

children *churches* & daddies

the **UN**religious, **NON**family-oriented literary & art mag

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Mindful Transition

Kathryn A. Graves

All the same she knew when she was ready -
recognizable handwriting, visible
from the inside of her eyelids,
even when she slept. It spilled over
into the weekends,
hung off the couch like a fat cat
and kept her up at night - sometimes
it was the little things, sometimes harder,
hard enough to write down long hand
and in pencil, not out of anger or irresponsibility
but to allow them to soften and move
into something bigger.

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Scars art

2 (the Aurora Borealis, photographed in Fairbanks Alaska), 4 (3 palm trees in Beijing, China), 9 (editor on her sister's bed in 1988), 10 (John Yotko's stuffed Baseball), 12 (two image of Ellen with a minor), 13 (a street band in Los Angeles), 15 (editor holding a mirror in a house basement), 16 (the 1st & 3 images are mannequins were photographed in Zurich, Switzerland, & the 2nd & 4th mannequins were photographed in Luxembourg), 17 (fish, including a Clown Knife ("Trickster"), Tin Foil Barbs ("Steely Dan" and "Remington Steele") and a Plecostomus ("Bunny Foo Foo"), 18 (left: a bell at Confucius Temple in Shanghai China; right: a Washington DC bell), 34 (Dawn laying in the grass, and photographs of Joel in the grass, with and without sunglasses). Cover art of a wall outside of Wagas, a restaurant in Shanghai, China.

poetry
the passionate stuff

I imagine

Eric Obame

Life begins at the sub-atomic
Our bodies are made up of billions of cells
Working together to keep us alive
And inside them are atoms
And inside them, sub-atomic particles
Working together, and keeping us alive
And maybe billions of times smaller than the atom
Oscillating strings of various shape and size
Things within things
String Theory states that there is an eleventh dimension
And inside it, an infinite number of universes
I imagine
What if universes are the living beings—the only true life
And we are like sub-atomic particles inside them?
Our planet supports trillions of creatures, perhaps hundreds of trillions
Perhaps more, from single-celled organisms to us
And it is just one of several spinning around the sun
Like electrons circling the nucleus of an atom
But our star is just one of several hundred billion
Going around and around a super-massive black hole
At the Milky Way's core
So perhaps, it is the electron
And the Milky Way is just one of several hundred billion galaxies
In our cosmos
Maybe they are the cells
The universes, the people
And this eleventh dimension, a Pangaea-like super-continent
I imagine our universe as part of a population—a species of universes
Perhaps, walking, talking, and mating like us
But dying after a googol number of our years



There might be lesser ones, like pets and beasts
Where protons are unstable, for example, and DNA never formed
Or other universes that are more evolved than ours
Where the laws of physics are even more elegant, perhaps even magical
I can only imagine
But then, what would be the purpose of us, if that were true?
What would be the point of us, if life were bigger than us?
What would be the meaning of me?
Is it enough to be just a role player?
Is it okay to be small—to be insignificant, if it somehow benefits the whole?
I imagine
Life begins at the sub-atomic

redhead

Jack Henry

when i was
a kid
around eight, maybe
i knew a girl
- red hair
- blue eyes
- pale perfect skin
- delicate smile

she loved every boy
but me
and it pissed me
off

when i was
in college
the first time
i knew a woman
- red hair
- green eyes
- pale perfect skin
- arrogant smile

she fucked every guy
but me
and it pissed me
off

when i was
in college
a second time
i knew a woman
- red hair
- blue eyes
- pale perfect skin
- innocent smile

she died in
my arms
and it pissed me
off

growing old
seems imprecise



RedHead,
painting by
Cheryl
Townsend

The long and detailed principal of governance

Sergio Ortiz

He's the prophet of my choice,
addicted to unabridged fan-mail,
graffiti-bathroom-fantasies,
Email cluttered with classified
massage ads from expensive
escorts services, detailing
the significance and benefit
of a stress free orgasm.
Not all sizes fit. It's a
mismatch, his crown
and my head.



Hat, art by Edward Michael O'Durr Supranowicz

the mad sun

David McLean

the mad sun screams his anxiety
over the trees, luckily for him they are naive
and interpret this as patient patented
motherly love

the trees respond so trustingly and grow
they do not know all suns are mad
and up to no good, they do not know
that life lies best dead in the mud





The Badlands, art
by Christine Sorich

Yang Chu's Poems 458

Duane Locke

Like a solitary blade
Of grass
In a wide field of sand
That is mowed
Again and again,
I try to regrow
My face
That was moved away
By people' words,
I am trying,
But now only my neck
Has regrown,
But the face
Is starting to grow.

I want my face
So I can smile again.

nothing is ever out of sight

David
LaBounty

she is talking
on the phone
and she says
that's too bad
at least a
dozen times.

she hangs up

and tells you
that her thirty
year old cousin
in Wichita
has Lou Gehrig's
disease and you
say how awful
and doesn't
he have kids? and
the answer is yes
with another on
the way and you
shake your head
and both of your
faces turn to the
television that
is flickering like
a mutated candle
and it's a rerun
of a sitcom from
a decade ago.

you both sit silently

until

you both start to laugh.

Age of Aquarius

Michael
Ceraolo

Your head is
always in
Uranus

Libations and Preparations

Benjamin Nardolilli

I drank before coming here,
You were going to ask me to speak,
And I didn't want to disappoint you,
I have in the past, so,
I had a drink or two at home,
My hands were nervous too,
Almost as bad as my lips
And I didn't get to measure what I poured,
Even though I mixed it up
With a ruler, giving everything
A nice turpentine taste and texture.
I drank at a friend's house too,
He told me that he had to get rid
Of a beer in his fridge, it was old,
And I was desperate, I could use it.
I cut my hand opening the damn thing,
The cap would not give,
Instead I broke the top off,
And was careful not to cut my gums,
Because poets can't be taken seriously
If they bleed up and down the stage,
Plus other people have to use the mike.
I was only trying to be considerate,
To the other poets, and my friend,
Even when I was drinking, I thought
About all of you and how drunk you would be
By the time I got up here.
I only wanted to be one of you,
Nobody wants to be the only sober person in a room,
Especially if you don't have a corner to rule,
Nobody listens to a sober fool,
They pay only for the drunks
Who can keep their words together,
Their voices leaning on a piano
Or a page of paper for support.



#024 Summer'07
(Beer & smokes at Jack
Kerouac's Grave), art by
David Thompson

Mother May I?

Sami Schalk

I don't remember her exact words
in that exact moment
when my mother unknowingly
gave me permission to think,
but in my memory I am
small, thin and preadolescent,
maybe eight or nine.
We are in the living room
back when it still had
ugly brown carpet and
fake wood paneling,
the Pope is on TV.

He is Pope John Paul II
and we are Catholic,
so we are watching.
He is talking about abortion,
a word I have already learned as sinful
in my Catholic school classroom,
so I am listening and nodding,
as if I know what it all means,
but suddenly, across the room,
on the couch, my mother is speaking,
not to me, but to herself
or maybe to Pope John Paul, or God.

Slowly, she is shaking her head no.
Softly, she is saying something
about a woman's right
and in that moment,
in our female only household,
still at an age where my mother
was infallible to me,
I learned that not everything
they tell you in school is true,

that even the Pope can be wrong,
that disagreeing is OK because
even Girl Scout mothers
who buy Market Day
and teach Sunday school
secretly think for themselves and
have opinions they whisper
to television screens
when they don't know
their children are listening.



Modification 1, art by
Mark Graham

Counterman Rushing By

CEE

“Can I help you with sumthin’?”

Means

Are you shoplifting

I always

Respond to their impertinence

By asking for a dozen different things

Take up their next half hour

Then

Keep coming back ot them

Then whole time

I’m in the store

If I have to wait behind others

I wait

Just go ask for more help

If they go on break

I stay in the store, ‘til after their break

So I can bother them again

And if they go home

I call the next day

Requesting that they

Personally

Help me out

The young ones especially

Hate me

No, I’m not trying to take anything

But, I use up some of your life

Asshole

That’ll learn ya

To bother me

When I’m shopping



Close Body 17, art by
Melanie Monterey



art by Joel
McGregor

Tracks

Chad Newbill

The tracks on her arm are
bread crumbs
to fiendish ulcers in her head.
She makes private vows of one last fix.

She knows she's a liar,
but the ego dominates the id.
She romances the times before.

Thin, steely thoughts
draw her soul to the poison.

Her beauty is covered
by unpredictable wisps of smoke swirls that shade her imminent abyss.

The black circles around her eyes
deflect the message;
promises made with crossed fingers.

Anything to feed the need.
To feed the hedonism.

Lost.

Clumsily, her
white knuckles and yellow stained fingers
try to fold her map back to a
functional tool.

She questions my eyes,
as if I know the directions.

I know the way,
but doubt she would follow the roads
required to get where she needs to be.



Play ball!

I.B. Rad

With bases loaded
in the bottom of the 9th,
Team America
was three behind,
when that infamous slugger,
Joe Prez,
stepped up to the plate.
“Strike one,” the umpire cried.
Then, his next call,
“One ball;” until,
with the count two and three,
a final pitch
seared over the plate.
It passed so fast
the ball bounced out
of the catcher’s mitt,
rolling round
the batter’s feet.
“Praise God! It’s a homer!”
the umpire whooped,
covering the ball
with his left foot;
while he mimed
tracking a ball
soaring over a wall.
Not losing a beat,
Joe Prez shot off,
circling the bases,
tipping his cap to the fans;
while his manager,
sauntering up to the ump,
slipped him ten grand.
Honoring the old saw,
“Good things happen
when you play ball,”
sports casters went wild,

extolling Joe Prez to the sky
while the sole announcer
who’d wondered aloud,
“What on earth’s going down!”
suddenly found
he’d been put off the air.
The fans didn’t know
what to make of the scene;
though, as they’d merely been
trained
to cheer their own team,
the stands rang with acclaim.
As for those unpatriotic few
who started to boo,
their neighbors taught them
a lesson or two.
In the end,
Joe Prez was catapulted
to baseball’s Hall of Fame,
its’ supreme ref ruling,
“That guy’s a born winner,
a credit to the game!”
And so, oh, too much later,
in some fairer age,
when a sole critic
was heard to complain,
“But he struck out”
- it didn’t matter at all.
And then, only then,
a wizened Joe Prez
was heard to drawl,
“But what’s all the fuss?”
It wasn’t me
who made the mistake;
it was clearly the catcher
who dropped the ball!”

it all is nowhere

Barry Pawelek

we come around
again my love
and we still jump
in the same holes
to play with the same animals

there's a duty
i seek in the soil
the work of the theban plays
and far away surf

we always arrive
going everywhere
remembering nothing
until it all is nowhere
but i will not stop my love
i'll still come around again my love
even after the holes fill
and animals scatter
i will dig through
to find a shining son
and a recognizable you

Images of Large Joshua Tree by Barry Pawelek

Teacher's Lounge

Charles Michael Craven

"I like to wash dishes in the morning."

"Instead of taking medicine I just wash dishes to get rid of a headache."

"Usually washing dishes alone is just as good."

this is what my life has come to:

listening to old fat ladies talk about sex in code

on my lunch break.

I used to be the guy coming down from an acid or coke binge

smirking at the other motorist

headed to work with the moon overhead.

my sandwich tastes stale.

Narcissist Alisa Steinberg

So,
not that I'm your machine where you pull levers
and clowns pop out and grin and bow their heads to
acknowledge your sadness.

Not this person.

Not this vein pulsating.

You are not listening
in a blanched box in a corner
at the very far end of the room.

So,
not that I'm your wormhole where you spill secrets
and voids open up and swallow and seal their lips to
absolve your distress.

Not this being.

Not this mouth annunciating
that you are not hearing.

In a muted mirror on a wall
at the very far end of the house.



Global Warming

Eric Muhr

I saw a river of corn sucked out of the ground
and men -- miles high -- tearing at the edge of a hole
in the sky. A ridge of ice dripped away in the summer sun
while starlings swallowed New York.

But the people laughed
at a clown who could eat 300 hot dogs
and pray
and mispronounce his mother's name --
all at the same time.

"The end of the world is near," I cried,
and the band played a merry tune
while we danced.



The Neighborhood

Julia O'Donovan

Sirens screech to a halt
Down the street
You come in and say
One of the crackheads
down the street od'd
As opposed to the heroin addicts

And Randy sits on his front porch
Drinking his beer
His doctor told him ti exercise
So he walks half a mile to the store
To get his beer
And walks home

The old couple
Came back from Florida
They didn't have
Their little dog with them
I always wonder
Who will make it back

It was rumored
Eddie's mom had Cancer
But she's back on her porch
Watching everyone and everything
And people visit her
To catch up on the gossip

While the sirens go by

Baggage

John Duncklee

He looked sallow in death
They had done their best
But, death is possessive, final
The son looked in
A tear rolled down each cheek
They had had their ups and downs

Looking at the white hair, old
The son felt like a boy again
In spite of his own middle age
Had he always been the boy
Now he was free to be a man
He didn't know

He remembered the note
The plea to call, Janet
Inform when time slipped away
She would want to know
He was not supposed to know
But things like that slide out

Something his mother had said
She was talking on the phone
She didn't know he was there
He didn't mean to listen
He heard only his mother's side
His father never spoke

He raised up and stood aside
Time to meet and mourn
There were some that looked old, too
White hair and faces grooved by time
Return to pews
Listened to the words of a stranger

Left condolences with son
He shook their hands and smiled
Now he was a man
No longer a son
Finally shrugged away the burden
It was not his baggage to bear

She walked down the aisle
Aided by a man the son's age
Guided by his grip
Strong around her arm
She looked neither way
Her eyes toward the coffin

They stopped
Both looked in at the old man
Both had sadness in their eyes
Tears rolled down
Struck the floor
She lifted a single red rose to her lips

She placed it on his chest
Touched his cheek
Another tear
She turned
The two approached the son
"I am." She stifled a weep

"Janet," he said. "I know."
"I never met you, but I know you, James."
"This is your brother, Harry," she said
"That I didn't know."
"Now you do because he's gone."
"I am glad he loved you, too."

The brothers looked in wonder
Their eyes spoke
They saw all those years
They smiled.

The Schizoid Jig

Joshua Copeland

I broadcast on which frequency?

Radio waves blend into the bedtime air

Making it hilly

Arousing it

A mirror ripples

Their stethoscopes act as evil audience

To the pulse of my arteries

To the wheeze of my lungs

To the squish of my eyeballs

Under their combat boots.

Their veined eyes peer from murky onyx alleys and

Accentuate their scorched earth policy.

The prose is purple

Let alone high on treble

Cheap and lazy comedy to them

The seashell to your ear hums of

The slither of eels over mud and

The blunt tap dance of static and

The crackle of imploding skulls and

The lick of the fire alive

A dirigible framed against the angry stars

Unleashed

A thing never to plant itself on the earth again

My carcass dances a wormy jostle below

I don't look like that anymore

Then the crash of an electric wail:

A sea of lamps minus the shades

Gently bob and

Pulse with erratic current...

All this so they can see me and feel me and hear me

Tune into my red vessels, hear their tunneled screams, see if I'm lying





"Mannequin," left image
by Cheryl Townsend

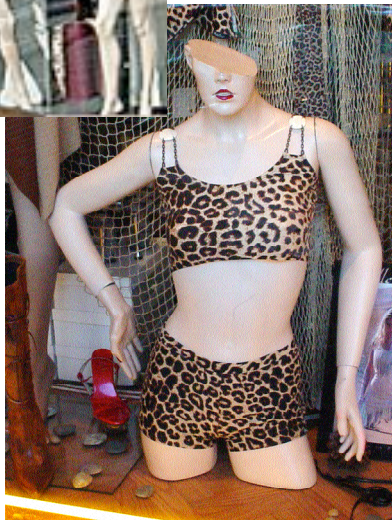
Happily Married to a Mannequin

Je'free

Call him weird or genius
At least he's happier than us
She'll be eternally young and pretty
With the most perfect bust
The ideal lover who can get cut,
But never bleed,
Customized suitably
To cater to his needs

Call him wacko or imaginative
At least he's got an output, a therapy
She'll be a listener with a heart
In his own reality
The lover delivered in private
With a lifetime warranty,
Low maintenance, replaceable parts,
One hundred percent reliability

Call him out-of-the-box thinker
At least he is living his dreams
She'll always compromise, and
Never be argumentative with him
The lover that can not cheat,
With legs that can not leave,
Every neighbor gets a trip
Outta this gal he'll forever keep



Life is Fine

J. Neff Lind

It's a strange feeling
not to be
worried about
life
and the way
my past
will haunt
my future
the way the present
doesn't seem clear
until it's fading
into past.

I've worn out
my worrying muscles
the brain parts
where my stress
is baked fresh

every morning
have died from
overwork
like a car
you drove too hard
or a door you slammed
too many times.

The problem is
without worry
I keep on
wandering
out into traffic
knowing that
the cars have brakes
and will likely
stop
I keep on telling

ghosts and goblins
that they're blocking
my light
when they try to cast
an evil shadow
across my path.

And when I smell smoke
I just hold my breath
the fire can have
its way
and if I burn
then I'll float off
as a gray cloud
and enjoy the view
since I've always
wished that I
could fly.



Fish Facial

Marilyn Raff



A man with black, straight hair floating behind him receives a fish beauty treatment at a hot springs

resort in China's Chongqing province. He lies on his back, water up to his nose, while

tiny, toothless fish swim, track his scent, nibble away dead, dried skin around cheeks, lips, ears and chin.

He is certain the creatures will not enter holes in his nose, ears and mouth.

prose
the meat and potatoes stuff

The Bell Tolls Again

Mel Waldman

The church bell seems to toll forever. It rings slowly again and again, and in the air, a miasma covers the city. We can't see the beautiful bronze Statue of Liberty. Our Lady, Goddess of Liberty and Hope, is invisible now. And we are blind and filled with fear and rage.

How can we heal? What do we feel? We only hear the incessant, repeated strokes of the bell. Yes, it rings slowly again and again. When will it cease?

The city's a desert now and a sirocco of despair approaches, a dark, oppressive wind and perhaps a storm too threatening to swaddle us in a cage of injustice.

In the distance, the bell tolls again and again and we remember some of the shattered faces-black faces of those killed or seriously injured by the police:



ELEANOR BUMPURS
ABNER LOUIMA
ANTOINE REID
AMADOU DIALLO
PATRICK DORISMOND
OUSMANE ZONGO
TIMOTHY STANSBURY JR.

And

SEAN BELL.



We pray for them and all other known and anonymous victims too-black, Hispanic (we remember ANTHONY BAEZ), white, and... Some were innocent. Others were troubled. None deserved to die or suffer serious injury.

The bell tolls again and again and the police continue to use excessive

force against minorities. (There is police brutality against all races, but minorities still seem to be profiled.)

We can never know all the innocent black men and women killed or injured in a wasteland of police brutality. In this urban wilderness, our good police officers, of whom there are many, I believe, are obscured, our citizens oblivious of their presence. We must search for them. And they must find us too. Together, we must heal.

Now, the church bell rings slowly again and again. When will it cease? Will it ever?

Today, it tolls for Sean Bell, a young black man killed on his wedding day after a 50-bullet fusillade, 46 bullets fired by 3 detectives acquitted by 1 judge.

And the church bell seems to toll forever, as we wait and pray for justice. How shall we heal? What do we feel? Now, the bell tolls for SEAN BELL, SEAN BELL, SEAN BELL... But tell me, please... FOR WHOM SHALL THE BELL TOLL TOMORROW?



Fatal Bombardment, art by Aaron Wilder

Something in the Ones and Zeros

David Backer

It's definitely possible to be a cynical believer in clairvoyant dreamers. What I mean is that it's reasonable to believe that this world is capable of producing someone who can go to sleep, have a dream, and be reasonably confident that the events of that dream will occur in the near future.

My roommate Robert says that we all have the right to realize our dreams. But I don't think that's what I'm talking about. Plus, Robert doesn't really exist so I don't have to take what he says seriously.

What I mean is this: we dream at night. No one doesn't dream. Sometimes people say they don't dream, but they really do. (I learned this in a psychology class.) They just wake up feeling like they didn't dream. But I wake up feeling like I dreamed every morning. Like this morning, Sunday, I remembered the dream I dreamed where my roommate Robert went to Argentina to visit his girlfriend who worked with bees there and they decided to travel all over and see the countryside in a rented car, but they blew a flat tire while they were driving, in my dream, and they spent days walking around trying to find someone. But they couldn't find anybody and they laid down in the middle of the road together and yelled until they couldn't anymore and died.

At least they were together. That's what I thought when I woke up.

Now you could say that Robert won't actually die on a road trip with a girlfriend who works with bees in Argentina. You could say that I just dreamed it up. You'd have a good case for this. Robert's girlfriend works in Bolivia, not Argentina. She doesn't work with bees, either. Actually, one of Robert's ex-girlfriends works with bees. In Tunisia. And Robert's girlfriend actually works at a nursing station. She helps people who get a particular kind of parasite from dirty water that grows underneath their skin and forms a big boil and a fully grown worm bursts out of the boil and crawls away.

Robert's actually an international type of guy. He wouldn't get caught dead without a spare tire on a road trip. He reads the New York Times every Sunday front to back. Every single section. He also reads the Economist front to back. And when he reads, he looks up all the words he doesn't know and writes them down in a notebook. When he finds a word he doesn't know, he usually waits a day or so until he can remember what it means. Then he asks me if I've ever heard of the word and I say "no" and he tells me what it means. He runs three miles on Sundays, too. Even when it snows. And when he comes back from running his three miles he does 100 push ups right in front of me on the living room floor and audibly counts each one. Sometimes Robert does push ups even if he hasn't run three miles. He just does them to be healthy. He also swims every day at a community pool a few blocks away from our apartment. Robert's also a vegetarian and does his own taxes in February to get the biggest return possible.

But, like I said, Robert doesn't exist. Gale my therapist says so. She says

he's just a symptom of my depression and anxiety. She says I fabricate Robert's good and admirable habits and accomplishments because mine aren't as good. She says that I have a complex and she assures me that the whole thing is purely chemical. This is why every time I go to see Gale, which is three times a week, she insists that I take mood-enhancing drugs to help me with my chemical disease. But I always say no because I fear the post-industrial mechanization of the human soul, which is something that I saw on the cover of a new release at Blockbuster Video. When I tell her this she shrugs and says that if I believe that, then I'll have to keep living with Robert.

Anyway, get this: Robert told me a few days ago about two friends of his that were actually traveling in Argentina together and blew a flat tire and died because they couldn't find anyone to help them. And Robert is actually going to visit his girlfriend in Bolivia this week. This is interesting because it sort of fits with my dream.

It's Monday morning and Robert and I are eating breakfast at the fold out table in our kitchen.

"I'm leaving tomorrow," he says.

"You shouldn't go, Robert," I warn him.

"Why not?"

"Because I had a dream where you died."

"Really?"

"Yeah."

"Well," he stops to think, "I think I'll take the risk."

"But you might die," I insist.

"It'd be better to go than not go, I think."

"Why?"

"Because I want to go. You have to do what to want to do. Or else life isn't worth living."

Robert does whatever he wants to do. But he always does good things. Like he volunteers for Habitat for Humanity and he reads a lot of books about morality that talk about what Goodness is and whether or not we just make it up as we go along. He also makes a lot of charitable donations, which he itemizes on his list of deductibles when he does his taxes two months in advance.

"But you might die," I repeat.

"I think that would be okay, as long I'm doing what I want to be doing when it happens."

He sits and peels a grapefruit (Robert always tries to eat healthy things) on the fold out table. He holds the grapefruit at arm's length so he doesn't get any juice on his clothes. He is wearing a pressed white shirt and a tie because he is going to work. I am wearing my robe and pajama pants and a dirty undershirt. I'm not going to work because I don't have a job. I am independently wealthy. I am independently wealthy because my grandparents started a very successful soda company that my parents continue to run very successfully. They sell soda all around the world and

they want me to be happy so they pay for my rent, my food, my therapist bills and my entertainment. But I don't need much entertainment. I don't do much of anything. I talk to Robert when he has the time in between work and volunteering and reading and exercising. I go to see Gale three times a week. And I do two other things that I haven't mentioned. Whenever I have an emotion, any emotion at all, I write either a 1 or a 0 on a wall in the kitchen that I call my wall of emotions. If I have an emotion and there's a 0 at the end of the last line, then I put a 1 next to it. If I have an emotion and there's a 1 at the end of the last line, then I put a 0 next to it. I've been doing this since I moved in, which was a week after I graduated from college. The night I moved in I sort of randomly decided to write a small 0 at shoulder height on the wall in the kitchen. I guess I didn't know what else to do.

There are a lot of 1 and 0 marks on the wall of emotions. Robert asks me about it sometimes. I think he thinks I'm an artist. But I'm not trying to make the wall look like anything, which definitely means I'm not an artist.

The other thing I do is walk everyday to the Blockbuster Video store around the corner from our apartment and read the titles of the new releases that are on the new releases rack. Nobody talks to me at the Blockbuster. I don't meet anyone there. Everyone just comes and rents a movie and leaves. They have different people working there all the time, so none of them recognizes me. I walk in and walk out and it doesn't matter.

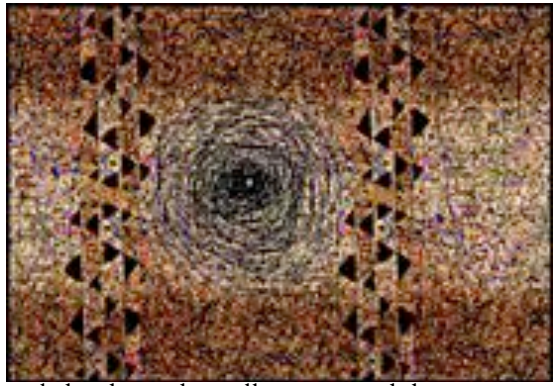
Robert finishes his grapefruit and gets up and walks away. He says "goodbye" as he closes the door and I try to say "goodbye" as soon as I can but Robert shuts it as I speak. Then I get up and I write a 1 next to a 0 on the wall of emotions.

So, like I said, it's possible to be a cynical believer in clairvoyant dreamers. Because the chemicals in our brains, the ones in the synapses, I think, keep working when we're asleep. They take all the thoughts and images you experience during the day and mix them up together and register them chemically in your memory. This is why dreams seem crazy: they're made of all your experiences, but mixed up into something totally different than what you're used to. And when they get ordered into something new like that they feel just like another experience, only weirder. But even if you think dreams are just chemicals swirling around in your head, even if you think that there are no magical clairvoyant powers and people are just brain chemicals and synapses, you can still believe that there are some people who can tell the future. Because there's a chance that some of those new orderings that the brain makes when it's asleep will be accurate depictions of the future.

For instance: I had a dream last week that I was getting married to Parker Posey, and the night before our wedding I had to pick up a white Cadillac with my bike and attach the white Cadillac to the back of my bike with a yellow strap and drag it to Parker Posey's house for the rehearsal dinner.

Then, the next day, the morning after I woke up from that dream, I saw a movie poster with Parker Posey on the front of it when I was at Blockbuster. And when I left Blockbuster I saw a pickup truck at the intersection outside the

the Art of Paranoia,
art by
Peter Schwartz



Blockbuster dragging a Honda Civic behind it with a yellow strap and there was a white Cadillac right behind it. I thought that alone was interesting, but then things got more interesting. The white Cadillac that was behind the civic ran a red light at the intersection and hit a homeless man who was wearing a wedding dress. He was pushing a big dirty cart full of cans and newspapers and blankets that went flying through the air when he got hit.

It's Thursday and Robert gets home from work and starts to pack for his trip to Bolivia. He packs some clothes, but not too many because Robert can live very sparsely. He trained himself to not need very much. Then he pays his bills for the month at the table. He has loans to pay from college because he was the first one in his family to graduate from college, and his parents don't make very much money at all. Then he ties a pair of boots to his hiking bag and fills up his water bottle for the flight.

"How's the wall coming?" he asks.

"Alright. It's funny because it's starting to look like something."

"You mean a picture?"

"More like some words, I think."

Robert suddenly drops to the floor and does some push ups. He counts loudly as he does them. He gets up after he says "fifty" and faces me again.

"What does it say?" he asks, panting.

"I'm not sure."

"Hmm," he says.

Then he puts his backpack on and clips a small clip across his chest and then a bigger one across his waist and then he walks away.

"Bye," he says.

"Alright," I try to say, "see you when you get back." But he shuts the door before I can finish.

I get up and make a small 0 next to a 1 on the wall of emotions.

It's a week later now, another Thursday, and I'm very convinced that we can be cynical believers in clairvoyant dreamers because earlier this morning I got a phone call from a woman who said she was Robert's mother. She sounded upset. I asked her if she really knew Robert. She said that yes, of course she knew him and that he

was her son for Christ's sake. She was sniffing into the phone and started crying. She said that Robert died in Bolivia with his girlfriend because they got food poisoning in a remote mountain town and couldn't find medical help in time.

"At least they were together," I told her, not knowing what else to say.

Since then I've been making all kinds of 1 and 0 marks on the wall of emotions because, for starters, Robert was a real, actual person the whole time he was living in my apartment. On top of that, I dreamed that he was going to die a few nights before he actually did. And, on top of it all, last night I dreamed that the 1 and 0 marks on my wall of emotions really had a sentence written in them. In my dream they said:

"Fear the post-industrial mechanization of the human soul."

Gossip I, II and III by Janet Kuypers

"I had to let him know I was having sex with someone else.
I worked with the guy, and we just got along so well,
and he's so good to me,
and he loves me,
and we have so much fun together,
and ... I don't know.
I mean, I love this guy, and he could be the one,
but I have security with the first guy.
He has a better paying job,
our families know and like each other,
and we have four years together.

I think I just need to get this guy out of my system for now."

"Oh my God, there was this guy,
we worked where I worked, at the options board
and we went out, and I went to his place

and he took me there in his GEO Tracker
and I saw in his apartment
that he had an framed
autographed picture
of the lead singer from R.E.O. Sepeedwagon,
what was his name,
but yeah, he had this autographed picture
framed in his stereo cabinet -
it was even a glass cabinet, you know,
so anyone could see this R.E.O. Speedwagon
framed picture."

"I've never orgasmed while having sex
with him.
And no, I haven't told him.
He tried to make it better for me,
but I don't know what it is.

And yeah, I have before, with other guys,
I mean, with one guy years ago
it was the bed sex ever.
We only broke up because he had to go
to his girlfriend back home."

Growing up, I blamed Mama for my unhappiness. Then one day, happiness found me—in Texas.

During my high school years, I wasn't known as the girl most likely to do anything. I wasn't known at all. Unfortunately, every year before school started, Mama cut and home-permed my hair. I looked like a white Samuel L. Jackson. She'd purchase a new wardrobe from Goodwill, and say "No use payin' retail for something that'll go out of style in five years."

Dating wasn't a priority for me. I had other goals. I didn't want to end up like Mama. I wanted to escape from El Dorado trailer park. I dreamed of having loads of money and moving into prestigious Windcastle subdivision, located three miles and a million dollars away.

Depending on Mama for help in furthering my education was useless. If I wanted to go to college, I needed a scholarship. By the time I entered my senior year in high school, Mama—oblivious to my needs—wrapped our existence around saving her lifeless fourth marriage. From the start, the foundation of that unholy union wobbled like gelatin. Mama would say, "Sophie, the devil's out to get us. Be on the lookout. He'll hunt you down—and he'll getcha every time." I thought the best place to hide from the devil might be in a big state like Texas, so I mapped out a life plan to move there after graduation, before the devil had a chance to find me.

After my senior year, a recurring nightmare haunted me. *I'm lying naked on a table, waiting for a gynecological exam, my legs strapped into stirrups. A red-horned demon wearing a white coat, and carrying the book of my life, enters the room. He leans between my legs and takes a bloodhound's whiff.* I wake up. That demonic creature crawled into my sleep almost every night. Maybe it had something to do with Stepdaddy leering at me through door cracks and digging through the hamper to sniff my dirty underpants.

I succeeded in obtaining a full ride to a local university. It wasn't Ivy League, and it wasn't Texas, but its campus sat a good ten miles from Mama, Stepdaddy Dearest, and the trailer park. After completing my college freshman year on the Dean's List, I managed to trade in my Goodwill—Samuel L. Jackson look for a softer, Samantha Fox style. I felt like the ruts in the road had finally smoothed over.

Other than my disturbing nightmare, I was happy living as the only virgin on campus. My roommate, Marie Star, became my best friend. Marie was the kind of friend who rescued lonely people. She invited me to spend two weeks of summer vacation with her at her family's cabin on Mark Twain Lake. I accepted.

We drove to the lake with Marie's parents. Angie, her mom, looked like someone who carried a tennis racket and sipped iced-tea from a tall, thin glass. Her dad, Tony, resembled Harrison Ford and talked so much, and so fast, no one had a chance to lasso the conversation away from him.

Marie's uncle, Jess Star, met us at the family's cabin. He managed *Star Moving and Storage*, a company based in Kansas City. Jess wore snake-skin boots, a tattered

cowboy hat, and a belt buckle as big as Texas. It didn't matter that he was twelve years older than me; his emerald eyes made me feel like an Eskimo pie melting into the asphalt on a sweltering August afternoon.

The first day at the lake, I wore a metallic bathing suit. I hoped its sparkles would make Jess notice me. It didn't, except when I belly flopped off the deck near his fishing spot. He tilted back his cowboy hat and called, "You all right, little lady? You scared all the fish." He grinned at me like I was the catch of the day. Then he moved his line away from my splashing. I guessed a twenty-year-old girl flapping in the water wasn't as interesting as the worm squiggling on the end of his line.

That afternoon, we ate lemon-smoked bluegill fresh from the lake. After lunch, Jess and Tony strummed their guitars and sang Eagles songs. Later, we watched the movie *Psycho* while munching on popcorn, but halfway through, Marie complained of a pain in her side. By the time Janet Leigh lay bleeding to death in the shower, Marie lay writhing in agony on the floor of the cabin.

Tony said, "Sophie, stay here with Jess. Angie and I are taking Marie to the hospital. We'll call when we know something." He lifted his daughter into his arms like a baby, and he whisked her away.

Thunder clapped, and Jess placed his hand on my shoulder. "Don't worry, little lady," he said, "Marie will be just fine."

"I think it might storm," I replied and looked up into eyes as green as endless Texas prairies.

He tilted back his hat and replied, "Yep."

Minutes later, trees bent like rubber and fallen leaves flew like flocks of birds. Deadly streaks of lightning slashed through charcoal skies and we lost power. I watched a funnel form and drop from a cloud. I'd lived in a trailer park long enough to know tornadoes carried the power to blow away your life.

"I'll grab a flashlight," Jess yelled, "Let's head out."

"Out?" I asked.

"Yep, cellar's on the side of the cabin."

Jess stuck a flashlight in his pocket, took my hand and held onto his hat. We battled strong winds as they wrestled us on our way to the cellar. Debris blew into my eyes. I held onto Jess with both hands as he opened the door to the tomb-like hole in the ground.

"Get in!" he yelled. His hat blew off and disappeared.

I didn't want to die in the storm, but I refused to climb into a grave. "I can't!"

Jess hoisted me over his shoulder, and we slid down the ladder. Blackness swallowed us. He set me on my feet. With only the beam from the flashlight, he fought to latch the door shut. It stunk in that hole like the inside of an unplugged refrigerator. I reached out and clawed for the ladder, but Jess pulled me off.

"Please let me go! I have to get out!" The trees cracking above us sounded like a monster severing bones from bodies. "I'm going to die!" I cried.

He sheltered me in his arms. "Shhh..." he said. He rocked me back and forth. Through the slats in the wooden door, I saw bolts flashing as a circle of light

danced around us. “Hold on, Sophie. We’ll be fine.” Softly, he crooned into my ear, “Welcome to the Hotel California...”

I tucked my head under his chin as the storm bellowed. The door above our heads strained; a force pulled at us, like a hungry dragon trying to suck its victims from deep within the bowels of the earth.

Jess sang, “Such a lovely place...”

I begged, “Don’t let me go.” I ran my hand over his face, across his solid chest and down his stomach. “Take me. Please.”

“No. Not like this.” He held my head to his heart. “A pretty gal like you should be with someone your own age,” he whispered and gently kissed my forehead.

I buried my face into the nape of his neck, and a force brewed inside me like Texas tea bursting from a newly discovered oil well. I yanked his denim shirt until the buttons popped off. Our lips met, and I slipped from his embrace and pulled him down to the floor. We were like the storm—hands pulling at clothes, bare, wet skin—rolling in filth and muck, touching and groping.

An unexpected jolt of pain struck me as he thrust between my legs. My explosive cry echoed into the thunder as he broke the shell that separated a girl from a woman. I didn’t feel any of the ecstasy that I’d read about in Mama’s trashy novels.

“There, there, darlin’, it’s okay,” Jess said and rode me like a cowboy at full gallop on his favorite filly. “Relax. The pain’s over. I promise.” In a few moments he stiffened and groaned as if he felt the same shock I had. He rolled off me and onto his back. “You were a virgin?” He patted my shoulder like I was a good horse. “I’m sorry. I would have been—much—I—wouldn’t—have—I’m sorry.”

The storm subsided, we dressed, and he helped me out of the cellar. Trees littered the ground like discarded building blocks. Part of the roof had blown off—but unlike my innocence—the structure of the cabin remained intact. That night, Marie’s poisoned appendix had to be removed. Jess drove me home and continued to apologize, stammering in awkward, unfinished sentences.

I served out my summer as prisoner of the El Dorado trailer park. Mama got a divorce and regularly attended church—in search of husband number five. I returned to classes in the fall and came down with a serious case of pregnant. I confided in Marie, because my first symptoms gave me hope that my appendix might be about to rupture. Marie held my hand while we waited for the pee stick to decide my fate. I never divulged to anyone that Jess was the father. I assumed that Marie told her mom about my condition, and her mom told her dad, and her dad told Jess.

Apparently, Jess solved the riddle. One day, he showed up at my dorm donning a fresh cowboy hat. He continued to apologize, brought me arm loads of bluebonnets and boxes of chocolate. He took me to expensive dinners that made me nauseous. As the watermelon seed inside my belly grew, I gave in to his persistence and decided to play the game of life with Jess. Gradually, I fell in love with the soft-spoken cowboy who changed my future on a stormy night. We mar-

ried and moved into a *sprawling* seven-hundred-and-twenty-square-foot ranch home in Kansas City. The sex improved, and we settled into a perfect life. I gave birth to a baby girl with emerald eyes and named her—Texas Star.

Texas isn't always where you think it is.

Vermont
Thunder,
art by
Peter Bates



Mallory, Queen of the Ants

Sam Brown



She watched the tiny black ant climb the blades of its holy atmosphere. This field was sacred, but of course, the ant did not know this. He could not possibly know that deep below the surface of his shared lair, important people were buried. No, no. He went along with his business, typical ant-like business, carrying small particles to fellow employees and then going back to retrieve more. She pictured the ant supervisor with his clipboard and sunglasses yelling, "Quickly, now! Faster!" They moved along in an assembly-line fashion until all the small particles were moved to their designated location. Then onto the next, and next, and next. Mallory thought about the little ant village and the indigenous insects that occupied it. *When do they clock out? Do they ever go home? Do they tuck the baby ants in at night and read them bedtime stories? Do they need ambien and xanax and lunesta just to have dreams too?*

She was the mayor of Antville, watching them from tallest building in the field. Her head rested on a small pillow of her own long brown hair meshed with dandelions and other weeds. Her small frame fit perfect in the area of flattened grass left for her by the deer. She could not see past the high grass that surrounded her and liked it that way. The peripheral sky above was a glass ceiling. Neither her nor the ants were going any higher.



She imagined herself lying there for an entire month, a year even, and she thought of her friends below. Their decomposition was what made this field so beautiful. They were just piles of bones and teeth now, but the roots of these plants and weeds had absorbed the souls of the deceased giving them one last breath. *They need this air. They are suffocating down there. Have we buried them alive?*

Mallory tried hard to focus on the ant as he made his way across the goose-bumps of her exposed stomach. He was smart to avoid her belly button, the eternal abyss, the second charka of anger, joy, and sex. *I am a short cut. Mallory Bridge. I am a stepping stone for an ant. I wonder if he knows that what he's crawling on is alive. I wonder if he cares.* She thought of the ants' home, and how they too bury their living and only come out to work. She looked around the colony to see if she could find her ant twin. But no ant was lying on its back atop a dandelion daydreaming about microorganisms and not doing its job. They were all far too diligent.



The ants were doomed.

They had invested too much time and too much sweat into this colony to have god as a garden-hose come in and flood them out. It would happen. Some child would stomp on their life's work. Some dog would piss all over their city, or worse, another, more important, animal would build its home there. These things happen, and the ants just don't size up in the pecking order of life. They are made to feel so, so small.

Dusk began settling in, but Mallory stayed. She stayed with the ants because everyone else was dead. All those important people were buried beneath her, and this was the closest she was going to get to making any kind of friends. Not even the ants were very friendly, but they allowed her to lie here in the St. Augusta Cemetery and just be. The ants were busy carving their niche in-between unattended, malnourished grave stones, and Mallory was too.



Timbuktu
Mosque,
art by
Kenneth
DiMaggio

Untitled

Joseph Zlab

It was a sunny, late afternoon. Everything had a warm orange glow. We were in the farmhouse kitchen. I pulled my tee-shirt out of my jeans and leaned over the white porcelain sink. I stared out the window. The bluegrass music on the radio played over the yelling and laughter of the kids out front. I could just make them out through the glare on the window. They were out on the Merry-Go-Round and Abby had the hose on the rest of them. Kelsie was jumping up, snapping at the water in the air. I took a sip of beer, then wiped the cold can across my forehead.

Nancy came up from behind and slipped her arms around me. She looked over my shoulder at the kids. I breathed in deeply and exhaled slowly. Life just doesn't get much better.

Harvest starts next week. This years crop is just about as much as we will be able to handle. We will be living well this winter.

I said, "Hon....do you think the kids would like to go skiing this December? I was thinking we could go to Utah."

Nancy pulled a little closer and said, "What do you think? John is cutting lawns for a new set of downhill skis."

"Man, that boy is growing".

"You're telling me. It seems like I'm buying him new Levis every three weeks."

I took another sip. I patted Nancy on the leg with my free hand and said, "I love you".

She took my beer and gulped a few swallows. Setting it aside, she ran her hands up my shirt sleeves. I turned and noticed the fire in her eyes. She smiled mischievously and said, "get me drunk and take me to bed".

Clouds 41,
at by
Tracy M.
Rogers



Night of the Kaalia

Liana Vrajitoru Andreassen

After they pulled the raft onto the embankment, twelve year-old Soell offered to be the first to watch over the sleeping family. He promised to wake his mother up as soon as he felt that he could not keep his eyes open any longer. The others did not find it easy to fall asleep. Hurried, confused whispers flew back and forth for a while. The mother held the two girls close to her, and her warmth comforted them. Finally, their breathing became deeper, though their worries followed them into their dreams. The father soon gave in to sleep as well, after struggling with thoughts of nameless horrors that lurked behind the dark rocks, merging with the starless sky. Not even the benevolent light of the moon was on their side tonight. The rocks bent over them like giant burglars, and their shadows startled them if they opened their eyes between troubled dreams. Awake, they felt no safer.

Soell sat on the wooden railing, to protect himself from the temptation of slumber. He wrapped a blanket around his body, but the sneaky cold wind stiffened his back, making him uncertain if he was still awake. He kneeled inside the raft after a while, next to the railing, to shield himself from the wind and from droplets that reached him from the river. He could see well enough through the logs. He listened with uneasiness to the unrelenting wailing of the water, and to the lone birds that cried in the night. Stray moon rays came through the clouds and danced on the water for brief moments, and Soell would startle, uncertain of the shapes that reached his eyes.

That is why he was not sure at first if something had really changed in his surroundings: the strange noises, the shifts in the colors of the night. Since everything moved slightly if he stared for too long, he didn't know what to make of the two distant shadows. But his senses sharpened: these shadows had more purpose than the other morphing shapes pulsating and rustling in the night air. He could barely see them move, but they were indeed moving. They were slowly crawling toward the raft. One shadow would move first, and then the other would follow it and stop, and then the same thing happened again. It was hard to accept it but, with all of the boy's sleepy drowsiness, the lurkers were no illusion. When the shadows drew closer, they became two skulking silhouettes: that of a man, and that of a very large animal. There was no mistake at this point, no matter how much he still wanted to doubt that their feared enemies, the man and his beast, were really creeping toward the raft. It was no dream!

Soell's body tensed. A hot wave cut through his stomach and sped through his limbs, like a paralysis. He had to remain calm: panic might get the better of him and his family, and they would be easy prey. Soell remembered the terrible

pain and fright that he had felt when, only a few days before, the tiger had charged at him from behind. With the marks of the tiger's claws still on his back, Soell could not take any chances. He tried to make his breathing small and unrushed, although it was hard to keep his chest from gasping for more air. He lowered himself even more into the raft, and drew closer to his sleeping father. He whispered in his ear:

"Father, father, be very quiet... Wake up father, but be very quiet..."

Luckily, his father did not startle and was quick to realize that Soell didn't want him to make noise. Soon, he understood why. As for the mother and his older sister, Soell did not disturb their sleep, for he knew that if he tried to wake them up suddenly, they both would scream. Instead, he touched the face of his ten year-old sister Benya, and when he saw that she had opened her eyes, he placed one finger on her mouth and motioned for her to come close so he could whisper. When she realized what was happening, her first impulse was to get out of the raft. Soell and the father managed to stop her before she could make herself seen.

Panic aside, the three tried to come to a solution.

"What should we do?" Soell said to the others, in a barely audible voice. "They're close, and I think they'll attack. Should we wait here quietly, or should we jump out to scare them away?"

"No, we better wake the others and push the raft into the water," said the father.

They could see through the railing that the two figures were about thirty feet away, so if the family were to make a run for the river, no matter how dark and unforgiving it looked at night, they would have to do it now.

"I think the five of us can fight them," said Benya, who had regained some of her confidence. "Why don't we wait quietly, and when they're here, Father, you grab the man and fight him, and we wrestle the animal. We have our weapons!"

"But the animal is much too strong!" protested the father. "At least one of us could be killed before we can overpower the beast! We shouldn't waste any more time, so let's just wake the others quietly, then rush for the water."

"Yes," said Soell. "Besides, the man must have a powerful weapon. Father's right."

"But..." Benya started.

Quickly, though, she realized that they could be right: maybe they would all get horribly hurt if they fought.

"Wait, wait!" said Soell, as their father was getting ready to wake up his wife. "Look!"

The three of them looked through the railings and saw that the man and the tiger were now running *away* from the raft, as if either they had sensed that they had been noticed, or something else had made them turn around.

"What is it? Why are they running?" said Benya out loud, and that woke up the mother and Aluna. The two jumped from their sleep and instantly knew that

something serious was taking place. Their voice shaking and their hearts racing, they asked the others what was going on – and the whispers increased. Five heads were now coming out of the raft, looking in the direction in which the two shadows had disappeared. At the same time, another shadow arrived at the spot where the two had been skulking. This shadow, whatever or whoever it was, must have chased the predators away. And then, her veils fluttering in the night wind, the shape of a woman made itself seen: it was the same silent, undisturbed woman that they had seen walking in the distance that very evening. She raised her arms into the darkness and let out a piercing cry, throwing her body in the air and shaking her fists in the direction in which the man and tiger had run, as if her anger was to follow them, like a curse. And then she turned.

Seeing the woman coming toward the raft with firm steps made the five uneasy, but they did not move. For one, she was alone, and she did not carry any weapons or strange animals. Moreover, she clearly was not a friend of the man with the beast and, without any effort whatsoever, she had driven their enemy away, into the night that he had come from. For that, they could only be grateful. They waited for her to approach, and they all stood up in the raft to greet her.

While earlier in the day she had not even looked at them, let alone spoken, now her voice broke the spell of that terrifying night and brought them back to reality after a waking nightmare. Her voice was soft, but clear, and she did not falter when she announced to them imperiously:

“They’re gone now. Come with me.”

“Who are you?” the mother murmured.

“Who I am does not matter – yet. You will know more about me in the morning. Now let me offer you food and a better place to sleep. *He...* will not bother you, as long as you are with me,” she said, vaguely turning her head to look behind her.

Upon hearing the word “food,” the poor famished family looked at each other and felt embarrassed for not hesitating to come out of the raft. They accepted the invitation readily, even though they still felt uneasy. They knew that they owed each other some kind of caution, but this strange woman, who had chased away someone stronger and scarier than her, had to be trusted: there was no other way at that time of night and in that unwelcoming place. Even though they remembered how distant, almost not human, she had appeared to them when they had seen her only a few hours ago, now they felt they had to follow her to stay alive.

She instructed them to take their blankets and follow her to a small opening in the rocks, through a labyrinthine passage, and then up, climbing their way through another narrow passage toward the top of a big rock. It was very hard to climb at night, even though now and then the moon flickered yellow light upon the black rocks. The woman walked with ease, unlike her sorry-looking followers. They all made their way on the hard humps of the rocks for a while, until they were higher than everything else around, crossing over to

what lay hidden behind the rocks – the same rocks that had seemed impossible to climb over during the day.

Finally, they began to descend, and what they saw was a small meadow, surrounded by trees and smaller rocks – another side of the same mountain. By now, their eyes were more used to discerning the lurking shadows of the dark, so it didn't take long to realize that there were houses on the meadow – huts, rather – made of tree branches and strengthened with ropes and mud. There were some thirty or forty of them – an entire village! Judging by the sounds of heavy sleep coming through the walls, the huts were inhabited. There must have been at least a few souls in each hut, gathered to rest for the night.

There wasn't much time for questions, with hunger, sleep, and weakness making it hard to be thrilled to see human dwellings. The woman brought them to one of the huts – an empty one – and she motioned for them to sit on the inviting straw bed that lined the wall opposite the entrance. She returned after a while with food – a strange, hard bread, a chunk of meat, and water in a big clay cup. Although rough and not entirely fresh, the food tasted better to them than the greatest feasts that had ever enchanted their palate. They wolfed down all the food and drank the water, and even groped in the dark for crumbs that might have fallen to the ground. This was not the time to feel shame. Just by looking at each other, they knew that none of them was judging the others for the lack of manners, or for the uncouth way in which they accepted and ate the food. When their hunger was finally less monstrous, they drew closer to each other and lay down on their bed, covering themselves with their blankets, then tried to get some rest for the remainder of the night.

When morning came, the five tired travelers would have lingered in their dreams for a while longer, but their sleep was cut short. Through the rays of the already bright sun, in the frame of the hut's opening, there stood the woman who had guided them through the darkness of the unfriendly night. The five struggled to shake sleep off of their lids, and attempted to smile in greeting. The woman was not smiling, and for the first time they could see her angular, supple face hardened by winds and sun.

"Perhaps you want to thank me," she said, still standing in the door, as rays of sun gave chase through her vaporous green veils. "I'm Kaalia..."

"Yes," said the mother, trying hard to remember her manners. "We all thank you for your generosity and for saving us from the man..."

"Except," the woman continued undisturbed, "that I am not the one who saved you."

Nobody understood. Then, as if in response to the general confusion, another woman joined the other in the hut's door. She was identical to the first, wearing the same clothes, and with the same dreamy eyes and undisturbed face.

"I am also Kaalia," said the second woman in the same voice, "but I am also not the one who saved you. The one who brought you here does not need

to be thanked.”

“What?... Who...? What is going on?” asked Soell, standing up and shaking the straw off his clothes. “Who are you?”

“Why do you look the same?” asked Aluna, rubbing her eyes to see better.

“But then again,” said the first woman, “there is nothing, really, to be thankful for. Do not try to thank us at all, because your fate will not change, no matter what you say.”

As she spoke, her dreamy, green eyes gained purpose, as she turned her gaze onto the travelers’ questioning faces. Although her eyes were small, one could simply not look away, for they were steady and unapologetic in confrontation.

“Hold on, what are you talking about?” asked the father, stepping forward.

Benya was also drawing closer to the two women, as if to convince herself that they really existed. When she peeked behind them, she jumped back in fright, for what she saw outside of the hut was even more unsettling than the incomprehensible words of the two women. Seeing her rush back to her family, the women gave a laugh and parted, to let everybody see what Benya had seen and not believed: more women just like them were approaching, more than they could count, and soon more and more of them were near the hut, watching the family: all with the same face, the same careless, piercing eyes, the same veiled walk, and the same vaporous presence that had become unpredictable and cold.

They did not, could not understand why there were so many of the same and why, all of a sudden, what seemed to be friendliness the night before, and a desire to help, had turned into a mocking threat that made them instantly regret their trust. The mother gathered her children around her and held them tight, because not even the bravery of Benya or Soell, or the newly found confidence of the father, were enough to attempt walking out of the hut. Soon enough, many of the women were gathered right at the entrance. More were arriving, while the defiant distant eyes were multiplying and multiplying, like clouds gathering to block the sun – for the sun they blocked indeed – until some made their way into the hut. These ones were carrying ropes wrapped around their arms.

“What do you want from us?” shouted the mother, and Benya hurriedly repeated the question.

“Look, we can talk about it,” said Soell, trying to stand tall, though he felt as if rolling thunder filled his chest.

“We should have put the raft in the water...” said the father sadly, as if his idea from the night before had come back to accuse him. He could not believe how easily they had trusted this woman. Why had it not crossed their minds that perhaps the man with the beast was running away from a danger more terrible than him? Now it was too late to regret what should have been done.

Aluna felt tears stream down to her chin and she hid her face at her mother’s chest.

“Yes,” said one of the countless women. “You are wise not to try to run.

What would be the point? There are two hundred and seventy of us, and a few more hundreds will follow.”

“Don’t stare at us as like frightened field rats,” said another with contempt. “We don’t like to see fear.”

“We don’t like to see self-pity either,” said another, looking at Aluna and her mother.

“It would be wisest of you not to resist. We don’t like those who struggle. Come, you need to be tied up and put into the carriage.”

“Oh, you’re not very willing to be tied up!” laughed another, unwrapping the rope coils, and giving the victims a sharp look. “Then maybe you are asking for a beating first. Come, hurry, put your arms behind your backs!”

Since neither of the five was following the orders, one of the women gave a signal and they swarmed the hut in the blink of an eye, greedily gulping all the air and the light.

“They don’t like it, do they,” some of the women said. “They liked it more when we were nice to them, didn’t they.”

“They like food and water, but they don’t like to be grateful for that which they didn’t work for. They think it’s easy to raise crops, hidden from the others on the mountain, hidden from their hate!”

“Wouldn’t the others like to find our hiding place and kill us to save these pathetic ones!”

“Ha-ha! But they don’t know – they don’t know that it is *them* whom death seeks! You’ll never get rescued, you hear?”

“Never!”

The mention of others living on the mountain was like a ray of hope shooting across the hopeless morning. If only they could find out who else lived on the mountain and how to ask them for help!

“Somebody will rescue us!” Benya shouted, clenching her teeth and struggling with the rope that was pulled tighter and tighter around her body.

“Who? The spirit of the mountain?” laughed one of the women and slapped her over the head. “Maybe you can pray to the mountain and it will swallow us all!”

“In the pits of darkness, in the belly of the mountain, that’s where you’ll outrun us!”

“Just shut your mouths and pray that we don’t kill you before we even get to the Waiting Town!”

“The Waiting Town?” asked Soell, trying to keep his wits, but barely able to think. “What town is that?”

“It is the town where we wait!” came the curt answer.

“What do you wait for?” he said, ignoring the pain in his wrists, twisted to accommodate the invasion of the rope.

“We wait to become stronger! To become more skilled! And finally we will be able to kill them all!”

“Are you going to kill us?” asked Benya, and Aluna started sobbing, because her younger sister had expressed a thought that none of them had dared to name in their minds, although it hung in the air like a thunderous cloud.

“Silence, little one,” said one of the women. “If we wanted to kill you, wouldn’t we have killed you already? You’re still alive, aren’t you? Have you thought that, maybe, we have a *use* for you?”

They carried their prey outside the hut, now roped too tightly to manage more than a wriggle of resistance. There, more women were watching silently, and silently they parted, to let the small procession walk through. The five prisoners were taken to a big wooden chariot on two enormous wheels. There were other chariots around, resting on long, wooden poles that served as handles in pulling – now not in use. As they dropped the terrified family into the empty chariot, with traces of straw on the bottom, the women turned to the multitude of their sisters – or whatever the bond between them was – and asked:

“The man, should we take him?”

“Yes, for now. It’s not good to leave his body here, unless we bury him, but there’s no time for that.”

“The other army could bury him,” objected another. “When they complete the multiplication.”

“But they don’t have much time either. We all need to gather soon and start getting organized.”

“Right, right,” agreed the others. “We’ll take him with us, and kill him when we reach the Waiting Town.”

The prisoners shuddered, hoping that they misunderstood the meaning of those words.

“Let’s go! Let’s go!” shouted some of the women, and the others joined in the shouting, until the message was sent to all of the veiled warriors. They all started to move toward the chariots, then most of them jumped in, some in the one where the family lay, and then the remainder of the women grabbed the poles and started running. They pulled the chariots with surprising ease, as if they had done that so many times before, that it had become second nature. Through the luscious woods where stray rays of sun barely made it through, the running women looked as if they radiated their own light. The chariots were moving fast, lined up one after the other and following an unseen trail through the woods. They went around obstacles and jumped hurdles, while the women in the chariots would cheer and ask the pullers to run faster. Veils fluttered in the air as they ran, teeth gritted, and faces grew red. On these faces, one could see a hidden pride, a hidden smile, a hidden glow of determination that would have made their prisoners exhilarated to watch, had they joined them under different circumstances.

It's true that my soft spoken mother will ask, what shall I do now that I've undone myself? My quiet father will say nothing. Woe is me, boo hoo and all that junk. Feel no sympathy for me because it would really be a waste of your emotions since I alone am responsible. And to tell you the truth, I don't give a shit.

In the spirit of the mood, I decided for a walk. It being a sudden spring after a long slow winter, I couldn't see any reason to not go. There would be time later for such mundane things as packing. I brought little and unpacked less.

In the hall on this early morning, I saw a couple kissing each other in the hallway. The man was wearing a backpack and still prepared for the recently gone winter. His blanketed body a contrast to his presumed girlfriend. Shorts that only reached inches below the crotch revealed long, smooth legs of the color bronze. Her shirt clung close on her breasts displaying its bountiful and full glory while being baggy around the waist giving vague ideas about her size. It was obvious that they had been within each other's arms last night and by that I mean hot, quick and dirty intercourse. For she stood within his doorway and shared a kiss of impure relations. I found the whole scene cruel at first for it only emphasized how utterly alone I was. My heart strings tugged upon me like ropes on a rack. But my mind forever clever knew how to escape.

They may grasp tightly today but I knew it would not last. Kisses would become hisses, and love become hate. For it is those that we hate most that we had first loved. Now all that saddened me was how I wouldn't be around for the yelling. It always filled my heart with glee. Nothing is more amusing than the irrational things said in the throes of passion. I wish I could hear the things said while in love but while in hate is always loud enough for any to hear.

The ill conceived trucks and SUVs thundered down the 'main' street (these noisy machines being the only music). I bring attention to the idea of there being a 'main' street since it was more or less the only street in town. The other paved ways are too small and in too much disrepair to be properly called streets. Nor did these other ways hold anything of interest (I know, I checked). The street though was a shining example of a cleanly swept street with businesses lining its glory. It was as black as space with bright streaks of white and yellow like comets. Almost a work of art in its own right. But what can one expect from a street so new? In time its glory will

fade, thanks to budget cuts and misspending. In one year's time the colors will dull like the buildings along the street and in five it will carry potholes from bad original construction. But for now two bloated old women ahead of me would marvel at this 'wonder of our times'.

These two women of bad physique and even worse smell would prattle on from one useless thing to the next in infuriating innocence. One would go on and on about her pretty granddaughter in high school. The old women marveled at how pretty she was in her mini skirt and tank top. To myself I thought of how this 'pretty' granddaughter was probably quite adept at moving these accessories to relieve her itch. She would be quite 'pretty' indeed when she would have to shed those 'pretty' cloths for a big bad B-A-B-Y. I myself avoided such activities with 'pretty' things in my time in High School. What an utter waste of flesh they are.

They would go into gossip, a thing as an outsider I care naught for. I left them so as to get onto the bridge over the river.

The wide river calmly drifted past as cumbersome automobiles sputtered plumes of gas as they went by. The sky contained only the lightest of clouds sitting softly on a rich blue blanket. Gracing the banks of the river were trees barren but still gleeful in the long forsaken warmth. The river itself had minute wrinkles running its surface from a couple of ducks swimming peacefully above the darkness lurking below the surface. The bridge's concrete gave me sound footing as I stood atop the railing. I thought of plunging myself into the still icy depths below. Maybe it would bring some relief with its cold grasp. I felt a little warm and wanted to see how cold I could get. No one can know until they try.

I though would never know. I never heard the car screech to a stop or feet racing in concern but I would feel myself torn to the cold concrete ground by hands empowered. I hit it soundly.

I must of blacked out for a second for when I came to, a women was over me. She was not sexy, beautiful or pretty, she shared my age and looked normal though a little on the pudgy side. She wore a dark hoodie and a body that heaved from heavy breathing from effort, tension and adrenaline still running its course. She was not in the peak of attraction but for some crazy idea (maybe it was the clunk on the head) I kissed her soundly. Her warmth, feminine scent and sweat temporarily mingling with mine. Her lips were sun soft, and saliva surged forth covering my demanding lips. She tore away blushing not knowing what to do. Luckily for her, others coming would excuse her from such things. Behind others would she disappear while I smiled at the quick thing I had done.

They sent me to where people who stand on railings go. It was a terri-

bly boring place with the women there always being distraught. And without any books or walks to distract me I constantly thought on the bestial. Which quickly bored me, being horny is only fun for so long. The women there seemed to be of weak quality and would often break down at my conversations. The attendees would constantly remind me that conversations on death were off limits. I ignored them because death is too important of a subject to ignore, of course then again I did talk about ways to die. I would eventually grow bored of this as well and the attendees were starting to think they were winning. I was contemplating on going mental to break the boredom and piss everyone off when she arrived.

Since I was such a good little doll during my stay they allowed for me to be with her alone. I won't bore you with specifics but she told me how I left her in great confusion. Her life she thought set until I came along and threw it all into the air. How the opinions of her parents about my condition delayed her coming. She went on about other excuses, she was obviously confusing me with a person who cares about such things. I let her go on as I drank her in, she dressed respectfully in an attire that said 'I'm not devoid but I don't give easily'. I think she noticed my ogling so I let her have no misconceptions. Again we kissed; less hurried than the last. Deeper and longer this time. I would of tried for more, but I didn't. It wasn't out of any moral reason (that would be stupid of me). I didn't for I disliked the idea of doing such a thing in a place like this. I forgot to mention, it smells terrible here.

She fresh from my kiss proclaimed that she would wait for me to get out. And not long did she have to wait, I had motivation. As her sweet scent of lavender faded from the room I wished deeply to smell it once again.

It would be over the border the next time we kissed. We ran from our parent's disapproving gazes and sealed our relationship. The wedding was tacky and gaudy for my tastes but I didn't complain because I didn't care about such aesthetics. I let her do all the planning and she was happier for it. I was not what she had expected to be married to, but in her eyes I saw happiness. I on the other hand was only pleased. I wore the tuxedo. Our friends were gleeful, our families not so much. Oh well, this is not the times of the oak but of the cattail.

We moved into a large city where there was more streets than one carrying the name 'main'. There was many and varied names for the legion of streets. The people were friendly, dumb or loners (I preferred the loners but I was amused by the other two). The buildings rose into the clouds, the mass transit was always crowded and smelly. When I strolled those streets I came to the closest thing to love. I was smiling ear

to ear when we walked those streets to a many interesting place. Heavy music of rock and roll roared from every bar doorway. I was so utterly jubilant and she laughed at how active and happy I was compared to normal. For the first time I felt happy to have her at my side, even though she wore a flowery skirt.

Years went by and we opened a bookstore. The store was simple and we would spend our days together, she liked to talk with people so she got the front end. I would deal more with the stacking and organizing. The bookstore attracted all sorts of amusing people. They tried to appear greatly intelligent and academic. They talked about obvious conclusions from books they had read. I would laugh within when they talked like these conclusions were “earth shattering” and “truly revolutionary”. The rare times that I came out to talk to them they would be left either baffled or awe struck.

The bookstore made enough to be financially sound and made her happy and me content. I realized that we could do this for the rest of our lives, I was shocked when I first realized this. I even considered running away from it all. And I think hard upon at least once a year, but she prevents me every time.

I can't say I love her, but I would miss her presence. When I'm with her I can somehow deal with bullshit. I know I attracted her with attempted suicide and kept her with the following phrase that I would slip every once in a while, 'Don't die tonight, for if you die, I die tomorrow'. But I never or ever will plan to commit suicide. I was thinking of an impulsive swim when I stood on that bridge. It was simply misconceptions that she and the State thought I intended to do the worst.

Cruel you may call me, but that's how it is. She might not be different from any other women, and I know smarter and better looking women but I wouldn't want to lose her for everything in the world. I don't love her but I have grown accustomed to her ways. And she had grown accustomed to my ways as well, I think she even finds my bitterness endearing.

For this I'll resolve the current stress in our relationship. She wishes for a child ever so deeply. I know I won't enjoy all the pains and tribulations that goes along with the process but she deserves it out of all people. Tonight I tell her that I'll bear the child. I don't want to see her face in pain, I don't think I could withstand seeing her so weak.

“And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare

As any she belied with false compare.” - William Shakespeare,
Sonnet 130

Stone and Wind

Carl T. Abt

I have a child of stone. I dare not tell my husband or daughters. They would not think it healthy of me: I invest so much into my sculpting. But their thinking isn't what counts. They won't be around after we die. The child who carries my name will be stone.

And nobody will be forgetting my name – not when I have a statue *this* big to it. I dangle from its nose, a rope and pulley system holding me where I can use a torch to polish the surface above his lips – Native American chiefs weren't big on mustaches. Crazy Horse was no exception.

I've been carving Crazy Horse into a mountain side near Mt. Rushmore for over 18 years. It's been like raising a child – except better: Crazy Horse won't snap back at me when I try to add a little refinement to him. I've left my two daughters below, to be off somewhere to be kids, South Dakotan hurricanes of hyperactivity.

Dusk has arrived for those on the ground. Up here though, I have a few more minutes of light. There is always more light for those above the daily affairs.

I close my eyes and the world is remade.

In my self-imposed darkness, I remember the wind, as it tries to unbundle my hair. I run my calloused fingers over the rigid lips, passing over the rim, and on up to the nose. No matter how many times I had read the stone texture like Braille with the half-conscious dream of finding my name, with my eyes closed these are shapes I cannot know the ultimate meaning of. What I have given birth to here wasn't just larger than human scales: it was beyond human comprehension. But you could only know that when you couldn't see. Someday, my daughters would see that when their silly dreams of being writers and politicians proved themselves to be dreams. They would see that no matter how large they made themselves, life would always be larger than they could comprehend. That is the truth you see when you close your eyes. They said they would understand that one day, when they had given birth. I'm not so sure.

The wind shifts and shifts till it is impregnated with such a cornucopia of scents they dare me to define them. There are bird droppings, dust from the drills, granite tainted with minerals not cataloged. The second you try to put your finger on which one has come to you, the wind changes, and the world is new again, like a child who changes scent every minute from mud, to soap, to vomit.

I shudder, and open my eyes; my world is back.

I lower myself to the flat surface that will eventually become Crazy

Horse's arm, and will be all but tattooed with my name. Until I unbuckled my tool belt, a dozen handles tapped my thighs like they were my daughters learning to play the piano. The wind sang through the slack ropes like the violin strings my daughters had also pinned their dreams on. With a few practiced motions that let leather groan against steel clasps like a mother bound to unbending children, I free myself of the harness, and light up a Marlboro. I'd told my daughters to find dreams that could be more than dreams, dreams that did not ask you to close your eyes, dreams that could be real. Like accounting. Or child care. But they would have none of it. Writing. Politicking. I told them how few people made a living at these, and they rallied by the word hypocrisy. How many people got to be sculptors? I told them I was lucky, but luck wasn't a concept they shared with me. No matter. Let them drown themselves in poverty: I didn't need them to carry on my name.

I take a drag, letting the Marlboro take a calming hold on me, and then let the smoke drift out of my mouth: I'd smile if I went out with that white cloud as long as my name stayed down here. I'd burn my name into stone even it left nothing of me but smoke. I'm not afraid of standing on the edge of the cliff. Death cannot hold itself over you when the world will remember you. And no one will forget my name. So I bring fire to my lips. So I stand one step away from the forever abyss. And so therefore I am.

I take a step closer to the edge and flick the nearly spent Marlboro into the valley below, which yawns like a great maw big enough to swallow Comprehension itself. I lean over the edge to watch the cigarette be extinguished before it had given all it had to give. There was still smoke left in it – and where there was smoke, there was fire, that power which could make a name burn brighter. Then a gust tore itself up into a fury from out of nowhere.

There was a clatter of loose rubble, and then I was falling. This is not a cartoon. I'd looked over the edge enough times to know there are no convenient trees growing out of the side of the cliff. Wouldn't have wanted those on a statue. Statues were for names.

My heart quickens, but I am not afraid. Two hurricanes brew below, out of the last light of day, their screaming winds never ruffling my bundled hair. But I am not afraid. I have Crazy Horse, my child of stone. But what would Crazy Horse say if his lips could move: "When people look at your work, will they say your name – or mine?"

I close my eyes. The air is stone-still, but I fall, and in falling, hear the howl of wind that is not wind.

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