

RAINY DAY



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Submission Guidelines:

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NEMATODES

Shashi Bhat

Each day, I watched my husband Krishna's figure sink farther into the ground. He wanted to build a passage from the yard to a basement entrance, so we could rent out the basement room and earn some extra cash. While cooking dinner, I looked out our kitchen window to where he was digging a trench, growing a few inches deeper every time I checked. On the first afternoon, his body stayed fully above the dirt, and he waved at me with ridiculous enthusiasm, wielded his shovel with gusto, wiped his forehead with his stretched University of Alberta t-shirt. A week later and his boots and his knees were obscured by the ditch that surrounded him. Much later, I stretched and reached to catch the movement of his hair in the wind, and even leaning up against the window glass, mostly I saw only the dirt that left his shovel.

In high school, my closest friend was Jolene, and we were inseparable. Jolene and Anjali, Anjali and Jolene, ten years before Anjali and Krishna. A professor told me once that the two of us complemented each other.

"How would you want to die?" I asked her again and again, as she paused for a moment in her nonstop chattering opinions, swinging her legs from the edge of the concrete block where we always spent lunch. Perched on the uncomfortable surface, kids from our classes played their guitars and smoked their cigarettes, framed by the back of the school building and the nearby forest. My strongest image of Jo showed her on the concrete block: she swept her crimped hair out of her face, adjusted her overlarge t-shirt, chewed the skin around her fingernails. I must have appeared dark next to her. Including me, only two brown kids attended that high school, but attaching myself to Jo generally made me forget the embarrassment of my sari-clad mother at parent-teacher conferences. Jo and I were morbid then; the death question grew to be a favorite of mine.

"Well, I worry about the pain and all," she admitted, "so maybe I'd just like to go softly in my sleep. Like in a rocking chair or something cliché like that. But that's such a sucky way to go. I get these rushes of bravado where I want to be like, *remembered*, you know? And maybe it's awful to be remembered by the way you die, I don't know, but sometimes I think of going over the Niagara in a barrel, or getting stabbed eighteen times with a letter opener, or having a tapeworm inhabit my digestive tract until I starve to death."

Jolene's answer to this question sounded different every time. She spouted far more creativity than I could have, chewing on the ends of her hair as she listed the

names and symptoms of afflictions I'd never heard of. Jo was the reason I started reading the obituaries. She never posed my question back to me though. In the years after losing touch with her, nobody ever expressed curiosity as to how I'd want to die, so I never got to use my mentally compiled list of dramatic endings.

Shortly after I lost my window view of Kris's face, the underground passage collapsed around him. I saw the ground give, heard the metal tools creak, hitting each other as they sunk into the ground with him. His head remained uncovered, and after phoning for help, I ran out to him, and knelt in the dust, my office clothes tearing and my nails beginning to bleed as I scraped dirt away from his face. "Anjali, don't," he whispered, "Stand back on the sidewalk. Just wait for help."

I left him to go stand on the sidewalk as a crew of people tried to help him out. The police sirens blared next to me in the street, followed by the fire trucks. The people spilled out of the cars in a mix of red and navy figures. The neighbors came too, and our yard flashed colorfully with all their clothing, and with the tulips and grasses, so that I could barely see the dirt Kris had been digging. They had uncovered down to his waist when the tunnel collapsed a second time, covering his whole body and his face. Somebody's arm clasped my waist, hands touched mine, brushed the sticky hair from my cheek. The workers jumped out of the way to avoid being crushed, and Krishna suffocated in dirt from our backyard.

The city finished removing his body and used a giant orange truck to cover up the hole in the yard. Krishna was cremated and I scattered his ashes off the edge of a rented boat on Lake Ontario. By the time tulip season ended, I had left the house and the suburbs to live in an apartment in Toronto. When I had memorized the photo albums with Kris's thick black hair and skinny copper legs and his pale palms and the glinting whites of his eyes, and when so much time had passed that my husband's name on paper looked foreign or misspelled, I thought of Jolene.

Jolene grew up to become a parasitologist. I don't think I saw it coming, her eventual affiliation with science, because she always spoke so dramatically, like an aspiring author or actress, in a clear voice, lower than you'd expect. I should have had some inkling about her future career choice though, because she always dragged me to exhibits at the Ontario Science Centre. The Science Centre tended to be a field trip location for elementary schools. The building, large and brick, housed raccoons around the front awnings. You couldn't leave the Science Centre without a newfound, extreme love of science.

The first time she took me there we were audience members for a demonstration on static electricity. The presenter called for a volunteer and Jolene flailed her arms to be chosen. She approached the front of the room, pulling me stupidly with her. She never unlinked herself from my arm. She stood there, pressing her hands onto a large metal globe, pretending to concentrate, comically tightening her eyes shut.

Strand by strand her hair began to crack and lift and shape itself into a whitish-blond dandelion weed about her head. I thought if I breathed too hard, the pieces of her hair might drift and plant themselves around the room, multiplying and growing into many more copies of the same girl.

"That was crazy," I laughed at her, puffing and flattening her hair with my palm as we left the exhibit.

"Kid's stuff," she frowned and slapped my hand away. Then her eyes glowed, "Let's go see the bugs!"

She grabbed my shoulders and we giggled, skipping like fools and sliding on the wooden floor. A section on parasites dominated her attention. She read all the fun facts that were pasted on the walls in green and brown fonts, making sure I fully understood the genius of it all. "Oh my lord, look at this, Anjali! The loa loa larvae are transferred to the human by deerfly, causing a disease called loasis. You know you have the disease if you, like, see worms crawling around under your skin and under your eyelids. Holy shit."

I stood to the left of Jo, looking at a scale model of the largest nematode ever seen. It was eight meters long, flat and thin and ugly, and it lived inside a whale. I imagined taking a swim out in the ocean, diving off the edge of a boat and being swallowed by a giant whale. This in itself was deeply interesting, but then I saw myself traveling down the inside of the whale's body, only to find that in its intestines lived an eight-foot worm. I added this to the list of possible ways to die.

Leaving the exhibit, we passed under a large arch. The arch had a quote painted on it, in flowing delicate script, displaying the words of A. B. Cobb, from his 1915 book, *Nematodes and Their Relationships*. Jo read the quote out loud, sighing with a slightly melodramatic sense of wonder.

"If all the matter in the universe except the nematodes were swept away, our world would still be dimly recognizable, and if, as disembodied spirits, we could then investigate it, we should find its mountains, hills, vales, rivers, lakes, and oceans represented by a film of nematodes. The location of towns would be decipherable, since for every massing of human beings there would be a corresponding massing of certain nematodes. Trees would still stand in ghostly rows representing our streets and highways. The location of the various plants and animals would still be decipherable, and, had we sufficient knowledge, in many cases even their species could be determined by an examination of their erstwhile nematode parasites."

She paused and looked at me. "We're surrounded by the little guys. It's like you can't really be alone. 'Cause of the nematodes."

Later, years after the last time I'd seen Jo, Krishna told me a story about God, and I remembered the nematodes. I heard the quote in my head, in Jo's voice, still infused with wonder. We lay in bed; Kris had shoved all the blankets to my side, because I shivered, perpetually frozen, but he could sweat through the winter in

jogging shorts with the windows open. He rubbed my head as though I were a child, and I looked around the room as he spoke, at the peach walls, the white carpets, the statues and paintings of various Gods that Kris had accumulated through the years. He had searched for these collections through shops in Toronto's Gerrard Street, and then in Mumbai and New Delhi, cities that formed a path over India from North to South. Krishna and I shared a Hindu background, and the tale he told me was one I hadn't heard before, about the Lord Krishna, his namesake. It was a strange little story, about the Lord Krishna as a boy. His mother Yashoda watched him play in the yard. He jumped and ran under the mango trees, disrupting the paths of the red ants that flowed across the gardens and up his pale blue ankles in thick rivers. Then Yashoda saw him bend and take a generous fistful of soil and lick it joyously off his palm, laughing and crunching it in his teeth. She ran to him, took his shoulders and shook him. "Why would you do that? Why did you put that dirt in your mouth?"

"I didn't," he said.

"Why are you lying to me? Open your mouth then, if you're telling the truth!"

The Lord Krishna opened his mouth. Yashoda gasped and took a step back. Inside the boy Krishna's mouth, spinning gently on its axis, Yashoda saw the entire world.

The story spoke of the power of God, the beauty of a blue boy who would grow up to save mankind on countless occasions. I found the story oddly beautiful. And it reminded me of the nematodes, and how they must have lived in the soil the Lord Krishna had consumed.

"Did you ever think, Kris, about how when you're born you're completely separated from the world?" The night had grown late and we were eating fruit salad in the living room. "Even in the earliest possible memories, there are these connections to family, to friends. But when you're born, even coming out of your mother, you don't know that she's your mother. You really don't know anyone. And when people die, they know all these people, but nobody's really with you when you die. I mean, they might be standing next to the hospital bed holding your hand, but it's not like they can follow, where you're going. Even if somebody's dying at the same second you are, you're still on your own."

Kris waited silently. I think I caught him off-guard. He chewed his fruit salad and scratched the dark stubble on his face as I continued to speak. "That's what scares me the most about dying, that you're all alone. In high school I used to wish that somehow Jo and I could die together. We went everywhere as a pair—it wouldn't have been anything new. We were counterparts. It's so cowardly to wish somebody could be with you at all times. Did you ever feel like that? Did you have a counterpart who you wished you could take along for the ride?"

"I have you." He smiled a little, and I didn't know what to say.

What would I have said if I had spoken to Jolene after Krishna died? Seven years had passed since I'd seen her. After the accident, I wanted to call her, but I didn't have her new phone number or know where she lived. I called her old number and strangers answered, and I wondered if Jo had died too, until I found her name and contact information listed in the faculty for the University of PEI's Department of Pathology and Microbiology.

Her new number went straight to voicemail. It beeped and I hung up. I pictured Jolene in her office, walls covered in pictures of parasites and creatures I had never seen. I pictured the desk with metal sculptures of insects, and a photo of the husband she must have by now. I pictured her answering the phone and listening to me speak.

I'm alone, Jo. I've never been alone.

I wondered what I would have said if Jo had ever thrown my question back at me, "How do you want you die?" I asked her the same thing all the time, so she could change it up, vary her response as it suited a certain day. If she had given me the question though, I would have regarded it as my one chance to answer it. And with my list of endings, I wouldn't have been able to decide.

Four months after Kris died, I spent a great deal of time trying to choose an ending. I thought about Lord Krishna and the world in his mouth, and about how my Krishna had sent me to the sidewalk five meters away from where he died, and about the dirt that must have filled his mouth as he gave a final cry. I thought about the nematodes, and they were almost a comfort.

QUESTIONABLE CLUTTER

Jennifer Nunes

Plastic

Goat without fur –

Why every day gaze – why

Not eat my paperclips – why this

Diet?

JOINING

Roseminna Watson

I wanted to make you twist
like I lived in your body,
sweat through the other side of your bones
and pull you through my teeth,
suck you for my own

now

You lift my hips,
the room suspends together
we are silent bodies
(air)
inside each other's faces

the somewhere of you
has always been collecting
in my stomach.

OUT FROM UNDER

Undo the buckles
on your war shoes
angle your feet again
to the rhythm of
hot-edged neon corners and
twist kick.
Bite off beats,
flick them in my mouth
with your fairy tale
tongue
and let's zigzag
up the sky wall
out from under

BREAST POEM

Lynne Feeley

Thank you, Steven, but I'm not feeling very beautiful tonight.
My teeth are feeling especially crooked,
and, in 50 years, my breasts will be saggy.
Young boys will make jokes about them.
They will be punch lines in movies that our grandchildren
will see. As they leave the theater,
our grandchildren will grab at their crotches and high five
each other in order to be men.

If it happens to be Christmas time,
they will sing "Grandma got run over by a reindeer" in rounds
but substitute curse words in for
the verses and make references to my breasts. They
will be wearing khaki pants with pleats.
I will be cross-stitching, watching Murder She Wrote reruns,
not having been fucked in nearly twenty years.

They, like you, will come for
presents and cranberry sauce. I will fake it.
You will smile, hug me
(and think This woman is nothing but hanging skin) and
tell me you'll send your report card and eighth grade school photo
in the mail.

AIRPLANE POEM

Even after airplane and everything else,
I would palms-up refuse the milk,
puddled in its bowl, cereal long enjoyed,
an empty white pool to be washed,
not by me, down the kitchen drain.
A kid crossing guard, I grew wasteful as
I grew weak.

Years later, a fly would die in your window sill
and a taxi would pass by underneath.

I would see neither, lying prone, morning
film running across my forehead,
a tightness to my lips, nearly but not saying aloud

I can see your heart beat
at different places all over your body:
in your throat, in the veins of
your upturned wrist, in the place
where your knees meet.

Instead, I am again a crossing guard,
pressing my palms into your mattress, getting out,
and sneaking down the stairs
to your kitchen, where I would,
in a moment of unspeakable weakness,
make breakfast.

DEATH POEM

In the days following our death,
I tied my shoes as often as I could,
my index catching in the bunny-loop-hole
one in every few trials.

That and I left
all the clocks on the wall but removed their batteries.

It is true I would have done the same
inside your house
among your knickknacks and
unpacked moving boxes, I would have
taken down the portraits but
left the empty spaces—
they may have appeared
like shadows or ghosts tacked up—
but our families had buried,
along with the cakey make-up they
covered us with,
the key.

They received us
with lunch meat rolled neatly up,
Miracle Whip and white bread,
which I ate,
walking across the church basement floor
to the bathroom
where I would, in our wake,
rinse my face and
wash my hands.

PARTY POEM

The woman
on the back patio
is glassy-eyed and feverishly
tired.

She does not smoke or read or
feel sensation whatever but
looks over the yard
noting in particular
the fence's rectangularity
and the freshly trampled lawn,
last night alive under party-goer feet. Her fingers
twitch her out of motionlessness and seem to
her like an infant's hungry lips or a dog's wagging tail,
signaling readiness,
assuredly helpless and alertly out of control.

If she could, she would tell someone
that she feels,
at this very moment,
pleased

in the same way that a golfer or a husband
feels pleased in the seconds after a good swing.

But as it is, she takes hold
of a white Dixie cup and tears it to pieces,
beginning with the curved rim and
working down the sides until
minutes later she reenters the
house a murderer
and has no cup.

LAYING

Laying
face up in the sun,
an ant, stuck between the blades of grass and
what must seem like the moon crashed down,
tickles me around the spine.

I tighten, jerk up straight,
swipe my arm violently backwards
at the spot I cannot reach, the
dome place between my skin-soaked
shoulder blades, the cloud place, a
place missing as far as
I'm concerned
until
you touch it.

I lay a sweater down on the grass,
arrange it tidily, as you would a dinner table,
and lay down once more.

That I can no longer feel anything when I lay back
reminds me that
the front door to your house
the sheets on your bed
my tee-shirt, your zipper, a window
the summer heat that you can see buzzing over the blacktop
unrealized poems, forgotten-about suitcases
dead dinosaurs, history books, extinct grandparents
and a word
lies between my underside and you:
a prick on my skin,
stuck, not unlike a footprint on the moon.

THE BRIT ON THE BUS

Jonah Green

To the bald, broad-backed musician:

You left your tuba on the bus. It was late and I noticed you got on the bus with a giant white case. You looked very stern, very contemplative, you with the teal blazer and British face. This was a midnight bus, so I experienced little surprise from anything, let alone your pale, skeleton face or tuba. However, when I woke up at my stop, the last stop—green delicatessen at the end of Jackson Heights—your tuba case and I were the only passengers left. What could I do? I didn't see where you got off, and the bus driver was staring impatiently at me, so I took your tuba with me.

When I finally got home, I carefully put down the great white case, panting helplessly as if I had slung a beached whale over my shoulder and climbed the Washington Monument. Immediately my wife scolded me—where did I get it, did I steal it, why would I need such a large trumpet, et cetera. The case seemed to make her nervous; she even slapped the side of my head and pleaded to know what I was thinking, just like mother used to do. I explained to her the situation and she eased up. After a moment, I'll tell you, she became quite intrigued by the thing and inspected it thoroughly—rubbed it against her open palms, felt its smoothness, smelled the plastic deeply. That night we made love passionately as if I'd been overseas. The next morning—it was Saturday, as you'll recall—we were surprised to find your tuba still sitting erect by the door like an obedient puppy, right there next to yesterday's *Times* and our little orange Chinese umbrella holder.

We sat in the kitchen drinking coffee and considering the tuba issue. I remember this in a haze. My wife was smoking (hadn't seen her smoke in years). She asked, "How could someone forget a tuba?"

"I don't know," I said.

"And the bus was empty?"

"Yes, just us and it."

She asked me to describe you so I did. I told her you had a very serious, skinny head with light gray fuzz on your temples. Very British-looking. Something in your dried face showed me beans and the pound, soccer and pubs. I'd say elegant, in fact.

She put out her cigarette and said, "It's the bizarrest thing. I wonder why he left it there."

"Well, I doubt it was on purpose, Gloria."

Right when I said 'purpose' the phone rang. It was our son, Marty. Gloria picked up the receiver and told him about our situation.

Gloria said to me, “Marty says we should open it. Says the address might be inside.”

“No way. We can’t open it.”

“Right, ok, hold on—He’s asking how you think you’re gonna find this so-called British musician.”

“First of all I don’t know that he’s British for sure. Secondly...forget it. Nobody opens this tuba case. Period.”

The rest of the afternoon passed normally, slowly. We read the paper, listened to WNYC. After a few hours the tuba kind of cluttered up our tiny apartment, so we went out to get some air. Decided to see a movie—it had been a while since we did that. Afterwards we took a walk, both of us, I’m sure, subconsciously looking for a stern-faced musician. But as you well know, no luck.

It was still there by the door when we walked in. Gloria began to feel guilty and insisted on cleaning the case vigorously, but ran out of Pine-Sol in the middle of the job. This agitated her more than I would have expected. She wouldn’t stop complaining about the half-clean tuba, the “stupid lopsided case” with one half “*crystal* white and the other an *egg* white,” as she put it. So I took the robe I was wearing and threw it over the damned thing. Gloria looked at my large, angry, nude body in the center of our living room and we made love on the couch.

At ten in the morning I opened my eyes. It occurred to me that somehow we had fallen asleep without turning off the living room lights, which at that moment seemed extravagant. Gloria was playing with my elbow fat, which to me always felt very creepy.

“Stop that, Gloria.”

“Are you awake?” Toothpaste breath.

“I’m awake.”

“I tried to open it,” she muttered guiltily.

“And?”

“Well, apparently you need a key.”

You’ll understand why I chose not to open it. Taking the thing into my house was one thing, but for a perfect stranger to put their grimy hands—not that mine are, just theoretically speaking—all over an instrument especially with parts one wraps their lips around would, I think, have been an invasion of your privacy. In my mind I see you musicians as being very attached to your instruments (you, of course, being the exception). I never knew what it was like to have that kind of burning passion for any sort of hobby, not in that all-consuming, Mozart-y way. What do I like to do? I like to read, listen to music, smoke cigars, take afternoon naps, have dinner ready for me when I am tired and angry. I like to watch my wife sleep and I like it when she buys me socks and pretends to be my mother (bless her soul!). I have made it a habit of cooking especially good soups from the finest ingredients, researching

and throwing myself into it (Gloria knows to stay away when it's soup time). If a strange man got hold of my pots and sauces for a weekend? Well—

Well, for the moment it didn't matter. The tuba was still plopped near our door, half-gleaming.

I bought *The Post*, a sandwich, and a coffee and boarded the bus. The idea was to ride the bus all day, read the newspaper, and hopefully run into you. Don't feel bad—I had always wanted to ride public transportation without a clear destination, but never had a reason to. And without a reason to ride aimlessly, you are nothing more than a vagrant.

But by 236th you were not there.

By the fourth McDonald's you were not there.

The next day I went to work. It was on the bus ride back that I saw you. You were sitting in the corner with a different button down shirt, no blazer, but unmistakably the same strong face. You don't know the elation I felt when I saw you. Like I had found a long-lost brother, like I had trumped an impossibility in a giant city. I approached you cautiously and explained how I had accidentally taken your tuba. You know what? You weren't you. At least, you pretended to know nothing about a tuba. Kind of laughed it off, the whole idea of a lost tuba, sitting homeless on a bus and all. I'm convinced, however, that somewhere in your eye I saw a faint glimmer of recognition. I asked you one last time, "Are you sure, buddy. You don't own a tuba? Big, white case? That's...not yours?" But in every way you refused. What choice did you leave me? I apologized for disturbing you, and it was then I realized how cold and watery-blue your eyes were. You said it was no problem at all, and got off the bus.

My sandwich gone, *The Post* now boring and trashy, you again an impossibility, I had no choice but to ride the bus to its end. At McCullough a bunch of kids stepped onto the bus. You know the type: very noisy, completely oblivious to everybody out of their sphere of interest. Pushing old men holding railings, yelping useless things. Why don't philosophers choose to scream with their buddies on the end of the universe? Why must the empty children come screaming premonitions of nothing important? I asked one of the kids to keep it down, to think of the others. He called me a fat asshole. I laughed it off, when in reality I wanted to kill the fucker. But I had a son, and Marty sure could be a pain in the ass when he was young. I did notice one of these scrubby kids was holding a tiny violin case. Thought to myself that he couldn't be so bad if he was a musician. But the funniest thing happened then. Can you guess? The damned kid forgot his violin case on the bus. The reality of this situation took some time to hit me, and when it did I grabbed the little case and jumped off the bus in pursuit of the kid. After wheezing for three blocks, I couldn't even muster the breath to say that I had found his violin case. So I held it in front of this kid's face and grunted. He didn't seem to understand, or

care—nudged his punky friends like *Hey check out the old fat guy*—and kept walking. Finally I said, “No. Listen—this is your—violin. You forgot it. Here, take it.” The look he gave me then could best be described as empty; a look with the comprehension of a cash register.

He didn’t want it.

I took the damn violin with me and got back on the bus. My plan wasn’t to bring it home, but to leave the thing on the bus, to burden someone else with its existence. But since I was the last stop, and no one would claim it for themselves, I had no choice. I even offered it to the bus driver, but he declined. When I walked through the door with this violin case, I shrugged at Gloria, who was sitting on the couch languidly, eyes unfixed and legs splayed as if she were exhausted. Above her our hanging houseplant was tilting as if agitated.

“What have you been doing all this time?”

“I don’t know.”

I put the violin on top of the white tuba case. Still only half-clean.

ITEMS

John Underwood

She asked where it was at,
and I told her.

There are several items,
I said,
and they can be found

HER GRAVE

Cole Long

a cemetery sleeps vague summer sleep
covered with creepers, drowsy with perfume
vines and the highway, exhaust and blossoms,
curious we stop at mother's behest
the headstones peek like primitive children
timorous and pale, unused to the sun
spanish moss cascades, remiss in caretaking
a few rays illumine a still, dappled box
square softened with weather, gray yielding white
loving lichens clung to skeletal etchings
girlish grey flowers, the relief of bones
is this I thought, lonely and ancient
juliet's grave? and where is her romeo?
lift me, mother, that your child may see
the corner cracked, someone, heartless
has struck it, a piece lay unnoticed below
in stray light I saw you, a hint of white bone
asleep and bare, you are my first
glimpse of death, where is your lover?

UNDERTOW

I am six, September, and I wade
saturated sand like satin clay
holds tiny feet, not strong enough
though it is the whole earth
the sea is stronger, I resist
rebellious toward release
as I go waist deep, and the peaks
of waves are a thousand
gray hands reaching for me
I spread little boy arms
like flying fish wings
I let go to the undertow
upside down drinking salt water
a first taste of wine
I fly low seeing only gray-green
unwilling and free and then
I am ten and tempest-tossed
brackish and blind, begging
breathless to mermaid girls
cast me where you may
let jellyfish water fill my mouth
I am kissing brine, my legs entwined
in your long lean tails, warm seaweed
tresses whip my shoulders
until I flash white and blue
choking out their taste, cold,
flat on my back in the shallow surf
breathing air and yearning to drown

PEEKING

Max Eskin

Like radio signals fly lost in the galaxy,
We wade uncertain in morning.
We have defeated time,
Peeking at night's workers
Laying down a cover of snow
That others, who wake up, will marvel at.

For us, it is but housekeeping.
We saw the clouds gather outside the window
While life went on half a world away.
We saw the streetlights seem to glow brighter
As they reflected off the overcast sky.
Rabbits ran around looking for something.

And then it started:
The snow began to fall.
Flakes clung to each blade of grass.
By the time the sky glowed gray again
From over the horizon,
The landscape was white.

When others wake up, to them it will be
The Way Things Are,
Much like the Earth itself,
Or sleep, or day and night.
But we, we saw it happen.
We have defeated time.

HOTEL

Once things were built to last,
But stand abandoned nowadays,
Thrust up in reddish scabs
From out the vinyl town
The greyish white experience
That surely we'll get sick of it
And want it to collapse itself
Lest we must take it down.

Beneath the rags of posters,
The paper muting a great mouth
And many sheets of plywood
Applied to open sores,
Behind the homeless sleeping bags:
A hotel's vanished entrance,
Untouched by light for decades,
A pair of glass bronze doors.

It seems that here, once long ago,
Someone had talked of different plans
With gold and azure ceilings,
And planes, and cars, what he had said,
Now ruins: perfect metaphors
For greatness, satisfaction,
A rocket through thin folds of clouds,
Who knew that only darkness lay ahead?

In the hotel, the plaster hangs
From erstwhile azure ceilings
Now yellowing with water
Gold specks upon the carpet.
The rain beats daily on the panes
Whose frames are wrinkled as dry eyes.
The wood beam groans teased by the sun,
The sky conspires to warp it.

The guests who muttered in the halls
Replaced by silent vapors,
Where could they all have gone to?
But now there's only air.
I hope to tear the lawn
With a sleek silver DC-3,
Step down, past the "No Entrance" signs,
Will you come join me there?

Our hobby now is gagging
On food left from the party,
Tornadoes come, sweep all away,
Start Solitude anew!
But waiting for the center
To finally stop holding,
What harm, to dance a last time,
To times we know are through?

I will be the wind
Coming through the broken window
You will be the breeze
Coming through the half shut door
And light as air we'll swirl
In endless dance formations
Merging ever closer
On the abandoned ballroom floor.

MOTORCYCLE

It starts when the walls go unpainted,
Black circles grow around the switches,
The grease gathers in the corners.
Soon, vision gets a constant shade of yellow,
The paint on doors starts chipping,
And the upholstery collects scrapes and cuts.

Who knows; each time may be the last.
The motorcycle stalls trying to climb the hill.
Who knows; each time may be the last,
The motorcycle stalls trying to climb the hill.
Who knows . . . it's gasping for air,
It smells gasoline,
But the lungs are jammed from the effort.

There is the new and there is the old.
When one will conquer the other, which will it be?
Will the moon hang only feet above us,
So there is no space to make a single thought?
We would then walk staring at the sidewalk,
Cracked, barely recognizable.

The sun would spit its light at us,
Us like a fish out of water,
If only we could breathe the rays, undiluted.

Now is the time for change,
Maybe later we will drive in rusty cars.
What if everything comes to a stop?
The deer would run around, sure,
But we would not exert any effort.
It would be like heat death.

TEACHER

Annie Cha

My father, wielding fragmented English,
teaching a group of businessmen to center their Chi
ten hours every day, dictating motions and peculiar poses
that he may feed hole, hoof, and fang at home—
twenty-eight years.

My father, who taught me which shoe to put on first,
which hand to use when pouring tea, the correct degree of my formal bow—
has been shrouded in paper and placed on a steel manger.
a doctor fishing out what lessons
his body failed to learn.
My father places his hand on my head,
Annie, your posture has gone to hell since I left.

Bedside manner: my mother and sister hover
over him like un-petaled angels.
their fingers twitch excessively—as my father asks for water,
the television remote—to keep life at a normal keel. And

I'm running—from the dark musk of wet leaves,
past the picket fences, the fields, right past the town's sign: *Now leaving Hope.*
mouthing the word hope as my feet pound pavement.

THE MECHANICAL MAN

Ron Maimon

Bjorn and Anna, husband and wife, were cleaning the living room when the doorbell rang. Bjorn pushed the intercom switch:

“Who is it?”

“Special delivery.”

Bjorn thought a bit.

“Are you expecting anything?” he asked his wife.

She paused and thought a while. Then she turned red.

“Oh my god!” Her voice rose an octave. “It’s here! Oh, that’s wonderful!”

“What is it?”

She began to clap her hands. “It’s a surprise! It’s for us—oh it’s so wonderful! I’ve been waiting all week.”

“What is it?”

She grabbed his hand and pulled him out the door, around the corner, and down four flights of stairs. She was running fast, and Bjorn was out of breath when they reached the bottom floor.

At the front door was a delivery man and, next to him, a nine foot-tall wooden crate. On its front, diagonally stamped, were the words “Pleasure Industries.”

“Sign here.”

Bjorn signed. The deliveryman walked away.

Bjorn circled the crate suspiciously.

“It’s too big to fit in the elevator.”

He tilted it a bit.

“It’s heavy.”

He began to push it toward the stairwell. He was out of shape, and the exertion made him sweat. Beads formed at the top of his head, where hair used to be.

“Will you grab the other side?”

But Anna was already in the elevator, chatting excitedly into her cell phone. Her arms were waving. The elevator door closed. He climbed the first step, wrapped his arms around the box, and, with some exertion, managed to heave the box onto the first step. He mounted the second step.

By the time the box was in their living room, Bjorn was in quite a foul mood. His right arm was holding his back. Still, he wasn’t upset; he was curious.

He watched Anna remove the four fasteners on the corners of the crate. As she did, the sides of the crate fell to the floor. Inside was an eight foot-tall iron machine. It was pitch black with pistons and gears and a rotating flywheel on top. On the side was a chair—also black—elevated off the ground, with a variety of ornaments and knobs and two diagonally slanted leg-rests. A can of oil with a bent spout hung on one of the levers next to the chair. In front was a furnace with a grilled door. Next to the device were a sooty bag and a shovel.

“But what is it?”

“It’s a mechanical man! It runs on steam,” she explained.

“I sit here,” she pointed to the chair. “And that’s the coal for the furnace,” she pointed to the sooty bag.

“And what does it do?” he asked.

“I’ll show you.”

She led him to the machine and sat delicately in the chair. She shivered slightly and closed her eyes. She fidgeted with her skirt and pulled her underwear down her legs.

She strapped her body with four belts and adjusted the levers, raising the chair until her thighs rested on the leg-rests, slightly spread.

“Will you be a darling and start it?”

He threw some newspaper into the furnace and lit it. He heaved a shovelful of coal into the machine. It took a few minutes for the boiler to heat up. He heard the wheels start to move.

“Mmmmm,” cried Anna.

The gears of the machine were turning slowly. The boiler began to hiss. The flywheel started spinning. A few of the levers had begun to move, and the chair was shaking slightly.

“Ooooh.”

He took the shovel and fed the furnace again. The coal was quite heavy. As he stood again, he put his hand on his back.

“Oh!”

The gears were turning steadily. The chair was rumbling.

“Faster.”

He picked up the shovel again. The hiss changed to a whistle, and the flywheel spun faster. The whistle became a shriek. The furnace was very hot, and a steady exhale of steam surrounded his body. He was sweating from the exertion. He took off his shirt.

“Unh—Ooooo.”

The machine was grinding and spinning, and hissing full throttle. The three pistons repeated a pattern. A gear began to squeal, and Bjorn oiled the spot until the squealing stopped. The only sound was the chung-kashung of the pistons, the whirring of the flywheel, and the whistle of the steam valve. The steam was making the living room humid. The coal was heavy. He wiped away his sweat with his shirt. He looked at Anna. Her eyes were closed, and her nostrils flared. On her face was a look of intense concentration.

“Oh Jesus! Yes!”

He continued shoveling the coal for twenty minutes, until he was spent. The machine slowly wound down, and as it did, a smile of contentment spread across Anna’s face.

“That felt wonderful.”

When she got off the machine, she kissed his cheek.

“Thank you darling, I’m worn out.”

She walked toward the bedroom.

“Oh, and take a shower before you get into bed. You’re all sooty.”

Bjorn took off his clothes and ran the water for the shower. He looked in the mirror. His arms and hands were covered with soot. His face, too, where he had wiped it. He looked down at his gut. It had grown in the last year, just enough to make him feel awkward. He ran his hand slowly across his bald-spot. It had grown noticeably bigger too. Bjorn stepped into the shower.

He came out wrapped in a towel and slowly walked through the living room. The bedroom door was closed. He turned on the lights and sat on the couch, facing the machine. He thought for a few minutes and stared. He noticed a long rod four feet off the ground at waist height that seemed to be a bit tilted.

He looked at it more closely. It seemed to be bent, but he wasn’t sure.

“Hmm,” he whispered to himself.

He walked to the machine and grabbed the rod. He shook it slightly. It quivered.

He paused and glanced nervously toward the bedroom. The lights were off.

He shook the iron rod again, this time more forcefully. It seemed to be moving downward and bending diagonally. He pushed it harder. It was stuck. He turned around and put his weight against it. The bar slid down and Bjorn fell. He hit the floor, winced, and the rod jumped back, squealing. A piston clanged.

The bedroom light flipped on. “Stop playing with it, you’re going to break it!” Anna

yelled.

Bjorn picked up his towel off the floor and wrapped it around his waist again. He was tired. He walked toward the bedroom and went to sleep.

The next day at the office was slow, and Bjorn had a lot of time to think. He didn't get much work done. He noticed Sylvia, the office manager, walk by. She stopped for a moment in front of his office window, turned around, and walked awkwardly in. She hesitated.

"I made some coffee," she said.

"OK," he said.

She turned around and walked awkwardly out. She glanced at him before she left, shyly. As she walked out, Bjorn began to think again. He had a photograph of Anna, taken before they were married, sitting on his desk. He looked at it. He dialed her cell phone number.

"Let's go out to eat tonight." Bjorn said. "You know, like we used to."

They made plans to meet at eight.

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At the restaurant, Anna ordered the buffet.

"Do you like your salad?" he asked.

She chewed.

"Uh huh."

"Can I try some?"

Crinkle. Crunch.

She let him prod her plate. He chewed.

"Can I have some more?"

She gave him some more.

"It's all you can eat," he said. "We sort of get two for the price of one."

Crik, crup. "Unh. Gmm." Crinkle, crack.

"If I had a restaurant, I would charge us double."

"Mmhuh."

He paused and looked down dejectedly.

"I'm boring," he said. "I'm sorry."

"You're fine," she answered.

That night, he was able to shovel the coal for an hour. The mechanical man hissed at him. With not a small amount of malice, he thought.

The next morning, without telling anyone, Bjorn went to the gym. He took out a half-year subscription and exercised before going to work. The workout made him feel young. He bounded cheerfully into the office. Sylvia smiled at him.

He went every morning. He would lift chin weights and knee weights. He even lifted dainty finger weights. He would do back-lifts and stomach turns. And he performed the deep-jump; he deep-jumped sixty-three times. By the end of the week, he could feel his muscles bulging.

When he got home, Anna felt his muscles. "You turn me on, Bjorn," she said. She would get more excited, and for longer, as he worked the mechanical man. And, as he worked, she would stroke his back and chest with her right hand.

"Who would have thought that you would get so strong just from shoveling coal," she said.

- - - -

The week after, Bjorn began implant treatments.

"It's better than a toupee, it's your own hair. It's undetectable!" the doctor assured him.

At the end of the first session, he had a big patch of hair in the middle of his head, surrounded by scalp.

"It's fashionable," the doctor said, but Bjorn bought a cap before going in to work.

"I like your hat," Sylvia told him as he walked in. She smiled and looked down awkwardly.

He went every day, right after his workout. By the end of the week, he had a full head of hair.

That night, he took off his cap when he came home. Anna ran her hands through his hair. "It feels so real," she said. She touched his muscles. "My god!" She was shivering in excitement now, as she led him to the machine. As he worked, she ran her fingers through his hair again, and again, and touched his muscles.

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The week after, Bjorn signed up for smooth-talking lessons. "Smooth-talk in Seven Sessions!" the poster advertized.

The instructor was very thorough. He described all the well known smooth-talking techniques, and some that aren't so well known. There were even methods that had never been taught before. Bjorn learned to talk of the night fish off of Cairo beaches, and the moonrises in the desert. He learned how to tell jokes and how to make subtle innuendo. He practiced in the mirror at the bathroom at work.

When he was confident enough, he began to smooth-talk at Anna, and she swooned. He talked to her about the lonely life of a lighthouse operator, and starlight that reflected on a lake. He talked about snowy mountains, and an earthquake that, once begun, would never stop. She devoured his smooth-talk and began to sweat and shiver. And she ran her hands through his hair and closed her eyes. And she touched his muscles. Her body buckled, and he lifted her up. She whispered in his ear.

"Darling. Let's not waste any time. Tonight, I want something special."

He asked her what she wanted, and smooth-talked some more.

"Will you ... speak to me while you do it?"

As he shoveled the coal, she ran her hands through his hair, and felt his muscles, and

the mechanical man screamed. Although he wasn't sure if she could hear him, Bjorn smooth-talked the entire time. In bed, at night, he continued to smooth-talk as Anna fell asleep, smiling.

- - - -

It had been a month since the mechanical man arrived, and Bjorn felt beat. He was out of ideas. He sat in the office chair looking glum.

"What's wrong?" asked Sylvia.

"Nothing."

"Why, a big, tall, handsome man like you!" she said, running her hands through his hair. "Why are you always so down?"

She touched his arm muscle.

Bjorn had never been unfaithful to his wife, but Sylvia was such a pretty girl, why had he never noticed? He began to smooth-talk to her. He talked about wine fountains and cardamon. Purple chariots and Roman orgies.

"Come home with me." Sylvia said, swooning.

"Ok. I'll see you at six."

"No, let's go now."

She grabbed his hand and dragged him to the parking lot. They drove home, speeding, and she was frantic with anticipation. He talked about recklessness and mist, boats swaying, and arctic tundra. She shivered.

They reached her doorway and she kissed him passionately. The door flew open, and he flung her on the couch. They kissed again, and she removed her underpants.

He lifted her skirt and positioned himself. But he was careful. He felt in his pockets, instinctively, but knew that there would be nothing there. He was not prepared for an infidelity.

"Do you have something?" he asked.

“Wait just one second,” she said.

She bounded out from under him and opened the closet. He heard a commotion. He got off the couch and walked toward her. Her rear was sticking out of the closet, and her legs were straining in her skirt.

Bjorn heard a familiar squeal. She wheeled out a device from her closet—eight feet-tall, and black. It had a sooty bag of coal beside it. Bjorn considered, paused, thought. He licked his lips with anticipation, and rolled up his sleeves.

HAVING NEVER LOVED HIM

Beatrice Maoh

having never loved him, only deceived,
did she stroll across the muddy yard,
the sunny, insistent sand. it made no difference now,
the weather; her ruined violets given value
too soon in passing. Black-eyed susans in celebratory weeping,
heads heavy-laden with easy sorrow,
shamelessly morose. a billboard culture, coitus&coupling
on fat big-screens. no private grief
is hers to twist like a voiceless towel,
hollow howl with every wringing.

a tapping at her window: is she ready,
woman, come-of-age
enough for the fair-haired boy in spectacles,
his face turned upward, eying glass
and aiming, the small boulder pressed
in the naked fold of his slippery palm?

CONFESSION OF A NINE YEAR-OLD BOY

Dylan Rosal Greif

Dear Bethany,

It has been quite some time since last we spoke, and I know you must be awfully surprised to hear from me. But let me assure you I am well and good, and that I do miss you.

Bethany, there is something I need to confess. You see, there was a time when I separated from one of my many girlfriends. She was not for me, but perhaps for one of my future selves, and I was not yet ready for that self. And there are many future selves that belong to me, Bethany, yet I know not what to do with them all. You are wondering which future self I am speaking of at the moment. Oh, this is the charming husband whose cheeks glow red when he comes home in the evening. He is a man of thirty-four, but of his pride, you would say it belonged to his early twenties, and of his wit, perhaps to his late fifties. The hair on his head is a dark brown, and slicked back, just as a little one fashions his hair after a bath. He straightens his shoulders and hardens his chin.

The future self I speak of now, he comes home in a sweater vest, and he wears a smile that will be kissed by his wife as he walks through the door. On Saturdays, he takes her out to dinner, and for that special occasion he has a mustache; he can grow one full in under eighteen minutes. And later when he takes her to bed, he wears leopard-skin underwear that would be *sleazy* if it had been seen by anyone else.

Yes, Bethany, this is the self that would have loved her, but like I said, my time and that self and this poor girl, we were not meant to be. And how I often forget: I am still nine years old (and three quarter months). And she! She will be seven in a week tomorrow! I have not the sprouts under the nose to meet such romance, nor the allowance in my pocket to meet such leopard-skin underwear.

But that is not what I have come to write you for. I have shared but the woes of a child, and confession is much more than complaint. Bethany, before I tell you this next thing, I want you to keep something in mind. I want you to ask yourself one question, and that is whether you are happy. And as you read on, I want you to wonder if I am the reason you are not.

Have I surprised you? I am sure it seems for you startling that after all these years apart and half our lives gone by, I still know the thoughts in your head and the feelings in your heart. Imagine! We now are twice the age we were *four* years ago. An eternity. You pressed your thumb intimately against the soft of my nose and told me

never to come again. I now understand why, and this is what I have come to share with you.

You see, Bethany, I am a sick and disgusting little creature. You might never have believed it for a million years, but when I look long at my face in the mirror, I see depravity. Oh, I have held the hands of so many girls, and I have kissed four of them on the mouth. *Four*. That's an overwhelming majority of fingers on the hand.

Of these mouths that have been...touched by my own, one belonged to a sweetheart named Samantha. I saw her once through the legs of a crowded room, and she was lost in a forest. I approached her, and took her hand, and she blushed and we marched away, escaping the crowd, down a tall dark hallway, and then upstairs to the second floor where I squeezed her round little tummy and we *did* it; we kissed. It was my first kiss on the mouth, and hers too I am quite sure. And we returned downstairs and she ran into the forest and I never saw her again. And I hated myself for it. You see, I had become what I had become. I felt wretched...but to say that I was wretched—to *denounce* my actions—would have been to unleash a world of guilt that my little soul was not ready to bear all by itself. No, instead I decided to feel proud, and I justified my actions, and three weeks later I kissed the girl from school with the big feather jacket. A week after that I slapped my first butt: Sarah Hemming—oh, thunder struck that hand! And then there was the third kiss, and then the fourth, but I forget who they were and where they came from.

Of course, Bethany, I don't mean to forget about you. I just thought you would prefer that I not consider you my first. After all, you pulled away. You pressed my nose. You told me to leave.

Bethany, I am writing to tell you that I am in love with you, but that I do not want to kiss you. I never want to kiss anyone or anything ever again. I would not kiss your cheek, and I would not kiss your hand, and I would not kiss your bellybutton, and not your nose and not even your elbow. I do not mean to scare you, but only to tell you I understand why you told me never to see you again. I understand, I understand, I am wretched with understanding. But let me come see you now. I am changed, and I can be new every second of my life. With every thought and image that enters my brain, I can be a different boy. But you have never changed, and if you have changed, and if you are like me, pitiful and disgusted with your own skin, let us step outside our selves and be together again.

But if you are happy, and if I am all wrong, well then...I'll probably become overly attached to my mother, and maybe I will hate my father. Or maybe I will write children's books for the rest of my life, or maybe I will dream of impossible things, like swinging on the moon.

Maybe I will become vain and love only myself forever. Whatever might become of me, I will be waiting for your response. If it is nighttime when you read

this letter, have a good night. If it is morning, have a lovely day. If it is afternoon, then I would like to know how your day is going.

Sincerely,

Charlie

EVOLUTIONARY SUMMER: 2004

Harriet Antczak

It's all very heartbreaking and romantic.
Using words like 'assiduously'
And with baby possums in her hair. They cling, you know, with their tails.

Sometime during the second week was when
"Something will be important to you"
meant him to her and she wonders where it went wrong.
"I'm ehheh kinda special and you ain't"
is what the professor said.

You got it bad, huh?
Yup.
Warn the museum-goers!

Finding God from science was not what she had in mind,
But it's all relative anyway. She had her own pizzazz:
Environmental anorexia and the pope's secret archives.
("archive me, not my teachers" she would say)
infatuation is like fool's gold for love.

Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that
She wanted a story.
God made the rain fall. And created a tempest in a teapot.
(methinks it is like a weasel)

How much luck does it take?
Ever since noah and his arc
(ives)
Burned,
The atheists have been separated from the believers.
Magnify me, amplify me
Is what she wanted

And began to pull away from it all.
Was just looking for a common base:

ACGT, or something like that.
Something older than books.

If there is no God
Is there love with a capital L?
Or is it all just genetic revolution?
(when you write your first book, make it *nyul*)
maybe we just pop up like lemmings.
And nothing remains.
All.
Gone.
(dead as a doornail).

There was an old man selling balloons
With cranes sticking out of his head.
Whistling just like that.
And he dropped his pipe,
Inspector,
Grabbed in the air where it had been.

Perhaps I will keep it to myself.
In something other than books.

TARDIGRADE DREAMS

Jamie Anastas

When tragedy descends upon
the mushy mire of their puddles and ponds
they sing their children to soft sleep
tuck in their tails and close their eyes
for five, maybe six years of humble dreaming

Water bear wives dreaming of water bear husbands
water bear husbands dreaming of water bear wives
and everyone dreaming of dawdling days
in the silken waters of their ancestors

It's not the same for us:
We've been sitting with our feet soaking in hot, hot water
for ten whole days and there's nothing beyond
the slightest tingling of the toes and the sparkless pain of bloat

God must be in a raindrop for a tardigrade
Just a drizzle and, pop, the streets are filled with traffic
there's blood in the nest, and the voice of life
anew is clang-clang-banging in their ears

SOMETHING TO BE WHISPERED

I want to taste the salt of lost stories
and have caravans and carnivals
tangled in my hair
I want to crawl through that damp place
feeling death in the creases of my knuckles
until I am folded bone by bone
encased in a sheath of my own marrow

I want my doubt swept up by the wind
and caught in the gull's beak
and my lies to sleep so
deep under the enamel
that I can't hear them anymore
I want to dry these wants out in the hot sun
Till they dissolve with the hollow sound
of the worms muttering to themselves

So let us go now and clean our faces
with whispers and lavender sounds
and follow that sweet and rotting
smell of ink on parchment
In the shade we will find the crumbled stairs
where memories and mortar are the same

We will go through the overgrowth
unpeeling these empty layers
of rotten fish smell
Let's leave these coffees and teas and
false-gods-of-parking-permits behind
Here, we can follow the scent of love breathing

We won't need memory
For we will be crystallized
Scrubbed so clean that even money has no color
Listen. It is a soft and a simple thing

• 46 RAINY DAY

Let us go where I will no longer fear
The tinge and the chill of waking alone

I ALREADY KNOW

He came up from behind and breathed on my earlobe:
I can turn off my liver on command
and change the movement of my bowels, he said
his hands trembling in fingerless gloves
Sometimes, if I concentrate, I can turn my kidneys inside out
and even make my veins flow backwards
These powers belong to me because I know the secrets of the ancients
I can show you just as sure as a spider spins silk

There is an easy way to deal with people like this man
but sometimes, I like to play a different game:
That's nothing, I boasted
I can make my heart run laps from the tips of my toes
to the end of my tongue while deflating my lungs
and balancing a melon on my head

This man is not like the others
He ignores this and slides his hand onto my shoulder
I know what Hell smells like, he continues
and I eat nothing but moss and millipedes
it builds an immunity to disbelievers and frost
and mockers like you

His breath hot on my neck now, frozen in a pale arch
I can tell who you are by the shape of your teeth
and know you are the kind of girl
who wonders what it would be like
(His hand locked in a firm grip on my knee now)
if she stalled her heart for just a moment
It's not so easy as the liver, but it can be done

I could teach you and we could both stop our hearts together
And we could
But he never had a chance to finish
Pulling away, I stumbled into the street

The old man was wrong
I already know how a stopped heart feels

Sometimes it happens when I click the door locked at night
then return upstairs to hide the piles of hair under the bed
or on summer evenings when the pulse of the crickets
throbs so loudly that I want to scream to block them out

More often the arteries sigh and the chambers collapse
at that moment when I sit up in the bathtub
with sheets of icy water peeling off my skin
and I realize that I can't quite remember
which way is up.

HALF-HANNAH

Matt Lowenstein

Harold stepped on something sharp. He emitted an abrupt yelp and heard a clattering noise as something scattered across the floor. He fell onto his bed. The obstacle confused Harold; he didn't remember anything in the doorway, but it was his chess set with the kings that looked like queens. He got back up and searched for a dusty metal chain on the ceiling. When his fingers found it, Harold gave a pull and a pale yellow light went on. Papers covered his floor and spider webs draped across his ceiling. The walls were forest green, but borrowed a sleepy pallor from their dusty blanket.

Harold bent over his computer desk, an old mahogany piece adorned by rips and scratch marks. The main drawer of the desk once boasted two plastic gold metal knobs that you'd pull to open it. Now those knobs were lying somewhere beneath the desk; Harold hadn't bothered to pick them up when they'd fallen off.

Inside, the drawer was a clutter of Band-Aid boxes, tissue boxes, condom boxes, boxes boxes, and a mess of plastic containers. When Harold's hand settled on the right container, he removed it from the drawer and brushed the dust off its label. "Percocet." Harold swallowed a pill and went downstairs.

Next house over, his friends were packing a bowl of pot and topping it with opium. Empty beer bottles littered the floor and the table. Some of his pals sat in chairs, some on an old, green couch, others Indian style on the floor. Someone banged two bottles on the table, Vodka and Jagermeister. Paper cups abounded, if you didn't mind used and discarded ones.

"I found some pills," Harold said.

"Whatchya got?" asked Mike.

"Nothing special. Whatchya got yourself?"

"Real special."

"Sidney's pot," someone added, "Great stuff we got. And we got some opium too." Sidney lay supine on the couch. Sidney was bashful.

Harold sat down on the floor. His companions swayed to the melody of a Radiohead album. Seline and Hannah were there too, next to each other in a corner. Seline sucked on a lollipop with her back to the wall and her knees pulled up to her chest. Hannah's thick black frames rested dumbly on the end of her nose. She stretched her trim, athletic legs out all the way, crossing them at the slender, sockless ankles.

Harold's hand fingered his wallet and the bottle of pills inside his pocket. He removed the pills and rolled the bottle onto the table. Somebody picked it up and

said, “Percocet. Aw, man.” Harold didn’t care what anyone thought, but he glanced at Seline. She was talking to Hannah.

“Where’d ya get the opium from?” asked Harold.

The person next to him exhaled and passed him the bong. Harold took another pill with a shot of Jager and took a hit. One moment, the world was as plain as shredded wheat. Then all of a sudden everything dazzled with a strange and mysterious interconnectedness and the world really touched him as if with an inexpressible, and perhaps altogether meaningless, epiphany. The music started to turn around him like prisms and hung as a serene, profound backdrop for his ambling thoughts. Sometimes barely noticeable, and then as immediate as unexpected nudity, the music played, “No alarms and no surprises, no alarms and no surprises...”

He stared at Seline; her curly red hair hung moppishly on the side of her face like Raggedy Anne. Freckles speckled her ruddy, but feminine face. Just a little too pretty. She’d done a lot of shit. Drugs and men, probably women too. A little too wild, enough to be out of his league. That downcast siren charm that some girls evoke when they become pessimistic hovered like the spirit vapors about her face. Or maybe it was the spirit vapors pretending at loftiness. He looked at Hannah.

Hannah was beautiful—gorgeous. Her dark black hair and eyes seduced everyone hopelessly, the portrait of a knockout. Everyone thought she was hotter than Seline, her best friend. When rating their respective looks, a discriminating friend once referred to Seline as “Half-Hannah.” But Harold disagreed. “Hannah’s elegant,” he would say, “she has magnificent poise and a coffeehouse coolness, and it doesn’t seem to be affected, but to me she’s like a beautiful painting, and not something I’d wanna fuck. Though I’ll grant you she’s gorgeous, Seline is much more attractive.” It was largely bullshit. Harold probably would’ve given anything, even his Oxycontin or the tattered notebook he used to write in that he now kept buried under an avalanche of dust and prescription drug bottles, to fuck Hannah. But Hannah was so far out of his league! He hadn’t seriously considered a girl like her since Christina Poman humiliated him in eighth grade.

Jessica was kind of cute. She was a little chubby, but she had a shy, nervous glance, and she was also a redhead. Probably good for an easy lay, since she was so unsure of herself, but you’d probably feel like a proper bastard afterward. Like Poland, you could conquer her, but you couldn’t make her like it. Harold eyed her seriously, but decided, as he always decided, that she had been a good next-door neighbor and that using her would be worse than immoral; it would be un-neighborly.

Christy was not attractive. She was distinctly unattractive. Out of respect for her innocent, innate kindness, Harold was loath to judge her physically. He would end up laughing at her, and she deserved better. It was altogether better not to think about her sexually. And yet...picturing her naked gave Harold a sly, guilty pleasure, and he evinced a broken cackle that rose in pitch with every throaty “heh.”

But inevitably his fantasy returned to its habitual subject. “Ah, my Seline,” he thought, “Seline, Seline, the beauty queen, oh how stricken I have been. Seline, Seline, with eyes of green, if you touch me shall it be in dream?” Harold never wrote that poem down, though he’d thought about giving it to her. No, he thought, anyone in his right mind would feel awkward and embarrassed to hear a poem like that.

“Then fucking explain it! Don’t just say, ‘that’s bullshit,’ fucking explain it!” Sidney’s hoarse yelling awakened Harold to the conversation.

“Dude.” Mike was patient and grinning widely. “Okay. First of all, Gore Vidal’s sources are all left wing, wacko sources. Secondly, if you believe that Bush both planned September 11, *and* was negotiating oil deals with the Taliban then...then...I mean, Christ, man, it’s a fucking huge contradiction.”

Someone laughed, not Mike’s calm, studied laugh, but the laughter of the extremely intoxicated. “Haha. He’s right. Hehe. Sidney, he *is* right.” Sidney shook his head back and forth.

Harold grimaced and expostulated, “Besides, the US government just wouldn’t do something like that.” Harold had thrown down the gauntlet. Sidney bared his teeth, slammed his bottle on the table, and spewed out his leftist dribble like a propaganda spigot. Sidney was never inebriated, because his fanaticism exercised an authoritarian monopoly on his thinking, guarding his brain jealously from the subversive, deflating effects of substances.

Mike lay down on the floor in silence. He enjoyed watching Harold argue. He also enjoyed the chemical reactions produced by a cascade of substance abuse. Occasionally, Harold would steal himself from the argument to regard Seline. She didn’t seem to notice his academic prowess; she seemed rather bored.

After a while, Sidney was in bad humor. He felt cheated by Harold’s knee-jerk discounting of all his sources. Hannah put an empty beer bottle on the floor. “Dude...” she stared blankly at the ceiling, all the guys mentally undressing her, “I’ll be right back. I need...another shot.”

“Fuck it. Me too. Haha.” Harold slouched up and walked, wobbling slightly, to the kitchen. He was glad for a reprieve from the conversation. In the kitchen he procured a beer for himself and for Hannah. As he shut the fridge, Hannah spoke to him. She was leaning against the wall. Her black hair was cut short. All her clothes were black. She was peach-colored, Israeli, and she had smallish, firm, high breasts. Her nose was small and slender, her eyes very wide.

“You’re pretty good at that. That debating shit.” An ample smirk hung on her face, ironically.

“I think you’re fuckin’ggg...mocking me. I can tell by that haw—haughty smirk. Haha. I don’t care.” Harold smiled back at her and winked, “Issss cute ‘n you.” It was easy with Hannah. She was so far out of his league that there was none

of the nervousness he felt in Seline's exclusive company. Or maybe it was just the drugs.

"Lemme see your beer bottle." She got up from the wall and walked over to Harold.

"Huh?" For a second he suspected she was going to kiss him and his ears warmed with apprehension, but she actually did just want the beer bottle. She took it from him and put both bottles on the ground, and then her peach skin flushed white and red. Harold noticed she was staring at his eyes and became confused.

He reached out and touched her hair. Her head shook a little, as though distraught, and then she kissed him. They kissed for a while, and she sucked on his tongue, and then did something a little strange. She jammed her pelvis into his leg, not once, but over and over again. Whatever; Harold wasn't about to complain.

When she pulled away, he started to ask if she wanted to go to his room next door, but she pretty much tore off her shirt and made Harold squeeze her tits. They were surprisingly cool beneath her hot neck. Perfect, round, Israeli peaches. Wonderful.

At length she pulled away. She looked at him with a wide smile, but not at his eyes this time. Still blushing, she avoided his glance. "Like a fucking newbie," he thought, "Haha. She must really like me." Her Eastern eyes glittered and her smile, though subtler and smaller than before, hinted at an inner elation. She might have been in love.

Suddenly, she threw herself at Harold and squeezed him tightly. She kissed his cheek and whispered, "I want to make you come," and she got on her knees.

"Are...are...ok?" Harold wasn't sure he had understood.

"Do you want me to?"

"Oh. Yeah. Yeah, fuck yeah, if you want to. Ha." Harold winced and shot a furtive look to his left. He could see into the living room where their friends were still talking, laughing, and poisoning themselves with pleasure. He didn't really care if they were watching, but he was used to being with girls that did. "Mmm...uh...uh...I oughtta tell you, thissss usually takes me an awful while llllloong time—why should probably...uhhh that was...uh that's really goo'...why don't we go to my...my room neh...neh-hex' door?"

Hannah pulled away. She looked up at Harold. "Alright." Harold reached to the floor and took a sip of beer.

The light was on in Harold's living room. They met Jessica on the stairs. What was she doing in his house?

"Hey guys."

"Hey Jess. Don't mind her, she's Israeli." They all chuckled. Jessica went downstairs; Harold and Hannah stumbled upstairs and turned into Harold's room.

"Watch a chess set. Sss'all I got in the world." He looked at Hannah. She was nervous. "Fuckin' A," he thought, "who woulda thought *Hannah* was nervous?"

They took off their shoes and glasses and Harold threw off the green blanket, which stirred a cloud of dust that lingered a moment in the air. He lay down on his bed. Hannah stood there looking at him. She reminded Harold of a creepy art deco porcelain doll, cheeks unnaturally blanched by the room's dim pallor and re-stained in feverish scarlet. Radiohead wafted in from next door: "I'm a creep. I'm a weirdo..."

"Com'ere," he whispered coarsely and took her hand. She got on top of him and he pulled her close. They kissed. Her shirt came off as easily as before and so did her bra. He sucked on her breasts and she cooed. Then he started undoing her pants and she shivered. As she shuffled her pants toward her feet he sucked on her tongue and looked into her eyes.

Harold pulled away to go down on her and Hannah clenched her eyes tightly and smiled weakly. She mumbled something and seemed about to cry.

"What is it? What?"

"I know you won't mind cause you already flt't but I'm still nervous." The girl was shivering as though she were freezing, trembling nervously but with manifest excitement.

When Harold looked down, he saw her half-penis. It wasn't really a penis, more like a proto-penis or an incipient penis. It was short, stubby, and slightly thicker than the inner tube of a ballpoint pen, and blood red. Cotton swabs and athletic tape held it in place. Underneath was a sort of fetal scrotum, a shriveled black and blue pouch smaller than a marble. Harold stared curiously, surprised but not shocked.

"I...I'm sorry. I'm s'ry," she teared up, but Harold cut her off.

"Naw. Haha. S'alright," he said, but then his voice became unsteady, "Sssss. S'not the kind of thing that really botherss m-me." He took another peek for a vagina, but saw again the crippled half-penis. She felt his hand run up her cheek, smearing the tears across her face and then into her soft, black hair. He nuzzled her cheek with his cheek and she realized he was also crying. They held each other tightly, he wrapping her in his arms and she gripping his body with her hands, and a low, rumbling moan escaped one of them. He kissed her.

MEMORY MEANS

Emily Waples

Memory means
I acquire things. Wine glasses.
Your hand. We were naked and
still wearing watches.
Last night we walked to the Thames, I said,
Oh. I thought it would be bigger.
You said the country air
Reminded you of home.

Somewhere,
A cow probably mooded.

Now
we are standing in the station hating
people who look like us, mouthing words
as if sound hurts.

The floor against their shoes

Inertia.
For every lie, a suitcase.

makes hollow noise.

Sixteenthirtytwoto Edinburgh; you say:
I guess that's me.

And this is what we've become.
You can identify by
A moment in time.
Sixteen thirty-two. I'm thinking:

Somehow, the fact that in a minute it will be
something we call
sixteen thirty-three
seems profound now.

Your black coat boards the train.

Your black coat
with your heart inside,
calling at Coventry
in an hour's time.

Outside the station it is still England and
everyone's discussing the rain.
I am walking down Broad Street
without you now. Now I can say
remember the time
we walked to the Thames –
what a good weekend when
we were twenty
and twenty-one, irrespective of
all of this. Yes.

We met in September.
It was almost a pleasure,
but your 50p caught in the condom machine.

THIS IS HOW

Laurel Ingraham

Do you know how I play with words,
twist them until they look like you?
twirl the letters around in my head
uncurl your arms from a block of lead
like Daphne's hands into marble leaves,
yes, this is how I'll save you.

You press me to you so I have no choice
but to press you too, onto the page,
bury the soft skin of your back
under layers of notebook lines and ink,
wrap you in my fake Shakespeare tongue,
yes this is how I'll need you.

And then in my pocket in college rule,
your hands locked in lines of indigo blue,
I'll hold your form close to my side
and this is how I'll keep you.

Yes I'll tie your ankles with wires of ink
and this is how I'll leave you.

FEATURED POET

Lynne Feeley

Lynne Feeley hails from Syracuse, New York where she attended Westhill High School. Westhill High School has fences around it. Big silver chain link fences. There is a football field there. On it, boys will be boys. She got a brain here, and she got eyeballs, too.

She is currently a junior English major in the College of Arts and Sciences. Her brain looks like a wagon missing its handle, which was made of paper and lopped off with a Barbie Doll's leg. She is bald so that her wagon brain can fit. Her academic interests include modern and postmodern fiction and poetry. She likes to draw pictures of houses. Once she climbed a tree and hung a banner from it that said "No War." What she meant to say was "You Eat Bologna Sandwiches and Bologna Sandwiches are Made Out of People." This is why we will never go on a date.

After college, Lynne would like to go to college again. The difference between this college and that college will be profound. There there will be rhododendrons and a particular kind of music spelled s-a-n-d. She is looking for sand to fill her brain.

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

“**Harriet Antczak** is pretty much my favorite animal. She was bred for her magical powers and keeps her nun chucks in my locker. She is also a senior at Cornell majoring in English and History and is a captain of the women’s polo team,” says Napoleon Dynamite.

When **Jamie Anastas** is not busy tending her flock of sheep, she prefers to spend most of her free time cultivating ornamental species of squash and editing public service announcements for local radio stations.

Shashi Bhat is a junior pre-med English major from Toronto, Canada. She is involved with the yearbook, the chorale, and the Cornell Tradition Student Advisory Council. Her stories have appeared in *Chicken Soup for the Soul* and *The Toronto Star*.

Annie Cha is a senior in the college of Arts and Sciences. She is currently pursuing an honors degree in English and she likes to play with the innards of the English language.

Max Eskin is a senior from Boston majoring in Electrical and Computer Engineering.

Jonah Green is cute as pumpkin pie.

Dylan Rosal Greif’s Profile: A member since April 26 2004. Looking for friendship, in a relationship. Music, books, movies... and Dylan’s Groups: The Public Journal, The Yellow Chateau, and 109 Llenroc. Dylan has not listed any courses.

Laurel Ingraham is an English major in Arts and Sciences who enjoys the color green, white russians, her dog, and taking pictures with her camera phone. She despises broccoli, eating meat, and keeping her hair the same color for over a month.

Perpetual undergraduate **Cole Long** politely requests some degree of anonymity.

Matthew Lowenstein is on forced leave pending the outcome of several criminal investigations. He has been on the wagon for two hours.

The Rainy Day editors do not know much about who **Ron Maimon** is, where he comes from, or what he does. What we do know is that we like his writing.

Beatrice Mao is a freshman in the College of Arts and Sciences and is considering either a biology or English major. In high school, she received the English department's "Excellence in Creative Writing" award, was voted "Most Individualistic" by her peers, and received 8 keys (6 regional, 2 national) in the annual Scholastic Writing Awards. She has recently been published in "The Apprentice Writer" and once won \$100 from an online poetry contest.

After being stung by a wasp and nearly dying this summer, **Jennifer Nunes** has become increasingly passionate about achieving her life's goal: to have sex in an asparagus patch. No luck yet . . . In the mean time, she's trying to keep her mind off the matter by studying International Agriculture and Rural Development, managing Dilmun Hill, Cornell's student run organic farm, and pretending to be an English major in her spare time.

John Underwood was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee in 1983. He began writing at the age of six, and believes that after fifteen years he is almost good at it. He has been a college student, cook, newspaper deliverer, contract laborer, receptionist, typist, grocery store clerk, bookstore clerk, and a homeless person at different times in his life. Currently, John lives in Knoxville, Tennessee, and is wearing a warm flannel bathrobe.

Emily Waples studies English literature at Vassar College and is abroad for the year at Oxford. She wants to be a sassy footnote editor.

Roseminna Watson is in her fourth year at Yale University, which is less than it's cracked up to be. She is a graphic design major and lives comfortably in the pre-fabbed portion of the picturesque university with her roommate, Emily, and her anorexic fish who is yet to be named. Roseminna hates washing lettuce and gets a secret satisfaction from cutting hair off Barbies.

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