



spring 2012
euphony
vol. 12, no. 2

EDITORS' FOREWORD

We are proud to bring you the Spring 2012 issue of *Euphony*. Our second issue of the year brings you a diverse collection of poetry and fiction. Within these pages, you will find plenty of reflective and poignant moments, insights into human relationships, beautiful landscapes, and even a historical survey of architecture.

Euphony is always excited to bring new content, both through our printed magazine and our online website. We continually make an effort to make updates to make website year round. Please note that this year we have changed our email address permanently to euphonyjournal@gmail.com. As always, we look forward to reading your submissions, questions, and comments.

We thank you as ever for reading the oldest literary magazine at the University of Chicago, and hope you enjoy our latest issue.

THE EDITORS

EUPHONY

VOLUME 12, NUMBER 2

Spring 2012

Euphony is a non-profit literary journal produced biannually at the University of Chicago. We are dedicated to publishing the finest work by writers and artists both accomplished and aspiring. We publish a variety of works including poetry, fiction, drama, essays, criticism, and translations. Visit our website for more information.

Founded Spring 2000 by
Stephen Barbara and Matthew Deming

euphonyjournal.com

Euphony is a registered member of the
Council of Literary Magazines and Presses
www.clmp.org

Printed in the United States of America by
LaShore Press, Inc.

This publication was made possible by
the Student Government Finance Committee.

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Jennifer Tappenden

Ghost Signs

Bumpy old downtown brick
gets paint like sailors get tattoos.
A faded arrow points the way
toward Seventh and Washington, toward
Buettner's Home Furnishings, their long shuttered studio
now a shoe store. Another building down the block
shows the back of its shoulder and the faint lace of a sign
for King Bee Hats. Ghosts are like that. Notice one
and suddenly they're everywhere,
seeping through younger signs, directing
their former shoppers who slip among us
on the street. A man, transparent in his fedora,
glides into SPoT Coffee. The wisp of a shopgirl
lingers along a display of spring dresses. The shade
of a newsboy glares at a metal box
auto-dispensing the Post-Dispatch
and their intent collects
into a warm, spectral current,
all of us swept up, then presently obscured
by passengers stepping off bus 59.

Sandy Yang

Beautiful Dreamer

I watched Lily sitting behind the cash register at the front edge of the store, just a foot or so away from the mall traffic. From where I stood, at the rear of the store, I could tell she was doing her homework, paying little attention to the people walking past. Even then, she could still draw in the fan boys, as a strong magnet could pull metal filings from the sidewalk.

I used to be that girl in front though I was not beautiful like Lily. Three years ago when Terrance hired me out of high school to work at the store, Lily was a long-limbed thirteen-year-old, and we used to poke fun at her for renting every episode of *Sailor Moon*. Now she possessed the shape of a woman and the unguarded openness of a girl, which she increasingly reserved for people her age or who looked like any well-adjusted person off the street, not our regulars, the older, overweight, seemingly apathetic men who came in almost every night because they could finish off a sixteen-hour installment of Japanese anime or a Korean soap opera series in two days.

Just beyond the back of Lily's head, I spotted Frank's wild gray hair. As he came into focus, I could make out his shapeless layers of sweaters and collared shirts underneath a half-zipped blue windbreaker at least two sizes too big, even though we lived in the hot, suburban part of Los Angeles. He came in at least twice a week, and sometimes we'd debate which of Rumiko Takahashi's characters were more beloved. He liked the green-haired alien girl with horns and a leopard-print bikini in the *Beautiful Dreamer* movie, and I told him to try the animated series about two men pining for a young, grieving widow.

Frank carried a plastic bag of tapes, but stopped to say something to Lily, as if he needed directions. She glanced at him and immediately pointed toward me. Frank waved at me, but I could tell that he wanted to spend more time with the sixteen-year-old. Perhaps he was imagining Lily in a leopard-print bikini. I averted my gaze and walked to the stock room in the back through the cloth partition. I could have retrieved Frank's tapes, the episodes of the series I had recommended and had already set aside that day, but I just stood and waited, surrounded by rows of black VHS's and plastic DVD cases, each labeled with the title and episode number, stacked all the way to the ceiling.

When I re-emerged, Frank stood before me. He had recently shaved, possibly for Lily, but his hair still looked like a bird's nest. His face and neck were damp. His potbelly pressed out slightly against all that wool, cable-knit and the smooth nylon shell of the jacket, as if we would assume he had an average physique under his clothes if he just piled on enough layers.

"How are you, sweetness?" he asked and placed the tapes on the glass counter.

“How’d you like the series so far?” I asked, but I looked away as I collected the loose labels and Sharpie markers that were strewn about the counter.

“It’s slow and the characters are annoying, but I know it’ll get better because you like it,” he said, and still I would not look at him.

“I’m getting a disability check soon,” Frank continued, “so I can buy that next time.”

He pointed to one of the boxes on a shelf above my head. It was an off-white 12-inch vinyl figure of the beautiful widow heroine Kyoko from the series, dressed in an apron and holding a broom mid-sweep.

“I’m going to paint that for you,” he said.

“Frank, you don’t have to do that,” I said, looking at him now and trying to appear grateful, even sorry. I took back his unwound tapes and went to get his weekly installment. As I walked out from the partition, I heard riotous laughing; Frank also turned his head toward the three teenage boys who had gathered around Lily and blocked the narrow store entrance.

“Look, look,” one of the guys called out, holding his smartphone out as Lily and the other two guys crowded around the screen.

“No way,” Lily screeched.

“She puts out if you even look at her,” said one of the guys. “Too bad she’s fat, even in this tiny picture, you can see the fat rolling off her stomach.”

“But her boobs aren’t bad,” said the guy with the smartphone, and Lily laughed some more. In fact, she never stopped laughing in the presence of these young, hulking guys.

I handed Frank the new tapes inside his plastic bag. He wasn’t looking at the group anymore, but I saw him glance at them a few times, as if he were strategizing his way out of the store unscathed.

“These are a lot funnier than the beginning episodes,” I said, but Frank didn’t seem to hear me as he reached for the handles of the bag.

I noticed the corner of a VHS sticking out of a small tear at the bottom, and I was about to get him a new bag when another burst of laughter erupted and one of the guys was swaying his hips and slapping his hand at the air from left to right.

“I’ll get rid of them,” I said.

Frank nodded, and I lifted the top part of the counter and walked the path leading to the group up front. I was surprised that Frank followed behind me, and I stood a little straighter.

“Excuse me,” I said, as I approached the guys.

They were all over six feet tall, and Lily looked to be their height as she stood on the platform that Terrance had built to hold the cash register and the bar stool for the girl up front.

“If you aren’t buying something, please leave,” I raised my voice, but I could feel my face burn.

The guys looked at me, and I could feel far nastier comments reflected in their dismissive stares, how did I end up looking like their middle-aged white mothers, with my wide hips and thick thighs, heavy upper arms that were especially unbecoming of an Asian girl, unlike Lily, who was apparently greeted by a gentler rite of passage that had filled out her slender frame with only delicate, pleasing curves.

“We *are* customers,” said one of them, picking up a random game piece from a pencil cup with 25¢ written on a Post-It and taped to the black wire mesh. He flicked a quarter toward the cup, but it missed and dropped to the floor. Lily bent down to search for it.

“You are making very crude comments and I’d like you to leave.”

“Are you kidding,” said smartphone guy, and I saw his eyes shift to my left, where I could hear Frank crunching the plastic bag in his fist. “You’re the one selling porno to kids.”

I saw a woman pushing a stroller through the mall stop and glance at me now, possibly at Frank, before moving on. I turned my head back to look for Frank, make sure he was OK, but instead I saw Terrance coming toward us from the back of the store. I was relieved to see him, but when he got close, I smelled smoke, as pungent as birthday candles lit in front of my face.

“What’s the problem here?” Terrance asked.

“We’re trying to buy something and your . . . *employee* told us to leave,” said smartphone guy, and he started tapping the tiny buttons of his device with what seemed to be laser-like speed and precision. “I’m going to write a bad review about my experience.”

“I’m sorry,” Terrance said, putting his hand up like an Eagle Scout taking an oath, or perhaps it was his imagined power of stopping something bad from happening. “We would never treat our customers that way. Browse for as long as you like.”

“This is a fire hazard,” I said. “They’re blocking the entrance.”

Terrance shot me a look, and I noticed the bags under his eyes as puffy as pincushions. His waist-length black hair looked like it hadn’t been washed in a week, and the fluorescent lights above cast a dull glare on the part in his hair down the middle of his head. I wanted to slap some feeling into his placid face, after he had disappeared once again, leaving me alone with Lily for days at a time and now these guys. Frank took his leave in that moment, and I hoped, prayed that the tapes wouldn’t fall through the hole in the bag. I couldn’t bear it if the boys turned and laughed, but I saw Frank cradle the videos to his chest and disappear into the crowd.

“Browse for as long as you like?” I said to Terrance as we were closing the store.

He didn’t say anything as he stretched out the retractable black gate from the left side of the store entrance to the right.

“Why don’t you help yourself to a free rental while you’re at it?” I continued. “Drop kick a few customers on your way out.”

Terrance walked away and disappeared behind the cloth partition, but I followed him into the corner of the stock room toward the cheap plastic table that held a 13-inch TV and a rewinding machine. He pushed the button of the machine and a lid popped up. Terrance turned around and tried to walk around me, but I stood in his way so he either had to ask me to move or shove his body against mine to cross over the narrow opening that I’d left for him.

“What are you angry about?” he asked.

I had not intended to corner him so literally, but once I had him just inches from my face, I flinched. I didn't want to start a fight that would inevitably require Terrance to point out Lily's loveliness.

"You still owe me two week's pay," I said.

"You'll get it next week," he said, his voice weary but not exactly remorseful. I stepped away and let Terrance pass. He went to retrieve a stack of tapes on a shelf.

"You'd have the money if you hadn't hired Lily," I said and I could feel my voice about to break if I had to say another word.

He turned to face me now with four tapes under one arm. With his free arm, he put his hand up again, as he did with those teenage bullies.

"Please stop," he said.

Normally, I would. In the three years I worked here, I had come across a few people who I sensed were teetering on an edge between living and disappearing, that on their very best day, they managed to put on clothes and tie their shoes, somehow end up at the store so I could feed them their dramas and fantasy series. They clammed up at the question "How are you?" and they cringed at the crash of quarters and dimes pouring out onto the glass counter from their otherwise empty pockets, but they had allowed themselves this tiny seal of light, before one slip of the mind or a disapproving glance or word could close that opening. I could feel something in Terrance that wasn't quite right, but who was making sure that I didn't fall off?

The lid of the rewind machine sprang up and startled me. I watched Terrance pull the tape out, slide it back into its paper case and put the next tape in. He pressed the button, activating the loud whir of the motor inside, and I stood there, as if waiting in line to use the machine. After he was done, he asked me to file the tapes. I hesitated but eventually took them off his hands, and he disappeared again.

In two minutes, I returned the tapes to their rightful place on the shelves, and then I waited for Terrance to come back. When he didn't, I walked out to the empty store and saw him grabbing the Kyoko vinyl figure from the shelf, the one that Frank had pointed out.

"Where are you taking that?" I asked.

"I sold it online," Terrance said after a pause.

"You can't take it," I said. "Frank said he was going to paint that for me."

"That is a Japanese import from the '80s. You really think Frank will save up three hundred dollars before he blows it on six-packs and cigarettes?"

Terrance twisted his face into one of those self-satisfied smirks that came so easily to those guys from this afternoon, but it was ill-fitting on him, as if he were embarrassed, as if he were forced to reveal a deformity that he had hidden so completely until now.

"Unless you sell it to Frank for thirty bucks," he said.

I grabbed the nearest thing I could reach for, which was only a stuffed monster with its tongue sticking out. Still, I aimed for Terrance's head, and it hit him in the face because he didn't duck. Then I took a few steps and put my hands around the Voltron action figure worth a couple hundred that Terrance had just placed on the counter. This time, Terrance moved,

running over to me, but still holding Kyoko. He put her box down before he put his hands over my hands that held the Voltron, with all its sharp edges and bright colors contained inside a sealed package.

Terrance didn't attempt to pry my hands off the toy. He held them as if I had been unwrapping a piece of candy during a theater performance, a mild admonishment, but delivered by someone who meant the best for me. There was a time when I had imagined myself with Terrance in this way, one night that we would go to such a show, laugh along with the audience, and afterward debate the themes of the piece and the motivations of the characters over a glass of wine, a nice dinner, a piece of fish or lean chicken, next to candlelight.

I looked at Terrance. The smoke on his breath, now lingering in his graying hair, had gotten worse, not better, and I feared that it was hiding something even more lethal. I knew that in reality, instead of a show, I would probably be subjected to his terrible taste in '80s animation and the old-school *Transformers* soundtrack that would most certainly blare from his stereo as we made out. But even that picture was fuzzy. I feared for what would happen when he let go of my hands and disappeared again.

I dropped the Voltron on the counter. Terrance let go of my hands and took it back into his possession. That was when I grabbed the nearby Kyoko box and threw it down to the floor. I raised my foot over Kyoko's face looking up from behind the clear window of the box and I stepped down as hard as I could.

"Don't," Terrance yelled out, but his voice sounded far away.

I started to crush the valuable contents inside with my heel, but Terrance kicked the box away. He crouched down on his hands and knees to assess the damage. When he picked up the misshapen box and opened it, the head immediately fell out and landed on the floor. But it appeared to have only popped out of its socket. Terrance let the head rest on its side, its blank white face, big empty eyes staring out at us. Terrance was quiet for a while, holding that open box without looking inside, as if readying himself to extract a body from the wreckage.

Kelli Allen

Jealousy is When

The bees fly back
into my mouth, past

zippers released
from their teeth. It is not

that I want
what you have,

rather I need
a route around

brief parts
of myself, too glued,

caramel-firm,
nothing like honey.

Four Legs, Two Voices

Our gravel pile grows until you, anxious with lobster swollen cheeks, kick the mass fecklessly toward the water. I am a weak companion whose twelve raving princes would rather collect feathers from red throated birds than share this cracked beach with you.

Still, we ignore everything aside from a promise, even though each other sounds faintly extinct, post nebular, like whispering amen behind missing fingers.

We have been constructing for the whole of an afternoon, an anthology of simple sentences and devoured junctures binding between what is not said, will not be told, and the chipped rocks continue mounding.

Fireflies manage hours lazy as our pebbles, like flecks of bone rise and rise, and you pause each time a wing lands close to your elbow, the architect's patience showing itself as false, betrayed in flutter of tiny hairs rising to meet the winged things whose home we are perched too near. God,

how horrible I have become that I want to hurt you, collect full fistful clusters of sand to rocket hard in your mouth and eyes. Too many times I have sat on your roof, swallowing dense dread enough to taste, enough to burn rightdoing and wronging out of potential conversation. Now here we are, sixteen

miles from that edge and an expanding example of distance now washing into drab small waves because there is only me and only you after all and we engage in jumping far but never tragically, and no closer to relieve.

Richard Murphy

Love and Death in Granada

The crowd that flowed over London Bridge
rattled castanets in the Granada Streets:
By day as civil servants
and by night an arm pledged
to the Civil Guard that butchered fruit trees.
The Catholic Church buried the innocence.
Gacela and casida hung from limbs.
Ants took up positions within poems,
docile but capable without a word.
The walking dead resisted every breath
but hoarded oxygen from reading rooms
in the normal world.
The bitter root rejected imagination
and filled the bullfighting stadium
where friends feigned danger.
Wrapping typing paper around
a boot showcased the night with spurs
that invaded gypsy city and the moon.
Most bones cannot somnambulant alone
when stopping the river
from singing about an apple.
Lips part and then the jaw drops,
and the guitar suffers the swords,
while constellations, pistols.
The refrain: Each line after frowns.

Crumb

From newspaper, custom, and pillows
a swan built a nest for detecting air currents
and memory gusts that blossom 3-D into a tail:
cream cheese stained with strawberries.

Mother pecked cheeks to feed.

Hawthorn wrote the way with pond water
and shade, but the ennui in privilege
parented the sensitivity to the blotting
in daily rituals and to steeples gathering
upon a carriage leaving town.

The countryside folded into the brainstem.

Steeped in tears the down neck
on Marcel gives way to out-stretched
wings and each feather detailed
permitting the rider to linger above
the petite concerns that peopled Combray.

Owning the Terrier

Shell shocked, each Europe
picked through the rubble remains
for the genuine. Cities ducked
at thunder and nations drank
to forget. The island tail
that once wagged a mighty big dog
began to shake, and the canine
started to suffer dissociative
identity disorder. The implosion
called homecoming doubled
as victory. The Agamemnon family
troubles landed men in living-hell
onto bayoneted fences
or into the panoptic cells.
Clarissa wandered rocks for flowers.

For lack of Guinea,
brilliant women regret
or sally with five big sons.
Psychosis may have held
melancholy prose poems
hostage for new language
that only XX could articulate.
The time had come to regard
less the canon than to form English
before a tongue became a yawp.

Kevin McCoy

A Man Dressed as Jesus

He remembered a man dressed as Jesus
Dragging a wooden cross down Indianapolis Blvd.
A reminder of he who died for our sins
Like a pentecostal sticky note
Left on his refrigerator

Gone out – back soon xxxooo

Ricardo Nuila

Asshole

A week ago I discovered my nurse, Miss Mary, has ties to the mortuary business. For fifteen years she's been self-referring my end stagers to Abe's Funeral Home in the Fifth Ward. How I find out is me and the wife are in line at Alfreda's, a barbecue joint, when who should roll in but Claude Arceneaux, Jr., and his big black posse.

Claude works maintenance in my building. He's Miss Mary's husband, the father of seven children, and now with Abe out of the picture, the sole proprietor of Abe's Funeral Home. He is also the son of NBA journeyman Claude Arceneaux Sr., whom I'll discuss later.

Claude greets all the patrons and workers, including Alfreda, who asks him, "Whatcha having?" Of course he takes the opportunity to cut. This incenses the wife. She's a pediatrician and vehemently discourages cutting.

It's possible Claude could have quickly written down his posse's order, moved on, and maybe things wouldn't be so jacked up now, but the way he orders—"Fellas, we having the chicken or the spare ribs, the chicken or ribs, fellas? Chicken or ribs?"—it doesn't help the situation.

He goes through the entire menu like that.

I give the wife a look that's supposed to mean, "C'est la vie."

"You're so nonplussed," she says. "I hate that."

The wife. Politically, she's to the left of Khrushchev, but when it comes to the male-female union, she operates under conservative ideals, meaning there are things I must do in my marriage, what she terms "the man's job."

So I step up. He's a strong-looking guy who's forever brushing his hair forward. This is what he did the whole time with Freda. There's a rumor going around that he spent some time in the XFL. I say, "Excuse me, sir," like I don't know him, hoping he won't recognize me, but right when I do, his phone rings. It's the loudest ring tone I've ever heard. Heavy, heavy bass. He answers. I fall back in line.

I propose we swing by one of a million other barbecue places, but the wife refuses, out of principle. She starts talking louder so that Claude'll hear, but he doesn't. The people in line give her little whispers of assent—"This is bullshit! Somebody ought to do something"—but nobody does anything. Next thing I know, she's at the front of the line lecturing Claude about manners, really working herself up into a frenzy. Claude just grins. He looks up and down the line. His eyes stop on me.

"I think I know that bull. Do I know you?"

"You work for him," says the wife, which is true and isn't.

Claude rubs his hands together. "You the nigga making me rich." He insists we order ahead of him. "Ladies, ladies," he says, standing back, holding out his hand in a gentlemanly way. I jump. I order my sandwich and the wife's potato salad. I need to get out of there.

While they prepare our order, Claude rounds up his posse and describes exactly how he and Miss Mary have been getting our end stagers over to Abe's. One of the posse members says to me, "You the nursing home doc?"

"Technically-speaking, yes."

Our order comes out, and I thank Claude. Everyone in line gives us nasty looks on the way out. I'm expecting the wife to give me the silent treatment in the car for being a coward, but she's not angry at all. She's worried. She says she heard on NPR there's a major crackdown on Medicare fraud. This one Florida doc, a neurologist, ran a sleep center until he got busted for referring people to something called "Night Relax Therapy," which, if you traced the address, was a boat storage facility run by an employee's uncle (in Fort Myers, no less). The feds asked the boatman where all the patients were. He just chuckled, on NPR. The point is, this neurologist didn't have a clue. He didn't even know if "Night Relax Therapy" existed. Didn't matter. He still had to do two years in Huntsville and pay a two hundred thousand dollar fine.

"Fuck," I say.

Which begins this long debate about what we should do and ends with me agreeing to visit a lawyer, immediately.

Why?

"Because maybe I want kids," she says.

I just want her happy.

I consult my father, who over a fifty-year career as a family doctor has had his own set of legal battles (nothing major). He tells me there're basically two names, one of which comes with his "strongest recommendation possible."

Of course we go with the other. Not to slight my dad, God forbid, but because he's available.

The lawyer's this extremely well put-together black man with a gray crew cut that fades into a beard. His name is Norbert. That's his first name.

Norbert's office looks like he's just moved in: no diplomas on the wall, no blinds, not even a shredder. I want to ask him if he's gone paperless just like everyone, but I'm too nervous: I've never interacted professionally with a lawyer.

Norbert takes out a pad and scratches down every word I say. I'm thinking: Is this what lawyers do?

"Repeat what you just said."

"Skilled Nursing Facility. We call it a sniff."

"No I got that. The other thing. The thing about the nurse."

"Miss Mary."

"Whatever her name is. Who is she and what is she doing?"

What can I say about Miss Mary? She's been with me from the day I opened, comes into work every day happy, my only employee who's not jonesing to leave early. The clients love her. Very loyal, but lazy. Careless. An opportunist if I've ever seen one, especially when it comes to free shit, like pharma pens. (I bring a handful from every conference I attend, and it's Miss Mary who bleeds this well dry, because her kid needs them, or because she collects them, whatever.)

Her favorite are the Zypress ones with the dosing table that pulls out like a charter. Can I see Miss Mary screwing me all these years? No doubt.

Norbert reviews his notes like he's tallying a score.

"Sir, I'd like to say something bold right now, but I need your permission. May I be bold?"

"Please."

"We all have gifts. Some more than others, of course." Norbert chuckles with this last bit. "But you, I get the feeling you lack the gift of personality. Is this correct?"

Are you allowed to be taken aback once you've been warned?

"Depends what you mean."

"You strike me as a quiet type. One who's content to let people take advantage of you, so long as you don't cause problems. Is this correct?"

"It is."

"And you're married?"

"I am."

"I see."

He does his tallying thing again. Then he makes copies of all the notes and hands me my file. I stand up, because it feels like the meeting's over.

"My recommendation is that you fire this Miss Mary. Today. Get it on record. I must admit. I don't feel you have the capacity. Questions?" He holds out his hand.

"One," and everything pours out like it's the first twenty seconds of a psych visit. I say "everything" though it's really only one thing, the most important thing:

"My wife and I haven't had sex for one full year."

Poor Norbert. Of course, I'm the one paying a hundred bucks an hour.

Lots of lawyers, probably even the one my father recommended, would have let me drone on about this, nodding their heads, achieving eye contact with a man at his lowest. I know the gig. But not Norbert, which is why I feel I owe him. He does what any real man ought to do: he pretends this isn't happening.

"I may not look it, but I'm Korean," he says. "Army brat Korean, but Korean."

He tells me about his life, how his father was a Tae-Kwon-Do instructor back when the martial arts struggled. We're talking early 80's: Bruce Lee dead for over a decade, Atari, nuclear defense over self-defense. Bleak times, "Particularly for blacks."

Norbert says the family moved into his dad's dojo after the bank foreclosed their house. He remembers sleeping on sparring mats.

Then comes salvation, a movie: this young boy, harassed by bullies, learns karate from his condo's maintenance man, a Japanese. The movie comes out and soon everyone wants to learn karate, *demands* to learn it, so his dad opens a second dojo, then a third. He promotes his sons to masters and begins selling karate-related apparel, gis, headbands, as well as exotic products, samurai swords, nunchucks.

He opens the desk drawer and places a very small ninja star on the desk.

“We gave these out as party favors,” he says.

The way Norbert talks about his youth, you’d think he was a lottery child, with one major difference: his father didn’t blow the money on a high-rise with a recording studio. He invested, bought a house, paid his kid’s law school.

“You must feel blessed,” I say.

“Yes and no.”

The mother’s a different story. She was a school teacher. Every morning, 5 AM, she fixed her makeup in the wall mirror and tiptoed over her boys sleeping on those mats. Little Norbert, however, was awake. He watched her, *studied* her, pretending to sleep until the moment she stepped over him. He didn’t know why—was it from TV? a book?—but he said something to her as she hovered above him, something to carry her through the day: “Knock ‘em dead, mama.”

He did this for years, 5 AM, “Knock ‘em dead.” She always acted surprised. Then at the bus stop one morning, a six-time ex-con tried to take her backpack. Her instinct was to resist, so the con punched her, in the ribs, the breast, the eye. She crouched beneath the bench but the flurry came down harder; she went limp. He was peeling away the backpack when an off-duty police officer smashed him in the temple. The con and Norbert’s mom were taken to the hospital—the same hospital—and she ended up okay, had a couple of rods placed and couldn’t move that eye too well so that every time she looked right, she had to move her head, but was back teaching math via the 5:10 bus within a month, except now Norbert accompanied her, walked her on the bus, kissed her, said it loud enough for every thug to hear: “Knock ‘em dead, mama.”

The con took a little longer—epidural hematoma, sounds like—but Norbert was waiting for him at discharge.

“Know why?” He folds his fingers into horns, points them at me. “Confrontation.”

What Norbert did to the con—karate kick? nunchucks?—he wouldn’t say, and probably for good reason: he’s my lawyer, not my friend. His parting advice is “Be bold, be firm,” and, of course, “be careful.” This is lost on me with the “Knock ‘em dead” that follows.

I roll into work obsessed. I can’t get it out of my head. Miss Velda reaching for her food tray. Knock ‘em dead, I tell her. Mister Broadway straining on the toilet. Knock ‘em dead.

I spread the word: the Boss needs to speak with Miss Mary, pronto. Meanwhile I write a note to Medicare. I address it, “Dear Medicare.” I don’t rant. I explain I’ve already fired the employee that’s been self-referring to Abe’s, that her breach of law took place without my knowledge. I write, Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions.

I address the letter to the nearest Medicare outfit, seal it, drop it in the outgoing mail basket, where I find Miss Mary.

I tell her, “Follow me,” but what I’m thinking is, Knock ‘em dead. I sit her down. My voice wavers as I describe how much of an asset she’s been to the clients, that this sniff would be nowhere without her, etc.

“See what I’m driving at?” “I can do overtime?”

Poor woman, I think, and the premonition rises that I won't be firing her, that I'd rather have Medicare on me for the next fifty years, curling barbells, childless in Huntsville, than live the next two minutes of discomfort. I search my desk. I hand Miss Mary a Xyvexa pen I got in Vegas two weeks ago.

There's a trick to these pens. They sparkle.

What I do is level with her. Miss Mary, I know what's going on with you and Claude and I want it to stop, sort of thing. I make it clear: No more dead clients going to Abe's. "Questions?"

"How many mouths you feed, doc?"

This is the same woman who once said, "I have childrens." She stands up like the meeting's over, at which points the words come out: "Miss Mary you're fired." It should have been different, but there it is.

"Excuse me?"

"You heard me."

Miss Mary knows how not to burn bridges. She walks out of there like getting fired's old hat for her, and meanwhile, I feel weightless. I call the wife to give her the good news. I get her voice mail. I hang up at the beep.

Later that morning, Claude pays me a visit. I find him staring out the window of my office after I'm done with a patient.

"Who let you in?" I ask.

"Doc, there's no air in here, I need air." So I follow him to the roof. Technically, Claude does maintenance. He knows all the vents and back-doors. I've never been to the roof his way.

There's a little breeze at the top. Claude holds out his hands like he's hugging it.

"Love this city, doc."

"I know what you mean," I say, though I really don't. We're only four floors up.

"You ever meet Abe, doc?" He spits something brown through his teeth. I hear it hit the pavement. "You remind me of Abe. Abe was the sort of bull that liked things neat. Everything had to be neat."

This is true: I gave Abe Trautner samples of an anxiolytic when he came by the sniff to visit his ailing mother once, and though he told me in confidence he loved the stuff, he requested a letter stating I gave it to him for "the acute treatment of obsessions and compulsions," which I happily obliged.

"He was a good man."

Claude chuckles. "Yeah he was. The problem with Abe was, he didn't take care his own."

He points to a yellow Corvette parked directly beneath us. Then he hands me the envelope addressed to Medicare. My letter's been ripped in two.

"Know what I mean, doc?"

Claude takes the nape of my neck in his lineman's hands and gives me a shake. We're one foot from the edge. My happiest and most lamentable moments should be flashing through my head, but instead, I'm scanning my brain for Abe Trautner's cause of death. Prostate cancer sounds right.

"I *know* you ain't like Abe, doc. I know my family can trust you."

He pinches off another spit wad. The world's his spittoon. This time, I don't hear where it lands.

I address God, quick-and-dirty. I say, Please God, let it have been prostate cancer.

I took care of Claude Arceneaux, Sr., as a med student. We rotated through the state penitentiary, or rather, prisoners of the state of Texas were transferred to us when they became too complicated for prison docs. We saw all sorts of things: worms in the brain causing seizures, a guy with Tourette's who'd pinched the prepuce off his penis, gang keloids. Back then, I was thinking surgery or psychiatry, I don't know why. I was on surgery one night when I read the name "Claude Arceneaux" off a chart. He'd gone to prison for tax evasion, white collar stuff. Nobody knew who he was in his fluorescent orange jumpsuit and the cuffs on his wrists and ankles, but I did.

I'd seen him play at Depaul and for the Bucks, a lock-down defender who could drain the three, the first of his kind really. Had a solid career, never made the All Star team, but was well-respected by his teammates and coaches, the kind of guy that leads the prayer in the locker room. Then for contract reasons, he went to Turkey. Apparently he became a star there. People knew him on the streets (not too many black guys in Turkey back then, I take it). I think he enjoyed the stardom but got lonely. After two seasons he came back. The Bulls signed him. They were looking for role players, guys who'd defer first, contribute when called upon. They'd not won a championship in two years. The league's darling, the once and future logo, fresh out of retirement, visited Claude Senior's home in East Texas, and rumor has it, got him to sign on after losing a round of golf.

What happens from there is three straight championships, Claude Arceneaux, Sr., from Port Arthur, Texas. In press conferences, the Great One called him a vital member of the team, and yet, you could count on one hand how many times Claude Senior took off his warm-ups. He only played trash time.

He weighed one hundred twenty-five pounds by our scale. Claude had suffered a mental breakdown. The reason the prison docs transferred him was the wad of toilet paper he'd swallowed. He was trying to do himself in, stuff it down his throat, except the wad went down the wrong pipe, giving him a small bowel obstruction. When I saw him, he had a tube in his nose and IV's in each arm. Green fluid was being suctioned. He kept wanting to vomit, made all the motions, but the bile just came up that tube.

I examined him briefly, I spent most of my time reading through the chart. I was curious what had happened to him, if somebody'd taken a good history, but there was nothing. By the chart, he was just another SBO.

He got better with fluids alone and the next day they sent him back to prison.

I found out later that it was during his stint with the Bulls that Claude had gone downhill. They'd brought him in to be that lockdown defender, but his principle job in practice was to guard the guy with the wagging tongue. What drove Claude Senior insane wasn't that his shot was gone. It wasn't even how he got torched in practice. It was the shit talking.

This is what I found out when I made inquiries (per one of the assistant trainers, who now owns twelve rehab centers in the greater Milwaukee area): the reigning MVP and most famous player in the world, the face of the Bulls, Claude Sr.'s teammate and rival, you know who, talked more shit to his opponents than anyone on the planet. He made sure the Bulls signed Claude Senior so that every practice, he had an enemy to take down. The shit he talked was legendary. He had this deep, quiet voice that only the man guarding him could hear. He'd talk throughout a scrimmage and during the shoot-around, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk. If Claude Senior dribbled a ball off his foot, he talked. If he tweaked an ankle, there he was, His Majesty, standing above him, talking. Even if Claude drained a three right in the face of the Greatest Player to Ever Play the Game, he still got a talking to. It was never clear what was said. It may not have even been that bad. But it was bad enough that by the time the team had won three championships, Claude was done. The team knew it. He needed his own room on road trips, wouldn't shower with the guys, started losing weight. And still for three seasons, the Bulls kept him on the bench.

I read about this and wanted to be a psychiatrist again. Then lo and behold, years later, I come to find that Claude Arceneaux's son works in my building. (Really not that surprising, this is East Texas). And what an asshole he is.

Do I tell Claude I performed a physical examination on his father at his lowest? Of course I don't. I'm not even sure Claude Sr.'s alive.

Claude shakes me the way a ventriloquist would his puppet.

"We Louisiana people, we *backward* people," he says. "It ain't nothing personal. You cook your meat over a fire, don't you? We coonasses, we bury our meat, cook it *under* the fire. See what I mean?"

"I see."

"I want you to think about something," he says, releasing my neck. "The woman with the big mouth, pressing me. That's your wife?"

"It is."

He chuckles.

"Think about it."

For a second I envision myself taking two steps back and then ramming him, literally knocking him dead, manslaughter in lieu of Medicare fraud. But Claude, it's like he can smell it on me. He backs off the ledge and heads downstairs via his maintenance man ways. I'm left alone on the roof, nothing there but spit puddles and the breeze, to ponder my options.

The instinct's to call the wife right then and there, tell her Claude's just threatened me and possibly her. But she'd only tell me to call the lawyer, and I'm done with lawyers.

I could run. The wife and I could drop our practices and both work in the jungle, together, like we always wanted. Great idea, except I already know her response: What does a nursing home doc do in the jungle?

Then there's Huntsville. Take it like a man. Maybe instead of the boiler room, they can find a job more befitting a man of my education. The infirmary might have some interesting pathology.

I head downstairs thinking what I'll do is negotiate. Play ball. I can see it now, me and Claude, partners, everything half-half. Or if he wants

a little more, fine. I don't need much. Only securities. I walk through the sniff considering this new life. I like it because it's less self-centered.

"Hey asshole."

I look around.

If there's such a thing as a rabble rouser in a nursing home, that'd be Mr. Bunn. I spend half my day diffusing complaints made by other patients' families about him: the snoring, the slurs, the scaring roommates in the middle of the night, you name it. We nearly kicked him out after an altercation with a resident's granddaughter (long story that boils down to him feeding her goldfish to our eel). Mr. Bunn blames Alzheimer's—he *always* blames Alzheimer's—but I've seen his CTs.

"Can I help you, Mr. Bunn?"

He points out his walker, which is tucked away behind the sink.

"Unfold it. My legs burn."

I straighten the snap joints and mutter something only a mother would say: "You shouldn't be calling people asshole, Mr. Bunn."

He stands. "Says you."

"Yeah, says me." I pull back the walker. This surprises him, but he's a country boy. He shuffles forward. I pull back some more.

"Hold still!"

He reaches for the walker with his cane. Just as he's about to hook it, I move it out of reach.

He shuffles another two paces and at the last possible moment, I pull back. I repeat this again and again. Does it cross my mind that a broken hipped Mr. Bunn has an adjusted thirty day mortality of eighty percent? Of course not.

To his credit, he keeps coming, shaky legs be damned. I goad him with the walker all the way into the hall, where I remove the orange tennis balls from the legs and toss them down the hallway. Mr. Bunn looks at me like he half expected it. I hand him back his walker. "Hop to," I say.

There's something beautiful about how useless a walker is without those damn tennis balls.

Ms. Velda, two doors down, lets out something between a wail and an expectoration. It means she's hungry.

"Miss Velda," I say, "Would you like your meal?"

Miss Velda hasn't moved from her bed since admission. Big, big stroke. Every night the food guys drop her tray off on the sink even though the lady hasn't moved her right side in six years and her cord's half-necrosed.

What I'd pay for the woman to have some facial expressions. I estimate her maximum arm span and ballpark the distance from bed to utensil, add six inches. That's where I leave her tray.

She expectorates harder.

"Not my job." I leave the CALL NURSE button beneath her fingertips.

"Doctor," I hear. "Thank heavens, it's the doctor."

It's Broadway. By the sound he's making, I'm sure he's stuck on the toilet again.

"Doctor. You there?"

Broadway once claimed he sat on the toilet for six hours, which is impossible.

“Mr. Broadway, stay put. I’ll be right back,” I say, though I won’t, because that’s what you pay employees for. Which reminds me of Miss Mary.

I find her in an empty room, mopping. I stand in her backstroke.

“Didn’t I fire you?”

She goes into this spiel about how much she likes it here, wants to be here, etc., which I believe on multiple levels. On any other day this would prompt me to tell her what a great job she’s doing, possibly even give her the afternoon off. I plop the end stager charts on the stool next to her. They all say, “PHOSPHATE ENEMA PER RECTUM x 1, NOW.” Signed, me.

Two minutes later she’s on me again. She wants to know if we can substitute an oral laxative, out of consideration.

“Funny you should mention that.” Enemas, I tell her, are like crack for end-stagers, crack that’s good for them, good for the doctor too. “Win-win for everyone.”

She snaps on a pair of Latex-free gloves, chuckling.

“Something funny?”

“Claude get ‘atcha?”

The fifteen years that I’ve employed Miss Mary, this is the first time she’s spoken to me this way.

“We talked.”

“What he say?”

“He said you should do whatever I tell you to do.”

“Don’t sound like Claude.” She rubs her hands together. “If Claude said something, I’d know.”

The confidence behind those words strikes me: *If he said something, I’d know*. That’s when it dawns on me: it’s not just Claude I’m dealing with, it’s Team Claude. Which begs the question: where’s my team?

The last time the wife and I were a team was in med school, when we studied together. I remember the head and neck final, the two of us at my tank, how we flirted by smearing bits of skin on each other. We were so loud Joggy Brahmhatt told us to leave, so what did my firebrand do? She cut off some tongue and stuck it in his manual while I asked Joggy to explain cricket for the millionth time. Now that’s a team. I remember after every whirlwind of exams, fucking for days-on-end, and in between, reading each other *New England Journal of Medicine* abstracts, how easily I could cajole her back then. We showered together on test days: while one of us shampooed, the other quizzed. We practiced physical exams on one another. We placed IVs into each other. We were a team. Then residency came and our lives veered, hers toward pediatrics, mine to the end stagers. Now she has her chore days, I have mine. Now if one of us says anything more than what our patients had, the other turns on the TV.

I think of her visiting me in Huntsville—namely, how she *wouldn’t* visit me in Huntsville—and I remind myself I don’t even have kids with this woman, I’m only bound to her by law.

“Claude takes care his own. Who you take care of?”

There’s something you don’t know about Miss Mary. You look into that hippopotamus face of hers, and what you see is devotion, and there’s nothing evil about that.

I go back to the patients prepared for hellfire, everything I've built in shambles, Mr. Bunn shaking in a body bag, the Medicare cops dusting for prints, Claude polishing brass knuckles, whatever. What I find is something shocking. I find Miss Velda's eating carrots off her tray. I find Msrs. Broadway and Bunn in their wheelchairs in the sunlight.

"Join us, asshole," says Mr. Bunn.

We get so loud security arrives.

"You bulls been drinking?"

Mr. Bunn laughs so hard he can't stop coughing. I slap his back.

"Thanks, asshole."

"You're welcome," I say.

I check the end stagers. They look relieved, happy. They don't look like end stagers at all.

For the rest of the afternoon it's like that, me being an asshole, happiness following. I can't explain. I don't even try. What I do is take advantage, scut out the social worker, hit the lights in the bathroom, that sort of thing. I'm not trying to change my constitution. There are things you do for your team.

It's dark when I get over to Abe's. A yellow Corvette is parked in the loading area. The door's open.

The chairs inside look used, like a service just let out. I imagine which of my end stagers it could have been when I see a little boy in the second row.

"Where is everyone?" I ask him, but he only stares at the chair in front.

"Little man," I say, taking the seat next door. "Would you like to see a Chinese star?" Then it hits me. I know this kid.

Some months ago, I overheard Miss Mary talking about him on the phone. None of my business, but she said it so loud, I couldn't ignore. She said he's eight and still wets the bed. I laughed at first, then I thought about it, thought about how goddamn sad it made me, so I called her into my office. I told her it's not normal. She said it's because he's lazy. I said no child does it because they're lazy, and that night, I told the wife. We stayed up talking about it. She said we should call the cops, CPS, somebody. I asked why. She said it was neglect, and neglect's a form of abuse. I said that's life. She said no, that's not life, we could save this boy, save him from his parents. Save him? She said we could adopt him, put him in a good school, teach him values, it could be our life's work, we could give him securities, how great would that be, to have our own little black child?

I thought about it long and hard, truly I did. I looked up schools. I drove through his neighborhood. I visited a urologist, who referred me to a psychiatrist, who told me I should see a gynecologist, not for me, but for us. He was also an endocrinologist.

Then one day the wife stopped bringing it up. I heard her sobbing in the night. I wanted to ask her, Are you okay? but I know she hates that, so I pretended not to hear.

"Claude?" I say.

"Yeah."

I can see him standing with her on a bus, embracing her after a game. Road trips, barbecues, graduations, little Claude and the wife. Team.

“Claude, where’s your daddy?”

They’d come visit me. They’d sit behind the glass in Huntsville and talk to me for hours: “Claude made honor roll!” “Claude’s going to state!” “Claude was admitted to medical school!” “That’s my bull,” I’d say in my orange jumpsuit, my hair in cornrows, my soul filled with glee. And when the big black guard yells, “Time!” I’d behold my wife and child, nothing but plexiglass between us, and sop up the devotion.

“Let’s go, Claude.”

The little boy brushes his hair forward. I whip my hand out of my pocket and hold him by the wrist. Little blotches appear on his shoulder and chest and everywhere I touch him. I look at my hand. There’s ink everywhere.

Little Claude looks at me like he’s done something wrong. I tell him to be strong. There are tears in his eyes close to trickling.

“I got something for you.” I take the busted pen from my pocket.

Do you do that? Do you take another man’s child?

I shake and I shake. I say, Please God, just one sparkle, for the wife. Of course you do.

Marvin Shackelford

Bombed

Today, before I got the oil changed in my truck,
came home and started drinking,
an Asian woman in an elevator
felt the need to explain to me
the way the buttons work.
I accidentally stepped out and hopped back in
on the second floor, when she got on,
and she thought I didn't understand that
her pushing the call while I was headed up
meant stopping to get her. I told her I didn't know
where I was going. I had a job interview,
one I think I may have bombed,
and since then it's been cheap beer
from large glass bottles and thinking
about this girl named Ling,
who isn't Asian. But she's pretty.
She wears too much makeup and waits
tables with her wedding band hidden.
Her name asks me where
I see myself, five years from now.
Her name is like that woman
who thought I was too stupid for the elevator,
narrow with the smell of flowers
and leading me nowhere I need to be.

Liz Bowen

A Shot Rang Out in the Quarry, 1986

1: swimmer

It bowled me down
It rolled its tongue out under me like a carpet
so when I fell, it was soft
a water bed
a seashell

It spread its jaws wide,
walls sticky with cinnamon
a terrarium
a crystal

I do not know where it comes from
I do not see where it goes
my eyes are open

the water is black.

2: suspect

I didn't kill her if you want to be technical about it. If you want to be real technical, the quarry killed her. She drowned. The bullet was in her lung, right? That's where they found it? No, I didn't know her. Never seen her in my life.

3: swimmer

I saw the gun
I saw all of them
lined up on the rocks
laughing

I did not hear it
my ears were full
of mud and minerals

a lung filled
with algae

I drank the quarry hot like tar.

4: blotter

The young man is believed
to have fired two shots into the quarry
successively.

He is thought to have
believed he was aiming
at a monstrous catfish.

Witnesses say he appeared to be
shocked at the sight of the grimacing
red cloud.

They say he stood still,
as if waiting for the blood to crush him
in its rising fist.

Then, suddenly, he ran,
according to witnesses.

One report has him tripping
on a root before shrinking among
the oak trees.

Another has him stepping
into a snakehole just in front
of his van's door.

Either way, he tripped,
they all say.

5: swimmer

I look at myself sometimes
my skin slick and grey
as eels

It is like jade,
the water
that mills through
my airways

It is like finding
a dynasty buried

when I look at myself

6: kids

Ma says there's bodies in that quarry. You believe it? Seems like some shit. What are you gonna do, get impaled on a slab of slate? Nuclear poison leaked down from the plant? Give me a break. You going in? Yeah? Yeah?

Deepwater's Neighbor

Nothing left to be said of the sky pumped back to crystal, the post-traumatic shore. The dizziness has diluted to a thin grease on my skull. The fish bite again. The nets fill with quivering silver bellies. Nickels to make up for the fishless months, the emergency room. Nothing left to be said when the car leaks kaleidoscopes. When the garage smells like the bile-biting sea.

I sometimes forget how to feed myself but my washing is incessant. Scraping the smoldering gills that won't stop growing between my ribs. Scooping sludge from my hair in spoonfuls. To say I saw it coming is to say I let it come.

It's been a year since the dolphin washed up at my feet like a beer can. Ask me why I buried it under the dock. Why my worst dreams are of rainbows.

Nathan Prince

Architecture

You ran past it a few times before you ever noticed the futuristic angles, the oppositional shape, the musicality of the design, the way light hit parts of it to be reflected, refracted, absorbed, illuminating pools of shadows in places where it was intended for there to be illuminating pools of shadows. Eventually you stopped and walked around the premise, peering in through the gallery windows from the sidewalk, gawking. This was something. Here was something. How had you missed it? The plaque in front reads, "Dr. Aaron Heimbach House," designed in 1939 by Bertrand Goldberg, better known for Marina City downtown (another kind of sustained vision).

An unpublished work of the International style, the modernist home is a historical gem, a remnant, a curiosity really, here on the southside. The project would have come just after the experimental automobile and the North Pole Mobile Ice Cream Store. Goldberg studied at the Bauhaus in Berlin under Mies van der Rohe during the weird, uninhibited, transitional period between the World Wars, before the rise of Nazism, you read later on Wikipedia. Mies, in search of a new architectural language, new forms of conceptual expression and ways to interpret the strange, bemusing incomprehensible, believed and taught architecture

as a representation of the time, nothing more, "und ist Ausdruck der inneren Struktur der Epoche, aus der sie wächst," the spirit of the age in his case, and in all cases, that each configuration, each element, each component, from the screw to the worldview, lead to this ideal. A nautilus, he read the philosophers, from Aquinas to Heidegger, incorporating his impressions into his buildings, using industrial steels, plate glass and newly formulated technologies to define space. The Crown Hall building on the IIT campus downtown considered a masterpiece, physical embodiment and summation of all these abstractions. You find yourself standing in the middle of it one weekend thinking about love and all

the possibilities. The snow white snow beaming white through glass and splintered sunlight. You brought the girls with you, your wife, the four-year-old and the six-month-old. As sterile as a hospital, it's no place for a family, this marvel of engineers and technologists. You don't care. You just wanted to put an eyeball to it. "Now what the fuck is this supposed to be,"

your wife asks, you trying to go over it all with her again, contemplating the simplicity of it, the structure, the geometry, but then takes it back the following weekend at the Farnsworth House in Plano, without the girls this time, both of you kind of stunned, staring, bewildered, transfixed by the little glass

house from the driveway surrounded by trees and grasses. "It's like a Greek temple," she says. "Should we get out?" There's simply no precedent. Testament of glass, concrete and form on the Fox River floodplain, postulating heaven and earth, it is the poem that connects and brings us all together here. A Shinto temple, the guidebook calls it. "So what was Bauhaus again?" Right. Out of Harvard, Goldberg arrived in Germany May, 1932. At the time, the Bauhaus, a bastion of the Weimar Republic, was located in Dessau. On the verge of failure, they collected tuition fees but nothing happened. Enrollment was impossible. Upon arrival, Goldberg went to its director, Mies van der Rohe, in Berlin and elected to stay there to study

with Mies, who simply attached him to Bruno Walter, his only architect. Goldberg, the informal apprentice, would meet Walter at about eight o'clock in the morning and work on Mies's buildings until about ten o'clock at night. Then the Bauhaus was relocated to Berlin. The first year's courses were called *werklehre*, the study of how to work. Josef Albers taught a course on dimension; Hinnerk Scheper, based on the science of color and vision developed by Goethe and Joseph Mallord Williams Turner 100 years prior; color; Kandinsky, painting; Ludwig Hilberseimer, city and house planning; Miesian concepts of inner and outer space, best exemplified by the Tugendhat

House, were studied and explored. What you like, you tell her; is that a Bauhaus architect was supposed to design everything – pots, pans, automobiles, clothes, dance, furniture – as well as the buildings. Quoting Goldberg, you relate, "You could not have contemporary architecture as it was taught at the Bauhaus, as it was taught by Mies, as it still will be taught again, I am sure, without a violent economic and political change. The value system of modern architecture came from the value system of political rebellion." Supposedly Mies inherited a sense of space from Frank Lloyd Wright, certainly at least a sublime sensitivity to and respect for it. From the portico to the inner chambers,

Wright can be seen all over Mies's Barcelona Pavillion, considered his European masterwork. So it came as no surprise to Wright that Mies wanted to meet him upon his arrival in Chicago, 1937. Goldberg drove Mies to Taliesin to meet Wright, who came down in a beret, white hair down to his shoulders. This would have been the third

Taliesin, after the fire, the seven axe-murders, and another fire (in that order). Goldberg, all of twenty four, despised Wright's romanticism, "I couldn't have had a deeper immersion in romantic nonsense than Taliesin." There's a picture of Wright and Mies talking to each other

passionately, Goldberg standing off to the side eating a sandwich. Goldberg left on Sunday, when a church service based on Wright's personal beliefs, his architectural ideas, revolving around "nature," commenced. You ask your wife if she wants to visit Taliesin, most of it, built by students, in an extraordinary state of disrepair. She wants to hear more about the axe-murders. You don't know: Google it. Later she tells you she heard from a friend that they offer tours of the Heimbach House, but you don't want to go in. You just want to be able to drive by it and run past it every so often, stop on the sidewalk and look in, the misanthropic stalker, gawking through gallery windows, studio lights flooding in from everywhere at once, always.

Joshua Michael Stewart

Love Music

It starts with a fever in your pants,
ends with a one-way conversation

with a cigarette. I'm a bottle of blues
floating in your boogie-woogie.

This is what it's come to: the slow groove
of my heart, listening to Frank Sinatra

on a winter morning with the blinds drawn,
Count Basie slumped over the piano

tapping the black keys—those naked
little branches, sinking them in snow.

Linda Baldanzi

Not Exactly What They Have Us Believing

He beat her bloody with her shoe
She had kissed the shoe
Slept with it
Put it between her legs.

The Prince ate the shoe
So the King would never know.

They took her away to the stately Elm Tree
And hung her— Hooded men
Who did exactly what the Prince told them to do.
(The Prince never heard the midnight flight of birds.)

The majestic Elm shades its toddler tree
That someday will stand side by side with it.

—And maybe she is less dead.
Maybe she never existed—
Maybe she is anti-matter and
Never existed at all.

Jeremy Butman

Transparent

My first sexual experiences were online. When I was fourteen, before I'd kissed a boy, my friend Suzie and I used to go on one of those interactive chat sites – one which I'll call Glazer.com, although that's not its real name – and spend hours broadcasting our nubile bodies into the void.

We would say: “we're bored, let's sign into Glazer and see what's happening.” When young teenagers get together and declare that they are bored, what they often mean is they are excited by something illicit. By the time we were sixteen, Suzie and I were using the same logic to go and buy pot from the college kids who hung out by the Cumberland Farms in the center of our dinky town. We said we were bored and then went looking for trouble.

Yes, occasionally we would find a genuine 16 year old on Glazer, whose reasons for being there were similar to ours: to learn how to interact with the opposite sex in a consequence-free way. But the majority of the ‘boys’ we found to chat with were actually quite older men: ‘pervs,’ as everyone called them online; men who took pleasure in sexually harassing young girls like us.

There were ‘pervs’ and then there were ‘trolls,’ and at the time it wasn't easy to see that what separated the two was age. Now that I'm older it's obvious that the ones who called us ugly or sluts, or ugly sluts, the ‘trolls,’ were the younger of the group, the 15 to 19 yr olds, who were sexually confused and bitter but whose abuse was rooted in a less deep-seated, scary place than that of the ‘pervs,’ who were likely almost all older men (although of course you have your exceptions) and whose insistent and impersonal demands always followed a strict pattern: first, that we show our feet, then our ‘bellies,’ then our bras, then our boobs, and then our panties... you get the idea. We'd sit before our webcam, just sitting there mute and motionless, and let literally thousands of nameless, faceless men jerk off to our developing bodies from the safety of anonymity.

We knew what they were doing because they told us so, either out in the public chat or through private messages, letting us know that they had just cum ‘to us’, that they were about to cum (and could we please oblige them by showing something *quickly*), and then also because of course you had your occasional onscreen dick. In fact you were guaranteed at least one exhibit masturbator per session. You see, generally the ‘pervs’ would not even ‘join’ the ‘chat’ – meaning let us see their membership tag by ‘entering’ our ‘room’ (which, I scare-quote this last word because it is a term used by the site, but in reality they were indeed *allowed into my bedroom*, sitting there maybe a thousand miles away but *in my bedroom* and *with my permission*) – but some men would ‘cam up’ in our ‘room’ and expose themselves to us, jerking off or just letting the thing dangle limp in front of their cam.

By the time I was seventeen I was going on those cam-flip sites, ones like Chatroulette.com, to enjoy the power of watching men cum at my image, but at fourteen, when I first saw a man cum online, it was repulsive. Suzie and I shut the computer off and didn't log back on to Glazer for a week. Yet, as we began to learn how to 'flirt,' it became clear that this was sort of part of the package, and in the end we would even play along, putting our faces toward the part of the screen where the dick was projected and stick out our tongues, emulating an act we had only the most abstract idea about how to perform.

It must have all appeared truly in the spirit of fun, the way we started to learn how to tease the pervs. We'd dance around, change out of jeans into booty shorts, grab each other's boobs playfully, bounce around the room and do gymnastics and splits. When they asked us to kiss we giggled for a good period and then kissed each other; when they asked to see our tits (or rather, at around the ten thousandth request) we looked at each other and then flashed quickly, collapsing in laughter afterwards. Of course it was clear to the old men that we were discovering our sexuality and that they were exploiting this. The extent to which we grasped this fact, however, is unclear. I can say that I didn't have any feeling of exploitation at the time: it was exploratory, and we were too self-centered to notice anybody else's intentions.

Truthfully, it was exhilarating to be engaged by men and wanted so openly by them, when in our daily reality we were surrounded by children who, though they were also awakening to their sexuality, certainly had no grasp whatsoever of how to relate to it. It made us feel mature to be partaking in what we assumed was normal adult behavior: submitting to and teasing with the rapacious desires of anonymous men. If anything, I think we might have felt like we were exploiting them, these older men – for their tired, adult desperation. It was the process of incorporating their oldness into ourselves, of garnering the abuse I was sure that everyone of a certain age had suffered.

I started going on the site alone, without Suzie, pretty quickly after we'd gotten used to seeing the guys jerk off. I'd sit there, wearing a low cut top and short jean-shorts and just stare into the camera, watching the chat box fill with sleazy come-ons and demands to show parts of my body, keeping track as my viewers increased. If I failed to be the most watched girl on Glazer I'd get down on all fours and lean away from the camera to show off my butt, or bend over the cam so they could see all the way down my shirt, always transparently aware of what I was doing.

Finally, I started going 'private' with some men. The guys who would cam up with their shirts off and have real nice pecks and abs and short hair, and they wouldn't say anything mean or pervy but just talk to me a little bit, tell me how beautiful I was, etcetera, and then eventually they'd private message me and ask if I wanted to talk just the two of us. "Now that we're alone," they'd say, "how about you take off the shirt, baby." Ha. I had only ever been called baby by men online, and I really liked it. I would take my shirt off and then, without being asked, stand up and unbutton my pants and slide them down around my ankles. "You're incredible," they'd say. "You want to see me," they'd ask, identifying their subjectivity with their penis, and I'd say, "yes, let me see you" or "yeah, I want to see

you cum.” And they’d move the cam down to their lap to reveal that they were already hard and stroking themselves. I would stick my tongue out and say, as I had learned to say from these chats, just what they wanted to hear: “you’re so big, you’re making me wet, I want you to cum on my face.” I would then get naked for them and masturbate, watch them jerk off until they came on their stomachs, or into little balls of toilet paper, and then I’d kiss toward the camera and shut the thing down, feeling proud of myself, contented, and like I was in good shape to be one hot item when it came time to finally pick a boyfriend from the gawking, awkward mass of would-bes at school. I had a good grasp on what the fantasies were, and that was a serious leg up from a lot of my girl friends.

These friends were appalled that Suzie and I engaged in the online stuff, when I told them. And when I confessed the true nature of men’s sexual desires, they were horrified, coming just short of swearing off the prospect of the whole enterprise. “All they really want is blowjobs and to cum on your face,” I told them haughtily, feigning astonishment at their naïveté. “Oh, my God,” my friend Justine said upon hearing this, “that is, like, so fucking disgusting.” She was a ditsy one, and somewhat horsey, we all agreed behind her back – a natural prude. “No fucking way, you’re not *coming* on my *face*.” She insisted that sex wouldn’t ever be that way, not for her. “You call them pervs, yourself; that’s not how good guys are supposed to behave.”

“That’s how they all are,” I corrected her. “Believe me, I’ve seen enough.”

“You cyber-slut,” she said, but I could tell that she was jealous.

“You can make fun of me for going on the internet, but at least I know what’s going on.”

* * *

Chris Hinkley was a real shit. He was a lacrosse player, one of my classmates our first year at the public high school. He had a good build and wore good, preppy clothing. His girlfriend and he had already fucked, according to the gossip.

In late October freshman year, Chris posted a video on my Facebook wall. It was linked to a site called teencams.com and I knew what it was before I even pressed play – there I was, in the video-still, on my computer chair with a loose shirt on, staring raptly into the camera, with the word ‘private’ in caps at the upper left of the image and the Glazer logo on the top right. I decided to watch just to see which one it was. It was a pretty recent session, from the summer, and a particularly graphic example; it included, in several acts over several minutes, me: getting completely naked, fingering myself, rubbing my clit up close, bending over doggy-style and sticking my tongue out for the virtual facial. Below the post all he had written was “nice!”

It got around school pretty quickly, although I deleted the video immediately. I did a search for my name on Google but nothing came up. I went to teencams.com and scrolled through all 130 pages of videos of young girls doing exactly what I had been captured doing, but still couldn’t find the video of me. Brutal luck, I thought, and decided that the

only course of action was to own it. So I went into school the next couple weeks and proudly told everyone that it was great fun to fuck guys like that online, and that it didn't bother me a bit that the video had gotten out. "Whatever," I said, "I'm hot, and that was fun. I'd prefer not to be videotaped, obviously, but I do that and I don't care who knows it."

The truth was that I kind of believed that. That was all part of the thing about being on Glazer to begin with – I didn't care who saw me teasing or flashing; it was all out in the open, and that was the point.

Of course I was called a cyber-slut by everyone at school, and no matter how hard I tried to convince them that I was cool with it, it didn't matter: every guy was suddenly saying nasty things to me as I walked down the hall – 'cyber-slut,' or, 'you do have some nice titties,' or even just something as innocuous as 'what's your msn,' coming from a total stranger. They didn't get that I didn't care and that who would care, anyway. She wasn't discovered by anyone at school, but I know for a fact that Suzie had some guy post a video on her Glazer page of her flashing. What was the big fucking deal with being naked anyway? Literally everyone is naked on the internet, I thought. And I'm still not convinced that isn't true.

Nevertheless, that year was pretty hellish for a long time. I even considered telling my parents, so maybe I could change schools. But I didn't really want them to find out – they're from a different time, obviously, and the thing would have meant something totally different to them.

I did tell the guidance councilor, though. He had some pretty harsh things to say, about needing to protect myself and the rest. This was around the time of all the scandals about child-pornography, and girls sending pictures of themselves naked over their iPhones or whatever, and one of the things he wanted to impress on me was that such things could have serious consequences, and could potentially get me in a lot (he emphasized this), a lot of trouble. I wasn't so cool as to act like this didn't affect me, and I think that I might have seemed pretty shaken up.

In retrospect, it was a time of strange internet revolt, actually. I started paying more attention to that sort of stuff—internet rights and privacy and all that—after Chris posted the video of me. I became adamant that there shouldn't be any privacy restrictions—that we should be able to view and say whatever we wanted online and it should all just be out there. Wikileaks was just then getting a lot of attention, too, which I had only a vague understanding of but fully supported, probably mostly because I took after my parents, who were staunch liberals and were all about exposing government corruption and abuses, etcetera.

I won't pretend that my penchant for flashing on Glazer was anything like a political statement, that would be absurd, but nevertheless, it did all seem to be related, in some obscure way, when I went to talk to the guidance councilor one time after the incident. He had a blond goatie, wore a tie over flannel (which made him ridiculous and unthreatening), and said stuff to my friends like, 'you're too young to have sex, just keep giving him blowjobs and tell him he's lucky'; he swore in front of us and seemed like he actually kind of knew what was going on with music, which was all pretty cool and those of us who talked to him regularly tended to like him. Anyway, this time I went – it wasn't the first time we talked about the problem, but it might have been one of the times I started crying – he introduced his whole, dull

'you're body is sacred and you shouldn't give it away' routine with a kind of strange injunction, which stuck with me more than anything else he told me; in a quick sort of way, as if to himself, he said: "this totalitarian transparency is gonna ruin us," just kind of under his breath, not really directly at me at all. I've been thinking about what he meant by that for a while now. For some reason I feel like it kind of undercut everything he was then gonna tell me about my body, which was pretty straightforward guidance-councilor-type advise, and stuff that I had a hard time taking seriously, thinking at the time that he was probably himself, however nice, the type of guy who went home, got on Glazer and exposed himself to girls my age. Another teacher once brought it up with me, for instance, which was pretty inappropriate. It was an English teacher who had probably overheard some students talking about it, and he asked me to stay after class and then when I did he told me he knew what was going on and that if there was anything he could do to help, blah blah blah, that I should let him know, but he said it in this way that was a lot more like one of the shithead kids in the hall asking me for my msn or commenting on my nice tits than some concerned teacher. I'm sure he spent hours rummaging through the sites trying to find me – I even considered at the time just telling him what the site was and saying, 'best of luck finding it, perv.'

* * *

Full disclosure, part of the thing about it was for me, at the time, that my parents were going through a really messy divorce, about which I was only told half-truths and niceties by them, but the full story of which I got more or less in full from listening to my mother scream at my father behind their closed bedroom door, and was basically a typical sort of situation: my father had been having an affair with a younger woman, much younger it seemed, like in her twenties, and my mother was sick and betrayed and furious and never wanted to speak to him again. I had to hold my ear up right next to the crack in the door to hear my father's responses to her, which were apologetic and quiet but also somewhat defensive, accusing her of no longer being interested in him sexually and being possessive of the children (us) and of essentially staying in the marriage for the sole reason that she didn't want to give up the cushy life that he provided for her, the gist of all of which was more or less like let-me-have-my-fun-since-you-clearly-are-in-this-for-selfish-reasons-that-have-nothing-to-do-with-me. I sided with my father, who never screamed. But the whole thing I also found rather disgusting: his betrayal, the fact she had stopped loving him but wouldn't tell him, that he couldn't tell her that he knew, that he felt he had to sneak around – it all seemed really childish and silly and I'll say, since I'm sort of putting it in contrast by association anyway, very much the opposite of the sorts of shit that happened on Glazer. So I think that my opinion of all the internet transparency stuff was really colored by how pathetic it seemed to me that my parents were such babies about everything and couldn't fucking tell each other a single truth if the world depended on it. It would have been easier if it had all been happening online.

I didn't stop going on Glazer, though I did stop accepting men's requests for private interactions.

And then, finally, I got a real boyfriend. I mean, I had had 'boyfriends' before. It should be pretty clear by now that I'm a pretty good-looking girl, and at 16 I was about as hot as they come. And it had been a bit odd, people said, that I had only had a few boyfriends in middle-school, and didn't kiss one or touch a penis until the eighth grade (and then only to try to take it out and put it in my mouth, but when I did the guy got freaked out or whatever and came in his pants and kind of got up and left the room hastily, pretending he had something more important to do elsewhere on a Friday night than be with this hot girl on her bed, and it was obviously just that he was embarrassed by having come so quickly and it seemed like pretty terrified of the idea of what might happen if I put his dick in my mouth; and also, I noticed, when he put his hand down my jeans (not unbuttoning them) and touched my pussy that he pulled his hand out real quickly and when he put that same hand on my neck it shaking really bad, as though he'd just had some kind of traumatic experience and was shell shocked). But so I had not had luck with boys to begin with. And then the first year of high school there was the whole video incident, which, though it certainly attracted a lot of attention, didn't get me a lot of sincere or heartfelt date offers. So, yes, *finally*, in junior year a nice boy, quite shy actually and smart and pretty good looking, asked me out and I accepted and we kind of just started dating.

When I lost my virginity to him it was a clumsy affair, lots of awkward adjustments and nervous interludes where he'd stop and make sure the condom was on right and that everything was alright for me, which was sweet, but it kind of killed the mood, and though it was good, and I think we both performed quite well for a first time (it was his, too), naturally my internet knowledge didn't come in handy at all and I was just as confused as he was. But it was great, actually, and within a few months we'd gotten really good at it, and I did get to introduce a lot of 'advanced' moves that I had in fact learned from the internet. I had been 'exposed' to a lot of possibilities online that I wouldn't have otherwise known about, and certainly I'd say this paved the way for me and Eliot, this boy, having a way more versatile and adult sex life than most people our age.

But there were some down sides, too, and maybe Eliot wasn't totally the kind of standup kid that I'd taken him to be at first. For example, within the first couple months of our starting to fuck, he said that, since neither of us had ever been with any one else before, and there was no risk therefore of STDs or anything, how about we try fucking without a condom, cause everyone says that condoms really make the whole thing way less pleasurable, and he wanted to get the full sensation with me; he'd be incredibly careful and vigilant about pulling out before the first drop of precum even appeared on the horizon, he said; so I agreed. And he was pretty careful, and he'd fuck me and tell me that it was indeed so much better without a condom, and thanks for being such a hot, cool girl who was down for the real thing, and when he was about to finish he would pull out a few seconds before hand and cum on my belly or my back, or, if the pullout made him suddenly lose the moment, I'd go down and put as much of his cock (which I could say based on my experience was a decent

size, bigger than average) into my mouth and then when he'd let out a little muffled cry right before he came I did what I'd learned to do and said in my sexiest voice, somewhat strained, 'cum on my face, I want you to cum on my face.' I really did actually enjoy having his sperm suddenly blast me on the chin or the cheek, although sometimes it got in my eyes, which was unpleasant, or went up my nose.

* * *

When I got pregnant, I had to rethink a couple things. The condoms, of course, but also this business about transparency.

I didn't want to tell Eliot. In fact, I dumped him cold, not letting him know for a second that anything was up. It just would have been way messier to have to deal with it with him there, trying to be supportive, freaking out and not knowing what to do. It would have meant him feeling some kind of responsibility to me for his whole life, I imagined, and I really just couldn't be bothered. So I lied to him, and told him that I didn't like him anymore, that it was time for us to move on. That was hard. He called me some nasty things and then took up with another girl, who kind of looked like me.

The real trouble was that the abortion clinics in my state required parental consent before they could perform the operation. My mom was definitely out. I considered for a moment telling my father, but when I thought about how it would affect our relationship for the rest of our life – me having to tell him that I had been so stupid as to not use a condom, had been having sex at all, that I had dumped the boy and he hadn't meant enough to me to bring him through this process, that, additionally, I had lied to this guy, after years of hounding my father about the evils of lying – it would just have given him too much grist and made him think, I'm certain, much less of me – his little girl, who he got so much satisfaction from. You see, I was a strong student and, all told, despite my modest pharmacological and sexual secrets, a good daughter. I really was. I made him breakfast on Saturdays, I went to baseball games with him, I still wrestled with him occasionally. It would have ruined him. And, moreover, it would have ruined me in his eyes. I know it would have.

So instead, I got on a bus and went to the next state over, where an abortion didn't require anyone else to know about it. When it was my turn to go in, the doctor didn't say anything. It was over quickly and then I went back home, returned to my father's house and went straight upstairs, feeling quite weak, and went to bed before ten o'clock. I didn't cry or anything; it had to be done, and it had to be done in just the way I had done it.

I think my father still thinks I'm the perfect daughter, the sweetest girl, now that I'm in law school and have a long-term boyfriend and live in a nice apartment in the city. My boyfriend knows all about this whole story, and I'd say he knows me better than my father – by a long shot. But I like the version of myself that my father knows. Better than I've ever liked my 'real' self. If I didn't have his illusion to live through, I'm pretty sure I'd be a much less happy person.

Don Pomerantz

North of Hartford

Oh tobacco shed I never worked you
or near you
only stood pretty close
or down the road some
watched you breathe the brilliant light
into your darkness
exhale steam
into the August steam
through the lifted slats
over the shaded fields
gauze nets like shrouds
turning patches of Windsor into the tropics
baking the island workers as they plucked
weeds from around the precious weed
spirits wilting while the wilting leaves
draped from poles inside grew stronger.
It was a paradise without remorse brewing poison—
a paradise I tell you, where the light was perfect
and the summer dust rose into it, just so.

Around the bend in trucks last week
the men with crowbars came to raze it—
for a good long time it had leaned
like a flower towards the light.

CONTRIBUTORS

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