stumbled into the garden, face dirty and streaked with tears. The bows in her hair had all come undone. Her top loop twisted up into a gnarled scar, and one dark eye sat lower than the other.

"I can't find my parents," she whimpered. "Have you seen them?"

My brother and I stared at her. We could not help it. How could we? She had such a mouth, from which yellow teeth gleamed with spit.

I had never seen anything like her. Her face, her dress, her little hands. She was even smaller than me, and I am the smallest. Her coat was full of wrinkles, and her eyes were hollow and dark. She was beautiful. My brother told her so.

She stared back at our mouths.

"They made me get out of the car," she said and started to cry.

A red bow further unraveled in her hair. She pulled it free and dropped it to the ground.

My heart dropped with it, for her.

"We have cakes," I offered. "Sweet cakes."

A soft urgency darkened her face. My brother was already reaching for her hand.

We brought the girl into the house and sat her down at the head of the table. I thought she looked very pretty there,

like a picture. In the kitchen, I made a tray up for her. Bowls of pudding and applesauce. And little cakes, tucked neatly into wrappers. Lemon cakes, frosted cakes, raspberry linzer, chocolate drizzle. Angel food. Red velvet. Carrot. Flourless.

When I carried the tray into the dining room, the rest of my brothers and sisters were gathered around her like a wall of skin. They offered her clean clothes and told her she was welcome here. They offered her touch. They offered her love, and in return she did not flinch at the sight of them.

I set the tray in front of her and it must have been a long time since she had eaten because she ate the cakes and puddings all up. But we were fascinated by it. We listened and watched as she chewed, licked crumbs away from her lips, sucked cake into her mouth from the space between her two front teeth. In her mouth, we heard ourselves. We all yelped with her when she bit her lip.

My breathing quickened. My blood stirred. My mouth felt wet and dry.

Bits of sugary icing stuck to her cheeks. She picked up a lemon cake, smooth and buttery yellow. Our hearts pounded as she opened her mouth to bite into it.

“Oh, do it,” one of my sisters breathed. “Oh, please.”

But then Mother was home, and she was wrapping the lost girl into the soft warmth of her big body, and the lost girl was crying a deep sadness into Mother’s arms, and Mother said, “Please, honey, tell us your name, tell us your name.”

•

THEY SAY THAT there is a woman whose love is so great and so huge that it becomes a wound. And this wound, this strange and terrible wound—its only relief is to cut itself into someone else.

And so we could not persuade Mother to leave the lost girl her teeth. We tried, and lobbied, and ironed all the clothes, but Mother only knows one perfect kind of love.

And the lost girl—well, she stayed, anyway.

•

AFTER HER MOUTH was clean, that girl refused every cake we put in front of her. I kept hoping that she would take one, just one little one, and put it to her lips. I knew it wouldn’t be the same. I thought I could imagine. I thought that would be good enough.

Then, one day as my little sister and I hung clothes along the line, I considered her. She was a good girl. She kept her head down. She was kind and warm and full of new love, but even though she looked at us and didn’t flinch, she didn’t like to look at herself.

She remembered our birthdays and made us trinkets by hand. She did what Mother asked of her, and did it well, and maybe that was good enough for her, even if she had to be sweet-less.

I looked at her through the hanging linens. All of them were gray or black or white, except the red ribbons from my sister's hair. I could smell her in the silent breeze, and somehow, she still did not smell like the rest of us.

It was unfamiliar and unsettling. I only knew the endless burn of sugar in my throat. I leaned into the linens and sniffed her. If she noticed she didn't do anything but hang clothing. Then I thought: it did not matter if Mother had left my sister her teeth. It did not matter because she would have lost them to the sweetness anyway.

At least, in this house, we were not the sum of the things we lose. We were the sum of the things our mother gave back to us.

Then, something twitched at the edge of the garden. My sister and I both looked to the sound, hands full of socks and pajamas. My heart thumped, perhaps with joy. Perhaps not. I thought of the day my little sister came to us, her red dress, the rounded yellow bones of her teeth. The cakes she ate.

She stood. I stood. I kept my hands at my sides, and wondered if I should smile.

Then the bushes parted, and a little baby bluebird popped through into the yard. It flexed its periwinkle wings and waddled over the ground, picking at itself, plucking worms from below its feet.

The bird opened its beak and chirped. The beak was sharp. It was toothless. I wondered if, like my sister, it was sweet-less.

I started to cry.

My little sister went to the bird, gently, her gray dress swishing along the grass. The bird did not skitter off away from her, even when she stooped, even when she scooped it into her tiny palm. She held it up and stroked its blue neck, its orange chest, its tiny toothless beak. She lifted her other hand and folded the little bird into palm-sweat darkness. The bird made no sound.

"I can feel it moving," she said, pressing her palms closer. "It is so fragile."

She turned to me and, for the first time since we got her, smiled with her red mouth open.

"We are all so loved here," I say.

•

I ONCE KNEW a boy who disobeyed his mother.

On a shadowy evening he slipped away from after-dinner music and stumbled out into the mouth of the forest. He tripped over roots and scraped his knees on underbrush. He tore the soft gray fabric of his pajama pants. This did not matter to him.

He had not made it very far when he felt that his mother knew he was gone.

He pushed his little legs over stones and logs and ferns. He stretched his hands out into the falling darkness to part the vegetation and bat away spider webs. He wished he could make himself go faster, but he couldn't.

His toothless gums smacked together as he ran. Like his legs, his lungs couldn't go fast enough.

But he made it all the way up the hill, to the long road at the edge of the thick trees. He knew asphalt when he saw it even though he had never seen it before. The boy wasn't sure if he should bring himself up to the road, possibly to be exposed, so he ran across the pavement and tucked himself into the trees on the other side. It felt like a great divide, a great distance between his home and him. He waited for headlights, believing he would recognize them.

But when the headlights came, they belonged to a massive cargo truck. Its cab was raised too high for the driver to have seen the tiny boy waving weakly at the edge of the road, and its engine too loud to have heard him over the roar. The boy tried to chase the truck, but it passed, none the wiser that he had been there.

The boy went back into the trees and waited. He waited for a long time, worrying every second that he would soon be found, that he would be made to go home.

Running and worrying made the boy so tired that he fell asleep, hidden in the bushes. He dreamed of cakes and pliers and lost girls with no teeth, and when he woke, he screamed because he thought he was in his own bed.

The sun was rising by then. The sky behind it was red.

The boy's belly rumbled, so he carefully roused himself from his nest in the bushes. He walked along the edge of the road, wondering how many cars he had missed.

He didn't know which way to go, front or backwards, so he picked one and kept walking.

He heard birds he had never heard. He counted the yellow stripes that marked the middle of the road. He looked for berries and ate the ones he found. It was his instinct to worry about the purple stains on his hands, but then he remembered what he was doing.

The road was silent.

He walked until it was dark again, and slept in the bushes until it was light. He did this for days. His belly practically howled, having only berries in it. The boy missed the cakes. He thought about eating a plant, but he didn't know which ones would make him sick, and he was sure that some of them would.

On the sixth night, the little boy, faint with hunger, cried at the silence of the road. He yowled at the pavement and its carelessness, cursed the quiet. A sudden memory of lemon cake made him drool down his shirt.

And so then, when he did see headlights, the boy stumbled into the road, waving his arms, slobbering and crying and gagging. The car slammed on its brakes and swerved to avoid him. A woman got out of the driver's side and started to hurry to the boy, but she stopped when she got close enough to really see him.

"Oh, God," she said.

"Please," the boy said, offering his palms. But she had already gotten back into her car. The smell of her tires burned his nose.

The boy collapsed onto the road and he lay there, shivering. He felt so ugly.

He laid in the road and shivered and wished that he would die. He was sorry he did not say goodbye to his favorite siblings. He was sorry, sorry, sorry. But before his little heart could give out the way he wanted, a new car quietly pulled up behind him and parked. Its headlights shone above him like two bright index fingers, pointing as if now they could show him the way out of the forest.

"Oh, my poor baby," his mother said as she got out of the car and gathered him up into her arms.

He cried harder now. He cried because he was hungry, and because he did not have the strength to fight her off, and because now his new sister had no teeth; but he cried, most of all, because he knew he loved his mother.

She tucked him into the backseat of the car and pulled a blanket over his tiny body. His bones and joints no longer felt stiff or sharp. He felt defeated and hideous and he would have felt hollow, too, but his mother looked at his face in the rearview mirror so much.

"We'll get you some treats, sweet boy," she said softly. He knew there would be cakes, and that she would give him as many as he wanted, of anything he wanted, even though he had wounded her.

The ride home felt warm and long and so, so slow.

Sign Broken; Message Inside ~

Kevin Brown

There is nothing for us to say
ever again,
no need for us to go
to the mountain,
come down to say *gentian*,

cistern, house, bridge,
gate, even monolith,
all communication missed
connections. Signifiers
and signifieds have drifted away

from one another
like lovers who once knew
every freckle and mole,
every indentation and bend

of the other's body,
but now pass each other in the mall,
tantrum-throwing children trailing behind,
don't recognize the other's
heavier face or gait.

And yet, of the making of books
and videos and tweets
and poems and podcasts,
there is no end,

as if there were some ineffable
something rattling around our rib cages
that made all our futile comments,
all our failures and failings worthwhile.

Touring the Glore Psychiatric Museum ~

Richard Sonnenmoser

Entryway Plaque

Glore Psychiatric Museum is the result of one man's tireless efforts to collect items, documents, artifacts and exhibits that explain how the treatment of mental illness has improved. This museum was created so that we might learn from the experience of those who have suffered the many forms of mental disease. George Glore was a Missouri Department of Mental Health and St. Joseph State Hospital employee for 41 years, retiring in 1996. The Glore Psychiatric Museum was chartered by an act of the Missouri Legislature in 1992.

PART OF ME WISHES I were visiting the museum tomorrow, 11/11/11. I'm interested in apophenia, but I'm not a sufferer. Superstition about dates may not be apophenia; it may be magical thinking. I'm at the museum today, the tenth of November, because I don't teach on Thursdays. I'm here because this museum is one of my favorite places in St. Joseph, Missouri, where I grew up. The museum is a favorite place, but I can't say I understand it. I can't say it understands itself.

The museum charges admission, gets funding from legitimate sources, provides tours to schoolchildren and attempts as best as it can to educate citizens about how we used to view mental illness, how we view it now. The museum is simultaneously shocking and nonchalant about its subject. It reserves its deepest editorial ire for Stone Age cavemen while giving the psychosurgeons of the mid-twentieth century a free pass.

Most of Missouri State Hospital #2 has been converted into a prison. A few friends, from childhood and early adulthood, have served time in that prison. The psychiatric museum is located in a brown brick building on the campus of the old state hospital, just outside the high barbed fencing. I couldn't come tomorrow: The Glore Psychiatric Museum will be closed on the eleventh, a sign on the entrance informs me, in observance of Veteran's Day.

This morning, television news reported that Penn State football coach Joe Paterno had been fired. I saw this news

at a restaurant chain, My Favorite Muffin, where I'd gone for breakfast with my wife, in Maryville, the small town where we live, fifty miles from where I was born. An assistant coach at Penn State had been indicted for crimes relating to the sexual assault of eight children. On the drive from Maryville to St. Joseph, I listened to a Penn State student on the radio saying Paterno should be fired but should also be allowed to end his career on his own terms. The student mentioned a game this Saturday. I wonder if the student is worried about the outcome of the game, or if he wants Paterno to be allowed to coach a final game, perhaps to know that the game he's coaching is his final game. I turned off the radio and said into a small digital voice recorder, "Pedophilia is both a mental illness and a crime. We view acts of pedophilia as crimes. We view those who are pedophiles as suffering from a mental illness."

Now I'm wondering how pedophilia as mental illness jibes with the photocopied pages, an educational handout, I've pulled from a carousel at the museum's entrance: "People with Mental Illness Enrich Our Lives."

I pay five dollars to a man at a cash register. He asks me if I've been here before, and I tell him that I have. I begin to explain that I've visited a few times, and that on this visit I'm planning to write about the museum. Vaguely I'd thought, before I spoke, saying these words might feel inspiring, or maybe virtuous, but I'm suddenly hot and embarrassed, and so I ask him, just for something to say, if he minds if I walk around the museum with a small recording device, talking to myself.

He says he doesn't mind at all.

Camisole

Camisoles such as this one were constructed in the hospital sewing room until approximately 1968. They were constructed of very heavy material, with row after row of strong stitching. The camisole laces up the back in the same manner in which a shoe is laced. About midway up the back the laces pass through grommets on the end of each sleeve, thus confining the hands.... The camisole was used for those patients who displayed overt combative behaviors toward themselves or others.

I START IN THE BASEMENT. The basement of a psychiatric mu-

seum, I'm thinking, is probably where they keep the really interesting stuff. I vaguely remember an exhibit from an earlier visit: a mannequin in a wooden tub, another mannequin standing over her with a fire hose. Instead, I see farm implements, a cream separator, a shoe anvil. I'm alone, and so it feels best to whisper. I read a placard into my voice recorder: "Farming was a major industry within the hospital. From the opening of the institution in 1874 to the 1960s, commodities produced included beef, pork, poultry, milk and other dairy products, and a variety of vegetables for use in the hospital. Much of the farm labor was provided by able-bodied patients." Later, when I listen to my voice, which is mostly reading the placards, I will hear fear: my voice wavering and breaking, catching. Even at the farming exhibit, even at art therapy, I will sound afraid. Now, here in the basement, I'm wondering about the ethics involved in putting mental patients to work: farming and gardening, cooking and carpentry, cobbling and sewing. Working in the hospital garden seems a humane, perhaps restorative, way to occupy a patient's daylight hours; I am less sure about the manufacture of straitjackets. "Oh, isn't it funny," I imagine a restrained patient saying, "that just earlier this week I was punching in the grommets on this very camisole..."

Included in the exhibit are two vehicles, a car and a truck, restored and made into elaborate art objects by patients at the Woodson Children's Psychiatric Hospital, which is no longer a standalone hospital but is now a division of the Northwest Missouri Psychiatric Rehabilitation Center across the street. In what used to be Woodson's front yard, at the corner of 36th Street and Frederick Avenue, there used to be a playground, which, as an eight-year-old child, I once asked my mother about. I must have intimated that I wouldn't mind visiting the playground, that it seemed nice. She shook her head, disappointed, and told me I shouldn't envy the children who had to play there. One of the vehicles, a truck donated by Toyota, is painted in a Rock 'n' Roll motif, with bright plush seat covers; it has a name: Juke-Box Hero. A talking box says the children who worked on the vehicles remain proud of their work.

Stomping or Stepping on the Patient

The belief in demonology, or possession of persons by evil spirits, persisted into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Often the mentally ill became the victims of bizarre exorcisms, or "cast-

ing out” rituals.” Here, physicians are attempting a cure by “stomping the devil” out of a sick man.

I’VE BEEN READING Elliot Valenstein’s *Great and Desperate Cures: The Rise and Decline of Psychosurgery and Other Radical Treatments for Mental Illness*, which provides a good explication of the historical and professional developments which converged in the late 1940s and early ‘50s and caused thousands of lobotomies to be performed across the world. I almost included scientific before developments, but lobotomies were, as Valenstein argues, ego-driven experiments sans the intellectual rigors of good science: “After drilling two or more holes in a patient’s skull, a surgeon inserted into the brain any of various instruments—some resembling an apple corer, a butter spreader, or an ice pick—and, often without being able to see what he was cutting, destroyed parts of the brain.”

These surgeries were morally and medically dubious, and Valenstein presents ample evidence for how medical hubris and unchecked community enthusiasm, often originating in the popular press, allowed the practice to spread. Doctors generally wanted to help their patients, we might assume, but many physicians were guilty, at the very least, of being caught up in a fad, or of not trusting the evidence that what they were doing was more harmful than helpful. Perhaps, too, some were after glory or profit. Some, ostensibly, were after more manageable sanitariums. Thousands of incapacitated patients perhaps seemed to these doctors necessary means to a desirable end.

O’Halloran’s Swing

In this and other revolving devices, the patient was either turned on his own axis while seated in a chair or while lying in a bed with his head pointed outward and describing a circle. The patient was given from 40 to 100 turns per minute. The effects, especially those produced by the revolving bed, were extraordinary. Centrifugal force drove the blood to the brain, causing intense anxiety, false sensations, fear of suffocating, nausea, vertigo, vomiting, urination and defecation, and sometimes brain hemorrhage. This device was used for delirious, melancholic, obstinate and uncooperative mental patients, to train them to submit to discipline, to live according to prescribed regulations,

and, above to all, to be obedient.

NOW I'M IN THE MORGUE. Or I'm in the doorway of the morgue. I'm standing in the threshold between hallway and morgue. I'm feeling suddenly hollowed out. I'm feeling vertiginous and cold. Suddenly I wish I weren't alone.

A sign says the room is monitored and that any movement of the barricade will trigger an alarm. I inch forward. I'm having a hard time focusing. A placard says, "Although the morgue is not being used at this time, the refrigeration units are still working and the morgue trays (slabs) are cold. The temperature of the coolers is maintained at about 40 degrees. Capacity—4 bodies."

My first time visiting the Glore was with my high school psychology class in 1997. My teacher, Mr. Hamilton Henderson, talked about how he used to work in this building, at what was then Missouri State Hospital #2, and how he was afraid of being in the morgue at night. My class also visited the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas, a trip which my mother co-chaperoned. I had never before asked my mother to chaperone a school event. I had an idea that a mental institution would be of interest to her, that we would enjoy spending the day together at a psychiatric hospital. We ate lunch, I remember, in the dining room where the patients ate lunch. Many of the patients were my age: 17 or so. I remember thinking it strange that this was a field trip to a place where people lived, met with their doctors, tried to achieve peace. I remember thinking how annoyed I would be if I were living here and some chipper high-school students showed up and noisily drank iced tea and complained about the food.

I'm the only patron in the museum, as far as I can tell. The walls hum with heat. I've been in the museum for five minutes, and I've twice felt risk on the back of my neck. And twice I've turned toward where I've sensed personhood, only to not see a living staff member or museum patron but a mannequin. Some are dressed as nurses and doctors, others as patients. They stand in the exhibits, archaic psychosurgical implements posed in their plastic fingers. They are wearing camisoles; they are positioned in fever cabinets and douching tubs and seclusion rooms. Sometimes they are positioned, as if alive, as if they are working, in the hallways.

Why do they continue to cool the morgue trays?

The placard tells me that the morgue held the bodies of patients until family members made arrangements. I know, too, from Valenstein, that doctors in the United States would often read a book, usually Freeman and Watts' *Psychosur-*

gery, send away for a leucotome from a medical supplier and then practice their technique on one of the many unclaimed patients in the state hospital's morgue. I learn this morgue and autopsy room were also used by the state of Missouri for "deaths that might involve foul play." A family of four who were murdered in northwest Missouri were brought here, we're told. We, those of us standing in this room, don't know anything else about them.

Psychiatry Caveman Style

The earliest "psychiatry" of which we have any knowledge was that practiced by Stone Age cave-men some half million years ago. For certain forms of mental illness, probably those where the patient complained of severe headaches ... the early medicine man treated the disorder by means of a disorder now called trephining. This operation was performed with crude stone instruments and consisted of chipping away one area of the skull in the form of a circle, until the skull was cut through. This opening, called a trephine, presumably permitted the evil spirit, which was causing all the trouble, to escape, and incidentally may have relieved a certain amount of pressure on the brain. In some cases, trephined skulls of primitive men show healing around the opening, indicating that the individuals survived the operation and lived for many years afterwards. This early brain surgery left much to be desired in terms of technique, but it was even more inadequate in terms of the naïve, unscientific theory of demonology upon which it rested.

ON THE MUSEUM'S SECOND FLOOR, I find the display devoted to Phineas Gage, who on September 13, 1848, was impaled by a tamping iron. He was on a railroad crew in Cavendish, Vermont, and he was using the tamping iron to pack explosive powder into a hole drilled under a rock. The iron, which was three and a half feet long, an inch in diameter, and weighing about thirteen pounds, exploded into his left cheek near his eye, punctured the frontal lobes of his brain and exited his skull. (He kept it; daguerreotypes survive of him holding the iron.) Gage survived the accident but suffered a dramatic personality shift. He also suffered from seizures, which resulted in his death at 36, eleven years after the impaling. John

Martyn Harlow, the doctor who treated Gage, wrote about a breakdown of the division between Gage's "intellectual faculties and animal propensities."

Gage's case provided fodder for neurologists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; here was an empirical link between personality and the frontal lobes. Studies of First World War soldiers with prefrontal lobe damage seemed to confirm that prefrontal lobe damage caused severe personality changes.

I don't know exactly how Gage's personality degradation via tamping iron impalement led to the lobotomies performed by Egas Moniz (shouldn't Gage's story have prevented the lobotomies?), but the museum exhibit asks me to draw the line.

Utica Crib

The Utica Crib was a restraining device used during the middle of the nineteenth century at the Utica Lunatic Asylum in New York There have been variations of this device in use at public hospitals throughout the country. Patients wrote of being locked down in such a position that it was impossible to turn over. The crib was used as a restraint for the violent and at the will of the attendants for the punishment of the unsubmitive.

WHAT JERRY SANDUSKY, the former assistant coach at Penn State, has been accused of is rape. The rape of boy-children. Saying sexual assault allows us to avoid the image, to believe that perhaps, in moments that could have bordered on playful, Sandusky touched the boys inappropriately. What he is accused of is rape. He is accused, among other charges, of having anal intercourse with a ten-year-old boy.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV classifies pedophilia as a paraphilic sexual disorder. Paraphilic disorders "are characterized by recurrent, intense, sexual urges, fantasies, or behaviors that involve unusual objects, activities, or situations and cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning." The definition makes it seem as though the "impairment" on the sufferer is most important to us. Of course, with pedophilia, the social impairment, the occupational impairment, the impairment in important areas of functioning, none of these, really, are our concern.

By definition, pedophilia is unusual. That is what causes

it to be classified as a psychosexual disorder. It is a mental illness which has been treated with cognitive behavioral therapy, drugs, applied behavior analysis. Of course, pedophilia also violates our societal codes of conduct, which is what makes it criminal.

There was a student riot at Penn State last night not in response to what Jerry Sandusky is alleged to have done but in response to what Penn State's Board of Trustees did: firing Joe Paterno. From a story in *The New York Times*: "'Of course we're going to riot,' he [Paul Howard, 24, an aerospace engineering student] said. 'What do they expect when they tell us at 10 o'clock that they fired our football coach?'" From a story in *The New York Post*: "'We just feel totally betrayed by the school,' sophomore student Emily Ralkan said. 'After 60 years of all the work he's done for us, for them to just fire him is ridiculous. They won't even let him finish up the season. There's no loyalty there. And it's sick. It's disgusting. He's probably done more for the school than any of the trustees has.'"

Restraint Ring

This metal ring was removed from a basement wall ... in December 1980. Rings such as this one were at one time common in the infirmary, the women's detached unit and in the center building. The rings were mounted to the walls, and patients out of control could be restrained to the wall by means of a chain that passed through the metal ring.

EGAS MONIZ, "the father of cerebral angiography," is the neurologist who popularized lobotomy or, as he called it, prefrontal leucotomy. There were others who were working on similar procedures around the same time as Moniz, but, as it often happens in science, he was the first to widely publish and present his work, and so he gets the credit. Moniz was born to an aristocratic family in Avanca, a coastal village, in 1874. Before becoming a lobotomist, he was a physician, politician, professor, and, most notably, a successful brain-imaging researcher. In late 1935, without any preparatory animal experiments, and not much intellectually consistent theorizing, he began operating on the prefrontal lobes of mental patients. "Owing to the procedure's similarity to coring an apple," writes Valenstein, "it was called the core operation."

Walter Freeman, an American lobotomist, and an en-

thusiastic press helped spread the word about the practice without also inspiring discussion of its ineffectiveness. The operations yielded inconsistent results, but they kept happening. About 40,000 lobotomies, including those performed on Rosemary Kennedy and Tennessee William's sister, were performed in the United States.

The discontinuation of lobotomies was strangely slow. A placard says, "In Missouri, a study by psychologist Mary Frances Robinson showed that little psychological change was gained by the surgical procedure, and as a result the use of lobotomies was discontinued in the early 1950s." Robinson was the first clinical psychologist to be employed at the St. Joseph State Hospital. The introduction of new antipsychotic drugs, such as chlorpromazine, or Thorazine, most likely contributed to the gradual reduction in violent, incapacitating brain surgeries. Another placard nearby says, "Lobotomies were discontinued at the Fulton State Hospital in 1966." Why, if Robinson had shown the procedure to be ineffective in the early 1950s, and if antipsychotics were on the market, would the lobotomies continue at Fulton, two hundred miles away, until 1966?

Egas Moniz was Portugal's only recipient of the Nobel Prize until novelist Jose Saramago received the honor for literature in 1998.

Seclusion Room Door

Such doors were constructed in the hospital's carpenter shop. This particular door had heavy reinforcement bars on one side, with the heavy wire mesh on the other side. The screen door rather than a solid door was necessary in the wings of this building as there was no source of heat within the seclusion room. The screen door allowed some heat from the hall to enter the room where the patient was confined.

MOST EXHIBITS ON THE SECOND FLOOR, including the "Seclusion Room Door," use mannequins. In a museum which captures, more than anything else, a sense of suffering, it is strange to see so many plastic people. They are, I want to say, department store mannequins. Mannequins like these aren't used much anymore in department store clothing displays. Once, my sister dared me to touch the eyes of a mannequin at the J.C. Penney's in St. Joseph. I remember the hollowing-out sensation, a sudden give in my lower body, when I touched

the mannequin's eyes. I'd had similar sensations on roller coasters and flume rides.

I am alone, my whispering not so much the necessity of polite public behavior as a habit I can't shake, so I could probably touch some mannequin eyes. Many of the "doctor" mannequins in these displays don't have eyes. They don't have mouths. They have, as their only facial feature, a nose-ish lump in the middle of their faces. Without the ability to express, they are without humanity. If I half-close my eyes, I can almost trick myself into thinking them people.

In Ken Kesey's 1962 novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the narrator, Chief Bromden, says of lobotomized Randle McMurphy: "There's nothin' in the face. Just like one of those store dummies." Later, after suffocating lobotomized McMurphy with a pillow, Bromden notices that, even in death, McMurphy's face still has the "blank, dead-end look." In death and in life, he's a mannequin. At the Glore, doctors and patients all have the dead-end look.

I arrive at the "Insulin Coma Treatment and Electroconvulsive Therapy" exhibit. A woman under a sheet is wearing headphones. They only look like headphones. They are really the electrodes, or representatives of the electrodes, that are part of electroconvulsive therapy, which is still used today in cases of severe depression. My grandmother on my father's side received electroconvulsive therapy in the early 2000s. Once, after visiting her in the nursing home, my father described why he thought the treatment effective: "It sounds severe, but really what it does is allow her to forget. She wakes up and can't remember how she felt the day before. It breaks the chain of depressive thinking. The shock resets her."

The Bath of Surprise

The Bath of Surprise was a seventeenth-century device for calming disturbed mental patients. The patient was dropped suddenly through the trapdoor into a tub of cold water. This was supposed "to throw violent shock," to break the chain of delusional ideas and perhaps create conditions favoring sane thinking. In addition, it apparently inspired fear in patients "stubbornly opposed to the use of medications or determined not to submit to rules established for the common good."

THE MUSEUM HAS PROMISED to show how "the treatment of

mental illness has improved.” But so far, after two floors, I haven’t sensed much improvement. I don’t know, and I’m having trouble guessing, about what’s happening now to those teenagers I saw in the dining room at the Menninger Clinic, nearly fifteen years ago. “Juke-Box Hero” certainly seems like a fun project, and I appreciate the intangible benefits of giving patients the time and materials and instruction necessary to create elaborate art objects, things without obvious function. “Juke-Box Hero,” I have decided, was created from of an irrational but nonetheless true desire on the part of the creators, and I sympathize with that kind of thinking. But many of the other patient projects have the whiff of chain-gang servitude about them: the farm implements of the 1890s, sure, but also the vocational rehab projects of the 1990s, which all seem to have been created at the behest of the museum. I hope the patients in the carpentry shop enjoyed—and perhaps even felt, while working, empowered—creating the replica Bath of Surprise and the museum-friendly version of a damp, rat-infested cell at Salpêtrière. I hope they felt this work to be useful, or at the very least an amenable way to spend the day. Perhaps they had a little joy while working, maybe some laughs shared working with others. Still, there is something uncanny about a 1950s mental patient putting the finishing touches on a restraining camisole; there’s a cousin of that uncanniness perhaps in the patients of a psychiatric hospital working to build replicas of the torture devices used in old asylums.

Now, on the third floor, I am shocked to feel—suddenly and powerfully—moved. In every room of the museum I’d overheard myself, a whispering monster moving through rooms that seemed not to want movement. I’d talked when I should have listened to the walls. I’d spoken the words on the descriptive placards to myself, and then made snide comments, thinking of my later self, about the laughable quality of the “Stomping or Stepping on the Patient” diorama, the creepiness of the faceless, single-bulb-lit mannequin in the “Seclusion Room.” But I’ve arrived at Music Therapy, and I’m moved.

There are guitars propped against and laid across chairs. There’s a drum kit and piano. There are Styrofoam cups on the floor and window ledges, which give the room the impression of having been recently vacated. I stare at these cups for a while, uncomprehending. Slowly I understand that they’re here on purpose; the room has been staged. On the walls are a few photographs of patients performing together for an unseen assembly. Painted on the wall are these words:

Hesitation

At first, patients are quiet and withdrawn, their minds occupied by constant struggle. But as music fills the room, their senses awaken to the rhythm, and their approach to the situation changes as they begin to make their own music.

Exploration

Patients come out of their comfort zones to socialize with others and build self-confidence. Making music goes far beyond the simple side-effect of relaxation. It grabs our attention, helps our memory and improves how we see ourselves and our world.

Transformation

A new person may emerge from a music therapy session, ready to face their fears and express themselves with a newfound confidence and a positive attitude. The brain reacts to the comforting rhythms and lyrics and gives new hope to patients of all ages.

Rocking Chair Hospitals

St. Joseph State Hospital, along with most other state psychiatric hospitals, was known as a “rocking chair” hospital into the middle part of the century. Patients not assigned work detail or therapies were expected to sit in rocking chairs along the wall of the ward and make no demands on staff. If they sat quietly and did not present problems, they were considered to be “good patients.” The chairs were arranged, one after another, along the wall facing the main entrance. Having the chairs set up in this manner discouraged socialization and led to a quieter ward. Today, the ward furniture is arranged to enhance socialization and interaction. Patients are encouraged to take part in a variety of activities and education programs and are no longer relegated to their chairs.

ON THE DRIVE HOME from the museum, I turn on the radio. I’m expecting to hear more about the riots at Penn State,

the fired eighty-four-year-old football coach, but I am driving between hours and am relegated to regular programming. It's Fresh Air on public radio, and Terry Gross is interviewing the actor Kirsten Dunst about her new movie, *Melancholia*. I first heard about the movie when, at the Cannes Film Festival, its director, Lars Von Trier, said some embarrassing, Hitler-sympathizing things at a press conference. He wouldn't stop saying the embarrassing things he was saying, and Dunst, sitting next to him, cycled through emotions, from pity to embarrassment to sympathy to something like resignation.

The movie is about a depressed woman, played by Dunst, and a fictional planet, *Melancholia*, which is on a collision course with Earth. In talking about the opening shot of the movie, Gross mistakenly identifies the objects falling in slow motion around Dunst's face as leaves. When she gets her turn to talk, Dunst corrects her: "Well, first of all, they were birds that were falling out of the sky."

They share a laugh.

Dunst says, "Leaves are kinder; they naturally fall."

Before heading home, I'd sat in the parking lot at the Glore for a half hour. I listened to all I'd recorded, and then I'd taken a closer look at "People with Mental Illness Enrich Our Lives." It's a kind of Who's Who of the depressed and bipolar: Sylvia Plath, Abraham Lincoln, Ludwig von Beethoven, Virginia Woolf, Isaac Newton, Winston Churchill and Charles Dickens. I'd looked for the words paranoid schizophrenia in the descriptions that justify each name's inclusion, but I didn't see them. The photocopied pages are a friendly lie made possible by clinical and manic depression's inclusion under the umbrella of "mental illness." It's a friendly lie that helps to battle the stigma of mental illness. Still, the platitude that people with mental illness enrich our lives, and the list of these names of people who succeeded despite their struggles with clinical and manic depression, seems shallower after going through the museum.

I turn off the radio. I can't listen to other people talking, and the realization that I'm right now unable to listen to other people talking seems dysfunctional, a problem, maybe a sign.

I'm thinking about the men and women who sewed the camisoles, who forged the restraint rings. I'm thinking about those doctors in Fulton, lobotomizing people with manic depression or aggressive, combative personalities the year the Beatles arrived in America ... and the next year ... and the next. I'm thinking of the aunts and uncles, the great grandmothers, all these people who I only know by name,

by reputation, by a sad look in an old photograph. I'm thinking of my own grandmother, Rosemary Sonnenmoser. I'm thinking of all those people, the Sonnenmosers and the Harringtons, the Moores and the Obermiers: the schizophrenics, the manic depressives, the good old-fashioned clinical depressives.

One of my favorite family games is Get Dad to Talk about Borderline Personality Disorder. The game's pretty simple. I ask my father to tell me a story from his childhood. I ask him about one of my long-dead relatives. In telling me about these people—the uncle who preferred to sleep in the field, with his cattle, the grandmother who refused to use ingredients necessary to cooking, such as baking soda or salt, because, on their own, they tasted bad—we invariably arrive at the posthumous diagnosis: Borderline Personality Disorder.

It's a good game, if he's willing to play. We play it sometimes alongside one of my mother's favorite games, Trace Our Hereditary Facial Features in Old Photographs. The games are best played together. We learn a little something every time. For instance, we have the same nose, me and the characters in most of my father's stories. Right away you'd see the family resemblance. Sometimes, as he talks, we hear it. Sometimes we understand. Sometimes, in thinking about the mental illness in our line, we know something new about who we might be.

August ~

Wendy Mitman Clarke

Let me just say: I know
I'm supposed to be loyal.
I planted these seeds, didn't I?
Every day hope unfurling—
the feathery tops of carrots,
the red vein of beets—
until now, deep August,
the eggplants worn
as an immigrant's suitcase,
the tomatoes wild and rotting
on the vine. You know
something about desperation.
I should love you for that
but your requirements for tending
exhaust me.
Squash bugs, aphids,
cutworms, late blight.
Fight your own battles.
Leave me to fight mine.
Maybe then we can agree
the weight we bear for this
dissembling bed
of vegetation is worth it—
blue riot of morning glories
warping the empty pea trellis,
finches bending spent sunflowers,
bouncing lightly, ardent gymnasts of seed.

On Watson Road ~

Wendy Mitman Clarke

You're just a bird—
feather and hollow bone.
Were he available,
God would remind you of this every day.

Most of your kind won't survive the nest
let alone the world.
Miraculous migrations notwithstanding,
your startled feces still smears the windshield.

On Watson Road, a case in point:
car door ajar, limbs pale in the dirt, shotgun
spent, bits of brain gemlike
in the new day's light.

This was God's job, not yours,
to remind this hollow boy
of what he forgot. Or perhaps
that's what dawn is for, each web

in the meadow beside Watson Road
a cloudforest of dew,
your mouth open to the unattainable
drop. Why else such beauty

but to betray the truth
of your body lying
here in such unruffled repose—
blue feather, white breast, curled claw.

The Looting ~

William J. Cobb

THE SANDPIPER MOTEL and in fact most of Christmas Beach has a last-day-of-school feel to it, a sense that nothing really matters anymore. The entire hotel is booked for a square-dancers' convention, but most of the guests have already called and canceled. Kyra hasn't even started on The Arabian Room when it begins raining, low blue clouds scudding in from the sea, churning the green water into washing machine surf, full of black swells and white froth, breaking waves smashing into the crooked piers on the other side of Palm Boulevard. Ben finds her in the Coup De Ville room, curled into the white leather seats of the convertible Cadillac in the living room, the TV turned to a soap opera.

She asks him to remove his shoes before entering please thank you very much and adds she can't believe Monique would leave Carter for Mitchell because, I mean, really, Carter is a zillion-times cuter and Mitchell has such beady eyes and arm fur. "Look at his shirt cuff." She points at the screen. "He's borderline ape."

"Kyra? I'm starting to sense you don't really love this job."

"I hate to be the one to tell you this," she says, smiling, "but those crazy square dancers are about as likely to show up here tonight as I am to enter a bowling tournament."

Ben insists they can't count on the storm hitting. It could stall or head toward Cuba or Puerto Rico or the Yucatan. Who knows. Nobody knows. We have to be prepared for the eight couples who have not canceled yet, possibly arriving late this afternoon, all hyped up for some kick-ass square dancing. The National Weather Service has issued a hurricane warning, which in the hotel and restaurant management business means they're fucked. He climbs over the Caddie's door and plops beside her, putting his feet on the dash.

"You went to the dentist again." Kyra has an extremely sensitive sense of smell. She can tell when Ben has had his oil changed, when he's showered, when he's smoked pot with Skip, when he's been eating pickles and once, when he forgot to wash his face after making love to Caitlin.

Ben takes the remote from Kyra and clicks to ESPN just to piss her off. "What kind of plane was it?"

"Was what?"

“You know. Your parents’ plane wreck. It wasn’t that horrible crash off Long Island, was it? That was spooky. It just fell into the ocean and nobody knows why.”

“Not that one.” Kyra wrenches the steering wheel, dodging an imagined deer. “Actually, it was a helicopter.”

“Really?”

“Uh huh. The kind that land on roofs. Like how famous people commute to work.” Kyra makes a go-figure face. “That’s not easy, you know, landing on those little roofs.”

Ben wonders what it takes to be a helicopter pilot. Kyra thinks he should look into it. “Really. I’d like to see you at the controls of a chopper. And a tractor-trailer rig, too.”

It would beat managing a crummy hotel, that’s for sure. It’s not even his job, anyway. He’s just covering for Caitlin while she’s in Miami, and if he wasn’t so glad she’s out of town, he’d resent her for it, this lousy hotel work. It’s humiliating, is what it is. Caitlin earned her bachelor’s degree in Hotel & Restaurant management, and though he’d never say it out loud, Ben thinks it’s a joke. He knows he should theoretically respect it, but he doesn’t. He secretly theorizes that Caitlin is uncomfortable knowing things, that instead of a virtue or a blessing she sees it as a burden. As this suspicion crystallizes, he finds himself not thinking of himself as the male half of a couple, as he should, since they’re living together, but as a disgruntled romantic partner in the pre-breakup phase. Kyra has noticed this and has a hunch that things are about to change, that the Volkswagen Jetta Ben and Caitlin drive is roaring down the highway toward Splitsville and neither of them are stopping for traffic lights.

•

BY EARLY EVENING the mayor and chief of police and the disaster planning commission have ordered the entire resort area of Christmas Beach evacuated and only one of the square-dancing couples arrives, insisting that the whole thing will probably blow over, as they check into the Frontier Frolic suite. Ben offers to cut 10% off the price. The man is string-bean thin, meek as a sinning preacher, his watery eyes focused vaguely on Kyra, who’s lounging in the office, pretending to be a happy guest. “You’re going to love that room,” she says. “My mom and I stayed there last winter and it was like spending a weekend in the Old West, minus the outlaws and cannibalism.”

The woman wears a flounced square-dancing dress and holds her fringed purse with both hands. “We’re so glad to be here!” She does a little twirl in the center of The Sandpiper’s office. It lifts her skirt high enough to flash a

glimpse of ruffled white underthings. When she stops she points at Kyra and declares that she has absolutely the most gorgeously fantabulous hair in the world. "I'm serious," she insists. She sashays across the room and leans over to get a close-up view. "Can I touch it?"

"That would make my day." Kyra smiles as the woman pats her head as if she were rewarding a good dog.

"Young and beautiful." She shakes her head, causing a secondary ripple in her flounced skirts. "Ain't you the lucky one?"

"It's just a tropical storm," says the man. "Hell's bells. I've seen worse than this."

His square-dancing partner nods, still smiling at Kyra. "I would die for your hair!"

Kyra tells her to stop. "Really. I mean it." But gosh, it's nice that somebody around here notices what she has under the hood. "Tell you what." She takes the hem of the square-dancing dress in her fingers. "I'll trade you my hair for that dress."

"It's a deal."

The phone rings and it's Nola, the female half of Ben and Caitlin's married chums, Skip and Nola. She's been watching The Weather Channel all afternoon and is completely freaking out. The only thing keeping her from a full-fledged anxiety attack is a pair of Xanax. ("Don't tell Skip, okay?") Has Ben heard of this storm surge thing? The weather people won't stop talking about it and they claim there's no telling where this baby is coming ashore, but Nola has a feeling. "You know I get those sometimes," she says. "Don't ask me how I know, but mark my words. The storm is landing smack dab on Christmas Beach and there is going to be WIDE-SPREAD DESTRUCTION."

When the square dancers go for their luggage, Kyra pops up at Ben's elbow, lip-syncing Who's that? Ben covers the mouthpiece and tells her. She makes a face. "She just called an hour ago. What does she want now?"

"Widespread destruction," says Ben.

"I could arrange that."

On the phone, Nola asks if Ben can come over for dinner, that she needs his presence. If Ben comes over, the storm won't tear the roof off their house or shoot two-by-fours through their picture windows. "You make me feel so calm, you know that? You make me feel special. Like a low voltage electric current is buzzing through my skin. My tissues. Maybe I shouldn't be saying that but we're good friends, aren't we? Aren't we good friends?"

“Yes,” says Ben. “We’re good friends.”

Kyra inches close enough to hear Nola’s voice, and mimes sticking her finger down her throat. Ben says he doesn’t know about dinner, the storm complicating everything and Caitlin maybe not even making it in tonight. As Nola insists she wants him to come anyway and says she won’t take no for an answer, Kyra tries to grab the phone, and in their tussling she bites Ben’s arm. He yelps and pulls the phone out of her fingers, catching up to Nola’s voice asking, “What’s going on? That’s not your maid’s voice, is it?” Why doesn’t he let his maid run the office? She’s not retarded or anything, is she?

“Retarded?” asks Ben, grinning at Kyra. “I don’t think so. But, you know that’s not a word I’d use.”

“Did that bitch just call me retarded?”

Nola opined that a hotel shouldn’t even be open in a tropical storm. Really. She needs him the most. “My god. You don’t expect me to count on Skip, do you? He’s not like you. Like right now, I have no idea where he is. You I can call and get on the phone any time I want. You want to know what I think? I think Skip hides. How can you count on a man who spends half his life hiding?”

Ben says he really has to go. When the square dancers return with their luggage, Ben manages to hang up, eluding Kyra’s attempts to grab the phone, though she leans close and whispers, “I’m not finished with you yet.”

Ben leads the way to their room, with Kyra following behind, saying she just wants to take a peek. “You know,” she says. “Memory road.” She and her mother used to have such great times there!

The square-dancing woman asks just where the good woman is now.

“Heaven.”

On their suite’s door is a wagon wheel and a plaque adorned with a loopy black wood-burned slogan: DUSTY FROM THE TRAIL? FOR RIP-ROARIN’ RELAXIN’, TRY THE OLD WEST WOODEN BARREL HOT TUB! The square-dancing fellow confesses that he just loves a good soak in a hot tub, even if it does seem rather feminine and decadent, he supposes, in a free-love, sexual promiscuity kind of way. Kyra touches the wagon wheel, falsely noting that it’s a real wheel, you know, from a real Conestoga wagon right off the Oregon Trail.

“What a bargain,” quips the woman. “Fantasy and authenticity to boot.”

•

ON THE DRIVE to Skip and Nola’s, Ben squints through the

manic slapping of the windshield wipers as Kyra twists in her seat, pointing out the as-yet-unremarkable signs of storm damage: a newspaper vending machine overturned on the sidewalk, parking lots flooded with rain, a palm frond torn loose and floating in a ditch. She's positively giddy. "This is so cool! I've never witnessed a disaster before." She drums on the dash with both hands, shaking her hair into her face. Ben points out that actually, that's not true. Kyra has witnessed a disaster. "Remember the party Caitlin threw for Nola? Now that was a disaster."

She pushes Ben's shoulder. "Look at you. Cats away, mice will play?"

Ben squints at the windshield. "I cannot see a fucking thing."

•

WHEN THEY ARRIVE at Skip and Nola's condo, Nola hugs Ben and kisses his cheek, glances at Kyra for a split second and opens her eyes in an ambiguous gesture, somehow combining a false expression of Oh so glad to have you! and So this is what uninvited guests look like. She takes Ben's hand and pulls him into the den to see their new shark. It's a taxidermized hammerhead, caught by Nola's rich alcoholic deep-sea pervert father, mounted on the wall. Ben steps up and touches it. Kyra says, "That's certainly an attention-getter."

Nola touches the turquoise necklace hanging at the base of her throat and burps softly. Besides the Xanax, she's been drinking Merlot all afternoon. "What do you mean by that?"

Kyra pokes her hand inside the hammerhead's gaping jaws. "I mean it gets people's attention."

"Caitlin loves it," says Nola. "She saw it last week when I picked it up from the stuffing shop, and she thought it would look perfect here." She moves closer to Ben and whispers, with what seems an exaggerated smile on her face, "So what time is her flight getting in?"

"It's supposed to land a little after midnight, but I heard they closed the airport."

Nola thinks that's horrible. Flying is bad enough with storms and cancellations.

"I'm not worried," says Ben. "I'm sure she'll get back some time."

Actually, Ben is making it all up. Caitlin has no plans to return that night and Ben fantasizes about her never coming back. Unfortunately, she will. But there's a phone ringing in the Heartbreak Hotel, and Ben has a good idea who's on the other end of the line. He rubs his neck and pegs the

stuffed shark as a trophy to Nola's needy ruthlessness or an emblem of her daddy's girl status, probably both.

•

BY THE TIME Nola has the four of them take their places at the antique table in the dining room, Skip's eyes are bloodshot, he's dropping cigarette ashes on his slacks, and his ears and nose are so red they look sunburned. When Nola suggests that Kyra sit there, and Ben sit here, Skip says, "You sure that's close enough?"

Nola scratches her wrist. "To what?"

"To what do you think?"

"This is perfect," says Ben. He takes his seat and looks at the platter of broiled mackerel in the center of the table. "I'm starving."

"That's good," says Skip. He opens his napkin unsteadily, almost knocking over a glass of iced tea. "We like our guests hungry, don't we?"

The room gets excruciatingly quiet. Nola stares at her plate and says, "Maybe this isn't such a good—"

"What?" Skip reaches over and paws at her forearm. "Come on, Honey... Sugar..." When she lifts her face and gives him a stunning glare of hatred, he raises his hands. "Okay. Okay. I won't say another fucking word." Making a lurid comic face, he pantomimes zipping his mouth shut, twisting the lock, and throwing away the key.

Skip is a recovering alcoholic who, as far as Nola is concerned, has not had a drink in seven months, two weeks, and three days. For a man who's married to one of the richest women in Christmas Beach, he's remarkably unremarkable. Though Caitlin insists "he can be hilarious," in Ben's opinion Skip's only redeeming quality is a rugged, Tom Selleck slash Channing Tatum handsomeness. He's the kind of person who talks to the TV, describing what's happening on the many cop dramas to which he's addicted. When the squad car screeches up the sidewalk and corners a crook, the officers leaping from the car, Skip will say, "Watch out! He's getting away!" When the cop chases the hood through back alleys and finally tackles him trying to climb a chain-link fence, Skip laughs with a sense of jocular justice. "Oh yeah. Thought you were going to get away, didn't you? That's what you get for thinkin', Punk!"

For a while Nola refuses to meet anyone's eye, says not a word, and picks at her food, an unconcealed smile of contempt on her face. Kyra looks at Ben and rolls her eyes. She speaks to him as if the married couple were not even in the room. "Remember when you bet me fifty dollars that Jupiter

was the fourth planet from the sun?”

Ben shakes his head.

“Easiest fifty I ever made.”

“So I forgot Mars. People make mistakes.”

“You forgot Mars? The red planet? Matt Damon in *The Martian*, like MacGyver in space?”

“Remember when we saw *The Revenant* at that snazzy cinema in Miami that sold mixed drinks at the concession stand, and you spilled your margarita all over my white sweater? I could have killed you!”

“*The Revenant*,” says Skip. He leans back in his chair and leers at Kyra. “That’s a chick flick if I ever saw one.”

Kyra points at Skip and says he’s joking, right? Ben metaphorically drops his head low, out of the line of fire, doing his best to pretend as if he lives on a planet habited by human beings who love each other. Nola leans toward Kyra as if they’re old chums, and in a stage whisper, says, “Skip is so out of it. Every day he’s losing ground in this vaginocentric universe. And the sad thing is he doesn’t even know it yet.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It’s a joke,” says Nola. “Lighten up.”

“The fish is fantastic,” says Ben.

“So true,” says Kyra. She adds that must mean today is special, right? Of course, if you really think about it, every day is special. “I mean, life . . .” She waves her fork in a two-inch circle in the air, the small gesture indicating the mystery and beauty of animate existence. “Go figure.”

Ben agrees. “It beats death any day.”

“Which can happen just like that.” Kyra snaps her fingers. The other day, in fact, she read in the paper how this man was walking down a street in Manhattan and was hit by a key chain that someone had thrown out a window twenty-two stories above, and it killed him dead.

Skip lights a cigarette, then rubs one eye after getting smoke in it. “Well I for one think we should all thank Kyra for that NPR moment.”

She throws a lemon wedge at his head, but he ducks and it skitters across the hardwood floor behind him. One look at Nola and you know she does not approve of food being thrown in the house, but perhaps more importantly, she truly hates to be ignored by both her husband and her guests. After a time, the three become aware of her icy silence and in turn clam up. At that point she uses the lull in conversation to bond with Kyra. “So, what do you like most about working at the hotel?”

“Ben.”

She looks as if she has swallowed an olive pit. “Better not let Caitlin hear that.”

“She knows. It’s no big deal.” Kyra jabs her fish with a fork.

“So, what do you like most about being married to Skip?”

Nola smiles unpleasantly. “The pleasure of sleeping next to the man I love.”

As if watching the couple say I do at a wedding of the two least deserving and worst possible people in the world, at some point in the dinner Kyra and Ben rise from the chairs, put on their rain jackets and open their umbrellas, and leave. On the drive home, they laugh wildly in nervous derision and feel guilty for it. As they pull into the sweeping rain and wild wind of The Sandpiper’s parking lot, Kyra pulls the hood of her rain jacket over her outrageously thick red hair, pokes her head out at Ben and gives him a look he has seen before but never from her. The sound of her voice is faint, just a delicious ripple in the car. “The question is,” she says, “where are we going to sleep tonight?”

•

THE NEXT DAY it’s almost noon before Ben manages to pull his pants on and pad down the main hall barefooted to make a cup of coffee, having spent the night in The King’s Kourt, which features a round bed with a gauzy canopy. The door to the square-dancers’ room is open. He checks it for a moment. While making coffee he watches the Weather Channel, which shows a petite Asian-American news reporter woman being buffeted by wind and rain right there in Christmas Beach. Nola had been right after all. The storm has swerved and rolled ashore as if Christmas Beach were a meteorological bull’s eye. Kyra peaks around the corner of the hall, wrapped in only a white towel. Ben tells her they’re on TV.

“Cool.” She thanks him for the coffee and curls up on the lobby sofa as if she owns the place. After eight hours of continuous rain there’s now widespread flooding. Wind gusts peaked about 10 a.m. at 75 mph, and they expect the eye of the storm to pass directly over the peninsula in a couple hours. With high tides and the rain and wind blowing inland, the storm surge is predicted to be as much as eight to ten feet of water, the entire peninsula will be without power for at least two days, and cut off from the mainland with the flooding of Route 16.

Deciding to stay put even if it means going without a shower for a couple of days (“If you’d like, I can lick you clean,” offers Ben), they find a box of candles in the store

room and walk around the hotel naked, carrying flashlights. The only car they see drive by is the Sheriff's Ford Bronco, and they duck and crouch on the floor to hide, giggling.

At one point Ben says, "I forgot to tell you. The square-dancer gal left you a present. It's on their bed."

When Kyra returns she whirls into the room in the frilly-chested dancing dress with the stiff red skirt that splays out wide but short, like a cross between a Scarlet O'Hara antebellum Southern hoop dress and a miniskirt. She prances around the lobby, modeling it for Ben, swirling so the skirt lifts high, offering glimpses of her slim white legs and coppery patch of Venus. "I skipped the bloomers."

"Good move."

Besides a steady wind that overturns the patio furniture by the pool, sending the aluminum frames clattering across the shuffleboard court, the storm is decidedly ho-hum. Ben and Kyra watch most of it from the sofa in the office, right behind a huge glass window. "Shouldn't these be taped or something?" asks Kyra.

Ben claims there is no way in hell he is going to get soaking wet for nothing. He suggests she scoot below the window ledge so she won't be horribly disfigured in the unlikely event those babies shatter and rain razor sharp shards all over her naked skin.

"But I won't be able to see," she says.

"Then live dangerously." Ben wriggles and squirms onto the couch until he is kissing her thighs. Sometime after that Kyra declares that she has known from the moment they met that they were meant for each other, that their lips were destined to do some serious smooching, and that Marvin was the little storm that wouldn't.

•

AT MIDAFTERNOON, the rain stops. The skies clear to a filmy white. The wind dies to a gull's breath. Kyra wades across the parking lot in her square-dancer blouse and skirt, splashing water at Ben. Palm Boulevard is completely flooded, making it impossible to drive anywhere, though Kyra is dying to tour the destruction.

"What would you say to a boat ride?" asks Ben.

Kyra pushes the hair out of her face. "Ahoy matey?"

Ben climbs across the roof to the storage sheds, then strips the tarp off the fishing skiff stored in the hotel's garage, lowers it off its trailer, and fires up its outboard motor. When he swings around to pick up Kyra, she wades out carrying a paddle she's found in the maid's room.

"I just had the wickedest idea," she says. "With every-

body evacuated from Christmas Beach and most of the town flooded under this ungodly amount of salt water, it's quite likely that there won't be a single soul at the mall, right?"

Ben narrows his eyes. "No."

Kyra laughs. "What's the harm in a little looting?"

"It's wrong."

Kyra shrugs. "Whatever we take they won't miss. They'll just write it off as a loss. And their insurance will cover it. Then they'll order more stuff from the factories and create more jobs. So, in the long-run, big-picture kind of way, we'll be encouraging industrial growth."

"In junior high I stole a pocket knife."

"Lightweight," says Kyra. "I once snagged a diamond earring worth two grand, easy, from this woman I used to babysit for. I gave it to my mother, who will never wear it because she thinks it's stolen."

"I thought your mom died in that helicopter crash?"

Kyra smiles. "Oops."

•

WHEN IT COMES to looting you'd like to think you wouldn't. You'd like to think that you are without doubt a good person. A good human being. Not a semi-dangerous hooligan. Not a ratfink. Not a sleazebag who requires visible law enforcement officials and the threat of prison and if not that at least ridiculous lawyers' fees and the unpleasantness of having to appear before a district attorney and plead guilty or not. No. You'd like to think you didn't need mandatory sentences and The War on Drugs to keep your nose clean. At least you'd like to think you don't. But then again In your darker and most honest moments (Come on. It's just us. Nobody here but us, chickens) you know some of society's laws seem merely arbitrary. Yes. Take ownership, for example. Consider the maldistribution of wealth, Bernie Sanders's speeches, not to mention Thorstein Veblen's theory of the leisure class.

It's always the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. You don't have anything against Electronic World, but then again, it's a multinational corporation with offices in Taiwan and London what did the Taiwanese ever do for you and it's fully insured so when you get right down to it are they going to miss that 35" Sony television with on-screen programming picture-within-a-picture and detachable speakers with Dolby Surround Sound? Is Electro Land actually going to miss a TV? An iPad more or less won't matter, will it? Won't Aetna or Mutual of Omaha or State Farm cough up the dough for the missing invoice?

Isn't it a crime, the amount you pay for insurance—health, auto, dental, dismemberment (dismemberment!)—that you'll never get back, never collect because frankly you're healthy, goddamnit, and a good driver to boot. So, you're never going to get that money back, now are you? So, in fact this consortium of insurance monopolies owes you, by god. They owe you that TV and as far as that's concerned, the Blu-ray player as well.

•

THE FISHING SKIFF is a fifteen-foot aluminum boat that smells of old bait and the dried husks of shrimp. The palm trees seem shorter, with the water reaching to only a few feet below the fronds. Seagulls swoop in the blue sky above them, though storm clouds encircle the horizon. They troll past the roof of the country club, past the submerged tennis courts marked only by the flagpole the tips of their chain-link fences.

With its nearness to the shoreline of Torpedo Bay, the parking lot of the Las Brisas Shopping Mall is now part of the ocean, the wide stretch of water broken only by the poles of mercury vapor lamps arcing down close to the water's surface like the necks and heads of aquatic dinosaurs. A few cars have been left there, and as Ben and Kyra motor by, only the roofs and antennas are visible above the water's murky green surface. Ben says he feels like Lewis and Clark discovering an ancient junkyard. At the Dillard's entrance the water reaches three feet up the wall and the glass doors have buckled on their hinges, jutting inward in a translucent V, opening a four-foot watery path to shopper's paradise. Inside the aisles seem furtive and apocalyptic in the murky darkness, the lapping sound of the water blanketing the stillness, the bait shop reek of brackish water mingling with the lingering scents of perfume displays and floral thingamajigs to produce an aroma suggestive of an unwashed, vigorously homosexual pirate with a splash of Old Spice on both cheeks.

At first Kyra takes a black leather purse and two pairs of the coolest shoes, but decides she needs a duffel to lug them home, then puts them atop a 40% clearance rack of ladies knit blouses and tells Ben to remind her to pick them up on their way out. The water is knee deep at this part of the store and Ben admits that it feels really weird to see mannequins floating face down in women's wear. Kyra asks if Ben has ever seen Dawn of the Dead, that sequel to Night of the Living Dead that takes place in a shopping mall.

“You know last night when you told that story about

the man being killed by the key chain tossed from a window twenty-two stories above? Was that true?"

"It could be."

While Kyra tries on shoes Ben wanders off to snag a pair of duffels from Sporting Goods. As soon as she's not within visual distance, he experiences a keen and unsettling shiver of fear. As pale sunlight in the store diffuses inward in a misty haze from the buckled entryway, the second floor is dry and even quieter, but darker and more cave-like. Ben stumbles around until he overturns a basketball display, scattering balls quickly absorbed by the pulsing darkness. When he returns to Kyra in Women's Shoes, she asks, "Where are the duffel bags?"

He admits he couldn't find them, then got spooked in the dark.

"But you found something you wanted." She points to his hands.

"Shaving kit," he says sheepishly. "Complete with toenail clippers and tweezers and everything."

She takes a few steps forward, standing on a fitting bench to keep out of the water, staring at her feet. "What do you think?" On her feet are a pair of cream-colored cowboy boots with swirling patterns of stitching on the sides. "They're made from ostriches."

"I don't think that's a good thing." Ben frowns. "Is it just me, or have we inadvertently stumbled a little too close to the edge of total devastation?"

"I know what you mean. I'm starting to get that feeling like when you're watching a slasher movie and you know the psycho is waiting in the closet with a butcher knife and the teen bimbo says, 'Maybe I should bring a jacket?' And you're thinking, 'Forget the jacket! Don't look in the closet! Just go! Hurry!'"

•

BY THE TIME they clamber back into the skiff, shove off the glass walls and cut back across Parking Lot Bay, the feelings of dread, misery, and an overwhelming sense of impending regret evaporates. They slalom through the trunks of palm trees in the swanky shopping center. Passing a Pier One Imports store, they come upon Skip's ski boat anchored near the collapsed doors. Nola wades out first, carrying a pair of candles the size of mortar shells. "The rugs are still good!" she shouts. "They're stored high on shelves and didn't get wet."

Skip is close behind her, carrying a white wicker plantation chair over his head. When he plops it into the boat, Nola

tells him to be careful. What does he want to do, smash it?

“What do you think of these chairs, Ben?” asks Skip. “Me? I hate them with a passion.”

“They’re for my sister,” says Nola. “She loves that kind of crap. It’s kitschy.”

“I don’t get it,” says Ben. “What are you doing this for? You don’t need this junk.”

Skip tosses a pair of throw pillows toward the boat, one of which teeters on the gunwale then flips into the drink. For a moment it floats there, a comfy throw pillow decorated with a pattern of bright yellow sunflowers on its way to flood damage.

“Who said anything about need?” Skip wades back into the flooded gaping doors. “We want to be bad.”

Nola slogs up with a pair of pewter candleholders. “Since when did you get so holier than Mao?”

“That’s not the point.”

“The point is we want to be bad, too. Why do you get to be bad and we don’t? Flaunting around with Little Miss Kleptomaniac while Caitlin’s out of town. What does that make you? Mother Theresa?”

“Can I be Madonna?” asks Kyra. “Now there’s someone who’s good at being bad. Or used to be. Now she’s just, kind of, old.”

As the skiff wobbles, rising and sinking just slightly in the slow swells of the ocean covering the parking lot, Ben tries to form some convincing argument to deplore theft and larceny, one that will equate the actions of looters with the lowest forms of human behavior, but by then the storm is passing, the great eye is closing and they are about to meet the sequel, Hurricane Marvin Part II, as the other side of it comes ashore, the winds starting to pick up. Palm Boulevard now ruffles with waves, whitecaps splashing against the glass walls of Pier One and making it resemble a huge aquarium, the dark figure of Skip adrift inside like a porcelain deep-sea diver now magically animate.

Meta-Documentation ~

Charly Santagado

1. I'm addicted to lists.
2. That's the main reason I wrote this as a list although half the fun is wasted before beginning because I'll presumably care about it too much to destroy it and of course the only thing more satisfying than a list is the destruction of said list.
3. Apparently that is also the case for snowmen.
4. Insert some sexual comment here.
5. I think I put the sexual comment in too soon.
6. What does it mean to be permanent and is it really such a good thing?
7. There is at least one other person in the world that is as preoccupied by lists as I am and that is whoever came up with the "listography" books that all the hipster bookstores sell. The books boast the catch phrase, "Your Life in Lists" and I obviously spent the \$14.99 to fill in prescribed list-making blanks.
8. Did you know that a lot of girls keep a list of guys they've slept with on their phones?
No, I'm not kidding.
9. I'd really like to make a list of all the books I've read.
That's on my long term to-do list.
10. You know what's great is cleaning out your inbox. You should really try it.
11. My favorite list is probably my favorites list. It's rarely altered, which makes it seem special.
12. So maybe permanence isn't what we're after and it's something like longevity instead.
Longevity is going on the list.
13. I bet some list-makers skip the number 13 like hotel elevators do. 13 isn't my favorite number, but it's nice that its constituents add up to four.
14. When destroying a snowman, what's the best tactic?
I imagine kicking out the stomach first and watching the buttons fly. Seeing the head topple in slow motion, carrot nose drilling into the sticky snow. Then I stand on the base like a pedestal, raising my arms in triumph as if to say, "I am your creator, and I am your destroyer" in a godlike tone, feeling the buzz of power overtake me and momentarily understanding the motivation of the Inner Party in 1984.
15. Poor Frosty.

Trimming the Rose Bushes ~

Kathy O'Fallon

Dampness muffles my morning ritual,
a soft click, click—clippers
cutting back the dead
off a wild rose bush,
color of blood mixed with citrus.
Next door chainsaws
and a chipper swallowing
the lifeless. Yesterday
fire threatened Camp Pendleton,
this morning bombs resume
their rehearsing. If I confess
who I am, will I be the murdering
or the murdered? Turkeys chuckle
in the back forty, sprinklers
a light patter, like cat's feet
pouncing on the wide expanse of lawn.
How long till the well stops giving?
I know all things are temporary:
rose petals, flames, threats of war.

Making Charcoal ~

David M. Harris

Pile up the wood—no, first gather the timber
from the forests of experience, then build
the great, broad cone, as wide as two or three men
laid out on the ground. Cut the turf and lay it
on the stacked wood, and here's the art, so the fire
will neither blaze nor die, but char,
half-smothered. Tend it for days
so it is never too hot, never too cold.
It smolders like a grievance.
Oxygen exhausted, it cools. Unbuild the furnace.
If you have learned your craft, stoked enough
and starved enough, haul your load to market,
so others can cook their meals
and reduce your labor to ash.

Mythical Birds of the Sun Paradise ~

Laura Madeline Wiseman

We begin in a chair. One foot wraps behind the other. Elbows lift. Necks lengthen. Balance. The AC bucks, weeps. Speakers spool. The teacher paces, Be steady. Breathe. Sometimes we fly out of it, as if from soft eggs. Other times we sweep arms open. Do we seek what was revoked? Do we bend into a warrior, trading hunger for hunt? Are we birds of prey or preyed upon? Are we stronger than where poison writhes? Then, we shape-shift from feathers to men. Some of us become instruments of death. It's all a story, just mirrors, wings made of letters.

*

With wings made of letters, we start in runners, then bound side angle. Distributed between our limbs, the weight of our ancient tongues, how to lift into that bird again? Shift back, hop forward, come to toes, we find endless flight. Is this an island paradise of quiet or an inner city slum where the wicked sound? If some are caged, could more be left to wind? To hold, float, or pose? To hummingbird, honeyeater, or spiderhunter? Some postures exist to let go. Sometimes we're eagles, other times kites. Without real legs or arms, still our plumage dazzles with color.

*

With a plumage that dazzles with color, we drink the immortal rays of the moon. Such nectar exists. We upend as mallard, lift goose necks, sail thermals like hawks, hoot from the trees. Soon our goslings, ducklings, and fledgling will lift rictuses from nests, scramble to the edge with their fuzzy yellow-brown bodies, drop from branches to find first flight, then climb down the banks. What if from a common kitchen table, as sunbirds, curved beaks, extraordinary feathers, we could find lift through the shoulders, space in the palms, transform hands into stars? What if we could burst into flames?

*

To burst into flames, we hold bad news, death, souls of tigers. In the cult classic film, we die because the gun wasn't loaded with blanks. We sing songs of ourselves. We read books that wait for us. We are made of war, white-striped, white-winged, fairies, herb collectors, sisters. When the timer starts, we shift forward, squeeze limbs, draw core, lift. At the center of every hand is a hollow.

These fingers become again youth stars—drugged, hurt, saved—or drug, hurt, save—the difference between actors and acted upon. We live for the sun, but fill trees with singing.



Book Review

Erin Belieu's *Slant Six*

Copper Canyon Press 2014

96 pages 978-1556594717 retail: \$16

Ryan Borchers

In *Slant Six*, Erin Belieu's fourth and most recent collection of poetry, the world is about fifteen minutes from total destruction. It's a world simmering with anxiety and self-doubt, a world that "is pest, is plague, is / global atrophy, desire / insipid, the single saltine in its crumpled / sleeve."

The heck of it is that the collection was published in 2014.

Were things in the real-life world bad back in 2014? I certainly remember feeling then like they were. In fact, I'm pretty sure I've felt that way as far back as somewhere around 2003 or so.

But in that way books sometimes have, *Slant Six* has aged a few years and now manages to give off a vibe that's eerily suited for the current times. It goes beyond whatever feelings you may have about the executive branch in Washington. (Let me be clear that I offer no on-the-record opinion about that subject one way or the other given professional concerns I have at my day job.) It's just plain hard not to open up Yahoo News, log in to Facebook, talk to a friend or stick your head out a window without getting the feeling that the world is spinning out of control.

That's the feeling Belieu's book conveys. It's not about apocalypse (though you can find it in some of the poems, especially the final entry, "Après Moi") so much as it's about that pre-apocalypse period where you know what's ahead. The opening poem, "Ars Poetica for the Future," even manages to downplay the end of the world ("The Rapture came / and went without incident") in favor of the anxiety that comes from waiting for the future to get here: "In this world, / I've given up sleep for dreaming / and art is still our only flying car, / but I can't recall when anticipation became the substitute for hope."

From there, Belieu shows us Easter candies shaped like bullets, "razor-blade women," Southerners asking God to "Unplug the power... / Illuminate the devils," a woman running among graves in a Mormon cemetery, "keen,

pheromonal terror, when dawn / arrives too bright, too soon” and other examples where something sinister seems to be afoot. Sure, life is also marked by genuine moments of contentment, like when you gain a new appreciation of things like lighthouses and “admire them for their spooky, / correlative truths,” or when you cuddle with a loved one while watching TV. But between those happy moments, these poems are populated with references to bombs, explosions, war, death and the like. A wonderful entry called “Poem of Philosophical and Parental Conundrums Written in an Election Year” hits a little too close to home in its mediation on the concept of “HATE” and its role in modern political discourse, though you might have more fun fixating on the poem’s use of the term “fucokulous,” which is a perhaps-real word (Belieu [said](#) in an interview with The Rumpus that she’s actually heard people say it).

So what can one do in the face of disaster? Is there anything still worthwhile?

Slant Six seems to propose an answer: poetry.

For all its musing about our anxieties, *Slant Six* is just as much a book of poetry on the subject of poetry itself. In the aforementioned “Ars Poetica for the Future,” the last two stanzas read: “I imagine digging a series of small / holes, burying poems in Ziploc / baggies. I imagine them as baby teeth / knocked from the present’s mouth.” The apocalypse approaches, but the poetry will survive, a sentiment also expressed by Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer: “podrá no haber poetas; pero siempre habrá poesía.”

And the poetry, the books suggests, is for everyone. The poems here employ an eclectic mix of voices. Some, like “12-Step,” make use of elevated diction. Others, like “I Grewed No Potatoes To Write About, Sir,” sound more folksy and provincial. The delightfully energetic “Time Machine” is spoken from the point of view of a woman who is cut off in traffic by a younger version of herself: “I make it / my mission to stalk this bitch / in her silver Mercedes, roaring / once more through creamy suburbs, / hunting her down cul-de-sacs / with careful lawns, their safety / the illusion I think I will never buy.” Another one, which has the self-explanatory-enough title “H. Res. 21-1: Proposing the Ban of Push-Up Bras, Etc.,” is in first-person plural, though I suppose it could be someone using the royal “we.”

No matter who is speaking, though, the book reflects a meta-textual fascination with poetry. It’s a book of poetry that constantly reminds you that you’re reading a book of poetry while you’re also reading about the possible

end of the world. *Slant Six* as a title refers to the Chrysler engine, but also hearkens back to Emily Dickinson's aphorism to "Tell all the truth but tell it slant." In addition to "Ars Poetica for the Future," two other poems have the word "Poem" in their titles. Another has the words "Love Letter" and another has "Write." The speakers will occasionally use the subject of poetry to create a context for expressing self-doubt, like the speaker in "When at a Certain Party in NYC" who says "it's pretty clear that you / will never cut it anywhere that constitutes / a where," or the speaker in "The Problem of the Domestic," who says "you'll wake up and come find me / here, in the garage, / where I'm smoking and trying / to write a poem in which you appear, / to peevishly announce we need / to quit smoking while reaching for / the pack." The poems contain several phrases that are obvious inversions of clichés, like "I must change / what I cannot accept," which naturally appears in "12-Step." And there are several lines that end with words like "for," "and," "to," etc. If you've taken at least one poetry-writing workshop, you've probably heard, read or intuited that picking strong words to end your lines is generally a good idea. Given the number of times Belieu ignores that maxim, you can't help but read them as calling attention to themselves as deliberate subversions of poetic expectations.

So, in the face of disaster, do writing and reading poetry remain noble pursuits?

I'd like to think so. It especially helps when the poetry is as good as Belieu's.

Contributors' Notes

Dallas Woodburn, a former Steinbeck Fellow in Creative Writing at San Jose State University, has published work in *Zyzzyyva*, *The Nashville Review*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *Monkeybicycle*, among many others. Her debut short story collection “*Woman, Running Late, in a Dress*” recently won the 2018 Cypress & Pine Short Fiction Award and is forthcoming from Yellow Flag Press. A three-time Pushcart Prize nominee, she won first place in the international Glass Woman Prize and second place in the American Fiction Prize. She is the founder of Write On! Books, an organization that empowers youth through reading and writing endeavors: www.writeonbooks.org.

John Gallaher's most recent collection is *In a Landscape* (BOA 2014). His forthcoming book is titled *Brand New Spacesuit*. He lives in rural Missouri.

Maddie Murphy is a fashion designer, textile artist, journalist, and creative writer based in Kansas City, Missouri. She graduates from the Kansas City Art Institute in May with her BFA in Fiber and Creative Writing. This summer, she interned at the Saint Louis Fashion Fund, specializing in fashion journalism and public relations. Murphy is a staff writer at Informality Blog, an arts and culture publication, and was on the editorial staff for the Kansas City Art Institute's literary magazine, *Sprung Formal*, in 2017. In her writing and visual work, she seeks to illuminate the importance of supportive communities. Maddie Murphy believes the highest purpose of our finite lives is the way we connect with those around us, seeking to leave the world a little better than we found it.

David Starkey served as Santa Barbara's 2009-2011 Poet Laureate, and he is Director of the Creative Writing Program at Santa Barbara City College and the Publisher and Co-editor of Gunpowder Press. David has published seven full-length collections of poetry, most recently *It Must Be Like the World* (Pecan Grove, 2011), *Circus Maximus* (Biblioasis, 2013) and *Like a Soprano* (Serving House, 2014), an episode-by-episode re-visioning of *The Sopranos* TV series. His textbook, *Creative Writing: Four Genres in Brief* (Bedford/St. Martin's, 2017), is in its third edition.

Luke Rolfes teaches creative writing and literature at

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Al Simmons was born in Chicago on December 21, 1948. He attended Northeastern Illinois University, in Chicago, and won two Illinois Arts Council Awards as editor of *Stone Wind Magazine*, Northeastern Illinois University Press. Poet-In-Residence, City of Chicago Council on Fine Arts, 1979-80. Founder of the Blue Store Readings, Home of the Spoken Word Movement, and creator of the Main Event, the World Heavyweight Poetry Championship Fights, and The World Poetry Association, (WPA). He was Commissioner of the WPA and the World Poetry Bout Association, (WPBA), Chicago, Taos, New Mexico, 1979 - 2002. He has two books, *Care Free*, poems, Smithereens Press, Bolinas, California, 1982, and *King Blue*, a memoir, Stone Wind Press, Chicago, Illinois, 1992. He has been published in *The Chicago Reader*, *Strong Coffee*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *Queen City Review*, *Blue Collar Review*, *WORK*, *Out of Our*, *Horus-Hi Road Glyphics*, *Green Panda Anthologies* *The Next*, *Forage*, *Your Impossible Voice*, *Creating Chaos*, *Echo Literary Review* and *Peacock Review*. He lives in Alameda, California.

Brad Johnson's full-length poetry collection *The Happiness Theory* (Main Street, 2013) is available at <http://mainstreetrag.com/bookstore/product-tag/brad-johnson/>. Work of his has also been accepted by *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *J Journal*, *New Madrid*, *Meridian*, *Poet Lore*, *Salamander*, *Southern Indiana Review*, *Tampa Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, and others.

Michael Chin was born and raised in Utica, New York and his hybrid chapbook, *The Leo Burke Finish*, is available now from Gimmick Press. He won *Bayou Magazine's* Jim Knudsen Editor's Prize for fiction and has work published or forthcoming in journals including *The Normal School*, *Passages North*, and *Hobart*. He works as a contributing editor for *Moss*. Find him online at miketchin.com or follow him on Twitter @miketchin.

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Thomas J. Erickson's poems have appeared in numerous publications. His award-winning chapbook, *The Lawyer Who Died in the Courthouse Bathroom* was published by Parallel Press of the University of Wisconsin Libraries in 2013. His full-length poetry book, *The Biology of Consciousness*, was published this year by Pebblebrook Press. He was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2016. He is an attorney in Milwaukee.

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Wendy Mitman Clarke's poetry has been published in *Rattle*, *The Delmarva Review*, and in spring 2018, *Blackbird*. She has won the Pat Nielsen Poetry Prize twice (2015 and 2017) and her poem "The Kiss" was a Pushcart Prize nominee. Her nonfiction has been published in *River Teeth*, *Smithsonian*, *Preservation*, and *National Parks*. Her novel *Still Water Bending* was released in October 2017 by Head to Wind Publishing. You can read and view her work at www.wendymitmanclarke.com.

William J. Cobb is a novelist, short story writer, and essayist whose work has been published in *The New Yorker*, *The Antioch Review*, and many others. His three novels are *The Bird Saviors* (Unbridled Books 2012), *Goodnight Texas* (Unbridled Books 2006), and *The Fire Eaters* (W.W. Norton 1994), and his story collections are *The Lousy Adult* (Johns

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Charly Santagado graduated from Rutgers University in May 2017 with a major in philosophy and minors in creative writing, dance, and music. She is currently a dance teacher and choreographer, a professional dancer, and a writer who is working on a book of poetry.

Kathy O'Fallon's poems and short stories have been published in numerous literary journals, magazines, and anthologies. She is a psychologist in Fallbrook, CA, avocado capital of the world.

Until 2003, **David M. Harris** had never lived more than fifty miles from New York City. Since then he has moved to Tennessee, acquired a daughter and a classic MG, and gotten serious about poetry. All these projects seem to be working out pretty well. His work has appeared in *Pirene's Fountain* (and in *First Water*, the *Best of Pirene's Fountain* anthology), *Gargoyle*, *The Labletter*, *The Pedestal*, and other places. His first collection of poetry, *The Review Mirror*, was published by Unsolicited Press in 2013.

Laura Madeline Wiseman is the editor of two anthologies, *Bared* and *Women Write Resistance*, selected for the Nebraska 150 Sesquicentennial Book List. She is the recipient of the 2017 Honor Book Nebraska Book Award, a Wurlitzer Foundation Fellowship, and an Academy of American Poets Award. Her book *Drink* won the 2016 Independent Publisher Bronze Book Award for poetry. Her latest book is *Through a Certain Forest* (BlazeVOX [books] 2017). Her book *Velocipede* (Stephen F. Austin State University Press), is a 2016 Foreword INDIES Book of the Year Award Finalist for Sports.

