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Cover Design by J. Brandt Buckley
based on Morning Tea, by Aaron Sherwyn
Somewhere in between Tom suddenly being called away to Paris (on business still unrevealed), Hunter S. Thompson blowing his brains and the pope dying, the fiction was selected, the poetry reviewed and the art criticized. A cover? Yes, we ended up with one of those, too. Reputation? Yes, depends on who you ask. Anonymity? Yes, but it appears questionable. Tense problems? No, we had sense problems.

“I am so tired of hearing about the war in Iraq,” (said immediately after an in-class veteran spoke of his tour of duty).

“That’s not poetry, it’s just words on a page.”

“Sentimentality is for the weak minded.”

“This was the only story worth reading.”

“Fuck fascism, fuck communism, fuck capitalism…” Wait, no that was a poem.

<Insert several comments on amount of editor’s work here>

“Enough about battered women, let’s hear something new.”

In the end, did all these things ultimately bring down the quality and reputation of the magazine? Oh Glory, at first you tasted like cinnamon chewing gum, but now only the pasty residue of bittersweet almonds remains.

Sincerely,

Gabrielle N. Perret
The Courtyard of the Best Western Hotel
Hameln Germany
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Always said I'd die a braver man, but this death will not do. No, I ain't brave John Wayne, not even a minor character swan-diving two stories down, exaggerated arms holding on and on to a little screen time.

I'm dying of cancer.

And I pass my time with heroes of a black-and-white West, by-the-by, losing my life between commercial breaks.

"Courage is being scared to death, but saddling up anyway," twangs John Wayne to a coupla extras.

The story is nearing its end, everyone's hittin' the floor and dying, everyone except John Wayne.

There's a polite knock at the door, and the pale doctor hovers as abrupt firing sputters in the brothel,
stuntmen are taking buck-shots 
in the gut and tumbling down the stairs – the camera cuts away. 
My doctor’s interested in charts and x-rays, 
but I marvel at the ease of death, the ease
of everything in the movies. 
But is this how it ends?
No horse troughs or last lines. 
Just one take.
“Well, there’s some things a man 
just can’t run from,” declares John Wayne, tipping 
his hat to the easy
Western Sundown.
Angels and Clouds and Gold Furniture
Gabrielle N. Perret

My body, my good ole body that does things and thinks things will rot in the ground, one day... and worms slippery crawlers through the sockets of my eyeballs! Bobbing for apples in my head!

(And some people will say that they, too, are going to die, but then they throw in that someday with a sparkle smile)

Someday I will die, they say, proud and heavy headed with sacks of garbage between skull walls.

But not today and not tomorrow, and God, not for a good fifty years. Fifty years... (too long worms wait)

Not until food is in applesauce form, or perhaps is just applesauce. (or perhaps, until we become applesauce) Worms crawling through a rotten apple head, eating up thoughts and memories like wonderful wet gummy candy,

And, to lie in a bed all day thinking and thinking about God and dying, just how great it will be to be with all the angels and clouds and gold furniture. And they lie there in bed all day wishing good ole God would just take them now (anyday now anyday).

To be on that grand ole movie set called heaven
all shiny lights and microphones and the Craft food service and a limousine.

Fifty more years I have left, long and hard and hot I have left.
Of taking care of all the loose ends, like bills, like testing the padding of caskets, finding a well trained, reliable makeup artist to ensure I will not be a dead clown, like sleeping in the cemetery grass . . .
Like finding a movie set sized pitchfork to turn the mounds of books and pictures and papers and music, the steaming heaps of compost, the organic matter that is my life.

And to make good friends with rocks and dogs that dig.
Roxie
Gabrielle N. Perret

Roxie
Gabrielle N. Perret
April 2, 2004 Afternoon in Ojai, outside of Rainbow Bridge Health Food Store.

i watched 19 gardeners light candles against their ears
the faith i had that they might soon hear me was no greater
than the faith that fueled their --

car alarm, just like that we're on the other side
of this disk running hundreds of revolutions a second.
I thought to myself,
19 gardeners light candles against their ears.
the faith i had that they might soon hear me was no greater
than the faith that fueled their --

door slams shut, just like that we're on the other side
of this disk running hundreds of revolutions a second. I thought
to myself,
candles against their ears?
the faith i had that they might soon hear me was no greater
than the faith that fueled their --

baby cries, just like that we're on the other side
of this disc running hundreds of revolutions a second. I thought
to myself,

ears... --
the faith i had that they might soon hear me was no greater
than the faith that fueled their --

two cars start: first one, then the other.
precisely one minute and 48 month later,
a third starts. just like that we're on the other side
of this disk running hundreds of revolutions a second. I thought
to myself,
the faith?! i had that they might soon hear me was no greater
than the faith that fueled their -

smiles and tucks her hair behind her ear.
just like that we're
on the other side of this disk running hundreds of revolutions a second. I thought to myself,
they might soon hear me was no greater
than the faith that fueled their --

the boy reaches orgasm long before
the girl, creating
prolonged awkwardness

and silence

; just like that we're on the other side of this
disc running hundreds of revolutions a second. I thought,
to myself,
greater than the faith! that fueled their --

an ornament slips from the tree and fractures
a reflection of a timeless, nuclear moment into countless
scrap of tin shrapnel.
just like that we're on the other side of this
disc running hundreds of revolutions a second. I thought,
to myself,
faith... that fooled there
fuelled they're
their

and now they're rationing paper cuts?
just like that we're on the other side of this disc running hundreds of revolutions a second. I thought to myself,
a bottle of two dollar wine christens
a voyage that no one will ever write of.
just like that, we're on the other side of this disc, running
dozens of revolutions a second, I thought to myself,
"we're on the other side of this disc!" running dozens of
revolutions a second, running dozens
of revolutions a second I thought to myself;
dozens of revolutions
a second, I thought to myself.
a second, I thought to myself. second, I thought to myself i
thought to myself two... my self
thought myself thought to myself to my self
my
self.
Ear-drums are strung by using electric wires, buzzing with communication. The pupils should dilate with lenses inside, projecting the flicker of images in the theater of mind. And when chatting, the tongue will click as keyboards act beneath the effect and snap of typing fingers.

To retract your words, simply backspace highlight erase.

To install the heart, connect its valves to the speaker-box, and it will thump in the trunk, jumping to get out.

Now to address the extra parts: the soul is useless, an out-dated means of travel, like hot air balloons. And the imagination is a satellite, orbiting among suns but forever in the dark.

Philip Sciranka

State-of-the-Art
When I first saw her, I didn't think she was a robot.

Kevin and I were reclined on the backyard grass at Merry Jim's party, watching the evening traffic drift by slowly overhead, cigarettes in hand, philosophizing. All around butane torches burned, orbited by lazy rings of insects worshipping their sun god. A few adventurous souls flew into the flames, towards perceived nirvana and actual destruction. From inside the house came slow, melancholy, orchestral music and flickers of black and white. Some of the guests were watching an old movie on television while others sat raptly around the enormous Bodge, listening to him talk about whatever crossed his mind or field of vision.

There was a crash and a "Fucking cat!" Merry Jim came across the dim grass, limping on the foot that had just accidentally kicked his cat, Peacock, while he was stepping out onto the patio. Peacock, not multicolored as the name would suggest, was actually no color at all. It was transparent, which is not to say invisible, but transparent and only viewable as a hazy whitish outline with yellow eyes that always seemed to catch the light. In the daytime Peacock could be sighted easily enough, but at night one had to tread carefully to avoid stepping on the tail which was always carefully lain across well-traveled corridors. Merry Jim came and stood over us, casting down the orange glow of his cigarette.

“What are you doing out here?” he asked. “There's a party going on. Didn't you get the invite?”

“As I was saying,” Kevin said, ignoring him, “God cannot be omniscient. God knows nothing above Himself, right? So then how does He know that there isn’t some greater God putting Him on?”
Merry Jim made an impatient half-turn and threw his cigarette towards the bushes along the wall. Before it hit, a giant mosquito swooped in and intercepted the glowing butt, carrying it skyward like a winged Prometheus. “Some bugs we have here,” Merry Jim said. “You look like you need a drink.”

In the kitchen sat half a dozen drunken teens, playing strip Parcheesi. The boys were losing, and one poor fellow was only a left sock and pair of boxers away from, according to the solemn rules of the game, getting up and running about the house, asking everyone if they knew where his doughnut was. I made my way around them and grabbed a beer.

Merry Jim stepped through the circle, upsetting the game board and eliciting moans of protest and exaltation from the girls and boys, respectively. “You ever had a Diseased Sailor?” he asked me. I hoped he was talking about a drink. I shook my head, no. Merry Jim, chief alchemist, fiddled with a few bottles and ended up with what looked like dirty green tea. He handed it to me.

“All right. Merry Jim, cocking his ear as if picking up the faint call of a siren, suddenly bolted from the kitchen and went up the stairs.

“What does your philosophy say about free will?” Kevin asked me. This was a game: initiated by the word “philosophy” used in a question, we both had to answer questions with questions until someone lost by uttering a statement.

“Hasn’t every atom in the universe been moving, interacting according to murky laws of science since the beginning of time?”

“What do you mean?”

“If every bit of matter has been reacting with every other bit,” I began, “and they’re all following a set law of physics towards an inevitable conclusion, then how
“Can free will exist?”

“But isn’t the illusion of free will just as good as actual free will?”

“I suppose so.”

“Ha!” he laughed. “I win.”

The doorbell rang and spared me any further loss of pride. There was a thumping from up above. We all filed into the living room in time to see Merry Jim come bounding down the stairs, trip over Peacock, briefly fly through the air, and smack the door with his head. He was up a moment later, apparently unharmed except for a cross-shaped red mark on his forehead. He opened the door to reveal three voluptuous sirens.

I knew two of them, the twins Audrey and Amber. Blonde and dark-eyed, they stepped over the threshold holding hands. Immediately, all talking ceased, and every head pointed their way.

“So glad you could make it,” said Merry Jim. “Let’s see, Audrey?”

“No, Amber. We’re color-coded this evening. Our hair has pink streaks,” she motioned to Audrey, “and we have green.” She bowed her head slightly, revealing neon green bands mixed with the blonde.

Audrey and Amber always used we or us, never I or me. It must be so limiting, having been forever barred from using certain pronouns. They never did anything separately and sometimes joked that they were really Siamese twins, still connected by some vague psychic link. They were always the most popular girls at a party; whoever took one to bed got the other for free.

“And who’s your friend?” Merry Jim asked.

“This is Kate,” said Audrey, “we met her at a show and asked her to come.”

“Because we all know you throw the best parties,” Amber finished, “we couldn’t bear to let her miss one.”

The other partygoers gawked at the twins, but Kate was the one who caught my eye. She was wearing a red corset straight from Hell’s branch of Victoria’s
Secret, and her long black hair swirled down over her shoulders. She stepped over the threshold, and Kevin came to meet her.

“How do you do,” he said, sweeping her hand in his fist and giving it a brief peck.

The stereo was belting out “She Never Told Me She Was a Mime,” and Kate yelled to be heard over it. “Oh, ya know. Hey, is this a party or a funeral?” She had a lilting Minnesota accent with pursed-lip O’s and “ya” for “you,” only a dozen or so generations removed from the mother tongue.

“There are drinks in the fridge, and I won’t let you go too long without something vicious,” said Merry Jim. “If you want something non-alcoholic, the punchbowl probably hasn’t been spiked yet.” The twins continued on into the kitchen, but Kate paused by the door a minute.

I extended my hand in an embarrassingly platonic handshake. “Hi, I’m Mike.”

“Oh hi, Mike,” she said. “How are you?”

I smiled. She pointed at an X on my hand, written in black marker. “That a tattoo?”

“No, it’s a reminder.” I scratched my head with the marked hand. “There was something important I was supposed to remember, but I forgot what it was.”

“Anyway, man, you gotta check out what I got,” Merry Jim commanded, then bolted upstairs.

I looked at Kevin, who nodded and escorted Kate into the kitchen. Acutely perceptive of the world around him, he’d seen me looking at Kate and would prepare me a full report using his ninja spy powers.

Merry Jim’s room looked like what set designers built when the script called for a “Stoner’s Room.” The lamplight filtering through a cloud of reefer smoke revealed Bob Marley, smiling down from every wall. There were bookcases and desks stacked all over. Every horizontal space was taken up with an eclectic collection of pipes: bongs, hookahs, sherlocks, sneak-a-tokes, bubblers, and one-
hitters. Most of them, aching from disuse, were kept only for show.

Merry Jim knelt by the bed, reached under, and pulled out a clear plastic bug farm. Inside were two dozen spiders, each an inch in diameter and covered with exotic wavy patterns in yellow and black. Startled by the sudden appearance of light, some flitted about, crawling over their siblings to find a shady spot.

“You know what these are?” Merry Jim asked me, his eyes all lit up. “Night Stalkers, straight from the darkest part of Peru. I’ve been raising them for months, and a few are due.”

“Due?”

“Dude, these things are poisonous. They carry this hallucinogenic poison which they inject into prey. Then while the prey is having some whacko trip, the spider eats it. But it’s not enough to be dangerous to humans, just a great trip. How many drinks have you had?” he asked.

“Just the Diseased Sailor.”

“Oh, okay. I’ll give you a small one then.”

He opened the top and reached in with a long pair of tweezers. He seized one of the spiders and hauled it out, legs twitching and scraping at air. “Open up.”

But a cloudy blur leaped in front of my face. Peacock pounced at the spider, missed, and knocked over the farm. No longer prisoners, the spiders inside formed into a single-file line and fled out the door, drawn to the enchanting din of the party through some instinctual call.

“Damn it, Peacock!” Merry Jim yelled. “Where are you?” The cat was easy to miss in the clutter. How long had it been lingering on top of the bureau, watching our moves, waiting for the right time to strike?

“Fuck, man,” Merry Jim said, still holding the lone spider. “Those were worth a lot of money. I already promised this one to you, so…” “He held it out to me. It was still moving. “Hurry, while it’s still alive. You can’t get the whole effect unless you feel the legs twitching going down.”
I opened my mouth, and Merry Jim inserted the spider, airplane to the hanger. I flipped it back into my throat with my tongue and swallowed. It wriggled on the way down.

I lay against Jim's bed. “Where did you get a transparent cat, anyway?”

“Mail order.” I wasn't sure if he was putting me on or putting me off. He sat back on one of the bean bags. “So yeah, man. How 'bout those twins, huh? I'd like to hit that.” He raised his arm, palm down, in the universal pantomime of doggy-style.

“I've got my eye on Kate,” I said. As I thought of her, I felt the spider briefly flutter again in my stomach.

“Yeah, well, good luck, man. Just be careful with her.”

“What do you mean?”

“I'm just saying, be careful,” he said. He looked off at his wall for a few awkward seconds. “Well, don't you think we ought to rejoin the party?”

The stereo was crunching out the latest record by the PoMo7: samples of jackhammers, cell phone ring tones, car horns in the key of F, passenger jet “No Smoking” sign beeps, while over the gleefully irrational noise a little girl recited the poem “Jabberwocky,” her voice weighted with flange, echo, distortion, and a dozen pitch-shifters on every frequency operating all at once. The music was ghastly, but it had a strange beauty to it with all its disjointed, arbitrary voices; that quality of randomness and uncertainty that no one can quite classify, but is always recognized by instinct.

Bodge and Kevin were in the corner, shouting questions at each other. Audrey was staggering around with a lampshade, a sure sign of a good time, on her head. She tripped over one of Bodge's disciples and ran into me, nearly spilling her drink. “Whoa!”

Amber stood behind her, arms crossed, the disapproving parent. “Don't mind us,” she said. “We've only had one drink.”

“But what a drink!” yelled Merry Jim from the kitchen.
"We feel woozy," said Audrey and sat down Indian-style at the foot of the stairs.

"Which brings us to an important point," said Bodge. "If you aren't drunk, but think you are, are you?" Bodge took up both sides of the loveseat, hairy and apish like the charts you see in school detailing the progress of the human species from simian to scholar and looked to be about four or five evolutionary leaps backward, somewhere around Homo Erectus or Habilus. A half-dozen partygoers sat around him, hanging on every word. "If you're high, but don't think you're high, are you really high?"

I went into the kitchen. The Parcheesi players had set their game back up and were playing with renewed zeal. Amber followed me in and sat on the stove watching Merry Jim, who stood in one corner, hovering over innumerable bottles, picking and choosing. He poured half a glass of yellow liquid then added a shot of something white, and the whole mixture turned deep red.

"Goat's Blood," he called, holding it up. A hand reached up from the circle around the game, seized the drink, brandished it three times, and brought it back down.

Kate was watching TV, an old black and white movie. She smiled when I sat down next to her. Onscreen, a man and woman were dancing in sweeping ballroom style, his tuxedo black and sharply cut, her dress billowy with little frilly things all over, looking like the next harsh gust of wind would take her into orbit.

Kevin came in and stood behind us. "It's symbolic, you know. The director's trying to let us know that they're fucking. But he can't just show it; he's got to hide it in metaphor." He grinned at us. "Sometimes directors or writers do similar things nowadays, too. But it's done mostly for the sake of art or to bury gross sexual inexperience on their part in esoteric sci-fi mumbo jumbo."

"Well, it could just be dancing, too," said Kate.

"Sometimes a dip is just a dip," I said. Kevin rolled his eyes.
From the living room came Audrey’s voice. “Oh, Bodge. You’re so sexy…” Amber rolled her eyes and slid off the stove. “Kate, help us rescue ourselves.” Kate gave me a smile and followed Amber out. The program cut to a blurry shot of an alien world, a space suited figure in the foreground.

“Hey, we finally made it to Europa,” Merry Jim said, switching bottles. “No, it’s Io,” said the naked Parcheesi player, sipping his Goat’s Blood. “Europa was last year.”

“We haven’t landed anywhere,” Kevin said. “C’mon, Star Trek XVIII had better special effects than that.” He continued to stare at the TV, nonetheless. “You know,” he said to me, “I think she likes you.”

“Really?” His eyes flashed over to mine. “But I dunno, man. You know she’s a robot, right?”

What?

“Yeah, Amber told me. Cause they’re models. They bought her online to help with hair and makeup, and for parties.” He grinned. “Pretty realistic, huh?”

What? I still wasn’t hearing right. I’d seen some high-end servant robots before, but nothing this realistic. Were all her smiles and coy looks just the result of programming? That fine hair synthetic, that fair skin high-grade composite plastic? “Does she…?”

“…have all the right bits and pieces? You bet. But, I dunno. You think you can handle that, the fact that if you’re alone with her, you’re really all alone?”

“Well, what about you?” I asked. “How do I know you’re not a robot too?”

“Well, because…” he hesitated, thinking. The spaceman on Europa, or Io, or in a TV soundstage, was suddenly attacked by sinister pink aliens who danced around him in threatening leaps and cartwheels. Were those zippers or scales on the aliens’ backs? Kevin shrugged. “I got nothing.”
“Okay. A robot would probably come up with something better than that,” I said. “So what should I do?” I’d never met a female robot before.

“It’s up to you. But remember, Amber and Audrey would be real pissed if you broke their new toy. Me, I’m going for the twins themselves.”

“You’ll have to fight Bodge for ’em, sounds like,” I said.

“No problem.”

The teen drinking Goat’s Blood started coughing. “No chance,” he spat out.

“What’s real for one isn’t necessarily real for another.”

The din from the living room got louder, so Kevin and I went back in. We passed Merry Jim and he gave me a friendly jab with his elbow, “Hey, you feeling that spider yet?”

I started to answer no, but realized I was. My vision bent and twisted itself like a wall-eye lens. No, I was already seeing that and had been for some time. I just hadn’t noticed it. Across the room, Bodge finished his speech, gave me a knowing wink, lapsed into a trance, and eyeballs rolled back, head waving back and forth.

Amber was calmly sitting on top of her sister, sipping at a cup filled from the punchbowl, while Audrey hissed and spat and clawed and wrestled to get free. Kevin harvested some of Merry Jim’s Brazilian Night Stalkers that were crawling all over the floor and began dropping them one by one into the punchbowl. Kate came up to get a drink, and Kevin, ever the gentleman, poured her one, stabbed one of the spiders with a tiny umbrella, and plopped it in the cup before handing it to her. She followed me to the couch.

Merry Jim walked in, arms laden with bongos, congas, triangles, castanets, pots, drumsticks, shakers, and anything else that might be enlisted to make noise. “Rhythm circle!” He announced.

This was my chance. “Hey, Kate,” I said, turning to her. “You wanna come up to Jim’s room and get away from this madness? There’s a cool movie I want you to see.” She nodded, and we snuck away from the gathering ruckus.
I shut the door as she turned off the lights. The disc player was already on, and I inserted a flick pulled at random from Merry Jim’s library. When I stood up and turned around, she was right in front of me, her ivory skin shimmering slightly in the near-dark. I grabbed her around the waist and pulled her towards me. We kissed, and for a brief moment while we stood embraced, I felt a vibration, a murmur through her body of hydraulic valves hissing, switches snapping, and the nearly inaudible hum of an electrical transformer somewhere shuddering deep.

We broke off from each other and pulled back. There was what looked like genuine warmth in her eyes, the result no doubt from a complex algorithm of coordinated muscle movements, preprogrammed by a technician who devoted miles of code to this one expression. Fine work.

We laid down on the bed, entwined, she with me, me with the idea she was a robot. We fumbled, pushing and breathing, me and her, human and machine, like some wild H.R. Giger painting come to life. She climaxed, or rather the program decided that acceptable tolerances had been met, and triggered the appropriate response.

We laid, panting, for a few minutes. Then she got up and dressed, mechanically. We headed back downstairs again.

Something in that act must have shaken the foundations of the world. The party was in utter turmoil. Someone had put “Paranoid Android” on the stereo, and the entire troop was skipping about to the beat, banging any rhythmic instrument they could find. A dozen spiders floated, drowned, in the punchbowl. Amber and Audrey sat on Bodge’s thighs, climbing on him and making cooing noises.

Kate got caught up in the madness as well, dancing round in circles, spider-spiked drink in hand, and I left her and went back out to the backyard. Kevin was in a chair, hand hovering over his thigh. It took me a moment to realize he was holding Peacock.

“You do it?” he asked, voice slurred by the cigarette in his mouth.
I nodded.

He chuckled. “Yeah. But you know, I was just kidding about the robot thing.”

He gave me a smile that I couldn’t decipher. Had he been lying earlier? Or was he now? Did it matter?

I looked up to the traffic weaving its way around the nighttime sky. “How many ships have human pilots,” I said, “and how many are under computer control?”

“Are we still playing Philosophy?”

“Did you think you had me there?”

There was another crash, which overpowered both the stereo and the diligent efforts of Merry Jim’s Fun and Fanciful Percussion Choir. Through the window I saw Kate spinning around out of control, rivaling Audrey. She collapsed, sputtering gibberish, flipping out, while Bodge’s disciples rushed to protect their master. Merry Jim and Amber ran to her side, briefly examined her, exchanged shouts, then looked up at the same time through the window at Kevin and me.

Were her circuits jammed? Or did she drink too much of Kevin’s spiked punch? Either way it didn’t matter; we were eternally each other’s accomplices.

Kevin stood up and forfeited the game. “Run.”
Suburb

There is an idiot standing on the corner of First and Easy. Dressed like a velveteen Lady Liberty, he is playing an advertisement like Pete Townsend on an electric guitar. Someone run him over, please.
Life of a Snail
Chris Alexander
overweight.
Ballpoint Abortion

MRC
You
Marti Petri

You.
Remove that bar from your brown brow.

Wrap the metal around your finger.

You’re supposed to marry women.
One tiny drop, teeters on the lip, threatening intoxication. Notes of fruit and earth pervade, drawing on the depths of the old and new—hearty, with a clean finish. Men, aged 'n oaken with the raw and unfiltered, talk of the way things could have been—glass after glass. We weep 'n rage over ifs and loves and each complexity of reds, roses, and whites. Husbands of the grape and lovers of yeast, we touch warm glasses with friends, and enemies.

Tom Sullivan

With

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Tom Sullivan
Progress
Aaron Sherwyn
Once again Spring had come to the prairie. Suddenly the snow was gone, the grass turned green, the sweet scent of the wild rose filled the air. Far out, our land was the last cultivated farm on the plain: isolated, lonely, and beautiful. The wide blue sky overreached the earth.

Here I was born; the great prairie was always part of my life and consciousness. And here I loved to wander. I set out at dawn, the red circle of the sun just breaking out of the ground. Flocks of ducks and geese were flying, songbirds were everywhere, far and near the grouse were beating their drums. I always carried a gun and a small shovel. The gun was for the ducks and the shovel for the wild ginseng, hard to find and sure to bring hard cash in the Oriental market.

I came to a pretty green meadow filled with tiny lady slippers. Do little elves go dancing here and forget their tiny shoes? Beyond the meadow, Mogo’s haystacks came into view, abandoned, like ships becalmed at sea. And now his house came into view and my spirits sank. My friends were gone. For in times past, beset with pouring rain and hail, I would be welcomed there. My mind went back.

On just such a day as this I was afield and saw a white tent. Old Mogo, a fine figure of a man with a luxuriant long white beard, stood by a campfire. His young son was sleeping in the tent. We were soon drinking coffee and trying to talk. He spoke more Russian than English. He held up two fingers.

“Two years now I escape from Communists. Stow away on a fishing boat. This is a great country.” He looked out at the growing fields.

By midsummer his house appeared deep in the wilderness. The homestead was now legally his. He did a wild dance, waving the document over his head. “My
land! There are no collectives or commissars here. I'm free!

Time passed and Mogo prospered, reaping the wild hay and selling it to the horse ranches. He would also buy wild horses at the auction and break them himself, his long white beard flying around the kicking horse. With a wild Cossack yell, he flew over the prairie. Soon his son Danny was doing the same thing. Danny grew up and had a girlfriend in the village. It was time for the New Year's dance, but a strong blizzard was blowing. Mogo said to Danny, "Don't go. I have a bad feeling."

Danny just laughed: "I know this country."

Poor Danny set out on his skis and was never seen again. For that night a williwaw, a whirling, spinning storm and terrible frost, came roaring out of the north. Old Mogo hung a lantern atop his house to guide his boy home. He stayed up all night but only heard the great storm wailing and rushing around the house.

Out of a stubborn hope, thereafter his lantern was shining every night, a beacon in the prairie sky. Sometimes, travelers who lost their way would see the light and knock on his door. Each time filled with hope at the knock, Mogo would leap out of bed—again his hopes would be dashed. And he would sink further into despair. Wicked rumors were heard in the village. That Danny had grown tired of the lonely ranch and run away under cover of the storm. This was the cruelest blow of all to old Mogo. But he never stopped searching and was after seen far afield even in storms. His white beard would fly in the wind, his cheeks black with frostbite.

After a time, Mogo was almost forgotten by the villagers. Even I had stopped coming out to check on him and have coffee. One day I was out hunting when bad weather caught me far from home. I had always taken pride in my Spartan life; rather than walk twenty miles home in the dark, I would bed down in a willow grove, piling up a soft bed of dry dead leaves, a thick wall of willows around me, and feel secure. But with a black thundercloud close overhead, I made a run for
Mogo’s house. Desperate for refuge from a downpour of rain and hail, I came to the silent, brooding house and realized Mogo was gone, and had been gone a long time. No friendly words welcomed me. Only a door creaking eerily in the wind. I realized they must both be dead, their bleached bones lying somewhere on the prairie. Suddenly, tears came to my eyes.

I cooked my ducks and had a lonely supper in the empty house. I went to bed in Danny’s room. That night a talking wind was moaning around the house. I seemed to hear voices in the kitchen. I lit the lantern and wandered through the house to lay their ghosts to rest.

I had been so engrossed in my daydream reminiscences of Mogo, that I almost fell into a little pond. I clearly saw the fields again with their lonely haystacks, when I noticed smoke coming from Mogo’s chimney. Had some tramp invaded his house? I walked closer and thought I heard the sound of a violin playing a wild, beautiful melody. I flung the door open and drew back in surprise. A pretty girl with blue eyes and a striking mass of black hair was staring hard at me with a long, penetrating look. With conviction she said, “You’re Robby.” And without another word she threw her arms around me and kissed me. I was overwhelmed by her sweet girlish warmth.

“I am Tillie Mogo. Uncle Mogo is my father’s brother. He wrote all about how much you have helped him, how you taught him English and Danny too. And where to find things and how to file for a homestead.”

Once again a hot fire was burning in Mogo’s stove. We made tea, instantly warm friends. She said, “I have come far. I studied music at Moscow Institute. And now you must tell me all about my uncle Mogo and my cousin Danny.”

And I told her about the hay making and Mogo’s garden and his brick oven where he baked the black bread he loved. And how sometimes I would stay the night and eat with them. Mogo would gather beets and cabbage from his bountiful
garden and bring down some smoked ham from the rafters overhead. Soon there was a big pot of red borscht boiling merrily, with fresh baked black bread. Just as my appetite was raging, suddenly Mogo would fall into a black study and stare into the steaming pot. Time would reel back in his mind. “If only my beloved wife had had this soup.” His tears poured down. Danny and I had to witness his self-flagellation, and we went supperless. When Tillie heard this story of her uncle, she burst into tears and again I was enveloped in her sweet embrace.

“Oh,” she cried through her tears. “If only Uncle Mogo were here now. To see there are those who love him and care about him. When he left this ranch to me, I see I also must run away from Russia, like my Uncle did. The directors would never let me develop my own music anyway.”

As I took my leave and started on my long trek home, my heart sang. The old house was alive again, and there again I had a friend. I turned to look back at the light in the window.
Winter Ranch
Hart Schulz
The Desert
Philip Sciranka

The vastness attracted me.
It was what I loved the most. I was young again,
chasing blue-bellies in the sand.

And I admired your heart because it seemed
out-of-place, being shifty and fragile, quiet
as wind through dunes.

You captivated me with miles and miles of vision,
for it was the sky – in all directions – around me.
And then night quickly came, and springing
from distant-levels of earth were stars,
and they held their glory
with the shake-shine effect of fireworks
forever going. But when morning absorbed night, I scavenged
for love among rocks and in your arms
found the embrace of a riverbed, splintered
with bits of shale and fossils.
And while studying the geology of your thoughts,
I discovered the digging worthless,
since you insisted keeping secrets buried.
You were so arid, so feral, and I,
deserted, realizing I had lost my way somewhere
during the chase. And now, deliriously,
I begin to imagine better things.
Woman Figure
Seth Martini
Holiday at Manzanar

Gabrielle N. Perret

My mother called me late this evening, but I have slowly grown accustomed to that now. In her former life, my mother was asleep by ten o'clock every night of the week, starting to nod off at nine thirty. She would rise and fall with the sun, and I never realized I needed an alarm clock until I had left for college.

So when the phone rings late in the evening, and it is her on the line, I already know what she is going to say, it has become that routine. She half whispers to me through the phone, asking what I am up to, what am I doing, and wouldn't I like it if she came over to visit. She rushes through these questions, not really paying attention to my answers, just trying to get through the sequence. How much she misses me, she says, how she misses the days when she was there to wake me in the morning, to tuck me in at night. Then comes the point of all this: she might suggest some sort of getaway weekend, some vacation of sorts. Don't you need to get away, she'll ask, you work so hard. You always look tired, and lonely, she tells me. Let's you and I spend the next few days together.

If she says she wants to stay with me for the weekend, it is not so bad. If she calls during the week for a two or three day visit, it has escalated to pathetic. But when she suggests a vacation I know it has gone to worse. You can measure how bad it has gotten by how far the destination is. She called me one evening and suggested that we move to Canada. She said she knew it was cold, but that there was no crime and free healthcare.

My mother rings me suspiciously late that evening, eleven o'clock, and suggests that we take the weekend off and drive to see her mother's grave in Independence. She says we need some time together and she has not been able to make the time to drive up for a while. She says she is packing already. She will be at
my home shortly. Before I can reply, I hear a dish shatter and the phone hang up.

My mother shows up quickly, I haven’t even turned the porch light back on or unlocked the door for her. She rings my door bell and I can see her dark, impatient figure through the murky glass of the front door toting two clunky bags. I watch her for a moment, balancing the bags and nervously looking around before I open the door.

“Mom, you don’t have to ring the doorbell. You can just come in. You have a key, remember?”

She doesn’t say anything as she walks in toddling around with her bags in hand. Outside the door she acts like a stranger, but once inside she acts completely at home.

“Why aren’t your bags packed? Where is your suitcase?” She asks as I flip on the hall light. Her head turns quickly downward, and she acts like she is searching for something in her bag. I notice how quickly she must have packed, she has mismatched socks and undergarments and shirts and clothing all balled up and forced into a travel bag. I notice her jewelry roll, chocked full of the rings and necklaces and jewels of many generations of my mother’s family.

I know it must be bad if she hasn’t looked at me yet; it must be worse if she has brought her jewels with her. She mumbles and acts busy, rummaging, although I know she is not looking for something at all.

“Mom? What’s the matter? Look at me.”

She turns away, shooing me with her hand. “Why are all the lights on? Why is it so bright in here? Are you trying to wake up the whole neighborhood?”

I gently grab her arm, the soft fatty part of her underarm. She slowly looks up at me and the side of her jaw is swollen already. Her face isn’t bruised yet, it is too early. It’s just fluid filled and red.

“The bags fell from the top of the closet as I was getting them down.” She makes a half laugh, her eyes darting to the side. “Roy was too busy watching the
television, you know, watching a sports game of some kind. He couldn't help, you know, he was watching. So, like a dum dum, I tried to get them down by myself and they all fell on me. Lucky I only ended up with this, not bad really. Just stings a little. But let's not linger in hallways talking about my stupid mistakes; let's get your bags ready.”

The suit cases have fallen on my mother three times in the past year. She has also slipped on the wet floor, like a dummy, and tripped over a dog toy onto the corner of the coffee table, like a dummy. I am not sure if they even still have a dog. I haven't been over there in so long.

“Come on, get your bags ready.” She ushers me with her small hands through the hallway.

“Mom, it's eleven o'clock. We can just go in the morning. I don't want to drive now.”

“I'll drive. Get your things together. We'll make good time on the road. No traffic this time of night.”

I don't argue with her. I don't want my mother's last years to be of being beaten up and fighting with her daughter. I don't try to tell her that Roy is too drunk to drive at this stage of the night. He would never be able to back the car out of the garage anyway. But I can't convince her that he won't follow her here, so I get my small travel suitcase down, an awful pink one she got me for Christmas, and this makes her smile. I can see the swelling in her cheek push up her eye, making her lip crooked.

I bring my suitcase into my bedroom and pull some clothes from the dresser. I hear my mother in the kitchen, the clinking of the dishes going into the dishwasher, and the running water in the sink. I hear the cupboards opening and shutting, the refrigerator door open and close. I hear a spray bottle spray onto the counter, and I hear the wiping motions of her hands. I pack the clothes into the suitcase and snap it shut.
My mother comes in moments later, wiping her wet hands on a kitchen rag.
"Are you ready?" she asks, her eyes big, her mouth with another lopsided smile. "Bring a nice dress, I'll take you to a nice dinner when we get up there."

"I did," I tell her, knowing I packed no dresses. There are no "nice" restaurants within a hundred mile range of where we are going.

She takes my light suitcase and puts it with her bags in the hallway. "Put the bags in the trunk, love, and I'll make us a snack to take for the drive." My mother wants me to pack the car up because she is afraid Roy will be outside. I am not afraid of Roy, he is not the first man I ever hit, and he knows it. Roy won't come to my house. He has a fear of being run over by a car or being hit in the face with a metal baseball bat. But my mother won't believe this and telling her will send her into a fit of denial that will make me upset.

I take the bags through the house to the garage and load them into the trunk. My mother makes peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for us. She knows my kitchen better than I do. She comes for the weekends and weekdays with bags of groceries, things I would never remember to buy, like saran wrap and mayonnaise. She buys Tupperware she stores away in cabinets I have never opened. She throws away the old takeout containers and soy sauce packets, making room for the vegetables and things she has bought to cook up for me.

"Ready?" I hear her ask from the kitchen as I clean out the trash and empty paper coffee cups from the back seat.

"Yeah come on, let's go."

She opens the garage door and sort of peeps out. Her eyes looking around for Roy, I'm sure. But to my mother, it is totally plausible that Roy is waiting in the closed garage.

"You drive, and if you get tired, then I'll take over." If Roy is outside, which he is not, she and I both know I will keep driving and she will not.

"All right, get in." I turn on the ignition and flip the lights. I click the remote.
and the door creaks and whines open, my mother sitting rigid in the passenger seat. She buckles herself in and hits the key for the automatic locks. I see her watching the side mirror as the door slowly rises.

I want to tell my mother Roy is not outside. I want to tell her to take a deep breath and relax. Have a nap, I want to tell her, have a Xanax. But she would tell me she was relaxed, why wouldn't she be? Going on a nice trip like this with her daughter, this is relaxing.

I back out of the driveway, my red tail lights illuminating the street, the tailpipe spitting out clouds in the darkness. Roy is nowhere to be seen, but my mother will not loosen her grip on the sides of the seat until we are twenty miles away on the freeway.

***

When we reach Los Angeles my mother yawns and stretches her arms. 
“Let’s stop at this hotel up here for the night. It’s late and there could be drunk drivers on the road.”

“Mom, we have been driving only an hour. We could have just slept at my house and left in the morning.” I flip my blinker on to get into the lane for the off ramp.

“But hotels are so nice to stay in. Your father never took us to hotels, so now I like to stay in them every chance I get. Makes me feel so decadent, you know. Sleep in those nice smooth sheets and take a bath. Tip the maid and go, you know.”

“Hotels are always too cold for me. They always have the air conditioning up too high, and the blankets are too thin.” I get off at the exit.

“How is your father?” She asks in a very pseudo-casual way.
“I’m sure he is the same as ever.”
“Don’t you talk?”
“No. We don’t really have anything to say to each other. We never have.”

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“I’m sure he is the same as ever.”
“Don’t you talk?”
“No. We don’t really have anything to say to each other. We never have.”
"That's too bad. You should really make more of an effort."
I let her have the last word. She left him for the same reasons I did. My father never said a word to anyone in his whole life, and the words he did say were angry and cruel. He was quiet, in that serial killer quiet way. He would work all day, eat his dinner in front of the television, and go to sleep. My mother and he never slept in the same bedroom. They had separate rooms since I could remember. My father was to be avoided, if he was in the living room, then you went to your room. If he was home from work, you peeped behind walls before you took turns around corners. If he was asleep, you tiptoed like there were land mines in the carpet.

My father was not a rich man, and he was also not a poor man. He was neither of these because he had no drive for money or the materials that accompanied it. He never vacationed, never had a Sunday car, never built us a swimming pool.

We pull into the drive of the hotel, and it is still early enough to have a bell hop lingering around the front door. He opens the door for my mother, who blushes like she is twelve. He unloads our bags onto the brass trolley and rolls it into the lobby.

At the desk the man flirts with my mother, and she basks in the attention. She pays the man on her charge card, ordering us the most expensive suite they had left.

Roy is not a poor man, he is quite the opposite. Roy is a wonderful example of what happens when you give trash money. Roy met my mother in the grocery market near my father’s house. They kept ending up on the same isles, bumping carts. He would flirt; she would blush. He asked her out, not a date he said, looking at her wedding ring, just a cup of coffee and a Danish. Light talk and rich pastries, he said to her. My mother is a sucker for cheap charm, she eats it up like a child’s first taste of sweets. My mother will never admit Roy beats the hell out of her. She will never admit she left one extreme for the other. She will never admit she is
wrong or unhappy.

As I think of Roy, of his phony charm and quick fists, I hear my mother say something about the bags falling on her face with an insecure laugh. I turn to the desk man who says with a flirty pointed finger, "You better help this young lady next time! It pains me to see such a pretty face all pink and swollen!"

I grab my mother's arm and pull her away from the desk man, down the lobby into the elevator, focusing on the floral carpet and cold hotel smell. For all I know, he is the next Roy, and by examining her choices in men, he is probably worse. I trust no man that flirts with my mother. The elevator makes my head feel dizzy and tired. My mother makes light conversation with the bell hop up until the moment she tips him, God knows how much, and he shuts the door.

"Are you hungry? We could order room service. I know how much you like to eat out."

"No, I'm just tired. Let's just go to bed."

My mother's face saddens, but I'm too tired to stay up all night eating sweets and watching dated movies. I watch her as I pop open my suitcase. She unravels her ball of clothing only to realize she has forgotten to pack pajamas. Her face seems worried and anxious, and I can read her thoughts trying to come up with an excuse of why she 'planned' a trip and did not bring pajamas.

"Have a pair of mine, I brought extra." I hand her a pair of long sleeved flannel pajamas. She says nothing and walks to the bathroom to change. Changing behind closed doors, I cannot see bruised hips or thighs. I cannot see her face, I cannot see her body.

I hear my mother run the faucet, rinsing out her mouth, knowing she didn't bring a toothbrush either. I hear her wash her face. I imagine her touching the damage of the night.

My mother opens the door and turns out the bathroom light. I am in the wrong or unhappy.

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My mother opens the door and turns out the bathroom light. I am in the
large bed next to hers and am already underneath the cold hotel sheets.  
"Don't new sheets feel nice?" She asks me as she turns out the light.  
I wonder how she feels the sheets through all the flannel of her pajamas.  
"Yes," I agree with her. "Goodnight."

***

I wake to a knock on the door and the bright California sunshine through the pulled shades. Room service has brought us breakfast.

My mother is dressed, and it appears she forgot to bring a blouse because she is wearing one of mine. I wonder what she did bring, but I would be too sad if I looked.

"I ordered you French toast and waffles."

"Both?"

"I wasn't sure what you would like, so you choose and I'll eat the other."

I push back the flimsy sheets and sit at the end of the bed, rubbing my eyes. She pulls the cart to the bed and takes the lids off the room service plates. She had also ordered several cups of juice, a pot of coffee, and hot water for tea accompanied by a hundred different bags. Plates fill the cart with fruit and different slices of toast.

"Eat, you must be hungry."

I eat some of the French toast, not enough to satisfy my mother, but all that I can stand. My mother plans our day out.

"Well I thought, first, well, we could drive through the desert to see my mother in Independence and stop at all the jerky stops and nut stands. Those poor miserable people living in the desert. Then I thought we can stop for lunch somewhere in Independence, and then drive up to Mono Lake. So eat up and get dressed and let's go."

I finish the last syrupy bite I can stand and push the plate away. "Aren't you going to eat?" My mother hasn't touched a bite of anything.
"No, not too hungry this morning. Just anxious to get on the road and have a nice trip." The swelling in her face has gone down, he must have just slapped her, no closed fist on any part that I can see. There is no bruising showing through her makeup, although it does still look swollen. I pull on some jeans and a tee shirt. I pull my hair back with a rubber band and wash my face with cold water and hotel soap.

***

On the road through the Mojave, my mother is quiet, and we listen to the radio. She watches the Joshua trees and earth colored mountains. I drive a hundred miles an hour, passing cars, feeling like I am flying. My mother tells me to slow down, it is dangerous to drive so fast, and she is missing the scenery. I slow down, and cars begin to pass me. A road sign flashes by us that I ignore, but my mother has caught

"The sign for Manzanar went by. Let's stop and visit the museum. We can get a little education in on the trip."

"Interment camps are not fun."

"Well we've never been; it will be interesting."

The turn comes and I put on my blinker for that mile-long stretch of turn lane. I pull the car into the newly paved parking lot of the newly built museum, a building that looks too much like an airplane hanger. The museum stands tall and alone, the actual internment camp torn down long ago. All that remains are dinky wooden markers claiming suspicious empty lots.

"Take the path around the camp." My mother points to a rickety trail cleared through the brush and rocks. I turn down the path, the rocks and debris shaking my car in all directions.

Along the path are painted wooden markers. My mother reads every one we come upon.

"Block nineteen...block seventeen... hospital..."
“That’s not true.”
“What’s not true?”
“There was no hospital.”
“Of course there was. There were a lot of people here.”
“Yeah, no kidding. Like every person that even looked Japanese on the entire West Coast.”
“Not every person.”
“Yes. Every one: women, children, cripples, babies, daddies.”
We pass by some more signs marking off different buildings. Trees stumps and random bricks litter the rocks and dirt. I see the gleam of a Budweiser can catch my eye.

“This place was not so bad. People make it out to be such a horror, but it was not really that bad. Look, there. Pull the car over.”
I pull the car over to a sign that reads “Serenity Garden.” I let out a sarcastic laugh that my mother does not catch. She gets out and starts to wander through the brush and down a tile path. I follow behind in her footsteps. At the end of the path, which seems a little contrived and suspicious, is the concrete shell of what was a pond.

“See, not that bad. They even had a fish pond.”
“That was placed there so America will think this place wasn’t all that bad. That’s called a cheap sham to hide the truth. Americans cannot admit to the atrocities against humanity that were committed here.”
“No, that’s not true! Why would you say that? There was nothing to hide. We just kept people here until they knew who was bad and who was good.”
“Mom, bad things happened here. That’s why the buildings are all long gone. You don’t think that is a little suspicious they tear down everything else but the ‘serenity pond.’ Mom, don’t be a fool.”
“I don’t know who told you that, but it’s a lie. People just waited the war out

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“I don’t know who told you that, but it’s a lie. People just waited the war out
here. They were protected. They had houses, beds, and they even had a Buddhist Temple. If that’s not tolerant, I don’t know what is.” My mother’s voice grows defensive and angry.

“Mom, wake up. People’s lives were ruined here and we destroyed the evidence, all we leave is one little path that leads to a fake pond. The pond never had any water, for Christ’s sake! And please don’t believe there were fish, because there were not. This pond was poured way after the atrocities that went on here, after they even tore down the evidence. People lost everything when they came here, even the clothes on their backs. People where imprisoned here, and when they came home everything they owned was sold off.” My eyes start tearing up and I don’t know why.

“Don’t spread lies, don’t say such things. Why would you believe that?” My mother walks away from me, down the stones of the phony path, but I follow her.

“I believe them because they are true. Not everything in life is a resort.”

“Don’t you think I know that?” She turns her swollen cheek to me and I look down, sorry at what I have said. She walks the path in silence and I walk through the brush, trying to get away from the car, away from her. I stumble over a tree stump that was long ago cut down. Its rings show a swirling pattern, and I count forty of them. Forty desert rings. Forty years of desert life. This tree grew after the camp, after the people were here. When they demolished all the buildings, the hospitals, and Buddhist temples, they left the tree still standing. I wonder, between now and the demolition, when was it cut down? When did they come out here in the middle of nowhere and chainsaw it down? It was before the museum. The museum was built only a few years ago. I stop thinking of where this stupid tree stump fits into this all, and wonder where my mother is.

I stand up and look around. I see her kicking rocks and dirt, like a child, near my car. She leans over and picks something up, examining some small artifact in

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I stand up and look around. I see her kicking rocks and dirt, like a child, near my car. She leans over and picks something up, examining some small artifact in
her hands blowing away the dirt and grit with her mouth. She looks up quickly, surprised to see me watching her. She motions with her hands for me to come and see what she has found.

I walk over to her, watching my step through the jagged rocks and brush. When I reach her, she holds out her hands to me. A small piece of broken blue tile gleams in her palm.

“Look a blue tile. Where do you think this came from?”

I want to say the torture chambers or the crematoriums. But I don’t, I don’t want to fight with her.

“I don’t know, Mom. Where do you think?”

We get into the car and she fills my head with tales of lavish Buddhist temples, steamy bath houses, pretty tiled floors of tea rooms. I don’t stop at the museum, and she doesn’t notice. I get back onto the highway, accelerating to a ridiculous speed, and she does not notice that either.

“Let’s go to McKaferty’s for lunch, they have blue tiled floors, I think.” I agree with her, and she talks about the blue tile until we reach Independence.
Lessons
Lynette Morinini

“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters, compared to what lies within us.”
– Ralph Waldo Emerson

Everything I learned about coffee, I learned from my grandmother.

1. Only buy Folgers in the red metal can, and buy the largest one, always. Keep it handy. Set it on the sink near the faucet and next to the coffee pot, which should be a standard, silver Farberware, percolator model: no filters needed, tall, upright and full spouted.

The holiday season arrives with a full pot brewing, and as another year comes to a close, Grandma and I are together, once again, for the weekend. Beneath the dim light of her kitchen’s bulb, I hold her comb with steady hands, gently brushing her hair away from her face for the evening. Slight curls rest on her neck, in the way petals fall from roses to rest. Her hair is yellow like the ceiling, which is stained from years of smoking between closed walls. It is her home; she can do what she wants here. Everything is a sentence. What else?

A six-pack of Fresca is chilling in the fridge. We both want company. We bake cookies, her favorite recipe, Biscotti. Tonight she doesn’t remember where she got it from or when, but on her scribbled recipe, the date reads 1959 – the year she would have celebrated her 25th wedding anniversary with Nelson, a sailor, who left her in ‘59. My mother would have been eleven.

I sit across the table from her and watch her swollen hands form the dough into shapes that seem odd to me, less than perfect. Still, she places them on the
baking sheet with a familiar care. I, too, roll the dough between my palms, careful to keep the shapes uniform. There was a time she wouldn't have had it any other way.

2. There's nothing better than a lengthy conversation over a fresh cup of coffee.

The phone rings. She gets a call from her best friend who tells her she is blessed to have me there. As she lights a cigarette, I get up and walk towards the pianette and sit on the rickety bench, and in my mind I am no more than two or three years old. My mother plays my song. In her light-hearted voice, she sings, *Michelle my Belle*... We lived together in this house then: grandma, mother, and I. But that was long ago. Tonight, at age seventeen, I place my fingers on the keys, only I cannot play anything. I smell the cookies baking in the oven. There is cookie dough on the floor here and there, the fear of this and that. It is 1:04 in the morning, early for us, and while my grandma talks religion on the phone, I pour her another cup.

3. Drinking coffee should never be limited to any particular time of day. Anytime is the right time: morning, noon, night, and everything in between. A rich brew won't keep you awake if you drink it regularly; your body will get used to the caffeine in time.

Biscotti is a complicated recipe to master. The dough must be chilled to a certain temperature. The ingredients are specialized. And the brief fragment of time between done and overdone requires keen attention. However, the rewards are well worth the effort. Tonight, we have baked four batches, more than a hundred and twenty cookies in all, and as I rinse off the pans, Grandma gently dusts each cookie with a sprinkling of powdered sugar. I watch her press an index finger into the remainder of crumbs dappled across a layer of paper towels that cover her Formica tabletop. Carefully, she leans forward and lifts her finger to her mouth, repeating the motion several times. Crumbs fall into her coffee. When I return to the
table, she folds the paper towels into her hands and passes them to me to discard. “We did good, kiddo,” she says. We arrange the biscotti into decorative tins. Her friends have come to expect them this time of year.

Before long her eyes begin to flicker and the radio fades in and out. This is when a child must face one of her greatest fears, something she ran from in hospitals as a child: a needle, a shot. Grandma is ready for bed. You hold her hand, walk her into the bathroom, and draw the insulin into the vial. You find a familiar scar. The room smells of almonds and anise. Christmastime.

4. Coffee warms the soul.

My grandmother would take a cup of coffee to bed every night and, turning on the pink nightlight, read. She said the coffee soothed her to sleep. On the advice of a physician, she once switched from regular to decaf. I remember seeing the green Folgers can on the counter and thinking how out of place it looked against the familiar dusty-rose tiles. Due to her diabetes she really wasn't supposed to smoke cigarettes or drink coffee. Likewise, she really wasn't supposed to eat sweets, either.

As I put on my nightgown, she wraps her curls around her fingers and secures them with bobby pins. She unscrews the lid from a Noxzema jar on the counter and dips her fingers in, scooping out a plentiful amount, and massages it into her skin. As she rinses the menthol lotion from her face, eyes closed, I watch her pat her skin dry with the sheets.

“Never wipe down, pat in an upward motion,” she rehearses. She finishes her routine by putting on her night-cap and turning off the light, then double checks the switches to be sure they are all off, including the one that controls the heater. In the many years I’ve spent here, none of the heaters have ever functioned properly, if at all. However, they have done other things. When I was a child, the floor’s iron-grid heater was a constant source of mystery to me; I was
certain “something” lived beneath it. My cousins and I had made up many stories. Carefully, she finds her way into the bedroom where I have nestled under the covers. Although her full-sized bed is a bit narrow for the two of us, we find comfort in sharing the familiar space. Beneath the nightlight’s pink hue, we lay our heads on her satin pillow. I smell coffee steaming from her nightstand as she tells me the story of Sleeping Beauty. And, although she has told it to me at least a hundred times, each time it’s a different telling.

Halfway through the tale, I begin drifting off, and in that place between sleep and dreams, I hear the faint sound of a foil wrapper, and then, a hint of chocolate on her breath.

5. Get up early, before rising permanently for the day, and make your first pot of coffee so it is ready for breakfast.

My grandmother could make a pot of coffee in the dark with her eyes closed, which wasn’t too far from of the way she functioned when diabetes damaged her eyesight. I would watch her in wonder. She always said that if you wanted something bad enough, you’d find a way to get it, coffee included.

We awake to the sound of the neighbor’s rooster. The Silva property runs alongside the house; they are one of the few families who have maintained the orchard and farm established in the ’20’s, before Santa Barbara developed its reputation as prime Southern California real estate. The land grandmother’s father built their house on had once been part of the large ranch, before it was parcelled out.

Grandma loves the persimmon trees whose arms reach out across the Silva’s redwood fence to surround her back yard. In autumn the syrupy aroma would hang in the air as we made persimmon bread and cookies, with raisins, nuts, and creamery butter. But today the trees stand dormant, awaiting the first rays of spring. After snuggling a bit, we climb out of bed onto a cold floor. Knowing that
we have a full day of shopping before us, we saunter into the kitchen to prepare breakfast. Anise still permeates the air, and coffee gurgles in the percolator. I open the small Frigidaire to grab a large grapefruit, and I cut it in half. My nose tingles.

6. If coffee isn't enough to keep your bones warm, find another way.

Her kitchen is a small space, cold and damp most of the time. Occasionally, we use her oven as a source of warmth. During wintertime, the windows steam up until the moisture beads and then drips down the panes. Through the lattice patterns, the alcove in the rear of the house is visible. In springtime, snapdragons, freesia, and pansies bloom; in the winter, poinsettias and miniature roses rise up from the earth. Against their ever-changing backdrop, we watch for hummingbirds. My grandmother believes they are carriers of wishes to the heavens, and I believe her.

As I toast two pieces of bread, she watches, hoping to catch one of the winged blossoms in their passing. I turn the sticky gauge on the oven to 180 degrees, its lowest setting, and open up the door to let the heat permeate the room. Her attention is elsewhere. She opens up her purse and counts her money, once and then again, then folds the bills and puts them back into her purse, zipping it tightly. Her hands shake. She pulls a cigarette from its pack and lights it with the burner on the stove. The gas pilot clicks. Smoke billows. I hand her toast and coffee, and with patience, she lifts the cup to her lips; the steam rises up across her face as she sips, eyes closed. For her, this is a religious experience. Neither of us says much. I pass her a small paper cup, filled with her medication. She pretends not to see.

7. After a second cup, you are ready to start your day.

Grandma emerges from her bedroom wearing a salmon-colored pantsuit, a long string of cosmetic pearls around her neck, and a small brooch. I rustle through...
my belongings and select a pair of purple velveteen slacks embroidered with rainbow patterns down the pant legs and a red sweater for the holidays. We are counting the days until Christmas, both of us givers.

"Make sure your shoes are comfortable," she suggests. I look at her and see she has chosen a pair of dress shoes. I put on my lined boots.

We meet in the bathroom. The house has finally broken its chill, but her hands still have a bluish tone to them. She hums Ave Maria as she shuffles through her make up, and I slide next to her and brush my teeth as she "puts on her face." Sitting on a small velveteen stool, she generously applies beige cake powder to her face, and then opens her eyes to view herself in a small magnifying mirror. She pats her skin, pencils in her eyebrows, and examines her array of lipstick, most of it dated. Choosing a deep coral shade, she smoothes it on and kisses her lips together, now pleased and ready to face the world. To me, she always looks best without her made up face. But I do not tell her that. She combs my hair and remarks on how quickly it grows.

8. There are even shades of lipstick named after coffee. Espresso, mocha, and café au lait, to name a few. Regardless of the shade, Maybelline is the brand of choice.

Purses clutched at our sides, we leave the house at a quarter to nine to catch the 9:05 bus that is scheduled to stop at the corner of Olive and Mission. We walk three long blocks beneath an umbrella of bare jacaranda branches, in the absence of what was, in ventures past, a violet-petal carpet. At each cross street, she leans her weight into me finding her footing down from the curb. Cars stop to let us pass through each cross walk. Motors purr. She walks slowly, unsteady. My arm in her’s helps her maintain her balance. We reach the vacant, wooden bus bench surrounded by dandelions. I check my watch: 9:00, our usual arrival time. We sit down, and she closes her eyes beneath the rays of winter sun. Oversized sunglasses cover her prescription lenses. As she sits, I get up every couple of minutes and walk
to the curb and lean into the street to check for the bus. Minutes pass. Eventually, I give up checking, sit back, and take Grandma’s hand. I watch crows drop down upon and then lift off the wires. Wings flash and Bus #9 approaches. The wind blows her curls across her face as the doors swoosh open. I help her on, our coins jingle in the metal fare box: two quarters and two dimes.

As the bus ambles across town, we watch the world go by through the glass panes. Houses are adorned with Christmas lights and welcome wreaths throughout the neighborhood. Every now and then, a decorated tree can be seen through an open window: an angel, a star. On one corner lot, a family has a full, wooden marching band displayed in the front yard. “Scotland Yard,” she says. We laugh. On the next block, Grandma points out a nativity scene. Jesus, Joseph and Mary face the street, the wise men around them.

The bus pulls into line at the depot and I help her to her feet with a couple of tugs. The driver watches in his rear view mirror as the doors swing open.

9. Sometimes “Greasy Spoons” have the best cup of coffee, especially if you drink it black: cheap prices, quick customer turnover and a fresh brew. Best of all, in most places, you can still get a bottomless cup for less than a dollar.

In the company of busy shoppers, we bustle two blocks, past the Bank of America, See’s Candies, the jewelers, and Val’s Used Books, to Newberry’s, her favorite spot. Once inside, she is anxious to sit down, so we make our way past the cosmetics to the familiar row of red vinyl, swivel stools. Being one of the last dime stores remaining in Santa Barbara with a soda fountain diner, customers can shop and dine all in one place, which is another one of Grandma’s reasons for going repeatedly. Newberry’s is also notorious for its root beer floats and grilled hot dogs, and today, although it is between mealtimes now, the counter is nearly full. Nonetheless, with grandma’s lucky charm, we find two seats near the end.

“Run along,” she whispers. “I’ll find you.”
Like always, she hands me ten dollars. I can remember when it used to buy a pair of roller skates and a couple of new paperbacks, with change to spare. Today, however, I look for bargains to give for gifts, but the ten dollars will not go quite so far. I move to the front of the store and find a cart. Tonight, we will want to have all of the items required to wrap festive gifts. So, with that in mind, I pick out a variety of Christmas paper (Grandma and I like the traditional patterns and the solid foils), a multi-pack of ribbon, decorative bows, plenty of nametags (all ninety-nine cents each) and tape rolls at four for a dollar. Wandering through the aisle, I pass a row of toys: race car sets, Barbie dolls, marbles, bouncing balls and board games. I scan the shelves, remembering how I used to fiddle around for hours trying to decide which new toy I would ask Grandma to buy for me. I never was very good at deciding. I continue on, past the greeting cards, and towards the books, when, as if out of nowhere, I feel her hand upon my shoulder. She places her other hand on the rim of the cart and helps me guide it.

We walk through the aisles, picking out lilac stationary for Mom, photograph frames for some of her friends, sachets and lotions, a mock Pendleton for Uncle Kenny, embroidered cotton handkerchiefs for Ms. Silva, a tin of hard butterscotch candies for Aunt Beth, and paper dolls and a coloring crayon set for my sister. She grins and slips me a roll of bills. For myself, I pick out a tube of flavored lip-gloss and a fountain pen set, and as I get in line to pay for our items with her money, she returns to her stool and her coffee. In line at the register, I watch a group of carolers swing by outside, past the storefront, singing Winter Wonderland. Clouds form gray streaks across the downtown sky.

After making our big purchase, I join Grandma at the soda fountain counter, bags overflowing with gifts, and sit down in the stool next to hers. As always, she has set her napkin to reserve the space for me, and half a hot dog awaits my arrival. I sit down and she winks. Immediately, one of the waitresses, Genevieve, hands me a 7-Up. I recognize her by the mole on her cheek and her teased-up hair. She has been here as long as we have been coming. An elderly man sitting next to her winks.
to me rustles his newspaper, and like most of the customers, Grandma included, he smokes. The counter is lined with small glass ashtrays, like the ones for sale in the window—two for a dollar. She is quieter than usual; I sense that her energy is waning. Unlike the years before, when our shopping sprees were an all-day adventure, I understand that today’s will be short lived. I nudge her, and say, “Ready to go?” She smiles and nods, pressing her cigarette into the tray with twist.

“Ready if you are, Kiddo,” she rehearses. I eat the remainder of the hotdog and wash it down with a swig of the soda.

Cradling my one free arm in hers, bags loaded on the other, we weave our way between the crowds of shoppers out into the busy streets. Looking down, I notice her feet are swollen, hose stretched tight around her ankles. She should be wearing tennis shoes, doctor’s orders. To the bells of a Salvation Army volunteer, she stops, reaches into her pocket, and drops a handful of change into his jar. It jingles, finding its way to the bottom of the lot. A sharp wind stirs, we huddle together, and carry on.

10. If you are too tired or weak to make your own coffee, let someone else make it for you. Someone who knows how you like it.

Back home, we enter through the breezeway, past the washer and dryer, and unload our day’s treasure onto the kitchen table. I make a fresh pot of coffee, careful to rinse out all of the grounds from this morning’s pot. She takes off her shoes, and I hurry to get her a pair of slippers from the stack of retired pairs in her closet. In the distance, I hear her rustling through the packages. Two o’clock, time for her afternoon shot.

We find appropriate boxes for each of our gifts, and prepare for our wrapping to begin, the appropriate paper for each trinket, the perfect bow. She watches as I attend to our ritual, worrying herself over loose ends, visible tape, and crooked ribbons. For each gift, I try to select the most suitable paper for its
recipient's personality, a favorite color, perhaps, and the perfect bow. Mother always says our wrappings are more elaborate than the gifts. Grandma knows this; she insists on tradition.

These days, I keep a keen eye on her, and today, for the first time, I realize that through the creases on her face, and the yellow sheathes that cloud the whites of her eyes, I can see traces of her mother, my mother, and myself. The slight tilt of her nose, like mine. The silver-gray blue of her eyes, the eyes of my mother. Her full, Swedish lips, her mother’s lips. Her paper skin, her own. She looks up from the box of nametags that she has been shuffling through, and our eyes meet. With the gliding of her hand across the table, she passes a gift tag, embossed with a partridge in a pear tree, into my hand. “For you,” she says, “little bird.” And she makes her way towards the pantry to get out the tins of biscotti. They, too, need to be wrapped.

When we have finished, I carry the decorated gifts into the living room and arrange them around the hearth. I pass the pianette, the bookcase, and the wall of antique family photographs. I hear the oven kick on again; still, the house is cold. When I return to her, she is sitting upright, unlit cigarette between her fingers, eyes closed and fast asleep. I pour myself another cup of coffee, and the phone rings. It’s my mother, singing me a song: Little Drummer Boy, Silent Night.

11. The lessons you learn about coffee, you will remember for many years to come. They will remind you how to love.

Alice Dyblal McMindes—September 16th, 1916–December 27, 1987
I walked by the lobsters
About to die
Piled
With their pinchers pressed
Against the glass case
Looking like what they are
Perhaps ugly to some.

As the cook lifted the creature
By its back shell
And placed it
Into a pot of boiling water,
I heard a high pitched scream
Of terror,
And it became my own.
I knew the pain
And insanity of the act,
But to no avail
The wail of sorrow can go unheard
And connect to only those disturbed,
Who own that sound.

I have eaten lobster flesh
And can no more,
Because I swallow their screams
When we are one.

Diana Lopez
Santa Barbara Pier
Woman At Table
Michelle Adler
Gabrielle N. Perret

**Untitled**

I balance anvils on my head
the way African women carry baskets.

But a flat crown
or a cement spine
is not the trick.
Tightropes are a cakewalk
when the eyes
are fixed;
anything can be carried
when the end of the world
rests over the horizon.

Underwater, the joints burst like chrysanthemums.
The Pacific Ocean intimidates
the untrained head.
Nitrogen bubbles can fracture
the linkage of smiles and
the logistics of legs,
bringing the body down
to kiss the sea floor.

The bends are just hell on joints.

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Grief
Allison Britt
Crystal sat wedged between a dirty wooden desk and tacky orange seat. The light coming in from the window made her hair appear redder than usual and her complexion milky. Even though her figure sat painted against a horrid backdrop, I'd never seen her look so delicate. Her presence made me think of my mother and how my mother had said that one day I'd make a beautiful wife. I wondered why she thought I'd be a wife at all, let alone a beautiful one.

"Yes, Julie?" Mrs. Philips asked. Remembering my hand was up, I asked if I could read the part of Romeo. I could tell she wanted to refuse me the part and give it to a boy, but she didn't and let me read. Why should a boy play the part of Romeo anyway? In Shakespeare's day, men played the women's roles; it's about time women played the men's. But the truth is I only wanted the part because Crystal was chosen to read for Juliet.

I watched her as she fumbled over the language until finally it was my turn to speak. I could feel my chest getting red and my cheeks pink. I was thankful for the high neck on my t-shirt. I wondered if my sudden anxiety looked unattractive, if anyone other than my mother could find me beautiful. I am a buggy-eyed fifteen-year-old girl with the inability to coordinate an outfit. My complexion is anything but milky and I have brassy hair. That's the one thing I would really like: soft hair, like the women in the shampoo commercials. But once I began to speak, the anxiety slowly faded, and the lines flowed more smoothly than I expected. I'd never realized how much I sounded like a girl. Trying to fit the part, I slightly deepened my voice. The class started to giggle. They thought I was trying to be funny. When I finished, Mrs. Philips looked over at me, slightly raising one eyebrow. She looked at me the way she looked at Freddy when he sneezed real loud.
"Okay let’s have new readers," Mrs. Philips said after I’d read a couple more lines. I hated her for doing that, for embarrassing me in front of the whole class: Miss Perfect trying to make everything perfect, trying to make me even less perfect. Couldn’t she just let it be? I crossed my arms and put my head on the desk. I turned facing the wall and quickly reminded myself of last week, trying desperately to get out of this week.

Last Tuesday, I’d gone snooping in my mother’s closet. When behind her large assortment of purses, I found her back massager. I didn’t know what I was looking for until I found it. Finding it made me reminisce about the first time I tried vodka and the warm Christmas-filled feeling it gave me. With vodka memories still in mind, I went to the bathroom and plugged it in. I stared at it as it shook.

It reminded me of this dream I’d had, where my body was immobile. My arms and legs were tied to the floor by imaginary rope and I liked it. I was alone but I could feel fingers and bumpy tongues moving up the curves of my body. It was a ride only I could create, only I could love.

I smiled as I looked back down at the massager. I slipped it under my skirt and could feel the vibration before it ever actually touched. When I finally let it touch me my knees melted and my body slid against the wall. The sensation made my lips numb, and within seconds I was gripping the cupboard next to me. The bathroom lights seemed unusually bright, and I could feel the cool air coming from the vent above. A chill ran from my thighs to my toes until a surge greater than vodka spilled onto my virgin colored panties.

I looked down and saw that my sweaty palms were holding the desk. Startled by my present self, I turned my head from the wall towards the classroom, towards Crystal. I noticed her legs were faintly apart. Through the crack of her shorts, I could see the color blue, my favorite color. I could hear the buzz of the...
massager and watched as Crystal’s legs opened more the harder I stared.

“Julie, are you okay?” Mrs. Philips asked.

“No, I am not feeling too well. Can I go to the nurse?”

“Yes, you look a little flushed.”

I got out of the room fast. The trees outside were turning from green to red to yellow, and the scattered teenagers gossiped loudly. It was as if they all mocked me as I passed, as if they knew something I didn’t.

When I reached the office, I told the nurse that I thought I was going to vomit. She pointed to the bathroom. When I got inside, I pulled my jeans down and sat on the toilet seat. I looked down at my private area and found it pretty, like a budding flower. The one thing on my body that actually looks beautiful, no one’s even seen. Maybe that’s why my mother thinks that one day I’d make a beautiful wife. I wanted to touch myself and feel the surge the massager gave. I turned on the faucet so no one could hear the sound of my rubbing. So no one could hear the foulness that came as I rubbed faster. So no one could hear how much I hated myself for being this way. I rubbed so hard that it started to hurt. The harder I rubbed, the more I hated myself. Then I suddenly got an overwhelming need to vomit. I flipped up the toilet seat and threw up the wings I’ll never again pretend to have. I puked up the first day of school, the idea of ever being a beautiful wife and the mother who wished that of me. I wanted to flush myself down with all of these things. I wanted to let go of the edge, go to wherever it is that vomit and shit go.

“Julie, honey, you okay?” The nurse asked.

“Yeah, I’ll be right out.”

But I didn’t feel all right. I picked myself off the edge and looked in the mirror. I looked undistinguished. I splashed water on my face hoping something might wash away. But the girl looked back even thinner than before. Her features were one big abstract mess. All the things I’ve wished for, like rain and snowmen
in winter and apple trees and shorter days, seemed so long ago. I’ve never wanted anything more than to wash away the face in the mirror.

When I walked from the bathroom, the nurse looked at me and said, “Honey you look like crap. School’s almost over, you can lay on the cot until then.”

I gave her a little smile and walked to the cot. The cot was the same tacky orange as the seats in Mrs. Philip’s classroom. Only I felt less delicate. I closed my eyes and fantasized my last life. I pictured myself a bee stinging the lips of girls, filling them with nectar. All the men would come to my giant nest and bring me gifts of lilies and roses. They’d thank me for making their ladies sweet. I’d be the most loved of all the insects. I started to doze off when I felt a hand around my ankle.

“Julie, I brought you your homework,” a sweet voice said.

I kept my eyes closed and hoped to find a face I liked. I thought of Crystal and her complexion. How I yearned to touch her unblemished skin just once. I wondered if she could find me delicate against the orange cot. The light echoed purple shapes against my lids that I thought I may never open.

“Julie?” said the voice.

“Julie, are you asleep?” She asked.

The cot suddenly lost its extra weight and I could hear that feminine voice telling the nurse that I was asleep. I wanted to open my eyes and run to her. I wanted to tell her that I loved the way she sat and the way she spoke. I wanted not to be a coward. But I couldn’t. I couldn’t have it not be her, not today.
Boston Public Library
Danielle Camacho
I made the effort.
And that is why I will sleep
The eternal sleep.
The Granary Burial Ground, Boston

Danielle Camacho
Without ever having timed it, Carl knew how long it took him to smoke one Marlboro Light. He’d smoked them for seventeen years, and the amount of time it took one to incinerate from tip to filter was just something he couldn’t help noticing. So he’d switched to hand rolled, and avoided buying a roller—so some days it would take him four minutes, others four and a half, others five. Besides, the taste was better.

This was his cigarette between classes. He taught history, the same three classes every year: Medieval Europe I, Medieval Europe II, and U.S. History. People would ask him if it got boring, always telling the same stories, and he would say no, not really. History took shape more completely as he taught it. He became immersed in the particular ridiculousness of a time other than his own. He took a long drag leaning against the stucco and saw Mark Sheldon, a young physics professor, walking down the hallway toward him. Sighing, he nodded hello to his longtime colleague.

“How have you been, Mark?”

“Oh, pretty good, pretty good. Samantha and I just finished putting everything away from the move. The cabinets in the kitchen still haven’t been finished, but I figure it’s best to get things put away first, so we have a living area, you know?” Mark asked.

“Mm-hm,” he breathed around his cigarette.

“So, how about you? How have things been going?”

Carl didn’t answer right away, taking advantage of the fact that he had just raised the cigarette to his lips. After he’d exhaled, he said, “What you’d expect. I’m thinking everyone was right about history being the wrong thing to teach—”
“Oh yeah, I’m sure there isn’t a lot of enthusiasm for that. I don’t envy you, Carl, but I know where you’re coming from. College students aren’t exactly aching to learn physics, if you know what I mean.”

Carl curled his lips in a smile and nodded in response.

“The only things that grab anyone’s attention today are violence and disaster. When I teach my eight a.m. class in the auditorium, about five people are still sleeping when I walk out of the room. Yesterday, I got off topic, talking about that comet that’s been in the news lately. Most of them took this to mean that the skies were pretty well monitored, so I pointed out that we probably wouldn’t know the earth had been hit by an asteroid until we felt the shockwave and saw the wall of fire coming towards us.” Mark laughed. “They just wouldn’t let the subject drop—and only one guy slept through it.” He laughed again, and looked at his watch. “Well, I’ve got a class. Nice talking to you.”

“You too,” Carl said to Mark’s back.

The cigarette was almost dead, about a quarter of an inch away from his fingers. He didn’t have a class to teach for another fifteen minutes. He thought briefly of an asteroid hurtling towards him, oblivious all the while. For an instant he was outraged, indignant at the idea, but then, as he relaxed into its timelessness, he felt gratitude, accompanied by a deep, delicious guilt. He let the cigarette drop from his fingers and started toward his office.

He sat down at his desk and looked at his hands. They were bloated, meaty; he had arthritis. On cold days, pain settled over the joints of his fingers like atmosphere compressed by gravity. Again, he closed his eyes and pictured that big, voiceless piece of space rock, floating dumbly closer every second. He found himself hoping with unexpected fervor that there would be no warning, no time for the invention of a “why.” The only “why” to be found would be in the form of mathematics, diagrams of vectors and drag and gravitation, unending and purposeless causality.
And suddenly, he was able to define a word in that precise, dictionary fashion. History: confusion and lack of preparation masked after the fact by reconstructions, which first appear in the mind as "it must have been..." Always this desire for purpose, for artificial weight—this pretense that things had to be as they were, that math was an art and not a science. Happiness, claimed Ayn Rand through the red-headed Women's Studies professor across the hall, is man's highest moral purpose. Happiness, an arrangement of chemicals in the brain. Happiness, a set of plotted points, no less ineffable for its mechanical nature. If happiness could be mapped and explained, quantified in terms of physical mass and position, then everything else was just commentary, as far as he was concerned. A human being was a mouth, an anus, a set of reproductive organs, and commentary. Where did morality fit into the pursuit of a chemical configuration? What did this glorification of happiness amount to but a celebration of biology?

Carl looked at the clock; class started in five minutes. What did he have now, Medieval II? He shuffled around in the papers on his desk, trying to remember if he needed to hand anything out today. With a shrug he decided there was nothing that couldn't wait until tomorrow. He needed the time for another cigarette.

Every day he stood at the front of the classroom at a podium whose legs never seemed to touch the ground all at once. As he spoke on a point he thought to be particularly salient, sometimes he would lean forward onto it, forgetting, and stumble, then everyone would snicker.

An attractive blonde walked in late. "Traffic?" he asked her as she passed him by on the way to her seat.

"No, the class I have before this one is just all the way across campus, and I usually have my car, but today..."

"What class?"

"Primate observation."
He contained his laughter long enough to ask, “Two in a row?”
She smiled vacantly and sat down. She opened a compact and blew the collected dust out into the air, as though, being so little, it was in fact nothing at all, he thought—that inability to understand life as an accumulation of these flashes, these nothings. He felt tired.

After class, he was about to roll another cigarette when Mark leaned in his door.
“Samantha just gave me a call. The in-laws cancelled dinner tonight. So we’ve got a rack of lamb and fridge full of ordered desserts. How’d you like to make an evening of it?”
“That sounds tempting, but are you sure—”
“Of course, of course, it’s no bother at all. So you’ll be there?”
“Sure. What time?”
“Let’s say around six. Does that jive with your schedule?”
“It certainly does.”
“So I’ll see you then.” Mark moved to leave, but turned his head back over his shoulder and said, “You don’t have to come alone, my friend.”
Carl grimaced.

On the drive home, it occurred to him that he should pick up some wine, something to have in his hands as he waited at the Sheldons’ door. He began scanning the scenery on the right side of the road for a liquor store. There was a cemetery there, right next to the busy street. There must have been a funeral going on—he could see at least a dozen people crowded together. That there was no sound wall seemed to him obscene; any drama, any moment of grief came through dulled and muted by the sounds of passing cars.
Carl thought of the night ahead of him. He’d known Mark ever since he’d...
been teaching, fresh out of grad school. He was impetuous. In his first year, Mark had almost lost his job—he'd lit a "controlled fire" in his classroom to aid him in his illustration of some concept or another. To Mark's credit, the whole thing had gone off without a hitch until the administration got wind of it. There'd been a legal battle that no one really ended up winning, and Mark began an affair with his attorney. Samantha had even moved out for a few months over it. Mark had said to him one day, at his wit's end: "Christ, I don't know what to do. My emotions just ran away with me, and I kept lunging after the moment…" Carl had nodded sympathetically even as he felt a mixture of contempt and envy; he had passion in him, but was in no way a passionate man. What passion he had was internal, always internal and aching, but dampened immediately upon contact with other human beings. He saw the softening of truth in their eyes; he saw God in their eyes.

An ABC Liquor store caught his eye; he swerved to the right and made a quick exit.

He figured a mid-priced Chardonnay would be a safe choice. As he waited in the checkout line, he noticed a National Enquirer headline that read, "Be Fused into a Diamond with Your Loved One." The idea struck him as depressing—fused carbon atoms, pieces of organs clinging together senselessly—and the hopeful look in the eyes of the lovers purchasing their "plot."

"Carl?" A woman's voice broke into his thoughts. He turned to see that it was a woman who'd moved from the apartment across from his a few years back—her name was Ava, he remembered. She used to have long brown hair that she sun-dried by the pool on top of the building. She'd cut it short now. "It's good to see you, what have you been up to?"

"Same as ever. Teaching history to kids who couldn't care less." She laughed and pulled at her hair.

"I'm sure some of them care. You tell it so well." She smiled. "I remember one
day by the mailboxes, you said that there was only one historical constant … “she tried to think of the words.

“That no one ever wants to give up their tacky little grip on power.” She burst into laughter as he finished.

“That was it. You use that in your lectures or what?”

“No,” he lied. He set the wine down on a shelf and rubbed his hands together to disperse the arthritic clouds around his knuckles.

“What’s the wine for?”

“I’m having dinner with a colleague of mine and his wife.” He paused. “You’re free to come along, if you want—” He was being ridiculous, he could tell. But she smiled and set down the six-pack in her arms.

“You’re on your way now?” He looked at his watch; he was half an hour early and had meant to stop at his apartment.

“Yeah, it’s about fifteen blocks from here.”

“So I’ll follow you in my car?” she asked, still with that smile.

They were early, as he’d known they would be. Samantha answered the door; she was wearing some ridiculous sea-foam green dress.

“Oh, Carl, who is this?” she asked with evident surprise.

“Ava—” he couldn’t remember.

“Ava Ferlich. I used to be a neighbor of Carl’s.”

“Nice to meet you.” Samantha looked her up and down.

Mark came in from the kitchen.

“Hey, you’re early! The lamb isn’t done yet.”

“I guess we’ll just have to find some way to entertain ourselves until then,” Ava said. Mark apparently had not noticed her.

“And who is this?”

Carl made the introduction. Several minutes of halting conversation
ensued. Mark laughed nervously at an untold joke and began suddenly, “I just read an article in The New Yorker about some recently deceased poet—his name started with ‘Wa-’ or ‘Va—’”—His wife hiccupped with laughter. “But this guy thought he was such hot shit. A professor friend of his asked him to speak to his Poetry 101 class—so this poet accepts, and his friend gives him some of his students’ poetry to look over.”

“So what, the guy just doesn’t show up?” Samantha asked.

“No, he shows up, let me finish. He walks in the door with a gun—supposedly unloaded. He points it at the class, moves it back and forth over the room, looks at them in disgust, and walks out.” They all laughed.

“How did he die?” Ava asked.

“Suicide. Shot himself in the head.”

“You have to wonder if it was the same gun,” Ava said.

The oven timer rang.

“Lamb’s ready, come and get it!” Samantha grinned, and flounced into the kitchen in a haze of sea-foam.

The dinner dragged on, and Ava suggested they open the wine. When that was gone, Mark brought out a bottle of brandy and they moved to sit in the living room.

“You know, I heard on the news the other day that forgiveness is really good for your health,” Samantha said drunkenly in the midst of a long silence. Ava looked over at Carl with her lips curled on one side of her mouth. They were slightly parted, and on the inside of her lower lip, there was a smudge of chocolate from the desert.

“Minimizes the energy you have to expend plotting revenge?” Mark sneered. He was also drunk. Samantha ignored him.

“They said that people who forgive instead of hating live longer lives, and...
are happier and healthier. And they have higher serotonin levels."

"But if you're going to forgive, shouldn't you forgive because the person's changed, apologized? Shouldn't you forgive when a person deserves forgiveness, not just because it increases your serotonin levels?" Mark asked.

Carl cleared his throat uneasily and said, "Forgiveness is based on flawed ideas about human nature anyway—that really, underneath it all, we want to be good, and that people can change or be different."

"You don't think people can change?" asked Ava, her interest piqued. The chocolate was still there; if he could, he would have leaned over and brushed it from her lip with his thumb.

"You mean, do I think it's possible to overcome?"

"Yes."

"No. To say that man can overcome implies that there is something new he can change into—"

"But there is something to change into! A thief can stop stealing, a liar can become honest—" He didn't let her finish.

"Of course you can change what you want, but not that you want!" he said. "Why would anyone change unless they'd be happier as a result of the change? Alteration is cosmetic." He was panting. Samantha jumped nervously from her seat and pulled a book out from a shelf under the table.

"I just bought the most interesting book, Carl. It's a collection of drawings by M. C. Escher. I thought it would be a nice coffee table piece." She paged through it and stopped to show a colored drawing, a mass of arms and legs and heads trying to push their way out of a beautifully geometric cage. It was entitled, 'Gravitation.' I liked this one a lot," she said.

He took the book from her and looked more closely at the drawing. The arms and legs belonged to visually separate creatures; the feet of each creature rested on the walls of another's prison. They all looked at the picture for a long
time.

"It seems to me," Ava said slowly, "that life is a struggle against gravity."

"No, I don't think that's it," Carl said. The subtraction problem of his heartbeat throbbed in his ears. "It seems to me... that life is the struggle for gravity."

He looked over the table at her. Her face betrayed nothing. He glanced down at his watch and feigned surprise. "Samantha, Mark, as always, it's been a pleasure, but I have an early morning tomorrow, and I need to make a stop across town. Do you need me to show you out of the neighborhood, Ava?"

"No, just point me in the right direction," she said.

Mark and Samantha said goodbye. Ava came up beside him as he walked to the edge of the driveway.

"Just take this road down to the end of the block, then take a right, then twelve blocks straight, then left onto the freeway. You'll know the way from there."

She was looking down. "So I'll see you around, then." He started towards his car.

"Wait."

"Yes?" He turned around slowly with compounding terror.

"I want to— I don't know, I just thought— " She was becoming increasingly agitated. She looked up at him, and for a moment he thought she might grab him by the collar. "I don't want things to just happen anymore. Not like this. Not when it means nothing, when it's just... I know there's more. Even when I don't understand, and I don't remember, I know that it matters... " she begged. He could not bear to catch her eye as she spoke. This feeling would pass; it would dissipate like the clouds above his fingers in warm weather.

"No one can know that." He walked towards his car, anxious for a cigarette.

"I'll see you around, okay?"

No, he would not celebrate biology.
Death of a Handyman

MRC
Crossbreed
Aaron Sherwyn
Moon Shot  

Bob Meinke

Greg broke up with his girlfriend and quit his job the same day the Apollo 11 divorced Earth for its lunar mistress. None of them took the news well: his girlfriend kicked and screamed, his boss pleaded, and the Earth grabbed frantically at the ascending rocket with desperate tendrils of gravity.

He watched the rocket, the massive Saturn V with the Columbia and Eagle nestled inside, lift off on Wednesday morning on his TV. The news cameras followed the rocket upward until it disappeared over the Atlantic Ocean.

Watching the launch, he felt the same longing as when he had listened to the radio broadcast of the first Mercury mission. Back then, younger and only slightly less mature, he had rushed out of the house, eyes straining to see the tiny capsule in the sky above. He found some pebbles in his backyard and threw them, one by one, up in the air, trying to push the stones past Earth's gravity and out into the void beyond.

It didn't work.

No matter how hard he threw them or how high they sailed, each one fell back, riding a gentle rainbow of physics. When his mother called and he came back into the house a few minutes later, he heard the radio broadcaster announce that Alan Shepard and the Mercury capsule had safely touched down in the ocean.

The phone jolted him from the screen. He looked lazily around his apartment for his roommate, and picked up the receiver when he couldn't locate him. It was his girlfriend.

"Did you watch the launch?" he asked. "The Saturn V just lifted off."

"I thought it was called Apollo," she said. "Anyway, can you come over? I
really need to see you.”

Greg rubbed his head, still groggy. That word, need. He loathed it. In it were contained all the other abstract nouns he had come to hate: responsibility, necessity, devotion, gravity.

“I’ll come over in a little bit,” he said.

“No. Come over now.”

“T’ve got things to do.”

“I’ve missed you.” Last night he had been at the beach. He went without telling his roommate where he was so his girlfriend couldn’t track him down. He had sat on the cool sand and gazed up at the Moon for hours, imagining himself on the edge of the Sea of Tranquility rather than the Pacific.

“So come over,” she finished.

He made up another excuse.

“I haven’t seen you in forever,” she whined.

“You can come over here if you want to.” The eternal tug-of-war.

She yelled something unintelligible and hung up on him. He turned his attention back to the TV. Two anchors were talking about the rocket.

“Right now they’re entering low Earth orbit, only 117 miles above us, where they’ll make a final check of all systems. Then it’s one more burn to break orbit and put the spaceship on trajectory to the moon.” The other anchor nodded along.

Without the commentators, Greg knew what was going on inside the spaceship. They had no doubt already taken off their bulky spacesuits, having braved the worst effects of the ascension. He envied the three men of Apollo 11, inside the command module Columbia, already freed of the constraints of gravity, soon to be free of the worries and needs of Earth.

The phone rang again. He checked his watch; it was exactly five minutes since she hung up on him. He answered it.

“Hi, honey,” she said. “I’m so sorry. I hate it when we fight.”

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“Hi, honey,” she said. “I’m so sorry. I hate it when we fight.”
He grunted in agreement.

“So,” she asked, “when are you gonna come over?”

The more she wanted him, begging and pleading for his attention, the more he was repulsed by her. They were each identically disgusted by their need for one another. The proportion of need fluctuated; he would be as sweet and gentle to her as he knew how and she would treat him like scum. Then they’d switch.

A few months ago, when they were reversed, Greg had paid extra attention to his girlfriend. She could smell his dependence on him the way a shark smells blood. He brought her flowers; such an obvious overture of sweetness demands harshness. She berated him and second-guessed him at every turn, and his obliging loyalty made her sick.

But now he was in the dominant position. She had, over the course of a month, disowned and spurned each of her closest friends for various irrational reasons. He was the only friend she had left. He figured that she had reached the apex of need; she never had and never would again need him so much.

Watching the launch and realizing that the astronauts, now weightless, would be on the Moon, completely removed from the insistent pull of the Earth within a few days, excited and inspired him. He didn’t have the awesome power of a Saturn V behind him, but he knew that blissful weightlessness was within his grasp.

But first things first. He got dressed and went in to work even though it was his day off. He worked in an antique furniture store. Every available inch of floor space was taken up by armoires and desks, tables and cabinets, resplendent in veneers and inlaid wood patterns. He moved the heavy wood furniture around, in and out the back door, and repaired the scratches penny-pinching customers sometimes made on the finish when they wanted a better deal on the price. He was the youngest employee, and the only one strong enough to do any heavy lifting.
His boss was a small elfish figure who took fashion tips from the mission controllers in Houston: white shirt, black tie, pocket protector, thick black glasses, and a time capsule haircut from the '50s, buzzed on all sides, flat on top. Greg usually felt either disgust or pity for his boss, and occasionally a mixture of the two. His boss was surprised to see him. “What are you doing here?” he asked.

“I just came in to tell you,” Greg started, “that I quit.”

His boss was shocked. Greg had been a staple at the store, the most dependable of workers. “But you can’t quit. We need you.” His boss looked at him, pleading, for some sign of duty. “How about a raise? Fifty cents an hour.” A pause. “A dollar an hour.”

The more his boss begged, the more disgust Greg felt towards him. After his boss offered to clean out one of the storage closets and transform it into an office for him, he stopped. Greg’s eyes had taken on a glazed, distant look, completely devoid of concern, and his boss could see that there was no getting through to him.

“All right,” his boss said. “When is your last day?”

“Yesterday,” Greg said, and walked out.

He pulled up in front of his girlfriend’s apartment. It was late in the day and he looked up at the gathering darkness overhead. A single bright streak cut through the dark blue sky, an unfortunate meteor lulled towards its doom. He walked up the steps and knocked.

“Come in,” came a call from inside.

He turned the handle; it was locked. It was always locked. When he knocked again she finally unlocked the door and opened it.

“Oh hi, baby!” She said to him, pulling him inside. She sat him down on the couch and then trotted off into the kitchen. “So how are you?” She asked while she rummaged through the refrigerator.
Even if he had the intention of answering her, she gave him no time to. “Do you want a Coke? They're a bit warm, but I've got ice.”

“No thanks,” he said, flipping on the TV.

“Only a few minutes until the final stage ignition,” said the news anchor, “which will propel the spacecraft out of Earth's orbit and on a course to intercept the moon three days from now.”

She came back out, holding two glasses of ice and Coke. She handed him one as she sat down. “It takes them three days to get to the moon?” She asked. “What do they do in the meantime?”

“Well, they’ve got a whole spacecraft to take care of, so they’re pretty busy.”

“I thought that’s what the guys in Houston did.”

“Yeah, they do, but——” he stopped, at a loss. The more he explained, the more explaining there was to do.

“But what?”

“Nothing. Never mind.”

“No, I want to know.”

She was tugging at his shirtsleeve, insistent. “There’s a lot of work to do, computing vectors, calculating the orbit of the moon——” she already looked like she had a million questions, but he continued, “—keeping the computer system functioning, and lots of little things that have to be done perfectly.”

She sat back on the couch, sipping her Coke, finally quiet and suffering from question overload. A short circuit like that, he thought, would be fatal to the astronauts. For a few minutes they sat staring at the TV, watching someone in a white lab coat, who could only be a former Nazi scientist, demonstrate docking the command and lunar modules with two handheld models.

Now was the time.

“We need to talk,” he started, but sensing what was coming, she leaped up and went into her room.
"Have you heard the new Rolling Stones record?" She called.
Greg hated the Rolling Stones.
She came back out, a record under her arm. "It's great," she said. "There's this one song on it—" She put the record on the turnstile.
"Listen, I need to talk to you about—" he tried again but was drowned out by a duet between Mick Jagger and his girlfriend. She was dancing in circles, arms waving crazily about. He had no doubt that she would plunge headfirst like an ostrich if she came across a sandbox.
"I'm breaking up with you!" He shouted, but, wildly flailing about, she knocked the record off on his second word so the last three were unnecessarily loud, echoing in the small apartment.
She stood, dazed like she had when he explained too much about Apollo 11, but not completely so; she must have had some feeling that it was coming.
"What?"
"I'm breaking up with you. We're through."
"No we're not," she said, as if convincing herself. "We have problems, but…"
"This is it," he said. "I just came to get my guitar.
She didn't stop him as he went into her room to retrieve the guitar, a cheap acoustic, a fragile symbol of their union. No matter how many times they cussed and fought, bolted screaming from each other's apartments, she always knew he'd be back for it.
When he came back out, she was by the door, crying. "I won't let you go," she said. "Please don't leave like this. Don't you understand? I need you. I need you!"
That word made his mouth spasm, a chronic facial tick brought on by overwhelming obligation. He reached around her and grasped the doorknob, but the door wouldn't budge; she was putting all her weight against it.
He shrugged and opened the door to her fenced-in patio. From here it was
just a short hop over the wall to the sidewalk. He leaned his acoustic on the other side of the wall and jumped over. She was already out the door, and when he bent down to retrieve the guitar she grabbed his other arm with both hands.

“No no no no!” she cried. “Don’t leave me! You know how much I need you!”

He tried to shake her off, but she held tight and sat down on the sidewalk. He dragged her along for a few feet before finally releasing himself with a furious tug. He ran to his car, keys already in hand, unlocked the door, and got in. He put the guitar in the back seat, and when he turned back around she was standing at his window, looking at him with a mix of anger and longing. They stared at each other for a few elongated moments, then he started the car and drove off.

Once he was safely away, he turned on his radio and found a news station.

“Reports from Houston,” the disembodied voice said, “say the final stage has successfully fired. Apollo 11 has left Earth’s gravity.”

Greg smiled.

Having dissolved all engagements, he decided to go to the beach. The drive took him over hills, thrust upward by tectonic plates and pulled downward by the Earth, assisted by erosion. He parked his car, sat down on the sand past the high tide mark with his guitar, and played soft dissonant chords until the moon rose above him.

He finally lay down the guitar and slumped sideways onto the beach. His eyes were level with the gently illuminated surface, and looked over the expanse of tiny dunes. With an ant’s eye view he imagined himself on the Moon, skipping effortlessly over the placid dunes, making moon-dust balls, and throwing them past the horizon. The breaking surf was the echo of breath in his space helmet.

Miles away, in the command module Columbia, Neil Armstrong floated, unaffected by Earth’s gravity, for the first time in his life. Even on Gemini 8 he had
still been constrained. The passengers on a spacecraft orbiting the Earth aren’t truly weightless; they only appear to be because they are in constant freefall at the same rate as their ship. The way you’d feel when the elevator cable breaks and you plummet, both you and the elevator accelerating at the same constant thirty-two feet per second squared, right before the terrible crash. An object in orbit travels so fast that it falls towards the Earth at the same rate that the curvature of the Earth falls away.

The command module pilot, Michael Collins, was running routine upkeep with direction from Houston; Buzz Aldrin was sleeping inverted relative to Neil. Neil looked out the window at the Moon, which rose and set in the window as the spacecraft slowly rotated. He couldn’t see the Earth; it was behind him, imperceptibly shrinking as the Columbia, with the Eagle attached, shot away from it, miles further each second. Somewhere back on that jealous sphere, Greg lay on a beach, wishing he were with them.

She arrived at his dorm on Sunday just before Neil Armstrong flubbed his immortal words: “That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.” Greg was watching the moon landing with his roommate. He’d had to pee for the last half hour and wanted to delay it until after the landing but couldn’t bear it any longer; his body informed him of its urgent need to evacuate. He sprang up from the couch.

“Don’t let them start without me,” he said to his roommate, and ran into the bathroom.

When Greg came back a minute later, his girlfriend was sitting on the couch next to his roommate. He stopped and stared as she cheerfully rotated to face him. He was too polite to ask what the hell she was doing there, but his face told her enough. “Hey,” she said. “Remember how you promised we’d watch the moon landing together, a few weeks ago?” She rose and advanced on him, arms
outstretched for an embrace.

He took it, grudgingly, while she gripped him around the midsection. “God, you feel good,” she said. “I’ve missed you. What have you been doing all this time?”

Mostly, he’d been avoiding her. He knew her tricks; he hadn’t gone anywhere he usually frequented, knowing how likely she might set up a “chance” encounter with him. “Not much.”

“Working a lot, huh?”

“No, I quit my job.”

Her eyebrows formed into lunar furrows. “You quit your job? Why?”

He shrugged. “They needed me too much.”

“And me? I needed you too much?”

His roommate looked up. “So you got a new job?”

“No.”

“You’ve gotta work sometime,” his girlfriend said, watching him for emotional response. “Well, what are you going to do?”

His roommate took her side. “How are you gonna pay your half of the rent?”

Greg motioned at the TV. Armstrong was taking his first few experimental steps on the Moon. “I’ll live on the Moon,” Greg said, only half joking. “I’ll just bounce around all day.”


His initial response was childish and unreasonable, even for him, and he immediately shut the thought away, buried it beneath all his other half-realized dreams. But she read his mind like so many times before.

“Because it does matter,” she said. “You’ve got to think realistically. And right now you need to work somewhere you’re appreciated—” he knew what was coming and turned away as she said it,—and be with someone who appreciates you.”
It was a devastating dialectic; in his internal thesaurus he had never equated “need” with “appreciate,” and now considered it grotesque. To appreciate something so much that one went through withdrawal without it—he abhorred the concept.

“Just think,” his roommate said, without looking up from the TV, “that after you two are done missing the moon landing, you should just kiss and make up.” She had no doubt coached him for this monologue. “It’s pretty obvious that you two need each other.”

Panic set in. He was trapped, cornered. There was no abort lever to pull, no one in Houston to call. The escape hatch! He bolted for the door, threw it open, and ran out, leaving his roommate confused and his girlfriend yelling after him.

He got to his car and gunned the engine. She was running down the sidewalk towards him, shouting. He tore out of the parking lot and headed towards the beach, hoping she wouldn’t follow him. Over the winding road he flew, accelerator pressed to the floor. The hills passed by, ghostly dunes in the moonlight. He pulled hard on the steering wheel to follow the sharp bends in the road.

The Moon was directly ahead and above him. He took his eyes off the road and gazed up at it, leaning forward to get a better view. It was calling to him, imploring him to snub this planet and fly off into the heavens.

Faster, he thought. Escape velocity!

He hit something—another car, the edge of the road, he didn’t know—and the car vaulted into the air, the front end rotating upward. And for a split second before the terrible crash, the car rotated so that the Moon was framed in the center of the windshield.

I’ve done it, he thought. I’m free!

He awoke in the hospital days later, dazed and aching. There was a commotion coming from the other end of the room; doctors and nurses were
huddled around a TV in the corner. His girlfriend hovered over him, only nodding vacantly when a nurse rushed over, checked Greg's temperature, and exclaimed that the three astronauts of Apollo 11 had safely touched down in the ocean.

His girlfriend saw his eyes open. "Oh good, you're finally awake. Are you in pain?"

"Mmpf."

"Great! You're lucky that motorist found you when he did. The doctors say you're pretty banged up but nothing's broken. You'll be out of here in a few days."

He was drugged, he was sure. There was a pounding in his head, an even rhythm which, even dulled by the pharmaceuticals, crashed like a loose gear at regular intervals. His girlfriend's voice echoed loudly.

"Oh baby," she said, picking up his limp hand and caressing it. "Don't you see? It's perfect. You need me now just as much as I need you." She beamed at him, as if completely unaware of the events of the past week. He wanted to flee again but couldn't; he wasn't even strong enough to sit up. He closed his eyes, wishing he were far away.

"I called your boss at work and explained the misunderstanding. You've been so stressed out lately. He understood, and said you can have your old job back as soon as you're up and moving about. And I'm going to be at your apartment first thing to get you up and dressed for work. You don't have to worry about anything. Oh baby," she said, gazing down at him with a nurse's love, "isn't this all so wonderful?"

He stepped out of the Eagle and regarded the barren landscape in front of him. He made a few experimental leaps, then found a fist-sized moon rock and chucked it, watching it disappear over the horizon. His radio headset crackled.

"Eagle, this is Houston. We're gonna need you to prepare for liftoff and rendezvous with the command module."

He paused, then answered back. "Houston, I think I'll just stay here awhile."
Dune Bowl
Trevor Gotsman
Announcers leave their homes just to rap
kinesthetic, wrap their tongues about a Herculean
wonderland of swoosh, crack, thump, whap, pop,
a boisterous chorus of blubbering ballyhoo.

Mmmmm-my, he's the most human, human ever to turn
a neck, blink, butter a pancake and blah de blah. Oh
my! He's got two arms and a couple of legs! Can you
handle it?
You've got to be there to feel the DNA.

Can suck down a six-pack in a single breath.
National home creosote remover
has 'em standing in the aisles.
And what a pre-game show!
Puts tar on a bat, hand in glove, feet on the ground . . .
How has he done, did, do it?

Former womb resident. He's out-a-there!
Now makes 'em howl with wood and leather.
And the creosote in his chimney? You try and find some.
He's kissing babies, climbing into men's wombs, succor, suck or
excel.
He's manned the heart breach under sagging metaphysical sigh.
He's, he's… the Guy who's replaced the proverbial why
with summer wizardry. The eternal gentleman
of swoosh, crack, thump, whap, pop.
If I were drafted I would run
and live with the bears and rocks
in Canada
where they don't ask you to
crime every other eight years or so.

No, wait.
I wouldn't run.
Because eventually I would want to come home.
To this jewel-box house,
and old dog.
To my crammed freeway.
To my California.

And
if I ran away I could not come back home
and face the woman
at the Post Office.
She would know I ducked out.
It would be on her computer screen
like the North Star
on the wrong side of the moon.
She would take out her gun
and shoot me like a deer.
I would be bleeding anyway.
wounds in the name of freedom.
Crouched on the floor
behind the counter
blood running north, like I did,
pelted by postage stamps
crying out:
"But I didn't believe in it!"
But I didn’t believe in it!

I drive my car on a freeway that is not free.
I give my dog water from pipes I would not kill for.
I stand behind an old man
in line at the Post Office
and imagine
us all green
running together
pelting grenades like postage stamps
hiding behind trees
being approached
by a soldier who hands
us face paint
and says, “Now you will see how we hide.”
The old man takes it
and puts it deep
in his face
drawing the line
like soap on a baby.
It settles in his white wrinkles
and he hands me the tube.
I roll the paste up to the edge
and put it on my lips.

But I would not die for this man
anymore than I would to save
the pipes
that run to
my house,
or to be the first in line
at the Post Office.
Today,
Gabrielle N. Perret

God exists as an Hibiscus flower.

Petals pink, and fleshy,
slim stem reaching,
the powdery stamen
spitting seed onto my sleeve
when I brush by too closely.
God, what an appetite you do hold.

But how quick you are to pull your gun,
a short gush
a real dud of a firework
a single moment
it took.
The reserves lay spent,
yellow and defiled,
an unattractive
smear on my blouse.

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Collusion

Trevor Gotsman
Looking to My Left
Jay Iwasaki

looking to my left
i missed what was on my right
and lost half the world

looking to my left
i missed what was on my right
and lost half the world
About the Contributors

All contributors to Moorpark Review are students or staff at Moorpark College. Their work was reviewed anonymously by the editorial staff in English 47, Moorpark College.
Chris Alexander

Chris Alexander, creator of *Life of a Snail*, finds his inspiration in the small details of the world that others often overlook. Most would hardly think of finding beauty in a creature as lowly as a snail, but that is exactly where Chris would look. As small as they are, snails symbolize isolation and security, inching along under the safety of their shells, yet they are fragile and often crushed beneath our feet without a passing glance. Chris believes we should all put down our Caffè Lattes, silence our stereos, and devote a moment of our day to observing and appreciating the beauty of this world that we all too often take for granted.

Allison Britt

*Possibly Maybe* is a piece by Allison inspired by indecision. The figure remains still, listening to headphones, and lingers in the safety of reflection then action. It is entirely digital art.

Allison's *Jolene* is inspired by jealousy and hurt. It is meant to capture the realization that you are no longer as important as you once were to someone. Jolene is universal: a man, woman, or situation. It is what steals away whatever security you thought you had. It is entirely digital art.

*Grief* was made the day Allison heard that a boy from her elementary school had recently died in a car crash. Although she had not spoken with him in years, it was the first
encounter she had with death. This piece was meant to express the feelings of loss; not only for his life, but for the time lost that she could have possibly gotten to know him better. Grief took approximately 2 hours with oil pastels.

Jeff Brown

What A Ballplayer was written to comment on how words such as “hero” and “genius” are thrown around to describe athletes. He believes that the hyperbole is out of control in the disproportional emphasis sports are given in the US. Jeff finds that we have become a generation of must-see-TV’ers—our addiction to entertainment is blocking us from seeing more important national and international concerns.

Spiritual Gonzo is Jeff’s take of how most of us live in a general malaise, unaware of our true, eternal nature. He believes we are here because the spirit and its education are primary, and our focus on the temporary, temporal world runs counter to its basic nature. If we ignore it, we suffer accordingly.

Jay Iwasaki

Jay, author of Looking to My Left, considers Haikus overdone and cliché. This piece, however, is so simple and universally applicable, that he thought he would give it a chance.

Danielle Camacho

As she stood at the bottom of the stairs to the burial grounds seen in The Granary Burial Ground, Boston, Danielle’s focus turned instantly to the guide at the entrance. While watching him for a moment, his presence reflected as much of the silent wonder and
Danielle knows that sometimes Boston Public Library may seem ordinary (even to her) but the feeling she gets from it is much more. She had never stood in a library like that before. What got to her was how the crowd of college students cramming for midterms was such a contrast to vast quiet of the ceiling above, even though the whole place was still. So when she stood back to photograph, she wanted to see the floor of busy brains meeting with the solace of the open space above.

Heather Marcucci
On Gravity was born out of the idea contained in its last line—of happiness as a celebration of biology. Carl’s existence is a shrine to meaninglessness; he refuses to submit to the urges of his “biology,” rejecting them as though the one being rejected and the one rejecting were two separate entities.

Christy Dusablon
Christy is the author of Face in the Mirror. It’s always been Christy’s notion that if one person can read her story and feel a little less lonely, then she feels that she has done something right.
Trevor Gotsman

In lieu of a single biographical statement for his pieces, Trevor has offered a short descriptive caption for each that gives more perspective to each individually.

**Hearth:** As the sun goes behind the mountains above the fishing village of Kalk Bay, South Africa, native fishermen and their wives congregate for a night of revelry. Long before sunrise the men return to sea, and leave the women to find their own warmth.

**Collusion:** Right wing conservative, mustering the power of the law, Apartheid era, South Africa, an uncomfortably familiar parallel also found in post 9/11 USA.

**Dune Bowl:** Atop the dune, a slow avalanche of sand reverberates with a threatening hum. These sand dunes, reputed to be the highest on earth, also host the sidewinder adder, and the DeBeers diamonds.

**Diamond Fields:** Contemplating the last un-eroded mountains 100 miles away and nobody within 7 day’s walking distance. Nearby, pristine Bushman paintings dating back more than 35000 years help enhance the primal being.

**Mandela:** A just reward, I believe, for any righteous life, what some would call Nirvana. This quote, massaged into Haiku form, taken from an NPR interview with Nelson Mandela, a real representative of South Africa.

Seth Martini

*Sorrow, Woman Figure, and Woman with Feather* are studies from Seth’s 3D Design and Life Drawing classes at Moorpark College. Seth’s artwork
has meaning and a lot of imagination. He believes that his life, friends, and family are his inspiration to create artwork, and he won't stop until the ink runs out.

**Jay McClow**

_VChip What_ was inspired through cable and entertainment. Jay edited his piece from a child watching cable television to a child watching pornography. He wants to make a statement against the irony of the acceptance of violence and nudity yet the rejection of vulgar language.

**Bob Meinke**

_Automatophilia_ caters to Bob’s fascination with subjective experience. Perhaps he perceives you as a cactus; maybe you think he’s a robot. In the absence of objective truth, who’s to say for sure? Bob is also the author of _Moon Shot._

**Lynnette Morininni**

_Lessons_ is Lynnette’s meditation on love as seen through the lens of memory, song, and spirit. A tribute of sorts, the work explores the spiritual connection between the hearts of three generations and her faith that within every action is eternity.

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Gabrielle Perret

Some themes keep reoccurring in Gabrielle’s writing: what it means to be a woman in this world at this time, what it means to die, and what it means to believe God exists. All of these themes are represented in the work selected. Gabrielle is the author and creator of *Today, Untitled, Holiday at Manzanar, Angels in the Clouds and Gold Furniture, and Roxie.*

Aaron Sherwyn

Whether capturing a coincidental instant in time or assembling something from a figment in his mind, Aaron tries to share with others what fascinates him about life and its infinite little quirks. Sherwyn is the creator of *Beautiful Blue and Morning Tea,* an image of a fly in a teacup upon which the cover was based.

Tom Sullivan

*With* is a rare manifestation of Tom’s poetry. It is more classically poetic than his usual writing. He wrote it for a man, whom he did not know; yet at the time of the poem’s writing, he considered the man to be his enemy. Tom dedicates *With* to Pope John Paul II, a individual who truly cherished humanity.
Alex Tennenhouse

Alex, author of *Prairie Story*, finds it easy to write about the great prairie, for he did indeed grow up on a prairie homestead. The lonely isolation of the bitter winter and the incredible beauty of its sweet summer serve as inspiration for his tales.

dzuy Vuong

dzuy feels that he is not really saying anything that hasn’t been said before. Watching, listening, adding (+/-) subtracting, and making sure to always take time to trim his fingernails neatly. dzuy is the author of *Ear Wax, What We Mean to Say*, and *Suburb*.

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the end.