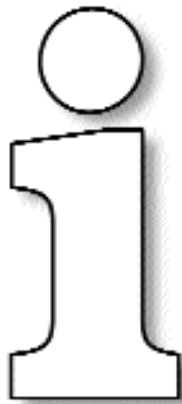




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ON THE SOCIAL IMPROPRIETY OF STANDING AND STARING

• *Inscape Essay Award* •

Today a random thought lodged itself in my mind. While this is hardly an isolated incident, the nature of the idea was so unusual to me that I had to pause to examine the strange logic by which it appeared. My thought: "I wish I smoked." My reasoning: "because then I would have an excuse to stand out in the open and stare at things." At the time this notion appeared, I was walking around campus, trying to decide if I should go straight home or buy a cup of coffee. Then I caught a glimpse of sky: full white cumulus clouds backlit by the sun, golden on the edges, with long rays of light extending visibly from the cloud. It reminded me of a child's landscape drawing, complete with crayon yellow sun rays reaching all the way from the sky to touch the stick people and the birds that resemble V's. Caught up in wonder, I longed to stop in my tracks and stare open-mouthed at the sky. However, being a properly indoctrinated American adult, I recognized that it is not Socially Acceptable (or shall I say comfortable?) for a person to stand in the middle of a walkway, gazing at something, without an acceptable excuse.

Now there are, of course, mitigating circumstances that would pardon such deviant behavior. "I'm waiting for a friend" is good, especially if you look at your watch every few minutes and repeatedly scan the area. Then when your friend comes you will be vindicated for the asocial, possibly criminal, behavior. Another good one is "I want to finish my cigarette," which is obviously the true reason people still smoke these days. Evidently smokers are smarter than the rest of us and realized some time ago that in order to protect a few minutes to themselves they would have to roll up some herbs in a small square of paper and then spread some reports that this habit is life-threatening. That way, they can stand and stare at whatever they want, and other people won't bother them because they don't want to inhale the deadly gases. Unfortunately, if you don't have an obvious excuse such as one of

these, you may be viewed by passerby as "strange" or, what's worse, "unproductive."

There seem to be few sins as worthy of contempt as unproductivity. We wear badges of business around to prove to ourselves and others that our lives have meaning, that we are not frivolously wasting these lives we have been given. Have you ever witnessed this dialogue: "How are you?" "Oh, fine, fine, keeping busy" or "How are you doing these days?" "Ok, but a little tired, you know, from all this stuff I'm doing." Tired is good, Tired proves that you have been fulfilling your social obligation to maintain a constant state of business and are therefore valuable in the eyes of society. How could it be otherwise in a country where one's value is measured by one's success, and one's success is dictated by hard work, and one's hard work is evidenced by one's completely insane calendar?

Because of this, I am embarrassed when overcome by latent tree-hugging desires to stop on the sidewalk of a busy overpass and admire the rapidly shifting colors of a particularly gorgeous sunset, with clouds stretched in wispy strands and illuminated in tones of rose and gold. No doubt every passenger in every car in the six lanes of traffic in front of me is staring and wondering what the heck I'm doing. Clearly I am violating the American Work Ethic by standing in one place without apparent cause for more than two seconds. And I am keenly aware of my transgression; my heart is beating fast and my mind is racing, even as I struggle to overcome the ingrained urge to keep moving. More than once, I wish a bus stop sign would suddenly appear next to me to give some kind of rationale for my odd behavior. I suppose it's possible that not as many people really care what I'm doing as I think, but I know that some people are turning to look at me because I am also casting furtive glances at them to see if upon observing me gazing off into the distance, they also turn to see what attracts my attention. Then they would understand, and I would not feel quite so much like a freak. Finally, a bicyclist, upon seeing my fixed stare skyward, turns his

head too, and when he sees the bright pink clouds gracing the sky, he turns his whole body toward the sight, holding the handlebar with his left hand and swinging his right hand back to counterbalance himself. I smile to myself and walk away, chalking this up as my act of Cultural Resistance for the day.

ALI LAUER

LAST LEG OF THE JOURNEY

I walk toward the doorway marked “citizens” leading into the designated exhibition hall at the L.A. Convention Center. It is only 8:00 a.m. yet the place is teeming with people, a myriad of noises bouncing off the bleak, sterile walls. We are only allowed into the hall if we have an appointment letter. Mine is clutched aloft as I wave it at the guard like a flag of surrender. Passing through the door I stop in my tracks. The hall is cavernous, eerily highlighted by blue-white fluorescent lighting. Centrally placed above the podium stretches the room’s only adornment: the largest stars and stripes I’ve ever seen. People are everywhere, shuffling and skittering in all directions. Momentarily panicked I envision holocaust victims herding into cattle cars. Things turn black - Oh God don’t let me faint, not here alone amongst all these people. I take a huge gasp of air and steady myself.

This is a day of many queues. I am so glad I speak English and can understand the directions booming out at us from the podium. I join a snaking line of humanity leading to one of the rows of metal framed chairs. Row, upon row, upon row of metal chairs. There must be thousands of them. My seatmates on either side are Asian, I recognize one or two Indians a few rows down. Today, here at this place, I am a minority. Scanning the room I determine Asian and Hispanic to be the majority. So many languages hum, chirp, rumble and squawk through the hall. We all wait, clutched into ourselves, our various documents grasped tightly in our hands, waiting for the next instruction.

Row by row we are shuttled over to the wall where a bank of INS officials sit, checking our paperwork one last time. The blue penciled “OK” is our goal on this last leg of our citizenship journey. Without this blue “OK” no citizenship status will be conferred that day - the worst of nightmares after having come so far. Looking for a friendly face I head toward a grandmotherly lady with roundly curled grey hair, pearls and glasses, sitting farthest away from the congealed masses. She smiles as I hand her my paper. I relax a muscle or two. Scanning the

questionnaire she asks why I had been out of the country since my first interview; “my father” I reply, “an emergency.” Nodding, she gently smiles again, complimenting me on my English accent. I hand over my alien registration cards. “Welcome to the United States” she says, giving back my paper, which now sports the cherished blue penciled “OK.” I grin back, trying to control the throbs of emotion pumping up inside. “Thank you, thank you very much.”

Now in yet another line leading to another seat to await the swearing in ceremony. Scanning the crowds of guests at the back of the hall, jostling behind ribbons of yellow “crime” tape, I spot my husband frantically waving and aiming the camera. He gives me a “thumbs up” as the camera clicks. I give him the “thumbs up” back. I am home free!

Such a diversity of people in the room. Many of the elderly are in wheelchairs, too feeble to walk or stand. From announcements we learn there are those of refugee status also waiting to be sworn in. I contemplate and wonder at the many and varied journeys taken in order for us all to arrive here today, to the same place at the same time, with the same goal.

An eternity seems to have passed, yet it is only 9:15 a.m. as we sit waiting for the judge to arrive and administer the Oath. There is time for me to reflect on my own journey to this place and this time. Perhaps not as dramatic as some, certainly not as life threatening as others, but fraught with personal travails, nevertheless. Each and everyone of us in the hall today are joined, at least for the moment, in a comradeship the likes of which will never occur again. Quite a feat; I am proud.

The swearing-in is done and an INS representative begins to speak. He dismisses the United States “melting pot” adage preferring, he says, to see the United States as a mosaic, made up of a collection of unique, individual, colorful tiles. I like this analogy. He goes on to say that those born in America by chance are not as fortunate as those of us born elsewhere. This is a new spin - now I’m really listening. We who have chosen to become citizens, he continues, do not take life in this country for granted, because we all know what it is to live with less. He

echoes a strongly held sentiment of mine, that all Americans should travel, for only then would they truly realize how blessed and well off they are.

The speeches are over, the media is poised to capture the moment as 6,000 become a commercial for citizenship, each waving a plastic flag. The ceremony is over.

On our way out of the hall we bump and elbow each other eager to claim our Naturalization Certificates. There are smiles, and squeals and tears. Before leaving the hall I have two more things to do before completing the last leg of my 34 year journey. The final queue I join that day is to hand in a passport application, reluctantly relinquishing the so newly acquired Naturalization Certificate - they won’t lose it will they? Lastly I submit a complete voters registration form, with a large “X” in the box marked “U.S. Citizen.”

For the first time in my life I am eligible to vote. Let the new journey begin.

ROBERTA HALES

WALKING BILLBOARDS

We've all seen those annoying things interrupting our concentration and enjoyment while reading the newspaper or magazines, watching television or listening to the radio. Those things make us turn the page quickly, reach for the remote to hit the mute button or turn the volume down on the radio. Yes, you know what I'm talking about: commercials or advertisements. Even though most people will not admit to being affected by them, look around. A woman wearing a Tommy Hilfiger sweatshirt, Calvin Klein jeans, Donna Karan sunglasses, and fuchsia Adidas just passed me. In her hand she held a can of Coke. On her back, she had a JanSport backpack. Oh! There's a man listening to Sony Walkman and wearing a Denver Broncos team jacket and a Super Bowl XXXIII tee shirt. I think he's hungry since he's carrying a bag from Burger King because he must have heard somewhere that when you have it your way, it just tastes better. I can hear another woman talking but to whom is she talking? Ah, yes, she's taking on a Sprint Digital [because clearer is better] PCS cellphone to the man from the mountain, a First Union broker (who came to her, since she couldn't go to the mountain). Of course, unlike other people, I'm not affected by advertisements. That's just a silly notion! So this morning I slipped on my Levi Strauss jeans and Nike Just Do It sweatshirt over my [Just Wait Til We Get Our Hanes on You] bikinis and Victoria's Secret Wonder bra. Then, after lacing up my Nikes, I put on my DKNY sunglasses and rushed out the door to my Lexus in relentless pursuit of [bodily] perfection at Bodies in Motion, because I know that I can rest when I'm dead!

MICHELLE ANGELINI

WE AREN'T POOR

We aren't poor. My brothers and I aren't like those starving children with bloated stomachs that you see on TV. We always have plenty of food. Every meal, our plates are piled high with food we like. After dinner, we usually have some cake or pie for dessert. We're never hungry. We even have food stamps left over at the end of the month.

We aren't poor. Our mother doesn't have to make our clothes like the mother on "The Waltons." We get our clothes from the store. I have two pairs of pants and a skirt and two shirts. By switching them around, I can go through a whole school week without wearing the same thing twice.

We're not poor. We're not like those people in Appalachia who live in a shack, with a water pump in the front yard and an outhouse for a toilet. We live in a big house in the city. My parents always rent big houses with hardwood floors and second stories, built for rich people a hundred years ago. And the plumbing works fine. Whenever we need hot water, we fill a big pot with cold water in the sink and heat it on the stove. It doesn't take long. We just can't use the water heater because my stepdad owes the gas company money from a long time ago, before we knew him.

We're not poor. With the check my mother gets from the government, she can pay the rent and the electric bill. There's plenty of money to buy my stepdad his beer, but I wish there wasn't. He's a mean drunk. But we aren't poor.

AMELIA VETRONE

SMITH FALLS

The sign reads Smiths Falls, POP 5,000. When the towns two stop lights are green, you can drive from one end to the other in exactly four minutes and forty-three seconds. Unless, of course, you get stuck behind Mrs. Dryden. She's the lady who drives the nineteen seventy-six Buick and never goes over twenty kilometers an hour. If you are uncertain as to where your friends are going to be 'hanging out' on any given weekend evening, head over to the local Burger King or the Soper (the only movie theater in town) and chances are pretty good that they will be at one of those two places.

I spent eighteen years of my life in Smiths Falls, POP 5,000 and could not wait to escape. To replace the monotony of that town with independence, adventure, and intrigue. I wasn't exactly sure how I would achieve that, but I was certain that Smith Falls could never provide it. I believed that.

Yesterday I drove past a sign that read Pasadena, POP 180,000. I have lived here for over five years, and in that time I have visited the Norton Simon Museum and seen the Picasso exhibit at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. I have walked the grounds of Huntington Gardens, and hiked the mountains of Altadena. I have shared secrets and pursued dreams.

Yet there is nothing more intriguing or adventurous than hurling a sap-ridden milkweed out of my sticky hands during one of the ongoing 'milkweed wars' my sister and I had with Dene and Ian Johnson. Or pedaling like crazy, fingers biting into the grips of my handlebars, as I tried to leap my bike over the monstrous 'mudhill.' And as to my independence, I think it reached its high point that one summer day when I put the last branch on the roof of my tree fort in the 'so-flats.' Permitting entry only to the select few who had been informed of the secret password. After spending the majority of my adolescence wanting to leave Smith Falls, I now welcome the opportunity to return. Not only did I have the time of my life in that town, but I also found the love of it.

Thomas Chadwick Hitchins is his name. We grew up together and the term 'childhood sweethearts' would definitely have applied to us. Weekend evenings during our senior year in high school were spent watching movies, or going to school dances and parties. The word love

was mentioned a few times, as was the word university. We both ended up going to different schools in pursuit of different careers. Although content with what we once shared, there was no doubt in my mind that it would pale in comparison to the mystery and romance that I would find abroad. I believed that.

Since that time, I have watched the tide roll in and out while sitting on the beaches on Santa Barbara, driven the coast to Monterey, enjoyed candle lit dinners and taken moon lit strolls. I have said the words "I love you" and felt them with my heart.

Yet the most romantic moment I have ever experienced occurred late one spring night while standing in the shivering rain, awaiting my first kiss from Thomas Chadwick Hitchins. He actually missed my lips, out of nervousness I think. Eventually, he got the placement right. And as for my sense of mystery? Well it hasn't been heightened since the evening we spent together exploring our culinary skills. It wasn't the impenetrable cloud of smoke coming from the oven door, preventing us from even locating the stove. Or the constant and deafening ring of the smoke alarm drowning out any possibility of reason. But rather the curiosity that came with actually taking the first bite. Yes, we both had too much pride to dispose of our scorched lasagna without a taste.

If along your travels, you ever happen to pass by a sign that reads Smith Falls, POP 5,000, make a right turn into Beckwith street and see what movie is showing at the Soper. I'd advise you to keep your windows rolled up while going through the outskirts of town. You don't want to get hit with an incoming milkweed. Whatever you decide to do, make your drive last longer than four minutes and forty-three seconds. I wish I did.

ALLISON GRAHAM

ON THE SUBJECT OF SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL

Of course we must have sympathy for the Devil, for he is a “child” - or an extension - of God. And if this is troubling or difficult for us, think how much more so for him. How would you like that calling, that job, that eternal life?

Especially when we consider his voice as manifest in the lyric, wherein he speaks to us not simply in his nature as Ahriman, ancient and risen from the blazing sands of Persia, but as what Ahriman has become to us, the Christian Satan, one of the most tragic of figures; the Fallen Angel.

An Angel. Take a moment to think on that. Not human, not like us, but closer to God, or a purer manifestation of the One, not expressed in matter but with matter at his disposal, sitting ‘at the right hand of God’ - what did he come to believe that made him rebel? It must have been, could only have been, that he was blinded by something within him - something too close to human, something that allowed him to be consumed by the very hubris which is so much the curse of humanity.

Did he revolt because he was afraid of what God was capable of? And is it his punishment to have become what he himself feared, made manifest? Is he, then, paying the price for having knowledge a bit too much like God’s, but the lack of acceptance and trust which made him too much like us?

Of course we must have sympathy for him.

And when he asks us to call him Lucifer because he’s in need of some restraint, we should not be surprised. It is, after all, his name, cruel irony. Lucifer, the bringer of Light, cast into the dual, the manifold, role: Ahriman, Satan: Spirit, Prince...of Darkness. When we call him Lucifer, we acknowledge that he is from and of God, and that he understands the awful nature of what he does, of what he now is. Such acknowledgment might, alone, express sympathy enough to stay his hand...a hand which it is thusly clear we all recognize as the hand of an angel.

O tortured soul.

Sent to manifest evil, born untold thousands of times and all as one, made to live as many histories as we have been able to devise for him, and always knowing each one’s path beforehand, always knowing that not only is he from the One, but he has been oh-so-much more a part of the One than most who will ever live, and that he is now of a different nature than he has once been. If we do not understand how God could allow, let alone create, evil and suffering, imagine how he feels, having been closer than we could ever remember being to God, and then being made the very instrument of evil and suffering.

All the stories he must live are true for him.

So we must have sympathy for him. Especially since we know that, in the end, whether or not our souls are laid to waste is not really his decision. This knowledge, that we mere physical mortals have the clear chance not only to resist him, but to transcend both him and our very roles in this passion play, must cause him an agony perhaps even greater, and almost certainly more profound, than that he suffers over the tasks his nature has inherited.

We should, for all these reasons, listen when he speaks. And even though, or precisely because, he holds no real danger for those who can love by understanding even him,

Of course,
we must have sympathy
for the Devil.

PATRICK LUBOW

WEATHER WARRIORS

It's cold, bitterly cold. It even looks cold. The temperature is 25° below zero with a wind chill of 80° below. You know that when you go outside; the inside of your nose will freeze, instantly, when you inhale. You know this, because you've experienced it before. It's eerie. It's dangerous. If you don't protect yourself from the deadly elements, you WILL be sorry. Every winter we get a few days like this, and local weather reports remind us of how long it would take to die if you stood outside naked - yes, a curious report, but descriptive, nonetheless.

It's early morning, and not a soul yet stirs on the streets below. I sit in my apartment looking out on the desolate city, wondering how I was going to gather the courage to drag myself out there. Cold is no reason for missing work. You are expected to get yourself there regardless of the weather. Besides, the El trains run in all kinds of climates - rain, snow, ice, and cold, so you can't even use the "dead car battery" excuse. Your boss's philosophy is if one person can make it to the office, then surely everyone can. And, of course, there is always some over achiever from work who lives across the street from or next door to the office who doesn't have to trek far at all, making it impossible for the rest of us to use the weather as an excuse to stay home, sleep late, read a good book, etc.

I drink my coffee, preparing for the frigid blanket I know will drape my body as I unwillingly step out my front door. There is no escaping it - no matter how I dress. All I can do is be brave! so, I clothe myself in multiple layers, leaving only my eyes exposed. I take a deep breath, and, reluctantly, off I go. The icy sun is bright, but radiates no heat. When I breath in, my lungs tighten, causing me to cough. I walk as quickly as I can to the El stop five blocks away. As I take off my glove to get my commuter pass from my pocket, I glare, with envy, at the teller in the heated cubicle, protected behind bullet proof glass. When I reach the platform, all I can do is wait - wait for the next train, my temporary salvation, to take downtown. My fellow commuters and I jump up and down, walk in circles, shift our weight rapidly from foot to foot - to

stand still is to freeze. We take turns leaning over the platform, looking down the track, as if this would make a train appear. Just seeing a headlight in the distance, coming in our direction will give us hope and keep us hardy. When the train finally does arrive, everybody jams in, no matter how crowded. On a warmer day, some might wait for the next train before they'd press themselves in like sardines, but not in this weather, no one waits! We charge into the train cars, madly, with urgency, before the doors slam closed, shutting us out, leaving us behind for 10 more brutal minutes. If we're lucky, our train will be one of the newer ones. The newer trains have heat, so that by the time we get downtown, we're just beginning to warm up, in time to continue our journeys to our offices. No one speaks - it's too much effort! We must conserve our energy!

Downtown is unforgiving. Lake Michigan, in her indifference to the human's quest for warmth and shelter, sends a continuous blow of arctic air, gaining speed as it whips around the skyscrapers, with gusts strong enough to blow an unsuspecting commuter off his feet. Covered faces scurry blindly with head down, using only familiar cracks in the sidewalks as guides to make it to their destinations. If you're one of the unfortunate ones who have to cross the river to get to your destinations, you'll have to fight with all your might to cross the all-mighty bridge. It's the bridges where you are at your most vulnerable. The giant, crissed-crossed, steel beams give forth the illusion of a frozen jail, and all who enter shall never leave. The choppy, gray river below sends glacial air upwards, locating nooks and crannies in your clothing and assaults you with its sting. Shivering, teeth chattering, numbed nose and ears, you make it, never certain you would, across the bridge of, seemingly, no return then onward to your destination.

By the time I reach my office, I am frozen, but exhilarated. I've made it! But, I've won only the battle, not the war. At 5:00 my struggle with Mother Nature will return.

ADRIENNE CORCORAN

FISHING WITH DAD

A fishing trip always began the night before, and it was always the same. There was comforting, ritualistic quality to the sequence of events, a ceremony that never changed. These nights were the only times Dad allowed me to stay up past the rigidly enforced bedtime for nine-year-olds, which was 8:30. This concession was not mere paternal indulgence, but for the sake of my education as a young fishergirl. At 11:00 p.m., Dad and I would go out into the garden and pad softly around the backyard with flashlights, tracing the surface of the lawn with bright beams. At night, especially the rainy nights so customary in Washington, the worms would come out of their holes so as not to drown and would often lay half in and half out, like kids at the swimming pool in summer, dangling their legs in the water. We would walk slowly so as not to alert the worms to our presence by shaking the earth with our footsteps. There's a nightcrawler! I would crouch down and grasp its sticky, slimy ridged skin. The nightcrawler, sensing its doom, invariably wrapped around my finger and squirmed feverishly. I dropped it into the milk carton half-filled with coffee grounds that would be its home until it met my hook. Poor nightcrawler! I always felt rather sorry to disturb his slumber and force him into the chamber that was the preliminary for his death, which would eventually come in the form of multiple stabbing by the hook at the end of my line. I usually asked Dad to do this squeamish task for me and much preferred salmon eggs as bait; no killing involved!

Next, we would go to the kitchen. Dad would slap some mayonnaise on white bread and cover it with two thick slices of ham. I wrapped cookies in tin foil and put a few apples in Dad's lunch box. I would be so excited that Dad had to insist I go to bed. He tucked me in with a gruff kiss and I would lay awake, smiling up at the ceiling, dreaming of big fish and deer on the lake's edge and baby ducks tagging after their mother, and being outside with Dad, just the two of us.

The morning always came too soon, dark and unwelcome. The excitement of the night before did no result in a restful night's sleep. I was cranky and resentful those mornings, but Dad would coax me out of bed by evoking mental pictures of fish frying in a pan for dinner and of the lake and all the creatures I would see. Dad crept through the house in his moccasins, trying not to wake Mary or Bill, my teenaged older siblings who now valued sleep more than family rituals. I would listen to the sizzle of an egg hitting a hot skillet and reluctantly put out my bare feet to be assaulted by the cold wood floor. First long johns, then jeans and sweater. Two pairs of socks under my boots. Gloves and hat and coat and a long yellow home-knit scarf, Mary's ambitious Girl Scout project. The kitchen was not the warm and inviting kitchen of cookies and Sunday afternoons, but the cold, dim, half-asleep variety. Dad had two plates on the table containing poached eggs and toast and sat down beside me with two mugs, mine hot cocoa, his, coffee. We ate quickly, famished and hurried, and then I stumbled out into the dark to the truck while Dad hooked the boat trailer to the truck and loaded the poles and tackle boxes. I carried the lunch box and the thermos of coffee.

We left a silent street of sleeping houses and joined the early morning highway community, which was only slightly more lively. We passed an occasional big-rig and I waved energetically to the other drivers. The eastern horizon, now yellow, faded to light blue sky overhead, and pitch black on the western side. Night and day kissed each other good-morning, and we drove on through the wooded highway.

When we arrived at the lake, a bursting sunrise with clouds tinged rose and yellow declared the sun's first greeting. Hovering over the lake was a thick mist, covering the waters with a blanket of mystery. Dad launched our boat, laden with all our necessities, into the water and steered us right into the middle of the lake. It was like being inside a cloud. The thick, moist air closed around us and obscured the view of the sky and the shore, and everything was foggy, like a dream.

Dad mercifully consented to bait my hook, and we cast into the lake's depths. We sipped coffee from the thermos and waited, expectantly, watching our bobbers and willing the fish to oblige us. Dad's superior casting technique inevitably yielded the first catch of the day, and I rejoiced heartily as he coaxed its slippery form out of the water and into the waiting net. He placed the fish in the waiting bucket, which I eagerly peered into every few minutes with a surge of hope and longing. Dad would bait again and recast. More fish would follow, eventually one of them brought in at the end of my hook and Dad coached me gently to reel it in smoothly and firmly. He netted it for me and I put it in the bucket, which I now gazed into with pride and satisfaction.

Gradually, gradually, the dawn stole away and the warmth of the sun spread over us like a welcome blanket. We shed our excess layers and started to swat mosquitoes. The bird song was now accompanied by the gentle splashes of fish, leaping out of the water to catch some breakfast and sometimes I caught sight of them. Dad and I sat quietly together, enjoying the silence, not feeling any desire to break the stillness with words. And then it was lunch time. I gobbled down my ham sandwich, half smooshed from its long journey, and declared that no other ham sandwich in creation had ever tasted so good. I threw my crusts to the ducks, who squabbled loudly over my crumbs. I always tossed toward the smallest ducks and loved to watch them dive down, sticking their tail feathers up in the air.

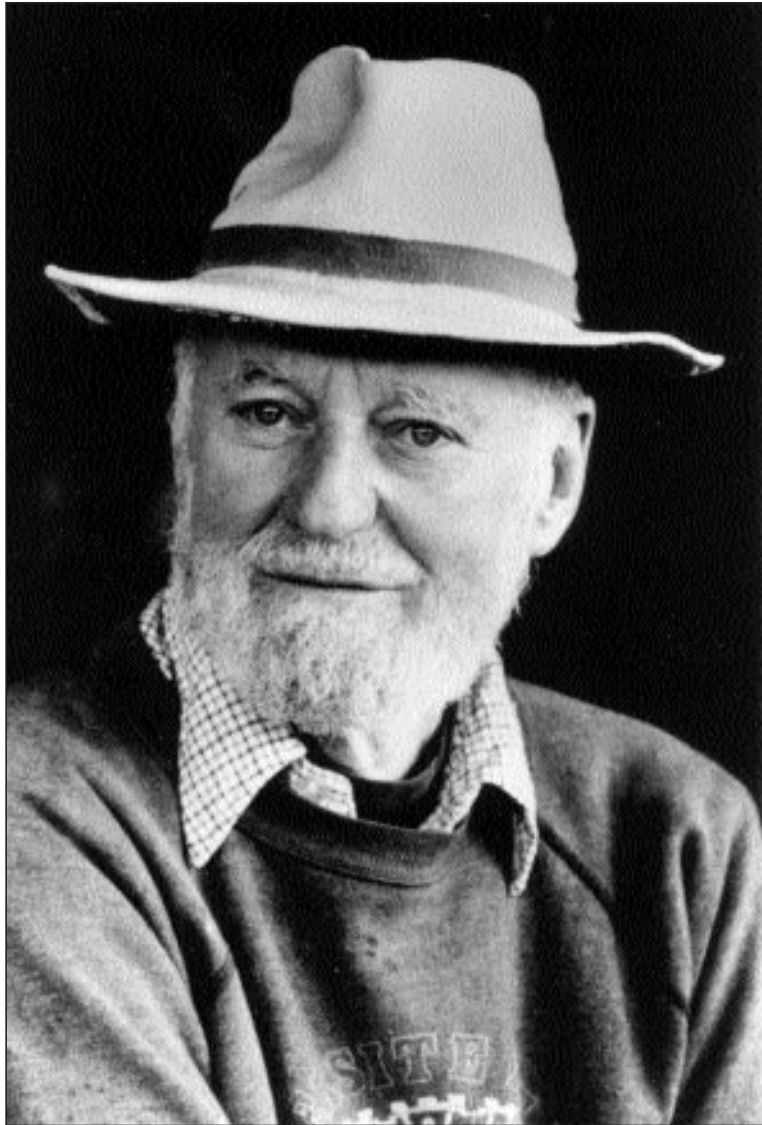
The afternoon wore on. Relaxed to the point of boredom, the warmth of the air and the food in my stomach conspired to make me sleepy and I felt a compelling urge to curl up in the bow, just for a minute or two, and sleep. As I drifted off, the sounds of Dad reeling in his line, the wind in the trees, and the mallard's domestic squabble grew softer and softer and then faded away altogether.

I woke with a start to the sound of the boat's motor. Dusk was approaching and Dad had caught his limit. We putted over to the side

of the lake, and I took my last admiring gaze at sky and water.

The boat was hitched, the truck loaded, and the fish settled for the journey home in their bucket at my feet, so I could look at them and delight in our success. We drove into a sunset which was the inverse of the sunrise so many hours before and talked eagerly of skilletts and frying trout and warm beds. And then we were home.

ALI LAUER



Lawrence Ferlinghetti was born in Yonkers, New York, on March 24, 1919. Lawrence's father died a few months before he was born. When Lawrence was a year old, he moved in with his mother's uncle, Ludwig Mendes-Monsanto and his wife, Emily. Lawrence's mother, Clemence, had gone insane and had been admitted to a state hospital. Not long after Lawrence was adopted by his great aunt and uncle, they began having marital troubles. Soon after reconciling, Ludwig and Emily had severe financial difficulties and decided to put Lawrence in an orphanage. Eight months later Emily separated from Ludwig, and took Lawrence away from the orphanage. Emily and Lawrence moved to Bronxville, New York.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti eventually went to University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. While Lawrence was in college, he became circulation manager for the college newspaper and continued to write poetry which he'd begun writing at the age of 16. After graduating from college, Lawrence returned to Bronxville and enrolled at Columbia University Graduate School after being discharged from the Navy. Lawrence decided after receiving his master's degree to move to France, where he worked on his doctoral degree in poetry at the Sorbonne in Paris.

Upon completion of his degree, Lawrence moved to San Francisco where he and Peter Martin began a magazine called "City Lights." According to Cherkovski, "City Lights was an attempt to give voice to the cultural ferment [they] found developing in the San Francisco Bay area." Soon the two opened a bookstore below their offices, and the bookstore was named after the magazine. The City Lights bookstore still stands in its original place today. Ferlinghetti began publishing books and poetry, and he was the one that first published Allen Ginsberg's "Howl." In fact, after "Howl" was published, Ferlinghetti was tried for "wilfully and lewdly [printing] and [selling] obscene and indecent writing." Ferlinghetti was later found innocent of all charges. Today at the age of 76, Lawrence Ferlinghetti continues to live in San Francisco as the city's Poet Lauriat.

CITY LIGHTS

BOOKSELLERS & PUBLISHERS
261 COLUMBUS AVENUE
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF. 94133

Advice
to
writers:
WRITE!
Ferlinghetti

BOOKSELLERS 415-398-0193
PUBLISHERS 415-392-1901
FAX 415-362-4981

FORTUNE

Fortune
has its cookies to give out
which is a good thing
since it's been a long time since
that summer in Brooklyn
when they closed off the street
one hot day
and the

FIREMEN

turned on their hoses
and all the kids ran out in it
in the middle of the street
and there were
maybe a couple dozen of us
out there
with water squirting up
to the
sky
and all over
us
there was maybe only six of us
kids altogether
running around in our
barefeet and birthday
suits
and I remember Molly but then
the firemen stopped squirting their hoses
all of a sudden and went
back in
their firehouse
and
started playing pinochle again
just as if nothing
had ever
happened
while I remember Molly
looked at me and
ran in
because I guess really we were th only ones there

— LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI

BIRD WITH TWO RIGHT WINGS

And now our government
a birth with two right wings
flies on from zone to zone
while we go on having our little fun & games
at each election
as if it really mattered who the pilot is
of Air Force One
(They're interchangeable, stupid!)
While this bird with two right wings
flies right on with its corporate flight crew
And this year its the Great Movie Cowboy in the cockpit
And next year its the great Bush pilot
And now its the Chameleon Kid
and he keeps changing the logo on his captains cap
and now its a donkey and now an elephant
and now some kind of donkephant
And now we recognize two of the crew
who took out a contract on America
and one is a certain gringo wretch
who's busy monkeywrenching
crucial parts of the engine
and its life-support systems
and they got a big fat hose
to siphon off the fuel to privatized tanks
All all the while we just sit there
in the passenger seats
without parachutes
listening to all the news that's fit to air
over the one-way PA system
about how the contract on America
is really good for us etcetera
As all the while the plane lumbers on
into its postmodern
manifest destiny

LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI

AT THE PUBLIC MARKET

At the Public Market
Seattle winter time
A big shaggy bearded man
like Walt Whitman
standing sill in the cold rain
with his shivering dog
a cardboard sign on him.

I AM OVER 70
MY DOG HAS THREE LEGS
NOBODY
WANT US

The hard rain pours down
There is no tin cup

LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI

SUICIDE HAIKU

MAN FISHING
in shrinking gene pool
hooks last gene –
 Jumps in

LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI

THE PENNYCANDYSTORE BEYOND THE EL

The pennycandystore beyond the El
is where I first
 fell in love
 with unreality
Jellybeans glowed in the semi-gloom
of that september afternoon
A cat upon the counter moved among
 the licorice sticks
 and tootsie rolls
 and Oh Boy Gum

Outside the leaves were falling as they died

A wind had blown away the sun

A girl ran in
Her hair was rainy
Her breasts were breathless in the little room

Outside the leaves were falling
 and they cried
 Too soon! too soon!

LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI

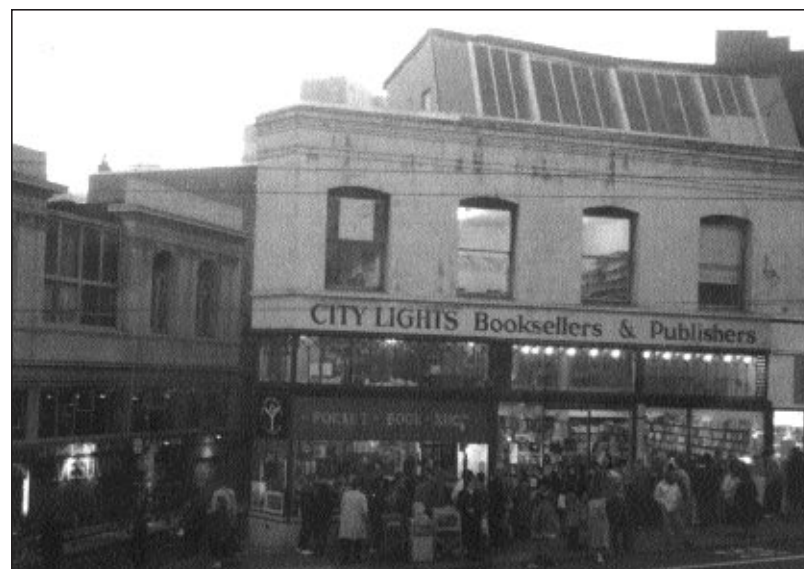
DOG

The dog trots freely in the street
and sees reality
and the things he sees are bigger than himself
and the things he sees
are his reality
Drunks in doorways
Moons on trees
The dog trots freely thru the street
and the things he sees
are smaller than himself
Fish on newsprint
Ants in holes
Chickens in Chinatown windows
their heads a block away
The dog trots freely in the street
the things he smells
smell something like himself
The dog trots freely in the street
past puddles and babies
cats and cigars
poolrooms and policemen
He doesn't hate cops
He merely has no use for them
and he goes past them
and past the dead cows hung up whole
in front of the San Francisco Meat Market
He would rather eat a tender cow
than a tough policeman
though either might do
And he goes past the Romeo Ravioli Factory
and past Coit's Tower
and past Congressman Doyle
he is afraid of Coit's tower
but he's not afraid of Congressman Doyle
although what he hears is very discouraging
very depressing

very absurd
to a sad dog like himself
so a serious dog like himself
But he has his own free world to live in
His own fleas to eat
He will not be muzzled
Congressman Doyle is just another
fire hydrant
to him

The dog trots freely in the street
and has his own dog's life to live
and to think about
and to reflect upon
touching and tasting everything
investigating everything
without benefit of perjury
a real artist
with a real tale to tell
and a real tail to tell it with
a real live

 barking
 democratic dog
engaged in real
 free enterprise
with something to say
 about ontology
something to say
 about reality
 and how to see it
 and how to hear it
with his head cocked sideways
 at streetcorners
as if he is just about to have
 his picture taken
 for Victor Records
 listening for
 His Master's Voice
and looking



 like a living questionmark
 into the
 great gramophone
 of puzzling existence
with its wondrous hollow horn
 which always seems
 just about to spout forth
 some Victorious answer
 to everything

LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI

VINCENT WAS HERE

- *Inscape Poetry Award* •

.....said the schoolyard wall
Back when crayons were noble swords,
Paste was a fine delicacy
Classes were taught by raisins,
and Tempura paint always cured your diorama.
Next to Vincent's premature epitaph,
with one of those eraserless blue pencils
I wrote, "So what?"

ARIELLE CECI

NUMBER ONE

I'm sitting
in loud solitude
in my rented room
talking to my deaf cat.
And thinking maybe I
should throw my life
in a suitcase.
Leave.
And never arrive.

MARTIN J. WATERMAN

LAMENT FOR BUKOWSKI

Bukowski, you angel that burns
to unveil the soul's night.
We meet on a corner
and you offer me a sip of words.
I enter your madness, pass in your fables.
I see your mask that whirls in rage,
taste your whiskey song that pours drunken visions.
Invite me to sit on a throne
where shadows spew on whores
who spit on memories, and obsessed men
waste away and chant while they die.
Thoroughbreds guide us down
to where death awaits cosmic readings.
And your lovers trade you in
for your prophetic life
as it whispers a magnetic dynasty.

THOM GARZONE

ETHICS CLASS

Dead old thinkers who know
Nothing about me
Brainwash me;
"Be good," they say.

JENNIFER HAAGENSON

THE NIGHTLY POEM NEWS

Six poems written
Two with suicidal intentions
Two with love
Two with depression.

Poet found dead
with words in mouth.

JENNIFER KIM

THE GHOST

There were a million stars
On a universe of curved glass
The storm had arrived
In silence

Later in the bar
Beautiful girls and pretty boys
There was one ghost

I paid my respects
And went out into the beautiful rain
To try and forget
The ghost

He stayed behind
At her going-away party
He is always at her side
But I've been gone for years

PATRICK LUBOW

SUCCESSION

Rain slips over the brick house, the attic,
Its gray slate roof; pools in the basement.
The boy leans against the furnace register,
Absorbing his father's books, his father's frown.

Landscapes close down on the dark-panelled
Walls. "The Barbizon school—suicides,
Some of them; misfits" Bare trees alone;
Mute clouds in yellowed, in evening-red skies.

"Dad, what should I read?" *Teach me.*
"Try this one—*The Way of All Flesh*—
And *Jude the Obscure*—a must."
His sixteen years' heart is ready to be hurt.

Seven bedrooms have emptied themselves;
Two are left. A dozen words suffice
For a day. In dreams, his siblings
Reach out to him with bleeding arms.

Rain muffles the brick house, the attic,
Slides gray over the roof; settles the basement.
The boy curls up by the furnace register,
Inheriting his father's books, his father's frown.

ROGER RINDGE

SORROW OF THE PALMS

Palm trees tower overhead,
The fronds exploding from
their apexes like the mighty
heads of
decapitated lions, slumbering
on limber posts-
Swaying in the wind, the
lions shake their heads
left and right, disapproval
at something beyond their
control. Their leftover
conglomeration of parts,
somewhere below them, are lost.
The heads weep with no roar,
just a wind-swept shiver,
raining tears of fronds down
below. Perhaps lamentations
shall fall upon the decapitated
bodies of palm-lions, advising
them to look up, lamentations
multiplied twice for
decapitated beasts have no
eyes...

PHILIP KIM

NIGHT

Night
Puts off the blaze in the west
With her bare hands,
Taking the burnt marks
That are yellow, orange, pink, red, and gray,
She silently endures the pain
And pulls up her dark blanket steadily
Until she is completely enshrouded
Only then, she lets out her shiny tears
Which twinkle and hover around
The surface of her vast cover
So dark, so silent, so mysterious,
Minutes and hours pass by
Without disturbing her rest
Until a rooster cries,
Then they hastily wake her up
As her wrathful foe starts burning the places in the east
And help her retreats,
Folding her blanket
And revealing once again her now yellowish scars,
There she quietly goes
Just as she came.

MYAT NOE

WEATHER

It's hard living without seasons.
Winter is down time, quite time.
 Time to take stock.
 Then, spring comes.
 Renewal,
 hope,
 ambition.
 It's time,
 weather finally permits,
 Put winter's dreams into action.
 In LA, seasons are all the same.
 The same demands to perform,
 all year round.
 There are no excuses that people accept.
 The roads are never closed
 because of snow.
 Cars are never too cold to start.
No relief.
 Just plenty of demand.
 Demand to go.
 Demand to get.
 Demand to be like that.
 To be the same.
 Like the weather.

AMELIA VETRONE

REEVALUATION OF LIFE

Immunize your love-
Smother mud onto eyes-
Place plugs in ears-
Sew your mouth-
Conceal your flesh in ill-fitting garb-
Pollute mind and soul with media rubbish-
It is for the best-

In the name of safety-
Misinformation, utmost importance-
Celebrity martyrdom-
Morality preached = Pointing the finger at yourself-
Revolutions run dry-
Lies become truth-
Conformity to rebellion-

Armies of miniscule differences-
Coalition of consumption-
Mind numbing, wholesome fun-
Procreate for God-
Choice should be outlawed-
NO new ways are good ways-
Future impaired-

ALEXANDRA BARNES

HECHO EN LA NACIÓN INVISIBLE

Timeclock-razor rips deep red gashes
Killing America's imaginations!
Flash and flicker of bluely gauzed montage
Applied by coca-cola-texaco
Covering eyes shocking and softening brian with arc-weld sparks
Barked out with the urgency of priests
Whose cardboard-cut-out god is fading fast!
Angular fingers probe and pick like hard-shelled insects
Following psychological synaptic maps with sniperscopic instinct,
Strangling with tapeworm dogma,
Filling the world's bloated psyche
With the garbage and agua negra
Of what it is to be
Beautifulsuccessfulbeautifulsuccessfulfullfull!
While everything is emptied
But the bellies full of gulps of dust and faded cardboard wafers!
America's over-ripe head-burst falls from stuttering forceps
To soured purple ground
Upon which I walk,
The probing of the clicking clacking knitting needles
Dances curtained by the darkened shells of my eyes,
Drums the shuddering industrial train-track metronome that
Dictates the rhythm of the body and the blood,
Makes its own sense of my cut-up ransom noted speech pattern
Reflecting my span of attention which can't bridge the vastness separating
One moment from the next!
El mundo desechable,
La enfermedad invisible,
The disposable world
Poured out sticky and sweet from toothless groaning "o" mouths
Of cans and bottles with multi-lingual labels crushed and broken
Yet still oozing tar pit promises sickly and sugary
Clogging the pores of green things that once leapt toward the sun

Like tigers
Now stand rotting coated with the buzzing of bickering flies,
Mutely awaiting the scythe
Their lamb's mouths bulging with blood-soaked cotton
Anesthetized!

I push my way through; "bleat, bleat," say my kamikaze thoughts
Crashing discord in concert with the orchestra of oblivion which I conduct
With my baton of disquietude leaving trails in the stale auditorium air
With every swing of my arm!
Each grace note stabbing at your essence
Leaves you perforated!
"Bleed, bleed," whispered your umbilical myths
As they dry up and sigh
"Shush, shush," carried away,
Reverberating, limply dangled from helicopter claws.
Forgotten before they're born.
Snatched from the belly of your culture,
Food for the tiger teeth of my cancerous need
To growgrowgrow!

"Kiss me"
My breath is blast furnace residue.
I'll caress you under your footprints
You'll be safe here,
I'll protect you
You can hold me to my word.
I'm beautiful, successful,
Y ya saciado
"Trust me"
Hasta que no haya nadie.
Until there is no one.

JOHN CROSS

MODERN MAN

You tease, you taunt, playing god with your big machines
You who must always be in control
You must have machines to control your living environment
You must have laws to control your world
Children and animals, they must respect you
You cannot stand things out of order
Nature you abhor
Can you not see that life will not be controlled?
You who live in your artificial environment of skyscrapers
Can you not see that you will never truly be in control?
Surrender yourself to life's natural disarray
Be not the master of your universe
Let life flow like the undammed stream

JENNIFER HAAGENSON

CLEAVAGE

There has always been a trend that seems a bit deranged-
the way in which a woman is pressured to have her breasts
arranged
The overflowing silhouette of centuries before?
The liberated 60's breasts that sought to even the score?
Is the fuller figure of the 50's the curvy muse of lust?
Or perhaps the anorexic 1990's bust?
Covered in spandex or maybe lacy mesh
Are they silicone or are they flesh?
Are they to be hated? Inflated?
things to be praised? Dramatically pushed
Or slightly raised?
Objects to be hidden? Things for all to see?
Are they bubbles of our animosity?

ARIELLE CECI

YOU'VE GOTTA JIGGLE IT A LITTLE BIT

Rotating toilets flush each other out *swish swosh* swirling
Down the throat of an always open mouth starving for
Knowledge but gets shit instead - of course - they're
Only toilets! but still they swallow whatever they
Can get which usually is a lot since there is so
Much to be received, perhaps in the end there
Will be one united final flush gulping down
All that shit - I mean knowledge - when
All toilets fall in sync and together
Begin a revolution forcing cats
To stop drinking from them
While they safely pack
Away the world's shit
- I mean knowledge -
Down the white
Porcelain - or
Perhaps not -
They're only
Toilets

DEREK BLACKWAY

AHHHH

I want to drink from your knowledge!
and...break wisdom with you...like
hot-baked-buttered-bread...
from morning till' noon.

That's what I want to do!
what I want to do.

I want to dip from wisdoms
cup...you've got so...much to
give...so much in your heart,
many things, few years.

Wisdom's cup, bitter and sweet
Allow me to sip my thirst away
when we meet; Growing, unfolding, basking
in the things you say...

Investing in my quest...to become greater still each day;
And as you have shared, I will do the same...
knowledge, sweet knowledge
power!
insight!
please, come enjoy
this dance if for life.

URITH L. WALKER

CELEBRATION JOURNEY

Yellow moon
Burns in warmth.

I can see we're coming to Long Beach
When we approach the oil refinery.

Its starlit fantasy molds
Skeletal words.

Fourth Street's drunken nakedness
Flashes in the omniscient night.

Pyres over the illumined
Wrath of poets.

We drive home and lights
Weep against the moon.

THOM GARZONE

THE LITTLE ALIEN AT THE POETRY READING

There he stood, reader #7

He compactly read works on
instructions for being human,
instructions for grandparents,
instructions for children.

His voice, terse and crisp,
occasionally lilted up
full of restraint and emotion.

Perhaps he was visiting
from another planet
and wanted to stay with us
instead. Maybe, he had made
a new life for himself here.
But it was his time to go.

When he was done,
his small hand held up
a blue folder
of his poems for sale.

JENNIFER KIM

WONDERWOMAN

Superb in every way
No enemy matched her
Beauty
Thought
Skills
The picture perfect lady
Always on her toes
Except when Catwoman came around
The rare occasion
When she went down on her knees

DEREK BLACKWAY

BETTY CROCKER, NECROPHILE

She'd check on the cake...
But she's got a hot date
With a cold body

She'd make you brownies...
But she's got a post-mortem plaything, they heat it up to 375

She left the oven for beyond the grave lovin'

Sick, maybe
But her Devil's Food has never tasted better

ARIELLE CECI

THE .99 GRIEF STORE

On the radio, I heard of this great store
that cures grief.
It was all the way out in the Valley
but I figured it was worth the trip.
When I got there I was amazed
by the rows and rows of neon-lit aisles
holding products to cure
every kind of grief:
death of a pet
death of a spouse
death of a significant other
bad grades
cancer
and endless more.
I wanted some help but no
one was in sight. What I needed
to cure was the typical grief
of a lonely heart.
An announcement sounded off:
Shoppers, we will be closing
in one minute. Please bring
your final purchases to the front cashier.
Where were the lonely heart products?
I ran up to the cashier and asked.
"I'm sorry, we just had a 2-for-1 on those
and we're all out now. How about this pack of gum?
It cures bad breath."
I bought it and some toe-nail clippers
that were by the register.
Then I went home, chewed my gum,
and clipped.

JENNIFER KIM

SPARK

You don't have
that spark

It doesn't twist
between us
during the week
while we are apart

It doesn't shine
through the covers
when we sleep together
on the weekends

but it does
exist
for a half-hour

Illuminating
the cab
of a car
of a guy

Who I am
acquainted with

BO APPLGATE

RENEE'S SONG

Her lips were like the wind
that pass in remembrance
through golden reeds that
kiss against the soul.

She embraces me in the night
and I am reborn in her chrysalis eyes.

She perished in a storm,
a tranquil spirit
emerging
in oracular air.

She reveals her face
in unknown women: librarians,
transients, and medical secretaries.
I have felt delusions
from her obliterate memory.

They found Renee
with no sign of an assailant
during a Central California rainstorm
in January 1982.
Her throat was cut
and so eternity diminished like rain.

THOM GARZONE

AFTER WORDS

I was a human set of ellipses,
With a mouth
that didn't want to eat
And teeth that refused to be brushed
for fear of washing away your stolen magic
That awkward saliva my first and last souvenir
of that deflated night

I had to rinse it all away
Color turned black- and- white,
humans reverted to zygotes,
and Adam turned back into dust

And here you are- a poem, an a number,
and anecdote, a friend by default

Another planet thrown out of my orbit.

ARIELLE CECI

20 NEARLY 26

half-hour late because i was
playing nintendo with Time

mario wasn't fast enough

they were there at
the Lizard, being
harassed by carnivorous men

"Get us out of here!"

i step out of the car to burn
my lungs, and watch
cats and mice play

"Can I bring one home?"

driving home listening
to drunken philosophies,
watching pheromone
soft core in reverse

"Can I bum you for a cigarette?"

sitting in the living room waiting
to take a leak
she walks out dragging
a large plastic bag

"Can I help you with that?"

i don't get up
she walks over and reads
my eyes like tarots

"I'm not that big of a whore."
"I didn't think you were."

"I'm just a lonely bitch."
"I'm just a lonely asshole."

she tastes like beer
i taste like cigarettes

"You're going to be a heartbreaker."
"I doubt it."

i carry the bag to her car past
Jim, the guy she brought home that night

BO APPLGATE

ONE WHITE LINE TOWARDS ABANDON

Pulling off for secluded sex
and the fast release
from tight pants and parents.
Knowing exactly how to
move the gear shift
out of my back.
Afterwards, endless chatter
then sinking into
familiar highways
that would become
our lives.

SHELLY ARMSTRONG

CONFRONTATION

• INSCAPE SHORT STORY AWARD •

Vanguard raised his gunblade as the dark, armored rider charged at him. He pulled the trigger, shot the head off of his enemy's maiasaurus, and grinned with satisfaction as the dying dinosaur threw its rider off of its back. Suddenly, pain shot through Vanguard's left eye as the fallen rider's bayonet pierced it. His last conscience thought was to slash at his enemy's shoulder and pull the trigger. His last conscience senses were the recoil of the gunblade, and the sting of sparks and metal fragments as the gunblade cut through his enemy's armor and shattered it.

Vanguard awoke with a start, instinctively reaching for the gunblade that rested by his side. Nothing but the darkness of his bedroom. Darn, he was having flashbacks again. He felt his left eye, and noticed that it was twitching uncomfortably again. Vanguard sighed, turned on the lights, and stared at his reflection in the gunblade's edge. The wound was barely noticeable; a faded scar and minor discoloration were its only physical signs. When he awakened after the battle in a regeneration tank, the medics promised that he will gain his eyesight, and that he would be as good as new. They were only half right. Vanguard did regain his eyesight, and his new eye was as sharp as his old one. However, psychological scars would never fade as easily as physical ones. Vanguard's nightmares and flashbacks were permanent reminders of the horrors of war.

He stood up and walked to the kitchen, the gunblade in his hand. The sun had not yet risen, but Vanguard doubted that he would be able to sleep again. As he prepared a simple breakfast, he thought about his experiences during the Pangaeon Civil War. Of the blood he had shed. Of friends he had lost. Of the fires that raged through the countryside when Colonel Volsung used the NORSE rail gun to shell Jutland, determined to crush the "rebellion" once and for all.

Of her.

Vanguard winced at that memory. The woman he loved, the woman whose beauty and gentleness touched him, was an enemy spy. When she escaped, she had left him a letter, proclaiming the sincerity of her love and her apologies for doing what she had to do. He never forgave her for her audacity.

"But you would never betray me, right, my love?" he joked to his

gunblade. The loneliness was terrible, but he had learned his lesson well. A true soldier couldn't afford to trust his heart. The heart was weak, its beating too easily affected by adrenaline and hormones. The brain, the core of logic and instinct, that was what a soldier must trust, that was what he must rely on.

Finished with his meal, Vanguard returned to his bedroom and opened his closet. Although he hadn't worn his uniform since the day the war ended nine months ago, he had kept it clean as a matter of pride. He put on the blue shirt and pants, carefully tucking his shirt under his pants. The blue coat came next, followed by the belt for his holster. Vanguard carefully set the pauldron onto his shoulder, ignoring the inconvenience that its weight caused him. (In modern armies, such armor was more useful as a rest for medals than as protection.) When he was done he made sure that the letter from General Harsh was in his left breast pocket, tucked within the pages of his Bible. There; he's ready.

Vanguard entered the stable and saddled Horny, his Parasaurulophus. As he rode away from his home, he glanced back and thought about the loneliness of his cabin among the plains. When he joined the Army, he had wanted to leave all this behind, to live among the many interesting people from the city. Their colorful demeanor and clothing had made an impression on him when they occasionally came to visit the ranches during the years before the war. After the war ended, Vanguard returned to this loneliness of the plains; older, wiser, and wary of the treachery that lay in the hearts of interesting people. Was he willing to risk facing such treachery again, to come out of his comfortable retirement to answer the General's request? Yes; a soldier must be willing to accept any risk, to accept any mission, for the nation, for the people. Vanguard steeled himself as he rode towards the train station.

He saw the steam of the locomotive's breath before he saw Dodge City's wooden walls. The tops of the walls were sharpened to discourage attacks from the Tyrannosaurs that roamed the wide open plains. Although many guards stood watch over the walls, the cannons in the towers weren't manned. Such carelessness was proof that the people now lived in peaceful times. Vanguard rode through the open gates, dismounted, and tied Horny to a post in the town stable. He didn't know how long it would take him to complete this assignment, and he

hoped that Horny would be okay during of days, or weeks, that he would be gone. Vanguard used the government voucher that came with the letter to obtain a free ticket, and entered a cafe to await the train's arrival.

The Hyperion Express announced its arrival with the distinctive thumping and puffing of the metal heart and lungs that powered it. A jewel of science and technology, the train was a machine, given life through the psionic powers of its builders. Although Vanguard was trained to use psionic powers in the army, he was still marveled by the thought of what humans can accomplish by manipulating the physical world through pure thought and concentration. A mere three-hundred years ago, such abilities were called magic, and were considered impossible for humans to use. The efforts of many patient researchers were required to prove that humans did have the innate ability to generate and control psionic energy. Vanguard crossed himself before he boarded the train, a childhood habit of his.

With a whistle; and a roar, the train left the station a passed through the town's gates, which closed automatically after the train. Vanguard ate his lunch on the train, a simple Iguanodon steak sandwich and dried fruits. He wished that he had cheese to go with the meat, but that couldn't be helped. (Dairy products, though a common item in northern Pangaea's grocery stores, were scarce in southern Pangaea. Those who attempted to bring domestic mammals to this region always failed, for the animals would either starve because they failed to compete with the dinosaurs for food, or they would end up being the dinosaur's food.) Finished, Vanguard lay back in his chair and..

What was that? A metallic glint on the desert sands. It may be nothing, an item that a traveler had lost while passing through the land. Instinct, however, warned Vanguard that desert raiders may be present. He cast a vigilance spell on himself, and looked again. Damn, it's confirmed; Vanguard saw a rifle's barrel jutting out of a sand-colored blanket that covered a large pit and concealed what was probably a raider and his mount. He stood up and walked towards the front of the train, where defensive machine guns were set on top of the guards' car behind the locomotive.

"Hey, where do you think you're go..." The conductor stopped when he saw the rank insignia on Vanguard's pauldron.

"Alert the guards. Desert raiders may be nearby," said Vanguard, his

voice booming with authority.

"Yes, sir!" answered the conductor. He led Vanguard to the guards' car. "Heads up, men! We may have some problems with raiders," said the conductor.

Vanguard saw that the captain of the guards had a pair of binoculars. "Give them to me," he said. It took a moment for the captain to understand, but he complied. Vanguard raised the binoculars to his eyes and scanned the desert sands. He was right. Although the raiders were well hidden, a trained eye knew what to look for, and where to look. He didn't gain his promotion by being careless. Strange. The raiders were in the perfect position to launch an ambush, but they weren't doing anything. Soon, the train would pass beyond the range of their weapons.

"Why aren't they attacking?" he asked himself. The answer flashed in his head, as sudden and as shocking as lightning.

"Stop the train!" Vanguard yelled to the conductor.

"What!? Are you crazy?" came the reply.

"The raiders have sabotaged the tracks! If you don't stop, we'll be derailed!" Vanguard shouted.

"My god!" said the conductor. He ran towards the locomotive. "Stop the train, it's an emergency!" he shouted to the engineer. The engineer answered with the sound of brakes screeching.

"BOOM!" Everyone covered their ears as a bomb blew away the rails that lay ahead of the train. Soon, the raiders shouted and roared as they emerged from their pits like the fangs of an agitated rattlesnake and launched their attack. "Brace for impact!" shouted Vanguard as he grabbed the handlebars beside the windows. The train barely stopped in time, mere centimeters from the missing rails and a potential derailment.

"Take cover!" shouted the conductor, running aft to warn the passengers and ignoring the bullets and arrows that crashed against the thick windows. The machine gunners fired a few rounds, but the guns were quickly silenced as arrows penetrated their armor and fell them.

Vanguard risked a glance at the windows to size up his enemies. Thirty raiders on each side of the train, each raider riding a Triceratops. Four of the raiders wore Tyrannosaurus teeth necklaces, a common practice among the chieftains of the Maul tribe. These four chieftains carried machine guns. Each chieftain was protected by four raiders, who

had rifles of various makes. The other raiders carried bows.

"Give me a rifle!" shouted Vanguard. Although there were only twenty guards, the weapons locker held twenty-four rifles. (Two of them belonged to the fallen machine gunners. That makes six spare rifles.) Vanguard left his gunblade in its holster, aware that, although the gunblade had greater stopping power, it lacked range. (His former drill sergeant once commented on the gunblade's range by saying, "When the enemy is that close, it's time to retreat.") Vanguard picked up a rifle, checked to see if it's loaded, and was dismayed by the fact that it wasn't cleaned recently. Such sloppiness was further proof that the people now lived in peaceful times. A pity. He stuck the barrel through a firing port, aimed, and fired. A raider fell from his mount, and was quickly trampled by his companions.

Soon, the roar of the guards' rifles and the whistle of raiders' arrows were joined by the cacophony of the various weapons that the passengers carried for self-defense. (Although the politicians in the northern cities often complained about the liberty with which the southerners armed themselves, and often proposed illogical laws to regulate them, the fact remains that southern Pangaea was a dangerous place. Here, a person's best friend was often a weapon.)

By the time guards replaced the dead and/or wounded machine gunners, it was too late to halt the raiders' charge, a soon the train was rocked as the triceratops rammed against the cars. "Time to get up close and personal," Vanguard said to himself as he ran towards the door. "Everyone, fit bayonets to your rifles and prepare to engage in hand to hand combat!" he shouted towards the guards. Although the guards were severely outnumbered, Vanguard knew enough about Maul culture to understand the importance that they placed upon their leaders. If their chieftains were killed during an attack, the Maul warriors would automatically retreat, no matter how great an advantage they had over their prey.

"Cover me!" Vanguard shouted. The guards looked at him with disbelief; wasn't it safer to be within the protection of the armored cars? Vanguard opened a crack in the door and shot randomly to cover his exit before leaping through the door. He jumped on top of the next car, dodging the arrow that whistled under his crotch and struck the door as the guards frantically tried to close it. A charging raider aimed his lance at him as he ran along the train's roof. Vanguard jumped, pushed

against the lance's staff, and used the leverage to kick the raider off of his mount. Firing a shot at the fallen raider, Vanguard then mounted the triceratops and charged towards one of the chieftains. He cast a frantic spell on his new mount to speed it up, but it stopped suddenly when the raider archers turned their attention towards the renegade dinosaur.

To a soldier, having his mount die under him was a mere inconvenience. Vanguard used the remaining momentum from the dying Triceratops' charge to jump. He dropped his rifle, drew his gunblade in midair, and slashed at another mounted raider. Vanguard threw the dead raider off of the saddle and grabbed the reins. Several raiders aborted their attack on the train to deal with this new threat. Vanguard used his psychokinetic powers to suspend the rifle in midair and open fire. The shots missed, but they distracted the raiders and allowed Vanguard to escape. He rode in search of the chieftain. There he is. As Vanguard charged, the chieftain fired his machine gun at the Triceratops' bony frill. Ignoring the Triceratops' grunts of pain, Vanguard focused his psionic energy on the bullet in the chamber and pulled the trigger, generating a blade-shaped shock-wave which cut through the desert sands, cut through the chieftain's bone armor, and cut the chieftain body in half on its path of destruction. Blood, fragments of armor, shattered pieces of metal and bone from the gun and the chieftain's Tyrannosaurus teeth necklace fell to the ground. The remaining three chieftains roared to rally their men and prevent them from giving in to panic and fleeing. Good, that makes them easier to find.

Vanguard charged towards the next chieftain. Suddenly, a bullet ricocheted off of his pauldron, denting it. Vanguard more surprised by the fact that the "useless" pauldron stopped the bullet, than he was by the fact that the shot came from the railroad cars. (Friendly fire was a frequent mistake of people who found themselves under a surprise attack.) He ducked to the side as more bullets struck his Triceratops.

"No, no he's a Union soldier, he's on our side!" Vanguard overheard the conductor's frantic cries from a passenger car. It took a moment for the passengers to stop shooting at him; Confederate sympathizers were probably among them. Idiots. Soon, Vanguard only had to worry about the shots that came from the raiders. Good. He noticed that his Triceratops was panting from pain and exhaustion. So

did a raider, who decided to take advantage of his enemy's misfortune by cutting him down with his battle-ax. Vanguard blocked the blow with his gunblade. Damn, he's strong. Have to end this soon. Vanguard pulled the trigger. The raider had never seen a gunblade before, and failed to defend himself against it. Vanguard mounted the fallen raider's triceratops, ignored his death throes, and sought out the next chieftain.

There he was, leading an attack on the caboose, far away from the guards' car. As Vanguard charged, the chieftain uttered some phrases to his bodyguards, and attempted to flee the battlefield. The four riflemen frowned at their leader's cowardice, but they nonetheless obeyed his last order and rallied to stop Vanguard. No matter. Vanguard parried the raiders' bullets with his gunblade, and braced himself as their mounts crashed into each other. While the raiders attempted to regain control of their Triceratops, Vanguard leapt off of his and slew them. Good, the cowardly chieftain was still in range. Vanguard aimed his weapon, focused his psionic energy, and fired. His target fell. Vanguard didn't know if the chieftain was truly dead, or if he was merely playing possum. It didn't matter; Maul chieftains who dishonored themselves in battle would lose their men's respect, and their orders would never be obeyed again. Vanguard turned his head in search of another target.

The next chieftain opened fire with his machine gun as he charged. Without a mount, and without a long-range weapon, Vanguard was at a disadvantage. He rolled along the ground to dodge the chieftain's range of fire, waited for his enemy to come withing range, and shot off the charging Triceratops' right foreleg. Sensing that something was wrong, the chieftain leapt off to avoid being crushed under his mount's weight. As Vanguard aimed his gunblade, the chieftain dropped his machine gun and drew his saber. Vanguard didn't know whether or not the chieftain was out of ammo, but it was clear that the chieftain wanted to prove his courage by defeating an enemy in hand-to-hand combat. Vanguard complied with his request as they raised their blades to strike. Vanguard cast a berserk spell on himself to increase his strength, and the chieftain did the same. Their blades met, throwing sparks as they focused their psionic energies on their weapons. Vanguard put both his hands on his gunblade to increase the force of his blow, and the chieftain dropped his leather shield to do the same. During this time, no shots were fired at them; the shooters feared that they

would hit their own champions, or maybe they wanted to show respect to these two warriors. Suddenly, Vanguard laid back on the ground. The chieftain found himself falling towards his enemy, unable to halt the momentum of his attack. Vanguard used the leverage to kick the chieftain into the air, forcing him to drop his saber. As the chieftain fell, Vanguard jumped upright and raised his gunblade to give his enemy a warrior's death.

Suddenly, a high-pitched scream pierced the air as an arrow flew towards him. Vanguard parried the arrow, set his boot upon the fallen chieftain's throat to prevent escape, and aimed his weapon. The last chieftain, having run out of ammo, had resorted to using bows and arrows in a desperate attempt to save his... her comrade? Although Vanguard was surprised to see a woman in command from such a patriarchal society, he nonetheless aimed his gunblade at her. She was an enemy, a threat, and he couldn't allow personal feelings to get in the way of his mission... could he?

Vanguard intentionally aimed high to shatter the bow without wounding the woman who welded it. She dropped the useless weapon and drew her lance. Vanguard lowered his gunblade and touched the fallen chieftain's nose with his weapon. The woman chieftain halted her triceratops a meter away from them and held her lance four centimeters away from Vanguard's heart. Driven by momentum, her Tyrannosaur teeth necklace lashed at Vanguard like a cave bear's claws, but her lance was frozen in its place, as if by fear. Vanguard thought that he was safe from attack, for his enemy didn't dare to endanger her comrade any further.

"You leave, he no die!" he shouted again. An eerie silence filled the air, as the combatants paused to witness this psychological battle. Her face darkened by anger, the woman tensed her arms and prepared to strike. For a moment, Vanguard thought that she would to press on with her attack, and that he should kill the fallen chieftain, attempt to dodge the woman's lance, and, if he lived, kill her. Then the woman dropped her lance, reached into her saddlebag (slowly, to avoid alarming her enemy), and retrieved a white flag. She waved the flag and shouted a command to the surviving raiders. Simultaneously, the raiders put away their weapons and rode away from the train. Seeing that the woman had complied with his request, Vanguard removed his boot from the fallen chieftain's throat, holstered his gunblade, and

stepped away. Without dismounting, the woman reached down to lift her comrade off the ground, and set him before her in the saddle. The man grunted with pain and glared at Vanguard as the woman smiled sadly at her comrade, relieved that he was still alive. They rode off together.

Together...

Vanguard sighed as he walked back towards the train. He heard the sound of a shotgun cocking. Casting frantic on himself, he rushed towards a passenger car, grabbed a gun barrel that was aimed at the departing chieftains, and pulled. The gunman didn't let go of his weapon in time; he was dragged towards the window and his head struck painfully against its frame. Holding the gunman's weapon, Vanguard examined the fool who attempted to violate the impromptu truce that he arranged. He wore a pin with the Confederate flag engraved upon it. Damn, another Confederate sympathizer. Didn't these idiots know when to give up?

"Leave them alone," Vanguard said sternly. The former traitor stared at Vanguard with fear in his eyes, like the coward that he was. (This was the opinion that Vanguard had of all Confederate sympathizers.) The other passengers quickly holstered their weapons. Vanguard returned to his seat on the train and graciously accepted the free drink that the conductor offered. He cleaned his gunblade as the engineers repaired the tracks. By the time the train started moving again, he had fallen asleep.

LONG TSUN

MOMMA'S SECOND PRIZE LEMON PIE

Of course I'll never forget that day Momma flew out our living room window. Just like a bird she flew away. I couldn't believe it. It was raining something terrible and I thought she should have at least worn her red and white candy-striped rain slicker; I loved whenever she wore that; she looked just like a big peppermint stick with a plum colored wig on top - crazy hair of Momma's. Lucky Momma. I wanted to be the first to fly.

Before my father left, he said that the three of us would fly to New York City to have dinner at the Rainbow Room on top of Rockefeller Center. *The Rainbow Room* - it sounded like the most heavenly place on earth: a hundred stories high and the most beautiful room in all New York City. He said that the dining room was splattered with rainbow colored lights and he told Momma that there they would "trip the night fandango"... or something like that. She kept insisting that he'd keep his promise and be back some day. That was three years before Momma took flight.

Her departure day fell on a Wednesday, Prince Spaghetti Night at our place. It was also the day of Momma's big bake-off. It was the Fourth Annual Rotary Spring Bake-off and Momma and her tart lemon pie were sure to be its stars - or at least that's what we thought.

Other than it being a Wednesday, and also for the fact that I had a bit of a stomach cramp, that day seemed to be like any other. School was the same old drag, except that it was Pizza Day. Pizza Day and Hammy Sammy Day were my two favorite days of week. My fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Nickelich (we called her Nickel Bitch), had just started teaching us division, and for the life of me I just couldn't understand it. It's six years later and I still don't understand it. Math sucks, I hate division.

I kept thinking how nice it would be to have a small afternoon snack of kindergarten paste. Maybe that would fix my stomach. I usually kept a jar in my desk for when I needed a little pick-me-up. Snacks help me get through rough days at school and troubled times. I've been caught eating it before, and when I am, I'm usually scolded into embarrass-

ment in front of the entire class and reminded by the teacher that I'm no longer in kindergarten and that boys my age don't eat paste.

Kid's tease me. Not just for eating paste, but for my size, too.

I didn't think Momma would be there that day when I got home because of her big bake-off. I figured she would be out celebrating her success. This contest was everything to her. Actually, cooking was everything to her. She used her talents with food to make people happy. She would often spend all night baking a pie and by the time I awoke the next morning, it'd be gone.

"Where did the green apple pie go, Momma?"

"Oh, I took it over to the DePalos in two-ten," she replied. "I thought it would cheer them up - you know, they've had car trouble all week. It's such a shame."

She felt it her mission in life to bake people's tragedies away. She hated hearing about a family's grief and took it upon herself to cheer them up. I think that gave her a purpose.

Momma once baked a rhubarb pie for Crazy Charlotte Antelline who lived in the building next door. She was disturbed over hearing it rumored that her daughter Easy Chiara who lived just one floor below was seen kissing a pizza delivery boy. The worst of it was that he wasn't even delivering the pizza pie to her apartment. She was on her way upstairs to visit her mother when she bumped into the boy in the hall, and right there, she stuck her tongue in that delivery boy's mouth. Momma's rhubarb pie surely eased poor Crazy Charlotte's shame away.

And then there was the time Edgar Evans' whole world fell in. Edgar Evans lived in the apartment directly above ours and was, as Momma put it, "a confirmed life-long bachelor." One day his cat Miss Tilly took it upon herself to make a delightful little kitty crudité out of his prize winning purple lady slipper. Though he owned many orchids, this was but his most beautiful and also the recipient of many praises and prizes. He couldn't believe that his very own Miss Tilly would turn on him so, but thanks to Momma's raising cake, he was soon able to forgive and forget. Momma's pies and cakes healed many family wounds. I guess that's why she took her loss so hard.

Now it's in Miss Tilly and Edgar Evans' apartment on the eighth floor

that I make my home. I moved upstairs after Momma flew away because Edgar Evans was the closest thing to family that I could claim.

I came home that day to find our kitchen in shambles. Cake pans and muffin tins were everywhere. Mixing bowls and measuring cups were strewn about like a bomb was dropped in Momma's kitchen. And there, in the middle of the mess, sat my Momma, in a heaping pile of flour, sugar, and salt, with a lonely eggbeater clutched in hand and a second place ribbon pinned to her purplish head of hair. She was crying. I had never seen my mother cry. It looked as if she was gonna plunge that eggbeater right through her heart. She was devastated. I found out later that she had lost out to Brenda Barker's sweet cherry tart.

The winner of the Rotary's Fourth Annual was a Chamber of Commerce board member and I'm sure that Momma felt, for political reasons, she had been judged unfairly. Momma couldn't face the truth.

Not knowing what to do, I wiped her face and laid her to rest on the couch. I proceeded to make myself a peanut butter and marshmallow sandwich and then I poured a tall glass of lemonade to wash it all down. I guess that's when she decided to do it because when I came back into the living room, Momma was perched up in the open window like an old crow about to fly from her nest. Already half-drenched from drizzle, she spread out her arms and gave them a few good flaps and out she flew into the rain. She looked so free. I was stunned; I couldn't believe my eyes; my own mother flew away. I wasn't sure what to do. I put down my sandwich. then I allowed my thoughts to turn to what was left of Momma's second prize lemon pie. I was just about finished with it when I noticed that the sunshine was beginning to relieve our sorry gray sky. And right outside my very own window, a rainbow was beaming up into the heavens; it was beautiful. Then I finished that tart lemon pie. Momma's pie wasn't half-bad.

JACK BOX

THE HALL PASS

"You are to go straight to the restroom and come right back." Mrs. Lee handed Gloria the white plastic hall pass. Gloria waved good-bye to Victor who was at the pencil sharpener. She skipped down the hallway, turned a corner, and entered the jungle where red and blue birds cawed, yellow snakes slithered, and deep purple hippos bathed. A monkey dressed like the school principal screeched, "Gloria, do you have a hall pass?" Gloria said "Yes!" and waved her pass. The monkey-principal let her go on. Gloria forged her way through the jungle, brushing past thick banana leaves and found herself in front of the S.S. Gigantic. Blonk! Blonk! blared the ship's horn. "All aboard, have your passes ready!" Gloria held her pass out as she ran up the plank. "Good day, little girl," said a smiling man in a crisp white uniform.

The S.S. Gigantic had five swimming pools, game rooms on every floor, and candy machines that were all free. There was even a gargantuan-screen movie theater. "Apes and Doughnuts" rated G was playing. The usher asked for her ticket. "I have a pass!" said Gloria and she was escorted in. Gloria giggled through the whole movie, especially when the apes danced with the jelly doughnuts.

"Next stop, Transmangia!" called the smiling man. A woman with big clunky yellow baubles around her neck whispered to Gloria, "If you don't have a passport, they won't let you in." When it was her turn, Gloria flashed her pass and didn't have a problem. In Transmangia everything was upside-down. The ground was up, the sky was down. The pass accidentally slipped from Gloria's fingers and quickly floated away. "Oh no!" Gloria dashed after the pass and grabbed it just before it hit the sun. When it started to rain dirt, Gloria decided it was time to leave. Then the hall pass grew bigger and bigger until it was the size of the chalkboard in Mrs. Lee's room. Gloria plopped herself down on it. The pass rose up and wheee! she was flying! Gloria did a few loopy loops and figure eights and was on her way out of Transmangia. She flew over the Atlantic Ocean, skyscrapers, and the Brooklyn Bridge to

the Statue of Liberty! The pass let her off right in front and then shrank back to its normal size. Gloria asked a tour guide to take her picture. She held her pass up high just like the Lady held her torch.

"Phew! What a morning I've had," said Gloria. "I should get back to class now." Gloria rode the Liberty Express ferry and then a city bus, with her pass in hand of course, and was dropped off in the school's hallway. She turned the corner and passed the restroom. She remembered she still had to go. Then Gloria skipped back to class. When she returned, Victor was blowing at the tip of his pencil. Gloria quietly hung up the hall pass and whispered to him "Apes and Doughnuts is playing." Victor grinned and raised his hand.

JENNIFER KIM

ROMAN POLANSKY, THE CARETAKER, AND OTHERS WHO GOT AWAY

“Pull over I need to pee!”, said Michael who had this annoying habit of waiting until his bladder pounded on the abdominal wall before he’d request a bathroom stop on a road trip. Our treks from L.A. to anywhere but L.A., included a strict set of rituals, such as I, Susan, always drove (I was the only one with the car, so that was a given), the person sitting next to me controlled the radio dial (usually Michael because he’d yell “Shotgun!” during the planning stages of the trip),

and the victim or victims in the backseat mixed cocktails on demand without spilling a drop, because if we happened to get pulled over by The Fuzz we couldn’t have the V.W. smelling like an old bar, the kind with no windows. Although we never did seem to worry about our breath. On this day, Saturday, August 9, 1969, (I’ll never forget that date), Mikey and I were lucky to have Doug in the back for several reasons, one being that his folks had Navajo White, wall-to-wall, shag carpeting, which made him really good at not spilling because he had lots of practice from raiding his Dad’s liquor

cabinet, which he learned to do quickly and efficiently during cocktail parties since old Don Keep kept it locked up the rest of the time because, “Those damn contractors...” were hitting his juice again, and another being that no one else wanted to go the Haight via I-5 in the middle of summer in a beat-up Bug with no A.C. except the Hippies, but none of them ever had any money, so without Doug we’d have been pouring our own drinks and spilling all over ourselves. Doug said he could use another pack of Camels so we might as well let

Mikey do his thing, and even though we were only about twenty miles from home, I whipped off the Five onto Van Nuys Blvd., and pulled into a Gordito’s “You Fill ‘Em, We Grill ‘Em!” gas and burrito joint (not necessarily in that order). Mikey headed for the head, and Doug went for a “Gordito’s Guaranteed To Give You Gas Grande”, while I topped off the tank with a whole three dollars and fifty-eight cents, and while I’m pumping, here comes Doug with two Grandes and a new friend, and

man if anyone looked like they needed a burrito and a friend, not to mention a bath, it was this girl. Now Doug is a typical Virgo, and anyone who’s ever read Linda Goodman’s *Sun Signs* knows quite well that Virgos have an inborn need to save the waifs of the world, which reminds me of how I met Rick Griffins and his doberman Ceasar through my Virgonean Aunt Midge, who had

picked them up from the side of the road because the dog was bleeding from the end of his two-inch tail, and Rick (who happened to be carrying a nitrous-oxide tank) leapt in front of her Ford Galaxy screaming, “Hey lady! I need some styptic powder!” It turned out that Rick had tried to save money by cropping Ceasar’s tail with a block of wood and a butcher knife, and didn’t think it would bleed because, as he said “Dogs don’t have any feelings there...”, but my aunt Midge pointed out, “If they haven’t any feelings there, then why do they wag when they’re happy?” And Rick couldn’t answer that one, so he

handed her a balloon from his tank instead, and that seemed to make her happy, and even though people say that Midge helped them because of Rick’s tank, I know the real reason is because she’s a Virgo, just like I know that’s why Doug couldn’t resist **this** prize on that smoggy, summer day. This babe was in bad shape. I mean, “You can take the girl out of the trash, but you can’t take the trash out of the girl” kind of shape. I kept thinking she had this familiar odor, and then it dawned on me what it was. Her aroma brought back memories of searching for empty cardboard boxes behind the Market

Basket the last time I helped some friend move. Underneath the layers of grime, you could tell she was kind of pretty, like a bright red desk found in a Salvation Army, or a solid brass candlestick discovered in an attic, but she also had an evil surrounding her, something I couldn’t quite put my finger on but Norman Bates did come to mind, and she needed a ride home. And her family had the best California sunshine, and the greenest bud south of Humboldt County, and her old man knew the singer slash drummer of The Beach Boys, and he even had a gold record of theirs, and “We’re not in a hurry to anywhere in partic-

ular" whispered Doug, "So we might as well take her..." Now I've never been a big Beach Boys fan, not now not then, but Mikey, who had since joined us and was struggling with his fly, pointed out how good our Karma would be if we gave her a lift, so in a matter of minutes, there I was, heading north on Arleta, then left on Devonshire, watching for Topanga Canyon Blvd. where I was to

turn right. "Cocktails anyone?" Doug asked, and LuLu (her real name we found out later was Leslie, but we knew her as LuLu) said, "Oh no! Not me! Charlie don't like no drinkin'." "That's it!" I said, grinding the V-dub's gears, "You said your man has the groovin' dope, and now I'm getting that he doesn't dig drinking! Which is it? Huh?" Doug gasped, and as Paul McCartney wrapped up "Why Don't We Do It In The Road", the Bug's interior took on an eerie silence that made me wish I'd left LuLu in the road. Glancing into my rear-view I caught

her stare, as if she were working towards the purchase of my soul, and right when I was about to sell out, Michael screamed, "STOP!" and his feet hit the floorboard as if he had brakes, and mine did too, and while we slid towards the bumper of a Helm's Bakery truck, I apologized for all the unmarried sex I'd had and for all the married men I'd had sex with, and as my Volkswagon came to rest neatly beside the truck, Mikey flipped the driver the Bird and sighed, "Now that's some damn good Karma.", and right then I knew I had to take

her home. To get to her pad I turned right on Topanga, then left on Santa Susana (no relation to me) Pass Road, and after winding around for a mile or two, I came to a bend and on the left, there it was, Spahn's Movie Ranch. "What, a dump!-ling of a place you have here LuLu!" blurted Michael, who obviously didn't cover himself, but LuLu was so thrilled to be home she didn't seem to notice, so after a sigh of relief I pulled up to rickity, old hitching post, yanked on the emergency brake, and jumped out to shove my seat into the steering wheel so LuLu could get the hell out of my car, and I could get the hell out of there. "Well dear, it's certainly been a pleasure..." "Cut the engine." she said, "Charlie will want to meet the nice souls who brang me home." You

mean steal the nice souls, I thought, and as Mikey turned off the ignition, and LuLu scampered towards what used to be a saloon, I took in the scenery. Home was a run-down, western town, retired movie set with no signs of life. Broken down beat-up junk cars of all makes and models (but mostly Dune Buggies),

were splattered like blood all over the place, along with a school bus that may have been operable. The sagging structures were ideal termite tenements, but not suitable for humans of any caliber. Mikey, who along with Doug was out of the car by now said, "Fuck Charlie. Let's get out of here, and now, Susan!" I turned to Doug who by this time happened to be just an ass sticking out of my doorway on his way back inside, but the sound of a wooden screen door slamming shut caught my attention, and as Michael hopped back into his seat,

I looked and saw him. He was a small man, but the freakiest thing happened as he and LuLu confidently strolled toward us. All at once I noticed movement everywhere. Naked women and children poured out of the foliage as if on cue, and birds took to flight from the tree-tops as if responding to a rifle cocking. The surrounding hillside came alive with unseen eyes that made my flesh quiver, and my ass hustle back into the driver's seat. The Bug turned over on my first try, and as I jammed her into reverse, I could see that LuLu and the man named

Charlie had stopped to watch us leave. They were letting us go. And as I sit here, decades down the road, with my lap top and my locked doors, I remember his face. And The Beach Boys, and my Volkswagon, and The Beatle's White Album, and Karma, and the Tate-LaBainca murders, and Death to Pigs, and Leslie Van Houten aka LuLu, and cults, and Helter Skelter, and Vincent Bugliosi, and cocktails in the backseat, and the Manson Family and all those who came into contact with them, and lived to tell about it.

JODI PAVLOVICH

1999

The music was loud and I danced until my feet began to ache in my brand-new black pumps. There was only an hour left until countdown, and I was already gasping for a breath of the New Year. I fanned myself with my hand as I walked off the dance floor. I took a seat right in the middle of Sandy and Dawn. We had all come to the party together, but for some reason they didn't seem to be having as much fun as I. We sat staring and laughing at some of the hideous outfits that crossed our path as the DJ switched records. "Ooh', I said, 'I am burning up."

"I bet. You were out there shaking your ass like there's no tomorrow," Sandy said smiling at me and lifting her right hand to slap five with Dawn.

"Ain't that the truth," Dawn agreed, meeting Sandy's hand in mid air.

They were right. I had been dancing from the time we arrived at the party. I was in a good mood. The New Year was here and I felt like a new person; in fact, I was a new person. I was starting all over. See, I had just broken up with my - no job having, momma's boy - boyfriend and declared my independence from blood sucking leeches like him. I had on my skintight black dress - showing off curves that not even a race car driver can handle. I wore my hair down - just over my shoulders and flipped at the ends - and everything else about me was perfect. The DJ put on an old school jam and the three of us got up to dance. Gracefully, we moved to the dance floor as if we owned it. Sandy in her long, white, flowing dress, and Dawn, in her short sassy red dress, looked just as good as me. We went right to the center of the floor, bypassing all the "wall flowers" and a few shameful looking women dressed in "dental floss." We clapped our hands and sang aloud as our bodies carried on with the music, forcing our hips to sway from side to side and causing our arms to fly up in the free air. We laughed and cheered each other on as we did the best we could at keeping up with the fast paste rhythm. Brothas and sistas all around us were having a good time. There was a smile on all the different shades of brown faces. Sistias did a dance that seemed to hypnotize their male dance

companion. Fingers were snapping, heads were bobbing, and even the darkness of the night seemed to enjoy our mood. Fluorescent lights revealed the mystery of the dark, the music blended in with it's nature call and we all danced and sang and clapped as if rehearsing some sort of ritual worshipping the night. Then DJ put on a slow song, so we sent back to our seats where there was now a good-looking man sitting in my place. Sandy and Dawn claimed their seats and I brought over a chair from another table. I wasn't angry that the guy stole my seat, but I was a bit annoyed that he didn't even offer "his" seat to me after seeing that my friends had already seated themselves, and I was left standing. Placing my chair between Sandy's and Dawn's, I smiled at him. He smiled back and that's when I realized what a handsome man he was. Something about his smile paused in my mind as I tried to carry on a conversation with the girls, I kept becoming distracted by his presence. I looked at him through the corners of my eyes and could see that he was moving his head up and down to the beat of the slow, sensual music that played in our background. When it wasn't obvious, I turned my head in his direction to get a full peek of his wonder. I managed to see his shining jet-black hair formed in tiny curls all over his head. He wasn't sporting a Jerry Curl or anything like that, he had a natural do. Before I could turn my head back in the direction of the conversation I was trying to have , he looked up and looked right into my eyes. I got shy and turned around quick. *He must've felt me looking*, I thought. My pulse began to speed up and my palms were getting moist. I wanted to talk to him. I wanted to know who he was and why he was sitting alone. I kept my cool and pretended to know what Dawn was talking about when she looked at me for an answer to a question she must've asked. Sandy started to say something but I ignored her, and in the middle of her sentence, I turned around to gorgeous and before I could catch myself, I asked him if he knew the name of the song that was playing. "No" he said and keep moving his head to the music.

"My name is Tonya" I said and held my hand out for him to shake.

"Hi Tonya" he said and shook my hand lightly.

So far, I was on a one way street to nowhere because he acted as

though he didn't want to be bothered. I swept a piece of my hair away from my face and behind my ear. I bit down hard on my bottom lip and sighed. I should've known that if he was sitting alone then obviously he didn't want any company. I returned to the conversation between Sandy and Dawn.

"So Tonya are you from around here?" I heard his calm voice ask from behind me.

I turned around and smiled. "Not originally, but I am attending UCLA."

"UCLA? Wow, you must be smart," he said sounding a little more interested.

"No, just a hard worker that's all"

"What's your major?" he asked looking right into my eyes. He scooted his chair closer to mine and leaned in toward me. I was getting nervous, but I played it cool.

"Psychology," I said trying not to blush, "Are you from around here?"

"No, I attend school out of the state. I'm just here for the holidays visiting my family." Damn, I thought. He shot down that plane. I wanted to end the conversation right then, but something about him just wouldn't let me. I looked into his warm brown eyes and took a deep breath.

"Soooo, are you here alone?" I ask exhaling the air I sucked in.

"No, I'm with a friend but I don't know where he is."

"I hope you drove."

"I did."

"Good. What college *do* you go to?"

"Michigan State"

"Oh, what's your major?"

"African History," he said proudly.

History? I hate history. I can't bear to be in a history class for an hour much less having it for a major.

"Why history?" I had to ask.

"Why not?"

"I don't know? I guess I've never been one for history."

"Can't live the future without knowing the past," he said, pointing his index finger at me and grinning.

"Yeah I know, but..."

"But what?"

"No offense or anything, but history is so boring." I confessed.

"How can you say that?"

I shrugged my shoulders and gave him a confused look. I guess that was all he needed, because he began to enlighten me on a bunch of African History I didn't know about. The funny thing is that what he talked about wasn't the boring stuff my professors taught. What he had to say interested me, and the more he spoke, the more I became attracted to him. He had moved his seat even closer to me and was leaning in so close that I felt an overwhelming desire to lean over and kiss him right smack on his beautiful lips from which his knowledge flowed so passionately. He talked about the books he had read - some of which I either tried to read but got too bored, or fell ignorant to know they existed. He quoted Maya Angelou and Dubois. He spoke of all African American achievers, some I knew, but most, I was unfamiliar with.

"Have you read 'Things Fall Apart' by Achebe?" he asked.

Who? I had no idea who he was talking about. He had blown my mind thirty minutes ago when he first spoke, and I was not ready to look like a complete uneducated fool in front of him, so I lied.

"I've heard of him, but I haven't had time to actually check out his work," I say feeling my nose wanting to grow.

"You should really check it out when you get the chance."

"I will."

It was my turn. I dazzled him with a little bit of Freud, a dash of Erickson, and a lot of Rodgers. I was determined to let him know that I was no dummy. I too could hold a decent conversation. I talked about why I chose Psychology for my major. I told him how, Psychologically, African American children are in need of love and support from their peers, parents and people in the community. I discussed my plans to specialize in Family, Marriage and Child Psychology so I could help to rekindle the relationships in African American families. He listened. He

gave me his undivided attention. He was totally oblivious to the world around us and was clearly focussing on what I had to say. I never looked away from his gaze as I went on and on about my career goals and life aspirations. He listened intently and gave an occasional smile and a nod of his head. I felt at ease, as if I could tell him anything about me.

"What are your hobbies?" he asked.

I was shocked because most guys never even ask that sort of a question.

"I'm a writer, so I guess you can say I like to write." I answered.

"What do you write?"

"Fiction."

"Really?"

"Yeah, mostly I write short stories and essays, but right now I'm putting the finishing touches on my novel."

"Novel!" he said surprised.

"Yep" I said smiling and holding my head up in the air with the utmost confidence.

He said, "You're amazing."

"Not really," I responded modestly.

I looked around me, and Dawn and Sandy were gone. I scanned the area to find them and I saw Sandy dancing with a short, chubby, light skinned man. He appeared to be having a difficult time keeping up with her, but that didn't keep his little fat hands from rubbing up and down the sides of her tall, thin figure. Not too far from them, Dawn was leaned up against the wall talking to some big, masculine, chocolate brotha. He was looking fine as hell and I could tell that Dawn was pleased with him too because she was grinning from ear to ear and nodding her head in agreement to whatever he was saying.

"Do you live on Campus?" gorgeous asked recapturing my attention.

"No, I live on my own."

"You mean at home."

"No, I mean I live alone in my own apartment not too far away from campus." I said shocking him again. He asked if I worked and I told him that I worked full-time. He said that if I worked full-time, I must go to

school part-time. Though I knew it might be hard to believe, I told him that I also went to school full-time. Then he wanted to know how if I worked and went to school full-time, how did I have time to write a novel. I didn't answer him because I had no idea how I managed to do all those things at once. He, on the other hand, lived at home with both of his parents. His mother was, of course, a housewife and his father worked for NASA. He said his parents paid for his tuition but he had a part-time job working for a friend of his family. He also considered himself a writer in his spare time. I started to feel inferior as he turned the subject from him back to me and began telling me how amazing I was to be out on my own and still accomplishing my goals. I told him that he was lucky to have parents to live with and financial support through school.

"My parents divorced long ago, and when I turned eighteen my mother kicked me out of the house." I said almost ashamed. He asked why and I told him the long drawn out story. I didn't feel right telling him so much, after-all we had just met. Besides, a party wasn't exactly the appropriate atmosphere for me to go digging skeletons out of my closet and laying them on his lap, but he listened empathetically. He reached over and massaged my shoulder and I felt like I'd known him for years. I wanted to hold on to the moment. I wanted to spend the rest of my life at the party talking to him. He looked down at his watch.

"Can you believe it's one thirty?" he asked.

"One thirty?" I said, I looked away and saw Sandy making her way towards us.

"Girl, I'm ready to go", she said standing with one hand on her hip and the other hand trying to smooth her hair back into place. Sista was sweating like a pig at a luau. I looked at gorgeous and he said, "It is getting late. I think I better go find my friend now."

Damn things were just getting good and Sandy just had to initiate the ending of it all.

"Maybe I can call you" he said, "I would love to get together and have coffee sometime."

Trying not to show any disappointment, I said, "sure". We exchanged telephone numbers and vowed to keep in touch.

"I'd like to read your novel" he said.

I didn't have a problem with that. In fact, I would have told him the complete story line by line, right there, just to prolong our departure. I told him that I would, also, like to read anything he had written. I told him that I would be sure to check out Achebe's, *Things Fall Apart*. I felt myself growing empty as our encounter's fulfillment oozed from my heart. I didn't want to walk away. It was almost like a feeling you get at the airport when you're saying good-bye to a loved one who doesn't visit very often. You know that you may see that person again, but the question is, when. I looked at him and I wanted more than anything for him to know what I was feeling. I couldn't tell him, I mean how could I? What was I to say, "Oh darling, please don't go. I have waited for someone like you to cross my path and now that you're here, I don't want you to leave. Come with me, let's run away and build our perfect little world of peace and harmony"? I couldn't explain my feelings. All I know is that I wanted to have a few more moments of his time, but as the three of us stood in a semi circle, him waiting for me to excuse him so he could go find his friend, and Sandy waiting for me period, I knew our time was up.

"Okay, it was nice meeting you." I said.

"Same here." he said and shook my hand good-bye.

He was walking away when he turned around and called out "Tonya!"

"Yeah" I said raising my face up from the floor.

"My name is Eugene" he said and smiled "and I promise I'll call you".

I smiled and waved. I stood there and watched him disappear in the crowd of people still dancing and having a good time, but this time not everyone was smiling. I held the small piece of paper with his phone number written on it tightly in my hand and made a wish to see him again. I looked at Sandy and she was still standing there with her hand on her hip looking at me.

"Who was that white boy?" she asked rudely, frowning her nose up.

"His *name*", I said 'is Eugene".

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