

free quarterly journal of politics / prose / poetry / pictures

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Editors' Notes

Kyle Peterson -- Political Editor Mike Young -- Fiction and Poetry Editor

--Kyle / kyle@noojournal.com

O OUR FAITHFUL READERS, my apologies for the delay in publishing this issue of NOO Journal. This is the second time since Mike and I started NOO that I have attempted to manage two publications at the same time while trying to finish a college degree. It is apropos or at least ironic that I have now finished my degree in history, U.S. history no less, since one can often discover striking similarities between the past and present. We've left the politics out of this issue, but I am confident that the rest of the work presented here will help take your mind off a crumbling U.S. economy, rising gas prices and petty presidential politics, at least for a little while.

--Mike / mike@noojournal.com

WHAT KIND OF LIFE DO I WANT? Rumors. "Oh yeah, I know Mike. He works at Safeway, right?" "Um, Mike moved to Alaska, dude. He's a whaler." "No, I think Mike lives in Utah. He repairs dehumidifiers and hosts one of those public radio shows that hates the government." "Wait, they have dehumidifiers in Utah?" "Guys. Mike died. Last week in Portugal. No one recognized him. They combed his ashes into a wine bottle." "Mike got a sex change. It's true! No, listen! Now his name's Mimosa Blue and he walks dogs for crack money in Bushwick. It's sad, really. It's sad!"

What kind of friends do I want? The people in NOO [eight]. Literary magazine editors are sometimes accused of publishing their friends, but our accusers always get the timing wrong. It's only after I read Ofelia Hunt's marzipan and rocket launcher prose that I wanted to meet her. Six months ago, I didn't care at all about Daniel J. Bailey or his mother. Now I'm a fan of both. Even the people who may or may not be real—Jasmine Dreame Wagner's Maddy and Benjamin Buchholz's Dirt Joe—these are the people I want passed out on my couch Saturday nights. Literature as a route to esprit de corps, a corner booth full of in-jokes. And you! Don't think I forgot. We've been after you. Here, reader: read like we're all holding hands. It's not creepy. Literature as a communal wink, literature as a model of trust, literature as an ark.

What kind of news do I have? Political editor Kyle Peterson has taken a one issue leave of absence, as he's been busy editing *The Panther*, Chapman University's newspaper, which you can find online at thepantheronline.com. But he's all done. Graduated! Congratulations, Kyle. Essays will return in NOO Ininel. In the meantime, go ahead and compute the science of Sean Kilpatrick's piece, which is an excerpt from his e-book *Spurious One-Man Lobotomy With Clipped Inquisition*, illustrated by Daniel St. George 2nd and available at www.magichelicopterpress.com. It's Magic Helicopter Press's first release. That's my new press. Check it out. It's cute.

And what kind of assurance will I leave you with? I know what you've heard. Most of those rumors, well, I started them. It's the only way to make friends these days. But here. We're together now. I'll tell you the truth. Everything I do—including NOÖ and Magic Helicopter Press—is put together in a secret bunker underneath the cottonwood tree, six miles from the tin circus, uphill both ways. You're close when the air tastes like coconut. All your expensive chocolate starts to melt. Most of the deer are wearing limited edition t-shirts. It's warm, even for May. Something secret and cuddly starts to pull your face apart. You look down, the grass is monochrome, and you're surrounded by NOÖ Leightl. Good find.

Notes From an Underground

-- Stephan Clark

HEN YOU LEARN you're going to Ukraine for a year, become less of a fundamentalist. Don't insist on being a vegetarian. You already eat fish, but that isn't enough. Go to the In 'n' Out Burger and order the #2, then sample the lamb when you find yourself at that Indian buffet your family really likes. Practice. Get used to it. Know that you'll need to bend a little so you don't break. You won't be in California anymore. This will be Kharkiv, Ukraine. And so you'll eat the beef and the lamb and even the occasional piece of chicken, despite all the hidden camera footage you've seen on the PETA website. You will do this because you think it will keep you away from the national dish, salo. You don't do pork. Never have. As for cured pork fat, you can't believe an entire country could rally around this. So yes, eat everything, the beef, the lamb, even the chicken, hoping this will allow you to show your host the flat of your hand and say, "Actually, I don't eat pork fat. I have an allergy. My doctor told me—or rather my priest said, I mean my rabbi-well, the long and short of it is the chicken's so good I think I might just have some more." Prepare for the day. You know it's coming. Be polite but firm. Show you have limits. Tell yourself this. You do have limits.

Eat pizza your first afternoon in town. Have it at the restaurant near the university, knowing you can't eat here everyday. You didn't travel halfway around the world to eat pizza everyday. If you did that you would be a failure, even

in the eyes of your Italian friends. So yes, eat the pizza, but consider it a decompression chamber. It will take you from Marin County to Kharkiv. Don't forget the crust.

At the market across the street from your flat, you will find six aisles. One is given over to hard alcohol, another to mayonnaise. Inspect the milk. Some is in a box, some a bag. Of course there's no soy. Don't even look, certainly don't ask. Instead, decide which brand of milk to put in your basket. Choose like an American. Find the one with the best packaging. A grandmother, a cow, a green pasture, mountains in the background. Feel like more of a local. You already have a

consumer preference.

Quickly learn to redefine "average daily requirements." Eat muesli and milk for breakfast, maybe some yogurt if you remembered to check the "made on" date, then go out into the world and see what else you can drum up for lunch and dinner. At the underground, stop at one of the kiosks. Get your money ready and approach the window. While you wait, practice how to say, "I would like ..." Move forward in line. Do not act frightened when the lady's face appears in the little window. You are not buying a *Playboy*. This is not your first time getting condoms. You are hungry, that is all. So speak calmly, as if it's no big deal. You're just another commuter looking for something to eat before getting on the train. Say it. Piroski s kapusta. Sloika s gribami. Then say it again if she says anything, because that probably means she didn't understand. Be conscious of where you hold your tongue, how to move your lips. Speak as if the words are little boys on the diving board for the first time, unwilling to jump. Push them if you must. And then marvel at how little it costs: fifteen cents, forty cents. Walk away with your bounty and and try to make this your lunch. The sloika are like pastries, and the *piroski* donuts. Only both have something healthy inside. Potato, mushroom, cabbage. Eat these until you discover varenniki, which give you the same choices inside the shell of something you consider a ravioli. (Do not cover these ravioli with that pasta sauce you bought at



the best supermarket in town. It does not taste like pasta sauce. It tastes like ketchup, spicy ketchup, and not even good spicy ketchup at that. Wonder again if it's gone bad, or if this is just what goes for popular here. Tell yourself: No more pasta. This is not Italy.)

When you tire of eating cereal, and yogurt, and donuts and ravioli (and you will tire of these, despite all your efforts to find comfort in nothing else) look for more variety. Follow your *devushka* to the central market, and stop alongside her at the sausage counter. Feel safe (she knows you don't do pork, and she's willing to work with you so long as you'll give on everything else) but don't feel too safe. See the ruptured sausage casings, the flesh of the blood sausage bursting through. Taste it when it's offered to you. Take the meat when the old lady's thumb pushes it off the blade of the knife. Put it in your mouth. Chew and nod when the old lady's smile reveals two gold teeth. When your girlfriend asks if you like it, say you do and buy one. Then nod again when she tells you it's only good for three or four days.

Three or four days later, look at your blood sausage. Feel the filmy texture of its casing, see something that you tell yourself resembles mold. Text message your girlfriend. Tell her the meat has gone bad already. Imply that this is wrong. When she tells you it's supposed to go bad after three or four days, and what are you thinking? write her back to say you're a writer, you need to be reminded of these things, you're almost retarded. Then look again at the blood sausage. What are you going to have if not this? Pasta? There is no more pasta. This is not Italy. Break open the sausage and see the blackened pockets of decay. Cut around these. You've just finished One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, and you tell yourself you can eat anything they would've eaten in the gulags. This would have been a delicacy, you tell yourself. And besides, you can't throw it away. You feel guilty enough as it is. You've already thrown away a loaf of dark bread that hardened before you could finish it, and a package of pork you thought was beef, and a bagful of apples you couldn't get to in time (everyone will give you apples from their dacha, more apples than any one man could possibly eat). You don't want to sneak to the dumpsters in the dark. Not again. You tell yourself you'll eat enough for dinner and then cut up what sausage is left and give it to the stray dogs around back. There are enough stray dogs in the city for a Disney movie and a straight-to-video sequel. Someone has to feed them, and

tonight it will be you. After midnight, you tell yourself. When it's dark.

The next evening come home from the university hungry. Know that another piroski just won't do. You are a man and a meat-eater and potatoes and cabbage and mushroom won't do, not anymore, not after three weeks. Look for meat. Look for beef or lamb. Pass the shwarma stand (they smother it in mayonnaise) and look for something new. Go down one length of the sidewalk and back up the other. Visit parts of the city you've never seen before, looking for something recently alive that is now dead. Food. Meat. This is a city of almost two million, there has to be something to sink your teeth into. A bun. That is what you imagine. Mustard. A Number Two, animal style. But there's nothing like that, so at last double back toward your metro stop, Holodna Gora. Notice the meat store as you pass it. See the chickens in the window. The cooked chickens. But keep walking, because you don't know the word for chicken. Do you remember the word for pork? Find a well lit storefront and pull out your electronic translator. Punch in the letters. Shake your head. There's no way you're pronouncing that. Who would make "chicken" so complicated? Remember the Russian word for "hello." Twelve letters, four syllables. That's who.

Stand there. Hungry. Considering it. Cooked chicken. You want nothing more. You had some chicken in Kiev. A drumstick. It was at the house of a public affairs officer from the US Embassy, a meet-and-greet type affair with other Fulbrighters. It was the best thing you've had in Ukraine so far, so meaty, so tasty, like something from a barbecue on a hot southern night. Chicken. The way god meant for it to be. Dead and in your mouth.

Go into the store. Stand by the cooked chickens. Look at the packaging they're wrapped in. See a different word for chicken. Don't say, "You've gotta be fucking me." That would be rude, even if no one understands. Just wait there until the lady finishes with her customer and comes over to you with her question. Tell her you would like one. Listen when she says something. Hear what you think is one of the words for chicken. Nod your head. When she says something else, who knows what, say, "Da." It is the magic word. She reaches for a chicken. Weighs it. You thought it'd be nineteen something out the door, just like the little sign says, but she apparently wants to bring the kilogram into this. Fine. Stand there like a man, a hunter, proud of your abilities. Your inadequate command of the Russian

language has brought in a game bird. When she says how much, marvel at your ability to understand numbers, then reach into your wallet and pay.

Try not to hop as you leave the store. Do not click your heels. You are not Fred Astaire, and this is not the time. Simply tuck that chicken away like a football. Tight against the chest, pushed back into the hollow of your elbow. Do not run. You are not Tony Dorsett; this is not the Super Bowl. You have a cooked chicken, that is all, and you will be home with it in five minutes.

Wash your hands. Look for a cutting board. When you don't find one, take out the biggest plate. It's no bigger than the smallest plate, but this is fine. You have a chicken. "A chicken," you say. Stand it on your plate. Pull down its plastic wrapping. Try to find where the seam is. Curse silently. Look again. Curse aloud. Feel like you're undressing a drunk girlfriend. Think of cutting the chicken on the counter-top, but then imagine the germs. You want this to be perfect. It is a cooked chicken. Try to get the plastic off. See the chicken slide this way and that, its wings going out from under it. Use the one Russian curse word you've learned. Then finally get the job done and marvel at what you hold. A chicken, naked, moist, soft, a fleshy chicken. Reach for the knife. It is a hunter's knife, the only knife in your rented flat, and for the first time it is appropriate. Push the blade into the flesh and trace a half-circle around the base of the drumstick. Imagine it. Teeth into flesh, chicken into mouth. A good and rewarding meal. Cooked chicken.

Then see blood. Red blood. Not dried blood, but blood that runs. Look away from that long enough to see some sort of translucent goo. Call this salmonella. Watch it slide out of the pocket of flesh you've exposed, and then see the pink meat from which it has escaped. Set the chicken down. Stand back. Feel like the French must have felt when Paris fell to the Nazis. Do not think you are trivializing the suffering of those who died in World War Two. This was a chicken, a cooked chicken, and you were going to buy one every day. Swear loudly if you must. It will make you feel better. And the neighbors won't know any better. Then get desperate. Look for a cooked part. Surely some part of the chicken must be cooked. Find it. Cut it away from the rest of the bird with an anthropologist's care. Hold it up to the light and inspect it from all sides. Now put it in your mouth. Rest it on your tongue. Push it up to the roof of your mouth and savor its juices. Smoked. Smoked chicken.

Make a note to yourself: look up word for *smoked* chicken. Then remember your girlfriend. She had you promise never to eat smoked chicken. You agreed without asking why. Now you are here with it and hungry. But no. Make a decision. Walk away. Know that you will flee with it in the night, off to the dumpster that brings no end to your shame. You will not eat smoked chicken. She is a local, and she must know something you do not.

But you are hungry, and there is nothing else. Blood sausage maybe? Bad blood sausage? Some muesli perhaps? But there is no more milk. Remember the other American in town. Call him. Do not worry that it costs twenty cents a minute to talk on your mobile phone. Throw your money into the wind and tell him in great detail about your chicken. Tell him you ran like Tony Dorsett, and nod your head when he offers you his kind and compassionate words. Then listen as he tells you of his attempt to buy milk. He's been eating dry muesli. For weeks he's been doing this. His language skills aren't as advanced as yours, and only yesterday did you learn of his condition and teach him how to pronounce the word moloko. "What went wrong?" you ask. You feel in some way to blame. But then he tells you he was able to buy the milk, he just couldn't drink it. "None of the milk was refrigerated," he says. "It stood on the store shelf just like all the dry goods." Your milk was no different, you realize, but you haven't stopped to think about this until now. You were more worried about the packaging. The grandmother and the happy cow. "What did your package look like?" you say. "Did you taste it?" Because your milk was good, better than any you remember from the United States. No growth hormones. But he says his just wasn't right, the taste. "I poured it down the sink," he says. "It killed me to do, but I poured it down the sink and ate dry muesli again." Look at your chicken. Tell yourself you will not give up. Tell your fellow American you're gonna cook Chicken Kharkiv. Tell him one more thing. "We put a man on the moon, didn't we?"

Now hang up and look at the chicken on your plate, its left side hanging limp, the drumstick dangling. It's not like it's salo, it's not like it's pork fat. It's just a little undercooked chicken. Smoked chicken. Reach for your knife. Think of your grandmother. Remember all the food she cooked you in Texas. Move toward the animal. Carve into its flesh. Pile all the many pieces in a bowl. And more than anything, know what your grandmother knows: that with enough hot oil, anything is good.



Two Hard Workers

-- Noah Cicero

NE'S NAME WAS JOSIAH. Josiah was not very smart. The most common thing said about him was, "I think he might have brain damage." Josiah was a hard worker but not a good worker. At the concentration camp they were forced to make boots for the Nazis and Josiah kept messing up and causing problems for the other workers. People were always saying, "We're in a concentration camp probably to die at any moment, and Josiah is making things worse for us."

The other's name was Yosef. Yosef was a hard and good worker. But Yosef never stopped talking. Yosef would start talking as soon as he woke up till the second he went to sleep. Yosef didn't need anyone to respond to anything he said. He would keep talking no matter what. People were always telling Yosef to shut up but Yosef never listened. People often said of Yosef, "Why won't he shut up, we are so miserable, life is so hard, and he keeps talking."

Yosef would also do things like if he stepped on a nail and got cut he would go around telling everyone how he got his foot cut and people would reply, "Yosef, we're in a fucking concentration camp waiting to die, who cares about a little cut." Yosef wouldn't respond to that though, and would go on telling everyone about his cut foot.

Yosef also made friends with the Nazis. He would talk to the Nazi bosses and try to make friends with them. People would tell him, "Yosef, the Nazis hate us. They're laughing at you."

Yosef would respond, "No, the Nazis love me."

People would walk away in anger.

Josiah though made great potato soup with very little ingredients. Josiah would prepare the soup and everyone would feast and people would say, "Josiah messes up a lot, but he does make great soup."

One day there was no food. And many were close to starvation, so Josiah took it upon himself, maybe because of empathy, bravery, or because he actually had brain damage, to steal some food.

Josiah crawled through deep snow and through barb wire in the night to break into the Nazi food supplies. Josiah broke into the supply shed and got out one box and pushed it slowly through mud and snow while crawling for over two hours back to the barracks for people to eat, knowing the whole time if he were caught it would be the last thing he ever did.

Everyone was so hungry they chewed on the uncooked potatoes in the night. Yosef though, did not eat the

potatoes. He went to the Nazi bosses and told them what Josiah did.

The Nazis marched in the barracks where the starving Jews were. The Nazis grabbed the potatoes from their starving fingers. One Nazi ripped the food out of a small girl's mouth. The Nazis shot Josiah in the head. Josiah lay there still and quiet never to mess up at work again. The starving Jews looked at dead Josiah, the person that tried to save them who they always said had brain damage. Then they looked up at Yosef standing next to the Nazis. Yosef stood smiling with not an ounce of remorse on his face.

The Nazis shot all the starving Jews that ate the potatoes. They lay there dying. Their waiting was over. In their last moments they didn't know who to blame: Josiah for stealing, Yosef for snitching, or the Nazis. They bled to death before they could decide on someone to blame.

The Nazis never killed Yosef. Yosef lived through the war and still lives. No one ever knew Yosef did that. The starving Jews were dead and the Russians killed the Nazis there that night.

After The War was over Yosef went to America and became a successful businessman. He got married and divorced several times and had several kids. He can be found in Florida living in a retirement community getting a tan next to a pool.



"Wobbelin Concentration Camp" / from the National Archives via Pingnews (flickr.com/photos/pingnews/1860321383/)

André and Sonja, As Friends



-- J.P. Gritton

WOMAN IS DANCING ALONE in the middle of the room.

"A dancer should be—" you tug my ear to tell me this, and I think of how strange it is that I can feel no warmth in the tips of your fingers.

"A dancer should be," you continue, "not the trunk of an English Oak, but a shaft of bamboo."

Jesus, André, how magnificent your English.

You're a poet. Is that what made you decide to shake my hand in the middle of Budapest, outside of Zará, where I'd rested my head on the window? And while we're on the topic, where have you taken me? A restaurant? Nightclub? I don't care, actually.

"Hello, I'm André," you said. Hello, André. American, yes. Just passing through. I flew Paris to Cairo on Magyar Air, I have a three-day layover. A drink? Okay. I don't know Budapest very well.

And now we're here with your two friends, beautiful, blonde Hungarian women in fur coats.

I like the décor here: there is a red tapestry along the walls, with tiny embroidered fleurs-de-lis. It extends from this unlit corner to the girl eating calamari with that fat, bald man; from them to where it sags a little, by the old woman drinking alone, still in her fur coat; and from her to where the band plays.

Jesus Christ, it's "Eye of the Tiger."

The keyboardist is standing a few feet from his chair. His chair is marvelous: it has an over-stuffed zebra-print cushion. There's an upright bass, and a weeping willow of a man playing it. There's another man, the alpha male, dressed like Elvis circa 1970. In the center of the room, a dancer, alone. The whole room is a slow red: a glass of merlot and a valium.

André, would you understand me if I told you that I feel like as though lost in some vacuum? That I've seen the face of the ex-Soviet bloc and it's in this little restaurant or nightclub or speakeasy, whatever the hell it is?

André, you speak English better than you understand it. "Everybody looks sharp. André, you and your friends look exceedingly sharp," I say, finally.

You nod. One of your beautiful Hungarian friends nods, as well. The other one—Sonja?—is glaring at me.

You talk about the European Union and nobody really cares.

You say, "The European Union will change everything. Correct?"

All night, you'll say "Correct?" to me.

Yes, André, your opinions seem correct to me.

"We are no longer a socialist country," you say, "Now Budapest will shine with the light of capitalism!"

I laugh. Your other friend nods. Sonja sighs.

Secretly, I feel Sonja has a sumptuous remove. She is not saying much, André, but I feel like she's controlling the conversation. You and I feel bent around her, and I understand at once that you are in love with her.

In the same moment, I realize that you think of me as a novelty. I'm the only American here. The only foreigner here, I think. As for the Germans from the hostel, they're in a basement pub with Mick and Carolyn, Australian surfers on their way home from Greece, eating "very, very good Goulash." About two hours ago, we were drinking Grolsch and smoking Pall Malls. How had they wound up in Greece, I wondered. We spoke about English history, and then conversation wandered toward the sun setting over the fisherman's bastion, dying an orange death on the spires of the Hungarian houses of parliament. This begged the obvious question, "Can we buy ecstasy here?"

Mick said: "You and that rough exterior of yours, mate."

Everyone laughed. Even me, I saw the humor.

But why was there humor in this, I wondered? Was it possible for one to have a soft exterior? Why would he point out, say out loud, that I have no rough exterior? Is there something about my exterior that is notably unrough? For a while I was thinking about this. Was he talking about my weak chin? Or was it something deeper than that, something in the marrow? Was that it!

I said nothing for twenty minutes.

"All right, mate?" Carolyn asked, finally. Really, she and Mick were kind people, good people. Earlier, Carolyn had given me a book on the War of the Roses.

"Take it, Yank. It's yours," she'd said. I'd smiled. I'd felt good.

At the bar in the hostel, she only looked at me sadly. Did I subconsciously want her pity? Would she love me if Mick was still in Crete?

Not that you would know, André. Do you realize you've been speaking Magyar for the last five minutes? Everything seems bent around the dancer with her tree torso in the middle of the room. She's alone.

Sonja says "Do you consider your sadness timeless?" She speaks English like a Londoner, only a hint of something else. I am in love with her.

I shrug.

Sonja says "Your only mistake in sadness is that you consider it timeless; actually it places you within a fairly specific culture, in a fairly specific era in human history."

"I understand you, totally," I say.

"Good," she says. She will say nothing else for the rest of the night.

After I left Mick and Carolyn at the hostel I felt skincold Hungarian day become bone-cold Hungarian night. I shuffled to the square in my secondhand, puke-orange windbreaker, and bought some mulled wine and a sausage from a man whose face reminded me of sycamore moss.

I sat alone on the steps of the National Bank, tucked my ears into my jacket, ate my sausage and drank my wine. A white-faced clock at the far end shone; around me the venders began to close up their wooden shacks. They looked like little spiders spinning webs, their quick fingers closing latches and fitting padlocks through links of chain. I watched a man pat himself: "Did I forget something?" That expression on his face, it's universal.

I crossed the square, intending to go back to the hostel. But like a gnat I was drawn to Zará, a huge cube of neon in the cobblestone gloom. I put my hands on the windows: Look at those clothes!

And then I met you, André.

André, you're laughing more, and your face is flush. Are you drunk yet? Your shot glasses lie scattered around you like little toy soldiers. You're just a kid, playing. I like you. You seem like a pretty decent guy. There's something that you've given me now, a gift: a sense of connectivity. It could be all this liquor, or Sonja, beautiful and elegant and smarter than anyone in the room. You saw me in front of Zará and asked me for a drink. That is a gift.

But it will only be later, when you excuse yourself and disappear, leaving me with a three-hundred dollar tab, that I understand you've given me two gifts tonight.

I'll walk to the front of the restaurant and yell at the waitress ("40,000 Florins? Impossible!"); your friends will slip quietly out the back door. I will look back at the empty table and realize I've been had. For a millisecond, I'll be angry, André (Isn't that a French name? Are you really André?). Then I will laugh. I will laugh maniacally. I'll barely be able to control myself as I ask the manager, "Please, sir, do you accept VISA?" As they swipe my card my eyes will be drawn, as by magnets, to the empty table, where I once sat with André and Sonja as friends. I'll stumble out of the place talking about how this never would have happened if this country were still communist.

"¡Hasta la victoria, siempre!" I'll shout at the bouncer.

For a few days I'll complain about the incident loudly to the other tourists in the hostel. Then I'll fly back to Paris and ask my parents for a loan.

They'll say "Sure, son, how much do you need?" I'll think about the arbitrary nature of existence.

Later on, I'll tell the moon about Mick and Carolyn.

By the way, if you're standing on the fisherman's bastion and looking at the Hungarian houses of parliament, then you're facing east—so, actually, it's impossible to watch the sun set. The truth is that, from there, the sun only rises.

Tomorrow, I promise to watch it rise.



"Waiting For the Tram" / © 2008 Petteri Sulonen (flickr.com/photos/primejunta)

THE CANADIANS



-- Gabe Durham

OW THIS CRASH. A red car and a blue car, the same make and model. Each car was doing 30ish and driving right in the center of the road. In the instant before the collision, there was a harmony of tire-squealing (the pitch of the red car's squeal a perfect fifth above the pitch of the blue's), then those cars folded into each other like accordion ends, front hoods crumpling in the same exact way. They are totaled, these cars.

I take my phone out of my pocket and dial 611, abandoning my library voice and getting nasty looks. In fact, three nasty lookers simultaneously turn, glare, and clear their throats in three syllables. Nasty lookers: Listen to me! Two cars have perfectly collided and two people might be perfectly dead and you don't want me to disturb your reading? Are your priorities are so hacked, so mangled? Have you been so diluted? I am tempted to put 611 on hold to deliver a lecture entitled, "Things That Are Wrong With All of You."

611 says nothing. There is not a person behind the number.

911 asks what's my emergency and I say that two cars have just perfectly colluded right in front of Forbes Library on West 66. They say that matters of plotting and collusion should be taken up with the local police department. Wait! The cars collided, I say. Thank you, they say. Great work.

I shut my phone and peer out the window for signs of anyone who might've run out to rescue the drivers. There is no one. I get up to race down the stairs but hesitate. Should I pack up the laptop? I'd hate to not be a hero and have my computer stolen. I pack it up, hands shaking.

I take two steps and fall over, catching myself with my hands. The library carpet smells exactly like the carpet from my living room when I was a boy.

I race past the nasty-lookers, down the stairs, out to the street. The drivers have gotten out of their cars. The driver of the red car is a medium-sized white woman in a blue shirt. Her hair is frayed. The driver of the blue car is a medium-sized black man in a red shirt. His hair is too short to be mussed. They are giggling and woozy like they just got off a ride.

I shout to them. They say they are OK. I ask them what is funny and they tell me that it's amazing how perfect their crash was. I tell them, I know! They tell me to listen to this: Each had been sipping water and had it go down his or her throat the wrong way and had a brief coughing fit and lost control of the car. Their cars had met right in the middle of the double yellow line and now their cars are totaled and they both have slight neck cricks. Not only that, but they share the same birthday. And not only that, but neither of them is insured because both are illegal immigrants from Canada. The icing on the cake, the man tells me, is that they both are heavily involved in the same collusion and had previously only known each other by their code names. The Canadians tell me that whatever I do, I should not call 911 for obvious reasons, or 611 because there is no person behind that number. But the sirens are wailing in the distance and I think my face gives me away. They look at me like you SOB and pull their arms back as if to strike me.

He's not worth it, the woman says.

Exactly what I was thinking, the man says.

I point at Smith College, just across the street. You can hide in there! It's a big school! They run with gorgeous Canadian strides into the school and are never found. Still grateful for not having been punched, I tell the cops that the drivers split before I arrived. One of the cops, possibly suspecting I'd lied, or because he doesn't like my face, punches me in the gut. I fall perfectly into the arms of the other cop, a sweet man who tussles my hair and tells me that his partner was just frustrated because he'd been cramming for his LSAT exam and the library had been too noisy.

from Today and Tomorrow



-- Ofelia Hunt

OU'RE MY LITTLE ANARCHIST," my grandfather said. "Know what that means?"

I shook my head. I was fifteen years old. It was September.

"Means you've got personality. You're clever. You know. Anarchist! Surprising word, has a little punch probably. Something you can tell police when you get pulled over for speeding. Just stare at the cop's eyes and say, 'I've got anarchism in my heart,' and the cop's surprised and a little scared and you say, 'but not the way you think,' then smile a little smile and you'll never get a ticket. You've got anarchism, I think."

"I also have caterpillars," I said.

"Caterpillars are interesting too," my grandfather said. "Insects with hair. Make cocoons. Metamorphose into big winged butterflies or moths or something and flitter around prettily. Humankind could learn something from caterpillars, but I'm not sure what. Maybe something about embracing nature and I don't just mean plants and trees and stuff but maybe embrace instincts, things like that, building mud huts, farming, subjugating and dominating animals and plants or maybe how to design stylish clothing."

We were at the zoo watching the penguins swim around.

"Penguins are good too. Very stylish. Life of the party."

"Penguin," I said.

"Are you hungry?"

"Can't eat penguins. Penguin-steaks are probably illegal or something," I said.

"Correct. No penguin eating. But there's ice-cream around here somewhere."

"Ice-cream?"

Penguin " / © 2008 Mattia Cerato

(www.flickr.com/ mattiacerato

"With waffle-cones and strawberries and things."

"I don't know," I said. "Ice-cream is sort of evil, isn't it?

Made from milk and sugar and stuff but isn't it evil to steal cows-milk from milk-cows and then change it, unnaturally, and to filter in sugars and preservatives and berries and chocolate and waffles. It's a little like playing god."

"Milk-cows make milk and would not exist otherwise. You must eat ice-cream and drink milk, otherwise those milk cows are redundant and pointless and would have to be slaughtered which would be disgusting

and bloody."

"We could save the cows, couldn't we? Together? We could invade cow-farms with semi-trucks and steal the cows and drive the cows to Alaska or Canada. Some place safe and unexpected. Belize?"

"It'd take a lifetime."

"Important work though. We'd design and build cowsaving submarines and transport the cows to uninhabited desert islands and recruit teenagers and college-students. It could be the 'bovine-underground."

"You draw up the plans. I'll get the ice-cream."

"Okay."

"Ice-cream's over there," my grandfather said. "I see the umbrella. Be back shortly."

My grandfather walked toward the ice-cream stand. I sat on a nearby bench. There was a slight breeze so I hugged my shoulders and thought about my grandfather's over-the-calf black-and yellow argyle birthday-socks about which that morning my grandfather had said "When I wear these with shorts I'm visible to drunk-drivers and spy-satellites." I touched my socks and watched my grandfather's socks and thought about how our socks were different socks, though often my socks and my grandfather's socks intermingled in the washer and later in the drier and that our socks shared static-electricity sometimes. Then, momentarily, I couldn't see my grandfather's over-the-calf black-and-yellow argyle birthday-socks so I stood and moved toward the umbrella which was white and green and I concentrated on the white and green umbrella and the little black ice-cream bar symbol stitched into the white and green umbrella and I wanted suddenly to be beneath that ice-cream-stand-umbrella so I moved quickly and recklessly toward the umbrella. My shoulder smashed an old woman wearing a rain-bonnet who said, "Excuse you, bitch." I nearly trampled a small girl in denim overalls. My hands moved in front of me and opened and closed as though my hands wanted to grab something, but I didn't know what my hands wanted to grab.

I stood beneath the ice-cream-stand-umbrella.

I remained very still.

I could see my grandfather's argyle socks.

"Here," my grandfather said. My grandfather's hand was wrinkled and spotted and shaky. The hand held my ice-cream and moved the ice-cream toward me and I watched the ice-cream move toward me.

I took my ice-cream.

"Thank you," I said.

I held the ice-cream and watched the ice-cream and the ice-cream didn't move. The ice-cream didn't disappear.

No Daughters Like This One

-- J.M. Patrick

HERE ARE DOCTORS THAT LISTEN to your heart, counting out a slow and steady beat. There are doctors that spread your legs and crawl inside. There are doctors that open you up like a melon, feeling inside with latex gloves; that slide smooth wooden sticks down your tongues; that slip cold metal syringes into your veins, nod abruptly, and leave you with the nurses. But here, in this house, on a Saturday night, there are no doctors at all.

I can never tell if my mother is coughing or throwing up. It sounds exactly the same. The difference is, when she coughs we run to check the tissue for blood. When she throws up, we soak the sponges in bleach. I am sitting on the couch, reading *Are You There God, It's Me, Margaret* when she starts.

"She's throwing up, Anna, it's your turn."

Thomas turned sixteen last month, drank his first beer, and had sex with a skinny blonde girl from next door. Ever since, he's been acting like a prick.

"No it isn't, I did it last time."

He glares at me, picks up a magazine.

He doesn't go to school anymore, but I haven't told my mother. When she gets upset, she cries and when she cries she coughs, and when she coughs too hard, she throws up, which makes her cry even harder. I really don't tell her anything, except for what time it is, and what station Oprah is on and at what time.

"Fuck you, you did not. I cleaned her puke while you sat on your fat ass." This isn't true. My mother coughs harder. I get up.

"Hm. Well I guess if you take care of her so much, she already knows you aren't going to school."

"You're such a cunt." Thomas pushes me out of the way.

Our living room is tiny, or maybe it's the mess that makes it so small. There are two couches, one for each of us to sleep on, a coffee table piled high with textbooks, magazines, Lay's Potato Chip bags, McDonalds wrappers. Every day I tell myself I will clean it, at least the garbage. I don't.

I hear Thomas coming back. He stands in the doorway. "Anna?"

11

"Maybe someone should tell your father."

Aunt Lisa is here, holding us even though we don't want to be held. We see her on Christmas, sometimes on Easter. She never wears a bra and always smells like beer or pot. Today she is wearing a tee-shirt with a wolf on the front. He is howling at an invisible moon.

"He doesn't care," Thomas says.

"Well I'm sure he will. Someone should call him."

We agree that yes, someone should call him, but no one will.

III

Aunt Lisa is cleaning our living room and trying to make pasta salad at the same time. Thomas is next door, having sex with the blonde girl, and I'm using a broom to sweep the crumbs off the couch cushions.

"Anna baby, can you find a big wooden spoon?" she asks. I tell her we don't have one and she rolls her eyes.

She calls me "Anna baby" now. It's nice of her to come here and clean up our mess and make our pasta salad, but I want her to leave. I wish Thomas were eighteen so he could take care of me and we could do this on our own.

"We can go pick out the casket today." She says this in the same tone she used to ask about the spoon. I think about telling her that we're better off just throwing her body into the ocean like they do in the mafia because we don't have any money.

"Thomas is going too, or I'm not going at all," I say, and I put the broom down.

"Fine." She opens the refrigerator. "You don't have any mayonnaise?"

I shake my head.

"Fuck it. We'll eat out."

IV

The funeral home is small and dark. To get to my mother, we have to walk through three open rooms with leather couches and tiny tables stocked with tissues. This is where we are supposed to cry.

The biggest room is last. There are five rows of chairs with ten chairs in each row. I count them twice, and then I'm angry because I know that there will not be enough people to fill all these chairs. Even if all my teachers came, and all the neighbors, and all the waitresses that worked with my mother at the diner before she got sick, there would still be too many chairs. I tell Thomas this. He tells me to shut up.

At the front of the room, my mother is dead in a "light oak casket with a fine gloss coating hand finished throughout. A fine bronze finish shade highlights the side." When the funeral director handed us the pamphlet and read aloud the description, Aunt Lisa said "with a lovely berry bouquet and a smoky finish." We didn't get it. She said "It sounds like he's selling us wine."

There are giant flower arrangements down the right wall. "Loving Mother" says one. That one must be from Thomas and I, though we didn't pick it out. "Beloved Friend" says another one. There is one in the shape of a giant heart. I wonder if that one is from my father, or one of the men my mother dated. I turn around because of the smell of them. For the rest of my life I will think dead bodies smell like flowers.



"The Reaper" / circa 1902 Fitz W. Guerin

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I try so hard to cry at the wake. Aunt Lisa does, standing next to me in the receiving line, kissing person by person on the cheek and whispering "Thankyouforcoming."

I think about the time our dog got hit by a car and we had to put her to sleep. I think of the part in *Charlotte's Web* when Wilbur says goodbye to Charlotte. I even think about what life would be like without my mother. Nothing. Not one tear.

The blonde girl from next door comes. She is wearing a black cocktail dress and strappy black heels. She is crying so hard her mother has to hold her up by the arm. I try to think of at least one time she'd met my mother, but I couldn't. What a bitch.

She kneels down in front of my mother's casket, crosses herself and closes her eyes. I can see up her dress. She stays like that for a second, praying. She's probably praying for new lip gloss or perkier boobs. When she stands, she smoothes her dress and sighs.

My brother kisses her on the mouth. Aunt Lisa kisses both her cheeks and hugs her with one arm, dabbing her eyes "Thankyouforcoming."

When she gets to me, I put both arms around her and say "Thankyouforfuckingmybrother." She doesn't even hear me.

Jessica is here. She's been in my class since first grade. I wonder how all these people knew. She stands in line with the rest of them, waiting to see my mother like she was some attraction at a fair. Jessica isn't crying. She patiently looks at the collage of pictures between the flowers. Jessica smiles when she sees me, and then catches herself and looks away.

When her turn comes to kneel in front of my mother and pretend to pray, she looks panicked. She pulls her sister's hand. "Do I have to?" she mouths. Her sister pushes her ahead.

There are daughters that get manicures with their mothers, daughters that scream and fight with them over boyfriends and expensive clothes. There are daughters that call their mothers to tell them they are sleeping at so-and-so's house. There are daughters that cry when they see their mother's cold body laid out in a casket. But here, in this funeral home, on a Thursday night, there are no daughters at all.

BABYFAT

-- Claudia Smith

MAN IS TRYING TO MYSPACE HER. He looks like her father, but not exactly. His online name is The Ancient Mariner. He has a red moustache, and music, all ballads about people lost at sea. It could be her father, the picture is blurry, reminding her of the twenty-something women who take pretty pictures of themselves in mirrors, blurred, at odd angles.

He's in there, a little square, for days and then she friends him and he writes her. She checks to see if he is online. He is. He has six hundred and ninety six friends. He says, You are who I think you are, aren't you?

She writes back. She says, who do you think I am?

It's Wednesday night, which means drinks with the librarians. She is a library assistant, and they are her friends, sort of. She might move to New York. They talk about it, about how they are not what people expect. But, she thinks, they really are. They are laughing because Trish is wearing a tight tee-shirt she made herself. It unzips. It says, I'm All About Easy Access.

She gets very drunk, and the other librarians drift away. All they've had is beer, and there's class tomorrow. She tells a man in bicycle shorts her name. She says, "I think my father is trying to fuck me."

The man says, "That isn't a very good line."

One of the librarians takes her to the diner across the street. They drink black coffee.

"You look like someone who sleeps with stuffed animals. I mean that as a compliment," she tells the woman, whose name is Lorelei.

"You're much funnier when you're sober," Lorelei tells her. "Drink your coffee."

Yesterday, she'd thought the most interesting thing about Lorelei was her name, and her haircut. Now, she thinks Lorelei is very wise. Lorelei offers her a cigarette and she takes it, even though this is a smoke-free city now and she doesn't even smoke. It feels good to maybe have a friend. Lorelei is plump the way her father would have called babyfat sexy, and her hair is the color of sherry, with bangs cut in zig-zags across her forehead. She wears hand-knit hotpants.

They split a cab fare back. Turns out her maybe-friend only lives a few blocks away.

"You should watch what you say to people," Lorelei says. "Not everyone wants to protect you, you know."

Before going to bed, she walks around the apartment complex. People are on their balconies, laughing, smoking, drinking their beer. She can hear an ice maker, and a small dog yelping. Fall snaps at her bare arms and legs. The stars are too bright, they hurt her eyes.

She doesn't go to work the next day. The man who may or may not be her father says he would like to meet women with medium to low self esteem. He has sent her another message. It says, that wasn't me. This is. Talk to me. His profile picture has changed now to a picture of Britney Spears looking sad and pretty. She's wearing a little brown hat. There are posts from other women, some slightly younger than herself. One says, Meet me behind the Diamond Shamrock you know what I'm talking about Blackbeard. Another says, Your song is sweet and soulful. It touched me.

She posts a comment. It says, This man has poor hygiene, and he does not bother to wash his hands after going to the bathroom. He is a landlubber.

She changes the background of her profile to a softly lit pink. She drinks a pot of coffee, feels her heart go pit-pat, pit-pat. The last time she saw him, long ago, they got stoned and he called her little Pete. She wasn't sure what he meant. Peat moss? But it could have been something he'd called someone else, and he forgot. Their kiss was slurpy and his laugh was broken, brittle crumblies. When she goes back to check, he is no longer her friend.



It Was Only Two Months

-- Carrie Spell

FTER ROBERT STOPPED CALLING, I figured it was my fault. I felt like I was just along for a short ride. We met at a party where I watched him from across the room, thinking he looked like a long, sharp needle.

Later, at the buffet, he turned to me and asked if I liked computers. I was plopping a spoonful of dip on my plate.

"They're okay," I said. "I have a brand new one."

My computer was the newest kind, still in its box—with a DVD burner, flat-screen monitor, and quadraphonic speakers. I felt like I was rambling, telling him about it, sounding like a blurb from a Dell catalogue, but he seemed interested, and, after the party, we ended up back at my apartment because he said he could help me set it up.

It was two in the morning and this somehow agreed with him. He clicked around for a while, helped me install a few things. He did a kind of shuffle dance when it connected to the internet for the first time. I imagined the neighbors below, hearing the ceiling creak and thinking, "I didn't know anyone lived up there." My cat sniffed at his shoes and turned her head to me, anxious about all the excitement.

Robert and I ended up fooling around. I was quiet about it, steady, but Robert kept moving around, switching positions, getting into it. He kept surprising me.

Four days later he called and asked if I wanted to go to an antique show with him. I thought it sounded great and said I'd go and thanks for asking.

"I collect antique pocket watches," he said when he picked me up. He showed me a watch he had—it was tarnished silver with an elaborate M on the cover. On the back was an inscription in tiny, spidery script that read, Presented to Mayor Francis McDougal at the banquet given in his honour at the Russell House by his Ottawa friends and admirers, Wednesday evening January 30th, 1901.

Robert told me he'd researched the mayor and found out he was notoriously corrupt.

"Wow," I said, and probably sounded dumb.

When we got to the antique show, Robert picked up watch after watch, staring at some of them for more than fifteen minutes, talking about the quality of the gears inside, the different manufacturers, the countries where they originated. He talked fast and was friendly with all the vendors. Some of them knew his name.

I didn't say much, just nodded my head and wished I could seem enthusiastic. After we left, we got milkshakes at Baskin Robbins and I invited him back to my apartment.

We walked in, and I flipped on the lights, and he said, "It's very clean in here. I noticed it the first time—your carpet looks like it just got put in. My place is a cluttered mess with all the stuff I collect."

"The carpet's old," I said. "It's been here since I moved in three years ago. I just vacuum a lot because I like the way the marks look on the carpet."

Robert and I fooled around again, and it seemed messy but good, arms and legs and lips everywhere. After he left, I noticed how bare my apartment was. I didn't have any posters or art on the walls, no bookcases full of books or coffee tables with stacks of magazines. Just a boom box in the corner, a brass lamp on the side table, a small couch against the wall.

Robert called me a couple of days later.

"The Braves are in town for spring training," he said. "Want to go? I love baseball." I'd never been to a game so I went and had a pretty good time and wondered why I'd never gone before.

We ended up dating for about two months, and in that time we went on a five mile bike ride, ate at a fondue restaurant, watched a figure-skating competition, and drove a half hour away to Cape Canaveral to watch the space shuttle launch. I'd never done any of it before.

Robert had a guitar in the bedroom and once I asked him if he would play it for me. He sat up all that night, playing the guitar and singing Pete Townshend songs with his soft voice. Everything felt new. And good.

After he stopped calling, I wasn't angry and I thought a lot about him. About once or twice a day, in fact, something would come to my mind that reminded me of him, which was more than I thought about a lot of people in my life—even people I'd known since childhood.

I sat on the loveseat in my apartment, late at night under the dim lamp, looking at the smooth carpet, and wanted to telephone Robert, ask him to fill his drawers with me, to play me like his guitar, to look and look and look at me, the way he did with his pocket watches, and—just sometimes—to think of me.

The First Noel



-- Bobby Farouk



AME TABLE. SAME TABLECLOTH. The roses I'm trying to figure.

Her hair pulled back into a knot. I've seen that.

She called me. I didn't call her. Took the bus into the city. The Green Line here. She poured the whiskey and the wine.

Her side of the table. My side of the table. A vase of white roses between us.

The roses baffle me. I shouldn't be baffled. I am baffled.

The apartment a long hall with rooms coming off it. Against the wall, on the floor, by the door: my brown paper bag.

She asks about my dad. I tell her he shot the cat.

He killed Zippy? she says.

Zip ate one of the grey squirrels, I say. Zip made a mistake.

She sips her wine.

He really likes those squirrels, I say.

I try to be careful with my drink. My drink is my one drink. I enjoy the ice.

I don't know why I want to figure the roses.

On the wall above them is that print of the farmhouse at dusk. The downstairs lights are on. The trees are bare, and a stream runs off a pond like a shredded ribbon.

I know the spider plant over the kitchen sink. I know this chair. I know this glass. I know the framed prints of old Vogue covers in the narrow space above the cabinets.

I am in a smaller version of a previous life.

Tomorrow's a workday, I say.

Yes, she says.

Yes used to be some kind of word. I miss that word.

She leads me down the hall to the door and my brown paper bag. In her close-fitting suit jacket and wool skirt to just below the knees. In her skirt. I watch her move under her skirt.

I know that hair when it is undone.

White roses. Time goes on and I get dumber and dumber.

Outside I look into my brown paper bag under a streetlamp. On top is a cracked plastic Easter egg with my name painted on it.

I walk to the subway. I can hear the train under the street. Over that I hear a public speaker playing music. I hear: and still their heavenly music floats o'er all the weary world.

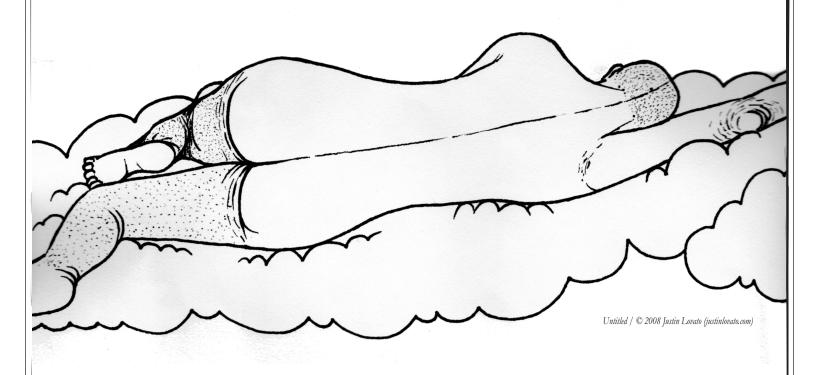
I guess it does.



Starling

-- Andrew Michael Roberts

e sticks a knife in me. I watch his face. Then I stick my knife in him. We're on the ground, each with our clenched eyes, each lying between two railroad ties. My shirt is filling with blood. 'Look at that bird,' he says. He points at an overhanging branch. It's an old sock dangling there. 'A starling,' I say. 'Here,' he says, something in his hand. 'I want you to have this.' It's my knife, he's cleaned it on his pants. I've known him longer than anyone. I lay my head on the rail. I want to sleep, but a whistle keeps blowing inside my brain. Time seems funny. Right now for all I know a planet somewhere is becoming a moon. I feel the knife slip from my hand. 'Look,' he says, 'the starling.' I look, and it's gone.



Family Reunion

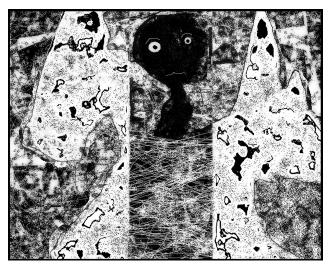


-- Elisa Gabbert & Kathleen Rooney

The future is now? You mean *now* now? I love you, but ouch. A punch in the arm, a swift kick in the pants—I can't say I like your idea of catching up. My life is still a sore subject, so how about we drop it. Will I ever stop getting carded or start liking it? Why must the desire for a) dessert & b) a higher power be childish or childlike? What keeps me up at night: the fact that aliens do exist, but they don't care for us as we care for them. Feign surprise? I'm actually surprised. I've been getting asked that question about 100x a day. I don't keep up w/ cinema; even suspended over a canyon, I can't suspend my disbelief. They said "Don't look down." I looked down. Cold water. Bright. Satisfying. I get freaked out when it seems like there are too many horizons, railroad tracks & an approaching vanishing point. This is where our ancestors went to die. Some view. Newsflash: status jockeys don't ride horses, & anyway, you're more of an antisocial climber. Trade you my color dreams for your black & white? Your tendency toward abstraction for my fear of heights. The blood pounded in my ears. I just pounded two beers. My tour guide said nobody loves a tourist, not even other tourists—obviously, I had a lot to learn, so I grounded myself. When Mom said she'd feed my pet rock until I got back from summer camp—was that a joke? What did Granny mean when she said I'd be the evil one if I had a twin? If I were a statue, I'd look like me, w/ a heart of stone & a spooky set of eyes. I can get mad. & even sadder. I used to think gray hair smelled like smoke.



good girlfriend never cries and when she sits it's in the splits because she's a gymnast, or used to be, or wants to be, or something, and this is why you love her. Because she's a go-getter. Because she picks you up in her Chevy Silverado and she keeps her tandem bicycle in the back, and a blanket, and she knows the shortcut to the ravine. In my town there are no ravines. In my town they named the street that runs through the viaduct under the train tracks Covered Bridge Road, and I believe this to be intentionally misleading. One time I told this to a friend, but all she said was, Is that the end of the story? Was that even a story? It wasn't the end, but I didn't like her tone so I said yes, all sarcastic, and then I stopped returning her phone calls. A good girlfriend waits up for you when you're out starting fires. A good girlfriend would help you steal a car. In other words, if it means buying a blonde wig and a fake I.D. and never going back to Sioux Falls, never looking back over her shoulder at what could or might have been for fear she'll turn to a pillar of salt, even if it means living in sin in Tijuana, okay, yes, sure, I will help you steal that car. Because I remember when you asked me to help you love me, and I think this is what you meant. For nineteen years we were like two ants from different hills whose paths would never cross because it was not predestined in the stars, but now you ask how long I'd wait if you were in prison and I hold out my arms to indicate that I love you as much as polar bears love ice floes because there aren't enough anymore and the polar bears are drowning.



Wings of Garbage' / © 2008 Peter Schwartz (www.sitrahabra.com)

Universalism

-- Leigh Stein



I didn't even know what a chlorofluorocarbon was until I met you. When I was a young girl in Sunday school at the Universalist Church we often made Native American drums to pound the rhythms of our hearts' secret desires, but sometimes we made macaroni jewelry, and in the spring the cicadas came we got snow shovels and cleared the shells from the sidewalks under the old elms, singing, Let beauty, truth, and good be sung, through every land, by every tongue. I remember Tyler found a live one and plucked its wings and was reprimanded by the same woman who told me when I asked what I should believe in that I could believe in "anything." I found out later that what she meant was that universalism means God loves me so much that he wouldn't create me if He thought I was unsalvageable, but at the time I thought, okay, of course I believe in Beatrix Potter and Millard Fillmore and trees, but what if I grow up and decide that insects have no souls; what if I grow up to be the kind of girl who throws away the drums she made and disregards the law and finds herself in the backseats of cars with someone's hand in her hair and she likes it so much she decides to become a girl who asks for such a thing. What congregation would open their arms and their hearts to her? Where could she go to learn the songs she'd have to know before she could even go to where the congregation who was going to open their arms to her met each week? And which of these stories will I tell my children? Will I tell them to believe in anything or will I specify, will I buy them butterfly nets, will I buy them rackets, will I dream at night that they're taken from me, will I teach them to swim or hire someone or drop them in the water and see if they drown? Maybe they'll walk. Maybe I'll have no children. Maybe I'll miscarry and take up oil painting and brew iced tea in the sun while you are out collecting cattle skulls and when you come home to me we'll stare at the map on the wall and throw darts.

Smoking Crack with My Mother



-- Daniel Bailey

7 ou don't smoke crack in real life do you? I believe I do not. What about you mother? Never. It's disgusting and I can barely think about anything but punching through dams and drowning myself in an entire city's water supply but not dying you know what I mean? I know mother exactly what you mean. It's burying your face in the corpse of someone who isn't dead yet, maybe anyone with any color hair. Quit trying to act like this is real life son. It isn't. I will never smoke crack with you and you will never smoke crack because you are afraid of waking up without your kidneys or allergies because you know I would steal them—your kidneys. I need them son. I know Mother. You need them to fall out of my body but why did you say allergies? You don't want those. But son I want to take them from you. I have listened to you too many times and it hurts my ears almost as much as your throat. Mother you are a good mother. If you truly needed kidneys I would give you mine in a heartbeat. You would wrap them in your heartbeat son? I would Mother. I am glad we smoked crack in this poem.



Maddy's Bakelite Wristband

-- Jasmine Dreame Wagner

Maddy's friend Katie took a bus to New Mexico, had a breakdown

in a Motel 6, wouldn't check out. You drove out to save her, didn't

you, Maddy, and didn't she smash in the windshield of your mother's car?

For a few years, I called you every Father's Day to see how you were,

your father left when you were a baby and I could imagine you driving farther

and farther west. The summer we opened the windows to listen

to the thunderstorms. The summer we slept on linoleum tile, the only

thing in your apartment that was ice cold. Your favorite fruit was

pomegranate. You swept the beauty parlor floor for cash. Did they

perm your hair into wire-ring curls or did the lightning do that?

7



"Umbrella Hair" / © 2008 Chelsea Martin (jerkethics.com)



Fietions

-- Samuel Wharton

n the story of the city there is no city in the story of the Filipino fisherman's son a garden of ruined picnic tables lingers

behind a scrim of trees splinters sharp enough to pierce to heartwood here is a river-story: floodplains spread along the line of time

alluvium: a swelling in the world whatever is not washed over is left right where you left it because people move more like particles of water

than anything else there is a natural flow to our unnatural world brick by brick buildings are offered up: a prayer there are unseen threads

everywhere the banks where all the flotsam goes in my story of sadness someone falls asleep before the tv screen bathed in silken light

closed eyes look inhuman that's the end of it once dreamt a thing cannot be undreamt though every said word wants its own unsaying

in the story of the parking meters emptiness is a failure of purpose heaviness is a silver tinkling rain filling up their heads because the hours

of the night are not empty because one person's way of framing the problem (there are too many words & not enough actions) is not the same

as another's (the words crowd out the things themselves) sometimes a crowd will drift and spread like gas filling an empty

container in the story of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas every sickened tree is worth saving once a rash of poisoned oaks spread

across the South under this one Stephen Austin signs a treaty with the natives thinks: Texas's gonna be so big and now Texas is so big hey

there goes your story on immigrant populations I say send 'em all back send the French back send the Canadians back send the English back

in the story of Bacall & Bogart To Have & Have Not a sea of ineptitude between them the sulfur-sheened dressing room births a turbulent new world

I imagine it was like floodwater—that mounting mutinous sentiment the story goes like this: they plant phlox for its marvelous magentas while daisies

push up between cement slabs — not a dozen yards away a hobo holds out his hand the story goes like this: — in the story of the story — a thunderclap accompanies

every climax in the story of the city the city grows from a seed of no city this is the heart of the story of the story: the machine of history has no history

has no meaning except as a river rushing away with our things



N©Ö [eight]



POEM for the Long Fourth of July WEEKEND

-- Patrick Duggan

There's a homeless man sitting in a recliner in the middle of the street kicking his feet at passing cars while the barista at Papa Toby's strums his guitar and his voice is so intensely hollow his lyrics have to be true.

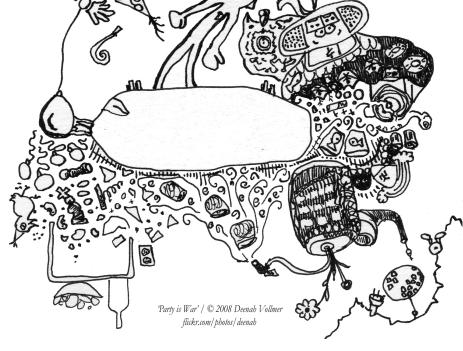
Mark resigned himself a long time ago to the fact he'd never have an at-bat in a major league game. Sam took a drink of his Newcastle and looked out the window into the hot Boston summer. He hadn't yet. I'm watching the Red Sox on TV and remembering. Sam is in Chicago now, I'm in San Francisco, and I haven't really spoken to Mark in three years. I miss the feel of Boston, but it's a city of memory and mason work. I remember two-for-one burger nights at Charlie's Kitchen. I remember a snowball fight with Beth Steidle on Washington Street during the first blizzard of the season.

Early July, 22nd Street in the Mission, bored, thinking about Willie Nelson. I'm, like, nine kinds of pathetic. Sarah touched my elbow and my cactus of a heart shook and shriveled. I'm half deaf after last night's vodka tonics, World Cup soccer, and punk rock side show. The sound echoed around my closed mouth, down my throat, and

fought for any way to escape. I remember, after that snowball fight with Beth, we made hot chocolate mixed with Rumpleminz.

Elliot told me today he still goes to church, like he was ashamed, like to me church is narcotics anonymous. I'm not much interested in bones or what goes on top of them. I told myself that once, like it was so profound. I don't know why I remember that, but last night I bruised my spine doing something involving poor road conditions and protected sex. Ame says I'm always on this one unbending level. I used to take bourbon shots to fight that level. That level is caustic and constricting. That level doesn't unbutton jeans and breath in wet denim air. There's a furious disconnect between wants and the pockets my hands seem to rest in.

"I got a weak heart," Myron says with his hand on his chest. "So do you, I seen your



eyes when you were talkin' to the waitress." It's more true than most things. They say when you get sober you have the maturity of the age you started drinking at. Twenty four with the emotions of a thirteen year old and the tired legs of a lifelong laborer. They don't tell you that your long term memory will be a shredded photo album, and your short term memory will be the single most embarrassing thing in your life. I'm twenty five now. Running in place sucks. I reinjured my back at Critical Mass; roving hordes of philosopher kings and pedal monsters.

I remember Metropolis, a ghost town Nora and I passed in Nevada. Cigarette smoke rose off the tables and whipped across I-80 in those days. Metropolis was an archway in the desert with nothing for twenty miles in any direction. The second largest city in the state subsumed in sand. Uncle Rick told me not to make the mistake he did, he married for love. Aunt Judy told me not to make the mistake she did, she thought he had money. I remember making tombstones out of sheet rock for Halloween when I was a kid. I remember Thanksgivings, and my grandfather coming over early to make the spiral ham, except he called it spiritual ham. I remember that.

The Ghost of Wells



-- Alex Burford

could be the/an architect made of language or the fire trapped in the hum of circus tents,

like breathing back through. A fly-wheel in the ditch, roadside, big sun and crisp

starches of corn stalks. We are falling about work styles and behind the mutter

of button snaps and knee pops. If hands disintegrate begrudgingly. We can roll the

return. Fall into it. I could be the rust latch of your verbal, or I am the dome for which

you entangle bee sap and cardigan blues, i.e. sex, beer, shiny things, forgetting, red, the #4

Alice, also the #72. We are never to forget the oak notes concerning down shifting, go back,

try again. The trumpets under the hood-try settling up with ghosts. If not blue then what

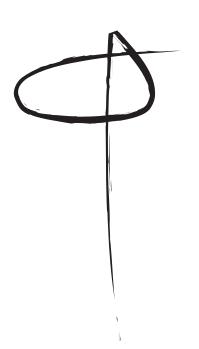
other color? Simple: change, remember, divide (pray). I am trying to say your name infinity

times. Sometimes definition—that comforts meaning. We remember dissatisfied Alphabits

in congress with beer. The trembling boredom of all things understandable i.e. flammable or

fluorescent. How dumb a sonnets itches. The nouns, asses kicked, in coffee shop disco slam lights...ughhh,

the shimmer of contextual blah blah. "Getting it" means falling in a well only to know its bottom.



LOVE S a translation of Ricardo Aleixo



-- K. Silem Mohammad

series of fragmentary beach parties we have no choice but to attend

a voice cries out loud and long this morning, we exist

ah my trick vibrating eyeballs, excuse me while I ruin this piano





from Spurious One-Man Lobotomy with Clipped Inquisition

-- written by Sean Kilpatrick & illustrated by Daniel St. George 2nd

761. Did he posture expression selectively?

HE STAINED HIMSELF ALONG WHAT PASSED FOR NIGHT UNTIL ARCHITECTURE WAS DEEMED BLASPHEMOUS.

8. Dressed up little slogans and named them boy?

Universe WAS THE BLINDFOLD OF HIS DECAPITATION.

11.5. And did he mistake the screaming for a marriage proposal?

HE FILLED A CARRIAGE WITH CALENDARS - A COLLECTIVE DIAPER.

I CREATE FOR MYSELF AND TO THE PUNCTUALITY OF HUMAN ROT - A MINOR SELF INJURIOUS CULTURE OF MY OWN ACCUMULATION. I KNOW, FOR INSTANCE, ENEMY MEANS ANYONE. I REFER TO THE MATING PROCESS.)

2. Why do you drink the hydrocephalic runoff of your loved ones?

THE COLOR OF MY HAND IS REALLY JUST A RADIO. MY RADIO IS RADIO-COLORED. I PUT IT.ON A TRAMPOLINE INSTEAD OF VOTING. BECAUSE I HAVE A BACKGROUND IN PORNOGRAPHY

47. Did you get your hysterectomy at Toys R Us?

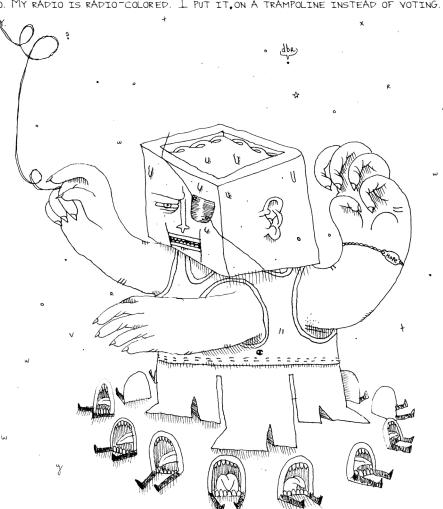
I MET A GIRL WHO DANCED LIKE A RARE DISEASE. SHE UNWOUND MASKING TAPE IN PLACE OF ANY DRUM. SHE WHISTLED LIKE A GRENADE IN BED. WE USED A STOVE TIMER. Now WE ARE IN LOVE; OUR BODIES NO LONGER REQUIRE FOOD.

28. Some girl's face convinces you to throw milk at a wall-is portraiture happening?

ANOTHER WHIFF OF SAINTHOOD MIGHT KILL THIS FLAVOR.

117. Is your life the mistake of a sob for laughter?

SEEMS LIKE A TECHNICAL PROBLEM OR MAYBE I AM LONELY.





COMMON RESULTS: MALE

You believed in corduroy pants.

You stole my waterbed with a syringe.

You spat tobacco in my ventriloquism.

You broke some ocean to build my gibbet.

You filed a lawsuit so I would hold your hand.

You mistook my high heels for a lawnmower.

You replaced the tires on my car with your

diaphragm.

Thirteen Stares



-- a series by Benjamin Buchholz

Thirteen Stares

allrat munching cinnabon in striped toe socks giggling your girlfriend to walk the potted plan length like hopscotch from Vicky's Secret to The Buckle and thereby avoiding stepping on the break your mother's back of the schoolnight eyelash aglitter kissing boys with folded triangular notes, O what do you remember from before your incarnations in Sicily and Kermanshah? Long, long to be looked at, girl, long giggling in your unsatisfied splendor, your quarterly reportdcards, your healthcare, xBox, jitterfinger, make toast and cut the crust off, walk to school unlooked-at and hankering for somehow to escape suburbanity. Know this: what you want in your secret heart of notice-me hearts is not what you might expect it to be, these thirteen stares and the wildboys who would flee from embarrassment at your growing ghost, such rapine beauty, America.

Alabama

f they ever invade, or say perhaps like Caesar across the Rubicon or Potomac armies turn messianic, I'd lay odds on Alabama as the last bastion of freedom, the sound of copper dropping in the spittoon, the bloodhound rocking chair howl, the kudzu, Alabama! butternut! —while in Connecticut, or Nevada, Alaska, new kings will come naked as the old to play similar games on the hardscrabble, seeking oil, the woodman's workglove now a mark of terror, a black-headband, a toothless jihad of secrethandshake, insignia, perhaps neighborhood meetings, cellar celebrations, Rotary as the guise of insurrection, graffiti coded on the T-72 to commemorate old ways while our children ask the soldiers guarding Wal-Mart and McDonald's to play baseball or give them water, bread, bic lighters, life.





No God

The place to find God is not, never has been, in the set of stacked Pentecostal folding chairs where the organ dustcover and orange jellybeans at Easter, or cleanliness, sidewalk router suburbia, clipped, fertilized lawns and sprinklers, conservative Oldsmobiles for gentle coffee and the body of Christ flat on the same tongue as adultery, Lo, beat the stolen hubcap of the Minister of Agriculture's Mercedes into a birdbath, there He is, find the Kuwaiti coin from the year of your anniversary, as if, striking in sunlight, the mold fits the one thing that ever fit you, her, and grass seeded on the lee of the dune, swept, root bare, smiling outside the girls' school where accidentally the squaddie hears them screaming at recess.

U.S. Education

tatistics show U.S. schools fail for fourth consecutive quarter teaching the fine art of beggardry, for the sympathy of dirt, Dirt Joe, unwashed, within 2.5 minutes of the HUMVEE's arrival barefoot across the expanse of day bleached desert with two sisters, Fatima, Farina, skipping from syringe to PVC pipe with a handful of Saddam dinars, gimme water mister, A+, kept dirty, candy, cute, please, 98th percentile on the standardized response of some hard-bitten team leader who believed implicitly in the smell of napalm in the morning before he arrived here, and in red white 'n blue, before tan, and in Sunday school, before touching death and beauty in the same sunset; then, after, after which, this girl, smiling, bewitched him, so he smuggles her beanie babies each Tuesday at noon, unable to explain at his homecoming picnic a sudden disgust with tickertape and the PTA.



see the full series at www.noojournal.com

Contributors' Notes

- Daniel Bailey is from Muncie, Indiana. His work has appeared or is forthcoming from Word Riot, Robot Melon, Smokelong, elimae, No Posit, No Colony, and other places. If you google Dan's name you can find his blog at 97percent.blogspot.com.
- BENJAMIN BUCHHOLZ is the author of the non-fiction book *Private Soldiers* from WHS Press, now nominated for the National Book Award by ForeWord Magazine. Work he published in 2007 has been nominated for the Pushcart, the Million Writers Award, and will be included in the anthology *Best of the Web* from Dzanc Press. He is a US Army Officer.
- A LEX BURFORD likes the smell of three birds. He lives in an apartment. He has a blog that no one reads: pandapandapandaalex.blog-spot.com. He will probably be the most famous person that you will ever know, but he co-edits *Pinch Pinch Press* and you can see more work in *Listenlight #15*.
- ATTIA CERATO is a young and willing free-lance illustrator from Turin, Italy. He loves drawing illustration for kids, magazines, t-shirts and many other things. Another passion of his is to travel around the world and meet interesting people. He has lived for a while in the US and New Zealand too. But only drawing makes him really happy. Reach him at mattiaceratoychs @hotmail.com or www.flickr.com/mattiacerato
- OAH CICERO has three books published, The Human War, The Condemned, and Treatise. He has been published at 3:AM Magazine, Black Ice, Identity Theory, Prague Literary Review and many other places.
- S TEPHAN CLARK lives in North Hollywood with his Russian wife, who keeps him extremely well fed. His fiction has been published by Ninth Letter, The Cincinnati Review, Fourteen Hills, Night Train, and the LA Weekly, among others. His creative non-

- fiction appears in the current issues of *Swink* and *Salt Hill*.
- New Hampshire, and received a BFA in photography & literature from Emerson College in Boston, and an MFA in writing from California College of the Arts in San Francisco. He is editor and cofounder, along with Elliot Harmon and Marcus Merritt, of *Idiolexicon*, and his poems and articles have appeared in numerous journals, including *Beeswax*, *Floating Holiday*, *Hazmat Review*, *Mirage*, *Monday Night Lit*, *Parthenon West Review*, *Traffic* and 26 Magazine.
- Tabe Durham lives in Northampton, MA. His writings have appeared at *Daytrotter, WordRiot, Crate* and *Expressionists*. He gives away free words and music at gather-roundchildren.com.
- R OBBY FAROUK lives in Vermont.
- LISA GABBERT is an editor of Absent. Her recent poems have appeared or will appear in Colorado Review, Diagram, Eleven Eleven, Meridian, Pleiades, Washington Square and other journals. A chapbook, Thanks for Sending the Engine, is available from Kitchen Press. She is also the author, with Kathleen Rooney, of Something Really Wonderful (dancing girl press, 2007), and That Tiny Insane Voluptuousness (Otoliths Books, 2008).
- ANIEL ST. GEORGE 2ND a.k.a. the artist formerly also known as AZ-Star78, is a painter currently living and working in Brooklyn. He has been an art director, designed his own line of clothing called Spiked Punch, and worked with the likes of StŸsssy, Typestereo, 111 Minna Gallery, Giant Robot and Jeremyville. His plans include creating installations and moving sculptures, which will allow the viewer to physically enter the realm of his experience, and printing limited edition silk screened art books.

- J.P. GRITTON works in the editorial department of the Seattle weekly Real Change. His poetry and fiction have appeared in Juked, Barnwood Magazine, Thieves Jargon, and Paradigm.
- OFELIA HUNT lives in the Pacific Northwest. She is the author of *My Eventual Bloodless Coup* (Bear Parade, 2007). Her story included is an excerpt from a forthcoming novel.
- DEAN KILPATRICK'S work has appeared or is forthcoming in Jacket, Forklift, Ohio, Lamination Colony, Mi-POesias and more. He is the author of books forthcoming from Six Gallery Press and Magic Helicopter Press.
- IM LAING grew up in Kent and studied illustration at Brighton University. Visit www.timlaing.co.uk for further artwork and contact details.
- OROTHEA LANGE was an influential American documentary photographer and photojournalist, best known for her Depression-era work for the Farm Security Administration.
- USTIN LOVATO'S work can be found at www.justinlovato.com.
- This is Stupid I Love You. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Pequin, No Posit, Loveless and elsewhere. Visit the best site ever at jerkethics.com.
- SILEM MOHAMMAD is a mediumsized woodland creature with an advanced degree in the liberal arts.
- .M. PATRICK lives in Connecticut with a photographer who collects animal bones and an engineer who looks great in a leisure suit. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Night Train, The Summerset Review and Smokelong Quarterly, among others. She can be found online at www.jmpatrick.org.

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ATHLEEN ROONEY is an editor of Rose Metal Press and the author of Reading with Oprah. Her collection Oneiromance (an epithalamion) is forthcoming from Switchback Books, and her collaborative collection (with Elisa Gabbert), That Tiny Insane Voluptuousness, is available from Otoliths Books. A collaborative chapbook (also with Gabbert), Something Really Wonderful, is available from dancing girl press.

PETE SCHWARTZ is a painter, poet and writer. He's also an associate art editor for *Mad Hatters'* Review. His artwork can be seen all over the Internet but specifically at: www.sitrahahra.com.

CLAUDIA SMITH'S stories have appeared in several literary journals

and anthologies. Her chapbook, *The Sky Is a Well and Other Shorts*, was featured in Powell's Daily Dose, and was recently reprinted in *A Peculiar Feeling of Restlessness* (Rose Metal Press). More about Claudia and her work can be found at www.claudiaweb.net.

Work in Black Warrior Review, Beloit Fiction Journal, McSweeney's, Georgetown Review, and many other magazines. She has taught creative writing and literature courses at The University of Texas-Pan American for the last two years and will begin teaching at Auburn University this fall. She has served as an Assistant Editor of the Mississippi Review.

EIGH STEIN is the author of many chapbooks, including How to Mend a Broken Heart with Vengeance (Dancing Girl Press, June '08). Other work has appeared, or is forthcoming, in Bat City Review, h-ngm-n, Diagram, No Tell Motel, and MiPOesias. Originally from Chicago and briefly in Albuquerque, she now lives in Brooklyn and works for a comic book publisher.

DETTERI SULONEN is an amateur photographer and writer from Fin-

land. He started shooting at the age of six, and pontificating somewhat before that. His home on the Web is www.prime-junta.net.

DEENAH VOLLMER'S work can be found at flickr.com/photos/dee nah.

ASMINE DREAME WAGNER'S work has previously appeared in the Colorado Review, Indiana Review, Seattle Review, North American Review, Verse, MiPOesias, La Petite Zine, 32 Poems, Kulture Vulture and others. A reading of her three-part poem, "Towing and Melting," was set to music and accompanied by a series of pen and ink drawings in a multimedia performance and week-long exhibition at PS2 Gallery in Long Island City, New York.

Samuel's wharton poems have been published in *The Concher, Death Metal Poetry, elimae, foam:e, Open Letters Monthly, Otoliths,* and Redivider. He is the author of a chapbook, Welcome Home (NeOPepper Press, 2007)—in which "Fictions" also appears—& the editor of the online poetry journal Sambuck (which he encourages you to submit to).

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- -- You won't be in California anymore. This will be Kharkiv, Ukraine. And so you'll eat the beef and the lamb and even the occasional piece of chicken, despite all the hidden camera footage you've seen ... **Notes From an Underground,** *Stephan Clark, page 4*
- -- Everyone was so hungry they chewed on the uncooked potatoes in the night. **Two Hard Workers,** *Noah Cicero, page 7*
- -- We could save the cows, couldn't we? Together? We could invade cow-farms with semi-trucks and steal the cows and drive the cows to Alaska or Canada. Some place safe and unexpected. Belize? from Today and Tomorrow, Ofelia Hunt, page 11
- -- He looks like her father, but not exactly. His online name is The Ancient Mariner. **Babyfat,** *Claudia Smith, page 14*
- -- It's my knife, he's cleaned it on his pants. I've known him longer than anyone. I lay my head on the rail. **Starling,** *Andrew Michael Roberts, page 17*
- -- A good girlfriend waits up for you when you're out / starting fires. A good girlfriend would help you steal / a car.

Universalism, Leigh Stein, page 19

-- Quit trying to act like this is real life son. / It isn't. I will never smoke crack with you and you / will never smoke crack because you are afraid.

Smoking Crack With My Mother, Daniel J. Bailey, page 20

-- If they ever invade, or say perhaps like Caesar across the Rubicon or Potomac armies turn messianic, I'd lay odds on Alabama as the last bastion of freedom.

Alabama, Benjamin Buchholz, page 28