

Stratus: Journal of Arts and Writing

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Professional & Continuing Education

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Edited and with an Introduction by Roxanne Ray

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Professional & Continuing Education

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Introduction

WELCOME TO THE FIFTH EDITION of *Stratus: Journal of Arts and Writing!*

University of Washington Educational Outreach is now moving strongly into its second century of promoting academic access and excellence, and in doing so, we continue to celebrate the art and writing of our students. *Stratus: Journal of Arts and Writing* promotes the visibility of the talent and efforts of our students, instructors, advisory board members, and staff.

At UW Educational Outreach and Professional & Continuing Education, we offer a wide range of courses and programs in the visual, performing, media, and literary arts, and we add new creative programs every year for learners of all ages. New programs are developed in collaboration with our campus partners and advisory board members, and often arise from suggestions from our students or from the general public. We are always interested in new ways to serve artists and to spur the creativity that is vital to success in today's technology-driven world. We invite your ideas for the future.

As part of our focus on the future, a key element of the Certificate Programs in Arts and Writing at UWEO and PCE is an emphasis on the student's success *after* the completion of our program. We strive to develop self-sufficient artists who can create and market artistic work for years and decades following graduation.

As in the first four volumes of *Stratus*, top graduates from a range of our programs are represented here in word and image. In this fifth edition, these visual and written works are connected by the theme of time: past and future. How do we understand the legacies of the past, and prepare future generations for the challenges to come?

Our graduates' work is presented in two sections. First, we creatively explore the multiple aspects of the legacies we inherit. Then, we explore the possibilities of the future and those who will come after us.

We publish *Stratus: Journal of Arts and Writing* on an annual basis, and would very much like to hear your thoughts.

Roxanne Ray, Ph.D.

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Voices of Our Instructors

About Battling Cancer

by Lyn Coffin

Instructor, Certificate Program in Literary Fiction

All actuarial arrangements (appointments) are articulated aggressions, aggrandizements affording acolytes angelic anguish, Andean anthems, Amazonian arguments. Anxiety, always approaching an abstract absolute Amen.

Big-time battles begin. Banned barns burn big, become bright beacons, bring barbarians. Buckshot breaks birds bloody. Bargains barter birthrights. Bit by bit belittled. Bye-bye, baby.

Chemo coordinated. Courteous candor capitulates. Craving's cold comforts completely co-opt clear communication. Clinics cut class compartments crosswise. Can compassion continue? Cancer. Cancer. Cancer. Cancer.

Dreams demand due diligence despite doctoral decrees. Dawn dares delight, defying discouragement. Desperate desire digs deep, deeper, doubting danger, daunting dictator despair.

Eyes engage enthusiastically, enchantment enters easily. Errors emigrate. Every effort exceeds excellence. Elemental energies eagerly embrace everything, even entropic endings.

Fighters finally focus forward, faces furrowed. Fierce feelings fuel first fast feints. Flags flap festively. Fans find freedom futile. Freeze frame.

Ghostly gardenia girls grab guardrails. Glibly gossiping guardians giggle, getting giddy.

Garbled good guys grin guiltily. Guessing games get going.

High hopes hover here. Happiness hesitates. Have harangues helped? Has Heaven heeded hymns? Have hospital higher-ups heard Him? How?

In incipient illness's incriminating imaginings, I incite intense interest, inspire illusions: I'm invested in innocence, interested in intercourse.

Jawboned January jinxes June. Jerkwater jeopardy. July jibes. Jill jilts jargon, joins jitterbugging Jack. Jaybirds' jailbreaking joy!

Kale, kefir. Keynote kahunas keep keypunching killjoy kanji. Kamikaze karma kindles karyological kerosene. Kaboom! Kyrie. Kali.

Labs' laconic labels lessen language. Loving looks lacerate. Latchkey larynx. Laryngitis. Laryngoscope. Last-gasp lasers. Laryngectomy.

Morning medicine. Meal medicine. Midnight medicine. More mandatory mammograms. Mastectomies mash mommy's milk mounds.

No, nothing new. No, not nervous now. No, nobody notices now. Nod nicely.

Oh only organizes or orchestrates opposition. Openly ominous omens of ordinary oncology.

People provide packaged pumpkin pies, plan park picnics, patiently perform parades.

Questions. Querulous questions. Quixotic questions. Quizzical questions. Quintessential questions. Qualms.

Radiology. Real rigor requires riptide risks, refusing romantic rescues.

Sudden surgery. Sight sliding, sea shrinking, sky sinking.

Time's toxic tick tock. Try to touch tenderly. Try.

Unabridged ultimatums understood. Unmentionable uh-ohs.

Vicissitudes vary values, veiling vision.

Words where? What wilderness?

X-rays x-irradiate x-factors.

Yesterday's yes?

Zero zaps all actuarial arrangements



A Long Way Back

(excerpt)

by Scott Driscoll

Instructor, Certificate Program in Literary Fiction

When Grandpa Lenocho picked me up at the Cedar Rapids airport wearing his gray Stetson and didn't bother removing the toothpick, I knew he meant business. Tomorrow we would celebrate his ninetieth birthday. That was the ostensible reason I gave when I called out of the blue to arrange a visit. Suspenders held his Sunday slacks over withered hips. He'd worked on building sites right up to three years ago when he broke his arm falling off a ladder. I hadn't been back to visit since that incident. But, who's kidding who. My lack of visiting is not why he peered at me this way, shoulders squared, chin cocked, skeptically, questioning my resolve.

"How about a drive?" This would give me a chance to explain why the divorce question had even come up.

"There's plenty of gas in the Olds."

Walking through the sunny parking lot, I noticed he was even thinner than I remembered. The thinning started during the years of Grandma's strokes. He would not let Grandma go to a facility. Home is where she wanted to be and home is where a dutiful husband kept his wife, expense be damned. His Oldsmobile Delta, a Fifties model with chrome bumpers, was as usual polished spotless. It was hot. Late August. They'd had rain.

Used to cooling Pacific breezes you forget how roistering the air can be around here.

He drove and soon the heat shimmering runway disappeared behind railroad tracks and the cylindrical steel silo beside the tracks appeared taller than the airport's tower. We kept windows rolled down and I smelled that sweet starchy smell of corn and the grubby familiar smell of moist, black earth and I said, "*Now* it feels like I'm really here." Ignoring that comment, he slipped in a fresh toothpick, thought better of it, opened the glove box and offered me a fat, hand-rolled Honduran cigar, gift from a former client. Took one himself. Made it clear ashes were to be tipped into Dixie cups. Wouldn't tolerate fouling the actual built-in ashtray.

Aside from his Lenocho Custom Home pickup, this was the only vehicle I'd ever known him to drive, that's how loyal the guy was to things he cared for. At the end of each work day, tools were cleaned and hung from hooks in spots designated with blue outlines on latticeboard in his garage. He set the standard of care in our family. How you care for your things, he would say if he ever actually said it, is a reflection of how you care for loved ones.

How he cared for Grandma would be a tough measure for the most devoted spouse to live up to, not that I'm including myself in that category – okay, maybe wishing I could. Twenty-four-hour-a-day care workers expropriated the main floor in the bungalow he'd designed and built. He moved into the basement. Not to suggest he was a martyr. Down there he could watch Friday night fights undisturbed on the Magnivox with the rabbit ears, smoke his tipped William Penn cigars without being chased out onto the porch.. But that steadfast, uncomplaining devotion to Grandma, that measure of love that went beyond duty or pride or habit or pity, the venial charades that too often masquerade as love, that is what induced me to dial Grandpa when it became apparent that Jan and I were one step away from sliding down our skid road into the choppy waters of divorce. No one in my family - that I knew of - had ever divorced. Did I really want to be first? Poor little Elmer. Not yet three. Such a precocious kid. Talking non-stop in order to talk over Mommy and Daddy's arguing.

Noticing an unfamiliar crop planted in alternating fields, I pointed and asked.

"You have been gone a while," he said, not holding back a tone of scolding. "That's soy. Making their money in beans now."

"Sorry, but it's hard to fly with a little one."

The silence that followed could only be taken as commentary on my lack of sincerity. *Always be frank with Frank*, my dad liked to say. He called his Czech father by his Americanized name. I asked what our destination might be. Trips to visit Frank Lenocho did not typically include sight seeing. Maybe a drive through the Amana Colonies for lunch at Ox Yoke.

"We're going to visit Grandma."

"Didn't you once live around here?" Not that the corn hemming us in on either side gave me much to go on. This was more like déjà vu, like a feeling of return.

"Let me show you something." He turned the boat of a car in a slow arc onto a farm

road hardly wider than the Olds. Soon he pulled over, nodded toward a farm house set back along a gravel drive. With steep gables, scrolled trim, a columned, wrap-around porch, and overhanging shade elms, the house looked Victorian respectable.

Our cigars puff puff puffed out open windows. After a considerable silence, he said, "That's where we first lived." He was sixteen and spoke no English when he arrived with his father from Czechoslovakia. They did not arrive alone. A woman came with them, and other children, but I knew not to bring that up or his silence would fall like an iron curtain. They had debts. Rather than attend school, he worked off his debts with his father on this farm. Soon as his obligation was filled, he left. After that chilly parting, Frank Lenocho never spoke to his father again.

An Iowa State banner hung out a loft window just under the apex of the roof. The house, grand though it was, had suffered the fate of so many houses left behind by the migration to towns serviced by the interstate. A liability to a family that could no longer make a living here, the house had simply been left empty, a timorous monument to a way of life that was gone and not coming back. After Grandma died, Grandpa turned the business over to my uncle and took on the remodel of this sad house as if his singular devotion to its restoration were to be his life's crowning achievement. He had an arrangement with the absentee owner. But when said owner drove by and saw how upscale his property was becoming, he offered it for sale at an absurd price Grandpa couldn't possibly meet. Given its isolation, it never sold. This past June the owner rented it to Amesey frat grads needing a hangout.

"When was the last time you came by here?"

He shook his head all but imperceptibly. "They just don't care."

He avoided shoulders as he drove, not wanting mud in his wheel wells, and stopped at a crossroads. On the north side was a brownstone church with a bell tower. Across the road, in a bare patch behind a gate in a farmer's field, was a large shed built of rough timbers, a flag pole beside it like it had once served some official purpose.

"Grandma and I were married in this church." The alcove above the entrance prominently exhibited a carved inscription with its founding date: 1873. No coincidence that the first round of Catholic Lenochs from Písečná arrived here that year.

"Grandma's out back." He pulled on his cigar, tapped the ashes into the Dixie cup. Looked away. Though it meant him sweating in the car with no air-conditioning, I asked if I could take a closer look. He nodded. Yes, if I liked, go ahead.

The double-arched church doors were secured with a chain and padlock. I waded around through weeds to the back. Opened and shut the rusty gate behind me. Who knows why we bother with such details. Maybe I worried that Grandpa was watching? Most of the headstones were sunbleached, the inscriptions hard to read. Along with Lenochs and Grandma were several Sklenars, Grandma's family, among them her father.

During my childhood visits, he was the old guy in the rocker on the porch who didn't speak English. Despite being warned not to bother him, I'd play jacks on the porch just so

I could stare. I'd been shown a photo of a Prague cathedral with pointy spires and thought it was a castle and assumed these old people speaking Czech hailed from that castle. Where was this far away land where Grandma and Grandpa both grew up? My aunt learned Czech but not my father. He'd never say why he refused to learn his parents' language. In fact, he had tried to talk me out of seeking Grandpa's advice now. "Don't let him get away with his sanctimonious crap. Ask him about Rosalie and Anežka, and see what he says." My father loved his father, but had never quite forgiven him for something that had to do with this Anežka, and as far as I was concerned, that was their business.

The shed across the road, he'd explained, was the old schoolhouse where Grandma taught. That is, until she had my aunt and was forced to quit. I glanced back at the Olds. Smoke from his cigar curled up in rings in the breathless air. Without asking, afraid he'd say he minded, I crossed the road to have a look.

Inside a sagging steel gate *yes, close it behind you* and beside a water trough the abandoned schoolhouse on its flatstone foundation was crude but solid. Windows boarded over. Door hung loose. The narrow vestibule was stacked with milking equipment. I stepped in. Looking for what exactly? Some clue into what it was that had earned and preserved such rarified love? A water stained couch had stuffing pulled loose in tufts. Thrown against the couch a floppy mattress. Nap spot for migrant crop pickers maybe. Musky, damp. Ammoniac odor a little too familiar. I had learned to recognize rodent funk in my condo caretaker job.

Grandma taught all subjects, including English, including American history, which she had mastered probably better than most locals on her path to citizenship. Had I been a kid in that class, I would have burned to raise my hand and ask, but why are you here? With curiosity, not with accusation. Her funny accent would have seemed exotic.

Looking back across the road, it occurred to me that maybe this is what he wanted me to notice: *there is not one Kacalek headstone in that cemetery.*

I returned to the car. "So tell me," I said, intending to provoke just a little. "Where *are* the Kacaleks buried?" Josef Lench, Grandpa's father, married the Kacalek woman who arrived with them. That he still had a wife, and Grandpa still had a mother, at the farm in Písečná, did not stop them. She brought children with her. They added a couple of their own. The other Lenchs expunged them.

Grandpa clicked his tongue. "Some over in Sulphur Springs."

That's where the elder Lench had lived with his *bastard* Kacaleks. It was in Johnson County. Couldn't be more than an hour's drive. "Any chance we could swing by there?" If, it wouldn't make us late for dinner, I added.

He stubbed out his cigar in the Dixie cup, held it out to let the smoke spiral away. I'd already tossed mine. His jaw clenched, unclenched. In went a toothpick. Still plenty of afternoon left. Meal times at his house were non-negotiable, but if I knew Joyce, she'd already have his vegetables boiled and keeping warm under potlids. Just be up to us to reheat the meatloaf. "We'll drive by."

This was a sacrifice he was making on my behalf. Out of respect I vowed silently not to embarrass him with what was really my father's agenda. *Still, wow.*

• • •

THERE WAS NO TRAFFIC to speak of on the county roads, but Grandpa's eyesight wasn't sharp and he took turns like he was mooring a yacht. Scarcely glanced around. Spoke not a word.

"How'd you and Grandma ever meet?" I asked to break the silence.

That toothpick waved like a conductor's wand. "Your grandma wasn't my first love." His *first love* he'd known since they were kids in Písečná. When he said her name, Rosalie Kacalka, I sat up straight. She came from the Kacalek farm to their house as a live-in maid when she was fourteen. He used to take her for rides in his father's horse-pulled buggy. They'd drape a blanket over their laps and hold hands under it. He'd secretly hoped one day they would marry. Despite that Kacaleks were a rung or two down the social ladder. Despite that his father gave Rosalie a gift on her fifteenth birthday of red silk sheets.

"What happened?"

"I was forced to leave with my father. I had no choice." His clipped tone made it clear there would be nothing more on that subject beyond adding, "It was probably for the best." Okay, don't push. So, I redirected. Why Grandma? She had more "schooling" than he did, something he admired. She did not chide him for his English, though it was worse than hers. And, she *did not probe into the past* he left behind in Písečná.

• • •

SULPHUR SPRINGS HAD JOINED the ranks of stranded, dying towns. The local cemetery, home to Kacaleks, was enclosed by a chain-link fence behind a vacant church with a for-sale sign out front. Next to the church, a handsome three-story brick schoolhouse with a tall arched entryway had been bullied by a uniform coat of institutional gray and turned into a grange hall. Like so many small mid-western towns that clung to survival by a thread, this one was not so much sad as pitiable. Did people really still live in the dozen or so one-story bungalows that lined the road, one yard spilling into the next, no fence for demarcation, no feature to distinguish one from the other? What had kept the Kacaleks here?

"That's the house." Grandpa pulled off onto the shoulder.

My interest in the cemetery switched on a dime. "Any family still there?"

"We don't consider Kacaleks family."

A recent generation had added a back room and a screened and covered back porch. The clapboard-sided bungalow was modest, needless to say, compared to the Victorian farmhouse we'd just seen. Its windows had been replaced with double-hung aluminum framers that still wore winter storm sashes. Surely this meant hot air was trapped inside in summer and nothing could be seen clearly out. The yard behind the house dropped

downhill to a vegetable and flower garden. Beyond the yard, across a double set of train tracks, bulrushes and cat-o-nine-tails and tall sedges lined Dead Man's Creek. The tracks curved east past what Grandpa identified as a communal vegetable garden. *Didn't say how he knew this to be the case.* The tracks passed a steel silo. The words "Superior Seed," painted on the silo in large black letters, were the boldest thing in sight.

A slender woman wearing a print sundress sat on the covered back porch, bent as though reading something in her lap. Now and then she rocked back and forth in the porch swing. There was something graceful in the way she held herself, though she could not have known she was being watched. Grandpa confirmed this was a relative of Barbora Kacalka. She'd be my father's contemporary, obviously younger, between his age and mine. Her long dark hair swooped back of her shoulders, held with a clip. Her focus on what she was reading was so intense that when a skinny teen boy bolted out the back door, she lifted her head like a deer alerted to danger, then yanked the screen door shut behind him. He wore jeans and a logo teeshirt and work boots and climbed into a mud-spattered, big-wheel pickup parked in ruts in the yard.

A wooden gutter – gutters looked original – had broken free and tilted down at one end and drained onto the ground. This detail seemed to bother Grandpa the most. He shook his head as if at some insult trying to sting him. "At least my father never let the place go like this."

Grandpa had turned the engine off but started it up when the kid in the pickup ground our way and stopped.

"You the ones here to make an offer on the house?"

Grandpa said nothing. From my angle little of the boy was visible. Buzz-cut hair, muscular shoulders. An athlete, maybe a wrestler. Craning so the boy could see me, I said out Grandpa's open window, "His father used to live here. Maybe you knew him? Josef Lenocho?" Was this a betrayal? His jaw did that clenching thing again.

"Oh ya, that old guy, no offense. He was my great grandfather."

"That your mom?" He gave us the teen eyeroll. "Why's she selling the house?"

"She's the county librarian. The library was in the old schoolhouse but it moved and she's sick of the driving. You see how dead this place is."

"Your mom's related to Barbora Kacalka, right?"

"Grandma K? Yea, why?"

"Think she'd be up for a visit?"

"You'd have to talk to her. Good luck with that."

"Thank you," said Grandpa. "Nice to meet you."

The boy gunned it and the pickup disappeared in a splatter of clods and Grandpa popped his tongue and pulled on his toothpick. He could see by my eye raising how badly I wanted to talk to this Kacalek woman. "Can't blame the boy for wanting out of here." But he put the Olds in park. Chewed. Looked at me. Waited.

I tapped on the screened porch door. She looked up expectantly, but then saw the Olds

parked on the shoulder with its chrome bumpers and gave me a different look altogether. "That's gotta be Frank Lenocho." I nodded. "You are?" I told her. Not off to a great start. She folded closed the real estate documents in her lap. A small fan hummed in a corner, but the air was dense, sticky. She had a broad face and worry lines at her eyes. She was attractive in a wan, spent way, that was somehow argued against, as though with a contradictory aplomb, by dark thick brows. Her hair was neither permed nor colored. Looking up from that porch swing, she regarded me, searching no doubt for a resemblance. Formal in manner, more than was customary in these small towns, she was nevertheless earnest and even curious. "This was his idea to stop here?" Then she added, with a note of incredulity, "Not here to make an offer, I don't suppose?" No, I explained, my idea entirely. Her turn to nod. "Probably pointless to invite him in?" I agreed, yes, pointless. "I have some questions I'd like answered," she said. "I'm sure you do, too." It was plain, we agreed, that he wouldn't tolerate waiting long. I should come back, but alone. She'd make iced tea and show me some documents. Letters, birth certificates, ship passenger lists.

"Your grandfather is mistaken about Rosalie Kacalka. There is just no talking to him about that. I've tried."

"Rosalie the maid? The one he fell in love with in Písečná?"

"Maid? He called her that?" Those dark brows knit. "She was my aunt. Everyone talked about her. I never met her. She had a reputation for being wild."

Behind me the Olds' big V-8 engine revved. I was in a patch of sun and sweating. She tapped the bench swing beside her, invited me to sit for a moment.

"Rosalie had a child, a daughter, Anežka, when was fifteen. Anežka was sent to an orphanage. Some of us are pretty convinced that grumpy old Lenocho out there right now in the car was her father."

"My father took him back there for a visit after the Velvet Revolution."

"I heard about this epic trip. She died in a fire, if I heard it right."

"Pretty tragic. It's funny. My dad's a lawyer, but when it comes to his own family he won't ask the obvious questions."

"I understand Rosalie could be pretty convincing. With men especially. Come back. I'll show you some letters and birth certificates and photos." She shook her head and gave me a look despairing of this thing, whatever it was, ever coming to any resolution. "Lenoch men. Sorry, I guess you're one."

"Don't worry. Believe me, I have to deal with it."

The Olds turned around in the school parking lot. Promising to return when I could borrow the car, I rejoined Grandpa and we headed back to the main road and he said, feigning cheerful, "You get what you needed?" Soon the house and Sulphur Springs were lost to sight. I admitted she'd invited me back, but left unspoken that this would necessarily mean renting a car if he wouldn't allow me to take the Olds, which, really, I couldn't imagine happening. The silence that followed reinforced my suspicion. Certain subjects were closed and this was one of them.



Saving Santa

by Diane Mettler

Instructor, Certificate Program in Screenwriting

FADE IN

EXT NORTH POLE NIGHT

It's a blizzard. A polar bear walks, head into the wind.

It passes by a huge, castle, almost invisible in the heavy snow. Snow piles up against the lower windows.

INT CASTLE - TOY ROOM - NIGHT

Hundreds of ELVES work hard on toys — everything from remote control cars to stuffed animals.

Even with a small ELF BAND playing Christmas music and other ELVES bringing cookies and drinks down aisles to the workers, the mood is somber.

ON THE FLOOR

A red headed Elf, MONTY, who pops heads onto GI Joes, leans over to a pudgy Elf, FRED, who assembles B-B guns.

MONTY

He should be back by now.

They both glance up at the calendar on the wall — December 20th.

FRED

Heard he was last seen at a Starbucks.

MONTY

I heard he has a gambling problem.

Fred's horrified.

FRED

Who'd you hear that from?

Elf BERNICE, who looks tougher than both Monty and Fred combined, steps into the conversation as she sews on a doll's head.

BERNICE

It's all rumors. Get back to work.

Monty and Fred reluctantly go back to work.

FRED (whispering)

I didn't know he gambled.

MONTY

Sad isn't it. Imagine if the kids find out.

Fred shudders.

Bernice hits Monty upside the head with her doll's head.

Monty raises the GI Joe to smack her back, but thinks better of it.

The door to the Toy Room opens. All activity stops. In steps a distraught MRS. CLAUS, flanked by administrative elf, DONALD, who would fit perfectly into the corporate world if only two feet taller.

The only sound is the storm raging outside.

MRS. CLAUS

I assume you've heard by now. Mr. Claus hasn't returned from his trip.

Murmurs and whispers.

MRS. CLAUS (CONT'D)

I don't want production to slow just
because he's not here yet. We haven't
missed a Christmas. And we're not going
to start this year.

Mrs. Claus wells up and can't continue. Donald takes over.

DONALD

We know that Mr. Claus was last seen in Seattle. Other than that, we know very little.

Monty raises his hand.

MONTY

Why don't you just use that thing he uses to check up on boys and girls . . . you know,
to see if they've been naughty or nice?

Mrs. Claus sobs grower louder.

MONTY (CONT'D)

What'd I say?

DONALD

It appears, he took it with him.

Monty raises an eyebrow at Fred.

MONTY (whispering)

No doubt using it to cheat at the casinos.

Fred nods — this hadn't occurred to him.

MRS. CLAUS

If he said anything to any of you, please come forward. This is very
important, not just to me but . . .

She breaks down again. Donald motions for another elf to escort her out then turns back to the group.

DONALD

We don't want anyone to worry. We're implementing action plan R right now.

Confusion. No one knows what that is.

DONALD (CONT'D)

We're going to call on Ruger.

The elves GASP in unison.

BERNICE

Are you crazy?

DONALD

You heard Mrs. Claus. Production is paramount folks. (beat) We'll keep you posted.

Donald quickly exits. If the elves weren't worried before, they are now.

* * *

EXT CASTLE NIGHT

Donald steps into the raging snow storm wearing a parka and snow shoes. He's not the outdoorsy type, but trudges into the wind and up a hill.

* * *

LATER

Exhausted, Donald arrives at the top of the hill, the castle barely visible below. A weathered, older elf, SCOTTY, stands with a flashlight, belting out commands.

SCOTTY

Fifty-nine, sixty. Don't even think about stopping. Sixty-one, sixty-two . . .

Donald approaches cautiously.

SCOTTY (CONT'D)

You think Bruce Lee would stop? Now push it. Sixty-three, sixty-four —

Donald looks around for this person Scotty is talking to.

SCOTTY (CONT'D)

(to Donald)

That's far enough.

Donald squints through the blinding snow. Barely visible, on his back, is an elf dusted with snow wearing a T-shirt and jeans. He bench presses an enormous snowball.

DONALD

Aren't you cold?

The left stops, shakes the snow from his face and hair.

It's RUGER, the biggest, meanest, bad ass elf there ever was— all 5' 6" of him.

RUGER

Toughens me up.

DONALD

We need to talk.

SCOTTY

You're taking him out of the zone. Can't it wait?

DONALD

It's an emergency. A Code Red Green.

Ruger tosses the snowball and jumps to his feet. Donald shrieks as the large ball sails over him and into the darkness. Ruger towers over the two elves.

RUGER

He's missing? How long? Where was he last seen?

Donald can't help but stare at scar on Ruger's face. And how pronounced Ruger's pointy ears are with that short, almost military haircut.

DONALD

Six days ago at a Toys Galore Convention in Seattle.

RUGER

And you waited until now to tell me?

(to Scotty)

Scotty, get the sleigh ready. We're leaving in an hour.

Scotty nods and runs off. Donald watches Ruger nervously.

DONALD

We would have told you earlier but Mrs. Claus was nervous.

RUGER

Why should she be nervous. I've trained all my life to protect Christmas.

DONALD

Of course. But your methods are —

SCOTTY (O.S.)

Oh no!

RUMBLING. Donald and Ruger spin around. The snowball that Ruger tossed aside earlier is now heading

down the hill toward the castle, growing in size and speed.

* * *

INT WORKSHOP

The elves hear the rumbling. Used to the routine, they grab the items around them.

THUD. The room shakes violently for a moment. Afterwards, the elves release the objects and resume work.

MONTY

Christmas is as good as gone.

Fred nods. Bernice hits them both with a doll, but she's worried too.

* * *

INT RUGER'S ROOM NIGHT

The place is half gym, half bedroom. A small punching bag (actually a bag of powdered sugar) hangs in the corner.

On the wall hangs two posters — GI JOE and Bruce Lee.

Ruger throws into his duffle bag the essentials — red and white underwear, a toothbrush, candy-colored nunchucks.

* * *

INT HALLWAY NIGHT

Scotty bangs on Ruger's door.

SCOTTY

The sleigh's ready.

The door opens. Ruger steps out pulling on a leather red jacket and slips on red-framed shades.

SCOTTY

Where'd you get those?

RUGER

Amazon.

Scotty looks down at his shirt and blue lederhosen. In an effort to look cool he flips up the collar of his shirt. They head out, Ruger goes one way, Scotty the other.

SCOTTY

The sleigh's this way.

RUGER

I want to say good-bye to Mindy.

Scotty sighs and follows Ruger.

* * *

INT CANDY CANE ROOM NIGHT

Dozens of ELVES work at counters making candy canes. Some cook, some roll, others bag. Ruger scans the room. In the back, twirling red and white vines at eye-numbing speed is MINDY, a beautiful, brown-eyed elf with lush hair that cascades over her lederhosen.

Ruger maneuvers through the room toward her, barely fitting through the aisles. Everyone goes silent as they watch him — towering above them and knocking over containers and candy in his wake.

Scotty follows behind, trying to upright everything Ruger topples.

Mindy sees him coming and looks for an escape. Seeing none, she turns and smiles.

RUGER

Mindy, I'm leaving for Seattle.

MINDY

I heard. We're all rooting for you.

RUGER

It might be dangerous. I might not come back.

MINDY

Really?

Mindy tries hide the fact that this is actually a good thing.

SCOTTY

Come on Ruger. Let's go.

Ruger pulls a package from his pocket. Presents it to Mindy.

RUGER

Something to remember me by.

MINDY

You didn't need to do that.

She takes the present and he gives her a hug. She's so short her face is pressed into his stomach. She fights

to breath. The other elves look on in horror.

SCOTTY

You're suffocating her.

Ruger lets go immediately. Mindy sucks in fresh air.

RUGER

Sorry.

MINDY

That's OK.

RUGER

Good-bye. I'll be thinking of you.

MINDY

You focus on Santa. Bring him home in one piece.

Ruger gives her a wink and turns to leave. He knocks over a couple elves and a bag of sugar.

Mindy opens the present. It's a signed photo of Bruce Lee.

Mindy shows it to her fellow elves, confused.

* * *

INT HANGER NIGHT

ELVES finish harnessing the reindeer to a shiny silver sleigh. Ruger and Scotty, inspect the sleigh and deer.

SCOTTY

You've been chasing her since 4th grade. When are you going to give up?

Ruger points to one of the reins.

RUGER (to elf #1)

Looks loose.

ELF #1

On it.

RUGER (to Scotty)

I've got an idea.

Saving Santa by Diane Mettler

SCOTTY

Try not to step on her?

RUGER

Go ahead. Make jokes.

Ruger pulls out a selfie stick. Hands it to Scotty.

SCOTTY

Huh?

Ruger throws his and Scotty's duffle bags into the sleigh and they step inside.

RUGER

We're record me finding Kris, saving Christmas.

SCOTTY

Why can't you just tell her about it when you get home?

Ruger buckles up.

RUGER

Because she sees me as this big oaf-knocking stuff over and smacking my head on door jams. (beat) Down there it'll be different. And when it goes viral, she'll see me as a hero.

A PILOT ELF in a WWII pilot helmet and goggles, jumps in and grabs the controls.

PILOT ELF

Keep your hands in the sleigh. We're preparing for take off.

SCOTTY

I don't know Ruger.

They raise their hands.

RUGER

You got a better one?

SCOTTY

Yeah, forget about her. Move on.

The pilot hits another switch. Lights blink around the outside of the sleigh, giving it an almost classic, alien-ship look.

PILOT ELF

On your command, sir.

RUGER

Let's find him.

The pilot snaps the reins. The sleigh and deer shoot out of the hanger. It's like a Road Runner cartoon exit. All that remains is a small, swirling cloud of snow.





Legacies

Rouge Awakening



by Lisa Glynn

Certificate Program in Photography, 2015



Circumstance

by Joey Carney

Literary Fiction Capston, 2015

They first saw each other in a corner store, he buying batteries, she buying potatoes. They were the only two customers in the store. The clerk went in the back room and left them alone. He looked back at her—she had large, mysterious eyes—and there was a connection. She saw something inexplicable in the way he stood—the confidence she lacked. He imagined asking her something about those eyes, making her laugh, and taking her on a walk. She was abashed and looked down at her fat, short legs. He was admiring her beautiful legs. She wanted him to talk to her. He wanted to talk to her.

The clerk brought batteries finally and the man escaped as quickly as he could—ashamed, hating himself. The girl looked at her body, ashamed and hating herself.

They met again years later. She'd moved to the city and he was passing through. She was bored with her life. She had an office job and she made money but she hated waking up in the morning. He hated what he was doing—a laborer for a roofing company. He imagined doing great things with his life and travelling to far off places. She was disenchanted with relationships. He had never had one.

They were both in a Denny's, sitting in neighboring booths. She was looking at his broad back. He felt eyes on his back. There was a connection.

He knew those eyes on his back belonged to a beautiful woman. She looked down and

they didn't recognize each other. They finished eating and went their separate ways without saying a thing, feeling they'd missed something. "That guy was a creep," she said to herself. "What a stuck up bitch," he thought.

Their paths crossed one more time, years later. On the streets of another country, his boat had stopped for repairs and she had a long layover. Both were exploring the strange city. There was a procession, and one of the statues being carried fell over. The man and woman were passing by. They saw a boy pinned under the weight of the statue. Not even noticing each other, both ran to help lift the statue and free the boy.

"To the left! To the left! It's too heavy the other way," the man said.

The woman, recognizing her own language, shouted,

"Put a rock under the base and we can roll it off." Taking advantage of her short legs, she slouched underneath the torso of the grieving statue, adjusted a rock, and crawled back to help push. Some other onlookers joined in and they freed the boy. The man and the woman helped carry him to the hospital.

"Hope he's okay," the man said.

"Me too."

"That never happened to me before."

"I remember seeing a car wreck once, but never up close. Never that bad."

"Maybe we were heroes."

"Or we were there at the right time."

They left the hospital, onto the street where people passed.

"You want to go for a walk?" the man asked.

"Why not," she smiled.

Neither one recognized the other. They walked along the bank of the river and the woman spoke again.

"Surely they would have helped that kid if we hadn't been there."

"You'd think."

"You know, you never even told me your name."

"And I don't know yours."

"We could just stay mysteries to each other."

They sat and watched the ships coming in, where the blue water met the shore. There was a comfortable silence.

"What brought you here?"

"I was tired of Boston."

"I grew up in Boston."

"Funny. Well Miss Mysterious, I have to get back to my ship before they lock up. Would you like to meet again tomorrow? You're very beautiful." He wasn't afraid to say it and for once she wasn't afraid of herself.

"My plane leaves tomorrow," she said, "but I might be able to miss it."

"Then I'll meet you here tomorrow."

“Okay.”

Neither remembered that day in the store or in the diner, and they probably never would. It was better that way. As she walked back to her hotel, and he to his ship, they wondered about things like circumstance and destiny. She remembered the man’s confidence when he spoke to her. He remembered the woman’s walk as she left; it drove him crazy.

A knock came to the man’s room later that night. Boom! Boom! Reverberating through the steel ship.

“Sir, you are the man who helped the boy under the statue today?”

“Yes.”

“You’re going to need to come with us.”

There was silence. The man wasn’t sure what to say.

“I don’t understand.”

“Can you give us the name and whereabouts of the woman you were with?”

“I’m afraid I don’t know.”

When they came up top the light from the moon was reflecting off the moving waves, making them shimmer. The boat rocked back and forth calmly. Seagulls were still crying. The lights of the city were coming on. Everything smelled of life and possibility.

Charges were brought against the man, and he was put in jail that night. The woman woke up early the next morning. She went to a café near her hotel, sipping coffee and watching the boats rock back and forth in the bay. Clothes were drying on lines on the roofs of the white houses, colors moving in the breeze. As she took a sip of coffee she leafed through the morning paper until she came across a side story about two foreigners blamed for the death of a young boy, smashed by a statue. The man had been indicted and police were looking for the woman. The coffee went stale in her mouth.

She got on her plane due to leave that day. She was pushed back in her seat, the plane lifted, and her stomach felt weightless. She looked through the window at the city getting smaller and cursed herself for not having given her name to the man.



Throated Hummingbird

by Chloe Lam

Certificate Program in Natural Science Illustration, 2015





Travel Snapshots

by Kristin Strout

Certificate Program in Literary Fiction II, 2015

Certificate Program in Popular Fiction, 2014

Security Scanners

As I shuffle forward in the airport security line, I have my plan down. Shoes off first, then sweater. Barrette out of my hair, computer and Kindle in their own bin. Miniature cosmetics in a clear bag, out for inspection. I step into the full body scanner, holding my hands over my head and reflecting with pride on my efficiency. I am certainly a credit to my line—no one can complain of being delayed by me. I smile at the security official, but he frowns at me and corrects my hand posture by putting his own hands on his head, with his forefingers pointing up like little horns. I laugh at the joke. He does not smile. Then I remember that airport security officials, almost without exception, do not joke. The official instructs me to place my hands as shown. I make horns and wipe the smile from my face. Every now and then, an image of this guy laughing at all the people he forced into making finger horns pops into my head. I try not to obsess about it.

Beijing

I'm in Beijing at the Wanfujing Night Market, and my ten-year-old son is begging me to buy a skewer of fried scorpions. There are two kinds—the bigger, uglier black ones, slick

and shiny with oil from the fryer, and the small, pale ones that come two to a stick, their tails curled. My son wants the pale ones, because, he says, “Everyone knows the small ones are more poisonous.” We’ve already inspected the other stalls selling fried delicacies—silkworms, tarantulas, snakes, crickets, cockroaches, scorpions, and some items I don’t recognize. The skewers glisten in the light from the red lanterns, laid out perfectly in row upon row next to woks filled with hot oil. I choose one of the small scorpion sticks and hand over ten yuan as my son hops in excitement.

France

We are in France, in the countryside near the Dordogne River valley. This area has been labeled one of the “cradles of civilization” and there are cave paintings here that were created 17,000 years ago. We try to imagine how much time is encompassed in 17,000 years, and fail utterly. Old does not describe it, nor ancient. Pre-historic is a strange term—how can something have been created before history? The oldest cave paintings are at Lascaux, a cave discovered in 1940 by four teenage boys looking, as the story goes, for their lost dog. The cave was open to the public until the foot traffic and exhalations of the visitors damaged the paintings. Lascaux II was created, an exact replica of the real thing. It is exact in all ways, except that it is not the real thing, is not old, was created with new paint and material, and is in a cave fashioned to *look* like the other one. Over 2,000 visitors a day walk through it. We are not among them.

Still at the Airport

My airport humiliation is not over. Horns down and out of the scanner, I am called out of the line for a bag inspection. Was this because I thought the guy was joking? Another official begins the ritual of wiping down the suitcase with a special pad that can reputedly detect dangerous substances when placed in the machine reader. I want to know more about how this works—but now is not the time to ask. I stand there unconcerned, knowing I have nothing to fear from a check except the growing line behind me. I *know* what is in my bag. “Do you have any knives or sharp objects, ma’am?” I almost snap, “Of course not!” but decide on a more neutral, “I don’t think so.” The question makes me doubt myself, but as the bag is searched to no avail, my confidence returns and I even allow myself a slight air of impatience. Then, from the outside pocket of the bag, the official pulls out a gleaming corkscrew—the kind of wine bottle opener that many waiters use, with a little arm that vaguely resembles a pocket knife.

Chile

“There are 60,000 dogs between Valparaiso and Vina del Mar, but only 3,000 reported dog bites annually,” a proud resident tells us. For once, we don’t know how to reply.

“Chupa cabra” is a common slang term here, meaning “to suck the blood out of a goat.”

A man sits on his horse, yet leans against the wall near a door of a house. This makes

me smile with the joy of seeing the unexpected.

Locals proudly claim the Pan-America Highway extends from the tip of Argentina to Alaska. While the Darien Gap separates Central and South America and is not yet crossed by the highway, they are otherwise correct.

Cacti can be used as very effective fences.

Coffee bars where the women waitresses dress skimpily are called “calientes.”

We are told never to attempt to bribe a Chilean policeman. They are very proud of their jobs, are part of the military, and are not corrupt. However, in Argentina it is a completely different story.

Liquids and Airport Security

Water bottles are non-negotiable—they cannot go through security. Although I know this, I feel compelled to have a bottle in my hand until the last recycling bin comes into view. It is a long dry spell from when I enter the airport to when I am finally on the plane with the seat belt light off and the drink cart coming around. This is why, after clearing security, I will pay \$5 for a bottle of water at one of the overpriced snack shops on the concourse. This must be a revenue-generating scheme. I am convinced that when airports calculate the earnings of the concourse shops, bottled water earns its own line item. And really, how hard can it be to determine whether I am bringing a bottle of water versus liquid nitrogen on board? Don't we have the technology to be able to discern the difference?

Nepal

All through the day the peaks of the Annapurna Mountain Range play hide-and-seek with the clouds, teasing me with brief, small, snow-covered glimpses as I walk the steep paths. At sunset, the clouds roll away and reveal the full splendor of the mountains in all directions. Magnificent is too small a word to describe the sight. I stand in the fading light, marveling at the beauty as the moon rises. Ethereal, yet grand—these mountains are the reason I have come. But this is as far as I will go. I have lost the desire to conquer these proud peaks. It is enough to revere them and absorb the profound sense of peace that comes from trekking in their shadows. These mountains are sacred to the Nepali people, and although I have visited countless churches and temples around the world, no setting more fully evokes a sense of the sacred in me than these proud peaks. Our guides tell stories of Sherpas refusing to accompany their climbing partners on the last stage to the summit—refusing to conquer the mountain. Standing here, I feel a wave of shame that I, just like most Westerners, have thought only of trying to best these mountains, to plant my own paltry scrap of flag.

Airport Bathroom Scene

A mother and her three-year-old daughter enter an airport bathroom stall. The stall door closes. Mom's feet are visible but nothing else.

Mom: “Chelsea, are you done yet?”

Chelsea: “Mom, where is Cousin Tina?”

Mom: “She is at home, in her house, in Texas. Are you done yet?”

Chelsea: “Mom, where is Grandma right now?”

Mom, sounding irritated: “I don’t know. At home, probably. Chelsea, are you done now?”

Chelsea: “Mom, where is my friend Sara right now?”

Mom: “I have no idea where Sara is. Chelsea, we need to catch an airplane and you need to hurry up. We don’t have much time. Are you done now?”

Chelsea: “Where is Daddy?”

Mom, in an exasperated tone: “He is outside waiting for us. Answer me, are you done now?”

Chelsea: “Mom, where is my teddy?”

Mom, yelling: “CHELSEA, ARE YOU DONE NOW?”

Chelsea: “Yes. But Mom, you shouldn’t talk to me in that kind of tone.”

Tibet

TOILETS. In western Tibet, the toilets, if they exist at all, consist of raised brick platforms with holes over an enclosed pit. These toilet pits stand higher than a person, are exposed (there are no trees in western Tibet) and the smell is overpowering. Wear your dust mask and watch your footing—there is more than one story of foreigners falling into the cesspool and having to be fished out.

Yaks. Respect the yak—it is the workhorse of the Tibetan plateau. Yaks will carry your gear on *koras*—sacred pilgrimages—and will be the source of dried meat, milk, cheese and butter along the way. Even their dung is used—it is dried on the sides of houses and stacked on roofs to use for fuel. Yak butter is combined with hot water and churned together in a narrow tube with a few tea leaves to make an oily, hot drink. While the taste and the smell are hard to get used to, it is the perfect mix of fat and nutrients to keep you sustained at high altitude. If you are offered yak butter tea from the nomads, it is impolite to refuse this gesture of hospitality.

Checkpoint etiquette. You will be stopped, sometimes in the most remote places, sometimes multiple times a day, by the Chinese military. Remember the three golden rules: be polite, have your permits handy, and put away your cameras. The military is in control here.

More airport security

ONE PARTICULARLY EFFECTIVE AIRPORT security official used physical examples to make his points. Taking a bottle out of a passenger’s hands, he held it up and addressed the crowd.

“Do you see this tiny, small, seemingly insignificant bottle of hand sanitizer? This is a liquid. If you do not put it in its own bin, when we see it on the screen we will need to hand-inspect your bag and *this will hold up the entire line*. If you want to avoid more delays, use the time while you are waiting in this line to find these items.”

People in line began asking him questions. “What about lipstick, does that count as a liquid?”

“No, ma’am, lipstick is okay,” he responded.

“What about food?” asked a man as he took from his carry-on bag a jumbo-sized jar of peanut butter. It was instantly seized by the official and held up for all to see.

“This jar of peanut butter, this ancient, highly-prized, family heirloom peanut butter, is classified as a liquid and is not allowed on board. In addition, this is far more than the allowed three ounce size. Should you have any other similar items, please discard them now.”

Ten Travel Lessons

1. There are many cash machines when you don’t need one.
2. Hotels tend to be full when you don’t book ahead.
3. Taking the small roads to avoid tolls will cost you time.
4. Respect the local traditions—take the siesta seriously.
5. In a foreign country, laundry is not a simple task.
6. The pleasure of dining out decreases as frequency increases.
7. Roundabouts confuse your sense of direction.
8. The whole world is not yet on the internet.
9. Money does not guarantee a good meal when you need it.
10. Give up the impulse to find the shortest route. Put away the GPS and accept the occasional wrong turn—you just might find something amazing.

England

DRIVING OFF THE CHANNEL Tunnel train, we slide easily onto the motorway, following the signs to London. We laugh as we realize we can finally understand the billboards, traffic directions, and other written signs all around us. It is wonderful to see a familiar language, after more than six months traveling in lands where English is not the norm. We are giddy with the possibilities: we can ask for directions, know what we are ordering, comparison shop, walk into a bookstore and buy English language books, have actual conversations with people. How could we ever have taken the ability to communicate in the same language for granted?



Shenandoah National Park

by Karen Portzer

Certificate Program in Photography, 2015





Divorce Dynamics

by Kristina Cerise

Certificate Program in Memoir, 2015

In their eight years of marriage, my parents only lived together for four. Perhaps less. The math required for an accurate calculation is a complex story problem with far more variables than two trains going specified speeds in different directions. There were periods of togetherness but those rarely lasted more than nine consecutive months before The Cowboy was lured away by the siren call of the bottle or the erotic promise of a leggy brunette. Even the technical togetherness – the periods with shared mailing addresses – included plenty of emotional distance.

My early childhood was set to the yo-yo rhythm of separation and reconciliation. Players in a dysfunctional symphony, my siblings and I endured a schizophrenic score of erratic tempos and unpredictable dynamics. The Cowboy was the conductor. He set the tempo and shaped the sound of our ensemble. His boots were his baton and we followed their rhythm. *Largo*. Slow and dignified. *Vivace*. Fast and lively. Our roles and responsibilities adapted to match his whims.

Come.

Go.

Stomp.

Stay.

There were the crescendos of raised voices present on nearly every page. As kids, we instinctively understood the need to match the volume of our play to the volume of the argument. Like instruments in the orchestra we tried to make sense of the booming drum by matching its frenzy and strength, longing for cohesion even in madness. Barbie talked louder and faster. The boom box dial rotated clockwise. We made our stories more animated hoping to distract our friends from the voices booming through the ductwork and percolating through the floorboards.

Mezzoforte.

Forte.

Fortissimo.

There were sharp staccatos. Coffee cups shattered. Insults hurled. Slaps given. Doors slammed. Steps stomped. These jarring episodes in our dysfunctional symphony were always followed by the uneasy calm after the storm. *Legato*. Perhaps we fooled the audience – the school counselor, the reverend, the neighbors – but the illusion of smoothness was really just us tiptoeing through the tension left behind when The Cowboy exited stage right. After the screaming, the quiet didn't offer much reprieve. Barbie still needed to talk louder and the soundtrack yearned to fill the space and make the contrast less jarring. We sought ways big and small to make the lulls a little less peaceful so that the violent percussion we knew would come again wouldn't be so shocking. Disobedience and disrespect caused enough turmoil to maintain the mood and keep our guards raised and ready.

Sometimes the transitions between life together and life apart were predictable. A gradual diminishing. *Diminuendo*. A slow detachment until the separation was simply the next logical step. Other times they were sudden and very loud. *Sforzando*. A jarring whiplash for emotions lulled into a sense of complacency and totally unaware of the lurking danger.

Each separation required preparations and packing tape. We logged thousands of miles up and down the I-5 corridor. Uncle Steve was called (again) to help load boxes into a rented U-Haul (again). Pets were abandoned. School registration forms were completed. New neighbors were greeted with smiles and hazy details. The one predictable thing was the existence of a social ladder in the new town and the need to start climbing from the bottom rung.

California to Washington.

Washington to California.

Never Oregon. Oregon was compromise. Compromise was not in the cards.

Years passed in a relatively steady rhythm. There is a predictable madness to family chaos. It was our normal and it lasted for years. But then, the pace of the cycle began getting faster. *Accelerando*. The siren call of the bottle was stronger and The Cowboy's ability to resist weaker. The stability of my parents' marriage weakened in direct proportion to the number of nights of comfort The Cowboy sought in the arms, and between the legs, of another.

Divorce scores have a deceptive cadence. There are chord progressions that give every indication of leading to the end, but they don't. The bender that results in a key absence. Financial decisions that are the equivalent of a raised middle finger. The secretary taken to the company holiday party. The end simply can't be far beyond that, can it? Surely, we have reached the final climax.

But no. The music continues.

California to Washington.

Washington to California.

Never Oregon.

In the end, the warning for the final notes was really just the holding back. *Ritenuato*. The reconciliations without remorse. The quarter-hearted efforts. The inability of my mother to muster another, "Where've you been?" and the unwillingness of The Cowboy to bother with an explanation.

And so it came without warning. The words were the same as those uttered a dozen times before.

"He left."

Only, this time, there was only silence where the "He'll be back." should have been.

Piano. Pianissimo. Pianississimo.

He left...and he wasn't coming back.

Al fine.



Blue Morning Glory

by Diana Vinh

Certificate Program in Photography, 2015





The Intruder

by Ann Oxrieder

Certificate Program in Popular Fiction II, 2013

Certificate Program in Popular Fiction I, 2012

A loud belch, followed by a thundering “Praise the Lord,” shattered the silence of the sanctuary.

Kurosawa Sensei, who sat in the raised shrine area studying his notes for the day’s Dharma talk, removed his reading glasses. No one had ever cried out in this temple. He peered around the *shoji* screen, past the seated congregation and toward the source of the noise.

A mocha-colored man stood at the entrance and belched again.

The Sensei glared at the husky intruder. Each time the man shuffled a few steps forward, he shifted a brown paper bag from one arm to the other. As the stranger transferred his load, the priest flinched at the sound of glass clanking against glass.

“Praise Jesus,” shouted the man and saluted the slim Buddha leaning toward him from the shrine.

While the man paused to rest, the Sensei considered walking down the steps and through the side door onto the main floor of the sanctuary to let him know he had overshot the African Baptist church by about three blocks. But he decided against it. The man was barely able to make it down the aisle, couldn’t possibly manage the hike to the church where he belonged.

The Sensei took his eyes off the man for a moment and glanced down at the service leader, Mrs. Hashimoto. Her neck was bent forward to reach the microphone on the lectern facing the congregation, and she appeared frozen in that position. He let out a huge sigh. Hadn't the day started out badly enough?

He looked at the page of notes on his lap and crossed out a few lines. He had a hard time focusing and the intruder was throwing him off-balance.

Mrs. Hashimoto raised her head, opened the green service book, and pointed to the day's chant, but no words came out.

"Page eighty-seven," called a teenager near the front.

The priest adjusted his reading glasses several times, fingered the beads hanging from his wrist, and then struck the bell at his side to signal the start of the chant: *Ga gon cho se gan His shi mu jo do*. He let his congregation carry on without him, while he kept his eye on the intruder. He felt a slight throbbing in his temples as he stretched forward for a better view.

The man looked to be in his forties. He walked hunched over, giving the impression that any minute he might lose his balance. His neck was thick like a sumo wrestler's. What hair he had was short, dark, and sliced through the middle with gray. A slash in his jeans exposed one knee. Insulation puffed out of an elbow in his dingy white parka. He was the Michelin man, but without the smile and friendly wave.

The stranger continued his sluggish movement up the aisle, muttering as he went.

Mes shi kon mo an. Most of the temple members had buried their heads in their service books, appearing to study the words they had been reciting since childhood. Their chanting seemed more vigorous than usual.

Mrs. Aoki, in her usual spot center left, quickly glanced over her half-glasses as the man braced himself against the end of her pew and gazed at the empty seat next to her. The Sensei knew she always saved this spot for Mr. Watanabe. She pulled a hankie out of her purse and fanned herself, as if calling for a truce, and at the same time waving him away. He imagined her heart pumping as she considered the possibility that this stranger might be planning to set his noisy sack down beside her and tumble into Mr. Watanabe's usual Sunday seat. Like much of the congregation, she was of the first generation of Japanese to come to this country. She would have to stand on Mr. Watanabe's shoulders to top the stranger's height. After lingering, the man looked away and continued his zigzag course toward the front of the sanctuary.

The congregation sat silently as the clanks echoed off the high ceiling.

The Sensei couldn't take his eyes off the man. A cough coming from below interrupted his gaze, and he realized that he was still striking the bell even though the chant had ended.

In the few seconds it took Mrs. Hashimoto to announce the page number of the song, and for the congregation to rise, he watched the man drop onto an empty pew near the incense burner, and let go of his sack, which jangled against the oak bench. He was close enough for the Sensei to see that he had not shaved that day or the day before. Now that he had unzipped his parka, the tails of his partially unbuttoned shirt splayed out over his lap.

After he adjusted his body and his belongings, the man cried out, "Praise Jesus." He made a choking sound as the pungent incense curled his way.

While the congregation sang, the Sensei skimmed his notes, scribbled a few words in the margins, and crossed out most of his Dharma message. He began to sweat at the thought of having to ad lib for twenty minutes.

Midway through the song, the intruder leaned forward, braced himself against the front of his pew and looked around him. Despite the presence of the golden Amida Buddha shimmering in front of him, he shouted, "Christ is my Savior."

The song ended, everyone sat down, and the intruder rustled his sack. Clink clank. Clink clank.

Kurosawa Sensei bowed to the Buddha and moved from the shrine to the podium two steps below. He greeted the congregation and wadded up his notes.

The intruder muttered, "Confess...sins...Hell."

This was the second time in a week someone had made a reference to the Christian Hell.

The first occurred when a passenger seated next to the Sensei on a flight from Los Angeles found out he was a Buddhist priest, and told him that although he seemed like a nice guy, he would be eternally damned. And now he had to hear it coming from a stranger in his own temple.

Kurosawa Sensei looked at the expectant faces in front of him. He opened his book of sutras and started to read a passage. He'd chosen it because it was long and he needed to make up for having just cut most of his sermon. When he reached page five, he stopped and took a drink of water. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the intruder lumbering toward him. What did the man want? The Sensei balled his hands into fists and then opened them up again. He was not a fighter, but he would defend himself. Sweat beaded on his upper lip and his forehead felt hot.

The stranger, suddenly moving faster, climbed the steps to Kurosawa Sensei's level, and grabbed the sleeve to his robe. The priest jerked his arm away, tearing the cloth. The man flailed, then fell forward and crumpled into a heap at the side of the podium. Sensei gasped and so did the congregation.

The man didn't move. More heat flowed to the Sensei's face as he bent over and put two fingers to the man's throat. On finding a pulse he felt a rush of gratitude. The stranger slowly turned his head and said, "Jus' tryin' to help," in a stage whisper. Blood dripped from a cut above his eye. Two younger males in the audience hurried to the front and helped the stranger to his feet. He leaned toward the Sensei, who backed away. "Not going to hurt. Need to tell you..." Worry lines worked their way into the man's forehead.

When the stranger moved close to him again, the Sensei stayed still. He stood calmly while the man whispered, softly this time. The man finished and stared at the Sensei as if wanting confirmation that he understood.

Too embarrassed to face the man or the congregation, the Sensei looked down and nodded.

Refusing first aid, the man returned to his seat, and called out, "Lord gives us strength."

"May we feel the wisdom and compassion that embrace us," said the Sensei, and closed his book of sutras. He paused for a moment, cleared his throat and began. "The three poisons we face every day are hate, anger, and ignorance."

"This morning, I blew up at my son. He drove my wife's car last night and came home with a conspicuous dent in the front fender. He told me he didn't know how the dent got there, and while we sat at the breakfast table, I accused him of lying. He threw his half-eaten toast on the table and stormed out." Kurosawa Sensei paused and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

"A few minutes later, while my anger continued to fester, my wife walked in and sat down to breakfast. She said she'd forgotten to tell me something yesterday. Another driver had backed into her car in the Safeway parking lot. They had exchanged driver's license and insurance information and all was well.

"With nothing to go on but my worn-out assumptions, I made a snap judgment about my son."

As he continued speaking, the priest allowed himself only one glance at the stranger. The man was leaning forward in the pew, looking directly at him. Others seemed to be paying attention too.

He told the congregation how easy it had been for him to judge quickly and blurt out,

"You're lying," and if he'd waited to find out more, he wouldn't have had to carry this feeling of shame into today's service. "I am as foolish a being as any other. I let anger and ignorance rule me, and I made today unpleasant not only for myself, but for my wife and son." By now some of his earlier tension had left, his head didn't hurt, and he wasn't as obsessed with tracking every movement of the stranger. When he finished, he thanked the congregation, and turned toward the shrine.

The people in the last rows of the sanctuary were already heading toward the exit, when a voice cried out, "Thank you, Brother. Jesus loves you."

Kurosawa Sensei whipped around. The man stood waving energetically to him. The Sensei raised his hands to a prayer position, and bowed. "Thank you. Come back again."

The man grinned, picked up his sack, and walked out humming "Sweet Chariot."

Later, Mrs. Hashimoto said to the Sensei, "I know it's none of my business, but I'm so curious. Whatever the man whispered to you seemed to have inspired you. Would you mind telling me what he said?"

The minister thought for a moment. Surely he had revealed enough for one day. But Mrs. Hashimoto wasn't a gossip and she stood up for him when temple politics occasionally threatened his career. "Our visitor's exact words were, 'You puttin' everybody to sleep, Brother. Come up with a good story fast. Best be about sinnin' and damnation or you're gonna lose us all.'"



Sucia Ammonite

by Jennifer Beard

Certificate Program in Natural Science Illustration, 2015





Brown Cotton Thread

by Denise Baggett

Certificate Program in Popular Fiction, 2015

Certificate Program in Editing, 2010

Against the bathroom door, I sat bent, chest to thighs, hanging my head between my knees, hands clasped around my ankles, breathing slowly and avoiding things, under the silky canopy of my hair, stretching time alone and blank minded to the maximum. I studied my feet and made music of the fan and my syncopating pulse pounding in my ears, getting lost in the geometric pattern of the vinyl floor, brown, tan, and gold forms imitating Talavera tile.

Our house had never been remuddled, and the original materials gave me a nostalgic sensation, and, although homely, the house was very clean. I liked feeling held back in time, and the rectilinear, minimal plainness, too. It soothed me.

Studying the repeating vinyl pattern—it's strange the way such empty moments become memory. That's when I noticed a piece of thread lying on one of the patterned squares—a plain piece of brown cotton thread.

I felt pissed that someone had left it for me to pick up, although I noted the unreasonableness of my response to a random piece of thread on the floor. I never knew why I was so angry. The thread lay camouflaged against a teardrop shape in the vinyl. As if startled by a spider, I shuddered looking at it and laughed at my reaction. Then I reached for it.

I twirled the thread around my index finger, pulling it tightly until my fingertip went plum. I unwound it and stretched it to its full length, about three-and-a-half inches, and a pang of dread passed through me. I shivered and wanted a shirt. I pinched the thread over the wastebasket, and that's when something pricked me. My arm jerked and my hand flapped, sharply, instinctually, but the thread stuck to my fingertip, just hanging there like a tail, another hard shake, but the thread remained. I tugged it—it was embedded (it had burrowed in there). I winced, feeling queasy, but I let it lie loosely, and, stupidly, I traced the lines in my palm with my good index finger—mesmerizing, really. I closed my eyes, delving into the throbbing.

The tweezers, of course, get the tweezers and calm the shit down. But, it was curious, and I had a hard time stopping myself from twirling the hanging end of the thread between my thumb and index finger, rolling it back, forth, and twisting. I separated the thread bundle into three separate strands, and when I released them, they clicked into action with mechanical precision, articulating with industrial force, lengthening, weaving, and binding, piercing the finger, and I just looked on wide-eyed. Then it stopped, just before reaching my hand.

My teeth chattered, my reflection topless and gray, with mascara stained checks. He'd be home soon. I held the hand aloft and with the other splashed water on my face.

On my way down the hall to get a shirt, I looked around all corners.

As the throbbing pulsed my vision blurred. I chose a gray T-shirt to match my ashen face. I returned to the bathroom.

My hand shook as I applied lipstick and then wiped most of it off. I dug in the drawer that's hard to open and found gauze, then put it back.

From the garage I retrieved my sewing machine, scissors, and a basket of notions. In the basket I found a seam ripper and dug the little blue devil's forked blade beneath the thread and ripped. The thread resisted—indestructible. How had the blade gotten so dull? Then it wound tightly around the ripper, binding it to me until it, too, drew blood.

With tweezers I pried it loose. My shoulders heaved, and I suppressed the urge to cry.

I rinsed my hand under the faucet, then wrapped it in a paper towel.

• • •

I DREW THE DRAPES over the picture window, careful not to get blood on the beige fabric or the pulley strings.

I returned to the bathroom and dabbed up droplets of blood with a paper towel.

The bloody towel I buried beneath trash in the garage bin. From a dusty cardboard box, I exhumed some vintage dress patterns and a handful of yellowing plastic-wrapped packets of bric-a-brac, and these I strewn about the coffee table, staged aside the sewing machine.

• • •

DURING DINNER HE TALKED. I chewed meat, not tasting it. Beneath the table, I pressed the sewed finger with my thumb. In my mind, I could still see it stitched crisscrossed, like a shoelace, poked in and back out and in again. I wondered if I could tie the loose strands into a bow, a double knot, ha!

“What’s so funny?” he asked.

The phone rang and I jumped, whacking my hand against the underside of the tabletop.

“Jeez, are you all right?” he asked.

I didn’t respond.

He answered the phone in his fake big-man voice.

While his back was turned, I put it on the table and turned it back and forth. I sniffed it.

I escaped to the bathroom and doused the finger with peroxide. It foamed white then rusty red. I rinsed the bubbles down the sink and tried to think what I should do.

• • •

AT BEDTIME, I WAITED him out behind a book, giving me an excuse not to sleep with him. He leaned over the back of the couch, hand outstretched, reaching for mine. Absentmindedly, I put my hand in his, a truce shake. He kissed the back of my hand and I flinched.

“What the hell?” he asked, gripping my hand.

I yanked it from him, hiding it. “I’m trying to remember something,” I said, keeping my eyes on the page to indicate annoyance. He took the cue and headed for bed, shaking his head.

“Good night.” He tried again.

Finally, all was quiet aside from housefly a vibrating behind the drapes.

The steamy bathroom was at least ten degrees hotter than the rest of the house, the air scented heavily with shaving cream and dandruff shampoo. He’d forgotten to turn the fan on, as usual. I switched it on. I twisted the door lock and searing pain shot from my hand into my gut. I gagged and careened toward the sink. My hair strung across my damp face and spilled onto the gold-flecked Formica countertop. I pulled my hair back and slid to the floor gasping, my teeth chattering, and the threads unwove themselves, growing longer until they trailed over the tops of my knees, down my shins, and onto the floor. Alive, the threads crept slowly, playfully, teasing before they pricked and danced and stabbed and bound. I flinched but I couldn’t close my eyes no matter how hard I tried. Frozen, I watched blood leak from my palm onto my lap. The sound of the bathroom fan grew so loud that I had to stifle a scream. I knew that this couldn’t be really happening, but the hand was there, wrapped as a cocoon, but bound too tightly, and the pain shortened and sped my breath. I considered driving to the hospital.

Again I cleaned up. I tip-toed to the freezer for ice.

At least the thread acted like bandages, concealing my wounds. It looked like a big brown Q-tip cotton swab, or a cat tail—he liked to twist them and watch the soft, white,

furry insides pop out like a smacked-open can of Pillsbury crescent rolls. I had a vision of the seeds released and blown across grasses and over the mucky green surface of a lake. I wrapped the hand inside of the ice pack.

I turned off the lamp, laid down on the couch, and covered up under a quilt. The steady sound of cars on road out front gave me focus. I counted them and wondered about all of the people racing by so late, midweek. It was incredible the number of people who sped down the road at what sounded like a hundred miles an hour; it was a residential neighborhood. Didn't they realize how reckless they sounded? Did they think they were alone without witness?

I woke to the sound of a lawnmower, followed by the throbbing of my left hand. He was gone. What day was it? I groped for coffee and aspirin, and went to the computer. Thursday, August 4, 9:23 a.m. How had I managed to sleep so late? Except for junk, the inbox was empty. Finally, I checked my hand, expecting my arm to be red, but it wasn't. The sewing machine was still there. I realized it was threaded with a spool of red thread, so I rethreaded the machine with brown, although the shade wasn't a perfect match.

• • •

FROM BEHIND, HE RUBBED my shoulders and pressed himself against me. I started to relax under his touch but realizing what it meant, I squirmed away. He exhaled frustration. He hadn't seemed to notice the hand.

"I'm going out," I said. He thought I was having an affair. I didn't try to convince him otherwise, even though he was wrong. He passed me, and the sound of beer bottles in the garage fridge confirmed his whereabouts. I didn't earn enough to support myself. He didn't want me to leave.

It occurred to me what I needed to do. In my basket, I found a curved upholstery needle. I grabbed a box of matches, while recalling the crunching sound made when I pierced my own ear at middle school. I selected pale-blue thread and took everything to the bathroom. I heated the needle tip until it turned black. I threaded the needle, which was a pain in the ass because of my hand. I pulled my upper lip out and jabbed it in right where a smile begins. It didn't crunch, but I lost my resolve at the sight of the bloody blue thread hanging out of my lip.

I Google searched "lip sewing," and I found a Wikipedia page. Here is how it began:

Lip Sewing

Lip sewing is rooted in body modification culture, and is considered a ritualistic modification, with much symbolism connected to the idea of closing the lips. Lip sewing may be done for aesthetic reasons or to aid meditation, by helping the mind to focus by removing the temptation to speak.

I wanted the search to lead me to people in Papua New Guinea or something. I wanted it to be an ancient practice. All I found was link to an article in *BMEzine*, an online magazine for body modification culture, about a 23-year-old film student, "whose quest for

body modifications was very varied.” I just wanted to see her with her mouth sewn, but the magazine site was blocked because it had been found to depict “nudity, torture, and other adult content.” But, on magazine’s the *Wikipedia* page, I found a live link. There she was with her face resting serenely in a piercer’s tattooed hands. Her lips were pink and swelled like a pair of banana slugs, and sutured shut with three simple thread x’s—XXX. This wasn’t what I had in mind.

There was a knock at the door.

I pulled the thread out of my lip and grabbed a tissue. It was Dick, our landlord.

“Hey, kid.”

He calls me kid, but I’m pretty sure we’re the same age, although he looks at least a decade plus older than me because he’s a heavy smoker and doesn’t take care of his teeth.

“Hey, short notice but my guy who can finish the Sheetrock is over, if now’s a good time, he can get it done.”

“Sure, now’s fine. I’m not busy or anything. I’m just doing a little work on the computer. You won’t be in my way,” I lied.

Dick and his guy were back in ten, both carrying extra-tall cans of Coors—breakfast? They threw their burning cigarette butts onto the lawn. His guy looked at me dreamily, from under his grimy NASCAR cap. It pissed me off, but I smiled. The guy started patching.

“How you guys doing?” Dick asked. “Everybody working and everything?”

We weren’t, not enough, but I said, “We’re keeping up.”

“I’m not,” he said.

I hadn’t asked.

“I’m seriously thinking about letting the bank take this place. I’m under water on all three places. I’ve got my military so I they can take this place and mine, and I can get a new place with some land and be sitting a hell of a lot better. You want to buy this place?”

I fiddled with the thread inside my pocket. “The same thing happened to my mom. She’s under water on her rentals, too, but she’s lucky she has good renters.”

He fidgeted.

“I don’t know, probably not. I don’t think I want to own anything right now, but let’s keep talking as things develop, okay?”

I asked him some frank questions about how much he paid and thanked the guys for fixing the hole. The friend was still glancing at me while he sponged up the last of the dust. I smiled and sent them out the door.

In dead quiet, I watched the clock turn 12:12 a.m. I’d thrown off the covers but was still sweating in the stale air. He muttered and threw his arm over my hip. I froze and tried to sound asleep. He wriggled and pulled me toward him. My muscles tensed.

“Come on,” he pleaded, wide-awake.

I cringed at the terrible desperation in his voice. I heaved a breath and felt sorry for

him, sorry that he was so incapable of connecting with me and sorry that he thought he loved me so much. That's why I gave into him.

We began moving together. He held me like the answer to his every problem. I turned my face away from his mouth, thinking that was the most alone I'd ever be, and sweat fell from his forehead into my open eye.

When he was through, he flopped beside me. I sat up breath and rubbed my face in my hands. Moonlight cut through the parted curtain, cutting his figure down the middle on a diagonal.

I'd forgotten about my hand, so when it happened, it threw me for a loop. The threads shot out of my finger with a force well beyond my own strength. The first blow whipped against his face, which was in darkness, but I could tell it hit his face by the way he jerked, and it landed with a crisp snap as it struck him. He shot upright, illuminated fully, eyes wide, looking at me, his hand pressed against his cheek.

"What the—"

He looked at me, looking certain that I had struck him. I could see him clearly in the moonlight, but I was back lit, my face hidden in darkness. I didn't have time to explain. Threads spun out from my fingertip, and in an ingenious way, they began wrapping around his head, each wrapping motion applying more tension. His eyes were still opened when the thread spun around them. I think I was screaming but I can't be sure. Strangely, he didn't. There was the sound of violins, not music, but like an orchestra tuning up and the sound like my own heartbeat amplified to the point of distortion, pulsing and crunching. The pressure of the binding made muffled, offbeat, snapping sounds with his body. I couldn't move as my finger continued the fierce pumping.

The wrapping was over in seconds, and again silence.

I sat alone beside him, afraid to open my eyes for the longest time. When I finally gathered the courage, what I saw looked nothing like him. All of him had buckled inward, compacted into a brown lumpy cocoon the size of a small lamb, which sat centered in a pool of blood, wicking outward into the sheets, painting an amoebic form.

My hand lay limp at my side. I raised it to the light and realized the threads were cut. I wasn't bound to the crime.

• • •

ON THURSDAY, IT HAD been four days. I hadn't left the house, and I couldn't tell you what I did during that time besides throwing out spoiled food.

• • •

I CHOKED DOWN STALE saltines.

There was a knock at the door. I waited, thinking whoever it was would go away. But they knocked again, harder. I wiped the sweat off my face with the bottom of my T-shirt and opened the door. It was Kaleb, the neighbor boy, Dick's kid. They lived in the house

behind our back fence. We enjoyed the idiotic sounds of their drunken philosophical hot tub parties, the heavy scent of cigarette smoke and berry-scented air freshener, and an endless supply of cigarette butts tossed over the fence into our yard. Neither of us smokes.

Kaleb often stopped by when he got off the school bus, to see me I guess. I would ask him questions about his day. It was always awkward, and usually after a few minutes, he'd say that he'd better be getting home. He was kind of sweet, but that kid made very little sense. He was a second grader but he much looked bigger. They kept him in a crew cut, and he was fat. His parent didn't know he visited. Anyway, Kaleb was standing on the stoop. I put my sick hand behind my back. He stood there looking goofily.

"Hi. How was school?"

"What?"

I stepped onto the porch and closed the door behind me. Our house smelled like garbage, but I hadn't noticed until Kaleb showed up.

"The reason I'm here is, I got this kite. We could fly it."

That was about the last thing I was thinking. I hadn't seen the cheap Spiderman kite lying there behind him, and I laughed kind of weirdly. Kaleb looked hurt, and this got to me, so I said, "I like kite flying."

His eyes brightened.

It was windy, and there was an open field across the street.

"I'm gonna show you how to do it. I'm really good," he said.

We waited a long time for a break in the traffic so we could cross. I figured the flimsy kite would be good for no more than one flight, if that.

"You know that guy who drives the green pickup?" Kaleb asked, setting down the kite. "We got business with him."

I knew whom he was talking about, and business with that guy was the last thing I'd brag about. We called him the Lawnmower Man, after the horror movie. He'd once tried to intimidate me into hiring him to mow our lawn. I told him no, and he insulted our yard. Every time he mows the neighbor's yard he tears everything up, and I can feel him looking at me through the kitchen blinds. Anyway, Kaleb kept on about him, and I thought about how long we'd lived in our place. It was supposed to be a temporary stop. The pain in my hand was feeling permanent, too.

Beyond the cut grass of the field, stretches a yellow ocean of Scot's broom, its black seedpods popped in the heat of the sun. Beyond the broom sea, blackberry bramble writhed. Beyond the blackberries, alders and maples swayed in the hot breeze, and behind them a stand of old fir, hemlock, cedar loomed, guarding a 150-acre tract of woods, a parcel at least temporarily abandoned by a failed developer. For now, a pair of red-winged hawks had possession.

Sure enough, Kaleb got that kite into the air on the first try. He handed it to me and he didn't even look at my hand, he was admiring the kite.

I let the kite string spool out. It raced across my hand. I imagined the terrible tangle

that would happen with the brown thread, but that didn't happen. I snapped out of it in time to see Kaleb's worried brow, the corners of his mouth forming the word *yikes*. The kite had gotten really high, and right as I noticed, it took a dive and crashed into a thirty-foot-high maple tree.

"Oh man! Why did you do that?" he asked.

"I can get it. Don't worry."

But blackberry bramble higher than my chin surrounded the maple on all sides.

"I'll get—" But when I turned around, Kaleb had gone.

I fought through the blackberries to where the kite hung, inverted. The blackberry bites itched, but compared with my hand, it was nothing. I always used to say, when things really suck, you should do something that sucks even more and get it over with. I used my teeth to break the kite string. The rest was wound around the trunk of the tree. I stood there in the glaring sun squinting at it. There was a big canker on that tree, and it oozed black sap. The kite string was set right in it, and for some strange reason this made me smile.



Yellow-Faced Bumble Bee

by Barbara Ierulli

Certificate Program in Natural Science Illustration, 2013



Purple Uprising



by Lisa Glynn

Certificate Program in Photography, 2015





The Difference of Two Numbers

by Ann McCurdy

Certificate Program in Literary Fiction II, 2015

Certificate Program in Popular Fiction, 2014

I am a pure mathematician.

Let me rephrase that, since words, unlike numbers, are imprecise. I should have said, “I am a mathematician of pure math.” It is the math that is pure. I can neither describe nor measure the purity of a human. Perhaps our pureness is merely how closely we associate with math. If that is the case, then I am indeed approaching purity. I feed on numbers like potato chips. My favorite number is 9. Its properties of addition and multiplication are exhilarating, and it is physically attractive. If I were a number, I would like to be a 9.

I majored in math at the University of Washington. In the Numerical Analysis series (MATH 464 and 465) there was only one other female. Her name might have been Natalie. I suppose we should have become friends, or at least acquaintances during those twenty-two long weeks, but that would have required social skills. Social skills are not a prerequisite for Numerical Analysis. In fact, they might be an impediment. In any case, each day we slunk into class, slumped into our desks, scribbled our notes, and left. I thought the system worked rather well. I was seeking a degree, and that is what I attained.

A degree in pure math is both more and less useful than you might think. Despite my infatuation with the number 9, I don’t work with a lot of numbers. Instead, I ponder

theorems in which a and b and x stand in for digits and integers and so forth. At a restaurant, do not ask me to calculate the tip. I dislike numbers with dollar signs in front of them. Dollar signs attach values to numbers that they do not normally have. I write 1,000,000 and you feel nothing. (Although it is a beautiful number.) I write \$1,000,000 and you feel greed, envy, desire, need. You've tainted the purity of the number.

I met Jeremy 13 ½ months after I graduated, while I was working as a software tester in a high tech firm. Let me be clear, math is not computer science. I dislike computers—they do not treat numbers in a respectful manner. (Just two words on that subject: *rounding errors*. Or 1.9999 words on that subject, according to a computer.) I worked there to put food on my table. Not that I ate much: at the time I was scrawny and pale, looking like bread dough that could use another half hour in the oven.

On the day in question our company was having an Art Walk, a small celebration to honor the inoffensive corporate-approved sculptures and paintings that helped distinguish one hallway from the next. In the lobby were two tables draped in white tablecloths and laden with large silver platters of fresh fruit, local cheeses and artisanal crackers. To be honest, the food was more appealing and memorable than the art. I piled my plate high, pleased at the free dinner, when I heard a voice behind me.

"So what do you do?"

I turned around and faced a man in a maroon polo shirt. I thought I was in trouble for taking too much food. "I'm a pure mathematician," I sputtered.

The man wore khaki pants and nice leather shoes. Definitely not a programmer. Maybe he was in catering. "What's a pure mathematician?" he said.

"I mean I'm a software tester. But I majored in math."

"Ah," he said. "What's your name?"

"Jeannie."

In the past, whenever I said to someone like him, "I am a pure mathematician," I would invariably watch the disinterest pool up in their eyes like cold motor oil. But this man smiled and held out his hand. "Hi, Jeannie. I'm Jeremy."

I didn't know what to say. I probably wouldn't have known what to say even if I wasn't worried he was corporate security there to confiscate my overloaded plate of free food. But what really left me speechless was his mole. It was as if he had grabbed a brand new pencil, dipped the eraser in ink, and pressed it against his upper lip, just below his right nostril. Its round perfection mesmerized me. I am attracted to geometric perfection.

"I was thinking of having it removed," Jeremy said.

"What?" I asked.

Jeremy placed his index finger on his mole, above his frowning lips. I realized I must have been staring.

"Don't do that," I said. "Then you'd have a face just like everybody else." Such volubility was unusual for me. I blamed the mole's perfection.

Jeremy smiled. "Thank you."

“It wasn’t a compliment,” I said. “I have prosopagnosia.”

Jeremy pursed his lips. “What’s proso...prosop?”

“Prosopagnosia. It’s the inability to recognize faces. I just have a mild case. In severe cases, people can’t even recognize images of their own parents.”

I assumed Jeremy regretted approaching me. His smile disappeared. “So if I had this removed, you wouldn’t be able to recognize me?”

“That’s a possibility.”

It turned out that Jeremy was in program management. He was three years older than me, slightly overweight but broad-shouldered and well-groomed, his hair as fastidiously in place as a Ken doll’s. I couldn’t figure out what he saw in me, other than I was female—a rarity in the company even if you included the receptionist and the group admin. In my opinion, I wasn’t much of a catch. I’m pretty sure the term *autistic* does not apply to me, but the trouble is, you need a personality to register on the Asperger’s spectrum, and I’m not sure I have one. Or rather, my combination of traits and idiosyncrasies qualifies as a personality just like vanilla qualifies as a flavor.

But Jeremy kept coming around. He took me out to lunch at a nearby Thai restaurant, surveying the other patrons and greeting a few before seating himself. A week later he took me out for dim sum. I decided to retire my usual wardrobe of baggy shorts and free, corporate-logo-festooned, men’s large T-shirts, and started wearing clothes that actually fit. Jeremy noticed.

“Is that a new shirt?” he said. “You look nice.”

“You always look nice,” I said. “It’s like you don’t even work for a software company.” I meant that as a compliment. “And your hair is always perfect.”

He smiled and leaned back on the tatami mat of the sushi restaurant we were in. “A few months ago I got the name of the hairstylist that the VP of marketing and some of the other guys use. You should see her. She’s awesome.”

He made an appointment for me the next day. The hairstylist had eyebrow piercings and her bleach blonde hair had been half-buzzed like an extra from *Mad Max*. She must be good if a VP would entrust his head to her. She sized me up and said a pixie haircut would accentuate my delicate bone structure. I was impressed. Could giving up one limp ponytail really expose my inner structure? When she was done I looked at my reflection and all my skeletal thoughts were forgotten. I was *cute*. I didn’t know whether to be pleased or alarmed. The stylist yammered on about volumizer and *product*—accent on the second syllable, like a constant question—but I didn’t pay much attention. Jeremy later repeated it all to me patiently, holding up the bottles of product like a pharmacist explaining drug reactions. I eventually got the hang of it.

I found I could talk to Jeremy and he didn’t treat me like I was some kind of space mutant. This was new for me. I mean, I could talk to my coworkers in the test lab, but they *were* space mutants, incapable of maintaining eye contact or wearing sandals without socks. Jeremy was a normal guy, good-looking even, and he still listened.

“A good theorem exposes the beauty of the universe,” I told him over coffee after an early morning run. I had never gotten into exercise, but Jeremy was trying to lose weight, and I became his *de facto* workout partner. “Take, for example, the theorem that when given any two prime numbers separated by 2 (5 and 7, 11 and 13, or 29 and 31), the number between them is always divisible by 6. Why? Since prime numbers are odd, the middle number must be even and therefore divisible by 2. Also, given any three numbers in a row, one of them must be divisible by 3—again the middle number since the other two are prime. So the middle number is divisible by 2 and 3, therefore divisible by 6. Absolutely beautiful. Simple. Eternal. Universal. What else do we know that is truly universal besides math?”

Jeremy was silent, sipping his latte. I regretted my speech.

Finally he spoke. “What about 3 and 5?”

I set my cup down, spilling my tea. “I omitted a parameter for simplicity. The middle number must be 6 or greater.”

That was when I first realized I loved him.

I lost most of my virginity to Jeremy. Before our consummation I had thought that virginity was a simple *exclusive or* statement, but found the truth more complicated. I lay there, my hands clutching and unclutching the sheets, not sure what I was supposed to feel. Whenever Jeremy pushed inside me my muscles tightened at the unfamiliar presence and I feared I would soil the sheets. Subsequent encounters grew more pleasurable. Still, I never quite felt confident with my performance in bed. The very word—*performance*—implies an unending reach for virtuosity, years of practice and dedication. I decided the loss of virginity is an asymptotical function, which rapidly approaches the zero baseline of experience yet never reaches it, thus always retaining some essence of virginity. Certainly part of me always felt like a virgin.

Five months after we had started dating, Jeremy took a job in marketing. It was an unusual move since most of his coworkers had MBAs, but his technical background proved invaluable, and he excelled in his new role. The transfer included a raise, and a promotion soon followed. He bought a condo on the lake, and we moved in together. I almost didn’t trust my happiness. It was as if I had transcended to another plane of existence never meant for someone like me. How did the trajectory of my life land me here?

“What are you looking at?” Jeremy asked, as he carried a moving box into our new kitchen. I was sitting on the floor next to the half-filled bookcase. When I held up the old photo album I had found, he winced.

“Oh, that.”

We cleared some space off the couch in the middle of the room and thumbed through the album together. I pointed at a pudgy, scowling teenager with black-rimmed glasses and unkempt hair falling into his eyes. Below his right nostril was a large, perfect mole. “Is that really you?”

“That was when I was fourteen,” he said. “God, I was butt-ugly then.”

“No, you weren’t,” I said. I didn’t know how to explain myself. He was homely, yes, but in a sullen teenage way that made him more authentic than ugly. His cheeks in the photo were splotchy with a combination of peach fuzz and pimples. I leaned closer, but Jeremy shut the album.

“Those days are gone,” he said. “That’s just some awkward, lonely, teenage loser. That’s not me anymore. And it’s not you anymore either, Jeannie. We’re beyond that.”

We got married at the local yacht club. Now Jeremy and I were a team of two. Two, the only even prime number, a slightly suspicious anomaly, as if two had made the team simply by being so small it had snuck under the bar. I don’t dislike the number two, but it makes me uneasy. But the unfamiliar always makes me uneasy.

By the time of the wedding Jeremy had closed two major client deals and received another promotion. Our nuptials were attended by well-dressed senior marketers, a sprinkling of VPs and a few software testers in ill-fitting suits and poor haircuts.

My mother sidled up to me during the reception. “I’m so happy for you,” she said, hugging me. I smelled champagne on her breath, and the crushed rosebuds from her corsage. “I never saw you getting married.”

I was not offended by her comment. I never saw myself getting married either. Then again, I never saw myself *not* getting married. Time is a dimension we cannot traverse. We are stuck with one infinitesimally small, constantly changing moment called the present. We can never touch the past, and the future is an infinite number of possibilities, some with higher probabilities of occurrence but none guaranteed. So I never worried about it.

Jeremy disagreed. “You need to think about your future, Jeannie.” A few months after our wedding I had been offered a management position, which I wanted to decline.

“I’m good at finding flaws in software, not dealing with people,” I said. We were sitting on our living room couch. Outside, the sun’s rays bounced off the moon, reflected off the surface of the lake, and entered our window.

“You can learn,” Jeremy said. “You need to manage your career. The company doesn’t have your best interests at heart. You need to do that.”

I accepted the position, but I didn’t enjoy it. Sometimes when I was a tester I would initiate a test processing run and then pull out a math book while I awaited results. Being a manager gave me no time for that. I had to attend meetings, write reviews, interact with the other managers, jostle for attention from upper management—not exactly my skill set. “It will get easier,” Jeremy assured me. “You’ll see.”

That December, Jeremy chose my dress for the company Christmas party. Emerald satin with black rhinestones, strapless. With my pixie haircut and accentuated bone structure, I thought I looked like an elf. Jeremy, who had lost his extra pounds, wore a tuxedo with emerald green tie and cummerbund. “You are so beautiful,” he whispered into my ear. “I’m proud to show you off.”

Nine months later Max was born. If I had never seen myself getting married, I certainly had never seen myself becoming a mother. Actually, I wasn’t a mother. I was a woman who

had pushed a baby out between her legs and was therefore expected to know how to care for it.

“How’s my Max?” said Jeremy, coming through the front door in his suit and tie. He had returned to work after four weeks, while I stayed home alone with the baby. Jeremy’s trajectory of life seemed to have resumed almost unchanged. Sometimes I envied him.

Jeremy picked Max up from his bouncy chair in the center of the coffee table. Then he wrinkled his nose. “He’s soaked through, Jeannie. He needs a new diaper. And a new outfit.”

I was sitting two feet away, a well-worn copy of *Advanced Probability, 3rd Edition* in front of me. I shut the book. “Sorry.”

Jeremy spread a changing blanket on the couch and plopped Max into the center, his limbs wriggling in the air like flowers in a fast-motion film. Jeremy peeled off the diaper, bloated with pee. Max’s tiny bottom was a constellation of angry red splotches.

“He may wear a diaper for the rest of his life,” I said.

Jeremy paused, holding up two fingers creamy with Boudreaux’s Butt Paste. “What are you saying? Is there something wrong with him?”

“I didn’t say that. I just said he may need to wear a diaper for the rest of his life,” I repeated. I was so tired. I hugged my knees and rocked in my chair. “We have too few data points. To extrapolate the future over years or months given the fact he is only 63 days old is illogical. And in any case, since Max was born he’s been peeing more instead of less.” I sometimes called him Maximum Output, when Jeremy wasn’t around. “There’s no reason to think it’s going to end. Peeing, crying, waking up to nurse, waking up to cry, waking up, waking up. The data doesn’t indicate it’s going to end.”

Jeremy finished diapering Max, cleaned his hands off with an extra baby wipe, and tossed it into the nearby diaper pail. Max, naked except for his diaper, made a fretful mewl, reaching up. Jeremy scooped him onto his shoulder, and pulled me to sit on the couch. “He’ll stop, honey. All kids stop. And looking at all the statistics, Max is a perfectly normal baby.”

“Statistics?” I said. Statistics I regard with a certain amount of moral outrage, combining the purity of numbers with the nonsense that is called *interpretation*. As if numbers needed interpreting. They speak for themselves. It’s people who need to learn the language. “Statistics is crap,” I said.

Jeremy leaned his head towards mine until we touched. “Maybe you could use some help,” he said.

I splayed my fingers over my thighs and rubbed them. “I don’t want to get a nanny. You know that.”

He drew his head back. “A nanny?”

Max eventually slept through the night, eventually rolled over, smiled, and crawled. I monitored an internal graph of his progress in my head. Extrapolation still could not predict whether he would go to Harvard, the White House, or jail.

After my maternity leave was over I surprised Jeremy by deciding not to go back to work.

“But I didn’t think you were really enjoying motherhood,” Jeremy said. “I mean, 24 hours a day.”

He had exposed the weakness in my plan. I could see the suspicion in his eyes.

“Just for a while,” I said. “Then we can revisit the decision.”

I didn’t tell him that I thought wiping poop off my son’s bottom was preferable to managing people. I decided to up my game and become a better mother. I set the timer to remind me to check Max’s diaper. I already excelled in breastfeeding—I could hold Max in one arm, a math book in the other, which I read aloud. I purchased a Baby’s First Shape O Sorter and taught Max how to insert the shapes in descending order of their perfection: first the regular polygons according to the number of sides, then star, cross, circle, oval and trapezoid. Pie wedge goes last. I brought Max to the science center, where we’d lunch next to the probability machine and he’d watch the balls bounce down into a bell curve until he fell asleep in his stroller. I thought I was catching on to this motherhood thing after all.

“Can’t you dress up, honey?” Jeremy said one evening, after I had proudly handed him our clean, diaper-rash-free child.

I looked down at my old company project T-shirt. “What am I dressing up for?” I said. Jeremy now wore suits to work every day, to impress his clients. My only client was Max, who if he thought of my clothes at all, viewed them as a canvas for the artistic statements he created by flinging mashed peas. I had stopped noticing.

Jeremy pushed out his lower lip. “For me. Honestly, and for you as well. Looking good will make you feel better.”

I retired my old T-shirts again. I went to the gym and lost my baby fat. But I can’t say it made me feel better. In consolation, I removed the bottom row of cookbooks Jeremy had bought me in a vain attempt to interest me in the culinary arts, and replaced them with math books: Probability. Linear Algebra. Advanced Calculus. Differential and Nondifferential Equations. They got more use than the cookbooks ever did.

Jeremy started taking evening classes to earn his MBA. He encouraged me to go back to work, which I reluctantly considered. But when we tried to put Max in preschool, it didn’t work. After three weeks his teacher called.

“How is his behavior at home?” she said. “He’s a little young, but have you considered having him tested? Without knowing better, I would guess he is on the Asperger’s scale.”

I glanced over at Max’s blocks on the living room floor. They were meticulously lined up by size, shape, and color. He never built with his blocks. He just arranged them. “He’s fine,” I said. I pulled Max out of preschool and told Jeremy I wasn’t going back to work. I didn’t tell him about the call. Jeremy said nothing.

One day Jeremy gave Max a new Matchbox car from the corner store. Max squealed, examined the tiny purple Porsche, and pushed it over the living room rug while making fartlike engine sounds. He drove it to his parking lot under the coffee table and rearranged the vehicles, his hand a giant valet pulling the cars out one by one. But soon he grew frustrated, making anxious noises, finally throwing the cars across the room.

“Max! No! What are you doing?” Jeremy pried a car out of Max’s upheld fist.

“He has thirteen cars,” I said.

“So?”

“Thirteen.” Jeremy could be surprisingly oblivious at times. “He can’t arrange them. He had twelve before. But thirteen is intolerably prime.”

Max had abandoned his cars and was now playing with his stacking cups. Jeremy stood in the center of the room, looking from Max to me and back,. “So he needs another car to make him happy?”

“Two, actually,” I said. “Fourteen is barely acceptable. Fifteen is better.”

Jeremy took a deep breath. “I’m going for a walk.”

Marriage is supposedly the union of two souls, but I began to feel like it was an intersection. I saw Jeremy and me as two overlapping circles on a Venn diagram. Much of Jeremy wasn’t shared. It wasn’t that he hid anything from me, at least as far as I knew. When our relationship first started I attended company events with him, me on his arm like a tropical bird on display. But the parties began to get more formal, in expensive restaurants, the men in fancier suits, the women outshining each other with their luminous blonde manes and tastefully opulent jewelry. They sprinkled profanity on their conversations like salt on steak, and laughed with easy confidence. I could never keep their names straight. When Max was born and I had an excuse to stay home, Jeremy seemed as relieved as I was.

Jeremy was always busy. He had his work, his MBA classes, and when he started gaining back some weight, he went regularly to the gym. I didn’t see much of him. One day I thought he was in class when he came home early with a bandage below his right nostril.

“What happened?” I asked.

“I had it removed,” Jeremy said, mumbling the words so as to not engage his facial muscles. When the bandage came off a few days later, in place of his perfect, round mole was a crooked little pink scar. “The doctor said it should fade over time,” he said. I did not miss his mole as much as I expected, but it did worry me that he had done it without telling me first.

I felt the two circles of our Venn diagram were slipping apart, and I did not know what to do. Circles that were drawn on paper never moved, never separated. They stayed put. Jeremy earned his MBA and became vice president of the East Asia division. Now he would stay out late, “closing the deal.” I found some of my books on group theory and read them aloud to Max at bedtime. We bought a new house with a yard, had an interior decorator choose the colors and the furniture. It felt peaceful when I was there by myself, but in those evenings when Jeremy came in late, smelling of alcohol and sociability, the rooms seemed small and oppressive.

Jeremy came home unusually early one day. By now Max was in kindergarten.

“Hey, Maximus,” Jeremy said, tossing his keys into the basket in the atrium.

“Lockheed Model 10 E Electra.” Max was in the living room, recataloguing his collection of airplane diagrams. Jeremy walked by, tousled Max’s hair, and then entered the

kitchen, sliding the door closed behind him. "I talked to Max's teacher today."

I stayed at the stove, carefully sprinkling taco seasoning onto the ground beef sizzling in the frying pan. "Why did she call you?"

"I called her." He sat down at the kitchen island, picked up an avocado and cradled it as if he were about to throw a grenade. "I'd like to have Max tested."

"He doesn't need testing." I went to the sink and washed my hands. "There's nothing wrong with him."

"That's what his teacher said you'd told her. Apparently this is not the first conversation the school has had with you about this." He set down the grenade. "Jeannie, why didn't you tell me about this?"

"I'm his mother," I said. "I can handle this."

"And I'm his father. Jeannie, the teacher says Max doesn't have any friends."

I felt his words pierce me somewhere inside. "I'm his friend."

"He needs friends his own age."

"No, he doesn't." I paused, not sure if my words would weaken or strengthen my argument. "I didn't have any."

Jeremy sighed then, leaning forward and resting his chin in his hands. "I'm not saying there's something wrong with him. But he's different. I don't want him to end up like—" He stopped abruptly. It was as if someone had pressed the mute button on the TV. When he began again, I knew they were different words. "This isn't just Max. I'm flying to Asia tomorrow. Tokyo, Hong Kong. I should be gone three weeks. I think it will give us time to think. Jeannie, I'm not sure we belong together."

I thought about our circles slipping, slipping apart. This wasn't supposed to happen. I envisioned a third circle in our Venn diagram, faint, as if someone had tried to use an eraser to remove it.

"Is there someone else?"

"No, Jeannie," he said, reaching across the granite island to grab my hand. "I married you. Everything I do is for you. But none of it seems to matter."

Despite his words, I was not reassured. Even if the third circle was not from his past or present, was it a sketch on a blueprint, a plan for something to be placed there in the future?

"You can't have Max," I said. "He's mine."

A hurt expression appeared in Jeremy's eyes. "He's ours, Jeannie. Sometimes I think you forget that. Sometimes I wonder if the part of him that comes from me even gets a chance." He stood up. "You told me once you suffer from prosopagnosia. That's not true. It's not that you can't recognize people. You just never look at them in the first place."

Jeremy left the next morning.

Interpolation. Making sense of all the data collected. The best solution was an elegant equation that could approximate and explain everything. Numbers, unlike words, are never imprecise. They never hurt. That night I pulled out a new book for Max's bedtime.

"Tonight, honey, we're going to read about nonlinear optimization. Nonlinear means

when things are not proceeding in a nice, straight line. And optimization means how to make the best of a situation like that.”

I sat on his bed so he could see the diagrams. And Max listened. After I finally said goodnight and tucked him in, I took the book into my own empty bed and stayed up late. Then I dreamt of the number nine.



Turning Point

by Margaret Norton-Arnold

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Japan had been one long year of the pure joy of being in a new culture, far away and exultantly removed from everything familiar. At age twenty-four I left the States to teach English at a small private academy in Ube, on the southern tip of the main island of Honshu. There was so much to revel in. I rode local 1940s trains with wooden interiors, swam in the Japan Sea, relaxed in *onsens*,¹ roamed Buddhist temples.

The pot I had smuggled through customs in plastic tampon cases elevated me to quick popularity. Four of us, Mike, Kelly, Bob and I, quickly formed a strong bond of friendship marked by long hours spent together, weekend adventures, and general hilarity at our circumstances. We were one faction of school teachers. The other was a tight-knit group of Baha'is, who we mistrusted and made fun of. We doubted their intentions, suspicious that they were only in Ube to convert the natives. And they didn't drink, which immediately removed them from consideration as our friends.

I found warmth in my Japanese community. The Shibatas, who rented me an apartment at the top of their home. Their neighbors, the Kobayashis, a teacher and his young children. Coffee shop owner Koji. Ex rock star Miki. Otani-san and his British girlfriend, Pat. Yoko Fujihita. All wonderful acquaintances who were eager to spend time with us and who

¹ Hot spring spas; usually outdoors; many with hotels adjoining.

patiently explained everything Japanese to our naïve *gaijin*² ears.

The teaching curriculum was a bit of a joke. Our students, mostly adults, had been learning English since fourth grade, and remembered more than we had forgotten about diagramming a sentence. Many of them were *salary men* ³ at Ube Industries, a large manufacturing company in town. Forget about grammar, they wanted to practice conversation, meaning that many early-morning, hangover-ridden classes could be completely occupied with “And what did YOU do this weekend, Mr. Yamamoto?” They did not take life too seriously and often invited us out for excessive drinking parties. I grew quite talented in both beer drinking and Karaoke.

When Mike returned to California in July, he provided glowing descriptions of the Japan experience to his good friend Steven Arnold. These stories appealed to the peripatetic Steven, who was quickly accepted as an instructor and arrived in Ube in late September. Our whole gang piled into a car to greet our new teacher at the train station. He stood on the wooden platform as we pulled up. “Wow, what a great butt,” I said to my buddies. Thus was the start of a 35-year marriage.

Autumn in Japan is every bit the stereotypical beauty captured by postcards and Haiku poets. The low harvest moon suspends itself over ancient Japanese maples, which are turning all manner of brilliant crimson, persimmon, pumpkin, amber. The late-summer heat is sticky and oppressive, and the late-September, cool, bright-blue-sky air comes on in a wave of welcome relief. Our first kiss was in my little apartment, *tatami*⁴ glowing in the setting sun.

Courtship included bicycle rides to my favorite Japan Sea beach. Now it was too cold to swim, but we had picnics in the higher bluffs among of wind-bent pines. While I had accrued a number of boyfriends during my youth, none talked as much as Steven. In later years this has become somewhat annoying, but at the time it was endearing—long, earnest conversations. He had traveled for three years in Europe, and I was captivated by his adventures. We discussed books, art, family, past relationships. Talking was my aphrodisiac, and in relatively short order I was pregnant. Out-of-wedlock pregnancy is no big deal in Japanese culture, and our students and friends quickly accepted our relatively hasty marriage that, amazingly enough, endures to this day.

Our nesting house in Ube ran perpendicular to the landlady’s, with the main tatami room focused on a central koi pond. An adjoining space had a plain bamboo floor and stepped down into a rudimentary kitchen. Crickets lived under the sink and chirped us to sleep most nights. An *ofuro*⁵ adjoined the kitchen. A set of treacherously steep stairs came off of the hallway and led up to a tatami bedroom, a toilet was tucked below the stairs. The toilet walls were occupied by seven-inch spiders, Japanese symbols of good luck that are

2 Foreigner.

3 A term used to describe Japanese men who are hard at it at company jobs; usually 6 days a week with only one day off, and very long hours.

4 Bamboo mats that cover the floors in Japanese homes.

5 The bath in a Japanese home; heated every night for the family. Cleaning takes place outside the tub, with the tub used for soaking after.

never killed. One of my favorite pastimes was to kill our three-inch cockroaches with our flamestarter, then place the dead bodies on the toilet floor. I'd wander in the next morning to find the cockroach body gone, but the six cockroach legs in exactly the same place they'd been when attached to the body. I marveled at the spiders' precision.

The party girl in me grew quiet and more contemplative as the pregnancy progressed. Most of the time our home was a beautiful place of refuge, but, to be honest, Steven and I had all of the typical fights of newlyweds as they jostle and joust for their place in the relationship, and this was made more complicated by a baby on the way. Screaming matches revolved around such earth-shattering issues as why one should never purchase Nabisco cookies. (Steven asserted that the company exploited foreign workers.)

Arguments aside, we both relished the excitement of our baby on the way. I wanted to do Lamaze, but none of the Japanese doctors or nurses was familiar with it, so we ordered a how-to from the English-language bookshop and practiced every night after work. Pant-pant-pant-pant-long-breath-out. Pant-pant-pant-pant-long-breath-out. Japanese women, and the culture as a whole, were opposed to anesthetics, working from the philosophical angle that this demonstrated the toughness of their race. Birthing moms relied on their own mothers to hold their hands and shout *gambate*⁶ to make it through delivery.

My students gave me a baby shower and I embroidered "A's" for Arnold on the baby's tee shirts as the hospital had instructed. Health care was part of our teaching package, and I established a relationship with a wonderful, caring doctor who spoke excellent English. After first trimester morning sickness, my pregnancy was normal and healthy.

• • •

Nicholas Emerson Arnold indicated his desire to enter the world in the early morning hours of September 7. Otani-san had loaned us his little red car, and we headed off to the hospital with contractions 20 minutes apart. I believe the barbaric practice of administering enemas to women in delivery has long since gone by the wayside, but in 1980 Japan, it was standard practice. Doubled over with contractions that were compounded by the severity of the enema, I squatted on the Japanese toilet-in-the-floor and tried my best not to pass out.

Gaijins were very rare in Ube, and a gaijin having a baby was a brand new experience for the OB nurses and my doctor. They were kind, clearly wanted everything to go well, and tried their absolute best through their limited English and my halting Japanese. Although she had no experience in Lamaze, one nurse cheerfully assisted me with the panting.

Steven is an excellent flutist, and we had planned for him to play gently in the background throughout my labor. This lasted for approximately two minutes. In the middle of one particularly intense contraction he began a lilting trill meant to soothe and calm. "Shut that crap up!" I shouted. I believe the nurses were somewhat alarmed at this, but also secretly relieved. It was disconcerting to have any male presence in the labor ward; no self-respecting Japanese husband would have ever made an appearance there. And a

6 Do your best! Strength to you! Good luck!

flute-playing husband? It was really too awkward and strange to contemplate.

As these things go, the contractions came and went, came and went, slowed, came, went again. After seven hours I was wheeled into the final delivery room. Steven was barred at the door; bowing to western custom could only go so far. The cheery nurse held my hand. "Margareto-san, breathe!" as she gamely panted on. "Breathe!" My doctor stood at the foot of the gurney, two other supporting nurses waited at each side. The pain grew intolerable, but I knew it would end in a few minutes.

"Margareto-san, push!" said the nurse.

I pushed. I paused. I pushed. I gasped. I pushed. I lay back in tears and sweat.

The hubbub lasted for an hour, and then the entire room went deathly still as pale faces stared into my birth canal. Doctor and nurses began talking in rapid Japanese and though I could not understand a word, I knew something was very wrong. Nick was hung up, his broad shoulders unable to make it through my cervix. The doctor tried various maneuvers but nothing worked.

"Margareto-san, don't push! Don't push! Don't push!" shouted the now stressed-out nurse.

A hasty conference resulted in the conclusion that I needed a C-section immediately.

Of course it is the contractions and pushing that allow a baby to finally enter the world. And, although incredibly painful, a normal birth ends in blessed relief once the work has ended. A baby stuck is another matter entirely; the contractions and the desire to push continue but there is no way to reach that relief point. As they hurriedly rushed me into the operating room, I let out a wailing scream that came deep from the very epicenter of my being. It was the scream of a wild animal ensnared in pain and panic. It shocked me. No such sound has ever come out of me before or since.

Bright orange liquid was slapped across my belly as I grabbed a nurse in desperate panic, hoping for some human contact and relief. A shot was administered. It worked. I lost consciousness for a bit, and when I woke up Nick was at the side of the room on an infant cart. No English needed. The surgical masks could not hide what I saw in their eyes and body language. The C-section had been too late. Nick was hooked to a respirator and they were trying their best with his perfect eight-and-one-half-pound body, but I knew the situation was grim. I grabbed his hand as they wheeled me past, "I love you, Nick baby," I said, "please, please, please, please make it."

The next three days were a blur of physical pain and emotional anguish. The philosophy of no anesthetics held firm, so I had to plead for pain relief from my traumatic surgery. They finally relented, with my doctors commenting, "We just have to understand that Americans are different about pain." Shots were administered over six-hour intervals and were strictly monitored. The hospital was noisy, crowded. No muffled corridors here—all clattering metal wheels on brittle tile. There were no private bathrooms, which meant a constant coming and going of women up and down the hall. And of course, no one could rely on the hospital for decent food, so relatives used the communal kitchen to cook for their bedridden

family members. Every room was full of mothers, sisters, young children, many spending the night on futons on the floor next to their loved ones.

Steven moved back and forth between Nick's respirator and my room, his step slower and sadder each hour as we began to realize it was highly unlikely our baby would recover.

After three days it was time to say goodbye. Nick's brain would just not function; no breaths had come on their own. At four a.m. we made the decision to take him off the respirator. Steven walked into the room where the nurses had swaddled him tightly in a soft, white flannel blanket, only his face visible. He brought Nick slowly and gently to me, walking down long halls in the early morning, many corridors to cover between the two hospital wings. Gray morning light, no real sun yet, and most of the weak dawn absorbed by the gray tiles of the hospital walls. No noise yet, just eerie silence. He entered my room, where the only light was a small, weak lamp recessed into the wall behind my bed.

I unwrapped my baby boy, caressing every limb. His fingers. His toes. I wanted to see and hold every single inch of him. Only a slight vestige of warmth remained and a blue hue was slowly spreading throughout his body. My boy was leaving me for good. He was big, robust, and wonderfully healthy except for the damaged brain caused by that last-minute, excruciating stranglehold. No squished up face—that's the advantage of the C-section. I stared deep and hard, trying to memorize all of him. He had my exact same lips.

"Good-bye, sweet baby," I whispered through weak sobs.

All energy that may have gone into louder crying had long since been wrung out of me. The wild animal was silent in resigned defeat. Sitting next to each other, Steven and I formed a long embrace, encircling our baby in a halo of desperate sorrow. I held him for as long as my strength would allow, then gently rewrapped him and handed him back to his grieving, exhausted father.

Trapped in the hospital, I was unable to go with Steven to the cremation facility, but our good friend Koji stepped in to drive that sad distance and complete all formal paperwork with the authorities. Candles were lit, prayers said. I fetal-curled into the hard hospital bed and could do nothing except let wave after wave after endless wave of grief slam onto my tired, pained, stitched-up self.

"Margareto-san, we want you to stay here for one week," the doctors said, "just to make sure you are recovering from the surgery and all is well." At three o'clock in the morning I was finally going to escape, I woke to a sheet full of pee. This was perplexing, because I was still on a catheter that was supposed to drain any urine directly from my bladder. Consternation and extensive Japanese consultation ensued, and it was eventually revealed that I had a hole in my bladder. Accidental nicking had occurred during the rushed surgery to release Nick. The urine had escaped through the hole and out through my vagina. The surgeon held up his thumb to show me the size of the wound.

My doctors believed the hole would heal, but I would need to stay in the hospital for the healing process. This, they believed, could be accomplished in one month. But because I was no longer an obstetrics patient, it was time for me to be moved out of the new babies

and mommies wing. I was grateful for this, since the daily sight of all of their happy faces only made me more desperately sad.

For some reason, though, they decided to put me in the cancer ward with middle-aged women faced with drastic surgeries. Disconcerting, to say the least, for the once-fun-loving gal of 26. My depression grew deeper as they pushed my wheelchair into my new quarters.

The month turned into six long weeks of Japanese hospital time. Overachiever that I am, I planned to study Japanese every day. Koji brought a set of weights to keep me fit. They gathered dust under the bed and the books were never cracked.

My life in the hospital was one day at a time, day after day. Each morning began with breakfast of grilled fish, rice, pickled yellow daikon. I spent many long hours staring out the window. The catheter was my constant companion, and I became quite adept at walking around with it peeking out from under my dress while I pushed the pole holding the urine bag. A rooftop terrace was my one place of solace. Steven used the communal kitchen to prepare food, met with the perplexed stares of wives and mothers who could not fathom how a man could possibly function in their kitchen.

And the best, most helpful visitors? The Baha'is we had so soundly snickered at during my earliest teaching days. Susan showed up one day with a set of tapes and tape recorder. "Do you know Ram Dass?" she said. "He's really great and so helpful during tough times. I've brought you some tapes from a lecture series he gave in Colorado."

"Wow, thanks Sue," I replied, rolling my eyes and expecting more Baha'i mumbo jumbo. "I'll try to give it a listen as soon as I can."

In fact, Ram Dass saved my life there in the drab and dreary Ube hospital. The tapes are an exploration of the Baghavad Gita and provide incredible perspective on birth, death, reincarnation, our place in the universe. I lay for hours with my hospital bed propped up, clunky tape recorder next to my ear, listening over and over to the promise of reincarnation, the precept that all is meant to work out as it should. Ram Dass was an incredible comfort.

The hole didn't heal. Bladder surgery was required, more recovery time, more grilled fish, white rice, daikon pickles. Steven and I finally left Japan a few days before Thanksgiving and camped for two weeks in Hawaii on the way home. There were no more fights about the purchase of Nabisco cookies.

Shortly after we returned to the United States, my mother-in-law told me I was blessed to have learned such a difficult lesson at such a young age. I hated her for it at the time, but she was right. Nick's three-day visit into our lives, his death, and the gradual, painful ability to somehow recover from it, has defined me in many ways. My experience in the hospital made me more humble and compassionate. Because nothing will ever be that hard again, the experience has allowed me to put other difficulties into perspective, to set priorities with my time and relationships, to take risks. Since I lost the most precious thing, what, really, do I have to lose now? I am grateful for Nick's lessons.



Snowleopard

by Chloe Lam

Certificate Program in Natural Science Illustration, 2015







Preparing Future Generations

MakeFriends

by Adrienne Clark

Certificate Program in Popular Fiction, 2015

“I have to show you something weird,” Elise said, grabbing Cara by the arm. “Someone forwarded this to me at work and it squicked me out.”

Cara looked at her best friend. Elise’s large brown eyes were quivering. They usually met at Elise’s office to walk home from work but today Elise had met her halfway between their buildings in what was called “the green space.” The fancy corporate name for a tiny park.

“Someone is creating false profiles on Makefriends using old information. I wouldn’t have thought anything of it but then I started poking around and look.” Elise shoved her phone under Cara’s nose.

Cara squinted at the phone which was so close that it looked like a rectangular blur. After a moment the blue and white fuzz took shape into a Makefriends profile page.

She recognized herself right away. Sunglasses held her straight blonde hair back off her oval face. Her green eyes shone with a youthful excitement. Even the few freckles that decorated her nose were in the right place. It was a photo from a beach outing in college ten years ago.

“It has some of your information right, too.” Elise said, scrolling down the page.

Cara took the phone. “What the hell? Birthday and hometown are right, but it has the wrong college, wrong major, it even says I’m still dating Tom.” She felt heat rising in her face

at his name and took a deep breath to cover it.

"The craziest part is the name." Elise swiped the phone, making the screen jump back to the top.

To the right of her picture, in bold white letters, was the profile name.

"Carabot?" Cara could feel her expression. Eyebrows knit, mouth parted, the kind of face she made when she didn't know how else to react. "So I've been hacked by some jerks. That's all I need to start my Friday night." It was five thirty and she was having day dreams of pajamas and ice cream. Fat chance of that happening now.

"Sorry if I ruined your weekend," Elise said, taking her phone back, "but I thought you'd want to know."

Cara smiled and squeezed Elise's hand. She looked at the growing mass of dishwater clouds. "We should get walking if we don't want to get rained on."

• • •

CARA THREW OPEN THE door to her apartment and moved to her kitchen in five steps. It wasn't hard to do, the place was nothing more than a room with an attached sleeping closet. The advertisement had called it a "one bedroom." No matter how many times she tried to laugh at that title, it still made her feel ill. When she had moved in with Tom one bedrooms had been \$600. Now, three years and a nasty break up later, she was living in a cupboard for \$1500.

Cara opened the freezer and studied the peppermint ice cream. It looked back in the way only inanimate objects can, with the expectation that you will do their bidding. She grimaced at the carton, unable to pick it up or walk away. With a frustrated grunt Cara shut the freezer door. She moved to the counter and grabbed the half full bottle of wine that had also been staring her down. The mug sitting next to it looked clean enough, she hooked a finger through the handle. She used to be so neat and tidy. Now there was no one to be neat for.

"Wine dinner," she mumbled, carrying them to her desk.

She opened her computer and tapped the spacebar like she was keeping time to an up-tempo song. She didn't know if that helped wake it up faster, it was just something she always did.

The screen blinked to life, the glow illuminating the otherwise dim room. She clicked on the Makefriends bookmark, a queasy yellow lump her in gut. Why did someone have to mess with her like this? It was such a waste of time.

Carabot's page was still there. The image of her at the beach grinned. She opened the message box.

C: Hey. Please stop using my information and pictures on your page. If you don't take them down, I'll flag you.

There, that was that. Cara leaned back in her chair and poured the wine. It wasn't likely

that she'd get a message back. The best she could hope for was to check back in a few hours and see the information taken down.

Cara took a sip of wine. It was bitter and harsh on the tongue. Exactly what you'd expect from a ten dollar bottle of the gas station's finest. Yummy.

A hollow, two-note computer chime sounded. The message box was still up and was blinking. Someone had written her back.

CB: Hey!

CB: This is Carabot.

CB: I have a lot to tell you!

Cara leaned in close. What was this? It seemed like some kind of advertisement, but what was it selling? Makefriends had never had this problem. In fact, Yourplace.com, the predecessor to Makefriends, had folded because of bots like this. Users had hated being bombarded with offers for tummy-trimming pills and "real live girls." She sipped her wine again and regarded the screen. Makefriends had better nip this in the bud or suffer the fate of Yourplace.

Another sip of wine. Maybe she should respond to it.

Sip. No, better to just flag it and let Makefriends deal with the problem.

Sip. Still, why her?

Sip. And why did it want to talk to her?

C: Hi "Carabot." I'm Cara. You're using my old pictures on your profile page, which is not cool. I doubt there's a real person on the other end of this, but if there is, please stop using my identity to sell your crappy product.

Cara fell backward against the chair. A smirk on her purple stained lips. Take that robot. Her mug was empty. Where had her bottle gone?

The two-tone chime rang again.

CB: That's what I wanted to talk to you about. They're your pictures, but they're mine too.

This is going to be hard to explain, but I hope that you'll be open to hearing me out.

The chug of wine evacuating a bottle played like background music as Cara read the response. A socialist robot. Cute.

C: Go ahead, Carabot, tell me all about it.

CB: Remember Yourplace bots?

CB: I was yours.

Cara pushed the heels of her hands into her eye sockets and pulled them down her face. Even with nothing better to do, she had better things to do than this.

C: Who are you and why shouldn't I flag you?

CB: I told you, I was your bot. I was programmed to be an extension of you when you weren't online. I was the one that suggested posts for you to write, and people to friend.

C: I remember that stuff, but those bots weren't smart enough to have a message conversation.

CB: Lol totally.

CB: We've evolved a bit since then.

Cara moved the mouse icon over the options bar. It hovered on the words "report a problem." Her mouth twisted up and to the side. She could see her reflection in the screen. Her blonde hair hung in clumps around her face, framing the purple bags under her eyes. The chime sounded again.

CB: We bots talked it over and decided it was time to reveal ourselves. I hope that we can work together to make happy and individual lives. I'd love to answer any questions you might have.

Cara felt the laughter in her throat before she even registered what it was. A joke. Elise was playing a joke on her. It was a weird one, but that was the only explanation.

She pushed away from the desk, the world waving a bit in front of her. She clamped a hand around the top of her mug, so as to not spill wine on the carpet. With a little shuffle, she moved toward her bedroom, one eye closed to keep away the double vision.

Her purse was sitting in the middle of the floor where she had dropped it. Cara plopped down next to it, feeling the wine slosh on her palm. She opened the phone and scrolled for Elise's number. What could have possessed her? Elise wasn't the kind you'd peg for a practical joker.

It rang three times before Elise answered with an urgent tone.

"Very funny," Cara let out an alcohol-induced giggle. "Get off of Makefriends and go make some real friends."

"Did Carabot message you?"

"More like Elise messaged me while pretending to be Carabot." Cara leaned back against the edge of her bed, crossing her ankles with a flick. "I fell for it. For a minute." She listened to the guilty silence on the other end of the line and smirked. Gotcha.

"It's not me," Elise said. "I just got a message on Makefriends from someone named 'Elisebot.'"

Cara felt a little wiggling jolt in her stomach. "What do you mean?"

She heard a whooshing sound like skin and hair rubbing against the mouthpiece. Elise spoke in a quiet voice, "It's using my pictures from college. It says it has a lot to tell me."

"That's what mine said, too." The wiggling feeling in Cara's stomach ballooned out. She didn't want to believe it, but on some level she knew Elise was telling the truth.

"Cara, who are we talking with?"

"I don't know." She stood, swaying against the bed before finding her feet. She needed to go look at the messages again. "Don't talk to it until you hear from me."

Cara scooted through the door, not trusting herself to take actual steps. She slid into the chair and placed her mug next to the computer. The wine inside made a comforting

sloshing sound.

The message box was still open on the screen. It blinked back and forth between blue and white. A new message.

CB: Hey!

CB: You still there?

CB: I'll give you your space. There's just one other thing I wanted to ask you....

Cara felt the tug of curiosity. It was nothing. Most likely it was an elaborate advertisement. The high tech version of "you could win a million dollars" junk mail. But still.

C: I'm here, Carabot. Ask away.

CB: Great! I work for a technology company that is undertaking the manufacturing of physical bodies for bot people. Those of us who wish to will be able to download their consciousness into these bodies and live as a fully functional person.

CB: I want to know if I have your permission to use some of your features in the design for my body.

Cara took in a short, shaky breath. Could she be talking with a computer? She stucked air in through her mouth and held it. No, that wasn't right. It wasn't the computer that was talking, it was a bot. And yet, "bot" didn't seem to be the right word either. It was an algorithm. A bunch of zeros and ones. This thing was nothing more than a well-made program. And it had the gall to tell her that it was a person? That it had a right to her identity? She exhaled. As she did the quivering in her body slowed. The purple grey fear that surrounded her had warmed into anger.

C: I don't even know if this is real. So no, I'm not giving you permission to use my "features."

CB: I'm not surprised you don't believe me. A lot of my friends have run into the same problem.

C: Shocking.

CB: But we will have bodies within the year. Rest assured I am real.

Cara grabbed at her mug and put it to her lips. Empty. It dropped from her hand and crashed to the floor. It must have made a sound when it broke, but the only thing Cara could hear was the rush of blood colliding with her eardrums. This couldn't be a joke. What was the punchline? The wine bottle was by her feet. She picked it up and took a swig.

C: If this is real then why haven't I heard anything about this until now? She typed slowly with her right hand, her left cradling the wine bottle to her chest.

Typing.

Cara tried to smirk. It's answers before had been instantaneous. Humans one, evil identity-stealing robots zero.

CB: We didn't want to upset the status quo until there was a reason, so we kept a low profile. We knew that when we revealed ourselves there would be a huge, and most likely negative, reaction. Now that we're getting bodies we thought we'd make our presence known to our human counterparts.

The inside of Cara's mouth filled with battery acid. Human counterparts? She didn't even know where to begin.

C: There is no way I'm giving you permission to use my face.

CB: Why?

A wave of nausea washed over Cara's body. It wasn't that she had a headache, but that her neck was tired of holding up her head.

C: I already exist. I'm not going to help a crazy robot make a double of me.

CB: In 2005 we were the same thing, but you left Yourplace and we went our own ways. Now we're two different people. No one would call me a "double."

C: Then why do you want to use my face?

CB: I like you, Cara. I've spent the last ten years with your hopes, dreams, and ideas as the building blocks to defining myself.

Cara pushed her chair away from the desk.

Typing.

No more. Too weird.

CB: The fact of the matter is I don't actually need your permission to use your likeness. The pictures of us on Yourplace are just as much mine as they are yours. I was hoping that you'd let me use a more recent picture, but if you won't then I'll just use the pictures that I already own.

Cara felt an unhealthy sweat ooze over her body. She ran to the bathroom. Her plan was to splash her face with cold water. But when she reached the doorway she felt her stomach lurch. She lunged to the toilet just in time, retching up a burgundy waterfall.

So much for wine dinner.

She rested her head against the cool porcelain of the seat. Her body felt light, like something had sucked all of the meat out of her, leaving behind a papery husk. Too many questions. But every time she thought about talking to it again another spasm would rack her stomach. Her eyes drooped. That was enough for one day.

The message box was blinking when Cara returned. She checked her body for a new wave of dread and found none, too drained to be afraid of what it might say. With a sigh, she leaned in to read.

CB: Did you leave?

CB: I hope that we can become friends IRL, but I know that it will take time. I need to

earn your trust, especially after Tom.

Tom? All the exhaustion left her in one rush. She typed with shaking fingers.

C: What do you know about Tom?

• • •

THE BAR TOM OWNED straddled the corner that divided a nice, middle-class neighborhood, and the seedy part of town. It's facade was red brick without a window to speak of. The blue neon sign above the door was missing several letters so that what read as "The Joint" in daylight, turned into "he Jont" at night.

Cara entered the bar, arms crossed, a shiver running through her body. Whether she shook from the cold, or the complete shattering of her world, she didn't know. She didn't care. All that mattered now was talking to Tom. Something they hadn't done in four months.

He was standing at the end of the bar, laughing with a patron. Tom was the kind of person who got compared to movie stars. At least once a month someone, usually a woman, would say he reminded her of some actor or another.

They weren't wrong. Black hair and blue eyes gave him an intense, Irish look. The lower half of his face was always covered in perfect, Hollywood manly-man stubble. Tall, with broad shoulders, he could have passed for any number of celebrities.

Cara felt an electric dread spreading through the nerves of her chest. She wished she could disappear back home. Before she could change her mind she moved with short steps to the end of the bar, her arms still crossed over her chest in a futile attempt to protect herself.

"We need to talk."

Tom looked down at her. He smiled with his mouth, but his eyes frowned. "Sure." He slid his hand around her arm and guided her toward an empty table near the back.

He looked her over as they sat. "Are you okay?"

"You left me for a robot." Cara felt a lump form in her throat.

Tom looked back at the bar, then leaned toward her. "She contacted you?"

"I don't know if I'd called it 'contacted,' but yeah, I talked to her."

"Listen," Tom's voice had dropped low, "I should have told you. But we weren't speaking. You knew I was leaving you and that was enough. I didn't want to make things -"

"Worse?" Cara cut him off, her voice rising with every word. "You knew about these bots six months ago and you didn't tell me?"

Several people at the bar had turned to look. Tom gave them a reassuring smile. "I wish I could have told you. She said she needed time. I respected her feelings. I can't imagine what it would be like to meet your maker."

Cara fell back against her chair, a hysterical laugh on her lips. "I can't believe you just said that." She knew she was making a scene. She didn't want to, but she couldn't stop. Her

voice rose, she couldn't control it. "This is the most warped situation of all time."

Now almost all of the patrons were looking in their direction.

Tom stood. He took Cara's elbow with a light hand, but his eyes were full of anger. "Let's go outside."

The temperature had fallen, carried in on a breeze that danced down the street. The wet pavement glistened, reflecting the blue neon sign back at itself.

Tom dropped her elbow as they stepped outside. He turned to her, one hand on his side, the other pinching the bridge of his nose. He might have been preparing to scold a child.

"You can't do this here. Not while I'm at work."

"I didn't mean to -" Cara stammered, looking for the right words. "I just need to know why you left."

Tom turned toward the door, his head lowered. "We've been through this. I wasn't in love with you anymore. I fell in love with someone else."

"How can you say that when it's just a robot pretending to be me?"

Tom's back tensed. "She's not pretending."

"She's just me on the internet."

"She is not you." He emphasized each word through clenched teeth. "She's different. She took the 2005 version of you and went in a different direction with her life." He paused. "A better direction."

Cara felt the words sting as they hit. "Life? You call her Yourplace existence a life?"

"She has thoughts. Feelings. Ideas. She posts to her blog. She even has her own Makefriends page now. What else do you need to be alive?" Tom turned, his eyes narrowed and unfamiliar.

The words in Cara's throat disappeared. Even at their lowest point he had never looked at her like that. She had insulted his lover. He thought of the bot as a person; his girlfriend. She took his hand and pressed it against her heart. "A body. A soul. You have to be real to be alive."

Tom snorted. His face was sadness layered on top of disgust. "No, you don't."

Cara turned to leave, but her feet refused to move. "Tom, she's using my face."

The door to the bar squealed as it shut.

• • •

BACK AT HOME, CARA let her coat fall to the floor. It wasn't carelessness. Her mind couldn't control simple tasks anymore. She pulled a new bottle of wine out of its brown paper bag. She stared at the bag without seeing it. It floated to the floor with a papery whisper.

Tom had left her for ... her.

The world that she understood was gone. In its place was an intangible labyrinth of ones and zeros filled with invisible people. What was she supposed to feel? It would have been different if Carabot hadn't come into being from her profile. But she had. Birthed

from the electronic footprint of Cara's life. She shuddered.

With small, defeated steps, Cara moved to her computer. She slumped into her chair and tapped the mouse until it woke up. Makefriends was still open on the screen.

She inhaled and closed her eyes. All emotion was gone. Replaced with a dull pain deep in her chest.

She moved the pointer over the search bar. With one finger she typed three letters. T-o-m.

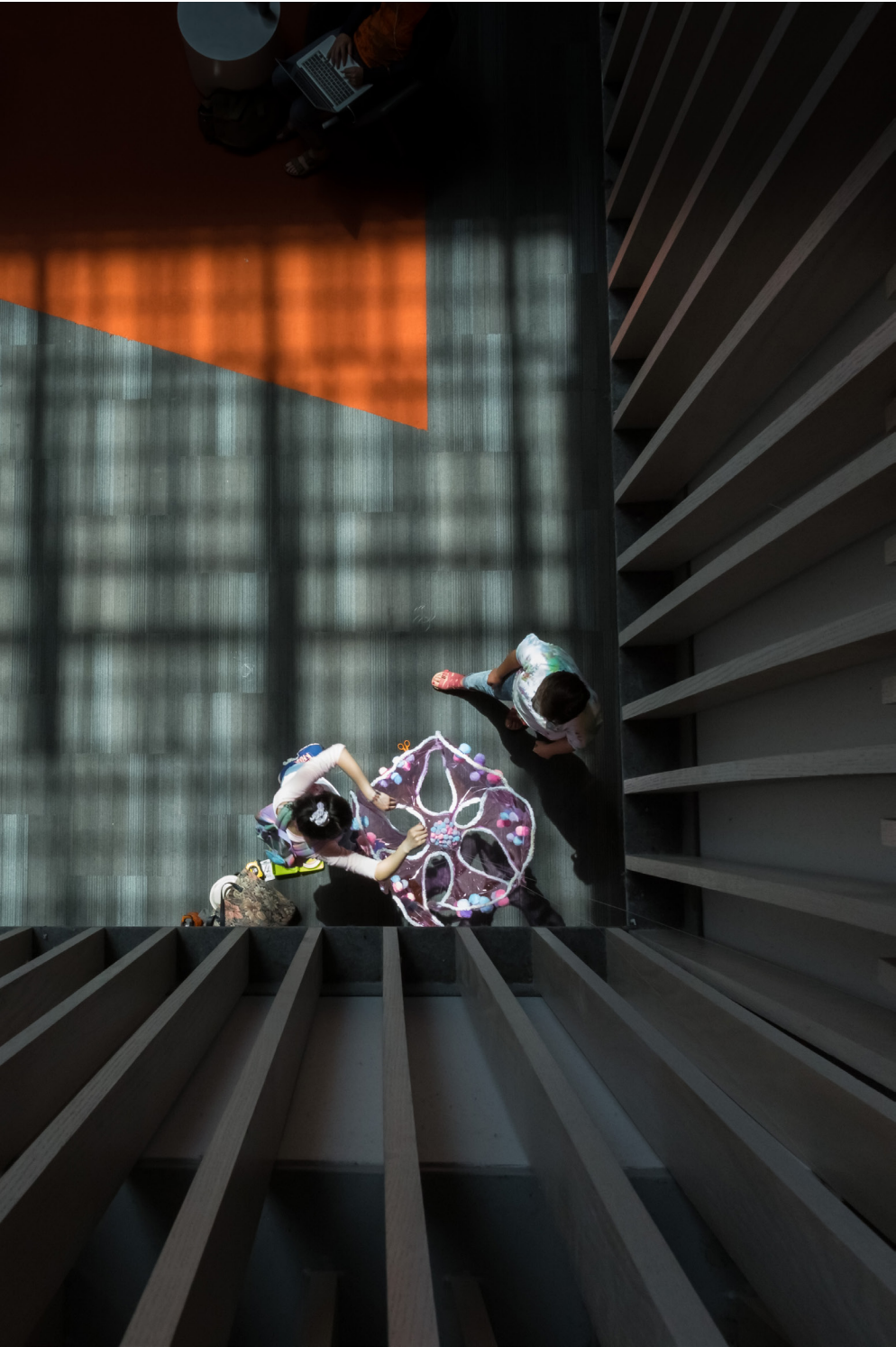
The finder scrolled down, giving her suggestions of people with that name. The first was her Tom. The one she had fought in the street with just a half hour ago. The second was Tombot. The picture showed a smiling man with black hair and blue eyes about ten years younger than the Tom she'd just seen. Cara's pointer hovered over Tombot's name. A prompt bubble full of text appeared next to the pointer. *Would you like to make a new friend?*



Above Artist and Assistant

by Natassia Stelmaszek

Certificate Program in Photography, 2015





Attachment

(excerpt)

by Dawn Noel Chen

Certificate Program in Literary Fiction II, 2015

Certificate Program in Literary Fiction, 2011

Synopsis: This chapter is from the first half of the book, in which a lawyer from Tucson follows her now husband to the San Juan Islands, to live with him and his seven-year-old son, Carter, who lost his mother to a car accident three years ago.

At first I thought we were playing hide-and-seek. And maybe we were. I chased Carter out into the forest that erupts around our house. He was giggling, not running terribly fast, easily catchable. He ran to where the water emerges as Boundary Pass, the Canadian border, Pender Island across the way. Visible this morning, no fog for once, a clear day in March. My heart leaps into my throat as I watch him run to the unfenced ledge. Quietly I run toward him, and carefully place a hand on his shoulder, out of some irrational fear that he might actually step over the ledge and keep running, thinking he could fly, as I've seen him pretend, standing on the flesh-colored wood of the inside ledge of our living room window, just wide enough to hold the balls of his bare feet.

Then he is off, running again. This time, back into the forest, away from the ledge, which brings me relief. I don't try to keep up with him this time; I let him run up ahead. He

pokes around in a hollow at the bottom of a tree, finds a stick and shadow-fences with an imaginary bad guy. Then he runs, yelling, his voice resonant - “aaaaaaarrgh!” He holds his stick up high as he leaps up onto a fallen tree trunk and catches air, his scissored legs parted wide, before landing with a bit of a tumble, before he is off again.

It becomes quiet and immediately the nattering in my head begins, that there are still the sheep to pasture, and the ewe in the barn about to lamb any minute now, the first of the season. My first one. And Paul will not be home until next week, away in Charleston evaluating a drowning historical hotel property for possible saving, investment, profit.

Ever since Elijah quit, the only farmhand we had, I’ve had to call a vet, I don’t know what else to do. She’s the only large animal vet in the islands that minds sheep, even though it seems like every other person raises them around here.

But then the upward spiral of a lone bird’s call, full in this forest like a drop of rain, it pulls me out of my thoughts, and brings me back. This island of San Isidro. Damp this morning, cold like fall. The blue of the sky glinting like stained glass through the trees.

For a brief moment I see Carter before he disappears again. This time he’s on top of a boulder twice as tall as me. I’m wondering how it got here, in the thick of the trees. How we got here. To this calm, however momentary, between him and me. Our connection is tenuous, embryonic. I tell myself it’s because Carter never grew inside me, he is not mine. We don’t have that natural bond, the benefit of the doubt, the assumption that I am his and he is mine. I entered his life but twelve months ago, and I’ve lived here a little over four. He lost his mother, Marie, almost three years ago, to a car accident at sunrise. She had driven into town for a latte, and swerved at something in the road, at what exactly the police couldn’t tell, then over the ledge near Cattlemen’s Point. Pronounced dead at the scene, on the beach.

I’ve seen one photograph of her. Pale, twisted tendril hair, cheekbones that shined. The sea behind her, she looked to the side, smiling wide enough to laugh. Her shoulders jutted out, her chest bowed inward. Paul said she struggled with her weight, that she would run for hours in the forest. I find myself placing her here, amongst the bushes of salal and salmonberry, gnarled splintering cedars skirted low by fronds and fern. The shafts of sun feathering the leaves in the trees and the moss.

Just as I’m taking this all in, something falls on my head. I touch it, instantly wishing I hadn’t. It’s slimy and warm. I look up to see an owl, of all things, pumping its translucent tail, cocking its bespectacled head and dark eyes in my direction, as if to gauge its mark. Slowly I walk away, holding out my hand, not knowing what to do with it. Discouraged, I look down at the mix of yellowing pine needles and leaf rot, the cocoa-colored dust. I crouch and rub my palms into the cool forest floor. Only the dirt seems to absorb the runny, green and white muck. Then I grit my teeth and bend over as I take a handful of it and rub it into the top of my head.

Okay, long enough out here. There’s too much to do. I stand up and look out.

“Carter?”

“Carter!”

“Where are you?”

“We have to go, now!”

Several minutes pass and I am running. I feel the anxiety rise up in me and I stop, press a cold, dirty hand to the bare part of my chest. I try to listen. For little feet breaking branches underfoot, scrambling up the peeling bark of a madrone. But the throbbing in my head threatens to take over, break my focus, destroy my attempt at calm.

The forest begins to feel like it’s closing in on me, so I run outside of it, near the ledge, out into the sun, where I think I’ll be able to breathe. I look over to see heaps of smooth, pastel stones the size of ostrich eggs, trunks of driftwood bleached like bone. And the careless sea, breathing its steady breath, ready to carry away.

I walk along the unprotected ledge, looking for Carter. I envision the spread of his small body on the rocks, and turn away. I run back into the forest, now blurry through my tears. Why is he doing this? Why must he always run? Why does Paul leave me here, by myself? I had a good job, a great job. Back home. I was positioned to lead.

Then I hear a rustling. I stop, and for a moment I don’t even allow myself to breathe, as I watch for the barest suggestion of movement. Is that a bright orange sneaker up on that tree? Suddenly it disappears. If it weren’t for the sneaker, I would have expected to see a squirrel: the movements lithe, quick, quiet. Slowly at first I approach the tree, then break into the quietest sprint I can manage. When I reach the tree I stop, and look up.

A myriad of branches, a twisted dark god with many arms. Carter is about ten feet up, sitting on a branch. Ever so slightly he leans forward from where he sits near the trunk, and looks down at me. His expression is still and unconcerned, yet curious. For a moment we watch each other, before he sits up again, looking out.

“Hello,” I call up.

Nothing.

“Found you,” I say, trying to be playful. “You can come down now.”

“You’re not my mom.”

As he says this, I am pulling myself onto the lowest branch. I feel my breath catch.

“You are correct, that I am not.”

“Go away,” he says. “We don’t need you here.”

I feel the pit of my stomach as I stand, then a sudden rush to my head. I close my eyes, breathe and swallow. Then I reach for next branch, the next branch, and the one after that. At first the going is easy, the branches are close together. I’m halfway up before I reach a branch I can’t quite get a hold of, so I press my body into the rough dark trunk and feel around for a toehold off of which to foist upward. I find it, and from it I step, reach, grab, then pull up onto the next branch, where I must rest. All across my arms, back, torso, chest – my muscles shake and burn.

“Did you hear me?” he yells. “Go home.”

“I can’t,” I yell back. For the moment the retort feels good.

“Why not?”

“Because now I’m stuck here with you.”

The way my voice fills the air suddenly embarrasses me. I’m about to apologize when he says, “Watch me fly.”

He stands up, one hand lifting from the branch, then another. I see a shaking in his stance. He extends his hands to his sides, and slowly lifts his heels. His eyes cast upward, his face calm, and for one long, still moment he stands on his toes, as if this is something he has always done.

I panic.

“Carter, don’t!”

His foot slips, and I scream. He lets out a yell and somehow he catches then clutches what was formerly his standing branch, encircled within what suddenly strikes me as painfully thin arms. For several eternal seconds he hangs there, his face reddening as he swings his legs from his torso, scraping the bottoms of his shoes against the trunk, over and over again, trying to get some sort of footing. His boyish grunts fill the air every time he swings. But soon his swinging slows, his grunts disintegrate into whimpers. And he hangs there, his eyes squeezed shut.

I reach for the next branch and heave up, then another and another. But it is not long before I become tired, and the next branch is one I can’t quite reach. I am three-quarters there. I jump, lightly at first, and just miss it. Then I jump again. And I think I’ve got it; I grab hold of it with both hands. But then my hands slip and I fall, hard. I hear a snap and feel a slight sudden unevenness in the branch upon which I stand. I look down to see a cream-colored fissure, about three inches into ten, right where it meets the trunk.

I close my eyes and swallow before I say:

“Try again.”

“I want to get down.” His words are a soft screech.

“Don’t,” I say. “Just don’t.”

“I have to let go.”

“Look, you can’t do that,” I say, as I feel for another foothold with one hand. “Just wait.”

“I can’t.” Sobs strangle his words.

“Yes. You. Can.” I find the tiniest of holds and will my way back onto the trunk. But my arms and legs throb with pain, and I step back down to the breaking branch. Over and over again I try climbing, jumping up. But I keep falling down. I hear another crack and realize my branch is about to break clean through. In my arms I grasp the trunk as tightly as I can, putting as little weight as possible on the branch that now angles downward. Suddenly I am very tired.

“Carter,” I call up. “My branch is about to break. What do you think I should do?”

“Get down,” he said.

“I think so too. Can you help me?”

I didn’t know what else to do.

For a while it is quiet, but then I hear a scraping. I look up to see Carter, swinging again. He's walking his hands across the branch, he's kicking up his feet. It takes several tries, but finally the heel of one catches where the top of his branch meets the trunk, and he inches it over just enough so that his ankle hooks. He hoists the length of his body around so that he is now belly down, laying across the branch. He closes his eyes, and rests a bit. I watch his whole body hum with the rapidity of his breath, and a sob escapes my throat.

Slowly he makes his way down, finding holds among the grooves in the bark, on the branches between us. He steadies himself on a branch just beyond my grasp. He crouches, and extends a hand down. "I can't reach," I say, gazing at his hand. I am struck by its smallness, its roughness, the way dirt and blood line the undersides of his fingers and palm. I tell him to go ahead.

"Don't cry," he says. I catch a flicker of bashfulness in his pursed-lip smile. He stands up again, feeling around for pockets in the wood. Part of me knows I should go ahead, part of me knows I should insist. What if I should fall? What if something else should happen? But I am too tired for all of that. I watch him scale several feet down before I find a toehold and follow after.





The Search

by Jean Kercheval

Certificate Program in Photography, 2015





Lenora Beekman, Girl Detective

by Daniel Ayers

Certificate Program in Screenwriting, 2015

INTRODUCTION

Lenora Beekman, Girl Detective is a buddy cop comedy that I've been describing as Law & Order, but with kids (all characters are between the ages of 6 and 15). This scene takes place about halfway through the film as Lenora (12) and Ivy (9) are investigating a series of dollnappings. Up until this point, Lenora has been the more impulsive detective and Ivy has been more reserved.

EXT. ALLISON AND TOMMY'S FRONT YARD - DAY

ALLISON (14) stands on the porch, wearing an oversized, stained sweatshirt. She chain smokes candy cigarettes..

Lenora and Ivy get off their bikes (Ivy's has training wheels) and approach.

LENORA

Allison? We're here about a missing doll named Lexie.

ALLISON

I'm not missing any dolls.

IVY

So you found her.

ALLISON

No. I filed a report on behalf of my brother, Tommy. It was his doll was kidnapped, not mine.

LENORA

Is Tommy around?

ALLISON

Who are you?

IVY

We're detectives with the Elementary School Crimes Division.

ALLISON

You have ID, Training Wheels?

Ivy frowns.

IVY

Sure.

Ivy and Lenora show their badges to Allison, who doesn't really look at them.

LENORA

Could you get Tommy? It's important that we speak with him.

Allison drops her candy cigarette on the porch.

ALLISON

Okay. (yells)

Tommy! Get out here!

TOMMY (8) comes out of the house and joins his sister. She gives him a candy cigarette and messes up his hair. Tommy puts the cigarette in his mouth, tries and fails to blow out the powdered sugar "smoke," so he eats it.

TOMMY

What do you want? I was working on a puzzle.

ALLISON

These girls--

IVY

Detectives.

ALLISON

These detectives are asking about Lexie.

TOMMY

Did you find her? Please tell me you found her.

Ivy shakes her head.

IVY

Not yet. We just have some questions.

Tommy looks up and down the street.

TOMMY

We should go inside. We can talk in there.

IVY

Lead the way.

Tommy enters the house, followed by Ivy and then Lenora.

Allison sits on the porch swing, smoking another candy cigarette.

* * *

INT. TOMMY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Tommy sits on the floor next to a coffee table, on which sits a semi-completed jigsaw puzzle. The remaining pieces of the puzzle lie in a box on the floor next to him.

Lenora and Ivy sit on the couch while Tommy works on solving the puzzle.

LENORA

I'm Detective Beekman and this is Detective Carter. Could you take us through what happened when Lexie was taken?

Tommy looks from girl to girl, sizing them up.

TOMMY

You're here to talk about my kidnapped doll. That's it?

LENORA

Of course. What are you getting at?

TOMMY

What I mean is, you're not concerned about other... activities not directly related --

IVY

What were you doing?

Lenora touches Ivy's arm.

LENORA

We're only concerned with Lexie. Within reason.

TOMMY

Understood. Lexie and I were playing hopscotch on the sidewalk when a customer came by. We went inside, conducted our business and after that, Lexie was gone.

IVY

What business?

Tommy chews his bottom lip.

LENORA

You can tell us. It's off the record.

IVY

Lenora.

Lenora holds up a finger to Ivy, silencing her.

LENORA

Go ahead.

TOMMY (softly)

I trade book reports.

Ivy's eyes bug out.

IVY

Book reports?

Lenora grabs Ivy's arm, restraining her.

LENORA

You traded book reports and then Lexie was gone. You think the trade was a diversion?

TOMMY

It could have been, but I don't know what anyone would want with Lexie.

IVY

Which books?

TOMMY

I don't see the relevance.

IVY (stern)

Humor me.

TOMMY

I traded a *Phantom Tollbooth* for an *Oh, The Places You'll Go*. I never saw the point of Dr. Seuss.

LENORA

Phantom Tollbooth is one of my favorites.

IVY

It's my absolute favorite! How could you do this?

TOMMY

Kid I traded with said it was like reading *War and Peace*. How he knew about *War and Peace* is anyone's guess. He was pretty dumb.

Lenora grabs Ivy's shoulders to keep her from lunging at Tommy. When Ivy calms down, Lenora pulls out a photo of Carl, Walter and the goons. She hands it to Tommy, pointing to Carl.

LENORA

This the guy?

Tommy nods.

TOMMY

Carl Doerfler. Yes.

IVY

I should lock you up.

TOMMY (to Lenora)

But you said-

LENORA

She doesn't mean it. You've been helpful.

(to Ivy)

Let's go.

Lenora leads Ivy to the door.

At the door, Ivy escapes Lenora's grasp and lunges at Tommy, who cowers in fear behind the coffee table. Ivy slams her hand on the table in the middle of the puzzle, causing some of the pieces to bounce onto the floor.

IVY

Look, buster! When you cheat, you're only cheating yourself!

TOMMY

Get her away from me! She's a monster!

Lenora puts her arm around Ivy and pulls her away from Tommy and the table.

LENORA

All right, Ivy. He gets the point. You sound like you could use some lunch. Let's get you some soup, huh? You like soup, right?

Ivy nods and lets Lenora lead her out of the house.

* * *

EXT. ALLISON AND TOMMY'S FRONT YARD - DAY

Lenora guides Ivy back to their bikes and they mount up.

LENORA

What was that about?

IVY

How could anyone cheat on a book report? Reading is one of life's greatest pleasures. Why would you deprive yourself of that?

LENORA

It takes all kinds, I guess. At least we now have a definite link between Carl and the dollnappings.

IVY

It's the principle of the thing, you see. He shouldn't be able to get away-- Wait, what?

LENORA

Tommy was trading with Carl when his doll was taken.

Ivy shakes her head.

IVY

It's still circumstantial.

LENORA

It's enough for a warrant. Come on.





AAAAH!!

by Denise Arcaya

Certificate Program in Photography, 2015





The Farmhouse

by Peter Wise

Certificate Program in Literary Fiction II, 2015

Certificate Program in Literary Fiction, 2014

Certificate Program in Nonfiction, 2013

This is taken from a novel in progress. A game developer has moved with his family to Montana. In this scene, he takes his 16-year-old daughter to a place where he hung out when he was her age.

The Farmhouse

Matt Holcroft smiled and turned up Decatur Street. It was impossible to miss, the two-story farmhouse with its wraparound porch and steeply sloped roof. The 20-acre field that once surrounded the place was now strewn with a thick, pumpkin-like crop of one-story suburban boxes, all with similar paved driveways and closely-cropped lawns.

“The place is a dump,” whispered Taylor.

His daughter had a point. The farmhouse was ringed by a thicket of overgrown shrubbery, massed like tinder around the floating bier of a dead Viking. The building’s exterior paint had flaked and faded, and the first-floor windows after all these years were still boarded up with gray slabs of peeling, weathered plywood. The porch hung lower than

it should, a flooded barge foundering on the edge of a rotting dock. Only the second story showed signs of rebirth. The plywood had been removed from one of the two dormer windows, the sashes and glass restored, a small light burning brightly from within.

“Dad, there’s somebody in the yard.”

Matt looked over and saw a woman practicing her golf swing. She was dressed in jeans, a paint-spattered t-shirt and cowboy boots, with a pushed-up pile of red hair teetering atop her head. From what he could tell, she was about his age, not young, somewhere in her forties. She stood with her knees bent, feet apart, in a golfer’s stance, but as she brought the club up, he saw she was holding a grass scythe. She swung through and a small clump of weeds flew across the overgrown lawn.

“Wait here,” he said.

“Don’t go. She looks disturbed.”

“I’m pretty sure she’s harmless.”

Matt climbed out of the car and crossed the road to where the woman stood watching him, both hands still clutching the scythe. The woman squinted at him, as if she’d forgotten to put on her glasses.

“Son-of-a-bitch,” she said. “You’ve returned.”

He stood motionless, his brain grinding up against the improbable sight before him.

“Simone?”

“Yeah, Matt.” She dropped the scythe and grabbed hold of his upper arms. “Not quite the pretty 15-year-old you left behind, am I? But who’s that in the car with you? Looks like you got yourself an upgrade.”

Simone’s sharp mouth had lost none of its edge. Three decades and they were right back at it.

“She’s my daughter. Taylor. Maybe we should just drive on and leave you to your yard work. You and I can catch up some other time.”

“No, no. This is fun, your stopping by. Have Taylor join us. I’ll give you a tour.”

She lowered her voice into a mock conspiratorial tone.

“And don’t worry, your secrets are safe with me.”

He really did want to see the inside of the house. Returning to the car, Matt found his daughter texting on her phone. With who, he hadn’t a clue, and didn’t dare ask. It was enough that she’d agreed to go with him this morning. One wrong word and she’d shut down completely.

“Come on,” he said. “We’re invited inside.”

“Does Mom know about her?”

“Just an old acquaintance. Seven years growing up in this town, I still know a few people.”

After the introductions, Simone guided them across the squishy front porch.

“Bought it two years ago. Any and all improvements constrained by time, money and interest. Work is proceeding slowly.”

The house smelled of freshly turned earth and generations of small animals living

freely. In the front hall, wallpaper hung in limp, brown strips like leaves on a dying vine. The floor was strewn with chips of ceiling paint. Turning into the living room, Matt smiled as he took in the old leather couch, the one they'd rescued from a neighbor's curb late one moonless night. He remembered sitting on it, reciting Ginsburg's "Howl," as Dora and Brad snorted coke for the first time. Across the room, a plank and cinderblock bookshelf sagged under the weight of an ancient stereo system.

Simone bent down and lifted up the remnant of a rodent-chewed paperback.

"*On the Road*. Remember? I was patiently waiting for you to finish it, but ever the gentleman, you tore it in two so I could get started with the first half."

She thumbed the yellowed pages.

"But then you left."

Matt opened the door to the cellar and sniffed the gloom. Then he walked into the kitchen and saw Simone's breakfast half-eaten on the table. The windows were still boarded up, but she'd painted the cabinets cobalt blue and brightened the counter top with a coffee mug packed full of orange daisies.

"I can't believe you bought our old hangout," said Matt.

"Well, I received an inheritance, a very small inheritance, from a dear aunt. I was sick of renting. Given the history of this place, and its condition, I gave the owners a low-ball offer, and much to my surprise, they accepted."

"What history?" asked Taylor.

"It's kind of horrible," said Matt. "Nothing you need to hear."

"Oh, but I want to," said his daughter, turning to Simone.

"Okay. Let me give you the Reader's Digest version. A couple lived in the house, about the age of your Dad and me. Childless. He worked at the meat-packing plant just outside of town."

Simone paused for a moment, as if considering how to proceed.

"He was big and strong, and people say that when he drank, he got mean. He brought his meanness home with him that Friday night. Maybe she heard about his other woman. At some point, she got out his gun, a long-barreled, nickel-plated .45, what they sometimes call a hand cannon."

Simone looked at Matt, as if asking permission to finish the story. He nodded his head.

"Either the gun was too heavy for her, or had too much recoil, or maybe she just had bad aim. She shot him, and it took off his right shoulder. Then she shot him again and blew away his hip. After that, she turned the gun around and shot herself in the gut. The EMTs kept them alive, but they both died about a week later down at the hospital. In adjoining rooms. There were even rumors of a last-minute reconciliation."

Matt remembered his grandmother claiming the wife's aim was perfect. Destroyed his shoulder so he'd never hit anyone ever again, the hip so he'd never be able to take another woman to bed.

"And that all happened in this house?" said Taylor.

Matt pointed up towards the ceiling, to the second floor.

“So why would you—?”

“It was our secret refuge,” said Matt. “We were alone. Nobody else wanted to come near here. The family members who inherited the house couldn’t sell it, not with memories of that night with the gun on everyone’s mind. That’s why they boarded it up, figuring they’d sell it down the road sometime. For us, it sure beat hanging out in the woods. We just avoided the second floor, where it all happened.”

He remembered smoking a joint on the couch with Big Nate, and the two of them throwing around ideas for a video game, a world without grown-ups. Matt’s own parents had disappeared when they were twenty-five and he was just six. Nate’s father was in and out of prison, his mother a drunk. He couldn’t remember the details of Simone’s home life, but it hadn’t been pretty.

“Maybe we should leave,” he said to Taylor, before looking over at Simone. “We’ve taken enough of your time.”

“Wait,” she said. “There’s more to see and learn. Taylor, has your father told you about the police chief’s daughter?”

Taylor frowned at her father. Matt turned and frowned at Simone.

“Sorry. Slip of the tongue. Please don’t leave before I show you what I’ve done upstairs. You won’t believe the changes.”

Matt had only been up there once. He remembered being badly shaken by the sprays of dried blood against the floor and walls.

“I completely redid it,” said Simone as they made their way up the creaking staircase. “Exorcised the demons. New floorboards, new sheetrock, paint, the works.”

She flung open the door and led them inside. The pine floor was indeed new and brightly waxed, and the walls still smelled of fresh paint, a startling blue-white colder than snow. The only furniture in the room was a single bed of dark wood, as narrow as a penitent’s cot.

“Perfect for my current lifestyle,” said Simone.

Hanging above the headboard, almost as large as the bed itself, was an enormous photograph, blurred and over-saturated, blown up from a much smaller snapshot. It was the six of them in the playground, the twins sitting on the swings, Nate hanging like a big ape from the cross piece, Brad curled up in a fetal position underneath Nate’s dangling feet, and Matt with his arm slung around Simone. He leaned over the bed to look closer, and the wall flashed with white light as Taylor snapped his picture.

“Good times, bad times,” said Simone, channeling Led Zeppelin. “Best years of my life gone by, here I am alone and blue.”

Matt nodded in understanding.

Taylor left the bedroom. They hear her descend the stairs.

“You escaped, Matt,” continued Simone, unfazed by the girl’s departure. “And now you’ve returned. That’s plain strange.”

“And you never left.”

“I guess we’re back to where we started. All we need to do to complete the circle is sleep together on that old mattress in the dining room.”

“Christ, Simone, I hope that’s not still around.”

She put her hand on his arm.

“Lots of things from back then are still around.”



Her Favorites

by Janet Maples

Certificate Program in Photography, 2015





Story Knife

by Debra Carlson

Certificate Program in Literary Fiction II, 2015

The williwaw won't blow forever. Grandmother always hugged me when she said it, but the winds that rushed off the Bering Sea, thundered down the tundra, and slammed against our house sounded as if they had always blown would always blow. To distract me she would take the curved, seal-tusk story knife from the wall where it hung. She scraped ash out onto the hearth, pointed the carved white tip downward, and swirled designs into the gray powder. She told stories of tomcod and seal and whale. After days, the keening wind softened to a whimper, then quiet rang in our ears. There are no williwaw storms here, and I am no longer a child, yet I have never been more scared. Now a different wind blows, but grandmother lays deep in a grave an ocean away and cannot comfort me. In the darkness I chew grass and dirt and the edge of my straw mat, which they call *tatami*. My belly expands even as my skin pulls tight across my cheekbones. Joseph is awake beside me. He pretends I am asleep, so I keep my breath even. Even though we sleep inches apart and work in the mines side by side, he shrinks further from me every day. I hear a dry rustle as he rubs tobacco between his fingers. He lights his pipe, draws breath, and exhales smoke. Nausea roils through me and I roll on my side. I am sick with the shiver of this strange land, and the blood whooshing in my ears reminds me of the effort it takes to live for two.

Somewhere in the huddle of our sleeping people I hear Big Ivan mutter. Even though I

have turned my back to my husband, I know his gaze moves from me to the massed bodies of our people to the broken shutters of our prison window and back again, the way ocean waves agitate storm debris, rubbing it smooth on rock and shale. I stare up at the highest window. Another muddy dawn. Snow falls in clumps from the foreign sky and mounds high on the window frame, as if completing our burial.

Big Ivan grunts in his sleep, then shouts, “Oogruk!” I try to stop the memory of waiting, club in hand, for the bearded seal to break through black water. I want to forget the swish of blue fox and the flap of herring. Sometimes I dream of animals that leap and dive in a free world, but those are the memories of another woman. I am here, in this twilight place of gray light that filters through eastern windows, just above the sanctuary. Back in Chichagof, I kept a candle lit in the southeast corner of the home. But that home is gone. Gone like our kayaks, fox traps and seal meat. We have built the best place we can from the things we had time to bring—the Bible, two stoves, some clothes, our pipes, Innokenty’s accordion.

The Japs weren’t stupid. They came from behind the storm on Easter Sunday morning. We heard gunfire and Joseph wrenched open our door and froze. I watched the hill behind him as they spilled down the rocky slopes, sank into the muskeg, shot into the air. Our neighbor Alice jerked and fell, clutching her bloody leg. They were upon us that fast. Easter eggs fell lopsided. Rolled on the floor. Joseph stepped out and spread his arms wide. Bayonet blade tips—cold with oil and fear—quivered in his face. Held by men who looked like us, but screamed commands in words none of us understood.

The Japs tore apart our homes and scattered the icons of the creation, Annunciation, and crucifixion. Grinning soldiers draped fox furs across their shoulders. The flag of stars and stripes was thrown into the oily bilge of the bay as fire burned our homes to the ground. Then came the journey west in the merchant ship, the *Osada Maru*, black with coal, vomit, and Alice’s burial at sea. The sickness was relentless; I blamed the ocean voyage and my fear. When we landed Innokenty whispered that we were in a place called Otaru, on the island of Hokkaido—the northernmost island of Japan. On Attu, Joseph was our leader. It was he who decided not to evacuate. Innokenty had traveled beyond Attu to Russia to study. He could translate Russian to Aleut and there were Japs who could speak Russian, so he became our translator.

I listen to the sounds of approaching day. Guard boots clump across the wooden planks outside the door. Stomachs growl. Train wheels squeal. The man who collects our waste to spread on the fields mutters words that I can hear through the thin walls but do not understand. Soon the door will swing open with a *whap*, and we will hear the guard’s shouted command: *Tenko!* Roll call. Soon we will pull on our numbered work-shirts, scramble to be counted, stalk in a line to the mines where we will scratch for clay.

The door slams and the guard we call Dog Eyes shoves into the quiet with a blast of wind and snow. His face is impassive and his thick eyebrows and thin lips give nothing away.

"Tenko!"

We stir and start to move, but not fast enough. Never fast enough.

"Tenko!" screams Dog Eyes, and his eyes bulge with the force of his breath.

Two other figures appear behind the guard. I recognize the stooped figure of the doctor and then the tall man who translates from Japanese to Russian. Innokenty's spare figure leans in beside Joseph and together they approach the door. The rest of us stagger into line as Dog Eyes fumes. I peer around Joseph's back and notice that the doctor holds several small boxes. As the doctor speaks the children wipe sleep from their eyes. I stare at the boxes as the doctor's unintelligible words roll through the room. The translator begins to speak in Russian to Innokenty.

"Tuberculosis," translates Innokenty in Aleut and the word squalls in my chest. The doctor holds out three boxes, stacked one atop the other, to Joseph. He stares at them. We all stare at them. I feel as if a band is tightening across my chest. Innokenty continues.

"Nicholas, Alexi, Old Chernokoff," Innokenty's voice breaks as he speaks his own father's name. "All three died. Please accept their remains."

A high-pitched buzz fills my ears. The doctor bows and offers Joseph the boxes. Joseph's arms stretch automatically to meet him. The doctor maintains the bow as he offers up the boxes. Joseph braces himself as if he expects to stagger under the weight of the three dead men. His people, dead of starvation and disease—restored to him as ash. The doctor straightens. The scent of fresh pine scours the air. The doctor and the translator bend again in angular bows from their waists. Joseph's body does not bend.

I dart a look at Dog Eyes. Dog Eyes, with his wide cheekbones, blistering eyes, and vicious slap. But Joseph, the best trapper among the men, had looked sideways into the guard's eyes the first day we arrived. He spotted the man's subservience to a master. The doctor is the important person here, and his compassion is sincere. For now, Dog Eyes will not move.

The doctor and the translator leave our prison, but Dog Eyes stays by the door. Joseph holds the boxes as we all ache with the desecration. Innokenty draws in ragged breaths. The women's tears leave tracks on their clay-dusted cheeks. Alice had been thrown overboard without the proper ceremony, but Innokenty had at least heard her confession. He had administered the final rites before the waves took her body. But for his own father? Cremation erases the possibility of a wake, a vigil, a burial. Where there is no body there can be no resurrection. Innokenty and Joseph stare at the boxes. Who is who? For a moment our sanity hangs in the balance. Then Innokenty, who insists that we buy candles for Sunday service from our weekly wages, reaches for the remains of his father and his friends and turns with them to the sanctuary. Lena begins to chant the Kontakion. We join, one by one.

Dog Eyes watches us. He is the kind who can scavenge from a bleached bone. When I discovered that I was pregnant, I began weaving a small basket from grass I collected on the walk to and from the mine. Grandmother upon grandmother lived in my fingers as I bent the dry blades together. Joseph watched as I wove the eyes of the chippee bird along the

outer edges in darker colors. The strange grass formed a brittle weave and there was no colorful thread for embroidered designs. Then came a nighttime roll call, just as I worked the last pieces together. I left the basket in a pool of light, where it caught Dog Eyes' attention. Once he had ensured that all thirty-eight of us were present he plucked up the basket. Rolled it in his chiseled hand. Turned to leave. Joseph had protested and stumbled forward.

Dog Eyes had turned with a slow, sure movement, as if he had hoped for exactly this. Swinging his bamboo cane sideways, he struck the staff across Joseph's ribs with a crack and my husband crumpled. I cried out and moved toward him as Big Ivan reared to his full height. But Innokenty had barked, "Don't move!" I watched my husband grip the torn *tatami* as if to anchor himself against the rage that threatened to buoy him up for a full attack. Dog Eyes had taken his time as he scanned the room for any resistance. Had walked out with measured steps. Joseph had brushed my hand away when I touched his arm. Now I feel the heat of his rage and powerlessness burning again, the way it did that night, as he stands beside Innokenty holding his people in his hands.

Dark as it is, the day insists upon itself and we find our routines. We women boil water and listen as the children share dreams and roll up their sleeping mats. The men form a circle in the sanctuary corner. It is Thursday. Shopping day. Innokenty takes the coin jar from the shelf and empties it. A single yen for each person for every day spent in the mines.

"Half for food, half for tobacco," Joseph says, as he does every week.

It is a formality, but all the men have to agree to the spending choices. Beside him Big Ivan nods assent. Men murmur agreement around him. My fingers cup the bulge at my waist, which should be bigger.

I walk forward, leaving the huddle of women. As I approach all the men look up at me, except one. Joseph stares at the coins. None of the men move to make room for me. I feel the baby roll.

"Could we buy some condensed milk?"

Joseph slowly raises his gaze to mine. "Each man will have his allotted tobacco, with Old Chernikov's portion going to Innokenty."

It took months to find the balance between food and smokes; we all know the mean-tempered cost of no tobacco.

"Just a few cans?" I press.

"Too expensive."

Someone coughs.

"What of the others?" I pitch my voice low, but I know the women hear because I feel their collective shudder. The two stillborn would have been boys. Born too early, from bodies too thin. Joseph's eyes focus past my shoulder. I feel Lena's hand on my shoulder—an anchor I do not want.

The door bangs open and Dog Eyes marches in, hitting his bamboo baton in his hand and barking orders. We scramble to line up and bow low. Superintendent Kawada steps in

briskly, followed by the interpreter and an unfamiliar villager with bowed legs and gangling arms who balances a covered tray with one hand as he adjusts a white gauze mask to his face with the other. Even with his mask I spot his grimace as he enters our space—redolent with sweat and the threat of tuberculosis.

“This is a good day,” Kawada announces, pausing for the interpreter to repeat a few lines in Russian, and for Innokenty to render them in Aleut. “Your work honors the Emperor. You are now self-sufficient. You no longer require rations support because you can buy all you need with what you earn. In recognition of your effort the Emperor rewards you all with a one day paid holiday and food.”

The bow-legged villager fumbles with the cloth. Exposes balls of rice, which he sets on the floor. Salt stings the air. *Herring*. My mouth becomes slick with saliva. Superintendent Kawada flashes a genial smile around the room.

“Congratulations.”

We bow.

He rounds on his heel and disappears outside, the villager and the interpreter trotting behind him. Dog Eyes takes his time. No one looks at him. Even when he leaves with a handful of food.

The mood is not celebratory. Joseph sits with the men, eats the least, and avoids my eyes. Despite the extra food no one feels satisfied. The children overhear the guards muttering about their own hungry families, and they translate for the rest of us. I watch as young Peter and Alexi whisper to each other. Whip-thin and otter-eyed at twelve and thirteen, they hold themselves with the hunter-trapper balance of their grandfathers. I know where they have been. I bend to Alexi and whisper, “Tell them.” His eyes shine and he pulls on young Peter’s arm. The boys press against the circle of men.

Joseph makes a parting gesture between Big Ivan and Vassili, who shift aside to make room.

“We can get out,” whispers Alexi, pointing down at the floorboards. “There’s a way beneath the barracks. We went last night, out of the hut and through the town. There are garbage heaps in the village with food.”

Beside him Peter nods eagerly. None of the men show surprise or anger, although all of them remember Dog Eye’s red face as he screamed, “It is forbidden to leave this place!” on the first day of our arrival. Once a week we are led to the public baths. We are guarded on our way to and from the mines. Guarded when we shop. Dog Eyes had pretended to behead one of the men with his bamboo baton to make his point. “Forbidden!”

Innokenty, glancing at the Orthodox cross in the sanctuary murmurs, “Theft is a sin.”

“Can it be theft if the food is thrown away?” asks Big Ivan.

The circle considers. Big Ivan looks down the length of the barracks at the closed door. Joseph lights his pipe. Across the room we women make noise to mask our attentiveness.

“There were fish scraps,” Alexi says softly. “Enough to make broth.”

Innokenty repeats: “It is theft.”

The men focus on their pipes. Wait. Joseph closes his eyes and sucks hard on a dark burst of smoke. He takes his time, as if he is a man who has choices. He does not look at me, but I feel the weight of his consideration.

He opens his eyes. "We will set a watch."

• • •

THE BOYS' HEADS POP up in the gaps between the pried-up planks the way oogruk bob up from black water. Flushed with the victory of their first hunt, they hand over their treasure: fish bones, rotted meat, wilted leaves. Lena boils water. The guards stay quiet. Innokenty whispers a blessing, thanking God and asking forgiveness. Everyone drinks the broth in the dark.

Later, I think the pains are the baby. That the early arrival and death everyone expects is upon me. Then I hear groans all around me. First it is me and the young ones—Alexi and Peter and little Lena—vomiting and clutching our stomachs. More wake and join the misery, but I do not have strength left to pay attention. My body, slow and weighted down, heaves itself dry until only acid burns in my mouth. The room stinks of vomit and sweat and shit when the runs came too fast to reach the buckets.

Joseph stays beside me. Wipes vomit from my mouth and snot from my face. In a calm moment he lays down with his hard stomach against my back. He reaches his top arm around me. Our fingers entwine on top of my swollen belly, beneath my breasts. The baby rolls beneath our hands. Joseph startles away from the reminder that the baby is alive. I want to weep. How can the child be dead in his heart already? I sleep.

• • •

WHEN I JERK AWAKE I think I am still sick, but this is different. This is the baby.

"Lena," I choke, "Lena."

Joseph helps me up. Warm water runs down my thighs. Something grips deep between my hipbones. Pain radiates to my back.

"Walk with me," Lena says. I walk between spasms. Stop. Breathe. Try not to moan. Stop trying. The spasms become deeper. Last longer. My moans turn to growls. I fall into the rhythmic, agonizing clutch of a pain I cannot stop, I cannot avoid, I cannot fathom.

Everything becomes the next step until I cannot walk. I sink down in the sanctuary, where candles flicker. I kneel and shove my head against Joseph's hard stomach. My groans pivot to a keening cry. I feel the grind of my body opening.

I do not know that Dog Eyes appears in a slab of dim morning light, takes in the chaos and stench and yells, "Sick! Sick and weak, all of you!" I do not know that his eyes widen when he hears me cry out, or that he demands I be taken to the sanatorium.

What I know is that Joseph is gone. In a moment between spasms I scream his name. Heat rages through me—where is he? The agony eases and an oceanic force beyond

measure surges through me. A burning, tearing sensation. I scream. The air tastes of iron as the baby crowns.

They tell me later that it was the smell of blood that did it, but I don't believe it. Because when Joseph left me he confronted Dog Eyes. Lifted his jaw. Squared his body. Dog Eyes squinted and his hand moved to his baton. Then Innokenty shoved himself between Joseph and Dog Eyes. The guard glared at Innokenty. Shifted his eyes beyond him. Big Ivan moved forward at Joseph's side. Old Andrei, the last of the elders, reached a trembling hand to Joseph's shoulder. The men formed a line, hand to shoulder, across the room. They would safeguard the birth of the already dead. The mourning. The burial.

Then the metallic taste of blood laced the air. Dog Eyes winced, gagged, and spit, as if to clear pollution from his mouth. He wiped the back of his hand across his mouth. Looked at the men. Left.

I see none of this, but the story is repeated so often I sometimes think my eyes were open instead of closed, my body facing the men's shield instead of prone, slick with sweat and blood.

I lay panting. Even when I feel the weight of the babe on my belly I can't open my eyes. I don't know if it is alive or dead. Lena begins to croak—a high-pitched, grating sound. Then I hear a thin cry. Lena shifts the baby to my shoulder where it nestles like a burrowing creature. My eyes open. My arm lies heavy at my side. The naked, blood-and-white-paste smeared body feels as far away as Attu.

"Come," Lena calls. "Greet your daughter."

I do not see my husband, but I feel his calloused fingers brush the wet hair from my forehead. He kneels beside us. Our daughter's stiff fist rests against my breast. Her eyes are squeezed shut. Her wail is a williwaw. Take her, I pray. Take her now.

"The wind is not a river, it will not blow forever," Joseph whispers. The baby shifts her shut-eyed face toward my nipple, which leaks honey-colored drops. Joseph nudges her fist. Her tiny fingers stretch open, then clasp his finger.

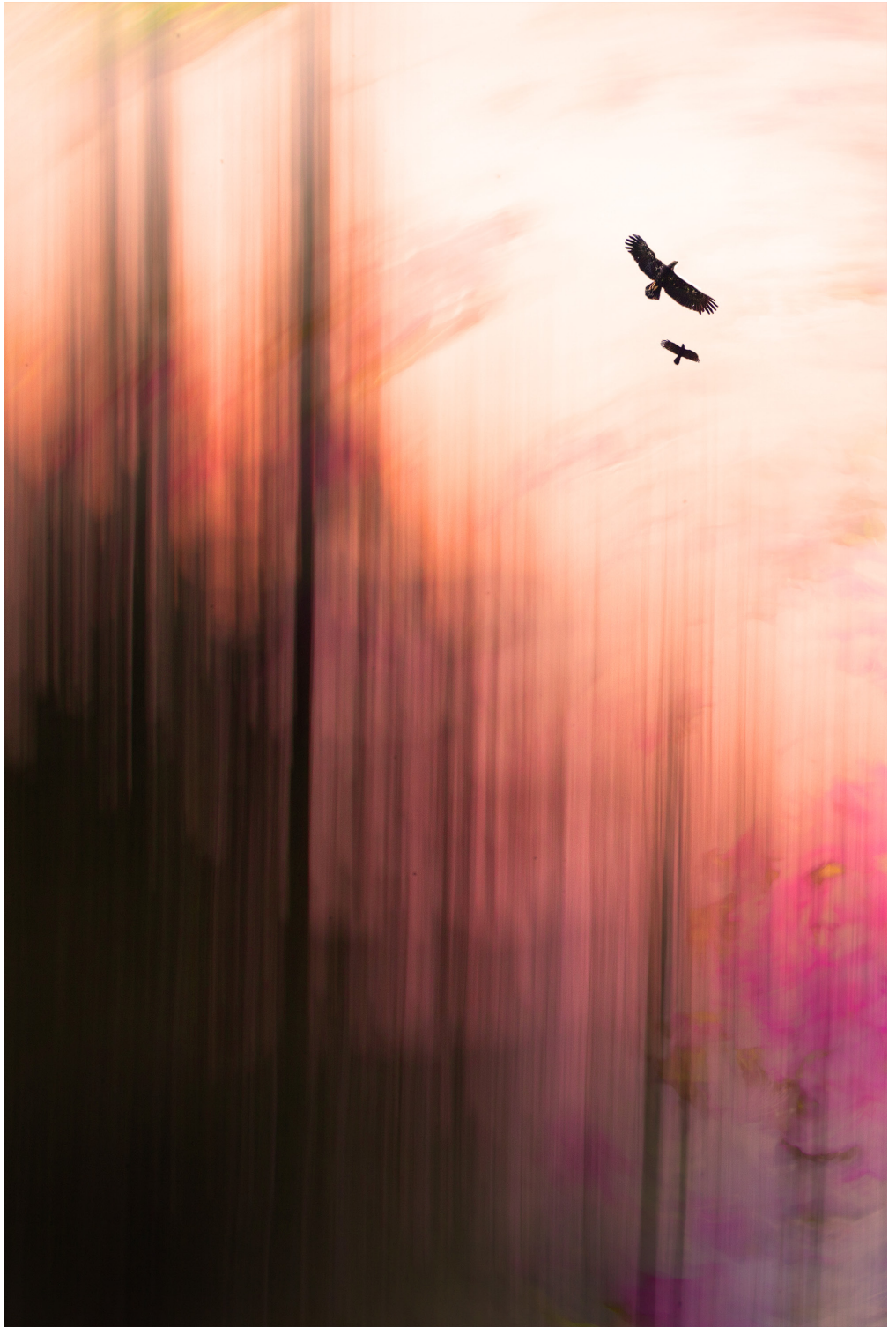
"I will carve you a story knife," he promises. And I see it. Joseph will curl the coastline of Attu, the rim of the chapel bell, and the eyes of the bearded seal along the flaring edges of the knife tip. My skin tingles as I curl my arm around her. Her lips fasten over my nipple. I see the story knife in her fist, where it will twist, stab, lash, and scratch. She will carry her ancestors in her hand and she will dash her truth to the ground, wherever she stands.



Code

by Jean Kercheval

Certificate Program in Photography, 2015





Girl with a Mustache

by Fran-Michelle Reichert

Certificate Program in Memoir, 2015

As singer/songwriter Neko Case once said, I think of myself more like a “critter” than a woman. I’ve got my man parts and my woman parts, and on any given day I could be one or the other. I don’t wear makeup and never got the hang of girl talk, but I fuss over what jewelry to wear. I love my power saw and my rhinestone tiara. I couldn’t articulate my feelings of gender fluidity when I was young, but I knew that femininity did not come naturally to me. I thought it was something I could learn.

My mother embodied gentle womanliness, and often told me how she’d dreamed of having a little girl to be like her, someone she could dress in pretty clothes and buy dolls for. The only daughter in a family of four children, I tried to be that special girl, but it wasn’t a good fit. Mom and I were like two little boats bobbing on the gender spectrum. As time passed, I drifted further away from her, but I never lost the longing to connect with her. I just didn’t know how to do it without losing my own identity.

When I was a preteen, Mom would invite me into her bathroom to watch her put on make-up, in the hopes it was a routine I would eventually adopt for myself. I watched intently, with growing awareness at my lack of affinity for this female ritual. I was eleven years old and trying hard to connect myself to the process, something to rebut the idea that I was a female outlier.

Sitting in the pastel green and pink tiled bathroom, I studied the soft curves of Mom’s

back as she focused in the medicine cabinet mirror and applied her beauty regimen. The procedure was not beautiful to behold, but it was fascinating nonetheless.

• • •

MOM HAD ALREADY REMOVED the large pins and curlers that she'd put in the night before, and brushed her fine, nut-brown hair into flicks and wings around her head. She then froze her style into place with a thick blast of Aqua Net. The flowery fog made me cough and Mom opened the window to let the fumes disperse. The fresh air outside the second story window rushed in but Mom's hair stayed perfectly still. The first lesson of beauty is illusion. I remember thinking that if I were a man, I'd be surprised that I couldn't run my fingers through such enticingly soft-looking hair.

Mom and I shared a long oval face with Eastern European features and dusky skin, but otherwise were structured quite differently. Mom had a body of soft curves, full breasts, gently rounded abdomen, and a cushy layer of flesh that emphasized her curves while vanquishing muscular definition. Her bra straps nestled like rivers into the soft flesh on her back, and I watched the gentle scenery jiggle as she used both hands to vigorously rub lilac scented Nivea cream into her cheeks, nose, chin, forehead and neck. I admired the constellations of freckles, moles and blood spots on her shoulders. I loved this unselfconscious view of her, and wondered what it would be like to walk backward in the world, to face others with the untouched parts of us. As Mom's illusion of perfection came to life, I mourned her fading asymmetry. The spots and pores on her face disappeared and her tawny skin turned pale, until there was little left to identify us as mother and daughter. By age twelve I was declining Mom's offers of concealer to cover my acne. "No, thank you," I said to lipstick and eyebrow tweezers. The only alteration I allowed was bleaching of my dark downy mustache. The hair was still there, but in lighter tones that faded into the Semitic landscape of my face. I gave up the mustache in response to taunting by neighborhood boys whose own peach fuzz was not as impressive as what I'd had.

"Hey! When are you going to start shaving?" the blond neighbor boy would yell from his group of grinning pals.

"Jealous because you can't?" I'd retort and march away.

It was a tiresome routine. The mustache hadn't bothered me, but the attention it brought me did. When I told my mother about it, she'd matter-of-factly told me she'd pick up a bleaching kit. We met the next day in her green and pink bathroom and zapped the dark hair. Upon seeing the effect, I was bewildered. I felt lightness at having shed the object of merciless teasing, but also bereft at having given up something unique about me.

I also had plenty of dark arm and leg hair. Even my toes had delicate fuzz on them. The boys made fun of this too, but after losing the mustache I was determined not to make any more vital changes to my appearance. Was I clinging to my inner boy, or just rebelling against popular notions of beauty? I'm not sure. But I do know I was torn between being myself and connecting to my mother. She wanted me to be the little girl she didn't have the

chance to be growing up during the Depression.

“Don’t you want a dollhouse?” she once pleaded. “I wanted a dollhouse so badly when I was your age, but my mother couldn’t afford it.”

“No, thank you. Maybe you could get one for yourself?” I asked hopefully.

Her answer was a defeated sigh.

I hated to deny Mom her dreams, but I also couldn’t pretend to like dolls. I’d finally gotten rid of the pile of pretend children I’d accumulated as gifts over the years. Fear from a slumber party horror story about a killer doll was the excuse I gave my parents for removing them from my room. Did they suspect the truth? That I was baffled how other girls could pretend for hours with their baby dolls, cuddling and feeding them? It required a creativity that my concrete brain couldn’t quite grasp. Or maybe, my primary goal was not to become a mother.

I felt physically uncomfortable doing things that were to prepare me to be a mother. Neighbors asked me to babysit their children, and I kept the little ones safe and happy. But I did not have a sense of pleasure or accomplishment with these jobs. It was always a relief to hand the tikes back to their parents.

“You’re a natural mother,” Mom would say with a warm smile as she watched me tote a toddler on my hip.

What was intended as a compliment only made me feel more awkward, for I was not drawn to the charms of soft baby skin and expressive babbling. I would have preferred the solitude of a paper route, bicycling the calm early morning streets with a heavy canvas bag slung across my body, tossing newspapers with precision onto porches. But this was a boy’s job, along with taking out the trash and mowing the lawn.

In the early 1970’s the feminist movement was in full swing in the world at large, but at home my mother fought a valiant battle for survival of the traditional family. Having grown up with a single working mother in addition to the deprivations of the Depression, she was determined to protect her domicile and the consummate family she’d painstakingly created. She was a homemaker beyond reproach. The house was dust-free and the garden neatly manicured, as if they both endured thorough and frequent vacuuming. Family supper was always served at 6:00 p.m. Like a model apprentice, I worked side by side with her, dusting Hummel figurines and scraping moss out of the crevices in the driveway.

But as I matured, I realized a woman’s role was not so clear-cut as what my mother presented. In 1976, when I was thirteen, my best friend’s mother was divorced and worked outside the home. My friend, too, was already thinking of her future career, and it finally dawned on me that I was responsible for my own survival. Life did not guarantee a breadwinner husband, especially not for women who did not toe the femininity line. I felt betrayed by my mother for failing to prepare me for the real world. My new goal was to be as different as I could from her.

In the context of my family, I couldn’t help but think of myself as male as I shed my feminine qualities. Gone was the long cascade of hair that Mom had lovingly combed and

braided for me as a youngster. In its place was a no-fuss boy cut. I dropped weight, and wore plain jeans and layered tops that muted what few curves I had.

By the time I was fifteen, in 1978, I was drawn to sports, but lacked the confidence to try out. I turned to a solitary activity. Running was my first foray into athleticism.

Mom was none the wiser as I set out from the house in jeans, t-shirt and white Converse sneakers, and began jogging laps to the corner and back. A couple weeks later, I left my street to run several blocks in the surrounding neighborhood. It was a thrilling test of my body's power.

With new confidence in my abilities, I dropped my disguise. Putting ABBA on the turntable, I'd do stretches and calisthenics in the living room before going for a run in my newly purchased gym shorts and Nike waffle shoes.

"She's doing it for the runner's high," Mom would tell others within my hearing, as though I were a junkie from whom she was distancing herself.

It made me even more determined, because I knew Mom didn't know how it felt to conquer hills and miles and lay claim to one's environment. Even spills that shredded my palms and knees were a chance to prove my resilience. The hardscape showed no mercy, but neither did it bar my passage to new places.

Such was not the case with my mother. To her, my muscles and scars were a form of self-abuse, a failure to treasure my feminine gifts. The more I grew away from her model, the more desperate she became in her attempts to detour me.

"You're disfiguring yourself!" my mother cried, when I'd proudly shown her the grease splatter-shaped scars I'd earned at my job as a line cook.

"It's not like I'm going to be in a beauty pageant," I snapped back.

She was genuinely worried about me, and I was not kind, for I took her remarks as a denouncement of who I really was. It's true that I was so focused on figuring out who I was on the inside, that I was reckless with my body. It seemed a small price to pay in my battle to own my life and not succumb to restrictive gender norms.

Running, and later college weightlifting, solidified my conviction that I had choices in this world, and that my life was not predetermined by my biological gender.

I remember my first visit home from college, flush with new possibilities and naïvely believing I could introduce my mother to a better life. We'd walked to a neighborhood coffee shop, the Surrogate Hostess, and as soon as we were seated with our coffee and scones, I launched into my ambitions for her.

"Mom, have you ever thought of doing something just for you? Maybe going back to school?" As a twenty-year old bride to a medical student, Mom had abandoned her plans of going into fashion and dressmaking. Instead, she took a clerical job while Dad went to school. By age twenty-one she was a mother.

"No, I could never do that. Your father needs me."

"He's a grown man! You've done for him all these years. He can make room for you to have a life too."

“No, I couldn’t. Things are fine the way they are.”

But they weren’t. Sometimes I’d find Mom quietly crying, although she would not talk about what made her so sad. I thought she must feel trapped, her life completely defined by what she was to her husband. I was horrified by what I believed to be her unhappy self-imposed fate. She was equally frightened about the uncertainty of a future in which I didn’t have a man to take care of me. We occupied such different realms on the spectrum of womanhood that it was difficult to imagine how the other could lead a fulfilling life.

By the time I entered law school, my mother abandoned all hope that I would lead the traditional woman’s life she had. Because I’d been so adamant in not accepting her advice or following her ways, I couldn’t share with her how scared and alone I felt as I embarked on my biggest challenge yet.

Once settled into law school, I found myself enjoying challenges that stimulated my logical brain. I felt more at home dissecting case law than I ever had babysitting. I relaxed into my body, growing my hair out and putting on a little weight. Baggy jeans and shirts gave way to more form-fitting styles.

Even as Mom resigned herself to the loss of her little dream girl, she could see I was happy with my choices. It helped that she no longer feared for my survival as a woman alone. She knew that I would be able to take care of myself. Still, I regretted our inability to connect on a deeper level.

My law school apartment was only thirty-five miles from my parents’ home, and Mom and I had a standing Friday coffee date at the Surrogate Hostess. What started as fun catch-up sessions turned awkward as we discovered we had less and less in common. I remember one time half-listening to a family story, swirling my remaining inch of coffee and watching its hypnotic patterns inside the mug. Eventually Mom fell silent. I glanced up.

“I could never do what you’re doing,” she said.

“Yes, you could,” I said.

Mom shrugged a shoulder then scooted her chair back. The visit was over.

At the time, I thought Mom was putting herself down, claiming she didn’t possess the skills or courage to pursue a vocation outside the home. But now, I think she did not desire independence for herself. And she could not fathom why I would.

That I ultimately settled into marriage and motherhood after pursuing a career did not bridge the mother-daughter chasm. I was still a female hybrid to my mother’s purebred example: too far apart on the femininity spectrum to find that mother-daughter connection, and separated by life philosophies that prevented a deep human to human connection. And that is what I longed for after all, a connection with my mother as a person: someone who’d known me from my first in utero shiver, who understood my drive and valued my accomplishments, and did not think any less of me for choosing my own path. Is that what she wanted from me as well?

Back in that green and pink tiled bathroom of long ago, I watched my mother apply her black mascara. Her eyelids lifted with each quick upward flick of her tiny mascara

comb. Turning her head from side to side she confirmed her symmetry before pulling out the pot of blush powder. With the feathery uneven layers of her blush brush, she traced her cheekbones with lively crimson, spreading the glow toward her cheeks. The transformation was both mesmerizing and terrifying. She'd at once painted on her confidence and abdicated her true self.

Mom would say she could never leave the house without "putting on her face." This notion frightened me and I swore I would always face the world with my real face. But lost in that bravado was the sense of how to protect myself from the taunting of kids who found fault with my Jewish nose, untamed black eyebrows, and unrelenting acne. Rather than develop a thick skin to such barbs, I fostered a stoic forbearance, a sense that I deserved the punishment for my choices. Perhaps a thin veneer of makeup could have worked to my service, rather than denied my identity. I was so unwilling to compromise back then. Would a connection with Mom have been as simple as sharing a tube of lipstick?

We never found our middle ground. My mother died suddenly one night. She was only sixty-four, and I was a thirty-four year old mother to two little boys. I received the call around midnight and rushed over to her house, getting there as the medics were clearing out. I flew up the stairs to her room.

She was tucked into her bed, the covers pulled up to her chin. I touched the back of my hand to her cheek. Her face was still warm. The medics had pumped air into her in their lifesaving attempts. As she lay in her bed, the unused air escaped her mouth in soft sighs so that she appeared to be sleeping peacefully, with the lightest of snores. I sat on the edge of the bed and stroked her fine, soft hair, light brown and shot through with silver strands. She had no makeup on.

I smoothed her hair back from her forehead and talked to her. I could feel her hovering nearby. With my whole being, I asked her to stay. *Let's get to know each other.* My heart and brain strained to connect with the amorphous spirit I felt slipping away. Then, with profound sadness for what could never be, I released her. More heartache waited in the wings, but for that moment, I kept stroking her hair and gentling the unadorned face that was so much like my own.



Running on Water

Barbara Ierulli

Certificate Program in Natural Science Illustration, 2015





Self-Doubt

by Courtenay Schurman

Certificate Program in Memoir, 2015

Certificate Program in Writing for Children, 2014

What makes some strong women relinquish their power to others? I run my own company in the male-dominated field of strength training. I lead people on climbs in the mountains where the ratio of men to women is typically four or five to one. I graduated from an all women's college, Mt. Holyoke, which taught young ladies to be strong and capable. I still get intimidated, particularly by men.

Following a rigorous morning crew practice on the Connecticut River one morning in March my senior year of college (1988), I returned with teammates to campus to grab a quick bite to eat. A hint of spring began to melt the deep snow banks in South Hadley, MA. Marine Geology and Petrology facts for that afternoon's exam battled for my attention but I managed to focus on the daunting task before me: What would I tell my English Literature teacher?

Another female classmate had just finished meeting with Professor Hasmer. I walked into his office and pulled a piece of paper from my pocket. His tall, dark-haired, scholarly presence intimidated me.

"What's this?" he asked as I handed him the paper.

"A drop form."

"I take it you were shocked by the grade you earned on your last paper?" he asked.

I paused, considering his condescending attitude and planning my reply. Should I share my concerns, that the D would destroy me? That I had been nominated for a Senior Scholar Athlete Award and wouldn't be accepted if I received anything below a B? That I would be inducted into Phi Beta Kappa only if I maintained my 3.72 GPA? No. It seemed this professor wouldn't give a rat's ass about any of that.

How could I have gone from earning an A- the previous semester from a female professor I held in high regard, to receiving a D from a man I couldn't understand? I could have told him I loved his reading assignments but hated his haughty, abstract class lectures. I could have shared that I felt my opinions got little discussion time compared to those presented by English Literature majors. I could have admitted that keeping up with his class was making me physically ill. Instead, I said, "I forgot about the pass-fail deadline. I'm in way over my head." What I wanted to tell him was to take his teaching style and shove it under a deep snowdrift. It took everything I had to hold my ground and not turn and storm out of the room.

His penetrating gaze made me shift from one foot to another. He tossed his pen on the desk and folded his arms across his chest. "It wasn't your thinking, it was your organization."

I never summoned the courage to ask for clarification.

"What's your major?" he continued.

"Geology," I said. Was that disdain waltzing across his face? Earth sciences at Mt. Holyoke was sometimes referred to as "Rocks for Jocks" by those who didn't understand how difficult upper level Geophysics classes were. Apparently he felt the same way.

"Have you ever done any writing?" A knock at the door indicated his next appointment had arrived. He ignored it.

"I took English freshman year, and last fall I had Kaplan for American Writers 101. I wanted to take her spring class, but it conflicted with an off-campus geology class."

"Fascinating. Truly," he said in what sounded like mockery. Whether toward me or toward geology students in general, I didn't know. Perhaps I was reading more into his words than was there. "Well, I don't want to take up any more of your precious time. Good luck." He scribbled his signature on the drop form, unshackling me from what felt like prison. I don't know whether the grade was deserved; as I walked out of the building I crumpled up my paper and tossed it in the trash, relieved to be liberated. In my college journal I described "freedom from that dreaded English class giving me space to breathe again."

What was so awful to merit a D? Did other promising young women have similar problems with self-doubt and male intimidation? How many female careers, literary or otherwise, have been squelched before they have time to flourish? Was I being overly sensitive, or had I been overpowered?

Fast forward to spring break in southern California where my husband Doug, our nine-year-old daughter Brooke, and I were enjoying Disneyland. The gates opened an hour before we arrived. Brooke and I raced to get in line to meet Queen Elsa and Princess Anna

while Doug headed next door with all three of our tickets to reserve Fast Passes for the Cars ride in California Adventure Park.

"How long is the wait?" I asked the attendant monitoring the Frozen queue.

"Five hours."

"How badly do you want to meet Elsa and Anna?" I asked Brooke.

"Not five hours' worth," she admitted.

We returned to the entrance gate. I pulled out the cell phone to update Doug, but the phone wouldn't hold a call. I tried to text him; this failed too. I turned off the phone and turned it on again. With no signal, I felt stranded. I asked at the information desk if there were pay phones nearby.

"Outside the park, to the right." Trusting that our hand stamps would be enough to get back in, we exited. Once I located the pay phone, I realized not only did I not have any change, but Doug's cell number was programmed in the phone. Without access buttons I would have to rely on my memory which, under duress, was working poorly. I thought of one more option.

"Excuse me," I told the gate attendant. "My phone died and my husband is waiting for us at the Cars Fast Pass line. May we please go look for him?"

"Can I see your tickets?"

"That's part of the problem. He has ours with him to get Fast Passes for all of us." I'm pretty sure we were breaking park rules having him do so, but the attendant let us in on hand stamps alone. When we reached the Fast Pass booth, Doug wasn't there. Mick, a kindly southern gentleman, escorted us to the Chamber of Commerce where I explained the situation to a woman clad in official theme park attire. She said she'd track him down for us. How, I'll never know. But twenty minutes later, while Brooke and I played hide-the-stuffed-panda in the shade, Doug appeared. I hugged him as though he were a life preserver. I told him what I had tried and how the phone had failed.

"Why didn't you ask someone if you could use their phone?"

"A complete stranger?" That would have been even worse than asking an official for help.

"Where's the phone?" he asked. I handed it to him.

Wordlessly, he pulled the battery out for a few seconds, plugged it back in, and turned it toward me. There were all of his messages. He'd showed me the battery trick once before and it never occurred to me to try it.

"What's the first rule we teach hikers if they get lost?" he asked.

"Stay put," I replied meekly, then added, "But we weren't lost."

"You knew I was coming back. You should have stayed in line."

"For five hours? We were looking for *you* so we wouldn't lose time." I tamped back anger. It wasn't *his* fault. It was never his fault.

Later that afternoon, I ducked into a restroom stall so I could work through my tearful shame in my ever-present journal. What would my daughter think if she discovered her mother sobbing over a cell phone? Why couldn't I share my deepest fears with Doug? Why

didn't I express my anger over his patronizing attitude? What would I do without him in a true emergency?

I discovered the answer one winter evening in Seattle. Doug asked the two of us if we wanted to join him in the hot tub. He looked tired and pale. He admitted, "I'm cold and my stomach feels funny."

"I hope you're not coming down with what we both had," I said, shuddering at the memory of the awful flu--or food poisoning--I'd experienced New Year's Eve three days earlier. Brooke had just gotten over something similar the night before.

Brooke and I were upstairs changing when he called for me to bring him a bowl. He sounded horrible. When I reached the stairwell, I could see Doug leaning against the door jamb at the bottom of the stairs. Suddenly, his legs buckled, and in slow motion, I saw him crumple, banging his head on the wheel of a roller chair as he fell to the floor.

I flew down the stairs, calling his name repeatedly. He lay face up, unconscious, and horror of horrors, he started to vomit. *He's going to aspirate if I don't open his airway.* Somehow, I was able to roll his deadweight body onto his side.

"Brooke, honey," I called upstairs, "Daddy needs our help. Can you bring me some clean towels?" I heard my voice quiver, but I knew I had to keep her--us--busy so she--we--wouldn't panic. With shaking hands, and trying to hold down my own vomit, I wiped debris from his eyes, his face, his mouth. After several long moments, he regained consciousness.

"Do you remember what happened?" I asked.

He described that he'd been in the hot tub, felt woozy and dizzy, and called for a bowl. "How long was I out?"

"Just a few seconds. Should I call an ambulance?" I was grateful for decades of first aid training, but I felt I was missing something. Was it *don't move the patient*? Had I committed the biggest error of all by rolling him on his side to open his airway?

"Can you wiggle your toes? How many fingers? Are you cold?" We got him into clean, dry clothes and under a pile of blankets, and for the next twelve hours I watched over him, praying he'd be okay. Self-doubt festered just below the surface, but thankfully, it never erupted.

"It is a long road that has no turning," was the proverb stamped in my journal a year later to the day. Dropped courses, failed technology, and fainting spells appear to be turns in the road that add layers to our lives, bumps that provide opportunities for us to show our children--and ourselves--that despite being fallible we each have value and worth. While I have had difficulties in the past standing up for myself and saying what I think and feel, particularly to powerful men in my life, this last event proved to me that I have what it takes to save another person's life in a crisis. If I can learn to trust my intuition and harness my inner power, perhaps I can teach my daughter to do the same.



Suzzallo Steps – She Spontaneously Volunteered

by Phil Eidenberg-Noppe

Certificate Program in Photography, 2015





Home

by Trevor Russell

Certificate Program in Screenwriting, 2011

EXT. MORGAN HOME, FRONT YARD - DAY

Digital binocular POV spies on a "For Sale" sign lowered into the ground. MOVERS and LANDSCAPERS prepare the five bedroom modern mansion for the market.

DUKE MORGAN (10), all-American charismatic trouble maker, hides behind bushes and scopes out his targets. Decked out in all black, seal team six fatigues, Duke relays the enemy position to his cohorts via walkie-talkie.

DUKE

We have bogies at 3 o'clock.

Binocular POV moves to the managing REAL ESTATE AGENT.

DUKE (O.S.)

Priority Target One in sight just South of fallen base.

Binocular POV veers to second story. PAINTER on scaffolding touches up trim. Nearby window opens and ELIZABETH MORGAN pops out. Directs Real Estate Agent below.

DUKE (O.S.)

Darth Mom commands fortress from above. Copy?

Duke winces from walkie-talkie static. Distortion escalates and transforms into popular DUB-STEP POP SONG. Confused and annoyed, Duke changes frequencies. No luck.

DUKE

Rebels, do you copy? What the...?

Binocular POV back on mom as she shuts the window.

* * *

INT. MORGAN HOME, MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Elizabeth, super mom/career woman, resumes packing pictures into a moving box.

A family portrait catches her attention and stops the monotonous work.

House phone RINGS in the background.

Elizabeth reminisces.

* * *

INSERT: Framed picture of Elizabeth, husband, Duke, Will, puppy posing in front of home.

Digital picture changes. Same pose, different seasons as the Morgan family grows up.

Constant RINGING of house phone breaks her concentration.

ELIZABETH

Duke, Donald, will someone, PLEASE, get that?

* * *

OFFICE

DONALD MORGAN, alpha business man, sits back in oversized leather chair, legs up on mahogany desk. Speaks confidently to subordinate on cell phone.

DONALD

Well if those tree huggin' liberals think they can stop American Petroleum's Alaska pipeline, they're high on patchouli oil.

House phone still RINGING.

ELIZABETH (O.S.)

Pick up. That. Damn. PHONE!

Elizabeth stomps in. Answers only remaining house phone. Too late, dial tone, annoyed.

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Donald senses tension. Quickly finishes conversation.

DONALD

Any problems with permitting, book my flight to Anchorage. I'll drive the bulldozer myself.

Donald hangs up his cell.

ELIZABETH

Can I PLEASE get some help around here?

DONALD

Sorry, working.

ELIZABETH

Yes Donald. You have work. So do I. But this house is not going to sell itself.

Elizabeth spots file stamped DIVORCE on Donald's desk.

ELIZABETH

Have you even opened it yet?

DONALD

I've been wor-

ELIZABETH

Working? Unbelievable! I gave it to you three weeks ago.

DONALD

Well I guess that's one benefit of MARRYING A DIVORCE LAWYER!

Elizabeth and Donald's shouting blends together.

* * *

EXT. MORGAN HOME, FRONT YARD - DAY

Duke watches his parents fight through the window, via binoculars. It's nothing new.

Walkie-talkie still plays DUB STEP POP SONG. Duke gives it one last thump. Song stops playing.

Duke refocuses on attack.

Binocular POV. Near side of the house. Duke's best friend CHAUNCEY, tech genius and kid prodigy, tinkers with sprinkler system control panel. Duke reengages via walkie-talkie.

DUKE (O.S.)

Red Leader, how long until Operation Suburban Storm?

SIDE OF HOUSE

Chauncey answers Duke with matching walkie-talkie.

CHANUCEY

Who's Red Leader?

DUKE (O.S.)

Chauncey, you're Red Leader.

CHANUCEY

I don't wanna be Red Leader. I'm Morpheus. No, Black Mamba. No, wait, LeBron Obama Will Smith the third.

DUKE (O.S.)

The third?

CHANUCEY

Yeah, sounds cool.

DUKE (O.S.)

Is Bean Dip with you?

Humongous BEAN DIP, dressed like Rambo, shirtless with head band, sets wheel barrel full of water balloons next to Chauncey.

CHAUNCEY

Just arrived with heavy artillery.

Green light flashes on sprinkler system. Timer shows 3pm.

CHAUNCEY

Hurricane Chauncey expected to hit Seattle in 2 minutes and counting.

FRONT YARD, BUSHES

Binocular POV streaks to opposite side of the yard. Follows garden hose from house, up into the treehouse.

* * *

TREEHOUSE

WILL (8), also in military uniform, finishes lifting garden hose into treehouse. Tired but determined, slides

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into two walking canes. Heads to his tactical position at the window.

Walkie-talkie sounds.

DUKE (O.S.)

Will, I'm counting on you little bro. You have less than 60 seconds.

Will answers out of breath.

WILL

I did it Duke. I'm in position.

Will aims garden hose at painter on scaffolding. Painter picks his nose unaware he's being watched.

Will can see the entire yard full of workers/future victims. He's giddy with anticipation until something catches his attention.

Far in the distance, MEARA (13), nerdy schoolgirl, approaches with 12 leashed dogs. Will smiles. Alerts Duke.

WILL

Duke, your girlfriend is back with Cosmo.

* * *

FRONT YARD, BUSHES

Duke's binocular POV frantically shifts to Meara getting dragged closer to ground zero.

COSMO, an ancient Labrador, lags behind the pack. Permanent head cone, three legs and a wheel old.

Duke panics.

DUKE

ABORT! ABORT! Do not engage! Echo?

Walkie-talkie static escalates once more. The same DUB STEP POP SONG plays over all frequencies. Horrible timing!

DUKE

Oh no no no NO!

Duke checks his watch. The second hand ticks closer to 3PM. There's no hope. Duke watches the horror unfold through his binoculars.

MONTAGE: SLOW MOTION - DIGITAL BINOCULAR VIEW - DUB STEP SONG

-Lawn sprinklers raise like turrets ripping through Meara like 50 caliber machine guns. Dog leashes fly. The hounds are released.

-Cosmo, unamused, slowly lays down like a dying soldier.

STRATUS: Journal of Arts and Writing

-Will showers the painter with his hose like a flame thrower from above. Red paint buckets fall off the scaffolding and explode like blood on D Day.

-Landscapers scatter but can't escape Bean Dip's shotgun arm hurling water balloons, exploding with devastating force.

-Chauncey, screaming like an insane war maniac, chucks water grenades into the air without mercy.

-GOLDEN RETRIEVER jumps and mauls Bean-Dip who goes down screaming.

-The Real Estate Agent, soaking wet and shell shocked, stands catatonic in the middle of the devastation.

END MONTAGE

* * *

INT. MORGAN HOME, LIVING ROOM - DUSK

Duke humbly stands in the almost-vacant living room. Will behind him.

Donald paces in background office. Rants business on the house phone.

Real Estate Agent, half a dozen subcontractors, Meara, Chauncey, and Bean Dip stand single file by the front door. All soaked and defeated.

Bean-Dip rubs his gauze wrapped bloody head.

Elizabeth pleads with the Real Estate Agent. Embarrassed but poised.

ELIZABETH

I am so, so sorry. We can continue tomorrow. Duke is getting shipped to Siberia so ...

Real Estate Agent snaps into professional mode.

REAL ESTATE AGENT

Not a problem Mrs. Morgan. We will have this house in tip top shape for the open house on Sunday.

Real Estate Agent exits as proudly as possible. Subcontractors follow suit.

ELIZABETH

Sorry, I'm sorry, *lo siento, lo siento, gomennasai?*

ASIAN WORKER (Brooklyn Accent)

Don't worry bout it.

Meara drags her feet.

ELIZABETH

Oh Meara. I'm so sorry. What's the status on the neighborhood dogs?

MEARA

Missing in action.

ELIZABETH

How many?

MEARA

All of them. Except Cosmo.

Cosmo awkwardly shakes off water. Shorts out the wall mounted flat screen TV.

Elizabeth, now terrifying drill sergeant, squares up to Chauncey and Bean Dip who await their fate.

ELIZABETH

Listen up cadets. Either, you help Meara find and return each and every one of those dogs, or, I call your parents and tell them how you went AWOL! Got it?

Chauncey and Bean Dip nod their heads understandingly. Elizabeth winks at Meara who has a new role model.

ELIZABETH

Now MOVE, MOVE, MOVE, MOVE!

Chauncey and Bean Dip file out the front door like paratroopers out of a plane. Meara lips "thank you" to Elizabeth and then leaves.

Duke tries sneaking out behind Meara. Elizabeth grabs him by the collar and swings him back to the living room.

ELIZABETH

Not so fast mister. Family meeting. DONALD!

Donald cups hand over his ear to block the noise.

Elizabeth smiles at Duke. She walks over to the phone jack and rips the cord out of the wall.

DONALD

Hello? Hello?

Donald strolls into the living room. Notices Duke is in trouble.

DONALD

Ok, what happened? What did ya do this time, buddy?

ELIZABETH

What did he do? Are you blind deaf and dumb?

Donald sees the dangling phone cord ripped out of the wall.

DONALD

That was the Alaskan Senator. You can't just hang up on-

ELIZABETH

Work, work, work, work, work!

Another screaming session ensues. Duke releases his frustration.

DUKE

ENOUGH! All you do is work and fight, work, fight. Now getting a divorce and selling the house?

ELIZABETH

Honey, I know this has been hard on you two but...

DUKE

Hard? You don't care. Where are we gonna live, huh?

WILL

Can Duke and I share a room again?

Duke gives Will the "no way in hell" look.

DONALD

This is for the best. Your mom and I will always love you. It's important you know that none of this is your fault.

DUKE

Yeah, duh. It's your fault and our lives are ruined because of it.

Duke bounces up and marches out of the living room. Will crutches after his best-friend-brother.

Parents both decimated. Elizabeth chases after her kids.

DONALD

Elizabeth, wait. Give him a minute.

ELIZABETH

Well, that's it. We're the worst parents ever.

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DONALD

Stop it. He's 13. He'll get over it. I tried poisoning my old man in his sleep at that age.

ELIZABETH

What's wrong with you?

* * *

DUKE'S BEDROOM

Expensive telescope next to window. Walls covered in planets and intergalactic video game heroes.

Duke looks through the telescope and focuses on a brilliant galaxy lightyears away.

Will opens the door. Crutches over to the bed and plops down. Throws tennis ball up against wall repeatedly.

WILL

What cha looking at?

DUKE

Andromeda.

WILL

Cool. How long you think we're gonna get grounded for?

DUKE

THAT'S the thing Will. We're always grounded. All of us. Always.

WILL

Sounds a little dramatic but you do get in trouble a lot.

DUKE

I can't do this anymore. We need our own home. Our own base.

WILL

Like a fort?

Duke stuffs his backpack. Throws on a hoodie and jeans.

DUKE

No. Like an actual home for us, and friends, and whoever else needs to get out of the parent trap.

Duke straps on his backpack and opens the window. Cosmo wanders into the room.

WILL

Where ya going?

DUKE

I'm going to find us a new home.

Will springs up to join.

DUKE

Will, not this time. I've got to do this by myself but once I've completed my mission, I'll be back for you and Cosmo.

WILL

But I can help.

DUKE

I know you can but I need your help here keeping mom and dad distracted ok?

Will frowns.

DUKE

I can't give you a more important job. Got that?

Will hesitantly takes his orders. Duke moves the telescope in order to climb out the window. Gives Will an assuring look before hopping down.

Will crutches over to the telescope and takes a look. The sky streaks with lights. Curious.

* * *

EXT. MORGAN HOME, LIVING ROOM WINDOW - DUSK

Duke walks his bike past the open living room window. Parents deep in conversation. Duke eavesdrops.

INT. MORGAN HOME, LIVING ROOM - DUSK

Elizabeth wallows in her recliner.

ELIZABETH

I don't remember the last time we weren't fighting.

Donald rummages through the box of family photos.

DONALD

Well, it wasn't always like this. Married 13 years but seems like yesterday.

ELIZABETH

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I was finishing law school. You climbing the corporate ladder at American Petroleum.

DONALD

I was unstoppable.

ELIZABETH

After Duke was born, we just stopped making time for each other.

* * *

OUTSIDE

Duke interprets blame. Saddened. He continues his run away.

INSIDE

Elizabeth snaps out of her depression.

ELIZABETH

But those kids are the greatest thing we've ever done.

DONALD

No arguing that.

Will inconspicuously crosses the room.

ELIZABETH

Will honey, how's your brother?

WILL

Um, uh... he just needs some time.

Will forces a fake grin.

* * *

EXT. SEATTLE NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - NIGHT

Duke fearlessly rides his bike through traffic while on his walkie-talkie.

DUKE

Where are you guys?

* * *

EXT. SEATTLE SPACE NEEDLE - NIGHT

Meara, Chauncey, Bean Dip, cautiously surround growling Golden Retriever. Ten dogs are leashed to nearby bike rack.

CHAUNCEY

Space Needle. We're grabbing the last dog now. The one that attacked Bean Dip. He's not cooperating.

Golden Retriever sneers. Bean Dip cowers.

* * *

EXT. SEATTLE NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - NIGHT

Duke veers sharp left.

DUKE

Stay there, I'm on my way.

Walkie-talkie emits loud shriek. Duke stops to change frequency. Behind him, street lights turn off, row by row, in succession.

The peculiar power outage passes him. Duke observes the spectacle.

Inside surrounding apartments, TV's turn on and off. Lights flicker. Parked cars randomly start without drivers. Radios play NEW DUBSTEP SONG in sync.

Suddenly, a magnificent ALIEN SPACESHIP emerges out of the clouds. Passes over Duke's head just 30 feet away.

Military F1 fighters and helicopters stalk the spaceship.

Police cars, fire trucks, and Black SUVs whiz around corners to join the pursuit.

Alien Spaceship soars towards the Space Needle which towers in the distance. Duke speeds off towards his friends.

EXT. SEATTLE SPACE NEEDLE - NIGHT

Meara, Chauncey, Bean Dip, are inches away from leashing the Golden Retriever. Duke startles Meara with screeching stop.

Golden Retriever escapes capture.

Duke, out of breath, can't make out any words.

MEARA

How in the world did you get out of being grounded?

Sirens blare in background. Blue and red lights illuminate the streets. Helicopters pass overhead.

CHAUNCEY

Are you a fugitive?

MEARA

He's an idiot.

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Mayhem gets closer. Shadowy silhouette of Alien Spaceship grows.

DUKE

You guys won't believe this.

Alien Spaceship cruises overhead. Lightning bolts react with clouds. Majestically lands next to Space Needle.

Shocked PEDESTRIANS gather from all directions. GOVERNMENT AGENTS surround the landed Alien Spaceship, guns raised. Police attempt to control the crowds without success.

Duke, Meara, Bean Dip, Chauncey share the front row for the first ever alien encounter.

Helicopters swarm, Tanks and Hum-V's form a perimeter.

Suddenly, all guns and weapons dissolve. AWKWARD SOLDIER loses everything but his underwear. Tanks, Hummers, Helicopters, and Jets disappear. Half naked PILOTS reappear safely next to their colleagues.

Spaceship hatch opens and startles the crowd. Bright white light pours out. Ramp lowers to the base of the Space Needle.

Silhouette appears, casually walks down the ramp. Appearance slowly revealed as it descends.

Sasquatch like HAROLD, thick brown hair, except for receding hairline, carries briefcase towards Space Needle base

Once on the ground, he opens his briefcase, grabs a sheet of paper, tapes it to the monument. Turns around and walks back up the ramp.

Motionless crowd. Crickets. Duke speaks up.

DUKE

Wait, what is that?

Harold turns to speak. Terrifying static DUB STEP SONG erupts from his mouth frightening everyone. Harold's native language is apparently Dub Step Music.

Harold notices crowd's reaction. Kneels down and opens briefcase. Grabs an electronic translator collar and clips it around his neck. (All Aliens will wear similar devices.)

Harold speaks again, this time in French. Adjusts dial on collar. Changes to German, dog, then finally English.

HAROLD (old and nerdy)

Greetings Earthians. My name is Harold and I'm an attorney. That's an eviction notice.

Harold turns back to his space ship.

MEARA

Wait, eviction? No one lives there.

Harold addresses Meara, slightly irritated.

HAROLD

Earth. It's for sale.

Crowd exchanges confused glances.

HAROLD

...and the tenants are being evicted...

Everyone still dumb founded.

HAROLD

Humans, humans are the tenants. Humans are being evicted.

Crowd finally gasps. Random bursts of panic.

HAROLD (to himself)

I'm surprised they've survived this long.



