

DINER JOURNAL

FALL 2021

FIRE

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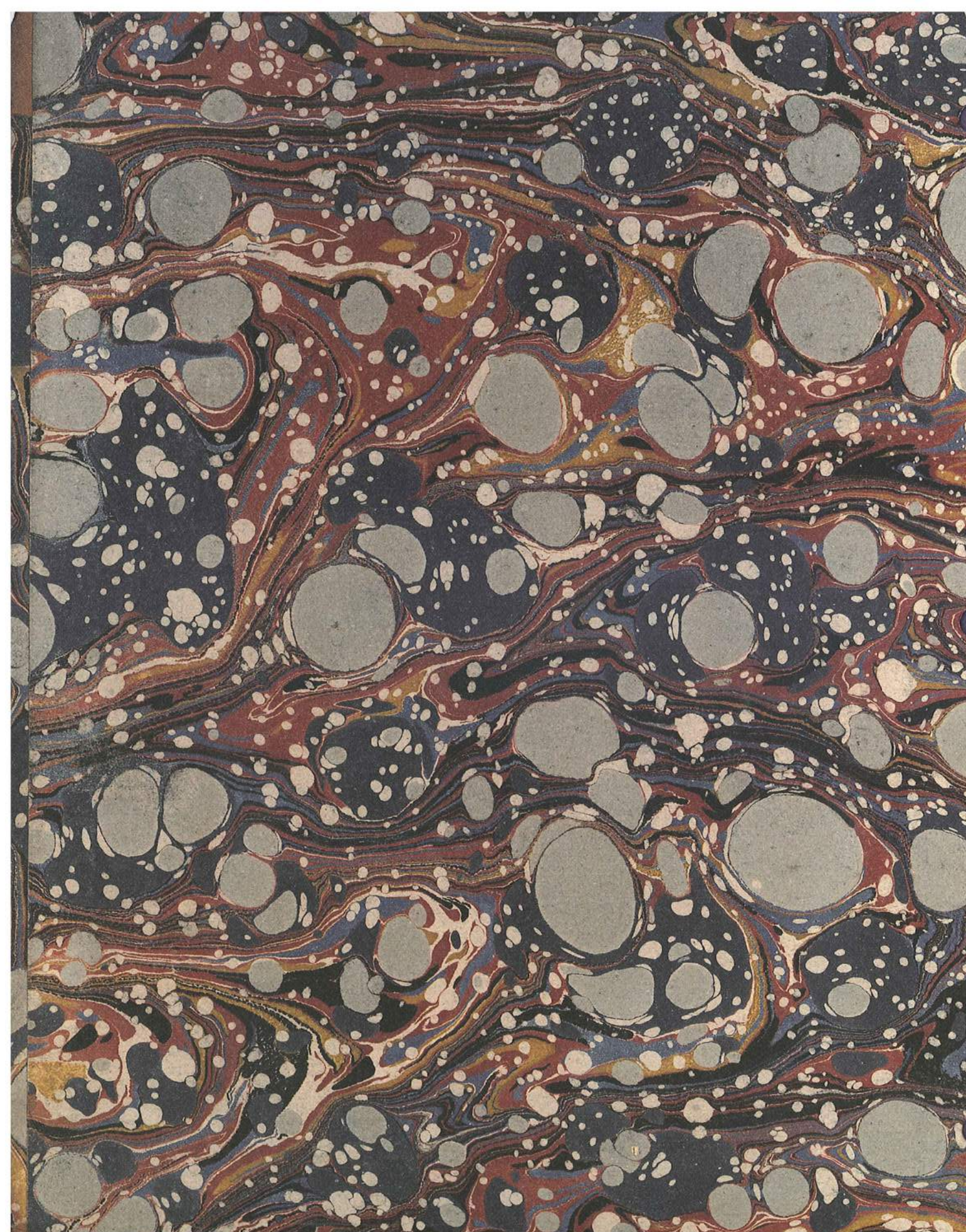
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Editor's Letter

BY ANNA DUNN



We carry them with us. Stuffed in old pockets. Tucked like a forgotten cigarette behind the ear. We parade them around at parties. Some are grand. Some slender. Some we nurture, embellish, tend to, allow to grow. Everyone has a story and everyone loves a story, epic or otherwise. Our lives themselves are figments, a constant creating. Over the years, we have published a short story here or there, a narrative poem, a fiction. We have imagined the recipes themselves as flash fiction and a few in this Journal as fairytale. Here we have taken a stab at what I find the most challenging genre.

Fiction. The way we recognize each other's aliveness is through a trading of our own personal mythologies. And I think this daily practice, this constant negotiating narrative, is the central reason it is so difficult to create the artful one. So many decisions are made in one day. That number grows exponentially when you sit down to a blank page. Most of the excitement around here occurs when imaginations collide. A series of choices, a series of collisions, a series of blooms.

Over the years many of you have contributed to the Diner Journal in ways that have been nothing short of sincere, graceful, stunning, and ultimately inspiring. You above all else have been the driving force behind the Diner Journal. That is to say, to create, maintain and re-imagine a format for creativity to flow through, for us all to flow through, to share and allow one imagination to inspire another has always been standard we strive for. Are there typos? Yes. Do I secretly love them? No comment. Do I wish we had more time to evolve certain ideas? Yes. However, the unique essence and I believe the great success of the Diner Journal has been one of community creativity.

We are now embarking on a new voyage . . . something I'm calling This Must Be the Place. As many of you know the upstairs apartment in the Marlow & Sons building is vacant and we have taken over the lease. It is a breathtaking space, one filled with light, with sky and a view of the grassy meadow the now absentee developers so graciously left in their wake. I was excited to bring Bird dog there. She was always on the search for the sun spot, traversing an afternoon room, napping contently only in the warm glow of the sun on the floor. Her spirit I know will live on here in this Place.

Here in this Place we will create a space that works in the same way as the Journal. It will be an open door for all of us. For teaching classes, for doing readings, putting on plays, for dancing, for hanging our work on the walls and inviting each other to look and enjoy and be inspired by each other. I'm open to any and all ideas. We want to host your ideas, as wild as they may be.

Many of these stories, in this Fire and Fiction issue of the Diner Journal, I've carried with me for years. I've grown with them. Reread them. Thought of them from time to time. Others are by writers I've known for years and some still I've never met. What makes these pieces, and the art inspired by them, successful is that when I read them, I am lost to them. I can relinquish myself to their language, their world, their beauty, to their ideas. I love to look at them. I feel no desire to look away. If all characters start out phantoms then so do we. The soft optical purr of key and computer like the hum of a well tended fire is how we become sisters and fathers, gardeners and bakers, pirates and Pans. Sharing stories, sharing recipes, sharing a flame, sharing space. It's how we love and are loved.

HIGH SUMMER

BY JIM MCHUGH

STRANGE TO ME IT IS, then, that music is first and foremost a communication, public ritual stretching all-way back to the building-of-the-hearth times, the early epochs of human mind-creation. It's how holy news of birth and murder was spread, pre-the-printed-word; how workers stayed on a page, in rhythm, moving forward. Music's how mothers taught their babies words of love and survival, and still is. It's where things stayed kept: in its timeless preserving fluid, lives stay suspended; whole of human history thrums in it, thrives there, stays alive, connected, right there breathing above the veins in your neck.

That ain't what's strange: that music's as human as death and need is imprinted there in the protein strands of us. What's odd and sad is that the benefits I reaped from this particular noisome execution of the necessary art are all solitary, lonely as cold hell: like I'd studied something grave in a monk's cell made of pure sound, my forlorn discoveries of unsayable things drowned nonetheless in a filling pit of mudcolored amp-wash. I hazard that's the nature of adhering to a band of relative strangers, opposed to your own tribe; that's how it is when you play in a designated rehearsal space or on a lighted stage 'stead of opening your nourished mouth to sing with your feet hot with the family fire. Or standing with your people in the darkened temple of high-worship. Intention defines the thing off jump-street. Built on a stack of coins, it's corrupted; fucked all to pieces pre-meditated like that: tailor-made only for exploitation and commerce, no matter

how ill-fated, piddling or five-dollars-at-the-door it may be.

In this thinking, I'm one step closer to Sun Ra, Pharaoh, Ayler, Trane and all those cloistered, far-out holy-rollers. Not a bad thing by any stretch, a grand realization you'd not be overreaching to call a benefit in and of itself—

Amongst others, I gotta say. I ain't trying to sound like a bitter little bitch. Playing with them crazy motherfuckers, Thee Pantrelles, offered some distinct joys. The benefits was all in the process, tho, all of-of-the-moment: only worked in the moment, heavy with bloodflow and discovery, then gone for good. Hard results ain't what's rife with glories: no musical, financial or social fruits worth chewing on came of it and won't, won't ever. It's all how it takes you in the moment you conceive it, where you follow it, what you channel, flail, pummel and transcend. When you come back, it don't matter a bit, won't make a lick. Proof's sake: one practice jumps right to mind.

I was deep in it, man—had been one flagrant shitstorm of a high summer day. At the restaurant, the a-cee was fritzing like it can, and the upstairs dishpit, already a severe clusterfuck of workplace design, was hot as two rats tubesock-humping. I was lunch-rush weeded. And whole time up there next to the sweating hood-vents, too, I knew after work was Friday afternoon, when I'm weekly slated to help Uncle Jimmy with our new garden errands. You best believe outside was full-on too: jungle-heat, that Athens, Georgia special.

Our debut was the upcoming Sunday

and we'd sworn to jam every night 'til then; I had to arrange for my boy Tee-man, who's got full-run of his old-man's Escort, to drive me straight from Jimmy's bidding out to Butthole Manor—the ivy-swallowed farmhouse they rented out Winterville-way—for a run-through before drummer Dang It and bassman Murph had to be back in town at their door-guy jobs, where I could catch a ride home for our late night supper after Aunt Francis' overtime Friday shift—another unavoidable weekend ritual in our home.

Eleven AM had me exhausted with the mere idea of the day.

Sure enough, after I'd cooled for a purloined beer and a post-shift sandwich, I headed home through the mind-crippling heat. Time I got there, I was shredded, wrecked; smelled like a turd's nutsack. Past the old water tank, I spied Jimmy to the back of the yard, his kneeled form straining and yanking against the plant life. Sheer fatigue halted me there in the road. Dazed, I caught the tinny lilt of Jimmy's hi-fi a-shimmer in the sunblasted mist.

I went inside, sink-showered, stood shirtless in front of a box-fan, hoovered down some ice-water and went out to meet him. For spiritual purposes, I put on my cousin Jasper's George Clinton Atomic Dog Southern Tour tanktop.

When Jimmy heard the screen-door smack, he stood, turned. "There he is!" he said. "Killer, you just in time!"

I walked to him. "What's on the docket today, bossman?"

"Well, after work I took the truck

over to Lowe's, got some seed and soil, and picked up some deluxe trowels and gloves for those guitar-hands of yours. I figured we'd finally clear this weedy patch where the big tree was, then we're gonna build some pumpkin hills. I wanna try and find a place where the squash'll grow against the bugs, too."

"Hey, 'member I told you I gotta split for a while but I'll be back in time for dinner."

"Yeh, I remember, son. I'm old but I ain't so old. I remember when my boy chumps out on his Uncle Jimmy. You best be back in time too. I got a hellified lemon-chicken planned and okra, corn and tomatoes from right over yonder," he said, raising a hand-hoe toward his rows. My Uncle Jimmy was old Georgia farm-hand going way back, red clay's in his blood even though what's mostly on his hands now is cleaning bleach and sheet-rock paste from the dorms he maintains for the college. He can grow some okra, pain in the ass as it is, and his tomatoes are neighborhood-famous. I tripped on his saying "tomatoes" with the snotnose long-A, like he was high society out there in his kudzu-hemmed patch of thrashed earth.

"I'm coming back in time. Told you I would."

"I believe you, Benny."

Then, boy, we got to it. Jimmy worked himself raw, didn't know another way. Watching him menace the earth with a nine-inch blade, I wondered how he summoned the energy, and I became bone-tired just thinking what you'll do in a lifetime: all that work, and the years you'll burn off merely drinking and drugging, nevermind what you lose shaking the jones; how you handle harshly and gently all the people who love you: all the child-rearing and the brother-burying a man'll have to bear in his time. How it could leave you broke-down, burnt and gone, like it did my old man, or disappeared in the ether like my mother. The intruding images of my folks stopped me for a second.

Then my Uncle Jimmy hoed the head off a woodpile copperhead with the non-chalance of a cigarette-pull, and I determined that at least part of me was made of superhero stock.

Jimmy always kept enough breath in his head to shoot the shit whole time

he pulled and ripped and harrowed. His mind as usual was on music; he had James Carr on the box he'd built onto on the screenporch, mounted with some weather-protected Boses. Once he'd chucked the snake-chassis into the back fence bush, he got to James Carr's tale: how dude was slam-flat-crazy, a Memphis cat who couldn't keep it together, day-job he pulled in the city blood-bank, which spooked management when viewed alongside his weird-ass antics. Dude was no mean machine, though, just had a fucked-up head, and was right zooted on weed and pills, too. Jimmy'd caught him on the Chitlin Circuit twice, once in

times he'd seen my pop play.

Best were the ones with Solomon Burke and Don Covay—he tore it up, stone-killed it. But the legendary one, of course, was with Jackie Wilson. Bass player Stink Settle had gotten drunk as a goat fighting with his old lady. All through the Georgia Prophets' opening act, they set to rousting his dead ass from behind the wheel of his cockeyed-parked pick-up. No dice: motherfucker was skunked, sandbagged, special-needs section.

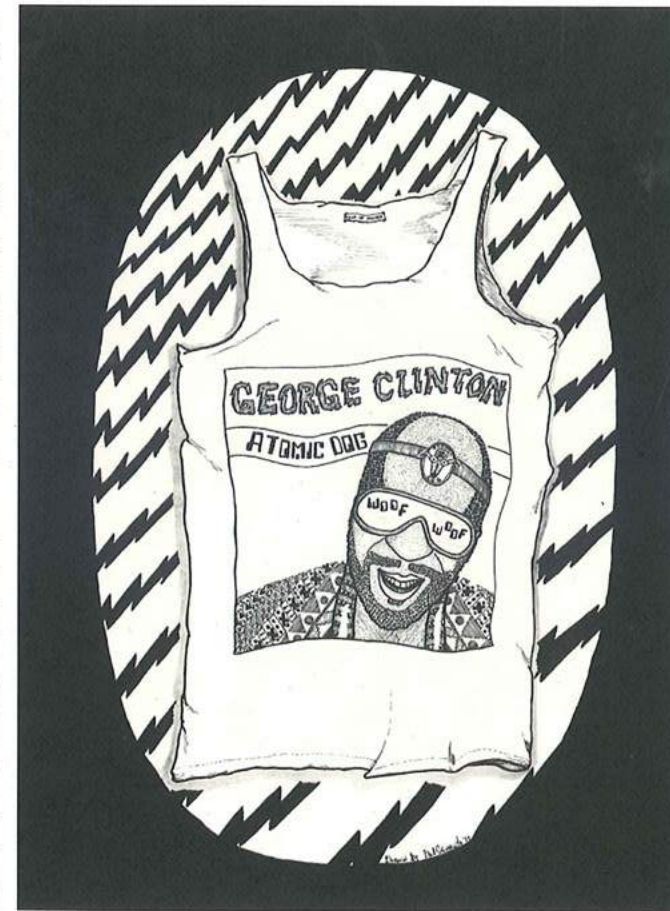
So my dad took it on, learned bass from scratch, had to happen that way: Jackie coulda done without a guitar, but his shit woulda been spineless without

that bottom. Turns out my pop owned the low-end, feeling the lines, moving with it, sticking the changes on instinct, on-the-one as a motherfucker. The Prophets' guitarist, some skinny white kid, knew most of Jackie's songs, too, from an all-Jackie cover set they did, so no harm no foul there, either. They straight-up burned Cootie's down that night, it's a matter of legend: first time my dad ever touched a bass guitar was there in front of a packed house, a-shake and a-shimmy, that he just destroyed. All the old cats say he was a natural at it, that he shoulda stuck with it, even old Stink—who that night may as well of been laying brick in Aiken, South Carolina—professes it, swears it, believes it just through sheer repetition of the tale: that right there'll show you the power in the telling of a story.

Uncle Jimmy says that seeing my dad learn that bass on stage like a strange woman lying sidewise in his arms was what put the

glitter and magic in my mother's eyes; she'd been there to see him as part of one of my pop's Standard Romeo Ploys, but of course it turned out different, bigger, beyond their control. Jimmy's voice ducked some and his eyes shifted subtly when he came to my mother's name: Pammmy.

It was still hot as a motherfucker when we discovered that what had grown in the patch that was once a large oak was some wild pepper vine that made your eyes water and your throat burn when



Atlanta and once at Cootie's, out in the sticks, where my old man had briefly been in the house-band. Jimmy said that James Carr came through right after my dad had fallen out with his combo, so he'd not gotten to add his vamps and phrasing to "Pouring Water on a Drowning Man" or "You Got My Mind Messed Up," which Jimmy said woulda been some perfect numbers for my pop at that point.

Though I knew the litany back-and-forwards, I asked Jimmy to tell me of the

you tore at it. The shit was bunk. Jimmy was dead set on his pumpkin-patch, tho, so we leaned into it, retching, hacking, leaking tears from our eyes 'til we got it all gone.

On a break we rinsed our heads with cooler-water and for the first time in a minute he asked me about my music.

"It's good Jimmy," I said. "Freaky: these new dudes I'm playing with are something else. But they can jam. Loud as a mug, though." For my comings-and-goings, he knew I'd started playing with some folks outside my basement-jams with Tee-man, but I'd yet to volunteer a thing about Thee Pantrelles. I wasn't sure if I wanted him and Aunt Francis to see exactly what I'd become involved with.

"Your dad loved that freaky stuff too. That acid-rock boochie. Hippy jams."

"I wonder if he woulda liked my new thing. It's in that line. We do Hendrix, and our own songs, too. It's like, I'm trying to get these crazies to do some Funkadelic, It's that kinda vibe, you know what I mean? Me doing the Eddie Hazel parts of course."

"Well he'd be sure as shit all about that, Benny. I'm saying."

Then something broke, and I felt it rush in, a formerly amorphous feeling that now had a name: my dad would never know how good I could be.

"Jimmy, reason I gotta split tonight is we got a show this Sunday to rehearse for."

"King Bee, Goddamn. A concert?"

"Why don't you and Aunt Francis see if ya'll could make it. It's short notice I know. But it's here in town. No big thing, but if you could make it, it'd be great."

"Damn. Sunday, I don't know that we could. Probably be late for a worknight, won't it?"

"Yeh, eleven or so I imagine we'd play."

"That ain't gonna happen, Ben. We'll just save it till you're at the Carnegie Hall."

"Well why don't I let you know what's next, Jimmy," I said and left it at that. I turned back toward the torn-open ground.

Jawing with Jimmy usually helped the work fly by, but this day I bid farewell every drop of sweat from my head. Was nothing but heat, dirt, time. I tried turning for it, to see—tried firing a feeling of need and loss into my heart, of family. But the image of my father felt far off: I couldn't see so clearly his tilting-back head and his halo of brain and bone, the gray ruined slippers I'd imagined him

wearing when he swallowed his gun—the gray stained sweater. I illumined the guiding moon my mother wrote of in her letters, but I couldn't find its face. There was no image, no weight, no gravity to attach to this moment in the garden: only absence, an inability to be witnessed, a loneliness beyond what you could feel searching for a misplaced path in the woods with the night coming on: no one was watching, no one was there. It was like when I saw an old x-ray of my own infant ear-canals, before the surgery and tubes made them real; like trying to feel connected to a foreign map someone told me was meaningful.

Jimmy must of noticed me floating in another bad fog. He stopped talking. His tape ran out and he let it be and all there was was his grunting against the stronger roots, the clink of his blade against stones, his coaxing the burning phlegm.

I could of lain in that snake-hole dirt and slept for hours, the ants tracing trails in my eyelids and hair.

Sure enough, though, I turned around and there Tee-man was, backlit through the grove yard by the beginning of a sunset. Jimmy caught my lapse:

"Shit, seven thirty already? We was just getting a line on it. Terrence, why don't you pull up a shovel, son?"

"Naw, Jim. You got the wrong dude," Tee-man said.

"Little shit. How's your folks?" Jimmy said.

"Uncle Jimmy, we gotta cruise," I said, stemming the tide of chatter. "I'll be back nine-fifteen or so."

"Alright now, tear it up, killer," he said, and I split with Tee-man, stopping for a second to brush off the dark soil Jimmy had got for the day's planting.

Out on the highway, we hit a hogleg and blasted Maggot Brain. I was brain-dead-nuked but it ain't like Tee-man was noticing. Time we passed the cattle fields, I was all but headless.

From down the rural route you could hear them wail. I cranked down Eddie Hazel's dirge to reverence a warm two-chord monochrome that was fucking with the sunset something fierce.

My blood got up. I felt about half-drunk. From the patio, with the drums, it hit like a twisted sea-chanty. Through the glass-door I saw they had my amp on standby, the tubes a-glow and the precious circuits charging, my guitar against the grillcloth all in tune. The drummers saw me, smiled and nodded, stoned as bats. I came right in.

I found the key and accelerated. Lemon-Lime and Murph were shocked

from their bliss-dreams by my stuttering chop-razor harmonics and half-chorded note-clusters. It was a natural guitar-key, perfect. I tagged the chords and the volume swelled, and that room filled to its molding with warm golden ooze. It went on and on. We didn't trade solos, no wrangling of dynamics, no stop-starting, just following the chords where they decided to drift. Time and tempo moved like an ocean, and I was sheltered in its glowing womb.

Then that song left like a tide of amniotic caramel, with only the blessed remnants remaining, glomming on our eardrums.

All was silence for what felt like a full minute.

"What was that?"

"Yo Benny," Lem said.

Everybody seemed too fried to talk: they stared at their beers, belched, hooted.

"No, seriously, man, what was that?"

"This thing I been working on today, dude. Called Caravan of Blades."

"Well let's pull that motherfucker again!"

"Yeh, I wanted to just fuck with that today. Leave the set alone for a while. Just jam, you know, feel good about it. We won't have it together for the show, but lets just mess with it for the rest of practice. Fuck it."

I looked at the VCR clock: quarter to nine. We'd played it for nearly an hour.

"I couldn't be more with down with that, my man," I said, and tucked back into my Strat.

We hit it a few more times, each one losing something as Lem snapped us from our pure revery with his attempts to arrange it, form it, limit it—make it something. But still, with the volume-trance it inspired, I felt like what ailed me was far away, in a whole other country. Night-time leaned against the glass, and I was able to get lost in it some.

Tucked in the maw of their fragrant van on the dark ride home, I felt as if I'd endured a b-ball practice where we hadn't hit our free-throws and were made to run suicides for a whole half hour—replete with what coach would call the runner's high. I was for-real high, too, but that won't explain everything. The feeling I had was it working: I felt the sheer joy of the endeavor, felt it lift me to states of ecstatic awareness, felt what music can remedy when its done in the right name of the moment. Most importantly tho: I felt. ■

(Excerpt from the novella High Summer.)

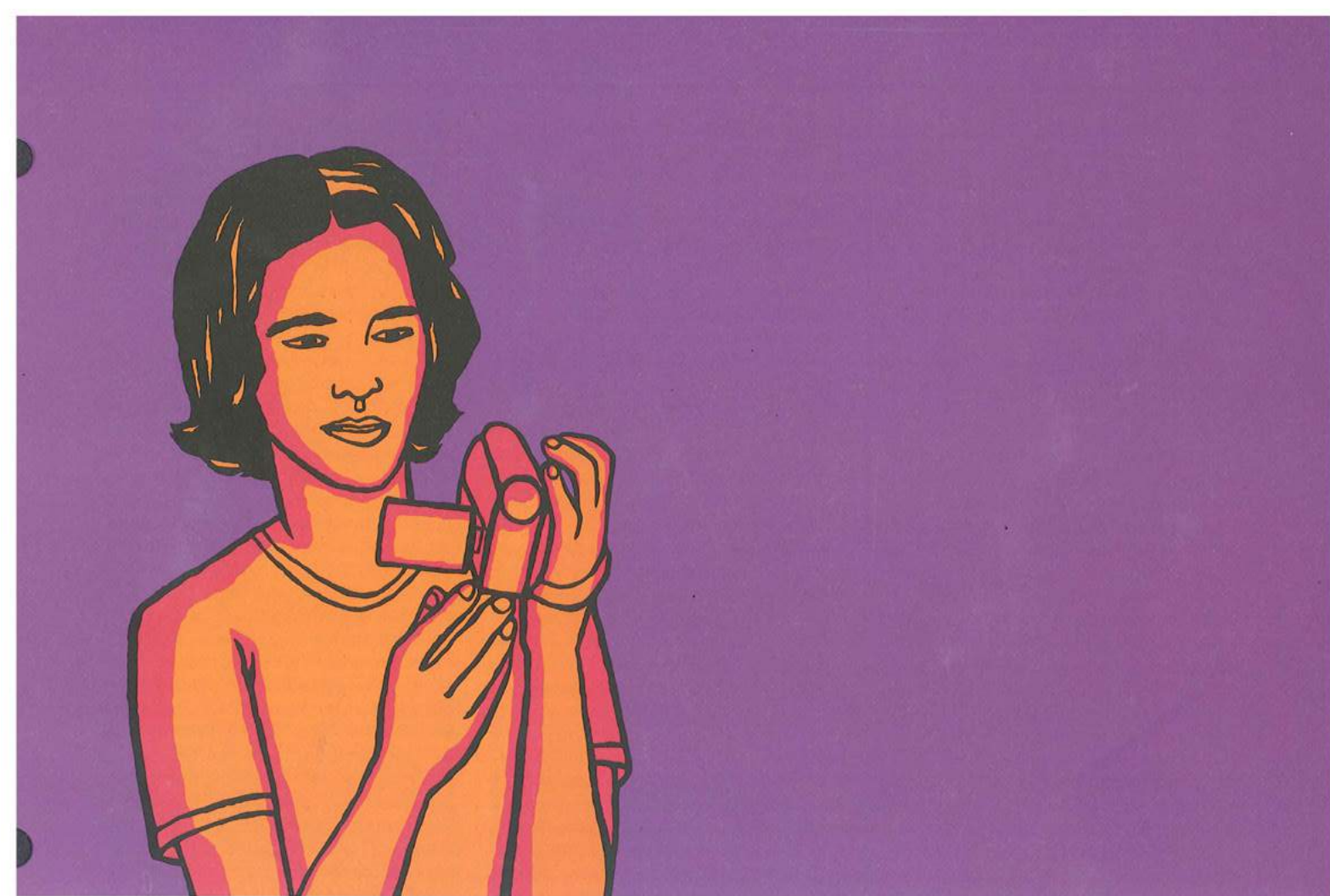


ILLUSTRATION BY Mike Worful

WHEN I TAKE ZACK ROLF OUTSIDE

BY PETER MILNE GREINER

THE SAME AFTERNOON I asked Walsey what the cost of drowning was Zack gave him a plasma torch and so he learned to weld. Earlier we were at the edge of this frozen beaver swamp snowshoeing when the dares started coming out. I told Walsey to jump across some ice for eight bucks while Zack taped it. Zack shot our lives on digital. Hyenas, I thought. We were all hyenas then before the Little Inventions.

I can say with some conviction and some compunction that I'm not a killer and that in fact I too had contemplated pillaging the Unitarian church for its wealth of yellow chairs. But it was Val

who did it in the end, and if I had beat her to it she would have burned empty-handed or not at all. This is not in my defense.

When I take Zack Rolf outside I sock him gracelessly in the face, and he falls back like a misfired pistol. His empty bullet shape now smoke from his prissy Cartier cigarette, I watch the wind once in him adjourn cataractously into the night the way babies' laughter disperses through a room. My newly opened hand grieves for, or a better way to put it might simply be remembers, the gone threat. There are many words for when a threat becomes a target. Zack sprawls like used

columns on the ground, accruing that pitiable ruin value unique to someone who has lost a fight. I can't—really Can Not—remember if it was him or me that set the church on fire.

In all that sacred cautery and holy rubble I saw something small shine through. I ransacked Val's dead burnt hand for her damned and damnable ring. The morning had been an unsoftly gray, frozen pond-water gray, bladegray. I shivered and probably as I did so Zack pressed play and watched it all again in the wobbly terraria of the camcorder LCD, solely knowing his own mischief. People from all over town scoured the foundation and the

surrounds. Here rafter fragment, there stained glass, all amongst office supplies, tapestry, pew carcasses. It was discovered that she was missing a piece. The charred ring hand and I found it secretly. A little piece of Pompeii replete with loot poking out from the sooty remains of the narthex. The hand continued its journey into my bag. That makes it sound like I had nothing to do with it. But I held her hand in death, tucked it away with my car keys ruefully and snuck it back into our lives again. Why.

Val had been accused by some of being a little too wifey. Mostly by people like Zack who would later accuse her of being a little too dead. Irreconcilably a tremendous bastard and a clown Zack was someone I wouldn't want to fuck off because there was cunning in him somewhere, something magnanimous that maybe incidentally came through in the tapes. The tapes which are I now see his saving grace and the core of his mysterious guiltlessness. He had been born without a conscience and was a true master of deranged rationale. In that part of his brain where the conscience should have nestled in fear of murder and remorse something else had grown huger in its handicap.

It turned out Walsey was a prodigy when it came to working with molten materials. He turned to sculpture. His were spindly mutant affairs: sunflower men, Skelties, the effigial manifestations of fantasy novel denizenry. They littered the yard like the dark yellow burns that newly covered his hands and wrists, the subhuman mottle that is art at its earliest. I told him he should be more careful and he says Gabe don't talk to me about being careful. The end of his torch is ultramarine joining limbs and carapaces. I know you burned Val to the ground by mistake he says and I forgive you but my burns have lately been my stability. Walsey's forwardness makes my neck red and I start fiddling with Val's engagement ring in my pocket. There's nothing really for me to say so I just wonder why I can't let him have it. Kin complicity will affiance blood enemies in this way. It's rare but has been observed in nature enough to be textbook and therefore reassuring.

She was stealing little tables and chairs for their apartment.

There isn't much difference between a burn and a ring and a bad sculpture. I tell this to Zack's Panasonic eye, his high-resolution escapism when he comes over and there's a purple and brown and black corona of bruise behind the viewfinder

because he forgives so readily. He tells me the police still have no suspects, that we must be in the clear and not to worry that most of it's on tapes at his parents' house in Monterey. I blanch at this. He scoffs ashes of burnt hymnals and girls and yellow chairs and guilt and ridicule. He shall funnel and shepherd us through his perilous apertures yet.

In fact we were never caught and convicted of arson and manslaughter because those tapes are Melty Destroyed and are eyes and a nose and a mouth on a Walsey sculpture, a Walsey sculpture that I made. I had to steal the tapes from Zack's house. I couldn't smash them to smithereens before watching them though.

On the tape me and Zack laugh. There's a little Pop sound and Whoosh sound when the Little Inventions hit the siding. Their fire moves up to the roof like arched backs. It is oceanic this fire and this hilarity. I sort of imagine Val inside maybe hearing that. On the tape I can't see her but I know she's in there with the smoke and the furniture and the good if not pious intentions. Her heist mid-botch. On the tape the vague hiss crossfades to siren. Zack pans toward it. Then the shot moves away and into the dark Hiding Month behind the church and cuts off.

Zack and Val were actually decent friends. She was too pragmatic though for him. She probably resented us because I talked too much and Zack laughed too much. Our two aspects of being loud. She said I talk hurdles: sea stars, The Maze of Death, synchrony, rare barking deer. Her knees would knock and Walsey would glare at me and come over and change the subject. Then Zack would pick it up again and prattle upon her about akpoteshie and mopeds and scrying from dashes made on notebook paper until she went to bed or left. I didn't ever want that to happen but I don't know how to shut my mouth sometimes and Zack made a game of it.

Christ Gabe. Walsey would say that because he was the only one who would call me out on things. Christ Gabe you spur him on. Christ Gabe you torched my girl. Things have changed—subtly—since I torched his girl but now he's a little bit more watchful and a little more prudish, a little more discouraging when it comes to my hanging out with Zack and making Little Inventions. Because they are what ended up causing all this or it would be fairer to say actuating all this. I went along with it until Zack told me way later about Magic Gasoline which actually wasn't magic at all, its only unusual

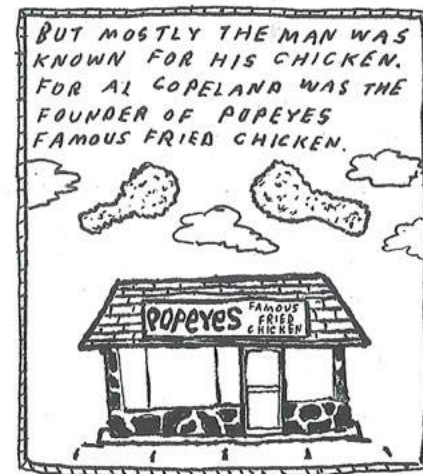
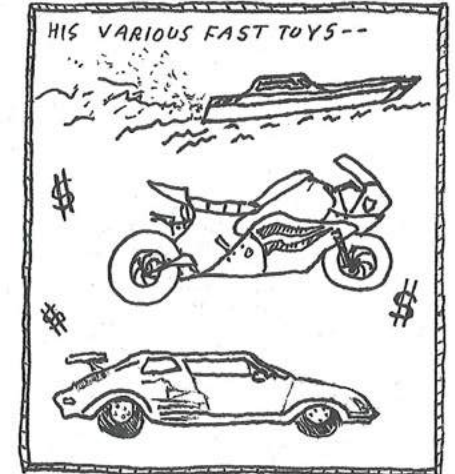
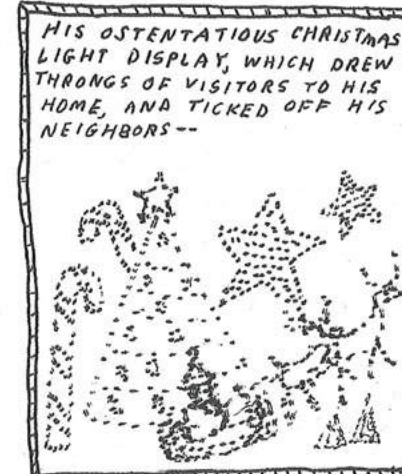
property having been its location: the broadside of a House of God. We made these Little Inventions by buying a shit load of strike-all matches and then cutting all the match-heads off and then filling tennis balls with them. You'd chuck one at something and it would explode. We learned how to make them from the Internet. These types of things used to be passed down from older teenage brother to younger but even that cultural phenomenon is outdated.

Zack did not mention Magic Gasoline until day thirty-one of Laying Low. We were on one of those remote decaying porches you see people in our position hanging out on. He asked rhetorically wasn't it funny how the Magic Gasoline flared up when the Little Inventions hit it? Wasn't it funny how he had set that shit up before you even got there Gabe? This crude but doubtless calculated reveal did not extinguish the guilt and I told Zack Rolph that when I took him outside. I told him what a dick to Wals he'd been and he told me that We Were All Of Us Morons What Did It Matter. This is a little insane put that fucking thing down here let me help you I had said punching him right in the camera and turning quickly guiltily to the door out of which Walsey was coming to find us. I panicked suddenly because I was holding the ring for no reason. Wals saw Zack on the ground, mistook my panic for anger and shoved me against a banister. Christ Gabe you fucking have to pull it together. This is such shit what you're doing he said and his eye follows the object that had flown out of my hand. Sorry I'll get it he said dropping one thing to pick up another. I looked at Zack. Shyt.

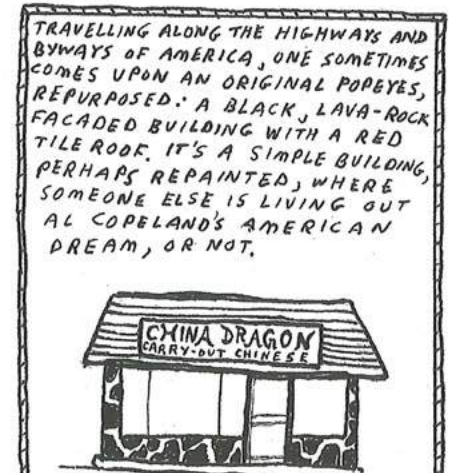
Wals looks at the ring for a long time. Then he looks at me and down at Zack still with the camcorder around his hand in a cloud of living daylight and doesn't say anything. Then he says that he Can't Believe This Shit Who Are You People Fuck You Both. He walks off toward wherever and I do not follow. Not all epiphanies are small shining things. Most are mundane. Val's harvesting of household surfaces was a function of the same exigency as felt and acted upon by Zack in his harvesting of what was really the most provincial phylum of catastrophe. I wasn't really sure where I fit in but I was starting to. This is a little insane I repeat. Look At What You've Caused. Zack couldn't answer to this I knew. What I had heard about us being morons was one of two sincere things he'd ever said in the course of my shame's fraudulent conveyance. The other was this:

Burn, Motherfucker. ■

Love That Chicken!



* FROM A 2-PAGE AD SHE TOOK OUT IN THE TIMES-PICAYUNE, THE LOCAL PAPER.



E.A. BETHEA

SEX MANUAL FOR LOWER CLASSES

∞

BY LYNDA SCHOR

"Their ideas were intolerable, but their penises were silky, she thought."
—Erica Jong

1. A queen walking along a glass surface deposits an oily, colorless trail at a rate of 0.8 mg of material an hour. This material evidently originates in the tarsal Amhard glands. Studies show that queen-produced substances prevent worker ovary development and egg-laying. Queen substances are important in worker recognition of and attraction to their queens. There's little doubt that these pheromones probably attract workers and allow them to differentiate between fellow workers and queens.

Honey bees have three types of colony members: queens, drones and workers. The queen reigns over the nest surrounded by attendants and is fed the

rich food she requires to perform her few but crucial tasks. Her slim lines hide her huge ovaries, which make her an extraordinary egg-laying machine, and her calm behavior masks her powerful pheromones. The drones are tended and fed by the workers, although they perform only one function: the all-important one of mating the queen. With their large eyes, flight muscles and powerful mating urge, drones are beautifully constructed for this task. The worker performs endless and diverse tasks in the nest. At any time a worker might be found walking the comb surface, perhaps tending the brood, cleaning debris from the nest, capping cells, ripening or storing honey, organizing pollen for storage, feeding or grooming the queen, guard duty, polishing cells, or food handling.

A worker leaving the nest on a foraging

trip can face an overwhelming array of flowers to choose from, some of more value than others. Foragers show great versatility in their methods of working flowers:

Open flowers—The worker bites the antlers with her mandibles and uses forelegs to pull them toward her body.

Tubular flowers—Workers insert the proboscis into the corolla searching for nectar. Pollen is collected incidentally when it adheres to the mouthparts or forelegs.

Closed flowers—The bee forces the petals apart with her forelegs and then gathers pollen on the mouthparts.

Spike or catkin flowers—The bee runs along the spikes shaking off pollen onto her body hairs.

Presentation flowers—The pollen is collected by workers pressing their



abdomens against the inflorescence, causing a pollen mass to be pushed out of the flowers.

Mounting and copulation are rapid and spectacular, with the drones literally exploding their semen into the genital orifice of the queen. Once contact has been made between drone and queen actual mating generally lasts less than five seconds.

As the drone approaches the queen from below, his hind legs hang downward, and in their initial contact the thorax is above the queen's abdomen and the first and second pair of legs straddle the queen. Within a split second the drone grasps the queen with all six legs and everts the endophallus into the queen's open sting chamber. At this point the drone becomes paralyzed and flips backward, and ejaculation results from the pressure of the drone's hemoglyph as the abdomen contracts. The explosive and sometimes audible ejaculation ruptures the everted endophallus and propels the semen through the queen's sting chamber and into her oviduct. The ejaculation separates the drone from the queen and he dies within hours of mating.

2. My curiosity, I rationalized, was not so much prurient as literary. Graham Greene's affair with Catherine Walston began when he was working on his novel, *The Heart of the Matter*. Green's biographers have written about their letters and I wanted to see them for myself. They might, I thought, illuminate the osmotic border between his fiction and his life. They are kept in dozens of stiff slender cardboard boxes, each the pale color of a London sky. Inside each box are about thirty green folders and in each folder is a letter or a postcard, perhaps a photo.

Catherine Walston was the American-born wife of a wealthy British landowner. At the age of thirty, inspired by Greene's work she decided to convert to Catholicism. Though she'd never met Greene she asked him to be her godfather. He accepted but couldn't attend the ceremony—he sent his wife Vivien in his place. A polite friendship between families developed but within a few folders it becomes increasingly clear that the friendship led to an affair. In one letter Greene refers to the precise instant this transformation happened for him. In a small plane chartered by Mrs. Walston to take him home to Oxford after a visit to her estate, he thought, "A lock of hair touches one's eyes in a plane with East Anglia under snow, and one is in love."

"I woke up this morning very calm and quiet after an odd dream of being dead, but even dead there were women and bedrooms."

In one photo in the collection C is dressed in a linen pantsuit. She has short, slightly curly hair, full lips, fine features, elegantly manicured hands with painted nails. She's smoking a cigarette, which today might convey a strain of self-destructiveness, but in those days suggested only sophistication.

The combination of her carnality and her Catholicism fascinated Greene. She seemed to live with one foot in the sacred world and one in the profane.

The affair reached its apogee in the late 1940s. By 1950 Greene was begging Walston to leave her husband and marry him. She declined, for reasons the letters only hint at. Perhaps she was afraid she'd lose her children. Perhaps she opted for the security of life with a rich and indulgent man. Perhaps she realized that Greene's habits and temperament were better suited to a lover than a husband.

"I love onion sandwiches," G wrote in a postcard from Amsterdam. Onions was one of their code words for making love.

3. A few days after hatching in an incubator on a huge farm, it has its upper beak and toenails snipped off. A turkey is normally a very discriminating eater, but the farmers have clipped the beak, transforming it into a kind of shovel. With its altered beak it can no longer pick and choose what it wants to eat. Instead it will do nothing but gorge on the highly fortified corn-based mash that it is offered, even though that is far removed from the insects, grass and seeds Turkeys prefer. After the beaks are clipped mass-produced turkeys spend the first three weeks of their lives confined with hundreds of other birds in what is known as a brooder, a heated room where they are kept warm, dry and safe from disease and predators. Their toenails are removed so that they won't do harm later on as in the crowded conditions of industrial production, mature turkeys are prone to picking at the feathers of their neighbors and even cannibalizing them. The next rite of passage comes in the fourth week, when turkeys reach puberty and grow feathers. Then they are herded from brooders into a giant barn. These windowless barns are illuminated by bright lights twenty-four hours a day, keeping the turkeys awake and eating. They stand, not on grass, but on wood shavings, laid down to absorb the overwhelming amount of waste that the flock produces. Still, the ammonia

fumes rising from the floor are enough to burn the eyes. Not only do these turkeys have no room to move around in the barn they don't have any way to indulge their instinct to roost (clutching onto something with their claws when they sleep). Instead the turkeys are forced to rest in an unnatural position analogous to what sleeping sitting up is for humans. These turkeys are all the same age and all of the same variety, the appropriately named Broad Breasted White. By their eighth week they are severely overweight. Their breasts are so large that they are unable to walk or to have sex. Instead, turkeys today are the product of artificial insemination. After twelve to fourteen weeks the whole flock is ready for the slaughterhouse.

4. Dr. Jim stretched, flexing one leg and pulling the sheet downward with his foot. Ellie's eyes widened but she didn't look away. He'd been aching for her since she'd leaned against him and given him that first tentative kiss; he was throbbing with arousal now but he acted as though having this woman stare at him didn't make him want to flip her on her back and bury himself inside her. That was exactly what he wanted to do, but even more than that he wanted her to learn she could trust him and that neither he nor his body was anything to be feared.

Her expression showed more wonder than fear, but he asked, "Are you thinking I could hurt you?" he asked.

"It does seem . . . that way."

"It only hurts some the first time," he told her. "Because a woman has a tiny piece of flesh that is torn. But after that it shouldn't hurt again . . . unless the woman is forced. That would hurt no matter how many times she's done it before. When she's ready to accept the man into her body, it doesn't hurt."

"So it wouldn't hurt this time?"

"I don't think so. Maybe a little bit uncomfortable since it's been a long time, but nothing like what you knew then. I promise."

"Did they teach you this stuff at school?"

"Some."

"How would I know if I was ready?"

"I could show you how to know."

She lowered herself to his chest again, bringing her legs to twine with his.

He explained the arousal of both sexes to her, finding it the most erotic thing he'd ever done. He didn't know how he'd survive if this was just a warm-up and she wasn't ready to move forward. But she seemed eager to experience all he'd

just explained.

"Did anyone at school ask questions?"

"Not as many as you do."

Her sweet innocence touched him anew. She ran her hand down his neck, across his chest, and her touch set him on fire. With great restraint, he kept his own hands curled in loose fists, one at his side, the other at her back.

She ended the intimate kiss, but her lips lingered, almost touching his.

"Did you like it?" he asked.

"Yes, did you?"

"Oh, yes." It came out as a half laugh, half groan.

She leaned back and ran her palm over his chest, down his stomach, studying him in the golden glow of the lamp.

She seemed eager to experience all he'd just explained. She sat up and unbuttoned the tiny buttons at her throat and slipped her nightgown off over her head, watching his eyes, gauging his reaction.

Her breasts were full and lovely, with darkened nipples that stiffened when he feasted his gaze upon them. Her waist was narrow and her hips flared becomingly.

"Do you want me to touch you?"

She nodded.

"Show me where."

She took his hands and brought them to her breasts. Her eyelids drifted closed as he ran his fingers over her budded nipples. She was lost to the magical sensations and the reactions of her body.

Dr. Jim forced himself to wait for her spoken or implied demands before he did the things he ached to do. And slowly but surely, she showed him what she liked. He held himself in rigid control, her inflaming touches setting him on fire.

With him Ellie felt so beautiful, so good and so right. Love made the difference. And knowing he loved her. She wanted to consume him. She wanted to envelop him.

"Now, Dr. Jim," she pleaded, "Take me now."

5. As for yellow dung flies, claims have been made that the female's decision to use one male's sperm rather than another's depends on whether she lays her eggs on a cowpat in the shade, or one in the sun. If a male yellow dung fly copulates for long enough, he can displace the sperm of previous males. To achieve this effect, small males have to copulate for longer than big males because small males transfer sperm more slowly. The male would then, after having replaced the sperm of his predecessors with his own, do well to then guard the female

until she has laid her eggs. That way his sperm would be the only sperm available.

6. There were what was called three rooms, but since it was already winter, and the landlord wasn't fixing the boiler, I began living in what I called the living room, off the combination kitchen and bathroom, which was almost as large, or maybe larger, but was home to a bathtub, large cylindrical hot water heater, and a sink next to a large gas stove. The toilet sat in a tiny wc adjacent. The floor had been painted black, but wasn't smooth, as if layers of paper had been scraped, but the job had remained unfinished. There were no sharp, clean corners anywhere, as if thousands of years of dust had been impressed where the floors met the walls, and where the walls met, layer upon layer of paint created rounded edges. The kitchen/bath had a dirty window overlooking a gray airshaft that had some irretrievable garbage at the bottom. But the living room had two large windows that faced a small concrete yard. Beyond that yard were the gardens of some brownstones, and I could see the trees, now looking like charcoal scribbles. Strangely, the ceiling had a band of ornamented woodwork, possibly oak, and there were huge sliding doors between that room and the kitchen/bath.

"But what am I telling you this for? I'm keeping you up." He made a move as if to rise, but because of his age, and his potbelly, it was so clumsy it seemed like a gesture. Like most young, poor writers I had lots of furniture retrieved from the garbage, and the chair he was in was a butterfly, with ancient canvas, stained, though clean, that sagged nearly to the floor.

"Don't go," I said. I was as excited as if he'd suddenly stripped himself naked.

"War," I said, "makes everything so serious."

"If you had seen the boys come back," he said. "It would have been better had they been killed outright."

"It must have been awful," I said.

Awful. The childish, meaningless word hung in the air, drawing a line between us.

He slumped again in the chair. "Why," he said. "What's it all for?"

For life. For art, I thought. For ideas. I wanted him to undress me, to inject his poetry right into me. The prospect of change, the prospect of love.

Unaccountably, I was so full of joy I couldn't breathe. I thought I might explode. ■

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PANNING

BY JESS ARNDT

HE HAD A BLACK SPOT on the webbing of his hand: a quarter-sized mark squatting there where his forefinger intersected with his thumb. She'd told him it looked charred and had even gone as far as to say "maybe a fire burned there once," a Devil's fire, she laughed, that had smoldered sullenly then gone out.

The black spot always made a spark of action for him. Women seemed to like it. He was, in their estimation, "a marked man." Their fingers trailed the smudge and at the *Okee-Doke*, the *Steer* and *Bertha's*, he had had some recent luck. He mulled over this as he buttoned his Carhartt shirt. There was a troublesome beaver down by the creek, and he, as he had agreed to do (he was the head and only ranch hand for the season), was this very morning going to set a trap.

In north Idahoan country, twenty miles from the Loon Creek Guard Station, deep into a series of valleys know as, "The River of No Return Wilderness," companionship came only from town, and it was a slog over washboard turns and rutted road in his limping Ford to get there. He had not always been a ranch hand. In fact, at 29, this was only his second appointment. Before that he had earned his salami in the ring, riding broncos. The everyday-ness of it, the snot-nosed kids mutton-bustin on sheep-back and the thickly cinnamonod elephant ears felt like a relief to him after he was let go from SEAL duty, home from the war. Though this series of jobs—Navy SEAL to bronc rider to two-bit hand—had seemed backwards to him last night when he spoke it aloud to her over a cup of Wild Turkey. In Stanley, the nearest town, he drank his whiskey in a regimented line-up of shot glasses that he then upended, leaving them on the bar to tally how many he'd had. The road was that treacherous. Only at home, at the Golden G, did he freehand the bottle into his tin mug.

He was using the same mug now. It had a few feathers of Turkey left in the bottom. He let his Yuban slowly cure the whiskey and steamed his narrow chin over it. His head and ribs were sore. It was a familiar ache, though not one that he'd felt in some time. They'd been rough

with each other, he guessed. He tried to summon it back. His hand felt cumbersome. He woke up so often now, there was never any question of morning wood. *Crack.*

In the nearest valley over someone was shooting a 30-30. Not his beaver, he hoped quickly, without really thinking at all. He had been wondering about the "pre-thought." For instance, he wasn't thinking, was he, when he squeezed a gelding's sides to nudge him up over a sudden swag of fence? Or further, last night, when his nuts had begun to fill with what he could only describe as hot buttermilk and he had "put on the dog" as the Corporal used to say, and he pulled her onto *not* his cot in the adjoining trailer but Lafferty's king-sized wrangler and whispered recklessly "I'm better than this baby I'm on the *up and up*"—what had he meant by it? Was it a pre-thought? A thought that was just now budding? She'd laughed at him again and stuffed his pale charge between her legs efficiently and that was that.

"It's not metaphysical, *Jimmy*," she'd said.

But back to the beaver, why did he, personally, want to catch it? Somewhere out there life had done its best to instruct him that dead was dead. He'd never made a beaver trap before and last night at the *Steer* the method that Frank Ballyhoo described seemed pretty half-shod. It involved fashioning a frame with an old stiff suitcase and a bale of wire, both of which he had unearthed from the burn pile behind the Lafferty's Lodge. He stared at the brittle cardboard of the suitcase and the bleed of stamps across its flank. He'd come to the Golden G with a duffle of clothes that were still stowed away—hand-stitched Rodeo shirts in bright tropical colors that did nothing to erase the puke-colored sky of a desert that had not been empty at all, like he had imagined it, but as it turned out was full of *stuff*.

Lafferty's great-grandfather was notorious for a colossus called the Coney Island Elephant, a 12-story elephantine brothel who's trunk hosed out over the Atlantic: "Pack right in to the world's

greatest pachy-derm!" the meticulously framed poster above Lafferty's king-sized read. Jimmy had found himself staring at the poster when he should have been staring at her. "31 class-A rooms and a ci-gar shop in her mammoth left toe!" What if Troy's wooden horse had been a brothel? Jimmy thought. What if we'd all been snuggled in 31 class-A rooms instead of left out, exposed, on that godforsaken infrastructure? Lafferty also boasted lineage with Lucy the Elephant (later renamed Margate) who, according to Lafferty was still standing, albeit frailly, at the nether quarters of dumpy Atlantic City, and the now lost "Light of Asia," or *Old Dumbo*, as Lafferty had fondly called the third and last pachyderm hotel when he was a kid. *Fire fire fire fire*, moaned Lafferty, fire takes it all.

The Golden G was less ambitious, but it was still, in Jimmy's estimation, a theme-park. Loon Creek, sawing along the valley floor, had once been plump with gold and Lafferty had kept the old prospectors' shacks where they lay at the creek's edge but now they were "authentic" guest rooms in the old style. The beaver was threatening that. Lafferty's guests wanted to dip their pans in a running river for chrissakes, feel the current spank their calves, the ice-melt creep up to crotch-level, not sit idle at some bucolic beaver-made pond.

When he'd first arrived to the valley, two months prior, Jimmy did some panning himself. He was embarrassed by his own naïve hunger but after the sun shod down he took his tools to the north bend of the creek where aspen, blooming mule ear and horse brush covered the path. He'd finished his SEAL training in only six months, six months faster than his father, the Corporal—an accomplishment he'd often repeated to himself in cramped spaces. When he was younger the Corporal had used a tool shed to train him. If you can't sit it out in *here*, he'd say you'll deserve every inch of what you get out *there*.

Jimmy set his Mag light on a rock. That was when he'd first seen the beaver. A flash of long tooth against the black stream. It startled him, a face bucking



up out of the dark like that. He began to sweat. A black spot, the Corporal had called his mark. The black spot. A spot that foretold death. *Unlucky.*

But how lucky did you have to get to disprove it? He'd survived 3 tours of duty ending with Al Faw, that ugly teething gnashing sonuvabitch. He'd been thrown in the ring more times than he could count. He'd dinged just about every rib he had, and then some. The rodeo circuit was over but he was doing pretty well in the bar circuit now: Annie, Wendy, Jo-Jo, Annie again, Annie last night. Last night he had pretended she was a Coney Island pachyderm girl. Her room, he'd imagined, was a top one. Right near the elephant's rump. She would have liked that, he bet, if he had shared it, and would have wanted to embellish the story even farther. But he'd kept his fantasy tucked away to himself. He was safer, he felt, when he stayed zipped up. Lyle had been the one he talked to, but Lyle.

Crack again.

A lever-action carbine. A good trail gun that no longer sounded as if it were a valley away. He loosed one of his tins of Cope from his back pocket. He kept two on hand, always. It was an Al Faw thing. One for the Devil and the deep blue sea. One for me, and one for the beaver, he thought absently. Annie was gone this morning when he'd woken up. A tidy space, as if she had never been there at all. What time had she left? Before day-break? And why. He was unsure of a lot of things, these mornings. A penumbral space. Penumbral for hours. The way these shaded valleys seemed to grow. But recently, even in the raw Salmon Mountain sun he felt gray.

Something was moving down by the creek. Maybe Annie, he thought, relieved. Out for an early morning dunk. She did what she wanted, of that he was clear. It was fall and the season was ending. Soon he would be alone—utterly alone—snowed in for an entire unused winter. By mid-November the terrain between the Sunbeam Mine, Loon Creek Summit and the Golden G turned so pitted with avalanches that even snowmobiles were risky. He checked his watch, already eight am.

In the deep freeze behind the trailer was a box of "beaver candy." A frozen spread of rotten salmon heads, mangoes, grapes and ground-up meal. He moved mechanically and hefted it out, grimacing. He'd found the beaver lodge near that bend in the stream. A bulky mound of shaved poles with a growing moat around it. Upriver was the dam itself,

an impressive wall of felled aspen. He returned each night with his pan—hoping what everybody hoped—but then she'd poke up like some rodeo clown and soon he was on his belly, scooting through the brush. The beaver was nocturnal too and as the season turned, was laying-in her winter stock of wood. She knew about the winter, he figured, how to survive it. Survival was a rigged game. Last month he and Lafferty had treed a bear and held the dogs on her for 24 long hours while they waited for the Wal-mart man to fly in and finish the job. The man had tipped him from a thick roll of Benjamins, and left him to clean up the carrion.

Jimmy dropped the freezer top. He was tense, he realized, from that rifle crack. Men like Lafferty, the Wal-mart man, the Corporal—liked to leave him their mess. He had gone into the tent afterwards and seen Lyle's kit resting there at the foot of his cot. He'd walked up and undid it. There were his towels, his carton of Camels, his Nascar mag, his "Wonders of Middle-East Cuisine" waiting neatly. Something invisible had skated off of Lyle's bag, something that was still screwing itself between Jimmy's ribs now. But no, Lyle had not left him a mess.

Jimmy shouldered the beaver candy and threaded down towards the creek-bend. Annie would probably end up with a mess-maker. Or no man. It was a girl like Annie, he imagined, who'd torched The Coney Island Elephant to the ground. The Lafferty clan had deserved it. One night Jimmy (walking as if with night-vision but asleep) left his pan out on his trailer-step next to his cracked Wolverines and the next morning Lafferty had uncharacteristically made him breakfast, setting the mining pan down as Jimmy's breakfast plate. A boulder of oatmeal and a sheep sausage still smoking in the middle of the tin.

Trying to skim off me? said Lafferty. Poor kid.

Jimmy pushed the oat mound with his fork. He'd found an old pocket watch, he thought of saying. He'd tried to wind it, but it couldn't keep time. He'd found a rusty six-pack of Busch. A beaver and her little moles.

Nossir.

Lafferty chuckled and overturned the plate.

Pan that, he'd said.

That had ended Jimmy's expeditions. But now Lafferty was gone, hunting in the Back Country, and Jimmy was stretching to fill the space. Annie, it's not so bad here in the snow, he practiced saying. Annie... Jimmy moved towards the

sound of splashing water. The shadows near the creek splotched and dappled. Maybe there'd been more whiskey in his cup than he'd thought. Or maybe he'd poured himself another mug. He couldn't remember.

Crack-CRACK.

He felt the hair staple up on his neck. This time the shot ricocheted above the creek stones. There was a shooter out there and Jimmy was away from the house now, without his rifle. It was half-assembled on his trailer floor.

The ground looked pink. There was breath behind him—a herd of something, a large man running clumsily that he recognized distantly as himself. He reached the bend in the river and stumbled, uprooting the foliage, skidding through the delicate palms of white mule ear, then he was in the icy river pounding the surface of it with his pink hands.

Dive Dive, he was saying to his beaver as he beat the creek. *Damnit dive!*

It was days since Annie had followed him home in her truck, he suddenly remembered. Days since she had touched his cigar-mark, an early favor from the Corporal. Days since she had said, I can't find you, Jimmy. I'm trying but you're....

Jimmy saw a man across the river. His thigh-high waders were gray and mottled.

Jimmy! he shouted, There you are! and chuckled his bull elephant head. He was holding a can of kerosene and shaking it along the dam, moving towards the beaver lodge.

Oh Lafferty you sonuvabitch.

Jimmy! The figure shouted, *panning again?* and chuckled his bull-elephant head. He was holding a can of kerosene and shaking it along the dam, moving towards the beaver lodge.

Now Jimmy was punching the side of the wigwam (he'd sped through SEAL training in only 6 months) and now he was wriggling through the femur-deep mud and now he was snuffing at the small beavers, her babies with their wet black fur and *now* he was huddled in a cocoon of wood strips and wattle and lifting a plug of Cope into his mouth.

The pre-thought while Lafferty rummaged for his match. Same as the 8 seconds you had to stay on a bronc for while he pawed and lurched and tried to throw you. The shiver it took for Lyle's face to blow out the back of his head and Jimmy to watch that happen and go down on his pulverized knees and start collecting bits of Lyle in the sopping pan of his shirt.

Oh Lafferty, Lafferty you sonuvabitch. ■

SUFRAGE

BY CARRIE LEILAM LOVE

YOU HATE TO THINK of her knuckles. The swollen ridge of them, a row of ripe grapes on the back of her hand. Your stomach drops. This is your womb contracting in fear. This is biology consorting with men to prioritize your parts. You sat at her feet, watched her fingers flit like insects over fabric, the needle too thin to see at that speed. You know what dresses sound like. The raging rustle of taffeta, muted weight of wool. You can tell the difference between cotton and silk linens by the ring of the needle, by the heft of wind with her scent of hot peppers and butter as she shakes out a shirt-waist on her lap.

You are in the vaulted entryway of a New York concert hall. You are sitting for a photograph. You notice cracks in the gilded moldings. You smell burnt filaments. One of the gaggle of gray ladies milling just off the photographer's set has a small dog, it yips and claws at the aubergine lace at her collar, she coos and bows her wrinkled lips to calm it. The dog continues to rebel, but you must be still, you are sitting for a photograph.

Still as the anchor in your mother's backyard, something your father brought home from the sea and insisted on preserving. It was legend in New Orleans. Children would knock on your door and ask to see it. He found it in Mobile Bay. The men on the merchant ship had luck and docked Jubilee evening, when sea life swims toward land instead of away from it. They grabbed nets and buckets and went down shore for the easy catch. His bucket was tin, the fish flopped and thudded inside and the crabs scraped and scratched. And there were the voices

of two townsmen, recalling past Jubilees: You remember that summer Henry? When old Tim said he bet he could bring a shipful of niggers right into Mobile Bay under the officers' noses? Yeah I remember, and he won that bet too. He got that old anchor, one from the Clotilda, propped up like a statue in his front yard nowadays. Your father heard this, then got the Oilman and the Wiper. Hustled up some horses, rope, planks and rollers. He went down to old Tim's, gave him a month's wages and a packet of rare tea from India he'd been given in London. 'S an old joke now, old Tim said, coughing into his doughy hand and wiping it on his paisley bed-jacket. You want it, fine. His breath rattled, Tell me, how was the catch at the Jubilee? Your father, the Oilman and the Wiper felled the anchor to the sled with a slow saw through the thick rope that moored it to a post (one driven into the clay by a Clotilda survivor). They drug it all the way from old Tim's back to the ship. It was a long labor. When they got home to New Orleans, they drug it to your backyard. There is an old oak there that you call *Michelangelo* for its benevolent canopy, like a heavenly wingspan, and its forked trunks bent like the legs of an alighted angel. The anchor's shank stretched from branch tip to branch tip and its hook leaned heavy on Michelangelo's knee. Your father solemnly rubbed the anchor with oil and scraped at rust spots with steel wool. In winter it was dark with rain, in summer the surrounding air shimmered with heat. You thought sometimes, on hot afternoons, that the anchor would disappear into a wavering mirage.

But it seasoned on.

Now, you are sitting for a photograph. What the anchor is to the seasons you are to several moments, to each broken bulb at the end of the photographer's raised stick. You are the thing the light returns to. This play at petrification is necessary so the man taking your picture, a white man who does not know you are not white, can turn many moments into one. Can freeze time. Your heart is a moth drawn towards the crash of each flash-bulb. You hate to think of her knuckles, once elegant, like tiny eggs nesting on the crest of her hand, like dainty French soaps lined up at the edge of the blond-wood washing bowl at the back door. While your body is pretending time is stopped, your mind sees her knuckles racing through it, from pearls to walnuts in jittering movie-motions, ballooning with arthritis, crackling with the film.

About 300 beads a square-inch from your knees to the draped, pleated hem of your gown, trained enough for Buckingham court. Beads at the square-necked bodice and on the sash at your waist. Thousands and thousands of silver beads like stars, heaviest at the hemline, as if you'd walked across the sky and dirtied your skirt with them. But you did not. Your mother sewed every one, some by feel nights when the lamp burned out. She dampened the white organza, made hundreds of twists and laid the fabric to dry in the pantry. It's called primitive pleating, mama said, all the French ladies are wearing it. You had a moment when you thought the pleats might give you away. While waiting with the other concert guests for the photographer, a

jaunty, ambitious hobbyist, to hang his painted backdrop of a Grecian temple. A humming fear that an upstanding matriarch of New York Society might ask the white woman they think you are, Where did you find a girl who can do those pleats? I've only seen that quality from France! Fear they will ask her for the name of her *girl*. Her *girl* is her been-grown mama, who was born into slavery and once sewed miniature gowns for the young mistress' dolls, who gave what was left of her cartilage for this gown, this concert gown, reception gown, this quadroom-ball gown, which quite recently was a wedding gown for your big, northern New York wedding to *the* Negro poet. Silk organza, not cotton, a higher vibration of the needle, one that sings again in your ears, a sharp whining whisper that says, Do not speak the word *primitive*, they will watch it form on your thicker lips and they will know, they will flatten their nostrils while sniffing you out, child, they have come to the concert hall to see a girl play the cello and so have you, but what kind of shame is it worth to catch the glance of a woman bowing a cello? What's it worth to sit gripping your tusk-ivory fan too tightly and tearing the lace with the jagged edge of the fingernail you have been biting (you did not even realize you had removed your gloves) because you imagine the warm,

wet, sweet spot behind the sweet spot, because you know what the vibrato is doing to the young woman wielding that instrument between her knees? You know because she whispered it to you behind the imported Japanese screen in her dressing room at the last New York concert, *Mon petite créole*, she whispered, *Mon petite créole*, when I play this is what I feel, and you wondered how she knew what you were. Her French was continental, flat. Her dark hair curled around her rectangular face, her eyes were small, her

pupils tiny black pricks, irises streaked, brown agate cabachons. She tugged your glove from your hand violently, without grace, shoved your soft hands and rough nails under eight layers of knife-pleated cherry chiffon and hand-embroidered lilies, past where there should have been bloomers but weren't any, shoved your hand right inside her and *The Arrogance*, *The Nerve* you thought, and also *The Danger*, *The Excitement*, and your desire overwhelmed your defense. You asked



when she would return to New York. She kept a hold of your hand and laughed between her sighs of pleasure, *cé ne pa Paris, ne Prague chérie*—but I might return for you. Before then, you will come to Leipzig. You'll come to Gewandhaus, and sit in the front row, and when I feel this, when I feel what your hand is doing inside me, but from the cello, I will look at you, and you will know.

You never went to Leipzig. She sent a ticket and a voucher for the crossing but you did not go. You keep the envelope

in a false-bottomed drawer in your desk. She did return to New York, and sent you a concert ticket by courier, right to your front door. You put the ticket in the drawer next to the other one, and intended to leave it there indefinitely, but this afternoon, the organza began to whisper at you from the wardrobe and you listened, you put that dress on and your feet did the rest, taking you first to the closet for your gloves cape and umbrella (you forgot your hat), down three flights

of narrow stairs and into the street, the broad and frothing street where every citizen was mocking you, with their starched collars and shined shoes and committee memberships at the NAACP.

You wonder if, after the photograph is taken and you get up from the photographer's stool, there will be a mark on the floral cross-stitched upholstery where your wet went through the organza. You fear you might smile, you might crack open and show your teeth, your salivating tongue, you might set time going again too soon and cause a rupture, let something go that gets between you and the clock. This time, you are going to make the cellist play *you*. You are going to give the arrogant brat a lesson in body music. Weight that float in her hand. Bring it down hard, bang bang bang you are a banjo, she is the band. She plays the notes but you keep the time. You will take her from chamber music to chamber-maid, in the old servant's quarters, just off the

boarding-house kitchen, toile pastoral wall paper peeling in swaths and waving like parasol fringe with the wind you will make, the white girl on her back on the pin-striped ticking of the bare mattress. You will sit astride her face and hold her bow-hand inside you, you will show that white bitch how to really fuck, how to really, really fuck you right—If you can just get un-frozen from this moment.

You are the last to take a photograph, soon you will be in the dressing room, which is inside the clock-tower because

the Cellist believes herself a princess, and insisted on it. The white glow of a single grand electric orb will light the giant backward numbers of the clock-face, the Cellist will tamp down her powder box on the vanity that black men lifted in through the window by pulleys like a piano, and the noise of the box against the old fruit-wood will bounce off the circular wall and sound like it could be coming from anywhere. Her sweet scent of orange blossoms will grow arduous and sour. The beads at your breast will shine bright enough to burn an after-image when the cellist finally looks away, and the minute hand, large as a locomotive coupling rod, will be there marking the distance between the cellist pinning on her hat, picking up her train, and you getting her down from the tower, off the back door, and down to the boarding house. Anyone could see you go out the front and it would be of little consequence. The back door, in fact, is entirely more suspicious and likely to cause low tones of disapproving chatter (or envy) and that's why you will choose it, for the drama, and also because even the few hundred feet it will save matters to you, to the butterflies inside: This is your womb opening with desire; This is your biology finally defecting from your enemies. You are responsible to this only, not to the other guests, who, after the last note, will populate the front steps of the hall, ladies minding their skirts over dingy puddles at the bottom stair, in velvet capes plush as darkness, careless breath misting up to the slow night-clouds as they crane back and laugh, none of them aware that a few blocks south, a black sheep will give a tugging lesson to their white ewe, their cellist, their precious prodigy, the Mozart of the suffragettes, King Edward debutante, escorted by the young Duke of Somerset, who still writes earnest letters of courtship on perfumed paper in perfect script, who imagines that having a suffragette for a wife one day might allow him the room to mother his children, which is what he wants the most. He confessed this to the cellist once in the conservatory after champagne, he pinched the fragrant lip of a potted *lilium orientalis* and stared down its blushed throat at the sticky star of pollen on its stamen. I've never seen Father hold my infant brother, he said, I don't remember meeting my father until I was seven, and it seems rather cruel to me, terribly cruel, and the cellist laughed at him, but she also kissed him, hard, on the mouth, and this is why he keeps writing her letters, and she keeps receiving

them because affection delights her, because she was drunk that night not on champagne but on the notion that she was desired by every man, woman, and child in the world, that she could choose whoever she wanted for whatever she wanted, for company or knowledge or sex, and that this boy, however simple, was also desired by many people, and he fancied her, making her the fancied of the fancied, and there wasn't anything better you could be than that.

The last time she played New York, she chose the Creole girl. She was older than the cellist, but to the cellist, *girl* seemed to fit. She was youthful. The cellist walked through the lobby, where the producers had impressively set up tea for hundreds, butlers serving white petit fours, each with a coffee bean on top, that looked, to the cellist, like guano. Julius walked behind her with her Poiret cocoon and gloves, so she was free to shake hands and courtesy as she traveled among her admirers. She was introduced to Mr. Hudson, the publisher, who was ruddy and austere, and she heard, despite Mr. Hudson's low-c entreat for her attendance at dinner the next day, the light sound of a woman speaking French. Her French, the cellist noted, was not continental, though someone with a different ear may not have noticed. She turned to look. *Oui, j'ai vu Lucy Blackwell, j'ai voyagé avec ma mère pour la voir*. The girl was tall, but not as tall as the cellist. Something about her, maybe the sweep of her cheekbone like the scroll of a cello, reminded the cellist of the Brazilian girl Papa had to keep his studio tidy back in Porto. She wore white organza spangled with silver beads that cooled the light around her. Her dark hair was piled high, shining and majestic as the domes of a Russian Cathedral, her face as smooth as the stone beneath, and her hazel eyes, stained-glass portals to what the cellist imagined was a cavernous and light-filled place of sacred musings. The Creole girl sipped from her porcelain demitasse while the other member in her conversation went on: *Nous connaissez-vous en France avoir une suffragette qui s'habille comme un homme?* A rivulet of tea escaped the Creole girl's lips and dribbled onto her chin. She lifted her hand to wipe it with the back of her glove, and the cellist wanted to take her photograph, she wanted to make her stay that way for ever, her knuckles just touching her lower-lip, her shoulders turtled to her ears in embarrassment, it was not delicate, it was not lady-like, but her face was as fine as the hand-hooked

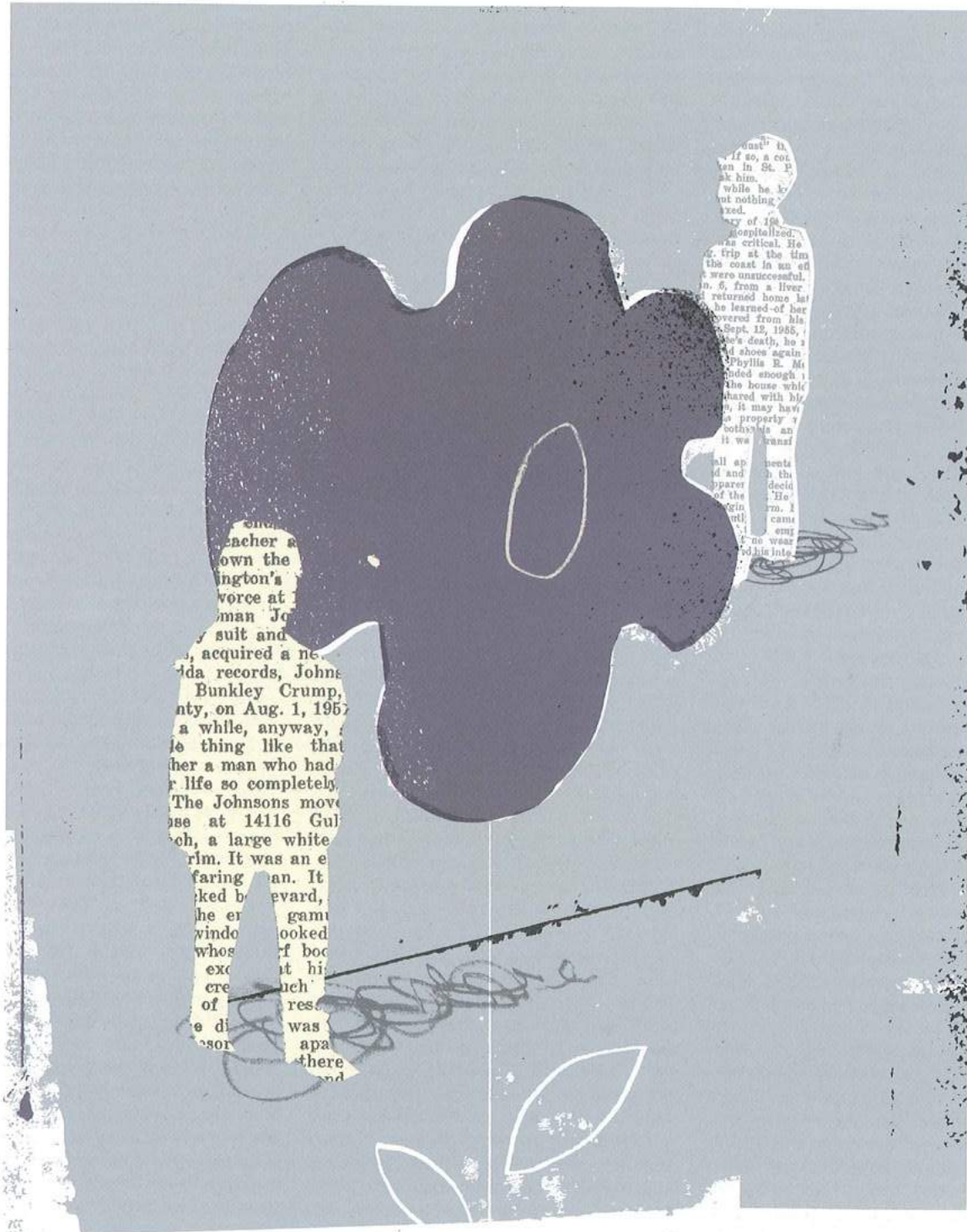
lace of the fan she dropped in surprise when she noticed the cellist staring at her, brazenly, never mind Mr. Hudson still trolling on about the talents of his cook or Julius standing there anxious that she not offend Mr. Hudson's ego. Have you anything to write with? She asked, and Mr. Hudson obliged, Of course I'd love an autograph, he said, but the Cellist wrote a note instead and sent it with the next butler who came by over to the woman speaking French: It looks as though you are wearing the moonlight, it said.

You remember that moment as the last bulb pops with a tinkle of thin glass, as you stand, courtesy to the photographer and whisk your dress behind you. You were disgusted by the girl's privilege, and envied it so that your ears began to burn. You were ashamed of the tea on your chin. You went to her dressing room to thank her for the note, and to wait for the sure display of her over-determined sense of entitlement, so you could take back your thanks and tell her why. But she asked you about suffrage and you were distracted. Women's suffrage is necessary for the progression of modern society, she said, and you agreed. Women's suffrage will lead to a world free of war, to a world in which one can marry and still own her belongings, a world far better than this one, she said, and you agreed.

Later on, after the photographer has long packed away his machinery and the guests have retired to the hallows of their own private ordeals, you push the cellist's callused fingers back and forth over your hard button, and she defines that moment, the moment you lifted your hand to wipe your chin, as the first of many she wanted to capture, she wanted to possess, forever, just the way she wants to have you now. You think of your father, scrubbing rust from the anchor in your back yard. When you told your mother you were a suffragist, she only said, after a protracted silence, I wish I could get your father to move that heavy thing away from here. You would like to forget. You would like to disappear from time. You pull the Cellist close to you and plunge your teeth into her neck. You dig your nails into her back and drag them across, you see the red welts raise on her shoulder, you swear to Jesus that when you collect your picture from the photographer, you will not put it in an envelope and mail it off to Leipzig for the Cellist. You will tear it to pieces. You will burn it in a fire. ■

PANSY

BY COLLEEN ASPER



“*♪♪♪♪♪*”
Jill.
“*♪♪♪♪♪*”
Matt flipped his book face down and turned his phone to silent.
“.....”
Cupped in the palm of his hand, it buzzed softly while a cartoon of a receiver jingled on the screen.
“Hey, Jill.” Silence, he had waited too long. Matt hit return call.
“Hi, this is Jill. Please leave a messa—” another jingling receiver, answer.
“Hey, Jill, I was just about to leave you a message.”
“I was just leaving you a message.”
“Oh, yeah, sorry—was away from my phone for a sec.”
“Oh, right. So I was just calling to make plans. Does Friday work for you? For dinner?”
“Yes, yeah, definitely. So what would be a good area? Where do you live?”
“Actually, not that far from you. I mean, Ann told me you live nearby. I was thinking—I was with a friend, the other day we went to this Spanish restaurant on Fulton—”
“La Tasca?” Matt had been there before; he remembered unremarkable food and orange walls dimly lit.
“That’s the place—you’ve been there before?”
“Sure, that works. So Friday? How about 8?”
“Yeah, great. I mean, does that work

for you?”
“Yeah, sounds great. So I’ll see you then. Friday.”
“Great. Ok. See you Friday.”
“Ok, great. Bye Jill.”
“Bye Matt.”
End call. Matt turned his ringer back on. He picked up his book; it was upside down, but he didn’t notice for several minutes.

Matt’s older brother Don had a daughter who was hyperactive. Not hyperactive in the sense that one might use the word to describe a personality—not someone whose effervescence was felt in the surrounding air as so much joyous fizzing, or a spunky go-getter, or even a jubilant, grating enthusiast—but hyperactive in the clinical sense: there was something wrong with her. She had been diagnosed as having something; what it was Matt could never remember, not ADHD—that he would have remembered. Uncomfortable around children, he typically registered her as little more than an annoyance, but never more so than one day when he sat in his brother’s living room and she lay on her stomach between them shrilly humming. Like a cat in the room, her presence kept insisting upon itself as a conversational point.
“LalaaaalAAAALaaaaa”
“Is she bothering you?”
“AaaalAAAAAAAAA”
“Oh, no—no, she’s fine.”

“aaaaLAAAAAlalalalala”
“She likes to do that.”
“lalalalalalalalalalalLAAA”
“Hmmm.”
“LAAAAAAAAAAAAALaaaaa”
“The doctor said that it’s good for her. There are a lot of nerve endings in the stomach, so lying that way, it uses a lot of the brain. It’s very calming; it allows her to focus on other things.”
“ALaaaaLALALalalalalA”
Matt’s preferred way of reading had always been lying in bed on his stomach while eating. His body doubly distracted, he could focus this way.
“laLAAAAaaaaa”
Matt had never had a dining room, never had a dining room table, a coffee table—rarely, even, a couch. The only girlfriend he had ever lived with complained, constantly, of crumbs in the sheets.
“AAAAAaaaaa”
This habit of eating while he read made him uncomfortable about lending books. Their pages, inevitably, would be peppered with food stains—orange brown, grey brown, brown brown smears. Brown: the chromatic destiny of so many things.
“aaaLALALALALALALA”
He looked at his niece and wondered what else they had in common.

Matt and Jill were being set up by Ann. Ann had met Matt when she dated his

friend Frank. Matt and Ann could never date. It was a problem of scale; Ann towered over Matt and this was unattractive to them both, but they shared in common having once been close to Frank and also shared, despite seeing him all the time still, confusion over how this could ever be so.

Spotting Matt outside of an opening, Ann walked toward him, wrapped her arms around him in a hug and kept walking until her hug had pushed him into the far wall. "Do you have a girlfriend?" she asked as she moved him along.

"Hi Ann," said Matt.

"Do you have a girlfriend?"

"Oh I'm well—how are you?"

"Matt"

"No."

"I want you to meet my friend Jill."

Googling had turned up few photos of Jill. In each she looked, not serious, but as if she were responding to the prompt 'serious' with the reflexivity others reserved for that of 'smile.' She was self-conscious, she was trying to compensate for a frivolous nature, she had a great sense of humor and loved imitating the middle distance stares of book jacket photos, she had bad eyesight—Matt tried out explanations for this photographic affliction while he flipped through a flickr account that had produced a dark photo of Jill carrying a cardboard box down a stairwell. He scrolled through endless such photos of anonymous people engaged in commonplace activities before coming across another of her wearing a giant straw hat clearly donned just for the shot and framed by two smiling faces with squinting eyes and shining skin. There she was, lips flattened into a mute horizontal and eyes round. 'Serious.'

Tonight was Frank's birthday and Matt joined other celebrators at the bar. It was cold everywhere except for in front of a fireplace as incongruous to the rest of the dingy interior as the straw hat. Here it was unpleasantly hot, causing the crowd to pulse around the fire's exterior as they grew hot and cold again in turn.

"Matt."

"Frank, Happy Birthday," answered Matt.

"Thanks man."

"Hey, do you know if Ann is coming tonight?" Matt asked, but Frank was buried in a birthday embrace and moved away by the crowd before he could answer.

Matt drank his drink and leaned against the back of a couch. He rolled his

shoulders—back, down, forward—and noticed a girl to his right with straight bangs. Sip, glance, roll. Sip, sip, roll, glance. Sip—the third time they made eye contact he began:

"Are you here for Frank's birthday?"

"Excuse me?"

"My friend Frank, it's his birthday tonight, I thought maybe you were here for that."

"Oh, no."

Sip, sip, swallow—Matt tried again, "So what do you do?"

"I'm a professor."

"Oh yeah? What do you profess?"

"Excuse me?"

"What do you teach?"

"Writing."

"Where at?"

"Nassau Community College. It's my first semester teaching, I just got this call about it last week, a couple days before the first class!"

Matt concentrated on the sharp horizontal where her dark bangs met her pale forehead. "Can I get you a drink?" he asked.

"Sure," she said.

He noticed, with relief, that she was drinking a Pabst and downed the remainder of his own on the way to the bar. Coming back with two cold cans pressed next to one another between his hands, he stretched his arms and the drinks towards her as one, prompting her to grab a can by balancing it next to her own still unfinished drink.

"So, what kind of writing do you do?"

"None. Yet."

Matt woke up after a couple hours of deep, drunken sleep and knew that he was going to stay awake. He lay in bed anyway. He lay in bed thinking; thoughts falling on thoughts—clumping, useless thought drifts piling soundlessly while he stared at the orange light of the room that shined through his closed eyelids. He got up and peed. He got up and drank a glass of water. He got up and found white bread that he rolled into balls, eating the rest of the loaf one ball at a time. Back in bed he breathed hard out his nose to clear the thoughts away, imagining them falling to the floor like dandruff brushed off a sweater. He remembered Ally Sheedy in *The Breakfast Club* scratching her head to make snow fall on a crosshatched drawing of a winter landscape and thought about jerking off, but instead got up and took a Tylenol, then three more.

He couldn't bring himself to talk on the phone and texting seemed a rude way

to break a date, so when evening fell, he set out to meet Jill. Walking down Fulton he felt with complete certainty that there is nothing he wanted to do less than meet Jill.

As he approached La Tasca he saw a bent head through the glass door with hair he recognized from the photos. She looked up as he approached the door, clearly recognizing him as well. He noticed, just as his hand reached up to push his way through the door, that there was a rope draped across it hung with tassels, signaling that the door was not in use. He remembered this from the last time he had been here—remembered that the door that served as the entrance was around the corner, but having been spotted by Jill with his arm outstretched he felt somehow less foolish continuing through with this gesture and then making a pantomime of his discovery of the doors inoperability. She smiled, a face incompatible with that he had seen in the photos, and jumped up to point to the other door as he walked around and inside. They both laughed as they introduced themselves and walked to their table, talking about the door all the while. Finally sitting, she began, "So how are you—what did you do today?"

"Ok, today—not much. Really—I'm kinda embarrassed to admit this, but I am pretty hung over today. Last night was my friend Frank's birthday—my friend Frank, actually, is the reason I know Ann. Maybe you've met him? They used to date. Anyway, it was just one of those nights. You know how it goes."

"I don't drink."

"Oh?"

"Anymore. I'm in AA actually."

"Oh."

"It's always an awkward thing to bring up, but yeah. It's been 12 years, so it's something I am pretty committed to."

"I understand—my family, well, there are a lot of people in my family that should probably be in AA."

Again, the smile. "So Ann tells me you're a writer?"

"I am—"

"Can I get you guys anything to drink?" asked a young waitress with a high ponytail.

"I'm fine with water," Jill said.

The waitress turned to Matt, ponytail following the turn of her head after a beat.

"I—I'll have a coffee," Matt said.

"Would you guys like to hear the specials?"

What followed was a succession of words Matt took in only sonically. He

thought about the pits in his skull where his eyeballs rested. Two hollow spaces, throbbing, pulsing—

"What kind of writing do you do?" This was Jill. Answer.

"Well, I'm working on a novel. I guess that is a stock thing, to say one is working on a novel."

"No, I mean, that's exciting. What is it about?"

"It's hard to explain. But the best way I can think to—well, the narrative is told in sections, not linear at all, and each section is based off part of a 'how-to' writing manual."

Jill tilted her head encouragingly. Matt continued, "I hate describing it that way. I realize it sounds like such a postmodern, meta-writing project. It's not cynical that way. I really—I'm not trying to lampoon the prescribed structure of the 'how-to' with some sort of clever parody. I'm trying to find parts that are unexplained and tease out something poetic from those—mysterious parts."

"Are you guys ready to order?" The ponytail again.

Matt and Jill both shot their gaze to their menus.

"Sure—"

"I think we need a min—"

"Oh, are you ready?"

"Oh. Not if you're not."

"I can come back," said the waitress.

"No, no—if you go first I can be ready," said Jill.

Matt ordered the first thing he saw, knowing if he tried to read the menu that the words would swim meaningless.

"I hate menus," he said when the waitress left.

"But not 'how-to' manuals?"

"Well, I guess not."

"Which ones are you using?"

"*Strunk and White* is probably the best known one."

"*Strunk and White*?"

"*The Elements of Style*. It has this whole crazy definition of will versus shall that got me started. Shall is supposedly about belief and will, consent. So the example that it gives is that the swimmer who is drowning and doesn't want to drown says, 'I shall drown; no one will save me,' but the suicide says, 'I will drown; no one shall save me.' And I just thought that was such a strange thing to find in a grammar manual. So one part of my book, there are these two drowning victims and I try—not through the content of what they say, but just through the language they use—to communicate which is the suicide and which the accident. Or for another section I use Lester

Dent's *Master Fiction Plot Formula*. Do you know him?"

"No."

"Lester Dent, he was a really successful pulp author. *The Master Fiction Plot Formula* is this unbelievably corny set of rules for a story. It says things like, 'heap grief onto the hero,' over and over again. And it is incredibly systematic; it divides the story into four parts and basically repeats the same structure for each part. The hero struggles, physical conflict, plot twist. But then at the end, at the very last line—after Dent walks you through the conclusion of your story and he is giving you a last check list—he says 'Did God kill the villain. Or the hero?'"

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"I don't know. That is just the thing—what does it mean? When I first read it I thought about how many hero/villain epics end with the hero sparing the villain, but the villain killed anyway by falling off the building, or the cliff, or the scaffolding—God intervenes so the hero can be guiltless. But—the line comes after Dent has described the hero's defeat of the villain, so I didn't think about this at first—but if you isolate the text you can also read it as, 'who did god kill, the hero or the villain?'"

Clank. The waitress appeared with plates. Sliding his elbows of the table, Matt moved back to make room.

"How is that a part of your story?" Jill asked.

"Well, that line, in my book it begins a murder investigation," he unwrapped his silverware and dropped his napkin in his lap, examining the burrito-like roll on his plate. It steamed pleasantly and he imagined letting his face drop into its doughy folds, beans filling the hollows of his eyes.

"But I have been going on and on. Why don't you tell me about what you do?"

The waitress, having adjusted plates and the table's candle centerpiece, turned. "I still need my coffee," Matt said.

The ponytail flipped back, "Right—sorry! I'll be back with that in a minute."

Matt turned back to Jill, "What were you going to say?"

"Oh, well, I do video editing." Jill paused. Matt waited till she began again before picking up his fork and knife.

"I mean, for a living. Well really, I just graduated from school, so I don't do anything for a living yet. I went to NYU for film with a concentration in editing, instead of direction or production. But I make my own videos; I shoot footage all the time. I used to just shoot things that were happening around me, pretty

documentary I suppose, but personal, because it was about me—my surroundings, the people that were around me. Recently I have been setting things up, working with narratives. But it always begins with something that's happening in my life. I have to work from that, I mean—does your writing work that way?"

"I've—I always feel uncomfortable using biographical content in my work. I worry that it would limit the work, or the read of it anyway."

"Hmm. Well maybe I started to feel limited too, cause I have been making videos of stories. Maybe a little like your 'how-to' manuals."

"What stories?"

"Right now I am working with a Henry James short story. It's called *The Beast in The Jungle*."

Matt and Jill stood outside the restaurant. Rain fell too lightly to see, making it appear as if each object the rain touched was itself generating the wet film the rain had made. Having gotten here without talking about what they were going to do next, they shuffled and grew wet.

"So, do you know anything going on tonight?" Matt asked.

"Some friends of mine are doing a film screening," Jill said.

"What are they showing?"

Jill pulled out her phone and glanced at the time. "By now the screening would be over and it would just be people standing around drinking."

"Oh. Is that weird for you? Standing around with a bunch of people drinking and not drinking?"

"No. I mean, I do it all the time. A lot of my friends who drink like having me around because I can keep an eye on them, make sure they get home safe. It's fine."

"Well, I wouldn't mind checking it out."

"OK," Jill paused. The light from a passing car made her wet face bright. "Actually, there is something else I want to do tonight," she said.

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah, but I feel kind of strange asking."

Matt held completely still.

"I want to shoot the last scene in my film and I want you to be John Marcher."

"Wait, really? Matt laughed, "if you've shot the rest, don't you already have someone playing Marcher?"

"I haven't shot the rest, but I want to shoot this scene and then, well, we can see about the rest later."

Matt felt the weight of later—the

future, however undefined, it implied. He could say no; he could go home; he could do anything, really. But the present has a weight too, a weight all the more forceful because it pushes us steadily forward. Faced with such a clear request, yes was compatible with indecision in a way that no wouldn't be.

"Where will we shoot it?"

Smile. "We can walk to my apartment, my camera is there, and then we can shoot it outside, on the street. I just have to get my bike—I rode my bike here. And we can stop at the grocery store along the way and get the supplies we need to make fake blood."

Matt followed Jill as she retrieved her bike from outside the restaurant and followed her, too, as she wheeled it beside her down the street, its heft hovering between them unsteadily. Outside of the Save-A-Lot she struggled with her bike lock in silence and he thought of all the questions he could ask her. "Where are you from?" "How long have you lived in New York?" "Do you have any brothers or sisters?"

"What do you use to make fake blood?"

"Corn syrup and red food coloring. I got the formula from a website for low-budget horror films. Shit—I don't know why this isn't working. Can you just hold it while I run inside? I will just be a minute."

Matt stood outside holding a bike that wasn't his. Every time the florescent rectangle of the grocery store's door swooshed open, he looked up. When it swooshed closed he looked at windows beside him that were covered with pictures of giant vegetables. "What do your parents do?" "Do you believe in god?" "Do you want to have children?"

When Jill came through the bright door she held up her white plastic bag triumphantly.

"Are you comfortable?"

Matt nodded as best he could with his head on asphalt. He lay on the street outside of Jill's Bed-Stuy apartment, an apartment so newly moved into that the table they mixed their fake blood concoction on was comprised of a stack of boxes and when they were done, the remaining bottle of corn syrup met an empty cupboard.

"Where did you live before this?"

"Greenwich Village. The whole time I have been in New York I have lived by NYU till now. But are you sure you're OK like that?"

"Fine."

"The street's not wet?"

"I think it stopped raining."

"I am going to start pouring the blood. Let me know if this feels funny."

Matt closed his eyes. The syrup hit his forehead suddenly and then began moving down his left temple.

"This looks great. Wow, it looks so real."

It trickled onto his earlobe, tickling at first contact and then muffling Jill's voice as it filled his ear.

"Thanks so much for doing this. Really."

It began to pool on the street around him, sweet smelling and sticky.

"Oh, it is getting in your hair. You can take a shower here if you need to."

Matt tried not to smile.

"Ok, I think this is good. It's not bothering you?"

"No, no, I'm fine."

"I think I am ready to start filming. This looks really, really good. Are you ready?"

"Yeah, but should I—should I move or change my position at all?"

"No, not if you can stay like that comfortably. It is going to be a long shot and I need you to stay as still as you can."

"I'm fine like this," Matt said. Jill walked away. The tripod squeaked as it turned.

"Ok, I am going to start filming. Ready?"

"Ready." Jill stopped moving and Matt made his breath shallow. His belly felt like a sail gently rising with his breathing and he wanted to suck it in, but was afraid the movement would show. A dog barked; a door slammed. Boys with voices pitched low and loud berated one another, their insults rhythmic and senseless and lost to the sound of a passing car. The embarrassment of the camera's scrutiny faded and Matt felt alone. The blood on his face crept, itched. He couldn't feel anything solid under his limbs, just dampness and cold and a pain in his hip. It was his head that felt everything, registered every noise and every movement through its contact with the street. His head grew roots, the pavement whispered to them. It was his head that vibrated with the wheels of another car, this one closer. It was his head that felt it park, felt the door open and felt feet hit the ground, moving towards him without closing the car door. Matt wondered if he should move, but Jill was silent and he was dead.

The dark behind his closed eyes flashed bright and Matt opened them to white light. The light filled his vision and then relaxed into a circle held by a figure

silhouetted against the sky.

"Did God kill the hero, or the villain?" Matt asked him.

Jill couldn't stop laughing. "Do you think someone called the police or he was just driving by?"

"I don't know; I am sure someone lying in a pool of blood on the street is not an uncommon sight in this neighborhood."

Jill stopped laughing. "I'm sorry I didn't say anything. I was so intent on the shot I didn't even notice him till he was standing right there."

"It's ok. I mean, it was really funny. I've always thought it's funny that we talk about cameras as shooting. That police officer, he was looking for a shot too. I mean, I know every homonym doesn't have to be significant, but it seems like this one is. That in the U.S. cinema is equated with violence. In German the word for film is the same as conveyer belt. A tool, rather than a weapon."

Jill was silent.

"We should get this blood off you," she finally said. She gathered her camera and tripod and Matt picked up a tupperware stained red that held what was left of the blood and followed her into the apartment. Inside he stood in her living room with an open kitchen full of boxes, trying not to drip on the floor while she disappeared into another room. He put the tupperware in the sink and ran water into it that turned kool-aid pink. When Jill emerged she was holding a towel and a black t-shirt that said, "Fuck you, I'm Irish," in green letters.

"I'm sorry," she said, "this is the only t-shirt I had that I thought would fit you. My grandfather gave it to me. As a joke. I'm not even Irish," she paused, "I brought it because there is some blood on your shirt and I thought if you gave it to me while you took a shower, I could try and wash it out."

Matt took the towel and shirt. "Thanks," he said and remained standing in place.

"The bathroom is down the hall."

"Oh yeah, thanks." Matt walked down the hall and closed the door. He stared at his face; bits of gravel stuck to the fake blood. His shirt. Not sure what else to do, he took it off and opening the bathroom door part of the way, stuck it on the outside doorknob and then closed the door again.

He made the shower so hot it hurt and once under the water's steady pressure felt every ache and nauseous complaint quiet under this one pounding sensation. Jill had a roommate who didn't appear to

be home, but between the two of them they had half a dozen shampoos. Matt chose one that targeted an itchy scalp and washed his hair twice. He wondered which shower pouf was Jill's and decided on the lavender one, then scrubbed himself with moisturizing mango cleanser. He picked the pubic hairs out of the pouf when he was done—in case they were his. Afraid he had been in the shower suspiciously long he turned the water off and reluctantly dried himself with a towel that was unmarred in its whiteness and too small. Jill's t-shirt was loose but short enough that the top of his pants showed. "Fuck you, I'm Irish," he said to himself in the steamy mirror and then walked out of the bathroom. The door across the hall to Jill's bedroom was open and she was inside, sitting on the bed and looking at *Strange Pilgrims*, a book of short stories by Gabriel García Márquez. The only light in the room came from a lamp on a bedside table and there was no place to sit other than the bed. Matt sat down.

"Have you ever read this?" she asked, holding up her book.

"I read *One Hundred Years of Solitude*."

"I haven't read that one. A friend just gave me this, but I really like it so far."

"I hate magical realism."

"Oh. Why?"

"It's just—that book, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, it is like a song with one note. Surprise, something colorful is happening. Surprise, something colorful is happening. Surprise. After awhile I just wish that someone would do something banal."

"Well, you know a lot more about books than I do."

"Thanks for washing my shirt."

"Oh yeah, it is in the kitchen drying."

"Thanks."

"No problem. I thought—if you need to spend the night here you can."

"Sure. I mean, it is kind of late, huh?"

"Yeah. I—I'm gonna get a glass of water, do you want anything?"

"Maybe some water too? Yeah, that sounds good." Jill left and Matt sat on the bed and tried to read the words scrawled in marker on her unpacked boxes. The only one he could make out was, "plates." When she came back she handed him a glass of water, took her pants off, and got into the bed. Matt did the same. He got under the covers in the Irish t-shirt and old boxer briefs that, stupidly, he hadn't chosen with the idea in mind that anyone would see them.

The room was quiet. Any action would break the silence, announcing its intention. So this is what it is like to try and

sleep with someone without a drink Matt thought. He slid his hand under the blanket until he found Jill's arm and slid his hand down the arm until he found her hand. They held hands under the covers and Matt thought about the first girl who he had ever held hands with in bed, a cousin who he used to pretend to be hamsters with.

"This is nice," Jill said.

Matt slid his hand back up her arm. He reached her sleeve and skipped over its break, up to her color bone. He traced the bone back and forth and then her neck, stopping at the ear. He thought about the syrup and food coloring mixture that had filled his ear, but only traced hers along the rim and then reversed the motion and went up her temple, across the forehead and down her nose. Nothing happened when he got to her mouth, so he moved to the chin and back down along the neck. This time he tried to move under the shirtsleeve, but his arm couldn't bend that way without jabbing her in the face, so he went back down the arm till he got to the hand. Her hand began to move, tracing a line up his forearm and back down again, up and down until finally she made slower and slower circles at his wrist. Then Jill sat up and turned off the light by the bed. The room was still bright from the moonlight that came through a large window without a curtain. Outside was a fire escape with broken pots and dead plants. Jill reached for something beside the bed and pulled up a piece of fabric, an irregular purple silk shape with frayed edges. She put it on her face and then lifted it up at the corner and turned to Matt. "I sleep with this," she said.

"Oh yeah, sometimes I put a t-shirt on my head to block out the light," he said.

"It is not about the light, I just like the weight of it. I used to be embarrassed of it, but that was when I cared what people thought." Jill turned away and situated herself under the covers. "Do you want one?" she asked. Matt stared at her back in disbelief.

"No, I'm fine." He lay stiff and unmoving.

"Are you comfortable?" she asked.

"Yeah." Matt fixed his gaze on the ceiling. He knew was not going to be able to sleep again.

In the morning Matt met Jill's roommate on his way out. She gave them a knowing smile.

"It's so great that you can walk home," Jill said at the door.

"Yeah."

"Are you sure you don't want anything. I have some cereal; I think there is milk."

"No, really, I should get going. I have a lot of stuff to do today."

Jill smiled. When she smiled she looked completely happy. "I had such a good time," she said.

"Me too," he said. He turned toward the door and she opened it for him. The day was unpleasantly bright and Jill was still smiling. Matt went to kiss her cheek but her face moved and his kiss landed on her neck. She laughed.

"Bye Jill," he said.

"Bye Matt," she said.

Matt walked away as fast as he could without seeming like he was walking fast.

He didn't look up until he was several blocks away and when he did he was across from a public library, the same sort of one story, cement affair that he sometimes went to in his neighborhood when he didn't feel like writing at home. Matt hadn't ever been inside this library and couldn't possibly write there without his laptop, but walked in anyway because he didn't want to go home and go to sleep quite yet.

The vast majority of the inside was taken up with blue carpeted cubicles that separated large boxy computers, ancient PCs with signs announcing, "Internet, 15 minutes." The bookshelves were spare, children's books and rows of encyclopedias towards the front. Matt found a book of Tolstoy's short stories in the fiction section and pulled up a wooden chair to a plastic table.

He had read some of these stories before and some of them he hadn't, but he was too tired now to do anything more than flip through them. Matt put down his book and looked around the library. Everyone was using the computers except for an older couple talking by the window. The were well dressed—the woman in particular, wrapped in white with a pale green scarf, had a regal air. They faced each other intently, but spoke too softly for Matt to hear and he returned to his book. In the middle of *Family Happiness* he found a pansy pressed between two pages. It was the color of Jill's scrap of cloth. "Who would press a flower in the pages of a library book," he wondered.

The older woman's voice rose and Matt grew still to hear her.

"Don't you know—now?" she said. ■



DESERT

BY SARAH GERARD

IT WAS AN unspectacular wedding. Like the endless Mojave, arid and trudging.

With suggestions of possible landforms in the distance—seen like watery mirages or maybe they are islands in water—what is the future if not the hope of relief to one's suffering? That's how it keeps you advancing toward it. What is in the distance? it asks. Until someday you reach what you thought was an island, and it is actually the long, dry, terrible death you'd nightmares over as a child growing up by the water, when in the middle of the afternoon you'd fall asleep on the sand to the lapping waves, which became in your mind's eye winds blowing through cacti, and the relentless heat as it stuck to your skin became desert grains blowing off of dunes, blowing into a storm that sucked you dry. You awoke panting and ran for the waves, and found inside them the safety of the water's embrace, but here there is no water. No, this is Mojave: endless, indifferent. Here, it is only the illusion of water you see, and hills that become islands in the distance but are actually beautiful, lying, unreachable death traps.

And here is your husband, driving quiet. And there is Los Angeles, somewhere ahead.

It was a brief and necessary courtship. It was celebrated as such, like a hunger that is quenched so that one may move

on with their work. It gave peace.

It was necessary for you to get out of that town. There was nothing there for you but closeness of a claustrophobic kind, suffocating and nothing like the closeness one has with a lover. There was nothing but teeth in the kiss of that town. There was nothing but the rhythm of the waves, the retreat that you felt by the water which was no longer soothing however often you returned to it after a certain period of returning and returning like a chronic illness. The lushness of the trees surrounding; the silent walks to school before the land came awake. Those became lonely, too, like the rest. Flowers opened, turned their faces toward the southern sun like schoolgirls opening their skirts on the way to class in the morning; like obedient, timely splashes of color you'd learned to wait for. But where were you walking?

There was nowhere to walk; you walked in circles.

You left when you could; you left instantly, soon as you could. You left hastily, without even thinking and rode, shotgun, which is what you have always done. You can't drive. You are cowardly as you ride now into the unknown, to the place with a name that means angels, you think. It was only an excuse. It was harder to stay there, and that was the challenge, and one that you failed. You know that now. You are running toward something

just because you can, and it is nothing like what you have known, or know, or can even want to know. Are you ready for what you earned?

You drive into endless, desert-dry scrub. Sere, you leave behind the certainty of death. You leave behind the comforts of ennui and sadness. There were possible waves in the distance, you thought, in some words, if you left. Those words that you spoke to your parents when you told them you'd leave with this man they had only just met. There are possibilities, you said, in the golden light there, and gold was a color you'd never seen at home. If you were to be honest with them, you'd have said that gold was a color you knew nothing about, but you hoped held potential. Then, maybe, they would have understood, would have given you their blessings. You can't ask for them now.

You left with this man who is singing a popular song on the radio, who fills the quiet of the desert with noise he has brought from elsewhere, noise you can imagine wouldn't even exist were you simply to leap from the car into the vast, silver, untended air, onto the other side of the hot steel doors, where there is simply no sound, where sound is lost in the dry, open air, with nothing for its waves to echo off of and to come back to you, still familiar. (Lost, like the sound you made in the night when you started

in your bed to grasp at the darkness.) You imagine you'd look at your bare feet on the sand, and see all the stuck sandspurs in your skin but not care, because you couldn't even feel them in the throes of breathing. You stare over the deep Martian plains, stare so deep into the distance, the silence, feel it close on the skin of your arms and your eyes, which become heavy in the heat. You fall heavily to sleep.

You,

dream that the car has become a sailboat and you and your husband are tacking

in love. You,

dream that you taste the water. You

dream that you reach your hand down into it and it is so clear that

your hand disappears.

Your arm disappears, your shoulder, your breast. Your body and your husband

disappear. You,

dream

you are tossed as the water in waves, that your body falls away into particles,

is absorbed by fish and seaweed and sucked into the bellies of whales, you

dream

it is lost.

You dream you become the bottom of the ocean, fall between the

grains of sand into the center

of the earth, and burn. You

dream that your burning is both cold and hot. You

dream you are burning but don't feel the burn.

You are quiet and burning lovely like the center of a star.

You are calm.

You wake in a gas station parking lot in the California desert, wet with your face in the sun. Your husband pumps gas brown in the shade, his hip on the back panel of the blue sedan, hair in the sunlight a hot white halo. He's handsome but you don't know why he is handsome. You wouldn't know how to describe him to others, feature-by-feature like you could the desert. He is not like the desert; there is nothing mysterious in his face, his stance, his disposition, his voice. You cannot find a feature you like or dislike. You are unaffected—you wish you disliked him.

What is a pillow, a roll, a touch in the center of night, an unwilling scent, a hollow sleeplessness kept vigil over just to be alone? What is a water cup in the console? you ask. What does it mean that his breath is in it? What is it now if not your breath?

And what is a lonely death on the desert. Is a lonely death this: your desire escaping your body, diffused into the stillness that surrounds everything, evaporating out into a landscape that steals the wetness from bodies, especially yours? You look at your hands. You flex them. Your skin pulls over your bone like worn elastic. Your knuckles turn white like the surface of everything under the sun at a certain time of day. You spread your fingers, paying special attention to the space between, so under-touched. The meat of your thumb, so unappreciated, folds in half at the will of your bones. You hold your hands outside the window and feel the air, or maybe you don't, it is all so still. Perhaps it is waves of heat you feel.

And why do you cringe when he smiles at you? Why do you smile, nonetheless, when he leans in the window to kiss your forehead; why do you feel that it's insincere, not on the part of his lips, but yours, as you raise them to request a second, to reaffirm the first, the one that you dry secretly with your sleeve when he turns? Why do you hate yourself so for this act of deceit when you knew, upon leaving, you were so selfish? Why did you hate yourself and yet go, leaving your family, your friends, yes, yourself behind in the green of your hometown? Your history behind you, you launched out over the open desert where there is nothing, no, nothing that invites you.

To pull yourself out from the madness of a barren landscape, with no civilization, no places to seek haven: this is your task. For this agreement is but a tenet of civilization you've affirmed. And what does it mean here in this place without law, where death is often confused as

life, where life appears as death and there are no such things as time or promise, but there are animals that rove in packs to kill you or circle overhead in case you are left behind, and the shadows?

You lock the door suddenly and maybe he notices. You lock the door because you are afraid, but roll down the window a crack to let the air in. One action cancels out another; you are fine. You position yourself in the path of the wind and breathe deeply. You gaze out the window. You listen to the long, deep sighs of the road and the humming he thinks you cannot hear.

As a girl you had wanted to become a nurse. You were curious about the insides of bodies, had a vision where you reached inside your own and felt all your organs, could identify them by touch and heal things just by running your fingers over them. You had a dream once that a girl was lying on top of you. You were in love and you reached inside to heal her, but she was hollow like the inside of a bargain store mannequin. You were scared because you wanted to fix her, but you cannot fix a thing that has no parts, and so she died there on top of you and hardened to stone and weighed you down so you couldn't breathe. You are scared now remembering it and because you feel like that girl, who lay there on top of herself in the act of making love and then let herself die without being filled. That was you, you know now, with her stone tongue in your mouth, keeping inside the breath you would need to scream, pinning down the hands you used to grasp at your empty room.

In youth, you did not learn to love yourself for there was nothing to love; no single thing to admire in the mirror or in your writings, which you quickly abandoned, or your ability to soothe like nurses do, which you always felt was a lie, or your private fascination with blood and its privileged interiority, which you decided was a hazard and so you abandoned that, like everything else, like you would abandon him who is seated in his rightful place next to you, who rides his horse proudly over a vast, open kingdom, manifesting a conjoined ideal, would you leave him alone in the desert? Would you?

You see windmills from a miles-out distance stolid on the plain. You see their purpose before you see their form. Their purpose: to generate power by repeating a task; to turn regularly over, or not to. To stand so evenly in rows, to move to wind. To be as they are.

Your purpose: is what? From hours of unmoving, your head has become like a clod of dead grass. You feel that you were once alert but have nodded your way into permanent sleep and can talk to the spirits of the desert, which are few, but call to the center of your mind and tell you nothing that has words and yet you call back. They call from the scrub and the rocks and ask you to pull over, to step out of the car in your bare feet and walk through spurs to the trunk of a juniper, urinate on it and your heels and stare out over the forever plain while the desert drinks what you've given to it.

Your purpose was once to be as you were. Is this true? As a child, you found a nest in the neighbor's tree with six mockingbird eggs. You returned to that nest over and over until they hatched, and then you brought them inside, closed them in a cigar box and showed them to your father who you'd never before upset. He brought a ladder to the tree and cupped the babies gently crying in his hands, which he lowered into the nest as he told you they would die. Their mother wouldn't feed them. They smelled like you now.

Your purpose is now to be as your husband is. You are one, linked from the crooks of your finger to your hearts, beating in time with the wheels' rotation; shifting in weight like the great distant landmasses outside your window; converging, as clouds do over mountains. He will lie on top of you, making it so. You will reach inside him and find that he's filled, and the filling will be made of your body and you will want to pull yourself out, but fail. Try as you might, you will find that there is no separating yourself. You are the same now, you don't know what that means. What is it to be converged when you were never even one?

And what is a scent, a space in the hollow of your hands, a pattern left behind in the skin where you leaned, sap like the desert wind on your throat as you descend to the car, windmills spooling your threads, a breeze in the leaves of your tree, an ache in your belly for worms, which are none in Mojave, a night?

A night: a deep, dark hollow; a forest you left, endless, for an endless expanse; dark safety closing around you; a place to sleep; for nothing here wants to see you.

Or a restless unsleep in a foreign bed, on the edge of a desert with a breathing around you that is not yours, or is yours now. You feel the shift in his hands. You feel his fingers twitching around a thing

behind his eyelids, feel him dreaming dreams he will tell you about in the morning, like he did in the days before you were married. In the interstice between one trip to the courthouse and another, he dreamt he could feel you but couldn't see you. He climbed over snow banks and dug down deep into the snow, chased a sense of you down the flurried streets near your house where he met you for the first time, (you came to the door and he was just there), dreamt he chased you all around your house in shadows but your body was gone, as if on the wind. You were lost to him, lost. But were you lost, then, even to yourself, as you ran through the shadows of your house. Were you not, also, there on the hunt?

You wish you could dream you were hunting. You shut your eyes, tighter, you unshut again. Your fingers find his face in the dark, trace the curves of his nose, the line of his lips, his one brow leading into another. You draw your finger along his jaw from ear to chin and let your thumb rest again on his lip, which is yours. This is something you can do when you want to, you think. You press his lips together and trap his breath, sour in your nose like milk in heat, and here is his face, turning towards you as if he knew he couldn't breathe against your hands. You see his features in the dark like a cluster of shadows sharper when they move. He parts his lips and you feel his breath emerge and smell it. You turn away.

A foreign bed, an army of windmills giving you power, a silent engine parked in the lot of a hotel in a desert all around you for miles. Here is your lot, as you rise from the bed: an assembly of signs that lead nowhere. A story you'll never write (you quit), a body you'll never heal (you're afraid), a city you'll never reach (though it is yours if you want it, so want it), a marriage you wanted for what it could do and not for its own sake (what have you done). Will you stand in the night, unsteady by the hotel mattress, over him like an angel reporting a death? Will you cross the carpet to the door, open it onto the deepness of night and its chill and its endless, unclothed landscape, close but not lock it behind you and walk in your shift to the unseen hills in the distance? It is wrong to dream of doing these things. You shut the door and go back to bed.

The morning you left, your mother stood barefoot in the driveway at daybreak. You think she knew you were there watching her. You stood at the kitchen sink with dishes left from the night before,

when you celebrated tensely your recent marriage, and washed them in water so hot it burned your hands, inhaled the steam rolling upward to the ends of your hair, your cheeks, your eyelids, your ears, watching as it stuck to the window, obscuring your mother's figure against the grey light of dawn. She turned, and through the fog of the window, drifted to the door which she waited to open, but which you heard scrape across the floor. How she hated that scraping for years. It marked the wood.

She entered the kitchen, hung in the doorway wordlessly, watched you dry the dishes you'd cleaned, still warm in your hands but the dishtowel cool, and set them in their cabinet places. Shutting the doors, you felt her there. You turned to her and together you quit the house, walked to the water and sat on the edge of the sand, remained there until it was time to leave, and then rose toward the house where he waited for you.

You left as soon as you could. You left instantly, soon as you could, and leaving, you pointed to buildings where this, and this is where, and there was nothing you knew outside of the center of town, and nothing now as you follow the curves of the San Rafaels, the light gold and lovely burning through the mountains at dawn. Your husband is happy and singing at your left. He has brought you here like a spoil of the hunt, will clean you and eat you and stuff you with sawdust, leave you in the marbled foyer and point you out at parties: his pride.

The ocean is distant and smooth in the offing. You smell it through the vents in the dashboard, kill them and roll the window down, breach the glassless border and thrust your hands out into the wind. Essence of pine and eucalyptus and evening golden light on the hills and your arms. You are here.

He pulls in slow to the driveway and places his hand on your knee, you place yours over his in turn. It is automatic; you do it, then you know that you've done it. His hand feels other than yours, when you lace your fingers together in worry, and feel yourself there, it is not like his hand. His is a force pushed against your own force. Yours is symbiotic; it is the force of you, alone, come together. The memory of his shape remains behind when you pull away, but you don't know where to place your hand and so you hover in midair while he moves up your thigh and finds you hollow. You shiver, or maybe you shudder, you moan. You reach for the passenger handle, you pull. ■

STRAY DOG WALTZ

BY ALICE FEIRING

Three hours northwest of Mott Street, embedded in fields, forests and forgotten apple trees, was an elderly, cockeyed farmhouse that my boyfriend Zach and I adopted as our very own. The truth was its real owner neglected the house and acreage after her husband's fatal aneurysm. The place needed caretakers. Zach, who during the week worked in a suit, craved care taking. The barter worked for nearly a decade. We had our retreat. She benefited from his projects such as bat guano removal, replenished woodpile and a new wrap around deck. At the beginning of this odyssey, I resisted the constant schlepping. After all, I was a forty-year old downtown die-hard who fainted at the mention of deer tick. Yet, I had grown to love being up there. In fact, I sometimes wondered if our attachment to that house had displaced our attachment to sex.

It was the end of August and the creek was parched. While Zach split wood for winter, I typed in the kitchen, on a paint-chipped, rickety telephone table, which looked out at hills, the forest and the lonely, thriving garlic clove I had planted under the dead willow. The old phone rang, disturbing the peace. It could only be one person, and I thought about ignoring it. Yet tired of its loud sound, I lifted the receiver. She told me she and her new beau were engaged. After listening to her prattle on about her wedding plans, the owner of the house asked me how the work was progressing. I told her of my own gardening and had a heart-stopping premonition when she pouted, "But, I don't like garlic."

I went out to put my arms around Zach and to tell him the news of the upcoming nuptials. He just kissed me sweetly and shook his head knowingly and sadly. Then we separated and worked steadily all morning and then sometime before noon, I saw movement on the brand new deck into which Zach had just recently sunk the last nail.

"It's a dog!" I said, feeling ridiculously excited.

Zach whooped to scoot it off. I saw him pick up some rocks, I ran to the door and yelled, "Don't you dare."

I never spoke to him that way, I always got angry in hushed sweetness. Zach dropped the rocks. I rushed to the animal.

The pooch, part hound, part beagle with a Bambi red brown color and white snout and paws had the saddest black eyes I ever saw. He shook with fear and

hunger, but did not run away.

"He's emaciated," I sighed.

"No he's not. He's a perfect weight." Zach said.

"He's sick. He's weak," I protested.

"No he's not," Zach countered. "And he doesn't belong here." Never the less, he knelt down to examine the dog, who had no tags but a scarlet collar. Zach checked his paws and saw wear marks on the nails. "He's come a distance," he determined.

I noted that ribs were showing through the dog's back fur. Yes, the dog had gone a while without a meal. I cracked an egg into a bowl and served it to the animal who played it cool, trying not to come off as eager. But he merely didn't have the strength to be enthusiastic. Too weak to stand to eat, he tilted his head and rested his furry cheek on the ground. Sideways, he lapped up the yolk greedily with his long, red tongue. We kept his water bowl full and went about our duties while the dog slept for the entire afternoon in the sun on Zach's newly seeded, hay strewn lawn.

In the afternoon we started to make calls to try to find his owner. The sheriff. The dogcatcher. The radio station. We asked the mail deliverer, did she recognize the dog? We came up with nothing. We were leaving in a few days and this dog was fast becoming our problem.

After a frustrating day, we needed grilling provisions and more suitable dog fare. "Get chopped meat and dry food," Zach instructed.

I drove the ten miles to the local Big M to scavenge the victuals. When I couldn't resist throwing a flea collar into my basket, I was sure the dog's wistful eyes had unlocked deep and heretofore cloistered maternal feelings. Walking through the aisles, I realized that the last time I trolled for dog food was when I was a skinny little girl riding on the back of her Weimaraner, instead of a bespectacled food geek who translated French cookbooks.

Finding comestibles suitable for humans up in that part of Delaware County was a challenge, but it was evidently a lot worse for dogs. I feverishly read the ingredients on all of the packages, and finally chose the least offensive lamb dog meal. In the car back I started to refer to the dog as mine. I considered names like Buddy or Chester, neither seemed poetic enough for such a sad-eyed creature. I parked under the twin pines and grabbed the shopping bags

from the car seat. Filled with an inner pink joy I headed for the house when Zach intercepted me. "He's gone," he said with no urgency.

"What?" I asked, confused.

"Just now. He ran after those asshole hooligans on their ATVs."

I dropped the bags and dashed to the road. And there struggling up the road in the dust was the dog. I yelled back at Zach, "I can't believe you let him go! You did this to me on purpose."

Zach looked at me as if I was not the woman he had loved for a decade but like some harridan impostor. Furious, I ran after the dog calling out Chester! Buddy! Pooch! Puppy! No response. The idiot dog, with no trace of gratitude, continued to limp like a one legged sailor after the kids. The silly dog was on autopilot and just didn't know he was too weak to wander. I felt loss. I felt anger. I felt used. I felt like a sentimental fool. Then I thought, just as well. Not our problem anymore. I had saved the Big M receipt. The dog food and collar would go back. I would throw the meat out. I'll show that animal.

The night fell and we grilled up a slew of ultra-spicy eggplant, but I had no appetite. Zach tried to comfort me.

"You can't keep wild things," he said.

The next day neither one of us went to town and bare-chested, shining with sweat, Zach split wood for hours. Before Buddy showed up, Zach had had the biggest brown eyes I'd ever seen. He was skinny just like the dog. He had large hands, like the dogs large paws. I had fallen for the dog the way I had instantly fallen for Zach, when we argued about who was the better dancer, Baryshnikov or Nureyev.

Then on Wednesday morning, while I was hammering out the words for Truffade de la Vacherie, which was just fancy for mashed potatoes with chard and cheese, Zach yelled out, "He's back!"

I rushed to see, and there he was; the dog was quaking, limping so bad he scuttled like a crab. His left eye was injured, all red, the eye could barely open. I got nauseous at the sight. I rushed for food. Zach snapped on the dog's flea and tick collar as if it were a set of handcuffs. "Okay Buddy," he said, giving into responsibility, "you're getting tied up."

Zach tied him up on a lemon yellow rope. Then he grabbed a multi-vitamin and massaged the pill down the dog's gullet. The dog accepted it with grateful

gulps—such a sweet disposition.

By dusk, the temperature dropped dramatically. I started to lobby for bringing the dog in the house but Zach, as certain that dogs don't belong in our friend's country house just as they did not belong in our New York City tenement apartment, fashioned a doghouse by turning over the wooden lawn cart and padding it with hay. Then, he packed the pooch in to that fabulously chic shelter. Zach tried to convince me that Buddy would be happier sleeping under the stars, but I wasn't buying it.

That night Zach and I spent a few hours walking through the fields and watching the incredible star show, struggling to see Uranus through its blue gasses, and watching the dew fall out of the forest and onto the field. It was a cold late August night, just above 40 degrees. When we came back, Buddy was standing outside of his doghouse, whimpering and wagging his tail, excited to see humans and not a pack of wolves. He licked my hiking boots in gratitude and then, accepting his fate, crawled back into his home. I could see by the way he tucked the dog in that Zach too, was getting attached. Zach pulled me close to his chest, led me up and onto his deck. He embraced me in a slow, syncopated waltz, up and down its length while the pup percussed its tail to our rhythm. Zach was hot beneath his sweater. His smell, slightly metallic, slightly cut grass, slightly truffle, was intoxicating. As he held me, he said, "Vi, I'm going to tell you a story. When I was a little boy, eight or so, I caught a rabbit and brought it home. I built it a home out of an old suitcase and some chicken wire. In the morning I went to look for the rabbit and it was dead. I couldn't stop crying and that was the first time I found out that you can't keep wild things."

"The dog is a runaway, he's not wild," I protested.

"His nature is wild, he's a hound. He can't be domesticated." He used the kind of tone that told me he was not just talking about animals. Instead, I focused on how fiercely he had just clutched me. "This dog is bigger than the both of us," Zach said.

"What does that mean?" I asked.

"One day, a dog knocked at the door," he said.

"You're jealous," I said.

"You're crazy."

"You're jealous about the dog," I said. Then I got angry. "You're jealous about everything that takes me away from you for a second."

"You know this is our last summer

here. You know this, and instead of savoring every second, you're making it about that animal."

He sounded like a sullen child, but the words sounded too much like my father telling my mother, "When Vi goes off to school, I'm leaving."

"It is not our last. You still have work here to do. We're not done yet." I was grasping for hope.

"She'll bring him up here," Zach continued. "He thinks he knows how to wield an ax and worse. He'll mark the property, like a cat."

And then a dog showed up at the door. I thought.

I couldn't sleep. During the night, I kept on hearing the dog's tail, thumping like a heartbeat, drawing me out. It was about four in the morning when I delicately slipped out from Zach's arms and sprayed myself with Deet. I grabbed a pillow and sleeping bag and I, terrified of the wilderness, crawled into the doghouse and cried myself to sleep. I felt like a split open suckling pig.

In the morning Buddy licked my nose. I even got a bark out of him and lots of tail wagging when I cooed to him. I went back to the house to grind the coffee. Zach wouldn't say a word to me. There I was, in the country with two men, and could really trust neither to stay. Zach went out to split wood while I hand fed Buddy. I felt like a bloody idiot.

Finally around noon, I approached Zach with a Chimay. This is often how our fights ended, in an offering.

"Did you like sleeping with him? How many nights have I begged you to sleep with me by the fire?" he took a long drink of the cold beer.

"I liked sleeping with him," I confirmed.

Time was passing. We were leaving the next day. Zach was firm but tender with me as we searched for so called, "No Kill Shelters." The ASPCA in Delhi had a very low euthanasia rate. Low euthanasia was too much for my taste. Then I called Pets Alive in a town about two hours away on the way back to New York. The woman suggested we actually call that Delhi place, highly recommended, good people. Real dog lovers. Then she promised, "If they don't place the floppy hound in two weeks, I'll take him. He sounds like a fine gentleman."

Bingo. We had a real plan.

"Oh," she asked, "that is, if he is neutered. Is he?"

This was new to me. I've only had girl dogs in my life. "How can you tell?"

The Pets Alive woman told me how.

I looked at Buddy. Buddy looked at

me. He thumped his tail as if in anticipation. I'd never been this intimate with a dog and it all felt a little obscene. I put my hand on his shaft, I felt no lump. "He's fixed!" I cried out into the phone. When I hung up, I tried to get braver about the reality; he was leaving me.

Solemnly, we took the dog for a last walk; we coaxed him to lift his leg and squat before the ride to Delhi. He did the former on a big thorny burdock plant. Still no squatting. "The dog needs an enema," I told Zach.

"Stop being such a Jewish mother," Zach said. "You're turning into this saccharine creature, the next thing you'll do is tell me you want babies."

I was having none of Zach. None of him. I rushed ahead with determination, jumped in on the passenger side and brought the dog with me. When on the road, Buddy put his head in my lap and smiled at me and tears flowed from me like water from the Trevi Fountain.

"You would choose the dog over me?" Zach asked, quietly and seriously.

Zach and I had been together for ten years. I loved him intensely and now I wondered if his heart was so small, he was jealous of a lost beagle.

By the time we pulled into the shelter parking lot, I'd already decided that if Buddy didn't get adopted in two weeks, I would give myself over to fate, even if it meant that Zach would move out.

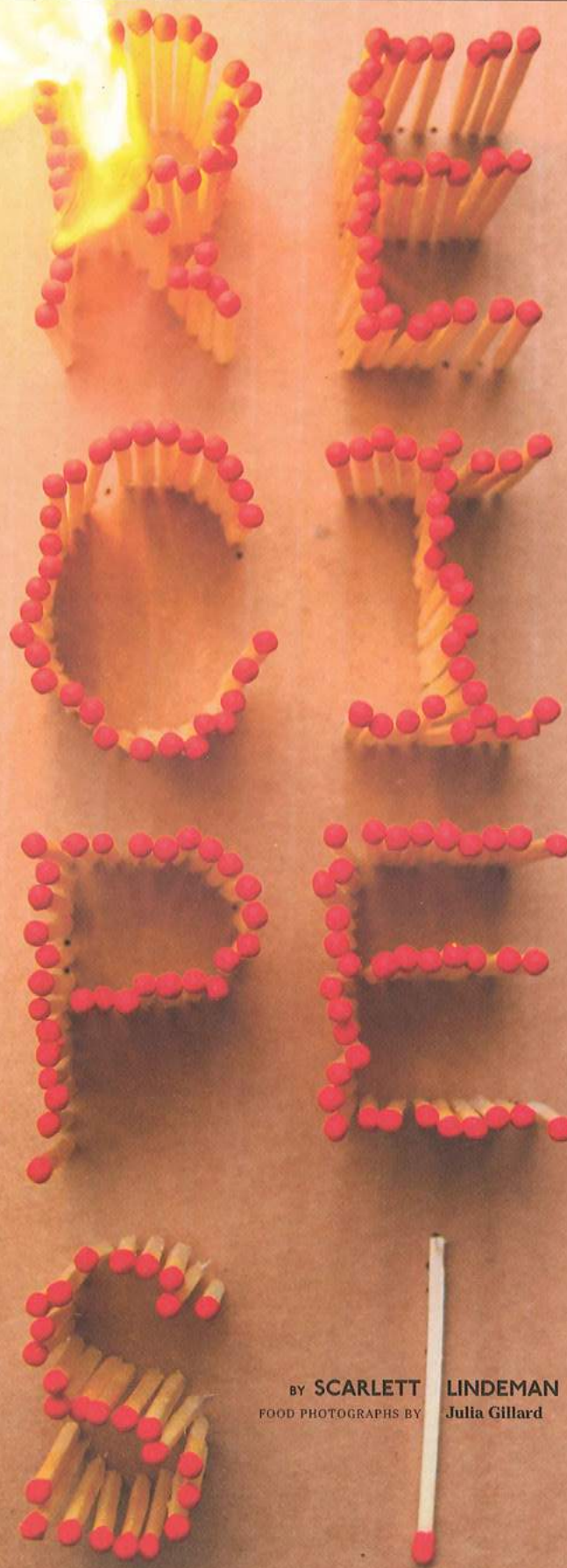
We waited. The dog panted. Finally filled with bravery, we three walked inside. It wasn't so bad. Lots of dog love around. Kids from a nearby day camp were squealing over new puppies in the corner. Seconds later the white-coated vet ran over to us and with excitement said, "I know that dog!" Her fingers rooted around for something underneath his collar. She affectionately pinched and exposed a fatty tumor I somehow had not noticed. His name was Mac. He belonged to the Grossmans. She said he had been rescued from a muddy ditch two months ago. Then he'd been missing for three weeks and this was the second time he had hit the road. "Oh Mackie," she said to him, "you are such a devil." Without letting me kiss Mac goodbye, she led him away from me.

We donated our dog food and got back into the now doggy smelling car. We gave ourselves over to the emotional exhaustion and a mixture of relief and grief, Zach took my hand and gripped it tightly before he buried his wet face in my hair. ■

(Excerpt from the novel *Shadows Over Dead Willow or Stray Dog Waltz*.)

Learning to manipulate it is entrancing. There are the first-time jitters, the fumbling attempts, the comfortable understanding that comes with experience, the occasional painful sear, and scars—it's a sort of love affair that progresses through the years. The fear, the desire, the necessity that comes with the cooking flame, is a biting force that snips the heels of every cook. After years of being taught to fear fire, to turn your back on something you are viscerally drawn to, in the kitchen you get to play with it. The relationship begins somewhere, you just have to look back and see the spark.

My first kitchen job was at a French restaurant in a suburb of Salt Lake City. Housed in a perfect stone chateau at the mouth of Little Cottonwood Canyon, the restaurant was an ersatz Loire valley manor and entering its formidable wrought iron gates was like entering Disneyland, for wealthy Utah'n wedding parties and local graduation celebrations. It was surrounded by forested grounds and preened lawns that peacocks bobbed over. The waitresses wore French peasant outfits with tight bustiers that smashed their breasts up into plain view and we served lobster bisque, escargot,



BY SCARLETT LINDEMAN
FOOD PHOTOGRAPHS BY Julia Gillard

and dusty magnums of wine. To get to the the actual restaurant, you had to turn off of a mountain road, follow a cobblestone path that wended through the woods, over a pond, and up a steep hill that my Toyota Corolla would slip backwards down on icy days.

I went to high school with the owner's son, who, knowing I liked to cook at home, was able to wiggle me into a part-time starter position. During the day, I would pipe pate choux into swan figurines and cut trapezoidal shapes out of slabs of ice cream while whittling my 10th grade Spanish into kitchen slang with the other prep cooks. I worked nights only when they were busy and needed an extra, albeit unsteady, hand. I would call up Juan, a head steward, and ask in broken Spanish if he thought they had enough covers. Juan, yelling into the phone over the din of the kitchen thrumming away in the background, might say yes, if he anticipated a rush. I would come in to plate warm spinach and bacon salads, Caprese salads with mealy tomatoes, and an impressive 3D avocado creation that wrapped fans of the pale green fruit on end to form a circular hold- ing pen for shredded

lump crab meat and grapefruit segments. Meals ended in fire. The two of the most popular desserts were cherries jubilee and bananas foster, both syrupy and laced with booze. We would ignite the desserts in the kitchen. Waitresses would rush table side with gravy boats of fire, full with sauces to be poured anxiously at arms length into ice cream filled goblets below, flames slipping hungrily through the air. The alcohol burns away, so it's okay to eat, the Mormons explain.

At night, the main kitchen clanged with excitement. I was stationed in a separate prep kitchen, occasionally peeking in at the live flames that burst out from under saute pans. It was loud and hot, and the quick movements of each cook seemed to me fueled by some still unknown and urgent energy. It seemed far-away and foreign at the time, but I liked getting to use my hands and working with food. I liked sitting on overturned milk crates during family meal with my coworkers, who would pass around bottles of Tapatio they brought from home. The large stainless steel kitchen flickered with the transformative power of heat. Like edges of a piece of paper that catches fire and creeps forward, I



was intrigued by the frenzy of the kitchen even if I was just outside, peering in.

I committed myself to this union long ago and continue to learn more. These days, I carry an ease around fire and hopefully a graceful one. Assuredly reaching my hands into an 800 degree wood-burning oven. Scraping knuckles on it's concrete tiled floor. Knowing just when that sizzle will turn into a sear, and catching it, before a burn. You can feel it, in the middle of your body, when a steak is ready. With every slick porterhouse pressed into a hot cast iron pan or grill marks branded onto a spring onion, there comes a greater understanding of the way heat works, and still, an excitement.

The recipes in this journal focus on fire—the licking heat, the singed black edges, the drama of the flame. You can roast vegetables on coals, grill meats over burning wood, inspire heat with chiles and spice, or even just light food on fire. If cooking is a harnessing of heat then real fire is the most elemental of applications. ■

ON A BED OF COALS

ROASTED PEPPER SOUP, CRISPY PANCETTA, CHERRY TOMATOES

¼# pancetta	1 cup chicken stock
8 poblano peppers	salt
1 white onion, peeled and cut in half	1 lime
1 quart cream	

Cut pancetta into lardons, 1 inch by ¼ inch matchsticks, and pan fry until crispy. Drain off the fat and keep lardons warm. On a bed of coals or a hot grill, roast peppers and onion until blackened and charred in spots. Transfer peppers and onion to a bowl, cover with a towel, and let steam for 20 minutes. Peel peppers of their skin and remove stem, seeds, and any white ribbing. Place peppers, onion, cream, chicken stock, and a pinch of salt in a blender and blend on high until smooth. Strain mixture through a fine strainer. Taste. It should be smoky, well-seasoned, and rich. In a pot, bring soup to a simmer. Divide soup among bowls. Top with pancetta and sprinkle halved cherry tomatoes on the top. Squeeze a little lime juice over each bowl and serve.

EGGPLANT PUREE

4 large eggplants	pinch of sugar
1 garlic clove	lemon
salt	1 cup olive oil

Roast whole eggplants on a grate, set over a bed of smoldering coals, turning until blackened, completely wilted, and soft. Remove eggplants and let cool slightly, before peeling off all the stems and blackened skin. Place pulp into a large bowl with a garlic clove that has been mashed to a paste with salt, a pinch of sugar, and the juice of one lemon. Using a whisk, mash and whisk the pulp into smooth submission. Add the olive oil and whisk together until creamy. Taste and adjust the seasoning.

ROASTED PEPPERS, GRILLED POTATOES, FETA

4 white new potatoes	1 Tablespoon capers, chopped
6 sweet red peppers	1 garlic clove, crushed into a paste
Extra virgin olive oil	handful of parsley, chopped fine
Red wine vinegar	4 oz. feta cheese

Par-cook potatoes in a small pot of boiling salted water. They should still be firm and relatively raw in the center. Cool slightly and cut into ½ inch rounds. Set aside. On a hot grill or directly on a bed of hot coals, roast peppers until charred, turning occasionally to roast all sides. Place charred peppers into a bowl and cover with a towel. Let peppers sit and steam for ten minutes. Meanwhile, brush potato rounds with olive oil and sprinkle with salt. Grill on each side until tender. Peel skins

from peppers, remove stems, seeds, and any white ribbing. Slice into manageable strips. Toss peppers in a bowl with good olive oil, a glug of red wine vinegar, capers, salt, garlic, freshly ground black pepper, and chopped parsley. Combine potatoes with marinated peppers, tossing to coat. Check for seasoning then plate peppers and potatoes and crumble feta cheese over.

CHARCOAL ONIONS

4 whole onions, unpeeled

Get a good bed of coals going. Place onions on coal bed and cover with more coals. Let roast for 15 minutes until completely blackened. Remove onions from direct coal contact but continue to roast for 15 more minutes. Remove onions from the heat. When cool enough to touch, peel off outer burnt layers until you get to the browned, sweet core. Drizzle with olive oil, sea salt, and serve with roasted meats or toast.

SHELL BEANS, GREENS, SMOKED PEPPERS, PIMENTON

4 sweet green to mildly spicy peppers—cubanelles, poblanos, wax	Spanish paprika
2 # shell beans, any variety, dried if you can't find fresh	1 bay leaf
1 onion, diced	1 chile de arbol
1 carrot, halved	1 bunch thyme
4 garlic cloves, crushed	1 head escarole
2 teaspoons pimenton, smoked	extra virgin olive oil
	red wine vinegar

Blister peppers on a bed of coals until speckled with char. Place peppers in a bowl and cover with a towel to steam. Once cool enough to handle, strip peppers of their skin, stems, and any white ribbing. Slice into 2" strips, toss with salt, and olive oil. Meanwhile, sweat onion, carrot, garlic in good olive oil in a medium pot. Add pimenton, bay leaf, and chile and cook for just a minute before adding the beans, thyme, and enough water to barely cover. Cook beans at a slow simmer until soft but still retains some bite. Add a handful of salt and leaves of escarole, cook for ten minutes more. Stir in cooked pepper, ½ cup of olive oil, and a splash of red wine vinegar. Taste and adjust seasoning. Serve warm.

COAL-ROASTED SWEET POTATOES

4 sweet potatoes

Get a good bed of coals going. Place sweet potatoes on top of the coal bed. After 10 or so minutes, use tongs to turn the potatoes to roast on the other side. Roast for 10 more minutes. Pull potatoes from the coals and peel off the blackened skin. Eat the flesh.

LOBSTER, BUTTER, BRANDY, HERBS

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 2 live lobsters | 1 bunch chervil, finely chopped |
| 2 Tablespoons grapeseed oil | 4 Tablespoons chives, sliced fine |
| 2 shallots, finely diced | 1 Tablespoon of parsley, chopped fine |
| 1 garlic clove, crushed | salt |
| ¼ cup brandy | lemon |
| 6 Tablespoons cold unsalted butter, cut into small pieces | |
| ½ cup stock (lobster, fish, or chicken is fine) | |

With a heavy chef's knife, split lobster quickly and cleanly lengthwise down the middle of its face. This will kill it instantly, though it will continue to move around. Twist the tail from the body and split in two, lengthwise. Twist off the arms, and twist the claws from the knuckles. Discard the body. You will now have 2 claws, 2 knuckles, and 2 sides of the tail. Repeat with second lobster. Heat oil in a large saute pan over high heat until it shimmers. Slide lobster pieces into the pan. Sear pieces for a minute and then turn pieces over to sear on the other side. Add shallot and garlic to the pan and let cook, 30 seconds before pouring in the brandy. If the pan is hot enough it should burst into flames. If it doesn't, tilt the pan slightly to the flame to allow the alcohol to ignite. Once the flames die down, add the butter and stock and let cook down into a sauce, turning lobster pieces to coat. Cook lobster for 3-4 more minutes. If the sauce reduces too much, add a tablespoon or two more stock. Add chopped herbs, the juice of ½ a lemon, and adjust the seasoning with salt. Serve with lots of crusty bread.

BURNT GARBANZOS, SMOKED SAGE

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1 quart chickpeas | 3 chile de arbol |
| 2 carrots | salt |
| 1 onion | 1 large bundle sage |
| 3 cloves garlic | |

Soak chickpeas in cold water, overnight. Drain chickpeas. Cook ceci beans in a pot with, carrot, onion, garlic, and chile, until al dente. Add a handful of salt to the pot and continue to cook for 10 more minutes. Once garbanzos are soft, drain off cooking liquid. Pour peas onto the counter and ignite sage leaves, being careful not to singe your fingers or eyebrows. With flaming bundle, knock chickpeas around the counter until subdued and sleepy. If you can whack peas into a serving bowl, they'll be extra flavorful and you'll advance to bonus round. When your Dad busts in the kitchen and asks if you are smoking weed, just tell him it's aromatics for cleansing the kitchen of angry spirits. Drizzle olive oil over peas, toss to coat, and serve.

RADICCHIO SALAD WITH CHICKEN LIVERS & FIGS

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2 slices rustic bread | 2 Tablespoons red wine vinegar |
| 8oz chicken livers, cleaned | 1 Tablespoon honey |
| 1 shallot, finely diced | extra virgin olive oil |
| 2 Tablespoons brandy | 1 pint figs, halved |
| 1 head radicchio | lemon |
| 1 bunch frisee | |

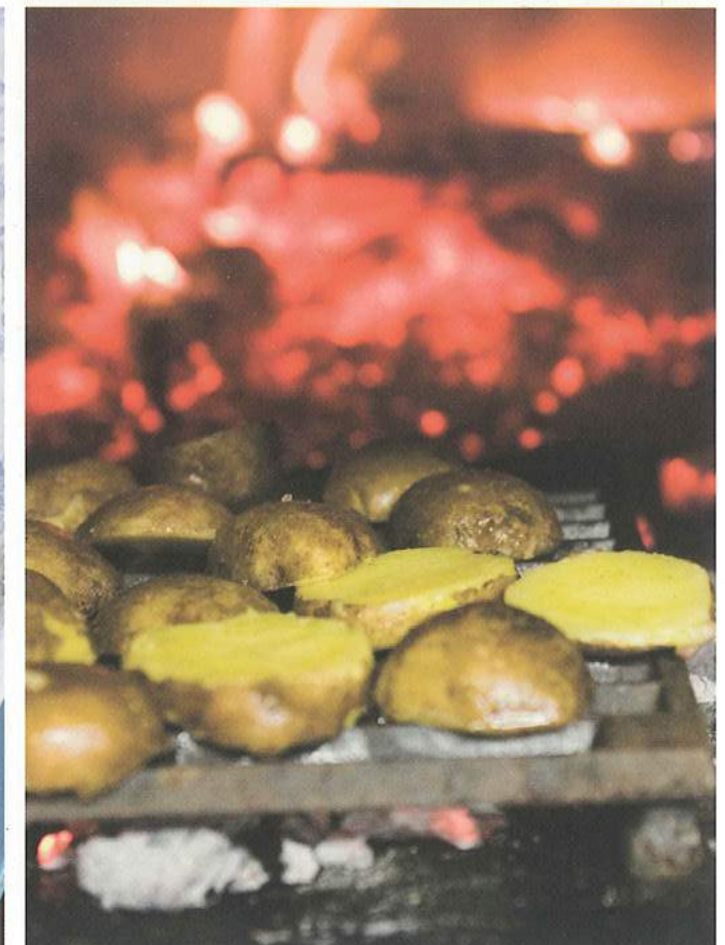
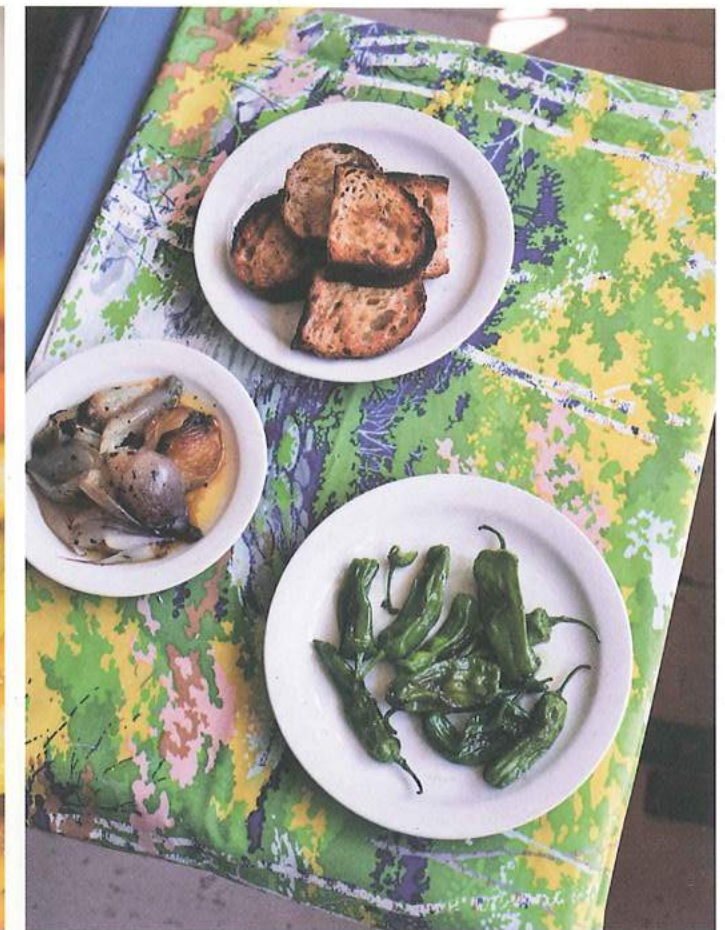
First pan fry bread in good olive oil until golden and crispy on both sides. Remove bread from the oil and let drain on a paper towel. Sprinkle with salt and cut into 1 inch squares, like croutons. Season chicken livers with salt and pepper on both sides. Heat a glug of olive oil in a medium saute pan until shimmering, almost smoking. Add chicken livers and sear quickly on one side, just one minute or so. Flip livers to the other side, add the shallot and continue to sear for another minute. Livers should cook until just rosy in the center. Add brandy to the pan to deglaze. It should sputter violently and possibly ignite. Set livers aside. Whisk together honey and red wine vinegar. In a large bowl, toss leaves of radicchio and frisee with the croutons, red wine vinegar mixture and good olive oil, seasoning with salt and pepper. Add livers and any residual juice. Toss carefully. Add halved figs, sprinkle the salad with lemon, and serve.

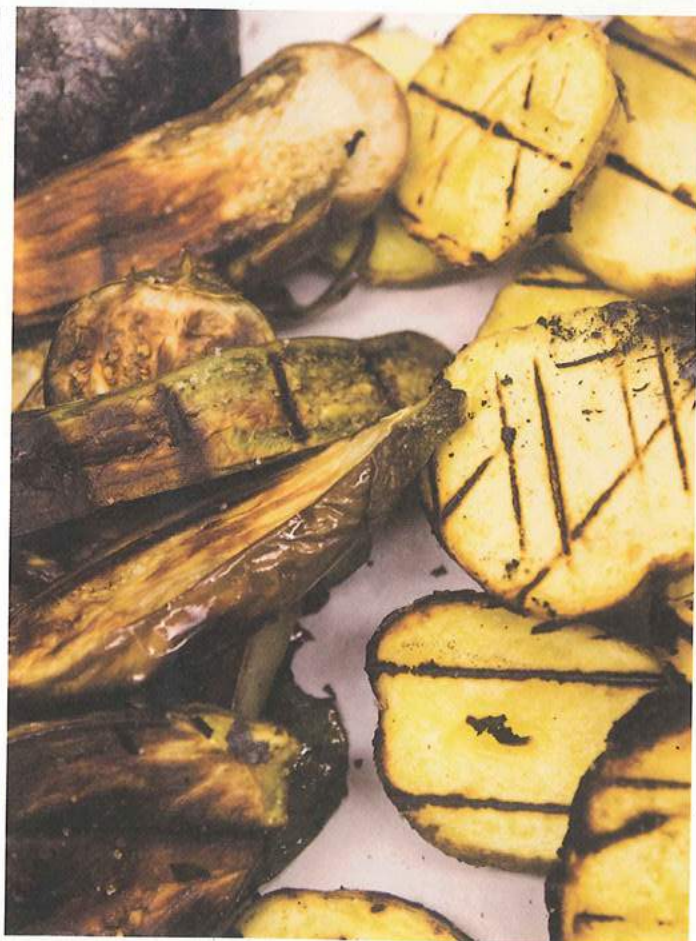
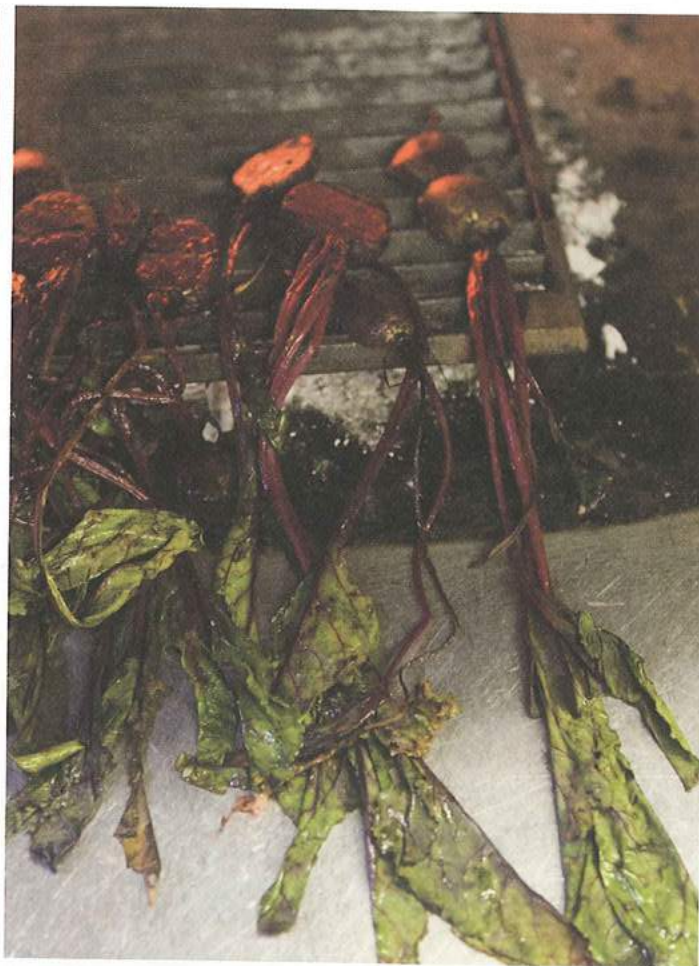
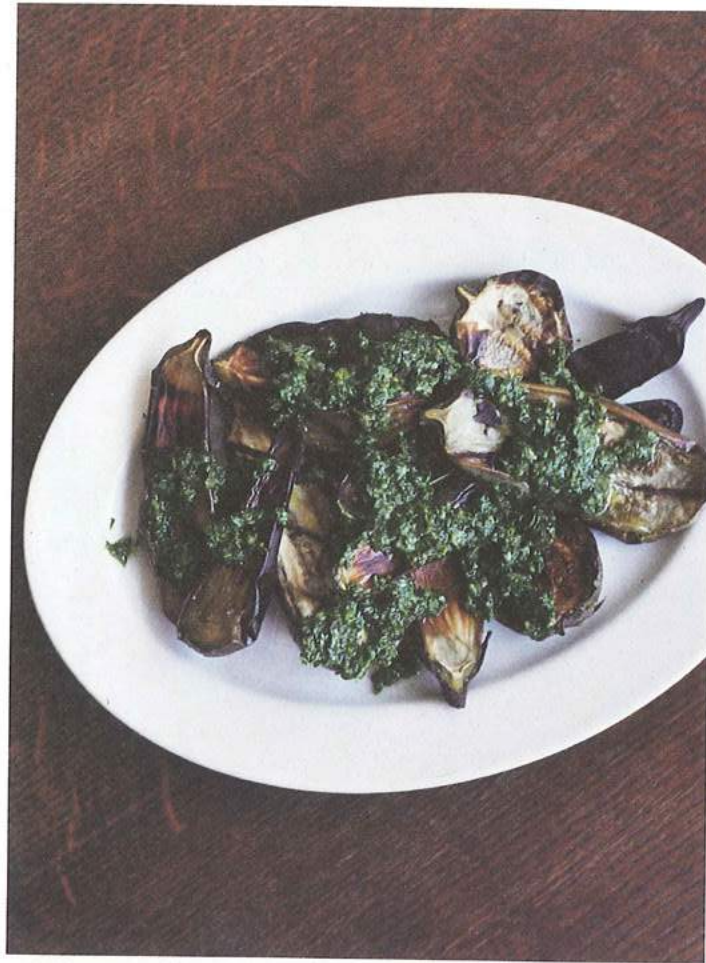
GRILL MARKS

STEAK, TOMATO, BUTTER LETTUCE

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 2# bone-in ribeye | 1 head butter lettuce |
| aioli (recipe follows) | sea salt |
| a mix of heirloom tomatoes | extra virgin olive oil |

Keep steak out at room temperature for at least an hour before you cook it. This recipe works nicely on a hot cast iron pan or a grill. When pan or grill is hot, brush steak with olive oil and sear on one side. Flipping occasionally, cook steak until charred on both sides and is slightly firm but springy to the touch, 9 to 12 minutes. Pull steak from the heat, brush with more olive oil and sprinkle with fine salt. Let rest for ten minutes. Swipe spoonfuls of aioli onto a large platter. Cut tomatoes into wedges and fat slices and layer onto the platter, sprinkle with sea salt. Slice steak into large pieces, sprinkle with sea salt, and set on top of tomatoes. Tear leaves of butter lettuce and pile on to the steak. Drizzle lettuce with any residual pan juice and sprinkle with more sea salt





AIOLI

1 garlic clove
1 Tablespoon salt
5 egg yolks

2 lemons
water
2 cups olive oil

In a mortar and pestle, pound garlic clove with salt to a paste. Add egg yolks, mashing and stirring until paste is well incorporated. Squeeze the juice of one lemon into the mixture, swirling to combine. Slowly drip in olive oil 1 or 2 Tablespoons at a time, stirring constantly, to form a quick emulsion. Stir constantly until the mixture is homogeneous and yellow. Once a small amount of oil is incorporated and the emulsion is set, you can pour more quickly. Continue with the rest of the oil. If the mixture is too thick after all of the oil is incorporated, sprinkle in a tablespoon of water, whisking to combine and loosen, a bit. Taste—it may need more lemon or salt.

GRILLED EGGPLANT, MINT SALSA VERDE

12 small Japanese eggplants
extra virgin olive oil
2 cloves of garlic
2 Tablespoons capers
2 pieces of crust-less bread, torn into pieces

1 bunch parsley
1 bunch mint
red wine vinegar
lemon
salt

Get your grill hot. Cut eggplant in two, lengthwise. Brush with olive oil and grill, cut-side down until charred slightly. Flip eggplants and grill until completely soft. In a mortar and pestle, pound garlic into a paste with salt and capers. Soak bread in water and squeeze completely dry. Pound bread into the garlic paste. Chop parsley and mint very fine and pound into the paste. Scrape mixture into a bowl and whisk in a cup of olive oil. Whisk in a splash of red wine vinegar and the juice of ½ a lemon. Adjust seasoning with salt. Drizzle over grilled eggplants.

GRILLED BLUE FISH, FENNEL, & ALMOND BREAD SAUCE (TARATOR)

1 2# bluefish
2 bulbs fennel, cut into 1/4s

extra virgin olive oil
salt

For Tarator

½ cup almonds, toasted
2 slices crust-less bread, soaked in milk
1 garlic clove, smashed to a paste
1 Tablespoon honey
2 Tablespoons nut oil

1 Tablespoon red wine vinegar
olive oil
water
salt
lemon

First make the tarator. In a food processor, pulse almonds, bread, and garlic to a rough paste. Add honey, nut oil, red wine vinegar and pulse to combine. With the food processor going, stream in enough olive oil to form a smooth, spreadable but

loose paste, adding a little water if necessary to thin to proper consistency. Season with salt and adjust with more honey or acid. It should be garlicky, rich, and well-balanced. Get your grill hot. Brush fish and pieces of fennel with olive oil and sprinkle liberally with salt. Place bluefish on the grill. Place fennel on the grill, turning when nicely charred. Carefully flip fish over after 8 to 10 minutes. If the skin begins to stick and tear, let it cook for another minute or two until it releases. Grill fish on the other side, 6 to 8 minutes more. Serve sauce with the fish and fennel, sprinkling everything with lots of lemon juice.

GRILLED ENDIVE, BLUE CHEESE, CRUSHED WALNUTS

½ cup walnuts
¼ cup red wine vinegar
1 Tablespoon honey
extra virgin olive oil
4 endives, split in half horizontally

4 oz. blue cheese
extra virgin olive oil
salt
black pepper

Get your grill hot. Toast walnuts until fragrant in a 350 oven. While warm, toss them in a bowl with a splash of olive oil, salt, and then rough chop. Whisk together red wine vinegar, honey, salt, and pepper. Toss endives in the vinegar mixture, reserving a little to drizzle over the top at the end. Place endives on the grill cut side down. Grill for 3 to 4 minutes, then remove endives and set on a serving plate. Drizzle with more olive oil, the reserved vinegar mixture. Crumble cheese and walnuts over the top. Crack lots of fresh black pepper on top.

GRILLED AVOCADO, CRAB, CORN

6 blue crabs
4 avocados
3 ears corn, husks left on
1 can baby corn
½ cup mayonnaise

ground chile de arbol
1 bunch purslane
salt
lime

Boil crabs in salted water for five minutes. Remove from water and chill. Once cold, crack shells, claws and legs to remove the meat. Once meat is picked, spread it out on a sheet tray. Turn off light and use a black light to scan for any tiny bits of shell and gristle, set aside. Get your grill hot. Turn on Korn's eponymous 1994 debut album, *Korn*. Grill ears of corn in their husks, turning occasionally, for 8 to 10 minutes. This will steam and cook inside kernels. Drain can of mini corn cobs. Toss in a bowl with olive oil and salt. Grill mini corns for 2 minutes, turn cobs 45 degrees, and grill 1 minute more. The nice cross-hatch grill mark is essential. Cut avocados in half, leaving skins on. Save the large round ball for the 9th hole. Brush cut side of avocado with olive oil and grill, cut-side down, 3-5 minutes. Remove from grill and peel off skin. Cut the kernels off of the mini cobs. To plate, place one half of avocado on a plate, stuff the inside divot with crab meat, set the grilled corn on the plate, slather with mayo. Sprinkle the mini corn kernels on top of the grilled corn, then sprinkle with ground chile de arbol, salt. Drape purslane over the top, sprinkle with fresh lime juice, then put the lime in the coconut, and mix it all up.



GRILLED BEETS, PISTACHIO, YOGURT, MINT

2 bunches baby beets, halved down the middle leaving greens attached
 ¼ cup pistachios

¼ cup thick yogurt
 mint
 olive oil

Bring a pot of well-salted water to boil. Once boiling, dunk the entire beet and its greens into the water, then pull out of the water and drape the greens over the top of the pot and clamp them in place with the pot lid. Cook for 2 minutes: the stems will steam, the greens will stay raw-ish, and the beets will cook slightly, releasing some of their sugar. Remove the beets and place on a sheet tray. Drizzle oil and sprinkle salt all over the beets. Get a grill hot. Grill the beets in batches, cut side down, turning once until nice grill marks appear. Try and keep the greens off the direct heat. Plate warm grilled beets. Drizzle with yogurt, chopped pistachios, and torn mint. More olive oil, a squeeze of lemon, and freshly ground black pepper finishes the dish.

GRILLED TURKEY WITH PORCHETTA SEASONING

1 25# turkey, breasts de-boned with wing joints attached, legs partially de-boned with thigh bone removed and remaining flesh scored around the bone to promote even cooking
 6 Tablespoons fennel pollen or wild fennel seeds
 4 large sprigs rosemary
 1 head garlic

3 Tablespoons salt, plus more to finish
 1 cup white wine
 ½ cup chicken stock
 1 Tablespoon reserved cure
 ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
 1 bunch of rosemary baster

This porchetta-style cure is best applied a full day before grilling. On a cutting board, chop fennel pollen, rosemary, and garlic finely (seeds would first need to be ground). Sprinkle salt over the herb mixture and continue to work everything into a paste. Reserve 1 Tablespoon to mix into the baste liquid. Rub it all over the turkey pieces and refrigerate. On the day of cooking, make sure you give your meat at least 1.5 hours to come to room temperature. Get your grill hot, then let it die down to a low/medium low heat with a solid bedrock of coals, pushed to one side. This will allow you to control hot spots, flare-ups and to feed more coals, which may be necessary over the 35-50 minute cook time. Grill turkey pieces skin side down, turning and flipping bird frequently. Occasionally, lash the turkey with the basting liquid and a big rosemary sprig to keep it from drying out or burning as it cooks. If there is a brick or two handy, wrap it in foil and weight the meat—it will cook faster and stay juicier. When the juices close to the bone run clear, the breasts feel slightly firm and springy to the touch, and the internal meat is just light pink, the bird is done. Pull turkey from the grill to a platter, tent with foil—it will continue to cook as it rests. 15 minutes later, serve.

GRILLED FAVAS

If you get fresh favas, young and tender enough, you can grill them and eat them whole: pods, inner pods, beans, all of it. You'll need to set up a grilling rack close enough to the fire to char slightly but far away enough so they don't burn. Figuring out the perfect height will take some experimentation.

2# fava beans, still in the pods, trimmed of any rough stem

extra virgin olive oil
 salt

Toss favas with oil and season liberally with salt. Their fuzzy skins will soak up a lot of oil. I like to line up the favas on a cookie resting rack, and then transfer the whole rack to the grill. Grill for just a minute, making sure they don't burn but are still kissed by the flame. The inner steam will start to force the beans out of the pod and they will be done. Remove rack from the flame and slide favas into a bowl. The residual heat will continue to cook the inner beans. Eat whole or peel and eat like edamame. More olive oil, fleur de sel, and lemon wedges are a good accompaniment.

CHARRED CORN SOUP

6 ears corn, shucked
 ½ white onion, diced
 ½ a Chipotle pepper
 4 cups milk

2 Tablespoons butter
 2 cups chicken stock
 salt

Get your grill hot. Grill corn, turning occasionally until nicely charred. Cut the kernels from the cobs, reserving cobs. Melt butter in a medium pot and saute the corn kernels, onion, and chipotle for 3 minutes, seasoning with salt. Blend corn mixture and milk in a blender until smooth. You can strain the puree through a strainer to remove any stray pulp or keep as is. Return puree to the pot. Take each corn cob and using a spoon or the back of your knife, scrap the cobs to release the milky juice into the pot. Add the chicken stock and heat until just simmering. Season with salt and serve.

PLANCHA

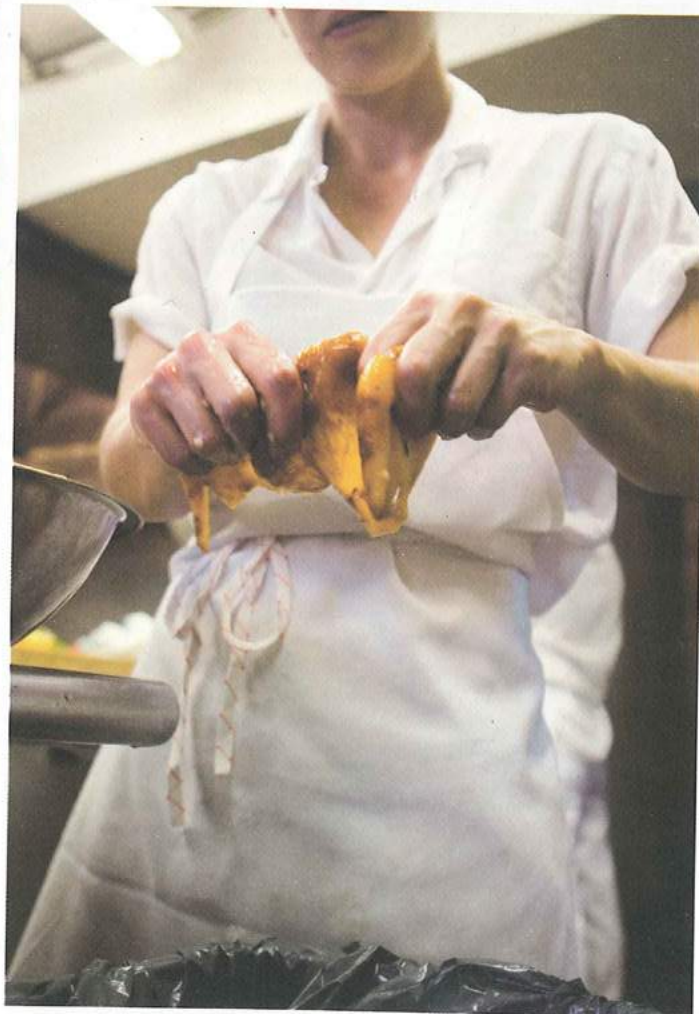
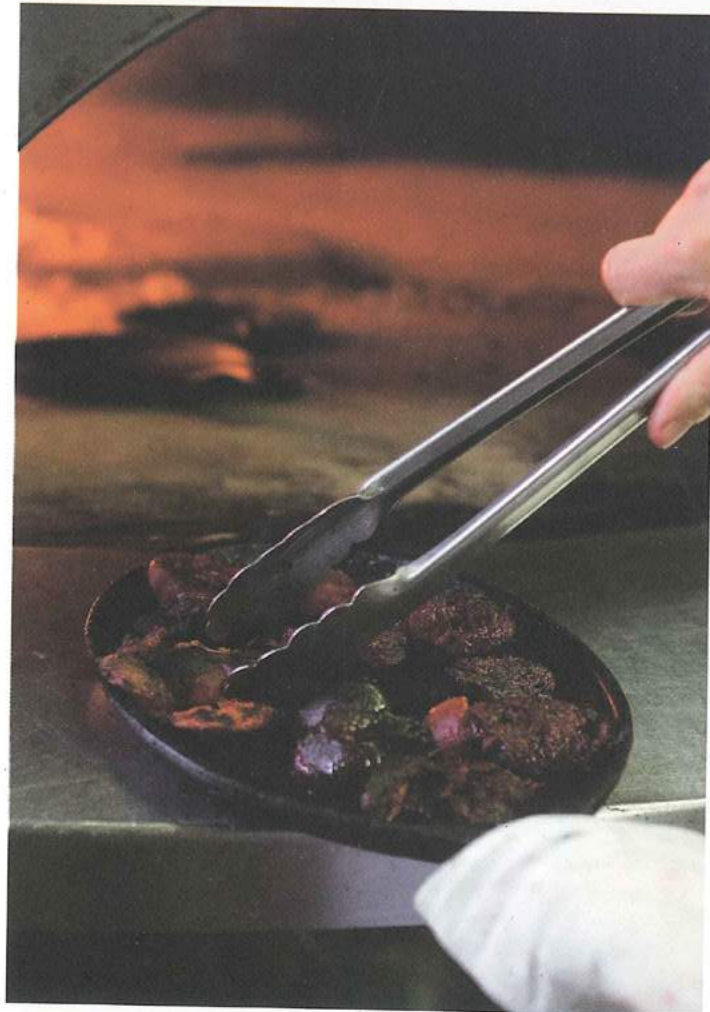
PORGY A LA PLANCHA

Porgy, porgie, bream, orata, dorade, a fish with half a dozen names. It sears quickly on a flat surface. A plancha (a flat cast iron pan works well) and is a good size for one person to tackle.

a porgy for each person
 lemon

extra virgin olive oil
 salt

Slide a flat cast iron pan close to the fire. I like to stuff thin slices of lemon in the belly of the fish, maybe some thyme sprigs too. Brush each side of each fish with olive oil. Carefully place fish onto the smoking hot surface. Sear fish for 3 minutes on first side, then flip carefully. If the skin is stubborn and sticks to the pan, it's probably not ready to flip, yet. Once seared on the other side, brush with more olive oil and sprinkle salt all over, like a French fry. Serve with saffron aioli and beet or grilled vegetables.



SAFFRON AIOLI

Similar to the standard aioli but with the distinct flavor of saffron and a bright orange color.

1 pinch saffron threads
¼ cup warm water
1 garlic clove
1 Tablespoon salt

5 egg yolks
1 lemon
2 cups olive oil

Stir saffron into the warm water to let bloom. In a mortar and pestle, pound garlic clove with salt to a paste. Add egg yolks, ½ of the saffron water, mashing and stirring to combine. Squeeze the juice of ½ lemon into the mixture, stirring vigorously. Slowly drip in olive oil 1 or 2 Tablespoons at a time, stirring constantly, to form a quick emulsion. Stir constantly until the mixture is homogeneous and yellow. Once a small amount of oil is incorporated and the emulsion is set, you can pour more quickly. Continue with the rest of the oil and the rest of the saffron water.

SHISHITO PEPPERS

shishito peppers
extra virgin olive oil
sea salt

A live flame isn't essential for this but it does make for quick roasting. Get a cast iron pan heating up. Pour in a tablespoon of olive oil and swirl to coat. When the oil is almost smoking, add the shishitos to the pan and toss to coat. Roast peppers as close to the fire as possible, jostling occasionally until blackened in spots, just one or two minutes. Pull from the fire and plate, sprinkling liberally with salt. Eat whole.

FLATTENED PAN FRIED BEETS

2 bunches baby beets
bunch of thyme

extra virgin olive oil
salt

Make sure beets are clean, free of dirt, and trimmed of long roots and stems. Rub beets with olive oil and sprinkle with salt; place in a pan, with a splash of water and bunch of thyme. Cover the pan and roast beets until pierced easily with a paring knife. Remove beets from the oven and let cool slightly. With the heel of your hand, gently crush beets until flattened. Get a cast iron pan heating up with a couple tablespoons of oil on the bottom. When smoking hot, cover the bottom of the cast iron pan with the flattened beets and roast until they darken and crisp on one side. Flip beets over and continue to roast until fully crisp. Remove beets from the pan and sprinkle liberally with salt.



BURNING HEAT

HOT SAUCE

This is a standard vinegar-based hot sauce with a little more roundness and chile flavor than ole Tabasco. You can really use any mix of dried and fresh medium to medium hot chiles. It tastes great on everything—fried eggs, sandwiches, and the two recipes below.

4oz. dried chile de arbol, stems removed
3 jalapenos, stems removed
1 small white onion, halved
3 garlic cloves
6 cups water
3 cups white distilled vinegar
4 Tablespoons salt
pinch of sugar

Combine chile de arbol, jalapenos, onion, 2 garlic cloves, 4 cups water, 2 cups vinegar, 2 Tablespoons salt, and a large pinch of sugar in a small pot and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to a simmer and cover. Cook for 30 minutes or until dried chiles are softened. Transfer mixture to a blender and blend, in batches, on high for 2 minutes. Add the last 2 cups of water and last cup of vinegar and adjust seasoning—a pinch more sugar, the rest of the salt. Blend again. Store in squeeze bottles for easy use.

CHICKEN AL DIAVOLO

1 garlic clove
1 Tablespoon salt
1 teaspoon ground chile de arbol
1 teaspoon fennel pollen
1 half chicken, wing tip and thigh bone removed

1 Tablespoon olive oil
¾ cup chicken stock
1 Tablespoon butter
1 Tablespoon hot sauce

Crank the oven to 500. Find a large cast iron pan that the chicken can fit horizontally in as well as another pan to press down, as a weight, on top. In a mortar and pestle, pound garlic clove, salt, chile de arbol, and fennel pollen into a paste. Rub the paste all over the chicken. Slide the cast iron pan glazed with olive oil into the oven to heat up. When hot, place chicken, skin side down in the pan. Place weighted pan on top and slide pan-sandwiched chicken back into the oven. You'll want to periodically turn the pan and check the skin-side of the chicken so it doesn't burn. It should roast for approximately ten minutes. Remove the top weight, flip the chicken over—the skin should be golden brown and crispy and should feel a little springy to the touch. If it's not, cook skin-side-down a little more. Remove the chicken to a plate while you drain off any accumulated grease from the pan. Pour the chicken stock in the pan and slide the chicken back into the pan, skin side up. Let the chicken rest in the pan outside of the oven. The residual heat should continue to cook the chicken just past a pink opaqueness. Once rested, remove the chicken from the pan juices and keep warm in the oven while you make the sauce. On the stove, bring the pan of chicken stock to a boil. Boil for one minute to reduce slightly. Add the butter and hot sauce and swirl together to combine. Taste for seasoning. Slice chicken and pour sauce over.

FRIED BREAD, EGGPLANT PUREE, EGG

This isn't really a recipe, just an assemblage of ingredients that you might have laying around, perfect for a quick lunch.

- | | |
|---|--------------------|
| 2 slices thick-cut country bread | handful of arugula |
| olive oil | hot sauce |
| 2 eggs | sprigs of cilantro |
| 4 Tablespoons eggplant puree, recipe on page 35 | olive oil |
| | salt |

In a medium saute pan, heat a quarter inch of olive oil until shimmering. Slip in the slices of bread pan and fry, swirling the pan to cook evenly. After 30 or so seconds or when the bread is golden brown, flip the bread over and fry on the other side. Remove fried bread from the pan and discard the oil. Pour a little more oil in the hot pat and fry two eggs, season with salt and pepper. Spread the toast with eggplant puree. Place a handful of arugula on top of the puree and then the fried egg on top of the greens. Squirt on the hot sauce and garnish with cilantro.

KIMCHI

Joe, one of our butchers, makes incredible kimchi. Here's his recipe, with a Vietnamese slant.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 1 large Napa cabbage, diced | 1 Asian pear or Granny Smith apple, diced small |
| 1 medium carrot, julienne | 2 Tablespoons salt |
| 1 Daikon radish, diced | |

Marinade:

- | | |
|--|------------------------------|
| ½ cup Fermented Korean Chile Paste "Gochujang" | 1 medium onion, grated |
| ¼ cup Korean chile powder "Gochutgaru" | 2 stalks lemongrass, bruised |
| 1 bunch scallions, sliced on the bias | 4 teaspoons fish sauce |
| 1 2-inch piece ginger | 1 teaspoon lime zest |
| 5 cloves of garlic, minced | 1 teaspoon sugar |
| | 1 Tablespoon sesame oil |

Combine cabbage, carrot, radish, and pear into a large mixing bowl. Sprinkle mixture with salt and massage into the vegetables for a minute or until most of the salt has dissolved. Transfer mixture to a colander to drain for 20 minutes. Meanwhile, combine all marinade ingredients except for the lemongrass in a large mixing bowl and whisk until homogeneous. Rinse vegetables in the colander with cold water, mixing with hands to ensure all surface salt washes out. Squeeze handfuls of the vegetables to remove excess water and place in a large bowl. Add the marinade to the bowl and mix thoroughly to combine with the vegetables. Transfer mixture to a one-gallon jar, preferably glass, though any waterproof container with a tight lid will work. Stuff the lemongrass into the center of jar and press the vegetables down as dense as you can, forcing as many air bubbles out as possible. Press a layer of plastic wrap tightly to the surface of the kimchi and close the jar. Find a cool, dark place and leave kimchi there to ferment for three days. At three days, transfer the jar to refrigeration. You can eat the kimchi now or let ferment for another week or two. The longer you leave it, the stronger it will get. Enjoy the kimchi for up to two months.

KIMCHI FRIED RICE

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| 2 Tablespoons vegetable oil | 3 cups cooked white rice |
| 1 garlic clove, minced | 1 cup kimchi, chopped |
| 2 green onions, whites and green separated, thinly sliced | 1 teaspoon sesame oil |
| | 2 eggs |

In a saute pan over high heat, cook garlic and white part of scallion with vegetable oil until fragrant, 1 or 2 minutes. Add in the rice and cook, stirring constantly, 2 to 3 more minutes. Add kimchi, stir to combine. Make a well in the center of the rice and crack the eggs into the well. Mix up the eggs, allowing them to cook and incorporate into the rice. Add the sesame oil and green onion tops, stir quickly to combine, season with salt, and serve.

DESSERTS

CREME BRULEE

- | | |
|------------------|----------------|
| ½ cup hazelnuts | ½ vanilla bean |
| 1 cup whole milk | 6 egg yolks |
| 1 cup cream | 1 cup sugar |
| pinch of salt | |

In a 350 degree oven, toast hazelnuts until golden and fragrant, about 10 minutes. Chop then combine with milk, cream, and vanilla bean in a small saucepan. Bring to boil and then remove from heat. Let nuts steep in the milk, ten minutes. Meanwhile, beat egg yolks with ½ cup of sugar until light and ribbony. Whisking constantly pour in the milk mixture to the egg. Strain through a fine-mesh strainer. Pour custard into a 10 inch pie plate and set in a baking pan. Pour water to come up half way of the pie plate. Bake for 35 minutes. Remove and let cool. Chill. Sprinkle ½ cup sugar over the top of the custard. In a really hot oven, heat a clean 8 inch cast iron skillet until smoking vigorously. Carefully remove from the oven and press the bottom of the skillet onto the surface of the sugared custard. It should sputter and smoke. Check the surface. It should be a dark golden brown. Let sugar harden for five minutes then serve.

BANANAS FOSTER

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 5 slightly under-ripe bananas | ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon |
| 4 Tablespoons butter | pinch of salt |
| ½ cup of dark brown sugar | ½ cup dark rum |
| 1 teaspoon ground nutmeg | ice cream |

Peel bananas and slice into lengthy chunks. In a medium saute pan, melt butter, sugar, spices, and salt. Bring mixture to a boil and let reduce for one minute. Slip bananas into the sauce, swirling to coat. Gather your guests and immediately add the rum. If the mixture is hot enough it should start to go up in flames though you may have to tilt the pan towards the fire so the fumes catch and ignite. Let the booze burn off—it should just take a minute, then pour bananas over ice cream.



CHERRIES JUBILEE

1# sweet cherries
½ cup sugar
1 Tablespoon brown sugar
1 Tablespoon cornstarch
pinch of salt

1 cup orange juice
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
½ teaspoon ground nutmeg
¼ cup brandy
vanilla ice cream

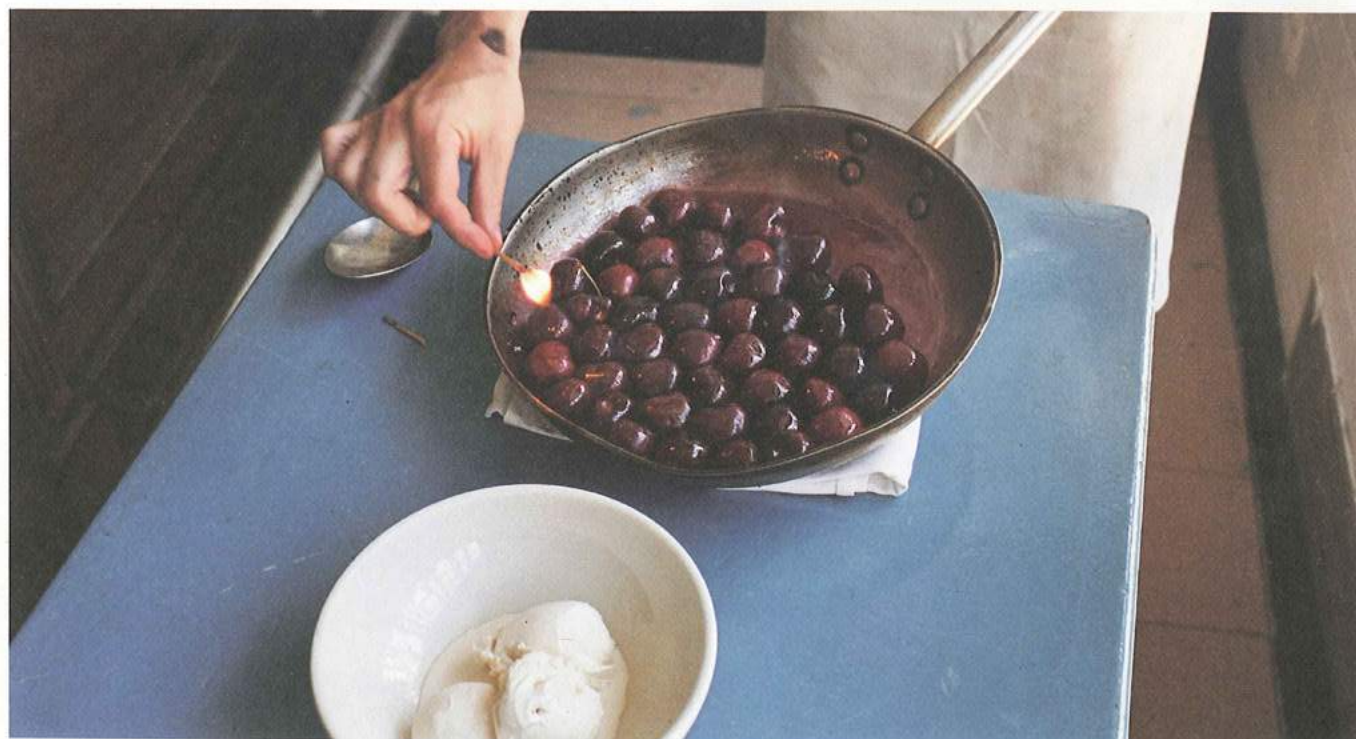
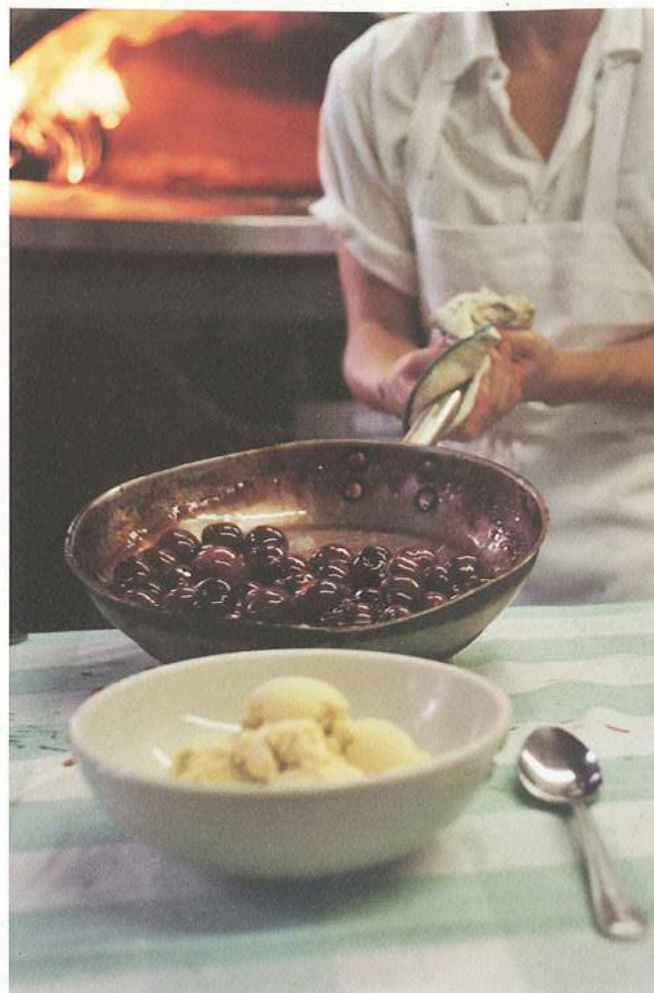
Remove stems from cherries. You can also remove pits. We leave them in. Whisk together sugar, brown sugar, cornstarch, and pinch of salt. In a medium sauce pan over high heat, heat sugar mixture, orange juice, vanilla extract, and nutmeg until simmering and starts to thicken. Add cherries and bring to a boil. Add in brandy and carefully tilt towards flame so alcohol ignites. Cook cherries until the flames die down. Pour over ice cream.

GRILLED PEACHES, AMARETTI, CREAM

4 peaches, cut in half, stones removed
¼ cup grappa
2 Tablespoons honey
3 Tablespoon sugar

pinch of salt
1 package amaretti cookies
2 cups cream
½ teaspoon vanilla extract

Toss peaches with grappa, honey, 1 tablespoon sugar, salt and let marinate for ten minutes. Get your grill hot. Whip cream with vanilla and the rest of the sugar. Grill peaches cut side down for 3 to 4 minutes until peaches caramelize on cut side. Remove from grill. Crush amaretti cookies in your hands over the grilled peaches and dollop lots of whipped cream on top.



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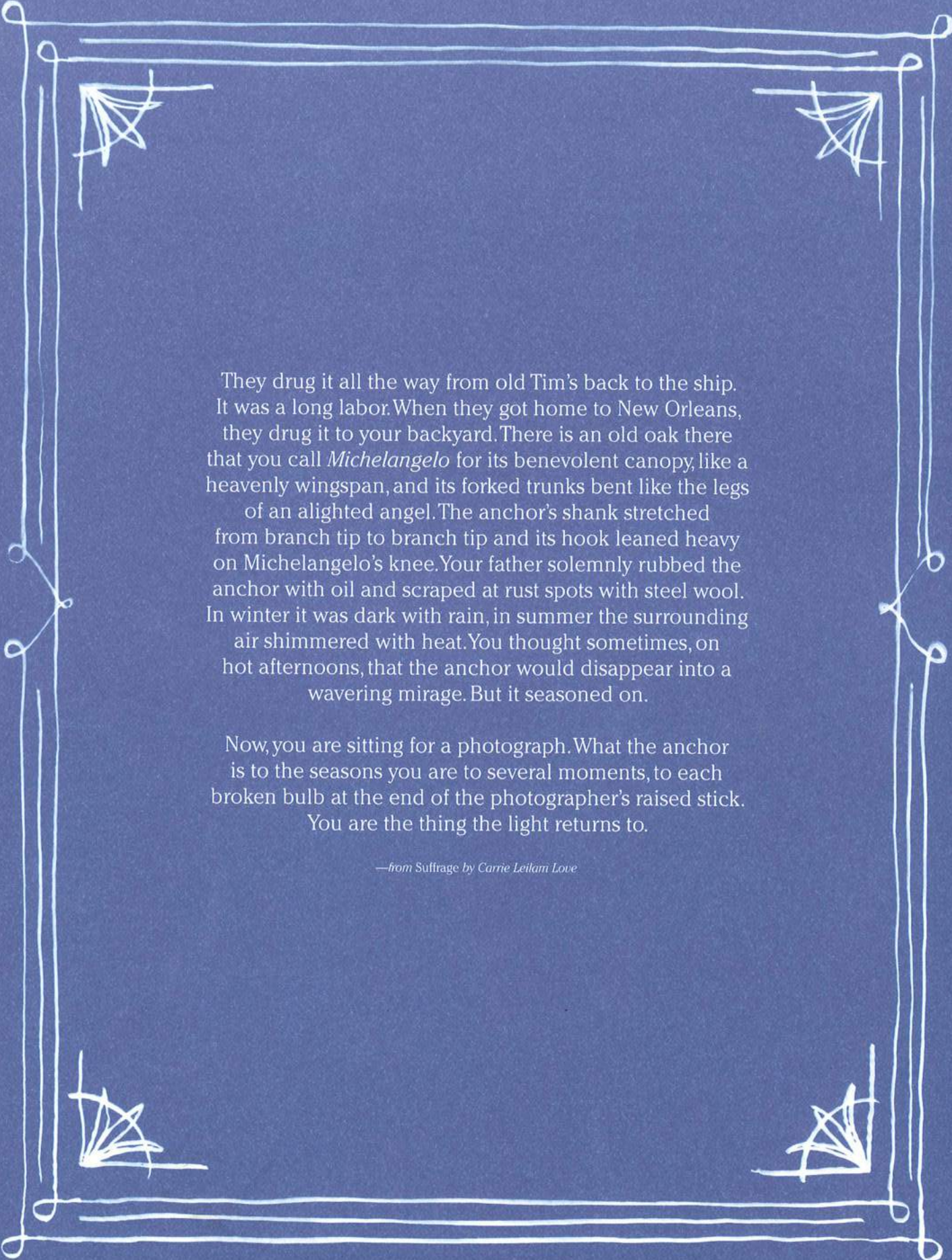
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Inside Covers: Handcrafted marbled endpaper (identical with cover) of a book manually bound in England around 1830. This is a file from the Wikimedia Commons. PP-US: This image is in the





They drug it all the way from old Tim's back to the ship. It was a long labor. When they got home to New Orleans, they drug it to your backyard. There is an old oak there that you call *Michelangelo* for its benevolent canopy, like a heavenly wingspan, and its forked trunks bent like the legs of an alighted angel. The anchor's shank stretched from branch tip to branch tip and its hook leaned heavy on Michelangelo's knee. Your father solemnly rubbed the anchor with oil and scraped at rust spots with steel wool. In winter it was dark with rain, in summer the surrounding air shimmered with heat. You thought sometimes, on hot afternoons, that the anchor would disappear into a wavering mirage. But it seasoned on.

Now, you are sitting for a photograph. What the anchor is to the seasons you are to several moments, to each broken bulb at the end of the photographer's raised stick. You are the thing the light returns to.

—from *Suffrage* by Carrie Leilani Love