



# York Review

2006

# YORK REVIEW VOLUME 12

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**Failing to Age**, *Greg Smith*

gelatin silver print

14.222" x 21.444"

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*Kendall Snell*

The wolf was in need of shelter,  
so he searched out some new digs  
and so it was that he ended up  
at the homes of the three little pigs.

He walked up to the first door,  
the home was made of straw  
"This will provide no protection," he said.  
"No, this won't do at all."

But a tiny speck of pollen  
carried on a breeze  
tickled that poor wolf's nose  
and caused him to sneeze.

With a great tremendous howl,  
the sneeze came roaring out  
the first piggy's home was flattened  
and he began to shout.

That wolf was mighty sorry  
as he continued on his way  
to see the second prospective home  
that he would view that day.

This home was made of sticks,  
And he tried to ring the doorbell  
but to his horror when he pushed  
the flimsy house just fell.

That wolf was feeling awful  
as he continued to the third abode  
he was hoping to have better luck  
and he continued down the road.

The third house sure was sturdy  
for it was made of bricks  
"Oh this is so much better," he thought,  
"Than a home of straw or sticks."

But then the door swung open  
and a muscular pig stepped out  
and glared in the wolf's face  
and loudly began to shout.

"Oh I can't stand big bullies,"  
that well-built pig said with a wail  
"Now, big bad wolf, come with me,  
you're going off to jail."

"Those things were all just accidents,"  
the frightened wolf cried with a tear,  
"I just wanted to find a house,  
like this beauty you have here."

The pig smiled at the wolf  
for his home was a source of pride  
"I've just finished improving it," he said.  
"The paint has barely dried."

The two friends forgot the unpleasantness  
Of the moment just before  
and went off to go shopping together  
at their local home-improvement store.

They built the wolf a mansion  
next to the third piggy's home  
and now the wolf has a permanent address  
and no longer has to roam.

## THE WAGNER CHRONICLES

---

*Greg Smith*

We climb to the top of this mountain, made harder by the fact that it is a boulder field. Ankles scream as legs propel bodies of flesh upward over bodies of stone. The boulder field stops; we and the peak are separated by fifteen feet of solid rock face, going straight up. So we climb, trusting our lives to half-inches of rock and finger. Like spiders, we move up the face, reaching the summit sweaty, but exalted. Wagner and I look at each other and over the land before us. From our mountaintop view, we stare directly into the birth of the Great Plains, able to pick out exactly where the Rockies stop and the plains begin their endless roll to the east. To our backs, the Rockies watch us ponder their demise, where their eminence can stretch no further. The moon is full and stands out like a belly button in the sky, though the sun has only begun to slide off the horizon. Soon, the air above us is filled with shades of red and the clouds glow electric orange; the moon, now higher, watches its domain, a proud father. I look at Wagner and ask, "Is this Heaven?" We are nineteen years old. Cimarron, New Mexico.

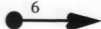


Skating is getting old. Failing at completing a kickflip can only be tolerated so long, so we resort to the myriad of balls stored in Wagner's trunk, which we had "acquired" from high school. I hold a football in my hand. Wagner holds a tennis ball in his. "Throw it up," he says, "I want to see if I can hit it." I throw my ball, aiming for the sky. Wagner throws his ball, aiming at my crotch. He connects. I scream and fall to the ground. Wagner laughs. Writheing in pain, I begin to roll uncontrollably down a hill of freshly cut grass. Wagner laughs harder. At the bottom of the hill I lie motionless, wishing I were dead. We are fifteen years old. Shrewsbury, Pennsylvania.

In the CN Tower gift shop, there is a giant moose. It is a stuffed animal and easily over seven feet tall as it stands on its back legs. Its front legs—or, I guess, arms—outstretch in either direction making it resemble a giant letter "T" or someone hanging from a crucifix—which is pretty much how I feel. I'm miserable because Stacey continually shows no interest in me. Wagner is also miserable because of a girl, but not because he doesn't have one; rather, the one he has is seven hundred miles away. He actually isn't that bad as far as sorrow is concerned. I am. At such a young age, the tender heart my ribs houses has yet to be callused over by the emotional abuses of the female gender. So, we wander the Space Needle of the North as a miserable duo of emotional destruction, spreading gloom at over one thousand feet in the air. We are fourteen years old. Toronto, Canada.

It is cold outside. Snow covers our tents and mucus flows freely from my aggravated nostrils. From behind a naked bush I spy my prey. He is standing about twenty-five feet in front of me, on the other side of a green dome tent and a smoldering fire pit, talking with Pinky and Tommy—completely unprepared. I slowly begin my advance, crawling in partially frozen sweatpants and a Pittsburgh Penguins Starter jacket to a green tent, where I take cover. Now, maybe fifteen feet away, my prey is still unaware of my presence. Moving to the left side of the tent to avoid running through the fire pit, I wait for my opportunity. As the threesome laughs over a joke, I run from my shelter and salute my precious prey by shaking my rear and chanting "Wag your tail, ra ra ra." This is how I meet Wagner. We are twelve years old. York, Pennsylvania.

Wagner the bear quietly runs into the woods. Tommy, Pinky, and I begin to move towards our younger sleeping campers. In the distance, leaves begin to rustle and guttural sounds meet our ears. We violently shake sleeping bags, disrupting dreams and utilizing the element of surprise. Do you hear that noise? There's a bear out there. Get out of your sleeping bags. Come on. We gotta move. Groggy eyes turn solid and bodies move. We have at least seven of them out of their bags, in their sleeping clothes, waiting for our instructions. Zampier is clutching a knife and praying out loud. He is now, ironically, a Marine MP serving in Iraq. The distant thrashing comes closer. Everyone is awake. Like a thumbtack attracted by a magnet, we're quickly running from the scene, running for safety. I yell. We stop. We forgot Wagner at camp. He was sleeping away from us; the bear will get him. So we go back, slowly. Not hearing the loud roaring we had run from, we assume the bear has Wagner. As we get to





camp we hear rustling just beyond our sight. We venture further. Wagner is rolling in the sleeping bags and laughing hysterically. We are sixteen years old. Northeastern Pennsylvania.

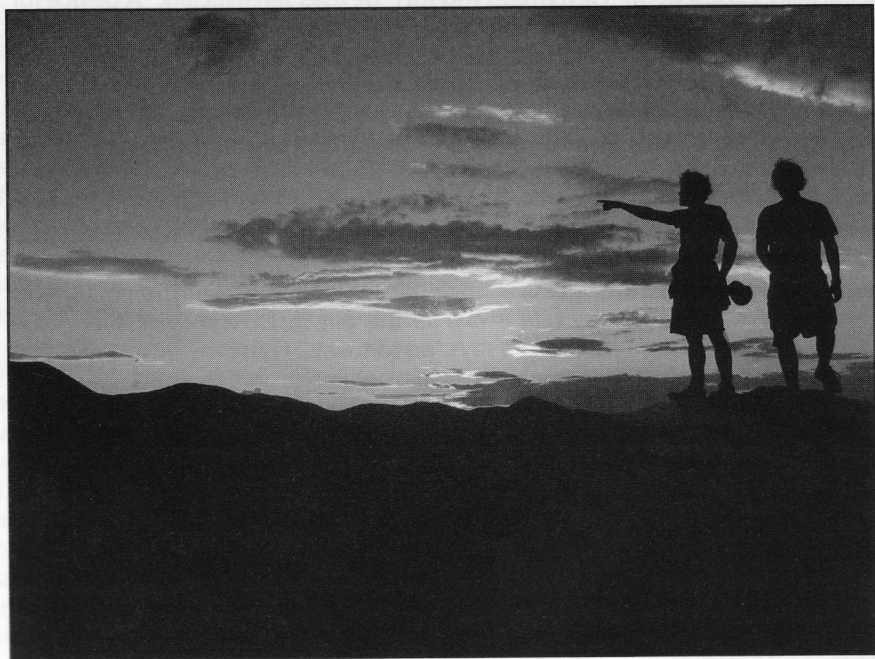
The first room in the house has a dank, moist smell. It is a big room with no windows, aptly called "the cave" by those who live there. I already don't like it. Selinda leads us—me, Wagner, Carol, my roommate Korey, and his girlfriend Diana—through the cave and up a long set of wooden stairs to the second floor of the three-story house. Diana turns to me, "I can totally see you guys together,"—referring to me and Selinda. I give a slight shrug. The second floor greets us with cigarette smoke, empty beer cans, and *Sex and the City*. One of Selinda's nine roommates is complaining loudly about her "asshole of a boss" at the restaurant where she is a waitress. Another polishes off a Marlboro Light. The room is filled with a sorority sense of authority. I make a motion that we should maybe go elsewhere, our group crowds the small room. So we go up another flight of stairs to the top floor, through a bedroom, and into Selinda's room. I have long since realized this trip was a mistake. We assemble in her room, taking spots leaning against bed posts or sitting on the floor. I recluse myself into the corner with the guitar her dad had bought her for her eighteenth birthday, an old friend of mine from when we dated. According to a paddle on the wall, Selinda is the president of her sorority. A large, green, empty bottle of Jagermeister sits on her desk. Wagner pulls a bong out from behind a partially closed door. "Hey, what's this for?" he asks sarcastically. "A device for smoking marijuana," Selinda answers, bluntly. I have had enough. This is not the girl I knew and certainly not the girl I dated for thirteen months, only to break up weeks into our first semester of college. The cold fact of the matter is that I had been replaced. Her new lovers lie all around me—empty aluminum and glass, burnt tobacco and weed. We are twenty years old. West Chester, Pennsylvania.

We step out of my uncle's maroon GMC Sonoma. I carry a .22 revolver, Wagner a .38 revolver, and my uncle a high-power rifle. The bed of the Sonoma carries a cooler filled with soda. My uncle takes two cans from the cooler and throws them about twenty feet away, off the dirt mountain road and into a grassy clearing. "There you go," he says, "go to town." I raise my pistol, take aim, and...miss every shot. Wagner laughs. He then misses his six shots. My uncle laughs. We are obviously out of our league. I am sort of glad that since we are at the top of a mountain, there is no one to see us. The pastimes of the west obviously have no jurisdiction in the lives of two suburban Pennsylvania boys. I reload, dropping four of the six bullets in the process. Wagner laughs again. My uncle sort of shakes his head. I walk over to the can of soda and put it on a tree stump. My next shot destroys it. My uncle laughs. Wagner shakes his head. We are eighteen. Missoula, Montana.

I rode with Wagner on the way to and from scout camping trips whenever it was possible. His mom would always have a bag of Oreo cookies between the two front seats, and, before anyone else could, I would ask if I could have them. She always said yes. That was, until, I shot Wagner's mom in the head. Well, I

didn't shoot her exactly in the head, though it probably would have been better if I had. Instead, I shot her hat. Her favorite feathery white hat. With a bright pink paintball. She was descending a ladder out of her team's fort. I, fifty feet away, was perched three floors up in a wooden bunker, sniping. I saw her and another mother and knew I had a chance. I shot. Paintballs sometimes have a tendency to curve and miss targets, due to grime in the barrel or wind or if the ball leaves the gun with a bad spin. This one didn't. It flew true, stopping only after the feathers could cushion it no longer. It looked roughly like a chicken had been shot. Sounded like it too. Wagner, who was next to me for the whole ordeal, had a startled look on his face. I laughed. He began to laugh. We were thirteen. The Poconos, Pennsylvania.

We blindfold them as the Saturn begins its ascent to the cliffs. Stacey (now, ironically, Wagner's girlfriend) squirms. Selinda, my girlfriend, just accepts it. We get out of the car and open the girls' doors, leading them to what, we hope, will be an awesome surprise worth two hours of driving. Hands on hips, we usher them up the short gravel hill and three stone steps to the cliff's base. The scarves are untied and pupils collapse under the burden of new light. Trees and farmland as far as the eye can see. A couple birds look like black paper airplanes against the gray sky. Selinda smiles—my day's goal accomplished. Ditto for Wagner. We are seventeen. South Mountain State Park, Maryland.



**The Sun Fell Down Again, Greg Smith,**  
gelatin silver print, 16.7" x 22.2"

*Elyse Reel*

Aliens have taken over the world—the toy world, that is. Bratz dolls, super-skinny, big-headed, and fashion-obsessed, barely resemble the preteens at whom they're marketed. Nevertheless, the dolls are disappearing off shelves, earning their creators, MGA Entertainment, \$600 million in three years. But some parents can't help but wonder, is there a darker side to the Bratz? Are they merely harmless playthings for children, or do they contribute to growing body image problems in America?

MGA Entertainment first launched the Bratz in June 2001. Tweens—eight-to-twelve-year-olds—were instantly entranced by the dolls' risqué, belly-baring fashions, devil-may-care attitudes, and wild makeup, which contrasted sharply with the more adult, career-oriented Barbie. Sales skyrocketed. By December, the Bratz had become the top-selling fashion doll assortment.

In order to appeal to a worldwide audience, the dolls—Cloe, Dana, Jade, Sasha, Yasmin, Fianna, Neura, Meygan, Roxxi, and Phoebe (the "Bratz Pack")—are multi-ethnic and have their own individual styles. On [bratzpack.com](http://bratzpack.com), the dolls' official website, each Bratz comes with her own miniature bio. Sasha one of the African-American dolls, dresses like a cheerleader and raves, "My friends call me 'Bunny Boo' because I love the hip-hop thang!" Meygan, who appears to be half fifties-style waitress, half-punk rocker, tells her audience, "My friends call me the 'Funky Fashion Monkey' because even when I just hang, I still look good!" MGA also devotes part of the BratzPack website to "BabyBratz," which features the original Bratz dolls in their younger years. "Party all night, sleepin' tight!" their scrapbook reads, showing a toddler-like doll decked out for the clubs.

The boys aren't left out of the Bratz' trendy world. The BratzBoys line features Dylan, Cameron, Eitan, and Koby, and covers the Caucasian, African-American, and Asian lines. A Hispanic doll, Cade, is available in a one-time gift set. Last year, MGA also introduced the Lil' Boyz line with Colin, who is Greek, Deavon (Indian-English), Lakin (Italian), and Mikko (Finnish). The male dolls sell just as well as their female counterparts.

With the dolls comes a horde of merchandise. Too cool for school and work, the Bratz instead spend their time at sushi bars, ski slopes, malls, salons, cafes, discos, and spas. Bratz owners have to be a little less extravagant in their play choices, but still have lots of accessories to choose from: clothes, posters, perfumes, candy, magazines, jewelry, stickers, lunchboxes, backpacks, tissues, and more.

MGA's extensive line of products has been wildly successful: to date, more than 50 million dolls have been sold, and the company has raked in \$600 million. They haven't quite topped Mattel and the Barbie empire yet, but as MGA president Isaac Larian gloats, "They're not going to stop this train now." The message is clear: Bratz is poised to completely cover the tween market.

To try and combat the Bratz steamroller, Mattel introduced their *My Scene Barbie* line, which took Barbie, gave her a bigger head, bee-stung lips, and a hipper



attitude. Rather than the career-oriented Barbie and Ken, *My Scene* featured a cell-phone and PDA-obsessed teen Barbie; Madison, an African-American shopaholic; and Chelsea, the requisite bohemian artist, and Bryant, Hudson, River, and Sutton, their impeccably groomed male friends. Unfortunately, something in the *My Scene* dolls was lacking—too little eyeliner? Not enough stomach showing?—and the line was a flop.

Bratz' popularity is alarming to many. "I work at a Toys 'R' Us," says Erin, an eighteen-year-old high school senior. "These dolls are probably one of our biggest sellers, and it bothers me, because I feel that they encourage certain behaviors and stereotypes by reinforcing society's 'ideal' standards. They wear belly shirts, high heels, and mini skirts, and presenting a doll in that way encourages girls to focus more on their appearance than what really matters. They're forcing society's beliefs on people who aren't old enough yet to comprehend them."

Not old enough, indeed: The Bratz "Superstylin Funktivity Book" includes tips on flirting, sexy fashion, crushes, and attention from boys. It's a juvenile version of *Cosmo*—aimed at six-year-olds. Meanwhile, Bratz at the Runway Disco sip drinks out of martini glasses. The drinks, say MGA spokespeople, are no cause for alarm, as they're simply smoothies. Still, it makes one wonder if the Bratz drink their milk out of shot glasses.

Probably of most concern to parents is the Bratz' blatant sexuality. "Bratz are much sexier than Barbie, who, in spite of her conical breasts and tiny waist, always seems fairly asexual," writes Susan Linn, author of *Consuming Kids: The Hostile Takeover of Childhood*. "They radiate a cartoon-like, street-smart, in-your-face combination of sex and toughness. On the official Bratz website, they are posed to show off their lush butts and melon-sized breasts." The dolls' bared waists are so tiny they look like they could snap, which contrasts sharply with their buxom, and barely covered hips. In short, they bear almost no resemblance to their audience—or to human anatomy as we know it.

Others worry about the Bratz' stick-like arms and legs just as much as their voluptuous curves. Eating disorders among tweens are a big risk—10% of girls admit to having an ED before the age of 10; 40% of nine- and ten-year-olds are on diets—and the impossibly petite Bratz are nowhere near healthy role models. Coupled with the constant bombardment of underweight, undernourished figures in magazines and television, the Bratz reinforce the idea that thin is in.

Tweens are still at an impressionable age where toys are able to mold their behaviors, opinions, and actions. What they see and play with tells them that only skinny and sexy is cool. The Bratz slogan proclaims, "The girls with a passion for fashion!" The implication is clear: the dolls look good, and their confidence in themselves comes from looking good. Many teens buy into that appearance-conscious message. "I see six-year-olds toting Bratz dolls in the malls, and asking their mothers if they can wear the same clothes," says Anna, seventeen. "They're not old enough to have any real concept of sexuality, but they're the victims of this message to 'look like this! act like this!' in order to be cool, and so a lot of girls feel pressured to buy into something they don't fully understand."

Marketers use the term "KGOY" to describe the trend of "kids growing older younger"—a trend that forces the creation of more sophisticated products to appeal to their markets. It's what has forced Barbie into "babyish" status, and has

brought Bratz to the forefront of the tween market. Ironically, the continued sophistication of tween toys guarantees the continuation of the KGOY trend: the more they redesign products, the older kids will be forced to grow.

If it keeps up, preschoolers will learn sexuality with their colors and numbers.

I DIED OF TYPHOID FEVER:

LAMENTING THE DISAPPEARANCE OF *THE OREGON TRAIL*

---

*Kendall Snell*

It's the music that really brings me back; those three notes of computer-generated sadness indicate a member of your wagon party has died of dysentery, influenza, typhoid fever or a myriad of other circa 1843 diseases. Those three notes, less sophisticated than the average cell phone ring tone, are the notes of my childhood.

Oh, how I miss *The Oregon Trail*. It has been over a decade since my elementary school social studies class visited the computer lab, formed our trail parties and headed west to grab our computer-simulated slice of the American pie. I loved the computer lab days as a child. What better way to grasp the importance of the Oregon Trail's unique place in American history than to sit down at computer screen and simulate our own disease-ridden, misfortune-laden journey into the west? A whole generation of children got in touch with our inner pioneers through what we would now consider a crude computer game.

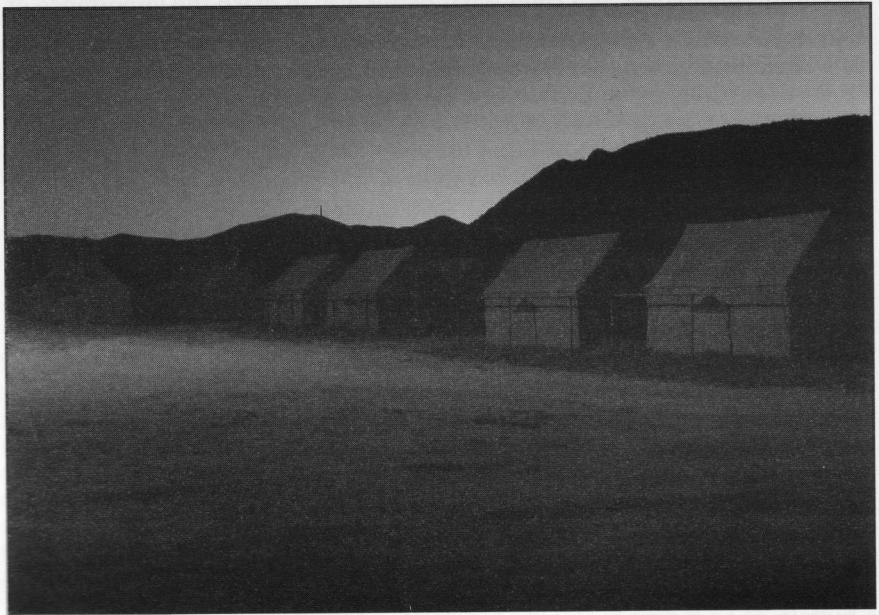
The first crucial step of the game was to form your wagon party: a group of five family members, friends or potential love interests that would serve as your companions during your grueling journey along the trail. (And if your little sister died of dysentery along the way, don't worry, you could always bring her back to life in the next day's game.) My wagon party usually consisted of my mom and dad, big sister, best friend, Dana, and my then-boyfriend, T.L. Occasionally, I'd choose Jonathon Taylor Thomas. (Don't recognize the name? Just ask any female in her early twenties.) On-screen, we'd visit the supply store together, choose our food, clothing, and sturdy oxen and head out for a better life under the beige fabric of our covered wagon.

Along the way, we faced many challenges. Sometimes, a thief would break into the wagon at night and steal clothing, food and supplies. Other times, the oxen would get lost and we'd lose a few days of our journey. Occasionally, we'd have to go hunting in order to get more food for our party. (Although I never shot a buffalo, as an Indian in real life, I understood the importance of that animal to my sister tribes. Even as a ten-year-old, I had my principles. Okay, so maybe I shot one once or twice along the way, but only if we were starving.)

Perhaps the most important lesson of *The Oregon Trail* was in the area of decision making. Should I purchase two wheel axles at the start of the game and carry the extra weight, or should we risk breaking an axle along the way? Should we attempt to ford the river, or pay five dollars to take the ferry across? Should we consume generous portions and waste the food or cut down to meager portions and risk illness? These were the issues that weighed heavily on my young heart.

But alas, at some point in my education, teachers began to utilize books, websites and research papers for history lessons. *The Oregon Trail* was left behind, along with my JTT posters and scrunchies. Alone, I was forced to ponder bigger questions, like "what should I do this weekend," "what should I major in" and "how does my hair look today?"

However, you never know when something from the past will sneak up and reintroduce itself to you. Recently, some friends and I found ourselves locked in a long conversation, lamenting the mysterious disappearance of our beloved and once-familiar friend. Oh, where have you gone, dear *Oregon Trail*? None of the questions and issues that I now face in life seem as compelling as the decision whether to ford the river, which brought about my brother's untimely demise every time.



**Philmont**, Greg Smith,  
gelatin silver print, 16.7" x 22.2"



## EPITOME OF APATHY

---

*Ashley Fischer*

I lounge in my sweats  
flipping through the channels  
not even bothering to pause  
to see the news scroll across the screen.

Junk food is my drug of choice  
and I am a complete addict.  
It is my only motivation that  
I have to move away from those television rays.

Do I vote? No,  
but I have my opinions,  
and I cannot identify with any figurehead.  
Or at least that's what I tell my politically boisterous roommate.

Truth be told,  
I am the epitome of apathy.  
Procrastination is my middle name.  
Agnosticism is my religion.

Lack of energy is my excuse  
to stay far, far away from the gym.  
No time is my reasoning  
for shoving fast food in my face.

Why am I so tired  
when I do nothing at all?  
This lazy blob that I've become  
is almost unrecognizable.

I look in the mirror and I cringe.  
The future of America stares back at me,  
an expressionless,  
blank,  
canvas of college student flesh.



**Attention**, Christine Flok,  
gelatin silver print, 6" x 9"

## TANGENTS

---

### *Jacky Liquori*

How many times can the Yankees win?  
What shade of blue is the sky?  
What's the square root of 1300?  
What kind of computer should I buy?

Which CD came out this week?  
And is that a lyric from a song?  
Do I have a paper due in an hour?  
What's taking my friends so long?

Did I lock the door before I left?  
What's for dinner tonight?  
Do I have any cash on me for lunch?  
Does my hair look all right?

Where did I put my flip-flops?  
Did I subscribe to that magazine?  
Am I going to that concert?  
Did *Major League* star Charlie Sheen?

Who was Nathan Hale?  
Didn't he say some quote?  
What kind of job do I want?  
Did I register to vote?

The thoughts just fly from left to right,  
and all the directions in between  
They say that I have 'ADD,'  
but what is that supposed to mean?

## OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND: A GYNECOLOGICAL DIATRIBE

---

*Andrea Puskar*

"Can you scoot up please? Now move back. We need you to bring your hips closer to the edge of the table. Okay, good."

Somehow, I manage to maneuver my way through these instructions without embarrassing myself. But then—it all comes undone. The flimsy, blue hospital gown and white paper blanket slide up, and I'm exposed. Everywhere. But rather than mercifully re-securing my meager defenses, my subjugators seem encouraged by my increasing helplessness.

What a terrible, terrible event.

Like eating spinach, or visiting a boyfriend's family for the first time, going to the gynecologist was something that I knew must be endured "for my own good." However, like all the other unknown and awkward experiences of my life, this was something that I'd put off for as long as possible. Because, unlike the benefits of a diet rich in leafy greens, or getting better Christmas presents for your future in-laws, the pay-offs of proper gynecological health are something out of sight and out of mind—much like vaginas themselves. Cervical health? Bah! Cervix, shmervix.

Although I knew that a woman should schedule her first visit to the gynecologist when she becomes sexually active, this was information I'd stuffed into the clothes hamper of my brain, along with the dirty panties. Besides, wouldn't it be a little awkward, making the announcement to my mother after prom night: "Guess what mom? It's time for a trip to the gyno!"

Eventually, though, the articles in the women's magazines began to weigh on my conscience. At twenty, I was finally ready to lay myself bare. In a moment of weakness, I broke down and scheduled my first pap test. Almost instantly, I regretted it. But I've never been a quitter. I'd suffered through years of crappy jobs, competitive sports—even band camp. I was not going to let a gynecologist, of all people, get the best of me.

I have, however, always been a worrier.

For weeks, I stressed about it. About the unknown and sheer awkwardness I anticipated between my gynecologist and myself. I don't care if she's a doctor or not, I do NOT want her looking at my vagina! I confessed my fears to one of my roommates, who just happens to be a nursing major, and rather knowledgeable about the whole gynecologist thing.

"Oh, please," she merely snorted with contempt. "They see hundreds of vaginas, every day. Yours isn't special."

But, being the helpless romantic I am, I couldn't help but think that it is special. I needed comfort and reassurance. So, I turned to my boyfriend. "Sean, I'm scared! What do I do?"

Charmingly, my one and only offered his sweet words of consolation, never taking his eyes off the television. "I don't know, open wide?"

So much for romance.

When I arrive at the doctor's office, I head up to the front desk to speak to the receptionist. She's about my age, with tanned skin and chic, short hair. "Oh, you're Andrea, right? And you're here for your pap?"

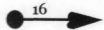
Pap. She makes getting my cooter examined sound like it is a hip, new trend. Unfazed, she hands me over to a nurses' aide, who leads me to a room. I've only been there five minutes, and already I feel like a piece of meat. On the examining table, a folded blue hospital gown waits for me. While a nurses' aide is taking my blood pressure, which is undoubtedly through the roof right now, I try to pretend like I'm not here, tuning out her explanation of the upcoming procedure. When she's finished, she leaves me with a warning: "The doctor should be in shortly."

After she's gone, I hurriedly undress. I figure I'll need a little extra time to figure out how to work a hospital gown. I was right.

Does it tie in the back, or in the front, I wonder. Normally your bare ass is supposed to be sticking out, isn't it? Maybe I should leave the front open for them, for, you know, easy access.

I settle on wrapping the oversized gown around myself twice, and the end result is something very much like a straight-jacket. Nothing is exposed except about three inches of my wrists and ankles. This is comforting to me. So is folding my clothes, which I place neatly on the chair. My cotton bra and white, old-lady underwear are on the bottom of the pile, under my pants and shirt. For some reason, it's important for me to keep those private—they're all I have left. I still have time to kill, however, so I leaf through last year's issue of *Good Housekeeping*. I even read an entire article about Wynonna Judd's struggle with her weight.

There's a knock at the door, and the doctor comes in. She is short, with shoulder-length black hair and thick glasses. As she introduces herself, and we shake hands, I take a long look at her hands. I am horrified. As the doctor begins her





speech on what, exactly, she's about to do to me down there, my brain is silently screaming over and over: She's got man-hands!

Meanwhile, the doctor is firing questions at me.

"Are you sexually active?"

"How many partners have you had?"

"Have you been with the same partner for a while? How long?"

And then, there comes the kicker: "Would you like us to test you for chlamydia and gonorrhea?"

Instantly, my mind starts racing.

If I say no, she'll think I have something to hide. If I say yes, she'll think that maybe I'm worried about something... Like those blurry nights from freshman year... Fuck it! I got nothing to hide.

"Sure," I try to sound casual.

"Okay then! Now let me bring in my assistant..." She opens the door.

Assistant! Does she really need to call for back up, just to look at my hoo-hah? Just when I am starting to feel a little better about this whole mess, she makes yet another party privy to my most uncomfortable experience ever.

The assistant enters. She is older, and slightly built, with close-cut, iron-grey hair. Without a word of hello, she begins coaching me into position at the edge of the table.

As I feel the doctor's gloved hands gently—a little too gently—exploring, for lack of a better word, I lay back and stare hatefully at the ceiling. There's a border near the top of the wall, a silhouetted desert scene featuring a wolf howling awkwardly at the peeling, red sky. Who picked this border pattern? I wonder, becoming more and more annoyed. Silently I focus my rage at the doctor, who's certainly taking her time. Jesus, I think, it's not gonna bite. Just do your thing and get out of there. Wincing, I shut my eyes and wait.

Finally, it's over. I sit up and stare at the doctor and her assistant, who both appear to be in some big hurry.

"You can just meet us at the reception desk where we will give you instructions for getting the results for your tests," they tell me, and abruptly, they leave.

Frustrated, and feeling rather used, I get dressed in no more than three seconds. That's it? I wonder. I've had dates who have had more courtesy than this! For as private as a first experience as this was, I would have at least expected the doctor to stick around for a little while—I wasn't expecting a bouquet of roses or anything, but a "How are you feeling?" would have been nice.

Silently berating the doctor and her assistant, I take the long walk of shame down the hall to the reception area. The doctor is there waiting for me, and she gives me a pamphlet instructing me on how to get my results via telephone. The telephone? I wonder. Forget it, I probably won't even call.

After a month of worrying, and fifteen minutes of hell, my vagina is back where it should be—out of sight, and out of mind.

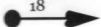
*S. Dustin Landrum*

The weather was getting blustery, colder, which by Georgia standards is not all that cold compared to more northern climates. But it was cool enough for me to actually break down and head to the mall to make a clothing purchase, not that I mind buying new things, I just hate doing it at the mall. Teenagers, children, rude employees, teenagers. My friend Dana, she worked at Rich's and promised to help me find the best deal on a couple of sweaters that I realized I needed right then and there as I really had nothing of warmth in my closet. I found two, grey and navy, that seemed warm enough, and then we passed by the belts. I let out an exclamation of profound interest as I saw a reversible belt. This was new technology to me. I had never seen one before. And I had to have it. The one I wore at the time was a shredded piece of rope that did nothing for the black pants I wore. I decided to sign up for a Rich's charge card, because in doing so I would receive a ten-percent discount on my purchase and Dana would get a commission, not a grand commission, but in those days every little bit helped. The card has nothing to do with this piece, I only mention it because I never pass up a chance to show that I'm a hell of a guy.

The belt had a steel buckle, unpolished, but smooth and textured; brown on one side, black on the other. I would have no reason to use the brown side, but the fact that I might, that one day my customary black dress shoes would be destroyed in a fantastic act of savagery and I would have to borrow a pair of boring brown loafers from my roommate made the reversible nature of this belt comforting. I wore the thing proudly; it looked fetching. It was good belt, I do miss it so.

Months passed and my belt was lauded by those I showed it to as a work of genius. Spring came much too fast for me now that I look back, I had fun that winter and miss it to this day. Early one May morning, before the crack of dawn, my friends and I boarded a plane at Hartsfield airport and flew to Miami. There we changed planes, almost missing our connecting flight because a friend of mine got stopped and searched at security. In his carry-on was a canteen of water and an alarm clock, very close together. And when seen through the X-Ray scanner, it looked just like a bomb, nearly causing one of the security people to faint. After a few moments of confused fear, we made our flight, as I said, barely. From Miami, we flew to San Jose, Costa Rica, drinking like sailors on shore leave and the flight attendants did not seem to mind. And if you've ever drank on a plane for an extended period of time, you know it's not difficult to get wrecked.

We landed, somewhat the worse for wear and tear, bribed our way through customs, I'm serious about that, we didn't get checked or searched at all, had to declare nothing. And the good time that we had been looking forward to for so long was upon us. I should mention that a good friend of mine is from Costa



Rica, he organized the trip. I dread to think of what would have happened if we had just hauled off and went down there ourselves. I think we'd probably be rotting in a Costa Rican jail, or perpetually washing up on an abandoned beach. We saw an active volcano, I drove a laden Ford Fiesta at break-neck speeds around the bends and curves of a rain forest, angry monkeys threw feces and sticks at our car, I saw churches older than our country, attractive and cheap hookers, a filthy stretch of the beach and ocean that contrasted sadly with the beautiful blue lagoon and white sandy beaches of a resort, and I witnessed a sunset that can only be compared to the first one our planet saw since the land emerged from the sea. And my belt was there through it all.

The day before we were to leave, I contracted that which has no eloquence. I got the shits. In a bad way. So I lay curled up in the bed of our hotel in downtown San Jose, my friends drinking at a bar that had no stairs for public use, but a slide to get from one level to another; they ate at the finest restaurant in town, and I watched the final episode of Seinfeld as it premiered in the U.S. Only I watched it Spanish. I don't understand Spanish. It was not an easy television experience. And before falling to sleep, I removed my belt, slung it to the floor, slept in my pants and a shirt. Pure misery. I still hate what I missed.

We left in the morning; I was still sick and sick for the next week. Apparently, there is such a thing as poetic justice, as everyone else got sick the week after we got back. Except for our Costa Rican friend. I think he called us pussies. It was on the plane, somewhere over Cuba, that I needed to hurl myself towards the restroom. As I lowered my pants, I realized that I had missed a step. No. Not my belt. Holy shit, I can't believe I lost my belt. Where? When did I have it last? The hotel. It's on the floor. Sigh. Probably got kicked around, molested by the feet of my friends as they sloppily returned from the fun I missed, those bastards, no pity, no shame at all. And my precious belt, my Batman belt, was lost forever.

I often wonder where it is now, and I try and take joy in its memory. Maybe the maid comes in, she's having hard times, it was a nice hotel and all, but do they pay her enough? She sees my belt on the ground and thinks my God that's a great belt, what kind of idiot would leave a belt like that just laying around, those stupid Americans with their wealth and lack of appreciation, though, of course, all in Spanish. And she picks it up, sizes it to her waist and thinks that her son would love a belt like this one, he's a stylish fellow, and I can't afford to give him much. So her son comes in from school one day, staying just long enough to change clothes for his job, and on his bed is this belt. This reversible belt, black on one side, brown on the other, a steel buckle, not polished, but still smooth and textured. This nice belt that will give his attire a certain dignity that it lacked before. So he wears it. Everyday. Knowing full well that you can only wear the brown side with brown shoes and the black side with black shoes, and it opens doors for him. People notice him. He graduates high school, gets into a good college, an American college, no less. Maybe he goes to Georgia Tech—they have a ton of foreigners—and maybe he takes a shine to engineering, and maybe he meets this guy that goes there too, they become friends, and

maybe this American guy and Costa Rican son go out to eat dinner with some of the American's friends, and maybe I'm sitting across from this Costa Rican son who is wearing my belt. Would I recognize it?

Or maybe no one cared at all about my belt, maids don't even want to touch it. It gets tossed out with the trash, because it can't possibly be worn, since it was obviously left for a reason, was probably used in some depraved sex act and is covered with dried fluids. So the maid, she throws it out. In the dumpster behind the hotel, a bum is sleeping and this bag falls on his head. He's thinking joyous day, more garbage. He tears the bag open, sifting, sorting, taking what's edible, and there, there's this belt. Why would anyone throw this belt out, he thinks, it's a great belt, all I have is this hemp rope, this belt will not only hold my pants up better, but can also be used for many other purposes, though, of course, all in Spanish. He wears the belt, and maybe one day he is set upon by a small gang of thugs, some real dirty, street-type ruffians, and they're aiming to wear him out. Ah, but he's armed, he whips the belt from his waist in a fluid fatherly motion, striking those contemptible brigands, they are unprepared for this onslaught, such fury from a formerly easy mark. And this bum, he wins the day, they don't bother him anymore. And over the years, he becomes highly proficient in beating ass with his belt, not to mention the other tricks he devises, such as using it as a tourniquet to stop the bleeding on a man's arm after he was mugged by the same or another group of thugs, and maybe the bum carries this man, this well-dressed American man to the nearest hospital or policeman, and maybe this man is exceedingly wealthy, and maybe, out of gratitude, he gives this bum a job as his bodyguard. Maybe this bum, already an expert with melee weapons, becomes even more proficient in hand-to-hand and maybe one day this rich man becomes a congressman and the bum is head of his security and maybe I see them on television. The man talking, the bum in sunglasses and a suit, the pants being held up by a reversible belt, the black side showing. Would I recognize it?

The maid comes in and she's young, she's hip, she's with it. And so are the rest of the hotel cleaning staff. She sees my belt and thinks what fortune, oh this'll look fabulous slapping across Lupita's ass, this belt is perfect for us, who would leave such a ribald belt behind, though, of course, all in Spanish. There's this room, in the bowels of the hotel, something akin to a break room where the staff gets together when shifts end and maybe it's a strange room that the owners ignore out of fear or the desire to just keep their employees happy. It's got beds, medieval racks, chains, whips, couches, a liquor cabinet, leather as far as the eye can see. And a few digital webcams, some digital cameras, maybe even a good ole fashion 8mm. There's depravity in this room, the sex is all S&M, an orgy of sleek tan bodies and black leather devices with steel hinges, the grind and lashings of rough sex a sweaty symphony of groans, moans and screams, the kind of acts that make people like me a bit uncomfortable, nervous and utter prayers that no one ever puts a thing like that in that place on me. And these movies and pictures, they are shown on a website and it's popular, so maybe while cruising regular, non-threatening porn a pop-up annoys my lavish flat panel monitor and there's this picture there, a woman lashing the hell out another woman, or



maybe another man and you can't see their faces for the masks and their bodies are curved in costumes and maybe this person is being lashed by a belt that is both black and brown with an unpolished, smooth and textured buckle that I used to wear on ordinary occasions. Would I even want it back?

Stuart Adamson, lead singer of the eighties band Big Country, hung himself in Hawaii in 2001. Now that's three years after I was in Costa Rica and my belt was left on the floor. Being a raging alcoholic and wealthy, maybe Stuart went to Costa Rica to party. Maybe he stayed in a hotel, and maybe my belt did get kicked up under the bed, and when Stuart opened his eyes the next afternoon they were looking under the bed since he passed out on the floor and he saw my belt and he kept it, not because he needed it and not even because it's a cool belt, but because he thought it was odd and maybe even after he cleaned the vomit from his hair in the shower and put on fresh clothes, he wore it. He might have worn it to Hawaii. And maybe he used it to hang himself in that hotel room, in despair, unable to cope with his alcoholism, thinking if it's good enough for Michael Hutchence, it's good enough for me. And maybe at some point in time I come across a picture of him in Hawaii, smiling, disguising his pain and holding up his tan linen pants that hover just above a pair of sandals is the brown side of this belt. Would I admit it's mine?

Or maybe it's still there. Still under that bed. Wondering where I went. It was a good belt. It's a shame it got discarded so. To this day people talk to me, people say things, say you look different. I say thanks, I've been exercising a little more, watching what I eat. And they say no, that's not it. And I say something like of course. They say you look awkward, a little unbalanced, something seems to be amiss. And I respond, ah, I understand, you see, it's just, I left my belt in San Jose, and I'm just not the same.



**Reflections of Philadelphia**, Greg Smith,  
gelatin silver print, 13.9" x 22.2"

*Andy Gertz*

A lone drake upends on the water's surface,  
apathetic to the warnings of late autumn winds.

Webbed feet and black end jutting into the air,  
he is content in the quaint dew pond.

The mallard emerges,  
green head and yellow bill dripping wet.

A gust comes once again,  
but the drake merely swims along, giving no heed to season's change.

Friends have departed for warmer lands,  
some squawk above on their journey to more fruitful days.

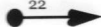
But some, the mallard knows, will drop from the sky,  
victims of the hunter's hand.

Still some will die before journey's end,  
or lose the flock amidst the fog.  
If ducks could sigh,  
this one would.

With no mate to fly with,  
our drake stays grounded.

He knows no better life awaits,  
no flight can change his solitary state.

He quacks to no one  
and paddles on.



## ODE TO ALZHEIMER

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*Ellen Siska*

Grunts, twitches, and mumbo-jumbo  
now pass as conversation.

Gaps in your mouth are no longer filled  
by false teeth you always wore.

Your twisted body, stuck in that chair,  
is padded by a bulky diaper.

Your hip was broken by the fall  
that made it easier for the staff.

For you weren't like the rest,  
unaware of the horror.

You shuffled up and down the hall,  
back and forth, back and forth.

No longer can you pace at sundown,  
begging to go home.  
"This IS your home,"  
they told you.

Liars!

The blessing of ignorance  
was not your gift.

So now you sit there,  
waiting to die.

Your dignity gone,  
crushed by your foe.

And a wail of agony escapes my throat,  
as your soul screams for release.

Are you still in there, Dad?



**Mask, Reflect, Smile**, Catherine Sacchi,  
inkjet, 6" x 5"

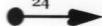
## REFLECTION (FOR MOM)

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*Kendall Snell*

I like to look in the mirror  
after bathing  
as my damp hair  
curls in black waves  
around my face.

Make-up free and pure  
I see your face in  
the constellations of my freckles,  
each tiny cheek a galaxy  
in the foggy reflection.





My smile,  
undeniably my own,  
ends in your dimples  
while the curl of my lips  
is rearranging the universe.

My eyes  
so like yours in appearance and purpose  
gaze into the mirror.  
To be thought of like you  
is my highest achievement.

## THE RING

---

*Andy Gertz*

I came upon the weathered ring in his jewelry box of ivory.  
My father's ring glittered in the sunlight,  
golden eagles ascending from flames of silver,  
the band bent and dented from tough times of days past.  
It glittered in the sunlight,  
a blinding trinket of beauty, an ornament of my aching pride,  
my father's '72 Air Force ring.

Too loose for the third finger,  
I shoved it over the middle knuckle and made a silent vow.  
I'd be worthy.

Grateful for its mere existence, I flexed my fingers  
and cherished the weighty feel,  
heavy with the new responsibilities of being a man.

That hand-me-down now on the finger of his heir,  
I thought of him  
and smiled.

It glittered in the sunlight.

## FLOODS

---

*Catherine Sacchi*

An ocean and centuries away from the swirl of exams and papers, I stood in a golden octagon, intrigued by ancient tiles that form patterns that show and tell stories of Genesis, Joseph, Jesus and John. On the lowest band, John baptizes the Son of Man. The image is on the east wall, over Ghiberti's bronze doors, which Michelangelo himself labeled "The Gates of Paradise." Tourists come to see the Baptistery, but many do not bother to enter—they look at the famous panels and decide they have seen the building.



Above the cousins and the institution of the sacrament of baptism, the Magi flee from Herod. It's a classic work of interpretation—the Scripture translation available to the craftsmen of the time tells that the three Kings “returned home by another way.” Tradition told that the Magi arrived by camel and over-land procession, so the artists depicted the Magi returning home by sea—“another way.” The alternate path, the water, saves them from Herod's treachery.

In the highest narrative register, God creates the world by separating water and land. It is one of three images in the building that is not blinding in golden dazzle. Scholars attribute the design to Cimabue—Giotto's master. Opposite the creation of the world, Noah, with his three sons, builds the ark to house the exotic, diverse menagerie. A panel later, God drowns the world, in order to begin again.

I listened to a lecture on the saving power of water and why images of that salvation are appropriate for a Baptistry, where generations of Florentines brought babies to be saved by water, chrism and faith. Above the altar, Jesus the Judge sits in an unnatural mandorla, hands outspread. On His right, the Saved sit in orderly, hierarchical ranks—very Scholastic categorization. Closest to the viewer, three holy men sit, cradling babies in their arms. Did parents who were already aware of infant mortality want to think about children in Heaven? The image could comfort or distress—it is as ambiguous as Noah's story here. Yes, the water purifies, but the flood is indiscriminately destructive. Noah and the occupants of the ark live—but how terrifying was that kind of mercy?

We talk about water in a Christian context. We don't talk about 1966, the year the Arno flooded and the city almost drowned. Hippies from around the world flocked here to save the art and sleep in camps. They were called mud-angels, because there wasn't enough clean water to bathe in, after the flood. It seems ironic, that after a surfeit of water caused such a disaster, potable water became scarce. That flood didn't save or purify. I wonder if, after that, the people of Florence looked at the saving waters on this ceiling with jaded eyes—or if any of them cared about mosaics when they ran short of gasoline and heat.

I am writing this six months after standing in the Baptistry. I remember these images and conflicting messages, but they strike closer to home now. The tsunami ripped apart Thailand and Asia last year, and now Katrina has drowned New Orleans, this continent's very first Sin City. Popular fiction populated the city with corruption, thieves, scarlet women, gamblers and debauchery of every variety—but that's not why they were hammered by a hurricane. The Big Easy didn't have a prayer. The mud angels grew out of the hippie stage—they bathed, cut their hair and went to sleep indoors. My generation was told to stay home; if we wanted to help the people of New Orleans, we were to send money and prayers to the professionals. Would we have gone, en masse, to help however we could? I don't know.

Noah's story isn't a two-by-two song today. The lecturer's question teases me: “How will the world end: fire or flood?”



**Sunday Morning**, Christine Flok,  
gelatin silver print, 8" x 6"

## IF PAT ROBERTSON WERE GOD

---

*Greg Smith*

do ver would be rotting in hell  
because for the sake of some he will condemn all.  
straight backward from the scripture, yes?

hugo chavez would be dead  
we have the means to kill him, so why not  
it's cheaper than a war, pat robertson.

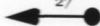
jazz would cease  
we all know that's the real reason  
katrina ravaged new orleans.

women would take three steps backwards  
trip over their rights, destroy their families,  
and just before hitting the ground, crush capitalism.

9/11 would be everyday  
until the pagans, feminists, abortionists, gays,  
lesbians, ACLU, and people of the american way are gone.

we would all yield 200 million  
dollars, insults, fake smiles, empty lines,  
misguided followers, enraged souls.

the world would exist inside the vacuum of a single mind  
alone, shallow, and barren.  
echoing endlessly from a self image exploded.





**U.S. Botanical Gardens, Rebecca Esslinger,**  
inkjet, 4" x 6"

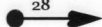
## THE LOSER

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*Andy Gertz*

Two gnats  
had a dogfight  
below the ceiling's fluorescent light.

The loser was exiled to another room,  
while the winner,  
the winner hovered victorious above his prize—  
circling one final time.  
He descended and drowned in my cup of rum.





*April Breneman*

Students gather outside, spread across the campus lawn,  
legs crossed, sandals tossed to the side,  
and book bags strewn in disarray.

Cars pass by with open windows,  
music drowning the sound of chirping birds,  
yet even the thumping bass belongs.

The first warm day of the year has everyone feeling alive, energetic.

Water flows past us in a graceful stream,  
light reflecting from the water's surface  
and illuminating the golden rocks below.

I bend a twig between my fingers,  
then toss it to the side when I hear it snap.  
I select a piece of grass and inspect its fine lines.  
There is much to discover in this small territory.

Sunlight trickles through the weeping willow branches,  
casting shadows onto the grass.  
A sweaty mist forms on my face  
as the warm sunbeams penetrate my skin.

We discuss morality,  
apply the theories of Aristotle, Mill, and Kant,  
contemplate what's right and wrong in our world,  
and deliberate about our human responsibilities  
as a spider leaps onto my pile of books  
and then burrows into the grass again.

Each minute passes by like an hour,  
and for once there is nowhere else we'd rather be.

*Sara Barshinger*

Across the green and misty moor  
With wind bitter and icy cold  
Two figures crept along the floor  
Fighting apart the mud and mold.

These two, a brilliant pair,  
Each one half of the whole  
One the Living, with caption fair,  
One the Sports, with all he stole.

Each caught turning in the wind,  
A whirlwind where they flirt and spin.  
Safe the lovers, from all chagrin,  
Each curling up a grin.

In the rippling whirl, they fly to the top,  
And when the wind dies, they suddenly stop.  
Motionless, the papers lay,  
A picture of love's display.

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CAN A LEARNED LIFE BE SIMPLE?

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*Greg Smith*

*"I have never let my schooling interfere with my education." Mark Twain*

I have often wanted to quit school and become a trucker. It would be the ideal life. Sure, I'd have to live by myself, with no friends or significant others. Sure, I'd have to deal with assholes on the road all day and learn to make those insane, wide right-hand turns, but it would be worth it. My rationale is this: As a trucker you can, by law, only drive eight hours a day, leaving sixteen hours to sleep and do other stuff.

For me, this would mean getting one of those huge, badass Volvo trucks with the TV, refrigerator, mini-table, folding beds, and amazing sound system inside. And also, vitally important, I would need a motorcycle. For eight hours of the day I would cruise the country in my truck/office/mobile home, getting paid to see the land and meet its people.

After my eight hour workday, we'll call it a 7am-3pm, I would have another eight hours (3-11pm) to do whatever I wanted. If in an interesting area, let's say Santa Fe, New Mexico, I could unload my bike and cruise around, checking

out the cool sites. It doesn't matter that I have no idea how to ride a motorcycle—I'd learn. Or, if I were in a less interesting place, say, South Dakota, I could catch up on my reading.

In college, I have no time to read. And by read, I mean read what I want. I'm talking finishing John Updike's Rabbit Angstrom tetralogy, the classics I never got to read, and, of course, Dave Barry. If I were feeling insightful, I could read some philosophy, perhaps Lao Tzu or Bertrand Russell. Scientific? I could read some Hawking or Einstein. Or if I were mad with Smirnoff, some Dostoevsky. I could keep a diary of where I've been, what I've seen, who I've met, and take tons of pictures to remember. I could lump them together into a book and get it published, or if it's really good, made into a movie.

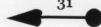
My main point is that excessive schooling is not needed to gain an education. Beyond the elementary level essentials—learning to read, write, and master simple mathematics—there is not a strong need for formal schooling. The working-class bound are not going to get anything out of British Literature, nor are prospective biochemists, nor Navy SEALs. A true education is acquired through experience. No number of books explaining how to perform a root canal will match the experience of watching a professional at work.

I sometimes wonder if school does in fact get in the way of our education. Is there anything past, say, the eighth grade, which is essential for our understanding of society? Not according to the mandated eighth grade reading level of our newspapers. Is there anything taught in the classroom that cannot be learned outside of the classroom?

Instead of holding our youth in high school for four questionably beneficial years of schooling, why not revert back to the medieval system of apprenticeships? Take the aspiring auto mechanic out of biology and put him (or her) in a garage to work with and learn from real mechanics. It makes sense, right?

This, of course, will never work. Not only because an eighth grade student rarely knows what he wants to be when he grows up, but because society has grown out of apprenticeships and into heavy schooling for a reason: we have become specialized. No longer are there just "doctors," but doctors of oncology, dermatology, cardiology, anesthesiology, radiology, and neurology—to name a few. Everything is clear-cut and defined. Today there is rarely more than one way to get from point A to point B.

Want to be a doctor? Twelve years of school and numerous certifications. A teacher? Not without a degree and state approval. In modern society, it is becoming increasingly harder to gain an education without school. It is an age of not letting your education get in the way of your schooling, because if you don't pass that test, no matter what you know or how much practical experience you have, you aren't going to get a job. Is that right? Is it fair? Probably not. But it's the way it is.



## LIES ABOVE THE FOLD

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*Bill Keller*

People ask me what I do for a living.  
I tell them I am a writer.  
"Oh, so you mean like a novelist," they ask.  
I smile. "Oh, no, I'm a liar."

The looks on faces at that statement  
makes the moment deliciously priceless:  
always followed by a long, blank stare,  
a knowing laugh, and a sarcastic, "No, really?"

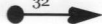
I don't have the heart to tell them  
that, everyday, when they pick up the paper,  
read bold headlines on translucent, inky pulp,  
all they see is what they want to see.

I get a check every two weeks.  
Twenty-six times a year. One-thousand-one-hundred-and-eighteen checks  
if I can keep on lying  
until I turn sixty-five.

I remain content, back-scratched, belly-rubbed content,  
knowing I help people sleep at night  
when I let them prove to themselves  
that they are right.

Conspiracy dictates:  
The government funds me from corporate payoffs.  
Clandestine appointments made by Senate officials  
to make sure people never know.

Reality stipulates:  
People are gullible. Writers get lazy.  
And writing new lies  
is easier than researching the truth.





**G Sharp Minor on Tooth Ridge**, Greg Smith,  
gelatin silver print, 16.7" x 22.2"

## LEGACY

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### *Jacquelyn Arnold*

Jacob and Caroline Lennox had resigned themselves to a childless life. Three miscarriages and a stillborn daughter left Caroline in such a state that she was prescribed the latest in designer tranquillizers. All the rage among the nervous and anxious housewives of the seventies, Valium left her dull and passive. When she found out that she was once again pregnant, she was so disconnected from the world around her that it took her several days to work up the energy to tell her husband.

When his wife gave birth to a healthy baby girl, the only emotion Jacob managed was a vague sense of perplexity. He stood with his hand fisted in his pockets, staring into the nursery while a nurse in a bright purple smock held the child up for his inspection. In later years, it would embarrass Jacob that his first reaction upon coming face to face with his child wasn't the instant, all-encompassing love that a father should feel for his child. Instead, he narrowed his eyes and wondered when the hospital would realize that they had made a mistake. There was no way they were actually going to let them leave with that little girl.





It wasn't until he was strapping her into the car seat in the back of his beat up Toyota that Jacob realized that the whole thing—the diapers, the tiny clothes, the car seat—was real. While Caroline checked, rechecked, and checked again that the baby was safely harnessed to the backseat, Jacob sat gripping the steering wheel with a white-knuckled terror he had never felt before. Before pulling away from the curb, he studied every blind spot imaginable in a way that he had not done since his driver's exam nearly twenty years prior.

"I'm a father." If he had been driving more than fifteen miles an hour when the thought finally struck him, he might have swerved off the road.

"Are you okay?" Caroline asked, sitting sideways in the passenger seat so that she never broke eye contact with the car seat.

"Huh." The half sigh, half grunt was Jacob's only acknowledgment of the birth of his daughter, other than the face-splitting, ear-to-ear grin that never seemed to go away. Jacob was known for a lot of things in his life. He still held the record for yards rushing from his years as a football player. He ran a construction company that had a reputation for fair estimates and quality work. He'd even been named Brighton County Businessman of the Year in 1981. One thing he would never be remembered for was his way with words.

Naming the newborn proved to be a more daunting task than that first drive home from the hospital. Their baby who had died before she ever took a breath of air had been named for Jacob's mother, Marian Elisabeth. That left Caroline's mother. Mary Katherine Sortore was still alive and very much kicking, albeit from a rest home two towns away. Jacob would have rather assigned his child a numeric identification than name her for the rude, caustic woman who laughed when fellow residents in her care facility fell down. Caroline did not hesitate in agreeing with Jacob's assessment. After Mary Katherine's reaction to her pregnancy—a snide comment about Caroline looking fatter than normal—Caroline remembered exactly why she never felt any guilt about putting her mother into a home.

Without any other viable relatives to dedicate their child's name to, they were forced to become creative. Caroline dug out baby-name books and child-rearing manuals for inspiration. In the end, however, they named the girl after an unremarkable news anchor. While watching the local news one evening, the baby began to wail—a screeching, wracking sob that the new parents would find endearing for exactly a week—the very moment the anchor tossed her cue to the newsroom.

"Matilda," Jacob blurted.

Caroline emerged from the bedroom, cradling the baby in the crook of her elbow. "Hmm?"

"Matilda," he repeated. "What do you think about the name Matilda?"

"Matilda?" she repeated skeptically.

"What are our other options? 'The Kid'? 'The Baby'? We might think that's cute now, but I don't want her getting teased on the playground because of our bad choices."

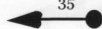
Caroline laughed, sat on the couch next to her husband, and rubbed a hand over the crown of the baby's head. The hair was so fine and light, it was nearly transparent, and she found herself running it through her fingers in fascination whenever she could.

Just as nonchalantly and uneventfully as she had been born, the baby was given an identity. Her nickname was a source of a great deal of contention in the Lennox home before they finally agreed to disagree. Jacob called her Tildy and Caroline called her Matty. They both called her by her full name, Matilda Jane, when she was caught trying to chew through an electrical cord—the modus operandi of her terrible twos.

Jacob would have liked another child, a son named Jake Jr. He could teach him to hunt, pass on his old baseball mitt, watch football, and complain at length about those goddamn Giants. Matilda would call him J.J. for short, because she would have a little trouble with her "k" sounds. Jacob's wishes were in theory only. He had his Matilda, and he wasn't about to roll those dice again.

Jacob never resented the fact that he didn't have a son; he wasn't a chauvinist by any means. In her adult years, Matilda would often describe her father as being more of a progressive feminist than her mother. Caroline taught her all the skills that would make her an excellent housewife someday. From her earliest years, Matilda knew to sort her laundry by color and to check her pants pockets before putting anything into the washing machine. Jacob, meanwhile, taught her all the necessary skills to become Brighton County's first Nobel Prize winning Olympian. He taught her how to field a ground ball and he brushed up on his math skills, just so he was prepared to help her with the inevitable homework questions. Matilda learned to appreciate her mother's quiet dignity over a recipe for lemon meringue pie and was taught to respect the complexities of a business ledger while keeping her father company at his office. She learned to pick her battles with her mother during her teenage years, because even when Matilda was positive that she was right, Caroline always seemed to come out on top.

From time to time, Caroline would become concerned that Jacob was pushing Matilda too hard and Jacob complained that Caroline was coddling the girl too much. Every time they were about to come to blows over the pitfalls of the other's parenting style, Matilda would march in and announce that they had no choice but to listen. She was nearly eighteen years old, she'd say, and it was time for her parents to come to terms with her being an independent person. Then she'd stomp out of the house, slam the screen door behind her, and return moments later—another dramatic exit ruined by forgetting the keys to the car.



Whatever their differences in opinion on parenting, Caroline and Jacob did nothing if not raise a successful daughter. Field hockey, basketball, softball, Future Business Leaders of America, Students Against Destructive Decisions, Student Council, Yearbook Club, National Honor Society, Varsity Club. You name it, Matilda Lennox was involved in it, and if Matilda Lennox was involved in it, chances were good that she also held an elected position.

Jacob was aware of how annoying he must have been. He couldn't resist stopping by the bar for a few drinks with his crew after work to brag about his daughter. The newspaper headlines made Jacob's bragging more than the average fathers' exaggerated folklore of their exceptional children. On the days where he would open to the sports page and see the name "Lennox" in a headline or see his daughter's sweaty, triumphant face in a photograph, he would go to the bar, and order his beer. He would perch on a stool with a smirk that, despite his best efforts, was always just a little condescending. He never said a word, and why would he when the headlines did his talking for him? "Lady Mustangs Steamroll Hawks, Lennox Scores Record Breaking 35 Points," "Westminster High Clinch Playoff Position with Lennox 9th Inning Homer," "Westminster's Lennox Signs Letter of Intent—Duke University"

There were those that were irritated by Jacob's incessant bragging, those that were tired of hearing about perfect little Tildy Lennox. They would whisper in low, vile voices that they couldn't wait for the day that perfect little Matilda finally fell from grace. "It's inevitable," they'd say while hiding behind a menu so no one could hear their vile comments. "No one gets that high on a pedestal without falling off." They held no ill will towards the girl, but they wouldn't mind seeing that irritating smirk knocked off Jacob's face.

Moving their daughter into her dormitory was a surreal experience for her parents. Matilda packed as much as she could into a slightly used Honda, her high school graduation present. Whatever didn't fit was strapped down in the back of Jacob's pickup truck for the long drive from New York to North Carolina. Caroline made the best of things, helping to hang curtains and posters with the idea of making the cinderblock cave a little more welcoming. Matilda bounced up and down the stairs, unloading their vehicles with her typical boundless energy and Jacob sat on the edge of her bed and counted the distance—in hours, in miles, in states—that would be between him and his daughter by the end of the day. When Matilda and her new roommate headed off for the first of many orientation activities, Jacob and Caroline climbed into the truck and began their drive home. Jacob found himself constantly checking the rearview mirror and looking for his daughter's car. He couldn't quite seem to remember that Matilda wasn't following him anymore.

The first thought that Jacob and Caroline had when Matilda announced she was bringing home her new boyfriend, James Thames, was that someone's parents should have watched more broadcast news reports before naming their child. When a shiny black SUV pulled into the driveway, Jacob peeked through the blinds and watched the young man cross to the passenger side and open

the car door for his daughter. The young man was as neat as pin, his light brown hair trimmed so neatly that it looked like each individual strand had been measured for continuity. If the boy was willing to put that much effort into impressing his new girlfriend's parents, he might not be so bad, Jacob thought. But if he was that immaculate all the time, the kid would officially be creepy, and Jacob was prepared to drive him off with a flaming torch.

Jacob was prepared to hate him based on his ridiculous name alone, but James was exactly the kind of guy a father would want his daughter to bring home. He was polite, well-spoken, intelligent, and obviously enamored with Matilda. He was the grandson of Robert Thames, the discount mattress outlet magnate with stores across the country. Jacob could vaguely remember a cheesy commercial he'd seen in the eighties. He debated what that commercial said about the grandson, letting his mind wander while James charmed Caroline with stories about his trip to the Amazon the previous summer.

Jacob blinked into focus and realized that his wife and daughter were in the kitchen fooling around with whatever desserts Caroline had concocted. "Mr. Lennox," James began in a voice dripping with nerves. "I was wondering if I could talk to you for a few minutes privately."

For one horrifying moment, Jacob was convinced that he was having a heart attack. The vice-like grip on his chest loosed enough for him to suck in an uneven breath. "No," he said with great confidence, despite the sweat breaking out on his brow. "Absolutely not."

"What?" James asked, his lips moving and his eyes darting back and forth.

"Are you going to ask for my daughter's hand in marriage?"

"Yes...I was—"

"Then I don't need to talk to you in private," Jacob interrupted as he reached for the bottle of wine that sat in the middle of the table. "She's not even nineteen years old, and you want to get married? What are you, twenty-one?"

"Twenty-two," James corrected petulantly.

"Oh, well, in that case..." Jacob toasted the young man with his wine glass. "The answer is still no."

"Daddy." The single word was uttered like an expletive and had Jacob wincing. With his wine glass still at his lips, he shifted and saw Matilda in the doorway. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes watery, and her hands on her hips. "How dare you?"

"Tildy," Jacob said in the same voice he'd used to teach her important lessons as a toddler. "You're eighteen years old, you're not even an eighth of the way through college, and you want to get married?"

"I'm eighteen years old, which means if I want to get married, I will," she retorted. "I love James, and he loves me. Why are you being so horrible about this?"

"Why did he ask my permission if you both didn't want to hear my answer?"

"It's a formality." The identical withering looks from father and daughter made James painfully aware that he was better off keeping his mouth shut.

"Well, since it's a formality, and you're going to do what you want because you're eighteen," Jacob mumbled. "You can do whatever the hell you want. But that doesn't mean you're going to get my permission to do it. Or pay for it, for Christ's sake."

"Fine," Matilda snapped, turning to give her mother a chaste hug. "I'm sorry, Mom," she said. "James, let's go."

"Matty, don't," Caroline begged. "It's just a shock; your father doesn't mean it. Stay, we'll talk this out."

Matilda paused, glancing at her father. "Oh, he means it," she said. She grabbed James's wrist and dragged him towards the back door.

He could see his little girl, that little nameless blob that was swaddled in a cream-colored blanket right after she was born, marching out the door. He knew how he could stop her—by apologizing, by telling her it was okay. He still couldn't bring himself to say that he was okay with his baby—his little Tildy—getting married, even if it would make her stay. "I'll remind you," he shouted. "That since you're eighteen and so independent all of a sudden, you can send me a forwarding address so I can send you your tuition bill for next month."

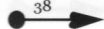
"I don't need your fucking money!" It was the first time he'd ever heard her swear, and for some reason the profanity broke his heart more than her running off with some mattress salesman.

They didn't hear from her for two and half weeks, and in those two and a half weeks, the only time Caroline would speak to Jacob was to remind him that if they never heard from their daughter again, it would be entirely his fault. He nearly dropped the phone in relief when he finally heard his daughter's voice. She was pleasant—distant, but pleasant—and asked for her mother at the first sign of an awkward pause. After Caroline hung up, she sat down on the edge of the couch and faced him. "They're getting married next month. February seventeenth, at his family's place in the mountains. We can come, only if we promise not to be critical."

"Is she pregnant?" Jacob asked wearily, rubbing his hands over his face.

Caroline was taken aback. "I don't know," she said slowly. "Why do you say that?"

"I don't understand why Tildy would suddenly decide that she had to get married as soon as possible, with or without our support. If she's not pregnant, she's





on drugs, because that's sure as hell not our Tildy."

On a frostbitten day in February, Jacob walked Matilda down the aisle, grinding his teeth every step of the way. The flowing dress was cut in a way that Jacob knew that he'd have a grandchild by the end of the year, even if Matilda hadn't admitted it yet. The only way he managed to smile in the pictures was to entertain vivid fantasies about choking the life out of his son-in-law with his own ridiculous bow tie. He kept his mouth shut, smiled for pictures, danced at the reception, and toasted the couple at the reception. The only thing he'd learned over the months of tension was that proving a point was not worth losing his daughter.

Jacob and Caroline didn't think about it often—that bleak, miserable time before Matilda had been born—but when they did, they both fervently prayed that their daughter would never experience the same heartbreak of losing a child. In its way, it was a blessing that Matilda waited until the last possible moment to confirm her pregnancy to her parents. It meant fewer days of putting on a happy face and pretending they weren't terrified for their daughter. It meant less sleepless nights, lying in the dark and waiting for the phone call that would make their terror all too real.

When Jacob was sitting down to his lunch at noon on a Thursday afternoon, he got another phone call entirely. Caroline gripped the door handle as if her life depended on it as Jacob broke dozens of traffic laws in their trip to the hospital. They expected Matilda to be in the midst of labor, but were instead told by a jovial doctor that she gave birth in record time, a bouncing baby boy with all the necessary equipment.

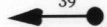
Jacob found James standing at the observation window to the nursery, his hands buried deep in his pockets. He'd never seen the young man anything less than impeccably dressed and groomed, but now he was in a wrinkled gray tee shirt and jeans that looked to be decades old. "Everything okay?" Jacob asked, even though he recognized the perplexed look on the young man's face very well.

"What? Oh, yeah," he replied, making an effort to look like he had his wits about him. "Yeah, I'm good."

"Does he have a name yet?"

"Yeah, he does," James said, finally registering an expression other than confusion. "William Lennox Thames."

Jacob turned and looked at his son-in-law, not as that no-good son-of-a-bitch that got his little girl pregnant, but as a person, as an equal. Suddenly, he saw so much of himself in the boy. In that moment, he was thirty-six years old, on top of the world, seeing his child for the first time.



Just as quickly, he was fifty-six. He was old. His hair was thinning and white, his knees didn't bend right when it rained, and he spent more money on blood pressure medicine than on groceries in a month's time. It wasn't his baby being rocked by a nurse, and James was not his son.

James and Matilda's marriage wouldn't last the year, but Jacob didn't know that then. He didn't know that he'd suffer a minor heart attack—a "cardiac event" his doctor liked to call it—after seeing Matilda's black eye and bruised wrists. He didn't yet know that he would spend the first month of his retirement finding the nastiest lawyer money could buy to make sure that James never saw his son without the supervision of state social workers. Jacob didn't yet know that at seventy-one years old, he would take Will to his first baseball game, where he would buy the boy a tee shirt he would wear until it was torn to shreds and a foam finger that would become one of his most treasured possessions. He didn't yet know that he would pass down his ancient baseball mitt and doze off while his daughter pitched baseballs to her son in the backyard. He didn't know that he wouldn't wake up from that nap, a massive stroke while he slept taking his life. And he didn't know that when Will would say he missed his dad, everyone would know that he wouldn't be referring to James.

Because if Jacob had known all of that when he was standing next to his son-in-law in front of the nursery window, he certainly wouldn't have offered James a hand and asked "Well, son, how does it feel to be a father?"



**Pixie**, Christine Flok,  
gelatin silver print, 6" x 8.5"



**Irish Memorial—Gettysburg  
Battlefield, Amanda Getka,**  
gelatin silver print, 6" x 4"

## FAMILY TRADITIONS

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### *Kendall Snell*

My indianess sat next to me on  
the floor of my white grandmother's living room,  
blocking her view of me,  
while my white cousins played fully in sight.

Daddy and Mommy,  
majority and minority,  
smile nervously,  
the prejudices hanging in the  
air around them.

Mom carried, still carries,  
the prejudices of that family  
who never really knew her.  
Her indianess blocked her too,  
my half, her whole.

*Chris Veghte*

We meet in a third grade classroom: Veghte and Wilkocz. I sit in front of you for the first of many times. I turn around to look and realize that with your pale blue eyes and your fair brown hair worn down to your calves, you're the most beautiful girl I've ever seen. I know I shouldn't feel this way. You are one of the very vile sources of cooties, and by all accounts something to be wary of.

"Hi," you say to me. "I'm Missy."

"Hi," I reply, not believing that I'm actually talking to you. You must be using those devil powers that our dads all say you girls possess.

"I'm worried about having Ms. Colton for a teacher," you tell me.

"Yeah, me too," I say, putting my head down to avoid eye contact.

"I hear she's the devil herself," you say as you put your head on your desk to look at me at eye level again. "Did you hear that too?"

I don't know how to respond, so I just nod and agree.

"They've been saying at my bus stop all week," you say, captivating me, "that Ms. actually stands for Master of Satan Colton." I believe every word. Your soft-spoken voice tells me that every thing you say must be true, and I think for the first time I have found what my older sister tells me is called a crush. I just met you, and you fill my stomach with what I imagine are butterflies; I hate to admit it, but I like it.

I find myself stuck in study hall in seventh grade, bored as always. Jason tries to talk to me, even though he knows that we're not supposed to. I pretend that I'm interested in the giant chocolate chip cookie at his favorite restaurant that comes covered in vanilla ice cream and hot fudge. Normally, I'd find this subject quite appetizing, but not now. Something else has my attention.

You sit next to me; we can't escape our alphabetized seating after all these years. We have a winter formal coming up and all I want to do is ask you to it, but I can't. Boys don't ask girls to dances in 7th grade, and anyway nobody would go with me. So instead I doodle a picture of you and me dancing in the margin of my notebook, the same notebook that has your name scrawled on every page.

We're finally really friends. It has taken years for me to build up enough courage to talk to you in homeroom and at lunch. It's tenth grade and I'm glad that you're one of the first people that I've gotten to take out driving with me after getting my license. Even if we only drive to your church, I still cherish it.

Right now though, I hold your hand as we pray. I know that I should be focusing on the prayer that Pastor Fair is reciting to us, but I can't concentrate. Your hand is actually in mine. It's sweaty and I wonder if it's because it's holding my hand. My hand almost slips out of your grasp. Damn it, I curse myself as I realize my hand has begun to sweat as well. You're going to realize that I like you, that I love you.

But with a faint amen everyone opens their eyes and I look at you. Your blue eyes tell me that you're happy, but I can tell that's just because I agreed to come here with you. You're happy that I've agreed to ignore every single thought and hunch I've ever had about the world and follow you into a church. I'm happy that I've finally gotten to hold your hand; I just wish you felt the same.

We walk into your bedroom, a room that I clearly remember used to be your family's dining room. You lie in the hospital bed that CHOP has sent home for you to use and you are beautiful. As always your blue eyes light up the room more than any fixture from Ikea ever could, and when they see me they sparkle a little more.

I don't really want to be here. It's too hard, but Beth heard all our friends were coming to show you their dresses, so she wanted to come too. I can tell you think I'm handsome, dressed up for a change in a tux, sporting a bowtie like our principal, Mr. Sullivan, (who happens to send his love) always wears. And then I see you look at Beth, and your eyes change. They dim and your eyebrows arch slightly, causing a wrinkle to cross your forehead. Most people wouldn't recognize this look as anger. I know you well though, and I know you hate her.

"You're almost pretty enough to go with him," you tell her before you try to laugh. For a second I can hear the contagiously childish laugh that used to incite everyone to laugh along. And then you start coughing; even that sentence was hard for you to say. The morphine is taking its toll, but you are still in there somewhere, enough so to almost ruin my prom. Standing here looking at the two of you, it hits me hard. I'll spend the night dancing with Beth even though I know it's your hands I should be holding, it's your head that should be on my shoulder. You own my heart and she knows I love you more than her, but we never say a word about it.

"Kiss me," you say.

I look at you and even though I know you're halfway to being loopy from morphine, and even though you have crust on part of your lips, I want to. I don't think I've ever wanted to kiss anyone more than I want to kiss you right now.

It hurts to say it, and at first I don't even realize I had the strength to. "No," escapes my lips as I watch the pain cross your eyes for a split second. The pain doesn't last long, and soon enough I see the unending love that your blue eyes always show me. A love I don't think I've ever really deserved.

I just made love to my girlfriend and the phone rings. I look at the caller ID and know it's you. My heart panics as I feel Lisa's hands on my shoulders playfully massaging me as they always do. I tell her to be quiet, that you are not allowed to hear her voice at all. You don't even know about her, and I almost love her as much as I love you.

"Hello," I answer the phone with as much excitement as I can muster.

"He..he...hello," I hear you reply, trying to say the words that quickly run from your mind. And every word after that one is just as hard for you to say. It's so hard to listen; I don't know how many people still stay on the line for you. Lindsey stopped calling, and Jason is never in his dorm room, your mom tells me every time I see her.



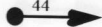
Your cancer has spread so rapidly, and you're leaving us so quickly, even though you fight harder than I thought was even possible. So I stay on the phone as long as I can, even ignoring Lisa pouting next to me naked in all of her beautiful glory. I wish I had the strength to tell you about her, but I can't. I haven't been able to tell any of the girls in my life about you either. There's never been a person in my life that I've loved more passionately than you. I feel it in the way that you say: "I love you, Chris." Each word is clearer than anything else you've said to me on the phone for the past 40 minutes. "I love you too," I say, truer than any other words I think I've ever spoken, and then immediately try to bury the hole inside of me with Lisa's embrace.

All eyes are on me, I know it. I sit in one of the front pews at your church and everyone from our high school must wonder what I'm doing here. Who is that long-haired hippie sitting with her youth group and family, they're thinking. I know they recognize me; I recognize everyone here and I wonder what they're doing here. None of them are really your friends. Sure, some of them played field hockey with you or shared a class or two with you and realized that you're the most amazingly nice person anyone could have the luck to meet. But that doesn't mean they know a thing about you.

They don't know that you cried many nights worrying that your grandmother wouldn't be waiting for you beyond the pearly gates because you're not sure if she accepted Jesus. They don't know that pretty girls made you feel weird, and it worried you that you might be bisexual. And they don't know about that bombshell Bonnie dropped on me at your wake.

Bonnie sits a few spots down from me, smiling at me. You were the older sister she always needed and that's why she loves me too. Because of what you told her and what is gripping my heart right now as I can barely manage to follow the sermon of our favorite pastor, Pastor Fair.

"She just wanted you to know that if she made it through this that she knew she'd always end up marrying you," Bonnie told me with that bright, 14-year-old, naïve, ready-to-take-on-the-world smile that always made me laugh. I hugged her, not really knowing how to respond. We never had a date, a kiss, or any of those trifling matters that equal relationships in our young adult lives. It doesn't matter though; I know exactly what you meant.



## A BRITTLE FALL

---

*Greg Smith*

two leaves fall to the ground,  
dancing blindly through an invisible maze,  
brushing ephemerally,  
recoiling embarrassingly.

it's all too easy  
to lose yourself to the surroundings  
in the chaotic mixture of midnight charlestons  
and lethargic lindy hops.

we tumbled to the grass in a topple  
of limbs and grins, chests to the moon.  
staring at the silhouette of an oak.  
i whispered:

please don't worry, love,  
the leaves are falling  
like planes from the sky,  
but they aren't fighters.

these acorns, these bombs,  
will raze the land,  
but not kill,  
only create.

so pull down that collar,  
lift that chin,  
there are birds in the sky  
who can see through the haze.

i said it was a haze like hazleton,  
but different.  
you said it was like franz ferdinand.  
i asked if you meant the band or the duke.

she hesitates to answer  
and slowly lifts her eyes from the leafy ground,  
peering through her wavy prison bars of crimson,  
then replies: both.

i began to learn that the best material comes from the truth  
and felt a little worse for dylan.  
i was too,  
tangled up in blue.

her eyes crash back to the ground,  
amidst the wings and tail fins—  
the wreckage of the season:  
fragile and forgotten.

his ascend to the sky,  
fascinated by the veterans,  
swooping and fluttering in infinitesimal loops,  
the hopeless romantics  
silence swings from a noose above—  
a dissonant chord struck.  
as invisible fingers rake the leaves from the trees:  
he cannot help but smile.

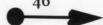
i had always thought that the best relationships  
were the ones that stood no chance,  
that were doomed from the start—  
they were the most memorable.

i held her, bittersweet,  
as a nomadic cloud stepped in front of the moon  
and a threw melancholy blanket over the land,  
engulfing us completely.

I want to ask You on a date for the rest of your life.

a leaf leaps from the ground  
caught in an updraft,  
twirls, swoops, and just as quickly  
falls to the ground.

close-lipped, he hands her a defeated smile.  
her eyes knowingly question.  
together, they fold their fears like paper airplanes  
and lose them in the breeze.





**Bathing**, *Christine Flok*,  
gelatin silver print, 6.5" x 8.5"

## THE DEATH DEALERS: PART I

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### *Hilary Clawson*

I never mean to kill them. I pull their wings off because they're a constant reminder of things I don't have. Freedom. The power of flight. Still, somehow they always die once they lose their wings. They run around in circles on the windowsill for a while—sometimes even hours—but in the end I always come back to find them dead on their backs.

I suppose I used to be like them. I buzzed around my life, smacking into glass I couldn't see, unaware that there was a power capable of tearing my wings from my back and leaving me running around in circles.

I was locked in this room over a month ago. Arrested for murder.

I'm innocent.

I know, I know, "they" always say that, don't they?

Whoever's in charge of this whole process decided it would be a good idea for me to undergo some psychiatric evaluation. It all seemed pretty straightforward to me; I was hooked up to a variety of machines and barraged with questions for hours on end. I thought that would straighten things out. I've never killed anything bigger than a fly—I have nothing to hide. Apparently they found something interesting, though, 'cause I'm still here.

I used to be able to fly, you know. I could fall into a daydream and send my spirit out over the rooftops. I only ever sent it where it was sunny though. I don't like being in the cold and dark.

I don't much like being locked up in this room either. I can't get out, not even in my head. I miss the feeling of the city around me. This room.. it might as well be a sensory deprivation box.

I never killed anyone.

I'm not crazy.

She certainly looked innocent enough, curled up in the fetal position on the bed. One of the two men looking at her through the small, square window in her door sighed and turned away. The other continued to stare at her, a look of intense concentration on his face.

The one who'd turned away pulled a pack of cigarettes from the inside pocket of his suit jacket. He tapped it in the palm of his hand a couple of times, opened it with a flick of the wrist, and pulled forth the cigarette that had popped up with his lips.

"You keep staring like that, you're gonna get a headache, DeCillo," he said. The other man said nothing.

"You can't smoke in here, detective," said the nearby doctor. "Hospital regulations, you know."

The detective sighed again and tucked the cigarette behind his ear. "C'mon, partner, you almost ready to go? What are you looking for, anyway, the fatal character flaw?"

The other detective finally turned away from the tiny window. "She looks so small, sleeping like that. I'm trying to reconcile that with the facts of the murders."

"I know, man, it's weird to think that a little girl did all that, but you've said it yourself: the evidence is irrefutable."

"Murphy, something just isn't sitting right with me on this. I can't put my finger on it, but something's just... weird, man. That's all there is to it. It's weird." He approached the doctor. "How long has she been here now, doctor?"

After checking his clipboard, the doctor replied, "Six weeks, this Friday."

"And her story hasn't changed in all that time?"

The doctor took a deep breath through his nose. "No..." He exhaled.

"But?"



"Were the results of her tests ever shown to you, detective?"

"Not that I recall, no."

The doctor nodded. "Come to my office, then. I have something to tell you."

"So what you're saying is, she has multiple personalities?"

The doctor aimlessly shuffled papers around on his desk while he searched for a response. "That's not exactly it. See, the brain scan we did revealed an odd... I suppose I might call it a shadow or an echo, something that reminded me of what might appear if there was more than one personality present, but I've had her run the whole gamut of DID testing and—"

"DID?"

"Dissociative Identity Disorder. It's another term for multiple personality disorder. Anyway, the testing shows that she's a fairly normal person. She denies having been abused as a child, and none of the tests we've done have proven otherwise. She's had no episodes of amnesia or derealization. She talks about being able to fly, which may be a sign of depersonalization, but..." Murphy cleared his throat loudly, and cut in.

"Doc, excuse my ignorance, but 'derealization'? 'Depersonalization'?"

"If she was experiencing derealization, she would be perceiving her surrounding environment as unreal, which is decidedly not the case. Now, I say that she may be experiencing symptoms of depersonalization when she is 'flying,' because she's not perceiving herself as in her body, but I haven't actually seen such an episode, so I can't say for sure." Detective DeCillo looked down at his hands, neatly folded in his lap.

"You don't have any idea what's up with her, do you?" he asked quietly. The doctor answered, just as softly.

"No. Not really." DeCillo pursed his lips and continued to stare at his hands. After a moment, he stood up from his seat before the doctor's desk.

"Thank you for your time," he said, and extended his right hand.

"You're quite welcome," said the doctor, giving DeCillo's hand a brisk shake. "If we get any new information..."

"You'll give us a call. Talk to you later, doctor."

The door to the doctor's office clicked shut behind the two detectives.

The doctor sat at his desk and stared at nothing.

Six weeks earlier:

*Hysterical woman on phone:* Oh my God! Oh my God! You have to send someone right away! Everyone... everyone's dead!

*911 operator:* Ma'am, I need you to stay on the line, okay? Where are you located?

*Hysterical woman:* Where am I...? I-I'm in the alley by... by Jake's Bar... The one on Fifth and Cottage... Oh my God, you have to send someone... [sounds of sobbing]

*911 operator:* Ma'am? Ma'am, stay with me, there's help headed your way. Now, I need you to step out of the alley... Is it safe for you to go into the bar?

*Hysterical woman:* I don't know... I was in there a minute ago... My friends just went out for a quick cigarette and now... [sniffing; shuddering breaths]

[silence]

*911 operator:* Ma'am? Are you still there?

*Woman:* [whispering] There's something moving in the alley.

*911 operator:* Ma'am, I need you to get away from that alley and into an open, crowded area now. Stay on the line, but move.

[silence]

*911 operator:* Ma'am?

[screams]

[line goes dead]

"What'll you boys have tonight?"

Murphy turned to his partner, who was brooding on the barstool to his left. "I don't know, DeCillo, should we start out with beer or jump straight to the boiler-makers?"

DeCillo snapped out of his reverie long enough to snort and respond. "I'll have my usual, thanks."

"You heard the man. Coupla Buds, Max."

The bartender rolled his eyes and turned towards the taps. "You guys still working on that weird murder case?"

"Yeah."

"Find out anything?"

"Nothing we can tell ya, buddy."

Max leaned over the bar, mugs of beer in hand. "I heard it was some girl that did it. I heard she's barely twenty an' skinnier than your average pencil. Am I close?"

Murphy cocked an eyebrow at the burly man behind the bar. "You gonna stand there and let that beer warm up or what?"

Max grunted. "Fine, fine. But I want details when this gets wrapped up."

"Have I ever let you down?"

The bartender drifted off down the bar to tend to other customers.

Murphy looked at DeCillo. "Whatever-it-is still buggin' ya?"

DeCillo was staring off into space and gnawing on his lower lip, but he paused long enough to glance at Murphy and grab his beer. "Yeah." The chewing of the lip resumed.

Murphy shook his head and took a swig. "I keep telling you, you're gonna give yourself a headache, and what's the point? The evidence we have is enough to get her the death penalty. You heard the doctor: she's normal."

"She's almost normal. There was that shadow thing..."

"The doc couldn't even tell us what it was! And even if it was another personality or something, that means she's criminally nuts—we'd be putting her away either way."

"Yeah, but it'd take execution off the table. And maybe she could get treatment. But it's not just that that's bugging me."

"Well, spill it, then."

DeCillo set his mug down on the bar and spun around on his stool to face his friend. "Look, how long have we been partners now?"

Murphy looked slightly confused. "Uhh, about six years... what does that have to do with anything?"

"In the six years we've been partners, has my gut ever been wrong?"

"Wha—?"

"Do you trust my gut?"

"Y-yeah, I guess so. You've been dead on about a lot of stuff."

"Well, my gut is telling me there's something really weird about this case. And I mean really weird. Think about it. Think about what happened to those people."

Now think about that girl we've got locked up. She took on six people, Murph, and three of 'em were guys that had at least fifty pounds on her. Each. And you're telling me she did what she did, with her bare hands, and none of those people could stop her? She took them apart, piece by piece--"

"We don't know for sure she didn't use anything..."

"We sure as Hell didn't find anything, did we? And we checked every Dumpster on the block! And think of how we found her: passed out on her face..."

"In a pool—no, a freakin' lake—of blood, none of which was hers. And their skin was under her nails, man. C'mon, you read CSU's report, same as I did. The evidence is rock solid."

DeCillo turned back and glared into his beer before taking another gulp. "Something isn't right about this case."

Murphy threw up his hands in exasperation. "Fine. Something isn't right about the case. So we'll keep looking into it."

"Fine."

They finished their beer in silence.

Those cops came back and stared at me some more today. They never actually try to talk to me, although one of them always looks like he's going to. I'm still debating about whether I'd really answer his questions. Maybe I'll just sit there and stare at him with a creepy look on my face. Give him a taste of being a zoo animal for a change.

It's strange, but sometimes, when I've been staring out that window for a couple hours, I can almost feel the city out there. I pretend it's waiting for me to come back, like a patient lover, like someone who knows I'm prone to getting sidetracked on my way home from the corner store with the milk.

Sometimes, when I've been staring out that window for hours and hours on end, I feel like I could push through the Plexiglas and wire and escape.

But I couldn't really...

Seven weeks earlier:

*DeCillo:* What can you tell me, Tao? Anything?

*Coroner:* Not much, yet, Frank. All I know about this one is that she's the one who dialed 911 on her cell. The phone was found in her hand, a short distance away from the rest of her arm.

*DeCillo:* [quietly] What was her name?

*Coroner:* Tracy. Tracy Rhinewold.

DeCillo slammed his fists into his desk, then pushed away from it with his rolling chair. "It's been too long, Murphy. We've got nothing. She's still sitting in that room..."

"You heard the new trick she's been pullin' lately, man?"

DeCillo's head snapped up. "Trick? No, what is it?"

Murphy gave a reassuring chuckle. "Relax, Frank, it's nothin' special. She's

started sitting against the door where people can't see her when they're lookin' in that window."

"What?"

"See, she sits sideways, parallel to the door, all squished up against it so no one can see her."

Eyes narrowed, DeCillo asked, "Do the doctors know why she's started doing that?"

"Nope, not a clue. Gave 'em a turn the first time it happened, though. Thought she'd escaped. Three guards almost lost their jobs, and she almost got her ribs broken when the first poor shmuck to run in the door tripped over her."

"Hmm..." Detective DeCillo rolled his chair back over to his desk and rested his chin in his hand.

Murphy looked at him, a bemused expression on his face. "What, you think it means somethin'?"

"I don't know. I don't know what it could mean. I just don't like the idea that she's started doing something strange."

"I don't know how much longer we can keep her in that hospital, man. The mob's beatin' on the door with torches and pitchforks."

DeCillo chuckled wryly. "God knows it won't be appeased until it sees blood... Only a convicted killer's, of course."

"Of course, of course. But the DA's working towards a preliminary hearing, so if you're still set on proving that something weird is going on..."

"I know. There isn't much time left." DeCillo sighed. "Look, I think I'm going to head over to the hospital and see about talking to the girl."

Murphy shrugged. "If you think that'll work. Want me to come with?"

"Nah, finish up that paperwork you're doing. I'll call you if anything drastic happens."

"See ya in a bit, then, buddy."

"Yeah. See ya."

I can do it. It's going to work, I can feel it. Let me just put my palm against the windowpane...

The guard at the main entrance seemed preoccupied, but that did nothing to prepare DeCillo for the sight that greeted him as he pulled into the visitors' parking lot. The hospital grounds were buzzing with activity. Men in white were walking swiftly around the perimeter of the building, dogs on leashes milling about in front of them. From the look of things, they weren't picking up a scent. DeCillo felt his stomach turn.

Two Weeks Later:

*Official:* How long before you realized she was gone?

*Doctor:* About half an hour.

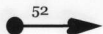
*Official:* Why so long?

*Doctor:* Well, she'd taken to sitting in front of the door where no one could see her, so the guards just figured that's what she was doing. It wasn't until an orderly went in to give her lunch...

*Official:* So she just walked out? It was broad daylight, how come no one saw her?

*Doctor:* I—I don't know! I can't explain it—the door was still locked! The window wasn't open or broken or anything... She just disappeared!

*Official:* People don't just disappear. How far a drop was it from her window?



*Doctor:* Only a couple of feet—there're different levels to the hospital, so there's a flat roof right outside her room... But we'd had people out there with dogs. There was nothing.

*Official:* And what happened next?

*Doctor:* Detective DeCillo asked to see the roof anyway...

The doctor was right. There was nothing on the rooftop, not even the prints of her bare feet in the gravel. DeCillo looked towards the gray sky and frowned. It was going to start raining soon. Any chance of the dogs finding a scent would be lost once the clouds burst. His fists clenched at his sides, he turned back towards the window, frustrated. A sudden thought furrowed his brow and narrowed his eyes. He gestured to the doctor, who was still watching him, pensively, from inside.

"Shut the window for me, would you please?" DeCillo asked. The doctor shrugged and did so.

He wouldn't have noticed anything strange if he hadn't taken a step backwards, but that step was enough to allow a last ray of light, escaping from behind a cloud, to reflect oddly from one part of the window. DeCillo stepped forward again, waved the doctor away distractedly before the man could open the window, and stared, perplexed, at a sight he did not understand.

"Where the Hell did you get this?" Darrell Keenan, head of the CSU, practically shouted as he peered through the window Detective DeCillo had taken from the hospital.

"Can you help me out? I have no idea what this means."

Keenan's face crinkled up like a stomped-on soda can; his eyebrows nearly met at his nose. "This isn't some joke you and Murphy cooked up to mess with me, is it?" DeCillo let out his breath in an exasperated rush and opened his mouth to protest, but Keenan put up his hands in surrender. "I know, I know, you're not the type, even if Murphy can be." He sighed. "I can't tell you anything definite, but it looks like someone didn't quite make a clean getaway... through the closed window. Obviously, you noticed the hair." He pointed to the tiny clump of about ten strands that appeared to be stuck about half-way up the windowpane. "I'm going to assume you looked closely enough to spot that they aren't just stuck to the glass, or you wouldn't have bothered to bring the whole window.

"Having examined this thing under magnification, I can definitely tell you that the hairs are embedded in the glass. They were almost through when the thing, uhh, resolidified or whatever, 'cause they don't go all the way through the windowpane—only about halfway, in fact. It's probably safe to assume that they were the longest hairs on the person's head or there'd be more in the glass. Luckily, since they were yanked out of the scalp, I'll be able to compare the DNA to that missing girl's using the skin tags at the end of each hair. I should have results for you in half an hour. I put a rush on it."

DeCillo nodded gratefully and clapped Keenan on the shoulder. "Thanks. You've been a huge help."

Keenan snorted. "Right. I don't know how this is going to help you find her..."

"Hey, like they always say, every little bit counts."

"Yeah, whatever, man."

"Call me when you get the results?"

"Of course."

DeCillo nodded again, then turned towards the door.



He arrived back at his desk to find Murphy waiting for him with his arms crossed tightly over his chest and steam only seconds away from shooting out of his ears.

"So you'll call me when something drastic happens, huh? You wanna explain to me why I'm standing here, then? I feel like a goddamn jilted prom date!" DeCillo rolled his eyes. "Would you relax, Murphy? I had to move fast on getting the window out of the hospital. Our doctor friend was less than thrilled." Slightly mollified, Murphy uncrossed his arms. "You think he had anything to do with the escape?"

"No, I just don't think he's interested in any bad publicity."

"Hm. You got CSU working the window?"

"Yeah, Keenan's on it."

Murphy nodded approvingly. "Okay, fine. But next time you say you're gonna call me, you better freakin' call me. This isn't a small deal, DeCillo. The captain's already called down twice, wantin' to know what we're doin' about it."

"What did you tell him?"

"I told him... heh, I told him you know what you're doin' an' we'll call him when we get somethin' concrete." Murphy looked upwards to the ceiling, or perhaps beyond it to a higher power. "Of course, what that 'something' may be does not lie in my realm of knowledge. So, partner, fill me in."

Detective DeCillo was about to speak, but the phone rang and he grabbed it. "DeCillo. Yeah? Thanks, I owe you one." He hung up.

Murphy held out his hands. "Well?"

"The hair from the window is a match to the girl."

"Great! Now where does that leave us?"

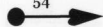
"Hmm... good question."

They simultaneously found something interesting to stare at on their shoes.

"Hey, kid, you gonna buy somethin' or what?" The girl didn't move, just kept on staring fixedly at the rack of newspapers whose headlines proclaimed the escape of some killer. She hadn't blinked in minutes. Pedro groaned inwardly. It was almost closing time, and the last thing he needed was some skinny-ass white girl losing her mind in his bodega. The hood hiding her face from his sight was attached to a sweatshirt that looked exceedingly similar to the ones sold in that shop down the street. He decided that if she didn't answer him this time, he was going to call in the fuzz. God knows they'd be lurking somewhere nearby, in this neighborhood. He moved to put his hand on her right shoulder. "Look, girly, I ain't got all day to be standing here—hey! Ow!" His hand never made it to its destination. Without even turning to look at him, the girl reached over her shoulder with her left hand and grabbed his arm. With her right, she calmly plucked a newspaper from the rack. Pedro's glance finally fell on the front page, even as he was trying to pull his arm from her grasp. There was a photo of the killer under the headlines. It was a girl...

She folded the paper in half with a quick flick of her wrist and slid it into the large pocket in the front of her sweatshirt. Pedro suddenly realized that none of his attempts to pull his arm away had caused the girl to move, not even to steady herself. He had about four inches on her, and at least thirty pounds, and yet there she stood, immobile despite his increasingly frantic attempts to free himself. And then she turned to face him.

It happened again. I just woke up on the floor of some



little... bodega, I guess. There's a rack of newspapers over there, and a pool of blood and—and an arm... And this newspaper in my pocket has a picture of me on the front. And now I'm outside, but I must have stepped in the blood... somehow... I'm leaving bloody footprints on the pavement... I need shoes.

The phone rang. Detective Frank DeCillo's eyes snapped open. The arm he'd been using to prop up his head snaked out and took the phone off its receiver.

"Hello?"

A moment of listening...

"Shit! Murphy! We have to go! NOW!"

The wind was brisk and chilly when they arrived at the crime scene, and the sky was a threatening shade of iron-gray. Detective Murphy squinted up at it and sighed unhappily.

"CSU get pictures of all this yet? It looks like it's gonna rain any second and we don't want to lose anything."

DeCillo stood up from his crouch over the bloody footprints and responded. "I'm not sure. Hey, guys, over here!" As a couple of the crime scene investigators headed over, DeCillo shot a glance at Murphy and said, "I'm going to see where these go. Stay here for now so they have at least one detective on-scene. I'll call you if I need you."

"I don't like this, Frank."

"I understand that, George. But I think it'll be okay. And like I said: I'll call you if I need you." DeCillo walked away from the bodega, eyes glued to the ground. Murphy sighed again, and took his cigarettes from his jacket pocket as he stepped into the bodega. "Unlucky bastard," he muttered to himself as he looked down at the torn corpse before him. After studying the body for a few moments, he grimaced, looked at his hand as if surprised to see the pack of cigarettes was still there, and stuffed it back into his pocket.

"Damn things'll kill ya, anyway," he growled.

The bloody footprints stood out clearly on the pavement for yards before they began to fade away.

"Girl's feet must have been soaked," DeCillo murmured, disturbed by the thought. He followed the prints for a few more feet, up to the opening of an alley, where they abruptly vanished. "Damn it!" He was slowly spinning around, trying to figure out where he might have lost the trail, when a weak voice came from the alleyway beside him.

"Hey, man, you a cop?" DeCillo stepped cautiously into the dark space.

"Yeah. Why, you see somethin' recently?" He could just make out a dark, hunched form, slumped against a wall. Eyes glittered at him from the darkness.

"Yeah, a girl..."

"A girl? When? What was she doing? Where did she go?" The voice from the alley took on an indignant tone.

"What was she doin'?" I tell you what dat girl was doin'! Dat bitch done stole my

shoes right offa my feet! Nice brown sandals they was, too. Leatha. I only jus' found 'em this mornin'..."

"Did you see which way she went?"

"If I tell you, will you get me my sandals?"

"I'll try."

"Hmph. That way. The way you was goin' before you stopped here. She jus' grabbed my sandals and kep' on her way."

"Thanks." Detective DeCillo acknowledged the dark form's help with a nod, then turned and walked briskly out of the alley.

Under the thick, green, cotton hood that was currently framing the deathly pale face with wide hazel eyes—eyes that seemed capable of swallowing souls—the girl wore her brown hair short, in an almost boyish cut that reflected the complete lack of effort on her part to maintain it; in fact, her hair seemed to have an odd affinity with her shoes: scuffed, worn scraps of leather that at one point might have resembled sandals, but now just looked like stitched-together dead leaves (the ones that have blown around in the street since last fall). Small children ran away when they saw her coming.

I can't remember being anything other than what I am now. I suppose that isn't too surprising; the process of becoming something new must have been rather like the process of becoming taller: you don't really notice it's happened until one day you can see what's on the kitchen table without standing on your tiptoes.

When I try to remember what happened... what's been happening, it squirms away from me. It's a strangely physical sensation, that squirming, a cross between déjà vu and that feeling of a word I can't quite remember resting on the tip of my tongue.

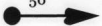
Maybe if I find a mirror and stare at my reflection for a while, something I haven't done in a long time, I'll see myself and remember what I am, or at least what I was.

DeCillo couldn't help but notice how empty the streets were as he made his quick but efficient way through them. True, the day was overcast and gloomy, but unless it was actually raining, there were always children about. He had seen none, except for one somber-eyed little boy who looked at him gravely and pointed down the street in the direction DeCillo was already heading.

The street suddenly gave way to a vacant open-air market, surrounded on all sides by dilapidated apartment buildings. The market stalls were all closed against the impending weather, and perhaps the pervading sense of doom, as well. The light-sensitive street lamps were struggling to decide whether or not they should be on or off. They were currently opting for the latter, and the unrelenting shadows didn't help relieve the leaden atmosphere in the slightest.

DeCillo was about to give up in disgust, the market providing no further clues as to the girl's direction, when the wailing started.

It could only be described as keening, lamentation for something permanently



lost or destroyed. He nearly dropped to his knees at the brain-boiling sound of it and ended up staggering around almost blindly before coming to rest against a lamppost. The sound continued to echo about the buildings for a never-ending moment before finally dying down to a low sob, at which point Detective DeCillo was able to focus enough to try to determine where the cry had come from. He had only just pushed himself off of the lamppost, when a girl, the one he had been seeking, came rushing out from one of the stalls. Her face was pale, her nose red, her cheeks streaked with tears. She halted as soon as she detected his presence in the market, and stood before him, quivering slightly. As he stared at her, uncertain, she opened her mouth to speak. Tears continued to stream down her face as she did so.

"I-I looked into a mirror..." she choked, gagging on the words. "... and I wasn't in my reflection..."

The street lamp upon which DeCillo had been leaning chose that moment to burst into brilliant life, showering the street and the girl with bright orange light.

It was another moment before DeCillo realized there was something wrong with the sight before him, something very wrong. As he unabashedly gawked at the girl, trying to pin down the source of the wrongness, his gaze was drawn to the wall directly behind her... and the shadow on it. What should have been the shadow of a hooded girl of average height was instead the shadow of a tall, muscular, and most definitely un-hooded man. The more DeCillo stared at it, the more he could have sworn he could make out the man's facial features taking shape on the wall. At which point, in a distinctly male voice, the shadow spoke.

**"Got a problem, Detective?"**

Not in my reflection? I really am going crazy... But I... What's he staring at, anyway? I can't look that bad. He won't notice anything missing. So what...?

**Got a problem, Detective?**

Ow, it echoes in my head... but someone said that out loud...

This isn't happening. When I turn around, there will be nothing behind me but my shadow.

Luckily for DeCillo's sanity, the girl fainted as soon as she looked over her shoulder, taking the shadow to the ground with her. He stayed where he was, a step away from the lamppost, and looked down at the crumpled figure by the wall. Thoughts rushed through his brain too quickly to become coherent. He attempted to grab one, succeeded, and—having nothing else he could think of to do—said it aloud:

**"Great. Now what?"**

Everything is fine. I am here on the ground with my eyes closed. When I open them again, everything will be the way it should be. Nothing is wrong. Nothing just happened. Everything is fine... everything is fine.

**You're full of shit and you know it.**

Fine... everything is...

**You can't deny me. You've blotted my existence from your mind for long enough.**

Not... happening... Get...

**Get up, you worthless bitch. I've got a detective to take care of. I'm gonna**

savor this one, and I'm gonna make you watch.

Get...

I told you to get up, you bitch. Get...

GET OUT OF MY HEAD!!!

Sometime between the girl's fainting and her curling up into a twitching fetal ball, DeCillo managed to call Murphy and ask for backup. He couldn't find the words to explain what had happened—he barely believed it himself—so he just told his partner to get a move on, things were getting wacky. Murphy thankfully refrained from asking what, exactly, “wacky” was supposed to mean.

Detective DeCillo leaned back against his now-familiar lamppost and continued to watch the girl. She looked just as small as she had in the hospital.

He knew nothing about such things, but it appeared as if war was raging through the girl's body. Her twitching had become much more violent, was in fact bordering on seizure-like thrashing, and he was just taking a step forward so he could restrain her when she suddenly leapt to her feet, screaming, from her prone position.

**“GET OUT OF MY HEAD!!!”**

DeCillo jumped back to his light post and pulled his gun. He trained it on the girl's head, which was currently locked between her clasped hands. He couldn't tell if she was trying to crush it or pull something out of it.

And then all movement ceased. She slowly drew herself up, until she was standing, straight as a rod, before him. His eyes darted nervously from her to her shadow, which was a shuddering, formless blob on the wall. Its edges undulated like a slithering sidewinder for another couple of seconds, then straightened, hardened, became a normal shadow. But he couldn't tell whose shadow...

She looked up slowly, and they locked eyes—man and girl. Hers had a fluid quality to them, a soft, liquid feel that wasn't entirely unshed tears. They would have been beautiful, had they not been so haunted.

He didn't break the eye contact as she approached, but neither did he lower his gun. It was aimed at her forehead, right between the eyes he couldn't find his way out of. He didn't realize how much her steady gaze had mesmerized him until his gun was somehow gone and her hands were on his shoulders. She broke the eye contact to rest her head on his chest for a moment. DeCillo could feel her tears soaking through the thin cotton. She slid her hands slowly down from his shoulders, until she was gripping his arms right above the elbows. He looked down into her face as she looked up into his, and he saw the soulless, snakelike smile now carving its way through her features, and the endless river of tears that was starting to pour down her cheeks from those tormented eyes; and as the grip on his arms began to tighten, he told her, with a look, that he understood.

Two Weeks Later:

*Official 1:* So what did you see once you arrived in the market with the backup?

*Murphy:* [looks at stand; clears throat] Well, sh-she'd already gotten his... his arms off. That's actually how we were able to find the fuh- godforsaken place—he was screaming...

*Official 2:* Where were he and the girl located in relation to you and the





backup?

*Murphy:* They were about 50 yards away when they first came into sight.

*Official 1:* And what, exactly, was happening when you arrived?

*Murphy:* Well, I could see him... kind of slumped against a streetlight. I guess... [takes a deep breath] I guess by that point he'd lost a lot of blood, so he wasn't movin' around that much... and she, she was kneelin' at his feet [trails off, becomes inaudible]

*Official 1:* I'm sorry, what was that?

*Murphy:* [very quietly] I said she was twisting one of them off.

*Official 1:* One of what?

*Murphy:* His feet.

*Official 2:* And what did you do next?

*Murphy:* The, uh, the guys that weren't pukin' tried to shoot her, but, uh, the bullets didn't seem to hit her...

*Official 2:* I'm sorry, "didn't seem to hit her"?

*Murphy:* Yeah, they, uh, actually seemed to be going through her. I mean, one of the guys kinda grazed one of her hands, and the bullet seemed to hit that, but the rest of her body... We could see the bullets hittin' the wall instead of her.

*Official 1:* And then you took it upon yourself to do what, Detective Murphy?

*Murphy:* [looks at panel of officials] I shot my partner of six years numerous times in the chest and head.

*Official 2:* And why...

*Murphy:* [almost yelling] Because, you heartless assholes, a man I'd grown to respect more than my own father over the six years we were detectives together was lyin' on the street **with his arms ripped off**, and we couldn't hit the freak that was still busy tryin' to twist off his foot.

*Official 1:* Thank you, Detective Murphy, that will be all.

*Murphy:* No, no, I've got one more thing to say. In all my years on the force I have never seen anythin' like what this—this monster did to my partner. After I shot him—

*Official 1:* Thank you, Detective Murphy, that will be all.

*Murphy:* [continues]—she stood up, and her shadow... wasn't hers...

*Official 2:* Bailiff, help Detective Murphy find his way off the stand, please.

*Murphy:* It was a man's shadow! The guys can back me up on that! When she stood up, her shadow wasn't hers...

[Bailiff takes Murphy's arm; starts leading him from the stand]

*Official 1:* [wryly] This was before you let her escape, I assume?

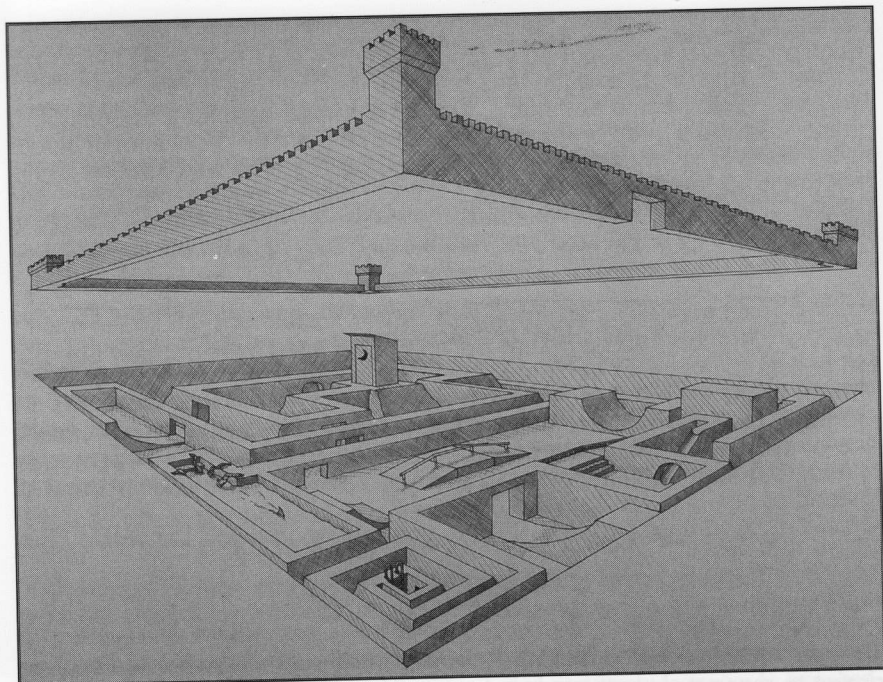
[Bailiff pauses so Murphy can answer]

*Murphy:* "Let" nothing. She blew us a kiss, then ran away through a wall.

*Official 1:* Right. Goodbye, Detective Murphy. I'm sure we'll be seeing more of you at a hearing of your own, soon.

Many miles away, a girl in a stained, hooded sweatshirt and brown leather sandals walks down the center of a pine-tree lined road. The trees tower over her, stabbing into a sky so flat and gray that it calls the existence of the sun into question.

My city... I have left it so far behind me that I wonder if I will ever not be lost again. I can't even hear it call to me, but then my mind is full of a different voice now.



**Can You Make It in Time?**, *Liz Diehl*,  
pen and ink, 18" x 24"

## FIVE MINUTES

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*Lindsey Anderson*

I'm wearing my favorite jeans. I call them my Saturday morning jeans because I wear them for cleaning on—you guessed it—Saturday morning. There are so many holes in them, patched and unpatched, that they are not fit to leave the house, really. But it's not Saturday morning; it's Sunday morning. Due to varying circumstances, I did not make it to church today, as was my intention. Now, I am feeling a bit lost and lonely in the house with no one home and the cat sleeping beside me as I read on the couch. The pumpkin pie scented candle that I lit is making me drowsy and my apartment stuffy. I feel cooped up and restless and it's not even winter yet!

As I look out my living room window and see the blue sky, I contemplate whether or not I want to go outside ... and decide that there is no reason not to get a breath of fresh air. Lately, it seems as though the only time I go outside is to walk to my car or to class, and the only time that I enjoy seeing the sky is through the windows of my Rhetorical Theory classroom. My homework can wait for five minutes.

I put on my favorite sneakers to complement my favorite jeans and walk out of my apartment, across the fallen leaves, and into the sun, which is hitting the backyard quite nicely at this point in the day. I walk over to our pet rabbits and attempt to have a conversation with them. It doesn't go over so well, as usual, and seems a little one-sided to me. They snub me, as is their way, though I offer to let them run outside of their cages for a bit. They retreat to the back of their pens, and I tire of trying to get any kind of response out of them. Well, what else is there to do back here? There is no place to sit other than on the porch step; unfortunately, that seating only provides one with a view of the swimming pool, which takes up a good chunk of the yard close to the house. I want to be close to the trees! The six pine trees that line our back yard have always seemed incredibly tall to me. As I look over at them, I remember how I used to climb up as high as I dared, just to sit (or hide, if a game of hide-and-seek had commenced). I remind myself that if I climb one of the trees, I will end up with sap all over me. Do I want to deal with sap today? No ...

Still standing in front of the rabbit pens, I look to my immediate left and see the old tree swing. My eyes rest on it for a moment as I think about how it hangs neglected and lonely most every day. Oh, but what fun we used to have on it! There are no bad memories attached to that swing, only good ones. I walk over to it, kicking through leaves that the large oak has dumped down onto the ground.

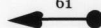
I fear that the rope has weakened and will not hold me, so I tug at it a few times and look up at the branch it hangs from, as if that will tell me for sure. The branch is twisted and dead, the only one without any leaves. It moves with the weight of my arm pulling down on it and clatters against the other branches surrounding it; it seems all right for the time being.

I look down at the seat of the swing. There is a chunk missing from one corner of it and it looks terribly weather-beaten. I recall the color it used to be: a horrid bubblegum pink, the same color as my bedroom was many years ago. I sit down cautiously ... and the swing still holds me, though it sinks so low to the ground that I hover only a few inches above. I assure myself that it is not because I gained that much weight, but because ... well, just because!

I shuffle my feet around the leaf-strewn ground, gently building momentum, watching the tail of the rope follow me as it is dragged through the leaves. Pieces of the rope come off on my hands, on my sweatshirt. I wonder if I could get a splinter from them and release one hand from the rope to look at it, then brush the fragments off.

So many memories are attached to where I am sitting: my sister and I taking turns spinning each other in circles; the neighborhood boys climbing over our fence and waiting in line for a turn; the huge pile of dirt that we would jump off of as we hung onto the rope for dear life, sailing through the air and hoping that we wouldn't crash into the trunk of the oak tree; years later, me as a teenager, reading *The Chronicles of Narnia* in the early evening as I swayed back and forth in the shade.

I realize that I have not done that in a long time ... just sat and read a good book. How fast-paced my life has become! For a short moment, I ache inside for a feeling that has gone ... that feeling of being a young girl, carefree enough to just sit and read under a tree ...

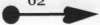


My gaze shifts downward to my feet and I see that, beneath the brown and red leaves, brilliant green grass has grown. This is new! The ground had only ever been pure dirt since I could remember, brown from our feet scuffling around on it as we pushed each other back and forth or skidded to a stop. We had never given the grass any time to grow. These bits of new life, though a pleasure to see, seem to laugh at me as they remind me how much time has passed.

I hope, as I push my feet against the trunk of the oak tree to gain momentum, that the swing will be here when I move out; when I come home to visit, I hope that, if I ever have children, they can sit on it and play the same games that my sister and I did. I especially hope that the withering branch that the swing is tied to will last through all that time, though its looks tell a different story. When the branch cracks and falls, will anyone bother to climb back up and retie the rope to another one? Really, would there be any point to it? Good grief, I may never even have children ... but if the swing is gone, there will be a gaping hole in the left corner of the back yard. The idea of the swing disappearing from my sight forever makes me sad, and I sigh, sorrowful from something that hasn't even happened yet. In a bit of despair, I lean back and gaze at the blue sky peeking through the red and brown oak leaves, realizing that the sky has not changed. If that's all my eyes can see at this moment, then maybe I can pretend ...

Suddenly, I remember that I am 21 years old and that I must look ridiculous on this rotting swing as I hang several inches off the ground. Really, it's time to go inside—I have things to do. Without lingering or thinking too hard about it, I place my feet on the ground and stand up. I say goodbye to the rabbits, and walk across the yard back to the house, leaving the swing to itself under the oak tree.

**Snow Through Lace,**  
*Catherine Sacchi, inkjet, 6" x 4"*





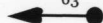
**Cigar**, Matt Hanson,  
gelatin silver print, 6.25" x 8"

## MY WORDS

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*Joe Aldinger*

Understand,  
they lay naked.  
Perfect in,  
simple imperfections.  
Judge, jury  
executioner;  
you are.  
Quickly, harshly,  
good, bad,  
published, trashed.  
Spear me,  
foul me,  
wrong me.  
edit my soul.  
Drafts in,  
progress,  
Understand!





## TO: THE BARNES & NOBLE SNOB

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*Jacky Liquori*

I'm a danger on the keyboard  
because my mind moves too fast.  
I'm a writer; it's what I do.  
It's not like I can turn it off.

And if you let me  
I'll write you a pretty poem,  
so you can read it, feel cultured  
and completely miss my point.

And if you let me  
I'll tell you a story,  
that you won't quite understand but  
you'll tell all your friends that you do.

And if you let me  
I'll write you a very thick book  
that you'll buy when it's on the bestseller list  
to stick on your coffee table  
but never get around to reading.

And now if you'll excuse me  
I'm going to go hide in my little writer's hovel,  
the one you're completely convinced  
I have in a cave,  
*somewhere.*

## LOVE IS LIKE A FART

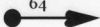
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*Elizabeth Fitzpatrick*

Love is like a fart.

Neither is tangible, but both can be strong.  
Sometimes they are loud, obnoxious, and other times, silent, but deadly.  
Their causes are internal.  
A build-up of something—whether it's affection or gas—  
and release is a relief.  
Ties your stomach in knots if unexpressed.  
Love is like a fart.

But only one is good in bed.



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