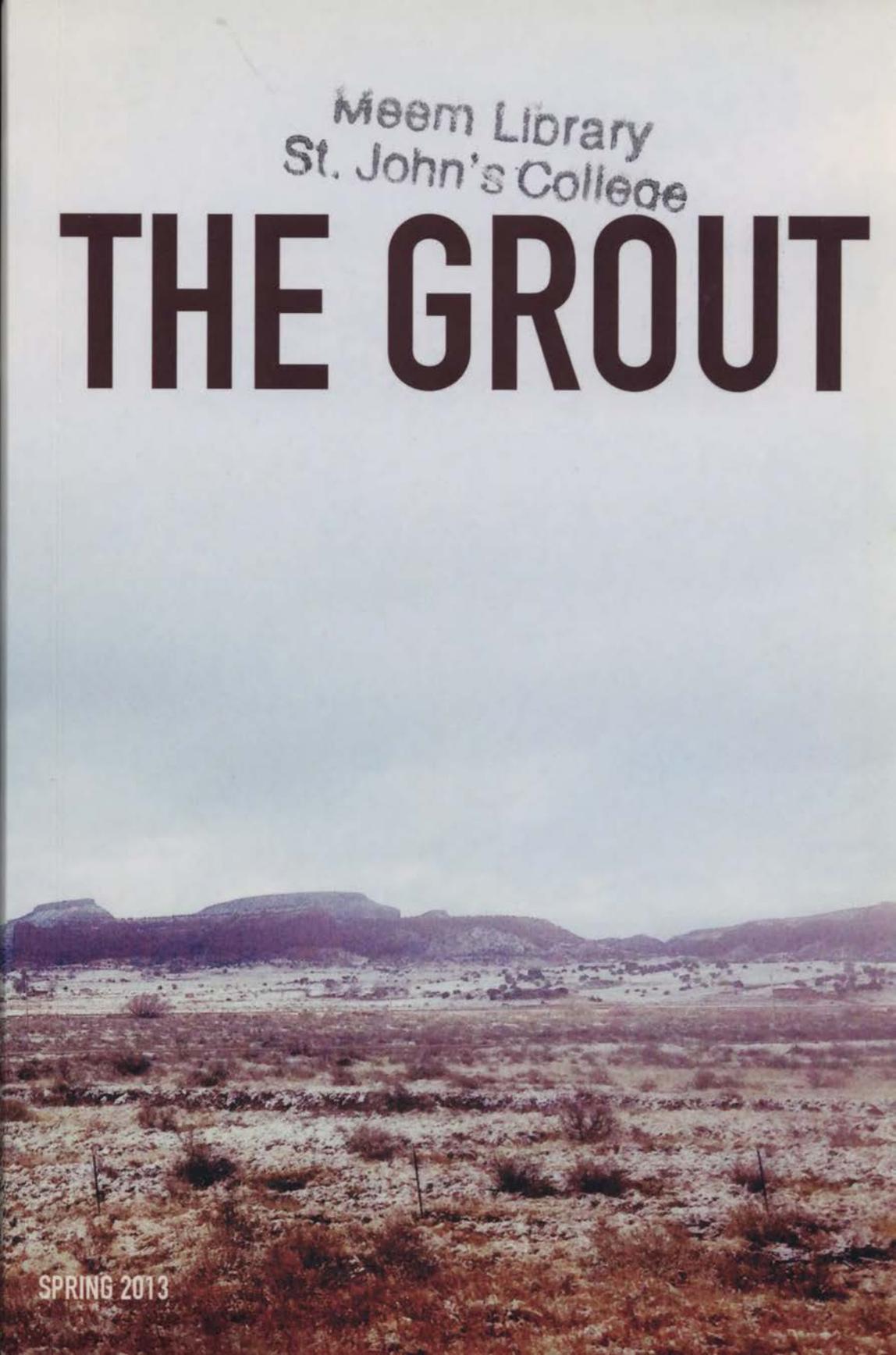


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# THE GROUT



SPRING 2013



# THE GROUT

*The St. John's College Literary & Arts Magazine*

# THE GROUT

Volume 1, Issue 1, 2011

Edited and designed by Aidan Freeman and A.J. Peters  
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## Another Confederacy

SOMETIMES SLEEP is not so simple.

I was moving uncertainly, trying to put my limbs to rest when a noise issued from the breast of Verit; I turned to meet his eyes, but despite his sudden start he was still sleeping. His eyes were closed, and for a while that could really have been any length of time, I gazed at the whole atmosphere of his face before regarding individually the aspects of his eyelashes, his brow, the rim of his lip. His eyelids were steady, and from them my focus shifted to the morning white sheets of the bed and the sounds that adhere to the starting sun.

It was still spring then—something like April—and I knew all the inevitable apologies and fears would infiltrate our relationship soon, and then the incidental afternoons spent alone driving or sitting in parks, along with the general wondering about the correlation between days I felt I couldn't go home and days where the wind and the clouds made driving far more desirable than sitting in parks. I knew this period would come, and that in all likelihood our relationship would end just as the summer rains would threaten to fall, so I thought about ending it, there in that bed, that morning, eliminating every possibility for pain and confusion and whatever other faceless feelings I knew had to come before too long. But even without him, there would be space for such pointless solitudes. I just feared sharing such burdens.

In my dreams, Verit's face was always wet, as if he had been wrestling in caverns or under waterfalls. My dreams also had voiceless men, echoing presence at the ends of hallways, wandering slackarmed and casting the obtuse shadows of science fiction battleships or wild-eyed, animated mustangs—but Verit was never in these dreams. The mornings I awoke with his face in mind were typically those when I awoke alone, after drunken nights of palpating, raving jealousies, and I could never remember the dreams themselves, apart from vague feelings nearly within reach and set-pieces I could only remember for a couple strained minutes lost in sweat and residual horror.

But this one morning in April or May the dream I had had was so firmly set in mind that it took a while to notice or care. In the dream our car had run out of gas at the top of a massive interstate cloverleaf exchange, as high as Babel, hovering over the city. It was midsummer, and we sat beside our car on the concrete divider, trying to figure the best option to

take, and then resigning ourselves to defeat. Somehow the car could still play music, so we turned the radio full blast and smoked in the sun. It was noon at first, but instead of heading toward evening, the noontime day rapidly set deeper and deeper within itself, the sun seeming to fall toward the earth until we were forced to take off all our clothes as the cars roared by, at increasingly fanatical speeds—and the sun was moving in some kind of imperceptible spiral that allowed us, by merely sitting still, to use each the other's body for intermittent shade. Someone arrived and told us about the existence of water down below, so without hesitation we fell together off the edge. But what we expected to be the cool breeze of falling was the coarse grind of heat waves, impeding our eternal descent until I grew bored and woke up and looked at his face and the sheets and listened again to the world outside.

I kissed him on the lips and took a cold shower, fully prepared to end our relationship as soon as he woke up, but when I left the bathroom shivering, wrapped in a towel, and saw him sitting up, yawning, scratching his hair, I didn't know how to do it, for the first time in my life, and something like fear or a demented forgiveness told me to light a cigarette and climb into bed, where I let him wrap his arms around my wet, naked body—my arms far from rest, shaking subtly at their most tenuous joints.

## Estuary

Easily addicted to this darkness, I sit here clawing  
at my freckles for them to open up and swallow me.

I miss the heavy clouds  
that huggd street dogs when I was a street dog,  
when I could read pornography for hours  
on the bus rides, listening to a musician chat up  
the businessman a few seats behind me, reminding me  
that strangers hide behind their belongings, too.  
I prick my digits with thumbtacks to stop  
myself from holding anything between fat  
stumps, to protect myself from my own  
propagation, predilections, prostitution,  
pregnancies, popping popping popping  
paradises.

The Iliad consumes highlighters  
on my nightstand. I hate the book.  
I hate what refuses to satisfy me, and I hate  
that there are people who are the stories, not just  
reading the stories or making the stories, and I wish

I could write you a better poem, but I'm trying to find the spot  
on my back I can't itch by looking for it in the mirror, all contorted,  
and the whiteness of my skin always astounds me. And the word the word  
estuary the word estuary estuary estuary is stuck in my head because  
estuary reminds me of salt water and cranes and the smell of the sea and  
gargling and my father losing his glasses in the ocean and the smiles of  
beautiful girls being beautiful girls and me watching them because I do  
not want to be beautiful anymore.

## Shutters

He hires a photographer.  
All the shutters in Philadelphia, he says.  
Those old, outside shutters no one fingers, no one  
leaves grease-prints on, yes, the red ones, the green ones,  
the rotting ones, even. What do you call those kinds of houses again?  
The kind that hug each other. I want to live there. With her.  
He says, and the photographer asks no questions. Scaffolding  
finds its way into the corners of the scenes,  
Starbucks, a puddle of piss mistaken for water, a church  
his brother slept in one night, empty bottle in hand, for  
protection, he said, but from what? A child throwing a tantrum  
nearly stomps into the piss-puddle, but this is a photograph;  
we'll never know if it shoots up in his face or not.  
He leaves fingerprints on the finals, strewn about his desk  
like the melodramatic part in a movie, where he remembers  
uprooting his father's vegetable garden, spilling wine  
on his mother's white dress – accidentally, of course, but  
there is a photograph his grandson finds; mind you,  
his grandson has no blood in common with that woman  
he wanted to live in that house with, and he never lived in Philadelphia  
anyway, moved out West, but, still, his grandson finds the photo,  
can't tell if it was an accident, figures it isn't, can't read the smile  
on his great-grandmother's face. And then he's crying, ripping them,  
or thinking about crying, thinking about taking some acrylics  
and painting over all the faces with yellow-black smiles, thinking about  
throwing them on the floor, but then he remembers they are shutters,  
not faces, and he wonders if there was something in his Earl Grey,  
and he throws the rest in the sink, thinks he's wasted  
so much money on such a worthless task, and he doesn't even  
want to touch himself, repugnant, impure,  
and he gave up cigarettes years ago.  
He lays out on the carpet, pulls the books off his shelf, lays them about  
him like a chalk line around a corpse, thinks about angles, boundaries,

how shutters are a goddamn loose metaphor, how he'll never love a girl like he loved her because she was so asymptotic.  
Fuckhead-intellectual, he calls himself, and wishes he had a beard to shave, but he shaved this morning. He wishes he had a baby, wishes a child could just spring from his head instead of these poems.  
He takes his hands and puts them over his face, thinks about praying, thinks about taking a piss, thinks about reaching into his body and pulling out his heart, about holding his hands around it like a pair of shutters, an impermeable membrane, creating a line of symmetry, an absolute.

## Her Spot

THEY ENTER the restaurant. The waiter shows them to their table, and there is always a table. There is always a table and always a line out front. They, the restaurant, do not wish to overcrowd, so a healthy line is maintained while the priorities, as they are known, are seated.

The restaurant is warm. Almost unbearably warm. The waiter's moustache is thin, not unbearably, but just enough to identify him as a waiter. His collar is just a tiny bit stained with sweat. He has been working for the past six hours. He has opened thirty-six bottles of wine and mistaken three medium-well orders for well-done. Nobody seems to mind so he doesn't mind. It's when people start minding that he has to mind and exert everything that makes him a waiter – his head bald except for a few oiled fields of hair on the side, his hands expert at grinding pepper, his thin moustache.

Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* is playing hushed in the background, nearly drowned out by the silence of the establishment save a few clinking glasses of wine. The majority of the clientele is older. There is a young couple in the back. Every now and then they hear them laugh. He turns from the table to look at the young couple, she looks right ahead. They are behind him. The young man has his hand on the girl's knee. She seems elated. He does too. They are the only laughter in the room. The *Marriage of Figaro* plays on.

At their table she is his girl. He would like to think so. This is her favorite place to come. He brings her here because she doesn't make scenes that way. She seems to know most of the people eating their dinner, and the waiter, but not the young couple. She looks at the young couple pensively. He cannot guess what is going on in her head. The waiter brings them wine. The year is old. It tastes young, he guesses. They sip at their wine to fill the silence. He takes out a cigarette and is about to strike it when he notices her looking disapprovingly at him. The waiter wags his finger in a serious manner, as serious as a man with such a thin moustache can be. He puts away the cigarette, strikes the match anyway, and lets it burn. Heads turn at the smell of sulfur. He does not care. He turns to look at the young couple.

The young man's foot is touching the young woman's foot. She spins her legs about and lays them in his lap. He runs his hands along her calves. Their eyes are looking into each other's. They might be engaged,

or very fond of each other. The young man says something, the young woman laughs. Her laugh is not bad. It is airy and her eyes point towards the sky as she laughs, then settle back on the young man. He is not bad looking. Neither is she. He hopes that they are engaged as he watches them from his table.

The food arrives. Mozart is still playing, still hushed. As they eat and clatter silver against their plates a thought enters his mind. He edges his foot closer to hers. They meet. She looks up at him, but does not smile. Her foot slides back. She adjusts her dress. He feels defeated. His steak tastes well-done instead of medium-well.

Number four.

The waiter appears and pours them more wine and moves along. The cloth over the waiter's arm reminds him of a matador. It moves ever so slightly in the thick, warm air. He tugs at his collar. She does not seem to mind. She is dressed very elegantly. Her dress is backless and that is enough to cool her off. She is eating some kind of salad, with a salad fork no less. He looks at her for a while, maybe too long. Her eyes meet his again, they stay on him long enough for him to feel uncomfortable and look away. She returns to her salad, her duty.

He looks at the paintings on the wall. They are neoclassical, but still stifling. He sees men in togas in the fields. He sees men holding pitchers of wine. There are no women to be seen. He wonders if this is pederasty. He decides it is not important that no women are there and finishes his steak. He takes the wine in large gulps. She looks disapprovingly at him. He is hunched now, his hand playing with the empty wine glass. He looks to his left, locks eyes for a moment with one of the older women, looks right, locks eyes with the waiter. The waiter takes this as a sign that he has done something wrong and walks over. He is shooed away.

The young couple is kissing now. He is turned all the way around in order to watch it. It is delicate, gentle kissing. His lips are between hers. His hand is still on her calf. She somehow manages to laugh while being kissed. Now his hands are in his breast pocket. He produces a golden bracelet and clasps it around her ankle. She feigns surprise, throws her arms around him. Now she is sitting completely in his lap.

At their table she is still looking pensively at the couple. She seems to have lost her appetite. She sips at her wine. Her lipstick leaves a mark. She looks at him. He looks at her. Her emerald eyes meet his brown, and they stay like that for a moment. His foot edges forward on its own and touches her toe. She looks down to wipe her mouth on her napkin. She shifts her weight uncomfortably. She does not have much weight to shift. She is skinny, and pale, with a beautiful complexion. She takes care of herself more than any person he has ever known. It makes

him feel insignificant. The look on her face makes him feel insignificant. Her hair is up, which is not unusual. She used to keep it short until she decided to grow it out. He is not sure which he likes better. He likes her face more than her hair. He likes the way her breasts look in the dress. He likes the way her figure is accentuated by the dress. He can't remember if he bought her the dress or not. He supposes not. She usually did not wear the things he bought for her, especially not the dresses. He is not sure if he bought her the earrings. They are beautiful and silver and the stones match her eyes. He thinks about asking if he bought her them, realizes this is a stupid thing to ask, and focuses on the new music playing. He is not sure if it is Mozart. He was never all that good with music.

It is then that he notices her perfume has changed. Her scent is usually consistent. It drives him mad when she is in the next room and he can smell her. The scent makes him want to wrap his arms around her. Sometimes she gives in.

"Your perfume is different."

"What about it?"

"Do you mean 'what about it', or 'how do you know my perfume'?"

"How do you know my perfume?"

"Because I was in love with you during the old perfume."

"Then I guess it's good that I switched."

"Yes, I guess."

The young couple is moving towards the door now. She has her arms about his waist. He has his arm over her shoulder. The hand on the arm is on her right breast. Her hand is rubbing his stomach.

They are so captivating he does not realize the check has arrived. He pays. They stand up. The waiter clears the table after they have walked some distance. They walk together but not together. He nearly trips her with his foot, on accident of course.

## Not a Pipe

I looked over and saw a Magritte –  
 Son of Man, that was Jesus Christ, correct?  
 - except it was missing the apple,  
 The Granny Smith apple.  
 Instead there were hands and numbers  
 And though there was no face before, I saw  
 The white, wanting face of a clock.  
 I cannot remember the time it read –  
 Do you read it or does it tell you?  
 - yet it was a beautiful blue sky  
 Somewhere behind the dense clouds  
 Over the sea, above the low bricks,  
 Light like a lamp off the black suit,  
 The black bowler,  
 The red tie –  
 Was that a reminder of man's own time  
 Ticking imperceptibly within a magazine page?  
 Or of the fact that, face only part hidden,  
 We can never know someone  
 Until we tear the hours off the wall  
 Sit down  
 Smoke  
 And speak regardless?

## 24 Hours

We walked dark streets  
Just the two of us – the last of our kind,  
And truly we felt as if entirely, utterly alone  
our steps echoing in the night,  
The streetlights unwelcome and frivolous,  
Blinding light of the nearby shop windows  
Lit solely for us, so we would not pillage them.

Yes this is solitude together,  
This is loneliness together  
As our eyes prowl for women, any woman,  
Any body to keep us warm in our time of need,  
Any hand to take ours in its no matter how long,  
Yes this is true solitude  
This is true loneliness.

We found ourselves in a sex shop,  
Twenty-four hours as advertised,  
But there was no solace in this  
Not even our laughter at the objects for sale  
Could brighten our spirits or fill in for the fact  
That we were the only humans, the only real flesh  
In sight.

Food, the only thing that could fill the void  
In the husks of bodies we dragged behind our minds,  
Who could forget the noble waitress  
Her gait crowded in obligation  
Her eyes tired and collapsing  
Beneath the weight of our demanding,  
Early morning confidence.  
Return as the sun rises and shakes our hearts,  
Tears loose the chains of seclusion and reign

Of legs that have walked too long,  
Of faces that have chatted til light,  
Of hearts  
That have beaten for the last.

## Karl and the Void

KARL AWOKE to find himself floating in an expansive emptiness. "How Kafka," he thought "or Kafkan, or Kafkaesque?"

Over the next few minutes Karl mused over how to describe the experience of waking up in the void. He tried his best to remember his college courses on absurdism but could only remember how pretentious his professor was. He took himself so seriously, he was an ugly old man and his mustache seemed like it was from the seventies. There was a gorgeous girl in the class: dark hair, brown eyes. She was very pretty but seemed vaguely sad. He had tried to talk to her about the class but she didn't seem to care about the professor's stupid mustache.

"Maybe if she laughed a bit more she wouldn't be so sad." He thought. "I laugh all the time and I'm doing fine." Karl continued drifting into the void.

Oddly enough Karl didn't remember anything else from college. "Did I even go to college?" He couldn't remember anything else so perhaps it was a movie, or maybe it was a dream.

Karl suddenly came again to the realization that he was floating in a void and that he needed to find a solution.

"I must find a solution." He thought. Karl stared skeptically into the void.

"Maybe I'm asleep." Karl tried pinching his cheeks a few times. It had worked in movies but it wasn't working now.

"Well I guess that proves it," he thought, "I am definitely awake." Karl continued to stare into the void

\*\*\*

The time of a day had passed but Karl hadn't noticed, partially because there is no day or night in the void but also because he had become enthralled in examining his hands. He had been trying to figure out if he was wearing a space suit but had run into the problem that he could not remember what his hands had looked like. He had in this time begun speaking all of his thoughts aloud to himself without noticing.

"Hands are so strange." He said. "It's weird to have a body." He was suddenly taken by the realization that if he was truly in the void there would be no light and thus would not be able to see, but he could see his hands. The shadow of his head darkened out different parts of his hands depending on where he moved it.

"From this experiment I must assume that the light source is coming from behind me!"

He turned his body around noticing a faint glowing object far in the distance. The object seemed to be getting slightly bigger every second until he could faintly make out the shape of a man. This was his way out.

"Hey!" He yelled, waving both arms over his head but he heard no response. As the man got closer Karl realized the man was doing the same.

This gave Karl hope.

"Finally, another person like me!"

As the man grew closer Karl noticed that the movements of the glowing man were not just similar to his own but exactly the same.

"This man is mocking me!" He yelled. "Do you know who I am!?"

He began waving even more wildly in an attempt to mock the glowing man mocking him but the glowing man mimicked his movements exactly.

"Fine. Fuck you. I won't move at all. How do you like that?" He said, spitefully crossing his arms across his chest.

"He'll get bored eventually." He said to himself. "How childish."

\*\*\*

After 20 minutes neither Karl nor the glowing man had moved. Karl had grown bored but he didn't want to let this glowing man win. Who was he to treat Karl that way? Did he know who Karl was?

The glowing man was now 20 feet away and as he grew closer Karl could see the man was wearing something like a space suit without a helmet.

He couldn't make out the glowing man's face because the light emanating from him was so bright. The man was now within reach.

"Hey look, I'm sorry about the stuff before but who are you to treat me like I'm nobody?" Karl said and as he reached out towards him the glowing man disappeared.

Karl was shocked at first but then found it funny. It was pretty absurd when he thought about it. How could a man emit light? Clearly he was reflecting it from some far off light behind him. And how could this man have helped him? They would have just floated along together. The company would have been nice but it was not a solution and that is what Karl wanted.

He could now barely make out a faint glow behind where the glowing man had been.

\*\*\*

In an attempt to keep himself entertained Karl had begun imagining playing a game of chess against himself, but he was having trouble remembering the rules. He couldn't remember what the pawns did but he had some idea that they were useless.

"How could there be that many useless pieces?" He said. "It doesn't seem quite fair." He then decided to create his own version where every piece was a King but he had the faint idea that even though the King had a higher title he was equally useless.

After trying to solve this problem for a number of minutes, Karl realized that he could hear himself speak.

"I can hear myself speak." He said.

"That must mean that this isn't the void if I can hear myself speak."

From this Karl came to the conclusion that someone must have put him there, that this must be some cruel and elaborate joke.

"Whoever you are, please let me escape from this place."

But Karl heard no response since he had immediately forgotten about his question and had gone back to thinking of how to improve chess.

The dim glow in the distance had become much brighter and larger since he had first noticed it. It seemed to be moving faster towards him than the glowing man had but perhaps he had just become accustomed to the waiting. It was already taking on a shape like a box or square.

After what had felt like an hour had passed, the shape had gotten very close. It was a glowing square approximately 3x3 Karls.

"Hey square!" He yelled. "Help me!"

He was not waving his arms like before, since he was still embarrassed from the glowing man.

But the square continued on indifferently with Karl passing through its center.

"I fucking hate you, square!" Karl yelled after it. "You are a shitty object!"

Karl wildly kicked and punched at the emptiness in front of him for a few minutes before becoming exhausted. He started to feel sorry for losing his temper at the square.

"I'm sorry square." He said quietly though he heard nothing in return.

But the square heard him.

And the square did not forgive him.

\*\*\*

Over the few days that had passed since the square left, Karl had become oddly ecstatic.

"I am oddly ecstatic." He said happily.

Perhaps forgiving the square had caused him to become happier or perhaps giving up hope had pushed him into some kind of enlightenment or perhaps there was no real reason for it at all.

There had been another light behind the square. This one was very large and very bright. It looked like the sun but staring into it did not blind Karl.

"It's all starting to make sense." Whispered Karl. "That is what was lighting everything else." Karl clapped, applauding himself for having figured it out. "I am a goddamn genius!" He screamed triumphantly. "I've found it. I've fucking found it!"

The sun was getting closer to Karl, or maybe Karl was getting closer to the sun, and Karl was the happiest he could remember ever feeling. He hoped that before he touched the sun he might recall all of his memories, the way he'd seen in movies. But he could remember nothing. "Maybe I never had any memories." He said. "Maybe I was not a person at all."

Karl stared silently towards the sun and for once he didn't feel worried. His head surprisingly empty of thoughts.

And Karl was engulfed in the sun and was instantly incinerated.

July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2012

Why write poems when you can kick down people's doors  
and cry in their living rooms? Everything sounds boring

Please don't kick down my door. Okay.  
It's as easy as that

everything that is now an image was once lived  
but how do you even see that? Everything sounds boring

I'll take a Budweiser and a steak and a show and some ads  
I love all of this, I love it all

Turn it off, turn it all off

February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2013

I am here to make jokes  
why are you not laughing?

I am Kool A.D.  
I am Dorothea Lasky  
"I am all root here in the ground."

There are other people awake  
for this

coming in and out of dorms  
flushing toilets down stairs

they might hear the music  
so I will turn it down  
for now until they all leave

there is a gunshop not too far  
that or a car in a garage

12 dollar rum and 3 dollar packs  
that they want to get rid of

I'll take you in  
because I love you

because I am a song

and you should repeat that  
at least three times

more than that  
and it'll be kind of tacky

and you don't want that  
(no no no I don't)

No no no I don't

GABRIELA AMAYA-WILLIAMS

## Your Young Men Will See Visions

We can't stay here and  
be street-corner prophets  
Your haircut looks like  
it cost you money  
And I get the feeling that God  
doesn't talk to our kind of post-grads.

We don't have a holy book to  
quote at the people  
Not even one of those Bibles  
that they put in motels  
And the only thing you ever  
memorized is Lady Madonna.

We can't stay here and  
be street-corner prophets  
Our stuttering won't stop  
without the burning I am that is  
And no one will believe us  
if there's nothing to believe.

AIDAN FREEMAN

### 3' x 2' x 18"

The cracks in this palm-grease table  
are where the fear would start,  
the dark knots of fragrant wood  
fertile breeding grounds for doubt,  
like still water for tiny larvae.

There are only two things I want  
when I see the cracks filled with  
nothing but the distance between the two planks.

One: wax candle rests on hard surface. Watch it  
warm, then collapse; liquid architecture left boneless;  
lava; sticky desire  
kneading itself into everything brittle.

Two: stack, set, lean: build structures out of magazines.  
The lamp knows about this; it does it so well –  
only its underside can feel where it comes from.

## Two Things

It's all there in front of you:  
Cloth-bound artistry.  
We don't want to peel  
Back layers anymore –  
Now stand at some distance  
And let in.  
Ink dresses the page but  
Beyond that which is  
More malleable, skin or  
Blank paper?  
Variety can't be the only measure but  
I see no other, so I'll  
Stand the two together,  
Carry both around when I come back,  
Hold them up to those familiar lights.

## Excerpt from a Novel

“OH, FUCK,” I muttered, noticing that the gas meter had just dropped below empty. The next city was Las Vegas, and I was not about to stop there. I hated Las Vegas about as much as it’s possible to hate something that’s never actually done you any personal injury.

I was rescued by a Chevron about twenty miles outside Vegas. It was just a little station, four pumps, cracked paint on the windows, probably just one employee. Most people passed up this little, depressing place and went on to Vegas, but I pulled in, parked my Subaru Outback at pump two, and stepped out of the car. I pulled my wallet from the hole in my back pocket and slid my Visa into the slot. The machine beeped, and a message appeared: “See Attendant.” I sighed, deciding whether it would be easier to go inside or move my car to another pump. I elected to go in.

The store was arranged like a gas station—pay counter facing the door, beef jerky and condoms and gum beside the cashier, beer and beverages in the fridge behind a few aisles of snacks and car repair tools. Without even looking at the cashier, I shuffled back to the fridge and pulled out a couple of vitamin waters—vitamin water doesn’t stick in my throat like soda.

I approached the counter. “How you doin’?” I asked, placing my waters on the counter, now looking at my phone, rehashing my text-versation with Kara, still not looking at the cashier.

“Pretty good. Just waiting out the clock.”

Prompted by the unmistakable sound of a woman my age, I glanced up from my phone. I raised my eyebrows. I never expected to see attractive women in gas stations, but the cashier perching on the stool in front of me was like a solid ten—dark blond hair; sharp, small features; tan flesh, tight like a trampoline; pretty sizable breasts with just the right amount of umph; and smooth looking legs with that kind of long indentation in the thighs which meant she was in shape.

Like someone had just dunked me in water and pulled me out, I felt the melancholy from my conversation with Kara slip away to be replaced with a hunger for new conquest. My carefully cultivated flirtation abilities awakened within me, giving a mighty yawn, preparing to engage a foe.

"Yeah, I know how that is," I said, just testing the water, establishing a baseline for this woman's personality. "When do you get outta here?"

"Not for"—she glanced at the cash register's clock—"fuck, too long. You know, you are my second customer in three hours?"

I laughed easily, gently, not overdoing it, as if I were indulging her attempt at humor but didn't actually find her amusing. "Jesus, that's gotta be boring."

"Yeah." She smiled, a sort of apology for her language. "Is that gonna be everything for you?"

"Yeah," I said. "Or, no: forty on pump two."

"Cool." She punched something into the register. "\$46.64."

I pulled out my card and handed it to her. "I'll let you hold my plastic for a second."

She looked at the card. "Awww..." she said, frowning in the way you do when you look at a baby kitten. "It's like a toy credit card."

I really did laugh this time. "I know, right?" My credit union had experienced some fraud a few months back, so they'd cancelled everyone's cards and sent us new ones without bumps on them; that way you couldn't make a rubbing. The alteration did, however, make the card appear pretty childish. It also didn't help that my card was bright green and said in big letters at the top Be Money \$mart. "My first account was attached to my mom's," I said. "I was like fifteen so they gave me the kids card. For some reason they always renew it the same." I mixed just the right amount of self-deprecation and easy confidence into each syllable to turn this little fact into an asset.

"Well I think it's adorable."

"That comforts me. I'll think of that next time people make fun of me." I shifted on my feet, an annoying habit of mine, and knocked a canister of 5 Hour Energy out of its name brand box with my elbow. I caught it before it hit the ground. "Sorry," I said.

"No worries. No one wants to drink that shit anyway."

I laughed again. "You know a product is bad when its whole ad campaign is focused on convincing you that its something normal people drink. That whole 2:30 feeling thing?"

"Totally. Anyway, this is everything?"

"Yeah," I said, happy with myself, ready to count this little interaction among my wins.

The cashier bit her lip and turned away, looking at me from the side. "Are you sure it's everything?" She glanced at the box of Durex condoms on the counter.

My heart immediately began to beat against my chest and my

knees went weak. Was she really suggesting...? I met her gaze. She smiled wide, half mocking herself, half mocking me. This was the second time in an hour that a girl had called my bluff. It was like she was saying: You know what you were doing. You ready to follow through?

I had slept with strangers before—I'd warmly embraced bar culture in the last couple years—but I'd never been with any woman who was this much of a stranger. I mean, I didn't even know her name... I swallowed hard, looked at her again. She held her bottom lip gently between rows of white teeth, conveying obviously false timidity. She had her legs crossed on the stool, and she ran a hand up and down between them.

All of a sudden the whole thing seemed absurd. This was right out of a porno—couldn't be real. The hot cashier just decides to bang the first dude to come through the door? This kind of thing didn't happen. I knew I should just take the water and the gas and get the hell out, but then again... I looked her up and down one more time. She was wearing these jean shorts that left her legs mostly bare and a wife beater that let you know her tits were the real deal... Condoms were like 99.9% effective, and she was really... I couldn't think of a single reason not to sleep with her. There was no reason to sleep with her, but the ultimate negative became a positive: the fact that there was no reason not to sleep with her meant that I should sleep with her, didn't it?

That seemed right to me.

"All right." I swallowed, took a breath. "These too." I pulled out a pack of condoms from the box, placed it on the counter.

The cashier smiled and rang me up. The next few seconds were crucial. Somehow we had to both get back to the bathroom without looking at each other or talking to each other: that would be way to awkward. Maybe if I just sidled over toward...

"We're gonna fuck, right?" The cashier had already stood from her stool; now she was walking toward the bar door, heading toward the bathroom.

I froze for a second, holding the condoms and the water in my hands. I always feel awkward when I'm holding something in both hands. Don't ask me why. I guess it makes me feel somehow childish, or maybe childlike—whatever the bad one is. I watched this girl step from her Star-trek command center counter and stride with un-intimidated confidence toward the bathroom.

"Aren't you worried someone's gonna come in?"

"What do you care?" she said without turning around.

I took a deep calming breath. I wanted to turn around, just get in the car and drive, run away like I always did.

She slid the key into the bathroom lock, put her hand on the

handle. "Are you coming?"

Who was I kidding? Of course I was going to fuck this woman. All this moral deliberation and inner conflict was just a way of making myself feel better. I figured if I retreated into the comforting aesthetic of ethical dilemma then I could pretend I made a mistake later, pretend I was really a good person deep down. What a load of bullshit. Why wait a second longer?

"Yeah," I said. "Yeah, I'm coming. I'm Logan, by the way. Blackwelle. Logan Blackwelle."

"Okay."

"Aren't you going to tell me your name?"

She smiled and disappeared into the bathroom. I could see her taking off her shirt just as the door shut.

## Dissatisfactions and Improvements

I need substance.

Not your trifling & fickle ways, all you do is scold & scold for days because I lay on my back while your mind is filled with trays of unhappiness & sorrow, while mine with coconuts, lays & purple haze.

I need determination.

Not my lackluster & constraining thoughts, that leave me to flop like a fish forgotten on a fogged dock. Free me from frightening fears fenced with futility & forgetfulness. Force, freedom, & fire frenzy in my fights & rescue me from faint & fallow land.

I need inspiration.

Unknown brother wandering the dark & lonely streets of my inward thoughts. Where you see the tired, poor, hungry, depressed person aching & reaching for just the slightest sliver of silver & mystical moonlight only in the midst of a heavy cumulonimbus clouded night.

I need laughter.

It is the hope & should not be centered only to cope. You're not a dope & you'll float because you didn't need the boat it was only a slope not needed to be climbed. You'll find a streamline & time for all that you've had in mind, it'll unbind into a shrine & all will be kind.

I need love.

There's no need to alter what I have on an altar for I listen with my auricle from the oracle's holy mouth. I look & want to kiss her lips & feel the same amount of passion I feel burning & coursing through me flow & rush into my body & breath life back. But I'm just minor acting as a

Another poem in lines

miner trying to find her, but I'm not a great finder. It's a cold feeling to be coiled with coal, I've lost my sense of everything. Why am I here for? Why do I sense I am all full of holes & have set myself no meaningful goals; becoming a paper bird, nothing but folds. I'm tired of my rave running like a foal, I'm in dire need of getting Dr. Scholls — I'm slowly becoming a troll & am having a hard time finding my soul.

## Another Poem in Lines

Envious.  
Here, with secret cigarettes  
on my balcony.  
I watch  
all the bodies mash  
followed by their eventual  
splash  
of a midnight's caress:  
negligee negligence.  
Ever-changing faces  
doing the same old disgraces  
going down that same tattered  
rocky path.  
Mama mia! you can't understand  
your faith in me will never comprehend.  
I'm sorry that I left you,  
so long ago,  
in my pursuits & my actions  
body & soul.  
Most things are a cacophony  
til' I can find my own,  
someone to latch onto  
but I can't even hold—  
onto the gold  
in the mold  
that everyone has told  
me not to scold,  
that I'll get to it...  
eventually.  
I don't want to see!  
I just want this mental sea of mind  
to calm its raging waters  
so that it's something I can define.

There's beer over here,  
but I really don't want to go,  
cause even around people  
I feel like I always  
drink alone.  
I'm convinced Hell is subtle,  
added things you won't mind,  
'til they collect one by one  
in the perpetual loop of time.  
I'm not even close to the divine.  
She's not a thing of mine.  
So I search & search  
ceaselessly  
for her sovereignty:  
To be peaceful & kind.  
Look at young-old me:  
a wind-up doll filled  
with uncertainty.  
I shiver not to the cold,  
but for other unknown reasons.  
Passing by,  
here I go,  
blowing thru the seasons.

## I Don't Know Why I Smoke

I don't why I smoke  
To tell you the truth.  
Sometimes I say it's because I'm young  
and reckless & don't know what  
I want in this life.  
Other times,  
it makes my idle hands  
seem slightly more purposeful.  
It makes the empty bench I sit on  
seem to have company.  
It makes my lonely walks a little less cold.  
Sometimes I think it's cause  
my dad died,  
but I never say it.  
I don't know what I find romantic  
about Nicotine tearing away at my lungs.  
Is it so  
I can feel  
something  
& breathe in tar  
and turn it into something beautiful?  
I'm constantly deluding myself  
that I'm mastering  
the fire,  
but before I ever will  
I'll be  
yellow-toothed, charred & gone.  
I don't know why I smoke,  
but for some reason.  
it makes me think I can cope.

## The Day the World Ended We Went to the Beach

THE DAY THE WORLD ended we went to the beach. We walked hand in hand through the toppled buildings. We passed the fires and you joked we should roast marshmallows. When there were other people, dead or alive, we looked down at our shoes and hummed. I think we hummed The Joker. You told me a story. I don't remember what about. There was a tire swing, I think. And a dog. Maybe SpaghettiOs. When we reached the end of the pavement we kicked off our shoes. They're probably still there, nestled by the brick wall, toes touching the sand with our socks neatly folded over them. Who folds socks? You fold socks. The sand was hot. But we pushed our feet down harder. You squeezed my hand tighter in the last moments. I let go and I don't go to the beach anymore.

JOSH PRIMIANO

## Untitled

The young man sits at his window.  
It is morning. The crisp Spring air  
invigorates his still-waking mind.

Below him, across the street,  
gathers an influx of penitents,  
patiently wending their ways together

to this one place, on this one morning.  
Their somber voices, much like their  
bells which earlier awoke him, meld

with their somber hymns - a discordant  
sort of harmony, celebratory yet ominous,  
exultant yet reminding, reminding of

the reason for their gathering: the Death  
that brings Life; a Life that,  
supposedly, killed Death.

A breath of air blows through his window.  
Far above the highest-reaching prayer  
gathers a company of clouds, unapologetic

kinsmen of sky and wind. They  
congregate slowly, lazily, over the  
churchground, neither paying heed

to the creatures assembled there  
below, nor to their rituals, nor, even,  
to the young man who watches,  
who unifies the two images before him,  
who observes this meeting of

sky and flesh. He realizes then

that neither the pious nor the clouds  
have gathered for him, that his  
presence at the scene is merely

accidental. The people worship.  
The clouds gather. Their voices  
are lifted on the wind, as the sky

is moved by the wind. A breath...  
A Spirit acts in all this, he guesses,  
and whether it be the spirit laid

claim to by the churchgoers, or  
some invisible gust extending over  
all the earth, is of no matter.

The humans depart. The clouds roll by.  
The church stands still. The sky remains.  
The young man sits at his window.

## Ode to an Old House

I was born in my parents' bedroom,  
the third floor of the Old Mill Road house.  
It was fine.  
I don't remember it well.

Some time later, I was truly born,  
in a beaten-down beach house,  
from salty air  
and cold ocean currents.

Given life by a twelve foot catamaran  
on the waters in front of the living room,  
a cotton sheet fort on a  
splinter-prone porch,  
and the firs that stood tall  
behind the bedroom I shared  
with my sister.

The ivy wrapped me up with  
the widow-makers,  
and the ferns put me back on my feet.  
The winter wind whistled in through the windows,  
singing auld lang syne all of December,  
while the wood floor would creak a perfect fifth.

And the rain came through the roof  
in the grey months,  
until my pillow was a soggy down sledge.

In high school  
I would sometimes wonder,  
with roof-tar hands,  
or rotting rafters in my nostrils,

what it might have been like  
to grow up somewhere else.

Like in the house of friend -  
the one whose father was a  
suit-wearing and suitcase carrying lawyer.

Where not even the hardest of rains  
could pass through the cedar shingles,  
and the thermostat never read below seventy.

But I know now,  
that any comfort that might come  
from a leak-less roof,  
could never replace the joy,  
the ritual,  
of moving the furniture,  
and placing out the pots from the cupboard to  
collect each drop with a steel ping.

And that a well-insulated home,  
though it might have its merits,  
could never be more lovely  
than a blanket-bundled breakfast,  
or the warmth of lying on the floor  
before the gas furnace  
after a January-morning shower.

## For Mom and Her Satsumas

I thought about you this morning,  
As I drank my coffee with cream,  
And read from the book of poetry  
that I found so delicately wrapped,  
next to a stocking full of satsumas  
on Christmas morning.

I thought about you,  
and I thought about what else you have given.  
More than just black letters in a perfect bound book,  
Or that sweet citrus scent  
in the depth of dull December.  
More than I could ever say with  
these simple combinations of vowels and consonants.

And so here I teeter on the edge of triteness,  
just to say,  
thank you.  
And I know, I know no lanyard made at camp  
will ever set us even.

But perhaps just to say it—to say aloud  
that you have given me more  
from the fruit tree of your love  
than could ever be returned in a lifetime—  
will somehow help.

And that I'll think of you,  
when someday I sit with child in lap,  
nursing dark coffee on a dark December day,

peeling satsumas and wishing  
a Merry Christmas,

silently hoping,  
that I might nourish that tiny being,  
half as well  
as you have nourished me.

## The Intruder

SHE ASKED ME what I was so afraid of. My mouth opened but with no answer. I rummaged through myself. Nothing. I simply didn't know. That night, the answer came to me in a horrific dream:

Someone breaks into Calliope. I'm petrified in bed, gaping at the strip of light beneath the door. I hear the intruder's tympanic steps and pray they don't come closer. When they do, I try screaming but can only wheeze, struggle to rise but am paralyzed. The steps halt and the shadows of two feet emerge. In an instant, the door bursts and the dorm is overwhelmed in light. In its midst, untouched by the swarming rays, a shade. I repudiate any final-words, sophisms, memories, or dignity—I'm fated to die on this pitiful mattress.

"You are suspended on the most ancient of tight-ropes, which no acrobat may cross. Below you on each side are two chasms; the smaller holds a reflecting stream leading to the ocean, and the larger cradles oblivion." The absurdity doesn't wake me. "There is only one direction in which to walk, and only one chasm in which to fall. Observe the fool, the analyst, and the artist who alike try besting the rope: they do not see its length extends as far as it takes to exhaust the will. Behold the king, philosopher, and saint: they neither try nor fail, they jump. But to you I come bearing a precious stone no miner can unearth: a line to safety that leads to eternal foundation; your great yearning has lifted you from the task assigned to all of man." I anxiously accept the exemption—feeling subtly disquieted.

The minutes drip into days that swell into years. Suddenly I'm a panicked, old man quieting the distant grumbling that has shadowed me since that night; the centuries unfold, until millennia later I am still wandering Earth, in search of rest. I can't ignore the truth that's taken form: I have sold one phobia only to be hunted by another more elusive and greater. But's too late; within the dream, I am condemned to suffer every passing moment, to scale. Eventually, I must count time by unfathomable units. I witness humanity crash into the larger chasm. I am as ancient as mountains when the Sun swallows the Earth and disintegrates my body. But, I linger, a disembodied awareness drifting in space. The universe expands, space-time unstitches, and I am left utterly alone and nowhere.

At the infinite hour, I grow tired of it. Yearning for color and shape and number, I drive my field of perception forward with all my strength, until I somehow tunnel myself into the surrounding void. I dis-

cover that I am drilling into a wormhole that leads back into me. Within, there is a blank screen onto which I can project memories. So, I recollect it all from the beginning: myself, singularity, expansion, cooling, fire and rock, biology, history—until I arrive at myself again: conception, gestation, birth.

I'm six years old. Everything is lightning and thunder in the world of giants, yet an excuse to curl up in mom's arms. One night, I dream an angel is sitting at the edge of my bed, running her hands through my hair like a comb through honey. My eyes grow heavy, but before I fall asleep, she wakes me. I look up at her. And in a rush, I remember: the intruder, the endlessness, the screen, these words I write. The next evening I'm in the bathtub, my mom blowing bubbles in my face. Only after the angel's visit can I be happy to see her, that smile of hers lost for so long. I want to lodge myself into this moment, I want to, but it passes like water through cupped fingers.

"What's wrong, sweetie? Is everything fine?"

I nod and show a sober smile.

"I'll be right back. I'm leaving the door open, so shout if you need anything, okay?"

"All right."

I slide beneath the water and look up at the world of distorted lights. I try convincing myself I'm in the womb again, restful and ageless. But the rippling water reminds me of the inflexible truth. Inhaling deeply, so timeworn I don't struggle, I dip into the gentlest sleep I've ever known. The shade of my angel appears above. She's come for me—but I have already awakened like Lazarus thirsting for Sun.

## A Parody

I peer out the door this morning  
Not looking, but sweeping the scene  
Only, letting the colors of light fill my eyes  
Patient for the things to register from contrast  
of color and movement  
into a story for this minute.

A sweeping movement in the grass interrupts the easy panning of my view.  
A smudge of red leaps from the ground back onto a bar in the falling  
down swing set.  
A tall dandelion stalk rights itself.

At first I assume, sipping my coffee from a teacup,  
That it was a mistake  
The little finch misjudged the strength of the stalk.

Then again, the bird reaches for the stem,  
Holds the stalk, sweeps to the ground,  
Springs back to the bar.  
Tracing the shape of caenus minor,  
Procyon empty of wishes.

Robert Frost stares at me from Birches,  
A twinkle of delight in one of us,  
An homage,  
Reminding me to come back to earth,  
Reminding me to play at reaching for heaven, and  
To come back to earth again.

The hard world of ceramic cup and coffee,  
Holds a context of time  
To which a bird playing with physics in the morning  
Opens a droplet of joy

It does not notice,  
But I am grateful  
Sipping.

## Ran So Hard the Sun Went Down

*Spoke to the wrong person that day  
Went back home and hid away  
Looked out the window and what did I see  
Tar and feather comin' afta me  
Ran so hard the sun went down  
Ran so hard the moon went up*

– Otis Taylor

“CORN GIN?”

I've never been much of a drinker.

“Uh, ok, thanks,” I said. I took the cup that was offered to me, drank to the man's health, and fumbled with the empty vessel awkwardly.

The man smiled affably. “You from around here?” he asked. He fingered the blade of the axe he was chopping up a stump with. It looked like his eyes were narrowed in suspicion, but the misty drink tried to tell me it was just paranoia and I, refusing to end our relationship.

“Yeah. I mean, I live up the road,” I said, pointing briefly to the mountain. He smiled, nodding, and I smiled weakly back, squinting in the sunlight.

“What do you do for a living, son?” asked the man. He lifted the axe and tested the sharpness with his thumbnail. He focused his eyes back on me. “You living with family, I suppose? You got your mother up there on that hill o' yours?”

“Oh I live with my pop, but he's gone to Blackwater and he should be back soon.”

“Blackwater? He doin' business there?”

“Yeah.”

“I see,” said the man. He leaned his ax against the side of the cabin. “Name's Cade,” he said, in what was supposed to be a warm way. We shook hands, and I forced myself to squeeze his hand hard. “What's your name, boy?”

“Uh, Aaron.”

“Aaron what?”

“Aaron Walter.”

"Walter? So your daddy's...Frank Walter, I suppose?"

"Yes sir, that's right."

His eyes widened slightly. "Really?" he asked. "Is that right?"

"Yes sir, that is."

He resumed his casual look and seemed unsurprised. "I thought so, by the look of you."

"Oh. Ok," I said. "You, uh, know my pop?"

"More?"

"What? Oh – alright, I guess."

"You should be havin' plenty of drink at your age. Give you some hair on your chest," he said. He put the axe down and stretched out his arms, an expression of enjoyment on his face. It was a nice sunny day and there was a breeze, and the sky was very bright.

"Well," he said, "We're all born to somebody. Can't change fate, now, can you?"

"No sir, I guess you can't," I said.

"You just gotta stay in the light and work with the people you have."

"Sure."

"Now then," he continued, "I guess we're neighbors, aren't we?"

"I guess we are."

"You're a smart boy. Listen – you know, maybe I'll need some help one of these days. Fixing my roof here – that kinda thing. I'm gettin' old, and an old man's got no place on top a roof. Why don't you tell me where you live, in case I need your help sometime? I'll pay you for the trouble."

"Um," I said, and the drink got the better of me and I became an idiot:

"I live up on the edge of the mountain there, you take the left road when you hit the fork. It's about two miles from here."

"Grand, that's just grand," he said smiling.

"Uh..." I said, not knowing what else to say. I looked at the house this man had, with its stones and overgrown moss. "That's a nice deer you got," I said. "Where'd you shoot it?"

"Aw, him? That one I got by the stream. Right in the middle a' broad daylight, he was. Clearest shot I ever had, I could aim so well. Someone shoulda told him to stay outta the sun, eh?" He chuckled.

"Yeah, the sun sure helps you find things," I said awkwardly.

"Oh, it does," he said, and suddenly he looked like someone who would eat things alive.

I said goodbye to him as I backed onto the road: thank you for the drink, very kind of you, I guess I'll see you one of these days. And he

waved and hollered, "Oh, I'll be calling on you pretty soon."

I walked up the stony road drunk and not sure how to feel. After a while, though, the drink wore off, and I began to walk faster than someone normally would. The road to the house is a mountain trail, one that has ancient stones and pine branches reaching out to scratch your face.

I ran to the house as soon it was in sight. I got inside; locked the doors, windows, drew the curtains.

It was funny how I could scare myself so much. I calmed down and set up some kindling in the fireplace, then hunkered down on the floor, hugging my knees and trying to reassure myself with the fire. I just wanted some light since the curtains were drawn.

I held out my hands in front of me and looked at their roughness; I drew nineteen stars in the ashes from the fireplace. I sang songs inside my head and quietly passed the time. I sometimes think of myself as a person who would rather take a blow than move, for want of rest, but this is thankfully never the case.

I fell asleep.

When I woke up the fire was nothing but a few pinpricks of red in the ashes. I got off the floor and went over to the cabinet for a piece of bread. Nothing happened; it was late in the day. I whittled down a piece of wood with a penknife until it was nothing.

As soon as I let the remaining sliver of wood drop to the floor I became aware of voices booming from down the hill. Managing to get off the floor, I stepped across the room to the window, grasped the curtain and pulled open a crack of light. There, not too far away, was a mob of people, dirty and angry and violent. All were carrying pitchforks, sticks and guns; in their hands they carried pails of smoking black liquid, material from hell which slopped around in its containers; one man held a burlap bag of what I knew had to be feathers, stuff taken from their wives' pillows and ripped off the surfaces of birds. They were all headed up the road this way.

I ran away from the front window. I grabbed my knapsack, stuffed my feet into my shoes, broke the back window with my fist and climbed out of the house toward the cliff.

Branches scratched my face and made my hands bleed as I climbed down this ridged slab of rock behind our house. I concentrated on my feet gripping the stone, but lost my grip and fell down to earth painfully. But I was only slightly stunned, and picked myself up to keep running.

I managed to slide down a stretch of mud and found myself at the edge of somebody's cornfield. I stopped for a moment, and after seeing dark smoke rising from the edge of the mountain I'd left, dove in. But

running through a cornfield is maddening. Everything around you is the same and you feel like you're going to run through abstraction forever until you miraculously reach the end; I pulled fibers out of my hair, tripped over a root, and ran until I reached a creek.

A new set of woods stood on the other shore, looking like no-one had ever lived there. As I waded through water and stepped onto the bank, there came a vast expanse of shadow that grew rapidly from the east, a monster shadow made by rainstorm clouds and the setting sun. Relieved, I sprinted into it, letting it cloak my dirty body and my worn-down clothes. I stumbled and had to stop, and my knees hit the ground and I shook.

The light around me turned red. I had made the sky grow dark! I had lost the sun and the mob and my father. I stayed on the ground for a while, watching the light leave, knowing that at night they'd never find me. The sun went and was gone, and I hoped it would never come back.

## Untitled

I own a pack of cigarettes.  
It sits in my desk drawer and laughs quietly when I have company over.  
I bought it after the trial.  
I was driving home and my hands were shaking and I wasn't ok and it was  
ok that I wasn't ok,  
So I decided to pull over.  
I smoked the first cigarette in the parking lot where I lost my identity that  
one time.  
I could see the American flag on top of the city and county building, but  
when I saw the American flag I saw a heart shaped balloon getting stuck in  
a tree.

I only smoke when it snows, although I don't smoke every time it snows.  
I only smoke when the color of the snow matches up with the color of his  
face in my memory,  
And when it sounds like bones crunching beneath the soles of your shoes.

Even though I think it's tacky when girls smoke,  
It's nice to pretend you're accomplishing something when really you're just  
staring at the moon and grinding the bones of the clouds and thinking  
about how cool you must look pacing in the snow and smoking a cigarette  
like the pensive motherfucker you are.

It's also nice to smell the tobacco on your clothes the next day.  
It reminds me of her dad and I miss him more than I'm allowed to say.

I only smoke when there's snow on the ground and sadness and imbalance  
I can't escape.  
I only smoke when I remember that it's ok to want to poison yourself a  
little bit sometimes.

## Mt. Whitney

Oh, Living Sunbeam!  
Offspring of strong morning brightness and heavy, fertile earth.  
"Wake up! I'm bored of sleeping," She speaks softly, eagerly.  
Wake up, I hear, there is too much to waste!

Eyes which pinpoint the midpoint between open sky and fathomless sea,  
Discern without hesitation,  
Receive pleadingly.

She tells me about Druids and ghosts and the color blue and for a moment she is radiating her own light,  
Vivid.

Bleeding before violence,  
She is a warrior nonetheless and her fist leaves dust in its wake like so many terra cotta soldiers.

Pale skin, translucent irises, she is in-substantive:  
A solar panel, a wind chime, a pot placed under a leaking roof.  
I have so much to learn from her necessary presence.

She sees through me, she sees through everything;  
Gentle fingertips pass through forced physical boundaries, and it is pleasant.  
Her reach flows into my veins and a thousand tiny throats gulp down her nourishing warmth.

Oh, essential fragility!

I cannot touch you, I cannot grasp you or reassure you in the same way that you do me,  
And I am disappointed.

I'm positive that you and I are different creatures,  
Your lineage fluent by now in impersonating mine,  
Guiding silently.  
You must be a secret! Some grand whisper,  
A zephyr tickling my face.

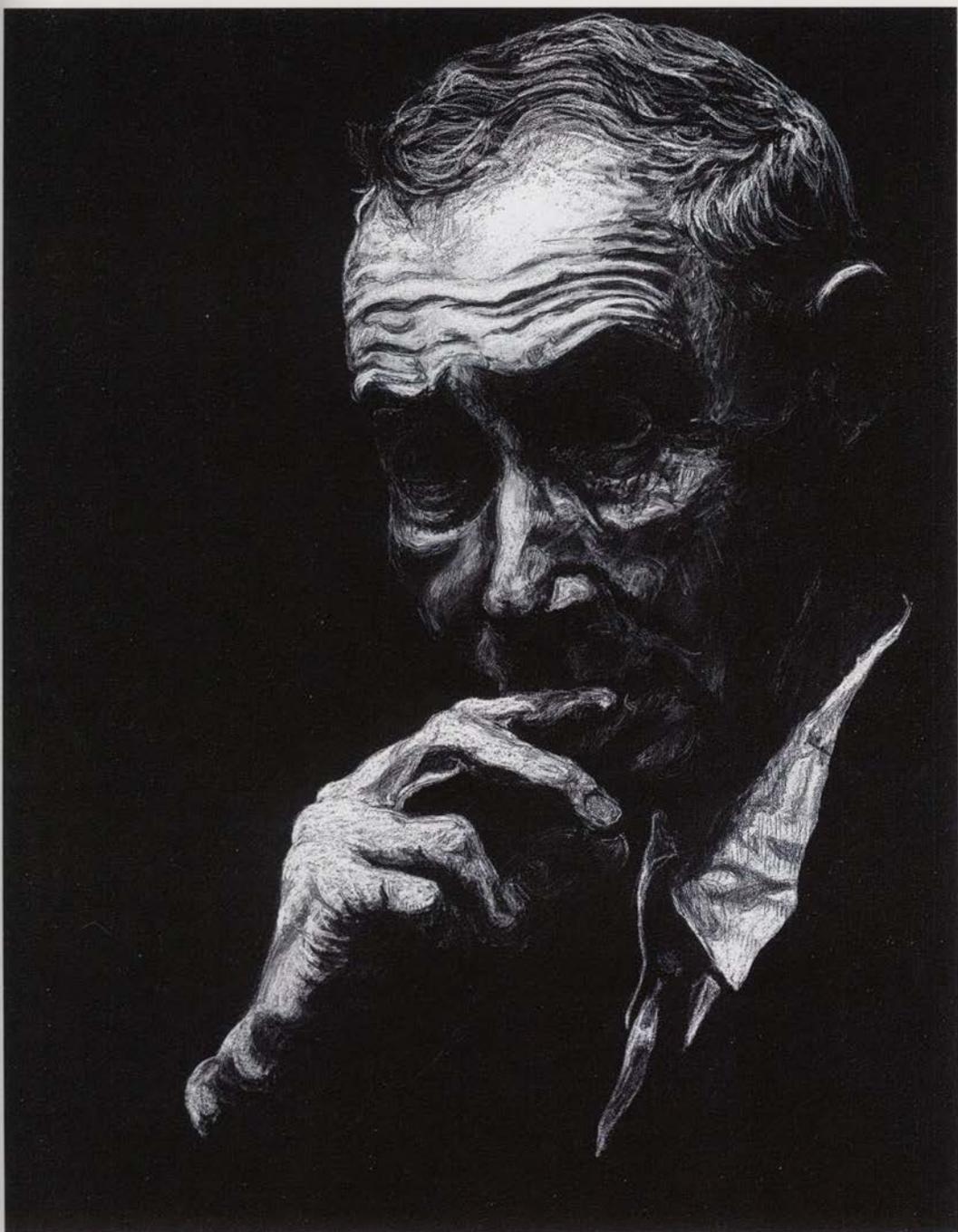
She loves her ankles, and so do I.







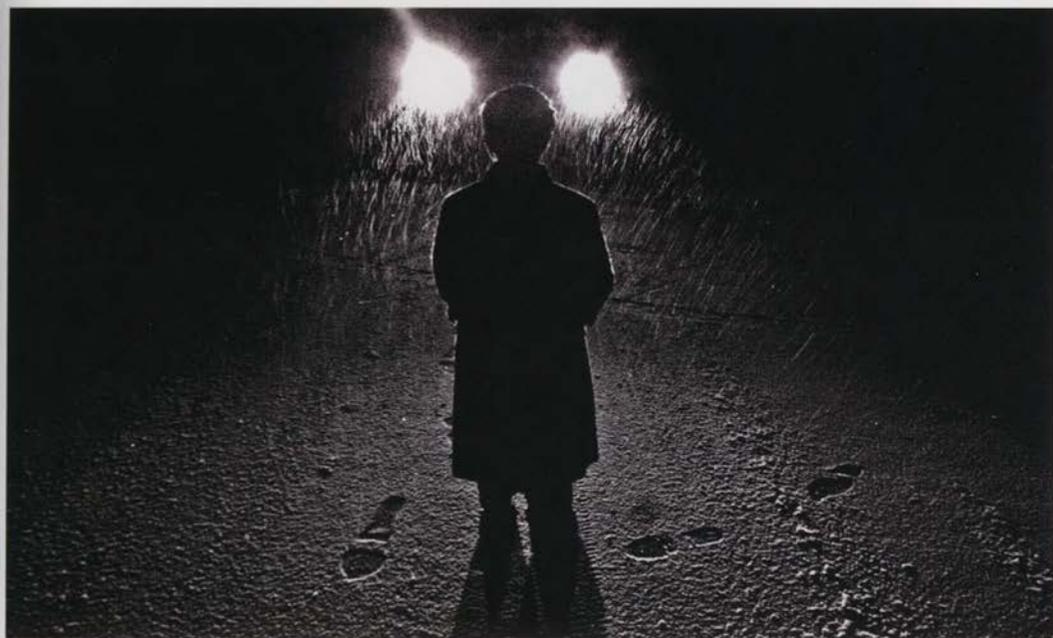
ISLA PRIETO *One and His Twelve*



*Oppenheimer*



LUCAS DUTCHER





EMMA GOOS *Atlas*



*Serendipity*



A.J. PETERS

