

2007

## Exile Vol. LIV

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## Exile Vol. LIV

### Authors

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READ JESUS  
THE CHRIST  
BIBLE SAVES  
WHILE SINNERS  
YOU'RE FROM  
ABLE HELL  
II TIM. 2:15 JN. 3:16-21

**EXILE**  
**2007-2008**

You of the finer sense,  
 Broken against false knowledge,  
 You who can know at first hand,  
 Hated, shut in, mistrusted:

Take thought:  
 I have weathered the storm,  
 I have beaten out my exile.

*Ezra Pound*

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### **Editor's Note**

While I cringe at the use of sports terminology in literary writing, this was something of a rebuilding year for Exile. It was only through the dedication and assistance of certain Denison staff and students that we were able to revive a lagging program. To Dr. Baker and Anneliese Davis I give my deepest thanks; without your logistical assistance, this publication certainly would not have gone to print. To all the coeditors (Katie, Anne, Jayme, Jess, Halle, Jenny, Carlin, Leah, Laura, Mad, Jacs, and Lauren), my warm thanks for your efforts and my sympathies for having had to deal with me. To our graduating editors, our best wishes on your lives in the "real" world off the hill.

Spring 2008

## An Imaginary Conversation with Amy Lowell

She smelled of thick cigars, ink on ancient  
paper and the presence of another woman.  
her body expanded across the sofa—I was eclipsed  
in mass and influence and my tongue  
fell flat from the weight of her.

I asked what came to mind—what is Love?  
She lit a cigar, spread her legs, and said  
*Delicious hysteria, continuous anticipation,  
an obligation to give, to keep on giving,  
an intoxication; absence is death. An addiction.*

She smiled and I knew there was more  
beneath each phrase, each term wedged between us.  
Smoke slowly filled the room and our minds  
were full of the noise of It.  
I held a cup of bitter red wine;

*I think that love is drinking this and breaking  
the glass to pieces on the ground, then walking  
barefoot through it to your beloved again and again.*  
She laughed, her throat cracking roughly,  
and broke her glass on the mahogany floor.

Dawn West, 2009

## Deliberate Fire-Building in the Coldest Months

Winter wind shot at me  
Through the split in the wooden  
Outhouse's door.  
I pushed off the heatless seat,  
My thighs wondering how something  
This cold could be considered romantic.

In the coldest month  
Each person retreats,  
Coiling in our beds  
Like frightened worms,  
Protecting ourselves from  
The harm of touch.

Snow tickled the back of my neck,  
More lightly than fingers do.  
Wind slid against my jaw,  
My teeth chattered like they needed  
Something to bite on, and  
I shook in frustration.

In my coldest month  
I watched fires kindle,  
Too apart from them for the  
Shivering to dwindle,  
Rubbing my own skin, but the wind  
Rushed by me.

Lauren Malkin, 2010

I stiffly collected dry wood  
 And my cracking hands stacked  
 The slabs, creating  
 A careful pile to ignite,  
 And I began to sweat just  
 In assembling it.

Kristine Aman, 2010

## HYPOESTES PHYLLOSTACHYA

"Don't give them too much,"  
 mother advises. I gladly  
 flood the 4-inch pots  
 each morning, the livelihood  
 of freckled leaves  
 in my hands. I lean  
 toward the warm windowsill  
 and aim for the roots.

I grabbed for your hand too soon,  
 I realize. If only I had waited,  
 given you enough time  
 to take hold on your own.  
 Now you know my palm was open  
 and I would rather drown my plants  
 than watch them shrivel  
 for a lack of care.

Lauren Mallett, 2010



## Letters to God

The letters were found somewhere in the Atlantic, netted and drawn from the water like any load of fish – or maybe the people on the boat saw the plastic shopping bag bobbing like a buoy.

The contents of the bag: hundreds of letters addressed to the Lord, some typed, some written neatly on initialed stationery, others scribbled on lined paper, a grocery list for God.

I wonder if the letter-writers expected replies, some dramatic communiqué via angels or plagues, or something more direct, even playful, an epistle in a bowl of alphabet soup: EVERYTHING WILL BE OKAY.

How the letters landed in the Atlantic is still a mystery. What if searching for God in the sky was all wrong? What if we should seek Him in water? Every bath a true cleansing, even rain a reassurance.

Jayne Hughes, 2009

## Red

The pang wrings the organs in the depths of my gut, twisting them like soaked cloth, a piercing twinge that beckons the saliva to seep into the crevices of my mouth, collect at the corners of my lips and coat my tongue. It subsides, then I conjure up a chunk of meat, slightly oozing, waiting for me to tear into it with my shard sharp teeth and my mouth waters again. It consumes me, the need to be fed. I find myself thinking of nothing but rabbits whose pulpy flesh and innards run like warm butter over my palate and down my throat, or of the fawn whose limber muscles are lush, melting like fat over a flame on my tongue. Instead meals of wild berries have replaced them, doing nothing but puckering my lips and staining my once chalky white paws. Mimicking the birds that once dwelled here, I've sampled meals of bugs and beetles of sorts but they crunch and crackle repulsively, spewing bitter juices that my stomach only rejects in a foul pile of bile, fur, mashed berries and insect parts. I am not well.

Once burly yet poised, I was a graceful animal, my coat sleek, almost lustrous when sunlight shone through the trees at the right angle. My hind legs flexed, ample and taut, when I crouched to ambush my latest

prey. My jaw jutted sharply when I clenched my teeth around the neck or underbelly of a vulnerable animal. Oh, I can still taste it! That last piece of meat, my last meal, it stays with me as if scraps were still lingering in my mouth. The warm blood lubricates the tough hide I've plucked effortlessly from the bone, as if it were a petal from a flower. Veins and vessels from the carcass barely quiver against my tongue as I lap up the last bit of syrupy juice spilled upon the forest floor, hardly caring if some of the underbrush mixes with it. I can still taste it.

Just yesterday I caught my reflection, slightly distorted in a rippling puddle. I remember inhaling the purity of the rain, when I caught a glimpse of myself in the water below. I saw ribs poking through my furry flesh, which is now only patches of matted hair. Other joints were visible, like that of an old crone's arthritic hand, almost as if they might protrude through my skin at any moment. My body once curvaceous and muscular is nothing more than a series of sharp angles and sagging skin. My jaw is slack, encrusted with bits of dirt and dried drool from relentless hunger, where my snout is coated thick with mucus and mud from burying it in the soil in hopes to come across a scent of a hot-blooded body. My

hind legs drag behind me now, relying on my front ones to transport me at nearly a crawl.

Today, like most days, all I am able to do is surrender to the bed of pine needles and dead leaves below me. I'll lie on my side, tongue hanging exposed, to aide my nose in detecting a meal. Sometimes I wish the earth would take me so I could become part of the soil to enrich the vegetation. The small animals would return and my brothers and sisters would be able to feed again. It tears into me, this ravenous hunger. I am the prey, hunger the predator, and I've lost all defenses. It rips open my abdomen just as I mutilated others in the past. My insides are relished by hunger's greed. I see myself feasting, burying my muzzle into luscious intestines, voracious, red painting my face. I am hunger, the intestines my abdomen. It paralyzes me from limb to limb, but I refuse to let it eat me alive.

What was that? Oh please let it be some other carnivore that could engorge his stomach with my masticated limbs. If I cannot eat then I'd rather be eaten. But my ears are twitching erect without warning at this snap of twigs. My heart thumps with anticipation, threatening to crack



my ribs with its momentum. If I squint just enough my eyes must sharpen into focus. Oh! Look at the flickers of red illuminating the blanket of greens and navy blues of the canopy! An animal with a coat that is redder than the blood I've spilled for my meals, more vibrant than the berries I've been unable to digest. So long it's been since my nose has quivered from a new scent. It wafts from the direction of the red amongst the brush, permeating the familiar smell of pine, soil and wild flowers. As poignant as honey on my tongue, it is sweet with a distinct bite that tantalizes my nostrils, stinging them slightly. It's so strong I can almost taste it, unlike anything I've encountered before. How my mouth waters and nearly froths! Another slash of red. The foliage bleeds with open wounds. The breeze swirls the scent into my nostrils again. But this time, something familiar, a trace of identity of this animal. Something in the scent is seems ripe, untouched, fresh; too much so to be wild and roaming. It is so close that I can lick the air and taste it.

It must not hear me approach. I cannot let it escape. It is survival that has ignited this rash spark within the pit of my stomach, swelling into my blood, my heart and brain aflame. It has consumed me. My once firm

legs tremble beneath me with each step closer to my prey. The smears of red defiant against the dark brush breathe the scent that so closely resembles warm honey and maple that my nose yearns to gorge upon. Little wafts will not do. The scent is potent now, as if the very heat from my feverish body ferments the animal's flesh. My ears twitch again, but not from the splintering of branches. How curious. I would have thought it to be a robin's song but the melody is not as shrill. The song comes from the red animal. Its scent, growing potent as I approach, churns the juices in my empty gut. It gurgles like a strangled rodent. I will throttle the creature between my stealthy jaws, wrenching the life from its lungs. The red coat now overlaps the greenery. It is all I can see and I know it's blood is as red as it's covering.

Closer and closer still, but wait, it halts. But I will not stop the hunt, crouching low; I must become part of the underbrush. It turns slightly and there is a new color luminescent against its deep red coat. Golden tendrils, fine like wood shavings; against flesh that resembles a ripe peach. How scrumptious that plump flesh will taste, docile between my bite. Part of the coat is falling away, revealing its golden mane. The



wind swirls the golden tendrils over the red coat and I am so close I can snag its mane with my claw. Only moments until my fang rip and scalp the hair from its body to get to the meat. I wonder if its blood is as sweet as its scent. A voluptuous hunk of meat will enliven my tongue again! I will rip the flesh from the bone; rupture every organ that will spurt salty sweet liquid, an extra treat. Unrelenting, I will bathe my face in its juices, tepid and savory. I will lap the supple remains from every crevice and clean my paws and snout with my taste buds. Just one more inch and these jaws will rupture that quivering vein under its sheer skin, lips nearly grazing its blue swollen trail and...

A gleaming flash, crack and snap! Oh, my ears endure the throb radiating from my pierced ankle. It travels, the beating, tremmoring through my veins, sending thorn-like jabs throughout my limbs, up my neck, to my skull. It aches and pulses as if broken shale has been jammed into my bone, threatening to sever it from my paw. It's gnawing and gnashing, but if I thrash it digs in deeper with more excruciating pain, and I am dizzy from it, my stomach threatening to splatter its contents. I can sense the animal, smell it, and nearly taste it. A piercing howl and whine.

I can feel it vibrate in my throat. With glinting, serrated points flickering light at their tips, these silver jaws criss-cross, mangling my limb into fibrous strands. The creature approaches closer still, its musk permeates my nostrils. But the pain has purged the hunger, eaten it alive, eating me alive. I cannot hold my weight any longer. I will lie down, just for a little while until it subsides. The forest, *my* forest is dwindling, fading. The creature has stopped moving, no snapping twigs, scent lingering. A shadow looms, shrouding what little light there is breaking through the leaves. Those eyes, they peer through its red coat, cobalt eyes, its golden mane framing them as they boar into my skull. This animal, so close, it shows is glaring white teeth, taunting me. And the red, it torments too, so glaring it pulses and a forlorn whine surfaces from my chest. But this is not how it is suppose to be. I am the hunter; I am the savage beast who slaughters its prey! The creature's eyes, they stare. My vision is blurring. It stares with its ice colored eyes, chilling me and I am cold. It is so very, very cold. The red throbs. I am so cold. Please, cover me with your red coat.

## *The Fish Plastique*

*(after Elizabeth Bishop)*

We had a fish who died  
from cold, motionless waters,  
but we found another  
to take its place at home.  
This new creature slept  
in my hand, serene,  
hard as rock, still.  
Two pairs of lateral fins,  
pale and bleached orange.  
The face was plastic in response,  
a small smile imbued  
with a "Mona Lisa" glint.  
Cow eyes of egg white circles  
In an egg shaped body  
rest in a clear glass grave,  
the water in the bowl.  
No gills to breathe oxygen,  
nor organs for food, nor heart.  
More a clock inside for a beat,  
fed by batteries and electrons,  
hidden by mottled scales,  
the brown of earth and chestnut  
and orange peel for its shell.  
The little propeller spins

like a windmill without a breeze,  
and the fish lives dead.

The incision at its middle opens  
and the aperture of life descends-  
a screwdriver that fails its task-  
and the fish lies dormant,  
without sight, sound, and smell.  
Only feeling as the egg descends,  
the triangle of a fin quiescent,  
the waters without ripples,  
the fish floats, bobs, and is still  
on the surface of the tank.  
Another fish dead, yet it remains.  
No jar to clean food from  
that reeks of refuse -or hairspray-  
depending on the scent visible.  
Still, the motionless body sits,  
bobs on the surface of the bowl,  
and I stare at its orange frame,  
its zombie-like gaze, vacant mouth,  
-tasteless, unappetizing, silent, forlorn-  
like the fish that swim in sand,  
the beaches covered with their dead,  
motionless on a shelf in my room.

Alex Huperts, 2010

## Tartar / Dissident

If you meditate for long  
enough, do it really well,  
they say your spirit can leave  
your body, visit other  
worlds, like heaven and hell.  
They say you could leave for months  
at once and it won't matter  
where your body was.

Bet he's wishing he'd paid more  
attention in tai chi class,  
wishing he could do astral  
travel now, now that he is  
surrounded, blinded, by these  
four invisible walls, gone  
deaf from their silent darkness.  
I bet he wishes he still  
had all his senses.

Think he still knows what he's in  
here for? Wonder what year he  
thinks it is? Think its time we  
showed him the outside, gave him  
a small taste of what he's missed.  
Wonder how he'll feel finding  
out that the world's been getting  
on fine without him?

Stephanie Chan, 2009

## Mnemonics

She is smiling, glint-toothed, and her breath  
is sour with the taste of our last drink  
that someone calls *The Water of the Lethe*,  
which we embrace. Engulf. We hope to sink.  
The sweat thickens walls, a heavy condensation  
of air, smoke-slicked with lust and spilt malt's fumes  
along her hips, my hands, and condemnation  
in the base notes of hours-applied perfume,  
salted and bittered, on my tongue. Beside the door,  
I see you, black-lit, straight-mouthed, shining eyes  
fluoresced and flicking from me to the floor  
as something in me balks, rebels, denies—  
a faltered word, remembering, comes to lips  
but, like my hands, be-Lethed, falls to her hips.

Matthew Miller, 2010



## Music Lessons

Junior high, a time for lessons: watching my fingers  
on the coin-like keys of the flute, the band teacher says  
I was always meant to play. We are dedicated,  
playing daily, flute section silver semicircle

so far from the trumpets, the tubas, back-row brass boys,  
cut off by a sea of clarinets, curly-haired girls  
who sit, suck their reeds, and eye the saxes one row back.  
Listening to and making music, elementally

different acts. I prefer spending practices hidden  
in the storage room, black instrument cases lurking  
behind their latched, barred doors like animals in cages.  
So many skills to master, when to breathe, how to blow,

lip position (perfect pucker); our first kiss was by  
the oboe cubbies, metal bars latticing my back,  
my shirt hitching like a cough on the latch, his fingers  
sliding along my spine as on the keys of his sax.

Later, when uniform fittings take over the room,  
we snicker as hands pass over us, assessing us,  
afraid to move. The year progresses and I master  
the whisper of pianissimo, forte's bolder

burst of sound, and the director lectures that we must  
focus upon playing as one, that our crescendos  
should shake the stage, seismic quakes, that if we can feel it  
in our souls then we're doing it right.

Jayne Hughes, 2009

## PARALYTIC (I)

I am held in this unwashed mason jar.  
I fill it up. I am touched all over  
by its glass, contained by it. It's alright  
to have cried about it, my mother tells  
me. You are not weak. You can cry about  
the crumbling preserves that press like fossils  
into your body. They are only scraps,  
the parts I couldn't spoon out at breakfast.  
I try to tell her the meaning of it but my voice  
only beats back to me, hollow like  
the voice of Sylvia Plath. God knows I'm  
not so scientific, so precise. I'm  
not doomed by Sylvia Plath. I am doomed  
by my container alone, the way it  
answers my pressure out with pressure in.

Katie Berta, 2008

## There She Was

The last fingers of sunset stretch out in orange and violet across a plain  
of waist-high green grass. A breeze stirs the blades of grass to wave  
goodnight to the setting sun. The grass defines a valley bordered by a  
mountain range to the north with blue-grey peaks that breach the heavens  
in their enormity. The west edge of the valley is bordered by a steep  
cliff face of white marble. To the east of the valley lies a peach grove,  
once famous for its apples. East of the peach grove the trees grow taller:  
redwoods straining to pierce the sky above them. Through the center of  
the valley runs a stream sourced from the northern mountains that snakes  
its way from the western white cliffs to the eastern peach grove countless  
times until it meets the southern horizon. Several creeks drain off the  
stream and into the peach grove as though the earth is tilted that way.  
Along one of these smaller creeks towards the center of the valley stands a  
log cabin built from the redwood forest.

\*\*\*

"There she was, squatting in the long green blades of grass.  
Actually, at this point I didn't know what she was, all I knew was that she  
looked more like me than anything I had seen."

"So what did you think she was?"

"I don't know, she looked something like me, I guess I just figured she was another one of me, but with long hair."

"That's it?"

"Yeah, well she was squatting, like I said in the grass, and she was facing away from me so I couldn't see, you know, our differences."

"And what did these differences look like?"

"Hold on, that's not the important part."

"Well then what is?"

"I don't know, I mean I guess what happened in the few days she was there."

\*\*\*

The clouds are sparse, providing just the right shadows to make the ground sway. The sun is high, but not too hot, and not that bright either. I'm walking through a grove of apple trees. The sunlight bounces off the millions of vitreous red orbs that highlight my periphery. The grove puts on this same light show everyday, tempting walkers to sample its fruit.

The grass bends with each step I take and rebounds as my heels lift off the ground to tickle the backs of my knees. I reach the edge of the grove and I stop. I stop because she's there, in the grass, squatting. Her hair covers the middle of her back with honey brown waves. Her brown skin looks like nothing I've ever seen as the sunlight cuts through the branches above her. It looks like her back is dancing. A breeze ripples through the grass and the blades caress her body as she rises. First they touch her lower back and move, as quietly as she stands, down the apple curve of her buttocks.

The blood at the bottom of my feet convects to my waist. The blood in my head drains to the same place. She turns, as though she feels my eyes on her and knows what's happening inside me. She turns not with her body, but with her head, and I get my first glimpse of those red lips, those hooked eyebrows, that wide flat nose before she runs down a row of apple trees.

\*\*\*

"Did you follow her?"

"Hmmm?"

"DID YOU FOLLOW HER?"



"Oh. No, I just stood there, wondering why she ran."

"Why didn't you go looking for her?"

"I don't know, I had never felt that feeling before and I was a little afraid of it... of what she made me feel."

"What do you mean?"

"It's hard to explain."

"It must be very complicated."

\*\*\*

A tall figure walks down from the mountain along the meandering stream that cuts through the center of the valley. The figure is wearing a long-sleeved grey robe that slips on over his head. Long weathered fingers grasp a speckled pink granite staff in his left hand. His knuckles are white around the ages from overuse; his fingernails are long but straight and white; he has a long grey beard to match his waist length hair that he shows no signs of losing. His destination is the cabin. The man that lives there has asked him for some conversation. Between the two of them, he is the only one that can climb the mountain so he has to come to the valley every time the man in the cabin wants to talk. His feet would appreciate the grass cushion of the valley if they were not leathered through years of

travel up and down the hard rock of the mountain face.

\*\*\*

The sun is high and hot in a cloudless blue sky, shining a warmth onto the world that excites my muscles. My pink skin glistens as I walk along the creek bed next to my cabin. Crab tracks criss-cross the fine grain tan sand that presses between my toes with each step. Up ahead the waterway meanders to the left, I stop. She's been here. Three footsteps dart through the sand to the edge of the creek. It's not so wide that you couldn't jump it with a good run up and that looks like what she did. There are two deep footprints on the other side of the water. From there her trail leads into an endless meadow. If I follow the creek I will end up at the apple grove, if I jump it I will be following her steps south.

\*\*\*

"So what'd you do?"

"I followed the creek."

"Why'd you follow the creek?"

"I saw her in the apple grove the day before, I figured she'd be there again."

"I though you were afraid of her?"

"I was, but it was that fear that made me want to see her."

"It made you want to see her?"

"Yeah."

"You wanted to face your fear?"

"No, sort of... I wanted to know why I was afraid of her, that's why I wanted to see her again."

"Was she?"

"Was she what?"

"Was she in the apple grove?"

"Yeah."

"What happened when you saw her?"

"I don't know, it's hard to explain, I couldn't really control it. Or maybe it was just that I didn't want to stop it.... She was just standing there."

\*\*\*

She is standing at the edge of the grove, petting the grass playing at her fingertips. She is standing on the other side of the creek. She is facing me with her bare round chest and nothing between her legs that I can see. She is not the same as me, but she looks like me, and I can see how she's

different from me. I feel the blood in my body organize itself between my legs like the first time I saw her. Her stare moves from my face, down my own bare chest and rests on the only part of my body extending towards her. She shuns its gesture and turns. She is going to run again.

What blood is left in my cheeks rushes to the surface in shame and anger. I yell to her to stop. She pauses. I take two steps back and prepare to jump the creek bed. I hear her say something, but there is too much happening in my body to listen to the words. The energy gathering in my body easily carries me over the creek bed. I reach out an arm to feel her chest, to feel how it is different. She pushes my hand away and turns to run. I rush forward and tackle her from behind. She screams a scream that bounces off the apples into nothingness. She tries to crawl out from under me, and her fingers rake the earth.

I grab her around the ribs and turn her over. Her fingers tear at my face, cutting my lips, nose, eyelids, and forehead. I grab her wrists and pin them to the ground above her head. She is yelling again. I ignore her again. The blood pooled at my hips wedges between her thighs. Her eyes widen and she stops yelling to draw in a breath too big to release. A warmth surges through me and I bend down to bite her lip. A salty

taste leaks into my mouth. My backside flexes back and forth, building momentum. Sweat drips from my brow onto her face, cutting across her tears. I feel all the blood in my body rush to the tip of my existence and then explode back through my veins. I stop thrusting, her legs are shaking. Her head is turned so her right cheek presses against the grass. I can't see where her eyes are looking, but it's somewhere far away. The earth gyrates as I stand up and I almost lose my balance. Blood stains my skin from my stomach to my thighs. She lies there, gasping as tremors disrupt her body.

\*\*\*

The man that lives on the mountain stands outside the cabin. He looks up at the rising moon, then lifts his right hand and knocks on the door seven times. He lowers his hand as the door swings open to the inside and the sound of wood rubbing against itself fills the air. He greets the man who lives in the cabin with a hug then proceeds inside without waiting for further invitation. The man who lives in the cabin closes the door slowly with his right hand.

Inside the cabin is one room. The door opens in the center of one of the three walls that form a triangle. Just below where the roof meets

the walls that the point of the triangle across from the door the logs have been cut out, creating a window that opens to the mountains. Along the wall to the left of the door is a neat pile of grass contained in a rectangular wooden frame. On the right side of the cabin is an apple wood table for two with a matching set of chairs. The old man is the first to sit down, his back to the mountains. He extends his right arm and points with his whole hand to the chair across from him, inviting the man who owns the cabin to take the seat across from him.

\*\*\*

"What happened next?"

"I'm sorry."

"What happened after you stood up?"

"Oh, I turned around and walked into the creek."

"Was it cold?"

"Yes, very."

"Were you?"

"No."

"How long did you stay in the creek?"

"I walked all the way back here in the creek."



"You walked back here?"

"Yes, and I laid down on my bed, right there, and went to sleep.

Then when I woke up things were different, the apple grove was different. That's why I called you."

\*\*\*

The sun is low in the sky and the grass stoops, trying to move away from the heat. The wind is dead and the only thing that touches my body is a sweltering stillness that extracts the water below my skin. Deep grey clouds circle the mountains to my left, but offer no shade to the valley. To my right the grass meets the southern horizon and I can see the earth's vaporous exhale of heat. I am standing in front of the apple grove, looking down two rows of bare, black limbs. The ground is littered with rotten leaves and apple. I bend down to pick one up. Worms wriggle through it at every angle, consuming the brown flesh under its sagging red skin.

Brandon McAdams, 2009

## Jenny and the Baby

Jenny walks into the kitchen and opens the refrigerator to get a bottle of wine, but she notices that it's still on the counter from the previous night. She takes the open bottle and puts it to her lips and lets the warm wine slowly find its way down her throat. It quenches and it satisfies and after a moment her headache begins to fade. She sets her purse down on the table and rifles through the mail. There's nothing she's interested in, although the Victoria's Secret catalogue looks alright, so she sets it down to read it later, maybe in bed before she turns out the light. The bottle gets tipped completely vertical as the last drops fall on her tongue. She goes back to the fridge to get the other bottle, but then she sees that there is no other bottle, and that this bottle *is* the other bottle from when she had another bottle last night. She checks the cupboard, she checks her bedroom, she checks the closet in her bedroom and the closet in the hallway. She checks the garage, but she finds nothing. And even though she just drove stop and start for over an hour, she gets back into her car.

Autumn is finally here and the leaves have split themselves into two

groups. There are the leaves that cover the grass and the roads, brown and dead and crispy and cracked. And there are the leaves on the trees, and as Jenny drives she notices how green they are. They are, in fact, all green in their various shades and stages of green. She is startled by this and she stares up and around at the trees in awe. There is no red, no orange, no yellow and no purple; there is brown and there is green. They are alive, or they are dead. They are alive, or they are dead, she thinks, and she gets her first glimpse of yellow and red and stops at the light, jolting her car more than she likes because she finds it hard to pay attention.

A woman pushes a stroller slowly across the intersection, slowly and nearly methodically, Jenny thinks, and she imagines she's done this a million or two million times before. It's routine, it's built in, it's a part of her, almost as much as her own child. Her face is bored, it's routine, and her mind is either moving a hundred miles an hour or not at all. She stares ahead, blankly. The woman stops the stroller in the middle of the intersection right in front of Jenny's car and reaches into her pocket. She pulls out a cell phone and smiles instantly as she opens it. Jenny wonders if the call is from a lover or friend, relative or spouse, and for a moment

she contemplates what would happen if she ran the woman down. This woman and her child, the mother on her phone, the little baby asleep in the stroller, or maybe it's not asleep. But the woman pushes the stroller again, talking on her cell phone, smiling and talking, smiling with her baby. Maybe Jenny could steal it and she wouldn't even mind. Maybe she could get out of her car and take the baby and run the woman down and nobody would mind. She could name the child Catherine, or William, she thinks. The light turns green and Jenny is about to press down on the gas but a car comes racing on her right and runs the red light. She is just slightly out of breath, and her headache is just beginning to reappear.

The time is 6:18 in Minneapolis. Jenny knows that where her sister lives it's 7:18. People forget about Mountain Time, she thinks. Television advertises every show with the Eastern and Central Time, and everyone knows about Pacific Time. But she feels as though people forget about Mountain Time, and how it just sits there unacknowledged, how it sits there while everyone talks about the time in every other part of the country. Maybe I should move to Colorado, she thinks, or Montana or Idaho. I could go skiing and I could wake up every morning and look out



at the mountains, or I could move to Arizona and look out at the desert. The vast, open wasteland with nothing but sand and the only water you can find is in a manmade lake or inside a cactus, or the rain that falls not that often.

She pulls into the parking lot of the store and turns off the radio, but the radio was already off so she presses the dial again. Her feet hit the pavement, covered by a crunchy blanket of fallen leaves, and she kicks a few in a hesitant spurt of a playful mood.

The store is virtually empty and close to closing, the last few making their purchases or on the way to do so. Jenny walks up and down the aisles, although she knows that she will inevitably head straight for whatever happens to be on sale. She looks for the cheapest bottle of red wine and grabs three and doesn't bother to look at the name. She goes and sets the bottles on the counter and opens up her purse and takes out her wallet. She hears the amount and looks for cash or a card. She looks in her purse and her pockets.

"Christ."

She walks back to return the bottles to their place in the aisle. When she sets them down she looks over at the counter again, and the cashier is busy with the last customer. Jenny walks next to a nearby display of vodka and puts two of the smaller bottles in her purse, smoothly and easily, and with a final nod to the cashier she's out the door and in her car, and as she turns back onto the street she thinks she hears someone, faintly, screaming for money.

A kid on a bike darts out in front of her car just blocks from her house and she slams on the breaks just in time. The belt catches her and she jolts against the seat. She starts crying, softly, slowly, and watches the child pedal away. She reaches for her purse to pull out a tissue and notices a flattened cigarette pack on the ground of the passenger's side. He must have thrown it there, she thinks, it must have slid underneath the seat. But she doesn't touch it, and she wipes her eyes and blows her nose and checks around her for any more children, and when she is certain that it's safe she drives away.



Jenny thinks about packing up and leaving. She wonders what it would be like to live in a place like Montana, Arizona, or Colorado. She wonders what it would be like to be the one who leaves. She wonders if she might like to live overseas. She could pack up everything and just leave, she could leave and go and never come back. Jenny could move somewhere where they don't speak English, somewhere where she doesn't know a word of what anyone is speaking. She could go to Switzerland or China. She could move to Iceland, and live where it's cold up in the mountains and never come down unless she absolutely had to. And she would never come down unless she absolutely had to. Where she could sit and think and drink during the night and day and be alone. And the more Jenny thinks about it the more she thinks it would be a good idea, to get a fresh start, to cleanse, to walk away without looking back. That might work, she thinks. But the more she thinks about it the more she thinks she couldn't go anywhere, not even if the plane was leaving and someone handed her a ticket.

Jenny sometimes wonders if there's a god. Some people believe in

nothing. Others believe that God causes everything. She thinks, what's the difference?

She tries to think of other things, she tries, but she can't help herself. She pulls into the garage and wastes no time getting out and into the house, she's sick of being in the car today. The house is dark and sullen and abandoned, and even though she's lived there for years she fumbles for the light switch. She opens the closet to hang her coat and she does and when she closes the door it gets caught on a hanger. She pulls the door a few times before she forces it shut but it catches a coat and knocks it to the ground. It is a familiar, worn, brown leather jacket and she is hesitant to pick it up, but she does, and she runs her hand over it and could swear, she could almost swear, that it was still warm. But she knows it isn't. She goes back into the kitchen and gets a glass and fills it with ice. Jenny takes the two bottles out of her purse and throws the catalogue away. She walks down the dark hallway to the room at the end, but she doesn't bother to turn on the light. There is a rocking chair in the corner, and she sits in it. She opens one of the bottles and empties it into the glass. There is a box on the other side of the room that contains a baby's crib that was never put

together. And she sits, and rocks, and stares across the room, and as she brings the glass up to her lips she can smell the faint aroma of cigarettes on her fingertips.

Nicholas Bailey, 2009

## The Blacker the Berry, the Sweeter the Juice

I am blown up, face forward arms back, on a cold canvas  
that rotates to each of you who wonder if I'm black.

You bring my skin into question  
daily, and you wonder why I have a color complex.

At best, I laugh. A maple syrup ejaculation that slithers  
down the street between me and another someone

who's put me on display. Light skin is not a blessing  
and songs follow me, down black and white streets.

When I was six years old I stood in the mirror, asking why.  
And before you ask, imagine being called a high-yellow bitch.

Dawn West, 2009

## The Man I Saw Outside Post 475 at 3 a.m.

In the war, every Brit officer we saw  
was a damn nobleman. They lorded  
it over us, pissed because they needed  
our guns and our money. Their rank-  
and-files got almost the same look down the nose.  
I've thought of titles—Lord, and Sir,  
and Baron, and etc. I've no use—  
just leave me America, a life in  
the mills or mines or factories, free to die  
of a sawblade or black lung or poverty  
from labor outsourced to the goddamned Commies.  
I'd settle for dying nobly—  
strong to the end, some good fight, enough  
time for a speech. But who dies nobly?  
I'm an old man, drunk on the ground  
of the blurry alley outside the Amvets,  
touching the medal always pinned  
in my jacket, Lady Liberty's head  
worn smooth and "Freedom From Fear  
and Want" too small to read in the dark.

Matthew Miller, 2010

## .001 x 10<sup>-234</sup>, or Scientific Notation

Mathematicians eagerly round to zero  
when something's close enough to nothing,  
representing such an infinitesimal  
probability or preposterously  
microscopic decimal  
that they just can't calculate  
its universal lack of implication.

Lying on my lawn tonight  
I realize they would round for you  
without thinking twice,  
so it's good that I'm not preoccupied  
with percentages.  
I just like to lie  
under the moon with you  
thinking about the planets  
and the creeping tilt of the night,  
pondering the feeling  
that is you beside me.

Luke Gelber, 2009



## TIED UP

They came undone again,  
those fibrous little nuisances,  
objecting to stay  
looped and knotted like they should.

I'd rather not watch you  
seize and quake  
your hunched torso straining  
from stillness.

Your sun-spotted hands come short  
of contact, failing to reach  
beyond the sofa's frayed edge  
to tie the pair.

Those palms mended engines in Korea,  
maneuvered a Firebird wheel,  
and cradled me,  
the first of your first-born.

The same knotted digits  
later demonstrated the art,  
guided me to master a knot  
cat's claws could not loosen.

Now a faint forearm beat is your stillness.  
Loop the loop, pull it tight  
I recall, my hands along  
the tie, holding them together.

Lauren Mallett, 2010

## Sons of Confederate Veterans

My father's friends came over after dinner in late November to plan their formation for the Christmas parade, which they had been a part of since their high school graduation in 1967. In the den, their huddle was framed closely by the over-sized Stars and Bars which served as a wall hanging. My father went there each evening anyway for better access to the liquor cabinet, but they were the only ones who were ever invited to join him. I loved them because they filled our house with the scent of gunpowder from their replica coats and the sound of needles weaving in and out of the buttons which had loosened in their last reenactment, and they teased me, when I dared to sneak in for a moment, that someday I would fill out the shoulders of my father's faded jacket. He was just a few years older than me when he was given the honor of riding a white stallion onto the football field at the start of each game in full Confederate regalia. His picture hung among others in the trophy case outside of my homeroom, under a placard proclaiming their role in "Defending Our Heritage." I sometimes paused there for a moment to see his face before his eyes were glazed and his cheeks constantly flushed.

On the day of the parade, my father was pleased that my school marching band would be following his unit in the parade. I had a fife solo

in "Dixie," and he figured that if I wasn't cut out to be the lone, proud Rebel, I might as well play a supporting role in the drum corps. Even my mother had a part, carrying the scarlet and grey Sons of Confederate Veterans banner with another wife. We marched down Main and took a left on Market to the beat of the bass drum. We passed the Baptist church, where I watched my father, mounted and clad as a member of Stuart's cavalry, share a sloppy wave and a grin with all of the folks camped out on picnic blankets across the front lawn. They waved back and cheered. And then he fell sideways out of his saddle, his head jolting back, his foot catching in the stirrup for a split second before twisting free and following the rest of his body to the pavement. Just before he landed, I saw the bottle of whiskey slip from his breast pocket and onto the surface beneath him, shattering into shards that dug into his face and neck. I remember someone saying afterward how fortunate it was that the only ambulance in town was carrying Mrs. Claus only two blocks behind us, but I only recall the voice of one man yelling, "Serves you right, you bigoted son of a bitch!" I looked up and saw him in front of the drug store, his dreadlocks and his anger framing his face, before he turned back into the crowd.

Katie Partridge, 2010

## Tenth Wheel Semi

Sometimes I'm an inside dualie on a Kenworth blowing 80 in the desert, dangled and shuddering backward over steaming belt sand blacktop on the angry vibrations of that third axle. You cross rippling sun glare rest stop pavement to pluck bolts, ten rusty shirt buttons, and lay me in the twilight's triangle of gray-green cool on the east side wall of a shed.

Luke Gelber, 2009

## WAKE

Before she has actually died  
we begin planning. Her favorite  
colors, we say, were fuchsia  
and violet, and we pick the flowers  
to match. She was simple,  
we tell people, and flatten her out  
in preparation for a coffin:  
A Kentucky girl, hard-lifted  
with craggily hands, she wouldn't  
want the bell-and-whistle marble  
of richer mothers. Hers will be slim,  
will slick into the sky with  
the economy and struggle of her  
breathing. It will be practical:  
a name, two dates, "a patient  
mother". We mark all of this  
off our lists. Before the funeral,  
in this time of business, one can  
only wonder what else we can do  
to prepare. Someone brings up  
Grandma's broken-ribbed fall,  
my Great-Aunt's nagging cough.  
We all eye each other, bold, mark off  
items and days in our heads.

Katie Berta, 2008

## The View From the Eyak Salmon Runs

*circa 1900*

The canneries  
placed their nets  
five miles out  
off the Copper  
River Delta  
and processed  
the pink-bellied  
salmon by the ton.  
Bald eagles gathered  
in trees, promised  
easy meals, talons  
pinning fish-flesh  
as their beaks  
dipped down to rip.

Matthew Miller, 2010



### How it Might Have Been

He never proposed. "It just seems like the next step Mard." My mother's name is Mardi. The first time they met he asked if it was short for anything. She said no, but that it meant Tuesday in French. He was impressed. My mother hates it when people fuss over her. She doesn't like notions of tradition or convention. She feels like a mime in an invisible box.

They'd stop by a local antique shop, unplanned, maybe while they were out picking up groceries at Giant Eagle. He knew he'd get discount at an antique shop. His father sold and collected antiques so he knew other's who did in town as well. My father probably had a one in mind, ancient, brassy with an ever-fading luster, worn to the point that the shine was drained from it. My mother would think of her mother and the jewelry she left on the bath towel that covered her dresser; rings with the same cloudy surface as the one she was about to try on her finger. She would think that perhaps the woman who used to own it cleaned as much as her mother did, sponging down dishes, buffing them nearly sterile, scrubbing the grout between the tiles in the bathroom, polishing windows. My mother would finger it with her nail as it sat on the velvet show cloth

barely glinting like a withering star. But she'd be thinking about the ice cream melting in the brown paper grocery bag that sat in the square of sunlight coming through the car window

That is how my father is, likes to spoil the people he cares about. But he doesn't use my mother as his personal display, doesn't buy her a kitschy ring with metal so burnished it slips around on her finger, top-heavy so the stone in the center falls into the space between her finger. He knew he could afford a ring like that but had no interest in buying my mother something she would wear just to make him happy. He knew she preferred store brand shampoo, was content with a scoop of vanilla in a sugar cone and didn't like patterns on her clothing. Though through their years of contact with each other, their collisions would color her black and white world.

Modest but striking to complement my mother's hands, my father would struggle to get the band around her large pre-arthritis knuckle. My mother hated the fingers she inherited. She thought they looked like a primate's, stubby, deep lines like grooves in wood. She would try not to think about them and how misplaced the ring would look. My father would hand over a check to the man behind the scratched glass counter

and they'd walk out of the store, the bell dinging as the door opened and close behind them. In the car the square pebble would catch light reflecting off the review mirror as it sat in the middle of its gold orbit on her finger. My father would try and catch a sideways glance of my mother's face for a sign of something to tell him what to say next as he turns a corner and takes the turn a little too sharply. Groceries would topple out of the bags in the backseat and my mother would twist around to retrieve them from the floor of the car. The ring would cast fragments of light over a raw chicken breast. He'd cook for her that night, she'd eat half and they'd share the carton of ice cream later that didn't melt after all. Maybe that night would be the first time she'd add chocolate syrup and spill a little on her ring. My father would lick it off and she'd smile. Maybe that's how it was.

Halle Murcek, 2009

## Buried

A man was walking along the beach  
when something in the sand caught his eye  
It was gold ---it caught the sunlight.

He was looking for earthworms  
to catch fish with on the beach  
when something in the sand caught his eye.  
He dug it up to find it was a gold tooth.

He was intrigued, he dug it up  
to find it was a gold tooth, to find  
it was connected to a skull.

And parts of a human skeleton,  
a hand tucked under the chin,  
were connected to the skull.  
He thought it looked very peaceful.

It looked like it had gone to sleep  
like that: he thought it looked peaceful.  
Then the children ran up to look.

The old people and locals  
were not surprised; they told  
the children who ran up to look  
about Nineteen Forty-Two.

About the hundreds who knelt here,  
blindfolded and bound, back in Nineteen

Forty-Two. Their backs to the shore.

For being Chinese or having the wrong  
tattoos, they knelt facing the sea, their  
backs to the shore and the firing squads.  
Their bodies to the tide.

The *bojo kempei* then fed the  
bodies to the tide, so they would  
not have to worry about them.

Sixty years on, the beach has a bike path, a boardwalk  
and a World War II plaque to remember the dead so we do  
not have to worry about them. Until the next time  
someone finds a tooth in the sand.

Stephanie Chan, 2009

## Late July

1.

The crimson breeze slipped over my skin  
as you pulled the cotton dress over my head.  
You propped my legs upon your shoulders  
and I held part of you,  
there,  
beneath the darkening trees.  
The orchard did not disapprove.  
Their branches hung heavy  
with the weight of neglect.

2.

The peach trees did not produce this year;  
a mid-May frost rendered barren the entire orchard.  
I watched alone, willing them to bear fruit.  
Now your return makes no difference.  
I stand with you this time,  
enclosed in the orchard fence,  
and hear a ceaseless whispering  
in the grass of the orchard,  
over the fallen peaches.

Catherine Mehta, 2008



## *We Kissed Three Times*

We kissed three times

on your 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. Between  
your drunken/honest rambles and my  
sober/jealous silence, your lips managed  
to find mine in the darkness of your back  
yard when we were sitting sorely  
on your wooden porch. They were  
quick/dead kisses; no tongue. I was  
and am a gentleman, but gentlemen  
can still be suckers for cinnamon eyes.

We kissed three times

because I think it made you feel loved  
for a second/for once. He broke your heart  
when he gave you that disease and again when  
he vanished afterwards. "Who'll go  
to the doctor with me to see if it's turned  
to cancer?" All I could think was how  
I'd kill to be the hand you held when  
the good/bad news came. "I wish he could."  
He made/faked love to you,

and we kissed three times.

I rocked you in the blistering December  
wind like you were the victim of the worst  
of skinned knees. Your bleeding mascara

painted pictures like ink blots on your face  
that I interpreted: "make me laugh  
sweetheart." Every joke I cracked brought  
you closer to life, and soon you were  
brilliant/you were you, shining bright through  
a cloud of whiskey stench. When we rose, you  
shook and said, "I forgot where we were;  
I just knew you were holding me."  
And it's funny, because after

you kissed me three times,

you'd made me forget too.

## Mr. Jones

I rode the elementary school bus, because we lived  
just far enough outside of town that I couldn't walk myself.

Each morning I waited by the stop sign,  
close enough to the street so I could see

Mr. Jones coming two blocks away, but not so close  
that the bus would flatten me like the blue station wagon

that he crushed the year before while backing  
into a four-way intersection. Mr. Jones

drove his standard yellow bus on weekdays  
in the same mossy flannel shirt and ragged cap,

but each Sunday he took his place  
at the front of the 3rd Street AME Church

to practice his true calling in a starched,  
white clergyman's collar at the pulpit.

To stay limber between Sundays, he liked to practice  
on us, his squirming cargo of untamed souls

in need of an elementary education  
and some high-decibel discipline.

So when the 6th grade boys launched  
a yo-yo in a perfectly aimed arc

over all 17 rows and hit him  
right on the crown of his head,

we pulled over in the chicken-wire fenced  
side lot of the local milk-bottling factory

for a 30-minute sermon  
on the evils of temptation

and the omniscience of the School Board,  
which could always look in on us

through the pinhole lens  
of the mounted bus camera.

One day when Alyssa Thompson told him  
she was crying because her neighbor had died

in the night of a heart attack, he told her  
that liars go to hell and left her standing

on the sidewalk in front of her house  
with tears spilling down onto her pink coat.

He puffed up his cheeks, tipped his hat  
way back above his blood-shot eyes,

and drove us silently on to school,  
rows of vinyl pews hushed and sticky beneath us

with sweat, because he spoke in a tone  
that assured us of his connection to God.

I hugged my Little Mermaid lunchbox  
to my chest in the 6th row, 1st grade section,

and I prayed that his booming quotations  
of Old Testament prophets was never directed

toward me before we were delivered  
to our final destination.

Katie Partridge, 2010

## The Pseudo Coup

Sometimes in airports I like to stop and sit at points along the way  
to my gate. To see how big the bags are and how they are carried. So I  
can watch fathers shepherd gaggles of little kids, likely wondering why  
they felt the need to procreate so efficiently in a span barely long enough  
to accommodate two summer Olympics. Other times I just need a rest.

Today was not one of those 'sometimes'. It was Tuesday,  
December 12<sup>th</sup> on the calendar but apparently December 23<sup>rd</sup> at 6:00 p.m.  
in the airport. The terminal was a life-sized kaleidoscope of limbs and  
coats and bags weaving in and out of each other. There was no possibility  
of sitting and observing today. And yet as I side-stepped a woman  
carrying five shopping bags, I thought that the scene must have looked  
bizarrely delightful from above: thousands of people tacitly agreeing to  
square dance politely around one another and through the chaotic public  
space they were navigating.

We were not running late (yet), but we were not overly punctual  
either. Sammy stayed a few steps behind me, carrying only a light duffel  
bag in his left hand and a backpack over his shoulders. He was still  
distracted by the spectacle of the airport. He wanted to stop and look or



laugh at something. The distractions were endless, and could generally be placed into a few categories...

I. Speed-related amusement

A. Man sprinting through airport

1. knocking into people
2. sweating through expensive French-cuffed shirt
3. "probably the only workout he ever gets" – Sammy

B. Tram Stop-And-Go

1. individual (a child) neglects to hold onto pole in railway system that shuffles patrons around tram propels the individual either forward or backward depending on the direction of its movement
  - a. the individual hits the tram's floor
  - b. the individual hits other patrons
  - c. the individual hits one of the holding poles, producing one of the airport's finer moments of dramatic irony
3. Sammy rides the tram again to see the incident unfold one more time

II. Moments of nostalgia

A. Spotting an arcade game room

1. entering and recognizing a favorite video game from childhood
2. engaging teenagers
  - a. asking them about their highest score

- b. at game "X"
- b. telling them his
- c. defending the possibility that someone could actually achieve such a high score
- d. pulling out dollar bills and finding a change machine
- e. doubling not only the score of 14 year olds at arcade games, but also their age

B. Walking past a "Milo's"

1. becoming ecstatic that the grimy burger chain still exists
2. demanding a menu at the front desk
  - a. making certain that the same blonde woman on a motorcycle graced the menu's front cover
  - b. also making certain that the kids menu still has chicken fingers for two dollars, so that if you ordered three orders of kids chicken fingers you would get more chicken and pay less than you would for the adult listing of chicken fingers

III. The rest

A. Enough to write a novel

1. which would be boring

Once we reached our gate, the crowd began to thin as people broke off to destinations on the left and right. C9 was going to Dallas. C12 was

going to New York City. C27 was hopefully going to Pensacola at 4:35 p.m.

“Was New York our first plane ride?” Sammy asked.

“It was for me,” I said. “I don’t know about you.”

“It definitely was for me,” said Sammy. “I remember complaining to Mom that the plane wasn’t going fast enough.”

“No you don’t.”

“Yes I do. I was twelve. You must have been, what – eight? Of course you wouldn’t remember.”

“I remember some stuff,” I said. “I remember...well, you and Mom weren’t sitting near Dad and me. You two were somewhere else, like always. But I remember thinking we were going to drop into the water. I was looking out the window and it was night, and I thought that Manhattan was the whole United States and that the Hudson and East Rivers were the Pacific and Atlantic Ocean.”

Sammy looked ahead stoically, side-stepping a young black woman next to C16 who was bent down to tie her lime green high-tops.

“That might be the dumbest thing I have ever heard,” he said, matter-of-factly.

“I was eight.”

Sammy looked at me, trying to hide a smile.

“I was eight! I probably fell asleep and Dad woke me up to look at the city as we flew over it.”

“I guess that makes sense.” Sammy laughed. “It’s still a pretty weird thing to think, though.”

“You know what was even weirder? There was this creepy old guy next to us. I think there was, at least. Does this ring a bell? Am I making this up?”

“No, I think I remember that. Let’s see...I sat with Mom up ahead of you guys. I think she was wearing her pink gypsy-shawl thing ‘cause I kept shaking my hand and banging it like a tambourine to make fun of her. At least I think that is what happened. I just remember my hand hurting from banging that tambourine so much.”

As we passed C21, Sammy quietly raised his right hand to waist-level, palm up. His pace slowed almost imperceptibly as he floated through the increasingly empty space of the concourse, all the while staring at his hand. Veins and cavernous palm lines cut across it like a complicated road map over an emaciated terrain. He looked like someone

waiting for communion, only he didn't know that mass was on Sundays.

"Sammy," I said, "the old guy?"

"Huh?" he said, de-magnetizing his eyes from his skeletal hand.

"Oh, right, the old guy thing. Lemme think. You were sitting in the back with Dad and you guys kept laughing about something when you got off the plane." Sammy reached to his ear for a non-existent cigarette as we walked by a *No Smoking* sign. "Goddamn. Oh this is gonna kill me. What in the hell were you two laughing about – you wouldn't stop the whole fucking trip."

C23 was boarding on our left. My hands were clammy from carrying a blue L.L. Bean suitcase and black backpack while wearing a down coat. The fact that the airport was over-heated didn't help matters. Even my brain felt clammy.

"It was like a poem," I said, abruptly.

"What?" Sammy replied.

"Like a poem. The old guy kept saying the city was like a poem. Only he wasn't just saying it, he was telling me. Specifically, right to me. 'The city looks just like a poem tonight'. Dad and I were dying. I didn't think I would make it off the plane without losing it. This lonely old

geezer thought he was doing some sort of civil service by informing me that the city was like a poem."

"Christ, you're right," Sammy said. "The rest of that damned trip that was all you two were saying. 'This' was a poem and 'that' was a poem and 'this hamburger is a poem' and 'that homeless man is a poem'."

"We need to bring that back," I said.

"Well, if I go another year without seeing you then that probably isn't going to happen."

"Stop being such a poem."

"What does that even mean?"

"I don't know," I said. I laughed, and it was like moisturizer on my clammy hands and brain.

"C27 – that's us, right?" Sammy asked, pointing with his free right hand.

"Yeah I think so. That's what it says on the ticket."

"Wouldn't know. Left mine in the car."

In the split-second in which I became momentarily enraged at him, I concurrently realized that we wouldn't have been able to get through security without our boarding passes.



"Go fuck yourself," I said.

"That's more like it."

\*

Answer: an irritating travel experience that Phil Satterfield has endured on nearly every single one of said traveling experiences.

*What is flight delay?*

Correct. But that buzzer means we are out of time, which means that the people at gate C28 will move on to Chicago, Illinois. Normally there would be a final round, but I'm jumping on the flight to Chicago because 'where efficiency goes to rest its head' is the answer for *What is gate C27 to Pensacola?*. Don't forget to have your pets spayed or neutered. Good night.

\*

"Taking all aspects of the legal system into account, how much trouble would we get in for sneaking into the cockpit and trying to fly it ourselves?"

Why even respond to Sammy's stupid question? We sat in seats 26E and F, waiting. To my immediate left, a man in a brown suit who had introduced himself as Jean-Paul was already asleep. Our backpacks

jostled with our feet below us. The plane roosted on the runway.

"Well, you could start with pilot regulations," I said. "Like, that we don't have licenses or whatever to actually fly the thing."

"It would also be stealing."

"Yes, but I don't think this would be like stealing candy bars from the convenience store as kids."

Sammy conceded the point by putting his headphones back in. Some people slept. Others read. Everyone tried to envision themselves somewhere other than flight 1068 to Pensacola. Outside, snow rustled under churning engines. Blinking red lights floated away obliquely into the darkening sky. Monica texted to ask if I had landed yet and I replied that I was enjoying the comfort of the runway too much to bother with taking off. When the individual in front of Sammy reclined, Sammy paused for two beats and reached for his backpack. After sifting through its contents, he pulled out a small book replete with empty squares.

"Not you too," I said.

"What?"

"Really? Sudoku? Am I the only person who finds this-"

"Addicting?" Sammy interjected. He fidgeted around in his newly

compressed space looking for a writing utensil. "I know, it's like doing cocaine with a pencil."

"Oh, no-no-no, it's intolerable. What do you get out of it? Why not crossword puzzles anymore? Those are beneficial – they improve your vocabulary at least."

"Why, because they expect you to know 'Elvis' last name'?"

"No, but..." The intercom made an announcement about progress and patience and thanksgiving for such patience and thanksgiving for the seven other planes in front of us.

"But what?" Sammy asked.

I pulled my shoulders back as the chair in front of me exhaled backwards onto my two feet of personal space. I thought I saw Jean-Paul shift a few inches closer to me.

"I dunno," I said. "Sudoku seems so chic and so coffee-shop. Why not just stick with Solitaire or Tic-Tac-Toe or Hangman or word searches?"

"This coming from the kid who probably has dad's old Scrabble score-sheets lying in his bedroom on top of an eighty-five year old version of Parcheesi," Sammy said.

I tried to shrug off Sammy's words, but they lingered, indigestibly. I thought of the storage room back at my apartment. Stacks of plastic containers in the corner held sticky photos. Towers of shoeboxes and old appliance boxes lined the floor in uneven grids. So many times I had wanted to clear a space in the middle of that room– to organize, categorize, examine, prioritize. But clearing space meant moving/shifting/eliminating. Throwing out. If you seek to slam light down onto a table in the middle of endless weakening cardboard, then you must remove that which rests in the middle. Finding a vantage point means clearing out some element of space<sup>1</sup>. Sammy had never even been to the apartment, and yet he knew how it looked. I grabbed his Sudoku book and shoved it in the pouch on the chair in front of him.

Sammy chuckled. "What in the hell makes you tick, Phil?"

"I dunno, Sam. What makes *you* tick?"

"No, I'm serious," he said, raising his posture and vocal projection. "What is your deal? How are you all worked up at me over some stupid little game? I don't get it. Why do you act like every conversation you

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<sup>1</sup>Practical example: sublime painters of the 19<sup>th</sup> century find a previously unseen landscape, capture said landscape in artistic form, and then share the mountains/trees/dirt with the world in the form of a 3'x7' masterpiece

enter is some sort of soul-strangling experience?"

"That's ridiculous," I said, loudly.

Three rows ahead on the left, a chair tilted forward and cast a hand up at the service button.

"Is it?" he said. "You keep your cards so close to your chest and just keep going around in the same goddamn circles. Chat a little, take offense to something, get over it, move on. Why don't you ever just try something *new*."

The stewardess was walking down the aisle in our general direction. A few heads were already turned, looking to see what was causing the problem in row 26. Sammy pulled the Sudoku book from the pouch and calmly tore out a page.

"Excuse me," Cindy the blue-suited stewardess began, "but several passengers have issued complaints regarding your behavior. I am going to have to ask you to control your use of language as well as the volume of your discussion in order to respect the wishes of the passengers around you."

Before I could diplomatically and apologetically respond, Sammy did. "Fair enough, Cindy. I'll take care of things right now."

Sammy began doodling on the extricated Sudoku page. Unsure of exactly which things were being taken care of, I allowed him to doodle on.

"Here." He pointed to the piece of scratch paper. I skeptically granted his wish and glanced at it.

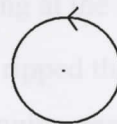
"This is your life," he said.



"You need help," I said.

"No, but seriously, listen. This is you. All you."

Sammy thrust his pen at the paper, pointing.





"That's great Sammy. Thanks so much. Do you want me to show Cindy? Maybe she'll give you a thumbs up."

"Fuck you, cause this is you."

"What am I, the dot?" I asked.

"No. Fuck no. Not in a million years." Sammy paused and looked out at the runway. I wasn't certain, but it appeared as if he was blowing imaginary cigarette smoke into the window. "You just – ah, it's fucking terrible. You just keep going around and around doing the same stupid shit without ever getting closer to anything."

I began running down a checklist in my head:

- we had not consumed any alcohol that day
- to my knowledge, Sammy never had an opportunity to smoke anything
- although I did go to the bathroom a few times throughout the afternoon, I did not think Sammy had been hit in the skull with any obtuse items

"You are nuts," I said.

"No, you are *stupid*. Look. *Look*. You just keep going in the same direction all the damn time."

"Sammy, what in the hell are you talking about? *You* are telling *me* that *I* don't have direction? I am in school. I have plans, Sammy. I have a girlfriend. I have a direction."

"Yeah but direction isn't *pulse*," Sammy said, "it's not *want*, it's not – it's not..."

Sammy made a series of jabs at the paper.



"It's not this!" he yelled in a whisper.

Heads turned. Some glared indignantly. Others eyed the service button. Jean-Paul creaked his right eye open slightly. I stared at the paper, looking at the fierce arrows tearing in at the middle of the circle. One almost ripped the page. I thought I heard Sammy exhale a little quicker than normal.

"You have nothing that pushes you *in*. Nothing so addicting-"

“Addictive.”

“Whatever. There’s nothing that you’re willing to push the routine aside for to just Go. Get. It.”

“What is ‘it’? Girls? Drugs? Is this what they teach you in rehab? To ‘go get it’?”

“If you don’t believe me,” he said, pausing to measure his words, “then ask yourself why you didn’t want to visit Mom. And why you didn’t want me to come along.”

I looked at him accusingly.

“And don’t lie to yourself,” he said.

Sammy crumpled up the page of drawings and tucked it into the pouch on the back of the seat. Seconds later his headphones were in his ears and I was pulling papers out of my backpack onto the small tray table. Sammy was the one who needed prodding to come. I had to retrieve him, call off work, book the flight, and do everything else to get us both down there. I was the one leaving the girlfriend and the school and *my future* to go take care of mom.

Outside on the adjacent runway, a plane pulled across the snowy foreground and skated off the ground into the dark sky. The red lights

blinked and blinked, each time propelling more of the steel bird into formlessness. As it disappeared, the red lights lingered, plotting points in the empty night that encompassed them.

Patrick McGinty, 2008

## A Note to Fundamentalists On Evolution

*Be calm, I tell them.*

*Do not be troubled.*

Darwin was a man  
after your own hearts.

His first mention of finches  
is of killing one beneath a hat.

Matthew Miller, 2010



Fundy's  
By: CAROL JACOBS  
10/27/94