The RED Wheelbarrow
THE "Z"
Kate Wilkinson

as a little girl
nearly one hundred moons
old
my greatest ambition
was to be Zorro, himself,
slapping my sign
on many walls.
"You may all return to your apartments. Thank you for your co-operation." O'Riley requested some papers from one of her firemen who had left his post by the stairs. She sat on the orange couch next to Samsonette who had returned to that spot after the incident with Mrs. Miphter.

"Miss Hughs," said the squad leader. "You've been a great help this morning. You are the only responsible, intelligent person I've met here."

Samsonette nodded graciously. She lifted her body, bare except for a watch, and left for her apartment, to dress and later to write a letter to her mother.
"How dare you ever consider suicide. Being guilty of sexual perversion is bad enough, but, but suicide!!!

O’Riley had hold of Mrs. Miphter by this time. "Miss Hughes, my utmost thanks. I should have kept a closer eye on her. You can never tell what this sort will try."

Samsonette let go of the severely traumatized old woman. She pushed her hair away from her face and tried to regain her composure. The squad leader motioned to the policeman. "You’d better take her away, officer."

The vice investigator gently lead Mrs. Miphter out of the lobby. He shook his head and muttered, "Too damn early in the morning for this kind of thing. Desk job is what I need."

The lobby was alive with talk. O’Riley clapped her hands loudly for quiet. "I am sorry you all had to witness that scene. I was negligent in my duty by not arresting her right away in my own capacity." At this moment the building inspector returned to the lobby. "I believe the inspector is through with his investigation. In five minutes you may all go back to your apartments."

The inspector approached O’Riley. His face was a portrait of weariness and disgust. "Miss," he said. "We’ve got some violations here, but they are very minor. They sure aren’t something you needed to call about at six thirty in the morning. I’m not even going to fill out the reports." He turned to Mr. Quinn. "You just fix up what needs fixing---you know what it is." Mr. Quinn nodded and smiled gratefully. The inspector walked quickly out of the building before O’Riley could say a word to him. She glared at Mr. Quinn.

"I have the power to file those reports myself," she said. "And you can be sure I will. I know my job, and I do my job."

Mr. Quinn shuffled nervously. O’Riley spoke to the whole group.
BUST OF A WOMAN, PICASSO

Anton Janulis

Oil and chalk on canvas. 
A woman’s head and shoulders. 
In life we know 
no one’s hands 
are that large.

It is enough, perhaps, 
to know that her shape 
is defined by what is 
not drawn, and Picasso 
might have made 
a mistake, and covered 
it with chalk.

It is enough then 
to know that she looks 
to her left, 
and that her smock 
is falling down her arms.

boiler, and searched through one or two first story 
apartments. As the inspector was heading upstairs, 
O’Riley and the vice officer returned from Mrs. 
Miphter’s rooms.

"But, officer," O’Riley was saying. "It is a 
blatant infraction. There is no doubt, and you are 
obligated to make an arrest."

"Yeah, yeah, I know the rules," he said. "But 
after all, no one would have found out if it hadn’t 
been for the fire. Crazy, trying to fix that wire 
support with a soldering gun... But she was 
discreet, so, I mean, who really cares? Oh, I 
guess I’ll have to talk to her. Where is the poor 
old thing?"

O’Riley looked around the lobby. She spoke 
loudly.

"Where is Mrs. Miphter? Has anyone in here 
seen her?"

Everyone mumbled and searched around the 
lobby. Mrs. Miphter was no where to be seen.

Samsonette said, "The last time I saw her she 
was over by the utility closet, ma’am."

A young male tenant jokingly opened the closet 
door and poked his head in. There was Mrs. 
Miphter. She was still wrapped in her brown and 
yellow robe, her face stained with tears. She was 
sitting on an overturned green plastic bucket and 
she had a bottle of liquid drain cleaner in her 
hand. The shame of being found out had been too 
much for her. She stared wildly, then threw her 
head back to drink the corrosive clog remover, but 
Samsonette was already there... Nude, and still 
slightly damp, the college student grabbed the 
bottle and tossed it towards the front desk. She 
pulled Mrs. Miphter violently out of the utility 
closet and shook her. Samsonette’s wet hair 
whipped around. Her whole pale body quivered with 
rage and morality.

"How dare you, Mrs. Miphter!" She could 
barely get the words out. Samsonette’s mother had 
trained her to abhor the very thought of suicide.
Samsonette sat and considered her perfectly trimmed and tended toenails. She did not speak with the others. In her opinion, they had no respect for the law which should be held sacred, and they obviously were not in the least bit shocked at Mr. Quinn’s negligence or Mrs. Miphter’s perverted and criminal activities.

However unhappy Samsonette was with her neighbors, she was very pleased with O’Riley. Here was a public official who took her obligations seriously. Others might have ignored the safety violations or the infractions of the vice code, but this woman knew her duties.

At ten to seven Mr. Quinn approached Samsonette with a large maroon paisley smoking jacket that he had solicited from one of the tenants.

"UH, Miss Hughes, uh, I thought that maybe you’d like this, I mean, after all, the police are coming and just to cover up I thought, well, that you might..." Mr. Quinn trailed off and held the silk smoking jacket limply out towards her.

"Mr. Quinn!" spat Samsonette. She threw back her shoulders and held her head high. "I have no reason to fear the police. I have not broken any laws. Under these circumstances my nudity could not possibly be considered indecent exposure. And do you really think I’d accept anything from a derelict property owner?!" Samsonette swung her long hair and full chest away from Mr. Quinn and stared at the firemen who were opposite him. Both fire fighters remained stoic.

"And after all, mother told me never to take articles of clothing from people I didn’t trust!" she thought. Mr. Quinn let the robe drop near her feet and scuffed back to the front desk.

A few minutes later the building inspector and a policeman arrived. They greeted Squad Leader O’Riley together, and the policeman disappeared upstairs to Mrs. Miphter’s room with the efficient young fire person. The building inspector poked around in corners, went downstairs to check the

DAWN

Mika Perrine

I hear my sign calling, an empty whistle blowing through the skeletal pine.
A swan rises, the three feathers on its back stretched and alive.
I stand at the beginning of the dark water, my hair thrown back by the early air.
THE DRIFTERS
Mika Perrine

I didn't even look that good. I was wearing cut-offs and a wrinkled white t-shirt, my hair pulled back in a sloppy pony tail. I hadn't even bothered with make-up. I don't know why it happened.

I had wandered down to the pipe. The power plant used it to drain excess water from steam into the lake, and it was kind of a neighborhood hangout. I was pissed at my Mom because she'd gotten drunk again. I'd left her conked out on the living room floor and I'd come here to think. But instead, I found Jeremy and a bunch of his buddies, smoking and throwing rocks at the seagulls. I sat down on the beach a few feet away. I felt a strange sort of comfort, listening to the skaggs of Bay City tell dirty jokes and complain about their lives. They didn't bother me, just said "Hi" and let me be, no questions asked. I was just Sarah, the girl who used to play baseball with them in Sunset Park, the girl who snuck them pop when they hit Burger King on Saturday nights. That was all they knew, all they needed to know.

It was late evening, that slow time of night when it's so easy to just drift away with the day, let yourself disappear into the darkness. The faint smell of the paper mill hung in the humid air. The sounds of August filled the background: lawn mowers, radios blaring, a few shouts from kids swimming down the beach. I was too tired to think. I lay back on the sand, closed my eyes and zoned out, concentrating on my breathing. When I opened my eyes, Jeremy's buddies had left, and he was sitting on the pipe, fiddling with a piece of driftwood.
Samsonette pushed her chin out and glared around the lobby. Her next door neighbor laughed when he saw her, but Samsonette did not acknowledge him. He was beneath her contempt. That was another of her mother's sayings: All men are beneath contempt.

The head fireman was not beneath her contempt, however. The head fireman was a woman. She came down from the fire carrying some forms and, when she asked the time, Samsonette spoke up immediately.

"Six thirty-seven, ma'am."

"Thank you," said the petite redhead, glancing without criticism at the exposed young woman. She fastened the forms to a clipboard and scribbled for a few moments. Then she looked around the lobby, carefully making eye contact with every tenant, and with the landlord, Mr. Quinn. She pursed her lips. "Ladies and gentlemen, I am Squad Leader O'Riley," she stated. "If this were a simple case of a burnt bra tree, I would let you all go back to your apartments with no further trouble. But I can not do that. I have been compelled to call in both the vice police and the building inspector. You will only be allowed to return to your rooms when they are through with their investigations."

"Wha?" cried Mr. Quinn. "Why do we need the building inspector and the police in here?"

"Landlord, I noticed at least, at least, six health and safety violations in this building, and that is why the inspector is coming. I've already called him."

Mr. Quinn swallowed hard in his skinny throat and scratched at his pale green spandex leggings. O'Riley turned her head and smirked at the plump widow, Mrs. Miphter, who blushed and looked down.

"Mrs. Miphter," said the squad leader sweetly. "You do realize that city law prohibits any person over the age of fifty from owning or using bondage gear?"
I should just go home, wake Mom up, fix something for dinner. Maybe do the dishes, see what kind of trouble my brother was in now. These were my duties, since Dad left, taking the car and a six pack and escaping the insanity of marriage and raising children. I knew how he had felt, and the thought of returning made me sick. There was something in Jeremy's eyes that seemed to be kindling, some challenge I wanted desperately to meet.

"Yeah," I said softly, slipping my dirty white tennies off and setting them on the sand. "Let's go for a walk." I turned and started down the beach.

I looked over at Jeremy as we walked, trying to sense what he was feeling. His face was a mask, his eyes wandering directionless out over the lake. He walked with his usual arrogant stride, hands shoved into his pockets, chin up.

Jeremy was part Chippewa and he looked it. His hair was dark and thick, coming down almost to his shoulders, his eyes a mysterious hazel, changing from brown to green with the day. He wore a loose black tank top and beat up Levis, holes cut in the knees with a switchblade.

There was an intenseness about Jeremy that had always intrigued me. He came from somewhere very dark and beautiful, an ancient place I could never reach. He knew things I would never know, and it was this wisdom I was attracted to.

"I know this cave," Jeremy said. "It's just a little farther down. Kind of a hole in the side of the cliff. You want me to show you?" he asked indifferently.

"Yeah, sure," I said without hesitation, pushing a strand of hair out of my eyes. 

"Good," he said softly, and his eyes lingered on my face for a moment.

ONE MORNING AT THE GIDION APARTMENTS

Samsonette Hughs stepped out of the shower, dripping with the cold, rusty water that constantly and inexplicably ran at the Gidion Apartments. Then, before drying off, before smearing her body with lotion, before struggling into the old fashioned underwear her mother insisted she wear, she always put her watch on first.

And this is the reason why, when the fire alarm rang at the apartments on Monday the fifteenth, at six a.m., Samsonette was the only person in the lobby wearing her watch and nothing else. Everyone in the lobby was hoping that Samsonette would ask for a bathrobe or a blanket, or that she would at least blush. But she didn't; she merely sat, quite calmly, on the orange plastic couch.

She felt that she was doing very well for a student in her first year out of dorms. She had followed one of her mother's key pieces of advice that morning: Respond promptly to a fire alarm without stopping to consider material possessions. The big-boned, blond-haired, bland-faced twenty year old frowned and nodded her head. Yes, she had behaved properly that morning. Samsonette "humphed", noticing the reactions of her co-residents.

"Well, just think if it really had been an emergency situation instead of Mrs. Miphter's bra tree catching fire," she thought with righteous indignation. "They would all be burned dead in their apartments searching for robes or slippers or eyeglasses. And I would be naked but alive!"
Dieter Weise

A man chases you with an axe
but it’s okay.
He only wants to give it to you
as a birthday present.
You run, because
it’s not your birthday.

Suddenly, a Vampire leaps at you with a
briefcase and tries to sell you
magazine subscriptions.
You scream, “No! I don’t want any!”
But it’s too late.
You’ve signed.

Turning, a raving lunatic approaches you.
He shakes your hand
and introduces himself.
You smile and say, “Let’s go for a walk.”
He is the only sane person you’ve run into.

The cave was hidden by shrubs and vines and we
had to duck to get through the entrance. It was a
small round room, tall enough to stand up in the
center. There was a crack above the entrance that
let in a thin stream of light. I could see the
corners, littered with a few empty Budweiser cans
and crumpled up packs of cigarettes. It seemed odd
to see those remnants of the real world this far
from town.

Jeremy sat down in the corner and I sat down a
few feet away. I suddenly realized how tired I
was. My body was limp with exhaustion and heat. I
looked up to find Jeremy looking intently at me.

“You remember when we first met?” he asked.
I grimaced. “Yeah. You pulled my hair and I
called you a dirty Indian and gave you a bloody
nose. Good old third grade,” I recalled. Jeremy
smiled.

“You’re really beautiful, you know?” he said
suddenly. His voice nudged at me. I pulled my
knees up to my chest. Why was he telling me this?
I looked down at my bare feet, toenails speckled
with peach nail polish.

“Sarah, come here,” Jeremy said softly. His
voice seemed muted, controlled. I shrugged and
screeched closer.

“No, come here, sit next to me,” his voice
rising, just a fraction, but I could feel the
tension. I remained where I was, hypnotized by his
glare. There was a gleam in his eyes that reminded
me of a cat at night, a frosty green glow.

“For Christ’s sake, Sarah! Come over here!
Sit by me!” he commanded. I realized then who I
was with. Jeremy Savage didn’t have to ask three
times. Jeremy Savage got what he wanted. I looked
at the opening, wondering if I could get out quick
enough. I shouldn’t be here, I thought. My
mantra. I shouldn’t be here, I shouldn’t be here.
“C’mon, Sarah, C’mon,” Jeremy said, edging closer. I could feel his eyes on my legs, on my breasts. I could hear his uneven breathing. I felt his iron grip on my forearm and cursed myself for ever coming.

“Jeremy, let go!” I said suddenly, and I heard an eight year old girl telling the bully to let go of her hair. Jeremy hesitated for a moment then held my arm tighter, pulling me into him.

“Please let go!” I sobbed, but he kissed me, a long strangling kiss and my words were lost. I felt the cold dirt floor of the cave beneath me, and I knew I was trapped.

“You’re so beautiful,” Jeremy mumbled, and I saw that his eyes were closed; he could not even see me. He was somewhere else, with someone else. In my mind the light began to fade. My body was refusing to work for me.

“Jeremy,” I said softly. “Jeremy, stop it,” my words echoing in the chamber, and then I felt my own strength, drew it from the solid rock walls, the resonating tone of my voice. I screamed, “JEREMY! STOP!” His hands rested on my shoulders. It was up to him now. His eyes fluttered open and he saw me, pinned beneath him, my eyes wide, fists clenched. He saw this and let go of my arms. I fell back against the dirt floor, jolting my body. He stood slowly and there was nothing in his eyes, just a blank, lost look. He staggered to the entrance and didn’t turn around, even as I got to my feet. He was gone when I got outside of the cave.

I stood, my legs shaking, next to the lake. The water lapped at my feet and I took a deep breath. My back felt like it had caved in. My arms would not relax. I stood in the cooling twilight, listening to my heartbeat slow down.

My fists uncurled slowly and I looked out over the lake. Seagulls bobbed on the surface, their screeches carried by the wind. I could not force myself to think of anything. Words, odd little phrases, drifted through my head.

SUPERSTITION

Adam Smith

Broke a mirror today: Not going to extract any superstition from it, only bits of glass from the bathroom rug.
I saw my mother, her tired eyes floating away as she drank, and then later, a pale face, lying on a dirty, ragged carpet. I could smell the dirty socks and cigarette smoke of our house, hear my brother talking to his baseball glove late at night. I could feel Jeremy’s hands let go of my wrists.

I stood on the edge of the lake and felt I was on the edge of the world. I wanted to fly out into the water, fly away from everything. I felt the wind on my cheeks, the softest caress. I turned, slowly, back towards town. I hesitated, my feet seemingly imbedded in the sand. Then I began walking, and each step seemed to be heading in a new direction.
MY GRANDFATHER’S LAST MONTH WITH MY GRANDMOTHER

Jennifer Feeley

He sits at the kitchen table, his dull knife spreading creamed herring onto a rye cracker, humming a song about two clouds.

She watches his hands shake as he lifts the cracker to his mouth, a communion with childhood. But now he is seventy, with gray hair and glasses. Refills his heart pills every month.

In the evening they play Pinochle until the sun disappears, a flame blown out by the wind. He tries to shuffle the cards, but they slide through his fingers. She gathers them from the floor; it’s her deal now.

Sometimes she stays awake at night, her hands folded in prayer, wondering what nightmare is next. Beside her, he sleeps, a thin branch, slowly bending.

THE JUNKIE

Matthew Kreuder

Candy cigarettes aren’t realistic. You can’t pack them and if you light one, all you get is a foul stench. It doesn’t even stay lit.

There was a time in my life when I would eat candy cigarettes. I liked the way their texture would change from sandpaper to a snail with rigormortis.

I guess that I started hanging out with the “wrong crowd”. Now I crush the cigarettes and snort them.

It started out as social snorting. At parties I might inhale one or two after a few beers. I guess I went to too many parties.

I get nosebleeds every day, and my nostril hairs are crusted with dry blood and coated with a sweetness I wish I never knew.
Ah, but back to the friend. She, too, was quitting - it was one of those moral support things, you know. She gets whiny and pathetic when she quits, I get bitchy. I don't think we were highly morally supportive of each other. It was a short phone call.

So, I'm off the phone, and I have nothing to do. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing.

You never quite realize how much time you spend smoking until it's not there anymore.

Then I did something embarrassing. I mean, really embarrassing. I live with three other people, and they don't like me to smoke in the house, but the windows don't open, so I've always stood on the toilet, and smoked into the vent. I know, I know, how dumb can you get? Just listen to this - then I stood on the toilet, and pretended, yes, you heard me correctly, PRETENDED to smoke a cigarette. One of my housemates walked in on me, and I thought I was going to cry. She told me to go down to the drug store and buy a pack before I drove her insane. I called her a lousy friend, and went and picked up two packs.

So, my first attempt at quitting was not precisely successful, to say the least. But then, two months and many packs later, I discovered what the difficulty truly was - I was in love with the little man. Now, now, you may laugh, you may chastise, you may in point of fact believe that I am insane. And, you know, I probably wouldn't blame you.

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RUSSIAN ROULETTE: FROM A PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN IN NEW YORK CITY, JULY 1942

Kate Angus

And the voices stop.
The party blurs behind us as we stand on the terrace.
The red wine dregs congeal in my cup.
It is my fourth glass.

though, at this moment, I believe I am sober.
A cigarette burns my fingertips
as I stab it out in the ashtray.
I think I could well be drowning.

You hold the gun; barrel slick as a snake's belly,
as black as your own shining hair.
There is one bullet in the chamber.
A round metal piece compressed tightly;
small and hard as our hearts are this night
where words I once took for granted like faith
and love seem diminished into trivialities,
like the two dimes clinking and jingling in my pocket.

I look out across the street where the lights
in the other apartment buildings
shine like so many candles.
I turn back to look at you.
I don't know what kind
of salvation we're asking for
but you can't even meet my eyes.
I pull the trigger,
and you and I and the gun,
all of us come up empty.
NIGHT RIDE

Kate Angus

The rain beats down on the truck roof like the sound of handfuls of tiny pins falling to a carpeted floor.
I turn to you, smiling, as you pass me the bottle of Southern Comfort to finish.
Our cigarette tips and the green dashboard light shine like the night eyes of animals by the roadside.
You slip Janis Joplin into the car stereo and her voice, pained and throaty, drifts along with the sound of the turning wheels.
I am slipping in and out of sleep, lost in a haze of Valium, sorrow
and seventeen years of watching you running on empty.
Sister, I think we have finally reached the end now, perhaps we two in our truck have driven off the end of what once was the world.
Lightening cracks out across the sky like small explosions of gunfire and from the light it sheds I can see the tears as they slip down the sides of your face.
But you don’t turn to me, so I take another sip from the bottle and say nothing, our red pickup glowing like a torch through the darkness as we hit I-95 and keep on driving.

So, on the first day of my supposed “quitting”, it was really rough. To ensure lack of temptation, I gave away the remainder of my cigarettes, and promised myself to a brand new, healthier, happier, less wrinkled, less expensive life. But it’s sort of like that old boyfriend who you know is bad for you, but just can’t seem to give up - within the hour, I was in tears, and scouring the apartment for any I might have missed, in old packs, or whatever. I found three. They were all Virginia Slims. Now, that may not sound too bad, you know, a heavily addicted smoker, having a nic-fit - three cigarettes sounds perfect, right? Have you ever smoked a Virginia Slim? It’s sort of like smoking a toothpick. I assure you, I never have, and never will, let a stick that small persuade me to do a damn thing. So, I arrived at a moral impasse: smoking Virginia Slims being totally against my personal beliefs, and yet going out and buying a pack would, in essence, admit total defeat, and I wasn’t ready for that. No, no, not yet.

So I ate everything in the kitchen, and called a friend instead. Now, when I say I ate everything, you’re probably thinking, oh, sure, a sandwich, maybe a few cookies, a piece of fruit. No. I mean EVERYTHING. I assure you, you have never seen a kitchen go from so full to so empty in so little time. I ate raisins and cookies and chips, and ten-year-old turkey dinners. I ate carrots and pasta and Twinkies... Let it suffice to say that I could have passed for pregnant after consuming that meal. By the way, I’m not, and no, these are not fat implants, this is indeed my own natural stomach. I know, there’s no reason for me to get implants, why would I want to look like I’m pregnant, but some people have kinky ideas about what’s swell.
19

QUITTING

Katie Eyer

Quitting smoking was the hardest thing I ever had to do. It wasn’t the actual physical activity, although it was that, too. It was more simply the psychological strain. Now, many of you may be wondering how it is that I see smoking as an activity fraught with deep psychological value, and I’ll tell you, it’s just like sex. "How is it like sex?", you may then ask. Well, let me tell you, in this world it’s all about sticks, it just depends what size stick it takes to make you do whatever. Police batons, cigarettes, writing utensils, the great male "stick", hell, even those granola freaks out to "save the wilderness"; what is it they’re really after? In my opinion, nature is really only defined as a rather large area FILLED with sticks. I think I’ve made my point.

In any case, giving up smoking was like losing a friend, and not just an acquaintance, mind you, a very close and personal friend. Just think, we had laughed together, cried together - a cigarette will listen to you blab until you’re blue in the face and never tell you to shut up. In point of fact, I suppose it was never quite as "together" as I make it sound, more action on my end, and more quiet crying on theirs, but I always thought they were with me. You know, I just sensed that there was some little man sitting there in the middle of the fiery hell of the cherry, saying, "Yeah, I know how it is...

THEY SHOULD HAVE NAMED ME LUNACY

Elizabeth Paddock

This happens every, every time, Nolen. I can’t help myself. Someone takes over and I forget where I end and they begin.

John was here, just yesterday. He started kissing me. He thought he was smooth; what a fool. We are all such fools; I didn’t stop him. We almost slept together. Before I considered him to be the long lost brother I never had. I ended up asking myself over and over, what does this person, next to me, this minute, want anyway?

I have never loved anyone innocently in my life. Nolen, you are no exception. I have tried to fight for the past year to end this and look how well I’ve done.

Nolen, hold onto yourself; letting go of emotion will be the end of you. I can not let you get close to me.

If I was suffocating under my father’s embrace, I wouldn’t make the slightest effort to move. I’d watch myself from the ceiling and wonder how many eternities would go by before he killed me.

There is something of a demon inside of me. She comes out in my dreams, she is a child in a new, white, frilly, Easter dress and patent leather shoes, being taken by her father. He is dressed as a cowboy, boots and ten gallon hat. Sometimes I wake up after feeling his hands on my body and can’t bear the touch of anyone.

Once, I was sitting on a dock and my father touched my shoulder, trying in vain to comfort me. I shook him off too violently and we almost fell into the cold October water. He was attempting to love me in some decent way.
It tears me up to be so honest; no one ever listened before. Nolen, it would be easy for me to make believe that this is love. Do you know how hard it is not to ask you to hold me, how much energy it takes to keep from touching your face? I warned you, I am not a reliable friend, I am too lonely.

Why do you always stare into me? Your eyes grow so huge, I'm afraid they will pop out. When I stare like that I imagine the person I am staring at can hear inside my head. I always think I hear them listening. My eyes scream, I know you know.

Nolen, do you remember what I said in my sleep last night? You are the only one who knows what is happening to me. Don't forget what I say, write it down.

I am sleeping naked tonight. It is too hot. I haven't moved and sweat is pouring from my temples. Even my legs are sweating. This attic is too hot. It is like I'm on a beach, the sun beating down, but there is no sun in here, only darkness.

I've seen God. I was in France and out of nowhere this bearded man made the sound "Booo" as he was turning a corner. God scared me so badly I clutched at my heart. It is hot enough in here that I have trouble breathing.

All you do is watch my eyes open and shut. Are you counting the number of times I blink? I sometimes do that to pass the time when I have sex. It works. I concentrate hard on the place around me so that when I'm quizzed on Judgement Day I'll know every detail of the rooms, in technicolor.

Maybe I should light a candle. But then the place might catch on fire. Or maybe the heat is already so strong a little fire wouldn't disturb me. But the smell would. The smell of burning. Burning like in hell. But I saw God. Once. I swear.

GOOD INTENTIONS

Katie Eyer

I mean to forget these things:

How I was amazed by the enormous red globe of the sun,
by the sound of swan's wings passing overhead,
by this incredible tenderness,
by the sound of men's voices, and
the smell of them.

How one day your hands touched my face,
and how even here, now,
I can feel your fingers weaving
a web of fine silk about my mouth.

I mean to forget how we all once believed
that these things were real,
that these things were permanent.
Every one of them spreads wide, like wings;
every one of them, so fragile.
PATIENCE
Debbie Upton

Outside
it is one
of those
gray days
after
the rain.
Earthworms
washed from
their underground
tunnels
fill the air
with their
heavy stench
as they slither
helplessly
in puddles
on the sidewalk.
Tomorrow
they will bake
in the sun
and wait
for the rain
to wash
them home.

When I was two, I lived in a huge house. Maybe it was as dark as this at night. A little blue dog came to my window. I was sleeping in one of those window seats. The dog came into my room and talked to me for a while. The dog told me not to be afraid because he would always protect me. Then he left and I was in the big playroom on the first floor. I wanted to go find my mother, but I couldn’t get the door open. I searched the room for some kind of a key to unlock the door, but I couldn’t reach the keyhole. I thought I had been locked in. Really, the humidity had swollen the door in place.

I feel small. I’m taking off my clothes. My hands are smaller than my mother’s and hers were so tiny and weak she couldn’t even hold my father’s fists away. My mother and I used to play a game. I would put my feet up against her hands and, when my feet finally grew past her fingertips, we didn’t play that game anymore.

Nolen, if you don’t touch me I am going to shatter into a million pieces. “I have come to know myself and have gathered myself from everywhere,” the Gospel of Eve. I have not even gathered myself together from the last man who broke me. He scattered me all over the earth, like ashes from an urn.

I used to imagine that my father was a butcher. He would chop me up into little pieces and feed me to his cannibal friends who would play poker with him and stink up the whole-hell-house.

If I stand in front of this mirror long enough it will shatter. I am always coming apart. Never together. I put the mirror in the center of my wall for this reason: I can almost make out my form in the glass.

I feel the pit of my stomach rending away into butterflies, black, and poisonous. I open my mouth and they fly out. One by one, a long, slow procession of the evil, consummated inside of me.
I am learning to die each night, and breathe again in the daylight. I pray for longer days and shorter nights. I dreamed a few nights ago that I was being followed by a vampire. I saw him open his mouth to smile at me and his teeth grew down to his chin, in slow motion. I was terrified and woke up soaked, and I wonder if it was his sweat. Before I sleep, I check the locks on the one door to this attic ten times.

I dream of babies, too. I dreamed two nights ago that you were a baby held in a disfigured man’s arms. You were not any more than three months old and you could speak like a prophet. I asked you how this was possible and you answered me in foreign tongues. Who should I blame for what has happened? I’ve been doubting myself all along. This is real, Nolen. This is real and it is not my fault.

Don’t leave me, in the name of everything dear to you. Don’t leave me. You’ll be walking on quicksand if you do. The dirt under our nails from digging me out of this live burial stinks with dead life.

Vengeance, Nolen, that is what drives me. I have carried this pulsing temper in my body for years—if my father is not careful, if he doesn’t keep walking on water, Nolen, I swear I will suck in all the air in this godawful place and put out his candle flicker, faint glow of a life that poisons my dreams.

Nolen, I do not know how to tell you all of these things. It seems like I have forgotten my life, or that this one is not mine. Oh, but it is. I have just awakened. I slept for fifteen years, and I am trying to tell you everything that happened to me in that dream. There were times that were good, but those don’t really even matter. It is the small minute indiscrepancies that turn me in on myself.

Sometimes all I want to do is dance, contort my body, exorcise those nightmares. I want to starve myself; be so deathly skinny I can see my bones, so if any father of mine tries to get close to me my knife bones will split into his skin. What a joy it would be to watch his blood flow like deltas on the floor, dripping beneath the door like the light shining in so many years ago. I bet his blood would glow in the dark.

In this heat my hands are cold. Is it because of what they have touched that they steam like dry ice? My child hands still work clumsily, try to unlearn all they know, the bitter, thick, white bone on my father, and his love-sharpened teeth.

Lilithe would not have learned to doubt. Lilithe is the one they failed to teach me about in Sunday School. Strong first wife of Adam, who refused to accept his penis when he wanted her to pleasure him just by the mere tightness of her flesh. It is Lilithe’s scream that haunts virgins right before they are exposed to passion for the first time, before they want it and need it like I have so long, even in sleep. I would have worshipped Lilithe above all others. Father himself would not approve of a daughter worshipping a woman. His hands would reach up to heaven in total anguish if he ever thought his sweet young daughter knew how to make a woman tremble. Now he wastes his time believing all is right in my world, that he has always been my father, and that he will always love me.

Nolen, it is too much for him to ask that I accept his letters or answer the door when he travels thousands of miles to visit me. It is too much that he should expect me to make the slightest effort to abandon myself to him. I can not give up this hiding, this handling of my own affairs. Nolen, I do not want to see him anymore.

I will bite my lips until they bleed. Maybe I am a snake or a bitch dog on my hind legs howling at the moon. Why didn’t they name me Lunacy? I want someone to pull me to her chest and calm me.
I am learning to die each night, and breathe again in the daylight. I pray for longer days and shorter nights. I dreamed a few nights ago that I was being followed by a vampire. I saw him open his mouth to smile at me and his teeth grew down to his chin, in slow motion. I was terrified and woke up soaked, and I wonder if it was his sweat. Before I sleep, I check the locks on the one door to this attic ten times.

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Lilith would not have learned to doubt. Lilith is the one they failed to teach me about in Sunday School. Strong first wife of Adam, who refused to accept his penis when he wanted her to please him just by the mere tightness of her flesh. It is Lilith's scream that haunts virgins right before they are exposed to passion for the first time, before they want it and need it like I have so long, even in sleep. I would have worshipped Lilith above all others. Father himself would not approve of a daughter worshipping a woman. His hands would reach up to heaven in total anguish if he ever thought his sweet young daughter knew how to make a woman tremble. Now he wastes his time believing all is right in my world, that he has always been my father, and that he will always love me.

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I will bite my lips until they bleed. Maybe I am a snake or a bitch dog on my hind legs howling at the moon. Why didn't they name me Lunacy? I want someone to pull me to her chest and calm me.
Outside
it is one
of those
gray days
after
the rain.
Earthworms
washed from
their underground
tunnels
fill the air
with their
heavy stench
as they slither
helplessly
in puddles
on the sidewalk.
Tomorrow
they will bake
in the sun
and wait
for the rain
to wash
them home.

When I was two, I lived in a huge house. Maybe it was as dark as this at night. A little blue dog came to my window. I was sleeping in one of those window seats. The dog came into my room and talked to me for a while. The dog told me not to be afraid because he would always protect me. Then he left and I was in the big playroom on the first floor. I wanted to go find my mother, but I couldn't get the door open. I searched the room for some kind of a key to unlock the door, but I couldn't reach the keyhole. I thought I had been locked in. Really, the humidity had swollen the door in place.

I feel small. I'm taking off my clothes. My hands are smaller than my mother's and hers were so tiny and weak she couldn't even hold my father's fists away. My mother and I used to play a game. I would put my feet up against her hands and, when my feet finally grew past her fingertips, we didn't play that game anymore.

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I feel the pit of my stomach rending away into butterflies, black, and poisonous. I open my mouth and they fly out. One by one, a long, slow procession of the evil, consummated inside of me.
It tears me up to be so honest; no one ever listened before. Nolen, it would be easy for me to make believe that this is love. Do you know how hard it is not to ask you to hold me, how much energy it takes to keep from touching your face? I warned you, I am not a reliable friend, I am too lonely.

Why do you always stare into me? Your eyes grow so huge, I'm afraid they will pop out. When I stare like that I imagine the person I am staring at can hear inside my head. I always think I hear them listening. My eyes scream, I know you know.

Nolen, do you remember what I said in my sleep last night? You are the only one who knows what is happening to me. Don't forget what I say, write it down.

I am sleeping naked tonight. It is too hot. I haven't moved and sweat is pouring from my temples. Even my legs are sweating. This attic is too hot. It is like I'm on a beach, the sun beating down, but there is no sun in here, only darkness.

I've seen God. I was in France and out of nowhere this bearded man made the sound "Booo" as he was turning a corner. God scared me so badly I clutched at my heart. It is hot enough in here that I have trouble breathing.

All you do is watch my eyes open and shut. Are you counting the number of times I blink? I sometimes do that to pass the time when I have sex. It works. I concentrate hard on the place around me so that when I'm quizzed on Judgement Day I'll know every detail of the rooms, in technicolor.

Maybe I should light a candle. But then the place might catch on fire. Or maybe the heat is already so strong a little fire wouldn't disturb me. But the smell would. The smell of burning. Burning like in hell. But I saw God. Once. I swear.

GOOD INTENTIONS

Katie Eyer

I mean to forget these things:

How I was amazed by the enormous red globe of the sun, by the sound of swan's wings passing overhead, by this incredible tenderness, by the sound of men's voices, and the smell of them.

How one day your hands touched my face, and how even here, now, I can feel your fingers weaving a web of fine silk about my mouth.

I mean to forget how we all once believed that these things were real, that these things were permanent. Every one of them spreads wide, like wings; every one of them, so fragile.
QUITTING

Katie Eyer

Quitting smoking was the hardest thing I ever had to do. It wasn’t the actual physical activity, although it was that, too. It was more simply the psychological strain. Now, many of you may be wondering how it is that I see smoking as an activity fraught with deep psychological value, and I’ll tell you, it’s just like sex. "How is it like sex?", you may then ask. Well, let me tell you, in this world it’s all about sticks, it just depends what size stick it takes to make you do whatever Police batons, cigarettes, writing utensils, the great male "stick", hell, even those granola freaks out to "save the wilderness"; what is it they’re really after? In my opinion, nature is really only defined as a rather large area FILLED with sticks. I think I’ve made my point.

In any case, giving up smoking was like losing a friend, and not just an acquaintance, mind you, a very close and personal friend. Just think, we had laughed together, cried together - a cigarette will listen to you blab until you’re blue in the face and never tell you to shut up. In point of fact, I suppose it was never quite as "together" as I make it sound, more action on my "end, and more quiet frying on theirs, but I always thought they were with me. You know, I just sensed that there was some little man sitting there in the middle of the fiery hell of the cherry, saying, "Yeah, I know how it is..."

THEY SHOULD HAVE NAMED ME LUNACY

Elizabeth Paddock

This happens every, every time, Nolen. I can’t help myself. Someone takes over and I forget where I end and they begin.

John was here, just yesterday. He started kissing me. He thought he was smooth; what a fool. We are all such fools; I didn’t stop him. We almost slept together. Before I considered him to be the long lost brother I never had. I ended up asking myself over and over, what does this person, next to me, this minute, want anyway?

I have never loved anyone innocently in my life. Nolen, you are no exception. I have tried to fight for the past year to end this and look how well I’ve done.

Nolen, hold onto yourself; letting go of emotion will be the end of you. I can not let you get close to me.

If I was suffocating under my father’s embrace, I wouldn’t make the slightest effort to move. I’d watch myself from the ceiling and wonder how many eternities would go by before he killed me.

There is something of a demon inside of me. She comes out in my dreams, she is a child in a new, white, frilly, Easter dress and patent leather shoes, being taken by her father. He is dressed as a cowboy, boots and ten gallon hat. Sometimes I wake up after feeling his hands on my body and can’t bear the touch of anyone.

Once, I was sitting on a dock and my father touched my shoulder, trying in vain to comfort me. I shook him off too violently and we almost fell into the cold October water. He was attempting to love me in some decent way.
NIGHT RIDE

Kate Angus

The rain beats down on the truck roof like the sound of handfuls of tiny pins falling to a carpeted floor.

I turn to you, smiling, as you pass me the bottle of Southern Comfort to finish.

Our cigarette tips and the green dashboard light shine like the night eyes of animals by the roadside.

You slip Janis Joplin into the car stereo and her voice, pained and throaty, drifts along with the sound of the turning wheels.

I am slipping in and out of sleep, lost in a haze of Valium, sorrow and seventeen years of watching you running on empty.

Sister, I think we have finally reached the end now, perhaps we two in our truck have driven off the end of what once was the world.

Lightening cracks out across the sky like small explosions of gunfire and from the light it sheds I can see the tears as they slip down the sides of your face.

But you don’t turn to me, so I take another sip from the bottle and say nothing, our red pickup glowing like a torch through the darkness as we hit I-95 and keep on driving.

So, on the first day of my supposed "quitting", it was really rough. To ensure lack of temptation, I gave away the remainder of my cigarettes, and promised myself to a brand new, healthier, happier, less wrinkled, less expensive life. But it’s sort of like that old boyfriend who you know is bad for you, but just can’t seem to give up - within the hour, I was in tears, and scouring the apartment for any I might have missed, in old packs, or whatever. I found three. They were all Virginia Slims. Now, that may not sound too bad, you know, a heavily addicted smoker, having a nic-fit - three cigarettes sounds perfect, right? Have you ever smoked a Virginia Slim? It’s sort of like smoking a toothpick. I assure you, I never have, and never will, let a stick that small persuade me to do a damn thing. So, I arrived at a moral impasse: smoking Virginia Slims being totally against my personal beliefs, and yet going out and buying a pack would, in essence, admit total defeat, and I wasn’t ready for that. No, no, not yet.

So I ate everything in the kitchen, and called a friend instead. Now, when I say I ate everything, you’re probably thinking, oh, sure, a sandwich, maybe a few cookies, a piece of fruit. No. I mean EVERYTHING. I assure you, you have never seen a kitchen go from so full to so empty in so little time. I ate raisins and cookies and chips, and ten-year-old turkey dinners. I ate carrots and pasta and Twinkies... Let it suffice to say that I could have passed for pregnant after consuming that meal. By the way, I’m not, and no, these are not fat implants, this is indeed my own natural stomach. I know, there’s no reason for me to get implants, why would I want to look like I’m pregnant, but some people have kinky ideas about what’s swell.
Ah, but back to the friend. She, too, was quitting - it was one of those moral support things, you know. She gets whiny and pathetic when she quits, I get bitchy. I don’t think we were highly morally supportive of each other. It was a short phone call.

So, I’m off the phone, and I have nothing to do. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing.

You never quite realize how much time you spend smoking until it’s not there anymore.

Then I did something embarrassing. I mean, really embarrassing. I live with three other people, and they don’t like me to smoke in the house, but the windows don’t open, so I’ve always stood on the toilet, and smoked into the vent. I know, I know, how dumb can you get? Just listen to this - then I stood on the toilet, and pretended, yes, you heard me correctly, PRETENDED to smoke a cigarette. One of my housemates walked in on me, and I thought I was going to cry. She told me to go down to the drug store and buy a pack before I drove her insane. I called her a lousy friend, and went and picked up two packs.

So, my first attempt at quitting was not precisely successful, to say the least. But then, two months and many packs later, I discovered what the difficulty truly was - I was in love with the little man.

And the voices stop.

The party blurs behind us as we stand on the terrace.

The red wine dregs congeal in my cup.

It is my fourth glass though, at this moment, I believe I am sober.

A cigarette burns my fingertips as I stab it out in the ashtray.

I think I could well be drowning.

You hold the gun; barrel slick as a snake’s belly, as black as your own shining hair.

There is one bullet in the chamber.

A round metal piece compressed tightly; small and hard as our hearts are this night where words I once took for granted like faith and love seem diminished into trivialities, like the two dimes clinking and jingling in my pocket.

I look out across the street where the lights in the other apartment buildings shine like so many candles. I turn back to look at you. I don’t know what kind of salvation we’re asking for but you can’t even meet my eyes. I pull the trigger, and you and I and the gun, all of us come up empty.
MY GRANDFATHER’S LAST MONTH WITH MY GRANDMOTHER

Jennifer Feeley

He sits at the kitchen table, his dull knife spreading creamed herring onto a rye cracker, humming a song about two clouds.

She watches his hands shake as he lifts the cracker to his mouth, a communion with childhood. But now he is seventy, with gray hair and glasses. Refills his heart pills every month.

In the evening they play Pinochle until the sun disappears, a flame blown out by the wind. He tries to shuffle the cards, but they slide through his fingers. She gathers them from the floor; it’s her deal now.

Sometimes she stays awake at night, her hands folded in prayer, wondering what nightmare is next. Beside her, he sleeps, a thin branch, slowly bending.

THE JUNKIE

Matthew Kreuder

Candy cigarettes aren’t realistic. You can’t pack them and if you light one, all you get is a foul stench. It doesn’t even stay lit.

There was a time in my life when I would eat candy cigarettes. I liked the way their texture would change from sandpaper to a snail with rigormortis.

I guess that I started hanging out with the “wrong crowd”. Now I crush the cigarettes and snort them.

It started out as social snorting. At parties I might inhale one or two after a few beers. I guess I went to too many parties.

I get nosebleeds every day, and my nostril hairs are crusted with dry blood and coated with a sweetness I wish I never knew.
ADAM’S APPLE

Adam Smith

A Delicious apple
my mother placed
on the table
still sits, so
I pick it up
and eat
ignoring the juice
that drips from my
lip and chin,
then turn
and grin
at my black dog begging.

I saw my mother, her tired eyes floating away
as she drank, and then later, a pale face, lying on
a dirty, ragged carpet. I could smell the dirty
socks and cigarette smoke of our house, hear my
brother talking to his baseball glove late at
night. I could feel Jeremy’s hands let go of my
wrists.

I stood on the edge of the lake and felt I was
on the edge of the world. I wanted to fly out into
the water, fly away from everything. I felt the
wind on my cheeks, the softest caress. I turned,
slowly, back towards town. I hesitated, my feet
seemingly imbedded in the sand. Then I began
walking, and each step seemed to be heading in a
new direction.
"C'mon, Sarah, C'mon," Jeremy said, edging closer. I could feel his eyes on my legs, on my breasts. I could hear his uneven breathing. I felt his iron grip on my forearm and cursed myself for ever coming.

"Jeremy, let go!" I said suddenly, and I heard an eight year old girl telling the bully to let go of her hair. Jeremy hesitated for a moment then held my arm tighter, pulling me into him.

"Please let go!" I sobbed, but he kissed me, a long strangling kiss and my words were lost. I felt the cold dirt floor of the cave beneath me, and I knew I was trapped.

"You're so beautiful," Jeremy mumbled, and I saw that his eyes were closed; he could not even see me. He was somewhere else, with someone else. In my mind the light began to fade. My body was refusing to work for me.

"Jeremy," I said softly. "Jeremy, stop it," my words echoing in the chamber, and then I felt my own strength, drew it from the solid rock walls, the resonating tone of my voice.

I screamed, "JEREMY! STOP!" His hands rested on my shoulders. It was up to him now. His eyes fluttered open and he saw me, pinned beneath him, my eyes wide, fists clenched. He saw this and let go of my arms. I fell back against the dirt floor, jolting my body. He stood slowly and there was nothing in his eyes, just a blank, lost look. He staggered to the entrance and didn't turn around, even as I got to my feet. He was gone when I got outside of the cave.

I stood, my legs shaking, next to the lake. The water lapped at my feet and I took a deep breath. My back felt like it had caved in. My arms would not relax. I stood in the cooling twilight, listening to my heartbeat slow down.

My fists uncurled slowly and I looked out over the lake. Seagulls bobbed on the surface, their screeches carried by the wind. I could not force myself to think of anything. Words, odd little phrases, drifted through my head.

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SUPERSTITION

Adam Smith

Broke a mirror today: Not going to extract any superstition from it, only bits of glass from the bathroom rug.
A man chases you with an axe
but it's okay.
He only wants to give it to you
as a birthday present.
You run, because
it's not your birthday.

Suddenly, a Vampire leaps at you with a
briefcase and tries to sell you
magazine subscriptions.
You scream, "No! I don't want any!"
But it's too late.
You've signed.

Turning, a raving lunatic approaches you.
He shakes your hand
and introduces himself.
You smile and say, "Let's go for a walk."
He is the only sane person you've run into.
I should just go home, wake Mom up, fix something for dinner. Maybe do the dishes, see what kind of trouble my brother was in now. These were my duties, since Dad left, taking the car and a six pack and escaping the insanity of marriage and raising children. I knew how he had felt, and the thought of returning made me sick. There was something in Jeremy's eyes that seemed to be kindling, some challenge I wanted desperately to meet.

"Yeah," I said softly, slipping my dirty white tennies off and setting them on the sand. "Let's go for a walk." I turned and started down the beach.

I looked over at Jeremy as we walked, trying to sense what he was feeling. His face was a mask, his eyes wandering directionless out over the lake. He walked with his usual arrogant stride, hands shoved into his pockets, chin up.

Jeremy was part Chippewa and he looked it. His hair was dark and thick, coming down almost to his shoulders, his eyes a mysterious hazel, changing from brown to green with the day. He wore a loose black tank top and beat up Levis, holes cut in the knees with a switchblade.

There was an intenseness about Jeremy that had always intrigued me. He came from somewhere very dark and beautiful, an ancient place I could never reach. He knew things I would never know, and it was this wisdom I was attracted to.

"I know this cave," Jeremy said. "It's just a little farther down. Kind of a hole in the side of the cliff. You want me to show you?" he asked indifferently.

"Yeah, sure," I said without hesitation, pushing a strand of hair out of my eyes.

"Good," he said softly, and his eyes lingered on my face for a moment.

**ONE MORNING AT THE GIDION APARTMENTS**

Kate Wilkinson

Samsonette Hughes stepped out of the shower, dripping with the cold, rusty water that constantly and inexplicably ran at the Gidion Apartments. Then, before drying off, before smearing her body with lotion, before struggling into the old fashioned underwear her mother insisted she wear, she always put her watch on first.

And this is the reason why, when the fire alarm rang at the apartments on Monday the fifteenth, at six a.m., Samsonette was the only person in the lobby wearing her watch and nothing else. Everyone in the lobby was hoping that Samsonette would ask for a bathrobe or a blanket, or that she would at least blush. But she didn't; she merely sat, quite calmly, on the orange plastic couch.

She felt that she was doing very well for a student in her first year out of dorms. She had followed one of her mother's key pieces of advice that morning: Respond promptly to a fire alarm without stopping to consider material possessions. The big-boned, blond-haired, bland-faced twenty year old frowned and nodded her head. Yes, she had behaved properly that morning. Samsonette "humphed", noticing the reactions of her co-residents.

"Well, just think if it really had been an emergency situation instead of Mrs. Miphter's bra tree catching fire," she thought with righteous indignation. "They would all be burned dead in their apartments searching for robes or slippers or eyeglasses. And I would be naked but alive!"
Samsonette pushed her chin out and glared around the lobby. Her next door neighbor laughed when he saw her, but Samsonette did not acknowledge him. He was beneath her contempt. That was another of her mother’s sayings: All men are beneath contempt.

The head fireman was not beneath her contempt, however. The head fireman was a woman. She came down from the fire carrying some forms and, when she asked the time, Samsonette spoke up immediately.

"Six thirty-seven, ma’am."

"Thank you," said the petite redhead, glancing without criticism at the exposed young woman. She fastened the forms to a clipboard and scribbled for a few moments. Then she looked around the lobby, carefully making eye contact with every tenant, and with the landlord, Mr. Quinn. She pursed her lips.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I am Squad Leader O’Riley," she stated. "If this were a simple case of a burnt bra tree, I would let you all go back to your apartments with no further trouble. But I can not do that. I have been compelled to call in both the vice police and the building inspector. You will only be allowed to return to your rooms when they are through with their investigations."

"Wha?" cried Mr. Quinn. "Why do we need the building inspector and the police in here?"

"Landlord, I noticed at least, six health and safety violations in this building, and that is why the inspector is coming. I’ve already called him."

Mr. Quinn swallowed hard in his skinny throat and scratched at his pale green spandex leggings.

O’Riley turned her head and smirked at the plump widow, Mrs. Miphter, who blushed and looked down.

"Mrs. Miphter," said the squad leader sweetly. "You do realize that city law prohibits any person over the age of fifty from owning or using bondage gear?"

"Hey," I said, quietly. He turned towards me and smiled. His reply was distant.

"Hey there, Sarah."

"Where’d the guys go?" I asked, sitting up and brushing the sand out of my hair. He grinned. "Oh, probably to Lenny’s to steal cigarettes or something." He laughed and put the driftwood down. I wondered why he had stayed, but didn’t ask.

"So, what’s up with you?" he asked, and his question cut through the layers of lies I kept around me. I felt something in his voice tugging at me, pulling me in. It had been a long time since I’d said anything more than "Hi" to Jeremy. I caught my breath and looked at him.

"Oh, pretty good, I guess," I paused. "My Mom got drunk as hell last night, and this morning she puked all over the bathroom floor."

"Life sucks," I said.

Jeremy Savage had known me for a long time. In the third grade I was the only girl who stood up to his bullying. In eighth grade I was the only girl who wasn’t dying to go out with him. Jeremy couldn’t figure me out, and I liked that. I sat and stared out at the horizon.

"You busy tonight?" he asked. I shook my head.

"Want to do something?" His voice was nonchalant.

"Like what?" I countered, looking up at him.

"I dunno, go for a walk? Down the beach?" he shrugged. It was probably only a matter of time before he would take off, try to track down his buddies.
I didn’t even look that good. I was wearing cut-offs and a wrinkled white t-shirt, my hair pulled back in a sloppy pony tail. I hadn’t even bothered with make-up. I don’t know why it happened.

I had wandered down to the pipe. The power plant used it to drain excess water from steam into the lake, and it was kind of a neighborhood hangout. I was pissed at my Mom because she’d gotten drunk again. I’d left her conked out on the living room floor and I’d come here to think. But instead, I found Jeremy and a bunch of his buddies, smoking and throwing rocks at the seagulls. I sat down on the beach a few feet away. I felt a strange sort of comfort, listening to the skaggs of Bay City tell dirty jokes and complain about their lives. They didn’t bother me, just said “Hi” and let me be, no questions asked. I was just Sarah, the girl who used to play baseball with them in Sunset Park, the girl who snuck them pop when they hit Burger King on Saturday nights. That was all they knew, all they needed to know.

It was late evening, that slow time of night when it’s so easy to just drift away with the day, let yourself disappear into the darkness. The faint smell of the paper mill hung in the humid air. The sounds of August filled the background: lawn mowers, radios blaring, a few shouts from kids swimming down the beach. I was too tired to think. I lay back on the sand, closed my eyes and zoned out, concentrating on my breathing. When I opened my eyes, Jeremy’s buddies had left, and he was sitting on the pipe, fiddling with a piece of driftwood.

Mrs. Miphter wiped a tear from her eye and softly whispered, "Yes, I know.

She wrapped her yellow and brown terry cloth robe more tightly around her potato shaped body and moved into a corner near the soda pop machine. O’Riley faced the entire group again.

"I remind you all, no one is allowed back to his or her room on any condition until the investigations are thoroughly complete, not for any reason. That is city law."

Mr. Quinn raised a high pitched, timid voice.

"But, uh, you’ll let Miss Hughs go get dressed and, well, some tenants need to get ready for work. You’ll let them do that, won’t you?"

Samsonette spoke before O’Riley could answer.

"Mr. Quinn, I am quite prepared to sit here as I am until the authorities are finished. It’s warm in here, and I’m not worried about catching cold. And I’m sure my fellow residents have enough respect for the law to go in late for work just this one morning."

Some of the people in the lobby murmured, but no one could really disagree. Samsonette had spoken with such fervor and surety. O’Riley smiled at Samsonette as a teacher would smile at a star pupil. She then turned from the group to talk with her firemen who were just coming down from Mrs. Miphter’s apartment. O’Riley posted two of the largest and hairiest fire fighters at the entry to the hall, and two more at the bottom of the stairway. The tenants began talking quietly among themselves. Some were upset about not being able to go to work; some were angry that their breakfasts were being delayed. A few were worried about the police. All felt that Samsonette really should find something to cover up with; she was simply too curved to go about au natural. All were highly amused with Mrs. Miphter’s bra tree and the revelation of the bondage gear. Several wondered how a bra tree would catch fire at six a.m.
Samsonette sat and considered her perfectly trimmed and tended toenails. She did not speak with the others. In her opinion, they had no respect for the law which should be held sacred, and they obviously were not in the least bit shocked at Mr. Quinn's negligence or Mrs. Miphter's perverted and criminal activities.

However unhappy Samsonette was with her neighbors, she was very pleased with O'Riley. Here was a public official who took her obligations seriously. Others might have ignored the safety violations or the infractions of the vice code, but this woman knew her duties.

At ten to seven Mr. Quinn approached Samsonette with a large maroon paisley smoking jacket that he had solicited from one of the tenants.

"Uh, Miss Hughs, uh, I thought that maybe you'd like this, I mean, after all, the police are coming and just to cover up I thought, well, that you might..." Mr. Quinn trailed off and held the silk smoking jacket limply out towards her.

"Mr. Quinn!" spat Samsonette. She threw back her shoulders and held her head high. "I have no reason to fear the police. I have not broken any laws. Under these circumstances my nudity could not possibly be considered indecent exposure. And do you really think I'd accept anything from a derelict property owner?!" Samsonette swung her long hair and full chest away from Mr. Quinn and stared at the firemen who were opposite him. Both fire fighters remained stoic.

"And after all, mother told me never to take articles of clothing from people I didn't trust!" she thought. Mr. Quinn let the robe drop near her feet and scuffed back to the front desk.

A few minutes later the building inspector and a policeman arrived. They greeted Squad Leader O'Riley together, and the policeman disappeared upstairs to Mrs. Miphter's room with the efficient young fire person. The building inspector poked around in corners, went downstairs to check the

DAWN

Mika Perrine

I hear my sign calling, an empty whistle blowing through the skeletal pine. A swan rises, the three feathers on its back stretched and alive. I stand at the beginning of the dark water, my hair thrown back by the early air.
BUST OF A WOMAN, PICASSO

Anton Janulis

Oil and chalk on canvas.
A woman’s head and shoulders.
In life we know
no one’s hands
are that large.

It is enough, perhaps,
to know that her shape
is defined by what is
not drawn, and Picasso
might have made
a mistake, and covered
it with chalk.

It is enough then
to know that she looks
to her left,
and that her smock
is falling down her arms.

boiler, and searched through one or two first story
apartments. As the inspector was heading upstairs,
O’Riley and the vice officer returned from Mrs.
Miphter’s rooms.

"But, officer," O’Riley was saying. "It is a
blatant infraction. There is no doubt, and you are
obligated to make an arrest."

"Yeah, yeah, I know the rules," he said. "But
after all, no one would have found out if it hadn’t
been for the fire. Crazy, trying to fix that wire
support with a soldering gun... But she was
discreet, so, I mean, who really cares? Oh, I
guess I’ll have to talk to her. Where is the poor
old thing?"

O’Riley looked around the lobby. She spoke
loudly.

"Where is Mrs. Miphter? Has anyone in here
seen her?"

Everyone mumbled and searched around the
lobby. Mrs. Miphter was no where to be seen.

Samsonette said, "The last time I saw her she
was over by the utility closet, ma’am."

A young male tenant jokingly opened the closet
door and poked his head in. There was Mrs.
Miphter. She was still wrapped in her brown and
yellow robe, her face stained with tears. She was
sitting on an overturned green plastic bucket and
she had a bottle of liquid drain cleaner in her
hand. The shame of being found out had been too
much for her. She stared wildly, then threw her
head back to drink the corrosive clog remover, but
Samsonette was already there. Nude, and still
slightly damp, the college student grabbed the
bottle and tossed it towards the front desk. She
pulled Mrs. Miphter violently out of the utility
closet and shook her. Samsonette’s wet hair
whipped around. Her whole pale body quivered with
rage and morality.

"How dare you, Mrs. Miphter!" She could
barely get the words out. Samsonette’s mother had
trained her to abhor the very thought of suicide.
"How dare you ever consider suicide. Being guilty of sexual perversion is bad enough, but, but suicide!!!

O’Riley had hold of Mrs. Miphter by this time. "Miss Hughs, my utmost thanks. I should have kept a closer eye on her. You can never tell what this sort will try."

Samsonette let go of the severely traumatized old woman. She pushed her hair away from her face and tried to regain her composure. The squad leader motioned to the policeman. "You’d better take her away, officer."

The vice investigator gently lead Mrs. Miphter out of the lobby. He shook his head and muttered, "Too damn early in the morning for this kind of thing. Desk job is what I need."

The lobby was alive with talk. O’Riley clapped her hands loudly for quiet. "I am sorry you all had to witness that scene. I was negligent in my duty by not arresting her right away in my own capacity." At this moment the building inspector returned to the lobby. "I believe the inspector is through with his investigation. In five minutes you may all go back to your apartments."

The inspector approached O’Riley. His face was a portrait of weariness and disgust. "Miss," he said. "We’ve got some violations here, but they are very minor. They sure aren’t something you needed to call about at six thirty in the morning. I’m not even going to fill out the reports." He turned to Mr. Quinn. "You just fix up what needs fixing—you know what it is." Mr. Quinn nodded and smiled gratefully. The inspector walked quickly out of the building before O’Riley could say a word to him. She glared at Mr. Quinn. "I have the power to file those reports myself," she said. "And you can be sure I will. I know my job, and I do my job."

Mr. Quinn shuffled nervously. O’Riley spoke to the whole group.
"You may all return to your apartments. Thank you for your co-operation." O'Riley requested some papers from one of her firemen who had left his post by the stairs. She sat on the orange couch next to Samsonette who had returned to that spot after the incident with Mrs. Miphter.

"Miss Hughs," said the squad leader. "You've been a great help this morning. You are the only responsible, intelligent person I've met here."

Samsonette nodded graciously. She lifted her body, bare except for a watch, and left for her apartment, to dress and later to write a letter to her mother.
THE "Z"
Kate Wilkinson

as a little girl
nearly one hundred moons old
my greatest ambition
was to be Zorro, himself,
slashing my sign
on many walls.

THE RED WHEELBARROW

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