

forum

VOLUME XXI

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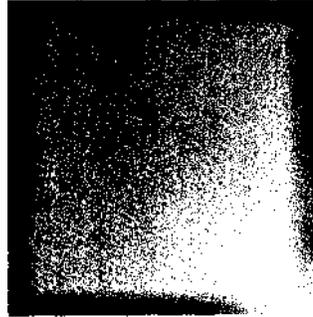
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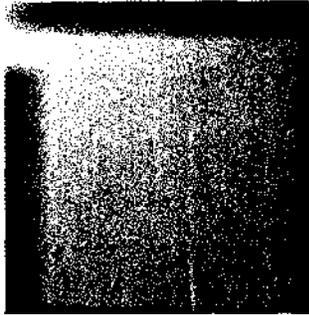
-Gene Fowler

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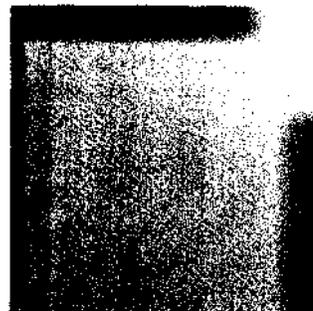


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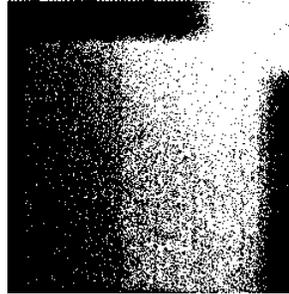
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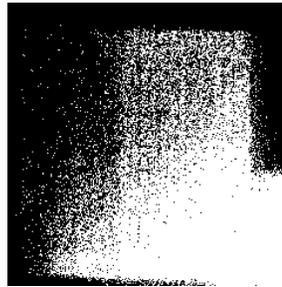


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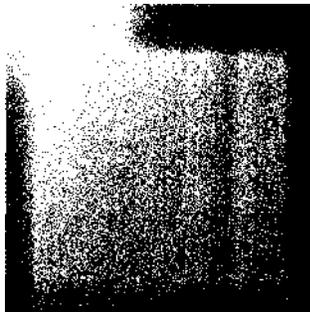


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# LAVENDER AND OLD LADIES

ALEXANDRA J. FEIGEL

I LIVED WITH MY GREAT GRANDMOTHER FOR THE FIRST EIGHT YEARS OF MY LIFE, BUT I STILL WONDER WHETHER SHE EVER FIGURED OUT MY NAME. THAT'S JUST THE WAY she was. She had twenty-three great grandchildren to keep track of, and even at the ripe old age of 85 (which I will always consider to have been her prime), she could rattle off the name of every single one before she got to mine. It never bothered me, except when I was in a hurry; her backwards-record player sounding chain of half-names seemed to last an hour. I can still hear her squealing from the kitchen, "Rich-Kel-Kev-Es-Lis-Ed-Wal-Jen, get in here and clean your plate," as I was running off to catch a chicken or build a tree house. It may have been that I was just a kid, and remembering my name wasn't that big a deal to me, but now, looking back, I realized that Great Grandma and I had a connection deeper than I have ever had with any other human being. Great Grandma was more than a mom, dad, brother, mentor, or even a great grandma. Above all, she was my friend.

I spent weeks, sometimes months at a time, at Great Grandma's. Mom and Dad would wake me up at our house very early, so they could drop me off and be at work on time. It wasn't a big deal, and we didn't make it a big deal because then it would seem like they were leaving me. By doing the drop off quickly and painlessly, my parents tried to downplay the situation. I was always eager to go to Great Grandma's, although I often pleaded with my parents to let me take Kevin, my older brother, with me. Kevin was in all-day school, and although he sometimes came for the weekends, he came on his own will, for fun, and that was a completely dif-

ferent concept. I had fun at Great Grandma's, but originally, it wasn't my decision to go there.

It wasn't that my parents abandoned me or didn't want me, they just wanted to make sure that I had a "normal" kid's life, with plenty of love and attention. After my mother's maternity leave was up, she had to go right back to work or risk not advancing in her career. The same was true for my father. They didn't really try to explain it to me; after all, I was only three months old when I went to Great Grandma's for the first time. After that, it was old hat. Sometimes, Mom and Dad were "off to work" with a kiss, wink and a smile. Other times they were "very, very busy. Daddy's got a new client, darling." They meant well, I know that now- they weren't making excuses for their good, but rather for mine. They were torn between building a good home or just being with me. Their decision to send me to Great Grandma's was the best move they could have ever made.

Great Grandma was too old to work, so instead she managed her farm a half-hour outside Pittsburgh, where my parents lived. Great Grandma and I stayed in the main house. She had her own room downstairs next to the kitchen, and I had mine, up the stairs and to the left. Mine was a beautiful, sprawling room, decidedly southern in character. Yellow floral drapes framed two huge windows, and homemade, overstuffed pillows stretched the length of the window seats. An ebony armoire occupied one corner, a vanity sat against the wall opposite the door, and a huge canopy bed was on another wall. It too was covered with Great Grandma's hand-stitched yellow sheets and pillow shams. Her trademarked patchwork quilt covered the foot of the bed, and baby dolls and stuffed animals (also completely homemade) sat on my pillows. My room seemed to catch the sunlight at any time of the day, whether to accompany the rooster every morning or to embrace me as I said my evening prayers.

Great Grandma was the one who decided my room would be southern- she came from the Deep South, a small town in Georgia that has since been swallowed up by industry and expansion. She was born in 1902 into a poor, farming family. They lived in a small, one-room house among fields and fields of her father's tobacco. When she was five, her father died, and Great Grandma watched his proud, bushy tobacco wither as her mother planned her second marriage. Years later, when she was eight, her mother died giving birth to her

twin brother and sister. She became the caretaker of the new babies. When the twins were old enough to require more solid food, Great Grandma would chew up meat and then feed it to them. She would only chew on bones to satisfy her hunger. On their second birthday, the twins died in their sleep. The day after, her stepfather dropped Great Grandma off at her grandparents and left town. When they didn't want her anymore, she went to her aunt and uncle's home in northern Georgia. When Great Grandma turned eighteen, she decided that she had had enough shuffling around.

Luckily, it was at that point that she met my great grandfather, Ferdinand Vanistendael, a Belgian who spoke perfect English. He was on his way to Pittsburgh, the city of steel mills. He asked her if he could take her away from Georgia, and marry her. She, of course, said yes, and on April 18th, 1920, Essie Mae Mathews became Essie Mae Vanistendael, in a small Catholic Church in Pittsburgh near her new home. My great grandfather set her free, took her away, and loved her when she felt only anger at being constantly abandoned. Although I never met him, I will forever admire him for this, as he taught Great Grandma to do the same for me.

I can't remember the first day I went to Great Grandma's to stay for an extended period, although I do remember a time I returned after being with Mom, Dad, and my brother Kevin for Christmas. I was about six years old, red and green ribbons flowed through my blond hair, and my bright eyes were anxiously waiting to get back to my farm. What would the cats and the horses do without me for one more day? My father walked me from the tan Thunderbird, we trudged through the snow, me in my multi-colored moon boots and mended, hand-me-down coat, he in his gray wool overcoat. Dad tripped over the ledge leading to the door, the ledge I was so accustomed to running over, and I wondered what was wrong with him. As I pulled open the screen door, the smell of the wood fire wafted through my numb nostrils. Dad brushed off my boots and helped me up on to the doorstep. The familiar and unmistakable smell of home flew from the stove; Great Grandma was making me sweet potato pie. Dad squatted down outside the door, and I stood facing him, a few steps away inside the kitchen. He smiled and said, "Watcha thinking, Jen-girl?" I sighed, and replied, "It's good to be home." Even through his fogged up glasses I could see the desperate flash of shocked sadness pass through his eyes.

Great Grandma turned away, toward the sink, and began to wash dishes. Dad didn't say anything for a moment, and I just stood there. Finally, he kissed me, said "I love you," and left. He wasn't angry, he had just realized that Great Grandma's was my home.

My relationship with Great Grandma centered on the fact that she let me be independent, to grow because of my own decisions and their outcomes, not the typical, "Don't do that" way of learning. I made my own schedule, and knew what my responsibilities were. As long as I fulfilled my end of the unspoken bargain, she and I would be fine. Also, Great Grandma never made me feel like I was a visitor. Everything she had was mine; it was our home. If there was any unspoken exchange, it was simply my unconditional love for hers.

A typical day began at the crack of dawn; we got up with the roosters. Great Grandma would make flapjacks with molasses, or steaming grits with orange or peach marmalade. She steamed milk on the stove every morning and made me fresh hot cocoa. Then we were on our way. First, we fed the chickens, they bothered you the most, and Great Grandma hated to be pecked on the legs. Then we poured milk over old bread for the cats, gave Skippy, my horse, his morning oats and hay, and then fed the cows and ducks. I raced back to the house to get my backpack, filled to the brim with the essentials for any child's day of adventure: a hammer, bent and discarded nails, crayons, a few bottles of warm Coke, lots of damp, black mud, worms, and my great grandfather's pocket watch which had an engraving to Great Grandma on it. That went in the clean front pocket for safekeeping. Then I was off. I would saddle up my Skippy and set off for that day's task, whether to build a club house or rig a tree swing.

Great Grandma and I ate lunch together every-day; often she packed a basket and brought it up to the hillside that I would play on. We would lie on the blanket, and she would rattle off all the tall tales and true life stories she knew. My favorite was the one about the three-legged dog named Champ that she had as a child. A three-legged dog was very interesting to me, for some reason. When I got upset and cried about my failed attempt at a duck trap she would laugh at me and make up a silly rhyme. When I made her angry, instead of yelling she would silence my arguing by crying, "Snot, snot, eat it red hot!" We would both collapse in laughter, she, an 85-year-old retired nurse, and I, a seven-year-old tomboy raised on a farm.

I didn't have to come in at night until I wanted to, Great Grandma thought I should make my own decisions. All she said was to watch for coyotes and raccoons, and not to let the devil catch my toes, digging in the ground after dark. That warning alone had me inside no later than an hour after sundown, or ten o'clock. Besides, Great Grandma and I had stuff to do. First I had my bath, then I would run, steam rising from my little body to her room, where she dressed me in my great grandpa's old, dingy undershirts which I used as nightgowns. If I was lucky, I got to put on her silky powder, a luxury after a hard day's work. It smelled of lavender and old ladies, a smell that grabs me even today, if I'm lucky enough to come across it.

Stories and songs, and hot milk with vanilla and cinnamon marked nighttime with Great Grandma. She would lie with me and rub my back until I fell asleep. She covered me with the quilt she had made, and kissed my forehead. Sometimes, I would wake up as she left my room. I could hear her groan as she went down the steps; they were so hard on her arthritis. That didn't matter to her, though. Every night, no matter what, she did her routine.

I moved out when I was eight. My parents decided that it was time to stay at home; I was to go to a new school. I left, kicking and screaming, and as usual, Great Grandma stayed calm, assuring me I'd be back the next summer to stay. She was right, I would come back the next summer and all the summers after that, and things always went back to normal. We fell back into our old routine and I was happy again. Winters away from Great Grandma were rough. In the beginning, I had a bit of a southern drawl, and I used all of Great Grandma's odd phrases. The kids at school always made fun of me, and embarrassed, my parents constantly corrected my grammar. It didn't matter to me, though, because Great Grandma had taught me tolerance, patience, and the beauty of taking things with a grain of salt.

Great Grandma died when I was thirteen; she was ninety years old. She had suffered through three strokes, which left her almost entirely blind, and paralyzed her left leg. Because of this she had to go live with my grandmother, and I knew this was hard for Great Grandma, as she never wanted to be thrown into anyone's lap ever again. However, she stayed strong. She didn't show her pain and kept the pride I so admired. Inside, I was miserable. Great Grandma and I could

never again have our routine; she would never again watch the sunset with me on a red and white checkered tablecloth while we talked about fireflies and crazy black roosters. She would never again walk me up the stairs to bed. Just when I got desperate, and was clawing at some remainder of our past, I realized Great Grandma still couldn't get my name, ever, even on the fifth or sixth try. In an odd and confusing way, it comforted me.

After Great Grandma's death, I felt as if a chair had been pulled out from under me. Although she couldn't walk, and rarely spoke near the end of her life, she still inspired me and kept me strong. When she died, I felt truly abandoned for the first time. Every night after her death, for months, I wrote letters to her in a notebook. I reminded her of all the things we used to do, and how much fun we had. I told her how sad I was that she died. I pasted pictures of her and me together, feeding the horses or shoveling manure. I asked her to give me some sign that she heard me because I couldn't understand where she had gone. At times, I got angry with her for leaving me. I assumed that since she had taken me when my parents didn't want me, that that meant she would never leave me. I thought that when she did leave, she would at least let me down easy. She was the first person I ever knew that died, and when she did, there was no one there to explain it to me. For my family to justify my sadness would be to admit that I was really close to her. And admitting that I was really that close to her was admitting that they had abandoned me and allowed our closeness to start.

As children, we are all relatively sheltered, which allows us to believe that the life we are living is completely normal, and is the same as every other kid's we see on the streets. I did see kids with their parents more often than I saw them with great grandparents, but I justified it somehow. Because of this, abandonment is something you feel only if you can comprehend it and are conscious of it, but is often only apparent in the eye of the onlooker. I'm sure many of my relatives and family friends who knew my situation pitied me, but I never felt sad. I don't understand where their pity came from, and in a way, I resent it. By pitying me, it was as if they were saying I wasn't normal, and that I was missing out, but I wasn't. Great Grandma was my life. The farm was our life. Our adventures were what kept us alive. We were each other's happiness.

At Great Grandma's funeral, the song she had

chosen as her recessional was "The Wind Beneath my Wings." Although the song was written about faith, it was also the song of our relationship. In the song, the "you" is the person who helps the other person to fly. She is the wind, unable to be seen, but yet so strong. Birds depend on the wind to propel them to flight, just as we depended on each other. By ourselves, we were completely independent, because of the lives we had both been abandoned. But when we came together, ironically, we became weak, and depended too much on one another.

I have never been as close to another human being as I was to Great Grandma. She taught me what true devotion and companionship really is. She taught me independence and self-sufficiency, but didn't allow those difficult lessons from a person who knew the ins and outs of my heart but never really knew my name.

Once, at a Father-Daughter Lunch at Cozumel, my favorite Mexican restaurant, my dad apologized for choices that he made that had hurt me while I was growing up, and then asked if I thought he was a bad parent. It was a difficult question to answer, as I knew exactly what he was talking about. I knew that, as a parent, it was his nature to agonize over every decision he made while I was growing up. I also knew that all his fears were unfounded, and I reassured him of this. However, as I reflect on this moment in relation to the rest of my life, I wonder if this was the correct conclusion. I don't know if all his decisions benefited me, all I know is that today, I am Jen, and that is all that matters.

I don't know if a child's place is with her mother and father. Nor do I know if her place is with her Great Grandmother. For all I know, a child belongs with a pack of wolves or a family of lions. I'm not an expert on child psychology, and I don't think anybody really is. We only know that a certain moment or decision in life is right if we are living it, if we are feeling it at that given moment. Looking back and analyzing decisions made more than a decade ago serves no beneficial purpose, instead it leads to regret and sometimes remorse. I don't ever want my parents to think that they've done me any wrong by having sent me to live with my Great Grandma, because they didn't. They are the only ones who question my well being today, as they are the ones who made the decision those 18 years ago.

I wish there were a few choice words to sum this up, to give closure to the abandonment issue, but I can't. I don't know whether I was abandoned. Because

I don't *feel* as if I was abandoned, I find it hard to define this word for myself, let alone other people. The bottom line is that I was lucky enough as a child to have been shaped by many dynamic people and experiences. Great Grandma would surely go at the top of that list, but my father, my brother, fireflies, my retarded friend Boo (not Radley), my friends today, and my five-month-old niece Kristen would follow. I am still a child, in a way, and I am still developing. We are constantly being influenced, by people and experiences, and we often try to comprehend this concept. Our development as people is not meant to be monitored and analyzed, it is meant to be left alone. Our thriving as humans should be allowed to blossom and turn into something beautiful that we are not necessarily meant to understand. Life was not intended to be planned and made perfect. All we are meant to do is live.

# THE DIVINE SPARK

CHARLES M. HILL

"...That art is the  
epitome of human life,  
the truest record  
of insight and  
feeling."<sup>1</sup>

IN THE BEST CLASSICAL MUSIC OR EVEN THE BEST SONGS PLAYED ON THE RADIO, ONE MUST ALWAYS HAVE A SENSE OF TIMELESSNESS. MUSIC MUST SPEAK TO THE HUMAN condition or the work of art is lost. In the symphonies by Beethoven or in the classical guitar music of Ron Perl, I have witnessed timelessness. Their music has endured mainly because people have always found it brilliant and beautiful. It speaks to a piece of humanity that does not change, an innate mystery that transcends generations while commenting on the mindset of the present. In my opinion, no mystery is more pondered than that of creation.

Water was brewing. I would say coffee, but many in my class disliked coffee, and so we brewed water in a coffeepot so that everyone could make his or her own cup of tea or cider. We always looked forward to Wednesday in our Greek class. Mr. Bob Patrick, our teacher and mentor, decided that part of Greek culture is philosophy. Thus, each Wednesday I came prepared to eat a bagel and make a cup of the best-spiced cider that you have ever tasted. He began the "colloquium" abruptly, hoping that we would all calm down. Writing on the board, he began,

"Now there are two main theories of the creation of man."

I turn my attention elsewhere and ask my long-time school buddy Theresa to pass the cream cheese.

"First there is a theory originating from Socratic thought that says that God gave man a 'divine spark' as his human soul."

His face gleamed vividly when he breathed the two words, "divine spark." He relished saying every bit of the phrase as if suddenly, to him, the world made sense. He beamed because he enjoyed exposing this idea to us for the first time. I had seen this excitement

before, and I knew that the discussion would be long and deep. I also knew that I should pay attention because this information would undoubtedly be on the next test.

"The other main idea of human creation was given shape by Rousseau who claimed that the human intellect, the human soul, is like a blank slate, and that we have things written on our slates by our experiences in life and our environment."

Very little relish accompanied these phrases, and it was obvious to see which theory Mr. Patrick believed. Nevertheless, he asked each of us what we thought about the two ideas. What ensued was a conversation questioning the very origin of man and his relationship to nature. Why was he created? Does he have a soul? Does he have a free will? Is he shaped by past experiences or genetic characteristics?

When I first saw "The Creation of Adam" by Michelangelo, my mind drifted back to those glorious discussions in Greek class. I wondered what Michelangelo would argue in our debate on the nature of the soul. Did he wonder why man was created? Or did he create a work that focused on what God created: man. So many Christians take this miracle for granted. It is never questioned, rarely misunderstood. Most tend to glide over the fact that God created man in the image and likeness of God in favor of seemingly more important questions, just as my Greek class did. The *why* of creation is continually sought while the miracle of creation is ignored.

And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him."<sup>2</sup>

Man was created in the image of God. In creating man, God gave him every intellectual and emotional capacity. Man was given the capacity to love and to hate. Now man would weep and rejoice. Now man had responsibility, dominion. It was to manage this vast dominion that God made man. Therefore, man is valuable. Genesis stops at this simple explanation of why God created man. Perhaps the author of Genesis thought that the fact that man is valuable because he is created in God's image was enough to ponder in the beginning book of the Bible. God gave man an essence

and this essence reflects the divinity of God. Yet, as humans, we perpetually ask the question why. From the lamentations of Abraham to twentieth-century existentialism, humanity repeatedly asks one question of human existence: why? Why do bad things happen to good people? If we are made good, why are we placed on an earth of corruption? Why do we sin? Why should we consider life valuable?

Very few people meditate on what God created, as described in the book of Genesis and the paintings of Michelangelo. Very few consider the enormous beauty, the potential in the creation of the first human being. Even fewer comprehend the enormous gift of the soul that is imparted at that moment in time. Look at Adam; his face strains while the muscles in his body remain absolutely relaxed and calm. He is accepting a gift through the slight touch of a divine hand. What a concept! Divine life is imparted to humanity in such an elegant touch. The royal purple, flowing robes of God carry him above the heavens, yet they also bring him down to our insignificant existence and give us significance. Michelangelo understands beauty in ways few have ever tried, and in the painting "The Creation of Adam" he invokes a sense of movement and potential that would push him above and beyond the realm of paints and frescoes to a reflection on the mysterious beauty of creation and its implications for our society.

According to Creighton Gilbert, an authority on the life and works of Michelangelo, Michelangelo began his artistic career as commonplace sculptor. He was always good at creating noble statues within the classic Florentine tradition of naturalism. He brought noble people and ideas to perfection in very solid, dense yet realistic statues such as the "Pieta" and "David." These statues attained a heightened sense of perfection in imitating the human form that few sculptors have been able to copy. However, after intensely studying the movement and form of Leonardo da Vinci, his art flourished into a new genre from the present tradition. According to Gilbert, "Michelangelo's greatness emerges in the fact that, absorbing Leonardo's fluid action and growth, he loses nothing of his massive simplicity. From this moment, creating figures as vibrantly alive as they are densely solid, this is the mature Michelangelo that we know."<sup>3</sup> In 1508, Michelangelo began work on the Sistine Chapel. As a sculptor, he began painting rather timidly, but "...the first rather classic, static forms shift to a very original statement of

power and stress mobility and involution..."<sup>4</sup> It is in this phase of painting that Michelangelo began "The Creation of Adam."

One look at "The Creation of Adam" shows the observer that this is not a typical sixteenth century piece of art. Without sacrificing the detail and natural positioning of Adam's body nor the omnipotence of God the Father Almighty, Michelangelo adds movement. And how else could the creation story be displayed except in the fullness of grace and agility as God had to reach out to impart the "divine spark" of life to the human soul? A spark is never silent, never static. It demands a certain fluidity in expression, which found little attention in traditional art up to this time period. Later, movement would be taken to whole new levels in works such as that of Degas' "Little Dancer." In the "Little Dancer" as well as "The Creation of Adam" movement creates this fluidity of expression which perfectly emphasizes the spark, the potential present in each work. Fluidity in expression perfectly envelopes the divine strain of God to man and God to man.

John Sherman, in his essay "The Functions of Michelangelo's Color," explains the creation of movement in this painting by saying, "The focal point of the action, consisting of the two hands that are about to touch, has been moved slightly to the left of the center of the painting. In addition, the dynamic line forming the lower edge of the figure of God parallels the diagonal behind Adam. Together, these elements create a convincing expression of movement, and the moment is charged with tension and expectation."<sup>5</sup> In addition, Michelangelo's use of vivid green and flowing red draperies give a sense of urgency and energy to the movement of the Almighty One. Furthermore, the faces of God and Adam and the angels are "charged with tension and expectation."<sup>6</sup> The Almighty's forehead is wrinkled; Adam is straining. The one hand reaches out imparting this "spark of divinity," this full spectrum of thought and emotion, to the other hand. It is the "breath of life,"<sup>7</sup> the ultimate moment, as God sets Adam both within the world and above the world. Adam is still a creation of God destined to walk upon the mortal world, but now he has God's life, the "breath of life" giving him stewardship over the whole earth according to the book of Genesis, and finally, as a consequence of this creation, man exists in the knowledge of an omniscient God. God knows that man will fall, wars will be fought and unbearable suffering will come to

those created in his image. Yet God creates man, and it is a beautiful, charged moment of the greatest power of God- the power to impart an immortal soul, divine life.

In this painting, Michelangelo marks the beginning of our civilization, and instead of asking why God created us, he describes what we are. According to Michelangelo, we are divinely touched beings of great value in the kingdom of God. It is this description of *what* that often eludes many of society's most accomplished members. Michelangelo does not try to answer the *why* of existence in this masterpiece. His work reminds the observer that the life of God is molded and fashioned in each of us, and therefore life is valuable. Movement allows Michelangelo to focus this expression. Movement allows him to grasp what before was unattainable in art because now he finally depicts the vitality, the anticipation of the inception of spiritual life.

Look at the horrible crimes committed in our world today. Unborn children who have been given this divine spark at conception (nothing extraordinary happens at birth) are murdered daily in the thousands. A new form of death, euthanasia, is poisoning the minds of our older adults. Little children are tortured daily in the sweat factories of China and Indonesia, and we support the torturers. We pass bills in our legislature, which harm the environment for the sake of business. Most obviously, we allow millions of people to go hungry, homeless, and uneducated every day. Do you think that we, as a society, fully comprehend the dignity and value of the human soul on earth? If we do, then the state of justice in our world would seem to indicate otherwise. If we do not, then each of us needs a more vivid reminder of life. We need a piece of art that is admired and revered by every generation since its inception. We need a piece to reflect on the gift of life and the value of the "divine spark" in each of us. Only the "The Creation of Adam" could give fluid expression to a "divine spark," and only such movement could make humanity stop and ponder the implications of the very first "breath of life." Only a work of such anticipation and vitality can arouse the dormant responsibility that is ours, which is to dignify this divine spark in our system of justice and in the treatment of our friends and enemies.

The creation of life is still a mystery in our lives. It demands continuous exploration and revision in light of new biological evidence. In its ability to describe and explore the idea of a "divine spark" in all generations, Michelangelo's "The Creation of Adam"

transcends time and space to challenge society's very conception of life. It emphasizes the value of life: even though life is not always perfect, life comes from the breath of God; the metaphorical blood of God mingles with our own mortal blood in the creation story. I imagine that even the first caveman, when he was cursing his field of mud on harvest day, questioned why God would place him in this misery of earth. Today, in high school and college classes across the country, students and teachers brew coffee or water, eat bagels, and discuss the *whys* of our existence. Too often, when discussing the *whys* of existence, we completely pass over the beauty of the miracle and the mystery of creation. We forget to meditate on the implication of the "divine spark," in our everyday lives, and thus Michelangelo's work has a moral lesson for each forgetful generation.

<sup>1</sup> Langer, Susanne K. "Cultural Importance of Art." Line 3.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:26-27.

<sup>3</sup> Gilbert, Creighton. Michelangelo On and Off the Sistine Ceiling. Ed. George Braziller. (United States: Braziller, Inc. 1994.) pp. 27-31.

<sup>4</sup> Gilbert, Creighton. Michelangelo On and Off the Sistine Ceiling. Ed. George Braziller. p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> Sherman, John. "The Functions of Michelangelo's Color." Ed. Pierluigi De Vecchi. The Sistine Chapel: A Glorious Restoration. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994.) p.105.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 105.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 108.

# UNWRITING a poem

KEVIN RYAN

"Perhaps the basic secret the scientists have never discovered, the first fount of life, is that which happens when a thought takes shape in words."<sup>1</sup>

THE DESTRUCTION OF A MANUSCRIPT WILL NOT HAVE STOPPED IT FROM EVER BEING WRITTEN. IT WILL SIMPLY NOT EXIST ANYMORE. IT IS WIDELY THOUGHT THAT IN order to unwrite a poem, the manuscript must be tossed into the fire and its ashes and remnants sent skyward in a willowing wisp of smoke. This prevailing thought is much akin to sweeping dirt underneath the rug or placing a Band-Aid on a bullet wound. It covers up the problem but neglects to solve it. However it is the first step towards unwriting a poem. The manuscript did not exist before the poem was written so it must be destroyed, but there is much more than that.

The artistic inspiration for writing is known as the muse. There are some that are visited by the muse once in their life and are doomed to hold up their mirrors to the sun trying to recapture the magic they once had. "One cannot simply will the muse; the writer or artist's power lies in his ability to receive, not invent..."<sup>2</sup>

Once the manuscript has been physically destroyed, the impossible task of actually reversing the creative process begins. The following steps must be followed in their entirety exactly. Otherwise unpredictable results may occur and the author of this manuscript is in manner responsible for any mishaps resulting from misuse of this information. The muse is not likely to be happy to be denied its instinctive duty to inspire the works of man. First, it is advised that the reader glance at these words of caution before beginning the reversal process:

1. The length or style of the poem is important when it comes to unwriting a work. A haiku is easier to unwrite than say T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland" because the haiku is hundreds of lines shorter in length. In the

same vein, a poem written in iambic pentameter has a higher degree of difficulty than the free verse work. This makes sense because the amount of inspiration the muse must sprinkle upon the writer varies with the degree and length of the poem.

2. Reversing an artistic work is only advised under the select following circumstances: No circumstance.

3. The person wanting to unwrite the poem must be the writer who wrote the poem. Otherwise, the reversal process would be reverse plagiarism and is punishable by the statutes of something vaguely known as a "Class A" violation which are all handled by the Dishonor Council.

Now begin the instructions for the unwriting of a poem. First, the writer must receive the muse. It is easier to receive the muse through what Arthur Rimbaud called the "rational derangement of all the senses." The muse gave the inspiration; only the muse can take it away. Once the muse has descended, it is necessary for the writer to reject the muse. Basically, the muse receives a punch to the face by the writer. If it is a female writer, the muse will have a beer thrown in its face. It is similar to the renewal of the baptismal promises on Easter day. Simply replace the word "Satan" with the word "muse" in the question, "Do you reject Satan and all of his empty promises?"

Now that the muse has been rejected, sent away with its tail between its...legs...the next step is for the writer to call upon Dionysius and the bliss of intoxication. The writer's mind is the blackboard and intoxicants are the great mental erasers. Only in this case, childish pranks of placing chalk in the erasers will result in that writing movement known as stream of consciousness.

The final step of the unwriting of a poem is widely regarded as the most difficult. The emotional, mental and physical state of the writer must be duplicated as exactly as they were when the call for the muse to descend originated. The success of the duplication of the emotions and feelings varies with the type of feeling. If the feeling is one of despair, it can be duplicated by watching "Touched by an Angel." If it is a feeling of disbelief in reality, it can be duplicated by watching "Ally McBeal." It has also been discovered that being located in the same locational coordinates greatly assists in the completion of the final step.

The poem has now been unwritten. The writer

is no longer aware that the poem was ever in existence. The physical manuscript has been destroyed. The actual process is a lost art. Recollection of works accredited to anonymous or unknown authors are plentiful. These are works that have been unwritten and have only survived through oral tradition and folklore. The decline in quantity of such works exemplifies the loss of this art of reversal.

The unwriting of a manuscript is an ancient tradition. There exist certain prerequisites and regulations for your own safety with regard to the reversal of the writing of a poem. These regulations must be followed to the T. Once the prerequisites have been satisfied, the reversal process may begin. The steps in this process must also be adhered to closely and are considered extremely difficult to complete successfully.

*"This is what you shall do: Love the earth and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to everyone that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence toward the people, take off your hat to nothing known or unknown or to any man or number of men...re-examine all you have been told at school or church or in any book, dismiss whatever insults your own soul, and your very flesh shall be a great poem."*

- Walt Whitman

It can be argued that it is possible to unwrite a poem, but you can never unwrite yourself.

<sup>1</sup> The Fountainhead, Ayn Rand. The Penguin Group 1943.

<sup>2</sup> The Doors: The Complete Lyrics. Dell Publishing 1991.

# VALENTINE'S DAY APOSTLE

JENNY ZASOWSKI

TODAY IS NOT ONLY A SATURDAY, IT IS VALENTINE'S DAY AND DRIVING MY SISTER'S RED CHRYSLER CONCORDE, I AM HEADED TO PROSPECT AVENUE TO PICK UP MY FRIEND Chrissy. My first stop is marked by the precision between the white lines of the Quick Check parking lot. A few minutes later, I emerge from this place of "convenience" with French Vanilla coffee- a drink that supposedly "stunts my growth", yet helps ease the transition to the adult world. I have secret, important matters to take care of, matters that make me feel mature in the early daylight. They are issues that ten minutes ago forced me to sneak out of my house and deceive my parents. Above all, I just want to do what is best for Chrissy.

She gives me a warm smile as she slowly walks towards the car parked outside her house. After strapping on the seatbelt, she faces me and gives me a heartfelt "Thanks." I casually reply, "No problem." We begin our journey with the soothing voice of Adam Duritz and our favorite song 'Round Here' in the background.

Chrissy directs me from a square yellow note paper that she clutches tightly the entire time. The New Jersey Turnpike, Route 287,... forty minutes later, and before I can breathe in all I have ever been taught in life, we are here. Sitting in the parked car in what appears to be an affluent neighborhood, I find it difficult to focus on the name of the establishment on the sign. I can't stop looking at this small group of dedicated protesters with hand-made posters raised proudly in the air. They are slowly parading in a circle outside the building. I instantly feel paralyzed, saddened, sick, and worse, I feel stuck.

"C'mon," she says, as she can probably see me

beginning to fade away. The street light is red as we step out of the car. I put a quarter in the meter, and we cross the street in front of a shiny, black Volvo, towards the small but powerful clan of believers. One of them comes to meet us. Desperately trying to work her magic, she wants to "talk things over." Her name is Barbara and she knows that "there is another way." Politely, we give Barbara some of our time. She quotes the Bible and wants us to trust in God. With a styrofoam cup of coffee in one hand, she reaches around with the other to pull out a pamphlet from the back pocket of her jeans. Pointing to the list under the subtitle "Alternatives", she asks if we would like a cup of coffee of our own, her "treat", so that we can sit down to discuss our options in more detail. I uneasily look to Chrissy who is staring at "Today's Special" posted on the dry-erase board outside the gourmet shop. Barely looking back at Barbara, I decline.

"Which one of you is it?" Barbara abruptly asks as we begin to walk away. The three of us now at a halt, she focuses on Chrissy who shakes her head from left to right in denial. From this point on, Barbara directs all of her talk at me. She comes closer and preaches to me from her own experiences. She too, once brought a friend to an abortion clinic and feels it heavily on her conscience even now. Standing there, listening to her talk, I am unable to shake this one thought from my head; as a result, I feel silently condescending: *thank God I am still a virgin... thank God I am not the one who is pregnant..* My smug side fades as she implores, "Please don't do this."

Her request makes me uncomfortable. I am irritable because deep down I can *feel* that Barbara is right - and here I am supporting what my parents and a lot of other people think is wrong. This woman who, minutes ago, was a stranger, has got me holding conversations in my head. That's *right, Jenny. Stay stone-faced. Don't for a second think that you helping out a friend in need is wrong- and for that reason alone you are doing the right thing.*

Barbara's brown eyes are sincere, but I sympathize with Chrissy, who demonstrates her certainty by straying away from Barbara. Following her lead only takes me even closer to the gang of other protesters. "Look at what you are doing. Please reconsider!" yells the middle-aged woman with blonde hair and black roots carrying a picture of a fetus. "We can help you!" shouts a younger woman. "Don't do this!" begs a third.

Two steps later and we are "safe" at the door.

Chrissy goes right to the front desk of the L shaped room to fill out the papers and pay for the procedure, while I turn the corner to find a seat in the crowded waiting room of the second floor. *Men In Black* is playing on the television and I desperately try to lose myself in the scene. My efforts are unsuccessful as Will Smith is searching for clues to a murder at a morgue; the concept only makes me worry more about where I am right now. Barbara's words start echoing and the time is running short. *I take pride in how great a kid I am, so what am I doing here? I was wrong: I don't belong here.*

I look around at all the unfamiliar faces and, with tearing eyes, start to panic when I cannot find Chrissy among the other patients. *Did she go in already? Please God, no. Let me speak my piece.* I stand up and my legs make contact with all those sitting down as I make my way towards the desk. One Hispanic couple, both in their mid-twenties, halts their conversation and look up at me as I hurriedly pass by. I imagine their wonderment surrounding the circumstances that brought me to this place.

Turning the corner, I find Chrissy blank-faced, leaning against the wall.

"I need to talk to you," I say, damned near hysterical. "I don't want you to do this. I thought I could handle taking you here, but I was wrong. Chrissy, I don't want to be here. Please reconsider."

She speaks emotionlessly as though she is unmoved by my gravity. "Jenny, I'm sorry that you feel this way, but I'm gonna go through with it. If I don't do it now, the cost increases. I have no other choice. You can leave if you want, and I'll find another way home."

Now I am scared out of my mind. Here I am breaking down, while Chrissy remains strong as she typically does in the face of adversity.

She and I have been playing basketball together for five years. This year, our senior season found me as captain and her as my assistant until midway through when she decided to quit. Between living in her sister's shadow on the court and the frequent embarrassment caused by her father's public rage each time the coach screamed at her for making a mistake, Chrissy said she couldn't handle playing anymore. After a close win at Middletown North High School, while most of the parents stood congregated on the gym floor excitedly talking about the game, Chrissy's father was causing something to talk about on his own. As our victorious coach

accepted the congratulations while making his way for the locker room, Chrissy's dad began kicking the bleachers, and loudly calling him an "Asshole!", swearing that his daughter "shouldn't've been benched the second half!" Despite Chrissy's stoic facade during coach's post-game wrap up, she turned in her uniform the next day. "I have to do what's best for me," she explained to me in homeroom that morning...

*Well what about what's best for me right now?* I start thinking about the constant pressure that my parents put on me to always "do the right thing." I'm not so sure that I'm doing it right now. I need someone to help me get through this, but looking around at the strangers in the waiting room leaves me no better off. No way am I going to abandon Chrissy, but I need to do something for myself.

Alone, I go down the stairs and out into the cold, crisp air. The picketers are in the spot where we left them, but this time appear less monstrous and more human. It is as if they were taking a break- no shouting of convictions, just a few of them engaged in some intimate conversation. I take a deep breath as I quickly try to slip by.

The hawk-like Barbara won't let me go unnoticed, though. She immediately rushes over, as I increase my speed. The pace proves a little too much for her, and from a step or so behind, she joyfully wants to know if I reconsidered. "Where are you going?" she hounds me.

Unsure of what I will actually do, I escape to the red car. To make it look as if I have a plan, I grab a handful of change out of the ashtray. After flipping the visor down, I stare at myself in the mirror, marveling at the reflection for a second. *I thought I knew who you were...* I angrily slap it back up, then get out of the car.

Barbara loyally joins me when I get back to her territory on the other side of the street. She starts talking again, and now feeling more lost than ever before in my life, I listen. "Thank God..." she is still chirping about the decision she thinks I have made. "Don't worry, we will find a way to help you," she rejoices. Annoyed at myself for having given her false hope, I rudely shut her up by saying, "It's not me! I'm not the one getting it done!" Poor Barbara, she thought herself victorious for a while; the saint thought she had saved another soul.

I continue to talk, tears now streaming down my face. "I don't want her to do it, but she won't listen

to me. I'm so scared. I don't know what to do and I don't know who to call."

Right there and then, Barbara starts praying out loud on the cobblestone sidewalk. I have my hands wrapped around the receiver of the pay phone and bow my head, searching for anyone's grace. *"Dear God, please give Jenny here the strength and answer to the question of who she should call..."*

I'm sobbing, thinking of the utter disappointment my Catholic parents will have in me. I'm so afraid of them, of how their view of their baby girl will change. I feel the fear, but call anyway.

"Mom?" I say in a trembling voice.

"Where are you?" I can tell she has been heavily concerned.

"I'm so sorry, Mom. I'm so sorry..." I'm crying with Barbara right beside me.

"Jenny, where are you?" I know she is afraid of my response.

"Please don't be mad at me, and don't judge or think less of Chrissy. Mom, I took Chrissy to get an abortion..." I put my head down and close my eyes, preparing for her response.

"Oh, Jenny..." She wants to know exactly where I am so she can come and pick me up.

"No, Mom. I'm not going to tell you. I don't want you to come." I'm still crying, but feel better because she now knows the truth behind my earlier disappearance. "I'll be okay, I just don't want you to be mad. I'm sorry. I'm sorry, Mom."

"Jenny, I'm not mad at you right now, but I do want to be there for you." I tell her again that despite the way I sound now, "I'll be okay." I don't want her to come, because I want some time for myself to reflect on this experience.

I hang up the phone and while wiping away some tears, look towards heaven. After taking a deep breath, my gaze shifts back towards the angel Barbara. Peacefully, she smiles and reaches out to hug me.

She asks me again if I would like a cup of coffee, and I take her up on the offer this time. She goes first into one of those gourmet shops and holds the door open for me. The stylish man in the tight, ribbed black turtleneck, black rimmed glasses, and apron at the cash register knows her by name. "The usual, Barb?" he asks. "And what about for her?"

I go for plain coffee this time and while we sit there, she tells me a little about herself. Barbara was

once very promiscuous, but now she believes she has "seen the light." She is dedicated to helping others find a way as well, and is delighted when she hears I am still a virgin.

Twenty-five minutes later, there are two empty cups on the table. I thank Barbara for the time she has spent helping me, and she leaves me with her copy of the Bible. She inscribes a personal message on the inside of the paperback cover, a sentiment her black ink makes most permanent in my mind, "Waiting is worth it..."

I ascend those stairs again and pass the Hispanic couple who watch me as they did during my panic before. Sitting alone in the still-crowded waiting room, I notice that not much has changed except for the fact that Chrissy isn't around. She's somewhere behind the double doors; through anesthesia she has temporarily transcended the world.

Noticing the heart stickies on the window for the first time, I am reminded of the irony of the day - St. Valentine's Day. Sitting there, my mind wanders off to the purpose of its celebration, the different chambers of love: romantic, physical, brotherly, spiritual, and unconditional. I conclude that when we have self and spiritual love, it is easier to stay away from the physical. I then wonder what kind of love all the people in the room around me have in their life, and I say a prayer for all the positive love I am fortunate enough to have in mine.

About an hour later, the double doors open and a nurse is showing Chrissy the way out. She stops to look around the room, probably a little unsure of whether or not I'd be there. Her doubts are erased when we make eye contact as I stand up and start moving towards her. She tries to give me that smile she did when coming out of her house earlier in the morning, but her facade can't hide the pain this time. It even hurts to look at her for she seems very weak. Slightly hunched over, she strugglingly walks towards me.

We meet and I instantly give her a hug. I don't completely let go, but instead keep my arm around her as a source of support. Looking at the nurse I say, "Thanks... I have it from here."

# monkeyBUSINESS

DANIELLE DECKARD

I FLIP THROUGH THE SPARKLING NEW DELIA'S CLOTHING CATALOG THAT I JUST RECEIVED THROUGH THE MAIL ADDRESSED TO ME, MISS DANIELLE DECKARD. MY FIN- GERS glide over the glossy pages — the bright photo- graphs jumping out at me — until my eyes come to rest on page 27 — item B, monkey t-shirt. 100% cotton, sizes S.M.and L, \$18, the description reads. I'm in love; I must have it. Just like I had to acquire another item from another catalog, the "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil t-shirt" - the forest green cotton screen printed with three adorable, posing monkeys: one cover- ing her eyes, another with his hands placed over his ears, and the third with her hands covering her mouth. Then, when item NK 137, the "go bananas" tee was unavailable, I went into mourning. That item was spe- cial — not only did it feature an utterly precious little cartoon monkey enjoying a ripe, yellow banana, but it actually gave off the delicious aroma of bananas — a scratch-and-sniff t-shirt, what will they think of next? Why this penchant for cute little monkey t-shirts?

I buy them simply because I like them, but why do I like these particular shirts so much. It's not because I simply like monkeys. If everyone had one, I wouldn't be so eager to become a clone, so maybe I'm just trying to be different. Isn't it ironic that I'm trying to be unique by purchasing a mass-produced good with a generic name and item number, which is available to any citizen of the United States, or even other countries such as Canada, who so chooses to and can afford to fill in a general order form and send it in to a faceless corpo- ration, which will take one from the piles of hundreds resting in a warehouse? I don't think that I was overtak- en by a sudden transformation from "Plain Jane" to "Miss Originality" in the manner of Clark Kent who

magically becomes Superman when he puts on his superhero suit. Be that as it may, I did feel unique when I wore that shirt, and being unique has always been important to me. There may have been hundreds, even thousands, either sitting in a warehouse, or being worn at the same time all across the country, but out of all the students in my school, I had the only one.

That first monkey tee was my favorite, until the star-crossed day when it shrank in the wash. Before that luckless occasion, I had loved it. It was special (nobody had it), and perfect for me. I know it's just a t-shirt, but maybe it was more than that. Clothes reflect the wearer's personality, her individuality, her style, but I realize, too, that they can show to what an extent someone is a slave to fashion, a victim of trends, one surrendered to the conformity of society. I wonder if I loved this t-shirt because it so perfectly suited my personality — the cute, little monkeys were just like I had always been and hopefully forever will be — little and cute. There's no escaping it. Even when I'm a grandmother, I hope I'm still cute and petite with a little white bun perched on the top of my aged head. I've always been described as "cute" more often than I've been called pretty or beautiful (only my boyfriend says that). The word has so little meaning nowadays — boys are cute according to the squeals of adolescent girls; soft, pink babies are cute; desirable clothes are cute; anything little and remotely attractive is cute.

Is cuteness an inherent part of my personality that I've possessed since birth or have I always been conforming to the image society has thrust upon me? The pages and pages of tall, thin models advertising the latest fashions (that would never look good on my body) and illustrating beauty tips in fashion magazines implicitly dictate that because I'm not six feet tall and my features don't live up to model standards that I'm not beautiful. Since I'm not ugly, I must be cute. I'm probably also naturally susceptible to wearing cute clothes because of a pattern that originated many years ago when mom stuck bows in my hair, and I basked in the glow of mothers who looked down at me, smiled, and cooed. "She's just adorable!" Is my style creative and unique or is it simply what it was destined to become in reaction to the influence of trends and the media and the suggestions of my mother during all our shopping trips? No one is raised in a bubble; we can't escape outside influences. Thus, I must have been affected to some extent.

As for influences in style, there are the obvious

spreads in periodicals proclaiming the hip, new trends of the season and neatly categorizing "what's hot and what's not." Was I brain-washing myself during all those years of actively pouring over Teen, *Seventeen*, and YM magazines? Am I still? There are billboards, television, movies, and the drama of real life; an actual person wearing actual clothes can be seen as a sort of living model. There is the deception of advertising campaigns everywhere — "Use Product X and you'll become pretty, popular, younger, etc." Or, "Wear these clothes and you'll be as cool as Miss TV Star." Sure, I've been influenced by ads and magazines, but not completely manipulated. I mean, how many of us have been seduced into buying a product that we had no desire for until we saw the ads?

There are also the subtle suggestions of friends and family. I can clearly recall my sister's voice: "Oh you're going to wear that?" I felt hurt when my sister questioned me like that. I don't understand why she felt so compelled to make these remarks. I mean, one shouldn't hurt someone's feelings because his or her attire isn't to your liking. I tried to tell myself that I shouldn't become upset over such trivial little comments. Sometimes, I would defend myself or respond spitefully, but on other occasions I would change my outfit, thinking, "Maybe she's right." I remember when gossipy friends would say with horror: "Did you see what she had on?" and I'd reply vaguely because I didn't want to be a part of such negative and shallow conversation. In the back of my mind, there was a fear that someone was talking about me like that. With the monkey tees, to my knowledge, I received nothing but positive feedback, so I probably didn't have to worry about any gossip there. If everyone had hated them, I may have thought twice about wearing t-shirts, but then, oh no, I would have been conforming again.

In reality, after buying monkey shirt number one, I received many compliments. Since I liked hearing, "Oh, I love your shirt; it's so cute," perhaps my motivation to continue to build a collection was the natural desire for attention, even if the attention was over something trivial, so shallow, and so materialistic. (By the way, my collection now totals three including the original, which still rests in a sacred place on my closet's shelf even though its shrunken.) After all, everyone loves compliments.

However, I haven't received the same enthusiastic response here at college when I've worn shirt two.

Perhaps college students are not as shallow as high schoolers or perhaps, my friends in high school were trying to be nice while my new acquaintances don't feel as obligated. On the other hand, maybe shirts two and three merely aren't as nice looking as shirt number one. For whatever reason, the reaction for shirts two and three has not been as overwhelming. Now I'm starting to rethink my plan to create a collection of monkey tees. Is this a direct effect of the diminishing peer response or have I simply decided that the idea is silly after taking a step back to reflect? Now, if I glance upon an adorable little t-shirt in a store or catalog, I am sure that I will still desire it, but not with the same intense feeling of necessity. On second thought, I don't think that it's because I receive fewer compliments or because I think it's silly. I'm simply happy with the number of monkey tees that I own at this time.

This I can explain in economic terms. The economic law of diminishing marginal utility states that as more units of a product, in this case monkey t-shirts, are consumed, the demander, myself, will acquire less and less satisfaction from the purchase of each additional unit. Therefore, I was immensely pleased with my purchase of shirt one, but with shirt two, although I was still happy, I derived less satisfaction, and then with shirt three I obtained even less pleasure.

I'm rather ashamed to admit that I obtained pleasure from such a material source. I don't want to sound like Veruca Salt (that spoiled little rich girl in the movie *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*) who demands from mummy and daddy every pretty thing she glances upon in the shop window and whose sole desire in life is to have control of her dear husband's gold card. After all, a shirt is a meaningless thing which may provide fleeting pleasure, but that's far from happiness. It's not as if shopping is the sole purpose of my existence. In fact, I don't go shopping very often and am content with my modestly sized wardrobe.

Since about the midpoint of my highschool career, I've been happy to peruse sale and clearance catalogs and take a trip to the mall every once in a while. Gone are the routine back-to-school extravaganzas. Nearly every item I purchase is on sale or priced relatively inexpensively. When I enter the Gap, I zoom straight to the sales racks. One reason is that after having my first job, I can't stand to part with my hard earned cash. Additionally, over time I've become more self-confident and mature. I have broken free of most of

the bonds of peer pressure and Mom pressure in regards to decisions on my wardrobe. (Since I now have my own money and the use of a car, I can shop without having to hear my mother drill me: "What are you going to wear that with? Are you sure you need it? Why don't you get this?") I don't care so much what other people think of my clothing or fashion in general. There are more important things to worry about. It was by no means an overnight process; it was part of growing up. In that respect, I assume I'm similar to most people.

As for my obsession with monkey tees, I'm not too unusual in that respect either. Not everyone collects monkey tees, but each person has his or her own thing. My friend Molly, for example, wears navy blue almost exclusively and another friend makes nearly all her purchases at the Gap. I know someone who has worn his favorite baseball hat each and every day for the past five years. It has faded from red to a grayish pink hue and become literally worn to threads. When the brim fell off, he sewed it back on because he couldn't bear to retire the hat. Most people choose a favorite store or style of shoes or whatever happens to suit them. My favorite tees just happen to feature monkeys, but I don't wear them every day. I also have favorite jeans (*LEI*), favorite stores (*Strawbridge's* and *5-7-9*), and favorite sneakers (*Nike*); the list goes on and on. My penchant for these tees is part of the universal habit of establishing preferences. We choose favorites for many reasons including comfort, familiarity, and name brand trust. For instance, I like Nikes and LEI jeans because they have a good fit. A few simple reasons for my monkey tee preference are that they're casual, comfortable, fun, and don't forget the ubiquitous word- cute, like children's clothes.

My monkey tees let me feel like a kid and hold on just a little while longer to the idyllic freedom of the fantasy of childhood. If I dress like a kid, I can still feel like a kid. This desire for a monkey tee collection ties into my Peter Pan complex. When I was a kid, there were two things that I never wanted to do: grow up and drive a car. My favorite cartoon was *The Jetsons*, and I was certain that by the day I hit sixteen we would all be zipping around the sky in magical flying vehicles. Unfortunately, this hasn't happened yet, but I'm over it. As for becoming an adult, on career day, when my teacher asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" I replied, "Peter Pan." Truth is that I didn't want to be anything when I grew up because I didn't want to grow up. The Toys-R-Us jingle ("I don't want to grow

up. I'm a Toys-R-Us kid...") should be my theme song. I still don't want to go out into the real world to those scary places where everyone has to wear a suit and tie and sit in a cubicle all day. So, why would I want to wear stuffy office clothes?

My monkey tees are the complete opposite of the somber suits with leather pumps with scratchy, annoying pantyhose. The saying goes, "You are what you eat." I think it would be more accurate if it was, "You are what you wear," meaning that you feel inside like your outer garments or you are judged based on your appearance. Corporate America subscribes to this belief. Did you know that the employees of MBNA, who spend their days making unwanted "courtesy calls" are required to dress professionally, even though their customers only hear their voices? If I feel the need to be taken seriously, I will bring out the black skirt, starched shirt, heels, and pantyhose. If I'm in the mood to lie back and relax, out come the overalls or sweat shirt and sneaks. There's another cliché, "You can't judge a book by its cover," but everyone does. Accordingly, if I want to come across in a certain manner, I'll dress that way.

Our clothing makes a statement, whether we intend it or not. For example, expensive designer dresses can symbolize wealth and elegance. At the Academy Awards, the stars' walks down the red carpet are some of the most important parts of the evening. Television coverage of the event is filled with images of the most important people wearing their important clothes. Joan Rivers focuses her praise and criticism, not on award-winning movie performances, but on the evening's fashion hits and misses. On a smaller scale, we can see how clothing style is often a symbol of popularity by looking at the junior high and high school culture. It seems like the "popular" people always wear the right clothes.

I'd say that my overall preference in the realm of style is variety and uniqueness. My boyfriend wears a polo shirt, jeans, and his *Adidas* every day. In contrast, I might be in the mood for a long dark denim dress with leather sandals on Monday, running shoes, wind pants, and a sweatshirt on Tuesday, and boot-cut jeans, a soft burgundy v-neck sweater, and clunky leather boots on Wednesday. Guys, of course, have fewer fashion options, but they can still be labeled as different types: dressy, casual, preppy, grunge, etc. Generally speaking, fashion is definitely more important to girls, and it's been my experience that guys don't judge each other based on appearances with the same scrutiny that girls judge each

other. How many fashion and beauty magazines have you seen for teenage boys? Anthony, age 18, asks, "Isn't it ironic that girls judge guys by what they wear anyway?" I suppose that is, but personally I don't think I "judge" guys by what they wear in a negative way. I mean, I think I can certainly get a glimpse into a guy's personality through his wardrobe choice, but I would never write someone off based on his style or lack thereof.

I try to avoid categorization by dressing in a variety of styles. In my high school, it was easy to see where most people drew the lines. There were preps who frequented the Gap or Limited, the country-style people (some are members of "The Future Farmers of America") with their boots and brass buckles, and the devotees of rap and R&B with their baggy jeans, shimmering b-ball jerseys, expensive sneakers, and obvious labels such as Tommy Hilfiger. There are other categories, of course, and those who defy labeling, but even those who defy labeling can be labeled "non-conformist." It's human nature to try to box everything into neat little categories because it organizes the world and erases our understanding. When it comes to people, this labeling isn't always a "good thing" (as Martha Stewart would put it). At its worst, it can lead to stereotyping and prejudice. I hated this labeling, because in my school, where everyone knew everybody, you couldn't get around it or even give yourself a makeover without causing the gossip wheels to start spinning. I like to think that I fall into the latter group — that my style is a bit special, a little off from the mainstream. I suppose that's rather wishful thinking on my part, considering that I compile many of my outfits from items stolen out of my sister's closet, and there are garments exactly the same as mine hanging in closets across America.

Let's face it, in this world full of mass-produced fashions and media influences, it is nearly impossible to have a truly unique style. The only way to have a one-of-a-kind look is to sew your own clothing. My monkey tees are an example of how I've accepted this fact and my cute image. It's not so bad to be cute; it could be worse. I could be seen as frightening or unfriendly — the way that some people (perhaps unfairly) view those Goth chicks who dress completely in black with the fishnet stockings, combat boots, body piercings, and dark lipstick. They go on talk shows to explain to their "Square" parents that it is a form of self-expression and a statement of individuality, but since there are entire

shows devoted to these people, even Goth is a trend. It doesn't bother me that if I was cast as a Spice Girl, I'd probably be Baby Spice, not Scary Spice or Posh Spice. It's fun to be little and cute. Not everyone can get away with going trick or treating into their late teens or with wearing little monkey tees. But what will I do when I get too old for that? If I have to change my style will I have to change my personality, too?

# WATER SLOWING

GEORGE CONVERY

SHORTLY AFTER CHRISTMAS MY NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOR DIED. MR. HARPER — GENE WAS HIS FIRST NAME. I DIDN'T KNOW HIM THAT WELL. I REMEMBER HE NEVER minded when my friends and I ran through his yard playing guns. He let us play on the basketball hoop in his driveway when he was away, threw our balls over the fence when he found one, and we shoveled his driveway a few times. He was old. How old I don't know, but definitely old enough that it was okay for him to die, at least for the average person's standards. He had been sick for a while and spent much of December in the hospital, but he came home for Christmas. I'm pretty sure the doctors said he didn't have much time left, and knowing he was going to die, I'll bet he wanted to be in a place that was comforting and familiar to him when he passed on, rather than in some sterile hospital that would limit his visitors.

After all, he had a big family. They always had huge parties that would keep me up half the night when I was little. My bedroom window is only about twenty feet from the Harper's house and I could hear voices and music coming from their patio. All of their children had moved out years ago, and on the day he died there certainly wasn't a party, but sure enough there were cars the length of his driveway and at least half a dozen more, that probably brought children, grandchildren, and other relatives, parked in the street. I saw the same sight about three months later when I came home for spring break, cars lining the street and the Harper's driveway. I immediately assumed the worst. "Mom, did something happen to Mrs. Harper?"

"Muriel? I don't know, but she's been sick too."

I thought to myself that maybe the reason Mrs. Harper stayed healthy so long was because Mr. Harper was around her and now that he was gone she could die too. Shortly afterward my mother told me Mrs. Harper hadn't died, but her tone of voice told me that she didn't think Mrs. Harper would be with us much longer. The way my mother broke the news to me about Mr. Harper, and the way she treated Mrs. Harper's illness showed me that my mom is very accepting of their deaths. My mother's mother passed away over seven years ago, her father only a few years before that, and I've attended several funerals of my mother's relatives and friends. I guess she's gotten used to death, but as a twenty-one-year-old college student I can't understand, how. I supposedly have the rest of my life ahead of me and the idea of myself or one of my friends dying just doesn't compute. I couldn't even imagine my parents, who are only ten or twenty years younger than the Harpers, dying, yet Mr. Harper, knowing he would probably die, accepted this fact and went home to enjoy the time he had left. My mom accepts the fact that Mrs. Harper is going to die as well.

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Four of my roommates, myself, and our friend Jerry all entered into a Celebrity Deathpool last year. It is based on the premise that a certain amount of many celebrities die each year, so one of the celebrities would kick it before the year was out. We came up with one hundred and twenty celebrities, ranging from Stephen Hawking to Estelle Getty to Kelsey Grammer to Isaac Hanson to Yanni, and each participant was randomly distributed twenty of the celebrities. We each threw in ten dollars and agreed that if none of the celebrities died by the end of the semester we'd each pick another ten in the hopes that one of us would select the first one to die. The winner of fifty crisp, clean, dollars of U.S. currency would be the one who was lucky enough to have one of their celebrities die first.

The first celebrity on the list to die was Esther Rolle and it turned out that Jerry, the only one of us who didn't live in the room, had her. However, we saw a lot less of Jerry towards the end of the semester and the one time we did see him after Ms. Rolle's death he didn't even mention it. We all figured that it was his own fault for not hanging out with us enough, keeping track of his celebrities, or paying attention to current

events. Whatever the case, the death of Ester Rolle cost no one in my room ten dollars. We just decided that if another celebrity died before Jerry came to collect his prize, whoever had that other celebrity would be the winner.

The next celebrity on the list was Joe DiMaggio, and wouldn't you know it, Jerry had him too. We all began to wonder if Jerry knew Joltin' Joe was on his list. Well, after a few days he called stating that he had won and a few days later he collected his winnings, unceremoniously. He announced at the door, "I came for my money," and proceeded to badger each of us throughout the course of the evening until we each finally gave him his ten dollars. He stuck around for a little while after that, had a beer, and left. We were all kind of peeved; one, that we lost and two, about the way he collected the money. But in the end we figured it was probably best that he found out, because the way it was going, by the end of April, Jerry's eighteen other celebrities would probably bite it too, and none of us really had anything against Gilbert Godfried or Don Rickles. So now if Slash, O.J., Kenny G, or Don King die, we'll still receive satisfaction, but we won't win fifty bucks.

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Right before Christmas break I won seamonkeys as a third place prize in a comedy improv competition. The seamonkeys came with a little green aquarium about the size of a soup can and three packets. One of the packets contained a purifying agent for the water, because seamonkeys can't survive in tap water. They need a "special" environment. The second packet contained seamonkey eggs in suspended animation and the third was seamonkey food, which was supposed to last for several months. They don't eat much.

My friend Rachel (a person who has never had a pet that survived more than a year) and I followed the instructions on the packets and at first had thought that we did something wrong, but after a few days we saw little specks swimming around in the aquarium. If you are unfamiliar with seamonkeys they are little crustaceans that are relatives of the daphnia and the brine shrimp. They kind of looked like tiny little feathers with eyes, that just fluttered to move through the water. We wondered how big they would get, that if one day we would walk into the kitchen and see the seamonkeys sitting at

the table eating breakfast while they waited for us, but my largest ones didn't grow much bigger than tic-tacs.

They survived January and by the end of February there were at least fifteen seamonkeys of various sizes. We estimated that they were on their third generation. I was a seamonkey great grandfather. They were also quite an attraction. Whenever people came over they would inspect the seamonkeys. One friend of mine would just stare at them for a while in the dark, watching them swim in different directions as he pointed a flashlight at the tank.

The beginning of the seamonkey tale is exciting, but the end is tragic. I had been over-feeding them, so I figured I would wait until Friday right before spring break to feed them, instead of feeding them on Monday like usual. This way they could eat the left over food and would have enough for the week I was gone, but in a Wednesday night cleaning frenzy my roommate threw out their food. So, basically they had to survive spring break on scraps until I could get more food. When I returned there were maybe five left, some swimming around and the others nosing around the bottom through the dead seamonkey carcasses. By Friday only three were left alive. I was tempted to flush them down the toilet where they might be able to fend for themselves instead of sit and starve, but I didn't. I figured soon I'd be able to get them more food and maybe I could repopulate the species, but again while cleaning, the same roommate carelessly placed them on top of a frying pan set atop our microwave. He turned his back on them. Then the precariously placed frying pan, along with my seamonkeys, fell to the floor, cracking the plastic aquarium and crating a large puddle of what used to be a few live seamonkeys.

There was nothing I could do. I was upset, but it was a mistake. He apologized and another roommate made a tombstone out of our dry erase board, stating:

The Seamonkeys

January 1999 - March 1999

R.I.P.

(Rest In Puddle)

I recently purchased a new set of seamonkeys, but I have yet to bring them to life. I'm worried my seamonkey fatherhood will again result in a mass extinction. Still, they were a lot of fun. Hopefully this time I'll keep better track of their food.

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One of the biggest obsessions that hit my room this last year was with James Bond, not Pierce Brosnan or Sean Connery, but with the Nintendo 64 video game. It's a wonderful concept. How often does one say that they would like to kill their roommates? This game allows you to do that several times a day. You would run through hallways, corridors, caves, and complexes with anything from a throwing knife to an assault rifle to strategically-placed proximity mines that explode, turning your friend or roommate into churn when he or she gets a little too close.

Although we haven't played as much this year as we have become engrossed in different games, filling each other full of lead for hours often caused us to be late to classes, rehearsals, meetings, or just to blow off our homework because it was so much more fun to blow up each other. And afterwards no actual harm was done. No one is really killed, and even prizes, like the best marksmanship, most deadly, and the highly-coveted most dishonorable award are doled out based on your endurance, killing accuracy, and style. In truth the game was sort of ruined for us by another friend, who, by himself, beat three of my roommates by the score of 10-2. After being abused like that, killing wasn't nearly as fun.

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Have you ever actually watched water freeze? There is this stage between when the water is exposed to freezing temperatures and when it actually begins to freeze and little particles of ice start to surface. To me it looks as if the water gets sluggish, simply slowing down. Science would tell you that as water cools the movement of water molecules decreases and gas escapes from the water until the molecules are so close and motionless that for all intensive purposes they are frozen in place. So in essence the water is slowing down, but I find this scientific definition too simple. What about the tiny animals like seamonkeys that might be living in this water. Do they simply slow down too? Is it all left up to physics and chemistry? I don't think that nearly enough information is paid to the will of the water.

I think the situation is more like that of a person's retirement or of the traveler in the Yukon in Jack

London's short story, "To Build a Fire." The traveler works so hard to stay warm and dry in spite of the snow and far below freezing temperatures, but no matter what his efforts are he cannot. So he decides he has to build a fire. At first he fails, but then he gets it going only to have it doused by snow. He tries one last time, but fails again. He begins running, stumbling through the snow, his feet bare, towards the destination that is much too far for him to run to. Finally, he stops, falls down in the snow, and shortly after dies. He knew it was his time, decided to fight it no longer, and simply accepted it. I think when water freezes it is something like that.

# THE DEMYSTIFICATION OF THE PIPE

JOSEPH CAPISTA

*For under \$8.00 you too can start reaping its psychological benefits.*

YOU HAD TO LOOK CLOSELY TO TELL I WAS PACKING. HIDDEN BENEATH MY SHIRT, NO ONE NOTICED THE INDISCREET BULGE-AT LEAST THEY DIDN'T LET ON IF THEY DID. Alex slammed the car door shut, and we didn't wave good-bye to his mother as she drove off. The Ferris wheel's eerie lights shined on the thick, saline air as it blew by in misty pockets. We ascended the dark ramp, and the Ferris wheel's muffled song was lost among the din of the boardwalk.

When we stepped into the light, I pulled it out into the open and began loading. The tobacco was some awful drugstore brand my brother sneaked before dinner; as I packed the bowl, my fingers browned with stale tobacco juice. It was a shoddy job, but Alex didn't care-finally, I'd swiped a pipe from my father's college junk box, and we were ready to smoke.

Between the wind and the cheap matches, it took a while to get the thing lit. When smoke finally slid from the bowl, we decided it was time to walk. Or rather, strut.

"Are you smoking a *pipe*?" asked a cigarette wielding elder.

"Yep." I passed the pipe to Alex, who took a puff, coughed, and smirked.

And this was only the beginning.

Ever since Sir Walter Raleigh swaggered into 16th century English courts, pipe smoking has assumed

an enigmatic, mystical quality. I recall the first and only time I saw my father with one of his college pipes, puffing through the backyard sun, still suited and tied from a day at the office. Until that point, I hadn't even realized he *owned* a pipe (or a small collection, as I discovered in my rambunctious teenage years). "Is that *really* my father?" I wondered. He looked swashbuckling, almost gallant.

Gallant is the appropriate word-for most Americans, the pipe is directly associated with order and chivalry. From the rationally deduced world of Sherlock Holmes to the idealism of Bing Crosby, pipes are a symbol imprinted in our psyche telling us all is well. Yep, a pipe suggests, everything's under control, gonna sit back and have a smoke. (Marketing genius Hugh Hefner was quick to catch on to this association-the pipe was a critical part of his gentlemanly get-up, helping *Playboy* maintain its reputation as a "respectable" men's publication.)

Years after our initial pipe adventure, Alex and I were sitting around a table, engaged in a late night, pipe-side chat. We began discussing our favorite blends, then got to talking about pipe stories. Not *our* pipe stories, but stories total strangers volunteered to us while we were leisurely enjoying a solitary bowl of tobacco. Countless times, the lure of pipe smoke transported people's minds into fond memories of childhood and yesteryear.

Suddenly, Alex and I were puzzled. Everyone, it seemed, was delighted with our pipes. If a mere whiff of tobacco brings someone back to childhood days when his grandfather soothed his aching ears by blowing warm pipe smoke into them (as an older priest confessed with enthusiastic nostalgia), and if pipes gamer smiles from scores of admiring strangers (as a pipe does for both of us), why have the pipes become such a rarity in American culture? Why did that old lady in Denny's assume I was smoking marijuana and call the Pennsylvania State Police as I was sipping my coffee a few months ago? Were Alex and I the last remaining few of the pipesters?

Eventually we decided that pipes, while perhaps the greatest application of Prometheus's gift of fire, lost their popularity because they were just too damn mystifying for most people. After all, if it has mystical qualities attached to it, it must be difficult, right?

This is a fallacy. Pipe smoking, despite its appearance, is easy, cheap, lot of fun, and soothes the

brain. Here's why and how *you* should join the brotherhood of pipe smoking.

### This Is Not A Pipe

In 1929, Belgian artist Rene Magritte began turning the everyday world upside-down with his early surrealist paintings. Among the Father of Surrealism's most famous works is a simple painting of a pipe, beneath which, in huge swirly letters is written "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" ("This is not a pipe.").

The simple irrationality and absurdness of this piece has delighted the many who've beheld its blunt irony. Such mystical irrationality is not uncommon for the pipe today, though. As pipe smoking spiraled upward from its everyman status in the 18th and 19th century, to become a staple of the 20th century elite, pipe smoking was unjustly snuffed-out by most folks- it was too upper-crust, too much of a hassle. This rejection became even more prominent as the pipe became a symbol of authority and reactionary values in the turbulent 1960's.

Consequently, today we think pipes are strictly for the elite; pipes became associated with artists (VanGogh, Magritte, and Rockwell), or dictators ("Oom Paul" Kruger of South Africa), or lofty philosophers (Sartre) and geniuses (Einstein), or cartoons (Popeye) and their wise-cracking cartoonists (MAD Magazine's Dave Berg).

This belief, combined with the fact that the pipe conflicts with the very workings of our society, has left pipes only aspiring to their popularity in the 1950's. Today, the art of pipe smoking is maintained by a small (but steadily growing) populace.

When I say that pipe smoking runs contrary to our society, I meant that in our age of technology and convenience, when leisure time has been scratched off the daily planners of so many Americans, there is no longer time to sit down and enjoy a pipe. (It's no wonder pipes continue to enjoy a commonplace status in the less strenuous European culture.) In this utterly pragmatic and literal society, the mystical pipe is revolutionary.

### So Why the Hell Should You Smoke a Pipe?

Pipe smoking is unhealthy, dated, boring and expensive. It's for high-brow, symphony-loving, pate-eating, old granddads, right? So why the hell should you try it?

For me, it was only natural to start smoking a pipe as soon as I had enough secondary-sex hair to purchase tobacco. As a teenager, I loved the sensation of the bit clenched in my jaw, heads turning, people asking if the pipe was some kind of a joke. Indeed, a joke it was; the pipe was both a lighthearted mockery of my own teenage-awkwardness as well as a subtle form of rebellion. I emphasize subtle-when my parents found my pipe stashed in a bedroom closet, they recognized it as a mild, *mild*, assertion of my independence.

As was said before, part of the reason the pipe has disappeared is because society is on the move. Express mail, express cash, espresso...who has time to sit down for half an hour a couple of times a week and enjoy a quiet pipe-smoke? An arcane thought! The relaxing ritual of a pipe smoke has no place in this society, you barbarian!

Stop and think a second, though. What's one of the most *unhealthy* aspects of your daily existence? For many of us, it's stress-a direct result to the express lifestyle. As Americans, we rise stressed, and we go to sleep stressed. Stress gives us headaches, panic attacks, and high blood pressure. Poorly managed stress makes us susceptible to strokes, causes sleep deprivation, produces an ornery, irritable disposition.

Yet, despite protests from overworked and harried doctors, slowing down and reducing stress gets put on the back burner. How is it possible to just stop your day and schedule in relaxation?

The pipe, my friend, *is* the antidote to this dilemma.

"Our pipes help us unwind, they let the air out, they release the pressure and they are extremely soothing," says Santa Monica pipe store-owner Ed Koplín. "There are immense psychological benefits from pipe smoking. Pipes help you relax. Pipes help you live longer." At 90 years old, Koplín knows a thing or two about living.

Relaxation touches the essence of what it is that distinguishes a pipe smoker. As a pipester, one of my favorite things is a bowl or two at the end of the day to help me process my life. Usually, I creep onto the roof of my porch and watch the 33rd St. traffic thin out into the sunset. Pipe in mouth, I have an *excuse* to reflect, to tap into a sense of well-being that gets smothered behind a desk or at the office. It's little wonder that the image of the ancient wiseman is never without a pipe peeking from his lips.

What I gain from moderately smoking a pipe (no more than two bowls a day) is priceless and, as it turns out, common among those who share my favorite pastime. Those who carry pipes tend to be "together," composed, and possess a wry, knowing smile. One can't help but wonder, is this their natural disposition, or the affects of a good pipeful?

Slowly, people are beginning to realize the benefits of pipe smoking. Tobacco shops have reported an increase in pipe sales. Jason Valiquet, of Fader's Tobacconist in Baltimore, says sales are up because pipes are less stress on the wallet than cigars or the ever-omnipotent cigarette. Pipe tobacco hasn't met the same heavy taxation cigarettes and cigars have, so they're a significantly cheaper and healthier alternative to the previous two.

"There are two reasons why pipes are becoming popular again: they're all natural and they're cheaper than cigars," says Emma Johnston, who began pipe-smoking to warm herself in winter weather. "Also, pipes are just relaxing. There's an old saying: A pipe gives a wiseman time to think, a fool a reason to keep his mouth shut."

Interested? Here are answers to some of the most frequently asked questions in pipe smoking, and a guide to help get your chimney puffing.

#### But Won't a Pipe Kill Me?

"I hated tobacco. I could have almost lent my support to any institution that had for its object the putting of tobacco smokers to death...Now I feel that smoking in moderation is a comfortable and laudable practice, and is productive of good. There is no more harm in a pipe than in a cup of tea. You may poison yourself by drinking too much green tea, and kill yourself by eating too many beefsteaks. For my part, I consider that tobacco, in moderation, is a sweetener and equalizer of the temper."

-Thomas Henry Huxley

With all the anti-tobacco rhetoric surfacing in the media lately, it's only *sane* to wonder how detrimental pipe smoking is to your health. Although there have been no exclusive pipe studies since the early 1960's, a 1994 study by the American Cancer Society and the American Heart Association actually demonstrated that pipe-smokers live an average of two years longer than

non-smokers. This was a minor study, though, I'm inherently suspicious of such surveys to begin with.

One thing's certain, however: since pipe smokers don't inhale (pipes, like cigars, are puffed), there is little threat of lung cancer emphysema with pipe smoking. Only those areas which come in direct contact with the smoke—the palate, gums, tongue, and throat—are susceptible to any smoke damage. Any problems are likely to be intercepted in early stages, since a routine trip to the dentist would reveal any abnormalities. Minor tissue damage may occur to the avid smoker, but Dr. David Boska, a North Carolinian physician, notes that this can be prevented by moving the pipe around while you smoke. "People get into trouble when they just leave the pipe in the same spot in their mouth all day long," he warns. Surely, this is not an issue for the moderate smoker to be overly concerned about. The mouth is the most resilient part of the human body; it's not easy to harm, and any trace of damage is usually minor.

Dr. Brad Rodu, a leading cancer researcher at the University of Alabama at Birmingham concedes that "the tobacco control people are out of control." When this mouth cancer specialist was asked about how risky pipe smoking was, he replied "Nothing is risk free...I have not studied pipe smoking per se, but I do know that one or two cigars a day carry almost no risk, and I suspect the same is true with pipes."

Pipe tobacco does contain nicotine of course, which has given it a bad wrap in light of the recent anti-tobacco crusades. Nicotine, itself, is comparable to caffeine—both stimulate the brain, enhancing concentration and performance, and creating a feeling of well-being—except that nicotine makes your mouth water, while caffeine makes you urinate. Essentially, a few pipes a day won't hurt you anymore than a few cups of coffee. With corporations driving up the price of coffee these days, I say go for the leaf, not the bean. Aside: As Dr. Rodu suggest, pipe smoking is not without its hazards. Here are a few tales about the perils of pipe smoking. Beware!

*A man intent on lighting his meerschaum walked right into a storefront window. The results were not pretty- the pipe knocked out two molars and was lodged into his throat. A 350 lb. policeman named "Tiny" witnessed the accident, and threw the gasping man on the ground to perform mouth-to-mouth. After oral*

*surgery, stitches for the facial laceration he received from hitting the ground, and a Tiny special, he survived the ordeal.*

*The ASP newsgroup recently posted a piece about a man who struck his lit pipe in the pocket of his shirt. He must have forgotten about the matches in his pocket, which caught aflame and burned the man so severely, he died recovering from his burns.*

*Pipe smoker Russell Clay reports that, while enjoying a pre-dawn bow-hunting smoke in a perch, he felt the tree begin to rumble. Earthquake? Armageddon? Worse: Grizzly! (Grizzlies can climb trees.) Frozen stiff, the pipe dropped from Clay's mouth and knocked into the bear, who picked it up, examined it, and carried it off. It's a good thing the bear liked Clay's blend.*

#### Tobacco. Here Goes Nothing...

"Tobacco I love and tobacco I'll take, And hope good tobacco I ne'er forsake. 'Tis drinking and wenching destroys still the creature; But this noble fume does dry up ill nature."

-Massingham

To the novice pipester, the tobacco shop can be a daunting visit. Lining the shelves are packages touting names like "University Flake" and "Goodmorning Blend," and on the counter are jars with signs for "Indian Summer" and "The Real Cherry Blend." (Yikes! Should I beware of pits?) Every beginner's first question is "How will I pick a tobacco I like?"

As any music lover can tell you, there's only one way to find your favorite symphony (or Beatles album)-sit down and listen to the music! The same strategy applies to pipe smoking. Smokers don't find their favorite blend by guessing, but by trial and error. (Unlike music, though, you shouldn't go by how the blend *sounds*, but its taste.)

A little tobacco guidance can save boxes of matches, as well as a lot of aggravation. For example, some one looking for a mild smoke should definitely shy away from burly blends. How can you make this common knowledge work for you? First of all, don't be afraid to ask a tobacconist their advice on finding a nice intro-

ductory blend. (Since you're just starting, smooth, mild blends are advisable; they're not too robust, but that's good since they won't be overly harsh on the mouth.) Many shops have house blends, which are usually inexpensive and fun to mix and match. Pipe tobacco is relatively cheap, so experimentation is a gentle adventure for the bank account.

Listed below are a few general terms used to categorize pipe tobacco. Often, a few types of tobacco are strewn together to produce varying degrees of flavor and aroma (a tobacco cocktail, if you will). It usually takes a bowl or two to pin point what you do or don't like about the tobacco, so don't surrender after a few puffs. Use the definitions below as a guide to finding tobacco that suits your taste.

Burly: Burly tobacco has an extremely low dextrose (sugar) content, which gives it a very dry and robust aroma. Burly is sort of like the Guinness of weed, and is commonly blended with milder or flavored tobaccos (there's even a famous "Half and Half blend similar to a Black and Tan). Burly is "air cured" for two months, which means it's hung in open barns so natural airflow can get to the leaves. It might be nice to try this with a few weeks of smoke already through your pipe. Recommendation: Blue Edgeworth.

Cavendish: This method of treatment originated in England. Tobacco is flavored and heated on by high pressure or copper pans, which yields an almost black product. As a result of the process, the tobacco is sweet and mild-blends like cherry, vanilla, and Irish coffee are produced by soaking tobacco in liquid flavoring and heating. Beware! The tobacco flavor is usually sucked-out in the process, so the real tobacco taste will be missing from your smoke.

Kentucky: Kentucky is actually a fire-cured Burly tobacco, a product of (Ta-da!) Kentucky. Very aromatic, its nicotine content is quite high. Kentucky is usually added to Virginia blends to give them more punch.

Virginia: Virginia tobacco is the most common type of tobacco on the market. Grown world-

wide, it has a high dextrose content, so it is relatively sweet in its raw form. Leaves are harvested, then left to hang in a heated barn for 3-5 days (a process called "flue cured"). Raw tobacco dealers, then, usually age the tobacco for 1-2 years before being stripped from its stalk and blended or smoked. As a result, Virginia tobacco is famous for its fine "flake" types.

*Recommendation:* Dunhill's Light Flake. A bit pricey for a beginner, but sweet for being medium strength tobacco.

I once met a girl from Wales who insisted her house was haunted by a pipe smoking ghost. Every time a detective movie came on the television, there were footprints in the hall, and the lovely aroma of pipe tobacco drifted down the stairs and into the living room. The family loved it! Unlike cigarettes and cigars, most people actually enjoy a whiff or two of pipe tobacco, so try and find a blend that's especially aromatic for social occasions. One thing you'll notice about pipe-smoking is that you taste, but don't smell, your own smoke (sort of like when you sit in someone else's chair and it's warm, but your chair isn't). Therefore, if a fellow pipe-smoker asks to borrow a bowl, you should look upon it as a favor-you'll finally get the opportunity to whiff your own luscious tobacco!

### The Pipe

The pipe is more than a tool for smoking. The pipe is an instrument of self-expression, a companion, a shoulder to lean on and a buddy to drink with. Surely ancient people knew this when they began crafting pipes out of willow bark, roots and rose leaves. Onges tribesmen on the Andaman Islands have even been known to smoke pipes from crab claws!

You and your pipe are going to get pretty intimate, so it's important to choose a pipe that suits your particular style (crab claws are *not* recommended). There are a few things to consider when making a pipe purchase-from the type of wood to how the pipe feels in your hand-so this next section is intended to help get you smok'en.

Nearly every pipe you've seen before is made out of briar wood. Mediterranean briar is the obvious choice for pipe makers because it is porous (so it smokes cool), yet will not burn; instead, briar "chars," giving the

smoke a tinge of flavor. Briars are priced anywhere from \$20 to the four digits, so it's safe to say there's a briar for everybody. Essentially, the more pricey the pipe, the older briar wood it is made of (older wood means a greater porosity, which means a cooler smoke).

Pipes are also made out of a white material called meerschaum, which is German for "sea foam," and the common name for a mineral called magnesium silicate. Smoke a meerschaum, and you're essentially smoking from a fossilized fish. Not only is meerschaum expensive, but it's very delicate, so it's not recommended for the novice. They're worth a peek at when you're in the store, though—often, meerschaum bowls are elaborately carved busts of mythological gods or dragon claws, so they're quite a sight. My father insists he's got a beautiful leftover meerschaum from college floating around the house, but I think he's just trying to get me to clean out the basement.

Clay pipes, like the ones George Washington smoked, are still produced as souvenirs. Unless you've got a musket and are looking to snag a few of them Red Coats, I'd stay away from these—smoking out of clay pipe is about as pleasurable as smoking from a PVC pipe.

Last of all is the corncob pipe. Some pipe connoisseurs consider corncobs fit only for those with a button nose and two eyes made out of coal. These people are mistaken. Corncobs are perfect for those experimenting with pipe-smoking—they're easy to maintain, durable, and disposable. Best of all, they're incredibly cheap! (Check out the "Under \$8.00" box.) Grab a corncob, a raft, and pretend you're Huck Finn.

Briar pipes are the smoker's overall best-bet. They're not too expensive, and they basically last a lifetime if properly maintained. In an article called "How to Pick the Perfect Pipe" (*PipeSMOKE Magazine*, Vol. I, Issue II) Richard Carleton Hacker walks pipe shoppers through some guidelines for pipe-purchasing. Hacker, it should be pointed out, is regarded as *the* pipe authority. Not only has he recently penned the *Ultimate Pipe Book*, but he is a member of the exclusive *Academie Internationale de la Pipe*, and was recently elected Germany's Pipe Knight of the Year. (Odd, huh? I suppose the knights gather and light up after they've slayed a dragon or two.) Here's some of his advice:

- Purchase a pipe with a curved stem. Less saliva will trickle into your bowl as a beginner.

- Make sure the stem fits snugly into the shank.
- Make sure the pipe's walls are of even thickness. (An off-centered hole may cause you to burn through the briar.)
- Buy a pipe with thick walls-the smoke will be cooler, and burnout is less likely.

There are few briar backdoors which may help you get a smooth-smok'en pipe without having to skip next month's phone bill payment:

- Look for pipes labeled "factory seconds." These are pipes that are sort of equivalent to irregular socks-they're made by reputable pipe companies, but are not sold under the company's name because of minor blemishes on the pipe's exterior. The blemishes are usually just aesthetic flaws, and won't change the way the pipe smokes.

- Estate pipes, or second-handpipes, are an option, if you're not grossed out by some other guy's saliva. These pipes save the smoker the trouble of "breaking-in" their briar, and are usually quite cheap. Some expert pipe smokers choose to exclusively smoke estate pipes. Carve your own! If you're handy this will be a relatively fun and painless procedure. (If you're not handy, you may be in for a relatively painful, handless procedure, so including chunks of briar with pre-bored bowls and fitted with stems. Get artistic! (For information, call PIMO at 802-362-3371.)

There's a big no-no involved in pipe-purchasing: when you go into the tobacconist, there's probably going to be a little barrel of pipes with the label "JUST \$15" Do not buy one of these pipes. They are cheap. They smoke poorly. You will gag. Look to spend somewhere between \$40 and \$50 dollars for a decent beginner's briar.

Isn't \$50 a lot to spend on one pipe? Think of all the *other* stuff I could do with that, you may say to yourself. Well, look at it this way: Curves, lines, the ergonomics of design- don't think of your pipe as an object, think of the pipe as a work of art.

Consider the long run. This is an investment in well-being. \$50 gets you half an hour in the psychologist's office, or a lifetime of briar-therapy. You choose.

*Aside:* What do you call your pipe when you don't want to call it your pipe? How about your barrel, furnace, smokestack, incinerator, burner, chimney, tea-pot, stove, or favorite tooth-breaker.

*Aside:* In 1787, John Frederick Bryant began going blind. What did this Bristol clay-pipe maker do to keep himself from falling into debt? He wrote a book of poems, of course! Here's an excerpt from "To a Piece of Clay." Warning: it might take you a few bowl-fuls to get through this.

*Rude mass of earth, from which with moiled hands, (Compulsive taught) the brittle tubes I form-Oft listless, while my vagrant fancy warm, Roves (heedless of necessity's demands), Amid Parnassian bow'rs, or wishful eyes, The flight of genius, while the sublime soars, Of moral truth in search, or earth explores, Or sails with Science through the starry skies-Yet must I own (unsightly clod) thy claim, to my attention, for though art my stead, When grows importunate the voice of need, And in the furnace thy last change I speed: Ah! then how eager do I urge the flame, How anxious watch thee in that glowing fire, that treats my eyeballs with extinction dire!*

#### Other Minor Details

One thing every smoker needs is a pipe tool, which can usually be purchased quite cheaply. (See pipe tool diagram.) At first, this appears an intimidating gadget, but its use is really quite simple. Essentially, the pipe tool consists of a flat part for tamping down tobacco when packing or smoking, a shank-reamer for cleaning the shank, and a bowl scraper. I'm also convinced you can build a satellite or restore an Olds with these elaborate looking things.

It's also nice to have a decent tobacco pouch, though not a necessity. Occasionally, you'll see pipe filters in stores. Since pipe smokers don't actually inhale the smoke, a filter is pretty worthless. Every pipe smoker I know removes the filter from their pipe.

Pipe cleaners are for more than kindergarten art and crafts-they're a must for every pipe smoker. It's important to keep the inside of your pipe dry, allowing

the moistness to thoroughly evaporate before smoking it again because excess moisture causes tobacco to burn at higher temperatures, which means a "hotter," less pleasant smoke. After a smoke, run a pipe cleaner down the pipe's airhole to absorb any gunk and goo that may have accumulated there, as well as rid it of moisture.

*Aside:* Be on the lookout for an offer by pipe manufacturer Dr. Grabow Inc. Their pipe cleaners sometimes come with a complimentary mail-away starter offer, which includes a catalog, a free tobacco pouch, and a free pipe tool.

*Aside:* So, you dig the notion of kicking back with a pipe-you need the time, the relaxation, the general wellness a pipe offers-but are broke. Not a problem. You start becoming a seasoned pipe smoker for under \$8.00! Just follow along. You'll need:

- One corncob pipe. (\$2-\$4)
- One pack of Branger Burly Blend, or any one of the many cheap pipe tobacco blends that exist. (\$2)
- One pipe tool. (\$1.25)
- One pack of matches (\$0.30)

All of the following products can be purchased at a local pharmacy-you've spent all that money on cruddy prescriptions, when the secret to sound health wasn't even located behind the counter. Go figure.

#### Getting the Damn Thing Lit

Now that all the elements have come together. You've got the pipe. You've got the tobacco. Time to smoke.

It should be emphasized that pipe smoke is *not* inhaled. Pipes are designed to be puffed on. With this in mind, let's start packing our pipe. Take a pinch of tobacco and place it in the bowl, then gently tamp it down with the tool. Repeat this, tamping down harder as the pipe gets full. Strike a match and move it over the bowl while puffing. When the tobacco is evenly lit, maintain gentle puffing, sit back, and enjoy. Simple. Pipes tend to sputter out before they're really finished, so if you experience a burnout, simply re-light when you are ready to resume smoking.

Speaking of lighting, it's best to use wooden stick matches for pipes. They're not doused in chemical like paper matches and lighters, so you won't get a

mouthful of unwanted toxins to spoil your tobacco flavor.

Voila! You're now a pipe smoker.

#### The Art of the Pipe Smoke (Or keeping it lit).

"Tobacco has gone out. To be sure, it is a shocking thing, blowing smoke out of our mouths into other people's mouths, eyes, and noses, and having the same thing done to us. Yet I cannot account, why a thing which requires so little exertion, and yet preserves the mind from total vacuity, should have gone out."

- *Dr. Johnson, St. Andrews, 19 August 1773*

Dr. Johnson's lament is common among new smokers. As you may already know at this point, it's easy to get a pipe lit, but takes a lifetime to master the art of keeping it alight. This is somewhat comparable to Buddhist monks perfecting the bow and arrow. Keeping the pipe lit while drawing as lightly and rarely as possible, maintaining a cool and pleasurable smoke, is tricky business. Perfecting this takes years, but merely trying is part of what puts pipe smokers in a meditative state, which is one of the major psychological benefits of the pipe.

Don't be discouraged when the pipe sputters out. Smile, re-light, and continue puffing. You're on the road to someplace better.

#### Plato, the Soul, and Long Term Affects of Pipe smoking

The most prominent long term affect of pipe smoking is a general well-being—pipes soothe the mind and the soul. When it comes to tobacco, Michael P. Foley, a Ph.D. candidate in theology at Boston College, points out that there is a strong connection to tobacco and the soul. In a short essay, Foley brilliantly illustrates that the three major forms of tobacco correspond to Plato's tripart division of the soul.

Cigarettes, Foley begins, correspond to the appetitive part of the soul. Inhaled, the cigarette must be fully consumed to evoke pleasure, and its quick buzz is instant gratification. Therefore, it's only appropriate that the cigarette is associated with food and sex. Such hungers easily lead to addiction and self-destruction. What Hollywood femme fatale would be complete without a smoking butt, after all?

Cigars, meanwhile, correspond to the spirited part of the soul; this explains why cigars are often linked

to politicians, executives, and so on. Cigars symbolize ambition, and are a phallic testament to male power; honor-seekers use cigars to bear public witness to their smoker's prominence and virility. Hence, Boss Hogg, from the Dukes of Hazzard, topped off his white get-up with a massive cigar.

The pipe, explains Foley, corresponds to the rational, or highest part of the soul. Unlike disposable and whimsical tobaccos, the pipe endures. Thus, it relates to the philosopher, whose ponderings transcend human desires and ambitions. Further, the stem and bowl are the manifestation of both masculine and feminine properties, paralleling the philosopher's masculine hunt for Truth and his passive contemplation of what he's found.

You don't have to be Nietzsche to tell Foley's on to something here. If you've ever sat in a room of pipe smokers, you'd notice there's no narcissism like in a cigarette break, and less backslapping banter than a cigar smoking session. Simply put: When a pipe's in hand, things change. People become more attuned to themselves and their surroundings.

A history professor and dear friend once described how his thesis advisor silently commanded the room with his pipe. As his colleagues sat and squabbled over dates and theories, his advisor would sit back and silently take it all in, puffing on a massive curved briar. When he thought the discussion had gone awry, the advisor took a deep tug from his pipe and blew an enormous smoke ring, which rose in to the air and gently lulled down to the center of the table. By the time the ring silently dissipated into the table's center, he managed to capture everyone's attention.

The same majestic affect often comes over the pipe smoker, whether or not they intend it. Sitting with thoughts collected, smoking bowl leaking a sweet fragrance in to air, people get serious without getting pretentious. Conversation drifts beyond the normal hum and often ends up on subjects like culture, spirituality, and relationships-things that *matter*.

Perhaps this avenue for communication explains the recent success of a number of clubs that have surfaced along with the surge of male-centered pipe popularity. I suppose pipe smoking offers men enough technical gadgetry to satisfy the male preoccupation with "things" while simultaneously serving as an elixir for communicating to one another. A perfect combination.

Pipe smoke must make for a congenial atmos-

phere-pipe clubs like the Minnesota Briar Friars report a rise in membership, and a number of new on-line chat room have recently been established. Clubs often host speakers, dinners, tobacco samplings, and sometimes field-trips to local pipe and tobacco manufacturers. Nearly all proudly boast the comraderie associated with pipe smoking.

#### Pipe Smoking for Life

"Every morning I wake up and think, good-another 24 hour's pipe smoking."

-J.R. Tolkien

As the novice pipe smoker comes to find out, they have embarked on an addicting pastime. Smoking per se is not addicting, but the placid disposition that overcomes the pipe smoker is. Many become avid pipe collectors, and their quest to find the perfect pipe resembles a search for the Holy Grail. Pipe smokers are constantly trying new blends, mixing their own blends, and comparing pipes and smoke tales, so it's easy to see why many pipe smokers stick to it throughout their long lives.

Hopefully, this article has begun to demystify the art of pipe smoking. Ultimately, pipe smoking is both a means and an end to those who enjoy puffing a balmy bowl: it's an outlet for workday anxiety, as well as a hobby that grows at the pace of one's enjoyment. When you start pipe smoking, you'll understand how beneficial a few bowls a week is to one's existence. So put this in your pipe and smoke it.

# MELROSE DINER

BETH BARNYOCK

WE KNEW IT ALL. RELIGION ? AGNOSTIC. PHILOSOPHY?  
EXISTENTIAL. HISTORY? PERPETRATED BY THE WHITE  
MALE MAJORITY. POLITICS? GREEN. SATURDAY NIGHT?  
Milkshakes at the Melrose Diner.

Looking back, there is something innately  
humorous about being sixteen; knowing it all, nothing  
left to discover, so sure of ourselves, of the night.  
Scrambling on suburban rooftops shouting at the sky,  
knowing that *'someday soon* when we're *'just a little but  
older,'* we're *gonna change it all'* The sky at our finger-  
tips, the stars on our side.

Those long summer nights after days of part-  
time employment — minimum wage employees at the  
Sev, Siren Records, or dishwashers for Rodi's — were  
marked by complete freedom, gross amounts of time and  
zero responsibilities on our shoulders. We'd drive all  
night, sometimes with no aim at all, playing games like  
*'let's see where this road ends;'* finding ourselves dead-  
ended at a naval base in Philadelphia or an abandoned  
airport hangar in outer-suburbia, counting the number of  
traffic violations on the way to Philly, or how many  
Circle K Laundromats on Route 611. The nights were  
ours to hold, to run free the open fields of time. It was  
on such a night that my four friends and I found the  
Melrose Diner.

## Night-Dreaming 1994

It's another Tuesday night; too early for chasing  
the sunrise but too late for much of anything else. The  
summer heat is an oven as we lie in the grass outside the  
old elementary school, in the moon shadow of its minia-  
ture buildings with miniature desks and chairs — things

that once eclipsed us. I remember the stairs inside, being afraid of them, such a height I might fall. Each step filled with fear, tiny fingers grasping the grimy railing. Years later, returning I realized that the once monstrous climb consisted of only five stairs and a fall would result in merely a bruise not the ultimate end I had so feared.

As I lie there night-dreaming, someone whispered that magical phrase — *road trip* — and we were up in an instant, the five of us piling into Colin's father's station wagon. Forty-five minutes later, finding ourselves headed into South Philly, bearing right off Broad Street onto West Passyunk Avenue. Where Passyunk meets Synder, we found the night's mystery destination. There at number 1501, stood glowing our own morning star, the Melrose Diner.

### Those in the know

The word "diner" is a derivative of "dining car" and reflects the approach that early diner manufacturers borrowed from railroad cars in the shape of the diner itself and in its long counter and booths. The Melrose diner is a prefabricated narrow structure with a generous use of stainless steel employed inside and out. Its glowing sign, highlighted in red and yellow, is marked in the center with a clock the shape of a coffee cup, reminding patrons that it's open twenty-four hours a day. Inside, there is a counter and precarious stools that swivel and leave your legs dangling above the floor and tables set with ketchup and mustard bottles.

We step out of the station wagon and into the silver structure, plastic seats sticking to our bodies as we slide into a booth. There are two waitresses in white aprons who spot us and begin haggling in the corner. The one with dark brown hair pulled back into a bun and thick black glasses is arguing with the other, a thin woman whose hairnet looks like a spider web over her white-blond hair. The brunette reaches into her soiled apron and pulls out a single shiny coin. They flip. The pink lip-sticked mouth of the spider woman forms around a one-syllable word and she reluctantly shuffles over to our table, teenagers who she knows will only order drinks and fries and leave a twenty-five cent tip. She wears a cutlery-chaped pin that tells her name and reveals the year she started. "Susie. 1967" calls us "honey" and asks if we are ready to order.

The menu is simple, just three pages long. The Melrose is one of those places where you can get break-

fast twenty-four hours a day, served with homefries just salty enough and not terribly greasy, and where everything comes with coleslaw and a pickle. Popular Melrose dishes include deviled crab cutlet, fried shrimp with heavy breading, navy bean soup, egg salad sandwiches, scrapple and their famed Chip Beef on Toast, also known as SOS for reasons unknown to the five of us at the table. The on-premises bakeshop prepares favorite desserts such as hot apple pie with vanilla sauce and butter-cream layer cake, reportedly best paired with a mean cup of Melrose coffee.

We order shakes and a platter of fries from Susie '67. Unfolding our napkins we discover they are emblazoned with a rhyming couplet: "Everybody who knows goes to the Melrose." We consider ourselves in the know because, after all, we have just overheard the old man in the booth behind us tell his companion that the diner was *'not named after Mr. Melrose, my dear, but rather after a can of tomatoes.'*

There is no fifties-flashback nostalgia at the Melrose, no Marilyn Monroe or Elvis photographs, no jukeboxes on the table. Its stainless steel interior-exterior is the real deal. Paramount Manufacturers constructed the diner in 1956 for a German immigrant by the name of Kubach. It was the third in a series of diners for Kubach called Melrose, this third diner opening just a few blocks from the original site. The other two no longer remain. Richard Kubach Jr., the original Kubach's son, has run the current Philadelphia Melrose Diner for the past twenty-seven years. The diner now has 100 full-time employees, and gets about five million dollars a year in business.

Furthermore, it is in a seedy enough region of Philadelphia to give it some of that old South Philly charm. A Philadelphia mummer once reported that South Philadelphia loves to claim Frankie Avalon, Larry Fine of the Three Stooges, mayors and mummer and that in addition to being Philadelphia's first neighborhood, South Philly is one of the oldest ethnically mixed big-city neighborhoods in America. Melrose Diner, filled with faces from all over, was to become our own late-night South Philly landmark.

#### Reunions 1999

It's three A.M. on a Saturday in October 1999; the autumn leaves still clinging to the trees. I'm driving in the car with my old friend Colin; we're headed back to South Philly to revisit the Melrose and perhaps relive

a bit of our younger days. I turn from South Pennsylvania Square onto South Broad, then onto West Passyunk to our destination on Snyder Avenue.

On the outside and inside, the Melrose appears about the same: same silverware outside, same diner stench inside, overall perhaps a bit more tacky than I recalled. The spider-haired Susie '67, however, is nowhere to be found. I remember when she first approached us, like a spirit trapped in time. I wonder what she looked like in 1967. She was then probably no older than Colin and I were when we first found the Melrose. Like us, she must have had her youthful hopes and dreams. I wonder if she is happy. I wonder if I will become 'Beth '99' in someone else's story.

We gossip over our old friends: *Did you hear Judy interned on Capitol Hill? Kris and Becca are living together; yeah they got an apartment above a cheese store in Wisconsin. Everyone wants to go to law school. Kelly is due in six weeks. Keith's father died, I know, I know. Cheryl was a dominatrix this summer in NYC — hey, we all got to pay the rent one way or another. Have you been tested for HIV? It was the scariest two weeks of my life, the waiting. I am totally not ready for marriage.*

We punctuate every pause with the phrase: *I still don't know what I want to do with my life or Can you believe we used to spend hours here?*

Minus the absence of Susie, the Melrose Diner is the same; probably the same as it was when it opened in 1956. It is Colin and I that are different. Returning causes a person to look at oneself objectively and to see how fragile and funny our lives really are. Returning to the Melrose is a step backward, not forward. We find only memories of our freedom we once imagined we had. The sky we once saw as a stretch of endless possibilities now becomes a chaos of opportunities; stars — a myriad of options, the night — a black confusion. Colin and I have grown into our bodies, become beautiful if only because we've become comfortable with ourselves. We talk louder and clearer. Sit up straighter. Look a little more tired.

Zen Buddhists have a tenet called the beginner's mind, the ability to always keep a fresh outlook. Perhaps this is the secret of youth — all our energy, optimism, idealism is not gone; it's just buried below the surface.

Tonight the Melrose is full of truckers and teenagers, as it had been for over forty years and most

likely will be for another forty years to come. Colin  
braves the SOS and I go for an egg salad. Catching our-  
selves staring at our reflections in the bottoms of empty  
milkshake tins, we smile and laugh, realizing we know  
nothing at all.

# THE WHITE FIRES OF VENUS

NEESHA NAVARE

PINNED TO THE OLD, SPRINGY BED BENEATH ME, MY BODY WRITHED. TWO BONY PALE WRISTS FORCEFULLY PRESSED DEEPER AND DEEPER INTO THE FEATHER BED BELOW ME, and my hands went numb. It puzzled me how just one of his hands could crush all the power out of both my own. His thumb pierced the palm of my hand and I half expected the stigmata to remain where his unwelcome fingers had dug into me. "Just one kiss," his raspy voice crashed in my ears and my stomach turned at the potent smell of Jack Daniels and cigarettes on his breath. Leaning in closely, his cheap cologne tiptoed into my nose, a scent I would forever associate with that night. His pimply tongue dragged itself over my neck and towards my lips like sandpaper on porcelain. "Please stop," it was barely a whisper. I wriggled my trapped wrists with all my strength, attempting to free them from his captivity. Beneath his strongly, overpowering body my feeble one kicked and squirmed as his violating hand began its way up my smoothly shaven leg. Calluses, I remember his hand being callused as it crept over my silken underwear beneath my red cotton dress. In the other room, an audience laughed from the television set. The laughter pushed at the door wanting to come inside to rescue me. I wished someone would. Yet nothing could distract me from the moments of sheer hell and helplessness that ensued.

His moist tongue headed towards my lips. As he approached my face, I swung my head back and forth furiously, rapidly begging him to stop. He persisted. Suddenly, my high pitched scream pierced the air and, as abruptly as it began, it was violently smothered and

silenced by the hand that had been caressing itself over my limp body. He spat harsh, threatening words down at me, hovering shroud-like over me, just close enough for me to feel the heat emulating from his body. It was sensual, angry, and abusive. The feel of his body heat covering me from head to toe paralyzed me with fear that it would overtake not just my outside but the inside, as well. As he roughly pushed on my mouth causing my head to sink deeper and deeper into the well of a bed that seemed to be capturing my impression in it, he breathed in my ear, "Shut up! Just shut up, bitch!" The heated feel of his body shot out from his mouth and penetrated my ears; they grew hot at his mere breath. Salty tears seeped in torrents from my eyes leaving small streams in their tracks to dry. 'Don't cry,' I thought to myself. *'Don't let him see you're hurt.'* My eyes shut in the blackened room and I struggled to maintain a stable mind. He shoved his tongue hard through my soft, tightly shut lips. The fading taste of beer began to take over as he poked and prodded inside my mouth with his bristly tongue. The prickly stubble formulating around his lips scratched like rug-burn ferociously on my chin and upper lip.

My breathing ceased as his hand began its descent once again. My entire focus lay on his straying hands and forcefulness. It was hot and sticky in the room as he pushed and grinded down on me with his hips and lower body, yet with each movement of his hand, my body shivered from the inside outwards. The dress that usually hung a few inches above my knee he successfully hiked up toward my belly button and goose bumps hatched on every inch of my body. He reached underneath me and, with the ease of a professional, unlatched my bra. This time I did not tell myself to stop crying, I screamed for my friend in the other room and cried so hard that my head ached. Only the muffled television replied and his hand fumbled back towards my mouth until once again, I was mute. He alternated between silencing my shrill screams with his damp, animal-like mouth and rough hand, depending on which was exploring a new region of my imprisoned body. Each time he removed one, the other would substitute within milliseconds, and a new feeling would be provoked. His mouth intruded while his hand remained more oppressive and cruel against, not only my lips but my chin and lower face, as well. Defeated. I took to praying in my mind for him to stop, hoping someone would save me, waiting...for what, I did not know.

"Let me make love to you," he said, removing his mouth for a moment from my own to make this demand after what seemed like hours of innocently believing he would stop if I lay still. It felt as though I had been punched in the stomach so hard I could not react with anything but frozen shock, no breath, no tears, nothing. All of my reason disappeared, my thoughts fled in every direction of my mind before I could chase after one notion to hold fast to, some kind of reason to formulate a plan by. I could not think but a sudden burst of libido began to emerge within my depths. Finally, he granted me one vulnerability as he leaned on his left side and his exploring hand retreated itself from my body to undo his belt; a sudden surge of energy ran through me, a golden opportunity finally presented itself, and in seconds I had my retaliation. Where my thought had failed me, my instincts rose to the occasion as my knee lifted with the swiftness and force of a swinging baseball bat, hitting my target head on. The pressure exerted on my wrists alleviated immediately. His tongue, which had been circulation in my mouth, now drew back in pain at my sharp, carnivorous teeth sinking, without hesitation, into its chicken-like texture. Rolling from the embrace of the bed and crashing to the hard ground below, I welcomed the cold air that nipped at my exposed body. The strong desire to kiss my freedom offered to me by the floor rushed over me as I struggled to cover myself with my clothing. It was comforting to be dressed and independent of unwelcome hands.

I twisted the smooth knob allowing the light from the other room to stream in as a spotlight on his anguished-stricken face. He shrunk into a deformed heap of profanities, gasping, groaning and cursing at me, "God damn...uhhhh...bitch." I watched him slump over in a feeble attempt at chase after me as I ran from the room to find my friend. There, in the living room, she slept innocently, soundly as a child in the arms of my terrorist's roommate. I shouted her name and rushed towards her urgently but just as the monosyllable escaped my lips, my violator seized my wrists from behind. I cringed at his touch as he dragged me out the door and shoved me from his apartment into the ominous light. "I'll call you sometime," he shouted still puffing and holding onto his genitalia as he sent me flying with his free hand down the four steps and onto the concrete sidewalk. Then he hobbled back into the living room leaving me alone in the peacefulness of the

cold, Baltimore night.

Sprawled out like a spider on the stubbly cement below me, I found myself more comforted than I could ever remember being in my life. The heavy door slammed shut as he disappeared behind the chilling brick walls and I sat. The streams of tears that had stung my face earlier remained, like scars, on my pale face. My nose ran like a stream and the salty substance trickled onto my lips. I was safe. The air felt warmer than the atmosphere that had attacked me in the apartment even though the temperature had gone below fifty. Yet even though I was so far removed from the situation, I could still feel remnants of his touch all over my body. To me, it felt like spring as I walked the dangerous path home regaining a mental and physical sense of stability. But I was tainted and weakened in spirit, internally. The heavy, overwhelming feeling he had created, still clung to me like remnants of a snowstorm on an untouched, grassy field. The taste of his rough tongue coated in liquor lingered in my mouth and on my neck. The sweat that had poured itself all over me reeked on my clothes and his voice against my ears; so unfeeling and violent...it all remained, hovering as if I had never escaped.

At four in the morning, I found myself showered; dry and warm in my bed, my body quaked and shivered at the memory. Under my blankets, I still felt him, hanging above me, breathing in my ear his carnivorous desires. The overwhelming feel of violation, extending deeper than simple touch, remained with me like a funeral blanket, clinging on into eternity. Each time I shut my eyes, I saw the darkness of his room and felt the fervor of his body above me as if I lay there still, helpless and guilty. The shroud clung as a constant reminder of the ordeal, a branding from the night that would never disappear.

# WONDER

MAUREEN TRAVERSE

"Empty out your pockets; toss the lot upon the floor  
All those treasures my friend, you don't need them  
anymore.

All the planets gravitate around you  
And the stars shower down about you...  
So far away and yet so close."

-Nick Cave

"SO WHERE DID SPRING GO?" I ASKED MY ROOMMATE TODAY ON THE WAY TO CLASS AS THE MERCURY HAD PLUMMETED FROM A LOFTY SEVENTY-EIGHT TO AN ABYSMAL FIFTY-ONE IN JUST A FEW days.

"I don't know," she replied, "out the back door, I guess."

I could see the sky blooming with thick, charred clouds that had disintegrated in places, revealing patches of blue. The wind was stiff, chilly and troubling, pulling tree branches like hard taffy and spiderwebbing my hair in all directions. While the rain had ended, dark stains still clung to the curb along the edge of the street and brown puddles on the sidewalk lightly trembled. The light was muted and gray as if I was seeing it all through tinted windows. I ought to have been pleased; this weather was exemplary when I remembered March's ice storm.

Freezing rain all night had solidified when the temperature dipped that morning. The campus crystallized. I stopped to admire the grass as each blade was encased in its own cylinder of ice and the ground was carpeted in clusters and clusters of these tiny prisms. Paths became slick, but intricately so; the ice had been sculpted over the bricks with such amazing skill that I wondered how this detailed work could have been completed in just one night. All around, people stepped gingerly like tightrope walkers, trying to avoid a spill. Climbing across the arched pedestrian bridge for eight o'clock class proved the most difficult feat of the trek to campus. Finding it impossible to walk up without sliding backward, two parallel lines formed on either side of the bridge as we pulled ourselves across with the aid of the railings. What makes me laugh is the way nature just slipped in subtly, but altered our morning pattern, even our way of walking, so dramatically, like an installation artist playing with the space we move through...the world that morning like a Christo piece, everything wrapped in ice.

But winter has subsided and spring climbed out and all

of the sudden it is time to choose housing accommodations for next year. At room selection, one of my roommates and I passed the two hours before our lottery number was called, chatting about nothing in particular. "I wonder why you don't remember being born?" I asked her, thinking of the baby I'd seen in the bank that morning. (The guy in front of me in line had gone nuts making broad-smiled faces at her and waving.) My roommate is a psychology major and if anyone would know why you don't remember a thing, she would know.

"It has to do with the way memory is encoded," she informed me. It turns out that your memories from birth to age two or three are still stored in your brain, but you have no way of retrieving them because you recorded all of those memories non-verbally and it is more a matter of not remembering how you used to think without words. As a writer I have to stop and wonder what it would be like to be without words.

In a sense I already know, having been cursed since before I can remember with a frustrating shyness. I often find myself lacking words. To be shy, I think, has less to do with being too timid to say what you are thinking and more to do with just not being able to locate the proper words at the proper time. It is a nervousness more than a fear, but I have often wondered how it is that what seems clear in my head, appears even more clearly on paper, yet somehow gets lost on the way to my mouth. Maybe my roommate would have a way to crack my head open and find all of those lost words.

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:" the poet, William Wordsworth wrote. In British Literature, I learn how he believed that growing up meant a growing gap between one's soul and the divine, how the physical world served both as a distraction from and a conduit to the supernatural. In several poems he mourned the loss of his childhood wonder for nature. But when the "spirit of the age" evaporated and the Victorians emerged, Matthew Arnold stood on the same cliffs of Dover where Wordsworth had written but saw a profoundly different scene. For Arnold, the receding tide represented his receding faith and he felt trapped between two worlds, one dead and "the other powerless to be born." It remained unborn, I learn, as one primary characteristic of the moderns, stumbling through their wasteland, was the alienation of the artist, the constant search for connection. Ironic, as I see it; literature is connective, in a sense. I once heard it termed the "ah-ha moment," when someone long dead or far away so distinctly and perfectly writes the very thought that flitted around your head like a moth but for which you never had the words.

Outside, beyond the high classroom windows through which the hazy light drains, bouncing off of watch faces and jewelry, painting white rings on the wall, outside where life is

pressing on, the wind picks up. Trudging the way back, the wind circling me so that I feel it might pull me into its eddy like an undertow, the ends of my striped scarf lifted like two charmed snakes and I remember the same gray morning as when I spent three days in May on a tiny island, off the coast of New Hampshire, only reachable by boat

The cottage belonged to the family of my father's best childhood friend. From the wilting curtains, to the printed blue dishes to the brown glass bottles on the window sill and the twenty-year old games in the attic closet, the house had not changed a detail since the last time my father set foot inside. He and I hike the island when we have a free hour between his friend's wedding and the endless reminiscent chatter. We trudge over the damp soil, carpeted with brown pine needles and use tree roots as stairs up a slow incline. The damp air sweats a light rain like the condensation on the side of a glass of lemonade and the silence is only penetrable by the occasional crow and hammer of a woodpecker. Occasionally, we step into a school of gnats who barely brush my face and arms like the fur on a kiwi. We circle a grassy clearing in which the rotting remains of some wagon-wheel-and-lever contraption sit and my father leads me over a field of stones that he tells me were once part of a small resort hotel that burned back in the first part of the century. Something about the moss slicked over the stones, the tall grass sprouting through the cracks in the shallow remains of the wall strikes me as ghostly, the land regaining a firm grasp on ancient progress.

We are testing our footing on a hill, shimmying down, our feet sinking in the mud when my father spots the backside of a deer, her tail like a tiny white flame amidst the branches. I have never seen a deer in the wild before and I pause, the anxious excitement building in me, the momentary wonder as she leaps the low branches we had so much trouble wading through and disappears into the thick green.

# HIDING FROM marscarpone

S. DALEY

MARSCARPONE. I AM MISSING THE MARSCARPONE. WHAT IS MARSCARPONE? SCANNING THE LIST OF INGREDIENTS, I REALIZED THAT I COULD OBTAIN EVERYTHING BUT marscarpone. Butter, bread crumbs, confectioner's sugar, even red currant jelly, but no marscarpone. A picture of the dessert, "Buttermilk Cake and Strawberries," snatched my attention as I thumbed through my *Eating Well* cookbook, and reading the ingredient list line by line I visualized the treat. Fluffy yellow cake with sliced strawberries layered atop a fruity-creamfilling, a perfect gift for an upcoming receptionist appreciation day. Then I read that the recipe required marscarpone, or "Italian cream cheese."

While the parenthetical gave me a clue as to what marscarpone was, I still could never recall strolling down the aisles at the supermarket and seeing it. More remarkably, I could never once remember it in the concoctions of my Italian grandmother, a confections creating wizard. Frustrated, I turned to page 180 and reread the instructions for "One-Bowl Chocolate Cake," an easier recipe. My "fall-back," I can only make this dessert a few times a year for fear of dependency, and it frustrates me when I cannot create something new because of lack of ingredients. I feel inadequate, actually, probably a symptom of my malignant perfectionism. Tomorrow I plan to pick up what I still need, Dutch process cocoa and some baking soda so I can cook over the weekend.

Maybe I'll find some marscarpone...

During my freshman year of college, I started cooking. More coincidence than any desire to create a tasty treat: a reaction to boredom. Home in my dorm one January afternoon, I dumped a sack of chocolate

chips into a pot, turned the stove on, and then melted the chocolate into gooey syrup. Taking a few strawberries purchased earlier in the week, I dipped them lazily in the chocolate. After eating a few, I placed the rest on a plate to save. It was only when I friend called later, asking me to pick up chips for a meeting, that I considered using the strawberries instead. So I brought them, to rave reviews and have made desserts ever since.

Cooking seems easy enough, but it is quite a meticulous hobby. Time, money, and attention are just as important to making a cake from scratch as butter, eggs and vanilla extract. Several afternoons' agendas have been cleared to open space for a cherry cobbler or lemon meringue. Brown sugar and Dutch processed cocoa often need to be replaced: costly buys for a college student. Finally, as someone who needs to concentrate, I need pretty much my "own" kitchen; I have found myself antsy if "assisted" while cooking.

Once I shouldered the responsibility for cooking breakfast while on retreat. Forty tired sophomores waited for pancakes and eggs while I, dreary from turning in at 5 AM, struggled to keep the batter from slipping about the pans. Several times my friends have offered their help, only to be barked away with assorted grunts and hand gestures. Cooking has fast become a solitary excursion.

My motives for cooking have been mixed. I've grown to see it as therapeutic, as a retreat from reality into a world of spices and creams. Frustrations spent churning cake batter or stress relieved by rolling out pie crust, I usually find myself very relaxed after cooking. Nevertheless, that was not my first reason. Cooking gave me an in. No one on a college campus turns down free food, especially a homemade dessert, especially freshman year. I met more people through handing out random treats than in several on-campus organizations. Unlike my more suave classmates, I did not know anyway to make an impression on women, this was all I could think of. Early results proved positive, because who, male or female, can resist cookie bars or homemade ice cream.

My amateur days scare me because of such motives. Hiding in the shadow of my platters, I scampered past initial defenses by appealing to tastes. Edmund was not the only youth succumbing to Turkish Delight because I charmed many a friend's beckoning buds with peanut butter fudge. How many people believed I concocted several desserts that were instant

mixes! What selfishness...

As I dig through my pantry to locate my baking soda, I really hound myself about marscarpone. The final ingredient...that last piece...imagination lacking...more one-bowl chocolate cake.

I once tried to replace buttermilk with milk, and still do from time to time, because the grocery store is too far from campus. That's regrettable, because buttermilk, while fattening, enriches flavor so much that to use milk afterwards always disappoints. You should not substitute ingredients, except in extreme circumstances, because recipes are made to provide proper results. Tampering should be frowned upon.

For a semester I spent time using my desserts as a way to woo my friend Cathy. Sometimes I wish I had been less naive than to think large cookies with chocolate chip smiles embedded in their surface could serve as collateral for a relationship's foundation, Naive, but what did I know? Coming from an all-male school, I wondered what did one do to court a "woman of the nineties?" Desserts were my cushions, never failing to garner a smile, which seemed a good thing.

Now don't get me wrong, cookies are great, but not to replace interaction. Who was the boy baker beyond the platter? I still struggle with that one, because I cannot understand what made me believe that desserts could serve as such a demanding social function. I used them as a pacifier — a placebo for my social weakness. I realized this when Cathy was successfully "wooded" by the ex-wrestler from St. James and not the baking writer. My faith in desserts faltered: a consequence of supplanting the proper ingredients to a friendship.

Cooking delights me these days, because it no longer substitutes. It is my stress relief, no longer an "in." A six-month jaunt abroad, a complete break from kitchen conjuring showed me how relaxing the process of preparing, mixing and baking really could be. How exciting to have me senses tickled by the scent of brownies as I open the oven, mitts in hand to grasp the warm tray. How satisfying it is to feed people and make them smile without ulterior intentions: to cook for the sheer challenge of taking powders and dusts and trying to fill a friend's stomach.

Before I turned to page 180, there was a brief relay through my head to simply use cream cheese instead of marscarpone, but I dismissed that soon enough. Tampering should be frowned upon.

# BLINDING LIGHT

MEGAN LINZ

*"Hear me, four quarters of the world,  
a relative I am!  
Give me the strength to walk the soft earth,  
a relative to all that is!  
Give me eyes to see and the strength to  
understand that I may be like you.  
With your power only can I face the winds."*

-Black Elk, Ogala Sioux holy man

I BECAME VERY ATTACHED TO MY FLASHLIGHT THE SUMMER I BEGAN TAKING NIGHT WALKS WITH MY FRIENDS. THE THIN BEAM OF ARTIFICIAL YELLOW LIGHT FASCINATED me. I pointed the ray at my feet to see the ground slowly moving by, isolated from the rest of the earth. At times, I pointed my beam into the sky, to see switch-like gray birch branches suspended weightlessly in the dark. I wondered what animals were crawling around just outside my vision. I was afraid of all those things that were not like me, that I could not understand or control. Was I walking into a patch of poison ivy or near a den of red foxes?

That summer, we'd go to the woods we knew best and set out towards midnight with a sleeping bag and water bottles stuffed under our arms. Each person held a flashlight, scanning the ground directly in front of her for roots and sharp rocks. The thin beam was my sword against the outdoors, against the dangerous wolves and bears I was certain were lurking just beyond the trees.

One night, after we'd parked our car on the patch of grass where the trail opened out from the woods, we discovered we'd lost the trunk key somewhere by the creek near our spot. Our magazine of flashlights, protection against the dark, scary night, was locked in the small trunk hold. We had to set out alone toward our familiar site. A train formed, each person walking close behind the other. I doubted we'd ever find our way. I wondered about the things we couldn't see that were hiding all around us.

At first, there was nothing but the darkened shadow of my friend's body directly in front of me. We

were all silent, climbing through the woods to our campsite. Light crunching of stale leaves and the shuffle of bare feet over dry dirt echoed between the trees. Our blind shuffle seemed somehow natural. Rhythmic, yet irregular, it punctuated the darkness alongside the flutter of insect wings and the vibration of beating mantis legs. Occasionally, I could hear another large animal thumping in the darkness. I was no longer afraid. Without the piercing stream of a flashlight or large streetlights, all the darkness was my guide. I was not cut off from the rest of the world by the small stream of canned yellow rays. The darkness swallowed me and flowed through me. I could not see my own arms and legs, they were darkness like everything around me. I felt the earth through my toes, knew where to go by the smooth dirt path beneath my feet.

Flashlights became unnecessary. We could find our way better in the dark.

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My family and I go camping each year just outside Lancaster. We set up camp with ten other families, full of kids who grew up in Towson, the archetypal suburb. We sleep in pop-up trailers with sinks and stoves and ten years' supply of food. Every Memorial Day, we all pile in minivans or bike down from our sites to the pavilion for the annual Family Olympics. Our families compete against the townies, the campground families who spend their summers in beat-up trailers at the permanent sites on the edge of the grounds. They excitedly pull up to the games like us, only in pick-ups, wearing fluorescent pink camouflage-patterned hats that say "My gun-cleanin' hat" and have large yellow permits hanging from the brims. We never speak with them. Their old black t-shirts and hunting gear are enough for us to justify shutting them out of our cleanly delineated lives.

This year as they pull up, we smirk and laugh about their slang speech and "funny teeth" back at our campsite. At night, the campfire glows warm on my friends' faces. Flickerings and thin yellow and orange snakes flash against the ground and the trees around them. Each face at the center shines brightly as the flames grow upward. From outside the circle, ten feet away, I don't exist. I stand alone, unknown to my friends joking together about the 'rednecks' we met during the day. They can't see me. I know that as they look around, they can see nothing beside themselves and each others'

faces. The gushing fire creates a structure for them, walls of pitch-blackness to hide the things outside themselves. The warm light blocks out everything the darkness could hold. I guess my world has always been like that. I've been brought up to reject the foreign things in my life and had created a carefully closed off world around me. I needed that clear separation. It organized my world, let me see the things like me and it hid the things that were not. Somehow, the wall of light made everything easier and less threatening.

If I couldn't see things that were different, then it wasn't really my fault if I didn't know them, wasn't part of them. Or was it?

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I met an Appalachian woman last spring named Maxine. Traveling on a service trip with a group of students from school, we landed in southwestern Virginia, in a town called Ivanhoe that I couldn't even find on a map. I walked into Maxine's home off Main Street, a complete stranger. She called to me, "You one of those Ly-ola young 'uns, aren't' ya?" Before I could answer, she'd wrapped her arms around me, welcomed me into her town, and asked almost every question I could have thought possible. Without ever meeting her before, I was an old friend.

Later that night she gave a speech to all of the volunteers. "I don't know yawl, " she told us, "but I can honestly tell you I love you. I know because I can see you. " She caught my eye as she left the room ."Hey lovely young 'un, you sleep tight, you hear." She sounded like a backwoods version of my mother. But she didn't really know me.

I thought you only loved your relatives. But Maxine said she loved us all. Because she could see us? Did my hair hang right or my clothes look perfectly pressed? Did she love me for my effort or for my smile?

An old Lakota once said you have to make your relatives. To do this, you must look upon each other as family. Let them affect you. No small beam of light guided Maxine through her acquaintances. She wasn't as restricted as I was by her ideas about other people and other things. Her world was one of unconditional darkness. Everyone affected her, and she opened herself to everyone, loved each one because they were part of her world. There were no barriers around her world.

One night I heard the Lakota spiritual elder,

Tokala Two-Elk, speak. The lights were dimmed and I could see clearly through the glass walls of the meeting room to the darkness surrounding us. The old healer wore an electric blue windbreaker with geometric shapes carving out feathers and stripes on the surface of the fabric. Shadows collected in the deep cracks that ran through his face as he spoke. He told me, "Our prayers make relations with the trees, the air, the mountains and water— our prayers go beyond our vision. You can make yourselves relatives, if you look into everyone, respect their energies, their powers and gifts, if you are thankful." I thought about the old Lakota, picturing him on the journey of knowledge and growth he described. I imagined him as a young man on his four days and four nights of discovery, sleeping atop the sacred mound somewhere in the Black Hills. He slept alone in the dark, with birds floating overhead and unknown animals roaming fields and woods at his feet. He was not afraid, he was part of the circle. He learned there to go beyond the mere physical seeing, the seeing of images and appearances, the shells that everything lives inside. He strives now to see people, to see the world and all its amazing forces. He goes beyond his sight to what is fundamental in everything.

Maxine's son, Clark, came to visit us the next night at the old cinderblock firehouse in Ivanhoe where we were staying. As he walked up, it struck me that he seemed the same as the regulars at the old campground. His long hair hung in clumps knotted in front of his face and he wore a dirty black heavy metal t-shirt under a flannel shirt. He smiled, excited but rather aloof. We were the young college kids, come into his town to fix it. He had to maintain his dignity, at least.

"I'm going to college soon, " he said, matter-of-factly. "Yeah, goin' back to college just as soon as I get the money." I thought about why he was there, talking to us, getting to know us. I thought about what he was doing in the town. I asked questions about his life and his travels in the passenger seat of his brother's big rig. He'd been to twenty states, he said, but he like Texas best for its dancin.' And the people, he said, the people make the places. "I've met all kinds of people. Some like yawl; some that'r dirtier 'n sin."

I'd never been off the East Coast, never met many people, never opened my life out to them. Clark told me about Tennessee and Montana, what the people there showed him and the tricks he'd learned. I soaked him up, every anecdote about an old man he'd met or a

beautiful young woman who'd broken his heart. He taught me card tricks and drew pictures of his home and my face. I opened myself up to him and let him reach me. I flowed with the darkness, with the world whirling around him and through me. I didn't separate his world from mine with artificial light.

I had no need for light. Light in the darkness caused me to see the appearances and not the rhythms and life that lie beneath and within. The light was the divider between myself and the unique people and things around me. I realized it had been that light I had depended on that had caused my prejudices. I had never really looked into the 'rednecks' or the townies, bumming around in pick-ups and black t-shirts. I breezed over them, not opening myself up to them the way I did to new friends at school or people like me, in my path of life. They had stayed in the darkness, outside the slim ray of light I allowed in.

I know a woman who went blind after eighteen years of sight. Her eyes had been burned by chlorine in an unregulated pool. Her world was entirely dark, held together by the calm continuity of night. It was impossible for her to restrict things to a narrowed view. I wondered if her life was much harder now. Did she miss the blazing colors shooting up from a fire? Did she often wish she could see an expression or a face?

"No, not at all," she assured me. " My life is better now than before." She has more friends, real ones, ones she knows for their personality and their spirit. She said darkness was liberating not being able to see someone's shell. She joked she could 'see ' their hearts instead. I couldn't decide if I would be friend with the same people if I too could see only their insides. Did I even decide on my friends based on their shells, the packages that held them?

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In high school I volunteered at Maryland School for the Blind. I played in a program that joined "regular" first graders with blind first graders from the school. I worked with two children, Jennie and Mark. Jennie, a seven-year-old who had been blind from birth, was amazing. Walking in the field or swimming in the pool during my afternoons with her, she radiated happiness. Her face glowed when she was able to conquer a new skill or make friends with another child. Mark was much different. His demeanor was much more reserved.

He was the kid from grade school who was chased around by the other boys at recess and labeled by the girls as "cootie boy." His hair clumped in greasy strands and his clothes never quite fit around the bulge at his waist.

Mark stayed back from Jennie from the start. He was sure that she would reject him as the other kids had. But Jennie didn't pull back; she talked with him and laughed, asked him questions and told jokes. For Jennie, darkness was natural. She came to know Mark the way that the other kids hadn't. He teased her, shared his prized pet iguana and talked with her more than he had all year. She relied on ways other than seeing to understand Mark. She was able to relate with him because she opened herself up to him and let him show her who he was.

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Later this year, driving home from school, my friend, Carrie, hit a tractor-trailer, a big rig towing a ton of canned Pepsi's. The police said a thin stream of dark cola poured onto her car as she was trapped between the wheel and the bumper twisted above her head. Her sister called me late that night. She was at the hospital and they weren't sure if she would make it through the night. Sitting in my dorm room studying for exams, I was too far away to get to her. I wondered how she felt, what she looked like, if she was alive. I worried she'd never be the same.

I sat at my desk completely alone. My small room was all around me, lit up with lamps and bulbs. The light was overwhelming. I could see into every crack, on every surface. I stared out of the open window, wishing I had a friend there who could understand and was scared too. I saw only myself reflected back to me off the glass. I needed something but I was cut off in my room from anything around me. Everything was bright and blinding. I couldn't even see outside through the glass.

Something was missing. Outside my fear and uncertainty I had a need to be connected to someone or something that would assure me everything would be all right. I walked outside into the dark courtyard hoping to find something comforting in the darkness I had come to understand. I wandered around in the grass barefooted and found a seat next to the mangled root of an old oak tree. The wind whistled against the bark of the tree and

rattled the branches high above me. The light from my bedroom shone down to the spot by the old oak. I slowly rocked together with the breeze. Softly, another girl from my building sat down beside me. She sat silently with me in the darkness. I didn't know her well and at first felt uncomfortable at her presence. She was different from me, involved in different things with different friends. She took my hand and slowly reassured me it would turn out for the best. The light surrounding me slowly faded. I looked around and could see no hands, no arms, no feet or faces. Our bodies had blended into the darkness. I could feel it through my skin. I began to feel the calm in her voice. The wind brushed against our arms and tickled the hair against our faces. I knew she was worried with me. The walls I may have kept up at a different time were unimportant. I didn't need the light; it only blinded me. Somehow, here, in the night, I could understand her. She accepted me and I trusted her.

I thought of Tokala. The darkness was my guide.

# INTRUSION

MIKE CUOMO

LAST NIGHT, I WENT OUT IN SEARCH OF A NEW PAIR OF ADIDAS RUNNING SHOES. I HAVE OWNED MY CURRENT PAIR FOR EIGHT MONTHS. THEY'RE ALMOST DEAD.

Driving to the mall, my fingertips fiddled through the numerous radio stations until they landed on "Immortality" by Pearl Jam. I began singing along with the few words that I actually knew, yielding a totally inadequate contribution. Suddenly the radio failed as well, surrendering to a sports talk channel. The host, droned in an affected tire of grief, announced the headline, "the nation turns its lonely eyes to Dimaggio, Joltin' Joe dead at age 84."

It was warm for March, wonderful. I sat outside for lunch and read *The Baltimore Sun*. I do not read the newspaper everyday. Spring is due at noon tomorrow. I got this from a bird just in from Miami.

There's much to see. Two boys are playing basketball at the park across the street. A large woman is eating a chilidog, while jogging to her car. Gracefully obese. A man is walking his golden-retriever along the sidewalk, as the dog leads him towards a group of other canines, his neighborhood dog friends.

I direct full attention to my turkey breast sub. It is a six-inch creation topped with mustard, American cheese, lettuce, tomato, and pickles. I found a black ant scampering out the back of my sub, incriminated by his mustard coat. I ended his industrious life. Squish.

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Solicitors love to interrupt my life. A week ago, I was comfortably sleeping in my double bed, when suddenly my peace was violated: the telephone rang. I woke up from my sedative state and reached across the

bed for the telephone, knocking over a glass of water.

"Hello."

An excited young girl answered this pathetic attempt at politeness; I could hear her smile.

"Hello there, Mr. Cuomo! I am Cindy and I am calling you on behalf of Citibank Visa. I have a wonderful offer, especially for you today," she burred.

"I am terribly sorry but I..."

"All right, then let me just verify some information and we can get this card sent out to you in no time," she pressed on. "Let's see, you live on 321 Homeland Avenue. That's in Baltimore, right?"

"Yes, that is my address, but I do..."

"You are twenty-one years old and you are currently a student," she rambled. "What university do you attend, Mr. Cuomo?"

Here was my chance. Loyola's a college, not a university. I had her.

"Actually, I am not enrolled in a university, but a college. I am terribly sorry if this has been a waste of your time. But obviously you have the wrong Mr. Cuomo," I steamrolled on.

"Oh no, actually I meant to say college—" she struggled on.

"Good-bye Cindy!" Clack.

I tried to go back to sleep, but her piercing voice remained in my head. It reminded me of a cartoon character's voice.

I got out of bed and fixed myself two scrambled eggs, three strips of bacon, a glass of orange juice, and a piece of toast with a touch of strawberry jelly. Dangerous living, man.

I wondered what it would be like to have Cindy's job. Each day she calls hundreds of people. Some welcome her aggressive sales pitch. Most push it aside. She calls people at all hours, without warning. Soliciting particular offers that might be of little or no interest to the unlucky individuals that fall on her list. I would wish this job on my worst enemy.

I read that many telemarketing companies have asked their employees to place a mirror in their cubicles. While calling, the employee is instructed to smile into the mirror. In theory, the person being called will not feel the intrusion. Why should he be offended by such a pleasant smiling salesperson?

\*\*\*

I was walking down the street, when I saw a guy wearing a black T-shirt with the words, "DO NOT DISTURB," written across the front. I approached to ask where he found such an intriguing shirt. But when I got within ten feet, he greeted me with a fierce glare. I deserved it. The shirt warned me, but I still wanted to intrude. I went on my way.

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Lately, I have been disloyal to the television set because of my idea to install tinted windows in my car. At first, it seemed expensive, but my father's friend said that it could be done for \$125. That seems like a reasonable price for a little privacy.

With a little time to spend before Theology class, I planted myself on the red futon to watch television. Flicking through the channels, I landed on a video of Elton John playing his tribute song for Princess Diana's death. Friends and family members in the audience wept. "Good-bye England's Rose" was the title of the song, which was first written as a tribute to the death of Marilyn Monroe.

I thought about the Princess's death. It angered me so much that my teeth hurt. A fatal car accident: the result of an intruder's desire to steal a photograph, an autograph, or just his desire to be a jerk.

For me, it is tough to imagine dying at the hands of an annoying news reporter. I always thought of death as a result of something criminal: murder, armed robbery, arson, drunk driving, or simply beating someone to death. It never occurred to me that intruding on someone's private life could result in death.

# SILENCE

MAUREEN TRAVERSE

DURING THE SUMMER WHEN I WAS SIX, MY PARENTS TROOPED THEIR THREE CHILDREN OUT ONTO THE INTERSECTION OF OUR SHADY STREET AND A MAIN ROAD WHERE crowds had already sprouted along the curb, waiting. I don't remember if I knew why we stood there, my baby sister perched on my father's shoulders, her arms wrapped around his forehead and me in my green windbreaker, chewing on one of the laces from the hood. Sometimes, explanation only leads to further interrogation and perhaps my parents wanted to preserve the silence that their seriousness had evoked. Lines of people snaked along the street, all the way beyond my view, as if admiring a Memorial Day parade complete with fire engine and high school band. Only the street remained empty and immersed in an awe-filled hush ruffled only by the lilting breeze and the low chatter of the expectant crowd. We waited.

This next part I don't remember. Maybe my father pointed. We must have seen them coming. A group of runners, skin glimmering as the sun emerged from behind a sheet of cloud. They grew as they neared us, beginning in several twinkling specks on the horizon and slowly becoming a jumble of arms and legs, actual creatures with feet pounding the pavement in a steady rhythm. The entire memory moves with the eerie quality of a dream from one still image to the next. I don't remember the approach, but I do remember the actual moment when their feet and legs (all I saw at my height) crossed my field of vision and moved past me. The man in a middle carried a burning torch. The flame was just a wisp of orange in the breeze, almost to the extinguishing point, impossibly surviving the perpetual motion, never catching its breath. While this group of runners would eventually stop, the torch would make

it all the way to Los Angeles for the 1984 Olympic Games. It must have flown through millions of streets, past hundreds of millions of people, and at six, I had little concept of a world beyond that one block. Now I look back and wonder how time put that man there, in front of my street, how time put me there, between my parents.

The crowd must have erupted in cheers. My sister must have hollered. My father must have nudged me and said, "See, they're going to run that torch all the way across the country," simplifying things the way fathers do. Yet, as with so many of my childhood instances, I remember the moment only in utter silence, as if the energy in maintaining the picture alone is mammoth, not allowing for the restoration of sound.

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Earlier that same year, the Winter Games had been held in Sarajevo. I watched the opening ceremonies on television, children in puffy red, blue, yellow and green snowsuits. I've heard that the very same stadium is only a shell now, riddled with snipers' bullets.

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From where I sit, tucked into the thick quiet of the library, I see a rack of today's newspapers from various cities: Philadelphia, Madrid, New York and Washington. Today, for the third or fourth day in a row, headlines are bold and succinct. "NATO Launches 2nd Wave." Above a photograph of a crowd burning an American flag, the words "Defiant Serbs" ring a blaring chord in my empty thoughts. I hardly think that if I suddenly met an Albanian and a Serb side by side I would be able to tell one from the other. I think the same must be true for many Americans, yet the newspapers and the politicians group them and map out their territories in careful diagrams. Looking at the space allotted to each, I imagine the land must be as empty, blank and flat as the newsprint paper on which it is drawn. For me, seated at a library table, distractedly hunched over my work, the land is just space, more space I've never set foot in.

The entire front page of The New York Times today is in Serbia. The spread is a jumble of rumbling voices from every corner of the war. I read three before setting my eyes on the middle article, "Birthday in a

Shelter, With 'Fireworks.'" The piece reads like a personal narrative of a roving journalist, holed up in shelters with Serb families, waiting out the raids. The reporter, with no particular concern for his own safety, drinks Turkish coffee and homemade plum brandy with a thirty-seven-year-old father of two while asking the man's wife where she places the blame for the current attacks. "There is plenty of guilt to go around,' she said. 'No one need feel left out.'"

The man, Mile, bitterly jokes that the bombs are fireworks, celebrating his wife's birthday, which they spend in their basement with their six-year-old son and five-year-old daughter, who buried her face in her hands during the raid and said "I don't want to die, Mommy." The gap closes. For a few minutes I lose my ignorance in the voice of the journalist and trudge with him over the rubble in search of perspective. Finding your footing on the uneven ground of a nationality you do not understand is confusing and I could not attempt to side with anyone save the frightened little girl.

But the paradox blooms. Remain silent and we more or less condone the brutal attack on Albanian towns. Yet when we speak up, it is in a voice like the thunder of fire. We may reach the nation, but to the individuals, clutching their children in basements and shelters, we are bullies who cannot separate a people from the actions of their president.

Most of the voices in the article agree. America and the West have made themselves the enemy of the public by taking such action. They are only helping Yugoslav President Milosevic in convincing the Serb people that the West is not to be trusted. Even after the air raid sirens blared, Mile's daughter would not enter the basement until her superhero cartoon was over. With the desperation of a father who does not understand a child's need for continuity at any cost, he asked her where her superheroes were to help them now. The cartoon was an American export. Perhaps we were in Yugoslavia long before the NATO planes took off.

The ground trembles under their feet; the gravel rises and falls, almost like breathing.

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On a dark night we drive from Meredith, New Hampshire to Worcester, Massachusetts. The road takes us between two states, but the change is hardly noticeable before we reach the city. Headlights smear

the black charcoal of night, etching paths of sight to follow. From the backseat, I watch houses fly past, glimpse their yellow windows and wonder about the lives behind each. Why was I not dropped there? How did I end up in the car stealing by so fast one would think we had more than time on our tails?

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The poet, Charles Simic, wrote an autobiographical piece narrating his childhood in Belgrade during World War II and his eventual migration to New York City. *Columns of smoke went up as the bombs fell. We'd be eating watermelon in our garden, making pigs of ourselves while watching the city burn. My grandmother would cross herself repeatedly. The dogs would get restless.*

For the children, war became natural, a part of the ordinary occurrences which no one questions. One little boy learned to imitate an air raid siren so perfectly that he would go up onto the balcony and wail like a bird caller until people below begged him to stop.

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I trudge back from the library in a grey dusk on a noisy street. The wind lifts my hair like a sail and sways the leaves like folded paper. I am far from the place where "ignorant armies clash by night," but not so far that I cannot smell a bit of the ash in exhaust and hear a note of the chaos in the surging traffic. All day I had been caught up in my work, laboring over words, but isolated. Yet when I traced my fingers over the Times article, almost no time elapsed before I was in the basement, feeling the cold cement under my legs and watching this father try to comfort his daughter. Only through words had I been dropped there.

# BEYOND listening

COLLEEN HUGHES

"The loss of a sense adds as much beauty to the world as its acquisition."

-Marcel Proust

"IT WAS AWFUL, COLLEEN. TIMMY WAS TELLING MY MOM AND I HOW MUCH HE LIKED LISTENING TO THIS CASSETTE TAPE THAT HIS FRIEND HAD LET HIM BORROW, BUT THEN when I found the Walkman on the couch, I noticed that there weren't any batteries inside. I mean, at least I accept that I am deaf."

Flicking her reddish-blond hair over her shoulder, Jill ends the conversation, unscrews the lid to the bottle of nail polish remover, and runs inside the house to retrieve the cotton balls she had forgotten. From the porch, I can hear her slam her finger in a drawer and gripe in pain.

"You alright, Jill?" I instinctively yell through the screened window. Not expecting an answer, I stare thoughtfully at the snoozing cars lined along Chandler Street. Background noises blend in steady monotony: a lone jogger returning from his run, sneakers pumping and chest heaving; a lawnmower whirring faintly; a few neighborhood children scratching a hopscotch grid on the sidewalk with pastel chalks.

I had only known Jill for a few weeks, but already I could sign the alphabet with my fingers. Impressed with my speed, she had promised to teach me the most complicated succession of signs that she knew: "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star." I had reacted with surprise when she said this, and she informed me that neither she, nor her brother, Timmy, were fluent in sign language because their parents had decided against sending them to a school exclusively for the hearing-impaired.

Although I had not asked for an explanation, she had added, "I mostly lip-read. I do notice very loud noises, but I have trouble recognizing distinguishing characteristics between certain sounds—I can only

discern a muted hum or buzz most of the time."

As I ponder her straightforwardness, I notice a squirrel whisking along the hood of a parked red mini-van, his bushy tail fanning away crisp, brown leaves. Suddenly, his clicking claws set off the car alarm and interrupt the calmness. Plugging my ears with my thumbs, I jump from the plastic chair and join Jill in the kitchen.

"I was going to bring out some pretzels too," she begins, but then stops, cocks her head towards the window and squints her eyes in concentration.

"An ambulance?" she asks hopefully. I shake my head, and she tries again, "Police siren? Fire alarm? The Apocalypse?"

Despite her light-hearted attitude, I resent the fact that I cannot nod in affirmation. As I try to describe the van's resonating whoo-whee-whoowhee, she bites her lower lip in frustration.

The alarm is silenced, we return to the porch, and Jill remarks, "Feel that breeze touch your cheek? It's slight, but reassuring."

I had not noticed the soft wind.

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It is Monday, 11:00 a.m., Biology lab. Pig dissection is about to begin, and fifteen pairs of lab partners snap their latex hospital gloves—some in anticipation, some in anxiety. Jill is first in line to hoist a baby pig from the ten-gallon bucket of reeking formaldehyde. "We have to get a big one," she had exclaimed before class. She brings back our pig, immediately christens him "Squiggly," and without hesitation, dumps him into our dissection tub, as if she handled dead animal corpses every day.

While I timidly poke the pig's side with a scalpel, Jill eagerly skins the animal, not at all distracted by the slimy pieces of pink flesh that slip through her fingers.

"Jill, aren't you revolted by this, this morbid embalming?" I ask.

She glances at me, tries, but fails not to snicker and coerces, "Come on, you wimp, dig in!" I laugh a little too, but then she becomes serious.

"Put your hand on his back," she commands. I do, but then squirm uncomfortably at the gooey, uneven texture of his half-peeled skin. Then she places her hand on Squiggly and asks, "Why are you afraid? Can't you

feel his stillness? No pulsing heart, or blinking eyelids, or stomping hooves, or spiraling tail...there's no life to harm you."

I think back to a few days ago—that afternoon on her porch when the car alarm was set off. What had she said when I told her that the alarm had been silenced?

"I thought so, Coll, but I wasn't sure. You see, I do not know what real silence is because I experience its counterfeit so often."

Ironically, it was I who had not noticed the pig's limp tranquillity.

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That evening, Jill and I walk along the dusty trails in Pennypack Park. Every so often, I nudge her to the right to allow an impatient biker to whiz past us. Suddenly, she stops me to read the carvings that graffiti a submissive oak tree. She traces "Anne and Peter 4-Ever" with the tips of her fingers and then whispers away the specks of bark from her palms. I am unusually subdued, and she turns towards me to question my quietness.

"What are you thinking about, Coll?"

I bite my thumbnail and mumble, "Nothing, really, but..."

She stops walking, cuts me off mid-sentence, and in good humor mocks me: "You know I can't read your lips with your finger in your mouth."

A collie and his master trod past us; the dog's tags jingle.

More at ease, I ask, "Jill, I was wondering...do you remember realizing that you were deaf?" I am somewhat ashamed of my question, for I feel as if I am trespassing on territory that I should regard as too respectful to set foot upon.

Jill seems surprised by my question, is silent for a moment, but then looks directly at me and quietly responds, "You've just set a record. I've know people for years who continue to avoid that subject."

I am unsure whether to stand a little straighter or bow my head in repentance, but thankfully, she does not give me the option of sorting out my feelings.

"Don't get me wrong," she assures me and then sarcastically adds, "I am quite willing to divulge my greatest secrets."

Neither of us speaks. We come to a bridge of a

few wooden planks, which shivers and frets as we cross a polluted creek. The stagnant water coats rocks and dead, floating minnows in a dull, brown sludge. As I wipe away a buzzing fly, she begins to talk.

"No one noticed that I couldn't hear well until I was nearly two-years-old. I was at my cousin's birthday party, playing with ten or twelve other little girls when my aunt called in to us from the kitchen that the ice cream was being dished. My playmates all ran excitedly from the room, but I just continued playing with the building blocks. Then my mom came in and asked me why I didn't want any ice cream, and I just stared at her blankly. Since then, though, my hearing has gotten much worse."

I fiddle with my plastic zipper on my sweatshirt. A bird rustles in a nearby nest. Jill continues:

"I think I made a self-discovery with the pig this morning. For once, I could hear what everyone else hears too—even if it is absolutely nothing."

She glances over at me. I avoid her gaze, dig the heel of my sneaker into the muddy trail and relish the squish.

I am too thoughtful to speak, so she continues to ramble.

"Timmy hears even less than I, but he's more stubborn. He'll watch TV without closed-captioning, and well, I told you about the whole Walkman episode."

A mother coos to her sleeping infant as she pushes a stroller past us.

Jill stops talking, awaits my comment, and sniffs the slicing autumn air. As we leave the park, I am acutely aware of the acorn shells and twigs cackling beneath our shoes and the constant whoosh of a kite flying above. I crack my knuckles, snap chewing gum, and kick a stone into shrubbery; each sound is amplified.

I want to comfort her, although I don't think she wants that. I fight pity. I clear my throat and almost change the subject. But then I hesitate—too afraid I might say the wrong thing. I grind my molars and keep silent. I slump in defeat.

Does she know how I feel?

Jill comments that the damp ground chills her toes and points out a dead tree trunk rotting in despair.

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La dee dum de da dum. Plunk. Dee la la dum  
dee la da da dum. Plunk. Plunk.

"Oops, I know that was off, sorry, let me start over."

I try to hum along to Beethoven, but sour notes interrupt my harmony. I don't complain, thought. Jill sits primly on the rose-colored pad of the piano bench and squints at the sheet music in front of her.

"You know, Coll, I shouldn't have quit. After just a year, I can barely remember pieces that I used to know by memory."

She shakes her head in ridicule. "Why do I even bother?"

Still, her slim fingers peck away at the keyboard. I am amazed as her fluidity and precision begin to return because for her, the difference between the notes C and F exists only on the music measure. I drum my fingers rhythmically on the top of the piano. Jill grimaces in concentration, and I find myself enveloped by the instrument's oscillation.

As she plays, I listen to the hail beating against the windowpane; it is now too cold for long walks in the park. Since that day a few months ago, I had overcome my reluctance to question Jill about her hearing. At my request, she had willingly described to me the difficult process she went through learning how to speak: straining to put together bits and pieces of her mom's constant talking, singing, and reading aloud.

"I was embarrassed to talk at first," Jill had said. "I was confused about and afraid of what I couldn't understand. But thankfully, my mom was a persistent Annie Sullivan. Even now, I find that she is able to explain certain sounds so that I can appreciate them too."

Suddenly, I want to show Jill that I grasp what she is explaining.

The piano is silent. I touch the smooth, ivory keys and push them down, one by one.

As if she senses my determination, Jill demands, "Describe the melodies that I just played."

I contemplate for a second and then sputter:

"-stars chasing lightning  
-maraschino cherries  
-fresh mint leaves  
-August chill, January sweat."

Her eyes glitter.

# Rosemary Wilson

LAURA DUNBAR

THE FIRST TIME I MET MY GREAT-AUNT ROSEMARY WAS ON A BRISK FEBRUARY NIGHT IN THE BELFAST TRAIN STATION. SHE WAS HUDDLED TOGETHER WITH HER SISTER JEAN, Jean's husband Neil, and my great-uncle Jim. At first I didn't notice Rosemary. The "wee one" of the bunch (as she liked to call herself), she hid behind them, holding on tight to Jean. As I shuffled along with the crowd of the late weekend commuters returning from Dublin, I spotted the humble group down the platform. They looked so eager, like they had just heard someone famous was getting off of the train and they were waiting around to see if they could catch a peak. The sight of their anticipation initially made me nervous about making a good first impression, but I was reassured in knowing that they were just as excited as I was to meet them. The resemblance of my uncle Jim to my grandfather was striking. He immediately grabbed my duffel bag and hugged me with a fervid shake. Jean was the first to point out that I looked just like a Dunbar. This meaning that I too bore the feature that my relatives in New York refer to with reserved pride as the Dunbar nose. Rosemary would remain silent through the happy greetings. With one firm motion she released Jean and pulled me into her small frame. Looking up to me, her eyes widened and then focused on my face. She was reading me very closely, and there was an urgency in her expression that left me fearing to speak the wrong words. Still clenching tight to my arms now pinned tightly to my body, she finally spoke to me. "Lovely."

Rosemary Wilson is the second sibling in my grandfather's family. Gerard Dunbar (my grandfather) is

the eldest of the four, born in Detroit in 1925 when his parents attempted a stake at life in the United States. When prospects failed, my great-grandparents returned to Ireland with my infant grandfather to renew their lives in Belfast. Eighteen years later, my grandfather would receive a draft letter from the United States to fight in the Second World War. When he left Belfast, the only home he had ever known, Rosemary picked up the responsibility of keeping things smooth in the house and helped to raise Jean and Jim. At the time, their father was ailing from the effects of paint inhalation at his job in the shipyard, and would soon die.

After the war, my grandfather relocated to New York City where he met my grandmother Catherine Harrington, a first-generation citizen of Irish parents also living in New York. The family back in Belfast continued to struggle, and Gerard would send them any money he could to help them get by. Rosemary herself was growing up, and also moved out of the house at 12 Cliftonville Road with her new husband Pat Wilson. Pat, a printing-press operator, provided security for her and a new home that would quickly expand with the birth of their first son Brendan.

This was all I knew about my family in Ireland when I visited Belfast last February. What I did not realize then was that my aunt Rosemary was searching for in me some sign of her brother. Her gripping embrace that night in the train station was as much an attempt to physically connect with a piece of him as it was a welcome to me.

Rosemary and Pat still live in the house they raised their boys in on seven Chestnut Gardens with their adopted stray dog Scruff and parakeet Ira. Every morning Rosemary walks to 8 o'clock mass with her life-long companion Sadie from across the street and Pat takes Scruff along for a couple of laps around the water works. At one end of their street lies the entrance to the water works which extends toward the base of Belfast hill. Going north in the opposite direction leads into the neighborhood of Ardoyne, which was often the site of conflict during the troubles between the Catholics and Protestants. When the troubles were on, Rosemary and Pat said that they could hear the car bombs and machine guns echoing through the valley from their living room.

The house at seven Chestnut Gardens is kept warm by portable gas heaters in mock-up burning wood

fire places, wool sweaters, warm tea and electric blankets. During my stay, Rosemary made me the personal thermostat in her house. "Are you too warm dear? Too cold? Here now put this blanket across your lap and I'll put some water on for tea." Each night I spent in their house, Rosemary would switch my blanket on to pre-heat my bed before I went upstairs. I stayed in the front room of the house, which used to be Rosemary and Pat's room before they decided that in the winter it was too cold. The room was still perfectly kept and seemed as if the two could still be using it. Despite my feeble attempts to make the bed each morning, the blankets would be adjusted by evening, and each night I would crawl under sheets folded under with the deftness of a military instructor.

On the ornamental mantle were pictures of their wedding. In the old black and white photos of Rosemary in her youth I could much easier pick out the resemblance of her to my grandfather. There were pictures of the boys lined up as children on the cliffs and two statues of Mary the Virgin Saint placed at either end of the fireplace. Above my bed hung a small brass crucifix. Nothing in the bedroom was overdone or in bad taste, however, I could not help my eyes from drifting up to the cross I was sleeping under.

Like my grandparents, the Wilson's are devoutly Catholic. I am not. It was my parents decision to baptize me at the United Methodist Church in Farmingdale, New York. My grandfather, out of disapproval of this decision, did not attend my christening and has chosen not to attend any of my family's church functions. Every time I visited my grandparent's house when I was a young child, my grandmother, Nanny as we fondly called her, would take me to any mass being offered at Our Lady of Victory that day. Since her passing, my father does not attend Sunday mass anymore. I was never aware of these differences as a child and as an adult never thought they held much gravity. Sleeping in Belfast under my great-aunt's cross was very intimidating. My Protestant condition was not mentioned in the house. I was afraid of disrespecting their past, and they, working on putting the past aside, did not want to alienate me as a guest in their house. I wondered at times if they even knew. My queries were answered one night at the local pub with Rosemary's son Michael, his wife Charlene and her sister Amy. When after a couple of pints of cider, Amy slipped a pointed remark about Protestants towards me I realized that my

grandfather had forewarned his family and they had chosen to be silent about it as well. My relatives never purposefully made me feel like an outsider, but I could not help the feeling that I was a disappointment to them. I felt like the weak link in a continuing chain of watered-down Catholicism in my family. And still I cannot help but wonder if I were Catholic, if Rosemary would have taken me to mass with her on Sunday.

Over an Ulster Fry one morning with Rosemary and Jean, Rosemary told me that she thought I was quite brave for flying to see them on a plane all by myself. She mentioned the trip she took with Pat just after they were married to visit my grandfather in the States. She could barely stomach the ocean liner and is still afraid to fly. She never went back, nor has she left Ireland since.

I was shocked that she did not at some point venture beyond Northern Ireland. Jean and Neil had relocated over twenty years ago to Australia in order to escape the troubles and seek a more peaceful place to raise their children. My grandfather has been in New York since the second World War. It was hard for me to imagine Rosemary, such a shrewd woman, content to muster around in her rose wool house cardigan singing to Ira and adjusting fireplaces for the rest of her life until we drove one bright afternoon up the Antrim coast. That day we took a two-hour's drive north up the coast to the Giant's Causeway. Driving around the cliffs and passing through glen after glen was picturesque to the point of being surreal. The water along the coast is a turquoise color not to be confused with the water in the Caribbean. Rosemary laughingly told me that some people attribute this coloring to the rain washing off the green from the hills down into the glens and out to the ocean. Watching Rosemary walk along the cliffs at once answered all of the speculations I had about why she, unlike her other brothers and sister, had not expanded her life beyond the reaches of the still scarred and barbed-wire streets of Belfast. The glittering sun shining off of the ocean re-lit a spark in her eye that I would again see in my grandfather when I returned back to America and talked to him about his home. At first glance, it is devotion to family and home and the fulfillment of her daily Christian duties that keeps Rosemary to this day happy and strong in Belfast. But I know after breathing in the mist from the ocean along the Antrim coast, the hypnotic and lasting beauty of the country. As well as the contagious effects of the underestimated

strength of that old-fashioned Irish pride.

# ETERNAL CURRENT

HEATHER RYBACKI

"Set Memory on the jar  
For the ghosts  
That slip through endlessly  
(Eavesdrops from the overhang of time)."  
-Mary Finnin, *Overtones on Australia Day*

THE BUS RUMBLES OVER THE GRAVEL PATH THAT HAS BEEN CARRYING US DEEPER AND DEEPER INTO A WOODED ABYSS, THEN LURCHES TO A SUDDEN STOP IN A HAIL OF POWDERED dirt. Dusty particles are thrown up in a flurry, then settle lazily back down to the earth. The bus driver turns, smiling triumphantly at us over his shoulder. He has found the trail.

Our original stop had put us at a wide path, its open, inviting air shattered by a huge notice reading "Trail Closed." *Closed?* I had wondered. How could they close off nature? Why must we follow a trail? Couldn't our sense of direction guide us and take us to someplace unknown? As the bus began its grumbling again, I assumed the answer was no. And so our bus driver forged ahead, determined to get us to our pre-set destination. We were on a search for another trail that would lead us to the same place.

Earlier in the day, the bus had careened up the perilous Grampian Mountain roads, roaring up inclines and tackling blind curves as all forty-eight of us on board gripped our seats, petrified at what might find itself in our way. The asphalt slowly wound itself into a tight gray ribbon. We were climbing to the sky. The dark, foreboding trees disappeared somewhere behind us, and breath-taking views materialized outside our windows. Our knuckles released their grips as we gazed out across a picture postcard view of colors and shapes, stretching to the edges of our sight.

But now we are down in it, the Australian bush stretching out in all directions. The bus carried us here, but now our feet must carry us further. We kick up dust again as we stumble out of the bus, weary from a

long day of hiking and travel.

A humble wooden sign marks the beginning of the trail. Neat, square letters announce that our destination, the Cave of Hands, is 1.3 kilometers from the spot. I've only been in this country, away from the familiar world of miles and feet, for three weeks now, and I'm not too sure about the whole kilometer thing. I'm not even sure how to say the word: kil-om-eter or kil-o-meter? But I obligingly join the assortment of American and European students as we start our journey to yet another place of wonder.

This ground belongs to the Aborigines, ancient land upon which hundreds of generations used to hunt, gather, dance, sing, breathe, and live. All Aboriginal culture is inextricably tied to the land through both ecological and spiritual bonds. The many different tribes, from each corner of the continent, find all meaning and beginning in nature. Their Ancestral Beings are embodied in animals and natural elements such as the rainbow serpent, Possum, and Moon.

These Beings gave shape to the World by creating the landscape and the people in a period called the Dreaming. The ancient figures are eternally present, existing in all Aboriginal people through the Dreaming, never dying or changing within their complex myths. There is no concept of history, merely a belief that the past is contained in the present, like a ceaseless stream, always gathering more substance in its eternal course. All being is a layer building existence.

Hence, their ancestors are eternally contained in their lands, making all Aboriginal grounds sacred. But the land did not hold the same meaning to the Europeans who came and colonized this land two hundred years ago. The Aborigines had no concept of the white man's ways, and were subject to the power of their guns and machinery. Cities were built, land was plowed, natives were murdered. Native children were taken away from their families and placed in white societies in order to be "cultured" and "Christianized"- the Stolen Generation. Their existence was disrupted, destroyed. It has been a long, tiresome walk home for the thousands of Aborigines who lost their roots with the coming of the Europeans.

Our feet drag over a man-made channel of fine sand. The light powder shifts slightly underneath our boots and sneakers, as it has under the footsteps of thousands of other tourists. The sand meanders among foliage unfamiliar to my eye, slopes steadily upward,

slipping through dry, prickly bushes, winding around eucalyptus trees.

In two weeks, I will visit the Royal Botanical Gardens in Melbourne, 36 hectares of diverse plant life molded into neat gardens and planned forests. A young Australian, his white skin weathered from the outdoors, will lead a group of us on an Aboriginal Walking Tour. The land upon which the Gardens were built is sacred to the Bunurong and Worwoiong people, but the man who leads us through the Gardens is from neither of these tribes. In his comfortable, lazy accent, he tells us that he is a descendent of a tribe that is found farther north.

My thoughts will pause when I learn this. *How could this man be Aboriginal?* His pale skin bears no resemblance to the rich black of the Aborigines I had seen. As he shows us edible plants and talks about Aboriginal culture, our guide also tells his story. Born with the belief that he was of European descent, he grew up feeling that something was missing. This emotion compelled him to research his heritage and he discovered an Aboriginal ancestor- a great-great-grandfather.

The Dreaming spoke to him, called him to his people. His entire being changed with the knowledge of his past. I can not imagine being driven by such an emotion.

My friend Amanda lags behind the group, toting a video camera over her shoulder. I had met her two years ago, my first glimpse of her through an open doorway as I moved into a tiny dorm room my first day of college. I had smiled nervously at her that day, wondering if I had made the right choice, chosen the right school, taken the proper path. As we wander to the Cave of Hands, I can't imagine her not being in my life. The November before, she had strolled into our apartment and asked, "What do you think about going to Australia next year?" It's because of her that I'm even here.

She stops, separates from the group, peers at the world through a plastic lens. The gray-brown of branches and a million shades of green come into focus. She speaks her commentary to the future viewers of our videotaped journal as if narrating a nature show: "This is the Australian bush."

Countless Australian legends speak of small children wandering off into the vast expanse of wilderness and losing their way. Then, the tales go, huge bush-hunts are organized to comb the country and find the missing child. Since the continent is largely uninhabited

- only 18 million people populate a space about the size of the United States - the stories are easy to believe. But most Aussies live in the sprawling suburbs around the seven main cities. Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane are the bustling metropolises of the East Coast. Perth is their counterpart on the West. Darwin is perched on the northern edge of the immense island. Canberra serves as the nation's capital, set cautiously between Sydney and Melbourne. Adelaide lags half an hour behind the eastern cities, its ornate churches chiming the hour thirty minutes later than the ones in Melbourne and Sydney. And nestled in the empty spaces in-between are little suburbs, tiny towns, a few outposts, and a lot of wilderness. Perhaps the stories are merely myths to frighten young children so that they will not wander off and find themselves lost in nature.

The trees here amaze me - large, sprawling eucalyptus and gum trees, the trunks twisting and winding, their branches stretching outwards, reaching for the edges of the earth, then turning to question the clouds. I often stop on my way to class to admire them, to try to figure out the secrets hidden in their curves. They appear much grander, much solidier, years wiser than the American trees with which I grew up. As a child, I climbed maples and oaks that grew straight up, easily, with no twisting groans in their trunks. They reached directly for the sky, never turning back to what remained on the surface. I'm almost jealous. Australian children learn much more from climbing their trees than I learned from mine.

Occasionally, the sand path is studded by worn wooden boards, creating neat steps up steeper inclines. I stumble at the thought of returning to my tiny dorm room in a few hours, the thought of all the schoolwork I have ahead of me. But I won't get my schoolwork done that night. I'll have a visitor after I return from our day trip, an Australian boy I hardly know who lives a few stairwells over. The next week, we'll get drunk together on cheap red wine and talk until the kookabura starts its monkey call outside my window the following morning. Our friendship will only blossom as time continues, and we will share stories and laughter, create experiences and memories that will make both of us smile later in remembrance. In four months, I will leave, and our hearts will tear when we realize that our eternal friendship must be separated by half the Earth. A word, a picture, a line from a song will make each of us think of the other. Some moments I will wonder if there was ever a

time when I didn't know him.

I swerve to avoid a prickly bush jutting out into my path, but I notice it too late. Instead, I crash right into it, slicing wounds into my bare arms. I will be reminded of those thorns for weeks.

The path twists left, upwards, and a rock, a boulder, something bigger appears before us, growing out of the land, attached at its roots. A cavern has been worn out of its belly, creating an overhang that extends twenty feet, protected behind a chain link fence whose shiny metallic gleam offends the matte gray of the sandstone trapped behind it. The Cave of Hands. I don't see them at first, as I squint my eyes at the far wall, but then they are clear - red speckles of ochre leaving clean spaces in the middle where 24 hands have pressed against the wall.

Big hands, tiny hands, hands of all ages, for all ages. They were placed there 10,000 years ago, and haven't moved since. I look at my own hands, which have only existed for 20 years so far; which used to fly effortlessly over the ivory keys of a piano; which now were meeting others everyday, embracing in welcoming greetings and waving to new, friendly faces in this far-off country; which soon would curl over the computer keyboard, sending messages of "I miss you:" around the world to the hands they so recently had to let go of. I think of the Stolen Generation, of tiny hands being pulled away from their mother's. I think of the embraces when they are reunited years later.

A sign strapped to the fence explains that the 'prints' were made by placing a hand against the stone, then spitting ochre around the hand so that the print would be left. Further to the left are twenty, thirty, forty stick figures, all drawn with vivid crimson of ochre. They look much like the ones I used to draw as a child. They look like the ones that all children draw. My stick figures have found their way to a trash can, or at best, a yellowing scrapbook. Ten thousand years later, these images are still here, inspiring awe, producing wonder, sustaining history, preserving the eternal flow of life.

But it is time for us to leave. We saw what we came to see. We took photographs to remind us of it later. We even signed our names in the "guest book" placed near the end of the trail. However, the photographs will not be enough to bring the experience back with us. They will not be of the moment they were taken, but merely a reflection of that moment, carried across time. It is not the same. Only those who are

there to read our names in the guest book will understand.

It is a quiet walk back along the trail, back to the bus that will take us over highways to our residences. Back to the residences that will carry us forward into the lives of others and to new experiences. To the experiences which will find a place to live in our hearts and in our minds. Perhaps someone will write it all down, will share their memories with their friends, their children, their friend's children, and their children's friends.

Or perhaps someone will leave a handprint in the wilderness, and let others discover the rest on their own.

# FORUM 2000

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