

Gallatin Review

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Expiration Date

Harita Koya

This is my greatest shame:
there are limits to my desire,
and one day I will cease to feel
your phantom touches on my skin.

Your shade will dissolve,
the scar on my arm will fade,
and I will no longer remember
the tiny mole at the corner
of your mouth.

Sometimes, now, I think that I will die
wanting you (of wanting you).

But you can't die of a broken heart,
and I am made of sterner stuff
anyway. Pride will be my salvation,
and when I see you in the street,
I will barely know you.



he Bloody Garden Party

Chloe Byrne

*"Begin at the beginning," the King said, very gravely,
"and go on till you come to the end: then stop."
Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland*

It's darker now, inside the house of cards,
where chandeliers of spoons all dim the halls.
The King does fall, and now my heart is barred.

The glittered guests arrive for dinner, marred
by flying cups: the Hare and Hatter's brawl.
Now darkness falls inside the house of cards.

He's dressed in velvet reds and snowy shards
of glass that pass unnoticed in his shawl.
The King does fall, and now my heart is barred.

The party moves about the yellowed yard,
the cherry trees hang fruit, so sweet and small,
but darkness falls around the house of cards.

Eclipsing midnight bathes the spaded guards
that drench in red the hedges and the walls.
The King does fall, and now my heart is barred.

Outside, the field: stamped with heels, hard.
Upon the moon, the Cheshire cat will crawl.
It's darker now, inside my house of cards.
The kingdom falls, and now my heart is barred.



LESVOS, GREECE, JULY 2012 Vivi Fragou

he Wall

Liana Berkowitz

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The thing I loved most about her was her ability to see the beauty of possibility in anything and everything. I first noticed it when we were only kids growing up on the endless expanse of a small Maine farm. We would sit for hours on the soft, verdant land, our toes entwined with grass blades still wet with dew, staring at clouds and guessing at their shapes. I saw hearts, flowers and letters of the alphabet. Anne saw carousels, New York City's skyline and marching bands. She always felt the need to make things magical. It was almost as if she had such an abundance that it overflowed into everything she touched. We were forever running out of notepaper, and when I found 100 paper airplanes suspended from the barn ceiling, Anne insisted it was coincidental.

My mother had never gotten over the shock of her own marriage to a simple farmer. She had come from a well-to-do family that had probably come over on the Mayflower with their white-gloved butlers. Our mother had named us both, in her typical passive and pretentious manner, with the kind of names reserved for princesses. My sister had it worse, admittedly. My great aunt Sophia has long told that when they christened her Anastasia, newborn Anne burst out crying hysterically, her ceaseless wails filling every stone corner of the neo-Gothic cathedral. To me, this simple story had summarized the greatest difference between us. I didn't make a sound at my christening. I'm sure if Anne had been given the name Willoughby the windows would have shattered from the force of her cries. She was a force of nature, and was never one to say yes when she really meant no.

Anne and I had always shared a bedroom. It was one of those great big dusty lofts with huge windows that allowed our space to always be flooded with cool northern light. Our lives were marked by the things that hung on our dove grey wall. When I was a toddler, the walls wore the ABCs. By the time I was six, our mother paid a local teenager to cover the space with

pages from *Grimm's Complete Fairy Tales*. Of course, the teenaged painter had never actually read them, so when Anne read aloud the oft-underrated gruesomeness of the German brother's stories, I cried until our father tore the paintings off the wall furiously. I can still feel his large, callused hand smoothing my hair gently as he explained that our mother probably hadn't thought we'd be able to understand the words. Truthfully, I'd had no idea what they meant, but I'd seen the fear in Anne's face and felt it as acutely as if it were my own. The next day my father, in an attempt to placate us, hung a map of the world that stretched the entire length of the room.

Despite our differences, my sister and I shared a love of the world we had never seen. To appease Anne's need to explore, which had led to many a scraped knee and wayward splinter, our mother gifted her with a subscription to a children's catalogue, which featured a different country each month. The map and Anne's magazines further fueled our interest, and we took turns marking the maps with blue and white pins as promises for future travels. Every time Anne placed a white pin on the map, no matter how obscure the location, I would place my blue pin right next to it. One time she'd laughed outright, pointing to our pins floating in the cerulean expanse of the Atlantic Ocean. "I knew you were following me, Willa, but I didn't know you weren't even watching where!" She was still laughing as she plucked her white pin and moved it to Madagascar, leaving my pin floating alone like a shipwrecked sailor.

When Anne turned sixteen, she asked that her birthday present be the freedom to put up whatever she wanted for the next year. I was fourteen at the time, and completely unaware of the effect that this wall would have on my life. I was barred from the room until she finished, and slept on the couch for over a week because Anne had asked me to, and it never occurred to me to do anything but what she asked. When I came back into the room, I was stunned into silence. It was not a chart, a map, or even a picture like I had expected. She had driven five long silver nails into the wall, one at each corner and one in the center. Each nail head was almost completely covered by light blue or white string, which crisscrossed the wall until it created a seemingly un-patterned web. My first thought had been how, despite lack of direction, there was a precision to each suspended line of string.

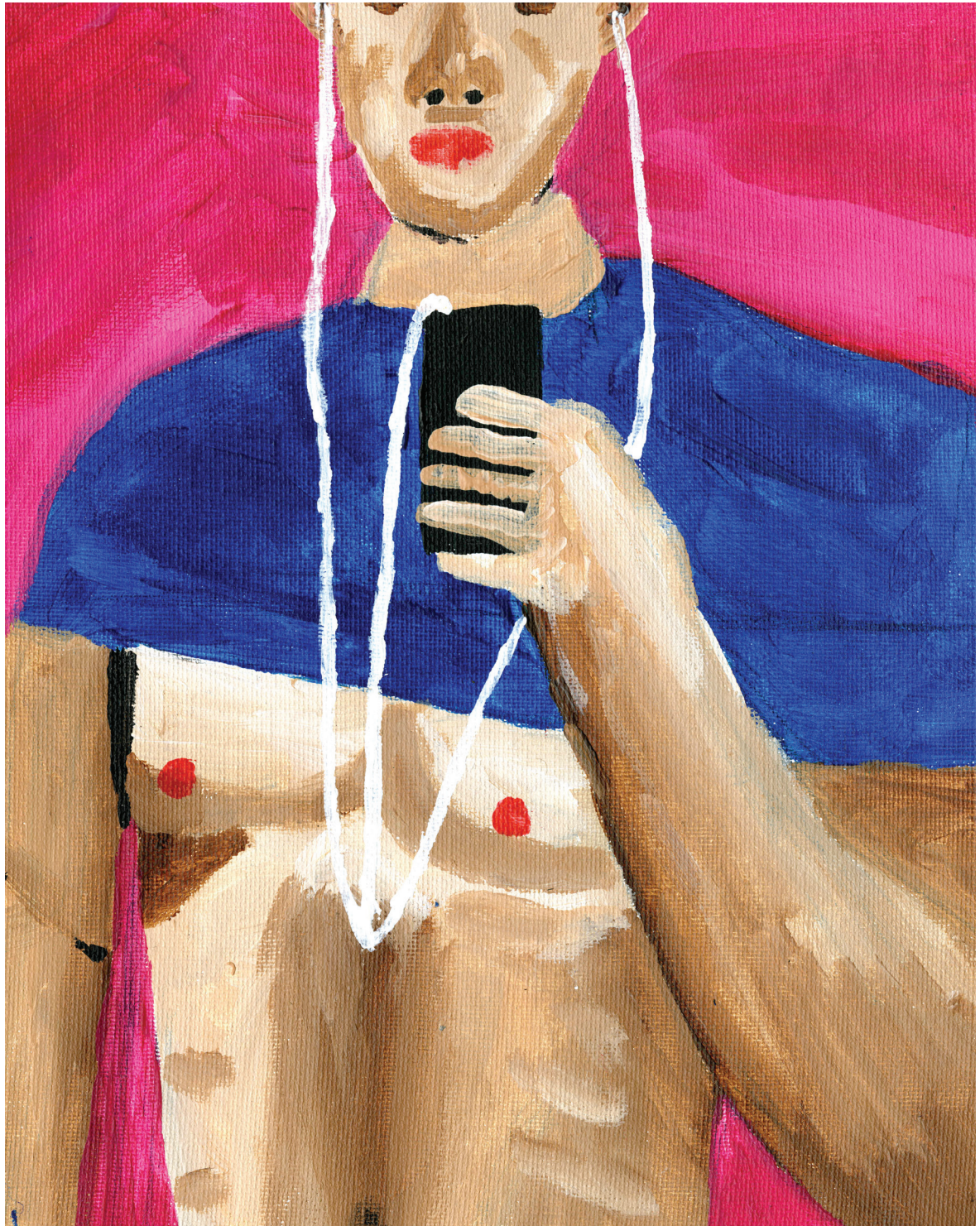
Never having known my sister to be a proponent of modern art, I walked over to the wall in confusion. When I was close enough to see the

slight fuzz surrounding the threads, I spotted something behind the web. Leaning in until my nose nearly grazed the string, I could make out the faintest outline of our old map, with the central nail resting directly on top of where my old blue pin had been abandoned in the Atlantic Ocean. I looked back at Anne in surprise.

“Remember the pins, Willa?” Anne’s question came before I had the chance to ask my own. I nodded slowly. “You were the blue,” she continued, watching me. I knew she was waiting for me to grasp the wall’s meaning, but I still didn’t understand. Anne, sensing my confusion, walked to the window and looked over her shoulder at me. That same cold light that always felt like we were in an endless Alaskan winter, even in the depths of summer, radiated yellow around her face. Anne glowed and smiled sideways, her crown of rays flaring with brilliant prisms. “Willa, you still are. You’re the blue thread,” she said. My eyes widened in surprise, and I turned back to the wall to appreciate it for what it was. Anne looked at it too and explained quietly, “Even when we leave here, even if we’re across the world from each other...” Then she turned her face away from me and looked out the window she has been standing in front of.

I couldn’t believe it. Anne had never been one to “pollute the air with maudlin sentimentality,” as she had said herself every time my mother cried at a movie or at any mention of love’s mysteries. But when I turned back to her creation, and I saw how intricately the strings had been woven, and how just when it seemed the white or blue had stretched to some far corner alone, Anne had hooked the other color into its center. There was never a spot that was completely blue or white. The strings never wandered too far from one another, neither was suspended in loneliness, and so there was no place in my future that did not have Anne in it.

I smiled in complete shock. Anne, whose ability to vibrate like a tuning fork with her singular life force, used to make me feel like I could never truly be close to her, since I could never truly be like her. She cared about staying with me, being a part of me. I walked towards her, my steps careful and light. Looking back, I think it’s because I was afraid of startling Anne—she was a doe, subject to be startled and change her mind, tear our strings apart. She didn’t move however, and when I went to stand next to her she put her arm toward me an imperceptible inch. I could feel the soft, yellow hairs on her arm brush mine, and I laid my head on her shoulder and watched the sun’s rare kindness, its leonine rays warming our cold fingers.



GYM RAT Jon Henry



Sophie Elias INCENSE



ntimacy
Harita Koya

You don't know that I prefer Callas
to Tebaldi, that I like sitting
in the window seats of trains,
but the aisle seats of airplanes.

You don't know that I drink hot chocolate
daily, even in the dog days of Texas summers.

But you do know the curve of my waist
and the arcs of my breasts and the point
of my chin. You know where
my neck meets my shoulder.

(You know, like me, the oppressive heat
of a southern August and the way life can revolve there
around football games and church meetings.

And we both also know: New England, glorious in fall,
wood-panelled classrooms, easy sprawls across grassy quads,
the careless knotting of a school tie.)

You know the inside of my mouth
and Texas and Exeter, but not that
I show my love with my fingertips.



Natalie O'Moore **BELOW SEA LEVEL**

Musing Pranav Pendurthi

Should I descend like Saint Genet,
and deny the fact that I am
fungible?

Because, thinking about the way she spoke about his jaw line
(charged, indifferent to my gaze),
collapsed my reason.
The internal cinema, once agitated,
became merely prolix lecture.

Is it inherently wrong to think with such intensity—
to be in a state of infinite regress?

When simply conversing, reading, or gently fucking,
I am suffocated by the spontaneous play of language,
and my serf-like sensibilities.

I am an Individual—
Simple, profound point to be impinged upon,
by arbitrary values.



Marcella Hausen **GUARDA CHUVA E ESPERANCA**



eadache
Pranav Pendurthi

A prison-yard calm is yet to be found,
amongst all these busy bodies,
 you know,
constriction of blood vessels,
not a means by which to escape
 the outing I had promised you.

The corruption of a binitarian godhead
is marginalizing reason
and I wish so much that I
could prise apart my skull
and drench my hands in blood and fat
until my eyes would signal vacancy.

W

irroris

Jenessa Abrams

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When I turned 11, my mother gave me an empty perfume bottle. Remnants of warm honey and champagne lingered within its curved glass. I never opened it in sunlight; I only let it whisper towards my nostrils on nights she did not come home. Choosing not to understand the difference between her business trips and hospital visits was the only way I could keep the lid on. I was used to her weekly business travels, but couldn't comprehend why after several years of surviving breast cancer she still needed to see doctors. I later learned that it was to undergo a procedure to take both her breasts and fears away. This time when she was gone, envisioning her in the first row of a cushioned Delta aircraft was my only defense against having to recall her sickly body lying atop the stark cotton of an infirmary bed.

For most of my childhood, imagining my mother traveling up in the sky at any moment was comforting, but after having seen her once in a hospital gown, I couldn't get the image of her skinny form out of my imagination. That evening when I sat in bed, my glossy visions of her felt false. Trying to focus on the sleepy way her suits looked after she came home from a consulting trip was useless. My little hands couldn't help but twist open the crystal top of the perfume bottle and steal a part of her; the soft elegant part that only I was allowed to know.

The initial cancer treatment had made her better, in a hair-losing, spirit-impairing sort of way; but that was a long time ago, before I was old enough to remember. It was a few months after I was born; she told me she swore to the doctors she would live to raise her newborn child. She didn't tell them she would work incessantly between chemotherapy sessions to sustain her equally valued career. Now, 11 years later, she was returning to the doctor's hands, this time by choice. She wanted to make sure she could make good on her word; with an inability to operate in anything but extremes, she chose voluntarily to have her breasts removed.

I wondered sometimes about the moment she first cupped her chest and felt the cancerous lump. I questioned what she could have been thinking when she saw it, whether it was then that she knew. I never imagined I could ask her; I certainly never imagined I would have to.

I was 14 when I found it, a grape-colored bump that spread like sticky jam against my chest. It was after a shower; I was watching small particles of water dance and disappear against the fogged up glass when the dark bump on my skin emerged. I stared in that mirror for several moments, unsure of the girl who was staring back at me and of the marking that was slowly deforming her milky breast.

Goosebumps spread across my torso as I cautiously reached up and tried to place my fingers upon it. I couldn't stop my shaking, couldn't bring myself to feel the ugliness that stained my chest. I had never felt my breasts before, never curiously traced their outline, never even had them touched by an eager boy's palm. I was too scared and too young.

That night, I was fortunate that my mother was home. When I called her into my room she sat awkwardly on the corner of my bed with her hands sitting tensely in her lap. As I revealed the lump, she examined it with a brief glance and told me that I shouldn't be frightened, that it was *nothing abnormal* and that *really there was nothing wrong*.

There was something about the look in her black, burnt-colored eyes as she spoke that startled me even more than if she had told me the mark was something awful. It was a calm in her voice that enveloped me and clung to my skin like the words hanging stagnantly between us. When I watched her slender frame disappear uneasily from the room, I knew she was lying. I turned restlessly atop my mattress, wondering whether she was trying to protect herself from having to relive her suffering or whether she was trying to protect me from the discovery of my own.

That night I thought about my mother.
I have never seen her look in a mirror.

I imagine her eyes would be downcast, her thin fingers attempting to unravel the rust from three necklaces, one chain for each child. They dangle from her neck like we do; their faulty clasps in equal distance from that

vessel in her chest. They are her only adornments; oversized suit jackets and leather-bound briefcases make up the rest.

She is always rushing, but I am certain if she gave a moment to her reflection she would adjust her loose-fitting blouse. Her clothing is shapeless, concealing the feminine form her post-cancer, medicinally-enforced diet of whole grains, raw broccoli, and egg whites has carved away.

I have never seen the wigs she wore when she lost her hair during chemo. From stories I heard, I know she rotated between two: one black, in a tight bob, the other light brown, with long bangs in a feather-do. I have often wondered what her eyes looked like underneath them the many times I sat on her bedroom floor looking up at the blank-faced mannequin heads on her wardrobe.

My mother's hair has grown back now. It is thin and it is graying, but it is hers.

A few days after I showed her the small bump, it worsened. A deep purple lump developed where the colored spot had emerged. This time when I called her in and shyly undressed, her chapped lips parted slightly to gasp. There was in fact something wrong.

A phone call, two apologies, and three car rides later, I found myself closed within the same four walls my mother had been in during the cancer, surrounded by pamphlets, anxious women, and the itchy scent of Febreze. When we were alone in a small room, I felt my mother's eyes resting upon me as her breath settled. A bony woman with wild strawberry curls sprouting out of a dove-colored jacket entered. She asked me to remove my top. The high-pitched sound of her voice scratched like the edge of a whisker. I instructed my mother to turn around. She obeyed with quiet eyes and touched her necklaces as she swiveled and took a few steps backward. I knew without having to see that she was hurt.

As I slowly began unbuttoning my blouse, the woman's eyes flickered with amusement: *What a color!* These are the words she said to me, this strange woman in a doctor's coat with white pointed gloves aimed towards my body. We had yet to exchange names and she was already entranced to the point of vocalization by the lime green bra I had decided to don for this occasion. My face flushed. I should have considered this earlier, considered

that my bra choice was no longer personal. None of this felt quite real; wearing an unnatural green seemed fitting.

A few visits later, when it was determined that a benign growth had developed in my right breast, the doctor told me in a voice intending to be kind that *I would experience a pain far worse than my mother's*. I still question why she said this, still contemplate whether she thought she was helping and if she could have begun to imagine the kind of fear that caused me to shudder.

As doctors described it, I had certain faltering organs that would have made the use of anesthesia *undesirable* during the procedure. If they were ever to have asked me, and of course, they never did, I would have told them that having to watch my teenage breasts be deeply cut into by a strange redhead doctor was fairly *undesirable* too.

When it was time for the doctor to go forward with the knife, a small nurse held down my wrists and I thought about my mother's back and desperately wished to see her eyes.

I am often told that I look like my mother, *from certain angles, in certain light*. She had cancer, and while she didn't have to be awake during any of her procedures, my lump, unlike hers, was benign. Most nights, my imagining feels more real to me than the true things that have emerged in my life. Only when I am sitting in the dark with a perfume bottle cradled to my chest do I feel close to my mother, remember the honey, and see her burgundy light.

NS

pring Comes, I Wait Becca Park

Today the last cynic has officially tucked thoughts of cold away in the attic. Everyone in New York is turned on. And everyone knows it. Layers off, skin on. Eyes blossom. We fall in love at least twice a day with strangers on the sidewalk. Taxis get poor business because people are too busy hailing each other. Bar tabs go through the roof. The parks are all types of happy. Didn't you hear the forecast? It's sunny, with a chance of panties.

23

[the smell of sunburnt cement is on the rise. darkness is a satin blindfold. it's 2am and the window's open. a breeze lap dances its way through the room and rustles the shades. the draft of heat acquaints sheer fabric to the sweat beads descending the nape of your neck. it doesn't matter what music is on because everything sounds like sex, down to the wailing sirens outside. on the skyline the half-hidden moon assures the city that even the loneliest person feels divine tonight.]





ALGA BAIANA Marcella Hausen

Water for Twelve Years

Sara Montijo

The wind lashes at me rhythmically,
to the cue of lizards hunting on

my window sill. The rain
will begin soon, each drop a memory

I should have of him,
but don't. Water for twelve years

of washing his face from mine,
his big toe from mine, his steep

canyon eyes from mine. A child like this is not alone
but left rubbing her skin

like a stranger's and hoping
the rain will end soon. The desert's

supposed to be arid, vacant.
But monsoons weep, spirits

swarm, and concord grape colored skies
won't let him die.



MODERN WOMAN Natalie O'Moore

he Children in the Field Are All Sunburned

Charlie Wright

There is a game that adults play
before they leave grade school.
They sit in circles bartering with their pudding
or scabbing the undersides of their nails
with mud and gravel, building fortified nations.

They'll look over their shoulders
and find the one who isn't scabbing
and they'll ensure that he does.
As this all unfolds, a peculiar dialogue
bumps like pinballs from neuron to neuron.

"Red is the color of reverence," says one.
And the other says, "Pride is purple,"
as the other chimes in with, "Blue is for bravery."
And after eavesdropping, I will say that,
"Orange is the color of forgetting."

This is what the trees howled to me
as the fall tempest swirled threateningly around their limbs
causing their population to wrinkle and discolor
before they collapsed to the pavement
making space for the new generation.

My goldfish blabbed the same secret.
When I tapped on their window to ask them
they scattered, turning to pebbles for protection.
And five seconds later the same finger and hand
sent them into shock all over again.

It's as if the second he snatches them from the womb
the doctor holds them out by one flimsy leg,
spanks them and lets them hang there
until their pouty purple feet have absorbed the sun
and are stained the peachy hue they were ordained to.



OCTOPUS MOUNTAINS Jesse Wheaton





XIANGBI SHAN Sophie Elias



umbleweed Colleigh Stein

For as long as I knew him, Ben Foster always wore cowboy boots. He was a loner, never interacting with anyone and content to live in his idealized world of saloons and spurs. At school, he and I rarely acknowledged each other, and our wildly imaginative peers took to calling him “Buffalo Ben.”

He lived at the end of my block and used to invite me over to his house to watch old John Wayne movies. He and I weren't exactly friends, but Ben didn't have many to begin with. His proximity meant that our relationship started more out of convenience than companionship. Besides being neighbors, I partially believe Ben took an interest in me only because he thought I had a perfect cowboy name. I hated Jebediah, though, and insisted everyone call me Jed. This seemed to disappoint him, but since neither of us had a real excuse to avoid each other, we often found ourselves spending a lot of time together. Somehow, though I never really admitted it, I grew to like him.

We would watch his movies, Ben's pupils dilating and eyes turning glassy as though he were imagining himself in the middle of the scene. He would be the one riding a pinto mustang across great sweeping plains or having a duel at high noon. I never really understood the allure of the Wild West, but I enjoyed Ben's enthusiasm and found myself spending Sunday afternoons on his couch, eating sliced cheese sandwiches and drinking root beer out of bottles. Root beer, Ben said, was a good drink for a cowboy. Never having given it much thought, I had to agree.

The bottles were old fashioned, molasses brown and glistened with condensation. Ben would grip his tightly by the neck and take quick, nervous sips in between dialogue. Bits of foam would cling to his upper lip and evaporate as he silently mouthed along with the actors. By the end of the movie, he wouldn't have even touched his sandwich, and it would fall to me to eat them both. I never minded, since the cheese was pressed between two slices of fluffy white Wonder Bread and slathered with mayonnaise, both of which my

mother vehemently protested and never allowed me to eat.

Sometimes, we would skip the movies altogether and take his tanned leather boots out into the California wilderness where they belonged.

“Jed!” Ben shouted. “What can you see?”

I was on my hands and knees, crouched atop a sand colored boulder. Despite his longing for adventure, Ben was afraid of heights and so it was I who had to climb up rocks and inspect the terrain. We lived near the canyon and when it wasn't too hot, we'd leave the comfort of air conditioning and root beer to explore the hills behind our houses. They were coated in withered, yellow shrubs and stunted trees that would blaze up at a moment's notice during the dry season. Ben and I once came across a tumbleweed that was almost as tall as we were, which seemed to delight him. Here and there boulders would pile up and form craggy towers nearly 20 feet tall. It was dusty and dirty and deserted. In the hills, you really felt as though you'd stepped back through time.

“Nothing!” I shouted back, eyeing the busy freeway in the distance. “Not a soul for miles!”

Ben nodded like this pleased him, scuffing the heel of his pointed boot against a rock. “All right, Jed,” he said in his best commanding voice. “Quit dawdling, we've got exploring to do.” He always spoke like he came from another era.

For once, I managed to not twist my ankle when I jumped down from the rock. I drew the back of my arm across my forehead and squinted at the sun. “You don't have any root beer with you?” I asked. “Water?”

Ben shook his head. “Sorry.”

I shrugged. “Where are we going?”

He nodded toward a path only he could see and set off in a steady march. I followed, shoving my hands in my pockets and thinking about what it would be like to drink real beer. For some reason, I could never imagine Ben drinking alcohol when he was older.

Our friendship was short-lived. Not even two years after we'd met, Ben announced he was moving. It was the week before my fourteenth birthday party. I had invited a few of my school friends over to swim and

play video games, nothing extravagant, but to invite Ben had never crossed my mind until my mother asked if he was coming. I hesitated, unsure if I wanted to mix Ben with my other friends. In the end, I decided I had to invite him.

When I showed up at his door on a Thursday he looked surprised. We rarely talked during the week.

“Hi,” I began awkwardly, “I’m . . . having a party. On Saturday. For my birthday.” I waited for him to say something but he seemed to be waiting for the same thing. “Did you want to come?”

Ben looked at his boots, his hands, over my shoulder, finally at me. “Is Andrew Reed going to be there?”

“Andy?”

“You guys are friends, right?”

I tried to think if Andy and Ben even knew each other. The only thing I could think of was a time when Andy had made some crack about “Buffalo Ben’s” cowboy boots.

“Yeah,” I said finally. “We are. He is.” I realized the feeling was mutual. Ben didn’t want to be around the boys from school as much as I didn’t want them to mix.

“Oh.” Ben was silent for a while. “I can’t. I’m awfully sorry, Jed. I don’t want to miss your birthday, but my dad’s coming back from base this weekend.”

Ben’s dad was training Marines at Camp Pendleton near San Diego. I’d only met him once, but even off duty he seemed strict and disciplined, like the military officers you see in movies. He seemed like the type of man who would never show any weakness.

“I understand,” I said, trying to keep the relief out of my expression as I turned to go.

“Jed, wait.”

I paused, glancing back at Ben.

“We’re leaving on Monday. My dad’s been reassigned to a camp in Bridgeport. We’re moving up near Tahoe.”

“Oh,” was all I could think to say. I knew the stereotype associated with military families, but somehow I never thought of Ben as being anything other than permanent. “Cool . . .”

Ben appeared awkward. “Do you want to go exploring one more time?”

“Yeah,” I responded immediately. “That sounds great, Ben.”

It was strange to think that I’d have to find something to do on Sunday afternoons from then on.

That Sunday, Ben and I set off for the hills. We hiked for a mile and made camp by the edge of a ravine that Ben probably would have called a cliff. The boulders around us would have made for a better vantage point, but since Ben wouldn’t climb, we sat silently in their shade. Ben reached into his backpack and pulled out a bag of beef jerky and two slightly flat root beers. I appreciated his authenticity, but after the mile-long hike I would have preferred a burger and pint of ice water. Nonetheless, I was grateful for something to drink and downed half the bottle in one swig before biting into the jerky. Beside me, Ben was chewing and staring up at the sky, blinking in the face of the sun. I followed his gaze and saw a red hawk in the distance, circling.

“I think it’d be nice,” Ben said at length, “to do that.”

“What?” I asked, finishing my root beer. “Fly?”

Ben nodded. “Just jump off the ground and into the air.”

I squinted at the bird, at the sheer amount of space between it and the earth. “Aren’t you afraid of heights?”

Ben shrugged. “I wouldn’t be,” he said confidently, “if I could fly.”

I couldn’t argue with his logic, so I just shrugged. We lapsed into silence as the hawk wheeled out of sight.

The sun had shifted its position in the sky, the boulders casting longer shadows over us, when Ben finally spoke again.

“It’ll be strange to leave this place.”

I nodded my agreement. “It’s nice here.”

“It is.” He was silent for another moment. “I reckon I knew it was coming, though. That I’d have to leave.”

“Don’t say ‘this town ain’t big enough for the two of us,’” I pleaded before I could think if it would offend him or not.

It didn’t. On the contrary, a faint smile spread across his face. He struck his hand out and I took it.

“It was good knowing you, Jebediah Weston.”

For once, I didn’t wince at the sound of my name. I didn’t hurry to correct him, either. He sounded too genuine.

“You too, Benjamin Foster,” was all I could think to say.

He dropped his hand and we each stared once more at our canyon. I wondered if Ben would see it again.

Ben and I walked home in silence. We’d left the bottles sitting in the shade beside the boulders. Before he left Southern California for good, we promised to stay in touch. Call, maybe, or write. Visit if he came to town.

But we never did.

Thinking back, I wish I had kept my promise. That I had contacted him over the years. Called, emailed—anything to show that I remembered when our lives had intersected. But it had never seemed important enough, never felt like something I needed to do. I never knew where he ended up.

I would think about him, though. Whenever a new cowboy movie would come out, I found myself wondering if he ever outgrew his childhood obsession. I wondered if he ever made new friends, ones who wouldn’t call him “Buffalo Ben.” Sometimes, I would look at the mountains and wonder if he ever managed to climb them.

It had been 20 years since Ben Foster and I sat beside our boulders to watch the tumbleweeds bound through the dust. The memory was like a shard of glass in my mind. Clear, sharp, and a little painful. I wonder if Ben felt it too, the nostalgia.

I stared at the newspaper spread before me, my eyes tracing the shape of the small printed numbers. Hesitating. Twenty years separated me and those numbers.

805-236-3787.

Our area code. He’d come back to Southern California.

I scanned one last time through the article that had brought Ben to my attention and picked up the phone, dialing.

It rang three times before the answer came.

“Hello?” the voice on the other end sounded hoarse, fatigued.

“Hi, Mr. Foster?” I responded awkwardly, remembering the one time we’d met. “This is Jed Weston.”

No response.

“I was friends with Ben in grade school,” I explained.

“I remember.”

A few seconds of strained silence passed between us before I finally spoke again.

“I’m sorry for your loss.”

The boy who was afraid of heights had jumped. They found him in the canyon with a blood alcohol content of .19 percent. He was clutching his old leather cowboy boots.



he Creaking in Your Attic Is My Fault

Shelby Kern

One day I'll have my own haunted attic to strip in.
Then your grandmother won't get so cross
when I throw my boots against the wood floor,
or when I balance on one foot to remove my stockings, and topple over instead,
pulling a cedar bookshelf to the floor with me.

She won't groan when I unbutton my white blouse,
tie it to a broomstick, and wave it out the window.
I've abandoned my post.

I toss my floral skirt to the wind, and stand,
framed in the dark.

My ruffled underwear holds my
stomach in,
breasts up,
ass tight,
lungs stuck.

I unclasp my bra and inch my panties down my legs,
then sprint from one end to the other.

Your grandmother complains that my "stomping" will wake your grandpa
but I can't stop now.

I won't cease until I can't breathe any longer.

When my knees give out, I lie on the racecar bed you slept on as a boy
and savor the cold sweat dripping down my body.

I stare out the window at my makeshift flag
and rub my chapped lips against the linens.

My torn lips might tear your sheets too.



EMBASSY James Schwartz



h, but Look How Much You've Grown

Gina Hong

Strangely, I do think that I've succeeded in
not only finding my roots but also
orienting myself to this society:
I know what is important to me,
what moves me and lights me up,
what work I have left to do in order to give myself
to this world.

I also know how to thoroughly cite an essay in an anthology
edited by two or more authors
in MLA, APA, and Chicago styles.
I know what it is to love someone so much that daily, mundane life
simmers down to a reduction of dark, sticky annoyance
clinging to the back of my throat
like double-cream ranch dressing.

I've also realized that so often I am capable of
hating someone on the simple basis of who they are:
I sit in class across from someone and think: what the fuck?
I hate you.

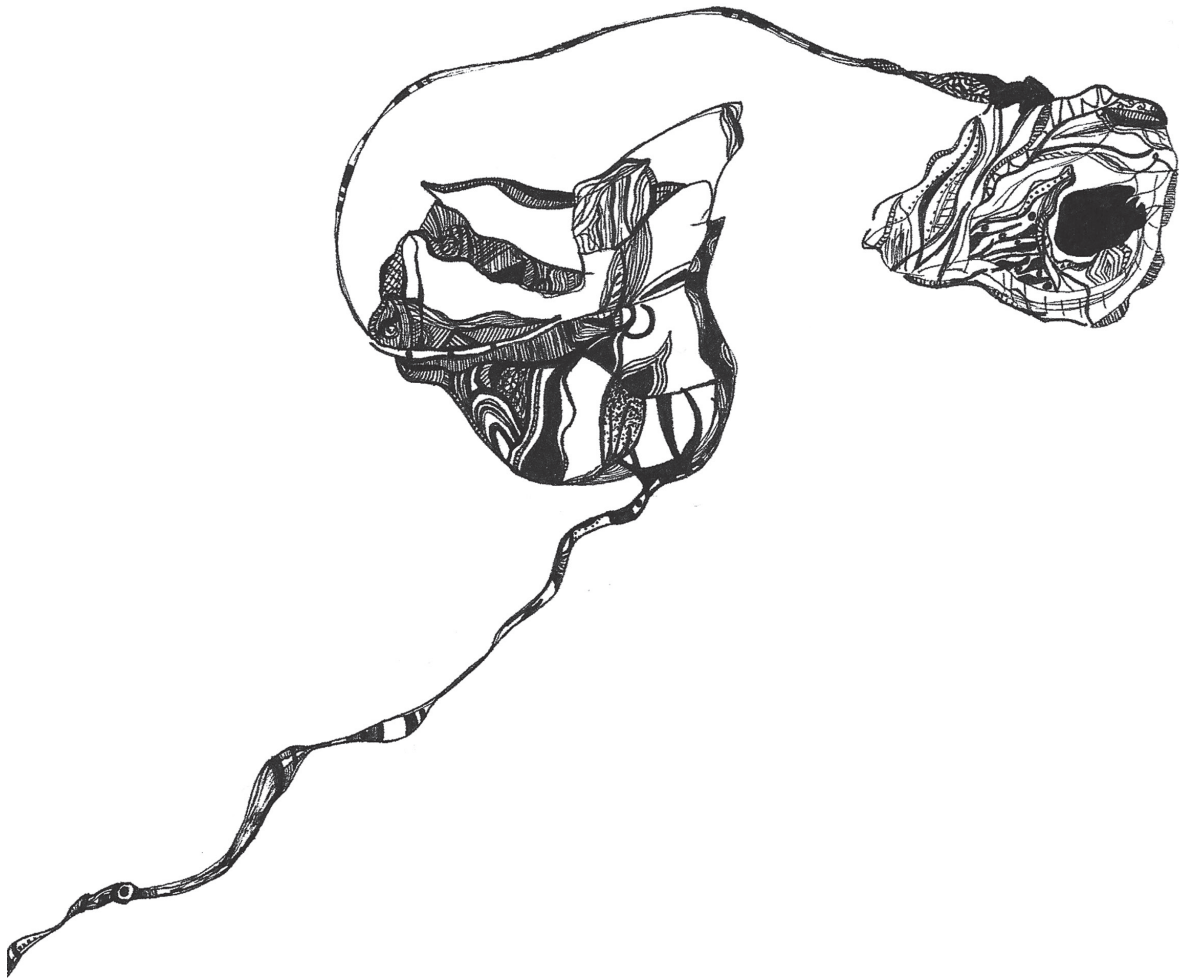
I really hate you right now—you weak-minded, thin-skinned,
white, cisgender, male, Levi's-wearing,
upperclass, pseudo-European, usually bearded,
blue-eyed, dirty blond
hipster fool. Look at me.

Lower your voice and put down your hand,
reckon with the idea that I may be more than

a chopstick wielding ninja freak ready to cut you open
with a coy colonizer cultured gaze
and a perfectly assimilated tongue that lashes out only to say
ffff—check your privilege.

The base and petty reactionary tendency coats me like a chill,
an urge to flirt and conquer.

Meanwhile I sit and ponder my use of footnotes,
the swallowing of my whole self in the middle of class,
my post-grad plans.



Lauren Peinado UNTITLED #4

1

The birthday candle in the basement
flicked itself off the wall composed of egg cartons.

The candle was shaped like a 3. But
that can't be right, can it?

2

A train composed of jonquil paint and fluorescent light
rattling on inky tracks of a pulchritudinous night.

The beady red display read Tulpenstraße
but before I realize we've moved again,
a perfunctory voice announces: *Ostendorfplatz*.

No, that can't be right.

3

Moonlight became blue morning light,
and illuminated the stark, white nude.

I've seen ghosts with darker skin than you.

4

Soon, not quite spring light snaked
through the blinds. I opened them
and let it gash the room.

I drew on you, and can't imagine now
what it could have been that I drew,
but when I said that I was through,
that's when the dam broke

and the destitution of nostalgia set in.

5

I listed the things we used to say
on the back of a euro note
but accidentally used it
to buy a train ticket later.

The machine sucked it up
just as I realized my mistake.

My memory is awful. It was all I had.
The things we used to say are gone.

A man asked me something in Italian.
I shrugged my shoulders at him and still
shrug them when I remember that note.

The board changed, the times shifted,
and the destinations were new.

6

We didn't speak; I looked out the window.
Up above, where the platform meets the sky;
a deception of rising off the tracks.

I close my eyes and accept floating,
the wind-split tree, and the iron railing.

Everything reminds me
of something else.

7

After such a long trip, we sighed with relief
when the conductor announced
with long, drawn out sounds
and a certain flare: *Karlsruhe Hauptbahnhof*.

K, you're shaped like a star.
You're so lucky to be loved. But I confess myself;
I'm reluctant to remember why.

8

Jesse reminded me;
In heaven there's no husbands and wives.
I pray we don't have memories when we die.

I pray we don't have scenes
spliced and shoved into memory,
like little orphaned pieces of life.
The things we used to say are already gone.
What exactly was it that made me forget?



e Restaurant Chinois

Jenessa Abrams

There is a buzzing in the corner.

I turn from my menu and decide it is a fluorescent lamp struggling against its plastic rouge cover. Then it dims. As if to say, there really isn't much room here for lying. I would have to agree. The Chinese restaurant is rather cramped; the folding mustard tables scattered, the dead wood backing of chairs brushing too close to one another.

I didn't come for easy company. But I am reminded by the fade of a cheap light that the crane flies and the occasional loyal rodent will follow you anywhere.

It's been well over seven minutes. I seat myself, furthest table in the back. Asymmetrical. Thinking, maybe it won't look so empty when I sit down. I was wrong of course. My body shrinks the moment I press against the table's surface, the blood-drained skin on my thighs seeming to ooze milky white onto the floor.

I watch my skin dissolving, a pallid puddle forming inches away from my toes. My table indeed looks vacant. At least that's what I tell myself when the old Chinese woman still does not come. She must not see me.

I catch a mirror hall glance of myself in the storefront window. I can hardly imagine a more abandoned scene: a 25-year-old American girl flies to Antibes high on the idea of forgetting with baguettes and bottles of wine; moments after touching down, the gilded coating of her idealism chips; she finds herself alone, seduced by the synthetic glow of a shabby oriental sign, praying to never again encounter another charming French man or creamy wedge of *fromage*; she waits to order Chinese; 1,024 miles from home, she is ignored.

Once more the waitress passes, tray in hand. In one transitory gesture her sagging flesh brushes my uncovered shoulder. I quiver and swiftly move myself against the wall. Its faint scent of stale lemon suggests it may not be

safe either. My stomach churns, either from being sickened or from my hunger; at this point I'm not certain which is stronger.

The woman lowers herself in a slow, calculated motion and places a plate of steaming noodles down on a nearby table. A few men and women laugh, something wonderful has just been uttered; there is warm food to be offered. As the sounds of their easy bliss travel toward my corner, I think for a moment I might like to join them. But then I remember, that's not what I've come for.

As the waitress rises, she shifts her lips into something reminiscent of a smile. It feels familiar, the mouth straining gently, pressing out to meet pieces of thin, fallen hair. The strands lay dark and brittle; pieces of hair separate on the skin on her neck, desperate to touch one another. Somewhere within those splitting fibers and in the smile she finds difficult to muster, I remember a feeling. It's a sad, sweet feeling, an uneasy comfort; it's familiarity, a bit like feeling lost, and at the same moment found, in the doorway of your childhood home. It's losing the giddiness of your birthday and trying to remember how beautiful it is to watch candles glow.

I memorize the waitress's movements. Sometimes watching a strange woman balance sadness with a stack of napkins, the way your mother used to when her fingers could still cradle a bowl, is the most beautiful thing in the world. I start to feel a small movement in my hand when the woman nears. I think I might reach out towards her, the sunken place below my chest wanting to hold her while I can. Something faint starts to part between my lips; her wrists look worn. *I wonder if she has a daughter.*

Thud—there is a soft hollow sound. A ceramic bowl lands in the lonesome crevice of my lap. She nudges her head forward, "*Mange.*" There is little left to be said; I look down at the bowl before me and nod my head.

I remove something sandpaper colored and press my teeth into its ridges. It crunches like Styrofoam and dissolves bland on my tongue. It is the first food I've eaten since morning. I could hardly stomach one oily flake of the croissant Jean put before me at breakfast.

"And for you, *mon cher.*"

He had one of those foreign accents that was paired, like his stiff denims, with suffocating charm.

I think I smiled; at least I remember pressing my lips together tightly, lying hollow in his bed with the eggshell covers draped carefully over me. He could tell I didn't mean it. He nearly dropped the plate onto the floor as he climbed in next to me to prove it.

“Qu'est-ce que c'est, mon chaton?”

His touch was vanilla, a saccharine warmth I wasn't prepared to welcome.

“Nothing,” I promised, and leaned past his forearm to pick a crumb of pastry from the crumpled sheet. It melted too quickly against my lips and reminded me of the blouse and, certainly now, torn hosiery strewn somewhere on his apartment floor. “I'm happy.”

He brushed a piece of hair from my forehead and shook the tanned skin on his head slightly. “Why do you tell untruths?”

I turned. “Why do I lie?”

“Oui.”

I looked up at him blankly. A perfect stranger; I suppose they always are. He waited for some sort of response, remorse maybe. He had found me out. I smiled; it was earnest this time.

I had almost emptied the Chinese woman's bowl. The crackers' flavor hadn't gotten any richer, but I felt I owed the gesture to the waitress. She had delivered them with something of a purpose; it was only right of me to adhere.

I set the basin down and picked up the weathered menu once more, thinking perhaps a bit more clearly about what to order. I have to admit the room started to take on a simmer, a lovely peppering that made the dry scent fade and hinted that perhaps there was some spice somewhere. I felt a warmth that smoothed the goose flesh of my skin and sent small vibrations through my neck. The waitress emerged from behind a drawn, silk screen in the back and neared herself, body shifting uneasily with each step, toward my corner. I dangled my fingers above the table to see if they were indeed there; my legs seemed planted in position, I was sure my head peeked out from atop the crown of the chair. *Now she has to see me.*

“Parle français ou parle anglais?” Her voice was like pebbles; it went well with her ragged yellow fingernails.

I decided it was no use to pretend, *“Anglais s'il vous plaît.”*

“D'accord.” She didn't have a pen or even a notepad to scrawl a word

of what was said. “What do you want?”

It was a simple question really: The noodles or the duck? What did I want? My father had asked me the same question once. A few months and an ocean later, I found myself still unable to answer.

He told me I was a fool for going. There isn't a distance that can take it away. The pain he meant; it wasn't going to up and leave me just because I ran off to a place I could no longer recognize as home. It had yet to dull even in him. Death had softened him, but it hadn't made him weary. He still felt a twinge in his chest when he laughed; he called it his battery malfunction. Though I always knew my mother's passing disrupted his rhythm more than anything a doctor could diagnose.

“Mademoiselle?”

I peered up from the menu. I spend most of my time waiting for things and haven't the slightest idea of what to do when they come.

“The noodles.” She nodded and turned like she could already see me, chopsticks in hand, pretending to know how to work them, imagining there was nothing in the world but this table and her cooking. “Actually.”

The sagging skin pouring out from her shirt turned back into view, her dark pupils widened. For a moment we just looked at each other; her sweating above me, the lines of her face creasing with stories which she had no one to share with, me hunching into the crooked table holding my arms in a cradle and thinking I might like to stay here, both of us believing for one distilled moment that my next few words could take us anywhere.

There were so many things I started to say and I truly intended to. But instead, I looked at her wrinkled hands empty without a notepad and said, “I'll also have the duck.”

There was a slight upward flick in her lip; then she was gone.

I had ordered food for two, either an act of my subconscious or a consequence of my indecision; I wasn't interested in settling the specifics.

Either answer would lead to a stomachache or momentary head trauma. What was the use in letting a decent meal fall to spoils? I let questions pile up around me without answers like the newspapers I refuse to

throw away. One day, something might mean something. I'm starting to think I may have already missed whatever that something came to be.

"*Ça va?*" A trembling deep voice flutters into my ear. The waitress has long since disappeared. I turn to see a limping male figure in a faded Hard Rock t-shirt with patches of violet skin on his scalp. He has addressed the entire restaurant; I'm sure I am the only one to notice. He moves himself towards a table slowly, wobbling against the peeling paint on the walls and scratching his stomach in vicious circular motions. I find I cannot adjust my gaze.

"*Mes amis!*" He is alone; he is shouting. A crooked yellowed tooth frees itself from its proper place and peaks out happily from his flaking mouth. The crazy man is smiling. I think it is aimed in my direction.

It isn't nice to call him crazy. That is what my mother would surely say. I find my reflection once more in the storefront window. I don't see much of a difference.

I raise my hand slowly, unsurely. He quickly takes notice. He's wobbling and I'm shaking and now everyone is staring.

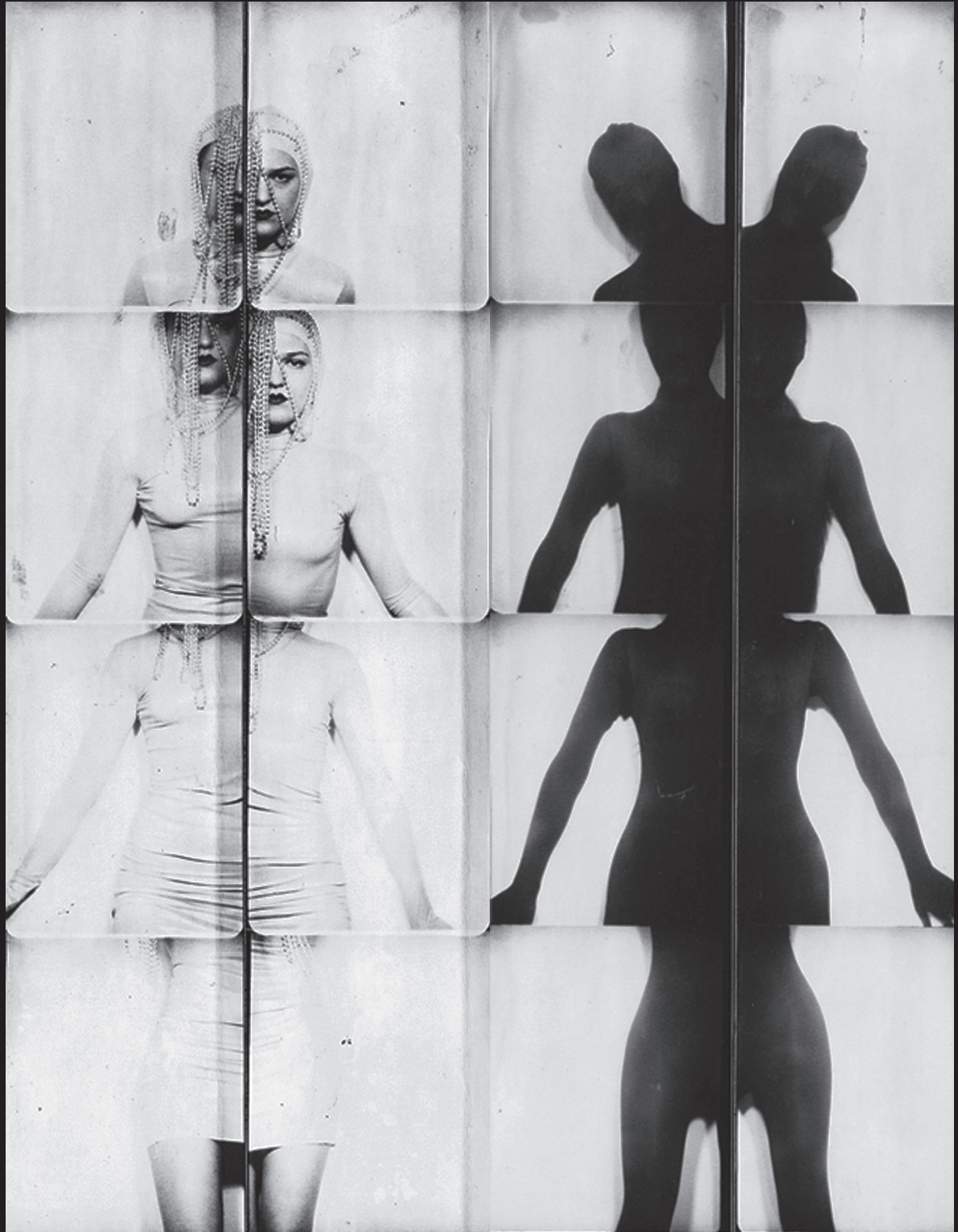
They are still watching when he finally reaches my corner. "*Belle!*" He smiles crooked and giddy like he's happy to see me. I haven't seen that look in a while.

"Would you like to sit?" I motion. He looks blankly but still smiles, "I've enough for two." He stands there fidgeting, adjusting the bottom of his tattered t-shirt. "Please." I get up from the table, pull out the adjacent chair and smile.

Underneath the fluorescent glow I watch him stand up taller, smooth his soiled clothing and then humbly lower his body to the table.

"You looked—" he stuttered, "lonely."

"I was." I smiled.



POLYCEPHALY Sofia Szamosi



Portrait of Gwenifer Bosch Armand Silvani

The way I figure it, we all have one great crime inside of us, one really good sin. Of course there's a whole class of people with the potential for countless other, smaller crimes. I don't mean the delinquents on the evening news. Forget about shoplifting and credit card fraud. I'm talking about crimes of passion. About powerful, deep-seated convictions. The kind that, when provoked, justify a single act of otherwise inexcusable behavior. We all have one. Mine was murder, but that's not necessarily yours. Your great crime could be a bank heist, or impersonating a lawyer, kidnapping a monkey, whatever. Again, I'm not talking about serial killers or career criminals here. I mean regular people like you and me.

Take my friend Elaine. Sweetest, most beautiful person in the world. Actually I'm lying; Elaine threatened to cut the ears off a kitten once, but in all honesty she's a sweetheart. Last year she burned down her hair salon. I don't know if it was for the insurance or just because that salon was Elaine's personal hell. A decade of giving perms and root touch-ups to ungrateful old grandmas had eaten away at her soul. Arson was Elaine's one great crime, the single really bold act of rebellion she could warrant. She bought the gas, shorted the fuse box, wore plastic bags around her shoes—this woman was committed. And it's a shame the ceiling caved before she could get out of there, because if anyone I know deserved to get away with arson, it was definitely Elaine.

Elaine's one great crime was premeditated, which is rare. Usually your great crime is a foggy, private fantasy that stirs inside you for a while, something you never suspect you'll ever act on. And when it bursts, it pops, like a balloon, comes as a surprise, a crime of passion born from the rush of your own hot, blinding emotion—you're running, you're jumping, there's fireworks, and before you know it, you're bashing a 90-year-old woman over the head with a Napoleonic marble candlestick. At least that's my experience.

Obviously your great crime could go completely different, like Elaine's, or even Lars's. Which reminds me—

I know this guy named Lars. He owned Gwenifer's old house where we were staying. Lars is Gwenifer's great grandnephew or something. She signed the townhouse over to his parents in the late 1980s and it went virtually untouched until I moved in. I say virtually because Lars had been growing weed in the basement since 1998. I was only down there a couple times, but he seemed to know what he was doing. He had grow lights, irrigation, some kind of a fan belt. It smelled like a nest of dead raccoons. The stench wafted up the dumbwaiter when you opened it. To be honest, living three flights over his whole operation made me a little uncomfortable. And at first I really wasn't impressed with a wise-ass thirty-something growing weed in his great aunt's basement. It took me about a month to realize this was Lars Molenaar's one great crime.

Lars lived someplace else, an apartment somewhere, and he'd bike back and forth at least once a day. Sometimes he'd bring lunch, usually pears and wheels of foul-smelling cheese he got from his food co-op. I'd hear the metal *shunk* of the dumbwaiter and know he was on his way up. He liked to watch me paint, often for hours at a time. "Pete," he'd say to me, "Pete," with the faintest Dutch accent he still couldn't shake, "Pete, I really love the way you hold your brushes. Teach me how to hold a paintbrush, Pete." I just assumed he was high, until I started asking questions about Gwenifer and the house and all of a sudden he'd turn disturbingly sharp.

"Her husband was my great aunt's brother. Those candlesticks were a wedding present from my great grandparents. They are Napoleonic. The marble is from Campan, the south of France. Have you been?"

See, Lars was not a pothead. He'd always hated the stuff growing up in Amsterdam and never got the idea to grow it until he inherited the townhouse. That year his parents' cruise ship capsized in the Aegean, leaving 22-year-old Lars in charge of a four-story historical landmark in the heart of the city.

As it turns out, the captain of the cruise ship was high. This was a favorite topic of Gwenifer's. "I told that boy!" She'd shout this at me every time Lars left the room. Her voice was always shrill and angry, her beady blue eyes perpetually pierced together. "I told him to sell it! Get rid of this old

house. Give the money to that club, that Drug Choices group. They know what to do with those people. Burnt out. Completely irresponsible. No-good hopheads.”

Fifteen years of Gwenifer’s nagging, not to mention the historical society nipping at his heels. You’d think Lars would give into the pressure, but no. Instead, what does he do? He empties the furniture out of the basement, lines the walls with reflective padding, and turns their precious historical landmark into his own private marijuana hothouse. No more German Expressionist photography, no more postcolonial wicker ottomans, just Lars and his drugs.

He’d bought a cot and tried to make the house comfortable before Gwenifer and I moved in. This meant shaking out the dustsheets, lining the floor with newspaper, buying a new fridge and hauling the old one down to the basement. It felt like a hidden shrine, this artifact of 1950s powder blue enamel lost in the isles of cannabis. It’s not like Lars hocked the basement furniture or anything. He just piled it all up on the fourth floor landing. Plus the rest of the house was fully furnished. I mean really overdone. It had been an art collector’s powwow den in Gwenifer’s prime. Way too ornate for my taste. The library alone had a list of irreplaceable antiques long enough to teepee the townhouse. Oak bookshelves, a monster chandelier, the most beautiful crocheted tablecloth in all the land.

Bottom line, this room had only one window. I was sending 10 emails a day, back and forth to the committee, explaining that I paint with turpentine and why working in the library was a bad idea. Never get in an argument with the people who write history textbooks. This library had been a Mecca for an entire generation of inbred millionaire art snobs. It’s where Mrs. Bosch *had* to be memorialized. No, I couldn’t paint her in a different part of the townhouse. It was only for two months anyway.

The books were long gone, so I propped the canvas on a bookcase. I set up a scene between her armchair and the credenza with the single spotlight I’d brought from my studio. Moth-eaten furniture and ugly-ass wallpaper must have been what the committee meant when they said “innate charm and exemplary vintage.”

“The chair cannot go there. That’s no place for a chair.” I swear, the first words she ever said to me. “You moved it away from my window. It’s

facing your ridiculously bright light. How will I be able to read?”

“Who’s reading? Mrs. Bosch, this is just for the painting.”

“In the library? You’re painting me in the library, but I’m not reading? Where’s the point in that?”

“There aren’t even any books! How long haven’t you—it’s—it’s just for the painting. Okay?”

I’d only glanced over what the committee gave me on Gwenifer when I first accepted the job. Welsh, German, married an ambassador, cultural emissary, cardigans, corgis, you get the picture. If they’d shown me what she looked like I would never have said yes. This woman, I mean, I’ve got a book of photos dating back here to the 1920s. She was one scary looking seven-year-old. For starters, she’s got a nose like an albatross: that thing is a *beak*. Darwin classified subspecies of finches based on less evidence than what I have here. It’s no wonder they never had kids. She must have crossed a reproductive barrier; the species were no longer compatible.

And in a way it made sense. I mean, I’m not your typical oil on canvas, portrait of General Mannon over the mantelpiece kind of guy. I do mostly animal portraits, actually. Yeah, I’ll do people on commission, but I’m not the artist you call when you want your beloved relatives depicted in stunning realism. Probably a smart move by the committee.

She, Gwenifer, the rhino-queen, stayed cooped up in the attic. She only came down for our painting sessions, which for me became a daily trial of mixing paint and enduring verbal abuse. “Don’t sit like that. You’re getting paint on the furniture. I don’t like that smell. That’s not paint; don’t tell me that smell is paint. I know what paint smells like. I worked for Otto Dix.”

After five hours of this, she’d slither back into her attic lair. It took her 10 minutes to climb a single step. When Lars wasn’t there to hold her, she’d get on her belly and crawl up on her hands and knees, knocking over all the furniture Lars had piled up there, her clothes getting caught on the lampshade and pulling her back down to the floor. It was pathetic.

When she wasn’t sitting for me, Gwenifer was always upstairs. Her little old feet shuffled across the creaky floorboards, one floor above my studio, and my bed. Lars left her meals in the dumbwaiter twice a day. She ate like a hungry caterpillar, apparently oblivious to the dead animal stench carried up from the basement.

One of Lars's neighbors had four gigantic Dobermans that would not shut up. Plus I had to keep the window open at all times for ventilation. Sometimes, when I couldn't stand her anymore, I'd stick my head out in the alley and let their barking drown out the old woman's voice. For a couple of brief seconds there was fresh air, dogs, cars, the brief shimmer of an outside world. Then back to Gwenifer Bosch and the cloying smell of turpentine.

At first I kept my paints by the window. It was convenient, and there was light. When I lost the first tube of cobalt blue, I figured an open ledge wasn't the greatest place to store stuff overnight. So I moved my paints onto the bookshelf, under the painting. And I just left them there, in the open. I mean, I'm a trusting guy. I don't make assumptions about anybody. Maybe I misplaced the first three tubes: hey, it's possible. Not till the fourth one disappeared did I start losing my cool.

I really didn't want to suspect Lars. I tried testing him. I asked if he could pick me up another couple tubes of blue. "Sure boss," he said and came back with a bag of paint he'd charged to the historical society. So that told me nothing.

I knew he sometimes let people into the basement, the pot people he did his drug thing with, so it could easily have been one of those scumbags. I only ever heard them coming in downstairs, just a couple at a time. There were probably some starving art students among them. Some rebel hipster Picasso going through a blue period. Who knew what went on after I went to bed?

So I had what I thought at the time was a really bright idea. This is how you know the turpentine fumes were already getting to my head; I thought this was a moment of astonishing genius. I moved my cot into the library, right next to the painting. Then I put the paints under my bed. This way, if anybody so much as stepped onto the third floor I'd hear them. Foolproof, am I right?

That first night in the library, I thought I dreamt I heard a record player. You so rarely hear old records anymore. Especially in German.

Hast du etwas Zeit für mich

Dann singe ich ein Lied für dich

Von neun—and then the record skipped. Static for about three seconds.

Auf ihrem Weg zum Horizont.

In my head it repeated like that, on and on until the morning. I opened my eyes and was welcomed by the unfinished, ghostly shell of Gwenifer, propped against the bookshelf. And then the real thing, the decrepit, but still living flesh,

a minute later.

“This is your bedroom now, you decided? So I have to sit in this smelly room and stare at your bed? Well I’d have thought changing the sheets would be the least you could do. Hygiene, Mr. Pratchett.”

The Dobermans were going out for a walk again. I craned my head out the window to try and catch a glimpse of their owner. She was a stocky blonde who kept the leashes clipped to her waist. When I turned back inside the chair was empty and Gwenifer was hovering next to me.

“Let’s see it. Your two months are almost up. Aren’t you nearly done?”

“What? No. I mean, I still have your face left. What do you think?”

Gwenifer leaned in, her proboscis practically piercing the canvass. Her beady blue eyes darted around the portrait while the corners of her mouth twitched. Finally she spun around. A line of brown paint smeared onto her nose. “I don’t understand,” she said to me. “Where are my babies? Why haven’t you painted them?”

“Your what?”

“My babies! My pets! You neglected to paint them.”

“Your dogs? You wanted your dogs in the painting? Nobody said—”

“Why do you think we chose you for this? You paint dogs, Mr. Pratchett, yes? Why on earth would we have chosen a dog painter to paint a portrait with no dogs? What do you take me for, a buffoon? I’m fed up with your japery, Mr. Pratchett. You can call me to pose for you only once my babies are back in the painting. Until then, I don’t want to hear a word from you. Do you understand?”

She marched into the hall and shouted for Lars to come help her up the stairs. After that, Lars left her donuts in the dumbwaiter and spent the rest of the morning helping me find pictures of her corgis. “She has them all upstairs. They are dead. Stuffed. But she is very protective of them. Using photos will be better for you.”

The silver lining in having to backtrack for a bunch of dogs was getting a week of painting free from Gwenifer. I sent another strongly worded email to the committee about the setback, but in truth it was a huge relief. I erased half of the ugly wallpaper to fit the dogs in. Lars told me two would be enough, that’s the most she ever had at one time. I worked through lunch, layering up their goofy smiling dog faces. When I finally went downstairs to

make myself a sandwich, I passed out on the kitchen floor and woke up two hours later, still exhausted and with a sore back. I lugged myself to bed and dreamt more of German lullabies. Then of corgis and a pack of Dobermans ripping Gwenifer's face off.

This painting was kicking my ass. Why did I feel the need to make it so precise? It was more detailed than anything I'd done in years. It should've been loose, interpretative, faster, easier, that was the whole point. Gwenifer's punyprune hands, her lumpy carrot legs—I'd taken the time to mold them, turn them into graceful fingers and ballerina thighs. She had these boney humps on her forehead, where they sawed her horns off. I'd rendered them like the purple shadow of a halo on her brow. The *trompe-l'oeil* was taking Gwenifer's features and convincing you she wasn't a proboscis monkey.

I woke up that morning soaked in sweat. Somebody had shut the window and the library was beyond humid. Like a moron I tried to force the window open and got my thumb caught under the casing. Panicking, I yanked it out and sent my bottles flying off the windowsill, spilling turpentine and linseed oil across the room. Thank God it wasn't my left hand—I paint with my left hand. I wound a rag around my thumb and held it up over my head while I mopped up the mess. That morning was the only time I wished there was a TV in this place. Something to distract me while I ate Lars's leftover cheese and wrapped fresh paper towels around my bleeding thumb.

I moved the fan into the library and plugged it into the strip with my spotlight. My paints were still out from yesterday, the corgi colors still wet. Gwenifer was shuffling around her attic, waiting for me to add her babies to the portrait. I didn't notice till I started filling in the wallpaper that my cobalt blue was missing.

I turned over every piece of furniture in that room. I looked under tarps and couches, big heavy curtains wrapped in plastic. I checked the floorboards, stained where the turpentine had soaked through the newsprint, but there were no loose boards or gaps large enough for a tube of paint to fall through. Lars had bought two new tubes of the stuff. That made six total. Six missing tubes of cobalt blue.

I decided to soldier on. The flowers in the wallpaper could be hunter's green, it's not like anyone would notice. I had a quinacridone violet I could use for shadows. I tried not to waste time on those tiny corgi faces. Two,

three days flew by and I got more work done than I had all last week. Freed from the unrelenting tirade of complaints and criticism, I felt young and unclouded and somehow unstoppable.

The only detail I couldn't finish was her eyes. She had bright blue eyes. You can't exactly dilute quinacridone violet into a piercing, sky blue. So I left her eyes white for now, no pupils or anything. I'd get more blue from Lars next time he came up, but I was on a roll now and didn't want to break my momentum. I was finishing up the shadow her nose cast across her face, this somber veil of darkness that hides half of her features in every single photograph. And I was sort of singing out loud to myself as I did it, because I was happy about how well the portrait was coming. Like I thought this might actually be one of the most masterful things I'd ever painted. And then I realized I was singing in German, the words to some lullaby I had no idea the meaning of.

That's how I figured out the record player couldn't be a dream. Because I don't speak German. *Each speeken zee*—see, I've got nothing. And there's no way my subconscious was providing me with lyrics—rhyming lyrics—in a language I don't know the first thing about.

So I waited up, sitting Indian-legged on my cot, the fan shut off to make sure I could hear the record player. I was waiting for more than three hours in the hot, humid dark, but I didn't mind. I can still hear that needle falling into place, the metallic reverb the song acquired from traveling down the dumbwaiter shaft.

Hast du etwas Zeit für mich

Dann singe ich ein Lied für dich

Von neunund—shhhhhhcckk-aaaackk—auf ihrem Weg zum Horizont

I banged my fist on the inside of the lift. The record stopped. I banged again, rattling the rails that held the cart in place. "What?" Her voice echoed down the shaft. "Whatcha want?"

"Mrs. Bosch? Is that you?"

"Of course it is! Who else is here? Did you finish with my corgis?"

"Yeah, I finished painting them. They're really lifelike."

"Well? Come help me down so I can see them!"

"Hold on!" I ran up the stairs, past the picture frames and blanket chests Lars had piled there. A tunnel was cut through the junk up to the

master bedroom. Cobwebs were everywhere and the furniture was faded. A row of taxidermy corgis lined the far wall. Gwenifer was sitting at a vanity covered with makeup cases and a week's worth of empty dinner plates.

"What're you doing up here?"

She rubbed her leathery face in the mirror. "I had no idea how old I got!" Pounding the powder puff into her ashen cheeks, she waddled over to the record player and flipped the Nena album on again. She turned the volume up so high I had to strain to hear her. "You're asking me what *I'm* doing in my own house? Please! I should be asking you that, Mr. Pratchett. Lord knows you've been squatting here for long enough." She tilted her head back, granting me full view into her capacious nostrils. Bats could get lost in those things. Behind her, the record player continued to skip, playing the same thirty seconds in a loop. *Dann singe ich ein Lied für dich*. "You say my babies are done? I would've thought the whole painting would be finished by now." Her thin lips were strawberry red. *Und dass so was von so was kommt*.

"Are you wearing lipstick?"

"I need everything I can to make myself look beautiful! Now that I know I'm so old! Now, show me the painting!" She shoved passed me. Her hunched little body tackled the stairs one at a time with renewed vigor. I took a last look around the attic before following her down. There was a layer of dust on the bedspread, like she hadn't slept there.

I found Gwenifer standing in front of the portrait, making faces like she had food poisoning. The spotlight was on. The blinding white eyes shined so bright they gave the illusion of light pouring out of Gwenifer's portrait, into the room. "I hate it," she said. Outside the Dobermans were at it again, yapping in competition with the record player blaring on the floor above. *Von neunundneunzig Luftballons*. "Complete slosh. Do it over."

"What?"

"You call this art? It's banal, completely tasteless. Bland. The whole thing's bland. Toss out the dogs. The dogs ruin the whole composition. Except that's all you're really good for, isn't it? Animals?"

"You made me put them in! You made me! This is your—"

"Shush your nose. It's my portrait. And I said it looks like crap. What kind of expression is that supposed to be? Am I surprised?"

"I haven't done the eyes yet! Look, it isn't finished. And when it is I

don't give two—" Except I didn't call her out, because Gwenifer waddled over to my spotlight, raised her stubby leg, and kicked the whole thing over. The 20-watt bulb shattered at my feet; sparks flew across the newsprint. The paper caught fire and I ran to stomp it out. Then I heard a *swoosh*, like a raven in the night. Gwenifer had high-tailed it out of the library and slammed the door behind her. And I was left jumping up and down on a pile of old newspapers, which were soaked pretty much all the way through with turpentine, trying to save her house from burning down.

I found a water pitcher, but it was empty, and I was still playing hopscotch on the fire, kicking up the newsprint into balls of smoldering ash. *Und dass so was von so was kommt.* This time the record didn't skip, the song continued. Clap. Clap. Drums, base, and then the keyboard, an '80s pop ballad. And I realized, from the light the orange flames cast on the bookcase—my painting. She took my painting.

I grabbed the candlestick off the bookshelf and lit it off the fire that was, at this point, inevitably going to consume the entire third floor. I ran into the hall and headed back up to her bedroom. A dinky little light was still on over her vanity, her stuffed corgis staring at me with tongues hanging out of their mouths. The turntable was blaring and a trail of smoke wafted out of the dumbwaiter. But Gwenifer wasn't there. So I headed down through the tunnel of basement furniture, just as Nena's voice rejoined the instrumentals, the tempo twice as fast as before.

*Neunundneunzig Luftballons
Auf ihrem Weg zum Horizont*

The heat was so strong, I raised my bandaged hand to cover my face as I ran past the library. I held out the candlestick to look ahead. Most of the second floor was boarded up or covered in plastic. I ran down to the kitchen and started throwing open pantry doors, trying to find where she was hiding.

*Hielten sich für Captain Kirk
Das gab ein großes Feuerwerk*

She was nowhere. I wound up back on the second floor, crouching to look under desks. I opened a window and stared down on the street below. The air outside was just as humid. Had Gwenifer left the building? Could she have already turned the corner, carrying that painting down the street alone? The sound of two police sirens went whizzing by, coming in and out of focus as they

sped along some nearby street. I left the window open and made a mad dash for the basement.

Neunundneunzig Kriegsminister—

Streichholz und Benzinkanister—

The song was blaring loud as ever as I busted into Lars's pot garden. Cymbals were crashing, the keyboard pounding. The basement door was bolted, but the antique wooden frame couldn't stand two hits from the blunt end of my candlestick. I scanned the aisles of pot planters, holding out the candle, looking for an old woman somewhere in this forest of spikey green darkness. Then I found that shimmering blue artifact, the 1950s fridge. Gwenifer was standing in front of it. She was crying into my portrait of her. "Look at my face!" She brushed her bony fingers through her hair. "My face used to be so beautiful. What happened to me?"

"Mrs. Bosch. My God. Pull yourself together."

"Look at how little hair I have. I'm bald! I'm a bald-headed monster!"

"No. Mrs. Bosch, plenty of old ladies' hair thins out. You're not bald. You're just old."

"It's so wiry, it has no shape. What if I get a permanent?"

"You don't want to do that. It's better you get a wig. Your hair can't hold up to chemicals anymore."

"What are you, some kind of hairdresser?"

"No I'm—I'm not a hairdresser. I had a friend who was."

"You had a friend who was a hairdresser?"

"Yeah, my friend Elaine, back home. She owned a salon and had a lot of clients who were old ladies like you."

Nena's voice was back again, this time slow and sultry. *Neunundneunzig Jahre Krieg.* Gwenifer's blue eyes met mine. The candlelight flickered in her piercing, wet pupils. I reached out and she let me take the painting back from her. The eyes were gouged out. Right through the canvas she had stuck her fingers, or a fork or something, and ripped right through the last part of the painting I hadn't finished. She nodded at me, her artificial strawberry lips spread into a jack-o-lantern smile that turned my blood to oil. *Ließen keinen Platz für Siege.*

Gwenifer grasped both hands around the refrigerator door handle. She pulled it open. The fridge was empty and unplugged, sitting in Lars's

sweltering basement pothouse. Except it wasn't empty, something sat there on the middle metal rack. I lowered the candlestick so I could see them. Six tubes of cobalt blue.

*Hab' 'nen Luftballon gefunden
Denk' an dich und lass' ihn fliegen.*

The wick extinguished and the candle fell from the stick the moment I swung it through the air. Light didn't matter since I could hear where Gwenifer hit floor. By the third swing I was on my knees as well, pounding that candlestick into ground, not sure anymore if I was connecting with her head or not. Because it didn't really matter whether or not I was succeeding, so long as I was actually *doing* it. My mind became lucid as the adrenalin kicked in. For once I had no doubt, no nagging second thoughts. I was simple, loose. Completely cool. I stayed like that till the firemen found me. They shined a flashlight in my face and I could see there was a crater in the cement three inches thick, the candlestick dented beyond recognition.

That's the kind of balance you achieve when your mind and body are wholly committed to one, simple task. Totally transcendent, and I won't experience anything like it ever again. It's a one shot thing, a fluke of nature if it even happens to us. The moment I connected with Gwenifer's head, it was like her hard outer shell split open, letting me see into her soul. I bathed in her light, totally purged of all my spite. Or maybe that was blood? I don't know. It helped that all my senses were shot down there. It was dark and hot and I couldn't smell a thing over Lars's weed. And that damn song was blasting the whole time, those German lyrics I still can't understand, pounding through my head.



he Philosopher in A-Minor

Chloe Byrne

The sky creaked closed as the man,
broad on his back, still wrapped and
half inside his tent, started
to stir under his parted

earthy hair. He woke up just
enough to catch the sun blush
through the tight seams of the earth's
shredded red shirt. From the dirt

rose the sweet November cold.
The last light left, he unrolled
himself to greet the night and
felt the moon, soft in his hands

like a ball of fresh socks; one
dandelion picked, undone from
her dark stem. Whole, she hung high
until he breathed—it was like

a splash of silver fish, caught
in a boat's gaping light, shocked
and spun, they spread. He groped
the moon like a bar of soap

and she slipped back to her black
basin. He felt cold and cracked,
left open at the globe, when
he could not hold her again.

or Fred

Ryan Casey

In *Swing Time*,
Fred and Ginger float across the floor,
punctuating swinging phrases
with toe tips and tight turns—
step hop step hop step hop step step—break!
Spat-shod feet that click in unison,
fast footwork that seems so effortless,
playful moves that look so natural—
they move as one.

Their feet just barely graze the floor
as they glide about it, cheek to cheek,
embodying every last drum beat,
tapping rat-a-tat tattoos
with grace and poise and grins.
When they finally sail over the railing
and out the door, you can still see
the swing in their step
and the swing in their spirit.



(Bad) Life in 8 Battles, Ending in Condemnation

Katie Zhang

1

The candy you stole from the
teacher's desk
because she was a nar-co-lep-tick
and the class was laughing.

2

The first boy who made you feel
like a girl
and you punched him in the face.

3

10 years later, gazing down from a neon pole
at white-collar clowning Washingtons
thinking: "Whatever
. . . toys can have agency."

4

15 years later, dissertating
quotes by Simone de Beauvoir
thinking: "Fouc-ault!
. . . toys can have agency."

5

2 months in Zucotti
critiquing the dominant hegemony
of—untouchable colored(ism) womyn split (trans)
. . . then puking.

6

Failing to learn guitar after 12 years
of A-C-D-E because you must
have ADHD, and it shows.

7

Crumbled paper
stupid—No thesis!
Narcissus thinking: “Critically
. . . toys run this agency.”

8

Reading motivational mgmt literature
meditating Chopra (Oprah-chop!)
doing downward dog, and interviewing for
jobs in social media.



Maggie Franks WLI FALLS

Reversals

Sam DiBella

The street is full
and the street is empty
and I walk.

The city cries.
The wind shushes
a child.

Passing cars
whirl fallen leaves
in circles.

A man sells
flowers that do not
grow here.

The day goes
dark, while lights go
on.



hite Noise

Anita Rojas Carroll

I

11:45 AM

I try to write a poem about three word philosophies scrawled all over the bathroom in a coffee shop on the Bowery. A drawing of bear tits, low-hanging, caption reading, “WHY GO TO WAR WITH IRAQ WHEN YOU CAN HAVE A WHORE WITH A RACK?”

My page remains empty.

II

2:00 PM

I saw a boy with a tattoo of California behind his ear. He was born in Tenafly, but when people ask about his ink he tells them he was conceived in a poorly lit room in Chateau Marmont. He writes personal essays about fucking girls with Spanish last names in the Mojave, but really he hates the sand.

III

4:15 PM

There’s a mango lady on almost every corner of 14th Street between Ninth and Third Avenues today. They are so small, and I love watching them cut the slices with little cinnamon fingers. Their hands remind me of my grandmother’s, but I don’t want to add to the collection of Beautiful Brown People stories that people are always weaving. So I guard the memory of her swift hands in my anthology of fragmented images that bleed into each other with time, rolls of film that melt in sunlight.

IV

6:05 PM

My daily delusions have led to me to believe that I am either a premature failure or that I am the next great luminary. Today it is a bit of both. I think of Marilyn and how beautiful she remained when she was sad. And she could tell me why we want to fall in love with people who are always aching to create beautiful things but constantly destroying them.

V

8:35 PM

I need to tell at least one lie every day. I have this story that you don't wash your sheets because you want to pretend I'm still there.

(But of course, I know you have, because for you everything is clean and there is not one stray strand of hair or mascara stain on the pillowcase that you cannot transform: clean linen).

VI

10:50 PM

I always notice that the beautiful people aren't really beautiful, or some stupid pseudo-profundity like that. This time it happens to be in a grimy apartment in Alphabet City. I drink too much and sit on the floor, watching their mouths move in horrible shapes like they were carved into their faces with butter knives, and it's like I am watching a silent film where the only true thing is the strand of Christmas lights that keeps flickering.



Sofia Szamosi OK GO

usbandry Alex Badura

The garden where my grandmother slaves
over tomatoes and *gurken* at the age of 92
used to surround a munificent peach tree.
My mother would climb its arms, like a newborn on her perfect father,
picking fruit like grey hairs out of the head of someone with answers.
She found promise in the peaches,
the tickle of their pubescent fuzz,
a reminder of the potential sweetness to come.
The reachable limbs and their distance from the sunroof of the sky
made sure she got caught red handed in reverie.
My grandmother would make her pray kneeling on rice for hours,
and she prayed, prayed for Warsaw, and small revolutions.
I don't think I'd exist if she had made it
to Warsaw to become a doctor.
Who knows who my father would have married,
who knows who she would have as a son,
and who would care?
The peach tree has been cut down for decades now.
My grandmother, picking weeds out of the beds of her flowers,
cleaning dirt off of the carrots
does not know what she has done
because my mother still stops by to fix the garage door,
the sink, the lights, her ears,
a new type of dutiful husbandry.



Maggie Franks EVE'S

Q

uestions and Answers Abena Opam

Abena, are you Ghanaian?

After I touched ground at Kotoka International Airport, in the brown sprawling mess that is the city of Accra, until I stepped into the New York snow outside of John F. Kennedy International four months later, I was asked a few questions on a semi-regular basis.

My father, Kwame, was born in Kumasi, Ghana, a small city in the center of a small country. Ghanaians call it the Garden City. I offer this fact to anyone who asks me what I am and if that part of me happens to be Ghanaian.

Abena is a Ghanaian name—meant for those Ghanaian girls born on Tuesdays—and I do suppose I have some Ghanaian features. Ghanaians also have a tendency to ask for my Christian name, or my British name, upon discovering that my name is a traditional one. This seems to me awfully, perversely peculiar, as if having a Ghanaian name is not enough. “But . . . your Christian name? Is it Abigail?”

Sometimes I feel like I live on the shores of a warring ocean, and sometimes I believe firmly in the need to not prepare for things.

So, yes, I am Ghanaian. But when I look in the mirror, I often see a wry smile and my mother’s Haitian cheekbones. My mother, Danielle, is from a small village town in the Central Department of Haiti called Saut D’eau. *Saut d’eau* is the French word for waterfall. In my youngest memories, my mother’s village smells and sounds and looks something like the washed-out edges of old photographs: a scruffy-faced goat tied to a iron stake in my great-uncle’s backyard; a brown river that flows up to my chubby arms; my great-grandmother’s paper-thin brown skin; a great massive waterfall on the edge of town, shooting wet confetti rain into the palm and pitch-apple trees below; a dog with fat ticks, panting on the porch of a pink stucco ranch house; darkness and latrines and spiders.

Haiti is washed-out, although it breathes solidly in the family I

have in New York, my mother and grandmother and aunts and cousins. Haiti breathes in the green mangoes and *keneps* and canisters of rum that my grandmother smuggles into LaGuardia Airport by way of Miami International; it also breathes on the coasts of West Africa, in Ghana and Togo and Benin, in the high-ceilinged walls of slave castles like Elmina and Cape Coast.

I don't think it occurred to me that there was anything more to know about my Haitian family in New York. Holidays, birthdays, and barbecues were always full to bursting with my mother's chattering extended family: Grandma Denise; Uncles Eddie (with the dreadlocks), and Joe; Aunts Juneau, Marie, and Rosemary; cousins William (the Jehovah's Witness), Yamiley, Jean, Andy, Jackie, Dennis, Cecile, and now baby Antonio (whom I have yet to meet).

Grandma's apartment on Dean Street was the site of all meet and greets for the Registres: whenever a parent was stuck at work or going on vacation or exterminating rats or roaches, their children were dutifully deposited on Grandma's doorstep in Crown Heights. I remember pieces of the 20-minute drive that we would take from our home in northeastern Queens to Grandma's building in Brooklyn. In particular, I remember the cemetery we would drive through, its expanses hugging the edges of the narrow Jackie Robinson Parkway. I would hold my breath and count to 12. After tumbling out of the car at Grandma's stoop, we would walk up the four flights of winding project stairs, my brother Kwame pushing and prodding me up along the way; I would smile broadly when I reached Grandma's landing.

"Hi, Gramma!"

"Hi, Grandpa!" A mischievous smile from the family matriarch.

"Aw, Gramma! You know I'm not Grandpa!"

And she would smile, and I would smell the *griot* and *bouillon* and black-eyed peas burning on her silver-polished stovetop.

Grandma Denise has since moved to Elmont, a small, quiet, mostly black suburb on Long Island. We still do the "Gramma-Grandpa" *shtick* from time to time, but I have never known either of my paternal grandparents. In fact, the only member of my father's extended family that I was ever close with was his brother, Apraku. Or his half-brother, as I discovered a few

months ago. My Ghanaian family has always been a mystery, and so few of them lived in the United States at all. Indeed, my being Ghanaian never seemed to exist outside of odd symbols when I was growing up: a too-small skirt made of traditional *kente* cloth that I received from “a relative” (always a relative) when I was six; the steaming tray of *jollof* rice that I brought to my elementary school’s international luncheon in the fifth grade; my name. I often wonder if the size of my mother’s Haitian family isolated my lonely father more, if the sight of the 12 Registres around the Thanksgiving table hurt him any. By the time I was old enough to ask, my father was no longer there to tell me.

My mother and father separated before I turned 10, and when my parents broke apart, I listened to shards and scraps of their arguments and heard what is best and worst about myself: that Haitians were just stupid enough to have been shipped across the Atlantic; that Ghanaians are too black African.

In the current political landscape of my life, my father is prone to ignoring the Haitian flags and rainbow banners that paper the walls of my bedroom. He also has a certain proclivity for such acerbic non-sequiturs as, “Haitians are losers” and, “How were your trips to the slave castles? You know you don’t have any slave ancestors.” At times like these, I am between an acid that comes from a failed marriage and internalizing harmful ideas about half of myself. At times like these, I am often thrown for a loop as to how, exactly, to be.

Abena, have you been to see your family in Kumasi?

From August to December of last year, I lived in Ghana and spent most of my time avoiding the half of my family that lives there. I saw my father’s face everywhere on the streets of Accra—saw his dark skin, his shiny bald forehead, his anger. Saw my own dark face mirrored in the thousands of rich, poor, young, and old Ghanaians who surrounded me. We visited the Wli Waterfalls in November, and while everyone waded to their necks in the cold, silty water, I hung back and felt myself fly to plateaus and stucco in the Caribbean.

In many ways, Haitian is the only way I know how to be. When I

think of Haiti I think of my mother and of safety and warmth, perhaps in an infantile way, but as soon as I got to Ghana, I needed to be Ghanaian for everybody. My white friends looked to me for some harmless combination of authentic African tour guide and token black friend. My African-American friends glared with jealousy that I was able to come to this country and find, quite literally, what they could only seek symbolically: roots.

The drifting Haiti of my memories seems especially muddy, especially hard to pin down, when remembered in tandem with the crystal-clear images—in my memory and in my iPhoto album—of my semester abroad. My memory seems to be working overdrive in snapshots of bus rides and conversations recalled verbatim.

For example, my cousin Jeffrey—Amoakohene is his Ghanaian name—called me almost daily to ask how I was doing. He was born in Kumasi, like most of my family, but lived and worked in Tema, another coastal city just east of Accra. One night, after much fretting on my part, we had dinner at Labone Coffee Shop, and he brought me Ghanaian chocolate and a *kente* cloth dress. I accepted the gifts, tugging uncomfortably at the collar of my button-down shirt and trying to smooth my jeans. The dress would spend the next few months folded up in the back of my closet.

I'll save it for Amma, I reasoned, thinking of my small sister. *She's appropriately feminine.*

I constantly received phone calls from unknown numbers in Ghana, family members in Accra for the weekend who wanted to catch a glimpse of rich Uncle Kwame's American daughter. Every time I thought to pick up the phone, I thought of the conflicted look on Jeffrey's face: one part familial love for his cousin Abena, one part disappointment (did I imagine it?) at her lack of boyfriend, lack of husband. I may have imagined all of it, but I felt this most acutely when the NYU Accra program took us on a day trip to Kumasi.

At four in the morning on a wet-smelling October Sunday, it was already hotter than any October day in New York. Our four resident assistants were running in circles around the 32 kids who made up NYU's Accra program—waking and re-waking us, distributing two-liter bottles of Voltic water and Styrofoam rectangles filled with fried chicken and *jollof* rice.

Many miles and many hours later—during which we had paid 20 Ghana *pesewas* (about 12 cents) for toilet paper and took pictures with

ostriches at the largest tilapia farm in West Africa—I had my headphones on, face pressed to the warm glass of our tour bus.

“All right, everyone,” sang a convivial, maternal voice from the front of the bus. My sleeping classmates stirred; Julian snorted loudly and fell forward with a start.

“I know it’s been a long ride, but we’re finally in Kumasi.”

The voice belonged to Christa, the assistant director on our campus and an American ex-pat from Philadelphia. I fished through my gray traveler’s backpack, trying not to kick the empty bottles of water, now caked in mud, that lined the bottom of the bus. It was close to three in the afternoon, and I was in Kumasi.

“Hey, Abby, what are you thinking about?”

I must have looked strange. I sat up and turned toward the friend who had asked me.

“Nothing much. I can’t believe how long it took to get here!”

“Yeah . . . Hey, isn’t this where your dad’s family is from?”

“Mm . . . yeah. I guess?”

I turned around, back toward the picture window of the tour bus, at the houses and streets and colors and children playing on dirt roads, and I imagined whole other lives for myself outside of Queens and New York and an immigrant’s America. Piles of trash burned in black plumes, shoeless kids in football jerseys roasted goats, and I, who had not been back to Haiti in more than a decade, felt as though I could have been in the back of a pickup truck in Saut D’eau. They are not so different.

But, I thought, very deliberately, this isn’t Haiti. I was six the last time I was there. This is Kumasi, and I am 20 and a college student and a lesbian in a country where to be so is illegal.

I turned off my phone and turned up my music.

Abena, do you have a boyfriend?

The week before I boarded the plane to anglophone West Africa was suffocatingly hot. For three days I had put off packing. The evening before takeoff, as cicadas buzzed lazily in the maple tree outside my bedroom window, my father interrupted my haphazard packing spree in order to

impart a particular bit of wisdom.

“You know I have always accepted you, Abena.”

“Mhmm,” I intoned. I bit my tongue, bent over my dresser to examine two nearly-identical pairs of pants. I was trying to decide exactly what shade of blue would best complement my new African personality.

“Sit down and talk with me.”

My father has a very peculiar way of talking about my sexuality, and it is one that involves never actually saying the word “gay.” But, in very roundabout and awkward terms, we proceeded to discuss my sexual orientation, my fierce love for the New York City Pride Parade, and my tendency to gravitate towards activism in issues of gender and sexuality. However, my father warned, my sexuality was not something that I was to discuss in any context in Ghana. “I am only concerned for your safety,” he implored. I knew what he meant; I had done some casual Googling, had read the articles that friends and acquaintances were circling on various social networking sites. *Ghana Orders the Arrest of All Homosexuals. Ghana Cracks Down on Gays.* And here sat my father, my absentee father, sitting on my twin mattress and telling me: *Stay in the closet because I love you.* Since coming out to my father late in high school, it has always seemed as though he has accepted, or at least tolerated me. But something in his voice told me that my Ghanaian family, the family I never met and never knew, would not.

“And in any case,” he said with an air of finality, “it is not proper to talk about such things with family.”

Ah. So, there I was, standing at the precipice of twin mountain peaks called Your Father and Your Past, and a shove called Homophobia sent me tumbling back into the abyss. I could not be both Ghanaian and gay, my father was telling me, so I had to choose. I chose gay.

I was never, and cannot imagine, being asked whether I am attracted to women while I was in Ghana, but once, while conducting street interviews for a project on the queer community’s presence in Ghanaian media, a man stood with me behind the camera and spoke candidly with his friend about the good uses of rape as a tool for curing lesbianism.

I also don’t usually feel guilty for my more masculine gender expression. Fairly recently, however, I was walking through the men’s section of Macy’s, riffling through flannel shirts and track jackets. It was a few days before Christmas and a few days after I landed back in New York. I felt explicitly out of

place, gendered in a way that I have never felt in New York City. I felt the gaze of my Ghanaian family, who would have been so happy to see me, in Kumasi, in a *kente* dress.

“We just want to see you!” the voicemails, messages, and emails said.

Experiencing Ghana for the first time as an adult was very different from experiencing Haiti as a child. *Do you want to run through the waterfall?* becomes *Do you have a boyfriend?* and your age, status as family member, and being a woman conflates into a list of heteronormative assumptions that bury your existence as a person.

I am at a point in my life where there is something in the thought of speaking with my family that gives me panic attacks, and all of this has grown into a wedge between me, and my ancestors, and my ancestry.

Abena, wo te Twi?

Abena, you speak Twi?

Twi is a principal indigenous language in Ghana and the most commonly spoken language in Accra. It is also a language that I heard a bit of growing up; sometimes my father would answer the phone and lapse into a string of garbled sounds I could not understand, and I imagined him sharing secrets I would never hear, with people I would never meet.

I do not speak *Twi*, but I do understand bits and pieces of the very musical Haitian Creole language. When I was five, my babysitter’s name was Madame Apollon, and at breakfast every morning, the two of us could be seen giggling and throwing cereal at my big brother Kwame, all the while chattering away in Creole.

“Bonjour, Madame!”

“Bonjour, Abby! Ça va?”

“Ça va bien!”

“Cafe au lait, Abby?”

“Non non! Du jus, s’il vous plaît, Madame!”

I often found that people in Ghana—saleswomen arranging oranges at the market, men playing *mancala* on the street—were grossly offended by my inability to speak *Twi*. I found myself longing to respond, “No, but I do speak Creole,” or “No, but you could ask my dad why he never taught

me.” My resentment towards my father for not teaching me *Twi* is naïve and self-centered to be sure. After all, what do I know of the immigrant’s imagination, of wanting your child to be normal and American and assimilated?

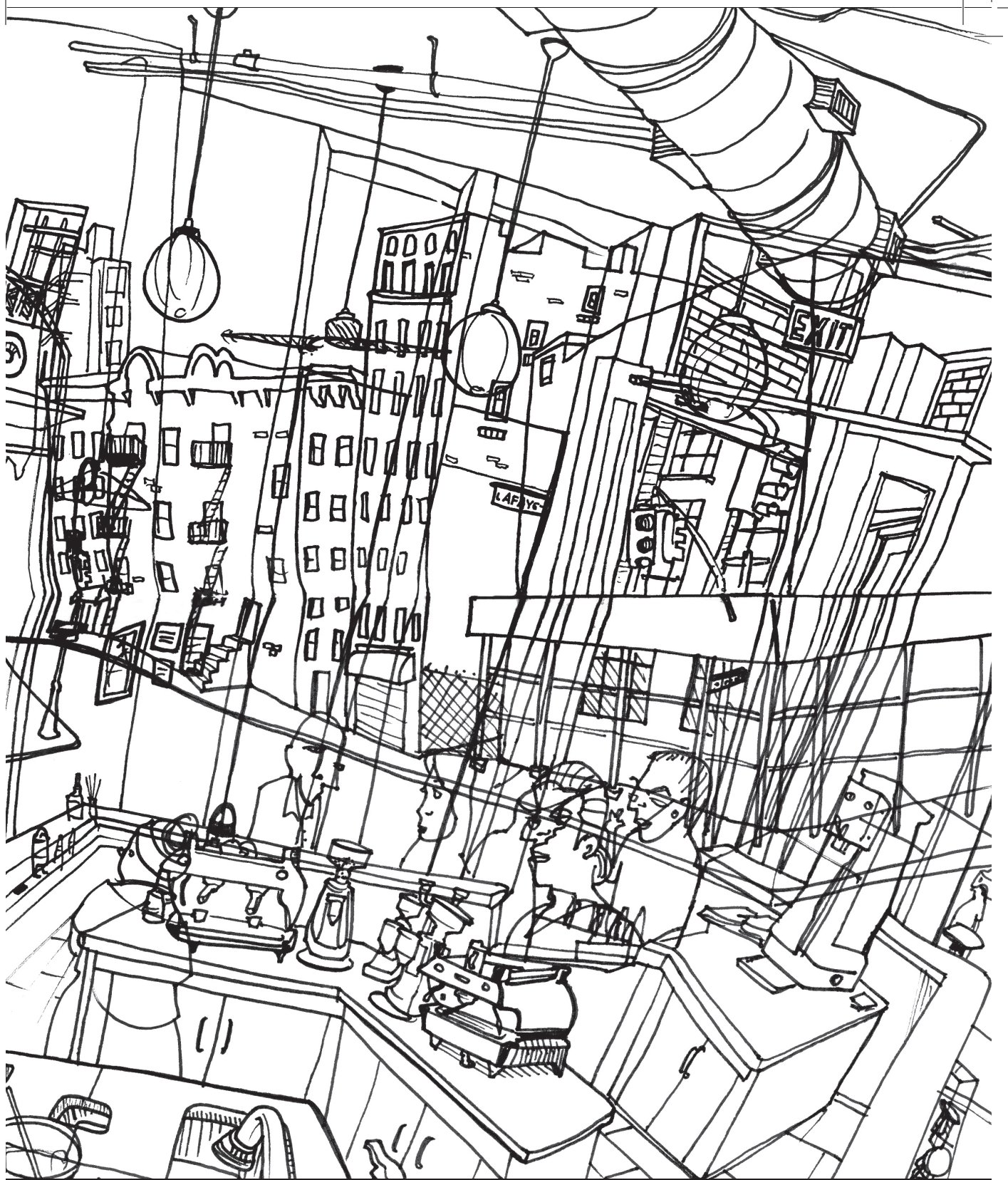
After living in Ghana for four months, 120 days, I do know how to say a few words in *Twi*. *Allo*. Hey, friend. *Yebeyhia bio*. See you soon. And one more little thing. On sticky, hot Accra mornings, whenever I walked through the house gates on the way to Creative Writing or African Popular Music, the guards would smile and say something very curious. It wasn’t a question.

Abena, ko bra.

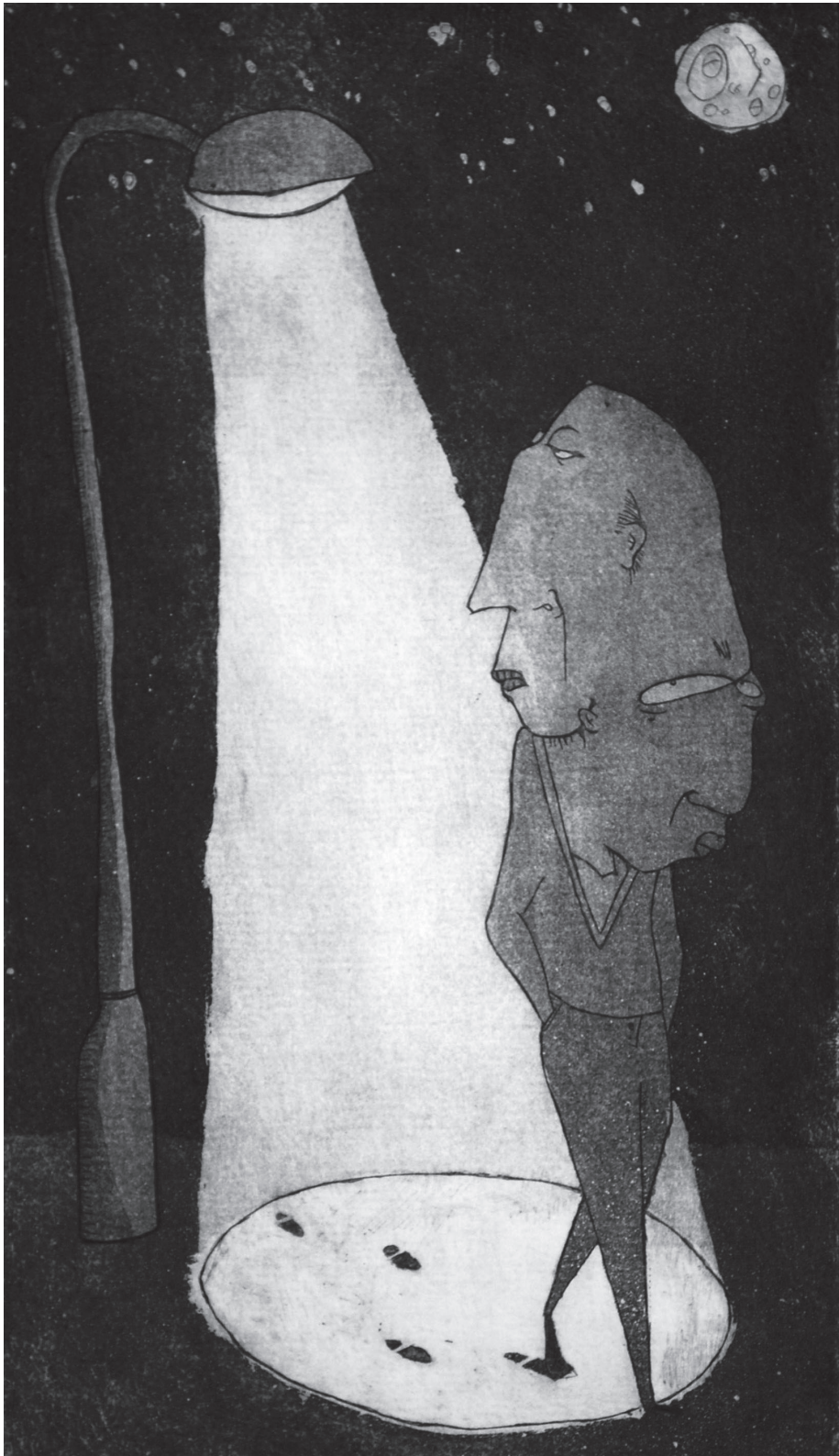
Abena, go and come.

“Go and come” is the very particularly Ghanaian way of saying something like, *Come home safely, because I care about you*. So, to Ghana and to Haiti and to my absentee Ghanaian roots, and to all of these other slippery questions from last semester, I would like to answer: *All right, Ghana*. I was not always comfortable. But for now I am safe, and I will try to go and come. Hopefully, I’ll be able to answer your questions a little more honestly when I do.





LA COLOMBE INTERIOR Max Schieble



Max Schieble **TENDERLY**



our Beard
Nanci Tischler

Looks heavenly
in moonlight

Flecked with red
brown like leaves

You crunch against
me side by cheek

Five o' clock
has come and gone

A shadow cast
won't stay for long



CAUTIONARY TALES



omeland
Gina Hong

Unicorn lairs and paranoid libations
soak me in the sensation of
 being left to rot.
I feel my mind reeking of a putrid communist air
and wonder
 where the revolutionaries have gone
and: what abandoned the guerilla fighters
left to fend for themselves
under the weight of the white man's feces.

[thirty-eighth parallel]

I am your sweet fair skinned wetness,
 open,
the embrace of a kimchi child with thick hair.
I will be waiting for you in bed:
 take me since you've never asked.
Am I pressed against your hips,
my gaze sly underneath
the sweeping monolid?



even Cataracts Sara Montijo

People come here to die.
They sense recklessness in
shattered lights under the sapphire blue
sky. They know a 9,157 foot fall
would beat their bodies to bush
and shrub. And who doesn't wish

their knuckles would sprout flowers,
their hands unclench regret?
Who hasn't wanted the wind
to whisk them off the edge? Call
it an accident. Seven

cataracts would smile, the rattlesnakes
would curl before their prey. The
desert would welcome you into its skin.

But others come here just to look,
to feel fresh air glide over their ears,
to melt with a blending of copal and cranberry hues.
They come here to share
themselves with nature and
they leave wondering whose face

was etched in limestone, whose hands
wrapped around that steering wheel, who was lost
in all the ash?

They know people
come here to die. They know fires
leave half a mountain scathed
and one mysterious van
corroded; it looks like a rock.

ootnote

Geraldine Inoa

89

Soon-to-be-drunk coeds litter Third Avenue. I weave through them, feeling a disdain that's almost palpable. For they can do something I can't. They can freely (ab)use their livers while mine remains untouched. It's been over seven months. As I approach my room, I get a lump in my throat. I know the tears are only seconds away. Why am I crying? Perhaps I'm in mourning. Mourning for the reckless abandonment that used to govern my life. Now my life is full of structure, routine, and most importantly, constraint. It was a trade-off I was forced to make, a trade-off I'm willing to accept (most days), but it does not ward off a painful longing that hits me especially strongly on weekend nights. I could do it, though. I could pick up where I left off, start up again with the life I once had: willingly submit myself to the perpetual hangover and anxiety. It would be so easy—I would just have to walk one avenue south and I could have my pick of my next nervous breakdown. A breakdown that comes in a variety of people, places, and things: rum, whiskey, the various assortments of vodka, mixed drinks with semi-clever names, darkened bars and pubs made solely for awkward sexual conversation, a pack-a-day habit, and endless nights of crying and wishing that it could end, that I could make it end.

They say the first thing to do is to admit you have a problem. But I'm not there. I'm about three jumps, a hop, and a skip away from admission. I am buried in the abyss that is recognition, the loneliness of a disease I'm barely old enough to suffer legally. I could go to meetings, and sit around with people three times my age offering conventional wisdom between coffee breaks; unsolicited monologues designed to give inspiration make me feel tiny, stupid and young, not nearly as fucked up as I'd like to be. I could get a hobby, immerse myself in a banal project of self-improvement, take up knitting, quit smoking and be a better person. Whatever that means.

No, I'm not going to stop smoking. Every cigarette is a silent protest,

a signal that I'm still alive and that there's a just a bit more recklessness left inside me. The date of my last drink is embedded in my memory. April 16, 2012. Like the date I lost my virginity, my ex-boyfriends' birthdays, and the date I got into college, this date has become immortalized in my mind; it's grown into a legend. My memory plays tricks on me. It glorifies things, makes them larger than life, fills the memory with a false glow; facts are edged out, feelings are swapped. It's emotional pretence. The last drink was divided into two margaritas. One mine, one not mine. I was notorious for finishing other people's drinks. I was an Equal Opportunity Drunk: no drink was too strong, no drink was finite, size did not matter—the only thing that mattered was my tenacity in self-destruction. My health, my sanity, and my will to live all sat back while my self-destruction, in the front seat, drove me to collapse. They say that everyone has a different place of starting, that the origins of recovery are rooted in your own personal rock bottom. My rock bottom occurred on March 30, 2012. It was a Friday.

I had left New York in a huff; the air was still lightly frosted in a winter chill. I was severely underweight. My body was frail, my spirits were low—about two weeks prior, my “ex-boyfriend” had broken up with me over text in a manner so cavalier that I felt I had been erased from the world. As if I were in an Etch-A-Sketch and someone shook it 'til I was gone. I had left New York for Connecticut. Gone to visit a friend. It was all very hurried and unplanned. I wanted to leave myself behind, so I left New York; it worked for a few hours until I finally caught up with myself. After I sat through my friend's play, she took me to a cast party. The alcohol was expensive and the people were stuffy. People drank—mostly sipped—while conversing about the most pedestrian of topics. It was at a two-story house on campus, supposedly for a traveling a cappella group. Spread out across the kitchen counter were red Solo cups, the college staple, sodas to serve as chasers, and massive amounts of alcohol.

My eyes perked up. I had found my solace, if only temporarily. I picked up a red cup and drank two shots. My friend urged me to not fill the cups so high, that what I was pouring was more than a shot. And she was right: what I was pouring was an accelerant to a fire that had already started. We went upstairs. There was music playing. Cast members from the play were still in their makeup. It was like my own private theatre of misery and the

house was completely full. I found a beer in a refrigerator. I downed it. From the moment the party began to the moment I hit rock bottom, I was on autopilot, subservient to the thoughts in my head. The thoughts played like a broken record: recycled sayings from my parents, insults from ex-boyfriends, the sing-songy chants of supposedly harmless teasing from grade school, middle school, and high school. They swirled around in my head, getting louder and louder. The only way to drown them out was to drink. So I drank and drank and drank. Eventually, I went back downstairs and made myself another “shot”: a cup full of vodka filled to the rim, gulped down in a matter of seconds. I found a bottle of wine. I drank from the bottle. Germs were the last thing I was thinking of. I drank another beer. And my memory stops there. From what I was told, a few more drinks went down my throat; all in all it was nearly a dozen drinks in an hour. The following hours I spent lying on cold linoleum passing in and out of consciousness, occasionally throwing up. Even though I was black-out drunk, I could feel myself half-celebrating the mess I had created, and the agony I had caused myself. Through my drunken stupor, I could feel self-loathing radiating from my body. I was hot and cold, passed out, and near what I hoped was death. It turns out what I was nearing was the hospital.

I woke up still fully clothed in a hospital in Connecticut. It was around seven a.m. I had forgotten that I was in Connecticut. They explained to me the events of the night prior and handed me some literature on alcoholism and sent me on my way. I took a cab back to campus. I quietly sobbed while sitting in the back of the cab. When my tears dried, I was starting to feel the worst hangover of my life. It was quickly settling in. Two weeks later, I'd quit drinking. My last drink would leave me sick and unable to walk.

Now, nearly three months out of rehab, plump and sober, I still feel an ache in my heart at the sight of drunken individuals; occasionally my head buzzes too loudly with the same old routine of self-loathing and self-deprecation, but the silver lining to this tribulation is that, due to my recent lifestyle changes, I've ensured for myself a long, long life. Someday, all of this—this mistreatment of my body, this existential crisis, and this state of being young, senseless, and rash—will be a footnote, an ancillary detail that informs but does not define.



order Crossing in Hebron Julian Phillips

Blast walls, barbed wire, and 4,000 soldiers separate Hebron's 120,000 Palestinians from its 400 Jews. As in similar situations of urban segregation, the close proximity of the two communities provides individuals with myriad opportunities to transgress their boundaries superficially. Israeli security forces and foreign visitors freely pass between Jewish and Palestinian zones; local civilians trade projectiles over—and occasionally cross—the dividing line. On a recent visit to the divided city, I pondered whether or not such acts were truly transgressive or whether they enforced the power differential that underlies Hebron's segregation.

Israeli civilians began settle in Hebron in the 1970s by occupying vacant (and often privately owned) land and structures. The Israeli government refused to evict the settlers and eventually legalized their presence in five areas on the southeastern outskirts of the Old City. Since that time, a few hundred Jews have resided in three complexes at the edge of the medieval town and in scattered buildings on an adjacent hillside.

In the mid-1990s, in order to protect this population, Israel retained control of Hebron's Old City and surrounding neighborhoods (about 20 percent of the municipality) after withdrawing from most Palestinian urban centers. By the early 2000s, Israeli authorities had expelled Palestinian residents and storeowners from Ash-Shuhada Street (which runs along to the four settlements and the Haram al-Ibrahimi), and placed barriers and checkpoints between the neighborhood and the rest of Hebron.

As an American, I was able to cross the checkpoints between Israeli and Palestinian zones with ease. Conversation in English or French served as a de facto passport (I was never asked to present any documents). The exchanges were very brief:

“*Lo Ivrit*. English?”

“You are tourist?”

“Yes”

“Go ahead.”

Or, later:

“*Lo Ivrit*. English?”

“You have a knife?”

“No”

“Go ahead.”

On the Palestinian side of the line, residents volunteered to tell their stories of the Israeli occupation. A fruit vendor named Shadhi Sadar stopped me on the street and brought me to his family home, which is adjacent to two Israeli apartment complexes on Ash-Shuhada Street. In polished English, he rattled off a register of injustices that settlers had perpetrated against his relatives. Most dramatically, he told me that his young nephew suffered from impaired vision after Israeli neighbors threw acid at him from their building. (Shadhi’s brother, Abad, gave a similar testimony to the International Solidarity Movement [ISM] this past February. Neither I nor the ISM met with the boy, to confirm the allegation.)

On the Israeli side of the line, no civilians approached me to ask about my presence in the neighborhood or to tell their stories. Most of my contacts were with border policemen. They were very guarded during our brief chats, although they were willing to answer factual questions about the situation. A guard stationed outside the Tombs of Jesse and Ruth readily identified the surrounding houses as either Israeli or Palestinian, but gave a noncommittal answer to a follow-up question about whether or not the neighbors “get along.”

My freedom to enter and exit both sections of segregated Hebron was extremely unusual. Palestinians must get permits to access the Jewish neighborhoods; Jewish-Israeli civilians may not enter Hebron’s Palestinian areas under an agreement between Israel and the Palestinian National Authority. When I wrote a leftist Israeli friend about my experience, she commented, “you’ve probably already seen more than me . . . my information comes from media, despite the close distance.”

During my visit, I watched one Palestinian civilian cross into the Israeli zone under very different circumstances from my own. In the middle of the afternoon, I was standing outside the entrance to the Jewish section of the Haram al-Ibrahimi, which straddles the line between Israeli and Palestinian Hebron. I heard a commotion at the adjacent entrance to the Muslim

sanctuary, and turned around to see a group of Israeli border policemen drag a screaming young Palestinian woman through a gate between the two zones. The policemen slammed her body against a nearby trailer—possibly an accident—before forcing her inside. The woman continued to scream, apparently in pain and fear, as the officers held her on the trailer's floor, her arms behind her back.

According to a pair of foreign observers from the Christian Peacemakers Teams, the young Palestinian had pepper-sprayed a border policewoman during a routine security check at the Haram al-Ibrahimi entrance. It is not clear what precipitated the altercation. An Israeli spokesperson reported that the woman had planned to stab the policewoman after incapacitating her with the spray. The allegation of premeditation was questionable, however. The area around the Haram is too heavily patrolled for an assailant to expect to escape arrest.

That afternoon may have marked the Palestinian woman's only crossing into Jewish Hebron. Her journey was both literal and figurative. She physically entered a space reserved for Israelis and foreign tourists. And, briefly, she and the policewoman swapped conventional roles. For a split second, a uniformed Israeli felt pain and fear and a Palestinian civilian watched.

Ultimately, the Palestinian woman's passage into the Israeli zone only reinforced segregation in Hebron. She will likely spend time in prison for assaulting a member of the Israeli security forces, while the policemen who beat her during her arrest will not suffer any legal consequences. This will perpetuate the legal double standard applied to acts of Israeli and Palestinian violence, a line that parallels the geographic divide between the two populations.

My crossing between Hebron's two zones also reinforced the racial-ethnic basis of the city's division. On both sides of the line, my status as a foreign visitor privileged me above many local residents. Palestinians took the time to share their stories with me under the illusion that, as an American, I would somehow amplify their voices in a way that their neighbors could not. Israeli policemen provided me with information—their deployment calendars, the names of their hometowns—that I doubt they would have shared with Palestinian passersby.

Rather than battling this segregated hierarchy, I perpetuated it. I did not tell my Palestinian acquaintances that I did not possess the political or media influence to justify the time they devoted to our conversations. Nor did I reveal to the policemen that, unlike many American tourists, I was one of their ideological opponents. This was the most disturbing aspect of the situation in Hebron: the system of segregation is inescapable. Neither a Palestinian civilian nor a leftist visitor can cross the lines without normalizing them.

about It:

The Three Little Pigs

Emily Stein

Written in the style of Angela Carter, author of *The Bloody Chamber*

Not by the hair of his chinny-chin-chin.

Whiskers scraped my skin, tender. Handcuffs cold. Holster, leather, rough. My thighs are torn. Underground, time passes, I don't know how much. His shield badge reflects light from somewhere, dimly. I squint. Close my eyes, close my mind, and go far away.

Officer Brown was between my legs. Officer Brown has a brown beard. Officer Blonde was late. Officer Black was never late. Officer Black's house. Officer Black liked to watch.

Time was passing and my mind was gone. Time passed and I came back. My legs, cold again. Officer Blonde burst through the door, out of breath.

"The fucking dog found us," he hissed. "My house got burnt down during my shift today and I know it was that stupid kid that's been following us." The policemen went upstairs to discuss.

Lucas . . . My dear big brother. Son of another mother. Grew up across town, but didn't let that stop him from protecting his little sister. Not on the playground, not even when he became a man and his body was covered with dense hair and no razor could tame his whiskers.

My sweet Lucas. His protection kept me soft and sweet. I grew breasts, my hips widened, and my skin remained unbroken; he became more protective. Lucas must have gone mad when I went missing. Poor, sweet, hirsute Lucas doesn't know there's no hope for me. I've been tarnished.

Stomp, stomp, stomp, one stomp lighter and quicker, the three came downstairs. Officer Blonde first, dark expression aimed at me. Stopped being afraid of the men many intrusions ago—Blonde's fury, personal. My pulse quickened. Thundered in my ears, drowned out echoes of my screaming, of Blonde's grunts and curses, teeth clenched. Must be much insulated, this

basement. My heart went to Lucas and my mind went away again.

Not by the hair of his chinny-chin-chin.

Blonde collapsed on me, huffing and puffing. Goatee, damp with sweat and spittle, grated against my ear.

Time passed. Probably more than a day. Darkness came, darkness came again. The door clicked, sickly smell of half-sprouted oats entered. Used my nose and found my dinner. Ate in the corner. Bowl empty, chewed at spoon. Long sliver of wood (metal would have made an easy weapon) came off. Slipped it in crack between wall and floor. Dragged spoon across cement wall, smooth. Eyes, weak, trained in vague direction of door. Finished, climbed onto my table and slept.

Officer Black came down, stroked my limbs and back, numb from much use. But Black was the gentlest. Leaned down and kissed me, no tongue. Brush of his moustache against my lip.

Not by the hair of his chinny-chin-chin.

More time went by. Time is always going by. Feels like years of being here. Almost like I was born here. Must have been months, if only now I hear of Lucas hunting for me. Did he know Blonde didn't have me? Did he run into the flames to find me? Did his lovely, jet-black hair get singed? Lucas loved fire. Burnt most of the hair off his hands and forearms playing with it. I would watch him close his eyes, take in a long breath, and blow out a match. The only time he took his eyes off me, before he got a job.

They came again. They took their turns. Black last, as usual. He wasn't done when the others reacted. Something on the scanner, our constant fifth companion. Turned red in the face. Brown swore loudly. He paced. I listened to the voice emanating from three belts.

"All emergency personnel to 23 Weirfield Street. Five-two-foxtrot at two-three Weirfield. Every room affected. Occupants unknown. All emergency personnel requested."

Five-two-foxtrot. "52F" means fire. Another fire. Must be Brown's house.

"Why didn't you shoot that hairy sonofabitch?" he spat at Blonde.

"I didn't see him. He doesn't live at her house. Their dad isn't listed on the little bastard's birth certificate. I don't know his last name. I don't know where to find him. Believe me, I would have shot him if I had the chance."

They ran out, stomp, stomp, stomp up the stairs. Black finished in

silence, breathlessly.

Later. Black had cleaned up and left. Later. Bowl of moldy oats. Another chunk of spoon sequestered. Later. Black came down to pet me. Probably has children. They probably sleep above me. Probably comes and pets me after tucking them in. Probably have a big backyard to play in. Probably has woods all around.

Blonde cracked open the door. Hushed tones. "That kid" followed them. Hiding in shadows. Brown, outside, keeping him back. Blonde and Black rushed out, muttering.

Lucas found me! My darling Lucas. I've been rescued by my big brother with his puppy dog eyes.

Pop. Pop. The only noise I've heard beyond my walls as long as I've been here.

Poor, sweet Lucas. Like a wolfhound he protected me, but he was never very bright.

What to do with his body. Probably take it far away. Spread out the deeds, make it harder to connect the dots. Children played in the backyard. I had at least an hour.

Found my chunks of wood. Took the largest piece, put it down, arranged smaller pieces around, longest piece between my palms. At least six spoons for this. His wife would notice if one went missing or if they smelled like mold. Used many spoons for me. They served well.

Twirled the long piece into the big one. Twirled and twirled and twirled and twirled, faster, faster. My hands, still soft from my brother's coddling, burnt and ached. Slowly bore a hole into the big piece. Blood pricked up on my hands. Wiped it away. Twirled more. Don't let it cool. Twirl, twirl, twirl. I smelled smoke. Eyes, keen as a wolf's from lack of light, saw the first dim spark. Bunched my makeshift kindling closer. Knelt down, spun the stick, sniffed for smoke.

Another spark. I huffed, and I puffed, it caught, and I burnt that house down.



Fractured Family Fairy Tale

Otter Lee

PROLOGUE

My mother always dressed me in red, so I would stand out in a crowd, so that she would never lose me. She was always terrified that a stranger might want to carry me off. From an early age, I knew not to talk to strangers. Yet there's something that my mother never taught me, something that she couldn't. Sometimes it's someone close to you who becomes a stranger. It starts with small, innocuous changes, a difference in word choice or a shift in day-to-day activity. . . . It happens slowly, but as the days creep by, you find the people you love can be swallowed into the purgatorial abyss we call the human condition and come out most inhuman. One day you go to kiss them, and you realize that they're gone. In my fleeting 18 years, I've found the most dangerous monsters are the ones who haven't completely lost their hearts; trapped on that fine line between love and madness, they claw away at themselves and those they hold dear.

ACT I

My grandmother was born during the Japanese occupation of Malaysia in 1944. During World War II, as the villagers fled for sanctuary on higher ground, my great-grandmother collapsed in a church graveyard to give birth. My grandmother was so minute that she fit in her father's palm and so peaceful that the nuns thought she was stillborn; if not for her magnificent shriek, the howl of someone who very much wanted to be heard, she would have been buried alive in the shoebox she fit inside. The future beauty queen grew up in a big house with servants. She was fearless, only afraid of the water snakes that slithered through the currents and stood upright like floating knives. At 18, she discovered there were no sea serpents in New York. Upon arriving in America for the 1964 World's Fair, she was crowned Miss Unisphere. Shortly after, she met my grandfather on the streets of Chinatown.

He was a rogue, a charmer, a hunter—a debonair with a squirrel monkey on his shoulder and a grin that could charm a nun. My grandmother was a daughter of the air, or perhaps one of fire. Beautiful and ladylike, timid yet shrewd, she did not dare give him the time of day as he stalked her. She tried to ignore him, she resisted, she evaded, but in the end she fell . . . completely and utterly in love.

ACT II

My grandfather was someone you might call a modern-day huntsman: a parole officer, in fact. Whether he was dealing with thieves, drug-dealers, or murderers, he kept them all in line. Even the craziest and most dangerous of beasts understood the will of the huntsman. With iron fists, feet like lightning, and a mind like a steel trap, the huntsman tamed the wilderness of Manhattan. Nobody dared combat him one on one.

Capable of taking all manner of shapes, the huntsman infiltrated the most dangerous of lairs. When an armed madman took a hostage, the huntsman was quick to cook a solution. Casually, cleverly, he picked up an empty paper bag he saw in the hallway. Pretending he was a Chinese deliveryman, he rang the doorbell over and over again until the seven-foot felon came to the door. “Get out of here, man, I didn’t order no Chinese food!” The huntsman remained persistent. “I got your food here. You pay now!” The quarry opened the door and peeked out, just in time to see the huntsman draw his gun from the paper bag. The poor fool was served a meal he never forgot!

But even Champions can find themselves the clearest of targets. One day, the king of rats decided that he would do away with the huntsman once and for all. He phoned in a false tip and laid an ambush. The trap was set. When the huntsman went to meet the “informant,” someone would be waiting to shoot him from behind. Fortunately for the huntsman, he had to carry another criminal to prison that day, and he was not sent. His partner and close friend, the woodsman, came instead to pick up the tip. When the woodsman showed up at the meeting place, he was met with a hailstorm of bullets. The huntsman’s life was spared, but his heart was shattered by the loss of the woodsman. He retired to his seaside cottage and to the side of my grandmother.

ACT III

Times turned dark for the couple. Burdened with the guilt of his friend's untimely death, the huntsman lost his way. He stopped going out. It was as if he slammed a latch on top of his soul. The body that had shackled legions started to betray him. His circulation was the first to go. His hands and feet turned black—and so did his heart. His wife tried to comfort him. He responded by moving to the guest bedroom. The huntsman writhed and hollered at dastardly rats hidden in shadows. “Come out, you motherfucker! I see you! Come on. You're not so tough!” His wife did her best to please him. She tried to hold him and only got more howls. She tried to make his favorite pork chop dish. He tossed the plate at the wall, showering the room with shrapnel and grease. Sometimes it was as if their entire house was quivering and shaking in pain along with him. I don't know how my grandmother survived those terrible years as the shock absorber of turmoil. She was meek and obliging on even the worst of days. My grandpa's tormented wrath was a destructive force that no human could hope to withstand.

Almost a generation later, my grandfather, once the huntsman, has mellowed out. With his new grandchildren, his relatives, and his many friends, he learned not to let himself be sucked into the abyss of his bad moods. He still has occasional flashes of terrible rage and his exterior is gruff as ever, though for the most part he has found the medium between serenity and storm. My grandfather learned to conquer his monstrosity within and saved his humanity, but a horrible price was paid. The universe works in mysterious and often painful ways. One grandparent was saved at the cost of another.

ACT IV

Spring 2009. I receive an urgent text from my mother. *Something happened with Mima and Pop Pop. Call me back and come home NOW!* I am a little shocked, but not entirely surprised. My grandparents often quarrel. Regardless, I dash home and get into my mother's car. The drive is hot and stuffy for spring. When I roll down the car window, my jacket begins to whip from our tailwind. A red sleeve grazes my cheek. Today, I'm wearing a jacket I got from Urban Outfitters, the one with the Rising Sun of Japan on it.

My mom parks the car outside and a shudder runs through me. The driveway is empty and the door is open. As we enter, I hear sobbing, but

it is not like anything I have ever heard in my lifetime. The slow, wracking cries are not the sound of someone who is merely sad. They are the product of a lifetime of resentment. The stairs are short and few, but each step feels like I am hammering closer and closer to the center of the Earth. Inside my grandmother's room, I see a wolf lying in my grandmother's bed. I mean, it is my grandmother, but . . . "I caught him," she cries and laughs at the same time. "I finally caught the bastard!"

When my grandma speaks, it is as if there are a thousand different voices trying to be heard through her. Her eyes flicker constantly, but still manage to pierce my being. She knows we are afraid and she enjoys it. Very calmly, my mom tries to reassure her. In our family, jumping to conclusions often comes with disastrous consequences, but we're too late. I watch my grandmother, the smartest, fiercest woman I know, break down before me. She tells us she has proof that my grandfather had an affair with the woman next door. Deftly for her level of hysteria, my grandmother produces a tape recorder. She clicks the button. I brace myself for the horrible truth.

"Can you hear it?" she asks. Nothing. For the longest time, we hear nothing. Nothing but taps and clicks and static. An ocean of oblivion embraces our ears, but no evidence of an affair. Occasionally a blip that sounds like human speech manifests, but nothing on the level that my grandmother hears. We do not hear the woman next door and her daughter knock on the door, asking to be let in. We do not hear the giggles. Just once, someone winning a car on *The Price is Right* graces our radar, but it is Drew Carey dealing out the prizes—certainly not my grandfather buying a car for "that bitch next door!" After watching hours and hours of *Lifetime* specials with my grandmother, I am horrified to find myself thrust into one straight from her savage imagination.

And so the fantastical nightmare continues as the huntsman becomes the hunted in his own house. After years of dealing with criminals, my grandfather finds himself face to face with the deadliest mastermind of them all. One who knows everything and everybody he holds dear, and precisely how to destroy them. The fantasy affair my grandmother has crafted for my grandfather is highly reminiscent of an inquisition or witch trial. If he denies it, then he's a liar and needs to be pressed further, but if he agrees, then all her hard work paid off after all. Fed on a diet of quiet rage for all of her life, my

grandmother threw her restraint and rationality out the window. She hurts my grandfather because she loves him—because she would rather destroy him and herself than take her chances with any other force or possibility.

And still, I do not know if she is truly lost. There are days when it seems like she is playing us. There is a certain theatricality and order to her madness. The timing, the finesse, is all so meticulous. If she is crazy, then she is the most cunning madwoman I have had the pleasure of knowing. Even when lost in phantom obsession, her observations are astute and her decisions are planned. Sometimes I wonder if she simply got bored—if she wanted to see how many times she could set the world on fire and rebuild it again and again.

My grandmother lives in a sandy box on a rolling hill. The century-old sycamore at the foot of the abode casts a dusty haze over the front lawn, eternally crumbling, but still unyielding. At night, the wind whistles over the distant ocean—a cry of grief. A lone palm tree greets visitors upon entry, verdant except for a single skeletal branch. Each section of the house is a different climate. The living room is as creamy as vanilla ice cream. The master bedroom is the crimson of an imperial palace, every pillow a sunset bleeding profusely with reds and golds. Even after years of acting as an unwilling witness to this saga of sorrow and rage, it is still very much the house of a lady.

I see my grandma dancing on the precipice between life and death, flailing through the last precious moments she has here. When I look at her, I feel confused, lost, and upset; I am not always sure who is sitting across from me. I see Grandma in the car, her foot on the gas, speeding like a demon; Grandma telling me a bedtime story, resting a hand on my head as I fall asleep; Grandma in black stockings and a mink fur coat: “Am I a cougar?” she coos lasciviously, her lips covered in blood red lipstick. Grandma singing Abba songs while making hot cocoa; Grandma hiding in the bushes, plotting her next move on the woman next door. But when I look at my grandmother, I do not see the manipulative dragon lady that my relatives do. I do not see the wolf that the neighbors fear. I see a little girl, smaller than the palm of my hand, screaming with a tightly clenched fist before someone buries her in a shoebox.

Contributors

Jenessa Abrams is a junior at Gallatin whose concentration is “Examining the Abnormalities of Human Behavior through the Lens and on the Page,” with a minor in child and adolescent mental health studies. She has worked on the *Bellevue Literary Press* editorial team, as well as at the production company MUSE Film and Television. She is involved in literacy education, having student-taught a writing class for ESOL students at the University Settlement Society, as well co-taught a writing course at the Mount Sinai Adolescent Health Center. She is currently studying abroad in Paris.

Alex Badura is a first-year student from New Jersey concentrating in marketing and modern and postmodern studies. He enjoys tea, twinkle daddy jams, and biting off more than he can chew. He has written for other publications, including *Naked Magazine* and a blog about bagels.

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Neal Beaver is earning a post-baccalaureate in TESOL from NYU Steinhardt, and will graduate after this semester. Originally from Jacksonville, Florida, he’s a graduate of the University of North Florida’s English Department. He lives in Queens with his fiancée, Cynthia.

Liana Berkowitz graduated from Gallatin in January 2013 with a concentration in “International Political Economics.”

Chloe Byrne’s concentration, “Swankification,” focuses on design—from graphic arts and product design, to conceptual architectural pieces. In her studies at Gallatin, Chloe has also explored physics and, more recently, poetry. Outside of class, Chloe writes music and works as a graphic designer.

Ryan Casey is a Gallatin senior studying “The Morality and Sociology of Literature,” particularly 19th century English realist fiction. He is a teacher, choreographer, and nationally acclaimed tap dancer, as well as a freelance journalist currently interning with CNN.

Samuel DiBella is concentrating in “Formal Systems,” studying logic and

linguistics with a minor in game design. He has worked as the show producer for *The New Midnight Society* at WNYU and as editor in chief for the Headless Society's *Guillotine* publication.

Sophie Elias studies geography and communication. Her photos were taken during a semester in Shanghai.

Vivi Fragou is examining the inextricable nature of life and death in her concentration, "The Death Drive, Decay, and Regeneration." She works at the International Center of Photography and in her spare time collects cameras, cassettes, and animal skulls. Through color film photography and creative writing, she strives to capture the heartbreaking beauty of experience, memory, and loss, and hopes to crystallize this in a Gallatin senior project.

Maggie Franks is a senior at Gallatin concentrating in graphic design. She is the current designer for the *Gallatin Review*. Her photos were taken during her semester in Accra, Ghana.

Marcella Hausen is a senior at Gallatin concentrating in global public health with a minor in child and adolescent mental health. Her photos were taken in Bahia, where she has started a photography program working with adolescents in the neighborhood of Subúrbio Ferroviário. She uses photography as a means to provide preventative and rehabilitative services to marginalized youth and victims of trauma.

Jon Henry is an artist with a practice rooted in sculpture. He explores his heritage in the rural south, utilizing an academic research lens of queer-themed topics related to identity politics, technology, and geography. While at NYU, Jon has kept up his art practice along with writing for www.gayrva.com.

Gina Hong is a senior at Gallatin concentrating in "Reclaiming Resources for Power in the Political Economy." She is from LA County. Poetry is not a luxury.

Geraldine Inoa is studying "The Outcast: A Social Phenomenon through a Psychoanalytic Lens," which merges the studies of dramatic writing, literature,

psychoanalysis and French. At NYU, she has directed two one-act plays: *Fat Envelopes* and *Fragments*. She is currently writing a TV pilot.

Shelby Kern is studying the “Collaborative Art of Film,” focusing on the different roles involved in filmmaking and how those on both sides of the camera come together. She is a singer, songwriter, and actress. She has written pieces for various online publications, including *inconnu mag*, *Surviving College*, and a *Lake Forrest Patch* travel correspondent series.

Harita Koya is currently studying French and francophone literature at Gallatin, as well as minoring in classics. In her spare time, she enjoys napping in the sun, writing poetry and nonfiction prose, and following European soccer. She intends to devote her life to writing, traveling, and taking long walks with no particular destination.

Otter Lee is a first-year student at Gallatin, where he is concentrating in “Epics and Epic Performance,” a study of performance and writing, with a focus on acting, screenwriting, and fantasy literature. His influences range from Chrétien de Troyes to Tina Fey. In the fall semester, Otter staged, directed, and costarred in *Bite Me*, as part of the Gallatin Theater Troupe’s student play festival. He also was featured in the Gallatin Writing Program series, Students Reading Their Writing, where he read an excerpt from his novel-in-progress, *Crystal Lattice*.

Sara Montijo is a junior at Gallatin studying poetry and the art of historical narration, specifically the (re)production of inequality to limit one’s sense of self and subvert the importance of community. She is the co-founder and vice president of the NYU Poetry Club. Her poetry also appears in NYU’s *Minetta Review* and *West 10th* literary journals.

Natalie O’Moore is concentrating in photography at Gallatin, taking studio, theory, and business courses. Natalie hopes to continue shooting both commercially and artistically, and looks forward to travelling after she graduates.

Abena Opam is concentrating in “Nonfiction Media and Identity

Production,” a combination of documentary film and memoir writing within metropolitan studies and gender and sexuality studies. She is passionate about Sub-Saharan Africa and raspberry sorbet, and will be graduating from Gallatin this May. Hopefully.

Becca Park is a senior forming her concentration on how expressing oneself through personal narrative and other creative platforms can be a powerful component of health and well-being. Park has a minor in nutrition and a passion for DIY documentary filmmaking. She is also a co-founder of the nonprofit organization Youth Take Charge, which brings human trafficking workshops and mentorship programs to New York City high school students.

Lauren Peinado is a senior at Gallatin concentrating in “Visual Culture: New Media, Art, and Design.” Her studies include studio art, digital art, media theory, and graphic design. She currently works as the designer for the Gallatin Writing Program’s *Literacy Review* and as a studio assistant at the Lower East Side Printshop. She was born and raised in Texas.

Pranav Pendurthi is from Birmingham, UK; he is a senior studying philosophy and economics. He has ADD.

Julian Phillips graduated from Gallatin in January 2013 with a concentration in modern Arab history. He works in the rare books department of the Strand Bookstore and blogs regularly at www.hududborders.wordpress.com and www.bornequal.wordpress.com.

Anita Rojas Carroll is a rising senior currently studying at NYU Madrid. Her concentration, “Identity as Narrative,” combines Spanish and Latin American studies, film, and literary theory with history and psychology to analyze the formation of identity through a narratological lens. She will be taking over as editor-in-chief of the *Gallatin Journal of Global Affairs* next year, and is also a member of the Dean’s Team.

Max Schieble, described as The Next Great American Artist by such notable figures as his mother, is a Gallatin senior concentrating in “Creative Communications.” Max is a person who draws pictures, sings sad jazz songs,

and writes written things. You can also catch him doing his thing in the cartoon department of the *New Yorker*.

James Schwartz is a recent graduate of NYU. His thesis exhibition examined the language and scale shifts in design and construction. Using precision and intuition, James finds inspiration for his work in the industrial waste of our cities. Recent endeavors include working abroad on the GLOBAL Design NYU London exhibition. He currently lives and works in New York City.

Armand Silvani's concentration, "Illustration and Creative Writing," means he takes writing classes in Gallatin and art classes in Steinhardt and Tisch. Past projects include painting a mural on a baby grand piano for the New York City community outreach project, Sing for Hope, illustrating the Gallatin holiday card two years counting, and co-authoring a graphic novel adaptation of St. Augustine's *Confessions*, displayed at GallaCon this fall.

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Rachel Sipser is a junior at Gallatin with a focus in art theory, film theory, and studio art. Photography is her way to find beauty in moments that might seem insignificant.

Colleigh Stein is studying creative writing and literature. She focuses on classical mythology, medieval studies, and early modern literature, and their adaptation to film and television. At NYU, Colleigh has edited for the *Baedeker Travel Magazine* and the *Gallatin Review*, and is a member of the Gallatin Dean's Team.

Emily Stein is concentrating in "Psychology and Its Interactions with Written/Oral Traditions," examining the long-term effects of psychology on religion and literature, and how storytelling and religious instruction are evidenced in psychology. She is also minoring in American Sign Language. After attaining her PhD, she hopes to either conduct research on anxiety disorders or become a forensic psychologist (or both).

Sofia Szamosi is a visual artist and a sophomore at Gallatin. She has been making art in photo booths since 2006.

Nanci Tischler, more commonly known as Nay, is concentrating in “The Power of Words,” ranging from a personal perspective to the reception of words through media and education in the digital era. She is also minoring in studio art. She loves paint between her toes, dark chocolate, and drinking orange juice straight from the carton. Nay is a self-proclaimed coffee connoisseur and will always make you laugh.

Jesse Wheaton is a first-year student at NYU. In his first year he has had two exhibitions and become the lead graphic designer for a Brooklyn start-up that creates apps for iPhone, Android, and tablets. He plans on developing a concentration that combines art, mathematics, and international studies.

Charlie W. Wright, a first-year student, is an actor majoring in educational theater at NYU Steinhardt. Most recently, he acted in *Company* with NYU’s A Class Act and in *The Can-Do Duck* with NYU’s Lamplighters. Charlie also enjoys playwriting and is an active member of Uproar Writers Corps, a playwriting group comprised of members of Uproar Theatre Corps.

Katie Zhang is a confused primate who climbed up the wrong tree and started itching. A super-senior who thinks she wants to study complexity theory, mathematics, and computer science, she has unfortunately discovered that she is not good with numbers. Or letter grades. Seeing no other monkey to pick the fleas off her back, she is feeling stuck now, and may never graduate. Oh well.