

euphony

EUPHONY

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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.

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Welcome to Spring 2018 Issue of *Euphony*

This year, spring comes late. The trees hesitate, unsure of the current health of the earth. But unwilling to break the life cycle that has kept our planet going, they make their resilient return. The birds hesitate, too. But eventually, they too emerge to outperform the twittering humans, heard viciously bickering amongst each other.

This year's spring does not bring the kind of euphony that we normally expect. Harmony can no longer come at the expense of conflicting voices. And yet we must not swing indifferently to the other extreme of silence. Instead, like the melodious, singing birds that respond to our human call, we must respond to our own calls of toxic rhetoric, of pain, of help. It seems to me, therefore, that one important challenge for literature is to craft a world that can give form to such a response.

In this issue, we respond to this challenge with our first ever commissioned artwork featured on our cover spread. Entitled "The Only Way: Communism!" it aims to criticize the false promises of a Communist utopia. We are grateful to Ilya Kabakov for framing our issue in the interaction between the world of utopian narrative and another, equally powerful world of color, shape, and visual composition. We also respond to this challenge with our Short Story Contest. Corinne Rutledge's winning entry "Odd One Out" presents human interaction in a dystopian world in such a way that, instead of leaving us out, involves us by necessitating our interpretative response. This issue's prose and poems also join in the chorus, with a sustained engagement on the border of the mythic and the mundane, crafting one as response to another, in ways that create dialogue amongst each other.

I would like to add a personal response to the work put into this issue, and none seems more fitting than to give a boundless *thank you* to the people who made it possible, especially to Mahathi, Ben, Jake, and Miles. I am confident that this issue will quietly, but surely, reveal all its work. And in the words of another poet, Elizabeth Bishop, who captured this work of late spring: "the little leaves waited,/ carefully indicating their characteristics."

-Maya
Managing Editor

POEMS

POETRY EDITORS' LETTER

Dear Reader,

Thank you for picking up the Spring 2018 issue of *Euphony*. We're excited for you to read the poems in this issue, as spring has brought on a wonderful change for the *Euphony* board, namely a fruitful poetry co-editorship that has delivered a richer, layered range of perspectives and voices to the poetry selection.

While assembling this issue, we found two main themes emerge from the pieces: nature and parenthood. We were struck by how so many of the poems conversed with each other, placing ideas like motherhood and fatherhood in the realm of nature. Like mothers and fathers, nature leaves us with lasting memories, teaches and nurtures us, and sometimes even hurts us. And as we compiled the poems, the body of work grew to encapsulate many more themes: the passage and legacies of time, the myths of birth and death, and the mediation of memory through all of the phases of life. These are all bound by a shared emotional vocabulary, grounded in natural and generational origins alike.

This poetry compilation begins with a storytelling form, ensconced entirely in the world of moons, forests, and men, with "The Moon is an Apple". We carry on to new understandings of fatherhood, motherhood, and childhood, as images of nature guide the speakers as they make sense of the realities around them, like in "My Mother", "Rage", and "The Night-Blindness Epidemic". Then, we get into the beautiful grittiness of growing up, the rituals of coming-of-age, and finally the sweet settling into that amber age where the bonds of parent and child secure their significance and take their places among the rich constellations of our relationships, as in "Moon Slide".

No matter where you are reading this, we hope that these poems draw you in, whether that be into a mother's embrace, onto secret paths, or into the lands of mythos. A thank you to our authors: this issue would not be possible without their creativity.

Happy reading,
Mahathi & Miles

These are the gardens we grow: the memories of our mothers and the fables of our fathers.

The Moon is an Apple

Jake Weiss

Billy was a bowman,
a straight shooter is what they said,
and in the empty notebook pages of night
he scrawled blood. Carcasses
fallen and fresh. According to lore
it was he who was responsible
for the human rise.
Before, we had only our hands.

But things were not as simple
as they seem. There were the troubles
of seeing in the dark, of notching arrows
on the flimsy bow, of avoiding,
while hunting, being hunted. Not to mention
the challenge of knowing
the cycles of the inconstant moon,
foreteller of fruitfulness in the hunt.

After a time
the moon became reliable enough
that when it wasn't there
it was less, to Billy, the absence of a thing
and more a great hole in the sky, a rupture,
and this was when the hunt was at its finest.
Gave his village meats, coats
and in the bitter cold, peace of mind.

Billy with his baby boy; scarce a word
from Billy the Younger. He sliced him
an apple every day, and as the moons
enlarged so did the slices, when they shrank
the slices did too, and, said Billy to his son,
'Son, the moon is an apple, an apple
the moon: when the apple is full
you are good and full,

when the apple is naught
you are hungry and grim, so with the moon,
when it is naught you must hunt
for your fill! Billy the Younger,
the slight boy, true to his father, hunted
beneath the aimless, moonless stars
but did not shoot the things with legs,
no, he shot apples

dangling from the trees,
and when the apples were exhausted
he shot at the moon,
at where it should be,
for the moon is an apple, an apple the moon,
and though the moon was new and unseen
the arrow landed in a heaven-high cloud
where a shadowed man stood, watching history.

My Mother

Devon Tomasulo

A path, still warm from the day,
guides her to a forest
filled with honey jars.

They are cracking, leaking,
sticking together, honey
at the bottom like rain
on soaked ground.

The thin, dark trees know
not to help her, know
they must watch as she realizes
there is no way
to save this sweetness, wind begins,

the trees are aching to move,
the jars' jagged edges catch the moonlight—
a night's first stars—she wonders
if she broke them.

What's Important

Patricia Hanahoe-Dosch

In fourth grade, girls sometimes passed around packets of pop rocks at recess. They dissolved into static in my mouth. Saliva can't drown static. I ate them and smiled to make friends. I earned two real friends. Once, we almost drowned in the ocean together. Lifeguards rescued us after our raft tipped over and was pulled away by the undertow.

My mother made Tang when our family went camping on vacation. Tang for breakfast with eggs and bacon, Tang for lunch with bologna sandwiches, Tang with grilled hotdogs and potato salad. My tongue drowning in Tang is the taste of family. The smell of Tang is the sound of my mother's scream when she saw a bear saunter past. The smell of Tang is the smell of adventure. My sisters and I swam in the campground's lake without fear of drowning, wanting only to glimpse a bear in the surrounding woods from the safety of the water. My mother stayed in the shallow end with my baby brother until thunder interrupted. My mother was more afraid of bears and lightening than of drowning.

We lived by the Atlantic ocean. My friends and I swam for hours, every not-rainy day, all summer, every summer. I had to be rescued by lifeguards four times before I turned thirteen. Lifeguards will only save you if they see you are drowning. You have to raise your head above water occasionally and wave your arms.

Never let your raft drift close to the sharp edges of a jetty or dump you into the whirling currents between the huge rocks.

There is a terrible tang to the taste of drowning. Sea water tastes like static. It burns your throat and lungs. Dark green and black water can bubble and foam, like pop-rocks, but don't swallow or breathe it in.

Water only gives you up when the crabs are done with you. Sometimes it never gives you up. My brother disappeared in water. He went scuba diving, alone, in the early hours before dawn, loaded up on alcohol and anti-depressants. He couldn't raise his head above water, couldn't wave his arms, shout or scream, ever. Or I didn't hear. I never heard beyond the static in his voice.

But it's not the static that matters. It's the fizz in a gift you don't want; a dirty, patched raft under you as you ride a wave, sunburned, but flying high over a jetty; one or two good friends cheering you, on a day you don't drown though you think maybe you could, maybe this will be the day you breathe the tang and burn of that elusive thing you've been trying to glimpse in the wrong places: in the woods, in family, in bubbles and rip tides; it's learning how to wave and shout so a life-guard somewhere can see you need help out of the deep tidal pools where you can't breathe in swirling silence between jetty rocks put there to protect against only erosion and storms.

Pushbroom

Steve Myers

The balance has gone out from under
Ferrell Smithy's pushbroom, with no one

to honor or even remember him,
propped upright, tipped forward, its haft to his chest,

or lament the passing of his floor routine.
No one ever had a better name

in Trenton, refined as Duke Ellington's moustache,
or to warehouse work was so inclined.

Rage

Kelli Simpson

My mother left me
her good dishes and poor choices
her letters and let him
her turquoise and rage

Three Purples

Anna Evas

I. Violettes Cristallisees

Tyrian purple,
your candied petals

flavor my humiliations
with a hint

of French soap.
Freshened,
I straighten like a tree
roosting with martins.

II. Wisteria

How is it, being real,
you evoke the unreal?
In Tuam,

your aerial lavenders
suggest a soiree of elves.
In Tokyo,

the paintbrush of Hiroshige
turns you into a curtain
for a shrine.

III. Lavender Field

When your seaworthy blues
moor in the sun's

late saffron,
I board the ship

whose keel
night-worms devour.

As I sink
into bottomless color,

my hands rise up
in surrender.

German Translations

Matthew Landrum

-original German poetry by Katharina Müller

I.

Kalte Morgenluft durchfließt die Lungen
Regt an zu neuen Taten
Sonne lässt mich am Fenster verweilen
Die Sonntagmorgenrevolution--wird erst Montag starten.

II.

Und zwischen seinen Schulterblättern
mein milchzartes Refugium.
Die Welt zieht weiter ihre Kreise,
die Zeit verrennt sich, schreiend, stumm.
Lächelnd zieh' ich mich zurück. Naiv und weise.

III.

zurück

Großstadttropen
Eiskaffee
Sonnenbrillen Hosenträger

im Untergrund
dein Wasserfall

I. Sunday Revolution

Cold morning air fills my lungs
a call to action
the sun keeps me at the window
the Sunday morning revolution--
will start first thing Monday.

II. Milk- Refuge

And there between his shoulder blades,
my milk-gentle refuge.
The world goes on spinning.
Time runs on the wrong track, screaming, silent.
I pull away, smiling. Naive and wise.

III. Underground

back--

metropolitan tropics:
iced coffee,
sun glasses, suspenders--

in the underground,
your waterfall--

IV.

in einem anderen leben

unsere wege durch die stadt
geometrien des letzten sommertages
wo ich unsere bahnen kreuze
asymptotische berührungen
deine hand an meiner wange
gibt es kein anderes gefühl
als das unseres anderen leben
wo ich wüsste wie du aussiehst,
wenn du schläfst.

IV. In Another Life

in another life

our ways through the city
geometries of the last day of summer
where I cross our tracks
asymptotic touches
your hand on my cheek
no other feeling
than that of the other life
where I would know what you look like
when you're asleep

Still Life with Bride

Timothy Clutter

The clapper
in the bell
in the steeple
fell off years back, a lightning strike,
and afterward
faith shrank to
the spaces
between the notes
in hymnals.

I shrank
to the diameter
of a ring
and velvet petals like drops of onset,
faces with lipstick,
thank-you notes,
and minute rice
for fertility.

A hidden pearl
tradition-sewn
in proper gown
off-white, like me, more off- than white,
a bell of fabric
ringing silence
but for the crush
of uncertainty
and satin.

Then I return
to infant faith
that swings and
rings no longer, now the clapper in the bell
in the steeple
is in me
—silence
my vow
no more.

Parlous Ink

Timothy Clutter

Parlous ink writhes over the page,
the vigilant letters coil,
float on muscular fear,
unlatch their jaws, then—period!—strike.
History won't back down—it forks
and feathers my mind with tongue
that has licked a blackberry branch,
watches with slivered eyes
born as glittering shards, and hisses
“I have fangs for skin too tender.”

Dry scales glide down wet page
tracing rumors of rumors of rumors,
jagging a winter-lightning path,
slipping from yesterday's skin
—fragile, deformed, translucent—
paper armor,
to be shredded by a brawling wind,
to be studied or stepped on
or encased in the nature museum
as warning.

History slithers on.

Dierdre

Timothy Clutter

From my bed in the earth, dug by the realist,
on paper a husband, thirsting for treasure now
buried, like swan hatchlings, in my dry womb.

I leer back at the face of a pock-marked moon;
her frosty beams marbleize my own scarred face,
and she now my only mourner.

Now earthworms as blind as the realist to beauty
use me for a congress, as dead as a table,
now they wear my jewels, my sapphires and garnets.

Peruvian emeralds and jacinth and rubies
and pearls white but pinkish if stared at in moonlight,
now stuffed in my womb, in my satin-lined cask,

I found, like all treasures worth keeping, not trying—
while measuring shoreline, befriending the tide
and vainly trying to herd the sunset.

“Poor Deirdre was given in youth to the realist,
an ocean she saw but never again family,
never the braes and glens of her childhood.”

Creatures were all that we shared on the island—
swans, goats, a spiritless husband made me hunger
a face without feathers and hair without horns.

Was I broke the wings of the devious swans,
I sang to the truculent goats as I milked them,
was I fed our bodies while he starved on greed.

He cracked his back digging, his eyes in the mud,
romancing and dancing not wife but a spade,
whistling of mammon and cursing the sunset.

So what did I owe to the realist who worked me,

who gave me no bairns and traded no tenderness?
—Deirdre to bury and righteous revenge.

The obscene necks of the swans I twisted,
goat udders I stabbed 'til the milk ran red,
chose a sunken bed whose leaves made a blanket.

And then I lay down where I had known moonbeams
would wash me. The small gems I swallowed
or shoved deep within me and sated my womb.

I keep them for dowry, he never will find
for the bastard will never dig me up again,
one plot on the isle will his avarice shun.

The realist unknowing (as they ever are)
that he covers all treasure when he covers me,
then I and the earthworms will wear my revenge.

How cold the dirt falling, and pebbles they sting,
the moon has a much nearer face, black and greedy,
framed by a halo of pock-marked grief.

When I learned what my name meant, I knew of my worth,
knew at last why the family never sold their plaid child
but—poor little Deirdre—had to give her away.

Port Man Toe

Timothy Clutter

He took to making up the words
—*creatoria, rapunzeline*—

and stringing them like garlands,
—*monikernels of lexicorn, meanderloads of glossipedes*—

felt cool frisson in warring sounds,
—*teutongitude meets latin-tude in maledictionary*—

withstood bleeding guardian serpents of spell-check,
—*syllabamanders, reptilographs*—

knowing language likes to sleep around
but may not stay for breakfast.
—*impolite friction, despairachute*—

So [sic] at heart was he,
he took his vorpal pistol and
lewiscarrolled himself to
—*beelzeblivion, hyperboleternity*.

Boy

Liz Bruno

He is lean and firm, as thin and cold as a razor blade.

I watch him study his face in the bathroom mirror.

He is a man, he thinks, when he wears a beard.

He is a boy, he thinks, when his cheeks are cleared.

I watch him fight battle after battle in this glass,

Warring with each solidier who goes marching past.

There is the general with wide sideburns

And the admiral with a curling moustache.

I watch him shoot down each man who goes parading by,

Mowing down each version when it grows too high.

He's learned to alter himself with the flick of his wrist,

To drown himself using the faucet's drip.

Every time I look up, he's saluting someone else.

The Night-Blindness Epidemic

Leland Cacayan

Families were the first to notice. Sammy's father must have driven past his house seventeen times before realizing his mistake. He was joined the following night by Anthony's father; the night after, Maria's; and then, by the end of the week, my father in his rounds around the block. Maria's father didn't even have a job! The epidemic spread quickly, and soon, the whole neighborhood was illuminated by a grand circuit of fathers — a paternal derby held under the moonlight. In the grasses, watching our fathers make another lap, we bet on whose father would come home first, and whose mother would blame night-blindness for the partially burnt dinner that night. Funny how the burnt portions of the casserole were always reserved for our fathers.

Tumble

Jessica Pierce

Here I never shush my body. See
the light on my shoulders, on my head? Crowned,
I rustle through ferns like water, step
onto the stone wall, follow it into
the woods where no one can ever find me,
unless I want them to. Tender mosses,
lustrous deer skulls, fierce trees
with muscled limbs—all of them keep my secrets
safe. I can trick you so you think a rock is just
a rock. A rock is never
just a rock. Listen to all of the promises
this loamed earth offers. Be not
afraid. We are never going back.

What a Beautiful Beyond We See

Lena Breda

Walking through snow,
I see with blizzard eyes
How lovely your gray hair will be
And how much I will cherish
Watching you eat Raisin Bran
on wrinkled Sunday mornings in fall
and asking me
a three-lettered word for
Satisfaction.

And for me?

My hand was always suited for the
wooden clasp of a cane
And the silken cave of your palm.

Reminiscence

Andrea Moorhead

the heartbeat remains
here within my hands
a melody so translucent
that I can no longer perceive
the spaces between the notes
the winding line of a broken chord.

What Forms?

Alita Pirkopf

I will fling wild words
at the white waves,
 to be thrown back and forth
 as I watch silently
 from the still beach.
 Perhaps something of nature,
or from inside my own head,
will rise and come to me
 in new form and clarity
as I ponder ancient forms—
odes, epics, black dolphins,
scuttling crabs—
against a horizon
where eternity
stretches in a wordless,
wondrous, universe.

Moon Slide

Judith Janoo

My mother sometimes rides with me
down the old oak banister,
our shadows moon-sewn

close, her loose blue dress
clover-flecked, my slacks
frictionless

she asks if Dad got his wood in.
“He’s fine, he’s alone,
he eats lunches out

when he can see to drive.
I wish he’d mention
your name.”

Astride the scalloped banister,
she recalls I once flew
down over these stairs.

I was sure I could fly,
that one day I’d take us above
the toll of my father’s war.

She smells of cinnamon
as I lean into her, sail down
the moon-chosen railing

her dress bellied,
my legs free.

PROSE

PROSE EDITOR'S LETTER

Euphony began in the first spring of the new millennium. It's now the spring of 2018; UChicago's oldest literary journal has officially reached adulthood. They grow up so fast, don't they?

This season also marks the first time in a decade that *Euphony* has held a submission contest. We asked for original prose pieces five pages or shorter. From the slew of high-quality entries, we managed to select two to publish—both, as it would happen, from current UChicago students: our runner-up, “Columbus, Near Briggsdale” by Michael Wiley, and our \$50 prize-winner, “Odd One Out” by Corinne Rutledge. Congratulations, and a huge thanks to everyone who submitted!

Our standard-submission prose is no less sensational. In contrast to Chicago's colorful career towards a storybook summer—into which the campus has emerged from its cocoon of coats and cocoa with sighs of relief—the scrutiny of our review board has yielded a rather dark trio of pieces. We follow a child, forced to take a role in the sinister truths of an adult world she does not fully understand; the temerity and consequences of this world are thrown into relief upon a background of indifferent red rock. We follow an adult, whose adult world takes the nothing he has and makes it even less; when cruelty and confusion obscure hope, the only way to go is down. And finally, history blends between our cover and our content with “Kindness in Leningrad.” We witness the decay of decency in the protagonist's tunnel vision of survival, on the frigid theater of the besieged Soviet Union. You need only read on to discover what becomes of her humanity.

And so, dear reader—pull up a lawn chair, soak up the sun, and enjoy the prose of the Spring 2018 issue of *Euphony*.

Cheers,
Ben

Odd One Out

Corinne Rutledge

Short Story Contest Winner

I've always been the odd one out. Jayne and Hennri never needed me like I needed them. They met first, in kindergarten. I was sick the first day of school, and arrived on day two a thoroughly tired and nervous mess, my shoes patched along the sides where the seams had split. Jayne and Hennri took me in, as kindly neighbors would a stray dog from a storm. That first day, under the bright florescent lights and squished between the mustard yellow walls of *The Intrepid* playroom, I watched them play and said barely a word. Already, they worked so well together. I could tell. I was an addition to their dynamic duo. Only we didn't become a trio. We became a duo plus one.

I like to think that I was satisfied, at first. Even though the walls were yellow and we weren't allowed to leave until our parents picked us up at 6:00, there were plenty of toys. Stacks of blocks, troughs of Legos. Vintage stuff. Then there were the robot kits and tablets, and a few computer games that could be hooked up to the one VR system. There was always a line for that one. But Jayne and Hennri and I always went for the dinosaurs. Piles of multicolored plastic shapes. Hennri pointed out that most of them were represented inaccurately, that they would have been different colors, or had feathers. Jayne reached out to pinch her with the T-Rex's mouth, Hennri squealed and tossed a handful of Stegosauruses at her, and I laughed, my own hands going for the pterodactyl. That's when it was easy.

Then the preschool was moved to a different room while repairs were done. The new place was shiny and silver, like my dad's uniform, with all its pins and ribbons. Later he told me *The Intrepid* was running out of room, that the number of kids that year was unprecedented, that the ship was struggling to hold them all. Our preschool had been converted into a nursery. But there weren't as many toys in the new place. I grabbed a dinosaur, turned around, and found Jayne holding out her hand. There were only two. For the rest of the day, I watched her and Hennri gambol the tiny figures about, my own hands empty.

You always need a partner. "With your partner, come up with a few ideas...", "Turn to your partner, and discuss..." Jayne and Hennri would put their heads together and whisper, their backs to the world. If I leaned closer to hear, I would feel my own desperation weighing on me like a wet towel. Sometimes they would giggle or shriek, too loud,

and the teacher would tell them off. But it was with an indulgent smile.

I sat there, staring at my computer screen, until being forcibly paired off, a different classmate every time. I didn't talk much, and my eyes drifted towards my friends. During recess, the army let us use their training gym, which was every kid's dream, like a jungle of rubber and plastic. At least there, I could go back to being the "plus one". My legs were the longest and the fastest, so I was always picked for Capture the Flag.

I guess school is just designed for people who already work in sync. School and life. While Jayne and Hennri played games at the arcade, the ones that required two players, I worked on the flight simulator. The extra points it got me didn't seem to mean much, but my dad patted my shoulder approvingly.

Group projects: a dreaded pair of words. Once, I made the mistake of thinking Jayne and Hennri would want a third project member. I asked my mom to take me over to Jayne's living quarters. I brought glue and scissors and colored construction paper. But when I got to her room, the room that was so much bigger than mine, the room that had a window, she and Hennri looked at me with eyes I don't ever want to see again. Like I was a bit of sludge on a perfectly clean white wall. I didn't even have time to take in the magnificent view peeking out from behind them before I turned and left. Ran away. I didn't assume anymore after that.

We don't really do birthday parties, usually. Not enough space, not enough resources. Jayne always got one, though. A big one. And I was always invited.

I showed up late to Jayne's thirteenth birthday party. I don't think it was my fault. She barged towards me and made an acidic joke. I don't remember the joke either, but I remember the tears that were suddenly there, right behind my eyes. Jayne snatched up her present and ripped off the paper I had carefully taped over it the night before. Later, I watched her toss it onto a large pile in a corner.

The extra points on the flight simulator added up. Sometimes, a crowd would form around me while I operated the controls, oohs and ahs accompanying my every move. When it got loud enough, filling my ears like warm water from the shower, suddenly they'd be there, Jayne at my right shoulder, whooping excitedly, Hennri at my left offering advice. The energy that moved through the room was infectious.

In fighter training, I was paired with Hennri, because our last names were closer alphabetically. I hated that my heart lifted, and I tried to stamp it back down. The flight suit chafed at my waist; though the orange material was smooth, it was too big for me. Hennri rolled her eyes good-naturedly as I adjusted my belt. On the first try, I was the pilot, and she was the gunner. I got into my seat and strapped myself in,

the motions familiar from all the times I'd done so on the simulator. It was so familiar, and at the same time, my blood was boiling. When we dropped into space, the thrill skittered through my veins and I let out a laugh. Then a whoop, because nothing compares to your first moment of real flight.

Our ship danced and twirled through the endless night, speckled with stars. I remember laughing, again and again, and I think Hennri did too. But in that moment, I was too wrapped up in my own head and heart to notice. Targets and obstacles were presented, floating debris and roughly painted red rings that had been cast adrift in space. I dodged and flipped and sped and slowed, while Hennri blasted as much as she could out of our way. Each shot she took, dead-on. Precise, surgical. When we re-landed and jumped from the cockpit, I felt lighter, even as gravity resettled itself in my bones. I turned, rounding the silver siding of the ship, and glanced around for Hennri. She was hugging Jayne.

Sometimes, between trainings and history lessons, my schedule allowed me enough time to eat in the dining hall, rather than shoving down a quick snack and getting right back to work. On the observation deck, the wrap-around window looked out over empty blackness, and sometimes, the wide swell of the blue, blue earth. It always surprised me with its brightness, its color. Like a jewel dropped onto black velvet.

Our graduation party was insane. For the first time, we were allowed to drink. Parent volunteers stood near the doors, but dancing on tables seemed to be expected. Jayne leapt up first. Hennri followed, her drink spilling over her hand. They giggled, pupils wide, as the room cheered. Jayne swayed into a dance, and the cheering grew. She knew just how to move her arms and toss her hair. Then she reached her hand down to me, and pulled me up with them. The cheering was suddenly like clouds in my ears, pierced by a few whistles. Shrill, then wild. I felt Jayne and Hennri take my hands, and we were spinning, skipping. My feet flirting with the edges of the table. Everything was soft and bright, and from somewhere, music was melting in my ears. I felt like I was with them that night. Not the odd one out. Not the plus one. But it was almost worse. To feel so close to them. Because at the same time, I could feel the earlier separation in my chest, pulling taut. I wanted to exist in this moment, only this moment. But I couldn't. No one can.

It was that night that Jayne told me she was planning a post-graduation trip. Her mom had all these connections after all. A last hurrah before beginning full-time army duties. Was I surprised that she asked me to come? Part of me was. Another part wanted to say no. But of course I didn't.

They say it's common for the ship-born to want to go back. To set their feet down. Earth is still our place, even if we can't call it home.

There are lots of post-education programs set up. Tours, scholar-

ships, that kind of thing. But Jayne and her mom were determined to find a place off the beaten track. Nothing but the best for her little girl. The long silver shuttle dropped us off at the outskirts of a city with communicators in our helmets. Just the three of us.

The silence was impossible. *The Intrepid* was never silent. Always heating, always moving, always breathing. This silence was a gag, a blanket, a curtain.

Skyscrapers absurdly large. Their sides rusted and collapsing. The sunlight that glanced off their sides jabbed at my eyes, but I didn't stop looking. The gray ground was rough under my boots, cracked and flooded into marshy areas where white blossoms sprouted. I reached out to stroke one. Jayne told me to be careful, that we weren't sure what was still soaking in radiation, and that our full-body suits could not protect us from everything. When she wasn't looking, I ran a finger down the side of the flower. I could barely feel anything through the suit. Only that it was springy and delicate.

I trailed a little behind them. Jayne kicked at cracked cans and Henri took pictures. She even laughed at the signs in doorways that proclaimed stores "open". Jayne saw something move and instead of keeping her distance, chased the two-headed snake until it disappeared down a drain.

I saw ghosts. Moving through doorways, looking out windows, dumping their trash. The silence was pressed over my ears, my breath echoing in my helmet. How many feet had walked where we now did? Carrying bodies to work, to family, to home. And how many of them had burned with the first wave of attacks?

Wind whistled through unseen holes and cracks. A low moaning. Jayne and Henri chatted, and I kept a half-step behind them. I shivered, though the suit kept my body at optimal temperature. Goosebumps appeared all over me. I was suddenly aware of where I was, of what ground I disturbed with my steps. Not sacred. But a graveyard. This space had once been filled. And now it was empty. Its people buried or blown away. Its temples and homes crumbling into dust. Its knowledge and beauty irretrievable. A cavern opened in my chest.

We were supposed to meet the ship outside the fallen city, on a small rise. It was brown and dusty. Plants scraggly and dry. We were there early, so Jayne and Henri began quizzing each other for our next promotional test. Fine particles of dirt drifted around them as they faced each other.

Farther from the city, another small rise loomed. It was green. I started walking towards it. Henri asked where I was going. I said I was going for a walk. Jayne said to remember the shuttle would be coming back soon. I told her I knew. Henri said to watch out for the mutant bears. I would have rolled my eyes if I'd been paying more attention.

The side of the rise was steep. The muscles in my legs bunched and tightened. My breath came louder in my ears. The ground was soft under my feet, and the green was greener than I had thought possible. Greener than any of the pale starved plants in the basement of *The Intrepid*. Each blade of grass waved and bent as I walked. There must have been a breeze, too soft for my hearing.

Before me stretched more hills. A blanket of green. No end in sight. The sky and the ground raced towards each other and collided at the horizon. How could all this space condense to a single line? Leaves twirled in the sky and a yellow bird twittered, though the sound was muffled. I wanted to remove my helmet. I wanted to feel that wind brush past my neck, ruffle my hair. I wanted to hear birdsong, and feel the warmth of the sunlight on my cheeks. But that was impossible.

So I sat. And I looked.

Columbus, Near Briggsdale

Michael Wiley

Short Story Contest Runner-Up

After the teenagers began using our home for sex, Marcie and I stood in the lobby of the Grand Pacific. It was a fine hotel, I thought. Perhaps not grand, but certainly fine. Marcie was saying something about the chandelier. "Harold, would you look at those diamonds? Oh, dear, those can't be real! My God, how positively awful those diamonds are. And those curtains! Would you look at those curtains? My Lord, how dreadful those curtains are."

She is a petite woman, Marcie, with absolutely no patience for gaudy, no fancy for fancy things. I should have known that Chicago would not win her. She does, after all, think it suspicious when the tops of buildings disappear into clouds. "Why must they be so tall? For what good reason?" She snarled at Chicago's busses, clogged her ears as its trains screeched along the overhead rails. Marcie prefers life's simplicities; she appreciates, for example, the compactness of an Amtrak restroom. We had taken one of their trains from Columbus (an affair which she had originally met with skepticism, but sadly she was bored by long rides in the car and petrified by the concept of flight). I counted windmills through the square window. Marcie excused herself for thirty minutes and returned with a frantic demeanor: "Harold, you simply must see it! The coat hook folds into the door, Harold, just like that, and the changing table hangs above the toilet by the slightest scrap of Velcro! Oh, and the faucets! Harold, the faucets."

The reason for this trip, as I have mentioned, was that the teenagers began using our home for sex. Marcie and I inhabit a small apartment on the outskirts of Columbus, near Briggsdale. We have a single bedroom, a single bathroom, and a room with a fridge and faucet that could be considered the kitchen. The walls are "a calming beige," according to Marcie, who had the idea to paint over "that garish green" in the bedroom. It had also been her idea to live there. After our children moved out of the old house, the place felt too big to her. It had too much space. "Honey, I'm drowning in all this space," Marcie told me.

Teenagers had been using the garage for sex. The garage is not connected to the rest of the apartment, so I suppose it is not entirely honest to say that they had been having sex in our home. They had been having sex near our home, separated from us by a short skip through the yard. On top of the lawn mower, between the racks of gardening

equipment—one can only imagine how they did it. But they did do it, and that is the point.

It took me a while to figure it out, too. My suspicion began on a Tuesday evening, when I wandered into the yard to have a cigarette before bed. Stepping through the soft grass, I pulled a pack of Kools from the pocket of my pajama bottoms. A nearby telephone pole hummed softly, and I felt something nudge the corner of my slipper. I bent down to examine the object in the faint glow of a neighbor's porchlight: a beer can. An empty Budweiser. In the moment I paid little mind to the litter, as it probably belonged to one of the other tenants. I finished my cigarette and carried the can inside with me, then fell into bed on my side of the mattress.

The following evening, a Wednesday, I stepped into the grass to find that the garage door had been opened. Only slightly—a crack in the threshold, a strip of darkness against the white door. I moved across the yard and closed it myself, wiggling the knob back and forth in my fingers to ensure that it had been shut. Again, I paid little mind to this. The wind had probably pushed it open, I thought. After all, there is no lock on the door; I should think that the wind often makes its way through. I resolved to call the landlord, tell him to install a lock. Tomorrow I will. Perhaps not though. What was it he had told me the last time? "It's too many damn keys to carry. I can't keep track." That was it, I recalled as I returned to the house, returned to Marcie.

The following Friday I was all out of cigarettes, but still I ambled into the yard. Without a smoke my sleep was lousy. I had known my landlord to be a heavy smoker, a two-packs-a-day man for sure, and I hoped that he might keep a spare carton in the garage. The lawn was free of cans, and the garage door was firmly closed. I opened it with my left hand and went inside, waving my arms in the dark, feeling for the chain. There was a faint smell of beer, and the air felt heavy and moist like that of a locker room. I felt the chain with my left hand and gave it a tug.

Before continuing, I would like to reiterate that my wife and I are good, suburban people. We go to Service. We keep to ourselves. We brush our teeth, and we sleep at reasonable hours. Marcie and I have made love, but we refrain from sex as all good, suburban people do. It is with great sorrow, then, that I looked down at the floor of that garage. Down at my feet sat a boy and a girl, buck nude, their legs intertwined, hands covering each other's mouths. They stared up at me, their eyes wide like those of a catfish. At first there was silence, but I soon broke it.

"I... you... ruh... Ruffians! True ruffians! Vagabonds! Hooligans!" I threw my arms and stamped my slippers against the concrete. I hurled buckets of paint from the shelves. "Remove yourselves!" The offenders untangled their limbs, and the girl gathered her personals in a frenzy.

“Leave it! Just leave it!” the boy yelled, grabbing her hand and yanking her out into the yard. Having been roused by the commotion, Marcie stood at the window rubbing sleep from her eyes. She looked down in horror as they ran through the grass, the boy cupping his genitals in an open palm, the girl trying madly to fasten her bra. “Oh, God! Oh my good, good God!” Tears came to her eyes as she ran to the telephone, poking at the numbers with shaken fingers. First she called the police, then the landlord. “Put a lock on that door this instant! For the love of God, lock that door!”

She slammed the phone back into the receiver and sobbed into her nightgown, alone, while I drove to the corner store for cigarettes.

This was, I thought, good cause for a vacation. The landlord had agreed to install the lock within a week, a week Marcie and I decided to spend in Chicago. We have a daughter at one of the universities there. She studies politics, and she does not have sex or drink. Our daughter comes from good, suburban people, I thought quietly to myself as we entered the Grand Pacific. Marcie led me to the reception desk.

“We would like a room,” she said to the woman there. “Separate beds, please.”

“Separate beds?” I asked, but she seemed not to hear me. The woman at the desk handed us the key to a room on the seventh floor. The Grand Pacific does not allow smoking indoors, so I took my nighttime cigarette out onto the street. I stood at the edge of the sidewalk in my pajamas and slippers, a cigarette pressed between my lips. The wind pulled fiercely at my robe, and one of the valet boys came over to me.

“Need a light, sir?” he asked, and I accepted. He held a lighter up to my face. I took a long drag, looking the young man up and down as I did so. He was expecting a tip.

“Say, kid, you have a woman?” I asked, and he nodded that he did. “A real nice one,” he said and smiled.

“You two ever gone on a trip together? Just the two of you?” When he said that he had, I asked him whether they ever sleep in separate beds. He laughed at first, then straightened up. “Of course not,” he explained. “Never.”

“Yeah,” I said slowly, finishing my cigarette. “I figured you’d say so. Sorry, kid, left my wallet in the room. Thanks for the light.”

I took the elevator back to the seventh floor and fell into the bed near the window. Marcie sat in her own bed reading a novel. She hadn’t said anything when I entered the room. I adjusted my pillows and tucked my feet under the blankets, then sat up against the headboard for a moment. Examined the empty carpet between the beds. “What is it Harold,” Marcie said flatly. “My Word, you’re absolutely brooding.”

I sighed heavily, wondering whether I should go back outside and have another cigarette. No, I thought, I can’t show my face in front of

that valet boy again. Instead I spoke to my wife. “It’s just the way they were doing it. That’s all.”

“Who, dear?”

“Those kids. The teenagers in the garage. They were all tangled up, all their limbs and various extremities. It’s just... It was like nothing I’ve ever seen before.”

“Oh, you be quiet now,” she said, her nose curling up. “We promised we would never speak of it.”

“I know, Marcie. We did promise that,” I said. My sheets were so soft, so warm. They were like bird feathers, or the skin of a younger woman. “But I think I want to try it.”

“Harold!” she gasped. “Stop this now. It’s been months since we—”

“Marcie, I know! Don’t you think I know that? Of course I know how long it’s been.” Marcie slammed her book down into her lap. She looked at me seriously now, her mouth slightly open. Eyes full of terror, like she’d accidentally wandered into a dogfight or something—pushed through a crowd of shouting men, money being thrown about, animals tearing into each other’s limbs. I looked at her with eyes full of surrender, eyes full of longing, the way a man looks at the woman he’s meant to love. “How long, Marcie? How long do we have? There are so many things I want to do, Marcie. So many things I haven’t done. Please, for the love of God, let me join you. Please let me come over there.” I kicked aside my sheets and moved to the side of her bed.

Marcie looked up at me with those familiar catfish eyes. “N... n... no, no you may not. Of course you may not,” she said, reaching desperately for the lamp switch. She nearly threw herself out of bed grabbing for the thing. Finally she caught it with the tip of her ring finger and pushed it down.

Then everything was still. I stood in the nearly dark hotel room, the faint glimmer of Chicago’s skyline falling through our window. Marcie breathed heavily and covered her face with a blanket. “It’s okay, sweetie,” I said, patting the outside of her thigh. “I’m okay, dear, really.” I walked to the window and closed the blinds. (Marcie resents the brightness of city lights.) “Sleep well, Marcie,” I said, taking a seat on the corner of my own mattress, alone.

The Gorge

Christian Michener

When we went gorging we sang up the gorge, up the gorge, up the gorge we go. We scabbled over pebbles and past the cacti that looked like angry pickles and the dusty red rocks and over boulders stained the color of our summer skin until it got late or too hot or the shadows made us cold and we'd turn around and go back down.

Then we'd sing, down the gorge, down the gorge, down the gorge we go.

There was me and Tommy and Tommy's older brother Camus who had a crush on me and sometimes Elisabetta from one of the trailers in the valley when she or her mother wasn't napping and sometimes my sister who I always had to watch. First came the valley where we all lived then came up the valley above where we all lived and then came the gorge. Our house was the last you passed and it was made of hay bales and old tires inside but looked like any old house, and below it there was the old barn the twins lived in who were still too young and two normal homes and an old Methodist church that was empty now but where Sandy and Samson used to live. The first time Samson left, Sandy had said, he'll be back, ain't the first time he's run away, not that I care where he is. But then she stopped saying that when she came to visit my mother for coffee and then she stopped coming to visit and then she was gone too.

And so now what am I supposed to do? my mother said.

Do whatever you want, my father said.

She was my only friend, she said.

My father glanced at me exactly like he looked at me when I saw him and Sandy kissing. He looked at me but then he couldn't and stopped looking. My mother and Sandy had been having coffee and were saying goodbye in the driveway when my mother went back inside because she forgot something. My father was washing the car and Sandy came up and put her hand on his butt and kissed him on the lips like they do in the movies. Jesus, my father said, are you nuts? and that was when he looked at me.

She's not the only woman here, my father said to my mother

She isn't here, my mother said. That's the problem. Nobody's here. You're not even here.

I do have to work, my father said. He rubbed his head like he always did when they fought. We moved here because he couldn't take

the city. Great, we trade pollution and noise for rednecks and hippies, my mother said. What is it you want, Caroline? he would ask. What is it exactly that makes you happy?

And it doesn't matter who's here anyway, my mother said. She gestured out the large window of our living room. Cliffs of rusty brown stabbed the sky. This isn't here, she said. This is nowhere. Your god-damn nowhere.

We stood looking back at up the valley, right where the gorge started to squeeze. From there it looked like the earth had ripped itself open, spread wide and flowed out and turned green when it rained and you stared out into haze and on some days you thought the haze was Los Angeles and on some days you thought it was the ocean.

It's not the world at all, Camus had told us. Our mom and dad's souls go there at night, to fly around.

What do they do? Elisabetta said, but I didn't say a thing, pretending I wasn't jealous.

I punch them at night, Camus said, while they're sleeping. They don't move.

Once I punched my mother sleeping, and she said, what the hell are you doing? but I didn't tell Camus.

We weren't allowed to go further without my mother. Always need to see you, she said. Not seeing you is going too far. Her head was down because the hill was steep and it was hot and she'd said she'd go with us only with a sigh. She hardly left the couch since Sandy left but today she said we could go up to the very top if we wanted to. The top was where the gorge finally ended and you had to climb up the cliff or turn around which we always did because my mother said no way are you allowed to climb that hill.

Elisabetta waited with me but Tommy and Camus were around the bend in the gorge where they knew my mother couldn't see them but they didn't care because when somebody else's mother yelled at you it didn't really matter.

Come on, Tommy said from behind me.

Just a minute, I said. I couldn't say I was waiting for my mother because they would say, who cares about your mother?

When I got around the bend the walls of the gorge came together far ahead of me like two doors closing off the sky and that was where we would turn around. Tommy and Camus were each standing on one of the red round rocks that had rolled down the hillsides over the years. Years and years and years, my father said. Dinosaurs played dodgeball with those rocks, he said. We climbed over them and hid behind them and jumped out and yelled heh! and would see how many of us could stand together on top of one. I would come home nearly choking with

dirt and dust and the day after would see scrapes all over me. You will be shaking dust out of your socks in heaven, my mother said.

Tommy and Camus were staring into a little space between the rocks and the cliff. They climbed down where I could only see their heads. It was OK to be there but they looked around like it wasn't. I went running over and so did Elisabetta.

"Go away," Tommy said.

Elisabetta stopped but I climbed up on the red rock. Tommy and Camus were staring at something stuck way down in the dirt. It looked like a big cardboard doll, bigger than any doll I ever had, bigger than me, like a deer but it had fingers and shoes and was covered in blue cloth. I couldn't tell whether it was coming up out of the dust or crawling back into it.

What is that? I said.

Don't touch it, Camus said.

It's a soul, Tommy said.

I felt a hollow place in my chest I didn't know had been there. I heard that when we die we become souls but this wasn't what I wanted to be, looking like a dead deer with dirt on it. Whose soul is it? I said.

Souls don't belong to people, Camus said. Souls are souls.

You said your parents had souls, I said.

Amy! my mother yelled.

Don't tell her! Camus said.

She'll kill it, Tommy said.

Aren't souls dead? I asked. My mother wouldn't kill anything.

But Tommy was pushing me away, back to my mother, and Camus was coming with him. Souls never die, Tommy said. That's why they're souls.

Camus pinched my arm. Not hard but it hurt. Don't tell your mother, he whispered.

If you don't tell, Tommy said, you can come back with us. We'll come back tonight and watch the soul.

I didn't want to do that but I said, watch it do what?

Go into the haze, Tommy said.

But then one day came and another day came and Tommy and Camus never came back. They said they had to work in their parents' garden. I asked if I could help but my mother said no, that it wasn't a garden for kids.

But Tommy and Camus work there, I said.

That doesn't mean it's a place for kids, she said.

On the way back down the gorge Tommy had walked on the far side from the soul so nobody could see it, and we all walked with him. I don't even remember getting to the end because I could only think

about the dusty doll. We sang, down the gorge, down the gorge, down the gorge we go louder than we usually did. My mother was hot and came plopping down the hillside into up the valley and then the valley and collapsed onto the couch and said can't you find something else to do with your time?

Every night I woke up and looked at my bedroom wall in the direction of the gorge. Did souls fly through windows and what did souls do anyway? Did they take you with them and never bring you back? Maybe that's what happened to Sandy and Samson. One time Samson came to our house and stood at the end of the driveway and yelled, where the hell is my wife?

My father stood near the end of the driveway but not all the way to the end. You just go on home, my father said. You've had a little too much to drink.

Oh, hey, Mister BMW, Samson said. Mister Rich come to lecture me. Is that what you do with my wife too? he yelled. Tell her to go on home once you're done?

Just go on home, Samson. Your wife isn't here.

He started to turn around to tell me to leave but the front door opened. What's the matter? my mother said when she came out. Samson was shuffling home and yelling something I couldn't understand.

Nothing, my father said. He's drunk.

Again? my mother said. In the middle of the day? Poor Sandy, she said.

One night I watched the moon slide across my floor and I thought, if I were a soul this is the night I would fly into the haze, and I hurried out of my room and jumped into bed between my parents.

What's this? my father asked. What have we here? He let me stay a minute and then he told me I had to go back to my own room. He gave me a little push and said, Go on, sweetie, everything's fine.

I decided I would wait one more day and then I would tell my dad I wanted to see the red rocks but then Tommy and Camus came up to the house after dinner the next day. My father was sweeping the slate on the side where we had a patio, where Sandy kissed him after having coffee with my mother and my father said Jesus are you nuts. She was always having coffee but one time she came out of the house and said, See you, sugar, and when I went inside nobody was there. My mother was at the store and my father was out in the backyard painting a dresser and whistling.

We're going up there tonight, Camus said. At midnight.

At night? I said. I didn't know this is what they meant. What will your parents say? I said.

They don't care, Tommy said. They said it'll be all right.

My mom says it's all right too, I said.

I had never been in the night alone before when it was all dark except for what the moon took away. I was surprised at how still and whisper empty the world was. It wasn't like there was much around during the day—we were all just sitting in some big open space in the world—but the silence seemed bigger in the dark. Just the old barn and the old church where Samson and Sandy used to live and the few houses and the trailers around the corner you couldn't see.

Above me the dark windows where my parents and sister were sleeping stayed dark. I heard Tommy and Camus talking before I saw them and when they saw me they asked if I was ready and then we climbed into up the valley towards the night sky. My shoulders hurt but I wasn't going to let Tommy and Camus know I was scared. It got hard to walk once we got into the gorge and the shadows were deeper.

We won't be able to find it, I said. We should have brought a flashlight.

You're just scared, Camus said.

We moved to the side of the gorge where the soul was but it seemed like forever that we kept walking. What if we missed it already? I asked but nobody said anything. I looked back over my shoulder but could only see the sides of the gorge as dark walls holding up the blue night. What if my mother found my bed empty? I am going to tell her I was sleepwalking, I thought.

Ahead of us the gorge was disappearing into its own shadow. The sky's black was brushed lighter and I wondered if that was because morning was coming. I was about to say we should turn back, but then we found the rocks and climbed up on them. In their shadows the dark was even darker. I swallowed hard and wondered why I came and if I might be taken away by the soul. Where do you go? I wondered.

Do you see it? I asked.

I could barely see Tommy and Camus moving around below me. I told you it would fly away, Tommy said.

Shut up, Camus said.

I was glad it was gone because I just wanted to get back. Then a cloud slid off the moon and I saw a pale glow on the ground behind Tommy. What's that? I said.

There it is, Tommy said when he turned around. He and his brother touched it with the ends of their shoes. My throat was really dry. I didn't know what was supposed to happen. It was lying there just like before, a big dirty doll. It hadn't gone anywhere.

I don't think it's a soul, Tommy said. His voice sounded funny, like he wanted to cry.

Don't be an ass, Camus said.

Maybe my dad would know what it is, I said, but nobody said any-

thing.

Don't you want to look? Camus said to me. I think it's sleeping.

A soul sleeping? Tommy said. Now who's the ass?

This might be your only chance, Camus said to me.

I looked back down through the gorge and wished I could see my house. Everything would be all right if I could see the house because I knew no matter what happened I just had to move back to it and everything would keep on going as it had before but it was around the corner. I got on my butt and slid down between the boys because I knew I would never come again and I better touch it now.

You better not tell your mom, Camus said.

Or your dad, Tommy said.

It still looked like a doll but now it seemed like plastic. It was covered with dust and it might have had hair where a person did and its skin looked like clothes that had gotten wet and then dried in a ball but then I screamed and jumped up. It has no eyes! It has no eyes! I yelled.

All three of us went hurtling back over the rocks as I was yelling. Shut up, shut up! Tommy kept saying and when I stopped he did too but my voice and beside it Tommy's voice kept bouncing from one side of the gorge to the other. His and Camus's shoulders went up and down and their faces were tight.

What did you scream for? Camus asked.

It didn't have any eyes, I said.

Neither one said anything for a while, then Camus said, Who said it would have any eyes?

It had a face with a mouth and a hole where there was a nose but it didn't have eyes, I said.

That's not a face, Tommy said.

I want to go home, I said. I didn't care if they thought I was a baby, plus they were scared now too.

We should probably go back, Camus said.

Mom and Dad said we had to be back before morning, Tommy said.

Ahead of us the valley seemed only to be night. The moon had gone and the sky had gone. I could feel the dust all over me like a new skin. What if my house wasn't there? I was too scared to move but too scared not to move so I started walking and didn't care if Tommy or Camus were coming too. But then I heard the scrapes of their feet behind me.

I didn't see any eyes, did you see eyes? one of them said, but I couldn't tell which one.

I didn't go to sleep that night and when I finally did in the middle of the afternoon the next day my mother said, are you sick?

No, I said, but she looked at me funny. Then that night I wasn't tired and couldn't sleep because all I could think about was the soul in the gorge without any eyes or nose and I heard something at the window and didn't even look but went right into my parents' bed.

Oh-ho, this again, my father said. Sweetie, I have to get up early for work in the morning.

Amy, you need to sleep in your own bed, my mother said in her mumbly sleepy voice.

Wasn't she sick? my father asked.

My mother touched my forehead. She said she wasn't sick, she said.

My father slid out of bed and put his hands under me and drew me toward him and lifted me up. I was too big so I put my arms around him and helped him and he carried me back to bed. This reminds me of when you were a little girl, he said.

He put me down on my bed and then stood still. Oomph, he said. Getting too old to do that. He stood up real slow with his hands on his back. You've been having bad dreams? he asked, then his face frowned. Something happen? Those boys teasing you? he asked.

Where do souls go when they die? I asked.

My father sat down on the bed. Sometimes he and my mother yelled but sometimes he was soft and droopy like he was on the bed. Is that's what's bothering you? he asked.

Do you think Sandy and Samson went there? I asked.

The bed creaked as my father shifted and then sighed.

Tommy and Camus found something and said it was a soul but it didn't have any eyes, I said.

What? my father said.

There was a hole where the nose was and two holes where its eyes were, I said.

My father blinked. What? he said again. What are you talking about?

It was Sandy, Camus said.

I know that, I said. I tried to make my voice not wobbly because I was lying and because that meant it was Sandy not a soul and that Sandy was dead.

How do you know? Camus asked.

Because of her dress, I said, which wasn't true until I said it. I should have recognized the blue print dress, one she'd wear when she visited my mother.

My mother said we weren't allowed to leave the yard. Tommy and Camus's parents said the same thing and Tommy and Camus didn't say anything. Then the parents all walked up through up the valley and

disappeared to where police and firetrucks and an ambulance had come and we sat down on the driveway. When I told my father about the soul he said I was just having bad dreams and didn't need to worry about souls and dying because everybody was still really young. I'm sure it was just some animal, he said, or a pile of garbage from campers. But Tommy and Camus's parents believed them about the doll without the eyes and they went up into the gorge and saw.

A soul has to have a body, Camus said.

Samson killed her, Tommy said.

My sister was swinging a stick and making a swooshing sound and I told her to stop. I know that, I said. Nobody even bothered to say I was lying. I didn't even know if what I said was a lie or if it wasn't.

Or she just fell, Elisabetta said. That's what my mother said.

He'll get the electric chair for sure, Camus said.

So we're just talking to everybody, the lady in the blue jacket said. She didn't say so but I knew she was the police. We talked to your friends too, the police lady said. You're not in any trouble. Your mom and dad told you what happened? she said.

I stayed silent a while. My father said I was going to be in trouble for going up there at night and my mother said, for Christ's sake, leave her alone, you didn't even believe what she told you.

I know it's Sandy, I said.

That's right, the police lady said. And did you ever talk to Sandy? Did she ever tell you anything?

I was in my kitchen but it felt like I was in the gorge. It was a big open falling space but there were walls everywhere and they wouldn't let you out.

I said hi, I said. And she said hi.

She visited here, didn't she? the lady said.

My mother was sitting and the police lady was sitting and I was sitting where Sandy sat when she had coffee with my mother. My father was behind me and he shifted a little so he was behind my mother. With his arms folded he looked out the door where I could only see a little fuzzy shadow of the cliffs in the distance.

You can tell her, my mother said. It's OK.

Yes, I said, she visited here.

Even though the cliffs beyond my father looked fuzzy I knew they were hard and high and in the sun.

Go on, my mother said.

Yes, that's what she did, I said. She was my mother's friend. They had coffee.

The police lady wrote with a pencil on some paper and my mother reached over and laid her hand on mine and gave me a little smile. The

police lady looked up and smiled too. She asked me some more questions, and I told her about the time we went up the gorge and Tommy and Camus were playing on the rocks and they said it was a soul. Then I told her about the second time when we went up at night. I started to cry because I knew I would get in trouble but my mother reached over and touched my hand again. It's OK, she said. You won't get in any trouble. She said it louder than she had to and I knew that meant she meant my father was supposed to hear it too. He had his hands up on either side of the door now. The light had changed and through the screen the cliffs had hardened and looked flat like a piece of broken wall and the sky was so pale and blue and flat it seemed just tacked on above it like a sheet of paper.

The police lady said thank you and shut her notebook. And you're sure you didn't see anything else? she asked.

My father was staring out at the same flat hills and sky. But I knew the earth was round and him looking away meant he was staring all the way around the earth and back into this room where Sandy was once and where I wanted to be after me and Tommy and Camus went up into the gorge at night.

No, I said to the police lady. I didn't see anything.

The Teeth

Salvatore Difalco

Arto awoke to discover that his upper two front teeth had fallen out during the night. His tongue flicked through the fresh gap, touching the torn gum. He could taste blood. He sat up in his bed, shaking off the cobwebs. He felt the gap with his fingers. What the fuck? He searched around for the teeth, turning aside the sheets and flipping over his pillow. There they were, under the pillow, resting in little blots of blood, his two front teeth.

He shut his eyes to gather his senses. Could this be happening? Was he still asleep? His tongue probed the fleshy gap in his smile line. It felt real enough. He slapped his thigh sharply. The stinging skin confirmed he was awake. You can't slap yourself in your sleep and feel that.

Two questions immediately came to Arto's mind. One, who did this to him? And two, why did they place the teeth under the pillow? Was it some kind of joke? You know, the bizarro Tooth Fairy had come?

His eyes darted round the room. The closet door was ajar. He jumped from his bed and swung it open. Nothing but clothes on hangers and shoeboxes. He froze and listened. He could hear shuffling upstairs, but that was just Old Man Winks. He was always moving around up there. Dementia. Arto wondered if Old Man Winks had committed this indecency, but recalling how the guy could barely tie his shoes, he likely lacked the manual dexterity to yank teeth.

Arto returned to the bed and reluctantly picked up the teeth. He tried not to look at them, but couldn't help himself. Solid, but badly stained from all the coffee, blood still reddened their roots. How had he not awakened during the extraction? Had he been drugged? He felt no chemical aftereffects. Very strange. Why would someone do this fucked up thing to him? Why? He wrapped the teeth in a paper tissue, wondering if a dentist could somehow reinsert them. They had techniques these days, technologies. It would cost a bundle, for certain. But he didn't have a bundle. Living in a rooming house as Arto did evidenced a degree of penury, if not complete degeneration. You don't wind up in a rooming house because things are going peachy for you.

Up until now, Arto had not felt fear, just confusion, and perhaps anger. But when he started thinking about how monstrous this act was, how vile, and also how peculiar—cold fingers of fear gripped his neck.

He quickly dressed, pocketed the wrapped teeth, and stopped in the hall to use the bathroom shared with the other two residents on

his floor, Max the ex-junky, a shell of a man, and Luther, a middle-aged masturbator, whose perverse habit had cost him his job as a stock broker. Neither seemed a likely suspect.

Neither man had yet attended to their morning evacuations. The bathroom exuded a nice Mr. Clean freshness that in a small way mollified Arto. That is, until he saw his gap-toothed visage in the bathroom mirror. His knees buckled and he gripped the edges of the sink to keep from falling to the floor. He shut his eyes and drew deep breaths. Who could have done this to me? he thought. Who would want me to look like this?

He turned the tap, drank some water and swished it around his mouth. He spit it out along with little clots of blood. Fucking butchers, he thought.

He staggered down the stairs to the first floor. The kitchen, or mess hall as some residents called it, was located in the back, with a patio opening out to an ugly rock garden. Someone was usually in there making coffee or munching on cereal or toast. A cook from the ministry prepared lunches and dinners, but for breakfast the men were on their own; since most of them rose late, mornings never saw the kitchen crowded.

Hank, an obese ex-cop with Elvis sideburns and a suicidal gambling addiction, sat in the kitchen on this morning—granny-glasses perched on his bulbous nose—studying pink racing forms. A white mug with the logo Monkey Monkey steamed at his elbow; a plate with several oatmeal cookies rested by the forms. Hank had once explained to Arto that in gambling, Monkey Monkey is the nickname for picture cards. The original word was Monarchy, referring to face cards—kings, queens and knaves—but Monarchy morphed into Monkey.

“Good morning,” Hank said without looking up from his forms.

“Hank, Hank, you gotta help me,” Arto said, rushing to his side.

Hank looked up from his forms and studied Arto over the frames of his glasses. “What the hell happened to you?”

“You won’t believe this. Someone pulled out my two front teeth!” He peeled back his upper lip.

Hank reared his head and raised his plump hand, appalled. “Jesus, man. Looks like you stopped a hockey puck.”

“You gotta help me, Hank. Someone did this. I have no idea who or why.”

Hank smiled. His incisors were gold, an affectation that never ceased to annoy Arto. Whenever Hank smiled the room seemed to tilt a little.

“You in deep with a loan shark?” Hank quipped, familiar with the terrain.

“I’d know about that, wouldn’t I? Whoever did this must have drugged me because I felt nothing.”

Hank nodded. "That's some fucked up shit, brother."

"Wanna come and inspect the crime scene?"

"Now why the fuck would I do that?"

"You're an ex-cop, Hank."

"What is about the 'ex' you're not getting?"

"I'm just saying. I feel stupid calling the real cops for something like this. What do I say, that someone came in the night and yanked my two front teeth without me noticing? Don't look at me like that, Hank. I haven't touched anything for 369 days and eight hours, you know that. Fuck, you were at the meeting last week when they gave me my plaque."

"Yeah, they gave you a plaque. They gave me one, too."

"But Hank, no one pulled out your fucking teeth."

"You're gonna have to call Spencer about this."

"Fuck Spencer, he'll think I've been using."

"Demand a blood test."

"Blood test! I'm clean, man. You've been here as long as I have. Not once, not once have I stepped out of line."

Hank smiled, his incisors reflecting sunlight shining in through the kitchen window. Arto felt a buzzing in his ears, as of bees.

"Arto, buddy. You're getting all bent out of shape. Now let me tell you something, and don't take it the wrong way, but frankly, you're mistaken if you think for a second that I keep tabs on or give a rat's ass what you or anyone else does in this shit-hole."

"That's harsh, Hank."

"Call Spencer, or better yet, call the Director."

"Come on, man."

Hank wasn't taking this seriously. He selected a cookie from the plate, slid it entirely into his mouth, and returned to the racing forms, blubbery jowls fluttering. Arto removed the tissue from his pocket, unwrapped his teeth and thrust them under Hank's nose. Hank let out a guttural grunt and fell back so hard his chair tipped over and the great bulk of him landed upended on the floor still firmly lodged in the chair.

"Help me," he groaned.

Arto stood up reflexively to help the big man, but froze at the least second.

"Help me, you sonofabitch."

"What are you gonna do if I don't, punch my teeth out?"

"Help me up!"

"Call Spencer, or better yet, the Director."

Arto pocketed his teeth and left. He regretted approaching Hank with this problem. Now he had to formulate a game plan. He considered canvassing the rooming house residents to ask if they'd seen anything untoward during the night. Of course, some of the younger residents weren't beyond shenanigans. Yogi the redheaded junky came to mind,

or his pal Felix, a known child molester. They were quite capable of terrible doings. But Arto's dealings with them had been issueless. He'd given them no motive for such a heinous act.

Arto exited the rooming house with no clear plan in mind. He considered visiting the police, but they'd surely laugh him off once they knew his history, and where he resided. Men inhabiting such places often fell victim to bizarre and violent acts. Madmen, addicts, subversives, pederasts, what do you expect from the dregs of society? A few inexplicably missing teeth was comical. He'd lighten the officers' day with his tale, bring smiles to their faces.

He decided that a walk-in dental clinic was his best recourse, though he'd never dealt with one and didn't know how he'd pay for such a thing. He had a hundred dollars to his name, if that, and wouldn't have a penny more until month's end. His social benefits card allowed for some dental coverage, but not this. The teeth had been unrooted. He could still taste blood.

As he walked to the plaza on the other side of the apartment complex flanking the rooming house, the cold October air punched his palate, the pain so excruciating he held a hand to his mouth. By the time he reached the plaza he thought he'd faint from the pain. He located a dental clinic next to a bargain shoe shop. The place was packed. He wondered if everyone had been assaulted by a demented Tooth Fairy during the night. It would have given him some relief to know he'd not been the only victim.

As he approached the reception desk, the angular, ear-phoned receptionist held up a finger while she dealt with a client on the telephone.

"Yes, Mr. Mercer, we can clean your teeth, but only if you pay cash. That's right, cash only. Your last cheque bounced, Mr. Mercer. Insufficient funds. It's just company policy. Yes. That's right, Mr. Mercer. You have a good day now."

The receptionist cued Arto to tell his story.

He opened his hand, flattened out his palm, and revealed the teeth.

The receptionist recoiled.

"It's not what you think," he said. "I wasn't in a fight or anything. I woke up and the teeth—someone pulled them out during the night. I found them under my pillow."

The receptionist unplugged her head-set and rushed off to the back, likely to summon security, Arto thought, if they had such a thing in this clinic—but she returned moments later with a tall silver-haired man in dentist's whites.

"I'm Dr. Fennel," he said. "How can we help you today?"

"Well, like I told her, I lost my two front teeth during the night . . ."

"You'll have to schedule an appointment with our denturist to discuss replacements."

“But I have the teeth with me.” Arto opened his hand.

“Uh, yes, well. There’s nothing we can do with them now.”

“You can’t, like, try to put them back in?”

“As I said, sir, you’d best talk to the dentist about that, and Ms. Bellows here can schedule a consultation for you.”

“Should I put them in milk or something till I do?”

“Talk to the dentist. And by the way, our rates are posted on the wall there. Study them closely.”

Arto glanced over the tables and figures. They made no sense to him. He suffered from undiagnosed dyslexia. He felt crushed. He walked out of the crowded clinic without booking the consultation. He held his hand to his mouth as he rushed back to the rooming house.

Once there, he went into the kitchen and poured a glass of milk. He put his teeth in the milk. He’d read somewhere that putting teeth in milk preserves them. Hockey players often resorted to that trick. He covered the glass with a square of aluminum foil and put the glass in the fridge behind the condiments. He thought of affixing tape with his name written on it, but figured no one would bother with a covered glass set so far back in the fridge.

He ran into Hank in the hall. He thought Hank might do something violent and was prepared to kick him in the nuts the second he tried anything.

“I’m pissed at you,” Hank said, hobbling. “First you freak me out, then you abandon me.”

“Sorry Hank, I was out of my head.”

“Better now?”

“Not much. It’s gonna cost me thousands to get the teeth fixed.”

“That sucks. That really sucks. Almost broke my hip.”

“You want me to feel guilty ‘cause you freaked over teeth? What kinda cop were you anyway?”

Hank smiled. The room slanted eastward.

Disgusted, Arto went up the stairs to his room. He sat his desk and took out a notebook. He wanted to draw up a list of possible suspects and motives for the act. But after jotting a few names, he grew bored with the exercise. He had enemies, sure, everyone has enemies, but he found it impossible to believe that someone hated him enough to come in the night and by some weird stealth pull out his front teeth. It made no sense. Would it ever?

His tongue felt the flap of flesh where his teeth had been rooted. He could still taste blood. Maybe a salt rinse would help. Salt always helps with this shit. And the teeth were in milk, safe for now. He had to come up with a plan to get enough cash to put back the teeth in his mouth or have them replaced altogether with implants. But this was altogether unrealistic.

Arto wept. He seldom wept. He'd wept when he went off the opioids. He thought he might die. But he got through it. He chewed a lot of gum and drank barrels of coffee, but he got through it. He had been clean for 369 and a half days. An achievement. He had a plaque. He wept full-bodied now. He'd never thought, a few years back, when he was working and making money, happy with his girlfriend, happy with life, and doing his drugs without getting into trouble, that he'd wind up in a rooming house, broke and fucking toothless, but here he was.

He crawled into bed and cried himself to sleep, something he hadn't done since he was a child.

He slept through dinner and slept through the night. His sleep was heavy and dreamless. It may have been the most restful sleep he ever had. He awoke to the trilling of birds and a lovely spring buzz in the air. For a moment he considered that it had all been a crazy dream, losing the teeth. And that even Hank and the rooming house had been a dream. But when his tongue jabbed forward and felt the fleshy gap, his heart sank doubly. This was his room. This was his reality. There was no escaping it.

He dressed and hit the bathroom. It smelled peculiar, fleshy. Arto did his business and washed up, avoiding his reflection. He didn't need to be reminded. Then he heard a commotion coming from downstairs. He dried off and headed out. Max the ex-junky happened by, moving like a zombie.

"What's going on?" Arto asked him.

"Dunno," Max drawled, eyes closing and opening. "Going down to check."

Old Man Winks was already shuffling down the stairs, his long white hair trailing behind him like a veil.

Voices issued below. One of them sounded like Hank. He could holler pretty good. Arto followed Old Man Winks and Max downstairs and back into the kitchen. Hank and Yogi huddled around someone on the floor. Arto caught a glimpse of the Nike Jokers and knew it was Felix.

"What happened?" he cried.

"Something in his windpipe," Hank said.

"He's, like, choking to death," Yogi said.

"Get him up and do the Heimlich," Old Man Winks said.

"We tried," Hank said. "We fucking tried."

"I think Hank broke his ribs," Yogi said.

"Aw, he's dying guys," Hank bawled "He's dying."

"Call 911," Yogi said.

No one moved.

Arto spotted a glass on the counter. No, he thought, not possible. His eyes searched for the aluminum foil and when he didn't see it he gasped with relief. As Hank and Yogi tried to perform CPR on Felix,

Arto went to the fridge and opened it. He pushed aside the condiments and stopped.

The glass was missing. Arto glanced at the floor and when he saw the glitter of aluminum foil his heart jumped. Felix, that fucking idiot, had drank the milk in Arto's glass, and was probably choking to death on his teeth. He looked over at Felix, convulsing on the floor. While Hank massaged his heart, Yogi stood by counting down like a boxing referee.

Arto lunged.

"What're you doing?" Hank cried.

Yogi straightened up.

"He's got my teeth!" cried Arto, grabbing Felix by the throat. "He's got my fucking teeth!"

If Felix wasn't dead when Arto put hands to him, he certainly was when Arto let go—his throat and chest clawed open as though a wild horned animal had gored him. The others grabbed Arto, screaming at the top of his lungs, an action made grotesque by the missing teeth.

They waited for the cops and the ambulance. Hank used his bulk to restrain Arto, while the others tied him to a chair. He continued crying, "He's got my fucking teeth! He's got my fucking teeth!" Finally they stuffed a cloth in his mouth to silence him.

And no one but Hank knew what the hell Arto was raving about. The teeth, the teeth, the fucking teeth. One fucking stooge had put them in the milk. And another stooge had swallowed them. Hysterical. What were the fucking odds of that? You couldn't make this shit up, Hank thought. He also thought it best to keep mum on the subject. Talk about killing two birds with one stone.

Kindness in Leningrad

Corey S. Hill

Dina scrutinized the tinned meat carefully, turning it, tapping it against the desk. She ran her fingers across the faded label, probing for anything she may have missed on her first pass. She had to be sure that the seal had not been punctured, that in no way had her payment been compromised.

The girl who brought the tin could not have been much more than fourteen or fifteen years old, a cadaverous face shrouded in tattered layers of scarves. She said her name was Alexandra. It may very well have been her name. Sometimes they wished her not to know and the name they gave was not their name. It did not matter so long as they could pay.

“And where did you say you got this?”

“My Uncle worked in a shop. He has been keeping it for months on end. I asked him if I could have it for this purpose,” the girl said.

Dina placed the tin atop the surface of the desk and folded her fingers beneath her chin.

“This will do,” Dina said.

“And you have done this before?” the girl asked after she had removed her dirty coat and held it in her hands in front of her.

“Yes, many times,” Dina said.

Before the siege Dina had been a midwife. Sometimes without conscious intention that world intruded in fragments, like the insistent memory of the Petrovs holding their red-faced baby and Igor Petrov who said nothing during the five hours of his wife’s labor, only moving up and down his caterpillar eyebrows and finally when it was done he was wiping away runnels of tears holding the squalling little girl they named Constance. Leningrad was a different city then. People wanted to have children. Buildings did not burn for days on end.

“And will it be difficult?” Alexandra asked.

“It will not hurt, that is all I can say,” Dina said.

“And the baby will not feel any pain, either?” the girl asked.

“No, nothing. The baby will not feel a thing. When you consider everything that’s happening now, this is a great kindness you are doing,” Dina said.

“I suppose you are right.”

“Just lie down, be comfortable, and soon it will be done,” Dina said.

Alexandra did as she was told.

Dina performed the abortion without any complications. When she was done, the girl rested for a few moments and then was on her way. Dina washed her hands once more, made a few notations in a black notebook, put on her thick coat, her gloves, her hat, placed the tinned meat into a hidden pocket within the coat, and then opened the door.

The smell of everything burnt; the cold.

Warrior of the Red Army, Save Us, the poster said. The bayonet always menacing. The woman always drawn back in fear. The child always just inches from the blade of the fascist beast's bayonet. The splash of red the only color set against matte to draw the eye and strike home just how real, just how close the danger. Blood always dripping.

Warrior of the Red Army, if your saving takes much longer there will be no one left to save, she mused as snow fell on the tip of her nose and on the jumble of bricks and cinders that had once been a bakery.

Dina felt the tin through her pockets, thinking of the proper time to eat it. It would be best to wait until late at night, so that wandering noses would not be drawn closer. They would want to take what was hers.

For now there were no sirens, no drone of airplanes, no whine of artillery, no deafening burst of fire and metal. The Germans were taking a pause to save their ammunition and allow the snow and hunger to finish the task of killing every last person in Leningrad. Clumps of jackets and scarves with wasted eyes shuffled the ice-crusting ruin to find something to eat or something to burn. They moved short distances only, as anything more than a few blocks was impossible for most. If they fell they did not get up. Stacked like logs the dead ribbons tied to their fingers and toes because more snow would come before the bodies were moved from the street into great pits.

The entryway to her apartment building stank of soot. She locked the door to her apartment, then checked once more to make sure that it had been properly shut. She pulled down the blinds. She walked back to the front door and checked the lock a third time. Then, and only then, did she remove the tin from her hidden coat pocket and place it on the kitchen table. Her mother previously made Zharkoye that was the envy of the entire neighborhood. This tinned meat was not fresh meat, but together with a few other things she'd gathered it was something and she could use to conjure shards of the thing that was. Her mother was an excellent cook but she did not boast and she considered this skill a necessity. She was a woman who kept most things to herself. Viktor, her father, was the opposite; never had there been another person so porous. To be suspended between them was a constant flight between

extremes. Dina learned from her father when he was drunk on vodka that her mother had wanted to be a famous singer. Dina had never heard her mother sing. Now her mother was dead so there was to be no opportunity to discover if the woman possessed any talent. She could not ask her what she had wanted from life and how she had handled the not getting of it.

It occurred to her then that the only sensible course of action was to hide the tin. Then she could attend to it as she pleased. It could be tomorrow, it could be next week, it could be next month. She intended that she would be here then; that was all she knew. To move one day and another day and still be here. The tin was part of that calculation. The tin was not the only item that would need to be hidden, though. The other items she had accumulated over the past weeks would also have to be hidden. Every one of them would have to be secured from the possibility of discovery, theft. She opened the cupboard and removed the cans and boxes, sorting them on the kitchen table. She placed a tin of beans behind a book on the bookshelf. A hollow leg in the kitchen table, cured ham. In her closet, a box of sweets. When she was finished, 34 different items were distributed throughout the apartment.

Knocking on the door.

She knew before opening that it was likely the neighbor, Andrei Sokolov. Andrei Sokolov had once been a person she could respect. They would converse about music sometimes before. Art sometimes before. His children sometimes before. He was a strong man before. But now he was a weak man incapable of doing what was necessary and his family was suffering as a result.

“We are starving. My family is starving. We will die if we have nothing to eat, and I have heard that you have food. I know that you have extra food you could give us. There is no reason for you to have so much while we have so little. Could you please share something, anything with us?” he asked.

She was no longer like him. Not so long ago she'd staggered through the snow with a tattered ration card, waiting in lines for hours and sometimes at the end of these lines there was nothing. She had conceded then the certainty that she would starve. Siege recipes traded: there were soups made from fermented sawdust, macaroni made from flax seed, toothpaste. Wallpaper. To be reduced in such a way by hunger was something she would never repeat. In the final days at the hospital, Dr. Mikhailov contended that in these times there was no strictly scientific reason to dictate who lived, who succumbed to starvation and who did not; of course there were calories and sugars and blood pressure and the like, but there was something else, a will, something. A light. Sometimes there was no way to say why this person and not that person, other than every day they committed to keep going. Those who kept

that light, who made that commitment more strongly, maybe that was enough. Dr. Mikhailov — one day the light faded or he did not make the commitment and Dina found him at his desk. He could have been napping, with his papers still neatly arrayed. She remembered this always as the same day that the elephant in the zoo was killed in an artillery strike.

I am sorry, I have nothing," she said to her neighbor.

She closed the door.

She turned the dial on the record hoping to catch a musical program. However, she located only the break between programs -- only the metronome played. *Tick tick tick*. A heartbeat to remind them.

Tick tick tick.

Something is still out there.

Tick tick.

Beneath all this is another city.

Tick.

One day, perhaps.

The next morning, Dina heard commotion in the hallway. She cracked open the door to see that Andrei Sokolov and his wife Marishka Sokolov were carrying out a form wrapped in a white sheet. The building supervisor was assisting in the matter. It was Antonina, judging by the size. Antonina wanted to be a poet and now her light her drive was extinguished. Andrei Sokolov glanced at Dina and his eyes were red but otherwise his face was slate. If he were a stronger man he would have said something. He would have cursed Dina or renounced the Soviet regime or gnashed his teeth theatrically. He would have required the building supervisor to hold him back because his grief and anger would have caused him to lash out.

Dina waited until she was sure they were all gone before leaving her apartment. Somewhere in the distance something thudded. The streets were quiet otherwise.

The girl was twelve years old. She said her name was Lucya. She was accompanied by her mother. Lucya had been impregnated by a soldier of the Red Army who was a friend of the mother. Nothing was said, of course, beyond this description, but it was clear to Dina that Lucya had not been a willing party, was only a child, could not have been willing. But the woman, the child, where were they to turn? Warrior of the Red Army, Save Us! Or perhaps, if that is too great of a request, at least, do not rape and impregnate our twelve-year-olds.

Lucya's mother brought three potatoes as payment.

Dina squeezed the potatoes, sniffed them. They were still good.

In the course of her routine questions it became clear that there were going to be complications.

“There is a chance that you will not wake up,” she said to Lucya. Lucya only nodded.

A certain fatalism, widespread in Leningrad. This was not so terrible, really; few people had the opportunity to exercise such control. Few people in this city were given the choice of when to die unless they did it themselves.

“Do you still wish to proceed?” she asked.

“We do,” said the woman, before Lucya could answer.

First, Dina provided the anesthesia. She checked that the girl was still breathing normally. Her heart beat normally. She did not change color. All the while Lucya’s mother paced back and forth, her face drained. When she was done, the girl woke up. It was a victory.

“Thank you! Thank you so much,” said the woman. Some color and light had returned to her face. She was recharged with something. How long it would last -- there was no way to know.

“You’re welcome,” said Dina.

Lucya and the mother continued nodding and grasping her hands, and Dina returned this gesture.

Three potatoes! As near to miraculous as she dared believe. Now the treasure must make the journey safely to her home.

The potatoes were invisible within her jacket yet she still felt the eyes of everyone who passed upon her as she walked home. Beneath their black and brown jackets there were only ribs pushing through skin and organs on the cusp of shutting down. These types were capable of anything.

The hallway was dark and smelled of soot, but thankfully empty.

She locked the door and almost ran to the kitchen, exhaling deeply and placing the potatoes on the kitchen table. She rolled them down the entire length of the table, humming as she did so. The reality of these potatoes was almost too much to bear. To feel their brown skin against her fingertips -- even this confirmation did not fully convince her. The potatoes were real. She was still here. She would be for another day, and another day thereafter. She would chance a larger meal with this potato, why not? She had provided a valuable service.

She turned the dial on the record and hoped to hear music, but it was only the metronome.

Tick tick tick. Leningrad is still here.

Tick tick Dina is still here.

Tick.

Beyond that who can say?

Dr. Mikhailov told the story of a young boy named Anatoly. Every day Anatoly would write a poem. No matter what happened, Anatoly would write a poem every single day. Sad poems and poems about food

and sometimes happy poems. No matter what, he would write a poem. Dr. Mikhailov liked to draw some sort of lesson from this. He showed them the poems the boy had written before he fell ill. He recited some lines of the poems that the boy was writing during his stay at the hospital. "There is something to it, something remarkable," Dr. Mikhailov would say and, for a moment, he was perhaps somewhere else. He was illuminated differently. When Dr. Mikhailov read the poems to her she wished fervently that the words would do the same for her, that holding onto the scrap of paper with poor penmanship and reading the words aloud would generate some heat within.

Tick tick tick.

The increased pace of the metronome indicated that there was to be an announcement.

Tick tick tick tick tick tick tick tick tick tick.

An important announcement.

Tick tick tick tick tick.

Tick tick tick tick.

The potatoes, it seemed, would have to wait.

The pace of the metronome quickened to a feverish crescendo, then stopped. The excited voice of the announcer replaced the heart-beat:

Please be advised -- take immediate cover! Luftwaffe air raid incoming!

Immediately afterwards the wail of the air-raid warning rang out.

Months ago, the first time she heard the sirens the fear that gripped Dina was paralyzing. For five minutes while the klaxon reverberated off of the hard surfaces of Leningrad, she remained in her apartment, forgetting to go down to the basement, forgetting even to get beneath an item of furniture. She wished to move but could not. The sirens cut off without even so much as the sound of an airplane, but for hours afterward she had been unable to do anything other than walk in circles in her apartment, breathing rapidly, urging her heart to beat more slowly.

After months of raids the threats had come to be a part of life in Leningrad, a near daily threat. Now it was routine. The Germans occasionally grew bored with artillery shells and starvation and sent some of their planes to destroy an apartment building, a church, a zoo.

Close and lock the front door. Travel down the hallway stinking of soot, down below the first floor to the basement, the smell and the heat of all of them pushed together. The entire time the wail of the sirens piercing the city.

Still they conversed because otherwise there would be only their thoughts.

“Do you hear Shostakovich is composing?”

“I have heard they will break through soon, there are reinforcements coming from the West and the Germans will soon be sent back!”

The constant blare of the sirens.

“I have never much cared for him, Shostakovich I mean.”

The staccato puncture of anti-aircraft fire. And the distant thrum of propellers cutting through the sky.

Dina preferred to wait in silence through the air raids. She already knew what the people in her building thought about most things. There was no real reason to talk to them.

“I have heard that they have decided to give up on Leningrad completely. That they are concentrating on preparing for Moscow.”

“There is a rumor that city officials are stockpiling grain and other foodstuffs.”

My daughter is in Petrograd. I hope she is safe. I know—”

The woman, Georgina, stopped mid-sentence as everything shook violently.

The grumble. The roar. It was close, this one was close, perhaps even right on top of them.

There was no reason to leave and Dina knew this. But she also knew that she would leave. That she could not stay in the cellar any longer. One or two of the neighbors reached out to her as she ascended but their attempts to stop her were half-hearted at best. When she reached the street it became immediately clear just how close the bomb had struck.

Across the street, the front of the building was staved in, bricks and timber tumbling into the street like entrails. Within, a fire. Writhing orange, red waves, sloughing black cilia of smoke. There were sirens, of course, everywhere, but Dina knew that there would be no one coming to put out the fire. The heat was immense, almost unbearable, but it proved also that the cold was not impenetrable. Curiously, next to the fiery ruin of the impact, a piece of the building remained completely intact. And in the windowsill a potted cactus, with orange blooms. The cactus, going as before, an undisturbed life, while everything else behind it burned.

Dina walked quickly across the street, the heat almost too strong to bear, and gathered the cactus in her hands.

“I’ve got you, no need to worry, I’ve got you now,” she said.

There was a place for it, in the kitchen, where it was warm and dry. She returned to her apartment, unlocked the door, and placed the cactus on her own kitchen ledge. Through the thin pane, the green bulbs and orange flowers set across the white, grey, black of the street below, the city, the clouds.

“Good night cactus,” she said before wrapping herself in a pile

of coats and going to sleep.

She found herself talking to the cactus in the mornings and in the evenings.

“How were you today? Did you miss me?”

The cactus, of course, did not answer. But that was the appeal of the cactus. She would provide both the question and the answer, and in that manner she had complete control of the relationship, a neatness that people could never hope to achieve.

“I am still here. Another day, still here,” she said.

Through her work, she was able to secure heating oil, so her home had not become like many others -- freezing.

“I hope you did not miss me too much while I was away,” she said.

Later there could be some time for other considerations. Now there was only the day after day. Beyond that, there was another Leningrad, there was likely another city, still. But it was foolhardy to think beyond the next day.

There were six more girls and women whose names and ages Dina recorded in her black notebook. They provided vegetables. And an egg! A fresh egg. This was a miracle with no explanation.

When she returned with the egg they were gathered in the hallway.

It was Nikolei, this time, she was told. Nikolei used to draw pictures of horses. They had nothing to wrap him in. He was already mostly skeleton, she remembered. They would leave him in the kitchen for now; it was cold enough in their kitchen that he would freeze until they could find another place for him.

Andrei Sokolov was going to ask her for food again, she knew. Unconsciously her hand went for the egg in her hidden pocket. She caressed it as he spoke.

“Please, Dina, my family is dying. Can’t you see? Don’t you have anything left in your heart but coldness?” he pleaded.

“I am sorry, I cannot help you,” she said.

This was the calculation. To help where it was possible. To draw boundaries where boundaries must be drawn.

“I have items that may be of interest you. Perhaps a trade?” he asked.

“If there were anything I could do, I would certainly do so, Andrei,” she said.

She intended above all else to continue.

Tick tick.

Dina is still here.

“Do they not see, cactus, do they not see what I see? That there

is only so much we can control?" she asked.

Walking back to the apartment from a visit with a young girl with no name, aged 14, no complications, she saw a man struggling in the snow.

"Please help me," the man called out.

Dina considered him. He had slipped and was unable to right himself. He did not yet see her. If she wished it, she could sidle away.

"I need someone to help me. I've slipped. Please help me. Anyone," the man called out.

He wasn't even wearing a hat.

She had heard stories of what happened when people tried to help those who'd fallen into the snow. Of being pulled down, and never getting back up. It was true, she was stronger than many, but still she had to be certain. Dina knew that there were beasts and there were heroes in equal measure in Leningrad -- she would attempt neither; she would perform what kindnesses she could, where appropriate, and she would not sink to the level of the devils they whispered about. That was the right balance, and anything else would intrude on the primary goal of moving to the next day.

"Why have you allowed yourself to fall?" she asked the man.

"Allowed myself to fall? It was an accident! I was walking to secure rations for my two children, when I slipped on a patch of ice. I am so tired, I have barely eaten anything in four days. I cannot get up on my own, but if you were to pull me up, I am confident that I could continue on my way," he said.

"How am I to know that if I reach out to you I will not also fall? I might injure myself in this way," Dina said.

"I cannot guarantee that this will not occur. However, I will do everything in my power to ensure that we have a better outcome," said the man.

"Do I not also have reasons to live?" she asked.

"I would think that you do," said the man.

"And are my reasons any more or less important than your reasons?" she asked the man.

"I do not know how I could know the answer to that, as I do not know anything about you. I know only that you are in a position to help me. Please help me," he said.

"It would be a great kindness to help you, would it not?" she asked.

He was confused by her question. He paused for a long while.

"You will not leave me here to die, will you?"

She would do what she could. That seemed as much as could be asked of anyone.

"I will not," she said, finally.

She gripped the man's hand. He was surprisingly light, and without much effort at all she was able to pull him to his feet.

He embraced her and she could feel beneath his jacket that there was nothing left to this man.

"Thank you!" he said.

"You are welcome," she said.

He continued on his way.

The hallway stunk of soot.

Tick Tick Tick.

The metronome quickened.

The radio announced that the bread ration had been reduced to 300 grams for laborers, and half of that for non-laborers. Dina was unconcerned. She did not eat the bread. She did not need it. It was mixed with sawdust, anyway, though that information was not included in the announcement.

"Did you miss me today? I had an odd encounter with a man trapped in the snow! But after all, I decided I should help him. I was in a position to be able to do so. Often I am not, but today, I thought I should. So I grabbed his hand. Can you believe it? I grabbed his hand and pulled him out of the snow and he was on his way, walking off to do whatever he was off to do; disappearing, not disappearing, there is no way for me to know," she said to the cactus.

Her name was Kirya. She was 32 years old and this would have been her fourth child. Two of her three children had died already.

"And there will be no pain?" Kirya asked.

"No, this is a great kindness," said Dina.

Kirya was thin, but not as bad as some of the others Dina had seen. She seemed possessed of a hidden strength. Dina was sure that this would go smoothly and quickly. She was accompanied by her husband. The man was moving about constantly, clearly concerned.

"So are there any risks?" the man asked.

"There are some, but I have done this many times. I think this will go fine. I foresee no reason to worry," Dina said.

Still, he could not keep his hands from moving to his hair, to his hat.

"It will be fine, I can assure you," she told him once more before placing Kirya under general anesthesia.

He finally sat down after Kirya's breathing slowed and Dina began the abortion. Everything went smoothly, just as she'd thought it would.

But Kirya would not wake up.

"Is everything okay?" the man asked.

Kirya's breathing continued to slow until it could not be detected.

"Is she dying? Is my baby dying?" the man shouted.

"Please, let me work," Dina said.

She did everything she could but there was nothing else.

"What have you done? What have you done?" he asked.

"I'm sorry," Dina said. She crumpled then.

Hours later, three men arrived pulling a sled through the snow. Dina helped them load the body of the woman onto the device. Then they were gone and she was alone in the room.

Then she was alone walking the street to her apartment.

Alone opening the door.

There was nothing that could be done. It had been foolish to think this was possible. She took the picture of her and the entire hospital staff and smashed it against the table and then she jumped up and down on the pieces of the frame and the shards of glass until there was little more than powder on the floor of the kitchen.

"And you? You? You were the worst of all!" she shouted at the cactus. She opened the window and the cold, the white, the grey. She picked up the pot and threw the cactus from the window because it was stupid to pretend. The cactus, below in the snow, gone. All gone.

Dina went to retrieve the cactus the next day but there was nothing there.

The snow had swallowed it.

Someone had taken it.

What happened to it? No one could say. There was no way to know. It was gone and that was all that mattered.

One day there were three women. They paid. She hid the items in her apartment.

Another in the apartment downstairs died during the night and the superintendent said they would leave the body until it was warmer. It was Georgina.

Then one day they were to help dig trenches. Dina rode in the back of the truck to the outskirts of the city, past the buildings, into the white stretches of snow where the soldiers of the Red Army clumped together around jutting metal and tents.

"We are all grateful for your help in defending the city of Leningrad," the boy said.

He was skinny like everyone else. His uniform was worn thin in places. There will not be enough shovels. Some of you will use sticks. There was a murmur through the group of them but beyond that what would be the point? Somewhere out there a German was watching

them dig and determining whether it was worth it to drop bombs on them or to save the bombs for Moscow or save the bombs for Sevastopol and simply allow them to exhaust themselves digging, to fall down in the snow and not get up, to die of the cold, to simply allow them to eat each other. Somewhere out there were millions of Germans holding the same terrible purpose.

“You look strong, I will provide you with a shovel,” he said.

Dina gripped the shovel in her hands.

She was strong, it was true. She had held to her track better than most. She had found a way. And because of this, when she held the shovel and pushed she was able to move more snow, to strike deeper into the ground that was nearly as hard as rock.

“Do you think any of this is worth it?” a woman asked.

Dina realized after some time that she was asking her.

“I do. I think it is worth it. Anything we can do is worth the effort,” Dina said.

The woman continued to strike at the ground listlessly. Dina grunted and pushed harder. She would do all that she could. She struck again and again and pieces of earth were pushed aside and something was being accomplished, something was being done in the face of millions of Germans who wanted them all gone, blown up or starved.

When they paused to rest she did not pause. Dina was stronger than they were, she knew this for certain. She could do more. She had to do more.

She dug and in this she was whole for a while.

She knew that there was more swirling deep beneath that she could not fully grasp, and by holding the shovel, by digging faster than the rest of them, she was able to tame it in some way. She could regain control, it was so easy to do, and she would do so now.

As a child Dina had wanted to become a dancer but there was no money. Her mother told her that it would be better if she discarded the idea entirely. Her father agreed. But every so often her mother would forget, and they would dance together in the living room.

Dina was making more progress than anyone else, even the men. She would not allow them to impact her drive. It was her decision alone. If she could control nothing else, at least she could control this.

“Excellent work,” said the boy as he passed by.

Her fingers had no feeling and her shoulders, arms, were burning fiercely. No one else was still working, yet still she pushed, again and again.

“It is time to go home now, Comrade,” the soldier of the Red Army said, almost apologetically.

“Can I continue just a moment longer?” she asked.

“No, we must go,” he said.

“Okay,” she said.

He took the shovel and it was over. They left the grey white expanse and piled into the back of a truck.

They could not go the entire way, so Dina would have to ride on one of the trolleys. Few were operating, but luckily the line that would go near her apartment was functioning today.

There was no heat inside, but still to have a break against the wind was something. Dina felt the weariness hit her all at once, the sheer exertion of a day spent digging snow and dirt striking every limb in her body. She would do anything for a warm bath; she almost laughed out loud and chided herself for harboring such a ridiculous desire.

“Shostakovich is composing, have you heard?”

“I have heard that they are keeping all of the food to themselves. That they still have meat, and eggs, and even fresh fruit!”

The woman next to her nodded in her direction, inviting her to join their conversation. She was too weary to do so. Today she had nothing more left. When the trolley began with a rumble, Dina nearly slipped from her seat to the ground. The woman beside her reached out and Dina accepted her assistance, allowing her to pull her back into her seat.

“Thank you,” she said.

“Of course,” said the woman, tipping her large red hat.

Dina once talked music with her neighbor in the hallway. She walked by the lake and saw young people painting and having picnics.

“I know that they are leaving us to die here. I know it,” said the woman with the large red hat.

You are probably right about that, Dina thought.

The city moved by the window slowly outside the window, chugging along as the metal wheels groaned over the tracks.

Dina once talked music and when she was seven she and her father took in a kitten and fed it table scraps. Her mother pretended that she was angry but Dina heard her mother whispering to the kitten and calling it her own made-up nicknames so it was clear that in time she came to love the cat as much or more as any of them, though for some reason she pretended for many months that it was a great nuisance.

“I went to a show last night, a play, can you imagine, in all this, a play? And in the middle of the play, a goat came on stage and started singing. It was the strangest thing I’ve ever seen in my life. And nobody chased the creature away. It sang and the theater players danced around it. The crowd was rapturous. I could not say why, but it was one of the most spectacular evenings I have had in my entire life.”

Dina was bending to adjust her shoe when the first screech of artillery caused her to freeze in place. By the sound, it was close. The

others on the tram all ceased talking and craned their necks to see if they could discern the trajectory.

The explosion was felt before it was heard, the compression of air in ears and chest followed by a deafening blast. Dina turned to see that a crater was opened in the street behind them, not 30 meters distant. The tram continued and the entire world slowed, time and the material distended as the further whine of inbound artillery shells pierced the air.

She crouched and placed her hands over her head as the next explosion ripped through the street somewhere close.

She opened her eyes to see that this one had landed some place in front of them. The tram was now trapped between two smoking holes in the ground.

“Come on! We have to leave NOW!” she shouted to the woman with the red hat. The woman with the red hat did not move at first, merely shaking her head back and forth.

Dina grabbed her hand and pulled her to her feet.

A doorway. Perhaps a basement below. That was the goal. Everything reduced to the single doorway, the possibility of somewhere below.

The woman with the red hat would not run so Dina began running without her. One step, two steps, she was strong, all of her work to stay healthy was for this -- so that she could continue, would continue, when others could not.

The doorway. The doorway ahead and below a space where the fragments of metal would not enter. She would go there. Her thoughts were reduced even further to nothing, it was only her lungs, her eyes, her blood circulating in harmony of this goal.

The doorway, now only ten meters.

A whistle, the whine of artillery, a roar, and then blackness. The compression of the self to a pinprick. Time passed. No sound save for the ringing in her ears. She touched her finger to her face and examined the powder and blood. She touched her finger to her face again, slowly, probing to see what had been lost. When her sight returned she saw the trolley crumpled on its side. Black smoke coughing from craters. The snow melted in places. Like a beetle upturned. A wheel lodged in the snow. But Dina's face was intact. She was whole. Five meters away the woman dug through the snow with a piece of metal jutting from her back. When she turned the same piece of metal could be seen to extrude from her stomach.

“Have you seen my hat? Where is my red hat?” The woman asked before falling down dead, the meter-long metal pushed through in grotesque triumph.

Dina found another woman trapped beneath a scrap of timber

and she helped her to her feet. The woman staggered two steps then fell.

Dina searched through the snow and rubble and people began emerging from the buildings to help, lifting up the bodies and helping those who could be helped. Dina stayed for a few moments before beginning the short walk to her apartment building. On the way, she found herself deliriously, unreasonably, laughing. She was whole. Alive. With ash still on her face and a feeling that no matter what she would find her way. This was the ultimate test case -- she would make it no matter what. One more day. She had made it one more day.

The entryway to the apartment building stank of soot. She was surprised that she could still make out the smell, her face blackened as it was.

She nodded to Andrei as he passed her on the stairway. He opened his mouth but then he said nothing and continued on his way. Tomorrow she would say something to him. She would have a conversation. Perhaps they would talk about music once more. They could talk about something tomorrow. When she was rested they would have something to say to one another.

There were no more places left for her to hide her new tin — the one she had left on the kitchen table in her haste to leave. Maybe it was not so important? Maybe she could leave it on the table, after all? She would come to this later. She remembered the stove. There were places in the stove that were empty, that served no real purpose. She opened a panel and placed the three cans therein and sat on the chair watching the snow fall to the ground. Snow fell equally on all surfaces, the bombed out and the intact alike, the corpse-like people shuffling from door to door, the corpses stacked twelve across in pits.

She turned the dial on the radio and at last there was music. It was something by Shostakovich.

Warmth radiated through her body. She hadn't felt so warm in a long time. She sat by the window and watched the flurries of snow drift to the ground and she smiled. Shostakovich is composing again, have you heard? When they came to the hospital they were so happy then and she handed the babies to the mothers and they held them close and they were all of them warm and contented. In the summer of '39 they ate sweets and walked beside the Neva River and smelled the water. The oboes swelled and the clarinets fluttered. It was something from Shostakovich and she understood; clearly, this was a composer of some refinement. He was special. A treasure. The kitten, her mother nicknamed it Little Rose and Mr. Bear and many other ridiculous names. The snow outside the window continued, it would for some time, a fresh layer over everything that Leningrad had become but surely one day it would melt.

Andrei Sokolov awoke as the sun rose, after a fitful night where he dreamt of his children. As always he thought only of his hunger and the danger to his family. He conversed with his wife about the rations and which of them might have enough strength to walk through the snow and wait in line for the grain that might be there. He would go. She was not strong enough. He could not risk it. He could not handle any more. He did not know how we still managed with what he had endured, other than the driving force to keep the remainder of his family alive for as long as he could.

He walked into the hallway and immediately felt something was wrong. He could not say exactly what it was.

Andrei Sokolov traced the strange warmth and smell to the door of his neighbor Dina M.

There was no sound from within. This was not so unusual, but there was also the smell of ash and soot that was much more alarming.

He knocked on the door.

There was no answer.

He knocked again more vigorously.

Again there was no answer.

Andrei Sokolov went down the stairs and knocked on the door of the building Supervisor, a Mr. R. Regalov, who had helped with many matters both great and small in the building.

“There is something happening in the apartment of Dina M.,” he said.

“Oh?” said the Supervisor.

“It smells like the stove has broken, perhaps she has gone out and left it?” said Andrei.

“I will have a look,” said the Supervisor.

The supervisor knocked on the door, heavily, but there was no answer. He searched through his keys and opened the door.

The smell hit them like a fist. Over the Supervisor’s shoulder, Andrei could see his neighbor. She was seated upright in a chair by the window. He did not bother calling out to her. It was clear that she was dead.

“Stand back,” the Supervisor said, covering his mouth and nose with his sleeve. He moved into the kitchen and Andrei heard the sound of metal hitting metal, adjustments being made, windows being opened. Eventually the supervisor emerged.

“Fumes,” he said, simply.

“The stove?” Andrei asked.

The supervisor nodded.

“It was blocked, filled up the apartment with fumes. That’s what got to

Mrs. Dina M,” he said, “a peaceful way to go, warm and peaceful.”

“I suppose,” said Andrei.

Andrei helped place a bedsheet over Dina M. She did indeed appear peaceful—her face closer to contentment than he had seen in many years.

Hours later, after many phone calls, Andrei assisted the Supervisor with the stove, standing behind him as he unscrewed the blocked component.

“Well, look at this,” said R. Regalov.

He held aloft a tin of meat.

“That was in there? In the stove?” asked Andrei.

“And two more, it looks like,” he said in response.

“My god,” Andrei said.

“We should have a look around, see what else she may have been hiding,” he said.

They found food hidden everywhere they looked. Behind the radiator. In a box hidden under the bed. Between the various rooms, they found enough food for many families.

They piled the food upon the kitchen table. The Supervisor stood by the door as the residents of the apartment lined up. They came to the door, and walked away, their arms filled with wares. Andrei Sokolov took two tins of meat, and even a fresh potato, in addition to many other goods. Tonight, and in the coming weeks, his family would eat well. For at least a little while, they would not starve. They would continue.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Andrea Moorhead is editor of *Osiris* and author of several collections of poems, including *From a Grove of Aspen* (University of Salzburg Press) and *Géocide* (Le Noroît). Recent translations of Francophone poetry include *Dark Menagerie* by Élise Turcotte (Guernica Editions). Her work is featured in *Phoenix* 23 (autumn 2016 issue). In 2017, Red Dragonfly Press will publish her collection, *The Carver's Dream*.

Katharina Müller, born in 1989 in Hessia, Germany, is taking her Master's in linguistics and has a soft spot for anatomy books and puppies. She lives in Berlin where she likes to wallow in her Teutonic gloom.

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Jessica Pierce's work has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and featured in a podcast episode of Painted Bride Quarterly's Slush Pile. Her poems have been published in *The Madison Review*, *The New Haven Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *JMWW*, *Euphony*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Mead*, *Illya's Honey* and *Northwest Review*. She earned her Ed.M. from Harvard, and is the Dean of Students at a public alternative school outside of Portland, OR working with students at high risk of being pushed out. She comes home to two wild and wonderful children and her sitar-playing husband.

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