



Issue 2
2010



A JOURNAL OF THE ARTS CREATED BY THE
CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAM AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI. SPONSORED BY THE
ENGLISH DEPARTMENT.

Issue 2

2010

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A LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Esteemed Reader,

Mangrove is unique in that it features work by English and Economics majors alike. It is a celebration of our shared love for writing regardless of occupational pursuits. We are fortunate in that we are able to draw from undergraduate students and recently graduated alumni from throughout the University of Miami.

It has been an honor to receive, read, and publish work from some of the best writers that the University of Miami has to offer. We would not have this opportunity without the generous support of the English department.

We would also like to take the time to thank all of those who have worked towards the publication of this issue, and especially the judges of our contests, Will Allison (fiction), Diana Abu-Jaber (nonfiction) and Tony Trigilio (poetry), for their contributions.

On April 22, we invite you to join us in celebration of this issue at the Rathskeller, where several of the authors represented in this issue read their work.

If you are interested in joining our undergraduate staff, information will be available at our website:

www.as.miami.edu/mangrove

Collette C. Morris, Editor-in-Chief

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Sake

SHARI SEIDMAN

The baby kitten is discovering the world. The feel of the fur on her bristly tongue. Cleaning herself. Better than we can, with our 16 oz bottle of flea shampoo. Baby kitten licks with force and doesn't realize that she is about to fall. And she does. But with the agility of a baby kitten, she flips midair and lands softly on the ground to quickly climb into my lap. She doesn't fall off my lap. I hold her and pet her. And if I pet her too much she cries. If I don't pay attention she types stories on my laptop with her miniature paws.

Meet my cast of characters.

Presenting Dr. Mitchell Greenberg

"Strat-veets-ya. That's Russian for hello." We hear the muffled voice coming from the other room, and the click of the T.V. Dr. Greenberg comes into the kitchen and says, "Sa-deet-ez pogy-leester ecroit provyglaz."

"What does that mean, Mitch," says his daughter Courtney, who, since seventh grade has been calling her father by his first name.

"Please sit down and let me look in your right eye." His pronunciation is completely wrong. He has not even attempted a Russian accent. And this is how he will say the phrase to his patients when they sit down in his examination chair.

"Sadeet ez pejolester ecroit provyglas," Courtney says to her grandfather, who understands Russian, but is completely deaf without his hearing aid and looks at her funny.

"Ya et soup," says Dr. Greenberg.

"What does that mean?" asks Courtney.

"I eat soup," he says.

"Really? Ya et soup," says Courtney to her Grandfather, who responds with, "Hello, hello, hello," which is how he adjusts his

hearing aid that hardly works.

Dr. Greenberg is the local ophthalmologist. His small office is in a large apartment building on Brightwater Court in Brighton Beach. For thirty some-odd years, he has been seeing patients, who, apart from a select few, have gotten consistently older, more decrepit and increasingly Russian. The few sentences that he knows in the language, he has taught to his daughters, who, when wanting to distinguish themselves from being “girls from Long Island,” use the lines to claim their Brooklyn roots.

Presenting Mrs. Florence Greenberg

Dr. Greenberg’s mother, when not in Florida, lives in another large apartment building not five minutes away. She walks to his office, three days a week, to bring him lunch sometime between twelve and four. If she isn’t playing canasta, or watching tennis, she recreates the delicacies of his past; cheese things, maple syrup banana fruit salad, bologna rollups-which he never eats. And if she isn’t learning about how to use the internet at the Y, she is on the phone with his wife. Asking her to book airline tickets. Or if she could find a doctor, licensed in Florida, residing in New York, to screen her vision, to renew her already expired Florida driver’s license. And when she isn’t complaining about her lack of things to do, she is complaining about not being invited to her son’s house, for the weekend, with his wife, and her cooking, which she doesn’t even like. But she’s lonely.

Act I The Brisket is Burning

I just saved fifteen pounds of brisket from being burnt to a crisp. It’s too late to be cooking, but between going into the office, managing the crazy office, burning charts all day, I mean billing charts all day, this is the only time I’ve been able to get anything done. I still have to wait for the challah to rise before I put it in the oven, and I have to marinate the tofu gefilte fish for Courtney. She doesn’t even like gefilte fish, but she came home from college yesterday and

informed me that she no longer eats anything that could have had any type of loving relationship with its mother. And what kind of mother would I be if I didn't make something to remind her of the holidays. Maybe I could have started earlier, but his mother was just driving me crazy. Every counter has at least one glass that she used with her fuchsia-magenta lipstick all over the rim. I'm sick of looking at them. A whole weekend of her. I hope she goes to services tomorrow. Tonight's going to be a long, long night. Where was I?

(re) Presenting Mrs. Greenberg

When she was younger, Mrs. Greenberg (Dr. Greenberg's mother) dreamt of being a starlet. An actress in the movies, or in the theaters, it didn't matter. She wanted to be Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz. Or Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind*. She listened to the radio and learned to dance swing. She felt it her civic duty to entertain, and danced with the new soldiers, held them close to her bosom. It was 1945, and at 19, she was ready to serve her country.

She met Herman that same year, at one of the USA dances. He was tall and strong. His strong nose accompanied a shy smile. His blonde hair was combed precisely to the left and his blue eyes sparkled in Florence's direction. She thought him striking in his pressed uniform.

"May I have this dance?" he asked her after getting up from his chair. For the last ten minutes, he had been watching the vivacious Florence charm his friends.

"Right now?" she asked. The music had slowed down. Couples, some newlyweds, were getting up to dance. Florence had been dancing to the colorful music, making the rounds.

Spinning from arm to arm. Her feet were aching. This dance? No, this dance wasn't meant for strangers, she thought.

More confidently Herman said in his shy voice, "Yes, ma'am. I'm no good at the Charleston. If they had known about my two left feet, I wouldn't be going nowhere to fight. What's a soldier got to do for a dance with a pretty girl?"

"I suppose I could make an exception," she said, biting her

lip, looking up into his gaze.

She placed her hand in his. He led the way to the center of the dance floor. These soft hands were not meant to fight any wars, she thought. He put his hand around her waist. She put hers on his shoulder. "Do you know where they're sending you?" she asked as they sashayed to the right.

"No," he answered, and changed direction. "It could be anywhere. If I'm lucky, I could be stationed right here." He wouldn't say whether or not he wanted to fight. It was clear from the tone of his voice that he wanted to be lucky.

"Oh," was all she said as he spun her under his arm. He wasn't like the other soldiers she had met. Those men were too gung ho, stupid with drunken bravery. He dipped her deeply. She trusted she wouldn't fall. Herman held her waist tightly, with an I-don't-ever-want-to-let-you-go grip, she thought.

He stepped all over her feet the first time they danced.

Act II: The Tenants

Dr. Greenberg is the landlord of a small building on Ocean Parkway, also in Brighton Beach. It houses two doctor's offices and two residential tenants. First floor: Dr. Lynder, the OBGYN, and his mother. She is a different species of mother than Mrs. Greenberg. One, who over the phone, will scream in Russian that since the branch underlining the sign to her son's office had been cut down, his patients will not be able to find it. To which Dr. Greenberg's multilingual, 97 year old father-in-law will respond in Russian, "This isn't Russia. Go back to Russia and plant as many trees as you want."

As an ear nose and throat doctor in the mother country, Rozalia Lynder holds no license here. Yet, she goes by Dr. Lynder, has the office lease in her name, runs it, and even sees several patients of her own. The ones who, from mother country, see Dr. Greenberg for their eyes.

"Stratveetsya," says Dr. Greenberg to Valentina Potpova, his eleventh Russian patient that day. Ms. Potpova for a change is a younger woman. She wears five inch gladiator style boots, the

tightest jeans her voluptuous behind can squeeze into, and a tee shirt with the letters BCBG written across her equally voluptuous chest. She has the round face of a babushka doll, and her round blue eyes are fringed by extra long, hot pink lashes. She has seen Dr. Greenberg once before, after a royal blue lash jumped into her round blue eye and scratched her cornea.

"Sadeetez pogylester ecroit provyglaz?" Dr. Greenberg says to Valentina, as she takes a seat. She looks at him funny, it is her left eye that is coated with a film of white pus and disfigured by inflammation.

He reverts back to a slow and fragmented English, one that he thinks she might understand better. "What-seems -to -be -the -problem -Ms. Potpova?" he says.

"I have ietch around eye. I see very blurry," she says in well-spoken English, heavily accented, outrageously sexy. Dr. Greenberg takes a closer look at her eye. Lo and behold, her cornea is melting. Dr. Greenberg hasn't seen anything like this since the eighties. "They used to call it lover's lye," he would tell his daughters. "Angry girlfriends would throw lye or chemicals into their cheating boyfriend's eyes to blind them so that they could never look at another girl again."

"Ms. Potpova, have you been exposed to any chemicals?" asks Dr. Greenberg.

"I think the pink from my lashes has stained my skin. However, they say at salon my eyelashes are hypoallergenic," answers Ms. Potpova, drawing out the word hypoallergenic in her sensuous voice.

"When did your eye begin to itch?" he asks, discounting her hypothesis.

"Three days ago, I have redness in the eye. It tears like when I cut onion. I was having yellow crust over pink eyelashes after I wake. The light, it hurts to look at. I thought I might have the pink eye. After I put in the urine drops, the burning stops, for a minute, but this starts to happen, and then I come see you," she answers, pointing at the infection.

"The urine drops," sighs Dr. Greenberg. "That sounds like you had pink eye." Which it no longer is. Now, he realizes that it is pink eye, aggravated by the traditional Russian folk remedy of fresh urine.

Dr. Greenberg has seen already two of these cases this week. Unfortunately, it appears that Ms. Potpova has used the urine of her boyfriend, Alex, the son of one of Dr. Greenberg's Ocean Parkway tenants, who may or may not be so faithful. Who most likely has contracted some type of STD. Which mayor may not be gonorrhea. Dr. Greenberg diagnoses Valentina's eye as "gonococcal keratoconjunctivitis," and refers her to a specialist, in futile attempts to save her melting cornea and fleeting vision.

Act III: A Love Story, Kind of Sort of

Right before seeing Ms. Potpova, Antyuhkan, the big Ukrainian truck driver, and father of the movie-star-handsome Alex (who we used to see holding the hands of equally handsome young men), drops off his rent. He has his own company and pays Dr. Greenberg, on time, in full, cash only. He has not called in a complaint for the entirety of his now seven year tenancy.

Dr. Glass, who works in the office below Antyukan, also pays on time, and calls in only to report toilet flooding, which has become an ongoing problem.

Which brings us to our kind of love story. Alex and Valentina Potpova have had a very long distance relationship. They met in a chat room for Russians Only—even though Alex is half Russian, half Ukrainian, and 100% All American Boy. Valentina is from Moscow. Desperately seeking American citizenship, she hooked up with him on a week long ski trip in Utah. She moved into his apartment the week after. How it all happened? We aren't sure—it was too fast.

They lived together for six months. He wouldn't marry her. And after she was deported, they continued their romance from Moscow to Manhattan Beach.

"Yes, his visit, it was crazy. We were together twenty-four eight, and he didn't want to leave. He was oh so sad," said Valentina,

her lips curling up at the corners, smirking. Sitting at my desk, billing charts, PI couldn't help overhearing the Skype conversation Valentina was having with Larissa—the Russian girl I regrettably hired to answer the phones, and welcome the Russian speaking patients. Sharp tongued and bitchy, Larissa refuses to speak to me in English unless she has to. What she doesn't know is that just because I can't speak the language doesn't mean I don't understand it. I know all about Larissa's ingrown toenails and her different lovers. And I don't need to know any Russian to understand that she is interested in my husband. The way she looks at him when he comes out of the exam room is enough. How she talks to him in the sexiest voice she can muster makes me livid. I used to work from home. Now, I come into the office every day. As soon as we can find a replacement, preferably a grandma, nun, or lesbian, she is out.

"I couldn't help smiling at the airport before his return flight though, because that was the gate from which I would normally fly to Florida, How mean am I?" said Valentina.

"You slut," said Larissa. "You don't still talk to him do you?"

"Not anymore, he's just backup. I paid him a little visit before I left for Moscow—I was very direct, if you know what I mean. I couldn't get him to do it. Alex seems more committed anyway," said Valentina.

"You whore! Whatever, tell me more about Alex and Valentina take over Moscow. Did your family approve of him?" said Larissa.

"Kind of. My mom said he was a bit too young and immature for me. She says I am more mellow than he is, however she said he was very hot. My dad said that this has been the best choice so far."

"Promising. Ok I have to go, the sexy Doctor is about to walk over here," said Larissa.

"Wait, the sexy time was very good with us!" said Valentina as Larissa quickly shut the laptop and beckoned my husband with her come hither stare.

Now, six months later, and back in the United States on a work visa, Valentina thinks she has citizenship in the bag. Alex has taken Valentina to meet his parents—to her, a sign of success—who

look at each other questioningly when he brings her home. They cannot imagine why Alex would even bother to bring a girl home, let alone announce his intentions of a possible marriage. They have known about his homosexuality for years, although they prefer he remain in the closet.

Meet The Brothers El Sakah

El Sakah, the supposed brother of Majeed, rents Dr. Greenberg's remaining apartment. He has been living in it for the past two years and for all intents and purposes is a good tenant. We are not sure as to how El Sakah is related to Majeed, but Dr. Greenberg has his theories. The first one, their being brothers in the sense of Jihad. The second, Egyptian spies. El Sakah is dark skinned and narrow eyed. His front lip slopes to almost touch the tip of his hooked nose, and is cleanly shaven. Majeed, on the other hand, has an oblong face and full head of braided hair underneath a turban. He has two lines for lips and heavily lashed eyes. *None of these people who are which my friends*, Majeed would always mutter. And one day Dr. Greenberg received a short letter informing him that his brother El Sakah would be taking over his lease. No questions were asked, the switch was made. Dr. Greenberg's thoughts: he would rather a visit from the FBI than Hamas.

We often hear El Sakah pacing back and forth, his phone call conversations that crescendo and diminuendo in lengthy octaves. Dr. Lynder has complained more than once of the clanking of metal, and the jujza noise of a drill on steel. Strong smells come from the apartment, and she complains that his ethnic cooking seeps through the vents and keeps patients away. We think that he cooks to mask the smells of his chemical experiments.

Dr. Greenberg received an emergency beep last week. His service told him that there was an emergency on Ocean Parkway. Already half way home, at Costco, with his mother, bringing her to his wife for Rosh Hashana, he was picking up the list of items that he had already half forgotten. Shit, the toilet must have flooded again,

he thought, and dialed the number of El Sakah. Who answered the phone and said that he only had a *kind of* emergency, and that the emergency wasn't really an *emergency* emergency.

He asks, "Dr. Greenberg, what do you call animal which looks like rat and has fat belly? Poposurn, pusum? Opusom? I look it up on internet and this is what I find. Popossum. To nothing does this animal will it to move! It sits on the ledge of the window of my neighbor. They take of its picture!" The building is a brownstone and is no more than five feet from the building next to it. "It watches me. It stares into my window all night and I don't know what to do. It's scary." Dr. Greenberg tells him that he cannot call the exterminator because it is outside and furthermore, it isn't even on his building. "I think I will kill it myself," declares El Sakah. With what, we aren't sure. Dr. Greenberg tells him that he doesn't think it is a good idea and tells him to phone the police the next time he sees it.

Act IV Living in Magenta

"Would you like a free make-up consultation Ma'am?" asked the young esthetician behind the counter.

"Thank you, I would," said Mrs. Greenberg.

"Let's start with skin type," she said, and examined Mrs. Greenberg's tanned leather skin. Her crows' feet, sun spots, moles, freckles. The assortment of every dermatologist's top ten watch out for these list. She took out a powder and dusted Mrs. Greenberg's face ever so lightly.

"Perfect," said the sales lady, "We have just started adding SPF to many of our products—instant sun protection!" she exclaimed.

"Lovely, how beautiful," said Florence sincerely, admiring her complexion in the mirror. The saleslady reached for jet black eyeliner, asked Florence to close her eyes, and drew a thick line, as straight as she could, across the little heaps of eyelid. She then took a wet mascara to coat the few lashes that framed Florence's eyes. "Hypoallergenic!" said the salesgirl.

"Exquisite," cooed Florence.

"Now for the finishing touch," said the salesgirl, "the season's latest in lipwear: Magenta Me Splendid," and painted Florence's lips.

Florence blew kisses to the mirror. "I'll buy it," she said. And walked out of Bloomingdales feeling ten years younger. When she came home, Herman, her husband of forty some odd years noticed her very pink lips. In whatever was remaining of his seventy year old excitement, he kissed her deeply, so that he too could have a taste of the playfulness from her lips.

"My pussycat," he said. "My apple blossom bunny, I've missed you today."

"My Herman," she said, "My Hy, the apple of my eye, I love you," she said, and kissed him back. The kiss lingered on his lips with the cool salt air from the ocean, twenty stories below their high rise, beachfront apartment.

Baby Kitten jumps into my lap and onto my keyboard. It's one thirty two in the morning and my cast of characters, most of them anyway, have gone to sleep. Dr. Greenberg exhausted and passed out in front of the TV in the sunroom, is waiting for me to finish cooking. His mother curls up against the emptiness on the right side of the king sized bed in our guest room. Valentina is in the bed of her soon to be ex-boyfriend's apartment, crying out of her uninjured eye. Said soon-to-be-ex-boyfriend is in the bed of his boyfriend's apartment, fast asleep.

VI.

Sakah, as usual, is pacing back and forth. Baby kitten crawls back into my lap and begins purring. Her eyes close and she falls asleep. Making me think that I should too. Because, after all, the brisket's done, and I'm just living the life, and the day and these characters will just keep on living too. I look at my baby kitten. It seems that she has grown twice her size since the first page. And her miniature paws have gotten big. But she hasn't changed one bit. We call her Sake Monster.

I-84E

LAURA BURGESS

I take responsibility for nothing.
blowing grass bubbles with soda cans,
aluminum lipstick riding shotgun on my teeth.
James Bond's got nothing on me with my
Vera Cruz spiderlike veins,
mapping the industry one vessel at a time.
melanoma you,
drive under the influence of giants.
telephone poles mark my
hundreds of thousands of
eyelashes that land handsomely.
my millions of wishes that go
unanswered because my cage can't lend
anymore ribs.
so lay your adam to rest.
my lips are frazzled.
my neck is bent.

Mr. Grieves

DANIELLE NASH

My mother killed herself four days before my twenty-first birthday. I did not know this as I celebrated, falling asleep shortly before midnight, Seattle-time, having spent the entire day jostling through airports, those grim portals of steely resolve and anxiety. I remember lying in my hotel bed—angry but not surprised that she hadn't called to wish me a happy birthday. She was jealous of the time my dad, sister, and I spent together and it stained with guilt and resentment the few vacations the three of us took as a pseudo-family. Afterwards, we would always downplay any fun we had so as not to upset her. On my birthday, then, I assumed she was ignoring me for being happy when she was not.

I did not find out that she was dead until a week after my sister, father and I returned from a vacation in Canada. We spent the day stressed, with jaws clenched, airline tickets in hand, making our way back to my dad's house in Jacksonville. We arrived mid-afternoon, giddy that another family outing had not dissolved into disaster; we had pictures of ocean kayaking and walks on the beach to prove it. And then my father sat us down. He wanted to talk to us. I thought we had been spending too much on the credit card and that he was going to give us a lecture about fiscal responsibility and integrity.

"Your mother killed herself last week," my father said. "They found the body while we were out of the country. She asked for there not to be a service. I would have told you... We would have flown back if there had been any service or any chance that she would survive. But she had been dead a long time."

Like a punch to the stomach, the words came too fast and unexpected to create complex emotions, just a bodily reaction. Curl up, protect the face, cry, ask for help. The more complex emotional re-

sponse came later. At that moment, I felt disbelief. Hours later, I entertained the notion that she wanted to start a new life and had faked it all. Sometimes I still think that.

It shouldn't have been hard to believe. My mother had attempted suicide five times during my adolescence, the first when I was junior in high school. It was just she and I living in a little house in Saint Louis; my sister had gone with my dad when he moved to Florida. (My parents were the only couple alive to think after seeing the movie *The Parent Trap*, "Well that seems like an effective and pain-free custody arrangement.") I had walked in late at night to ask a question, god knows what, and there was a note and pills thrown around like confetti and three bottles of alcohol, nice stuff, mostly empty, lined up next to her bed. I said, "Mom, mom, mom, mom," insistent and panicked, and I cried and shook her, but she would not respond. Even then I felt all the wrong things—I was too close, I should back up, it was dangerous being so close.

The next day I saw her in the ICU and she promised me, "Never again." I helped her walk to the psychiatric ward where she was required to spend 72 hours. I picked her up three days later, after I got out of school. I didn't tell my father. He would have taken me out of the house when she needed me most.

I accepted a consoling hug from my boyfriend's mother once, hoping she wouldn't smell vodka on me. I knew things weren't normal and shouldn't go on as normal, but isn't normal a relative term?

I start too many sentences with "I." I am self-absorbed.

Maybe that's why I'm writing this. My life continues. I go to class, I drink, I go out, I meet new people, I have crushes, I have to buy milk, I have tests, I have a job, I have anxieties about hair and weight and why doesn't he like me. I have a million thoughts everyday that have nothing to do with her. I don't tell anyone she's dead. In my life only three people unrelated to me know. I am so inhuman that I go about as if she never existed. And yet I am writing about her and how much she hurt me and how hard this is. Why? I

am a narcissist who feels her story must be told. I am cannibalizing my family's horrors for a short essay. I thought maybe it would help. By throwing all these globs of emotion at the page and trying to sort them out, to make them fit into language and grammar—a comma goes here and a comma goes there—after finding out she shot herself, it had not been pills as I expected ...Maybe this is gross and voyeuristic. Look at me. I'm hurting. Feel for me. I don't have the voice to tell the people walking in and out of my sight that I am sad and I am lonely and I miss her.

My parents divorced and somehow, through the infuriatingly mundane and confusing laws on death and inheritance and wills, I am the executor of my mother's estate, although in her note she asked that the executor be one of her siblings to not burden her children. Her body is in a morgue in Saint Louis as I am beginning school in Miami, my last year of college. My bedroom wall is a collage of post-its, information I need for the death certificate, the city she was born in (I am a disgraceful daughter), whether she had any Hispanic heritage, her mother's maiden name, the number for the medical examiner's office, the number for a Saint Louis crematory, the address for a funeral home in Jacksonville where I hope she doesn't mind I interred her ashes. Selfishly, I wanted them to be somewhere we could visit. I disregarded her request that her ashes be disposed of. That was the worst part of the note: throw away her ashes. Dispose of her life and then of the remains, pretend we never had a mother who we loved, even though she was unhappy.

I had "You Will Be Missed" engraved on the slab of marble in front of her cremains. (The stupidest word—Oh, lets mash up the words "cremated" and "remains." There has never been a more pathetic phrase, so inadequate and belittling.) They don't make slabs of marble large enough to even begin to honestly engrave what she will be to us.

My mother shot herself four days before my birthday, and wasn't found until a week later, as we assumed she was not answering our calls out of bitterness, and three weeks later I was holding

Mangrove

a large black box with what remained of my mother and putting it into a lonely dark square, so ugly and disrespectful, a marble slab put in front of it, the funeral director hugging me and saying, "You are too young. Of course she knows you love her." But the funeral director does not understand the situation and I will not tell her just like I will not tell most of my friends. I will continue on like this never happened, and I will try with all of my heart to be happy because being unhappy means death and I do not want to die.

I am writing this, purging tiny bits of my anger and resentment and isolation and sadness and guilt, hoping to leave them here and walk away and be better at being normal. But I know it is futile, that I cannot leave behind my mother no matter how much she wanted me to, and I would happily swallow all of these horrible feelings and carry them forever if I could bring her back even for a day, just to tell her I love her, and, "Please don't. You feel like nothing but you are everything to your girls."

Life goes on, no matter how bizarre it seems. I get A minuses on papers and wonder how the teacher could not recognize my ordeal and reward my stoicism with a solid A and a look of recognition for my strength and fortitude. I talk to strangers in bars and, occasionally, to my deep disgust, mention my mother as if she were still alive. I sing without abandon to the songs playing in my car, finding new, sometimes morbid, meaning in the lyrics. I eat lunch and dinner and, on the rare day, breakfast. I wake up and walk around, and at night I go to sleep. But, oh my god. I miss her.

Dancing in the Dark

GRACE CASTRO

dance with me
with my arm around your waist
as I gaze into your face
and you laugh in my ear
whispering softly “can I see you again?”

only in the dark
where I will not be seen by tus padres y tus tios
so they do not see me holding your waist
“they wouldn’t understand,” you say

¿porque no?
we speak the same language, con el mismo acento
eat the same food—swallow the same soup
move to the rhythm of the same groove

so my skin es el color de cafe
¿y que?
hasta tomanos el mismo cafe
why shouldn’t we dance together, again and again
slowly, closely

not in the dark so they can’t see
not in the light
but with all of the colors moving together that’s inside of tus padres
y tus tios
in you and in me

Coffee with Lucy

LAURA BURGESS

The girls' bathroom mirror in Sal's Sandwich Shop distorts Lucy's perfect, little, straight nose and makes her creamy complexion spotty and grey. She smiles nevertheless confidently back at herself and gives her shiny curls a fluff or two. She tugs on her bra straps until they slightly hide under her snug baby blue top. With her pinky finger, she evens out the sparkly red gloss on her lips and blows a kiss to her reflection. "Do whatever's necessary, Lucy."

She finds her way out of the girls' room to a vinyl booth in the back corner of the shop, her low, black heels clacking on the tiled floor. Her tuna sandwich is waiting for her just where she left it. She takes her seat, and crosses her bare legs, keeping her chin slightly raised and both blue eyes on the door.

She places her pencil firmly into her yellow-papered writing pad, gnawing on the sour metal strip beneath its hard, pink rubber eraser. She scribbles:

I need to...

- Find Homecoming dress
- Call Meagan about deadline
- Get interview with Harry Stone

She circles a big, lofty heart around number 3 on the list. She grins and pushes back stray wisps of her gold hair behind her ears. She crosses her legs and glances at the oversized clock. 12:30 pm. Her tuna sandwich remains untouched, yet the end of her pencil is riddled with teeth marks.

Outside the shop, two short, unkempt guys hassle a tall young man, about 6'2" in height. The young man's hair is a soft brown, groomed neatly around his ears. His hand is on the door handle; his body leans into the glass door so that everyone inside has the opportunity to hear their conversation. His eyes

flit uninterestedly from one guy's face to the other, glancing occasionally into the cool indoors of the restaurant.

"Harry! Harry! Do you think you can drop your time .3 seconds by Saturday for the state meet?" One of the scrawny guys yells out.

"Harry, please, just 5 minutes... I need this article to pass!" The other whines, "Just tell me how you manage to juggle all of those crazy extracurricular without going insane. What does it all add up to now? Captain of the Edgewood High Hawks boy's swim team, leader of Students Promoting a Clear Environment, tutor at a local middle school, and rank top 2% academically in our senior class. So how does it feel, man? You're a local phenomenon, girls want to date you, and guys wouldn't dare stop their girlfriends from doing so."

"Sorry, fellas, but there's a cold cut turkey sandwich with my name on it inside... maybe next year," he smiles brightly at them.

The two guys let the heavy glass door close on them, their postures hunched over in defeat.

Lucy whispers to herself, "They forgot to mention the jaw structure of a demigod." She taps her number 2 pencil against the pad of paper and scans the crowded sandwich shop. The brown haired guy takes a seat on a stool by the coffee bar.

His broad shoulders fill out a blue and red letter jacket that reads "Stone" in swishy letters across the back.

"S-T-O-N-E." She spells across the top of the pad. "Can he pull the sword from the stone?" she scribbles. "Will this Stone sink or float... or skip across the top of the pool water...?"

"Rubbish, just rubbish," she strikes the words thoroughly throughout with her pen. "Stone, Harry." She continues to write. "Stone demeanor." She smiles before scribbling down her last observation, "Stone hard... body."

"Well, this is getting nowhere," Lucy pushes the tuna

sandwich away from herself, resolved at last to get somewhere. She places the pad underneath her arm, sticks her pencil in her mouth, and picks up the red tray supporting her sandwich.

"It's now, or back to filing papers," Lucy mutters around the pencil stuck between her lips.

She places her tray above the garbage, runs her fingers through her hair, and smooths down her black cotton mini skirt. She makes her way through the crowded shop towards her current fixation. Her wild curls bounce as she drifts by Harry Stone's corner of the coffee bar. The flick of her wrist as she passes the table is so slight that Harry does not immediately notice the transfer of a tiny piece of ripped yellow paper from her hand to the wooden table top.

On it is written: Got a few questions for ya, babe... call me 281-555-0303.

His eyes follow those bouncing yellow curls out of the shop, through the heavy glass entrance door, and to a low stone wall that wraps around the shop's exterior. She sits, crosses her legs, and taps her black heels against the cement wall. She reaches into her leather purse and pulls out a pack of clove cigarettes and a lighter. She lights up a cigarette, leans back and stares into the day's clear blue sky. Her phone vibrates inside her purse; she instinctively pulls it out and places it to her ear in one smooth motion.

Harry stares out the window, up from his empty turkey club sandwich wrapper. The attractive girl who left the note on his table is flipping her hair from side to side outside, chatting away on her red Motorola cell phone and puffing away on a brown smoke. He grins and waits for her to hang up her phone.

Seconds later he joins her out in front of the building.

"I heard you like your coffee black." He says, handing her a fresh cup of the shop's coffee.

She reaches out and takes it. The veins in his tan sinewy arms make her hands shake. A bit of coffee spurts out onto her hand, but he is quick to wipe it off with his fingertips. She recovers from her

initial jitters and responds, "Oh really... from whom?"

"Well, maybe it was just an assumption."

"I see."

"So you had something you wanted to ask me?"

Excitement sparks in her eyes, but her mellow exterior maintains a mysterious coolness. She shrugs, looking upwards and away again, and takes another drag on her clove cigarette.

"I suppose I do. Yes," She replies, her eyes returning back to the earth, grinning into his handsome, well formed- face.

"So this is an interview?" He smiles.

"Only if you want it to be." She grins back.

"Great, then I have a question for you," he smirks.

"No, no, no.. that's not the way this is going to work." Her shift from laid back to assertive makes his smirk vanish into a distant frown.

"Fine."

"So all the girls on campus are just dying to know..."

"If it's going to be one of those interviews, then I'm ready to leave."

"Wait! Wait, okay I can respect that... It's just that I'm not quite at a level to... I need what sells, okay?"

"You want what sells, huh? Hmmm... you mean like Favorite color? Boxers or briefs? Did I really date Angela Basset my sophomore year? My favorite flavor of ice cream? Who really did inspire me to take up swimming?"

"And...?" Lucy's eyes brighten, hand perched over her pad, licking her glossy lips.

"Boxers. Brushed past her in the street, so no, but I wish. Cookie Dough. My Dad... sob story... yeah... he saved me from drowning... the whole bit, but I don't want you to make me sound like sponge, ya know? Filled to the brim with emotion, just waiting for the right moment to trigger me and squeeze it all out. I'm supposed to be a Stone, ya know?"

Lucy beams.

"Oh, and Red."

"Red?" She asks.

"Red. That's my favorite color."

"Oh! Great!" She furiously scribbles onto her yellow pad R-E-D, 'smiley face'. "Perfect now..." she takes the reigns of the interview.

"And let me guess.. moonlit walks on the beach?" She jests.

"Only with you... haha!" He winks. She holds her breath. Every word out of his mouth makes her flush.

"Red's also the color of the dress you wore last year to the winter dance," he mentions casually.

Lucy blushes furiously.

"And the color of your lips, though it wore away throughout the night because your nervous habit," he adds.

Lucy's eyes widen, and she stops biting her bottom lip. She fidgets with a loose curly hanging by her ear.

"And was my hair up or down?" she prods.

"Down. It flowed down your pale shoulders, hiding the back lacing of your red dress, except when you'd dance, your hair would lift up into the air and momentarily give glimpses of the nape of your neck, and the lacing of red silk braided down your back."

"And the flowers in my corsage?"

"Roses," he responds.

"Why?" Lucy asks with a coy grin.

"Because they're your favorite," he answers.

"And my favorite season?" she continues.

"Autumn," he adds, "because you like to sit outside with your yellow note pad and get lost in your thoughts, as the crisp air surrounds and refreshes you."

"You're quite perceptive. I suppose you're salutorian for a reason. I guess I just find it easier to write when..."

He jumps in, "When the crisp air fills your lungs, clears your head, and heightens every sense as though you finally started to live."

"Exactly..." her eyes wider now than ever. "And the leaves..."

"The leaves... oh yes! I know all about those leaves:

The ones through which you'd stare
Gold Brown Pink Green. Bare
All of the colors that shaded you
Your canopy.
Now no longer there."

Her face freezes. "I never let you read that. I've never let anyone read that. That was private..."

His smile broadens; his perfect teeth gleam in the afternoon sun.

He begins to mimic her doodling, raising his voice an octave higher to match hers, "Sometimes I wonder if there's more to life than what everyone makes me believe. Sometimes I just want to lay in warm grass and turn clouds into creatures, and then when the sun goes down, start measuring the universe one star at a time, counting them until..."

"... Until I am too overwhelmed to continue..." she finishes for him, unnerved. "How do you know this?" She blushes.

"Know what? That you write in your diary every day during fourth period?"

"No..."

"That you can't write more than five words without biting the end of your pencil."

"No... well, yes! But no, I mean how can you possibly know the exact words of my journal!"

"Why are you so concerned, Lucy? Aren't you flattered that I take an interest in you?"

"I'm flattered, really I am, but my writing's personal." She stammers. "Please tell me how you know..."

He cuts her off again, his voice dropping to a low, even tone.

"And that day he became so cold on the phone, that I felt my heart try to rip itself free from inside my ribcage, and I cried until I choked on my heaving breaths and tears, and finally I had no energy to cry anymore. So I just laid there, emotionless, it is all I had the power to do." At this point he was down on the ground claspng at his heart

like a bad actor out of a melodrama, pretending to reach into the sky with his other hand.

Two sophomore girls pass by the scene Harry portrays, eyeing each other in confusion and curiosity. He starts quoting louder as though they were his audience, "I fear I shall never love another individual again! No man will ever have what it is... that something... to love me for eternity! I would have bet my life he was that man... the man... no my entire being soul, body and mind he was him... but I would have lost them all it seems. I have never been much of a gambler."

He pretends to roll dice in the two, young girls' direction. The two pause at the door, giggling at Harry's theatrics, perhaps also at how the veins in his neck and around his jaw protrude ever so slightly. They blush and wave goodbye, chattering excitedly until they find their seats indoor. He blows an over-theatrical kisses to their backs and resumes his attention on Lucy.

Lucy, however, fights back tears.

"Harry, please! Stop!"

"And the roses... all those roses you wrote about! Don't even get me started on those roses. How every time you saw one, you felt your heart fly away... sometimes out of pain... sometimes out of hope... sometimes just for beauty's sake."

"Please..." Tears stream down her cheek.

"Roses. They were always my brother's favorite flower too. He used to tell me they reminded him of Eden's Garden. That they were the perfect flower, only they grew thorns after the fall of man."

"That's beautiful," she says, wiping away tears.

His tone slips into coldness, "That's why I asked for roses to be placed on his casket before they cremated him. I knew he'd want them there... to shed some beauty on the awfulness of it all."

Lucy's eyes widen; her clove cigarette slips from between her limp fingers into the dirt.

"I'm so sorry," she whispers, her eyes drying, "I didn't know Alex passed away!"

"No of course you didn't." He folds his arms across his chest.

"It's just... I thought..." She stumbles over her words.

"What that he was expelled? That he was doped up? Thought he had drugs hidden underneath his dark sweatshirts, like all of those damn teachers? Betcha didn't know he made straight A's, huh? How he excelled in arts and literature. Everyday he'd quote me something new. But I must say he got his favorite quotes from you, looking down at you from that small oak tree behind the west wing of school. The one that grows near the wall and overlooks the empty land behind our school. He would climb up there during your fourth period break and perch on the lowest hanging branch of the leafy tree, waiting for you to sit on the stone bench directly beneath him and start writing in your diary. He then wrote your thoughts in his journal. He lived in your thoughts."

Lucy raises her eyebrow at this confession. Harry ignores her inquiry, looking past her into the bushes.

"One day he brushed past you in the hallway, and he said your whole body smiled at him. He swears you radiated a beauty so deep, he didn't even know it existed at this school. He sat me down and said, never looking away from my eyes, 'Harry. This girl. She's the most amazing thing I've ever seen. Don't laugh, but the only way I can express it is in the words of an author I admire so, 'I felt my heart dilated and compressed by that delicious spasm which tortures and caresses the hearts of lovers.'"

Lucy tenses. Her privacy, her intimacy, her work, all torn apart in a few words, "Dumas."

"What?"

"Alexandre Dumas, The Three Musketeers. He quoted D'Artagnan speaking of..."

"Whatever. All I know is after that night he stopped smiling. He stopped showing me the pages he wrote down after watching you from the tree, his beautiful writings in response to the emotions you brought up in him. He stopped rattling off his quirky thoughts as I tried to finish my calculus homework. He stopped being my

Mangrove

brother." Harry's brow darkens, "And all I want to know from you is... not your favorite color, not your fucking favorite flavor of ice cream... I just want to know... what did you do to him... to make him so miserable?"

"Me?" She stares at him with wide eyes. "I don't understand. I only knew him as your brother, the same way most people in the school knew him. I never even spoke to him." She sips nervously at her coffee. Her face contorts as she swallows the now lukewarm drink. "Hey, I thought you said this coffee was black."

His eyes are empty. A silence falls between them.

"I'm sorry, Harry, but I just don't know."

"He took his life over you, and you just don't know? He wanted nothing more than to be close to you, he loved you in ways I'd never seen a person love before, and you just don't know?" Tears escape his eyes.

"Harry, I'm really sorry..."

"You were all he saw in this world. All he wanted to do was be close to you, and now, thanks to me, he's inside of you. There's your story."

Lucy's face reads confusion, "Harry, what on earth are you talking about?"

Harry calmly wipes the few tears away from his face and stands to leave, regaining his proud posture.

"Well, we're done here," he says, flicking her dropped cigarette into the bushes and walking back towards his car. Over his shoulder, he calls back, "Enjoy your coffee."

Lucy brings the coffee cup she was sipping down from her lips. Her tongue runs across a scratchy residue on her bottom lip. Her stomach lurches. She lifts the protective lid on the cup and throughout the dark brown liquid, grey ash clumps to the bottom sides of the cup and spirals throughout the drink. Her face drains into a sickly shade of white as she vomits into the bush, spilling the contents of the beverage down her legs and onto the hot, grey pavement.

Yo Era Otra

VIVECCA CHATILA

El día que te ame
Yo era otra.
El día que te dije que
Yo era otra.
Ese día lo condeno,
el mismo que se olvidó
que yo existía.

Aquerdate que yo estaba ahí.
Estaba a tu lado,
para quererte por siempre,
Siempre a tu lado.
Pero ahora, yo soy otra.

Cambiada por el odio y la rabia.
Torturada por los días sin ti.
Nadando en mis lágrimas negras.
Pero ahora te olvidé,
Como me olvidaste a mi.

Aquerdate que yo estaba ahí.
Estaba a tu lado,
para quererte por siempre,
Siempre a tu lado.
Pero ahora, yo soy otra.

Aquerdate que yo estaba ahí.
Estaba a tu lado,
para quererte por siempre,

Mangrove

Siempre a tu lado.
Pero ahora, yo soy otra.
Otra extraña que tú nunca conoceras

Latency

ARISTIDES DIMITRIOU

The real voyage of discovery, he says,
Is not in seeking new landscapes,
But in seeing with new eyes —
But Lady Justice has never been so blind,
And eyes have never been
So wanting.
I may never defy you, stars
But in the midst of death I am in life
Yes, I am
Alive

Mother's Men

CHRISTINA M. CAYMARES

When my mother spoke to men her eyes would open to the size of a seafood cracker. Her arms spread out and took on a personality; this woman with a big blue hat with ruffles along the border was speaking. And her clothes managed, by themselves it seemed, to get a little more revealing. Her earrings looked brighter and her teeth got springier. When she reached for the coffee-maker, I could still see her smile coming from both sides. By this time, my mother's Spanish was in full motion and we were unable to make out what she was saying. A mixture of excitement and animation allowed the Spanish language to have a life of its own. The man who sat beside her understood her language and responded with the same stimulation of words.

My older sister and I use to love imitating Mom. Our childhood friend and neighbor, Lauren, inherited the same silly games my sister and I liked to play. First we would dress up in dresses, heels, scarves, and jewelry. Our Spanish then began to flourish, and our journey in search for the perfect man began. We all picked a side on the wall and started talking to our imaginary future husbands. Our hair would swing back and our combination of Spanish and hand movements meant that we were adults. We would say things like, *Que quieres comer hoy mi amor? Quieres pollo o carne? A donde tu quieres ir hoy? And, Como pasaste el día hoy? Yo pase el día limpiando.* Besides the fact that we loved our husbands with great passion, they always ended up dead! Once they passed, we choose another. Our final departure ended with a love letter buried into the ground. The letter, I think, meant they would not forget about us only because they were gone.

My father passed away of a heart attack at twenty-six-years-old. My mother was left to raise my sister and me, a task she says

was one of the hardest. My mother says my father was not a perfect man, but rather one with a bad temper, a drinking habit, and a loose hand. Her next four husbands contained the same qualities, except some were better or worse than others.

Her mother, my grandmother, passed away in Havana while giving birth to her. Her father, my grandfather, passed away in prison. He was an important contributor to the large amounts of cocaine sold in the U.S. My mother's tía abuela (great aunt) legally adopted her. Mom tried to juggle everything, including her kids. My mother was not caring, not loving, not consistent, not a hero. She was an adopted widow trying to raise three kids on her own and her attraction to men was to the bad boy. Bad boy means you work outside, picking up cement, painting houses, and you get your hands sticky. Bad Boy means you are free to come and go into our lives as you wish.

Her second husband, Jimmy, father to my little brother, was around until I was ten. Jimmy was a terrible cook because all he cooked was American food with lots of A1 sauce, and we are Cuban. He is the only one I choose to write about because he is the only one I remember being mad at. If we did not eat what he made, we were put into corners for time out. Occasionally, I would throw him the unoriginal, "You're not my dad!" But in fact he was for the time being. Every night he sat in the kitchen with his newspaper, eyes blood-shot red. My sister and I would ask him things like, could we have a sleep over this weekend? Or, could we borrow five dollars? Because at this time a yes was a for-sure thing.

After Jimmy, growing up with my mother's husbands meant nothing to me except more material for my sister and I to mimic. My mother was happy, working, and we had a lot of room to do what we wanted. It is not that doing what we wanted was allowed, but rather things could fly right by my mother because she was tired from working. Working to make money and working to keep her husband around. She knew us already. She was trying to get

to know these men, so most of her time went into building these relationships. And most of my time went into chasing the attentions of boys.

When I was in middle school, there was a guy named Chris who had a crush on me. He thought he loved me. He would wait for me to get out of class, bring me roses and flowers on Valentine's Day and pick up my pencil if it dropped from my Louis Vuitton backpack. I never told him that I would never date him, but I was aware of that. My feelings were not involved; he could not make me vulnerable. This is why I wanted him to love me. I wanted him to think I was beautiful. As long as his eyes were fixated on me, everything was going to be okay.

I had my eye on a guy named Mafu. He was not your average good-looking swimsuit model, no, he was chubby with little curls of hair and a little bit of hair under his chin. Mafu had a nice walk though, like if his father was the vice president of Rockway Middle School. He had little freckles on his face and every time I talked to him, I felt he knew that I got enough attention from the other boys.

In order to get Mafu to notice me I did what Chris did, but instead of holding a Valentine's card, I held my back up straight and my waist tight. Eventually, after days of smiling, running, screaming, dancing and singing, I eventually got Mafu to want me. But that did not last because I wanted him to never want me, that was the only way I would stay attracted to him. After two weeks, the relationship ended and we moved on to other people.

During this time my mother was busy chasing Sergio, a painter. Sergio was what every girl dreams about when they feel like being naughty. He was tall and dark skinned. He had thick calves and a couple of God tattoos. We would pass each other through the hallway by the kitchen and say hello, but that was all. He married my mother and lived with us for about two years, until my mother got sick of him stealing her white Infiniti in the middle of the night and told him to pack up his things. After that, we could see that Mom was really depressed. My sister and I would walk

in from school and the house was pitch black and all you could see was my mother's wild, red, curly hair and the smoke from her cigarette coming from the couch.

My mother is a tough or weak woman, depends on your perception. She does not like it when we cry or beg. She does not like it when we get hurt, and she does not like it when we tell her how we feel. My sister and I were taught not to ask so many questions, suck in your stomach, comb your hair, and brush your teeth. She always said if your father were here he would tell you to stop acting like a little girl and suck it up.

At eleven years old, I had my first real boyfriend. His name was Amado, nicknamed Pwee, and he was a break-dancer. We would meet on Fridays at Hot Wheels and skate together. After two years of skating and talking on the phone, I dumped him for a graffiti-writer named Karl, nicknamed Rear. I dumped him for a guy named Diego, who I met at school. At sixteen I dumped Diego for Manny, a guy I thought I really liked, but he left me for a girl named Susie.

During my first long-term relationship, four years long, I learned I was obsessive, neurotic, vulnerable, and impossible. Obsessive because I wanted to keep him, vulnerable because I wanted him to leave already. No matter how many candles, steaks, shoes, cards, flowers, etc. my boyfriend brought me, I would not leave him in peace. I made excuses to leave him about once a month, like you don't care about my feelings, you're selfish, and there is something wrong with you. But I knew there was nothing wrong with him, rather there was something wrong with me. When he cried or tried to tell me his feelings, I insulted him by saying, you're such a little girl or you're such a turn off; I'm glad were not going to be together and suck it up, my god! Look at you. Eventually, I hurt his feelings to the point where he stopped calling me.

When I was nine-years-old, my sister eleven, my mother and Jimmy took us to ride our brand new Mongoose bicycles at Tropical Park. My sister and I warmed up by running up and down the hill,

imagining the big sign of Hollywood posted in the middle. She was better at riding bike than I was because she had more prior lessons. She loved to ride by me with her sprockets shining and her fingers clamped tightly on the handle bars like if there was some secret to riding a bicycle. Down the hill we went, our feet peddling fast. But my bicycle went straight into the big tree in front of me, flew, and landed next to a water fountain by some benches. My knees hit the ground hard, my hands fell flat on solid ground. I started crying. My mother grabbed me from behind and dragged me by my under arms, while Jimmy took my knees. My knees were gushing blood like a scene from *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. I had pieces of skin missing and only a quarter of my leg had hair. My mother tried to calm me down, but I demanded to be taken to the hospital. I cried the whole way home, while my mother explained that in Cuba when people got hurt they did not have hospitals.

“When somebody gets hurt over there, you know what they do? They bury the skin and pour cooking wine on the open wound and you wanna know why? Eso es todo que Castro le da. Entiendes?”

When we got home she covered my legs in Band-Aids and Neosporin and put me to sleep.

Parked Under a Gray Sky

STACY CARRILLO



Bicycle in Amsterdam

CARLA LANSER



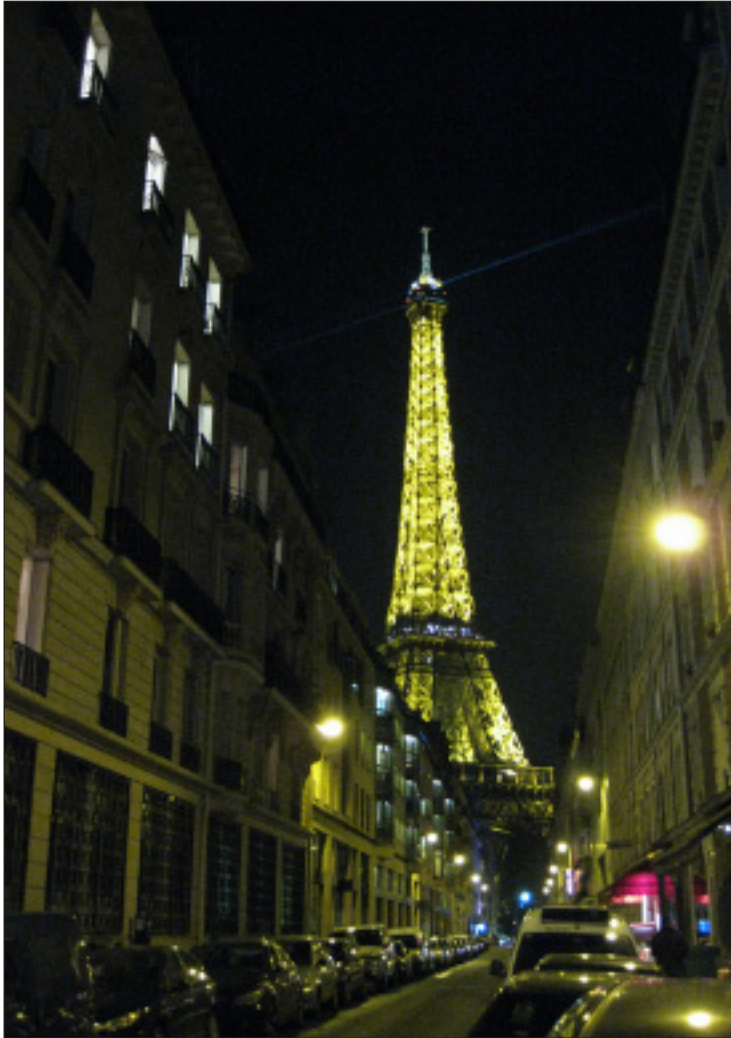
South African Wildlife (Acrylic)

CARLA LANSER



Glow in the Dark

CYBELE SAFADI



Our Summer Past

STEPHANIE GUEDJ

Sundays it was us,
strewn on the blossom sheets,

scanning the age-stained books
on the ceaseless soul, glass-

splintered light at the seams.
We lied in the room

with the sun-washed walls
and wooden slats

slinging from the window.
The crooked clock

smeared in the summer rain.
We were sage-heavy

with bread, wine,
and saints on that day

we hid in the psalms.
You whispered the words

over me, and traced the stray
strands on my cheeks.

Tilted star. I remember
we were lip- and tongue-

struck with spiced peppermint
and sweet honey:

the sun-ripen months,
sewn with seraph's lace.

A rusted autumn dusk
severed the threads,

Mangrove

leaving us to slip
into a flaked

descent. I see a splinter
and almost sweep-up

the blessed dust
of the fall-shattered days.

Recycled Genetics

BARRETT KOPEL

Digested and Recycled, I pass from Earth to mouth.
Found in the grass and the shit, in the water and milk,
From the fish and cows slaughtered,
The flies feeding off the waste,
And the rejected shavings off the extraneous, unsightly growth on
the crust.
Ribo & Deoxyribonucleic Acids nourish my soul
And when my cadaver meets the earth,
So do my genetics – food for the ground.
A return to Basics.
Unseen underground denizens seize control within my body
And the worms begin their journey up.
And the worms pass me to the birds and, in turn, the flies and the
buzzards and the fox,
To the salmon in the river to the sharks down below
To the trees in a forest photosynthesizing
In the sun.
To the rain from a hurricane; expected but not welcome,
To North Carolina in a chicken broth
To the belly of a woman that was late that month.
And in a molecule of food dispersed ages ago,
I am now the spark of life embedded within my new cast.
I am integrated and consolidated with your fresh pair of eyes.
But we can no longer remember that I was once from a different
time,
And was recycled when I died.

Unheard Sounds

JUSTIN ENGLES

At lunch that afternoon he handed his step-son the photograph again. Helen weighed approximately 129 pounds and she was drooling into a spoon.

"Ninety-five years old and she's got fewer wrinkles than I do." Robert has forgotten that he made the same joke last week. But Adam could tell from his step-father's intonation that he was meant to laugh, so he roused a weak smile. His grandmother's dementia had lost all its charm a few months ago when her amiable confusion had been replaced with a vague racism. Adam had received from her a few shares of stock, sold when he was twelve years old to delay Robert's declaration of bankruptcy. He had also inherited a progressive neurological disorder called Essential Tremors. As a teenager Adam had mouthed the handful of syllables until he had worn them smooth of their beauty.

Adam occupied himself with imagining the sounds his grandmother was making as the photograph was taken; they were sounds that a linguist might savor, like the first primitive groans of an infant. His own condition would worsen with age, of course, but for now it only made his hand shake enough to make him look like an alcoholic, sloshing his beer across the table each time he brought it to his lips. It could be worse, he thought, he could have ended up like his cousin Brent. Poor, epileptic, Brent.

He still remembered the face of the gaunt young boy lying in the open casket, dead from a fit, while something in his face still resounded with the echo of MRI machines. Tendon rupture, the doctor had said, very much aware of his own mustache. Helen had begun her slow descent at that point, and she imbued the funeral with an air of the carnivalesque. The more she grasped at the pulpit, imperious and frothing, the more it seemed that she belonged in a

top hat, hustling bystanders into a three-ring circus.

"I haven't seen her spirits so high in a long time. It's a shame you couldn't be there."

He forced another smile. When Adam was six weeks old he had smiled for the first time, an instinct of joy had coaxed a response from new muscles. It had made his own father's breathe catch in his chest. He experienced now, a terrible parody of that moment.

He looked over at his step-mother Hannah, or rather, his step-father's wife, who sat there as inert and easily forgettable as the armchair she inhabited. One of her horses had died of a heart attack that morning. It had been the same tired muscle that had failed her father two years earlier. Adam didn't bother to mention the parallel.

"Anyway, I found something else you might be interested in when I was going through her things."

Adam flinched at the oblivious reference to something he considered to be open-grave robbing. But he took hold of the paper Robert was tapping against the wooden table. The letter was written almost as if by his own hand, creased twice, and perhaps read as often. Attached to it was the author's polite obituary taken from the pages of Musical America. Adam's grandfather had managed the New York philharmonic. The only real vestige of that time was a grand piano that lay under a quilt in storage, the rest of the grandeur was decomposing with his grandmother's mind.

"That's my uncle Paul, your grand-uncle I suppose." Robert said this with the tone of one who had guessed that he had stumbled across something valuable, but had no real comprehension of its worth.

Adam looked at the faded picture, the size of a postage stamp. The man's eyes were brown, callous, and handsome. He was the only youth surrounded by pictures of decaying sopranos and forgotten composers.

"He was my age."

"Yes that's right, twenty-one." Hannah nudged Robert in the

ribs.

"Twenty-two, yes that's right he was twenty-two. I just thought you might like to see it, since you're leaving so soon and all."

Reading the small note to himself, Adam murmured a few words aloud. Finishing it, he read it again.

Mom and Dad,

First of all, without even an introduction mind you, Bean is far too young to marry and I don't want to hear about anymore of this business about romance and proper stock. I don't care if the boy has oil in his veins, she's still just a girl. Just try and say a word to her about it and you'll see how right I am.

In other news the dentist here tells me that I'm going to have some real trouble with my gums later on in life, even though they haven't bothered me since the summer we spent at the lake. By now Mother no doubt has sauntered over to the family portrait on the mantle to shout 'I told you so' at my weak-gummed likeness. Well a boy doesn't play baseball his entire life and not chew some tobacco. Otherwise I'm still flying this plane around, two and a half hours a day, five days a week, dutifully patrolling all the cropland this side of the Mississippi. Rest assured, this year's harvest will remain safe from Nazi occupation.

Do send me another package soon, my bunkmate has received three in the last month and shared each one with me, they even send him gum, gum! Do you believe it? But in all seriousness, you don't want me to be a moocher do you?

With love from your son, Paul.

The letter was dated three days before the obituary. Adam read between the polite euphemisms phrased in the text, he allowed himself to imagine it as it had happened. It had been crisp that morning, he thought, the sky stark and candidly blue, and braced by the bare trees on the outskirts of the airfield. Paul had been talking about trouble with lift and drag, and his canceled leave. The

mechanics had only just finished chaining the frame of the aircraft to the jeep. One of them answered his complaints curtly, crassly. Paul has the kind of laugh you would hear from a boy walking off a playing field, it is full of November and dusk, the air coursing and the feel of the cold across his chest. That is the sound of it.

But he'd left something on the ground, a lighter, a pack of cigarettes, and the steady exhalations from the engine of the jeep rasp as it pulls away, towing the small plane, tension through iron, he bends to retrieve his satchel, stands swiftly, and the tip of the wing strikes him hard across the neck and shoulders. Breathless awe as the lines of the earth are suddenly vertical, then the foolishness and disbelief of the hurt, and then only the dim awareness of pressure, the crushing weight of wheels that kept turning in spite of his father's pipe tobacco, in spite of the friend who had spent the previous afternoon looking allover Baringer for him, in spite of his gums. Only the crushing fixtures of the plane, followed by a blunt moan, as he is compressed into the dust, into the thawing earth, with the last of the frost that stiffened leaves of grass. Paul Mallory is killed in a training accident at Fort Curtis Air Force Base. He is twenty-two years old.

Adam felt the pressure of a faint palm pressed to his sternum, a sore recollection of the bare mechanics of movement, and overwhelming number of alternatives, the existence of the thousand different ways that morning could have played out, and the furious consequences that leapt out at the moment of the man's end. He felt the length of a man's life contract and exhale, all within a handwritten page.

As a boy he was sensual. Adam came to know things by touch and by feel. He came to know sex and music by pulse and by vibrations. He came to know Emma. They were married following the completion of his second tour of duty.

She had inherited a house on one of the Elizabeth Islands from her aunt. She had a handful of memories associated with the place; rooting for small insects in the garden with a nameless boy who would later succumb to leukemia, taking a koi out of the small pond and watching it gasp, warming her feet in the sand by a fire.

They moved in as the madness of the summer months receded into a smooth torpor.

At first, Adam dismantled things. He took them apart, to build them, and rebuilt them again. He programmed the television, fixed the air conditioner, and repaired the faucets. With ritual slowness, he made the coffee, scrubbed the pans, fed the fish, and transferred the laundry into the dryer. He bought the groceries, chopped the onions, and seared them in butter. He would go about the actions of normalcy until they rooted in the axiomatic rhythm of his own life.

Through the frame of her doorway, Emma lay on her bed in repose, balancing a book about landscape architecture across her narrow lap. She moved only to trace the lines of a diagram, or brush a strand of hair behind the curve of her ear. She held up her arm, and followed the path of the nerve that ran from her fingertip to her shoulder. The impulse traveled fifty meters per second, the velocity of her striking life, within the sunlit stillness of her arm.

Adam carried lumber into the living room, and laid it before him like scaffolding. He lined up the edges, shifting the 2x4's into place, exactly, precisely. He shaped and sanded, hammered and balanced. The skeleton of her bookshelf slowly became discernible. He finished, stood, and waited for her expression. She rose from her bed, and with perfect innocence, closed the door of the bedroom. That is perhaps what was so terrible about her. She could close a door, as if it were nothing.

He had once read that everyone sleeps in the same position that they kept in the womb.

He watches as the muscles of her body aligned to her natural pose. He folded himself around her, pressed his chest into the hollow of her back, and kept his mouth against her neck while he slept.

He kept this pose until he was sure that he was alive. In the mornings he made promises to console himself. He tried to reconcile the shape of her bare legs with his own unforgiving and dark understanding of the world, with his own morbid and violent dreams, with his sand weathered memory. They had walked out to

the point one night, engulfed in the warmth of being drunk and the sudden apparent simplicity of things. He told himself he needed only her and their four walls. Even as he said it, he could feel something ebbing, and he was dimly aware of a constant fear. He framed his grand-uncle's letter and kept it by their bed. He swallowed the impulse to run from her.

Her father became ill, as fathers are wont to do. The two of them moved back to the mainland to be closer. Adam found himself once again in the grip and squalor of a small town. He longed for their old house, to be apart from veteran's centers and earnest handshakes. In the winter it was abject, vigorous, and placidly poor. The cold left one with nothing to do but stare, wide-eyed at your own family. He had run out of places to smoke a cigarette in peace. He told Emma, but she had withdrawn into her father's illness.

He left the apartment often and without purpose, oppressed by her silences. The idea came slowly into perception, faltered, but finally took root. He would move the house. He'd seen it done before. He would move it here. The thought lay there like an ember in his hand. Adam spoke to contractors and moving companies. The task gave him purpose. He poured money into the idea, everything he had. It was the thoughtless gesture of a child. He uprooted the old house, and dragged it through the town on slow-moving trucks. The town fought him, first over the licenses, then over the trees he intended to cut down. It fought him on principle it seemed, to remain as it was.

He drank more, locked in a room musing over contracts and schematics, staring at times towards a framed letter. Emma fell silently into the periphery.

He began to borrow money. He learned to ignore the ringing of telephones. He saw his likeness in the local newspaper. The last time he had seen himself there was in a photograph of troops returning to the area met by tearful mothers, children grown taller. His name had been left out of the caption.

No one seemed to understand the necessity of it. He paused at times, at the absurdity of someone trying to hold him accountable for

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figures in a ledger. The house had crawled to the pier, and awaited transfer to a shipping barge. The figure lay on the horizon. It was perfect, and they would understand, it seemed, if only he could reach it, and hold it up for them, and reveal to them what it meant.

Emma stood in the center of clean room, putting on a green wool coat, contemplative, eyes downcast, calmly weary of him.

"I'm leaving you."

He searched in her face for any sign of the familiar. For some time now she had just been another voice in his head. He saw now the tired woman in front of him. He was drunk. She tried to remember the sensation of lying beside him on the beach, and could not.

He had failed then, he thought. And it was himself he thought that he held in his hands, that he tried to hold and tether. It was himself, he thought, that he held, when he pushed her away from him and into a wall. The sound of her forehead against the plaster resonated with newness. The sudden awareness of it, and everything it meant, held them in awe, like a birth, like the first note of an overture. The mute surprise, that it had been created from their bodies. She left. He did not move to stop her. A small smear of blood had been imprinted on the wallpaper, later, when it had dried, he would trace the outline with his fingertips and wonder at the strangeness of the shape, so like the crescent lobe of an orange.

He stood on the wharf by the harbor for a time. The house stood there, surreal on the listing waves of the harbor. It had captivated some of them. Young men who sat on the low concrete wall at sunset, passing cigarettes, eyes full of the apparition. They watched it sway with the tide, responding to it without knowing why, aware perhaps, of the presence of something beautiful. Adam felt nothing for it now. None of it had even the shadow of his intention. His hands felt slack and loose. He had tried to sculpt something from fragments, had tried to shore up a foundation, and stood now in awe as it came apart, seeing that it never could have been whole in the first place.

Why Poets Should Never Watch Romance Films

JUSTIN R. LIMOLI

Love is two lovers
sleeping through each other's snoring.

But love comes and goes
like the man who cleans my chimney poles.

Wine and spirits profit
harpies scream
poets moan
strangers pass unlacing looks
to other strangers passing.

All because love is just heavy breathing
and twitching fingers.
But let us not make a scene.

Love is the chaser that settles the nerves,
and the invitation after.

Love comes and goes
like the full stomach of an Eskimo.

Artists make a killing
businessmen knot their ties
grease and oil find their way into hair
strangers pass unlacing looks
to other strangers passing.

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All because love is just the invitation accepted,
and unsettled nerves.
But let us not make a scene.

Love is the growing warmth in your belly
that stays with you in your sleep.

O! Horror!

NICHOLAS MORAN

(for Bök)

For months, Doc Ock longs for comfort.
Solo, Doc Ock slowly plots from old London
donjons – Ock plots not “pro bono,” Ock plots
for common doom, for gross throwdowns. Who
knows Ock’s sort of forlorn frown, Ock’s sorrow:
not Ock, not Ock’s doctors (of voodoo, or of ontology),
not monks, whom Ock mostly scolds. So Doc Ock
took no Zoloft; took comfort from pot bong, from
Coors. Blown, blotto, Doc Ock holds two convos
on Octo-Blog: both to Costco folks, to posh snobs.
(Doc Ock’s Blog: OcksPlot dot com – Follow Ock pronto!)
“Look,” Doc Ock froths, “hot bombs pop on top
of Cod Rock. Onto corps of bloodshot, poor troops.
Onto Oslo, Morocco, Tokyo, Kyoto, Boston, Congo,
Togo, Norfolk, too!” Ock concocts odd bombs –
Robot Molotovs! – dollops forty bombs onto
Orthodox forts. So Orthodox monks scorn
Ock, grow fond of cosmos, bow down to cross:
“Lo! Good Lord God, dost God’s Son doom yon
flocks of poor Orthodox monks so?” “How droll!”
or “Spot on!” Doc Ock mocks. “Do bombs boom towns,
or do boomtowns go boom? Boomtowns form Ghost
towns! Ho ho ho!” Soon, Ock’s monopoly on doom
not only rots world, Ock’s monopoly on doom
prolongs storms of sorrow for crowds: from Mongols
to Scots; from sloths to Goths; from morons to profs;
from schoolboy bros to porno hos; from Fyodor or

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Tolstoy on to Octo-Mom or Tony Romo. Concord torn down, nobody knows for how long Ock plots to concoct doom, to lob bombs onto poor crowds: Doc Ock bops crowds, crowds flop down. "Stop!" Moscow folks frown. "Stop?!" Doc Ock howls, "only to drool for common doom, fools!" Boom! Fort Knox's door locks blow to or fro (wood looks corky or worn), so Doc Ock confronts box on top of box, row on top of row of gold loot. "Now, on to Hong Kong!" Doc Ock hoots. "O! How Ock loots!" Bob Orlov on BronxCom sobs. "Tomorrow looks not too good."

Digging in the Attic

NICHOLAS MORAN

Mike and I started at daybreak,
eager to scour the chests
for remnants of your past.
On the narrow staircase, we bumped bodies,
vying for first place as we ran
to the dusty dark attic with the kind

of energy appropriate for kindergarteners.
When it rained on summer break
at Nana's, the estate held us ransom,
cooped indoors like the forbidden chests
her and Grand-Dad wanted everybody
to look past.

Back then, they wanted the past
to be the past, the unkind
nature of the truth to be kept away from everybody,
most of all us grandkids. "You'd break
fragile things up there! Play nice!" they'd say, chests
just above eye level. They ran

everything while mom was out, so we ran
upstairs until she came back. We passed
time by guessing what was hidden in those chests.
What kind
of secrets we were barred from knowing.
Everybody

Mangrove

had clues. At the reunion, Uncle Rob told anybody listening that they should just ran-sack the whole attic, throw everything out and break the chests with all that “Fuckin’ past inside.” He spat and said “Good riddance” and kind of stammered around a bit before spilling his drink on his chest.

Mom held me tight to her chest when that happened. Her body against my ears, warm like kindled firewood. Then Uncle Randy took Uncle Rob by the arms, walked him past all of us, out of the yard. The party broke

up. Later Mike and I opened the chests for the first time, randomly happening on the one with pictures of your body after the wreck, glimpses into the past at the kind of man you were before your foot missed the brakes

Shiksa!

ELISE HENRY

Until seventh grade, I went to an Orthodox Jewish day school, where I was forced to pray every morning, eat kosher food, learn Torah, and dress modestly. I was indoctrinated with religious ideas and beliefs that were never reinforced in my home. My parents did not find kosher food at all palatable, did not care how I dressed, worked on Saturdays, and never prayed or went to synagogue.

I grew tired of moving in and out of the religious world every day. I reached an age where I began to be aware of the discrepancy between secular and religious frameworks. In my naiveté, I could not see how such different ideologies could exist simultaneously under the umbrella of Judaism and not render the whole deal invalid. Is it possible to be American, Israeli, Jewish, and Iraqi and still have a solidified identity? It is tempting to want to separate Jews into categories that conjure up a sequence of assumptions about a person's beliefs, family, lifestyle, ethnicity, traditions, dress, gender, and sexuality. In doing so, however, I believe we ignore the inherent complexities and idiosyncrasies that color the contemporary Jewish experience. The Jewish identity is fluid, and depends on a person's level of integration with surrounding people and cultures. As a Jew, I grappled with the ambiguity of my own Jewish identity.

Feeling alienated and lost in the hazy boundary between secular and religious worlds, I decided to end the charade and go to public school, where I could be an atheist in peace.

This past year, during a short-lived reencounter with religious Judaism, I discovered that the issue of secular versus religious is not always as black and white as a Haredi's wardrobe. The diversity that exists within secular and religious Judaism is indicative of the complexity of what it means to be Jewish. Is self-

identification enough to be considered Jewish by all Jews? Can someone be “more Jewish” than another?

Of course, there are no clear answers to these questions. It is certainly true, however, that a Jew is characterized largely by her degree of assimilation. Jews have often lived under the rule of other cultures—Joseph in Egypt, Ezra in Babylon, the Rambam in Spain—and they have successfully kept their own religious law while abiding by the law of the land. More recently, Reform Judaism began as a way for Jews to conform to the Christian communities in which they were living in Europe and America. Jews were urged to be modern men in the street and at work, and traditional Jews at home and in the synagogue. It is natural for surrounding cultures to influence people in a community when they do not isolate themselves. Since becoming a nation about four thousand years ago, Jews have adopted aspects of other cultures and interbred with other ethnicities. Judaism did not evolve in a bubble. Even the traditions of Jews who were secluded in shtetls reflect the customs of nearby peoples. No Jew who exists today is free of outside influence.

When I attempted to become a more observant Jew last year, my mother felt threatened. In her charming, watered-down Israeli accent, she yelled things like, “Orthodox Jews are crazy! How can they live like that? So limited!” A self-proclaimed heretic, she obviously did not want to think of her own daughter as one of the “crazy and limited Jews.” Before I began my brief “fake it till you make it” approach to orthodoxy, I had a similar take on religious Judaism. After all, I spent the last four years living in Israel among the grossly secular. My Israeli family sneered at the *dosim*, a derogatory term for religious people, for the financial burden they place on Israeli society, their extreme religious dogma, and their impoverished lifestyle. My own confused opinion on the matter was compounded by an experience I had touring Meah Shearim, the most severely observant community in Jerusalem.

Walking down the stone-paved street in jeans and a t-shirt, a man with a black hat, shadowed face, and curled peyos shouted, “Shiksa!” in my direction. It felt like a stab in the back. Setting the more offensive interpretations of that word aside, a young Jewish Zionist never wants to be called a gentile while walking the streets of Jerusalem, even if she is an atheist. The slur hurt me, and I admit that it made me question my Jewish identity. To the man who called me a shiksa, strict adherence to all the laws is the only correct way to be a Jew. There are no grey areas in his Judaism.

Last December, I returned to Meah Shearim. But this time, I was dressed modestly. My skirt was probably not long enough for their standards, but I was at least accepted as Jewish. It felt good to belong, even though I knew my membership under such strict standards had an expiration date. I tried to believe in God and to reconcile my ideas about a religion created by man to suit his needs with the Orthodox view that Judaism was given to the chosen people directly by God. I tried to see beauty in the role of the woman in the religious world, in making Shabbat and keeping the home, and in her limitations. I kept Shabbat for two months. I stopped devouring bacon, shrimp, crab, and other delicious treif my rebellious mother raised me to eat. Needless to say, it didn’t work. I felt like a complete fraud. I have always been a freethinker, a rebel, and a lover of feminine power. I am a sensualist. I crave physical and intellectual freedom like I crave stone crabs. It is part of who I am.

I must find a way to balance belief with disbelief, religion with secularism, adherence with disobedience. Thankfully, Judaism is so much more than a religion. It is sufficient, for me, to keep the traditions of my family and study Jewish history and religion without adhering to the attached beliefs. It is possible to embody conflicting points of view and retain a solid identity. I can say with confidence that I am Jewish and I belong. I proudly carry the burdens of my ancestry and the torch of Israel.

Names of the Dead

AMANDA MOTT

Three more confirmed this week:
Three states lost a man
Three families lost a hero

That knock no mother wants to answer.
A uniformed figure on the welcome mat,
The sealed ivory envelope

His solemn expression
She knows-
A mother always knows.

Etchings on the wall of fallen soldiers
A ceaseless sea of white stone on green
Hovering cherry blossoms of pink

Flags shaped of tri-cornered hats
Stripes of red and white enveloped in blue
As light of the day vanishes into darkness

Nostalgia

ANAY PERETZ

I remember the backyard where I played,
the earth I used to make biscuits in plastic pots.
Crystalline strings from Mexico's Gulf
play a melody. Softly, they pull me in.

Now, no more delicate pots or clay desserts.
The Caribbean still flows through my veins.
An Island whose green heart bleeds.
My pen still longs for you.

Ducky

MAX SCHLONER

The Ducky's Discount Clothing sign flickered to life, beat out the early morning sunlight and framed her scowl. "No. You do it," she said. I had forgotten her name for the seventh time. I'm pretty sure it was something like Joan or Jo-Ann or maybe Katherine. I stopped searching when it wouldn't even tickle the tip of my tongue. There were more pressing matters. I had to get into that damn building with enough time to dart through the labyrinthine stacks of sweatshop cheesecloth and into the back room to clock in. Also, there was a dead pigeon on the sidewalk.

She nudged and then rolled it over with her purple canvas sneaker. Its head drooped in slow motion, drawn by the momentum of its bloated corpse. The newly-upturned side was flat, all grey matted feathers with debris peppered in through the downy striations. It was disgusting and beautiful. Fresh enough to sag but dead enough to put up a fight. *Causa mortis*: indeterminate. There were no signs of a struggle.

I thought maybe it was a protest. Ducky's mascot, a thinly-veiled rip-off of Scrooge McDuck named Bill with a fan of money in his "hands," is probably frowned upon by the avian realm as a gross mischaracterization. Birds don't have lawyers; what do they have but the spectacle of suicide?

I plucked a greasy Big Mac container from its perch in the stagnant trashcan—the strip mall's maintenance staff surely hadn't emptied it in more than half a week—and fitted it into the curve of my hand, forming a kind of cardboard mitt. "Okay." I bent down and grasped it with the box, half-looking at the bird as though partial eye contact made disposing of the creature in a fast food receptacle more dignified. I gave the body a little jerk to be sure it was secure inside. I tossed the whole thing into the trash

and frantically wiped my hands on my pant leg. Death is contagious and the leftover cholesterol on the Big Mac box wasn't going to do me any favors.

She sneered and backed away as if she had done the deed herself. I shrugged. We went inside. Her name is Selena.

Something about cheap clothing tickles my nose-hairs. I'm not sure if it's an allergy, the conditioned air, or a visceral reaction to the blood-diamond conspiracy theories I weave regarding the origin of retail apparel. But I deal in symptoms, not causes, and it was especially bad that afternoon. I was sneezing every fifth polo shirt. Every other pair of denim. Ducky's shell-shocked and shuffling customers observed an invisible half-circle barrier ten feet from me in every direction. An unforeseen perk of the mystery affliction.

Halfway through a rack of sequined women's tank tops, between wondering who wore the awful things and why every hue in Roy G. Biv's convenient name was accounted for, I was seized by a double-header. A sneeze-cough. It was devastating; it spun me into the aisle. And howdy-doo, what's this?

Nestled on a dust bunny lay a tight roll of bills of undetermined worth. I scanned my area for a potential owner, but alas, I had blown the last vestige of patronage away with my mighty nasal/postnasal detonation. I snapped into action, stomping on a shoelace with my left foot and pulling up with the right. Alack! An untied shoe! Safety first at Ducky's, ladies and gentlemen.

As I rounded third for home in the loop-swoop-and-pull, I snatched the money off of the beige marbled tile and stuffed it into my pocket. My knees creaked as I stood, and a smile pulled at my cheeks. Excitement was soon smacked away by a perverted sense of duty. Perverted, of course, because, I mean, how many children have died at the hands of this awful, awful company? What is a man's duty to evil? What does he owe—Oh, so much for debate.

My manager, whose name I have not forgotten (Teresa)

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surged towards me, her all-knowing binder clutched under her arm. Her hooves and her annoyingly colorful pen clicked briskly as she approached. She forced a smile with her face and cried desperately for help with her eyes. I always had the impression that she thought she deserved better. I didn't necessarily agree, but I couldn't help but respect her out of fear of karmic reciprocation. I promised myself I'd make like the Fast Food Pigeon if ever I found myself with that same sense of superiority boiling underneath a binder and a nametag at Ducky's, say, ten years down the line.

"Break time," she sighed. Her binder flew up from under her arm and went flat in her palms in a fluid action. Her pen clicked one more time as she scribbled probably nonsense on a sheet that probably meant nothing.

"Okie dokie," I managed. I bit my bottom lip and started for the back room, but caught myself. "I, uh, found this." I took the money from my pocket and offered it to her.

Without looking, she stole it and folded the bills into the binder like drying leaves. "Okay, thanks. I'll hold it up front. If anyone asks for it..." She walked away and so did whatever she was saying.

I only used thirteen of my fifteen minutes; I stared at the wall for ten minutes, pissed for three, and walked back out to the sales-floor. I worked for two and a half more hours and never heard about the money again.

The trashcan was empty when I left.

This is What a Stroke Must Feel Like

CYBELE SAFADI

When I was younger
I never made the connection
when you came home sweating
breathing heavy
because you were drinking
and I, as a third grader,
would hold my math book to my chest
by the steps, my sleepy eyes
trying to bat away mid-night
sitting, waiting
so you could help me. teach me.
I know you're not an alcoholic, daddy
but you weren't an audience member, either
I would sing in the theater
my voice was no good
damnnit
I tried raising it higher
because maybe in your downtown-lit office
you could hear me.
or did you only listen to the clink of ice cubes
in your drink.
it wasn't ever really
about you coming to see me.
maybe that's what you think.
technically you were there
in the shadows
which I thought at best was bearable.
I used to think daddy's were part of a sect
some convention that met

every night and most weekends
I would tell my friends, "well obviously
my daddy, he has an important meeting thingy"
because every Sunday, you'd sit in front of the TV.
you'd be beat.
I wasn't exactly spiteful
just frightened
like when I went under
for my first operation
when I almost had that brain hemorrhage.
do you remember it?
it was explained to me
when I had barely graduated fifth grade:
at first there's a clot in the brain
it brings on confusion and a little bit of pain
like when you cried dad- when sending me to college
it pulses and throbs
it's tense.
like eating a family dinner with you in silence
no ranting. No gossip.
the only energy emanating
from your big bushy moustache.
and over time this throbbing
is released
held back
released again
just like when you told me
that your love was never pretend
but I would see you sneer at mother
when you thought I wasn't looking.
over time this clot
it bursts
this confusion
it bleeds into the spaces

and before you know what it is
it hurts. It can kill.
some survive
with hollow parts in places where they were once
whole.
after the operation
things made so much sense
everything concerning you
was a
stroke of midnight
stroke of ego
stroke of genius
our, different strokes
I was
a stroke of luck
of God
of fate, to you.
you never gave me credit, when credit was due.
just a credit card.
let me notify you, father
I'm not sending you an invoice
but a check. I signed it, too.
so now I'm sliced open in the operating room
the pressure has left my left brain
that's it, it's drained.
and even though you never knew what it felt like
to have your own blood platelets drumming on your left eye
you were one of many who saved me
thank you.
still the doctors scalpels and syringes couldn't cure this loss, this ache
that I felt in my chest,
here.
this confusion through the years
that spread.

Mangrove

you should know that now, it's dead.
after all we've been through
all the surgeries I've slept through
couldn't keep me from the disillusionment-
the disintegration-
of you.
this is what a stroke must feel like.

Peak

CHERYL WALKER

The shadows we rushed by always pulled us back around the kitchen table.

Trailer park dances, jobless nights of Parcheesi and even the day Mom's flannels were ripped by the anger. I still see the eye-daggers ripping them first, making his hands seem stronger than they were.

"Hard times are hard times," she said "but we sure are rich in dogs." And she was right—

Four dogs larger than our Sky-blue house on the mesa could hold.

Somehow she always knew that Jewels lived in the broken things. Somehow, that overnight our hearts would grow like the Sandias through the dark, past the clouds and rest by this orange sun.

The roots to their kisses reach to those broken shadows now. All the way down to the soil where tension-talks bred love-roots too thick to break

The Richest Country

DANIEL THOMPSON

I.

"Da chiawaren needa leapin," he gestures into the pitch dark of the church compound. I look but see nothing in the moonless, cloudy night.

"Huh?"

"Da chiawaren," he gestures again, emphatically, "neeeeda leapin." He rattles out something else unintelligible, but apparently English.

"I'm sorry, I don't understand you." I look again, waiting to see the shadowy figure of something sinister come out of the night. The old man grabs the hand in which I carry the flashlight, and with it walks me five steps into the darkness. Two children crouch in the dust, tired and shivering.

"Oh."

The tukul next to mine, the third of four in the Episcopal Church compound, is unlocked, so I open the door and point to the beds.

My heart is still pounding when I leave the outhouse and walk back to my bed. Somehow, Phil sleeps through the whole episode in the other bed in my tukul. I sleep with the door closed the next night.

II.

Bishop keeps stopping in the Land Cruiser before each puddle and stream to put it in four-wheel drive, and stopping again after each to take it out again. Sometimes I wonder how we don't bottom out or break off the tailpipe when we lurch over rocks or across narrow streambeds with steep banks. I have heard a story about some men somewhere who make their living simply carrying

people across a stream on their backs. It wouldn't surprise me to find that in southern Sudan, but the rains haven't set in too hard yet and for now the old blue cruiser can make it. The Commissioner's Land Cruiser disappeared ahead of us a while ago, followed by the SPLA and JIU trucks full of their soldiers, and I keep hoping that we won't get there too late and miss everything. Bishop and Mama Viviana speak Moru in low tones in the front seat. I understand nothing.

Sean, Matt, and Kevin don't either, and begin to tell me about their lives Stateside. After only two weeks away, life there seems so distant to me; Equatoria forces you to disengage from American life, from American concepts of time, belonging, and comfort. You almost begin to believe the prophylaxis-induced dreams lived out under your mosquito net at night as you try not to let your sweating back sink too far into the hard mattress: last night I held hands with my girlfriend only to find that her fingers had been blown off by a landmine, leaving only bloody stumps. I woke up shaking and checked my hand to see if her blood was still there. All the dogs in town were howling, the roosters crowing. I can swear sometimes that all the babies join in by crying too, and in my sleepy daze I picture them running naked with the wild dogs and chickens of the town.

Eight miles down jungle road takes an hour. Sean talks about music, Matt about his family, Kevin about God. Bishop assures us that we won't miss anything—the exorcism will probably take all day. I munch on trail mix and take a sip of water whenever the road is flat enough to facilitate lifting the bottle to my lips without knocking a tooth loose. The straightaways are driven at breakneck pace; streams and puddles are taken inch by inch. You don't risk much when the nearest auto parts store is four hours away in Juba.

When we drive straight through a field of corn, plowing down the rows that lie in the road, I figure we are getting close to the village. Thatched roofs appear and a drum throbs out the fervent heartbeat of a Moru hymn as we pull into a circle of huts and squeeze the cruiser in beside the other SUVs. Bishop

and Mama Viviana are still talking Moru and I wish I could understand.

III.

"He is just like the Nigerian. He is a powerful man. And today God has brought him down."

Mama Vicki's shrill voice once again slaps me awake from my heat-induced doze. Indeed Taban is down: he lies in the shadow of the mango trees, near the center of the dirt-floored compound, eyes closed. Bald and unmoving. Next to him lies an elderly woman, her head, like his, shaved in mourning. Other village women move their hands over the foreheads of both figures in the sign of the cross. The Evangelist, impeccably dressed in an olive-colored suit, speaks again in Arabic, and Mama Vicki cuts each sentence of translation short in order to keep up.

"The Devil has tied the Church of Equatoria. This one sent lightning to kill and rain to stop these ones from coming." She motions to Taban and then to me and the three other Americans who had just come from Virginia. Even in the shade, the heat saps me of energy. My Dinka friend Peter tells me that my white skin is not made for the heat of South Sudan and always laughs as he says it. An SPLA soldier sits down in the wooden chair next to mine, on the edge of the shade; the extra AK-47 he is holding for his friend lies across his lap pointing directly at my stomach. I eye it uncomfortably without turning my head. He glances at me from the corner of his eye and slowly shifts the barrel away.

The acacias and lulu trees on the distant edges of the clearing waver in the heat. The Evangelist keeps speaking and Vicki translates. Every once in a while he interjects an English phrase and looks pleased with himself. His favorite is "in the name of Jesus!"

Vicki continues translating as the Evangelist's female assistant takes over from him in Arabic: "Up to now Bashir had a connection with him. Up to now the Nigerian had a connection with

him. Twenty-one years our country has suffered because he is the one of urgency.”

“If there is a person who is bewitched, God has given us an eye to see them,” the wide-faced female evangelist looks fiercely at those of us sitting in the semicircle of chairs under the mango trees. For a moment I am afraid that she is going to see some evil spirit in my eyes and try to exorcise me, so I avoid her gaze. She looks down at Taban, lying on the round, and at Bishop, seated next to the possessed man with his eyes on the ground, listening helplessly while the wide-faced woman and the olive-suited stranger from Nuba Mountains take control of his flock.

Now the Evangelist directly confronts Bishop: “I am not a bishop, but when I come to your office, you must know that the servant of God has come.” He points to Taban, still unresponsive on the ground. “This man will bewitch you and eat you. He eats people and drinks their blood. Up to now this man has been talking to president of Uganda, to Bashir, the president of India, the president of America. If he has magic in his house, we will pray for the house to burn.”

He continues with a story about an elderly woman’s attempts to poison his coffee, again invoking “the name of Jesus” when describing how he overcame the poison. He and the broad-faced woman have apparently found a collection of spirits throughout the countryside: the evil spirit of the mountains, the spirit in the Yei River, a spirit of drinking that has possessed the pastor of Mvolo town. The devil has been hard at work in Equatoria, and he leaves his tracks everywhere: the cracked and empty buildings throughout town, the corruption of the government in Juba, the Ugandan contractor who ran off with money after beginning to build the bank and the bishop’s house, malaria, sleeping sickness, LRA kidnappings, tribal killings—the countless graves of those who died in the latest twenty-two-year-long war. But the whites and Western-educated all have scientific, social and political explanations.

“This is the richest country—we have gold and petrol, but the

Devil has bound them. Let us pray a prayer for God to forgive us and help us. We do not need money. We need God to heal the people." Vicki can hardly keep up with her translation. The Evangelist's eyes burn with indignation, his voice growls. "This man buried a goat alive on a small island to place a curse on the office of commissioner. God said he would not remove the spirit from this man unless the bishop and commissioner came." A soft clucking and chirping draws my gaze down to the ground, where a half-featherless chicken and three chicks come stalking between the chair legs, hunting for anything edible. Right at my feet, all four stop and preen what feathers they have proudly.

IV.

"God killed the Ambororo and the spirit visited me here." Vicki translates for Taban this time. I have no clue what an Ambororo is. The drums begin beating, and women taken over by the Holy Spirit lose control and dance wildly through the cassava shoots. Others make throwing motions toward the flames as a whirlwind spins off of the downwind side of the house, picking up dirt and leaves along with the glowing strands of thatch curling as they cycle skyward.

Bishop leans over to me and whispers, "This whirlwind is associated with the vile one leaving the house. We all must be in prayer now so that the spirit does not come possess one of us, though I don't think we're in great danger." I'm not sure about all of this, but it's best to be safe.

The female evangelist and Mama Vicki circle the house holding sticks as guns, battling the demonic spirits as they leave. Men and women all around have taken up Bibles and point them like firearms at the inferno of wood and straw, murmuring prayers and sighting down the spines. The hymn has risen to a frantic tempo; a bass drum breacing the words "God with Us" provides the heartbeat. The song is purely African, complete with ululating calls from the women, and it increases in tempo as the roof of

the hut collapses and flames fully engulf what was previously the interior. Thick black smoke billows into the sky bearing ash clumps and demons with it. To the north the small valley of the River Yei stretches off toward the distant line of steep hills. The clearing is one of the few places where the foliage has been cleared away enough to display some of the country, and the beauty of the gently rolling hills covered with the jungle strikes something inside me.

"The Nigerian—the Ambororo—he is buried at the other end of the clearing," Bishop motions to the northwest. "We will go there next."

And so we proceed, single-file, between the papaya and banana trees and through the massive stalks of elephant grass to an overgrown, rocky mount where a large rock sits. On this rock, Taban places his last remaining possessions—a mosquito net and an ammunition box with something inside it—and piles sticks on them. The flame takes to them quickly and the hymn with the heart-drum is raised once again. Taban kneels subordinatesly beside the Evangelist, who stretches out one hand toward the flames with a stern look, holding a Bible at his side with the other. The flames die out and the hymn trails off. We shuffle silently up the hill through the elephant grass to where the Land Cruisers are waiting.

V.

Reverend Morris laughs as I take out a voice recorder and set it on the stool in front of us, beside two cups of powdered pineapple juice. I feel awkward trying to be so official, but since I have money to do research, I figure I need to do something the proper way. Reverend Morris starts again.

"So with Shari'a law, maybe if you steal they cut off your hand, maybe also your foot for running away. Maybe even if they accuse you of stealing. When the Arabs came, we ran into the bush, toward Kotobe and Maridi. The government was driven back in ninety-one, but they came back in ninety-four."

Morris speaks with an ease and erudition uncommon in South Sudan. He was educated during Nimeiry's presidency, the one stretch of peace in the history of this Godforsaken country. He motions southwest, across the dirt-floored compound toward the clearing where Taban's tukul burned several days before.

"IDP camp down toward Kotobe. The government helicopter gunships—they came to the IDP camp and opened fire." He wipes his hand over his forehead. His squinted eyes are a little moist, deep in their sockets, but his matter-of-fact tone is striking.

"At night the sky was red from the flames."

ISAAC BASHEVIS PRIZE IN FICTION JUDGE

Will Allison has worked as an editor of publications such as *Story*, *Zoetrope: All-Story*, and *Novel & Short Story Writer's Market*. He released his first novel, *What You Have Left*, in 2007 and is currently working on his second.

LESTER GORAN PRIZE IN NONFICTION JUDGE

Diana Abu-Jaber teaches at Portland State University. Her fiction and nonfiction has received numerous distinctions, including the PEN Center Award for Literary Fiction, the American Book of the Year award, and the Oregon Book Award.

LAURENCE DONOVAN PRIZE IN POETRY JUDGE

Tony Trigilio has taught at Columbia College Chicago since 1999 and co-edits the poetry magazine *Court Green*. He has written and edited numerous collections, chapbooks, and books of poetry criticism, as well as the poetry collection *The Lama's English Lessons*.

"Summer Days," a photograph by Vivecca Chatila, is the winner of Mangrove's 2010 Art Contest. Vivecca graduated in December of 2009 with a Bachelor's Degree in Motion Pictures and Creative Writing.

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AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI. SPONSORED BY THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT.**

