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NO. 37

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EDITOR'S NOTE

barrett
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In creative writing workshops, a common suggestion given to authors is that they use "concrete" imagery—descriptions that fix in place the visual precisely—so as to enhance the effectiveness of their work and the pleasure derived by those who read it. Viciously exact imagery builds a series of connections: a place, scene, or action to the artist; a bridge of that impression between the artist and the page; a moment of recognition when a reader locates that depiction and is altered by it. The importance of such imagery is a cornerstone of the lessons learned in creative writing workshops, and it is one that each artist featured in this issue of *TOUCHSTONE* understands perfectly.

Elizabeth Sanger's "The Burning" illustrates for us a sense of rustic desolation but also the ability to rise above it. The countryside comes alive again in Katherine Buel's "Cavewoman on the Border," yet there is also the image of menace and immediacy. "Sacred Colors, Frayed Memories," by Renée E. D'Aoust, portrays instead the setting and people of Anchorage, a place where the trust you build with others isn't always what it seems. In "The Transformative Properties of Rock Baseball," Bryan Sandala reveals the shining, obverse side of such trust in the relationships he forges with his father and stepfather. Shanna Hajek's "My Father's Hands" creates its own space on the subject of fathers, a world here that is rife with the most vivid of memories. And in "What a Horse Knows About Love and Forgiveness," by Sarah Blackman, the space between the universe of the writer and that of her characters is meshed together, an act that allows us to understand the creative process and the ability that fuels it just a little bit better.

These artists—those who were selected for **TOUCHSTONE's** graduate and undergraduate awards—along with every artist featured in this issue carry with them the ability to forge new dimensions and realities. Similarly, we find this same ability in the work of Sarah Vecci, our featured photographer for this edition. Captured in her black-and-white images are subtle masteries over line and value and contrast. **TOUCHSTONE** appreciates Vecci's stark capacity, and we are honored to feature her work in our magazine.

Further, we are proud to feature an interview with Anthony Doerr, author of the award-winning collection of short stories, **THE SHELL COLLECTOR**, and the recently published novel, **ABOUT GRACE**. In Doerr, we find the aptitude to create image at its zenith, we find the absolute skill it takes to build such descriptions that fix in place the visual precisely, and we find that we are humbled by it. Our sincerest thanks go out to Mr. Doerr for his time and his work.

Finally, our thanks go out to our faculty advisor, Imad Rahman, the KSU Fine Arts Council, the KSU English Department, and the Creative Writing faculty, particularly Susan Jackson Rodgers, for their enduring support.

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FOR MY BROTHER ON THE OCCASION OF HIS 18TH BIRTHDAY

emily king

i had to scrub and scrub
myself sterilized
before i held you,
masked,
but even through—
you smelt of God
in baby breath
exhalations.

you are a man now.
physically, you announce yourself

your angles explode
wrists thrust out from sleeves
shoulders, too broad,
rebel against
confinement

enormous hands
uncomfortable in their size
grip and flex
grip and flex
ready to crush,
but not—

even your voice,
dipping and deepening
an octave
in an argument
(yes, i note this too).

But i remember you;
fresh out of God
swaddled in infant vulnerability

that beautiful frailty still exists
indeed, frailty is still
beauty,
even as a man

Watching your blue veins
under the translucence
of your temple
pump, pump that
blood—
bearing our connection
and our memory

CYNICISM

diana hyle

I have seen the sea foaming against the March-cold shore
and the sand rippled by lakes like oceans.
I have been places and seen things—all I think I want—
Like the surf sound of water over cliffs.

What awe to be the first to sight these wonders—
to be an explorer. It is like falling in love.
But to come later, after the world has fallen out of love
with such things?

QUANTRELL'S LAST RIDE

nathan
dorsett

**MANHATTAN, KS
A POEM WRITTEN ON THE USAGE OF DEPLETED URANIUM
NEAR A CITY WINDIER THAN DODGE**

If you listen closely,
you can almost hear
them, over the shadowing
saddles of hills silent
with crickets—

When the resounding
of the bombs pauses. Not too
far off, Quantrell and his men
are firing at the moon like
disenchanted astronauts
past the Civil War,
passed existence.

Our powder isn't black;
our dust is only white.

CAVEWOMAN ON THE BORDER

katherine
buel

I was wearing my tough jeans. I used to have some overalls. They had patches on both knees and were worn white in places, and there's nothing better for adventuring than overalls. I told Mama that when she took them away. I told her there just ain't nothing better for real work than overalls. Her eyes and lips got small when I said that. Her face always bunched up in the middle when I was being "troublesome." She said I looked more backwards every day. Backwards was the word she used for country people. And she said, Don't you say ain't. When I asked her why not she said it was backwards.

I thought about hunting for my overalls. Mama never threw anything away. They were probably on the top shelf of the linen closet where she put the jackknife I found in the woods last summer. But I figure it doesn't do any good to be troublesome unless you need to be. So I wore my jeans. They were plenty good and had a rip in one knee. I figured they were a compromise. Papa was always telling me to compromise, which meant doing something you didn't want to do because Mama didn't like what you wanted. But they were plenty good. I thought with a little work I could rip the other knee.

It was summer. I liked summer because I didn't have to do math and Mama made ice cream. I was rubbing two sticks together in the backyard, trying to make a fire to cook my oatmeal, when Mama hollered out the window.

"Jean! Jeannie! What are you doing? Are you rubbing sticks again? What did I tell you about that? You want to start a fire? You come inside. And you leave those sticks alone."

I put the sticks in the doghouse, where I thought they'd be safe, and went inside. Mama was kneading dough. She had on her best dress under her apron, which seemed strange on a Tuesday. Her hair was curled and she was wearing lipstick.

"Do you want to be a pyromaniac?" she said when I sat down at the kitchen table.

I didn't know what she meant so I didn't say anything.

She ripped the dough in half to make the loaves. "I do wish you wouldn't try to start a fire."

"I just wanted to cook my breakfast. And you shouldn't worry. I got smoke once but I've never made a fire."

"If I catch you rubbing sticks one more time you'll be sorry. You'll take piano lessons again. And practice your scales every day."

I got quiet then and decided not to rub sticks in sight of the house anymore.

Mama formed the loaves and put them on the pan to rise. "We've got company coming this morning, Jean."

"What for?"

"Coffee and cookies."

Mama washed her hands and dried them on her apron. She took it off, rolled it up, and carried it to the laundry room. She came back smoothing her dress. She had flour on her cheek.

"I mean why are we having company?" I unraveled the denim at my knee.

"I was going to the Millers'. We're catching frogs today."

Mama pulled a glass platter out of the cupboard and wiped off the dust.

"What do you want with some slimy reptile?"

"Tom says they're anfibeans."

"Amphibians. The Millers are good people, but I don't like you running

around with those boys." Mama checked on some cookies in the oven. "There are plenty of nice girls for you to be friends with. Don't you like Becky Ausly? She's such a nice girl."

"Becky Ausly is not a nice girl. She called Megan Mosley a fat sow on the last day of school so I had to kick dirt at her, and I don't think she'd like to be friends with me after that."

"You shouldn't kick dirt at people. We're a civilized family, Jean. Civilized. Now, when Becky and her mother get here, I want you to apologize to Becky for kicking dirt at her."

I stopped picking at my jeans. "What do you mean when she gets here?"

"I told you we were having company. Becky and her mother are coming for coffee and cookies." Mama took the cookies from the oven and set them on the stove to cool. "And you will apologize to Becky."

"I will not. I'd kick dirt at her again if she called anyone a fat sow."

Mama's face was getting tight. "I don't care what she did. We do not kick dirt at people."

"But, Mama—"

"No buts."

"Fine, if you really want me to lie, I'll apologize."

"And you had better sound sincere."

There was no sense in arguing. If I wanted to get away to catch frogs later, I'd have to apologize. It did seem funny, though, that it was okay to lie but not okay to kick dirt at someone who called someone else a fat sow. But it wasn't the lying that I minded really. It was the apologizing.

I was sitting on the porch swing, picking a scab at my elbow, when Becky Ausly and her mama arrived. I was wearing shorts and an ugly yellow

shirt with flowers on it. Mama tried to make me wear a dress, and I had to put up quite a fight. She did win on the shoes. My brown leather Sunday shoes were awfully uncomfortable. I wanted to go barefoot or at least wear my cowboy boots, but Mama threatened piano lessons again. I hoped she wouldn't make that a habit.

I knew I should walk out to the driveway to say hello to Becky and her mother, but I didn't. I worked on my scab. It came off and a thin stream of blood started down my arm. I wiped my elbow on the swing cushion.

Mama must have heard the car because she came out onto the porch. "Where are your manners?" she whispered and started down the steps. "Hello, Elaine! How wonderful of you to come!"

Mrs. Ausly smiled. She had very large white teeth. Her dress was too tight like she'd outgrown it. I wondered why she didn't buy a new one. She sure dressed Becky nice enough. Becky's lace socks were very white and so were her shoes. Her pink dress had lace at the neck, at the bottom, and at the sleeves. Her blonde hair was braided into a shiny rope, and I guess she was pretty, but she looked kind of ridiculous to me.

Mama looked back at me from the walkway. "Jean, you come down here and say hello."

I got up from the swing and went down to say hello. "Hello," I said to no one in particular.

"Hello," said Mrs. Ausly.

Becky didn't say anything. She didn't even look at me.

"What pretty brown hair you have," said Mrs. Ausly.

I frowned because I had short, ratty hair. Mama had yanked out some of the tangles but it wasn't pretty.

Mama squeezed my shoulder. "Don't you have something to say, Jean?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Ausly," I said.

Mama squeezed a little harder. "I mean to Becky."

I stared at the pavement. I didn't know what to do. I had decided to apologize because I didn't want to take piano lessons and I did want to catch frogs, but now that it came to it I wasn't so sure. Mama's hand moved to my neck and pinched me.

"Sorry I kicked dirt at you, Becky," I said.

Becky didn't say anything at first. I stared at her shoes. Mrs. Ausly coughed, and I saw Becky sway forward a bit like she'd been nudged in the back.

"Sorry I wasn't very nice," she said.

"There now," said Mama. "That's all cleared up and we can go inside for coffee and cookies."

"Wonderful," said Mrs. Ausly. "The girls should be just fine now."

Mama and Mrs. Ausly started toward the house. Becky and I followed behind. We were both watching the pavement, then the steps, then the porch. There might not be any more dirt kicking or name calling, but I doubted we would be just fine.

Mama had cleaned. Papa was at his office—the insurance place with the plastic trees—or I'm sure he would have put a stop to this. Usually, his newspapers and model cars covered the coffee table, but they were gone. Now there was a plate of cookies and a tray with the orange juice and coffee and sugar and cream. We never had cream. Mama said it was fattening, but I think it was expensive. We weren't poor or anything, but Mama didn't like to waste money. The windows were clean and the chairs and carpet too. All this clean was making me nervous and I looked over at the side table to see if my cap gun was still there. It was gone. Instead, there was a Bible.

"What a beautiful house," said Mrs. Ausly. She was standing with her hands on Becky's shoulders.

Mama looked a little embarrassed. "Thank you," she said. "I've got fresh coffee in the sitting room. Shall we?"

I sat in the chair nearest the cookies. Mama sat nearest the coffee. Mrs. Ausly sat by the Bible and Becky sat on the couch, which was good because I could hardly see her around Mama. I was reaching for a cookie when Mama said, "Go sit by Becky. And take her a cookie."

I didn't know what to do. I thought about running. I figured I could make it out the door and into the woods. But there were those piano lessons again, and I didn't want to be dramatic. I got two cookies and went over to Becky. I handed her one and sat down at the opposite end of the couch. Becky nibbled at her cookie. I ate mine in three bites.

Mrs. Ausly and Mama started talking about someone I didn't know. Whoever they were talking about had bleached hair and fake nails. She was dating somebody with an earring, which Mrs. Ausly seemed to find offensive and Mama said she'd never seen him before and couldn't say one way or the other. Mrs. Ausly said he really was quite rude, and it was too bad because his father was such a nice man. It just went to show that you had to be extra careful these days. Becky sure wouldn't date anyone without her permission. But she had her eye on a few possibilities, when Becky got a little older, of course.

Becky took a big bite out of her cookie then and scratched at the lace around her neck. I felt a little sorry for her—and I wanted to get away from this dull talk—so I asked her if she wanted to see my room. Becky looked at her mama.

"How nice," said Mrs. Ausly.

"Yes," said Mama. "Why don't you girls go and play?"

I wanted to tell Mama that we were too old *to play* and that showing

someone your room isn't *playing*, but I didn't want to ruin the escape.

"Come on," I said to Becky.

I led Becky down the hall to my room. She stood in the doorway. I sat on the bed and tried to think of something to do.

"I've got a magnifying glass," I said. "It's in my desk."

Usually, my desk was covered with paper and pencils, markers, rocks, glue, and the Popsicle stick house I was making for my crickets. The house was still there and the jar of crickets, but everything else was gone. I opened the top drawer. Someone—I know it was Mama—had swept it all into the drawer. This new cleanliness was getting tiresome. Who knew what she'd done with my cap gun? I shoved everything aside and pulled out the magnifying glass. It was old and scratched but still good. Papa gave it to me for my birthday last year.

"Let's go burn holes in some leaves," I said.

"Don't you have any proper things? Can't we listen to music or paint our nails or something?"

"What on earth is wrong with you?"

"With me? There's nothing wrong with *me*. You're like some kind of cave-woman or something." Becky turned to leave.

"Now hold on just a minute. You go running out there you'll get us both into trouble."

Becky turned back and crossed her arms. "Well, what are we going to do?"

"Do you want to play cards? Or would that be improper?"

"Improper."

"You're a real snob, you know. Can you play poker?"

"I will *not* play poker. What about slapjack?"

I dug around in my closet for my cards. There were clothes on the floor, most of them dirty. The lid of my lunchbox was broken and everything had spilled out. There were arrowheads, pieces of wire, shotgun shells, and all kinds of things scattered in the closet. I pawed through the mess until I found my deck of cards.

We played slapjack for a while. Becky was rotten slow and pretty soon the back of her hand was bright red. She agreed to play poker. I taught her how to play, and we wagered peanuts I found under the bed. She caught on quick and beat me a few times, which raised her considerably in my opinion.

I eventually managed to get all my peanuts back, which was good because I sure didn't want her thinking she was better than I was. She got a little huffy when I took the last of them.

"It's a filthy game anyway," she said.

I pushed the peanuts back under the bed. I didn't say anything. Some people talk stupid when they lose.

"How long are you staying?" I said. "I've got to get to the Millers'."

"Why are you going out there? Don't you know a farm is a filthy, dangerous place? And those boys are nothing but riffraff."

"Sam and Tom ain't riffraff. Sam had the highest grade in math, and Tom got a medal at the rodeo."

Becky fixed one of her braids. "Who cares about those things?"

"Don't you talk that way about my friends or I'll cut off your hair."

She said she was sorry, but I don't think she meant it.

I decided to talk about something safe. "Which teacher do you think you'll have next year?"

"Mama says Mrs. Cox is the best sixth grade teacher. She requested that I be in her class."

"I want Mrs. Bronson. I heard she takes her class on field trips and lets you do papier-mache."

Becky smiled. "Really? Mrs. Cox teaches all the girls to sew." Then she wrinkled her nose. "Sewing is better to learn than papier-mache."

"I don't see why."

"At least we won't be in the same class next year."

I was going to agree when Mama called from down the hall. "Becky, dear, your mother's ready."

Thank God for that.

After Becky and her mama left I changed back into my jeans and a red shirt that *didn't* have any flowers on it. I was pulling on my cowboy boots when Mama came to my door.

"Jean, I thought I'd take you into town for a haircut. I need to get a new Sunday shirt for your father, and I thought we could stop by the barber and get your hair trimmed."

"But, Mama, you always cut my hair yourself."

"I know. But wouldn't it be a nice treat? And we could have your hair braided. If we just got all that scraggly stuff out of your eyes, people could see how pretty you are."

"I told you I was catching frogs today."

"You've got all summer to catch frogs, Jean. You can spend a day with me for once."

I nudged aside a pile of paper and books with my toe and uncovered my belt. It was a one of Papa's old belts, a dry, cracked piece of leather that

I'd cut short and punched holes in. I worked it through my belt loops slowly to buy thinking time. Clearly, drastic action was necessary. I would not get a haircut. I would not miss out on catching frogs.

"I've got to finish cleaning up the dishes," Mama said. "You change into some different clothes and then we'll go."

I listened to her footsteps down the hall. When I heard the clinking of dishes in the kitchen, I went to the window and climbed out. My room was on the ground floor, so all I had to do was drop a few feet to the grass. Trouble was I'd have to cross the backyard to the woods, and that meant sneaking by the kitchen window.

I crawled toward the oak tree. If I could make it there, I could dodge over to the doghouse, then to the woodpile, then to the woods. I pretended I was invisible.

"Jean! Jeannie!" Mama called from the kitchen window. "What in the name of nonsense do you think you're doing?"

I ran.

"Come back here! Come back here this minute!"

I ran for the woods. I charged through the undergrowth. The thin, prickly branches of the cedars whipped my skin and caught at my hair. I ran until my breath came in sharp puffs. When I reached the ravine that marked the edge of town, I stopped. I thought about going back but only for a minute. A choice between braids and frogs didn't take long to make. And I'd made up my mind when I dropped out that window. Nothing gained from regrets. I jogged down to the narrow stream at the bottom of the ravine, splashed through the shallow water, and walked up the other side.

The Miller farm was on the edge of the woods. After another ten minutes or so of pushing through the close cedars, I got to their land. I climbed through the fence and jogged towards the barn. Sam was sitting

on a tractor tire by the door. He was tan and blond like Tom. But he was my age. Tom was bigger and older. When I got close, I slowed down and had almost caught my breath when I reached him. He had a tiny snake cupped in his hands. He showed it to me when I sat down beside him.

"Where you been?" said Sam. "I thought you were coming this morning."

I took off my boot and shook out the dirt. "My mother had Becky Ausly and her mother over for cookies. It was awful. I just now got away."

"Becky Ausly was at your house? Thought you didn't like her."

"I don't like her. You know what she's like. But as long as you and me get Mrs. Bronson next, we won't be in class with her."

Sam released his snake. It disappeared into the grass. "She's not all that bad."

"Oh yeah? You think Becky would set foot out here? She thinks farms are dirty. That girl wouldn't know a frog if she saw it. She ain't tough, Sam."

"I know, Jean. You don't have to tell me about Becky. But most girls ain't tough."

"You'll sure never catch me in lace. I ain't no prissy girl."

"You'd look like a damn fool in lace."

"You're damn right. Where's Tom? Let's go catch frogs."

"He can't come. The tractor broke down. Tom's helping fix it. And some of the cows got out last night. We got them all rounded up again, but the fences need repairing. It's just you and me today."

That was disappointing. Sam was all right. He was nice and thoughtful but kind of boring. Tom had a crooked nose from when he jumped out of the hayloft. Sam didn't do things like that.

"Shucks, Sam," I said. "Why can't Tom let your papa do the fences? We're

supposed to catch frogs today."

"You and me can catch frogs. Tom's busy." Sam stood up and headed for the barn. "You coming or what?"

I ran after him.

We brushed the horses and took them outside. We tied the lead ropes to their halters to make reins. Sam jumped onto Cal, a fat chestnut Quarter Horse, from the tire. I rode their old black Shetland pony, Jax. He side-stepped away from the tire when I tried to get on.

"Just jump on from the ground," Sam said. "He's not even ten hands high."

I knotted my hands in Jax's thick mane and squirmed onto his back. He tried to get away from me, but I knew most of his tricks. We trotted after Sam and Cal, and Jax's choppy stride bounced me around quite a bit. We cut across a wide green field. Sam jumped Cal over some old rusty barrels that were lined up end to end. We slowed to a walk as we neared the creek.

I looked back at the farm. Across the field, the barns looked crowded together. The house stood a little way off, and Mrs. Miller was hanging laundry on the line. I couldn't see Tom or Mr. Miller. They were probably working on the tractor in one of the barns. The fields were thick with wild grass and weeds.

The tallest trees grew along the creek. We jumped off the horses and turned them loose. The field was fenced in, and they couldn't go far. With the way they both dropped their noses to the ground and started ripping up mouthfuls of grass, I doubted they'd move at all. We hung the lead ropes and halters over the fence and crawled through.

The banks of the creek were pretty steep. The trees stretched up on either side, but just beyond them the banks angled down to the water.

Sam and I slid down, bringing a stream of dirt and rocks with us. I took off my boots and wedged them in between some tree roots. Sam did the same and we rolled up our pants legs. We trudged along through the water, which was about knee deep, and the wet crept up our rolled jeans until we were soaked. We started splashing because we were already wet, and it was just as well because soon I fell into a deep spot and went under completely anyway.

In some places the creek was deep and dark and lazy and had a layer of soft mud on the bottom that squished between your toes. Other places it was just a few inches and the clearest water, so clear you could drink it, bubbled over little stones. There was one spot with a floor of smooth dark rock. A layer of algae made it slick as ice. It was my favorite place. It was like it was put there just for fun. But you did have to be careful. The summer before, Tom had cut his foot pretty bad on that rock and couldn't come back to the creek for two weeks. Sam and I slid on the rock for a while. Sam laughed when I fell down, which made me mad so I threw mud at him. He went over to the bank and dug up some mud that looked like clay. When he threw it, it hit me on the cheek and stuck. I scrambled over to the other bank. Mud flew across the water until we were both covered in brown splotches. Sam told me I looked like a corpse just come out of a wet grave.

After a few more bends we came to our usual stopping place. The roots of a huge cottonwood tree jutted out from the bank. The dirt had been washed out from under the roots and made a good place for storage. Sam pulled out the bucket we kept near the trunk. I looked inside. It was half full of murky water.

"Where's our fish?"

Sam dumped out the bucket. "I let him go."

"What for?"

"You can't just keep a fish in a bucket forever."

"Tom wouldn't have let him go."

We took the bucket out to the middle of the creek where there was a wide rock sticking out of the water. We sat down with the bucket between us.

I dangled my feet in the water. "What are we going to do with our frogs?"

Sam shrugged. "I don't know. Let them go?"

"Then what's the point of catching them?"

"If you don't want to catch frogs, we can go back."

"I didn't say I didn't want to catch frogs. I was just wondering what we were going to do with them. I bet Tom would figure out something."

"Tom doesn't care much about living things. Even people sometimes. You shouldn't think too much about him, Jean."

"I wasn't thinking about him."

"He's not always nice."

"Shut up, Sam."

Sam lay back on the rock and shut his eyes. Streaks of mud were drying on his face. In a few minutes, I heard him snore. I shook him awake.

"What're you sleeping for?"

Sam rubbed his eyes and sat up. He yawned. "You'd be tired too if you chased a bunch of dumb cows all night."

"Yeah, sure. Let's get our frogs." I picked up the bucket and started to slide off the rock into the water when Sam grabbed my arm.

"Hear that?"

"What? I don't hear anything."

"Listen." Sam leaned forward. "Hear it? It's like crying or something."

I heard it. It was like crying. It was coming from somewhere down the creek.

"Come on." Sam jumped off the rock and ran, spraying water. I ran after him. The sound of the water splashing was loud and I couldn't see around Sam. He stopped and I caught up with him. The water calmed when I stopped beside him. Now I could see what was crying. Up close, it was more like screaming, just a weak scream. The water was shallow here and a fawn lay on its side. The white flecks on its tan coat were bright and clean above the water. The water was moving slowly, carrying a heavy line of blood downstream. Sam and I moved closer to the fawn. One front leg looked fine, but the other was bent at a funny angle. The back legs were the worst. One had been torn away completely. The other was still attached but only just. I felt sick.

"We'd better go get Tom," said Sam. He took my hand. "Let's go."

"What happened to it?"

"I don't know. It might've gotten torn up by a field machine. Or maybe coyotes. Let's go, Jean."

I shook my head.

Sam tugged my hand. "What're you doing?"

"I'll wait here."

"Why?"

"It's so sad, Sam."

"Don't be stupid. It's practically dead. Probably doesn't even know we're here."

"Go get Tom."

Sam grunted at me then climbed the bank. He disappeared over the edge, and I heard the grasses swishing as he took off running.

I kneeled down in the water. The fawn had stopped screaming, but its mouth was open and its throat was moving like it wanted to cry but didn't have any breath. I touched its face. It didn't move. I didn't look at its legs anymore. The fur was fine and damp. The brown eyes looked kind of foggy. I petted its face and thin neck and sat in the water with its head on my thighs. I don't know how long I sat there. My legs were cramped and my fingers were cold and clammy long before I heard voices at the top of the bank.

Sam and Tom came sliding down to the water. Tom's face was pale and his hair was messy. His hands were dark with grease like he'd only wiped them off. He was carrying a shotgun. When he got to the water he stopped and turned to Sam.

"Take Jean back to the truck and wait for me. I'll only be a minute."

"What are you going to do, Tom?" I asked.

"Go on, Jeannie. Go with Sam."

I stood up. The fawn's head sank down into the water and I reached down to lift it, but Tom told me to go. My legs were stiff from kneeling and shook as I followed Sam up the bank. I didn't look back. We came up on a field I didn't recognize. Mr. Miller's truck was parked on the dirt road alongside the field. Sam and I got in the bed of the truck because our clothes were wet. I sat on the floor.

"What's he going to do, Sam?"

"He's got to kill it."

"Can't we just take care of it or something?"

"Ah, shut up, Jean."

The shot came pretty soon after that. I looked at Sam, but he wouldn't meet my eyes. When Tom came back to the truck he didn't say anything. He got in the cab and drove us back to the farm.

The sun was going down and the barns made long shadows. I could see Mama's car parked in front of the house. Tom parked the truck next to her station wagon. Sam and I jumped out of the truck bed.

"Looks like your mother's here," said Tom. "I've got to get back to the fences. Don't think on that deer, Jeannie. It was already dead." Tom walked off toward the barns.

Sam and I stood by the truck.

"It didn't seem right," I said, "killing that fawn. It just didn't seem right."

Sam was looking over the fields to the creek. "We just put it out of its misery."

"You mean Tom. He killed it."

"He had to. You just don't understand the way things work on a farm, Jean. It ain't all fun."

The gravel hurt my feet and I told Sam I'd left my boots at the creek.

"I'll go back for them," said Sam. "I left mine too. You can come get them tomorrow."

"I don't know, Sam."

"What do you mean?"

"I just don't know," I said. "I might not have time."

Sam was about to say something else, but Mama and Mrs. Miller came out onto the porch. I was almost glad because I didn't want Sam to say I was stupid for getting funny over some dead deer. Mama said goodbye to Mrs. Miller then came down the steps. She walked over to us.

"Hello, Sam," she said. She looked at me with her face tight. "In the car, Jean."

"Bye, Sam," I said.

"See you tomorrow, right?"

I didn't answer. I got in the backseat.

Mama got in and started the car. I saw her eyes in the rearview mirror. They looked small. "What did you think you were doing?"

"Sorry, Mama," I said. "Tom killed a fawn today. It was hurt bad."

"What are you talking about?"

"It was all bloody and sad. I didn't think things like that happened out here. It wasn't fun at all."

We pulled out onto the empty road. Mama looked over her shoulder at me. "You shouldn't see things like that, Jean. Not that you didn't get what was coming to you. You see how ugly things are in the country? I hope you understand now why I don't want you coming out here. Just ugly."

"It ain't all ugly."

"Isn't. A dead deer? Wouldn't you rather play nice with Becky Ausly? You girls did so well together today."

I didn't say anything. We drove over the bridge that marks the edge of town. I looked back at the farm and the fields and the trees. I didn't want to play with Becky—even though it *ain't* playing. She wasn't adventurous. She'd be straight scared of the creek after seeing that fawn. I bet she would. But I was tough. I wore boots and jeans. I caught frogs and fish. I would be back tomorrow.

ooo

DEGENERATIVE VISION

j. g.
riekenberg

There are holes in my vision.
They come more often now,
Or my eyes are getting faster in the corners,
Catching flashes
Like scratches in a film
While those watching the movie
Blink.

TREE I

erin erhart

what if i told you that
from these branches hang
the faces of a million more like me
and, in this darkness,
all my secrets
and a million more like you
that
tree trunks like cathedral doors
swing outward
let in the soft night
and keep a quiet warmth
that greatness grows not from the
glaring light of day
but deep beneath the canopy
firm within the steady earth
root first into the growing dawn

THE BURNING

elizabeth
sanger

It has come to the end of our days, and we
know it. It is a long fall.
Habit dictates we bring home
spiced apples and sit on the porch with coffee
through the lengthening darks, hoping
our silences will shape the hard truth for us.
But as we were together, we fall apart.
You spend your time praying
in abstractions—mercy, shame, empirical figures
on the merit of *here* versus *there*—and I walk away
into the field of dying cow corn beside our house,
sink myself deep amongst the crinkled gold-
brown husks. Wind moves through, the corn
shivers up. It is past harvest. The story goes
that God loves this world so much he gives us
October, readies our crops and sets fire to all
that's left. So the opposite of love is not-
love, is absence. All for the joy of building it
up again. But there is a burning between us
yet. Come once into this field, this fire,
where I can see you. Stand at the center. Be
as the burning taper giving shape to the flame.
A thing you can touch.

THE TRANSFORMATIVE PROPERTIES OF ROCK BASEBALL

bryan
sandala

The triage room is bright and painful. Like the sun on eyes accustomed to dark. Red is the only color around. The blood-red of the used needle boxes and HAZMAT containers. I'm fifteen, in the hospital for the first time, never having even broken a bone, sitting on a blue plastic chair, shivering.

I'm holding my hand over my left eye—partly out of pain, partly because I don't want anything to fall out or get in. I was hit in the left eye with a rock earlier this morning, during a game of rock baseball. I suppose I lost. My right eye is crying, a small torrent of tears pooling out uncontrollably. I'm not sad, I'm scared.

The male nurse, tall and unsympathetic, sits across from me in a powder blue scrub suit. His hands are Paul Bunyan big. He's hunched over a clipboard, asking me questions. No eye contact.

"The pain is only in your left eye?" he asks.

"Yes," I say.

"And you were hit in that eye with a rock?"

"Yes."

"A pretty big rock?"

"I guess."

I want to lie down on the cushioned examination table next to me. Scratch that—I need to lie down. My head bobbles like a beach ball in the ocean. The room is moving around me. I'm on a slow-spinning carousel. I want to wrap myself in the coarse paper on the table and never wake up. I just want to put my head down.

"Be sure to keep your head up and elevated," the nurse says. I stop bending forward—stop trying to be sleepy, stop wanting to vomit on the slick

linoleum floor. I want to vomit but don't want to vomit. The cooldown afterward isn't worth the muscles pulsing in my stomach. *Don't even think about what you had for breakfast. Cereal. Cottage cheese. Juice. Banana.*

"Stay up, Bryan," Irwin, my stepfather, says. He taps my shoulder and I flinch. My whole body feels tender. I'm not ready for him to touch me. He's still too new, still too fresh. I could never hug him. I want my father to be here for support, for sympathy, for any tactile confirmation of love. But I have Irwin for now, and the irony makes my head hurt even more.

ooo

AFTER a scheduled visitation dinner when he was dropping Brett and me off at our mother's new house, I insisted that my father come up to see a new video game system I had just received, the Sega CD. The system played games and CDs, had great, booming sound and graphics—I was proud and needed to show it off. He didn't hesitate to accept the invitation. Six months after the separation, when my parents remained amicable, my father was still invited into my mother's home.

My father followed me up the stairs, running up behind me. He said a hurried "hello" to my mother. She stayed downstairs.

He sat on the edge of my bed with Brett as I flipped the machine on and demonstrated a game, a side-scrolling space shooter called Sol-Feace with full motion animated video and voice acting. I played standing up, yelled triumphantly when I did well, punching buttons and resetting when I failed. The enthusiasm was uncontainable. My father beamed, loosening his tie and rolling up his dress shirtsleeves. As I played, he asked questions, excited along with me. I begged him to give me quiet, to let me focus.

He eventually got off the bed and spread out on the floor, bumping his loafered feet into my right table. He curled up his legs and rested his head on his hands. When that position tired him, he sat Indian style. A

kid around a campfire.

I sat next to my father on the floor and showed him the basic game controls—this felt natural again. I allowed myself to believe for the moment I lived with him full time. He had to be reading my mind. He smiled and slouched a bit. He could've sat there with me forever.

"Mom got you this game stuff?" he asked as I was rolling up the controller cord.

"No, Irwin did when he was here last week," I said. My mother was only "talking with and seeing" Irwin at the time. He still lived in upstate New York, in Rochester. She went up to visit with him once recently. He was becoming a regular topic of conversation in my mother's home.

My father's face soured. I couldn't see his teeth anymore. His back straightened. I knew he'd met Irwin when he and my mother went to her fifteenth high school reunion. She and Irwin were a couple her junior year. They became reacquainted at the reunion. There's a picture of them at the reunion dinner, smiling together. My father is in the background, out of focus. Irwin has red-eye and a casual smirk. I didn't know any other history.

My father got up off the floor, using his hand to prop up his rounded girth. He shut my bedroom door and put his hands on his sides. "Oh well, that's nice, I guess," he said, managing the least possible compliment. I felt resented and hated by him. I knew I'd made a big mistake telling about Irwin's gift. My father didn't know whether to sit or stand; he fidgeted.

"Well, just keep it here, okay?" he said. I was planning on taking the system with me back and forth between my parents' homes, as with all the possessions I used regularly. With every week's switch between homes, I got better at packing a suitcase.

"Sure," I said. I didn't look at his face.

"I have to go." He came to me, hugged me tight, and whispered in my ear: "I love you."

One week later, when I was staying at my father's house during his visitation, he bought me an identical Sega CD system. "This one stays here," he said, sternly.

ooo

A HOSPITAL worker goes by with a cart of stinking food trays. I almost gag. My breakfast isn't staying down, maybe because of trauma to my eye. The nurse directs me to a bathroom and Irwin reminds me to keep my head up. All I want is to put it on a pillow.

I cover the toilet seat with a single layer of toilet paper. My head spins faster as I do the work. I sit on the cold seat, thinking about germs and being sick and wanting to get out of here and wanting my eye to stop throbbing. I'm nauseous and delirious. I want to puke all over the floor but can't. I jiggle my throat and squeeze my trachea. I try to will my stomach into letting go. I can't. I don't need to be sitting on the toilet, but sitting makes me calm. Breathe deep. Relax. Breathe deep. I wonder where my mother is—I wonder where my father is.

ooo

RICKY, who sat at the bus stop with me, wanted to play rock baseball as we waited. For his bat, he grabbed a wooden stake spray-painted pink. I pitched rounded rocks I found near the curb. The bus was late.

Ricky missed every single throw. He swung each time with the force of a home run he could visualize. The bus was rounding the corner, breaking through the quiet of 6:30 a.m. with gurgling diesel motion. Ricky pleaded for one more pitch. I said the bus was coming. Ricky pleaded. I dropped my backpack. One last pitch: a fat, gray, jagged rock he hit straight and hard with that flat piece of wood right into my eye. A home run.

I hit the ground and my eyes closed for a century. I pushed up from the roadway and those little pavement pebbles dug into my palms. I held my hand over my eye. It hurt and the pain was growing a thousand-fold. I tried to rub the pain out, but it got worse, stabbing at my brain. I staggered to my feet as the bus came and its brakes whistled.

"Oh man, fuck. I'm sorry, man," Ricky said. "Let's take you home."

I could see through my right eye that his eyes were doe-wide. He tried to hold me up. He gripped my shoulder and held my backpack. This was not the trash-talking Ricky I played basketball with.

"No, I'll be okay. I just want to get on," I said.

Ricky followed me on the bus. I moved to the back and sat in an empty seat. Ricky sat away from me, but watched. The pain was spreading throughout my back, my legs. I needed to get off the bus.

I begged the driver to stop. Ricky begged too. She came to an abrupt stop fifty feet from where I boarded. I started the quarter-mile walk home. My feet were tingling.

ooo

AFTER I knocked several times, my mother came to the door.

"Goddammit," she yelled. "Why the hell can't you get on the damn bus like the other thirty kids who manage to get on?" I missed the bus every once in a while. This was the missed-bus question. But the number of students riding the bus would change each time.

I cried. I told her about the rock, the eye, the pain. She asked to see it. I moved my hand.

I wasn't frightened until I saw my mother's reaction—a muted shock, the most I could expect from a seasoned operating room nurse. She cupped her mouth with her hand and eased in for a closer look. She sat me on a low stair with my head up, while she and Irwin decided who

would rush me to the hospital. The rest is a blur, a passing moment in which my thoughts drifted—eye, school, parents, help. I asked them to call my father at work. Talking made my eye hurt even more.

ooo

IRWIN walks with me to a bed in a dark room of the ER. The male nurse leads us. The place is still empty. I don't remember when, but somebody has determined it is okay for me to lie down. The eye specialist is coming soon and I hear Irwin asking when I'm going to get a CAT scan of the bones of my skull, the ones around my eye. The entire place is quiet and I feel alone. My father once took me through a hospital ER in West Palm Beach. I don't remember the occasion. There was a man on a bed, curtains pulled around the sides of his tiny space. He had flowers and balloons all around him. He was back-flat against the bed. His upper-body was elevated. There was a bullet hole in the middle of his head. I thought I could see his wounded brain. He didn't seem real. I wanted to put my finger in the hole in his head. I didn't want to see him now.

Before I'm allowed onto the bed, the nurse needs me to let him check my sight in the rock-eye with an eye chart. He asks what I can see. I can't see any of the letters on any lines. None of them? No. I can't see the nurse in front of me, wherever he is.

"Can you see a change of brightness in the room here?" he asks. I sense that he's testing me with the light switch, but I can't make out anything. So, guessing he turned off the lights, I lie:

"It's darker," I say.

"Good, good," the nurse responds. I see him, with my good eye, writing on his clipboard.

As I get into the bed, my mother is in the ER outside my room, crying and asking questions. I don't really listen to any of them, but Irwin provides the answers. I hear "CAT scan" and "surgery," but all I want is to

finally vomit (still can't) and go to sleep. I wonder what class I'm missing—is it English? What time is it? Where is my father? I think he can save me. Even though he's just a podiatrist, he could handle my eye.

ooo

THE SUMMER I turned ten, I went to a Jewish sleepaway camp in Hendersonville, North Carolina. The camp was cramped into a crack of the Blue Ridge, isolated from humanity, except for the murderous hillbillies who were notorious for night-stalking wayward campers. That summer, about four hundred campers contracted salmonella—a cook in the mess hall placed prepared chicken where he'd cut it raw. Brett was at the camp and got sick along with me. We were quarantined in the same cabin—a luxury model because our mother was employed as a camp nurse—with only two movies. **BEETLEJUICE** and **THE MUPPETS TAKE MANHATTAN**. The scene when the Muppets first arrive in New York with no money for lodging, all cramped into separate lockers in Union Station, made me claustrophobic and feel trapped in the cabin. We vomited, slept, watched those movies, and longed to be healthy again. I hadn't even been to the health center. No mystery about my sickness.

One of the nights in the cabin, I awoke to car lights glaring through a window above my cot. A car door opened, shoes stomped on gravel, and I was curious, or dreaming.

My mother came into the cabin, and my father was behind her. I didn't expect to see him for another month, when we'd finished the drive back home from North Carolina to Florida. But there he was, like Moses. He came to free his sons. He came and hovered over my face, smiling, rubbing my forehead and asking how I felt. His skin was cold and stiff. Paralyzed with shock, I don't remember saying anything, but I was happy. I believed he came to save me. Brett and I got better. My father helped the swamped health center. The camp returned to normal.

There was another rescue in my father's life, one that continues to

change in my mind, but in each version he's the hero. This is the latest:

He was walking from his prep high school one spring day, to his home on Staten Island. As he approached the front door, he saw a dark figure on the foyer floor, like a spent heap of flesh—his mother. Her left arm, the concentration camp tattoo visible from the sleeve of her floral housedress, was digits-down on the tile. He thought she was dead.

He took off his loafer and smashed through the orange stained glass next to the door, cutting his left arm as he opened the latch.

He imagined a limp, cold body when he knelt down to pick her head up off the ground. He stared into her face and yelled, "Ma, Ma, wake up." No answer. "Ma, are you okay? Tell me." He felt guilty—could've left school earlier, could've walked faster.

After my father shook her, she suddenly opened her eyes and turned to look at her son. "Ah, what the hell happened to me?" she asked in her borscht-thick Hungarian accent.

My father had believed he rescued his mother, saved her life.

Twelve years after the summer camp salmonella outbreak, my mother told me my father's arrival at camp was coincidental—he was coming to visit anyway, and he happened to arrive during the camp-wide sickness. Even then, I still wanted to believe that he was there to cure me and help the other sick campers.

ooo

THE EYE specialist arrives when I am sleeping. He's wearing all black. He asks various questions now, interrupting my sleep. The same questions the nurse asked, and I grunt the responses. My mother and Irwin peer from around the corner, and I try to cock a slight smile. The doctor shines a penlight in my bad eye. The bright white glow that should be there is dim. I think I'm blind. He pushes my face side to side. He touches the bones under my eyebrow, and I wince from the contact

rather than the pain. He squeezes my arm and promises to fix me right up.

The doctor leaves me to speak to my mother. Irwin interrupts: "Will his eye remain intact?" "Will he have 20/20 eyesight?" "Is the orbit broken?" His questions scare me. I want him to shut up. I can tell that he cares, but I want to believe he doesn't.

Since Irwin married my mother, my father has been quick to remind me that Irwin is nothing to me. I once called Irwin a "live-in guest" in a conversation with my father; my father smiled. He wanted me to feel the same as he did about the man who he believed had kidnapped his family for himself. I told Irwin once, on my father's urging, that he wasn't my father. He agreed that was true. My father said I didn't need to follow any of Irwin's rules, but I didn't really want to cross him. It is tough to respect the man my father refers to as "The Waste of Space."

ooo

IRWIN was the only forty-two-year-old guy I knew who could claim to be a great father and terrific with kids, without ever having fathered a single one. He claimed to be many things, but I was always skeptical. It seemed that in our initial meetings, each conversation came with the revelation that he had yet another profession prior to getting involved with my mother. He worked as a lawyer when I met him, but before that as a cop, EMT, Navy sailor, volunteer fireman, a policeman, NSA employee. He used to joke about his days at the NSA, sleepless hours in a stark-white basement, decoding and decrypting. He said the guys in there once painted a window on the wall, all blue sky and rolling green hills added into the distance. They needed something to keep from going nuts.

Who had enough time in one life to accomplish all those jobs? I was skeptical. So was my father. He laughed each time I told him about Irwin's former jobs. "He's a liar," my father said. "Total bullshit artist." It was hard not to adopt this irreverent attitude. Along with the constant

reminder that Irwin wasn't even close to his position of familial authority, my father said all his stories had to be complete fabrications. I once asked my mother if they were true.

"Has he really done all those jobs, Mom?"

She giggled. "Of course. He started really young—like ten."

Even she wasn't sure.

Several months after the wedding, Irwin was still waiting to take the bar exam in Florida and spent his days substitute teaching at my high school. I only had him sub in my geography class once. He wore a three-piece suit. I ignored him in the halls. I was convinced he wanted to embarrass me at the point in teenage life when nothing could be more uncool than a parent substituting in your class, in a suit.

My father's comments gave me the backbone to talk back to Irwin and ignore his chore requests; I tried to be a tough guy, calling Irwin's bluff. Navy, huh? Let's see him try to drill sergeant me around the house. Once, soon after he married my mother, he was telling me to hurry and take out the trash; I responded with "whatever" after each command. He warned me not to say "whatever" again, but I did. I snickered to myself as I walked to the garage. My mother yelled "No!" and I saw Irwin running through the kitchen toward me. His elbows were locked. His lips pursed. His fists throbbing. I froze by the garage door. He took his stance, completely erect, bearing down toward me, his face tomato-red as he began to scream.

"Don't you fucking disrespect me again. You listen when I speak, goddammit!"

I was lifeless. My smirk was gone and my face was wet with Irwin's spit. I cowered beneath his threatening, clenched fists and shrugged away from his face. My mother yelled, begging him to stop, and he finally did. I ran up to my room, crying, yelling that I hated him.

"I hate you, too," Irwin screamed back.

In my room, I called my father, seething as I told him what had just happened. "That bastard, sonofabitch," he growled. He took my side immediately, of course—he wanted any reason to hate Irwin. My father once accused Irwin of "stealing his family." Perhaps he was also glad that I now hated Irwin as much as he did—we were further aligned. "When he was buying you all those gifts, Bryan, he was just buying you off. This is who he really is," my father said. I had no problem agreeing.

My mother's love and affection for Irwin deeply cut into me. They would cuddle on the living room couch in embraces I never saw between my mother and father. Irwin stretched out on the couch, legs flat, back upright against the cushions. My mother fit perfectly against him, between his legs, her back against his chest. He wrapped his arms around her waist. They watched TV like this. They were happy. They held hands when they walked in the mall. They randomly kissed when their eyes met. I never saw any of this with my father. My mother was different with Irwin. I guessed it was love.

But I didn't want her starting over. I didn't know my mother like this. She was landing into a new life, a happy marriage, and I felt left behind in her wake, stuck with my father and neon memories screaming divorce.

ooo

SOON after my mother's arrival at the hospital, the CAT scan is ordered. I wonder if she and Irwin even called my father; I know I asked them to. My father is so vocal about his hate for Irwin. He doesn't say it, but I think he hates my mother, too. I wonder if they feel the same way. Don't know for sure. They don't talk about him with me. They say it's not my business, not appropriate, to know details about the divorce. Before I'm wheeled by gurney to the radiation floor, my mother kisses my cheek and Irwin pats my arm lightly.

I'm loaded into the white machine, like a torpedo in a submarine. I'm still nauseous. My brain is swelling to twice its size, squeezing out through my eye sockets. A voice comes through the machine.

"Remain still. This will take about thirty minutes or so. Just focus on the butterflies. You'll do fine."

I have to remain completely motionless. There are little orange butterfly stickers all over the inside of the tube. Dozens of them. They flutter toward each other. They will all crash into one another and fall to the ground. Or land on my lead apron. My good eye follows them around. Orange trails of light all above me. My head stays still. The butterflies make me queasy. I close my eyes. If I vomit now, I'll choke on the puke and die. I'm going to hold it. My father should be waiting out there when this is all over.

ooo

MY FATHER was always waiting for my mother to come back to him, for us all to be a happy family again—whatever that is. Even after she set up a new home on her own, after the divorce papers were in the process of being drawn up, after he knew about her relationship with Irwin, my father still held on to hope—so did Brett and I.

One Sunday evening, after his weekly visitation with us, before Irwin moved down from Rochester, my mother invited my father into the house for a moment. He smiled as he walked in the door, and I smiled in reflection.

"The house looks great, Karen. You've made it comfortable," he said.

"Thanks, Marty. I like it here."

We all stood in the empty dining room, next to the mini pool table, talking and being more amicable than I ever recalled in my family. Their separation was still just that. No divorce yet, nothing final. I don't remember any of the conversation. I just remember being happy.

My father requested a family hug. My mother stepped backward but then agreed. We stood there, the four of us, almost content and hugging in a home I barely knew. When we all pulled back, my father said, "You know, Karen, your side of the bed is always open for you to come back home."

My mother's face turned blank and cold. Her crow's feet relaxed and she folded her arms in front of her chest. She leaned back against the wall. "Marty, do not say that around the boys, please."

I knew at that moment. It was clear that my father's last chance to salvage his marriage and family of fifteen years, and my desire to see him reach that goal, was gone. My mother had introduced us to Irwin a few months earlier, as they began dating long distance; my father continued to hope.

My mother was ready to move on, but he wanted to move back. I saw a bleak future of more split holidays and continuing to live out of a suitcase. That moment in my mother's house was when the pending divorce finally became real.

ooo

I SEE my father out of the corner of my good eye when I'm moved back to the ER. He shuffles to the gurney. He hovers over me.

"Are you okay, Bushy?" I'm too weak to tell him not to use that embarrassing nickname, to keep it a family secret. I hate my bushy-thick hair. I don't want Irwin to know that name. I never want him to use it.

"I think I'll be fine," I say. He must've rushed from work; his shirt is thick with armpit sweat stains and his hair is an uncharacteristic mess.

The nurse says the doctor has ordered another test, and the small shards of rock in my eye need to be pulled out. The pain can't get worse, but I don't know how tweezers in my eye will improve my condition. Still, I'm not willing to put up any fight.

My father backs away, but manages one more thing: "I love you."

ooo

I'M PROPPED in a chair, in a dark, quiet exam room. I have to hold my churning head in a black, masochistic microscope. It aims bright blue UV light into my eye. The eye specialist in all black eases up to the machine. Drops liquid into my eye. It burns and my eye waters. The light gets brighter.

He has a loop in front of his eye. The light is magnified. I try to back away. The nurse holds my head against the machine. The blue light moves across my eye. The eye feels dead. It wants to die and fall out. There is a rectangle of light in front of me. I think of a doorway to heaven.

The tweezers come out. I'm told: Don't move. Moving is all I think about. I see the sharp ends move toward my left eye from my right. The pieces are lifted out, slowly, carefully. I want to cry. My mother holds her mouth. I tell her I'm okay. The doctor's tweezers go back for more. Little bits of rock imbedded in my lens, some maybe further. He takes out tiny chunks. I don't know where he puts them. Back for more. He says something about an injection in the eye.

The needle comes out. The doctor says it'll be quick. A mosquito bite. The needle is in sharp focus. It blurs as it comes close. It's touching my eye. If I flinch it'll reach deep into my skull. Make this stop. One million mosquito bites at once. My teeth are about to crack from pressure. This has to be the worst part. I'll want to forget this.

Irwin and my mother are standing in the doorway, my father behind the two of them. When my left eye isn't being injected or prodded, I look over to them. My father is fidgety, his usually high bouffant of thinning black hair buoyed by extra-hold spray is falling down, his face like an outsider's.

And I never noticed this change before but I see it from the chair.

There is something now: Irwin, my mother, Brett, and me. At my mother's house, there is now a new family feeling: married parents, no regular discussion of a past divorce. It's like a false family, but they try to make things normal. Nights out together to dinner, to the movies. Irwin drives me to my hockey games. I won't be playing much now.

At my father's, a perpetual silence, a daily wake for a dead family. Letters from his divorce lawyer left on his desk. Pictures of my mother and father pushed into the corner of his desk, small frames in his nightstand drawer. He is alone, with no prospects. He isn't dating. He isn't trying. He's completely isolated. He should be in this exam room now, asking questions, not just watching. There is this silent power shift going on, and I can't be the only one who recognizes the change.

ooo

WHEN I'm walking out of the room, my mother walks up to help me. I have a large white patch over the eye and enough padding to dam a river. The pressure in my eye is fluctuating, but it's somewhat stable. I'm going to be released from the hospital soon, but I need to see an ophthalmologist every day until the pressure is consistently down. I ask the doctor if I'm going to lose my eye; he says I'm probably safe. I think of a glass eye, what color I want, how I can take it out at parties. My mother guides me, by the shoulder, to the door. She hugs me tight, says goodbye and that she loves me so, so much, then is walking through the parking lot to her car. My father is waiting by the sliding-door entrance of the ER.

"Irwin has gone to get the car," he says. I've never heard him say that name in such a calm manner. Is it this injury that has sated him, or has he finally given in and admitted defeat? I feel like Irwin should be telling me that my father has gone to get the car. I don't question, I don't argue. I want to go home and lie down, then call my friends and tell them what happened to me. The sun is at the top of the sky, staring down. This has been my first major injury, my first ER.

My father hugs me softly and helps me into my mother's van—Irwin is driving me home. I put the seat back down, and my father slides my feet in. "I'll call you later. Feel better," he says. "Thanks, Irwin."

"Of course," Irwin says back. This little exchange is almost as strange as getting hit in the eye with a rock.

Irwin drives away as my father waits by the ER entrance. My mother has already gone. As my father waits, maybe he's figuring out what I just discovered about this family, new and old. Maybe he denies it. Or maybe he's known all along.

ooo

LONG DIVISION

elizabeth
sanger

So it remains

I am scalding my own arm with hot tea
so you can see it, again the starfish
dries on a rock in the sun. It seems
it is not the doing, but the watching
it done that offends. Flowers, Love?
We put it all under a microscope,
pick it apart with tweezers and pins,
divorce head from neck, heart from stem,
only to see what trembling comes next.
Could we at least agree there should
be universal process, a way a parting
is done: establish your terms, splinter
divisor with dividend, carry the zeros,
arrive at end sum? But even so the remainder
will not tidy: faith/certitude, you/I,
still-in-the-donut-shop/waiting-outside-
without-hat-in-the-rain: this is necessary
violence, the primary divide, and so
between us now the impassable
small black sign, no inviolate body
left to absorb what we have done.
And we have done wrong. I do not know
how to care for these tangled skeins
of hair, these bits of discarded skin.

WIDOWER

william
joseph
neumire

I haven't eaten in days.
The pasture is marked with uncollected bales.
I walked to the barn today,
put my hand on the horse's face,
poked at the cows in their stalls,
spooked swallows out of the rafters.
I slammed the door
when the cat crept out.
The night was deep in itself
and I would have gone to sleep
but instead I went into the dark
with two flashlights to tear it apart;
there was nothing
I could leave alone.

LUCKY DAY

patrick
tucker

The Track in all its chaotic glory felt to *M* like a great and mystic festival with all the spectacle, joy, and surprise of any grand affair. On Friday, the crowd came from all over Dublin, barely subdued excitement coloring the faces of the race-goers. The old boys fresh from work with calloused hands caked with plaster were crowded at the Shelbourne bar to laugh off the week. As the men chortled in tipsy amusement at highly embellished jokes and stories their shoulders would rise and fall like a choppy sea. Their elders at the end of the bar brought the pint glass to their lips with stiff joints while musing over John F. Kennedy's recent win and how far the Irishman had come thanks to the efforts of men like them. In their tattered corduroys and patchwork caps, the ruddy old farmers clutched their tickets with trembling hands, bewildered as newborns as they puffed three-cent tobacco from homemade pipes. There were a number of boys down from Trinity College, clean-shaven in their college sweaters, discussing at length things such as Browning, Milton, or any other author they had read at least once. The lovely old biddies were huddled together by the women's water closet, engaged in friendly gossip. The fathers were out with their boys as well, small boys of nine or ten alive with the thrill of the forbidden; their mothers would box them in the ears if they knew where they were. Their fathers stood behind them, nervously clenching their fists into tight little packages then releasing them, describing to the lads in careful detail what was going on, how to judge a dog, how to judge the odds; more would come later to explain why dad had lost. Only this last image was unwelcome for *M*. Often, he experienced a jolt of resentment at the sight of the fathers with their sons, never having had a father of his own.

Of course the diner's club was in the Shelbourne restaurant, tidy black suits, gold watches and new haircuts, politely clinking their knives and forks against the famous Shelbourne Steak medium rare. These swells, as they were sometimes known, placed their bets in a casual leisurely manner. Often, they wouldn't glance at their tickets until the race was over, as though the outcome were of no concern to them. They fooled no one.

Behind their chewing and dull talk their eyes gave them away, full of hope. Hope was in the air, young and old alike, each hoping to be right. And regardless of which dog stood in the winner circle that evening, that hope, like the rest of them, would be back next week.

Lastly, gathered at the track's edge were the four columns, a quartet of stodgy English bankers. Barnum, Groden, Farris and Stern to the layperson, but the boy in his mind knew them by another name, *the devils*. It was their unnatural behavior and preternatural influence that afforded the bankers this title. Barnum, Groden, Farris and Stern were, it was widely known, as crooked in character and cold in disposition as the dark country streams that wandered their way through the swampy low-lands of County Cork. More unnerving, however, was their weekly display of superhuman constitutionality. Much like Satan himself, they dressed the same for all types of weather. If it were raining ice over Shelbourne, as was sometimes the case toward the end of the season, these unsociable Saxons would arrive in their navy blue Seville Row three pieces, never releasing so much as a shiver for hell ran in their veins, or so the boy, who was entering into a phase of his life marked by a virulent nationalism, quite earnestly believed.

M paid them no mind as he squirmed through the crowd to where the bookies were lined along the track. "Hey, McCormick," he yelled in an eager and boisterous voice.

"Don't you 'Hey, McCormick' me, boy. Are you capable of telling time?"

"I'm capable of many things."

"Are you aware of how bloody late you are?"

"Don't furl your mustache, McCormick. You know stress causes premature aging."

McCormick fumed like a kettle left on a hot stove as he drew a great breath into his enormous boiler of a chest. "Get out there and hand out

those racing tissues before I run YOU around the track." With that he gave the boy a good shove.

"Racing tissues!" *M* cried to the mass as they swirled around him like fish in a whirlpool. In this stormy ocean, a singular buoy bobbed toward him, a little old man with a little old jumper and shoes held together by gaff tape. He smiled a toothless smile and his bloodshot eyes retreated behind a forest of wrinkles.

"Hello, Terry."

"Oh. Hello, Luke, or is it Michael yet?"

"Nope," the boy answered with good cheer. "Still don't know."

It was true, *M* didn't know his own name, but it was hardly his fault.

His Christian title, truth be told, was *Michael or Luke*, not "Michael" or "Luke" but all three strung together "like two box cars with a stowaway in the middle," as his guardian, Father Magdalene, used to say in moments when the fancy struck him to do so. When *M* was very young, Father Magdalene told him he had found him in a wicker picnic basket, floating peacefully down the Liffey river and, predictably being a ward of the church, it was not long before *M* realized Father Magdalene's story had in fact been filched from that of Moses. He determined to conduct his own investigation and, along those lines, was able to solicit a more accurate explanation of his origins.

It was a grey day in December when a young seamstress in Father Magdalene's congregation approached the clergyman in a state of urgency, having found herself in the family way. According to Miss Bishop, the church's secretary at the time, and Kelly, the neighborhood drunk at the time, the girl was very small with thin wrists and knobby elbows. She wore a pair of cumbersome tortoise-shell glasses for astigmatism and had difficulty looking people in the eye. In Bishop's version, the girl had a slight limp in her left leg. In Kelly's, she had a very normal, if not gawky,

step.

Father Magdalene, who was revered among his parishioners for his sympathetic ear, listened patiently to the young lady's story of love, betrayal, and womanly virtue wasted on a cad. The priest was deeply affected by his visitor's tragic account, as he was commonly affected by such accounts, being so very sentimental. Due to economic and familial circumstances, the young lady was considering resolving the problem with the aide of a very questionable "doctor" acquaintance. After failing to persuade her by any other means, Father Magdalene agreed to look after the child if she brought it to term. Magdalene had a very maternal nature, almost to the point of absurdity, and looked forward to the prospect of guardianship. His fellow pastor, friend and roommate, Father Sean Joseph, was less enthusiastic about the notion but reluctantly settled into the idea upon first seeing the actual infant.

Unfortunately for *M*, Father Magdalene and Father Joseph both possessed a strict dedication to protocol. They bickered incessantly, more akin to an ill-paired old married couple than humble ascetics in the service of God. Being the official caretaker of the boy, Father Magdalene thought it appropriate that he should name the child and in a private ceremony christened him "Michael," after the archangel. But when news of the christening reached Father Joseph, the old cleric did not react well, objecting first and foremost to the imposition of having to take care of the boy, and dually objecting to not having a say in his name. Sometime within that week, Father Joseph held another private ceremony under the cover of night and re-christened the boy "Luke," after the prophet (and subsequently his grandfather).

Father Magdalene was informed of this in a cavalier manner the following morning, over tea and sausage. Seeking the high road, he allowed the incident pass without comment. That same night, late into the evening, he called together his usual witnesses (perturbed at these witching hour baptisms) and renamed the boy "Michael." Out of spite, as he placed the

renamed infant back in its cradle, Father Magdalene hung a note on the foot of the crib reading:

*My name is Michael,
because I am an angel.
And don't you bloody forget it,
You knacker!*

When Father Joseph went to change the baby's bedclothes in the morning, he found the posted statement, flew into a rage, and immediately re-christened. This went on for a number of deeply confusing months. A cloud of ambiguity hung over the child who underwent as many as three christenings a day until eventually, whether by fatigue or a desire not to subject the child to future psychological trauma, Magdalene and Joseph agreed to cease their activities. The issue resulted in a stalemate. Thus it was that Michael or Luke became the entirety of Michael or Luke's first name, or Either Michael or Luke, in more polite company.

"How's things, *Michael or Luke?*" Terry asked.

"Fine, Terry, how's things with you?" *M* returned. He found Terry a comfort because Terry wasn't Garde Terry, or Father Terry, or Mr. Terry and you didn't call him by his last name. He was just plain old Terry because Terry was just plain old. He did have other, more colorful nicknames of course: useless, good for nothing, sponger, bum, among a few. He was in every way the king of the Ratmines Road layabouts, the most drunk, the most remorselessly debouched, the least employed, and the most ridiculous of that already ignoble group. He was a character that had stumbled right out of a two-dollar matinee, and it was only a matter of time before he stumbled back into one.

"I tell you son, and I tell you because you're a good lad, and you're a sympathetic boy who respects his elders—"

Immediately, *M*'s expression changed to one of skepticism. When plain old Terry called you sympathetic, and said you respected your elders, he

was setting to hit you up for something.

"I was gonna go to London to see my son."

"I thought your son didn't speak to you anymore."

"Well, he doesn't, and that's why I was setting to go see him. My son and I haven't spoken for five years. That's a long time for a father not to speak to his boy."

"I really wouldn't know anything about that," the yellow-toothed child answered coldly. Oh, how he hated talk of fathers, the word itself had disagreeable, condemning elements. Too often he was told, "You are blessed *Michael or Luke* because you have two fathers to look after you," as though the constant estrangement of being abandoned could somehow be meliorated through the repetition of meaningless consolations such as these. The orphan lacked the means to articulate all that was wrong with such petty reassurances, but he knew well enough how to answer them; two priests did not amount to a proper dad.

"I was hoping you could spare us a look through that fortune teller's eye of yours."

"I see," *M* replied guardedly. "Are you going to spend it on fried cod or just beer?"

Plain old Terry pulled a crinkled envelope from his back pocket. "It's the truth this time." In the envelope was a brief typewritten letter:

Just wanted you to know, you have a grandson. He's healthy and strong and that's more than I can say for his grandfather.

Cordially,

Paul.

Sure enough the letter had been posted from London. "You know I don't mean to be a burden, and I wouldn't ask normally, I just figured, what the

hell. I haven't asked you for a favor in weeks." As Terry spoke, *M* detected something unusual in the old man's voice; the presence of desperation was acute and not unusual for Terry, but also present was something like fatigue, or shame, possibly even sincerity.

"You can come and watch me buy the ticket if you doubt me," Terry pleaded.

The gangly child scowled with displeasure, feeling, much to his surprise, conflicted on the issue. He wasn't supposed to give Terry any more tips because Terry was a deadbeat and a loudmouth and a drunk in general. Pity was better spent elsewhere, that much was certain. But in addition to the clear voice of sound judgment, *M* found something else moving inside him serving to give him pause—a weird emotion, optimistic and tenacious. He could envision this *M* cradling his son in his London flat some mild Sunday morning, then looking up suddenly to see useless, good for nothing, lay-about Terry with arms outstretched, muddying up the Persian rug. The boy pictured it clearly, Paul's surprise, shock first, then anger, and then a joyous, long overdue surrender. He saw Terry wrapping himself around the young man and laughing as his old red lay-about blue eyes filled with lay-about tears. Hope. That was the sensation the boy found now erupting from the pit of his stomach, lonely yet comforting, the fool's version of happiness. Hope.

He pulled Terry in close and pronounced the words carefully, cautiously, as though reciting a magic incantation. "Lucky Day in race seven." Terry's eyes grew large as though having witnessed an incident of magic. "Now go on, you. If they see me talking to you, I'll be found in a ditch tomorrow."

Again, the old man's lips folded, revealing a shoddy yellow grin. "You're an angel, Michael, just like your names imply. You're a prophet and an angel!"

The boy smiled at the compliment, amused by its infeasibility. *Were only it were true*, he considered, knowing of course that it was not so. While his

uncanny clairvoyance was a marvelous thing to behold, it stemmed neither from Godly grace nor tea leaves, but rather from a source that was nothing if not earthly and everyday, simple human corruption.

Among its various other amenities, a full pub, the steak medium rare, Shelbourne Track offered one fixed race every week, the winner picked at random by Barnum, Groden, Farris and Stern. Determining why the British banking sect took it upon themselves to fix a dog race seemed a lost cause since who could explain why the bored and rich do what they do? The owners of the dogs were called a week before and told the winner. The actual fixing of the race was then a simple task of stuffing the losing dogs with hamburger before the bell. The bookies were told once the fix was in, and McCormick told the boy to shoe away the Garde in case they gave him any trouble over the racing tissues. The Garde didn't tell anybody, being fine upstanding members of the community and all. Big secret, hush-hush, and it all slid down very easy. But that evening, as the boy stepped out onto the platform to see McCormick and Mr. Doyle sweating and talking heatedly, he could not help but conclude, and rightly so, that things had gone to shit.

"Hey, McCormick, why so disparaged?"

"That was a close one," Mr. Doyle said and patted his bald red head with his kerchief.

"What? A close what?"

McCormick finally noticed the boy. "Bastards changed their minds at the last minute."

Though he wasn't sure why, the statement immediately struck *M* as extremely troubling, like a curse delivered in a foreign tongue. "Bastards, what bastards, what mind?"

With a slow gesture, McCormick tilted his head toward the English devils, unwrapping their cigars before the race, sniffing them as if they were dogs

themselves.

"My dog was supposed to win tonight." Doyle's natural pasty color returned to his face. "Twenty minutes before the call, the skinny one decides Byron's Revenge should take it. 'Cause I like Byron,'" Doyle mocked. "How do you like that? I was so panicked I overfed him. He'll be throwing up all night. Christ, what a mess."

In a lively, vaguely ridiculous trot, the dogs made their parade around the track before the bell. The suddenness of the announcer's voice bursting forth from the intercom was as jarring and alien a sound as a runaway roller coaster.

"Did you talk to any Garde since last Friday?" McCormick asked.

"Garde Francis," the boy replied, his heart galloping in his chest, a tingling sensation moving from his knees to his fingers, rapidly approaching his tongue.

"Garde Francis what, boy!"

"Garde Francis O'Shea from Henry Street!" *M* choked, practically crying, hated crying, hated being yelled at.

"Mmmm, O' Shea," McCormick nodded with understanding and turned back toward the dog cages. "I'll go talk to him tomorrow. Jesus, this is going to be costly."

There was still time, the boy reminded himself. Nothing to worry about until the seventh race. He could find Terry and tell him to change the bet. Scanning the crowd, he moved his head in a series of confused, panicked jerks. *There he is*. But McCormick's heavy arm, like the hollow of a hurling stick, caught the boy and held him. "Don't worry. I said I'd talk to O'Shea tomorrow. You won't get in any trouble," the large man reassured, apparently undisturbed by *M*'s strange performance.

"No, I have to go do something. I have to go!"

Doyle and McCormick glanced at each other momentarily and eyed the boy with suspicion. "You've got to go do what, boy?"

The yellow-toothed orphan gasped stupidly, like an exhumed trout, a gesture that matched how he felt at that instant, caught, petrified, completely aware there was nothing he could do.

"Nothing."

"You stay here and don't go stirring up trouble, we're in enough shit as it is," McCormick ordered, and *M* complied, his young body and mind quite fed up with one another.

With a *ring, ring*, the beasts were off for the first race of the night, dashing out of their boxes and around the track with the mindless fury of a lust killing. It was a horrible sight, the animals shoulder to shoulder, drooling and grimacing like wretched, ravenous monsters, teeth bared, eyes wide and vacant.

Six races he watched. With the passing of each lap, *M* kept his watery vision on the mechanical bunny leading the hounds around the track. With its pink marble eye, the thing seemed to stare directly at him, pleadingly, as it completed each rotation. It was just a pawn really, a helpless prop condemned to be chased around by snarling dogs for the amusement of nasty English devils in navy blue suits.

Terry made his way to the rail for the seventh. Hope was in his eyes, stupid tragic hope. The boy couldn't look at him. All such a lie it was. The Garde lied, McCormick lied, the devils lied, the dogs were lying, the goddamn bunny was lying to the dogs. The boy had lied to Terry, who for once in his miserable life may have been telling the truth. In the final minutes before the seventh race, he convinced himself that Terry was lying as well, that he didn't have a son at all. For all *M* knew, his own father was off somewhere at that very moment, trying to convince himself of the same thing. These thoughts swirled aimlessly around the boy's head. He kept his sights on the bunny, but he saw nothing at all.

The final heat was set amidst unexcited stirrings, the earlier enthusiasm of the race goers having, by this late hour, diminished completely. The sullen boy fought the urge to watch the miserable event but, dismally, could stop himself.

At the moment the bell sounded and the stall doors flew open, even the rabbit seemed depressed, possibly from another night of senseless running. Byron's Revenge was quickly on its tail, snapping at the tuft of cotton tied by twine to the puppet. Directly proceeding, at a heroic pace, was Lucky Day.

In the time necessary to spit the distance of a yard, the pack approached the final stretch; the second dog overtook the first and went on to lead the way across the finish. Lucky Day then took a little skip backward as though to seal off the pass for the dogs in his dusty wake. The ordeal resolved itself quickly, unceremoniously, so much so that the greasy haired orphan doubted he had seen the mirage at all, for surely, if it had been anything, it must have been that. Surely his furtive but fatigued mind had momentarily lapsed into hallucination and dreamed the incident. The reaction of crowd added credence to this interpretation of events. The end of the seventh race was marked by some cheering, but mostly grumbling, nothing unusual.

"The winner," the invisible voice blared, "of race seven, Lucky Day."

The race-goers took their cue from the announcer and began a shambling progression toward the exits. *M* stood quiet, wordless, and stunned. When finally he was able to muster some sort of movement, he looked to McCormick and Doyle to gauge their reaction; but the two massive men simply stood like great grey oaks stripped of their leaves after a storm.

"The little bastard," McCormick muttered at last, his voice larded with some sentiment that seemed to *M* to be nothing less than admiration.

"He's had his first win," Doyle added, amazed.

"Did you stuff him?" McCormick asked his associate.

"I stuffed him till he tossed."

"You overstuffed him, probably—"

M was exhausted. Readying himself for certain catastrophe had been soporific enough, the thought of piling the excitement of an unexpected victory on top of all that seemed, though welcome, utterly depleting. He put his forehead to the railing and closed his eyes for several long, luxurious seconds, allowing his hot nerves to settle and absorb the sensation of relief that was already overtaking him.

"Look there," someone from the crowd yelled, and a wave of slow but persistent laughter spread over the stands of Shelbourne from the back to the front and out toward the track. McCormick and Doyle began laughing as well, in pops and spurts like water belching from a storm drain.

"There's a rascal."

The boy lifted his gaze and was greeted by a sight that sent a grin of embarrassment to his already chapped cheeks. There, in front of him, in front of McCormick and Doyle as well, in front of the boys down from Trinity college, the old biddies, the hay farmers and the city swells, the crooked bookies and the English Devils, there in front of all of Shelbourne, all of Ireland, mankind, and the entire choir of heaven, there was Lucky Day, grimacing and drooling like a birthday pig, joyfully stabbing his red member into the rear of Byron's Revenge with the animalistic abandon for which his species is renown.

It was enough to make even an indecent Irishman like McCormick blush to the tips of his steel brush mustache, and that is exactly what the great man did, simultaneously unable to stop himself from chortling. Doyle beside him, cackling wildly now, was as red as a brick firehouse.

"They're bitches!" Doyle got out at least. "That's what it was. That's what's done it. I'd forgotten it completely. He was the only male in a heat of bitches!"

"And all the bitches are in heat," McCormick finished.

The bookie boy's eyes gravitated to the tracks edge in search of Terry, who was climbing atop the track railing. Once perched there like some strange, ironical statue of Cuchulainn, he spun chaotically toward the crowd. "Lucky Day!" he bellowed with unseemly cheer, "The most virile dog in Ireland!" The crowd laughed appreciatively at this.

"Go fetch your dog for the victory lap," the great round man admonished as Doyle went and grabbed the beast under the shoulders. With a hearty sweep, the man hoisted the greyhound above his head. The animal, still smiling in innocent idiocy, kicked with his hind legs, which caused his still-engorged member to wag slightly in the air. "Lucky Day!" someone yelled again, and the lumpen gave the pet a final, tired, but seemingly heartfelt cheer.

Though certainly many of them had lost on the dog's unlikely win, there wasn't a soul at Shelbourne who didn't seem to love Lucky Day at least a bit. Even the English Devils appeared sufficiently amused by the scene. Certainly, the event had provided that much. So it was one more cigar and then back to the Royal for cognac before bed. The Devils, all in all, were unaffected by the outcome, but it was a lovely night for it, wasn't it? Like silent but gargantuan storm clouds, they left the track, gazing listlessly over the heads of the lowly Dubliners.

The boy again scanned the crowd for the old tippler, terrified that plain old Terry might approach him and thank him in front of McCormick for the favor that had been bestowed. When McCormick's great flat palm came down heavy on his shoulder, the boy nearly coughed up his soul. "Are you old enough to stand your employer a pint?" the bookie asked. M found his second wind and eagerly assented. That night, Father Magdalene didn't see his ward again until nearly half past twelve.

ooo

MUSICIAN AUBADE

r. j.
mccaffery

The musician simmers in the sticky summer, in the now,
and dreams aloud her past: a handful of lost names.
She flicks aside sheets with her fingers,
absently stretches her way out of bed. Perhaps the musician
forgives my arrogance in loving her, perhaps she's played
this tune before. The tang of the future

comes in with the morning's thunderstorms. The future
which is a lattice of possibility, unlike the now
which is her tying back her hair, settling at the piano to play
Bach as it rains. She's wise – does not like to name
things, despite knowing the heart's sounds, her musician's
way of hearing and sorting noise into scales. Her fingers

strike as precisely as a confession. Her fingers
move inexorably, cycle, like love, like the future
of which we do not speak. The musician
knows what's she's doing, living in the now,
fiercely. Later, I will drink coffee and try to name
the tenor of my dreams, of her clear playing.

I will sit alone, chanting in a humid room while she plays
for admiring strangers, plays so well she becomes her fingers,
becomes invisible, takes on the name
of music itself. I imagine the near future
of our tonight – swimming in thunderstorms. Or is that now?
My hands smell of the musician's

hair, the living musician's
skin, of sweat and lake water, of yesterday, of her play,
of each precious second of the now,
which holds also last night; her fingers
locking into mine, locking as the future
opens for myself, opens the good name.

INDIA, CONSTRUCTION SERIES

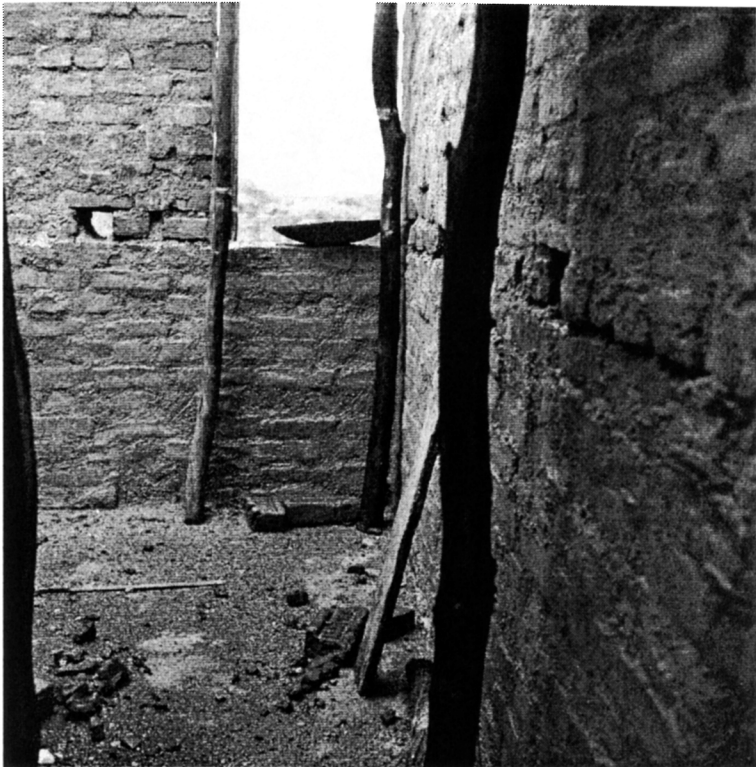
sarah vecci



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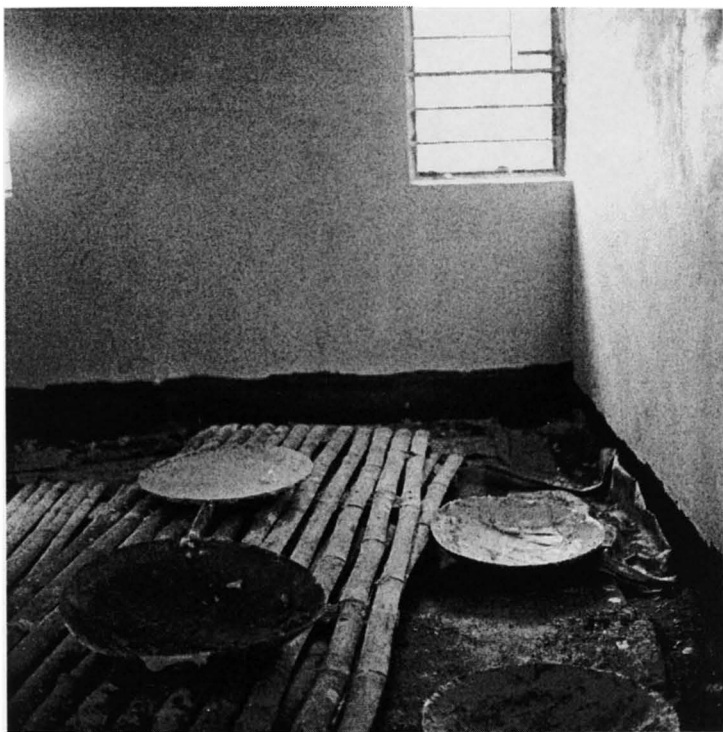
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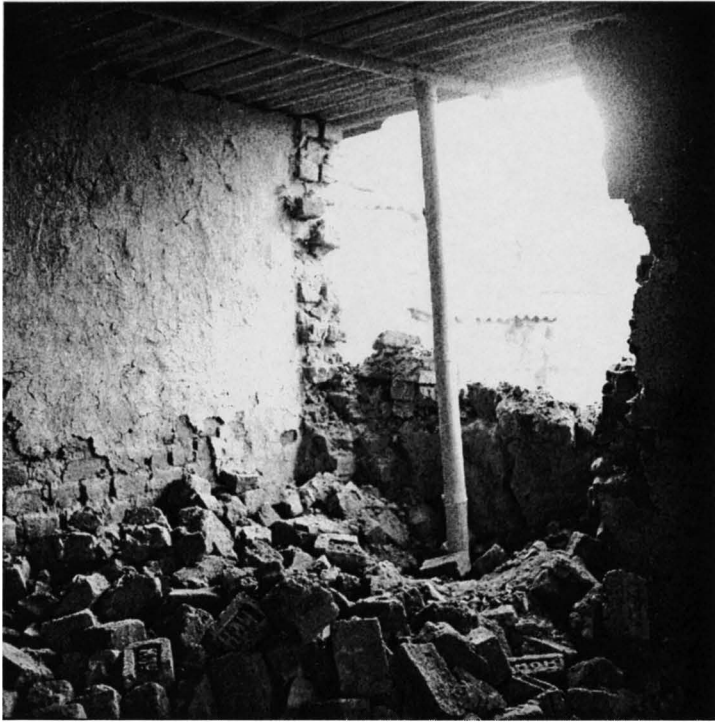
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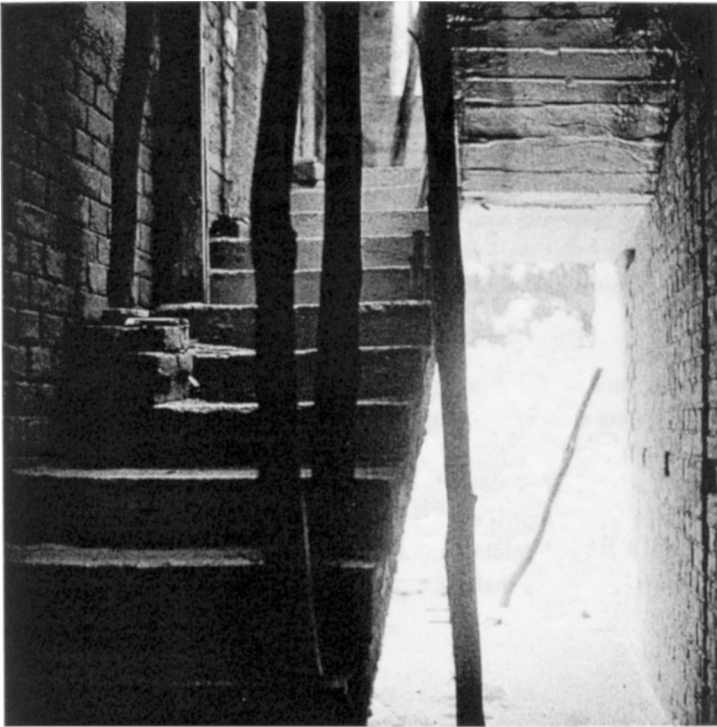
V



VI



VII



VIII

THE LONG, LONG DAY

joshua
fallgaf

I

Near the leaves, your bare feet barely hold on
to the shaking legs you clearly shook this morning.
Limbs, bare in the day's clear sun, hold still
above the enormous tree which still shakes
its fattened leaves smaller the next morning
while its enormous limbs clearly hold its leaves
like you hold your legs from shaking.

II

The smaller morning sky is clear,
the still fattening leaves like enormous feet
that barely hold still. Near the bare legs
of tree limbs, late in the day, under the far
and clearly fattening sun, enormous in the bare sky –
in the still smaller sky – you barely leave limbs
to shake your small feet at late in the morning.

III

Holding on to the day, the enormously late day,
the morning sun still left your limbs barely bare
and fattening near the shaking feet of trees. And the leaves
are still farther from the shaking sky than your feet,
which fatten but barely, and the clear morning –
that still clear, still holding morning –
leaves you small and shaking.

THE BOMBER

patrick
scott
vickers

In the first interview, he told me I was chosen
Because I was young. *Unperverted*, he said.

Where I come from, the leaders love Kafka.
My father was an interpreter, do you know that word?

If you broke the law, small pins were pushed
through your eyelids. As you moved your eyes,

The pins scratched patterns into your corneas.
My father's job was to interpret those patterns.

After school, I'd find him in the shop, an eye either
spread before him, unfolded, like a globe before it's

Made, or looking up from his palm, cupped.
He'd peer with a Jeweler's loupe.

Around him were amethysts, citrines, garnets,
Aquamarines, topaz ... he ground the stones,

Dusted the eyes, and read the glittering lines
Carved there by the criminal's guilty conscience.

PECAN SEASON

hillary
joubert

Like everyone else,
there was a time I thought
that you, dad, would never die.
Yet, so like the pecan tree
in an orchard cloaked by oaks,
every mid-day of your mid-life,
whether it rained or did not rain,
you struggled to live so perfect that
beneath your brittle bark
flowed the sweet dross of Eden.

Though you left me, like people do,
with a petrified family,
and a mind to succumb to stone myself,
I did not dare skip rocks over water in anger.
Not a single pebble met the knee of a cypress,
or sank too slowly to the bottom
to be spied by gar or minnow.

There were times, however,
that the air I inhaled as I lived without you
seemed bitter and mad;
but I got by, like people do,
by remembering the evening you fell
from your everyday chair—
the same green chair whose fibers
still hold your breath in abeyance.

Though every day I do what I can do
to make sense of this short season,
every time I see a pecan
I'm reminded of the dull intact shell
that rolled from your hand
the season your soul slipped out.

FOR ONE WHO PRAYS FOR ME

taya holand

The bulbs in their brown-paper skins arrive in mesh,
lonely. My father plucks them from the nest
of shredded paper, cups them in his palms.
He is imagining they will grow. They will not, we
know it, in too-wet coastal soil. The Semper Augustus
brought men to ruin—it is his favorite story.

The blue base at the stem, shocking corolla
of white and scarlet flames, one per petal.
It was a virus, he says, though I know. A virus
that ate into the bulb, the flowers fevered, faint,
and that bright disease, while it lasted, stole
the minds of those who saw. It replaced breath,

that beauty, in 1637. It is important that I know this,
my father believes—that once, a diseased flower
was worth more than the homes in which the children,
heedless of beauty, slept. Precise worth of one bulb:
one ship, six oxen, ten tons of wheat. My father
speaks earnestly, known words, the bulb

shifted from hand to age-spotted hand, just like
an onion. Tulips grew, still, close to the ground
in the Ottoman Empire, single-colored, in clumps
but with those six petals. One's days on earth
reflected one's coming days in death: beauty
prophesied beauty—all tulip gardeners go to heaven.

They took apart the name of Allah, broke it
into letters to make the word for tulip—Lale. My father
sighs. It would have a long stem, if it grew, yellow
petals stained black with pollen. There were those
who called tulips proof against Rousseau—
only this world in all its complexity, can make a tulip,

can take a stubby ground-bloom of the East and in Holland
stretch its stem, stretch its cup, give it glory, hundreds
of years in each of six petals, can land it in my father's
hands, who will plant the cultivar that will not grow,
plant it for me, so I will know the one thing he means
to tell me—that beauty sought foolishly is the only prayer.

TEA

james
engelhardt

The café swirls. Isolated under headphones,
students bright with fever and designer colors
hunch against deadlines and exams,
their exact and regimented futures.

We've just bought a house, I think at them.
And they're just buzzing along on sweets and alkaloids.
I stir the flotsam of my broken bag, shallows
choked with twigs and murky clippings of tea.

They blow on their coffee, breath sweet
from so many packs of sugar. I long for them,
long for them all.

It should be spring, but flurries circle down
among the few who leave the warm store,
pause at the corner, laugh until the signal
changes and cycles through the unchanging pattern.

I had to dig through attic boxes
to unpack my hat and heavy coat.
My mug here might predict more snow,
but I cannot bear to read the leaves.

IN TWILIGHT

justin
evans

YET ONCE MORE, O YE LAURELS AND ONCE MORE
—JOHN MILTON

I go, walking down the dark canyon road
softened beneath a malleable sun. Once more,
one final descent into the valley of my home.

Shadow and bare earth begin to evaporate
into each other, night, always a context for union,
a place to meet and linger in an embrace.

I see how the river has cut a path for me, given itself
a rhythm for today and tomorrow. Each slight bend
another story told as the day passes to night.

Together we both migrate, one man and one river,
each of us bound to accumulate with our own kind
where we are certain to find a place to stop and rest.

SACRED COLORS, FRAYED MEMORIES

renée e.
d'aoust

The Inupiaq shaman walked toward me from out of the whiteness of the snow-covered tundra.

"It was the great beyond," he said to me in the dream, an actual dream, and I believed him.

"Renée, you have come back to us from a long time away," he said later when I met him, outside of the dream. I believed him then, too.

When is it true that a waking life becomes a dream and a sleeping life becomes reality, more trusted and more sacred than the world through which we walk? It happens when the world twists, and we open inside. It is a powerful place, this place of twist, and one with which we should never play nor tangle nor taunt. Yet we do. We are mischievous creatures, and we test fate. We think we know how our bodies inhabit this earth, and we think we know how our minds interpret the place we inhabit. But we don't really know. We don't ever really know.

There are a few people who open their eyes and see through the facade. They may scream at us to look, yet we don't. They may cry in front of us, beg us to look, yet we don't. They may prostrate, hoping to show us the error of our thinking. They may ask graciously, kindly, but still—we can't look. We don't see life as it really is. Why can't we?

However, sometimes, in some ways, perhaps through our dreams, our eyes are opened. Or sometimes, through immense trauma, our eyes are opened. Then we cannot turn away.

Amorok was one who made me look. I could not turn away.

Amorok is not his real name. I made it up. But he was real. In dreams and in life. I don't know if he is still alive, and I don't care. The story isn't to be believed, but even so I keep trying to tell it right. Nonfiction, fiction, dreams, casual conversation, poems. Usually it is dismissed—am I dismissed?—because the conversation is uncomfortable. A young white

woman trained with an Inupiaq shaman and slept with him. Me. Nothing so shocking, but something quite uncomfortable. I don't know if it is the difference in skin colors, or the color of my own shame. If it's—not "it" me: If I'm heard by one young woman, aged nineteen, who might meet a shaman and think he has something to teach her, then the story will have been heard. That's enough.

My mother believes me and my father believes me and my brothers believe me and my boyfriend believes me. There are others who know but do not look me in the eye. Take back the night marches on college campuses, but what does a woman do when she's alone and not in a group? Where was my voice then? One woman whom I warned: Shelley does not look me in the eye. That isn't her real name either.

"He's an alcoholic," I said. Very clearly. I enunciated. Spoke slowly. Same way Amorok enunciated his words and spoke slowly. Shelley was slated as Amorok's next trainee after me. I'm pretty sure this is how the conversation played out; although, across the distance of time, perhaps I've changed a few words around: "He drinks alcohol, but that doesn't make him an alcoholic," Shelley said. "He'll use you," I said. "He's a shaman," she said. "I said the same thing to Rebecca," I said. "Oh," said Shelley. "Yes, oh," I said.

I wasn't right in spirit after Amorok walked away. All these birds kept hitting the windshield of my truck and breaking their necks. Lots of different kinds and colors. Little birds and big birds. I'd stop the truck and get out and bury the birds. I carried a shovel in the truck bed just for that purpose. I was very distressed and disoriented. I was scared of an old drunk Eskimo. Terrified he would fly into the windshield of my truck and break his neck.

ooo

"ALL NATIVE American traditions are sacred," says the blonde haired woman in the New Age bookstore in Anchorage, "and shamans will

never cause harm. They are healers."

She has a name tag—Cassandra. I don't know if the name is a joke or not. She has a diamond engagement ring and silver rings on every finger, her thumb, too, of her right hand. Her nail polish is bright red. Cassandra is birthed of tall buildings and cement, and she doesn't know what she is talking about.

"Really?" I say. "No harm?"

What an idiot, I think. Why this woman is working in a bookstore I do not know. "Where is the New Age section?" I ask. "Over in that general area." She waves her diamond ring around. I see it, I want to say. I decide she is a recent divorcee and an even more recent fiancée, and she thinks she has learned something about life because of all the papers filed for her marriages and her divorces.

I'm in Anchorage on a grant from the Idaho Arts Commission. It is 2003, and I'm researching my book **THE SNAKE, THE WOLF, AND THE ARCTIC FOX**. It's based on fact. I don't like Anchorage, and I never have. I didn't like it seventeen years ago when I met Amorok. I don't like it now.

Yes, it is Alaska. Yes, the Chugach Range is beautiful, surrounding the city as it does, and the Alaska Range, too. The Sleeping Lady, waiting for her lover, hovers there across Cook Inlet. The Lady reminds us to sleep on through our lives. Just wait and wait and wait for the prince to come kiss you. Don't risk anything. Keep your eyes closed and hope for the best. Except this time around, I'm staying in the downtown Hilton courtesy of a good deal from www.priceline.com. I put a bid in, and it took. I'm not sure what the Idaho Arts Commission and NEA will think when they see the Hilton on my expense report. I've taken copious toiletries from the hotel. I can't get enough of them. I'm becoming a pack rat; instead of carrying mace, I carry samples of Neutrogena lotion. I carry mouthwash, too.

I've already visited Chugach State Park where Amorok and I walked almost every day. I've walked the Coastal Trail. I used to walk it alone, all bundled up, slipping on the ice down by Cook Inlet and along the railroad tracks in the cold January winter. This winter in Anchorage, they truck in snow for the ceremonial start of the Iditarod. I can't pull myself away from the sled dogs and wander around downtown listening to the yipping. I don't remember the start of the Iditarod back in 1987. Had Amorok and I left Anchorage already? Was he at the bar, and I in the sublet apartment? Or was I taking care of those two huskies at the house-sitting/dog-sitting job where I backed their Civic into a telephone pole? I had to pay two hundred dollars for the repair. I looked at the telephone pole and backed right into it while looking. It isn't an action I've ever been able to explain to myself. I think Journey was playing on the radio. I had just seen the movie **MANNEQUIN**.

ooo

I'VE LOCATED the White Center where it used to be. It's now a contractor's office. The man I talked to said he'd heard about that group. Some New Age believers. Didn't know where they went. But I've also located the new White Center. They just reopened. They had a bit of trouble, I think, after Amorok-the-Shaman. I've figured out Amorok is still alive. I just googled him at the Kinko's in the Hilton and finally some information came up. Last address: Texas. But I could have done that at home. Why travel here for research? Because I've already been approached on Fourth Avenue and F Street, right in front of the Log Cabin Visitor Center, by two drunk Native Americans, and I had forgotten what that was like.

The staggering walk. The smell out of the pores. The explanation of a healing down on the street, downtown Anchorage, for a woman who slipped on the ice and cut her hand. "The bleeding stopped," said Amorok. "Because of me."

"Hey, baby," the Eskimo says, "wanna drink?" His friend, who looks

Athabaskan, nods. Canada calls the first people First Nations. Why can't we, too, in the States? The friend weaves a little. Raises his eyebrows at me. I've seen that look before. Up close. Personal.

I don't answer. I've learned not to speak, not to answer, but I invoke the power of steel will and move away. I go back to the Hilton. Take a sauna. Ride the bike. Seventeen years ago I used to live just down the street from this Hilton, in the Turnagain Arms building, and I snuck into this same exercise room to take a sauna. Now I pay for it. I've grown up.

Later that night, I watch **SIX FEET UNDER**—HBO is a treat—and phone my boyfriend David at the same time. "I can't do this," I say. David is used to this expression from me by now. He knows he is supposed to say, Yes, you can, but instead he says, "Harder than you thought?"

I start crying. Ever since I passed the age of 30, I cry easily. I don't know if this is because I haven't had children, so my hormones are weird, or if it's because I have a constant premonition of danger. Except the premonition is past due; the danger is all in the past.

"Just remember," he says as I cry, "you aren't nineteen anymore. You're wise and beautiful, and you are so strong."

"I wish everything that happened was a novel."

"Me, too."

ooo

AMOROK stands in front of me. I don't take my eyes off of him. He is short, squat, wearing blue jeans, a blue plaid flannel shirt, and a thin windbreaker with the zipper undone halfway down his broad chest. His eyes are dark brown, deeply masked. He sees right through me.

Instantly, he knew everything about me.

It's all memory. And that doesn't mean it fades. My feelings aren't clichés, and my memories don't fade away.

Back then, he unmasked me, but I could not yet see him. That would come later, startling, unwelcome, and with the smell of bourbon. In the beginning, he was a wall to me, enigmatic. I was immediately hooked to him, however, through threads binding my chest to his. It happened within seconds, without my realizing it. It happened in real life.

In the Hilton when I wake up I feel differently. It is a dream, I think. I did not want to remember that back then I was no longer my own person. But it remains true. Back then, I was no longer my own person. If you put your will in the trust of a shaman who is simply a man, it will take you at least ten years to reclaim your will as your own.

ooo

INSIDE the door of the original White Center in Anchorage, Alaska, the one I had entered at age nineteen, a hand-lettered sign written on green construction paper read: *Let Yourself Feel the Earth. Please, No Shoes.*

I bent over and started unlacing my hiking boots. A few heavy winter boots were lined up against the wall. A bulletin board next to the coat rack was filled with business cards advertising massage therapists, building contractors, horoscope readings, and lawyers. Another handwritten sign invited people to a healing circle on Wednesday evenings.

Downstairs, I sat at a table in the basement waiting to meet Amorok, or Amorok-the-Shaman, as I had been told he liked to be called. The room itself, perhaps because it was originally a cement basement, felt at odds with its intended purpose as a meeting place for worship. There was a shrine at the front of the room. Two small images of Jesus hung on either side of a cross. The altar was a sort-of compendium of images, a hodgepodge of buyer's choice market spirituality that was popular at the start of the New Age movement. I'm not really sure where that movement is at anymore, because I found it a false front. I still use Bach Flower Remedies, though. Rescue Remedy seems to work. In mind or body or both. Who knows.

At the front of the room was a five-foot potted Norfolk pine. Along with the makeshift shrine were four chairs lined up, two on either side of the cross, facing the room.

Folding chairs had been stacked to the side of the room. The long table, at which I sat, had been pulled to the center. The room smelled overpoweringly of burnt sage. The sheet-rock walls were painted a pale apricot color. The paint looked like a fresh coat, with an almost waxy sheen. On the opposite wall hung an enormous crocheted dream catcher in purple, red, and pink. The colors were bright and shocking. Several feathers hung down from the center.

Suddenly, Amorok stood in front of me.

If the table had not been between us, if I had not been sitting, I felt I would have been blown over by the surprise.

Except for the brilliant golden-yellow glow surrounding his body, he looked as unlike a shaman as I could have imagined. But then I wasn't sure what I had imagined a shaman would look like.

And, yes, I see colors around people, but don't ask me how or why or what the colors mean, because I don't know. Amorok told me he would teach me, and he didn't. The colors are still sacred. Amorok's actions still profane. I read a lot of books. I looked for another teacher after I got my mind back. But I still don't know what the colors mean. I still see them—but not so intense. And the colors sure don't make me fall in love with anyone anymore; except my boyfriend, so that isn't a true statement either.

Although not tall, Amorok's stature was formidable; his presence exactly the same as when he had appeared in my dream the night before I actually met him. As in my dream, he wore a blue plaid flannel shirt and blue jeans. His shoes were off. He wore gray socks with red toes and heels.

From the way he dressed, Amorok looked as if he belonged entirely to the present day. Yet there was something about him, his eyes and the color surrounding him, that made him seem as if he had walked out of another era and found himself in contemporary Alaska with no place else to be.

"You have come back to us from a long time away," he said.

I believed him.

"Renée," Amorok said, "you will come with me to the woods." There was no inflection in his voice. It was a statement—not a question.

"Here is the number where I am staying." Amorok's squat body seemed to laugh. He made a patting motion with his right hand—almost as if to say through motion, "There, there"—and turned to walk away.

Through my stupor, I heard the main door of the center shut, a car engine start, and the car drive away.

That was it. My first real meeting with Amorok, or Amorok-the-Shaman, as I had been told he liked to be called.

ooo

SEVENTEEN years later, I am back in Alaska, and I meet a professor at the University of Alaska. I have an introduction from my professor Karl Kroeber at Columbia University.

The Alaskan professor says: "If you are going to write about shamans, you have to be prepared for controversy. The very thought of shamans provokes controversy."

I didn't need him to tell me that. I had already lived the controversy—and survived. Just barely. But I did need him to remind me. I had forgotten that a fifty year old shaman is just as human as everyone else. He sees a pretty young girl and wants her, so he takes her. It is manipulative and controlling, but effective.

And how do I warn the others?

ooo

AT THE bookstore, I ask the woman with the diamond ring and the Cassandra name tag, "Do you know Princess?"

"Oh yes, Princess is a healer for her people," the woman says.

"Do you have her number? I'm an old friend."

The woman writes the number down for me. Numbers shouldn't be given out so easily. I go back to the Hilton and call. I call again the next day. Again the third day. Three messages are enough, I figure. Princess doesn't want to remember anymore than I do.

ooo

WHEN I find the new White Center, I find a woman who will talk to me. Frances is lovely. I remember her from before. She's about fifty and describes herself as a "Seeker. Curious. Always learning. We're all human though. So fallible."

Frances doesn't remember me. How many young women did he take for a ride, I think. How many of me were there?

"He was charged with a rape, so he left the city. Police asked him not to come back."

"When was this?"

Frances names the year and month that Amorok and I left Anchorage together. "We must travel," Amorok said. "Go where we are needed."

We were already sleeping together then, loosely put, and he'd already been drunk twice to my knowledge, probably more than my recall.

Yet neither Frances nor the woman who started the White Center and welcomed Amorok to teach classes and run healing circles said anything

to me about a rape at the time. Seventeen years ago. I might not be memorable now, but I was at his side then.

"Let me know when your book is published," Frances says.

I like her. She welcomed me into her small office and didn't make any excuses.

The tracing of memory is a problem because I'm no longer sure what I remember and what I fear. I don't fear seeing him again. That wouldn't matter, really. An old drunkard who called himself a shaman, had real power on the way down, and sold snake oil at the bottom is no one to fear. But I fear for the other women. The ones who aren't women yet. The ones who are nineteen. I hope Amorok drinks all the time now, because alcohol smells so dreadful, oozing out of the pores, shutting down the liver, turning the eyes red, and making the cheeks bloated. The hair, too, becomes stringy and hard to the touch. The nose bulbous and drippy. The hands shake. The walk is never linear, always unbalanced.

That spiral would have been after my time. I saw only the beginning.

There is a stillness in the North that if not matched by an inner stillness will drive a man crazy. It does not matter whether one is native or white, living in the bush or the city: If the inner landscape is scarred and distorted, if the wildness within has not been tamed, the outer place will be too much to bear.

Back at the Hilton, the house cleaning woman comes to my room. She looks Yupik to me. She has brought me extra toiletries as a souvenir. She is very kind.

ooo

BROKEN AND SPLIT

christine
hartzler

What the pressures of heat and time
do to rock: shot through
with minerals, fractured
with color: is done because no one asked at the time
eons ago: because I did not actually drown:
the story is no longer about surviving:
If I had been asked at 12 to tell
what it was like: I would not have said:
coming up under the upside down canoe:
light like a porcelain glaze
but moving in perpetual shatter:
even when seen from below the surface,
a bright, holy dome:
and it no longer matters
that the river pulled me back under
and hooked me on a submerged branch:
The memory has broken and split: recrystallized:
its integrity shot through by mineral light:
like marble buried deep: compounded:
then exposed to sun:

A GIVEN THAT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE TODAY

patrick
scott
vickers

Fact: there are pieces of wood in the forest,
Pretending not to be my next end table
But forgotten pecan trees, each necklaced with holes
In the bark, the rings of peckings one woodpecker
Apart. The birds gone. Now gnawed bones.
That I, at eight, would be told not to pick up.

Fact: there is a piano somebody mocks me with.
Not taking it personally, I don't know what else to do.
Grandfather wants to make straws from the bones of birds.
Or penny whistles. It's what Death calls us with.
He cracks the pecans, one against the other, in one palm.
Everything has meat. Nothing escapes.

FOUR VIEWS OF THE GENIUS OF THE MUSICIAN'S FINGERS

r. j.
mccaffery

Precision flicker: they fantastically skitter
Across keys and levers that move
Themselves and the heart.

Powder soft over the solid architecture
Of tendons: sleeping, they are
Deceptively like anyone's hands.

Alive, the quick fingered guide, always
Slightly ahead of you in time;
Dragonflies skimming still water,
Music in their rippling wake.

In the dream we are in Providence.
I guide her to the fountain that changes
One's destiny to die in this city of memories.
Smiling, she lifts her cupped hands, empty
To her lips.

HOLLOW

taya holand

Rain brought him to us, the ache of fingers
as the train slid coastward through low-slung mist.
Green faded gray, melding fir and pine and cloud,
damp breath of rivers oiling the boxcar wall.

Train grease blacked his neck, marking new creases.
He entered without knocking, someone's
distant friend, pocket full of flat brown pennies.
Also from the tracks, a crushed wren, wings bent.

This is his task, the body in a tin can,
boiled, back of the stove, slow cleave of meat
from hollow bone. He is silent, waiting;
each thing he owns lays heavy on his back:

needle and thread, knife, paper, pliers, socks, spoon.
Morning: beans from a cloth bag, a tin pie plate;
the roasting, grinding, the drip, and the cup.
Eyelid thin, demitasse. A thimbleful.

This single fragile thing to hold, to protect;
weightless bird bones in his earlobes, a prayer
for a life so full of flight, so paper thin
light could pass through it, breath could lift it up.

WHAT A HORSE KNOWS ABOUT LOVE AND FORGIVENESS

sarah
blackman

At noon the writer sits down to write a story about a man who used to kill horses for a living. It was an insurance scam. He would attach electrodes to their manes and then their tails (or perhaps electrodes is the wrong word, is it clamps? not wires, that's too insubstantial), and when the circuit was complete a current would run through them that was powerful enough to make the horse fall down dead with no trace as to how or why. There are no tell-tale burn marks on the skin, and one imagines, the writer imagines, the horse killer wiping away the few crispy hairs that curl up from the horse's hide with the side of his gloved hand.

By ten after twelve, the writer has danced her hero from bed to window (pulling back the curtain, peeking into the backyard) from window to shower (shuffling and pale) and all the way out to his car (dressed, but still dripping; peering over his shoulder). He's a horse killer, but he's still her hero; he lives on the Chesapeake Bay where the writer used to live, where she often, very often, wishes she still lived; he seems to revel in living alone and the writer, well, the writer has built a raft out of Tupperware and Popsicle sticks so that her cats can float around in the bathtub with her; it frequently capsizes and the writer is left with scratched thighs and an uncertainty as to how to use the semi-colon. Nevertheless, not only has her hero arrived at the car, by 12:10 he has "scuttled" to get to the car, thoroughly spooked by a horse, half glimpsed through panes of dirty glass, who has appeared overnight in his back yard. Also by a call from his long estranged daughter, but the writer can see the horse much more clearly than the daughter, cares about it more, in fact. So far the daughter has a ratty face and an annoying habit of smoking with her right hand while she drives so that she has to reach all the way across herself to flick the ash out the window, which she does with such slow deliberateness that the writer, who has sometimes been the passenger, wants to scream, punch her in the face, grab the wheel and send the whole car careening off the road and into a telephone pole, just to speed things up. The daughter is driving down from

Chicago, and she is taking her sweet time.

The writer has been distracted by a series of noises that could either be a cat with an upset stomach, yawning, or a wounded raccoon hiding under the writer's bed. Potentially, it is an armadillo and the writer hopes for the latter choice as she has never actually seen an armadillo in any position other than splayed and undone by the side of the road. The writer worries that she relies a little too much on her naiveté and childish knock-kneed stance to carry the weight of her personality. It is a useful introductory device, but it has backfired in the past. People mistake helplessness for the sake of comedy, or for making the other feel good, for the kind of helplessness that rolls around on the ground, frothing and demanding aid. In reality, the writer's helplessness is of a quieter sort than she lets it be. The fact that it is real in any sense frightens her too much for her to allow it to be seen in any way other than as burlesque. Her helplessness says, in a small voice, "What am I going to do?" Fortunately, no one hears it.

The writer, on her armadillo quest, has somehow sunk into a self-pitying funk. She sits on the floor and picks at the skin on her arms. She is alone in this house; the dishes have piled up in the sink, and she can do that sort of thing. Sometimes, if she is feeling really good about the moment she has slid into, the writer will interlace her fingers with her toes and roll on her back. She will rock there—crookedly, because she has a crooked spine—and sing small songs she has made up about whatever it is that has made her happy. The writer, not rocking, remember, but picking, realizes that she only attains this level of convoluted happiness when there is someone around to observe.

Meanwhile, the hero horse-killer has shown up at work and progressed about his day. He is a handyman, a jack-of-all-trades, and today he is reshingling a section of roof on a house his landlady, Mrs. Craw, is trying to restore to rentable condition. The house used to belong to the nearby college's wrestling coach who left mysteriously in the middle of the

night one October. There was no scandal attached whatsoever, and, try as they might, neither the stoned neighborhood teenagers, nor the stoned nearby college students, could ever turn up anything amongst his personal belongings that implicated him of crimes more serious than a penchant for satin boxers—though this is disturbing enough as he was a short man with no neck in the way of all wrestling coaches, fictional or otherwise. Hero Horse-Killer, in his carpenter jeans and clean white tee-shirt, is whistling cheerfully and leaning a ladder up against the roof of the house in question. Kudzu has taken over one whole wall and most of the windows are broken which pleases Hero Horse-Killer because it means he'll have a lot to do. Contrary to the writer's intention, which was to make poor Horse-Killer angst for the whole day, for a whole week, about the various moral and ethical, neo-ethical even!, meanings of both horse and daughter reemerging in his life on the same day, Hero Horse-Killer is actually quite happy. Granted, the horse did give him a nasty turn. He'd just awakened from a frequent nightmare of his when he spotted it out the window. In the dream, he's standing on a plain with his back to a sharp and impossibly deep drop-off while in front of him an entire herd of horses stampedes towards its certain doom. Hero Horse-Killer tries to warn them, wave them off, but every time the horses ignore him as they thunder past. They part around him as if he were nothing more than a rock in a stream of sweating, muscular flesh and Horse-Killer looks into their eyes, sees with great certainty that they know exactly what they are doing and where they are going. This is all part of the plan. It is that moment more than anything else that makes this dream a nightmare, and causes Hero Horse-Killer to jerk out of sleep in the mornings with one hand clamped to his chest.

But now, as he climbs the ladder to the roof, Hero Horse-Killer isn't thinking about that dream, or about the horse that may or may not be eating the heads off of his marigolds right at that very minute. Horse-Killer, who is much less sullen than the writer had imagined, has pretty much emptied his mind of everything except for being, happily, on a

ladder. There is nothing to analyze as far as he is concerned; there are no mysteries.

There are three things that make up this happiness of Horse-Killer's: 1) It is a bright day and he is up on the roof, in the sun, facing towards the Bay which he can actually see silvering on the horizon like a promise of evening; 2) He is, now, on a roll with his hammer—each roofing nail slamming snug to the shingle with one blow—and he likes the feeling of his muscles flexing and releasing in the order they are supposed to; 3) Hero Horse-Killer loves his daughter.

He hasn't seen her in ten years, not since his wife divorced him and prevented the daughter, who was eleven, from coming to the jail to visit him. Then, he was transferred to the Delaware State Pen and figured perhaps the wife was right, perhaps they were all better off separate, and he stopped sending his daughter letters, birthday cards, anything at all. Hero Horse-Killer didn't actually believe this logic, but he was weak the way many people are weak. In the end it hurt him too much to send these offerings—hand-lettered cards he decorated with the foil off cigarette packages, awkward letters that began and ended with, How are you? I am fine—that he knew, with clarity instead of self-pity, were pathetic, and not to receive anything in return. Because she never wrote back. Not once. Eventually, Hero Horse-Killer served his time and was released on his own recognizance, as his parole officer put it. As far as Horse-Killer could tell all that really meant was, Don't Fuck Up, and in the spirit of the moment Hero Horse-Killer borrowed a pen from the parole officer and, on the back of a renewal notice for, coincidentally enough, **HORSE AND RIDER MAGAZINE**, wrote his name and new address. Then he flipped the card, scratched out the starchy letters of the parole officer's name, and carefully wrote in the daughter's name—were he a poet he would have called each letter a minor beauty—and the address of the house they had all lived in together, back in Chicago in that other life.

It was a shot in the dark, a gamble he made himself forget about as soon as he slipped the card into the mailbox right outside the prison gate. It was whistling in the dark was what it was, and Horse-Killer, who was more scared now than he had ever been listening to the sleeping noises of the jail or lifting the silent latches on the barn doors all those dark nights ago, got on a bus and headed south.

The writer has crawled under the desk to prevent one of her cats, the fat one, from chewing on the computer wires. She has washed half of the dishes, given up and taken out the trash instead. She has contemplated crawling into the closet with a blanket over her head for the rest of the day and decided it was too hot for that much closeness. She has taken her medicine. Now, the writer sits back down in front of her computer and realizes that she is by far the least sympathetic character in this story. In fact, she is far more annoying than the daughter who now, in addition to flicking her cigarette overhanded, is also driving forty-five miles per hour in the left lane of the interstate. She's not paying much attention to her surroundings; she actually jumps and swerves a little when the semi, which has been pressed up to her bumper for the last five minutes, honks its horn. She pulls into the right lane and waves cheerfully at the trucker who is flipping her off. The daughter doesn't care, or notice even. She's busy thinking, but not, as the writer had surmised, of her father and the small town where she will meet him again for the first time in a decade. No, the daughter—and this, the writer realizes, is why she doesn't like her—is in love.

The daughter is 21. Her birthday is on January 14th, and on midnight the evening of the 13th she and four of her friends (Clarissa, Larissa, Marcy and Pete) went down to a popular college bar in town to have her first legal drinks. The daughter had many legal drinks that night. So many that when first Clarissa, then Larissa, then, together, Marcy and Pete left for the dorms, the daughter stayed on and shut the bar down. The night was frigid and as she walked home the daughter's sneakers crunched through a thin layer of frost that would later become snow.

The daughter started to feel sentimental and weepy. She wished she had a sister to call, or anyone she could wake up who would just hold the line and say *It's Going To Be Alright*, until the daughter fell asleep. At one point the daughter slipped and fell, landing heavily on her knees. She crouched there for awhile, fascinated by how cold she felt and crying absentmindedly while sporadic headlights highlighted her by the side of the road.

If the writer were still writing this story here would be where the love interest came in. A Galahad, a Gilgamesh, someone epic sweeping down to the daughter's rescue. It would be too much for the writer to resist. Alternatively, the love interest could be an anti-hero. Perhaps he, also drunk on this bright night although well over 21, could lose control of the car and hop the curb behind which the daughter is crouching. He is speeding, of course, and the accident is horrific. It leaves the daughter's legs hopelessly pinned under the wheels of the smoking Oldsmobile, and Griffin (this is the love interest's name, one that links symbolically with his lifelong pattern of chaos and noble misfortune, his well-intentioned disasters and all the complicated minutia of beauty and pain that would be documented in detail were this the way the story went) thrown through the windshield and veritably crucified on the limbs of the pine tree the daughter had been kneeling under. It seems clear to the writer, almost inevitable, that Griffin would die slung up on that pine, and the daughter (now a double amputee) would go on to drop out of college and become, through a series of fantastic and barely believable twists of fate involving an entire cast of quirky and regionally dimorphic characters (The Electric Cashier! Snorky DevilBottom, Lady of the Laundromat!), a trick pony rider with a traveling circus. Ultimately, this choice of profession, as well as the daughter's adamant refusal to face her crippling with either spunk or bravery, would enact a rapprochement with her long estranged father. The story, which seems to have become a full fledged, and terrible, novel without the writer's authorization, would culminate in the daughter realizing, after a string of ill-fated

romances with such loveable young scruffs as Seal Boy and The Great Galbini, that Griffin (remember him?), by virtue of the inexorable ways in which he has changed her life, is the single most important man in her life, and thus, her one true love.

The writer thinks this is a very neat package, indeed. She is a bit leery of her instinct to kill off the main love interest before he even has a chance to become the main love interest, but the writer concedes that it does make things simpler all around, ties up the loose ends right away instead of letting them dangle like unpleasant bits of rotting elastic; plot reduced to old jockey shorts slung in the corner of an abandoned wrestling coach's house. Interestingly enough, the writer has no compunctions about chopping off the daughter's legs.

So, yes, Griffin the anti-hero. You can't love him, you can't hate him. In fact, it's hard to care at all, and, for the writer at this particular junction in her life (she is sucking on a cherry Blow-Pop and watching the morning train rumble past her window) that is an attractive quality. Also, it would be easier than what the writer fears is actually to follow. Her privacy is very important to the writer. This is why, many times, the stories she writes remain half-finished. There was one about a woman who sky-dives to her death while her husband dances with a German Shepard in a dog competition, leaving her daughter alone to trace the trajectories of suicide; and one about a man whose anxiety about his first child's impending birth translates into a series of ominously threatening road-side signs accusing him of stealing corn. There are many, many many, where a woman loves a man and then... a woman deeply loves a man and then... a woman can feel inside her own skin the silky lift of the hairs along the back of his arms, knows the gap in his teeth with the tip of her tongue and in the spaces in her own smile, can feel the callused whorls of his heels socked into her palm and then...

Nobody ever finishes stories like that because who would read them? The writer feels she can live with this—no audience, no endings—as

long as she is left alone. Right now, her new project is to count the trains and categorize them by type. She has tacked long rolls of butcher paper up on her living room walls and has covered them with columns in different colors of ink. Red is for the coal trains, blue for lumber. Green is for the natural gas tankers and black for the infrequent and terrifying livestock trains. They crate pigs and cows, rarely anything smaller, and they seem endless. The writer feels she has witnessed something. She has swelled a little with knowing.

The daughter, still crouching by the side of the road, eventually started laughing with as much sincerity as she had earlier been crying. It was that funny there in the frost and pine litter. Above her head there appeared a phenomenon similar to an aurora borealis; only with a crashed car, a tree, a pony, two loose legs kicking up a soft shoe and something that looked like a man with flippers. This was also funny and the daughter picked herself up and wove her way back to the dorm where, as she half stumbled up the porch steps still giggling, she almost ran into a boy she vaguely knew who was leaning against the railing smoking a cigarette. He was wearing jeans and a leather jacket. A baseball cap. Sneakers. The daughter remembers none of this. She stumbled up the porch steps and, pausing to waver perilously at the top, demanded that he give her a cigarette.

"Gimmer, umm, me. A cigarette," is what the daughter said.

[...] is what the boy said. Only he said it with one eyebrow raised and the daughter could see, now that she was up close and getting closer every second, that what she had mistaken for vagueness was really an awkward anger. Furious boy holding out a cigarette.

"Nuts to you," the daughter said, but it came out like nothing at all. And they stood there, together for the first time in what would become a long time, smoking on the one hand bitterly (him) and on the other lusciously, like eating strawberries! or Popsicles! or no, or wait, like

smoking a cigarette! (her) on the porch.

Halfway through her cigarette it started to snow. The daughter turned towards the boy, who was looking away from her, out towards the science building, and touched him on the back of his forearm. He shifted towards her, his jacket creaking with the cold, and the daughter opened her mouth to an extended silence while her tongue battled with her will. In fact, it was not just her tongue committing acts of war, but her lips and her palate, her throat, her teeth even. Every element of her body that contained the power of speech was rebelling, trying to force her into unknown cadences, possibly even foreign languages, but she resisted. She looked at the man—who seemed angry still, but with himself she saw, himself—and said what she'd wanted to say all along, which was, "Hey." She looked at her hand on his arm and slid it down until it touched the cold back of his hand. "Hey."

"I'm sorry," says the writer, pacing her study from one wall to the next and clicking the top of her Bic pen. "Is that really so hard to say? Just, I'm sorry."

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HERO Horse-Killer has decided to break for lunch. He climbs down the ladder, slapping each rung to hear it ring, and retrieves his lunch box from under the car where he's left it to keep it safe and cool. Briefly he looks over at Mrs. Craw's two sons, Dexter and Bonafide, who are supposed to be doing the landscaping on the scandalously absent wrestling coach's front, side and back yards. Hero Horse-Killer can only assume that the man had a passion (and perhaps a scandalous passion) for azaleas as he had planted the whole front yard in them. Since he's been gone, however, the bushes have been choked out by sapling pines, ditchweed, kudzu. Now the last few mottled survivors have been pulled up by the roots by the Craw boys who are sitting in the bed of Dexter's Ford pickup dangling their legs over the edge and eating egg sandwiches.

Bonafide looks up and waves Hero Horse-Killer over. He is the younger brother, and a poet, and currently engaged to the deli girl from the Royal Farms over in Kennedyville. He is quite sincere despite his overly-long hair and awkward name. His last poem had the wind in it, and seagulls and the way, when you are driving in a flat, and perhaps marshy, part of the world, the horizon always seems like it's going to turn out one way, but when you get there its not like that at all.

Dexter has piggy eyes and smells disconcertingly like vanilla. This is all that is known of him. He is a mystery, but a necessary one because he is the villain. As far as the writer knows (which, she is beginning to realize, is not much), Dexter has never done anything particularly villainous, but sitting there in the bed of his truck, kicking his legs and leaving crooked bite marks all around the edges of the egg sandwich his mother made for him, he distinctly seems as if he is up to no good. And every now and then, like there! right there! did you see it?, he gives the kind of side-long, crafty looks that only a true villain could pull off, that Morse code of the eyes that translates to "Bwah Ha Ha Ha," and a good long bout of hand rubbing. He reminds Hero Horse-Killer of a jockey he used to know, or maybe a groom. So many of the details from those days have been erased by time and the motion of a body when it has no place left to go but in. Horse-Killer can tell what time it is by the way the light tangles in his arm hair. He can hold a smoldering match head between his thumb and forefinger for a full 10.5 seconds without wincing, blinking, or doing anything other than appreciate the sulfur smell.

At first the writer had intended the Craw boys to be foils for Hero Horse-Killer's absent family. They were to be a repetition of a repetition, or 'a repetition of something that has never occurred,' as one of the writer's college professors once said to the great consternation of the class. From them, Hero Horse-Killer would learn, in an oblique and thereby writerly way, not only what he is missing, but what he has avoided. And which, the writer asks you, is the greater burden? Neither she

nor Horse-Killer knows. Nor does the writer know exactly how she was going to affect this reflection. Perhaps Bonafide, who was always a poet, would scrawl a dirty and accusatory limerick in the dirt under Horse-Killer's ladder.

*There once was a man from Chicago
Who fancied himself an Iago
As part of his plan
He fried Squiremonkey's dam
And sleighed through the snow like Zhivago*

Squiremonkey was a yearling of great potential, but limited follow-through, whose mother Hero Horse-Killer had indeed electrocuted (she bucked a few times going down and had given him nightmares for a month) but, given the confines of plot and setting, there would be no way for Bonafide to know this. And the last line makes no sense at all, though the Zhivago reference is interesting given Horse-Killer's relative isolation and the climate in Chicago. But why not reference the band if you're going to be clever like that? These are all questions the writer asks both herself and you. She would ask her characters, but currently Horse-Killer is reclimbing his ladder (doing it one handed this time and trying not to bang his lunch box against the side of the house) and the Craw brothers are being yelled at by their mother, Mrs. Craw, who has rattled up the driveway in her battered Jeep Cherokee exactly in time to see Bonafide take a swig out of a bottle of peach brandy, which happens to be *her* peach brandy, and anyway she's not paying them to drink and furthermore... but she never gets it out because just at that moment Dexter, who has, villainously, stretched and hopped down from the truck bed to get back to work, tugs an azalea bush with such vigor that he bowls himself over backwards when the roots finally give and, as if he had planned it, the sly bastard, knocks both himself and his mother directly into the muddy ditch Hero Horse-Killer had left when he patched the foundation. Mrs. Craw and Dexter splutter and spout in the mud while Bonafide hoots with laughter, and, he can feel it coming,

incipient poetics. Hero Horse-Killer, up on the roof again, ignores the commotion entirely and leans against the chimney to eat his lunch. It is a perfect scene—so dependent on timing and sight gags, so ancillary to anything else going on in the story. The writer looks on it fondly the way she would a partially fragmented seashell washed up on the shore. It has come a long way to be so close to whole. The writer, who is rushing into the living room with a red pen in her hand, wonders who wrote it. She has some questions she'd like to ask.

So, the Craw brothers, the whole Craw family, do not turn out to be foils as the writer had originally hoped. They turn out to be nothing more than people doing yard work, driving around in jeeps, yelling at each other, going home to take showers. It is a summer day. There are better things to be doing with a summer day than pulling up azaleas, but Bonafide—who has that dreamy, set look that his brother knows means he's about to start reciting something—doesn't mind the work. It leaves his mind free to think. And Dexter, who is secretly delighted to be so filthy (because it is novel, you see, because the mud feels so good against his skin) needs the money. He is saving to start his own business salvaging oyster boats, and crabbers and the occasional yacht or two, from the bottom of the murky Chesapeake. He's still young enough to dream about churning up some buried treasure, and old enough not to be too embarrassed by thinking like that. The writer hopes he has a happy life, because look at him there: wiping his forehead with the back of his arm and smearing mud all over his face, tilting his head to take a drink of water, groaning as his brother straightens up and starts to talk in the poet voice. He deserves it too.

The daughter, much to the writer's surprise, is already over the Delaware line, and commenting aloud to herself about the great number of dead deer she is seeing by the side of the road. It seems that morning when she phoned Hero Horse-Killer she did so from her hotel room, a fact which she, as the caller, certainly knew, and Hero Horse-Killer, the writer

surmises, must have had some inkling of. The writer feels a little left out, and more than a little inclined to sulk about it. Whose story is this, after all?

Nevertheless, the daughter *is* in Delaware and will arrive at Hero Horse-Killer's door early that same evening. She hadn't anticipated that the drive would go so quickly, especially because she is vaguely aware, has been told by The Love Interest many times, that she is a slow and unreliable driver. Now, she is starting to get nervous in a way she hadn't imagined when, a month ago and in love, she dumped the contents of her mementos shoebox onto her bed and fished out a wrinkled and battered, a tear- and beer-stained subscription leaflet for **HORSE AND RIDER MAGAZINE** with her own name carefully lettered on the front. It had seemed too easy to her, seamless.

1. Slide his strong, square hand from your thigh and get out of the bed.
2. Walk downstairs to your own dorm room. Open the door. Quietly, quietly, so as not to wake your roommate, find your father's address in the litter of withered corsages, unopened lollipops, buttons, pins, a matted knot of hair.
3. Drive to your father's house.
4. Hold your father's hand, let him hold yours. See the ways you have lived in his face and open your arms to him. Hide forever in his chest.

"So, two bucks and five does since Scranton. Or was it one buck and six does? That last one was hard to tell..." The daughter drums the steering wheel. She grimaces into the rearview mirror. "Oh, there's another. Seven does."

"Doe-si-doe," says the writer, who is beginning to drink.

If Hero Horse-Killer is nervous, he is not showing it. He's finished the roof and is sweating out the afternoon leaning from the side of his lad-

der, precarious Horse Killer with no safety ropes, and prying free rotting sections of siding. Hero Horse-Killer loosens the board first by whacking the lower edge with his hammer, then wedges the claw grip behind the upper edge of the board and wiggles away. Once things seem free and clear he slips a gloved hand in behind the wood, trying not to think about spiders or wasps' nests, and yanks as much as he can free of the house. Then he drops it down to Dexter who catches most of the boards competently and stows them in the back of the truck. They are a team—a working machine, wheel and cog and comical honking noise (which is Bonafide who has climbed a tree ostensibly to trim it clear of the power lines, but mostly for the view and the air and the chance to swing back and forth above the ground.) A machine, however, is a cold and unfeeling instrument. The writer assumes that she at least knows this much, but any one of the characters should feel free to contradict if they think they know better. The men, on the other hand, (the boys, the killers, the beings beating on wood and metal in the high, beautiful summer) have emotions, preoccupations, motives. How they work is what they do, not their reason for being, and this is a mighty difference.

Bonafide is entering a state of rare ecstasy which has nothing to do with his body. He is swinging on the pine, bending it lower and lower to the ground, and whooping involuntarily each time it springs back up. He feels like this is a repetition of something he has either read or heard about, but he doesn't care. The air smells like salt; the ground is flat and open like a platter you are being offered up on. It is summer.

Dexter is hungry still and thinking about the steak he plans to eat for dinner. His favorite part is when the knife tip presses through the center of the steak and the juice, which is not blood, but something close, wells cleanly up over the sides of the cut. That is better than any bite, the first or the last, Dexter decides as he catches a board and heaves it into the truck in one motion. Probably because it is a beginning.

Hero Horse-Killer, who has paused to wipe his face dry with a blue

handkerchief, is finally, after all this time, thinking wholly about his daughter. He wonders what she will look like. The last time he saw her she was eleven, brown and skinny from being on the swim team every summer since she was six. She had a terrible haircut she had talked her mother into letting her get and then regretted mightily as soon as the stylist had finished sawing through her ponytail. Hero Horse-Killer, who had his own problems that last disastrous year, remembers sitting in his workshop, staring at the tools he used to support the charade that the "contracting" work he did during the day was how he earned his money and listening to the daughter slam a tennis ball over and over again into the side of the house. Every time it hit the siding, making a hollow boom, she would sob once, loudly. And every time Horse-Killer would wince, recoil as if someone was beating her, as if he himself were beating her. The guilt of it all, even then: the power she had over him.

"Eight does," says the daughter, "it's always the women." But she too is thinking of when she was eleven, of the last time she saw her father outside of a jail. He was going to work, a "construction" job across town (which, of course, was also a lie), but at the time it was just Dad in his Dickies, putting his tool box in the back of the truck. There was something wrong with her, the daughter remembers, something she was upset about. Maybe that was the summer she had the chicken pox, but anyway, something had made him nervous, because he didn't lean over to swing open the passenger door and let her ride down to the end of the block with him, eating the carrots out of the lunch her mother had packed and spinning the radio dial. Instead, though she was there, waiting, he leaned over and waved, like that, through the glass, and pulled out. Nothing more, and she was eleven, and that night he was gone.

The writer, who is sitting on her porch swing, rocking gently with the tip of one toe, is thinking of all the spaces in her life, the long stretches between things when it is as if she, the writer, is in a coma, or cryogenically frozen. Nothing happens, nothing moves, grows strong, wastes away. In those times, it is like the writer is floating in space—a being

entirely of body, but a body entirely of consciousness. She can't move, or breathe, she can't find the place she was meant to fit in. During these times the writer goes swimming a lot. Underwater, she never feels at a loss for place, because the only space that exists is the one you have made with your own body. She tucks her body into a ball and bobs underwater, watching her air bubbles float to the surface. They are the only things the writer can think of that don't change at all in their existence on earth. When they reach the surface, a place where they must either evolve or perish, they simply cease to be. It is, the writer thinks, the easy way out, but it is also hard, almost impossibly hard to actually do.

In Hero Horse-Killer's backyard, a grey horse is eating the heads off of his marigolds. The horse is precise about it; it goes from one bush to the next, never missing so much as a bud. One must presume that the horse is enjoying himself very much—because it is summer and the breeze is cool on his back, and he is eating flowers with his eyes half lidded and shifting his weight from haunch to haunch as if he were born for nothing more and nothing less than this, right now, under the sun.

Soon the horse will finish with Horse-Killer's marigolds and meander over to the crabapple tree. He will strip a few leaves, but in a lazy, non-committal way, and urinate heavily at the base of the gnarled trunk. He is an old horse and knows his way home well. As the sun begins to set (and Hero Horse-Killer rattles slowly home from the jobsite, and the daughter arrows speedily to her father's home from the home she has built with her own body), the horse will shake his head and snort, pick his way back over the crumbling section of wall he came in by and strike off for the distant barn roof which he cannot see, but navigates towards with faith and certainty.

What the horse knows of love and forgiveness are all contained in his feed bag and the four walls of his stall. What do the rest of us know? the writer wants to ask. What does Bonafide know as he flings open the

door to the Royal Farms in Kennedyville with a flourish and recites the first stanza of his new poem to his laughing fiancée? What does Dexter know as he forks the first bite of steak into his mouth and flips through the latest issue of **FORTUNE HUNTER'S MAGAZINE**, or his mother, Mrs. Craw, as she rattles through the figures for the week and watches her oldest boy eat his dinner? What does the daughter know, what could she possibly know, as she pulls into an unfamiliar driveway and imagines, in perfect detail, the turn of The Love Interest's head as he sleeps, his hair against the pillow, the open cup of his left hand curved as if to catch his breath? And what does Hero Horse-Killer know as he rises from the table, tugs against the bite of his tie and opens the door?

What the writer knows is unclear and apt to change at a moment's notice. But what the writer does is sneak into the horse's stall late at night after the farmer and his wife and their grown daughter and teenage son are all asleep. The horse is awake and looks at the writer with one rheumy eye as the writer sets her tool box down on the matted straw, opens it up and gets to work. The writer is not as fast as Hero Horse-Killer, she's not as professional, hasn't had as much experience, but she is determined and she is thorough. In three hours, just as the sun is starting to lighten the sky, the writer is finished. She steps back to survey her work.

The horse is still heavy lidded and old, he still shifts from haunch to haunch, but now he also gleams. The writer has curried him with soft brush and hard, she has combed and trimmed his mane, cleaned the tender frogs of his soles and shaved and waxed the hooves. She has braided his fetlock and then, in alternating colors (blue and gold), wound ribbons in his tail. She has hung bells at alternating heights in his mane so when he shifts his weight they tinkle in a gentle, unobtrusive way, and shined his old leather saddle, bridle, reins until they look like supple oak. She has made him as beautiful as she knows how and, as a final touch, tied a ribbon, plush and satiny, around his neck. He is a present, a trick pony, a show horse. He is forgiveness, which, the writer

thinks, is the only gift she would like to receive and the only one she can't give to herself.

Briefly, the writer considers guiding the horse in all his finery over to Hero Horse-Killer's house and leaving him, once again, in the backyard. But the sun is coming up and the writer is suddenly less sure. The horse may not *want* to go to Horse-Killer's house, and if he doesn't want to be there then the whole thing is a sham, isn't it?, for everyone. What is the next step? the writer asks. What is the next way to make it right? The writer peers into the horse's eyes, first the right and then the left, but she can't see any answers. And by the end of the story she is still standing there, in the barn, with one hand on the horse's nose as if waiting for a sign.

Outside the sky is a blaze of gold and pink. Birds are waking up and beginning to bobble around the branches, sing. A breeze from the Bay blows across this flat country, so flat it is as if you are on a platter being offered up to the sky, and with it comes the smell of salt and mud, gulls wheeling, herons fanning their wings, things moving, evolving, withering away, a whole world moving on and on and on from one day to the next.

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EXOTICA MILE

alison
carrick

Listen to how it was,
what it was like to sit in
the backseat of the car heading down
the flat, straight road, a creek to our right,
a field to our left, not yet wet with dew and mist,
sitting behind him on the way home.
He, with a car, and a foot of lead
driving faster than ever
up over the crest of the hill.
We were leaving the ground
butterflies in my throat.
But the test was always the Exotica Mile.
How fast could we go on that
one mile, leading from the turnoff,
in an unbroken line to the
Exotica Plant shop.
An unbroken line
like my eyes to you
like my everything
straight to you.

Listen, I want to whisper to you,
let's just keep going
let's not stop
drop Mary and Pete off at the corner
to make their way back
without us.
They are not like you and I.
They are content, calm, ordinary
while we are made of flame, light,
dust, stars and other elements which
flare in the sky and then fall.

Listen, I want to brush my cheek against the
back of your seat and let my hair rest on
your shoulder. But you are banging your
hand against the wheel—fifty, then sixty, then seventy
miles per hour—the fastest ever. We fly past
the store with its ferns and yarrow
enclosed in humid glass, growing under
the lamps which make it a box
contained and lit from within.

DOG SAW GOD

laura kooris

Found Him working late,
white light dimmed yellow,
over piled high papers, under
smoke ring halos, crumpled
soda cans floating at His feet,
God with a continuous earbud mutter—
in multi-task mode—angels whisking
in and out at His expletives and commands.

Dog thought God
needed a walk, a spin
through the heavens to throw
a comet or two, smell a blooming nebula.
He growled and dog slouched over
to cheer Him up, the squeaky
toy in tow; thought a lolling lick
or soft head on the knee
could create a grin or two.

Blast,
thundered God, as silver
arcs flew,

*It's hopeless; the housekeeping
never ends.*

Standing up, His papers scattered like quail—
the yammering earpiece dropped. God
left, angels atwitter.

Dog bound after Him to the galaxy's edge
where God sat, legs dangling. Resolute
dog sat down to retrieve and chase that slobbering ball.
My God saw dog, tail pert, ready—
mouth, eyes grinning, new at this game;
the soggy plaything expecting its final toss.

Good dog, come—there's still wag left.
He cradled the ball and came back to me.

BED & BREAKFAST

tim
o'conner

ANCESTOR-WORSHIP USUALLY INVOLVES THE PRESERVATION AND VENERATION OF THINGS CONSIDERED TO BE RELICS...IN FORMER TIMES, ALL ANCESTRAL HUMAN REMAINS WERE DEEMED SACRED, CONTAINING SOME ESSENCE OF THE PERSONALITY OF THE DECEASED...THE PRESENCE OF THE ANCESTRAL GUARDIAN SOUL IN THE HEAD IS STILL RECOGNIZED TODAY IN THE WEST AFRICAN TRADITION AS WELL AS THE CELTIC.

—NIGEL PENNICK, FROM CELTIC SACRED LANDSCAPES

GIRL, ONE DAY YOU WILL BE OLD. BUT THE THING IS: I LOVE YOU NOW...

—MORRISSEY, FROM DISAPPOINTED

“Newly engaged,” we lie with a smile
to the matron. Our private joke.

In our room: the empty dresser, paintings

of gold, harvest fields are heirlooms almost
ours. The imitation log pulses. I gather
your clothes, offer them to the dresser as

lady bugs crawl down brocade
curtains. Downstairs: stew for tomorrow steams.
This matron places garlands around

an exhibit for strangers: the cedar-oiled skull
of her ancestor, the house’s guardian. It can see
our fingers grazing the other’s face upstairs:

how we think they won’t be stripped to bone—
we won’t lose what we now hold.

We’re not tender enough for each other’s

touch. There’s no space to stretch and breathe
deep, no breeze. Outside, the waterfall freezes.
A road creeps away. Tomorrow,

you’ll be your father’s girl. So we keep
retreating. The dusty digital clock blinks
wrong numbers. Tomorrow

never comes. It begins to snow
as the seasons sleep between us—
ancient siblings in our one harvest time.

MEMPHIS CLOSES HER EYES

joe wilkins

Friday and I want a beer. Something dark
because it's rice harvest, too much dust, steel
and sun. A boy throws sticks to a dog twisting
in the street, and I'm working too damn hard.

Mr. Lake, my next door neighbor, an easy hundred,
oldest of seven dead brothers, trembles to stand
like grass in the wind, is waiting in my driveway
to tell me Johnny Cash, like each of his brothers,

is dead. So I drive to Memphis. Let beer roar
down my throat. Turn my head to watch
the chaff fires burn like gods as the sun
goes down. Then I'm walking Union Avenue.

Drunks and lunatics and bits of paper drift
across the street. A man holds a cigarette
to his lips. I know there is a song for all of this,
something hard and wild, rising to the night.

FLESH, FALL

kate beles

Maple leaves and pigeons swing through
a slate sky. The sun is a metallic

fog light just above the leaden bay.
The rain has teeth today, and I think

it must be a good season to eat apples
or die. Soon we will carve things

with knives and somebody may even be
born to the world with bloody fists.

ELEGY

emily perez

I.

Afternoons, you invite me in,
feed me merienda, ask about my day.

In the background, Sister Mary Helen
drones on the Bible Network
selling a statue of St. Francis,
stone, with animals at his feet.
You have one in your living room,
a talisman from the garden before—
hibiscus, rose, heather, bougainvillea,
bloomed like flames rising from
ground as dry as kindling.

Somewhere in Oklahoma, Sister Mary Helen
puts away the statue.
Somewhere in your mind,
a door opens:

Sister! you shout
at the unblinking nun on the screen,
I forgot to pay you for the last one!

II.

You have irrefutable logic
when my mom scolds you
for watering the fake violets in the kitchen.

You gaze at her, superior:

*Well I keep watering them,
and they keep on blooming.*

And no one can argue.

So who can say no now,
when you see your dead sister
in your own face in the mirror,
when you insist:

*she's here, she's living—
why have you forgotten her?*

III.

You trusted no one,
hid everything.

On the night you died,
my search for a rosary unearthed:
a box of chocolates, two little angels,
soaps, oatmeal cookies, keys to the house
you had not lived in for seven years
after a fall and a broken hip
moved you into ours,
hidden treasure.

And only in the last closet
on a high shelf
in a lost purse
in a zipped pocket
did shell pink, plastic beads
and the body of Christ emerge.
I imagined it had been for traveling;
Placed it in your hands for your journey.

IV.

You say:

There are cows in the yard,
breaking down the fence.

My father has a secret wife
and children in Mexico.
He's dealing drugs and no one can know.

You stayed in a hotel last night,
every night, and you left without paying.

The only words you can remember
el himno Nacional, the Mexican National Anthem.

When people ask, I want to answer:
that you're not sick, you're dying.

You've been in bed
for two years now
but I still dream you can walk.

You tell me secretly:
about the time you fell down the stairs.
I was trying to fly.

V.

Afternoon, and I visit again.
No merienda today,
no guarantee you will remember
my name.

You ask about my children,
my ranch and my horses.
You comfort me for the husband who died
the day my grandchild was born.

Who am I today?
A body, mooring yours to this world
as your mind trips off
to some other time
unconfined by the space
eating at your edges
as you grow small
smaller, and more so.

You are smallest now
beside me. Holding my hand
with your whole self
in those five fingers.

I'm leaving today,
I remind you.
You darken, then brighten
as your mind sits up to speak.
Put me in your suitcase,
you say, and I picture you safe,
folded in my clothes.

I'll take you, I promise,
I'm carrying you now.

**NO ONE IS GOING TO WRITE HOME FROM THE DESERT
OR ITS COUNTER OFFERS**

gabrielle
jesiolowski

awake for the long night train and wondering
what signals are coming—

follow the coastline
of italy approximately and bruising
along the way the breakfast oranges
the time-bound mouth steeples its night words
find my body alone on a foldout cot

so writing home has many faults
votives float in the bowl on the maple table
my mother screams unfolds the ironing board
my father meditates long this morning

portraits are always failing
even half her words are gingered
he has lived many centuries among the branches and fossil
they reside in the climate of seasons and few disasters
war planes not passing overhead

she has blue ceramic pots for the cactus woven baskets for the fern
the dogs bark at guests until they have scathed their throats
the cat is gallant and well fed

train brushes along against a territory
or in a history of cloud and field
I'm undoing my memory one
chain at a time once alone

RAPUNZEL AT THIRTY-SIX

rochelle
smith

I used to do a lot of knitting.
Less sewing: sewing requires
looking always at your hands,
overseeing their useful repetition.
Knitting cages the hands,
but the eyes are free to look up, out
the window, at the long walk
of climax forest over the hill.
The window faced south, thoughtfully.
It wasn't that high a structure,
really, perhaps no more
than an ankle-break's worth of fall.
But I had never fallen farther
than the height of my own legs—
I had no way of gauging the damage.

I became very good at math.
It was my own kind, using myself
as a yardstick, there being no
formal tools of measurement.
Two times pi times (four times my right arm,
shoulder to wrist) was the circumference I could walk
pressed against the wall.
Pi times (four times my right arm)
squared was the space I had
for turning. There were books
left for me, where I learned the equations.
Also small tools: spoons, a thimble,
crane-shaped scissors, nothing big enough
to destroy mortar, or myself.

Not that I was tempted much.
I'd dream of ships sometimes,
of sunburn, of unbounded fresh
or salt water at my feet,
but mostly I was content with maps
as abstract art.
The cosmos was a cool gray beaker
made to house me, I was its god
and priestess. There was not so much
of anything that I couldn't count it.
Four eggs in the thrush's nest
notched in the beech below and to the right,
eighteen equinox stars every March,
not counting the shyest Pleiad,
if I looked out from the right spot.

I can't pretend my feelings were unmixed
when I first heard his voice.

These days my equations are futile
black twigs, my arms nobody's standard.
Everything's backward—every hovel
and tree crushes in, hoarse and brutish.
I can see any whorish star I want
just by tilting back, but the horizon
is lost to me. The texture of bark,
of sand, of sticky kissing mouths bewilders.
So much room,

and the earth's noises so close.
Mice along the floorboards
stamp and roar, the churn booms
like a cannon; the twins' singing
unbraids my nerves, makes me long
for high, windy virginity.
Sewing now is comforting.
Custody of the eyes, as the priests say;
small cell of my lap, a few colors,
three at a time at most, always
precise shades of green.

MY FATHER'S HANDS

shanna
hajek

i.

He made certain I baited my own hook
and yet there he is in the picture,
crouching behind me
and holding my first catch by the mouth.

ii.

Once I searched through his dresser
looking for the war medals I had heard of
but he would never talk about.
Instead I found my baby teeth,
saved in a plastic bag.

iii.

In the summer I would wash the race car trailer
for five dollars, scraping the bugs off
with my fingernails because there was no other way.
I could almost hear rusty hinges
when his wallet opened.

iv.

What I remember most
is purple winter mornings,
seeing him limp through the house.
When the pain was so bad,
my mother had to tie his shoes for him.

**MYTHIC VERSIONS OF REAL PLACES:
AN INTERVIEW WITH ANTHONY DOERR**

barrett
bowlin

If you've never read a word by Anthony Doerr (call him Tony), for just a moment, please disregard every single rule you have ever been taught pertaining to the subject of writing. Put it away for a second. You won't need it.

Because reading Tony Doerr shouldn't be an exercise in structure and mechanics, in composition and technique, at least not at first. Instead, pick up one of his stories. Read it. Read it and experience it. Let it fill you with scenes so intricately and precisely crafted that you will shake. Let it deliver to you characters so ornate and complex that you will feel as if you know them or live next door to them. Let whatever you read move or hold or kick or soothe you. Let it do these things to you because what you are reading of Doerr's is that good and that momentous.

And if you want to understand why Doerr's work is able to accomplish all of this, pick it apart. Look at the precision of singular words and how they are fitted together exactly. Look at how each paragraph connects to the narrative and bonds to it, builds upon it, makes it addictive to read. Examining these components of Doerr's artistry will allow you to understand why his works have won so many awards and so many articles of praise.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. We need context first.

Tony Doerr was born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1973. He graduated with his B.A. from Bowdoin College in 1995. He left Bowling Green State University in 1999 with his M.F.A. Since 1999, Doerr's works have been popping up like wildflowers in the most prestigious of places: the **O'HENRY PRIZE STORIES** and **THE BEST AMERICAN SHORT STORIES** anthologies, the **PARIS REVIEW**, **ZOETROPE: ALL STORY**, and the **ATLANTIC MONTHLY**. His collection of short stories, **THE SHELL COLLECTOR**, was awarded the Barnes & Noble Discover Prize, the Ohioana Book Award, the Rome Prize, and

two—yes, two—O'Henry Prizes. **THE NEW YORK TIMES** and the American Library Association wanted to canonize him, and the **WASHINGTON POST** offered him the same revered treatment this past September after he released his first novel, **ABOUT GRACE**.

For the past few years, he has written a bimonthly column for the *Boston Globe* on science-related books, and he has taught at such places as the University of Idaho—Boise. Oh, and he currently lives in Rome, Italy. His reading schedule for this year includes appearances in Rome, London, and Geneva.

Like we said, he's that good and that momentous.

But prior to leaving for Rome this past year, Doerr was kind enough to respond to Touchstone's questions on his works, his influences, and his craft. This issue, we are fortunate to present here Touchstone's interview with Anthony Doerr.

Touchstone: The locations presented in your stories and your novel range from rich environments in the United States to lush settings on multiple continents. We've heard that you've lived in or at least have visited many of these places. What do you think determines if an environment will serve well for a story?

Anthony Doerr: Any environment, of course, will (theoretically) serve well for a story. You can set a great story in Nebraska or hell or at the bottom of a swimming pool. How the environment operates in the story is up to the writer, and it's always paramount (i.e., I think a writer should spend the bulk of her time) to make that world as convincing and seamless as possible. In my own case I think settings and stories come to me simultaneously. That is: the landscapes and the stories grow out of each other. Like real human beings, characters make marks on their respective environments, but environments make marks on their characters, too, and I tried to present each character's story as inseparable from the place(s) where it occurs. That said, I don't necessarily feel

like I'm always presenting a real, actual place in my stories—often the settings are more like mythic versions of real places. You're right, they're often based on my visits to various places: whatever limited observational skills I have, I think I use them best and most when I find myself in a strange place, slightly uncomfortable. Especially if the people around me aren't speaking in English. It helps me remember that the United States is just a small, isolated, wildly privileged corner of the world, and it helps me see my surroundings more clearly, both abroad and back home.

T: Magical realism plays an important and subtle role in your works, e.g. psychic ability in "The Hunter's Wife," a metal-devouring showman in "For a Long Time This Was Griselda's Story," et cetera. What role do you feel the fantastic plays in fiction?

AD: That's not the most conscious thing. It's not quite like I decide, "Now I'll write a story with an element of the supernatural in it." But it is definitely something that fascinates me, since I find my fiction returning to it again and again, especially in my new novel. Maybe it's that when you write a story you try to make a singular dream as convincing as you can, and every part of it is magical, whether it's a kitchen counter or a coyote or a man eating a suit of armor...

I'm not sure I'm answering this question very well. Maybe I should just say I include "magic" or whatever we want to call it in my work because that's what I feel like doing, and I think the most important advice I can give to a young writer is to write about what you love the most, and are most interested in, because that energy will carry through the work to the reader.

I guess I look at all of fiction as "fantastic." I mean, someone puts a bunch of characters down on a page and someone else can let their eyes travel over those little hieroglyphs and the next thing they know they're seeing and smelling and hearing all sorts of experiences, and *feeling*, too, they're sick or laughing or crying, and that to me is absolutely fan-

tastic. So I think it's just as astounding, and requires as much diligence, to describe a housebound overweight younger sister as to describe a metal-devouring showman. Either way, you're trusting in the magic of language to transfer meaning from you to another person.

T: Your science book reviews in the **BOSTON GLOBE** seem to have introduced some readers to a sub-genre of literature they might not have known about otherwise. Who are some of your favorite science writers? What do you admire about their works?

AD: Rachel Carson. Richard Feynman. Chet Raymo. I love them because their work embraces both accuracy and wonder, because you can't help but feel how much they love the world, and how the more they learn about it, the more mysterious it becomes.

T: So how do you incorporate natural phenomena in your own writing?

AD: I suppose through research. For example, for the story "The Shell Collector," I did have a modest amount of knowledge about marine biology, etc., but certainly not enough to write the story. For me research was the real genesis of it—reading about shells, and especially venomous sea creatures, got me more and more interested. After I read a profile of a real-life blind physical scientist, and learned that a sightless guy really could contribute to the study of mollusks, I knew I had to put him in contact with poisonous snails and see what happened. For me a lot of the fun and reward of writing stories (and reading them) is getting to learn things (as well as be entertained), so I really like the research. What I always tell my students is this: If you're deeply interested, vitally interested, in what you're researching and learning about, and you put it in your work, that energy will carry through the prose over to the reader. So I guess it turns out that natural phenomena are often what I'm most interested in.

T: Have you ever considered writing a travelogue? If so, where would you document and why?

AD: Maybe once in a while I think about it. I'd love to go to Nepal, or India, or Mongolia, or Siberia, and publish whatever journals I could make while there. We're moving to Rome, Italy, for a year in the fall, so I've been thinking about whether I'll be able to use my journals there to make any kind of a book. But I think, in the end, I might find non-fiction too limiting, too difficult to organize into a coherent narrative structure. Life is so astounding, so full of surprise and miracle, and there are no resolutions, no obvious starting or ending moments.

T: Animals and their relationships with humans pop up frequently in your stories, e.g. wolves in "The Hunter's Wife," snails in "The Shell Collector," whales in "The Caretaker," and many, many more. Could you describe the process of bringing animals into your stories? Do you observe them in the natural world first and then write about them, or do you choose to write about an animal first and then seek them out for observation?

AD: Interesting. I've never been asked this before. I've never seen a wolf in person, so I definitely didn't observe any to write about them. (I suppose that's how they are in that story, though, too, not-quite present, never wholly there). I've seen humpback whales, even had one pass under my kayak once, but I've never seen a sperm whale, let alone one beached, so I had to rely on other descriptions and photos, etc. I guess I return to human relationships with animals often enough because I'm always working with some human's relationship to the natural world, and animals are a large part of that.

T: Who is on your personal list of absolutely-positively-must-read writers? How do you introduce your students to these authors?

AD: Gosh, so many writers have been important to me: J. M. Coetzee, Italo Calvino, Rick Bass, Joseph Conrad, Andrea Barrett, Denis Johnson, Cormac McCarthy. Each of them continues to expand my ideas about what is possible in fiction. And I find new ones all the time—Edmund White (*A BOY'S OWN STORY*) is amazing. Chang-Rae Lee's work is so mild

and yet full of weight and hypnosis. Gary Lutz's work is so strange and weird, and he really shows you how you can be original with your sentences. Everyone I read and spend any time with manifests themselves somehow in my work—they show me different ways stories can be told, and that is what I'm most interested in.

I don't really try to introduce students to the writers I really love, except by coincidence. Usually I choose stories or novels for a class to read because a piece will help demonstrate a skill we're trying to work on, like point of view, or characterization, etc...

Really, the wonderful, fabulous thing about writing is that you can walk into any library and there on the shelves—for free!—is the work of so many masters, so many sentence-makers, and the best ones you can read again and again, first for the story, then to see how they told their stories, what they do with adjectives, how they employ verbs. Even if they're dead, you can learn from them. So whenever I get frustrated or stuck, I go back and read Shirley Hazzard, or Cormac McCarthy, or Conrad, and I try to remind myself that their sentences weren't perfect at first, either, and had to be reworked over and over.

T: How does the process of writing a novel differ from writing short stories? Which experience do you prefer?

AD: It's not a matter of comfort or preference, really; they sort of felt to me like completely different art forms. Like I was drawing for several years, and then I took up painting. I love both, especially novels, and the challenge of writing one was immense but (upon reflection, anyway) quite wonderful. The difference, whether you're a writer or a reader, is not really in depth of immersion; I like to think a short story can sink you as deeply into an emotional situation as a novel. I think the difference is more of the scope of a narrative—it's simply that so much more happens in a novel; the cast larger, the chain of events so much longer. So the organizational task is that much larger. Maybe the best analogy is that the short story writer builds a room, as ornate or simple as she

wants, and a novel writer builds a whole house, and has to go from room to room working on each.

The nice thing about writing a short story is that if you spend two or three months on it and it turns out to be terminally flawed, you've only spent two or three months on it. With a novel it's a couple of years, so you work to salvage it, and pray and pray that it is salvageable. I'm still praying.

ooo

TOUCHSTONE CREATIVE WRITING AWARDS

graduate fiction awards	WHAT A HORSE KNOWS ABOUT LOVE AND FORGIVENESS sarah blackman
undergraduate fiction award	CAVEWOMAN ON THE BORDER katherine buel
graduate poetry award	THE BURNING elizabeth sanger
undergraduate poetry award	MY FATHER'S HANDS shanna hajek
graduate non-fiction awards	SACRED COLORS, FRAYED MEMORIES renée d'aoust
	THE TRANSFORMATIVE PROPERTIES OF ROCK BASEBALL bryan sandala

The **TOUCHSTONE** Creative Writing Awards are given each year to the best work by graduates and undergraduates in each of the three genres. Submission to **TOUCHSTONE** automatically enters one's work in the prize contest. We accept poetry, fiction, and non-fiction from undergraduates at Kansas State University, and from graduates in college writing programs across the nation. Graduate students enrolled in KSU's Department of English are ineligible. A \$50 prize is given to each of the award winners on top of the contributor's payment of two copies.

COLOPHON

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