



the plum creek review
spring 2014

THE PLUM CREEK REVIEW
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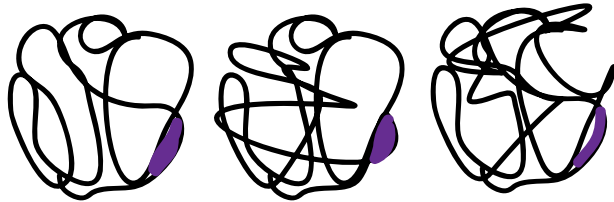
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**PLUM CREEK
REVIEW**

50th Anniversary

Welcome to the 50th Anniversary edition of *The Plum Creek Review*, Oberlin's longest running literary and arts magazine. PCR prides itself on being an inclusive space for all forms of art and writing—we accept anything and everything, from sonnets to power point presentations. PCR is published once a semester and, with each new edition, continues to evolve and expand into new and exciting territories. We operate under a democratic system, where each staff member's vote holds equal weight. In this way, we are able to create a magazine that is representative and all encompassing of Oberlin's creative culture. All submissions are reviewed by staff anonymously to encourage unbiased conversation; respectful dialogue is key, and every submission is treated equally. On behalf of our entire staff, we are honored to share the magazine with you yet again, and are grateful for the immensely talented students who continue to submit their work to *The Plum Creek Review*. Enjoy!

With love, sweat, tears, and oxford commas,

Ryann Eastman & Zack Knoll
Co-Editors-in-Chief

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front: *Mary Catherine* by Mimi Leggett, back: *tracings - one* by Sarah Rose Lejeune

Everyone I Loved at a Gas Station in Utah

Paris Gravley

I. 11:13 am

Two seats wide, Ham Hands
eats a foot-long at the corner
table. Cheetos stain blue
jeans a Nevada orange.

II. 2:48 pm

At pump four, Mr Cap pulls the nozzle
from his metal truck just as Legs gets out on
the other side. She's yelling about walking
home, comes around the front to
push him. He slings gas near

her jean skirt, a couple drops hit,
sliding down towards her bare feet. *Oh,*
fuck. She looks down, looks up.

They stand still, grinning at each other,
like a couple of bank robbers at noon.

III. 7:22 pm

Three fat boys lick ice
cream cones the color of Pat
Nixon's skirts, melting. Their
mustaches will come in early
and fragile, prized like the dog tags
their dad's gave them.

IV. 9:10 pm

An arrow near the
exit points towards the highway.
Trucks wheeze by like

bitter great uncles.

The meridian shakes with
topless Oleander. The headlights
stare, shameless.

V. 11:17 pm

At the cash register, a trucker
winks while he puts a dollar bill
into my tip jar. The door rings as he lets
it fall behind him. I watch, growing richer, gently.

Texaco

Nikki Johnson



Easter

Ryan Murphy

"Please, tell me again why we must dye the eggs
if once God did it himself."

We roll them over in the bright vinegar. We make
sure each is as red as the other, then we peel

away their sanguine shells like paint for the membrane
beneath, smooth as resurrection.

"Don't ask me about that," you say, your hand
waving me away with my father's Catholicism.

You know that you're not spreading God thin.
The wine-colored liquid trickles into your cracked

winter hands and makes them pink as my skin.
Easter came early this year. Always you say

my name alone would be enough to make
my grandfather roll over in his grave, no matter

how many wind-rolled stones I lay atop it. He, like them,
will never sit still enough for you. Now, your mother

stands in the doorway with that man from
the bookstore. She smiles in her survived

way, proffering low-fat desserts and the name
Bill. I finally know of the seven years in which she

cracked the world in half, and I can only
be thankful that you are showing me how to peel

things away gradually. Mother, you have become
a wheel. You have seen your boulders rolled aside

for coal, a husband who held your blistered hand
like another holy wafer. Now our deft fingers rub oil

and fresh rosemary onto a raw lamb, both of us
feeling the body's presence, the full tomb.

growing pains - four

Sarah Rose Lejeune



plexiglass dry point prints on paper, oil based black & white ink

The Couple III

Zack Knoll



Arb Study, Part I

Dyeemah Simmons



film photograph

Speaking from the Sea

Alana Reibstein

She is writing to you from the sea. The middle of the sea where there is no land in sight. She is going to tell you about people, even though she's only seen them from the sea, on a boat, swimming, on a raft. She is going to tell you about the way their feet look in the water, because she can't tell you about how they look on land.

In the sea people look young and they always seems to need a friend, or love. In the sea everyone looks romantic. Except for those people who can't handle the sea—those people look ugly and snotty and the most unlike me.

The people that come here are usually looking for something. Nobody is wearing a pink bikini with white ruffles and polka dots. Everyone is wearing gear. I used to live in a sea that sparkled right up next to soft, warm sand. So I know the difference between bikinis and gear. I know the difference between its clunky metal, its rectangular ways and the camera lens, and coolers full of beer and sandwiches. The people that come here look concentrated. Romantic and concentrated and never wanting to go back.

She is going to tell you about the other women who live with her, the sea women. They are actually pretty similar to the women that live on land. She is going to tell you about being born, and how she felt anonymous. Please try to be sensitive. It may be hard for you to understand. She'll tell

you all about what it's like to feel the daily pressures of womanhood. You may think she's lying because it sounds so familiar, just like your life, but what she says she has written, and so it is the truth.

I live with all sorts of women. Some are small, some are large, some are thick, others are thinner, some are red in color others are closer to yellow, some have all the colors that you've seen, plus some more that I've seen that you wouldn't know about. Still, the women look like those you've seen before. You know those women, those women who when you look at them you can just tell, instantly, whether they like the sun or the rain, the winter or summer. Then there are those autumn women, those women are the best, those women are the real women. Then the day women and the night women. Anyway, you've seen all these women before, even if down here they appear in different colors. They all have one of those energies I just talked about, one of those looks in their eyes.

They either walk like princesses or like queens, or they walk like they've got claws that could explode from their hips at any moment. Well, we say swim down here, and we call our hips something different, I am just trying to put this into terms you will understand. Because, really, our women are quite the same as yours. I know, it's hard to believe, the women that shriek when rubbing thighs with our women are really quite the same—thinking of the same men, grocery lists, the weather. Our women are all mothers, cooking in the kitchen, bathing in the light shining through the water. I will tell you more about the women later because I think it may interest you to know. And sometimes it is good to feel a little bit frightened. But now, I'll tell you about my birth, my lonely baby years.

I was born on a rainy day in May when the wind was howling and the air saltier than ever. Air can only be so salty for newborns to stand, as the water has enough salt in it to hold you in one place forever. I will say

my birth was quite difficult because of all the salt. I didn't come swimming out as easily as my brothers and sisters did, who stayed inside my mother until the air cleared up, as you are supposed to do. If I had waited with them, as I was supposed to, I wouldn't have seen quite as much trouble. So I was lonely as a baby. There were all my sisters, all 20 of them, and then there was me. The salty oldest child. They didn't respect me very much for not waiting. Sometimes I wish I would've just waited. We don't respect you, they all say to me.

So childhood was hard and being a woman was tough luck too, especially when your 20 sisters were being women all together and decided not to share any of their knowledge with you. When the water around me turned red for the first time my sisters told me it did that so I could bathe in it special. They told me this was the age when you start to get especially smelly, and because of that you've got to take a special bath with a special red soap that really gets the stink out. You've got to take a special bath, one sister said. With a special red soap, another sister said. To really get the stink out, said another.

My mother saw me scrubbing in there and scolded me to get out. She said that wasn't funny and how could I not know better. That wasn't very funny, she said. How could you not know better, she said. I said she never taught me. She never had. She didn't think she had to.

Don't you all know these types of mothers? The kind that really yell and hurt. Don't you all think you are these kinds of mothers? The kind you are trying to avoid. You are always the mother you try to avoid. I'm a mother of many and certainly not the kind I wish to be. My children grew up without me because I followed a person once, but that's a story I'll get to when I'm asked to tell it.

She'll tell you the story about giving birth to her sea children. The story might not be true. There is really no way of knowing, but I've always wanted to hear it.

There isn't much of a story here. I became pregnant when it was my time. I was one of those autumn women who I mentioned, so it was mid-October. Luckily, it wasn't a particularly salty day. None of my children waited, they were all very well behaved and came out just like that. I was by the big rock near the grocery store when it happened. The day was made for blue and red, as most autumn days are. I sat down and all of a sudden there they were, clouding around me, already asking me for everything. So I swam away and they followed. They could already swim. It's hard to believe they are my children. Of course I love them all very much.

That husband of mine, father of theirs, they never met. He wandered around the sea with the rest of the men. They usually wandered in packs of four or five, never staying in the kitchen, the house, the town. They floated on their little legs, never cooked a thing. It was salt for every meal, mothers for desert. They always made you feel so sweet.

Now she is going to tell you about the salt. She told you a little bit about it, but it is important that you know more. Her story here is a cautionary one. One for you, if you are someone who doesn't wait much.

The salt down here varies in size. Some pieces are so microscopic, not even the fanciest scientists who visit here could tell you how big they are. Then there are some grains that are so great in size they are about the size of your head, or seven of our heads all pushed together, if you can picture that. So the salt can be small or big. It can also be in the air. I mentioned this when I told you the story of my birth. When it is in the

air it is usually big, that's why it is such a problem when it's in the air. You can get stuck really bad up there. That's why you are supposed to wait to be born if it's an especially salty day, as it was on the day of my birth. But I have never waited much for things. One day, I didn't wait for the air to clear before doing a backflip out of the water. I got stuck up there, mid-flip, and that's when I saw the person.

She'll tell you about abandoning her children, now, but only if you really want to hear it. She's not happy to tell it but she realized she's going to have to tell it anyway so might as well get it over with. She has to tell it. It is the story about following the person.

I don't want to tell this story so I will tell it brief, because I have to. This story is about following the person. Like I said, I was stuck in the air, in the salt when I saw the person sitting right there on this little wooden thing. The voice of the sea spoke, asking him to tell his story. But the person didn't. The person did not see me, either, for he had all kinds of metal devices everywhere, so by accident he kicked me so hard he released me from the salt's grip. I was in love. I attached myself to his ankle, not waiting to be in love, and followed him to find out what he would do. He didn't realize, I guess that's just the kind of person he is. Someone who doesn't realize.

She was young and restless and will tell you all about this and what happens.

I suppose I was young and restless and I followed the person higher and higher up into the air. I was fine with

the air but it kept getting saltier and saltier and I couldn't do anything about it, but cough so loud the person suddenly realized me. The person got so excited he shoved all the salt he had into me until there was so much salt it was clear that it was only going to get saltier from here until it exploded salt and I was so asphyxiated I had to stay up there with the person, this husband of mine.

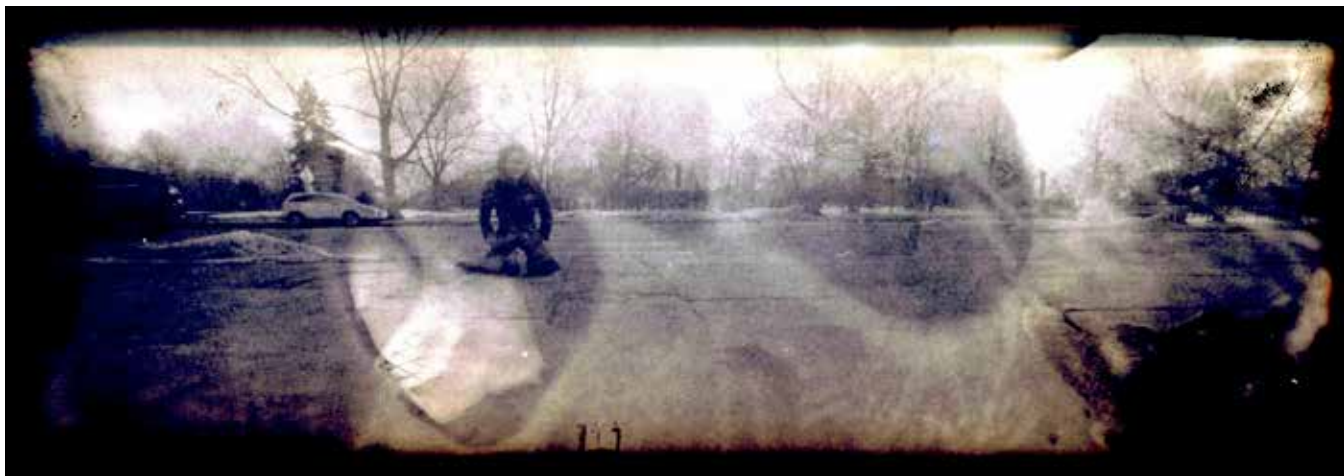
This husband stayed in one place, stood on his long legs, cooking me dinner. String beans or asparagus? He asked me. I liked the dinner he cooked, the way he stayed in the kitchen, in the house, in the town. I liked the way I stayed in bed. I stayed there so long I had more children. I was in the bathtub when these children came out, just three of them. They came one by one, with long pauses in between. You'd think they'd get bored and crawl away, this whole labor thing taking so long. But they clouded around me, asking me everything, already. I got up from the tub and went back to the bed, these children crawling after me, with their hips. I realized I had stayed too long. I was no longer in love.

So I found my way back home to the sea, missing its blues and reds, its voices. Missing my sea children the way I did. But my sea children weren't there anymore. They must've gone somewhere else, to a different part of the sea. Or maybe they followed a person, too. But probably not, because they would've known how to wait better. Someone must have taught them who wasn't me. And that's how I abandoned both sets of my children. And that's the way to be the worst mother.

She is writing to tell you about being the worst mother you can be. She doesn't really want to talk about it, but she is speaking from the sea, and there are so few that will. She is telling you about people, looking romantic while she speaks, and never wanting to go back.

Ragdoll

Celia Keim



Stare Back

Celia Keim



pinhole photograph

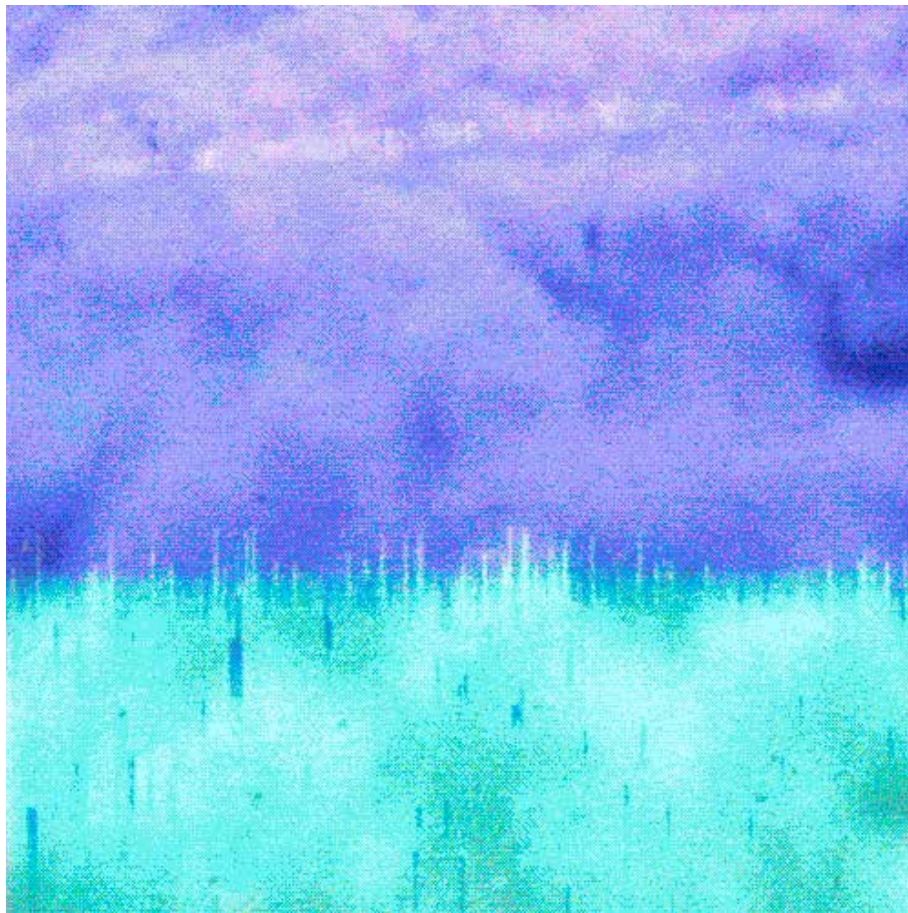
Nyotaimori at the Oberlin Inn

Jolene Dert



Untitled

Oliver Levine



digital mixed media

Switchblade

Krista LaFentres

Sometimes I remember how my father once cut
the stretch-marked skin of my mother's hip open
one summer night with a cheap pocket knife
but, when asked, he couldn't remember
anything at all. It was if his anger
had blinded or wiped his mind clean.

At work he cut expensive steaks and cleaned
fish for minimum wage. More than once, he cut
the pads of his fingertips down to bone. Angry
and meat red, his index finger hung wide open
until doctors stitched it up. My mother, remembering,
always said *You got no business around knives.*

When I was little, my father used his hunting knife
to sharpen my pencils when I broke all the points clean
off. *Don't press so damn hard*, he'd laugh. I never remembered
and my drawings were always littered with bright cuts
in purple and green, old drawings peeking through open
blinds. I drew hard out of excitement. Not anger.

Once he hit a dog and it woke, growling and angry
after he leapt from the car to help. It sunk the dull knives
of its teeth into his pinky and left the tip hanging open,
nothing but red flesh for nail. My father said it was a clean
fight. *I'd be pretty pissed too if someone cut*
me down with a car, he says each time he remembers.

I ask him sometimes if he can remember
the time my little sister marched, pantless and angry,
from her room, refusing to go to school until he cut
the legs off her too-long blue jeans. The knife
he used (we had no scissors) slid cleanly,
sliced denim and his freckled leg open.

In summer, we left our fishing lines open
overnight with the bullfrogs and remembered
them in the morning. We crawled from the tent to clean
the lines. I once caught a soft-shell turtle, the hook an angry
pushpin on white flesh. My father always swung his knife
down on water moccasins hiding in the uncut weeds.

My father can open, like an old book, anger
but he built all I can remember with knives and his back.
There's no such thing as a clean cut.

an abundance of peaches. v

Sarah Rose Lejeune



an abundance of peaches. ii

Sarah Rose Lejeune



thread on paper, back lighting

Tuesday

Mim Halpern

I leave math class on Tuesday
to take a pregnancy test
in the girls bathroom

Mr. Ventucci is teaching parabolas
and I already learned all about them
last year

A girl in the bathroom faintly traces her eyelids
staring herself down in the mirror

I lock myself up in the last stall
pull my green and red checkered kilt
up around my waist

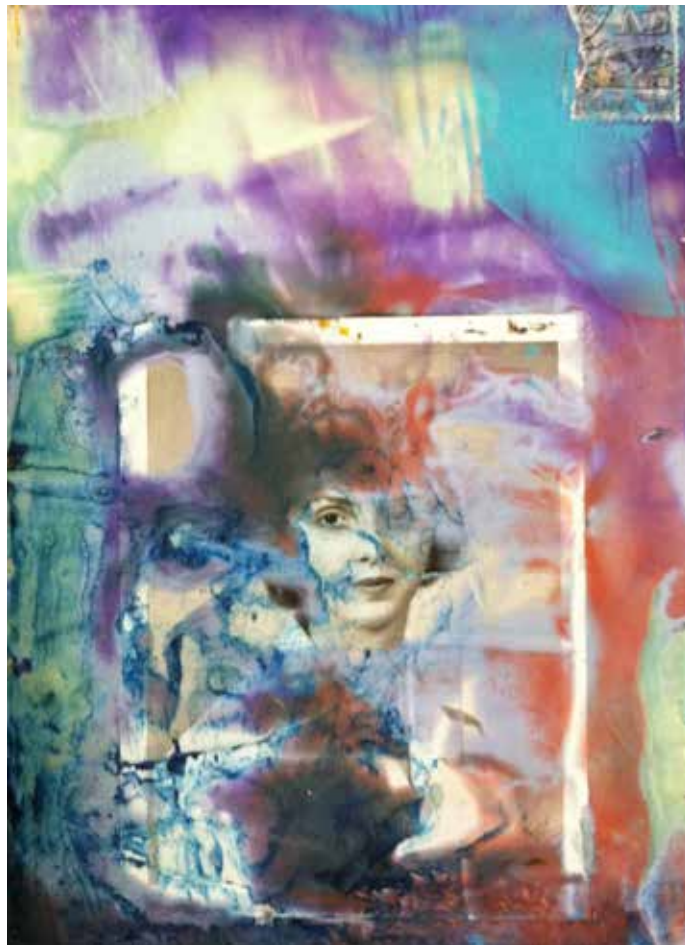
thin thighs
speckled with small blond hairs

Mr. Ventucci's voice
bounces against the walls
full of parabolas

I lay the stick to rest on top of the toilet paper
waiting

The girl at the mirror
now brushing her hair with a pocked-sized comb
humming the tune of Somewhere Over the Rainbow

margarette
Zack Knoll



encaustic collage

The Good Woman

Ryann Eastman

It's a Saturday morning, bright and lazy, when Alex finds the severed penis in my freezer. I find him in the kitchen, standing on the lime-tiled floor, the freezer door open behind him, staring at the tupperware container cradled in his hands. It reminds me of college, when he faced politics textbooks like an adversary in battle. He would either force himself to understand, or be destroyed. I stand in the doorway, the pink bulge of the organ dark against the transparent side of the container.

"I thought it was a sausage," he says. "I was going to make you breakfast."

I lean against the doorframe, crossing my arms over my chest. I'm wearing his baby blue button down and a pair of wool socks I found in the back of my drawer. Light pours through the slanted windows, outlining the sparsely furnished apartment. My two-speed bike leans against the wall, a line of beakers dry on a dishtowel beside the sink, stacks of medical journals frame the doorway. Alex swallows and his Adam's apple contracts, bobbing like a buoy at sea.

It started with an offhand comment from a stranger on a Friday night. I had just moved back to San Francisco for a job with a non-profit, where I would be working in a lab researching medicines to combat brain cancer. My friends and I went to a local bar, known for its three dollar Long Islands and the mechanical bull in the back room. I had ordered a shot of Jameson when he turned to me - a man in his early thirties, with too long blonde hair and a tiger tattoo climbing up his left arm - and said, "You certainly think you're the tough girl, don't you sweet cheeks?"

I was wearing a high-necked blue dress and my hair pulled into a braid down my back. When I had shown up at my friend's apartment earlier that night, wearing a thick scarf and a buttoned up jacket, she'd said, "Just because it's cold doesn't mean that you have to dress like a school teacher." I told her I didn't want to attract attention.

"And your name is?" he said. He slurred his words, and a wet trail of beer stained the front of his Raiders t-shirt. The tiger crawling up his arm sneered at me with long teeth shaped like bike spokes.

"Mary," I answered and the bartender handed me my shot. I moved to leave but the man leaned forward, grabbing my elbow. His breath smelled like fry grease and beer, his thick hand circling my forearm.

"You don't look all that virginal," he laughed. Sometimes, in high school, boys would ask if an angel had visited me with good news. The bolder ones would offer to do God's work for me. I looked at the man, with his blonde hair sticking to the sweat on his forehead, and wondered if they had taught him about evolutionary psychology when he was in school. I wanted to know if he acted this way out of indifference, or if he had decided that his actions were institutionally confirmed by science.

From what I've read, the main gist of the theory claims that it is natural and efficient for men to be promiscuous. It's an evolutionary trait, learned through thousands of years of being top dog on the societal food chain, and therefore is not something they should be blamed for. It's in their DNA, along with a love of football and getting your hands dirty. A woman can only have one child at a time, but a man can impregnate as many women as he can trick into his bed. The more sperm circulated in the world, the higher chance some of it will reach an egg. As a result, more children will be produced, the species will grow, and the human race will take another step towards survival and prosperity.

Women, however, are not born with this evolutionary right. They are the carrier of the human race, a vessel for future generations. They must be responsible for their actions. It is only proper for women to have historically been confined to the home and the profession of marriage, where the males can protect the all-important womb. Patriarchal oppression can be traced back to this basic instinct to preserve the uterus; after all, the vessel is never as important as the cargo. Men only know sex for a transitory moment, but there are nine months that a woman can carry the experience inside of her. That's just biology. Someone has to make sure the child survives.

The man leaned towards me. "Do you know anything about evolutionary psychology?" I asked.

His grip tightened, tugging me forward. "What?"

"Right," I said, and smiled. "Want to get out of here?"

He followed me to the alleyway behind the bar, a crevice in between the brick buildings that smelled of spilled beer and gasoline. I pushed him against the metal dumpster, his feet slipping on the cement as I

held an arm under his throat, pressed against his collarbone. "Too eager to go home?" he smirked, leaning forward to kiss me. I hit him with the heel of my palm, splitting the bridge of his nose with one crack. He grunted, sucking air into his chest, blinking. It felt like the peak of the first drop of a roller coaster, waiting for the rest of the car to climb up the slope. Like a swoosh, and a settle.

"Who's is this?" The freezer door is still open and Alex, wearing only his boxers and a pair of purple socks, must be cold. His wide, shocked eyes focus on the tupperware cupped between his palms.

"I don't know his name," I answer.

He looks up at me, jaw slack. "Did you do this?"

"Yes."

I have a list, written down on notebook paper, and hidden behind the unused snow boots in my closet. I don't always know their names, so I categorize it by weapons. Fake suicide, pills, strangling, rope, a 1911 .45 pistol. There are a few names written in the margins - Mark at his home in Merced, Josh in the parking lot of Macy's, Carl under the pier in Santa Cruz. I had met this man in a bowling alley in Concord, where he whistled at me and said, "I have another pair of balls I'm sure you'd like even better." The list said: Unknown, parking lot of the bowling alley, stabbed three times in the chest, penis removed. I left him in his jeep with blood on the leather seats and, the next day, I read in the newspaper that it was an expected gang incident. His estranged girlfriend had been taken in for questioning, but was released later that day.

Alex turns, placing the tupperware on the counter and closing the door of the freezer. I'm glad he doesn't ask me to explain what it is. I had hidden it underneath a bag of frozen peas, and hadn't considered that he would find it. Neither of us cook often and, ordinarily, we would have had breakfast at the coffee shop down the street. Alex nods, closes his eyes, and slides down the fridge, collapsing onto the floor.

"Have you done this before?" he asks, his voice thick and strained with shock. "Yes."

"How long?"

"Three years."

Alex covers his face with his hands. We were meant to stay at his apartment the night before but, caught in the rain and exhausted from a night of bar hopping in North Beach, we had retreated to mine. You

weren't supposed to see it, I want to say, but that isn't reassuring.

I have loved Alex since two weeks before our graduation from college. We had driven to Lake Erie that day, to pick red apples in the orchard nearby and see the lighthouse. I told him that the lake has always been a hot spot for diving for shipwrecks, and he told me that he had never seen the ocean before. He had grown up in a suburb of Cleveland, on the flat Ohio land. Lake Erie was the largest body of water he had ever seen.

I threw an apple into the water and watched it sink. He kissed down over my throat, I told him that I loved him, and it was the only time I ever said that to a man.

Alex slumps against the fridge, his socked feet slipping on the tile. I want to ask him if he remembers those crisp red apples, the shipwrecks.

I met Alex for the first time in the bathroom of a stranger's house. We were still in college, a small liberal arts school known for its radical activism and strange taste in music. I was smoking pot, pressing my mouth to the metal screen to blow the smoke out the window, when he barged in. I'd had a few drinks, and forgot to lock the door. He was wearing a forest green t-shirt the color of camping tarps and had a wine glass full of beer in his hand.

"Oh, sorry," I said.

"Why are you smoking in here?" he asked, closing the door behind him. "No one would care."

"You don't have to share if you're alone," I answered. Although the school was small, I didn't recognize him. "What's your name? Are you my year?"

"Alex. And if you're a fourth year, yeah."

"I'm Mary. How come I've never seen you before?"

"Probably because you smoke by yourself in other people's bathrooms."

I held out the bowl to him. "Want some?"

"Yeah, ok," he said and sat down on the edge of the bathtub. He lit it and, when he blew the smoke out, didn't bother to lean towards the window. "So this isn't your house?"

"No. I'm guessing it's not yours either."

"No." He handed the bowl and lighter back to me.

I'd never met him because he was a Politics major, and most of his campus involvement revolved around his dream of someday becoming a senator. "But not a politician. That word has so many negative connotations. I want to be what a senator was meant to be, originally, you know? A voice for the people," he said, his voice growing thicker as the bowl shallowed. I was a Neuroscience and Biology double major, and spent most of my free time working at the bike coop or helping with the community garden. I told him about the scientific theories that I took issue with, the ones that split gender evenly down the middle, like two opposite ends of the Richter scale.

"I've never met a hippy neuro major," he smiled.

We started dating a week later. I liked his taste in movies and that he didn't take things too seriously. He liked my affinity for travel, and that I quoted science journals when I was drunk. We broke up after college, and didn't get back together until a year after I moved to San Francisco. Alex packed up his life in Ohio, quit his job and took a plane to California to restart our relationship. "Real life girls are so boring," he told me, when he arrived. "I was never going to find another you."

My favorite was named Christian. It was my first year in California, and I was just settling into the consistent weather and anxiety about earthquakes. I had made a few friends at the lab and local bars, and was hitting a stride in my medical research. I was becoming accustomed to the fog.

There had been three men before him, including the blonde at the bar that I always passed on my way to work, and each incident had been carefully covered up. Working in a lab allowed a certain amount of ammonia and rubber gloves that made the job simpler. I never inflicted the same injuries twice, avoiding any consistency or patterns. The police had not connected the investigations.

I met Christian at a natural foods store on Haight Street. He asked me to help him choose which vegetables to use in a stir fry. His parents were coming over for dinner that evening, and he had promised he would try to cook. We went to a bar the next night. He had lived in the Bay Area his entire life, and was enthralled by the idea of living in a place that properly experienced the four seasons. "Snow is just a tourist attraction here," he told me, ordering another beer. "Something you visit on the weekends as a novelty." He was an associate at a firm specializing in environmental law, and knew more than I did about the city's initiatives to make San Francisco more eco friendly. At the end of the night, we took separate cabs back to

our respective apartments, with a promise that we would see each other again.

He was one of the first friends that I made in California. We would jog in Golden Gate park on the weekends, or walk down to Pier 45 to watch tourists, or eat at his favorite pizza place on Telegraph Hill. He told me about environmental justice, and I talked to him about the discoveries we made in the lab. He introduced me to his friends, and a group of us drove down to Half Moon Bay one weekend, to walk on the beach and find hollowed out caves in the rocks dotting the shore.

A month after I met him, he kissed me. We were in my apartment, drinking red wine he'd bought at the grocery store down the street, and watching a documentary on pot legalization. He took the glass from my hand, placed it on the coffee table, and grabbed my chin, leading my face towards his. When he kissed me, he smelled like the halibut he'd eaten for dinner. I pushed him away, his grip still tight on my chin, and told him no. I just wanted to be friends.

"Come on, we've been seeing each other for a month. You're into me," he said, moving his hand up to cradle my jaw. When he kissed me, his teeth scraped against my bottom lip and when I pushed him away again, he laughed. He leaned forward, pinning me between his body and the couch, one of his hands stroking my hair. "You owe this to me, Mary," he said. He patted me on the head, his other hand sliding beneath my shirt.

I bucked forward, my forehead connecting sharply with his. When he reared back, I punched him in the stomach, my legs twisting to push him off me and onto the floor. I grabbed my wine glass, breaking it against the wood of the coffee table.

I straddled his stomach and held the tip of the broken glass against his throat. He stared at me, his hands instinctually moving to my thighs, and I paused.

"Is this a joke?" he asked, breathless. His eyes darted between me and the glass, like a hunted animal.

There was a cut on my forehead from our skulls connecting and the blood dripped down behind my ear, wetting my hair. I pressed the dull shard of the glass against his throat, watching as a little bud of red formed on his skin. I lunged forward. A slash and a pool of blood on the white carpet—easy enough to get out later, with some lemon water and baking soda.

Alex sits prostrate on the floor, staring at the tile. He hasn't said anything in four and a half minutes

and I'm standing in the doorway, itching to move toward him. I think of the list in the back of my closet, leaning against my snow boots. Stabbed, poisoned, drowned, shot. There is a bit of rope in the back of my car, a can of pepper spray in my purse, a heavy silver ring sitting on my bedside table.

"This has nothing to do with you and me," I say but he doesn't move, and I'm not sure he even heard me.

Every now and then, in a lab or a science classroom, we run into an anomaly. Something that defies logic, a variable that doesn't fit, a surefire hypothesis that falls through. The placebo effect still works; if you lie to a patient, and say you're pumping morphine into their blood, their pain will start to seep away. Galaxies still spin, even though they don't have enough mass to create centrifugal force in space. There are four neutrons in existence that defy the laws of physics, little clusters impossibly held together. Scientists hate these anomalies, deny them, create wilder theories every day to try and explain them away.

But when I met my anomaly, I decided to sleep with him. It was two months after we first met in a stranger's bathroom, and he still hadn't tried anything. Every time I thought he would kiss me, he grinned and pulled away; like it was a game and I had to make the first play. He didn't fit into a proof or a hypothesis. Biological theories on male behavior didn't apply.

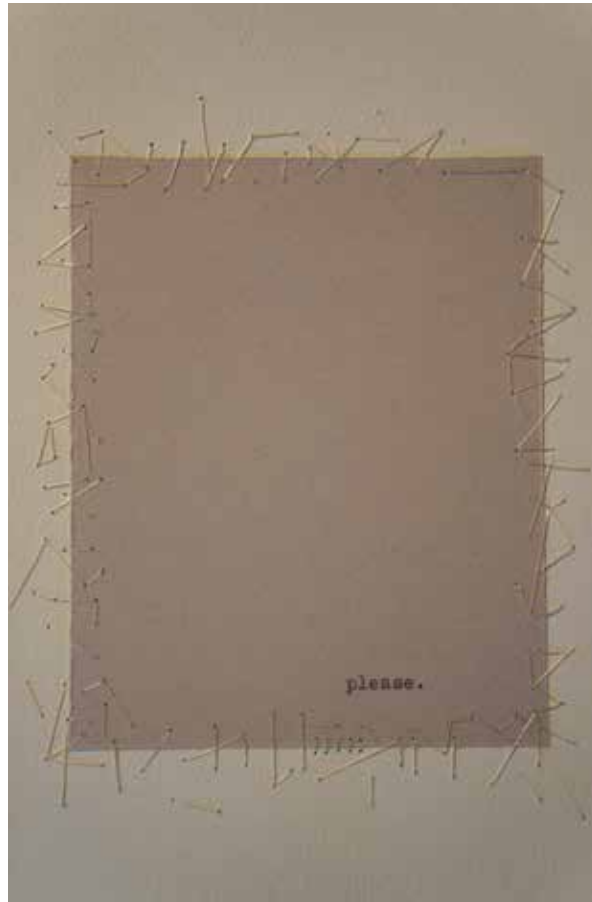
Alex has remained unprovable for five years. His shoulders fold inward, his eyes closing and, even though he cringes, I move forward, kneeling beside him. I lean across the tile floor, my hand closing over his. I think of the half empty bottle of chloroform underneath my bathroom sink, the box of rubber gloves in my kitchen drawer. I want to tell him how it feels, like when you remember that you're going to die someday just as you step into an elevator.

Alex won't look me in the eye and I turn my hand in his, our fingers interlacing. I realize how easily he could change, like a galaxy suddenly experiencing gravity's pull and hurtling through space. He could go straight to the police station and provide them with every detail about the serial killer they didn't know they were facing. He could write me off as a scandal that would mar his career, get in the car, and drive away. He could grab the butcher knife on the counter, just out of arm's reach, or slam my head against the oven door until I was unconscious.

Just stay with me, I want to say, my grip on his hand tightening. Don't ever leave.

Mother - three

Sarah Rose Lejeune



paper sewn on paper with typewritten text

wings

Vida Weisblum



tracings - three

Sarah Rose Lejeune



printed photographs/tracings of wood bark and grain on tissue paper

Crying, a proper response.

Delwin Campbell

We all say, "he's so beautiful"
"look at what our loin factories have put together"

He thinks:

BRIGHTBRIGHT
HOLYSHITSTOPTOUCHINGME
BRIGHTPAIN
EYESHURT
ZZZZZAAAKGHAKAN
THEELECTRICITY
THENOISE
my skin was not ready for this

: which is what babies would write
if they had language (and precise motor skills)
: which is also why whisky calms them down

Good night, angry fleshball.
I love you and only the
evolutionary biologists know why.

naked i and ii

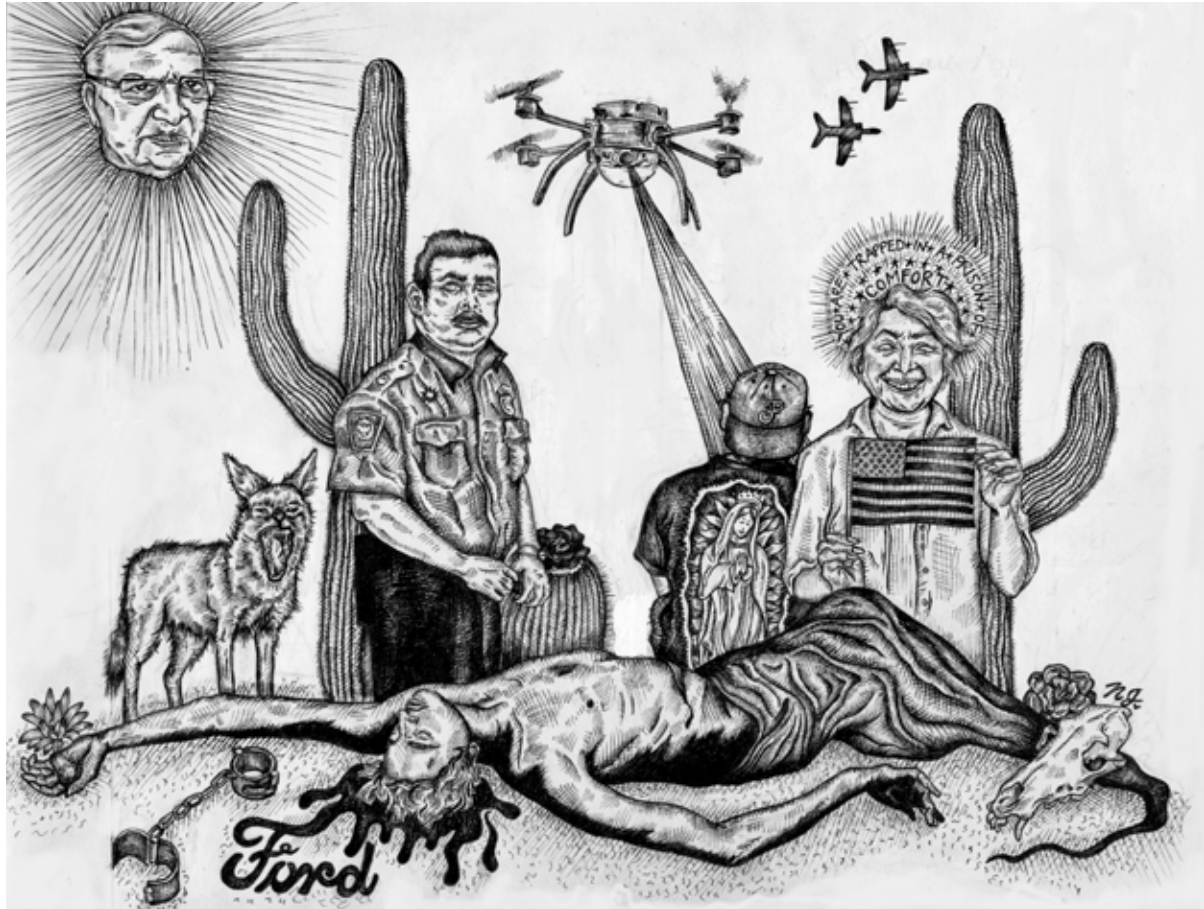
Zack Knoll



digital photograph

Desert

Nikki Johnson



Untitled

Oliver Levine



digital mixed media

The Aunts

Julia Brennan

MY TANTE MARIANNE is being evicted. No one will take her in, I am sure of it. Oma will hiss – *that girl of mine*, shaking her fragile head slowly. Mom will ask Dad what he thinks. Mom who is paid to listen, who only knows how to love hard. She can probably anticipate the reply before she asks the question. This is one tricky skill she has developed over the years of her training at Columbia School of Social Work circa 1984: New York, New York. *No way, Cint* will be Dad's expected reply. Out of her home, out of the family. How Opa must feel, *rolling around in the grave!* as he watches his eldest fall out.

From where I am sitting this is the view. A woman with gray hair, a benign brain tumor, once malignant, crowding and building a nest somewhere in her skull. My Oma still pays for her health care, the doctors do little to loosen up the worry and her skin hangs ragged at the bone, most likely a result of this sad fact. When she was eighteen she made a decision to give up a full scholarship to Brown and went to Hampshire instead. *Hampshire is out of the question, Jules*, Mom warned me when she caught me browsing the website. My Dad echoed the same stern sentiment. *No way, not in a million years.*

My Tante Marianne is weighed down by a body that has accumulated mass for the last twenty years. To put it bluntly, my Tante is heavy. I wonder sometimes if it all could have been prevented, her slow decline into sadness. She could have packed the same leather suitcase, full of her paints, the clothing she made with her own stitching fingers. She could have kissed her Ma and Pa goodbye, squeezed Ma's hand as a tear dropped along her cheek. She could have gotten on a plane to Rhode Island instead of Massachusetts.

Maybe she decides to switch right at the airport, looking up at the glowing departure board that holds both the questions and answers. Who knew the future could be contained in a thin yellow line – AMERICAN AIRLINES, FLIGHT 2567 Terminal 1 GATE 56 – but this is my own invention. Perhaps if Marianne went another direction she never would have become “wife of Keith” – that

strapping Amherst grad, piano virtuoso, maker of art films, thrower of heavy plates. Slandering her always — Fat Cow, You Wreck. Abusive, I guess you could call it, but that sits weighty on the tongue like some deep poison — confusing because her eye has never been punched in. She has never been slapped. The hurt doesn't fit the typical picture, refuses to follow the usual cues.

ON MY WALL there are two cards. One is from Marianne, the other from Auntie Ei. Marianne's bears a mark of perfection, flowers rendered in deep colors of blue and pink, the hand and grace of a trained artist present in the work. Ei's is messy and signed with a small heart in pen, a symbol she becomes obsessed with every time she has what they like to call an episode. Put bluntly, an episode is the span of time when her mind is not her own, when she is supposedly *mad* or *dangerous*. It is also the time when I am not supposed to contact her. A problem solved by the fact that we can never find her during these bad days, seasons.

When I say "they" I am referring to the doctors. But I am also referring to this thing we call "this country," the U.S.A, all of us convinced of the power of pills and quick fixes. All of us just a little numb, growing numb-er with the ticking clock.

Not that Auntie Ei doesn't have a real problem — I am not trying to trivialize the severity of the gap between her reality and the reality of the rest of the world. Once she hung her panties up on the altar of St. Dominic's believing she was called by the Lord to do so. Then the time when my Grandpa had to drag her into the house from where she stood naked in the backyard, rain pouring down, she was screaming and disturbing the neighbors. Some days she would jump into her car and go missing for weeks. Everyone in the family would go nuts with worry, when I was young I just hoped she was having a swell time. Auntie Ei needs a lot of help sometimes but don't we all. Some days I envy her ability to avoid buying into the Useful Myth — the structures that keep us pinned and dislocated at the very same time. Pinned to some notion of the ways we should act, some idea of where our head should be at any given moment. Sometimes I'd like to crawl into her mind, lie down there, and rest awhile.

The episodes find their root in the MS that attacked her brain instead of her body at the age of 26, when she already had two kids, a stable career as a nurse, a husband named George who still owns a pharmacy in Long Island where she still goes to get her prescriptions every week to this day, when she is good. The MS causes hallucinations, break-ins, manically scribbled birthday cards and gifts – empty mint cans, cracked eggshells wrapped in ribbons. She reserves these gifts for her kids and for me – the other oldest Brennan girl.

I look at both of the pieces from my aunts on my wall and admire their creativity, wondering how they are doing. I haven't seen either of them in several years. I keep their pieces pinned there as if by leaving them tacked in plain view I can remind them both of their greatness. I like to think they can see them from afar, even though we rarely speak. The rest of the family is set to bang down the gavel on these two. Guilty as charged. A mess, insane. The end.

In solidarity, whatever that means. We are the eldest daughters. We share some things.

THE PHOTO OF TANTE MARIANNE shows that when she was young her hair shone like straw in loose folds against her back, her eyes held within them an intensity that could dagger a fist in your eye. The photo album is kept on the shelf at Oma's house, bound in red leather and covered in dust. Rifled through only by me, *too curious for my own damn good*. That's what they always say. I have been tempted to keep it but I leave it there for Opa's sake, imagining he would want the memory of that girl there if he was still alive and scuffling around the apartment with his crossword puzzle clutched in his fist. *Nell, would you like some tea?*

Comparing a photo now from a photo then reveals that the shine is long gone. Tante Marianne is without a house and also without a home because our family is intent to ignore her precisely. If I could paint the way I imagine the story will end, I would paint the family. OPA, OMA, KOOS, NICO, JESSE, MOM, SA, standing alert, all of their backs straight and turned against her. An army prepared to examine only the periphery, never what lies in front or behind, never what hurts. They would stand in rows like the gravestones in Arlington Cemetery. Perfectly white, perfectly positioned, perfectly moral.

I TALK TO MY MOTHER at the kitchen table. She slides a firm eye over the wood, making sure not to miss a single crumb as she wipes away with her sponge. My Mother is quiet and thoughtful in the morning. She listens to me as I rattle on, sipping her coffee and nodding, *mmhmm, I see*, interjecting sometimes to offer me sound advice. Often when I return home from school she tells me that she worries about me before going to sleep at night, about little things like me not getting enough exercise or sleep, and big things like that I'll choose the wrong partner or that I'll give up on some big dream of mine, one I don't even have yet. *You remind me of Marianne sometimes, so talented. Just don't end up with some loser, get lazy, let anyone convince you that you're not as great as you are.* When she talks of her oldest sister during what she calls the "prime of her life" namely, that point up until the day she met Keith, she talks about her with reverence. *She was way smarter than me, she says. Marianne was just a tour de force, and so beautiful!* I know the eviction depresses my Mother, so does Marianne's lack of professional success.

My Mother is the second to youngest in a family of six. If there is anyone in the bunch who will sympathize with Marianne it is my Mom Cinta. But alas she too has had it: *at some point you make your choices. You get it together.*

I think of the two of them when they were young. Reading in bed in the room that all the girls shared, with their perfectly crisp sheets and that clean lemon smell that is everywhere in my Grandparent's home. I see my Mother curled up beside her sister, learning to sew, whispering in the dark. Modeling for Marianne's photo shoots on the weekends. There is my Mother, tumbled in a pile of leaves, hoisted against a tree, sitting back in a chair in the living room, looking absently out the window.

MY AUNTIE EI, THEY SAY IS

1. Unnaturally Impulsive 2. Irresponsible 3. Easily Sidetracked Creative to the Point of Madness Inconsiderate Poor Soul Timid Paranoid Off Track Too Tired *oo oo all that big bad energy / she'll flip like a switch* 4 5 6 7 8 9 9 9 9
!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

I spend the quiet parts of Saturday morning wondering how she is. We become mixed up suddenly and I don't even know who the speaker is anymore, who the speaker is speaking to. Auntie Ei, me or you?

I OVERIDENTIFY WITH MY AUNTS. And I haven't been to Portland where Tante Marianne lives since I was small, five or six, so why do I care about that house. I can't remember it anyway — the house with the big FOR SALE sign in the yard by now, some real estate agent in Oregon is having a happy day.

When I try to recall the trip I only remember that it rained, that the black tip of the umbrella wouldn't bloom as we walked out of the airport and into the flooded road. A flash of my boots, yellow or orange. I don't know the color, the size, the shape — the house draws a blank in my memory.

We lived in California at the time but my parents were planning our move back to the Northeast in the coming months. The trip to Portland was a last stop on this side of the country, a final hello, my Mother knowing she wouldn't see Marianne for some time. Marianne having no money for a visit, my Mother's affair with the slow rhythms of the West Coast expiring fast.

All that sticks are Mom's words. You are just like your Tante Marianne, Julia. The anthem spit from her mouth. *Both of you just like bulls in a china shop!* My Mom says her house was disheveled, the studio kept poorly. My Tante inside with all her ideas, knocking around without focus.

THE RAIN FALLS DOWN today and I watch this tiny white spider creep its way up my window, slats of light falling in through the blinds, slashing the color of this wall, splitting me in two, if beams could do that. I imagine Tante Marianne - she is snapping her photos, tacking them up to her bedroom wall. She walks door to door in Hollin Hills carrying her work, that small Virginian suburb where my Mother's family moved to from Holland when my Opa was working for the World Bank. *Hollin, no wonder - that's like Holland, where our family is from!* A novel coincidence, I used to think when I was a kid. *I am so smart!* Exciting even. Hollin Hills, an exhausting sort of boredom, with all the sweet cars and the plain white houses exactly the same, the streets easy to get lost in because you could wander into any home and know where you were, where your bedroom was. A pool with the neighborhood kids, small plastic toys on the bottom. Everyone diving in to get a piece.

I return to you somewhere in this tangle, thinking about us in the roaring dark.

MARIANNE WAS NOT an amateur photographer, Julia. She had a real business. She was sought out. The imagining of Marianne going door-to-door selling her images doesn't hold up. She had her own dark room, a professional one she built by herself, using the funds a large clientele base which grew bigger all the time. Businessmen used to come back from work in the Capital, dressed in their three-piece suits. My wife wants some family portraits, are you available? She was often the photographer for fancy weddings, a one woman operation working the event, sometimes offered a beer here and there. She was reeling the money in, really knew how to market herself. We were all very proud, my Mother tells me.

I ALWAYS REMEMBER the story of the plate. The way Mom tells it, Tante Marianne was standing in the kitchen after making dinner. I know she is an excellent cook, I remember her visits, the love in that food. I wonder what got into Keith that day.

This is how the story goes: He saw Marianne standing on the other side of the room and he threw his plate full of food across at her. It hit the wall of her house, the one she will be leaving soon, if the wind had been right it would have split her forehead in two. Thank god it hit the wall and it cracked, sending the mess of it in the air. I imagine it hung there for awhile, shattering her. *But he has the \$\$, Never get married Julia, until you have a career of your own, until you can survive without him,* my Mom's severe warning. I was mad at my Aunt for giving up on herself for some shithead, some bully, curling into herself when I know she is too big for that, too good, and she'd lost the perspective to see that, my Tante.

THE LAST TIME Keith visited my house he got up too fast at the dinner table. His hair caught on fire, the candles on the chandelier pouring wax slow onto his balding head. His son, my cousin who I don't know very well, shaved his hair off in our creaking bathroom, the rusty water pipes a nice backdrop to our little scene.

I hated Keith and laughed heavily at his misfortune. I was ten, I didn't feel bad. Ten year olds do stuff like that. But to this day, I still do not feel bad, not for Keith who I have learned to blame for this eviction, for the plate throwing, the crack in the wall.

ONCE TANTE MARIANNE visited and helped Emily and I paint a mural on Emily's wall. A jungle of animals, so sloppy, three days of work and paint on our faces, three days of solid laughter. She let us have the whole wall – never attempting to fix the eyes on the Cheetah or contain the body of the curvy snake. Emily will be 21 soon and the mural will grow one year older with the blowing out of candles on the cake.

KEITH CALLED me a few weeks ago from the middle of nowhere, Indiana. I didn't pick up the unknown number so he left a five minute long voicemail in my inbox, rambling. I hadn't talked to him since the candle incident, but I had started writing this piece about Marianne just a few days before the call. It felt crazy to hear his voice, the timing too insane to believe, and I stood on the sidewalk with my mouth gaping as I listened to him speak.

Hey! This is your Uncle Keith speaking! Do you remember me! This might sound crazy, but I'm in Indiana. Walking around this depressing town – pretty weird place. Anyway, I am driving through to your parent's house on my way to Boston! I'm moving out there for a job at Emerson College, doing film stuff, maybe you knew already. More about that later. I was wondering if you and your sister wanted to go out to breakfast tomorrow? I would love to see you guys and Oberlin, it is right on the way. I'm really interested in the Conservatory, in seeing where your Mom went to school and stuff. I've heard so many stories from your parents! Anyway, give me a call back. Hope to see you soon! Of course, I understand if you guys are busy.

I consult my sister and we agree it would be a good thing to do. The guy has been driving for a week, alone in a car. He was probably going nuts. *It would be nice to see him, maybe,* Emily said. *And the gesture was a nice one.* We call him back and say *yes, sure. See you in the morning.*

He can check out the Con on his own, though. I tell Emily when I hang up. I wouldn't even know what to show him.

I WONDER SOMETIMES what she thinks about when she paces about the house in the morning. I can see her there, pausing to sit on the couch, in a room that is otherwise empty. She is alone with the kids out of school already. Keith in the car with the silence of signs on the freeway. When she sits at the table her feet begin to miss the simple creaking of the oak floor, the old mugs and silver spoons. She sees a single deer outside the window, white tail flitting away, and wishes to be as agile. A thin smile begins to form and the house's empty ring is soon transformed into the clear, crisp sound of release. She will not be following anyone to Boston.

HE ARRIVES late in a small red Volvo stuffed to the brim with clothes and kitchen appliances, fans and rugs. A duct-taped door, the body of the car sunk in from the weight of this move. He really needs a U-HAUL, I think, but maybe the cost was too great.

Keith's hair has grown back and falls in a floppy grey mess against his head, his hairline receding. I notice his teeth are a bit yellow and his cheeks are bright red. He looks tired, a man on a long journey. *It is great to see civilization! I've just been listening to the radio for six days straight.*

At breakfast the conversation speeds up and stops, then speeds up again. Everyone is a little on edge. I ask questions about the move and the house. The new job at Emerson College. He is not a bad guy to have breakfast with, I think, as I ease into it — pretty smart and engaging. A likeable guy if you encountered him without context. He asks me questions about the Cinema Studies Program, what sort of writers I'm into. The half of me that feels angry at him for the stories I've been told remains quiet and I listen with the other half, trying to give him a chance.

Near the end of wolfing down eggs he talks about Marianne. *She is pretty sad to leave Portland. She'll be living there for a few months and then she'll come meet me. It will be nice though! She will be so happy to come to Thanksgiving.* He speaks of her

cautiously around us, probably knowing that we've heard all of the bad things. I feel a little bad for Keith, bad for my Tante too. There are always multiple ways to see things.

When we say goodbye I wish him luck, knowing the wave on the corner signals the end of that exchange – not going to see him probably for another 10 years, at least, unless he decides to show up for Thanksgiving. He rolls around the corner, dust spitting up, and the belly of the car almost touching the road. Tonight he will be at my home eight hours away, the one with the warm fireplace, where he will exchange stories with my Mother and Father. Together they will call Marianne, my Mother and her oldest sister catching up. I am longing for home throughout the day – the changing leaves and the hills I miss all the time.

I THINK of Marianne. Alone in Portland. Hoping she is enjoying her time.

Madeline

Mimi Leggett



pen on vellum

Phaena

Elena Gold



twitter poem

Olivia Harris

I.

I'm the one in the corner
stress-eating
a chocolate croissant Being
a narcoleptic nymphomaniac
would really suck Marilyn is such
a good grandma's
best friend
kind of

name the lowest
of the low
in the acting world:
being an adult
in a Disney Channel
original movie

2.

All I can think about is pizza holy
fuck a diet coke
after a run kind of
feels like an orgasm as if
this day couldn't get

any weirder/suckier,
a banana exploded
in my backpack I think

the going savory
or sweet decision
at brunch
is one of the hardest decisions
a girl
has to make
in her life

3.

I feel like there's a perfect proportion
to way dad's old sweaters
always fit
to their daughter's

perfectly lactose intolerant
intolerance =
someone performing
hate crimes against
lactose intolerant people people kissing
on the subway
is gross
but I'm probably just saying that
because I don't have anyone
to kiss

on the subway.
No hobo man...I would
not like
to kiss you.

4.

I love seeing old people
with lunchboxes why
is there always a line

at every post office,
ever?
I thought
they were supposed to become
obsolete or

something this "Universal Technical Institute"
commercial keeps saying
"UTI"
and all I can think of is
Urinary Tract Infection.

5.

Halloween
Oreos are by far
the best-tasting

Oreo brb
eating an entire box
of Special K
Red Berries I now
vow

to wear
sidebangs for the rest
of my life I want a dog

on a skateboard
to be the emblem
of my life.

Untitled

Oliver Levine



pastel on paper

Meet me at the Discotheque

Dana Fang

When's Your Birthday?

Sometimes when a woman says yes she actually means I don't know. After too much gin I start hearing it said everywhere—in the linoleum as the busgirls wax up and down the slanted sides, in the *pop* of pink gum in their mouths, in the slapping of soles against the silvered tiles. We're almost ready for biggest birthday party this side of Hyde Park has ever seen. I'm drunk before the girls even get here. *Who's this for* the mustached bartender asks and none of the uniformed girls know. Their bubblegum lips spread across thin cheeks. Strings of red LED lights hang from the ceiling like strands of ivy about to bloom. Or does ivy not have that sort of season? I want to tell the bartender that the razors are on sale at Walgreens for 99 cents. I want to tell the bartender that gin and ginger ale make for a great love potion. Is this party for me? Am I paying for the live cover-band that starts the disco before guests show up? If I am the only one on the floor then is this still a good time? I invited the girls who sit at the bar across the street from the university's gym. They come in about to die of thirst. The strap of my metallic gown is like a knife slicing open my ripe shoulder. Let's dance and dance and dance—let's say the words we say to one another while sipping dark drinks over candles—I hear all those little secrets. The double doors open and I see how people fist-fight to get inside. If I pull at my dress will it peel off a piece of me? Here here! I can give it anyone who says *yes I'll take it*.

Have We Met Before?

The person I love wakes very early in the morning to drink out of the rain barrel. Barefoot, behind the shed she goes, her back a buoy in the blue mist. Her shadow is a bent branch that falls over the dark barrel as she cups her tiny hands to break the silvered surface of water. I see everything from the bedroom window. I continue to give her alcohol at meals to see how much she will drink before falling asleep. Half a bottle and she is done. The rest is backwash.

The person I love is in season. With the pumpkin and squash she steady grows. When I come home from the supermarket she is sitting on the steps with stones in her hand to throw them at me. I laugh and step away. She looks at me with slitted eyes. My windshield cracks and I drive seventeen miles for repairs. When I come home she is standing behind the shed washing her hair in sun. She tosses her head and streams of water and red hair draw a semicircle in the sky before slapping her shoulders. Her arms thrust into the sterling water of the rain barrel as if pulling a length of rope. *Let go* she screams at me as I press her against my skin.

Tell Me Your Name.

Make me a red helmet with paper-mache—white LED lights for eyes and a metal screen over my open mouth. I will breathe through tiny holes punched where my nose should be. The sides are padded with pieces of Styrofoam. *Do you want this helmet?* she says. My hands are covered in hot glue. The gun sits on the tiled table. Clocks on the counter *tick tick* the time: half-past two. Something crawls up the legs of the table to sit on my shoulders. She raises her hand and says this is not for you. Only when you've stayed in this house for nineteen years will this be for you. Only when you've cut those lace stockings will be this for you. Those triangular collars, that dark lipstick will never be for you. Your hands will wind the clocks back every week with precision, your hands will not touch anything that melts or squirts when you squeeze. *That is not for you. You will look at me the way you look at the sky or at a god standing in a pool. You will ask permission to fall asleep. The muscle that tightens between your tights, the sac in your right lung that carries your laugh, the twitch in your hands. That is not for you. Feed me full with cream. Wash behind my ears. Carry me until I am ripe with age and have crashed into the steering wheel. Pay for my medical bills. You will love me and for you, I will love only when it is convenient.*

Goodbye.

Say how old you are then say how old you'd pass for on the street. Walking back to the subway from some sex-shop hidden inside a Paradise Hotel Suite, you finger the trigger of your gun, actually just the fingers on your hand taut in the shape of a gun. If it is safer to carry it in your back pocket, then carry it near your breast. They tried to sell you a cock studded with silver. You wanted a Silver Bullet. Ten dollars could buy you a ticket to the new Disney movie. It's the kind of night for waifs to roam under banners telling everyone where to trade jewels for cash and where God goes to meet those lost halfway.

dog days

Leila Benedyk



cherry apocalypse

Delwin Campbell

when the end comes
you'll find me in
a Wal-Mart
among the stocked aisles
that will be the placenta
of our Reconstruction

under a hut of
insulating cardboard boxes will wait
 my salvation
the cashier
lucky enough
to have to work when the wave hits

we'll rule our Kingdom
together
I'll laugh when she sets fire to
her manager's office,
the expired bureaucracy
keeping us warm through the night

I Said So

Celia Keim



61

oil painting

Webs

Celia Keim



oil painting

Debra Always Ruins the Fun, and I Bet She Does it for the Attention (that Whore)

Paris Gravley

the theme of the party was alligator
skin suits as its very in fashion to
rub together like the sound
of coins, *dollar* coins, so that
we, well, c'mon, i mean them plus me,
can clink together, like those a-
dorable dinner bells that you beckon
things with. scales you probably
don't know, are priced by their
timbre, the higher they chime,
the higher the dime! that is how the
saying goes, don't you know?
anyway, at the party, scales rubbed against scales,
shoulders rubbed against shoulders,
chins rubbed against the well-
exercised triangle between left and right
cheeks--oh, don't be so naive--why do you
think there's supposed to be a gap between
our two thinned thighs?

debra, on the phone:
these pains are just killing me. yes, yes, these pains!
how can they be so
painful? oh yes, my pain certainly
hurts. hurts beyond imagine.
(oh shut-up debra, no one actually cares)

pigs dressed as humans, i mean, dressed as
dusting maids held these trays flat and round,
like the moon, made of a aluminum leather
and gold blend. on the hooves on the trays were
bottles of wine the color of saudi arabia's dirt
or whatever, the host said they were specifically chosen
for humanity or something, but also because they
were the same color of dorothy's ruby slippers.
for laughs, we threw the bottles on the ground
and danced on the shards. if our feet bled,
what more the drama was worth!

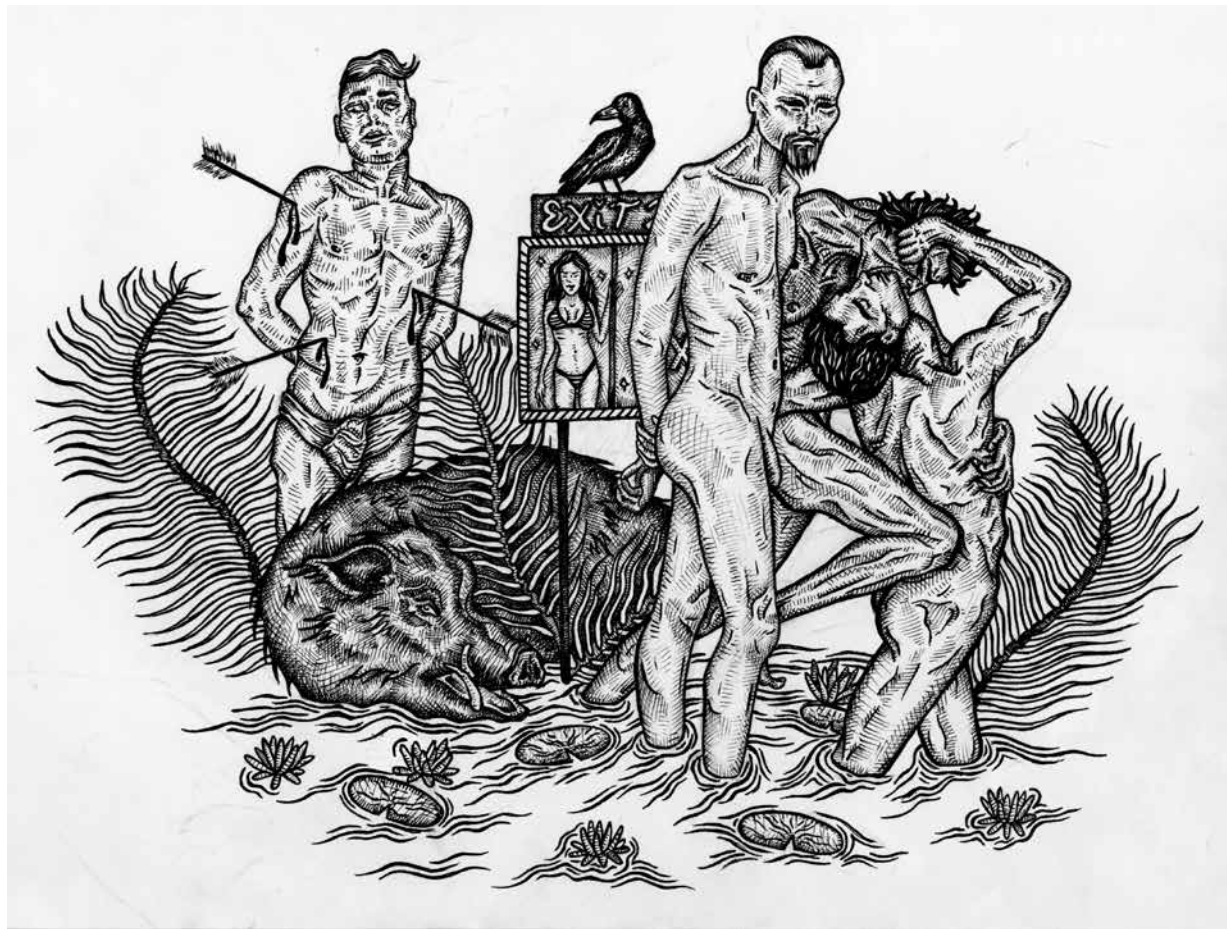
debra, beginning to yell:
my FREAKING pains, how terrible they are!

the party was fantastic and just the right amount of
boring, just as all could hope. everyone looked
the same, alligators in a ball room, walking
on egg shells because cost was not
taken into consideration. perhaps the
climax was when all the wax from all the
candles dripped down onto some of the
waiters, i mean pigs, (made the whole party smell like
low-grade pork i tell you) and we took it as
a sign that we should pity them,
so we got debra to strip down naked
and burn her skin till it was the same
wrinkled pink texture of a cooked pig
or a burn victim. it's not fair
because she's definitely going to start
a new trend, especially because
her pain is *real*.

*debra, beginning to smell,
becomes passé.*

Swamp

Nikki Johnson



Zin

Alana Reibstein

Zin is the name we call our mothers. Our mothers, in turn, call us the names they have given us. My name is Susan. My mother named me after her favorite diner, 'Susan's.' I have never been there before, the diner being way across the bridge, but I hope to go one day. Zin says the cornbread is to die for. My best friend Joanna is named after her mother's favorite ice-cream parlor, 'Joanna's.' She has never been there either. Too far away. Our Zins used to live way out there. They tell us we should go visit these places, that their owners, Susan and Joanna, would be so proud to see us big girls. It is not just Joanna and I that were named this way. All the future Zins I know were named after their mother's favorite places—grocery stores, restaurants, cafes, etc. None are named the same since every Zin has a different favorite.

My father's name was john. My best friend Joanna's father's name was anthony. Their Zins just picked these names from the list of boy names. The list is kept at this office in this government building, with maybe twenty tiny names on it—'nathan, frank, jerry, anthony,' etc. Zins can pick whatever name they want from the list, it doesn't matter if the last Zin that was there picked the same one, or anything like that. So I guess my dad's Zin picked john, just because it was there on the list. Zin says she probably just closed her eyes and pointed to a name and there was john. Of course she had to use the magnifying glass they keep there to see which one she landed on, and well she must've landed on a few, her pointer finger being the size of the list itself, but john was the one she took. Zin says this is the way she would do it too if she had had a boy, "god forbid."

It was always too bad when dads had to sign their names. Fortunately this didn't ever have to happen except for when they married a Zin. When my dad signed his name, you could barely see the J and it looked like "ohn." Joanna's dad, "nthony."

.

Zin always tells me how lucky she is to have had me, not some boy. All Zins feel this way. The boy babies are so small that you can't even love them at all. The problem is that they are cute. And when you first see them, you want to love them, so you try to, right away, right when they're born—you hug them, you kiss them, you cradle them—but all they do is cry and cry, loud and harsh, because turns out they can't receive any of this love. The doctors think it hurts them, physically, and that's why they cry. But I don't think that's it. I think that's just how boys are. So Zins are only wanting girls so they don't ever have to deal with all that, that rejection. Zin says she heard from her friend who had a boy that it's just the worst thing, seeing these baby boys cry non-stop when all you did is try to love them for a second. So you stop loving them, after that second, and you leave them at the hospital until they have stopped crying enough to go to the rivington day school where there are people who are qualified to deal with them, who are used to getting tears and screams instead of love.

.

Now I am a Zin. I first got pregnant the same time Joanna did, but Joanna looked much different, and I didn't know I was pregnant. She was all big and round, as pregnant women are, and I was just big, as women are, looked the same as always. So I didn't even know I was pregnant until Joanna started feeling labor coming and I was with her, eating breakfast one day when it really started coming and I rushed her right to the hospital. I got her into a delivery room when I started to feel a little something coming, too, and some doctor specialist looked at me closely and said I may be having something, too. So they put me in a delivery room all the way on the other side of the hospital, and all of a sudden there was a baby boy in front of me so perfect looking, quiet. So quiet I could hear Joanna still giving birth all the way across the hospital. But then the doctor person handed me the baby boy, to love I assumed, as one would, but it started crying, protesting so loud I just had to leave it there with that doctor. I assumed I would have to do this if I had a boy, just like Zin's friend who had a boy did, and all the other Zins who had boys did, but there was this moment when I

saw the baby boy at the bottom of the bed and it was so cute that I thought maybe I would love it forever, for more than that one second, and raise it to be big. But, of course, that didn't happen and I went across the hospital to welcome Joanna's huge baby girl into the world. When Joanna saw me she told me, "sorry about the boy, but you'll get a chance at a girl at some point." She was so happy.

That was the last time Joanna would be in the hospital, but I knew I would be back. I would keep getting pregnant until I had a girl. Until I became a Zin. I had a friend who had twelve baby boys before having a girl. She didn't have a choice. She just kept ending up at that far end of the hospital time after time, until finally, she had her girl.

.

Now, I am a Zin. I named my girl Liz after my favorite deli, 'Liz's.' She is growing up quickly. I feed her ten times a day like Zin advised me to do. Every Sunday the new Zins get together and leave the babies with the old Zins.

"She was reading chapter books this morning. Let her try Harry Potter when I'm gone," I told Zin.

"I know, I know," Zin said, rolling her eyes slightly. After all, she had been a Zin much longer.

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Zin always used to tell me everything is better big. After all, she was ten feet tall and plenty feet wide. Deep, too. So she used three bars of soap whenever she washed me, all seven feet of me. For dinner she made more spinach than I could possibly eat and more macaroni than I ever could desire. Zins are funny that way.

Whenever Zin went on a business trip, which was often, she would call every other Zin there was to take care of me. Usually, they all realized the seriousness of the situation and would offer to gladly watch me. But sometimes all of the Zins were busy taking care of many feet of children and dad had to watch me all by himself. Zin would be quite worried.

When dad watched me I'd get smaller and smaller. First I'd lose my stomach. It would completely

flatten out, then start to cave in, looking more and more like dad's. Then I'd get shorter, which is the part I hated the most since I could never reach anything. The last thing to get all small would be my hands and feet. The whole process all happened very quickly, really within a matter of several hours, but there would be a point when everything was pretty small except for my hands and feet and it was hard to keep my balance, them being so heavy. In retrospect, maybe I hated that part more than the getting shorter.

When dad made me dinner, all he made were a few peas with a couple strands of spaghetti. I was hungry all week, so after "dinner" I went to Joanna's house where Zin would be making a vat of chicken noodle soup and more loaves of bread than letters in the alphabet. Zin saw how small I had already gotten and gave both Joanna and me baths, six bars of soap, suds everywhere, and then I went back home. dad was already asleep on the couch. I sat on him by accident, not seeing the few feet of him under the quilt.

"ow," he always breathed, and went back to sleep.

By the time Zin got home I had shrunk down almost to dad's size—a few feet and some inches wide.

"I'm sorry, honey. I meant to come back earlier. I had a feeling it was getting too small around here."

"I'm starving. And I couldn't reach any of the snacks in the cabinet," I would pout. She would explain that dad is not a Zin so didn't grow up knowing how to do the things that *we* Zins do.

"I am not Zin!" I told her.

"You will be one day soon."

In school the next day I asked my teacher when me and Joanna would become Zins. She told me, "That's your Zin's decision," and gestured at the small building across the street. This is the boys' school, "ivington day school," it read. I had never met the boys from there, but I heard they were small and had trouble writing.

"Zin, will you take me to meet the boys at the ivington day school?" I asked at dinner through a mouthful of thick cornbread.

"rivington, honey."

"But it looks just like ivington."

"You know how those boys can be."

"Uh-huh," I nodded and choked a little on my bread. I didn't know how those boys could be.

"But will you take me?" I insisted. Zin just smiled and said she will tell me when the time is right.

.

I'd met my husband nathan at a dinner party. He sat at a table with other boys, playing with the tiny particles of food he had on his plate. My plate overflowed and I dropped a piece of lettuce on his khakis.

"Sorry about that."

After that we got married. That is how it goes here, as long as you have been to the rivington day school, met the boys you ought to have met.

.

One day it rained so much that Joanna and I had to go outside. Our Zins had taught us about water, and to get it however, whenever, wherever we could. So we asked our teacher if we could leave school early that day to collect the water. Being a Zin herself, of course she agreed. "I am proud of you, girls. Thinking like Zins already." Our teacher must've thought our Zins had told us it was the right time to visit the school. But they hadn't, it wasn't the right time. We stopped at my house and grabbed a bunch of buckets. More buckets than we could carry. We each balanced one on our head. We brought them back to school because it seemed that was where the most rain was falling. Our buckets filled up fast. We drank bucket after bucket right there in the rain. You could barely finish a bucket before it started filling up again.

"Why don't we take a bucket over to the boy's day school?" Joanna said between gulps. "Aren't you starting to feel greedy? Zin says they never have enough of anything. Shouldn't we share?"

“Well I guess that could be the polite thing to do.”

.

nathan raises Liz the way he is supposed to. He does a good job, but it is dangerous to leave her with him. Still he loves her and insists on tucking her in at night. I tell him I'd really prefer that he didn't, but he does it anyway. I think he feels he will disappear soon, and tucking in Liz will help him stay around a bit longer. But it doesn't work this way. nathan doesn't get bigger. It's just the opposite—when I go to wake Liz the mornings after he tucks her in, she is smaller than the day before. She shoves her whole hand in her mouth instead of just her thumb and cries and cries over this confusion. I worry that if dad keeps tucking Liz in, she may disappear soon too.

“It's okay Liz. Zin is here to make you big and strong. Zin is here to make your thumbs nice and big.” I feed her cornbread.

.

When I told Zin Joanna and I had gone over to the day school to offer the boys the buckets, she was not happy. I remember how red she got, the way her shoulders seemed to grow and grow, how long and wide she looked in that moment. I was so scared I almost wished my dad were there to make the moment smaller.

“Susan, I have to tell you when you can start sharing. You can't just decide to start sharing whenever you like, Susan.” Each time she said my name the S sounded so loud, so big.

“Huh, what, what's that, what happened?” dad breathed, stumbling downstairs, waking up from his nap.

“Nothing, go back to bed.”

“It wasn't a big deal Zin. They were friendly. They were quiet and small and Joanna and I wrote their names for them in cursive with big letters. What's the problem with that?”

.

nathan went to the boy's school when I was at my school across the street. He looked like the rest of the boys there, felt the same even. Their hands and feet small like grapes, stomachs that seem to be missing, their skin hairless, but rough. So it is easy to mix up the boys there. When I met nathan I asked him if he remembered the day I brought the rain, because I remembered him. He was standing there just like the others, but with a name tag that said 'nathan.' He didn't remember. "I must've been sick that day."

.

Even though Zin yelled at me for sharing the rain, I continued going back to the boy's school. She didn't scare me yet. I was still too young to be scared. There were a lot of boys at the school and it seemed all of them needed my help. I went through them one by one, trying to teach them to write bigger, speak louder, eat more. Missionary work. Most of my efforts failed, but they seemed to have at least grown a little in some direction by the time I left.

.

Since I became Zin nathan has gotten even smaller. He works selling school supplies at the corner store in town. He is a good husband as far as they go, sometimes he'll even eat a little something for dinner. When nathan's sleeping, which he often is, Liz and I are together getting bigger. Now Liz can rest her chin on the top of the refrigerator, I duck through doorways. Liz is four and reciting Shakespeare. I am 22 and radiating life from my core.

.

Zin comes over to play Scrabble with Liz.

"Triple word score! Did you see that Zin?"

"Yes!" Both Zin and I respond. We are both Zins, we are not sure who she's talking to. After Scrabble Liz's friend Jessica, with a big J, comes over. They read together then eat the loaf of bread I made last night.

.

Eventually, Zin told me it was okay to go share with the boys—she didn't know I already had. Zin took me to the school for condoned sharing and that's where I met nathan. After a week of condoned sharing Zin took me to my first co-ed dinner party, where I met nathan.

.

When Liz and I sat down on the couch this morning to play scrabble there was no breath from beneath us. No, "ow," no nothing. It was just a little quieter than usual. We looked under the quilt and there was no nathan. I stepped outside to look around. All the other Zins were out there too, looking patiently from their doorsteps, growing taller, deeper as they looked. I think I saw a few men get carried down the street by the wind. But it's hard to say, the men now so small like particles of dust. It seemed it was going to rain.

So all the Zins went back inside. Liz and I finished our game of Scrabble, and ate a great, big piece of cornbread.

growing pains - five

Sarah Rose Lejeune



advertisement i.

Nicole Le

Do you like the idea of a milkshake that tastes like lemonade? Say you were a girl who preferred being the type of girl who was spotted sipping a milkshake in a lawnchair in the yard in a 60s retro swimsuit and cat eyed glasses and big red lips and high cheekbones and a God-given jawline. Just say. But you absolutely abhor the stuff. Or maybe you're lactose-intolerant. And so you long for the milkshake somewhere in the infinite universe of expanding possibilities that tastes like a lemonade but looks like a milkshake. The summers of wishful thinking have begun for other girls on the block with their Oxford-chasing sandals on the pavement of the pre-September heat, but for you, it's a summer of wistful thinking. Because at the very least wishes are meant to be fulfilled in some regard. Wists are another matter entirely.

Time of Death II

Alexis Gee



"You're doing so well, come on, good boy, you can do it." I kick furiously, with more of an effort of leaving this horrifying liquid-space rather than try to walk in it. I am terrified of my death. And yet, she has no idea, does she? How can she stand in here when all I can do is reach out desperately for anything solid? I peed but it disappeared. If this liquid-space can take my *scent*, my *essence*, what stops it from taking me next? I have to get out of here.

elegy at hither creek.

Thomas Rathe

i never used to like the feeling
of marsh grass under my feet.
the ground would squish
like a filthy bloated sponge
smelling foul at low tide.

i'd swing one leg into the
sun-bleached fiberglass rowboat
and then another.
and it never felt quite right
somehow.

i can't seem to remember
all that much about the creek
back in those days—
except for maybe the meticulous
click of the galvanized steel oarlocks
as granddad rowed patiently
out into the morning.

it's hard to picture him
looking any different than he does
now.

thin arms glowing
blue with exhausted veins.
i didn't used to like to see that skin.
i'd recoil on the inside as if
my foot had gone and sunk
into the marsh
or i'd gotten sea lettuce wrapped round
my ankle
and i'd hop on one leg to the safety
of dry grass or the washed out
sand road.

* * *

maybe it was august when
i woke up one morning in
the desert.
and in the stillness i remembered
something i'd written once—
the whitegold noonday sun
on the surface of the reservoir.
and then the gleam faded into thoughts
in my head
like a choir of angels
you can't turn off
and you don't even want to be saved—

desert sun take me and i'll
join the cactus skeletons,
join the dead cities
under a quarter inch of sandy soil.
blood full of hibiscus flowers,
then and there
i can rest.

but it doesn't always feel like that,
bone dry and empty.
every year's a year more
since they buried papa
out on ram's pasture
in a silver box
under a red stone,
thirty some-odd paces
from the fencepost.

and granddad still rows—
bad as his eyesight is—out
by the half-sunken barge with the
black cormorants and back
home in time for a
watery cup of folgers and
a swiss cheese sandwich on
dry wheat bread.

sometimes the fishermen'll ask him
if he needs a tow.
i think he just waves since he
can't hear them anyway.
and i don't really know why
he rows still.
better i reckon than
waiting around to die in
the whitegold sun and
grey salt wind
where the oystercatchers
and terns and gulls might
pick at your bones
before the tides take them
back out to
the beginning of things.

Bambi

Annika Stridh





