

RAINY DAY

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RAINY DAY

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Submission Guidelines:

We only accept e-mail submissions. Send all submissions to the editor (ejs55@cornell.edu). You must include the submission as an attachment, preferably a “.doc” file. Please make sure all the formatting is correct. The subject in the e-mail must be “RAINY DAY SUBMISSION.” Also include within the document your name and contact information. We accept multiple submissions. Send all inquiries about joining the staff to the editor. Further information, as well as back issues, can be found at our website: www.rso.cornell.edu/rainyday/.

WIND RIVER CANYON

Joshua Wilson

In the spring, I found work tending bar at a little casino on Main Street. There was a gas station and a liquor store in the same building, and this fellow named Robert owned it all. He was a fairly nice fellow, and I made extra money by coming in early and cleaning the bathrooms and mopping the floors and cleaning off the tables in the bar. When the summer came in Montana, the days stretched to near-Arctic length, and despite the amount of time in my life I had spent in bars and casinos, I never liked to be in one before the sun went down. It was a boring job, but I was getting caught up with the Lady and saving a little as well.

In the early afternoons, before the customers got off work, the casino was a quiet place, and I was left alone with my cleaning. With the days warm and bright, I often caught myself wondering about my old rodeo pals, how they were doing, whether they were winning, who had been hurt and who hadn't. When I first came out west I'd had plans to ride some bulls, but I never expected to try to make a living at it. My first job in Wyoming was another bartending gig at a ski lodge over in Jackson. That one lasted about two weeks. They fired me for showing up with whiskey on my breath. It was not that big a deal for a bartender to have liquor on his breath but not when he showed up late for a lunch shift. There were a few jobs after that, none of which I remember well and none of which lasted very long. When spring finally came, I decided to give it a go riding bulls.

I had been a good bullrider back in high school in the South. My senior year, I even qualified for the national high school finals in Shawnee, Oklahoma. Drew a PRCA bull there in the first round and got bucked right out of the gate. The bulls out west were different from the ones we had down South. Bigger and stronger and more athletic.

Still, I thought I could make enough that summer to pay my entry fees from show to show and keep some fuel in my truck and some food in my belly. I rode in shows from Grover, Colorado, up to Miles City, Montana, and just about everywhere in between. They were small shows, penny-ante rodeos, maybe a thousand dollar jackpot every now and then.

I was lucky never to get hurt very bad. There were a few close calls. Out in southeastern Idaho, I got hung up on a black angus and ended up sliding off down underneath him. He probably went about fourteen hundred pounds. I remember lying on my back and watching his hind legs kick straight up in the air above me and then come straight down toward my midsection. Nearly made a hen out of me. I got rolled over just in time and took a hoof in the rear. No permanent damage.

There was another time up in Cody when I got to ride a PRCA bull called Big Bad Motherbucker. Thought I had a pretty good seat, but somehow he yanked me down and gave me a face full of his forehead. Knocked me out cold and busted my nose up pretty good as well.

Other than that, there were a few nicks and cuts, a few bruised ribs, nothing too bad. I almost placed in the money at Gillette, Miles City, Rawlins, Sheridan, Pinedale and Cody. Was second place in jackpots at Green River and Laramie and once down in Grover. There were barfights in Lander and Rawlins and Douglas. Got arrested in Laramie. There were women in most of those cities and in some other ones as well. Some were prettier than others. Anyway, I did not win often, and between the entry fees and the travel expenses, I lost all of my money that summer and some I didn't have as well.

At some point I'd become friends with an old fellow named Edd Warner. Scrambled Edd everyone called him. We met at a show in Gillette and just hit it off and decided to start traveling together, split the cost of gas and motel rooms and booze.

Edd was the fattest bullrider I'd ever seen or even heard of. He was maybe five-ten and probably weighed two and a quarter. He also knew more about riding bulls than anyone I'd ever known. Twenty years before I met him, he had retired from rodeo a two-time world champion, but within five years he'd become an alcoholic widower in the middle of bankruptcy. Sold everything but an old Cadillac and his riding gear and went back out on the road.

He rode in the money every now and then, more often than I did at least, and, between the prize money from that and the subtle handouts given him from those who had known him back when, he managed to get by just fine and even to look out for me some.

I won my first rodeo not long after Edd and I started traveling together. It was a good show, and the purse was a thousand dollars. I'd drawn a good bull in the second round and somehow managed to ride him and get myself into first place for the short goal. I drew another good bull for the short goal and knew that if I rode him, I had a real good shot at winning. I went out to the parking lot and sat on the tailgate of my truck, trying to get my head straight for just one more good ride. Edd came out and sat down beside me. He offered me a cigarette, and I took it. He lit it for me.

"You scared?" he asked.

I nodded and spat on the ground.

"That's good," he said. "When you stop being scared, it's time to stop riding."

"It's not the bull," I said. "Guess I'm just tired of losing."

"Yeah," he said. "I know how that feels."

We sat and smoked. He finished his cigarette and tossed it onto the gravel.

"I'm going to head back to the chutes," he said. "You coming?"

I shook my head. “Think I’ll get ready out here,” I said.

“Well,” he said, “you probably ought to brush out your rope again. I’ll come back and get you.”

I nodded and hopped off the tailgate. I went around to the side of the truck where my bullrope was tied off to the bed railing. I took a wire brush out of my bag and began to brush out the rope. Edd had gone back behind the chutes to where the bullriders stayed. I always thought it was a little strange the way bullriders kept to themselves. When I was younger, I thought it was because the bullriders didn’t want anything to do with the other cowboys, the ropers and racers and wrestlers. After I’d been around rodeos for a while, though, I began to think that it was the other way around, that the other cowboys didn’t want much to do with bullriders.

I was at a rodeo down in Colorado one time when I heard a little boy and his dad talking as they watched the cowboys get ready for the show. The boy was probably four or five and was sitting up on the fence near the chute where they fired the calves out for the ropers. He pointed over to us bullriders behind the roughstock chutes and asked his dad why we were so quiet.

“Those are bullriders,” his dad said. “They’re a little crazy. You don’t want nothing to do with them.”

I had smiled as I knocked the mud out of my spurs. That’s about right, I thought.

I worked carefully as I brushed out the rope, scraping out the built-up rosin from the tail and the handhold. I reached into my back pocket and pulled out my riding glove. I slapped it against my thigh a few times and pulled it onto my hand. I dropped some fresh crystals of rosin into the deerskin palm and crushed them up and then rubbed the rosin into the tail of my rope and into the handhold as well. I put the glove back into my pocket and began to tape the wrist of my right hand. I checked my spurs for tightness and then felt around my neck for the leather thong I used to tie the glove around my wrist.

Everything was in order. Edd would be back soon, and then it would be time to ride.

I lit a camel and put my lighter and the near-empty pack into a small pocket inside my bag. I put the bag into the cab of the truck and went around to the back of the truck and hopped back up onto the tailgate.

The thing I loved most about bullriding was that there wasn’t any room for bullshit. When that gate blew open, there were no lies, no expectations, no misunderstandings. It was just you and the bull. You rode him, or you bucked off. If you screwed up, you could die. If you did everything right, you could still die. Or worse. Nothing I knew could make me feel so alive. Nothing made me feel like such a man.

I heard Edd call for me and hopped onto the gravel. I went to the side of the truck and pulled my rope loose from the railing and slung it over my shoulder. My

spurs clicked on the gravel as I trotted toward the arena.

“Gibbs put up an eighty-three.”

“So I need what, eighty-seven?”

“Eighty-six. Unless Roger or Sonny comes up with a miracle, all you have to do is ride this bull.”

I nodded and ducked my head slightly as I stepped through the gate to the chute area. Roger Shanks and Sonny Welsh were the last cowboys to ride before me. Neither was expected to cover his bull, which meant that an eighty-six would win it for me.

Welsh was getting ready in the front chute, Shanks in the middle. My bull was waiting in the rear. I climbed up on the chute and looked down at my bull. He must have had a dozen different colors on his back. I couldn't tell if he was part brahma or black angus or red angus or what. He could've been half jersey for all I knew. I figured him for seventeen hundred pounds. One of his horns was pointed upward and the other pointed forward. He was the ugliest bull I'd ever seen. All that mattered, though, was that he usually bucked in the mid to high eighties and that if I could ride his ugly ass I'd win.

I lifted my leg over the top slat of the chute and placed the heel of my boot in the center of his back, just letting him know I was there. He snorted and twisted some but not much. I climbed slowly over him and stood with my feet in the slats on either side of him. I was careful not to get into his sides with my spurs.

Edd spotted me with his hands under my arms, and I eased myself down onto the bull's hindquarters. I lowered the loop of my rope down the bull's left side until the cowbell softly clanged against the mud and manure below. Edd reached beneath the bull and hooked the loop and pulled it up to his right hand. I checked to make sure that the bell was on the front side of the loop and that the rope wasn't twisted, and I pulled the tail of the rope through the loop and then pulled the rope tight around the bull until the handhold was in the middle of his back. Everything in order, I tied off the rope and carefully climbed out of the chute.

Edd and I stood side by side on the chute platform as Roger took his wrap.

“Sonny?” I asked.

“Into the well.”

I nodded and looked over at Roger as he nodded and called for his bull. The ride was over as soon as the gate was open, and Roger shook his head and cursed himself as he got up off the ground to go get his hat and rope.

“Showtime,” said Edd.

I nodded and spat and quickly went through the ride in my head. Weight low and lift like hell. Work your feet and keep hold with your spurs. Eyes on his hump. You're going to be alright, bud. You're going to be alright.

I took the glove from my back pocket and pulled it onto my hand. Edd stood behind me, my elbow in his stomach, and pulled the glove tight as he could. I took

the leather thong from my neck and wound it around my wrist and tied the glove tightly in its place.

I climbed the chute and pushed down on the bull with the heel of my boot. The bull was quiet and still and seemed to know as well as I did that it was time to play. I climbed over the bull, and Edd spotted me as I sat down on the bull's back.

I pulled loose the tail of the rope and handed it to Edd, who stood on the platform and leaned out over the chute. Edd took the rope and pulled it upward as tight as he could. I grasped the rope with my gloved right hand and jerked my fist downward three good times until I felt the heat from the rope through the deerskin. I then turned my thumb down and jerked my hand upward until I felt the heat again. I slid my hand through the handhold and jerked it sideways across until the handhold too was hot. I worked the handhold side to side until my pinky was in line with the bull's spine. I nodded, and Edd pulled the rope tight. I grabbed a fistful of the bull's hide and then pulled the handhold toward me so that my fist fit snugly into the hollow place behind the bull's shoulder blade. I nodded, and Edd pulled tight the rope again. Another slight adjustment, and Edd pulled the rope again. "Good," I said, and Edd gave me the tail of the rope.

I pulled the tail across my palm and around behind my wrist and then back across my palm. I closed the hand and pounded it shut over the rope. I opened the hand again and pulled the tail between my pinky and ring finger and then closed it again and pounded it shut. I lay the end of the rope up on the hump of the bull.

I reached forward with my left hand and grabbed the top slat of the chute and slid myself forward until my riding hand was just beneath my crotch.

Okay, I thought. It's time. I smiled and looked at Edd. "Tell me everything I need to know about bull riding."

Edd smiled. "Just keep your mind in the middle, son. Keep your mind in the middle."

I grinned and nodded and called for the bull. "Outside, boys, outside!"

The bull exploded out of the gate one jump and two jumps and three jumps and four jumps spinning hard into my hand.

2.5 on the timer in my head.

The bull planted his hind feet and spun back to the left. I opened up my shoulder and tried to beat him around. Keep that spur in front, I thought. Keep that spur in front.

Three seconds. Four seconds.

I awoke to the muffled sound of Edd crying next to me. I wished I knew the words a man should say to his friend when his friend is sobbing quiet in the night. Sobbing because he is old and sobbing because he is fat, sobbing because he is lonesome, with no one and no place to stay.

I did not know the words and rolled over and went back to sleep.

At some point in the night, Edd had gone into the bathroom and managed to

get up on the sink and move aside a few of the ceiling tiles until he found a good sturdy pipe. When I got up in the morning, I found him hanging from his bullrope in his white boxer shorts. His eyes were still open, and he had shit himself. I went back into the front room and called nine-one-one and then went back into the bathroom to get him cleaned up before anyone arrived.

Two days later, I was by myself driving south along Highway 20 through the Big Horn Basin in midwestern Wyoming. Just after sunup, I came into a place called the Wind River Canyon. The only radio station I could pick up was a public access station out of Thermopolis. It was playing Native American chants handed down from before the missionaries came. The canyon must have been at least ten miles long. The railroad was on the western side of the river, and the highway on the eastern side. On either side the sharp black walls of the cliffs climbed straight up into the heavens nearly half a mile above.

I drove the length of the canyon, descending downward into tunnels beneath the stone and rising back up again toward the sunlight before finally ascending a gradual rise and bursting out of the final tunnel with the Wind River reservoir filling up the plain to the west.

I pulled over to the side of the road and turned up the radio. The wind was strong and rocked the pick-up truck back and forth on its shocks. I listened to the chanting of the hymns of a people who knew about a God long before anyone thought to tell them. I thought about Edd, and I thought about my wife. I told myself that this was one of those moments that for whatever reason I would always remember. I thought about the wind and the stone, the water and the sky. I told myself to make them mine. I thought that some day I would need them. I put my head on the steering wheel and cried. I listened to the chanting and the wind outside and cried until I was sick.

I fell asleep on the side of the road, and when I awoke I thought of a story someone had once told me. Or perhaps I had read it somewhere. Maybe I dreamt it. Anyway, the story was an old Native American myth about how good men die in the spring and bad men in the winter. The story goes that the earth will take back the good ones only after the snows of winter have melted and the earth has become soft again, able once more to open up her arms to those whom she has missed for so long. The bad ones she fights. To give the bad ones back to her, men must dig through the snow and through the frozen dirt, and, when that is done and her shame is buried, she blankets herself in the winter until the work of spring comes and the deeds of the bad men in her belly are forgotten.

Back home, I knew that the leaves were turning, that no matter where I was, the winter would come again.

BUILDING BRIDGES

Cameron Cooper

I was never good at building bridges,
Not even those little toothpick ones in grade school.
They'd always collapse in a gooey mess
And I'd hide my hands under the desk
Peeling off the dried glue,
Thinking that maybe if my hands weren't seen
The work they weren't doing wouldn't be questioned.

How do you build a bridge to something
So familiar
That you can't accept that reaching it
Takes crossing a chasm?

Bridges mean distance.
They mean that whatever separates
You and It
Is too painful to put your foot in.

Instead of sharp rocks, or tigers, or torrents
I imagine nothingness beneath our bridge.
Not a sucking black hole, or
A maelstrom in the dark—
Just a defiantly featureless landscape.
I don't know what kind of bridge
Can cross that kind of hollowness.

I try weaving words into a
Three-ply rope of apology.
I fling it across to you
But it swings back and forth
Like a pathetic pendulum
Measuring failed
Attempts
Instead of time.
I am left clutching that thick strand,

Wondering if I should have made it a different color.

Another try.

I paste pictures of us on a

Huge piece of cardboard.

See, there's us laughing,

That's when we picked strawberries

And you stumbled into the basket,

Staining your shorts as red as our tongues.

We were twelve.

Now I unfurl the collage out over

This big space

Like I'm rolling out the red carpet for you.

See, it covers the nothingness!

But you're not even looking.

I wait,

Picking the glue off my fingers.

AFTERTHOUGHT

Chelsea Finn

Of the infinite steps to your heart, I climbed perhaps one or two.” ~ Peter Ustinov

It occurred to me
months after our paths had parted
that if I had been clever—left behind
some lipstick or t-shirt or bra—
I’d have had an easy excuse to call, find you
coily say “did you happen upon...?”
But after these playful thoughts,
it also occurred to me:
I’m not much on the phone,
I cannot bear awkward conversation.
You see (and this I truly did forget to say),
my tilted heart
waits on mossy river stones
leaning into cold currents.

CIRCADIAN RHYTHMS

Connor Morrow Puleo

lying my back down on the bed so I am beside you, touching
only the tip of my toe, tucked to the soul
of your larger feet though that touch
is larger to me.

begun to sleep, you breathe softly. You are asleep, or you would not
let me listen, breath is too intimate and unadulterated,
too raw from the lungs and hot. You are dreaming
and your breath is slow.

holding your ready heart as well, as the over-honest air you hold back
from a gasp, from the throat should you shout or sing.
I am so conscious of you now, in sleep unaware,
breathing and heart beating.

that everything about me is unready. To be sleeping here beside you,
your roaring back and rising heart, a riptide dragging,
while I am still holding, me to sleep,
me to match you.

will be waking to tell you, I cannot sleep next to you
and push a space apart. You were holding my back
and I could not breathe. I take a toe and
press your skin, a small pressure.

EVERYTHING IS GOING TO SLUSH

Jennifer Nunes

Telephone poles
carrying messages in sugar
to where I thought
I had left so many things
behind, all those upside down
party hats, rogue hair clips,
green rubber stamps cracking
into clutter along the wayside.
Spring never comes
just once here, the trees
glowing one by one
behind those bars, those
telephone poles suddenly
sentinel, watching the birds scattering
and slowly falling back
into place along the wires,
like the hem of my skirt
keeping track night after night.
Not that spring changes anything
for the quietness,
its head nodding above my fireplace,
a glass-eyed trophy for summer. We let it roam,
crouching in snow drifts,
mauling our voices with its snowy paws,
but once the drippings begin
we open our mouths,
wider and wider,
calling flower petals while our fingers,
they close tightly, a band
of branches around its neck.

SQUAMOUS CELL LYMPHOMA: A SELECTED BIOGRAPHY

Alexandra Kleeman

Though the amount of new information in cancer biology at times is overwhelming, it still can be assembled and organized in a way that makes learning a logical enterprise. More than ever there is a need to provide some intellectual framework upon which to hang all the new facts.

(*Cancer Biology*, ed. by R.W. Ruddon. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.)

These books were born from pain. At night I imagine mythological origins for them: Disease in copulation with Empathy, the production of Pain. Pain first bore many Bad Dreams and Unbearably Quiet Nights. When those proved useless, she conceived and brought forth a body of research, tomes with Photos of Rorschach tumors and Graphs that showed lines plummeting to their deaths. And these walked circles around their origin, not looking at it, not talking about it, but translating it into tables of data, which could then be talked about.

When my father was diagnosed, I didn't know what to do, so I borrowed *Cancer: the Misguided Cell* from the library and read it all, read it from table of contents through introduction, all the way to the dry skeletal structure of the index. This meant I loved him. For anybody else I would only have skimmed.

Histocompatibility: A state of immunological similarity (or identity) of tissues such that successful transplantation can occur between one individual and another.

Homeostasis: Maintenance of the constancy of the internal environment of the cell, tissue, or organism.

(*What We Know About Cancer*, R. J. C. Harris. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1970.)

These books go through what I have gone through, though they express it in clinical language, in glossaries full of euphemisms for emotion. I read about organ

transplantation. Isn't it a metaphor for empathy?

These books are vultures circling in the air above him. They are made of facts, and the facts are hungry.

I told three people. He did not have to be told. Neither did my mother. I looked for connection. I made a sandwich. I went to work, where I proofread a book on the stock market crash of 1929, which was a euphemism for cancer. I looked for connection. But not with him, he was taken. He and cancer were a pair. Cancer biology and I were a pair. My mother watered her plants.

I assume that these scientists have stayed up at night, gulping tepid tea and reading treasuries of romantic verse because their dreams are piles of wet black crabs. I wish to assume, I have to assume.

Metastasis: The transfer of disease from one part of the body to another. In cancer the new growths are like the original tumor.

(*Science and Cancer*, M. B. Shimkin. U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1973.)

The compulsion to identify, the compulsion to identify with. A link between these decaying pages and my flowing blood. A hundred attempted combinations until, at last, in a great release of empathy offered up to the universe and emitted like radio waves or carcinogenic radiation, I saw myself as a thing in metastasis, in search of a place to put roots and grow sadly into a warm net of blood vessels and fibers.

Every book reads of my illness.

TRIPTYCH

I.

Saints walk the streets. They carry Styrofoam cups full of soul.
Rain runs off roof, and is filthy.

It has been so long, too long, since we spread blankets on the grass
And drank dry glasses of red words. Darling, the
Faith has curdled in its carton in the fridge.

I am lost to you again, and you hardly notice. “Just
Leave it on the table,” you say,
You say, “I’ll clean it up later.”
I lean forward and my heart falls out, there are
Notches in all the clocks, nerves in everything I touch. The world passes.

II.

When we turned the knob, the faucet
Gave us warm grey water. The chalices are all unwashed,
Growing sin like mold in the old sink.

Tell me a story. Once there was a religion that ate itself.
That’s all.

It was not until I tried to pour myself a glass of milk that I
Realized: all of the house was made of paper,
And I was paper.

Too, when I clawed at the door it was
A line drawn in marker. So couldn’t I
Tear it down I was after all a good person, a pious person I
Read the newspaper though only the opinion sections
But when I tore at the walls I was as light
As a thought.

III.

I give to you my body. I am a fish,
Gut me in various positions.

I give to you
This wine, but it's really blood, but it's
Of a good vintage. I light 6-franc candles, in
Ribs empty as a cathedral.
To say to the amazement of all,
"I cannot tell when we are to be thrown to the beast."
And when she had heard what had already happened,
She did not believe it.

This faith breaks promises. This faith fell out of
Someone's hands and into a gutter where nobody
Picked it up. They just left it there.

Romance is the transubstantiation of a rose into a cliché.
I lean forward and my heart falls out
Onto the kitchen table.

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DAYS LIKE THESE

Anandita Philipose

Telephone wires whipped
the stars into a frenzy.

My world teetered, balanced
and then broke
Many fragmented.

The stars fell around me
Joyous, I slept under
a blanket of blue
with dog shit crowning my head
and a leaf
curled shyly
around my toe.

UPON FINDING HIS OLD HEART

Beatrice Mao

do i sit here comparing. the poem he wrote
 for Lia *ascends*
 and sings its righteous quixotic tune
 across fields of her grace like a valley owl.
 displaced and strong-bridled, mine, though noble
 is quieter, nervous with sticky pins.
 i imagine at some point his shaky hand
 resorted to mythology, losing its rings
 while desperately groping. yet look right here
 at this incorrect tense; this sorrowful sandwich
 of 'it' between 'this' and 'my.' the price
 i pay for my lofty fifth-floor office
 (his ambitious lyric carelessly strung).

it seemed for a moment my lips would assist me
 but gravity held their corners down smartly
 as if pitching a tent. so instead i said nothing,
 my hair regrettably black and not red,
 his arms full of tar. cold at his side
 where those of Menelaus had once been raised
 in desperate anguish, his fleet of persuasion
 lost to the storms, his Helen gone. distant and radiant
 even in capture, Helen is smiling. she smiles in love,
 doused with joy for the downfall of Troy.

COUNTING UP TO EIGHTY

Jonathan Papas

In the morning, Baskin-Robbins has at least thirty-two flavors. By the time the Rosowskis got there, all that was left was a scoopful of Nutty Coconut and a whole container of Old Fashioned Butter Pecan with the little nuts collecting ice crystals, supersaturating in the ice box. Mr. chose a waffle cone with chocolate sprinkles. Mrs. got rainbow. There was a long parking lot and a long walk between the ice cream shop and the appliance store, a light-darkened obsidian wasteland, punctuated by the bold yellow lines, noticeably prominent as though they were relics of ancient fleet of school buses, trapped under the time cooled lava rock. Mr. kept his feet lined up next to the lines, carefully and consciously maintaining no more than five inches of space, often veering so close that the black buffer disappeared, leaving only yellow paint and white golf shoe. The woman, a foreigner to her husband, is walking away from his hand in the asphalt gulf between parallel lines, tying her green plaid scarf around her head.

“It’s about time you bought a dishwasher.” She finished tying her scarf while talking and holding her waffle cone with rainbow sprinkles. “The next time Katie comes up we can play a card game instead of washing dishes. Maybe you could show her your train set upstairs. She’d like that, I know because Denise said that she always counts the trains as they go by. Denise said she counted up to eighty once! Isn’t that something?”

Earl thought long and hard. As hard as he tried, eighty was just eighty, and he figured that eighty is a normal number for a fourth grader to know. He opened his mouth to say something, but as the words were cueing up at his larynx they passed a sedan, lonely and shining its clouded windows into the empty lot. He stopped and frowned in concentration while she kept walking.

“The girls down at the Club said that there’s a seniors’ trip organized for next weekend to Toronto! It’s even on that big ferry ship, and they said that we could see a show while we were there. I hear that Hairspray’s still playing, you always loved that musical, but Edith said that Urineville or something is very good. But we all know about Edith’s taste lately- with a name like Urineville, I can hardly believe it has any good songs at all.” She reached out for his hand, her long hands sticky with dried ice cream around her inflamed arthritic joints.

Earl was two hundred feet back, four feet to the right of the sedan, peering at the windows, his eyes big rheumy defrosters set on high. Mrs. Rosowski, slowly turning, put her fists on her hips, purse crouching angrily under her arm, but Earl couldn’t see this because he had walked around the front of the car. He looked up

and saw a young couple, fully clothed and scared, staring back at him. As though someone had screamed in his ear, the young girl at the wheel fidgeted for the key and tried to start the car. The engine turned and stopped, the car coughing like an asthmatic running laps in the cold. Earl lurched forward and the car started, slammed into reverse, and while the car drove away Earl heard the silence creep back in, taking away the car stereo thump of his thoughts, leaving him alone with his inner monologue speaking silently.

Inside the store, the dishwashers were squatting, an army of square eggs with front load hatches. Mrs. Rosowski went tittering off in the direction of the nearest blue shirt, straining her cataract eyes and shouting “Excuse me, Excuse me, Excuse me.”

Earl looked inside the dishwasher and he saw two girls sitting in a car, listening to music and holding hands, fingers wrapped and writhing around each other firmly and smoothly. Their hands soft as velvet, their ears listening to the radio, their hearts pumping and covering the windows in condensation. He sees them come home and lie in their bed, clothes off and dreaming of each other. He imagines the water and rinse powder flooding their room, floating the sheets around them, blue soapy liquid staining the sheets as they smile and snuggle. He sees them look through the ceiling, lock eyes with him, and scream.

“I... sometimes think that you don’t listen to me?”

Earl turns and looks at his wife, seeing where age has pulled out the threads of her skin, leaving ragged edges and tightly puckered dimples. He glances at two dishwashers, both chrome and identical, sitting next to each other. She gazes at him, stunned to feel his hands on her waist, caressing fast and hard. He walks with her, motions towards the firm, smooth silver eggs squatting in the middle of the white checkered floor, and opens his mouth to speak.

FLOODLIGHT

Rebecca Schonberg

noises in the empty stadium: grass rustling, regaining its posture,
a rock kicked clean of the earth
clicking as it rolls to the road,
and the empty field's exhale
sending up loosening clouds of dust
as if in apology
to snag in the warp and weft of what's visible,

to seem stilled by the light and yet spin still,
aping the stars.

SWALLOW

My dental hygienist tells me there are less great men nowadays because there are more abortions: “We just don’t know who we’re flushing away,” she says while scraping plaque from out beneath my gumline.

“Nnghh.”

My mouth is full of tubes, and sharp edges, and my tongue is in the way, fat, a carpet-bound dog who will not be made to roll over. I drool and she pats my chin, gently.

She tells me the earthquake that caused the tsunami the Monday after Christmas was caused by the bombing in Iraq.

“All that shaking woke the Earth,” she says, “made her shudder in protest, strike out.”

My face in her eyeball is a thumbnail sketch of my face: my wide-open leaking mouth and my eyes, blinking rapidly, as if to say, “I think great people are made and not born,” but by now the conversation has moved on and it is all I can do to lie back and swallow.

HURRICANE LESTER

Kevin Allardice

When Hurricane Lester ravaged the southeast coast, spinning his tantrum through the Florida swamps, killing hundreds, I couldn't help but feel proud. Lester, my namesake, was really making his mark. I was sixteen and spent that June collecting newspaper articles that documented his reign of terror, taping them inside my journal. Every afternoon, alone in the house, I would hear the thump of the paper on the porch, and I'd run out to get it for Lester's latest chapter. My mother never seemed to notice the windows I cut in the *Times'* front page.

A few months before, mold had been discovered in my bedroom walls, and because it might aggravate my latent asthma, I had to move down into the unfinished basement until the problem could be taken care of. It was musty down there, a veritable thrift shop of discarded toys, clothes, books, records; and me, listening to my mother's footsteps in the morning, her heels clapping around on the hardwood floor upstairs. When the groan of the garage door told me that she was leaving for the day, I would emerge to have free reign over the empty house, the television with its channels of scrambled porn, and the computer with its websites of unscrumbled porn. While she was gone, I would occasionally peek into the master bedroom and see the bottle that lay in the blue sheets of her unmade bed, looking as if it were floating a message across the ocean, and the crumpled Kleenex that lay on the floor like crash-landed doves. At night I would hear her crying through the air ducts, and I always felt weird when I thought about how she used Kleenex every night versus the way I used Kleenex every night. It had been two years since my father had vanished, and she was still given to a month of sniveling depression here and there. I don't think she had any idea what was going on outside of her own private cycle of despair; she certainly didn't know about Florida and Hurricane Lester. But I did. We lived on the opposite end of the country, in Los Angeles, but I still let myself fantasize about riding atop that hurricane, orchestrating its destruction with conductor-like arm movements, like Mickey Mouse commanding his own storm in that old cartoon *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*—only I'd be much more bad-ass than Mickey, of course.

That was also the summer my grandmother became an invalid, although not because of the hurricane. It was a stroke that did her in, and one day my mom came down to the basement and told me, dry-eyed and matter-of-factly, that I could have my grandmother's car because her suddenly-paralyzed left side now prevented her from operating a motor vehicle. My grandmother lived out in the desert, where she was now holed up in St. Nathaniel's hospital, so I packed a backpack and boarded

an eastbound bus. I had asked my mom to drive me out there, but she refused, so I had to bear the two hundred miles of hot, sticky bus travel all by myself.

But no matter. I was getting a car—and with it, all the endless promises of freedom, adulthood, eternal happiness, you name it.

The town where my grandmother lived was clearly built for people just passing through—a rest-stop kind of town. Just off the highway was a tight cluster of gas stations, truck stops, and evenly numbered motels. But beyond that, out in the periphery, was where the lifers were. When I was dropped off at the street corner nearest the hospital and stepped out of the air-conditioned bus, the heat struck me full-force. It was the kind of dry, Saharan heat that would cause deserted men to see mirages of oases, only to find themselves drinking sand. So I went into the hospital as fast as I could.

I was shocked by how run-down it was. Most of the fluorescent lights flickered in epileptic fits, and the walls were yellow with brown water-stains bleeding through here and there. It looked like the kind of place where they still sucked bad humors out of people with leeches, and gave patients whiskey and a strip of leather to bite on. At least the place was air-conditioned.

I approached the front desk and said I was there to see my grandmother. Behind the counter was an old man in a suit and tie. He was jowled like a bulldog, had a militant flattop, and a hospital ID badge dangled from his lapel.

“Yes, well, uh,” he said, studying the computer in front of him. “You’ll have to excuse me—I’m just filling in for the receptionist while he’s at lunch. And what is her name, your grandmother?”

“Lolly Lalane,” I said.

“Oh, yes. I know I’ve seen her somewhere around here.” He began typing, hunt-and-peck style, never straying too far from the *L* key. “Here we go. She’s upstairs. Hey, you know what, I’ll show you. It’ll give me an excuse to leave this damn desk.”

He got up and walked with me to the elevators, where he introduced himself as Sidney Hughes. He said that he had been volunteering here at the hospital for the past month, ever since he retired from the plastic adhesives business. As he spoke, spittle flew from his lips like sparks. I just smiled and gave the occasional nod. When he saw that he was losing my attention, he returned to the subject of my grandmother: “Lolly Lalane, yeah, you don’t forget a name like that. I went and visited her the other day, when she got in. She’s, uh... I could tell that—in her day—she was a fine lookin’ lady.” And he gave me a consoling nod.

My grandmother’s name, Lolly Lalane, was always something that caused confusion in my family. That stuttering alliteration had the power to take the weight out of any sentence. My mom had trouble saying the things she did about her and calling her Lolly without feeling ridiculous—and she certainly didn’t like calling her anything as personal as “Mom.” Before my dad disappeared, he intentionally

called her Lois Lane, and perhaps we all wanted to think of her as some comic book character, not someone to fear or hate.

But when Sidney led me into Lolly's hospital room, that woman I was imagining with comic-book proportions deflated into a skeleton wrapped in sheer, clinging skin. She lay in a bed, and her legs and torso were so thin that they hardly seemed to affect the ruffled surface of the sheets. Her head was resting to the side, and her lips were now permanently twisted. Her eyes were closed, her hair matted down, and her skin was still nicotine-stained. A fat nurse was leaning over her, adjusting her pillows. Sidney patted me on the back and left.

I was feeling sick. It had begun when I entered the hospital and by now my palms were sweaty, my head buoyant. I was about to turn and leave when the nurse spotted me.

"Oh, hey," she said. "You must be Otis."

"No, huh, I'm not"—Otis, shit—"actually, I'm Lester, her grandson."

"Well she's been waiting for Otis. Every day she's like, 'Where's Otis? I'm waiting for Otis to take me away.'"

Otis was my grandfather, her husband. I never knew him. My mother didn't even know him, because just before she was born, an aneurysm in Otis' head popped like a fuse, and lights out, Otis was dead. But Lolly had always held his presence over our family—and over her fireplace, in a gilt urn—as some ideal of earthly perfection.

"She's asleep now," the nurse said. "But when she wakes up, you can talk to her."

I felt relieved. Talking to her was the last thing I wanted. Where were her car keys? Just give me the car keys, and I'd be out of there. But she began to stir. Lolly's head rustled a little, and a weak, guttural noise bubbled out.

"Hey, what timing, Mrs. Lalane." The nurse leaned over my grandmother and propped her head up against the pillow. One of my grandmother's eyes opened, the other remaining clenched shut. It took her such effort to open that one eye that her face contorted even further with the strain, her expression looking like a small child making a face. "Guess who's come for you, Mrs. Lalane?" the nurse said. "Take a look."

Her one working eye was now blinking fiercely and searching the room for her visitor, but she couldn't seem to focus on me. She mumbled something through her uncooperative lips with a sibilant lisp that leaked drool down her chin. "Ohhhshish," it sounded like.

"See?" the nurse said, turning to me. "You *are* Otis. She's been waiting for you."

I knew she was just teasing me at this point, but I felt I should explain: "Otis was my grandfather," I said. "He's been dead for like forty years."

"Oh," the nurse said, sounding disappointed. She had short blue hair, and

eyeliner streaked the outer edges of her eyes, making them look aerodynamic. Cellulite puckered her upper arms, and her face had the rocky topography of acne scars. She was obese. A massive, undeniable presence. “That makes sense,” she said. “She has dementia.”

So there she was: Lolly Lalane, my thoroughly stroked grandmother, her brain having leaked blood and memories, mistaking me, of all people, for some apparition of her dead husband, when she never even really liked me, or any of us, for that matter. I never knew why she hated us, but as a little kid, my parents had sent me out here to visit her once—probably an attempt on their part to reclaim that relationship, as if I were an ambassador sent with the peace treaty of a box of chocolates. Lolly rejected the offering, claiming chocolate gave her gas (although I did notice the truffles slowly disappearing from their foil pouches). That visit gave me the feeling that I was some pet she had to take care of for an out-of-town friend—largely ignored and told where I was and was not allowed to pee (“No, no! Not on the seat! Bad!”). And now this sudden promotion.

“Dementia’s pretty common after a stroke,” the nurse continued. “She’ll be glad for your visit no matter who you say you are.”

My nausea was even more volatile now that Grandma Lolly was awake. It felt as if my intestines were trying to uncoil inside of me. “I have to step outside for a moment,” I said.

“Gonna have a smoke?” the nurse asked. “I’ll join you.” I wasn’t, but didn’t have the energy to try and explain that if I didn’t leave, I might vomit.

We went out to a little enclosed courtyard that had a dried-up fountain in the middle. Two orderlies—guys who looked like ex-football players—were taking turns in a wheelchair, popping wheelies and doing laps around the fountain. I had forgotten just how hot it was, and the nurse advised that we stand against the wall, where the edge of the roof could shade us.

“My name’s Hannah, by the way,” she said, fishing a pack of cigarettes out of a comically small purse that was completely covered in patches for punk bands.

“I’m Lester,” I said. She lit up and handed me one. I didn’t smoke, but wanted to pretend.

“Yeah, you said. Famous name.” And I felt myself plume. “So how come you’re the only one who’s showed up to see her?” She cupped a lighter in her hands for me. “I mean, are there others on their way?”

“No,” I said, and sucked the little flame into the cigarette. A retch instantly bubbled up, but I caught it at my throat.

“Shit, sorry. That was dumb of me. I have to remind myself sometimes: ‘Hannah, don’t pry.’ I guess it’s just nice that you’re here to visit.”

I noticed an enormous mole at the top of her chest that was now beginning to peak out from her sea-foam green scrubs; it looked like a leech. “Well,” I said, feeling uncomfortable in the role of the good grandson, “I’m just here to pick up her

car.”

Hannah suddenly looked at me as if I was in need of sympathy. “Fuck. That’s sad.”

I didn’t know how to respond, so I just busied myself with the cigarette. Coupled with the heat out there, it felt as if the smoke was shriveling my lungs into two dried-up chili peppers. My eyes were burning, and Hannah blurred through the tears that were welling up from the smoke. I closed my eyes and tried to wipe the tears away when I felt a large, soft hand on my shoulder. She pulled me toward her and suddenly I was engulfed in her two fleshy arms, my face up against her breasts. I felt so embarrassed. I wanted to pull away and explain that I wasn’t crying; there was no need for a hug. But I just stood there, consumed whole. Then she let go, and I was outside again, in the dry, desert heat.

“There,” she said, every dimple in her lunar face smiling. “All better. Now I have to get back and change some bedpans.” And she walked back inside.

I stayed outside and let out a sweating fit of hacking and coughing, climaxing in some stomach-clenching dry heaves. With a string of saliva still hanging from my chin to the ground, I looked up and saw that the orderlies had stopped to watch me. I shrank back inside and tried to compose myself. I nursed the drinking fountain for a few minutes, then went back to my grandmother’s room. I think she must have been asleep; if not, she didn’t notice me. I realized that waking her and trying to explain that my mom said I could come and take her car would be too much trouble. But I didn’t need to wake her because I saw her purse lying there on the spare bed next to her. There on the bed, it looked more like an ornament of her past life, promising her that she might one day regain the use of her left side and be able to walk again, purse in hand. I checked to make sure that no one was looking, and then opened it. I rooted through the contents—*TV Guide*, cellophane bag of Cheerios, can of mace—until I found her keys in one of the side pockets.

Car keys in hand, I walked to her house a couple miles away and found her Chevy in the driveway. It was painted a ‘70s-era gold, now covered with scabs of rust and the pusing white wounds of birdshit. And, of course, it looked much smaller than I remembered. I got in and saw the interior had been smudged with about thirty years’ worth of my grandmother’s pancake-batter makeup. The steering wheel, the dash, the gearshift—they were all caked with a layer of skin-tone foundation. I knew she was always fond of a good, dense covering of make-up, and it had apparently been rubbing off on her car all these years, now dried and cracked by the sun. I started it up, the engine reluctantly grumbling to life, and I drove off. After about a block—as soon as her house had disappeared from the rearview—the car began to putter, hack, and shake, like me after a cigarette. I kept going, trying to convince myself that it just needed to warm up. But when it started to stall, I steered it into a gas station that had an adjoining garage. A mechanic eventually emerged from the back, his face covered in so much soot and grime that he could

have joined an old minstrel show. He looked at the car while I looked through an old, crinkly issue of *Cosmo* they had lying around—ads for rum and cigarettes all featuring women photographed mid-laugh, always looking somewhere just off camera. Coming back with the diagnosis, the mechanic told me that it needed this and that and about three days worth of \$30-an-hour labor. It never crossed my mind how I might pay for this; I was just anxious to leave and asked if the car could make it without the repairs. “I mean, as it is, how far could it take me?”

“Well, where ya going?” He told me that it could last a couple hundred more miles, or it could die within fifty feet. But, he told me, if I risked it, I would run the chance of being stranded out there with the buzzards.

I signed the work order.

Three days. What would I do for three days? I wasn’t about to go back to Lolly’s deathbed. I was only sixteen, so I couldn’t get a motel room. And I needed money. I thought about giving up, hopping a westbound bus home, but first I found a payphone and decided to call. My mom answered and I said, “Hey, it’s me.”

“Charlie?” She almost leaped through the phone, mistaking me for my father. Ever since my voice had dropped, she said I sounded like him. “Oh, Jesus Christ. Charlie. Baby.” Her voice sounded scratchy, damp with Southern Comfort. “Where are you?”

I hung up. That hurt, not being recognized, and that conversation—prying my mom away from the idea that her husband was returning, and telling her that it was just me, Lester, and that I needed help—was not one that I wanted to have just then. I heard the payphone drop my thirty-five cents down into its belly. It was dark already, and I saw a 24-hour diner across the street, illuminated by the radioactive glow of fluorescent lights, and I went in, thinking I could just go unnoticed and make it my own personal 72-hour diner. I got comfortable in a booth towards the back, and ordered a bowl of cereal. I took out my journal from my backpack and began to review the progress of my friend. A newspaper was spread out across an empty table near mine, so I got up and grabbed it. It was today’s front section and, sure enough, there was more news on Hurricane Lester. He had made it all the way up to Daytona, and now southern Georgia was starting to board up its windows. He had killed 347 people “at a rate faster than most wars,” said one hyperbolic reporter. I tore out the article—headlined LESTER CREEPS UP COAST, ADDS TO DEATH TOLL—and stuck it in my journal. Fucking bad-ass.

After a while, I began to feel tired and tried to get comfortable. I was just starting to doze off, when I felt the bright restaurant lights go dim—a presence standing over me—and I opened my eyes. It was Hannah, standing there like an eclipse.

“Hey, you,” she said.

“Oh, uh, hi,” I mumbled, rubbing my eyes. “What are you doing here?”

“Well, I *was* getting dinner, but now I’m rescuing homeless boys,” she said, and

her eyebrows tilted like a seesaw. “The waitress said you’ve been here for two hours. She told me to tell you that you can’t sleep here. The manager starts his shift at twelve, and if he sees you, he’ll kick you out.”

“I had a motel room,” I said, looking down at the cereal bowl and the few soggy Cheerios floating like inner tubes in the milk. “But they were overbooked because of some convention.”

She smiled to mock my obvious lie. Her shirt couldn’t quite cover her entire stomach, and a pale crescent was slightly exposed, revealing the furrowed paths of stretch marks down her belly. “I can get you a bed on my ward,” she said. “Would that sound okay?”

I reluctantly nodded yes. I was thankful, but my stomach quivered in protest.

Hannah drove me back there and told me to be quiet because most of the patients were sleeping. She took a blanket and a stack of sheets from a closet and walked me down the hall. When I recognized where she was taking me, I stopped dead in my tracks. She didn’t notice that I was no longer walking right behind her, and she kept going, down to Lolly’s room. I just stood there in the middle of the hall, my hands holding onto the straps of my backpack as if I was about to jump out of an airplane, dreading, just dreading. “I don’t want—” My voice was small and went unnoticed. Hannah opened Lolly’s door and then, finally noticing that I had stopped a good twenty feet behind her, looked back and said, “Come on.” Then she walked into Lolly’s room. I dragged my feet over and stood outside the door. Hannah came out and looked at me. “What?”

“Do I have to sleep in her room?” I mumbled.

Her expression dropped, and she said, “Oh. Listen. It’s the only free bed we have. You need to sleep somewhere.”

I nodded.

“She’s asleep,” Hannah said, her face heavy with pity. “I put the sheets on the bed. I’ll be around in the morning. Okay?”

“Yeah.”

Then she turned and walked back down the hallway, the rubber soles of her orthopedic shoes squeaking little mouse farts against the linoleum. I hesitantly stepped into Lolly’s room and closed the door behind me. She lay there as before, shriveled and crooked, and I suddenly felt as if I had bricked and mortared myself inside my own cask of Amontillado. I took off my shoes and got under the covers, otherwise fully clothed. The idea of taking off even my shirt seemed strange and perverted in the presence of Lolly, asleep though she may have been. I tucked myself into a fetal position, facing away from her, and thought about sleep. There was a digital clock near the foot of the bed, and I kept a close eye on it, staring at the pulsing red colon that separated hours from minutes.

The mattress springs found every evil pressure point in my body, and in no time I was shifting and twisting to the rhythm of my spasmodic back. This went on all

night. I know I must have gotten to sleep at some point, but it must have snuck its way into an occasional blink because I almost never looked away from the digital clock, and it seemed to speed ahead every now and then. When I saw dawn beginning to dilute the night sky, I was relieved that this night was almost over. Tomorrow, I thought, I'd have to find somewhere else to sleep.

It was 5:32 a.m., the clock told me, and as I shifted positions one more time I noticed that I had a rather pressing matter asserting itself. I tried to trick myself back into sleep, but lying on my stomach, my crotch was now stiff-arming the mattress, and I could no longer ignore it. It appeared that my body, at sixteen, was already used to a certain schedule, and it needed my attention. So, with my back to her, I listened to Lolly's breathing to make sure that she was still asleep, and then I did what I could as quietly as I could. I concentrated, but the usual fantasies seemed all the more distant and inaccessible that night. My penis was no longer willing to suspend its disbelief. Frustrated, I buried my face in the pillow and instantly felt a spark of something. I remembered Hannah's arms pulling me into her breasts, and I was held tight by her enormous body. I remembered how the smell of smoke had been dampened by perspiration. I imagined trying to wrap my arms around her equatorial waist, but she kept growing, and began to encompass me. I was working my erection against the mattress; I was burying my face deeper into the pillow; I was the mole on Hannah's chest, leech-like but ultimately, hopelessly, benign.

I finished, and there followed the only moment of real, unburdened rest that I had gotten all night. For a second or an hour, my thoughts went into an ellipsis.

Until a mattress spring shot a spasm of pain through my right side, causing me to turn over, and there she was: Lolly Lalane, facing me in her bed, that one cycloptic eye open wide, all pupil, below an eyebrow that was angled like an accent mark. Frozen there in her sights, I was reminded of the time I had to dissect a cow's eye in junior high—that huge tennis-ball-sized orb staring back at me from the tray of ice: it appeared expressionless, dead even, but I couldn't help seeing an imploring look there, a *please!*

"Lesssher?" she said, alive and awake.

I panicked, adrenaline dissolving into my chest like a shot of whiskey, and I jumped out of bed, my erection now pacified and limp. I looked down at it and saw the stain forming on my pants in the sad shape of South America. I looked back up at Lolly, staring at me with all her might, and I ran stumbling toward the door.

In my socks, I slid out onto the linoleum floor of the hallway as if it were an ice rink. A few people were starting their morning duties and looked up at me suspiciously. I started walking down the hall, trying to look as if I knew where I was going, when I saw a janitor's closet with its door ajar: a place to regroup, hide. I slipped in and sat down on an upturned bucket. This place was stocked like a bomb shelter with rolls upon rolls of toilet paper and jugs of hand soap. A mop was

propped upside-down in the corner, its dirty white dreadlocks forlornly hanging down, and the place reeked of bleach. I was breathing heavily, my heart beating wildly in my chest like an off-balance washing machine, so I just sat there for a moment trying to lull my pulse back down. On the shelf in front of me, I saw a dozen spray bottles of disinfectant, all aiming their nozzles at me. I thought about the thirty years' worth of makeup that was smeared all over the interior of her car—of my car—and I grabbed one of the spray bottles, running a forefinger over its exaggerated trigger. Just then, the door swung open and I gave a surprised jolt. I looked up and saw Sidney Hughes standing there in the doorway. A volt of fear ran through me, and without thinking about it, I was pointing the spray bottle at him as if I could ward him off with a defensive spritz of multi-surface cleaner. With one swoop, he reached down and grabbed me by the arm, pulling me up and into the hallway as if I was nothing at all. He pinned me up against the wall. His teeth were clenched, his jowls seething.

“Just what the—what were you doing in there?” With a jerk of his head, he noticed my stained crotch—which was apparently in need of attention again. “Oh, Jesus H! What have you been *doing*? What *have* you been *doing*?” My chest started convulsing as I tried to breathe. He craned his neck to look inside the janitor's closet, then back over his shoulder toward Lolly's room. “You sick little shit.” And he poked my chest, forcing out the gust of air that had been stuck inside.

I felt the sting of tears in my sinuses. I dropped my head and tightened my face, but the tears came, against all my efforts. My eyes and nose were soon running freely, and I began bleating noisily. I looked up, and everyone was staring at me: Sidney, a couple orderlies, Hannah. I felt like a well-salted slug—I wanted to turn myself inside out and wither away. So I ran away, down the hall, toward the exit, my heart sounding in my ears, my socked feet slipping beneath me, causing me near collisions with people, walls, the floor. I finally collided with the sliding glass doors and squeezed my way through them. Outside, the gravel gave me more traction, and the hot air against my tears actually seemed to cool my face as I ran.

I arrived at the garage, panting, sweating and coughing, my feet feeling like giant calluses, snot dried onto my cheeks like flame decals on a hot rod. I could only breathe in big, desperate gasps, as if drowning. There was no one around, so I jumped the counter and found Lolly's car keys hanging on a rack with others. The car was just outside. I got in, noticing that I still had a death-grip on the spray bottle. I let it go onto the passenger seat, and started up the car. It sounded as if a rock was bouncing around in the engine, and I had to keep my foot on the gas or else it would start to die. So I just kept moving, racing through town, back to the highway. In a snap decision, I drove onto the eastbound onramp, heading away from LA, away from home, the car convulsing and screaming, a plume of thick, black smoke trailing out behind me. I would drive away from everything. I would drive off mountaintops. I would drive off the face of the earth. I would drive across the

country, not braking at the Atlantic, propelling myself across that ocean like a skipping stone. I would drive this thing into the ground. I would.

BITUMINOUS 2

Norman Funicello

The gunslinger's leathery fist
always anticipating the moment
No one's read the book.

AS THOUGH FINNY FOLK WOULD FLIP

Mary Gilliland

As yet unknowing that fish
talk, ragamuffins living on the castoffs of the rich
believed the sound

was Russian sonar
or the CIA broadcast of operatives who spiked the Bay
Area's office Koolaid

rather than a feature
of the tête-a-têtes of simple fish whose school
colors matched the weathered

gray of houseboat hulls.
Echolalia—in those days—and echelons
were common.

In rank water
beneath the houseboats of Sausalito in the mid 70's
plainfin midshipmen hummed.

Echolocation
was some imagined edge of language
for the experts

when anyone wo'th his salt
could hyphenate. In '75 you could nearly find Tallulah Bank-
head still alive

but no animal sound
was believed to signify—not dolphins, not elephants,
not—gadzooks and heck—

emissions of plainfin
midshipmen. It took a Cornell neurobiologist
who dined in gloves

in the lab building's
cafeteria sometime in the late 90's to determine
the source of the sound.

By her time
the houseboaters had stopped accusing anyone of spying
on their lives

for they had bottomed out.
They were renting basement studios. Ordinances
word processed skillfully

by cronies of the rich
had made the docks accessible only to other cronies.
At that time

and sometimes
even today, all midshipmen are thought
to be people.

TRAVELING

In the twilight
 I wrap parcels for the suitcase:
 each new flower named, each love,
 old pants, hiking boots,
 picture of my cat...

I bend my neck, reflect the past
 when I was cast
 in plaster, broken
 for bronze

*

Many men come wrapped in paper
 tied with string.
 When did I order them?
 Whiskey...I forget.

Well, have a cup of coffee, it's karma.
 Karma?

Shrug
 shoulders less
 lightly now the shoulders
 bring them here the breasts the
 curving belly brings the
 laughing eyes the whiskey
 laughing in me to them
 brings a smile
 response try to touch all
 these ways of
 loving do they want to talk
 or cry with me do they
 see a person here or
 helper do they care to work they
 care to be sick they

sing and grab my
forearm they think about me thinking of...

*

I rise from the circle
of a quiet lamp

see my skeleton
on a tree
points of light

SUMMER THEN AND NOW

William Seidel

Summer

late late afternoon: before evening:

its playful sun winks through the pines, as you run by
and spills a diagonal slash onto the ordinary eggshell of a wall
like pouring honey.

Voices downstairs speak an incomprehensible dialect of promise.

Bubbling up like a bugle call to the ever onrushing now.

Watch it, coming like a freight train

and melting away like a tearful goodbye;

too-long put off to take dry-eyed.

BREAKING AND ENTERING

Ariel Brewster

On October 28th, a lunar eclipse obscures the copper blood moon, the Red Sox finally win the World Series, and the college girl who lives across the street from me is raped in her own bedroom. All of her roommates were home. Anonymous assailant. I crunch through the leaves on the sidewalk and look at her house, encircled with yellow tape. *Police Line—Do Not Cross*. Three cruisers are parked in the driveway.

I am okay that day, and the day after, and the day after that. But late on Halloween night I am awake and listening to a group of teenage boys smashing our jack-o-lanterns. Through my curtains I hear them on the front porch, and imagine them breaking down the door, like a rapist. I hear them milling around, shuffling their sneakers, snickering, egging each other on. Then the satisfying, soft crack of pumpkin splattered on the front walk, tangled fibers pulling apart.

This is the sound of defeat. Kerry concedes three days later, and I feel like someone has punched me in the stomach. For the first time this fall, the ache of cold weather pulses in my knee joints. November is a cruel month.

Mike calls after work on the day after the election and asks me to go get a drink with him. He's from Staten Island, has a 9/11 tattoo, calls himself guido. He will be celebrating, but we haven't seen each other in months, and I say yes anyway.

Alcohol is a bad idea and I cry. Twice, sitting on a barstool in the blue glow of a neon beer sign. Once, burying my face in Mike's broad, football-player chest. Mike says he voted for Bush because when it comes to foreign policy, Might Makes Right. As I let Mike wrap his arms around me, I wonder if that's what the rapist was thinking.

I don't know what to say when Mike asks me why I'm crying. No one is safe anymore, I say. The politicians have met and eclipsed each other like planets, and I am thinking apocalyptically.

The next morning I step over the jagged pumpkin pieces scattered like broken eggshells on the walkway. There is a U-Haul in the driveway of the victim's house. They are getting out of here. I think of the Canadian geese that migrate South in

autumn and of all the disillusioned Democrats who now are vowing to move to Canada.

I have plans to meet my father downtown for lunch. He likes the diner across the river from his office, by the old train station. Each booth has a greasy jukebox and there are ketchup bottles already on the tables, which, my father says, is how you can tell it's a joint. The diner is a converted train car, the remains of the railroad that deserted this tired town.

I sit down and my father puts his newspaper aside, then asks me how my car is. Fine, I say. He tells me how glad he is that his new car is a stick shift. More fun to drive, he says. He pauses, looks down at the table. He tells me that his boss has asked him to clear out his desk by the end of the week.

I contemplate this announcement. I am wondering if he's been fired because his lunch breaks are too long. First it's a bowl of chili, then a turkey melt, then a slice of blueberry pie with vanilla ice cream, and a cup of coffee with *The New York Times*. He's a big tipper, so the waitresses like him. He follows their love lives, knows who's behind on rent, or who threw out her boyfriend.

After lunch my father hangs out at Sharkey's Garage across the street, where he tends to the cars that get my mother and me where we need to go. The old Ford with the ailing transmission—which will cost more than the worth of the car to fix—needs checking on. The tires on my mother's station wagon need rotating. My father stands by and talks to Bert Sharkey's legs sticking out from under the chassis, or to Bert Sharkey's backside leaning over the engine, while Bert Sharkey changes the fan belts, replaces the brake pads, and swaps the radials for snow tires at each turn of the season. Sharkey's reminds my father of when he was a kid, tinkering under the hood of the wide and yellow family Buick with his father.

I don't know what to say to a father who's losing his job. How are the cars? I ask as we finish lunch, because this is how we talk about ourselves.

It's the strangest thing, he says. Yesterday I went to see Bert, check on the cars, like I always do.

Like you always do, I say.

Well, the garage doors are locked. No sign of Bert. None of his mechanics are around either.

Huh, I say.

I try to look in the window of the office, 'cause you know Bert is usually chain-smoking behind the cash register, but it's dark, and the glass is all grimed up with carbon monoxide. All I can make out are some car parts littering the floor. Then I see there's a note, hand-written, taped to the front door. Closed for Business. So I come back over here and ask Trish what's going on at Sharkey's, 'cause I figure I haven't seen Bert in a week or so.

Didn't you hear, Trish says to me. I hadn't heard. Hear what? I say. It was some sort of farming accident, she says. His tractor rolled. Happened a few days ago, she says.

He sighs, and runs his hand through the front of his hair.

That's awful, I say, and imagine Bert on his John Deere, bumping across a shorn cornfield that's brown and dead after the harvest, as a cigarette dangles out from underneath his moustache.

I didn't even know, my father says, shaking his head. Wake, funeral, burial—they're all over already, he says, and his voice is soft.

I nod. Trish, the bank teller, the girl at the convenience store—these are the faces he sees every day. He's a very loyal customer.

It's as if...as if somebody stole my right to pay my proper respects, he says.

He unfolds and refolds his newspaper. My father had a column in the local paper once—he would have written Bert a nice eulogy.

He's been our mechanic for years, he says. It's hard to think of getting somebody else.

Yeah, I say.

After lunch my father has to go back to the office, but he will mourn Bert as he packs his annual reports into file boxes. In the dirt parking lot of the diner, he lifts the hood of my car and checks the dipstick.

Come by the house if you need oil, he says. You'll be getting low soon.

Okay, I say. I will.

He looks up at the heavy, gray sky. It could snow soon, he says. You should listen to your old man and get those snow tires put on.

I know, I say as I get in the car. I promise I'll do it before Thanksgiving.

My father is right, and it starts to snow as I drive home. The snowflakes melt easily under the wipers, but they pelt the windshield like ticks boring into skin, and each flake stings with injustice.

* * * *

On the last night of the year—precisely two months after Halloween—an intruder who is bolder than the pumpkin-smashers, but not as bold as the rapist, visits my house. I'm not at home during the break-in, but he slips the basement door off its hinges, bashes the locks to the bedrooms, and rifles through my dresser drawers. Laptop, stereo, television, jewelry—all untouched.

The police officer is unconcerned, nonchalant. He surveys the damage casually and gives me a case number. He tells me that breaking and entering is a crime—a misdemeanor, actually—but this is the type of violation that's not really worth investigating. Besides, he says, nothing has been stolen.

He is wrong.

After the police officer leaves, I am alone in the broken house. I listen to the sound of my own cautious footsteps as I cross the room to the phone.

I call Mike, and ask him to stay over.

THE SMOKING GUN

Edmund Palermo

too much booze and fishing, boy, it drives a man insane
the sweet summer sky just aint enough to drive away his pain

didn't have my brand, man, i said i'll be back in a week
your hippy hairy barefoot baby singin' Janis by the creek

Ezra sitting on the sun setting- Pound you, i exaggerate
what we have here is a failure- a failure to communicate

blow out neon sale on ivy side walk chalk sign
that cellophane fix lipstick bitch is lookin *so* fine

printer screaming *publish me* for happy cigarette applause
A implying B implies a necessary cause

your woolen mitten snow drift pattern painted white
dont you know? you know it keeps me up at night

band-aid wrapping up your intel pentium glass of wine
high heels and lives of polystyrene pearls and swine

paid in happiness my sweetly Death-endowed arch-angel
hears about her snowing, Bob, and Jesus in the stable

slope talker cellphone walker Mom, you know i love you
plane flying keep on trying but i promise not to shove you

radioactive hat trick for a limited time only
toll free 1-800 number call me if ur lonely

clockwork blazing subterranean home-sick spiral ladder
Babel Tower tires squealing out 'we almost had her'

white stone tri borough grand central cross island parkway
all roads lead to Rome and Forum film school hearsay

testing other ways to sail this life than pale jump started
Catherine's smiling sweetly after smoking gun departed.

DESERT AGRICULTURE

Russell Brandom

Brodsky came to consciousness gradually, as if exploring it. He moved from a dream about his wife (not a sexual one, but driving through the woods) to closed eyes and train noises. Something caught in his throat and he started coughing. Out of reflex, his eyes opened and he brought his head up. He had slept against the window, and there was a red spot on his cheek that had turned dense and wet. There was another fit of coughing, and he recognized it as cigarette smoke. It's Europe, he remembered; they smoke here. He looked around and found the culprit: a man in a gray suit two rows back. A wave of coughs hit him, and he almost doubled up. He was ashamed that his lungs were so weak, that he was so badly equipped to handle inconvenience.

He would be reminded of it in odd places; in the shower; he would realize he was out of shampoo. After standing helplessly for a moment, he would call, "Jane!" She would be eating breakfast downstairs, but she wouldn't hear, or she would think it wasn't important enough to climb the stairs for. Brodsky, surveying his options, would decide to use Jane's immasculine shampoo and smell like lilac for the rest of the day.

Jane was in Granada—where the train was headed. He imagined her meeting him at the station, without the kids probably, but then she might not be there at all. They hadn't discussed it, although he had left her with the train number and time. No, he decided. Her Spanish was tolerable, but she was too ashamed to use it, and the train station had noisy crowds and fat men with opened collars. It would be too much for her. The kids would want to stay in the hotel where there was air-conditioning and television, and Jane would stay with the kids.

And there would be questions. Probably late, after the kids had gone to sleep, but why wait? They might slip off to a restaurant where Jane could wear a dress that didn't cover her knees, and she would ask, "What was Madrid like?" in such a way that the subtext was unavoidable. She would say it with a forced smile and awkward enthusiasm, to disguise what she was getting at. Her father had been a traveling salesman, and he had taught her the habits of distrust. Brodsky knew enough not to take it seriously—it was a gesture of insecurity—but it grated.

He considered lying to her: "Her name is Ofelia, and I used her for sex. She showed me around the Prado, and we succumbed to animal passion on the floor of her apartment. And then again an hour later in an empty bathtub." Brodsky was surprised at himself, a grown man fantasizing in public. "She cried out 'Manolo,' but I pretended not to notice. Once we were done in the bathtub, she put on a long

pale-blue dress and I crawled up under it and ripped off her panties with my teeth. She tastes like a nine-volt battery.” All right, that’s enough. His face was flushed, embarrassed, and his body had tensed into alertness. He took a breath and tried to reassemble himself.

“Madrid was fine. There wasn’t that much work, so I got to do some tourist things....” He would pause here, as if he didn’t know what to say. “It was lonely without you.” He had planned it to the point that he didn’t consider whether it was true.

She would smile, broad and eager. “Poor you.” She would probably giggle, some sleight-of-hand as a segue from something that made her uncomfortable. (Brodsky had seen her do the same thing to escape a conversation about her sister.) “We should take a look at the appetizers.”

Flying into Spain, he had been half-asleep and not a little drunk. He didn’t have to work until the next day, and that was only a factory tour, various notes to be made on clipboards: formalities, really. The whole trip was a gesture. He had three gin-and-tonics on the plane; before moving to straight gin, at which point he lost count. (If you were belligerent they cut you off—he had read a newspaper article about it once—but Brodsky was a sullen drunk, so he just stared at the back of the seat in front of him.) He didn’t feel visibly drunk when he landed, but it was so difficult to tell what was visible.

There was someone at the gate to meet him: a woman with short hair, wearing a suit. “Mr. Brodsky? I’m Rosa Gimenez.” She had good English, even with the lingering accent. Brodsky introduced himself (too loudly?) and they got the bags.

In the car, he could examine her without being obvious. She had a small head and loose skin on her neck. Probably all her skin was loose. She had reached the age—early 40s, maybe older—at which she could no longer keep herself from loosening. She was watching the road, so Brodsky ventured further. Small breasts, but tangle under the blouse.

“How was the flight?” she offered.

“It was... It was fine.” Was he slurring?

“If you want to see anything in Madrid, I’m supposed to show you around.”

“I don’t know if I’ll have time.”

Her shoulders had shifted forward, and she was moving under the steering wheel. (He could see, under the skirt, formless middle-aged legs shifting without stockings.) It took him a moment to realize she was working the clutch. She turned towards him and he moved his eyes back to the dashboard.

“Are you all right?”

“I’m fine. It was just a long flight.” After a pause, he added, “A bit of the flu.”

“I’m sorry. So many people get sick on the plane.”

He tried to focus on his hands. They moved too much when he was drunk,

sometimes shaking involuntarily. He tried to keep them still, but he couldn't. He sat on them. There was a smell too: he should have avoided gin for something less pungent. If she noticed, she didn't let on, but then she was probably smart enough not to.

He could see flags coming out of a building at the end of the block. "Do you think you'll be all right?" offered Rosa.

He paused to remember. Yes, the flu. "Oh, I should be fine. It'll be gone in the morning."

She stopped the car under the flags, and turned to him fully. "Well, I hope you like it here." She was suddenly smiling at him, and he didn't know how to respond. He ended up nodding politely.

"I'm sure I will."

After Rosa dropped him off, the bellboy took the luggage up and Brodsky escaped into the bathroom, leaving the tip on the table while the bellboy unloaded so they wouldn't have to speak. Brodsky undressed while the water got hot—leaving his suit rumpled near the sink.

It had been stupid to say he had the flu. He hated lying to people, especially when he was there for business. And he did it so often. It was horrible. He shouldn't have said anything at all. He tested the water with his calf and stepped into the shower. He didn't have the symptoms, and she might notice. He considered faking them, coughing or pretending to be weak, but he knew he couldn't. With any luck, she wouldn't even remember.

After twenty minutes, he came out of the shower naked, shedding heat. He lay on the bed, staring at the ceiling fan, and tried to relax. (He was sprouting up embarrassingly. A maid could have walked in unawares and caught him as he was.) He was still wet, but he preferred the air to damp cloth. He didn't even have to sweat, because water was already coming off of him. He exhaled and drifted off.

The telephone woke him up. He rolled over and pawed at the phone, eventually getting it to his mouth. The combination of stiffness, fatigue, and alcohol had ruined his motor control. "Hello?"

"Hello? Greg?" It was Jane. She always sounded bewildered through the phone.

"Yeah, it's me. I'm here."

"I just wanted to call, and make sure you made it there ok."

"Yeah, I'm fine. It's good to hear your voice." It was something he usually said to her over the phone.

"How was the flight?"

"It was fine."

"The kids miss you." There was a pause, and some speech in the background. Chris wants to know what you got him."

"I don't know. I haven't gotten anything yet. Probably an art book or

something. And a T-shirt for Liz.”

There was another pause as Jane relayed it. “He says it’s a surprise. No... Ok, but later.” She turned back to the phone. “I... I really hope everything’s going well.” She still sounded confused, but also afraid. Brodsky was too familiar to be stunned by the shift. He tried to sound reassuring.

“Pretty much.”

“Ok, I guess we’ll see you in Granada in a few days. I love you.”

“Love you too. Bye.”

She hung up, and he managed to drop the phone back onto its cradle. It was exhausting to talk to her, and the end always felt like an escape. He smiled when he realized how short the call had been. It wasn’t even a minute, possibly all they had to say to each other. He rolled onto his back again, still exposed to the air.

The phone woke him up again, hours later. Rosa was calling to remind him about the dinner. They had a brief conversation, while Brodsky lay naked on the bed. The thought amused him: she had talked, and genuinely listened to what he said. “Yes. I should be ready in twenty minutes.” He often absent-mindedly pictured people on the other end of the phone, not sexually, but as a mental aid. He imagined other people did the same thing. She was listening to him, picturing his bizarrely shaped head and bent nose, accompanied by the gray suit that was crumpled up in the bathroom, with no idea he was naked. There was something illicit about it.

It came to him—later, while he was getting dressed—that this was an opportunity. After dinner, she would drive him back, and he could find some light and deft way to ask her up to the room. Perhaps coffee; there was a coffee machine in his room, and it occurred to him that it existed for just this reason. How would she respond to that? A smile maybe, a slight movement of the eyes.

He wore the gray suit again—he had only brought two—and was waiting outside when she came to get him. She was also wearing the same suit, pale blue with a long skirt. (It was difficult to remember that it was the same day.) “How did you sleep?” she offered.

“Pretty well.” He hadn’t thought it was that obvious. “What did you do in the last three hours?”

She laughed. “Sleeping would have been better.”

And there it was. Certainly short of innuendo, but nothing to be made light of. It was a gesture, a moment they could both inhabit. She knew he had been sleeping, and he knew, and they knew together. After that, Brodsky felt they should be done speaking. He stared out the window for the rest of the ride, a shared silence.

Was it really that farfetched? She would laugh when he offered the coffee, but then agree. She had to park the car, she would explain, but she’d be up in a few minutes. There would be frantic preparation, but why? It was already a hotel room,

and anonymous enough. He would have wine sent up, and they would drink looking out over his balcony. (Only a few glasses, though. The rest of the bottle would sit on his sterile hotel table for the rest of the day. He would notice it as she was leaving: a convenient metaphor, tasted but not finished. He couldn't drink the rest of it alone, so he would pour it down the sink or leave it as a tip for the maid.)

When they got there, the maitre d' led them to the table: a small one in a corner, surrounded by kids in cloth jackets and old women. Rosa made the introductions: Mr. Martinez, Mr. Bernal. One had brown hair and a mustache, and the other was almost completely bald. He wasn't sure which was which, but he nodded and shook hands.

The bald one—probably Martinez—spoke first. “We're always pleased when outside people look at the factory.” Bernal—the mustache was Bernal, he was sure now—nodded humorlessly in agreement.

The conversation was what Brodsky had expected, the rehearsed enthusiasm and mild self-promotion. (Martinez told a story about Brodsky's predecessor. “We were very close. I always told him, ‘If you ever want anything in Spain, I will get it for you.’”) The menu was in Spanish, but Brodsky pretended to know what it said. When the waitress came, he pointed to something that said “del mar” and hoped it was fish.

“Where are you from, Mr. Brodsky?” offered Martinez. “If you don't mind me asking.”

He hadn't expected the question, and found himself briefly at a loss. He recovered, coughing. (There was smoke now, a pair of kids at the bar.) “I live in Chicago, but New Jersey originally.” Rosa had leaned back in her chair, running her hands along the edge of the table. The unbuttoned part of her blouse was suddenly looser, revealing the skin below her throat.

“Not the desert, then?”

“No, not the desert.”

This seemed to please him. “I always wonder what it is like for someone to come here and see the landscape. It's more like desert than anything else. But then, the olive trees, the oranges, all grown with very little water. You should make an effort to see some of it while you're here.”

(The train had passed several olive groves, identical trees in rows and columns so that, as the train passed, Brodsky got a moment of alignment when he could see for hundreds of feet down the corridor. Because of the spacing of the trees, the moments came almost every second, and the effect was like a rotoscope, a constant flashing. And, of course, Martinez was right: there were thousands of them, all drawing for what had already been sucked out.)

The food came, and from across the room Brodsky's plate was all orange and brown. He recognized it as prawns. They were vaguely horrible, the heads and shelled crustacean tentacles. (Brodsky could never find the eyes on shellfish, but he

got the feeling that prawns had them. He worried he might absent-mindedly burst open an aquatic eyeball with his tooth.) But they were only shrimp. Rosa was staring at the tablecloth now, holding her palm to her forehead.

The rule, he had found, was to dive in. Better to be too eager than too wary. He dug his fork into the shell (was that the head?) and brought it up to his mouth. Martinez stopped him.

“With your hands, or you’ll be here all night.” It seemed conspiratorial, maybe to keep from embarrassing him. “And your napkin won’t last, so save it for the end. Use the finger bowl.”

Brodsky nodded thanks and put down his fork. He ripped the shell off the first one and started to eat it. They were covered in some sort of prawn goo, but he could only fit the tips of his fingers in the bowl. His palms and the space between his knuckles stayed goeey. He glanced to his right, but Martinez was looking at his own food. Rosa was still staring down into her plate.

He grabbed at his wine glass, but it slipped out of his hand—a few inches forward on the table, but still upright. He had left a greasy thumbprint on it. Bernal covered his face with a napkin. He was suppressing laughter, but muffled giggles came through. Martinez was stern, looking away from Bernal, but his mouth was tight, pulled as far as he could pull it. Was it a smile? Rosa was looking down, probably to avoid the joke. Brodsky rushed through his last prawn, and finally cleaned himself off with the napkin.

As they were leaving, Martinez got into a long conversation with the maitre d’. It was all soft Spanish sounds, Bernal joining in on offbeats. Rosa gestured to Brodsky. “It’s very warm in here. It’s much better to be outside.” She smiled at him, and then edged silently around Martinez towards the front. Brodsky followed.

“I’m sorry about the prawns. I should have translated the menu for you.” She said it with genuine guilt, or he thought she did—it was difficult to tell through the accent. He smiled, but it made him uncomfortable.

“I don’t know what you mean. I like prawns.”

She glanced through the window into the restaurant. Martinez and Bernal had gotten away from the maitre d’. Brodsky took a step forward to make room for them, and felt the wind gust as they opened the door. It blew the smell of Rosa’s hair to him—something flowery, but familiar enough to know it came from a bottle—and he felt closer to her than he was.

It had been at a party with Jane’s office friends. She was wearing her thin brown dress—he remembered because he had liked it. Brodsky hadn’t wanted to go, but Jane needed make the rounds to show them how intelligent, well dressed, and noticeable he was.

“Really? Poland?”

“Oh yes. Greg’s been everywhere.” She answered for him, probably so he

wouldn't embarrass her.

"That's great."

(They would whisper after, "Not much hair. Also, did you notice the way he just stared off? He didn't seem too quick, but I suppose she couldn't do much better." Brodsky enjoyed imagining it. There was a thrill in having his inadequacies reflect onto her.)

In any reasonable state of consciousness it was intolerable, so he hit the bar early, and by the time he was meeting her boss he had lulled himself into an apathetic haze. He was clutching his gin and tonic and staring at the wallpaper when Jane pulled him over.

"Greg knows all about Goya. Greg? Walter was just talking about Goya."

Walter spoke up. "Yes. I'm always on the lookout for other admirers of the grotesque. There's just such a vital quality to everything he does."

Brodsky stood listening, and responded a sentence too late. "Well, we grotesque have to stick together." Walter paused and then kept talking, finding it easier to pretend he didn't get it. Jane, in the background, was horrified. When the conversation ended she pulled him into an empty room.

She was all force now, eyebrows drawn together. "That man could have me fired."

"He's not going to fire you. It was a joke. He didn't even notice."

She was staying close to him, trying to be aggressive, but he was too simple for that. There was something in the aggression of her face that he liked, especially with the dress. "That's not the point. This is someone I have to work with, someone I have to work *for*, and now I'm going to have to go back out there and apologize for my husband."

He leaned into her suddenly, and slid his hand onto the back of her thigh. He had meant to say something clever, like, "You could just stay here," but it didn't come together in time, so he pressed blindly forward. She twisted back and pushed him to the side, reacting.

"Stop. Just stop." She had drawn back already. Brodsky leaned against the wall and rubbed his head. She was waiting for him to say something, but he decided it was best to stay quiet. "What are you thinking?" Her mouth was open, and her jaw pushed forward out of disgust. She had turned on him—he was suddenly, acutely aware of it—although he no longer knew exactly what it meant.

He waited for what seemed like a long time, and then offered, quietly, "Maybe I've had too much to drink." He was looking off to the corner now.

"Just..." She was trying very hard not to say anything. The aggression of her face was still there, but deferred now, and useless.

She left the room abruptly; and he thought he would cry. He pinched his eyes shut and put his hand over his face for a minute to keep himself together. After a few breaths, he raised his head and walked out to wait in the car.

For some reason, it was what he remembered now. He had been bored, and thinking of Jane, and that was what came to him. It was familiar, the drunkenness and bare need, but it surprised him. He had almost humiliated himself with Rosa; during the factory tour he had to catch himself to keep from calling her by her first name. It was Ms. Gimenez, not Rosa. Nobody noticed, but he felt as if he had been caught in a lie. It had been the same feeling: a moment of openness, advance, withdrawal.

Shifting in his seat, he felt something. It was a displaced feeling for a moment, a floating sensation of fabric, before he recognized it as an erection. It was tenting his pants and possibly horrifying the gray old woman sitting across the aisle from him. He got a newspaper from his bag and unfolded it over his lap. He coughed again, and looked around the car. He didn't think anyone had noticed.

He occasionally bothered to trace back the causes, but it was obvious: Jane, cloth, skin. Two rows behind him, the cigarette had been put out and the old woman across the aisle was still buried in her book. He stared out at the landscape: an olive grove again, with its lines-of-sight. The land had lost its muted yellow, and faded into a bluish green as the sun set.

As the landscape got darker, Brodsky could see his ghostly reflection in the window. He had been honest when he called himself grotesque. He no longer felt any adolescent self-consciousness about his face. He knew it too well to have illusions about it. It was shaped like a pear—wider at the jaw than at the forehead—and his cheekbones had disappeared sometime in his thirties. Now, it was a face people got used to. Certainly, he had gotten used to it.

He glanced down at his lap. It would be weeks before he would be alone again. He would share a room with Jane, and not be able to get away. He would wake up to her, and spend the day showing the kids the various sights. He could slink off to the bathroom, but he would be noticed, especially if he took a long time. There was the shower, but Jane often had him leave the door open, and tried to carry on a conversation through it. No, it would be impossible in Granada. There was the train bathroom, though. He glanced behind him and saw it: a metal door, almost perpetually unoccupied. It was a possibility, leaning over the toilet, one hand supporting his weight against the wall. Her against a countertop, eyes pulled shut as if he were bringing her to life.

He was suddenly very conscious of the old woman across the aisle, and the smoker two rows back. He flattened the newspaper and crossed his arms over it in an attempt at nonchalance. In fact, there was nothing left to stop him. He mulled on that fact for a moment. The old woman glanced over and he moved his eyes back to the seat in front of him, suddenly viscerally afraid. He desperately needed a drink, but there was nowhere to get one. The café car, maybe, but he would have to stand up for that, displaying himself. He gripped the armrest, and tried not to look at anything. There was the window, but his reflection would be too much. He closed

his eyes, and tried to stop thinking.

It was all his own reflection, in the glass and the old woman and the back of the seat in front of him, and all equally unbearable. He leaned against the window and waited for sleep.

THE PILOT'S DREAM

Sara Zglobicki

He hoped
one day
to be a skewed shot,
bursting from the Canadian goose formation—
the summerbound arrowhead
that strips the crisp autumn sky—
suddenly sweeping
cloudward.
Whisked up with the cumulus,
passing through the crankety egg beater
of a mini tempest,
he'd love the exhilaration
of pinballing between
updrafts
and suspended freefall,
slowly piecing him
 apart,
until finally
he supernovas,
now seeds for the next gumball
hailstorm over Hawaii.

FEATURED POET

Mary Gilliland

Constitutionally incapable of attending an MFA program, Mary Gilliland wrote “Traveling” as she was packing up her life in California, where she had apprenticed to Gary Snyder. Prior to that she experienced life at Cornell, where it has been said that she co-founded Rainy Day (along with her future husband, also a poet; Gary performed their wedding in his capacity of Zen Buddhist priest.). Years later, in another life at Cornell, the “Finny” poem percolated: a neurobiology researcher who has since become a social worker enlightened Mary about the makers of a blissful sound that she had heard aboard her houseboat home in Sausalito, where she made a living shingling sumptuous duplexes.

Early issues of Rainy Day held poems, stories, drawings and photographs in a slim stapled volume that sold for 25 cents. Then, as now, staff meetings were as eagerly anticipated as the new issue itself. So was getting to hear other writers, every Thursday at 4:00 p.m. Cornell students, faculty and anyone else who showed up for the weekly open reading drank 10 cent cups of coffee and read and listened for several hours under the marbles in the Temple of Zeus.

Mary Gilliland has received many poetry fellowships and spent eight months as the Stanley Kunitz Fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown. A current manuscript has made the finals in a number of contests, including the National Poetry Series. Her work has recently appeared in LIT, Passages North, Poetry, Seneca Review, Smartish Pace, and as an Ann Stanford award winner in the Southern California Anthology.

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

Kevin Allardice is a junior at UCLA, where he is majoring in English. This is his first published story.

Russell Brandom is a sophomore at Yale University. Everything he knows about married life, he learned from *Yo La Tengo*.

Ariel Brewster '05 is a former tap dancer from a one-blinking-yellow-traffic-light-town in New Hampshire. Since her soft-shoe skills never did get her on to Star Search, she hopes to find fame (if not fortune) as a writer and will attend journalism school in the fall. One of these days she will get over her fears of the front seat and a certain evil blood-sucking rabbit named Bunnacula.

Cameron Cooper likes gerber daisies, lemonade with mint, and is excited to return to the States after a semester in Spain, where pastries have dangerously developed into their own food group.

Chelsea Finn is a senior psychology major from Washington, DC. She hopes to continue writing after graduation.

Norman Funicello, who has recently attained refugee status, now lives in a burrow just completed somewhere near Ithaca.

Alexandra Kleeman is a sophomore at Brown University concentrating in cognitive science. When asked “how are you?” she tries to give the most precise answer possible, a process which often takes a great deal of time and requires the use of many metaphors. Her work appears.

Despite her name being the odd juxtaposition of an old British ladies’ name and the surname of China’s most notorious dictator, **Beatrice Mao** is not old, British, or a dictator. She is, however, notorious and Chinese on a magnitude comparable to that of the Opium Wars (which, we can all agree, are at least half British themselves). So maybe she is partially British, but she maintains a reasonable level of sobriety and good oral hygiene.

After being stung by a wasp and nearly dying this summer, **Jennifer Nunes** has become increasingly passionate about achieving her life’s goal: to have sex in an asparagus patch. No luck yet . . . In the meantime, she’s trying to keep her mind off the matter by studying International Agriculture and Rural Development, managing

Dilmun Hill, Cornell's student-run organic farm, and pretending to be an English major in her spare time.

Ed Palermo was born and “raised” in Bay Shore, New York, USA, Earth beginning in the year 1984 AD and continuing shortly thereafter. He is currently a stupid college kid studying mechanical and aerospace engineering and living easily in Ithaca, NY. He doesn't exercise at all. And he smokes too much.

Jonathan Papas is an English major in the College of Arts and Sciences. He has interests in writing, music, frisbee, and ethane oceans on Titan. He thanks you for reading.

Anandita Mariam Philipose is a lover of books, of the ways words can be twisted and molded to mean different things altogether. Other than that, she is a graduate student at the Cornell Institute of Public Affairs, an accidental tourist and an ill-coordinated but enthusiastic dancer, who is determined to beg, borrow, or steal a life once she gets out of graduate school.

Connor Morrow Puleo is a senior, double majoring in English and Psychology. After graduation, she will be working as a research assistant exploring the genetic basis of autism/personality disorders within the Department of Psychiatry at Mount Sinai in New York City before pursuing a PhD in clinical psychology.

Rebecca Schonberg is a senior majoring in comparative literature. She hates writing blurbs, but loves almost all other forms of wordplay, especially puns and crossword puzzles. Currently unemployed, she is hoping to have time to travel and write next year.

Will Seidel was born in Newbury, New Hampshire and educated at St. Paul's School before enrolling in the Sibley School at Cornell University.

Joshua Wilson is a senior English major. He has recently enlisted in the United States Army with a Special Forces contract and will ship to Ft. Benning, Georgia in September.

Sara Zglobicki is a freshman Natural Resources major who finds guilty pleasure in writing poetry instead of scientific papers. In the future, she hopes to find herself in a humid South American location implementing sustainable agricultural practices. This is her second published poem.

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www.rso.cornell.edu/rainyday/

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