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new math

bath envy

end of summer

untitled

lost property

seeds

untitled

on an empty college track...

holiday gifts

kristin, 25 april 2006

bring on the ending

untitled

upon looking at a book of wallpaper...

listen:

adam mayer

fay strongin

lisa summergrad

will longo

joy heller

corey chao

ryan pyrtle-mcveigh

cary yasinski

sam kaplan

lara pollack

brian doherty

parker hoar

sam kaplan

genevieve andreas
Before our errands, I should brush your hair.
The blankets over your head (again) have destructed the braid I made.
Mother,
The strands are soft, but the roots are oily.
Perhaps this time the braid will stay;
I know the snarls never help you heal,
and I would love to (maybe) see you smile.

as the train crosses the bridge of our feet
the steam sinks beneath our eyelids
carefully dissolving our eyes
until all that is left
are the sockets of an empty tunnel.

meredith sine

paris, 1919

sam kaplan
His lips are so red. I love the way that when I'm with him, I can lose focus of everything except the parts of me that are touching him. I'm holding his hand, and I'm completely aware of his earlobe, the way it curves into his skin like a pearl held tight within an oyster.

I want to tell him that he's beautiful, so gorgeous, and that I would never have pictured myself fucking a man like him, but he wants emotions. I know just how bad it is to be told ambiguities to try and soften blows, but I just can't help it.

I want Marilyn to understand, to see how I'm sleeping with someone else because I value her so much. I close my eyes, and I can see through my eyelids.

III.

I'm groaning, I'm frightened, and I feel Marilyn's hands on my shoulders. I am sticky with sweat and I can't see anything except for Marilyn's blonde hair which is covering my face, and, when it's gone, there's just bright light. I close my eyes.

"Nathan," she's saying to me, "Nathan, listen." I turn my head towards her. We're on the bed, I am lying down. Marilyn is holding me. Her hands rub the tough skin of my neck, the tired muscles of my shoulders. She's rescued me. Marilyn has conquered the doorway, conquered me. She's holding me here with twines, she has tethered me like some falcon to his mew.

Her weight leaves the bed. "Everything's going to be okay," she says, and as she walks away through the bedroom door, I feel my skin tighten against my body, clammy and alone. She can't see through it, but it doesn't matter. The doorways of my mind can see everything, and I don't want to think about the future. I am conquered, I will never escape this shell of myself.

I open my eyes, and I am still in darkness. The door has shut, and I don't know how I can get it open again.

I.

I'm half-way out of the room when the doorway catches me, and it won't let go. It's got claws under my arms, and I find myself with my neck crooked like some mad insect, staring at the doorframe.

The bedroom is quiet, the window shut by Marilyn when she went to sleep. Moonlight filters through the curtains, weaves its way through the heavy cloth and plays itself on my back, and it goes right through my skin. I shudder, I cannot move.

My skin feels like lantern paper: it's tough, but the flames beneath are glowing through. If you look closely, you can see the layers of dirt that lie beneath the skin, the coals. And the tough skin on my head, under its short-cut coating of brown hair, itches with sweat. The sweat drips agonizingly over my scalp and around the curve of my ears before stopping halfway down.

I trace the doorjambs with my eyes, pupils crawling down the dark wood. I crouch down slowly. My hands are still stuck in front of me, clenched tight. I lick my lips, and my skin tastes like other bedrooms, like ragged breathing.

It's the corner of the door that's got me; the way the door closes into the wall. There's something wrong about it, and I cannot look away. Marilyn is snoring lightly in the background, now; I can barely hear her. The living room is dark; I cannot see an ounce of it; my entire psyche is focused on the jutting edges of the door.

I spin slowly, left then right, my eyes staying on that corner. I am terrified now, terrified of greeting the morning with my eyes stapled to the doorway, petrified that I will never be able to get out of here, that I will be lost forever in a sea of my skin. I gasp.

I am gasping, I am gasping, I

II.

"Nathan," he's saying to me, "Nathan, listen." I'm stuck here for the moment but I'm not sure what to say.

"I'm listening". His skin is so soft, so smooth. His lips curl upwards in a grimace, the stubble on his cheeks pressing into the skin, but I can see them in a smile.

His lips are so red. I love the way that when I'm with him, I can lose focus of everything except the parts of me that are touching him. I'm holding his hand, and I'm completely aware of his earlobe, the way it curves into his skin like a pearl held tight within an oyster.

I want to tell him that he's beautiful, so gorgeous, and that I would never have pictured myself fucking a man like him, but he wants emotions. I know just how bad it is to be told ambiguities to try and soften blows, but I just can't help it.

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I open my eyes, and I am still in darkness. The door has shut, and I don't know how I can get it open again.
Her beautiful mind misinterpreted,
her life confused and quarantined away,
she was taken in secret
and sealed in the Rocky Mountains
behind a great stone wall anchored in a sea
of prostrate green.
It was a communication blackout,
really. They said, “Forget the past to move into the future!”

No more New York City skies
whistling wind through tall steel girders.
An end to mid-winter sing-alongs in roaming packs
down Avenue C to Umbrella Haus,
splashing through black puddles,
our sneakers soaked in slush.
Only mountain skies and stone-tipped walls,
the sun bright above, ringed with fire,
and John Dewey whispering
“Don’t fly too close, Icarus,
you will surely burn.”

But now the dextroamphetamine have long worn off,
and the cigarette burns have healed,
and the best minds of her generation lie
prostrate on the floor,
taking last wispy pulls of Cancer
under a fading Tompkins sky.
the home stretch

it’s like
spitting up and bleeding out
calculating and cantilevering
gouging and retching and plowing and polishing
your life
onto paper

and then being told
Thanks for the time and effort
Thanks for your life and dreams
but
you’re not good
enough
for us.
And hopes
dashed
down the shower drain
with the hair and the snot.

So

we built the Wall of Shame
because we were not ashamed
of posting our battle wounds for all to see
thumbtacked through the cork
and straight into the eyes of admissions officers.

And as we trundled through the halls
a mess of North Faces and Carhartts, Birkenstocks and flannel
pencils pushed into hair, bare feet and dread locks
baseball caps, button-ups, sweatpants, perfect curls
jerseys and hoodies and fake tans and hemp necklaces
I imagined us doing a spontaneous choreographed dance
we’d shimmy down the stairs
and explode into the H wing and the B wing
past the lockers and the guidance office
in a whirl of synchronized high kicks and turns.

I love you
my cocoon
or nest, rather, of
snatched strings and
paper bits and things
thanks for the thoughts
thanks for the disbelief
thanks for coming to the funeral
let’s all go to the movies
let’s all go fishing
let’s all go hell in a fast car
we’ll
blow
this
town
oh yes -

in a fit of everything we've been and everything we are
- let's not worry about what we will be just yet –
hearts in our hands hands on our hearts
voice in the air
pencil to blue pamphlet
doughnut to mouth
eyes on the ball
thumb on the buzzer
fingers on guitar strings
make-up to face buzz your lips
easy now

let's go
As I was lying in a tree one night,
Eyes set high, while trains settled down the tracks
And sirens sighed off in the night somewhere
In scenes I’d never see,
My sight began to fail me, I believe,
Because it seemed to me, I swear, as though
The sky was closer to me than the leaves.
Another Disappearer

Your shirt is the color of red-nosed reindeer, with fur flat in the wet heat, smelling faintly of sweat or last Friday night in the Starbucks bathroom, oh god. The scent of your skin against my nostrils, I breathe from that night, but you sit silently now in shadowed backseat center, me driving, your eyes lost in the forward-view mirror like it’s oracular. You’re plugged into the stereo, and I wish you were into me. I want to talk to you the way I talk to my dreams, feel you respond with words and words and words, constant interplay of empathies, and you like to say that the right sort of music is truly erotic, stimulating, but the melody is washing past me and dividing us, some reverse Moses effect along the Red Sea of the headrest.

I am alone surrounded by leather and music, the moonlight filling the seat a milky, empty companion, but I can hear your breathing. I can hear you breathing, and the wheels roll over a hill, trees to the left and buildings right. I’m biting my lip like my sister used to do, questing for answers with my teeth, and it’s not quite right the way you’re never there when I turn back and look, holding the wheel cautiously with damp fingertips and twisting like a yogi, though I can hear your breathing.
A New Skill

One push of the clutch at a time
was all it took to push me
over the edge,
so he learned how to drive stick,
becoming a reluctant authority
on the gentle braking
one must use the moment before collision.

Every night—driving lessons;
unless he was tired or I had a headache
at which point we sat
and we listened
to the soft clank and trickle
of our engine at rest.

Sometimes, in our eagerness,
we stalled
and then the smell of burnt rubber
reminded us of what we might have accomplished
if we had a license—

for once we became parking-lot proficient
our hands were free and easy on the shift,
and we would have driven home but

instead,
we fumbled in the dark
unsure, excited yet
scared of the trees whipping by like grass we
were
reckless, untouchable,
completely unaware
of the what was waiting around the bend.
You used to think that drugs would make you high, but you told me once a while ago that they never did anything for you, really. Me, I’m content spinning around and around in circles until the floor pulls up against my side and my eyes flick back and forth and forth. For the moment, I am sitting comfortably still. Are you sitting comfortably? I am sitting in my dorm room on the spinning chair the college gave me, the chair that welcomed me to school three weeks ago. It really is a nice chair, so spanking new that the tag describing its ergonomics was still pinned to it when I unlocked my door for the first time. I am sitting here in this pleasant, sage-green chair, sucking on a Werther’s Original, picking at my lip, straightening the row of pennies I arranged two days ago at the edge of my desk, and I am praying to the Gods I don’t believe in that you have Lyme Disease. Tell me true when we were standing in the woods, your cannabis fumes stinking up that futon we pulled from the side of the road (when Dave asked me if this was my first time and handed me three bottles of misty tap water without explanation), when we were walking to that clearing in the woods, did you feel a prick on your ankle? Did you find that awful black lump there the next time you showered, or maybe the next time you pulled on your socks? Did your cheeks tingle with disgust when you wrenched it out with tweezers and left its shiny head embedded in your skin? Better yet, could it be that you never found it— that it perhaps gorged itself on your sweet fluids and, satiated, dropped to your bedroom carpet only to meet its end beneath your unseeing sole? It made a bloody mess, but you assumed it to be a by-product of yet another ill-timed nosebleed. You cleaned it with a tissue and milk-and-honey hand soap. But you don’t remember the tick, just like you don’t remember my birthday, just like you don’t remember to take your medicine in the morning, just like you don’t remember to tell your doctor that you can’t remember anything, anymore. Out of frustration and concern, out of sympathy and out of fear, I sought you out from the mires of the Internet. In the search box in the dead of night I entered your every symptom, ailment, and malady. From my fingertips I let flow every illness that you have let overcome you. I purged myself of your insecurities and your fears, your shyness and your anxiety, your attention span and your memory, panic attacks and clunky job interviews, Dave’s suicide and every afternoon you spent locked in the bathroom with paper towels wrapped around congealing wrists.

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Case Study

You used to think that drugs would make you high, but you told me once a while ago that they never did anything for you, really. Me, I’m content spinning around and around in circles until the floor pulls up against my side and my eyes flick back and forth and forth. For the moment, I am sitting comfortably still. Are you sitting comfortably? I am sitting in my dorm room on the spinning chair the college gave me, the chair that welcomed me to school three weeks ago. It really is a nice chair, so spanking new that the tag describing its ergonomics was still pinned to it when I unlocked my door for the first time. I am sitting here in this pleasant, sage-green chair, sucking on a Werther’s Original, picking at my lip, straightening the row of pennies I arranged two days ago at the edge of my desk, and I am praying to the Gods I don’t believe in that you have Lyme Disease. Tell me true when we were standing in the woods, your cannabis fumes stinking up that futon we pulled from the side of the road (when Dave asked me if this was my first time and handed me three bottles of misty tap water without explanation), when we were walking to that clearing in the woods, did you feel a prick on your ankle? Did you find that awful black lump there the next time you showered, or maybe the next time you pulled on your socks? Did your cheeks tingle with disgust when you wrenched it out with tweezers and left its shiny head embedded in your skin? Better yet, could it be that you never found it— that it perhaps gorged itself on your sweet fluids and, satiated, dropped to your bedroom carpet only to meet its end beneath your unseeing sole? It made a bloody mess, but you assumed it to be a by-product of yet another ill-timed nosebleed. You cleaned it with a tissue and milk-and-honey hand soap. But you don’t remember the tick, just like you don’t remember my birthday, just like you don’t remember to take your medicine in the morning, just like you don’t remember to tell your doctor that you can’t remember anything, anymore. Out of frustration and concern, out of sympathy and out of fear, I sought you out from the mires of the Internet. In the search box in the dead of night I entered your every symptom, ailment, and malady. From my fingertips I let flow every illness that you have let overcome you. I purged myself of your insecurities and your fears, your shyness and your anxiety, your attention span and your memory, panic attacks and clunky job interviews, Dave’s suicide and every afternoon you spent locked in the bathroom with paper towels wrapped around congealing wrists.

---

It is quarter after two in the morning on a Wednesday. I am crunching on the remaining shards of my Werther’s, and I am trying not to think about waking up in five hours. Are you sleeping comfortably? I am praying to every God there is and every God there isn’t that that the explanation for all of you is so simple, and that you can be raised again to the world of the clear-sighted with a mere dosage or two of blessed antibiotics.

---

becca

morgan
One afternoon, while building impenetrable forts in my sandbox, I see something odd. A middle-aged woman skips through the dandelions, trying to catch butterflies with an oversized net, grinning like an idiot. I am rightly confused at this sight, since it is cloudy and gray outside, gas prices are up, and there was yet another massacre at the Center for Cute Puppies. And yet this woman giggles and hops.

But I know what to do: “WHERE ARE YOU, SERGEANT SENSIBLE?” I shout.

With the familiar gurgle of his station wagon, Sergeant Sensible pulls around the corner towards us, molested by this woman’s excessive happiness. He walks out of the car with slightly above-average speed.

The woman, subdued by her own giddiness and a large monarch butterfly, is oblivious, and Sergeant Sensible sees his chance. Unhinging his jaw, he walks behind the woman, sinks his teeth into her leg, and pulls it off clean (above the knee joint of course, making effective prosthetic implantation impossible). Bleeding heavily, she soon passes out from the pain. She is confined to a wheelchair for the rest of her life, ending her Olympic marathon dreams and making butterfly-catching amusingly futile.

“Wow, thanks Sergeant Sensible!” I yell.

“No problem,” he replies. “Just remember, kid: always keep a reasonable perspective.”
Tight pants in black, camo and blue hugging hips, thighs, knees, ankles, tapered to a point tucked inside boots and cons or rolled up to show laces tied together leading down to steel-toed tips that lash out in kicks and swirls, making contact with knees and backs, shirtless and covered in sweat, red and dripping from the heat and the motion, the guitar solos and the drums.

Someone flies across the room and hits my outstretched arm with a wet slap. I slide backwards on the beer-splashed concrete floor but stay upright and push back while others join me and we send the sloping, struggling body spinning off across the room, legs kicking, arms flailing, mouth open yelling words lost in the fray with eyes wide in adrenaline rush.

Someone falls, hitting the floor with another wet slap, and he slides a few feet on sweat and spilled beer and momentum before swarms of hands spill down around him, grabbing arms and back and shoulders. Legs kick straight and he’s up, the back of his white shirt stained brown and stuck to his broad shoulders. He’s off and spinning again hitting people on his way into a brick wall across the room.

“What’s good?” I yell into an open ear. A mouth turns and presses itself against my head and with the hurried gasping words ushered into my ear comes hot breath against my skin and a rushed excitement. There is a brush of sticky-wet hair as the speaker turns away towards the man-boy with the microphone, his mouth so wide with screams that he could swallow the thing whole, teeth yellowed from cigarettes and liquor and infrequent brushing because hey, who needs to deal with that? He holds the stand like a lover, grasping it with desperate hands, breathing himself into it with every strained note and raspy groan, tipping it forwards and back in a dance that sways and bobs and thrashes in graceful, violent glee.

The walls reverberate with bass lines and drum beats. The air reverberates. I reverberate. Everything is in my ears my ribs my throat my lungs, and my poor intoxicated brain tries to wrap itself around the room and its fifty-something occupants and falls back, tired and defeated, to wheeze in the corner.

Then there’s a new sound, a harsh one, shrill, piercing through me in waves, oscillations, the Doppler effect: it gets louder and as it does people pause. The flashing flailing wonder stops momentarily until suddenly everything is movement and colors and action, yelling and running and escape. Backpacks disappear off the floor and their owners vanish as quickly and mysteriously afterwards. The darkness is punctuated by throbbing red light that flows in through the windows along with the yells of angry officers with citations to give away like Christmas presents to the poor little kids at the basement show in Brooklyn.
At first, he was drowsy, his fur was downy and he created sleep with each step. But as we came to know the snail shells, the sweet rolls, the spirochetes he made with his legs and his tail while dozing, we realized he could not be anything but teeming with energy that circulates like blood, yet is tightly coiled, and never rests. It is with this image blooming that I remember your sweet moments, your intellect—the time in which you hadn’t washed your hair in five days was when I loved you the most. You were full of physics and I liked to think of you as a warm coil asleep beside me, humming. Sometimes I awake with his warmth on my back and I seize—I almost expect you to return silently, hopefully, softly in the night, to curl up beside me, your whiskers barely grazing my back.
sex magnetic poetry on your refrigerator door, July 08 2006

gentle
languid
she spread sweet beauty through me.
tremble
shudder
our private language

Sometimes I pull out my eyelashes because they are good for wishing and I have so so many wishes that I don't have the time to wait for my lashes to fall out on their own.

Lashes

—brian doherty

The Looking Glass

—summergrad

—lisa tsang

—bety
There is a broken family, and a woman with no job. There is a man who works for a bank and is unhappy. There is a girl who burns herself with cigarettes.

“You take the movie a little too much to heart, and cry a little too hard.” Sam doesn’t look over at you, just squeezes your hand gently, and begins to stroke it with his fingers. When the lights come up, you wipe your face and smile.

“Ready?” you say. He squeezes your shoulder and lets his hand fall to rest between your shoulder blades. It feels heavy, resting there.

“Sure,” he says, and pushes you gently towards the aisle.

“I have to go to the bathroom,” you say.

“Ok, no problem,” he says. “I’ll be waiting by the escalator.” In the bathroom, you wash your hands and splash some water on your face. You put your hair in a ponytail, and look at yourself in the mirror. You take the ponytail out and fluff your hair around your face. Next to you, a thin young woman with cropped blond hair is putting on lipstick. She puts the lipstick back in her purse and then begins to apply a sheer layer of blush to her high, beautiful cheekbones. She has the kind of arms (thin, but muscular) that you only dream of. You both turn to leave at the same time, but you let her go first.

“Thanks,” she says, smiling at you, and strides confidently out of the bathroom. You follow her out, and see Sam waiting for you by the escalator. His hands are in the pockets of his white linen pants, and he wears a light blue button down shirt open a little at the throat that shows his tan, muscular chest. He is bent over slightly, and looking down, and a few light brown curls hide his eyes from you. He looks up when he sees you coming, and starts to smile. From the side, you can see the blond woman looking at him. She tries to make eye contact with him. As she passes, he looks at her for a moment, and she smiles. He looks back at you, and watches you walk towards him.

The blond woman disappears down the escalator. Looking at Sam now, you have the sudden urge to hurl yourself at him, throw your arms around his neck, and not let go. But you know enough by now not to let yourself; of what happens when you show your hand too early, or show it at all.

“Hi!” you say, smiling brightly, when you reach him.

“Hi,” he says, and bends over, putting his arms around your waist and kissing you suddenly. You have to stand on your tiptoes to reach him, but he moves one of his hands to your back to support you. You begin to burn inside, and for once, can’t think of what to say.

“What was that for?” you ask, trying to say.

“No reason,” he says, smiling shyly like a little kid. As you start to descend the escalator, you can’t help thinking how annoying you must seem from the outside, how cutesy and repulsive. You have thought this from the outside so many times.

The air on the street is thick and hot, a presence it seems, not like the chilled nothingness of the movie theater. As you move, you feel the beginnings of a breeze and you start to like the way the night air feels against your bare skin.

“Do you want to take a walk?” you suggest.

“Definitely,” he says, “It’s a beautiful night.” You decide to head for Central Park. On the way there, you hold hands and talk of small things. The movie, his sister’s job, the heat. You feel so comfortable in this smallness, and this comfort frightens you. You say something about the book you are reading, raising your voice a little.

“Hmm,” he says, and falls silent again. Not like he is uninterested, but like he is thinking about what you have said. At least you hope this is so. You take his hand and glance over at him, and he is already looking at you. You look down at your feet, but can’t seem to keep yourself from smiling.

When you reach the big round fountain with an iron statue of an angel, you decide to sit. You kiss for a time, then fall silent. For once this silence does not scare you. It seems natural. You hug him and he strokes your hair, and you feel as if anything might be possible. You try to imagine yourself as the kind of girl who belongs where you are sitting, and think that maybe you are not so far from this imaginary girl. You can feel this distance closing a little every day.

“I have a little something for you,” he says. From his pocket he pulls a small package wrapped in folded newspaper. When he gives it to you, you see that there is a little slip of paper with your name on it taped to the top. You look up at him, blankly. He bends over and looks down at the ground, rubbing his hands together slightly. You can see his feet tapping like they do when he’s nervous.

“I love you.” He pauses and looks up at you. “I love you, I do.” You look at him and narrow
your eyes. You feel nauseous, and your head suddenly feels much too heavy for your neck. This boy sitting in front of you – because that is what he is, you see, a boy not yet a man—was saying these words said only in movies, or else to other women with names like Janet or Tiffany or Meg. Surely this smallness, this comfortableness was not Love. You know enough to know that Love is found only in precariousness, with the fear that at any moment you might misplace him, or turn your back for a moment only, to pet a stray cat or examine a flower, and find him missing. But Sam looks at you now, with his pale boy eyes, solid and unmoving. Is love what is occurring here? You ask yourself. In schedules and returned phone calls, kept promises and meeting families. Can love live in small, solid things like these?

You decide that you will say it back to Sam and try to mean it. You decide that perhaps you are that kind of girl after all.

“I love you too,” you say, but the moment the words come out of your mouth they feel wrong and misshapen, your mouth gets that salty, watery taste in it that you get right before you are about to throw up, and you swallow and swallow, but can’t get rid of it.

Sam kisses you quickly, and then hugs you to him. You bury your face in his chest and smell his smell, warm and masculine and sweet.

“I almost forgot the present!” you say, remembering the little newspaper package. He releases you, and you unfold the paper to reveal an old silver, oval shaped pendant on a silver chain.

“I bought it at a flea market. The guy said it was his mother’s. It opens, and still has the pictures in it. I know how much you like that kind of stuff, looking into other people’s lives.” He smiles.

“It’s beautiful,” you say. You open it. On the right side is a small black and white photo of a man in an army uniform and a pretty woman with dark hair wearing a veil. On the left side, the photo is of a plump infant resting against a light green blanket. The pictures were yellowed slightly with age, but very clear. “It’s great, really.” You say, “You’re right, I do love looking into other people’s lives.” He smiles.

“You smile widely at him, and he grins.

“I’m glad,” he says. You put it on, and hold it in your palm for a moment.

“Let’s keep walking,” he says, and takes your hand. You walk a ways underneath dark trees and park lampposts, and a slight wind blows your hair onto your back. At once, you try to think about and not think about what has just occurred. Sam takes long loping strides like he does when he is thinking, and you have to scurry to keep up. You walk down a wide path with a row of benches on each side. The path curves, and ends at a lamppost. Two men are talking next to it, one is leaning against the lamppost and smoking, the other wears a blue canvas hat and stands across from him. As you and Sam pass, the one in the hat says to Sam,

“Hey man, got a lighter?” in this low, broken voice.

“Sorry, I don’t smoke,” Sam says and keeps walking. But this man takes a few steps backwards and blocks the way. He has thick dark stubble all over his face, except for a few patches on his chin and cheeks that are bright pink and flaking.

“Yeah, I bet you really sorry.” He turns to you then, and sticks his eyes from yours down your body, and then up it again to meet your eyes. You remember often thinking to yourself that this is the crudest gesture that exists in the world. You pull on Sam’s hand and try to walk around this man.

“Excuse me,” you say.

“Where you think you goin’, girl?” the man in the hat says, smiling. At this, the other man that has been silent up until now, throws his cigarette on the ground and takes a slow step forward. In the light, you can see he is much younger than the other man. His face is clean-shaven, and he wears a black leather jacket that is much too big for him, and dark jeans.

“Look, we don’t want any trouble,” Sam says, holding up his hands.

“There ain’t gonna be no trouble here,” the young one says. He puts his hands out in front of him, arms bent, palms towards each other. “This is how it’s gonna be. You gonna give us exactly what we say, and everybody walks away. We good?” He slips his hand into the left side of his leather jacket, and pulls out a small black gun. He lets the hand with the gun fall to his side. The gun shines in the light of the lamppost, and Sam inhales sharply and takes a step forward, putting his body slightly in front of yours.

“Oh,” he says. “Ok, we got it.”

“Good,” the young one with the gun says. “Now, you boy, gonna give us your wallet and that watch.” He motions to Sam’s left arm with the gun. Slowly, Sam unfastens the watch and holds it out the man, who takes it and puts it his pocket. Then Sam reaches into his pocket and draws out his wallet, which he also holds out. This time, the older one snatches it and starts to open it and root through it.
“Now, you girl.” The young man turns to you now, and you feel a jolt pass through you and down your legs. “Lemme get that purse.” You notice that this man’s skin is beautifully taut and smooth, the color of coffee with lots of milk in it, the way you like it. Keeping your eyes on him, you let the strap of your purse slip off your shoulder and fall into your hand. You hold it out to him. He takes it from you and meets your gaze, then abruptly looks down at it and hands it to the older man.

“Nice, nice,” the younger one says, as if speaking to a lover. “Now that necklace you got there.” You clutch the oval pendant to your chest, and look for a moment at Sam. His eyes are filled with the deepest kind of sadness, as if this is the worst blow of it all. You look away and unclasp it from your neck, and hold it out to the young man. It dangles there for a moment before he takes it, and you think, how right, how fitting that you should wear it for a moment only.

He takes it and holds the oval part in his palm for a moment. “Pretty,” he says, “real pretty.” He looks at you now, and smiles a little. He stares at you for a long while, and you don’t look away. In that moment, things come sharply into focus, and your eyes begin to hurt and your head swims. You see this man looking at you in that way. You can see out of the corner of your eye, Sam looking back and forth between you and this man. You can see it all happening already, and you open yourself to it. You can feel yourself expand a little. Suddenly, the younger man turns to the other.

“Well,” he says, and gives the older man the necklace. Then he extends his right hand with the gun in it to the older man, and turns the gun so that the handle faces the sky. “You hold onto this,” he says to the older man. Then to Sam,

“Stay here awhile with my friend. I’m gonna have a little chat with your girl.” Then those eyes are on you again. You do not move, do not try to run. You see this scene before you as if you have seen it somewhere before, perhaps in a dream, perhaps because you have lived it already thousands of times.

“What are you going to do with her?” Sam yells, and takes another step in front of you. “Don’t you touch her!” he shouts. The young man in the leather jacket waits. You take Sam’s hand and squeeze it.

“It’s ok,” you say softly. Sam looks at you then, his face contorted in horror and his eyes clouded with confusion, and you see then that the girl reflected in his eyes is so far from you, and always was.
So I’m sitting here
done with my drink
and all I got is this cup of ice
and I’m thinking
what is like a cup of ice?
Love
is like a cup of ice
because in the grand scheme of things
I mean grand
really grand
anything can be damn near anything else
and love can be a cup of ice
if you want
especially when you stick too much in your mouth
and your gums go numb
and your nerves get frayed
and you start chewing and swallowing
and then you start spitting because you know
you don’t want flat teeth
But damn
even with just ice in that cup
I mean sucked dry
like maraca-time if you had a lid
there’s still something in there
you just gotta wait for that shit to melt a little
and you ain’t gettin too much to drink
but damn that swig’s gonna be cold
if you can wait
and maybe you wanna go sip by sip and play it cool
or maybe you’re holdin’ out for that big gulp at the end

…and she knew she was
too young for this. She was
a girl of sixteen candles
minus three being led by
five fingers times two down
countless steps.
she had felt wise
beyond her years
she knew she was
bad, thought she
could hide her baker’s dozen of years
behind two tequila shots
plus three vodkas times the
thirty strangers flowing freely
in a brand new living room
but she had never done this before
so she cowered inwardly, protecting
her tenderness between strands of
close-cropped bleach-blond hair and
mixed in with the cool kids like
oil and vinegar
she somehow knew she had
been misplaced, laid aside in the wrong compartment,
when from across the room
she started receiving two telegraphs,
dual pearls dividing her heart in two
times five shots times
thirteen years total lived in
one hundred thirty seconds of
deadlocked gazes as her stranger
crosses the party lines

New Math
and calculated her free will
to be less than the creases in his heavy palm
and realizes that in
forty strokes, fifteen minutes
he would paint his masterpiece
across a pale skin canvas
wearing a cream-colored belt with
four holes minus three it
would have served the same purpose
for it fit too loose around her wiry frame
to protest
as five fingers subtracted one line of defense
as the cold metal of a
seatbelt pressed into her back,
already populated with smooth skin
plus thousands of goosebumps,
added one sharp gasp
to the equation
one breath devoted to the boyfriend
whose name she divided
between softened edges
at the corners of her vision as
experience was added, years subtracted from
her trust
and she
climbed
back upstairs to subtract 1 evening
and pretend nothing ever happened
The best way to see a falling star
is not to watch, he tells me.
I always look too early or too late,
turning my head to catch a sky of nothing
but scattered stars pinning the black up
like thumbtacks.

It’s cold for August.
The grass is damp and seeps
into my back through the blanket.
I curl the edges up around my bare feet,
regretting my flip-flops and
grateful for my sweatshirt
against the chill.

We use it as an excuse to touch.
He is the stripe of warmth against my side
while I stay still, pretending
that my shoulder to thigh against his
is an accident, a side-effect
of meteor showers.

I miss another star and he takes my hand,
guides my index finger, his jaw
pressed against my cheek
while we try to see the sky
with the same eyes. I claim I can’t
just so we can stay like this
a little longer.

A little longer is all we have.
Summer is almost over but for tonight
we linger and he smokes a cigar,
which any other night would be all wrong,
but not tonight. Tonight the smoke
washes over the dark, drifts up,
and smells like autumn.
I watch her at the wheel. She peers intently through her shaggy brown bangs, her fake designer jeans rolled ankle-length and worker shirt wrinkled. The way Janus handles cars is intimidating. “I like a little humor in my driving,” she says as she swerves the crusty old Volvo down dark country roads.

“You sure you know where we’re going?” I look out the window as we plunge into the belly of the state, into the land that could easily be mistaken for Arkansas, were it not flanked by Philly and Pittsburgh. Taking the silence as an affirmative, I swing my legs onto the dashboard, still trying to reconcile the relentless growth of my adolescence with the world’s cramped quarters, and mumble, “Your car sucks, Jan. Your driving, too.”

She answers with a laugh that fills the car, “There’s comfort in contortion, little sister.”

We pull into the parking lot of a liquor store and wait for Toby. Against the Volvo’s slowing putter Janus wiggles anxiously in her seat, her pink acrylic nails tap-tap-tapping five second indentations into the wheel. These traveler’s rhythms remind me of the last time I saw her dance, when it was in our quiet colonial with the staid neighborhood night to mask her clandestine midnight rave, party of two.

With complete disregard for our sleeping parents, Janus sent shivers through the furniture and floorboards, bobbing back and forth like a buoy caught in a swell.

“Sshhh! You’re crazy,” I said, looking up from the couch and smiling. “How about that interview?” I added, hoping this was a celebration of sorts.

Janus gave me a silencing look. Then I knew this was not a dance of triumph, of shining interview and budding career, but bitter catharsis.

“Hey!” Janus said, grinning fiercely again, “You watch, when I step onto the dance floor I will become alight with the power of the Ridiculous!” Her breathing came in short, excited spurts as she danced holes into the bottom of her socks. I laughed as I watched her long body bend in ways that seemed physically impossible, carving out original moves to party mixes and all the while speaking in a beguiling vocabulary of powerful, loose-swinging limbs.

In that moment I loved Janus’ expressive motion, despite its underlying causes, because for once in her life she was talking. Judging by the many detours her bumpy rides through life have taken, it’s

Lost Property
often been actual words that she can’t exactly master. But I don’t think it’s her fault. I want to
defend her and say it’s not the wiring of her brain nor the power of her memory, but the culture that’s
equipped her with only the crudest terms, clunky and imprecise words that trip past the tongue and
fly wickedly away if there’s just a hint of confusion behind their utterance.

When Janus was invited to this college by our cousin Toby, I watched her stumble and stutter
through excuses until she eventually gave in. “Come on,” Toby had said, “Don’t you want to go
to a college party, ever? You totally missed out! You should reclaim your youth, man!” I waited
anxiously for her reply.

“You’re so cynical,” Janus said to me with a little pat on the shoulder when I told her my res-
ervations. “Then why do you want me to go?”

She sighed, “Little sis. Do you want me to end up in Ohio?”

Inside the party those pink nails of hers curl around a beer can and
grasp it a lot less certainly
than the wheel. Some lazy-eyed boy approaches, and I can see Janus’ mental machinery just peter
out. The right words don’t come, or else they’re coated in a golden Budweiser slime, and I can tell
she’s too vulnerable, unsteadied by the mix of alcohol and unfamiliar surroundings.

After a while I pull her away, saying, “Jan, it’s probably time we headed back. Give me the keys
to your car.”

But she wants to stay. The guy murmurs some slobbery line about responsibility, she’s his
responsibility now. I shudder a little, thinking that his tone is teasing but his intentions are not.

“It’s no big deal, ok?” she says with a too wide, wobbly grin.

“C’mon, tomorrow she’ll probably just wake up with a bad hangover and you’ll have to drive
her home,” the murmurer adds. I try to edge him out, but he presses in closer and now it looks like
we’re cornering Janus, hungry for a taste.

“Shit!” I rush from the party, stunned and alarmed by her takeoff. This time I’m straining for
words, as every action freezes and my mind can only register an expletive.

“Shit!” I push past bodies, looking for Toby, screaming now for Janus. “Janus! JANUS!” But
she doesn’t answer back, she doesn’t say a word. I frantically scan the scene for her colorless work
shirt from the supermarket, or maybe those hideous nails. I imagine her knelt over some cold toilet
as the best possible scenario, the worst scenarios aimed for my conscience like rifle fire.

“Janus! What was I thinking? You can’t do this anymore, but I can’t stop you! Oh shit oh shit.”

I’m ranting in all directions now, but most people are too drunk to really notice.

Out of nowhere I begin to think of all the precious things I’ve lost over the years, jewelry with
generational significance, favorite winter coats, old notebooks. When I was younger I would tear
through the house looking for a lost item, upending furniture and scouring every room with a desper-
ate energy that drew frantic attention from the family. Hearing me wail, Janus would follow my trail
and wrap her long arms around me in a bear hug, almost to squeeze out the tantrum.

“Hey be quiet, kid. It’ll turn up, you know? Don’t worry, I lose things all the time but they turn
up.” I took what she said with utter conviction, and soon the object either reappeared or drifted from
thought. Thinking about it now, I’m surprised at how quickly I recovered from each loss, how the
emotion I used to feel seemed to deteriorate under the receding care of memory.

Now, with Janus lost, the sinkhole in my stomach reopens and I’m seven again, worrying what
Mom will say about my carelessness. I question the people nearest me, “Have you seen Toby? Um,
sort of tall? Brown hair, buzz cut? I need him to find my sister,” but barely listen to their answer
once someone slams a keg inches from my foot.

“Damn it, Janus! Twenty-five? Take care of yourself,” I throw my arms up, beseeching the
order of the Older Sisters to put this right.
Instead I hear Janus’ rumbling voice in my head, her soothing, automatic response to my tears at a lost treasure, “It'll turn up.”

I bend over, realizing that I have to catch my breath. My senses are ebbing, and I’m exhausted from panicking. Why does she do this to me? I circle the periphery once more, and I peer through the shadows again, but once this final sweep is up I turn my back on the party. I head for the car without looking back.

It’s like I’m being swept into Janus’ own words, caught in their tidal rush because there’s nowhere else to go. Janus is lost; she’s in some scary place doing who knows what, maybe even dancing, but it’s forever a void if I don’t know where it is. I lean heavily against the Volvo and then collapse onto it, adjusting my body so that I’m almost hugging the hood. Light and loud music waver in the background, an inconstant pulse of defiant, seemingly endless life. My cheek rests against the dirty metal and I close my eyes.

I hear myself murmuring, over and over, “Big sis, you better, you’ve got to turn up.”
As the afternoon waxes craftily,
I take care with the long wooden rake
clasped smooth and slender in my gloves.
The thin brittle little fingers crackle
among the flower bed.

Weaving through the grass
they take the leaves and make weightless piles
for the black billowing bag.

Now the rain waves, late in the day, and wind
shakes the trees, shapes the trees,
while I beneath row slowly in the cove.
A rake my rudder, I tack and row on
toward the cold glow of evening.

you run
slowly, surely,
eight laps around
the track—at night,
the color of dried blood.
You would have stopped,
but did not,
your sister’s on lap nine.

Your father
a self-proclaimed coach
for the 10 P.M,
Tuesday night
3-mile.
He is silent
he grows a half-smile
on the bleachers.

Two laps more,
you’ve hit your stride.
Go on ahead of her
you think
she won’t catch up,
her cheeks are pink and
she is ten pounds heavier
than you.
holiday gifts

Alone now—
on the inside lane,
you're alive
though unkind
and you've crossed the finish line.

Back in his Mazda 626
he elaborates
on the benefits
of jogging.

You can't recall the last time
you felt like this—
almost happy,
strangely sick.

Your sister stares
at the cars you pass
not blinking from their headlights.

plastic passengers
are blissfully unaware,
even the engine cannot know,
the futility of a track
that runs in circles.

carly yasinski

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sam kaplan
“Have you heard about Kristin?”
By Kristin they mean death,
As though she herself were the aneurysm
And all that she ever was
Subsumed into her dying
The life that was her is gone;
Her song is transformed
To hushed voices and grief.
upon looking at a book of wallpaper samples, a stamp collection, or a wedding album

i. 
i like the sepia he said
with furrowed brow
and gestured with a hand
she sighed nervously
and touched her neck
it wouldn’t match the carpet
or the shades.

ii. 
would you please stop
kicking me he asked
i can’t concentrate
but she remembered a time
when footsie was more important than his stamp collection and kicked him again.

iii. 
what a wedding he said
you looked so handsome
she said and such nice weather he said those were the days they said back when we were—but then they quickly changed the subject.
Listen:

Grab your keys off the table.
Get in your car.
Drive.

Drive out of the city,
past the strip malls
and suburbs and neon
and highways
until you find yourself
driving on a dirt road
with no headlights
in the oncoming lane
or rearview mirror
to light your way.

Get out of the car,
turn off your headlights,
and look up.

Now you know why your ancestors
put their gods between them and the sky.