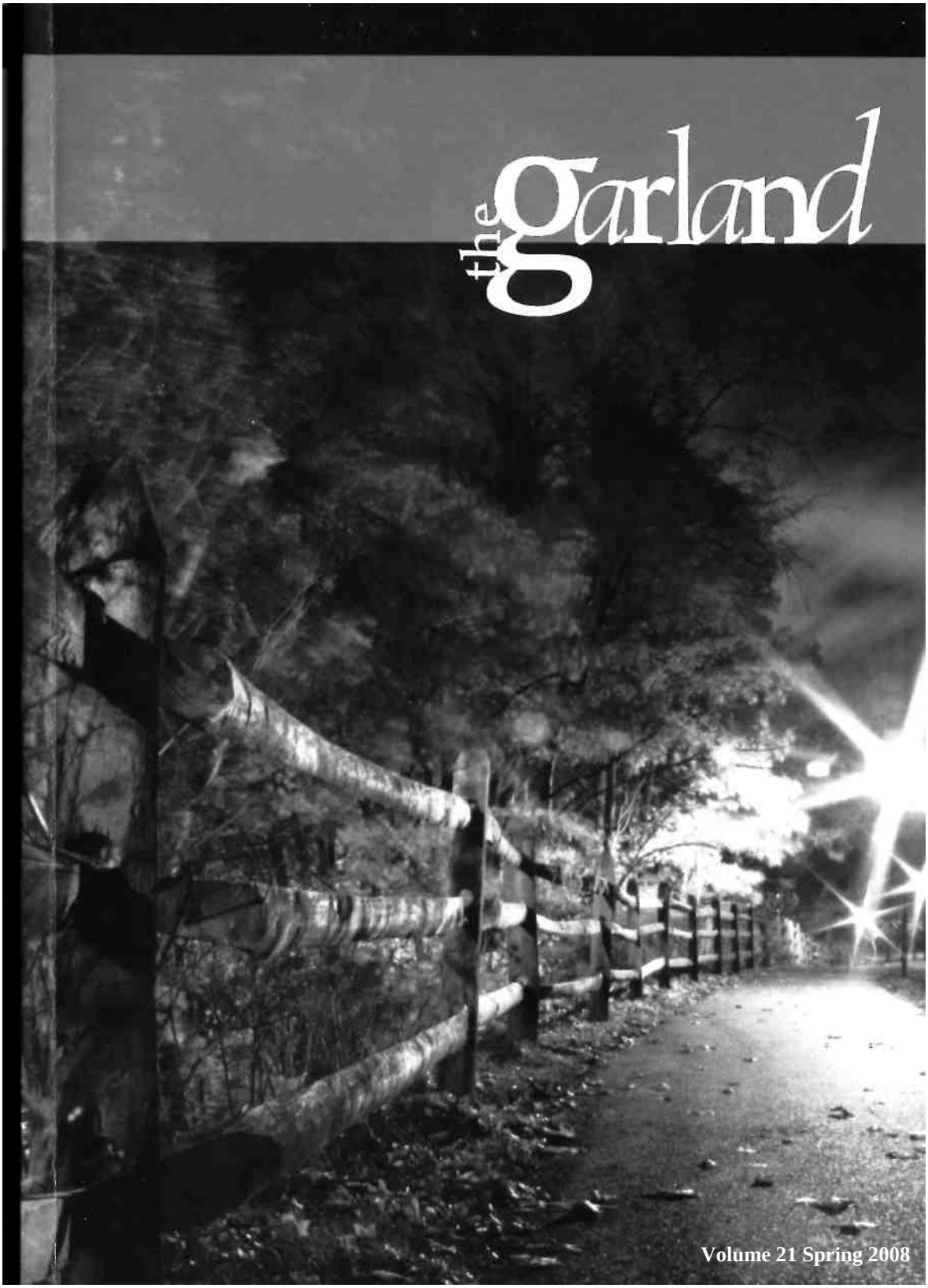
the garland



Volume 21 Spring 2008

garland

The Art and Literature Magazine of Loyola College

the garland Volume 21, Spring 2008

The Annual Art and Fiction Review of Loyola College

 Undergraduate members of the college community are invited to submit original works of poetry, fiction, art work, and photography. All works under review remain anonymous. Please direct digital submissions to garland@loyola.edu, and for more information, please visit our website: http://www.loyola.edu/writing/garland.html

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Like many editors of the past Garland issues, I am sitting down to write this short blurb to persuade you, the busy reader, to turn the page. Allow yourself to see the world through the eyes of the writers and artists lurking around Loyola's campus.

Good literature and art does not portray extraordinary and unimaginable events. Fiction allows us to realize that beauty and complexity exist in all corners—within the remnants staining the table after a crab feast, the black ink of the morning newspaper, and across endless dusty fields. The contributors of this year's Garland highlight these under appreciated spaces.

Please enjoy the poetry, fiction, art, and photography in this addition of the Garland.

A special thanks to the staff for their insight and careful eye. This issue would not have been possible without your patience, hard work, and understanding of my overflowing email inbox. And most importantly, to the contributors, whose work needs no introduction.

Lizzie McQuillan

Poetry

Photography

Fiction

Poetry

MORNINGS

Leon Malloy

Offbeat rain fell from patches
Of sky & I heard it
Through an opened window
Sporadically tapping the wooden sill,
As if someone were
Quietly knocking on a bedroom door—
Careful not to disturb a dream.

Later I sipped my black coffee & waited
For the middle-aged waitress to take my order.
An old man poured cream into his cup, & I watched
The milk marble the dark tea for a moment,
Before his spoon slowly stirred it to a dull brown.

Bold headlines framed
The grayed text—blurred just out of focus—
Of my opened newspaper,
Already read & nearly forgotten,
When the waitress refilled
my ceramic mug & placed in front of my,
Daily breakfast special of
Two eggs (any style) with home fries,
Toast & a side of bacon.
A fly buzzed & landed on the soufflé cup of
My mixed berry jelly & flew & landed again.
I bit into the rye toast, moist with melted butter

Then, remembered
The simple rye toast & bacon breakfasts
My grandmother used to make—
The sleep, which still lay heavy on the dining room furniture,
When I would solve at her side,
Under dim light the answers to
The Sunday morning crossword puzzles.

My father's mother wearing her pink floral housedress,
Reading glasses that oddly magnified her eyes, her diamond
ring—

We smiled when I somehow knew
A four-letter word for "Fine by me."
Silent rain seen
From the windows with white lace curtains,
Her *Old Country Roses* china mug,
Her ornamental script; black ink,
Boxes & rows of Across & Down.

AFTERGLOW

I could tell you—he's eighty-three today, that,
That low sun finally balances on the clouds
Turning the evening yellow.
Maybe in the empty lot, the flaxen haired boy chases fireflies,
As if running through wheat.

Earlier, the little blond boy picked a bouquet
Of goldenrod & dandelion & the man arranged the wildflowers
In a tea-colored vase & noted the absence—of
The young woman who sold fruit on the corner of Seventh & Canary.

The surprise was the taxi arriving at the painted curb
At half past eight & the fruit seller tipping the driver & carrying
A cake box to the old man's door.
She turned the brass knob & called to the boy.

Inside, she struck a match against the rough side
Of the cardboard box—to light the candles on the cake.
The weak flame forfeits when a cold draft
Blows through the swelled curtain at the window,
Just the mix of sulfur & pollen lingering.
But out the window, the old man sees an afterglow
Faint of firefly—which seems to rise from nowhere
& returns to it. The nothing—
The brilliance surrounding whatever comes to light.

BUT I AM JUST A WOMAN

Allyson Carroll

I want legs like squid tentacles,
That turn flush red
When wrapped around my mate.

I want to be pursued
With determination,
Like the killer whale after a grey whale calf—
A hunt
A chase
That lasts,
For more than six hours-

Spontaneous as the Trapdoor spider
Throwing itself off the top of a desert dune
And rolling,
Its body let free like a stray wagon wheel on the run
Or a whiffle ball in a gust of wind.

I think the spider frightens me,
Like one's own reflection sometimes can,
Because it's as restless as I am.

But I know I am more like a chimpanzee
Than a dolphin,
Or a swan.
Still, would it be wrong
To want a long neck to wrap around the One?
To want a bottle nose to nuzzle up underneath his chin,
And a memory like a butterfly
So every morning I can wake up
And fall in love again?
And again.
And again.
And again.

I want to be so many things,
But I am just a woman.

THE DAY THAT GOD DIED

Ross Losapio

no one noticed.
But in the days and weeks that followed
more prayers than usual
went unanswered
and people grew suspicious.
The holy men kept the secret
as long as they could from the cynics,
who always garnered a bigger audience.

No one held a funeral. The thought
never occurred, not even
for the sad ironic humor of it.
Plenty cried -for themselves mostly-
and everyone crossed the streets
a little more carefully.

Couples made love
until they grew bored of it
and looked at each other expectantly
across suddenly vast beds. The lonely
found no new meaning
in their solitude; only a new profundity.

The fools made gods of themselves.
The slightly less foolish
worshiped them and pretended
that they didn't know
the difference.

PORTRAITURE

After Steve McCurry's photograph, "Afghan Girl"

The red scarf that enfolds you
jellies like drying blood and heaves
you from the blurred and dying world.
Your frank eyebrows
root me to this spot. The set
of your eyes, sea-green jewels
in a red-earth face, jabs me.

I would touch you if I dared,
wipe the smudges from your nose and jaw,
but the grim line of your lips
would stay my hand. The dirt
must have a purpose.

I fell in love with you
before I knew your name,
resenting my foolishness
immediately. One of a thousand
to see a picture, a personage
rather than a person.

But that dirt remains somewhere
in a desert, half a world away,
where your bare feet touched ground
and no one has seen your headshot.

CODA

Siobhan Watson

I wonder if Beethoven prayed to St. Anthony upon losing his hearing,
hoping it was misplaced, shuffled under a composition or under his piano bench;

If his loss was another of God's bets with the devil,
a Job-inspired rematch to prove some injustices too great for a Christian man to take;

If you'd hear music in his empty composer's skull,
like the ocean in a shell or if you would hear the most tragic requiem of all:

silence.

THE AGE OF MANDATORY INNOCENCE

Lorraine Wolters

It was an era of saddle shoes and French braids;
we hung on dandelion cares that danced in the wind.
We stood single file, sat with mouths tight,
fingertips to the forehead, the heart,
left and right shoulder.
A bony digit pointed firmly to pictures representing Truth.

Straight, so as to clear our understanding.

Belief was not the question; His home was Anywhere.
Our backs prickled by the sun-scorched grass,
our eyes turned to the spaces between the trees—
and yes, He was there.
Rolled over to catch the deepest scent of earth,
lifting one hand to see the grass artwork on my palm.

Shapes appeared in the clouds.

A small cluster of brick buildings stood at the center of a field,
its nucleus an erect and white flagpole.
Clapping erasers billowed dust through the nostrils and eyes;
we tasted the chalky mist and peered up at the red, white and blue
soaring through the air. Wiggling, perhaps to escape those ropes—
It would fly away if it could. So would we.

The present is jaded by experience.

It all looks just the same in Spring, you know.
Soon the forsythia will weave through,
quilting the regal fuchsia blossoms.
Yellow and with feigned importance
it sings, weeps, sighs—
every year remaining the weed.

BREAKFAST

Dan Corrigan

I sit down to breakfast with
Van Gogh and Gauguin,
the latter who, with great reserve, sets
down a few saucers, plates,
a pitcher full of milk,
startling in its whiteness.
Gauguin is smoking, dignified,
a pipe (although I do not know
if Gauguin smoked) while
Van Gogh sits murmuring
the names of pigments which
no longer or don't yet exist:
—peach black, Venetian red,
titanium white— says he,
and here I'll note that
the windowpane is a limpid powder blue
—Powder blue being for interior
designs and leisure suits-
growls Gauguin, staring angrily
out one eye.
(the shifting
perspective causes Van Gogh
to suddenly, painfully,
bleed from the ears),
and Gauguin lowers into a chair
—what is it that you want?
an image, a simulacrum?
or a thing so material?—
he asks in french.
(Van Gogh, his space impenetrable,
spills onto his back,
an upturned beetle,
a rolled over Jeep)
(and here Gauguin laughs at me)
I move to answer him, but he
gestures with his arm and
unfurls the tabletop:
a few spoons, two flowers,
daylight breaking

SCHIZOPHRENIC

Caitlin Rohan

I.

The light of day fumes on the pavement,
And my heart whirls with a jerking joy.
I sleep with a T.V. droned lullaby and wake
to the lazy smell of pancakes.
I smile with calculated happiness.

II.

The night dark smothers the sky,
And my heart stops in blue-black moments.
I sleep with agony-tossing hours and wake
to a head of marching band chaos.
I frown with the practice of a spinster.

SUNSET

April Nicotera

You painted me up as a sunset
Warm, flowing—
Romantic, *soft*.
Exactly the way
You wanted to see me.
My colors blending in some
Perfect and still unmoving sky—
The bleeding and gilded smudge
Growing and shrinking;
I'm not a pretty sunset.
I'm all the grays and chapped whites
Stagnant and ugly—scars of
Smokestacks on my horizon,
And I'm waiting with a blazing silver
Slapstick of a circle keeping me awake
As I desperately sink into what
I can only assume is the most brilliant
And calming inky blue midnight
That anyone has seen.
I'm slipping from grays into that
Final and eventual slate of pain
Where I hover, suspended in this
Lukewarm grain of clouded suspicion
Because you, in all your artistic glory,
Thought I would look better
In all those pretty colors;
I'm not those *pretty* colors.
Not in the slightest...they don't suit me.
I'm the ugly sunset—the one which taints
No one's memory—the sunset which pains
Those watching with the thought of a new
And gloomy evening—silenced by
Thickened treatments of my
Inevitable circulation.

WHEN I GROW UP

Amanda Marano

I want to be a gravedigger
so I can bury fears and lies.
I want to start an ending
so I can witness some tears.
I want to put them in their places
and slam the doors shut.

I want to be a gravedigger
to make them remember their regrets;
to make them forget their promises.
I want to end a happy beginning.
I want broken tombstones
with dead and rotting flowers.

I want to be a gravedigger;
I would know their secrets—
taking them with me
and keeping them hidden.
Feel the dirt under my nails.
Shovel until my body aches.

I want to be a gravedigger
without remorse or conviction,
without passing judgment,
or protecting the innocent,
without Christianity, Judaism,
Buddhism, or Islam.

I want to be a gravedigger
so I can witness my own passing.
I want to remember every body
by name and not number.
I want to be neither remembered
nor forgotten for my work.

I want to be a gravedigger.
I want to live forever.

AFTER THE MILK ARRIVED

Matt Rooney

Frank and I sat down to some Cheerios
and read about people on the pages of papers
and I thought about
Washington tomorrow
while he spoke slowly and only
about London after the Battle of Britain
foggy in the autumn dawn
smoky in the cool English morning

in section A22 I found a weather map of America
with California close to the crossword and chromatic comics
near the fold
and New York close to the edge of the page
where the map ends
with spirals of clouds spinning away
sunny here and snowy there
and it dawned on me that
love exists in the areas outlined in yellow,
a murdering spree runs in areas red,
and fields of purple harbor quiet and relaxation

mountains rose from the page
in a simulated topographical projection of the nation
and red took over again near the continental divide
with high pressure and low flowing
either to the Mississippi
with noble intention
or to Canada,
without a second thought
maybe raining over the St. Lawrence Seaway
away from the states
into the cool purple north

and the horoscopes appear later on the page:
I don't tell Frank that Mercury is going to
assist Mars,
uniting both his fear of social settings and his professional suc-
cess

(nevermind that Frank has been retired for a decade and
actually does surprisingly well with people)
but the hope comes truly from Saturn and Venus
combining in fearful unity to en-fear the un-enlightened,
removing the few teeth he has left,
and promising financial security,
something he can really hang his hat on.

ENTRY FROM 32 NOVEMBER

We sit waiting for the bones to crawl up from concrete and find
skin and coffee and cream and sugar and symphonic subtleties
with perhaps a doughnut, or just a few more pills, until they too
can be counted with the sheep of the dying, not the birds of the
buried,
which is really to say we wait for a revised resurrection without
the hands touching.

CINEMATIC YEARNINGS

Raina Fields

We'd share a hoagie and a bag of potato chips,
squinting at the small television screen,
ignoring the books, papers, and clothes scattered -
on the floor, the bed, the dressers,
waiting for the classic films to begin:
Jezebel, Sabrina, In the Good Old Summertime
Bette Davis, Audrey Hepburn, Judy Garland.
I practiced their detached look of desire
in bathroom mirrors, when no one was looking.
I learned to smear lipstick across my face,
as if readying myself for a ball, to dot the beauty
mole where my lips creased upward, conjuring Marilyn.

I wished I was Shirley, carelessly tapping,
my curls bouncing in the air, my dress a frilled tower.
I wished - that is, until her young voice cracked,
Mr. Bones, Mr. Bones and the musicians walked out in blackface.
I stared at those who looked like me,
servants plain clothes, no blonder hair or come-hither lashes,
only appearing onscreen for minutes at a time,
Yes'um, Ma'am and *No, Sir*. Was Nat King Cole right?
Maybe *Madison Avenue is Afraid of the Dark.*

STRANGE FRUIT

Was she there? The way she sung it - a eulogy.
Her voice warbled, holding their memory,
though there was no funeral for these dead.

Salvation came in those pink blossoms,
magnolia sweet and fresh, mingling with
the burnt scent - a gift, sweetness in suffering,
though there was no funeral for these dead.

Death wouldn't greet them quickly enough,
unless lucky and the thick rope broke the neck.
Struggling only made the spectacle greater,
Men, women, and children jeered *Nigger*.
as *black bodies swung in the southern breeze.*
What harvest? What strange fruit? The dead


PhOto
grAphy

STILL LIFE WITH LIZARD _____ Dan Corrigan

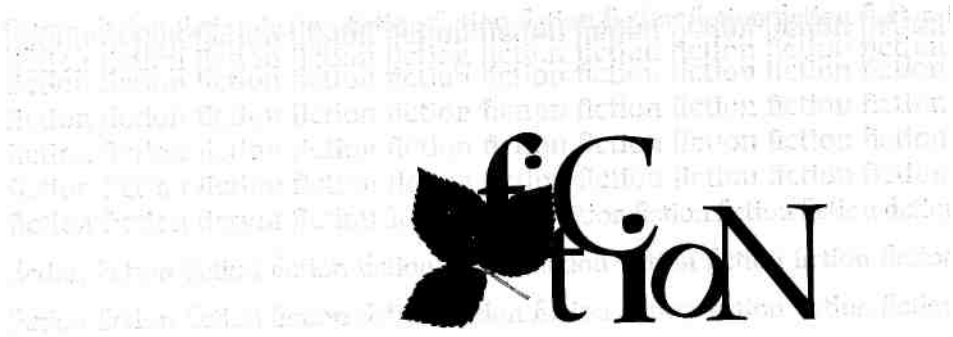
OLD GLORY Kevin Smith

REACHING FORTH Sarah Sweeney

UNTITLED

RADIOACTIVE CABBAGE Betsy Vanlangen

BALTIMORE'S BEST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DUST AND RECKONING

Sean Allocca

Rust-red fields of dirt and dried up wheat slithered across the land like a giant serpent in those days. It was a sight to behold--one long, slender body of dust, the color of drying blood--the scales, were the fields of golden wheat. The dust came in looking for a new home, following the features of the land. Through the mountain pass up in the North, it curled around like copper wire, and settled itself in.

We had just gotten back from church that Sunday, which would become known in the history books as Black Sunday - April fifteenth, 1935, the day the worst of those storms came rolling in. They caused havoc for the people trapped underneath them, like an avalanche of thick, brown dust. Poppa said it was all those New York City folk, come out here after the Stock Market crashed. They took over the land, not treating it right, and not knowing how to even if they wanted. Finally, the land wouldn't take no more. I couldn't tell why they would come here looking for 'stock,' we barely survived with the few animals we had. The flooding started when the rains came in, after a long period of drought. After having no rain for months, we had more than we would ever need. Momma was sure the end was coming near. Poppa helped the town filling sand bags and stacking them six-feet high around the creek. I wanted to help him, but I was too young. Instead, I stayed home with Momma, watching the rain and listening to the wind. I got real good at listening to the wind. I could tell a storm coming from miles away. Right before a dust storm, the sky would go dark, and it would get real cold. Momma would dampen cloths in a bucket of water on the porch and stuff them between the cracks underneath doors and windows. 'First in water, now in Earth,' she'd say. But that dust came right on through anyway, like we was sitting and talking, waiting for its arrival. I'd sit on the rocking chair in the living room and sway, wait for it to settle, to take off its coat and hat and have a seat down on the floor around the furniture. We learned to live with the dust. There was no other way. Momma learned how to knead dough for baking bread in a kitchen drawer, open just enough for her two hands fit in. There was no other way.

This particular storm came in on a beautiful, blue day. Never

would have thought. The sun was out, shining, and the temperature was rising close to eighty degrees. As a matter of fact, it was Palm Sunday, the day our Lord entered triumphantly into Jerusalem. Momma was in the kitchen boiling water for coffee, looking out the window over the laundry she hung earlier that morning.

"Being a holy day, I thought you would walk down and give the Freers a bit of that weed, you've been pulling," Momma said, "It'd be awful nice of you."

"I could, Momma."

"And, afterwards, you could go down to the creek and skip stones, if it's not too dark," she added, one watchful eye on the clothesline.

"It's a beautiful day for walking," she said. She was right. It was as if God was giving us reprieve from the dust on that Sunday, making amends with pleasant weather. I could almost hear a soft apology somewhere over the plains.

As for soap weed, now that was another story. It's a tough, root-like weed that even the dust couldn't stop from growing. It was back breaking to pull out of the ground, too. But, with it we could feed the portion of our stock that was still alive and use the milk to make cream to sell in the neighboring towns for a good price. I understood why Momma wanted to give what little we could to others not as fortunate as ourselves. God has a special bond with the less fortunate. I didn't understand why they couldn't just pull the weeds from the ground themselves. I had to walk almost a whole day to get to the neighbor's farm and back; one-way with an itchy bushel of weed on my back, all because they wouldn't pull the weeds out themselves. Some things nobody can understand. Poppa said they'd wait for Roosevelt himself to pull the weeds if they could. I thought of asking him if I should just walk a ways down the road, so Momma could see me off, then wait until evening and bring the weed back for our own cattle to feed. But, if there was one thing in this world my poppa loved, it was my momma.

Those first few weeks were the hardest on Momma. She used to say the end was coming near and all those saved souls, whatever it was they did or didn't do, would be taken up to heaven, just like it said in the Bible. I didn't know how she was so sure, that it'd be a day of reckoning. She had long, brown hair that was tied back in a bow, and two perfectly soft hands-hands made to come together in prayer. She was smart, too. Poppa said if she hadn't been born a woman, she would have been through school quicker than a leaf down a swollen stream. She'd probably be off in some big city, working with her head instead of her hands. Of course, Poppa did have trouble telling the truth often times. He used to say

that at times like these, telling the truth had trouble putting food on the table. I believed him. He put food on the table, alright. A tall and devilishly handsome man, you couldn't help but believe a man so sure of himself. And as for Momma's day of reckoning, he didn't give that much thought either. Even God himself couldn't scare Poppa. I guess he was too busy thinking about the food on the table. I imagined it quite different than Momma, though. Not anything like the stories in the Bible, or what my momma told me, but real quiet and peaceful. God has no need for showmanship. Those saved souls would be here one minute and gone the next, and then there'd be a real need for worrying.

I put on my boots and went out to Poppa by the barn. It was a large barn, could hold plenty of cows and pigs, made of weathered wood and rusted, metal hinges. All morning Poppa had been digging out sand that piled up from a storm the night before. The barn looked like it had just sunk in the ground right where it stood. We had already lost some of our livestock to the storms. Poppa said they couldn't find their breath in all that dust, but he was determined to save those that still could.

"Looks like you could use a hand or two" I said, walking up to the barn with a wry smile. I could barely hear Poppa over the animals, grunting and breathing heavy.

"You better stop with that talk and get yourself a shovel, boy" he replied, not bothering to pick his head up from the dust. His shirt was soaked through with sweat, under the arms, and in an upside-down triangle on his back.

"You think any of the animals passed last night, Poppa?"

"We'll see, boy. No use in worrying" he said. "I hear the government plans on giving us planting folk some money anyway. So, the banks won't take our homes from us."

"The banks won't take folks' homes from 'em now," I said.

"Already did, boy, and if the government don't make good on this money they promising, well...well, it's about time they made good on something."

"I suppose," I answered.

"Some, Farm Bankruptcy and Act. I heard Mr. Hannigan talking about it in the town hall, yesterday. He heard Roosevelt on the radio saying, 'he's expecting big plans to come to be in the future, ya hear?'" Poppa said.

Roosevelt was always talking about plans coming to be in the future. And, we always believed him. There was nothing else to do, I suppose. I bet my father looked like a dog at feeding time, when he heard plans and the future. I heard him, but I just let him keep digging. Momma said Poppa once had plans to live out on the

west coast, somewhere near the waters, but they never made it out of Kansas. She said they had it real good once, before I was born. They had the world in the palm of their hand, but they couldn't hold on.

"Get me the 'barrow from behind the smokehouse, boy," my father said, this time raising his head making sure I understood. I nodded and turned to go.

"Momma wants me to go to the neighbors with another bushel of weed," I said, "It being Palm Sunday and all." He dropped his shovel and rose up slowly. He put his hands to the base of his back, and arched backwards with a deep breath in. He exhaled and shrugged down again. I thought of asking him if I should just walk down and back without giving the neighbors. Anything, they couldn't get themselves, that is. I knew the animals would need feeding, being trapped in the barn for all the night and half the day. Once I got back, I'd be in the fields pulling more weed for the animals, instead of at the creek, tossing stones in the water like Momma said. Even if I didn't go to the creek, I could help Poppa with the digging. There was plenty to be done. Anything, than doing more pulling.

I could tell he was thinking the same thing. He was tired of the storms and the digging. He needed the help. The dust made his hands and forearms red. But, he shook his head.

"Then, you better get boy," he said, "do like your momma tells you."

CAMDEN John Dougherty

Tomorrow morning I will sit in the yard, smoke a cig, and watch the sunrise. The sky will be orange, a smooth, mellow orange, like the classy sorbet my mom used to buy, and I will see it netted by the honey-comb patterns of the chain link fence. A rectangle of sunrise, captured for my enjoyment.

I will. I will. Tomorrow morning I will be alive.

I slow down at the stop sign, but keep rolling through, looking quickly both ways. You don't stop in the middle of Camden at night, especially not on a street like this, surrounded by brownstones and squat stores, doors and windows covered by aluminum shutters. A group of black kids stands at the corner across the way, talking, laughing, their faces cast in varying shades of darkness by the street lights. Some of them turn as I drive past, but I don't meet their eyes. Dave doesn't seem to notice them, and reaches over to turn up the radio. He's black himself, and spends more time in this city than I'd ever want to. He's why we're here, me, him, and Ernie, sitting in the back, scratching himself and talking about politics. I'm the driver because I'm always the driver. That's fine with me, most of the time; Dave's car smells like rotten eggs, and Ernie can't drive for shit. I remember the night we were driving through Cherry Hill and Ernie missed a turn, so he banked the car to the right, trundled over the concrete divider, and almost side-swiped a bus. By the time we got back in the car to go home, later that night, one of the tires was flat.

But now, now I'm starting to regret this. Camden is a shit city, in all sorts of ways. Camden after dark is no place for a white boy. I'm not a racist or anything, but facts are facts: driving through this city at night is like driving through a 50 Cent video. Driving through in the day isn't much better.

I don't live here, of course. I live in the 'burbs, in Pennsauken, close enough to drive (or even walk, really, if I wanted to), but far enough away that I don't hear the gunshots at night, or catch the rancid scent of the riverfront dump. But I've heard stories.

An older guy, who I see out of the corner of my eye, a dark blur with a chunky face and a doo-rag, yells something at the car. I keep my eyes glued to the road, tap the gas. My legs are sweating.

"That's the whole problem with fucking *capitalism,* anyway,"

Ernie says. "Look at this shit. Just *look.* These people have all been fucking... what is it, *marginalized* on account of a bullshit system that says, 'The only way for this to work is for us to constantly be in competition.' Bullshit. What the system says is 'This is the only way we, a bunch of creaky old white men, can pop a bone: by divvying up the country and the social ladder, giving all the goodies to us fine, moral white folk, and handing out the shit to the blacks.'"

"What is this?" Dave asks, turning the radio's volume down slightly.

"Hoobastank," I say, and my voice comes out flat.

"No. What it is, is crap." He reaches over and flips through the channels, skimming casually across the airwaves.

"Put some classic rock on, man," Ernie says. "Gimme something I can sing to."

There's a traffic light coming up. I accelerate, a dull panic growing between my ribs, but I don't reach the light fast enough, and its amber glow goes crimson. I hit the brakes out of some ingrained sense of obligation that trumps my fear and stop. All four corners seem abandoned, but there's a scarred Camry parked across the street, lights on, exhaust rising lazily from its back. No one's inside it, and the building it is parked in front of has boarded windows. I pray to a Cod I've long rejected that the car's owners won't come out of that building while we're sitting here.

"It's up at the next light," Dave says. I turn to look at him, but he is gazing lazily through the windshield. I imagine that his eyes settle on the parked car, but of course I can't tell. He looks like a politician or a lawyer or something like this, in profile, jaw firm, eyes sharp. He's not going to college in the fall.

"Take a right when you get up there."

The opposing traffic light to my right goes from green, to yellow, to red, and suddenly my own windshield is lit emerald. I drive on, the side of my face briefly lit by the headlights of the parked car before I leave it behind.

This is a mistake. I know that this is a mistake already.

"There's nothing on," Dave says, still channel surfing, not sounding particularly annoyed.

"I told you, put on some classic rock," Ernie says.

"How 'bout something from this decade? I'd rather listen to Hoobastank than... whatever that shit is you listen to."

"The Who. I listen to it when I'm doing your mom."

I muster up an "Oh shit!", but my mind is elsewhere.

"Bitch! That's right!" Ernie says, slapping the back of Dave's headrest. I jump slightly, and resist the urge to tell him to stop screwing around. "I'm your daddy."

"If you were my daddy," Dave says, twisting around in his seat

and grinning, "I'd be a lily white boy with a thumbtack dick."

Ernie scoffs. "You're not black. Shit, you think you're black? You only look like that because your mom shit you out. I was hittin' that back-door doggy style!"

My hands are tight on the steering wheel. Why won't they just shut up? Don't they know what's happening? Don't they know what we're driving into? We could get killed, we could be dead by the end of the night, and then none of us are going to be seeing Dave's mom, or Ernie's mom, or my mom or anyone ever again, so why can't they just shut the hell up?

I flex my fingers, and the joints pop. Tomorrow morning I will watch the sunrise. Tomorrow morning I will be alive.

I turn right at the next light, and we drive on in silence, aside from the radio and the engine, until Dave tells me to slow down.

"Turn in here," he says.

There's something like a wide alleyway between two tenement buildings, lit vaguely orange by the nearest streetlight. He can't be serious.

"Dude...".

"Don't worry," Dave says, "I know this guy. It'll be cool. All right?"

"I don't think... we're gonna get killed..."

"Yeah? Would you be saying that if this was a white neighborhood?"

I roll my eyes. "Screw you. That's not what this is about."

"Man, I don't trust white people," Ernie says.

"That's because you're not white," Dave says. "You're a fucking albino."

"I'm not pale, I just glow."

Dave laughs. "Look, don't worry about it. We've got business with D-Block, so no one's gonna mess with us. It'll be fine. I'll handle this."

My gut is still hard and icy with fear, and I feel like there's a skyscraper sitting on my chest, but when Dave says this I believe him because, well, shit, he's Dave.

Dave is the guy you always want at your back. Nothing fazes him; nothing makes him lose his cool. Ernie, he'll overreact, and run out of words long before he's run out of anger, and me, there are times when I just freeze up, when I can't even think. But not Dave. I remember this one time, we were hanging out in the WaWa parking lot, and I noticed this kind of craggy, shady dude eating a sandwich and watching us from across the lot. After a few minutes he puts his sandwich down on the hood of his car and walks over and starts talking to us.

He tells us his name, which I forgot by the end of the night,

and he says: "Hey, I'm new in the neighborhood, I just moved in on Chestnut Street, and I'm having parties all the time, so if you guys ever want to drop by..." yadda yadda yadda, and then he tells us that he's a film producer. So, just kind of playing along, I ask him what movies he's made. He grins this slippery grin, and leads us over to his car. He pops the trunk, and this thing is full, I mean crammed, with porn DVDs. We just stare down at this, and me and Ernie, we're completely speechless. But Dave just looks down, nods, and says, "I've got a twelve inch penis. Is that gonna be a problem?"

Funniest thing ever. The guy's eyes popped out of his head, and he gave us some DVDs and gave Dave his number. I never saw him again, and we avoided the WaWa for a little.

I turn down the alleyway, and it turns out to be a street. There are people perched on the corners, and milling around the stoop. Gangsters, real, genuine gangsters, and some women who are probably hookers. I know that sounds racist but, seriously, that's what it looks like. I can feel every eye focus in on my car.

"Right here."

I pull up to the curb and stop, engine idling. A teenager passes through the beams of my headlights, giving us a hard stare from beneath a gray hoodie.

"Dave..."

"Don't worry about it," Dave says. He pulls his wallet out, takes out some of the cash, and shoves it into my glove compartment, before putting the wallet back in his pocket. "I'll be back in, like, ten minutes with the weed. Just sit tight till then, all right?"

"What if something happens?" Ernie asks from the back seat. I detect the familiar note of fear in his voice.

"Nothing's gonna happen," Dave says as he gets out of the car, slamming the door. He crosses the street in front of us, and goes up the stoop of the brownstone on the corner. He knocks on the door, it opens, and he disappears inside.

He doesn't come out for another half an hour.

In that time, Ernie and I sit in the car, doors locked, radio low, dead silent. I try to focus on just one thing, a spot on the wall or something, but my gaze is constantly drawn to the gangsters. I can't see any guns, but I know they're there, hidden beneath jackets and sweatshirts, shoved through waistbands, just within reach.

I'm not racist. I swear to Cod. I'm a liberal. I've done Habitat for Humanity in this city. I believe in equality and affirmative action and all of that good stuff. I would never judge anyone just because of their skin color. I'm not an asshole. But this isn't even about race. These people are dangerous—it doesn't matter that they're black. They're just dangerous.

They watch us, eyes challenging. More than once, one of them will cross the plaza, casting a sideways look through the windshield. I never make eye contact. They say that if you don't make eye contact with a dog or a wolf, they won't take it as a challenge and will leave you alone. So that's what I'm doing, I'm avoiding their eyes, because they are animals, all of them, all animals, and they wouldn't think twice about killing both of us: Just two stupid crackers somewhere that they don't belong.

I try to focus on the Ford logo in my steering wheel, cast half in shadows, half in light. Ernie makes a low, nervous noise in the back seat.

When Dave finally does come out, he walks quickly across the street, gets in, and remains silent until we've started moving. No one tries to stop us from leaving, and I drive on, eyes still set dead ahead, itching to look from side to side. It will be a long time before I stop feeling the sights of imaginary pistols on the back of my head.

Once we've passed through the alleyway, Dave says, "He fucked me over."

"What?" Ernie asks.

"He fucked me. He took my money, and went in the back, like he was going to get the weed. He ran off. Motherfucker ran off!"

Dave punches the glove compartment door and it drops open like a jaw. He slams it shut.

"How much money did you give him?" I ask.

"Ten dollars," Dave says. I know he's lying, because Ernie alone can damn near smoke a dime bag in a weekend, but I figure I shouldn't call him out.

"So... what?" Ernie asks.

"Look, I know where this guy lives," Dave says. "I've been over there a few times. Fuzzy took me over."

"Dude..."

"No, no, look, I'm gonna be cool. He lives around here. I'll just—I'll just knock on the door and I'll talk to him. We're... well, we were cool, me and this guy. I'm not going to do anything stupid. When do I do stupid shit? Ever?"

My head is pounding, and I want very badly to cry. And yet, there is some part of me that is more steel than flesh, and it knows that I should not have had to go through all of this shit without at least getting a blunt's worth of weed.

"Okay," I say. "Just tell me where to go."

He tells me, and we start off. At some point, we cross through an empty alley, totally black.

"Stop here for a second," Dave says.

"What? Why?"

"Just do it, okay?"

I stop, and Dave hops out. He's out of the car for about three seconds-, and then gets back in and says, "Go."

I promise myself that, after tonight, for the rest of the summer and definitely after I leave for college, that I am never hanging out with Dave again. He's cocky and getting us involved in this shit just because he got tricked by some low-level dealer. I consider telling him that, most likely, the dealer's just going to shoot him in the head when he opens the door, but I don't.

We reach the house a little after 1 a.m. It is in sort of an okay neighborhood, for Camden, at least. One of those more upscale affordable housing places that they've been building, in the interest of "economic diversity." There are slight, gray lawns running up to the houses, which have two floors. There are even a few dark trees, with leaves like dry spinach, sprouting up behind the houses. But it is still Camden, and I can see the trash littered on the grass. And something else: a few scattered kids' toys, a large rubber ball and a beaten-up Fisher Price tricycle. The thought pops into my head: Kids live here. I don't know why that should be so surprising.

The dealer, D-Block's, house is like the rest on the block, not quite suburbs quality, but not as much of an eyesore as the rest of the city. The windows don't have bars, and neither does the glass door.

"Okay, I'll only be a second," Dave says, and hops out of the car.

"That's what you said last time," Ernie mutters, once Dave has closed the door.

I duck down to watch him through the side window. He walks up the lawn, ignoring the concrete walkway, hands in his pockets. There's a broken hula hoop lying in the grass, robbed of color by the night. The house is dark and silent.

Dave stops in the middle of the lawn, and one hand falls from his pocket. He whips his arm up and back and then forward, a fluid motion that carves itself across my brain. I see the brick tumble in the air for a moment, and then the house's glass door goes white.

There's something like an ice flow onto the porch, and then the lights flash on upstairs. I see a woman silhouetted against the window, peeking through the shades. There's a little kid with her, and she's clutching his shoulders, and for a moment I imagine that I can see the wide, frightened globes of his eyes. And then Dave wrenches open the car door, and yells at me to floor it.

I floor it.

"What the FUCK?"

"I was just... I was just taking care of my business," Dave says. He leans his head back, and exhales deeply.

"Are you insane? You just—you IDIOT!" I can barely see the road, my consciousness blasted by anger and fear and shock. And then the laughter comes, and I can barely hold my head up.

We're all laughing, all roaring, and cursing, and then Dave's cell phone rings. There's a moment of silence, and then he answers it, just as Ernie tells him not to.

In the silence, I can hear the voice of Dave's dealer, D-Block. He doesn't sound happy.

"Fuck you think you're doing?"

"Paying you back," Dave says. "Use the money you took from me and fix your damn door."

"That was a really stupid thing you did there, David. You come to my house, frighten a man's family? That was real stupid. You hear me? You have made a-"

Dave hangs up, and turns his phone off. He drops it into his pocket.

I'm glad Dave had his phone this time. A few times he'd called D-Block on my phone, and if the dealer had my number...

"Do you think they got the plate?" Ernie asks, and my bladder spikes.

"No," Dave says, but, for once, I can tell that he's not sure.

I don't want to think about it, and it doesn't even matter, because right now all I care about is getting the hell out of Dodge. I drive and drive until we're safely in the suburbs again, and by then I have emptied my mind of the night.

In a few hours, it will be dawn, and I'll watch the sunrise in my backyard. That thought keeps my hands steady on the wheel, and my foot controlling the gas. I will watch the sky become red and orange and pink through a chain-link frame. It is tomorrow morning, I'm still here, and I will watch the sunrise.

ON THE ROCKS

Josh Ferri

Beneath one of the many glittering marquees stood a handsome man attempting to keep warm and waiting for his best gal. To avoid the rain, the man maneuvered himself at the edge of the awning- the one place he could keep dry and still search for her. He checked the time on his cell phone again: 8:02 p.m. He shook his head and took out his pack of cigarettes. He brought the cigarette to his lips before deciding there wasn't enough time to truly enjoy it. *Best saved for intermission,* he thought. He placed it back in the breast pocket of his jacket. He stood for a few more moments and watched the cabs, willing one of them to be hers. Finally, a cab pulled up. The door opened, revealing a stunning beauty. She was 5'8 with black hair, blue eyes, and a Colgate smile.

"Mark, I'm sorry I'm running so late. Traffic was just a mess," said Ammara. They kiss each other on the cheek. He hands her a ticket.

"Great seats; I love it. Thank you," she said admiring her ticket.

"We'll have to hurry; we are already late," Mark said, nudging her toward the door.

* * *

Ammara sat at her desk. She loved her job not because of what she did, but because of the confidence it provided. She was an associate at a Public Relations firm in Midtown. Her office was on the eighteenth floor and provided her with a wonderful view of Manhattan. The glass on the other three sides provided coworkers with a wonderful view of her. As she settled into her desk, her phone rang.

She quickly snatched it up to check the caller ID. Ammara hadn't picked up a phone without knowing who was on the other line first since she was a teenager.

The phone continued to ring and MOTHER flashed across the screen. Against her better judgment, she answered.

"Good morning, Mother."

"Hello, sweetie. How are you? I'm not bothering you I hope?"

"No, Mother, never. Always a pleasure," she said as she read

the day's gossip on Dlisted.com

"You're such a nice girl! How's Jason? Things still going well?" Ammara nodded and frantically searched her office for a distraction to get her off the phone.

"Yes, Mother. Things are peachy."

"I wish you two would get married. It's just not right to have a girl living with a man she is not married to."

"Neither one of us is ready to settle down yet. What's the point of being married at this point?"

"Honey, for your protection. What if he walks out on you? What are you entitled to? Also, once you're married, you can begin a family. There is no joy in life greater than being a wife and mother."

"Christ, Mother."

"Ammara, please! That language! I don't like when you speak fresh with me. What did you do last night?"

"Mark and I went to a show. It was decent. Theatre is dying."

"Oh, Mark. He is a nice boy. Is he dating anyone yet? I worry for him. That life can be so lonely."

"Mother, he's gay, not a leper. I don't think Mark has been lonely a night in his life."

"Oh, you are too much this morning. I can't possibly keep talking to you if you are going to be like this. I have a lunch at the club anyway with Mrs. Healey. But before I go, please call your sister today. She and Ted just found out they are expecting another child. Isn't that wonderful?"

"Ah, the reason for this call comes at last. You wanted to tell me about Gwen and her baby to remind me that I do not have a baby nor do I have a husband. Joke's on you, Mother. I want neither. Ciao." Ammara hung up the phone and checked the Tiffany's clock on her desk: 11:45 a.m. She groaned. She rearranged her pens to all face the same way and adjusted the few picture frames on her desk. She sighed, and then she picked up the phone again.

"Mark, what's up? It's Ammara. Care to grab a two martini lunch? Wonderful. Meet you uptown in 40 minutes."

* * *

The waitress was tall and slender with loose brown hair thrown up in a messy bun; she was most likely a struggling model. No doubt she will be on a billboard in Times Square sometime soon. She weightlessly glided over to the table and took the drink order of a tense couple. The couple looked as if they belonged in the small, chic sushi restaurant. Outside, the neighborhood was alive

with flamboyant gay men in tight t-shirts heading to the latest club and Uptown bachelorettes grabbing cocktails. Inside, the restaurant was crowded and loud.

"A bottle of Dom Pérignon, please," said Jason, sporting a well-tailored suit. He was a beautiful man with a structured jaw, Roman nose, wavy black hair and pale green eyes.

"Actually, no. No cliche champagne this evening, thank you. I will take a Ketel One martini, dirty, and he will have a jack and coke, on the rocks. Keep them coming," said Ammara in a slinky red dress.

"Baby, are you sure?"

"Yes," she said, glaring at him.

"I love you."

"Shall we share an order of dragon rolls and two miso soups?" she said, her head buried in the menu.

"Urn, yeah. Sure. Whatever you want."

"How was work?" she asked, flipping her black hair behind her shoulder.

"No one can fake being interested like you, kid," he said with a smile. She chuckled.

"That's what four years at Miss Porter's will do for you."

"You look beautiful. I love you in that dress." He grabbed her hand. "Not as much as I love you out of that dress."

"Drinks!" she said pulling her hand away and moving it quickly around her drink.

"How was your day?" he asked, pushing his drink aside.

"It was fabulous," she said, adjusting a chandelier earring. "I woke up, went to the gym, grabbed a latte with Susan before work, felt guilty about all the calories, went back to the gym, showed up just in time for my 11 o'clock meeting, impressed the pants off of the client, grabbed lunch with a friend, skipped out on the afternoon, went shopping, took a nap, and now I'm with you." As she finished, she shot him a wink.

"Quite the day!"

"Always is." They sat in silence. He stared at her lovingly as her eyes skittered from table to table watching other couples.

"I need to be forthright," she said.

"What's up?"

"It's about Mark."

"How is he? Haven't seen him around much."

"Mark is not who and what you think," she said, her eyes piercing through the Boss tie she detested directly into his chest.

"What do you mean? I'm not following." He never really could keep up.

"Mark isn't gay. He never was," she said.

"Why would he lie about his sexuality? I don't care if he's gay or straight."

"You really are not following. We lied so you would never suspect it."

"It? Oh Jesus," he said his eyes glued to the table.

"Here we go!" said the waitress placing another martini in front of the woman.

"Wait," said the man through repressed tears. He picked up his glass and chugged his drink. "I'll have another as well." The waitress's focus shifted from one party to the other. She felt out of place and suddenly more self conscious than she could remember. Her perfected walk transformed into an awkward shuffle as she backed away from the table.

"I'll move out. It's your apartment, and I'm already packed," she said, sipping her drink.

"You packed? You were planning this all day. That's why you left work early."

She sipped her drink.

"Keep the apartment. You love it, and I can't live in it without you," he said.

"I'm planning on moving."

"Oh. Yeah, I suppose you would move into his place," he resigned. The waitress brought over another jack and coke.

"Should I cancel the food?" she asked empathetically.

"Yes. My stomach is sick, I can't eat."

"Waitress, we will be canceling our order, but I'll take the roll to go. Thank you."

"You could care less. You really could. You are remarkable."

"I feel badly. I do," she said, reaching for his hand.

"Why did you bring me here?" he said.

"I don't know. I didn't want to tell you in the house. I figured..."

"You brought me here so I wouldn't make a scene!" he said, his face getting red.

"It crossed my mind that it might be best in public, but no, not for that reason alone."

"That's why you wore the dress."

"I believe a final impression is just as important as a first."

"How long has this been going on?"

"Who remembers these things?"

"You do," he said impatiently.

"Last spring. I met Mark at a company dinner. I sent you home in a cab. I told you I was going out with the girls. I went to his place. We had a few glasses of Pinot Noir and he told me about

his time in Africa. We fucked three times and then I showered and came home to you. You had no idea."

"Why bring him around? Why introduce him? To flaunt your manipulation? Your mastery of people?"

"Mark got sloppy. He fell for me. He called the house; he took me to very public lunches; he became careless. I decided that Mark would be introduced as a gay friend. That way, no one suspects, you don't become threatened, and no other woman moves in on him."

"You are proud of yourself. You are. Any other woman I know would feel ashamed, answer in one or two words, but you don't care. You tell every detail. You are so fucking proud."

"Jason, calm down. You're becoming crazed."

He buried his head in his hands. He rubbed his eyes with his fists and ran his fingers through his hair.

"Shall we go home and have one last fuck? You know, for old time's sake," she said playfully, her foot running up his leg.

"You're sick," he said, throwing the napkin down and pushing himself away from the table. The table shook and her martini glass fell. It plummeted slowly down and hit the floor with a crash. The glass broke into a thousand little pieces. He sighed heavily; she turned to look for a bus boy. She gestured for the small, Latino man standing against the wall. When she turned back, Jason was already crossing the busy restaurant. She followed him with her eyes until he left. As the door closed, she reached into her clutch and pulled out her cell phone.

"Mark, it's Ammara. I'm downtown. Care to meet me for dinner?"

HOUSE ON THE LAKE

Matt Lindeboom

From our canoe, I could see my sister waving her hands in high frantic arcs. It seemed like she was calling out to us, but her voice ran along the water and sank before it reached the boat. The late morning sun was high enough that it was slowly burning the mist off the top of the water, but my eyes could only catch Jenna's movements between the thin white sheets as they separated and collided with each other. At first she was waving to us, and then she was gone, leaving the beach empty—foreboding.

Dad had noticed her movements too, and he strained to see past the fog as he tried to stand in the front of the canoe, causing it to tip to the right. I grabbed the left side and forced us back, but Dad sat back down again.

"That's the second time she's come back. She's definitely not calling us in for lunch," he said, putting his hand through his white hair. He glanced back at me. "Is she still out there?"

"No, but I think we should go back in."

Dad nodded. He took in his fishing line, placing the rod neatly in the bottom of the canoe. It annoyed me that he seemed to show no signs of worry, not even a mark of concern after seeing the way Jenna was acting. On the inside, my gut was rolling, but I couldn't show that in front of him.

"Okay, let's go then."

I turned us around and aimed our bow for the very top of the old oak tree that grew in our back yard, its high branches were the only things that could be seen for sure over the mist. I was in the back of the canoe - the captain's chair - a position hard earned through years of paddling in the front, demonstrating endurance as the canoe's power house, showing my dad I understood how to turn the boat adeptly and slow it without adding the slightest additional ripple to the canoe's already quiet wake. When I turned seventeen, my hands then calloused and firm, finally, though not without reluctance, Dad relinquished the seat to me. He placed his paddle in the water and pulled forward hard, and we began to cut through the whiteness that floated on the warm summer water. I kept my eyes firmly on the treetops, and my paddle acted as our rudder keeping us straight toward the shore.

For seven years, since I was ten and Jenna twelve, our fam-

ily came up to the lake house almost every weekend. Before that, my grandpa built the house with Dad after my grandma passed away, and he lived in it alone, though my parents came to visit from time to time. While living there, he built a dock and planted a rose garden where my parents had their wedding reception. Dad came up and fished with him when he wasn't overseeing the construction business that Grandpa retired from. When I asked my parents to tell me about my grandparents, I could tell they cherished that time at the house with him. They were young, and it was good to have someplace to go that wasn't near Dad's work or Mom's grad school classes.

But then, the year that Jenna was born, Grandpa died suddenly and all that stopped. After they buried him, and cleared out his clothes and other belongings from the house, Dad refused to go up anymore; yet, he couldn't bring himself to sell it. So, for nearly a decade Dad rented out the house to various families. Mostly for the summers, and only once to a man and his girlfriend for eighteen months, who Dad had to eventually chase out by threatening them with the sheriff when they refused to pay the money they owed. After that episode, Mom gave him a choice.

"Either you sell that damn house," she said. "Or start taking us up again, either way you being afraid of it ain't going help."

When Mom gets firm with anybody, her Texas drawl digs its way back up from where she buried it in college. Her "damn's" become "dayum's", and her "again's" become "agin's". Whether there was only one viable option for my dad, or because all of his resolve melted into a puddle when her accent came out, Dad relented and we began to visit the house again. But seven years later I've begun to see that Dad still kept his distance from Grandpa's memory. Dad's distance was always there, and it often confused me as a child. Only now was I beginning to understand it; we all have ways of protecting ourselves.

* * *

As we neared the shore the fog peeled away and I could see the oak trees broad trunk and our beach in front of it. On either side of the shore, maple trees and sweet green pines stood starkly on the edges of the lake, throwing their shimmering reflections across the water. Dad and I thrust forward at the same time, and the canoe scraped up on the beach, pebbles and sand rolling under its bottom. Dad pulled the canoe out of the water and I leapt out. The yard was still empty except for the barbeque, which was lit. It sent a thin ribbon of grey smoke dancing into the trees above it, filling the yard with the aroma of garlic and potatoes. Beyond the smoke,

the house and the trees stood completely still like the backdrop of a painting, which seemed ready to collapse if I made a sound. Suddenly from inside, Jenna yelled.
"We're in here!"

Dad, who kept his paddle with him when we left the boat, dropped it and started for the back door. We came into the kitchen, and Jenna was holding a towel to mom's head as she was bent over the sink. It looked like they were washing her hair. But something was off. There was red on the floor beside the refrigerator that I knew then was blood. It trailed drops and small puddles. Immediately it was on Mom's white blouse staining her entire right shoulder deep red, and then it was on Jenna's hands, watery and pink from holding Mom's head in the sink. Jenna turned to me, her eyes blue and forceful: "The damn dog bit Mom. We called an ambulance already."

Mom called from the sink, "It wasn't her fault. I'm okay. I dropped something on her and she got scared. I'm fine though.

"You're not fine, Mom. Bosco took a chunk out of your face," Jenna said deadpan. She turned back to me, "Milo, please hand me those gauze pads. They're next to the microwave."

This would be Jenna's second year as pre-med at Johns Hopkins University, and she had been handling this sort of thing - injuries and bleeding - since I was on rollerblades. She was well used to commanding befuddled men and boys who froze stupidly at the sight of blood. Don't be useless. Keep moving. Don't be in the way.

As I turned to find the gauze pads my eyes surveyed the kitchen, searching the corners and under the breakfast table where Bosco's dog bed was. I didn't see her, and I assumed she was hiding. But Dad asked my question before I could, "Where is she?"

Jenna stared at Dad, and he stared back at her, his expression tight and his cheeks flushed. "The dog's not here. Aren't you even curious to see how bad it is first?" Jenna asked. Her question was as pointed as her tone. Their relationship was tenuous, full of love and stubborness for which Jenna and Dad were both renowned. But now there was something dangerous in my dad's posture, and Jenna sensed it. Mom did too.

"Stop it now, I'm fine. What happened was not Bosco's fault," Mom said again.

Outside, the sound of ambulence sirens was faint, but getting closer. I grabbed the gauze pads and handed them to Jenna.

"I'm going outside to meet the paramedics. Is there anything I need to tell them, Jenna? Something I can actually repeat?" I asked.

"Tell them the bite is deep-outside of the left eye- but only two puncture wounds. Also I've stopped the bleeding."

I glanced at my dad as I walked out but he didn't return my gaze. His eyes were fixed squarely on the door to the living room. The dog must have stuck its head in the door, as I left the room because I heard my dad.

"There you are." Again my mom defended Bosco. She said that she accidentally dropped a pan on Bosco and when she bent down to see if she was hurt, the dog bit her. She just got scared - it wasn't the dog's fault, it was hers! Then she yelled: "Don't you dare touch that dog!"

She must have tried to face my dad and put herself between him and the dog because Jenna cried out, "Jesus, Mom! Stay still, do you want to the bleeding to start again? Dad, get out!"

* * *

Bosco was Mom's dog; she was an independent Akita with white fur and a black face. When I turned twelve, we bought her from a breeder outside of Philadelphia, about fifteen miles away from our town, supposedly as a birthday gift. But we quickly found out that I didn't have the soft spot required to tolerate the puppy's constant need for attention. And so, since the dog wasn't my dad's idea and Jenna was fourteen and thus indifferent to most everything except her friends, Bosco became Mom's. She was quiet, and she went where Mom went—her bedside, the kitchen, and even the attic when Mom brought down Christmas decorations, though with some reluctance at climbing up and down the staircase as she got older. Her favorite thing to do it seemed, was to lie in the driveway and watch Mom intently as she planted tomatoes and parsley plants in the spring.

Mom was the one who walked Bosco, bathed her, brushed her, and took her to the vet for a rabies shot when she was bit by a racoon. Dad, on the other hand, seemed to want nothing to do with the dog, a theme he seemed to repeat in so many other aspects of our lives. School plays, graduations, concerts, and even baseball games—Dad did everything at a distance. He tried to connect with us and succeeded sometimes. When I was fourteen, Dad began to teach me how to shoot. He owns a gun: a nine-millimeter pistol he keeps in a black lock box under the sink of our upstairs bathroom at the lake house, along with two boxes of ammunition.

On Saturday mornings, Dad would wake me early and get the gun, place it and the ammunition in a paper bag, and drive us to a shooting range 10 miles east of the lake. We donned ear and eye protection and shot off a clip each at a time. At first my shots were wild and blind, and the buck of the pistol -though smaller than other pistols - made my wrists numb after four or five shots. I

was always surprised by the cold weight of the gun. My dad on the other hand, shot methodically in two round bursts, and his clusters were tightly shaped like clovers. We would often stay there all morning, coming back with the paper bag a bit lighter and placing it back in the lock box before lunch.

But my interest in shooting waned when I entered high school. Instead I took up crew, and began to row. Seeing another opportunity to connect, my dad bought a canoe and on Saturday mornings we went out onto the misty lake. This worked well, and soon we were out paddling and fishing whenever we could. On occasion Dad would leave work early and pick me up from school. We would drive the two hours to the house and fish until it got dark. It was on one of these outings that my Dad opened himself a crack. He had just helped me reel in a fish—one we both thought was going to be huge given the fight it was putting up. On the contrary, as we got it in the boat it was apparent that the fish was no bigger than my fist. We both laughed until we couldn't breathe. My dad's voice rising no higher than the insects that danced just above the water.

"Me and your grandfather used to come out here every Sunday...for hours," he said. "Those were good times—I'm glad I can do it again with you." I agreed, but said nothing.

Eventually, Dad kept everyone at a distance; even my Mom and it near drove her to the edge. I never had a doubt that he loved her; Dad's hands never wandered far from the small of Mom's back or her legs when they sat together on the porch in the evening. The calls of water birds and the fresh smell of the lake were euphoric. And since the walls of the lake house were paper thin, we could almost hear them at night—the swelling chorus of frogs and crickets. From the next room I could hear Jenna hiss, "Oh my god." I just tried my best to ignore it all.

But love wasn't something Dad showed very easily. He built houses, payed bills, cleaned, and he did what we needed him to do - for the most part. For encouragement Jenna and I depended on Mom, and for connection, Mom depended on Bosco. Last year, after a stumbling raccoon bit Bosco in broad daylight, Mom screamed when Dad shot the raccoon from less than four feet away with his pistol—as if he were going to do the same to Bosco.

"What in God's name do ya think you're doin'," she yelled from the porch, her accent jumping out. Dad pointed to Bosco, who was hiding behind the woodpile beside the house, frightened and licking her bite.

"That dog was just bit by a rabid animal, and I'm not going to let it bite our children," he said, his voice shaking slightly. "What else would you have me do, Joanne?" Mom came off the porch and stood defiantly in front of my dad.

"First you're going to put that gun away, and then you're going to let me take her to the vet." She walked away from him and inspected the dog's bite, which Bosco let her do. "Did you consider your actions for one minute? Did you think about my feelings at all?" Dad didn't respond. He stood, the protective distance between him and my mother forming like a chasm. "Do you care Henry?" she asked again. "Do you care at all?" Tears crept into her eyes and she wiped them away. She left Bosco and stood in front of him again, her eyes daring him to remain silent.

"Joanne—its just a dog. You're being ridiculous -- it's dangerous now." At that Mom hit him on the chest.

"It's not the dog!"

* * *

The ambulance arrived with flashing—behind it was a trooper. I rushed down to them as the paramedics climbed out of the back. A lithe, black woman and a boxy man with blonde hair.

"Is this where the bite victim is?" The woman asked, in a high, business-like voice. I said yes and motioned for them to follow me. As we climbed the porch stairs, my dad appeared in the doorway yanking the dog by her collar. There was no discernable expression on his face, and he asked to be excused as he pushed by us, the dog following obediently. "Don't do anything stupid, Dad!" Jenna yelled from the kitchen.

The paramedics ignored him and the dog, and rushed into the kitchen, where I could hear Jenna begin describing my mom's wounds in phrases I couldn't catch. I stayed on the porch and watched my dad tie the dog to the oak tree near the water - the rope suffocatingly close to the bark so she couldn't move more than a foot in any direction. I felt sorry for her. The plants on the porch hadn't been watered, and they drooped in the summer heat. Christmas lights were strung along corners of the porch from Jenna's birthday party three months before, dusty and unlit. I sat in a chair furthest from the door and watched Dad come trudging back up to the house. Behind him, a state trooper walked slowly and stopped when my dad turned around.

"Can you explain to me what happened here?" The trooper asked.

"My wife was bit by our dog," Dad answered wearily. He motioned to his eye. "On the face."

The trooper took notes on a pad, and he looked to where Bosco was tied up. "Is the dog rabid?"

"No sir. I don't believe so."

"Ever been bitten by another animal?"

"Once last year, but we got her shots."

The trooper looked up, "And you're sure she's not?

"My wife insists that she isn't."

"You know why the dog bit her then?"

I answered from the porch, "She said she dropped a pan on her, and Bosco got scared and bit her."

"I see," the trooper said, and wrote something on his pad.

There was a pause, and he looked at both of us, but we said nothing. Something about the trooper bothered me; I wanted him to leave.

"Well, its up to you of course," he said. "But it seems to me like the dog might be mad. If I were you I'd have her put down."

"Thanks for your advice sir, but it's my wife's dog," Dad replied.

The trooper considered my dad, and then replaced his notepad in his breast pocket. "Fair enough. Can I drive any of you to the hospital with the ambulance?"

Before Dad could answer, the paramedics came out of the house with Jenna and my Mom. Mom had gauze and bandages wrapped around her head, covering her left eye completely. Jenna was flush, and her hair was pulled back into a ponytail. She carried a bag in her arms. As they came out, Mom immediately looked for Bosco.

"Where's the dog?" she asked.

"She's leashed to the tree in the back. Let's get you to the ambulance."

It was about one in the afternoon now, and the lake threw sparkles of sunlight at us as we walked. The paramedics had Mom sit upright on a stretcher as they wheeled her, and Dad walked along side holding her hand. Jenna asked the trooper if he was willing to give her a ride to the hospital. He said he would, and before they put Mom in the back of the truck, the trooper addressed her about Bosco.

"Ma'am, as I was telling your husband, the fact that your animal has a history of being bitten, it's a good chance she's rabid," he paused, waiting for a reaction from my mom that didn't come. He cleared his throat and continued, "That is to say, I think your best option might be to put the animal down." Mom looked to my Dad and back at the trooper, her expression was one of suddeness.

"I see. I..." she stammered. "I mean, she's had her shots." She glanced back at my dad, looking for help. He spoke up.

"Thanks again for your advice, officer. I'll be keeping an eye on the dog, but we won't be deciding anything until things are a bit clearer." The trooper nodded and tipped his hat. Jenna climbed into the trooper's car as he started it, and before the car pulled away to follow the ambulance the trooper called to my dad.

"Hey, listen. A good pet is a wonderful thing, but don't let you're love for the animal jeopardize your family. Put your family first."

Dad waved to the trooper and the car pulled away towards the road. He sighed heavily and motioned towards the minivan. "We better follow them," he said. Neither of us glanced back at the dog as we pulled out of the driveway. But I observed Dad's expression as he drove. It was one of exhaustion.

I had only seen this in my dad once or twice before—when Jenna brought boys to the lake house. These were summer boyfriends, blond and brown haired with more muscle than not. And they tanned. They said they surfed and snowboarded; they laughed loudly and carried Jenna over their shoulders when they play fought in the water. Bosco would jump wildly in the water in great splashes of water and saliva. Hooded sweatshirts and jeans were their uniform. Only one of them wore sweaters, and he didn't last more than three weeks with Jenna. I couldn't remember ever seeing a group of people Dad disliked more.

"She's a beautiful and smart girl! How come she has to bring home these, idiots?

"They act as if they smell sex whenever she speaks to them," Dad would complain to my mom

"That's just the type she likes right now," Mom said. "She's young; give her some time to make mistakes."

"I'm just hoping one of those mistakes doesn't knock her up."

If Dad feared anything, it was the sex these boys brought into his house. I hadn't seen much to fear—they and Jenna slept in different rooms; although, there had always been much that I missed. They all treated me kindly—despite our age difference. Often these were the juniors and seniors that never so much as looked at me in the hallways of our high school. But when they were at the lake house with Jenna on their arm, they treated me as an equal. I was their ticket into Jenna's good graces.

One of them let me drive his Mustang up and down the back roads near the house, egging me on from the passenger seat to push sixty, then seventy, and then eighty—on the twisting asphalt bordered by nothing but dark green trees. Another introduced me to pot, and we smoked and laughed stupidly out on the dock while Jenna was asleep.

Once, Dad found the boyfriend with the Mustang out of his room and sneaking through the living room towards the stairs. Dad grabbed the teenager by the back of his neck, as if to throw him against the wall, but let go at the last moment. He took him by the shoulder and pressed his thin body against the door with one large hand. He told him to sneak back to his room, and if he heard so much as a creak from the living room or the stairs, he would get his

gun. Jenna had barely woken up the next morning when the boyfriend gave her a light and awkward hug, as she sat in her bed saying goodbye. Five minutes later the engine of his mustang roared and screamed away. Jenna never mentioned it to Dad; in fact, she didn't seem upset at all when any of these boys would leave. Finally one day I asked if she ever had been with any of them, to assure myself, or perhaps to validate Dad's struggle, that she hadn't. I was stunned.

"Of course," she said.

"Where?" I asked. She turned her head to the side and smirked at me as if I were a six-year-old asking why ice was cold. She pointed out to the water.

"On the dock. But only once."

"Which one?" I asked.

"That's for me to know." I never told Dad what Jenna admitted to me, and she in turn, never told him about the pot that she knew I had smoked.

* * *

As the road unfolded before us, and I saw his reddened eyes, broken out skin, and chapped lips—-I wanted to tell him everything. The sun was high and the road turned north away from the lake. A patchwork of shadows and light dappled the road as we tore along, and I put my visor down to block the sunlight. I saw him, his back rigid against the seat, and his hands white from gripping the steering wheel so hard, as something I had somehow failed to see before. My dad was vulnerable, and he was struggling. Right there I wanted to tell him it would be okay, and that I loved him as much as he loved me, and that I was proud of him. I wanted to tell him where to find the oak tree above the mist. Everything I had to say boiled up and hardened like a cannon ball in my chest. I could only exhale.

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