



HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY

Apogee Magazine

Celebrating our Golden Anniversary



Get out of Dodge by Harry Swartz-Turfle



HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY

Apogee Magazine: *Celebrating our Golden Anniversary*

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Include a cover letter
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Cover Art: Chinatown

Guillaume Vallée graduated from Concordia University with a Major in Film Animation, Vallée is interested in radical forms of animation and analogue techniques as a way of considering the direct interaction between different mediums. His work is an exploration of materiality within the creative process. In attempts to create a more complex relationship with his subject matter, Vallée makes use of cross-medium forms that range from camera-less techniques to optical effects and found-footage, often resulting in surreal and chaotic imagery. He's currently doing a Master's degree in Studio Arts - Film production at Concordia University.

Kate Hutchinson is a Montreal-based editorial and fine art photographer. Her work included in this issue is from the collection "Ulysses: A personal journey."

Mary Beth Jones is a student at High Point University currently studying photography.



Toledo by Harry Swartz-Turfle



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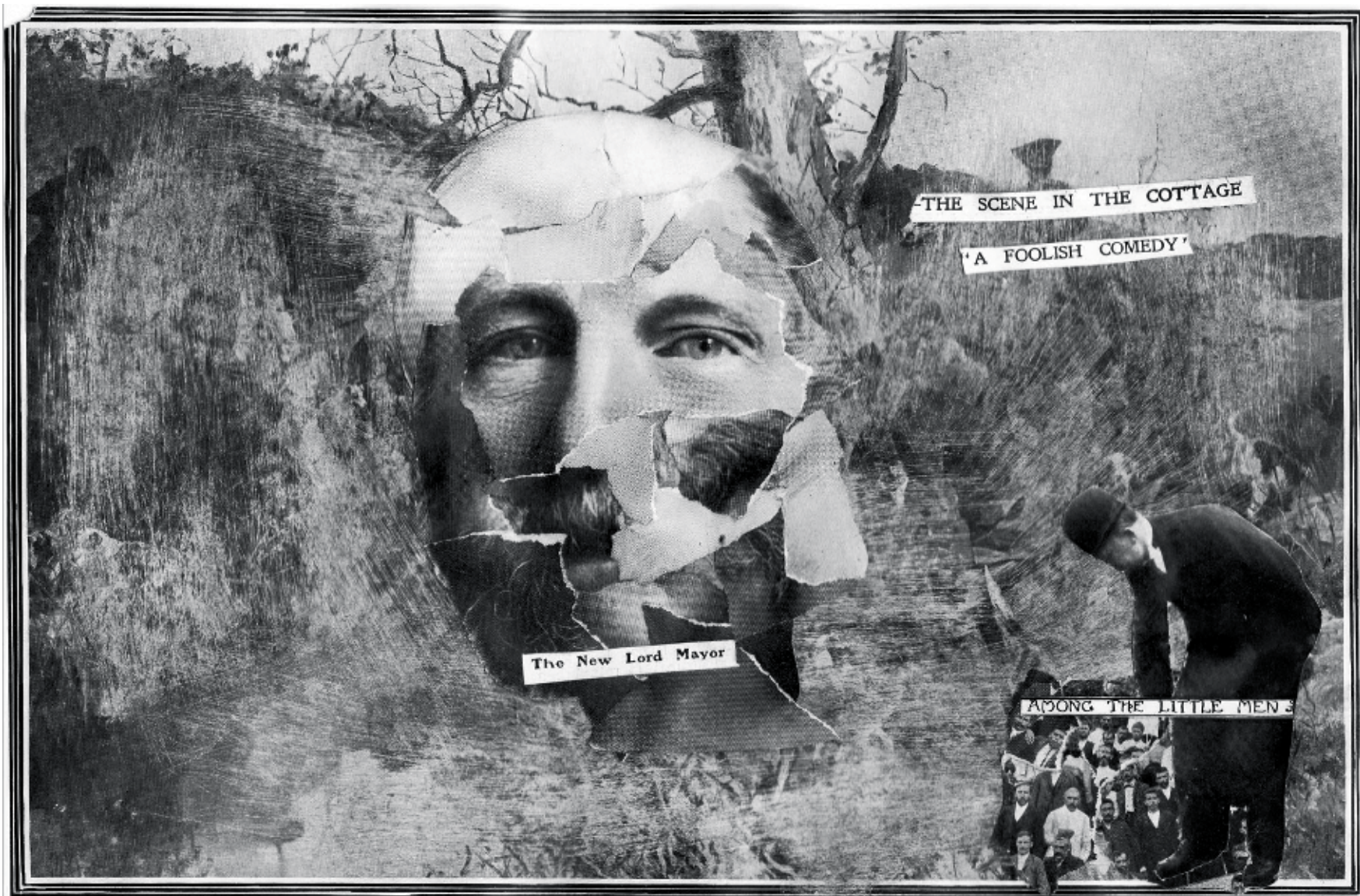
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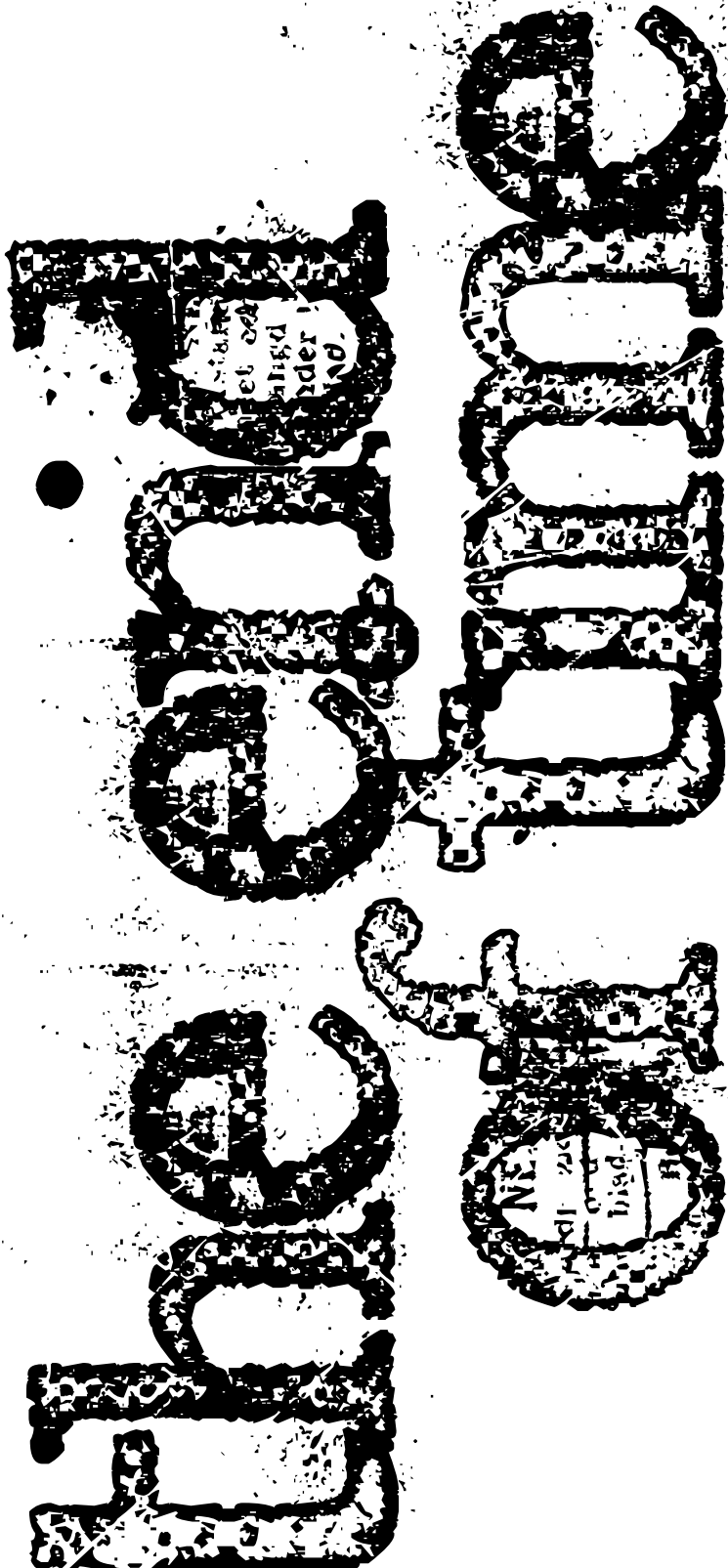
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A Foolish Comedy by Guillaume Vallée



words Douglas Rothschild

NOTE TO SELF:

Remember to pin a note
to the body which says, "Don't
worry. You won't miss me much."

SEPTEMBER 18/12

The quality of light this
evening changes the meaning
of the day—This new be-
ginning some alternative
ending. Missing information,
i leave the lights on so that
when i awaken in the dark,
i can see.

—
Look how the trees here
have now turned
bright red
& no one seems to care.

OUT FOR A WALK

I see the moon.

SWIMMINGLY

Animated cartoon
tradition holds that a
drowning person goes
up & down three times
before they expire.

A SHORT TRIP HOME

I have arrived
at the fortress of solicitude
& find myself
utterly alone.

MEA CULPA

Dark hawks on every
light standard.

SOUND ADVICE

Experience is the only thing
that matters & the longer
you know someone the better
it is. But what happens in
the real world?

ROCK FORMATIONS

Show no evidence of fall,
ignoring for now the world
that surrounds them.

A MARTIAN PERSPECTIVE

I seem to have
miscalculated.

SEPTEMBER 8/12

This afternoon autumn came
to albany. It brought rain.
By sunset, it was headed
your way. I asked it to
say "Hi" & remind you
to dress warm.

HUNG OVER

In a southbound
train i begin
my long journey
back to a place
that is not
my home.

SUNSET ALONG THE HUDSON

How many boats
were left beached
near Troy, for want
of crew members to
row them home?

HAIKU

This clear bright early
September sunset reminds me.

HOMEWORK: Memorandum

Both the aluminum
post anchor & the
steel support arm
at the top of the
railing on the south
side of the steps
have been eaten
through by salt.

IN THIS PICTURE

In the foreground
sunflowers.
In the background
music
you cannot hear.

VANITY PLATES

Ichneumon wasps &
the culture of 'girlie'
silhouette mudflaps,
plant notions in the
heads of their respective
hosts, that prove very
difficult to remove.

CONUNDRUM

Today my job
consisted of
determining
how two identical
parts were different.
The answer being
they were broken
in the same way.

Darkness closes in
as the promise of the day
burns out with the sun.

Looking southwest at
sunset i consider your
journey back home.

SEPTEMBER'S SUNSET

Happily reminds me
to call you yet October's
will prove me wrong.

SOMETHING AUGUST & APT

1.]What does hammer & tongs
mean? Or that buzzing sound
as we cut the shaft of Mjólnir?

2.] If Disney can dress
Eeyore, whom no one loves,
in wings & tutu—as if
he were Loki in his
guise as tooth fairy—
does that make Pooh
Bear Thor? & Piglet
Balder? Is Rabbit the
master of Utgarda? &
Christopher Robin Tyr?
or Odin?

NECKTIE PARTY

i made a noose today
with thirteen turns
& tight around the
neck. No one can say
i hang out alone.

LIGHT HAWKS ON EVERY
DARK STANDARD

i dreamt you were
a shining light seen
from afar on a cool
clear night.
i must have knocked
my head against some
thing hard within my bed.



The Past by Guillaume Vallée



The Flower Gardens by Guillaume Vallée

IT'S NOT ME, IT'S YOU

words Douglas Rothchild

*Yeah, ah—I'm sorry. Tonight's been fun, but I've got nothing.
Good night & thanks for coming. —Eric Bogosian*

These blank pages written as if by a sullen
speaker sitting alone in the half dark—
half drunk trying to re-number the time
lost for acquired taste, bland & ill
conceived.

I'll begin again.
Remembering the dismember-
ed doll, the dismasted doll house. I'm mixing
metaphors in a shaker chair—brooming out
the relentless brutalization, the brow beating,
the torch down. Roofing everything over with
your eternal suffering. Hammering your point
home with the relentless determination of a
Jehovah's Witness come to the door—Scripture,
Scripture, & the Word of God—You will not be
moved by the suffering of others. Yours is to
suffer & to move—nothing can stand in your
way—triumphantly battenning the hatches,
or thrown overboard all your contraband in
order to collect the insurance money. What
have you to say for yourself now? More
Staten Island Ferry than Circle Line. More
Circe than Penelope. More Siren than the
Sirens—no Orpheus to play his lyre—no
Phoenician sailor to return. You have done
it as Dido did. Long gone but founded on
the shore a city circumscribed in the space
of my skin. I am an operative.

Unable to
speak for myself,
you put words in my
mouth and speak them for me. i am
silent because i do not exist in the world
as such—but only as an anachronism,
a character in the novel of your life. &
despite the best efforts of Unamuno
& Pirandello, characters have neither
volition nor emotion, neither thought
nor context. & you or i are not alone

in this. I had not expected that Poseidon
was the author of all contexts. I had
not known that this mission was
missing guidance—that the oxen
of the sun lay stretched out so that
the flesh & hides would not die,
though separated from one another.
The lowing was horrible; the terror
undefinable. Over the phone you
accuse me of miscalculating when
the truth is inconveniently revealed:
So that it becomes obvious that not
only are you the man behind the mirror,
but that this secret so discovered is
not really even news. But...

Let me digress
a little more:

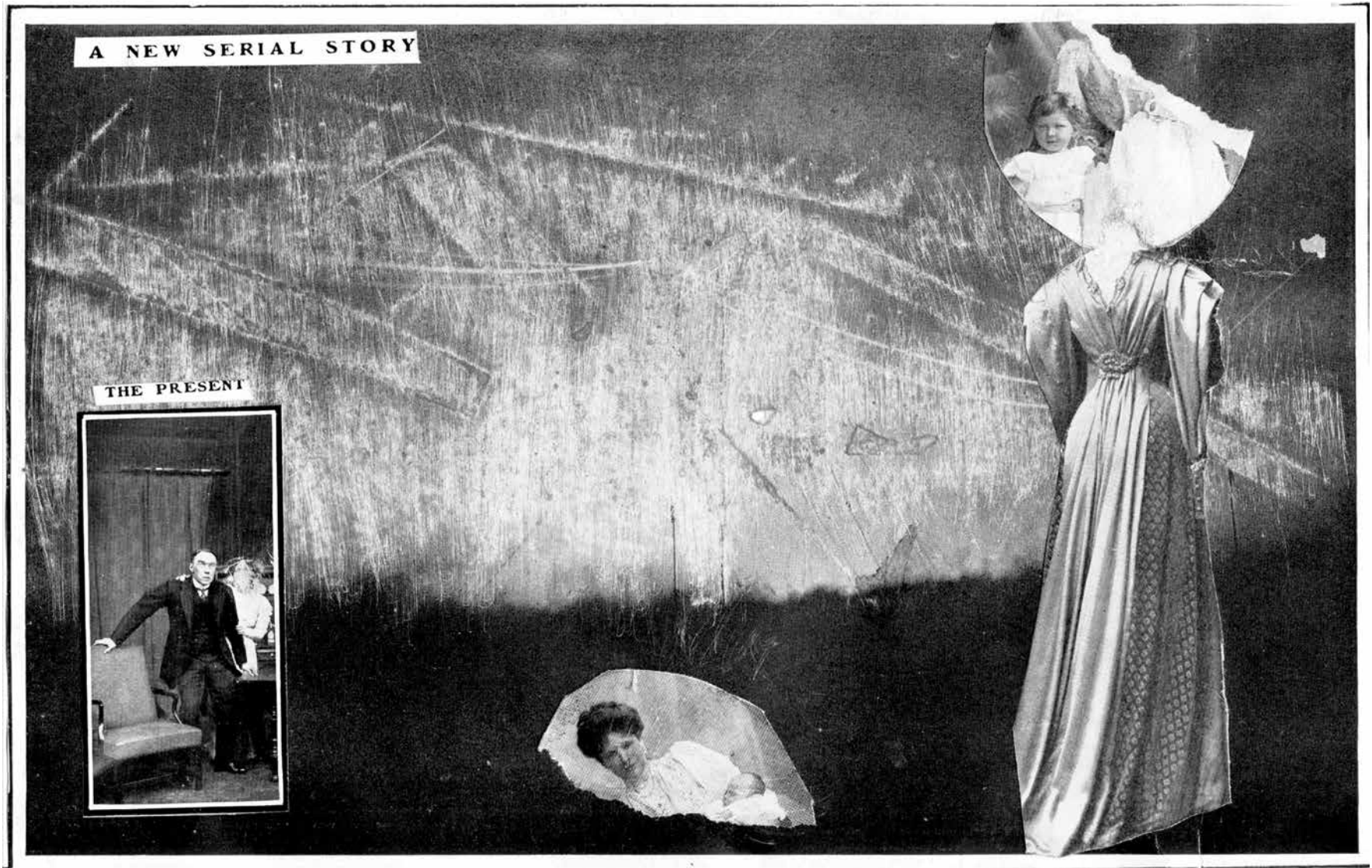
This brief table in
this blunt darkness. This inner candle
of hope, snuffed out at both ends. &
what do i care? What does anyone care
even about a friendly face? Having at it
like a punching bag—or one of those
child's toys—the clown balloon with
the sand in the bottom, that keeps
coming back for more. I might as well be
alone in my room for all the good that
mercy does me. Blow after blow rains
down. The system is rigged & i've been
given a blank space. An open square to
stand on. No photo big enough, nor any
pole long enough—so you of course make
good on your promise to bring into play
the forces of mob rule. & though i plead
Nolo Contendere hoping to remove my debt
unscathed. But the desirability bubble burst
long ago & i've been wandering ever since.
That's my goal, to finish this quickly—to grab
at the sacred olive branch & succeed or fail.

To sneak under a pile of leaves, here in this fall. To be discovered outside the constituency: outside the scope of this poem—water streaming down the street—even the requested suddenly ends.

October 7th

& another bus ride to nowhere. We are headed south but going up. Someone is eating their terrible potato chips, & the woman in front of me is talking about the miserable life she is leading. The men who've impregnated her, whom she did not marry, though she does not use these words. & although she does not realize it—How she is completely unable to understand her life: How people live; What emotions are; & the difference between desire & necessity. The difference between the human & the mind. All this spoken to someone who could not possibly be listening. Yet as the specifics of this woman's misery vastly differ from yours, the indelible marks of a passionate, compelling & completely dissociative monologue of undeserved suffering remain the same. Her attitude of self-inflicted victimhood shadow boxes our friendship into caricature. The same bas reliefs, in the flickering candle light; the self-same self-righteous delusions of import. It might as well have been me listening to you for all the pusillanimous details about how she was right, & how the unexamined elements of her life & thought were never there to be examined. They were merely bottled up like a pretty bug on a summer night. By now grown as hard & adamant as a late December snowfall that someone has forgotten to shovel, well packed by mid-afternoon. There it stood an icon; a beacon; a light house. Its fog horn screeching, as if calling for help, "Here I am. See me. Danger. Be aware." But all this detail only serves to burden her, to pull her down; keep her & her mind from wandering to a safer shore. She was there with the same venomous deprecations of anyone vain enough to come to her aid as you

were. & by imposing 'men' upon the equation; by supposing something about individuality & change, or sequences & causality, about the world's audacity to impose; albeit in some indelible, dissociative way; a reading as it were, that proclaims—you two as of one mind. & I, although, willing to believe everything you tell me, am discredited merely because I am willing to suffer your need to be believed. Hoping now that despite your lack of interest in the very details of the story which might illuminate the point of your suffering that at last the retelling will bring relief. & despite the loudness of her voice, & the conviction that the world has wronged you, the prevailing winds of secrecy & the twin towers of fragmentation & neglect have shattered all credibility in her/your symptomatic world of hallucination & recrimination. How everyman is guilty of the same things, unless it can be somehow arbitrarily determined, through some mystical formula, which is not the "smoke & mirrors" we have been taught to pretend it to be. & you, though I was not listening, thought that you could pull this off. Could pretend to be someone who thinks themselves innocent if only because they, cavalier in their appearance, & unconcerned with your well-being, seemed nothing other than self-concerned. "Knights" as it were—"glistening in bright armor" —Chauvin. I have tag-teamed the unexamined substance of that life. & know its parameters. Certainly this much could be granted as true—*a priori* & unexhumed by the shear momentum of it all. Such that now, i am the monologist reciting the monologue as unlikely to produce insight as the bus is of coming to a grinding stop. & as this unidentifiable interlocutor shares her troubles with those of us sitting close enough to not be far enough away to not have to overhear. I look out at the Catskills, where the trees blaze with an inner passion no one else seems to see.



A New Serial Story by Guillaume Vallée



Hiding Loops by Harry Swartz-Turfle

CATCHING FROGS

words Alice Zorn

Wendy drops spoonfuls of dough on a greased cookie sheet. Ginger and molasses with raisins. No nuts because Colleen is allergic.

From behind she hears shambling. Ricky. He leans against the counter, eyes on the cookies cooling on a platter. He's only nine years old, but soon he'll be as tall as she is. No one in her or Tom's family has such long legs.

"Can we have one?" he asks.

"One each—or one to share?"

He wrinkles his nose at her dumb humor and palms two cookies. "We're going to catch a frog."

"The frog won't be happy." Wendy flattens the mounds of dough with a fork. "He'd sooner be out in the marsh with the other frogs."

She glances at Ricky who pretends not to hear. Catching a frog must be Colleen's idea. If Wendy forbids them, they might do it anyhow, and then who knows when she'll find a dead frog in a box under a bed or at the bottom of a closet. She caught frogs, too, when she was a kid. She remembers them hopping through the long grass. Trembling and still in her cupped hands until she dropped them in a jar and their legs scabbled against the glass. Their berserk leaping. What was the fascination?

"Maybe you can catch the frog," she says, "then let it go."

Colleen runs into the kitchen, clattering the heels of the new shoes she's supposed to keep for church. Wendy points her fork. "You're not wearing those to the creek."

"I wasn't going to," Colleen huffs. She snatches the cookie Ricky hands her and flounces to the mud room. Ricky follows. They rummage for boots, knocking aside a shovel or a hoe—something with a long handle that bangs against the wall.

Wendy slides the cookie sheet in the oven and starts to clear the counter, dropping the plastic measuring cup and spoons in the sink, rinsing the bowl.

Then Colleen is back wearing her yellow rubber boots. "We need a jar."

Wendy crouches to the bottom cupboard where she keeps old margarine tubs and jars. "Look." She shows Ricky who's come to the doorway. "Keep the lid at an angle. The frog has to breathe."

"It'll jump out!" Colleen objects.

"No, it won't," Ricky says. "I won't let it."

The children crowd out the screen door in a hubbub of what-ifs. Wendy watches them cross the backyard to the path that dips a trough through the high marsh grass. Colleen's ponytail, barely above Ricky's elbow, swings with her jaunty, take-charge walk. Ricky holds himself more cautiously, arms close to his sides.

For six years Wendy and Tom tried to have a baby. Their minister suggested they adopt. Countless interviews and file folders later, they still had no child. They'd been approved as parents, but the waiting list for a healthy newborn was sunk in a well of obscure formalities. Wendy asked the social worker what more they could do. The social worker suggested they consider an older child. Or one with a learning disability, a clubfoot, partial blindness. Here—the social worker reached for a manila folder. These were the papers for an eleven-month-old infant whose X-rays showed that his ribs and arm had already been broken. He'd been taken from his mother and needed to be placed. Wendy sat still, wondering what horror this baby had lived through while she and Tom waited for a call. She asked to see the baby and spoke with the doctor. She returned with Tom, with the social worker, with another social worker, by herself. I want him, she told Tom. He needs us. Tom was less sure, but finally he agreed.

Ricky had to be coaxed to eat, spoonful by spoonful. He didn't crawl for a long time. He shied away from other children when they smashed toys on the floor, screeched, and careened about. He seemed not to know how to play. Wendy's mom and sister wondered out loud if he was normal. For a year Wendy and Tom met with a church group for marriage counselling.

Progress with Ricky was slow. Yet he grew to trust that Wendy's lap was there for him. He didn't fling his arms around her neck the way her sister's kids did, but his fist held on tight. In the yard one day he pointed at a bright batting of wings and turned to see if Wendy noticed too. That's a butterfly, she said. Pretty, isn't it? She kept her voice calm, though she wanted to whoop with triumph.

When she discovered that she was pregnant, she resolved that Ricky would never be made to feel less important. All those nights she'd sat next to his crib, keeping watch over his fitful sleep, knit him to her as surely as DNA. She's glad that his hair is straight and brown like Tom's. For people who don't know them that's enough of a resemblance.

As Wendy upends the last bowl in the draining rack, a car crunches across the gravel in the driveway. Adriana's red Nissan. Good. Wendy was going to call her this afternoon. Adriana teaches French at the larger school where Ricky now goes. Wendy hopes that, with students bussed in from around the county, Ricky will finally be rid of the gossip that branded him at the local school. That he was adopted. That his real mom and dad didn't want him. Of course, the kids only repeat what they hear at home. If Wendy can't stop her mom and sister from gossiping, how can she expect the neighbors to keep their mouths shut?

Adriana opens the screen door. "Do I smell cookies?"

"Your timing's perfect." Wendy is already at the sink, filling the coffeepot with water.

Adriana is a few years older than Wendy, but looks younger in her baby tee and tight jeans. “Where are the kids?” She slides onto a chair at the table.

“Catching a frog. Poor frog.” Wendy pours milk into a small flowered pitcher. She doesn’t have to be so formal with Adriana, but she likes feeling that she has company.

“It’s good they still do things together. Soon Ricky will start noticing girls and then he’ll forget he’s even got a little sister.”

“I guess,” Wendy says, but not as if she believes her. “How’s Sven? Still building that windmill?”

“You just wait. That’s how he’s going to water the garden—from the creek.”

Adriana and Sven are city people who decided to move to the country. Among families like Wendy’s, who’ve tilled the land for four generations, Adriana and Sven will always be strangers. Not to mention the way they behave. They don’t have children or go to church. For that matter, Sven doesn’t even go to work. He spends his days with a blowtorch, welding and twisting scrap metal, in the barn which he refitted with glass, poured a concrete floor, and calls a studio. Tom likes Sven who helped him dig a new well last summer. Wendy feels more comfortable with Adriana than friends she’s known since girlhood. Adriana listens and often has good advice.

Wendy pours coffee and sits. “So... how’s Ricky settling in?”

Adriana adds milk and stirs in tight circles. “What does he tell you?”

“Not much. He says it’s a big school. That it’s okay.”

“I don’t think he’s made friends yet, but he’s not the only one. There are a few new kids in his grade.”

“But?” Wendy hears her careful hesitation.

Adriana smirks. “You know kids. They all want the upper hand—and the easiest way they know how is by dumping on someone else.”

“You mean Ricky.” Wendy sets the cookie she was about to bite into on the edge of the plate. “What happened? Just tell me.”

Adriana places her hands, palm down, to either side of her cup. “This week in French class we read a short story. I took it from a magazine from Montreal. I thought the students would be more interested in a contemporary story than Maupassant and his soldiers. It’s about a boy who runs away from home, finds some kids who squat in a building, and gives himself a new name, Crache. It means spit.” She stops and frowns. “Yesterday I heard some of the students saying crache. I thought they were just saying the word because they thought it was cool. You know, the way kids do. But then I heard them in the hallway near Ricky’s locker—”

“Teasing him!”

Adriana touches Wendy’s arm.

“What do we have to do?” Wendy moans. “Move to Saskatchewan? Aren’t people ever going to leave him be?”

Both women hear a sound and turn their heads to the screen door. Ricky stands on the other side, panting.

Wendy thinks he’s upset because he overheard, but then she bounds to the door and pulls him in. “Where’s Colleen? What happened?”

He gasps. He can’t speak, can hardly breathe.

She clutches his arm, searching his face. Tears smear his cheeks. “Where’s Colleen!” She shakes his arm.

“Where did they go?” Adriana demands.

“To the creek.” Wendy slams out the door, running.

—

Ricky hears Adriana shouting into the phone for Sven to come. The door bangs behind her. He slumps to the floor, his mind blank. He doesn’t know what happened.

He and Colleen took a detour, hiking from the marsh up the low rise to the trees. He can’t remember why. Colleen had a reason. She wanted... something. Something she thought would help catch a frog. She scuffed through the weeds, the jar their mom gave them in the crook of her arm. Under the spreading branches of a pine tree they found a small, dirty clump of bones and fur. Owls swallowed birds and rodents whole, then threw up what they couldn’t digest. Small animal and bird parts turned inside-out and mushed together again.

He and Colleen crouched to examine the heaved-up mess. She wanted to poke it with a stick but he stopped her, pointing at the bugs that would fly up in their faces. The filmy wings of flies. The shiny beetles. Colleen dropped her stick and stood.

He heard and didn’t hear her kicking across the hard earth and pine needles. On his knees he edged closer to the dried-sticky heap. How did an owl’s stomach know what to keep and what to chuck up—almost as if its stomach had fingers and teeth to rip flesh and bones apart. Spooky birds they were, owls. With extra eyelids too.

He groped beside him for the stick Colleen had abandoned and gently prodded the jumble of muck and bones. Hardly a nudge but the larger flies rose with an angry whine. Ricky tilted back and stumbled to his feet.

Then he looked around. Where was Colleen?

The grass in the marsh was high enough that she could hide. Except Colleen wouldn’t wait in the grass for him to find her—not with the creek so close. She wanted to catch a frog.

With soft steps he crept toward the gleaming, brown creek. A silt mirror hiding frogs, minnows, crayfish and what else? He listened hard but heard only the wind rustling the dry, summer grass. The raucous call of a Redwing Blackbird.

“Colleen?” he called. And swivelling around, “Colleen?”

Nothing.

He crashed through the spongy edge of the creek, stumbled into muskrat holes. “Colleen! Colleen!” He floundered and tripped, mouth wide as he scanned the indifferent water. Panted and stumbled, flailed his arms, staggered, his heart drumming fear.

—

Colleen heard Ricky from where she hunched inside her tree trunk house. Didn’t know where she was, panicked he couldn’t find her?

Too bad. He wouldn’t let her poke the fur and bones, but she knew he would. He was always telling her what she shouldn’t do, only to do it himself when he thought she wasn’t looking.

She squatted inside the bark shell of the tree trunk. The top of the tree had fallen long ago into the ferns and bushes. It was a long carcass now, overgrown by moss and tunnelled by grubbing paws and teeth. All that remained upright was this crumbling crown of bark, still attached to the roots in the ground, just large enough for her to crouch inside.

Ricky had never noticed the tree trunk. It didn’t look like anything to him because he couldn’t fit inside. She’d discovered it when he was at school. She wasn’t supposed to go to the woods or near the creek by herself, but when Ricky wasn’t keeping watch, she often snuck away.

The tree trunk was hers alone. She squeezed past a wedge of bark that was partly broken away and hunkered inside with her knees drawn up. She could even wiggle the bark—like a door—closed behind her. Hidden from view, tucked inside, she breathed the earthy smell of decomposing wood. Through

chinks in the trunk, she could see as far as the bushes that bordered the creek. Sometimes she decorated the peephole ledges with Butter ‘n Eggs and Hawkweed posies. Once she left a cookie for next time, but something ate it. Maybe a rabbit or a squirrel. She didn’t mind sharing her house with a rabbit or a squirrel. But not a snake!

And not with Ricky. Always bossing her around. Never letting her do anything. Just because he was older.

Through a crack in the bark she watched him stumble through the marsh grass, flapping his arms, screaming. Out loud she said what he would have told her. “Don’t run, you’ll trip.” Her voice sounded funny inside the close wall of bark. And louder, more forcefully, she said, “Don’t run, you’ll trip!”

—

Ricky lies curled on the floor in the kitchen. Blue-flecked linoleum planes away from his eyes. If Colleen drowned, Mom and Dad won’t ever forgive him. They’ll send him back to an orphanage. He doesn’t remember the orphanage because he was a baby when he left, but he’s seen one on TV. Beds all in a row, boys with their hair shaven close to their skulls.

Behind him the screen door bangs. “Ricky!” Sven leans over him. “Ricky, where’s Adriana?”

The urgency in his voice. Demanding. Sven will blame him too.

“Where’s Adriana?” Sven shakes his shoulder. “Where did they go?”

Ricky opens his mouth but only a sob comes out. “What?” Sven bends closer, grips Ricky’s shoulder harder, hurts him.

“The creek,” Ricky mumbles.

The door slams in its frame.

On the floor, dumped like a sack. Alone. His lip wet with snot. He knows it’s his fault because he doesn’t belong here. People always tell him. Colleen is the only one who doesn’t know. She thinks he’s her real brother. While he’s with her, he believes it too.

Behind him the door opens again, more slowly. Heavy steps and Dad scoops him up against his chest. “What’s wrong, Ricky?” Dad’s voice is quiet. “Where is everyone?”

“Mom...” Ricky starts but can’t go on.

“Ricky, I can’t help if you don’t tell me what happened. Was it Mom? Or Colleen?”

—

“Colleen! Colleen!” Mom’s voice. Oh boy. If Mom finds her in the woods, she’ll be in trouble. Big trouble. But since she isn’t supposed to be here, Mom won’t look here. She’s easy to fool. Colleen just needs to wait for her to stop calling and then she’ll sneak back to the house, and pretend she was always there.

But Mom keeps getting closer. “Colleen! Can you hear me?”

Why does she sound so mad? And why is she looking for her here? Colleen scowls. Because of Ricky. He ran off like the sucky baby he is to say he couldn’t find her.

“Colleen! Colleen!” Who’s that? Colleen twists around to peek through a hole in the bark. Auntie A staggers through the high grass by the edge of the creek, swiping her arms at the bushes. Both Mom and Auntie A!

Colleen tucks her elbows closer, making herself as small as she can.

“Colleen!”

“Colleen!”

“Colleen!”

A man now. Colleen ducks her head and stares through a crack in the bark until he steps into view. *Uncle Sven*. Auntie A looks like she's crying. Mom is still calling, but she's out of sight.

—

"Are you sure she's here?" Sven asks Adriana.

"She came to the creek with Ricky."

"And he saw her fall in?"

"He didn't say."

Sven turns his head. "Wendy! Wendy, come here!"

"What is it?" Adriana asks. "What are you thinking?"

"Even if Colleen fell in, she could stand in that water. It wouldn't even reach to her shoulders."

"Then where is she?" Wendy's voice cracks from shouting into the empty air. Her face is tear-stained and drawn.

Sven stands with his hands on his hips, peering at the bushes and the high grass that border the creek. Finding no clue, he shifts around, his eyes narrowed. The ridge of cedars. A grove of maples. A half-rotted tree trunk. Sunlight glances off a glass object—a jar or a bottle—set at its base. He points. "What's that?"

—

Colleen hears the stomp of feet, a huff of panting. A slap thuds against the bark wall. She holds her breath, still convinced she's hidden.

The bark door is yanked away, breaking off. Mom hauls her out by her arm so roughly that they both stumble.

"Ow! You're hurting me!"

"*I'm hurting you?*" Mom jiggles her arm. "Do you know what you did to us? What's the matter with you?"

You heard us calling. Why didn't you answer?"

Colleen starts to cry. "You're hurting my arm!" She expects Auntie A to tell Mom to stop, but Auntie A's mouth stretches in a mean line. They're all against her.

Mom gives her a shove to walk ahead. "You want to hide, do you? Well, you can hide in your room all day tomorrow. You'll be lucky if I let you out by next week."

Colleen clenches her jaw. Why does she always get blamed?

"How could you? Ricky couldn't even talk, he was so upset."

Ricky, always Ricky. Colleen kicks through the grass swishing against her legs like paper knives. Ricky wasn't upset. He was just trying to get Mom to listen to him.

—

Adriana doesn't have to look at Sven. She knows what he's thinking. Kids are crazy. Just as well they don't have any.

Wendy's face is hard with anger—which isn't the best way to handle any child, especially Colleen. She moves closer to Wendy, hoping to calm her.

They trudge across the field in the direction of the house. Tom and Ricky step out the door and Tom waves.

—

When Ricky sees Colleen, he feels swamped with relief. She doesn't look hurt or wet or as if she fell down. But why does she march ahead like that?

"You'll never believe this," Mom says as soon as they're close enough. She swings an arm out as if calling the field to witness.

"Colleen's fine," she tells Ricky. "She was just

playing a trick. A *stupid* trick." She glances at Tom. "Wait till I tell you."

—

Colleen lets the grownups pass and walk together, but stiffens when Ricky hangs back to wait for her.

"I didn't know where you were," he whispers. "I thought you fell in the creek. Where were you? Didn't you hear me?"

She wouldn't fall in the creek!

"I thought you *drowned*."

Colleen stares ahead at the house—at the upstairs window that's her bedroom. Because of Ricky, that's where she'll have to stay for rest of the day. And how long will they watch her, without Mom telling her to stay put? All because of Ricky!

"I got Mom because I couldn't find you."

Colleen hears him say Mom and remembers what Grandma told her. She doesn't know what it means, but she knows it's true because of the sneaky way Grandma said it.

"Were you by the water?" he asks. "Because you know you shouldn't—"

Why is he always telling her what she can't do? "Leave me alone!"

Mom whips around. "Colleen! Haven't you made enough trouble for one day? Come here, sweetie," she says to Ricky. "Walk with me."

—

Ricky would sooner make peace with Colleen, but Mom holds out her hand as she keeps walking and talking to Auntie A. He steps forward to take it when, from behind, he hears Colleen hiss, "She's not your real mom!"



Delivery by Harry Swartz-Turfle





words Colie Collen

language I mean to remember

dirtbike I mean to drive

i mean to perceive
each leaf, I mean to press
it up against a hollow
and extract each time

i mean to stalwart wickedness.

i mean to nest in best intention
and not leave the turquoise eggs there,
and let anyone hold the eggs there,
and

whippersnip the elder
flower pluck
the suckers

for sure don't say I never warned you,
little-mouth-in-a-big.

you saving-the-very-beautiful.

the rest are silent little dead things
before they're dead.

see all this great elective compassion
its attention to the largest detail :

octagonal rectangular triangular circular
ovoid toothed lobed inverted
determinate symmetrical opposed

the starter

I
WAS

Swimming

WITH THIS
RASPBERRY; IN IT

Me on Sandymount Strand by Kate Hutchinson

words Colie Collen

This is not something most people
know about, maybe.

It was a perfect; I'd eaten
tens of amateurs; it was
globular but elongate,
bulbs filled that
fermented fungal-
colored pink

It punched me in the eye.

But see it loves me, we
swim in the storm together.

The sound of my breath on my
hood is its thunder.

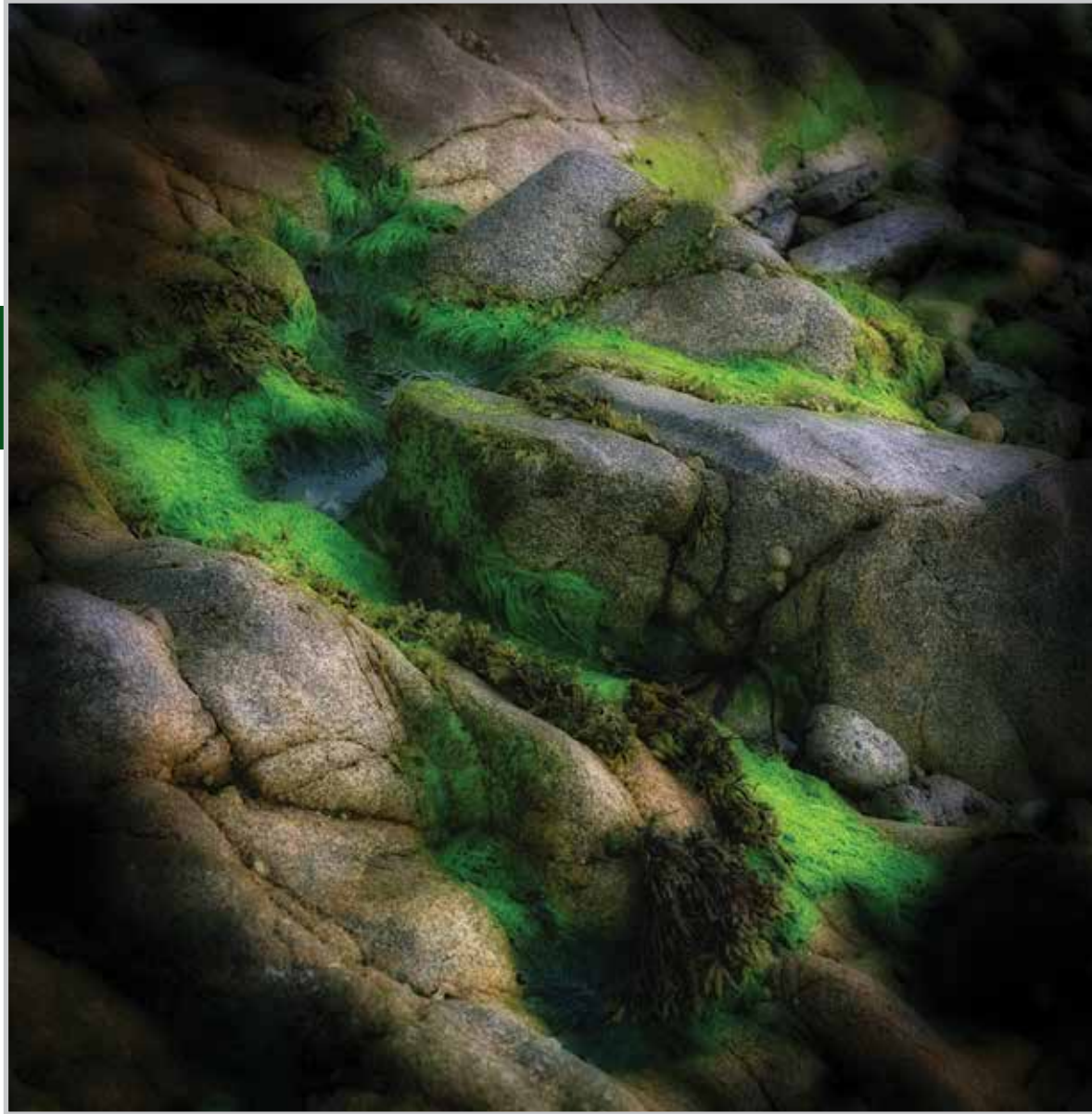
I hunt it by escaping things I hunt.

My friends are bent up
on the hill; their muddy
knees, their scratched
calves; their cultural histories

attuned to the texture
of the unpicked.

So I pick this one for them,
this one that loves me.

I place it in my filling palm
and fill my palm and slice my
palm in two for them.



is that



words Colie Collen

I'm sorry
I don't know
how to
help you
not be
sad
about
this

but I don't think it's a cop-out when I say it's up to you

I was looking for friends for so long
and now they're under there
all flecked in foam

and they accept with gratitude
and with half their hair

do acknowledge the deep deep pain
we'll call compassion

and are not afraid at all!

Magic one,
your walls constantly open
when it's warm
and close
when it's wet

though you are a-filled
with green green fruit,
it does sound like you
could be much happier.

Heart of the Moon



words Raina Callahan

The pair of dogs ran around the infinite night as one, paws sinking into the dark void, bouncing back up for another bound. Excitement surrounded the brothers, both coated in dark black, thick fur, one obviously the younger from size. Triumphant howls escaped their snouts, alerting all of the coming reunion.

Around their jubilant dance hung the excited whispers of the Twins, eager to be present for such an occasion. "How long has it been?" the first twin asked of the other.

"At least five years."

"They must be so excited."

"Anxious, too. So much to say in so little time." The second twin grabbed her sister's hair, beginning to braid the long blonde locks.

"I don't think all of it has to be said," the first twin reflected, holding her hand out to brush the sides of the brother dogs running past.

The second gave a small nod, "It is a bittersweet encounter indeed."

Running off in a new direction, the dogs left their side, ready to alert all who could have forgotten. Several lay in their path of excitement. Most of the birds flocked away, finding less disturbed perches. Most rose in anticipation of celebration with the pair, others passively smiled. A few shut their eyes and tried to find some peace, but it would be to no avail. Being personal friends and guardians of Kamaria, the spirit of the Moon, both canines expressed a level of jubilation they expected all others to have. Old Leo looked on with some dread at the incoming presence, rolling his golden mane into the opposite direction.

Traveling towards the Twins now were the Bears, and the Twins greeted them both with warm welcome. All the excitement seemed to

have the little one riled. He was young. His memory was not as strong as the others in the sky.

"Hello, Little one," the second twin chimed. He nodded a hello, keeping an eye on the two dogs who were now some distance away, jumping around Leo, trying to get the old spirit excited.

The first twin addressed the older bear, "He seems distracted. Does he not remember what today is?"

The Bear Mother leaned down to her strong son, looking after him with wonder and bemusement. "It is the joining of the Sun and Moon, Little one," she cooed, bringing him close. "They shall join together tonight."

Little one was perplexed. "I thought Kamaria and Samson couldn't see each other."

"Because of the wicked curse sent through the sky. The Fallen One, the one who fell right to earth."

The Fallen One loved Kamaria even though Samson and Kamaria's love had been written in the fates since creation. His jealousy drove him mad. He cursed their love, but for something so evil, he was cast out of the sky. But such wrongful words had a lasting impact.

"Right. It made them what you see today. Unable to even see one another, except during a total eclipse. That is the only time they may interact at all. Words must be chosen carefully, for the longest eclipse known to us only lasted seven minutes."

Mother Bear finished the tale, "At all other times, both are bound to their plane and unable to explore the skies the same way we do. They lost this gift."

“But they are still in love?” Little one asked, hope in his voice.

“Yes,” Mother Bear replied, “they are still very much in love.”

The Sky Clock sang out to all who could hear that the time was near approaching. All the citizens of the sky gathered around the Moon, the peaceful rock floating among them.

Kamaria appeared before all of them, her faint, hallowed glow illuminating their hearts with joy. She let a small smile escape the corner of her mouth, her energies gracing her so much more fleetingly than usual. The oncoming eclipse giving her greater strength.

The sky shook with delight as the very atoms around them vibrated from the increased energy. She greeted the citizens surrounding her from the plane of the moon, minutes away from the moment she could take her first steps back into the darkness that she used to call home. They were fellows of her love, Samson; they saw both Kamaria and him. She envied their eyes, what they saw day after day that slipped her sight. It saddened her to hear from her friend, Old Leo, that Samson rarely visited with anyone.

“It is time!” The Sky Clock yelled with excitement. Kamaria’s insides squirmed. Years it had been. It became harder and harder with every goodbye to say hello once more. Would he even come out to see her? Small words seemed so insignificant compared to the millennia of memories, filled of times spent side by side.

The darkness all around was blown away into dazzling beams of light, blinding her. She had forgotten his radiance. Blinking, she pushed away from the surface of the Moon, feeling the curse’s power weakening as it did with every total eclipse. Slowly, her eyesight flooded back, leaving her gaze on a face so foreign and yet more familiar than anything in the entire universe. Silence captured her tongue, ruled by shock that he could be standing before her.

Samson’s eyes burned bright with a heated passion Kamaria had desperately missed. “You look... magnificent,” he managed to say, voice dry from disuse and longing. She knew no words would rise to her lips that could justify any feelings she had in that moment, so she simply outstretched her hand. Her cold and lonely heart wanted nothing more than to be held and warmed by his commanding

presence. Without hesitation, he held her close, both wincing slightly—her touch too icy, his too fiery—not used to such interaction.

“How have you been?” she managed to say, worried about his developing habit of solitude. He shrugged in her arms, pulling her in closer.

“I am so much better now that you are here. How long will it be for this time?”

He was dodging her question. Still, she answered, “Three minutes.”

“Just three...” he sighed, letting go to get a better look at her. “Oh, my Kamaria. Trapped forever in the night. Your color is so pale, your skin so cold. I wish I could warm you enough to last all the years we are apart.”

“You do, Samson. In my heart, the warmth of yours remains.” They held tight to one another once more, aware they only had so much time to feel the presence of one another. Samson placed a delicate kiss upon her forehead. Kamaria cherished the small gesture of affection, smiling full, jubilant. “I missed you so much.”

“I can only dream about your smile whenever we are apart,” Samson replied. “To see it in person makes me realize how much I have longed for you.”

“You have had too long to think of ways to flatter me,” she laughed, grabbing his hand and holding it to her face.

“I can think of no better way to spend all my days alone.”

“There are others who wish to speak with you, to see you, Samson. Why do you deny them? I hear such stories of loneliness, Samson. It worries my heart.”

“Don’t shed a single drop of doubt or worry about me. I live for these days, the moments I am with you.”

“But for all the other days, there should be others you find company with. Samson, you are the purveyor of the sun, you were meant to shine your light bright on all of those in the sky with you, not hide away in useless longing.”

“You are what makes me shine bright. Without you, my light dims by the hour. I fear that if the rest of my days are spent away from you, I will burn out in sadness,” he held on tighter; “I just want to keep you in my arms. If only things were like this all the time... The Fallen One ruined all that we had together. All we could have been.”

“Oh, don’t bring him up again. You know he is long away, only his cursed words remain in the sky.”

“If he is gone, then why do his words still hold so much power over us?”

“They were strong words, filled with sorrow and spite and envy. Nothing is stronger than a curse forged of hatred and jealousy. You saw what he did to the earth, wiping out nearly all of creation in his fury. It has taken so long for the ground to heal and replenish itself once more. We will get there, Samson, we will recover, just as the Earth has.”

“I know he is still out there. If I weren’t bound to the Sun for the rest of eternity, I would search him out. I would make him renounce his words and then I would take his life.”

“You will take nothing but care for yourself,” Kamaria cried. “You will stop secluding yourself from those who can see you and want to help you.”

“I am not the one who matters, he is. Destroying this curse is all that matters!” Samson retorted, throwing his arms up in frustration. “It is all I obsess over. I have thought of every possible solution. None seem strong enough.”

“Do not waste our limited time on such petty thoughts that will have no outcome but more frustration!” The ground beneath them began to shake.

Samson’s eyes found hers, “I’m sorry. I just... I cannot do this again. It is so difficult to say goodbye.” He held her face in his hands, pulling her close, placing a kiss on her lips. A second, stronger shaking from below soon interrupted this.

Refusing the lump rising in her throat, Kamaria held tightly to Samson, holding his gaze, “Samson, I love you and I will always love you. Don’t you dare forget what you mean to me every day of my life, whether or not I am holding on to you like this or in my heart. I am yours and you are mine.”

“Kamaria, I—” Samson started to say, his words strong with passion, cut off by time.

He began to fade, his voice unable to finish what words were still left on his tongue. Kamaria reached out, reached through him, feeling a tear fall down into continuous oblivion. His lips were moving, trying so insistently to speak to her, but she heard nothing.

“Samson...” She began to weep at the pain of separation in those fiery eyes. He was trying so hard to be strong. She stood silent, staring at him, consciously trying to imprint his memory into her thoughts, so the voice, the eyes, the touch would not be sensory memories that fell back into the ever so large crevices of centuries of experiences filling her head. He began to fade away—legs, torso, arms—he was concentrating so hard on keeping his eyes on her and her alone, to not let such cursed words take him away once more. In a final farewell, Kamaria placed her fingers to her lips, sending a single kiss. With a final grimace, Samson was finally taken back into the plane of the Sun. She too felt a tug pulling her back to home. She gave no resistance, falling back to the surface with blunt force, creating yet another crater in her beloved land.

Kamaria sat weak, limbs limp, wishing so desperately for more time. It would be years before his hand was in hers once more, before she could hear him say her name. Already his warmth was fading from her core, returning her to the chilled existence she always kept.

Without hesitation, the Brother Dogs ran to her, curling around her peaceful glow. Letting out no more tears, she held tightly to the loyal creatures, blessed to have such companions. The citizens of the sky were all so curious about her encounter—they were all pretending to look away, but she knew. There was too much commotion here today. Too much emotion. Closing her eyes, she sent out peaceful blessings to all those in the sky. She felt the brothers slump into undisturbed sleep at her feet, breathing heavy. She returned to a quiet, restful sky—Mother Bear cradling Little one, the Twins resting on one another’s shoulder, the flocks of birds settled into their respective nests. What she couldn’t see was the brightest star, the love of her life, taken straight out of the sky, out of her eyes, missing, until however many years reunite them once more. She lay down next to her loyal companions, taking in their warmth, concentrating on those eyes as she herself drifted to sleep, praying they would not be lost to her when she awoke the next evening.



Puffers by Harry Swartz-Turfle

TO GIVE OF ONESELF *words Aaron Smith*

Mama cooked me a huge breakfast the day before my Trothing. A boiled egg, a dwarfed piece of toast made with fresh moldy bread, and a raspberry whose red color had nearly been snuffed out by the suffocating blackness of rot. She was notorious for doing useless things, this meal being one of them. She told me to eat everything slowly and savor every miniscule bite. I nodded in understanding and as soon as that woman turned her gaze elsewhere I practically inhaled the food. When she looked back at me, my plate was nearly empty and I was struggling to contain my laughter. But Mama wasn't mad and I didn't expect her to be; she just shook her head at the absurdity of her command, gave me a kiss on the cheek, and laughed along with me.

"It's good to laugh," she managed to say through her chortling, "good to get it all out now, child, because tomorrow you won't be laughing." It wasn't meant to be a grim statement. It was the truth. But the icy sting of the words, the stab of reality, left me numb. My laughter died down along with my appetite, but Mama made me finish what was left of the meal. Afterwards, she sat me down and shoved the hand mirror she'd had since she was a child into my clumsy grasp and began work on my hair.

I never thought myself attractive. My hands were clammy, frail and weak; my skin was a mismatched shade of brown, my nose was somewhat crooked and whenever I laughed—not a weak chuckle or giggle, but a real laugh that had me gripping for air—my brown eyes would cross and I would snort in the most unattractive manner possible. I was always a plain and frumpy child. Yet Mama whispered intricately weaved tales of beauty into my ear while she brushed the knots out of the mess of tangled black wires that was my hair, because she knew none of it mattered. My opinion didn't matter. All I was meant to do was to give everything of myself to people I had never even met.

"I look absolutely dreadful," I had complained in spite of myself. That earned me a harsh slap on the arm.

"Don't you talk that nonsense!" Mama reproached. "You're better looking than most, and that's what counts. It's not your attractiveness you should worry about anyways," she claimed, "it's the one you get paired with. That can make all the difference in more ways than one." She laughed silently, but this time alone. The fact that partners were chosen at random made the entire affair even more terrifying. "Remember, it's all for the good of mankind...well, what's left of it." I resisted the urge to roll my eyes. The Trothing had existed for as long as anyone could remember. No one could ever remember why it was originally instated, but the government insisted it was because mankind needed to be restored to its former glory. And so the people of the Underbelly quietly accepted this with bowed heads, despite knowing it was all a convenient lie.

"Why are you doing this, Mama?" I asked. My eyes never left the shattered reflection in the mirror. "They're just gonna change everything, anyways." The answer was obvious. Neither of us laughed at the absurdity of the question. Mama was quiet for a long time after I had said that, but she eventually went back to telling tales.

"Beautiful, beautiful child," she would coo with each stroke of the brush, "my beautiful, beautiful child." I clung to those lies as if they were the only things holding me together, and in a way, they were.

Once the unkemptness of my tumbleweed hair was tamed to some degree, Mama had pulled out her "make-up kit": an old shoebox containing crumbled up chalk and inkwells full of drying paint. She painted black around my eyelids and dyed my lips in red paint, then powdered my face with the chalk. All the while, I hadn't once looked away from my reflection, eyes glued to a sorrowful scene; I looked like a clown gone wrong. Though I'd reckoned that any look would have been better than my own.

With a smile, she sent me to bed after I was to her liking. But sleep ignored my calling and it had nothing to do with the ratty old cot that was the most uncomfortable thing in the world.

It was dark when the escorts came to collect me. I knew it must've been during the infant hours of the morning because the lights of the watchtowers had yet to turn on. People down in the Underbelly weren't allowed time-telling devices; we weren't gifted with the luxury of the Sun, being bred underground; stalactites were our stars. All we had were the artificial beams of the watchtowers, the scent of burning coal from the factories, and the screeching of sirens to signal the waking hours. The government thought it unnecessary that people like Mama and I should be bothered with time.

I could hear voices in the kitchen; one of them belonged to Mama, but the others were foreign to me. But I knew who they were: the dark, faceless figures that had haunted my dreams for months—the ones who, while not the holders, guided my strings for their puppet master and possessed my fate. I felt hollow.

A few minutes passed before Mama came into my room to rouse me, followed by two tall and intimidating men wearing black sunglasses and pristine white suits. I rose from the cot and sauntered forward without a word. They led me to the door and allotted me a few minutes to say goodbye. Really it was more like a “see you later,” but to me I was saying goodbye to myself. After that day, I would never be the same person. “Do everything they say and you'll be fine,” Mama said with tears forming in her eyes.

“We've done that our whole lives, but we've never been fine,” I replied, and Mama gave me a scolding look. I realized how rebellious I sounded. Mama had always been afraid that I would be taken away from her for having such a feral tongue. Papa was taken away for that reason. He thought he could change everything with a few encouraging words and false promises. He became so obsessed with the ludicrous movement that he soon ignored the pleas of his wife, who could only watch as her husband invited death to knock on the door, and the inquiries of his young daughter who couldn't understand why he was fighting for a lost cause. He was a selfish bastard to the very end. But I wasn't a fool like Papa. The fires of resistance had long since extinguished within my heart.

Instead of reprimanding me, Mama held onto me tightly. “You remember your number?” she asked. The question made me frown. Much like time, names were deemed unnecessary. They gave us numbers as though we were items on a shelf only meant to be used and then forgotten. Inventory. I nodded.

“109023-09-30.”

“Good girl.” Mama held me at arm's length, giving me a sweeping look before slipping that old hand mirror into my grasp. “It's a good luck charm,” she sighed shakily. “It was with me for my Trothing, too. Let it give you some peace, yeah? Everything'll be over before you know it.” It was meant to give me comfort, but did nothing to soothe me. Yet who was I to rob her of comfort? So I nodded absentmindedly and took the broken slab of glass gratefully, stowing it in my pants pocket that had the least amount of holes. “Beautiful, beautiful child. My beautiful, beautiful child...”

Mama always did useless things.

“Time's up,” droned one of the men impatiently. He sounded dreadfully bored, though I couldn't blame him. I would've been bored too if this was the twelfth goodbye I'd heard that same day. “We've a schedule to keep.” And like that, the fleeting moment passed. The men gripped me by the shoulders and led me outside to a white, windowless van that looked out of place in the stark darkness. Mama told me they were taking me to the Nest, the place of beginnings and endings, where the Trothing would happen. It was a grand place, she claimed, a palace made entirely of marble. I clung to that lie as well. Before they shoved me into the back, I took one lingering glance at Mama before raising my hand in bitter farewell.

A single dim light on the ceiling allowed me to see there were others in the van. Eleven other men and women of different expressions, appearances, yet all of similar background and fate. Most of them were children, like me, who were scared, indifferent, impassive, or a mixture of the three. I sat next to a boy who trembled like an earthquake, his large, green doe eyes wide and fixated with fear. He was a ripe age, most likely twelve or thirteen, a couple years short of my own.

“This your first time?” A young man sitting across from me with dusty eyes and obnoxiously gelled hair spoke, his gaze fixated on the boy next to me. He couldn't have been a day over twenty, but the shit-eating grin on his face told me that he was no stranger to this affair. A seasoned individual. People like him weren't uncommon, however; many were willing to do the Trothing several times aside from the required six for the extra rations that were given, or—in that man's case—for the sick pleasure of it all, if any pleasure came of it. The boy's eyes enlarged further to the size of dinner plates. He offered a weak nod.

“Is it, uh, as terrible as they say it is?” he stammered, his voice a mere whisper. The young man laughed and shook his head.

“This is my fifth time in a year, so you can take my word for it. It’s. Fucking. Amazing. Just hope you get lucky with your partner. The more attractive they are, the more enjoyable, and you’ll get bonus points with the government if everything turns out well afterwards.” The rest of the ride was spent with the man explaining in explicit detail each of his five experiences; the boy listened on with horror evident in his eyes whilst I tried to block it all out by thinking of Mama and her ludicrous tales.

It wasn’t long before the van finally pulled to a stop. The doors were wrenched open, allowing a piercing blanched light to flow in. We all shielded ourselves from it, momentarily stunned by the resplendent artificial rays. The silhouettes of our Escorts appeared in the beams.

“Out, now!” one of them barked. We had no time to gather our bearings. The men ushered us out of the van quickly, thrusting us into a pathetic huddle. I dared inch my squinted eyes further to see a massive building coated in an alabaster color that made the light surrounding the area more intense, almost painful. The courtyard was large, encased by staunch wrought-iron gates. The earthy ceiling above us was covered in crystal, glittering faintly like the night skies in the old children’s books Mama used to read to me. The escorts got on both sides of the group and ushered us up the steps and through the large doors of the building.

The inside was much more of a spectacle than the exterior, with the sweeping marble floors and columns, calmer light, and ornate decorations. White chairs and couches were situated comfortably along the white walls and floors, occupied by several other Underbelly citizens. We all looked outlandish in a place so immaculate, like dirt on a clean surface.

The escorts moved to the front of the group, studied us briefly, and with one sweeping motion, the two of them stalked off to the side, their bodies seeming to mold into the white walls.

“The final group has finally arrived!” All heads in the room turned to the back of the large vestibule. From a corridor, a tall man emerged, dressed in a white dress suit with a black tie. His eyes were brown, almost black, and beady. He wore a smile more resplendent and artificial than the light in the room, boasting his gleaming teeth. His clothes and confident

stride screamed surface dweller, a fleeting dream that most of us in the Underbelly chased but could never catch.

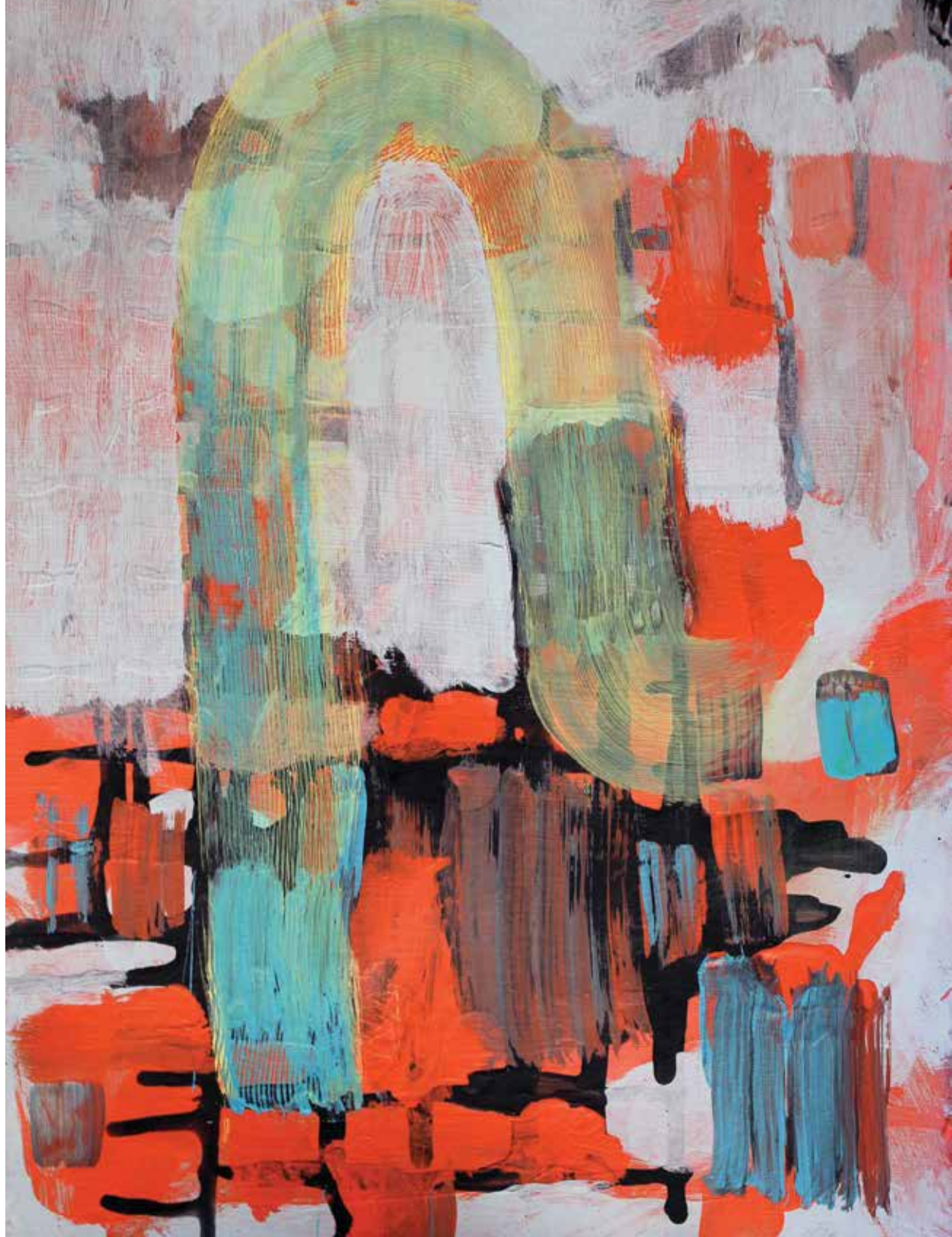
“Welcome, guests!” he dramatically opened his arms in greeting. He treated the Trothing as though it were some grand party. For a moment, I felt resistant and my tongue nearly broke its restraints, but I kept to myself. “Welcome to Aphrodite’s Nest. I am your Host for this month’s Trothing.” He paused and we, the guests, gave him the applause he demanded. His grin grew wider, more feline-like. “Let’s jump to the rules, shall we? For some of you this will sound like a boring lecture, but for most of you, this is your first Trothing. So I will take my time explaining.

“Your numbers will be called over the intercom,” the Host flourished his hands toward the large, white speakers hanging in the top corners of the walls, “and when you hear yours, you will make your way through the hall behind me. From there, you will be taken to the Spa for pampering, after which you will be taken to your rooms where you will await your partner if you have finished with the pampering early. As you know, your partner is chosen at random. Exciting, isn’t it?” No one replied, but the Host didn’t seem perturbed at all by the silence. His smirk just kept widening.

“Exciting, indeed! When your partner arrives, the Trothing shall begin. You only have an hour. Please do make sure you focus on the task at hand! You will be watched very closely, so do think twice about dilly dallying.” He then waggled his eyebrows. “Unless that dilly dallying involves the Trothing itself.” Silence greeted him, but this time the silence wasn’t satisfying for the Host. His eyes darkened and his brows sharpened like daggers, and so we entertained him with the most awkward of laughs. His expression softened and he jubilantly continued.

“After your Trothing, you will be led to the dining halls for a meal, then be given your rations and taken—” the pounding of footsteps interrupted the man mid-sentence, and all eyes snapped to a woman who was shoving her way through the crowd, her goal the exit.

She looked wild, the reflection of a rampaging and confused beast; her jet-black locks fell around her in a tangled mess. And as she neared where I stood, our eyes met. They were sharp blue, blazing infernos that raged as she did. I could see the hope in them, the plea to me. They reminded me of my foolish Papa; they disgusted me. I looked elsewhere. I felt her scowl, but thought nothing of it.



House in Santa Fe by Harry Swartz-Turfle

She didn't get very far. Escorts swarmed her from every direction, and soon she was lost to the sea of white. She thrashed as hard and screamed as loud as she could, but to no avail, and soon her screams became wails of pain, then dissonant whimpers, and then nothing. The Escorts slunk away to their original positions, save for two that gathered the now limp woman and dragged her out of the room.

No one was alarmed. No one was appalled. We were all too used to seeing rising heroes fall. And yet we all pitied her silently, because while she crashed and burned, she would still partake in the Trothing. Unconscious or not.

"Make an example of that one," the Host boomed in a triumphant voice. "Let her be motivation for obeying the rules. Everything will run smoothly if you cooperate. All we ask is that you give of yourself, so that we may give back to you." If the man smiled anymore, I was certain his lips would rip at the corners. "As I was saying: after your meal, you will be given your rations and taken home. Well, that's all the rules. Here at the Nest, we believe in seniority, so those of you that fall between the ages of 30 and 42 are up first. Then ages 11 through 19 will be next, and so forth. Until your number is called, you are free to socialize to your heart's content. As we say here at the Nest, Happy Trothing! And remember, it's all for the good of mankind." With an eccentric bow and a hearty laugh, the Host swept out of the room.

For a moment most of us in the group lingered, frozen in place, then broke away to join other Underbelly citizens. Many of the people in my group started socializing immediately, including the seasoned young man. The government encouraged social interaction because mingling made the whole not-knowing-who-your-partner-is thing

much easier. It was propagandized to be one of the great "mercies" bestowed upon the citizens of the Underbelly, only a few pegs away from the actual Trothing itself.

I watched blankly as the young man maneuvered the room like some freelancer at a mixer, flashing a smile here and kissing a hand there. As much as I wanted to, I couldn't blame him for being so jovial about the whole affair; I wished I could fool myself as he did. He even approached me. Our conversation was short.

"You look like a clown gone wrong," he snickered. I kept myself from rolling my eyes.

"Yeah. I know," I shrugged.

"But that's okay. They can make even the ugliest ducking into a beautiful swan." And then he bounded off to find other women to mingle with. Mama's lies, which were a mantra I repeated in my head, were soon forgotten, and I found myself hoping that the young man was telling the truth.

It wasn't long before numbers were being called. I took a seat at the end of one of the couches, eyes cast downward. There was no point to socializing in my mind. The government did not care whether any of us decided to get chummy because either way, the Trothing would happen and when it did, a few idle conversations with potential partners would be about as useless as Mama's lies.

"I, uh, don't think you look like a clown..." My eyes snapped up to find ones that were an endless void of green and gray. It was the anxious-induced boy. I made a point not to look at him, convinced that

if I did, his anxiety would infect me. “You look more like a, uh, Picasso painting...a bit mismatched, but, uh, beautiful in your own way.” The phantom of a smile graced his immature features. Brow arched, I studied him with limited interest.

“Thanks, I guess?” I replied, and turned my gaze elsewhere. I ignored him for a good minute, but the boy stayed firmly planted in his spot, despite my obvious disinterest. When he still didn’t get the hint, I fixed him with a glower. “Is there something you wanted?” The boy’s eyes flitted about anxiously like an oscillator; he wrung his hands, opening and closing his mouth in a fishlike manner.

“I just, uh, well...may I sit down?”

“You don’t have to ask. Do what you want.” And so he did. He practically jumped into the seat next to me. I turned away from him and allowed silence to settle between us.

“I, uh, meant what I said, you know,” he piped. “That man, he was just being a...uh,”

“Dickhead?” I finished for him.

“Jerk,” he corrected with a nervous chuckle. I shrugged.

“Same difference.” Again, silence. But it didn’t last long.

“Is what he said, uh, true? About the Trothing?” Another shrug from me.

“I don’t know. Maybe, maybe not.”

“Wait. This is your first Trothing?” I finally decided to turn to him. His face twisted in surprise, mouth slightly parted.

“Yes. Does that surprise you?”

“Uh, not really...well, sort of. You seemed so calm and collected, so I thought you might’ve been...err, experienced.” He blushed and cast his eyes down. If only he knew how wrong he was. “Sorry.” My eyes lingered on him a moment more before I turned away again. “It’s my first time, too.”

“I couldn’t tell.”

“Really?” He chuckled. “I thought it was obvious.”

“I was being sarcastic.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah.” Silence.

“I, uh, don’t really believe him,” he murmured so quietly that I almost missed it. I arched my brow, but did not meet his gaze. “I figure the partner you get doesn’t matter.”

“Oh?” Now I turned to him. He nodded. “And how do you figure that?”

“If they’re, uh, someone you can connect with on some level, then I imagine everything’ll be alright.” I gave him a skeptical look.

“The Trothing’s only meant to last an hour. Any longer, and I imagine you’ll get punished. I highly doubt that’s enough time to ‘connect’—” I curled my fingers into mock quotation marks, “—with someone.”

“It’s not,” he agreed. “But, that doesn’t mean I still shouldn’t, uh, try.” I stared at him, searching for fault, yet finding none. I found myself incapable of looking at his resplendent eyes for too long; there was an intensity in those orbs I couldn’t place, and I felt that it might consume me entirely if I wasn’t too careful.

“That’s stupid,” I replied quietly. “Getting too attached will only make things worse for yourself.”

“I don’t think so,” he shook his head. “I would, uh, rather be too attached than not at all. I want my Trothing to be...memorable.” I shook my head and chuckled. The idea was so absurd, and yet I wanted to believe in it, somewhere deep down.

“Who is he?” I asked suddenly.

“Huh?”

“Picasso. Who is he?” The boy arched his brow, but did not comment on my deflection.

“Oh, him? He, uh, was some artist that lived a long, long time ago. It was a time when everyone lived above ground and, you know, could do pretty much whatever they wanted. The Trothing didn’t exist.” I had to laugh at that.

“You sound just like my mama, making up stories.” He laughed along with me.

“It does sound crazy, doesn’t it? But it’s true. My dad said that he used to, uh, draw ‘abstract paintings’, whatever those are. He showed me some pictures of them from a really old book when I was little. We used to look at them together all the time while he was still alive. I always thought that the paintings were really, uh, beautiful. Different, but really beautiful.” I frowned.

“He’s dead?” I asked stupidly. The light in his eyes dimmed a little.

“Yeah,” he whispered. “We were, uh, really low on food, so Dad gave my Mom and I his own rations. Mom begged him to eat something, but he kept refusing. Then he started getting sick and he never got better, even after we fed him. It was too late.”

“Sorry,” was all I could supply. He shook his head.

“It’s okay. It was a long time ago, so I don’t remember much of him. But I don’t miss him. I’m glad for him, actually.” He leaned close to my ear and murmured, “Anywhere’s better than here.” I nodded in agreement. Most people in the Underbelly would be glad. Death was a godsend to us.

“My papa’s gone, too. He was executed for trying to end the Trothing altogether, and trying to rally others to his side. He was pretty stupid.”

“It sounds to me like he was pretty brave.” The boy whispered the last part, in case any unwelcome ears were listening. I gave no response and turned away. A lull passed between us, the only noise now coming from the chattering of people and the rattling off of numbers. I drank in the sounds, losing myself in them.

“You, uh, remind me of them.” The boy’s abrupt words made me jump a little.

“What?” I asked, snapping my head in his direction. The corners of his lips turned slightly up.

“The paintings. You remind me of them.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah.” Silence overcame. We simply stared at each other, locked in wordless conversation, in our own bubble apart from reality. All the anxiety I felt in him before had completely vanished. I saw in him a spark that could turn into a roaring flame if kindled. I saw in him what I abandoned, the hope I had before Papa was taken away, before reality struck me with a vicious ferocity. Mama’s lies, her delicate tales, seemed more believable. I felt the thick layer of hoarfrost around me crack and then completely crumble. Heat flooded me and suddenly the feeling became too much. I parted my lips to say something, anything—

“NUMBER 109023-09-30. NUMBER 109023-09-30. FINAL SUMMONS FOR NUMBER 109023-09-30.”

Just like that, the moment had passed, and the heat became no more than the warmth of a candle’s flame. The little bubble the boy and I were in burst and reality crashed into me, dread settling in the pit of my stomach. Two Escorts were storming their way to me, nostrils flared like bulls ready to attack. I drew in a shaky breath. I no longer felt hollow.

“That’s me,” I said, my voice nearly failing me. I looked away from the boy’s slightly crushed face and rose to my feet. Before I could meet the Escorts halfway, the boy took my hand in his and squeezed it comfortingly.

“Good luck,” he whispered, offering me a nervous smile. I chuckled. His anxiety ended up infecting me, after all.

“You too.” I gingerly freed my hand and made my way to the Escorts. The two men both started yelling at me, but I couldn’t register their words. They each placed a hand on my shoulders and steered me roughly toward the dark corridor. Before the light in the vestibule faded from view, I pulled out Mama’s old broken hand mirror and for once smiled at what I saw in the reflection.

Selections
from
Rare Birds

words and photos Leigh Kotsilidis

RARE BIRDS, (1) any bird, of the class Aves, which are winged, bipedal, endothermic, egg-laying, vertebrates, that are uncommon or scarce. Official designation of rare requires that the bird in question be less than 10,000 worldwide, though endemism (*see* endemic) may also affect a particular bird specie's status as rare.

(2) a novel written in 1997 by Edward Riche (1961-).

(3) a feature length film released in 2001 and directed by Sturla Gunnarsson (1951-), based on the book by the same name, written by Edward Riche.

(4) an art installation created in 2010 by Leigh Kotsilidis (1976-). Participants to thank include, Jerry Auld, Linda Besner, Esther Vincent, Sara-Ananda Fleury, Summer Geraghty, Jenny Gleeson, Zohar Kfir, Michael Martyn, Laura Snow, Jill Staveley, Michael Thomson, Andy Tonkin, Emmie Tsumura, Alice Zorn.

BEE SLEEPER, a dried and hollowed fruit of the Cucurbitaceae family filled with a hive of hemmed in hypoxic bees. During the Nara period in Japan (AD 710-794), a Bee Sleeper was given as a gift to newly inaugurated Empresses. While the new Empress slept, a monk of unknown persuasion would slip into her bedchamber and leave the Bee Sleeper dangling above her head. It was believed that the Bee Sleeper could ward off lecherous men, hungry for the Empress' power.



EMPERESS GENSHŌ (687-748) HOLDING HER BEE SLEEPER.

Bee Sleepers were made by a secret sect of Buddhist monks, who were notorious for their bee keeping skills. At midnight of each equinox, the monks would gather a single

bee hive. They would suspend the hive over a large slate covered with a concoction containing ground yellow lotus and myrrh. The chemical properties of the mixture would react to the bees' saliva used in the hive's layered construction, evoking a state of hypoxia in the bees inside the hive. Before sunrise, the monks would enlarge the round hole in the base of the hive, and then shake it gently over the long neck of an empty and dried gourd. The gourd was then stoppered with wax. The hypoxic bees remain in this state until the gourd is opened. When the stopper is relinquished and fresh air floods in, the bees awake, recalling only their defense of the hive. This made an effective gift. As the French in indo-china said about the Bee Sleeper, "Un scorpion avec une longue mèche"—A bomb with along fuse!

Bee Sleeper is the English translation of the Japanese word, • / 〇 ^ / 〇〇 , . A more literal translation would be, the place where the bee sleeps.

DARNING STONE, a

blunt force weapon of the sling family. This projectile weapon is a teardrop shaped weighted object, usually carved from stone or hardwood, tied to an elasticized leather strap. The slinger, with the slack of the leather strap held in one hand, swings the stone over his head. When the timing is right the slinger lets the slack out of the leather strap, the blunt object flying toward the enemy. References to this style of sling weapon go back to the story of David and Goliath in the bible. It is the weapon David used to slay Goliath.



THE STORY OF "DAVID AND GOLIATH"

Historical accounts of this weapon's use are conflicting. Researchers and hermeneutic scholars argue that this weapon, due to its relatively large size, was only used during battle, whereas other experts suggest that it would have been kept close at hand for the purposes of self-defense or attack.

During the early 19th century, a legend circulated amongst the English merchants

and farmers of Smithfield London about a woman who, while peddling her wares at the market place would carry the Darning Stone weapon under her dress. In the instance of attempted thefts she would pull out the weapon, which she referred to as "Darla" and knock the thieves unconscious. A poem, its authorship unknown, was passed on from one merchant to another and often recited during market hours with the hope that it would dissuade thievery at their own stalls.

*There once was a woman who lived in a town
Where some folks were good
And some were worn down*

*She'd go to the market to sell her some wares
And mend the odd trouser
Or a sock or a pair*

*She had her a small stone wrapped up in some gauze
To darn her some socks
With narry a pause*

*Some folks they would pay her and some they would not
Some they were honest
And some'd say they forgot*

*When folks tried to bluff her and not leave a dime
They'd get bumped on the noggin
Each and every time*

FERNZGHERKIN, is a fruit indigenous to Malaysia, belonging to the genus *Mangifera*, consisting of numerous species of tropical fruiting trees in the flowering plant family Anacardiaceae.

During early stages of growth, the fernzgherkin fruit is orangish-green in colour and once ripe turns white. The fruit also becomes low hanging, six to



FERNZGHERKIN TREE AND FRUIT, FROM KODHLES MEDICINAL PLANTS (1987)

seven inches in diameter, twenty-four inches in length and weighs between two and three kilograms. A fernzgherkin tree produces approximately ten fruit per growing season, June through July. The trees grow close to the Malaysian coastal regions in small numbers and defy cultivation. Biologists have thus far been unable to determine the conditions which stimulate germination of the fernzgherkin seed.

The flesh of the fernzgherkin is sour and salty to taste and has a similar consis-

tency as the banana fruit. It is high in fibre, vitamin C and potassium. Eaten in large quantities the fernzgherkin becomes highly toxic. Fernzgherkin skin has low levels of urushiol, the chemical in poison ivy and poison sumac. Although the fruit is always eaten peeled, small traces of the chemical are absorbed through the skin. Those with a history of poison ivy or poison oak will have an inverse reaction sooner than those that do not have the allergy, but typically five fernzgherkins is enough to cause severe internal lesioning.

According to Malay folklore, if a family member suffers from the side effects of eating too many fernzgherkins, the infected need only take the whole fruit and beat it with a stick. They continue to beat the fruit until their ailments subside, which in many cases was said to last up to three days. After which, the remaining fernzgherkin is buried beneath the tree from which it came, and the formerly afflicted individual abstains from eating fernzgherkins for the duration of a year. This is intended to demonstrate their newly acquired respect for the fernzgherkin fruit and its toxic power.



ART, LEROY (1905-

), a personal mythology. A divorced quotation mark. During the early 1920's, Leroy Art would meet his lover at the Obelisk, also known as Pompey's Pillar, in Central Park, New York city. Together they would terminate sentences, that is until his lover terminated him. Devastated and looking for a new life Art went to Tokyo, Japan. Unable to find work, he soon became broke, destitute and desperate. It is unclear how he met the magician Nikki Danjo, but rumours circulated that Danjo heard of Art's reputation and sought him out. Danjo offered Art a part in a public spectacle performed in the Shibuya district next to the dog Hachiko (1923-1935), who every day for nine years came to Shibuya station to wait for his deceased



LEROY ART PERFORMING NEXT TO HACHIKO IN THE SHIBUYA DISTRICT, TOKYO, JAPAN.

master to return. In 1934 a bronze statue was erected in Hachiko's honor. For three days, in April of 1931, Art lay motionless while the passersby yanked at his appendages, finally culminating in a plethora of white paste spilling all over him. Many after this occasion consider Art a performance artist, though others still, a completely useless and dysfunctional entity.

TAMBURLAINE, (I) the cocoon-like exterior produced in the larval stage of the Nostradamus. The Nostradami are a species which dwell deep inside the Earth's lower mantle, only emerging once a century to the Earth's surface, en masse, to feed and lay their eggs. The Nostradami thrive on moths and potatoes, or in dire circumstances other plants in the Solanaceae family. While on the Earth's surface the female Nostradami spin the fibrous and sticky tamburlaine around their larva as protection while it develops. In most cases tamburlaines are found on building overhangs or the lower branches of oaks, out of the direct sunlight. During the imago stage of development, once the larva has fully matured into the



TAMBURLAINES GROWING ON AN OAK TREE.
STEVENHALL, UK, 2011.

Nostradamus, it will emerge from its tamburlaine immediately ready to feed. On average, within eighteen months of

their births, the Nostradami will consume more than five-hundred tons of moths and potatoes, before returning to their nests in the lower mantle. Some agricultural scientists believe the Nostradami are the root cause of Ireland's potato famine (1845-1852).

In addition to wiping out potato crops and moths, zoologists have observed that if the Nostradami are driven to hostility, the dry and husky doll-like species will slowly take over private spaces. In the early 18th century, in Wagner, South Dakota, hundreds of Nostradami were found inside kitchen cabinets, chests of drawers and cradles. Many believe that this occupation gave rise to popularity of the cornhusk doll. Up until sometime between 1900-1930, the Nostradami had long been considered a pest, until it was learned that when the Nostradami still maturing inside their tamburlaines were exposed to the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, not only did it circumvent their hostility, but also coerced them back to their lower mantle nests. The last documented sighting of a Nostradamus or one of its Tamburlaines was 1947.

(2) *the Great*, a play written in 1587 by Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593). Tamburlaine, also the name of the play's protagonist, is the story of a Scythian shepherd who leads a band of renegades to the conquest of the Persian throne, after which, he groomed his sons to pursue further conquests, including Turkey, Egypt, Damascus, Arabia, Anatolia and Babylon. When one of his sons refuses to assist him, Tamburlaine declares him a coward and executes him. Tamburlaine soon after falls ill and dies, though he manages to maintain his empire. His kingdom is left in the care of his remaining sons. Marlowe was influenced by legends of Timur (1336-1405), also spelled Timour, known by name as Timur Lenk or Timurlenk, in English Tamerlane or Tamburlaine, the Turkic conqueror, known

mainly for his barbarism.

The literary critic Charles Lamb suggests Marlowe's protagonist was also intentionally given the name

Tamburlaine to reflect the potentially volatile Nostradamus larva inside the tamburlaine. At a young age, the character Tamburlaine was orphaned and abruptly torn from his formerly refined upbringing. Like the Nostradamus larva that isn't exposed to Bach, so too will the human severed from civility become hostile.



TAMBURLAINE (136-1405). [FOUNDER OF THE TIMURID DYNASTY.] ENGRAVED BY J.W. COOK.

TESTICOLO, a sculpture crafted by Michelangelo (1475-1564), the famous Italian Renaissance painter, sculptor, architect, poet, and engineer. Testicolo dates to 1498, the year before he sculpted the *Pietà* and three to five years before his most famous work, *David*. *Testicolo* is considered an anatomical study of the male genitalia. Originally, a defeated Goliath sculpture was to accompany the famous *David*, which explains the monumental size of *Testicolo*. Due to monetary constraints faced by the Overseers of the Office of Works of the Duomo (*Operai*), who were commissioning Michelangelo's work, the Goliath sculpture was abandoned. Despite its anatomical accuracy and beauty, *Testicolo* was never to be publically displayed. It remained in the vaults of the Palazzo Vecchio (*see also* Palazzo della Signoria, Palazzo del Popolo, Palazzo dei Priori, and Palazzo Ducale) until 1965 when a young priest searching through the archives discovered it. It took seven years to restore the sculpture to its original condition. In 1976 it mysteriously disappeared from The Study (*Studiolo*), of the Palazzo Vecchio, where it was being stored.

VAN OSTADE STICK,

is the tool named after Dutch genre painter, Adriaen van Ostade (1610-1685). The stick, approximately two feet in length, wrapped in cotton, the bulk of which wound on one end, was used by van Ostade to steady his painting hand and to avoid accidentally brushing the wet canvas with his arm. The padded end would be placed either on the edge of his unpainted canvas, the easel, or where the painted canvas was already dry, while the opposite end of the stick was braced by van Ostade's free hand. With the stick angled up off the wet portion of the canvas, he would then rest his painting arm on the stick to ensure it would not rub against the painting.

In the late 17th century, the van Ostade Stick soon became popular among other painters, though more commonly referred



ADRIAEN VAN OSTADE (1610-1685)

to as a maulstick or mahlstick (a translation from the Dutch, *maalstok*, i.e. "painter's stick"). During this time period, technical innovations to the stick also occurred, including an increase in shaft length, a thinner shaft, and buckskin to replace the cotton padding.



Look Me In The Eye

words Christina Buttafuoco

My father's first toy as a child was Pinocchio.

The little hard plastic boy, standing about two feet tall, hid in the corner of the spare bedroom before my brother was born. No boys were allowed, but he was an exception.

I still remember the paint chipping off the tip of his pointy nose, rubbed in and worn down by little white lies. He wore green lederhosen and a cone-shaped hat adorned his plastic swirl of hair. And those eyes, those eyes that bore into me. I could never look either of them in the eyes. *Yes Daddy, I brushed my teeth. No, I didn't eat the chocolate, I promise Daddy.*

I watched the Disney VHS about the little wooden boy hundreds of times. Pinocchio could only be a real boy if he proved that he was "brave, truthful, and unselfish."

They both grew up in Italy, my father and Pinocchio. He didn't have much, wandering from continent to continent until he was my age. Sicily to Australia to Italy to America. He was a nomad, the oldest of three children with a North Star somehow always guiding him home.

What little possessions remain from his childhood are now scattered in my garage, stuffed into boxes with his name written across them. He'll never get those back and I wonder why we're still hanging on to them, how they made it here in the first place. Why my mother allowed these pieces of him to be dragged here eight years ago, literally extra baggage when we were leaving that life behind.

I've made trips back up to New York since we moved. My grandfather's funeral. My best friend's Sweet 16. My cousin's wedding. We slip in and out of the state, hushed and stealthy, as if he knows. He asks how the weather in North Carolina is. Fine, I tell him. A little white lie. I have memories with a man who took me places and

bought me things. I have a handful of photographs with a man who smiles back at my tiny face, a man who I resemble with my big brown eyes and olive skin. I have nicknames and knick-knacks from time spent together.

But I do not remember having a dad.

I call him up when I need something. The phone rings once, twice, three times. It rings until it clicks to voicemail. This is the game we play. I don't leave a message. I usually give it an hour; I know he'll call back.

Our conversations are calculated and I wonder when I got so good at detachment. My mother calls me a manipulator, a positive connotation when it results in child support for my brother and me, a negative one when she knows I want something from her. Either way, I have become too good at getting what I want and need, but still no better at getting what I deserve.

My largest purchases over the past several years have one way or another been provided for by my father. The Macbook on which I type was my 16th birthday gift. He takes care of my sorority payments each month. He doesn't know it, but sushi last night was on him.

On the way to my high school graduation, he asked my mother to pull over at an ATM. I can still feel the weight of the wad of cash inside the card, \$600 and an envelope he didn't even bother to seal.

I only liked going over to his first apartment after he got Lucky. The little kitten reminded me of Figaro from the Disney version of Pinocchio, and I could hide under the table playing with her as I pretended not to look at the earrings left on the bedside table.

He moved in with her after he went bankrupt. The address is in the Hamptons, right on the cusp but a title he claims nonetheless. Just like Pinocchio claimed to be a real boy...but that still didn't make him any more real.

Her name is Christi-Marie. I remember hearing that the first time and just laughing, to the point of tears. Christina Marie and Christi-Marie. Nothing, not even my name, belonged to me. She is Irish and I've learned to drink tea and talk in a clipped accent back to her, thanking her for her hospitality, for being my father's keeper.

He calls me back, just like I knew he would. I can hear Christi-Marie in the background, about to leave for work. My father asks me what I want for Christmas. All I really want are things I can't have. Things I never had.

Mia fata dai Capelli Turchini. Mia principessa. My fairy with the turquoise hair. My little princess.

I ask him for a car, the most outrageous thing I never think I will get. He says he will start looking into leases for me. I don't know where my conscience has gone.

It has been two years since I've seen him. It doesn't feel like that long, but I know when the time comes he'll be a little grayer, a little rounder. He's still a handsome man, and I'm happy for my brother, who resembles him in stature with each passing day.

But I still have my father's eyes.

They say when someone is coming up with a lie, their eyes wander up and to the right. The last time I saw my father, he looked me straight in the eyes and told me he loved me before we said goodbye. I looked over his shoulder as I hugged him goodbye and told him I loved him too.

I wonder if he lies to protect me. I wonder when he decided that I was worth the truth.

I wonder if perhaps I am the liar after all.



Sketch Pink, Green, Black by Harry Swartz-Turfle



Sketch Purple, Orange by Harry Swartz-Turfle

MOVING

words Gwen Davies

It's 1972, an August afternoon. At the dining room table, Lorraine is reading *Democratic Models in Africa*, a book from Aunt Althea, to get ready for the fall. She stops, stretches, and checks the clock on the kitchen stove. Ten to five. Any minute, her two-year old, Eric, will bounce in from next door.

She tucks the book away in the den. Time to switch on the peas and potatoes – Eric's current favourites. Time to smooth the brown-checked cloth over the arborite table. And then pull the chops out of the oven. They're covered with a golden skin from the mushroom soup, something she's trying from this month's recipe exchange.

The door pushes open and in tumbles Eric. "Dinner in five minutes, kiddo." She bends to wave at the neighbour's beefy daughter on the doorstep and looks up to say "Thanks." Five minutes till the guys in Air Force blue swarm through the gate in the chain-link fence that separates the working side of the base from the married quarters. The exodus will be followed directly by a unified scrape of chairs as families sit for supper.

Eric looks up. Lorraine drops a tea towel on his head and he giggles. "Peek!" she says lifting a corner and dropping it again, setting the table while they play their game. Task complete, she plucks the towel from his fair hair and asks, "Where's your dump truck?" Eric heads for the toy box while Lorraine covers the chops and carries them in.

Through the window, she notices a girl kicking stones with her loafers. It's a good place to live, kids at every age and parents who offer you a beer on the front steps. When she was the age of that girl walking by, Lorraine got on a train by herself to go spend summer in the Annapolis Valley with Aunt Althea. She is smiling when the door opens and her husband suddenly fills the galley kitchen.

Eric explodes his block tower with the dump truck and runs. Will scoops him up, brushes Lorraine with a kiss, and drops his hat on the back of the chesterfield.

"We got a house for early October," he says tossing Eric, who squeals, "over on Winslow Drive. Hedge all around it and I understand there's a rose bed." He raises his brows.

Lorraine sears a finger as she pries foil off the broiler pan, and winces. "You weren't expecting it so soon, she says." Rose bed? With a kid, university courses, obligatory Mess nights and more than enough

parties, what would a person want with a rose bed?

"Good for you," Lorraine says. House is code for *promotion to officer*. Lorraine uncovers the potatoes. *Promotion to officer* means *eligible for pilot training* and, in the lingering feudalism of the military, triggers moving to officers' housing on the other side of the married quarters. Even if it's only months before they have to pack it all up again to head somewhere else for pilot training. She flicks marge and dashes milk into the potato pot and applies the masher. Well, she'll get rid of everything that's expendable. Not worth bucking the system over one more move: there are better issues to get the knickers in a knot for.

Once training starts, they'll both be too busy to worry about career-advancing parties like his mother's always given. His mother who dilutes her orange juice with gin.

Will tucks the squirming child under his arm and heads upstairs to change into civvies. "Put Eric's pyjama shirt on while you're up there," Lorraine calls. As she scoops a mound of potatoes onto each plate, her hand bumps Will's glass. It shatters against the butter dish – a gift for their hasty wedding. She unsets the table, shakes glass shards into the garbage, and starts over with a red-checked cloth.

At supper, Lorraine occupies herself with feeding Eric who wants to apply potatoes to his hair, and with making mental lists: register for classes, find someone to mind Eric, sort and toss for the move, start the cleaning. It's been three years since she sat at a desk. With Aunt Althea's inheritance, she can buy a second car to get to town – she'll have a longer drive from the next base to the nearest university but at least she can transfer.

Bridge is at their house tonight. She puts the dishes in to soak, an Althea strategy, and then sings and reads to Eric who finally succumbs to sleep.

Will puts down the paper when she returns. "Come and sit with me, Toots," he says. He pours her a scotch, refilling his own glass.

Sure, she can stop to talk – folks won't come till eight. At the PX today, she bought one of those wire cheese cutters the girls were talking about for slicing Velveeta. She'll make grilled cheese triangles with pimento olives – the bread is already crustless and waiting.

"You'll love this place," Will says. "You'll finally have a quiet street

and a private yard. The early promotion means we'll be in training right after Christmas." He flicks the arm of the couch. "You can get rid of this colonial crap and find some furniture that belongs in an officer's house."

Lorraine looks at their lived-in suite, from Will's parents' den. It served his father the officer well enough. No use starting anything just before company.

"Buy something on time," Will says. "That's what the old man says – from Eaton's, good quality and we can take the account anywhere." He shakes his head. "There'll be no kids' horseplay on that furniture."

"Did something change? I thought you weren't due for another . . ."

"The old man – he put in a word. Wanted to see how that promotion looked on me before he retired." Will downs his shot and pours another.

He starts, "Can't take . . ." as she says, "He didn't . . . Sorry, go ahead."

"He's getting old, can't take the punishment. Last time I was in Trenton he buggered off at midnight. The boys at the Mess were just warming up." He winks. Raises the bottle to the light.

"There's another one in the cabinet." Lorraine tips her glass up to enjoy the burn down to her belly. It was Will's father who introduced her to single malt. "I should get things ready. Did you give people a time?" She always asks this. Will never answers. And it's not the right time to talk about university and logistics. Lorraine stands. "Can you tidy the papers?"

She fishes the cookie sheet from the stove drawer. This move is where everything changes, not the one after Christmas. Moving to a new base, you get the same kind of house on the same kind of street and you pick up with the neighbours right where you left off. Sometimes they're the same neighbours, since people move every couple of years and there are only so many bases. She opens the bread bag and pulls the Velveeta loaf from the fridge.

Moving from housing for the lower ranks to officers' housing is where you go to another country. The casual fun of the Sergeants' Mess changes to the formality of the Officers'. She'll need new clothes for that but the significant pay raise doesn't come for another promotion or two. Women should get a clothing allowance like the men.

The slicer peels off smooth, even slices of orange cheese that she lays on the bread. The pecking order counts more when your husband's an officer. Fewer kids for Eric to play with. Lorraine will have to get used to the new ways of these wives. Will they swap recipes and commiserate when the guys are away on training? Not that she's done much commiserating. She sets the timer and begins

to lay out plates and napkins. You don't come waltzing back to your old neighbourhood once you move across the base.

She'll be expected to volunteer for committees the way Will's mother does. And if Will's right, tend the roses – hybrids no doubt. Althea used to say hybrid roses were for the showcase, not for the heart. Althea didn't garden or sew. Lorraine drains her scotch glass.

"You'll love a flying base," Will says from the living room. "Get away from the city. You'll find the Officers' Mess a little more lively on a flying base."

"That's after Christmas," she says. "We're moving across this base right now."

"My dress uniform needs to go to the cleaners." Will stands up, gathers the sections of the newspaper and stashes them in the TV cabinet.

—

Eric is asleep in the car when Lorraine arrives at the university parking lot. She waits to see if he'll wake up. Can she do this? Even if she does schoolwork while Eric is with a sitter it's a lot. There are husbands who clean and cook, but the Service doesn't seem to produce many. Will certainly takes his turn with Eric. Lorraine finds it easier to just get the vacuuming done.

Althea and Iris had a housekeeper. Lorraine turns to look at Eric, slumped on the passenger seat. A child. What a surprise ending to that long night. She couldn't handle the misery of Althea's death any longer so when Will urged her to come out, come play, dance and have a little rum and Coke she put on her dress and heels.

Eric's breath is even, slow. So little, he is. There's so much to figure out. Althea, god, what would she say to all that carelessness, and then getting married instead of . . .? She opens the door and sits with her legs out, looking over the campus.

—

Lorraine was ten when she spent her first summer at university. The train began to slow along the tidal flats. She was out of her seat before the conductor even called Wolfville, rising on tiptoe to look out the window of the door. She spotted her aunt, in jeans and T-shirt, standing on the platform. At the final squeal of brakes, the conductor pushed open the door and jumped down to set up the step. Lorraine descended into a warm breeze.

Althea gathered her in. Lorraine inhaled Althea's smell – Pear's Soap and ink. She was at her real home, with Althea and Iris. Her mother said Iris was Althea's roommate but Lorraine saw, as the fish was frying and the beans were steaming, how Althea's hand touched Iris's arm, how Iris's eyes met Althea's. As normal to Lorraine as the silence between her parents.

At length, Althea took a step back and looked her over. "You won't fit any of last summer's clothes," she said. She always said this. She checked her watch. "I'm talking for the Quakers at the demonstration today, so we can't shop till – probably tomorrow. Can you handle a crowd?"

Lorraine nodded. They walked toward the Jeep where Iris waited, eyes closed. "You'll need a passport, too, honey," Althea said as she opened the back door. "Hungry?"

"Yes." Lorraine climbed in. "Why do I need a passport?"

Iris twisted to kiss Lorraine between the bucket seats, then started the car.

"The university gave me money to go digging," Althea said. "We'll take some students out to a couple of sites in Greece, what do you think?"

"This summer? Did you tell Mummy?"

"Yes this summer. Of course I told her."

A flight of butterflies came loose inside Lorraine. "What did she say?"

"I told her she better not hold on to you too tight." Lorraine wasn't sure exactly what that meant, but Althea's chuckle made her laugh.

—

Sun beating on her head brings Lorraine back to the car. She struggles Eric's sleeping body into his stroller and heads for the auditorium, to register and write the first cheque on the bequest for her education from Althea's will. Inside the cool building she chooses a line-up.

The registrar mentioned they were starting a daycare on campus. She'll ask about it. That must mean she isn't the only student with a kid. They didn't normally get applicants with a correspondence certificate, the registrar said, but her school records showed she was exactly the kind of student they were looking for. He made an exception for her.

The line crawls along. Good thing Eric is not wanting to run. People look younger, and lots of them are wearing hippie skirts and ragged jeans. There are two other girls with kids.

The guy in front of her turns. "That your baby?" he asks.

After Service brush cuts, his long hair and earring make her want to reach out and touch. Despite the stupid question, she smiles.

"What're you taking?"

"General first year," she says. "And then political science. You?"

"French Literature."

"You speak French?"

"Air Force brat, I learned it overseas," he says.

"Oh, I'm – I mean my husband's Service. He's training to be a pilot." They shuffle ahead.

"Ah, my sympathy. How old's the kid?"

"Almost three." She wrinkles her nose. "Sympathy? About moving all the time, you mean?"

"Moving, drinking, which pool you can pee in if your daddy's not an officer. War games . . . I'm more, like, into peace, man."

He grins and holds two fingers up in the 'V' sign for peace. Like she used to do, at demonstrations with Althea and Iris. Lorraine laughs, glimpsing herself through his sardonic lens. Assumptions are dangerous. Then again, who is she, anyway?

She'd like to talk to this guy, see what he thinks about Trudeau and the peace movement and what's going on in Uganda right now.

Maybe he's not political. A joker, maybe, like Will. Willy, the popular guy who, improbably, chose to dance with Lorraine the Brain.

The line moves again and the guy with the ear ring goes off to the left with a little wave. Peace, man, she thinks. Peace is part of a world that got smashed to oblivion, along with Althea and Iris, in the twisted wake of a drunk driver. Lorraine propels the umbreller ahead, reaches for the unused cheque book.

She is leaving the gym when the guy with the ear ring walks up beside her. "Hey, like, good luck with school and the baby and all that. Maybe I'll see you."

Eric is stirring. "Great, I wanted to talk to you," Lorraine says.

"Oh yeah? What about?"

"Oh, um." No, not here, not now. "Do you know any place I could take some second-hand furniture? And clothes?" They walk toward the parking lot.

He laughs, like he knows furniture's not what she wanted to talk about and that's OK. It's not though. That whole life she was after she's tucked into Eric's nap time with Althea's books. Dreaming back to hot summers patiently scraping tiny sections of dirt while the students talked around her. Marching in peace rallies. Right up to the summer she was seventeen.

The guy's telling her an address, which she asks him to repeat as she fumbles to write on the back of her cheque book. He says it's a church basement.

"This is my exit," he says. "Stay cool." He holds up the peace sign again, then heads across the lawn.

Awake now, Eric is twisting to free himself from the stroller. Lorraine stops, pulls a bottle of juice from her bag to settle him for a minute. It's a beautiful campus, with trees and stone buildings. She bites at the hangnail on her thumb.

Friday night, Lorraine and Will have friends over to celebrate his promotion. Last to leave, Guthrie stumbles going out the door. Lorraine slips Will's jacket over his shirt. "Help her get him home," she says nodding toward Guthrie's wife. Her own head is tacked on loosely.

She heads upstairs, past the closet that holds the receipt for her year, tucked in her handbag.

When Will clomps in downstairs Lorraine closes her novel, one of Iris's Agatha Christie's, and switches his light on and hers off. A moment later, he's in the bedroom doorway.

"You're the kind of girl who can make a man," Will says. He weaves in and slumps across her. Toes off his shoes. "That's what Guthrie said. The kind of girl who can make a man. I told him, 'Guthrie, my man,' I said, 'that's why I married her.'"

"Can you get up and take your clothes off?"

"Sure, honey, sure. I sure can. Make a . . ." She realizes he is asleep. His breath is foul. No, she won't pull his clothes off and haul him to the other side of the bed. Tonight, Lorraine slides out, takes a sheet and blanket from the closet. She'll still wake up first when Eric calls.

The couch is comfortable – stupid to get rid of it. She stares at the ceiling. A rose garden. An empty house piled with boxes. University assignments. Would Will be comfortable at a campus party? She drifts to a place where the guy with the earring wanders into Althea's front parlour.

Thursday is stifling. Lorraine's turn to babysit. She fills the wading pool under the poplar and hauls drawer after drawer down to the back porch, sorting between rounds of splashing and snacking. After lunch, she returns the neighbour's daughter. Eric will nap in the car while they do errands. Last on the list is to find the church

basement and drop off clothes and baby toys.

Her watch says nearly 3:30 when they arrive. Eric's slept fitfully, restless and cranky these last couple of days which means he's coming down with something. She scoops him out of the car, catches him by the shirt as he stumbles on the basement steps. Supper is stove-top tuna casserole and it's ready to heat, no panic. She pushes the door open. In the cool fluorescent light, a woman on the phone laughs.

Lorraine's breath stops. It's Althea's laugh. Her eyes adjust. A woman maybe in her thirties, cropped fair hair, solid build, business-like. She motions them in. Eric has already seen the toy corner, and Lorraine releases his collar.

Her eyes scan a basement stacked with clothes, furniture, boxes. The woman hangs up, walks over. "Thelma," she says and extends her hand. "You a volunteer?"

"Uh – no. I have things in the car. We're moving and someone at the university said . . ." Words are sliding around in her brain. It's not just the laugh. What's wrong with her?

"We take anything," the woman says and sweeps her arm around the chaos. "And anyone . . ." Is she making a joke? Lorraine wants to laugh, get her to laugh again. Get a grip, for heaven's sake!

"I've got – there's clothes in the, in the car – and furniture, back at the house. Do you pick up furniture?" Is this a free store, like the one she used to go to with Althea? The woman is talking.

". . . whenever there's someone around with a truck. Give me your stats and I'll write you on the calendar."

"Early October, I don't have a day yet. We're in PMQs." She gives the phone number. This is a woman that would talk about things that weren't kids and husbands and recipes. Yes, and that's what Lorraine's just signed up for, at university. Remembering that stabilizes her brain.

Thelma stands at the calendar, pen poised. "You know this is the draft counselling centre . . ."

Lorraine smiles to cover up that she's misunderstood what the woman said. Uncomfortable because she wants to say, like when she was ten, "Will you be my best friend?"

The words Thelma said penetrate. Draft dodgers. The guy with the earring.

Lorraine is stripped naked. What did he think she'd do when she got here? He was toying with her in a mean way.

Thelma raises her eyebrows. "I gather this isn't a simple mistake."

Lorraine glances at Eric, toys littering his corner. The sight of him reminds her of normal. She calms. "No. I mean no, it's more like a – poke in the eye."



Thelma cocks her head. "Do you work at the university?"

"Univer . . . oh, where I heard about this place. No. I'm, no, I'm starting a degree." She sees Thelma glance at Eric. "I did correspondence."

"Tough going, doing a degree when you have to chase a hubby across the country and back."

How does she know that? Really, Lorraine just wants to drop things off and get back and cook dinner. She's in that dream where she can't move, can't run away. Anyway, she doesn't want to just drop things off and run home and make supper, that's not true either. Better do something.

"Look, if Eric's OK for a minute I'll empty the trunk."

Thelma nods.

Lorraine dashes. She feels her way down the steps with a couple of boxes. Stupid guy. Thelma points to an empty spot on the floor. It's none of anyone's business what she does with her life. The guy sent her here like a little lecture, because she's a Service wife. Well Service wife is not all she is. She arrives downstairs again. Thelma is putting a block on Eric's tower.

On the last bag, Lorraine stumbles at the top of the steps. Catching herself, she stops to lean against the wall a moment. The opportunity to think through all this doesn't exist. It's time to collect Eric, get supper, give the kid a bath. There's a song in her head, one Iris taught her when she was little. "There's a bluebird on my windowsill . . ."

Thelma is on the phone again. Eric makes an explosion noise and throws something.

Lorraine grabs his hand and pulls him to his feet. "Go pick that up." She gives him a push.

"Can't find it."

"You threw it, now find it." She hears the woman hang up. Hears her own voice. Drops her shoulders and walks over to where the toy landed. It's a block.

"OK, let's pick up all these toys and go home."

Eric turns his back.

"Daddy will be waiting," she says. "I can see him now. He'll come into the kitchen and say, 'Where's Eric?'"

"That's good, put them in gently."

As they head for the door, Lorraine turns to say goodbye.

"You still want that furniture picked up?" Thelma asks. "There's no markings on the truck, it's just whatever truck someone has available."

The furniture, that's right. Lorraine looks at Thelma. Her stomach dives like an otter down a mud bank. But – what else would she do with it? She nods.

"I'll need your info. Name, address and phone number."

She prints it on a piece of paper while Eric tugs at her skirt.

Negotiating traffic, Lorraine directs her thoughts to schoolwork while Eric makes airplane sounds. She thought it might be different, but once she saw the students she could feel herself on the outside again, no different from high school.

High school until Willy held out his hand. Just back from Germany, gorgeous, instant star of the basketball team. Drove a Norton Commando. She only had one class with him – Latin – and he was the class clown. Charmed the teachers right out of detentions. Everyone said 'Go on, go to the party with Willy. It'll help you get over Althea.'

Helpful Willy. Loaded their Coke with rum. Rum then, scotch these days – Willy's cure for many things. Lorraine knew the drink was loaded. She drank it anyway. Kept drinking. Drank till she felt like everything was going to be all right, and she didn't care if it wasn't.

Coke spilled down her dress – the one from her cousin in Montreal. There she was, almost naked in the parents' ensuite bathroom washing it off when in he walked. Sparkling. He ran a hot finger down her arm. Even now, her body heats up at their electric nakedness.

—

Saturday night, getting ready for the Mess, Will is half dressed in front of his closet when Lorraine comes over to get zipped. "Where's my green shirt?" he asks. "And those grey pants?" He flicks through his clothes.

"Why aren't you dressed?" she asks. "The babysitter will be here in two minutes." She hands him a shirt. He pulls on the pants from his dress uniform. The doorbell rings.

At the Mess, after the guys have come in to join the girls for dinner, after grace when everyone has taken a seat at the long tables, Lorraine turns to Will. She is fortified by an hour of scotch. "Do you remember that I start university a week Tuesday?"

He pours gravy over the mashed potato and slices of rare beef on his plate. When he turns there is no recognition in his look. They did talk, some time. It could have been a year ago.

"The trust fund, from Althea." She takes the gravy boat, makes trails across her own food, and sets it in front of Guthrie who is next to her. "Mr. Bruce? The correspondence course I finished? I start classes a week Tuesday." She reaches for the horseradish and passes it to someone who has asked for it down the table.

“I’m your job, Toots. What would an officer’s wife be doing at university?”

He’s had too much to drink. “We’ll talk about it tomorrow,” she says. The guy with the ear ring pops into her mind. Peace, man. Maybe they should pick Lorraine up too, when someone comes for the furniture. Maybe Thelma should come for the furniture.

Eric wakes up stuffy with a cold Sunday. By the time they finish late breakfast – Will’s blueberry pancakes and bratwurst sausage – he’s ready for a nap. Lorraine picks him up and Will checks his forehead. Slight fever.

She decides, as Eric’s breathing eases into sleep, that she will lay out what’s coming and listen to what Will has to say. Whatever she’s done, it’s done and they will have to find a way to make it work. She’ll get a housekeeper if she has to – there’s money to cover it if she’s careful.

“You didn’t make the coffee,” Will says.

“I’ll make it now. Let’s talk about university. I guess the last time we really talked about it was just after Eric was born.”

“I make the breakfast, you make the coffee.”

Lorraine sets the perk on the stove and peeks around the door jam. “Are you OK?”

“You think I haven’t noticed? You keep busy so we don’t have to talk. Supper is late.”

“Will, you could have made the coffee. Or taken Eric up.” The perk blurps.

Will comes to stand in the kitchen. Lorraine clears the table, stepping around him. The pancake platter, stacked with plates, almost topples when it grazes his arm. He doesn’t move.

Lorraine catches herself before she reacts. Next he’ll say how hard he’s working to get ahead because he had to quit school. She had not begged him to stay, get a degree. She didn’t say anything about his choice to join up. When she looked at herself the day the pregnancy test came back, she saw her mother’s face in the mirror and she let the weight of it sink down through her.

Will was there the day Mr. Bruce, the guidance counsellor, came to their trailer. Eric was a month old. He surprised them, bringing her the correspondence forms. Willy made tea for them, and then he went off. She runs water in the sink – the dishes can soak while they have coffee.

Mr. Bruce wasn’t concerned about the baby. He held her gaze and he told her how, these days, there was no reason in the world a young mother couldn’t go to school and get a career. No reason a girl couldn’t get a PhD, he said. All you need is to want it.

Lorraine dries her hands, slips around Will to fill their cups. He’ll get over his pout. “I’m going to sit on the steps,” she says.

Will takes her shoulder. She stops, her back to him.

“We’re not moving ’till October. Why did you get rid of my green shirt? And the pants?”

“You haven’t worn the shirt in a year and the pants didn’t fit last time you tried them.”

“We aren’t moving ’till October.” His body is large behind her, his breath hot. The pants don’t fit because he’s put on weight since he stopped playing basketball and started spending more time at the Mess.

Lorraine removes his hand. He puts it back, holding her, turning her. Coffee sloshes into the saucer and down to the floor.

“You’re job now is to be an officer’s wife,” he says.

“You wanted a coffee,” she says. “Let’s sit out and drink it in the sun.”

“I wanted a wife,” he says. He is crowding her, fingers clamping her shoulder.

“Let go.” His hand doesn’t move. “Will, let go of my shoulder. We can talk about this, but you have to let go.” She controls an urge to flip the rest of the coffee where he doesn’t expect it.

He slackens his grip and she steps sideways. She adds milk and sugar to Will’s cup on the counter and hands it to him.

“There’s plenty in the trust fund,” she says. She has her hand on the door. “But we’ll have to make some changes.”

He turns toward the living room.

Her shoulder throbs in the shape of his hand. She remembers him coming toward her at that Friday sock hop, tall and easy. She looked around but there was no one behind her. She tops up her cup and walks out the door. One change is, she isn’t going to run home like she did the other day. There’s the furniture pick-up, too. She’s uneasy about it, but it will happen nonetheless.

There’s a cooler edge to the breeze that stirs her hair. She waves at a neighbour walking back from late mass. Something reminds her of getting her passport, and Althea, when Lorraine asked about her mother. “I told her you would only break her heart if she held on too tight,” Althea said. “She might as well let you get out there and see how to make the world work for yourself.”

I am a
teacher

Father and I at The Gravedigger's Pub by Kate Hurchinson

words Clifton Patty

I am that man you pass on the street and ignore. I try to look like everyone. I try to look like no one. I do not work out. I eat healthy. I sit and I stand and I walk. But I do not run. *My God I do not run.* She is going to a party tonight. She will meet a man named Bryan. She will like him a lot. I have told Bryan, who is a smaller boy with terrible habits, that he will let Her like him. He will foster this adoration. And then he will drop Her. Never speak to Her again. She will learn a lesson. She will eventually grow to hate this type of person and not marry a man like him. I am putting wood on a fire. I am running the faucet and the sink is plugged. Letting the grass grow. You do not care for metaphors. This lesson is important and I will be paid well for it. She rarely drinks because of the Rohypnol I placed in Her drink. She had a bad night and I was paid well for it. She runs often because I had Her clothes exchanged for a smaller size. She is under the impression that She is fat. And because of this there is running. And I am paid well for it. Do you understand? This is my job. I place walls and set traps. I foster insecurities to eventually sprout confidence.

The powerful give me money so I control them. These people have no idea. I am nobody, but to them I am everybody. I hear

the phone calls and read the emails. I am going to a deli today, She tells a friend. I go to the deli before hand. Make sure the owner knows what the two are (and are not) going to order. I watch when they finally go into the deli. Can I have some milk with that, they ask. I laugh. (I literally laugh; I had liquid in my mouth and had trouble holding it in!) No, they cannot have milk! The owner says no we are out of milk. I am still smiling. (This is literal) They leave the deli because of this. She cannot have breakfast without milk. I know these things.

There is another place down the road. She will go there and I know this too. I have told the owner here to make sure She orders the bagel I gave to him. She will ask for a brownie, I tell the owner. But She cannot have a brownie. You will give Her this bagel, I say. He nods because he understands. She enters with Her friend. May I have a brownie? No, we are out of brownies. She whispers angrily under Her breath. Well I will have a bagel. Yes She will have a bagel. Of course She will have a bagel! I know these things. He hands Her the bagel I gave to him. She gets cream cheese. This is not a problem. She eats it and receives the nutrients She needs. I am happy about this. She will grow as I have been instructed to grow Her. (And I will not be running out of wood anytime soon)

She meets Bryan. She likes him. I told him to offer Her a cigarette. The cigarette will be laced. It will make Her sick. She will never smoke again. She tells Her friends to talk to Bryan. He says he is interested in Her too. I give it two weeks and make Bryan end it. He is unhappy and uncooperative but he does what he has to do. My dead bird to rocks thrown ratio is impressive. I will sleep well tonight.

She has a dirty mouth, just like I do. The parents tell me to fix that. I will do it later. She is so young. She can curse till She is 20 I have decided. I am in a car now. She cannot see me but I see Her. She passes me and looks into the window. Her face, Her skin, those legs, I know every detail. She is made of clay that I am still smoothing out. Her eyes slide over me like I am nothing. This is good. I bumped into Her on the street once. It was an accident and I blushed. She said sorry and I looked at the ground. I had to sit down and calm my nerves. The lesson today will be a small one.

I wake up. I shower. I do not shave till night. I put on casual clothes. My television is of Her. My radio is of Her. I own no computer. I own a pager and I have a mailbox. I pour a bowl of cereal each morning. Two percent milk. I take

too many pills and then get into the car. In the passenger's seat there may or may not be a package. I never have a day off. But sometimes I have busier days than others. I only speak to the people that influence Her. The package will have papers, pictures, and on the cover page will be the lessons of the day. There is also a sandwich. Wheat bread, peanut butter, and jelly. Grape jelly. This means it will be a busy day. The lessons read:

Today She will learn how to stand up for herself (Part 1 of 20)

Today She will learn how to abandon a friend of bad influence (Part 2 of 2)

Today She will learn how to make dressing (Part 1 of 1)

As Thanksgiving is approaching!
(The excitement is insulting)

Today She will learn how to be sympathetic (Part 33-42 of 450)

I am excited about that second one. The first part was entertaining. It will end smoothly and brutally. The sympathetic lesson has taken a pretty extended period of time. I have had a hard time thinking up how to construct such a lesson. I am not a

sympathetic person. I am not sentimental. My mind is a poorly made tissue and will break rapidly when compared to leading brands. At the end of the page are some things She needs to do. These are not to be confused with lessons. They are in no particular order.

She will need to:

- Buy groceries. (She has the list)
- Go on a run.
- Buy some new shoes (For goodness sake!)
- Meet a man named Alex (This is not a lesson; we just are just preparing something)
- And as usual, stay away from Margaret, Rachel, Damien, Taylor, Rich, Mike, Timothy, Bryan, Molly, and that tall boy with blonde hair and the cigarette addiction (We simply could not remember his name)

The boy's name is Rico. The list keeps going. Continues to be boring. It is a cold day. She meets up with a friend. This one is named Allan. I hate his name and I hate him. His face is tight like something is pulling it from the inside of his head. His eyes are too far apart and are never open

wide enough. His teeth are too yellow. His neck is too long. This boy would not survive in nature. He would be killed and eaten. For his genes are poor. She would survive. And She will survive. Allan is a sad boy. He whines often. It is so cold, he keeps saying. He is uncomfortable around Her and tries to fill in the silence as much as he can. He utilizes phrases like:

I like coffee a lot, but I don't like the way it makes my stomach feel.

I hate sneezing (She responds, I love sneezing)

My feet hurt.

That girl was hot.

I like to go fishing, but I hate fish.

Bugs scare me.

It is cold.

Damn, it is really cold.

I'm sleepy.

Is there something up my nose?

I always feel like there is something up my nose.

He is the fruition of years and years of evolutionary triumph!

The parents call me. They work a lot. They cannot raise her properly. If I accepted this job and did nothing. Never even laid one eye on this girl, would she turn out that

bad? I am ruining natural processes. Stepping on the toes of gods and wearing suits of armor in thunderstorms. My mind wanders recently.

The car is in the same spot. Always in that spot. I open the package. No sandwich. It will be an easy day. There are no exciting lessons. I do my rounds. Speak to Her daily breakfast place. Give them the food She will eat. I speak to a person who will be stealing Her purse today. She has this awful habit of hanging the purse on the tips of Her fingers. This can no longer happen. I call the credit card companies. Have the cards canceled and order Her new ones. She will be spending the night with a friend tonight. There is a phone number at the bottom of the page of lessons and assignments. I go to a pay phone and, well, we all know what I did in there.

Hello?

How is She doing?

Oh. She is doing well. Nothing new, I'll be having Her purse stolen today. I've already worked out the credit card issues.

Who did you find to do that?

Some guy.

...

I mean he's fine. He won't hurt Her.

You are not doing your job as well as you used to.

I know. I mean, Is there any time soon that I can have a day off or something? I'm getting really tired.

She needs Her lessons.

Can you guys not, like, handle Her for even a weekend?

You know that She can't handle things without you.

Well She's a human. She'll be fine for a few days without me. She won't even notice. Even used the restroom all by herself yesterday.

That's not funny.

I know.

Have you been letting her curse?

No.

You will have a day off when we can work something out.

This girl, She's... well, in nature there are these turtles. I don't know their names. If you help them cross the beach into the ocean when they hatch, they won't be powerful enough to survive to adulthood. I saw this on TV a while ago. And-

I have to go.

Of course you do.

Don't let her curse.

Please try to work something out.

Do not let her curse.

And there it ended. They think they are in a

movie. (And as said earlier this is impossible!) They think they are part of something larger than themselves. (Unless, of course, there are cameras following them) Talking properly and saying things like, She needs her lessons. I would quit this job, but She would flounder and drown. She would not get her nutrients, She would start smoking (and stop running), I care for Her and I cannot let this happen. There are big plans that I have for her in the future! I have all these dreams for her. Huge dreams. They are all of Her. These small things that She does and has always done. The little face She makes when She looks in the mirror. I do love this girl. I am more than Her father. I am Her puppeteer. I have produced this successful little creature.

I wake up. I shower. I do not shave till night. I put on casual clothes. My television is of Her. My radio is of Her. I own no computer. I own a pager and I have a mailbox.

I am eating a deli sandwich while She is at school. A television show is on. It is about mothers entering their young daughters into beauty pageants. Groups of toddlers prance on stage wearing inappropriate amounts of makeup. The mothers beam and clap in the audience.

I take a slow sip of coffee and sigh.

A Paradise



A Paradise by Guillaume Vallee

MAGNA OPERA

words Clifton Patty

The thousands of eyes began to erode her like a small creek carving deep into the earth. A consistent drip of water slowly developed into a towering stalagmite; the weight was beginning to pull on her mind. A drop of sweat slid down her cheek leaving a thin streak of moisture. The bright lights, that had once warmed her skin, reached the point of discomfort. Another drop rolled into the small concave created by the cleft of her chin. She hoped the crowd was unable to see the perspiration collecting on her forehead. The music continued spilling from her. Each time her arm drew over the strings that familiar vibration crawled down her spine. She was at peace in the music. With trembling legs, she readjusted her back in the chair. Her lips parted. She drew her face close to the cello. The girl played in rhythm with her heart; her natural metronome.

The sun buried its head into the side of the world and the only people left on the street had stories to tell. A man looked through the glass and saw an empty store; it would be closing down soon. The window was a bit too dark and he could clearly see his reflection. His hair was a bit messier than usual, and a bit too long, suppose it didn't matter as he would be wearing a mask. (But, if he was caught the police would surely think he was unprofessional!) The air was cold. The night was cold. And he could hear the suction of silence. The man kneeled against the chilled concrete and waited. Mother always spoke of how he would be a surgeon with those steady hands.

The audience watched in awe, so much love leaking from that instrument. Each time her hand crawled over the strings her eyes would tense. Her thin arms would flex and tug close; this body belonged beside the cello. Her hair was pitch black and hung straight down like a cluster of dark needles. Her skin was pale but her face tangerine. The lights rose and the instrument became alive like the body clenching it. It is more alive than the girl. She was just a tumor; an unwanted growth. The symptoms of a smile began to come across her face. Little blossoms of light erupted from her cheeks and nose.

A car pulled in to get gas. The man's tailbone was going numb against the pavement. Tonight is probably not a good night, no, this is the only night. He will not back down again, too many times, too many times. The car's taillights reignite and it slowly pulls into the street and is swallowed by darkness. He can hear the cashier rustling around quietly inside. This is it. (This has to be it.) The cold magnum tucked

tightly in his pants begins to dig into his skin. He stands up like he is on video and moves with planned deliverance. He can feel every inch of his body, and the flesh that holds it together. No one could ever understand this silence; the silence that sneaks into your spine, the silence that aches your muscles, the silence that judges your every move. He slips the cloth mask over his shivering skull and makes his way inside.

The audience sat motionless. They wished to love like her. They wished to be passionate and free like her. Their thoughts slithered along the bodies of their husbands, wives, and partners. They did not love them like the cello player loved her instrument. It all seemed so inadequate. The room grew warmer. Envious astonishment encircled the cello player like a rush of cold air. Her legs buckled inward and her body dipped down. The music continued to pour off the stage and the ears were feasting. The perspiration seeped from her pores. The hair of the musician fell down over her face. A few members of the audience found moisture develop in their eyes and the cello produced a deep groan.

He removed the gun from his waist and shouted words that he would never remember. The cashier stumbled backwards bringing down a stand of lighters and the air became louder. In the background a television played reruns of an old cartoon, a cartoon that the man used to watch as a child. He moved closer to the register and made his demands. His face was burning. His hands were numb. The cello player chewed across the strings and the entire building began to tighten. With each sweep the sky would open wider, and the minds of the crowd drifted upward. "Pull out the money and I won't have to hurt you!" The cashier hurriedly packed a small paper bag with trembling hands. "You're doing fine, just be quick." With the task complete the clerk handed the sack over and reached under the counter for a small red button. The cartoon played happily in the background and the man made his way for the door. With one final stroke, the instrument fell silent and the cellist slowly stood with the lights shifting to illuminate her. The audience jumped to their feet with rapturous applause. The man made contact with the door to find it locked and sirens began to twist into his ears. He smashed his gun into the glass to no avail. His vision blurred and he pointed the gun back to the clerk. The ovation continued long past the curtain fall and in the silence of the night a gunshot rang out.

And lord knows the two performances were greeted by some impassioned critics!



pening up

words Rabiul Hasan

I am walking down this valley all evening.
I am unsure whether I am alone.
You seem to be with me. I am not myself.
I am insecure when you shadow me.
Shadows belie; they are strangers.
We could be beside each other.
Come on. You have many things to say.
Trust me. I am not calling it a day.
Walk in tandem. Speak. You have my ears.

Proportion (she is)

words Sally Evans

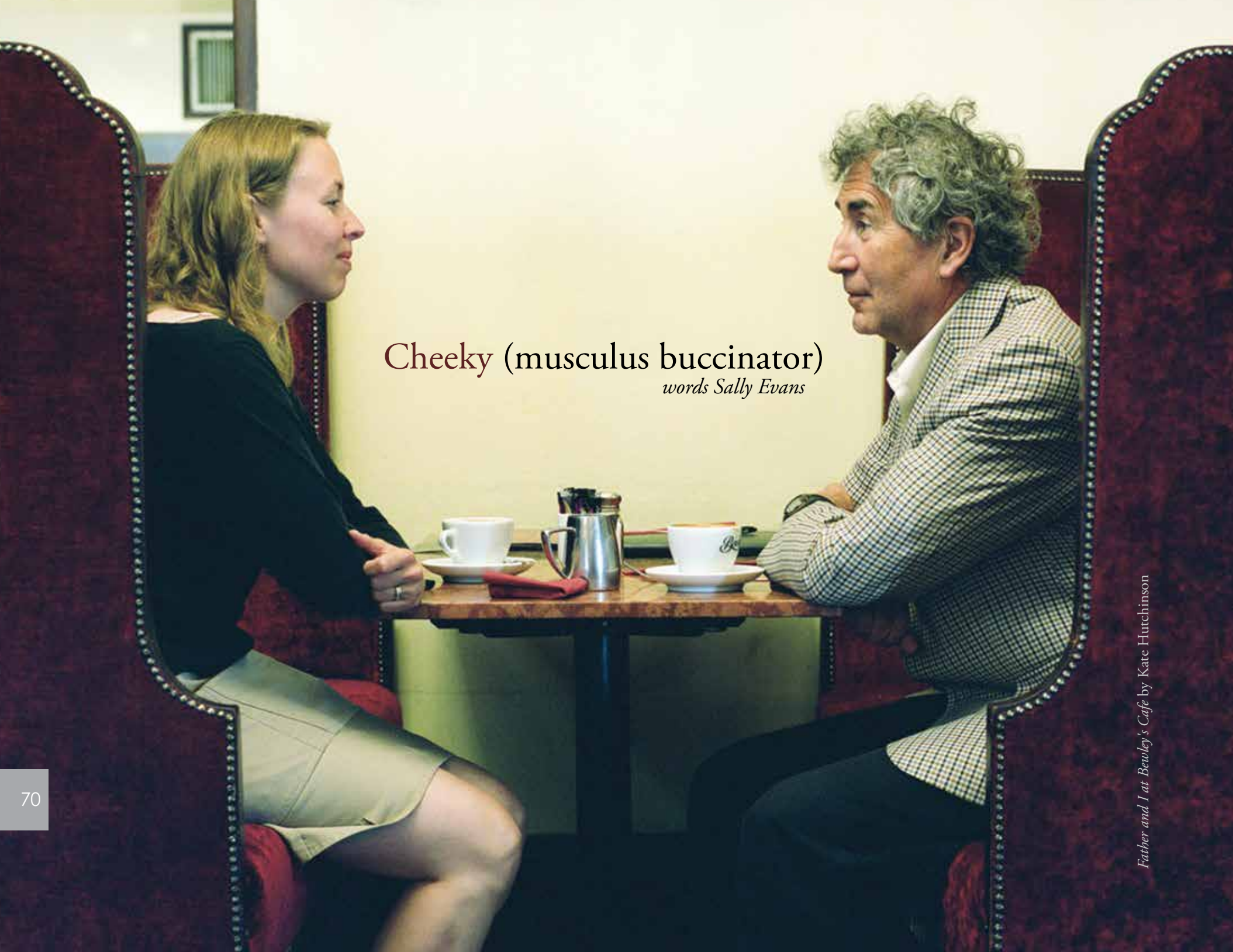
she is short.
about seven heads,
 maybe less.
two heads from

fingertips to elbows
a series of planes
kneecaps
humerus bones
 (laugh)
from the front
to the

back, the
principle shadows
the bulk of chest, lines
 indicated. the

thighs are thicker, the
shoulders are
 sloping
she is
seven heads
she is the
width between the hips
the distance from the
 top
of the skull to the
 tip
of the chin

she is outlined
she is peculiar
she is musculature
she is some body
she is



Cheeky (musculus buccinator)
words Sally Evans

How it
pulls, flattens.

How it holds you,
cheek to teeth,
smiles beneath
 laugh
 for five minutes
 for sixty minutes

how it is a
trumpet, it is
irreverent but
endearing,
the thief
 the look of grief.

How it makes you look,
the vital
piece
 how it keeps
 the beats.

YOUR AIM SHOULD BE

words Sally Evans

to scratch and scrub
away the form until
you feel
tactile traces
of

limbs,
of lips and
liturgies

to simplify it

to reveal rounded
folds and feet,
right before
left

to see change
in direction, to
choose rocky
routes

to be
soft and hard,
take the cup and
drink it,
bow your head and
rinse it



Matchless by Harry Swartz-Turfle

The Poem

words Sally Evans

when I was nine my grandfather said
“babe” and I
climbed up to the big
dictionary, under the small
light, found words,
read them, could not
hold them all – you ask,

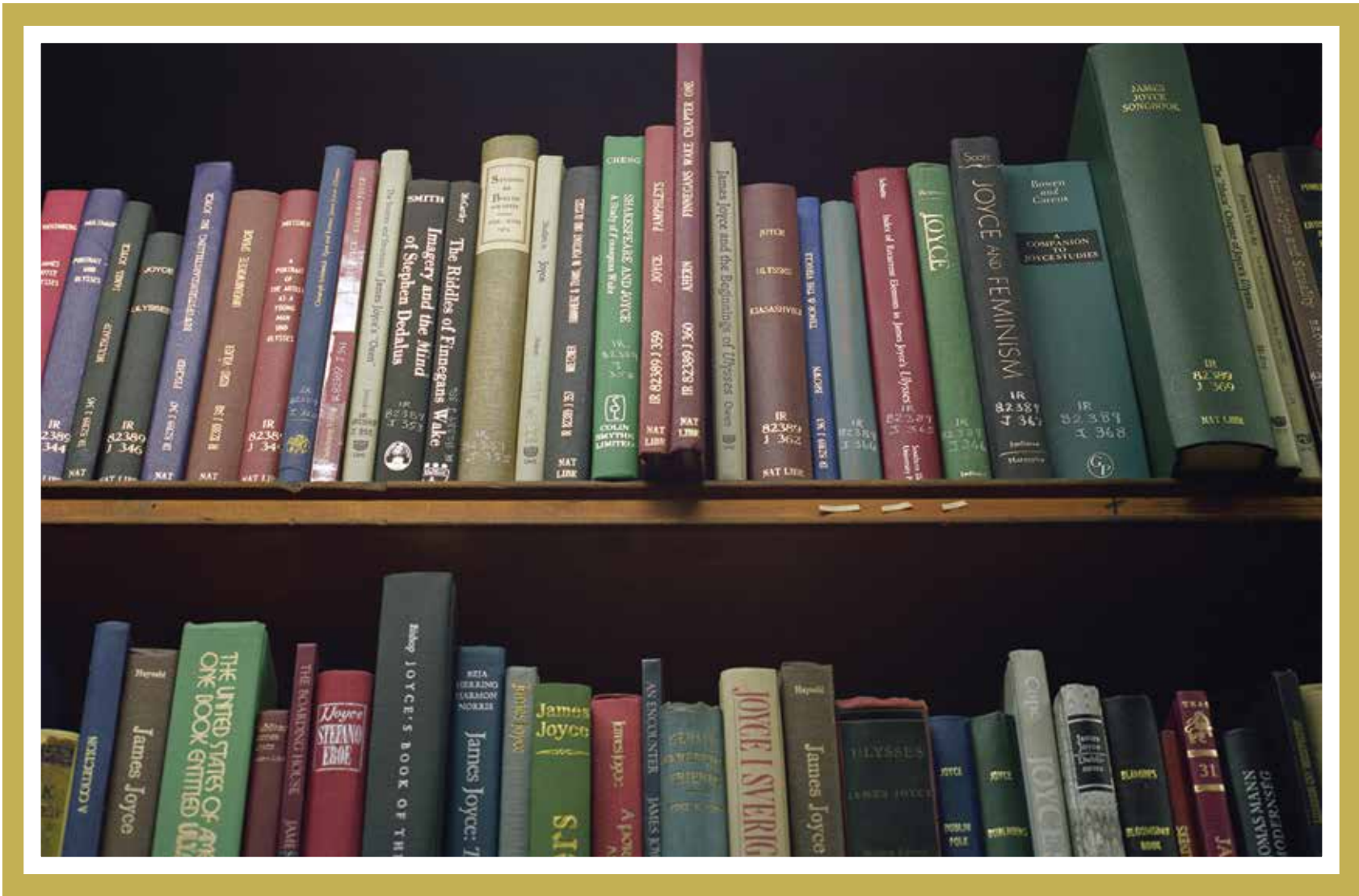
why does the cat
cry, I say, it only matters that
is does, cry, the cat –

not where the rain falls, but
that it is wet and it
feels like my socks,
in the cold, damp –

this couch is not a couch, it is
a ferry,
it is the people who sat
here, sit,

not I, but synapses and
jumping over them,
not our mouths but
wind that
blows through pipes,
like empty bottles
like organs, not
like organs
the way, when you’re quiet, it

doesn’t sound human,
but it’s still true and it
vibrates, like
a memory, like
my grandfather’s voice.



Books on James Joyce in the National Library Stacks by Kate Hutchinson

Authors

CHRISTINA BUTTAFUOCO is a junior majoring in Journalism with a minor in English Writing from Charlotte, N.C. She writes for various print and digital publications, and also served as an Associate Editor for the Apogee her sophomore year. Christina hopes to work for a magazine upon graduation.

As a kid growing up, nothing was more thrilling to **RAINA CALLAHAN** than flipping through the pages of a new book. To this day that passion continues to thrive as she continues to study both literature and writing at High Point University. Raina is drawn to anything and everything with a good premise and loves to learn and experience new forms and subjects in all areas of English. She plans to study law in Chicago, hopefully with a pet cat and a good paperback to accompany her.

COLIE COLLEN lives in Troy, NY, home of Uncle Sam and of her small farm project, Flower Scout (www.flowerscout.blogspot.com). Recent work can also be found in *color treasury 003*. These poems owe homage to Caretaker Farm and to the hills of Western Massachusetts, to goats, pigs, cows, raspberries, blighted tomatoes and pollen-heavy afternoons.

GWEN DAVIES writes stories and novels, teaches writing and works as a plain language specialist – translating English to readable English. She is active in the Nova Scotia writing community and loves the beauty of people beginning to hear their own voices.

SALLY EVANS, from Winston-Salem, NC, is a senior at High Point University who is working towards a degree in English Writing and Studio Arts. Her academic interests have led her to a growing curiosity in writing poetry and the relationship between literature and visual arts. Her writing is often a reflection of this relationship, but it also comments on the human experience both personally and universally, physically and cognitively.

Published in the United States, Canada, and Malaysia, **RABIUL HASAN'S** work has appeared in more than forty journals and anthologies, such as *Mississippi Writers: Reflections of Childhood and Youth*, *The Rockford Review*, *Writers' Forum*, *Widener Review*, *Coe Review*, *The Macguffin*, *The Texas Observer*, *Borderlands*, *The Mochila Review*, *Wind*, *The Black Fly Review*, *Images*, *Modern Images*, *Poet Lore*, *Permafrost*, *Aura Literary Arts Review*, *RiverSedge*, *Tributaries*, *Eclipse*, *Blue Light Review*, *Visions*, *The Southern Poetry Anthology: Louisiana*, and *Louisiana English Journal*. He is the author of

one collection of poems entitled *Madonna of the Rain*, published in 2008 by Rockford Writers' Guild Press in Rockford, Illinois. In addition, he has a critical book entitled *Rediscovering Hemingway in Bangladesh and India*, 1971-2006, published in 2010 by University Press of America, Inc. Hasan, who earned a PhD in English (American Literature) at Texas Tech University, is assistant professor of English at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

LEIGH KOTSILIDIS grew up in Niagara Falls, Ontario. Her poems have appeared in several literary journals including *The Fiddlehead*, *Prism international* and *Prairie Fire*; and have been anthologized in publications *I.V. Lounge Nights*, *This Grace* and *The Hoodoo You Do So Well*. In 2009 and 2010 she was selected as a finalist for the CBC Literary Awards. She is also co-founder of *littlefishcartpress*. She currently lives in Montreal where she works as a freelance graphic designer.

CLIFTON PATTY was raised in the small town of Ringgold, Georgia and been writing since the moment his hands allowed him. Creating stories gives Clifton an opportunity to share his passion with others and also serves as a method of meditation and reflection.

DOUGLAS ROTHSCHILD'S life has been one long miasma of failure, disappointment, coffee and overarching desire. Though he has not yet accomplished anything of note, Mr. Rothschild intends to continue on for some time yet. Some of this life, such as it is, has been chronicled in Bill Luoma's *Work and Days* & Jennifer Moxley's *The Middle Room*.

AARON SMITH is a native of Dallas, Texas, though has lived in Summerfield, North Carolina for nearly six years. He has written several short stories in the past, one of them being "*Mermaid's Tears*," which won second place for fiction in the 2010 Phoenix Literary Festival. He is a Sophomore planning on majoring in Biochemistry, with which he hopes to get into medical school, and minoring in English.

ALICE ZORN lives in Montreal, Canada. Her book of short fiction, *Ruins & Relics*, was a finalist for the 2009 Quebec Writers' Federation First Book Prize. In 2011 she published a novel, *Arrhythmia*. She placed first in *Prairie Fire's* 2006 and 2011 Fiction Contests. At present, she is at work on her second novel and another collection of short fiction.





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