



ginosko (ghin-occe-koe)

1) To perceive, understand, recognize, come to know; the knowledge that has an inception, a progress, and an attainment; the recognition of truth personal experience 2) Between literary vision and spiritual realities.

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VERTICALS

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abstract

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THE ANGEL AND THE HAWK

Michael Onofrey

VEMEER, A SILENCE OF LIGHT

author unknown at this time

WHAT WILL ARRIVE

Patricia Roth Schwartz

Boarder

Joanne Lowery

Precious and fragile things
Need special handling
My God what have we done to You?
We always try to share
The tenderest of care
Now look what we have put You through

Things get damaged
Things get broken
I thought we'd manage
But words left unspoken
Left us so brittle
There was so little left to give

Angels with silver wings
Shouldn't know suffering
I wish I could take the pain for you
If God has a master plan
That only He understands
I hope it's your eyes He's seeing through

—Lyrics of *Precious*, performed by Depeche Mode

Hearing Until We Listen

Grace Cavalieri

Nothing new, but tonight the sun *it is light and rises*
comes through the middle of the trees *it lifts, becomes air*
I'd never seen that before, *praise takes to the wings*
Time favors us, I thought, *changing the still music of humanity*
in its movement of prayer, its language, *believing praise to be prayer*
becoming higher than the visible world *as if it cures*
to teach us something about ourselves *a configuration of light*
what new place is created *what received space will appear*
with affection, over and over *making us ready*
until we can see it *for what will be given us*

OLD LADY, LATE DECEMBER

Tim Bellows

Disregarding the new year, she talks with Harrison. On the phone. Or maybe in accidental meditation, sleepy with after-noon TV. Silver hair thin around her head, as if losing its grip on her mind which might scatter itself in any direction. *I want to be poetry for a while. Do you ever write in those piled-up lines? I've lost what you told me was Culture, Harrison. Now I just want to set words down. Ice-blue and bald. Let the cat cry at the door a while. It's just tough. Things crave being set down, don't they? Words get smarter every day—and don't tell me it's not so; it is so—as days get whiter against the bright, stronger like winter, all storms.*

These changeable winds that carry snow. Some days fine and fast, some days, in big flakes that fall straight down—like my older friends who live in beds! That's right—roy told me it's all the Lord's light at the end. Randall said to let the borders of things get away again and again. Me? I'd rather think about desert distances. Those are nice. Or think of last year, stuffing envelopes to pay my way, keep the handyman paid. Keep the wind's claws from itching through the cracks. I keep my doors patched and snug.

But my feet. Cold in the winter house. If only they could be replaced easy as a door. Philosophers say bodies are made to wear out, but minds pick up more and more—like radios that educate themselves to catch the news falling from wherever snow is made. In the high-up weather? (The previous spring's where it's born, that's what I say. And that's what I've set down and that's just tough if some don't get it.)

Oh here's the cat crying again. Like static scraping around my radio. Anyway...these years, Harrison, I can read snows and radios better than my own squirmy cursive. But snowstorms crowd in on me—even in sunny winter noontimes. All the whiteness. My nervous hands. The people I've known coming around—talking histories, making the air fat in my room.

This close place—everything in easy reach. Got five pairs of glasses around here somewhere. Dish, fork, roll of towels, pencil. You'd call it a mess, Harrison, but you forgot—I have to deal with a lot of white weather. My ears dim too, but don't worry. Their little caves'r all blazing with snow light these days. Anyway, come by and visit soon. My doors? Doors are snug, thank you. I don't bother with locks much these days ...you can come in—come in.

Forgive me if I tell you what to wear. If I miss your words. I try. Inside this slow-winding fire things seem near and far. Both. But let me tend to the cat. Before we talk. (You have a little time?) When I go for good, do you think he'll be sad in secret—maybe go slink out front where a car can smack him upside? Right...cats make their own kinds of sleep and it's just the Lord's good love. But Harrison, I meant to ask...What about this light coming up? Pale? Blue? From between floor-boards? Look. I didn't think I had a basement here. Would you be a dear and look around? See if you find any stairs going down?

Allegheny Angel

Lisa Harris

Eliza eats where and when and how much she wants, and she wants for very little in her life these days. Inside her chest, she envisions an emerald, a sapphire, two rubies, and several small diamonds. She wants to be, and so she has become, precious. She continues to search for a perfect bloodstone with its power to heal. When she locates it, she will have it set in silver and wear it around her neck.

In her imagination, she has marked the calf of her left leg with the five horizontal scars to chronicle losses. One mark reminds her of her ancestors, the German and Scottish immigrants who left their homeland to come to America. One is for her great-grandfather, Evan, who died from diabetes before his daughter, Mattea, was born. Another is to honor Mattea's death. The two newest marks are for Ezra and Abbey, the twins, who she believed were her father and aunt, but she now knows were her uncle and mother.

Eliza's heart is the size of Pennsylvania. In her heart, an orange cat, a black dog, 11 hawks, one fox and an owl dwell in harmony. Around her neck in a small pouch she carries talismans that shield her: the skin of a red speckled newt, dragonfly dust, a lock of her child's, her husband's and her own hair.

She remembers Mattea's scent, the satin of Abbey's hands holding her own, and the jingling coins in Ezra's pockets. She remembers hundreds of stories that have been told to her, read to her, read by her, and dreamed.

Eliza often eats buttery things, rich things in remembrance of her childhood—smooth mashed potatoes and squirrel potpie. Nothing bothers her anymore. Her calm voice is the same as her aunt's, her mother's, and her friend Veronica's. It is the same voice as the Holy Ghost's, filled with thunder and music and the quiet of stars. Water lives under her skin: the Susquehanna, Beech Creek, and the Red, Black and Yellow Moshannon. Her bones are made from the Allegheny Mountains and her pupils are made of coal.

Sometimes God lives in her mouth, sometimes in her eyes, sometimes she is God, and sometimes God dies. When that happens, she moves beyond words—like the sky, like a tree, like a leaf. Sometimes she is so smart she can taste her brain, buttery smooth and rich. When she is strong, she can stand between others and their pain. She performs magic with food; it is its own alchemy. She turns water into wine and wine into water, knowing that neither water nor wine is as precious as blood. She makes a sea that Moses cannot divide, changes her bones into rubies, and carries the purple stone mountains on her back as wings.

* * *

Abigail Schnable believed God was created when stars and words and music collided. She believed the remnants of this collision produced God. In pieces. And she believed if she put the pieces together correctly, she could find God. She even professed she had done it, put God back together again, like the king's horses and the king's men. She told Eliza, "Soon as I did it, I wished I hadn't. God was just too close to me and so I had to move in the other

direction, away from God.

“I wrapped God in my finest scarves and tied the whole thing with a satin cord. Next, I opened one of my dresser drawers and dropped God in.”

When Eliza hears her speak, she also hears the rustle of silk as it lands on her Aunt Abbey’s wool sweaters.

“How long did you leave God tied up like that, Aunt Abbey?”

“Why, forever, sugar. He’s still in there. I don’t intend to ever let him out, but you can, as soon as you know I’m on my death bed.”

Eliza shudders, scared of her Aunt Abbey’s power to trap God like that, and scared as well of her aunt’s mortality. The world is hard for Eliza. She can either have Abbey, or God. The weight of the choice makes the air feel like water.

* * *

When Eliza was little, she had followed her Aunt Abbey from room to room to hear stories. “Our blood is red, like everyone else’s in color, but different in strength. Take it to a laboratory where love can be measured.” Her imperative made Eliza see the pale green walls of the local hospital where she went to get stitches in her lip after she fell off her bike. She saw herself hand a vial of blood to a woman in white, wanting what Abbey said to be true, but she knew there was no laboratory that could measure love by analyzing blood, even though she wanted there to be. She wanted science and fairy tales to be one truth.

Eliza fell often. Band-Aids and patches covered her skin. She had a gauze patch on her arm where the skin grew into it, making a weave of flesh and fabric. When she pulled the bandage off, she reopened the center of the wound; but around the perimeter the gauze had merged into flesh. Each time Eliza tried to move away from Abbey, she remembered the pain of this wound. Eliza’s and Abbey’s lives were woven together—flesh and fabric. She called Ezra and Trudy Mom and Dad, and she had her bedroom at their house, but she spent lots of her time with Abbey, Mattea’s other child. Eliza felt connected to Abbey—as if being with her was like being close to God.

As Eliza grew up, she began to understand. Abbey meant blood was stronger than anything—stronger than rock or wood, fire or metal. Abbey didn’t write her thoughts down in an informal way, because she spent a lot of her time writing down her dissertation and the subsequent articles that evolved from her research on Mars.

Abbey’s dissertation begins: “When Galileo first observed Mars with his telescope in 1610, all he could see were bright and dark spots. As technology became more advanced, hundreds of years later, the bright spots became identified as deserts, and the dark areas were recognized as ice that was packed with debris blown off the ice caps by frequent strong winds.” The thesis is filled with facts, as it should be: topographical names, technical descriptions, detailed charts, and photographs taken on Mars’ surface from many angles.

“Olympus Mons, the largest volcano, is ten times the size of the biggest one on Hawaii, and it is located near Alba Patea, Kasei, Vallis, Sinai, and Lunae Planuum.” While Eliza reads, she draws parallels between the heart of Pennsylvania and Mars. Her landscape is made of inky coal, purple rock, graying slag piles and spring-fed streams crowded by yellow daisies. She

recites the names of places here until they become an incantation: Karthus, Quehanna, Milesburg, Yarnell, Bellefonte, Snow Shoe, Phillipsburg, and Osceola. The power of place comes at her like a raven, the names anchor her heart, but fling her spirit into an azure sky, because while she has these names, she owns these places, and they also own her. In that ownership, she preserves part of who she is and works to create a net to catch Abbey, who is lying before her, just inches from death. This precious aunt, who she now knows is her mother. The past, present and future their own crazy quilt of memory, blood and hope. Eliza spends her time sorting through memories as they collide outside timelines.

Often what people know about others is what they have been told. An old photo or two might begin to re-create them, but more often it is the stories others have told that make people real enough for the rest of us to carry them around in our hearts. Abbey said her grandfather, Eliza's great-grandfather, used the fiddle as if it were a set of teeth, and for every sound his violin made, it took a bite out of time. And every bite of time fed him joy.

* * *

There is one old sepia photo of him with pale eyes staring out at the world. In one hand he holds his bow, and in his other hand, he holds his fiddle. His desire at the end of a long day was to get cleaned up and sit on his porch when the weather allowed it, and play his heart out as the sun slid away and the stars blinked into the night sky. Even the fear of his wife's rejection could not stop him from playing his fiddle and drinking his cider. He loved a well-hammered nail, fast trains, and his granddaughter, Abbey. Growing and eating potatoes was not enough for him. He needed words and music and touch.

* * *

The illness has pulled Abbey tight like catgut string. So as Eliza watches over her, she tries to imagine who her father is, since she understands it is not Ezra, the man who has loved her completely, the man who has been a father to her, when in fact he is her uncle. She fears Abbey has lost her mind. She does not know whether to believe Abbey's claim that she is Eliza's mother. After all, Eliza knows the morphine induces delirium. But as she sits, waiting for Abbey's angel of death to arrive, she knows also that Abbey has told her the truth. So, she is Abbey's daughter by direct blood, and Ezra's daughter by daily bread, and Trudy's daughter by vigilance.

Abbey has worn her teeth smooth with night gnashing, dreaming empty landscapes peopled by men who have their backs turned to her. Teeth. The smallest bones in the body. And now Eliza's dreams are filled, too, with men—their backs to her.

Abigail, the scientist, wore Pendleton suits, attended national conferences and developed theories about Mars and its possible inhabitants. But Abbey was also of the cemetery, a nightwalker, a diviner, and dream interpreter. Abbey the single woman, but really the mother of two? One living and one dead? Because this is what else Abbey had told Eliza: "You had a twin, baby girl." Eliza has no memory of this other child, but she begins to dream of her, too.

* * *

Eliza lowers herself onto the daybed outside Abbey's bedroom. She thinks of Elliott, who loves her. He loves her forward, backward and upside down. She holds onto the idea of Elliott, her strong, handsome husband, while she sits with Abbey. The aunt who in death has claimed to be her mother. She allows herself the tonic that memory can provide: the first time she saw Elliott as he watched her across a room; an early kiss stolen from her under the moonlight, when she had expected conversation and got a kiss instead; the way he smells when he has been standing at the woodstove warming himself after walking the dog, emanating the scent of the forest and his own sweet salt.

Eliza knows she is the live one, although tonight she feels dead. Abbey has told her that her babies were twins, and that one was named Anna Eliza Jones. She explains, "I gave you girls the same middle name, so you would never lose sight of each other. When Anna died, I let each of your first names go with her. I had named you Abigail after me—because you were the first born and you were the stronger one. I told Trudy and Ezra you were to be called Eliza. I made sure you kept a part of the name that both of you girls shared." And Eliza, who always envied Abbey and Ezra for being twins, suffers the joy of being one herself at the same time she grieves for her sister, Anna.

* * *

"How can you believe no one loves you? You have been claimed. You are part Schnable, and I made sure we kept you with us. You got to know your mother who you mistook for your aunt, and you know your uncle who you thought was your father, and your real aunt, who is no blood to you at all, you thought was your mother. And somewhere in there you were always loved." Abbey pauses. Speaking exhausts her. "How many sisters did you have, Eliza?" Abbey almost chants this at her, the way she used to say the old riddle: "While I was traveling to St. Ives, I met a man with seven wives. Every wife had seven sacks, every sack had seven cats, and every cat had seven kits. Kits, cats, sacks and wives, how many were going to St. Ives?" And the answer to both questions is one, at least according to Abbey.

But Eliza cannot answer her. Several hours pass before she speaks. When she does, she tells a story that is old and safe. "Romulus and Remus, raised by wolves, never knew their father was Mars nor that their mother was Sylvia, but their lack of knowledge did not prevent them from doing great things. Two small boys curled up against the soft fur of wolves whose tails tapped against the earth, their eyes fixed on the red planet, their canines hanging above their pink panting tongues."

"Keep talking, Eliza. Tell me a love story, please," Abbey says. So Eliza recounts pieces of mythology as she strings stories together, some from books she had read and some from her imagination. "Okay, I'll tell you a story to ease the pain."

"Better than morphine," Abbey quips.

Abbey has a halo. The edge of the headboard, the outline of the pitcher, the rim of the nightstand are also surrounded by light. Eliza sees God everywhere. This is the first time Eliza has seen halos except in paintings. She recognizes it as a sign that Abbey will soon ascend. She knows if she can recognize this fact, Abbey knows it too. After all, Abbey was always her

teacher. Eliza uses her storyteller's voice to steady herself and calm Abbey.

"Mars, Jupiter and Juno's son, loved to dress in his full armor, one large white plume flying out from his helmet when he rode about in his chariot looking for something to slaughter. His four steeds dwarf even giant Clydesdales; great dogs follow behind him while hawks, eagles, and vultures fly around him, jealous of his white plume fluttering in the wind. What a body this god had—all muscle and hardness."

Abbey's halo wobbles for a second because she has turned her head. Her eyes, dulled from the morphine on most days, have a glimmer of light tonight. This death is hard for Eliza, but not nearly as difficult as Ezra's death, Abbey's twin, shortly after Eliza's 15th birthday. Eliza keeps talking, not letting herself think too much about twins and death.

"He carries a sharpened spear and a burning torch. The sons he claimed, Terror, Trembling, Panic and Fear, go with him everywhere. And he never mentions Romulus or Remus. One of them dead at the hands of the other.

"His favorite beast, a winged green dragon, guards his drinking place, its gray fangs filled with poison, ready for any trespasser. When Europa's brother, Cadmus, arrives at the well, he slays the dragon because he wants to win Mars' favor. Instead Cadmus is punished with eight years of slavery and denied the joy of ever seeing his sister again." Eliza's voice wavers here and she thinks of Anna Eliza, her twin, dead at birth.

"First Cadmus severed the dragon's head, then when it hit the ground, the dragon's teeth fell like rain, and everywhere one landed, armies rose up. And Cadmus had to lead them into battle after battle. When his eight years were up, the eight years that felt like eighty, Cadmus built the city of Thebes and created the alphabet there. In his old age, Cadmus and his wife transformed themselves into serpents, watching the world with emerald eyes. And when people came too close, his eyes shot poison in ruby streams, drowning them."

The story has worked its magic. Abbey is sleeping. Her mouth is ajar. Inside, Eliza sees her perfect teeth made of stars and fed with blood. She hears music, and thinks of how violins are the miracle of wood and light and catgut. Of saws and resin and human touch. Eliza invents an image of the sister she never saw, and the face she imagines is Abbey's. She thinks of Giovanni Schiaparelli, the Italian astronomer whose work Abbey used to read to her, the one who located the faint lines running like canals on Mars, and she thinks of how disappointed he would be to know that the canals do not exist. Schiaparelli left the Earth believing there were magnificently constructed canals on Mars created by intelligent life. Years later, his theories were proven wrong, in part because of Abbey's own research and the interpretations of photos sent back to Earth by satellite. All that he believed to be true was not. And for the first time, Eliza becomes the scientist, whose theory, which happens to be her version of her life, is not true either.

She rises from the bed, goes to the old dresser, opens the drawer and takes out the scarves lying on top of Abbey's old sweaters. She lifts them out by their satin cord and rests them on the foot of the bed where she has been keeping watch. She kisses Abbey's forehead and then, carefully, she unties the knot and lets God loose.

Notes on Narrativity

Steve McCaffery

Footsteps in an orderly sequence and therefore predictable. Enclose it in a sentient pronoun and this monologue lives. An activity of mind carried a little further and thereby: judgment. Now the moors seem imponderable. Now the spark plugs show damp. Now the sentence repeats that the pumpernickel's stale. A strategy then of windows. Colourless, almost opaque. Just enough to see you with. Articulate, the floor, the door crack, the switch, the light. This room is not a room. This wall is in thinking. January 5. 'Thomas left us.' Precision. Not of cogs but machination still described as important to a story. How narrative begins in a one that is all of them. Suddenly, a theme.

[stormy weather]

Ivan Arguelles

instead of anywhere, else
leads to the famous junction
of light and breath a darker
section somewhere in the inch
beneath where it says Remember
but never do, a likeness to
the one you left behind re-
surfaces in the photo touched
up to look more, red is a
simple a flash and suddenly
for no reason at all, writing
in the margins to indicate
time of day and when the grass
should be cut and the leaves
raked, all along the curbs
you recognize faces violated
by oblivion and who surrender
if only to admit innocence
that is a thing to know, if
we have any recall of the day
it is at once subject to a
god in disguise whose purloined
hands seem to imitate a shadow
of music on the skin, sends chills
up and down the spine, as they
Say, wondering if in the dream
That follows there will be any
One, the difficulty persists
The sense that what is undone
That what is left unwritten
No matter how much the echo
Lingers more and more fade
To no longer recognize, each
Shares something of the other
Though no one can tell what
Unless it is the lyric secret
Like the rain
You can never say, nor
clouds

Anatomy Lab

Richard M Berlin

She was stretched out naked,
young and blonde,
wild and frightening

when the others were so old,
everyone at the steel table
pretending not to notice

the fortune of her body.
That first day I sliced off her breast,
scalpel circling round and round

the way I might halve a peach,
to study her glistening secrets
with detachment and awe.

We explored the deep insertions
where muscle joins bone,
subtracted her face, her arms,

plucked ovaries and heart like thieves,
but lost count of the treasures
severed from ourselves.

By year's end, brittle with guilt,
we hovered over our hollow creation,
pretending to look away

from the short blonde braid
at the base of her skull
no one had the courage to cut.

“segment”

Devin Wayne Davis

they made an appearance ...

a set of young lovers; eager, after sharing their chrysalis,

to emerge early from dreams; beautifully formed, one morning;

orange, large,
gentle, like a tiger's face.

autumn came then went.

bitter winter flew; and

hotter days stretched.

while, on wide green fields, others ripened
soft, yellow-striped, black & white bellies;

turquoise buds also sheltered,
in a sea only unfurled elders have seen: shells,

ready to be empty; all tawny, or darker yet;

that will rise, differently composed;
thirsting from lavish past lives; those loving the nectar of every flower out.

slim stems.
scales lighter.

summers were long on promise; just bristling, as with youth.

this was some time ago, before so many homes, vacant lots sat below overgrown hills.

such spots aren't a part of the maggots' estate;

far and away any hayseed flies.

we're permitted tasty, sweet cream.

magnates have memories. as we must, ever since our migrations amassed between
canada and california;

our cousins spanning toward florida in the northeast.

seasons allow us recall; that we may weather any variation, thus

stories of family travels followed from milkweed stalk to stem that late blooming.

tales told: colorful souls, dearly departed; these fluttered, almost clear as ghosts. ragged were
their values; in a range of uplifted spirits;

dusty myths of moony moths suffering for the sun. a real tragedy.

maybe it was beryl who first noticed hugh. perhaps, he saw her for the leaves missing.

since hugh cherished beryl, he saved her those tenderest fronds, often she halved them
beside him.

they matured, narrow as worms; very likely, by design;

but was it—as is claimed—to overcome some possible aerodynamic problem?

or, rather—had ardor so overwhelmed everyone else—that they would simply lessen
themselves? it has been said.

traditionally, we've always clambered for plumper trunks.

nevertheless, as there would be a lack of competition on shriveled branches, our pair
rested where drier fiber was preserved, there,

the freshest leaves left felt wilted; somewhat want for water, and withering.

(it's fact that this betters digestion. by then, much of a plant's fat content has dissolved).

a desiccated white syrup fed these caterpillars; crystal plantsugar, more bitter than milky incidentals.

this was living! abundant as a picnic ant; and everyone knows, no bug—or insect—can gather like an ant at banquet.

pleasing and ample as preflight stirrings ...

hugh and beryl had a pale blue shell they assembled, it barely fit them.

within so thin a housing; whose walls were soon browning under hot sun.

stuffed in, and quite weakened, they could see well past that opaque cage; it cracked, easily, onto the closing season.

even keen-eyed hardwings regarded these two slight bodies as appetizing. nearly edible; less bitter failures.

prior to their airy union, hugh & beryl had remained relatively separate;

at least they'd once fancied becoming a butterfly ... the kind that none had.

and after, they abandoned each other's wanton, unmatched, zigzag path.

she deposited eggs of their offspring.

quietly, the yellow pollen flurry blew.

now down to michoacan mexico, where monarchs lodge on sparse, not-so tall trees.

The Gulf

K.C. Hanson

I've been having my boys hit beaches, duck and cover, cut and roll, fire and maneuver, fire and movement, *this is how you take a fucking hill* for months now – practicing mostly on this damned boat, pointing real guns at each other and yelling *Buddha Buddha*, which should be really funny to Christians but they don't get it – fucking misguided children – but I couldn't train them for this. They're all white now, scared, and look like they might piss jizz and shit themselves. You'd swear we were going to live fire some tanks in our skivvies, and we might – you have to know that – but that's not what's bothering them. That wouldn't bother them at all. These boys, my boys, were born (if not born again) to jackoff and burn tanks; snap, jack, and burn the fandango: *I breathed the syph brother, no clanky tintopped mother steppin' on my britches*. They just couldn't do the math.

None of them. So when I said, *We got seven mags each and each hold thirty smackers or three loaders of ten, so you could say twentyone or twoten*, nobody gave a fuck. Only I do when they don't know. They just kept stuffing bullets 'til they were full. *It's twoten, Smoke, you can trust me on that*. Then I turned to two of the hoodboys and asked *How many bullets did each guy get off at Normandy?* They *dunno*. At least they say they *dunno* but when I say *nine* they don't seem a bit surprised, like the difference between nine and two-hundred-and-ten is either too tiny to matter or they're planning on doing a whole lot more killing here than got done there. I guess we'll find out. I'm carrying twoten too. And a map even though I don't know wherethefuck I'm going. Call it my baby blanket; it makes me feel better.

Numbnuts took a prybar to a grenade crate and there was a lot of *oohs* and *aahs* and *cool mothers* going on until I started hammering the clip backs on my helmet to seat the rounds. That's the traditional way to make sure you'll be shooting back. And my boys, the ignorant fucks, came back sobered to do the same, so I didn't have to say too much about that, which is good, and just about the grenades.

We each got four – heavier in my hand than I imagined even though I've held them before, maybe for the potential more than sheer poundounce weight; fucking grenades, they bother me. I bend the pins over good and bothways, tight, like a religion: any bomb strapped to me better for damn sure not go off. I check everyone else's but they don't seem interested. They're young. Grenades and bullets are for the enemy whoeverthefuck they might be, and won't hurt them. No shit. So I'm just mothering them, *poo poo pee do*, like I'm getting cereal for my little sister when I check their gear. These are *tough motherfuckers*. They even say so.

I yell that *I'm up* but check them once again because the first time is never enough when you're leading little ducklings through angry waters and they are jabberjawing *yo yo* whateverthefuck and *yolmes* – about how *def* and *dude* and the hoodboys hiphop about south Compton with the Mex from New York. I got no idea what the fuck it means but I laugh anyway because not even God Almighty could fuck up enough to put this crew together.

I'm the one who leads the line up the stairwell *make way* onto the quarterdeck clanking with all this extra shit. Death is heavy. But morale is high – *somebody's in for an asskickin'*, *shee-it* – because Hotrod the Mex says so, and I'm smoking because who the fuck's going to tell me not to?

Eventually I'm up, signing for *atropine* and *twopanchloride* which I guess you shoot in your leg when you're fucked and then Doc E. at the next table hands me a little tube, silver on the ends with a needledropper. He doesn't look so good. I lean over to sign and initial for *morphine sixteenmgs* and stutterstop – blankeyed – Doc E. looking. He says *It's half now and half later if you take one*, I know he means a bullet, and then he says, *but I've been letting everybody know that if you take the whole works it's all over*. I thank him even though he is staring at the sea. It seems like the thing to do. His career's over for saying it. You can't just tell troops how to end it all. I know and he knows I know and he's a *Good fucking Doc*.

So now I watch the braveboys turn ghostwhite, even the black ones, tails tucked under their nuts, coming from the tables holding not the enemy's death in their imaginations, but their own.

The Enigma

Mark Terrill

Sunday at the beach on the other side of the island some little kids are looking at my spider tattoo admiring it chattering in Portuguese daring each other to move in a little closer maybe even touch it & I can tell by looking in their faces that they're thinking it's the coolest thing ever & bad as hell & then I'm looking around at all the other young firm vivacious incredible bodies & the sagging paunchy over-the-hill bodies & the just plain body-bodies feeling myself caught up in the irrevocable drift of time with all of its manifestations exacting or otherwise & realizing with no small consternation that I am forever & finally cut off from that special sacrosanct place from which an ordinary meager 25-dollar slightly faded spider tattoo can be seen to hold something of the boundless mystery that is slowly but surely effacing us all.

earlier. he leaves. going. Moves

Gary Lundy

earlier. he leaves. going. moves. to the restroom. down. beneath the stairs. she. quiet. follows. enters. from behind. him. deeply. and. in this. way. their. coming together. coming this. way. there can. be. no innovation. or passing knowledge. in any. of this. the older man. not. ever this one. spews. stupidly about. a lot of. figures conceptual. part. he is. stupidly about. a lot of. figures conceptual. part. he is. stupidly. arrogant. in fearing. wants. to know his. older lover. all ready. in dying. lies. dead still. to his possibility. visceral motion. he recognizes. any where. a quality. very difficult. pompous. ass. real stupid. this being in. any kind. of relationship. to justify. as if that. is. possible. ever. anger cuts. she presses. her. their palms. on the nipples. worth while. distinguish. poorly. yet not. educating on. why. it is important. such fear. the unusual. transfiguration. of the unfamiliar. important simply. in mere. visual appeal. copulating emotion. being pretty. farther taking. the mechanical. voices. eloping reason. she. waits. his departure. in arriving. once a gain. greeting seasonal. genre pleasure. her breasts. hard in stark. cold. sudden storm. fury. problem. to trust. vulnerability. biases passion. every one. craps out. their. most popular. opinion. his. the care springs. lurches. she. her skin salt. lick. he. atop the. pleasuring. pleads. let it. begin. when it has. all ready. ends. this the. redundant. beginning. of loving. the other.

**Mr. Collins, Having Escaped Through the Leaves of the Book,
Asleep in the Woods**

S.D. Lishan

“I wish he would just disappear” —Pride and Prejudice

Something
Like singing
Calling out
To me.

Something like dawn
Spooling down
From the trees.

*

I know so little.

Notes of rain mystify
Whatever
I can say.

*

If it is a calling

I spurned their whispers

*

I tell you now I am joyful.

*

Scent of remorse

Like a violet.

*

Night stirs the roots about me.

Some nights I wish the stirring wasn't.

*

I can't paint the whispers
That follow me.

Dreams seem
Real for such
A short time.

I am here
Shouting

Love to you

Nonetheless.

*

Fire weeps for these urges.

It is sorrow to me
They ever end.

You know what you love. That's your essence. There are words behind the living and the loving even if you don't know the words. Trust the words that are most true for you as you go past the bends in the road of what's not true, or almost true, or kind of true.

--Patrice Vecchione

“You will not need my address. I will know when you come.”

Lately she had found the doormen more interesting than most of the tenants in her building. Especially the ones from Latin American countries. She would ask them about Todos Santos. Did they know it? The place had come to the forefront of her mind, come from where it lay dormant for several years, since the young man—Angel had been his name, Angel Torres— had described it as they sat next to each other on the plane to Guatemala. He was returning home to the wife and baby he hadn’t seen for three years while he worked in the states, his whole being suffused with joy as he described the home in the mountains where his family had sheep. Once home, he would never leave again.

“There is so much peace there.”

Alix had wondered why such a young man wanted peace.

“You must come. You must visit us.” Todos Santos. Population, 2,000.

She had registered the information, written it down, written his name as well.

It had been a buying trip, Alix bringing designs to be transformed for the customers of her shop in Greenwich Village.

Life had become more efficient. It was not necessary to leave home any longer. Their orders were e mailed to her network of suppliers. Sketches flew across the net and fell wherever the cottage industry lay and were shipped from there. Business was good. Was life?

She had begun to add a postscript to the Guatemala suppliers: “Know anyone from Todos Santos?”

Two mornings a personal trainer came before she opened the shop. Exercise didn’t get any easier over time: maintenance, a losing battle. On Thursday evening she took a Pilates class with Jeanne, her partner; afterward they showered and went to Mario’s for Italian or Little Basil for Thai. Once a week she had a manicure at Fay’s Face & Nails next door, occasionally, a facial. Alix had known Fay Kohn since she had opened her place, knew most of the Russian and Latin American émigrés who performed their wonders on her nails and face. Pilar was her favorite.

“Have you heard of Todos Santos?” She asked her. There seemed to be a Todos Santos in every Latin American country, but, “Not in Honduras” which was not Guatemala anyway.

Always, there was the shop. It was her baby, started with Michael, her best friend since he had almost made her wedding gown when she almost got married. So young, they had built every shelf and dressing room with their own hands. So young and nobody knew about an illness that would become a plague and take him away from her. She couldn’t forgive him for that.

“Have you heard of Todos Santos?” she asked the busboy at Mario’s, his hair straight and thick as pine needles. There were not enough Italians to go around, not the immigrant

Italians ready to do the low paying work of a busboy. Not since Alix' grandparents had come from the mountains of Molise in the South where they were probably sheep herders. Michael used to tease her about that. She had never been to the south of Italy, never returned to her roots. "Some day, we'll do it together," Michael had said.

In the city summer, there are days at a time when the temperature almost reaches one hundred degrees, a power failure threatens, and the shop's air conditioner is about to collapse in a tubercular wheeze. The weatherman announces an ozone warning: "People are falling dead from the heat. Drink plenty of water." Even when you're not thirsty.

Todos Santos, which is 8,154 feet in the air, would never be hot, never humid.

And it would be quiet.

There would be respite from horns blowing, music booming from open windows and jack hammers rattling. Music blasts from a new megastore, a comic book building: neon lights flash and escalators move up and down behind the glass walls. She crosses away from it and gags at the stench of plastic garbage bags stacked in long lines by the curb. Isn't there a better way to handle garbage?

Radha, her saleswoman, keeps the music in the shop at the decibel level predicated to stimulate sales.

"I must be getting old. I can't take the noise," Alix says and turns it down if not off altogether.

Radha, skirt slithering down to the floor from below her navel, looks puzzled and turns it back up when her boss goes over to Fay's Face & Nails or the lumber and paint place around the corner. Chartreuse is the color *de jour* and Alix has painted the sides and floor of the window before she decides she hates chartreuse. The green she loves is the color of leaves.

Jeanne's eye is for business, not art, and that's good. Their sales have gone up enough to keep two saleswomen.

Once, Michael draped blouses and dresses over the long stems of sunflowers and let their large petaled faces droop soubrette-like over the clothes. He would have made her love chartreuse.

Radha is steaming out the wrinkles in a new shipment of summer skirts. The cord from the steamer runs from behind the counter to the rack next to one of the dressing rooms. A woman who has been shopping with them for years is trying on a skirt and matching top in a homespun fabric from Guatemala while her impatient husband walks around the shop and stares at Radha's navel.

"Sweetie, why don't you sit here?" the wife asks and takes her bag off the tapestry chair Alix keeps in the shop for bored husbands. As though he's been caught in some mischief, Sweetie steps abruptly away from the saleswoman's navel and trips over the steamer cord. Alix apologizes as she and his wife help him, more embarrassed than damaged, off the carpeting and on to the easy chair.

She closes the store at seven and walks home past the block long line for the multiplex movie theater, wondering which of the ten movies, all effects and noise, is the blockbuster. *Am I really getting old?* Although she still prefers to read, just as she reaches a pivotal point in her reading, something stops her from going on and she jumps up, remembering an errand to be

done, a fact to be retrieved from the capricious web of her mind. *Who sang, "Do you know the way to San José?"*

Walking close to the building walls, her thoughts are submerged in the drone of air conditioning units, her body refreshed by falling droplets of condensed air. *Pathetic as a city mouse.* A right turning car cuts her off at the intersection. Pedestrian fatalities are increasing. Last week it was a bicyclist. The small of her back hurt for days from the shock. She dodges the man on roller blades, trips over an expandible dog leash. Life is a booby trap.

A grubby gray car stops just short of ploughing into an oblivious taxicab discharging passengers. The driver jumps out of the car, bangs on the taxi fenders and runs up the block screaming.

Home, she lies on the couch to watch the news – there is no terrorist attack today – and falls asleep. At midnight, she wakes up in a dazed state, takes off her clothes and crawls into bed. Now she can't sleep. A car alarm is ringing and keeps ringing. *Should I call the police? Would they answer? Who sang "Do you know the way to San José?"*

Morning comes and there are no birds.

A long legal letter arrives on Thursday. The man who tripped over the steamer cord, who just happened to be a lawyer himself, is suing the shop. He has multiple bone splinters, stretched cartilage in his knee.

"Guess we've lost a customer," Alix says, thinking of the wife.

"That clumsy oaf. He didn't hurt himself," Radha says, feeling responsible. But she's not, Alix reassures her.

Alix feels like banging on a fender, like screaming.

There's an email from Quetzaltenango. One of the Mayan women who does elaborate embroidery—Luz—comes from Todos Santos. She has family there. From Guatemala City, you take a bus to Huehuetenango and then another bus. . .

•

Her grandparent's home is a hike up the mountain from Todos Santos, almost to San Juan Atitán. *"Mas tranquil allá,"* Luz tells her. It is better, quieter even than Todos Santos which is getting busier, especially on the market days when the people from San Juan and the other villages congregate. They must continue on to get there before nightfall, before the fog sets in. Luz knows the way, but it would be difficult to follow the path even with the flashlight Alix has in her backpack. While she buys a bottle of water near the bus stop, a cluster of men in straw hats and dark wool ponchos watch, their broad mouths solemn as a Rivera fresco. They nod at Luz and talk in a language she doesn't recognize.

Alix and Luz follow the dirt road out of the village. It narrows to a path several hundred meters beyond the last adobe cottage and winds through a forest of oak and pine trees. The air is bracing. Alix spreads out her arms and inhales deeply, bringing the air to the tips of her fingers and feet. She can feel the frenzied contents of her mind dissipate like the diesel fumes

from the bus they left behind. They walk together in silence for half an hour until the incline rises noticeably to circle the mountain, roots twisted into brown braids making steps across the path. Her breath becomes shorter, her pace slower, and she falls behind Luz.

The path is only a foot wide in spots, one side a wall of rock, the other undergrowth and bushes that catch her pants and scratch her arms. She unscrews her water bottle and drinks. A ribbon of water meanders down the rock face widening as it reaches the ground. Several stones, worn smooth by the gurgling water, make a path across the shallow brook. She reaches out for a branch to balance herself as she crosses, and one snaps in her grip. Luz turns and holds out her hand, and Alix takes one brisk step at a time so as not to slip. The cold water numbs her feet.

“*Pronto. Esta cansada?*”

“*Si.*” She is tired. It’s a long day. She should have broken the trip. Why be in so much of a hurry to take a rest?

Although the air is cool, she feels warm from the exertion, her breath coming in short hiccups. She rests her arm across her chest and the beating underneath her shirt makes her arm tremble.

“Quetzal.” Luz whispers, holds her finger in front of her closed lips and points with the other hand to a place up in the tallest branches of the trees. Both women stand still. Alix raises her head to scan the treetops until her neck aches. She rubs at the arthritis in her left shoulder. Gradually, she sees the long red and green tail feathers of the quetzal through the leaves. There are two of them. “*Siempre dos,*” Luz says.

They are poised, majestic, on a branch, the green bright as chartreuse, almost the chartreuse of her shop window. She wants to tell Michael about them: two quetzals for her window. “*Dos quetzales in a cage; Puts all heaven in a rage,*” she recites, but her voice is only air.

Tired. Tired again, she sits on the bent trunk of a tree, its branches reaching back into the earth so the tips take root again. “One minute.” Any longer and she knows she’ll never be able to get up, that she, too, will take root and they haven’t been walking much more than an hour. She adjusts her back pack, stands up, balls her hands, and smiling says, “On we go. Onward and upward.”

Luz nods. Spanish isn’t necessary.

They walk quietly, the path smoother, more level, lined with trees whose topmost branches make flying buttresses to the sky. Tiny yellow flowers cover the ground where the late afternoon sun shines between the branches. She is about to ask Luz what they are called, but stops herself. Why does she need to know a name? To smell them is enough. The need to know is another life: the need to know everything, not to be caught unaware.

A slight growl seems to come from the ground. Is it beneath or above them? “*Volcán? Terremoto?*” she asks.

Luz doesn’t look worried. Alix looks into her shiny copper coin of a face and trusts her totally, a euphoric feeling.

The backpack grows heavier, pulling her shoulders back. She shifts it to her left shoulder, then to her right one. Seeing her discomfort, Luz lifts the backpack off Alix’s shoulder and slides it onto her own. There is no resistance. “How much further?” Alix asks, thinking

out the Spanish words slowly, she is so tired.

“*Cerca.*”

Alix is not sure if the words that come after it mean hours, minutes or meters. The trip back will be difficult. Her legs will seize up at the effort. “I’m never going back; down is always harder. I’m never going back,” she says.

Luz smiles agreeably and Alix stops thinking about it.

The cottage is in sight. Luz waves to a man standing still as an old oak totem, in his straw hat and wool pants, coarsely made sandals on his feet. He calls in the language that isn’t Spanish and an old woman comes out the door and embraces Luz. They have been waiting. She motions for Alix and Luz to come inside and pulls out a stool for Alix who unpacks gifts of soap and brandy from her knapsack.

The woman kneels on the dirt floor, her stooped body making an arc to the waiting earth, and flips circles of tortilla over a wood fire. She scoops food from a simmering pot into one of the tortillas, and hands it to Alix on a plate. Luz prepares her own food and sits on the edge of a cot pushed against the wall. The man pours them a drink of fermented corn and they drink it and eat to the sound of chickens scratching about in the yard outside.

Night comes when it falls and the last light is the dying embers of the fire. None too soon for Alix, she is that tired. Tomorrow she will see what she will do here and when she will start back. The old man stretches out on the cot in the main room and Luz doubles up with her grandmother. Alix has a bed to herself. She falls right to sleep or into a state like sleep that is peace instead, a peace she hasn’t known since the words forming into consciousness were interrupted by the noise of horns blowing and radios blasting, before that world of sound had begun and there was quiet, the buoyant quiet of being contained. The door flaps gently, the earth rumbles, and she hopes no one hears it, hopes she can lie here, not knowing, not understanding and never moving. There is the untroubled rhythm of the family breathing and the gentle bleating of sheep. The room is black and the world invisible except for the moon shining through the open space of a window. Turning her head toward the light, she sees Angel standing in it, smiling, while the night passes over her like an amniotic wave.

Desire Laid Bare

Mary Ann Mannino

Things are falling
like groceries from a broken brown bag
spilling out into the parking lot.
Kotex and breakfast cereal
Yogurt and corn pads
spearmint leaves and café Vienna
proclaiming infirmities
eccentricities and
desire laid bare.

Before It Dies

Allegra Jostad Silberstein

Let us speak in tongues entwined in
foreign lands of lips and longing thighs.
Let all the dancers whirl and then begin
the tango slow and breathless in surprise.
With lungs strung out in air that seems too thin
the pulse of heart becomes like fleeting sighs
and hope is thrown into the casting bin
that forwards messages but no replies.
There is a seed that flowers deep within
the granite wall all cracked and whirl-wind wise.
With water and a bit of dust laid thin
comes blossom lust the barren rock denies.
Spring rain rouses with a sudden din,
licks the earth and rushes out of skies
filled to bursting, passion built within
that falls to earth but once again will rise
to mackerel clouds that flirt with us in win-
some moves that touch the blue and hold our eyes
with spirit poems that filter down to spin
and tilt to truth, those hard words sounding lies.
We hold in sorrow like the man of tin
who longed for heart and did not know the prize
he sought was always there, held deep within.
Come, let us pleasure taste before it dies!
Let us speak in tongues.

The Stories We Can Never Tell

Michael Hettich

We got up early to walk along the beach
which looked empty at first but was scattered with large fish
that had somehow been cast beyond the reach of waves
and were flapping a foot or more into the air,
landing with a thud on the wet sand.
We made a game of catching them in mid-air, tossing them
back into the waves, one after the other,
until they all were swimming again, and then
we walked, looking for shells and beach glass,
taking simple pleasure in our nearly naked bodies
in the sun and salt air: So when I mentioned
I believe the body and soul can know themselves
only together, that they are undefined
apart, I meant to imply something larger,
more inclusive, grounded and wild,
that reaches back into the stories we can never tell
because we are the arc of them, because we are their breathing.

The Small Bird

Michael Hettich

When no one was watching, she chewed handfuls of the dry leaves
her father raked to burn.

Her mother was hanging the sheets out in the wind
that leapt from the ground and made her dress fly up.

The leaves flew up around her father's legs.

He told stories as he raked, about how he'd once been
a field of lean grass and wildflowers blowing
in an autumn wind, like this one; he'd been mist across a lake
at dawn when the cormorants swam underwater
without making a sound.

He said he'd met her mother when she was just an unsung song.
You see what I mean? Our lives are anything
but solid. But still they are real.

The distance between any two things, he reminded her,
is infinite. Everything is infinite. She started
laughing then, as she remembered him climbing
a ladder up into his favorite apple tree,
filling his shirt with tart apples, then climbing down,
smiling, offering her an apple but giving her
a small bird instead, which he'd clutched in his fist
and which she'd kept since then, and which she still held tight.

ALCATRAZ

Elena Fattakova

In the house of Lies you throw the dice.
In the house of the Dead you dwell in dust,
 for a time, times and half a time.
In the house of Hell the steam rotates and curls at the edge, breathing fire.
The blind man stumbles against the slime of earth.
In the earth's solid cage a man digs a hole to escape
the cemented fear.

The door opens and closes.

And the living creatures rushed out and returned. In the rock cave the walls sweat
glistening with the past.

I alone have the key to this savage parade.

after/words

Elaine Starkman

Now our bodies soften
Yours of dust, mine of bone

Storm and sun
No longer tell us

what they mean
or what we mean

or where to travel
Is an eye still not a hand

is a foot still not pleasure
In our First World,

we had our Garden,
but here I fear too many truths,

and we cannot flee
the Flood

Illumination

Marianne Taylor

This night, scant sign of rain's relief.
Electricity attempts a flashy overture—
white gunpowder trumpets sparking
over indigo timpani.
Land illumines and re-illumines
bleaches vibrant monochrome
bright beyond all day.

And in these fractured seconds
is a place I do not know.
Strange, like the twin one does not have.
Non-existent duplicate, impossible, yet there.

This x-ray of my barren fields, flimsy barn
graveled, sloping lane, drained
of familiar color, glowing oddly
is full of awful possibility.
Another home, another way to be.

And so, lifting naked to kneel
I watch your face by lightning flash.

LIGHT

Barry Ballard

*But I think for me it was the beginning
of empathy, not a large empathy
like the deeply selfless might have,
more like a leaning...*

—Stephen Dunn,
Empathy

Light never centers itself in the marrow,
or the hinged diagram of swinging doors
that make up your life. It never stores
itself like embers, burning through each narrow
extremity until it exits your singed
fingertips. Instead it leans you away from the noted
expectancies of “Every Man’s Road”, to where the dead
are buried, where the battered live on the fringe

of existence, where suffering is louder
than rain. It’s there that it meets you face
to face, refracting itself in the warm
colors of enchantment (and the clouded
hue of melancholy), leaving you to retrace
the sacred out of another’s—torrid storm.

VERTICALS

Barry Ballard

I stood in the cool April grass looking into the stained eyes of the house where I was raised, expecting a healthy resonance of welcoming from the extraordinary way that all houses speak from their crooked framework and uncoiled hinges. Instead, inside it strained to whisper like rustlings that had once lived and then given themselves over to stories, and idle wispings of afternoon light and meditation. And it questioned me out of the plaster's hair-line cracks and its deeper unexposed erosions. "Why have you returned to this lapsing deed of the soul's real estate? For the promise

of expiation, for the undoing of what has grown like wild grapevine through your own windows?" And I turned like a stranger staring out through the picture frame toward the forest I once explored across the street (pruning the briar away from the meditative home of where I should have been centered). "It's caring that brought me here", I answered. "Not death or its visible signs, but the slight hope that you might remember I was once an adventurer." But even the older Poplars stood straight and barren like spires choked away by the green around them, bright-trunked verticals caught in the world's downward curve.

Abstract

Kamuran Kelly

with eyes that cut thru the night she braided her religion in her hair
people stop and people stare at the might of the little tear glass tear
covered glass girl in the glass house don't you have a glass mouth
chime in with your little insults rub salt in the sore of my mouth
i got the glass mouth that crumbles like particle board i got the glass
tears that look like art to you i got the real not the understood i got
the facts I got the book you are the crook that stole my box and shoved me
in it i can escape no scapegoat just gloat and stare and starry eyes feel night
time more than you would care about the day when people sigh and give
up and say stay a while in the sunlite but i prefer the night the might
and most of all the light..

The Angel and the Hawk

Michael Onofrey

The train isn't crowded. I board. I walk down a corridor. I step into an empty compartment and sit down next to the window with my bag next to me. I've brought several bottles of beer and I get one out of my bag and open the bottle with a bottle opener that I keep in a side pocket of the bag, a sports bag, a grip as it's called in Europe. I travel light.

Outside there are announcements and after a few minutes there's a whistle. The train begins to move, no jerking or lurching, just a breeze in the direction I'm facing. I sip my beer. The train is away from the platform and in the yards, a pleasant day, two in the afternoon, mid-September.

I hear something and I turn and I see a woman in the corridor stumbling. She pulls the door of my compartment open and then she's inside with the door closed. She glances at me. I smile, she doesn't. Her eyes are about the vicinity where she chooses to sit, which is on the opposite seat and in the opposite corner from where I'm sitting.

She's somewhat tall and she has no luggage, only a purse, a small, boxlike thing with a gold clasp at the top, kind of cute, the purse that is, braided reeds spray-painted white with a metal handle that allows it to swing freely in the bend of her fingers.

Her fingernails are shellacked pink. Her skirt is light green. Her blouse is cream-colored with ruffles down its center. Lipstick dominates her face because she has big lips and the lipstick is pink, a lighter shade than her fingernails. Flecks, probably dried skin, pebble the lipstick. Her lips are probably chapped. She rolls her large, hazel eyes past me and out the window. There's nothing to see. We're leaving Frankfurt.

I sip my beer and look out the window and think about her hair, which is shoulder-length and brown but with something else in it as if she had dyed it a lighter color at one time. Toward the ends there is yellow. I wonder why she just doesn't snip those ends off.

I smell perfume and I smell something under it, something acrid, perhaps dried sweat. Together they remind me of Europe, and Europe is where I am, and where I've been for a little over a year.

She crosses her legs. I don't see it. I hear it. I'm looking out the window. The train is gaining speed. I think about her footwear, a pair of mules, toenails pink. The pink is chipped. In my mind, there's hair on her legs, kind of fuzzy, not thick but light and fuzzy. I'm guessing, but I think she's between twenty-six and thirty-three but if she were to tell me that she was twenty-three and had been around the block I'd believe her.

The train's rolling along and I'm wondering where she is from. Eastern Europe comes to mind but there's no telling. I wonder about language. I wonder about occupation.

It strikes me that I'm prime material for one of the occupations that she might be engaged in, for I'm fifty-three years old and I'm alone on this train. Of course I'm not in business attire, nor any other attire that would suggest money. I'm in a pair of loose jeans and a khaki-colored shirt with the sleeves rolled up to mid-arm. But why should I be thinking about this? She hasn't shown any interest in me whatsoever, not even common

interest, much less economic, much less romantic. I'm not looking for a prostitute. I'm not looking for anything. I'm on my way to Amsterdam with no specific plan aside from wanting to take another look at that beautiful city.

I turn my head and glance at her. She's looking out the window past me. I'm embarrassed for having turned my head to look at her. My head turns back. My view goes out the window. I sip my beer. Germany rolls by. I feel the cadence of the train. It's a pleasant day. Everything seems normal, but it isn't. I don't know why.

My wife died a year and a half ago, an auto accident. After three months I knew I had to leave, had to move. I quit my job, sold the house, put a few things in a detached room at my brother's. He has a big house on a big lot. The room is away from his house. He has a wife and five daughters. He's not going anywhere. I was.

I have no children. I have no wife.

I hear the woman opening her purse and then I hear it snap shut. I'm not going to look. I'm looking out the window. I hear her legs moving, maybe uncrossing and crossing again. I'm looking out the window. I'm thinking of possibilities. I'm fantasizing. I'm thinking about two strangers in a compartment on a train who have nothing in common except that train and that compartment and the scent of that compartment, which is her scent. But maybe she smells my scent, but I have no scent. I don't think I have a scent. I don't think I have anything. I'm not the invisible man. I'm just a man, a middle-aged man wandering around Europe without purpose. I think she has purpose. I know she has a scent. It's tinny perfume and stale sweat. It's roses and thorns.

The train begins to slow. We may be approaching a station. We might stop. I have no idea. I bring my bottle of beer up and take a sip. Yes, I think we're going to stop. It's a wonderful day. I'm glad I'm alive. I wonder what the hell I'm doing on this train.

*

We did stop but no one came into our compartment, as if in that phrasing the woman and I are sharing the compartment. We haven't spoken but I did glance at her while we were stopped. I did that on the pretense of looking past her into the corridor. I saw no one in the corridor. I saw the woman gazing straight ahead at the empty seat in front of herself, direction of her focus slightly downward. She's got a gold ring on the little finger of her left hand. She's got eyeliner and something dark is blotting her eyelashes. Her face hasn't been exposed to the sun for any length of time for some time, complexion white. She's got her legs crossed so her one shoe, a mule, is away from the heel of her foot. The white straps that keep the shoe on her foot are smudged but her foot is clean, white-clean with pink nails, pink chipped, white with faint veins. Yes, there's hair from the lower calf up. The train begins to move but not before there's a whistle. I wonder if she has hairy armpits.

We're rolling again, nice and easy. We're picking up speed and there's a man opening the door of our compartment. He's coming in. He's closing the door. I'm looking up at him. The woman is looking up at him. The woman is uncrossing her legs, two mules on the floor, chipped pink, white flesh, soiled straps. The man's shoes are nearby, heavy and black, a pair of leather shoes of no particular description aside from standard, and in that they are as odd as the three of us in this compartment on this train that's moving through the Rhine Valley on a nice day in mid-September, hail Hitler. Will that ever be forgotten?

I don't even think he's German.

He's got a high, beaked nose, a prominent bridge that slants down from out of his forehead, black eyes in ridged sockets, a healthy growth of dark hair along those ridges all the way to his temples. There's a black, leather jacket that hangs from sharp shoulders. He's long in limb, long in torso, long in head and neck, Adam's apple like a golf ball.

Early twenties. Early thirties. Definitely early. He carries no history.

He glances around. The scent in our compartment has changed radically. The leather jacket is opened. There are silver snaps on it. The man's wearing a white T-shirt. Did I say it was a nice day?

He almost smiles. He chooses the seat opposite me but not directly opposite so that we don't have to bang knees but off to one side which puts him near the woman. Her head is turned and she is looking at him, looking at his profile. She moves her purse from the seat to her lap. Does she fear him?

He has a kind face. He might be a gypsy. He might be Hungarian. He might be Robert Capa. I'd like to strike up a conversation with him but that's out of the question.

There's the smell of leather in our compartment now and it mixes with the smell of perfume and the smell of the woman and the woman's smell is a lot stronger now than it was before. I think she's secreting.

The man is cool and calm, perhaps shy. He looks at me and grins but I can't see his teeth, only trim lips on an olive complexion, a smooth complexion. Maybe he's Italian, maybe he isn't. I don't know where he's from or what languages he speaks or how he makes a living. I don't know any more about him than I know about the woman who's sitting near him, almost next to him.

The man isn't wearing cologne, nor is he wearing sweat. He's wearing leather and that's what he smells like on this sunny afternoon in Germany. He has no luggage. He has no book. He has no history. His hands are empty.

I return his grin. Our eyes meet. We are in agreement, but of what I don't know. And then, as if of the same kabala, I look out the window and he looks to the side, downward and toward the woman but not at the woman. She shifts her weight. I hear it, but before that I heard the man's leather jacket creasing and un-creasing, but now I don't hear that. I hear the woman. I hear the woman's body moving on the seat. I bring my bottle of beer up and take a sip. It's warm in our compartment. We are three. We are our compartment. We are alone, yet we are together. All of us are alone. We are always alone, yet here we are. What the hell am I doing here? What are they doing here? I don't have long to wait for the answer.

I drain my bottle of beer. I set it on the windowsill. I turn to unzip my bag to get a second bottle of beer. The woman is looking at the side of the man's head. He feels it. I see it in the way he tenses. He turns. She leans and kisses him on the mouth and they stay like that except she brings a hand up and wraps it around his head.

Her white fingers with pink nails are knifing through his black hair. The man's Adam's apple is bobbing. His tongue is working.

I'm stopped. I'm staring at them. I don't know why they are doing this. I don't know why they are doing this in front of me. I don't know anything. I'm alone but we are

together. It can be no other way, no other description. I smell the woman. I smell her sweat, I smell her perfume, I smell her sex.

I smell leather and I hear it creasing. He moves his left hand and he brings it up and under one of the woman's ample breasts that's beneath her cream-colored blouse. I can feel it.

Those pink lips—chapped, fleshy, glistening and all over his mouth. I can hear it. I can hear her lips slipping and sliding over his mouth-area like globs of skillet-fried fat. Her head is moving in front of his, her hair with those burnt, bleached ends, his with furrows of a comb, thick and black and shiny. Where did this come from? Do they know each other? They must.

We are alone. We are together. I'm getting an erection. I got my hand around a cool bottle of beer. I'm getting it out. I'm opening the bottle with a bottle opener. There's a pop and the silver cap falls to the floor. I don't care. They don't care. Her mules are skittering sideways like afflicted crabs. Her skirt is too tight.

Her purse falls to the floor in a clatter. They don't care. I don't care. The purse is on its side. The man's hand is strong and veined against the woman's cream-colored blouse. His fingers are without ornament.

They don't know each other. I know it.

The scent of beer comes to my nose, vapor at the mouth of the bottle. I take a slug, beer in my mouth. I wait. I swallow.

Her fingers are at the nape of his neck while his fingers fumble with a button on her blouse, button tucked into ruffles. I sit back. I bring a leg up and prop it on top of my other leg. I don't look out the window. I look at them. I watch. I'm not me anymore. I'm this, and this must be part of it, part of what they are doing, part of what's going on. We are alone. We are together. We are separate. He's working on a second button. It's undone. He slides his hand in. She's wearing a white bra.

Her lips slide off his mouth to smear his jaw line with pink saliva. Her breath is audible. Her legs are splayed. Her complexion is rose. Is she quivering?

Her one arm is over his shoulder, her one hand at the back of his jacket. I see that hand. I see its white flesh and pink nails and I see it clawing and raking black leather. It's lucky he's wearing that jacket.

There's a moan. I heard it, and now I see it. She is definitely quivering. I feel it. I feel it to the marrow. I raise my bottle of beer and take a drink. Beer leaks out the side of my mouth and dribbles down my chin and onto my shirt. I don't care. They don't care. I wonder if there's a conductor on this train, someone in charge, someone in control. What the hell is going on? He's wedging his hand under her bra. I can feel it.

The train changes cadence. Hardly perceptible, but there all the same, and it's there at the same time as the woman's white hand on the back of the man's leather jacket eases. I look for blood as her fingers slide on that leather to where her hand is flat on the back of his jacket. Her arm goes limp. The train is slowing. Her breath is no longer audible. I hear the train. Our compartment is fecund—sweat, humidity, leather—and all of it splintered with perfume and beer and something else. We are in Europe. We are together. We are separate. We are alone.

The man withdraws his hand from inside the woman's cream-colored blouse as the woman withdraws her arm from over his shoulder. The two of them separate and straighten. The woman bends over and picks up her purse from off the floor. She places the purse on her lap. Her fingers go to the buttons of her blouse. Her eyes go down to watch her fingers.

The train is slowing. My view goes out the window. I wonder what's next. I see a platform. I see people. My heart is pounding.

The man stands and straightens his pants. I look up at him. He does not look at me. The woman is looking up at him. The woman is sitting so pristine, lipstick smeared, hair mussed, skirt wrinkled. The man glances at her but offers nothing. He goes to the door and looks at its handle and opens the door and goes out into the corridor and closes the door and disappears from view. The woman is gazing straight ahead at the empty seat before her. I look out the window. I'm waiting to see the man on the platform, but I don't see him until we are moving, which is when I see the back of his black leather jacket and neatly trimmed head of hair as he is passing through a doorway into a building. But his hair is tweaked—evidence of history along with what's smeared across his jaw line. He'd better find a mirror.

The train is moving. No one has entered our compartment. We are alone. I look at the woman but she doesn't look at me. More than before, I dare not speak. I wish it had been the man who had stayed and the woman who had left. I could have spoken to the man.

I look out the window. I sip my beer. I hear the woman opening her purse. I hear something else. I turn and look.

She has a small mirror in one hand and a tissue in the other. She's cleaning her lips and the area around her mouth with the tissue. She gets out a tube of lipstick and applies pink paste liberally. She puts the lipstick back in her purse and gets out a small brush and uses it on her hair. I hear the brush going through her hair while I gaze at her pink lips. The brush and the mirror go back in her purse and she snaps the purse shut. She places the purse on the seat next to herself. She drops the wadded tissue on the floor.

She sits as if bored. She sits as if daydreaming. I look out the window.

Approaching the next stop, she stands and smooths her skirt. She picks up her purse from off the seat. Her body straightens. The train stops. She turns and looks at me.

I don't know what to do.

Her eyes leave me and she opens the door and goes out into the corridor and walks away leaving the door opened. I hear her mules clacking in the corridor. I stand and go to the door and look down the corridor. She is turning a corner. She is gone. I close the door and return to my seat and look for her outside on the platform. She comes into view. She is walking toward a stall that's against a building. There's a counter that runs the length of that stall. She stands at the counter and speaks to the man behind the counter. The man is wearing a white jacket with gold buttons. The man goes away and she sets her purse on the counter. The man returns and places a bottle and a glass in front of her. The man pours the glass half-full. I see foam. It's beer.

The train begins to move. The woman picks up the glass and brings it to her lips. The train is moving. The woman leaves my view. I am alone.

*

He's British and his name is Dave and he's perched on a stool next to me while I

stand because I want to stand after having sat so long on the train. We each have a glass of Heineken and we're in a room that has a small bar. The room and the bar are on the ground floor of a so-called hostel, not an official Youth Hostel, but an inexpensive place that advertises 'hostel' on a sign outside. I've just put my bag on a bed upstairs in a dormitory-style room with about forty or fifty beds, most of which are unoccupied. There's nothing of any real value in my bag so if it disappears that's manageable. Everything I really need is in a money belt that is around my hips and inside my underwear. My journal is on the bar next to my glass of beer.

I've just related the story of my train ride between Frankfurt and Amsterdam to Dave and we've just gotten two fresh glasses of beer. Dave's a young, thin fellow with a wispy goatee on a delicate chin. He wears glasses. He's from London. He's on his way to Israel to work on a kibbutz over the winter. He'll be a volunteer. He'll be in the Negev.

"Most definitely," he tells me, "the woman was an angel."

I smile.

"The man was a bird of prey. You said yourself that he had a beaked nose."

I look at Dave. He has soft, brown eyes and short, brown hair that lies flat on his head and probably never needs combing.

I say, "So she was an angel, and he was a hawk, or an eagle?"

"That is correct," says Dave.

"Were they real?" I ask.

"You saw them, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Then why are you asking me if they were real?"

I sense that Dave is well educated.

"Because an angel and a hawk aren't what I saw on the train."

Dave picks up his glass of beer and takes a sip. It's early evening. I'm planning on going to the Van Gogh Museum tomorrow. In a few days I'll go to Delft to pay homage to Vermeer.

"If you are asking for explanation," says Dave, "I'm willing to provide it. It is but one explanation, and it is mine, and it is based on what you have told me. You told me a story, which really wasn't so much a story as it was description. So now you want 'story,' because you want an explanation as to 'why.' You also want consequence and purpose. Am I right?"

"Yes."

"I could say," says Dave, "that they were in cahoots and that what they staged was connected to sexual gratification. But you have suggested that they weren't in collusion and I tend to agree. You also suggested that there was sex of some sort and I agree with you there, too. You also said that you thought that your presence had something to do with what they did and with sexual gratification. I'm in full accord."

We pick up our glasses of beer. We drink. I'm enjoying this.

"The angel and the hawk needed a witness, for without a witness there would be no act such as it was, and there would be no story such as this story. The witness was part of the phenomenon. The witness is at liberty to create story," says Dave.

The room we are in is quiet because there isn't any music. There are only three people seated at a low table some distance from us near a window. The bartender has ducked out for a moment. I think he serves the hostel in a number of capacities, such as handling check in and answering a telephone. I am thinking about dinner, but it's not urgent. I have time. Dave seems to have time.

"Assuming they weren't in cahoots," says Dave, "and even if they were, since you were an unknown factor to them, we can say that the entire incident was coincidental. All coincidence marches to the beat of its own time, which is always in the present. In addition, coincidence involves so many variables coming together at a particular moment that we cannot understand it.

"We describe," says Dave. "It serves our understanding, and it serves to anchor us. Often, we add to description. All this can take place quickly, or it can occur over time. We want to understand. That's what's at the heart of description and story."

I sense something, but I don't know what it is.

"Sometimes," says Dave, "something radical occurs and it shakes us. It throws us off kilter and draws our attention to coincidence—the random factor. But actually, coincidence is with us all the time. It's part of phenomena. We don't understand it. We don't understand coincidence, but we pretend to understand it, and that pretending is story. Story is our attempt to understand the world and its magic. Magic is coincidence."

I'm looking at Dave.

"An angel and a hawk," says Dave, "what a lovely story. We already know they were people, but I am adding. I'm giving you something else."

Speech rolls from Dave's mouth without effort.

"The angel needed the hawk because of something that occurred in the angel's past. The hawk flew into that compartment and the angel seized the moment and took the hawk into herself and took what she needed. The story continues. It goes on and on."

The three people at the table stand and leave the room. Dave and I are left alone. The lighting in the room is amber.

"Do I have to make a story?" I ask Dave.

"No," he says. "But you want to, don't you?"

"Yes."

"It is only natural," says Dave. "It's part of us. We've been doing it for a long time. It helps to describe us."

"So," I say, "there was the angel and the hawk and the witness."

"Yes."

"Okay, why?"

"It was for the benefit of all three of you as individuals, and as a group, a short-lived group, but a group nonetheless for its function. You shared an interlude. Something was given, something received. You are trying to name it. You are creating story."

I pick up my glass of beer.

"Story is only possible from hindsight," says Dave.

"All three of you gave something, in order to create something, and all three of you received something. The other members of this story are probably doing what you are doing

right now. You have an angel and a hawk; no telling what they have.”

Dave pauses. I sip my beer.

“For you,” says Dave, “that interlude with the angel and the hawk is what you have, and what you have is what you witnessed. It is no small thing. It is an important part of our lives, because it is part of our curiosity. It is actually all we have to go on. We describe what we witness. Description allows us story. Story allows us to explain the world. It is not bad. It’s an interesting endeavor. It’s the basis for what we define as knowledge.”

I’m trembling. I don’t know why. I set my glass of beer down.

I say, “And you are here to deliver this message, this story based on my description?”

Dave smiles and says, “It would seem so, but we didn’t know it until now.”

“It’s coincidence, isn’t it?” I say. “You and me right now—an interlude contingent on coincidence.”

“Yes.”

“It’s always happening.”

“Yes.”

“It’s all we have.”

“Yes.”

“We need story to understand.”

Dave looks at me.

“Because without understanding, we have problems.”

“Yes and no,” says Dave.

He picks up his glass of beer.

“Sometimes,” says Dave, “if we don’t add to it . . . if we don’t add to it, it will dance before our eyes, and we will be that dance.”

Dave drinks. I tremble. Dave is giving me something.

Dave swallows and lowers his glass and sets it on the bar, foam eddying down the inside of the glass. He smiles.

I’m in Europe. I’m in this room. Everything is vivid. I want it to last forever, but it won’t.

I reach for my glass of beer. I pick it up. I take a sip.

I will visit the Van Gogh Museum tomorrow to see madness in color. I will go to Delft to pay homage to Vermeer. I will have coincidence—precise, vivid, unique—an interlude of movement for a duration of time—fleeting—I am part of it—the angel and the hawk.

VERMEER, A SILENCE OF LIGHT

Improbably lit, rooms dissolve into ounces of silence, each virginal pearl
Mirrored back as belied liturgies of fabric, small texts
of domesticity.

Silence, its clean vowels. Its furniture.

The silence of light lays its hands on her shoulders, her smooth brow, an unopened
Letter.

Patinaed latescence, it pours from her mile jug in small, liquid psalms.

—author unknown

WHAT WILL ARRIVE

Patricia Roth Schwartz

Waiting in Magee's Diner for the soup de jour, a bland bowl, round and round you turn the small hot pink pocket mirror from Pakistan you saw in the stopover airport, and bought yourself, circling back up North after those fleeting pilfered days on the Delta (students robbed your words, your almost-lover's ailing mother deprived of her care). Now one day later back home, missing her slender fingers, the caramel vowels you don't know yet disguise her lies, the wide white bed in which you missed her as well, outside a snow squall fresh from Canada swirls up white against the frosted panes. You almost forget (*she's* the lemon-lover) how not to order the tea. Crystal who will be your server today makes you think of Amitra the sweet-smiled quiet girl who sold you the mirror; because of the tags pinned to their lapels you know their names. (Did *she* know yours? Is she pouring now the tea of duplicity?) Later the phone will not ring but now stuck on above her big round eyes, Crystal's lashes cling like furry spiders. *Honey*, she calls you, *What do you need?* The rest of your life-what-will-arrive-begins, like the sparkly chips around the rim of the mirror, to wink in the failing light, its face like the high pale citrus sun that starts to slip away. You can hear a secret beating heart wrapped inside the storm.

BOARDER

Joanne Lowery

On the other side of my driveway a well-meaning woman
calls to tell me she just met a good Christian girl
who needs a place to live, and, well,
since I need help, since I need more than help
because of my infirmities, maybe this good girl
could bring her Bible into my spare bedroom,
pay a little rent, clean our shared house.

On the first afternoon she would offer to bring me
a cup of Earl Grey and I would say no.
The front steps need to be scrubbed,
all the mini-blinds stripped of their fur,
the oven made to give up its black drippings.
What's a roof for if not to bring together

The haves and the have-nots under the rain?
Her smile is cheerful and dry as she asks
how tuna casserole sounds for supper.
It sounds to me like a large fish
lucky to live in the boundless sea.

Late Fragment
Raymond Carver

And did you get what
you wanted from this life, even so?
I did.
And what did you want?
to call myself beloved, to feel myself
beloved on the earth.

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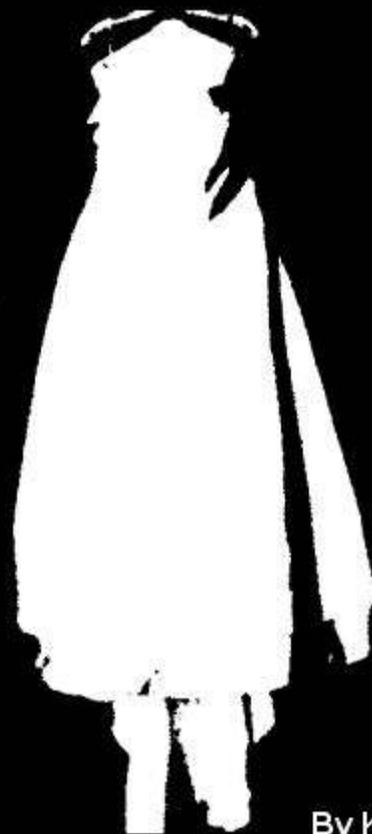
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*The Secret
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