

RAINY DAY

Volume XXXI, No. 1 / Winter 2003



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Editor's Note

This year a lot of things have changed here at *Rainy Day*. For an amazing thirty years we have been a magazine published annually. But this year, and in successive years, the magazine will be biannual. We hope this will increase the presence of a literary magazine with such a rich tradition on campus.

For this issue we received close to two hundred student works: well over any amount of submissions we've had in *Rainy Day*'s recent history. The competition was incredibly fierce and we had to reject many fine submissions. This opportunity to be selective made the quality of this semester's issue extraordinarily high. We also consciously limited the magazine to the have a maximum of three staff submissions in order to open up the magazine to the whole of the Cornell community.

Firstly I'd like to thank Michael Koch whom despite running a magazine of his own, was able to advise me whenever I needed help. Without him this magazine would have never been possible.

Thanks to my poetry editors, Irene Pollock and Emily Selove, who looked through numerous poems and never complained to me about it. Thanks to my fiction editor, Phil Dureza, for not only reading a great deal of fiction submissions but for providing this magazine with one of the best undergraduate short fiction pieces I've ever read. And obviously thanks to my staff who came out every week and read countless pages of submissions, gave valuable critiques of the works and, most importantly, made meetings amusing.

Thanks to Seth Levi for having to sit through my obsessive tweaking as he layed out this magazine and for his imaginative reformatting of the magazine.

Thanks to David Mendoza for consistently trying to make this magazine better and helping me figure out how to get through all the red tape.

I'd like to thank the SAFC for providing us with the funding to allow a biannual magazine.

And lastly thanks to the Cornell community for their submissions. Our staff was honored that you would share your work with us: each piece, without exception, had merit. We thank you for convincing us that Cornell is a school of extraordinary writing talent.

-Christopher Kang

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fiction

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Cover: the Academy of Music, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
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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 specify within the e-mail whether your piece is fiction, poetry, non-fiction, etc. We accept multiple submissions. Send all inquiries about joining the staff to the editor.

PHIL DUREZA

Town Square

It took one week for the town to decide to kill Balthazar, twice the time it took Balthazar to finally confess to Roderigo and Amos, and less than an eighth of the time it took Roderigo to tell the Middle Priest Pepe. The carpenters were already building Balthazar's coffin in Main Street near the Holy Altar in the Town Square, and the old widows were busy, practicing mentally what profanities they were going to yell at him.

About three weeks ago, Balthazar discovered that god was hollow. It was his turn to clean god in the three-month adult male rotation, and brushing along god's neck, Balthazar noticed that a tiny patch of god's bronze skin had fallen off. He pressed his pinky where the missing patch had been and found his finger going all the way through into god. When he pulled back, there was a visible hole on god's neck, and he nervously turned his head about looking for a bolt of lightning or a plague. None came, but the hole remained. His next instincts were to drop his brushes and bow his head on god's giant toes, weeping, asking for his forgiveness. He prayed, crouched on all fours, from one o'clock to five o'clock, missing siesta. The townspeople noticed him as they passed. "There goes Balthazar," Roderigo said at one-thirty. "What a devout man of god is he." "There goes foolish Balthazar," said Zach the Tax Collector at three o'clock. "Praying for his wife back I bet." "There goes poor Balty," said Ruth the ex-wife at four-thirty. "He dropped his contacts again."

Balthazar prayed and prayed that god might forgive him and cover up his sin, but at dusk, when he finally got up, the hole was still there. He went to touch it to make sure, and sure enough, his pinky was once more inside god. He peeked at it, blew at it, said *bello* to it. It was then at that moment, hearing the muffled echo of his own voice in god's big head, that Balthazar realized god was hollow.

God had a large boar's head, but had a human torso, which leaned forward, where then a large right foot connected to god's hips. God didn't have any thighs, knees, calves, or shins, but just an enormous right foot to match his boar head. According to the Pillars of Faith, god was filled with liquid gold and had a beautiful diamond heart. God's golden blood guaranteed the prosperity of the few ancestors who stayed, which turned into a village, then turned into a town. His diamond heart symbolized god's hardness at those who chose to disobey him. Carefully inspecting the peepshow on god's neck, however, Balthazar didn't see either blood or heart, only darkness.

Around a week and a half passed; Balthazar painfully kept the secret of god's hole to himself, not even telling his daughter Rachel. On evenings after dinner, he would ride on his water buffalo Buster, caressing the coarse, furry hide of the animal. "What does it all mean Buster? What does it all mean?" he would say to Buster in the night. Balthazar did not understand why god was hollow, or why nobody else had noticed it. During lunch one day at the community mess hall, he finally gathered enough strength to ask his best friend.

"Roderigo, did you clean god on Tuesday?"

"I do not know what you are talking about." Roderigo responded.

"Roderigo," Balthazar said. "I think god may be hollow."

"Shhh," Roderigo said. "God's diamond heart will not forgive you for such heresy."

"But...but god has no heart Roderigo."

"Shhh...Balty shut your mouth."

"Amos," Balthazar said. "You cleaned god also. Did you see the hole on his neck?"

"I saw no hole." Amos said. "I believe in god."

"But..."

"Shhh! Balthazar!" Roderigo and Amos both said.

"I will show it to you!" Balthazar said confidently and walked off.

Roderigo and Amos did not go with Balthazar to god in Main Street but instead went to the Office of Inquisition. That night, the Middle Priests Pepe and Hezekeil appeared on Balthazar's doorstep with a crowd of people in carnival masks behind them. Balthazar could tell that he knew many of the followers despite of their masks. Boboy,

in a shivering-face mask, still wore the same yellow scarf around his shoulders that his wife knitted for him years ago. Caleb, in an angry wolf mask, still had his wooden cane out to help him walk, and Ruth the ex-wife was in a Miss Piggy mask and still had her hair up in her favorite fashion. Practically everyone in town was there and had masks. On the corner were the three brothers Shem, Jam, and Haphet wearing a hear-no-evil, see-no-evil, say-no-evil mask respectively. Behind Father Hezekeil were his friends Roderigo who wore a happy-face mask and Amos who had a sad clown mask. Besides the priests and Balthazar, only Balthazar's daughter Rachel, who stood worriedly behind her father, did not wear a mask.

"Good evening Brother Balthazar," said Middle Priest Pepe. "We are here to condemn you of heresy."

"Don't I at least get a trial?" Balthazar asked.

"No," said Middle Priest Hezekeil. "We are a theocracy."

"Brother Balthazar," said Pepe. "I have heard from very reliable sources that you think god is hollow."

"Well..."

"It is too late to recant," said Pepe abruptly. "God has already condemned you. Not confessing would only mean more sin."

Balthazar thought about it for a minute. "But god is hollow," he finally said. "I've put my finger in him."

The crowd gasped. "Heretic," "Blasphemer," "I knew it," some of them said.

"It's true. I've fingered god." Balthazar showed him his pinky finger and flexed it up and down. "I've even peeked."

The crowd pulled back and gasped again, and the old widow Jezreal, in a mask of a pretty young woman, fainted for added emphasis.

Later that night, and for the next six nights to follow, the Committee of Persecution met to debate what to do with Balthazar. The High Priest Eli recommended that Balthazar wear a big, orange letter "B" for Blasphemer at all times. The Tax Collector Zach wanted to repossess Balthazar's property, and divvy it up into smaller pieces of real estate to sell to low-income families at a higher interest rate. The Mayor proposed a public lashing to boost his approval ratings in the gallop polls and banishing Balthazar to the shore where the longhaired, hippie heathens resided. After six days, when the committee could not agree on a conclusion, they called a secret town meeting. Everyone got invites

except for Balthazar and Rachel. “Crucify him! Crucify him!” cried the people in the secret town meeting. “We can’t crucify him,” said Judge Horace. “The Healer is already hanging on our only cross.” They groaned in disappointment. Then Stephen the Mailman stood up and suggested, “You know what guys? When was the last time we had a really good stoning? Like a really riot of a good one?” Cheers of approval started, then got louder and louder, and still louder, until the Judge had to use his gavel to pound them to silence.

That week Balthazar’s fate was being decided, the mailman stopped delivering to his house, and Balthazar’s cable was cancelled. He also went in to work one morning to find his boss Rizal with his arms crossed. “Sorry, I don’t hire non-believers,” Rizal told him. “But what about Peter the Christian?” asked Balthazar. “He’s in the union,” Rizal said.

On the way to the unemployment office, Balthazar was stopped by his best friend Roderigo. Roderigo had not spoken to him since that time in lunch and did not look him in the eye.

“Roderigo, I’m glad you finally came. I was worried...”

“I want my tackle box,” said Roderigo.

“What?” asked Balthazar.

“You have my tackle box...”

“Yes, but...”

“Just give me back my tackle box,” Roderigo said and left.

Balthazar stood alone and silent. Across from him, Balthazar caught his ex-wife’s sympathetic eyes, but she too turned away. He still did not understand why no one believed him. After all, god’s hole can be clearly seen even from afar, especially since it has gotten bigger and bigger and was now the size of a peach. But Balthazar dismissed the odd behavior of his friends and told himself they will eventually come around. He walked home, still waving and smiling at neighbors and children who lowered their faces at him and spat on the ground.

Balthazar was more concerned with god and his hollowness. During dinner, he would furrow his eyebrows at the beef stroganoff in his plate, deep in thought, as his daughter worried over him. Balthazar wanted to understand, tried to understand, but his heart was heavy with questions. *How long has god been hollow? If god is hollow, will we still prosper? Can god still punish us if he has no hard heart? Is there a*

paradise like in the Pillars of Faith? What if there is no heaven or hell? What if there is no sin? What if there is no god? Balthazar tried to reason his way out of the mystery. *If x is god and y is man, and a is hollowness, then $x + y^2/a = me$?* Balthazar crumpled the piece of paper and threw it in the fireplace. “What does it all mean Buster? What does it all mean?” he would say to Buster as he rode it in the night.

One evening, while Balthazar was experimenting with god in the multiplication table, there was a knock on the door. Rachel opened it and immediately started crying. It was Aguinaldo the Herald dressed in a black hood and carrying a scythe (traditional herald costume).

“I’m...I’m really sorry Balthazar...but the majority of the people tonight voted to stone you on Sunday.”

Rachel cried louder. Balthazar affectionately put his hand on her shoulder.

“Oh, honey,” Balthazar said. “I’m sure it’s not as bad as it sounds, right Aggie?”

“It’s to death,” Aguinaldo said.

Rachel cried even louder.

“It’s okay, honey,” Balthazar squeezed his daughter into him. “I wasn’t planning on living forever anyway.”

Rachel buried her face in her father’s side.

“There’s more, Balthazar,” Aguinaldo said. “Well, I’m really embarrassed to say but...the state...well, we’re kind of uhm in hard times...so we were uhm wondering if you can spot us for the coffin.”

Rachel was screaming in tears.

“Oh,” Balthazar said. “Well, I don’t think that will be a problem. Is that all?”

“Yes...see you Sunday Balthazar.”

“Goodbye Aguinaldo. It was good to see you.”

That night, Balthazar lay on his bed thinking that in six days, he was going to die. He felt very sorry that he was going to die. He lay there, not sleeping for hours, remembering all the people he ever met, and all the things he ever experienced, and he was moved by all of them. He wanted to relive fishing in the river with Roderigo when they were little boys and watch how his mother made him angel cake on his birthdays. He wanted to feel again Ruth’s warm hand on their wedding day and cradle baby Rachel when she was born. He remembered the last night Ruth and he made love, before she was repossessed along

with her father's estate by the Tax Collector. And Balthazar almost died, longing to breathe her in again. Balthazar lay on his bed and wept happy tears and thanked a hollow god for the richness of his life. Suddenly, a vision struck him; there was a plan.

Before there was light, Balthazar was out of bed, making breakfast for his daughter. He made scrambled eggs, toast, and sausages and left them in the oven on "warm" before he took off into the world. He picked out the best seeds and flowers he could find around his little garden and brought them over to the old widow Jezreal's house. There in the early morning, he tilled the soil and planted the seeds and blooming flowers in her front yard so she would momentarily forget her husband's death and see life's beauty up close once again. Then, Balthazar walked over to Boboy's house and placed in his mailbox his wool mittens. This way, Balthazar reasoned, Boboy's hands will not be shivering three-quarters of the year. Around noontime, Balthazar had bought wood from the carpenter shop and paid for his coffin and began assembling a stroller with wheels to give to the bitter cripple Caleb. Later that afternoon, Balthazar went back to his workplace to see Rizal who still had his arms crossed. Balthazar gave him his best hammer and chisel and told him his secret to stone cutting. When the sun had set, Balthazar knew he had done all the good he could for that day and went to bed feeling that his plan was working.

For the remainder of the week, this was to be Balthazar's daily routine. He would wake in the dark and watch the dawn appear as he cooked eggs and toast for his daughter. Then for the rest of the day, Balthazar went about to do good deeds. On Tuesday, he had cut the grass and trimmed the bushes in the school and fixed the scoreboard in the football field. On Wednesday, he volunteered in the nursing home and bought roller skates for all the neighborhood children. Thursday, he sat by the river and took all day to tie all the flies he had caught for bait. Then later, he brought Roderigo his tackle box with all his bait and his *Bass Magnet* fishing rods. Inside the tackle box, Balthazar left his double-faced, all-heads, no-tail, half-dollar coin that Roderigo lost to him in a bet when they were younger.

The townspeople were touched by all of Balthazar's good deeds and did truly feel sorry that they had to stone him to death. That week, Balthazar got his cable back, the mailman began delivering to his house

again, and people argued over who knew Balthazar first. “I knew him all the way back in first grade,” one man said. “Ha, that’s nothing,” another man said. “My mother told me I played with him when we were babies.” “Fools,” an old man said. “I rubbed his mother’s belly while he was still in the womb.” Then someone said, “Hey, how about we don’t kill him?” Cheers of approval started, and got louder and louder, and still louder, until the High Priest Eli yelled, “You people can’t just do whatever you want! We’re a theocracy for god’s sake!”

The Committee of Reward met that same day and decided the next best thing was to give Balthazar the Good Citizen Trophy and the Key to the Town. On Friday, Balthazar received his awards and shook hands with the Mayor, with the whole town showing up and applauding him. It had gone so well that the Committee of Reward decided to give him a parade the next day and sent Roderigo to inform him, but to Roderigo’s surprise, Balthazar politely declined.

“That sounds really nice, Roderigo, but Saturday I plan to spend with family.”

On Saturday morning, Balthazar got up earlier than his usual early time, before there was light, even before there was darkness. He lit a candle on the dining table and, with leafs and leafs of paper, began writing. He wrote all morning, and all noon, and all afternoon. His own parade passed him outside his house, while the townspeople watched him work. “There goes kind Balthazar,” the soup kitchen worker said. “Writing checks to the poor.” “There goes Balthazar,” the schoolteacher said. “Grading papers again.” “There’s poor Balty,” Ruth said. “He has beautiful handwriting.”

After he was finally done in the evening, Balthazar quietly left his house and went to the mansion of the Tax Collector where he bribed a guard into giving the bundle of papers to his ex-wife Ruth. Ruth took off the wrapping and read the first page. *Dearest Ruth, I know because of your father’s debt that we are legally no longer married and must be separated, but I would just like to let you know that there is not a day that goes by that I do not think about you...* Then the bundle of papers went on and on, listing every moment Balthazar thought about his wife. *Chiseling two big mountains for the Mayor’s party, I thought of you...Licking a lollipop in the park, I thought of you...Holding Rachel while she slept, I thought of you...Alone in bed, feeling my heart ache, I thought of you...*

That night, Ruth stole from the Tax Collector's mansion and sneaked into Balthazar's bedroom. There, they made love, like it was the first time, over and over again, forgetting about laws, and debts, and god's hollowness. Before the sun was up, Rachel knocked on the bedroom door and introduced herself in.

"Is it time Dad?" she asked.

"Yes," Balthazar said somberly.

"Rachel, why are you carrying a paddle and dressed in army fatigues?" Ruth asked.

"Mother," she said. "We're getting the hell out of here."

That morning, as the chairs were being gathered and stones sent for, the mourning had already begun. Old women wept behind their black veils and men cried under the bills of their hats. The Mayor decided it was going to be the most extravagant, expensive stoning yet. A full orchestra played sad music, while the stoning procession headed towards Balthazar's house, only to realize when they finally got there, that the house was empty except for a note on the table. It read: *Dear Friends, I realized this week that I had much to live for and hence did not want to die. I am not sorry I had to leave.* Then the rain started, then the hail, and the thunder and lightning, and Pepe shouted, "God is going to kill us all for not killing Balthazar!" And the people in the Town Square ran for their lives. But no one died, and an hour later after the storm had passed, the townspeople reassembled in Main Street to find god reduced to a right foot. He had filled up with water during the storm (the hole had gotten as big as a basketball), and his upper half collapsed under the weight. With pieces of god scattered everywhere, the townspeople could not avoid god's hollowness in plain sight, and they stared in silence for what seemed like days. "Shit," the High Priest Eli finally said.

BRANDON JACKSON

Closed Captioned for the Hearing Impaired part 2

Pillars of salt fill my consciousness
As I reflect on my tragic beginning
Shaking - alone with my paper and my pen
I realize it is I
Whom must stand alone

(Sometimes I feel like a Motherless Child)

Pillars of salt fill my consciousness
As I stagger past the idea
A mother's love
A longing memory

(What did I do to be so black and blue)

Pillars of Salt fill my consciousness
When I am forced to remember
That it was him and never her
Dancing with Hell
I realize freedom is a word that burns

(Soon a will be done with the troubles of the world)

Pillars of salt fill my consciousness
While I flip through the pages
Adam and then there is Eve
Who gave birth to Cane

(Wade in the water - Wade in the water my children)

While a mother's plea sings from the cage
I realize I too must be free
From the pillars of salt
Letting go-
I crawl into creation

(Not my father, Not my mother, but it's me oh Lawd standing in the need
of prayer)

CHRIS SIMS

Last Summer I Had This Thing Where I Killed the Cat

When I was twelve my dad jumped off the six story building where he worked. It was the Morristown Professional Building. Real professional, Dad. I wasn't there to see it, but after I turned eighteen I read all the police reports. Some enlightened fuck of an eyewitness actually used the phrase "a veritable swan-dive." I'm glad Dad put on a show, though, it probably gave people something to talk about for a few days. It means that some stranger has thought about my family, and that's sort of comforting. I mean, have any strangers ever wondered what it's like to be in your family?

I remember it was hot that day. It was the awkward last week of school when the teachers knew that teaching was pointless but did it anyway. I was sitting in the third row, behind Sonia, and thinking about sex when the principal came into the classroom and asked the teacher if he could possibly "have a word" with me. I knew something was up when he put his hand on my shoulder when we walked out of the classroom. He told me there had "been an accident." The accident hadn't happened, he simply expressed the existence of an accident, as if it were something I should have known all along, and then it would be my fault for getting upset when I heard about it. Fuck him. Rufe dick. I was twelve and almost as tall as he was, and I was only the sixth tallest kid in my class. He took me to his office without saying much at all, and when we got there, a New Jersey State Trooper was sitting in one of those ridiculously small plastic chairs made for kids' asses, not adults'.

"You need to come for a ride," the Trooper said. He stood up and he was massive. Intimidating is a weak adjective for the way the guy looked. Keep in mind New Jersey State Troopers wear these uniforms modeled after Hitler's SS guard. I shit you not. Heavy wool tunics that don't tuck in, complete with lapels and the leather strap cutting diagonally across the chest. Anyway, the thing to get from all this is that I was

scared, because a storm trooper was taking me away and the principal just nodding way too rapidly and neither of them would tell me what the fuck was going on. So in my mind I'm thinking that I've done something wrong. I think that plays a part in all this. That it's somehow my fault.

So I end up getting a ride to the hospital, where the storm trooper just dumps me off on my mother, who's also there. But Mom was in some kind of psychotic state that apparently only I could see. She wouldn't tell me anything, just mash my face into her tits with the one hand. Then she'd push me away to wipe tears from her eyes, and then wipe her hand on her skirt, and then fucking mash my face again. I don't know, there's probably some connection there. About the tits. I mean not that long ago I was thinking about Sonia's and what I would do with them and then all of a sudden I'm practically choking on Mom's. Whatever, I don't really blame Mom much for that. I mean Dad went and dedicated the suicide note to her, and that had to be pretty disturbing.

Jean,

Because you never asked what's on my mind, I'm expressing it all over the sidewalk. Go marry him now, you cunt, and be miserable. Tell Curtis I love him.

-Owen

Curtis, that's me. My dad made a suicide note shout out to me, which I suppose should be comforting, and I certainly got the kid gloves compared to Mom. Anyway, she had her reasons for being psychotically unstable, is what I'm getting at, so I don't hold much against her for the tits thing regardless of how it potentially affected me in the long run. I gotta wonder who she was supposed to marry though, because it's eight years later and Mom hasn't re-married or even dated anyone. I suppose Dad got his way afterall. Lawyers. The note I didn't get to read until summer before last, and that took a lot of smooth talking on my part to be able to see.

Here is how hot it was that day: the tar on the roof got softened by the heat, even already by ten a.m. So Dad left shoe prints, the bland un-treaded prints you get from dress shoes, all across the roof, from the fire escape on the alley side to the opposite edge of the building looking over the sidewalk. Back in the alley there's some graffiti, it says 'Jesus' in

white scrawly letters. Not Jesus Saves, or Jesus Loves, but just plain Jesus. Dad didn't write it, but I know he must have read it because it was right next to the fire escape so he would have had to stare at it. Not that it means anything though, this is just the sort of detail that's in my head, and what everyone tells me I should be talking about.

Mom's on Valium, now, and it seems to help. She tells people it's because of Dad, but it's really me. Last summer I had this thing where I killed the cat. I don't really know what to call it, an urge, impulse, something gut-deep like that. Whatever it was, it was an itch that I could only scratch by taking the cat out into the garage and tying his collar to the garage door with a piece of string, and then tying his tail to the floor. It was an automatic garage door. The thing is, I couldn't push the button myself, like physically, I had to sit down on the dirty concrete floor of the garage indian-style resting my chin on my hands, like, observing the cat until Mom got home from work. I'll admit right now that the noise was pretty incredible, and not at all what I was expecting.

I don't know why the cat, really.

So Mom's on Valium, Dad's dead, and after the cat I moved on to bigger and better things, as it were, and now I'm sitting in your office. I don't think I need to get into what I've done since last summer, because that's already pretty well documented, what by the media and all that. Of course there are the generalizations and judgements they made, and some of them I'm not too happy about, but being objective for the sake of being objective, I have to admit that most of what they said about me is true.

So here's you and me. I'm "talking through it," like you say, "getting it all out there," "sorting things out." I'm doing all kinds of therapeutic things that are supposed to be good for me by telling you this. I can see you have a shitload of diplomas there, behind you. Some of those places I've never heard of, but you're the man, as far as I'm concerned. I can see you're listening to me, and you're making an effort to be noticed as listening to me, with the nods, and the "uh-huhs," and all that. And you seem sincere, too, which believe me, I appreciate. But do I call you Doctor or something? I don't mean to offend, because I can see how this is good for me. I tell you these things, and you take notes there on your yellow legal pad, you don't know it but I grew up with yellow legal pads. Blue fountain pen ink on yellow legal pad is one of

those things I'll always associate with Dad. But you form professional opinions, or you compile case notes, or you get another chapter for your book or whatever, and I get something out of it. The key thing to all of this is that there's supposed to be some hope for me, right? That you're not just cataloging me. So basically, Doc, I guess what I'm asking through all this, is, Am I fucked up, or what?

AMANDA EVELYN WALDO

Untitled

blue ribbon strings in twisting dance
gate swings outside your father's house
balloons that sink the day once past,
as we were finding out

here are the cold creased lips
thin t-shirt scent
sun dust on suede, the diamondback
traintracks how to tie a shoe
beside a chainlink fence
ballbounce the cul-de-sac

*she was a writer independent
female, stubborn for a woman in
(like you in that)
way over her head for the time anyway
he had a youngvoice when on radioplayed
war medic navy nurse runner of
marathons or for office always
in flannel shirt, and spoke too long sometimes
scratchy, like whiskers like
gravel in the drive and camper tops*

these were the lives we learned
in stories told on ordinary days
in names that glittered crystal wine and
chandelier

*Popeye, Hal and Al Bob Willy Whistler and
the Hydes*

Fig Garden Village bridge mix fishing
on the Jarbage, a fish in a fish in a fish, old
shower curtains lightening storms, old
Smokes the old mutt and smart enough to go around
and beating off kangaroo rats with cook pots in those
the good ole days

you'll learn to drink your coffee black (he says)
or leave the stuff alone

but curtains (billowed) falling
fade
dark bright blue skies to
yellow gray

toy horses plastic castle drawbridge
moat and purple beast we slew
where Babba abode, the battle fray
this land of Ballabaroo!

these standing guard where pizza smells
and dogbreath through the room
glitter hooves or pixie dust yarn-haired:
this doll who lost one shoe
knees carpet-marked still hear sharp steps
voice rings out in the hall

those were the days that slipped
(they fell away)
beneath a broken moon

so sweep them up, now
throw them out and
ready for the Fall

these are the words that choked
where coke goes flat
the porch behind an old man's house

a sun that sinks, the day once past
as we were finding out

a hide and seek that knows no end
they asked her: do come round again
and though she skips, and though she calls
((steps echoed in the hall))

for this is the laugh that hangs

those were the words that slipped
and sliced away
bough breaks

the punch still cool with lemons in the yard

(I called out your name)

EMILY SELOVE

Sloths Sleep

Sloths sleep eighteen hours a day, and by the set of their faces
I'd say their dreams are mundane.

I live in Missouri, ten minutes north of miles and miles
of open corn and long stamped lines of highways,
twenty minutes south of a gently growing town
where most the action happens up above,
where black rolls of thunder storms go throbbing and unhindered
and the sky turns red and ribbed at twilight
and brilliant and coyote-filled at night.

That's probably what a sloth's dream is like.

And when sloths wake up for their six-hour lunching,
or to make slow sloth love in that pounding wet
rich marl of thorns and vegetation
where everything is dangerous and muddy and alive
and you never really see the sky
for the rain and green and strangler figs,
where everything is breathing and changing faces, they must think
this is the dream.

They must heave along the canopy,
wondering a little what it means,
taking notice or not taking notice, never taking it seriously,
all the time worrying about the corn crop they'll have to tend
when they've shaken that brief wakefulness away.

JODIE ESTES

Coffee

I look at her and she makes me feel old, even though only four years separate us. I watch her sleep and in the cool blue light of the frosted windows she is smooth, the skin of her forehead stretched tight and flat, tiny babyish dimples at the corners of her mouth. For her they must have been good years, to have a forehead so smooth and free of lines. I might be wrong in thinking this, that her life has been easier than mine. Sometimes when her guard slips and the sharp barbed edge of her wit momentarily eludes her I think I see something like sadness in her eyes but I can't be sure, and then she gathers herself – it's almost a physical thing – you can see her doing it. Her head tilts upward and she closes her eyes, briefly, as if there is something she cannot quite look at and then she looks directly back and the moment is past. I know her middle name, I know her father died horribly suffering over a long while, and that he continued to smoke even when he was on oxygen machines, bedridden with tubes up his nose, his lungs like withered black balloons, and that the two witnesses to his suffering, her and her mother, both smoke still. I know that at twenty-four she is no helpless girl, that when I first met her it was in a bar of all places and that I was playing eight ball and she pulled out a case when her quarters were up and assembled a three hundred dollar Brunswick cue and that she didn't win but I was having one of those nights when I couldn't seem to lose. I rarely play against her now; it's better to have her as a partner.

She looks up from her pillow and says, "You can stay if you want. Go to work from here in the morning. I'll make breakfast, bacon and eggs. Toast." Somehow she manages to make the word 'toast' sound lurid but I know that the only things in the fridge are bottled water and a lemon yogurt. When I don't say anything right away she adds, offhand, "If you want. It doesn't matter." What she doesn't say is there, in the way she turns and tucks her chin into the covers. She wants something, for me to say something I so far haven't been able to say. She wants to

know where we're *going*. I don't know how to answer this and so I haven't said anything.

She has moved the coffee table to the side of the room, lit candles and then almost immediately extinguished them, pulled out the sleeper sofa which is thin but comfortable and piled high with sheets and quilts, the way we both like it. The timer on the coffee machine is set, filter and Folger's in place, the water waiting. This is a necessity for her, the waiting coffee. She says that without those two cups in the morning she is like a sleepy animal lumbering around lethargically bumping into things, conversing in monosyllabic grunts. This pot of coffee is not for me. I tell myself I will drink my coffee in a different kitchen, sitting at a full sized table; not sitting huddled in the middle of the pullout bed with the blankets pulled around my shoulders. I will sit in my large kitchen; my wife will have left earlier, silently, with no kiss goodbye. I will sit there in my kitchen reading the newspaper and occasionally refilling my cup from the carafe on the counter. I tell myself that.

She's drifting off now, the quilts pulled up to her neck, her knees tucked tight to her belly, like me. When I join her I will face her for a few minutes, spooning, just to feel that comfort, the warmth of her body, the fit of our curves. I will touch the side of her hip, lightly, and run my hand down the length of her thigh to her knees before turning my back to her, bunching my own knees up tight, fetal. We are mirror images of each other. I will stay like that for a long time. I will wait as her breathing slows and grows regular. When I am sure she is asleep and I feel I might drift off myself if I wait any longer I will slide away from that warmth out of the sheets and then stand there shivering for a long moment before bending to find my clothes. I will leave her there, unmolested except for that soft curve of skin from knee to hip. I haven't gone further than that with her even though she tucks herself tight against me, turns to me with slow kisses. I tell her I want it to be special, I want it to be right, and she smiles like she understands but how can she when I don't really understand myself? She runs her fingertips up my cheek and into my hair, stroking softly. She seems content to wait but I know it's unfair and that she won't wait forever. The phone rings sometimes and she looks at the little screen poker faced before shutting off the ringer. She doesn't volunteer and I don't ask.

I stand in the doorway in my jeans, my shirt unbuttoned, my socks still on. I lean against the frame and wait for my eyes to adjust from the bright fluorescence of the bathroom where I have just borrowed her toothbrush and I stand and watch as her form takes shape, only her closed eyes and hair visible above the blankets. She is hidden from me, vague and undefined. I sip warm tap water from a tall cylindrical glass and watch for the rise and fall of the blankets but the movement is too subtle, the room too dark. She makes little sounds, small groans of comfort and contentment, sounds as gentle as the mewing of a kitten. She is very still when she sleeps. When fully awake she is likely to jump up and start tugging at me frantically in a hurry suddenly to go somewhere, anywhere, to escape the confines of her tiny apartment. I sip my water and watch her. The eyes of her cat glint out of the darkness, a glowing emerald-gold, startling me for a second.

I turn toward the sink, which is moderately clean like the entire apartment, and dump the warm water and run the faucet waiting for the water to get cold. In front of me there is a window and through it I can see large pines and a little ways off the neighbors house, dark at this hour, and I shiver a little with the sudden feeling that I am out there in the darkness, wrapped in my long black coat, watching from the shadows as I have done on other nights, and I, standing here in the kitchen, am a stranger, like those others I've seen in her house when I came by after last call, blurry, wanting to tell her something but unsure what, and there was a strange car in the driveway and huddled silhouettes in the window that I could just make out through her heavy curtains. I stood outside watching those shadows intertwine and eventually the light going out and I laughed. Laughed at myself. Laughed at my wanting what I had no right to want, no claim to, strangely empty of jealousy because some part of me realized how ridiculous that would be. I haven't committed to her, only stayed late a few nights. What if I were to emerge from the shadows, walk across the brittle layer of ice and snow covering her walk, knock on her front door? What would I say? Would I tell her I'm going to the lawyer tomorrow? Would I say make him go now and I will stay here with you and we'll forget these others, start fresh? I did none of those things. I turned and walked home telling myself to forget her, to let her go, that she couldn't be trusted and then I laughed again because who was I to talk about trust?

But what if I had? Would she have asked him to leave or would she have quietly let the curtain fall shut without ever opening the door? She has said she won't tell me what she wants, that her desires should not figure into my decision, I must leave my home because it's what I want to do and not because I have a guaranteed place to go. I find this point infuriatingly valid.

I have fallen back in her bed from a night of talking that left me spent, her intelligence outpacing me sometimes so that I could only stare at her in awe. For once, I am the one left behind, so that all I can do is take her face in my hands and bend her to me and kiss her, a lame response that leaves me feeling even dumber, even more lost, wondering if she talks like this with those others or is it all kissing? Somehow it reassures me to think of those others as purely physical because I know this is not what she wants. She is looking for someone who will challenge her, a mental sparring partner, someone who will sit up late listening to her secrets, trying to figure her out. And so I've fallen back in her bed three times before and only touched her hip, felt that length of thigh. We've slept the sleep of the old married couple, comfortable but passionless, not without desire, only not urgent, there is time.

I turn off the water and go back to the doorway.

She is looking at me from the bed, her eyes sleepy and only half open.

"Aren't you coming to bed?" she asks.

"In a while," I say.

"Are you going to leave again?"

"No."

But I might.

And then she rolls over and is gone again, unconcerned.

Last week I went to the place where I knew she would most likely show up and I waited. I had been waiting three days at my home, with the glances from my wife. Three days of my leaving for long walks with no kiss goodbye. Three nights where I fell into my bed in the wee hours and did not face her, did not touch her hip, three days of quiet brooding, outwardly calm but the thoughts racing through my head, staring at the television and not knowing the plot. Nights when my wife asked no questions and went to bed early. She knows. She knows something is happening but isn't sure what. I have stood in the doorway of our bedroom much as I am standing in this doorway now, studying

her, trying to understand what changed between us, coming to the conclusion at last that it is only me, she is still the same woman. She is kind and everyone likes her very much, including me. I didn't plan to meet someone else, to become so intrigued. I ask myself over and over what kind of person am I to consider leaving her when she has done nothing wrong. Watching her there, vulnerable and trusting, I feel incredibly selfish, I can't bear the thought of hurting her and know what I need to do, what I should do.

When she finally did arrive that night I ignored her, I tried to ignore her, tried to make myself calm and unaffected by her presence, but she stared at me and then came over and kissed me and took my hand and that night somehow, as if against my will, I found myself in her bed, my clothes strewn around the room as if something passionate had happened but both of us untouched, except that hip and our lips, her asleep beside me, her back to me, dry coffee waiting in a dry filter, staring at the red glowing letters of her alarm clock, watching as each minute grew longer until finally it was almost dawn and I got up and dressed and left her there in her warmth to go trudging blurrily through the frosty morning nearly a mile to my house with its locked door and me with no key and having to knock. My wife letting me in, the house so quiet.

That was six days ago and I have spent every waking moment turning it over in my head. I have tried to look at the situation objectively but objectivity fails me. Rationality does not produce an acceptable answer.

As quietly as possible I cross the now familiar room and set my glass of water on the end table beside the clock with its glowing red numbers and I undress and slide in beside her, not touching her with my cold feet. She purrs as I contort easily to fit her shape and then my hand is on her hip and I fall asleep determined not to turn away, to wake up facing her in the morning, to kiss her before she's brushed her teeth, determined to taste her fresh hot coffee.

JOSH MALAMY

Autumn in Ithaca, New York

I'm looking at Sara
through a bus window
in Binghamton,
buying a ticket
to New York City.
I'm thinking of Katie,
and how the three of us spent
the first weekend
of September together,
drinking and being bored in Hamilton.
Before I know it it's October,
and the sagacious trees drop their leaves,
sparked by loss to lose again.

Scorcher of a Day

At Ocean Grove Beach,
The words stood up comfortably in my mouth.
Don't ever leave me.
We kissed, my mouth moved to her neck,
It tasted like sunscreen. Thank God.

LAUREL INGRAHAM

8:00 a.m. sitting on the beach

before the lifeguards and tourists there for a tan
a man sits, stands, fishing pole in hand
waiting for a bite.
a woman walks by, young, hair and makeup already done
excuse me she says what street is this?
94th i tell her
oh I'm looking for 103rd I guess I have a ways to go.
another man walks by, 2 kids in tow,
splashing through the waves, giving mom some extra time
to sleep.
a young couple stands on the edge of the water
talking, arguing, forgetting to hear the music of the
ocean.
someone else swims by through their waves,
back and forth, swimming circles in the same spot.
another woman chases her runaway hat down the beach
as an old man with a metal detector beeps by.
he starts talking to an old lady on a bench
do you ever find stuff? she asks
he smiles like a little boy in a candy store
yesterday i found a dollar.

SHANTHA SUSMAN

Two Nights With Max

“Max, add up the tip and sign it, I’m getting antsy over here.”

“Okay, okay. What’s fifteen percent of twenty-seven fifty?”

“It’s about four dollars, but leave a little more, like thirty-three total. The waiter was pretty quick, give him points for that.”

“He brought me the wrong salad dressing.”

“Yes, but then he brought you the *right* salad dressing immediately after you said something.”

“Ok. Done. Shall we?”

“Please. Off we go.” Max and I shove back from the table, collect our things, and he lets me walk out first. I feel his hand tentatively touch my back, unsure if it should be there, so I walk a little faster so he won’t have to decide. The hand drops down to his thigh and we leave the restaurant.

I have taken Max’s virginity the night before, and I know he still senses it on me, as if I folded it up and stuck it in my back pocket like a wad of unused Kleenex, still soft and clean and white. It will get crumpled in my possession, but I don’t think he knows that. Max has taken me out to dinner to prove to himself that last night was more than just a casual encounter and that I am actually someone special. It proves to me that he feels indebted to me. I do not like being thanked for this, so I walk faster down the block. Max is almost as tall as I am, but his height is in his torso, not his legs, and I make it to the corner seconds before him. As we stand there waiting for the light, I point out the three feet of slush that we will have to sidestep or jump over to get from the sidewalk to the street without getting splashed. He twists his smile over to the side of his face, and says,

“I’ll just carry you” and puts one hand on my back, and reaches the other down along my thigh.

“I think not.”

“Come on,” he says, “I can do it. Just jump up so I can lift you.”

“Max, I plan on jumping, but wouldn’t it just make more sense for me to jump directly over the puddle?” I take a long leap over the slush, and only catch a little of the muddy ice water on the bottom of my pant leg. Max comes sailing over behind me, and we start walking across the street toward the movie theater. I suggested that we see a movie after dinner so Max would not be tempted to ask me back to his house right after we ate.

Max is practically pulling the bills out of his pocket already, so I won’t even offer to pay this time. It takes too much energy to try to stop his chivalry.

“Two for *As Good As It Gets* please.” He slips the money, gets the tickets, and the hand goes to the small of my back as we walk inside.

The escalators are long and we stand there, on the same step, not talking and pretending to take in the ambience, which is fake and molded, a gray stucco formed from plaster. One long escalator leads to another one, so there are minutes of silence with just the soft whirr of the escalator beneath our feet and the squeaking of our wet boots on the polished tiles of the floors when we walk off the escalator.

There is a little girl walking into the theater with her grandmother just ahead of us. When Max and I sit down, I tell him,

“You know how I could tell I was getting older? When I was really little, every time I went to my grandmother’s house, she had a present for me. A box of markers, a dress, maybe a stuffed animal. Just something, every single time. And she took me to the movies. We saw two Nick Nolte movies back to back once.”

“Which ones?”

“Which ones? I don’t really remember. There was one where he had a really spoiled daughter, and the other one was about sports or something.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah, but the point is that as I got older, she stopped doing those things. No more movies, really, and no more presents every time I went there, just on my birthdays and Christmas. You know, the regulars.” Max has his head cocked to the side and is looking intently into my eyes, trying to prove to me just how much he is interested in my grandmother. I don’t care.

“And then,” I continue, “she just started asking my mother to get me what I want, and she paid my mom for it. And *now* she just sends me checks.”

“Maybe that’s how you can tell she’s getting older,” Max says.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, like not taking you to the movies anymore. She probably would, but maybe she doesn’t have the energy?”

“Maybe. But anyway, that’s the same thing, right? We all age at the same time, just starting at different points, so if she’s getting older, so am I.”

“And so am I,” Max slides his smile sideways again, but I ignore this.

“She just knew when I was old enough to do things myself. When I was little and stayed over at her house, she’d put out half a grapefruit for me. She’d cut each segment separate with a small knife and put the grapefruit on the table in a little bowl with a serrated spoon next to it.”

“Aw.” Don’t aw me, I thought, but I didn’t stop talking.

“Yeah, and then as I got older, she just put out a whole grapefruit, and I had to cut it myself. Not that I minded, but it lets you know how old you are, you know?” The lights got dim and faded out, and commercials started to play on the large screen. I was suddenly very worried, and I was having a hard time imagining sitting through this entire movie with him. He’d probably want to hold my hand.

“Max.”

“Yeah?”

“Can we go? Please? I really don’t feel like watching a movie right now.”

“But we’re already sitting here, the previews are about to start.”

“Come on, we can give our tickets to someone coming in late, I’m sure we can get our money back.”

“Liz, I don’t care about the money, but are you sure? You really don’t want to see this movie?”

“Let’s go.” We leave the theater, and go back down the escalators, except this time I walk down them, and Max follows me.

Max followed me last night when I led him from the party we were at to his house, since he managed to tell me calmly enough that his parents were in Sweden and wouldn’t be returning for another two

weeks. His tongue followed my tongue from his mouth to mine and he swirled it around wildly, I guess to prove how much he liked kissing me. The smirk came back to his face after we stopped kissing and we were standing in his foyer, because then he grabbed for my hand and led me upstairs to his bedroom.

The walls were messy, covered with posters and splotches of black paint that were strewn around. One group of paint streaks looked like they might be part of a large anarchy symbol, but half of it was covered by a large Grateful Dead poster. His comforter looked dingy, but I lay down on it anyway. I was wearing a matching twin set of panties and bra, both in a deep scarlet, and my back tingled with embarrassment. It would look like I planned to be naked with company later when I got dressed that morning – why else would I match something no one would see? But I forced myself still and just closed my eyes, closed out the mess, and waited to feel his body lower onto mine. Those seconds of darkness, when I was alone on the bed but felt sure in my spine that he would come to me soon, if shyly, were moments of control that I had never felt before. They prove to me that I know exactly what I am doing.

I know what I am doing as I lead Max away from the movie theater. I am taking control again, but this time I am trying to tell him I am going home, and not with him. He insists on walking me to the train station, which is four blocks away. Even more because two of them are avenues, which are each at least two blocks in themselves, if not three. As we walk there is that quiet again, except for the clunking of our boots on the sidewalk, making solid thuds that mix with the thuds and clacks of everybody else's heavy shoes as we walk toward Union Square. We pass a woman wearing a fuzzy black and white striped coat.

When Max and I pass her, I say, "You know, there was one vacation that my family took near Amherst, and my mom and I went into this little shop one day to try on some stuff. I was looking for a dress because we were going to a wedding that weekend. My cousin was getting married to this guy none of us knew. I think her parents were a little on edge about it, since he was her chemical engineering professor so he was like twenty years older, but they were letting her go through with it, I guess. My parents would kill me if I married someone that much older than me."

"So younger is better?" Max grins, but I rush on.

“Anyway, this woman with a black and white striped shirt walks in, and was trying on these slippers, or something. Yeah, I think they were slippers, like to wear around the house.” Max isn’t looking at me because we’re walking, and I can’t tell if he’s really listening, but I don’t care.

“She sort of looked at me and asked which color I liked better, the red or the blue. She was wearing the red ones, and I told her that those were better, but that I liked the blue ones too. And then she laughs, and she says, ‘Don’t confuse me, I’m a Libra,’ and the woman who worked there seriously turned to me and said ‘No, you’re a zebra!’ almost loud enough for that woman to hear. But I guess she didn’t.”

“What did it matter if they were just supposed to be worn around the house?”

“I don’t know, maybe they weren’t just for the house, maybe you could wear those outside if it was nice out. Anyway, she bought the blue ones. She said they went with more things than the red ones.”

“That’s true, blue is much more neutral. Even in other shoes. You see a lot of bluish sneakers, but not a lot of red sneakers.”

“Yeah. I guess red would have been okay for me, I wear a lot of red.”

Max moves his smile over to one side, and says, “Yes, you do,” and I remember the red underwear I wore last night.

Even though the N-R would be more direct, I start walking toward the entrance to the L train station because I can take that train home too, and Max won’t be tempted to stand with me on the platform like he would on the N-R, since he can take those trains to his house, just in the other direction. But then Max curves the right side of his smile up and curves his arm around my waist and walks me along with him down the next block to the N-R station. He says that it’s been really fun hanging out with me these past two days. I smile at him because he can’t keep that nervous grin off his face, and when we reach the station entrance, I kiss him to show him that I’m not really an ogre, and his tongue swirls through my mouth again.

When we walk down the stairs and slide through the turnstiles, I let him lead me to the downtown platform even though I live uptown, because he leans into my ear and says, “Liz, come hang out. My parents are in Sweden.” I don’t want to be the one he talks

about when he recalls his first time and says yeah, but it was just a one-time thing, she kind of ditched me after that. I want to know that he'll feel all right about this, so I get on the downtown R train with him, just to prove that I have control.

ZAK COTLER

A Canto in the English of the Virgin Queen's Court

*The fairest daughter of the Elfes
is ravished by a Beast.
Aveng'd by warlike Nemesa,
the Beast becomes deceased.*

Within the deepnesse of the Fairie lond,
Among the vine and Verdant forest flowre,
A ladie Elfe with lovelinesse beyond,
The Siren song did spend the gloaming¹ hour,
Picking petals in a scented bowre².
Her watchett³ eyes like gleaming northstarres shone
To match the color'd light of distant towre,
Where Elfin-folk did wonne⁴, but she alone
Did grace the twilit wood with quiet footfall sowne⁵.

The starres like Argus eyes, launche'd⁶ the sky,
And forth she danced, her Yvorie skin shone bright,
Eftsoones⁷ her dance she stopped and did descrye,
A darkesome poole that mirror'd back the night.
This bountiest⁸ virgin walked in dimming light,
Drawn by her innocence to water's edge,
Past Oake and Ash did steal that purest wight⁹.
The onyx water pulled, its gleam a kedge¹⁰,
And slit and stonie eyes did watch her from the sedge.

¹ dusk, ² garden, ³ pale blue, ⁴ dwell, ⁵ sound, ⁶ pierced, ⁷ forthwith, ⁸ most virtuous,
⁹ human being, ¹⁰ anchor

The Beast, Erapio was once a knight,
But chaunc'd upon that poole in sylvan glade,
He drank, and evilnesse it did ignite.
Her beautie in his orbs him did abrade¹¹
He vow'd her virgin fastnesse to invade
Like Jove upon Europa he espyed,
And in his claw he gripped a bloud-blent¹² blade,
And on his wicked head a helm of Pride,
Within, his mind with all enfouldred¹³ was allied.

That ladie Elfe smell'd fowlnesse on the aire,
And glaunc'd up from the water for its source.
No longer seemed that poole a sweet repaire¹⁴,
So she from well's edge made a fleeting course.
The Beast foresaw his deed without remorse,
From thorne and bramble pass'd he her to chase,
And for his steed a Bull in stead of Horse.
It trampell'd in the footprints of her trace,
Erapio follow'd intent on her disgrace.

A Beacon shone from distant Elfin-spyre,
Its light a beame of blue and silver thin,
And toward she ran through Maple, Firre, and briar,
Yet in her wake rode Beast on beast of sin.
He, pricking¹⁵ fast, again beheld her skin,
She ran, and oe'r her shoulder Demons saw,
A wail she gave of Siren screame akin,
Bylive¹⁶ she fell beneath the Wild-Beast's claw,
And in her he did frame froward¹⁷ and blacke unlaw.

But in the instant of his griesly¹⁸ stoure¹⁹,
A farre off angel's justice-sense alarmd
"Alas," said Nemesa, avenging powre,

¹¹ consume with lust, ¹² bloodstained, ¹³ the color of a thundercloud, ¹⁴ resort, ¹⁵ riding,

¹⁶ forthwith, ¹⁷ perverse, ¹⁸ horrible, ¹⁹ paroxysm

Yclad in white and with a gold speare armd
 Enraged because an innocent was harmd.
 Upon a gyant hawke she sped in flight,
 It for a fleet and noble steed she'd charmd,
 To wreake²⁰ that ladie Elfe most fowly dight²¹,
 To bring wast²² on that Demon who hath doen despight²³.

Fell Nemesa on wings of wind did soare,
 Her eyes like brenning²⁴ coals atweene the starres,
 Their Vulcan glitterand²⁵ like melt'd ore.
 Beneath her bone-white mail a preace²⁶ of scarres,
 From battells wreaking those whom Evil marres.
 With Hermes speed acrossse the Faerie skyes,
 That warlike angel, fell as mightie Mars,
 Called to the night amid her prey-bird's cries,
 "Those beasts who shent²⁷ the pure are gelt ²⁸ before they dye!"

Erapio, the ladie languorous 'neath,
 He heard the ghostlie shrigh²⁹t the great hawke made,
 And leaping up he pull'd free from its sheathe,
 His tainted, curv'd, and bloud-imbrewed ³⁰ blade.
 That angel like a Levin-brond³¹ assayd³²,
 From skyes of hore³³ sheared downe with golden launce,
 The damag'd virgin fled, the wild Bull brayd,
 She smote the Demon 'crosse his creast a glaunce,
 His helm was Adamant, with blade he did advaunce.

Nemesa, flashing from her hawke to earth,
 Flung at the Beast her launce, a flake³⁴ of fyre,
 And open'd in his mail a bleeding firth³⁵.
 She drew an yron knife, its edge was dyre,
 To punish him for his distaynd ³⁶ desire.

²⁰ avenge, ²¹ disgraced, ²² destruction, ²³ wrong, ²⁴ burning, ²⁵ glittering, ²⁶ throng, ²⁷ disgrace

²⁸ castrated, ²⁹ scream, ³⁰ blood-soaked, ³¹ lightning bolt, ³² assailed, ³³ gray-white, ³⁴ flash,

³⁵ narrow channel, ³⁶ stained

She raged, "I banish thee to Pluto's mirk!"
"To share in Ixion's wretch'd paine and ire!"
And clove his root of malenesse with her dirk,
And in his shocke, the Beast he struck at her berserke.

Erapio, with wildnesse yet unknown,
His curving blade drew roundells³⁷ of her bloud.
From twixt his shanks a red persue³⁸ was sowne³⁹,
Like vermell⁴⁰ seeds into the loam and mud.
Eftsoones he fainte became, bet⁴¹ by the flood,
Fell to his knees, and cast his sword asyde.
The warlike angel's cry sung through the wood,
And plunge'd she her knife into his syde.
His stonie eyes went dim, he looked to Styx and dyed.

³⁷ globules, ³⁸ trail of blood, ³⁹ sown into the earth, ⁴⁰ vermillion, ⁴¹ beaten

EMILY YU

Ice Fishing

“So, this is how it is,” Ritzy said emphatically, leaning forward and rubbing his left knee, which bounced and trembled and half hit the other knee, because both legs were pulsing and bursting with more than his usual hot handles. Nobody so much looked up at him; we were all crammed together on the couch of some guy we didn’t really know, hunched around a fuzzy thirteen inch TV set with broken antennae and poorly spliced wires that unsplice or whatever the hell it is they do every time Fargo – the skinny, nervous looking redhead in the lawnchair – scooted over to get a better view. Fargo showed up at my door as a roommate by blind fate three years ago, and although we still obligingly haul him along whenever we explore the intricate realms of male beer bonding, he’s like the mismatched sock that reappears every week in your laundry basket. So whenever Fargo started his edgy shuffle towards the TV, the screen flopped dead like a scared guinea pig and everyone turned and cursed, and so he shoved his chair back with profuse apologies. Miraculously, the wires or antennae or whatever the hell it is that makes the TV work rejoined, and me, Ritzy, Aggie, Fargo, Mark, and a handful of other guys who probably actually lived there leaned in to see the New York Giants cream the San Francisco 49ers in the season opener on the only working TV on this block. And I mean, they were really creaming them. The running backs were running, and the other guys were tackling, and some other guys were charging, and everyone was whooping it up with free beer — free for us, at least; I think Mark knew one of the guys who lived there and got us all in — and Fritos and some nutritious looking bean dip that no one was touching. Someone said that Fargo had made it. Fargo, by then, was sulking in the back row, resigned to the fact that he was only worth a dented lawn chair.

Someone once said that Fargo’s destiny in life is to bring up the rear, which is a nice way of saying that he is always the ass of every joke. Unlike Fargo, Ritzy is the polar end of our eclectic group, electrically

charged in opposing directions and filled to his capacity with the essence of himself. He can make anything, almost by sheer willpower, turn out the way he wants. Everything about Ritzy, everything he says and everything he finds, is a serendipitous accident, and all of these things shine for a moment of his focused attention in a kind of intense light, before he turns away and you think he has forgotten you.

He once called a girl “sweet Sally” in bed. And her name was Caroline. She wasn’t just any old Caro, or Carrie, or Carol, she was *Caroline* with a cold stare. He told us the story one night, while Mark anxiously and recklessly smeared at his calculus textbook with a bleeding highlighter pen, while Aggie plowed through a bag of CornNuts nonchalantly, while Fargo wrestled with the trash bags in the driveway, while I held a dog-eared copy of *All the Kings Men* in my hands, forgotten, as I listened to Ritzy’s tale.

“Yeah, so everyone knows Caroline, right? Caroline. She’s the one with the walk, she’s the one who scares weird English professors with that *look*.” And Ritzy gives a pretty good imitation of the look. “So, I spilled a beer on her at a party.” Now even Mark looks slightly less engrossed in some curvy kind of graph, or whatever the hell it is that he studies. “Of course, I’m apologizing up and down the wall, and wiping everything – probably spreading it around on her that way – and then I think, Who is this girl and why the fuck am I bending over backwards for her right now?” He stops for a moment and gets this look on his face, the way he looks when he’s getting to the really juicy part of a story. “The next thing I know, I’m whispering in her ear that I spilled the beer on her so she would have to change clothes...at my place. And the next thing after that, I’ve realized that I just called her ‘sweet Sally’ in bed. I have no idea where that came from, except ‘Sally’ is *not* her name. Yeah, so I get the look. But the greatest part is, I have this great line. I say to her, Baby, this is how it is. ” He stops again, and everyone’s attention is more or less directed towards him, especially me. I have just about dropped the novel on the floor when he abruptly stands up with a smug smile on his face, and says, “but I forgot the rest of what I said.” He says it apologetically, but his eyes laugh at us simple men hanging on to his words and dying to know how he managed to save his balls from the Stare Queen.

“This is how it is.” Ritzy throws it out a lot, like the time when we found a pair of his pants in the backseat of Aggie’s car. When the

news about the pants incident came out, he calmly walked out to the car, shook out the pants, and said, “Yep, this is how it is. These *are* my pants,” like he had planned to leave his pants there in the first place. And he tucked them under his arm as if they had simply been missing notebooks or a pack of maps. I swear if he hadn’t already been wearing pants when he walked out to retrieve this missing pair, he would have pulled them on blandly and gone on his way wearing them. He slicks over his surprise and the rest of his emotions in his smooth way – effortlessly, because everything for Ritzy is like spreading frosting on graham crackers, neatly covering up the dry face so even the broken crumbs don’t break the surface.

“This is how it is.” He says it in a way that I really like. He’s really clear about the first word, puts a little extra fizz in it, and the rest rolls out sort of fast and smooth. I play around with it a little, rolling the words around in my mouth, trying to get them to come out like Ritzy’s. This...is how it is. This *is* how it is. *This is how it is*. This is how...*it is*. *It is*. It. Is. It never spills out so perfectly as Ritzy says it. That’s the way he is. He just sort of opens himself up and everything and nothing ebbs forth, pouring out into the right places at exactly the right times effortlessly, as if by accident.

I only really met him the night my dog died. My mom called me on a Monday night three years ago, right in the middle of a messy game of poker, spread out on the floor of the tiny dorm room Fargo and I occupied. Of course Fargo wasn’t a participant in the game; he was hopelessly and desperately mooning over a really cute girl down the hall who had asked him to fix her computer, and who also never remembered his name. The rest of us who hadn’t yet discovered love while staring into the guts of a computer splayed across our laps, we didn’t have real chips, so someone had stolen a pile of guitar picks from the music department –although I’m pretty sure that Mark returned them after we were done. For the first time, Aggie was winning and grinning gloriously, Ritzy wore a veiled expression like he was about to drop a bomb on us, Mark was nervous as always and calculating the exact degree of his losses, and then the phone went off like an alarm right in the middle of round. At first, I couldn’t hear my mom over Aggie’s exclamations, “Yes, yes! Pay it up, baby!” Ritzy yelled over everyone to shut the hell up, my goddamn mom was on the phone, and right as it got quiet I lost my dog.

I cried messily. There was an embarrassing amount of liquid and snot and shuddering, and we didn't have any tissues so I had to use one of Fargo's towels to sop it all up. Ritzy was still there when I looked up, my eyes smarting with tears still and my nose mashed from burrowing inside my elbow. He didn't do much, didn't tell jokes like I thought he would, didn't rib me gently for breaking down and bawling. Instead, he tipped his chair back and gazed at the ceiling.

"'Been thinking about you, and there's no rest....what do you care when other men are far, far better?' That's love, you know. And it goes everywhere – outward. Love is an outer-directed feeling. You can love your dog, your girlfriend, your father, and the very act of love means missing them. It goes out from you, and then leaves you with the something of empty, and you know what it is to be full."

He stopped and took his gaze down, and snapped his mouth shut like a book closing on the end of a chapter. He looked straight at me, arrested my gaze and would not allow me to back down. "You have to make something out of this world, you have to *connect*, you have to stand up to it. Don't forget to make the world see who you really are. Don't forget me, ok?" And, wiping his nose furiously with the back of his hand, he got up and left.

So, of course no one was really listening too closely that afternoon during the football game, in the midst of hearty cheers and crushed corn chips that stuck to your feet and fall breeze that didn't really clear out the room but hovered just in front of the open window, when Ritzy said, "This is how it is." Aggie was too busy fishing out the pack of cigarettes he dropped under the couch, and Mark was organizing the empty cans on the floor into a gorgeous little pyramid. Fargo's still backed up into the far wall and I don't think he will ever graduate to real furniture. I think the Giants just scored again, because the entire group rises in unison and emits a hearty, satisfied cheer. Except I, of course, have learned that when Ritzy interrupts your thoughts for you to listen to his, it's usually worth it. So I tune out the waves of frantic static from the television set, the jostling on the couch originating from two guys on the end grabbing for the same beer, the acrid smell from someone's grill that comes in the window. And for the moment, everything else has faded to a dim blur and it's Ritzy and me in focus, sharp, and I can see every feature of his face in excruciating detail. He hasn't shaved in a few days, and his eyes, besides being red rimmed and sunken into shadowy

swamps, glow dully like dying fireflies. His hair tufts up in little confused pieces, spun out of orbit by something even his determination cannot control, and despite a concerted effort on his part to grasp the edge of his seat, his hands shake slightly.

I understood him in that moment as he sat teetering on the edge of some non-proverbial cliff, at a breakpoint, at a spot where cleavage into his mind was easy and that which ate the underside of his surface growled for recognition. He looked straight at me, dead serious, and said, “I’m taking off – it’s my dad. He is the man of the hour, after all.” Nobody else heard, nobody else saw Ritzy at his core, without the smile and without the laugh, without a witty comment or a goofy joke. It was two souls laid plain against each other, Ritzy and me, no pretense, no masks. I instinctively felt the thread of his make, and the pattern of his weave; the pieces of him bound up against each other trying to separate or unite – they couldn’t decide.

And then the moment broke and he was regular old Ritzy again, looking everywhere but the same direction, hyped up and on the prowl, taking in the scene and spitting it out twice as fast. I scrambled to pick up the moment again – just as I try even today – to pick out that shining instant from a continuum of ordinary instants, to find that connection between random and arbitrary points on a plane. We were back to chaos and pandemonium on the outside, and from the outside, I didn’t really believe he was leaving. I assumed that he had dug up some crazy, typical scheme and wanted to drag all of us through the entire glory of it. Even after he left, after I drove him to the airport with his beat up suitcase and untied shoes, I thought he was joking. I thought he’d get off the runway with a huge, characteristic grin, thanking me for being such a good man and driving him all the way out there at six in the morning for no particular reason. I thought he’d turn up the next week, or the week after, with a great tan and a hot girl on his arm. But after a month, he didn’t turn up, and after 2 months I received a brisk letter from him. It said to me:

Hello, I suppose you must be surprised to hear from me. Don’t let your face show it, you know. I am taking better care of my family now, and I’ve become quite a student here. Take care, and all the best.
Edward Ritzy.

When I read the letter to Aggie and Mark, the first thing out of Aggie's mouth was, "*That's* his real name?"

The weekend after that abysmal letter, I dragged Aggie and Mark and even Fargo out on the pretense of a last-hurrah road trip. It was unbearably cold; even the sunshine felt weak and insufficient. I drove and drove, straight north into the biting wind, and that's why we are here – me, Aggie and his cigarette, Fargo, Mark – sitting on a frozen lake, a seriously frozen lake, and Aggie is cursing the cold but still trying to smoke his cigarette, and Fargo is trying to tell us stories about how the weather is like this all the time where he grew up, and Mark is fiddling with the ice-fishing equipment we rented from a little shady-looking shack a few miles back. The myopic old man who rented us this bundle showed me how to work all the stuff, but I'm not quite sure if I believe him. Still, we are out here in the middle of the lake – a wildly abandoned one at that – without Ritzy to tell us how it's all supposed to fit together. I try my best, awkwardly jamming the long metal stake into the ice, measuring its depth – eight inches – so it's safe to be out here. There's a big bladed scythe, and it rustily carves a circular groove into the ice. The circle is about a foot in diameter, and as the groove steadily grows deeper, I really begin to enjoy the effort it takes to carve out this little niche in the unforgiving frozen expanse. Ice chips explode grittily all over my pants and into my face, and the tender muscles in my back will certainly be remembering this day for a week to come, but it's good, solid work. There are medium sized bubbles looming eerily under my feet, under the eight inches of ice. They shudder and tremble shyly, waiting for me to release them from the icy water. When at last, Mark and Aggie and Fargo and I pull the plug our little private watering hole sits before us, I feel as though a great pressure has eased and escaped.

I discover that I like ice fishing, even if the name does tell you straight up what it's about, no trickery, no games, no surprises. There's ice, and there's fishing. But it's the greatest thing, sitting around in a little cold circle with Aggie, Fargo and Mark, everyone pulling out little glittering fish that shine like moments. It didn't even matter that we didn't keep the fish, just tossed them back into the watery hole. And I wondered how it would have been if we had called him by his real name – Edward Ritz. It's different if you call Aggie by his real name, if you try to be nice about calling Fargo, "Fargo," if you call Mark as Marky or 'da Man' or something. And it's different than calling me Greg, or Gregg, or G-

dogg, because Augustus Redding Buechler will always love smoking cigarettes on the fire escape, and Mark Davis Kennedy will always be caught carrying someone else's baggage, and Richard Whist Skeen will always be the only person you know who has actually grown up in Fargo, North Dakota, and Gregory Adam Kellogg will always be the last one out of the stands, picking up the pieces of everyone's story.

JAMIE ANASTAS

Mama Says

Oh my baby, rock my baby
Hold my baby girl

Mama says there's an old woman living in the mountains
Who wedges the bones of mice between her teeth
And keeps snake skins hidden in the folds of her dress
Mama says she eats them raw
Sucking the flesh off their bones
Banshee, witch woman, night cat

On cold, clear nights
I hear the faint crunch and crack
Of tiny bones in dusty teeth
Yellowed and softer than chalk

Mama says the woman's hair
Is long enough to wrap around the whole world
She's probably been here forever
Melting in and out of rock
Creeping like lichen on the cold stone
Squatting and scowling in the drip-drop cave

Oh my baby, rock my baby
See my baby, love my baby,
Hold my baby girl

Where's my baby girl?

Mama says you can hear the woman howling
In the sharp winds, cold and painful

And smell the lingering of her breath
A bit of festering in sweetest cedar

I haven't found any mouse bones
But I've seen her drip-drop cave
I haven't seen her braid that hair
But I've heard her faint singing:

Oh my baby, rock my baby
Hold my baby girl

Mama says the old woman's gonna leave now
She's moving North where it's still dark and cold
Mama says she's gonna tie
All that hair up in a big sack to carry
And there's gonna be a big wind storm when she leaves

I know Mama says the woman's leaving soon
But I can still hear the crack and crunch of bones
Nibbled in dark corners of the mountain
Something must be different, though
There are other hands
Small fingers just learning to braid hair

Oh my baby, hold my baby,
Eat my baby, love my baby,
Rock my baby girl

Mama says they huddle against the cold stone in winter
Little cat, mama cat
Nibbling and munching
Grunting and crunching
It's cold as hell in the drip-drop cave

It's getting late
So Mama kisses me goodnight
And sings:

Oh my baby, hold my baby
Rock my baby girl

But I'm not tired and I know
There are yellow teeth, and baby teeth
And a rancid perfume on the wind
And it's getting colder, damn colder
But that's to be expected, after all
She's been here forever
That's what Mama says

Cleaning the Attic

This is for the writer
 Who couldn't speak her mind,
 This is for the old soldier
 Who writes love letters to the war,
 This is for the philosopher
 Who didn't know how to think, and
 This is for the lovers who kiss,
 Simply to taste what the other has eaten.

Nine months is three quarters of a year
 But can seem so much longer than a lifetime.
 We're 9 to 5 with Christmas raises,
 Stamp collections, frequent flyer miles, and
 All the necessities.

O! This is what life is all about:
 Getting some cheap, unleaded gas in the car,
 Flossing and brushing our teeth with whitening toothpaste
 Buying groceries on Super Saver Tuesdays, and
 Balancing our checkbooks in ink.

We've got to clean the gutters
 All clogged with leaves.
 We've got to watch the game,
 The playoffs are on Sunday.
 We've got to go to the funeral,
 Somebody old has died.
 We've got to vote,
 Someone needs to be elected.
 We've got to go to church

Because God is lonely.
We've got to go to the doctor
Because we're all sick inside.
We've got to clean the attic
The moths are taking over.

I got lost cleaning the attic
Somewhere between the white wings
Clinging to Grandma's wedding dress,
And the spaces between my fingers.
I got lost cleaning the attic
And I was afraid.

So I tumbled downstairs
To find refuge by the refrigerator
The kitchen is bright and yellow
And still smells of wallpaper glue.

So now, I am standing here with a glass of water.
After taking two small, white pills,
I lick my chapped lips:
First the bottom lip,
Then the top lip.
He must have eaten fruit yesterday.
The kiss still tastes like summer.

TODD BOESE

Maria

I sat on a bench in the park one Wednesday, watching passersby. A little bird landed on my shoulder, and said, “Look at her. She’s gorgeous.” The bird twitted its neck towards a girl of dark-tan complexion and shoulder-length curly auburn hair; she was walking past my bench. “Ask her to lunch,” the little bird commanded.

Such was not my style, but I followed the little bird’s command and stood up and asked her to lunch. She laughed and smiled, and ultimately conceded. We had sandwiches, and agreed to meet Friday evening for a more formal date. Numbers were exchanged.

Friday I picked her up. I wore a suit, collar unbuttoned. She descended to my world in a white dress with patterned magenta flowers. We went and saw a play, then went back to my place. I held her hand. She kissed my lips. Her lips were milk, her skin honey. Perfection. Hours passed.

As the first rays of dawn began to peak through my window she left. She said to call her number. We’d have lunch on Wednesday.

No one picked up the phone on Monday. No machine either.

No one answered on Tuesday.

No one answered on Wednesday.

I kept calling for another week. Still no answer. I had the right number: she had answered before. Now she wouldn’t. The perfect girl had left my imperfect world.

Dejected. Wrought. I sat in my room listening to the rain outside, where she had been just two weeks before. She hadn’t used me – I had enjoyed it. No, she just changed her mind. I wasn’t her type. I wasn’t good enough. I didn’t give her the same feelings that she had given me. She was a bitch. A pretentious, arrogant, elitist, bitch.

The news came on. Rain through the rest of the week. Then her face appeared. A young woman, found dead in the street just this

morning. She had been found in a dumpster, decaying for two weeks, providing food for street rats.

I'm sitting on a wet bench in the park, laying my head in my hands. Rain is pouring down my back, but it does not carry away everything I've thought since the time she disappeared. The little bird lands on my shoulder again, and stares into the abyss within my dark eyes. "That's what you get for listening to a little bird," and he flies away.

J. LIAO

Sleepers

The storm shakes me awake, the thunder rolling me over in bed. I reach over for Colton, a sleeping log under the blue rumple of our down comforter. My cold fingers gravitate toward the familiarity of the warm, soft hairs on his arm. I rub them vigorously. Colton sleeps through almost everything. The sky claps.

When it rains like this, I can't sleep. Sometimes, after sleeping for a little bit, I'll wake up and cry. Sometimes there's a reason for it, but most times I'm crying and don't feel like there has to be a reason why I am. Besides, I like how Colton never wakes up and just lets me cry. I wonder if he'd let me cry like this if he were awake.

I'm very quiet about my crying, but I'm a sniffer so I'll sit up and reach across his chest for the tissues on the nightstand if I have to. I'll blow as loud as I want because if he's in deep sleep, he won't hear the noise anyhow, and if he wakes up then he'll give me that half-yawning dream smile. But when I do cry, I'll check to make sure that he's still sleeping. I'll let a tear drip off down my nose and watch it land on his sleeping face. Sometimes if I do it just right, the tear lands in a crevice on his cheek and I'll stare at it, amazed at how the crevice cradles the tear that wants to burst and slip away. After that, sitting up in bed, I might peek through the blinds, the window dotted with constellations of water drops. One drop touches another and together, the drops fall deftly across the face of the window, guided by the wind. I am crying.

I want to wake him up, make him give me a hug, comfort me from the rain that hisses outside, the rain that sizzles as it impacts the street like the sizzle of fried eggs on the oiled pan that I'll cook for Colton in the morning—but that's not for hours. No, I don't want him to be tired in the morning. He might not enjoy his eggs as much if I wake him up now.

Maybe I can just roll myself into his arms. He can probably handle one carefully plotted roll-hug and not be the least bit fazed. I look at his calm face, sleeping. A tear rolls down my cheek, and I think of the time two summers ago when Colton spent five weeks in the wilderness, camping out with his friend Riley every night. The sky in Idaho is shaped like a potato, he told me. He thought I'd like that. It rained throughout the last week of his trip, but that didn't stop him from sleeping under that potato shaped sky. Colton said the thunder helped him sleep.

"Windshield wiper distance is how far you should sleep next to a person," Colton told me after a month of sleeping together. Pulling up the cotton sheets, I had shot him a puzzled look, wondering if that was some mechanic's term he was trying to bring into the bedroom. "It's the distance from the driver's seat to the windshield wiper," he defined. He gave the look. When the tiny bare spot between the top and bottom of his left eyebrow disappeared into the furrow of his forehead, he was telling the truth. He held his lanky arms in front of him, measuring out the distance for me to see.

"But wouldn't that just be an arm's length?" I asked, pushing his ruler arms under the sheets.

"No," he said, fluffing his pillow. He stuck his arm under it and then topped the pillow with a sleepy smile. "An arm's length would be two and a half feet, on the average."

Maybe what he meant was the distance between two windshield wipers. That made more sense to me. No matter how many times those wipers swished across the wet windshield, the distance between the two remained the same—equidistant, and never closer to the other than they had been before the storm.

From that night on, windshield wiper distance became a unit of measure, and it made perfect sense. It's not so far that you cannot get there in one step and not too close that people are breathing into your space, stealing the air you breathe.

When we sleep at night we move all around the bed. Sometimes I end up turned around 180 degrees with a pillow on top of my face. One time I found Colton curled up on the floor with Lovey, the cat. Strange, I never remember tossing or turning myself around in bed. And

Colton moves an awful lot for someone who claims to sleep through the whole night. I just know that before we fall asleep, the sheets are tucked in at the corners.

Last year when Colton was going through his obsession with learning Thai, he'd stay up and study in bed. Sometimes he'd think he was entertaining me by reading some of the passages out loud. One evening when he was brushing his teeth, I decided to stuff the books under the mattress. I thought I'd be sly and hide them in the corner against the wall where it's hard to reach, but then I found the baby names book that I thought I had lost. I didn't know if I was allowed to "resurface" that book, so as a joke I put it in the fridge to see if he would say anything the next morning at breakfast. I think I took it out after a week because I needed space for the tuna casserole, and I guess it wasn't that funny considering I refrigerated a book for seven days and had to throw it out anyway. Someone tipped the iced tea pitcher and the baby name book sopped up most of it. Colton found his Thai books though, saying I was really naughty and instead of asking me why I hid them he said, "You're my baby."

Sleeping with Colton some nights, I get the feeling that a bug is slicking down the fatty part of my thigh. When I look down, I realize it's just the edge of the sheets grazing my leg, but I reach for the flashlight under the nightstand just to check to make sure a beetle, ant or spider isn't getting away with a few cells of my skin.

When we talk about the future, we have to be really careful. I have a formula figured out, called "greater than or less than." Whatever we talk about has to take place within two months of the time of discussion, or the event has to be so far off and distant in the future that it'll probably never happen anyway, so it doesn't hurt to talk about it. For example, in the future, we're meeting for lunch tomorrow at Fontenelle's, and we're going to Tahiti to find rare seashells and scuba dive (if we ever learn how to). It's easy to lose the time in between, and I wonder if I should get Colton a watch for his birthday.

There are exceptions to the "greater than or less than" theory. Talking about having kids, even if it's joking, is never okay. But there's a roundabout way of getting to it. We both want to move to California and we both want our picket fence to be white.

We lie in bed, on our backs and stare up at the ceiling. If we made love, we are naked, but he always sleeps without a shirt on. For five minutes, he might hold me in his arms and it might appear to someone as if we were sleeping. We don't like the stickiness of sleeping in each other's arms, he said. I agreed. When it's time, we kiss goodnight. As the kiss disappears on my lips, Colton turns around, his back to me and falls asleep instantly.

"Colton?" I whisper.

"I'm sleeping," he whispers back softly. He's sleeping, so I sleep too.

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RAINY DAY

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