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# The smells of mmmm and Dixie

Jamie S. Uyematsu

Like the sound of crayfish  
Playin' it red n' spicy in the steamy streets.

Where spit kisses the pavement  
Like rain on naked shoulders in the early  
Dawn of morning.  
Along this rhue,  
Even the street lamps are dancin'.

Here, in a bite of this city  
Where the Irish-Italians get-down  
To the sound of applause.

The songs are stringy,  
And the bass is brassy,  
Swingin' like a beer in tuba's clothing.

It'll cost ya a drink a piece to use the crapper,  
But down here, the open air is free.

The street corners know where the real soul is at,  
And as people toss coins into a cardboard box,  
It's owner's routine,  
Small boy with a mad mouthful of rhythm,  
Rat-tat-tat-rat-tat, taps on asphalt outside  
To the night club's sounds of the dance.

Time here is like one great gumbo,  
And if you listen closely it's still swingin'  
To the sounds of jazz jam on toast,  
Spread evenly with three horns.

Strands of plastic beads,  
Neon gimmick-beakers of draft,  
And boisterously competitive football fans  
Lumber in herds with pretty,  
Well shaped women in clean, upstanding,  
University dress & clever feathers.

Royal is throbbing with indulgent pleasures  
And the simple recklessness of adolescent games.

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With lackadaisical threat the Cops watch,  
As the wild boosing sloshes up against storefronts,  
And runs down balconies, trickling into a side street  
Where an old-timer rests on the step.  
With swamp-glazed eyes,  
And a resigned look of the new year,  
He waves it past.

By day, artists peddle their sweet & colorful work,  
While those with Voodoo eyes light candles,  
And sell passers by their future.

It must be witchcraft, these temperaments,  
Lolling off iron balconies,  
Like young fishnet women in older times & feather hats.  
Ferns drip from red brick,  
Frozen mid-stream like the black patriot below,  
Frozen mid-handshake & collecting tips.

Down the way,  
A magician commands the gathered crowd,  
Insulting his audience and awing them,  
With quickness,  
Into raucous laughter.

Into and out-of the day,  
Lounge sleepy magnolias  
Breathing the Mississippi over these words,  
And leaving soggy the acquired cardboard.

Only but days,  
Along a long strand of lifetimes here,  
But already this heart has begun  
To beat with a soft drawl.

And even the process of leaving,  
Feels like only the beginning,  
Of coming back,  
Here again to New Orleans.



Kelly M. Woods

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## Pears

Barbara Leon

She remembers summer's end  
herself: blonde braids and barelegged  
in one of those play outfits girls wore in the 50's  
short shorts and flowery halter banded across her flat chest.

Cooling off after supper  
folks gossiping in metal lawn chairs  
swatting mosquitoes, watching sunset  
zinnias flamed crimson against a whitewashed fence.

How she'd follow her neighbor to the pear tree  
that grew, wild and unkempt, heavy with yellow globes.  
He held a long stick to each branch  
shook hard, releasing showers on the grass, then

split each pear, his calloused thumbs  
scooping seeds as he fed her the halves  
pulp soft, juice dripping  
sweet and sticky as an August day.

Each summer the girl grew taller, stronger, and  
one season she budded out. The neighbor  
thrust his hand between her legs, those same  
workman's fingers parting her flesh, as though tearing open a fruit.

Dusk swallowed the tree  
and the pears  
left to molder  
in the field.



Dana Keating



KOAK

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Michael Reynolds



## A Crack Between Two Worlds

Dane Cervine

I remember Paul, his diagnosis: schizophrenia – and who could argue, sitting across from me on the edge of his chair, eyes like Jupiter moons, alive with the secret he kept but shared with me now: that the solar system was his, as far as Saturn’s rings, maybe even beyond. Then there was me: world shrunken to my perimeter of body, the narrow passage of mind, the dull glare of reality. When it comes to this machine of brain,

the *true* or *false* litmus of belief, there is only one test here: sanity, or its opposite. What poet could pass such exam without cheating, what artist answer with any confidence? There is a crack in the world, full of names – calling us to peer in, pull out our own secret from the bowels of earth. A radio dial

spans a wide band of frequency, but even this is too narrow a gauge. Beyond what we can hear, see, lies the farther spectrum of infrared light, rays of gamma, pitch of sound so high as to drive a dog crazy – while we look about blankly, hear nothing. It is good to be careful. The closer you listen, you risk losing – an ear, a career, a life. But what is horizontal in us begs the vertical, to meet here in the body as a cross, to spread arms and legs wide saying *touch the holes in my hands, the holes in my feet, feel the wound in my side*. Even our gods

are over the edge. So this is what we face: everyday, to be a ladder into the crevice, to pull ourselves out again, whichever side we stand upon, a bridge for the other, a thread for the wounds between.

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## Pastiche de Belem

Carol See-Wood

We sprinkled cinnamon, powdered sugar  
over tarts the size of a child's fist,  
warm custard, flaky pastry  
spilled into our mouths.

Every night we went  
to a bakery in Belem for their pastiche,  
walked down the steep hills  
of the Bairro Alto to the waterfront  
where the #15 streetcar clanged around the corner,  
shuddered to a halt before us.

The old wooden paneling,  
immaculate dark green velvet seats,  
sparks flying up from the rails,  
the tired courtesy of the driver  
who forlornly plucked the correct fare  
from our open palms.  
We stared out the window at the night slipping by  
drenched with neon lights from bars and cafes,  
cold air rushing through the open doors,  
the smell of fish and salt water.

All of this —  
sailing through the dark Lisbon night  
on that lighted toy of a streetcar,  
sitting in that bakery,  
first sweet bite of pastry,  
young lovers at the next table  
with entwined hands, burning eyes,  
hiss of the espresso machine —  
now one memory.  
And I can't recall  
the taste of custard  
without seeing sparks fly up from streetcar rails,  
and I can't remember the looks of those young lovers  
without recalling  
the scent of  
cinnamon.

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# The Next Ride

Sandy Raney

The driver of the first car that stopped to pick me up hitchhiking outside of Amsterdam had his dick hanging out. That should have been an omen. The second car that stopped was a new steel gray Porsche with a good-looking guy about my age who spoke perfect English. I poked my head into the open window. Going to Munich, he said. Cool. I needed a ride to Bonn. I threw my pack in the rear compartment and hopped in the car. I smiled smugly at the other hitchhikers strewn along the road. One ride all the way. It was a hitchhiker's dream.

I was one of the few women alone on the road. We always got the first rides. Next it was two girls, then a guy and a girl, and finally a guy alone. It was the order of things in the seventies. Young travelers throughout Europe stayed in hostels and lined the roads with their thumbs out, a rite of passage after college. I was a late bloomer at twenty-seven. My divorce, rather than a degree, sent me across the ocean.

Single men were the ones most likely to pick up a hitchhiker. But unlikely drivers also stopped their cars for me—a middle-aged woman in Scotland who took me to her cottage on the west coast, an elderly Norwegian couple who couldn't speak English and greeted me with broad smiles and worried brows because I was alone, a blond Nordic family in a van who drove me across Sweden sharing bread and hard cheese along the way. Before getting in a car, I relied on good judgment and sound instincts. One of them was never take a ride with more than one man in the car. This ride started out differently. As soon as I settled in, he grinned and said, "leaving Amsterdam so soon?" usually the first question was, "where are you from?" the second question was, "why are you traveling alone?" he did not ask either. He just smiled, and I swear the air around him sparkled. Maybe it was the bright morning sun, or the glint of the highly polished window trim that gave me that illusion, but whatever it was, I leaned my head back against the car seat, soaking in the feeling of comfort and safety around me. The car was full of good hitchhiker vibes.

He was evasive about his job, and said, "Not interesting," when I asked. About half an hour out of Amsterdam, he said, "I must meet someone at a restaurant near here. It will only take twenty minutes." He didn't tell me anything more. We waited in a plastic booth at a non-descript restaurant for forty-five minutes but no one showed. He gulped black coffee, and I drank tea. I noticed a restlessness in him that I had not seen in the car. He fidgeted with his keys, his eyes darted back and forth, and he jumped when the waitress walked up behind him.

"Let us go," he said, and pulled a huge wad of money out of his pocket to pay the bill. The person that he was supposed to meet remained a mystery. I glided back into the Porsche—a ride all the way to Germany. It was my day. Everything was glorious. Maybe I didn't notice the warning signs because I

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only cared about getting to my friend's house in Bonn by dark.

I cannot remember his name but I do remember the smooth sound of his voice, and his pale skin against dark blond hair, blue eyes the color of a faded cornflower, and a compact body that was quick and sure in his movements like an athlete. His clothes were stylish and looked expensive. But it was his wide and spontaneous smile that made me feel safe. He laughed easily and listened carefully. He had traveled extensively, but had never been to Israel where I had lived for seven months. The kibbutz life interested him and he asked many questions.

Before I knew it, we were at the border of Holland and Germany. He wanted to show me a charming town along the river that bordered the two countries.

"I will buy you lunch," he said.

"I have money. You don't need to do that."

"No, no. It is my pleasure. Dutch hospitality."

We strolled to a quaint restaurant on the river where we sat outside and had beer and sausages. The sun moved in and out of the clouds. I smelled rain.

"Come to Munich with me," he said after we finished eating.

"I can't. I'm going to visit a friend."

"I will give you two hundred dollars. You can take a train from Bonn to Munich. We will be there for only two or three days."

I hesitated. It wasn't the money. I had been traveling alone for a couple of months and the thought of a nice traveling companion, the luxury of a car, and the chance to see Munich made it an appealing proposition. But I did not know this guy. This was different than meeting other travelers with backpacks. He would probably want to sleep with me.

"No, thanks. I have to get to my friend's house. She's expecting me."

It was a lie. Sherry had no idea when I was coming. She only knew I was wandering through Europe and had her address. Sherry was a close family friend, and had been my babysitter when I was young.

"But you will have a good time in Munich. It is a beautiful city. You must see it." He leaned toward me.

"Sorry. I can't" I looked away.

He stood up and smiled down at me. "Come. I want to show you the town before it rains."

I followed along the river to the small town center. There were several women's boutiques and he walked into the first one. Confused, I stayed outside by the door.

"Come in," he said.

I shook my head. Why was he going into a woman's clothing store?

He quickly rummaged through a couple of dress racks then pulled out a lovely expensive looking teal sundress. He held it out to me. "Come try this on."

"No. I don't need a dress."

"But look at your clothes." I looked down at my faded jeans and t-shirt. I was pretty scruffy. "You can wear this in Munich."

"But I'm not going to Munich."

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He grinned. "Maybe I can convince you."

I shook my head again and walked away. I was sitting on a bench when he came out of the store. I was relieved to see that he didn't have a package. He sat down next to me.

"Why did you not want to come into the shop?"

"I don't want you to buy me things."

"I have money. I can buy you a dress."

He glanced at my jeans, raised his eyebrows, and then stood. We walked down the quiet street toward the car, and he said nothing else about dresses or Munich. There was a tension between us that had not been there before. He was quiet, and held his head stiffly, staring ahead. The easy familiarity that had been there before was gone.

I hesitated when we reached the car.

"Maybe I should take a bus or a train to Bonn."

"No, no. Why would you do that? That is nonsense. I am driving right through Bonn. No. No." He opened the car door, then smiled. The tension was gone. He was himself again. I got into the car.

He drove back to the road we came in on. I recognized it immediately because U paid attention to landmarks when hitchhiking – a café, bridge, unusual house, a busy intersection – they are filed away just in case.

"Why are we on the same road? Isn't there a bridge in town to cross over into Germany?"

"I know a shortcut. It is much faster to Bonn."

I settled back in my seat, and stared out the window. The sausages from lunch balled up in the pit of my stomach. The beer made me feel bloated and sleepy. The sun was completely gone now, the clouds ahead a dark gray. But that would not matter now. I would be in Bonn in an hour. No more hitchhiking today.

He pulled off the road to a service station. "I must make a call."

I watched as he dialed then spoke into the phone. He glanced at me a couple of times during the short conversation, giving me a quick smile, as if to say, "All is well."

He got back into the car. Without a word, he headed back to the autobahn. He was driving faster now, and his hands gripped the wheel. Something had shifted in him after the phone call. He was withdrawn and his eyes narrowed as he drove. He would not look at me, a warning that he did not want to talk anymore. I was uneasy, and moved away from him, leaning against the car door. We were flying past other cars as if they were hardly moving. My anxiety grew with each exit we passed. After we had been driving for fifteen minutes back the same way we came, I pulled out my map. Germany was very close, just to the right of us within a few miles. I searched for a road into Germany within the next twenty miles. I could not find any.

"Where is the short cut?"

"What shortcut?" He stared ahead.

My breath caught in my throat.

"The shortcut to Bonn."

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"We are not going to Bonn. We are going to Belgium. I am picking up a friend and you are coming with us."

"I am not going to Belgium."

He did not answer, but clenched his jaw, as if holding back something he wanted to say. He was too close, with only the gearshift separating us. I could smell the beer from lunch on his breath. My hands started to shake, and I clasped them together in my lap. His knuckles were red from gripping the steering wheel. He was now driving 160 kilometers per hour. My pack was in the back of the car. This time I had been careless, and thrown my passport and money in the pouch at the front of the pack.

"Let me out. Stop at the next exit. I am not going to Belgium with you."

He ignored me and sped up.

One of my landmarks passed by. It started drizzling, and he turned on his windshield wipers. I remember the dreamy hypnotic sound of the wipers, cutting me off from the outside world. I frantically examined the map again, but big empty spaces loomed ahead. It had been miles since I had seen a house. My mind would not work. I could not believe this was happening. If I jumped out of the car at this speed, I would surely kill myself.

The Porsche slowed, and he turned on his blinker as we approached an exit. I couldn't believe it. He had changed his mind. He was going to drop me off. My shoulders relaxed a little until I realized he was not stopping. He raced along the deserted two-lane road boarded by a forest on each side as if he knew the area. Without hesitating, he turned onto a narrow dirt road and drove deep into the woods. It was raining harder now. I clutched the seat when we hit a mud puddle and the car swerved, barely missing a tree. He turned his headlights on, and slowed down only when branches struck the side of his car.

This was it. I was going to die. I could already feel his hard pale hands wrapped around my neck, the silver ring on his little finger branding me. Afterwards, he would toss me into a shallow grave. His fine clothes grimy, his hands caked with mud. No stone to mark the spot except in his own memory. I would never be found. No one had any idea where I was. My family would soon now I had been in Amsterdam because of the postcards of canals and Anne Frank's hiding place sent a few days ago. I was strangely calm, as if my whole journey had been leading towards this dirt road, with this man, on this gray day.

He pulled into a small clearing and stopped. I thought about jumping out of the car but he reached over and grabbed my left arm, his fingers pressing into my flesh. I glared at him.

"I trusted you. I felt safe with you. I can't believe you're doing this to me." I turned away. My breath came quicker, as if I could not get enough air into my lungs.

He was quiet for a long time, as his grip tightened on my arm.

"You are very scared, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am," and that is when I started to cry, quietly with my face turned away from him.

I could hear his breathing next to me, long slow trembling breaths. His hand

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was hot next to my skin, his ring digging into my flesh. My arm began to hurt. I waited for what was to come next. I did not have the strength to scream, but then no one would hear me anyway. I cannot explain why I didn't fight him, take my chances, and jump out of the car. My thoughts were of my family. It would be weeks before their fear set in, before I became one of those missing women you read about in the papers.

He relaxed his grip on my arm. Then he let me go completely, shoving me against the door. He started the car, and the Porsche lurched forward. He backed up, mud flying from under the wheels, then sped down the dirt road toward the two-lane highway. He did not say a word. I was numb, and still couldn't quite believe he was letting me go. At the autobahn entrance ramp, he squealed to the shoulder, put the car in neutral, jumped out of the car, and grabbed my pack. He threw it onto the shoulder as I got out of the car, my legs so shaky I was afraid I would not be able to stand up. He got back into the car and roared away.

It was almost dusk. I remember how cold the rain was on my face as I turned to make sure he was really gone. Over the years, I wondered if I became an accomplice to him because I let him go, never reported the incident to the police. The thought haunted me that maybe that had been the first time he had ever done anything like that. Maybe the next time it was easier for him. Or maybe he had done it many times before. It seems so when I remember how sure he was when he turned off the autobahn onto that lonely road, and how easily he turned onto that dirt road into the forest. But then why did he let me go?

I imagine he is still out there now, middle aged in his ancient Porsche, charming young women travelers to his special spot in the forest. He has grown more confident over the years, his hands stronger, his will unwavering. He dreams of dark forests, and a woman, no longer remembering her face.

I lifted my heavy pack onto my shoulders, stumbling under the weight. With my head down, I struggled up the ramp. Once again, I was on the side of the highway with my thumb out, waiting for the next ride.



Diane Patracuola

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# Little Rich White Girl

Chloe LaFortune

Yes Sir,  
Yes Sir, I know the color of my skin makes you feel uncomfortable  
No Sir, I don't understand how a color  
so pure, so clean, so godly could possibly offend you

Because you say,  
Because you say it is the color that has been stained by lifetimes of  
Hate, discrimination, murder and privilege  
But, Sir, I don't know anything about that  
My upper-middle-class, living-on-the-right-side-of-town family never told  
me about all that jazz  
I am naive, I am protected, I am innocent, I am ignorant

This Little Rich White Girl  
Who wears ribbons in her hair,  
Who writes fanciful hearts after her name,  
Who claims her favorite color is pink,  
Doesn't know your story and can't relate to your pain

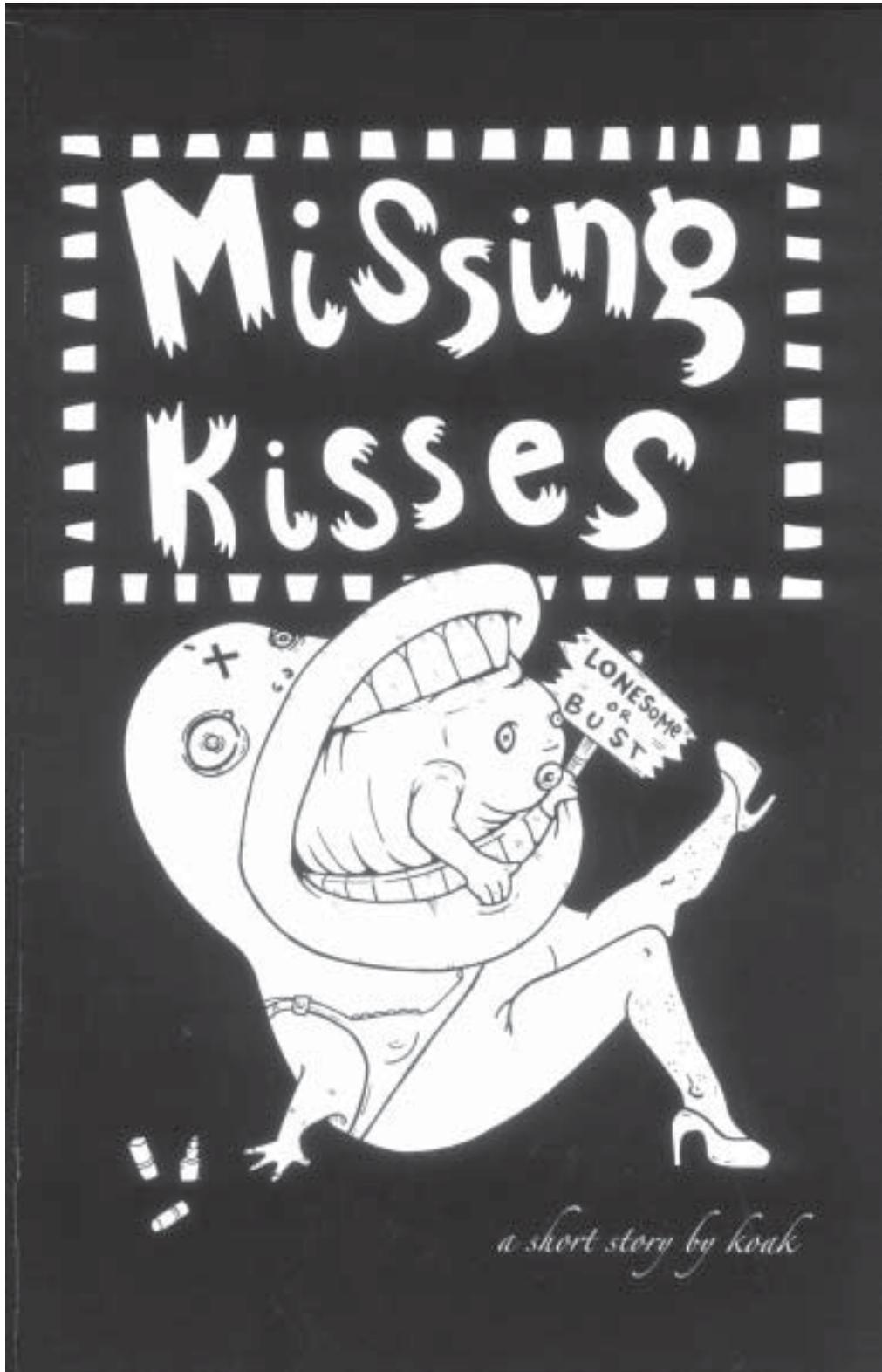
This Little Rich White Girl  
With daddy's credit card,  
With mommy's shiny new car,  
With grandma's college trust fund  
Has never heard your story and hasn't the time to listen

If all of this is true, and I have never heard your story, then surely you have  
never heard mine

Masked by my painted rose lips and costly streaked hair,  
Is a scared young woman afraid to come in to her own  
I, like you, also have a story of pain  
Mine involves a loss of innocence to a man's touch that was never wanted,  
A struggle to maintain grace and poise amid the turbulence of adolescence,  
And a constant fight to meet the expectations of myself and of my family

Being the Little Rich White Girl that I am, ensures that I have privilege  
With privilege comes pain, from pain comes hope, through hope, faith is  
realized

This is what I wish to share with you.





the boy who can't finish



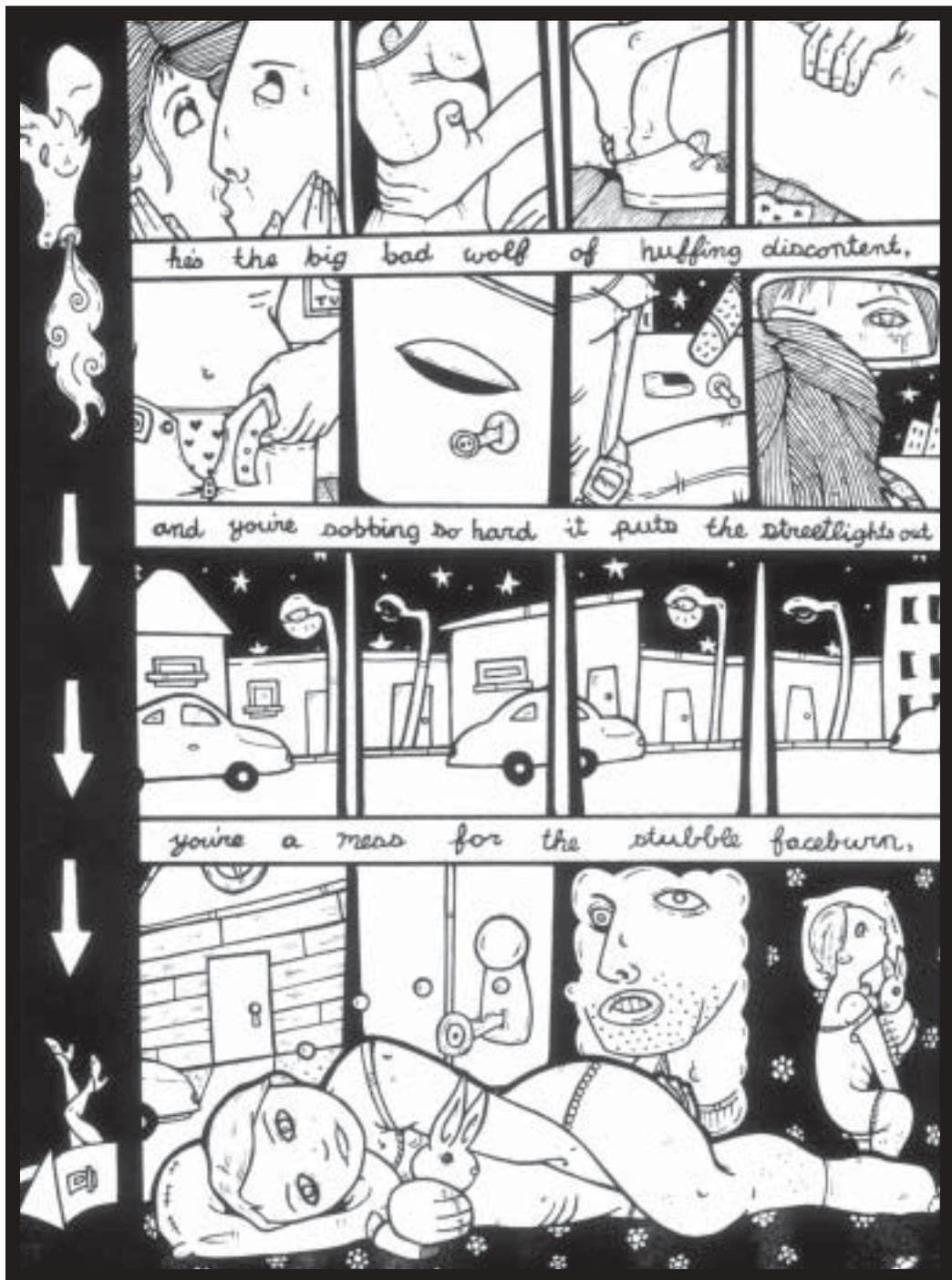
**SENTENCES**



who makes you **CRY,**

because he  
cares





and those long silences which you take as "i don't care".

you're refilling your  
dreams + stitches



with moonlight donators  
which are not yours 

and at this POINT you could CRY  
so hard it could cause A citywide  
black OUTs of heart break you CAN'T  
SHOW.

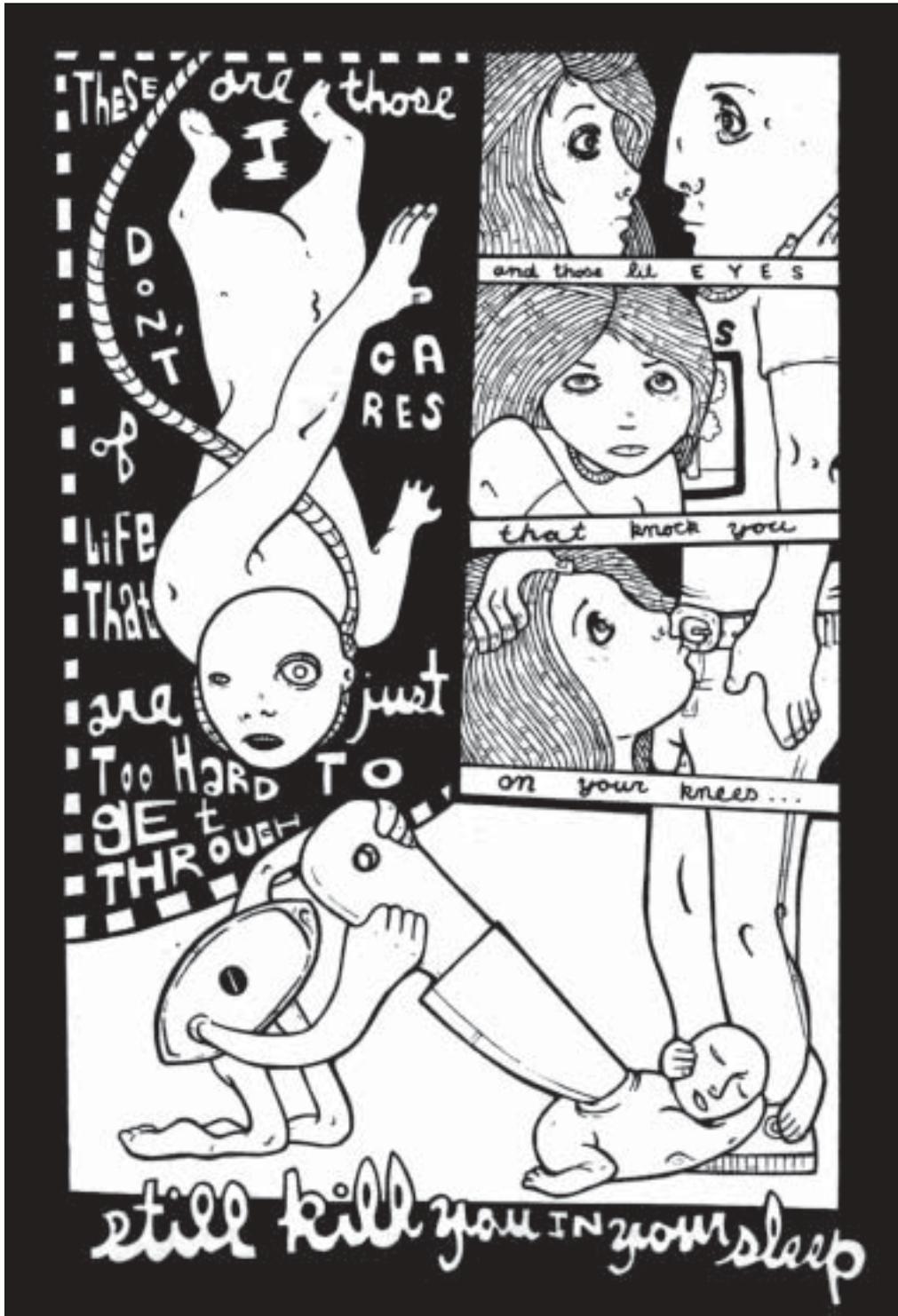
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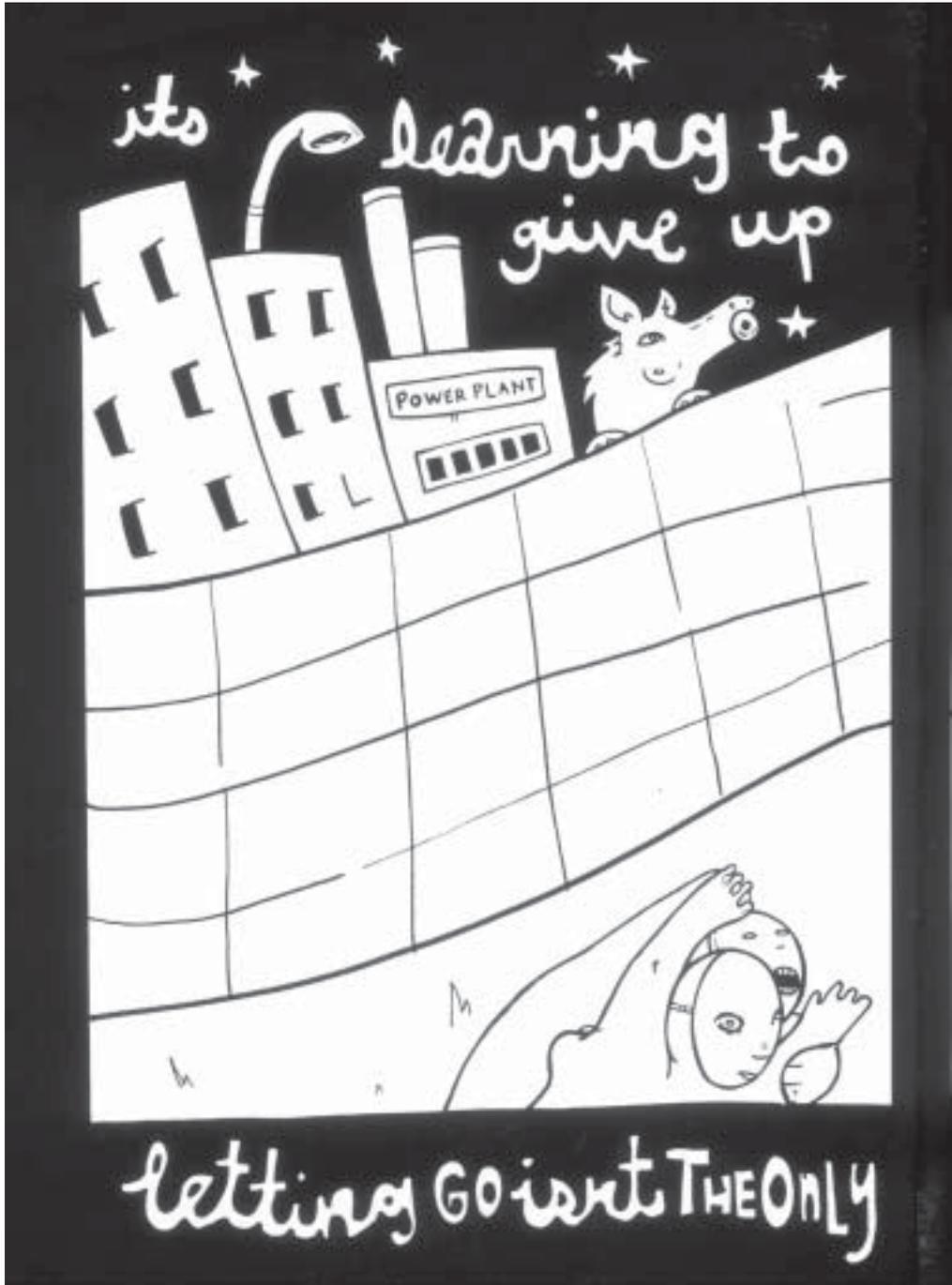


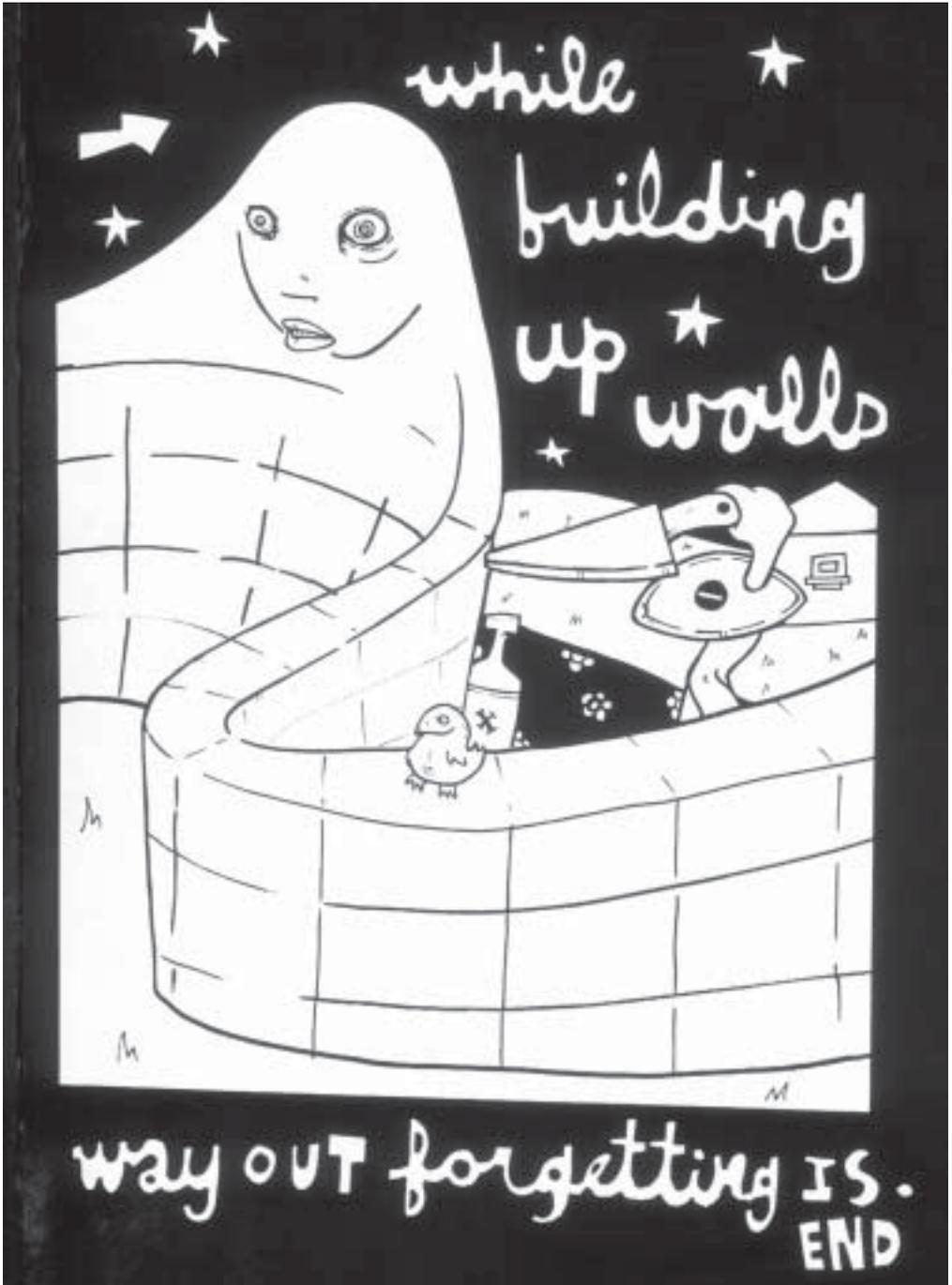


its boy long crazy nights...  
Too much used time with no  
electric blanket body warmth  
to Torment with your cold hands



its icy bar nights waiting to pass without their faces





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# My Last Pair of High Heeled Shoes

Evie Fingerman Alloy

The shoebox is way on top  
Of the clothes closet  
Other shoeboxes piled on top  
I reach up and carefully  
Slowly ease the box out  
From the bottom.

It slides out and the other  
Boxes fall down into its place.

These are my last pair of high heeled shoes  
Two inches high  
Dark brown, thick stylish heel, squared off toe.

I remember my 20's when I had  
Long slender legs, wore short skirts,  
Had boyfriend after boyfriend pursuing me  
Ahhhh, those were the days  
Of innocent youth, school days, love on my mind  
When life was simple; divorced at 25

The 30's follow  
A failed engagement  
Time clock calling out for babies  
Body still beautiful  
Mind still hopeful  
Career, marriage and baby still realistic goals.

The 40's arrive with a second marriage  
The body starts to change  
To sag, to flab  
Work harder, see less results  
Go on a diet, gain weight  
Still no baby, only a husband.

Now the 50's are here  
And this one last pair  
Of high heeled shoes remain  
One last chance to feel younger

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More beautiful again

I slowly slide the shoebox back to the bottom of the stack.

I cannot bear to give away my last pair of high-heeled shoes  
Even if I never wear them again.

As long as I keep them  
There is still hope.



Dana Keating

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## Autumn Offering

Julia Alter

I keep the ribbons in the box for now,  
the Japanese paper printed with cranes, chrysanthemums.  
I want you to be my offering to the Gods,  
crushed marigolds around your face on my pillow  
and we press ourselves so close we feel each other's shadows  
saturating the dark marrow of our bodies.

You say *your hair is virgin straw. Your mouth, a strawberry.*  
And summer has stiffened this field of wheat,  
then autumn rain has softened it  
and the first hot October day came in so hard, so fast  
it smoothed the stalks to thin threads  
and so we push our heavy bones back  
into the soft throat of it.

Here is the miracle though,  
that we found a place where wheat and marigolds  
grow at the same time,  
a land of rainstorm that turns to a scape of scalding sun.

You say *your mouth, a thick slice of watermelon*  
then you bite and drink.  
Paper cranes come alive from dying trees  
and we feel their long shadows  
birthmarking our bodies.

When you finally press into my bones,  
you breathe in my ear *I am home.*  
And now home is the pressed marigold of our skins.  
You crush into me and the scent of a shrine rises up around us,  
wreathes of golden flowers, sweet church of wick and wax.

You are begging the blown dandelions from my body,  
a hundred wishes flying like tiny stars  
from my mouth.

And this season has no name.  
Because our hands fold into each other like a whole church  
in Christmas prayer. Our mouths of crushed melon

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drip summer down our chins. The dried maple leaves send themselves  
red and purple back to the earth. And somewhere  
under our bodies, the world still knows that spring will come,  
something small and green and opening  
slowly climbing its way.



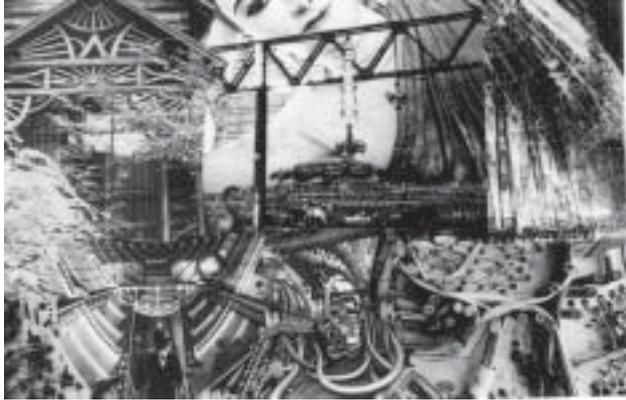
Angela Gibson

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T. Mike Walker

## Chibi

Barbara Angell Fuller



He was called that because of his small size. Twelve years old, he had never in his life had enough to eat. He couldn't read and had no idea where the Pa-

cific was, only that it was a body of water with islands and jungles where Japanese soldiers were always fighting. And though there was no more rice and no more bread or eggs or meat, the war was very far away until that spring. In the third month, when his mother had always checked the papers for first sightings of cherry blossoms, the enemy's B29s had come three times. Most of his village had burned to the ground.

His blind father refused to heed the air raid warnings and stayed alone in the house. But on the night of the last and fiercest attack, Chibi managed to pull his fragile father onto his back and with his mother's help, drag him to the shelter.

By the ninth month the stench of acres of charred timber, scorched tatami and most unbearable, burned flesh, had begun to fade. The family now slept together in the part of the house that had been a store with a rolling aluminum door that pulled down at night and probably saved it. His mother had sold tropical fish there until there were no customers for tropical fish.

His three sisters had abandoned the proper sleeping position for women—face to the ceiling, legs perfectly together. Now they slept in a clump, all facing the same way, knees to knees, arms around each other's waists. They shared a single patched futon out of choice, hanging onto each other to stay on it. Chibi always dragged his own thin bedding as far from theirs as he could but it was not far enough. He could hear them talking late at night.

Taka, fifteen, heard from a woman who heard over the village headman's radio that ships were already delivering barbarians to Yokohama. Now they would invade Japan as if they owned it. "They are covered with hair," she told me, "their faces, even their private parts! They think nothing of raping ten or twenty girls in a day or even a whole temple full of Buddhist nuns! She said we shouldn't leave the house when they come here!"

"Especially wearing red!" Chizu, seventeen, threw in. "I heard that red, bright red like the silk underkimono, might drive them mad with lust!"

Emi, eighteen, pointed out that their mother had traded her wedding kimono and the obi and scarlet *nagajuban* more than two years ago. She was paid in rice but not enough for six of them to live on more than a week. All she wore, all any woman in the village wore these years was *monpe*—bulky, coarse-woven farm pants. They stuffed their short jackets into these, and wore white rags

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over their hair. On their feet, the black sneakers with the separated toe like carpenters or fish sellers...

She propped herself up on an elbow to make the point, "could anyone, even *them*, lust after us the way we look?" They giggled nervously...

"Shut up and go to sleep," Chibi barked in his forced new voice meant to show them he was now master of the house. Soon, his sisters slept but he lay awake, his stomach gurgling with hunger, his body habitually alert for the throb of the B29 engines which he had always felt before hearing them. They would not come any more.

He got up, slid the door just wide enough, muffling the jangling bells his mother kept on it and slipped outside.

In the eighth month the voice of the emperor, descendant of Amaterasu the sun goddess, was heard on the radio. No one had heard it before. Chibi's family had no radio but gathered near the crowd around the village headman's house. They bowed their heads while he spoke. His majesty's voice sounded thin and high, his language so formal that they weren't sure what he was saying. But the next day, when a transcription of the message appeared in the paper, they knew Japan had surrendered. There had been the unthinkable bomb. And, hardest to bear for some, the emperor told them he was a mere mortal, like them. Chibi's father sobbed quietly when they read him the newspaper.

Outside it was warm, dark, the sun not yet up but the night beginning to sift off the ground. Roughly Chibi shoved his feet into wooden *geta*, rinsed his mouth from the dented brass cup on a chain, spat manfully and poured water over his stubbled scalp that he kept shaven to avoid lice. He shouldered the battered hoe he used to forage for food and, if necessary, defend himself when *they* came. For a moment he stood still, considering the direction he would take.

To the north, an abandoned vegetable plot had yielded a few onions to Chibi's hoe and, another time, a handful of small, blackish potatoes. His mother had cooked them to a greyish-purple glue that made him retch, but it was a change from the dried sweet potatoes they ate stewed to a thick syrup at almost every meal.

He started for there but stopped to look up at pine-choked hills to the north, now scarred with grotesque black streaks where stray incendiaries had landed. He had found mushrooms there only last fall. They had been fleshy and delicious, thrusting up from decaying logs like comic hats. He had carried them home in his sleeve. His mother made a delicious soup that gave them all diarrhea but it had been worth it. Starting to run, his *geta* drumming softly up into the woods, he imagined his mother's surprise when he dumped the mushrooms in her lap.

But the path he remembered had disappeared. The fires! He could find no mushrooms. Stumbling downhill, head bowed like an old man's, the tears burned in his eyes.

Because he never spoke much, some of the villagers thought Chibi wasn't quite *right* but his mother knew better. He was undersized because she had suckled him on breasts gone slack from a diet of mostly sweet potatoes. Most of

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her friends' infants had died from this — the doctors could only shrug their shoulders. But when Chibi did not die, she felt like the mother of Kintaro, Japan's boy hero.

At six, she had walked him to the kindergarten, but entering the classroom, Chibi spied the row of little blue smocks on hooks. He looked back to ask what they were for but his mother had deserted him! He would punish her for that. Every child, except Chibi, put one on. *Sensei* coaxed and shamed him in front of the class but he sat, lips clamped, staring thru her as if he had not heard. At rest time, when the children put their heads down, he bolted from the room.

His mother was outside, half expecting him. On their way home she bought him a row of tiny dumplings roasted over hot coals. She never mentioned school again.

Now he dropped to the ground, put his face against the warming cheek of the hill and cried noisily. He couldn't feed his family. His country, thousands of years old and never before defeated, had lost the war. There was no Japan. There was no descendant of the sun goddess. It was all a lie.

He cried until he grew hoarse, gasped for breath. Then an unfamiliar sound brought him to his feet, a truck on the Inuyama road just below him and traveling fast. He recognized the sound of a truck but not a Japanese truck — a thrill of fear ran through him. He wanted to see — began running and sliding down the loose soil of the embankment above the winding road. A tunnel of brown dust rose below him, lengthening behind the truck which he could hardly see. He leaped like a goat to be at the turn the truck would have to take. Maybe he could get a glimpse of the hairy faces.

But the thong to one of his wooden *geta* broke just then, pitching Chibi to the ground. One side of his face felt raw, his lip was bleeding. For a few minutes he lay there, nearly upside down, sucking his lip, hating everything, betrayed by everything.

Below him, the truck rattled past — there were soldiers in the back of the truck, not Japanese soldiers. They were laughing at him and yelling something like *boi-san, oi, you, boi-san!* Yelling and laughing, they threw packages toward him and then the truck was out of sight.

Forgetting his hoe, Chibi crossed the road, approached the packages warily, circling them like a cat. He picked one up — a very large tablet, brown with silver writing. Maybe soap. He breathed in deeply — not soap. It was some kind of sweet food — something good.

Stuffing both tablets into his sleeve, he started for home without going back for his hoe or his *geta*. Although he was barefoot, he ran down the road the way the truck had come, hardly touching down on the deeply crusted ruts, squinting his eyes against the dust that still floated above the road. The sun was rising faster than it ever had in his entire twelve years of life and the things in his sleeve were softening.

They were definitely softening. His mother would know what to do about it. They would want to know about the hair but the dust had been thick and they were going so fast. He'd forgotten to look.



“End of Delaware Ave.” Michael Allison

## Pilgrimage

Elaine G. Schwartz

Maria Elena Hernandez Perez, eyes  
the color of chocolate, mutters  
*maldito sol*, accursed sun, as she  
crawls across blistering desert sand,  
knees swollen, blue jeans strained red,  
empty water jug marking her tracks.

A smile breaks across her sunburned  
face, her daughters, Eugenia y Luisa,  
dance beneath winter sun, words  
trill from their moist pink lips –  
*San Serverino de la buena buena vida,*  
*hands move, hacen así, así el carpintero,*  
*así así así, así me gusta a mí.*

Maria Elena finds sanctuary beneath  
the canopy of an old *palo verde*, leans  
against its smooth, lime-green trunk,  
gives thanks, *le da las gracias*, as  
darkness swallows the western sky.

Maria Elena Hernandez Perez, mother,  
daughter, wife, *numero noventa y nueve*,  
found, twenty miles southeast of Tucson,  
eyes wide open, pink morning sun illuminating  
the silver rosary in her hands.

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## What She Doesn't Know

Geneffa Popatia Jonker

When he hits her, I feel a deep relief  
inside like a festering has been found  
and scraped out, a scab lifted off my  
lungs and I can breathe again.

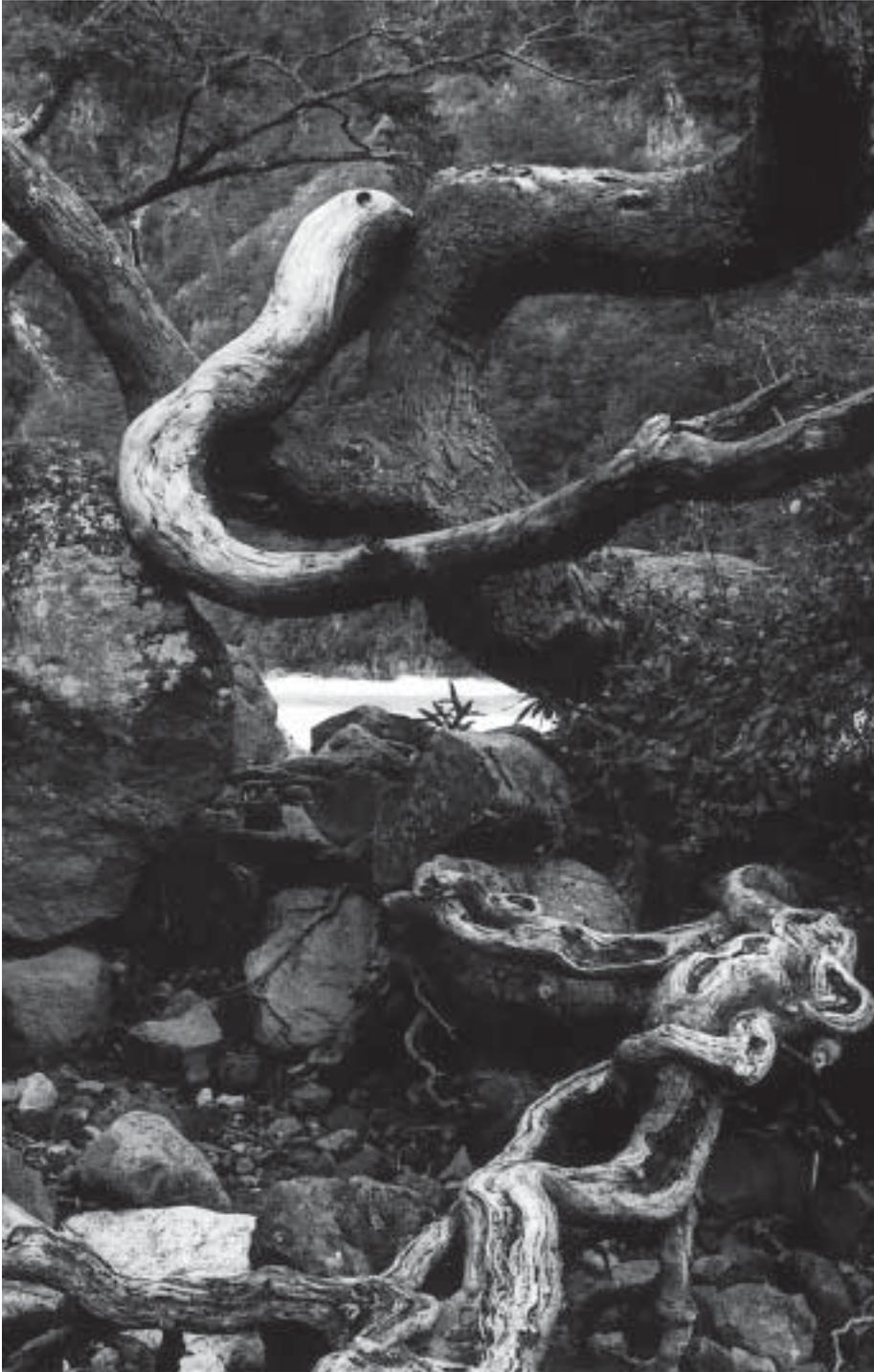
She comes to life in those moments when  
Daddy hits me; her eyes pop and hands  
clutch the air. "Aziz, maar-ni, maar-ni," she  
says, "Don't hit," but her voice dies away as  
his slaps grow louder and bolder like the  
alarm clock in the morning before he  
punches snooze.

How can she understand I resent her  
power, how her screams and sobs earn  
us the release of a few days peace?  
Choking on futile pleas and placations,  
at times I say, "Hit her. Okay. Hit her.  
I'll hit her myself." And I feel every  
slap, every blow to the head – metal  
wheels clanging inside my skull.

When she hits me, she uses the back  
of her hand. When she caresses me,  
she uses the front. And when her knuckles  
sweep towards me like the rakish wings  
of a big brown bird, she bites her bottom  
lip and her eyes look hungry and fed at  
the same time.

I rarely hit my daughter. When I do,  
it's to save her from him.

And for some reason, it only hurts when  
she does it.



Kelly M. Woods



KOAK

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# Lost in the Department Store

Jamie S. Uyematsu

And I can't tell which direction the escalator is taking me. . .

So what is it, that's gonna move this world?

Will it be a degree with my name on it, or a mountain of gold?

Don't flash your I.Q. in my face and try to tell me that you deserve more,  
This globe is full of smart people and we're still all stuck here, fighting our  
wars.

Are we meetin' on the level or is there some kind of protocol I'm refusing to  
notice?

'Cause we may come in all 12 fruity flavors, but that don't make you any  
sweeter than the rest.

Well shit, it doesn't take a diploma to have morals.  
You sure as fuck won't find love on a transcript,  
Or generosity on a resume.

And no, I'm not religious.  
I find that it tends to get in the way,  
Of how I value human life.  
I do not worship a particular context,  
Because these circumstances that we live are beyond prediction.

Will the owner of a:  
5'8" medium build, brown eyed, kinda scrappy, northern skin, wild haired girl  
with high cheek bones, a round nose, pointed chin, pierced ears, Asian blood,  
small hands, big feet, pretty face, thick thighs, thin breasts, scarf, but no watch,  
a ring through the lip, but not on the finger, relaxed stance, and quizzical tilt of  
the head, please come to the perfume counter to claim her soul.

Close your eyes and look at me again.  
Now, tell me what you see.

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## Lists

J. D. Hager

I am sitting on a bus. King County Metropolitan Transit Agency. The seats are all blue plastic. There is a residue of use permeating every surface, everything dull and battered but strangely the same, all the plastic and chrome tarnished through contact. How is it that humans tarnish everything they touch?

So I'm on a bus. This alone might stand as proof of how far I've fallen. It almost feels like where I belong, a homecoming of sorts. Sweaty, graffitied and tagged in alien script, smelly and often sticky; public transportation makes me think of a used condom. I've seen plenty of used condoms on buses before, taking up an entire seat like a paying passenger. That's what I feel like, a used condom. Even lower, if that's possible.

It is a dry bus, I'll give it that. In Seattle, dry spaces are much harder to find than you might imagine. So what if I didn't know where I was heading. I bought a day pass. I needed to do some thinking and I needed to be dry and let's face it, the bus was my only choice. Just sit and do laps between Seattle and somewhere and look out the window a lot, scowl at anybody that tries to talk to me. Outside it's raining sheets and blankets and pillows and whole mattresses, like an entire bedroom turned upside down and shaken out by its heels. Normal metaphors don't apply. But inside this grimy public bus is dry, and to tell the truth, it feels like the first good thing that has happened to me all day.

I'm completely drenched of course, my expensive suit a clinging nuisance, my underwear and socks in need of a good wring. I sit in a puddle in a blue plastic seat, the tiny flood on the floor expanding with each bank and turn, each stop and go of this prehistoric vehicle. Too many other sopping wet passengers like myself and the bus may no longer be dry inside. Best enjoy the dryness while it lasts. In Seattle everything ends up dripping eventually, muddy and boned out like a wet kitten. I mean look at me, wet, shivering, left out on the curb. On second thought don't look at me. I'm sure I look like shit. Look away, look far away.

Look out into the abyss, the Puget Sound ensnared by storm, its pine cushioned slopes obscured by squall. See that big island out in the Sound? That's Vashon Island. I always wanted to go there and check it out, but it's not like you can drive there. I guess you could, but it involves a ferry ride and that's not the same. I heard it's nice out there, a different view of the same old thing at least. I've never been though and every time I see it out there it reminds me of all the other things I haven't done, all the things I always intended to do but just haven't had enough time for. How easily our aspirations are forgotten during the bustle of everyday life. And all the while the things we haven't done float like islands in easy sight should we only choose to look. Look, can you see it? There's mist and rain and fog on the bus window demoralizing the view, but you can barely see it. It's there everyday whether you look or not.

If I had a pen and paper and wasn't oozing wet, I'd make a list. Lists help

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me get things straight and put myself in order. In my mind thoughts, feelings and words fly around on their own, but on paper I can see things and arrange them and wrestle with sequence. Writing it down I can look it over and make it all mean something. I'm not sure what I would list or what it would mean. I'd probably start with a list of lists I need to make. A list of all the bad decisions I've made in the past few years, so I won't repeat them. A list of the things I've lost, if I had enough paper. Maybe I'd make a list of ways to get it all back. I could list all the things I haven't done but still plan on doing, things I can start today like going to Vashon Island. I could make a list of all the pluses, every glimpse of the bright side. There is a positive skew to anything when approached from the proper angle, right?

There are other passengers on the bus with me. I'm sure they look at me when I'm not looking at them, but never when I look. Nobody looks directly at one another, not in the eyes. Etiquette dictates people look each in their own private direction. But people can only stare at the blue plastic seats or squint through foggy windows for so long; eventually they need to look and see who else is inside.

There is one guy sitting near the back of the bus, by himself next to a giant plastic bag. He wears dirty army fatigues and sprouts long, black hair and a chaotic beard in all directions. He doesn't seem to know about etiquette; he stares profusely wherever he likes. He is not having an argument with himself, yelling, swearing, unpredictably furious, but an argument with some sort of imaginary companion. *I told you, I fucking told you.* Silence. *Well what did you expect? That bitch went down the alley before.* Silence. *Second door on the left. If it's locked kick the fucker down.* Long silence. *You're fucking hungry? Fuck you!* Every time I look at him he's already staring at me, and I begin to worry that perhaps he is talking to me. Maybe he's communicating with me telepathically and I don't even know it. Is that possible? Maybe he's dangerous. But then again so am I. Practically a loaded gun. *Man, I fucking told you,* and then riotous, gurgling laughter.

I need to talk to someone, and definitely not Mr. monodialogue. Best get as far away from him as possible. Slurping toward the front of the bus, my socks squishing sponges in my shoes, I notice an empty seat directly behind the bus driver. It seems like the safest place on the bus, as if the driver is a rock beneath which I can find refuge. I slide into the blue plastic seat slow and deliberate, hanging onto the cold chrome support bars much longer than necessary. I settle into the seat so the smallest possible portion of my body touches it, arching my back and compacting forward so my elbows ride on my knees, my hands wringing together into a single fist before me.

Sitting straight across from me is a gray old bone of a man in red polyester slacks and a yellow rain slicker, his upright two-wheel cart covered in plastic beside him. The top of his head is bald with wisps of gray floating smoky around the sides. His face and shoulders droop as if something invisible ponders down upon him. I look into his eyes, gray like his haphazard eyebrows, and we share a silent, intimate moment. I smile weakly and he merely nods before averting

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his gaze to the empty seat beside me. His shoes are fancy loafer style leather and very, very white. I imagine myself as an old man like him, riding the bus with my two-wheel cart and polyester pants, the weight of so many years compacting my joints. I never imagined myself as an old man before. It seems absurd now that I know I'll never be one.

I face the driver, meeting his cold, blue eyes in the giant passenger-spying mirror. Icy blue, shimmering like a shadow rippled swimming pool, and looking right back at me momentarily before returning to the road.

"Hey, how's your day?" he asks, his voice light and sardonic, his eyes studying me in the mirror again. They glow electric, filled with intensity not present in his voice, hardened by the wrinkles framing them.

I consider losing it, unloading on him like a cosmic dump truck, but no need to ruin his day too. I almost tell him that it can't get any worse, but I've learned that lesson by now. Try to stay positive.

"Things are looking up, I guess." I shrug. I smile weakly. Weak smiles are all I got. "How about you?"

"Just another day in paradise, I suppose." His eyes fade back to the road. He spits the piece of gum he's chewing into his hand and tosses it in a wastebasket next to him. Holding that giant steering wheel with one hand casually on the top he pulls another long, slender piece out of his breast pocket and uses his teeth to help unwrap it. He slides it into his mouth slowly, biting it into tiny sections with his front teeth. I smell Juicy Fruit. "Some storm, huh?" he asks, glancing at me again in the mirror.

"Sure is." Looking out the big front windshield I notice how hard the rain falls. Giant raindrops splatter across the glass like insects. The wipers oscillate on hyper drive but have no chance to keep up. Visibility six inches and shrinking. There is a feeling of blind velocity, hurtling through opacity. Surely somebody is spraying the bus with a fire hose. "Hey, you got a pencil and paper I could borrow?"

"I got a pen but no paper, chief. You could use a bus schedule. What do you need it for?"

"I need to make a list. A couple lists."

"Oh yeah? Well here's a pen," he says, turning to face me for longer than seems appropriate considering he is driving through a rainstorm. He twists around so he can look at me as he hands me the pen, just enough to see me for a second out of the corner of his eye. As I lean forward to accept I glimpse a profile of his hawkish face, tight drawn skin over bony cheeks. His mustache is thick and bristly, practically sculpted. His hair hangs short in front but long and wavy in back, scraping the top of his blue uniform collar. He turns back to the road. "The schedules are right there next to you," he says, waving his hand in my direction before returning it to the wheel.

The bus schedules are mounted on the back of the thin plastic partition directly behind the driver. I grab one and fumble with it in my wet fingers, squishing back into my seat a bit. The thin paper disintegrates at my touch, and my fingers are so numb I can barely grab onto the tiny blue pen. No way is this

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going to work. I lean forward and poke the driver in the shoulder with the pen. "I'm too wet right now. Here's your pen back." But before he can take it, the pen drops and rolls toward the exit and down the stairs. "Sorry."

"No problem, chief."

"Is there a heater on this bus? My hands are pretty numb."

"No, not really. But it's warmer in the back, near the engine."

I look toward the rear of the bus. The bearded weirdo is still giving me the stink eye. "Yeah, but that crazy guy is back there."

"Who, Rasputin? He's harmless. He rides this line everyday. He'll shut up if you tell him to."

Studying Rasputin, I weigh my options. Harmless or not, it doesn't seem worth it. I look into the mirror and notice the driver studying me intently.

"To tell you the truth I was more worried about you. You got the look in your eyes. What the hell happened to you anyway? What were you doing on the side of the expressway like that?"

"I had an accident."

The driver watches me in the mirror, raising his eyebrows in expectation.

"So, where is this bus going?"

"To SeaTac. Express from the transfer center downtown. Usually I don't pick up passengers on the expressway, you know. Kind of unorthodox."

"Yeah, well thanks. I've had kind of a bad day." I glance at the old man sitting across from me. He is already looking at me but quickly looks away. "It's nice to be out of the rain," I tell the driver.

He nods. "That's why I picked you up. Guess I felt sorry for you. So what kind of accident? I didn't see a car. What happened?"

I know once I get into it I may not be able to stop, but something about the blue eyes reflecting in the mirror tell me the driver really wants to hear. "I drove a car into the Sound."

"You drove your car into the Sound? The Puget Sound?"

"Not my car, my boss' car. Into the Puget Sound."

His eyes turn concerned in the mirror, narrowing slightly. "Your boss' car? How'd that happen?"

"I think I was trying to kill myself."

"Kill yourself? You think?"

"I drove his car right through the guard rail and into the sound. I had my seatbelt on. I was ready to die. But once that car started sinking and all that water was coming in I stopped feeling sorry for myself and decided I had plenty of things left to do in my life. I changed my mind then I almost drowned anyway. I climbed out of the water and hiked to the expressway. You picked me up. That was like the first good thing that's happened to me in the past couple days. Seriously."

"Whoa, slow down, chief. Why your boss' car?"

"Because mine got stolen last night. By my *ex-girlfriend*." Just saying the word makes me shudder.

"So you stole your boss' car?"

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"Yeah."

"Do you hate your boss?"

"I just needed a car and knew where he kept his keys."

"Does the ex-girlfriend have anything to do with all this?"

The question makes me laugh. HA HA HA HA HA! Everyone must be staring at me by now. "When I stole my boss's beemer I was only planning on driving it to the airport. All I wanted to do was get the Hell out of town. But as I was driving and thinking, thinking and driving I just started getting so depressed. Thinking about everything she had done to me. And after all that she stole my fucking car. I couldn't believe it. I decided fuck it and just swerved off the road. But when I hit that water, everything changed."

The driver slows the bus in the growing traffic of the expressway. The brakes squeal like whiny children. "An epiphany" he says.

"Who?" I envision Epiphany, the Greek Goddess of failed suicides.

"An epiphany," he repeats. "A revelation. Finding God or something like that. When you felt that cold water you had an epiphany." He smiles knowingly as he brings the bus to a complete stop inches from the rear bumper of an enormous semi.

"I just decided I wasn't ready to die."

"Yeah, that's an epiphany," he says, spinning the big steering wheel to the left as he changes lanes.

I think about it, about what had been going through my mind as that BMW began to sink into that frigid murk. I didn't have some sort of religious awakening or go down a long tunnel of light. God was the furthest thing from my mind. I was thinking of my girlfriend — *ex-girlfriend* — and suddenly I realized why I had to live. Revenge. I wanted to live so I could kill her before I died.

"I guess it was an epiphany of sorts."

"So what, your girlfriend steals your car and you got to kill yourself? I think that's going a little overboard, chief."

"Man, you don't even understand."

"What's so bad that you'd want to kill yourself?"

"I broke up with my girlfriend."

"Hell, that's no reason to kill yourself. There's millions of women out there, chief."

"Yeah, but then she stole my car."

"Jeez, talk about an over-reaction." The driver shakes his head. "I happen to feel strongly about suicide." He twists around in his seat and provides a stern, chiseled look that makes him seem much older. He turns back around before continuing. "My father took his own life when I was six years old. It's just so selfish. People never think about everything they're leaving behind, about how hard they're going to make it on everyone who loves them. Think of your parents."

"They're dead."

"Your brothers and sisters?"

"Don't have any. No aunts, no uncles, no children, no alimony. I don't have a job anymore. Nobody'd miss me for a second."

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"Still, it's not natural. People should die of natural causes. People killing each other and people killing themselves, those things aren't natural. A man shouldn't have the power to decide how and when he's going to die. That's for God to decide."

"Do you really think that God is up there in heaven making decisions like that?"

His blue eyes narrow in the mirror. "I believe God has a plan for everyone."

"If that's true then God must be out to get me."

"What are you talking about?"

"Yesterday I found out I am HIV positive."

His eyes grow larger in the mirror, his head nodding as he processes the information. "I'm sorry to hear that." Probably everything he thought about me has somersaulted, and as he looks at me in the mirror I wonder what he sees now. Does he see a person worthy of pity, or of ridicule perhaps? Is he appalled, as if he were looking at a used condom sitting too close in the seat behind? When he finally looks away he doesn't look back. "Real sorry, chief," he says, suddenly afraid to take his eyes from the road.

I want to tell him that it's not my fault, that I was lied to and manipulated, just another victim. But I'm tired of being a victim, sick and fucking tired.

I want to ask him what he's thinking or how my confession has shifted his feelings, but instead I say nothing. Silence dilates the space between us.

I look out the front window, watching the rain fall even harder than before, wishing I could change out of my wet clothes. I peel my expensive jacket off and lay it down on the seat next to me, blue wool and double-breasted. It smells like a wet animal. The universe feels lighter without that jacket on, less oppressive somehow. I turn back to the driver. He is still afraid to look at me.

"Is there a bus that goes to Vashon Island?"

"The seventy-one does a transfer with the ferry."

"I was just thinking about going there to check it out."

"Not much to it really."

"Yeah, well I just wanted to go out there, you know, before I die."

PSSHHHHH. He makes a sound like he has sprung a leak. "You ever been to Vegas?"

"Sure, a few times."

"Cause I was going to say, if there's a place a person should go before they die I'd say it's Vegas. I don't know about Vashon Island though."

"Well, I want to go there anyway. Can I transfer and make it to Vashon Island?"

"Sure, back at the hub, but you got to pay for the ferry. I'm going to the airport first though."

I study the upper part of the driver's face, the part I can clearly see in the mirror. His eyes stare out the front window, a long, pensive stare that travels so far into the distance that it can only point inward. The tilt of his eyebrows and the bunching of the skin between his eyes give me a sense that this man is nuisanced by me, frustrated.

I want to seem less negligent, to let him know that it's not my fault, even

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though I'm afraid that it must be. "My old girlfriend never told me she had HIV. When I told her that I'd tested positive, she confessed that she's had it for four years. Four years. We've only been going out for two."

"She never told you?"

"Nope. I asked her why, and she said she was afraid of being alone. Then she stole my car."

The driver doesn't even look at me. He doesn't say another word. I mean, what could he say? Was he going to say he was sorry again?

The bus passes a big, green sign for the SeaTac airport, exit one mile. The rain seems to be letting up a little, visibility expanding the world outside. A line of red taillights blinks off into the distance like a string of Christmas lights.

"Would you like a towel?" asks a brittle, old voice.

I look toward the source. The old man in the red polyester pants is offering me a green towel, holding it up so it drapes over his forearm in front of him. I'm so cold, so wet; a towel is exactly what I want. "Yes, please," I reply.

The old man starts to get up, struggling against gravity and the rock of the bus with his bony knuckles wrapped around the chrome bars on either side of him. I stand and lean in his direction, sweeping the towel from his arm before he can stand. It's a tiny towel, faded green and hardly bigger than a washcloth, with a miniature *Radisson* embroidered in one corner.

"Thanks." I ease back into my blue plastic seat. I run the towel across my face, ruffle it through my hair, wrap it bandage-like around both of my hands. The towel doesn't stay dry very long. In mere moments it's even wetter than I am.

"You can go ahead and keep it," he tells me when I offer to return it. He smiles at me, something divine twinkling in his eyes.

It happens. The epiphany. I have to wipe my eyes to keep the tears from falling. It feels like the nicest thing anybody has ever done for me, this tiny faded towel, this miniscule scrap of fabric. I look around me for something I can give him, some way to reciprocate his kindness.

"Thanks. Do you want to take my jacket? It's pretty wet, but I think it would look good on you. The blue would match your pants and shoes. Make you look like a patriot."

I stand up again and offer my jacket to him. He takes it like he's afraid it may bite him, holding it in both arms as if it might be as fragile as he is. He looks at it and smiles, flashing dentures so white they shine. "Blue was my wife's favorite color." He holds the jacket up by the shoulders, inspects it, and begins to slide it on over his rain slicker. Even with the slicker on the jacket hangs awkwardly past his hands, loose like he's a kid trying on his father's suit. He grabs onto the lapels and holds his hands there for a moment. "It's not that wet, really. Thank you," he says.

Looking across at him I notice his eyes moist with emotion. Apathy seems like the safest philosophy, but I can't help it. I feel like I'm about to cry.

The man notices me looking at him and he smiles again. "I just miss her sometimes."

I nod, wondering if there's any way to console him. A smile is all I feel fit to

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offer, only this one isn't weak. It's strong and wide, slowly growing until it must take up my entire face.

I realize that sometimes the tiniest gesture can be the greatest gift, a morsel of grace that makes the world a shared experience. We are two lonely men sitting on a bus, about to cry, our smiles somehow bridging the space between us and creating this blissful moment of agony.

The bus driver pulls into the airport, following the loop past the departures and then a second loop around past the arrivals. The old man stands up at the arrivals, holding the handle of his two-wheel cart entombed in plastic. He notices me watching him, and flashes a quick smile in my direction. "I'm meeting my daughter," he says. "She told me not to bother coming to the airport because she knows I can't drive anymore. I'm going to surprise her." He rolls the cart a few steps toward the exit. "She a pediatrician," he tells the bus driver, as if this fact explains some important truth. The bus driver stands and takes hold of the old man's cart, carrying it down the three steps and setting it on the sidewalk. The old man waves as the driver closes the door and pulls away from the curb.

"Nice old guy, huh?" the driver asks. I nod, watching the old man as he recedes from view. He is still waving when I lose sight of him, and I am still smiling even though it seems very sad, an old man standing in the rain waving at no one.

Soon all the old passengers have been exchanged for new. Businessmen with briefcases and cell phones. Each carries on his own conversation as the bus rocks along. At the final airport stop the driver stands and faces the passengers. "I'm five minutes ahead of schedule. I'm going to use the can and buy a cup of coffee." None of the businessmen pay any attention to him. He points to me and asks, "Do you want a cup? My treat." I smile of course and nod my head. The driver leaves the bus and closes the doors behind him, running across the street in the rain and through the big sliding glass doors into the concourse.

I see a businessman rifling through a collection of papers inside his briefcase. My hands are dry enough to write now, so I approach and ask him for a spare piece. He hands me one without even looking at me. I find that skinny, blue pen nooked in the entrance steps of the bus and sit down to begin my list.

At the top of the page I write,

*Things I want to do before I die*

*1. Go to Vashon Island*

*2. Forgive Janna*

*3. Kill Janna*

*4.*

I set the piece of paper down on the seat next to me and look at it. Not a very impressive list. I know there has to be something else I want to do before I die. There has to be more to life than travel, forgiveness and revenge. I want to try everything. I just can't think of what everything entails right now. It will come to me if I think about it long enough.

Maybe over a cup of coffee.

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# How I Spent My Summer Vacation

Bill Milestone (1958-2003)

I believe, no I'm sure, it was that scene in the hotel elevator in Maui, when I was seven. The loud woman with a floral print dress and matching sun hat said: "Did you hear how pushy those people were downstairs? I'm not surprised," she continued, but conspiratorial now, taking us into her confidence, "I'm sure they're Jewish."

It was just the four of us. My mother, my sister and me, and the flower print lady. I knew, instinctively, that something should be said. We were Jewish. If nothing else, we should state it clearly. I looked at my mother, expecting a quick reply. Not violence, certainly, but a cutting remark, something to put the woman in her place; *something*. Seconds ticked away audibly, my mother's face frozen solid, staring straight ahead. Her normally pretty mouth was locked in a straight line, not a smile, not a frown. I think this is called tight-lipped. Still, I waited for some response. Nothing. The elevator stopped and opened. Out stepped the flower print lady, still smiling broadly, unaware, while my faith in my mother's dignity, and in the rightness of things, closed shut, in sync with the elevator door.



Alissa Goldring

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# The Hug

Helene Simkin Jara

She was afraid, but she had to go to the funeral.  
Her sons would see her cry, or even  
sob  
perhaps,  
for the first time.

She supposed all the parents would be sobbing, too. After all,  
it could have been one of their kids  
riding the skateboard  
holding onto the truck's mirror  
for fun.

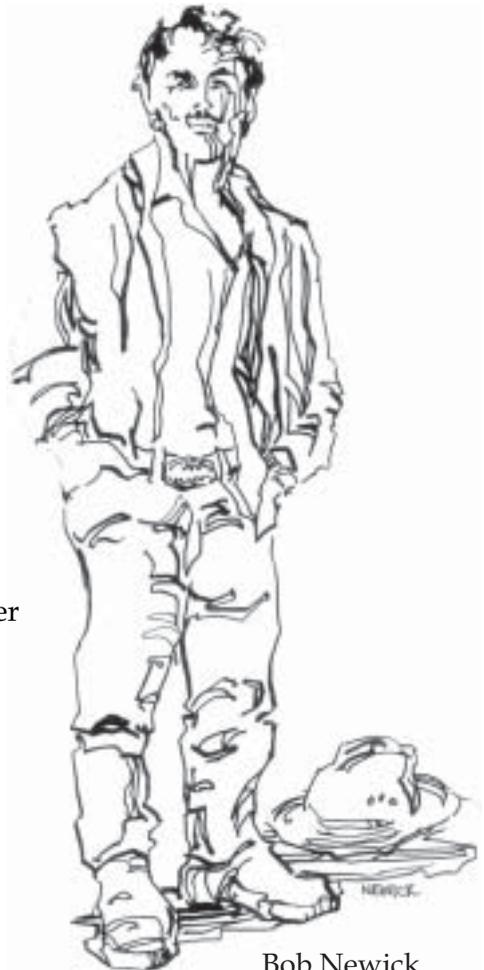
When she saw the mother walk up to the open casket and  
lovingly caress  
her dead son's hair, she wanted  
to cry out loud,  
but like the fathers,  
she held it  
inside her eyes.

She didn't know the driver,  
but the passenger practically  
lived at their house.  
She remembered his mom  
telling her  
that her son was a hemophiliac  
and that  
"yes" she was worried.  
But what could she do? As long as  
she gave him his shot,  
even if he fell skateboarding,  
he wouldn't bleed to death.

The father said he didn't blame the driver.  
He said kids do dumb things.  
What a man, she thought.  
That is how a man should be.

The fifteen-year-old passenger, towering over  
everyone in the room,  
walked alone up to the casket and stared  
at his good friend, remembering  
and knowing  
it was too late. He was only along  
for the ride.

The father of the  
dead boy  
threw his arms around the kid and  
hugged him.



Bob Newick

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# Intimacy's Ghost

Katrina Marvin-Travis

Remember in Monterey  
how everything was all coarse sand and red iceplant and the otters  
knifed in and out of the waves like birds of prey and the wind  
bit at the apple of my cheek, drawing out the pink, and I  
laughed in spite of it  
and everything else? But  
you weren't with me then.

Remember in Memphis  
where they sold long island iced teas in the street, tall  
and shock blue, and around  
every corner was another karaoke bar and the night air was heavy  
with smoke, and sweat, and deep reedy voices  
so it was hard to breathe without a wide smile, some  
misplaced gill? But you weren't with me then  
either.

Remember in my uncles silver boat I caught a rainbow trout  
and posed for the camera with the smell of river in my hair  
and its scales clinging  
like sequins  
to the downy hairs on my arm? Or  
in my front yard, where running through the clover flowers, I got my first  
bee sting on the tender pad  
of my fourth right toe?

If you were there, you would have smiled  
and shook your head at my bold bare feet on the blooming summer lawn.

    You would have  
brought me ice, showed me how to hold it  
just so  
and I would have prayed  
for you to kiss it, that silky, secret skin  
that had only ever known the touch  
of the toe right next to it. But it seems  
you were never there, no matter how I invent you, never where  
and how I would have wanted you  
just so, nor where and how I think  
you would have been with wild hair, veiled eyes, and sparse, ambiguous  
words.

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Remember in Petaluma  
when we bought warm strawberries and ate them there  
by the side of the road? The juice threatened to run down our chins,  
to make children of us  
again  
and you plucked a stranded seed  
from between my teeth. Later that afternoon  
you held my hand, first the satin glide  
of fingertips, then palm  
flush to flattened palm  
and you told me a secret I can still remember word  
for hushed and private word. But that  
never even happened at all.



Lucien Kubo