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“…it is precisely because I forget that I read.”

I am in the center on a mirror of rock and water.  
To the north—an evergreen is ravaged  
In elliptical winds, needles glass, the green shimmer  
A mirage of spring, a slight lichen quasar—

Birds of light and shadow hang by strings.  
Their bones chime the static between them—  
The evergreen at the edge in torrents,  
Smoke-stack-steam shrouds the vignette.

The wind scrolls calligraphy and bellows tones—  
The air deep below soul’s freezing point,  
Snow has been snow for civilizations.  
Dis-ease prevents me from freezing, too.

To the east—my beloved, waiting there  
In a reasoned flame, velvet red and liquid—  
A space contemplating song depths of ash.  
The flame forms a cradle, the shape

Of arms inclined to swaddle and I am engulfed.  
I rest—a bundle of soft flesh amidst burning—  
Raw petal edge and xylem vein untouched,  
Star-dew sparkle white in the quiet crackle.
To the west—the jungle. Blithe spiders
Spin bone scaffolds, bamboo flutes the hollow.
Wild rooks inhabit branch nooks—the angles
Upset their looks. Meanings change with seasons.

To the south—a smooth gray root spreads
In myriad crooks. Music moves through fascia—
Regret is lost in melody—a way home,
The percussion descending its gentle storm.
I Can Make Myself Disappear
Rob MacInnis
To see the darkened leaves of a tree
is easy, I think—and, mirrored there below,
large transparent mazings of another leaf
feeding the world we know: umbilical sleep,
unconscious mother night, blind taproot
tugging at the dreaming deep.

Break maiden fruit and find—
not blossom end but stem—a little sun,
a sun’s dwarfed twin inside: parthenocarpic
light’s sweet doubled grace. The light,
the light again.
Now and then what’s been comes back. Another congregation starts another clear though far-off hymn. Echo finds echo in my soul.

Myself the song-of-everything I sing, how can I keep from singing?

The photograph, which began my meditation on universal correspondences, was published in Uelsmann’s *Photo Synthesis* (University Press of Florida, 1992).

“Post-visualization” is the term Uelsmann uses for the meticulous darkroom process by which he combines separate images into the surreal photographs for which he has long been celebrated.

The horticultural term “parthenocarp” literally means “virgin fruit.” Embedded entirely within a navel orange lies a miniature second orange, the bulge of which produces the “navel” at the stem end. This “conjoined twin” is the result of the tree’s asexual reproduction, for all navel oranges (as I understand it) are the grafted, genetically identical descendants of a seedless mutation discovered in the nineteenth century in a Brazilian monastery garden.
Mumbai (roughly “Mother Goddess Mother” in Marathi; previously Bombay, “Good Little Bay,” in Portuguese) is a big, beat-to-shit beach city: Ridley Scott’s Los Angeles mixed with Charles Dickens’ London. I didn’t know it was possible for a place to get this beat-to-shit and still exist. New York, which always looks worn and decrepit next to cities like Seattle or San Francisco, is like a piece of high design, a flawlessly-functional Apple Power Book beside the fell-off-a-truck Dell of Mumbai. My wife Daphne, our two-year-old Owen, and I, in town for a wedding, were staying in Juhu Beach, a hotel overlooking the Arabian Sea. Neighboring hotels had views like ours, but their windows were blown out and their gates chained. Buildings that looked condemned were full of office workers. Nobody swam, but everybody waded, fully dressed, sari ends dangling in the water. Rubble filled the streets and dust filled the air. This was February, the dry season, which meant it was also the construction season, and this dust was in a state of perpetual manufacture, with no place to go but around chowks (roundabouts) and down throats and through the spaces where jambs and doors never quite met, into clothes and hair and eyes. Reading Dostoevsky or Dickens’ descriptions of St. Petersburg and London, with their constant references to the dust of the street, I’d always been left without a clear picture—till now. Their chaotic, under-construction, classbound, nineteenth-century world still existed in India (though the Internet service was flawless). At the end of the day I blew my nose
and it was gray. I blew harder and it was black. I had a cough and a sexy voice.

Sun-n-Sand calls itself a “five star” hotel—but the criteria used to make this evaluation are mysterious. The water in the hotel was “filtered,” but it may simply have been run through a screen door. I wondered if the Indian hotel industry operated a version of the New York Times’ restaurant evaluation system—whereby “ratings range from zero to four stars and reflect the reviewer’s reaction primarily to food, with ambience, service and price taken into consideration”—but with a fifth star? My guess (based on the Sun-n-Sand’s amenities): if you have private bathrooms you get one star; a restaurant you get two stars, a pool you get three stars, Internet access four stars, and a twenty-four hour restaurant serving multi-ethnic cuisine five stars. But the entity conferring these stars was unnamed.

The room we’d booked was unavailable. So they gave us the Rajasthani-themed Jaisalmer suite for the same price. It had a king-size bed, panoramic ocean views, filigreed screens that divided a foyer from a living room, a dining nook, chandeliers, a drain in the bathroom floor full of mothball-smelling urinal pucks, numerous oil paintings of Rajasthan. We put Owen in the bedroom, shut the door, ordered dinner from the twenty-four hour restaurant. Daphne’s questions about the contents of a curry dish called “butter chicken” were met with the answer, “It is a chicken preparation, Madam.” We ordered it, along with some dal—the best I’d ever had—and hit the sack.

Indians say “shift” instead of “move.” We were supposed to shift rooms that morning. Instead, India being a country that loves florid negotiations, I decided to see if I could bargain them down and keep the suite for the week. I went down to the front desk and told a woman in a gold-
threaded sari, who appeared to be in charge, “I’ve come to tell you how beautiful the room is.” Pause. Exchange of large smiles. “And how much it would mean to us if we could keep it.” She dipped her chin ever so slightly. I went on. “It would mean a great deal. To live in the presence of beauty is an elevating experience. But, as an American, there are psychological barriers to paying the price you are asking, barriers that will take away the pleasure of staying in the room. It is a cultural fact. So I wanted to ask if, depending on your occupancy, there is any way that you would be willing to allow us to stay in the room at a discounted rate. It is among the most beautiful rooms we have ever slept in.” The price dropped. Maybe the main differentiating factor between a Western five star and an Indian five star is that you can bargain with an Indian five star about your room rate. After the bargaining we went shopping for Indian clothes.

Traffic, always jammed, was uniform, composed of black-and-white, twilight of the British Empire-style bicycles, yellow-and-black Ambassador taxis (these looked like 1940s Studebakers), yellow-and-black auto rickshaws (ripoffs of Italian three-wheelers) called tuk-tuks after the sound of their two-stroke engines, driven by hunched, oil-smeared men who quoted Westerners at least quintuple the correct price.

Daphne, seven and a half months pregnant, writing about human rights issues, had a meeting with a woman often called “the female Gandhi,” a political activist who represented tribal people made homeless by the government’s aggressive dam building. We hired a driver to take us from Juhu to Dadar, in the middle of town. Santosh, our driver, was a thin Hindu with a close-cropped moustache and a Buddhist demeanor. Much as Jesus was a
Jew before founding Christianity. Siddhartha was a Hindu before founding Buddhism. And Santosh—whose name meant “happiness” in Sanskrit—with his thinness and equanimity, was a man in the meditative mold. I called him “Santosh-jhi,” Estimable Happiness, which he seemed to both enjoy and find quietly ridiculous. The trip—roughly Harlem to Midtown—took an hour, and was an opportunity for Santosh’s spiritual advancement. As we drove, beggars and hawkers routinely came up to the car, and both were able to keep up with us for as long as they wanted. Later, in Delhi, these hawkers sold books, usually Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*, but in Mumbai they sold plastic—toy cookware, Indian flags, and knockoff Bob the Builder toys.

Even things that looked like they couldn’t possibly be plastic—as in a desktop presentation stand for the Indian and American flags—actually were! India was a country in the first throes of its discovery/romance with plastic. A decade before everything was glass, metal, wood, recyclable. Daphne remembered taking the train from Nepal to Mumbai, and how tea sellers at the stations would hand clay cups to the passengers as the locomotive pulled away. When you finished drinking you threw your cup out the window and watched it shatter on the tracks. Now: all plastic. We didn’t make Owen use a car seat because it was unimaginable that we might go fast enough to have an accident. I never wore a seatbelt, and the experience of not being strapped in took me back to the whole life-is-easy feel of driving in the ’70s. The whole time we were there this never really seemed ill advised, not even during sudden, unexpected, and very brief bursts of speed. I would never want to drive here, though I wouldn’t want to be a pedestrian, either. We came close to killing several of these, and a couple bicyclists as well. Those brief bursts of speed
often seemed inspired by the pedestrians who dared step into the street. We came literally—not speaking in clichés here—inches from running them down. Santosh, however, did not seem homicidal, and did not seem to find any of it at all stressful, let alone unusual. He remained placid throughout. As he drove I watched adults and children bathe in the gutters, legless men pedaling hand-crank bicycles. I photographed old tires hanging in a beautiful, ropy-branched, cement-spattered, soot-dusted tree. A store called Last Stop Shop sold coffins.

In Dadar Santosh parked under an overpass that he called a “flyover” and Daphne disappeared into a crowd for her meeting.

I looked at Santosh. He was inscrutable, patient, kind-seeming without doing anything more kindly than being calm. In a city like Mumbai calmness is a form of kindness. His demeanor was the opposite of what I saw in nearly every Indian taxi or auto-rickshaw driver. And it was amazing what he had to deal with. Not only murderous traffic, but a Hindu nationalist government that had renamed every street in the city, so the only way to navigate was by landmarks. That morning we’d been looking for “the washing-machine store near the post office in Dadar.”

I turned to Santosh and asked, “Is there a playground near here?”

Head shake.
“Shopping mall?”
“Half an hour away. If we go we have to come back immediately.” He shook his head to say Bad Idea.
“A park?”
“No.”
“A museum?”
Slight bemusement at the idea of a museum.
“No, no.”
“A temple?”
“No.”
“Church…”
Head shake.

Daphne’s meeting was supposed to last an hour. We couldn’t just sit in the car. Owen needed to do something; otherwise, like many two-year-old boys, he’d become a danger to himself and others.

I didn’t want him playing under a flyover. And I was not going to let him walk anywhere. There were no sidewalks, people rushed—always keeping to the left, in what I guessed were residual British patterns, completely counterintuitive to me. I was afraid of pretty much everything: the streams of water flowing through the mud and dust that dominated over stone and cement; the fruit in the stores; the ubiquitous stray dogs, plentiful as pigeons in New York; the traffic (also keeping unexpectedly to the left); the possibility of avian influenza, a.k.a. bird flu, at that moment a pandemic in Asia. I put Owen on my shoulders and started down a wide street that ended in a massive, fifty-foot-wide staircase. People stared, pointed, laughed, took pictures of us with their cell phones. We were that much of a novelty. A truck full of chickens jounced past, feathers in its wake. Owen was silent.

I said, “Owie, are you okay?”
A quiet voice from above said, “No. Not okay.”
People pushed past us.
I felt very guilty for bringing him here.
Then Owen asked, “Daddy, are you okay?”
I said, “Yes, thanks, I’m okay.”

It was around 90 degrees and aside from thirty-three pound Owen I was also carrying twenty pounds (per the scale in the Jaisalmer suite’s marble bathroom) of water, diapers,
diaper wipes, Frommer’s 608-page India guide, snacks, cell phone, die-cast toy cars. Because my luggage had been lost, and the airline had given me a clothing allowance, I was dressed in a white Indian kurta shirt, weird new Indian pants, an Indian hat, Indian sandals that claimed, falsely, to be Italian, and Indian boxer shorts labeled “NOW.” I did most of the shopping at a place called Shoppers’ Stop in a mall that was seamlessly western, after you got past the fact that men with guns stood at the gate, and it was cooled entirely by three dozen LG wall-mounted air conditioners. The shop’s Indian section was called the “ethnic” section. The salesman who helped me find my clothes had been to the temple that morning, and there was a vermillion thumbprint between his eyes. And now I was completely Indian, with no way of reaching Daphne on her disposable Indian cell phone (I’d forgotten to take the number), my only landmark a flyover. I felt like I could easily have been swallowed up by this country. A strong wave of disorientation hit me.

I kept walking. The massive staircase at the end of the street led up to an overpass that spanned a dozen sets of track, as if all the lines of the Times Square subway station had been excavated and reconstructed in the air. I felt like we’d come aboard one of those alien spacecraft that hover above large American cities—which would have been more familiar. This was the Dadar station. I climbed up the cement and silver-steel-edged stairs. I didn’t notice the bright silver edging till I was on the stairs, because the crowds going up and down were so thick it was impossible to see the structure beneath—the impression was of a vertical wall of people a block wide and fifty feet tall. The silver shone from constant wear. At the top was a small platform, a turn, more stairs, another turn, and we stepped onto a massive, track-spanning platform—like a city block
hovering in the air—covered in dogs, loiterers, commuters, beggars, vendors of fresh herbs, stray children, and below it all the flash and tangle of constantly passing red-and-brown commuter trains, one, two, three blowing through together at once, with no doors, passengers leaning out the sides.

Owen said, “Choo-choos!”

“Yeah,” I said.

We stopped and watched for a minute, but I thought we were attracting too much attention staying in one place, taller than everyone else, so I walked across the tracks, down the other side, and to the end of a boulevard where tightly packed traffic was swirling around a chowk. Most pedestrians were headed left or right at the point where street met chowk. But maybe one out of every hundred people stepped straight out into the traffic and dashed to reach a small round building on an island out there. Architecturally, this building looked like what is known in India as a “public convenience.”

Through a large rectangular opening on one side I could see a long, stainless-steel trough. A urinal? Doubtful. It was in plain sight of the street. Public modesty is paramount in India (though Daphne once stayed in a small hotel where, in the evening, the male receptionist lay splayed and pantsless on a couch by the door in order to “air out” his genitals). Directly above the trough was a row of bells. Behind these was an altar and a brass monkey. We dashed across through a break in the traffic. People were removing their shoes at the threshold, bowing, with hands folded in prayer, as a bare-chested monk poured what looked like blood over the feet of the flower-garlanded golden monkey. The long, beveled, stainless-steel trough, which at first had seemed like a urinal, its inner slopes angling to a central slot, divided worshippers from monk
and monkey. After removing shoes and clasping hands in prayer, they threw money into the trough and rang one or all of the bells, then either departed or walked around and behind the altar to the temple’s second chamber. We took our shoes off, tossed some money into the trough, rang the bells, and walked around to the back, where cripples and supplicants conferred with more bare-chested monks. We did this several times, till a man in an Oxford shirt came and told us, “I am the president of this temple. It is for Ram.”

I looked at the monkey, the bells, the blood. Was Ram a monkey? I wasn’t sure.

“It is a beautiful and hospitable temple,” I said.

We all said “Namaste” to each other. A young monk, with very clear eyes, offered us a blessing. We said we would love to be blessed. He disappeared into the back and then returned to place a bright orange fingertip between each of our eyes. We chatted for a minute, and then the president said, “It is time for you to go.”
Le nostre vite per il suo oceano striato d’azzurro
di vene incandescenti
da effimeri e vivi
a fossili, sculture iridate,
con inamovibili aure di cenere
in fiamme a coronarci
la testa

Iniziammo, dopo secoli,
ad adorare il vulcano,
come si ringrazia un dio giovane e generoso

Capimmo l’estrema
strana, folle offerta che ci chiese
per renderci immortali
Crossroads

We change our lives for its ocean
striped in blue
of incandescent veins
from ephemeral and alive
to fossils, colored sculptures
with permanent halos of flaming ash
to crown our heads

We began after centuries,
to adore the volcano
as if welcoming a young and kind god

We started to understand the last
rare, crazy offer that it asked for
to make ourselves immortal
Donne

della palude
creature
della riva
scoscesa
continuate
a mormorare
chiuse
in piccoli
pozzi
d’ardore
Women

of the marsh,
creatures
of the descending
shore
continue your
murmuring
closed up
in small
wells
of
ardor
Soon, I will go to Buffalo.

Soon, I will pack my son’s suit, and for myself, perhaps something understated yet elegant, probably sleeveless, and some fashionable heels. Soon, I will drive my aging SUV from Chicago along the trembling lower lip of the Great Lakes, the waters that tumble within me. Quickly, we will pass the scabs of outlying urban decay, not even remember the smokestacks of Gary and Hammond, as platoons of corn nearly four feet high line up for miles and miles and miles. Sideways Eiffel Towers spray the crops with life-giving water. Only red barns, perfect as postcards, occasionally will freckle the land for more than 150 miles, even as we cross into Ohio.

Relief from all this sweetness will come when we stop near a clump of non-descript buildings called Toledo. Maybe then my son Nick will take the wheel, his fresh learner’s permit folded in his back pocket. Off we will go.

Now, it is December, gray and dreary. Then, it will be early July, warm and breezy. Then, I will grin out the open window, doglike, squinting as the wind combs back my hair, exposing my aging and ever-growing ears. I will be pushing 50 by that time; Nick will be driving 85. I will take in my own personal rolling shot of land scraped flat by ancient glaciers, then scrubbed of its pink Coneflowers and Black-eyed Susans to become farms. Movement. That little game I play with myself to show life goes forward.

More maize will march until we near my native
Cleveland. There I will wave, perhaps even toot toot, at my childhood home near Lake Erie. I will scoop up my mother, making my two-person family now feel like three. I will tool on down the toll road, following the signs for Erie—Pennsylvania, that is. My mother is a talker. She will talk and talk and talk. I will envy my son, now in the back seat, slowly putting in his earbuds. Carefully, I will veer ever so slightly into the more woody “PA,” as Ohioans say, where the land threatens to break up all that Midwestern flatness by hinting at the Appalachians below, before heading into New York—state, that is.

Twenty-eight years ago, my sister Bev called. She said, “I dreamed my baby was born, only it was you.” Truth is, her baby does look like me, too tall to be a pure-bred Italian, too broad faced to deny the Slovenian blood. My own son favors his father, blond and WASPy, so I am happy she accommodated this indirect legacy, I suppose.

Way back then, I wore a suit and heels and held my nephew in his trailing white gown when his mother—my sister—with a good heart told God and everyone, “His name is Matthew.” I was teary, moved as I pledged to help him make good choices in life, to renounce Satan, et cetera. The priest poured holy water on my godson’s little familiar face making him squint and cry and making the rest of us laugh, just a little.

I have been to Buffalo the city before and I have gone to buffalo the animal as well. But this time, all this happy roaming comes so I can see that little boy I once knew, now a man. His name is Matthew. Matthew is getting married, a choice so ordinary yet so brave that all who love him will come to watch, face into the wind and give silent support. Of course we will go. We are his people.

Five-hundred and fifty miles after we leave Chicago,
my son, my mother, and I will pull into a city known for architectural feats by Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis Sullivan, its harsh winds, its mist and its snow. Ah, Buffalo.

+++ “Mist is an understatement,” my husband said. “We’re getting pelted.”

Just across the Niagara River from Buffalo, Doug and I stood in rubbery blue-hooded raincoats as the boat motored straight through the perpetual rainbow at the rocky foot of Niagara’s Horseshoe Falls. Doug clicked our portrait, right arm extended, his eyes alive, naughty smirk. Smile.

The Canadian Falls rumbled as the Maid of the Mist inched closer. As all this tumbling water up here met all that still water down there, it created a powerful wind. I squinted and turned away.

On the way back to the little boathouse, we shook shook shook our Polaroid to reveal who we were. “I love this picture,” I said. I saw a couple in their late 20s, a journalist and her advertising copywriter husband, happy, crazy in love, people developing right before our eyes. Doug thought in our raincoats we looked like trapped sperms.

It was his brain I loved the most. Yeah, he was handsome in an all-American boy kind of way, but it was how he saw things, the connections he made that made him special, different, that made me pledge I’d stay with him until death.

Niagara, Marilyn Monroe’s voluptuous Technicolor film noir, made this natural wonder of the world famous as the honeymoon capital in the ‘50s. But this trip was years after I wore my mother’s satin and lace gown with the long, long train behind me as I cradled two dozen calla lilies. This was during the difficult time while Doug and I waited to become parents, for Nick to show up, so long ago. We walked along
the embankment, along the always-wet sidewalks, seeing the gardens. We held hands, ate ice cream and stopped by the clock made entirely of petunias.

We talked about Matthew, how he would make his First Communion, how a fallen away Catholic like me might cry when he walked into the church in his suit and tie, hands in prayer, next to little girls in their holy white dresses.

“Wait,” Doug said. “You’re planning when you’ll cry? No one plans to cry.”

“Well, we do,” I said. “My three sisters and I, we plan to cry.” Oh, this was just another example of the difference between we ethnics up North and those WASPSs down South. Italians plan to cry and we like it.

“We don’t cry. We drink martinis,” he said. We looked back at the Falls, and in the late afternoon light, the spray seemed more like smoke, making it all the more ethereal, heavenly.

+++ 

The Roman Catholic Church calendar reads this way: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, then Easter. Pity Holy Saturday. Compared to the rest of that week, nothing happened. No heartbreaking goodbye dinners, no meditations in the garden, no horrible deaths, no dazzling resurrections. It gets lost, poor thing, gets no special rituals, no way of marking its annual passing. Truly, it’s Nothing Saturday. A day of limbo, neither here nor there.

But it was a Nothing Saturday thirteen years ago, that day before resurrection is scheduled, when the troubles began as I watched the fireman start a fire.

My mentor is Bill. He is a journalist with cheekbones cameras love and a voice viewers trust. He taught me the two crafts involved in creating documentaries: producing—the comforting act of planning and planning and planning—
and then writing—the entirely uncomfortable act of throwing the plans away and telling the stories of what truly happened.

Over the years, Bill would prove my friend indeed. But Bill also is the biggest client of my work. This means when Bill is interested in something, I receive an assignment and off I go.

About that time, Bill realized his connection to the prairie started in his bones. He is a Kansan, through and true. It seemed natural that Bill became fascinated with the wilderness of his adopted home of Illinois, the Prairie State. Here, tatters of prairie still hide in the shadows of skyscrapers. I was happy for an assignment close to home, close to Doug and Nick, especially since we had yet to announce I was pregnant with Nick’s sibling. I loved my work but cut back, keeping my family in focus.

So on that Nothing Saturday, our three-person crew—camera, sound, producer—drove through early morning mist to Gensberg-Markham Prairie, a Natural National Landmark just south of Chicago, hiding just spitting distance from the junction of I-57 and I-294. Scientists say these 271 protected acres of high-quality prairie are very important, a special place where silver bordered fritillaries dance next to the bobolinks on the Indian grass, the white-fringed orchids and the quinine. But, it just looks like a vacant lot. Telephone poles and wires run through the land. Signs for the Mobil gas station and Popeye’s Fried Chicken on the next block stand in clear view. A line of 1950s-era ranch houses guard one side of the property. I bet it’s a great place for teenagers to sneak past the chain-link fence and get high. But this prairie is so important that the same stewards who protect and love it also set it on fire. They choose to challenge it, to prove its strength.
Native Americans call a prairie fire a red buffalo. It shows no mercy. It burns down everything. Every single thing. Down. To the ground. But, it’s good. It’s a test. What is meant to be comes back and starts new. What is not is lost, but not entirely gone either. Its ashes enrich the soil so those remaining can grow stronger. Here, at Gensberg-Markham Prairie, this red buffalo, this test of patience—of faith, really—was scheduled for Nothing Saturday.

Once, lightning struck the match to start the pleasing destruction of Mother Earth. Now, we control the burns and call them prescribed, as if the land is ill and needs medicine. Stewards make detailed plans to accommodate man-made houses and freeways and skyscrapers, keep them safe, making the scraps of the land’s former life the best they can be.

Chicago’s wind blew hard from the south that day, so the flanks of firemen, scientists, and ecologists dripped tongues of flames on the land at that end. Dry for March, it caught like, well, a wildfire. All day we danced between flames, capturing how fast and how high they could rise and the crackle of the plants and the scattering of animals below. Heat blew us back. I turned my head, squinting away the smoke, but I welcomed the warmth that color corrected my whitening face. Was it duty or denial, but I kept standing, kept working, conducting the interviews, hiding the pain. All day my legs shook, my belly screaming.

“Looks like Vietnam,” the scientist said, after the red buffalo disappeared into smoke, embers, ash, leaving the land by all appearances hopeless. Weeks later we’d return to find violets sprouting, green snakes moving back in, Aphrodite butterflies lighting on my shoulder.

But on that Nothing Saturday, I could not see that miracle. That day, I started to lose the little person deep inside of me, that little person who hadn’t seen the world
yet, that little one protected by my own warm waters, who didn’t know how much pain was to come.

+++ 

When in the parking lot at the Hyatt Regency Buffalo, my son, my mother, and I will hear the Niagara River, connecting Lakes Ontario and Erie. My mother will talk to my son about the Falls, how we love them, always have.

There is an equation: family fun = family + natural wonder.

For our family, the natural wonder variable was Niagara Falls. My mother will tell my son of our traditions, how we always went on the Maid of the Mist and ate ice cream on the walkway. And she will tell Nick how when I was eight, I wanted to go over Niagara Falls in a wooden barrel.

It is true, I will confess. I was obsessed. Like a little future television producer, I researched everything, thought through every logistical detail. I wanted an old wooden pickle barrel, padded with a pillow at the bottom. I wanted to smile, climb in and wave goodbye to my family as they dropped the barrel into the Niagara River. I would sit Indian-style at the bottom, pull lid on top. Then, I’d float, bump bump bump against the boulders as I heard the roar of the river, anticipated the drop. I would squint as the rushing air pulled me past the lip of the Horseshoe Falls, the prettier falls, and for a second, I would be suspended mid-air, the mist creeping in through the slats, intensifying the smell of pickles, heightening the joy. My pixie haircut would fly straight up as gravity pulled me down down down, all 173 feet. In that suspended bliss between here and there, the river’s roar would change to a hiss. No part of the barrel would touch me, not the sides, not the top, not even the pillow at the bottom.

Bam! The barrel would slam apart. No splinter would
pierce my skin. Thank you, Mr. Pillow. I’d gasp to expand my lungs to ultra full, shut my mouth, nose, and eyes before being forced deep deep deep below the surface. I would release exactly one bubble at a time as I calmly, gracefully, confidently, strongly, peacefully did the breaststroke on that long journey to open air. All. By. Myself. To. Safety. My family would offer a warm towel, take me to an open campfire, not that we were ever the camping or campfire types. And I would succeed at this challenge I chose, the only type I could ever imagine that life would ever present.

+++ 

I still smelled of prairie smoke when Doug took me to the emergency room. The doctor slathered gel on my belly, rolled a microphone across to hear a picture. I was bleeding so much that I was surprised to see the baby, three months along, and see the heartbeat. I didn’t want to know if it was a boy or a girl. I turned my head, afraid to get too attached. Doug couldn’t stop looking, expressionless.

Throughout Easter, I bled and cramped as we made motions to color eggs, hide the basket for Nick, and eat ham and scalloped potatoes with our friends. By Monday, the doctor offered no anesthesia, no relief during dilation and curettage. It was over. It was painful. This tiny, invisible loss hurt so much, my empty arms aching for the baby I would not know.

Doug called my sister Bev. She is a hospital administrator. Somehow, that got her involuntarily elected as the family disseminator of bad news. He took the phone in the hallway, away from me. A few days later Bev called. “We need to talk,” she said. “Something’s not right with Doug.” When he called her, he sobbed uncontrollably, wasn’t making sense, couldn’t say the words. I knew she was right.
Doug was changing, becoming withdrawn, having troubles at work, sitting in dark rooms with sunglasses on, seeming to have a few pages of his dictionary ripped out every day. One night after swimming together, I said, “I miss you, but you’re right here. Oddest thing.” He said nothing in return.

+++ 

I’ll be in the room at the Hyatt Regency Buffalo barely minutes before I will pull out my bathing suit, goggles, and cap. This will annoy my mother.

I will explain that after spending hours stationary in a moving object it will be time to be moving in a stationary object. I will try not to be pissed that the pool will be overrun by toddlers. I will try to find patience, remember when mine moved among their water-winged ranks. Still, I will insist on doing laps around the kiddos. Pull, breath, pull, breath, pull, breath, pull, breath, pull, breath. Move. Move. Move. Move. Move. Move. Towel off. Now, doesn’t that feel better.

As much as possible must be planned, and never a moment can be wasted. Matthew will be preoccupied and busy, so I will gather his brothers, Nick and the other teenaged nieces and nephews. We will string passports in holders around our necks, and I will start the Neurotic Person’s Passport Game. “Do you have your passport?” I will ask. They will look worried for a second, touch their respective chests, then say, “Yes, I do.”

We will jump back into my car. We will drive 20 minutes toward the Peace Bridge, cross into Canada. I will idle the car as we wait in line in customs. One of the kids—probably Nick—will say, “Do you have your passport?” We will all knit our brows, look down pointedly and touch our individual sternum then nod, “Yes. Yes, we do.” Waiting for customs will take a surprisingly long time, to cross into the
lands of our friendly yet cautious neighbor to the North with whom we Americans have never made war, never even had a beef with at all.

Once I pull up to the booth, the surly Canadian customs official will ask, “Do you have your passports?” We each will look worried for a second, then say, “Yes, we do,” and hand them over.

I will drive on Clifton Hill past the kitsch neighborhood of wax museums that natural wonders always sprout. I will hear the roar of the Falls yet resist the temptation my mother could not 40 some years ago. I will tell the kids how the first time we came to the Falls, their grandmother jumped out of our moving car to see the Falls for her first time, so excited by its sound, its mist, its rainbow that she left us kids and dad behind.

We will walk past the clock made entirely of petunias, white and purple and red. We’ll stand on the ledge at the top of the Falls on a platform with wooden railings and nails I will worry are rusty. My son will lean too far forward and my palms will sweat, fearing he just might want to jump out, proving he is alive, jumping toward his own life and independence, declaring himself his own separate miracle. We will then walk toward the little boathouse.

+++  

When I met the savior, it was a snowy day in late December 1998, and she lay in a manger in the little town of Janesville, Wisconsin.

She was a bison, born snowy white, but not an albino. This buffalo named Miracle fulfilled a 2,000-year-old Lakota prophecy that a white buffalo would bring peace on earth, good will among all Mother Earth’s creatures, reunite all races, restore balance to the world. When I met Miracle’s eyes I saw nothing special, felt nothing special, even though
I wanted to believe. I needed a sign of hope.

“Tell the doctors, tell them,” Bev said. “They can’t talk to you, but you can talk to them. Tell them what you see, how Doug has changed.” Four pages of notes detailed behaviors Doug no longer seemed capable of observing in himself, of communicating to others even if he did: how much he didn’t talk, how he repeated himself when he did, how he found religion, overate, got lost, forgot how to swim, choked a lot.

The note led a parade of physicals, therapies, blood tests, CT scans, MRIs and spinal taps, antidepressants, medications for obsessive-compulsive disorder, discussions of electroshock therapies, of how at 38 he was too old to be considering that he’d have schizophrenia. Nothing worked. Nothing made sense. Everything was getting worse. Day by day, Doug seemed more a stranger to me, to his colleagues, to his family. Doug was put on probation at work. I struggled to make excuses to our friends when he could no longer remember directions to restaurants or how to make change when the bill came. I spent my days working and chasing our cheery little boy. I spent my nights finishing Doug’s work, passing my writing off as his, researching everything possible that could be wrong with his brain. I lost my appetite and countless hours of sleep.

Just days before heading to Wisconsin came the oddly disappointing news that Doug did not have a brain tumor, something almost fixable, something I almost wanted. Finding nothing meant more sleepless nights, tossing and turning over a once-unimaginable choice: Did I leave Doug?

I said, “Please, Bill, I need work.”

“Yes,” Bill said. “Work is good. Work is an ever-loyal mistress. Work takes care of you the more you take care of her. You know what she expects, how to make her happy.
And she is always there waiting. Trust work.”

With Bill’s avuncular blessing, I let work become my lover. And like a lover, work did not really solve my problems as much as it let me avoid them. I focused on different stories than my own, felt control as I planned out events yet to unfold before the cameras, and always kept moving.

Bill’s love of the prairie became focused on buffalo. So, off I went. Driving up I-90 to I-39 in the weak December light, snow dusted the land littered with yellow-brown corn stumps, like a towhead with 5 o’clock shadow.

The 46-acre bison farm in Janesville was small and tidy. The owner, a fleshy-faced white man raised Roman Catholic, told me that just before Miracle was born an eagle—not common in southern Wisconsin—circled overhead. Then, two red tail hawks lit down in front of him. This was part of the prophecy, a sign that it would be his land, his manger where a white buffalo would lay, a symbol he did not know or understand. But the Lakota knew. When news spread that a white buffalo was born, it was only days until the first pilgrims arrived. By the time our crew came, more than 190,000 pilgrims had already visited the farm to see Miracle—spiritual leaders from the Native American nation and the Dalí Lama, celebrities like Ted Turner and Ted Nugent, and ordinary folks who drove 35 hours from Canada, who left behind their wedding rings as offerings. They came to pray that the prophecy was real, that balance and peace and hope were imminent.

The frozen land gave up a mist as we set up to interview the shaman next.

+++ 

After I buy the tickets near the Falls, the teenagers and I will snake through the line to get on the boat. We will don yellow or blue or whatever color the rubbery raincoats
of the *Maid of the Mist* will be this year, and we will board. The boat will tug us ever closer toward the foot of the Falls. We’ll move close, just feet away from where the airborne water meets the anchored river. The kids will extend their arms, take pictures of themselves with their phones. I will hide breathlessly, far more afraid now than I ever was when I was younger, knowing now how randomly death makes choices. When the boat reaches land, I will breath again with ease. Momentary terra firma.

+++ 

The shaman might be a great man of his land, the keeper of the sacred bundle, but he made a lousy interview. It wasn’t just his monotone. He wasn’t answering my questions, at least none of my direct ones.

I asked him to tell me about the great herds of buffalo that once roamed the prairies, how the white man hunted them down, slaughtering them into near oblivion, a story parallel to the Lakota’s.

He rambled and told me of the tatanka, the buffalo, and he spoke of them as a more practical, more noble, more intelligent race. He said, “We understand that the snow is going to be deep. We watch the buffalo and see how hard life will be, how to handle what will come.”

I asked him to tell of the white buffalo’s importance, if there are special ceremonies to honor the prophecy. He wouldn’t be specific. Instead, he told me that all ceremonies are about honor, love, respect, and that all ceremonies require a good mind and a good heart for healing and understanding. And, he said, how you pray has to come from within yourself.

Interesting, but none of this would make it on television.

He told me how Lakota follow the buffalo, migrate
when the animals do, survive mostly by moving. He said, “When you stay too much in one place, you kill the things that should grow there. So, we move.”

I sighed, frustrated. We had come all this way and I was not getting the story assigned. It wasn’t planned this way. I took a deep breath and signaled to the cameraman we would try again. The shaman did not flinch at my frustration. Instead he quietly looked straight at me. I felt uncomfortable. I said nothing, let go my control of the story. And after a very long silent minute, he started talking.

He told me how the Lakota watch the buffalo people—he called them buffalo people—to see how to treat their own families, to learn to be near to them, to be counted on, to live up to the covenant of love. He said women must watch the buffalo to learn how to keep their children as priority, protect them and guide them with gentleness.

The camera was rolling but clearly the shaman was talking only to me. Our eyes continued to be locked, and he paused. Silence again.

Then, he said the Lakota watch the buffalo people to learn how to tend the sick. Buffalo people stop, form a circle around them, protect and care for the ill. And then, they wait until their loved one has entered the spirit world.

The wind rattled the empty tree branches. I bit my lip and blinked hard.

“Always, face the wind,” he said. He went on and on and on. No matter if it is bitter cold driving snow across Kansas or dry heat driving dust across Nebraska. Do not turn away. Do not flinch. Be like the buffalo people. Always, face the wind.

Just then, the little buffalo child made only a small noise, and the shaman started singing in his native language. I was frozen yet moved.
I drove back home to Chicago, back to my son, my husband, my people. Part of me wished I could see a buffalo to learn how deep the snow would be, how harsh the wind would blow, but maybe I didn’t want to know that the news would become worse and worse and worse and worse and worse, that we would lose Doug in inches, a rare dementia starting to steal him away at thirty eight years old. I did not know our people would circle around and wait until he was taken to the spirit world.

+++ Where Matthew lives in Buffalo, the wind takes a running start across Lake Erie, dropping snow in the winter, humidity in summer. It will be July and in our fancy clothes, we will take refuge from the elements at Christ the King Chapel. With good mind and good heart, my son will walk with me down the aisle. I will sit on the right-hand side, among the other widows, my tiny aging Italian aunts.

Matthew’s brother Ben will seat my mother in the third row, then Bev will be walked down the aisle to the second pew with her husband Lou beside her. When it is quiet, Matthew will enter with his best men in front of him. Six pretty girls in matching dresses will walk slowly down the main aisle, one by one, as a lovely song plays.

For that moment, I will be a little confused in that way all the theatrics of ceremonies can mix up time and space and main characters. For a second, I will see Matthew at age two, walking down another church aisle and holding a pillow with Doug’s and my wedding rings, while I stand backlit in the vestibule with my daddy, the florist arranging my mother’s satin train.

As the music changes, we all stand, honoring the love of a father for his beautiful little girl, now a young woman named Cara. He will turn her over in her trailing white gown
The Round

to her tuxedoed betrothed. His name is Matthew.

By now, my aunts and I will have our hankies out.

With great tenderness Matthew will take his dear Cara’s arm and walk her up the steps of the altar. I will want to swallow hard but this mysterious walnut that formed in the back of my throat will get in the way, not allowing me to suppress the embarrassing, audible gasp. My other two sisters will put their hands on me, prop me up.

In predictable order, music and readings and candle lightings and incense burning and bells lead to the big moment when Matthew and his Cara will turn to face each other and hold each other’s hands. With the earnestness and sincerity only naiveté can bring, they will announce their intentions to bring children into the world and raise them together.

Matthew’s voice might catch, as many voices do when as they repeat their covenant. For better and worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do they part. Those horribly beautiful words.

I will work hard to dam my own personal Niagara, catch my breath, bite my lip, and force myself to look into the winds of a god so powerful. Then, Matthew and his bride will face their people. The priest will ask for our blessing on this new couple, and I will wish them tiny miracles: beauty in the fury of waterfalls, joy in the ashes of rebirth, blessings in the rare and unusual.

Soon, I will go to Buffalo. And I will pray.
One from a Distance
Cecilia Salama
Reluctant Splendour
Cecilia Salama
A loud first taste
in St. John’s Wood
I made friends with the ostracized
in floral prints and lace

Him dwelling on bird calls
Our song within black
He didn’t see your manicured hand
slipping into mine

You swore,
teaching me to smile with my teeth
And he handed me a plate, saying,
‘I am only a man.’
Your face painted in light inaccessible
I take your chair
enough to feel stolen warmth

Boyhood embarrassed me by hanging pictures of ships
and everyone falls
for the coffin of excuses which takes away what you cannot

Listening to an unaccountable man I am happy with a
broken pen
Our sweat and our wholesomeness tugging at my shoulder
All hopes of regularity thrashed, We are the stairs sped up.

Is it possible to love from afar? If so then I have loved
the King of the dumpster
my fox in the dark.
Why he’s sitting, I haven’t a clue.
He’s been sitting since in here he flew.
    Never once flitting,
    he repeats, unremitting—
he’s Italian—“mai più” and “mai più.”
I wish he’d desist, that he’d cease.
From his hovering there’s no release.
    He won’t let me dust
    that archaic Greek bust,
and I can’t go on reading in peace.
He’s no nightingale, nor is he lark;
his feathers are much, much too dark,
    while his aura, intense,
    lacks all commonsense.
Was he stationed, perhaps, by a narc?
On Ash Wednesday there’s no trace of gray,
but neither does he go away;
    and his constant refrain
    of “mai più” is a pain.
He’s not Catholic. He seems not to pray.
When St. Patrick’s Day brings out the green,
his black has a still blacker sheen.
    What can he portend?
    How will this end?
I quit laudanum first, then caffeine.
At Easter, when cherry trees bloom,
that creature still clings to his gloom.
I’m wondering whether
to pluck out a feather
and make me a grand nom de plume.
His presence without precedent,
why in the world was he sent?
— perhaps less to frighten
than maybe enlighten? —
thus I’d muse on what his lingering meant.
Trepidation took flight once I knew:
a drear chamber at midnight? mai più!
Now I’m done reading Dante—
have you met my amante? —
see the skies overhead, they’re clear blue …
My friend, may your troubles be few.
What sequestered me at last I outgrew.
Like chimera or gryphon he
was an epiphany.
Do I miss him? Believe me: mai più!
BED
Lucy Kissel
There’s paint slapped onto
my sky, thick like an impression
on my aching—scratch ink into
leather bound sketch journal
one long poem out of love, want to
take road poem and turn that into
novella that’s effortlessly sad but beautiful and bring
back those days roaring through
Ohio, Indiana, Illinois—breakfast,
sausage gravy—bat factory—beer—
Dave and Joe up front and me studying maps
in the back, shouting directions—no GPS
bullshit, horseshit—doing it ourselves,
it’s been three months—three million years,
the crops are shriveled junk melted down
and shot into our arms, the city is torn down
about my knees—
Joe threw his shit down on the curb, back pack, boots, sleeping bag, hammock, and all, and I dropped mine beside him. Dave was supposed to pull the car around 15 minutes ago, but there was no sign of him, we took pictures of each other so we could look back and remember what we looked like, because we thought maybe we’d forget, this is how I’m going to start it, just like those 7 days started, standing out on Broad flannel shirts and dreaming of the west, the last fast food stop on Oregon and then straight to the arch, we got to see middle PA, but this isn’t about that this is about the before, standing still, I kicked a bolt rolling on the sidewalk, it was there when we got back, it was all there, but different, that’s why I’m glad we took those pictures, the receipt in my pocket is less than 24 hours old and already it’s faded
We woke up one morning and the doors were gone. By midday, so were the windows, the mailboxes, and patio chairs. The afternoon stole our roofs and walls, snatched up our rugs and furniture, took off with a floor tile each time we breathed in and a kitchen appliance each time we breathed out. By sundown, we were standing in the middle of an endless street, the asphalt so black our shadows bled into it.

Our homes were gone.

We checked the grass and soil they’d been built on and could not find a trace of our lives.

The children didn’t start to mind until the sun vanished too. Then we were blind in the night—but there was nothing left to see.

When the sun rose again, we tried to rebuild.

We spat at the soil and packed it into bricks, but each time we laid one down, another disappeared. We blinked and they were gone, and now our town stretched on for miles.

We walked the length of the street several times. When we came to the end, we still did not know where to start. We looked at our feet, at the crooked way our toes leaned into each other. We shook our heads. Then we fell to our knees and tore at the dirt, searching ruthlessly for the things we had lost.

The earth collected under our fingernails. Rose, the old woman who had lived at #62, dug holes until her nails simply cracked and fell off in the soil.
“How’s it coming?” we asked.
“Okay,” some replied. “I think we’re on to something.”
David (#68) uncovered a house.
It was small, square and white, buried about twenty feet in. We unearthed it like a coffin, brushed the loose dirt from it with our thumbs. The doors and windows were intact and opened easily. White furniture sat untouched inside, still draped in protective plastic.
“Whose house is this?” David asked.
We were silent.
“No one recognizes this house?”
We did not.
“Who owned a white house?”
“...”
“Who had brand new furniture?”
“...”
One girl stepped forward suddenly. Her eyes were bright like the centers of daisies. We thought she would claim the house. But she only asked, “What is furniture?”
We began to go insane.
Jane (#54) started hallucinating. She saw mansions sprouting from the ground. We told her there were no mansions, only the square white house. Nothing else. She brought a rock down on her own head and bled out on the concrete. The children who had seen this began wetting themselves in their sleep.
Jane’s ex-husband Michael (#43) was off digging when it happened. He didn’t know until the rest of us had gathered and begun to bury the bludgeoned remains. When he came to the place in the street where the blacktop glittered red, he took the rock she had used and cracked his own chest open with it.
Cara (#57) buried herself alive. Joseph (#45) set
himself on fire. Stephen (#49) tore out his hair.

Soon we were all humming to ourselves. Twitching. Dreaming. Soon we were all dropping dead, one by one, like fat, poison-drunk flies.

One morning we woke up—those of us who were left—and we did not move. Not an inch.

We didn’t dig. We didn’t hum. We didn’t twitch. We lay on the concrete with our eyes closed. Some of us wished we were dead.

Night came. One of us heard sirens. And then we all saw them—blue lights popping through the dark.

We were instantly surrounded by cameras and police, immediately swarmed with questions. The news vans parked outside of the square, white house. We all gathered on the lawn like a family posing for a photograph.

“What happened here?” one of the officers asked. He looked around, amused.

We pointed fingers everywhere.

“Nothing,” we said. The cameras snapped their pictures. “Nothing here at all.”
Even in this terrific heat Pearl would have asked to borrow Isadora Duncan’s scarf. One by one she sliced the bright-red chillies, listening for the front door. Dinner is in hand, she would tell her husband when he arrived. Your mother would blister if she knew how scarcely I’ve fed my husband lately. Go on up and shower—in suferably warm today. And afterwards, she would continue, lubricious now, why don’t you relax on the bed? Pearl would giggle and assure him that a great surprise awaits. A great surprise. He’d grasp the intimation right away, she felt sure, and wait, eager as a snout at the swill.

The knife held tightly in her hand, Pearl shut her eyes, frowned, pictured herself going to the bedroom. She taps at the door. Into the half-lit room she goes and drops gracefully to her knees. Lying back in a light-blue dressing gown is her husband, propped on his elbows, legs trailing over the footboard. Almost unfelt, like spiderlegs, her fingertips creep tickling from his ankles to his shins. Over his knees they loop, across his heavy thighs, then around his sex. She looks up at him. Grinning and inscrutable she licks and bites her painted lower lip, continues to work her hands busily. Oh, her husband murmurs. Oh, he says, firmly now. That’s hot! he squeals. I’m on fire, love!

Pearl opened her eyes and the scenario melted away into a set of demitasse cups bought last summer, scalloped strawberries girding the polished white of each. Away from them she turned and took another chilli from the brown
paper bag. She drew then redrew the knife lengthways along its flesh and recommenced her frantic cross-sectioning. On the table was a letter, the ink purple, her sister’s hand.

*Dear Pearl, there is something you should know, something I must tell you...*

Heaps of chillies now lay before her, butchered and inordinate. With spurts of white noise, the kitchen radio lighted fitfully upon a French station. Supposing she were held captive for twenty years with no company but a warder’s hand and this radio station, Pearl wondered whether she would finally get a handle on the language of love, even though her French was cod, battered, wrapped in last week’s newspaper and sold to a bulimic. See? She could still joke. She was okay.

“Hi, dear.” The door snapped shut behind her husband like a mousetrap.

“O curse of marriage!” she spat, without volition, without moving, in a voice not hers.

One foot on the kitchen’s parquet and the other timorous on the carpeted hallway, Pearl’s husband froze. “I... beg your pardon, love?”

“Don’t mind me, dear. Read a little today — *Othello*. ‘O curse of marriage,’” she repeated, steeled now and turning toward him. “‘That we can call these delicate creatures ours and not their appetites.’ And speaking of appetites, dinner is in hand. Your mother would blister if she knew...” Her words sounded as if hewn roughly from wood.

Her husband asked was she quite well? Had she left the house today? Would she like him to help? He could do the rice, at least. He could do that. Pearl waited, all the while bristling, quietly clamorous behind her cool umber eyes. The humid air took on a new glassiness; things seemed breakable.
The pooh-poohs Pearl eventually issued satisfied him. He set down his briefcase, his evening paper, went to his wife and kissed her. Reading nothing into her puffy pink eyes, routine as they were, he shrugged and wheeled out of the kitchen. Yes, he would follow her instructions to the letter; she anticipated the eight of which the promised “surprise” consisted to be adhered to most attentively.

Pearl whispered the entire alphabet, then counted to fifteen, once in English, once in French. Through the window she saw the neighbor’s cat crouching among the buttercups, milky under the moon, in their un-mown lawn, crouching despite the darkness. Pattering dully through the ceiling the sound of her husband’s shower twisted “Candle in the Wind”—it was the sixth anniversary of Diana’s death—into something vaguely farcical.

“Wind?” Pearl said to Elton John. “Candle in the cloudburst, for some.”

“Well, it seems to me...” countered Elton John, unmoved.

Back at the chopping board, Pearl took the hacked red mass and began to rub it into her hands mechanically, continuing as the pulp bit, seared, stung.

Stuck on the fridge door was a magnetic cockroach whose antennae vibrated wildly each time it was opened or closed. Pearl stared at it, the throbbing in the chewed dermis around her fingernails so keen it fanned through her body. Junk, that cockroach. Of herself she said the same. And like the fridge, she considered, looking hard at its plastic bug, all the time kneading, she too had been opened, closed, opened and closed for years and years and years and years. From her things had been taken. Things had been put back. But not replaced, not truly. One small thing not at all.

My God, I don’t know how to say this. After what you’ve
already endured. I can’t even begin to imagine. I love you. I’m sorry. I can hardly—. I’m so very sorry. Do you remember mother’s catchphrase? ‘Just say it,’ she would tell us when we were kids. ‘Stop muttering, just say it.’ I’m procrastinating, my dear sister, I know. So I’ll just say it...

Since reading the letter Pearl had been evaluating under a new light what stood in place of all that was spent, irrevocable. The cold lump in the pit of her chest had swollen, rapid as mushrooms overnight. She felt blind-hearted, half-drunk. Consolation. That’s what had been put back. Consolation after consolation.

Her mother and father, to whom she looked for sanctuary and succor had been switched, one for a headstone in Cheshire, the other for a feeble frightened voice rattling over the telephone. Parties had become dinner parties. Games of chess, of bridge, of backgammon, all were now solitaire. Wine had gone from cheap and often to expensive and scarce. And now, at once, a perfidious sister had replaced a faithful one, and the man who had, eleven years previously, sworn to honor protect cherish obey, promised “to love you with my heart, all of it and always,” had vanished while she could no longer bear to look. In its place, a mute wound, without remedy. Then there was the other thing, for which a kind word and a hand on her shoulder were meant somehow to compensate.

“Habit is a great deadener;” the tramp had it right. Or did Beckett put it better himself when he wrote “Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to its vomit?” Either way, Pearl concurred. And what did she do, what had she done more habitually than wake in the morning and live? Every day a fresh loss, another color run. Life had become a photocopy of a photocopy of a photocopy and the inescapable lunatic carousel was just fucking unbearable—had been so for more

THE ROUND
than two years.

“A fibroid,” the doctor had said that day, as if she knew what it meant, as if it wouldn’t crush her. “Tragic but not uncommon, Mrs Burns. You mustn’t blame yourself.” She remembered him taking his pinstriped suit jacket, resting his hand on her shoulder, squeezing softly, solicitously. “I’m very sorry.” He said it quietly, closed the door softly. He left Pearl alone with one heartbeat too few.

Onto a paper towel she wiped the flecks of crimson and seed. The burning persisted, redoubled. She sniffled and put her sleeve to her eyes.

Arms straight as styluses she left the kitchen and caught a glimpse of herself in the long hallway mirror. “Who. You. Who. You.” Pearl drew up close to the mirror and in the faint electric light watched her lips as she repeated without sound: “Who. You. Who. You.”

Since she was a child, Pearl had invested time heavily in mirrors, car windows, shop fronts, puddles, in any surface willing to offer up a reflection. But never for vanity. Rather, it was to check she was still there. And now, this fey stranger framed in silver and orange before her, Pearl realized she was there no longer.

“Who,” she concluded, and turned sharply away.

News of the heatwave came on the radio. “In the United Kingdom alone,” said the lady newsreader—always so phlegmatic, newsreaders—“the death toll is expected to reach several hundred. Fears are that across Europe fatalities could escalate into the tens of thousands, with the elderly and the very young at greatest risk.”

Up the staircase Pearl went, bare feet keeping time with a heart pumping pell-mell. The air was sticky. She touched the mingle of perspiration and tears from face (hers no more), felt the sting in fingers rise to a pitch hectic
and white. Taking three resolute steps along the landing
she tapped on the bedroom door, entered the half-lit room,
dropped gracefully to knees.
Envirez-Vous

Il faut être toujours ivre, tout est là; c’est l’unique question. Pour ne pas sentir l’horrible fardeau du Temps qui brise vos épaules et vous penche vers la terre, il faut vous enivrer sans trêve.

Mais de quoi? De vin, de poésie, ou de vertu, à votre guise, mais enivrez-vous!

Et si quelquefois, sur les marches d’un palais, sur l’herbe verte d’un fossé, dans la solitude morne de votre chambre, vous vous réveillez, l’ivresse déjà diminuée ou disparue, demandez au vent, à la vague, à l’étoile, à l’oiseau, à l’horloge, à tout ce qui fuit, à tout ce qui gémit, à tout ce qui roule, à tout ce qui chante, à tout ce qui parle, demandez quelle heure il est; et le vent, la vague, l’étoile, l’oiseau, l’horloge, vous répondront, «Il est l’heure de s’enivrer! Pour n’être pas les esclaves martyrisés du Temps, enivrez-vous; enivrez-vous sans cesse! De vin, de poésie ou de vertu, à votre guise.»
Get Drunk

Always be drunk. That is all; it is the only question. In order not to feel Time’s horrible burden that bruises your shoulders and grinds you into the earth, get drunk and stay that way.

But on what? On wine, on poetry, or on virtue, as you please, but get drunk.

And if sometimes, on the steps of a palace, in the green grass of a ditch, in the joyless solitude of your room, you happen to awaken, your buzz fading or killed, ask the wind, the wave, the star, the bird, the clock, ask everything that flees, everything that moans, everything that sings, everything that speaks, ask what time it is; and the wind, the wave, the star, the bird, the clock, will all respond, “It is the time to get drunk! To not be the martyred slaves of Time, get drunk; get drunk unceasingly! On wine, on poetry, or on virtue, as you please.”
Very Old Car
Eleanor Leonne Bennett
My life story is the life story of everyone I’ve ever met. And I guess that makes me a pretty sad amalgam of things. It’s not that I only meet sad people; in fact, most of the people I meet could probably be described as fine. Yeah, I think I’ve met a lot of fine people. The problem with fine people is that I forget them. I forget the consonants and vowels that make up their names, that make up the contours of their faces. I forget fine people because fine people seem like no people at all. The result of indecision or decisions made that weren’t decisions desired. I see in fine people the prospect of quiet failure.

I think that means I become friends with people who are either ready to implode or explode, with people who are on the way to something they are not quite sure of. My mother asked me once why I didn’t want to become friends with all the other Portuguese kids at my school. I told her something about them being from the suburbs, about not being able to relate to them, to their money, to the apparent ease with which they conducted their lives. I think even then I was just afraid of fine people.

My great grandfather was working on an I-95 construction crew in Rhode Island, excavating around an old convent to pour the cement for the pillars that would hold up all those cars that needed to get new places. He found a pit of human bones, children’s bodies. He wrote a story for
the local newspaper about nuns and priests, about prayers whispered. They deported him for something, but mostly for themselves. They were afraid of fine people too.
New York allures for not much else than a tremendous multiplicity of narratives that intersect obliquely, often times spectacularly, within the city’s spatial arrangement. Where it happens is as important as what happened. All who live in New York City are aware of this; it is a secret sustenance, the quiet assurance that something life altering may happen because one is surrounded by so many others who too hope their lives may be suddenly and inexplicably altered. We live with hope that life might change. This, despite appearances, isn’t indicative of uneasiness or unhappiness but rather the psychological equivalent of evolution, of gills, of things that Darwin saw happening under the Pacific sun. One may be truly happy in the city but why then shower in such an uncertain milieu of possibility? The country is for contentment or for escape, obedient there to the lack of man and nature’s much slower transitions. Nature accumulates slowly, it’s measured with terms like eons. Man only lasts years. Man is more likely to juxta pose, to add and subtract haphazardly. That is our nature; we rebuild without destroying and often destroy to never rebuild. We made Edinburgh. We perpetuate genocides. We’ll forget yesterday tomorrow only to recall it the day after but then it might very well be much too late. History is the recording of what’s remembered not the day after but the day after that. A testament to the settling but not the eruption. You cannot walk on lava until it has cooled, hardened and suitably solidified. We speak of history like we walk on lava, aware of its past instability and grateful for its momentary strength.
There are certain things that are certain. The World Trade Center Memorial will be completed at some point and it won’t be the same as it was the summer I first saw it. That first time, I stood not amongst the ruins that used to litter the site, ruins I selfishly wished I had seen because ruins tell the truth, an incomplete truth that is yet more true than any subsequent attempt at narration, at telling a story that most will already know, but amongst an attempt at suture. We rebuild to forget. That is not what we are told, we are told we rebuild to remember, to memorialize, to document. But what documents better than the document itself? Memorials are built for catharsis, for an easier transition between days and then months and then years that will hold testament to history regardless.

I would wonder if anyone down there was from New York? If I could be down there because I was ninety miles away in a 5th grade classroom in the basement of a Catholic elementary school in Philadelphia when it mattered. Maybe you’ll believe me when I say that some of that smoke traveled down I-95, across the various interstates that travel out of New York, that maybe miles away other Americans could too share in the same stifling fear of an attack on national soil.

This was another one of those things to do in New York that I talked about doing with other people but ended up doing alone. You weren’t allowed to just go down there and wander around the construction; you had to get a free (donation recommended) timed ticket. My appointment with whatever was down there (I say whatever because even though I had seen the plans for the site, I had by then forgotten them and only knew about the two black chasms,
the infinity suggested by their central orifice and the water that made its way into the darkness of that central square) now bore a temporal scar.

I walked from 10th and Broadway and still got there early, screwed around in Tribeca for a bit, so I could say I knew Tribeca, and then crossed down into the Financial District proper. There is nothing about that part of town that seems normal. It is a city on steroids. Masses of blue glass and steel, whole blocks that reflect you as you walk by, a clever architect’s way of fighting the solitude of the city with an ever-faithful companion, yourself. I walked around New York with myself and on that day with all the people who work in all those buildings downtown and the throngs that walk around expecting to get a whiff of that past carnage, a finger in a gutter maybe, a cold breeze they’ll later call a spirit. Local and visitor alike are painfully aware of the strangeness of the blocks that surround the memorial site. There are streets cut off for construction, streets cut off for security and streets too full of people glancing nervously at each other, wondering who dare disagree with the solemnity of the air. As I followed blocks to dead ends and realized I could no longer follow the grid for direction, I asked a cop where I could find Vesey Street. I mispronounced Vesey and gave it all away. Showed the creases on my palms as those of a foreigner. I said thank you sir as he pointed the way and I wonder what the sir was for, whether sir was short for I may not be from here but I can understand the immensity of it all.

Fifty feet beyond a cement barrier were two of those orange and white striped tubes that direct potentially hazardous buildups of steam in subway stations out. They stood next to each other like two smokestacks on some New
England mill I had driven past but only registered now. They stood next to each other in perfect symmetry like the towers whose shadows they would have been under during those other days had men not made decisions they could not apologize for. And from their tops plumes of smoke flowed at a constant rate and for the foot or so above the lip the smoke kept the tube’s shape, solid gray cylinders, and then they would rise too far above the edge and the wind would distort them and they would bulge and dissipate in endless streams.

On one of those haphazardly created intersections of barricades and blocked streets where I found the striped tubes were also a bright magenta Jeff Koons balloon animal sculpture and a 9/11 Memorial site information booth. It was an odd composition. Koons’ art is confident, loud, and absurdly over priced; at first sight I thought it perfect for the Financial District, a more apropos symbol for the gloss of Wall Street than that silly bull tourists insist on taking photos of. I wondered about the spectacular irony of the magenta dog. The peculiar resonance of an expensive sculpture of a thing originally cheap, of a balloon filled with air in the shape of a dog, of a plaything for children right there by that odd plot of land. It seemed too easy to think of things inflated that could now last forever right next to where something that was supposed to last forever lasted for twenty-eight years. Strange jokes are often made to cope with uneasiness. I laugh when things become awkward too.
When men wore moustaches
and dinosaurs were new
from their graves, they held bones
together with wires and bolts
hidden in the primal umber.
Their shirtsleeves
striped up the arm, antiquated
as the twirls in their facial hair.
The headman in tweed
points to the shoulder
blade with a stick.
Turn the screws.
Pull the ropes.
Resurrect the beast
and place it in halls
that will echo with the profundity
of the footsteps of time
as she passes without even reading
the plaques for the exhibition.
WITNESS
ALMA SINAI ESFAHANI
It’s orange o’clock when they order the rafts for lake explorations. Using a head mirror, each player experiences, from multiple angles, a pinstriped boat with numbers on the sides, and white bench seats that open up as a mini refrigerator. The dissection equipments float in a green light, beneath: a stereo-tactic device, lancets, rasps, retractors, and surgical staplers, lined up, and floating to the surface.

Richter’s head mirror glows. Pupil sectors, cut away for two knife throwing wheels, spin in black spirals inside of his head. A small operator rodent, named Gosh, operates the eyes with cogwheels and pulleys, using them in great might, and agitation. The wooden wheels spin once, and then Richter closes the lid of the refrigerator, and Percy steps into the boat from the dock where he had been standing.

Percy is a motor mouth, he uses the Pennington clamp to keep his flapping jaws closed, but it doesn’t stay snug enough. His jaws drool through the retractors, spin lyrics, breathe letters. He never “speaks into the microphone.”

The two of them grab a pair of bandage scissors and snip the line of the dock. This leads to a TV splashing into the water, sizzling.

It’s green thirty, and the boys are getting really thirsty for an Xos 2 Exoskeleton (leader of all exoskeletons) so they can drink. Not once has either boy seen, or heard, an Xos 2, but the operator’s manual makes specific reference to their whereabouts in this lake, and so they go, to hunt down an Xos 2 exoskeleton, to drink it up into their head mirrors.
Percy unpacks his box of cardboard, cutting it with a scalpel, and putting together one of those robot suits that astronauts wear. Richter stuffs his arm in the water and pulls up a wet, bleached mountain goat, setting it on the floor of the boat. He notices the lack of movement and gets an RF knife to do the job, cutting the sloppy, goat fur away. Revealed within is a fur explosion, where Christmas lights piled under the whole inside fluff out.

One section followed by another, goat sends of string. Richter thought were seaweeds light up in the water. Row after row of Christmas bulbs light the depths of the murky water, illuminating the entire lake bottom in yellowing seconds. The goat starts twitching, and Richter puts the RF knife and bandage scissors in the air. Percy flaps his jaw, repeating a common phrase of the region, “Hammers tucked in conversation!” He mutters in the robot suit.

He has just fashioned a whole astronaut suit out of cardboard, and begins doing a celebration dance, awkward left and right, robot booty before falling off of the raft, his helmet part hits the arm rest, and lands inside of the boat.

Richter looks down into the water, at the headless robot floating away, into the thousands of Christmas lights, and then he lifts up the robot head from the planks of the raft, inspecting its sequins Percy taped on all around the mouth, and nose. Richter makes a noise, like approval, mixed with a kind of oblivious muttering, and through the glowing lake bottom, Percy watches as Richter begins putting on the helmet, careful of the poking tuna cans that the ears are made of.
The Myth

Michael Mount

“Well, this is awkward,” she thinks to herself, squatting beside the brick wall. Her urine rolls down the sloping concrete in a thin stream, pooling up around the broken glass. She pushes the last drops out and stands up quickly to yank her underwear back under her skirt. The potato chip wrapper floats lightly as the urine flows underneath it. And then the breeze smacks her in the face and tells her it’s time to get moving again.

She watches the road. Squinting with all of her might she tries to conjure a car into existence, illustrating its form in the deep cotton of night. It appears. Sometimes she can’t tell the difference between fate and determination. When she wants something to happen why should it not. When Willis went screaming into the ice bucket that time he shot his own finger off, did she not will it into being. She watches the headlights dilate.

“Looking for me?” he says.
“I guess so,” she says. “Can I get a ride?”
“Of course,” he says.
“You want anything?”
“Nothing. Hop in.”

His cigarette ember pricks the darkness. She runs her hands on the skirt on her thighs, rubbing out the wrinkles like her hands were irons. Just running the fabric smooth and steady as she felt the hairs on her thighs catch. Then the hot twitching inside her begins again, and she tries not to bend over.
“It’s funny, I don’t really see many women like you. I see all sorts of strangers, though. Mostly kids who are just running away and sometimes I’ll get a boyfriend girlfriend duet. But mostly it’s just the kids, they’re the ones who are always waiting. I found this one kid once, waiting with two grams of heroin on him and he offered me half of one. The thing about going all night though is you don’t want to be on that kind of stuff because it’ll just put you down. I mean, it’ll put your head right through the floor. It’s mostly just the uppers that I like. You need those if you want to push this chariot through the fire or whatever.”

At this point she notices that there’s a little bit of pee on her shoe, in a wet spot on the canvas. Damn it, she thinks, and begins to cry, very, very lightly. The feeling of holding Willis’ fingerless stump to staunch the blood comes back to her hands, the hot and pulsating throb.

“Do you have a band-aid?” she asks.
“What for?”
“Cause I got to patch something up.”
“What you got to patch up?”
He looks her up and down, keeping one hand on the weathered leather wheel.
“It’s not here,” she says. “But I need one for later.”
“Well I ain’t got any anyways,” he says. “You just gonna have to make do with some clothing or something.”

She thinks of every Christmas she used to spend in the yellow trailer with Pigeon the dog and her mother Mary sitting beside their skeletal tree with mugs of instant hot chocolate. One time she finished opening all the presents too soon and she asked her mother if that was all and her mother started crying beside the emaciated tree. The truck runs over a possum with a slight bump.

“Oh my God,” she says. “We just hit that possum.”
“That’s a possum.”
In the rearview mirror she can see its long crimson entrails in a vector leading from the flattened white body, and even the faint flick of one paw as the last of its life disappears. Then the taillights leave it in the darkness and she just has the little ember again, hovering under his nose. The smoke trails up, swimming into his nostrils in lines.
“Where are you going to anyways?” he asks.
“Amsterdam.”
“That’s not a bad place.”
“Nothing will be open at this hour and I need a band-aid.”
“There’s that little place on the corner that might be open. What’s a woman like you doing traveling alone anyways?”
He looks at her long spidery fingers plaiting the folds in the fabric like irons. Her legs are long and white and smooth. My God, she thinks to herself, watching the pine trees alternating between the telephone poles. My God, when will it all end. When will I be at the end of this long road and when will I be the one driving again. When will it all end. When will Willis regrow that finger. The driver says that he used to have a thief for a friend.
“The thing about the Lion King is you can’t trust him with a dime. You can’t trust him with a single thing. Don’t ever let him near your wallet. Don’t ever let him near your keys. But most importantly, don’t ever let him near you. He’ll steal the eyeballs right out of your head and you won’t realized till you walked into a wall.”
The headlights bleed into the light from a vending machine beside the road, under the awning of a garage. There’s a young man standing there, waiting. The truck
slows down and the young man puts his face in the opening of the passenger window, breathing frosty words into her face. Good God, she thinks, he looks like he’s been awake for days. The driver hollers out the window and invites the man inside. She scoots into the middle, wedged between the new man sitting to her right and the driver, on her left. He throws the ember pinprick out of the window and it tumbles on the road.

“Welcome aboard.”

“Thank you very much.”

“When I was your age there was one thing about the road that no one told me and now I wish someone had told me when I was young. That’s the thing about getting old though, you got to hold on to what you had when you were young and shed all that young skin at the same time. One time I shot a turkey in the neck with a pistol, hit that thing square in the neck with a forty four at twenty-five feet off, swear to God. It just ripped the whole thing clean apart and you bet we had something to eat for a long time.”

The man slips his hand into hers and she feels the warm feeling of something she had not felt for a long time, bubbling in her middle and rippling out into her toes and fingertips. She feels happy and safe again, watching through the windshield as the indigo night turned into the grey crimson, slowly percolating through the silhouette of the pine trees. She holds her thigh tightly with her remaining hand, clenching the patchwork dress on her smooth legs.

“It smells a little like piss,” the driver says, sniffing his nose. She feels the sweat in his palm.

“I can’t smell a thing,” she says.

And she can’t smell a thing and she holds tightly to the skin.
334 Smith Street, Providence, RI
Mary LoPiccolo
Windowless city of memory,
fools’ gold
scraping lip of sky;
twinned, memory’s lips
repeat, meet
and split, split
and meet, consume
make whole;
an innocent,
penniless dream—
the four-point buck
statue-still in the meadow,
one antler gone,
surrendered,
the madrones
waiting for the inevitable
summer fire.
Bastille Day

Christopher Janigian

Trees bend here.
Then venom spills into
thick canals—

they harbor
lifeless barges. Men blow
ghosts, burn lung—hands run

through hair. The throat
grows a rose—blooming blood
by the villa. Words

vein, roll from
someone’s tongue. Bent
god: flash by

with your bullet vest.
Do not watch this
terrible sky—

lightning cracks it
with yellow saw-teeth. It is not
for you. The dark-

skinned man stands, rises
to popular flux: locked
hands, perfect soldiers. Eye
contact costs a fortune. Black-eyed god: watch the high wheel of bone.

O, stone and river. This place swells with soldiers. Again shadows swarm the streets: police in bombshell suits spit at helmeted heads, lazy tongues. We pass one mouth I will match: the dead sphinx. I will stare into the numb umbrella of a hood.
Various media outlets reported that a delinquent piece of extraterrestrial matter, presumably a meteor, barreled from the outer atmosphere of our Earth, bubbling, molting, bulleting as it accrued surface pressure and velocity, passing through the alembic of cumulonimbi, transfiguring itself, reorienting itself, touching ground squarely in the transmission grid of the Niagara peninsula. Of course, touching ground squarely in the transmission grid of the Niagara peninsula, said meteor disrupted the electrical flow to most of Eastern Ohio, widespread regions of New York, and a great deal of the tri-state area at large including all of Long Island and the Western coast of Connecticut. Naturally, because of the ensuing blackout, various media outlets reported this via terrestrial radio, and those who still stocked batteries were in luck.

Our office was initially out of luck; when the screens flickered, flitted, we had little time to post haste and back up our day’s work on discs and back up those discs and so on ad nauseam as was protocol. Thus, the day’s work was not backed up because there was no clause in our company’s crisis management plan that accounted for delinquent pieces of extraterrestrial matter barreling into the power grid of the Niagara Peninsula. Thus, our day’s work, and most likely that of the days leading up to our day’s work, were rendered irreconcilable. By the time the backup generators kicked into gear, there was little to do but wonder what quite caused the blackout. Ralph down the hall had
double-A batteries and we implanted those bad boys into a radio outmoded since 1998, tried to tune in to 1010 WINS to get the “scoop.” This media outlet had little to say but for the fact that the extraterrestrial matter was lodged into a MW substation grid like a coral polyp in the ethodic floor of the ocean. Of course, I am adding such poetical ornament to 1010 WINS’ professional account of what the matter looked like, but as we huddled around the radio obtaining the “scoop,” this was the image that materialized in my head: a coral polyp lodged in the Hadal region of the ocean deep, a bright thing, outlying, right at home, bioluminescent in the maundring darkness. Sometimes I get poetical; it helps me get through the day, I suppose. Not that anyone in the office would appreciate my flights of fancy.

Our supervisor knew not what to do with us; WINS reported that the power would be out “indefinitely” until experts could come insitu and restore the damaged substation to its former functionality. There were whispers, too, that the secret service was to investigate the Niagara Peninsula for some “foul play” in regard to the extraterrestrial matter, to rule out any suspicion of a transcontinental sabotage or anything macroscopic that I have trouble wrapping my head around. But from my vantage point, I seemed to trust that the only difference between our power and our darkness in this very moment was a chance hunk of Icarian rock, precariously perched in the substation. That made sense to me. I could not balk at that logic.

Our supervisor knew not what to do with us still. Our supervisor examined his itinerary, scrounging for some assignments that could be completed manually analog, such as refilling, re-filing, fact-checking, etc. All the phones were down (save for landlines), and so our supervisor could reach only the secretary of his supervisor; direct access was
not viable. Furthermore, his supervisor was busy on the phone with another supervisee and such triangulation was amusing to witness, as the other supervisee to this superior supervisor (who, respective to me, would most likely be considered a “grand supervisor”) had an office on the other side of our floor with transparent glass and thus, I could see the incensed phone calls back and forth and this poorly triangulated chain of command denature. I could describe it as a farce, if it were not really occurring before my eyes. Then again, perhaps I am in a farce and the only propulsive force of it is a chance hunk of Icarian rock.

Our supervisor thus dismissed us for the day after giving up his attempts to get a definitive word from his supervisor. He offered us the proviso that “if the power comes back on, when the power comes back on, which it will within the week at most, we all must report in” and begin backing up and salvaging the work that had thus been repossessed from us by this turn of events. Of course, I had no bones to pick with that proviso; it was an expected one. We were all still huddled around the radio, though, trying to glean signals and signifiers of what had occurred at the Niagara Peninsula. Apparently, there were no immediate casualties; in fact, there wasn’t even a major conflagration from the falling porphyry. We were all fortunate in that regard. Of course, the ramifications of a far-spanning power outage across the Eastern seaboard were yet to be determined. There were surely going to be ramifications. From my vantage point, these ramifications were more along the lines of poorly triangulated supervisor/supervisee information sessions rather than ICU units losing their juice in crucial moments, and even then, WINS assuaged us of this fear by making note of the backup generators equipped by all major hospitals in each affected area, replete with an audio-
map of each outlet one should turn to if in need of medical assistance. So we were square.

The only elevator with power was the service elevator and one needed a silver swipe to access it. I lack a silver swipe, so I lacked access. I would have assumed that all formalities regarding the service elevator would have been dispensed with in light of this quite unusual event, but I suppose some regulations needed to be upheld. Thus, my colleagues/associates and I took the service stairs as a compromise. The service stairs are wider and their outcroppings are architecturally designed to provide for “heavy machinery” to be transported easily on them. In this case, the “heavy machinery” in question is more along the lines of a janitorial cart or a computer cluster kiosk or a baffle or a barrier. The service stairs are designed for Human Resources to utilize. We took the service stairs. While the backup generators downstairs accounted for the lighting system and the executive mainframe, the cafeteria’s zoning had some peculiarities whereby the backup generator did not allot power to the refrigeration units, only the hot plates; thus, the culinary staff started cooking up a lion’s share of the week’s rations, lest it turn and go to waste. Accordingly, we ate. We ate well and for free and all-you-can-eat from the hot plates. There was vegetable crostini that was quite to my liking and some choice cuts of flank steak. I ate with the radio huddle because WINS was still reporting on this hunk of rock and Ralph had a plateful of flank steak and an onion roll and Brussels sprouts and some mangosteen sorbet in a boutique bowl. He shoved a bunch of flank into his maw and commented, “Good eats today. Good eats.” And I did not disagree.

I gorged myself in the cafeteria. Usually employees pay extra increments on a scale basis. This was apparently
phased in when various workers abused the buffet system and would tarry in the mess area, but the culinary supervisors decided that it would be some draconian show of power were they to restrict us from gorging ourselves today, a day without power. And so, via supervisor diktat, all dismissed employees were to have their pick of the litter today. I gorged myself on that crostini. It had that kind of flake I go nuts for. I gorged myself on that crostini and listened to WINS with my unit. The various in situ reporters now reported that the polyp, the hunk of rock, had been successfully removed from the substation and the repairs process was to be initiated within hours (though apparently parts had to be flown in from Sedona, Arizona) and it was then, at the mention of “Sedona, Arizona” that it occurred to me how what I had considered “widespread” about this outage was narrowly confined to the power network our grids were aligned to. I realized that the only magic this hunk of rock exacted was mediated by a procession of tubes connected to a transmission grid connected to power plants and conductors. And, while indeed this swath was wide, in Sedona, Arizona there were workers making parts to remedy the conductors in Niagara, and these workers were probably in cafeterias not unlike ours, and there was no crostini on the menu, no flank steak, no scale basis. The circumstances and jurisdictions and codes and customs surrounding their cafeteria terms were entirely divergent from ours, and they were most likely receiving information from televised media outlets about the Northeast’s inability to watch television. I realized I was news. But I didn’t want to delve too deeply into this chain of inquiry. I had a bite of Ralph’s onion roll and I quite enjoyed it so I took five from a hotplate and continued with the gorging.

When my coworkers and I finally consummated our
dismissal by leaving the building, it was dusk and it seemed a helluva lot darker than usual because most streetlights were inoperable. People were lighting citronella candles and festooning the blocks with patio chairs and chairs for the folding and grills and I wondered where all this leisure typography came from, which woodworks they were hoarded in, whether everyone had flocked to a Sports Chalet or the K-Mart and purchased these very specific lattice chairs for this event, as if everyone had been in on it, as if that hunk of rock were a marionette cut loose by the public. I decided that perhaps everyone has a lattice chair somewhere in their home and I’m in the dark about it because I live alone. Perhaps the chestnut of domesticity is a lattice chair, and I haven’t been let into the club yet, that the lattice chair is the leather jacket with which one may be inducted into the boy’s club of the lounge lizard. But the number of lattice chairs in the streets for a Friday night was unforeseeable, eldritch even in its conspiratorial ornament.

Every neighborhood bodega followed suit with our office cafeteria; the perishable food would spoil without refrigeration, and the food had to be consumed somehow, so all bodegas and delicatessens and upscale markets were offering their meats *gratis*. Perhaps the lattice chairs and grills were merely anticipations of this. The streets smelled of barbecue and everyone was willing to share their surfeit of meat. There were so many sauces out in the streets, more sauces than I knew were produced. From block to block an array of sauces, hoison on lamb shank, A1 on duck haunch, every block emitted some smell of variegated meat. Vegetarians were grilling halved bell peppers and shiitakes and endive even or fennel or anything perishable conducive to being grilled. Some vegans grilled the meat-eaters for eating meat but the meat-eaters took these verbal jabs with
a grain of salt; everything said was good-natured and cordial as the meat denatured and the haunches were salted and it was unnerving. It was unnerving that everyone wanted to share, that everyone seemed to own a lattice chair and a grill and was just lying in wait for the moment to unpack them from the bubble wrap. I felt like I had missed a memo. Come to think of it, there were most likely fewer grills out on the streets than I recall, that perhaps my memory has embellished the gross number of grills. But there were grills, wholesale. Grills by the bushel, any way you look at it.

As the streets were merely candlelit, I decided to see what was happening at the nearby cabana bar. There seemed to be a happening from my fire escape, because people were congregating around this cabana bar. It seemed ceremonious, and so I locked up my door, top lock, bottom lock, and I stepped downstairs and outside and I joined the congregation around the cabana bar. With the immensity of candlelight, it seemed like a vigil of sorts, but everyone was all smiles so it was not a vigil. As it turns out, it was another grill. The cabana bar was grilling up pro bono geoducks and razor clams, and this was a rare and exotic treat for the congregation, as geoducks and razor clams are indigenous to the Pacific West coast. The cabana bar’s staffers were serving these free geoducks and razor clams over homemade mirepoix and handing these samples out on bulk plastic plates and there was a collection jar that was surprisingly zaftig at this point. The process all seemed very civil. One man was talking about how “I would never eat geoduck unless you gave it to me for free. It looks like a penis,” and he went on and people were laughing in agreement about how viscerally upsetting it was to see one grilling a geoduck outside because it taps into some deeply wired castration fear. One man actually launched into an
extensive explication of “castration fear” until his wife shut him up with a bite of geoduck and he warmly chewed through the hunk of mollusk and he kept chewing and kept asking for more. I stayed silent because I wanted to correct one specious assertion he made about the nature of “castration fear” but then someone passed me some razor clam and I got to chowing down, even though I was already quite gorged from the flank steak and the onion roll and the vegetable crostini and the thick smell of spitfire meats and charcoal rinds. The cabana bar turned on the radio and plugged in their subwoofers so the whole block could be within earshot and Steely Dan came on and everybody sang along to “Rikki Don’t Lose That Number.” Well, not everyone. Some didn’t care for Steely Dan. Some people’s mouths were in the process of chewing and digesting. Some people were dispersing, candles in tow, to see what was happening on other grills or to return to their houses to make love or to jot notes about how exactly they should remember this momentous display of camaraderie down the road or to do both simultaneously. I didn’t sing along but I could’ve had I not believed that the power would return any minute now, or had I believed that in Sedona, Arizona, I was news to someone.

The thing was, the power returned three days later and I haven’t seen a lattice chair since and I’m assuming I imbued the lattice chair with some sort of importance that is only informed by my relationship or lack thereof with lattice chairs. Apparently the hunk of rock is worth $300,000 dollars, various media outlets reported. It apparently caused between $4,000,000,000 and $10,000,000,000 worth of damages, factoring in the totality of the regions affected. Apparently the hunk of rock is one of the most valuable meteorites to ever impact Earth to date based on sheer bulk
and mass. It has not yet been sold, but there have been bids placed. I am not sure who will collect the tender from the bidder. I do not know who owns the meteorite. I would have to assume that the owner would be located somewhere in the Niagara Peninsula, though. Funny thing, that polyp. When I finally saw it televised, I was dismayed to find that it less resembled a coral polyp than it did some kind of twisted knuckle or bodily abscess, that I had gotten the conceit wrong. The two supervisors in my office work side-by-side now as to avoid any poor triangulation, and there has been ostensibly little hiccup since.
Midnight Train

Daniel Barbare

In the quiet of the living room
Under the chandelier that shines
I’m sitting at the table in a chair
Inspired by the distant sound
Of a train
The house seems to hear
The rhythm and the punctual horn
Till the sound is black
And the laptop fan cuts on and off.
There is a pattern emerging, there is a pattern emerging. Salt and pepper static with the tint turned up. A sky with an upset stomach retching rotten ice. Now Oak Ridge, Tennessee. Do not look away. Koi ponds reflecting green smoke and cemesto homes. Fold the page and new patterns emerge. Torii quake on origami shores and horrified stares become unfrozen. Rows of pupils loom toward you. They blink and yellow bombs become mushroom gills become children’s seizures. Flimsy clouds become silken bolts become Richter scale mascara. There is a pattern emerging, there is a pattern emerging. Everything scribbled in scratches of red.
Landscapes, Drawing 145
Jaeyeon Shin
Landscapes, Drawing 146
Jaeyeon Shin
Julia’s Brought a Writing Prompt,

William Snyder

some Rockwell prints: Quartet, Girl at the Mirror, The Runaway. She hands me Marriage Counselor—a couple in a waiting room, the guy, arms folded, eyebrows raised, a purple shiner welt his wife has given him. The wife, all color and fire—red hair, bluegreen paisley dress, turquoise cloak, bright red feather on her pill box hat. She looks at him—she has the guts to look—while his gaze focuses rigid and straight at the painter’s work, the counselor, us. She’s embarrassed, it seems, about the eye she’s given. But she’s determined to fix what’s wrong. It’s why they’re there.

Julia couldn’t’ve known about my own—the failures, the fiascos. Though it’s possible they wear on my face somehow. Fossilized lines on my forehead that might’ve clued her in. Or a vacancy in my eyes—beyond the corneas, the irises, the roots of the optic nerves—as if they were drained, emptied out by those two firm endings, those two long times ago. Marge, and Sherry. There were never slaps or blows. Nothing broken. No bookends thrown, or plates, or picture frames. But too, no one dragged, kicked, or shouted us in to counselors—it was not considered, not suggested. By Marge. By Sherry. By me. Did we know
it would’ve been useless, even if they had given me, in their turn, black eyes? Or could they see the future—my hardened fingertips from flat-picked strings; the lawn mow jobs to pay my share, the dawn-light calls for subbing junior high? That decisions were beyond me?

Get married? Sure, might as well; willing to do whatever to keep myself in strings. And a car would be nice. A place to stay. So, like a pan left on a low gas flame, left too long, Marge, in the stench and char of it, drove back home. And Sherry? I packed the Mazda—the guitars, the mics, the strings, and drove to Baltimore. For the Rockwell woman, it was probably for the best. For the three of us, I don’t know. Because over time, you forget—your suffering—how others did. Or you never understand. Or you hide those things.
Dreamwood

In the old, scratched, cheap wood of the typing stand there is a landscape, veined, which only a child can see or the child’s older self, a poet, a woman dreaming when she should be typing the last report of the day. If this were a map, she thinks, a map laid down to memorize because she might be walking it, it shows ridge upon ridge fading into hazed desert here and there a sign of aquifers and one possible watering-hole. If this were a map it would be the map of the last age of her life, not a map of choices but a map of variations on the one great choice. It would be the map by which she could see the end of touristic choices, of distances blued and purpled by romance, by which she would recognize that poetry isn’t revolution but a way of knowing why it must come. If this cheap, mass-produced wooden stand from the Brooklyn Union Gas Co., mass-produced yet durable, being here now, is what it is yet a dream-map so obdurate, so plain, she thinks, the material and the dream can join and that is the poem and that is the late report.
Annelisa Addolorato is an Italian writer and Hispanist. Having grown up living in both Italy and Spain, she writes both in Italian and Spanish. Her bilingual poetry books include: *Mariposas y falenas* - *Farfalle e falene* (Endymion, Madrid 2004) and *La palabra ‘lasca’ o la reconstrucción de Pompeya* - *La parola ‘lasca’ o la ricostruzione di Pompei* (Amargord, Madrid 2008). She teaches at the Universities of Milan and Pavia.

Holly R. Appling lives in Canada. Her poems have appeared in *QWERTY, Carousel, Leaf Press, Jabberwocky*, and *The River Journal*, and others will be upcoming in *Ideomancer* and *nycBigCityLit*.

Danny P. Barbare resides in the Upstate of Greenville, SC. He has been published locally, nationally, and abroad. His poetry has recently appeared in *Calico Tiger, picayune*, and *YARN*. He credits his wife, and dog Miley.

Sean Beld is a poet native to Southern California currently living in Corvallis, Oregon, studying for his MFA at Oregon State.

Eleanor Leonne Bennett is a sixteen-year-old British photographer whose award-winning work has been featured in magazines and galleries around the world.

Maria Bennett is a poet who has just published her first work entitled *Because You Love*. Her original work and her translations of the poets Nancy Morejon, Ernesto Cardenal, and Cintio Vitier have appeared in *Nexus, Crab Creek Review*, and *Esprit* magazines. She has written articles for *Utne Reader, The Daily News*, and *Westchester Weekly*. Her critical
work *The Unfractioned Idiom: Hart Crane and Modernism* was published by Peter Lang Press in 1987.

Gary Cansell was born in Essex, England, and lives in London. He is a sub-editor at *The Sunday Times*. As such, he is fairly good at spelling, though certain words still catch him out. “Monastery,” for instance. Tricky one, that.

Tray Drumhann is a photographer, mixed media artist, and visual poet living and working in the southern United States. His work has appeared in such publications as *Columbia New Poetry, Mad Hatter’s Review, The Pedestal, Moria, Rune: The MIT journal of arts and letters, The Emerson Review*, and *After Hours*.

Alma Esfahani is a senior at the Rhode Island School of Design studying Painting.

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Zachary Scott Hamilton is garnished in barnacles, slathered in sea-foam, and covered in psychotropic silicons. As of late he lives beyond the greater domes of the Western Hemisphere, he resides in a basement along with fourteen wild rats, two ghosts, and seventeen pet rats in Halloween, Oregon. Hallelujah!

Julianne Hill’s nonfiction work has appeared in outlets including *This American Life, Morning Edition, Chicago Public Radio, PBS, The History Channel, Real Simple, and Health and Writer’s Digest*. And her essay film *So, Mary?* screened at the Cleveland International Film Festival, the
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Blossom S. Kirschenbaum (1933-2011) received her MA and PhD from Brown University. Her translations have been published in *Chelsea 66, Journal of Italian Translation, Modernism, and New Italian Women*. In 2011, Dr. Kirschenbaum submitted several poems to *The Round*, of which *In Repose/In Re: Poe’s* was one.

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Tom Pescatore grew up outside Philadelphia, he is an active member of the growing poetry/lit scene within the city and hopes to spread the word on Philadelphia’s new poets. He maintains a poetry blog: amagicalmistake.blogspot.com. His work has been published in literary magazines both nationally and internationally but he’d rather have them carved on the Walt Whitman bridge or on the sidewalks of Philadelphia’s old Skid Row.

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Cecilia Salama graduated from Brown University in 2012 with a degree in Visual Arts. She assisted Tony-Award winning set designer Eugene Lee in his studio in Providence for over a year, and in 2011 designed and built the set of the Merce Cunningham Residency at Brown. She now lives and works in New York.
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Fabio Sassi started making visual artworks after varied experiences in music, writing, and photography. He makes acrylics with the stencil technique on board, canvas, or other media. He uses logos, tiny objects and what is considered to have no worth by the mainstream. Fabio lives and works in Bologna, Italy. His work can be viewed at www.fabiosassi.foliohd.com.

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Bill Wolak is a poet who has just published his fourth book of poetry entitled *Warming the Mirror* with The Feral Press. He is currently working on a book of erotic haiku entitled *Whatever Nakedness Allows* and a book of historical poems...
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*The Round* is based at Brown University. We consider literary and visual art submissions of any genre and source. Please direct all such work for consideration, as well as any questions, comments, or suggestions, to:

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Sincerely,

The Editors

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