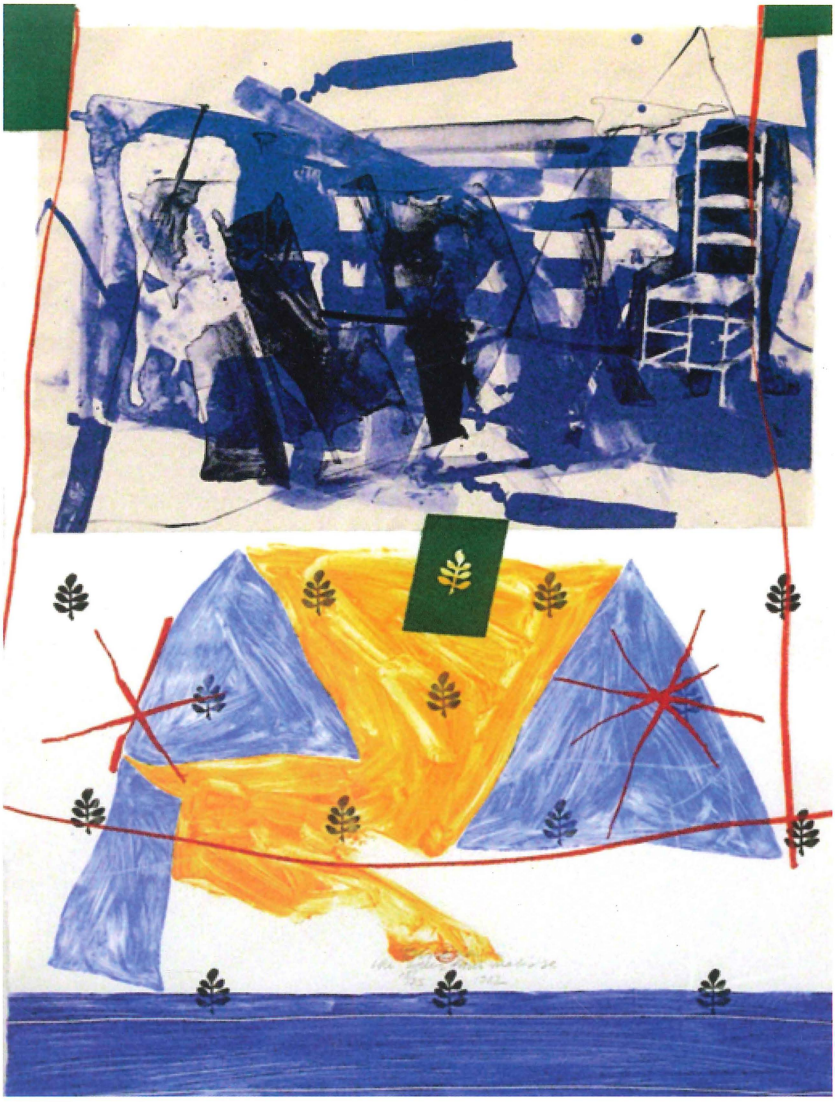

NDQ

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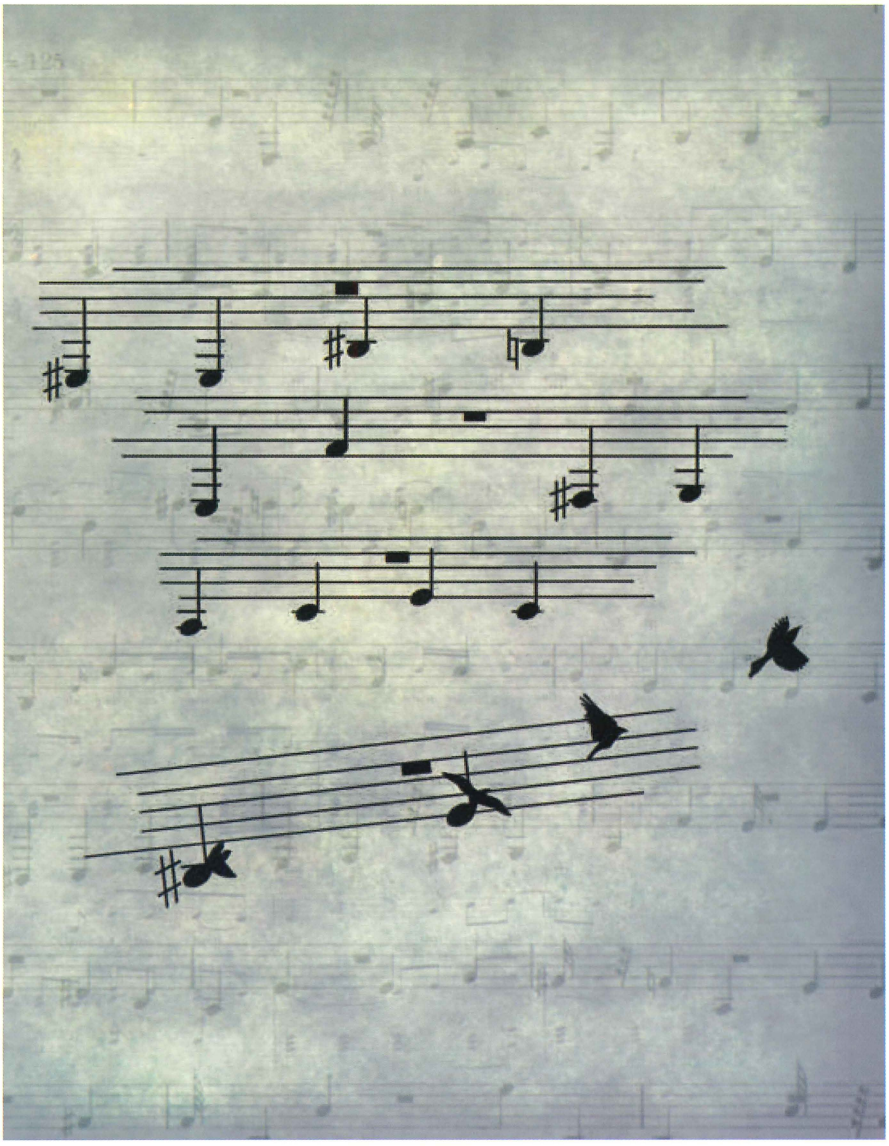

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ON THE COVER

Steven Sorman's *The Letter from Matisse* is a 1982 lithograph with collage and hand coloring, 36" x 24." Sorman, born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is internationally known as a painter and printmaker. He earned a BFA from University of Minnesota in 1971. Since 1994, Sorman has lived and worked in the picturesque countryside of Ancram, New York. He is best known for his multimedia, complex paintings, drawings and prints. Sorman is a master at orchestrating theme, line, layer, media, and color into challenging images that demand a rhythm of eye movement throughout his artwork.

Letter from Russia

September 24, 2014

The two volumes of *NDQ* (79.2 and 79.3&4) arrived with a very short break between delivery. Thank you very much for this generous gift.

Both journals are of a great interest to me. The 79.3&4 volume suggested a vivid character of Bob Lewis as a person of many talents and simply as a very good and honest man.

The essays and poems made for a wonderful reading for me, like a biography or a portrait of an American intellectual, written by the people who knew him in a close manner.

I met Bob once, when he visited Moscow as a member of a group of Hemingway scholars. He did not speak much, but his rare comments sounded amusingly clever. When he suggested his help with my American Studies educational project at the KubSU University (more than 2000 km from Moscow, in the Russian South), I wondered how he would manage his assistance. I understood the value of his help later, when the first issue of the *NDQ* arrived. It was an act of true support in realizing the importance of the regional university culture for the national cultural and educational efforts.

For about 30 years Bob sent the *NDQ* volumes for our Russian/American Comparative Studies in the History of Culture Department —an enormous contribution toward fostering our countries' bilateral expectations of trustful partnership. In the situation of an increasing tension between politicians of our day, I believe Bob's efforts to strengthen intellectual and psychological bonds between the scholars of our countries can be taken for a sample of active humanism.

Thank you for the materials, thank you for your time and, please, excuse me for the tardiness in writing this letter of gratitude.

With best wishes for the *NDQ*, a flourishing future,

Louisa

Louisa P. Bashmakova,
Prof. Emerita
Kuban State University,
Krasnodar, Russia

NDQ
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Contents

DEE REDFEARN

Paper Cut

It's dusk in New York when the pain sets in again; my right hand's third finger commands a full-blown complaint.

"Ouch! Do you have peroxide and a Band-Aid?" I ask Jane, my hostess. The peroxide bubbles. She offers me a Band-Aid, and I'm off for an evening of one-act plays staged at the Makor theater, mine included.

Two weeks earlier my writing day was interrupted by, of all things, a paper cut. How an insignificant scrape could cause such significant pain amazed me. Perhaps the location, the second crease of the finger, caused awareness every time I bent the finger. Most annoying was that the cut was a distraction. The pain took precedence over my muse. Who knew that a paper cut could not only interrupt my muse, but lead me to the brink of death?

At the plays, my finger turned a viscous violet and blistered. By the seventh reading, my finger had swelled to twice its size and hurt. I express my regrets to friends. "A paper cut," I say, embarrassed by the lame excuse.

En route back to Jane's East Side apartment, friend Connie—who ushered my exit—insisted we stop at nearby St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital Center. "To check this thing out," she says.

In the admitting office we were detained. "You must fill out the form," the nurse briskly commanded. Am I male or female—my address, my insurance, my age, and other time-consuming information. Time, unbeknownst to us, was of the essence. We hadn't a clue that hidden in the subcutaneous crevice of my third digit, a Group A strep (GAS) time bomb was set to go off.

There are three different strep types, I later learned, poring over medical books. None as voracious as type II, which can result from a minor cut (which I have). A predisposition for type II is diabetes or a severe illness-cancer, heart disease (I have neither). Type III involves muscle infection.

What are we dealing with here? Type II is described by doctors as "tricky at best," a bacteria that cloaks itself symptomatically as a more common skin disease found in type I—cellulitis, erysipelas, and impetigo. Because of its chameleon qualities, physicians can, and often do, misdiag-

nose the rare Group A strep bacteria, known as "necrotizing fasciitis" (NF). NF is an "insidiously advancing soft-tissue infection of the flesh-eating kind." Had I heard even a whisper of strep bacteria "of the flesh-eating kind," I would have been terrified.

The admitting nurse asks for an estimate of my pain on a scale of one to ten. "Fifteen!" I cry out and regurgitate my late supper over the antiseptically green linoleum. A male attendant appears from behind a door to clean the mess and to gurney me into a room on the tenth floor; my pain level shoots up to twenty.

A pleasant nurse slips me into a hospital gown and threads a needle, attached to tubing of an intravenous contraption, into my vein. Within moments of the administered fluids, my auditory sensitivity raises the surround-sound level by three or more decibels: the nurse closes the green curtains that screech across a metal rod; two doctors stage-whisper by my bedside; an attendant clatters a tray of various drugs, sloshing the contents of two hanging IV bags, one with clindamycin and the other with a morphine-spiked solution. I lapse into a state of bliss.

July 19, 6 A.M.: Dr. O. Alton Barron—a hand surgeon at the CV Starr Hand Surgery Center in New York—two residents, and a surgeon-in-training stand by my bedside. A teachable moment of *could be's* is bantered. (NF is not mentioned, at least to me.) The symptoms—pain, chills, nausea, discoloration of affected area, bullae, and fever—are similar to the more common skin diseases.

"What is it?" I ask Dr. Barron as he inspects my finger.

"We won't know until we get back the results of the culture. I'd like to schedule you for surgery. Today," he says.

In the lab the search is on. Unlike MRSA, type II NF is not easily identifiable under the microscope. By the time cultures reach the lab, often contaminants of antibiotics make results inconclusive. Chances are that by the time lab workup is processed, it's too late. NF is known to consume tissue at the rate of three centimeters per hour.

I hear the clock on the operating room wall tick away the minutes.

Dr. Barron will perform exploratory surgery. His objective is to drain and debride the affected area. "An infectious-disease doctor will be consulted," he says.

July 19, 7 P.M.: In the holding area an intern marks my right hand with a black X; the anesthesiologist in charge sedates me with a Valium derivative. He is aware that I have blood pressure issues under normal circumstances and worse under stressful conditions. He numbs the target area with Lidocaine before he places median-carpal-tunnel block. I will remain awake with enough sedation to feel no pain, he says.

I help Marion, the OR nurse, by bearing my weight to scoot myself from the gurney onto the steel table. The room is cold, all stainless steel and glass, and with a huge light that spots me. From across the table Marion chats with the scrub nurse. They cover me with a blanket and shroud me with a blue tarp. I am under a sky of blue, listening to a CD of John Denver's "Rocky Mountain High."

"You okay?" Nurse Marion peeks under the cover. She smiles; I nod. "It's late," I say.

"Oh, I'm usually off by seven. But Dr. Barron had to work you into his night shift. He's the best, you know," she adds, and I sink into my induced bliss.

Dr. Barron and I chat. Yes, he likes to work with music in the background. I get into the beat of "Country Roads."

"I'm Texas-born, you know, but I recently moved to the East Coast; I have two grown daughters." On and on I babble; who knows what other personal stuff I rattle off.

With a steady hand his scalpel slices deep into the tissues of my third finger. I, in la-la land, am aware enough to ask, "What do you see?"

"A cluster of pustules." Upon finding the gray glob, shiny in the reflection of OR lights, his objective is to tease the culprit from its stronghold and extract it.

Some time passes before I ask, "Did you get it?"

"I hope so."

In my Salvador Dali existence, one hour melts into another. The actual procedure takes two hours, but counting the prep and recovery, six hours lapse.

July 19, midnight: All smiles, Connie and Jane greet me in recovery. A good sign, I surmise. "The doctor says everything looks fine."

Oh, thank God, I think and fall into deep slumber. My hand is elevated, propped on my elbow—a position I grew to know well.

July 20, 6 A.M.: I'm chatty and still giddy from the anesthesia. Dr. Barron makes his rounds with his assistant for yet another teachable moment. He soaks my bandage with saline before carefully peeling it off. The blisters are gone. A small incision is visible on the side of my infected finger. "Everything looks stable."

I'm all smiles and feel no pain, although I'm still attached to the IVs filled with various solutions. "When can I leave?"

"Not yet," Dr. Barron says. "We have to wait to see how much of your finger this bacteria claims."

"Claims" grabs my attention. I, still in the dark as to the diagnosis, relax while the bacterium, invisible to the naked eye, visibly stakes its claim.

When Dr. Barron says he is going out of town for the weekend, I feel a surge of separation anxiety. "I'll stay in touch."

Alone in the hospital room, Connie, Jane, and I hover over my finger like the witches in Macbeth.

"It doesn't look that bad, considering all you've been through." Jane's positive outlook is no comfort. My finger looks swollen and deeper violet than it had an hour ago.

Connie suggests we ask the nurse—the jolly one. I supposed the jolly one would have a jolly-good outlook. "Not to worry" is the general consensus.

After visiting hours the hospital is silent. Alone in the hospital room, I continue my vigil and stew over morbid possibilities—am I mummifying an inch at a time?

Outside the door of 10A, I hear and understand Puerto Rican workers conversing over a pushcart of clattering supper trays. Underlying the smell of Lysol and alcohol, I get a whiff of cabbage and coffee. I stare at my tray of cold food. Nausea sets in.

Morphine and I don't agree much. I see insect-like images striving to break through from under the wall's surface. Creepy crawlers struggle, finally forcing tiny feelers to emerge and feel their way up the wall. I blink and they disappear.

Still mobile, I step over fallen varmints to take care of my bathroom needs, my intravenous contraption sloshing antibiotics trailing along.

I examine my finger. The color is now a deep purple. My right arm has red streaks creeping toward my shoulder. Or is it the morphine playing tricks? I push the call button. Yes, Dr. Barron's assistant should be paged, says the nurse after careful examination. I was hoping it was the morphine, but no, red streaks skulk toward my clavicle like tentacles. And yes, she will page the physician on call, who immediately calls Dr. Barron.

July 21, 6 A.M.: I am not as chipper and not fully awake when Dr. Barron takes my hand to examine my finger. Sometime during the course of the evening, my finger has (as I had suspected) mummified. It is black. An eerie black, which makes it appear drained of life.

Dr. Barron smiles, a gentle smile. (I take this as a good-luck omen.) The good luck is that early on Dr. Barron suspected that he was dealing with NF—the demon bacteria. I am scheduled for the OR. "Today," he says, keeping calm. His assistant, standing close at hand, knits his brow and nods. He bandages my finger and speaks in soft tones.

"Amazing," Dr. Barron says and describes a patient he treated three months ago who's similar to me in stature (petite) and with a great attitude (cheerful and chatty). "She had the same symptoms," he says. "I was able to save her finger."

"Able to save her finger" etches across the slate surface of silence.

"The hell, you say," my Texanese blurts out in the shock of the moment.

He pauses, smiles his winning smile, and waves, leaving me alone with my reality. Reality: When NF is not responding to antibiotics, other measures are necessary. NF, much like gangrene, is treated by amputation. Reality: I've already been on heavy doses of antibiotics and in surgery twice.

In 1924 a doctor by the name of Meleney resorted to amputation as a treatment for NF patients. NF, although probably in existence before, was first called "Meleney's gangrene." It was not until 1952 that the term "necrotizing fasciitis" was coined by a Dr. Wilson. Regardless of labels, dealing with the moment at hand, my digit is apt to go on the chopping block.

July 21, 10 A.M.: In the holding area of the OR, Dr. Barron greets me with a smile and a form of consent to sign. I start to read. "You have no choice," he says and hands me a pen. "Just sign."

Friend Connie concurs and later assures me that my left-hand signature (my right rendered useless) was done in record time and legibly. Dr. Barron had consulted with the anesthesiologist over my high blood pressure.

Dr. Barron takes his scalpel and slices deep into my flesh again in search of residual flesh eaters. I have no idea what's playing on the CD. I hear only the beeps of the heart monitor. As I imagine life without a finger, or worse (if it comes to that), the beeps on the monitor speed up. With my blood pressure reading at 170/100 and rising, Dr. Barron stops the procedure and pages anesthesiology.

I hear a conversation about adjusting the anesthesia, then a moment passes before I hear a steady *beep, beep, beep.*

Marion reaches for my hand. "Everything is under control," she assures me.

July 21, 4 P.M.: After leaving recovery, a doctor sits by my bedside in room 10A. She is pleasant, attractive, and an infectious-disease expert. She's not smiling.

"Well," I say, "I'm ready to leave."

"No, you're not." Her abruptness takes me by surprise. More than just abrupt, she seems confident in her diagnosis. She *is* dealing with NF. "How many operations have you had?"

"Two."

She smiles, knowingly, and says I am a lucky lady. Had I not stopped by St. Luke's-Roosevelt, I wouldn't be here. NF would have claimed my life in three hours. Medical journals concur that NF claims 20% of its victims, 30% if older, and 100% if not properly treated.

Of my near-death experience, my South Texas aunt would have said, "It wasn't your time." In truth, NF hadn't had time yet to surrender its stronghold. The clock still ticking, my stay at Roosevelt Hospital is just beginning and will cover a span of three months.

"Do you want the finger?" Dr. Barron asks, explaining the risks and benefits of what I face. On either count, I face yet another hand operation.

At the time, I had no idea how interrelated digits are. It's the musketeers' code, for the members of the right hand: "All for one, one for all." My decision will ultimately affect the use, or lack thereof, of the fourth and little fingers of my right hand.

"Do whatever to save it." I decide, making a decision that will roll me down the hallway back to the OR for five more surgeries, not including my reconstructive surgeries.

July 23, 3 P.M.: Dr. Barron's objective on this go-round is total debridement, slicing away any area affected with the bacteria. And to examine the surrounding area for rogue NF cells.

By my third operation, the anesthesiologist and I are on a first-name basis.

"So, Dee, what anesthesia do we use today?" Still in my induced state of chattiness, I suggest vodka.

Six hours lapse. Dr. Barron manages to save my finger by total debridement—the only way he can make sure NF is not lurking. At the unveiling, he suggests I not see the bony remains until he has had time to graft skin.

Days later I am wheeled back to the OR for the skin graft. After four OR visits, I feel like I'm rolling home; friendly faces I know wish me well. I know the attendant who pushes the gurney, Marion the scrub nurse and, of course, the anesthesiologist.

In the OR, Dr. Barron takes skin from the inner crease of my elbow, and a triangular chunk from below my right thumb, to rebuild the missing portion of my finger. In the aftermath of the total reconstruction of my third finger, the question still remains if my finger is viable.

July 24, 6 A.M.: Back in 10A, Dr. Barron and several interns witness the unveiling. An assistant unwinds yards of gauze. My third finger is not the same—no, not the same as it once was and it never will be—but does it work? Does lifeblood flow? He pinpricks. Yes. And does the blood actually circulate?

The doctor clamps a Doppler to my thumb, and we lean forward to hear the slosh of blood circulating. We make eye contact and smile. Thumb, slosh; index finger, slosh. I hold my breath when he clamps the Doppler to the third finger. We wait and after a moment hear the slightest slosh of blood finding new pathways. He smiles. And I breathe easy.

My little finger and ring finger are bandaged alongside my recently infected finger. Basically, three fingers are out of commission. Who knew that the two normal fingers would be so sympathetic? The code of honor upheld its integrity: *Unus pro omnibus, omnes pro uno*, we were to confirm.

Two weeks and six operations later, I am dismissed from St. Luke's-Roosevelt. Instead of giving me a bottle of Vicodin, the anesthesiologist asks me if I want to experiment. *Why stop now?* He straps a PCA component to me; the PCA is a fanny pack of sorts that functions as a patient-controlled infusion pump filled with painkillers (usually narcotics). He then slips a needle into my shoulder, higher than the radial nerve (a painless procedure). With the push of a button, I can control the programmed amount of painkiller that goes directly to my hand. The positive aspect of this component is that I don't pop pills that keep me in a drug-induced state. I can and do get on with a normal left-handed life. An existence I find humbling.

I need help cutting up my food, help getting dressed, help with opening and closing my purse. These simple tasks are performed by friends, family, or nearby nurses. Dr. Barron has, as promised, saved my finger; more importantly, he saved my life.

After weeks of occupational therapy, eventually I regained 95% use of my finger and 100% use of my hand sans help of my third finger. My fourth and little fingers will need therapy before they bend at will, and all five fingers feel stiff when I attempt to make a fist. I am conscious that my third finger is not all there, especially with certain yoga positions that require a flat hand. My third finger is a fingernail shorter than the rest of my fingers and crooks slightly. For all practical purposes it is, however, a finger that has managed to grow a fingernail. If I hold my wineglass in a certain way, you would never guess my third finger is not all there. And never suspect the trauma it endured.

Late July: Much of my convalescent time has been spent at friend Jane's Manhattan guest room. I'm the guest that came for the night and stayed for a month. During this time, I travel only to and from Starr Hand Surgery—after the grafting process and upon discovering that ring finger and little finger are rendered useless. I find this lack of control disappointing. Tenolysis is recommended. Tenolysis, a procedure to loosen tendons in the palm of my hand, is performed shortly thereafter. All this, and still the supposedly well fingers are frightfully immobile.

This lack of mobility, for someone who is agile, is startling. I am little help as a houseguest, and during one of our typical evenings of dining in at Jane's, while slicing a tomato, she cuts herself. It is a small cut, but both of us go ballistic: I reach for the peroxide, while she vigorously washes her hands. I wonder, *Should we rush her to the emergency room?*

I later ask the infectious-disease doctor to tell me more about this demon bacterium. Should I eat more garlic? Wear an amulet? How can I keep life-threatening bacteria at bay?

"With any cut, however minor, wash your hands. Soap and water," she says.

That's it? Just soap and water? I'm thinking turpentine or lye. I distinctly remember washing my hands after the paper cut. Perhaps I should have considered that by just attending to my day's work, the natural movement of bending my finger exposed live tissue.

According to medical journals, NF of the second type is rare. At the last report, six hundred people of the entire United States population had contracted the disease. There is no particular geographic location, nor is there a predisposition, with the exception of diabetes, for type II NF. Data shows the older population is more vulnerable and rarely are cases of type II NF found in infants.

Now, five years later, as I reflect upon this experience, I'm left wondering if I should have made a different choice. Would amputation have made a difference? In some cases, those who have lost digits to NF opt to amputate and use a prosthetic device and do so successfully. This offered option didn't suit my lifestyle. I am spontaneous, animated, and prone to misplace objects.

My third finger is smaller and slightly bent but hey, it works, and I have five operative fingers on each hand. I'm one of the lucky ones.

PATRICK HUNT

A Half Kilo of Dragons

From 2007 until 2009 I lived in Mongolia in a small town tucked between two minor mountain ranges, a long day's drive west of the capital. I taught English at one of the schools in town and lived in a yurt in the back yard of a man, Hoika, whose job, as far as I could tell, was "I Have a Truck." Mornings I'd wake up and there'd be a forest's worth of timber testing the integrity of his shocks, or there'd be two dozen goats milling and spitting around the yard, one on the truck's roof, one eating my yurt, one in the outhouse. Or I'd be coming home from school and I'd see the truck speeding down our one paved road, hay spilling from the back of the flatbed. Hoika would disappear into the countryside and then come back with stuff I'd never seen before in Mongolia. Hay, for example. Or chicken coops. Once, there was a treadmill sitting in the flatbed.

I didn't like Hoika. I thought he was a drunk and a clown, and he probably thought I was condescending. He frequently asked me to clean up my wood pile—stack the wood, pick up the chippings; Mongolians are fastidious about this—but I always refused on the basis that it was a waste of my time. This, by and large, characterized my behavior when I was in Mongolia: petulant, entitled, carefree.

The tenor of our relationship, however, was sealed the day I arrived. It was one o'clock in the afternoon and he was already drunk and had banged up his hand fixing something. So when he greeted me with my bags, he staggered forward with this bloody bandage tucked into his chest, and I shook hands with his elbow.

He was, then, the first Mongolian man I ever saw drunk in the middle of the day. And this meant (unfortunately for him and unfortunately for me) that he would come to personify the violent alcohol problem that afflicted Mongolian society. Every time I saw a man passed out face-first in the dirt, I saw Hoika. Every time I saw herders brawling outside the one bar in town, I saw Hoika. Every time I rode in a *porgon* and the driver pulled over, took out a bottle from under his seat, removed the interior light cover and used it as a shot glass, refusing to drive any further if I didn't partake, I was in Hoika's truck. (This actually happened more than

once.) And every time a colleague pulled me from class at noon and pushed me down the hallway and into a back room where a group of teachers huddled furtively around a bottle of vodka, all I saw was a bunch of Hoikas.

My clearest true image of Hoika, though, is actually rather benign: It is of him driving past me in his truck as I am walking through town, his ball cap canted raffishly on his head, his hand thrust out of the window— he's smiling and shouting my name, "Bet! Bet! Hey, Bet!" He couldn't pronounce my name, and that was okay with me, but it irked me that he always had to say it three times. It irked me even more, though, when I saw him driving past, that he never offered to give me a ride anywhere. How hard would it have been to pull over? And in this way he was like the older brother I'd never had. In the year I lived in Hoika's back yard, he only gave me a ride somewhere once. And that was to take me to get carrots.

Despite the Mongol Empire's extensive reach and its re-establishment of the Silk Road—everything from spices to carpets were so safely transported between Europe and China that it was said a woman could wander the empire with a nugget of gold on her head—Mongolians are not known for their cuisine. Mongolian winters last seven to eight months and the people are traditionally nomadic, so for almost a millennium Mongolians have subsisted on a diet that consists of what they can take with them, and what will withstand the harsh weather. Meaning: lots of meat and dairy. The introduction of hearty root vegetables and enriched flour and rice is recent and still, to the Western palate, doesn't contribute much in terms of flavor. Nevertheless, taking a page from Mongolians' knack for resourcefulness, I learned early on how to make a mean stew. Mutton or horse, your pick. And if I could get my hands on a can of tomato paste or an envelope of dried bay leaves, all the better.

One Saturday during my first year, I set out to make this stew when I realized I had no carrots. I bundled up and left for the market. As I walked across the yard, I heard "Bet! Bet! Hey, Bet!" and saw Hoika reclining woozily in the cab of his truck. A friend of his smoked in the passenger seat.

"Where are you going?"

"I am going to the market."

"What for?"

"Carrots," I said.

"Carrots?" He asked.

"Yes. I need a half kilo of carrots."

He furrowed his brow and looked at his friend. "Carrots?"

I sighed. Communication for me during that first year was impossible. Mongolian is a difficult language to pronounce, and once you get past the tricky grammar and speech behaviors, you still have all sorts of gutturals, fricatives, and nasals to wrestle with. I spent my entire first

year asking, "Can I ask you a question?" only to later learn that Mongolians' forthright manner of speaking precludes the use of rhetorical questions; even so, if you were to ask that sort of thing, you'd simply say "Question?"

"Yes. Car-rots. Carrots."

Hoika laughed and hit the steering wheel and looked at his friend, who smirked, and they exchanged words too fast for me to understand.

I stood there, fuming.

"Carrot" was one of the most difficult words to pronounce, and it was nearly identical to "dragon." I had had this problem before at the market, when I'd be standing in front of the carrots and would ask for a kilo of carrots and the merchant would look at me, puzzled. So I had practiced saying the word "carrot" again and again in my yurt until I knew I had perfected it.

"Oh!" Hoika said, laughing again. "You mean 'carrots.' Not 'dragons.' Not this thing," and he mimed a flying creature.

I stood there and stared at Hoika. He was hanging out in the cab of his truck with a friend, drinking and laughing at me, and I was lonely and cold and tired of eating dough noodles and drinking milk tea and speaking like a child, so I stamped my foot and let loose with what was the most articulate Mongolian sentence I'd spoken yet, shouting: "Why dragon! How buy dragon! I want carrots! Half kilo! I want soup!" I then shouted in English what I actually wanted to say: "I do realize that the word for 'carrot' is strikingly similar to the word for 'dragon' but in what universe would it make sense that I walk through this yard and tell you I'm going to go buy a *dragon*; that makes *no* sense and either you're stupid, or drunk, or fucking with me, or, more probably, a combination of all three, but in any case, I don't appreciate it. And I hate you."

I was probably more angry than I needed to be. Hoika and his friend stared at me for a while, actually appearing kind of hurt, as if maybe they understood me, but then Hoika swung his legs under the steering wheel, turned the ignition, told me to get in, and shut his door.

I sat between Hoika and his friend. They both reeked of cheap vodka. No one said a word as we drove out of town. I had no idea where we were going, but after ten minutes of bumping through the countryside, Hoika pulled off, grabbed my bag from my lap, got out of the truck and walked over to a small piece of cultivated land. He bent over, pulling carrots from the dirt, shoving them in to my bag, and when the bag was full, he walked back to the truck, threw the bag back onto my lap, and drove back home. No one spoke. When we got home, I mumbled "thank you" and got out and walked back to my yurt.

In my constant frustration to understand and be understood, I had somehow reached the conclusion that Mongolians chose not to understand

me. Or, to be more charitable, that they experienced a sort of cognitive dissonance when they saw a foreigner standing in front of them speaking Mongolian. They simply could not process it and so anything I said—"carrots," for example—would be misheard or ignored completely. I did not want to be Mongolian, but I wanted to be accepted, and I wanted to be treated like an adult, and I wanted credit for at least trying.

But if Mongolians couldn't see past what they thought I was, I couldn't see past what I thought Hoika was. To me, he was a drunk. A clown. That's all he would ever be. Because of that initial impression. It skewed my view of him and made me overlook all the very nice things he did for me during that year, like magically showing up with a chainsaw to cut into smaller pieces the logs the wood company had delivered and which I couldn't chop myself. Or teaching me how to start a fire with wet wood. Or just coming over from time to time to check on me. He even learned to knock, something Mongolians didn't do. I never accepted him, I never treated him like an adult, I never gave him credit.

A year after I moved into Hoika's yard, he sold the property out from beneath my feet without telling me. Some real estate agent (I assume; he was wearing a suit) woke me up one Sunday and told me I had to pack up and move by noon. I had nowhere to go, so I spent the next two nights sleeping in my school. A month later a brand new red house stood in Hoika's yard where my yurt used to be. For the next year, I only saw Hoika from behind the wheel of his truck as he sped across town, his ball cap set back on his head just so, and sometimes he'd wave and say, "Bet. Bet. Hey, Bet."

DAN SHANAHAN

To Be Unfathered: An Ode

I never knew my paternal grandfather. I see his face in a photograph that stood on my grandmother's dresser: it's a gentle face, almost fragile, with a posed Edwardian look and very sensitive eyes. He must be about thirty. He looks healthy.

Even as a child I saw the similarities between that face and my father's, the eyes especially. I remember clearly the senior picture of my father in his high school yearbook: the chin, the nose, the mouth, all so much like his own father's. The turn of the head is jauntier, but the quotation he had chosen to appear under his name was telling:

"Today I am a man."

I have reason to doubt that.

Take, for example, the only remark my father ever made about the war.

He had been a navigator-bombardier flying out of Italy. He guided his crew along the Yugoslav coast, skirting the Alps, and over cities like Graz, Klagenfurt, and Linz he sighted targets and dropped bombs which devastated what was left of the Wehrmacht's industry in the last months of the war. But despite the fact that we remained a military family well into my adolescence, he never remarked on what combat had meant to him.

Then came a fireworks display one evening. It must have been one of those summer nights when the warm, dry air and the heat still radiating from the earth would open him up. Watching the fireworks explode above us he mused suddenly, "The flak we used to get on our bomb runs was like that. You'd look down and see it coming up at the plane: it was so beautiful you'd never believe it could kill you."

Hemingway said courage is grace under pressure. But then what is dreaminess under pressure? Not courage. Not manliness. Maybe just naiveté . . . or maybe something else.

Okay, the remark had a hint of self-reproach: Ishmael in the crow's nest yanking himself back from Descartian vortices. But the pull of that dreaminess was still there, still powerful years later. In his heart of hearts I think he would have loved to sit in the glass nose of that plane for hours,

freed from the bonds of gravity, lost in contemplation of the deadly light show hurtling up toward him from the dark, invisible earth below.

My father can't have made more than a handful of such remarks, and that made me reluctant to probe—especially when it came to talking about that fragile Edwardian face on my grandmother's dresser. Now and then I might ask him a question, but his answers never led to revelations, only fragments. From these fragments I slowly pieced together a gossamer family history.

There had been a first Dougan, my father's grandfather.

I once made a trip to the "old country" to find my roots. The son of my father's cousin had done the same a few years before, walking the main street of the old village looking for Dougan signs on shops. But I have seen pictures of this son, and I doubt he would have felt as I did when I walked inside the store of "Michael Dougan, Chemist."

Michael Dougan, chemist, was not my father: he was too young. Nor was he me: he was too old. Nor was he my father in his senior yearbook picture, nor my Edwardian grandfather: he was too modern. But he was, without a doubt, one of us.

The chin, the nose, the mouth, the full hair—and the eyes: windows of vulnerability in an otherwise strong face, smiling, but somehow close to tears at the same time. As I looked into Michael Dougan's face I looked into my father's, his father's, and his before him. There, in a shop across a continent and an ocean, I felt at home.

Over the next few days, there were times when I would walk into a room and find myself eyed curiously from behind expressions of warm greeting. That curiosity bespoke of fathers and grandfathers whose faces evoked my own. I smiled back. I chatted. And I studied the others as carefully as they studied me, all the while collecting more fragments.

The Dougan who left the village had, like my father and I, been a Richard: Richard the First we'll call him. In the mid-seventies of the nineteenth century, at the age of twelve, he took a boat to America, then disappeared from family history.

A decade or so later he reappears, successful enough to have just bought a small grocery in the Vermont town my own parents would call home. He called himself Dick, and when it came time to open the grocery, he hired a sign painter to affix his name to the display window at the front of the store.

"Dick Dougan," he said with a sweep of the hand, tracing an arch across the upper part of the window as he stood in the street with the sign painter. "Grocer," he went on, describing a reverse arch on the window's bottom half.

The sign painter stood silently musing, his hand on his chin and his eyes on the window.

"What's your full name?" he finally asked.

"Richard Dougan."

The man paused again, still staring at the window.

"That's better, but it's not really good enough. What's your middle name?"

"Don't have one," his client replied. "We were too poor."

Again the painter stood in silence. Finally, tracing the same arches with two short sweeps of his hand, he said, "'Richard O. Dougan, Grocer' —that's it."

"What's the 'O' for?" my great grandfather asked.

"That's up to you," the man replied over his shoulder as he headed for his wagon.

A family yarn? Perhaps. But when I visited the small church in the old County Cork village I found the names of Richard and all his six siblings in the baptismal register. Unlike most of the others entered on the yellowed onionskin paper, they had no middle names.

And so it was that, during those times when boredom set in on warm summer afternoons and children begin to query one another about their middle names, I would shudder. I'd try to change the subject before the turn-taking reached me. I prayed that my mother would call me for dinner. Once I just prayed for death.

But rituals such as those offer no escape. Eventually, I was forced to utter the dreaded word: Octavius.

I would try to explain that it was Latin, that it was the name of a Roman emperor. I announced it in full, proud tones, hoping to intimidate the others with its grandeur: Richard Octavius Dougan, Jr. I might sooner have asked bored cats to ignore a cornered mouse. Drugged with idleness one minute, my friends would explode into laughter, rolling on the ground, howling and pointing in glee at the luckless chump who'd been named by a sign painter from another century, another world.

And, as a military kid, uprooted and resettled with infinite unpredictability for sixteen years, one thing about my nomadic life remained as predictable as the seasons: I would need to make new friends, we would find ourselves on someone's front lawn on some hot summer day, boredom would set in, and I would pray for rain, for mother, for death.

But Richard the First did okay. He came to own the entire block his grocery stood on, and he survives in three artifacts. Two are glasses: one a shot glass, delicate but ample; the other a cocktail glass with turn-of-the-century ribbing. Printed across each—in straight lines—are the words:

Richard O. Dougan
Dealer in Fine Liquors
and Whiskies
102 North River St.
Burlington, Vermont

The other is a rounded sepia photo-portrait which stares out at me from my mantelpiece. At first glance it resembles neither his son's Edwardian portrait, my father's jaunty yearbook photo, nor me. Richard's a successful man: he has small collars bent over a large knotted cravat. His face is fleshy with the good life. (We get leaner and squarer with each generation.) He is balding in his fifties: we are thick-maned, color giving way to silver, then to white—when we live that long. His face is simple, earnest, mildly self-satisfied.

But the eyes . . .

There, in contrast to the cravat, the successful balding, the full face, one sees the fragility, the faint glimpse of defensiveness, the vulnerability.

Maybe he was susceptible to the opinions of others. Maybe success surprised him and he wondered if he'd deserved it. (How many of the six siblings he'd left behind in the Cork village had survived, let alone to have their portraits taken in full bourgeois dress?) Maybe he simply always felt himself a foreigner, a Johnny-come-lately. Whatever the source, Richard's rounded sepia face reveals the beginnings of the Dougan heritage, that aching certainty, in the face of all evidence to the contrary, that life will break your heart.

You see it in the eyes of my grandfather's Edwardian portrait, shortly before events proved them right. You see it in my father's jaunty high school turn of the head, eight years later. I saw it, or something just like it, in Michael Dougan's eyes as he stood successfully behind his chemist's counter a century after Richard had put enough miles between him and the heritage that you'd think one or the other of them would have escaped it.

And I see it each morning in the mirror, however bourgeois, Edwardian, or jaunty I may be. Sometimes it's only a hint, a flicker in the eyes. Other times, it's a blunt direct statement put to me by every sharpened curve, every hair in a full head going silver: "Life," the mirror says to me on such mornings, "will break your heart, my friend. Bank on it."

I have no fragments to tell me whether Richard faced the heartbreak while he lived. Maybe success was a fortress against the heritage. Maybe he saw it lurking in his own eyes on some mornings and drove himself all that more determinedly to escape it for the rest of the day. His first son—Richard Jr.—died in infancy. Perhaps that was taste enough for him: maybe then he gave himself over to building strong walls, a deep moat, a secure perimeter between him and life. I don't know. But however secure

he may have felt, the fortress crumbled soon after he died at the ripe old age of seventy-nine. For within a decade, all the money was gone.

Three sons survived Richard. I remember a reference or two to a "disagreement" between them—something my grandmother mentioned with a bitterly resigned turn of the head. Then a grey fog descends upon family history, through which only two fragments appear.

One of the sons, my grandfather James, moved to Montreal to find work. My father was sent to a French Catholic school, where one day he was punished so severely that there was blood around his nose when he returned home for the noonday meal. The moment James saw the blood, he grabbed my father by the arm and dragged him through the snow, my father struggling all the way against the firm grip of his own father's hand. Back to the school they went, where, in spite of his own son's pleas to let the whole thing drop, James raged against the cruelty of the nuns.

This was not a unique event. There is another fragment from another of my father's rare unguarded moments. It came so even more unexpectedly than his remark at the fireworks display that I can't remember where or when he told me that his father had been a member of the Vermont state assembly.

"It was before we moved to Montreal. My dad had been elected as a Democrat," my father said. "But he didn't like the way the Democratic machine worked, so he tried to run as an Independent."

He shook his head. "They broke him for that."

It was another remark I never pursued. As he spoke, that trace of vulnerability in his eyes appeared like a melancholy tune from a penny whistle, and I never had—or lacked—the heart to probe more deeply. But I've always assumed that Jim's abject political defeat was the moment when the Dougan heritage kicked in, the start of the slow, painful decline that would leave my grandmother aging, devout and lonely, my aunt an alcoholic, and my father a bombardier sitting in the glass nose of an airplane dreamily admiring the beautiful death sent up to meet him.

Except for the story of the arm-wrenching trip through the Montreal snow, and the vengefulness of the Vermont Democratic Party, my father made precious few remarks about his own father, except in the context of the sanitorium. Even those were infrequent, and they rarely referred to his father's illness. He might comment on the weather and liken it to a day he remembered making a visit. He might compare a row of reddening trees in autumn to the trees that lined the sanitorium drive. But never a word about his father, his illness, or the days that passed as the tuberculosis took its slow, determined toll.

So it was only one day, a few years ago, when my father sent me a photograph of the Dougan family plot, with the names and dates plainly

visible on the hulking granite gravestone, that I was able to calculate with certainty that when James Dougan died, his son, my father, was ten years old.

Fatherhood is the name we give to the experience of being someone's father. We have none to describe the experience of being someone's son.

James Dougan had years of fatherhood before it was taken from him—or rather he from it. I doubt reminding him of that would have helped in those last days. When he wasn't worrying about the wife, son, and daughter he was leaving behind (or the tubercular symptoms that had begun to appear in the national economy they would face after he was gone), he must have felt cheated. At forty-three, pride in your accomplishments isn't likely to soften the blow of having been sentenced to death.

But at least James had his ten years of fatherhood with a son, fifteen with a daughter. That was something. But Richard, my father . . . he had his ten years of the experience for which we have no name, then he had it no more. I've never believed that his tragedy lay in having had his father taken away from him in his youth. The lasting trauma came from losing the experience of being someone's son.

When I was young, I suffered from a recurrent fear that my parents would suddenly be taken from me. My father would leave for work in the morning, I would start down the street to a friend's, my parents would make a weekend trip without me: at times like those I would suddenly become inflamed with the certainty that I would not see my parents again. Looking back, I realize that those moments were some archaic residue of what my father felt at the news of his own father's death.

But, however frightening those moments may be for me, however terrible the heat of the furnace my father was plunged into by the loss of his own father, I'm sure that's not what really mattered. For the pain would have subsided. But even when it had, my father would have found himself cut off from the experience for which we have no name, set adrift like a rudderless rocket in deep space. There, left to find his bearings for himself, he discovered the quiet, dry emptiness fatherlessness condemned him to.

I just adjusted the glasses I began to wear about a year ago. They're for work up close, mostly reading. My father began to wear glasses for reading at about the same age. My hair has begun to go to silver, a few years later than his but not many. I'm also starting to have some of the minor digestive problems that he had at the same age. So, however frustrated I may be by the inconveniences of aging, there is some reassurance. This road has been traveled before; I am not alone.

At times I use a phrase that has a familiar ring: I think back to my childhood and hear my father using the same words. Something may irritate me—begging by the family dog always provokes me to anger—and

when I reflect, I discover another echo from my childhood: my father always forbade our dog to be in the dining room while we ate. The circle, as the song says, remains unbroken.

But it's a circle that goes in both directions.

One day, in my twenties, sitting by a river in the summertime, drinking wine and soaking in the sun with a girlfriend, I remembered that I hadn't put on any sunblock. When I looked down at the skin on my arm, I saw that it had begun to turn the same copper color my father's would after an afternoon gardening. It's an attractive, healthy color, and for a moment I felt ambivalent—caught between feeling young and alive and feeling trapped in someone else's skin, following in someone else's footsteps.

Aggressive drivers have always provoked me, and in my anger I often end up getting just as aggressive as them. I usually feel at a disadvantage when I meet someone for the first time, and I'm very susceptible to the whims of women. In hindsight (and usually too late to do me any good) I realize that, in those moments, I've become my father.

But however confining they may sometimes feel, such moments leave a trail that reminds me of who I am. Take them away, or half-erase them—leave a heel mark here, a bit of toe a few hundred feet further on—and the landscape turns alien. You drift. Perhaps at times you become brave, stride along confidently however little you have to go on. At others you'll feel blank and lost, then frustrated and angry, then finally afraid. You'll begin to wonder where you are, who put you there, and why. And in the worst moments, you'll begin not to care: you simply give up. And maybe, just when you begin to despair, you see another half-visible mark ahead on the trail—a laugh you remember hearing once, the curve of your fingernails, the sight of trees on a drive reddening in autumn—and you take heart.

Often, between the bravery, the blankness, the frustration, the fear, and the hope, lost in the cold night of deep space, you dream.

I never saw the inside of the house where my father lived when his father died. I remember my mother pointing it out once or twice when I was a child. So when I imagine my father in his youth, I see him in the cold-water flat tucked away in the attic floor of a four-story house where my grandmother lived during my own childhood.

When we visited my grandmother the flat seemed ample enough. But as I grew older I began to realize that it was the building's low-rent unit, little more than a large servants' quarters, nestled on top of the building. In winter most of the windows were nudged by the naked upper elbows of elm trees; in spring you could reach out and take fresh buds in your hands. There were four flights of stairs to be climbed to reach it. It had slanted ceilings where the roof cut down at an angle and a big wood oven in the

kitchen that served for all the cooking, provided much of the heat in the winter, and warmed the water for my Saturday night baths.

But though I can vividly see my father in this house as a young boy, I can't picture him receiving the news of his father's death. Maybe he was prepared for it. Maybe illness had taken his father away gradually: a noisy, coughing presence at home in the disease's early stages; a weakening shadow in standard-issue robe and slippers during the months at the sanitorium. And, finally, an absence. By then the house would have changed, now the house of a working woman, a barely pubescent daughter, a ten-year-old boy—and perhaps only a dim memory of the time when the house had a father.

There was a time in my own childhood when my mother caught pneumonia during a pregnancy, suffered a miscarriage, and hovered close to death for days. On a day my father became convinced she might not survive, he took me aside tried to say a few things to prepare me for the worst. Maybe he was echoing an episode of his own childhood, a reenactment of some afternoon when his mother tried to prepare him for his own father's death. I don't know. I only know that, however prepared or unprepared he was for the news when it came, I can't imagine my father learning that his father was dead. But the times I've tried I usually see him in the large kitchen of my grandmother's flat, standing where I often stood, next to the table where meals were eaten, his back to the large wooden buffet where my grandmother kept her sewing box and her jars of buttons. He is facing the two doors on the other side of the room. His father is no longer alive.

One door leads to the pantry—like a small kitchen itself, with a sink and shelves. My grandmother is working at the sink. The other door leads into his sister's room. During my childhood, this room was like a cave, my aunt an almost subterranean creature who lived there, almost always drunk, speaking and breathing with the rasp of a heavy smoker.

I picture my father facing these two doors and the women—one of them still half a girl—behind them, and I see his eyes anticipating something. Maybe he's just asked to go out to play, or maybe it's nearing his bedtime. Or maybe he's just standing there in an idle moment. But whatever is going on, he's trying to synchronize himself with the two female presences in the other rooms.

He's young. His life is newly different because he doesn't have a father anymore. He doesn't understand women any better than any other young boy. He's just trying, as we all do, to adjust himself to the rhythm of the people he lives with. And because he is a boy, because he is earnest, because he has just lost his father and he knows they have lost a husband and a father, he is vulnerable, he has few defenses. These two

female presences are all he has to hang onto, and he'll be greatly affected by whatever rhythms he detects.

Probably too greatly.

For this picture echoes too with the emptiness of the other rooms in the house: the living room with my grandfather's small writing desk, my grandmother's bedroom with its rosaries and religious statues, and my father's own room. The emptiness of these rooms is something else for which we have no name: an absence, the absence of the father my father has lost. There, in the intersection between my father's eyes, the presences before him, and the silence which calls to him from the absence in the other rooms, I see his vulnerability dawn, and with it his nagging gaps in self-confidence, the flashes of strength, and the dreaminess.

From the pantry came the warm, steady pulse of my grandmother's glow: devoutly religious, stern from time to time, but protective and solicitous to a fault. I can remember a deep winter, when my father flew bomb runs in still another war and my mother and I stayed in the cold-water flat with my grandmother and aunt. I would stand bundled to the eyebrows in coats and scarves, barely able to see, desperate to get outside and breathe fresh air. My grandmother would bend down over me with genuine concern in her deep green eyes. "Now, Dickie Boy," she would ask in great earnest, "are you sure you're warm enough? Wouldn't you like your Gram to get you another sweater?"

The story is an old one: a woman loses her man too early to accept the loss passively, too late to find someone to replace him. She seeks refuge from the pain in her son, she dotes on him. He tries, in whatever way he can, to satisfy her needs. From that pantry, warmth emanated like smoke from an opium den.

But from the room to the left there came a different glow.

I remember tension between my father and his sister. At times it was almost electric. When the inevitable release came, rancor would flash out from her like a bolt of lightning: "Dickie!" she would spit at him almost impatiently, though no one else any longer used the diminutive with him.

What followed didn't matter. Her voice always had a note of bitter disappointment, as though my father had let her down somehow. He usually tried to rise above the anger, determined not to be drawn into her dark, rasping bouts of resentment. But there were times when his adult veneer wore thin. If it finally peeled back altogether, I would hear a plea come into my father's voice, like the trace of a now-faded hope that his sister would remember that he was younger than she was.

"Don't blame me," his voice seemed to plead.

Quivering like a needle caught between two magnets, with only the emptiness of the other rooms as a counterweight, the boy, my father, must have come to crave praise and fear blame. "You're going to be the man of

the family," someone must have told him as the shadow of his father's disease grew longer. Young, impressionable, and with little else to guide him, I'm sure he would have taken the remark to heart. He would have studied his mother carefully, his sister guardedly, gauging their moods, their fears, their few satisfactions, their contemplative moments, learning to anticipate them the way an accompanist anticipates the nuances of mood and rhythm a singer brings to a performance, mastering them by molding himself to them.

For most men, the lessons we learn at our mothers' sides have the counterweight of a father's presence, but from ten years old my father had none. He came to know women only in the direct glare of their light, untempered by the broad skepticism, the puckish teasing, the caressing warmth that might have radiated from the other rooms of the house. And so my father became protective of women, and the slightest bit wary of them.

I remember an evening when married friends of my parents were visiting for drinks. My father offered the wife her "usual."

"I'll stiffen it just the way you like it," he said with an almost brotherly good-naturedness.

Eight years old at the time, and just passing through the living room on my way to a Saturday night bath, I remember feeling proud of the broad and gentle openness my father showed with people he liked. Basking in that cheery warmth, the woman took the drink and said coyly, "Now let's not be talking loosely in mixed company."

It was only a friendly rejoinder, but my father didn't understand at first. When he did, I felt his warmth shrivel. A nervous laugh erupted from his throat, and he made a weak reply, backing away to a chair with an uncomfortable smile on his face.

Half an hour later, when I came in to say good-night, the conversation sounded forced, my father seemed preoccupied. From my bedroom I could hear the guests leave early, before I even began to doze, and then my parents fell into a mild argument. My father's voice was especially agitated, and I fell asleep with the nagging feeling that, beneath the forced smile I had glimpsed on my father's face, there was a boy about my own age, confused and uncomfortable at being in the company of adults.

At times—for days or even weeks—my father seemed to feel as though the ground beneath his feet had become unstable; he would become ill at ease, almost panicky, searching for a place to stand. In those moments, the young boy in him cowered and the grown man was moved to anger.

Sometimes the young boy would take over and my father's self-consciousness would become transparent. He would get confused, defensive, like on the night of the woman's ill-fated remark. But at other times the grown man would take over. Angered by the confusion he felt and by the young boy in him who wanted to cower or run, he would lash out.

I have a memory of my father that has no referent: the events in it never took place. Some insignificant thing has sent him into a rage. He storms around the house, yelling in a threatening voice. The house is charged with the electricity of his anger. We all—my brothers, my mother, even the dog—feel a sense of danger that is almost physical, though he has never struck anyone in anger and we know he never will.

The image is a composite of episodes that would recur almost periodically, perhaps as often as every few weeks. For several days my father would seem remote, quiet, perhaps even a little melancholy. Then the explosion would come. We would all, in our own ways, run for cover.

Hours would pass before the air cleared. When it did, everything seemed almost pristine, like the air after a spring thunderstorm. But as a child I never made the connection between the quiet remoteness and the fury that followed. And only much later did I begin to see how these episodes cycled on with remarkable regularity. Later still, I saw them in myself.

For thirteen years after his father's death, living with his mother and his sister, shaping himself to the presences and absences of the house with no father, my father learned what all women know: that life comes in cycles. For a time it seems full. Then it becomes uncertain. You become sad, melancholic. Then there is a jarring, a tearing at the core of your being. You are forced into the midst of life's messy pain. Afterwards you regroup; life goes on.

But something deep inside must have told him of another truth: that in the midst of the uncertainty, the melancholy, and the pain, you can stake your claim to a piece of ground and defend it, suffer the cycles in a place you call your own, resist them, outwit them, even defy them. True, in staking that claim you might no longer be able to see that life goes on, however brutal or relentless the cycles may be. But staking a claim lets you dream of one day becoming master of your own fate, perhaps even master of the cycles themselves. That dream alone, something inside him must have said, brings with it a special kind of endurance.

Like most males, my father had inner echoes of this truth. But with only absence to fill the empty rooms of the house with no father, there was nothing with which those echoes could resonate, nothing to coax them into their own. Absence only amplified the silence and the emptiness, making the echoes ring hollow, like a faint, distant sound that might be a call to arms—or might just be the wind in the trees.

And so the boy, my father, who grew up in the house of two women and no father, set out on his own in a way few men really do. Led by instinct, perhaps a little bit by fear, he went in search of resonances, of some path that would lead beyond the absences and empty rooms to a landscape that he might stake out for himself. Bathed in the music of

cycles—a siren's song at times, no doubt—he had no charts, no compass, no guide to lead him on. And knowing, instinctively, that he lacked these, he chose a tool that would give him only relative readings, but one which would provide him nevertheless with some sense of direction: he chose the sextant of responsibility.

When I was seventeen, I took a bus to San Francisco for a chess tournament, my first trip away from home.

As I left the bus terminal and began to walk up a dusk-bathed Market Street in search of a trolley, I slung the garment bag which held my only suit over my shoulder. In that moment, with that gesture, for a brief instant I became my father. I felt his decisiveness wrap me like a cloak against a cold wind. Dwarfed by the noise and the tall buildings, I took comfort in the image of myself as him, a man who became clear and decisive when responsibility was placed on his shoulders, a man whose ambivalence would dissipate the moment he saw the importance of his task.

I got lost that evening. But though the garment bag grew heavy as twilight deepened around me, I never felt my confidence dim. For in the moment when I slung that bag over my shoulder, when the image of my father kindled itself in me like a fire, all doubt disappeared. I had accepted a task, it was within my capabilities, I would complete it. Like my father, I became more at ease than if the task had never been given to me. Eventually, I found my way.

It was a trivial incident. But as time passed it resonated with the story of my grandfather dragging his son through the Montreal snow to confront the nuns (yes, I would have done that), of my great-grandfather, his boat passage, his determination to do well (yes), each image echoing outward like a pulsing cosmic chant that linked me with pioneers, explorers, and crusaders of all kinds, each invested with a mystical certainty, slinging their responsibilities over their shoulders, and walking down the Market Streets of their own lives.

But then I remember that there was a break, a rupture, that my father lost his own father before the resonances could begin. Then I'm yanked roughly back: to the vulnerability in the eyes of Richard the First, James his son, and Richard his.

There are some things we learn from our fathers, there are others we inherit from them. Half-orphaned at ten years old, my father had only the vulnerability in his eyes as an inheritance. He lacked the cloaking image of a father's determination and the certainty that image brings. Denied the things boys learn as their bodies resonate with their fathers', he heard only the faintest strains of that chanting cosmic chorus linking him to James and Richard the First and all mankind before them. Faced with nothing

more than the knowledge of women and the silence of empty rooms, he had but one choice: to invent himself as a man.

My father is as capable as any man of trying to ignore the truth. He has a great weakness for procrastination. And when they strike, his cyclic rages can blind him. But when he takes on responsibility, clarity descends upon him like a visitation. I have seen a look come into his eyes: circumstances present themselves, in an instant he sees how to respond to them. The clouds and noise of everyday events vanish, and his path becomes clear.

That look appeared when we encountered the black family by the side of the road, driving through the deep South from one post to another when I was four years old: a father, a mother, and two children about my age, a flat tire on a deserted country road flanked by brooding pine forests.

As they came into view, my mother said "Oh, look . . ." with a note of remote sympathy in her voice. I was sitting too deep in the well of our Hudson's back seat to see anything but my father's face as I felt the car begin to slow down. His eyes narrowed for a moment, taking it all in. Then they grew quite clear. He cranked the wheel of the car calmly to the right and brought the Hudson to a stop.

For the next hour, as we collected the family and their tire into our car, drove several miles—the family in stunned silence—to a service station, and brought them back to their truck, a feeling of great security came over me, even when the white service station attendant who was fixing the tire spat a contemptuous "Ov'r thar" to my mother when she asked for the bathroom for the children and their mother. My father was in charge, there was nothing to worry about.

Looking back now, I realize that in moments like those ambiguity disappeared from my father's world. He dealt in certainties. And his certainties gave me mine.

In 1962, we were stationed on a Strategic Air Command base in central Florida, and during the late summer and early autumn of that year I began to notice things that were out of the ordinary, even for those of us who lived our lives in the shadow of the Apocalypse: wave after wave of troop transports taking off from Cape Canaveral during a Labor Day visit to the beach; U-2s parked inconspicuously at the far end of the runway on our base in mid-September; squadrons of new fighter-bombers landing there by the end of the month. And at the same time, the disappearance of the B-52s, which were the reason our base existed. When I heard from a friend that the planes had been sent to Kansas, I asked my father—now a ranking wing administrator—why.

In a voice that told me I wasn't to ask any more questions, he answered, "To protect them from a first strike."

And then that fateful evening in early October, when all my on-base friends and I knew more or less what was unfolding as the hours ticked

by—and knew as well neither to talk about it among ourselves or to ask our fathers any more than we already had—my father took me aside. "Listen," he said. "If anything happens while you're at school, just go wherever they tell you, and we'll get together afterwards."

My school was on the north end of town, the base was on the south. I knew that, "if anything happened," my family would be sent in one direction, I'd be sent in another. My father would, in any case, stay at his post to face the inevitable. That night I lay in bed imagining myself wandering through the landscape of a nuclear nightmare, fatherless, to be sure, and wondering if the others for whom I searched had also been incinerated in a white instant.

But in the days that followed, as the unthinkable seemed to creep closer and closer, I clung to my father's words, the knowing squeeze he gave my shoulder, and, most of all, to the normalcy and certainty that filled his voice in that brief remark. Everything would be all right, it said. Everything will be all right. It was his mission to make sure of that. He accepted the mission: I accepted that he would accomplish it.

Of course, lacking a task or a mission, my father could stumble in simplest random encounter with a stranger. Stripped of the guise of responsibility, he could be tipped off balance by the merest of female whimsies. While his moments of certainty were formidable, they were intermittent, emerging when he accepted responsibility for others and not infrequently evaporating if he were responsible only for himself.

But however evanescent or incidental, those moments were unquestionably his. In the face of empty rooms and the cycles of life's messy pain, they gave him his bearings. They let him catch wisps of the chanting, cosmic chorus his father had so little time to sing to him. They let him dream of one day mastering his fate.

And so, like some bewitched prince condemned to live in a foggy netherworld save when the moon was full and the cloak of responsibility mantled his shoulders, my father wandered much of his life in half-light, aware of life's intensity, but watching it as from afar while it hurled up beautifully towards him.

He was vulnerable. He was self-conscious and detached. And intermittently he found himself possessed of a piercing decisiveness.

And all these he became from having been, so young, unfathered.

AMANDA OSGOOD JONIENTZ

Wayward Girls

Late August 1939, the weekend before we were to start high school, my sister and I made our way to the Rollerdome one last time. Rosie had arranged a ride that would take us all the way from Bellingham to the mouth of the Duwamish River and from there we could hitch up the hill to the skating rink. But that afternoon, our stepmother didn't come home. Thelma had promised to work only half a shift at the mill. She said that if we babysat for her in the morning, we could still have our afternoon free. She must have changed her mind. She did that a lot. She'd promise that we'd only have to babysit a short while, then she'd pick up a second shift.

Rosie went on about how if Thelma had kept her part of the bargain we wouldn't have to do this. She would have none of my worry. She said it was our stepmother's fault really. Pure selfishness. We were just free labor. That's why they'd moved us up from Enumclaw. She said we never even saw Daddy. He was out on a fishing boat for three months at a time. Thelma could boss us around any way she wanted. This time, Rosie said, Thelma was not going to ruin our good time. She applied a bright red coat of lipstick, dropped the tube into her pocket, and said, "Let's get us some rope."

Convincing Thelma's boy Donny to sit on the chair was always the hardest part. He bit Rosie. I tried to hold him down so she could get him with the rope. He was only four but his blunt little legs were solid muscle. I got more than my fair share of swift kicks. Baby Ginny woke in her crib and started bawling.

I tried to reason with him. Told him that if he'd sit in the chair and let Rosie tie him, I'd give him a piece of that butterscotch, the kind that was wrapped in silver paper. He stopped struggling and listened. "Two pieces," I said. "That'll be enough to last you till your mama gets home." He tucked his chin in and studied me. His bottom lip stuck out pink and shiny. "We won't tie your hands this time, and I'll give you some picture books." I let go of his legs and walked to the dresser. In the upper left drawer, underneath my stockings, I kept a box of butterscotch. The day Rosie and I moved to Bellingham, our Grandpa had driven us. We sat

three together across the seat of his old truck. Grandpa had tried to start the engine. It groaned and sputtered. For one brief moment, I felt relief. We wouldn't have to go after all. Then Grandpa chuckled and reached into his jacket pocket. "That's right," he said and pulled out two boxes of candy. He handed one to me, one to Rosie. "I forgot this old truck runs on butterscotch." Then he cranked the engine and it hummed all the way to our new life.

For three months, that box sat untouched in my dresser drawer next to the big bed Rosie and I shared in the front room. The only room, really, other than Thelma and Daddy's bedroom. It served as kitchen, a place to eat, and a bedroom. Across from us, Donny slept in a trundle bed that was a couch during the day. I supposed the top part would be baby Ginny's when she got old enough or had to vacate the crib that sat close enough to the stove that I could stir a pot while I held her bottle. The only other furniture was the table and four chairs.

I dangled two silver slabs of butterscotch in front of Donny. He crawled up on to the wooden chair and stretched out his hand. I shook my head. "Not until you're secure."

Rosie wrapped the rope around each of his ankles and the legs of the chair. Then she looped it up around his waist and chest. "This is for your own safety," she said as she worked. I wondered if she believed it. "If your mama had been home when she said, I wouldn't have to do this." She tied the end around a rung on the back of the chair in a perfect buntline hitch just like Daddy taught her. If Donny struggled, the knot would tighten.

Seeing him strung up like that made me uneasy. "Here," I said shoving the candy into his grimy little hand. I slung my skates over my shoulder. The hard rubber wheels knocked into my ribcage. I didn't mind. I liked that their weight felt substantial, as if they were all I needed to walk out that door. Rosie grabbed hers and we headed for the road. "What if there's a fire?" I said.

"Won't be," she said.

"He's our stepbrother."

"He's Thelma's brat, and I hate him." She quickened her pace. Her auburn hair bounced in a perfect wave across her neck and shoulders. Though I was at least a head taller, I had to skip every couple of steps to keep stride.

"Ginny's your sister."

"No, you're my sister." Her voice was hard-edged but she turned toward me and smiled sweetly, my little pie face, her cheeks and chin the shape of a Valentine heart.

"Could be a fire," I said.

The smile vanished. She jumped in front of me and stomped her foot. "Hannah Mae," she said. "If you're not wanting to go, head on back right now. I'm going and I don't want to hear no more what if's about fires or nothing else. I'm going to have the time of my life. Not you, not Thelma or those two hell spawn are going to spoil it."

I could feel her anger rushing at me like a wild log hurtling down a shoot. Try as I might to get out of its way, I knew I'd be laid flat by it. But, I also knew that as quick as her anger came on, it would be gone, and she'd be all sweet and smiles again if I just played my cards right.

"How'd you get Bobby Watkins to drive us?" I asked.

She exhaled and grinned, put a hand on her hip and arched her back. She was barely fourteen, but when she stood like that, a pose she had practiced many times in front of Thelma's vanity mirror, her breasts strained against the seams of her blouse and her skirt clung to her full round thighs. If one more person told her that she looked like Rita Hayworth, I thought I'd scream. Her head was already filled with fantasies from the movie magazines Thelma bought her. Nobody compared me to Rita Hayworth and it wasn't just that my hair was limp and sandy brown. I had posed like that once in front of the mirror. I would turn fifteen that September, but when I thrust my hip, all that strained against the skirt fabric was hipbone, sharp and angular.

"I kissed him," she said.

Bobby Watkins was seventeen years old and delivered groceries to our porch. Rosie would slip out back when he came. Just to say hello. I hadn't made much of it, but of late she had disappeared for longer and longer stretches. Now I knew why. Bobby wasn't bad to look at, but he didn't seem like a boy Rosie would go for. He quit high school the year before and would work at his father's grocery for the rest of his life.

"Do you like him?" I asked. She scrunched her face up. "Then why'd you kiss him?"

"He has the delivery van, silly." She wrapped a ringlet of hair around her finger. "Don't you look at me like that. It probably wasn't the kiss anyways. He's heading down to pick up produce in the valley. Besides, I'd do it again to get to Seattle tonight."

"You might have to," I said. "It's a three-hour ride."

"Yeah but we'll be in the back. He don't want nobody to see us and tell Daddy. Come on," she said.

She took my hand, and we started to walk again. The afternoon was warm. Alder leaves had already started to curl and fall and crunch beneath our feet. The smell of blackberries drifted up from the ditch alongside the road. Yellow jackets were starting to swarm and tear viciously at the flesh of ripening fruit. We reached the corner. Bobby Watkin's van sat idling behind a grove of willow saplings, but Bobby was

nowhere in sight. I leaned into the cab through the open window. A tattered copy of *Mandrake the Magician* and a pack of Lucky Strikes lay on the seat. Rosie peered through the willow branches, then quickly turned around, her hand over her mouth. Bobby rushed out of the bush zipping his fly. He gave us a brusque hello. Then he grinned and said there was room in the cab for one. He looked at Rosie and said she could put her head in his lap until we were out of Bellingham. I looped my arm through her elbow and pulled her toward me. If he thought I'd let her be alone with him in that cab, he had another think coming. Rosie leaned her head into my shoulder. Bobby snorted and said, "Suit yourself." He led us to the back of the van and unlatched the door. The inside matched the grey of the outside. Deep, near the cab, lay a dirty old mattress and a couple of blankets. I wondered if, when he agreed to give Rosie a ride, he knew I was part of the deal. We should have turned around at that point and gone back home. But I knew Rosie wouldn't listen, and if I protested I would just feel the fool in front of Bobby. So I just watched as she giggled and bit her thumb. She hitched her leg and swung herself up into the van. I followed. We each grabbed a rod and pulled the doors shut. I heard the latch snap into place. Now there was no turning back.

The air inside the truck was hot and close. We bounced along in the darkness for what felt like forever. I tried to imagine what must be passing outside. What I thought was Highway 99. Sweat was beading on my scalp. I could feel my hair a matted mess against my neck. We lurched to a stop and I thought of Thelma walking through the door to find Donny slumped in the chair. Sticky drool on his face. How long would she be mad at me? Last time we snuck off, she swore and threatened, but she didn't tell Daddy. The cop that rode us home told her that if he found us wandering around Pioneer Square he'd book us as runaways. Then he stood there and listened while Thelma ranted. Told us we were trouble on wheels. That if we weren't careful we'd end up like that girl up the street with that baby with rags for shoes. Is that what we wanted? No job. No money. To be known as good-time girls. Rosie had laughed at her and said, "What if I was pregnant?" Thelma shut her mouth and blinked. I thought she might slap Rosie straight across the face. But as cool and calm as morning water she said we'd stay home and care for it. Thelma was only twenty-two, seven years older than me. At times like that, she seemed more like an older sister than a stepmother.

One of the tires hit a pothole and Rosie's head slumped over into my lap. She was asleep. I put my hand on her shoulder. Could feel her breath rise and fall. This might be when I liked her the best. My baby of a sister. Soft and quiet. Close to me like when we were little, before she seemed ready to turn on me at any minute. It had always been us against them. But more and more Rosie seemed to be standing alone. I could feel her

moving away from me to someplace I couldn't follow. I wrapped my arm around her chest and pulled her against me as if I were strong enough to keep her with me.

At some point, I must have fallen asleep too. When the doors of the van swung open, the stream of late afternoon sunlight blinded me. Rosie pushed herself up off my legs. Her breath was hot and stale. There was sand in my mouth. Wobbly from hours of motion, we staggered to the edge of the van and eased ourselves down. A car rushed by, and Rosie jumped as if she had to get out of its way.

"Aren't you a sight," Bobby said. "Scarecrow and Raggedy Ann."

Rosie grumbled, pushed, and swam her way to the sidewalk. He laughed and said he'd be seeing us. He swung the van doors shut, climbed into the cab, and rumbled off down the street.

One look at Rosie told me that we were a mess. She asked where we were. I could see the train tracks across the street lined with idle freight cars. To my left, houses sprouted out of the hillside so steep they looked like they were on stilts. A car whizzed by and its engine echoed against great cement pilings. I looked up to see the span of the drawbridge. I realized he must have dropped us on the west side of the river near the steel mill.

"That's Poverty Hill," I said. "There's a service station down around the bend."

The pimply clerk eyeballed us as we marched straight behind the building to the bathroom. Mosquito eaters flitted around the bare light bulb. The door didn't lock and the room reeked of urine, but there was a dim and grainy mirror. We dropped our skates in the cleanest looking corner.

I splashed cool water in my face, rubbing off grime. Rosie laughed at her reflection and pulled pins from her hair. She wetted her fingers, ran them through the russet and gold strands that sprang free and looped into thick ringlets. She disappeared and returned with a brush. I didn't ask. She began to work her way through the rats in my hair. A half hour later, we emerged as fresh and scrubbed as two kids rolling out of school. Rosie winked at the clerk and handed him the brush. He blushed and tucked it behind the counter.

She leaned toward him and rested her elbows on the counter. "You ever go to the Southgate Rollerdome?"

"I been," he said, his hands on the cash register.

"That's where you'll find me tonight. If you go, that is. I'm Rosalynn and this here is Hannah."

He said hello to me but never took his eyes off Rosie.

"You know where someone could find a ride up the hill round here?" she said.

He ran his fingers along the inside of his cap and glanced out the window to his left. I followed his gaze and saw the handles and front wheel

of a bicycle leaning up against the side of the building. He looked back at Rosie. "A bus runs up Delridge every thirty minutes. Cost you a nickel."

"We only got enough to get into the rink," Rosie pouted. "You know where someone could find a nickel round here?"

His eyes widened in recognition. He glanced left and right as if someone might be watching, whistled a little to himself, and punched a button on the cash register. The drawer sprang open. Pulling out two nickels, he grinned and slid them across the counter. There was oil in the creases of his skin, but his nails were perfectly pared and trimmed. His hand stopped just short of Rosie's arm. She too glanced left and right before reaching over to take the coins. But she let the tips of her fingers brush up against his. "So we'll be seeing you tonight," she said.

His hand retreated into the deep pocket of his overalls. "Maybe you will," he said.

Rosie pocketed the nickels. We turned to leave. The bell above the door jingled when she swung it open. She hesitated then turned back. "We're awful hungry," she said. He frowned. I thought we had better count ourselves lucky and start up the hill toward the bus stop, but Rosie kept on. "Nothing but fill-yer-bellies since morning," she said. "I think I might just drop before I make it to the rink." She laughed a tiny little tinkling laugh. A practiced laugh. Not her typical gut buster.

I wanted to tell her to leave him alone, that I had brought a little money to buy a sandwich, but he had already disappeared behind the counter and came up with a lunch box. He passed her a wax-paper package. She thanked him, and we went on our way.

The sun disappeared behind a ridge of fir trees. A whistle blew. The steel mill probably. We hiked up the hill. Rosie unwrapped the sandwich and took a bite.

"I wish you hadn't done that," I said.

"He's not missing much," she said through a mouthful and shoved the sandwich into my hands. Spongy bread, a thin smear of butter, and one slice of salami. I took a bite and passed it back to her. "You know what I wish?" she said.

"What?"

"That you'd stop worrying for one minute and have some fun." She took my chin in her hand and leaned in close to my face. "Tonight, we're free."

I pulled away from her grasp. "If you say so."

She shook her head and tossed the wax wrapping.

We had to wait fifteen minutes for the bus. All the while, scraggly groups of men joined us. We could hear them drifting alongside the building behind the bus stop. There'd be laughter and voices but they all fell silent when they rounded the corner. They ranged in age from what looked like fifteen to sixty with not a lot in between. Cigarettes dangled

from lower lips. None too happy to see us. When the bus finally came, they let us climb on first. The driver took our nickels and watched us in the rear-view mirror. Rosie made a big production out of choosing a seat and finally took the third one from the front. The men filed in an endless stream. Though they stood pressed together in the aisle, the driver stopped the last two from entering. Full, he said, and pulled the lever shutting the door in their faces. Their wives or mothers would have to wait dinner, I thought, because of us. The bus engine strained against carrying so much weight and as we wound our way up the hill, the air became close with smoke and steel. I was used to the odor of day-old fish and sawdust on the laundry, but nothing could prepare me for the acrid smell of steel dust mixed with human sweat. It made my throat and eyes burn. Rosie covered her mouth. When the bus crested the hill, she reached up and yanked the bell string. The bus stopped at the next intersection. The doors opened and coughed us out onto Roxbury.

We slung our skates over our shoulders. Mine clattered against the window on the bus door.

"Watch it," the driver shouted at me through the glass. He shifted into gear and pulled away from the curb.

Rosie held a handful of her hair in front of her nose and sniffed. "God, tell me my hair don't smell like that," she said. Then she laughed. "Don't you fall in love with no steel man. I won't come to your house."

"You think I'm dumb enough to trade one mill for another?" I said.

"Mill. I'm talking about love." She put her hands together and twirled. "Don't you even want to kiss a boy? You never have, have you?"

"I'm not going to fall in love with anybody," I said. From what I'd seen, love just meant dirty dishes and diapers. I didn't want any of it. Rosie could have her Hollywood. Maybe she was right. Maybe I couldn't stop the worry. So, I'd settle for high school. In the end, I knew she'd be right there with me. Irish twins, they called us. Took me years to stop telling people we weren't Irish. We had started grade school together because Grandma and Grandpa hadn't wanted to part us. We came from a broken home, they said, and we needed each other. Rosie always struggled because of that. Not because of the broken home, but because she could never keep up. I whizzed through my work then showed her how to do hers. Did hers too, more often than not.

We headed toward Sixteenth Avenue Southwest. This was a rough part of town. When the dry cleaners and the tailor's shop were locked up, groups of young people drifted here and there going nowhere in particular. As we passed them on the sidewalk, the young men would talk in loud, boastful voices and their women would sneer at us. The first time we'd snuck off to roller skate, we saw a fight break out right there on Sixteenth. Rosie and I had found ourselves in the middle of a crowd. One

man knocked another down. The man gave the other a chance to get back up. When he didn't, it was all over. Rosie hadn't stopped talking about it for a week. She kept telling the story over and over. Each time the drama took on a new shape, until somehow she was the one they had been fighting over.

But on that late August night, the streets seemed quiet. It was starting to get dark. The street lamps came on. Though it had been a fine day, the night air began to chill and bite at our bare arms. A crumpled piece of newspaper tumbled down the gutter between the sidewalk and the street. We rounded the corner and in the distance, the Southgate Rollerdome rose out of the rubbish like an alabaster palace. Its placard sign of a giant roller skate winked at me. I felt my heart surge and race. I looped my arm through Rosie's elbow and knew that she felt it too. That the bright lights on the wall facing the street called out to us that this was our place. The place that held us together. The place that could carry us home.

We hurried around the side of the building to the entrance. Funneled into the line under the long narrow awning. Huddled between a family of four and a young couple. The little boy in front of me turned and grinned. He wore short pants and a cap. He asked me if I thought we'd missed the opening flag salute. His father chuckled, patted him on the shoulder, told him we were just in time. His mother, who perched a little girl on her hip, smiled at me and said that the boy's favorite part of the evening was when all the service men ringed the rink and Pop Brown raised the flag.

Donny would like that, I thought. I hoped that Thelma was home.

At the door, Ethel Brown took our dimes and handed us each a ticket. She checked our skates for dirt and rocks that would nick the polish of the floor. She always made sure that no grime from the street entered her rollerdome. Inside, still caught in the bustle of the crowd, I heard her ask the man behind me if he'd been drinking. I turned to watch. He said no. She leaned in and sniffed his breath, then let him through the door.

We dropped our skates with a thud on the shoe-check counter. Rosie touched the red mark on her shoulder where the laces had rubbed her skin. A woman at the counter wrote a number on our tickets and told us that unless we wanted to skate home not to lose them. They would tell her which box she stowed our shoes in. I watched her tuck our loafers in slots forty-five and forty-six. I found a bench. I sat down, plunged each foot into a tight-fitting leather boot and laced up my skates. Rosie did the same. When we were securely knotted, we stood, clasped hands, and rolled off toward the floor.

Close to the rink the crowd loosened. Space opened before us with a wide hanger ceiling suspended above the rafters and a polished wood floor that shone like glass. From the looks of it, the navy was in town. Wall-to-wall bell-bottoms and white caps. Rosie and I found a spot along

the edge of the floor. The house went black and the crowd hushed. A spotlight caught Pop Brown standing at the top of the rink. He looked to be in his fifties with a pot-belly and thinning hair but his back was ramrod straight. Next to him stood a skinny kid in khakis, a bugle pressed to his side.

From the opposite side of the rink, a member of the Southgate drill team zipped onto the floor carrying a US flag. I longed to be her. Swore I would be once I turned eighteen and could join. Believed that I could wear that flounced skirt edged with rose-colored sequins that fell just above the knees. That smart little cap glinting in the light. That form-fitting sweater. As she circled the rink picking up speed, each leg crossed in front of the other. The motion lifted her skirt revealing a hint of thigh. A pair of pom-poms danced at the ankle of each skate. She stopped on a dime directly in front of Pop Brown and plunked the flag-pole into the stand. When it hit the floor, Pop snapped to attention with a salute. The bugler barked out "Reveille." The moment his last note faded, the lights came up, and the organ burst into song. Skaters edged their way onto the floor.

Rosie and I swung into motion. We raced shoulder to shoulder, weaving in and out of hand-holding couples. Each time we circled the rink, we took a step toward center. We loved to start with the spiral. When we reached the middle, we clasped each other's forearms. Our legs were spread in a perfect V so that two feet pointed forward, two backward. We picked up momentum and leaned our heads back. I opened my eyes and watched patches of color and light streak by allowing the rush of dizziness to engulf me. Rosie was right. That night we were free. Here was a life without worry—I could taste it in the air that rushed through my open mouth—or it was the closest thing to it that girls like us would ever know. Forearms still linked, we turned so that we were both facing forward and took off in an easy glide around the floor. All too quickly, we came upon a young woman who clung to the arm of a stocky sailor. Her legs didn't seem to know which way to go but her feet seemed determined to fly out from under her. She landed smack on her bottom, legs splayed, the sailor rutting up between them. Rosie and I separated to avoid a pile up. A group of three or four of the sailor's comrades stood together on the outside of the rink. They laughed at the woman on the floor but clapped for our swift maneuver. Rosie did a quick spin to acknowledge their attention. I glanced at them. Those sailors in their white uniforms who could look so noble, so clean, so like they had just stepped off of a movie screen. I could see that Rosie thought so too. Her stride, which a moment before had been strong and straight, began to lilt and swing. I felt unease creep back into my chest. Rosie exited the floor. I followed her to the ladies room where we rolled our skirts at the waist so that the hem fell above our knees. We had done this many times before, imagining ourselves as pinup girls. Somehow, though it had always

earned a stern look from Thelma, I had felt it to be innocent. My beanpole legs sticking out couldn't possibly be thought of as alluring. But watching Rosie, I think I must have felt some of Thelma's concern. Rosie ran her hand over her bottom to smooth the fabric, then her hand traveled down along her stocking to the dimpled back of her knee.

When we returned to the floor, we skated separately. Leisurely. The cluster of sailors whooped as Rosie sailed by. She grabbed the sides of her skirt and swung them. It was a move that we had seen in a movie musical number. We had been practicing it for weeks. I pulled up to the sideline and watched. It was as if she and her sailors were moving together in an unstoppable raucous dance. She'd zip by, turn to skate backwards and flash them a grin. They'd shuffle and twitter in response. It was like she had them on a string and each time she'd pass by, she'd draw them toward the floor. From where I was standing, I could see that they couldn't skate. She pulled up beside me, breathless.

"What are you doing?" I said. I wanted to take her by the shoulders and shake some sense into her. I wasn't jealous, exactly. But what she was doing angered me somehow.

"Having the time of my life," she said. Her voice lilting. Unnatural. She glanced at me from under veiled eyelids. "And I'm not going to let you be a stick in the mud." She took my hand and pulled me onto the floor. We glided together. Her damp hand clung to mine. But I could feel that she was elsewhere. I could feel the eyes of the sailors and the electric wave that coursed through her body each time we swung past them. I looked at her, red hair glinting in the light, smooth luminescent skin. She did not need my company. She needed my reflection, pale in comparison, so she could glimmer and shine. I broke stride and drifted off to the side. In my fury, I jostled a few onlookers.

"Well, hi there," one of them said.

It took a moment for me to recognize him without his cap and overalls. It was the boy from the service station. "It's you," I said.

"Right," he said. "You're Hannah."

I nodded, surprised that he remembered.

"Willie." He stuck out a hand. Even in the dim light of the rollerdome, I could see that his hand had been scrubbed free of oil, could feel the warmth of the red and raw skin against mine.

"Wilbur, really. Willie just seems to suit me." I looked at him. His shirt collar tight against the smooth skin of his neck. He was right. He glanced over my head and said, "That Rosalynn is something else."

"Who?" I asked turning to follow his gaze. "Oh, Rosie. Sure she is." It was the same old story. "Why don't you go find her?" I said. "It's her you're here for anyway."

He grinned. His two front teeth were so large that he suddenly looked like a horse. He pushed off, joining the flow of skaters circling the floor. He raced up behind Rosie and touched her shoulder. She turned to look at him, didn't recognize him, but gave him a smile anyway. Her smile was so easy. It would brighten anyone's day. Could brighten my day. They pulled up across the rink from me. I watched as she talked and laughed, talked and laughed. Willie was in seventh heaven, but Rosie wasn't with him. She kept glancing back at her sailors. Then she glanced at me. Her grey eyes narrowed. She whispered something in Willie's ear, giggled into her hand, and he glanced at me too. She gave him one last smile and wagged her finger at him before returning to the floor. He watched her go. The organist struck up "Little Brown Jug." Children exited the floor and headed for the concession stand. Groups dispersed, leaving only couples holding hands. Willie glided around the rink and stopped in front of me. He held out his hand. "Care to join me?" he asked.

This was the first time any boy had asked me to a couple's skate. I took his hand. We circled the floor silently. Both uncomfortable but for different reasons, I suspected. Willie's hand was sweaty. Then he started to talk. Not to me in particular, just to fill the empty air. Turned out that this was Willie's last day at the service station. He only worked there during the summer. He was a junior at West Seattle High. School started day after Labor Day. He kept saying, quite a coincidence, quite a coincidence. Finally, I asked him what he meant and he said, "You two stopping by on my last day. If it hadn't a been today, I never would have met—" he paused, "you."

The song ended. He leaned his face close to mine. Pressed his lips against mine. I could feel his breath against my cheek. Could feel his giant teeth through his lips. I pulled my head away. Over his shoulder, I could see Rosie leaning up against a pillar on the edge of the rink. Her hands clasped behind her back. Her chest thrust out. Her face was triumphant.

"Did Rosie send you over to skate with me?" I asked.

He looked at the crowd of onlookers. Children. Old people. Everyone enjoyed watching the young couples. He said something about how Rosie promised him the next couple's skate, only if he kissed me. I pulled my hand from his. Wiped it on my skirt. I hope I didn't thank him for the skate. I hope I wasn't that much of a chump. I skated off to Rosie. She stood there clapping and smiling. She would have jumped if she hadn't been wearing skates. I couldn't breathe. I put a hand on the pillar to steady myself. I could feel a deep anger gurgling out of my chest.

"How could you do that to me?" I asked.

All the light left Rosie's face. "Isn't that just like you," she said.

"What?"

"I do you a favor and this is how you thank me?"

"Favor." I'm not sure I understood my humiliation, but I felt it. Something raw and ugly had come into the rollerdome, and I would never forgive her.

"You are a stick in the mud," she went on. "Don't you be mad at me cause you can't even get the attention of a stupid boy no better than Bobby Watkins." Her mouth was moving quickly. I watched a flush of red creep up the skin of her neck. "I'm not going to let you spoil my good time," she said. "Not this time. Not this time." She stomped her skate. The wheel made a sharp crack against the floor. She turned and sashayed onto the rink, rounded up beside her sailors. They moved to the side to make room for her, then they closed in a circle behind her.

I felt a hot sickness in my stomach, made my way to the concession stand. The crowd surged and ebbed around me. I may have stood there twenty minutes sipping on a lemonade. A man sidled up and ordered a hotdog and a bag of peanuts. When he picked up his hotdog, he smeared mustard on the lapel of his suit. A woman's shrill laugh burst out of the corner behind me.

I felt suddenly tired. All of the magic had gone out of the evening. I wanted to be home. Then Willie was back at my side.

"She's not there," he said.

"Who's not there?"

"Rosalynn."

"She can fend for herself."

"Listen, I know I made you mad. I didn't mean to, but you've got to listen."

I looked at him. His face was more animated than before. His head bobbed and he gestured wildly with his hands as he talked.

"She's gone. I've been on the floor. Skating all around. She's not there."

I considered what he said and thought about Rosie. I pushed away from the counter and skated toward the floor. The crowd had thinned. The organ droned. I peered into the faces of handholding couples. Stopped at each group of stragglers along the edge of the rink. He was right.

Rosie wasn't there. And that group of sailors. Gone. I raced to the ladies room. Called for her.

Pushed open the door to each stall. She was nowhere.

Back at the shoe check, slot number forty-six was empty. That reckless little fool, I thought. When I found her, I'd wring her silly little neck. My ankles sprang and wobbled like they were rubber bands. I flopped down on a cushioned bench and began to unlace my skates. My fingers fumbled with the knots. What if I couldn't find her? What if I never found her?

Outside, Sixteenth Avenue was alive with noise. Several skaters milled about in search of something stronger than lemonade. I rushed

around the corner of the building. One sailor had his head tipped back and was emptying the contents of a flask down his throat. Another peed against the side of the rollerdome. They looked at me as if wondering what I was doing there. I retreated and looked up and down the street. A siren blared in the distance.

The street seemed to meld into a sea of lights and noises. A wind picked up and lifted my hair from my shoulders. I clung to my skates as if their weight could give me substance. I didn't know where to look. Rosie could be anywhere. For at least a half an hour I roamed up and down the street peering into alleyways and the back seats of cars. I thought of finding a telephone and calling our mother. I knew where she lived downtown, knew the bar she tended, knew she couldn't or wouldn't do anything. I could hear her saying in her brass voice, you got yourselves into this, now get yourselves out. I thought of telephoning my grandparents but was afraid of what they would say, afraid of what they would think. And Thelma? Even though she'd be mad as hell, I knew she'd try to help me, but the house didn't have a telephone. Whenever she wanted to place a call, she had to walk down to the post office and pay a fee. I exhaled and could see my breath in the lamplight. I couldn't face any of them without Rosie.

It was then I saw it tucked around the corner of the street. The Five Spot Tavern. Its neon sign blinking *five-cent steak dinners*, and I knew that's where I'd find her. The wood door to the tavern was painted black and had a small circle of dingy glass. Looking through it, I could see the interior. It was dimly lit and narrow. A bar stretched along one side of the room. A platinum blond woman was pulling beer for a sailor. Small tables were clustered on the open floor. A couple of men sat huddled at the table closest to the door. They hunched over their drinks and turned their collars up to the rest of the room. They looked to be together for no other reason than to be alone with their beer. At another table sat two couples. The women wore dresses with bright floral prints and plunging necklines that revealed their broad and powered breasts. The men wore dark suits and dangled their arms around the women's shoulders.

In the middle of all of that was Rosie. Without even seeing the empty glasses in front of her, I could tell she had been drinking. Could tell because she sat in the same slouch our father did on the nights he came in from the fishing boat. Her chair was at a right angle to the table where her elbow rested. Her hand wrapped around an empty glass. She leaned back. Her head tilted with her eyes half-closed. Her knees spread lazily in front of her. Two of the sailors sat at the table with her. They were busy flipping a coin. It sailed up into the air, was caught and flipped onto one of the sailor's sleeves. He threw his head back and laughed. The other grabbed the coin from his forearm and began rolling it back and forth between his fingers. Then the third sailor appeared carrying three more

beers. He slid the glasses onto the table and nudged Rosie's shoe. She sprang upright. Her face was puffy, shapeless, but still so like a cherub. He put the full glass in front of her and patted her on the head. He ambled back to the bar for his own drinks. When he lurched back toward the table, I could see his face clearly through the smeared glass. His eyes were narrow and his grin sloped in a way I didn't like.

I pushed open the door and marched over to the table. The two sailors sitting at the table stopped talking and their eyes drifted up toward me. Rosie tilted her head. Her face relaxed into a smile of recognition. The sailor standing with his drinks turned his head. He arched his eyebrows then his mouth curled into a grin. At that moment, more than any other in my life, I felt I had a purpose, and it was to wipe that ugly leer off his face.

My skates tugged at my shoulder. I took them by the laces, swung them with all the force I could muster, and clocked him square in the nose. His head popped back and the momentum knocked him down into his chair. His face seemed flattened but there was no visible mark from the blow. He looked at me again, stunned.

"That's my sister, you son of a bitch," I said.

Then the blood started. Just a single drop. A bright red spot bloomed on his white trousers. He touched it with his index finger, put both hands to his nose. When he drew his hands away, they were covered with blood.

Rosie blinked, unable to comprehend what just happened. All those emotions that she had practiced in front of a mirror abandoned her. Her face went slack and her mouth dropped open. If I had waited one more second, I think she might have started to howl. But I grabbed her by the arm and dragged her toward the door. Outside, the cold night air knocked some of the stupor out of her. For a moment, she was running beside me. We made it a block from the tavern when she stumbled and skidded onto the cement sidewalk. I looked back, expecting to see the sailors right behind us. I tugged at her elbow but she just knelt there staring at the heels of her hands. Her shoulders started to shake. I thought she was crying, so I knelt down next to her. When she turned her face toward me, she was laughing. A little giggle that shook her whole body and brought tears to her eyes. She put both hands on my cheeks and pulled my face close to hers. I could feel the grit from the pavement embedded in her palms, and her breath was sour.

"Why you worry so?" she said.

She was right. From the time I could remember, worry had covered every inch of my life. Worry about where I would call home. Worry that Grandma and Grandpa would vanish from my life. Worry that Thelma wouldn't like me. That Mama would put me out on the street. That no boy would think I was pretty enough as long as I was standing next to Rosie. Irrational worries that plagued my every moment but that life had

confirmed for me over and over. And I worried at that moment because right as rain, I knew that this would lead to no good.

For the most part, I could have predicted how the rest of our adventure would turn out. The usual cop would find us wandering toward Mama's apartment downtown. Filthy and shivering from walking the twelve miles to Pike Street. Rosie had left her skates in the Five Spot Tavern and blubbered to him like a baby, begging him to drive us back there to get them. Just like that, she placed us at the scene. He'd listen, take notes in his little pad. Even then, I knew he wasn't a bad guy. He gave us each a blanket and some hot coffee. But what I couldn't imagine at that time was that he wouldn't take us home or even put us on a bus. He'd take us to the police station. I'd be charged with assault. Rosie, just general delinquency. I couldn't possibly have imagined that morning a week later in family court when Thelma stood up and shouted at the judge that he should send these girls home so that they could face the music. Mama sitting next to her, stone-faced. Grandpa shaking his head and staring at the floor. The judge just waited for Thelma to stop shouting, then told her to sit down. Told her that it was obvious that she couldn't control herself, let alone Rosie and me. Told her that she better think about the two children that she still had at home unless she wanted to lose them too. Even then, I wondered if he would have talked to Daddy that way. But Daddy wasn't there. He was still out on a boat. I'm not even sure that he knew he was losing custody. Thelma did her best by us, but she was smart enough to know when she was beaten. She sat down and listened like the rest of us. The judge cracked his gavel and said that we would hereafter be wards of the state and that until we turned eighteen we would reside at the Good Sheppard Home for Wayward Girls.

Maybe if I'd have known all that, I wouldn't have started laughing with Rosie as we scraped ourselves up off the sidewalk and ran past the rollerdome. Full of people living carefree. The place where all my dreams resided. Bright and glorious.

JOHN PICARD

At the Creation Museum

My favorite niece is standing with her husband in front of the skeleton of a wooly mammoth, if I know my extinct creatures. I don't, but the long tusks and massive rib cage make it my best guess. It's a photograph Laura has put on her Facebook page, taken, it appears, at a natural history museum and one of a series from her and Michael's recent vacation. To learn more, I scroll down to the caption. I read it twice, then a third time. The photograph, it turns out, was taken in Kentucky, and this isn't a natural history museum at all. It's the Creation Museum.

I've read about the Creation Museum, where the earth's geological record is based not on science but on a literal interpretation of the Bible and, accordingly, exhibits show humans and dinosaurs once living side-by-side. Because Laura and Michael have chosen to pose smiling and standing close together before the remains of this fearsome beast—as if huddling against the danger—they appear to be mocking the absurdity of where they are; at least poking fun at it. That couldn't be more wrong, of course. Clicking on Laura's other photographs of the museum, I come to one of a girl kneeling on the ground in a kind of loose-fitting sack dress. She's playing with some small animal while a couple of tyrannosauruses pad along behind her. I scroll down. Laura has written a caption that reads,

> Yes, mankind and dinosaurs lived at the same time both created by God. NOT millions of years ago. They were all vegetarians in the beginning.

Most of my family are fundamentalist Christians. Twice a year I make the three-hundred-mile trip north to their part of the country. Typically, I stay two nights at my father's in southern Pennsylvania. These days, if it's my summer visit, my sister drives over and spends part of the afternoon with me, the two of us shouting to be heard over the TV my hard-of-hearing father has at almost full volume. If it's my winter visit, I drive half an hour to my sister's home in western Maryland for Christmas dinner. Lately I've been going to Christmas dinner by myself. My father, who's in his nineties, finds all the commotion—noisy chatter, running and

screaming children—hard to take. It's not the commotion I mind. Besides me, my father is the only member of my family who isn't a believer. Without him there, I'm the lone heathen.

I search the Creation Museum's website and find out I was wrong. The creature in the photograph is not a wooly mammoth but a mastodon. Also, it's not real. It's a cast of the Burning Tree Mastodon, discovered on the Burning Tree Golf Course in Newark, Ohio, in 1989. The website says, "It is one of the most complete mastodon skeletons found to date!" It goes on to claim that flint marks have been identified on the rib cage, made by hunters who killed and butchered the animal, proof that the first humans coexisted with dinosaurs. It also mentions that before coming to the Creation Museum the mastodon had been displayed at the annual Southern Baptist Convention in Louisville.

Ninety-two percent of Americans believe in God. Eighty percent believe in heaven. Seventy-four percent believe in hell. Most of these people believe that angels and demons are active in the world. In a recent poll, one third of all Texans surveyed said they believed the earth is 6000 years old and that humans and dinosaurs once shared the earth. I used to believe many of these things myself, taught to me by my stern, religious fanatic of a mother. That's how I saw her, anyway. My sister, who embraced completely my mother's brand of Christianity, experienced her differently. When she died, Marcy wrote on her Facebook page about her ". . . precious mother. She has seen the face of the Savior she served her whole life." This Easter she wrote on Facebook, "HE IS RISEN!" Her daughter, Laura, wrote exactly the same words, if in lower case, followed by, "Hallelujah!"

When I was a fundamentalist Christian, my mother and I prayed fervently for my father and his immortal soul. We wanted him with us in heaven. The few times he attended church I thrilled at the possibility he would hear something in the pastor's sermon that would cause him to repent and ask Jesus to come into his heart. Because the prospect was so terrible, my mother and I never spoke of the consequences if he didn't, of his burning forever and ever in a fire seven times hotter than any fire on earth.

At the time it seemed almost everyone I knew was headed to hell. There were several Catholic families in our neighborhood. Though they prayed to Jesus and went to church, I knew they believed in salvation by works and not by faith and were therefore destined for hellfire. "That priest isn't going to get them to heaven," my mother would say. There was a Jewish family on our block, representatives of an entire people who'd rejected Jesus and were headed for the bad place. Whenever I saw one of the fathers on our street washing his car on Sunday morning—the Lord's day, the biblically mandated day of rest—I knew if he died today he'd find himself in the fiery pit. Whenever someone cursed or used the

Lord's name in vain, whenever someone told a dirty joke, I knew their fate. Most of my friends were going to hell; many of my teachers, too. The day I overheard Mr. Hildreth, my beloved baseball coach, use the "d-word" was a particularly sad one. Everywhere I turned people were in flames.

At age eighteen, I became one of them, finally admitting to myself that I didn't, that I couldn't, believe the things I'd been taught about God and the Bible. And until dementia quelled her mind, my mother, showing none of the reticence that kept her from speaking of my father's damnation, never ceased reminding me of mine. Neither, she claimed, would she cease praying for me until I came back to Jesus.

I know from taking its virtual tour that messages both uplifting and dire—written in handsome script and encased behind glass—are posted throughout the Creation Museum. Laura has photographed a warning that states, "Scripture abandoned by the culture leads to relative morality, hopelessness and meaninglessness." There is a quote from a British report on church attendance that predicts, "The church in this country will be dead and buried in 40 years." Another warning—titled "The Latest Attack"—addresses the issue of biblical time and an ungodly world's rejection of Archbishop James Ussher's seventeenth-century "discovery" that the earth was created in the year 4004 B.C. All of this bleakness is countered in the Biblical Authority Room. A diorama of the apostle Paul shows him sitting at a desk with the container of writing utensils he will use to write his epistles. Another diorama shows two men peering around a huge rock into Christ's empty tomb. On these walls are messages such as: "God's Word Is True." "God's Word Has Triumphed." "The Prophets and Apostles Agree on God's Word."

Like all modern museums, the Creation Museum provides a wide range of goods and services. It has a planetarium, a theater, dining areas, a gift shop, lecture halls. And it's about much more than dinosaurs. Comprised of exhibit rooms with names such as Babel Area, Dig Site, and Noah's Ark, the museum is a history of the Bible brought to three dimensional life. The exhibit called "The Garden of Eden" shows a naked Adam (his lower body concealed by a waist-high shrub) surrounded by animals he is presumably naming—Adam's only job before the fall according to the Old Testament. A related exhibit is located on Corruption Alley. It shows a now fallen—and clothed—Adam hoeing in the garden while a forlorn and very pregnant Eve looks on.

When my sister—who four times suffered the pain of childbirth imposed by God on women for Eve's sin—saw Laura's Facebook photographs, she must have rejoiced at this public display of God's glory. In private, Christian fundamentalists are not so showy about their religion, eschewing what the Bible calls "graven images." They worship the true God and not facsimiles of Him. There are no crosses or pictures of Jesus

in my sister's house. At Christmas, there is no Santa Claus either. Laura and her siblings were not taught about Santa, ditto the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy and all such secular demigods. With the tree and the presents under it, Marcy's living room could be anyone's at Christmas time, until you look at the bookshelves, that is. The bookshelves are dominated by translations of the Bible, commentaries on the Bible, picture books of the Bible, works of fiction for both adults and children with biblical themes—the kinds of things my mother used to have on her bookshelves, the kinds of things Laura no doubt has on hers. No Harry Potter here. None of those vampire books that are so popular today, either. Reading about wizards and the undead is asking for trouble, flirting with the dark side.

When I'm there at Christmas, before we eat, I usually chat a while with my brother-in-law, a licensed plumber and a deacon in his church. We discuss either the economy or his latest hunting trip. By now Wes's short, curly hair has gone completely gray and his face is deeply lined. I remember him as a blond-headed, fresh-faced sinner who cheated on my sister the first year of their marriage. She moved back in with my parents, though she soon reconciled with her husband who vowed to mend his ways. I assume it was then that he adopted his wife's belief system.

After our chat, I step into the living room and mix with my nieces and nephew and their spouses, try to recall what each of them told me about their lives a year ago and, if I remember, ask follow-up questions. I make sure to spend a private moment or two with Laura. I would play with my great-nieces and nephews, but they regard me with suspicion when I approach them. They squint their eyes at me and stiffen their little bodies, as if to say, "Who are you? Where did you come from?"

The table set, we gather around and join hands. Wes, the family patriarch, says the blessing, then we pull out our chairs and feast on the traditional dishes my sister has spent days preparing. Table talk remains within a limited range of anodyne subjects. Last Christmas it revolved around the latest beach trip. Every summer the family gathers at Assateague Island for a week-long vacation: swimming, sunbathing, cooking out. They don't call this a family reunion, but that's what it is. I have never been invited. I can tell by the way they talk that it's never occurred to them to invite me. Or if it has, they assume I wouldn't accept, and they would probably be right.

I don't go around wringing my hands over having so little connection to family. I have dear friends. I'm not lonely. Yet to this day people will ask me about that niece of mine, the one I have the special bond with, the one I used to talk about so much.

During my summer visits, when Laura was little and her sister, Kimmie, littler, I would stand outside and watch them play in the back yard, while Marcy was inside talking to our parents. Laura would do

cartwheels across the lawn, and Kimmie would do poor but spirited imitations of them. Afterwards, the three of us would sit cross-legged under a shade tree, and I'd get them talking about whatever I thought might interest them. Kimmie was too young for conversation, but Laura, with minimal prompting, would open up about her friends, her favorite TV shows, her Barbies. Each year, being with my nieces would be the highlight of my summer trip, the thing I'd mentioned first when friends asked me about my visit.

Of all my sister's children, why did I make Laura my favorite? It's partly that I liked her so much. Everybody likes Laura. She's the family favorite. Laura is just so extraordinarily sweet-natured, the most winning of my sister's very winning children. And it's partly that she showed flashes of intellectual curiosity when she was growing up, flashes that encouraged me to think she might eventually come over to my side.

Laura was homeschooled. Her textbooks, all of her study material, reflected and supported a fundamentalist Christian worldview. She'd been as thoroughly indoctrinated as I'd been, but if I'd managed to get out, perhaps another member of the family could too. When she was seven or eight I learned that Laura was writing poems in her little pink diary. They didn't make a lot of sense, but that wasn't the important thing; the important thing was that she had a creative side—like her uncle John—and creativity and strict adherence to religious dogma are seldom compatible for very long, I told myself. A year or so later I stepped into her bedroom and saw Andrew Wyeth's painting, *Christina's World*, hanging on the wall. Laura had come across the print at Target of all places and begged her mother to buy it for her. Laura didn't know the history behind the painting, or the name of the painter, but that didn't matter. What mattered was that she'd shown esthetic appreciation for an object that had nothing to do with her religion. Ever the supportive uncle, I gave her art books for the next several Christmases. But neither poetry nor Andrew Wyeth proved to be anything more than a passing fancy.

So adamantine did her faith begin to appear, in fact, that I entertained fantasies of proactively undermining her religious indoctrination. I imagined asking Laura subversive questions like, "What about all the people born before Jesus died for our sins? Are they saved? Or are they out of luck?" or, "Who was Cain's wife anyway? Surely not his sister. That would be kind of icky, wouldn't it?" Or maybe I'd just slip Laura a copy of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and make it our little secret. I never did anything of the sort, of course, but I continued to watch for any heterodox behavior or interest.

Laura was twelve or thirteen when she expressed to me her new fondness for sitar music. Not only that, she'd been reading up on the history of India. This was major, I decided. I'd been grasping at straws before, but

this India business, this seemed like pretty solid evidence of a budding sophistication, perhaps a cosmopolitanism. My family doesn't have much interest in other countries or cultures, while I'm a college graduate with a minor in history and the only one in my family who's traveled abroad. I recommended Indian food to Laura, which she'd never tried. I praised Ravi Shankar, whom she'd never heard of. She seemed impressed that I was knowledgeable about her exotic pastime. In subsequent visits I probed her about India. I was cheered to find out she'd finally eaten Indian food and loved it, that she'd discovered the films of Bollywood and could name many of its stars. We discussed the Partition of India, of which she knew the broad outlines. Over the next few years her passion for all things Indian remained undiminished.

Last August Laura asked me to meet her and Michael in nearby Winston-Salem. They'd be there for a week-long, church-related function and would be free for lunch on Saturday. It would be the closest any member of my family had ever gotten to Greensboro, my home for more than twenty years. After they married, she and Michael settled in Roanoke, Virginia, only two hours from Greensboro, close enough for a day trip. Neither Laura nor I had ever suggested taking advantage of the short distance between us. It would have been like making me a part of the annual beach reunion—unthinkable. But this was different. We'd be meeting each other halfway, literally, breaking bread on neutral ground.

Laura is a petite young woman. Standing next to her husband, who is a head taller and weighs two hundred-plus pounds, she looks tiny. She's only twenty but with her narrow, sloping shoulders, slender limbs, and small sharp-featured face, she could pass for sixteen. Her high-pitched voice adds to this impression, an impression not so much of immaturity as underdevelopment.

After handshakes and hugs under the hot sun, we enter the chain restaurant and grab a booth. I didn't get a chance to meet Michael at the wedding—to which I was invited—but we spoke last Christmas. Now, in answer to my question, he begins telling me about his and Laura's recent month-long stay in New Delhi. I've been eager to hear about it since my sister mentioned that Laura and Michael were going there for what I assumed was a sort of second honeymoon.

After we order our food, while Michael and I are talking, Laura, I notice, gives us her full attention. She's a good listener, genuinely interested, and yet she hasn't asked me a single question about myself. She's full of unforced optimism and good cheer, free of any trace of cynicism or angst or guilt—my specialties. She's like someone to whom nothing bad has ever happened. I don't think I've ever known anyone so innocent.

The only physical affection Laura and Michael allowed themselves during their eighteen-month engagement was holding hands. They waited

until the minister—Michael's father—pronounced them husband and wife to kiss for the first time.

I ask them what they saw on their trip. "Did you go to the Taj Mahal?"

"No," Laura says. "That's in Agra, which is like a hundred and fifty miles from New Delhi. We'll probably go after we're living there."

"You're going to be living in India?"

"Didn't my mom tell you? Michael and I are moving to New Delhi."

"You are?"

"But not for three years," Michael says. "Not until I graduate from seminary."

"What will you do there?"

"The Lord has called us to be missionaries to India," Laura says. "We'll be doing God's work."

I shouldn't be surprised, or disappointed, but I am. Contrary to my wishful thinking, Laura has never wavered in her faith.

"Not officially, of course," Michael says and explains that Christian proselytizing is heavily frowned upon in India, where it isn't outright illegal. He and Laura will take jobs in New Delhi with an American-affiliated company and do the Lord's business on the sly. How they will manage this without running afoul of the authorities I don't know and I don't want to know since what he's saying strikes me as outrageous, as the intrusive, presumptuous meddling in another country's ancient culture. If I were an Indian practicing my own time-honored religion, I'd be highly offended by these interlopers. But Laura and Michael, I know, are following the biblical injunction to spread the good news of Jesus Christ throughout the world, drilled into all fundamentalists from an early age, when they are made to feel responsible for the salvation of others.

We continue talking after our table's been cleared, but I'm finding it difficult to hold up my end of the conversation and wave the server over. We split the check. It was sweet of Laura to want to see me, a nice gesture. But as we separate in the parking lot after our rather superficial lunch, as we go our very different ways, I think we both know that we won't be meeting like this again.

It's not my family's fault that my mother left me with a life-long, neurotic fear of hell, or that I have a prejudice against religion—all religion—that I have to fight against every day. They are not the pious crazies so often depicted in books and movies. They are earnest, loving, well-meaning people, every bit as good as I am, probably better. They have never tried to convert—or rather reconvert—me, for which I am grateful. They have never pushed their views on me just as I have never pushed my views on them, which is all the more remarkable—and commendable—since we have so little respect for each other's views. Their approach to their religion is mild compared to my mother's, and yet their

doctrines are the same: salvation by faith alone, the inerrancy of Scripture, Christianity as the only way to heaven. Their doctrines are not mild. They're tough and they're hard, and I don't think my family would disagree. The Bible assures them, after all, " . . . strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

Of the many exhibits Laura has photographed at the Creation Museum, Noah's Ark seems to be her favorite. I can understand why. Judging from her many pictures of its dioramas, as well as what I've seen on the Web site, the museum has done an excellent job of recreating Noah's world. One scene depicts two women building wicker baskets to be used for storage during the forty days and nights of hard rain to come, another gives us a glimpse of Noah and his sons in their workshop, another shows the wooden cages where two of every animal (dinosaurs included) will be housed during the flood sent by God to wipe out corrupt humanity, sparing only Noah—the world's only righteous man—and his family. Laura has also photographed a cross-section of the Ark that reveals in impressive detail its many levels and rooms. Next she's photographed a part of the museum that has been turned into an approximate real-life section of the Ark; you can experience for yourself what it might have been like to be on board.

I remember when I was believer and read the Bible verses that gave the exact dimensions of the Ark—so many cubits wide, so many cubits high, so many cubits long. I have every confidence the museum has adhered with proportional fidelity to this description. Until now I'd never been clear on what exactly the Ark looked like. A helpful diorama shows the Ark in its final stages of construction, a bit of scaffolding attached to the bow. The exterior looks like varnished mahogany. The vessel's shape is sleek and elegant; there are no portholes, no masts, nothing to take away from its clean lines. Considerably longer than it is tall, it suggests a wooden clog specially made for a giant's very long, very narrow, very flat feet.

I don't recall whether the Bible says how long it took Noah to build the Ark, but I do remember that every sermon I ever heard about the flood speculated on the reaction of an Ark going up in the neighborhood, the taunts and insults Noah must have endured from the locals. The preachers, when they spoke of Noah's faith and determination in the face of such abuse, always made the congregation feel a little superior. I know I did. I was confident that if I'd been living back then I would have been totally supportive of Noah's efforts, never doubting his mission, offering constant encouragement, perhaps even helping out in construction. And the moment the rain started, I would have been right there with him when he climbed into the Ark. While I regretted missing out on this opportunity to demonstrate my own righteousness, I think I felt like everyone else in the

congregation. Though we weren't able to be on the Ark in body, we were on it in spirit, fellow survivors on God's great ship of grace and faith.

The Noah exhibit includes a scene of the flood waters beginning to recede, the Ark coming to rest on dry land; Noah and his family will soon disembark and start repopulating the earth. What interests me more, and what seemed to interest Laura too—she's photographed it from two different angles—is the diorama dramatizing the fate of the wicked. In it a rocky promontory juts out of a roiling sea, what I think the viewer is supposed to assume is the last mountain top, the last bit of the earth not under water. Standing among its crags are what's left of the human inhabitants. There is no diorama of hell at the Creation Museum, but there is this tableau, the sight of doomed souls looking toward the Ark and waving their arms, pleading for help, their last hope sailing past them on the dark, choppy waters.

I'm sure visitors to the Creation Museum feel pity for these sinners clinging to their rock, just as they feel pity for the sinners of their own acquaintance—family, friends, a next-door neighbor, the corner druggist—who are facing everlasting torment. Nevertheless, there is a voyeuristic component to this exhibit. It stirs the soul of the believer. It certainly stirred mine when I was young and came across artistic renderings of hell. The element here is water instead of fire, but it offers the same peek at the damned, the same but-for-the grace-of-God-there-go-I feeling, and with it the comforting sense of being on the right side of the battle between good and evil.

It stirs me now, but in a different way. It reminds me that metaphorically I am on that promontory and Laura is on the Ark. We are separated not by a stormy sea, however, but by an idea, an idea that will always separate us. Every moment the distance increases between us, every moment she drifts farther away. I wave to her from my vanishing perch, but not because I'm afraid, though I am, and not because I want to be rescued; there is no rescue. I'm waving, Laura, because you are nearly out of sight and growing fainter. I'm waving goodbye.

DANIELLE ARIANO

The Half-Light

When I step out of the bathroom, I smell it immediately. He's had another accident. lt's been happening once, maybe twice a week lately. I know that it's too late to do anything about it, so I don't rush down the steps in a panic. *What's done is done,* I think, as I finish pulling layers over my body, readying myself for work.

We are in the midst of another "polar vortex," according to the news. When I first heard the term, I imagined a team of meteorologists sitting in a closed-door meeting and brainstorming new ways to say that it was *really*, really cold outside:

> *Are you sure we can't just say that it's un-be-fucking-lievably cold*?
> *NO, the FCC, remember*?
> *Oh, right.*

For a while now I've suspected that meteorologists invent names for extreme weather events to make them sound more dramatic: Superstorm Sandy, Snowmageddon. As it turns out, a polar vortex is an actual thing—a semi-permanent system that usually swirls about out in the northern hemisphere. In places like Siberia and the North Pole, they're standard fare, but here in Maryland this kind of cold is unheard of.

Quietly, I leave the bedroom where my wife, Lindsay, is enjoying her last few minutes of slumber before her alarm sounds. I flip on a light and walk down the steps. The smell gets stronger. In the kitchen there are three brown mounds of shit.

Our younger golden retriever, Maddie, comes out from behind a bank of cabinets. She wags her tail innocently. If she were responsible for this mess she'd be slinking around with her ears back but since she's not, she bounds toward me, getting dangerously close to the poop.

"Stay," I say sternly, as I wrap a plastic grocery bag around my hand. I pick the mounds up, then pull the bag from my wrist and tie it shut. I walk briskly to the side door, where I throw the baggie toward our outside trashcan. A blast of freezing air takes me by surprise. Fucking vortex.

It's been well below freezing for days. Temperatures in the single digits with negative wind chills. On the news each night, there are stories about the weather.

Snow in Atlanta, freezing conditions in Florida.

Some kind of disturbance has caused parts of the polar vortex to snake southward. Arms of arctic air have been forced outward into regions of the U.S. long untouched by such frigid temperatures.

Wally is sprawled on his side in his usual spot, next to the container of food.

He is big for a golden, with long lanky legs that extend arthritically from his body. In the mornings and evenings he waits here, as if to remind us that we need to feed him.

"Hey, bud," I say, burying my hands in his thick fur. Over the years, his coat has turned coarse and curly from his numerous medications. He lifts his head slightly and then returns it to the floor. A long breath escapes through his nose.

He is thirteen and a half—a number that both sounds really old and not old enough. When I hear someone else say their dog is thirteen I think, *wow, old*, but when I hear myself say it, I think, *not enough*. I think, *I need more*, even though I know that we are lucky to have had this long.

In the past six months, Wally has lost his hearing. Both Lindsay and I have had a hard time adjusting to this change. I still find myself leaning out the door to call his name when he is in the yard; I still find myself surprised when he doesn't acknowledge me. Six months and I haven't adapted to this new state of being.

I open his food container and he immediately begins the work of getting himself into a standing position. After a couple of attempts, he manages to push the front of his body up, and for a moment he is a teetering triangle until he lifts his rear in slow increments.

I've gotten used to watching his struggle, in much the same way that I got used to watching my grandmother struggle as she grew old. Sometimes, I walked beside her as she made her way up the stone steps outside of her home, my hand on her elbow, as she moved one by one, her breathing labored.

She has been dead fifteen years, and I remember her long, slow decline as if it happened last week. It began with a series of falls: in the tub, in the kitchen, while shopping at BJ's. Broken bones: her collarbone, her ribs, her hip. Trips to the ER. Stints in rehab. Her body, bruised. Her ankles, thick with fluid. All these signs of what was to come and still, when she finally stopped breathing, nobody was prepared. The paramedics were called to revive her. I still find myself wondering how it is that nobody was prepared.

Sometimes, when I watch Wally struggling to stand up, I rush to lift his back half, as if I could erase the wear and tear on his joints, the years that he has lived. It is strange, knowing that his end is near. Strange and beautiful and sad all at once.

It has tempered me, made me more patient, more aware of moments, more forgiving. I am the best version of myself, knowing that he hasn't got long. It is a gift, this knowledge, though difficult to accept. A gift, similar in shape and size to the wisdom gleaned from mistakes—something gained bound up with something lost. Painful. Necessary. Unavoidable.

At times, I've refused it, crossing my arms over my chest and shaking my head no, like an insistent and stubborn child who wants desperately to go back to the time when tomorrow wasn't a question, when I had the luxury of taking life, his life, for granted. Making plans to do things without thought. *This weekend we will go for a swim. We will go to the park. We will. We will. We will.*

Maddie, who is almost seven, bounces up and down. Wally nudges the food container, as if to say that I am not moving fast enough.

"OK, OK," I say, even though he cannot hear me.

I pour the first half of their food into each bowl. This is our morning ritual.

Half a cup followed by Wally's meds stuffed into sweet potato, then the remainder of their food. Lindsay will feed them dinner the same way and afterwards, Wally will move to the living room where he likes to roll on his back and playfully snarl while rubbing his paws against his white face.

This morning, while the dogs are eating, Lindsay comes downstairs. She's in a rush to get to an eight o'clock meeting. She opens and closes doors—the closet, the refrigerator—grabbing shoes, jackets, and items for her lunch. She is all nervous energy in the mornings, dashing from place to place, always leaving a minute later than she intended.

"Does this look OK?" she asks about her outfit. She is dressed in heavy work jeans and a greyish-blue top. Her meeting will be on a jobsite and she will have to stand around in the freezing cold, the vortex chilling her to the bone. "Is the top too close to the color of my jeans?"

"lt looks OK," I say slowly, half wondering why she is so concerned when it's going to get covered up by a coat.

"I'm actually going to be in the office afterwards, so people are going to see my clothes," she says, as if she can read my mind.

"Well, it'd look better with tan pants, but it looks fine with jeans."

She disappears upstairs, and returns with a different top. The hanger scrapes across the bar in the closet as she grabs her jacket. Shoes thump as she rifles through the pile. These are the sounds that make up our mornings. They are routine.

Expected. A thing to be counted on.

When she moves into the kitchen, she crouches next to Wally, who is sprawled in the middle of the thoroughfare. She puts her face next to his and whispers to him while delicately stroking his head. Every morning she does this at least once. In the midst of her whirlwind, she squats next to him as if she has no place to be, and for a moment all of her nervousness evaporates. It is one of my favorite things to watch.

When she stands, we kiss goodbye, and she moves out into the cold. Wally gets up slowly and walks to the window. His nails tap on the hardwood floor with each step. He stands there, watching Lindsay get into her car.

I watch him, staring out at her. He's not very mobile anymore. Most days, when I get home, I find him sleeping in the same spot that I left him. He'll look up at me with half-closed eyes, his jowls sagging, his tail thumping gently. I've come to count on this, to expect it the way that I expect so many things to unfold in the course of a day—work, dinner, bedtime, repeat. And yet each day there is a moment where I find myself standing at the door, fumbling with my keys and a thought speeds through my mind, tiny and dim, like a bottle rocket in the night, *what if he didn't make it through the day*?

This split second is the only consideration I give to the possibility of a change that is inevitably coming. A change that will cause my life to splinter—in the way that only great sadness or great joy can—into epochs of before or after. Before my grandmother got sick. After I married Lindsay. Before Wally died. The passage of time, measured through life events.

When this change comes, when Wally is finally gone, I will be both shocked and not shocked. Prepared and unprepared. I will watch my life swirling around this great disturbance, offshoots of pain reaching places long untouched, though the possibility will have been there all along hovering, threatening, an inevitable promise.

Wally continues to watch out the window until Lindsay's car is out of sight.

He then looks at me quizzically. I look back into his soft, brown eyes.

"I know," I say. "Don't worry bud. She'll be home later."

She will. She will. She will.

BECKY HAGENSTON

A Happy Life

The two children were outside again, half-naked, shrieking in that disgusting sandbox. And of course the mother was nowhere to be found. She wasn't peeking through the tattered shade; she wasn't smoking on the back patio, or on the front steps (Christine had a clear view of the side and front of the house). The mangy black dog was the only baby-sitter, and it had wound itself around the magnolia tree and seemed to be strangling itself to death.

Christine marched out to her front porch. It was a bright Tuesday morning in early June; the Mississippi sun was already beating down. Did the dog even have water? There was a tipped-over tin dish in the dirt, so apparently not. The family had been living across the street for three weeks now, but Christine didn't know anything about them, even their names.

It wasn't as if she was meddling, she told herself as she crossed the street in her flip flops. She was just a concerned neighbor. She walked across the crab grass, and the two children—a boy and a girl, maybe eight and six years old—stopped digging and stared. The boy had what looked like a bruise on his forehead. The girl's green halter top had untied (or had never been tied) and drooped to reveal two flat baby nipples. Both children had what she hoped was strawberry jam on their chins.

"Hiya!" Christine said, cheerfully. She had no idea how to talk to kids, especially when she was trying to figure out if they were being neglected or abused. "What're ya'll up to? I'm Christine, from right over there." She pointed.

Neither child said a word. For a terrifying second, Christine wondered if they both might be deaf. Then the girl smiled, revealing a chipped front tooth, and said, "Making sand babies."

"Cakes," the boy corrected. "Sand cakes." He wiped the bruise—a smudge—off his forehead and yawned.

"Yummy," said Christine. It must be ninety degrees already, at seven A.M. In an hour, Christine would be sitting in a cold classroom, trying to pay attention to an accounting teacher who barely spoke English. Then at five, she would be serving drinks to her classmates at Bell's Pizza on

Main Street. It was this series of depressing thoughts that had propelled her across the street to begin with and which now prompted her to kneel next to the sandbox and say, very nicely, "Where's your mommy?"

"Work," said the girl, and started smacking the sand with an open palm. Her legs were completely covered in the damp, dirty sand; she looked like a white trash mermaid washed ashore in Pensacola. Christine reached into the box and pulled out a cigarette butt and flicked it onto the grass.

"Oh, good, she's at work!" Christine said, thinking, *child neglect.* "And she left you here by yourselves?"

"Annie Grace is coming over," the boy said. "And the door is unlocked so we can go inside when we want to." He stared at her gravely. "You should go now," he said.

"Okey-doke." Christine rose, wiping off her knees. "Can I help untangle your doggie?" The dog was straining and whining. She approached it, hand outstretched, and it strained and whined harder.

"He bites," the girl said.

"You should get him a shorter leash," Christine said. "And will you refill his water, please? He looks thirsty." She wondered if she sounded too bossy. But the boy leapt from the sandbox, grabbed the tin bowl, and filled it with water from a garden hose. He set it next to the dog, which yelped and began lapping with such ferocity that most of the water flicked onto the ground.

So, at least she had done some good in the world, Christine thought, as she walked back to her house. At least there was one less cigarette butt in the sandbox, and one less thirsty creature because of her, and that was certainly more than she had done for anyone lately.

Later, it would seem unbelievably quaint: writing a letter to the paper. Christine would tell her future husband, Gordon, about this on their third date, how Boardtown had been so small then, back in the early nineties, that a letter to the editor served the same purpose as a gossip column. So if you read about a church-going man who drank too much on Sunday mornings, the entire congregation of First Baptist would know that it was Henry Starkey (confirming their suspicions), and now that it was in print, they felt free to dispense the information to their friends and neighbors.

The letter was an anonymous editorial against the proposal to lift the Sunday alcohol ban, but everyone knew it was written by Henry's wife. *If a person already feels the need to drink whiskey in the morning before church, imagine what would happen if this person could legally obtain such substances after church, in a reputable establishment?*

Then someone else wrote to express his belief that lifting the ban on Sunday sales would result in "a rash of rapes" in the community. Look

what had happened over in Garretsville, he wrote, when they lifted their ban. That girl from the community college had been attacked in broad daylight, and now she had that colored child. The writer of the letter was Mr. Bernard Hawes, and it was fairly common knowledge that his eighteen-year-old niece had an adorable black baby. He showed off the pictures in church. The boy was in the military.

"So he started a rumor that she was *raped*?" Gordon asked, incredulously. Gordon was from Brooklyn. He had never lived in a place with a population of less than 500,000. He was studying at the vet school, and he met Christine at a grad school event; they were older by fifteen years than the rest of the students and had bonded over memories of typewriters and landlines.

"The South, as you may have noticed, has its elements of fucked-upness," Christine told him. She clinked her beer glass with his. They were at the pizza place where she had once worked and which now catered to sorority/fraternity types and their parents. They had good drink specials.

"Did you ever write a letter?" Gordon asked. "Just to see what would happen?"

"Oh, God no!" Christine said. And then she took a breath and downed the rest of her beer—because, of course, she had.

"It's not that I worry about them dying or being abducted or anything," Christine told her mother, who called from Atlanta twice a week. "It just bothers me. The mother actually seems sort of nice, but she's clearly messed up." She had no idea why she said this: the mother (small, round-faced, black-haired) had waved at her once. She seemed perfectly normal. But now, saying this—*She's clearly messed up*—somehow made it alarming and true.

"So go over and talk to her," was her mother's reasonable advice.

It was the end of July, and now that summer school was over, Christine could spend all morning observing the goings-on across the street. There was, in fact, a small black woman—apparently Annie Grace—who came over between eight and two and during those times the yard was empty and the house silent. Even the dog gave up whining and collapsed against the tree with its eyes closed. At two o'clock, Annie Grace would slam out the front door and drive off in her small blue Honda; by two-fifteen, the children would be in the sandbox again, the dog would be whining, and Christine would plant herself on her own front porch and just watch, though she wasn't entirely sure what she was watching for. The mother came home at five-thirty. "I'm thinking about it," Christine said. She was standing on her front porch, the phone cord stretched from the kitchen. Her street was lined sparsely with pastel shotgun-style houses, most of them with small, sturdy gates in the backyard to

contain various animals: dogs, mostly, but there were a couple of chickens at the end of the street. Christine's house was a pale yellow one-bedroom that had once belonged to a friend of her parents'. As soon as she graduated from college, her parents had informed her, they were selling it. Considering that Christine had gotten a D in her summer accounting class and dropped her summer session math course, there didn't seem to be any danger of that happening soon.

"How are classes?" her mother asked.

"They're great," said Christine, because certainly they must be, for somebody.

"Your father says hi. Your brother is here. We all miss you."

Which of course translated to: Why did you leave us? Can't you see we're all fine now? Nobody is yelling and I'm not threatening to kill myself and your father broke up with that woman and your brother isn't drinking as much.

"I miss you, too," Christine said.

But she didn't go talk to the mother, or to Annie Grace, nor did she walk across the street again to pick cigarettes out of the sandbox. Instead, she put her chair next to the living room window and she watched. Once, the boy set up a sprinkler (he seemed pretty smart, the boy), and he and the little girl ran through it, shrieking in their swimsuits. Occasionally they would disappear into the house, sometimes together, and sometimes one at a time. The dog came in when Annie Grace arrived, and she tied it up before she left.

Christine started timing her trips to the mailbox to coincide with the neighbors' trips, sometimes checking the mail two or three times a day.

"What do you know about the family with the kids over there?" Christine asked the neighbor on the left—a snaggle-toothed retiree named Doris. "I sometimes see them playing outside by themselves."

"Aren't they cute? I haven't seen a daddy over there."

"I don't think there is one, not living there at least."

"Must be hard on the little ones."

Then the handle-bar-mustached man on the right, who said, "I seen her drinking a beer on the porch late one night. But there ain't nothing wrong with that, now is there?" Then he laughed and slapped Christine on the shoulder.

The tall black woman on the right of the children's house said, "She came over once to borrow milk, and I thought: what kind of a mother don't have milk in the house?"

"It's worrisome," Christine said. "I think I saw a bruise on the boy once." Of course, she knew it was just dirt, but she said it anyway.

The woman widened her eyes. "Now that's a shame," she said.

And to the elderly man catty-corner, Christine said, "I saw them once, with what may have been blood on their faces. It could have been jam, though."

He shook his head. "I worry about them folks," he said. "I'll keep them in my prayers."

It gnawed at her, an animal in her belly. She thought of the raccoon she had seen by the bird feeder, big-eyed with sharp and tiny claws, chewing on seeds. It had stared dopily at her, too stupid to be afraid, then lumbered into the dark. Sometimes she woke up in the middle of the night, in her narrow bed, and thought she could hear it scratching beneath the house.

She had to do something. Her mother told her to go on dates, to graduate already, to find a real life. She had been late to work three times in two weeks. What was wrong with her?

Do something, she thought.

She told herself it was a good deed. She was acting out of kindness. Or was she just curious? Nosy? Bored? Trying to distract herself? She never was sure.

Dear Editors:

I am a longtime resident of Boardtown and I'm writing with a very pressing concern. It has to do with the current animal control laws. I live in a neighborhood that has many dogs, and while most of them are kept in fenced yards, there is one family that keeps their dog chained to a tree.

When I called Animal Control, I was informed that this was not against any kind of code. It's not only the safety of the animal that concerns me, however, but also of the children who play in the yard (in a rather filthy sandbox) next to the dog. It seems possible that a distressed animal might be likely to bite one of these children. (The mother, unfortunately, does not seem to be home for much of the day.)

I just wanted to express my concerns.

Sincerely,
A Worried Citizen

What happened next was not, could not have been, her fault. Could it? Just two days after the letter was printed? (The editor had printed his own letter beneath hers, expressing his belief that the care of animals and children was an indicator of moral responsibility, and leash laws would do nothing but fill up the jail and not dissuade such "immoral citizens such as your neighbor" from "doing what is right in God's eyes." It did not strike

her as odd for a newspaper editor to use this kind of language. He strongly urged her to contact local authorities the next time she felt the children were in imminent danger.)

But she didn't think they were in danger, not really. Her own mother had left her and her brother Tom home by themselves after school, hadn't she? To fend for themselves. Once, Tom had chased her around the house with a broom and she'd fallen down the stairs. Another time, she had nearly tumbled from a second-floor window. On Saturday afternoons in the summer, they tramped off through the woods behind their house for hours, built forts and hunted Bigfoot. But no one called the cops, not even when her father fired off a shotgun in the back yard as a warning—for what, she couldn't remember.

She was at work when it happened, and so the next morning she didn't know why Annie Grace didn't show, or why the dog and the children never appeared in the back yard. She ran outside when she saw Doris watering her lawn.

"Do you know what's going on over there?" she asked, and Doris nodded solemnly.

"Car came and took the kids away. They were screaming bloody murder. I'm surprised you didn't hear it."

"I was working at Bell's Pizza."

"I'm surprised you didn't hear the commotion all the way over there!" She shook her head, dribbling the hose on Christine's shoes. "They even took the dog."

Christine knew, from her neighborly gossiping (she hated to think of it that way, but that's what it was), that the mother worked at the B-Quik on the corner of Jackson and Highway 82. Three days after a car came to take away the dog and the children, Christine drove there, telling herself she just needed gas. Or maybe some fried chicken. She'd been there before, but only at night after work. The parking lot was full, and when she entered the store she found herself already part of a long line, snaking almost back to the beer aisle and then around again: mostly men, construction-types, black, white and Mexican; and a couple of women in cartoon-printed hospital scrubs.

It was too early to drink beer, but not too early to buy it. There had been several contentious letters to the editor in recent weeks about the law against buying cold beer in the county. Proponents of the law believed it deterred drinking and driving; opponents believed it encouraged such behavior. *If I have to drive all the way to the next county for cold beer, what do you think I'm going to do in the car on the way home? Enjoy one, that's right.* The anonymous writer who was concerned about a certain

church-goer's whiskey habit expressed her opinion that cold beer was just another rung on the ladder down to hell.

The children's mother was wearing her dark hair in a hair net and plucking fried chicken thighs with tongs from a large metal tray, tossing them into paper boxes. "Next!" she shouted, as she shoved a paper box at a bearded man whose entire body seemed to be stained the color of nicotine. She looked highly annoyed. But who wouldn't be, working at a place like that during lunch hour? The woman she was working next to was friendlier, calling a loud, "How you!" every time the bell above the door rang.

Christine pulled a six-pack of Bud Light from a shelf and maneuvered herself into the mother's line.

"You find ever-thing okay?" she asked, without looking up.

"I have," said Christine. "But how's the chicken?"

The woman looked at her. Up close she was much younger than Christine had expected—maybe not even thirty. Her face was clear and lovely; her eyes flashed. "It's great," she said flatly.

"Never mind," said Christine. Did the woman recognize her? Christine was suddenly certain that she did. That she recognized her, and knew what she'd done. "This will do me."

"You have a nice day," the woman said, handing over her change. "Come back."

Cold beer on a Sunday: that's what did it, what made her walk across the street one suffocatingly hot evening. She had already downed two beers fast to work up her courage. Beer made her lonely: didn't it make everyone lonely? She stood on the woman's front porch in her bare feet and rapped hard on the door. After a long, long moment, the woman appeared, her eyes wide as if she knew Christine was there to deliver terrible news.

"I recognized you in the store that day," Christine said. "I thought, she looks like she could use a beer. I know it's Sunday and all, but I had some left and I wondered if you'd care to have one with me."

"Oh," said the woman. Her eyes looked a little bloodshot. She smiled. "Well, hell yes, I suppose I would."

Her name was Brenda and her children were Carla and Jack, and the dog's name was Blackie. She and Christine sat on plastic chairs on the front porch, smoking cigarettes and drinking Sunday beer, and twice Christine saw the catty-corner man peek out his window and stare at them. When Christine had first moved in, he'd come over to invite her to church. She had told him she didn't go to church, and he'd said, grimly, "Well, may God find his way into your heart anyway," and she'd been highly irritated. Why did everybody need to know everything about everybody? But she was worse than he was, obviously.

"You probably saw what happened," Brenda said. "With my kids."

"I didn't, actually. I was at work. What did happen?"

Brenda exhaled; the smoke gathered by the porch light, misting the mosquitoes. She slapped at her ankle. "My sister-in-law came to take them away. Got a court order. Said she'd heard rumors that I was neglecting my kids. Since when do you get a court order for rumors?" She shook her head, and so did Christine. The beer was making her brain feel buzzy.

"My husband died six months ago, and I was living with her, in Birmingham. But she's so goddamn awful. My pastor knew some people here and said he could help me find a job and find a lady to watch the kids a few hours. And Blackie. I'm sorry if he was barking."

"Oh, he wasn't," Christine said quickly. Her heart felt like an old electrical appliance, something dangerous and poorly wired.

She waited for Brenda to mention the letter in the newspaper—the source of the rumors?—but she didn't.

"Now that horrible woman and her horrible husband have my kids. I know I'm a awful mother." She took a deep breath and stared into her beer, wiped at her eyes with the corner of her hand.

Christine reached over and put her hand on Brenda's wrist. "I went over here once to say hello. Your kids were real polite. Jack refilled Blackie's bowl, and they seemed real safe and happy. You are a *good* mother."

Brenda nodded. "You just want your kids to have a happy life," she said.

"I know," said Christine. "Say, maybe we can hang out again later this week."

"I've got a lot going on," Brenda said. "But maybe."

She had thought they might be friends. She had imagined many evenings drinking beer on the porch, maybe even going bowling, or to the movies. It was as if her loneliness was one of those spiders that lived in the cracks of her house, something that had crawled out fully formed, demanding some kind of action. Squash it? Shoo it outside? Or put it in a jar and watch it weave a strange and sickly web? But the next day, Brenda said she didn't really feel like drinking beer, and the next she didn't answer the door, or the next. She was gone most weekends, presumably to Birmingham to see the children.

Did she know about the letter? Had her awful sister-in-law told her that a neighbor (Worried Citizen) had written it? If Brenda did know, even if she did—she wouldn't know that Christine had written it, would she? And it would do no good to bring it up. And there was no guarantee of forgiveness, of course. Nor perhaps even a possibility of it.

The only thing to do was nothing and that was more difficult than Christine expected.

In August, a U-Haul backed into Brenda's driveway, and two bearded men in overalls began hauling boxes out of the house. Brenda stood on the lawn, smoking, with her arms crossed and frowning. It occurred to Christine, as she jogged across the street, that perhaps Brenda had been evicted—but for what? For rumors?

"Where are you going?" Christine asked.

"My kids hate me," Brenda said, blowing smoke into the air. "I been fighting for custody, but my sister-in-law is poisoning them against me, so I have to move there. I am not unfit."

"You're a good mother," Christine said.

Brenda gave her a watery-eyed smile. "You've been good to me," she said. "Not like that Annie Grace. I know it was her that spread those rumors."

"Really?" said Christine.

"You can be sure she won't work in this town again, after what I've been saying about her. Anyway, sorry I ain't been much of a friend." And then she gave Christine a quick hug and went back inside. One of the bearded men shoved past Christine, hoisting a red sofa, and she muttered, "Excuse me," and ran back across the street to watch from her porch. Some of the other neighbors had come out on their own porches, and she thought: *Go back inside, you assholes. Nothing to see here.*

But this was over twenty years ago. It feels like twenty years, if Christine thinks (she sometimes does) about all that's transpired since: her father's shocking but somehow unsurprising death in a Jackson bar fight; her mother's death from colon cancer; her brother's two years in prison, his newfound religion, his kind-eyed wife, their four children; her own hilarious and tragic marriage to an Italian engineering student that ended in divorce after less than a year; her rise from waitress at Bell's to supervisor, manager, then MBA student and owner.

And all around her, the town kept changing. That's what still unsettles her sometimes: the sushi restaurants, boutiques, martini bars. A Hilton Garden Hotel where the Catfish Shack used to be. Her old yellow house was torn down and rebuilt as a bright pink two-story faux-antebellum. Bell's is still on Main Street, but now there's cappuccino in the afternoons and free WiFi and trivia night every Wednesday. And the *Boardtown Dispatch* is online now, so people can leave nasty comments about pretty much anything, including each other.

"I can't imagine what it used to be like here," Gordon said to her once, and she agreed that he probably couldn't.

"Today you see black kids and white kids walking around together. You wouldn't have seen that. And now there's cold beer—on a Sunday, no less!"

"Such a scandal. I wonder what happened to the old woman and her whiskey-drinking husband."

"Me too," she said, although they never really crossed her mind.

Gordon hadn't wanted kids, but he loved Christine, and so at thirty-nine she gave birth to their first daughter, Gloria; two years later, after a terrifying pregnancy, she had Tina. And when Gloria was four, Christine suggested to Gordon that he bring home one of the abandoned puppies from the vet clinic—people were horrible, leaving their animals and not coming to pick them up. He brought home a white mutt named Dixie.

"I was picturing a black dog," she said. "But she's pretty damn cute."

They built a five-foot-high fence so the dog would have room to play. Then, because Christine asked him to, Gordon made the fence even higher—hammering on another two feet of plywood—shielding them entirely from their neighbors. One spring, when the magnolias were in bloom, she ordered a sandbox from Lowe's, and she stood by while Gordon hauled the heavy bags of sand into the box.

"No peeing in here, kids," he said, and the little girls laughed. Gloria made tiny sculptures and Tina loved to dig, and Christine made sure they were slathered in sunscreen and wore their tiny visors and had plenty of lemonade to drink.

She went online and tried to find Brenda and Carla and Jack—even Annie Grace—but she was never sure if she did, and then she felt ashamed.

It's still there, sometimes, the scrabbling animal in her belly. In the bright early mornings, she goes out to the sandbox alone and digs through it with her hands and with the children's shovels, removing dead leaves, twigs, bugs, flecks of mud, anything the wind might have blown in amongst the perfect, shimmering grains.

JAMES KNISELY

Riding the Storm

I

Kerouac missed his chance. Jack, I mean, not the other one. He missed his shot at immortality. Sure, he's famous, but he had a chance to become and to soar and finally to tell us things we didn't already know—and he blew it.

He went to the mountain looking for God but came face to face with only himself—and The Void. Well, after all, he was a fire lookout. Any lookout who has ever looked out from some lonely mountain has met The Void. But at the end of his only summer on the mountain, Kerouac ran away. And what he lost by never coming back was the chance to discover that the void is not merely the "abysmal nothingness" he found (mainly within) or the empty silence of the mountain Hozomeen and to see for himself that the void is also the chaos, the creation of galaxies by the flap of a wing. What he missed was the chance to discover that the void and the chaos are one, and together are the face of God.

He abandoned the mountain for a couple of reasons. One was his disappointment, his feeling that Desolation Peak, "that hated rock-top trap," had let him down. The other was the girls of Mexico City. Let's not blame our loss on them—they were only busy being who they were. But maybe if he hadn't craved their company so much. . . . All he had to do was return to his mountain for another summer or two, as Snyder did, or Whalen, and he might have seen everything for himself. But the señoritas called and Jack went, never to see the mountaintop again.

II

In June 1961, just a few years after Kerouac's legendary sojourn on Desolation Peak, I arrived for the summer at Little Mountain Lookout, a lonely sentinel above Washington's Cedar River. This was my second summer on the Cedar. I was still searching for my voice as a novelist or a poet, so in the summer of 1961 I came back to the solitude of the mountain.

Kerouac's lookout was a sturdy cottage on a barren summit in the North Cascades. Mine was a very tall tower atop a rather small mountain a hundred miles south of Desolation. At 110 feet, the Little Mountain tower was said to be the tallest in Washington State, twenty feet higher than the fabled structure on Tiger Mountain to the west. And not just tall but spindly, a tinkertower of ancient sticks so skinny and wobbly it put me more in mind of eternity than Kerouac's cozy bungalow (I've been there) ever could.

The tower had no room for lodgings of any kind. The tiny cabin or "cab" at the top had space only for an Osborne Fire Finder with a two-way radio tucked underneath and a glass-footed wooden chair. The catwalk around the outside of the cab was just wide enough for me to survey my domain, as I was required to do four or five times an hour.

I lived in a slightly larger cabin in the clearing below the tower. Food and water came up the mountain by truck. Electricity was produced by a gas-powered generator near the base of the tower. The generator charged only a battery, and the battery ran only the radio. Since the living quarters and the cab were separated by 110 vertical feet of wooden steps, the tower gave me a modicum of exercise to compensate for a job that mainly required sitting around—getting in a little reading or writing if possible—and shuffling about for ten or twelve watchful hours a day.

The lookout towered above the already old second-growth Douglas firs and hemlocks that covered much of the mountain, making it a prime target for lightning strikes, from which it was protected by a grid of heavy copper wires. A wire with a sharpened point rose from each corner of the cab to just above the peak of the roof.

These four lightning rods were connected by a wire that ran around the top of the cab and by another wire around the bottom. Each of the four lightning rods continued down its corner of the cab and down that leg of the tower to metal posts buried in the ground, creating a grounded "cage" that surrounded the cab. In theory, the cage protected the interior of the cab . . . and anyone foolish enough to be in it during a storm. That's what they said.

My job in the summer of 1961 was to stay at Little Mountain during dry weather, which even in the Cascades could last as long as a month at a time. I worked for the Seattle Water Department, guardian of the river from which the city drew its water. I ran up the tower first thing each morning to look around for smoke, then back down to fix breakfast, then back up by 8:00 to start the day's watch. I kept watch, checking in with the Water Department from time to time, until 5:00 or 6:00 P.M., then

descended to the cabin to fix dinner. After running back up a couple of times during the evening, I would turn in about 10:00.

I was snoozing soundly one night when a hammering at the door blasted me awake. The hour was about 12:30. I staggered out of bed and found Joe Monahan—my boss—on the steps. His rig idled behind him.

"Haven't you heard the thunder?" he asked. "There's a storm coming in. I need you up the tower." He was heading into the upper watershed towards Yakima Pass, but he needed me to watch for strikes from here.

"Stay in the cab till it blows over," he said. "Turn your radio on, but don't use it till the lightning has stopped. And for God's sake, stay inside the cage." Then he was gone.

I dressed quickly and hustled up the 197 steps of the tower to the "safety" of the cab and its cage. I turned the radio on and squared my chair around so it was touching nothing but the floor with only its glass feet.

Through the night a heavy blackness advanced from the west. At first there were only occasional flashes in the oncoming gloom, but by the time the storm reached my puny mountain it was popping in earnest. I didn't see any strikes, but soon I was engulfed in the clouds and couldn't see anything at all. Bursts of lightning surrounded me now in the dark and the fog, followed more and more closely by thunderclaps that rattled my trembly tower.

The cab had drop shutters that were hinged at the tops of the walls so that when they were down they covered the windows. Opened and propped up on poles, they created great wing-like eaves that covered the catwalk and protected the cab from the sun. Wing-like. I found no comfort in the thought.

As I sat in my hopeless chair staring into the fog and the murk and those terrible flashes, the hinges and bolts and nailheads of the shutters began to glow with an eerie blue light. I watched in disbelief while ghostly fireballs, tiny wills-o'-the-wisp, glimmered forth and commenced to dance fantastically on my shutters in the night.

I remembered hearing once of such a thing, a wonder called St. Elmo's fire. They tell me it's an electrical discharge that occurs when a current passes through ionized air, but at the time I knew only that it had a name. I wouldn't have doubted for a second I was getting some ionized air.

I thought very hard, though, about eternity, and prayed that St. Elmo hadn't been part of some cruel joke. I didn't know this either, but Carl Jung had written that St. Elmo's fire is evidence of the existence of God. Just then it was evidence to me only of the *fear* of God, which began to well up in me like an icy spring.

The fireballs danced for maybe a minute, a frenzied fandango that taunted my mortality and sang to me of the chaos in which we hang sus-

pended. Then, with a flash and a deafening clap, the cloud that had become my universe blew its charge.

The dancing lights went out. Even so, I remained frozen to my chair, carefully keeping my feet off the floor, wondering what might come next. The wind had risen in gusts that buffeted the cab and its wings like a box kite in a hurricane. I closed my eyes and prayed once more that this old tower might have one more proper shaking left in its bones.

Before long the fireballs flickered back to life. This time, as the hardware began to glow, I became aware of a buzzing behind me in the corner of the cab, the death throes, I thought, of a fly, beating its wings in a frantic struggle to survive the storm. Maybe the fly had become ionized too—or was gaping into the void. It occurred to me that it might even be involved in the destruction of a galaxy—possibly *this* one.

The buzzing grew louder and louder until I realized that it might not be some hapless insect after all but a terrible new sign of the wrath of the Cosmos. As the tower shook and the buzzing swelled and Elmo's ghosties grew brighter and brighter, another flash and thunderous crack exploded just outside, and the bedlam in the corner, like the fireballs, stopped cold.

It came to me then: the buzzing mere inches from my right buttock was the sound of ten million volts of cumulonimboid energy racing to the ground (or, technically, *from* the ground) through the grid of rods and wires that tied my little cab to the earth. Only that cage and its ground-wires stood between me and a dark and angry universe.

In spite of the peril into which I had been thrust, as a fire lookout I was useless. I could see nothing. Beyond St. Elmo's flameballs and the fog and those hair-raising fulgurations I saw no strikes, no fires, no mountains, not even the treetops below me; no evidence of any kind of the world in which I had thought I lived. I was adrift, staring wide-eyed into the heart of the universe itself. Yet suddenly, in the flash of a different kind of lightning, I knew that I was glad to be there. I was happy—not just to be alive but alive and riding the storm.

The tempest raged for what seemed half the night, though probably for no more than an hour. However long it lasted, it carried me to places I had never been and filled me with awe by an unexpected revelation: that the great void of the universe embraces both the silence of Kerouac's mountaintop and the tumult of the chaos from which we have all so recently emerged and into which we will all so soon return. That night revealed to me that swirling about (and passing through) our pitiful selves are forces we might certainly fear but with which we might also dance our too-short nights away.

I'll never begrudge Kerouac his Mexican girls. Ah, Mexico! There's more than one way to dance the night away. Even so, I can't help thinking that by never coming back he missed a vast and insane opportunity to discover a new dimension of the "vast and insane legend" of his life. To fly the chaos and stare into the void and dance with the blue lights of the universe—now *there's* a meeting with God.

III

After the storm that night came the rain. In the Cascades, raining is not storming; it's what we call summer. All the same, it rained harder than usual for the rest of the night, lowering the fire hazard to nearly zero. Once the rain let up, I kept watch under dark skies for another day or two just to make certain no ember or smoldering snag survived, then someone drove up the mountain and hauled me down to headquarters at Cedar Falls.

Days later I was still at Cedar Falls, swabbing the urinals and sweeping the shop. The woods remained damp, so I wasn't on the mountain. One afternoon we received a report of smoke near the top of McClellan Butte, a higher peak just a mile or so north of Little Mountain. Loggers who were working in those days on the Cedar may have seen it. Or maybe it was spotted from the air, I don't remember. The airplane augured even then the demise of the lookout. In any event, the smoke was almost certainly the result of that storm—*my* storm.

Because I was available, I went up with the crew to the fire. Thinking I was in good shape because of my summer of tower climbing, Joe had me carry one of our 5-gallon backpack pumps, our only water supply. I wasn't in the condition he had hoped but I managed to reach the fire, which was smoldering in a couple hundred square yards of the steep forest floor.

We spent the afternoon turning duff with our shovels and mixing it with mineral earth and wetting the hot spots as well as we could. The next day I was hauled back to Little Mountain to keep an eye on it. But we had done a good job, and the fire never flared again. Maybe I had earned my keep after all—not by the romantic heroism of flying the storm but by the gritty, sweaty work of turning the earth.

Yet that single night's hour of wildness ignited something new in me, something astonishing, a sense of how the energy of the universe passes through us as we pass through it.

That was fifty years and a couple of lifetimes ago. I suppose that means I'm older now—and hopefully a little wiser. Whatever Kerouac found,

whatever he learned about passing through the void, I can tell you this: he missed his shot. He could have been immortal. I'm certainly not—but I'm not Jack Kerouac. What if *he* had gone back? What if *he* had peered into the storm and passed through the chaos and lived to write about *that*? One day, one night, as the storm descended on Desolation, Jack might have found what he sought. And who knows what he might have told us then?

DAVID RANEY

Get Together

Like a lot of people, I say I like all kinds of music, but I don't. I can't warm to rap, and the electronic robo-tones swaddling a lot of today's vocals leave me cold too, wishing for a human voice that thrillingly doesn't crack because it might. I no longer like most of the metal that clanged through my teens, I turn off the lumbering prog-rock on "classic" stations, and opera—aside from eight or ten meltingly beautiful arias—strikes me as so much sonic waterboarding. On the other hand, I think opting for only one genre ("Hip-hop speaks to me, the rest is advertising"; "I listen to country, it's about real people") marks you as someone who's not truly listening. Keep your radio dial jammed in one place, wait for your app to recommend MP3s with the same musical DNA as the last four, and you're mainly looking in mirrors. To me, the most interesting part of every house is the windows.

I've been obsessed with music for long enough that I find it still stranger to meet somebody who doesn't listen at all. Once when I taught college, we were studying Shakespeare's sonnet "My Mistress's Eyes Are Nothing Like the Sun," and I mentioned the Sting album that borrows its title from it. The students looked blank. "The Police?" got no more response, so I asked what they listened to—not to seem hipper than I was (or not only that) but because I can't help myself. This got mostly shrugs and "Nothing, you know, whatever." Of course I've had students who were passionate and articulate about music, and I sincerely hope the rest simply didn't find it worth discussing with Professor Tangent. Because the alternative, that music doesn't make them shout or cry or even take notice, is insupportable. Kids are supposed to listen to music that, at a bare minimum, annoys the shit out of their parents. Clearly they don't have to like my music; they weren't alive when I was in college. (Although . . . the *Police*? I wasn't alive in 1955 either, but I know "Maybelline.") Dylan said you gotta serve somebody, and to my mind, maybe you hate Dylan, but you gotta love something.

I'm fudging, then, when I say I like it all, but if the word eclectic means anything, it means the crazy neighborhood crowding my shelves and iPod. "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom," William Blake claimed, and that may be so. It certainly leads to a house full of CDs. Jazz, rock and folk, indie and mainstream, roadhouse raucousness, coffee house quiet—I like to imagine Yo-Yo Ma handing off solos to Doc Watson, or Delbert McClinton blowing harp with Third World, Kasey Chambers taking turns at the mic with Steve Forbert and Etta James, Shawn Colvin and Billie Holiday killing a duet. Or maybe Merle Haggard sitting in with Peter Wolf, John Hiatt with Lyle Lovett, Bonnie Raitt sharing a stage with the Neville Brothers.

I did get to hear the last three, one recorded and two live, and isn't that the great thing about music—its odd bedfellows and metamorphoses? But unlike celebrity couplings that might elicit a "*What?*!" if found nestling in your morning horoscope (Paris Hilton and Jim Brown? Flannery O'Connor and Aretha Franklin?), all those people belong together. Hell, Flannery and Aretha probably do too. They're all trying to entertain, to sing away the minor demons and, like the rest of us in our clumsy or inspired fashion, to connect.

Because music is sharing, even (or especially) when it locks onto joys or hurts that feel completely private. Everyone's been gutted by a melody or lyric that knifes from a passing car or drifts over from a blanket at the beach and there you are, immersed in the first time you fell in love or out of it. No one had ever felt that way, of course, and when you hear the song years later, you know you're in the company of millions. But weirdly that doesn't dilute what it felt like to be you. It just adds a rueful sense of community, of what it's like to be human.

Still, those inner chords can tinge the experience with a fierce possessiveness. Maybe all passions do. It's easy to get competitive about how edgy and unknown your favorite bands are, for instance, and I suppose I'm as prone to it as anyone. But I try to just like what I like. I never understood the obscurity fetish that made people shift Bruce Springsteen automatically from "Second Coming" to "sellout" the day *Born To Run* put him on the cover of *Time* or that dismissed Los Lobos when "Don't Worry Baby" moved them from an East L. A. bar band to mainstream and made them some money. By that rationale the Beatles stopped mattering the day they climbed out of their last Hamburg basement.

Some of what you listen to, or for, probably traces to the house you grew up in. When I was eight or nine, lying on the carpet with my head between the speakers of our couch-long console stereo, I heard a grab bag of my parents' records, later mixed with whatever I could buy with paper-route money or wheedle for Christmas. It was Glenn Miller and Glen Campbell, Mom's Brahms and Dad's Dixieland, with Joni Mitchell and

Peter, Paul and Mary filtering through my sisters' door. Thanks to my grandfather, I discovered Eddie Arnold long before I knew he wrote "You Don't Know Me" and before I'd even heard of Ray Charles. The first time I heard "Born To Be Wild" I went windmilling off our fake-leather ottoman, and even now the first chords of that can put an adrenaline spike in my blood. My brother smashed our Torino GT to Heart's "Barracuda." Its grim guitar gallop just clamped jumper cables to his ribs, he could never resist it, and I still think his reaction (minus the wrecked car) is the one you're supposed to have.

And that's not even the embarrassing stuff. "Mandy," a song with more sap than a Vermont forest, has triggered my maudlin reflex ever since I heard it once in the rain while moping for a girl. (Stop me if you've heard this.) There's disco of course, and "My Sharona," and Up with People, and god help me, I once owned an LP called *Jim Nabors Sings the Lord's Prayer and Other Sacred Songs*. Granted my grandmother gave it to me, but it's not a thing you mention on first dates.

Very likely I'm rationalizing, but I think there ought to be a scattershot quality to that time, an openness that virtually guarantees you'll be mortified later. At eight or fifteen, you can't know what you're going to like because you don't know who you are yet. To put it another way, if you feel exactly the same about music (or books, or girls) as you did when you were twelve, you really haven't been paying attention.

If I try to imagine a world without music, I wind up thinking about my first Springsteen concert in 1981, twenty-thousand arms swaying like kelp to Clarence's "Jungleland" solo, his eyes squeezed shut but peeking once at the crowd before sending that sax out beyond the lights, the darkness. And another show in 2009 in Philadelphia, when I went to grab a beer and found every last person in the concourse singing "Glory Days": young, old, black, white, tattooed or not, burly bartender with gold earrings, somebody's mom.

I think about the piazza in Siena, a day I would like to fix and keep. My wife and I sat in the bright cold air as a group dressed all in black appeared in the distance. We labeled them the Goth Tour until they got closer and we realized it was a group of priests. Later we heard someone singing—really, *really* well—and it turned out to be one of them, an impossibly good-looking young man serenading his friends with Puccini's "Nessun Dorma." I imagined them prodding him into it: Go on, let's have one. The piazza strollers cheered and persuaded him to sing another, which I didn't recognize, then finally "O Sole Mio," with the locals joining in lustily on the chorus. Much applause and backslapping and everyone slowly dispersed. Later we spotted them from a shop window, near some steps leading onto the winding stone streets. On the chance he might sing again we stepped outside and were rewarded with Schubert's "Ave

Maria," stunningly beautiful, almost enough to make me forswear my pagan ways. I expected the pierced skateboarders occupying the steps—his only other audience—to snicker at priests and tourists both, but they sat and listened and nodded to each other as the band of brothers climbed the steps and vanished.

And I remember an afternoon closer to home. I'm waiting for my pizza to arrive when "Gimme Shelter" starts up on the restaurant sound system, those eerie ooohs, that dark careful guitar, a guitar crossing a minefield. I notice a twenty-something white guy bobbing his head near the bar, a sixtyish black couple doing the same at a table by the window. *Yeah, a storm is threatening my very life today*. When Merry Clayton launches into her spine-freezing vocal—*Rape, murder, it's just a shot away*—and Mick answers, *Love, sister, it's just a kiss away*, the older guy looks out the window a second then says something to his wife, who nods appreciatively. I'm guessing it's *Listen to that*, or maybe *Remember when*, or both. A small thing, but there aren't all that many times you feel people connecting. We're walled off in our cubicles, staring at iPhones, stuck in traffic. For me it nearly always happens with a soundtrack, and when it does, I see why the hippies thought it was music that would break down all the walls.

Come on, people now. Smile on your brother.

Introduction: Poetry Editor

I'm excited to step into the role of Poetry Editor at *NDQ*, and I look forward to working with its staff to publish and promote great writing. I'm a poet, essayist, translator, and critic who teaches at the University of North Dakota and who occasionally has published reviews in the journal. During the journal's recent transition, poetry submission readings were put on hold, which meant there were no poems in the file to draw from for this issue. But I actually welcomed the opportunity to start from scratch by soliciting work, to introduce myself and my tastes to *NDQ*'s readers so that you get a sampling of the kinds of poets and poems you'll be seeing in these pages, and the work I hope to receive. All of these poets are technically proficient in their craft and do things with words that make me swoon. Form is integral to their poems, which is as it should be, but which today is too often a secondary (if at all) consideration.

I love the intricate vocabularies and immediate accessibility of Allison Joseph; how Jehanne Dubrow always makes me think about the structures of thought and poetry; the way Tara Betts' pieces sing both on the page and out loud. I like the expansiveness of Jane Satterfield's brain, how it holds disparate things from across history in such beautiful tensions, and how Erica Dawson writes sonnets and quatrains that make you want to get down and shake your ass. While I am not the most experimental poet, I enjoy when poets manage to balance witty and absurd postmodern technique with profound empathy, the way Bruce Covey does. As a North Carolina native, I've long enjoyed Al Maginnes' work, and I am currently fascinated with the possibilities of prose poems, like those of G. C. Waldrep. And I admire translations that seductively introduce us, or reintroduce us, to the literatures and rhythms of other languages, as in the new translation of *Jason and the Argonauts* by Aaron Poochigian excerpted and reviewed here.

In short, these are poems I wish I had written.

You may notice that most of the poets represented here are women: in keeping with the ongoing VIDA counts (www.vidaweb.org), I am committed to working towards gender parity and will do my best to create parity for all poets during my tenure, while providing readers with poems that will take off the tops of your heads.

—Heidi Czerwiec

AARON POOCHIGIAN

Madly in Love with Jason, Medea Contemplates Suicide

Apollonius' *Jason and the Argonauts*, Book 3, lines 1000-1096

Her heart was fitful, restless in the way
a sunbeam, when reflected off the water
swirling out of a pail or pitcher, dances
upon the walls—yes, that was how her heart
was quivering. And tears of pity flowed
out of her eyes, and anguish burned her insides
by smoldering into her skin and sinews,
even into the apex of her spine,
the point where torment peaks when the relentless
love gods have filled us up with agony.

Sometimes she said, yes, she would offer him
the magic drug to charm the bulls; at others,
no, she would not and she would kill herself;
at others, she would neither take her life
nor offer him the magic, but remain
just as she had been, suffering, in silence.

She sat down then and, wavering, exclaimed:

"Which of these woes am I to choose? My mind
is reeling. There's no respite from the pain.
It burns and burns. It burns. I wish the arrows
of Artemis had struck me dead before
I saw that man, yes, long before the sons of
Chalciope had ever reached Achaea.
Some god, some Fury shipped pains overflowing
with grief from there to here, right here, to me.

Let Jason perish in the competition,
if he is doomed to perish. If I gave him
the drug, how could my parents fail to learn
what I had done? What reason could I give them?
What lie or ploy would be of any use?
If I see him alone, without his friends,
will I acknowledge him? My lot is cruel.
I cannot hope that, even when he dies,
I will be free from anguish. He will be
a curse on me when he has lost his life.

So good-bye, modesty. Good-bye, fair name.
Once I have saved him, let him go unharmed
wherever he desires while I, the day
that he completes the contest, leave this life
by dangling my body from a rafter
or taking drugs, the kind that kill the heart . . .

but, when I'm dead, they all will stand there eying
my ruin. The entire town will pass
around the story of my fall, and all
the Colchian girls will bear me on their lips
everywhere, harshly savaging my name:
She loved that foreigner so much it killed her.
By giving way to lust, she has disgraced
her house and home.
What shame will not be mine?
Ah, mad obsession! No, it would be better
to take my life here in my room tonight
and by an inexplicable demise
escape such dreadful infamy before
I do this shameful and outrageous deed."

So she resolved and went to fetch the casket
in which her many drugs, some good, some baneful,
were kept. She set it on her knees and wept.
Her nightgown's folds were wet so thoroughly
with tears that streams of grief were flowing from her.
Shrilly lamenting, keening her own death,
she wanted to reach out, select, and swallow
poison to end her life. She was already
unfastening the hasps in her desire
to take it out, poor girl.

Soon, though, a deathly
antipathy to baneful Hades vanquished
the urge. She was a long time held there, speechless.
The heart-delighting joys of daylight sparkled
before her eyes, and she recalled the countless
pleasures the living relish and recalled
her darling playmates, as a maiden would.
So long as she kept going over all
these pleasures one by one inside her mind,
the light of life was sweeter to behold
than it had been before.
And so she took
the casket off her knees and set it down.
Hera had redirected her intentions.
No longer did Medea waver, no,
she yearned for sunrise, burned to meet the stranger
face to face, and offer him the drug.
Over and over she undid the door bolt
and peeped out waiting for the glow of daybreak,
and welcome were the rays that Dawn shot forth.
People throughout the city started stirring,
and Argus bade his brothers stay behind
to monitor the girl's resolve while he
slipped out and went before them to the ship.

Soon as the maiden saw that Dawn had come,
she tied off with her hands the golden tresses
that had been hanging loose in disarray.
Once she had pinched her cheeks and doused her body
in fragrant oil, she put a brilliant robe on
and pinned it with exquisite, spiral brooches.
Last of all, she donned a veil—it shone
like silver over her ambrosial features.
And so she pirouetted round her chamber,
oblivious to all the griefs before her
and all those that would multiply with time.

ERICA DAWSON

Florida Officers Tied to KKK

I live just 85 miles away.
A *city nigger*. They've got pillow cases
Over their heads for makeshift hoods—a day
Of reckoning, initiations, traces,

Inside a house, of nearby citrus groves.
I'd like to make the trip to Fruitland Park,
Rap on the door and tell them how, in droves,
We're coming and we're big and black and bark

Like the animals they say we are. But in
Reality, it's me. This is a poem.
And is that tolerance? A fly will buzz
Around a rind like it's its only home.
Rinds have evolved with a much thicker skin.
What is necessity if not because

Of something? What is if then then or now
What now if not self-reparation done
For some survival—just a swooning bow
Taken in thanks the worst is over? Run

Is what I wish I'd think, until I've found
The state's southernmost point and let my feet
Drown in the waves waking my knees. I'd meet
My harnessed blame: I did not stand my ground.

It's easier to call my faults, say all
Those officers don't know no better, nor
Do I; say Erica, you're small in tall
Vast grapefruit trees, and slighter than a spoor
Of gator wakes in rivers. Still, I sprawl
When dreaming of the pith and underscore.

Love Poem after Learning Hair Is Dead Skin

I want to pin you down so I can drift
Onto your shoulders. I want you to say
Your dermis is so pretty. Never wear
A do-rag. Grow it out. Go natural.

This is the moment when we refurbish ourselves.
Rising and falling, dust and dander, mites.
We need a black light and a microscope.
I want to see you shed. I want your sheath.

TARA BETTS

Salmon Croquettes

Your father's large, rough hands took
deliberate steps after opening a can
of salmon. The label displayed
a glimmering fish that looked nothing
like the hunk of pink and gray flesh
with a small chain of cylindrical bones
running through its meaty core.

Your father begins a transformation
with studious eyes and dutiful hands.
He parts flesh gently in half, removes
the vertebrae. There are fine white
needles, soft straight fragments picked
away. Those hands that swung the belt,
and slapped your mother became gentle.

The salmon fanned out into a chunky paste.
What is not picked away is tenderly crushed.
The sweat beaded on his forehead as bones
were gathered, and the salmon joined
with eggs, flour, lemon, oregano, too quickly
to recall beyond the hiss of croquettes
in the heavy skillet, harder than his hands.

The Machete

All of his daughters had machetes,
not guns, but wide blades meant
to cut sugarcane, thick stalks
that grow in Caibarien, the Cuban
town that he will never see again.

He was proud to give this
glistening with its singular ting
as it was unsheathed. He smiled.

His eyes brightened when I insisted
on this gift. His son gave me a ring.
My father-in-law would have to give
me the blade with a long handle
since I would be the new daughter.

When I returned to visit, his stifled
snickers were barely contained.
He revealed the gleaming metal
in the dim living room.

My own machete
is not the exclamation
expected from a new wife.

When the new husband left,
He took most of his clothes
while I was out of town, and
he took the machete—my one
defense against intruders in
a first-floor apartment
with sliding glass doors.

My machete,
the one gift that said
you are my daughter.

Conceals

an ovillejo

Rough skin grown is what we see,
just touch, see.
Within its unbroken seal,
it conceals.
A sense of secret life spreads
unknown threads.
Growth that silently sprouts and treads
with veins into porous soil,
beneath bark where layers coil.
Touch, see, it conceals unknown threads.

G. C. WALDREP

Ars Poetica / Author Photo

You paint your daughter the same way you paint a lit candle, in shades of gray. It's dark out there, sure. You own a great embroidered robe, trimmed in fur, but you're not wearing it. You have one life and a nail clipper and somehow you have to MacGyver yourself and everyone you love out of this abandoned universe. You spot the problem: too many people to love. You try loving fewer people, but the remaining people you love just get heavier, body by body. You show your daughter the way the spinal cord runs up through the humping vertebrae of the back. *Is it snowing*, she asks. *Is that Jesus*, she asks. The live feed rolls up like an ancient map sorrow's spat upon. In the other painting, the candle leans slightly to the right, as if some Arctic had brushed against it. *The flame corrects for gravity*, you tell your daughter, scraping away the spilt wax. You set the two paintings on chairs, so that they face each other across the kitchen table. You imagine the robe, presumably hanging snug inside the cedar-lined closet a previous owner built into the house. Inside the obtuse angle there's another, different shade of gray you don't remember adding. Maybe love put it there. Maybe love is responsible for all the origami cranes that fill every other room here. You start unfolding them. This could take a long time.

The Many Uses of Trains

The staff of God is a blinding instrument. We mistake it for wheat, for fields of ripe wheat at sunset. Which is to say we mistake it for something edible. We gnaw on stones, suckle at bridges and railroad crossings, sharpen cutlery on the spines of presidents. There is this terrible hunger, you see. God is aware of this. With his blinding staff God makes the presidents rise and set. He mistakes the sun for an apple and takes a bite. His mother tells him *No*, slaps his hand. With his staff God strikes back, beating at his mother until she becomes an ocean. We mistake the ocean for the moon and go to sleep in it, our hands locked around our bellies. The sea mistakes our sleeping forms for its long sorrow and rocks us in its cold shoulder. Eventually, Tolstoy is born, writes, fornicates, dies. His death is filmed. Long trains carry Tolstoy's body across the Russian steppes. With his blinding staff God derails these trains, so that pieces of Tolstoy's immense and heavy body come to rest in glacial ridges and moraines. Men and a few women also rode these trains. They mistook Tolstoy's body for the sun, bit into it, and were immediately struck blind. They wandered for decades. The locals, superstitious to a fault, fed them yogurt and barley cake. Eventually they came to the sea, which mistook them for railroads and presidents. Outside Tolstoy's bedroom window grew a tree, and every night Tolstoy heard the low, crude moon of that lone tree blowing. What if God threw an election and nobody came. What if wheat is God's way of telling Tolstoy he is sorry, after all.

AL MAGINNES

The Silence of Disappearing Trains

If drone was not a family of echoes circling the stone lungs
of cathedrals for centuries, I might swear it was born
in the iron bellows of train whistles, a come-all-ye invented

to warn of the train's presence in town, especially
after midnight, their rattle already enough to pierce
the thin bubble of my sleep, before the miles-long note

ascended the same upward sweep that washed from steel guitars
in the country songs my father loved. A few miles north,
the trains would shake across the skeletal bridge built to chain

the two banks of the Etowah. By then I would be fully awake,
alone with my fear of the morning's quiz on the periodic table,
material I had ignored, leaving me the honed recitals of failure,

cadences as familiar to me as the river must feel
to its rock and sand beds. The river, like the train, knew its course
and did not vary. Hard calculation for a town

where variation and motion seemed forever in short supply.
In our alley-thin lives, adventure meant blood or police cars,
meant events accelerated to a pace beyond our want

or control. It would be a while before physics told me
that motion is the single constant of our lives. Even inside us,
cities, tiny empires, rise and wash away, hordes of bacteria migrate,

the mostly reliable pistons of heart and pulse hammer
while skin loosens, lost chemicals hiss and froth. Pain camps
where it pleases and moves on at the insolent pace

of the movie tramp rousted from sleeping in an orchard,
sauntering off, pockets full of stolen fruit, at a pace that announces
he knows the clock measuring our existence has no numbers,

at least none that matter. I didn't see any such knowledge hidden
in the chart the teacher covered the next morning.
We turned the test over and began, never suspecting

that particles too fast and small to know were shooting through
the air, through the tops of our desks, the blackboards and maps,
the stringy meat of our bodies, all the illusory solids of the world,

binding us to the ever-widening universe as they moved
to the space between stars, between bridge and water, to motion
that continues the way rivers continue, that continues

whether we find ways to measure it or just believe it so.
Motion we never feel unless we sense it on some rare mornings
inside the breath between sleep and waking, mineral pulse

drawing us toward the outbending walls of the universe,
into the lazy present tense that is all breath of time has
to offer us. On a few lucky mornings, you might

roll toward a body likewise filled with infinity
and rolling toward you, the two of you learning again
how lovemaking offers one way of resolving time,

each motion invented to linger but bearing you both
to the inevitable end and the geological sadness
of bodies when they are still again.

But all of that was before me when I lay awake
in the silence of disappearing trains, knowing only that
I did not know what elements made the world.

JEHANNE DUBROW

Caution: Hole in Ship

In drydock the cruiser floated feet
above the deck, like a model leviathan

hung in a hall of natural sciences,
so that a grown man could walk

full underneath without dipping
his head to clear the keel. Someone

had strung crime-scene tape
across a hatch left gaping,

posted a sign to stop workers falling
the way children used to fall down wells.

For weeks my husband peered into the gap,
as if it were the eyepiece of a microscope

so sharp it could reveal the small interior
of cells. Later, when the San Jac

was sealed up and returned to water,
he stole the cardboard square.

It sat in his stateroom all through
the next deployment, sliding a bit

on those nights of high alert,
when the sea was streaked with foam.

CAUTION: HOLE IN SHIP.
Not easy to think each day

about the thin hull that holds
the ocean out, just as it's hard to keep

staring up at the plaster diorama
of a squid wrapped around a whale—

embrace that looks so much like love
or longing— those terrible bodies

drifting in their blue, uncertain light.

Photograph of General Petraeus with Paula Broadwell

—later revealed to be his mistress

As with some painting from the Renaissance,
perspective pulls the eye to where his hand
encloses hers, his fingers reddening
around the white flesh of her palm. Notice
how even this professional touch has made
the General blush. He would do well to shun
a body pressed into a pencil skirt,
a bust that strains the limits of its blouse.
And yet, the composition cannot work
without them both, the light a sweaty sheen.
He's dressed in green fatigues, four tiny stars
embroidered down the center of his shirt,
where underneath must lie his collarbone,
and on his sleeve, an eagle staring left,
away. We want to look away as well—
Petraeus from the ancient Greek for stone,
but here he's just a man, hardly alone
in wishing to unloop a silver hoop
from the velvet lobe of an ear, or let
the onyx bracelet fall beside a bed.
We scan the picture for intelligence.
The thick, expressive folds of national flags
are backdrop to the scene.

In Jan Van Eyck's
The Arnolfini Wedding, we can't stop
staring at the hands, her right outstretched
and resting in the cushion of his left.
They should be smiling, yet both seem staid
as if already they can sense the secrets
that weigh all unions with a dark brocade.
On the windowsill: a group of oranges
to signal wealth or else illicit fruit,
depending on which scholar we consult.
A broom. A bed. An amber rosary.

A dog who's symbol of fidelity.
Behind the pair a convex mirror shows
what isn't shown—a door and witnesses,
the outside lookings of this little world.
How often do we watch two people stand
like this, held undistorted in the frame?
For a moment, we can see them as they are,
the woman cool, generic beauty, the man,
what hardness he contains now edged with longing.
All lines direct our gaze toward them, a glaze
of shadows, pale skin turned luminous,
the perfect clarity of their mistakes.

BRUCE COVEY

Fireworks

We're sitting on the lawn
& I realize the mower has missed
So many blades of grass that I
Want to pick each long one
& place it in your hand
Until you have a handful
Of dozens of green lines
Pointing in dozens of different
Directions then we each make a wish
& you throw them into the air

Double Sonnet

1.

Someone once said I looked like one
Of the members of They Might Be Giants,
& not just because I'm six foot seven.
Someone once said I looked like John Ashbery,
But then someone else said I looked more
Like Ted Berrigan. Most people say I look
More like my younger sister than my older,
But no one ever says I look like one or the other
Of my parents. My mother says I look like
My uncle. Recently someone said I looked
Like John Berryman. Someone said
They could see Gertrude Stein in my work.
I like Jean Baudrillard, and "William Wilson"
Is a great short story.

2.

In Atlanta, there's another Bruce Alan Covey
Who also works in IT, but isn't a poet.
His number is unlisted. Many people mistake me
For a comedian or two; they've told me the names
But I can't remember them. A bartender once gave me
A CD of his standup, thinking I was one or the other.
Someone once said I was a lot like Louis CK, who
Is not one of the comedians mentioned in line 4.
Louis CK guest starred in a sitcom called Parks &
Recreation, and my mother was Director
Of Parks & Recreation in Bethany, CT.
Kids in school called me Jaws or Tree.
I used to joke that I'd never appear on film
Like a vampire, but now all images are digital.

Jawbreaker

I'm stuck in the middle of a jawbreaker. The size of a superball with 2-dozen different flavor layers.

I'm walking on Elm from Temple to York, each block a layer, East Rock to my right. Most of the buildings are only ever exteriors. But there's a band—name at the tip of my tongue—playing in one. I'm always looking for their vinyl.

One of the seconds when I can finally leave something—a flourless chocolate cake. A classical concert I may or may not have seen. Was she a composer?

The Women's Table, Maya Lin, 1993, near Sterling, four or five blocks from Oldenburg's Lipstick (Ascending) on Caterpillar Tracks, 1974. That's five or four years per block.

Leaving Firehose behind. Henry Rollins. Seeing Gone. Hazy dreams around the unknown venue for Gone. Saccharine Trust.

Circles back to sweetness. There's nothing sweet about all of this fucking stone, carved, split, shaped, unyielding, even to my hardest punch. I know. I broke two fucking knuckles on it.

Bare

Bone and scar, skin slit
at its seams, bucket of wrinkles
at each knee, rivers of stretch
lacing my hips, thighs.
Satchel of stomach.
Largesse of lungs.
Cellular but never
a prison, fresh flesh,
sweaty sinew, pinky toe
and little finger, digits
wiggling from the get go,
the go-ahead, the goes
around comes around.
Oh my legs, my pistons,
my arms, my anchors,
my back broad, shoulders
anxious for latitudes, longitudes,
burdens and blessings.

Skinny

As a child, I hated that word—
hurled at me like a curse,
lips sucked in disgust over
my bony knees, lattice of
rib cage and clavicle, lack
of curves marking me as
suspect, stark mutant not fit
for adolescence. So when
you call me skinny now,
your compliments on lost
pounds and dropped sizes
send me someplace far darker
than you know: terrorscape
of somatic fears and teenage
taunts, maze of insecurities
more slippery than a winter
sidewalk. I did not lose
to enter the shrine of skinny,
join the cult of before-and-
after photos, diet confessionals,
to slip into some long-coveted
outfit: some star-spangled
bikini or Victoria's Secret
swath of pink. I lost so I
could live to write more,
family spectre of diabetes
lifted, high blood pressure
beaten back by well-worn
sneakers. Poetry tastes better
than skinny feels, and if
this loss gifts me with more
days, I will breathe, write,
run and live, skinny girl
I was loved, fat woman
I was loved, all those selves
coming to this page, singing.

JANE SATTERFIELD

An Ideal for Living

Ian Curtis (1956-1980) vocalist and songwriter for Joy Division

Beneath the flicker of fluorescent lights, the auras
of perfumed tea, double-strollers block the aisles.
Looks like we'll linger here a bit beneath the gaze
of flower-garlanded mannequins. Dear lady
of the artfully wrinkled Bermudas, destroyed
matchstick jeans and ballet flats—why is it this season's
psychedelic orange makes me think of detainees in stress
positions? Suddenly the volume's up, and I hum along, "Love
Will Tear Us Apart." How is it I've arrived here, teen in tow,
dear dress to impress with the vintage field army
watch, the studded leather belt? And what of ruined,
epileptic Curtis, winner in the suicide sweeps, Curtis
who crooned like Sinatra against a throbbing
bass line's frontal assault? Curtis who didn't live
long enough to hear his single—all-time great alt rock
anthem—become mere background noise?
How come I still hear the song as I first did, *authentic*,
on cassette, the dark tape's spooling through my battered
Walkman? Dear dressing room with the hidden cam,
dear *but-I-digress*, the joke seems less witty now
as, pressed for an answer, I tell my daughter what
"joy division" is: nihilism, word play, doublespeak
for concentration camp prostitution wing.
Not the work of meaning, but the making of meanings. Again . . . Love . . .
In the afterlife of that atmospheric baritone, my teacher's discount
buys me a black dress, my daughter a headband of shimmering silk.

In a Time of Troubles

Europa Universalis invites players to explore wartime scenarios through various eras and cultures, from Ancient Rome to the Napoleonic Wars.

Noxious heat descends, the possibility
of plague & an event chain
that includes revolt risk

& stability cost. Avoid the hazards
of sitting all day. Even in games
of grand strategy, ruler

popularity suffers from plain old
public fatigue. Asked for their expertise,
old gamers scroll through calamities

like beads on a chain—drained coffers,
diplomatic points spent, failure in missions
undertaken on a nation's account—

chronic catastrophes to be solved
with manpower replenishment.
No need to abstract

out women characters—in Roman Britain
they can function as warriors, take full
lead in the field. Trade nodes

increase bonus points, so try acquisition,
annexation, leaking trade to
pirate nations, though, this, too

might spark another revolt.
There's bound to be a huge
barbarian uprising when

least expected. Don't worry
about a first go-round demise:
no one conquers the world

on the first try. Site crashes won't pose
much of a problem. With patches
& expansions, it's easy to reassign provinces,

countries, & cultures. It's easy to play
as Carthage & win. The optimism idea
keeps up an army's rating, but an empire

doesn't have infinite will. Be warned
that the vision may not be backward
compatible. Better to sign a peace treaty

than slog through a long campaign.
Concentrate armies to avoid
attrition. Because it wasn't bad enough once,

you can rewrite history, undertake
another installment of domination,
create unique stories of conquest.

You have the conquistador helmet. Click sieges,
characters, armies, authority.
Click epic & definitive list.

The War Years: At Play in the Secret City

From the testimonies of women of wartime Los Alamos
as collected in Standing By and Making Do

We took it to heart like a love letter. Later it disassembled,
reassembled. Folded its prison around us. Fluttery, flammable.

One of the Brits corrected me: said the precise word
was *non-inflammable*. I didn't mind
a sip of his gin. I liked the oily, engine-like smell
it let off. It made me feel that I might never
want to go home. Ours was

a high time. The altitude for one—invigorating.
And the weekend fêtes fueled
by alcohol. All the aspirations

which drew us outdoors. Even Oppie endeavored
to join our amusements, having learned his lines
just moments before the stage curtain rose!

~

Once a husband had been subcontracted
into service as an "engineer," the door to the world
closed behind. Name and address erased to a chorus

of sighs. Such black swaths the censors cut through
our outgoing notes. Such piles of ash and soot. We carried

passes filled out in triplicate, carbon smearing
at the slightest touch. Tech area was guarded, heavily
fenced. About the project, we knew only
late hours in the lab outfitted with army

cots where, fitful, engineers often slept . . .

~

Soon it was all hands on deck. We typed, filed or taught, manned
the switchboard, overheard Town Council debate. It was work

to outwit the MPs or wangle your share
of maid-service. For two days one unredeemable joker

had a new operator page Heisenberg at frequent
intervals. A sweet WAC finally took pity, told her she'd *best*

call the Herr in Berlin. My first week on the hill I forgot how long
it took just to boil water and watched cake after cake
in the oven soar to magnificent heights

then deflate. A lovely excuse not to bake!

~

Intermittent testing explosions and security breathing
down our necks. Or the calm walk

through Frijoles canyon, searching for petroglyphs
etched in the rose-coral of the cliff face.

The hot pink flowers of cane cholla.
A cyclotron freighted in; expeditions

into town to spread the right rumors—

~

The Sangre de Christo valley with its lavender and scarlet trails . . .
    The one lockable file in O's office which
had been brought from Berkeley—. . . .

    Some eased their guilt
buying fiesta skirts, woven Chimayo jackets, Navajo
Silver. Others collected pottery.

~

Along the high trail up the Jemez mountains
the honeycombed tuff where ancient tribes retreated.

The series of switchback trails . . . All it would take—a single

swerve on that treacherous
single-laned road up through the pueblo . . .

~

Layers of silt, dust, and soot. Intermittent or explosive rain.
The library with the post's one ditto
machine, the document room and vault. The PX with its rota

of poor meals, warm Coca-Colas, chatter, and heavy smoke
fog. The avenues of our compound, such as they were, muddy

in wet seasons; dusty in dry. *Couldn't the commissary carry*
bottled artichoke hearts? If we missed

the faculty tea existence, the hat and glove
customs of campus towns, we didn't mind

blowing off steam. The bachelor group and those who'd trade off
their children had considerable

freedom. Square dances, skating parties, a golf course
laid in a barren field nearby. Outages, of course, and other

crises. The furor that was raised
to get fresh eggs! Still we took our *good citizen's*
shower, running water no more than a minute or two.

~

Some rose to watch from a ski slope. Others overslept or kept
vigil at home on the porch. The long wait. Then the uncanny

bright light. Our first sense of what the Project
had wrought. Attempts to resume

what we might start to look like regular
life. But not before one smashing send-off from the British
in thanks for our success.
Pot-pies and pastries, singing
and skits. Our beaujolais glasses raised to the Queen.

REVIEWS

Robert Zacharias, *Rewriting the Break Event: Mennonites and Migration in Canadian Literature.* Winnipeg, Canada: University of Manitoba Press, 2013. Pp. 232, $31.95 pb, $25 ebooks, pdf or EPUB format.

In the United States, Mennonites—traditionally separatist and non-resistant Anabaptist Protestants—have received relatively little national attention. This is not true in Canada. In Canada, Mennonite practices are represented widely and Mennonite literature is thriving. In *Rewriting the Break Event: Mennonites and Migration in Canadian Literature*, the critic Robert Zacharias explores the origins and preoccupations of Mennonite fiction in Canada through a careful explication of five major Mennonite novels: Al Reimer's *My Harp is Turned to Mourning (*published in 1985), Janice L. Dick's 2004 novel *Out of the Storm*, Arnold Dyck's *Lost in the Steppe* (first published serially in German from 1944-48 and translated into English in 1970), Sandra Birdsell's 2001 novel *The Rüsslander* (published as *Katya* in the United States), and *The Blue Mountains of China*, published in 1970 by Rudy Wiebe, the most prolific and decorated Canadian Mennonite author.

Zacharias's study focuses on novels covering the experience of Mennonites in Russia during and just prior to the 1917 revolution, a period of extreme hardship during which Mennonite property was confiscated, Mennonite landowners executed, Mennonite men forcibly conscripted, and vulnerable members of the Mennonite colonies raped and violated. This is the "break event" Zacharias's title refers to, the catalyst for the Russian Mennonite diaspora which saw Mennonites flee their colonies in what is now the Ukraine for two principal locations: the Canadian prairie and the Chaco of western Paraguay.

In Zacharias's reading, the trauma of the Russian Mennonite diaspora motivated the narratives that describe it. Importantly, however, he emphasizes that each text in his study approaches the "break event" differently. As he puts it, "each retelling, each strain of the larger narrative, affirms the importance of the Mennonites' dispersal history while rewriting it in significant ways" (25). *My Harp is Turned to Mourning* and *Out of the Storm* are what Zacharias terms "theo-pedagogical narratives," novels

which "tak[e] as their primary focus the spiritual significance that the Russian experience holds for the Mennonite community" (73). His reading of *Lost in the Steppe*, by contrast, focuses primarily on that novel's depiction of the (ostensibly) idyllic material state of the Mennonite colonies in Russia before the Revolution, a depiction that barely acknowledes the spiritual dimension of the Mennonite experience during that period, and in this way constructs Mennonite identity along ethnic Germanic rather than spiritually Anabaptist lines. Zacharias argues that *The Rüsslander*'s presentation of a fictional survivor's long-suppressed and deftly censored account of the massacre that took her family at once "focus[es] on the individual as an individual within the community—rather than the individual as representative of the community" (130) and offers "an extended critique of the adoption of individual trauma narratives in the construction of communal identity" (131). Finally, Zacharias sees *The Blue Mountains of China* as simultaneously "problematizing" and reiterating the role of the Russian Mennonite migration story in Mennonite culture, "demonstrat[ing] just how thoroughly enmeshed the Mennonites are in such stories" (176).

Each of these nuanced interpretations emphasizes a different aspect of Canadian Mennonite identity, from the spiritual to the material, the individual to the communal. By so carefully calling attention to the diversity of the Canadian Mennonite experience, Zacharias, too, "rewrites the break event," explicating it even as he critiques the way the novels he reviews attempt to reckon with it.

Zacharias's inspired analysis is grounded equally in Russian Mennonite history and contemporary critical theory. If there are a few places where the theorists he cites seem slightly ancillary to his main argument (notably in the case of Giles Deleuze's account of difference in the analysis of Wiebe's novel), most of these critical lenses—in particular Benedict Anderson's account of time and, perhaps surprisingly, Sigmund Freud's view of trauma—illuminate the texts in ways that are accessible not just to academic but also to casual readers. Indeed, by explicating the work of a number of key Mennonite novelists (with the notable exception of Governor General's Award Winner Miriam Toews), Zacharias's book is an excellent primer for anyone interested in Canadian Mennonite fiction or the history of the Russian Mennonites.

For U.S. readers, *Rewriting the Break Event* provides an occasion to consider why Mennonite fiction in the United States is not similarly prominent. Zacharias's narrative offers several possible answers. First, the descendants of Mennonites who fled the Russian Revolution constitute a relatively small percentage of the U.S. Mennonite population.[1] For Swiss Mennonites—most of whose ancestors came to Philadelphia in the 17th and 18th centuries and migrated across Pennsylvania, Ontario, and the

Midwest—there is no comparatively recent "break event" to provide an impetus for fiction. In North America, Swiss Mennonites were able to move "from the center of the general protest and utopian reform to the periphery through rejection, migration and isolation" (Redekop qtd. in Zacharias 48). This separatist, conformist orientation has perhaps not been conducive to the production of literature. According to the critic Harry Lowen, "when the Mennonites lived securely in Prussia and Russia for almost three hundred years they wrote almost no creative works" (qtd. in Zacharias 57); this claim would seem equally true of Swiss Mennonites living in comparable comfort in Central Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Kansas; in the absence of a recent "break event," the quietism and intellectual isolation of much Mennonite culture in the United States have prevented Mennonite writers from addressing subjects that a wider readership might find interesting.

In this lies another potential explanation for the lack of popular interest in Mennonite fiction in the United States: Mennonite separatism has been successful. Its tradition-bound, quietist ethos has succeeded in discouraging creative work and avoiding public scrutiny. But while it may be true that the Swiss Mennonite culture of conformity and separatism has inhibited the growth of literature, the U.S. fascination with Plain or Amish culture puts to lie the notion that a desire to be left alone is enough to guarantee cultural anonymity. The widespread U.S. fascination with traditional Pennsylvania-Dutch art and culture recently seems to have crystalized into an often prurient fixation on all things Amish. In this way, the more "dramatic" cultural conservatism of Amish culture—lack of electricity, horse-drawn carriages—has drawn so much attention that it has left the Mennonite culture from which it descended off to one side. Where tourist kitsch and patently false "reality" programs like *Amish Mafia* are concerned, this is probably for the good. But in the meantime, there has been little in the way of a sustained interest by the wider culture in the faith and practices of U.S. Mennonites.

This is a pity. As many of the novels in Zacharias's study illustrate, Mennonite communities are imperfect, but the Mennonite values of service, stewardship, and non-resistance remain worthy of consideration within U.S. culture and fertile subjects for literature. And a Mennonite literary culture in the United States is gradually taking hold. In poetry, Jean Janzen, Julia Spicher Kasdorf, and Jeff Gundy have all made important contributions. Sara Stambaugh and Evie Yoder Miller have written significant Mennonite novels, and Katherine Arnoldi's story collection *All Things Are Labor* has been widely praised. The Mennonite's Writing Conference will meet in 2015 for the seventh time, and Rhoda Janzen's 2009 memoir *Mennonite in a Little Black Dress* was a national bestseller. If its follow up—the 2012 memoir *Does This Church Make Me Look*

Fat?: A Mennonite Finds Faith, Meets Mr. Right, and Solves Her Lady Problems—was not as successful,[2] Rhoda Janzen's poetry continues to receive critical attention.

But as Mennonite literature in the United States works to find its footing, Mennonite literature, and in particular Mennonite fiction, in Canada remains a model for the way narrative can limn and explore Mennonite faith and practice alongside difficult, and even traumatic, subjects. Most Mennonite writers in the U.S do not have an ancestral connection to the "break event" of the Russian Mennonite diaspora which Zacharias chronicles so effectively, but it may well be that some of the most dynamic works to emerge by Mennonite writers in the United States will also be motivated by "break events"—albeit on a different scale—painful ruptures between individuals, congregations, families, and even God, "break events" that illuminate the strengths and strictures of Mennonite culture.

Notes

[1]Mennonites emigrated from Russia in two distinct groups; the first wave left for North America in the 1870s out of fear of increased Russian interference in colony life and settled in Manitoba and the plains of the U.S., notably in Kansas. This wave, which constitutes the bulk of the U.S. Russian Mennonite population, was not directly affected by the trauma of the "break event" and their descendants are, to a large extent, denominationally affiliated with the Swiss Mennonites through Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada. The second wave, whose emigration was precipitated by the "break event" of the 1917 revolution, settled primarily in Canada and Paraguay, though some were granted asylum in the United States. In the United States, the Mennonite Brethren Church, which arose in the Russian colonies out of anti-formalist Pietism, is the largest denomination composed primarily of descendants of Russian Mennonites. It comprises roughly 10 percent of the overall U.S. Mennonite population.

[2]Upon its release in paperback in 2013, the memoir received a new title—*Mennonite Meets Mr. Right*—which once again foregrounded its Mennonite cultural affinities.

Andrew Harnish
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Douglas Valentine, ed. *With Our Eyes Wide Open*. Albuquerque, NM: West End Press, 2014. Pp. 186, $18.95 pb.

With Our Eyes Wide Open is an anthology of political poetry from and about different places of the world. In my view, there are at least two kinds of political poetry, protest and revolutionary poetry. Protest poetry objects to where we are. Its argument tends toward moral judgement, with its emotion located in sympathy toward victims. Revolutionary poetry is more visionary, a critique of the system that causes brutality, and often involves an effort to take us to where we want to be. Its emotion, while sympathetic, holds historical range. While it demands equality and justice, it tends to perceive politics as less about morality than amoral systems that need to be changed or overthrown. These categories are merely useful, not absolute. Most poems in this book are protest poems. Most revolutionary poetry is ignored these days.

This book is difficult to characterize beyond the above categories, other than to say it includes diverse poets from numerous countries who present common objections to the structured injustices of war or economic oppression. The book's very diversity, which necessarily seems somewhat arbitrary, creates an amorphous quality, as if the poems just happened to be captured by chance. On the other hand, poems coming from so many places, cultures, and voices show how much in common we have, despite cultural differences. I find this aspect appealing. One possible (and perhaps "politically incorrect") conclusion from such a book, with poems that come together in their universal sympathies, is that the minority and ethnic divisions we have so enthusiastically nurtured in America are ultimately subsumed by the more general and shared experience of class oppression which exists toward the poor of all "races." All "races," a huge biological misnomer, includes whites, though clearly white racism against minorities does not require the economic privilege our founding fathers enjoyed. This collection should help us recognize that eliminating racism, while urgently necessary in opposing oppression, in itself cannot eliminate class oppression. Rome, as H. G. Wells pointed out in his *Outline of History*, was an egalitarian oppressor. Classism is a lot older than colonialism, which isn't to say that the latter hasn't been effective at dividing the "races" against one another, despite often sharing oppression, if with differing degrees of severity.

If the anthology brings together all races and cultures as shared protest against oppression, it also implicitly questions the special position ethnicity ultimately holds for worldwide freedom. For me, this issue arises in the first poem in the book, by Martín Espada, "Alabanza: In Praise of Local 100," which is about the attack on the World Trade Center. In focusing exclusively on exploited nonwhite victims, as the poem does, do we lose

an opportunity to include all economically-abused victims, regardless of race, who also died? The poem is clearly intent on condemning neocolonialism, or its more current version, neoliberalism, but the question I am raising is not premised on any suggestion that versions of colonialism don't continue to exist; rather, it is an issue of recognizing that there are indeed occasions where the victims include all races and certainly the world economy is one. In emphasizing ethnicity (immigrant minorities, from the U.S. perspective, in this case) when victims at the WTC were not ethnically separate, we lose the opportunity to promote solidarity between all "races," including whites, against their common oppression. One might think it effective, even necessary, to make such connections to counter prejudices that divide the poor against the poor according to "race." In fact, a recent article in *Truthout*, discussing the economist Piketty's recent momentous contribution, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, makes this point: "The American approach to caste has created an "identity politics" in the United States, focused on race, gender and sexual orientation, that is largely abstracted from economics and class. This has weakened class politics" (Derber). It is encouraging to see someone agree with a sentiment I have held for decades.

By contrast, I want to refer to the poem, "A Memory of Language," by Gioconda Belli of Nicaragua. As with Espada, I have previously reviewed and embraced her work. Her poem addresses the question of indigenous people whose culture has been subsumed by conquerors. "Who are we? / Who are these men, these women without words / mocked for the color / for their feathers and adornments?" This is certainly an "ethnic" problem, as near to it as we can get, and the poem acknowledges the yearning for the more ancient culture of indigenous ancestors.

> The poor have their hope.
> Earthen vessels where water is kept,
> a memory of grief.
>
> The America of our elders awaits the return of Quetzalcoatl
> the plumed serpent.

This is a poem of history and lost origins, one to which North American Indians could easily relate. The poem suggests no need to defend itself against the conquering culture; instead, it goes deeply into its own ancestry and the pain of subjugation, exploring a kind of internal exile. Like Espada's poem, this one is also focused on cultural oppression, but the difference is that the poem cannot be accused of excluding other oppressed groups and victims. The oppressed of its concern are clearly distinctive as people with a history older than Spain's, or later, America's colonial impositions. Nor does it derive from an incident where victims

were not targeted by race, or even class, but rather, merely for working in a building symbolic of power.

Eduardo Galeano, the famous writer from Uruguay, is represented with a somewhat widely known piece titled "Nobodies" which talks about the dispossessed. There is a lot of pathos (and again, irony) in his litany that spells out who the nobodies are and aren't. He describes what Marx would call "false consciousness:" "Fleas dream of buying themselves a dog, and nobodies dream of escaping poverty," a dream he then dismantles with considerable sympathy for the suffering that motivates it. I find this description useful in depicting the unmerciful realities behind poverty that are often ignored. It is written without being prescriptive. And again, a deep sense of irony, "the nobodies, who are not worth the bullet that kills them."

Two poems about post traumatic stress syndrome especially deserve mention: "VA Hospital Confessions" by Brian Turner and "Song of Napalm" by Bruce Weigl, both powerful. The voice in Turner's poem says "Some nights I twitch and jerk in my sleep. / My lover has learned to face away." In Weigl's poem the voice speaks of "burning bodies," perhaps referencing the famous picture of the young girl running in flames of napalm: "Nothing / Can change that; she is burning behind my eyes / And not your good love and not the rain-swept air / And not the jungle green / Pasture can deny it." Both poems are about the impact of war, both showing how the soldiers serving the invader, the U.S., are also victims from being put into the position of invaders. In both poems we learn how love is powerless against healing these emotional wounds. Another poem of return from war is "Torsion" by Yusef Komunyakaa.

Walter Lowenfels, in his 1973 booklet *The Revolution is to be Human*, quotes the muralist David Siqueiros as saying, "Mural art is a relation between a painting on the wall and a moving audience" (18). "Moving" is the important word here, which Lowenfels then relates to history. "Most of us get bogged down in yesterday's problem—we just don't know what today's audience is getting to be. The artist has to be a revolutionary in our time because otherwise he won't be able to tell which way the world is moving." I thought of this passage when I came to Bill Tremblay's poem, "The Colonel Comes Calling," which is about a warning given to the political painter from the Mexican Chief of the State Police, who suggests to Siqueiros that he cash in "as a hero of the revolution," "write [his] own ticket," or at least not agitate. The larger sequence of poems on David Siquieros, from which this poem is drawn, presents his commitment through his art and life to promoting political change. This poem shows how Siquieros rebuffed the Colonel, flipping his cigarette against the windshield of the Colonel's Buick "in a disaster of sparks." This is one poem in the collection that illustrates the depth of

conviction a revolutionary artist needs in order to be revolutionary. Siqueiros understood that the Colonel was not moving the direction that he, or history, was moving. Siqueiros never lost his belief that the audience changes as history changes, and it is clear that he was painting for this as yet undeveloped audience, in fact trying to create it. There is a lot of political poetry that has been ignored for a long time in America, but there is also every reason to believe another audience exists in the future, which will not care about the politics of "yesterday's problem," or for that matter, yesterday's networks of writers.

And so I come to my last thought on this collection: history is a moving target. The political poetry that will be most useful to the future is the work that hits that target. The issue isn't really the quality of writing. We should assume that quality is a given if a poem is worth reading, but writing can be very powerfully nostalgic or can be strongly felt protest but with limited value. As Lowenfels points out, "I can also weep for the brontosaurus" (20). I've come to believe there are two issues with political poetry. First, we do a poor job of processing history in America and that includes acknowledging our most politically-accomplished poetry, even though that is the work that leads us to the future. Second, we need a focus on social issues to reclaim poetry's social purpose, the limited presence of which gives rise to continued accusations of poetry's irrelevance, as all populations increasingly suffer from corporate control of the world's governments and economy. As the title poem by Sam Hamill implicitly argues, our senses are more than sensation. One can hear that history is "a promise broken— / if only you listen / with your eyes wide open." This is a book in the right direction, with many known voices represented.

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Floyce Alexander, *The Grand Piano*. Voice of the Poet Series. Northfield, MN: Red Dragonfly Press, 2014. Pp. 55, $15 pb., $3.99 audiobook.

Floyce Alexander grew up in the lower Yakima valley of Washington state where his father homesteaded a grape farm after working as a coal miner in Arkansas. His poems visit both areas of the country and are

always conscious of his working-class roots. He holds an MFA and PhD, but I find even more significant his study of poetry with Theodore Roethke. At age 74, he has been writing poetry for the majority of his life.

This book presents three poems, each a sequence: "The Grand Piano," "Another Young American Pilgrim," and "Irene Casteñada." The poems all are interrelated, moving through different periods of the poet's life. One of Alexander's projects in much of his poetry is to record—and some way save—his past, perhaps even redeem it from the worst aspects of its, and our, history. This effort leads him to confront his own feelings toward relatives, particularly women who have been important to him, since love is the leitmotif of much of his work. One might say that this book is a great love poem despite our national culture which promotes so much division and hatred. The poems are acutely aware of loves lost to the caprices of time which remain very much alive to him.

This focus alone would make the book immensely worthy, but it does more, for personal love is not the limit of its concern. Interwoven are larger societal and historical loves or their lack. The poet understands that love does not exist in political and cultural isolation. And it is at this intersection that we confront our national obstructions to love, in particular racism but also our "love" of war and, by contrast, our inability to love the poor enough help them.

In "The Grand Piano" love is equated with music, a language for our passions just as physical sensation can be, if passion exists. When it doesn't exist, both become brutality, but when it does, the poems want to open our passions beyond what the country ordinarily allows, "a change of uniforms, an end to war" (20). This suggestion that we can change our perspective toward what we love is one of the qualities of this work I admire most. In fact, I have long opposed the idealization and elevation of "the ordinary" in our culture, which seems nearly ubiquitous, as if what is ordinary is the same as political democracy. The truth is, oppression is the ordinary quotidian in our culture. I very much admire poems that want to dislodge the ordinary, as do these.

And yet, the difficulties of our country don't go away in Alexander's poems. There is no false sense that individual romantic love, however much the poet prizes it, can overcome the political realities that stand in its way. While personal love is possible, racism was also largely responsible for denying him his first passionate romance. In addition, the poet's own memory is the past the country constructed, the racism of the South: "My father's / father hated this black man who hated / him back. I saw why in my grandfather's face" (21). Later, we find a poem on Guantánamo, where music (and Christianity) is converted to an accompaniment for torture and death.

Alexander is not a poet who claims "love" answers history, one of those easy formulas we often hear, perhaps a hand-me-down from Jesus, nor does he assert it as a political weapon against the dark and greedy passions of war. But these poems are perhaps an effort to understand at least three things: where we have been, who we are as a nation (with our current limitations), and what is possible if we can surpass those limitations. In some sense, then, one might think of the love expressed for the women in this book as more than personal, also as love for imagination itself, as we find in Whitman, with the muse as love. There is great optimism (despite great resignation) in these poems, as in these lines:

> Ah love, the sky is our house and this earth
> its floor, the sun and moon our bright windows
> opening to the fire and to the stars . . .
>
> Ah love, I love you: you know all the words
> I say will never carry the meaning
> of our silence, your radiant presence . . . (49-50)

Sometimes publishers get it right. This is one of those times.

Dale Jacobson
University of North Dakota

Aaron Poochigian, trans. *Jason and the Argonauts*. By Apollonius of Rhodes. Introduction and Notes by Benjamin Acosta-Hughes. New York: Penguin Classics, 2014. Pp. 244+xxiv, $15.00 pb.

Apollonius of Rhodes was a third-century BCE Greek poet and Homeric scholar who was appointed the second head of the great Library of Alexandria by Ptolemy III, whom he tutored. Of his writings, only the Argonautica has survived intact. From the excellent introduction by Benjamin Acosta-Hughes, we also learn that Apollonius, while influenced by Homer, wrote a fantastical epic with a problematic hero unmatched in classical literature. This rollicking new translation by Grand Forks' own Aaron Poochigian is the first in over forty years and was worth the wait.

I'm a geek for translators' notes. So my geekiness was piqued when Poochigian described his attempts at improving readability and accessibility. I would have liked, however, a more detailed discussion of translation issues or challenges he faced. I did enjoy his explanation of translating the standard Greek dactylic hexameter line into English iambic pentameter blank verse, and the parallels he draws with the epics of Milton and Tennyson. But I think that he sells himself short: Poochigian also employs alliteration throughout, which further recalls the beginning of English epic in Beowulf. This choice makes perfect sense since, as the introduction notes, Argonautica reads "much more like Tolkien in poetic form" (xvii).

Jason and the Argonauts' crew includes the not-obviously-heroic titular character, the Ur-lyric-poet Orpheus, the mighty Heracles and his companion Hylas, and the Gemini twins Castor and Polydeuces (hatched from eggs after Leda's rape by a swan-shaped Zeus), among a long list (and I do mean long—the catalogue of Book I, lines 35-320, is best skimmed) of other notables, who are sent on a suicide mission by the cowardly King Pelias to sail the Argo through the Cobalt Clashing Rocks to retrieve the golden fleece. The reader can tell that Poochigian had a lot of fun reimagining this epic voyage and its various adventures in the way he richly renders such Homeric flourishes as the extended description of Jason's mantle (I. 971-1030), or the delightfully goofy wording he sometimes chooses, such as when Heracles uproots a pine tree to carve into an oar and is described returning to the ship as "galumphing shoreward" (I. 1607), or in the climax of a boxing match between Polydeuces and King Amycus where the former "leaned in closer, locked / his leg behind his foe's, and with a swift heave / hay-makered him above the right ear" (II. 118-20). These little winks add to the pleasure and accessibility of the text, but don't detract from the action.

Poochigian seems to lavish much of his art on Books III and IV which, to be fair, is where most of the dramatic action takes place: Jason and the Argonauts land in Aea, where the kingdom of Aeërtes guards the

fleece; the king's daughter Medea is convinced to aid Jason in acquiring the fleece; and the crew must flee, having angered both the king and Zeus. The descriptions of both the characters' emotions and actions are especially nuanced and lush in these sections. A generous excerpt from Book III, which Poochigian titles "Madly in Love with Jason, Medea Contemplates Suicide," may be found on pages 82-84 of this journal.

I fully expect this new translation to find a wide audience in World Literature and Classics courses, and among fans of classical literature. But it's the women of this epic who make the most compelling characters, and I hope that this book will find or rediscover audiences among those interested in women's studies and/or feminist criticism. The women are the action. For my money, the star of the epic is Medea, central to success of Jason's mission. In the early parts of the story, the men are beset by women: the murderous women of Lemnos who attempt to detain the crew, Hylas taken by the nymphs, the oracle Phineus tormented by Furies and Harpies. And despite Jason's deprecating comment—"if we entrust our homecoming to women, / our hopes are very pitiful indeed" (III. 646-7)—the goddesses Athena, Hera, and Aphrodite conspire to aid the Argonauts; Medea is persuaded to assist Jason with her dark magic; and the sorceress Circe, the Nereids, and Queen Arete help the Argonauts escape.

I am glad to see this new translation: a fun text, rendered by a fun poet and translator. But, above all, a fun read.

Heidi Czerwiec
University of North Dakota

Editor's Notes

Additional Memorial

Diane Drake's name was inadvertently omitted from the list of memorials in the previous issue, 79.3&4. Drake, of Thief River Falls, Minnesota, was the first to send a remembrance after Editor Robert Lewis passed away in August 2013. We regret the omission.

Masthead Changes

Our warmest appreciation goes to Brian Paulsen and Donald Junkins, who both gave their time and talents to *NDQ* for many years; Paulsen was art editor for 30 years, and Junkins was poetry editor for 10 years. Many thanks also to Linda Patterson Miller, a longtime *NDQ* contributing editor.

NDQ reorganized this year, instituting an interdisciplinary editorial board which will collaboratively shape the journal. Our wholehearted thanks to former advisory editors David Lambeth, Kim Porter, and Dexter Perkins. And a hearty welcome to new members of the editorial board: Rebecca Rozelle-Stone, William Caraher, Nuri Oncel, Lucy Ganje, and Eric Wolfe.

CALL FOR PAPERS

North Dakota Quarterly (*NDQ*), Volume 80, Number 4
Special Issue: Art and Science

Guest Editors: Nuri Oncel (University of North Dakota)
and Lucy Ganje (University of North Dakota)

NDQ, an interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed journal, seeks contributions for a special issue on the theme of "Art and Science."

Art and science might seem contradictory or oppositional modes of inquiry and work. But we propose that art and science are actually akin to complementary colors on the color wheel. Paired together, the disciplines reinforce each other, combining to create striking solutions to complex social and material questions relating to form and content. As John Maeda, former president of the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), puts it: The scientist's laboratory and the artist's studio are two of the last places reserved for open-ended inquiry, where failure is an expected and welcome part of the process, and where learning occurs through a continuous process of trial and error. A dedication to inquiry and the desire to understand, capture, and describe the nature of the world drives both the scientist and the artist.

This special issue of the *North Dakota Quarterly* invites non-fiction essays, short fiction pieces, poems, and artistic images that explore and illuminate the intersection of art and science, the similarities and distinctions between artistic and scientific perspectives, and how these merging methodologies impact other disciplines. Nonfiction submissions should be written for a broad audience. **Length:** Nonfiction essays and fiction pieces should be no longer than 6,000 words, inclusive of notes. **Deadline**: March 15, 2015.

Send hard copy submissions to:

Kate Sweney, Managing Editor
Art and Science Issue
North Dakota Quarterly
Merrifield Hall Room 110
276 Centennial Hall, Stop 7209
Grand Forks, ND 58202-7209

Cover Date

Yes, our calendars, probably like yours, read 2014, and this issue of *NDQ* is the first in Volume 80 of 2013. All subscribers receive four issues per year, and eventually we hope that those years will be the same as on your calendars and date-obsessed magazines and newspapers.

Explore . . . Endure . . . Evolve . . .

Contributors

Danielle Ariano received her MFA in Creative Writing and Publishing Arts from the University of Baltimore. She is a columnist of *Baltimore Gay Life* where her column, "Out-skirts," examines the peculiarities that can accompany living as a gay woman. Her work has been published on *Huffington Post*, *Baltimore Fishbowl*, and *Cobalt Review*. She also works as a cabinetmaker, and in her spare time, you can usually find her rock climbing or surfing one of her favorite breaks near Rehoboth Beach, DE. She lives in Lutherville, MD, with her wife and their two dogs.

Michael Beard is co-editor of the book series Middle Eastern Literature in Translation for Syracuse University Press and associate editor of the journal *Middle Eastern Literatures*. He is a Chester Fritz Professor of English at UND and, like everyone else at the *Quarterly*, he misses Bob Lewis.

Tara Betts is the author of *Arc & Hue* and the libretto *THE GREATEST!: A Tribute to Muhammad Ali*. She is a PhD candidate in English/Creative Writing at SUNY Binghamton University. Her poetry has appeared in several anthologies and journals, and her scholarly writing has appeared in *The Black Scholar*, *Obsidian*, *Xavier Review*, and *Sounding Out!* She has worked with young writers in Chicago, New York City, and London. <www.tarabetts.net>

Bruce Covey's sixth book of poetry, *Change Machine*, was published by Noemi Press in 2014. He lives in Atlanta, GA, where he publishes and edits *Coconutmagazine* and Coconut Books and curates the What's New in Poetry reading series.

Erica Dawson is the author of two poetry collections: *The Small Blades Hurt* and *Big-Eyed Afraid*. Her poems have appeared in *Best American Poetry*, *Barrow Street*, *Harvard Review*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, and other journals and anthologies. She's an Assistant Professor of English and Writing at The University of Tampa.

Jehanne Dubrow is the author of four poetry collections, including most recently *Red Army Red* and *Stateside* (Northwestern UP, 2010 and 2012). In 2015,

University of New Mexico Press will publish her fifth book of poems, *The Arranged Marriage*. Her work has appeared in *New England Review*, *Southern Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Ploughshares*. She is the Director of the Rose O'Neill Literary House and an Associate Professor of Creative Writing at Washington College, on the Eastern Shore of Maryland.

Becky Hagenston's first collection of stories, *A Gram of Mars*, won the Mary McCarthy Prize and was published by Sarabande Books. Her second collection, *Strange Weather*, won the Spokane Prize and was published by Press 53. She is an Associate Professor of English at Mississippi State University.

Patrick Hunt has had short stories published in *Lumina*, *The Lifted Brow*, *Quarterly West*, *Event*, and *The Bellingham Review*. He is currently a teacher in New York City. He can be reached at <patrickthomashunt@gmail.com>.

Amanda Osgood Jonientz was born and raised in Seattle, Washington. She currently lives in Grand Forks, North Dakota, where she is working on her PhD in English with a creative dissertation.

Allison Joseph's most recent book of poems, *My Father's Kites*, was published by Steel Toe Books. Poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *North American Review*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Sou'wester*, *TAB: The Journal of Poetry and Poetics*, and *Southern Indiana Review*.

James Knisely is a native Seattleite. His novel, *Chance: An Existential Horse Opera*, was a finalist for the 2003 Washington State Book Awards. His poetry and prose have appeared in *Exquisite Corpse*, *Knock*, the now defunct *Point No Point*, *Summit*, and online with several essays at HistoryLink.org. An interview with him appeared in *The Raven Chronicles* (Vol 13.1, 2007). He's honored to be the Novelist-in-Residence at Seattle's legendary Blue Moon Tavern, where Kerouac was also known to toast the muse.

Al Maginnes has published ten chapbooks of poems, most recently *Music from Small Towns* (Jacar Press, 2014), winner of the annual Jacar Press contest, and *Inventing Constellations* (Cherry Grove Collections, 2012). Recent or forthcoming poems will appear in *Shenandoah*, *Grist*, *Hamilton Stone Review*, *Lake Effect*, and *Tar River Poetry*, among others. He lives in Raleigh, North Carolina, and teaches at Wake Technical Community College.

John Picard is a native of Washington, D.C., living in North Carolina. He has an MFA from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He has published fic-

tion and nonfiction in *Iowa Review*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *New England Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, and *West Branch*, among others. He is a recipient of a North Carolina Arts Council grant for fiction. A collection of his stories, *Little Lives*, was published by Mint Hill Books.

Aaron Poochigian earned a PhD in Classics from the University of Minnesota in 2006. His book *Sappho*: *Stung with Love*, was published by Penguin Classics in 2009, and he was awarded a 2010-2011 Grant in Translation by the National Endowment for the Arts. His first book of original poetry, *The Cosmic Purr*, was published in 2012. His work has appeared in *Financial Times*, *Poems Out Loud*, and *Poetry*.

David Raney is a writer and editor in Atlanta. He earned his PhD from Emory University and is Managing Editor at Habitat for Humanity. His work has appeared in about two dozen magazines, journals, and books.

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G. C. Waldrep's most recent books are *The Arcadia Project: North American Postmodern Pastoral* (Ahsahta, 2012), co-edited with Joshua Corey, and a chapbook, *Susquehanna* (Omnidawn, 2013). BOA Editions will release a long poem, *Testament*, in 2015. Waldrep lives in Lewisburg, Pa., where he teaches at Bucknell University, edits the journal *West Branch*, and serves as Editor-at-Large for *The Kenyon Review*.

Bob Lewis: In Memoriam

Years ago Sherman Paul, the Emerson scholar and one of Bob's mentors, delivered a lecture at UND. Bob introduced him graciously, adding an addendum with an ellipsis: "This man made me what I am today." Pause. "Why, I could have been . . ." For me that summed Bob up. It was funny. It was brief. It was unexpected. He sounded like Groucho Marx.

We met in 1975 when we were both living in Cairo. He was on a Fulbright grant, and I was teaching at the American University. We would see Bob in the street from time to time (we'd know him by his moustache) and chat, but our paths crossed more meaningfully when Victoria and I got hepatitis. Bob left his research and, for two months, took over my classes at the AUC English Department. I was told later that it took some persuasion to enlist him. Much later the dean of the college told me that negotiations over the terms were rigorous. Bob was the best bargainer he had ever seen.

Of course he would be a good bargainer. He could put on an expression, just short of fierce, behind which you couldn't guess what he was thinking. It was one reason he was good at administration. It was also one reason he could be so funny. He could look forbidding and austere. He would reach you by surprise. In fact, a lot of us now find ourselves saying in retrospect, "I didn't realize that about him."

Bob was neither guarded nor reserved about music. I thought his music was a sign of his political beliefs, the politics we know from the songs of Joe Hill, Woodie Guthrie, or Pete Seeger. You could call him a Woody Guthrie socialist. We often sang together. In the eighties there were more demonstrations than you would imagine, and they were good occasions for protest songs.

They weren't all protest songs, though. Bob had catholic taste and had a repertoire that transcended categories:

"Bye Bye Blackbird"
"Good Night, Irene"
"Hard Traveling"
"I Dreamed I Saw Joe Hill Last Night"
"I'll Fly Away"
"It's a Sin to Tell a Lie"
"Long Way to Tipparary"
"Ragtime Cowboy Joe"

"Red River Valley"
"So Long, It's been Good to Know You"
"This Land Is Your Land"
"Union Maid"
"Which Side Are You On"
an Egyptian popular song, "Wa'iyyâk"

He knew a lot of songs and he always knew more verses than anyone else.

Not terribly long ago we had a tornado warning complete with sirens. Everyone in Merrifield Hall was ushered to the corridor of the first floor, which tradition says is safer. I ran into Bob as he came out of his office in Room 17. In the course of pleasantries I happened to ask whether he thought the threatened tornado would arrive.

"No," he said. "Nothing ever happens around here."

—Michael Beard