The Red Wheelbarrow

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

William Carlos Williams
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He sees Olive, facing the band, tapping her foot to the rhythm and sipping her new latte. A few people have gotten up to dance. He can't make out the lyrics, the music pounds in his ears. He walks over to their small table.

"Olive."
"Yes?"
"I'm sorry, Olive, I should go."
"No coffee?"
"No. I should sleep before my shift."
"Oh God, of course, James. I'm sorry for keeping you." She gets up to hug him. As she puts her arms around him, he holds his breath, staring straight ahead, but wanting to close his eyes. The music pounds in his ears.

The words came out in one breath: "I'm sorry about the latte."
"Oh, please don't worry about that. Do you still have my number?"
"Yes."
"Call me whenever. And thanks so much, James." She looks at him with those wild green eyes and smiles.

"Thank you, Olive."

Walking out into the street, he can still hear the music faintly. He has to concentrate to figure out the way back. The city looks different this time of day, the light faded but not quite night yet. The scrap of paper with Olive's phone number is still in his pocket, the paper soft from creasing and unfolding. He stops at the trashcan, thinking about how the flash of white would extinguish inside its dark mouth, then throws it in. He walks past the streams of people, the music of their laughter and talk carrying into restaurants and shops, glowing brightly below the darkening sky. He walks north, where the sky is fading blue, a lavender deepening into dark purple, where he knows the hospital waits for him, white and clean, somewhere up ahead in the silent horizon of the city.
had walked quickly out of the room after the congratulations, nodding, embarrassed, to the family, and down the hall to receive the next waiting patient.

_Miracle hands_, and now they look pale and worn in his lap, like tow heavy weights.

“So I have a question- why’d you get stuck with the nightshift? Do less people come in or something?”

“No, people are always hurt.” He can see that the boy is sitting in the back of the room now, guitar in case, resting on his knees, wearing that ashamed smile.

“How many, would you say?”

“I don’t know exactly. A lot.” James thinks of the hospital, the florescent light off its white walls and shiny linoleum floors, those heavy swinging doors labeled _EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT_, the strangely comforting feeling of the surgical mask on his face. Watching a patient go home.

James looks at Olive. Her eyes look kind but far away.

“Oh look,” she says, turning around and her chair and pointing behind her, “some band is setting up.” A group of men about James’ age, late twenties, begins to tune and set up the drum set and two guitars on the stage. The lead singer pulls up the microphone to full height. Someone dims the lights.

“Are ya ready?” asks the lead singer. The audience laughs, applauds. He needs to wash his hands.

“Olive? I’ll be right back.” He finds the bathroom, all the way in the back of the coffeeshop. At the sink he can hear the music of the band getting louder. He thinks about Olive’s hand. Even if resting on his for only a second, it had been cool and soft on his calloused skin. The calluses come from working in the hospital. He needed to wash his hands after any contact with the patients, to keep them clean. And though the constant scrubbing turned them rough and dry, James grew to like it, the familiar smell of soap, the rush of water. He lets the hot water run now, scrubbing away at the stickiness. He wonders if he could ever really tell Olive about the hospital, the dark walk through the city every night just to get to those clean white rooms and the people who need him. In the mirror, he is pale, thin body. He turns the faucet off and walks out.

Once out of the bathroom, he looks at the darkening sky through the

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**NOTES TO LADY MURASAKI**

By Meaghan Baxter

I wake early and something in the pale shadows of the trees, how I know they say something I can not read makes me think of you- how you would wear this dawn on your sleeves, seven layered in the tradition of spring gowns. Naked, you would step into that first silk kimono, thin, as pale as the western sky, then a blue that blushes like cheeks through thick powder. The garden has gone wild. This is perhaps where we differ. But I’ll always wonder if the emperor loved your body, fragile legs, nothing to praise except a mind and dark hair, how it fell in Chinese characters on the pillow. And when Genji whispered _aye ishitay ri_ if his mouth would taste like your ink. When you copied mantras, the length of you hair shorn, sexless, if the words of gods burned like rushes up your arms, into the sinew at the shoulder. Tattooed themselves over the lust in your core. Red dragons, yellow death, the silver from inside a cloud.

The mist rose from the fields and the view to the river cleared. Above, the clouds thinned and the sky showed through, blue and weak. Birds stopped singing their morning songs. Cicada’s hummed the sun higher and the grasses began to waver in the heat far off by the bank of trees. I have fenced since dawn. Something about the hiss of the _shinai_ through the air like tearing stockings helps me think. My forearms ache. The light is white now, sweat hangs from the tip of my nose. I find a cucumber in the garden beneath thistles and witch grass. I wish I could speak like the sword, like you and your Chinese, so foreign, how primitive. Your father, the court poet, said you should have been a son but you took the name of the girl that Genji makes love to on fallen leaves. The Lady of Autumn,
Murasaki. She was the only girl that leaves your prince in the end. She walked west across the white water.

My teacher says to paint with my whole body. Calligraphy comes from the core, that’s where you throw a punch from. She pinches my fingers, no! The fingers hold the brush but the movement of the character, insu, feel dog up your arm, feel dog in your shoulder, feel dog here – she pokes my heart. Black is all the colors fighting to be seen, grind your ink darker. In these strokes I search for you– see you swirling over your delicate writing desk like a madman, moving with each word. When Sami became ill, when she lay feverish, blind, passing, the monks drawing demons from her little mouth, incense thick as wintersilk about the neck, what good were words then? The demon flew into a shadow at the corner of the room, the girl lay back and with your brush hand you painted her upwards, animated her towards heaven. My teacher says gray tones are for mourning, the sensitive blade’s edge between love and nothing. She makes me paint mist. She makes me paint window seated cats and men caught in the rain. After Sami you abandoned your platform sandals, the harem, took to walking barefoot, drawing daughter, daughter from your heart like a surgeon sewing, pulling the lips of a wound that won’t heal itself closed.

I have cut my hair short. All that dignity gone like the weight of tradition. I feel the back of my neck, this openness. My arrows catch light like the insides of clam shells, like polished toe nails. I could run until nightfall for the lust of it. My arrows fly truer. I have watched bear cubs play with caribou calves, teaching each other the ancient roles. When the bear’s teeth grow in the calf is sure on her legs.

peeks.

“What do you mean?”

“I guess... what I do is I see what’s wrong, and I look for what I can do to help them...” James leans in on his elbows in a little, shifting his arm to set a hand down.

Olive nods. “Yes?”

“That way, I fix them for a while...” The boy hits a high note and James turns his head to the stage.

“Yes, James?” Olive reaches her hand over and places it on his. James jerks hi hand back, brushing the side of her latex and knocking it over. He tries to catch it in time, but the latte spills all over the table, dripping off the side.

“Oh, sorry, I’m sorry.” His face burns pink as the boy’s, who continues his scratchy song.

“It’s okay, I promise,” says Olive, but James runs over to get some napkins. He comes back with the napkins and covers the spill with them, and the coffee instantly turns them soggy and brown. He wipes down the side of the table and mops the small puddle that has formed on the floor. Then he throws away the mass of wet napkins and the half empty latte. His hands feel sticky.

“I’m sorry,” he says when he comes back. “Oh no, did you want to finish that? Here, I’ll order another.” He rushes over to the cashier.

When he finally comes back, Olive is smiling softly. “Don’t worry about it, James, please.” Her voice is steady and calm as her pulse was a month back, pounding loud in the stethoscope over his heart to his ear.

James tries not to worry. He watches the boy walks down from the stage amidst polite applause. James wishes he could say something to him, but what would he say?

“Anyway, where were we?” says Olive, and James catches a glimpse of her face, still smiling. He tries to put his elbows on the table, but it too is sticky from the spill. He pulls his hands back into his lap.

“Your job?” she offers.

“Yes...I help them, so they can keep on going.” He can still feel his face burning, so he turns it down a little, toward his lap, his sticky hands. They were hands that even the doctors had praised, This one’s got miracle hands, they had said, after the night he continued the surgery and the man had survived. He
But the sky from the big windows was a color he couldn’t remember seeing, a pure light blue, almost a lavender, and he had sat down, waiting for Olive.

Olive smiles and he follows. Her eyes are like city lights. They shine below her short auburn hair, and match the white teeth of her open smile. He can see her fingers though, drumming on the table. He looks down at his hands, resting in his lap. They are large hands, almost too large for his tall, thin frame, and prone to hanging heavily at his sides, like weights, when he isn’t working in the ER room. In the ER they move quickly, expertly, rough hands turned gentle, holding a blood pressure pump, a surgical knife, a heart.

“Are you going to get some coffee, James?”

James searches the black board near the front. Neon Frappachinos and Mochas glare back at him. “I don’t...I’m not sure yet.”

“I’m sorry for keeping you. You work the nightshift, right? So you should probably be sleeping.”

“Yes. I work from ten to seven.”

“Jesus. Well, like I said I’m sorry, it’s just that every Saturday night they have open mic, and last time I was here they had some pretty good stuff.”

Her latte comes, and she sets her hands down next to it. “You know,” Olive looks at him with her wide green eyes, “I remember you being really gentle.”

“Well, I think... what I do is...” He tries to look up at her.

She nods. “Yes?”

Voices rise from around the coffeeshop, someone laughs loudly. He darts his eyes from the direction of the noise, back to Olive.

“First... first I look to see what’s wrong.”

No, that wasn’t right either. The sky is blue, almost lavender. He breathes in sharply, begins again. “I guess it’s pretty simple.” He brings his hands out of his lap, setting his elbows down on the table. Skinny arms and those knobby elbows. They are only a few inches away from her hands.

James looks up at the stage. A pink-faced young man with a guitar climbs up on the stage to begin the open mic. As he waits for the audience to quiet down, he grows a deep shade of red. When he starts to sing his song he can’t seem to decide if he wants to look at the audience or not, and sneaks a look at Olive instead.

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THE POST

By Laurel Black

A plain box lands soundless on your front stoop, so full you must split it open on the welcome mat: as immediate, as demanding as my return address.

My new backyard unfolds at your feet, smelling of mint and dirty beach. Without ringing the doorbell, without introducing itself, the water barges in and overtakes your couch.

Minnows kiss the backs of your knees, nip your sandals. Tiny spiraled shells fill your mother’s glass bowl—their clicking is soft laughter.

What to do with the sea-winged birds perched on your banister,
the carpet of long grasses
nestling the TV?

Next week, expect the woods—
each strand of pollen
a seduction from me.

MIRACLE HANDS
By Taya Kitaysky

Olive enters the coffeeshop, eyes bright and green, hands swinging and flashing with a few rings as she walks over to him.

"Hi, James."

"Hello, Olive." It seems unlikely that they had been introduced by Olive's mother in hospital; James, the nurse who had examined her in the ER room the night before; Olive, the patient who'd just had an appendectomy. Then, they had both been shy, but a month later, bumping into each other in the grocery store, only James had been shy, pushing against the weight of the entrance door, groceries in arms, while Olive scribbled down number on a piece of paper against her knee, laughing as she balanced.

"Hold on." She orders a latte. "James, how are you doing? Did you find it all right?"

"Yes — I haven't been out this early before — in the city, I mean. I walked." After seeing Olive in the store earlier that day, James had walked the eight blocks back to his apartment, barely feeling the heaviness of the two grocery bags in his arms. It was eight AM, and he should have been sleeping before his night shift, but five-thirty, she had said, five-thirty. From his bed, he had stared at the thin lines of light barely escaping from between the blinds of his window, glaring into the darkness of the small room. He thought of Olive, the plan they had made, what he could say to her. The parallel lines of light. Five-thirty.

It had been five twenty-five when James had walked into the coffeeshop, and right away he had felt he wanted to leave. It was full of people; people talking on couches under posters of jazz musicians and rock shows, people leaning towards one another on the small round tables, people tuning their guitars by the stage in the back of the room. From the corner table, James saw that they were mostly young people, college kids, the kind he never was a few years back, the kind of college kids who are sent to his Emergency Room from car crashes or alcohol poisoning turning their skin cold and blue, half-alive from failed suicides.
Her face-lines narrowed and closed. She looked right into his blue eyes, speaking low. "I want you to take my hand and say it all now. All of it."

He clumsily traced the edge of her sleeve to her hand, cradling it with both of his. His body shook.

"I don't know if I can."

"Say it."

He breathed. "Julie, sometimes we lose people we love." He couldn't continue. He was shaking uncontrollably.

"Go on."

"Sometimes we lose people we love, and no one knows why. Or where they go. But—" He took her other hand. "But if your grandfather was lucky enough to have a little girl to cry for him when he went away..." Her body shook with his. "...then he must have died a full and rich man." Julia looked down, closing her eyes, unable to listen. "I want you to cry as much as you can, Julie—because your sadness is his comfort."

She fell against him. "Stop."

"The irises flew away," he said.

"I have more."

"They were for you."

She looked up at him, searching.

"Julie, will you cry for me when I am gone?"

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from THE APARTMENTS

By Mike Bushnell

Window three up, two over.

One girl sits

elbows at her waist,
sometimes spinning circles,

leaning on the pane:

hat tops, hair parts, the roads a single mass of asphalt.

Window

slides, spit in a slight wind. Window

latched.

The crowd moves in step.

C2

Alone at the

kitchen table, stirring in her coffee cup.

A laughs conspires out. Loud

coffee maker whir.

Red lipstick layered,

palm stiff, wind dries fingernails.

Full makeup,

all night.

Tapping her foot to

the Radio:

Alone again

for the night. Alone again, once more. She

Wrinkles tablecloth, fills ashtray.

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Being a visitor in her bathroom:
Pile of broken fingernails
from dirty hands, testimonies
summers spent
inside grooming.

Stained blouse draped over the shower rod.
Sleeves hang low, white cloth
and red wine in the shape of a bird, left breast.
One wing out
other holding it's head
to ribcage as if sleeping.

Cough drop wrappers
Green in garbage:
CHIPS
Eucalyptus
Menthol
CHIPS

You okay in there? The Coffee is up.
Attentive host. Coffee maker clicks.

Sounds of pipes shifting loose
Gutter slosh backforth in a spill
rise-fall rise-fall
Suitors come, she:
"Just stay one night.
heart, rise-fall
"Wife's home, work's over, goodnight.
Lungs, rise
fall.
With the slam of the door,
the radio falls, on:

"Yes you were. You were just a little girl, and I yelled at you, Julie, in my office, remember? You came to me in my office. They made me tell you, because you loved me, remember? You used to call me Monsieur les Mots—Mr. Words. I was Mr. Words, Julie. And your parents..." He shook her arm fiercely. "They couldn't watch you cry."

"Sir," she whispered firmly. "I can't help you. My grandfather died twenty years ago. I'm fine, I'm happy. Look, I have a little shop. There are other customers who are expecting me back from lunch" she lied. "I have to leave." She took the bouquet from his other hand and held it up to him. "Take these to your friend. He needs them."

"It was not twenty years ago. It was yesterday. It was today. I had to find you." He would not let go of her. Julia feared him.

"Mr. Hess,"—her arm resisted steadily against his grip—"I'm sorry I can't remember whatever it is you want me to remember, but I'm sure if you'd done something cruel to me then I would have forgiven you."
His nails dug into her coat-sleeve. "I don't want you to forgive me."
She pulled hard away from him. "I forgive you."
"I hit you, Julie."
She dropped the irises. They fled down the street in a stampede of leaves and wind, their purple heads knocking against the asphalt, their bodies twisted and torn by passing cars. One disappeared through a gutter.

The painting of dark flowers was the first thing Julie had seen when she came out of shock. The floor tasted like chalk.
She had tried to hug him, sobbing into his black jacket as he sat behind the oak desk. And then she was on the floor. And then she was looking at the French painting up on the wall. She couldn't remember why she'd been crying.

Julia's fleece scarf played against her face. She touched her cheek where he had hit her; it was hot, and stung.
"I didn't know what to say. In English or French, what could I say? I am so sorry, Julie."
"Say it now."
He relaxed his grip on her arm. "What?"
just work at a flower shop. We just met today. You came to my shop to buy flowers for your friend.” She wanted to cry. She wanted to cry often.

"Arthur Hess.”

She froze. He was only a few feet away from her. The wind surged between them.

"Arthur Hess,” he repeated.

"Mr. Hess?”

"Arthur.”

"Mr. Hess from first grade? French class?”

"Yes.”

"Jesus Christ, Mr. Hess, I’d completely forgotten.” She held her hand to her cheek. “What are you doing here?”

"I’m so sorry, Julie.”

"What are you sorry for?” She watched the lines of his face start moving again.

"Julie Tillman. You sat in the front row.”

"How do you remember my name?”

He took her arm. His white hand suddenly clamped down. It hurt.

"Tell me, do you remember me?”

"Yes, of course Mr. Hess. I didn’t recognize you.”

"Do you remember what I did?”

"What? What are you talking about?” His grip was terrible.

"Do you remember what I did to you when you cried?”

"What?” She searched his eyes, which flittered around like a blind man’s.

"Do you remember when you cried in my class?”

"Oh, I cried all the time when I was little. I don’t remember—”

"I shouted at you!” His voice swarmed upward through the streets and telephone lines, and a woman and her son crossing the street glanced back.

“Your grandfather died. Your grandfather died. And I told you in school and you cried so awfully and what do I do? What did they want me to do?” He tried to find her eyes, but they were lost, straining in memory.

"Sir, I’m sorry, I have no idea what you’re talking about. I was so young.”

Alone again, alone once more. Radio, cut.

Quiet bed creaks lean against the pane. Dirty glass
dark streets taxi emergency lights.
Tablecloth fray, ashtray overflow.
LEWISTON BEACH

By Bri Cavallaro

All along the Lake Michigan shoreline, delicate white tents rested in long rows, flickering like small votives in worship of cold, fresh water. "Lakeside gambling" read the staked sign, but we lit candles and set them deep in the grass: such a small shoreline procession, lending quiet light as we tussled in the shallows, our heels graced by the tails of minnows. Those gauze walls echoed our shadows, that quiet June night, and the waves hummed with such sweet, careful joy, that we could cup all we could not take back in warm hands, small firefly cradles, and ghosted them like sheer curtains over the surface, letting them fall at our heels as discarded prayers.

special to you."

"You are special to me."

Julia put her coffee down. The sandwiches came, and she waited for the waitress to leave. "Excuse me?"

"Excuse me." The man got up from his seat faster than she thought he would have been able to move, and walked quickly down the back hallway.

Arthur looked at himself in the mirror, saw his face unraveling, glanced down at his pocket and reached for Tuesday's pills. It was very cold outside. In his pocket, he felt the small square card she'd given him with it's elastic gold string. He threw it in the metal bin, blank.

When he came back to their seat, she wasn't there, only the purple irises on his chair, and there she was opening the glass door to leave.

"Julia, wait." She looked back with that quizzical look she used to get and Arthur laid his hands out. "Please don't go now."

She looked at him, concerned by his radical change of appearance, his sudden blurt of emotion, and, glancing self-consciously at the staring hostess, she walked back to the table.

"I have to go, sir, lunch break is over. I've already paid for both of us."

She was trying to reestablish formality, costumer and salesperson.

"I want to talk to you."

"Goodbye. I'm sorry about your friend."

"I want to say something."

She turned to leave again, stumbling over a small wooden chair, and walked briskly through the glass door and down the steps. The wind gushing through the open doorway made Arthur shiver violently, but he grabbed the flowers and pursued her onto the cracked cement.

"I need to talk to you, Julia," he called to her, his voice coming out broken and childlike. She stopped and turned around. Her scarf nearly flew into a tree, but she caught it and tied it tighter.

"I don't know you, sir."

"Arthur," he said, walking toward her against the wind.

"Why did you say I was special to you? You don't know who I am. I
"I write crossword puzzles. For French newspapers."
"How interesting! I bet they're impossible. I can't even do one in
English. Do you use French movie stars and strange names of rivers and stuff?"
"Tigris. The river. It was a word I used last week."
"Tigris. What a beautiful word. Is it spelled the same in French?"
"No."
She laughed her buoyant, tickled laugh again, speaking through the tail
end of it, tucking a sandy tendril behind her ear, looking at him over the thick
black rim of her narrow glasses. "Then I'd be hopelessly lost."
The soup came, steamy split pea soup for both of them. Julia savored
the first hot stream of liquid running down her throat, her chest, and took off
her coat and scarf. The man hadn't touched anything on the table.
"Have some, it's delicious."
"I am not hungry." What a strange thing to say, she thought, after he'd
ordered everything she'd ordered.
"Arthur, you have to eat." No answer. "Listen," she started, leaning
forward a little. "I loved my grandfather very much, and when he died I just
wanted to die with him. But you need to do everyday things, like eat, and talk
with people, and laugh and smile. Because you're still alive!" He looked at her,
and she could see the lines of his face suddenly manifesting themselves,
drawing themselves meticulously, measured to the millimeter like lines on a
map.
"My friend is not dead."
"I know, I'm sorry, and it's none of my business. Forgive me."
"I said he was dying. He is not dead."
"I know, I know he's still alive, and I know he'll love the flowers you
chose for him."
"You chose them."
"Yes. You asked me to."
"He will like irises?" The lines dug roads across his forehead, canals
and ditches around his mouth, moats under his eyes.
"I don't know. I don't know your friend, Arthur." She hoped Arthur
was his name. She'd forgotten already. "I just picked him my favorite flowers. I
don't know why they're my favorite. You may want to choose something

4AM JAZZ JUNKIE

By Caitlin Harrison

4am is the loneliest time
when you know for sure your white
skin won't hide you
in a jazz club blue
with cigar smoke and
the blue sheen
on dark black skin,
a crow's soot suddenly rainbow.

at some point you got this notion,
that maybe if you sit here long
enough
the smoke and the drum
and the pit-a-pat-pat, high
tinkling of the piano
will sink down into your bones,
grow itself out until
one day your skin wouldn't shake
itself awake, a stranger to the black night,
black eyebrows cocked at your meandering hips
and shuffling feet.

but earlier on you weren't even sure
in all your overpriced splendor.
it only came at nights,
the dorm janitor
owning sixty-five years, hair whiter than
balcony snow contrasting with his dark skin
under the street light,
the janitor smoking his cigars,
the thick blue smoke drifting through your window, mingling with the cheap, cheap perfume still on your hands and neck and tangled in the hair of your bedmate, her white-moon skin flaking off the layers of dried sweat. it was only in these moments you let your hands pit-a-pat against your naked, grey thighs, her bare bottom, the pillow the water glass the smoke curling around your ceiling, serpent-like, your hand beating to the old man's soulful droning under the window.
after cleaning up crap from kids all these years you know he's learned a thing or two, but nothing you'll be taught h-e-r-e. so you dropped out.
you learned the way of things, the hard kick and the jazz of hot nights, hot music. what happens when you ask for a cup of coffee at the cusp of midnight, when the sax player goes on a long gasp of notes, wailing with more passion in three minutes than you've ever felt in your life. but it's the little things that give you hope, keep you coming back to the same dirty club the same dirty music the same dirty booze, the shadows playing across your hand look darker than before, friends don't recognize you without your suit and tie and you've started thinking in blue notes-heart pit-a-patting against your ribs.

“Yes, I used to live here too. I am visiting my friend.”
“Oh, I used to speak French, but I can't remember how. It's funny, I don't remember a single real word, just stupid expressions like 'C'est la vie' and 'Apres moi, le deluge,' and I took the language for years.”
“You do not remember?” His eyes shifted to hers.
“No. I think it's beautiful, though.”
“That is because no one is forcing you to speak it anymore.”
“Probably.” The coffee came. She blew gently on hers and sipped it. He watched her. “You speak English very well, Sir.”
“I have lived in this country most of my life.”
“That's right, I'm sorry, you said that.” She was worried she'd offended him, but he just stared. “Why did you decide to move back to France?”
“I had a family. And there was a job.”
“Oh?”
“Yes.” She took another sip from her mug, trying to avoid an awkward silence, and burnt her tongue. “Ow. Jesus. I hate how long it takes for these things to cool down.”
He smiled. “Are you all right?”
She laughed a bright and vivacious laugh that popped like bubbles.
“Yes, of course, I'm fine. I'm sorry, what was it you said your name was?”
“Arthur.”
“Arthur, I'm Julia.”
“Not Julie?”
“Not anymore. But the way you pronounce it it sounds so French and lovely—maybe I'll have to switch back to Julie.” She imitated his gentle phonetic slur when saying her name again. It sounded right. “What do you do, Arthur?” She'd heard somewhere that if you repeated someone's name immediately after learning it then you'd remember it. Julia was always forgetting names.
“Crossword puzzles.”
She thought it might be a little joke. “Are you retired?”
“No.”
“Oh, I'm sorry...”
"Sure. You write it whenever you want." She handed him his change and he turned towards the door, holding the bouquet of flowers at his side, processing out in the same careful way he had entered.

Julia couldn't let him leave—she was always feeling responsible for people, her girlfriends told her. People came into her store in polar emotional states, either mourning or celebrating, buying flowers for forgiveness or consolation or love. But no one had ever left crying. And she liked this man.

"Sir?" He stopped walking without turning around. "My shift just ended, and I was about to go get something to eat. Would you like to join me?"

"Yes."

"I'll just get the keys and lock up, and we can go to a place down the block and eat lunch and talk. Ok?"

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"Have you ever been there?" She pointed to the picture.

"It is my home," he said, without looking away.

"You're just visiting America?"
Cold wind gust
and our shoulders press
together.
But your back
sways warm,
old beast.
Your nicker
rolls a heavy tongue.

And we wait
for the cauliflower folds
to bloom
in your knees.
My arms wrapped
around your neck.
Knuckles looped
in curling mane.
Ready
for your weight
to give.

"These will brighten up the whole house," she said about the daffodils.
She thought he might not want something too funereal. "They're adorable, like little yellow cups and saucers."

They reached the bouquets. "I arrange these personally," Julia noted, blushing. The man extended his white hand to a basket of ferns, roses, and baby's breath, and pulled back suddenly.

"Please, feel free to touch them if you like."
"You arranged these?"
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He ran his hand up the side of a large fern and closed his eyes. "My friend has a greenhouse he loves. He grows all of these flowers and more. I cannot remember his favorite. Perhaps you could tell me your favorite." The blue eyes flipped open and stared intently into hers.

"Is he a botanist?"
"Yes."
"Then maybe we should find him something really rare."
"You are a botanist too. I think he would love whichever flowers are your favorite. I will visit him tonight and tell him about you, and it will mean more to him."

She couldn't place his accent. French, maybe. Julia looked up at the irises for a second, and hesitated—she had never heard of a dying person receiving irises. But the man had caught her looking at them.

"Those, you recommend those?"
"Irises? Does your friend like purple?"
"He must."
"Then yes. Yes, I think he would love a gift of irises."

The man nodded. Julia rang him up at the cash register and pulled a small card from a drawer under the counter.

"Would you like to write him a note?"

The man stared, silent for a while. Julia looked at the clock and to the back room for Allan, who was late again. Time became a perk and pitfall of owning your own business.

When she glanced back, she saw his face was wet.

"I will write it later."
THE IRISES
By Paul Baumbusch

An old man in a black suit walked into a flower shop. The wind that followed him ruffled leaves of potted plants and a few petals flew about. Julia watched his dark silhouette passing slowly behind the rows of pink roses, the crowded rainbow of tulips, and the small bushes of lilacs. She watched him for half an hour as he circled the display tables, not stopping ever to look or to ask a question, not stopping to smell or touch a plant. She could not see his face.

She had to break for lunch. “Can I help you find anything sir?” The tall black figure stopped moving. “Sir?”

“Yes, I need to buy some flowers.” His voice was measured and curiously accented, a familiar voice. She came out from behind the counter and began walking toward him.

“Is there anything in particular that you’re looking for?”

“I need the most beautiful flowers you have.”

She came face to face with him. He was a handsome man with deep-set features and gray hair slicked back. His suit was trim and impeccably tailored. His blue eyes pierced through two dark sockets, and although he was very old, there was not a single wrinkle on his face. Julia felt she ought to smile as much as she could when speaking to this man.

“Well sir, maybe if you told me the occasion the flowers were for, I could give you some suggestions.”

“They are for my good friend.”

“What is your friend like?”

“He is dying.”

Inside, Julia’s heart crumpled, but she didn’t flinch. She’d done this before.

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“Then we’ll have to find him something really special.”

She led him through the store, to all the displays he must have previously visited, pointing out the flowers that smelled like love, like spring, the flowers that smelled like honey and wine, happy flowers and sad flowers with lovely or dark aromas.

LETTER TO A MOBSTER
By Kate Nelson

Dear John Gotti,

I want so badly to worry away all the small things like you do. I know your heart doesn’t pound as hard now when there’s too little salt on the spaghetti, or when there’s too much blood on the concrete and your pinstripes. How you wait for Sammy the Bull to call about this afternoon’s business but you never sweat the small stuff. You know the night’s dirty story always washes clean.

I can see us now: I want to curse like a sailor, maybe one you’d scratched last Saturday. I’d smile because it’s just the family business, what we’re always going to be like. You’d tell me to quit it, but you’re thinking how proud you are of your little girl’s tough skin, her fresh mouth. I wouldn’t ever get caught, I’d have your guys kneeling at my feet confessing they never mean to yell as loudly as they do at the dinner table. I’d love my daddy’s boys, the prying Protestant neighbors and the six o clock news saying we’re as tough as Teflon. If people could only envy me as much as they do you for always getting what you want. I wonder what it must be like seeing the fevers that swell their pug-nosed faces at your presence.

I’ll keep thinking of you, Dapper Don, the way your restless body won’t ever show how it aches now for a reconciliation between words and dirty hands. I know you don’t need a reminder that the prison guard pisses his pants when he thinks of bringing you your morning Danish. I wish I could have told you that it’s all eventual, that we’re all going to be found out one of these days for who we are, for what we don’t want them to know we fear the most.
DUST SONG

By Hannah Weber

After she stopped driving
her old blue Toyota,
and before she forgot
my mom's first name,
my aunt would
dip newborn lilacs
into a sink
of quivering water,
her crepe-paper palms
fingering each tiny bud.
She was drowning the insects, she said.
They got into
her rice,
hers vitamin pills,
found their way into cracker tin,
leaving raised trails of dust
in the back corners
of her newly varnished kitchen cabinets.
Although we washed those cabinets,
scrubbing with toothbrushes
and a green powder
which smelled like a new car,
we found nothing
but empty spice bottles.
My brother kept these,
hoarding round blue pebbles
and the pieces of Spanish silver
she'd given him
within their musty guts.
My aunt dusted everyday
looking for dead wasps or cockroaches,
which might have been nesting
over ceiling fans or between new clean sheets.
She would stop
and tell us to listen;
listen to the sparrows in the attic.
Their nightmarish song
kept her up at night
and she would let them out
if she could only find
the door.
After her house was sold,
two young women moved in.
They said the place was infested.
It crawled with the ghosts of insects,
wasp wings and bird feathers turned to dust,
the songs of drowned ladybugs.
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back room for Allan, who was late again. Time became a perk and pitfall of
owning your own business.

When she glanced back, she saw his face was wet.

“I will write it later.”
"Sure. You write it whenever you want." She handed him his change and he turned towards the door, holding the bouquet of flowers at his side, processing out in the same careful way he had entered.

Julia couldn’t let him leave—she was always feeling responsible for people, her girlfriends told her. People came into her store in polar emotional states, either mourning or celebrating, buying flowers for forgiveness or consolation or love. But no one had ever left crying. And she liked this man.

"Sir?" He stopped walking without turning around. "My shift just ended, and I was about to go get something to eat. Would you like to join me?"

"Yes."

"I'll just get the keys and lock up, and we can go to a place down the block and eat lunch and talk. Ok?"

"Yes," he said, facing the door.

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"Have you ever been there?" She pointed to the picture.

"It is my home," he said, without looking away.

"You’re just visiting America?"

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**ODE TO A DYING HORSE**

By Jesse Littlejohn

Weathered now, your old face—
black eyes shine silver,
leather strung mane
--white tipped
and licked dry
in the wind.

Teeth,
in yellow,
off-crook rows,
gleam once in the sun,
then shadows
fall
and your dark lips
close.

Heavy hooves
root
the warm earth.

My ear to your swelling ballast,

I can smell
the air
below—urine
drains in dips of sand.
Bronze earth
cracks dry
beneath
my boots.
the thick blue smoke drifting through your window,
mingling with the cheap, cheap perfume still on your hands and
neck and tangled in the hair of your bedmate,
her white-moon skin flaking off the layers of dried sweat.
it was only in these moments you let your hands pit-a-pat against your naked, grey thighs, her bare bottom, the pillow the water glass
the smoke curling around your ceiling, serpent-like, your hand beating to the old man's soulful droning under the window.
after cleaning up crap from kids all these years you know he's learned a thing or two, but nothing you'll be taught h-e-r-e.
so you dropped out.
you learned the way of things, the hard kick and the jazz of hot nights, hot music.
what happens when you ask for a cup of coffee at the cusp of midnight,
when the sax player goes on a long gasp of notes, wailing with more passion in three minutes than you've ever felt in your life.
but it's the little things that give you hope, keep you coming back to the same dirty club the same dirty music the same dirty booze,
the shadows playing across your hand look darker than before, friends don't recognize you without your suit and tie and you've started thinking in blue notes-heart pit-a-patting against your ribs.

"Yes, I used to live here too. I am visiting my friend."
"Oh, I used to speak French, but I can't remember how. It's funny, I don't remember a single real word, just stupid expressions like 'C'est la vie' and 'Apres moi, le deluge,' and I took the language for years."
"You do not remember?" His eyes shifted to hers.
"No. I think it's beautiful, though."
"That is because no one is forcing you to speak it anymore."
"Probably." The coffee came. She blew gently on hers and sipped it. He watched her. "You speak English very well, Sir."
"I have lived in this country most of my life."
"That's right, I'm sorry, you said that." She was worried she'd offended him, but he just stared. "Why did you decide to move back to France?"
"I had a family. And there was a job."
"Oh?"
"Yes."
She took another sip from her mug, trying to avoid an awkward silence, and burnt her tongue. "Ow. Jesus. I hate how long it takes for these things to cool down."
He smiled. "Are you all right?"
She laughed a bright and vivacious laugh that popped like bubbles.
"Yes, of course, I'm fine. I'm sorry, what was it you said your name was?"
"Arthur."
"Arthur, I'm Julia."
"Not Julie?"
"Not anymore. But the way you pronounce it it sounds so French and lovely—maybe I'll have to switch back to Julie." She imitated his gentle phonetic slur when saying her name again. It sounded right. "What do you do, Arthur?" She'd heard somewhere that if you repeated someone's name immediately after learning it then you'd remember it. Julia was always forgetting names.
"Crossword puzzles."
"She thought it might be a little joke. "Are you retired?"
"No."
"Oh, I'm sorry..."
"I write crossword puzzles. For French newspapers."
"How interesting! I bet they're impossible. I can't even do one in English. Do you use French movie stars and strange names of rivers and stuff?"
"Tigris. The river. It was a word I used last week."
"Tigris. What a beautiful word. Is it spelled the same in French?"
"No."
She laughed her buoyant, tickled laugh again, speaking through the tail end of it, tucking a sandy tendril behind her ear, looking at him over the thick black rim of her narrow glasses. "Then I'd be hopelessly lost."
The soup came, steamy split pea soup for both of them. Julia savored the first hot stream of liquid running down her throat, her chest, and took off her coat and scarf. The man hadn't touched anything on the table. "Have some, it's delicious."
"I am not hungry." What a strange thing to say, she thought, after he'd ordered everything she'd ordered.
"Arthur, you have to eat." No answer. "Listen," she started, leaning forward a little. "I loved my grandfather very much, and when he died I just wanted to die with him. But you need to do everyday things, like eat, and talk with people, and laugh and smile. Because you're still alive!" He looked at her, and she could see the lines of his face suddenly manifesting themselves, drawing themselves meticulously, measured to the millimeter like lines on a map. "My friend is not dead."
"I know, I'm sorry, and it's none of my business. Forgive me."
"I said he was dying. He is not dead."
"I know, I know he's still alive, and I know he'll love the flowers you chose for him."
"You chose them."
"Yes. You asked me to."
"He will like irises?" The lines dug roads across his forehead, canals and ditches around his mouth, moats under his eyes. "I don't know. I don't know your friend, Arthur." She hoped Arthur was his name. She'd forgotten already. "I just picked him my favorite flowers. I don't know why they're my favorite. You may want to choose something

4AM JAZZ JUNKIE

By Caitlin Harrison

4am is the loneliest time
when you know for sure your white
skin won't hide you
in a jazz club blue
with cigar smoke and
the blue sheen
on dark black skin,
a crow's soot suddenly rainbow.

at some point you got this notion,
that maybe if you sit here long
even enough
the smoke and the drum
and the pit-a-pat-pat, high
tinking of the piano
will sink down into your bones,
grow itself out until
one day your skin wouldn't shake
itself awake, a stranger to the black night,
black eyebrows cocked at your meandering hips
and shuffling feet.

but earlier on you weren't even sure
in all your overpriced splendor.
it only came at nights,
the dorm janitor
owning sixty-five years, hair whiter than
balcony snow contrasting with his dark skin
under the street light,
the janitor smoking his cigars,
LEWISTON BEACH

By Bri Cavallaro

All along the Lake Michigan shoreline, delicate white tents rested in long rows, flickering like small votives in worship of cold, fresh water. “Lakeside gambling” read the staked sign, but we lit candles and set them deep in the grass: such a small shoreline procession, lending quiet light as we tussled in the shallows, our heels graced by the tails of minnows. Those gauze walls echoed our shadows, that quiet June night, and the waves hummed with such sweet, careful joy, that we could cup all we could not take back in warm hands, small firefly cradles, and ghosted them like sheer curtains over the surface, letting them fall at our heels as discarded prayers.

special to you."

“You are special to me.”

Julia put her coffee down. The sandwiches came, and she waited for the waitress to leave. “Excuse me?”

“Excuse me.” The man got up from his seat faster than she thought he would have been able to move, and walked quickly down the back hallway.

Arthur looked at himself in the mirror, saw his face unraveling, glanced down at his pocket and reached for Tuesday’s pills. It was very cold outside. In his pocket, he felt the small square card she’d given him with it’s elastic gold string. He threw it in the metal bin, blank.

When he came back to their seat, she wasn’t there, only the purple irises on his chair, and there she was opening the glass door to leave.

“Julia, wait.” She looked back with that quizzical look she used to get and Arthur laid his hands out. “Please don’t go now.”

She looked at him, concerned by his radical change of appearance, his sudden blurt of emotion, and, glancing self-consciously at the staring hostess, she walked back to the table.

“I have to go, sir, lunch break is over. I’ve already paid for both of us.” She was trying to reestablish formality, costumer and salesperson.

“I want to talk to you.”

“Goodbye. I’m sorry about your friend.”

“I want to say something.”

She turned to leave again, stumbling over a small wooden chair, and walked briskly through the glass door and down the steps. The wind gushing through the open doorway made Arthur shiver violently, but he grabbed the flowers and pursued her onto the cracked cement.

“I need to talk to you, Julia,” he called to her, his voice coming out broken and childlike. She stopped and turned around. Her scarf nearly flew into a tree, but she caught it and tied it tighter.

“I don’t know you, sir.”

“Arthur,” he said, walking toward her against the wind.

“Why did you say I was special to you? You don’t know who I am. I
just work at a flower shop. We just met today. You came to my shop to buy flowers for your friend.” She wanted to cry. She wanted to cry often.

“Arthur Hess.”
She froze. He was only a few feet away from her. The wind surged between them.

“Arthur Hess,” he repeated.
“Mr. Hess?”
“Arthur.”
“Mr. Hess from first grade? French class?”
“Yes.”
“Jesus Christ, Mr. Hess, I’d completely forgotten.” She held her hand to her cheek. “What are you doing here?”
“I’m so sorry, Julie.”
“What are you sorry for?” She watched the lines of his face start moving again.

“Julie Tillman. You sat in the front row.”
“How do you remember my name?”
He took her arm. His white hand suddenly clamped down. It hurt.

“Tell me, do you remember me?”
“Yes, of course Mr. Hess. I didn’t recognize you.”
“Do you remember what I did?”
“What? What are you talking about?” His grip was terrible.
“Do you remember what I did to you when you cried?”
“What?” She searched his eyes, which flittered around like a blind man’s.

“Do you remember when you cried in my class?”
“Oh, I cried all the time when I was little. I don’t remember—”
“I shouted at you!” His voice swarmed upward through the streets and telephone lines, and a woman and her son crossing the street glanced back.

“Your grandfather died. Your grandfather died. And I told you in school and you cried so awfully and what do I do? What did they want me to do?” He tried to find her eyes, but they were lost, straining in memory.

“Sir, I’m sorry, I have no idea what you’re talking about. I was so young.”
Pile of broken fingernails
from dirty hands, testimonies
summers spent
inside grooming.

Stained blouse draped over the shower rod.
Sleeves hang low, white cloth
and red wine in the shape of a bird, left breast.
One wing out
other holding it’s head
to ribcage as if sleeping.

Cough drop wrappers
Green in garbage:
   CHIPS
   Eucalyptus
   Menthol
   CHIPS

You okay in there? The Coffee is up.
Attentive host. Coffee maker clicks.

Sounds of pipes shifting loose
Gutter slosh back forth in a spill
rise-fall  rise-fall
Suitors come, she:
   "Just stay one night."
heart, rise-fall
"Wife’s home, work’s over, goodnight.
Lungs, rise
fall.
With the slam of the door,
the radio falls, on:

"Yes you were. You were just a little girl, and I yelled at you, Julie, in my office, remember? You came to me in my office. They made me tell you, because you loved me, remember? You used to call me Monsieur les Mots—Mr. Words. I was Mr. Words, Julie. And your parents...” He shook her arm fiercely. "They couldn't watch you cry."

"Sir,” she whispered firmly. "I can’t help you. My grandfather died twenty years ago. I'm fine, I'm happy. Look, I have a little shop. There are other customers who are expecting me back from lunch” she lied. "I have to leave.” She took the bouquet from his other hand and held it up to him. "Take these to your friend. He needs them.”

"It was not twenty years ago. It was yesterday. It was today. I had to find you.” He would not let go of her. Julia feared him.

"Mr. Hess,” —her arm resisted steadily against his grip—"I'm sorry I can’t remember whatever it is you want me to remember, but I’m sure if you’d done something cruel to me then I would have forgiven you.”
His nails dug into her coat-sleeve. "I don’t want you to forgive me.”
She pulled hard away from him. "I forgive you.”
"I hit you, Julie.”
She dropped the irises. They fled down the street in a stampede of leaves and wind, their purple heads knocking against the asphalt, their bodies twisted and torn by passing cars. One disappeared through a gutter.

The painting of dark flowers was the first thing Julie had seen when she came out of shock. The floor tasted like chalk.
She had tried to hug him, sobbing into his black jacket as he sat behind the oak desk. And then she was on the floor. And then she was looking at the French painting up on the wall. She couldn’t remember why she’d been crying.

Julia’s fleece scarf played against her face. She touched her cheek where he had hit her; it was hot, and stung.
"I didn’t know what to say. In English or French, what could I say? I am so sorry, Julie.”
"Say it now.”
He relaxed his grip on her arm. "What?"
Her face-lines narrowed and closed. She looked right into his blue eyes, speaking low. “I want you to take my hand and say it all now. All of it.” He clumsily traced the edge of her sleeve to her hand, cradling it with both of his. His body shook.
“I don’t know if I can.”
“Say it.”
He breathed. “Julie, sometimes we lose people we love.” He couldn’t continue. He was shaking uncontrollably.
“Go on.”
“Sometimes we lose people we love, and no one knows why. Or where they go. But—” He took her other hand. “But if your grandfather was lucky enough to have a little girl to cry for him when he went away...” Her body shook with his. “...then he must have died a full and rich man.” Julia looked down, closing her eyes, unable to listen. “I want you to cry as much as you can, Julie—because your sadness is his comfort.”
She fell against him. “Stop.”
“The irises flew away,” he said.
“I have more.”
“They were for you.”
She looked up at him, searching.
“Julie, will you cry for me when I am gone?”

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from THE APARTMENTS
By Mike Bushnell

Window three up, two over.
One girl sits
elbows at her waist,
sometimes spinning circles,
leaning on the pane:
hat tops, hair parts, the roads a single mass of asphalt.

Window
slides, spit in a slight wind. Window latched.
The crowd moves in step.
C2
Alone at the kitchen table, stirring in her coffee cup.
A laughs conspires out. Loud coffee maker whir.

Red lipstick layered,
palm stiff, wind dries fingernails.
Full makeup,
all night.
Tapping her foot to the Radio:
Alone again
for the night. Alone again,
once more. She

Wrinkles tablecloth, fills ashtray.

Being a visitor in her bathroom:
the carpet of long grasses
nestling the TV?

Next week, expect the woods—
each strand of pollen
a seduction from me.

MIRACLE HANDS
By Taya Kitaysky

Olive enters the coffeeshop, eyes bright and green, hands swinging and flashing with a few rings as she walks over to him.

"Hi, James."

"Hello, Olive." It seems unlikely that they had been introduced by Olive’s mother in hospital; James, the nurse who had examined her in the ER room the night before; Olive, the patient who’d just had an appendectomy. Then, they had both been shy, but a month later, bumping into each other in the grocery store, only James had been shy, pushing against the weight of the entrance door, groceries in arms, while Olive scribbled down number on a piece of paper against her knee, laughing as she balanced.

"Hold on." She orders a latte. "James, how are you doing? Did you find it all right?"

"Yes — I haven’t been out this early before — in the city, I mean. I walked." After seeing Olive in the store earlier that day, James had walked the eight blocks back to his apartment, barely feeling the heaviness of the two grocery bags in his arms. It was eight AM, and he should have been sleeping before his night shift, but five-thirty, she had said, five-thirty. From his bed, he had stared at the thin lines of light barely escaping from between the blinds of his window, glaring into the darkness of the small room. He thought of Olive, the plan they had made, what he could say to her. The parallel lines of light. Five-thirty.

It had been five twenty-five when James had walked into the coffeeshop, and right away he had felt he wanted to leave. It was full of people; people talking on couches under posters of jazz musicians and rock shows, people leaning towards one another on the small round tables, people tuning their guitars by the stage in the back of the room. From the corner table, James saw that they were mostly young people, college kids, the kind he never was a few years back, the kind of college kids who are sent to his Emergency Room from car crashes or alcohol poisoning turning their skin cold and blue, half-alive from failed suicides.
But the sky from the big windows was a color he couldn't remember seeing, a pure light blue, almost a lavender, and he had sat down, waiting for Olive.

Olive smiles and he follows. Her eyes are like city lights. They shine below her short auburn hair, and match the white teeth of her open smile. He can see her fingers though, drumming on the table. He looks down at his hands, resting in his lap. They are large hands, almost too large for his tall, thin frame, and prone to hanging heavily at his sides, like weights, when he isn't working in the ER room. In the ER they move quickly, expertly, rough hands turned gentle, holding a blood pressure pump, a surgical knife, a heart.

"Are you going to get some coffee, James?"

James searches the black board near the front. Neon Frappachinos and Mochas glare back at him. "I don't... I'm not sure yet."

"I'm sorry for keeping you. You work the night shift, right? So you should probably be sleeping."

"Yes. I work from ten to seven."

"Jesus. Well, like I said I'm sorry, it's just that every Saturday night they have open mic, and last time I was here they had some pretty good stuff."

Her latte comes, and she sets her hands down next to it. "You know," Olive looks at him with her wide green eyes, "I remember you being really gentle."

"Well, I think... what I do is..." He tries to look up at her.

She nods. "Yes?"

Voices rise from around the coffee shop, someone laughs loudly. He darts his eyes from the direction of the noise, back to Olive.

"First... first I look to see what's wrong."

No, that wasn't right either. The sky is blue, almost lavender. He breathes in sharply, begins again. "I guess it's pretty simple." He brings his hands out of his lap, setting his elbows down on the table. Skinny arms and those knobby elbows. They are only a few inches away from her hands.

James looks up at the stage. A pink-faced young man with a guitar climbs up on the stage to begin the open mic. As he waits for the audience to quiet down, he grows a deep shade of red. When he starts to sing his song he can't seem to decide if he wants to look at the audience or not, and sneaks...
Murasaki. She was the only girl that leaves your prince in the end. She walked west across the white water.

My teacher says to paint with my whole body. Calligraphy comes from the core, that’s where you throw a punch from. She pinches my fingers, no! The fingers hold the brush but the movement of the character, inu, feel dog up your arm, feel dog in your shoulder, feel dog here — she pokes my heart. Black is all the colors fighting to be seen, grind your ink darker. In these strokes I search for you- see you swirling over your delicate writing desk like a madman, moving with each word. When Sami became ill, when she lay feverish, blind, passing, the monks drawing demons from her little mouth, incense thick as wintersilk about the neck, what good were words then? The demon flew into a shadow at the corner of the room, the girl lay back and with your brush hand you painted her upwards, animated her towards heaven. My teacher says gray tones are for mourning, the sensitive blade’s edge between love and nothing. She makes me paint mist. She makes me paint window seated cats and men caught in the rain. After Sami you abandoned your platform sandals, the harem, took to walking barefoot, drawing daughter, daughter from your heart like a surgeon sewing, pulling the lips of a wound that won’t heal itself closed.

I have cut my hair short. All that dignity gone like the weight of tradition. I feel the back of my neck, this openness. My arrows catch light like the insides of clam shells, like polished toe nails. I could run until nightfall for the lust of it. My arrows fly truer. I have watched bear cubs play with caribou calves, teaching each other the ancient roles. When the bear’s teeth grow in the calf is sure on her legs.

What do you mean?"  
“I guess...what I do is I see what’s wrong, and I look for what I can do to help them...” James leans in on his elbows in a little, shifting his arm to set a hand down.

Olive nods. “Yes?”
“That way, I fix them for a while...” The boy hits a high note and James turns his head to the stage.
“Yes, James?” Olive reaches her hand over and places it on his. James jerks his hand back, brushing the side of her latte and knocking it over. He tries to catch it in time, but the latte spills all over the table, dripping off the side.
“Oh, sorry, I’m sorry.” His face burns pink as the boy’s, who continues his scratchy song.
“It’s okay, I promise,” says Olive, but James runs over to get some napkins. He comes back with the napkins and covers the spill with them, and the coffee instantly turns them soggy and brown. He wipes down the side of the table and mops the small puddle that has formed on the floor. Then he throws away the mass of wet napkins and the half empty latte. His hands feel sticky.
“I’m sorry,” he says when he comes back. “Oh no, did you want to finish that? Here, I’ll order another.” He rushes over to the cashier.
When he finally comes back, Olive is smiling softly. “Don’t worry about it, James, please.” Her voice is steady and calm as her pulse was a month back, pounding loud in the stethoscope over her heart to his ear.
James tries not to worry. He watches the boy walk down from the stage amidst polite applause. James wishes he could say something to him, but what would he say?
“Anyway, where were we?” says Olive, and James catches a glimpse of her face, still smiling. He tries to put his elbows on the table, but it too is sticky from the spill. He pulls his hands back into his lap.
“Your job?” she offers.
“Yes...I help them, so they can keep on going.” He can still feel his face burning, so he turns it down a little, toward his lap, his sticky hands. They were hands that even the doctors had praised, This one’s got miracle hands, they had said, after the night he continued the surgery and the man had survived. He
had walked quickly out of the room after the congratulations, nodding, embar-
assed, to the family, and down the hall to receive the next waiting patient.
*Miracle hands,* and now they look pale and worn in his lap, like tow heavy
weights.

“So I have a question- why’d you get stuck with the nightshift? Do less
people come in or something?”

“No, people are always hurt.” He can see that the boy is sitting in the
back of the room now, guitar in case, resting on his knees, wearing that
ashamed smile.

“How many, would you say?”

“I don’t know exactly. A lot.” James thinks of the hospital, the flores-
cent light off its white walls and shiny linoleum floors, those heavy swinging
doors labeled EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT, the strangely comforting feeling
of the surgical mask on his face. Watching a patient go home.

James looks at Olive. Her eyes look kind but far away.

“Oh look,” she says, turning around and her chair and pointing behind
her, “some band is setting up.” A group of men about James’ age, late twenties,
begins to tune and set up the drum set and two guitars on the stage. The lead
singer pulls up the microphone to full height. Someone dims the lights.

“Are ya ready?” asks the lead singer. The audience laughs, applauds.

He needs to wash his hands.

“Olive? I’ll be right back.” He finds the bathroom, all the way in the
back of the coffeeshop. At the sink he can hear the music of the band getting
louder. He thinks about Olive’s hand. Even if resting on his for only a second,
it had been cool and soft on his calloused skin. The calluses come from working
in the hospital. He needed to wash his hands after any contact with the pa-
tients, to keep them clean. And though the constant scrubbing turned them
rough and dry, James grew to like it, the familiar smell of soap, the rush of wa-
ter. He lets the hot water run now, scrubbing away at the stickiness. He won-
ders if he could ever really tell Olive about the hospital, the dark walk through
the city every night just to get to those clean white rooms and the people who
need him. In the mirror, he is pale, thin body. He turns the faucet off and
walks out.

Once out of the bathroom, he looks at the darkening sky through the

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**NOTES TO LADY MURASAKI**

By Meaghan Baxter

I wake early and something in the pale shadows of the trees,
how I know they say something I can not read makes me think
of you- how you would wear this dawn on your sleeves, seven
layered in the tradition of spring gowns. Naked, you would
step into that first silk kimono, thin, as pale as the western sky,
then a blue that blushes like cheeks through thick powder. The
garden has gone wild. This is perhaps where we differ. But I’ll
always wonder if the emperor loved your body, fragile legs,
nothing to praise except a mind and dark hair, how it fell in
Chinese characters on the pillow. And when Genji
whispered *aye ishitay ru* if his mouth would taste like your ink.
When you copied mantras, the length of you hair shorn,
sexless, if the words of gods burned like rushes up your arms,
into the sinew at the shoulder. Tattooed themselves over the
lust in your core. Red dragons, yellow death, the silver from
inside a cloud.

The mist rose from the fields and the view to the river cleared.
Above, the clouds thinned and the sky showed through, blue
and weak. Birds stopped singing their morning songs. Cicada’s
hummed the sun higher and the grasses began to waver in the
heat far off by the bank of trees. I have fenced since dawn.
Something about the hiss of the *shinai* through the air like
tearing stockings helps me think. My forearms ache. The light
is white now, sweat hangs from the tip of my nose. I find a
cucumber in the garden beneath thistles and witch grass. I wish
I could speak like the sword, like you and your Chinese, so
foreign, how primitive. Your father, the court poet, said you
should have been a son but you took the name of the girl that
Genji makes love to on fallen leaves. The Lady of Autumn,
Edited By Cynthia Drake and Amelia Klock

Thank you so much to Therese, Mr. Delp and everyone who helped us with this issue.

windows. He sees Olive, facing the band, tapping her foot to the rhythm and sipping her new latte. A few people have gotten up to dance. He can’t make out the lyrics, the music pounds in his ears. He walks over to their small table.

“Olive.”

“Yes?”

“I’m sorry, Olive, I should go.”

“No coffee?”

“No. I should sleep before my shift.”

“Oh God, of course, James. I’m sorry for keeping you.” She gets up to hug him. As she puts her arms around him, he holds his breath, staring straight ahead, but wanting to close his eyes. The music pounds in his ears.

The words came out in one breath: “I’m sorry about the latte.”

“Oh, please don’t worry about that. Do you still have my number?”

“Yes.”

“Call me whenever. And thanks so much, James.” She looks at him with those wild green eyes and smiles.

“Thank you, Olive.”

Walking out into the street, he can still hear the music faintly. He has to concentrate to figure out the way back. The city looks different this time of day, the light faded but not quite night yet. The scrap of paper with Olive’s phone number is still in his pocket, the paper soft from creasing and unfolding. He stops at the trashcan, thinking about how the flash of white would extinguish inside its dark mouth, then throws it in. He walks past the streams of people, the music of their laughter and talk carrying into restaurants and shops, glowing brightly below the darkening sky. He walks north, where the sky is fading blue, a lavender deepening into dark purple, where he knows the hospital waits for him, white and clean, somewhere up ahead in the silent horizon of the city.
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- Cover
The Red Wheelbarrow

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

William Carlos Williams