A JOURNAL OF
LITERATURE
AND ART
# STYLUS

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## POETRY


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Andy Wass | *11* | "Rosa" |
| | *12* | "Silt" |
| Andrés Pérez Rojas | *14* | "At Jesuitenkirche" |
| Pauline Tran | *16* | "Home Country" |
| Genrikh Sapgir | *18* | "Icarus"<br>*Translated by Aaron Pearce* |
| Maureen McHugh | *22* | "To kneel, rubbing two sticks together" |
| | *23* | "Festival Images of Mexico, the Natural History Museum" |
| Mahy Dimitriou Polymeropoulos | *24* | "I Will Ask Him Afterwards" |
| Tamas O'Doughda | *26* | "Salvador Can See" |
| | *27* | "Small" |
| Laura Lehman | *29* | "Little Canoe" |
| | *31* | "Olive Night" |
| Gabrielle Dunkley | *33* | "Market Composure" |
| Friedrich Hölderlin | *36* | "The Half of Life"<br>*Translated by Liz Campbell* |
| Jenna Brager | *38* | "Arid" |
| | *39* | "Writhe As" |
| Alyssa Schimmel | *40* | "Mechanics" |
| Andrew Ortuzar | *41* | "For Constance" |

## FICTION


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Dan Schwartz | *47* | "Please Please Please" |
| Chelsy Meyers | *54* | "Hazard, Kentucky" |
| | *61* | "The Dependable Ronald Hubbard and How People Felt About Him" |
| Julia Jin Wang | *70* | "Ten Years Alone on a Hill" |
| Dóra Larson | *86* | "Prelude" |
| Magda Szabó | *91* | "Angel" *Translated by Dóra Larson* |
| Steven Yenzer | *98* | "Where the Dust Goes" |
| | *101* | "Full of Things" |


## ART


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Shannon Kielty | *107* | "Stuck In A Warehouse" |
| Miles Waltuck | *108* | "Elle Looking Up" |
| Aniko Makranczy | *109* | "All In One" |
| | *110* | "Encased" |
| | *111* | "Memento Mori" |
| Sarah Ruggieri | *112* | "Faces" |
| Caryn Wasser | *113* | "Untitled" |
| Caroline Battle | *114* | "Untitled" |
| Nettie Morgan | *115* | "Fourth Composition for Stylus" |
| | *116* | "Third Composition for Stylus" |
| Robin Hudspeth | *117* | "Georgia O'Keeffe" |
| Kevin Gomes | *118* | "Evolving Pencils" |
| Pauline Tran | *119* | "Of Tamas" |
| Lanny Hoang | *120* | "To be Alone" |

# EDITOR'S NOTE

The first thing you'll probably notice about *Stylus* this year is the shape. After three years of an interesting but slightly impractical kind of square, we've decided to switch back to the more traditional rectangle. It seems a little unadventurous, but you'll notice a lot of other changes throughout the journal. Perhaps most obvious is the paper stock—we chose a cream color and kept it consistent throughout the journal. We've also separated the genres out and mixed in Litfest winners and multilingual pieces. Finally, we did a little editorializing and included sketches and other staff-produced pieces in the pages of the journal.

All of these changes are steps toward two main goals—to make Stlyus more professional, and to give it more of a distinct personality. Although we did the best we could this year, we recognize that such major changes are a process, and we wholeheartedly welcome any comments or suggestions.

The photocopied pages and section titles you'll see in between genres are artifacts from the University of Maryland Archives. The Poetry, Prose and Art pictures are modified sketches from the 1936 edition of the *Terrapin*, the yearbook at the University of Maryland. The pages preceeding those section titles are taken from *To Do or Not to Do*, a womens' manual published in 1937 and 1938. All of these Archives pieces were chosen not only for their humor but for the strange mix of estrangement and closeness we felt when we reviewed them. They seem bizarre, and yet they are as much a part of Maryland's history as any famous alumnus or football game.

We sincerely hope you enjoy reading this issue of Stylus as much as we enjoyed preparing it. Although many of us have worked on the journal for years, I think we are all annually surprised by the quality and volume of work that the campus produces. This is truly a campus full of talent.

—Sydney Pickett, Editor-in-Chief

# Library Loafing

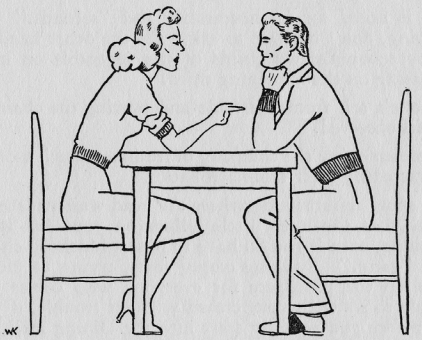
Bzzz-zz-zz. Interminable monotone voices murmuring great quantities of nothingness. What great questions are decided over the library table at night? Maybe a date for a dance is made; you meet the girl you have wanted to meet for weeks, you make a date for a football game and catch up on the latest campus news and gossip.

But what of the rare student who actually goes to the library to study? After all, he deserves some consideration, since he is using the library for its intended purpose.

If you must talk to someone else, make it short and snappy, and don't bother other people. Don't sit around and giggle. Nothing is so annoying as the persistent snickering of a small group, especially to someone who's got that term paper to finish.

Do your date-making outside the library. After all, it's not very complimentary to you if the boy won't spend a nickel phoning you.

And oh, incidentally—quite aside from your sense of ethical-ness; there are plenty of over-social people who have been bounced gently outside the door on their ear—to spend the rest of the term in doleful exile from the library.



# Dining Hall

The dining hall is maintained for students only. It is unnecessary to seek to impress the rest of us with your Sunday bests, but members of your table will appreciate old-fashioned cleanliness and neatness in your appearance.

# POETRY

ANDY WASS

# ROSA

They call it *cancer* from the Latin—
because her tumors look like crabs.

Meanwhile, within my body settled
silkworms, little owls,

talented ponies, urged dogs,
lesser ghosts of agency.

My aunt and I wrote letters
throughout our illnesses

and into our uglinesses
knowing one another's

bones, visible veins, our bodies
falling easy as oranges.

# SILT

We get up from sitting, hands black with city and the lack they hazard.
Now we've talked about our place, how we are pretty well-adjusted
but with a tint or kink from growing up absurdly in the South.

Mine is my birding—my preference for watching over happening;
or accidents. Yes, no, mine is my series of chronic accidentals,
arpeggios, those pacings from fear or restlessness.

Yours is your phrasing and how every time you're in town you
kiss me you kiss me you say you regret our first year.
And the kisses come back short of funding, in envelopes, addressed

to Bullethead:
you kiss like a shoe,
bluntly
familiar
drying;
to Blake:
you had your chance,
my chance;

and
to Resident:
stay.

Along the curb we drop rocks, we rouse the silt, we miss our misses.
What's stirred up settles, diluted. Then in the car with you and me
and our thin secrets, our organs are minutes apart. And when you get back

to New York, you'll find things I've sent north: wing, test, bone,
books and books of poems, settled sediment in water, what I'd wanted
and got only after everything was settled or made void.

You are the one this time siphoning weather from your shoes,
straightening yours the mouth that yields; weighing, unpacking,
shelving, storing old motions, addresses, salt and sound, the silt we harvest;

bird, chest, reversion, accident; torn proteins and cottons, carbon, ore;
and you're the one this time trying to figure out where to fit inertia.

ANDRÉS PÉREZ ROJAS

# AT JESUITENKIRCHE

## IN MEMORIAM RICHARD M. BAXTER

You went down on your knees to pray by the Altar,
whispered into folded hands

chapped from the cold. Daybreak flushed
in the Baroque interior—vast and hazy,

like staring into a cloud. Our guide spoke
in a faraway voice full of rehearsed reverence

for the sacristy, the rich stucco, the High Altar
decorated in "superb red marble," where the sun

bled a sooty scarlet. Over his words
a rainfall of footsteps echoed quietly.

We hadn't heard any mention yet of tumors,
swellings, chemotherapy, radiation

treatments. Your memories had not started to fray
and fade like the ghostly hum of a homily

against the chapel walls. We could still discuss
death without ever thinking about

what it means to be dying. Nobody noticed
your praying—you were too close to the Altar,

too wrapped up in devout historian's silence,
before the fixed stare of angels and saints

on the ceiling walls. Your head bowed, your chest
moving slowly underneath your winter

jacket, it looked as though you could actually hear
something in the scraps of voices that hung

in the air around the vault as though in a museum
of invisible relics, or a storehouse of stale prayer.

PAULINE TRAN

# HOME COUNTRY

FOR MAHY

Unconscious held my hand.
See there? I started with
this line,
    it led me here.
The sea says:
    "I caught you"
but the fish is ashore.

Moss curls up
    their lips,
Him and Her,
    Greek statues:
"I feel so
    young and beautiful,"
"So do I" he says,
        bending to her,
    they kiss.
            But I
am a boat
    named Mahy, sailing
for Oregon
    Montana
        New York.
Their names
            are sponge like
mushrooms toppled

from my teeth.
I will follow
my lines,
I'd like to visit
there,
record all the fish
I meet
with hands, and girls
with
oblong eyes
the color of oolong tea. And
I will be
Zizelle there,
a spirit
in the name,
three birds,
my friend,
wings flocked around me
in a dive for
the silver moon
I've crayoned green.

Its craters are
baklava,
Katerina loves when
I bake.
We ate the moon
standing over
the Parthenon,
our fingers
sticky and
like gods.

Генрих Сапгир

# ИКАР

Скульптор вылепил Икара.
Ушел натурщик,
Бормоча:
— Халтурщик!
У меня мускулатура,
А не части из мотора!
Пришли приятели,
Говорят:
— Банально.
Лишь женщины увидели,
Что это — гениально.
— Какая мощь!
— Вот это вещь!
— Традиции
Древней Греции!
— Сексуальные эмоции!
— Я хочу иметь детей
От коробки скоростей!
Зачала.
И вскорости
На предельной скорости,
Закусив удила,
Родила —
Вертолет.
Он летит и кричит,
Свою маму зовет.
Вот он входит в облака.
Зарыдала публика.
... Таково воспитательное значение искусства.

GENRIKH SAPGIR

# ICARUS

A sculptor molded Icarus.
The model walked
off, grumbling
*Sloppy work.*
*I have muscles, not*
*engine parts.*
Friends came
and called it bland.
Only women could recognize its
genius. —*What power!*
—*Now this is a man!*
–*Ancient Grecian, this*
*tradition, this—*
*appetite—*
*I want to breed*
*with this machine.*
She conceived.
And in a year, the queen,
biting her lip, gave birth
to a helicopter.
He flies crying,
calling for his mother.
There he is, breaking
the clouds.
The audience cries out;
the artist takes his bow.

Раскланялся артист.
На площади поставлен бюст —
Автопортрет
Автофургон
Телефон-
Автомат.

There's a bust in the square now,
a self-portrait,
a van full of portraits
a phone booth.

—Translated from the Russian by Aaron Pearce


MAUREEN MCHUGH

# TO KNEEL, RUBBING TWO STICKS TOGETHER

We grew up in a house on a cliff. A house made of all dust.
This was first. A house of big stomachs.
A house with a huge, required hunger:

We wanted light. The original feeling. A house of need—
The stairs that splintered our socks, black pans in the sink,
the dog that sidled up to us, spun in circles around us,
then left again.

Colleen would be singing in the morning
to the creases in the curtains to keep them still.

We were always breathing or sleeping. It was a house built on mechanism,
on thought, those shelves jammed with books,
their little spines all facing out, colorful and expectant.

A house like a soul. Like the edges of cruelty.

Now Colleen says she deserves a backyard or a door on a hinge
that she can open or close whenever she needs. She stands
in my bedroom, her heart looking thin in the light coming
through the curtains from behind her.

She wants the door to be obstinate, wide as an oak tree.

# FESTIVAL IMAGES OF MEXICO, THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

The banners proclaim something. A new religion, a coming
up to the sand from the sea. In the pictures everyone is moving,

the camera catching a whir of skirt or the necklaces flying out,
strung together with thick bursts of flowers or beads.

In the pictures they lift their legs to the air as they dance, the eyes
circled wide with a mask of color, rimmed blue and fixed to the sky.

They throw their bodies out to the place where prayer goes.

This is how they say culture comes into us: with the bottoms
of our feet impossibly dirty, sixty candles or a salty birth.

Not like the clay figures in the Western Cultures exhibit,
where the beginning of culture is kept so neat.

The clay figures are within their own bodies entirely,
the necks fastened there tight to the wall with pins.

Μαχη Δημητριου Πολημεροπουλου

# Μετα Τον Ρωτω

Καπως περασε το καλοκαιρι,
Δεν ειναι ξαφνιασμα το πεσιμο των φυλλων.

Περασε κι ολας η πρωτη σταλλα του χειμωνα.
Ερημωσαμε, και γυρνουμε γυμνοι

να ζεσταθουμε, και να κρυφτουμε.
Αδαμ η Ευα ?

MAHY DIMITRIOU POLYMEROPOULOS

# I WILL ASK HIM AFTERWARDS

Somehow summer has passed,
the falling of leaves is not a sudden thing.

Already the first drop of winter has come.
We're deserted, and we go around nude

to warm, and to hide.
Adam or Eve?

TAMAS O'DOUGHDA

# SALVADOR CAN SEE

Two Rottweilers walk at each
of your sides, muscled in elastic
tongue, drooling melted icicles,
claws smiling on the tiles.

You drown out their clicking
with your own copper boots,
stepping into the room
clothed in vintage scuba gear,
like sand grains still
clinging to being glass.

You stand, onstage, in dazzling silence,
safe in the warm air of your suit.
The crowd waits for the face of your
barred mask to melt, and
an elephant with skinny legs to spider out.

But you baby to them, grabbing around
your neck with palms trapped
in square gloves like metal rulers.

Your lungs swell for air
like a drunk couch of lips,
until a man
unsets your head.
What do you see?

# SMALL

my bed touches the ground,
it is easier for my feet
in the morning. a branch

reaches through my window,
dropping apples into my fruit bowl,
a large ladle of dark chocolate,

or an open chestnut shell. the apples
hang in, and rattle the bowl when they drop.
the apples are green, and I feel the caterpillars

more often than I see them. I pluck and set them
up the branch, they are butterflies
when they reach the xylem.

sometimes I sit in the window sill,
it is always open, and run my toes
over the leaves and apple skins, smooth on my own.

I have to bend under the branch to leave,
and keep a limber back as I walk
soft and barefoot on the hills.

when the tree dies, I will cut another
bowl out of it, and move,
carrying my bed until I am tired.
the next morning I will begin
building a cottage
around another branch
with no glass in the window.

LAURA LEHMAN

# LITTLE CANOE

In the open kitchen
by the banana trees,
where bees swarmed
discarded fish heads,
you passed hands for days.

With my red pocketknife,
Karu shaped you;
made you to fit the palm,
thumb-sized middle
carved out.

You were left to the table,
where unthinking fingers
deepened this groove,
pressed like prayer
to your center, smoothing
pink-white wood.
Pingo penned
zagging lines
around your rim
to pointed ends,
and, with berries,
painted the spaces.
I wanted to keep you—
to take you back

with all the hands
that touched you—
but thought,
Little Canoe,
maybe instead
we should send you
down the *Ríozínho*,

an adventure
with caiman and piranha,
all the way to the *Xingu*,
to *Ourílândia*, where
you'd be scooped
from the water
in a gold miner's hand.

# OLIVE NIGHT

We gather as our original selves.
It is early winter and we are ageless again,

returned to a known past, just for a moment,
our minds and bodies larger than before.

The basement knows. It remembers
childhood wedged between white walls;

how we grew into each other and apart again;
how we left, how we come back. Still

we play ping pong and tackle each other
over a card game, while upstairs the adults

sit around the heavy wooden table and cut
the smooth seeds out of olives. They wrap

empty olives, thick and curved
like one side of a tiny baseball,

around ground beef, then dip the balls
in beaten eggs, flour, more eggs, breadcrumbs,

and fry them, hundreds of them, on the stovetop.
This takes hours. All night. And

this is what the kitchen knows: our parents
are an assembly line, the room filled

with piles of olives—round brown pyramids
among soft lights and bodies. In the background,

Sinatra sings and they sway, wine glasses in hand,
while downstairs we sink into couch cushions

shaped to our smaller selves, until we are lured up
by the sizzling smells of meat and garlic, for olives

to leave our mouths and fingertips greasy
and warm.

GABRIELLE DUNKLEY

# MARKET COMPOSURE

Down here, this is our choir
Tongues too sharp to comply with God
Everyone wants to be a soprano

We brand our hot meat into the ground.
Sticking to each other's skin while
Bouncing beneath the yellow butter
You called the sun

We walk alongside the percussion
Beaded handbags and weaving bottoms
Under cotton skirts move in time
Cymbal-shrill of the sandals
Puff mushroom clouds of dust
Into the air

You stop to converse with the striking
Percussionist
I stand behind you
I'm the secret ballad you acquired long since
You discovered classical music

I back away into the woodwinds
Lungs blackened by devoting the diaphragm
To God's awakening sleep
You called "ganja"

"Have sip, try, gwahn."
A brown glass pendulum swings
In front of me
The face of the clock
Has gray whiskers for the hour and
Minute hands
And a dried grin as pinched and pitted
As the seed of breadfruit he clutched in his hand

I'm not interested in the time
I lean backward against a stranger's cart
Breathing the fumes of patty and fried plantain remind me
of our stay
Like anesthesia
Flowing the milk-candescent happy place
You inject in my veins

I dance beneath your canopy
Mimicking your movements
Fruitless attempts to catch shade
I accidentally inhale your sweat
Evaporating from your skin

When you move closer to me
I tug on your belt loop. Your hands
Flap as if fanning coal fire
"Pickinee gyal! Me soon come, Me soon come."

He walks through the pit band with the
Percussionist
I do not verbally contest
I marvel the creative process
Past masterpieces, especially ballads
Can only watch as their composers
Perfect their craft of composing

I watch your percussionist open
The peach back door to the corner shop
Leading you to the practice chamber

I suck drops of tambrin off of my bottom
Lip as I bite down…
Maybe if I bite harder
And drink blood
My muscles will regain awareness
And the ability to recognize pain
Will emerge as your anesthesia wears off

I focus on the mushroom puffs of dust
Mimicking my heart
Listening to the soprano shrills
Competing to impress God

I want to silence them
I want to tell them
He soon come
He soon come

FRIEDRICH HÖLDERLIN

# HÄLFTE DES LEBENS

Mit gelben Birnen hänget
Und voll mit wilden Rosen
Das Land in den See,
Ihr holden Schwäne,
Und trunken von Küssen
Tunkt ihr das Haupt
Ins heilignüchterne Wasser.

Weh mir, wo nehm ich, wenn
Es Winter ist, die Blumen, und wo
Den Sonnenschein,
Und Schatten der Erde?
Die Mauern stehn
Sprachlos und kalt, im Winde
Klirren die Fahnen.

FRIEDRICH HÖLDERLIN

# THE HALF OF LIFE

With yellow pears
And full of wild roses,
The land hangs in the lake.
You lovely swans,
Drunk with kisses,
You dip your heads
In the holy, sobering water.

Woe is me, where do I take,
When the winter comes, the flowers,
And where the sunshine,
And the shadows of Earth?
The walls stand
Speechless and cold. In the wind,
The weathervanes rattle.

—Translated from the German by Liz Campbell

JENNA BRAGER

# ARID

The woman who sat next to me
on the plane home from Vegas
to Baltimore was young,
I was sure of it.

But her hands were the hands
of an old woman—weathered adobe,
riven and bone-dry, as though she had
a lifetime of labor on her palms.

What an effect, those old hands
at the end of a young woman's arms!
As though the Nevada desert had
been sucking at her fingertips.

Lady, please don't leave me
to these endless swaying fields
of supple city hands!

She looked at me, sucked the salt
from airline peanuts hard.
With her cheeks pulled in
I could see her skull.

# WRITHE AS

I.
This is the world with no surface;
we are microscopic and only
children can see us,
our lips crawling lazily towards
one another.
Gypsy moth caterpillars;
brand new and compelled
to destroy in order to live.
It comes easily, instinctively: how to
gnaw the green away,
to leave only the hard wood, naked and raw.
But you and I, we are small,
and we are cruelest to ourselves.

II.
Those caterpillars plagued our cypress trees;
my mother cut down
branch after branch
wrapped in ghostly silk,
burned them in our backyard.
My sisters and I watched the gypsy larvae writhe
as they burned. We didn't know pain.
We thought it stunning and strange—
the dying dance of worms.

ALYSSA SCHIMMEL

# MECHANICS

There is a body in a body-bag on-screen. I watch in Austria
as the medics extract from the rubble of train-tracks
and split locomotive shells, the bodies. And my father,
slipped tenderly into a nightgown with painted pastel triangles
of green—eight hours away from surgery. So automatic
how they all operate: medics, nurses,
preparing the body for what's next: laying
the dead out straight as ribs, lining the doctor's tools,
polished to a shine. I don't understand
the German, with its hard clanging consonants; but the casualties
multiplying across the rescue workers' shoulders: arms, legs, backs
all limp and bloodied like some strange fruit. That I see.
The curve of my father's hips, not in black, just jutting
beneath and angular: like a hanger holding the linen
un-creased. Him, plucked and placed on the table, too early.
A subtitle reads: We weren't expecting this. Then, the focus
narrows. The camera pans to a train tilted off its tracks.
The gown slowly stripped away. As if a hand had crumpled
the metal, snatched the seats from its middle—and hard.
The surgeon unzips my father's ribs. On the tracks, bystanders
watch aghast—the new engine beating in the background.

ANDREW ORTUZAR

# FOR CONSTANCE

Bodily, make your hands be something like the myometrium
and my head could be the illiterate dream, amniotic and in you.

I would confess inside your hands, now looking something like parentheses
and my head could then speak like an aside, like your privilege, dear reader,

but in fairness to you, your hands can be something like front to back ears
so that my head could be a head that knows you from all directions, just
listening.

Ideally for me, your hands will just be something like a Sunday hammock
and my head will be a man of leisure, or this will be my passage on a modest
boat,

and metaphorically *sweetie*, I'll suggest you *make your hands bananas*
and if you do, my head would be the apple or the orange, cradled,

for keeps, we could be something like fruit, in something like a bowl,
living a still life, painted on a nursery wall. Anything like this, just

literally, I need you to hold my forehead and the back of my neck
whatever way you can visualize. There is someone you have not met—

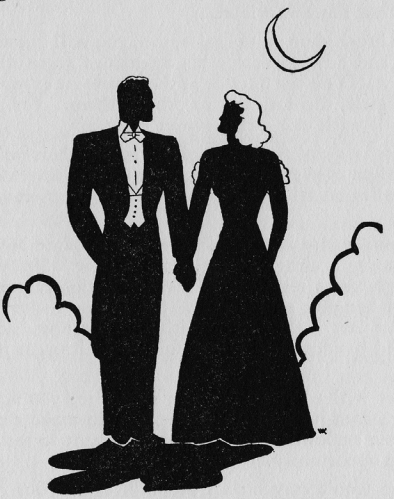
but you can know, she was a girl in a Maryland wheat field, on a sad day
when she touched me, or maybe she took me away, I can't say

but now you can take away my pulsing head,
and my heaving mind, by holding it,

the same way, whatever way
a mind would imagine
it is done.

He may have a heart of gold when you get to know him better. Even if he has a big nose and a squint, your sulking will make the evening that much worse. Try hard and see if he hasn't *something* to recommend him!

Don't break your neck rushing to get into your date's car. If you give him time enough he will open and close the door for you, assisting you in or out as the case may be. It is a nice gesture for you to reach across and flip the handle of the door for the gentleman—sort of keeps you from being a clinging vine.



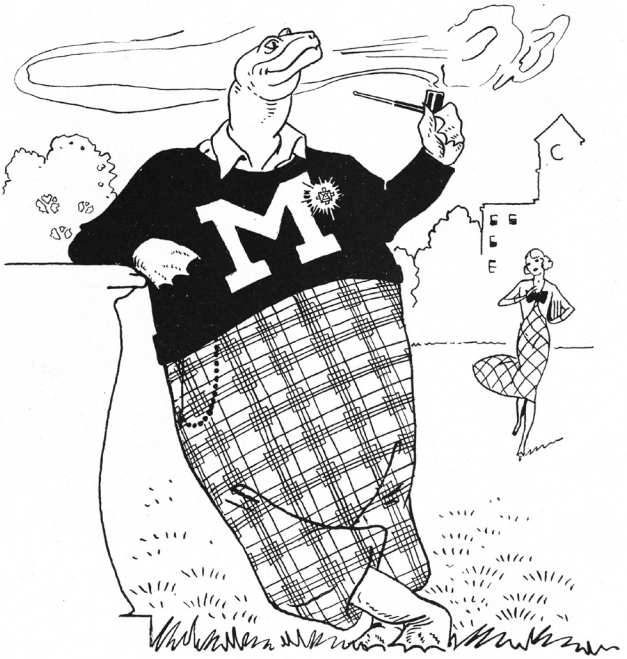
## Good Nights

"Door-knob hangers" are no longer the fashion. Say good-night, and mean it. Anything else necessary to the parting may very well be said in the garden, maybe, or along the road somewhere. But when the actual time comes, understanding should have long ago been reached.

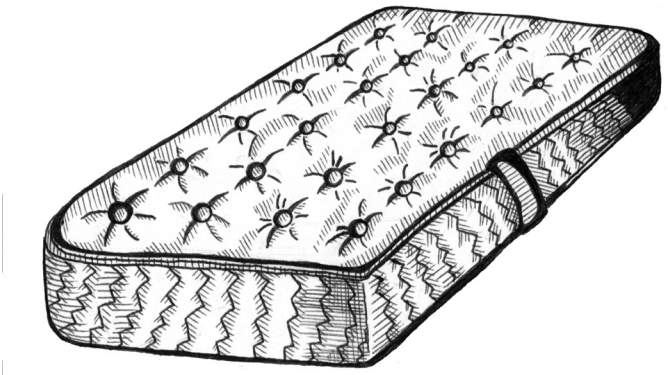
Besides—wind, rain, and mosquitoes blowing in the front door aren't exactly pleasant reminders of how thoughtful you are. And that one last dead-line minute means so much on the campus—it's well not to forget that!

A slow fade-out is never as effective as the "good-night" which snaps the whole thing off.

Love may keep you warm, but it's just a draft on the feet for the sorority sisters.



# PROSE



## DAN SCHWARTZ | **PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE**

In the middle of a conversation, a friend I once knew lifted himself off the ground, hovered there for a little while, then came back down. Everyone around him asked him why, what was up. He wouldn't talk about it.

Simon had always been a little shy, but this was bordering on ridiculous. His friends demanded to know how he could do what he did. He tried to laugh it off, saying it was nothing. People disagreed. They threatened him, started making fun of him. He asked if they could leave him alone. They descended upon him like the flood.

Eventually he said enough, I'll tell you. He told them that he wasn't feeling great, he was depressed. He told them about this girl he fell for. She did not fall back. He told them how he couldn't talk to her, how it got so bad that he couldn't move for a week. He stayed in bed. He told them how you can't just tell people things. You just can't.

On the seventh day in bed he began to float upwards and when he put his hand out he could touch the ceiling. He wanted to know why. When he began thinking about it he floated downwards, back into his bed. His room was a mess. Only the computer was clean.

He told his friends that if he just stopped moving for a little while, just stopped doing anything, he could float. His friends all tried it right then and there. They did not succeed.

"Why don't you try throwing yourself off a building?" one of them said.

"No," said Simon. "No."

Simon kept a bed on the ceiling, above his bed on the floor. This was meant as a precaution. Sometimes he would wake up in between the two of them. He said it wasn't so interesting after a while. He said it was something that he had to take care of. He said it was his own problem and that it should not be anyone else's. He said all this.

His friends told everyone they knew. He had kind of a rough time after that.

In the days afterward he realized that his friends weren't really his friends, so he applied for a job a few states over, packed his belongings into a small car, and found a new place to live. This is how I reconnected with him. The two of us had never been close, but we came from the same town. I could not believe it when I heard he was coming here. I never expected to see anyone from my hometown again.

The place where we live now is small. About three years ago I realized that I was sick of cities. After a decade of always being busy, I needed to take some time off. So I moved away, to where I can put out a lawn chair and stay out in the sun all day. The climate is warm here. My neighbors tell me that every day is the greatest day. They tell me other things. They tell me about the changes that God has brought into their lives. I put on sunglasses and try to find a good book. It was unlikely for me that I would come in contact with anyone from my past.

Simon found an apartment building, and a room that was smaller than his old room. He put beds on the floor and on the ceiling. When I came over to say hello to him, he asked me what there was to do around here.

"Well," I said, "there's a lot of things. This town is small but there's a good nightlife. There's a jazz club a couple blocks over, and some restaurants. We have a public library, we have a pharmacy here. You can go for a walk around town anytime. This neighborhood is safe so don't worry about staying out late."

"Good," he said. "I just want to keep myself busy, that's all."

"Not too busy," I said. "After all, if you wanted to be busy, you could have stayed in the big city."

We became friends, like the way maybe we should have when we were kids. Simon got to know more or less everyone in town. No one found out about what he could do. I asked him why he kept a bed on the ceiling, but he brushed it off.

He was labeled as eccentric and people let him go. He was a good person to have around.

Simon didn't talk much about his past, no matter how many times I asked him about it. I told him about myself, but if I ever asked him about himself then he would just say it didn't matter. I could respect that. He wanted to make something new of himself.

He kept himself going. During the day he would go to work, then read for a while, then go to dinner, then go out to clubs or bars, and then who knows what else. He would not stop. When we would hang out I noticed that he was always moving around, pacing or fidgeting. People just said it was an odd habit of his.

One day when I awoke early I walked to his place and knocked on the door, but there was no answer. The door was unlocked, and I opened it just to see if he was sleeping. He was—but he was in mid-air, between the two beds. I closed the door, a little too quickly, and he must have heard it shut. Before I could leave the hallway Simon had opened the door and saw me.

"What are you doing here?" he said.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I called you but you didn't answer. I wanted to see what you were doing."

He stared at me for a moment, and then invited me into his apartment. He walked in and left the door open, and I followed him. He made me a cup of coffee.

"So what did you see?" he asked.

"Nothing," I said.

"Really." He looked directly at me. There must have been something in my face that gave me away. He said, "You can't tell anybody what you saw. I am taking in you into my confidence now. You don't tell anyone, okay?" I agreed.

He told me the story, as I related it above. I told him I understood. I told him that I wouldn't tell anyone. But something intrigued me about the story, and I asked—"Well, who was the girl?"

He put his coffee mug down and looked away. "Just a girl," he said.

"Well, it had to be more than that," I said. "Tell me about her."

It took a couple more questions, but eventually I got him to open up. The way he described it, they met one night while they were at a bar. He was drunk, but she wasn't. He couldn't remember how he began to talking to her, but they ended up talking about music. They both liked the same kinds. Everyone has that one band that they know, the one that nobody else has heard of. It turned out they both had.

He didn't go home with her that night. He didn't go home with her any night, actually. He couldn't ask her for her number. Instead he went to the same bar every night, hoping that she would be there. Sometimes she would, sometimes she would not. When they talked, he said, it always seemed like she was having a good time. He told me he didn't know what he should do.

"I keep a journal," he said. "When I got home one night, I guess maybe I had had too much to drink. I started writing whatever came into my mind."

"Can I see it?"

He thought about it for a second. "No," he said. "Sorry. Maybe another time. But not now."

"When I woke up that morning and read what I wrote," he continued, "I realized I was in love with her. So that night at the bar, she was there, finally, I told her. Well, not in so many words—I told her how I felt and I told her I'd like to take her out sometime. She said no. Then she stopped coming to the bar. I knew friends of friends who knew her, but if we saw each other again it was only in passing. She said to me she didn't like me in that way. There was nothing—there was nothing I could do." He got up and washed out his coffee mug and put it in the dishwasher.

"What was her name?" I asked him.

"Mina," he said.

After he told me the story I was a lot nicer to him. I kept my promise and I didn't tell anyone about what he could do. He told me that if he stops, if he hesitates, he starts floating. He demonstrated it to me just to prove it. Yes, I tried it myself. It didn't work. I felt a great sympathy for him. I asked him if there was any way I could help.

"I don't know," he said. "I guess it doesn't matter. I've gotten used to it by now. Thanks for trying, but I don't think anyone can do anything."

"What about Mina?" I said. "What if you saw her again."

He opened his mouth, but stopped. He was silent for a few seconds, then hovered upward, and stayed there. "I don't think that's a good idea," he said, and came back down.

After that I decided I would try to find Mina. It wasn't very hard. I found her by calling Simon's friends from back in the city, asking if they knew her. One of them finally got through to her. I left a message on her voicemail. To be honest, I'm surprised that she called me back.

"I know about it," she said. "I heard. Listen, this is not my fault. I didn't do this to him, I don't know how this happened, okay? People blame me for his leaving, but, honestly, it's his friends who drove him out of town. I don't understand. Now

some of his friends won't talk to me, but do they ever talk to Simon? I doubt it."

I was convinced that if Mina could just talk to Simon, he would stop floating. I asked her if she would come and help him. "It isn't my problem," she said. "I have things that I have to deal with."

"Please," I said. "I think it would be good for him."

"Does he blame me for what happened?"

"He doesn't—I don't think so, I don't know. I just think maybe you owe it to him."

I heard her sigh over the phone. "I don't get it," she said. "I don't get it. All right, I'll be there."

I made arrangements for her to stay in the town's hostel. When I met her she was just checking in. She smiled and said hello, but I could tell that she wanted to get this over with. I understood that this would be uncomfortable for her. I was uncomfortable myself. "Why are you so interested in Simon?" she asked me.

"I guess I just want to help him," I said. "I guess I'm curious. He's from my hometown, you know? He's my friend."

"Hmm," she said.

I called Simon and told him to meet me in the park that day. While I was waiting for him I got to spend some time with Mina. There was a lot going on in her life. She couldn't talk about all of it. I could see why Simon had been so interested in her. She reminded me of the city. For all that I hated about the city I had forgotten that there are moments of beauty there, there are small things.

Simon came to the park at around three o'clock. It was a sunny day and the sky was blue. He saw me and came over to greet me, but then he saw Mina right behind me. Then he stopped. He stopped moving and stared at her. I looked at his face, but I could not tell what he was thinking. It was like he was in the middle of a thought.

"Mina," he said.

Then, slowly, he began to move upward. He kept looking at her. Mina ran up to where he was, but by that time he was above her head. "Simon," she shouted up to him. "I want to talk to you."

He said nothing. Very slowly, he rose up, and up into the sky.

"Simon," she said. "Please come down. Please come down. Please, please, please." He was no bigger than a dot in the sky. I looked up at him and then at her, and tears were forming in her eyes. She was looking up. "Simon," she said. "Please."

I was embarrassed. I was wrong. I couldn't see him in the sky anymore.

Later I took her to a coffee bar while we talked about what happened. She wiped her eyes. "Do you think he's dead? What if we never see him again?"

"I think he'll come back," I said. "I don't think he's dead."

"What was going on with him?" she asked me.

"I don't know," I said. "I thought if he could talk to you then he would be okay. I didn't know that—I didn't know."

She sipped on whatever her drink was. "I don't know either."

I was silent for a moment, then I said, "Maybe he just felt powerless. I thought he would want to talk to you. Maybe he thought that there was nothing he could do."

She didn't say anything.

"How come you didn't feel the same way about him?" I asked.

"Please," she said. For a second I thought she was going to say that we didn't need to talk about it. "I was interested in this other guy at the time," she said. "Well, I mean, he's my boyfriend now, so I'm still interested I guess. But Simon, I mean—yeah, he's fun, and he's cute and he's a good guy, but I just couldn't see it that way. It occurred to me once—" She put down her drink. "The thought did occur to me once. But two things happened. First I realized that the only times I ever saw him was at the bar, which means that the only times I saw him he was drunk or about to get drunk. Then, my boyfriend finally asked me if he could be my boyfriend. So when Simon asked me out it was too late. It just happened that way. I'm sorry." She took another sip, and then said, "No, I'm not sorry. I'm sorry that he's gone now, but I'm not sorry for what I did."

"So there was nothing he could do," I said.

She did not answer. Maybe a minute or so passed before she said, "Who knows anything. I don't know why things happen the way they do. You don't either. Nobody does. Why can't we just let things happen the way they happen?"

I thought about what she said later on.

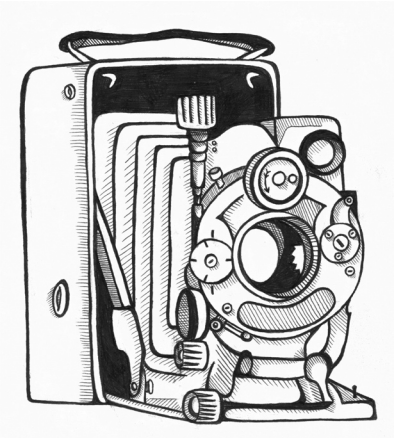
A few days passed and Simon had not come back. I wasn't sure if he was going to. His landlord evicted him, but I took his possessions in case he wanted them when he came back. I found his journal, the one he wrote in after meeting Mina. Some of it was illegible. I read through the entry that he mentioned to me earlier, the one when he realized he loved her. I found this passage towards the end of it:

Let's talk about things that we like, let's mention to each other how we feel. Let's form opinions about complicated situations. Will you stay with me even if I bother you? If you want me to leave, will you please tell me? I have to know these kinds of things. Please, you need to help me. You need to let me know. You have

to tell me. Please, please. Let's find a distinction. Let's talk about things instead of talking about stuff. You can talk to me, please, it's okay. Why don't you have a seat. I'll just be here, of course, always. You can take my head into your hands, I would like to rest please. I'm so sorry. Please tell me that it will be okay. Please tell me how you feel. I talk about myself so much. I'd like to hear about you for a change. How are you doing? Please tell me everything. I want to know everything about you. I want to know. Please help me. Please help yourself. Please. Please. Please.

That night I dreamt about ducks, that there were thousands of ducks and they were all angry with me. I dreamt about Mina. I dreamt that Mina was there and she was telling me something, but I couldn't remember what it was. I dreamt about Simon taking off like a space shuttle, like a bird. I dreamt that Simon was back on the ground. I dreamt that Mina was somewhere and that I was with her.

When I woke up I was in my bed. But I could have sworn, I could have believed that I had been at least two inches off the ground.



## CHELSY MEYERS | **HAZARD, KENTUCKY**

I hear the car pull up as I finish clearing off the table, and I know that they are back. Again. I take my time shaking the bread crumbs out the window for the chickens, then cover the plates as I put them back on the shelf to keep the dust off. I hear Mama talking to them outside, then sure enough, "Kids, come out here! Guess who's back?"

But I know who's back and I know why they're here, and I hate them for it. Hate them for the way they parade us around in front of that camera, hate them for the way they smile and say how cute we all are, when the only reason we're all so small is because there's not enough food to eat, hate them for talking about whether making us smile or frown would "appeal more to their audience," … but mostly I hate them for the way the blond one keeps looking at Mama.

Every time it's the same. They drag all nine of us out of the house and start to arrange us, first a photo with youngest in front and oldest in back, then girls in front, boys in back. It makes me feel like one of Tom's tin soldiers that he moves around in battle, first right, then left. They always leave Cara in the front. I may be the oldest, but that doesn't seem to matter to these men. What they do care about is Cara, with her round cheeks, sparkling brown eyes, and "delicate" figure, as they

say. I wonder how her brown eyes will matter in black and white.

But Mama says this is a real opportunity, that until the rain comes our crops can't grow, but that maybe if the city people get a real feel for what's happening out here, they'll help us.

I wouldn't count on city folk if they're anything like these two men. Though it's nearly a hundred degrees out, they're both wearing pants with slick jackets. The darker one sweated on me as he adjusted my arm around my brother Steve. I felt it on my cheek and was going to tell him as much, but Mama must have seen my face because she just gave me one of her looks and I clammed up.

At least there's no wind today, to stir the dust up into a fearsome storm that can choke both mouth and mind. I know it can, because every time the wind comes I try to sing Little Boy Blue in my head but I can't. It's as if the dust blows right through my ears into my brain and clogs it, so all I can think of is dust dust dust.

Once they finish their pictures for the day, and both of the men's suits seemed to have become a shade darker, Mama suggests that the nine of us take our lunch outside. I know what that means, even if the others don't. It means Mama wants time alone with the blond man. I don't know what the other man does in the house—he's fat, so maybe it takes him longer to eat.

I want to say something to Mama, beg her not to, but it's not worth it. I tried a few months ago, the first time they came, to warn her. I told her he looked like the type of man who smiles in your face as he steals the money out of your pocket, they way Pa use to describe the no-goods who came 'round to our house when the dust storms first started destroying the crops. Mama slapped my face and told me never to talk like that or even think like that again, that they were nice men who were doing everything they could to help us. I asked her why they would do so much for us when we can't even pay them for it. She had walked away.

I watched her as she walked out of the small kitchen, into the hall towards the back door. Her blue dress swished, and she left behind a cloud of dust, making her whole body shimmer. The bottom of her skirt was ragged, and all of it was streaked in dirt. Her hair used to be softly golden, but once the earth started to dry up so had she, and now it was rough and a dirty brown. There was dirt in the wrinkles on her face, in her nose, between her teeth. Sometimes she'd sit down and smooth her eyebrows out, only to shake more dirt from them. However, whenever she hears their car pull up, she rubs a bandana over her face and combs her hair quick, shaking it out as she goes. Her eyes used to sparkle, but she can't bring that back. She couldn't rub, comb, or shake the light back.

After she tells me to go gather everyone up for lunch outside, I scowl, making sure she doesn't see, then run back up the steps to the kitchen. In our cupboard is about 3/4ths of a loaf of dry, crusty bread. I pull it out, then grab a pitcher to fill with water. We have some milk left, but Mama likes to save that for breakfast. It took me a long time to get used to milk that needed chewing to get down.

Back outside, squinting at the glaring sun, I gather up the other eight and give Cara and Tom the pitcher to fill up from our well. We are one of the only families with a well. Right when it didn't rain two Mays ago, Pa began to worry something was wrong. Mama thought he was crazy at first, and yelled at him for getting our neighbor Mr. Chagel to help dig the hole. After a month of no rain, the yelling stopped. That's when the whispering began.

We troop over to the one tree we still have, an oak, out in the middle of the field behind our house. We wait for Cara and Tom to carefully carry over the water pitcher while I start ripping up the bread into hunks. While Cara is silly most of the time and Tom usually thinks of nothing but his soldiers, they are very serious while doing this. Even they know how important the water is, and how devastating losing even a drop would be. Steve is trying to keep baby Laura, almost two, from squirming out of his arms and running to Cara until the water has been set safely down.

I give everyone their bread and we pass around the water jug, then take a seat on the dirt. There is no grass left to sit on, except in our one little patch of garden on the side of the house, and Mama would kill us if she caught any of us near it. I don't feel much like eating, though I'm sure there'll be nothing for dinner. I just keep staring at the back of the house, wishing Mama would come out. The house stares back, and for just a second I think I see the curtains move in Mama's room. Our house looks hungry and alone, sitting there in the middle of nothing. I can't see the blond man's car from here, but I know the shiny black paint looks out of place. Everything not starving and covered in dust looks out of place here. Bobby, who's only three, crawls into my lap and curls up to eat. I am a little surprised; usually the young ones go to Cara. Normally I would push him off to the side a bit, but this time I wrap my arms around him and sniff his head. He looks so skinny to me. He has dust all up and down his back, and both of his shoulder blades are sticking out, looking like they are trying to touch each other. His brown hair is very thin, as though it could blow away with the dust the next time the wind picks up. He must have lost his shirt sometime between the photos and lunch.

I look around, remembering what our life used to look like, remembering the corn that Cara, Tom and I use to play hide and seek in with Pa. The others had been too young, and Mama always worried one of us would get lost in the high spikes

and endless rows of golden green corn. But Pa always found us.

Now the fields are bare. Every few months there'll be a light rain, and the next morning a blanket of green will be tucked in all around our house, but it hardly lasts more than a few days. Mama says it'll rain sometime, that it has to, but I don't believe her. Why start now if it hasn't in two years?

The little ones don't mind as much. Even Steve, who's almost six, can barely remember what the green looked like. They like the dust. Not when it's blowing through our house and into our food, but outside they love playing in it. They have dust fights, make dirt houses, and roll down the dust hills that are sometimes forgotten by the heat of the storm and left behind. At first Mama yelled when they came in so dirty. Now she never says a word about it, except to remind them to shake out before getting into their beds.

I used to think that the field was what changed the most, from yellows and green and reds to brown. From plants toppling over on each other from being so ripe with vegetables to flat nothingness. But now…now I think it's Mama who's changed the most. She used to be more strong-headed, more talkative, and more opinionated, like me. She used to laugh more. Not the fake laugh she puts on for those city men, but a real, thundering laugh that always surprised Pa and made us little ones squeal with delight, even when we didn't know what the joke was. I haven't heard her laugh in a long, long time.

Suddenly, we all hear a woman scream. I drop my scrap of crust into the dirt and shove Bobby off my lap before I run back towards the house, just as I hear the porch door slam shut. Both of the men are heading back to the car now, the blond one looking angry, the round one saying, "I told you not to get involved with a country whore like that, Lenny. Jesus, she's got a family with nine kids to deal with, what'd you think she'd expect?"

They stuff their equipment into their car and speed off, making an angry dust cloud that seems to chase them as they drive away. I look back to see that only Steve has taken a step closer to the house. The others are still huddled around the tree. Bobby is stuffing his fist in his mouth, licking the last few crumbs off his gritty little hand. The identical twins Sydney and Tammy are sitting like identical statues, and the wind slowly twisting their golden hair together. Mama is on the porch, weeping and holding her cheek. As I run to her I see an angry welt on the side of her face. I cradle her head and tell her not to worry, that we're better off alone. She just shakes her head, and I watch as the ground thirstily drinks up her sorrow.

* * *

I make sure Laura, Cara, and the twins shake out all of their clothes and brush off their feet before getting into bed, but it is never any use. The sheets still feel coarse and grainy against my skin, and no matter what way I turn the dust burrows into my skin, my hair, my thoughts. I try not to move too much and wake up Laura, who sleeps next to me, but there are some nights that are worse than others. My legs feel dirty and itchy, and the dirt between my toes is rough, like a thousand tiny rocks. Cara says it's no worse than lying on the ground outside, but she's wrong, because outside it's supposed to be hard and dirty feeling on your back. Not inside. Not in bed.

I can feel dirt when I curl my fingers up, slipping into the creases of my fingers. A breeze is always blowing a little through the cracks in the wall and floor, and it makes the dust scurry over me in a rush to find a hideout. Like tiny bugs too small to smash they scramble over my arms, legs and face. I try for a few more minutes to get comfortable before deciding it is impossible. Quietly I slip out of bed and make sure the others are still asleep. Tammy is sucking her thumb, and I can see brown smudges on her hand where her saliva has mixed with the dust. Looking around the room, I can see the four tiny bodies nestled together. Cara's legs already stick off the end of the bed a little. Laura has completely hidden her head under the blanket to try and avoid dirt from getting in her mouth, but it never works. Sydney cries out a little in her sleep, and for a second I think her eyes will flicker open. Instead she rolls to her side, creating a shield around herself. There is only one tiny cabinet in the room with our clothing in it, and when it is cold at night we wear most of it anyway. Wondering if we all would still be sharing a room if Pa had gotten a chance to add the addition he had talked about, I open the door and shut it quietly behind me, then creep down the stairs to the kitchen and take a seat at the table.

Bobby collapsed today. He was playing tag with Steve and the twins when he suddenly collapsed. Sam and Peter had been making dirt forts with a few rocks and started screaming when they saw him fall. Tom and I yelled for Mama and then ran to Bobby. His whole body was twitching and his eyes kept flickering open and closed, like a crazy person. Dust billowed up around him, as though the ground was getting ready to open up its maw and pull Bobby right in. Shamefully I wondered what those city folk would think of a picture of *this.*

There's some fancy scientific name for it, but most folks around here just call them the sweatin' shakes. It happens sometimes, when people are working or running around, they just collapse for no reason and roll all around. Their eyes circle back into their heads, their jaws clench up, and they shake. They look like they're trying to do a jig on their back with their eyes closed. Usually it stops after a few

minutes and the person can get back up and go about his business. Usually.

Bobby did. He still gave us the jitters though; it was rare to get the sweatin' shakes in someone so young, and none of us had ever seen anyone have them before, let alone someone in our family. Mr Chagel's wife had them a few months ago and he had told Mama all about them. Laura had nightmares for a week after, nightmares where all of us fall at the same time and no one can help her back up. Cara is the one who gets up at night and comfort her.

But the shakes weren't the worse part about today. Mama came out while Bobby was still having his fit. We all turned towards her, waiting for her to grab him or talk to him or do something, but she didn't. She stood there like the rest of us, not knowing what to do. When he stopped she asked, "Tom? Is he still alive?" Tom looked so surprised that he ran over and shook him a little, then nodded when Bobby started mumbling. Mama just shook her head and walked back inside. The kids went back to playing after Bobby had caught his breath, and after I had sneaked him a sip of water from the well. Mama has very strict rules about only taking one pitcher full of water from the well for each meal, but she wasn't around to ask.

I thought about all this while sitting at the table. With Pa gone and Mama as she was, I knew our family didn't have a shot. We would starve like the Wooster kids a few miles down. Their parents ran off, and they suffocated in the dust storm that hit the next day, all five of them. I heard they found the oldest one, a boy named Johnny, halfway between his house and his neighbors, like he had been running to them to get help before the storm hit. His mouth and nose had been packed full of dirt. No one has a chance of surviving outdoors when a dust storm comes round.

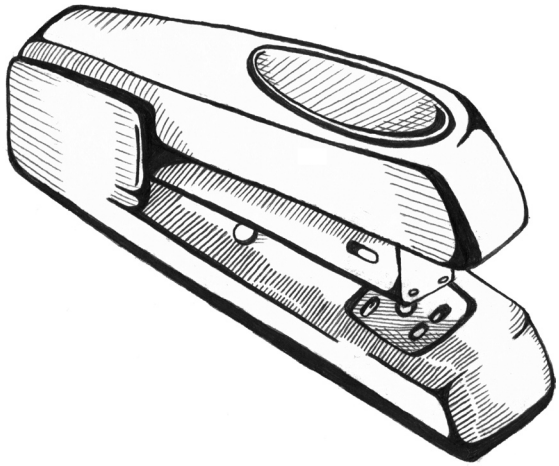
We didn't have dinner today, or the day before. We are going to end up like the Wooster kids, unless I do something about it. Pa knew that Mama wouldn't be able to hold us all together. He whispered in my ear before he died, telling me that I had to be strong and look out for the others now, that I had to be in charge of them, that once he was gone Mama would need me. At first I didn't understand what he had meant. Mama grew quieter, but seemed the same. It wasn't until after the city men came that I began to understand, and it wasn't until Bobby had his fit that I knew.

I walk over to our cupboard. We have half a loaf of bread and two small potatoes left in it. That was it. I rip off only the smallest bit of bread from the end of the loaf and put it in the front pocket of my dress. Then I go outside into Pa's old work shed. Inside he kept a canteen with a black stopper in it. I carry it to the well and fill it up to the brim, then take a long sip from the bucket. I look back at the house and realize I have on everything I own. Everything I would need.

I can never help my family if I stay here. There is nothing left to do here but

die waiting for the rain. I wouldn't let that happen, not to me and not to my family. The city men drove here in two hours, so it couldn't take too long to walk there, only a few days. Once in the city I might be able to find work, or a train to hitch out west. Mr. Chagel had told Mama that that's what everyone was doing, moving to the cities or heading out west. There is work out west. There is food out west. There is rain. I am little but strong, and can read and write well and figure some. I would make enough money to feed the others until Mama is well again.

I check to make sure my bandana is in my other pocket, loop the canteen strap over my shoulder, and take one last long look at the house. I see Laura at the window, and for a minute I think she is about to scream and spoil everything, and a small part of me wishes she would as I feel doubt and fear rise inside of me and almost take over my body and force me running back towards the house. But then she just puts her hand up on the glass, and I wonder how I must look to her, her older sister, standing outside in the moonlight in a worn and filthy dress, with dust swirling around trying to catch me in its giant and unforgiving maw. I put my hand up too, and as I turn away I feel a tear slip down my cheek. It is already turning brown.



## CHELSY MEYERS | THE DEPENDABLE RONALD HUBBARD, AND HOW PEOPLE FELT ABOUT HIM

Ronald Hubbard was an ordinary man, mostly. He wore a tie to work, typically blue and white striped, and he rarely took the time to shine his shoes. He liked eggs without the yolk because one time his sister told him the yolk was too unhealthy. He never drank coffee because he thought he'd become addicted to it if he tried it once. Instead he drank tea, usually a chai or mint of some sort, with a tablespoon of clove honey stirred in. He'd had an instant hot water tap installed when he first moved into his apartment, but he preferred using a teapot because he liked the noise it made when it whistled. He never used to wash plates and cups and spoons before putting them in the dishwasher, but his mother had recently told him about a news report she had seen (though not through the windows of a store) which had informed her of how dishwashers simply could not clean every particle of bacteria off of their dishes unless they were thoroughly scrubbed first. The lack of yolk made the plates and forks easier to wash, though did little to help the cups. The spoons agreed with his mother.

Because that was the other thing about Ronald Hubbard. His appliances, furniture, books—all inanimate objects, really—loved him. And he loved them back. He treated them well, absentmindedly patting the toaster or the fridge when he walked past them, always making sure everything was scratch free. At night the couches would crowd closer to him, pillows would creep into the air pockets under his knees and elbows, and blankets would wrap themselves around his legs and arms and once, accidentally, his neck. All of the blankets were different shades of blue, because an ex-girlfriend had once told him they brought out his eyes. Ronald Hubbard's eyes were brown.

If Ronald Hubbard decided to watch TV at night, his television would strive to create the clearest picture it could, wriggling its antennas back and forth to catch the best signals. It too would move close to Ronald Hubbard, but not so close as to damage his eyes, his brown eyes which were brought out by the blue blankets. It understood the importance of eyes, unlike Ronald Hubbard's younger sister, who would read at night with only a dim desk lamp on. Her desk lamp was not concerned.

Nothing every broke, hardly ever, and even if they did they would try to fix themselves up on their own. Ronald Hubbard once walked in to find a fork awkwardly bent into the back of his microwave while an innocent toaster sat by with his plug wrapped around the handle. The microwave was fixed three days later.

At night spoons and clocks and occasionally a blender would work their way into his bed. Women would ask him why, and Ronald Hubbard would shrug his shoulders, "I really don't know." However, women were rarely present in Ronald Hubbard's apartment. There had been one, the one who suggested the blankets, but that had been more than two years ago. She left because she claimed she couldn't really get to know him, no matter how much time they spent together. Ronald Hubbard had been crushed. He had few friends, being on the quiet side, though anyone you asked would say he was "the nicest guy". Ronald Hubbard was OK with this description. He sometimes wished though that someone, and not just his things, would want to get closer to him.

Pens would always end up in his pockets, highlighters, scissors, and once a stapler. It was nice to have most of them on hand. The stapler got a talking to.

In the morning, every morning, Ronald Hubbard, after washing his dishes before putting them in the dishwasher, went to work. He could afford a car, but he'd heard from his dad that he could be saving thousands a year if he didn't. And so Ronald Hubbard took the bus. The green line, to be exact. It didn't quite go with his tie, but like the blue blankets it helped to bring out his eyes.

And so one morning, this particular morning, Ronald Hubbard went about

making his usual breakfast and choosing his typical tie. For Ronald Hubbard, this was any other day. He packed his lunch, the same way his mother had ever since he was in grade school, apple and orange on the bottom, sandwich on the top (still without mustard). The only change was that he had since exchanged his Tropicana in a can for a bottle of water, as Jim Stevens from his office had told him that Tropicana is just as bad for you as soda. Ronald Hubbard took his word for it.

On the bus he sat next to a woman, a plump little thing with perfect dimples in each elbow. Ronald Hubbard was a man who could appreciate a few good dimples. Her grey hair was curly, as were the few whiskers under her chin. She had small eyes and wrinkles around her eyes that showed she was prone to smiles. Her earrings were long and jangly. She had a name tag on, and it read BARBARA SHILE, NATIONAL EDUCATION CONFERENCE. She didn't squirm when Ronald Hubbard sat down next to her, and this was a shock. It wasn't that Ronald Hubbard was extraordinary or intimidating in looks—he was quite regular looking in fact—but it wasn't often that someone seeing him for the first time wouldn't be startled by the paper clips dangling from his glasses, or the remote control sticking out of his blue suit pocket. The way the entire bus seemed to lean inwards when he stood in the aisle tended not to help matters either. One time, one of the few bad times, a balding man he had sat next to became quite perturbed when he noticed his watch had slipped off his wrist and was making its way into Ronald Hubbard's sock. He had quickly excused himself, approximately 27 blocks away from his destination.

So this ordinary looking rotund woman not at all frazzled by Ronald Hubbard's attire was, in fact, quite the opposite of ordinary. She slid her roly-poly bottom across the seat, leaving just enough room for Ronald Hubbard and his friends to squeeze in next to her. The bus seat did everything it could to accommodate.

Ronald Hubbard smiled at the woman, and then politely turned away, paper clips gently clinking with the slight turn of his head. He giggled at them, then slipped them off his glasses and into his pocket. The women watched.

"Can I have one of those? I like to have something to play with during conferences. Better than listening and trying to stay awake, eh?" She stuck out one beefy palm, though there was barely enough room between her and the window to lift her arm. It squeaked a little as her skin slid up the glass.

Ronald Hubbard broke into a small sweat. The idea of one of his precious items not only being given to a stranger, but a stranger who was open about her mutilation plans, was almost too much for him to fathom. "I'm sorry, no. They don't like that, really. Being played with. Or given away. I really do wish I could help. Really." For Ronald Hubbard, saying no was difficult. "Maybe it'll be more interesting this

time?" Ronald Hubbard was never rude, but he had to keep his paperclips safe.

The woman, who was dressed in red, which clashed terribly with her orange name tag, was now shocked. Before she could properly respond to Ronald Hubbard's statement and tell him exactly what she thought about a man who couldn't part with a paper clip, her name tag, which had been wiggling with excitement ever since he came on the bus, now jumped to him, mildly choking her. Ronald Hubbard spent the next three blocks wrestling with the woman's name tag. He smiled absentmindedly at her while wiping sweat off his brow, and was sure she would have smiled back had she caught her breathe by then. Ronald Hubbard got off the bus.

This, while unusual, was not what made this day the day. Ronald Hubbard said hello to Henry, the doorman, who had first suggested he start wearing a gold watch instead of silver. Henry's father had told him that gold was the color of power, while silver was a sure way to show someone you were merely second rate. Ronald Hubbard was in no position to disagree with Henry's father.

So into the building he walked and on to the elevator he strolled. When the doors closed a mirror appeared, but Ronald Hubbard barely notice his reflection as he pushed the button for the 5th floor. He did not see the deep blue suit, the white and blue striped tie like his older brother always wore, the glasses free of all but one particularly aggressive paper clip. His unshined shoes still drew the attention of several coins that had been forgotten on the ground, but before they could make it inside the door opened and Ronald Hubbard stepped out.

He walked down the windowless hallway to his cubicle. On the way he passed Jim Stevens desk, and, as usual, stopped for a quick chat.

"Good morning Jim."

"Good morning to you too. What's in your pocket today?"

"Just some pens and paper clips, a remote control. Oh, and—" Ronald Hubbard looked down to see the plump woman from the bus had let her earring escape, and now it sat in the palm of his hand. It was orange, to match the name tag. But this was not unusual for Ronald Hubbard.

"Going to drop it off in the lost and found at the bus station on the way home?" He nodded. Jim Stevens was probably what you could call Ronald Hubbard's best friend. Occasionally they grabbed lunch together; rather Jim would join Ronald in the kitchen to eat. Jim had previously invited Ronald to poker games at his place along with some fellow coworkers, but Ronald Hubbard had always declined. He felt that, while he truly believed Jim was his friend, going to his place with other guys would be incredibly uncomfortable for him. While he knew he was known as

a "nice guy," he also knew that socially he had a void of sorts that had always been with him and never really went away, even when he had been with her. The last thing Ronald Hubbard wanted to do was to make his closest friend feel awkward around him. And so with a smile and slight nod he would decline these offers.

"Guess I better head to my desk now," Ronald Hubbard said, barely noticing the coffee splashing out of its mug while it tried to sneak closer to him. Jim was used to this, and he moved it to the far side of his desk. As the ring of brown began to spread onto a few papers, he said nonchalantly, "you know, where your pictures are on your desk reflect the light right back at you. If I was you I'd move them to the other side." Jim began to clean up the spill with a paper towel he took from the roll under his desk. Something about Ronald Hubbard intrigued Jim, and he liked spending time with him and trying to crack his outer shell. It hadn't worked out yet. The coffee cup could sympathize.

Ronald Hubbard nodded and headed to the corner where his cubicle was, and a few employees groaned good-naturedly as their walls leaned towards him and knocked down a picture or two. However, most were familiar with Ronald Hubbard and his strange attraction by now.

Sitting at his desk for a few seconds, only long enough to neatly slip off his damp blue jacket and hang it on a little hook near where the wall of his cubicle ended, Ronald Hubbard began rearranging his pictures. He had approximately one picture per family member—mom, dad, older sister, older brother, and younger sister. Five pictures total. His older brother had warned him about putting in pictures of friends or, more particularly, girlfriends. It was awkward putting them up if it was too soon, and even more awkward taking them down. Plus, how would the picture frames feel? They only put up a slight complaint about the move, but once they saw that they'd be the same distance from him they settled down.

Most of the things in the office had learned to behave as well. There had been a small problem with a new copying machine about a month ago, but once it realized that it could not in fact fit into the cubicle with Ronald Hubbard, it settled for the occasional pat during his lunch break. That is, after it had been moved onto his side of the office.

And so Ronald Hubbard began his work for that day, and he worked steadily for three hours. Erasers began to make their move towards his lap in half the time—they never could control themselves. By the time his lunch hour rolled around, only the water cooler and a coat rack had made any significant progress towards his cubicle, both of which he easily maneuvered around to get into the lunch room. Apple first, then sandwich, then an orange to finish. Ronald Hubbard liked his

lunches exactly the way they were. Ronald Hubbard was a man of habit.

It was on his way back from the lunchroom that Ronald Hubbard made his mistake. As he headed towards his cubicle he was distracted by two paper airplanes which were trying to use his shoulders as landing strips. They'd slip off immediately every time, but would typically keep up the attempt for a few minutes. Ronald Hubbard let them try.

A woman was standing next to his desk, new. Ronald Hubbard was not used to new women, especially new women with honey golden curls flowing down their backs. Especially new women who stood at his cubicle as if waiting for him to arrive. Especially women who turned around and said with their perfect mouths, "Hi, Ronald right? I'm Sam. This is my first day here, I'm helping out in the accounting department downstairs. Someone told me you could help me figure out how to install the new program we just got into my computer. Numbers are my thing, but I'm kind of technologically challenged. And I'm trying to figure out the program while filling in all this paperwork." She gestured to a stack of yellow and pink forms to her right. "Which reminds me, can I borrow a pen?"

Maybe he was too focused on the airplanes. Maybe he was thinking about the woman from the bus who couldn't breathe for a full block because of her disloyal nametag. Maybe the chicken in his chicken salad sandwich was a little off that day. Or maybe it was because he had never seen a woman so incredibly beautiful before, nor had any woman talked more than one sentence to him in the past six months, but something in him turned off and he said yes, pulling out a pen and handing it to her before he could think. The pen was not pleased.

After agreeing to come down and take a look at her computer in about an hour, Ronald Hubbard sat down, not knowing exactly what he had gotten himself in to. Neither did anything else. Not a pot, fan, or cell phone could comprehend exactly what had just happened. It took a full three minutes for it to sink in with the objects nearest him. It took only five minutes for the whispering to begin. Pens to chairs, chairs to faded grey cubicle walls, in less than ten minutes the entire office knew. And it began to turn on Ronald.

His co-employees couldn't quite understand what was going on, but even they could sense that there was a problem. Their walls straightened, no longer leaning in the direction of his cubicle. Pens no longer rolled off the desks, but stayed exactly where they were. His photos quietly moved back to their original spots next to the wall. The coat rack edged away from him. The copying machine, for the first time since it had come to the office, broke.

Ronald Hubbard, in his cubicle, couldn't understand what was going on, or

why. All he noticed, after throwing away his paper bag from lunch into the trashcan under his desk (his dad always told him never to move on to his next task until he finished the first one), was that there was a certain stillness around his desk. The paper clips had fallen to the floor, and laid there, unmoving. The pens, though a few had poked him only moments ago, ceased to snuggle into the warmth of his thigh. The erasers were, for once, in the place where erasers should always have been.

He headed downstairs the next hour to help Sam with her computer. Everything went exactly the way it should when loading a program. Ronald Hubbard was distraught. Normally, the CD practically jumped out of his hand to get into the computer, and once inserted would load within seconds. Never had he had to wait 5 minutes for the CD to begin installing. Never had he had to wait the additional 13 minutes and 27 seconds for it to actually install. Ronald Hubbard was baffled.

Sam was interested in Ronald Hubbard. She knew nothing of his effect on things, but something about him had caught her eye. He had struck her as genuine, nice. Her past boyfriends had not been nice. Unfortunately, her attempts at small talk had been futile. Ronald Hubbard, normally shy, was too confused and upset to take much notice of these attempts. After roughly 38 minutes, he headed back upstairs to his cubicle. Nothing noticed.

That night, going home, the bus did not show him any special treatment. In his apartment he still patted the counters, the tables, the fridge, but nothing responded. In bed that night, for the first night since he could remember when, Ronald Hubbard slept completely alone.

The next day he got up and began to go through his normal routine—the tie, the eggs without yolk, chai tea—but everything felt different. He decided to make his tea using the instant hot water instead of his tea pot for once. Ronald Hubbard thought maybe they just needed to see a little change in him. Nothing changed.

He got to the bus stop that morning, but as it pulled up it seemed menacing. It didn't lean towards him, the bumper didn't curl up on the sides like usual. Ronald Hubbard stared at the hostile bus for a few seconds, and then, panicked, turned and quickly walked down the block in the opposite direction.

The street was crowded and yet Ronald Hubbard felt completely alone. Everyone looked the same in heavy grey coats, many with umbrellas in their hand. Ronald Hubbard had forgotten to check the weather that day and was therefore umbrella-less. But even if he had seen the forecast, he may have avoided his umbrella anyway.

Walking through the mob of people on the sidewalk, Ronald Hubbard didn't know where to turn. They sky was grey, the people were grey, and nowhere in his

pockets could a single item be found to comfort him. He kept sticking his hand in as deep into the blue as he could, searching for anything, but there was nothing, not even a single paper clip. The walls of the stores that lined the sidewalk had never stood so straight, street lights had never looked so unfriendly. Back at his office, his co workers had nearly all arrived, and Henry and Jim Stevens were wondering where he was. Sam, one floor down, would have flashes of him through her mind as she began her second day of work.

Ronald Hubbard kept stumbling along, not sure where to go or what to do, when he saw a sign that said "Repairs" across the street. He quickly crossed, forgetting that cars would no longer pay special attention to him. As he neared the store he saw a television in the window. It was on, but the picture was all static. Ronald Hubbard leaned closer, but nothing happened to fix the picture. He put his hand on the glass, then his face, then pressed his whole body against it, but nothing happened to the television. And all around him people continued to swirl past, no one noticing a thing. Ronald Hubbard stared at the television, mentally begged it to turn off, or change the channel, or even just produce a slightly clearer picture, but nothing happened. Nothing changed. Nothing seemed to be aware of poor Ronald Hubbard, standing outside and alone in the almost rain. The shop window was full of broken electronics, but if anything they all seemed to turn their backs towards him.

Ronald Hubbard had silenced them all, but there was no one around to tell him what to do next.

But then again, maybe there was. What was her name…Sam? Sam something. She would know. Ronald Hubbard had to talk to her.

Ronald Hubbard turned from the window and walked back in the rain to the bus stop. He got on, but didn't bother to look and see if Barbara Shile was on the bus again. He stared out the window, trying to stay calm, though subconsciously kept checking his pockets for pens and staplers. There were none to be found. He felt the bus could not move any slower—and maybe it was moving slowly on purpose. Ronald Hubbard could not tell.

He got off in front of his office and chose to take the stairs instead of the elevator. He wasn't sure he could trust it just then. Ronald Hubbard, still somewhat passive, did a quick jog-hop up the steps to the fourth floor. Once there he looked around until he saw her honey hair shining. Ronald Hubbard walked quickly to her.

"You have to help me," he stammered out.

"What?" Sam looked up, just as lovely as she was yesterday. Her eyes got an extra sparkle in them when she saw who was talking. Ronald Hubbard did not notice. "Oh, hi Ronald. Jim was looking for you earlier, he said you'd never been sick

before. Wait, what'd you say?"

"You have to help me. It's…this is your fault. I think. Not your fault, like you did something wrong, though I guess you did, kind of, but it's because of you, and you, you have to help." Sweat dripped down his forehead, he shifted from foot to foot, his hands moved back and forth frantically like a crazed conductor.

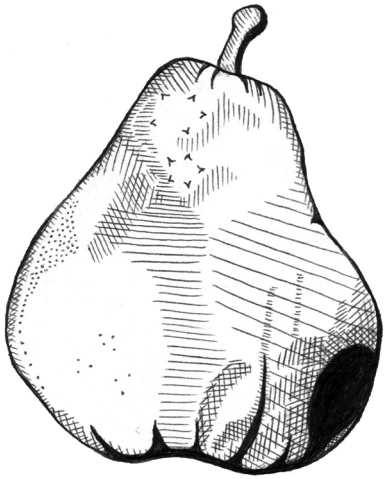
Sam didn't know what to do. A part of her wanted to sweep him up in her arms and comfort him. But the other part of her was shocked at what he had said. "I'm sorry, maybe I misinterpreted you, I did something? And what exactly did I do?" She leaned on her desk with her right hand.

Ronald Hubbard slumped over onto her cubicle wall. He was shaking. How did he tell this woman that she had somehow taken away the one thing he had to depend on for comfort? For friendship? How did he tell her that with one lovely look, he had betrayed the only thing that had never let him down? Never judged him for doing or not doing something? How did Ronald Hubbard, a man who had always been so passive all his life, tell this gorgeous girl that he felt he had to act for once, do something, but had never learned how?

Sam looked Ronald Hubbard straight in the face. His brown eyes looked sad, but there was something else there. Sam wanted to ask him what he wanted exactly, what he was thinking. Why he was so sad. If he had always been that say. Instead she just smiled softly, encouragingly. And next to her hand, a pen slowly rolled closer to Ronald Hubbard.

Ronald Hubbard nodded, then paused. "Want to go get lunch?" Sam smiled at him and grabbed her coat.

That night, the blender and clocks and spoons left Ronald Hubbard alone in his bed. He and Sam didn't mind. And the next morning, when his mother called to tell him to put on a sweater, he politely told her he didn't think it was necessary and hung up. Ronald Hubbard made breakfast for two that morning. His eggs were no longer yolk free.



## JULIA JIN WANG | TEN YEARS ALONE ON A HILL

Much later, the Sombreuil's fragrance was to stampede through the house, starting from the paper-filled basement, careening into the dining room, up and up through the second-floor garden, Tu2's bedroom, crashing through the laboratory on the third floor and exploding straight up through the roof. It was to hover over the battlements before crashing down in a deluge, shattering the pictures on the walls.

For now, the Sombreuil bush stood in darkness a good ten yards to the right of the house; the house stood on a hill; the hill held nothing alive except for the Sombreuil meant for the bee. The bee, however, was not to enter the picture until much later, and then only for a moment, so perhaps its importance was overrated.

In this condition it was found by a boy—or rather, a man, since he had a spray of light stubble upon his chin.

First, he smelled the Sombreuil roses. He looked around, alert, but it was dark. He inhaled deeply, allowing the fragrance to permeate throughout him and merge with him, and decided that it smelled of a pot of loose-leaf green tea. The pot was made out of clay—or no, he did not remember. It was irrelevant now. He had not eaten in days and an emptiness tore through him like an orange-clawed

monster and he winced, doubled over, hit his head on the side of the house.

The best words to describe what happened next would be that the hill breathed. Yes, the man felt the shuddering of not quite a guttural boom, but that of a large intake of vitality. The hill shook itself (not literally, of course). He lifted his head and had to squint against the brightness. He saw light spreading away from him, illuminating the green pastures beyond the hill. A moat encircled the foot of the hill. He did not remember crossing any waters, but there were lots of things he did not remember. He looked up and realized that he had bumped into the white stucco house. He knew, without looking, that the house looked like a block. It had a flat roof and no windows. The man pushed himself to his feet, grasping onto a certainty so tightly that it caused his liver to quake. He knew the white double doors waited for him. He imagined them swinging inward silently, and him walking through towards the fireplace within.

He realized that he had always known he would sooner or later arrive at this place. He looked down at his wrist. He did not have a watch, only a pale band of skin where his watch would have been. A twinge of nostalgia came over him, but for the moment he could not recall the subject of this strange melancholy and he was too anticipant for the future to attempt to remember.

He pushed open the double doors. They creaked under his weight. Before he reached the fireplace he collapsed onto the floor.

*Still in* BLACKOUT, *we hear the footsteps of someone walking steadily.*

DETECTIVE (*V.O.*): I have read this story many times. I know how it begins. I know how it should end. Despite her cruelty I have to admit that she has been right all along.

FADE IN.

INT. DETECTIVE'S OFFICE. DAWN.

*The office is unlighted.* DETECTIVE *is behind his desk. The desktop holds nothing except for an ashtray filled with cigarette butts, a picture frame facing away from us, and a stack of paper bound by string. The pages are disorderly and wrinkled, as if the manuscript has been read countless times. Behind him the bookshelf is full. The books are organized by size.* DETECTIVE *is in his mid-thirties. He keeps a five o'clock shadow.*

*Across from him sit* MAN *and* WOMAN. *We see them from behind.* WOMAN *has long black hair.* MAN *is bald.* MAN *is holding the hand of* WOMAN.

DETECTIVE *looks up from the manuscript at the couple. He stands up and walks a few steps towards the window. He twists open the vinyl blinds and dawn cuts through onto him. He stares out into the orange-red sky.*

DETECTIVE: This isn't right.

WOMAN: This is what he thinks.

DETECTIVE: Can you be sure?

WOMAN: I know my son. Look, you know his condition. He writes what he believes is going to happen.

DETECTIVE: I swear I've heard this story before.

MAN (*he speaks with a slight Southern drawl*): Good. That's what we're trying to find. He had a source.

DETECTIVE *frowns.*

MAN *looks at* WOMAN.

MAN: He has a, I mean, he has to have had a source.

DETECTIVE: Don't think too hard there, a man your age. (*He goes back to his desk, takes out some forms from the drawer and slides them across the desktop.*) I'm going to have you fill out this form. Name, age, social security, such. Standard procedure.

WOMAN: Have you read all those?

DETECTIVE: No, they're for show. Yes, I'm the real deal.

WOMAN: What makes you qualified for the job?

MAN *looks at her.*

DETECTIVE: I'd hate to remind you, lady, but you picked me.

WOMAN: Hardly.

MAN (*overlapping*): You are the best at finding things. This is terribly important to us.

DETECTIVE (*standing*): Would you like some more water? Coffee?

MAN: No, thanks.

WOMAN: No.

DETECTIVE: Now really.

WOMAN: Actually… since this'll be a while. It'd make sense.

DETECTIVE (*getting up*): Yes, it'd make sense.

DETECTIVE *walks around his desk, passes between the couple, towards us.* MAN *twists around to look at him, then at his wife.* WOMAN *gets up and follows* DETECTIVE *towards us.* MAN *grabs the form off the desk and gets up to follow.*

INT. DETECTIVE'S LIVING ROOM. DAWN.

DETECTIVE *emerges from his office.* WOMAN *and* MAN *emerge.*

DETECTIVE: Sit. I'll be back.

DETECTIVE *turns and disappears into the kitchen. We hear the refrigerator open and bags rustling.*

MAN: Let us—

DETECTIVE (*off*): Sit. Unless you want some beer.

MAN *and* WOMAN *sit down on the sofa. We hear the refrigerator shut, and general commotion in the kitchen.*

DETECTIVE (*off, cont'd*): I'm listening.

Second, he woke up. He looked at his wrist but only saw a pale band of skin. He did not know how much time had passed, and to wonder at it seemed increasingly senseless. The sun was a bit higher but it was still early in the day. He felt his head with the back of his hand. He had a fever and his nails were purple from the cold. There were logs in the fireplace. He made a fire. He went into the kitchen.

The pantry was full. The refrigerator had cold beer, grapefruit juice, and turkey slices laid neatly in Tupperware. While holding open the refrigerator door the back of his neck prickled and he had a feeling of being watched. He lost his appetite.

He went to the bathroom. For a long while now he believed that time was chipping away at his body. He prepared himself for the image of a tired, aged man, and looked himself in the eye. He noted the surprise, then the iron-willed stare that attempted to camouflage fear. His eyes quivered and moved onto the rest of the reflection.

His hair had turned a dull gray and, though still short, had the longish softness of a woman. The skin around his mouth sagged, or it might have been an illusion created by his incredulous expression. His nails were cutting into his palms and he unclenched to look at them. They were old and yellow, but still short, only in need of a little trim.

He had relied on his image telling him how old he was and therefore how much time had passed. He cocked his head in consideration. He looked foreign, like a creature that can be young and old at the same time. Now he was unsure of how to act, afraid of acting out of place. "There's no one else here," he told himself, which helped him feel a bit more confident. He was, then, a fantastical being. He laughed softly. His headache worsened, so he stopped thinking.

Third, he checked out the house.

In the very center of the house was a spiral staircase. He studied it with amazement. It seemed to have no support system, yet it spiraled through all three floors and up through the roof. He looked up at the hole to the roof. The circle of brilliant light pierced his eyes and he quickly looked away. He decided to go upstairs later. He wanted to see the basement.

He expected the basement door to open to a burst of chill, the way they did in science fiction films. Yet the door was not made of metal or glass. It was wooden and

whitewashed like all the other doors in the house. The man wrinkled his nose against the musk. He paused on the last step of the wooden stairway and gripped the railing.

In the center of the basement, the elevator stood as it should. White and compact, it was the Lego inside the Lego, if a bit beat-up. Guarding the elevator was a metal stand. The man thought it looked like the comment box at the entrance of a church.

Next to the stand were stacks upon stacks of paper. The man took a piece from the top and ripped off a corner. He took the pen from the stand and wrote: "watermelon." He stuck the paper down the slit, and pressed for the lift.

The descent was slow. The doors dinged opened to a long and brilliantly lighted hallway. The elevator opening took up one end of the hall, and the other five walls shone white with the intensity of the sky. Down at the end of the hall the item was on the floor. He walked down the hallway and thought, *how absurd, I could be walking on the ceiling.*

Just as he expected, the item turned out to be watermelon. It was not a whole one but a slice, a triangle of red flesh sitting on top of a green-lipped smile.

He picked up the slice and licked it. It tasted real enough.

He finished the slice slowly, staring at the lighted wall that cut off the hall. He pressed his ear against it and knocked on it twice. It sounded like an empty drum. Then he was nervous, and went back up to the kitchen.

He threw away the peel. Then he did not know what else he was to do. He did not want to go to bed yet since it was only noon. He filled a glass of water and sat down at the round glass table.

The glass table gave a jerk. He caught the glass of water just in time and the table started to rise with rickety determination. He frowned at it. He was going to leave it to its frivolity but realized that if it kept rising, it would crash into the glass chandelier, and then he might not have light.

He put down the glass of water, stood up on the chair and caught hold of the table's tri-clawed iron leg. The table gave up instantly and came down hard on the white tiled floor. In the first floor closet the man found a length of manila rope. He could not find anything fixed to which he could tie the table, so he roped together all four chairs and tied the other end of the rope to the table leg, resting the knot on top of its clawed iron feet.

INT. DETECTIVE'S LIVING ROOM. NOON.

WOMAN *and* MAN *are sitting on the sofa. On the coffee table in front of them are three plates of leftover leftovers, a few bottles of alcohol. On the floor around the coffee table were crumpled fast food takeout bags, pizza boxes, cups, and a stash of empty beer bottles.*

WOMAN (*to* DETECTIVE *off stage*): We've lost you.

DETECTIVE *enters with a bottle of beer. He sits down on the other sofa, twists off the cap and takes a sip. He picks up a leftover piece of pizza from the box on the floor.*

DETECTIVE: No, you've got me. Go on.

MAN: This is awfully important.

DETECTIVE: It's a nice Saturday, isn't it? Hear the larks in the trees? Feel the wind in your hair? (*Raises eyebrow at* MAN.) Well… But what does that account for? What does any of this mean? (*To* WOMAN) This is ridiculous. Just tell me the ending and tell me what you want.

WOMAN: Are you sure that's what you want?

*A pause.*

MAN: We found the manuscript in our mailbox the day he disappeared.

DETECTIVE (*jerks his head towards his office door*): That's it?

MAN: Yes. His handwriting's never been good, but we understand it more than others. That's why we're telling you this story first, so you'll have a general idea when you read it.

DETECTIVE: Does he die?

MAN (*surprised by* DETECTIVE): His character? I hope not.

WOMAN: No. (*Starting to get angry.*) His writing is a clue to where he was heading. That's why we've come to you.

DETECTIVE: Ah ha, so you don't want me to just find his source. You want me to find him.

WOMAN: One leads to the other.

DETECTIVE: The manuscript could be a clue, or it could not. It's not fact. It's just a story. A goddamn impossible story. I can't go on with that.

WOMAN: Of course you can.

DETECTIVE (*eating pizza*): You want to me to go and never come back. You want me to go.

MAN: Yes. We want you to go. (*He takes the hand of his wife.*)

DETECTIVE (*laughs, sprays out food*): This is swell.

MAN *looks at* WOMAN.

DETECTIVE: Does he die?

MAN *and* WOMAN: No!

DETECTIVE *groans.*

His fever subsided in the next few days and he took to the habit of eating his meals on the roof.

This time he woke with a start. He must have fallen asleep after a heavy lunch. He thought desperately, how much time had passed? Something was not right.

It was sprinkling out on the meadows. From the roof of his three-story house he watched as the distant shepherds gathered their flocks.

He jumped up and ran to the edge of the roof. He stood there quivering. Something was missing.

It was sprinkling out on the meadows.

He bolted down the spiral staircase, down, down, and out the door, down the hill, and to the shallow moat that looked like a river up close. Without bothering to roll up his pants he waded in, splashing excessively, flailing his arms. He fell backward and got soaked. He fought the water and stood up.

He looked back at the house.

It was sprinkling out there, but it was not sprinkling in here. The hill had no weather. Was that right? Was that in the rules?

"Hello!" He waved for the attention of the shepherds, but he was, obviously, too far away.

He threw himself down into the water and with his hands groped around the riverbed. He picked up a round stone and weighed it in his hands. He pulled his arm back, then threw with all his might. The stone followed its destined path across the water, but did not land on the opposite side. It disappeared as it hit the boundary marked out by the opposite bank, as if it traveled through an invisible veil.

He felt the old sense of certainty beginning to creep back. He realized that the hill was, in fact, a kind of separate space. A new dimension, a parallel world—the name did not matter; the name changed with the genre. But what was true was that at that moment, he became certain of his loneliness.

He asked the basement for a pet, a dog.

The basement gave him a basket of assorted vegetable seeds and the sapling of a pear tree.

INT. DETECTIVE'S LIVING ROOM. DAY.
DETECTIVE: He's crazy.
MAN: Clinically. Do you discriminate?

The soil outside was so fertile that the vegetables ripened in days and the pear tree matured in a matter of two weeks. He found it easier to pick his own food from his garden so he stopped relying on the basement for food. The only vexation was the Sombreuil shrub, which he realized was not a shrub but the sort that

climbed. Oddly, it did not reach for the house but spread out towards the river. It was starting to choke his vegetables until he beat it with a hoe and built four walls around the garden. Then the Sombreuil seemed to respect it enough to crawl around it in its trek towards the water.

DETECTIVE: I don't discriminate. I state facts. (*He frowns in thought.*) How come the basement is malfunctioning? Did I miss something?

It was as if the messages were being passed along a great game of Telephone, which he was the beginning and the end. The basement's quick deterioration caused him surprisingly little anxiety. He simply stashed away the useless items on the third floor, which he had not found use for before. However, when he received castanets for "toilet paper, in rolls," he reached the end of his patience. He threw the castanets clattering against the luminescent walls—"Argh!"—got in the elevator and waited for its slow ascent, got out, tore a piece of paper and wrote "Are you a MACHINE? I asked for stuff to wipe my BEHIND," then stuffed the paper in the box, slapped it on its side, and stomped all the way up to his third floor bedroom.

Nevertheless, despite technological problems, those next few weeks were to be the happiest during his ten years alone on the hill. He solved the bathroom problem by substituting with the writing papers in basement. He used it with great satisfaction and afterward went up to the roof for air. He sat down on the edge swinging his legs in triumph and heard a shrill sound.

"Yato!" it cried.

He started, alert. The voice sounded near.

"Yato!" the old woman cried again.

He looked down. The old woman was beckoning a girl who lay close to the other side of the river. The girl was young, blooming into her twenties with the same ferocity as the Sombreuil covering the banks of the hill. He said aloud, "You."

The girl jerked out of her reveries. She got up quickly and waved shyly to the advancing woman.

She moved so much like her. She stretched with that same impossible arch in her back and as she walked towards the woman her body flowed with the same assured grace. They both tucked their hair behind their ears with a swiftness that should only belong to magicians.

The two women left the meadow. He was afraid to move.

He did not know what he was to do.

He took himself to the kitchen and had lunch. Then he had dinner. Then, when

he got up the next morning, he had breakfast. It was fall. The trees were shedding their yellow leaves onto the meadow.

Yato began to come often to the river. Though he realized that since to her the hill did not exist, she was paying tribute not to a river but to a tree. Sometimes she would reach out to pat the tree, and her hand would pass through the entire hill, through the vegetable garden, the Sombreuil and the house with no windows to appear on the other side. There must have been a carving on that tree. It must have been a love insignia by the way her body heaved sighs and the way her hand, suspended in air, seemed to trace it endlessly.

The basement refused to give him binoculars so he could only squint through the bare branches to try to see the little sign of love. At that time Tu had not yet arrived, so the mock battlements on the roof had not yet been erected. The man was leaned so far over the edge that when he realized the earth below, he had a vision of himself falling, crashing through the thorns of the Sombreuil, down and through the hill to the bottom of the fertile soil until he touched solid curves of the Earth. He felt the weight of the hill on top of him and he beat his chest with his fist.

For the first time since he arrived at the hill he was conscious of the frailty of his body. He pulled back from the edge and climbed down the spiral staircase. He went out the double doors and with a hatchet hacked his way through the Sombreuil, which now had vines as thick as arms and flowers as big as two heads. The palm-sized thorns slashed him. Some slashes bled in beads on his pale skin. He ignored the cuts and arrived at the riverbank across from Yato. This Yato was certainly not his Yato, but she was close enough.

WOMAN: He is to live on the hill for ten years, detective. You can't expect him to write down everything.

DETECTIVE: Yes, but I expect the pieces he does present to be relevant to the entirety of the story.

MAN: Well, beggars can't be choosers.

They lived like this for three months. Fall turned into winter but she would still come to smile by the river, huddling close and wrapping her body around the entire hill. He would come down the spiral staircase and slash his way to her side.

She grew more subdued by the week, and he realized that she had found herself with child. As the child within her grew she became more and more foreign, and he ceased to see her as a stand-in for his Yato but as a being in her own right. She was a vessel that carried ancestral genes which will, through the fate of the generations,

bring him his Yato. She became almost a mother to him.

One day, he was awakened by Yato's scream. He ran down the spiral staircase to the bank of the river, and stood confounded as to what he was to do. He stood there fretting for a long time, so long that the Sombreuil had time to encase him in an upright coffin until he could only see her through a gap in front of his left eye. The smell of tea overwhelmed him. He remembered the darkness.

Yato was living up to her destiny as the great storehouse of the majesties which will succeed her. The enormous belly weighed her down on the bed of white slush and she was yelling things that he did not understand. The baby came easily, but Yato was fading away. She rubbed her hands with the slush to warm them. She wiped down the baby with the sleeves of her blue cotton coat and wrapped her inside the coat next to her heart. The baby cried and Yato fell into a sleep. By this point the man was crying so much that he barely heard the whizzing of a disk saw as it freed him from his thorny enclosure.

"Come home," said the skeleton with the disk saw.

"Home," he echoed.

He started to follow but turned back towards the river and with all his strength threw himself across the water. He would have succeeded, for he managed to fly cross the entire width, but the impenetrable veil threw him back within the vicinity of the hill so that he landed in the river at the back of the house.

He lay still, face down in the river, open-eyed and chilled. There were no fishes or planktons in the river, or even bacteria, he knew. He offered his life to the sterile river but it would not have anything to do with him. He was pulled out of the water by the skeleton with the disc saw, and was flung over the shoulder of its bony back, carried into the house, and set by the fire.

He fell ill. With the careful nursing of the skeleton he came to accepted that he was to not die. He fell into a state of melancholy so deep that he was to never truly recover.

For convenience, he named the skeleton "Tu."

"What do I call you, then?" Tu asked.

"I don't remember what they used to call me," he replied, "so I guess anything would do."

Tu named him Tu2. And he did not see any reason to argue.

"Where did you come from?" Tu2 asked.

Tu shrugged.

"Not here," it answered. "But somewhere."

Tu2 was satisfied with that answer but Tu went on. "They sent me because of

a message."

Tu2 pondered this. It was possible. He was, after all, the end of the chain. He saw that the skeleton was waiting for another question, or perhaps some directions, so he said, "That's all," and it left to cook dinner.

INT. DETECTIVE'S LIVING ROOM. DUSK.

DETECTIVE, MAN, *and* WOMAN *are sitting on the sofas.* DETECTIVE *is holding a bottle of beer. It is growing dark.*

DETECTIVE: She died?

MAN (*shrugs*): He mentions her one more time at the end.

The more he watched the skeleton the more his fondness grew. It soothed the kitchen table when it petted it on its glass pane so that it stopped shuttering and held still. Tu2 did not comment, and the manila rope was left tied to its iron leg.

Without being asked, the skeleton built a battlement out of cinderblocks to safeguard the roof. Every morning, it cleared away the Sombreuil from the edges of the double doors, refusing to get locked in. Before the Sombreuil grew too thick, it hacked through to the vegetable garden and spent three days transplanting all the vegetables into one of the second floor workrooms so that he could have homegrown vegetables whenever he wanted. Whim satisfaction was the sole reason for the second floor garden since the miracle of Tu's handwriting had fixed the basement and brought back toilet paper, clocks, dish soap and McDonald's fries. It asked for paint and enlivened the white walls with murals of classic art and images from Tu2's past that even he had forgotten. It told Tu stories. "There once was a mountain," it said, "on which there was a hole, in which there was a temple, in which there sat an old monk and a little monk. The old monk was telling the little monk a story. What was the story about? There once was a mountain, on which there was a hole, in which

INT. DETECTIVE'S LIVING ROOM. DUSK.

WOMAN: there was a temple, in which there sat an old monk and a little monk.

DETECTIVE (*joins in, they recite in unison*): The old monk was telling the little monk a story. What was the story about?

*They smile.*

When he and the skeleton went down to the basement for another bag of plant feed and a sack of sweet yams, he could no longer think of it as an "it," but as a son.

INT. DETECTIVE'S LIVING ROOM. NIGHT.

DETECTIVE, MAN, *and* WOMAN *are sitting on the sofas. It is dark. They sit for a long time. Then* MAN *and* WOMAN *stand up. In silence they take their coats from the coat closet and put on their shoes. They head out the door.*

DETECTIVE (*calls after* WOMAN): You left me alone. Why did you leave me here? I am stuck here. (*He opens his arms. He looks as if he is going to continue, but says nothing more.*)

WOMAN (*to* MAN): Honey, could you please heat up the car?

MAN *kisses her on the cheek and leaves.*

WOMAN (*steps back into the room*): We are all here. All of us. (*Walks towards* DETECTIVE *until her face is close to his.*) You feel shackled? We are all shackled. How do you expect me to put this into words? You have to remember that the story has holes.

DETECTIVE: What the hell does that mean?

WOMEN: We don't so much as end in death but in each other. We can use each other to live.

DETECTIVE: Why did you leave?

WOMAN: Our marriage was arranged.

DETECTIVE: Then you're a hypocrite.

WOMAN: I need to be able to choose.

DETECTIVE: Did you love me?

WOMAN: And the rest doesn't matter.

DETECTIVE: Did you love me?

WOMAN: No.

DETECTIVE: I'm glad you're doing well.

WOMAN (*leaving*): Find our son.

Tu2 began to feel his mortality. Not only did the tick-tock of the new clocks unnerve him, but compared to Tu, he was a very old man in much need of a rest. Tu did not need to eat, drink, or sleep. He could work day and night without rest. He cleared out the entire third floor, organizing into boxes the broken china, the green pantyhose, the book about sailing and all the rest of the neglected items and stored the boxes in the back of the third floor closets. Then, taking up the entire floor, he set up a laboratory with equipment provided by the basement.

Sometimes Tu2 brought up a damp rag for him to wipe his skull, but he never entered the laboratory. He was cautious of upsetting some type of balance.

He was impressed but at the same time perturbed by Tu's godlike abilities. Because of this, he felt almost thankful to the Sombreuil. Though he still detested its presumptuousness, he acknowledged the plant as the only constant showcase of the passing of time, since the clocks went back to the same spot every twelve hours. It was also the only item that Tu cannot tame.

The Sombreuil had covered the entire hill and had wound its way up around the house. Then tentatively at first, it started to climb in through the sky opening of the spiral staircase. It deposited its thinner vines along the spiraling bottom of the support-less staircase, a little longer each day, but with such unwavering purpose that Tu2 became certain of its intent to reach the basement.

He was amused, and often sat on the staircase next to the growth that seemed to consider itself entirely surreptitious.

Tu became paranoid. He took out his disk saw and tried all sorts of maneuvers to clear the skylight, but Tu2 was satisfied in knowing that he was to fail.

Tu2 started spending time in the basement. He found it inspirational. On the last afternoon that he was to spend on the hill, he felt the back of his neck prickle and finished writing down his thought before looking up at Tu.

Tu, holding a cup of tea, asked, "What are you writing?"

"A screenplay," he answered. "A short one. It's my first."

"Is it any good?"

"It stinks. Want to read it?"

"Sure. I have to check on the chicken first."

"Of course."

Tu frowned. "Is turkey okay?"

"Of course," Tu2 said, surprised. "I'll be up in a second, Tu. I'm almost done."

Tu set the cup down carefully on the staircase beside Tu2's feet and left.

When Tu2 dotted the last period he felt a great sense of relief. He tied it together with string and walked up to the comment box. He pried open the top, laid down his draft, put back the top and slapped it on its side.

Dinner was on the table but Tu was not in the kitchen.

Tu2 headed upstairs to call him down from his laboratory. The skinny vines of the Sombreuil had nearly reached the bottom step. Without thinking, he dribbled the rest of the tea down the vines.

He was not surprised that after he called it out, the Sombreuil lost all interest in stealth and charged through the house in a silent siege. Part of the plant must be steeped in the river because though it left the rooms clean and the doorways clear, it clung to the walls and coated the paintings with trails of river water.

Then it bloomed.

The white roses opened up as big as two heads all through the house.

Tu screamed. He charged out of this laboratory, waving his stick arms and yelling, "I am Tu the great. Bow down before Tu the great." His smile wavered at the notice of the Sombreuil but his excitement pushed away his fear.

"What did you do?" Tu2 asked him.

"Come and see! Come and see!"

Tu2 climbed up laboriously. Tu came down to support him, but in his eagerness dragged him up the last couple of steps.

They went into the part of the laboratory at the end of the hall. The room was a mess. Papers lay like snowflakes and the overhead lamp shone like a sun. Beside his desk was a glass cage bolted to the floor. Inside was a cropped Sombreuil rose. Something small and dark floated near it.

"Where did you get that?" Tu2 asked. "It's alive."

"Yes," Tu replied. "I've never seen anything like it. What is it?"

"It's a honeybee."

"What does it do?"

"Did you make it, Tu? It's alive. The basement never—"

"Yes. Yes, I made it. What does it do?"

"It makes honey," said Tu2. "I'm tired, Tu. Would you bring the kitchen table up to the roof?"

"But it's tied down.

"It's only rope," said Tu2, smiling.

"Yes. Yes, of course."

"I've never given it much thought, Tu, but you sound incredibly like me."

"How else would I sound?"

"I don't know. Perhaps not like me at all."

"That's possible," said Tu. "But I guess that's not how it turned out."

"No, no. Of course you're right."

Tu left to get the table, and Tu2 started his last climb up the support-less staircase. He slipped once, but a Sombreuil rose caught him and gently pushed him back upright.

"You really don't have to do that," he said furiously. "You've been doing that since the beginning, and I am tired."

The house, covered with Sombreuil, watched him. He ascended through the skylight and waited for Tu.

The Sombreuil had left an opening just big enough for the glass pane of the kitchen table. Tu2 laughed. He could not believe how blind he had been to its in-

tent during his ten years on the hill. With all those rickety attempts it had simply wanted to rise through the roof.

"Put the table upside down, Tu." Tu2 said.

As Tu2 stepped onto the glass, he had to hold onto the iron leg for support.

"You don't know how it works," said Tu. Then he cocked his skull to one side, and they could both hear water rushing downstairs. The oversaturated Sombreuil vines had burst like broken pipes.

The table was rising.

"Will you come back?" Tu asked.

He remembered the skeleton planting vegetables in the second-floor garden. He remembered the shock of seeing a face that he had forgotten painted on the kitchen wall. There was the winter and the death in the slush, and he remembered fall, and hunger, loneliness, the darkness. Then he remembered his travels before the darkness, and he remembered his Yato.

All at once Tu2's mind focused, and he felt himself being pulled together and latched up like clockwork. He was aware that he had spent his time on the hill with a certain procrastinating detachment, and this awareness caused in him a comprehension so unexpected that he craved to pour it all onto Tu. But he was already too high, and the river water drowned out his exclaimations. He smiled and waved.

The smell of tea came first. It gushed out the hole in the roof and the water followed soon after. It hovered above the battlements. Tu jumped off the roof.

He fell in the river as the water crashed down. He watched it knock down the battlements as if they were stacked out of Lego blocks and heard it roar inside the windowless block of a house. The flood did not last long. The Sombreuil washed out everything including itself, so that when Tu finished reassembling his disjointed body he stood up to see a dirt hill almost orange in the setting sun.

*She goes out but leaves the door behind her ajar. For a long time* DETECTIVE *stares at the crack in the door. He sits down on the sofa where* MAN *and* WOMAN *have sat. He gets up and goes back into the kitchen.*

INT. DETECTIVE'S KITCHEN. NIGHT.

DETECTIVE *gets a cup from the cupboard, fills it with tea from an old clay teapot, and drinks.*

DETECTIVE (V.O.): I could not forget the curve of her hips under my fingers. The first time I read his story I read for revenge. I wanted him to be crazy. It would make her suffer, and I would be glad. But as I read, his voice got inside my head

and gave me the unshakable sensation that his story and my story are one and the same.

DETECTIVE *turns on the tap and leans over the sink. He stares at the drain. He gives his head a shake and splashes water on his face.*

DETECTIVE (*V.O. cont'd*): After a while I grew confused as to who was telling who a story.

*He wipes his face with his arm, then leaves.*

INT. DETECTIVE'S LIVING ROOM. NIGHT.

*He enters and heads towards his office.*

DETECTIVE (*V.O. cont'd*): I wondered whether to believe them, or whether they would all fare better as phantoms in a dream.

INT. DETECTIVE'S OFFICE. NIGHT.

*He sits on top of his desk facing the chairs in which the* MAN *and* WOMAN *have once sat.*

DETECTIVE (*V.O. cont'd*): I went anyway.

*He takes the manuscript and begins to read.*

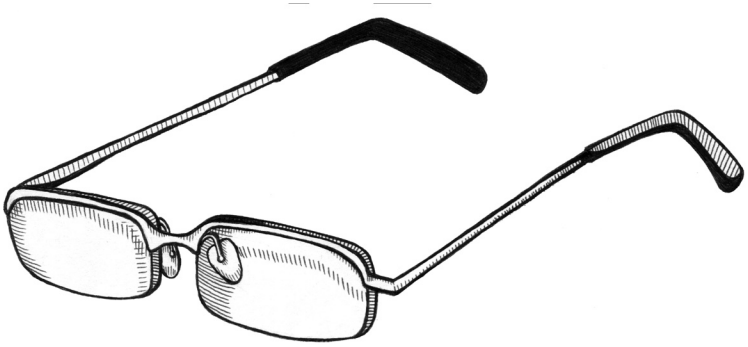
DETECTIVE (*V.O. cont'd*): The manuscript was jumbled, but they've told me what to look for. That night, her apparent hypocrisy has shown me the end. I thought she has walked away into her freedom, leaving me behind to fight with the beasts. But she had been right. There are holes to fill and I am as free as she.

DETECTIVE*, while reading the manuscript, walks slowly to his leather chair behind the desk as we* FADE TO BLACK. *We start to hear the footsteps of someone walking steadily.*

DETECTIVE (V.O. *cont'd*): I have been on the road for ten years. All this time I have been suffocating under the weight of that immutable destiny that she has handed me in a neat package tied up in string. Now I have arrived at this place.

*The footsteps pause.*

DETECTIVE (V.O. *cont'd*): He is not here, and I am beginning to feel that he does not exist. The thought is preposterous, yet I immediately feel a weight lifted off of me, and my mind becomes jumbled as thoughts ignite and collide into each other like bumper cars at a carnival. I can stop here if I want. I can take a rest if I want. It is astounding but I don't have to be a detective. If I choose, I don't have to be a man, or even my mother's son. I begin to smile and I inhale deeply the faint aroma of tea. My Yato, my lady, my love who says she does not love me, has taken my life and tried her hardest to give it back. She shoved me out into the stone-cold world not out of spite, but out of a certain hope. I can live with that.



# DÓRA LARSON | **PRELUDE**

Daniel stood beneath the map rising high above his head and frowned. He jammed his nervous hands into his pockets as he scanned the list of famous people, the mess of little boxes, some marked, some unmarked, for Chopin. He found him. It seemed easy enough, up some stairs and back to the right. Poor sickly Frederic. His name was actually pronounced cope-een, in Polish. No wonder he had wanted to stay in France. Convinced, Daniel turned from the map and headed up the main road, toward a big white tomb with steps winding up behind it. He tried to push his hands farther into his pockets and regretted wearing such tight jeans. He had never been this aware of his package in America. Glancing around self-consciously, he saw no one to glare at, so instead he glared at the thick grey clouds. He was nervous and considered shivering. What kind of a woman suggested a blind date in a cemetery? French women were crazy.

It had actually been Guillaume's idea. Guillaume had convinced him to buy four pairs of tight, Parisian pants, too. Daniel was not used to this. Maybe French men were also crazy.

"You are in Paris now," Guillaume had said. "You need people. I have women

friends you must meet, beautiful women—so beautiful women, it is like to lick your fingers."

"It is like to lick your fingers? I'm not sure I want to understand that, Guillaume."

"It is like—" Guillaume brought his fingers to his lips and kissed them, like an Italian.

"Oh, yeah? And how would you know that? If they're so beautiful, why aren't you seeing them? Anyway, I don't speak French."

"I have Julie now. But I only recommend women from personal experience." Daniel rolled his eyes, but Guillaume laughed and continued. "Everyone speaks English here. That is not an excuse. You have been here for two months now, and you meet no one but me. Enough. You must meet my friend Rose."

"Is she like to lick your fingers?" Guillaume ignored the comment.

"Rose is a beautiful woman. She is different, not like a typical beautiful woman. Very pretty. Very intelligent."

"What does she look like?"

"Pretty. She has brown hair, brown eyes, glasses. She is tall, very thin arms, but her hips—" Guillaume made an ambiguous gesture. Daniel understood it.

"When were you with her?"

"Many years ago. Do not worry, we are friends now. She is friends with Julie. It was she who introduced me to Julie. I will give you her phone number, and I will tell her about you, and then you can call her and meet her. You need to meet people. You cannot be alone in Paris."

"I don't know, Guillaume." Daniel eyed him skeptically. Guillaume kissed his fingertips with a sly smile. "Alright. Give me her number. Rose, right? Rose. God, I hate phone calls."

Daniel wandered to the right at the top of the uneven stairs. Rows and rows of tombs, some reflecting the cloudy light, the names sharp, others blue with lichen and crumbling, packed the space on either side of the road. Narrow paths between the graves twisted and stopped at odd angles. What a mess. Where did the new dead famous people get buried? There was hardly any space here. Good thing Chopin died when he did, otherwise they might have sent him back to Poland.

Rose's voice was higher than he had expected, though not high in a squeaky sort of way, just not the voice of a tall woman. She sounded like she had sharp cheekbones and straight brown hair with bangs that fell in her eyes. When she laughed into the phone he could see her brushing them aside, though he couldn't really

imagine the glasses, or the hips. He was glad she didn't sound too tall, because he liked running his fingers through a woman's hair when he held her against his chest. The moment he thought this, he pretended not to realize that he was already thinking of holding Rose against his chest. Her English was very good. It was her idea to meet by Chopin's grave. Daniel hadn't known exactly where Chopin was buried, but he didn't want to say so to Rose and sound uncultured, so he turned quickly to the Internet and hoped she couldn't hear him typing. He should have known: Pere Lachaise cemetery. Nearly everyone important was in Pere Lachaise cemetery, especially anyone romantic, so it was actually a pretty nice touch on Rose's part, and setting the meeting at five o'clock, too, just before dusk and all. Or maybe she just lived near it, and thought it would be a convenient interesting place to take an American. Maybe she was just being nice and selling her city to the foreigner. His stomach dropped. He was totally mistaken. He had completely misunderstood Guillaume—but no, it was impossible to misunderstand Guillaume. He said Rose was like to lick your fingers, and that could only mean one thing. He was on the right track. Besides, Rose had chosen Chopin's grave. They could have just met at the front gate, but she had been very specific. You couldn't get more romantic than poor Chopin. He should have brought her flowers. Just one flower. A single rose. No, that would have been terrible. A daffodil or something. What was wrong with him? Maybe he wouldn't even like her! Daniel shivered. There were so many tombstones.

The tapping of his footsteps in his new Parisian shoes made him feel effeminate, so he squared his shoulders and took bigger steps. He wanted to appear bigger next to Rose, even though she was probably one of those women who don't look as tall because they're so lean. Those hips might change that impression though, so he might as well play it safe. The shoes had a bit of a heel. Guillaume had been right to talk him into buying them. He turned off of the main road, toward the back of the cemetery, on a narrow lane that wove between the graves. He had to step on the edges of some of them to walk, which made him feel uncomfortable, but he didn't see much choice. At least the tapping of his shoes was gone, now that he had to step slowly and carefully. He passed Sarah Bernhardt's grave, the hollow cavity overflowing with red, white, purple roses, but he did not notice it. The fallen petals felt soft beneath his shoes as he eyed those really old tombs with the rough names. Whole families, with the same first names repeating over and over, were crammed into some of them. The name lists ran all down the fronts of the slabs, in double columns, like a newspaper, and spilled onto the sides. Daniel's father lived in Florida and his mother in New York, and he wasn't sure where his brother was living now, he hadn't heard from him since April. He saw his aunts once a year and

only liked one of his uncles, and he didn't know his great-grandparents' names. His mother had named him Daniel after the Elton John song, not after any ancestor.

At the next wide road Daniel took a right, because Freddy was to the right somewhere or something. He stepped quickly again, though he was no longer cold. He hoped Rose would be cold, so he could put his arm around her after they got to know each other a little better. Daniel instantly felt foolish and young. Chopin had died young, at thirty-nine. Mallorca with George Sand nearly killed him. Tuberculosis. What was George Sand's real name? Not Rose, he didn't think. He ignored the thought of going to Mallorca with Rose as he wandered up into a jagged path, cutting between a shining granite slab and a flat marble one. The shining tomb belonged to Edith Piaf and her little girl, but Daniel missed it looking down at the ground as he carefully navigated, afraid of stepping right on a grave. He had to kick several inches of petals out of the way to see where he was walking.

Where was Fred? Daniel looked up and found himself surrounded by low, flat graves. A glance at his watch said five twenty-one. He was late. He quickened his pace as he walked down a small slope. The road curved gently to the right. He tried not to worry. Guillaume was late all the time, at least fifteen minutes late, and Rose had been with Guillaume, after all. She was probably a late person herself. She sounded like a late person on the phone. She spoke quickly and interrupted herself often. She was probably pale. Daniel liked pale women. He walked even faster, thinking of Rose's pale neck and shoulders with prominent collar bones. Chopin should be just behind there. Daniel jogged down half a flight of steps leading around the big white monolith before he stopped short. This was wrong. This was completely wrong: just ahead of him were the main gates. He could see the huge map to the right of the entrance, white and blank from a distance. This was not right. He had to go back. It was five twenty-seven. He was even later.

Daniel stood still on the stairs, gazing down at the empty cemetery gates. He thought of Rose, her brown hair in her eyes, her thin shoulder blades beneath a light sweater, reading the names on the graves near Chopin's, scanning the path for a tallish, thirtyish man with brown hair and glasses. She probably didn't like him by now. She probably wasn't even there. Daniel shook his head and headed slowly down the stairs and toward the gates. It was too late. He passed right by Alfred du Musset's bust looking out over his head and walked toward the metro station, with short, fast steps and a cold breeze in his neck. His hands were jammed in his pockets as he quickly disappeared underground. Rose probably wouldn't have liked him anyway. His pants were too tight and he gestured nervously with his hands when he talked. He would have had to tell her that he thought Paris was a dreary, cloudy city

and that he hated carrying umbrellas all the time, and that really would have done it. It was better this way. He stood on the platform and hoped the train would come soon. As soon as possible. He looked up and peered down the tracks, listening for an approaching metro. He noticed two women standing to his left, one seven meters away, one nine, also looking down the tracks, their faces turned from him a quarter turn. He looked at them kind of sideways, without turning his head.

Two women, tall, brown hair, with narrow shoulders and fine elbows, small wrists and wide hips. The woman closer to him had straight brown hair to her shoulders with bangs across her forehead, cut above her eyebrows. She never reached up to brush them away, and she stood with all her weight on her left leg, so her left hip jutted out and forward. Her legs were very long, her face also long, tanned, her glasses thick, black, squarish. The other woman stood firmly on her two feet. Her brown hair was curly and parted on the left, and it fell into her eyes even though she tried to push it back behind her ears. Every twelve seconds or so she brushed it aside. Her face was very pale, and she had thick dark eyebrows behind her silver-rimmed glasses. The curve of her hip was smooth and soft. Blood pulsed in Daniel's neck. He could feel it.

"Rose." Daniel froze. He couldn't remember opening his mouth, but the word hung in his ears like cold breath. All he could think of was holding one of the two women to his chest and of sunshine in Mallorca. Now blood pulsed in his cheeks.

His eyes froze open as two pretty faces with big eyes shifted toward him. He could practically smell their hair, but instead he turned and walked with big steps toward the stairs out of the station, away from the platform, away from the high voice in the telephone. He couldn't hear his tapping steps over the sound of the train braking into the station.


# MAGDA SZABÓ | **ANGEL**

When she got back, only Grandmother was home, frying meat and crying.

This was neither surprising nor unusual. Grandmother cried about something every day; joy moved her just as much as real or imagined woundings, a broken glass or burnt food. She was still wearing her black clothes, she had just tied an apron on top of them: she must have recently returned from the cemetery. "She is mourning Mrs. Toth," thought Lujzi. Mrs. Toth had lived on the fourth floor, and they hadn't even known her personally, they just said hello to her. One time when Mrs. Toth was watering her leanders, Grandmother had yelled up that Mrs. Toth's cat always came to our door to relieve itself, and that it must be driven from the house. Grandmother yelled up from the ground floor, and Mrs. Toth down from the fourth, then the superintendent lady came out, and then there was quiet; Grandmother sat by the radio and cried. Last Sunday, though, Mrs. Toth died suddenly; Grandmother went to each apartment in turn to collect money for a wreath, and today she went out to the cemetery with the superintendent lady to represent the house.

Mommy hadn't arrived home yet, but Lujzi didn't remark this, she must be with Uncle Géza, Mommy spent every spare minute with Uncle Géza. Soon they would marry, then she would be here at home more. Uncle Géza had a beautiful

voice, it was a shame he hadn't become an actor, just an accountant. All week Lujzi waited for Sunday the most, because then Uncle Géza spent the whole day at their place, and he sang along with the radio. He knew the words to every song, even ones like, The woman is untrue…

If Daddy were alive, there would be no Uncle Géza, but Daddy died so long ago that she didn't even remember him, and the photograph that remained of him didn't tell anything. Of course, the photograph wasn't even out on the bureau anymore, Mommy had put it away when Uncle Géza brought the ring.

Lujzi began to organize her things, she took everything out of her drawer. Now vacation could really start, this had been the last thing to do this year, this afternoon's final class. She had turned in her old textbooks, these here were all new, she had even covered them all already, and on the inside bottom corner of the blue paper, she had glued a cut-out picture into each one. It had been nice, this final class. Now, when she still knew the material fresh and whole, the world all of a sudden became incredibly vast, and strangely populated. Somewhere, above everything, beyond the stratosphere, heaven stood on some hard, elastic blueness, and thick clouds covered it from human eyes. Clouds were humidity. But heavenly clouds could not be humidity, or they would dissolve or return to the earth in the form of rain. Heavenly clouds must be something else, maybe nylon. That was terribly strong.

And the angels! She found an empty notebook page and began to draw on it, she tried to draw an angel. In the church, an angel stood on the altar, but that one was an adult, too serious, and it had those sandals that tied below the knees. She wanted to draw a child angel, but she did not succeed. "With a single line!" they always said in art class. "Go ahead, carefully! Don't lift the pencil!"

She was not satisfied with the angel's hair. First she drew short yellow locks, but then she suddenly remembered negroes, so she colored the angel wooly-haired and black. It would be unfair if there were only white angels. White children's guardian angels were also white, the Koreans' were yellow. It was so comforting that people had guardian angels and patron saints. Who could that Saint Lujza be? Had she been beautiful?

Lujzi, unfortunately, was not beautiful. Mara was beautiful, she had a bob haircut, and last time they measured their thighs with string before gym class, and it turned out that Lujzi's thighs were thicker than Mara's, and her legs were shorter, this was very sad. Also, she had a braid, even though she hated it, but Uncle Géza said that all nice girls had braids, so she wasn't allowed to cut her hair short. It would have been good to be beautiful, so beautiful that everyone would admire her. But she wasn't. Why did the good Lord create beautiful people and not beautiful

people, and those nothing people, not ugly, not beautiful? When He created Adam, He made Eve, too, out of bone. And when He wanted to bring Adam to life, He breathed into his nose, this was very interesting. He had to lean really close to him to reach his nose, because Adam was only sand then, and he was lying down.

Last time in some news show they were reviving a little child like that. And if they had operated, and put a dog's heart into Adam? They already had dogs then. Let the Earth bring forth the living creature after his kind. No, they couldn't have done that after all, because they didn't have medical knowledge yet. In school they said people weren't allowed to dissect for a long time. Not even in the middle ages. The middle ages were terribly long ago, before the revolution of '48. The Pioneers dissected a frog during troop activities, but only the eighth graders. Wouldn't it be great to cut up a frog!

The clock struck, she looked up at the sound. Mommy was sure taking long! She won't throw these notebooks away, they were so nice! She'd put them away for mementos. This one was the nicest, this geography notebook. She had marked the monsoon with blue-green, it had really turned out beautifully. Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. Of course, the earthly cloud couldn't be like the heavenly cloud: the earthly cloud was humidity, it sank, rose, it couldn't support the heavens, no. Just the heavenly one.

Grandmother came in bringing onion smell with her from the kitchen, sat down beside the heater and kneaded her wrists. "God sees everything," thought the child. He was looking at Grandmother right now, as she kneaded her wrists, at Mrs. Toth in the coffin, at Uncle Géza, at this city, but at the same time at all foreign cities, because people musn't just think always of their own home, there were people everywhere who were decent and who did not want war. It was terrible, everything that the good Lord had to see! And He never rested, He always, always just watched. A long time ago the peasants and the workers never rested either, because they didn't have paid leave.

Here was her grammar notebook, she always understood grammar so well. This sentence was hard, the eraser marks showed, at first she had labeled the parts of the sentence wrong, she had confused the possessive with the object. Lujzi leaned on her elbows. Grandmother was crocheting mutely by then, glancing up at her occasionally. She didn't scold her, Grandmother knew that Lujzi kept every notebook; she never told her to throw anything away, though space was scarce. Dad had been a confectioner, but Lujzi would want to be something different, she didn't like anything sweet, she even liked the sour kind of sugar, really. Agronomer! If she were a model worker, she would get a box at the theater, and an award! She would marry very

young. How good it would be if a Chinese fell in love with her! Chinese people had such interesting eyes. Every person was equal, and skin color didn't mean anything.

Why did Uncle Géza say that there were differences between people, and not even just little ones? In school they said that there weren't, because everyone was born the same, and everyone died the same, too. Uncle Géza didn't like that Lujzi was friends with Mara, either, because Mara was a gypsy. That was such a confused thing, because Mara didn't even know how to play the violin. "The problem with this school," said Uncle Géza, "is that the little girl gets put together with all kinds of children." But every person was equal! And Mara's father was a worker, it was written next to her name in the class roster, he worked here in the furniture factory, the same one as Uncle Géza, and from where the construction workers got the panels.

She was different. Maybe Mr. Géza thought more of them than what was true, even though their pastry shop hadn't even been big. Dad had made the pastries all himself and Mommy had served. Different. He who had his own business was different. Saint Joseph was a carpenter. If Saint Joseph had had a…one musn't think of that, that is horrible silliness.

She pushed in the drawer and looked to see if the empty frame was still in the kitchen. It was there, she put the saint's picture in it, the gift she got for her exams, and Grandmother hung it on the wall above the bed, among the other pictures. It was a very nice day, and now here was the long vacation. When Uncle Géza moved in here, how happily they would live! Uncle Géza liked to go to the pool, and he was so funny when he ducked under the water and sprayed water out of his nose. Mommy could come home already, she had hardly even seen her today.

Mommy arrived very late, and when Lujzi ran to greet her, she deflected her hand and didn't pay attention to what she said. Mommy was pale, with little spots on her eyelids. She went into the bathroom and stayed there for a long time, Grandmother shuffled around the kitchen and complained to the stove that her daughter doesn't even deign to speak to her anymore, though she works all day and raises the child, because who raised little Lujzi if not her, if it were up to her mother Lujzi wouldn't even know how to pray, that one just runs off, and when she does come home, she starts right away that no one should talk to her, she's so tired. The child had set the table for four, Uncle Géza had had supper with them for over a year. Then Mommy came out of the bathroom and removed Uncle Géza's place setting from the table, and the child saw her hand: the ring was not on it.

Mommy didn't say anything, and when Grandmother saw that the fourth place setting had disappeared and that Mommy's finger was empty, she pulled herself up straight and stopped muttering. Grandmother never cried when she really had

a reason, and while she pried and asked around all day, she never asked what was truly important.

There was such great silence; only the knives clattered against the plates. Mommy barely ate, but she drank a lot of water. Lujzi tried to talk, but no one responded, so she stopped. Mommy's eyes were big, round, and somehow they seemed heavy, too; heavy and full, like a bucket filled to the brim with water. Uncle Géza had left Mommy! Nothing would come of the marriage!

They cleared up. Lujzi dried, Grandmother hummed. Her voice was strange, trembling: "My heart has become a prisoner of yours forever…"

No one paid attention to Lujzi, so she went to bed.

The night was warm, promising rain. Mommy called into the room, sleep, g'night, but she didn't come in to kiss her, instead she went out on the landing, and Lujzi could see through the window that she sat down on the trashcan, crossed her legs at the knees and stared straight ahead into the dark. It was very strange, her sitting there on the trashcan, apparently she didn't even notice the smell of the rotting fruit peels. Then Grandmother went out too, the child heard something crack, creak. Grandmother must have taken the stool out, and now the two of them were staring out into the dark. If the good Lord looked down, he could see them as the sat there on the trashcan and the stool, behind each of them their patron saint. Saint Rozália behind Grandmother, because Grandmother was Rózsa, and behind Mommy, Saint Anna, because Mommy was called Anna. Uncle Géza! Horrible!

"And now what will happen?" asked Mommy, and she was so strange, like a dog. "Now all kinds of things will happen," answered Lujzi in her thoughts, Mommy had wanted to repaint the apartment, but then suddenly Uncle Géza needed money, so the painting hadn't happened, and Uncle Géza promised that next year he would paint the apartment himself. They will laugh at us in the house, they've laughed at us the whole time, the lady next door said once, why does Mommy go with someone so much younger than her, it became a big fight.

"What will happen?" asked Mommy again.

Lujzi pushed herself up on her elbows. Mommy was really crying by then, Grandmother didn't say anything in response. The rain started, too, but they didn't really get soaked because here in front of there apartment, the landing was covered. When they died, Mommy would have it really good, because she had so many troubles on Earth, she supported all of them, and for the nights she brought home private typing jobs, because Lujzi and Uncle Géza cost a lot, they had to be well fed. And how many times had Uncle Géza slept here, he didn't even feel bad about using the good bed; Grandmother always pretended she was deaf when Mommy let

Mr. Géza out at dawn, though even Lujzi woke up to the sound of the door opening, Lujzi who slept deeply, let alone Grandmother, who got up so often during the night.

And if I prayed? If I prayed for Uncle Géza to return to them? If one really wanted it, really begged for it, with faith, then it would happen. Then he would come back.

But would he come back? She pondered. It would be best if he just brought back the money, the painting-money and the other money, the money Mommy didn't even know about, the coat-money which had been with Grandmother, from which Mommy should have bought a coat, but Uncle Géza took it last Saturday and said he would match it and buy the coat himself as a surprise. Should he come back? But maybe later he would just leave again. What would life be like with such an unreliable person? Suddenly a blind rage gripped Lujzi at the thought that Uncle Géza was having dinner somewhere this very moment, talking about them, about Grandmother, who, when she wasn't praying, was always sniffling, and about Mommy's dyed hair, and about her, who was friends with gypsies, that she stiffened, and her feet grew cold. She took fright and began to pray.

The rain knocked on the glass ceiling of the landing. Tomorrow she would go to the church, and with the money she got for her report card, with the entire sum, she would buy candles. There was an iron crown in front of the small altar, she would stick candles on the points all around it, and every candle would burn for Uncle Géza, so somehow everything would come right after all. The good Lord would hear her sooner, as if she had called Him on the telephone or sent a telegram, even though sound traveled terribly fast. Light traveled even faster. There was lightening. The good Lord was angry. There was electricity in the air.

It was pouring now. She could hear Mommy pull the trashcan farther back, and now the sweetish smell of trash grew determindly and unrecognizably, in a great wave. Grandmother picked up the stool, again that creaking. They came inside.

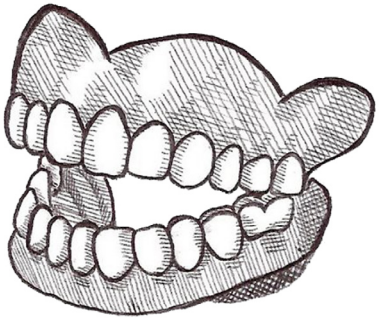
When the door opened and Grandmother turned on the light, she saw right away that Luzji wasn't asleep yet. But she didn't say anything, she didn't even ask, as she always did, whether Lujzi had prayed, she just went over to her and kissed her. The face which leant down toward Lujzi wasn't empty anymore: it was filled with such helpless sorrow, and some undeniable oldness, that the child was jerked into the helpless sorrow. But please, help us! The angel! The good Lord! Everyone!

She woke around dawn to Grandmother's counting—she couldn't sleep again, poor thing; she always counted then. Lujzi didn't move, just listened in the dark, and if something scared her, she reached under her pillow and pulled out the ro-

sary. Her words were fraught, begging, but behind the prayer's words her mind didn't rest, she thought of Uncle Géza taking their money and cheating them, he had sung and played, and he had eaten here, but everything he did was a lie, and when he died, his lying tongue would surely burn in hot oil. Outside the rain still beat down, but more quietly now. She slowly calmed, grew faint, became sleepy again. Then the angel. The angel! Then the angel.

But all at once she started awake again, now not to the counting, but as if someone had spoken to her, as if she had heard a voice. Grandmother snored. She felt completely rested, and the solution, the escape, God's mercy floated there in front of her like the dawn which spilled onto the tenement, like the clouds. But of course! She would get up very early in the morning, put on her white blouse, and go to the factory. She had many acquaintances there, that's where the construction workers got the wall panels, she had helped them bring them over. She would go to the director, she had seen him then, too, he was tall and had a round, bald head. They would let her in, they had let her in last time, too. She would go to the director and report Uncle Géza.

—Translated from Hungarian by Dóra Larson
Original text entitled "Angyal" by Magda Szabó
From the book, *Alvók futása* published in 2001 by Europa Könyvkiadó



# STEVEN YENZER | **WHERE THE DUST GOES**

At six o'clock in the morning the phone rings. It's my father, and he's calling from the garage. He needs help.

I dress quickly—it's two days after Thanksgiving and cold. My feet find five year-old flip-flops and my legs, middle school gym shorts. I didn't bring any sweatshirts home so I squeeze on a too-small grey one that says Marriot's Ridge Drama Department in big black letters. I walk softly past my parents' room, where the door never shuts completely.

Outside everything is grey-blue. The neighbor's minivan is spilling exhaust into the transparent air. The door to the garage is locked, but I know that the key is under the mat, and when I open it my hands are shaking. The garage is dark and smells like smoke. The television is on and Bill O'Reilly is still muted. My father is bent over in a lawn chair, his neck at an odd angle, his hands on his knees. His shoes look big on his feet.

"Hey," I say. "You okay?"

"Yeah," he says, and coughs. "I just fell."

On the floor next to him I see wet paper towels and the pieces of a bowl. I ask him what happened.

"I dropped some soup, I tried to clean it up."

"I'll get it later."

"I want to go inside, and I think I need your help."

I take his elbow and help him to his feet. His head is bent toward the ground. He takes his cigarettes and lighter from the side table with the broken leg and slides them in his pocket. I notice burns on his black jeans from dropped cigarettes. He threads his thin arm into the inflatable pink donut he sits in and picks up his pillow.

"Do you need help?" I ask.

"Maybe," he says.

I walk next to him as he moves toward the door, but I'm careful not to touch his elbow and back—like I'm checking the heat on a stove. If I touch him I will be helping him, and he will not be able to walk on his own. He will need our help to walk.

I open the garage door for him and he trips a little on the threshold. I start toward him but he doesn't fall. He moves slowly toward the deck stairs. I can't fit next to him as he goes up them, but he makes it up alright. I open the door to the mudroom and the door to the kitchen. The living room is paler than before; the colors of the TV are muted. He makes it to the couch and lowers himself onto the cushion.

"You okay?" I ask.

"Yeah, I just need to sit down for a minute."

"Do you need anything?

He is quiet for a little.

"Could you get me an apple sauce and a spoon? And a paper towel."

I am glad to go into the kitchen. There are two apple sauces in the refrigerator; I take the colder one and a spoon from the drawer. I place them both on the counter, and I neatly tear a single paper towel from the roll. I lay the paper towel flat and peel the foil lid off of the apple sauce. In the living room, I lay the paper towel down on the table in front of him and put the silver spoon and opened apple sauce in front of him.

"Thanks bud," he says, looking at me.

"Do you need anything else?"

He coughs. "Could you get my dentures from the garage?"

It's a little brighter outside. I wonder how he fell. In the garage, I look for spots of blood, which sometimes appear, long-dried, on the concrete. The pieces of the bowl look like big ceramic fingernails. I use a napkin to pick up his pink upper denture from the table and carry it back inside like I'm holding a snake by its neck. I deposit it on an empty corner of the paper towel. We are silent for a minute.

"You okay?"

"Could you get me…what time is it?"

"6:30."

"Could you get me some of my pills?"

"Yeah. What do you need?"

In the kitchen there are nine pale brown bottles with white lids. They are not child-proof because they are only sold in limited quantities at special pharmacies. We get them delivered by FedEx. They come in small, padded envelopes that rattle. One is called carisoprodol. One is called oxycodone. One is called diazepam—it is generic for valium. He wants four carisoprodol and one diazepam.

"And a cold Pepsi," he says from the living room.

I hold the pills in my fist and flip-flop back into the living room. I funnel them into his palm and then let him see me having trouble opening the Pepsi. The pills are in his mouth and he holds out a shaking hand for the Pepsi. He takes three small gulps and puts the Pepsi on the table.

"Do me one more favor. Can you get me a cup from the garage?"

In the garage there is a red Solo cup on the side table with the broken leg. It is filled to the first line with black and red mucus. On the shelf next to the television there is another stack of cups. I pull a fresh one off the top and bring it inside. On the couch, he is coughing—he spits into the cup in my hand. The heating clicks on and the dust zapper starts up. It sounds like a bucket of pennies being poured onto a marble floor. It works like this: when enough dust particles clog the vent, it forms a circuit, and the electricity zaps it away. Tonight I wonder where the dust goes. It must become finer dust, to roll gently out of the vents and into our house, like the sealed rooms from which movie heroes barely escape.



## STEVEN YENZER | **FULL OF THINGS**

When I enter his room my father is asleep again, and I almost run to his side to check the oxygen tube for condensation. For confirmation, I wait to see his chest rise and fall—and of course his heartbeat is steady on the monitor, but this is no proof. His aliveness is not evidenced by machines. Look, he breathes—he is warm and wet.

I feel a little thrill every time this happens. It isn't relief, but it isn't panic, either. It's like taking an envelope from your mailbox with no return address. Your name is handwritten and there's a cute stamp in the corner. You shake a little when you open it, because it could be a love letter or test results.

(This is better than waking up at 3 a.m. to your father talking to himself downstairs. This is better than hearing the door slam shut ten minutes later and finding, the next morning, a box cutter and a pack of cigarettes in your car. This is better than coming home to the garage (where he smokes) locked and wondering what you should be prepared for when you get the other key from the drawer in the kitchen and unlock the door.)

My father's room is his own. He and my mother never slept in the same bed because he snores. I thought that this was normal until seventh grade—when Sean Souders bragged that he saw his mother naked when he wandered into his parents'

room. I wondered why he didn't say "mother's room" while everyone else imagined Mrs. Souders naked.

The hospital bed overwhelms my father's room. It is metal and plastic and has buttons. He can adjust the angle and height. The hospice nurse tried to program the TV remote that comes with it to work with our TV, but he didn't do it right, so my father uses 1 and 7 to adjust the volume and 3 and 9 to change channels. He watches Fox News. He watches *Law & Order*. He calls it *Law & Order: SUV*.

Next to my father's bed is his nightstand. I helped him assemble it. I screwed up and one of the shelves is backward—the unfinished edge looks raw in the middle of all that smooth white. On top of the nightstand is a hospital-green reading lamp that is on for only one hour a week. This is when my aunt drives three hours down from Deale to read John Grisham novels aloud to my father. Next to *The Last Juror* is an extremely dry upper denture in a dirty glass. Above the TV, menacing a muted Bill O'Reilly, hangs the head of a stag. It doesn't have a name. It hung in the living room for about a month before my mom took it down and left it on my father's bed. It has hung in his room ever since. At night it just looks like a shadow with a glint of glass eyeballs. We have had the stag for almost fifteen years—since I was eleven.

I was in sixth grade then and we lived in an apartment complex a half hour from my middle school. My mother drove Amit and me to school in the mornings and Amit's mother drove us home. Amit's mother spoke mostly Hindi and played Bollywood soundtracks. She wore a sari wherever she went, with her hair tied back and smooth. Her nails were long and red. Once I asked Amit about a song she used to sing. It was only one line, over and over: "The room a man dies in should be full of things."

Amit's house smelled like something I didn't know. Sometimes I went home with him instead of to an empty house, and we would go up to his room above the garage to take turns on the computer. Sometimes we searched for pornography while pretending we didn't mean to. When one of us clicked on a site we acted like it was accidental. Eventually Amit's father drove up and pressed a button in his car and the whole room shook. That meant it was time for dinner—time for me to leave.

Back then my father drove a big blue Chevy pickup. Every Wednesday night he dropped me off and picked me up from Dr. Cole's office near the mall. I saw Dr. Cole because at school I had to call my mother once after second period, once after lunch, and again before sixth period, every day. I had to call her because I had to make sure that she was still alive. She always was; she still is.

This Wednesday was cold and dark. The way home was a back way my father liked to go. It took a little longer but the drive was winding and pretty. Folly Quar-

ter cut through a few farms and then ran along a forest dotted with ranchers. There weren't any streetlights.

I caught the incandescence of the stag's eyes only a few seconds before we hit it. My father was blowing smoke out the window. It crumpled and turned off at an angle, leaving a streak of blood and something yellow on the windshield. My father stamped on the brake. It was the first time I'd heard him say "fuck." One of the windshield wipers snapped off and the other was bent at an odd angle. The glass was intact but the passenger mirror hung by a tangle of wires.

He put the car in park and patted me down briefly. I blinked a lot and wondered if I was dying. He opened the door and stepped out, a little unsteady. It was just starting to get dark and everything looked cloudy. He stared into the forest like it was hiding something. After a moment he drew another cigarette from his coat pocket and lit it. He started toward the stag.

My seatbelt had locked and I was trapped in my seat. I tried to turn around but I couldn't see anything. The car was dark, but the cigarette that had been knocked out of my father's mouth was smoldering on the floor of the driver's side. I thought the truck was going to explode. I squirmed my arms out first, but the lap belt was tight around my waist. I could just reach the side of the seat and I pulled the lever to lean it back. I propped my feet against the glovebox and pushed with my short legs, locking my hands over the back of the seat and pulling. I slid out all at once and slapped at the door handle. It wouldn't open. I scrambled to the driver's side, rolled out of the window, and landed hard on the asphalt, scraping my hands. I looked up and saw my father standing down the road. I ran to him as fast as I could.

He was smoking his cigarette next to the stag. I don't know if it was still alive. I pulled at his coat, pointed at the truck. He wasn't paying attention. When he finished the cigarette he twisted it into the ground with his shoe and walked back to the truck. He started it, put it in reverse, and backed up to the stag. I stood to the side, watching the stag's flank for any signs of movement. It looked okay except for a little blood that had pooled around its snout like a shiny red speech bubble. My father got a pair of yellow gloves from the truck and dropped the gate on the pickup. He gripped the stag by its antlers and pulled its head onto the bed. Its eyes were still, I thought. He climbed into the back and took hold of the antlers again. The stag slid the rest of the way into the truck. My father climbed out and closed the gate.

On the way home he tried to use the wipers. They flapped and smeared red and yellow across the windshield. I smelled a new cigarette; the one on the floor had burned out. It was dark and the stag was drowned in shadows in the back. My hands were bleeding slightly from the fall.

# Pin Planting

Blame it on the moon, the music, or the mood, what you will—"planting" a fraternity pin is—or should be—a pretty serious business.

Serious, that is, in the sense that both the owner of the pin and its new wearer are thinking—or should be—fairly definitely about the future.

Greek jewelry changes hands altogether too frequently these days. There are plenty of people who think that wearing a fraternity pin should "mean" something.

Don't get the idea that your success will be measured by the number and variety of pins in your jewel-box; on the contrary, the more frat badges, usually, the more complications—unless you were born a diplomat. And few of us were.

If he wants you to wear it, and you want to wear it—and it's very clearly understood that there's nothing permanent involved—well, wear it. Incidentally—never wear frat or sorority pins on evening dresses.

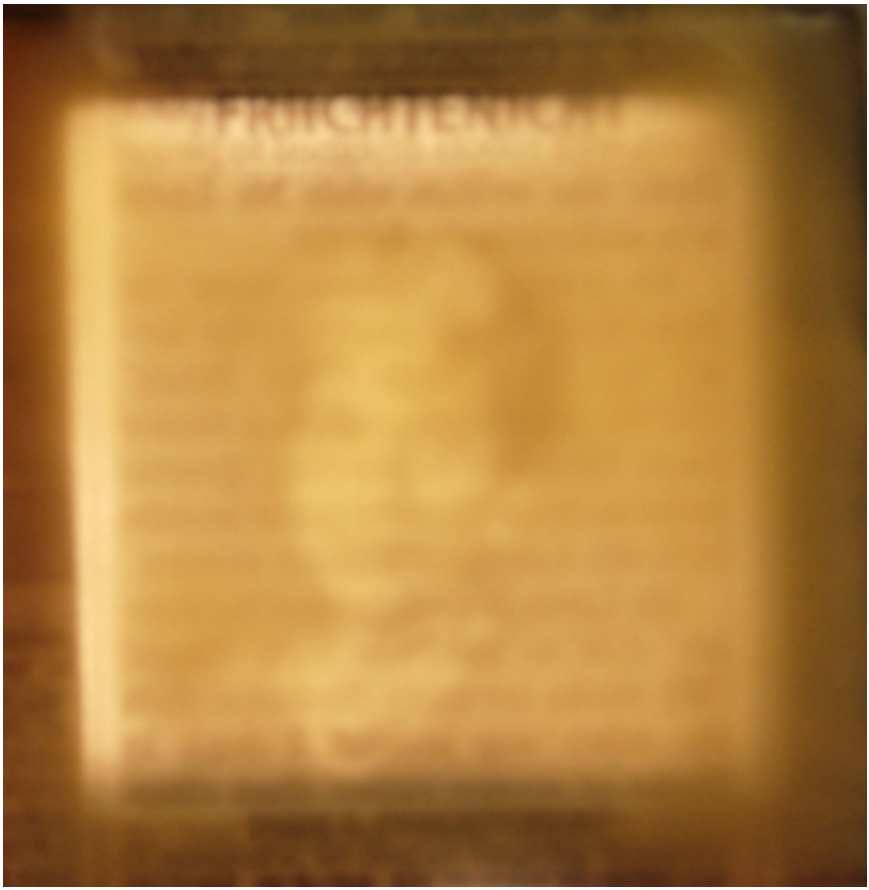
If, after you've taken it, the fire burns out and the ashes grow cold—don't sidestep into the two-timer role. Give the pin back.


# ART

"Stuck in a Warehouse"
Shannon Kielty
*Acrylic on canvas (24"x 30")*

"Elle Looking Up"
Miles Waltuck
*Digital scan of black and white print photograph (5"x 7")*


"All In One"
Aniko Makranczy
*Collage on wood (6"x 6")*

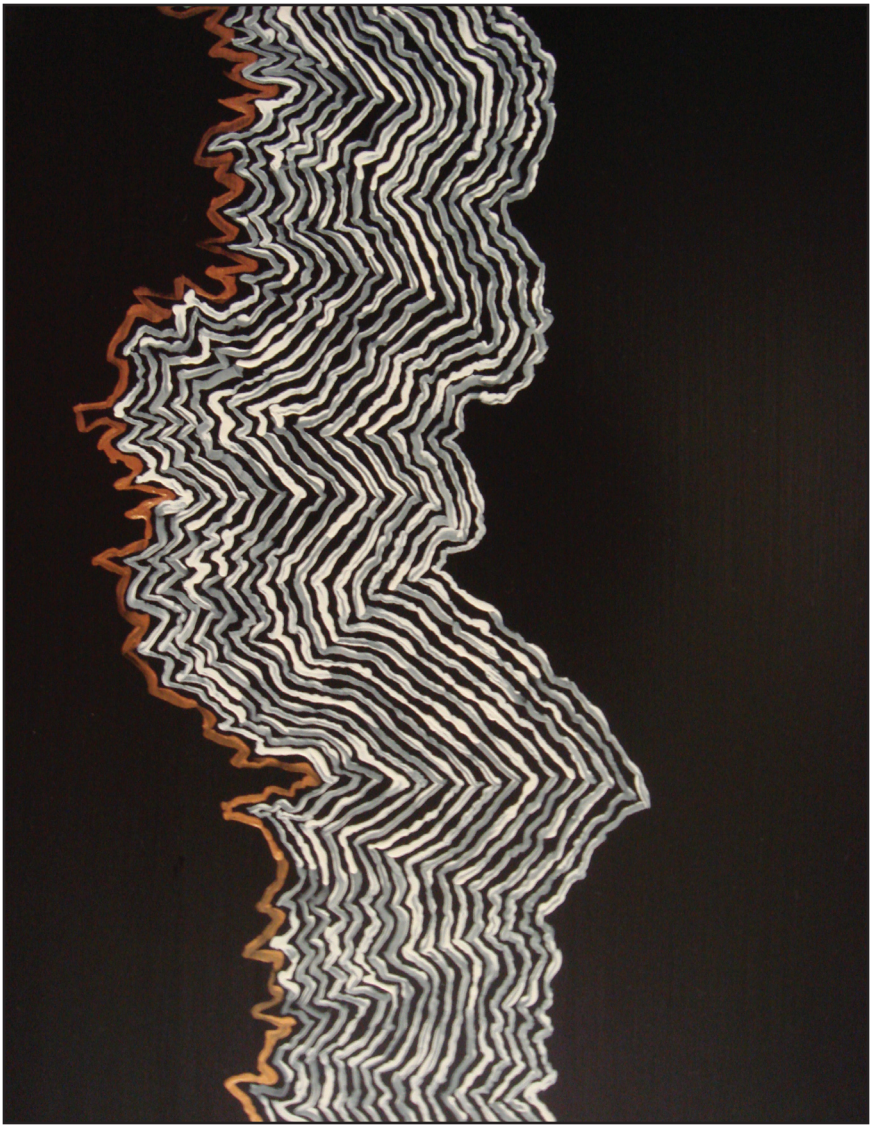


"Encased"
Aniko Makranczy
*Wood, newspaper, wax (2 ¾"x 1 ½"x 2 6/8")*

"Memento Mori"
Aniko Makranczy
*Newspaper (39"x 48")*

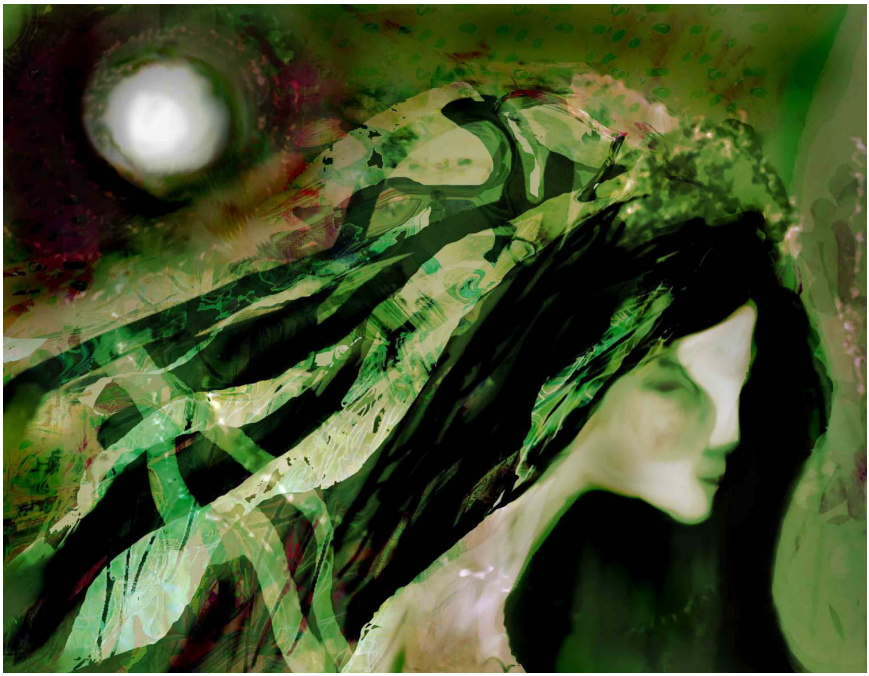
"Faces"
Sarah Ruggieri
*Acrylic, newspaper, and cardboard on wood panel (48" x 24")*

"Untitled"
Caryn Wasser
*Oil sticks (15"x 17")*



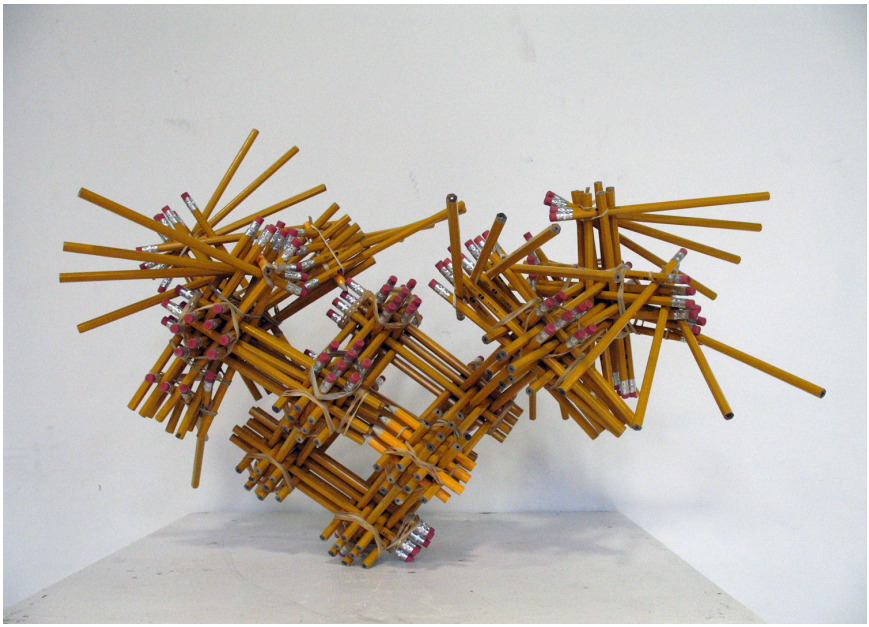
"Untitled"
Caroline Battle
*Acrylic on panel (11" x 14")*

"Fourth Composition for Stylus"
Nettie Morgan
*Acrylic on canvas (24"x 30")*



"Third Composition for Stylus"
Nettie Morgan
*Acrylic on canvas (24"x 30")*

"Georgia O'Keeffe"
Robin Hudspeth
*Acrylic on canvas (11"x 14")*



"Evolving Pencils"
Kevin Gomes
*Pencils and rubber bands (24"x 11"x 16")*

"Of Tamas"
Pauline Tran
*Photographi (approx. 6"x 9")*

"To Be Alone"
Lanny Hoang
*Acrylic on canvas (48"x 36")*

# THE JIMÉNEZ-PORTER LITERARY PRIZE

The Jiménez-Porter Literary Prize is an annual writing contest open to all University of Maryland undergraduates. The Prize is in its sixth year and is administrated by staff at the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House. To preserve anonymity, judges read the manuscripts after names of authors have been removed.

## POETRY JUDGE

Rod Jellema is Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Maryland, where he was founding director of the creative writing program. He is the author of two books of translations and four books of poems, including *A Slender Grace* and *The Eighth Day: New and Selected Poems*. His upcoming collection, *Incarnality: The Collected Poems of Rod Jellema*, will be published by Eerdmans in Spring 2009. He has received one prize and two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts. Mr. Jellema has recently donated his library of books of poetry to the University of Maryland. The Jellema Collection is housed in Jiménez-Porter Writers' House at the university and has served as a great resource for resident students.

## PROSE JUDGE

Neela Vaswani is the author of *Where the Long Grass Bends*, a collection of short stories published by Sarabande Books. Her fiction and nonfiction have appeared in *Shenandoah*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Epoch*, and the *Cimarron Review*, among other publications, and have been widely anthologized, including in the Norton edition of multiracial literature. She is the recipient of a 2006 O.Henry Prize and a 1999 Italo Calvino Prize. She received an MFA in writing from Vermont College and a PhD in American Studies from the University of Maryland. She teaches fiction in the brief-residency MFA in writing program at Spalding University, and Adult Literacy and ESL at the Center for Reading and Writing in New York City.

# THE JIMÉNEZ-PORTER LITERARY PRIZE

## PROSE AWARDS

1st Place: "Where the Dust Goes" and "Full of Things" by Steven Yenzer
2nd Place: "Prelude" by Dóra Larson
3rd Place: "Hazard, Kentucky" by Chelsy Meyers

Honorable Mentions:
"Memory Gardens" by Matthew R. Phillips
"Desert Discovery" by Ryan Leahey
"Please Please Please" by Dan Schwartz

## POETRY AWARDS

1st Place: "At Jesuitenkirche" by Andrés Pérez Rojas
2nd Place: "To kneel, rubbing two sticks together" by Maureen McHugh
3rd Place: "Market Composure" by Gabrielle Dunkley

Honorable Mention:
"Cliffs of Maine" by Savannah Renehan
"These Wild Men Are Quiet Now" by Joseph Andrew Ortuzar
"Stages" by Steven Yenzer

# STYLUS AND THE JIMÉNEZ-PORTER WRITERS' HOUSE

*Stylus* is funded and supported in large part by the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House, a Living and Learning Program at the University of Maryland, College Park. Many of the journal's staff members belong to our program (though any UMD student can be involved with Stylus). Located within Dorchester Hall, the Writers' House is a campus-wide literary center for the study of creative writing across cultures and languages. Students hone their skills through workshops, colloquia, and lectures led by Writers' House faculty and visiting writers. The two-year program is open to all majors and all years. For more information about joining the Writers' House, visit our website at www.writers-house.umd.edu or call the director at 301-405-0671.

# SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Submit all work to stylus.umd@gmail.com

Stylus accepts high-quality submissions of poetry, prose, and art from all currently enrolled University of Maryland students. Our reading period is from September to March, and our final deadline is February 15th. Submitters will be notified of their status by April 1st. We accept up to five pieces per genre, though some students may be invited to submit more. The work is put through a rigorous, anonymous review process. A two sentence biography of the author or artist must accompany each submission. Please also include your UID with each submission. We maintain flexibility in the layout process; no work is guaranteed acceptance until publication. If interested in serving on our staff, please email our account or visit our website for more information: www.styluslit.org.

Poetry and prose should be submitted in both the body of the email and as a Word document. Our prose limit is 2,500 words. Students interested in submitting longer pieces of exceptional quality are invited to email an excerpt of their piece, along with an abstract.

Multilingual work should be accompanied by an English translation when possible, or with expressed permission to be translated by our staff.

Art submissions may be emailed in TIFF or JPEG format at greater than 600 dpi. Submitters should also include information about the medium and dimensions of each piece. Students unable to send their pieces electronically should email the account to contact our art director.

Stylus is a project undertaken solely by students of the University of Maryland at College Park; the University of Maryland is not responsible for any of the statements, opinions, or printing errors contained herein. Furthermore, while the Stylus staff has done its utmost to prevent any printing errors, if an error should occur, the journal will print a correction on the website.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the following organizations and people for their support. Their generosity has enabled us to publish what we believe is our best *Stylus* yet.

## BENEFACTORS

The Jiménez-Porter Writers' House
The Student Government Association
The Department of English

## FRIENDS

The Department of Art • The Department of Spanish and Portuguese • The School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures • The College of Arts and Humanities • The Office of Undergraduate Studies • The Program in Creative Writing • TerPoets • Indigo Ink • Bridges: A Literary and Cultural Community at Maryland • University of Maryland Archives • Elizabeth Arnold • Lindsay Bernal • Don Berger • Maud Casey • Merle Collins • Michael Collier • Merrill Feitell • April Naoko Heck • Margo Humphrey • Rod Jellema • Laura Lauth • William Henry Lewis • Phoenix Liu • Elizabeth Loizeaux • Charley McCullough • Howard Norman • Stanley Plumly • Kevin Remmell • Vivianne Salgado • Johnna Schmidt • Anne Turkos • Neela Vaswani • Joshua Weiner • David Wyatt

# CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

CAROLINE BATTLE was born in Silver Spring, MD in 1987. She is in her junior year of college at the University of Maryland pursuing a bachelors degree in art studio and art history. She is a volunteer at the Herman Maril Gallery in the art department and the most recent first place winner for sculpture in the 2008 Sadat Art for Peace competition.

JENNA BRAGER, a white male, has been a poet since 2005. As a poet, he makes use of distortion, volume-driven feedback, and nonstandard tunings. His writing has been published in *WYWS Magazine* and *Mad Alley Magazine*, and he has co-founded the *Old Hat Audio Zine*, which will be sold nationally in August, 2007. In addition, he only wears flip flops in the shower.

GABRIELLE DUNKLEY, a current resident of the Jimenez-Porter Writers' House, writes to substitute sleep. Aside from writing poetry and prose, she is a freelance masseuse. She currently holds the position of president of TerPoets, the University's organization that showcases writers in weekly open mics.

LANNY HOANG has been pursuing the limits of his creative process since childhood. Painting has become a way of testing himself as a growing artist, to see what his capacity is and to strive to leap over any boundaries. With no constraints to his ideas or thoughts, Lanny Hoang's paintings show his own interpretation of the world around him.

FRIEDRICH HÖLDERLIN (1770-1843) was born in Lauffen, south-west Germany. In 1800, after parting from Susette Gontard, with whom he had had a love affair, Hölderlin suffered from mental illness, which plagued him for the remainder of his life. While his talent was not widely recognized during his lifetime, he is now regarded as one of the finest writers in the German language.

ROBIN HUDSPETH received my BA in Studio Art from University of Maryland, College Park, in 2007. She will complete my MA in Education (emphasis in art) in the summer of 2008. She is a member of a DC area art collective call Three Muses @ threemusesart.etsy.com. She hopes to begin teaching art in Montgomery County Public Schools in the fall of 2008.

SHANNON KIELTY is an artist from Northern California. Only painting for a few years, she creates art that is inspired by her personal experience while attempting

to connect in some way with every viewer. Using mainly acrylic as her medium, the artist attempts to address issues of conformity that plague modern society. Currently a business major at the University of Maryland, Shannon plans to continue art in the future either individually or as a double major.

DÓRA LARSON is a sophomore English, art history and French major and a second-year student in the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House. She enjoys traveling, learning languages, cappuccinos and dogs. Her favorite cities are Budapest and Paris.

LAURA LEHMAN is a junior English major with a Spanish minor. After spending the spring semester in Spain, her Spanish has gotten better, but her English has gotten worse, making writing poetry even more difficult than before. Either way, she will continue traveling and writing as long as she can, and hopes to make it to bilingual someday.

ANIKO MAKRANCZY is a third year graduate student in the Art Department.

MAUREEN MCHUGH is a Pushcart Prize nominee and is forthcoming this summer in Conjunctions. Upon graduating she plans on entering the MFA program at the University of Arizona in order to further cultivate her interest in cheap burritos, turquoise jewelry, and the domestication of Gila Monsters as legitimate pets.

CHELSY MEYERS is a junior at the University of Maryland currently studying English, Spanish, and secondary education. She enjoys the outdoors, writing, Mexican food, and the occasional nap. She would like to thank the Writers' House staff for their support these past two years, and all of the students in her workshops. Without you guys, Ronald Hubbard would still be standing on that street corner—thanks for giving him the courage to step off it.

NETTIE MORGAN is a senior, participated in the Honors art program last year, and is working on finishing up a double major in art history and studio art. She is still not sure what she wants to be when she grows up.

TAMAS O'DOUGHDA enjoys fireworks, colorful Band-aids, cereal four times a day, peanut butter equally as frequently, men who can sing beautiful high notes, Nepalese sweaters, and reminiscing on the Intergalactic Incense Burners.

ANDREW ORTUZAR thanks the smart people over at Stylus for publishing his poems. In the grown up future, his wife's father will write a phat cheque to the The Jiménez-Porter Writers' House to install a whirlpool bath. Andrew will be accepting thanks at the dedication ceremony, and will take the inaugural "jacooz."

AARON PEARCE is a student at Maryland.

ANDRÉS PÉREZ ROJAS was born in Caracas, Venezuela. He is a junior majoring in psychology and minoring in Spanish language and cultures. Recently he was awarded first prize in the University of South Carolina's *The Lettered Olive* poetry contest. He has sometimes been described as "a good egg."

MAHY DIMITRIOU POLYMEROPOULOS is a graduating student who is receiving a degree in Literature and Art. She is a returning student from 1985, when she stopped her studies to raise her children. Mahy has studied English Literature and Studio Art at George Mason Univeristy and at the University of Maryland, Drama at H.B Studio in New York City, and Greek Literature over the period of twenty years.

SARAH RUGGIERI is a junior art studio major looking to enter a 5th year masters program for art education. Sarah helps run the Herman Maril Gallery in the Art Sociology building. Sarah enjoys painting, drawing, collage, and walking her weiner dog, Junebug.

GENRIKH SAPGIR (1928-1999) was a prominent Moscow poet associated with the Lianozova group. He also wrote plays and movie scripts.

ALYSSA SCHIMMEL is a second year student of the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House and a junior communication and American studies double major, specializing in media studies and creative writing. She has worked with *Stylus* since 2005, serving as Fundraising Director and as a member of the poetry and multilingual boards. Aside from writing, Alyssa enjoys kazoos, hidden staircases, and alphabetical lists.

DAN SCHWARTZ is a senior English major, and will be attending the University of British Columbia for graduate school. Last year, his story "Repairs" won third place in the Jiménez-Porter Literary Prize, and his story "What Do You Want Me To Say?" was published in *Stylus*. He is always busy.

MADGA SZABÓ (1917-2007) was a Hungarian novelist, poet, essayist and playwright. Her work was suppressed by the Stalinist regime between 1949 and 1956; her first novel, *Fresco*, was published in 1958. Her work has been published in 42 countries. In 2003, she received the French literary prize, Prix Femina Étranger,

for best foreign novel.

PAULINE TRAN is earning her B.A. in English and enjoys studying poetry, lithography, painting, photography and film. She currently serves as assistant editor for D.C.'s local *Beltway Poetry Quarterly* and interns at Carbonfund.org, a non-profit carbon offsetting organization. Pauline has also interned for Split This Rock Poetry Festival and is a winner of the Arlington Arts Center In Two Tongues/En Dos Lenguas Poetry Contest. After graduation she hopes to pursue her craft, help protect the environment and direct a feature length film.

MILES WALTUCK is a third year psychology student here at the University of Maryland. He has been pursuing photography since his sophomore year of high school where he learned the fundamentals of black and white photography. He shoots primarily on film which he develops and prints himself. Miles has also pursued various forms of digital photo manipulation and color photography as well.

JULIA JIN WANG is graduating from UMD in spring '08 with degrees in English and Business. Her latest publication is the short fiction "Death of Lights" in University of Sheffield's *Route 57*. This summer she will be starting her M.A. in Children's Literature at Hollins University, and in the fall she will begin her M.F.A. in Creative Writing.

ANDY WASS completed the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House program in 2005, and has been published in *Stylus*, *The Iguana Review*, and *Poetry Midwest*. A recent New York transplant, she now works in fashion journalism.

CARYN WASSER first began painting at a young age as a way of coping with aspects of the world that upset her or that she didn't understand. Gradually, this expanded into ways of expressing history, war and conflict. She enjoys working with contrasting colors and oils. She is a freshman and a double major in history and studio art.

STEVEN YENZER is a sophomore English major at the University of Maryland. He is a layout editor for *Stylus* and *the* layout editor of *Little Patuxent Review*. He is grateful to his mother, to Emma, and to his friends for their support during a difficult time.