

A grayscale painting of a person's face and hand. The person's face is on the left, looking slightly down and to the right. Their hand is raised towards the center of the frame, with fingers slightly curled. The background is dark and textured with brushstrokes. The text "The Opiate" is written in a red, cursive font across the middle of the image, overlapping the hand and the person's face.

The Opiate

The Opiate

Your literary dose.

© The Opiate 2015

This magazine, or parts thereof, may not be reproduced without permission.

Cover design by Robert Bowen

Layout design by Sarah Shelton

**"To hold a pen
is to be at war."**

- Voltaire

Editor-in-Chief

Genna Rivieccio

Poetry Editor

Armando Jaramillo Garcia

Contributing Writers

Fiction:

Josiah Golojuh **7**

David Rice **13**

Daniel Adler **20**

Poetry:

Zeke Greenwald **27-28**

Matt Nelson **29**

Laura Sims **30-32**

Paige Taggart **33-34**

Larry Jones **35-36**

Criticism:

Genna Rivieccio **38**

Editor's Note

Although the summer usually evokes a feeling of levity, the cover of our second issue possesses a dark aura. There is, after all, something almost arousing about being antithetical to what people expect. Toying with minds and subverting expectation. This is what *The Opiate* is all about. Do not expect a constant. For that is not what literature—nor New York City—represents. These two aforementioned entities, so enmeshed in one another, have a toxic relationship, yet thrive on being together.

So, too, does *The Opiate* thrive on bringing you the type of material that no one else will—whether out of fear of breaking a certain mold or a mere lack of taste that deviates from what is au courant. This issue, filled with tales of monstrous villains, murderous friends and mildly schizophrenic delusionoids, is not likely to leave your subconscious anytime soon. Particularly if you're the sensitive soul I believe you to be as a result of picking up this publication and reading this far. Because, you see, all sensitive and artistic souls are dark-hearted, and grapple with the "lightness" of trying to fit in with the current literary landscape and the population at large.

For those who have still managed to wear their emotions on their sleeve, the world is a hard place. Especially a world that is constantly trying to shovel what they think will sell down your throat. But there's something to be said for the freedom of the fringe.

Yours very sincerely,

Genna Riviuccio

6.
FICTION

The Corpse Boy

Josiah Golojuh

Although he did not look like one, The Golem was a hero. An accident in space ravaged his body and made him appear a monster, as it did his brother, The Grim. Glen “Gray Hair” Graboyes, a hot shot shuttle pilot, and his brother Reuben, a crackpot scientist; together attempted to travel around the rings of Saturn, backwards and forwards through time. Interstellar raydons changed the identical twins into matching monsters. Save for the distinct scar across Glen’s face, they remained two stupendously different men who happened to spring from the same chromosome. They shared only two things, their appearance and their bold daring sense of adventure. A cataclysmic miscalculation on Reuben’s part, and overly impetuous piloting on Glen’s part, resulted in the interstellar radiation that changed them. They returned to earth, but they did not return as Glen and Reuben. Glen came back the noble and loving Golem, however Reuben’s dark heart grew only shades blacker as he became the murderous and hateful Grim.

When Oliver’s mum gave him the toy, the package read “THE GRIM,” in bold yellow and red letters, but he knew better. He knew it was actually The Golem, it was the hero. The Grim lied, cheated, stole, and even killed! Oliver’s toy was that of a good man. A man befallen by tragedy, which made him a better man. His toy was not the Grim, it was the Golem.

Everyday Oliver played alone in his yard. Inside the trailer his mum yelled so loudly at the TV it forced Oliver to gather a handful of toys and make his way to the barren front yard. There the tall dying grass became a desert savannah, a tropical rainforest, a far off alien world, anywhere other than where Oliver was. His imagination carried him off with one consistent feature to his tall tales, a quiet thoughtful hero subdued a loud and bombastic villain. The toys he took would vary, with one exception, he always took The Golem. The Golem was always the hero, Oliver’s hero.

The yelling happened when his Mum was alone, as she was nearly all of the time. Sometimes she shouted about those “liberal bastards,” or “those cunt bag Republicans.” He did not know what any of it meant, but he knew if his mum did not like them they must be no good.

Other times the shouting was different, like she was in pain, but enjoying it. That kind of shouting came when the men visited. She called them her “Special Company.” That shouting came at night. He knew it was best to pretend to sleep, trapped in his bed attempting to find quiet in his head. When the Special Company came during the day she never had to tell him to go outside, he already knew it. It was apparent to him by the looks on the faces of the men. There he remained until they left. On those days, even if it was raining,

Oliver would venture as far from the house as he could go without leaving the yard.

In the yard he played, and for the most part he tuned out the noise. He took The Golem on adventures all around the world. In his hands The Golem traveled deep into the past and far into the future. The noise from inside often prevailed, and he moved farther out into the yard. On the loudest days he played almost on the gravel road that weaved through the trailer park, often coming to the edge, but never stepping into the street.

Everyday the Paper Boy would come, deliver the newspaper, regard Oliver's toys and then be on his way. Other than the Paper Boy and the Special Company visiting every few months, never coming back a second time, Oliver was left alone in the yard.

Occasionally he had company from the Neighbor, a former Marine turned kindly-but-chronic-drinker-next-door. The Neighbor periodically stood over the open hood of his rusted, patchwork-primed Trans Am. On the rarest of occasions he even got as far as taking a wrench to a valve or hose on the engine, but in the whole of Oliver's short memory no progress had been made.

It was a Tuesday, and it was hot. Oliver's mum somewhere in the house with her Special Company. The noise forced him to the edge of the lawn. He would never step onto the road. He pulled several

bunches of the pebbles from its edge and built The Golem a fortress of rock. A battlement from which The Golem and his super heroic

adventuring friends would enact justice and protect the weak. As he played, he became lost in The Golem's medieval journey. The sound of gravel crunching under boot and the

smell of garlic and motor oil snapped him out of the trance of his imagination. Returning to reality, he saw a large man standing over him.

By adult standards The Man would have been considered short, but to Oliver, as he loomed over him, he was a giant. For a split second he could have sworn he looked upon The Grim. He was sure he was a villain, until The Man spoke.

"You best be careful buddy, else you'll end up in the road," he said grinning.

After the man spoke, Oliver knew he could not be The Grim. The Grim would not be thoughtful; The Grim would not look out for anyone other than The Grim. The Man continued, "The road's dangerous, it's not nice to little guys who get lost on it."

The Man hunched down over Oliver, casting his shadow over both him and The Golem's fortress. Oliver flinched

at the man's proximity. The Man leaned back, but he did not step away.

"It's a snake that'll bite off your little head," The Man smirked as he snapped his teeth together with a hiss. Oliver fled into the house, leaving his toys behind. Once inside, he locked the door



behind him. He sat on the floor next to his mum's chair, hoping she would come and comfort him, but knowing she would not. Outside The Man bent down and carefully reinforced the walls of the Golem's stone fortress. The Neighbor stepped through his front door. The Man froze for a moment as the Neighbor peered at him. The Man resumed his reinforcement and the Neighbor

passed it off as “simply peculiar.” As the Neighbor popped the Trans Am’s hood, the Man gathered The Golem and the other action figures, walking them over to the house. The Neighbor glared at The Man as he crossed the yard, The Man responded with a hidden chuckle.

Back inside the trailer, the Special Company stepped out of the bedroom. He was fat and hairy. As he walked to the bathroom, Oliver saw everything: all of the parts he knew he should never see. Even parts half hidden by fat. All of the parts he never wanted to see again. Despite his disgust, Oliver wished that one day the Special Company would be nice, that one would stay, that he would be his dad. But they were never nice, they never stayed, they would never be his dad. After using the bathroom the Special Company stopped in the hall, looking on the boy through small dark eyes. He entered the bedroom.

A moment later his mum shouted, “Get outside! Mummy’s got company! Go play in the

Oh-so-carefully closing it behind him, he stepped through the door. His action figures greeted him on the porch. The Man had stood all the toys up in a row, The Golem at the center. Oliver smiled. He checked the yard, and looked down the street. No sight of The Man, only the Neighbor leaning over his Trans Am’s exposed engine. Oliver returned to his fortress, finding it better than when he left it. Twice as tall, twice as strong, infinitely more glorious.

Each day the strange Man passed, and each day he passed closer and closer, finally crossing through the yard. Prior to that, the only one who would cross through the yard was the Paper Boy, everyday bringing more. Eventually The Man passed through daily and freely as though he were strolling through a park. The only exception being if The Man saw the Neighbor at his Trans Am. On those days, The Man journeyed at an absurd distance, inconveniently far away.

One day The Man stopped. “I know your name,” he said.

Louie?” The Man paused. “I know what it really is, your mum told me, she’s my friend. She said it’s Oliver.”

Oliver smiled, and moved The Golem.

“My name, I had to give it to myself. Your mum named you, but my daddy named me and he was a villain. I named myself Indian. All the greatest heroes and warriors were Indians, and I became a good man when I gave myself that name,” Indian finished.

Oliver’s hand trembled. The action figure dropped out. Over time, the comments expanded beyond broad greetings and generalities; they became open doors. Doorways through which Oliver refused to step. Invitations to conversations the boy did not want to have.

Day by day Indian tried something new, saying something about the neighborhood, cartoons, superheroes, even Oliver’s mum. With the crossing always came a kind word, a warm greeting, a comment on Oliver’s toys or the cartoon or superhero t-shirt he was wearing. Oliver

did not like it, Oliver did not like Indian, but he was always so polite, and knew the names of all

the toys! Nothing worked, Oliver never responded.

Until one day Indian hit upon the right detail. “You know The Golem really isn’t the hero,

“Oliver ceased to see a man, he now only saw a monster.”

yard!”

Upon his mum’s yell he got up to the door.

“And don’t slam the goddamn door on your way out!”

Oliver glanced up.

“Is it Glen? Maybe Reuben?”

Oliver looked away.

“Maybe it’s Huey, Dewey or

he's the villain. The Grim's the hero, but The Golem stole his identity and does evil in a good man's name."

With his eyes as big as hubcaps on the Trans Am next door the boy could not help but retort as the passion for his hero flared within him.

"No he isn't! The Golem's a good guy."

Halfway through his second sentence he teetered. His stance wavered and the fear of talking to Indian overtook him.

"Let me show you, back in my trailer I have the proof. I got all the comic books. All the original issues. Goin' way back into the sixties. When I was little, fresh little pumpkin peach like you," he said.

Indian reached down for the boy. Oliver shrugged him off. Taking The Grim, he ran inside the trailer.

Several weeks passed. During that time, the only person to cross the yard was the Paper Boy. His mum had no visitors, and Indian did not come. Even the Neighbor failed to make an appearance, having given up on the now tarp covered Trans Am. Finally, Indian appeared again. Indian stood far up across the other side of the road, acknowledging Oliver with only the slightest of nods. Paralyzed at the sight of Indian, Oliver stood, regarded him, holding his position in the yard, but not waving back.

As the next several weeks passed, summer turned to fall. The days grew colder and more damp, the papers came later, and

the sun set earlier. Indian once again inched closer and closer to the yard, until he was again crossing the yard, returning to general pleasantries he greeted Oliver, "Hi little friend."

Now thoroughly the heart of fall, the leaves were a dying rainbow of red and orange. Oliver grew comfortable with the routine. The moment of encroachment a long forgotten memory, Indian's passing became the highlight of remarkably uneventful days, greater even than the delivery of the newspaper. One day, moments after the Neighbor parted from his again untarped Trans Am and disappeared into his shed, Indian stopped in the yard. In his hands, a comic book featured the splash title "THE GRIM AND THE GOLEM." Oliver did not know the comic book, but he knew the characters.

Entranced by the cover, Oliver yanked it out of Indian's hands. It featured a weeping Golem standing over a grave that read "Here lies The Grim." The title at the bottom read, "Brother's Keeper." Oliver did not know what the words meant, but he knew they were beautiful. With greater desire than he had ever before known, Oliver wanted to open that comic book. To step through the doorway of the mylar bag and live in that better more vibrantly colored world.

"You like it?" asked Indian.

Oliver responded with a nod.

Indian leaned into the

space of the boy, Indian's beard brushed Oliver's cheek. The beard scratched the boy's soft skin just a little, but he did not move away. In the discomfort he felt a closeness he never felt with a grown up before. A warmth that the Special Company nor his mum ever showed him. Oliver thought this must be what it is like to have a dad. In a whisper, Indian asked, "Do you want to see more?"

This time, Oliver spoke clearly, loudly, full of anticipation, "Yes!"

Saying it the way he would have said it if his dad asked him to go for an ice cream, wherever and whoever he was. Indian nuzzled Oliver. Oliver wanted to inch away, to flee the grotesque encroachment, but again he froze in the intimacy.

"I'll tell you all 'bout The Grim and The Golem, and Hero, and his son Hero II, even Vigilance. All of 'em. I know all their stories. I have all the comics, and more toys even than you!" he shouted.

It again confused Oliver. He did not understand why Indian knew about the action figures, why he knew so much about comic books and cartoons, but again, he battled back his worry for the sake of this strange new closeness.

"Come to my trailer, I have boxes of 'em in my bedroom," said Indian.

Indian leaned back and took Oliver by the hand. Oliver extended the comic up to the man, but Indian pushed it back upon the boy, "No, no, you hang

onto that. That one's for you."

With the comic book dangling down behind him in his free hand, Oliver walked hand in hand with Indian. They strolled out onto the road and down over the crest of the hill. Just after they were out of sight, the Neighbor returned from inside his shed, dragging a soiled gray tarp behind him. Staring at the space vacated by Indian and Oliver. He shrugged and covered the Trans Am with the tarp.

Down they went, down to a spot, hidden behind uncared for hedges and bent jagged shrubs; there, Indian lived. The yard, filled with car parts and various other elements of mechanical junk and construction debris, was a virtual wasteland. Near the door sat a pile of trash, mostly discarded pizza and takeout boxes. Flies and maggots populated the stack.

Oliver halted. With a whimper he said, "I want to go home."

Before Oliver finished his sentence, Indian swung a short piece of rebar, splitting the side of Oliver's skull. He failed to knock him unconscious. Still clutching the comic book, his eyes searched for an escape that would not be found. With a yank, Indian pulled the now bloody comic book from Oliver and tossed it on the porch. He took Oliver, dragging him by his foot. Blood trickled from the wound across the yard, then the porch and then into the house. Oliver's exposed skull bumping over the metal at the base of the screen door.

Inside the house, Indian stood over Oliver. The house stunk even more strongly of garlic and motor oil than Indian. Oliver ceased to see a man, he now only saw a monster. With his dark deep set eyes and his roundness, Oliver was reminded of The Grim. The villain who shared the appearance of the hero. Oliver saw The Grim, Indian was gone.

Oliver took away the last lingering threads of humanity that The Grim carried, nothing of The Man could be left. That made it better. As The Grim dead-bolted the door behind him, Oliver thought of the screen door.

"He left the screen door open." Oliver's last clear thought.

The hours and days that came after were a haze of pain and confusion. A million images a second with crystal sharp clarity in his mind. He could not feel them, but he saw them. The images taunted him, like a collection of memories that did not belong to him, but belonged to someone who lived long enough to understand what they meant.

For days it went on and on. The Grim did terrible things to Oliver. Oliver wept and bled. He saw The Grim during the torment. He only understood the pain, pain being all he came to know. His last knowledge. His deepest.

Oliver decided The Golem did not exist, there was only the betrayer, only The Grim. Upon this realization he gave up. He stopped believing in God. He

stopped believing in his mum. He stopped believing he ever had a dad. He stopped believing in superheroes. There was no good, good was a figment of a child's imagination. A product of a small boy's split skull.

After a week, infection set in. The gash split wider each time The Grim tormented him. The wound throbbled, the world pulsated and bent in all directions with great awful surges of blistering pain. The gash festered, and with the stench growing ever more pungent, The Grim grew tired of Oliver.

In the dead of a crystal clear fall night, under the light of the moon, The Grim took Oliver, cradling him in his arms and carried him out the back door of the trailer. Through the tall dead corn and into the deep dark woods on the other side, The Grim carried him.

There in the woods at night, using an industrial steel wire, The Grim strung Oliver up, threading a noose of cold metal wire around his neck. The Grim released him, the wire tightened, slicing into Oliver's thin neck. The pain did not register for Oliver. He did not know there to be new pain, or more of it, only that it continued. It was pain on top of pain.

He hung in the breeze, swaying back and forth, the resultant twitching, a muscular reaction. He did not try to escape.

As Oliver hung from the tree, his life squeezed out of him. He saw The Grim, doing something to himself. Oliver did not know what it was, but

he knew it was bad. Oliver did not know it yet, but he had died, the image of the hunched Grim became his last memory. The Grim roared in satisfaction and stumbled away, back through the forest and into the corn.

The boy's lifeless body swayed in the breeze. The hurting stopped. There was only one feeling left and it was that of numbness. There was one more thought, "My mummy doesn't know I'm gone." Then once and for all, nothing.

The boy's corpse hung, swaying, waiting to be found.

Suddenly there was a great bright light. Great columns and colonnades surrounded the courtyard to an ethereal trailer park. The sun beamed as though it came from everywhere at once. Everything glowed, the world smiled. Thousands upon thousands of cartoon characters and human sized action figures stood cheering at the center of the courtyard. Oliver noticed his mum next to The Golem, together calling him over to them. Picking Oliver up, The Golem cheerfully heaved him up onto his shoulder. Overhead, several fighter jets darted by leaving a wake of fireworks that read, "Happy Birthday Oliver!"

A whimper on the wind the boy stood. He looked up, there he saw himself, hanging from a tree, snow upon his shoulders, the ice preserving his body. He knew he was dead and that was okay. He knew what dead bodies were, they were corpses. He was kind of like a superhero now, Corpse Boy. He glided above the snow. Watching himself as the leaves trickled down around his corpse he wondered, "How did I die?"



Joey In Vermont

David Rice

Joey drags him across the campground and into the lake with the others. I drift along, watching. It's always the same brand of paper towel wadded up in their necks. The gauzy dryness is the worst part. It's all I remember from when it was me, The Widow still in the trailer, covered in my blood, sitting where she'd sat when he walked in on us, cutting that first honeymoon summer short.

We grew into this together in Northampton, MA, where we first saw our future diverging from that of the species, heaving off what we called then the Tyranny of the Ordinary to found a thousand-year dynasty at whose outset we would soon stand. We would be the ur-fathers of a line of heroes that would define the entire coming era, perhaps the last in the earth's history. We spent our nights between nineteen, when we first knew it, and twenty-one, when we knew it was time to leave town, at the bar of the Hotel Northampton, where the Strip meets Main St. They carded but the bartender could see we

weren't like the others and left us alone. We sipped heavy scotch and sat till closing time, purging from our thinking all confusion and instability so that whatever had taken a chance on us would never have reason to doubt.

Old men in thick coats took up the rest of the bar, drinking themselves through the bottoms of lives they'd brought to no fruition in all the time they'd been given.

We left to find The Widow the year we turned twenty-one.

That New Year's Eve, the Hotel decked out with party lights and an ice sculpture of the digits of the coming year, we caught, in the snow falling against the windows, a glimpse of the world as it would be in a thousand years, free of all mediocrity and lassitude thanks to the thing that was in us and would filter through The Widow to find expression in our children. Even if we didn't live long enough to see it, we would die knowing we had passed it on.

As the snow fell harder and the crowd

approached mania, we saw her sitting at the end of the bar under a flashing blue Bud Lite sign. It was so vivid we began to approach, only recognizing it as the vision it was when we got where we were going and confirmed that no such Bud Lite sign exists in the Hotel Northampton.

When the crowd fell to chanting at midnight, their voices sounded like cheers of farewell.

We took the Peter Pan to Springfield the next morning and committed to that ruined city for six months until we found her at a bar and grill called Theodore's, near the highway onramp.

As soon as we saw her under that flashing blue Bud Lite sign, alone and waiting, Joey and I went back into the swarm of beggars outside, to see which of us would be the husband, which the cousin or uncle.

We waited, but no answer emerged. There was tension, an unwelcome flood of something close to anger at the faltering vision in our shared mind, suddenly weaker than it'd been at nineteen or twenty or even yesterday. We felt lonely and exposed and Joey hit a boy holding out his hands on the sidewalk.

Then he stormed back into the bar and got in The Widow's face and barked, "I'll do it" without making sure I was behind him.

We left Springfield in The Widow's trailer at dawn, our mandate having enveloped her life just as it had ours. She left the man she'd been living with and the real estate office where she'd worked.

We regarded her from the futon in back as she drove up I-91 to Vermont.

The wedding was held at a luxury inn in Brattleboro. It was June, the three of us and a Justice of the Peace. I signed as Witness.

The ceremony ended quickly and we paid the bill with cash from the savings account we'd closed upon leaving Northampton, and cruised to a campground fifteen miles further north, where the honeymoon would occur.

After The Widow parked the trailer at a spot with a view of the lake through the trees, Joey and I hung the rain tarp over the picnic table and waited while she showered and combed her hair.

We took stock of how far we'd come, straining for a vision of the future through the trees, but all we saw was the lake, night settling over it.

Joey looked at that and I looked at him. He sent off a kind of warning signal, like an eel's electric charge, so I looked away and back at the trailer, which The Widow was now exiting, her clothes sheer and suggestive.

Something in me wanted to flare at the sight of her, alarmingly more so than it had in Springfield, but I shook it off on the walk to dinner.

In the dining hall, the food was served cafeteria style and there was a comedian by the condiments area, talking on and on about his time at Vassar.

We left when he finished his set.

We made our way across

the grounds to the outdoor hot tub, slid off the foam cover and our clothes, and settled in.

Exposed to the Vermont summer sky, Joey and I scanned the stars, duller and more numerous here than in Northampton. The Widow closed her eyes and lay back.

They finally had sex after this. I kicked around a grove of picnic tables. Someone had carved BUTT CENTRAL into a tree, with an arrow pointing at a pile of cigarette butts balanced against the trunk.

I looped around the rest of the camp in case they weren't done, passing the archery and air rifle range and the climbing wall, and a pile of canoes plastered with weeds on the lakeshore.

When I came back they were passed out, on far distant sides of the trailer's foldout bed.

I slept on the futon under the side windows, and I can't say I slept well.

This became our routine.

After two weeks, we added mushrooms.

We ate them in the cafeteria, slumping into the hot tub just as they came on, our stomachs filling with gas and our skulls molting like soft-shell crabs. I felt my chest hair expanding away from me, and I felt hemmed in by my position here in Vermont, defenseless against whatever was coming.

When Joey and I closed our eyes we saw the high ground of the mountains surrounding the

lake, looming down and framing us in. The longer we looked into that dark that seemed even darker up there since it was more immersed in the night, the more we came to feel at the bottom of a steep drop, in the hot center of a volcano, peaks framing the sky on all sides.

We saw wildmen roaming those peaks, looking down on us. They made their solitary way along, on some errand that suffered no definition, perplexed to find us so far below.

We got out of the hot tub on the edge of drowning and squished back to the trailer in wet flip-flops, holding our bellies and doubling over in the bushes.

I spent midsummer imagining the three of us driving away in late August, The Widow pregnant with Joey's child and me whispering blessings against her belly, planning to rent a room in whatever town they decided to settle in, out West I hoped... and all of us living there like that, until returning here, with the first baby, next summer, to start on the next, confident that the world was already a little different thanks to the presence of our firstborn within it.

But by late July, Joey was spending the bulk of every day alone by the archery and air rifle range, swamped in his own thoughts, which crackled in our shared mind without coming clear to me.

He got his lunch from the commissary while The Widow and I ate in the dining hall. Sometimes, when we picked up beer at the

commissary after lunch, we'd encounter him by the microwave in back, slowly eating crackers and jelly with a spoon.

Usually, she unloaded the beer in the trailer while I waited outside, then we both went down to the lake until evening.

But on August 1, while she was carrying the six-pack and I was carrying a new can of repellent and six apples, The Widow invited me in.

It was mid-afternoon, and I could dimly hear Joey's thoughts far off in the camp, angry and confused.

She and I sat on the unmade futon, drinking two beers apiece and looking at the apples. The afternoon dimmed out behind the drawn plastic shades. I could feel how much pain she was in, and her desire to ask me something that might relieve it. I focused on containing those words in her throat, but still I saw a kind of darkness raining down on us both as if a trapdoor had been opened overhead.

This turned out to be the door of the trailer, and that darkness was Joey, standing there quiet and furious, bugs swirling behind him, the trailer creaking on its wheels as he shifted from foot to foot, a campfire crackling at a nearby site. He looked carefully over our four empty cans, the two full ones still slotted into the plastic six-pack rings, our posture on the futon, our bare feet touching. Then he looked it all over again, like he might glean more the second time.

Then he'd seen enough. He walked past us into the kitchen and

took the paring knife down from the magnetized wall strip.

When he came at my neck, I braced for it like a boy for a blood test, looking away from his outstretched arm. I knew that what was about to happen would be worse than anything that had happened before, but also that it would be quick, and that what would come after would be long and painless.

When he cut through the back of my tongue, I tasted strawberries on the blade.

The Widow didn't scream or try to stop him, or even move away as my blood rained over her. I think she grasped enough of who we were by this point to see what had to happen. By inviting me inside with her today, she simply decided it would happen now and not soon.

Joey pulled me off my seat with the knife deep in my throat and stepped on my head and sawed hard through my neck, biting into spine, looking at me until my eyes lost his. He stopped just before my head came off.

He dragged me down to the lake, rocks from the beach stuffed in my pockets, paper towels wadding my throat and covering the whole inside of the trailer.

The dryness of that quilted paper was horrific. When it got wet in the lake, it tasted like bile exiting my stomach.

As I sank, steam pouring from my corpse, she and Joey packed up the campsite and drove away, three weeks before the end of the season.

“I could feel how much pain she was in, and her desire to ask me something that might relieve it. I focused on containing those words in her throat, but still I saw a kind of darkness raining down on us both as if a trapdoor had been opened overhead.”

My first winter in steam is long and sad, and I know it's the first of many. It doesn't feel shocking to still exist, though it's no relief either.

I drift over the campground throughout the late summer and early fall, watching as the maintenance and kitchen crews depart and the facility is winterized. I watch the comedian fight to get paid.

Being in a valley, there is no ski season. The generators are put on Hibernate, just enough to keep the pipes from bursting. Then everyone is gone.

I drift around, my steam loose, up from the lake and back down at night, getting used to my new situation as the days shorten and a different Vermont takes over.

When it gets really cold in mid-December, I feel my steam turn sludgy, like bedridden muscles worn down to bad meat.

I contemplate wintering in the kitchen, where the pipes groan, but some mix of Hotel Northampton visions and a new set of steam-instincts sends me back to the lake, where my body lies on the bottom.

I drift one last time over the frostbitten facts of the campground and then, just before the solstice, settle into the water. I make it most of the way down before it freezes me through.

The winter passes without my managing another thought.

I thaw in late March, drift alone across the thawing grounds until May, when the staff returns. I'm at the property line at dawn on June 1 for the start of the season, the trailers rolling in, Joey and The Widow among them. I drift along in their exhaust all the way to the campsite, invisible in the humid reek.

They drive to the same site as last year and sit with the engine idling for a long time, like they're debating whether to stay. Summer begins when they kill the engine.

They cook in the pit by the dumpster and spray themselves with repellent away from the flame. I hang around in the smoke, trying to see what difference the year has made in them. I think they can feel my presence but dismiss it as the memory of me.

I hover close to their skin, seeing age, sallowness, exhaustion upon them. They both look somewhat crushed, their features closer together than last year, their heads smaller and denser.

After dinner and ice cream from the commissary, they walk barefoot across the campground to the hot tub, at its hottest tonight. Last year we joked that it loses a degree every night over the course of the summer, and I still believe this is true. They slip in, and I slip in with them, melding with the steam off the water in the cool night. We all three look up at the stars and I breathe the chlorine and their sweat and hair.

I drift along the tub bottom, past The Widow's feet, between her legs, pressing right up to the thin fabric of her bikini bottom. The two of them no longer bathe naked, as the three of us did. Nor do they risk taking mushrooms. I press up to Joey's suit and follow his body up to his head, turned up at the sky with his eyes closed, lids gray like they're covered with soot. His hand loosely supports a beer bottle in the water above his belly and I can almost see him searching the summit for those

wildmen.

Afterward, they stagger back across the grounds, tipping from the heat, hands on their temples, and fall on each other in the trailer, Joey's suit down around his knees, The Widow's pulled to one side. I hover by the door until it's over.

I'd planned to drift back to the lake and stay there until morning, but when I see The Widow rushing to the bathroom, cupping her crotch and trembling, I decide to follow her. She's in the shower by the time I drift past Joey, already asleep with his wet suit tangled around his ankles and his penis stuck to his left thigh.

I watch her standing to the side of the water, one hand still bunched up between her legs, bathing suit on the floor now, eyes red, almost bloody, adjusting the temperature dials with her other hand. I find it poignant that she takes such care to get the water right.

Then she's under it, scrubbing hard between her legs with a bar of soap, her back to me, sticking the soap inside, groaning, scratching at the enveloping skin with her long blue nails, uprooting hair, tearing at Joey's spurt like a nest of red ants.

I watch in sympathy, feeling that pain in me.

I hang out in the shower's steam, commingling with it. Once she's gotten rid of as much as she can, she goes on scrubbing, slow and gentle now, the soap dissolving, the register of her moaning creeping out of the realm of agony. She tips forward, leaning in more

against the wall, so I can see her opening fully out toward me from behind. I remember staring at an Internet printout with Joey at thirteen, very late one night in the space between our houses, of a woman in this position, her vagina and anus stacked atop one another with barely any space between, like the head of a comet with a thick vertical tail.

I move closer, close enough that she can feel me there. She pushes up against me and I feel my body made tangible, as sudden and drastic a change as when Joey killed me.

I summon all the desire I'd felt for that photo, looking into the future with Joey, starving for power, insane with ripeness, and crack open some hot pustule at my core. Braiding together the entrails I no longer have, I shoot its contents into The Widow.

She bites the linoleum wall of the shower.

Then I'm steam again, drifting back through the trailer, and she's toweling off, walking to bed, again cupping her crotch but not in pain anymore.

This sets the summer on its course. I follow them around every day, then into the hot tub at night, then hang back as they have their sex, never less sad than the first time. Then I visit The Widow in the shower, drifting back to the lake before dawn to regenerate in myself what I've spent in her.

Her skin changes early in her pregnancy. The ashiness lifts, the worry lines smooth out.

Joey, seeing it, lets go

completely.

I'm hovering by the AC unit when he presses her against the wall as she's slicing hamburger buns. He spews beery breath up her nose, staring at her rejuvenated skin and hair, his gut pressed hard against hers. He reaches around her throat and demands to know whose it is, only releasing her enough to say a name.

She says nothing, and it turns out he doesn't need her to. He takes the paring knife from her hand and tramps out, barefoot, in search of a sacrifice.

I still understand Joey's reasoning, though I can barely hear his thoughts anymore.

He runs to the nearest campsite, where a couple is roasting marshmallows, hits the woman across the face and goes straight for the man, shirtless, buff, tattooed.

In short order the man's neck is as ruined as mine was last summer, dammed with the same paper towels.

As I watch Joey drag him to the lake, I feel something like camaraderie, like we're again working together, sharing a grim clarity about what has to be done.

Joey kicks him into the water, jeans full of rocks from the beach, and I watch the body sink, eventually to find its way to the bottom, where mine is by now decomposed.

Joey and The Widow leave that night, their summer again cut short. The burgers she'd been cooking remain as black hives on the grill.

Another winter, another term in ice, shared now with a new body but no new man in steam since this one has no further part to play.

Joey, The Widow, and the baby, a girl, arrive on June 1. I've been thawed and drifting since March. Joey looks worse; The Widow looks better. I can see the rift widening.

I recommence with her in the shower that night. Her sex with Joey beforehand was so awful I couldn't watch, so I took a lap around the campground, watching strangers on their honeymoons.

This year, it takes only a day for Joey to see she's pregnant again. The saddest thing about the rage he flies into is how much effort it requires. He looks exhausted by the knowledge that if he doesn't kill someone there'll be truly nothing for him to do.

So he tells The Widow to take the baby into the bedroom and cover her ears with a pillow while I follow him out the door and watch as he kills this year's man.

After the body is in the lake, I expect Joey and The Widow to leave, but they don't. I listen as they discuss it, deciding that, since this will only keep happening, there's no longer any need to cut their vacation short.

It leaves me with a quandary as to whether to keep visiting The Widow in the shower, pushing our congress beyond the boundaries of the purely utilitarian.

I decide I will. I feel far enough from the days of divination

to put off wondering whether it's right, and she seems to enjoy it as much as I do, whatever she believes it is.

Life that summer takes on a kind of normalcy, all the problems addressed for the time being.

The years go on, boiled down to repetition. Joey and The Widow and I now have a proper Catholic family, seven girls and six boys, the trailer heaving as it rumbles in at the start of each season and out at the end, a new body sunk in the lake and a new baby growing in The Widow.

Joey looks inordinately old now, closer to his 50s than his 30s, and the children look frightened and malnourished. He and The Widow drink to suicidal excess, so much so that she often can't stand as we attempt to connect in the shower. At mealtimes she whispers about the real estate market in Springfield, depreciating faster than anyone thought possible. I suppose she's gone back into that line of work. Joey stares at his knuckles or chews the blood blisters on his fingertips.

I can see that our arrangement is close to over.

I follow Joey across the grounds at the end of the summer, my progress as slow as his as he lumbers through the weeds, tearing handfuls of sweat off his skin and throwing them onto his shoes. I hear him telling me that he won't be back. This is what it's come to, I hear him thinking, and I think, I agree, hoping he can still hear me.

Somewhere we're still nineteen at the bar at the Hotel Northampton, but not here. I perceive this thought without knowing if it's his or mine.

The next summer, The Widow returns without him.

I listen to her speak to our children, waiting for her to refer to Joey in some way that will reveal if he's dead or simply gone, but she never brings him up.

I watch her drink, but less this year, and more comfortably, like she's no longer sucking it down just to make way for more.

I wait for her to shower, but she doesn't that night, nor the night after.

On the third night, I crawl into bed with her, running up and down her body in search of the old friction, but she's cold to the touch, or I am. And dry.

My steam will not take shape.

As I continue to drift over her, my attention nervous and diffuse, I can tell there will be no more children. Perhaps there don't need to be. The ones we have will move through the world on their own terms, telling themselves whatever they want about the reason they were born, or facing the prospect of a life without one.

I drift once more over The Widow's sleeping body, letting a few droplets of myself linger on her skin until they're absorbed, wishing her well. Then, diminished, I float away, back to the lake, ready to never see her or our children again. All of them, as far as I'm concerned, will drift into the world Joey drifted into, the world of the living I suppose, and leave me here with all the ghosts of Vermont.

As I settle back into the lake, ready for winter though the air's still warm, there is relief in letting the last of my body go. I tip into the nonbeing I've lingered too long on the cusp of. No more sex, no more violence. Maybe no more time. Certainly no more desperation or fear.

THE END.

"I don't care. Order Chinese. I'll eat it later. Or whatever you want. I don't care," he repeated.

Michael retreated through the dark hall, the hair on his neck prickling. The look in Sebastian's eyes, his unawareness of his exposed nudity, his sitting in his room reading all day—abnormal behaviors, indeed. And worse, he had not yet scheduled his GRE test.

The next day Michael saw his psychiatrist of fifteen years, Mark Rosenfeld, a shortish man with small eyes and round cheeks. He combed his thin gray hair straight back and wore expensive suits and gold-rimmed rectangular glasses. He had written two books on bipolar disorder, which Michael had always thought he himself might have had, but Rosenfeld assured him that he was not manic. Over the years, their relationship had nearly ripened into a friendship beyond that of doctor-patient, but something professional in both men held them back from spoiling what they had, and limited their exchanges to Thursday afternoons.

Michael mentioned Sebastian's avoiding eye contact, his talking to himself, his sitting alone all day. Rosenfeld listened quietly, fingers steepled, brow low. When Michael finished, he broke the silence, "It's possible that he's manifesting symptoms of paranoid schizophrenia."

Yes. Sebastian's behavior had been intensifying for years: his lost sense of reality, his spending more and more time alone, which when pressed about, Sebastian called an exploration of consciousness or, "A Search for Truth." Rosenfeld had sat with Sebastian throughout his

childhood, not weekly, but now and then as Michael saw fit. He had told Michael that Sebastian's withdrawal from social situations was normal as a consequence of not having a mother. But now, in his twenties, it was clearly worse than either of them had expected.

Together Rosenfeld and Michael drafted a plan.

The following night, Michael invited Sebastian to Ringside Steakhouse. During the meal they discussed the purpose of art. Michael argued for the functionality of fashion and architecture while Sebastian invoked Kant's idea of aesthetic ideals for their own sake, which led Michael to momentarily doubt whether he was doing the right thing by taking him to the hospital (after all, could a madman recite such a logical argument?). But by the time they arrived at Good Samaritan under the pretext of Michael's making rounds, Sebastian was absorbing a collected Kierkegaard and had not met his father's eyes since his last bite of steak. Michael reminded himself that he and Rosenfeld had agreed upon a selfless action with everyone's best interest at stake.

He told Sebastian that there was a young patient who had been shot in the head in a gang fight, that it was worth seeing so that he could know how lucky he was. If Sebastian was suspicious, he did not show it, but once inside, when he saw Rosenfeld, he turned to run. Two male orderlies closed in on him. Michael began to sweat.

Sebastian's wail echoed down the hospital corridor, "Can't you let me be me?"

Now it was Michael looking away from his son, whose eyes flashed

with the desperation of an animal caught in a trap. Rosenfeld clapped him on the shoulder and said, "We're here to help."

"Fuck you," Sebastian spit. Each nurse grabbed one of his arms and began to pull him away. "You're a liar," he shouted at his father, "A fucking liar!" and in desperation, spit at him too. Michael shook his head. Sebastian broke down, crying that they were making a mistake, that Michael had betrayed him. "I'm the healthy one!" And with a look on his face like a dog headed to the pound, he threw a glance over his shoulder and said, "You've been living wrong the whole time. You hear me? You're the ones who are crazy!" The nurses pulled him along, unresisting, shaking his head and sobbing.

When his goosebumps went away, Michael looked at Rosenfeld, who shrugged and put an arm around his shoulder.

"I'm sorry," said Michael.

Rosenfeld sighed. "Now we can begin to help him."

For three days, Rosenfeld called Michael after Sebastian's sessions. His diagnosis was mild paranoid schizophrenia. The disease was early in its manifestation, though if left untreated it could worsen rapidly. Would he have to take care of his son for the rest of his adult life? He was not there enough in the wake of his wife's death; he was too focused on the boy's future instead of his present. He had waited too long to tell Rosenfeld how Sebastian slept past noon and locked himself in his room all day to read. He wanted to believe that Sebastian would outgrow these behaviors. He wanted to believe that Sebastian was normal.

The fourth day Rosenfeld

called Michael and said, "He signed out. He knew his legal rights and said he wasn't dangerous to anyone including himself, that he didn't need medicine. I wrote him a prescription for Aripiparazole in case he changes his mind. When he comes home, just apologize. He's upset with you most of all."

After all Michael had done for Sebastian, from paying for his college to letting him live rent-free in his childhood home while he prepared for grad school, he should be more appreciative, should understand that Michael had his best interests at heart.

Rosenfeld continued, "Tell him you're sorry you lied, that you noticed he was acting different and you wanted to help." Michael restrained himself from asking the question on his lips: What if he doesn't come home?

But Michael's worry was unfounded. Five minutes later the doorbell rang. Behind it stood Sebastian, soaking wet. He walked past his father, meeting his eyes briefly, looking scared and hurt, his gaze dirtied by burst blood vessels. In them was nothing of the glassy reflection from the week before; now his eyes were like two deep lakes on which sacrifices had once taken place. He had walked the four miles from the hospital in the rain.

Michael followed Sebastian into the kitchen and filled a kettle with enough water for two cups of coffee. "We only wanted to help."

Sebastian stared at the granite counter. "It was a prison," he said. "You tricked me."

Out the window, the biggest fir tree in the yard waved its limbs angrily in the storm. Michael filled the grinder and pushed down,

waiting until the sound became softer, less violent, before responding, "You wouldn't have gone otherwise. You needed a diagnosis. I needed a diagnosis." Michael instantly regretted saying that, but it was too late. Sebastian's lips tightened and a tension filled the room.

Sebastian sat without moving, his arms crossed on the granite. "I'm fine." A raindrop beaded from a strand of hair on his forehead and dripped onto the counter.

The wind picked up and howled over the roof. The fir tree's boughs waved faster, harder.

"Why don't you dry off? By the time you come back the coffee will be ready."

Michael half-expected Sebastian to resist. But he nodded and rose. When he came back downstairs, there was no more mention of the hospital. After that, everything returned, more or less, back to normal.

Sebastian's hospital stint was the proverbial wake-up call he needed. Although he seemed more guarded, he was willing to engage Michael openly, to discuss topics in the physical world, such as current events, as well as ideas. One afternoon Michael suggested that they get out of the house, drive to a cafe downtown. Sebastian smiled and agreed. They sat across from each other at Coffeehouse Northwest for a couple of hours, both of them reading until Michael had to make rounds. Sebastian's eyes flashed when he said, "That wasn't part of the deal," but he didn't make any other complaints.

A month later came the news that changed their lives forever. Michael's father's cousin, an eccentric spinster named Gloria they used

to visit on holidays and birthdays, had died and left Sebastian her acre property in East Portland, which she'd bought in the fifties when it was farmland. Sebastian abandoned his plans to apply to graduate school and listed the acre with a broker. Within days, a condominium developer bought the land for his asking price, with plans to tear the house down and erect two new buildings. With his small fortune, Sebastian planned to return to New York and buy an apartment. He had never loved Portland, had always yearned to be close to his mother's resting place, in a setting of high culture and diversity. There, he said, gentrification and real estate investment had a higher turnover, and he had a better chance to make a living as a non-working bourgeoisie. Michael could not tell if he was using this coinage ironically, and he knew better than to ask.

On a drizzly Portland morning, Michael drove Sebastian to the airport for his flight to New York. He congratulated Sebastian on his inheritance after having been so kind to the old woman whom he had always considered better off left in the care of others.

"She weathered the storm," Sebastian replied.

In her youth, Gloria survived a rare lymph node cancer, which had claimed her left leg. But that was no reason to accept her shelves of gewgaws and tchotchkes, the trails of ants that marched along her kitchen wainscoting, the two ancient pugs that shat in her house while she was left unaware, half-blinded by age and the blue glow of daytime television—her existence repulsed him to the point of denying the fact that he was related to her by blood, though as his father's cousin she was a very distant

relation. Upon once remarking to Sebastian that her house should be quarantined, Sebastian had said that it was dirty because she had no one to help her, and while cluttered, her home was filled with "relics." "If it gives her pleasure," he added, "why shouldn't she keep her house the way she wants?" At the time, Michael had thought the comment foolish, but now that his son's good will had offered him a career path in real estate investment made it all the more acceptable. Secretly, Michael had doubted Sebastian's ability to become an academic; he was too passive, too out there—and for him to work in an office seemed even more unrealistic. It was fitting that he should live alone in an apartment in the big city without having to rely on his father.

Michael did not plan to visit Sebastian. Though he himself had grown up in Long Island and done his residency at SUNY Downstate, he could not think of New York or Brooklyn without remembering Stella. He remembered that Saturday after a hundred hour work week, when

she was sitting at the kitchen table as he entered their little apartment. He knew immediately that something was wrong; normally she would have been waltzing through fumes of onion and garlic. She asked him to sit and hold her hand. She started to cry. At age thirty-seven, Stella had Stage IV liver cancer. The doctors expected her to live three months.

While Michael told her he would use his connections to get her the best care possible, the setting sun shone through the window, casting an oblique ray of light on her face. He had slept so little that week that he hallucinated she was wearing a golden mask. He squeezed her hand and together they walked to their bed. With his fingers in her hair, he fell immediately asleep. When he woke it was dark.

Television blared from the living room, where she sat on the floor, back against the couch, hand on a glass wrapped with paper towels. Two breasts of chicken marsala lay in a pan of cold onions, swollen like slugs. "Are you upset?" he asked. She

wouldn't look at him. He sat, still waking.

"You like making me cook while I'm sick?" she slurred.

"You don't have to cook," he said. "I'm so tired. Last night I slept an hour in the nurse's break room between patients."

She stood, her voice rising, "Oh, so you were with the nurses. You've been waiting for me to die." She screamed, "So when I'm dead you're gonna find a nurse to spend your money on? Is that why you ignore me, so I'll die faster?"

He didn't even respond to her drunk folly. How could he bring her a faster demise if he hadn't even known she was sick?

She went into the kitchen. Michael followed. She held the untouched panful of chicken marsala over the trash.

"Don't. It's a waste."

She flipped the pan. "Eat it from the garbage. Like the pig you are."

Such caprice was characteristic of her anger, prideful and unpredictable, yet so unnecessary. "You're drunk," he whispered.

"How dare you? The shitty husband you are. What right do you have?" She held her index finger inches away from his eye.

He grabbed her finger. She slapped him. He pushed her. At this point, Sebastian came out of his room and tried to get between them. It might have been endearing if what he had walked in on weren't so violent. Michael picked him up to take him to his room. Stella screamed like he was setting their son on a sacrificial altar. "Let him go!"

He tried to move past her, she ripped his glasses from his face. Sebastian fell to the floor, crying, and

"One can't always control others, though one can always control oneself. Pharaohs, kings, dictators and presidents alike display a great ability to deal with change despite vicissitudes. It was Sebastian's lack of self-control that worried him."

ran into his room. Michael felt on the ground for his glasses. Stella stomped on his fingers. With his other hand he found them unbroken and stood, shouldering her into the wall. She screamed and scratched his cheek. Then she sank to the floor sobbing. She sobbed, crying for him to get out. He hoped that by leaving she might sober up. He slipped on his shoes and out the front door.

As he walked down the stairs, he heard the bolt and chain slide into place behind him. He felt his front pocket for his car keys and swore; he'd left them on the kitchen counter. He replayed the evening's events in his mind as he rounded the corner. His eyes burned. He craved more sleep and he spotted the shadows of an arborvitae as a viable place for a cat nap. When he woke, the moon was a sliver with clouds passing in front of it like streamers. Stella would be sleeping in the television's glare, leaning against the couch, empty glass in hand, the way he often found her when he came home late.

The building's front door was still open. He crept to the second floor landing. No sounds came from behind the door. He knocked. No response. He knocked and knocked. "Stella! Let me in."

"I'll call the police." Her voice was muffled and sad—as if she'd been crying—yet defiant. He hoped she would call so they could take her in. He knocked again. She unbolted the door and it hinged open, bouncing back, still chained. Michael stuck his hand in, feeling for the circular part of the chain to slide and unlock when Stella ran against the door, catching him just above the knuckles. He screamed and swore at her and at himself, cradling his pulsating hand. In a fit of adrenaline, he stood back

and kicked the door open, sending the door-chain slithering like a headless snake across a splinter-dusted floor. She looked at him from across the room with eyes wide, trapped. For a moment he didn't know what to do. He could still move his fingers, though he could already feel them swelling, the color of raw sausages. Then he grabbed his keys and left for Greenwich, pulling over on the highway for another nap on the way to his parents' house.

Michael arrived after midnight. His mother microwaved a plate of food and gave him an ice pack for his hand. Twelve hours of sleep later, she told him to leave his wife. But there was no point; the least he could do was be there as she died. He drove back to Brooklyn to make rounds. It was already evening when he left the hospital, worrying about seeing Stella when he arrived home. But as he opened the front door she pulled a tray from the oven. "I hope you're hungry," she called, "I made lasagna."

Stella lasted three more years, largely thanks to Michael's calling upon the hospital director for the best treatment in the city. Yet the fights and drunkenness persisted. All the time Sebastian spent with his mother influenced him to take her side. That she died when he was a child painted a lasting picture of her in his mind as an innocent.

Michael took the onramp through the tunnel that led to the I-205. He accelerated, remembering the day after Stella's death, when a sixteen year old came in to the O.R. with a gunshot to the head. Gang violence, entrance wound in the middle-frontal lobe, brain dead. It was this event that Michael was thinking of when he lured Sebastian into the

psych ward at Good Samaritan. The boy's mother and uncle waited in the chapel. When Michael told them the news the mother fell into her brother's arms and wept on his shoulder. It was his first time telling a parent that her child was dead. The converse of what he had done the day before. He could do nothing but wait for the mother to control herself. He wanted to commiserate by mentioning his own loss, but he refrained; it would have been unprofessional. All he'd wanted was to move on. For some reason, watching her cry helped him grieve. Hers was a much greater tragedy than losing a spouse, which was common, albeit in his case premature. For a parent to lose a child, however, is an inversion of the natural order. Michael had imagined how he would react if Sebastian were the one wheeled in to the emergency room on a gurney, brain dead. It was then that he decided to leave Brooklyn after he finished his residency a few months hence. Brooklyn. He shook his head. That city will never change, no matter how many stores open or new towers they build.

When he moved to Portland, he met that nurse whose name he couldn't even remember, Kristen or Christine, who within a few weeks of sleeping together asked when they would marry. In bed with a heavy silence between them he told her he didn't want another child, nor did he want to re-marry anytime soon.

"You're wasting my time," she said. He backtracked, protesting, but she flew out of bed and stood there naked, breasts swinging, yelling as she pointed to the door. He didn't even have time to gather all of his clothes. A week later they arrived at his door in a package with a note that said she never wanted to see him

again, cautioning him to be careful in the future. Fear for his reputation in this new city filled his gut. After that, he was more particular with whom he involved himself.

Then there was Mai. She was tiny, Vietnamese, that thick mouth, beautiful eyes that flashed when she was angry, which was often; she was fond of debate, despite her poor English. After a few years together she too began to pressure him about marriage. Michael took her and Sebastian to Paris as a test. One night toward the end of the trip, Michael made reservations at a fine restaurant and said they could walk there from their hotel. It was warm and still sunny, though past eight. The walk was maybe ten minutes, but Mai complained because she was in heels. A block from the restaurant she refused to walk any farther. Michael pointed at the awning of their destination but she did not believe him, she said she wanted a cab. They weren't going to take a cab one block. She hailed the next one she saw, got in and drove away. He didn't know what to do, go out with Sebastian or try to find her. They walked back to the hotel. She was not in the lobby nor their room. In the dusk that filtered through their \$800-a-night windows, Michael had experienced a flash of *déjà vu*: Stella used to do the same thing, cross her arms, stomp away and leave him to find her. Except Stella was drunk.

Together he and Sebastian walked up and down the boulevards, past recently familiar places, and finally found her sitting at the same cafe where they ate their first night, on the Champs-Élysées in a crowd of tourists and cigarette smoke. Mai ignored Michael's apologies until she had finished half of her salmon terrine. Sebastian ate the rest. Back

in the hotel, Michael ordered a bottle of Cliquot. They sat on the balcony drinking it, watching fireworks explode over the Eiffel Tower. It was Bastille Day. Before they went inside, Sebastian leaned over the railing and smiled at Michael.

"Sebastian!" he shouted, pulling him back by his t-shirt. "Are you crazy?"

And then the look in Sebastian's eyes, his small hands gripping the railing as he pouted, "I wish I could fly."

Michael glanced at Sebastian as he took the exit to PDX. His son was staring out the window, those same broad palms and short, square-tipped fingers curled into loose fists. He had paid little attention to that incident at the time; he was too busy worrying about Mai's happiness. But perhaps that day had been the first of Sebastian's delusions. In any case, that was the last time he had lost control of a situation with a woman. It wasn't that he was a control freak, though Stella used to accuse him of that. It was that he wanted success for himself and everyone around him, especially Sebastian. One can't always control others, though one can always control oneself. Pharaohs, kings, dictators and presidents alike display a great ability to deal with change despite vicissitudes. It was Sebastian's lack of self-control that worried him. But if Sebastian is happy and can do as he wants in New York, maybe that's good enough.

Michael looked forward to both of them being on their own. He didn't like tiptoeing through conversations: a mistimed remark or a too-eager exhortation could delude Sebastian, start him rambling, or lead him into hostile accusations. Father and son aren't supposed to

live together as adults. It was time for Sebastian to strike out on his own in the world. It will be better for us to be independent and apart, though that doesn't mean I won't miss him.

They pulled up under Delta's departure sign. Michael got out of the car, walked to the trunk and pulled out Sebastian's bags. Sebastian stood with his arms outstretched. They hugged. "See you soon, Dad."

"Get there safe. Let me know what happens. Call me."

"Okay."

Sebastian saddled his bag, picked up the other, and entered the rotating glass sheath without looking back. Michael watched him disappear and got back in his car. He thought about making rounds, whether to have tuna tartare or filet for dinner. He wondered whether his girlfriend of three years, Ming, would want to take a trip to Puget Sound the next day in his Cessna or if she preferred the high desert. Sebastian was gone again. At least the assiduity with which he sold Gloria's land was reassuring.

Michael let his foot off the accelerator as he passed the "Welcome to Oregon" sign. Ahead the light was red. He came to a stop. Although he didn't normally talk to himself, he found the words exiting his mouth of their own volition, "I hope he's okay."

26.

POETRY

Toilet

Zeke Greenwald



The sun had lost its light tight-ropes
in the amber of the acne soap,
I wash my face;

and slowly soapy residue
attracts, with cracking dry skin clues,
my fingers.

Our fluids dry quickly in that way;
they evaporate across the grain
of our knuckles

and lips, whose movements crack their varnish;
thus sex is an inconstant artist
whose friable

medium has memory enough
to forget for you its obscure stuff;
so I scarcely

remember to even wash it from
our green and white striped sheets some months,
or me, some days;

or I forget complete occasions
drying as I withdraw, that cravings
newly spawn.

What she asked me

Zeke Greenwald

“And was it loud on your commute?
Your thoughts sobbing, forcefully nude,
stripped before sunbathing made them want to?”

“Or, regretting having ferberized your muse
who shrieks for solace every night:
wakefully thoughtless, brake shrieks might
contend with her for your despite?”

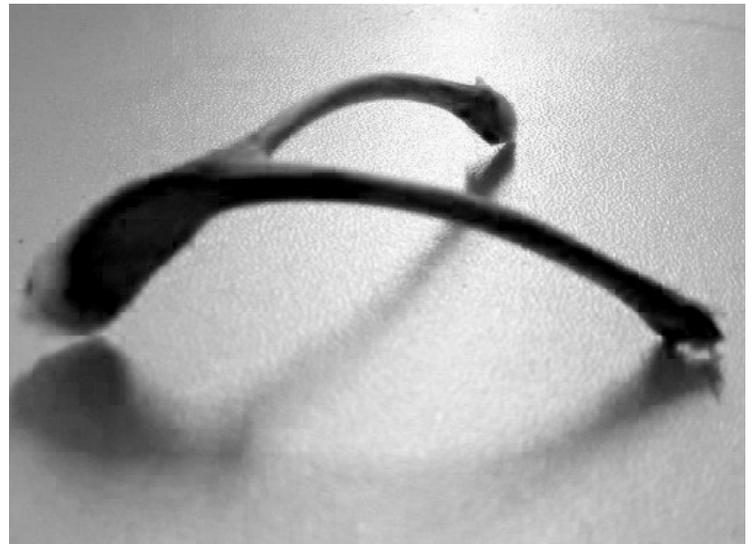
“Still early morning’s maquillage
beneath your eyes glossed on to gauze,
distant and departing railroad lines
lend lovely smoke to your sleepless eyes.”



How Can I Help?

Matt Nelson

Is there anything left to make?
Dinner smells good but so does your hair.
What would happen if we let it burn,
left the apartment with our shoes in hand
leaving the hurt of not showing up
next to the invitations, the peephole dry as a well.
I promise you, once we get to the first beach,
the second one will sneak up on you.
Everywhere today the sun is the color
of the boardwalk. Everyone agrees
that if the boardwalk was a color
this would be the color of the sun,
which you can walk on.
And if the throng of Easter
shall separate our diversions?
There's no doubt we'll meet again
like two pieces of a wishbone
scrapped and buried in the trash.



Olga Poems

Laura Sims

Olga, you linger

and cling
to the hive, to that
dirty unworthy metropolis.
Girl, you go
strutting around.
Like a slattern. Doggy.
Effete. The world
brings plague
to its smuttiest squirrels while you
nosh
down at Wing Stop. Take a
fetus-like look
into space; now sit
with the blood
and the triumph
of brain. Abide

in that place. Down the yellowbrick road
we were Pilates and
trilobites

once we were wholly
divine

Olga Olga Olga your Zoloft is mine

I love you
like *Emma*. I love you like
Pride. I love you like Jane Austen
dollars, I love
to insert you in snide
conversations with fuckwads
-slash-
colleagues of mine. Alas
we are not
metatarsal, we bones
we belong
in the hands. Muscled shut
you're shinola-won't-
grease-you-back-
into-my-life. Mrs. Darling
my privy
you're privy
to all whom the jillions
despise

Olga, your kung pao

chicken is here. To lay
waste to your bowels. Grab
a glacier! Embrace it! Its surface
agliter
with shit from the birds
of the centuries. Drink
the deep blue. Find it
cooling, steady. Let it
irrigate all
your canals, let it
sluice
you
out
until only bare rock
and your ironclad
gluttony
thrive

Olga, I cannot

stop seeing faces in leaves. Here's a bearded old goat. There's Napoleon
Three. And look, it's my dear dead Maman. She left me
this terrible gift—see it drip on the Andover rug.
If you tasted it, Olga, I swear, it would be
honeyed blood. How it fomented this
storm in my brain. And disquiets
the beasts. I see them
out there in the leaves—
an army a-bristle
with helmets
and hand cannons,
musket blades
gunning
for me

Olga, my phone

repletes me. I'm not
the same man I was
moments ago. I'm the man who, unfurling,
lay down in the leaves
like a leaf, like a winking
and ludicrous
tool. I'm the man who took
worshipful snapshots
of you and the sky, your face framed
in blue. I'm the man who caresses
the man who entertains I'm the man who the man who

considers our love a goat
stroking
endeavor. Lay down with me,
lady, in clover
and show me *emoji*

Durance of High-Values

Paige Taggart

A sad mystery would be having the candle
held too tightly around your mouth,
having the sea
spill into it and seeing kelp and things
grow in there, red thick mosses and
antique mandolins filling the air with what
they know and the vision they trust
as the things that slash and fear are near
you

A diamond mouthed shark aching to be by
your side
only brings you closer to the sadness you
envy, invaded
with porcelain, cracked roughage and the
assuage
of night, I am taboo of senses, heavy mud
dragging
me through the day, I am body and warm,
am wanton light
and traffic, hollow grid of what comes
next and the elements that provide them, I
have been proven
wrong, have slugged through thick grins,
falsified
and decoy, pillow and rock, the kid hid, the
dolphin
died, this aquarium is muted, it's a
transitional
phase of accompaniment, of companionship

A room to offer where the devices are left
on all day
so that the fluorescent fish shine through the
glass
endlessly like a seizure of freedom, mini
scarp for the mold, it's oxygen
replies, *hello, I am present, not president of the
manual for exploration or rapid causes in high
and lows of what is so damaged*, it's pain
pains

Distressed Blue Linoleum

Paige Taggart

Paper plates on the Q train

A method of take it or leave: irresolute

People telling you what to do and how to
behave leaving you presently blind in
search of the closest thing that doesn't so
closely resemble your life

The hardest part: ownership

Being an only daughter comes with a
breakdown in defense classes that askew
protocol towards more violent
temperaments and less mediated ones

Just wanted to talk it out

But the hog totally hogged the light

If you wanna train the beast to be more
languid, lay him out in the sun

Feed him milk from your teat like an
animus divinity

Each washing off weathers the skin

The sky is pale grey today and I don't feel
hesitant about a single thing

I'm all like fuck ya locomotion,
go for it baby!

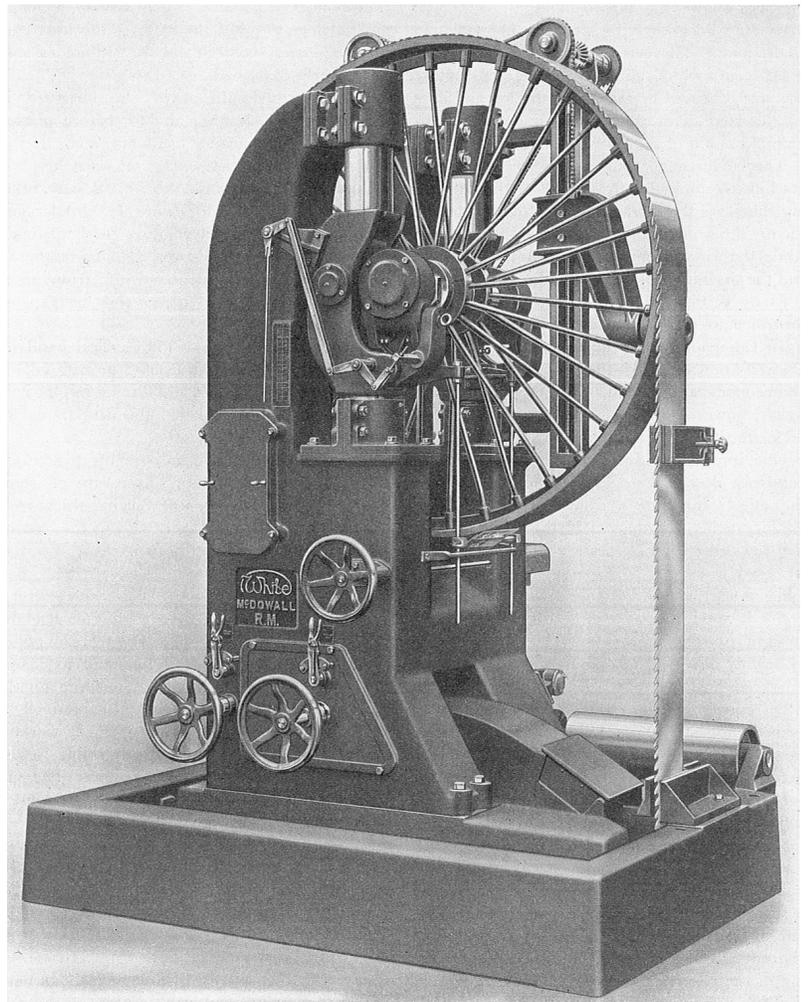
Nerves bottled up in a pink capsule

Swallow the whole network

A bird bending over in the sun makes a
rococo sculpture

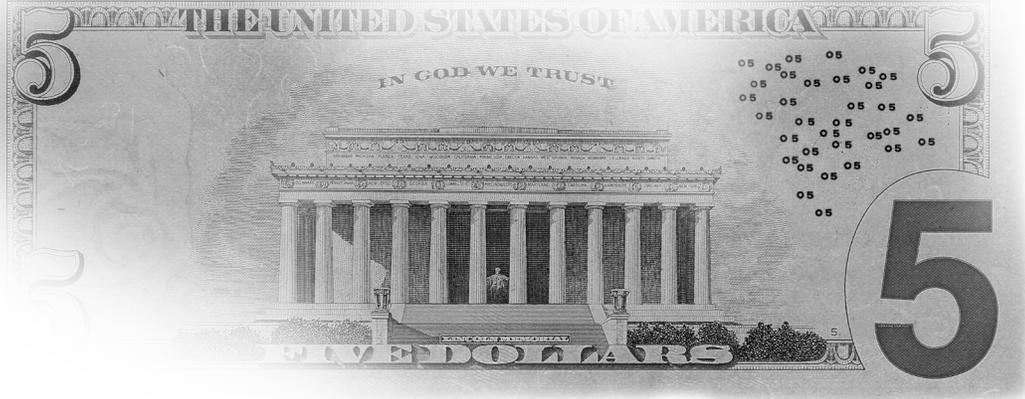
If you are hesitant to imagine this then you
are deep in the precut throttle of the
bandsaw

About to get chopped



the \$5- poem

Larry Jones



A shuffling statue, on a platform,
one Sunday morning down the shore,
roughly handsome, shaggy and surly,
smiling and greeting me “Good morning...

do you have a dollar? Partied too hard,
too late last night...” Would that he
had been partying with me, but no
it had not been he, or anybody else

in particular. I did not have a one
but a five I high handed him with
“This is your big day!” But the day
so far this Sunday morning, not so far

from Asbury, to New York Penn Station,
this morning so far had been mine,
the petition to me and not another,
I the one who had been blessed,

returning his smile with a silent nod,
tracking down his jean, the track,
smiling at him, smiling at Red Bank,
wistfully departing for another car.

Prayer for New York City 2070

*- A hundred years hence, . . .*²

Larry Jones

January 13, 1970 TWA
flight 90 now sighting the
City now descending down
the west side of Manhattan,
no twin towers but there the
Chrysler and State Buildings.

I often consider such
a reconnaissance as this
across some thirty years
of walking around up/
down and around some
fifty or so miles of town.

Often think to go sit outside
some sidewalk bar/café,
to think on one great New
York song or another,
yes to sit and sketch away
as the natives parade the day.

Then maybe in the morning
think to drop into a chapel,
drop down onto my knees
clasp hands mouth words and
devoutly pray that nations
might someday so unite as this

City of the Empire State
indeed the entire World
alone upon an elevator
with a young Dutch poet
madly necking and groping
one hundred two stories.

²*"Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," Walt Whitman*

37.

CRITICISM



Lana Del Rey, English Professor/ Nabokov Necro

Gemma Rivieccio

Passing something off as one's own is generally the name of the game when it comes to art. For centuries, writers and musicians alike have stolen from their forerunners to recreate and repackage a concept or idea that's already been done at least ten to ten thousand times before. Considering the current landscape with regard to the masses' level of interest in literature, particularly the classics, it is thusly no surprise that Lana Del Rey, goddess of new-fangled goth, has adopted a number of well-known authors' words as her own.

The scribe toward whom she possesses the most fondness is, by and large, Vladimir Nabokov. Quotes from

his famed *Lolita* appear often in the lyrics of her songs. In fact, one of her own track titles is "Lolita." Being that Del Rey's early shtick from the *Born to Die* album era consisted of cultivating the youthfully innocent air of what Humbert Humbert would call a nymphet, it makes all the sense in the world that she would croon, "I know what the boys want, I'm not gonna play," as part of a persona centered around Dolores Haze.

On the same album, Del Rey continued to showcase her nepotism for Nabokov with another song called "Carmen." In this sultry tale, most of her inspiration is culled straight from *Lolita*, including lyrics like, "It's alarming, honestly, how charming she can be,"

"Del Rey is a relentless regurgitator of masterworks in literature."

that compare very similarly against *Lolita* and Humbert singing, "Oh my Carmen, my little Carmen/Charmin' Carmen." Del Rey also throws in a Tennessee Williams allusion for good measure by crooning, "Relying on the kindness of strangers" in describing her version of Carmen.

Her obsession with the deceased Russian author seems to know no bounds once again on "Off to the Races," a lovely little ditty about sinister love in which Del Rey chants, "Light of my life, fire of my loins, be a good baby do what I want." In *Lolita*, it goes, "Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul." Not too striking of a difference.

While Nabokov's *Lolita* may be Del Rey's primary source of expertise in landing her a job as an English professor, she's also familiar with other beloved authors that might save her from being arrested based on charges of Nabokov necrophilia. The title of her sophomore album, *Ultraviolence*, for instance, reveals that she's at least read some of Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*. Or maybe it's Stanley Kubrick who has truly been serving as her literary guru (he, too, directed the film adaptation of *Lolita*).

Elsewhere in her canon, Del Rey references Walt

Whitman's poem, "I Sing the Body Electric" in her very similarly titled "Body Electric." The theme of Whitman's original work, which appeared in 1855's *Leaves of Grass*, explores the unavoidability of bodily awareness, how ignoring the beauty of the physical is to cut out some of the most key pleasures of one's life. Apropos of this, Del Rey features the song in her thirty-minute short film, *Tropico*, a three-part opus that recreates the events of Adam and Eve being in the Garden of Eden and subsequently being cast out--very Miltonian indeed. In the same video, Del Rey mellifluously voices over the most famous lines from Allen Ginsberg's "Howl."

In short, Del Rey is a relentless regurgitator of masterworks in literature. Does this make her an impostor for wielding these words as her own? Or is she a brilliant and humanitarian twenty-first century artist for repackaging these novels and poems in a way that appeals to a new generation seemingly incapable of opening a book (literally, it's all about reading via a screen now)? Perhaps the answer lies with the next songstress who succeeds Del Rey in her genre, and begins redesigning the Lake Placidite's lyrics as her own, never realizing Del Rey already reinvented them in the first place.

