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DENALI

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Sweethearts

RAMSEY TAINTON



The Routine of Others

ERIN COSTELLO

The ivy ran itself through her hands
Along the sidewalk
That stepped on her shoe sole twice daily.

The doorknob turned her hand
To an open door
And the darkness saw her as the inside stepped in.

The room, now filled with her presence
Allowed the sink to touch her fingers
And the water washed itself with her skin.

The carpet moved under her feet,
With the stationery door approaching.
She was back on the sidewalk that stepped on her sole.

The cold felt her as the outside took her back
Where the ivy touched her ankles
And the air inhaled her warm breath.

With moving ivy others felt her move.
And the air was warm,
Because that's what happens to a breeze when it touches people.

In Goya's Black Paintings

EMILY REED

There was always a mouth,
there at the center of the storm,
at the fount of chaos
and the end of all things.

There are those who touch
with bruising fingers
all the delicacy and delight
and howl in rage when it goes
limp beneath their probing.

The giant leaves the village,
its fists clenched in an infant's rage
crying with throat thick,
I hurt it! It hurts!

Somewhere in a brown and sinuous plane
a dog looks up from its great shadow,
its face a pebble in the ringing deep.
It looks up to the must be blue.

Now look down.
The dead deer there on the roadside,
look into its eyepool. The flat
trapped light narrows then softens,
as if to say, from a point past pain,
oh you poor things.

But who can change their shape?
For the Fates have us in their brute hands,
biting their fists as they squint
down into the slouching trees.

Unfinished

A.M.L.



The Babe Wore Red

The babe wore red. The babe wore red.

That's what he remembered the most as he peered through the chain link fence. He clutched a dripping burger, soaking through the grease paper, pickled mayonnaise in rivulets between his knuckles. Some wary ship through a cracked sea. He wanted to remember her—that's what he told himself, staring out past the broken concrete and shuffling peasants. He wanted to remember her in red—in a red dress, a red dress in a market of fleas.

Him, pawing through open troughs of dead-eye dolls and small glass figurines, seeing her pass by in the reflection of a van side-door. She twisted through the sun glare hot smoke of urban campfires, twisted past the peasants with their own dead eye doll stares. He thought of the 1939 World's Fair and Dali—Salvador Dali, Dream of Venus exhibit, those orgasms waiting on the tongues of those men, and an ache in the abdomen. He could see why the man had admired Hitler—not just the small of his back, but the sheer will, the sheer determination!

There, Dali—the womb silk of a woman's flesh, a bottle of Bordeaux, and a veranda, below marching an army, but the desire thick on your tongue

like broiled lamb loin, cigarettes; the subterranean appeal of dancing hours later in sequins and suit, hats taken on and put off. The meglo feastie! What rush! He would have followed her then; he followed her now, breaking off mid-bargain with a plastic-faced man melting slowly in the summer heat, like the dolls he had for sale; cut through them with an old butter knife.

The feast of youth.

He pursued her, breathing through his mouth, successive rhythms, synced to the soft padding of her feet. She stopped at an artist's booth, scooping up the cloth covering his card table, and grinning at renditions of Spiderman and Dick Nixon in deadlock over world peace. But they were only men, not saint-breed. They would still die in misery. She played with the corner of the cloth then thanked the artist and continued on. In the center of the market was a barbecue pit with boasting flames, smeared wooden picnic tables, and half-naked dancing children. Without the adult society, these younglings would have set up their own feudal systems and chosen a king, perhaps a queen, her skin to be covered with years of paint.

Ah, adult intoxicants. She flirted with a cook, took a paper plate of black ribs and potatoes, a

JOSHUA HUSSEY

glass of dark wine.

He sat next to her with a greasy burger dripping oil fat; her back was to him, an Irish band played a jig for the dancing monsters now strutting long legs after each other like animals in heat, and he could smell her freshly oiled skin, soft soft soft flesh, neck and hair dark like the alone moonless no night no lights, run-falling through the underbrush, the deadfall traps to break backs, alone again screaming softly.

He reached out to touch the tails of her hair, but she turned at that moment and he bit deeply into his burger, shooting juice on the table, the back of his throat clenching with sudden meat, a wash of euphoric want, his want, the hunter of meat, the weak ones picked off first like a lame doe, struggling under the jaws of a silken predator, smooth watcher from the woods, far back in and growling low. She finished her wine, left the eating pit to the judgment of the wild young, the elders in alcohol submission, the wants of their loins giving over to the energy of children.

The balance of the Buddha. She bought the figurine from a woman huddling under a leather quilt, the squat smiling wood belly of a man to plant 'neath her sycamore or birch, or careful ar-

rangement at bathroom sink. He stopped following her at the market gates; she passed through, out to the wild wilderness of automotive monstrosities and supper responsibilities.

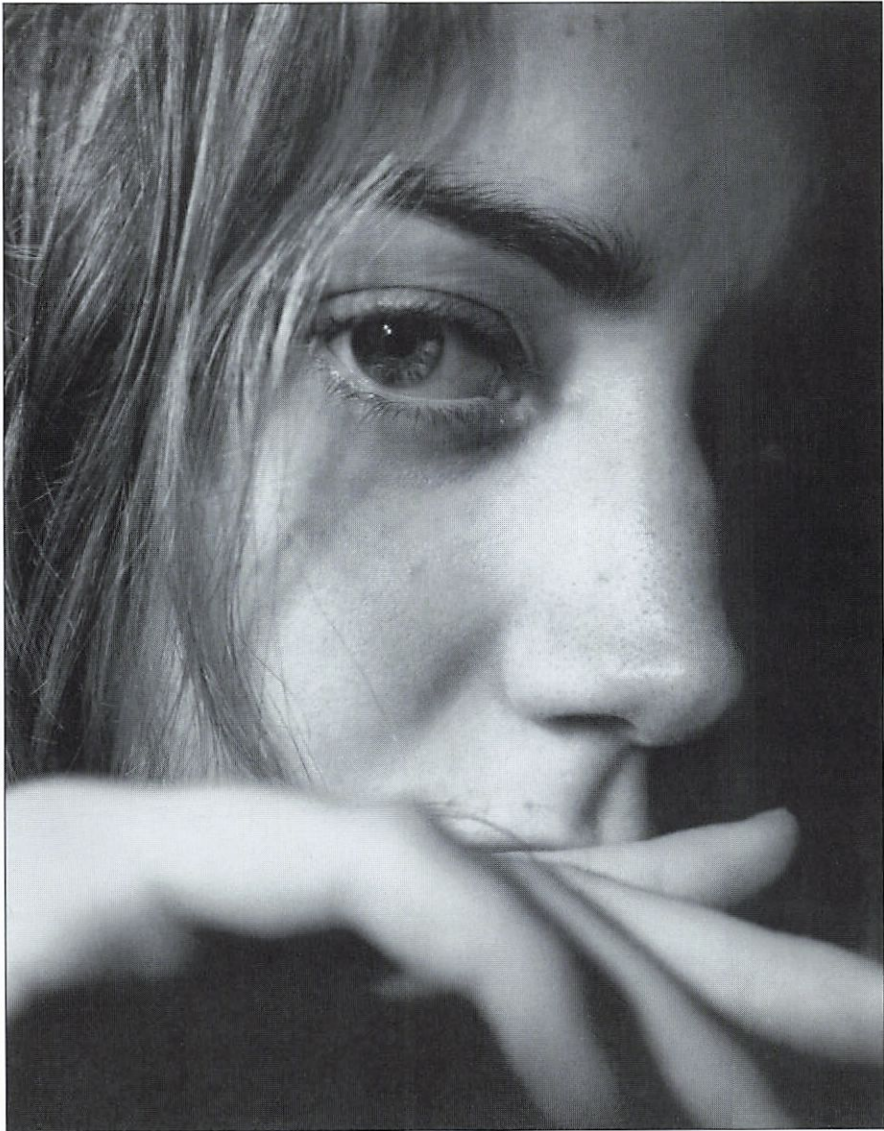
He crushed the burger unknowingly in hand, forced himself to remember. She wore red. The babe wore red. ॐ

In the Kitchen

LUCIA SHANNON

Get in the kitchen and I'll tell you: Today
counseling ground my brutal past into pulp.
Can't you tell I'm beat up?
Can't you see the bruises?
You can't imagine those addict bitches, spilling their guts
like broken eggs out thick onto the filthy floor.
Pass me that onion, hun.
A woman, I won't name her,
the one who speaks four languages, confessed
she took the whore who slept with her husband
out to the forest and cut her tongue out.
Cut her fucking tongue out!
Never mind my prostitution
Never mind the pimpingblackmarketviolentmen
Never mind the cokemethcrack.
Never mind the twentyyearsofmyfaceshoveddownabottle,
knife and skillet in hand when
I knew they were coming to kill us.
We were stranded in the mountains,
nearly frozen that winter. I kept warm
chopping firewood, but the kids: my son,
my son starting forest fires, neighbors
molesting my daughter,
and we starved —
starved —
but she cut a woman's tongue out.
Cut her fucking tongue out.
No, use the other plate. This one, here.
I'll tell you: I am
constantly cowering, terrified, sick
of the haunting, half-shadows
wretchedparanoia
and not a goddamn shiver shows.
I killitinside with every cringe. And
I will pop melt scream shatter,
drink it out.
More tea?

Jesika
RAMSEY TAINTON



Boxcars

MARLENA BENEDICTO



Maurice the Mouse Killer

MATT KEATING

Maurice took a long, serious look at the dents and scratches, blood and guts permanently etched in his 34" Easton softball bat. The bat served more as a security device and rodent eradicator rather than any type of sporting equipment for the monstrous middle-aged man.

But this story is not about the bloodstained bat as much as it is about the madman who wielded it. Today, on this early Colorado June Saturday morning, Maurice was fated to meet an unimaginable adversary, one ready to stand for the rights of his fellow kind and challenge the horrific, brutal acts of Maurice the Mouse Killer . . .

The ugly giant of a man reached with his massive hands to snag a burlap sack, which he used to wipe clean the remnants of mouse guts that clung to the shaft of his nasty metal weapon. The sun was just barely creeping through his dusty blinds. The particles of dust illuminated by the rising light were indistinguishable from the foul, unrecognizable stench that permeated Maurice's dank trailer, reminding the security-guard-turned-carnival-worker that he, yet again, had forgotten to take the trash out from his beyond-filthy trailer. No worries, though. The trash in Maurice's trailer served as a decent lure for the ubiquitously pesky field mice that traveled with Colorado's Carnival of the Weird. Keeping his trailer in foul disrepair, then, was the best way to combine his duty and pleasure. In his twisted mind, he was doing no wrong, for it was Maurice's distinct daily honor to rid each and every trailer and temporary tent of various vermin and rodents. How he went about his grotesque chore was left only to his lopsided imagination, limited as it was. Still wiping at the bat with the dingy burlap, he went over the high-

lights of the day before and counted, on his stubby man fingers, the number of mice who had met their dismal end at his hands.

"Maurice . . ." A tiny voice creaked behind him, buried in the foul pile that was his kitchen.

A pinkish hue of porn and musty man-sweat kept most everyone at bay and away from the trailer of the carnival's overnight security chief. So, when Maurice heard the squeaking, almost child-like voice coming from the tiny kitchen in his fortress of human filth, he was understandably taken aback.

The surly man-giant clenched his 34-inch, stomped several loud feet and stopped dead in his half drunk tracks at the idea of plain English sounding from his weathered kitchen cabinet. Sure, he had been drinking Black Velvet from a rusted flask all night, but that hardly seemed likely to bring on a full-blown hallucination. This was unheard of—someone was going to get an ass-kicking! But who would dare pull a fast one on Maurice? Who had the balls to dupe a 350 lb. evolutionary U-turn such as Maurice The Mouse-Killer? Was it Bob the carnival barker? Maybe it was the bearded bitch and her band of midgets goofing off in their own drunken stupor.

Whoever was moronic enough to disturb Maurice this fateful morning was sure to get an Easton 34-inch big barrel upside the head for trespassing, breaking and entering, and being a downright fool.

Maurice inched closer to the kitchen cabinet... *It had to be one of them midget folk*, he thought. "I'm gonna get you..." His barrel chest was ready to explode with rage as he cocked back his bat, preparing to smack some drunk little man to death. "I'm

gonna get you good!"

He swung the moldy cabinet doors open, revealing nothing but sad abandoned mousetraps, an unopened can of Ajax and a pair of lime green plastic buckets.

Nobody there.

Maurice was not wholly convinced, though. He squinted one bloodshot eye and raised an eyebrow, spying deeper into the dilapidated cabinet...

"Hey, Fatso!" A miniature voice chimed with a slight echo, "I'm in here!"

The bat fell from his hand, as clearly there was no one there. And again, Maurice attributed this voice as a direct result of either too much sauce or just sheer exhaustion.

"Who said dat?"

"I did, you lethargic waste of space. I'm right here." The sound, coming from the bucket, meant only one thing: the large, drunken rent-a-cop recluse was going insane. But, in spite of the approaching insanity, he was also becoming increasingly *pissed off*.

Tired from his drunken carousing of the wet carnival grounds the night before while he played 'security guard,' it would have been quite an accomplishment for the gap-toothed, brutish beast to comprehend *anything*—nevermind what the morning still held for him. With his over-sized, muddy boots he kicked at the bucket.

"Whoaaa!" The voice tumbled out of the knocked over bucket, revealing the small form of Maurice's sworn enemy—a black-eyed dun-gray field mouse.

The mouse brushed the dirt off his knees and stood upright. "Thanks, man! I thought I was gonna starve to death in that stinky bucket that you obviously *never* use."

Maurice was a little slow. "You talk?"

"We have a winner!" The mouse continued to dust himself off.

What little patience Maurice had was very quickly fading, "Rat, I am gonna kill you dead!" He raised up the bat and leveled it at the mouse, preparing to take his whole damn kitchen apart if it meant killing the creature that now stood mocking him.

The tiny mammal held up a miniature claw and stood up higher on his hind legs (still only three inches from the ground). "Look, Mister," he squeaked, "Number one: I'm a mouse--not a rat. Number two: how dare you call *me* filthy. I did just spend the last four hours under your sink, y'know."

There was no response from the puzzled giant. You could almost hear the rusted whir of the ancient cogs turning in his head as he puzzled over how, exactly, to deal with the animal.

"You're sad, Maurice, and you know it." By this time, the little mouse was desperate. He shrank under the shadow of the bat as Maurice stood there, waiting.

"Look," he continued, "I know you want to pound my mouse guts into oblivion with that death stick of yours—"

"I wanna send you to hell," Maurice interrupted.

"Good . . . good. You should," agreed the mouse. "But if you're gonna splatter my guts into oblivion... I wanna go out big. I want you to smack the life outta me with that bat so hard and far that I'll be remembered as your best kill ever."

The fat man stared blankly while rain droplets began to pick up a pitter-patter on the trailer's rusted roof, the light from the blinds fading into the darkness of a sudden rainstorm.

"It's not every day you meet a talking mouse—is it, Maurice?"

"No. Bet it's not every day you meet a madman ready to smash your furry little brain in, huh?"

The mouse chuckled and offered up a contingency plan for Maurice to introduce him to the Carnival Manager. Little effort was put into talking Maurice into this poorly planned business proposition. And, as Mouse predicted, Maurice didn't bite.

"Look, Mouse, your time stealing crumbs on this miserable planet are over . . . and NO . . . I'm not gonna take you to my boss!"

The mouse was satisfied with the man's disdain for bettering himself and urged Maurice yet again to "go all out." If he was slated for destruction by the bat that killed so many of his brethren, he may as well go with some notoriety.

"O.K. Mouse, enough crap." Maurice reached out and grabbed the mouse, nearly squeezing the life out of him, "I'm gonna take you to the highest point this two-bit carnival has and launch your miserable mouse ass across the river."

"I look forward to meeting my maker at the hands of the big bat, Maurice."

Puzzled, Maurice ignored the insane rambling of the rat he held tight in his hand and marched out of the trailer, past the games booth, far from the food court, beyond the House of Fun and the Tumbler, away from the Zipper and the shoddy Ferris Wheel, straight to the Slide of Doom—the carnival's highest point that, indeed, held a rather marvelous view of the river on one side and the sprawling circus tent set-up of the carnival on the other.

Step after muddy step, Maurice trudged up the football-field-high stairway. Bat in one hand, mouse in the other, Maurice felt satisfied . . . the meese's doom spelled a certain sick end to his otherwise whacked out morning.

Maurice was still sporting his undersized beer-stained "wife-beater" that was becoming increasingly soaked and by this time was translucent, showing off dirty kinked chest hair and one grotesquely misshapen nipple. The heavy rain beat down, harder as they went higher.

The mouse, eyes closed, heard a thunderous roar in the background that was muffled by the vindictive stomping and muddy slushing on the massive slide's wooden steps until, finally, the two reached the top.

"O.K., Mouse, this is it," the man roared into the rainy wind. "End of the road—time to meet your bloody buddies!!!"

The filthy excuse for a man tossed the mouse high up in the air and reared back with his bat, anxious to jack the little creature's bones and smart-ass brain so far and so hard . . .

Thankfully, Mouse opened his eyes just in time to bare witness to nature's fury. For Mouse came out of this unscathed and quite alive—able, indeed, to re-tell this amazing tale. What was about to happen was exactly what Mouse had fore-saw: the fat man's murderous metal bat, that 34" slaughter stick, acted as a rather effective lightning rod—frying the fat fool who'd been dumb enough to hold it so high in his gruesome grip.

High atop the Slide of Doom, the magnanimous Mouse thanked the heavens, slid to safety, and bid a fond farewell to the charred remains of Maurice the Mouse Killer. ☘

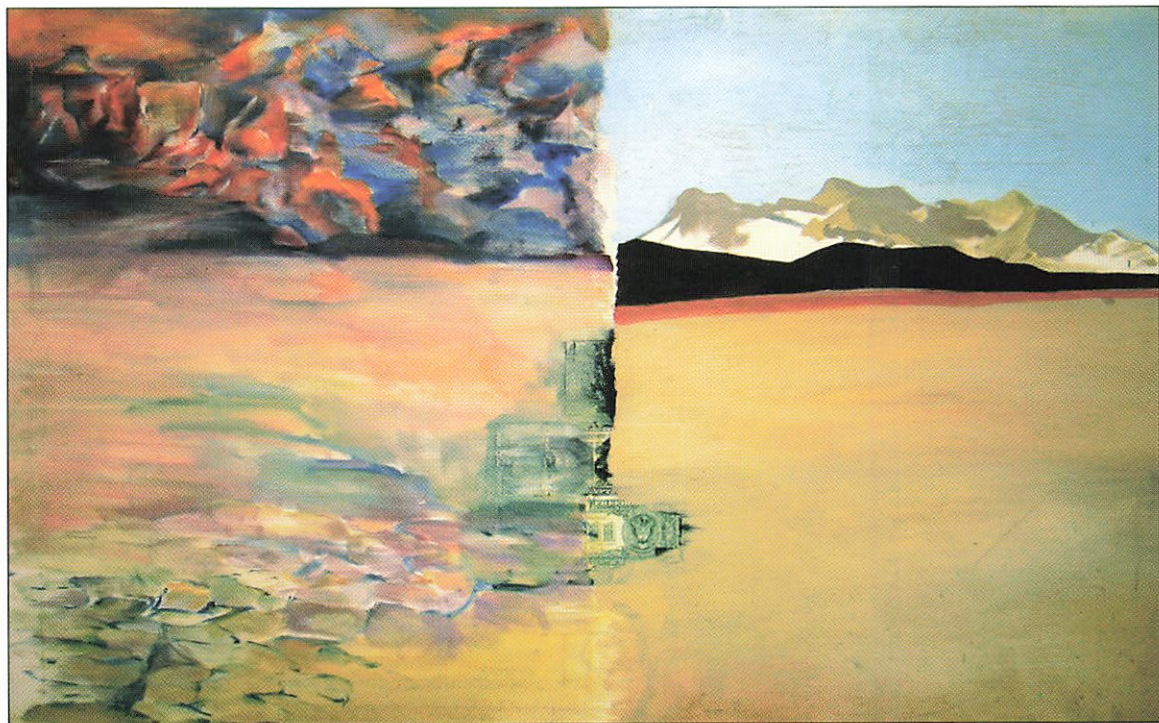
Untitled

RACHEL WHITNEY



Untitled

RACHEL WHITNEY AND SEBASTIAN FRASER



Celestial

i knew it would come to this,
this stupid
helpless
misery of affectation,
this
angry pointing of
fingers,
this
string of salt
and
wet questions.

when a woman says
she's okay with something,
what she really means
is that she will ignore it
for now
and then get angry
at a later point when
you
fail to change.

when a woman says
she's not looking for anything serious either,
what she really means
is that she will wait for you to fall in love with her
and eventually
erupt into anger
when you don't.

when a woman says
she likes your writing
what she really means
is as long as it isn't about her.

when a woman says
you were meant for each other
what she really means
is that she's afraid to be alone
and you,
you are the best she can get
or, possibly,
you are
the easiest to keep.

COLLIN CAVASHER

me,
i suppose i'm not
any easier
to deal with,
either.

when i say
i want to take things slow,
what i really mean
is that i want to sleep with you,
but not have commitment.

when i say
i think we should be friends
what i really mean
is that i want
to be left alone
and then
only until i've been drinking.

when i say
i don't care,
what i really mean
is that i knew it would turn out this way,
with us
strained and awful,
three miles apart on the couch,
dinner ruined,
and us too tired to talk.

i am lurching
from stone to stone,
pretending
that this changes
with
movement,
like
fish
losing memory
with each
passing moment.

The List

There's justice
—just for those of the list,
'cause new pro-cons chose
for freedom to be gone.

In God we trust
—though some only know
angel dust—
the police squad
while upholding peace
—thinks you're better off
deceased—
bust an 18 year-old kid
frying on acid.

There's a hope,
—when he is sober—
for repentance,
up until the sentence
provided the misguided,
confused human
with a lop-sided abuse
planned by the damned,
power hungry
devourers.

The kid, depressed and broke,
needed assistance,
not some government
shoving sticks
in his tire spokes
to enhance
a politician's finances.

The wolf dances
in clothes made from
the slaughtered sheep
that couldn't climb
the incline
to being socially divine
'cause the mountain
was too steep for
a life born
with its back to the knife.

Trying to crawl
through the thorns
as he's torn limb from limb
—unmourned—
and who will sing the hymn
while clinging
to the diminishing embers that
—when the legal system finishes with—
no one will remember?

JORDAN TURNER

They developed bombs
to dissolve your very protons,
resolving their problems
with revolvers,
—all I got was a four-leafed
clover —
when the world's over
they still can't feed four-thousand
with two fish and greed,
while leading a dead horse
that already suffered
so many beatings
at the tent of meetings.

Gentlemen,
—anger is fleeting,
remorse is eternal —
change course,
so another marine corps
doesn't get flushed
down the latrine
as he carries out
Big Brother's schemes.

Crying out
for a trap door at dawn
while they keep
drawing on brawn.
I just know this won't
grow into a swan

swabbing the deck of a
shipwreck
to buy more dip
for his memory chip
under old glory
—a bloody rag
that stays on top
of the white flag —
that couldn't pay its
legal fees with a PhD
in artistry

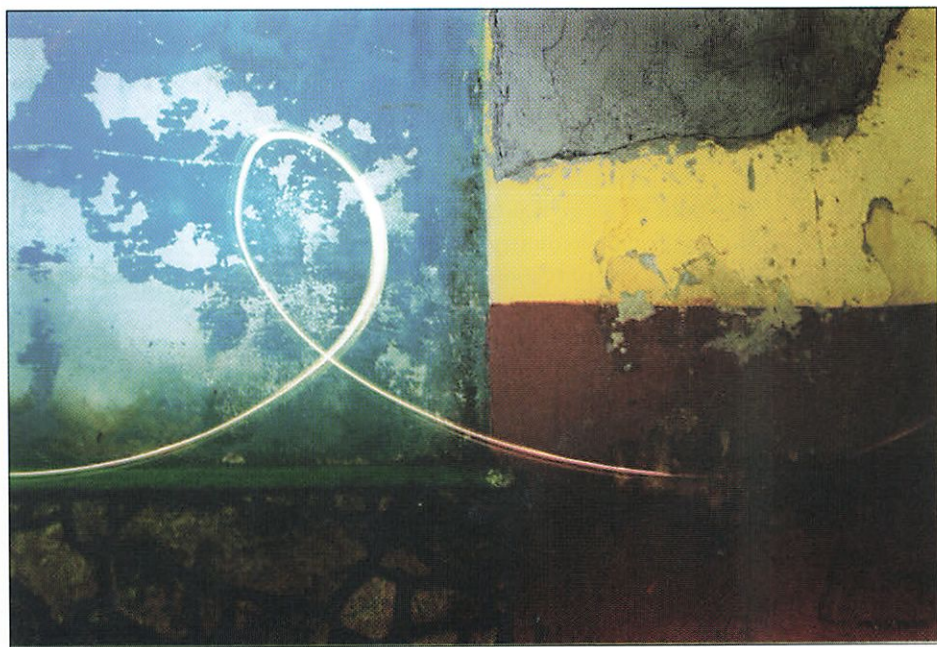
I'll just depart
with a starchart
—in a stock car
unconcerned with
the czar —
as I disagree
with the banshees holding
degrees in disease
—they summon the LAPD
by cell phone to kill
with a cyclone

those that couldn't carry
the stone of atonement alone.

El Katon Azul, La Puerta, La Pared

CARLY BOVARIA





Have/Have Not

Oedipus Rex did not know who his mother was when he consummated their vows; did not know to look into the eyes of the rich man he ran through and see father. And where in all of Thebes was the voice of compassion? "He was born to this." "The gods see fit to punish him." No reason for compassion — no. People have never needed reason to condemn in the name of faith, divine retribution paving the way for detachment and blame. When we read that play

in my Bible-belt high school, this blue-collar farm kid raised the flag of pity alone. "How come no one feels sorry for this guy? He didn't know." But the discussion kept to facts and brass tacks, citing flat literary intent. And those kids in my class without conscience or capacity for empathy

are taking charge right now. See, I come from oil country. In my part of Texas, you're tycoon or waitress, and no one wants to build a bridge between. Poor kids drive through gated communities on winter nights to see the Christmas lights hung by politicians and cattle barons. Working-class tourists, they pack up families after dark to visit the land of milk and money. They

KITT JENNINGS

are born to this. And those classmates
of mine carry cold superiority with them,
iced glass packed into boxes between Masters
degrees and expensive office supplies. Entitlement
and disregard will make fine paperweights when they
unpack to move into law firms, corporations, medical practices

and courtrooms. At the end of the
work week, they'll sing sinners' hymns
in the Baptist churches that dot my hometown's
streets, dropping fat tithe envelopes into offering
plates that they may someday buy their way out of a
tragic fate. This is how they give back: to fat cats behind
pulpits who need it no more than they. But they are born to

that. Yes, stone the misbegotten.
Slash food stamps and school budgets
for big business tax breaks. The desperate
acts of desperate men then can only stem from
destiny. They are born to this. They are born to it.
Born into a lower class. Born into trading their dignity
for their dinner. Born into thankless and faceless and beat.

When does the voice of compassion speak?

A Woman

She is a woman
who used to scoff
at the concept of clocks
ignoring the fact
that her whole life
was a schedule
she took great pride in keeping.

She is a woman
who can count her days
like phases of the moon
a woman
who knows her body
like she knows
that only 28 days fit
inside an empty womb

She is a woman
and tonight she stands
naked and alone
scanning her body
like a secret
trying to locate
that place
they hid the device
that so rhythmically
measures out her fears.
The one,
that somewhere inside her,
beats out the questions
she doesn't want to hear:
Tick. . .
Am I barren . . . ?
Tock . . .
Can life be carried here. . . ?

She is a woman
who stands
naked and alone
curling her fingers
around her belly
Like they could
for a moment
stop the tides
as if, for once,
the oceans
would sit still
in their places
just to watch
as a woman's hands
willed a life to grow.

MIRANDA WILLETTE

She is a woman
and out of all
the maybes in the world,
this one she wants to know.

A woman
and this month
the moon waned
without her
leaving her waiting
her body like a wound
that forgot to bleed.

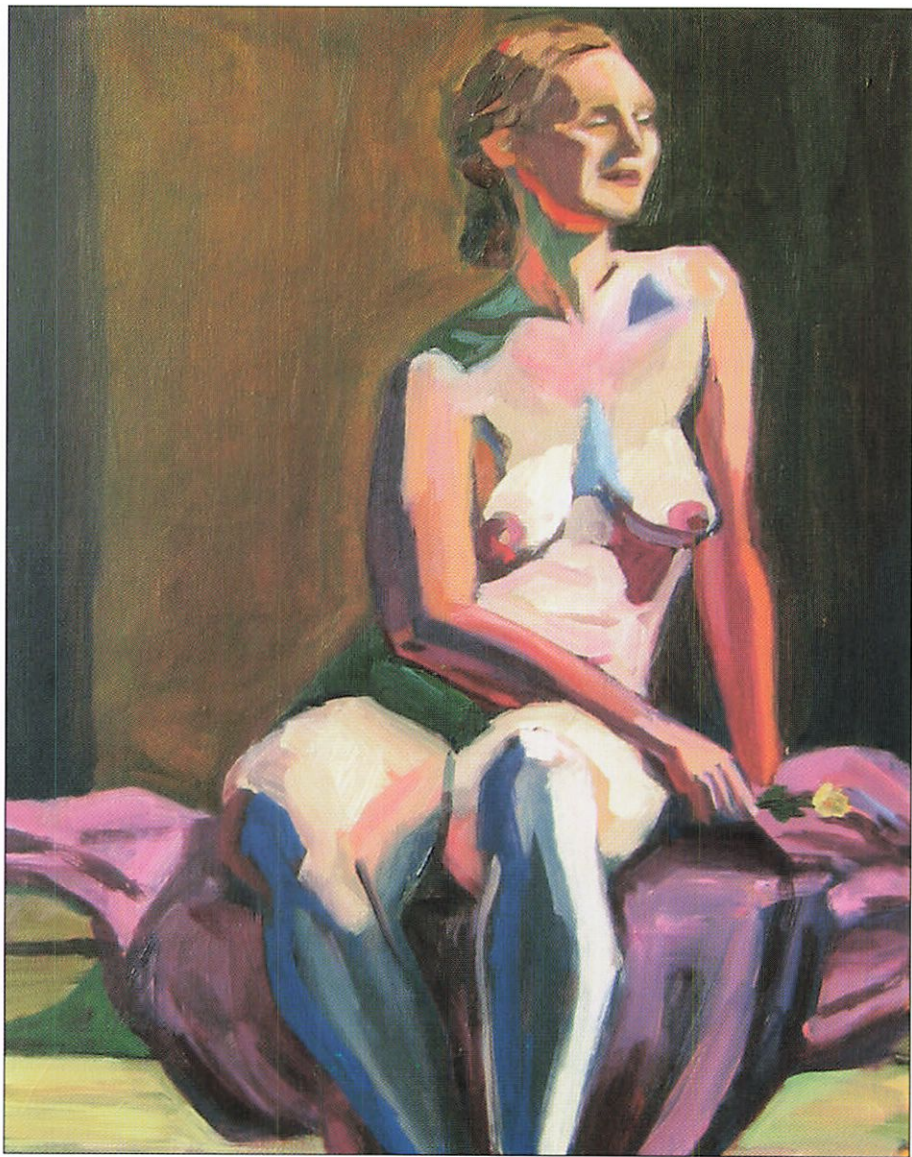
A woman
who hopes
it won't remember
while praying that it does
for out of all
the maybes in the world
this is one
she isn't ready for.

She is a woman
who has turned
counting into science
just to see how many
more days fit inside her.

A woman,
whose body will
later decide for her
as 45 in all
flow empty
from her womb

She is a woman
who used to scoff
at the concept
of clocks
But tonight,
tonight she's
just a woman
who stands
naked and alone

Kenee
CAROLYN (LINA) STAUB



Dane's fixer

COLBY PRITCHETT



Morpheo

VICTOR SCHRAMM

No buzzing in the lotus grove,
no ringing song of Orpheus.
In the land of Morpheus,
nothing calls to Apollo above.

Deathly silence, infinite —
broken, shattered by one sound —
His shovel tears into the ground,
echoing sharply with each hit.

Looming over sleepy herbs,
harvesting nocturnal buds
grown to mix with human blood
when human nerves become disturbed.
The shovel thuds.

Pockets full, his scythe and spade
in hand, the gardening is done.
Glancing through the gate of bone,
grinning, watching fates be made,
Hypnos leaves his dreamy glade.

The black gates unmanned,
alone in waking in this land,
sleep cherishes dreams of sleep
a bit before he too falls into the deep.

City Streets

RACHEL RAINWATER



Forms of Hands

GABE FETSKO



Desperate Conception

ZOË KEROUAC

I'm not supposed to say that
I'm writing this in class
Not supposed to admit that words
 are taking me over
 Pulling me under
Fucking my mind while I'm supposed to be
thinking about Chaucer and Spenser
and countless old men who would laugh at my
insanity
but count me wicked nonetheless
Because of my sex.
Because I can beguile a man with simple
 b i o l o g y

But what was I saying?
(Fuck, I haven't even written
the beginning of this poem yet.)

Gertrude Stein is creating me
a character in her poem.
I'm Kerouac traveled a long way
—The dharma bum finally
 falling off the road—
No one's written me that way before.
I've been an Alison and Acrasia
Always that wicked woman that

Chews men up
 &
Spits them out.

But now I'm Kerouac
(which I may never spell correctly).

Look at me now!
Spilling scrambled insanity onto
quiz pages that deserve
Far more respect than I can currently give
Beause of the verbs

Nouns

Adjectives

Juicy phrases and noises that
are screwing my mind in that teasing
slowing just edging inside way that makes me

Wet and,

Damn.

I am intellectually dripping.
Can't stop just yet cause
I'm too close to cumming.

— Yet another of my poems has come again to
dirt and smut and verbalized porn.
She's so vulgar, they said. But her words still ring
loudly and she still proclaims proudly that

"It's so much more satisfying to make love to a
blank page than to fuck a white screen."

In the aftermath of creation, she leans back and
breathes deeply, cursing herself for giving up the
slow suicide of Newport 100's two months before this

the most desperate conception.

Heron

STEPHEN BIRCH

The great blue heron lay just off the side of the river bike path, flopped over to the left with its right wing held out, trembling. One leg flexed in and out, the claw raked dirt, while the head wobbled, and neck doubled back on itself. The bird shivered, golden morning light bounced off the massive blue-gray wings tipped black on the underside. Shaggy feathers at the base of its long, tan neck crushed against the ground. Black streaked across the white head, like a neanderthal eyebrow, and formed a crest jutting out the back. Its foot-long, dagger-like yellow bill snapped open and closed like a suffocating fish's lips. The bill looked murderous.

A thing of perfect beauty, majesty, put to shame by injury. Frank stood transfixed, now ten feet away from the bird, his walk interrupted by marvelous pile of feathers and animal panic. He gawked at the bird in utter awe. He ventured a step forward. The bird glared at him with an unnerving yellow eye. A warning?

Frank had visited the Raptor Center, where injured birds of prey were taken for rehabilitation. He'd read all the brochures and felt he knew how to identify a bird in need of rescuing. This bird needed help, he decided to take the bird right then. He looked a long time at the bird, it appraised him, too, then he turned on heel and trotted back to the car. At the car he floundered the keys in shaking hand; started it with a few deep breaths. He drove closer to where the heron lay and took a towel from the back seat. He left the engine running and doors open. He silently stepped a foot closer at a time. The bird snapped its head toward him, warned in deep, harsh

croaks, "Frahnk, frahnk, frahnk." Each croak opened the bill wide.

"Shhhhhh." He tried to reassure it. He stood within two feet. It folded the broken wing close to the body, as if to show him. He closed and carefully folded the towel across the body, then tucked it around. The bird remained docile. He pushed hands beneath it and tested the weight: hardly ten pounds, if that. He picked it up and angled his head out of the way of the bill.

"Frahnk, frahnk, frahnk." The head pointed away. The neck billowed, pulled into the body, got stiff and relaxed. He moved to the car by inching footsteps. It seemed a lifetime before he reached it. He released the bird into the passenger seat, so that he could keep an eye on it. It no longer stared at him, but closed eyes and rested. Frank felt good. They rolled out of the parking lot, onto the highway, for a five-mile drive. As he exited the highway and drove the final couple miles it began to croak and stir. It lolled beneath the towel, shifted loose by moving wings, and turned to gaze at him, again.

"Come on, baby, just a little while longer." He turned up the Raptor Center driveway, a steep hill, parked. They made it.

"Frahnk, frahnk, frahnk."

"I'm so very glad to meet you, yes, my name is Frank. What's yours?" he said, turning to the heron with a sense of triumph.

The bird recoiled its neck, struck, and plucked out his right eye. ☘

We Didn't Make It

DANA TIEL

When did smoking stop being cool.

I used to slouch in the shadows of the alley to take long hard drags too deep for my ill lungs to embrace. Though, it was also still cool to hack, spit...wheeze.

I stumbled through adolescence barely functioning with the lightheadedness of malnourishment impeding my already skewed judgment, waiting for life to begin.

With nothing to actually say, we deliberated the conversations of intellectuals, possessing a few great words and using them in wrong context, pretending to already know enough facts of life to ponder the uncertain ones. But, when we were alone, we would anxiously listen for the voices of reason to guide us to the inevitable enlightenment we expected with age. We searched for the faithful arrows to direct us to our impending fates. A suburban future we, rebels, would protest with fury only to secretly crave the comfort in knowing that was the all encompassing standard tour of life, and we were done. Sigh.

I once asked a middle-aged friend why he was still working at the neighborhood grocery store. He replied, "I didn't plan on living this long."

We didn't make it to maturity, and now I am left alone to fend off the temptation to live a hollow, monotonous, impassive existence ... and just let it, well, pass.

I still smoke, I'm still hungry, and when I'm alone, I still listen for those voices. Now, I am unbelievably discouraged to suddenly realize how much I evidently do not know. It hit me across the face, leaving me with two black eyes and a devastating lack of security.

And it's hard to study with bruised eyes. ☘

Untitled

EMILY MONROE



Conjuring

KEVIN MOONEYHAM

As the second oldest, and married,
I watch the others pair off
boy with girl
girl with girl
boy with boy
sometimes a pair
is three or four or more.

I pay particular attention
to one woman
because if I were looking
she's the one I'd be looking for,
but the guy doesn't seem interested.

She joins us on the porch,
while Doug smokes cloves.
We dispense old man wisdom
of rubbing necks, shoulders
and insides of thighs
but we are a couple Stocfnarr,
natural fools,
for she already made these advances
and he retreated to his word, "no."

Thinking back to my talk with Eli
about transcendence and magic,
if I weren't so drunk
I would force my will
into a circle of runes and sigils
to conjure for her his dark hair, direct spirit,
and predilection for obscure, one line movie
quotations
fired off like shotgun shot —
it only takes one pellet to hit the mark —
and his word, "no"
would get lost in the dark.

New Orleans

RACHEL RAINWATER



The Ark

LINDSEY BROWN

The Oregon Coast leaves little impression on passing visitors other than the dark gashes of black rock that greet the Pacific like a ragged battle wound, broken up by brief minutes of golden beach. It consists, in memory, of bleak and windy trips to the shore truncated by cold, inhospitable sea or wet sand. Few visible life forms save for surfers and gulls stay for any length of time, and then usually only when something has died or the weather is very good. But below the surface, hidden beneath the rocks and the tumultuous surf, is a writhing mass of teeming life: the moving breath of primordial creation. It takes a certain type of man to stay long, and a whole other to settle down, but there's something mysterious about the sight of lush evergreen colliding with pacific blue that calls to people with few frontiers left to conquer.

Blake's Peak (more commonly known as 'Bleak Peak,' thanks to the ancient and never-corrected typo on the only highway sign), a tiny logging town, is nestled in the arms of a small valley just ten miles from the shore, its one-lane main street stretching east from the Marco Polo Diner to the back ends of the Moss Valley lumber yard, where the majority of the townspeople make their wages.

Alexander Moss built the houseboat on top of Bleak Peak after the death of his first wife, Lilith. It was during the building of the houseboat that old man Moss was crippled, and construction stopped for three months while he recovered (old, he was called, though in better shape than most men half his age). When he returned, it was cradled in the arms of a silver-sided wheelchair, which he insisted upon pushing himself.

Well before the boat was livable he had fashioned a small kitchen and a cot. His insistent med-

dling was a bane to the carpenters, and he went through two artists and four mastheads before settling on a Yaquina carver named Jonah who lived in a dry grotto.

When the houseboat (or, 'The Ark,' as it was now being called, though it was populated mostly with a variety of odd housecats) was completed, the thing was forty-two yards long and fifteen yards wide. The stern of the boat was built directly into a large basalt column that rose from the center of the summit by four huge firs cradling the keel, so it looked as though it were growing directly out of the weather-roughened rock. Its proud prow (with a finally finished masthead that resembled, sadly, a long gone lover) stretched over the cliff towards the Pacific, reaching for the distant horizon. A small door had been cut into the bow and a platform, like a makeshift pier, was connected to the driveway some ten yards below by a long ramp and a series of steps. The workers complained, but it was a wonder to see a man well into his seventies so spryly zipping up and down the steep ramp as the young carpenters he had hired to finish the job struggled awkwardly, haltingly up beside him.

Moss, like the ocean below him, was as inconstant as the moon—he veered between reclusive depression and wild exhibitionism. Two months he sat alone in the Ark, watching the skies and the sea move in and out, measuring his breath to the rhythm of the ocean below him. Rumors circulated the town, as many of its older citizens began to wonder why their beloved patriarch had taken to living like a hermit in a cavernous houseboat with no electricity while his modestly palatial house sat, dark and empty, alone just north of the peak. He

broke the silence with the unexpected announcement of his engagement to his scandalously young secretary, Eva.

The party was held at the houseboat on the eve of a full moon. Nearly half of the town was there; close to 400 people had caravanned up the hill to see what Moss had built and to take advantage of the open bar.

Alan Lowry, the county building inspector, was especially curious. Having been repeatedly denied access to the hill during the boat's construction, Lowry felt that the party was a good opportunity to inspect the structure that had so captured the town's curiosity.

Around him, the vague post-twilight forest rustled and he could hear the early mechanizations of nightly feline rituals, the buzz of evening bugs and frogs and the gentle far off lullaby of the full Pacific tide. Lanterns hung from strings and the windows of the houseboat glowed golden against the night, illuminating each step as he made his way up the ramp into the crowded house. Drunken elderly women and wayward, starry-eyed children reeled about, marveling at the lanterns and the curious lack of running water and electricity. Inside, a group of spiffed-up loggers stood in a tight circle around his cast iron stove, examining the copper wiring Moss had put up as a rudimentary heating system. In the back, surrounded by voluminous houseplants, Moss sat quietly observing the party, enjoying the open-mouthed stares of the baffled townspeople.

It was the first time Lowry had seen Moss in nearly seven years, and was surprised that Moss's substantial injury had crushed a good portion of his spine though none of his spirit. But the old man had changed. His vibrant, tenacious confidence had been replaced by a fiercer, more aggres-

sive strength—like that of a silently caged beast. Despite the obvious fact that his once Olympic form had cruelly snapped beneath him, he held his shoulders square and back straight.

Moss seemed to have become one with the metal chair, and although his guests had dressed in their finest, he still wore a pair of ragged jeans, so faded their color seeped into the silver on the chair, like a gilded figurine, and thick black boots that still had mud caked on the bottom from a job that had been abandoned months earlier on the north side of his mountain. The cuffs of his rough blue shirt were rolled up, and his thick work-worn hands gripped intensely the wheels of the chair. His cheeks had sunk, but his face seemed brighter and sharper than before, as though a pillar of flame was burning behind his steady blue eyes.

Lowry briefly thought: He's too lean to be pushing himself around. But although he was skinny, he was still wound tight with muscle, giving him the appearance of being ready to snap at any moment, as though he might just stand up suddenly and throw his hands in the air and say "Enough! I've had enough of this shit!"

Instead, he sized Lowry up with a stern, steel glint and took a healthy drink from the highball glass that rested in his lap.

"They let you up the hill this time, did they?" Moss mocked.

Lowry wasted no time. Removing a pen and a small notepad, he looked around the Ark. "I'm surprised you got away with this, Moss. I can't even begin to count all the violations!" He was almost giddy with wrath. "You have no ventilation—"

"Mr. Lowry . . .," Moss started.

"—No running water . . . Your supports are—"

"Mr. Lowry," Moss said, loudly.

Lowry stopped, surprised.

"Last time I checked you were a building inspector."

"Yes," Lowry said, hesitantly, wondering why the old man dressed him with such careless confidence.

"I remember when your dad helped me build the mill."

Lowry said only, "yes," because he could think of nothing more and memories faint from childhood of Moss dressed as Santa, his cheeks flush from brandy, crowded their way into the forefront of his concentration and he found it difficult to look directly at Moss, who stared at him as though he were still the same petulant boy who got caught stealing penny candy and was dragged back home by the ear.

He tried to brush those thoughts away and focus on the paperwork. "The fact is, Moss, you have —"

"The fact is, Mr. Lowry, that as a building inspector you have no authority over houseboats."

"Well..." Lowry started. Moss's expression didn't change. "No. The maritime —"

"Exactly. Now, enjoy the party, Mr. Lowry. If your business here is finished, I have guests." Moss set his drink back in his lap and started to turn away.

Stammering, Lowry nearly laughed out loud. "But. Moss, you're thirty miles from the bay. How are you ever going to get it down to the ocean?" The other guests stared.

Moss shook his head. "I'm not going down to the ocean, Mr. Lowry. I'm waiting for the ocean to come to me."

Lowry's mouth flapped open and closed.

Moss took a drink.

Lowry flapped his mouth again, hoping for something, but Moss stared right through him,

and Lowry had no choice but to walk away, awkwardly; taking a few last looks around at the high ceilings, he swore under his breath and stepped back out into the cool evening air, where awe-struck guests wandered back and forth under the lanterns and speculated what might have made the madman build such a thing so far from the sea.

Outside, the outline of the ark blotted out the stars and the cold moon. Below the cacophony of drunken revelry was the hush and flow of the fertile beach, and Lowry saw what Moss had on the edge of Bleak Peak.

Moss's spirit could not be contained in so small, so feeble and crippled a space — and he had grown wild with indignity at his imprisonment, wild with thirst for air which he couldn't breathe, wild with lust that could never be sated. ☸

Jena

EMILY MONROE



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