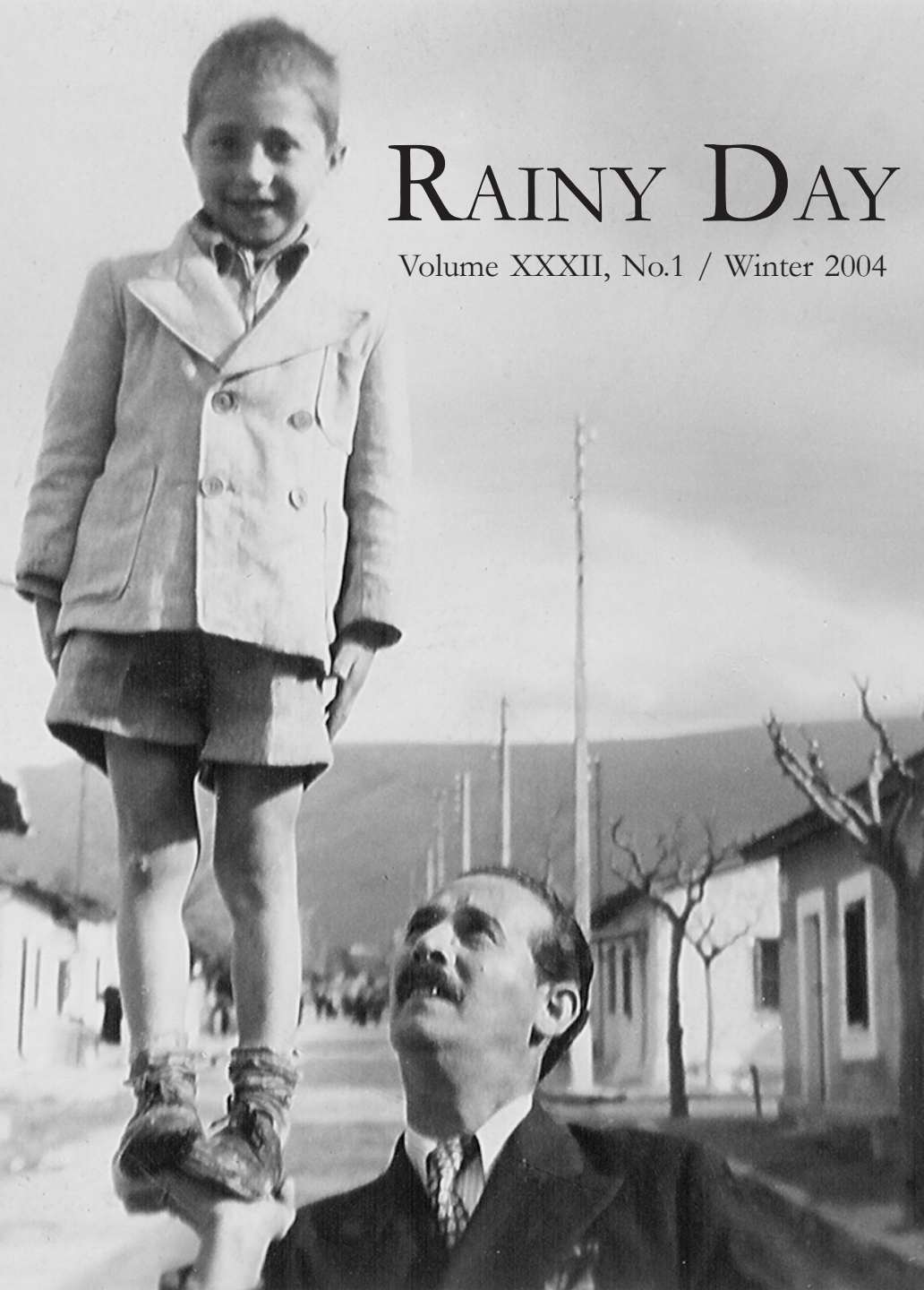


# RAINY DAY

Volume XXXII, No.1 / Winter 2004





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# RAINY DAY

Volume XXXII, Issue No. 1

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**Cover:** Kessariani, Athens (c.1955).

Photographed by Eleutheria Condellas

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### **Submission Guidelines:**

We only accept e-mail submissions. Send all submissions to the editor (ctk8@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/](http://www.rso.cornell.edu/rainyday/)

## GUNSHY

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Marissa Perry

My mother killed a girl and can't get out of bed. She moans and rolls over in the mornings, when we come and stand beside her, and my dad says, *Hester, Hester*, as if she has only forgotten her name. He touches my wrist and says, *You try, Juliet*, but my mother doesn't listen to me.

She sleeps during the day and stays up nights, getting out of bed only to lock herself in the bathroom and shovel ice cream down her throat. I find drops of vanilla on the tile in the morning, hardened into little pale moons, and I say, *Mama, I know your secret*, but she doesn't move.

My dad harrumphs around the house like an old dog. He stands in front of the open fridge for twenty minutes, fondling a hunk of moldy cheese, wondering how to solve the problem of an inert body and calling for me because he cannot find the parmesan. He teaches physics. He sleeps on the couch and stands by her in the mornings to smell her milk-breath and scummy teeth and he goes, *Well, Hester*, and never finishes his thought.

Sometimes you can hear my mother scratching away at the letter, the condolence & apology & admission of guilt, but she never gets very far before she tears the paper from the pad and then goes nose-diving into her pillow.

I say, *Mama, I'm taking your car*, daring her to open a dead-fish eye, but she doesn't care anymore, and that was always half the fun.

I take my father's car instead. The wheels slug through the dirt parking lot and the bumper touches the chain-link fence bordering the football field. It is hard to breathe. It is hard to breathe at school, when people whisper and the bold ones ask, Do you remember it? and you have to duck from the flash of their white eyes and say, No, I don't remember anything.

I go into the bathroom and tuck my chin to my knees and think of Nora Leigh and her blonde hair and pointy canines and how everybody fell so in love. Not me, I think, not me. The girls in the next stall light a joint, and I can hear their scraping giggles and how my mother said to me, *Let Nora sit in the front seat, honey*, and how I glared at her from the backseat, at her perfect ponytail, and imagined Todd Burgess sucking hickeys onto the back of her stupid neck.

In second period English we are assigned new books. Mr. Foster passes out *Romeo & Juliet*, and I think Goddammit, Mama. She grew up in Alabama, where the burnt-out fields go on forever, and when she got pregnant she laughed and lit a cigarette and told herself, My baby will be something out of Shakespeare.

We write our names in our paperback books which are water-stained and marked with signatures from years before. The insult will continue on forever, because next year someone else will get my book and see my name and think how lame it must be to be someone out of Shakespeare. I slink down into my seat and watch the kids sneak glances at me, wondering maybe of her blonde hair gone bloody, and I am about to escape to the bathroom when Mr. Foster leans over my desk and says in singsong style, “You can be our lucky reader!”

During lunch, I eat with my best friend Sandra—the self-proclaimed lesbian who has never kissed a girl and wears combat boots and fake tattoos because she thinks it’s hilarious. She has a honking laugh and mild acne, and we normally make fun of the beautiful people who slap asses and roll their big blue eyes, but it is hard today, these two weeks, because Sandra is secretly in love with Nora Leigh.

The air hangs on our skin and collects between our newly heavy tits. I sweat in the creases behind my knees. Sandra gives me her leftover cookies and says, “I just can’t believe it.”

“What?”

“You know.”

“Oh.”

“It’s just so weird.”

“I know.”

“One day here. The next day. Poof.”

This is how I think of Nora Leigh in seventh period. She is some kind of fairy with translucent wings and enormous eyes that just went poof. Todd Burgess sits in front of me, by order of last names, and I wonder if he sees Nora Leigh every time he sees me, or if he is thinking of her right this moment, as I am thinking of her, and I imagine our thoughts and dreary fantasies bumping together in mid-air and mingling and panting with a sweaty love before crashing into the parabola on the blackboard.

Mrs. Killinger turns from her precise drawing, her navy pants dusted white with chalk, and she claps her hands together and says, “Juliet? Are you all right?”

“Fine.”

“You look a little pale.”

“I’m okay.”

“Do you want a pass? Get a little air?”

I am the gunshy girl who was in the car with the popular girl who went poof.

My mother is a beached whale. I stare at her flame-orange hair that frizzles out from her moonblown face, and I say, *Mama, you can’t stay in bed forever*. I want to tell her I made the cheerleading team, but, of course, I haven’t, and I’m afraid if I say so then she will promptly bolt upright in bed and ask me to do some ridiculous move. My dad putters in the garage with old tools from a million years ago because,

as he says, kids don't care about physics anymore, so why should he care about teaching them? He's taking up bicycle repair.

I say, "Mama, I made cheerleading," and she opens a cold wet eye.

"What? You did?"

"Yeah."

"Well you should probably start running, then. You've got your mama's thighs."

"Don't you want to get out of bed?"

"No, it's nice in here."

"Mama?"

She sighs and burrows under the blankets. Now I have a told a lie that will only mutate and grow little impish offspring, and tomorrow she will ask if I have a uniform and the next day she will ask Daddy to videotape my performances at the football games, and she will want to roll over in bed to watch the footage of her Shakespearean daughter doing splits on balding grass.

I should have told her the truth of things, because it's not half-bad. I am no longer eating with just Sandra. They came up to me one afternoon, a few weeks afterward, a little herd of girls in short shorts with big hoop earrings, and they started to cry and hugged me and said, *We loved her so much*. They invited us to eat with them and offered us slices of melon their mothers cut up and put into plastic baggies. We said okay, and I could have told my mother this: that I catch Todd Burgess looking at me as I eat my pizza. He watches my mouth.

"Todd? He is such a fucking. Oaf?" Sandra tells me this, after school, when we sit on the hood of my father's rosy Oldsmobile and watch the boys throw a football and wrestle each other to the ground.

"I think he is cute," I say, because I don't really, but he is out there, among the mud-slicked bodies, throwing fake punches and getting watched by the girls.

"He's not my type," she says and laughs. "But I mean, seriously. Don't you think that's a little weird?"

"What's weird?"

"You and Todd. And then Nora Leigh? I mean. That's kind of a morbid ménage à trois."

"Oh c'mon, I'm not fucking him."

"Well, obviously."

"I just said he's cute."

"Weird," Sandra says, with her manic panic hair that goes from pink to emerald green, and the crop-dusters fly over ahead and we watch them dip their wings. The pretty girls in the field wave at us and then lean back in the grass, and I take Sandra's hand and we jump the fence and walk towards them, where they tear up dandelions and blow them in each other's faces, and I say to myself, this isn't so bad. This isn't so bad.



She calls on a Wednesday night.

She says, "Hi. May I speak with Juliet?"

"Yeah," I say. "That's me."

"Hi," she says and pauses, nervous, probably twirling the phone cord around her finger. "I'm sorry, this is a little awkward for me. My name's Veronica. I am, was, am Nora's mother."

I listen for the sound of heavy breathing, because my mother has a habit of eavesdropping on the phone, but there is just the static whir of some kind of pulse moving back and forth between my phone and Veronica Leigh's.

I only saw her once. At the memorial, when the Unitarian church was overflowing with sobbing people, some who had never spoken to Nora but wrote in their comment cards how beautiful she was, how kind, and her mother stood like a doll just awoken to life—afraid of this new world and not sure how to focus her eyes or how to put one foot in front of the other. She held onto rosary beads, I remember, and Sandra wept into my hair.

"Oh. Hi," I say.

"I'm sorry, is this a bad time?"

"No, it's fine," I say. I saw her little body behind the microphone, her eyes wet and wide like Bambi or some cartoonish trophy bride.

"I just thought maybe we could talk sometime." Her voice is high-pitched and cluttered with the nervous tingle of tears, and I tell her, sure, of course, even though I cannot imagine what we will talk about, and she doesn't know that I stared at the nape of her daughter's neck that day, marbled with a blue-green vein and pockmarked with a lasting mulberry kiss. She doesn't know how my mother looked at me and said, *Let Nora sit in the front seat, honey*, and how I listened.

"Yeah, um. Sure."

She has the voice of a woman who likes to be in control and hates to cry and wears designer shoes and drops five hundred bucks on a purse. They are few and far between down here, in this sweaty jungle of live oaks and magnolia and long leaf pine, and I wonder if she will have the smooth throat of her daughter and those magnet eyes that drew us in like iron filings.

I sit on the curb at school and wait for her, the pavement burning through my shorts. Sandra lights a cigarette and says, "This is so fucking weird."

"You don't have to wait with me."

"It's okay."

"You want to see her?"

"What?"

"You want to see the mother of your love?"

"Oh fuck you, Jules."

I laugh, because I am nervous, because my mother is stuffing her face at night, on the bathroom floor shoving it all into her mouth, and what would she do if she

knew I was meeting Veronica Leigh for lunch?

We go to the Meridian Club. The waiters wear tuxedos, and I am thinking, oh Jesus Christ I have to get out of this place, but Veronica touches her hand lightly to my back and says, It's okay, they know me here. The menus don't have prices. The dishes are in French. My mother always wanted me to learn French, because it's what the wasp-girls learn before they jet off for European summers, but I signed up for Spanish. I fell over the irregular verbs and horrid subjunctive and only remembered out-of-class vocabulary like *puta* and *coño*.

"The duck here is really marvelous."

"Which one is that?" I ask and she laughs. It is a laugh so hard and overwrought that you can tell she is trying not to cry, and I think, What? Was duck Nora's favorite? Did Nora Leigh sit here in this seat and eat duck and watch the way her mother's gold jewelry flashes in the sunlight?

"Would you like it?"

"Okay."

"I'll order for us," she says, and does, letting the foreign words slip off her tongue like casual phrases she says every day, and she orders us a bottle of wine, too, and I think, oh God yes, get me drunk, get me drunk.

By the time she is driving me back to school, I have already missed most of fifth period, and I am happy because the South American revolutions do not interest me very much, and my brain is bubbling with slow fireworks that make my head heavy and my eyes like two lost kites let loose without anyone to reel them home.

She shared her cheesecake with me and said, You have really gorgeous amber eyes, and I made up answers to questions like, Do you have a boyfriend? What's his name? His name is Drew and he doesn't go here, he lives downstate, and we have been together for a year, and he writes me beautiful letters in calligraphic script. I did not tell her that I dream of Todd Burgess wandering in between my legs and touching my hair and kissing me on the forehead.

I cannot stop burping or hiccupping, because one bottle turned into two, and Veronica pulls up to the curb and unlocks the door and touches me on the thigh and says,

"Juliet?"

"Yeah?"

"I had fun," she says.

"Me, too."

I have a secret now, and this keeps me sane when I bring my mother iced tea and tuna melts and I have the urge to rip out her hair by the roots and say, *Get up, get up, goddammit*. She has stopped eating in the bathroom, and now just sits up in bed and whimpers until I bring her potato chips and jolly ranchers and pop tarts from the cupboard. My father sleeps on the couch and grades quizzes on the back porch and

mutters things under his breath as the red pencil goes swish-swish. He shakes his head and swats mosquitoes and says, Whatever happened to the citronella?

"Get out of the way," my mother says when I put new batteries in the remote and stand in front of the TV. Part of me wants to tell her how every Wednesday I go shopping with Veronica. She lines my eyes with kohl. I skip fifth period entirely, because nobody is there to tell me I can't, and I don't have trouble like the shoplifting girls who might get caught or whose mothers will eventually say, Where you gettin all that jewelry?

My mother doesn't notice my new skirts, my highlighted hair, my made-up face.

She cries at night and slaps herself and goes, *You bitch, you stupid fucking bitch*, and I pretend I don't hear this, see this, because I do not recognize the woman with snot running down her nose. She doesn't change her underwear. She keeps trying to write the letter to the Leighs, apologizing for the car and flying glass and the milk-pale daughter in an urn, turned to gray ash and little slivers of bone.

My mother used to slap my hand when I chewed my nails. She wore pantyhose and got her hair permed and read *Reader's Digest* in the dentist's office. Now she yells at the television—at the stupid pregnant girls and the women who used to be men who are surprising their new lovers with the history of their genitalia. Some of the lovers say, I love you anyway. Some of them raise a fist.

"Where did you get that?" Sandra asks me, of the silver pendant, the locket from Tiffany's without a picture inside, because I can't think of whose face I want next to my heart.

"Veronica," I say.

"What for?"

"We're friends," I say and avoid her eyes.

"Does she ever mention Nora?"

"No," I say, because it's the truth. It's as if Nora Leigh were someone else's daughter entirely, and she is some other story belonging to some other year and is solely the sorrow of my mother.

"Don't you think that's weird?"

"I guess," I say.

"I'm worried."

"What for?"

"For you," Sandra says. "You are so fucking sad and you don't even know it." She stops in the middle of the hallway with tears hanging onto her inner lids. She tries to hold them there.

"I am not," I say.

"Yes you are."

"You're the one crying," I say.

"Stop pretending."

"I'm fine," I say and walk away from our lockers even as part of me begs myself to turn around and bury my face in Sandra's knees and tell her how my mother has killed a girl and forgotten all about me.

I mumble through the dialogue in Act V, because I am very tired of being Juliet, and I keep thinking of Sandra's face and the freckle under her eye. I am secretly happy when Romeo poisons himself, because Melvin Porter reads emphatically with a lisp and whispers every aside like a dirty joke and that monologue was so horribly long I thought I would cry. Then Mr. Foster paces the room with nerdy anticipation and I read the line, in tragic disbelief, O happy dagger! and then my final stage direction: *stabs herself and dies*. Goddamn you, Mama.

I am in a fury at lunch when Veronica offers me ice cream with a dozen toppings and pulls out a silk scarf she bought in New York, and I tell her, Girls my age don't fucking wear scarves, and she looks at me shocked, as if I were a two-year-old who suddenly learned to cuss.

She shakes her head as if trying to dispel the word from the air, brushing of the lingering scum on her ears, and she is so perfectly pretty that I want to reach over and hit her hard in the mouth. I pick out the M&Ms in my ice cream and watch her fiddle with her gold and diamond necklace. She stares out the window, nervously, avoiding my gaze, as if she were my hostage, and I feel suddenly like a toy, like a huge big-boned experiment that she gets to drawn on and dress up and say, Have the duck, it is really marvelous.

"Why don't you ever talk about your daughter?" I ask.

"What did you say?"

"Nora," I say. Her hand flutters to her temple. She sucks madly on the straw of her diet coke and looks around like a wild squirrel finding itself in a cage.

"I don't have to answer that," she says.

"I just want to know."

"It's. Difficult."

"We got ice cream after tryouts," I say. "My mother insisted. Nora got frozen yogurt. My mother liked that. She said to me, Honey why don't you get what Nora has, it looks so good."

"I was supposed to pick her up."

"I know."

"I couldn't make it. I called her and told her to find a ride."

"My mother offered. She saw Nora and thought, How pretty, a girl already on the team, we will take her home and she'll be friends with my daughter who will be a cheerleader this season."

"I'm sorry," Veronica says.

"For what?"

"I was supposed to pick her up," she says, and I know that this is the tiny thing that must always creep into her brain when she wakes up and goes to sleep and

drives through town with the radio on. I know the way it flies about like a butterfly in a paper lantern, knocking into your ribs, the way *let her sit in the front seat* knocks into mine and how if I hadn't listened to my mother, it would be so different, and how I don't know if I am happy that I let Nora sit there or if I really wish it had been me.

Veronica drops me off again at school, and I know something has changed because she doesn't pat my thigh or say Bye, Honey.

I feel sick in seventh, staring at Todd's back and feeling the formulas float through my brain like mysterious runes and hoping Mrs. Killinger doesn't notice and say, Get thee to the apothecary. I feel like I have knocked down all of the furniture in a dollhouse, thinking I'll redecorate, but now it's so empty and blank I can't even remember what rooms are what, and maybe I sort of even liked it before. I sort of liked the shopping and the lunch dates and her smoker's laugh that sounded so conniving.

Todd turns to me and mouths, "I like your shirt."

What? Who are these people? I write a big bubbly fuck you in my notebook, while my armpits get sweaty and my leg starts to tick up and down so fast that I begin to realize that I am in love with the fact that he likes my shirt. He likes my shirt, and I am so tired of my mother not noticing the way I line my eyes and how I show off my tits, that I begin to dream of pulling Todd Burgess down into the milkweed and saying the hilariously dirty things that you heard the women once say in a movie late at night, on cable television, when your parents were asleep.

I put things slowly into my backpack when the bell rings, trying to time it so I get up when he does and we walk out at the same time, and it will be awkward enough that one of us will have to say something.

"What's up?" he says. He is such a fucking oaf, but I love the way he loves my shirt, and I can only think of putting his hands onto my chest and saying, Feel this, hurt me, feel this.

"Not much," I say.

"You hanging out?"

"Are you?"

"We could go somewhere," he says, and so we start walking from the portables to the parking lot, mute and nervous, and I am walking fast because I cannot let Sandra see me doing this. I cannot let her see me getting into his car and kissing the mouth that kissed Nora Leigh.

He is parked behind the dumpster, in a space that's not really a space and nobody can see inside. There's loose change and flattened french fries on the floor. He says, So what do you want to do? And I turn and lean over and kiss him on the neck, the front, where the adam's apple rises to meet my lips, and I think, This, I want to do this, and he has nothing to say because he is Todd Burgess, sloe-eyed and bird-chested and slow to hit puberty, and he fumbles at the tape deck for some tunes

while I take his fingers and put them on my chest. The dumpster smells like cooked cabbage and old fish. I try and move his hand around. I try and get him to lean over and kiss me, but his eyes have gotten huge. He says, "I don't know about this," and his arm is stretched out and holding my tit like it's a grenade, like he can't decide what to do with it, and I tell him I'm so sorry and scramble out into the afternoon.

I stomp up the stairs when I get home and stand in front of my mother who is staring out the window and finishing off a bag of cheez puffs.

"Juliet fucking kills herself," I say. "Did you even read the fucking play?"

"Fuck this fuck that. Is that any fucking way to talk to your mother?"

She throws the bag on the floor and pulls the covers up over her head and mutters something that I cannot understand. I stomp back down the stairs and pick up the phone, my fingers shaking, because I need to apologize to Veronica. She doesn't pick up. I leave a message.

I wander outside where my dad putters with a bicycle tire, and he leans over on one knee to look at a diagram of something, and I say, Hello, and he says Oh, hi. I imagine going up to him and saying, Daddy, I made him touch me, and I thought it would be good and bold and something Nora Leigh might have done, but he didn't even want to, and what is happening to Mama?

I call Veronica's office and she isn't there and I tell the secretary, "I really need to talk to her."

"Is it an emergency?"

"No, yes, kind of."

"Are you of relation?"

"No."

"What's the message?"

"I just need to talk to her," I say and hang up and wander down our dirt driveway barefoot so the soles of my feet burn. I hop on the stones and think how my feet will blister, and how he just sat there holding on, and how I need to talk to Veronica.

She doesn't answer at work, or at home, or on her cell phone, and I sit in the middle of the living room floor just thinking how I need someone to sit across from me and nod and laugh and go, Oh it's fine, it's a good story, and I cannot call Sandra because then I must admit I betrayed Nora Leigh.

I can't think of anybody else, and that scares me so much I pick up the receiver and punch in the number for her office again, and a different woman answers.

"Yes I need to speak with Veronica Leigh."

"One moment, please." There is a clicking sound then jazzy music and another lady gets on and says, "Veronica Leigh's office."

"I need to speak with Veronica," I say, and there is a long pause and the shuffling of something and murmuring voices and the lady gets back on and says,

"I'm sorry she's not in at the moment."

"Juliet?" It's my mother's voice. She's on the phone upstairs, eavesdropping from her bed, and I can just imagine her sitting pink-faced and dumb with the phone cradled against her cheek.

I hang up. I stare at the magnets on the refrigerator, at the pictures of myself from elementary school with missing teeth and bad haircuts. I feel the blood wash around inside my ears. I hear the impossible sound of my mother bounding down the stairs. She comes crashing into the living room, tugging her bathrobe tighter around her waist and holding herself like that, like a little girl with a stomach-ache.

"What were you doing?" she pants.

"I just made a phone call."

"You're talking with Mrs. Leigh?"

"We're friends."

"You're *friends*?"

"Yes," I say and watch her chest rise and fall so wildly, from running for the first time in months, and Dad comes inside looking for a misplaced screwdriver, shocked to see her standing there, in a white housecoat damp with sweat and her hair stringy and gray at the roots, and she screams at him, "Richard! Did you know about this?"

"What?"

"Juliet & Mrs. Leigh?"

"No," my dad says, holding the bicycle wheel, looking at me, then at my mother and finally backs out the front door with his one hand held up and saying, "I'm not getting involved."

"How long?"

"A couple months," I say.

"You were sneaking behind my back?"

"No," I say. "I didn't have to sneak."

My mother puts her hand on the counter to balance herself.

I sort of want to walk over and touch her and say, you are here Mama, and look at my make-up and heavy amber eyes and the thighs I got from you.

"Why were you calling her?"

"I needed to talk to her about a boy."

Her cheeks goes cranberry, and she looks at me as though I were the blurry face in a photograph she can't ever remember taking. I want to say, Yes. Do you feel that? Do you see me? I want to ask her if she ever dreams that I was the girl sitting in the front seat instead, saying *Mama, a deer*, before she swerved to miss it and flung me into the forest.

She raises her hand. She extends the swollen fingers until they are pointing at me, reaching for me, and I want ask if she dreams of Nora Leigh doing toe jumps in mid-air.

“Come here,” she whispers.

I feel the butterfly beat loose at the back of my throat. I tell myself it is okay, it is all right, because even if she goes back to bed and never comes close to running her fingers through my hair, I can always say how I saw her blink in the kitchen light that afternoon and how she put her hand on my hand and seemed to say with her watermarked eyes, *But you are still my daughter.*



# MILLSTONE, MARKER-STONE, DROWN-STONE

---

Chloe Layman

Lay me dead in heather meadows down.

Leaf rot, wheat rust, plague of rush,  
thrush and lark song sank at mole-light.

Spell upon my millstone, marker-stone, drown-stone:

Snared among roots and twigs,  
it is I who breathed and bellowed  
and birthed the grave  
in all its rank and robed splendor.

Skeleton speak, serpent laugh  
keep time with rats' feet,      snails' trails  
beneath the wan-est seas of the stillborn moon.  
Bathe me there,      depths-plump, corpse-calm,;  
my hands at prayer,  
my tongue in exile.

Lay me dead in heather meadows down.

# GRAND CENTRAL STATION

---

Rebecca Schonberg

the undiscovered starnests  
that glow in the tunnels beneath Grand Central  
Station are beginning to bloom.

it is a seasonal thing  
like leafblush and birdwing spread thick  
across the sky, like the moment  
in late fall  
when everything diamonds.

litters of bare bulbs,  
dim pulses nursed  
to bursting with light  
along an insulated capillary bed  
of wire, taut with grace  
and the electric promise of maturity.

their swollen glow reminds travelers  
faces pressed  
against the train's plastic panes  
that the darkness  
is not just inside.

It is all around.

## LOON

---

when the boat tipped  
when the moment stretched  
to hold my sinking form, I swear  
I heard a loon cry, once  
from behind the thick trees;  
and out across the lake  
like tea tearing over onto the saucer beneath,  
its voice echoed  
faint, fainter  
a lone line of warning  
too late to break my fall.

# STATE LIGHTING

---

Alexandra Frank

Thirsty gray dirt covers the floor of Nevada.  
The next layer: stiff sagebrush  
Fuzzy lime leaves barely here nor there  
But the highway in Nevada is raised.

The next layer: stiff sagebrush  
Climb up when the sagebrush stops,  
But the highway in Nevada is raised, venerated.  
To the most perfect asphalt

Climb up when the sagebrush stops  
Two lanes always empty  
To the most perfect asphalt  
Dual directions over the hood:

Two lanes always empty  
Circling degrees drowning in miles  
Dual directions over the hood:  
Breathing down this desert

Circling degrees drowning in miles  
The inflamed lungs of the sky  
Breathing down this desert  
Thirsty gray dirt covers the floor of Nevada.

## FOUR O'CLOCK FIGHT

---

Phil Dureza

Tony slid his palms up and down each other, brooding over the fight at four. He had been worrying considerably ever since that fateful apple left his hand and launched the swirl of events leading to this afternoon's appointment. Although in some ways, he actually liked the attention: the warm pats on the back along the hallway and the stolen glances by the girls, examining him with fresh, stimulated eyes. Plus everyone agreed Diggs was an asshole and deserved a little fruit pelting. Whenever lost in the glamour of gossip whispers and boyish envy, Tony concluded his situation wasn't all that bad. That is until the moments when he was alone and introspective, and the prospect of the actual fight dropped down and hit him like a cold brick. Diggs was a pretty big kid.

Tony paced about his room too aware he hadn't even been close to a fight in his life. It was his little sister's seventh birthday today, and he could hear his parents bustling outside his door, setting up for the party. It was supposed to start at twelve-thirty, but factoring in the Filipino time-lag, the guests probably wouldn't be arriving until one-thirty or two.

Tony had asked his mom if he could leave the party early for a group project. She raised an eyebrow at him but eventually consented, leaving Tony somewhat disappointed she was so gullible. At the moment, he had only about a good four hours to learn all the moves he could in Rocky IV.

"Antonee," his mother called. "Go help your Tatay outside with the picnic tables."

Outside the weather was sunny but not humid, with cool, soothing winds and a cloudless blue sky – so very pleasant as a whole that it was hard to believe it was September in New Jersey. Tony's house and backyard were actually bigger than they seemed, but Tony lived in one of those Jersey neighborhoods where the goal had been, for real estate developers, to pack in an absurd amount of modest two-story houses within a postal stamp-sized lot, so that the homes would appear as cramped and unappealing as possible.

Tony marched outside in basketball shorts and a T-shirt and met his dad, who gave no visible sign of acknowledgement, proceeding only to take an end of a folded table expecting Tony to follow along. Tony's father was the eldest of nine siblings. At his grandparents' farm in the Philippines, before they ever immigrated, Tony could remember how his dad picked him up once with such careless ease and rested him on his firm, muscled shoulders. Tony had then felt invincible and exhilarated high up on that human mountain, far from the monsoon-soaked, muddy

rice paddies below that he had, crying with fright, mistaken for quicksand.

The lone tree in Tony's backyard stood off to the side with some of its branches hanging over the metal fence that demarcated the neighbor's property. Tony and his father set up the tables a little ways from the tree and tried to place the chairs strategically under its shade. *Manang* Pearl, an old childless widow who was also one of the first of the group to immigrate, had recently joined a networking company that sold lotions, mouthwash, and pet deodorizers over the phone and had since been lecturing everyone under the sun of the dangers of UV rays. Due to the matriarchal status *Manang* Pearl held and entitled herself to (she was, after all, childless, widowed, and old), most of the Filipinos humored her advice and bought her flavorless toothpaste and Anti-Sun Repellant that came in *Vanishing* and *Skin Tone* colors.

Tony and his father were quite aware of *Manang* Pearl's eccentricities and made wise use of the tree to guard against the "cancer-spraying ultraviolets." Except that in trying to catch the branches' shade, they had inadvertently arranged the chairs into something like a question mark. Tony and his dad stood back for a moment and examined their creation, puzzling over it as if it were a foreign language and secretly exchanging quizzical looks. Finally, Tony's dad broke rank and returned to the work.

"Why can't we just set up the tent?" Tony asked his father.

"We're missing poles," he replied.

"No we're not."

Tony's dad continued placing the Sterno food heaters on the table, not responding to the last comment. Tony knew that all the poles were there and suspected his father did also. The real trouble was that the tarp for the tent was on the roof of the garage, and with his father's bad back – bad for several years now – it would have been a strenuous chore to climb up the ladder, lug the heavy thing down, and put it back up again. Although Tony, at fifteen, was confident he could have done the job himself, he did not want to press the issue.

After father and son were finished setting up, Tony's mom called him over to help with the food. From the kitchen, Tony and his mom carried over to a picnic table half-trays of *lumpia*, *adobo*, *pansit*, and rice. On their next trip, they bore fried chicken, lasagna, and macaroni salad, while Tony's dad sparked up the grill with hotdogs, hamburger patties, and *Bangus*. Tony was always entertained by the eclectic mix of Filipino and American foods in these parties and found something comical in their odd pairing. He was playing with the *lumpia* rolls on the table when his mom spoke.

"If your *Tita* Gloria asks," she began, "tell her it is *chicken* adobo and not pork."

"OK," Tony replied, then after actually thinking about it, added, "Wait, why?"

"She gave up eating pork," his mother said. "She might ask you just so she can tell you that she did."

“Why did she give up pork?”

“God told her. She found a verse in the Bible.”

Tony smiled. He liked the way his mother could be so blunt. “I don’t understand why we even have to invite *Tita* Gloria and Pastor Jim. We’re not even Baptist, and they just make everyone else uncomfortable, trying to save everybody from hell all the time.”

“Shhh. Watch how you talk Anthony.” His mother shushed him with a reserved assertiveness. “We invite them because they are Filipino friends, same village as your Uncle Jose.”

“Even if we don’t like them?”

“Especially if we don’t like them.”

At this point, Tony’s little sister Lea had barged in and taken a resolute hold of her mom’s leg. Lea wanted to know, her face muffled in her mother’s thigh, why her visitors hadn’t come yet with all her presents. Tony watched his mother handle the situation: first a small lecture on patience, then an excuse of a traffic jam in the suburbs, finally a distraction to go check on the *leche flan*, which was Lea’s favorite dessert. And off his little sister went skipping away happy and less obnoxious. Tony was sure that his mom could have convinced his sister of anything if she wanted to, even into thinking it wasn’t her birthday. Tony wished she would.

There was always something in his mother’s nature, a subtle cleverness that appealed to Tony’s curiosity, as if she had with her a big secret of the world that she only shared with people close to her in miniature bits and pieces. Like the time he alone went with her to the city for a small Filipina nurses class reunion. After drinking a little wine, Tony’s mom had acted out in adlib comic characters from old college skits – some of them even a little vulgar – with surprisingly great skill, never failing to send everyone into roaring, aching laughter with every punch line or slapstick lampoon. But as quickly as she would reveal these glimpses to Tony, these peep shows of another life, she would shut them right back down again, quickly and coldly, with no apologies, a closed shoulder turned to him that read like mocking Las Vegas neon lights: *Entrance Denied to Rated-R Movie*.

“Go inside and get yourself ready Antonee,” his mother said.

Tony silently followed his mother’s orders and walked back to the house. Suddenly, he shuddered, struck by Diggs’s image just right after the Macintosh had hit him, his face contorting with outrage and nostrils flaring wide as big as a bull’s, “*I’ll fucking kill you, You Fucking Chink!...*”

The guests arrived gradually, the affluent few in their luxury SUVs, most in their minivans, and as for the two fresh-off-the-boat (FOB) immigrants, they claimed the backseat of a Volvo station wagon. The house bloomed into activity, with more little children scampering about like squirrels, and the adults meeting and greeting, exclaiming “*Ay Maganda!*” at the food, and gossiping in corners like their children

but in *Tagalog*. The first to come was *Tita* Bibing, her American husband, and their five-year old. Tony generally liked the American because he was always jovial and amiable, but in Filipino parties where the adults usually spoke *Tagalog*, the American Bob would cling to the first near-adult who preferred English, and this often meant that Tony had to smile along with Bob as he blabbed on endlessly, laughing at anything remotely funny, and trying his best to enjoy himself.

"It's way different here than it is in Texas," Bob went on, Tony conservatively sipping his soda. "All the roads there are flat. I thought I would enjoy flat roads – I had a Mustang then – but I didn't like them as much as I thought I would. So long and flat, so wide and flat, dry and flat. It got depressing after a while, all that flatness."

Tony *ub-buhed* and nodded away. Bob was in the middle of his run-in with a longhorn story when Tony screeched in pain. Lea had sneaked in and pinched his side.

"Lea!" Tony said, furious. "What the hell is wrong with you?!"

Lea ran away to the other children tittering, while *Tita* Gloria felt for her crucifix and glared at Tony's mom who then glared at Tony.

"Sorry," Tony said.

"Anthony, go get more ice for the cooler," his mother told him.

Although Tony was relieved he got to skip out on Bob's adventures in the Alamo, he was a little bitter at *Tita* Gloria's interference. She had arrived a whole hour late to the party, yet had managed – by coughing, clearing her throat, and seemingly feigning to choke – to force everyone's attention and reassemble all the guests around the food again to say grace.

Tony believed *Tita* Gloria had it in for him ever since the time she had asked him whether or not he thought about eternity, and he replied as a joke, "Only when I'm high." Pastor Jim almost dropped his pocket Bible, and *Tita* Gloria's face reddened to a bright hue that Tony did not think possible for Filipinos. Tony's mom gave him the routine public reproach soon after, but Tony was convinced he saw, in the deepest brown of his mother's eyes, a glint of fondness if not approval for his actions.

But then, Tony's resentment turned to his mother who always chose to appease others and not him, who never defended him but always made him apologize, who never thanked him once for doing his own laundry or getting the bat to fly out the basement. He condemned her for not appreciating him enough, not recognizing him enough. Here was Anthony Campalos: almost five foot seven and sixteen in ten months, who came in second in the sit-ups contest in gym, bench-pressed 105 lbs. the other day, and was taking on one of the biggest kids in his grade. But in his mother's kitchen, he was scooping ice for a stupid birthday party.

Tony then became more sorry that his Uncle Edgar did not make the occasion. Uncle Edgar was a distant cousin of his father and was currently in upstate New



York searching for the best pumps in the world for his mushrooms. Tony always liked the way Uncle Edgar called him “Tony” like his friends, or offered him beer behind his parents’ back, or talked carnally about women. He could tell Uncle Edgar anything, and he would listen. If he were here, Tony thought, he would have asked him advice about Diggs.

Uncle Edgar has an ex-wife and daughter in the Philippines, but he always told Tony that *he* was his boy. When Tony is old enough, Uncle Edgar promised to cut him in the mushroom business that he planned on starting, which would be booming by then.

“It’s all worked out, Tony,” his uncle told him once. “I just have to do a little more research on the parts. Then I can send the pieces in small portions at a time to Manila to be assembled, so we don’t get screwed over. Shipping internationally is a bitch, you know. Once we start producing our own mushrooms down there, it’ll be an instant hit. They don’t have mushrooms in the Philippines, you know, always have to import.”

Tony enjoyed talking with Uncle Edgar and feeling the contagious electricity of his excitement whenever he rambled on about his mushroom business. Listening to his good humor, his fearlessness of the future, and the easy manner which he dismissed his setbacks over a joke and a shot of whiskey inspired Tony with such hope and admiration that, in part, both their dreams became intertwined in his uncle’s verbosity.

“In America, Tony,” his Uncle Edgar used to tell him. “You can do anything. All you need is hard work and a little faith.”

After filling the ice bucket, Tony went back outside to where the cooler of sodas sat. Standing near it was a couple in their late fifties, Dr. and Mrs. Palanga, talking to Tony’s mom. Both of the couple actually held doctorate degrees, incased in wide, wooden frames over their fireplace, but Mrs. Palanga gave up her anesthesiology practice a long time ago to raise the kids. They were the ideal Filipino family everyone envied, boasting four children, the oldest in med-school and another a pharmacist. The Palangas, whose true influence far surpassed the hollow reverence given to old *Manang* Pearl, never fell in any category of Filipino pseudo-blood titles and nicknames. No *Tita* or *Tito*, *Nene* or *Toto*, and *Manang* or *Manong* behind their names with the MDs attached to the end. To the rest of the small community of Filipinos, they were always Dr. and Mrs. Palanga.

Tony’s mother owed a lot to Mrs. Palanga for initially sponsoring her for a nursing job in the US. Tony was refilling the cooler with ice, within earshot of their conversation.

“Did you hear Angie,” Mrs. Palanga said to Tony’s mom, “of Bibing’s car accident.”

“A year ago?” Tony’s mother asked.

"Yes, she sued for disability, and won a pretty big settlement."

"Disability?"

"She claimed to have lost movement in her right arm."

Mrs. Palanga, Tony's mom, and now Tony in the background observed *Tita* Bibing from a distance. All three watched as Bibing picked little Roberta up (right-handed), caught and fired a whiffle ball which the kids, in fear, ducked away from, and finally swatted some flies over her head that died instantly from her karate chops.

"*Walang Hiya Talaga!*" Mrs. Palanga exclaimed, then turning back to Tony's mother, she resumed. "How is *Toto* Bing doing with finding new employment?"

She was referring to Tony's dad.

"Nothing yet," Tony's mom replied. "He applied to *The Musketeers* Thursday."

"That's a good restaurant." Mrs. Palanga took a sip of her drink and gulped. "A step up. Edgar isn't here, I see. Off to New York, begging to investors?"

Tony's mom did not say anything.

"Such foolishness," Mrs. Palanga continued and shook her head. "Mushrooms in the Philippines. He'll drink himself to death."

Tony's nerves tensed.

"Hello Anthony," Dr. Palanga said, startling Tony and killing any chance for him to jump in the dialogue.

"How are you, Son?" the doctor asked. "Back to school?"

"I'm good, Doctor," Tony replied. "Yeah, I'm back." His mom shot him a hard look.

"Good. Sarah should be coming soon. She's running a little late."

"Antonee," Tony's mother said. "Go see if your father needs help with the charcoal."

Tony got the hint and left them. He did not go to his father but firmly walked towards the house, mad for getting snubbed again and at Mrs. Palanga for badmouthing Uncle Edgar. Tony's stomach churned with a disgusted feeling, and angrily, he hurried past everyone. Past Ernie the FOB wondering over the lasagna, past Pastor Jim and *Tita* Gloria preaching eternal salvation to the children, past *Manang* Pearl under her umbrella, white with blotches of cream on her face. The bodies and faces fell quickly behind Tony's heated footsteps, as his thoughts swelled big and poured over. *What's wrong with mushrooms in the Philippines?! He yelled in his head. I'd buy them! What does she know! She didn't do any of the research!* "You shouldn't knock other people down!"

"Did you say something?" It was Bob, grinning and bright-eyed. He had been alone for sometime and desperately wanted somebody to talk to.

"No. Nothing," Tony said coldly, then headed straight to his room, shutting the door behind him.

Tony lay on his bed, his mind burning with restlessness. The fan on the ceiling creaked with every cycle and annoyed him. He recalled now several instances in the past when his mom had tactfully excused herself from the table after Uncle Edgar began talking about buying generators and the times his father had simply said, "Pocket's tight, Eddie" after his uncle's entreaties to invest. Tony realized that his parents did not believe in Uncle Edgar, and it was no wonder the business never got off the ground if his own family did not have faith in him. And Tony hated them all for not believing. Staring at the fan, watching its fins spin interminably in circles going nowhere, Tony felt stuck and hot. Finally, he compelled himself to focus on the fight and replayed the incident that started it all.

Diggs had been flicking peas during lunch yesterday, arming his fork with a few and shooting them at random kids within range. The act was not beyond Diggs's customary bouts of obnoxiousness and had remained relatively benign, until, reloading the fork with rice, he had said before firing, "Just for you Tony, for all the Chinamen." Then the apple flew, chairs moved, and shock and laughter filled the air.

But overlooked in the tussle and turmoil, Tony suddenly remembered he had flung the apple first before Diggs ever got the forkful of rice off. Tony thought about why he did it. Diggs was just being Diggs, no more or less than his usual asshole self, and Tony had certainly suffered from worse pranks from him before.

Shortly after, some of the older kids, for their own amusement, had goaded both parties to fight it out and had set up the formal meeting: at the nature park, behind the parking lot, at four. Be there. Or look like a pussy.

In the mirror now, Tony furrowed his eyebrows and tried to look as intimidating as possible. He pictured Diggs's livid face, teeth sharp, and mouth curling savagely, spitting the words *Chink*, *Gook*, *Mustard*. And Tony swung at the face in the air, wild, wide hooks that almost spun his entire body around and made him lose balance. He kept at it, practicing his fury and grunting like Rocky versus the giant Russian, until he was distracted by a giggling noise. He turned and saw a collection of little heads peeking in through the door, with Lea in the lead.

"Get the hell out of my room, you little bitch!" Tony yelled and threw a slipper at his sister.

Moments later, Tony was called in the living room opposite his mother with, Lea, hiding behind her, in tears.

"Anthonee! For once, can I trust you to act your age?"

"I didn't even hit her!" Tony protested. "I missed!"

"Do I *really* have to deal with this today?" she looked at him, as if expecting a response. Tony didn't say anything. "*Please*. Try to act mature."

And with that, Tony's mom stamped off, Lea following behind, pausing only to grin back and stick her tongue out, and for the first time, Tony saw that his sister looked like a little gremlin. Tony clenched his fist and bit his lip, letting up only

when he worried he tasted blood.

"Hey you."

Tony looked up. It was Sarah.

"Just wished your sister Happy Birthday," she said, smiling. "She asked me if I brought a gift."

Tony blushed. "Yeah, sorry about that."

"Oh don't be. It was cute."

Sarah was the youngest child of the Palangas, and had, by the good luck of being born last, avoided the horrific blending of names that befell her older siblings. Sarah explained it to Tony once: her brother Aberardo, who was the eldest, was named after both her grandfathers Abraham and Gerrardo. GERALYN, her oldest sister, was a combination of the grandparents on her mother's side, Gerrardo and Bealyn, which was decided upon after Dr. Palanga did not make it to the delivery on time. The next daughter then, Abby Lanie, was aptly named after Sarah's grandparents on her father's side (Abraham and Melanie) which Dr. Palanga stressed was the only fair thing to do. As for Sarah, when she was born, all her grandparents had died except for *Lola* Bealyn, who was fortunately senile by that time and did not care whose name got passed down. The Palangas then, to avoid further drama, chose a neutral, simple, American *Sarah*. Tony thought it was a beautiful name.

"Hey guess what?" Sarah said. "I got my license like a week ago."

"Really?"

Tony became a little worried. Sarah was only a year older than Tony was, but the gap in their age always appeared to him to be gnawingly much greater. Sarah followed the Palanga line of child prodigies, minus the snootiness. She had already been to Europe, LA, and Oklahoma City for ballet, and was always rushing off to college campuses every summer for some weird science thing. At her school, she even had some senior friends who she would occasionally go out with Fridays or Saturdays. Tony was appalled the Palangas would let their youngest daughter go off with older kids without proper supervision. Of course now, she can legally drive. Tony didn't even have a permit yet.

"So, you drove over here then?" Tony wanted to confirm it.

"Yup." She pointed at a blue Ford Probe. *Damn*, it was true.

"Automatic?"

"No, stick," she replied. "Sticks are so much more fun to drive."

Tony was crushed. He didn't know how to drive stick either. Within a year, he planned on learning to drive standard and boost his Bio scores enough to attend the Gifted Young Students Camp at Princeton. Tony liked talking to Sarah because she made him feel at ease. He liked the way she smiled her big smile that made him forget about everything else.

"So, I hear your dad's looking for a new job?" Sarah said.

"Uh, yeah."

“What happened?”

“I don’t know.” Tony pushed the floating ice down in his drink. “I guess he just wants something different.”

Tony’s dad used to work for a restaurant in a hotel downtown as a chef. A week ago, browsing on the family computer, Tony had accidentally run into his father’s letter of resignation. It had said, in imperfect grammar, his intentions to quit work “effective as soon as possible,” and had expressed his father’s “disappointment” at the situation, but that he could no longer work with Mr. \_’s constant “teasing” and “name-calling,” which he did not find funny nor appreciate.

Tony had sat still in front of the soft buzz of the computer, feeling a great, exploding inertness building up in the pit of his stomach. He wanted to read the letter all over again to make sure but didn’t.

“I’m fighting this really big white kid today,” Tony told Sarah, but at the exact moment, little Roberta tripped from running and fell flying at the lamp stand next to them, immediately bursting in tears.

“What? I didn’t hear you,” Sarah said over her shoulder, rushing to help.

“I said...”

Tony didn’t get to finish. Roberta’s howling drowned out any possibility of communication, and, like a siren, attracted the mad dash of panicking adults, with *Tita* Bibing viciously clearing out the way to the scene of the accident, with a nasty stiff arm.

After the commotion was over, Sarah went up to Tony to say goodbye.

“I have to go meet George,” she said. “But have a nice day, Hun, and tell Lea Happy Birthday again. I’ll see you soon.”

Tony watched her go, his heart on the tip of his tongue. Then suddenly furious, he thought, *Who the hell is George?*

It was almost four o’clock. Tony knew biking to the nature park would take ten minutes. At the party, the Palangas, Rosarios with the two FOBs, and *Manang* Pearl had already left. Along with a few stragglers, only Pastor Jim, *Tita* Gloria, *Tita* Bibing, Roberta, and Bob with the cheesecake remained. Tony pulled a hooded sweatshirt on and decided to tell his mother he was leaving.

“After you clear the tables,” his mother said.

“But you said I could leave early?” Tony objected.

“It will take five minutes.”

“I know. That’s the point!”

Tony’s mother did not say anything more, forcing a bitter Tony to go back inside and pick up a *Hefty* bag. Rapidly, he stormed the tables, disposing plastic plates, napkins, and utensils into the bag, tying it shut, and throwing it where the rest of the garbage from the party lay, then trying to make his escape. “Anthonee!” his mother shouted after him. “Don’t leave the garbage there,

take them out to the driveway.”

“Mom! I’m going to be late!”

“Anthony. Nobody does a group project on a Saturday. Take the garbage out first, then you can go.”

“NO! You LIED to me!” His voice boomed loud and aggressive, breaking even his mother’s calm demeanor. Everyone still there stopped and turned. Tony was flustered, chin quivering, struggling for words.

“I’m going! That’s it!” he finally said, marching away with authority, then before disappearing into the corner, “I’ll take the garbage out when I get back.”

Tony hopped on his bike and rode off into the street, turning left on Whigville Avenue. The setting sun had left the afternoon sky fading into gray, and Tony felt the wind turning colder as it streamed against his face. He was sorry he made a scene and embarrassed his parents in front of *Tita* Gloria and everyone else, but he cleared his mind off of it for now. Tight in his hoody, Tony pedaled on, trying to remember how big of a kid Diggs was.

## GONDOLA RIDE

---

Billy Tobenkin

You feel the tension  
Of his back muscles, the thrust  
Of the wide oar through  
The gelatinous green glass.  
You turn back  
And suddenly you see his father's face  
Nodding the same way with less  
Practiced English, and further back  
Until your guide is his grandfather,  
A mute machine ferrying  
The aristocracy of everywhere, same  
Long oar into a verdant bed of glass.  
Wind through canals of human  
Life, hanging blue shirts on strings,  
Chandeliers through rectangular  
Windows, the smell of slightly  
Stagnant water, personal motor  
Boats, oceans of books, taxes,  
Love letters, hidden pornography,  
Old photography, rusted maps  
With monsters floating huge  
In uncharted seas, dense fog  
Of a thousand winters, red painted  
Nails, tailored shirts, and you  
Remember to stop being Venice  
And breathe slowly, as the lapping  
Of the water on sinking staircases,  
As the motion of the oar,  
An endless oval, as the eyes  
Of the man who was born  
To show you the history  
Of an existence skipped in textbooks,  
Happy to remain timeless,  
Happy to be his father,  
Happy to have a glossy oar

• 30 RAINY DAY

Feel like an extension  
Of his God-given arm,  
Happy to pass the torch,  
Not watch the flame.



# CATHOLIC HEAVEN

---

Robert D. Schultz

“Catholic heaven,” she said, “comes about a dozen times a year. And it hurts.”

Those were the first words I remember her saying. They careened through my head when I was with her on that hot summer day. It was July. Many Julys ago. The clouds were thick and gray overhead as mid-afternoon pressed forth, but the humidity still surrounded everything in her house. I sat up on her bed, leaving a wet outline on her sheets.

“God if we could only get out of this one, you know. If we could just skip ahead and not have to think about this and know that everything was going to be ok, that would be what I want,” she said.

I listened to her with only half an ear as I scratched the red bump under my lip. Past her nervous, pacing figure I watched the leaves of her willow ripple in the wind. She told me once that her willow was the only part of her property that she liked. Her father was set to cut it down by the weekend, as the long thin leaves had begun to clog the gutters and downspouts of their house. She used to pull down the longest leaves of the tree and tie them around her head. The tree fed from a brook that ran along side her house. Sometimes when its banks swelled you could hear the mud squishing beneath the floorboards in her living room.

“Are you even listening to me?” she asked as the silence built between us. I wasn’t.

I remember when I moved into her neighborhood. Upon retiring from his job, my father moved us south and bought a giant old home with big white pillars that interfered with the wrap-around porch. No amount of resentment from my mother could have deterred him from moving us. They chose rooms on separate floors and explained to me that the luxury of more closet space and private bathrooms was something they had dreamed of for years.

The house sat in the middle of a square plot of a giant green expanse at the beginning of Old Mill Road, situated just outside of town. There was another one about the same as ours about halfway down the road. My father told me that the other homes in our neighborhood used to be the homes of sharecroppers. She lived in one that used to be a carriage house, all the way at the end of the road. It was brown and small and had a small dirt bath that winded to the door. I can’t remember if it leaned left or right. Sometimes I think it was leaning both ways, collapsing from the top. It was the beginning of spring when we met, waiting to go to school.

“So are you the kid that just moved in down the street?”

She was wearing brown shorts and a white t-shirt with short sleeves. She sort of leaned forward while we both sat on the wooden fence in front of my house. The sun shined on her blonde hair and masked her face in yellow.

“Yeah, I moved in a week ago.”

“You got a real nice house.”

“Thank you,” I said.

I remember the feeling in my stomach that morning. It’s the feeling that creates a new space for something that had never been there before. A space others had told you about, but that you never thought existed. Some people describe it as a knot; some people say that it’s butterflies. To me it feels like overflowing. Like someone is pouring cold water all over my warm insides.

“How come you don’t drive to school, I see all those cars over in your driveway.”

“I haven’t actually learned yet. I have sort of been neglecting going to take the test and get it, you know? But I like riding my bike, anyway. Do you have a license?”

Something about my question was laughable. I pretended to know what it was while I waited for her answer.

“No, I ain’t even sixteen yet, but I don’t think I’ll be getting it for a while either. We don’t really have a car for me to drive anyway, you know.”

I leaned forward with her and we talked until we got to school. We talked when we got home and for the rest of the months that spring offered us after that. I didn’t make any other friends, nor did I want any. I could count on her waiting for me at the bus stop everyday and that was enough. I could count on that feeling to return to me at least for an instant on those days.

I remember the silence between us when we first met the way I remember the silence that day back inside her house. Full of an anticipation for a future too large for me to comprehend. As she stood before me I knew that my future would be forever different. This would all change, these feelings would be brushed over with the dark font of maturity and responsibility and age. As soon as she disappeared into the bathroom I knew that I would never look at her the same way. Circumstance had elbowed its way onto our armspace and would forever force its discomfort upon us.

“God damn. Damn this wrapper. I can’t get this thing to come out. Why the hell do they make this so damn hard to... What the hell is the childproofing for, it aint like no child would ever want to open one of these damned things, anyway. Here you do it.”

Her hand trembled beneath mine as she continued.

“Why are you so damned calm? Why do we even have to do this, we know what it’s gonna tell us.”

“So we should forget about it then?” I said.

“Forget about what? What are you talking about? Forget about the whole thing or just the test.”

She lobbed her questions at me and I was too prone to dodge them. This was the first time she had ever let me inside her house. The squishing sound of the mud beneath the floorboards was rare she said.

Before, I supposed our relationship operated under a pretense that had since been shattered by this awful circumstance. She had nothing, or could hide nothing, from me anymore.

“Here you go,” I said.

She sat down beside me on the bed and leaned her head against my shoulder.

“What if we just left? What if we just went away, and nobody knew about nothin’, and if it happened it did happen; we’d deal with that, and if it didn’t, well then we’d be outta here, and away from this town and these people and everybody lookin’ to see if they like what you’re doin’? I don’t wanna go to hell for this. I don’t wanna go to hell for nothin’. How come when God makes people it’s so beautiful, but when the rest of us make ‘em it’s so damned evil? Why can’t it just not be so damned evil?” The pimple on my lip seemed to grow as she spoke.

I remembered when Father told us about abstinence during Sunday school. We always sat in the back and snuck glances at each other while the rest of the class became informed about God’s presence in the room. I remember she whispered to me that Father was trying to make us all miserable like him. He caught us talking and kept us after to re-impart his lesson. The memory can be a cruel possession in times of crisis. It can remind you of your seemingly insignificant arrogance which you so often regret. I knew at that moment, while I listened to her talk about what the next five minutes of our lives would tell us, that neither Father nor God could help us anymore. Not that we ever asked for it.

“I think everything will be alright,” I said.

“Well you don’t know Paul. You don’t know if it’s gonna be alright. And what if it even is? What if I go into that room and find out that there aint nothin’ goin’ on inside of me and I can just go back to the way things were? Do you even think that’s possible anymore? Maybe everybody was right. We shouldn’t have been doin’ those things. They call ‘em sins for a reason and people curse damned Adam and Eve for a reason, you know?”

I didn’t know. I still don’t. I sat on her bed and I pretended too though.

“Oh hell Paul. Maybe it all don’t mean nothin’ anyway.” Her voice began to trail off and she looked away from me.

“Maybe this happened the same way wind blows the leaves around.”

At that moment it felt as if everything was pausing to await what was in store for the two of us. I lied back on her bed and felt like I wanted to sink beneath her mattress, beneath the slats that held it up, and into the ground.

“Are you there, it’s so dark I can’t see.”

In those moments I felt as if my ears were only constructed to pick up her soft whisper. For months we had ridden the bus and found out all the important things about each other. She told me about how her mother died when she was seven years old. She never seemed to care that much about it, but sometimes she would remember the little things about her that could make her sad. Stories about tickling, and hair brushing and things that maybe I could witness her doing to a child someday. I told her about how my life in the North, and about the friends that I had left behind. I learned about her best friend that moved away and her father who drank too much. I told her about my boyhood obsession with baseball and how I used to listen to games on the radio and act out the announcers’ every word. She told me about all the people that had criss-crossed through her life and the stories that they had left behind with her.

“I can’t see anything, where are you?” I said.

“Down here, your porch is taller than me, jump down here. Those stairs make too much noise.”

In the prior weeks we had been sneaking out of our homes late at night, at first to relieve her father of the alcohol in his cabinet. It started as something we only did on the weekends, but as it got warmer, we snuck off at night more, and drank less.

“Follow me,” she said.

She still guided the way every night, across my backyard, onto the trail into the woods, over the brush, and next to the brook that wove through our town and into our property. We liked it there because it was soft and warm and because we couldn’t see any lights out there. We always wondered how it could be so warm so close to the water. At first we brought picnic mats and towels from my bathroom, but tonight we left everything behind. The brush was thick and pock marked our legs as we ran.

She turned her head back as I followed and said, “Hey, I think our legs are gonna be scabbed forever.”

“Yeah.” If only we could have stayed in that night forever, picking at our legs and watching the water rush past.

I remember that it was a strange kind of fog. One that blinded you after five feet, but that you thought did not exist in front of you. The whiteness was always ahead, out of reach. Forewarning. Encouraging, too. We could only get to the brook by her memory.

“We’re almost there,” she said.

Years before I had anticipated, and feared, and dreaded that night. Loathing it for the things that people had warned me of, for the details that I thought they had ruined, and for the sin that I believed that might have accompanied it. As I ran behind her however, those suppositions, or inhibitions, all left. I ran and let the

thorns and sticks tear at my legs while I pursued. I looked at her then the way I did when I first met her. She was as seemingly unreachable at that moment. But I was there, and I could reach it.

When I cleared the last patch of wood, I saw her standing before the stream. Looking down. There was no moon that night. Up above was only darkness. Late summer clouds blocked us from even the stars. Yet I could see the water rippling yards away, nudging forth with little bumps and trickling away to reform again, sometime. All this before I walked up next to her and sat down.

“We’re here,” she said.

We were, I thought. Everything began and ended on the side of that stream. Something was changing forever for the both of us. Something that we could never get back. Something that we weren’t sure if we wanted anymore. Something that we wished we had back, that day in her bedroom.

She had a ceiling fan in her room that twirled a little off center. I watched it as I lied there, legs planted on the floor, back sinking into her mattress, pulling me down. I sat up when she disappeared into the bathroom. The door thudded closed, twice, and then the lock snapped. The willow had resumed its task and wavered before me. The leaves didn’t weep so much as they seemed to sway, as if they were keeping time for our little experiment, much more accurately than any clock. Once at Church they handed out leaves from the willow tree instead of palms on Palm Sunday. I asked why didn’t use real palms and Father just told me “you know what they’re supposed to mean, it makes no difference.” But I never knew really. The leaves just reminded me of her.

I never paid much attention to the future until that day. My life had been an apathetic drift through a wealthy upbringing among parents who had given up long ago. Sometimes I wondered if she had it better than I did. I never knew what it meant to be sad. I never knew what it meant to wake up feeling your heart floating in your chest, slowly sinking with every waking moment, to have your eyes half open because of swelling instead of fatigue. She taught me that day. No result could have cured it.

The door creaked open as she emerged, eyes connected to our thin, plastic providence.

“Well, aint nothin’ I wanted more than nothin’,” she said.

I glanced at her feet and gathered another breath before responding.

“What do you mean? Are you ok?”

She looked up at me and smiled.

“Yeah, I’m ok,” she said. “We’re ok.”

The wind blew briskly through her window as the gray of late evening began to set inside her room. I could hear the leaves of the willow outside brush together like whispering firecrackers. The last time I would hear them do that.

"You're ok? We're ok? Everything is alright you mean?"

"Yeah, we don't gotta worry about that no more. It's what we wanted, we're fine. Thank God we didn't tell nobody about it. You know what my Daddy woulda done? I'm glad we didn't tell Father neither."

What we wanted or what anybody ever wanted for us, I never knew.

"Why don't we need to tell him? I mean why is it good?" I asked.

She threw down the thin piece of plastic and walked to the other side of the room.

"Cause He don't gotta know. It aint His business. Even if it is what harm is it that He don't know?" She paused and lifted my chin.

"Oh what are you concerned about? God made like six billion people that are alive right now. He made twice more than that before and He's gonna make tons and tons more. What's He gonna care about us?" Sometimes possibility gives way to unexpected sadness. Sometimes you get the anticipation that runs over you in a hot rush. They say that you can only see the light when there is dark in the room. Or maybe it's vice versa. I don't know.

"Besides," she said, "nothing happened anyway. Nothing at all."

## 12:03: GLAM, ROCK, GOD

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Julia Vu

glam rocks your sixteen year old  
bedroom: first pack of nicotine, coke  
cans       bowls       bong: go

jump on your bed it's  
euphoric T-Rex and David Bowie  
swooning out loud: because you can

wear nothing but sunlight, air-  
guitar like you're playing a sold-out show  
behind a locked door: you just figured

what else your penis could do.

mom (or Eve) thinks *it's just a phase*  
while in suburban dark,  
the only right lights emanating

the forbidden 'males only' site  
you gaze scared/confident,  
innocent/anticipating: just breathe

Eve sits crying speckled tiles and *why*  
you lost       *it* in Adam's hard bed  
still thinking maybe she was

*always a little too soft*

you: frustrated fumbling fingers reaching for  
"the good book," turning searching but  
it is (has to be) missing some pages

so you throw it shouting *Eve and*  
*Adam* on top squashing you gasping  
*it's wrong but I love it.*

*but we're Catholic—  
we don't do that.*

*you're doing it wrong.*

if dad knows, you'll get kicked  
out back 12:03 slitting your wrists  
hoping to end it all you and only

blood tears electric sweating honey salt  
water shimmering seas were never so fluid  
as tonight's erectly throbbing stars.

pausing, you light the cig:  
ash it on the porch:  
lie in the hammock: singing

Gary Glitter, *I'll stop the world and melt with you*



## NUMBER ONE

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Lynne Feeley

First off, I'd like to write a poem  
that is going to make me Rich.  
I'd like to write a poem that will make me rich.  
Just one poem.

And I'll tell you that it, this rich poem,  
will probably be about flowers—about  
flowers but not really about flowers eg  
“you are weed-like, you dandelion, you.” That  
probably won't do. And  
there will definitely [de finite ly] be  
an allusion to some Greek myth-god—a  
web makes a poem Rich eg “take  
me over like Zeus; take me under  
like Hades.” Of course,  
this will not do  
either.

And I can tell you this much: my  
poem will be about you—about  
you but not about *you* eg “I'd like  
to write you a poem that is going  
to make me.”

exist.

This,  
of course,  
is not  
doing.

# EL DORADO ANARANJADO

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Dennis Dunegan

Perching on the edge of a lichen-slicked dilapidated dock,  
the boys murmur softly like water trickles over smooth-worn rocks.  
Toes barely breaking the surface of the water, ripples pulsing out,  
tossing small maple-leaf boats against the ruddy shore.

The last day of summer inks its final image upon the sky,  
oranges, reds, burnt browns,  
soft milky clouds laced with fire  
reflecting off the water.  
A sharp, mesmerizing, illusive coral reef coalesces under their toes,  
its vividness fleeting.

They peel oranges, gouging with finger and nail,  
stripping the orange wrapper away and flinging it out.  
They whip it away effortlessly,  
out from their wrists, spongy insides facing the sky,  
undulating upon the wind it floats across the lake.  
Splashing down after the second bounce  
the citron erupts on the water,  
an iridescent starburst.  
Again and again and again,  
peels floating,  
blanketing the surface,  
orange Lily pads sprouting everywhere.  
They call it paradise.

# UNBOUND

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Jonathan Pollard

It was 1967, on a Tuesday in mid-August, and the draft board looked over the boys, branding them fit to kill and be killed, and someone slapped Doug Crider on the back and said there was no way in hell America could lose this war, not with boys as big and strong as Doug. One of the old timers said, "There must be nothing scarier to a Viet Cong than coming through the bush and meeting Crider. Hell, he's big as two of 'em. That's when they know they're gonna meet their maker, whatever gook god they believe in". Anderson laughed. Crider didn't say a thing. Nearly everyone who played football for the Trojans in '66 was gone in '67. Drew Hodge went to Pittsburgh. But everyone else, too poor for college, too proud to flee; everyone else went to the war. In '66, we knew there was a war, we knew some people were dying, but it was still too vague, too far away. In '67, the war blew up big; it made the cover of Time magazine; it was the only show on tv. When they drafted Chambers Town's finest, that war got even bigger, and it got real in a hurry. They were leaving town on August 28<sup>th</sup>.

Now nobody is ever happy about getting drafted for a war, but some of the boys didn't handle it all that bad. After all, Joey Stickle had found the Bloodrock in England, made it out of Normandy alive, and got back home to his family's house on Fayette Street with only a shrapnel wound in his thigh and four weeks of walking on crutches. Somehow, we forgot the dead, however many they were, their names went unmentioned. All we ever did, us and the old timers, was point to Joey Stickle and his Bloodrock and think about how boys from Chambers Town could never die. Sure, we didn't say it, but we thought it. When the wars come in floods, it's easy to remember the dead. But when the wars fall decades apart, we sleep in the gaps, and pretend that the dead just kept on living, but somewhere in the next town over. There hadn't been a war since Korea, and those boys had been dead since we were little kids. We never knew any of them; we never knew anyone personally who'd died in a war. So at the physical, the guys talked tough. Anderson said he didn't have anything better to do since graduating high school. He worked the second shift at Roth Concrete, making mortar. He didn't have a girl, and he didn't have a good job. He said he "wouldn't mind spending two years somewhere warm; see the world, kill some gooks, pass the time." Four months later, he was dead.

All Doug Crider ever wanted was a farm somewhere in the middle of Pennsylvania, up past Altoona, back a mile long lane that held off the highways and blocked out the

sounds of trucks passing in the early morning. All he wanted was to grow a few fields, some corn and others wheat, and a few acres of apple trees. Maybe a few cows for milk and chickens for eggs. Even if he couldn't eat only off those takings, he still wanted to grow corn and put it on his table at dinner-time, if only for the deeper meaning that he gave to living off the land; if only to do as his grandfather had done. He wanted children, to be a father who coached little league baseball, and sat on the school board so he could make sure his kids were learning right. But in late summer of '67, they drafted him. And for all his violence on the field, Doug Crider never wanted a war. I remember the last time, the only time, I ever really talked to him. That was before it all happened. That's when he told me these things.

In the fall of '66, we met East Pennsburg again in the district playoffs. As Coach Hodge was often given to saying, we handed them their asses. 28 to 10. Still, he was quick to point out that we had a long road ahead of us. Pennsylvania got an early snow that year, in the first week of November, up at Buckstown West when we were in the first round of the state championships. I remember how the coaches brought out boxes of jackets that game. I remember how nobody would touch those jackets, how everyone shivered and cursed in his shirt-sleeves, rather than donning one of those jackets and looking like a pussy. There was a rumor that if you were the first guy to put on one of those jackets, Coach Hodge would bench you on the spot. They have a different coach in Chambers Town now, but I swear to God they still have that rumor. And nobody touches the jackets.

So we made it past Buckstown, and we played on, deep into November, when the cold stung just as hard as any hit, and practice until 6 o'clock drug us deep into the evening dark. We finally lost in Pittsburgh, at the state semi-finals, against Glen Mills, 20 to 17. After the game, Coach Hodge had told us, "Men, don't get yourselves down. We come from Pennsylvania. And anyone who's ever lived in this state knows, Pennsylvania is football country. Now we had a hell of a season, and nothing can erase that. You all played as hard as you could; you played to your fullest. And you made it to the state semi-finals. That's something to be proud of. Hell, you're gonna have boys a your own, and they're gonna grow up and play football for the Trojans, and you're gonna be able to tell them that you went all the way to semi-finals in '67. And I'll tell you right now, you didn't just lose to some run-a-the-mill team. You just lost to Glen Mills. And I guarantee you, they're gonna win state next Friday. I guarantee." And one week later, Glen Mills won state against Central Bucks West, 35 to 13. And in this, we were somehow avenged, and the memory of that season became sweeter; a legend of even greater proportions.

That night, leaving Pittsburgh, we shuttled onto the coach busses for the three hour ride home. The boosters made sure we all had plenty of food before getting on the

bus, two bag lunches each. I filed to the back, and took one of the last seats. Doug Crider sat down beside me.

When I was fifteen, Doug Crider seemed to me a leviathan, a mountain. He looked like a man; he walked like a man, and I thought that deep down, he felt himself a man. And all the while, I strutted and swaggered, hoping that I would grow into the image that I was keeping up. I thought that I could be a man because my father feared me; but my father was a coward, and being greater than a coward, one can still a coward be. Knowing Crider on the field, between the downs, I formed his image in my mind; I made him up. I made him cold-happy; a guy who drank lots of beer, probably owned guns and watched John Wayne movies on Sundays; probably went hunting. He was everything that I was not. Tough and cold and strong and grown. He played football because he loved it. And I played football to pass the time. I played football because it made me feel important. Everyone else played football because they loved it and had played since they were kids. And I was never one of them. Not because they didn't consider me one of them; not because they thought me somehow foreign; but because I knew myself and I knew them and there were gulfs. And that night, I realized that Doug Crider wasn't one of them either.

"Hey, Kincaid, how's it going, buddy?" And by the way he said it, I realized that Doug Crider was a nice guy all along. I just never knew it.

"Alright, I guess. You think they'll win state?"

"Yeah. No doubt about it, kid."

"Damn. So if we'd a just gotten by them, we probably woulda had a shot?"

"Probably. But you know, shit happens. You know, that was the first time we made it to semi-finals in like five years. Everyone back home'll be proud as hell, man."

"So are you sad, you know, now that it's all over?"

"I'll tell you bud, I've played football since I was 6, since way back in midgets. And I love playing the game. But it doesn't seem like it's really over yet. I know it'll be hard next fall, when the leaves start turning, and I'm not out there on the field hittin'. I guess that's when it'll finally sink in."

"I thought you were gonna play college?"

"Nah. I thought about it, but my knees aren't the greatest. They get sore a lot. I just don't think I'd be able to make it through college without gettin injured or having to

quit, so I just don't feel like it's right for me to play college in the first place, know what I mean."

"I didn't know your knees were bad."

"Yeah, I don't like telling people. But the truth is, I ice 'em down pretty much every day, after practice, after games. I just don't know if I'd make it in college."

"So wha' da you think you wanna do?"

"Well, you mean, what am I actually gonna do or what do I wish I could do?"

"What do you wish you could do?"

"Own a farm. When I was a kid, I grew up on my granddad's farm, up in the middle of the state, near Altoona. That's what I want, man. He was a cabinet maker, my grandfather. Lived on his farm, grew his own crops, had some cows. And sold cabinets on the side to pay the bills. He passed on a couple a years ago. I'd really like to go get his old farm back up and running."

"When I was a kid, we used to live near a farm. I remember feeding our neighbor's cows with apples from our apple tree. The farmer, he was just this happy old fat guy. I was real young then, like 5 or something, but I always liked that guy. He was always whistling or singing a song in German or something."

"That's exactly how I wanna be. Some happy old fat guy. Married, a couple a kids. Coach little league baseball. Maybe a furniture maker, just like my granddad."

And on we went, into the night, and the bus passed out beyond the lights of Pittsburgh, toward Oil City, down highways cut through the mountains, pitch dark and black, crawling toward Chambers Town, and the boys nodded off, one-by-one, dreaming of the could have beens, some happy to have gone so far, and others sad to lose, but all trusting to Coach Hodge's word that Glen Mills would win state; that the story would outlive them all. And some of them it did. And Doug Crider asked me what I wanted to be, and I told him "Something where you get to talk a lot, you know, argue things. Probably a lawyer, maybe a politician." I told him I'd probably work for a few years after high school, probably up at Walter's Garage or Roth Concrete. We passed by Oil City, and Crider told me about the wrestling team. Asked me if I wanted to come to tryouts in a few weeks; said it kept him busy, helped pass the time. He told me I seemed like a smart kid, that I could make the debate team, probably even get scholarship money for college if I really worked at it. And then he said,

“Kincaid, you’re passing out, bud. Why don’t you try an get some sleep, man. I’ll quit talking your ear off, bud.” Then he tossed me his sweatshirt, “Here’s a pillow.”

As a rule, Doug Crider was quiet. As a rule, he kept to himself. It’s been years, and I still have no idea why Doug Crider talked to me that night.

So on the 27<sup>th</sup> of August, the day before the boys were set to leave, Doug Crider went into work at Walter’s Garage in Fayette Town, about a mile up the road from my house. He went to work and did the same thing that he’d done every day that summer, and up until that day, neither him nor Buzzy Walter had mentioned the war. War was one of those things you didn’t mention around old man Walter. He’d been in the wars himself, and when you asked him which ones, he’d just tell you, “Both.” Buzzy was born in 1899. He’d fought in both: One and Two. In 1918, when he was in France, he sent back letters; they all sent back letters, him and everyone else from Battery G, 118 Field Artillery, 29<sup>th</sup> Division. The Common Opinion ran those letters every first Monday of the month. His two best friends died in the barbed wire outside of the Argonne Forest. While they were busy dying, he got cut off from the rest of the battery, and spent nearly twenty-four hours shivering in the trenches, burying himself under piles of dirt, hoping that the Germans wouldn’t find him. And when he made it back to his company, he got the news that those boys, Joe Hubbel and Frank Weiss, were dead. So he wrote letters home to both their families. And he wrote an extra letter, to Joe’s brother, Paul. And at the end of that letter, he said, “Please accept my deepest sympathy for the loss of your brother and my best friend and comrade in this whole wide world.” But he made it through the trenches, drinking that weak wine and black coffee, but never any water; the whole time dreaming about fried chicken and apple pie but eating stale wafers. He made it home, after the war, back to Chambers Town in one piece. And more than twenty years later, he volunteered to go back. Because the young kids were all drafted, and going to die. And he didn’t think it was right for them to go alone, without someone to look after them, someone who’d been there before. So he didn’t cry, he didn’t complain. He just signed up, went stone silent, and went back into the war. He was in Mariveles in ‘42. Buzzy Walter was on the death march, the march where you just kept going, and you pissed in your jeans because if you stopped to piss you’d get shot; he was on the march where you kept going because if you fell down you’d just stay down. He made it eighty miles from Mariveles, on the southern end of the Bataan Peninsula, to San Fernando. Six days marching. The first day of the march, he saw the body of a Filipino woman; her head was cut off, her legs were spread, and there was a bamboo stick jammed between her thighs. On the third day, two Filipino boys, only ten or eleven, saw the marchers staggering, half dead, and tried to give them food, tried to give them their own rice cakes. But the Japanese shot those boys, and they went down, and they stayed down

forever. And everywhere, the buzzards came in flocks. On the sixth day, they came to San Fernando, and the Americans who were left standing got prodded through the streets in a parade; a demonstration of Japanese supremacy. But Walter made it through the march, and he made it back home, though thirty pounds lighter. And for some years after that, Buzzy put up the flag each day and took it down at night with reverence; and he headed the VFW; but he hated wars, all wars, and he hated the governments that made them.

On August 27<sup>th</sup>, Crider went into work like he always did. He spent an hour wrestling the alternator bolt off an old Chrysler so he could put it on a new one. He worked all morning and didn't say a word about the draft, but every few minutes, Buzzy would stop whatever he was doing and stare at him. Normally nothing weighed on Doug Crider; normally he was the thing weighing on everyone else. But that morning, Crider looked like a ghost. And Buzzy knew it, and Buzzy knew why.

"Son, you gonna be alright?"

"Yeah, Mr. Walter, I figure I'll be fine. It's just . . . you know . . . you know what's going on, with the war and all." The war. He said it. Still, that word, war, he said that single word so much quieter than all the others.

There was one unspoken rule for anyone who entered Lee "Buzzy" Walter's presence: there would be no talk of war. It didn't matter which one; the first, second, Korea. If you mentioned the war, he could have gone flashing back, and that might have been the end of him. And Crider knew all this, and he never wanted to say that word, war, never wanted to bring it up. But it came to that.

"I know about it, son. Vietnam. The war. I know what's going on over there."

"Mr. Walter, it's ok. We . . . we don't have to talk about it." And Crider offered this to him as a way out. Crider, the Leviathan, who'd known Buzzy since he was a kid, and grew up knowing that you never mentioned war around him, didn't want to hurt the old man.

"Hell, Doug, this ain't ok. It's a war. You know what that is, son?"

Doug was silent.

"You know I was in both wars. Made it through the death march in Bataan."

"Yes sir, my father told me that."



“You know what I think about wars.”

“No sir.”

“I hate ‘em. I hate the men that make ‘em. I still can’t sleep through a whole night son. One sound, and I’m up outta bed, running; so scared I could piss my pants. You’re a good kid, Doug. I knew your daddy, and he was a good man, still is. See, your daddy got lucky, didn’t ever have to go to a war. Hell, my whole generation is finished. We all been in so many wars we can’t live natural anymore. You probably think I’m crazy son, but I’m gonna tell you something, only promise me you won’t tell a soul what I say. You promise?”

“Yessir.”

“Get the hell outta here, Doug.”

And Doug Crider was on the verge of crying, because he thought Buzzy Walter was mad at him for bringing up the wars; he thought he’d broken the old man, and he didn’t know what to do.

“Wha ‘da you mean?”

“Just like I said, you know what I’m talking about. Get outta here. Go to Canada, or wherever you can get to. Don’t go to the war, Doug. I don’t wanna see you coming back here ruined. This town’s forgotten. Everybody’s all hoopin and hollerin and beatin their drums and talking about fighting and making us proud. They’ve all forgotten about everyone who went off and died already. You take my advice, you get outta here.”

“Mr. Walter, I don’t wanna go. I don’t wanna kill anybody. I . . . I don’t think I could live with myself knowing that I killed some rice farmer or something, some guy who just happened to be farming in the wrong place, trying to raise his family. And one day, he’s livin his life, and the next day I’m shootin at him. I . . . I don’t think I could deal with having that kinda blood on my hands.”

“Then you get the hell outta here, son. I killed Nazis. And I tried to tell myself they were just Nazi bastards, and that they didn’t matter. But that only works for so long. A man’s a man. And when you kill a man, you’ll know it forever. It won’t let you forget.”

"I don't know where to go."

"Canada. That's where I'd go."

"My truck'll never make it that far."

"Come out back, I'll show you something."

So they walked out back, behind Walter's Garage, which fronted fields, which marked the edge of nameless woods that ran, eventually, into Pittman's. The back of Walter's lot was divided into two sections; junk cars, and cars that ran. From the building all the way back through the field until the trees started springing up, there were rows of cars; and in between the rows of cars, there was a path beaten by his work truck. He'd been collecting those cars for nearly fifty years. In the part of the lot that housed the cars that ran, there was a red jeep with its hood up.

"See that jeep over there. It's a 1950, but it'll still go. Built to last, they always told me. I've used it in the winter for the past fifteen years. I want you to have it, Doug."

Buzzy'd been up since 5am that morning, messing with that jeep, changing the battery and the spark plugs, giving it new oil, doing everything he could to make sure that jeep would get to Canada.

"What are they gonna say . . . when . . . when they find out that I left?"

"The dumb ones'll say you were a coward. The smart ones, the ones like me, they'll say you did right by you. And that's really all that matters."

Walter reached into his pocket, and pulled out the keys. He opened his wallet, and pulled out two one-hundred dollar bills. He handed these things to Crider.

"You call me whenever you get a chance. Write me a post card or whatever you can. Make for Buffalo if you can, it's the quickest way. 300 miles to the border."

"Buzzy, I don't know what to tell my dad."

"Don't tell him shit, Doug. Your daddy's a good man, but he's full of that pride talk. Glory and honor and everything else. I been to the death marches, boy. I been..."

And Buzzy Walters broke down.

“Don’t you go back their telling your daddy that you’re going to Canada. He won’t let you go. Don’t you go to that war, boy!”

And then he started shaking. He started crying. And Doug Crider put his arm around that old man’s shoulder, and walked him into the garage so he could sit down. Fourteen years ago, Ed Walter, Buzzy’s son, had died in Korea. And even if Chambers Town forgot its dead, Buzzy Walter could never forget his own.

You’ve heard stories about people dodging the draft, burning flags, tearing up their cards; making a scene out of it. Sure, that’s how it went for some people; for the ones who wanted to make an act out of it; wanted to make a statement. But Doug Crider didn’t wanna burn anything. He didn’t wanna piss anybody off. He just knew that he couldn’t deal with killing people; he just knew that he’d never make it in a war. Doug Crider cut and ran in the night, just past 10 o’clock, on August 27<sup>th</sup>.

He made for the border by the only highway he really knew. He figured Canada was somewhere north, so he left Chambers Town on Rt. 81, running dead north, and he didn’t leave that road for 200 miles. Near 2 o’clock that morning, he left the highways for the back roads, thinking that whatever was following him wouldn’t follow him, through the dark, up through the small towns. He passed through Connorsville, and crossed the New York border on the eastern side of the Alleghany Forest, on a back road, called Hillside Street. And even though he’d fled the highways for the side-streets, he still felt like someone knew where he was going; like someone was watching him. He stopped for gas and coffee at an all night truck stop, and tried to calm his nerves. He matched his fingers to the bar that marked twenty miles in the New York State road map, and he said to himself, quietly, “150 miles”. But even then, he knew it would never be so simple.

Doug jumped back on the highway, and gunned that jeep, headed dead on for the border just north of Lake Ontario. But ten miles out from Doylesburg, the last American town he’d see, something pulled in him, and he knew he couldn’t cross. He swerved the wheel and went northeast.

I can imagine Doug Crider, driving that red 1950 jeep, deep north in New York, skirting the Canadian border. Running, in the night, like a slave out in front of the master’s dogs, north freedom bound. But he knew like mad that he couldn’t cross that border straight. Something was pulling on him, holding him back. And he knew what it was. He was owned by the town and the tradition. Doug Crider was a Trojan, born and bred, pride of Chambers Town. And that town was weighing on him.

Chambers Town was a spot, a ghost town, 400 miles back. From New York, looking

southward, it didn't even exist. Chambers Town with its 6,000 people, and his house in Fayette Town, a village of 500, strewn with farms. He thought back, through the miles, through the night, to that town, his town, Chambers Town, asleep, the farms all shut down, nobody walking up Main Street, the high school locked and all the fields empty. So small, it could not matter; so small that, in relation to the vastness of the world, it simply could not be, and yet, to him, it was; it was everything and all powerful. It was fallen, the town and all of its dealings, obscured and fallen into nothingness through all those miles, and yet, it lorded a power over him, and that bond was one like blood. He knew that town, and all the towns just like it, all the towns that he had passed along the highway that night; they were all nothing; all rocks and dust, towns risen up from rot, meaningless in the greater scheme of things. Those towns were spots on maps, at most those towns were gas stations for people passing in the night.

The further he drove, the longer that leash stretched, and the tighter it pulled. The memories came back in floods. The back of that jeep was full of bricks. Buzzy Walter weighed it down because he used it in the winter, when the snow fell. And when Crider hit the gas, he felt that he could never get moving fast enough to break that tie that held him; and it was like those bricks were slowing him down. But it was more than bricks. It was Chambers Town, now 400 miles back, and refusing to fall into its rightful obscurity.

Doug Crider knew that he'd never make it in Canada. Lost, a boy from Chambers Town, a renegade. He had the \$200 Buzzy'd given him, and a few hundred that he'd saved that summer. He'd packed in a hurry. A duffle bag and a few pictures of people he loved. And in the seat beside him, his letter jacket from football, because it was the only winter coat he owned, because he thought it would be cold so far north in Canada. And all the things he carried with him, they carried their own weight. Even if he could have broke free, on his own, with nothing else but his naked body, he could have never broken free bearing the burden of all of those things; all of those things so deeply bound to that town with ties or memories. He would never make it in Canada. He knew he had to turn back. Four-hundred-twenty miles out, and he went all damage and delusion. He convinced himself that he had only two options left: he could turn back, or he could wreck his car into the mountain and end it there. But if he could make it back! He could turn around at the next intersection, hop back on 81, and gun it south. He'd be back home by morning, and he could show up at the bus station early that afternoon, haggard and seemingly hung-over, after a night of no sleep. But he would blend in perfectly, because all the other boys were getting trashed that night, their last night in Chambers Town. And there was nothing special about being trashed in Chambers Town, because you got trashed every night once you were old enough, because you had nothing else to do. And Crider knew all this, and so he

knew that he could make it back, and blend in at the bus station, looking still half-drunk, like all the other boys. He still had hope that he could make it back in time for the war. Because he'd never make it to Canada; Canada was a wall splitting the night, a wall guarded by men with guns, or so he saw imagined the border that way in his mind.

He couldn't cross the border, but he couldn't turn back. Because he knew there was something wrong about Chambers Town. There was something about that place that killed people. If you didn't get out early, you'd just stay there. Like Joey Stickle. Like the old timers. Sure, you could go on living, working the third shift at Roth Concrete or some factory out on Orchard Drive, in the industrial park. But for all intents and purposes, your life stopped mattering the minute you took off your football cleats; the minute you stepped off the baseball field; or at the latest, the day you graduated. Chambers Town killed you, never all at once, but in little pieces each day, because you noticed it less that way. And whatever you were when you started, whatever you dreamed about being when you grew up, the town beat that all out of you. And you fell in line with everyone else, and you nodded your head and said, "\$4.00 an hour is good money. You can have a good life off that." It was a vacuum. You got used to the roads that ran from your house toward the state park at Caledonia; you got used to the way the trees looked in the fall when they changed colors along the highway; there was something about the summertime and the night air in Chambers Town, something beautiful, and deadly, and soothing in a way; perhaps it was just the familiarity of it all; just being part of the routine. And when you got older, and you saw the young kids coming up, you saw yourself as part of that cycle. You went to high school, and saw the young kids playing little league in the fields behind the Fayette Town fire hall, and you knew that those boys would become you, and you would become the old timers. You saw it all, stretching itself out in years and decades, running forward, you saw it all unfolding until you saw yourself dying there, having never left, dying in that little circle, cut off from the rest of the world, dying in that town that never mattered. And you knew the newspapers would write your obituary, and the last line would say, "He lived his whole life in Chambers Town". And if it didn't wear you down and kill you slow, it wrapped you in the tradition, and filled your head so full of pride and bullshit about honor and glory and Trojan's never dying. And when you got older, and you realized how hollow all of those words were, you'd blow a whole in your head with a shot gun, just like Frank Barra did, just like James Carson did; two boys from my own school, from my own class. Or if you lived during a war, you'd go headlong into it, screaming about glory and saying the Lord's Prayer, just like you were playing in another, bigger football game. And you'd do it that way because you didn't know there was any other way to live.

And Doug Crider saw all of this. He saw it all unfolding in the years ahead. He knew

that Chambers Town would kill him in the end. He'd go to war and die for the glory and the honor. Or he'd make it out of 'Nam alive, then come back, and work the 3<sup>rd</sup> shift at Roth Concrete because his mind was gone and he couldn't think straight anymore; couldn't live in society after spending a few years in the war. In three or four years, he'd meet a girl, and they'd fuck and have kids and get married and put down roots in Chambers Town. And he'd never leave. He'd turn into one of the old timers. And he'd never make it back up to Altoona to recover his dead grandfather's farm. He'd never make it anywhere.

Everyone knew that Doug Crider was the biggest and the strongest and the bravest. But no one guessed he was the smartest. Yes, it took him more than 600 miles, 200 of those miles driving parallel to the border, weaving east to west, trying to force himself to cut those lines that ran all the way back, back through two states, tying him down to Chambers Town. But before morning broke, on August 28<sup>th</sup>, Doug Crider busted through the border near Ogdenburg, just south of Montreal.

Doug Crider was my hero. But I never told him that.

# MY HALF EATEN SANDWICH

---

Avi Levitan

I turn towards the east listening with my Western Ear  
to the voice of the north scratching out arctic words  
into soft tissue till the red comes out and turns white.  
Head clamped like a C with three right turns  
sucked limpet-like to the Wall                      -My Western Ear.  
Hearing a bunch of Israelis, that's how they come,  
in bunches like bananas grown as upside down grass, that's how they grow  
until they're picked apart and peeled o so slowly.  
All of them are stripped and pulled right down, *yanked*, fallout to rot.  
I heard them tongue to tongue picking up all of their verbs  
or maybe just the remains, all burned and raw, dead and numb.  
The hard P of stern lips was left hollow, empty and raked to the dark corners  
of that room where syllables lose cohesion, mumbled up close together,  
enervating the action of Pa'al, causing it to fall                      -fallout.  
The entropy leaked through like anger and frustration, little lost sounds.  
My grip slipped and the aural cup crumpled like so much cartilage.  
So much cartilage dropped out and down to the ground,  
chewed like dairy rags woven checkered as chess.  
Unable to find the water table rushing underground,  
heading to flood straight through the grass. Useless as bone dust,  
my Western Ear sat like a half eaten sandwich.  
Eyes blank and blind, the other one, on the other side of my head,  
turned up fresh towards the sky, listening for the cold air  
and the cry of birds as they fed their children.

3:14 A.M.

---

Reed C. Flaschen

His eyes were shut  
tight  
and hardly struggled anymore.

Before they knew what happened  
she was naked white ceramic  
that exploded into twenty pieces.

A shard went through my eye.

Pavement shimmering in the wet yellow sodium  
I talk to myself on the edge of a knife  
reciting silly half-rhymes about life.

Rain drips like syrup from the caves.



## SPLINE

---

I want to cry and take mescaline.  
There is a cactus oozing green transcendence into a shopping bag  
back at my apartment.  
I had an orange, textured dream last night.

There is a cactus oozing green transcendence into a shopping bag  
I took the bus to school this morning, and  
I had an orange, textured dream last night.  
The old man and I sat together on the blue plastic.

I took the bus to school this morning, and  
a woman three rows behind us screamed, "Liar!"  
The old man and I sat together on the blue plastic.  
"Not for ten million dollars!"

a woman three rows behind us screamed, "Liar!"  
"Who do you think you are?"  
"Not for ten million dollars!"  
The old man glanced while I counted the threads in my shoelace.

## UNTITLED

---

Laurel Ingraham

Ears to conch shells  
I am bigger than Columbus  
your gold runs deep  
in a jeweler's glass case

A silver knife  
could burn my tongue now  
words you don't need  
slip unknowingly off snail's backs

A hammer could smash  
a shell to pieces  
not the sound of the ocean, but  
wind and bits of sand, broken  
rock

I am hotter than Triton  
who says water cannot burn -  
groping at polluted air  
are lungs - mine,  
now

sweet molasses clogging  
a porous mind  
are

words in Spanish like sugar  
to a diabetic chocoholic,  
needles en mis brazos,  
you always loved the sight of blood.

## SOPHIA

---

Charlotte Nunes

Look at you. Your hair's a mess.  
A sun-streaked, manic squirrel's nest.  
Grains of sand and tea rose pollen  
play across your nose.  
Flung across such shoulders,  
flecks of sea foam show the way to men and women.  
Last afternoon you sudsed up with a slender friend  
who left her strut  
with the jaunty, side-wise hip cocked in her locker.

Whipping up a batch of scones  
you peter currants into batter,  
little piggy eyes to watch you whistling  
from the oven's crusty dungeon.  
Your form, it's own northeastern landscape:  
green mountains, purple valleys, not a crag or corner  
to disturb this contoured earthen skyline.  
You can solve a riddle.  
You can solder something rent.

## CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

**Dennis Dunegan** is a sophomore majoring in English and minoring in Information Science. He hails from Winter Park, Florida, and has had his poetry published in several Orlando newspapers. He looks forward to a life full of writing, rock climbing and healthy living.

**Phil Dureza** is a senior double major in English and American studies. He is from Whiggville, Connecticut and is *Rainy Day's* fiction editor.

**Lynne Feeley** is a sophomore English major. She hopes to concentrate in either creative writing or modern poetry. Her favorite writers include Woolf, Joyce, WC Williams, and Kerouac.

**Reed C. Flaschen** is a senior English major from Connecticut. He enjoys strange words, sounds, and people.

**Alexandra Frank** is a senior French major. Her interest in writing poetry started in Sun Valley Idaho, where she listened to the ballads sung by an old cowboy at the local bookstore every Sunday. Her first published poem appeared in the Santa Barbara Independent. Her reading and writing of poetry affects into every part of her life, including her paintings. Eventually she wants to work for the San Francisco Modern Art Museum.

**Laurel Ingraham** is a sophomore double major in Spanish Literature and English with a concentration in Creative Writing. From Andover, Massachusetts she has had several poems published in student/young writer anthologies. She plans on writing and possibly teaching English at the high school level.

**Chloe Layman** is a sophomore College Scholar and philosophy major studying post-Idealist German philosophy and aesthetic theory. Her work has been published in previous issues of *Rainy Day*.

**Avi Levitan** hails from Newton, Massachussetts and is currently a freshman in the college of Arts and Sciences. His major and future plans are undecided.

**Charlotte Nunes** is a senior English and History major from Peace Dale, Rhode Island. Eventually she would like to pursue an M.A. in English, History, or American Studies.

**Marissa Perry** is a senior with plans to graduate and be happy. She is proud to have had her fiction appear in student periodicals such as *Rainy Day*, *Our Time is Now*, and *Kitsch*.

**Jonathan Pollard** is madly in love with Katrina DiBarry. He hopes she'll marry him. After he graduates, he's going to Teach for America and then to law school. Abiit, excessit, evasit, erupit.

**Rebecca Schonberg** is a junior majoring in Comparative Literature. She is a member of the Cornell University Chorus, and will be studying in Paris this spring.

**Robert D. Schultz** is a senior American Studies major from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. "Catholic Heaven" is his first published story. He is currently writing a novel and would like to thank Professors Michael Koch and Glenn Altschuler for their guidance and friendship during his time at Cornell.

**Billy Tobenkin** is a junior English major from Los Angeles, California. His future plans include earning his Ph. D. in English, focusing on American Literature and Creative Writing, and becoming a professor.

**Julia Vu** is a sophomore human development and pre-medicine student from Lancaster, Pa. After Cornell, she plans on heading to medical school, while still writing music and poetry part-time. She is also a member at large for the Cornell Punk Society.

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