

S P I R E S

*intercollegiate arts & literary
magazine*

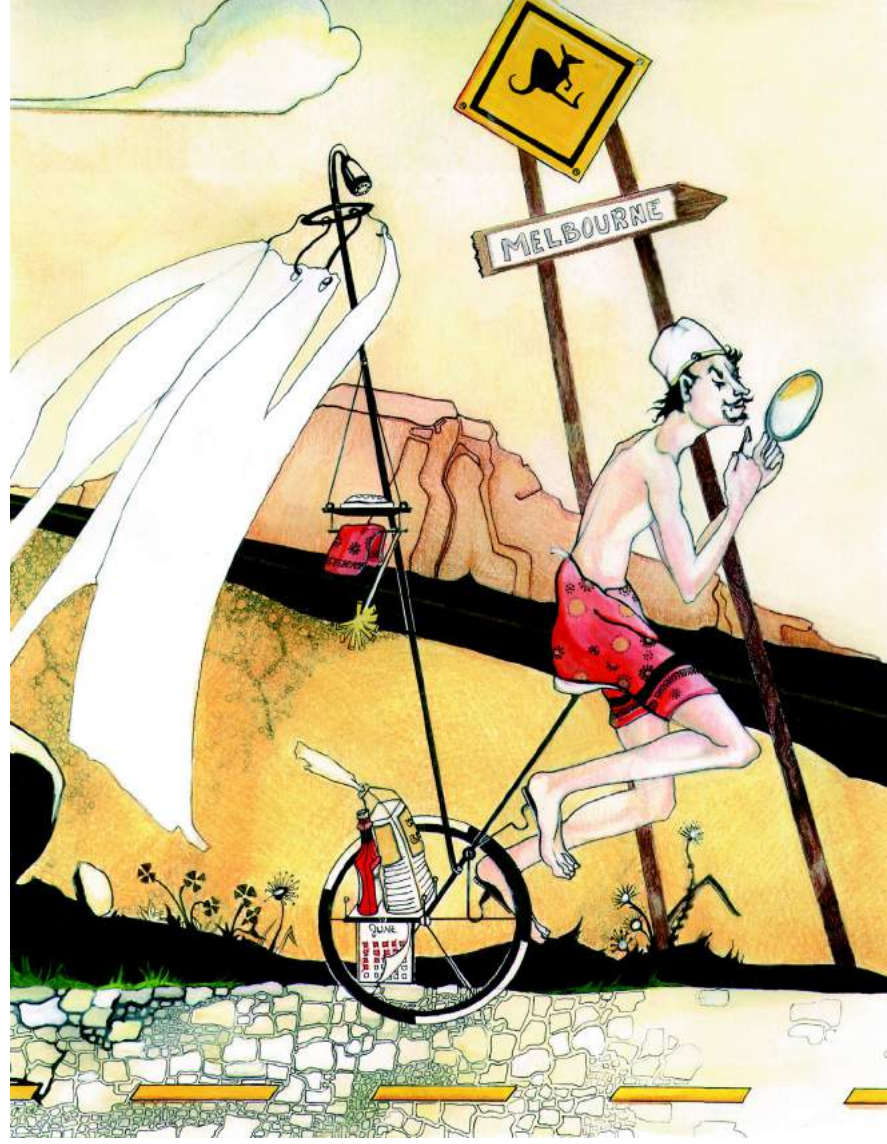
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SPIRES – intercollegiate arts & literary magazine – fall 2001 – Volume VII, Issue II

SPIRES

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INTRODUCTION

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the fourteenth issue of Spires. As I write this, I think back to my days as a naïve freshman, when I first discovered Spires. When I came to college in the fall of 1998, my desire to participate in a literary publication was overpowered by the belief that as a non-English major, there would be no place for me. My fears were eliminated when I met my Residential Advisor, the founder of Spires, (and engineer!), Bryan Townsend. When I attended my first meeting, I realized that the members of Spires were as diverse as the campus itself, not only in their backgrounds, but in their academic ambitions as well. Yet we all had one common goal – to encourage self-expression.

At no other time in recent history has the idea of self-expression been more relevant. Horrible attacks on our nation, and our country's efforts to avenge these acts, have caused our eyes to focus on the citizens of other nations. We see images of people who are prohibited from expressing their opinions and exploring the ideas of others. Oftentimes, people are executed or put behind bars simply for making a statement or for trying to educate themselves. With regards to this, many say that we take our freedom for granted, often not appreciating the luxury we have. Yet the fact that we take our freedom for granted is what makes it so great. The moment we begin to question our actions is the moment we begin to lose our freedom.

Many of my Spires cohorts can confirm that I've spent a great deal of this semester complaining about every little problem that surfaces. We've spent hours deliberating things as trivial as what font size to use on the spine, or how many fliers to print, or even how many pizzas to order for our meetings! I now realize what a privilege it is to be able to complain about these things. The fact we can create, distribute, and read this magazine is a luxury in itself. In some countries, what you are doing right now would be a crime.

I urge you to continue to practice your freedom of self-expression. You need not be an artist or writer. Over the past few years I've seen students use everything from a stage, to a protest, to a laboratory, to even a computer program as a medium for expression. I would like to thank the students who submitted to Spires for choosing this publication as a channel through which to express themselves. Finally, I would like to thank you, the readers, for making this all possible.

Sincerely,



Alison L. Passer
President

DAILY COMMUTE

Midnight.

X—# of feet below Times Square.

There's a lull where

The screeching wheels of the N-R should be.

A man fills the space with the sounds of his violin —

 Mozart for money

 Beethoven for bucks —

And I have pizza flour

 On my dress

 And a cigarette burn

 On my hand

 Below my pinky.

I'm so deep in the City

 It could be 3,

 Or 5,

 Or 6 p.m.

But it's not.

It's now 12:05 a.m.,

And there's a lull where

 The screeching wheels of the N-R should be.

Emily Pitlick

Washington University



Loren Lee
Washington University

DO YOU TANGO?

With frozen smiles and jealous eyes
Praying for each others' scandalous demise
They curtsy and bow with apparent grace
While dancing the dance of the greedy rat race

They circle each other like a hunter to prey
Each one attempting to win the day
By stealing the attention like a possession
And thriving on others losses like a distorted obsession

Although it seems they waltz with candid steps
Their insecure doubts fill bottomless depths
For their make-up masks their unfulfilled existence
When they embraced conformity with no resistance

And the coercive music forces their feet
While their dreams are trampled by a passionless beat
They crave a life different from the norm
But feel safe in the abyss they created when they conformed

Now their tired feet are weary from deceiving
And they forgot the reason they began misleading
So slowly they let go of their partners hold
Hoping to reclaim their souls, which they've sold

But as they step away from their "proper" position
A thousand piercing eyes question their volition
And here they are given their very last chance
Do they find destiny or do they just dance?

Many find solace in the minuet
Bowing and turning in a measured set
Except for the ones who's souls are let go
Who spin and who slide in a passionate tango.

With strident leaps and razor sharp dreams
They rid themselves of puppet strings
For now its time to find their face
And dance their dance at a dizzying pace.

There's always a dance for us to perform
But will you tango or march in uniform ?

Beth Shapiro
Yeshiva University

SAND

The grains of time
Slip through your fingers,
No matter how tightly
You cling to them.
They slide slowly, but irrevocably
Down an abyss,
Where they become irretrievable;
The past.
No single grain can be taken up
For minute examination.
Instead, you scoop them up in handfuls
And let them trickle back down;
The waves
Of so many memories,
Lost, swept away,
By an ever-changing tide.
Life is the hourglass,
Where time and memory,
Like so many grains of sand,
Slip away.

Carolyn Walker
DePauw University



Jodie Kovach
Washington University

THE CORE OF THE MANGO

I can remember the thick-skinned mangoes, the Andhra mangoes on Madras nights, peeled at the dinner table after dinner as the fan circles overhead, circulating the fresh but humid breeze that blows in from the open door to the balcony. The peels come off in circles, separating effortlessly from the pulpy fruit they clothe. Circles like the circles of apple peels that my mom peeled when I was younger, and I watch in awe now as I did then at adept fingers grasping a small knife, effortlessly uncovering the fruit. Spirals of peel fall off, springy, hitting the table silently.

The knife slices through it, through the meat of the fruit, while juice runs down the sides of the hands that hold the knife and down the sides of the mango whose meat the knife slices. Off comes the first piece, one whole side, an elliptical bowl of a piece. The next side follows, slumping onto the plate the way the first did. Adeptly, the hand that holds the knife slices into the remaining mango whose core is now surrounded on only two sides with the remaining fruit. Another slice separates, this time a yellow crescent, and falls atop the other pieces. Yet another, almost identical, falls away from the core, sliding onto the plate the way its twin did.

The hands pick up the larger pieces, the mango pieces that fill invisible elliptical bowls, and cut each of the two lengthwise down the center, through both locuses, perfectly. All four pieces slip onto the plate in turn, one-two, then three-four. The hands are drenched now with juice that has been running down their sides while they adeptly cut through the mango pieces. The knife is laid gently down on the plate with the thick spirals of peels that have fallen from the mango.

I reach over to grab for a piece, and from the plate I take the core. The lonely core, separated from the rest of the fruit and alone without a twin,

identical to nothing else in the plate. I bite into the fruit that remains that surrounds the core. Stringy fibers slide through my teeth, through the front once and again, as each bite of the fruit surrounding the core slides through my mouth, over my tongue, under my palate, and down. I run my tongue over tops of my top teeth, sucking the fibers from between them one by one before I bite again into the side of the core of the mango. Most of the meat of the fruit is gone after I systematically move around the sides of the elliptical core. I suck on the remaining fibers, pulling whatever juice is left away from the core and into my mouth, over my tongue, under my palate, and down.

Lonelier now, the core is a seed surrounded by nearly tasteless fibers. Most of the juice has fallen away, and the center of the mango stands alone for the first time. White now, not yellowed by the mango on all of its sides, the core clothed only by a few threads of fiber slides onto the plate to join the knife and the spirals of peels that have fallen from the mango.

Other hands have reached into the plate and grabbed for other pieces, so in the plate that held the pieces there is now only the juice left behind, still sliding down the sides of the slightly curved plate as it pools near the center. The white plate is yellowed by the juice and by the memory that the meat of the fruit was once there and is not now. Each pair of pieces pared away from the core has been eaten by others, by children like me who take rare pleasure in the taste and the feel of the fruit as they bite into the pieces.

Still lingering in my mouth and on my lips is the flavor of the fruit, the taste that should have slipped away but has not yet. I run my tongue along my lips, pulling away from them the remaining juice from the mango that lingers. I run my tongue along my teeth, sucking at the memory of the fibers that were there before but are not

anymore, making sure again that the strings of fibers that slid through my teeth are not stuck there. Assured that they are not, my tongue falls back and away from the teeth. The taste still lingers, cannot be pulled away because it is a part of my mouth now. Even later, months and years later, the memory of the taste still stains my mouth, and my tongue still runs over the tops of my teeth to pull out fibers that were there before but are not anymore.

Seema Mukhi
Washington University

Jeffery Asbbaugh
Washington University



NAÏVE

Blinded by the sight yet still staring
Deafened by the screams but can't stop listening
The hate and tension pierces the continually
beating heart
ALIVE but dead inside
The sight has killed the me I thought I knew

*Stephen Katz,
Yeshiva University*

*Bob Flynn
Washington University*



TORMENT

Involuntarily my hands trace it
following it along the underside of my breast

Rose, puckered,
swollen and ugly.

I rub the tight, bruised skin
splaying my fingers over the area.

The torn tissue painfully taught
I recoil at my own advances.

Glancing down at the misshapen form
I once called my chest

The essence of womanhood
held in place with silver clamps and stitches

What sight and touch ounce found beautiful
has turned repulsive and painful.

“It seems as if we were able to abstract it all”
But how much of me have you taken as well?

Jessica Moore
Yeshiva University



*Antonio Hsieh
Washington University*

SIX MONTHS SINCE WE LAST SPOKE

I tear open sugar,
light matches,
suck on an empty beer bottle.
I had forgotten this about you, you say.
You had forgotten my habits of destruction:
tearing paper,
melting straws and candles,
pouring salt into ashtrays,
biting your bottom lip,
scraping the skin from your back with my fingernails,
and as I reach for the last packet of sugar,
your hand catches my wrist;
your eyes,
which I had avoided,
are hopeful, almost laughing.
Someone might want to sweeten his coffee, you say.
I look away,
because in your eyes I see pain unfinished.
I say he'll have to drink it bitter.

*Nicole Ann Kubn
DePauw University*

HIKING REAVES GULCH

Into the gulch I slide
Hanging on to pines, and vines,
and anything else that will slow my descent.
The granite walls rise on either side,
rising from the entrenched batholith below.

The creek rumbles and sometimes gurgles over rotting logs,
through pools of moss and algae
—waterbugs skimming across the surface like skaters—
twisting and turning past a cottonwood enclosure,
past a fallen granite boulder,
past a clump of birch trees swaying in the sun.

The granite gives way to limestone, the overlying rock warped and bent,
fractured, faulted, folded.
The gulch's gurgle gives way to a trickle,
then to a drop, then disappears below.
Swallowed by the ground, devoured by the limestone.

I follow the empty creek bed
stepping and stumbling over cobbles,
faltering where the poison ivy
covers the floor like an unwelcome mat.
And at the base of the ivy jungle, the stream emerges,
fresh, revitalized, renewed,
emerges from the rock as if from a spigot.
Again and again, it plays this cat and mouse act—three times in all.
disappearing, then reappearing,
Mother Nature's own magic act.

The poison ivy thickens, rises sometimes two,
even three feet off the ground,
protecting a long lost forest floor,
threatening to spread its oils, its itch, its s curse.
From one end of the narrow gulch to the other,
the ivy has taken root. Turn back?
A rocky slope, intermixing with cliff-like drops, skirts the edge.
Thirty feet below, the pit of poison waits to swallow
one false step, one turned ankle, one loose rock.

The igneous intrusion sinks back into the Earth.
The sandstone and limestone cover surrounds and encases
the valley. Pines, always ponderosa, reach, stretch, and snap for the sky.
And then the gulch gives way to Centennial,
squirting me out into the known trail.
—no Reaves Gulch stream, though, that's gone below once more,
submerged beneath the surface.
failing to meet above ground, its bigger brother,
Beaver Creek.

Now atop an unnamed ridge
—picking off ticks crawling across my camo-pants,
swatting the flies buzzing by my sweat-slicked face—
I rest before returning to my Silver Volvo Supreme
Complete with malfunctioning automatic locks
and a severed vacuum hose that goes WHOOSH
with every press of the accelerator pedal.

I can see the road,
the Campers and SUV's barreling down the highway,
squashing prairie dogs, taking snapshots of the bison,
all oblivious to me,
and to the intricacies of the prairie
and the granite
and the karst
and of Reaves Gulch.

C. M. Amidon
DePauw University

THE LITTLE ONES

Dots,
in a field
Black
moving against
green and white.
this is distance
Closer, you see they're
still small
Picking cotton blossoms
moving,
one row at a time
complacent
 working
 singing
all my trials lord
soon be over

Coal Dust

They are
like steel rain falling
their skin soaked in earth
making it a dark rust
they are able beings
with strong durable bodies
strong durable souls
calm in their action
because they are pilgrims here below
Down by the riverside.

Once vivid

At some point they all became
the surrounding grass
part of the scenery
everywhere around everything
they are waiting
for a perfect peace
they are waiting
to steal away.

Ruth White
Washington University

THE IDEA

the idea approached slowly
as if dreading itself
it paced near the backdoor
for hours
not ready for the lights and linoleum
of the kitchen

She looked out the backdoor in no John Fogarty type of mood. There was no “why” to the fact that she was standing there. The kitchen smelled of eaten potroast, a sink full of warm soapy water, and the kind of brumal air circulation that leaves something to be desired. She stood as a bereft mother might, as if hoping that her runaway teenager would surface, silhouette first, from the edge of the neighbor’s lawn. She wasn’t moving, with the exception of her left hand which fingered the embroidery of her sweater. It was unravelling. She was helping it.

The fly that sped past her didn’t know what her deal was. It went straight for the dessert dishes next to the sink. It wasn’t fucking around. It did not care.

She looked at the neighbors’ tree house, and had the fly stopped to absorb the situation, it would have pinned her expression as nostalgic and assumed that she, too, had had a tree house as a child. It would have been wrong.

The idea didn’t want to come inside.

It was content to hide behind the boards of the treehouse and bury itself in the embroidery of her sweater.

It didn’t mind waiting.

It was in no rush.

She sat at the kitchen table.

The idea shared dessert with the fly and they left together, buzzing nonchalantly through the house.

She looked at the far end of the tablecloth, the subtle film of dust on the windowsill, the TV that wasn’t on. She looked at her hands. She looked at the place where the wall met the ceiling.

She did the dishes.

Dora Villarosa
Washington University



*Linnea Maas
Washington University*

WONDER

Do you ever wonder,
Do you ever ask,
Where they hid it all?
Where they put the thrills,
The watermelon juice trickling down
And dripping off your chin,
The rush of slicing through
The still blue water
On the first day of summer?
Where did they hide the whispered secrets,
The giggles of girlhood,
The fascination of a butterfly
Fluttering across the yard?
What about running though the sprinkler,
Skinny blades of grass tickling at your feet,
And the exhilaration felt
When gliding on a swing
Cutting though the wind like a knife?
One day it all faded away,
And the sunlight became muted,
And the great shade was drawn,
And it was goodbye to counting
The glistening stars in the sky.

*Kathryn Meyers
College of the Holy Cross*

GERITOL CRAVINGS

Youthfully careening towards
the geriatric:

Declining into shuffleboard and
Scrabble while my peers play
subversive sex games.

Careening in my muumuu,
expelling my platform shoes, my
miniskirt.

I want to drink prune juice.

Move to Florida.

Wear nice dentures,
And kick off terry slippers.

*Kathleen Heil
Arizona State University*

LIVE

long legs perused
along the grassy passage
a tickle upon this ankle and a tickle upon that
a naked body playful
suckled, nourishes, abused, nourishes, expired, nourishes
remembered there
in tall grasses
that fruit lies bitten

*Jonas Lauren Norr
Yeshiva University*



*Eric Whitney
Washington University*

THE CLOWN

Smoke filled the atmosphere of the tiny cave and the audience happily slurped down their minimum second beer or scotch. The brightly decorated little man on the stage jumped around holding onto the microphone for dear life.

“No, I’m serious, he ate the whole thing.”

The audience erupted into laughter once again.

“Thank you, folks, you’ve been a great audience.” The little man trotted off the stage and was replaced by another, taller, goateed man in a plaid jacket and pink shirt.

“Bruce Kinerer, ladies and gentlemen. He was great. A little jumpy, but great. I felt like I was watching a gerbil on speed.” Polite laughter from the audience.

“And now folks, a new guy on the N.Y. circuit. Just blown in from Chicago, let’s hear it for Jason Rosengartenbergstein.”

A decent applause as the ill-suited em-cee left and a skinny blue-jeaned kid with long curly hair slowly made his way onto the stage.

“Uh, hey,” he offered meekly. “I mean shit those others guys were funny. How the hell am I supposed to follow those guys? I mean, I’m funny, but... Fuck!”

Light laughter.

“Yeah, so I’m from Chicago.”

Applause.

“You guys act like that’s some great accomplishment. Mom, Dad, I wanted you guys to know, I’m from Chicago. Oh, son, we’re so proud of you.”

Flurries of laughter. The audience was starting to warm up to him. Jason liked to get feel for his audience by the second or third joke, and he thought he was in a pretty good groove now.

“I dunno, people tell me I have a Jewish name. Which is cool ‘cause I am Jewish. But when people

find out I’m Jewish they start making all these assumptions about me. A friend of mine asked me to do his taxes. I’ve never paid taxes let alone done someone else’s.”

The first guffaws.

“But, y’know, I started listening to my friends who just assumed I was good at math. So I took a whack at it. I just visited him in the minimum security correctional facility.”

Laughter.

“They audited him faster than he could say, ‘Tevey’.

Laughter and applause.

“No, but really, that’s what we Jews are known for, our brains. Albert Einstein, Theodore Herzl, Howard Stern.”

Laughter, but a little bit lighter.

“Yeah, did you hear this one? They say that Jewish guys are good lovers.” Jason makes a ‘what’s up with that?’ face and the crowd chuckles softly.

“I have know idea where that one came from. Certainly not my ex-girlfriend.”

More laughter.

Jason delivers the punchline, something about jewish penises being inversely related to brain size and the audience goes wild. With a little bow Jason exits stage left and is done for the night. The crowd sinks back into an oblivion of drunken amusement. Cigarette smoke filters the track lights that illuminate the comedy club on the upper West Side.

Jason caught the 6 train and took it forty-second street where he transferred to the N/R and took that to eighth street. The cool spring air calmed his nerves as he lit his cigarette. The walk to his alphabet city apartment usually took about twenty-five minutes, and he hated every second of it. He hated the garbage that lined the streets, he hated the fear that crept into his heart whenever he turned a dark corner, he hated the inescapable

stench of urine that saturated his neighborhood and he hated his apartment.

Jason turned on the light just in time to see the roaches and mice scurrying out of his way. He shuddered. He checked the answering machine, but, as usual, there were no messages. He took a day old cheeseburger and fries out of the fridge, and opened a forty ounce bottle of Miller Highlife.

“No, but New Yorkers are really friendly. I’ve already learned how to say, ‘fuck you,’ in twenty languages.”

Scattered laughs. He knew he was little off tonight. Not his material, he knew that was good, but he just couldn’t get into a good groove with the crowd.

“You know what I love about New York? Everybody delivers. Grocery stores, furniture stores, drug dealers, hookers. It’s great, I haven’t left my apartment in two weeks and I’ve gotten laid more times than all of college.”

“Jason Rosen, this is your mother. Honey, we just want to how you’re doing in New York. It wouldn’t kill you to call us.”

“That’s what you think, mom,” Jason thought.

“So, just call us, okay?” The message finished and Jason hit erase on the machine.

“She must’ve gotten the number from Amy,” he thought. He let his sister have it when he talked her. Jason hadn’t spoken to his parents in three months, since he left Chicago. And even when he was there, he tried to avoid them as much as possible. They didn’t understand what he trying to do. In fact, they didn’t really understand him

Whenever he happened to run into his parents they would pretend to be interested in what he was doing.

“So, what’s new in the joke business?” they’d ask him.

He hated that question, but they always asked

him. Amy didn’t understand him anymore than their parents, but she genuinely cared about him, and appreciated what he was doing.

“Y’know, for someone who wants to make people laugh for a living, you could lighten up a little,” Amy said to him.

“I don’t want to make people laugh. I want make insightful social commentary. It just happens that this is the only way I can get paid to do that.” Jason knew that wasn’t true. He loved the satisfaction of hear bursts of laughter in response to something he said. He could always make Amy laugh. She was his easiest audience.

Jason picked the hardened pepperoni off the cold pizza and turned on the television. He wanted to get one of those black boxes so he could watch porn. When It was scrambled everything looked like breast. But maintaining a drug habit was more expensive in New York than in Chicago, so the black box would have to wait until he could get some steady gigs. He lit a fresh cigarette and jotted down some notes.

“Y’know what I hate? These gourmet food fads. Y’know soy protein, goat cheese, bread.” Laughter.

“I don’t like eating anything that I can’t get at drug store.”

“Hey this is Victoria, leave a message after the beep.”

“Hey, Vicki, it’s Jason. I know it’s been a while, but I just needed someone to talk to, that I’m not related to. I know we haven’t talked in a while. You’re probably still mad at me for leaving Chicago. If it makes you feel any better I’m miserable here. Anyways, just give me a call. . . I. . .I’m sorry.”

Rami Cohen
Yeshiva University

FIRST SUNSET

My sister never saw a sunset
in three years living
alone on the Pacific coast.
Before night could come
her blood – *our blood* –
churned and boiled, relieved
by strains of venom.
She found night her own way.

Now we're back.
She doesn't know
but I see her hand wavering
while golden grains of bones,
and glass, beaten and ground down, sift
through her frail fingers.

She wants to tell me about herself.
Tell me where she was
when the sun never set.
We're not close enough
to the water
for the sand castle to keep shape.
I read her mind and say,
"You *are* an artist, you know."
She looks up from her sand dungeon.
A doubtful smile. "Yeah,
just look at my latest masterpiece."

As long as shame covers her scarred arms
in cotton fabric on warm nights,
she won't look ahead.
"Don't worry about what they see," I say,
because everything she's done is wrong.
In my eyes, too.

I can barely see the Pacific;
the sun's folded in its waves.

Katy Welter
DePauw University



Jodie Kovach
Washington University

IN THE MOMENT

Twenty hours on the train and she closed her eyes. The trees dancing past her window had lost their rhythm. Her bare feet were wedged between the wall and the seat in front of her and for a second she wondered if the suit sitting there would care. But then she slept. Her body shook with the movement of the train along the rails. He leaned into her and could almost feel her breath touch his coarse and unshaven face. He watched her like this for a long time not knowing or caring if she knew. She did. Sometimes she would scratch her cheek and move her lips like she wanted to say something. He made sure to listen for the moment she might disclose herself. "I never will," she had told him with a straight and blank stare. He took off his hat and settled it on his stiff legs while he put his face in his hands.

By the time she woke up her had turned the other way. So she stared at the back of his head. It had a gentle curve and his hair was dark like her eyes. She touched his neck not because it was him but just because she liked what it felt like. The luz bone at the top of the spine just beneath the neck – the last part of the body to disintegrate. "G-d will raise us from the dead with the luz." She hated it when he preached religion. He had felt slighted by her uninterested response, "hmm." He opened his eyes as he felt her cold finger drag along his skin. "Do you believe that?" She asked. His lips curled in a sarcastic reply, "Do you?" She kept her finger on his neck but he knew he had said the wrong thing. "Yes, then, I do." "The train's going to make a stop soon. I'm going to get off and walk around." Did she always speak in declarative sentences? "It's raining though." His voice was low and kind.

When the head car pulled into the station and the horn hailed its arrival and the breaks screamed along the tracks, she stood up and adjusted her

skirt. When she walked passed him the wrinkled fabric brushed his hand. He remembered their first night in the room. She had lain there on her back, staring at the ceiling fan, as he braided her knotted and sweaty hair. It was right after he had told her. He has saved it for that moment. He thought that she had chosen him for this. He thought he would make her happy – he thought he could make her happy.

So as she watched the dusty blades spin around over and over again, He told her that he would. He hadn't expected her reaction. She just smiled. She smiled one of her half smiles that say she's uncomfortable or amused or she's lying. He had thought it prudent at the time and she as glad of it. She had sat on the bed the next morning still unsure of her answer. Uncertain, also, why was she there at all. He was in the shower steaming up the bathroom while she revisited the moment over and over again in her mind. If he had known he would have felt compassion, *he* would have felt something. But by the time he walked through the door she was packed and ready to go to the station.

He thought now of that night with its heavy mid-August heat as her rough linen skirt lingered for a moment on his skin. Feminine hands. She had noticed that once. It disgusted her slightly when she looked at them for too long. So she tried to avert her eyes.

He saw her a few minutes later through the window. She was walking along just under the edge of the roof where the drops of rain gather and fall heavily toward the ground. He watched her as she passed a young man sitting on a bench with his knees drawn against his chest and a cigarette protruding obnoxiously from between his teeth. She stopped a few stops later when the static filled speakers announced the train was departing on track five. As she walked back she turned her face to look at a notice that was posted on the wall. He could see her breath in the air.

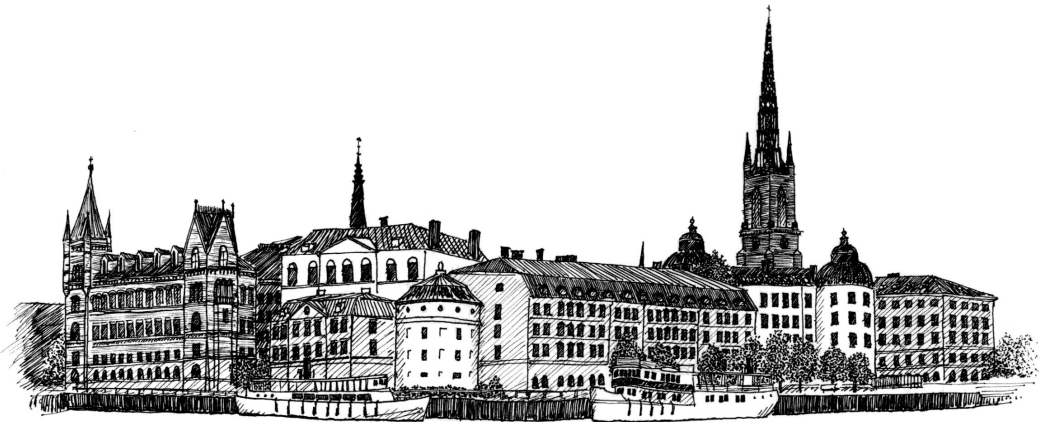
She had been missing him for a long time. She watched him when he sat in stillness with a look of concentration that she found so endearing as he studied the quotes in the paper. Sometimes he would chew on the back of his pencil or on the skin on the backs of his knuckles. And sometimes he would look up at her over the black and white print just long enough for her to notice. When he looked away she wanted more than ever to tell him, to throw herself at his feet and cry, or to scream to break the silence, or just to walk by and touch his face.

She passed the peeling, crackled, weather-worn notice on the concrete wall and read carelessly the words. The heels of her shoes sounded along the chipped tile floor as she walked towards their car. Others were hurrying around her, quickly boarding the train or dancing down the steps to a rhythm she swore to herself she hadn't heard before. When she reached the end of the

platform a man in an over-starched polyester conductor's uniform smiled at her from under his hat. She glanced at his nametag – Levine. "Are you getting on miss?" She stared blankly at the weathered skin beneath his watery blue eyes and played with the metal band on her finger. "You've got to decide lady, 'cause whether you're on it or not its pulling out of the station.' He chuckled at his own cleverness.

The husband sat with his hand on the empty cushion next to him. He leaned over looking out the window as the train slowly crawled out of the station and into the night. He could almost smell her perfume as she took her seat by his side. She didn't.

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LITTLE BEASTS

I

The hunter aims, the
Male turkey courts his female.
A shotgun wedding.

II

Landing on tied straw,
"If he only had a brain,"
Thought the fearless crow.

III

Little Mosquito
Stagers drunk through humid air.
Did you drink too much?

Julian V. DeMascole
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—for Jared

“Shift three programmers enter!” the voice commanded over the crackling loud speaker. The doors in front of John slid apart. The homogenous mass of programmers began shuffling and jostling through the barren entryway. “Move it everyone!” the loud speaker snapped, “You have three minutes to seat yourself! No talking!” John led the systematic charge into the partitioned computer stations. One by one, blue uniformed individuals broke off from the stampede to claim their stall.

“One minute remaining! You should be at your stall and booting your system. The language of the day is C++, version 6.66.” John seated himself, the last one to do so; his stall was in the absolute center of the large warehouse turned office. Although John could see no other programmers, he had a perfect view of the extensive catwalk system that crisscrossed the entire warehouse. The Overseer paced his beat overhead, somber, menacing, watchful.

“Begin programming!” The Overseer shouted into his megaphone. Conditioned, John’s fingers pounced on the keyboard rattling off code as if programming the voice of Space Ranger Barbie mattered to life on Earth. Reeling down the screen, John’s eyes followed the flickering code. Every so often he paused, blinked repeatedly, then returned his fingers to the intricate keyboard dance.

“Programmer P5317, put that cup of coffee down!” The Overseer spat acidly from the catwalk.

John’s ears twitched hearing a hushed damn filter through a nearby stall. His fingers never wavered from the code.

“Programmer P0038 button that collar!” Space Ranger’s Barbie’s voice transformed

into reality as the pages of code scrolled down the screen. ‘I’m going to the moon!’ John typed, losing himself to the imaginary, flirtatious voice.

“Programmer P2913 why is that in your shirt pocket?” John looked down. A five petal pink flower sat limply in his pocket. John’s heart quickened; The Overseer had questioned him. Why had he forgotten about the flower? Slowly raising his eyes to meet The Overseer’s scowl, John swallowed hard as The Overseer tapped his infamous baton on the catwalk railing. The clink... clink... clink... dislodged a bead of sweat from John’s temple, sliding down his cheek as if a glacier. He averted his gaze, stung.

“Programmer P2913, answer me!”

John jumped in his chair, his fingers scattering on the keyboard causing a disorganized mess of his previously pristine code. “My... My...”

“Spit it out, P2913!”

“My w-wife gave it to me,” John said staring at his computer screen.

“NO! Why is it in your pocket? That is a breach of the company dress code!”

“Ah... Ah...” Visions of Space Ranger Barbie blasting into orbit clouded John’s thoughts.

“Programmer P2193! Remove yourself from the stall! I will see you in my office. Immediately!”

Swallowing hard, John stood, glanced up at The Overseer pacing the catwalk, and hastily lowered his eyes. He tapped the screensaver button on his keyboard, and watched tiny monkeys dance across the screen. He swallowed once more and left his stall staring at the concrete floor. John could not bear to meet The Overseer’s gaze again; the hatred emanating from his eyes pierced John through his pocket protector. The unspoken words were more powerful than those spoken. If The Overseer’s glare could code, it would have written its own program.

The entire warehouse radiated an intense

dislike for everything human. The silence screamed “code, code, code” endlessly. Making his way through the stalls to a definite pink slip, John caught furtive glances from fellow co-workers, but if anyone suspected John had noticed them out of his peripheral vision, the programmers attacked their keyboard twice as intensely. None dared The Overseer’s wrath.

The concrete slab of the warehouse ended abruptly. John paused to take in the transition from the programmer’s compound to the executive suites. Through a simple glass door, the endless rows of executive offices taunted the programmers—the mahogany carpet, the potted plants, the carved oak benches beckoned the uninvited into a world known to none of them. About to reach for the door, his arm stopped inches from the handle, remembering that only executives could touch this door. As if on cue, The Overseer snatched the door handle, wrenching open the door as if it fought bitterly against him.

The air smelled of rose petals and carpet cleaner. It smelled alive. John’s eyes began to tear from the unimaginable aroma.

The Overseer snapped him back, ‘Move along P2913. It’s the first door on your left.’

The Overseer’s voice was not as harsh face to face as John thought it would be; it was almost human, almost as another programmer speaking to him. “I—I thought... I thought execs were to lead the way at all times, Sir.”

Nodding his head as if pleased, The Overseer replied, “You know your company manual, P2913. Good. After me.”

John stepped through the door before he realized he did it.

“Don’t slouch, P2913. Stand tall and proud in these corridors.”

John raised his head and pushed out his chin as The Overseer did. His upper lip began trembling, then itching. Every time John caught a

glimpse of The Overseer’s mustache, it irritated his lip further. The pressure was building into an unbearable tension, a sneeze.

“Here we are then. My office.” The Overseer looked John straight in the eye, as he had earlier, but lacking the menace. A small white thread dangled from the corner of his mustache.

He’s not perfect, John thought, wriggling his nose to evade the sneeze. Nightmares of sneezing on The Overseer flashed through John’s mind as constantly as “code, code, code”.

“Come in,” The Overseer said after an uncomfortable moment without blinking. He opened his office door. John did a double take at the inflatable furniture that filled the office. Plastic red and blue chairs sat opposite The Overseer’s desk. “Have a seat in the red chair, not the blue one.” The Overseer seated himself in an inflatable rocking chair behind his desk.

“Yes, sir,” John responded vacantly, his eyes adrift in the delicate urns, vases, and furniture. Executive privilege... John did not realize he had fallen into the air-filled red chair.

“I’m going to cut straight to the point,” The Overseer said. John had yet to detect any menace in the voice. His ears were putting up a diligent fight against his mind in convincing him that what he heard was pleasant. “P2913, we’ve been watching you for quite some time. For quite some time indeed.”

His job was at an end, yet John felt strangely indifferent. Glowering at the pink flower, colors began to seep from the petals. Pink tendrils began wafting around The Overseer, caressing his wrinkle-free suit. John looked right through him to the pulsing reds, yellows, and blues on the wall.

“Your action today has proven to us we were correct.”

A bowl atop The Overseer’s desk overflowed with apples, bananas, peaches, plums, and grapes. His mouth filled with the memories of fruit juices

enticing his tongue. It had been so long since he could afford fresh fruit. The entire fruit arrangement began to spin like a carousel.

"We never do this sort of thing lightly, but when we do it, we do it right."

The sneeze exploded without warning. John stabbed his fingers into the plastic arm handles. A paper slid off The Overseer's desk from the gust of breath.

The Overseer paused, then said simply, "Bless you" and continued, "P2913, we're going to promote you."

The inflatable chair squeaked as John tried to hide himself in the plastic. His head drooped in disgust. John could see the moisture droplets on the side of the desk.

"P2913?"

"Huh! What?"

"You've been promoted. Congratulations."

The colors vanished.

"Welcome to the big leagues."

The room righted itself.

"I'll expect you at The Club tomorrow.

3:00pm. Don't be late!"

The Overseer stopped abruptly at the tennis courts. "We'll take in a quick match while we catch our breath. You look a little winded, John."

Bent over at the waist, John's breathed in ragged gasps. "Tha... Tha... Thanks," he huffed. He stared at the grass wondering if each blade was cut to the same height. Since he had arrived three hours ago, The Overseer had paraded John inside, outside, and all throughout The Club. They had met the Board of directors to a chorus of 'hello s' and rigid handshakes. They had hurried through The Club's kitchen and dining room, larger than any football field John had ever seen, grabbing a freshly prepared Reuben with just the right tang from the Russian Dressing. After having visited the croquet, cricket, and pole vaulting fields, The

Overseer led John to the tennis courts.

John looked up to watch two club members engaged in a fast-paced romp on the clay courts. A man in a blue shirt used a strong backhand shot to score a point down the line. His opponent in a green shirt retaliated with a serve that nearly hit the blue shirted man in the knees. John looked closer. Was the ball crossing back and forth over the net yellow? And... smiling? "Is that..."

"No time for questions, John, we've still got much to see. We've already wasted too much time here. Come!" The Overseer grabbed John's hand pulling him into motion.

"But was..."

John's words were lost to the breeze in his face while The Overseer's came across with exact clarity, speeding up to match his ever-increasing pace.

"Over here is Avogadro's Golf Course. Let's check out your golf game for a few holes. There's nothing like a round of golf to set the mind at ease before entering the hedge maze. I'll let you take the first shot." The Overseer pulled out a driver from a rack of clubs next to the tee-off green and tossed it to John. As the club spun towards him, John ducked and shielded his face with his arms. "Come on, John! Quit fooling around or we'll never finish the hole!"

John retrieved the club. "What's par?"

"That's a silly question, John! This is *Avogadro's* Golf Course. The par for every hole is 6.02 times ten to the twenty-third! Take your shot already!"

John did, grabbing a tee and a yellow smiling ball out of one of the bags. He cracked his wrists, back, and neck, loosening his joints. Assuming the golfer's stance he had only witnessed on TV—knees loose, slight bend at the back, feet firmly set, he attacked the golf ball like a baseball. The club face connected with the ball, lifting it skyward.

"Excellent shot! You're a natural!" The Overseer cheered.

The ball sliced, disappearing in a cove of pine trees seventy yards away. John handed the driver to The Overseer. He teed off immediately. His ball lifted into the air straight down the center of the fairway taking three large bounces before settling into a twenty-yard roll.

“Good shot, sir,” John said, picking at his fingernails.

“No time for pleasantries, John, we must be off!” The Overseer grabbed a bag, slung it over his shoulder, and sprinted down the fairway. “Hurry, P2913...” his voice trailed off.

John grabbed a bag and began running. By the time he had covered half the distance to the cove, his breathing had returned to ragged gasps. He paused, massaging a stitch in his left side. The Overseer ran towards his ball, pulled out a club in mid-stride, and with a one-handed swing in full sprint, whacked the ball two hundred yards further down the fairway. John let the golf bag slip from his shoulder to the ground. He wiped his sweaty palms on his pants and ran after the possessed Overseer.

John fought through his heavy breathing to trail The Overseer. With each bend in the fairway, The Overseer’s club kept swinging, and the ball kept traveling down the winding fairway. Then without warning, The Overseer dropped his clubs and veered from the fairway. His new path took him into a grove of oaks and elms. John ran to the trees only fifty yards behind him. The trees surrounded them on all sides. The waning sunlight disappeared entirely beneath the thick canopy. The snapping of twigs and crunching of dried leaves echoed in the enclosure. Catching quick glimpses of The Overseer running ahead of him softened fears that John would end up forever lost on The Club grounds.

The towering oaks and elms began to give way to smaller brush. Trimmed hedges began intermixing with the forest vegetation. The

Overseer disappeared around a hedge. The hedges narrowed the pathway, funneling. When John reached the intersection, breathing like a spent racehorse, The Overseer was not in sight around any bend. He looked and listened. The forest brush was completely gone; neatly trimmed hedges rose ten feet high on all sides, in all directions. No sounds invaded the maze but the wind whipping the tops of the hedges.

A growing sickening feeling began gnawing away his stomach. To stifle the burning sensation, John began running in the direction The Overseer turned. The mossy grass cushioned his strides. The wind intensified the rustling of the hedges as he ran faster.

A voice cracked the silence. “Come on, P2913! Can’t you find me!”

John ran after the voice, turning left, than right, than left again. A stray hedge root snagged his foot, sending him sprawling forwards. His palms skidded on the mossy grass. Skin peeled off. The green grass began to mix with red.

“What’s the matter, P2913?” the disembodied voice screamed. “Did you fall down and skin your palms?” Laughter erupted from the hedges.

John stumbled to his feet running for the voice. The laughs would seemingly intensify in one direction, only to suddenly fade away in a few turns.

“I’m so close yet you can’t even find me! You’re worthless, P2913!”

The hedges were closing in on him. The air thickened with each step. His spasmodic breathing deteriorated into wheezes that grated the back of his throat like sandpaper. Rounding a corner, John lost control of his exhausted sprint. His body refused to turn, colliding with the hedge wall. A sharp pain pierced his side; a thorn-like branch speared him like an arrow. He wrapped his sweating hands around the branch.

“What are you waiting for, P2913! I’m over

here..."

John closed his eyes and clenched his teeth. Letting out a scream, he wriggled and twisted the branch from his side, the branch shredding his flesh.

"Just kidding, over here!"

With a final determined tug, the branch popped out like a champagne cork, sticky, red. Blood seeped from his side staining his shirt, dripping down his pant leg.

"This isn't looking good, P2913."

John put one foot in front of the other. He stumbled through the maze uncertain of anything. With each step, the hedges encroached further. The overcast sky melded with the hedges obscuring all sense of direction. One dead end led to another and then back again. He'd brush into a hedge, only to turn around and brush another. He stared at his feet forcing them to take another step, then another, never before noticing his withered sneaker laces or the holes over both big toes.

"Come on, P2913! Can't you get to the center? It's right here!" the voice tormented from every hedge.

"Yes! Yes!" John screamed, cried. "Yes, I can make it! I want it! All the comforts, the sandwiches, the green grass, the furniture! I want it all!"

"You haven't even made it to the carnival yet! There's so much more to see! Don't you want to ride to calculation coaster?"

John's stomach took a dive as he went over the first drop. "Ninety-eight to one chance of death, and dropping," the mechanical voice rattled in his head. The steel tracked rushed to meet him. He opened his mouth to release the screaming in his head but nothing came out. "Eighty-six to one chance of death and dropping." He tore at his hair, clawing at the voice. The coaster rounded a bend, the left side teetering off the tracks to the hiss of screeching steel. Sparks flickered from the

grinding wheels as if exploding fireworks erupting into the night. "Forty-two to one chance of death and dropping."

"Don't you want to meet the Muffin Man? Place a bet on the Roach Races? Spread the Eagle? Ride the Infinite Carrousel? There's so much waiting for you!" The Overseer's voice crumbled.

Roaches raced past him. Eagles dove for his eyes. The Infinite Carrousel circled around and around and around to the screams of people forever trapped in the infinite beast. "Twenty-eight to one chance of death and dropping." The Muffin Man bombarded his coaster with cherry scones, chocolate croissants, raisin bagels, and blueberry muffins. Each one bounced off his head like a brick. "Eleven to one chance of death and dropping." Where was the hedge maze? He could picture the scraggly branches reaching for his clothing, but the coaster of his mind would not free him. "Five to one chance of death and dropping."

Mocking laughter consumed the hedges. "The tooth ferry awaits you in port! How can you miss the tooth ferry? And you haven't even seen the big top spin!"

John saw his feet and commanded they take another step. Against the force of the coaster, he compelled his feet to move. He raised them inch after minute inch, the force threatening to snap his ankle. Just one more inch...

Grass. The Overseer caught John's collapsing body.

"Do you think we're done, P2913? The fun's just beginning! There's so much more to see."

John stared at The Overseer's black galoshes. There were bulges in them. It looked as if his ankles bent the wrong way.

"I don't want to see anymore..."

"Oh yes you do," The Overseer said twisting his grin. He hoisted John up by his armpits, and looked at him straight in the eye. "The carnival's

waiting!”

“No, no, no...” John gasped, clawing at The Overseer’s tie.

“Here we go!” The Overseer draped John’s arm around his neck.

The mouse scrambled across the steaming coffee mug pad that was his existence. Following the mouse’s movement, the cursor skimmed across the screen with a lackadaisical precision. The new spreadsheet appeared. Rifling through the papers scattered across his stall, John pulled out reports for Tinkling Tina, Sweet Maria Mermaid, and Astro-Annie. John assaulted the document with column after column of numbers—the productive output of Tinkling Tina, the profit margin of Sweet Maria Mermaid, the percentage of Astro-Annie defects.

As exhaustion and boredom overtook John, the data entry slowed as it always did. He looked at his plastic Casio. Five minutes until the shift change. His eyelids drooped, brought on by eight hours of cost analysis spreadsheets, expenditure pie charts, and the thin glow emitted from his monitor. He blinked repeatedly trying to ease the dryness in his eyes, each blink feeling like a minute. The end of the day pains, the swollen knuckles, the tension in his neck, the pressure on his bladder, began to appear like stars at dusk. Bending his fingers backwards to free his pulsating knuckles from the throbs tormenting them, five pops disrupted the calm that always settled on the warehouse moments before the shuffling of a shift change. John rolled his head to massage his cramped neck. As his blank gaze fell on the large sign hanging from the warehouse ceiling, the pit of his stomach began to burn from the awful Reuben sandwich he ate for lunch. The air-conditioned currents gently swayed the sign “Welcome to Management”.

C. M. Amidon
DePauw University



Eric Yeung
Washington University

CONTRADICTION

Vulnerable viscera revealed yet,
he stands proud, intact.
Tough elastic skin,
like the rubber band that held flowers
he picked me, protects
sentiments he sends me.

Novelty giftedly gleaming,
carries the stench of decay.
His rotted past
does not make him cringe.

Wearily, I taste his fusion
delicate texture, symphonic
slashing skin; his paradoxes
blend beautifully,
unable to discard, I indulge.

Keren Sussman
Yeshiva University

A PANHANDLER

Sunlight reflected off the Jerusalem stone on one side of the narrow alley and caressed the lounging plants nestled sporadically between the bricks of the fifteen foot wall. The plants were fewer on the wall's twin where it was shadowed. So I made sure to walk along the left side of the alley, in the light, letting my hand brush through the hanging plants when I could reach. I plotted my steps by the shoulder of a small degradation in the stone walkway, a gutter that winded with the alley down its middle where liquid light trickled. The rarity of moisture collected in little safe-havens along cracks in the wall and on the floor with love had sprouted mosses in a pattern, accentuating each shift and creak of the Earth, its presence in these stones, this alleyway, these walls. I walked with my eyes closed, face tilted toward the slender sliver of heaven above. The sunlight was like a stark white sheet comforting my body, as I with care lifted my lids to a figure coming in view just beyond a bend. A panhandler awash in the splendor, wrapped in a brown cloth, camel-like, sitting against the wall with smiles and greetings extended her arms toward me, her open palms shining like stars emerging from her earthy form. I placed a few coins against the white and in my passing she raised her hands. And I smiled.

Jonas Lauren Norr
Yeshiva University

ASIAN FIGURES

High heel,
Slim ankle.
Precarious.

Trouble
Is a white dress
Walking towards a red wine.

Hermaphrodites
Have
A mixed blessing.

Leech:
Your metaphor
Sucks.

Nicole Leist
Washington University



Ethan Hattendorf
Washington University



Mike Dennis
Washington University

WATCH

The Virgin Mary appeared in the corner of the old church in Mayfield looking down like she was perched on the edge of a cliff staring into a deep openness below. My first thought was: *My God, I must be dying.* Away all these years and when I come back to settle on selling Mama and Daddy's house, He's going to strike me down. I held onto the loose doorframe for dear life, rubbing my eyes with the other hand. She started whispering something, putting a hand to her mouth as if to cover up her words. Like they weren't for me. My heart slowed some. I was taking in the air of rotten wood, what felt like trapped air. That now bare lilac bush scratching against stained glass gave me a shiver long before the Virgin disappeared into a mist and then nothing but cobwebs in the corner.

"Not me," I mumbled to myself. My dream. She hadn't come for me but the man that brought me here to the First Baptist Church of Mayfield in the first place. What they'd all been saying in Lily's old greasy spoon about Vincent up in the hospital all alone. The Virgin Mary's face so serene yet troubled, coming for him, to tell me he was dying. And now I felt a warmed hand inch under the January breeze on my collar, tugging me to him.

I must have sat in the hospital parking lot for fifteen minutes. The only space I could find was earmarked for the clergy, the place filled to the brim on a Sunday. The parking lot trees swayed with the same wind that shuddered my little sedan. *To see him, laid up in bed. And then to get out and get on.*

The tiny room in the ICU smelled like the things that passed by it: mop buckets of ammonia, trays of tasteless food, and the recently departed. My face brushed against the polyester curtains, looking in, and it felt pale as heating coals gone

white. I stepped in, machines working around me, pumping air into him with a loud hum. One clicked every few minutes, released what I figured was morphine. My hands wrung themselves against that clammy, hospital air pressing in. *Any time now. You can go anytime you want.*

After moving in next to him, I let my fingertips play across his sweaty forehead as my graying hair hung down, touching his shut eyelids. They popped back, and slowly something, maybe words, struggled behind his lips but couldn't come out. "Vincent. It's me, Violet."

I fixed my stare above his bed, not in that face.

"Are you surprised to see me? I guess you would be. Twenty-six years. Lord, they've got tubes running through every part of you. I see they got your crucifix all done up there for you. Never very religious. You tell them that? Or maybe you changed. Wasn't even religion when you first invited me to come to your Daddy's sermon with you," I said, getting up to examine the wooden cross.

He had known all the rooms in and out, most especially that back room where they'd stored the dusty hymn books. After services, his hand slid up my dress, begging with his face shoved into my neck and a simple, "Please" which no one had ever said to me. His skin rubbed against me rough as leather and the overpowering stench of lilacs floated in from the open window, a smell in perfume or air fresheners that turns my stomach to this day. Finally, behind my eyes and then everywhere in my body, exploded something like fireworks, that time Daddy finally took us to the state fair where the sky shattered in color but my throat stung with the sulphur and burn smell so terrible I gave up my cotton candy.

Vincent'd sneak me off mostly Sunday nights, and I thought: love, God's incomprehensible will. I never refused. Daddy knew what was going on

between us, everyone in town did. He was firm about me quitting the family and likewise quitting the orchard, becoming a wife instead of continuing to gather pecans day in and day out before and after school. Vincent would be nothing, always would, and would treat me worse than that, but Daddy would not be shamed.

That day I left, it was fall out with an early freeze, and my face ached, raw and dry. I'd walked all the way from our house in town out to his next to the church, a few miles while the wind stripped away my skin as if to show me to the world for who I was. Hardly bundled up myself, I passed by people I knew, Miss Hillard my teacher, Dr. Ericson who delivered me, taking in their stares at the suitcase and bag I guarded while not one person stopped to offer a kind word or a scarf. I thought the sky might burst open and just let snow drop onto me and the entire world. As I walked along those gravel roads, each rock grinding its impression into my tired feet, I'd look up. Maybe the sky wouldn't be there, I thought. And I would catch God in his cruel lie. Silver rode heavy clouds on the horizon, white edging in as if reminding me of how cold it truly was. I pulled my jacket close only around my stomach, the only part of me I could muster concern for. The streaks of red and pale yellow looked like party streamers hung on some ceiling. It made me think all of this was some joke I'd laugh at later, having to leave my family and tell him and beg him to marry me. I trudged up Vincent's doorsteps, driven to convince him of what we had to do, by God and by everyone who knew what we hid in that back room.

"What the hell are you doing here, Violet?" he said, shutting the door behind him. But he knew as much as I did. If I could have captured his look at me then, right there'd be a record of pure hatred. It was part of his look all along which I buried beneath those few seconds with him. "You know

what my parents think of you."

"I don't have anywhere else to go. I was just hoping. I know you'd want to do the right thing."

"I never asked you to marry me. Never what I wanted, and you know it," he said in his hushed tone. "Just turn back around. We can end this whole thing here, you can go back to your parents' goddamned orchard. That's it."

"No, Vincent. I can't, and we can't. End this. That's all that's left to do," I said. His eyes darted instinctively down to my stomach, he couldn't hide that.

"Well, you can't stay here."

So he shuffled me over to the church, found some blankets and laid them out on the musty rug.

"You should be okay here. I can bring you something to eat in the morning, and I may be back later on tonight to check on you. We'll figure out what to do."

He rubbed his stubbly chin and then spread out the blanket carefully. His body pressed mine down, and before I knew it, my dress was pulled up, his pants were down, and he hardened his eyes on top of me. "Violet! Violet!" he yelled angrily like he was trying to cast out a demon within himself, making love to a rag doll instead of me right there under him. I tried to shoot into him those looks of ecstasy, but the sparks fizzled in me that time. My looks scraped against his eyes, two deep slits on me. I felt like a slave in his secret room which Reverend Boone probably knew about but chose not to find. A church by day promises hope and care, but sleeping on that concrete floor in the closet-size room after he left was like sleeping in a cave, the way that place shook and rattled and breathed with night.

I lay on my back, facing the ceiling. This thing that stirred inside me, shared my blood. Maybe it's my punishment, I thought. But maybe it's a reward. Out. It could have been, I hoped it was some way out of our sin and into a more

Christlike life.

Just as I'd finally reconciled those shadows of arms on the wall as only lilac branches, the door coughed open. Lights popped on.

"Violet, wake up! This is Dr. Fell, he's agreed to help us out. But he had to do it on short notice, coming so late."

The man's greasy, black hands hung at his sides like blunt tools while my eyes adjusted to the light.

"With what?" I asked. "With what, Vincent. We don't need..."

"Relax," the man said, stiffly moving closer. He wore an overcoat and tattered hat, its feather's quill nearly bare.

"Let the man do his job. It'll be over before you know it."

Vincent's fingernails dug into my wrists as he pinned me down. The last thing I remember before the red wall was a rusty wire thing and filthy hands thrust into me, then out. His words, "You may want to leave the room," and the nails like thorns that never let go. Left to lay on the floor, I came out of it all wet and dizzy, instantly beginning to pray. I sent Him what I could through it all, "Please help me up. Please tell me where to go. Lord, please take me or give me to something else," something along those lines. When not even the church walls stirred, I had known I was only talking to myself.

I felt above his bed the grooves of that crucifix, Christ cast in white plastic on oak worn smooth with worry or maybe anticipation. Outside, I imagined some priest searching for a parking space. *You don't have to do it. Not another word.* Letting my eyes fall down to the bed, I finally looked at him, into him.

"I'm not here to pull the plug or any such. If that's what you're thinking. I just wanted you to know one thing: I felt it, him. He has a name.

William, I decided to call him."

My stomach filled up again as I saw the flat, granite stone I had bought for him, cashiering all those Christmases at Famous and Barr. His name engraved, IN LOVING MEMORY, WILLIAM KNIGHT, the birthday cupcakes and chocolate rabbits for Easter. And that blank stone and plot waiting next to him.

"Vincent, I wish I could've come here and said I never think about you. But I still have nightmares, you know, afraid to be alone at night or even set foot in a church. Until today. Everybody in town's saying it's mighty sad, you having a stroke at 45. It is. Mighty sad," I said, wrapping my hand around his. "Truth is, I knew this was happening, just didn't know it was you. I been having this dream with the Virgin Mary in it. Had the same one last night where Jesus sits in a judge's robe, there to sentence you. My only witness is the Virgin who just sits there silent looking down. They wheeled you in, but you couldn't speak or move. Mama and Daddy and William grown as he would be now were the jury. I woke up, always do, before he makes his ruling. But back this afternoon at the First Baptist of Mayfield, I knew because the Virgin came to me again. I just knew."

A new roundness pushed out of his eyes, barely there, as I moved my lips to his ear.

"You're still with me in so many ways," I whispered. "And that's why I came. And it's why I'm going to be here, have to be here tomorrow and the day after if need be, how ever many days. For making him a tombstone and tearing me up. I couldn't say yes to the man I want to marry because of you, what you done. But I will say yes. When I can. I'll teach his two daughters to make bread and chocolate chess pie and live with them in their Victorian house where it's always warm. I know you'll be looking upward and seeing from where you'll be."

I turned away from him, gleaning some tears

from my cheeks. They were just a part of it all, not significant.

"I'm here to make sure, Vincent. Finally. I figure God can forgive me this. He owes me that much. Not until I know you're not here anymore, above the ground, in this air. I'm here, and I won't leave until I watch it happen to you."

James Crews, Jr.

University of Missouri, St. Louis



Linnea Maas
Washington University

I HAVE HAZARDED INTO A NEW CORNER OF THE WORLD

I have hazarded into a new corner of the world
Naked of rapists, racists
Ignorant to politics and sex appeal
And how they are one in the same
A green sky with blue clouds
White grass and stark trees
Stark earth, free of death and life
What it means to feel and perish
And how they are one in the same
Run the rat race into this black abyss
Avoid love, devoid of heart and soul
Seek absolution for your sins
And say a prayer, be thankful you were born to die

I have hazarded into a new corner of the world
And sleep 'til dark
When I can pretend that it is light
And I am not afraid
To be and see what, who, where, and how I am
Is this purgatory
Or a haven
From the pain of breathing

I melt

Danielle Christmas
Washington University

COMPOSED IN A NURSERY

Somehow dusk particles look like fairies, rounding silhouettes and real shapes free and fall themselves from a yellow square in a warm room-like snow on a mission-around infants, still remembering Silence's treble in the music of waves-like under oceans where we are formed.

My memory is long past that and so I tap analogies with type writer sense. Banging boards.

Wombs aren't like oceans at all I bet. And she misses the waltz-the lone slow swirling of it, with out head and toe because everything just is without declaration. Confident corners on orbs, like an aimless and liberated step (but even then the right usually goes first).

I see it because she sleeps often. Maybe keeping on a picture-like when I slightly wake and hold onto dreams-the lucid part of them, because even I know water slips quickly. And she knows it when she opens her eye in half because I make measurements. They say she is not used to our light and the sound of this room and the shape of a yellow box getting closer to her bed as a sun moves closing the day. And she is sad to know for certain that she has been here for 7 days and 1 minute exactly.

Because wheels that tumble down dark hills lose their smooth form at the slowing, showing equidistant spokes.

Elana Hornblass
Yeshiva University



Melanie Reinert
Washington University

TRAVELS BY CAR AND TRAIN

A road achingly flat and straight,
built tomorrow, today, yesterday—whenever you want—
stretching from Amarillo to Philadelphia.
Travels like this; long, light, useless,
led to the invention of cruise control.
When the road lifted, peeled in waves, you laughed.
For how can engineers be so ignorant?
Every student is told, 'Asphalt doesn't stick to dust.'

Upon arrival, departure, even travelling,
seemed irrelevant if both lands were connected.
Dust and smog filled air,
one from Mom
one from Black Death smoke goddesses.
People wear tight jeans under opposite pretenses:
smoke girls extenuate their backs—
as if this was a fresh concept—
yellow girls know it's normal,
and only tourists stare.

Natives speak in metaphors and circles,
since an unused bridge is only a hunk of metal.
These ridiculous zealots have no recruits.
Though seel mists drape brick geometry,
amber fragments smack barn shingles,
reminding family style restaurant patrons to wonder,
"Where was the non-dairy coffee creamer?"

Mickey M. Minnick
Temple University



*Loren Lee
Washington University*

A PERSONAL REFLECTION

Have you ever tried to say
“Narcissus?”
The poor man must have looked
ridiculous
saying his own name.

*Christopher Fisher
Webster University*



URBAN THIRST

In Suburbia-Town
People make offerings of sprinkler-dust
To long forgotten gods
Of aquifers.

Nicole Leist
Washington University

Antonio Hsieh
Washington University

A MINOR VICTORY

It was in fifth grade when I got my first pair of real boots—not the kind that kids wore in the snow, but the kind that businesswomen wore to work and movie stars wore while shopping. They were dark tan and shiny, had pointy toes, and had little hooks to pull the laces through instead of holes with rings on them. I would no longer have to try on my mom’s too-big patent leather pumps if I wanted to be glamorous; all I needed was to wear my own shoes now. Even though it was more convenient for me to wear sneakers to school so I wouldn’t have to change shoes before P.E., my mom let me wear the boots to school that day, no doubt because she could see how proud I was of them (in retrospect, they were rather hideous. I’d never wear them today, and if I had any children, I probably wouldn’t allow them to either). So I put white socks on after breakfast and pulled one boot after another on, double checking that these new tubular laces were tight in their gold hooks. I pulled my jean-legs back down over the boots and stood up proudly, admiring my feet.

My mom drove me to school as usual. I climbed the steps apprehensively, walked into the classroom, and sat down at my desk. I didn’t say hello to anyone because I had given up on that long ago. No, I just popped open a book—whatever I happened to be reading at the time, which was most likely young adult pulp of some sort—and slipped into the fictional worlds of the people I read about.

When the bell finally rang, school proceeded as usual. My new boots didn’t attract any special attention. They didn’t jump off my feet and do a little dance number. They didn’t attract the envy and admiration of the class as I had half-hoped they would. They just shone quietly in the harsh fluorescent lights, contrasting sharply with the dull, worn-out orange carpet.

Until lunch. We all lined up to walk to the lunchroom, and my books clicked a little while I walked across the off-white, dirty floor of the hall. Brittany looked down at my boots—she was a person or two behind me in line—and said, “You can’t wear your boots like that.”

“Like what?” I couldn’t think of anything that I could have possibly been doing wrong.

There is something you must understand about Brittany before I can tell you the rest of the story. She thought she was a trendsetter. She was one of the popular kids. She was the one who told me in fourth grade that I wasn’t allowed to wear my doubled-up socks slouched down, one green with orange on the top and one orange with green on the top, because she wore hers like that and no one was allowed to copy her. When I told her that I saw it on T.V., she claimed that it wasn’t possible. Apparently, it was her original idea. She was the one who, later, in sixth grade, fought with me over my hot pink cloth headband one day until it accidentally sling-shotted into the toilet. Her reasoning behind that one was that headbands looked stupid and were out of style. Brittany told people what they could and couldn’t wear, what they could and couldn’t say, how they could and couldn’t express themselves. She was our fair sex’s very own version of a bully. Now, back to our conversation.

“You can’t wear your boots like that,” she said.

“Like what?” I wasn’t trying to start an argument, really. I just wanted to understand what she thought I was doing wrong.

“Oh, you know exactly what I’m talking about,” she said.

“No, I don’t. I’m just wearing them.”

“Yeah, and your jeans aren’t tucked into them,” she said.

“So?”

We had reached the lunchroom by now and stood in line waiting to get food. She faced me

condescendingly.

“So,” she said, “everyone knows you’re supposed to tuck your jeans into your shoes or even your socks, and I wore mine out last week. You know that no one’s allowed to copy me, and you always do it. So tuck your jeans into your boots. Now.”

I thought for a moment about doing it, but I didn’t. More accurately, I felt that I couldn’t.

“No,” I said, “I’m not copying you, and I never have. I didn’t even see your jeans or boots last week. I like my jeans like this.”

By now, we had gathered quite a crowd. People were listening. Not only was this breaking up the monotony of their day, but most of them knew that I hated confrontation and never stood up to anyone. They probably were shocked to hear me talking at all.

“I didn’t even think of tucking my jeans in this morning, so I didn’t make any decision to copy you or not copy you,” I said.

“You did too. How could you not know that I didn’t tuck my jeans in last week?”

“I didn’t. And I wasn’t paying attention to your jeans last week. I know you think everyone’s always looking at you, but I wasn’t.”

She was stunned. “Whatever. Go on and copy me. No one’s looking at you anyway. They don’t care what you wear, and they’ll never notice your boots anyway. You don’t even know how to dress right. Those boots are ugly, and they don’t match.”

“Fine.” My resolution surprised even me. “I will wear these exactly how I want to. Think whatever you want about ‘em. I like them the way I’m wearing them right now. I don’t want to tuck my jeans in, and I won’t.”

She scoffed at me and walked away to sit at the lunch table with her friends. I sat at the end of the long table and tried to listen to their conversation. Someone mentioned me as if I wasn’t sitting

within earshot, but I pretended, as usual, that I didn’t hear anyone talking. I looked around at the lunchroom and listened to the dull, indistinguishable rumbling of hundreds of voices at once. I looked down at my feet, at my brown-fake-leather-clad feet, at boots with the little hooks instead of holes and smooth round laces instead of bendable floppy cloth ones, and at the legs of the jeans that hung neatly and tastefully over the tops of the boots.

I never wore those boots to school again. I didn’t really want to get into it with Brittany again, and, I had to admit, my mom was right about the inconvenience of changing into sneakers right before P.E. But I never did tuck my jeans into my boots (except when I was in my room experimenting to see how weird it looked). Not to this day have I gone out in public with jeans tucked into my boots. It was a minor victory, really. I feel certain that Brittany forgot all about it a week or two later. No one else would have remembered it for more than a month, tops. But to me, it meant everything. I stood up for myself, and it felt good. It was a minor victory, really, but I imagine that if I rack up enough minor victories, I will continue to discover strength I don’t know I have, and I might finally uncover a person whom I admire.

Seema Mukhi
Washington University



Leigh Cullen
Washington University

DRAB PURPLES

There are
the metal wound strings
crossing the wood
that used to be living
housing squirrels
or perhaps the wood
lived without squirrels
but not without leaves
falling
dropping
every autumn
after rains come
before the snow
autumn
when we died
when leaves die
and snow shows itself for the first time
like that first time
when I showed you
with eyes newly opened
like babies' eyes
a new world
or did you show me
a world
not so black and white
full of tones of gray
and cherry
or was it rose
shielding all wrong
from me
I couldn't see you then
as you are
living
as the wood was living
used to live
with leaves
hanging
not falling
as snow from the sky

Ruth White
Washington University

LA DOLCE VITA

Here in this expansive criss-cross of girdered underbellies
and reflective greens and whites,
We—crammed we, infinite we—
move from street to street in Mom's minivan.

This Friday night, every one of us is a loser
and a king, giants above stadiums and pyramids.
Our shared language, of mixtapes and science-fiction,
fills the spaces—spilling out of open windows and soaring beyond traffic lights.

We are still uncertain children, wanting to stay like this, not able
to accept the world outside our sidewalks and two-door garages.
There is solace in late-night drive-thrus and That Song
on the radio—turn it up. Oh, it feels good.

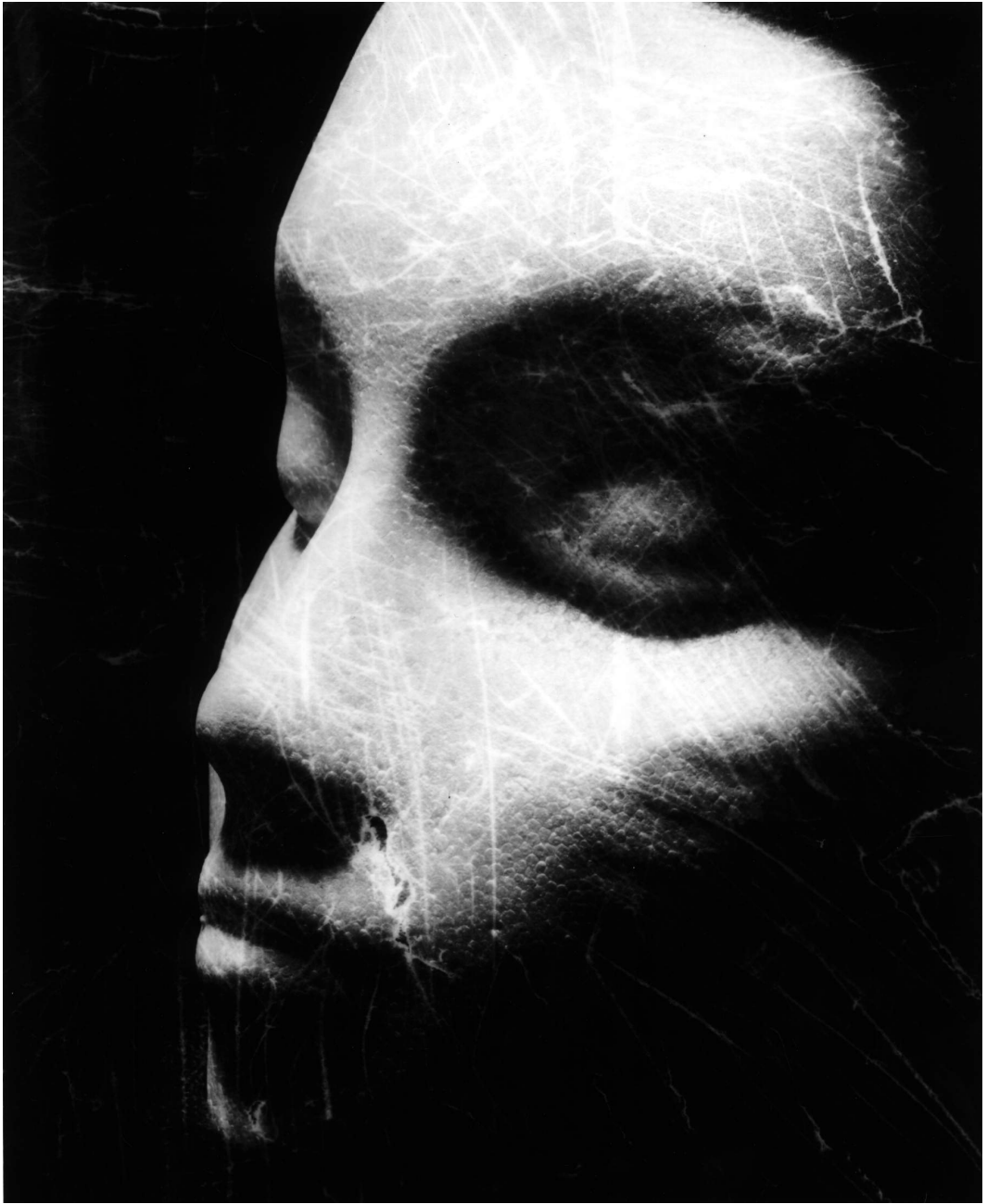
And all there is between us is the music and the night breeze,
a twinge of the inevitable that crosses each of our minds that instant.
Deliberately, the start of purple breaks on the horizon
and one-by-one we fumble for keys and try not to creak front doors.

The drive home is the loneliest, and I disregard the 4:08
as I pull into the driveway.
Nobody can catch us as we drive, just drive—
careening to a somewhere with a Spanish name or until the gauge light blinks.

After this, there is no going back.

Jonathan Lee
Washington University

Jeffery Ashbaugh
Washington University



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