So much depends upon

a red wheel barrow

glazed with rain water

beside the white chickens
the red wheelbarrow
1983-84
THE RED WHEEL-BARROW
EARLY WINTER '04
JULIE BUNTIN
TAYA KITAYSKY
Thanks to Delp, Therese, and everyone who submitted.

Love,
Julie Buntin & Taya Kitaysky.
The cycle of life is sped up in show business, and tension runs high through it all. There are few plays more timeless than A Midsummer Night's Dream, but its execution was all about the timing. Calendars were posted all over the place marking how many weeks until opening or closing night. Lights were set to the exact second. In the wings, we were aware not of what was happening on stage but of how many minutes until our next entrance. Nothing waits, and when it all finally does come to a grinding halt it doesn't matter if you're ten and you need more time to sort out the finality of an empty theatre—you pack up your dressing room, you go home, and you either move on, or you don't.

I checked the audition sections in the paper every week for years after A Midsummer Night's Dream ended. They'd always be looking for people younger than me, or the theatre would be out in the suburbs somewhere, or the dates didn't work, but still every Friday morning I flipped to the Weekend section and hoped. I was under no delusions that I was an actress, and didn't particularly enjoy memorizing lines or following blocking, but I craved the nonstop exhilaration, was looking to recreate the experience. Since then, I've built sets, played in orchestra pits, written plays, sewed costumes, pulled curtains, and had small parts in one-acts at my high school, but it is never the same as being a part of a big cast in a big theatre, with an ever-present band of cohort fairies.

Two weeks after the end of the show, we all met at one of the girl's houses for a fairy sleepover. The bags under our eyes had faded because we were finally getting enough sleep, and we were back to our mortal attire. The mother served us pizza. Her house was warm and carpeted and, unlike the theatre, we were allowed to go barefoot. Later in the evening, we locked ourselves in the girl's bedroom and made long-distance telephone calls to New York City. We left messages for Hermia and Demetrius, Lysander, Flute. Helena picked up the phone and seemed surprised to hear from all of us, together. She told us about the auditions she'd been going to all week. "It's so stressful trying to get jobs, four auditions in one day, directors that only want to look at résumés and headshots." There was an awkward moment on the line, all five of us listening in on speaker phone from Pittsburgh. "How's school?" she asked. We mumbled a collective "fine," ground our toes into the carpet. "Well, have a good night, say hi to Pittsburgh," she said after another silence.

Later, after we stashed away our list of phone numbers, we flipped through magazines and painted each other's fingernails like it was a normal sleepover, let warm comforters drown the knots in our throats. I knew then that despite our pretending we would not all stay friends. The end of something is not as beautiful as its beginning no matter what Shakespeare writes, and once I was sure of this it would
Trying to find my way out of the woods, instead I have a constant wind, and water at my feet.

Forgive him. His shadow is pushed by something other than the sun.

Half in the manner of Charles Wright, I write a poem about Li Ho.

I am too young for things to be weightless.

It’s winter north of here. Temperature below zero for the tenth day. Rolling tires over glass asphalt.

City lights—metal strength stronger than bones.

Return to form I tell myself, or start walking.

A show, no matter how big or small, starts slowly and ends abruptly. This has a profound affect on the kids and teenagers I know who act regularly—Kate most of all—but I have watched people who aren’t in shows often, 18-year-old boys who wear baggy shorts and talk in Ebonics, cry at the close of high school musicals. First there are auditions, months later a read-through, afternoons of costume fittings, short rehearsals that grow into longer ones. Then there is tech week with twelve-hour run-throughs that are both exciting and excruciatingly tedious. Opening night is a whirlwind of tension and parties, and then there are performances, the same thing with the same people in what seems to stretch on as a forever of nights. And then one day you say your lines for the last time and have a quick goodbye with cheese and crackers and before you’re barely out of the theatre you see the workmen in there, tearing the set down, dismantling the moon.

For the whole last week of the show, Kate and her mother advised us that we would all be going into deep depression when it ended. It was true that the Public Theatre, with its cinnamon air-fresher bathrooms and its skinny basement hallways perfect for both hide-and-seek tag and intense sessions of Truth or Dare, had become so much a part of my life that I could barely remember how I used to fill my evenings. I sported my black, Public Theatre sweatshirt exactly every other day, and washed it so often it wore out almost as thin as a T-shirt.

The stage manager put us fairies in charge of the mood music for the goodbye party. We played Sarah McLachlan’s I Will Remember You on repeat through the whole thing and sat in the stairwell above the lounge. The New York actors said quick goodbyes and rushed out to pack up their places and get on planes. A knot of spit and fear stuck in my throat all afternoon but I didn’t cry. I remember being terrified of everything—crying, leaving—when Kate, the most experienced of us all, hugged Adam and broke down sobbing.

I was used to days and weeks and months blending together as more and more of the same. Before the show, I spent every morning practicing clarinet and piano, and then I went to school, and afterwards to the Jewish Community Center. Every night, my mother and I listened to NPR in the car as we drove home, and then she cooked us pasta or rice for dinner. No one close to me had died. My one experience with summer camp made me homesick, not sad to leave. I wasn’t afraid of anything ending.
glitter for my eyes and shoulders, and fat, yellow glasses. On stage, it never crossed my mind to pretend to be a fairy; I was myself in uncomfortable clothing, going through the motions, backstage life blending with whatever happened in front of the audience.

Most of the kids and teenagers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had been brought up to be in shows, and have continued since. Titania went on to study acting at Julliard. Oberon was one of the three hockey demons in *Dogma*. Two of the fairies had been part of CLO Mini-Stars, a troupe for little kids in Pittsburgh who's mothers have put them on the path to be actors since they fit into the first size of tap shoes. The girl who played the fairy Mote—call her Kate—had, among other roles, played Annie in *Annie* fourteen times.

Kate was twelve years old and sophisticated and she swore just as well as the actors she grew up around. She already had to shave her armpits, she'd made out with boys, and during carpool rides home she would explain to us in the vicinity of shocked mothers that the man who played Snug was gay and what that meant. She wore short skirts with knee high black boots, and she was obsessed with the adult actor who played Francis Flute.

Flute was tall and he had dark hair and he brought the house down every night with his renditions of Thisbe. On Sundays, between our matinee and evening performances, we'd have a few rowdy rounds of Capture the Flag in the basement of the theatre, and sometimes he would sneak into our games and lift one of us yelping onto his shoulders. We used a raggedy teddy bear as a prop in the first act of the show, and every night Flute dressed up the teddy bear with scraps he found in the costume shop—as a wizard, as Puck, as one of the Spice Girls—and set him out for us to see just before we came on for our bows.

Call it a crush if you want, but most twelve-year-old girls that become infatuated with older men are dreaming about whispered conversations, holding hands—not about sex. "If I were 21, I'd be fucking him right now, in that dressing room," Kate would tell us, and then she'd go into elaborate detail. Because Kate ruled our clan of fairies, we'd nod and pretend this is what we were used to talking about and eventually she had us all obsessed. One of the fairies named her parakeet after him.

Three years later, Kate and I both ended up at Schenley High School. I recognized her right away but kept quiet, and it wasn't until a week into Geometry that she turned to me and said, "You were a fairy." She updated me on *Midsummer Night's* gossip—Flute had apparently married the assistant stage manager—but it became clear in our glances across the classroom that some things would be left unsaid, and we never, by any means, became friends. Kate had straight, bleached-blond hair by then, and she was still the sleek and sophisticated girl that wanted to be too mature for her age,
tears of laughter and arcing our heaving backs. After the show, the stage manager Fred gave us the “professionalism” lecture while we peeled off our wigs and unpinned our bobby curls, but the guilt we felt only lasted for about a night.

Another time, for carrying some petty drama or another into the wings before one of our entrances, the big shot Shakespearean actor that played Bottom told us in no uncertain terms that we were in this theatre to be actresses, not to ruin everyone else’s concentration and have a good time.

An actor is supposed to easily slip between two worlds, and the distinction in their lives between the stage and reality is supposed to be obvious. We were kids and we were flipping between about four different worlds—from home life to school life to theatre life to magical-Shakespeare life. It’s no surprise that most of us, running on little sleep and barely used to middle school, didn’t know exactly what to make of the process.

Don’t get me wrong: there weren’t five little girls running around Pittsburgh squeezing love potion out of the dandelions in their back yards, or expecting their math teachers to deliver monologues in iambic pentameter. But when the show got less-than-glowing reviews from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, we took it personally. Being around adults all night every night, beautiful New York actresses with fiancés back home and three-month leases for funky apartments on the South Side, made us crave their sophistication. On the road at midnight together every night after shows, we convinced ourselves we were just as grown up, never mind the fact that we were in the back of a minivan and being driven by one of our mothers. Then in the morning we were thrown back into the world of cliques around lunch tables and isosceles triangles, our skin still faintly ghost-white from all the fairy makeup, and it was hard to tell exactly where we were supposed to belong.

We were living the exact, concrete realities of creating a magical world. For weeks, the designers argued about the placement of the rising moon, painstakingly spatter-painted the wood boards on the floor of the theatre. We wore crazy white wigs that were supposed to light up and blink like candles for the last scene, but the drama surrounding burnt-out bulbs and overeager fairies who clicked the switch too soon never ceased. We sang our whimsical fairy song at a professional recording studio, and mouthed along to the mixed version that piped out through surround-sound speakers every night. Backstage, the concrete basement floors were cold. The white powder makeup that we covered our bodies in every night gave us rashes.

None of us, of course, really knew what it meant to be an actress, and it didn’t matter. We were there for what we looked like, fairy world atmosphere. I wore a skirt with yellow trim, an itchy white vest with a big yellow bow at the collar, yellow
tarded—and we did everything together. Most rehearsal evenings, our mothers met us for alternating dinners at the German or Chinese restaurants by the theatre, and they had a carpool schedule worked out, on paper, for our entire run—being in a show is supposed to take over your life, but when you’re a kid it takes overyour mother’s life as well. We had fairy sleepovers some weekends, and all went out in our fairy makeup Trick-Or-Treating together in between a matinee and evening production on Halloween, passing out leaflets for our show at every house. That night, with old women fawning over all five of us at every house, who’d either seen our show or promised to come, I remember being absolutely positive that I’d made it, that this was what it felt like to be on top of the world, and that nothing unpleasant could possibly happen to me now.

We shared one dressing room in the basement of the theatre, and the table under our bright lights and mirrors was piled high with powdery makeup, homework we rarely got around to doing, fingernail polish to match our fairy color—yellow for Mustardseed, green for Peasblossom—and Seventeen magazines swiped from the girl that played Titania. During the lull in Act Three and Four when we had an hour between appearances, we holed up in the back closet of our dressing room and played Truth or Dare, lilting tones of Shakespeare wafting around us through the PA system. One evening performance, for no reason that was important enough to remember, we had fairy sleepovers some weekends, and all went out in our fairy makeup Trick-Or-Treating together in between a matinee and evening production on Halloween, passing out leaflets for our show at every house. That night, with old women fawning over all five of us at every house, who’d either seen our show or promised to come, I remember being absolutely positive that I’d made it, that this was what it felt like to be on top of the world, and that nothing unpleasant could possibly happen to me now.

We understood in our heads that this show was important and adult and not the child of me. We planted forged love letters in their dressing rooms from Oberon to Titania to get them back. One evening performance, for no reason that was important enough to remember, we broke into uncontrollable giggling, right there on stage, aching to hold back silent laughter. And we were nine and ten and eleven and twelve years old. All of us were supposed to lie still across the stage and listen to Titania’s fervent monologue admonishing Oberon—These are the forgeries of jealousy...the fairy-land buys not the child of me.

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Dig was only a freshman but he built up a following pretty quickly and was proud of it. He knew he was Dig the Car-razy Modern-Day Philosopher with piles upon piles of beatnik yesmen at his disposal. I tried not to get too enticed by these antics.

Chael was his right hand man. That was his name: Chael—pronounced KULL. He was really named Michael but didn’t want to be just another Mike. There was also Motly, who didn’t want to be a Tim. And Dith who didn’t want to be a Judy. And so on and so on. It was probably good for these folks when Dig finally exploded that night. He was as false as false prophets go.

I remember sometime in early October of that year, Dig was sitting on his bed pinch- ing his fingers and shaking the images of Harry Chapin song “Cat’s in the Cra-
dle.” He was bony, lanky and acned, blonde-haired and blue-eyed. “I’m the kinda peo-
ple Hitler liked,” he’d told me on the first day, shooting a thumbs-up, forgetting my
last name was Schwartzman.

In an instuck of doobie, Dig said, “You know...this is a really sad song.” Hewaited for
a few seconds for the smoke to rise into his sinuses and then blew it out of his nostrils
like a mustache. “He didn’t have time for his kid, now his kid doesn’t have time for
him.”

I had my face buried in the spine of my Physics book, unable to make thermodynam-
ics interesting enough to bother reading about any further. I muttered, “You didn’t
know that?”

“Well I haven’t really listened to the lyrics much. But it’s such a happy song, y’know. I
mean this guy’s a genius. He can, like, wrap sadness in happy music and no one’s the
wiser.”

I nodded slightly, staring intently at the page number of the book so I could still see
the 246 on the back of my eyelids when I felt like blinking.

“l mean, there’s all this shit in the news today. If they just had...like, the anchorman
dressed like a clown or something, then it wouldn’t be so bad. That’d be kinda cool,
actually.”

Another night we found ourselves in similar positions—Physics, reefer, sixties music,
(Rolling Stones this time)—and he said, out of the blue, “Y’know, what if...there was a
guy...” he seemed to stay on that thought for an eternity, finally adding, “who, like, went
to every country in the world! And he just whacked off in every country, right!
And he placed his sperm on the--I dunno—sidewalk...of every country.” At a teetering
steet-foot-five, he spilled out of the bed onto his feet, needing pacing room for this the-
And Chael simply replied, as he usually did, "Totally." He turned, studied my face for out of your ass. It's only Friday night—loosen up."

"So! That's, like...so profound. I mean...the guy's named John Smith, okay? John Smith may live in America, but there's a little of John Smith in...like, Madagascar." He paused for a second and nodded, grinning, liking the sound of that word. "There's a little of John Smith in France. There's a little John Smith in Egypt. England. Cyprus."

He brought his square-jawed face inches from mine. "Luxembourg."

"But...his sperm is dead. It's dead by the time it hits the sidewalk, right?"

"Right, but," wheezing for dramatic effect, "they're a part of him."

He was worse when he was with one of his minions. I hated Chael! He was this portly guy with a head like a glob of Dak ham and big Buddy Holly glasses, always drinking coffee, always wearing all black, and always speaking with the same fake, alienated, angst-ridden, Goth-kid voice. "The world," he would recite one of his poems, sounding like a creaking door, "is a desolate place." He never liked me. Aside from me not thinking Pink Floyd's The Wall was the best film ever made, I was never sure why. He'd later accuse me of causing Dig's explosion—but that's later.

Chael would constantly be hanging around the room, his head always on my pillow, skunking it with his corn-and-pork stench that kept me awake at night. They'd usually be in the middle of a conversation in which Dig would try to flush out a Mary Jane-induced theory and Chael would try to drop the word "existentialism" into everything he said. Either that or complete stoned-out gibberish.

"Dude, it must, like, suck to be a bee," Dig said to Chael while I was trying to finish an essay for Poli-Sci on my laptop. "Cause, like, if a guy pissed you off and you sting him, you just die. That's it. Your lot in life is just to sting people when you get pissed off, but you can only do it once and you die. And then the guy that was pissin' you off just has, like, a little bee sting, a little prick.... Like your lot in life is that little, like, prick." After a few long seconds, he realized the double meaning of the word "prick" and chuckled to himself.

And Chael simply replied, as he usually did, "Totally." He turned, studied my face for a few seconds and noted, "You look like a squirrel."

"Shut up, all right?" I'd been fumbling with the same sentence for an hour, trying to focus on foreign policy during the Reagan era but continually having my concentration ruined by thoughts of, well, bees.

Dig stood up, as if he were outraged. "Hey man. You need to, like, pull the anaconda out of your ass. It's only Friday night—loosen up."
He always thought of me as this tangled mass of nerves; this guy who pulled his pants above his waist so he wouldn’t have to reach as far to get to his pockets. But I was just a normal, lazy kid. The only reason I was doing my essay on Friday night was because of the date I was having on Sunday and wanted to get enough sleep on Saturday.

I couldn’t believe my luck anyway in getting a date this early in the year—mid-October, in a new school no less. I mean I was no tall-dark-and-handsome, more of a tall-nerdy-and-paunchy. Not that tall, really—five-eleven—but the paunchy part was accurate, and then some. And Lori, the girl, was hot—coke-bottle figure, nice legs, glasses. Girls with glasses drive me wild—which reinstates my inherent geekdom, yes. But I’d never had a hot girl before. Actually I’d never had a girl, period. But it was a damn fine way to start off the list.

As I said though, girls dug Dig. It seemed every Saturday night I’d approach the door to the dorm and find it locked, which had an unspoken meaning that he was inside fucking Dith—another member of his entourage who I had the tiniest bit of a crush on—with one of my Trojans. Twenty minutes later I’d try the door again and they would still be going at it. I remember one night this kept me wandering the hallways till two in the morning. I couldn’t understand it. Here was Dith, tall, blonde, leggy—to say she was attractive was to say the Kennedy assassination was a bit of a bummer. But then there was Dig, tall, pockmarked, irritatingly skinny, eyes permanently bloodshot. Their relationship must have been based solely on his ability to turn sex into an epic saga.

When I finally got in after Dith left, I found the top half of Dig’s lanky body out of the covers. As soon as he saw me, he told me in a burst of inspiration, “Dude...the female vagina...is a lot like an apple!” And he left it at that—waiting for me to surrender to his coolness and ask him to continue. I didn’t give him the satisfaction.

But I digress. My date with Lori that Sunday was going pretty well. She was a film major so I had to sit through this long independent film about Irish nuns or something. Then we went to eat at this Italian place next to the theater and I succeeded in not spilling tomato sauce anywhere on my body. Then on the ride back—she was driving, I didn’t have a car—she said she wanted to take a look at my dorm. My, oh my. I was going to be the one locking Dig out of the room that night.

But of course, that didn’t happen. Dig was already in the room plowing through his third reading of A Clockwork Orange. I regrettablly introduced them both. A half hour later, she was lying on my bed engrossed in a fatalistic conversation about John Belushi—I’m not joking—while I sat at my desk without any intelligent input whatsoever. Dig blabbed, “...so then they, like, got to the part about his final film Neighbors with Dan Aykroyd, right? And he was so frustrated with the filming of that just...piece-of-
shit movie that he did more and more cocaine. Had he not agreed to do the movie—or if the movie was better—he woulda still been alive."

"Probably would have been in Ghosbusters," she added.

"Probably. So the screenwriter of Neighbors is partly—if not all—responsible for the death of John Belushi. And Chris Farley if you wanna believe in the whole domino effect. That he was, like, 'following in the footsteps' of Belushi!"

They both exchanged smirks. I squeezed an imaginary stress reliever in my fist. She went on to explain the film The Conqueror with John Wayne as Genghis Khan and the fact that it was filmed at a former A-Bombing site that led to Wayne dying of cancer years later. Dig then broke out the weed and I escaped to the bathroom to read a Mad Magazine in choked-back fury.

Lori and I never went out again. The next time I saw her she immediately asked, "How's Dig doing! Did he finish that book for Barnard's class!" I didn't even know he had Barnard's class. The only other time we actually exchanged words was when she offered up condolences the day after Dig spontaneously combusted.
The photographer has entered the portrait, it makes no difference now, who holds the camera, only that the book stays open to that single page, where Gene, just months before his death, wraps his hand around her shoulder, where they are photographed together- the two of them standing side by side in the grape arbor.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF ROGUES

(NICK SIMMONS)

It's not there anymore
All the times we sat
in city parks, golf courses after dusk,
with a bottle of whiskey and the Tao Te Ching,
the easily ridiculed ropes of camaraderie.

My friends and I fought no war,
no machine guns or tanks,
just the war inside ourselves,
trying to stay sane,
to keep the abyss from seeing too much of us.
The demented choirs sang
the soundtrack to our lives,
while we behaved in a way
that tested our fragile faith
in something we couldn't explain.

I think we knew, even then
that we were expendable.
We hadn't put in the work,
the keeping quiet, the things you need
to do, to be smiled upon by the world.

On the day before our brother's funeral,
when they played Amazing Grace and sent him
to Minnesota to be burned,
Sam and Jacob and I watched a man we didn't know
slowly leave this life,
a chance encounter on concrete. We walked away in silence,
after the paramedics came, and then each broke.
Sitting in the greasy pizza parlor staffed
by surly Albanians,
I grabbed the wall, the chair,
the back of my own wrist.

Sam was the worst. He couldn't
stop shaking, and my guilty hands
didn't need to fidget, I'd blocked it from my mind.
I think he knew, too,
but I threw my arm around him,
and on the sidewalk outside, me in my leather jacket,
a bottle of beer in my hand, he told us
that he loved us. He started to explain,
but we made him shut up, because he didn't need to.

We sat in a tiny apartment,
where our friends had struck out for themselves.
We sat on a tobacco-stained rug and listened to the turkey baking.

Every step we took those weeks
had some kind of meaning, screaming to the world
that we might be useless, forgotten, that the world might
not care. But that we had each other, and if that sounds
antiquated, or syrupy, or romantic, try to imagine what
it means, in a one-room apartment, littered with candy
wrappers and soda cans, next to a freeway.

Trying to be wherever I left to,
I write myself a smaller hole through which to watch the poem,
but accomplish nothing. I am still only typing at a desk.

I pull the window open.
Somewhere else, the blackbirds left without my noticing,
leaving power lines strung bare across the sky.

The bedroom is empty. A cool breeze enters
through the window.
The book of photographs
is left opened to the last page,
where the photographer himself
is in the portrait, standing with his wife.

The two of them have traded masks
and wear each other's clothes-
Madelyn sadly gazing forward
through an old man's plastic eye slits.
She is larger than him, now
in the last months of his life
his legs and forearms, thinned
by cancer.

He wears the hag mask
and stands turned,
leaning into her with both hands
resting on her shoulders.

The fence she leans against is wrapped in grapevines.

His face is turned to her, the hooked nose of his mask
almost touching the plastic cheek of hers,
as if to say some quiet thing.
shaking loose black feathers
from their folded wings
they shift from foot to foot.

I write, impatient and with patience, both at once.
A half eaten cake sits on the shelf,
where it's been left for days.
Night fills the air outside my bedroom window.
I am sitting at my desk, remembering
only small parts of day,
a far off lake shore strewn with broken branches,
its waters grey and weathered glass below a single
swooping dragonfly.

6.
In a book laid open on my desk,
I see the outdoor shadows settle
in the plastic folds of a mask,
The photographer, rewinding the spool
of family and friends one last time-
maybe just to say goodbye.
each one of them takes turns
putting on the mask
and stepping into a new photograph.

'If to know is noble/
it is ennobling'

Restless, unashamed
I write myself an exit through which to leave the poem.
and staring at the empty page, pass through it.
In poem close to where I sat remains a single shrinking hole
as if burned open on the air itself.
The room is empty, its florescent light
spills out the window.
The cake is as it was
without description.
A book of photographs lies open on the desk.
I want to write down every word of it.

5.
Seven Catholic siblings
each take turns putting on the old man's face,
and Madelyn, patient in her hag's mask
sits or stands with each and every one,
the dark contour of the youngest one's head
visible through the plastic where the mask sticks out too far,
the evening sun shining on the wrinkled nose
and brow as they hang crooked from the child's shoulders.

But his hands-
leaning his back against the ivy covered terrace wall,
the way his hands half grip the air,
casts shadow of a hand across his belly,
a long dark fingreded claw held up by his entire body,
the crooked mask gazing from his face in wonder
at his own hand's hanging shadow.

"One witnesses it is ennobling/
if one thinks so"

-a poet is a man who feels both ashamed
and unashamed at once, living both in his life,
and the poem of his life he is writing.
In the poem he is a villain obsessed with redeeming himself.
In life he is thinking up lines for a poem,
tapping his desk with a pen.

A swarm of starlings
settles in the treetops.
They cover every branch
and arrange in rows that span the power lines,
watching the city empty and refill
its streets with cars,
A table made from an old screen door
and two workbenches covered with peanuts in front of him,
with a wooden bushel basket at each corner,
implying the shape of a wagon.

He leans almost laughing, his elbow bent at his side
as the outdoor shadows fill the slits between his plastic eyelids
Madelyn as always, sits beside him on the bench, her head tilted slightly
towards the sky.

4.
The park too, has its captions:

“I wake to find the park has changed while I was gone.
The lake is like a sheet of glass with several yellow leaves
floating near the shore.
The wind seems calm and comes from far away.

Strung across the ground are fallen branches and uprooted trees,
torn open by a storm the night before,
their bark hangs gray in shreds,”

A man speaks while looking at the world and wants to write it all down,
death leaves shifting in his footsteps...

I remember reading Purgatorio on the couch of my mother’s apartment in the summer
while listening to the electric tone of an ice cream truck grow louder as it drives
in circles around our block, and laughing at the two things happening
to me simultaneously.

Each exact electric note falling into the pattern
of an old folk tune my uncle used to sing whenever the ice cream
track drove by.

I laughed until I heard my neighbor yelling at his daughter
and the world appeared to me less funny.

A flock of starlings flies in rapid circles like a swarm of dark wasps
above the tree line. There are thousands of them,
and I want to write it all down.

The ice cream truck’s tune starts over as it fades off down the road.

Maybe it is just because she looks like my mother,
but don’t they seem in love?
We picnic behind them, I patiently sip my tea,
waiting for her to look into strong eyes.

He holds her very close. They dance.

That red waistband and his thick arm restrain her.
His straw jaw is nearly covered by a straw hat.
I know he is looking at her. For now.

Her light and his dark contrast
the fall leaves that drop leaves on my table.
Is she about to feel his beard’s roughness
on her fair cheek? They dance.

I realize her eyes—
looking at the pristine leaves—
have already fallen.

He’s leaning closer. This time.

By the next twirling wind,
with a rough beard and strong hands,
we will look up—I hope she will look up—
because he will soon notice
the pale leaves too, having fallen so closely
to where they dance.
and crumble in my closing fist,

a poem

in which my friend and I still sit
together, waiting in the parking lot

3.
The photographer Ralph Eugene Meatyard,
after finding out the number of his few remaining years
decided on his final pictures.
He would make this time,
the family album
he would call his 'photographic poem'
a long series published in a single book
to be read in order:

He placed a hag's mask on his wife,
its hooked nose, its mouth and missing teeth
all exaggerated on its bloated face of latex skin.
The eyes childish and gaping, a sad and hopeful gaze
that brings each time the scene to someplace calmer,
what one would call
"that far off look..."

she trusted him, his fictitious world in photographs
and posed for every picture in the album-
each page, a casual double portrait
of her and an old man's mask
of transparent plastic-
worn by a different friend or relative
in every picture.

I thumb through the book of photographs
sitting at my desk:
The old farmer-poet fits the mask comfortably,
sitting cross legged with a hand on his thigh,
wearing a plastic face in the shade of a building
on his farm in Kentucky.
An enormous ape’s hand also leans at rest against the wall, balanced carefully at the end of the child’s wrist. He keeps himself completely still. Gazing out—his interest captured somewhere in the distance. His head in fear tilts slightly upward, the hood stretched tight across his cheek.

but sometimes there’s a little girl who looks straight through the camera, standing with her siblings in the alley.

('Because the known and the unknown 
Touch...')

I recall the cake we ate was fresh, though in the writing of a poem I was entering a dream in which the tan interior and dashboard panel of a car appeared from nothing and astounded by my recognition woke immediately, the scene intact.

It was the car where I remember sitting with my friend and eating a stale cake with white frosting in the parking lot, listening to the radio, smoking cigarettes and waiting for something that we know will take an hour or more.

I recall the cake we ate was fresh and moist, the writing of poem was there as well, in which, for one reason or another, I watched the cake grow stale.

Daddy bought a station wagon when I was born. A Cavalier with racing suspension; he bragged about the V6 incessantly, said it was a Z24 in disguise.

A year before the divorce, Mom’s Chevette broke down. She wanted a Honda but you bought her a Dodge—said it was a good American car, not made for some five foot Jap.

Years later (I was almost eight) we sold your last contribution and Mom got that Honda—only three years old. It’s not union built, Daddy, so I understand if you were hurt when I kept it over an Escort.

But you weren’t there when I shot the chase scene at 120 on country roads and I bet you never thought that car would make it more than twice as many thousand miles—you said it would do that car good to go off a cliff.

Daddy, why does my photo album stop when I’m three? We rode bikes to Hartford City and had a picnic the day you told Mom about Cheryl. I was smiling in all the pictures, I had no idea.

Later you took me in another station wagon to your new apartment in the city. I remember watching the odometer flip from nines to zeros; I was with you maybe half the way.

Now we’re all suburban and well off. Mom still has the house in the country and we fight every chance we can get. Every couple weeks I call you from your home state.

I’ve been a teenager and done all the things you did and told me not to.
You’re a yuppie drunk and drink wines with French names,
I’m a faux college kid and drink whatever’s at the party.

Every two weeks that goes by is just another
hundred-some hours and another hefty paycheck
going into your bikes and your house
and your SUV’s gas tank.

You told me I needed school to make it in life.
Tell me Daddy, whose loan is it anyway?
You’re the one making six figures off a GED
and I’ll enter college fifteen grand in the hole.

I decided I’d never miss home but oh how wrong I was.
Two packs, an eighth, and a nine-hour shift every day at the salvage yard,
a public-school education and a C+ average,
a single mattress in the corner of a huge room with a six foot ceiling.

I think I would’ve done alright
70% off any school in the state would’ve been enough,
cause that Honda’s gonna run forever
and I could always stay with friends when times got tough.

Daddy let me be four again and sit on your knee
and you can tell me stories of the car that my mom hated.
That ’85 Monte Carlo with a sleek black paint job.
What did she say when you brought it home?

You’ll tell me how fast that big 350 was,
and about that damn throttle cable
that snapped on the interstate;
tell me about the rubber you left on the onramp.

I want the car to be orange,
and I want to see you, bearded and younger,
wearing reflective sunglasses
as you drive away from home.

The son and mother in plain clothes
looking out from a crypt
in Lexington cemetery
sharing an untrusting glance-

The beginning of the book is filled
with photographs of children
and sometimes whole families.
None of them look at each other,
though as if at home they stand together
in a single setting-
holding both curiosity and fear
the way a grown man
holds his hunger,
or the way a dream is held
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children hiding in the foliage
or crouching in abandoned houses.
One beside three half opened doors,
another with a faded map of Kentucky
nail the wall above his head-
but usually the rooms are empty,
empty cabinets and peeling wallpaper-
some of them wear masks, misshapen
and too large for their bodies,
- standing as if waiting to be left alone
to move.

often there are cracks in brick or drywall
and sunlight on the forest floor,

There’s a portrait of hooded boy
who holds himself to the wall,
as if wishing he would pass straight through
by chance at any moment.
or perhaps
sends some nervous sign of warning.

I step back from it all
and the scene appears to me neither safe nor hostile
but moving through some cautious place between the two.

I find it easier to choose whether or not
to believe a story than to ask yourself
how someone like you became so untrustworthy.
A set of wings is carved in the stone above the door,
but I am somewhere else completely, sitting by the shore-
trying to remember an entire picture
from a book I once saw, but can only remember
parts of it at once-
or the arrangement of shapes on the page.

The rain has ceased for now but the ground is still wet.
A strong wind blows across the lake,
dragging the lake bottom debris to shore on swollen waves
I sit cross legged in the sand. It's October here,
the wild grapes hang shriveled on the vine.
I feel already I have stayed too long.

In a poem I write down what I remember doing
while trying to imagine parts I would write in a poem,
arranging their shapes to the page-
The textures of the sky are gray,
as rainwater rests in pools on yellow leaves.

By this time I am sitting at my desk to write it down.
It is not dawn yet, the days are getting shorter.

While I type I see it there, the open book of photographs
on my desk, the shape luring my eye to its center-
the dark vault.

---

(Christie Maurer)

I saw my grandfather undress
through the window and the space
where the silt-blue curtains
of the lake cabin didn't meet.
He seemed so unprotected
not knowing the eyes that watched
his arthritic hands gently pull
an over shirt over the body of a lamb,
his slow, careful motions.
He was so unaware, in that wooden room
that held all of him. I left
as to not cut some ribbon of trust,
gave those moments of wonder to morality
then curled up by the lake's edge,
not knowing what a person was.
I had not ever touched anyone.
"...that words are pictures."

-Meatyard alludes here to a preoccupation that runs throughout his notes. Repeatedly he writes that Ezra Pound's favorite Chinese ideogram was 'truth,' composed of character for 'man' and one for 'word,' i.e., a man standing by his word.

-James Rheum, "The Structure and Poetics of Lucylle"

1.

"Because the known and the unknown/ Touch,/
One witnesses / Its ennobling/ If one thinks so,/
If to know is noble / It is ennobling."

-George Oppen, "Of Being Numerous"

A mother stands still in the doorway of an open crypt, looking out, on her face concern but not surprise, body turned as if to touch the stone carved doorway's side, or lean against it without leaning in or out. The hollow space inside the room behind her seems dark a pitch black kept in walls of weathered stone. Her son stands in the foreground beside the iron gate, a small child, one hand on the fence spike the other on his hip. His stare is focused, unwelcoming his chin turned toward his neck. Scowling, pigeon toed in child-size cowboy boots his feet on ground that's overgrown with ivy, while leafless brittle vines behind him hang from the cracked walls of the crypt. The mother fidgets with her fingers.
ARS POETICA WITH THE PHOTOGRAPHER RALPH EUGENE MEATYARD AND HIS WIFE MADELYN
(CORY FERRER)

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**ONCE**

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and crumble in my closing fist,
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together, sitting in the parking lot

3. The photographer Ralph Eugene Meatyard, after finding out the number of his few remaining years decided on his final pictures. He would make this time, the family album he would call his 'photographic poem' a long series published in a single book to be read in order:

He placed a hag’s mask on his wife, its hooked nose, its mouth and missing teeth all exaggerated on its bloated face of latex skin. The eyes childish and gaping, a sad and hopeful gaze that brings each time the scene to someplace calmer, what one would call “that far off look...”

she trusted him, his fictitious world in photographs and posed for every picture in the album—each page, a casual double portrait of her and an old man’s mask of transparent plastic—worn by a different friend or relative in every picture.

I thumb through the book of photographs sitting at my desk: The old farmer-poet fits the mask comfortably, sitting cross legged with a hand on his thigh, wearing a plastic face in the shade of a building on his farm in Kentucky.
A table made from an old screen door
and two workbenches covered with peanuts in front of him,
with a wooden bushel basket at each corner,
implying the shape of a wagon.
He leans almost laughing, his elbow bent at his side
as the outdoor shadows fill the slits between his plastic eyelids
Madelyn as always, sits beside him on the bench, her head tilted slightly
towards the sky.

4.
The park too, has its captions:
"I wake to find the park has changed while I was gone.
The lake is like a sheet of glass with several yellow leaves
floating near the shore.
The wind seems calm and comes from far away.
Strewn across the ground are fallen branches and uprooted trees,
torn open by a storm the night before,
their bark hangs gray in shreds."

A man speaks while looking at the world and wants to write it all down,
death leaves shifting in his footsteps...

I remember reading Purgatorio on the couch of my mother's apartment in the summer
while listening to the electric tune of an ice cream truck grow louder as it drives
in circles around our block, and laughing at the two things happening
to me simultaneously.

Each exact electric note falling into the pattern
of an old folk tune my uncle used to sing whenever the ice cream
truck drove by.
I laughed until I heard my neighbor yelling at his daughter
and the world appeared to me less funny.

A flock of starlings flies in rapid circles like a swarm of dark wasps
above the tree line. There are thousands of them,
and I want to write it all down.

The ice cream truck's tune starts over as it fades off down the road.

Maybe it is just because she looks like my mother,
but don't they seem in love?
We picnic behind them, I patiently sip my tea,
waiting for her to look into strong eyes.
He holds her very close. They dance.

That red waistband and his thick arm restrain her.
His straw jaw is nearly covered by a straw hat.
I know he is looking at her. For now.

Her light and his dark contrast
the fall trees that drop leaves on my table.
Is she about to feel his beard's roughness
on her fair cheek? They dance.

I realize her eyes—
looking at the pristine leaves—
have already fallen.
He's leaning closer. This time.

By the next twirling wind,
with a rough beard and strong hands,
she will look up—I hope she will look up—
because he will soon notice
the pale leaves too, having fallen so closely
to where they dance.
I want to write down every word of it.

5.
Seven Catholic siblings
each take turns putting on the old man's face,
and Madelyn, patient in her hag's mask
sits or stands with each and every one,
the dark contour of the youngest one's head
visible through the plastic where the mask sticks out to far,
the evening sun shining on the wrinkled nose
and brow as they hang crooked from the child's shoulders.

But his hands-
leaning his back against the ivy covered terrace wall,
the way his hands half grip the air,

casts shadow of a hand across his belly,
a long dark fingered claw held up by his entire body,
the crooked mask gazing from his face in wonder
at his own hand's hanging shadow.

One witnesses it is ennobling/
if one thinks so

-a poet is a man who feels both ashamed
and unashamed at once, living both in his life,
and the poem of his life he is writing.
In the poem he is a villain obsessed with redeeming himself.
In life he is thinking up lines for a poem,
tapping his desk with a pen.

A swarm of starlings
settles in the treetops.
They cover every branch
and arrange in rows that span the power lines,
watching the city empty and refill
its streets with cars,
shaking loose black feathers
from their folded wings
they shift from foot to foot.

I write, impatient and with patience, both at once.
A half eaten cake sits on the shelf,
where it's been left for days.
Night fills the air outside my bedroom window.
I am sitting at my desk, remembering
only small parts of day,
a far off lake shore strewn with broken branches,
its waters grey and weathered glass below a single
swooping dragonfly.

6.
In a book laid open on my desk,
I see the outdoor shadows settle
in the plastic folds of a mask,
The photographer, rewinding the spool
of family and friends one last time-
maybe just to say goodbye.
each one of them takes turns
putting on the mask
and stepping into a new photograph.

'If to know is noble/
it is ennobling'

Restless, unashamed
I write myself an exit through which to leave the poem.
and staring at the empty page, pass through it.
In poem close to where I sat remains a single shrinking hole
as if burned open on the air itself.
The room is empty, its florescent light
spills out the window.
The cake is as it was
without description.
A book of photographs lies open on the desk.
Sitting in the greasy pizza parlor staffed by surly Albanians, I grabbed the wall, the chair, the back of my own wrist.

Sam was the worst. He couldn't stop shaking, and my guilty hands didn't need to fidget; I'd blocked it from my mind. I think he knew, too, but I threw my arm around him, and on the sidewalk outside, me in my leather jacket, a bottle of beer in my hand, he told us that he loved us. He started to explain, but we made him shut up, because he didn't need to.

We sat in a tiny apartment, where our friends had struck out for themselves. We sat on a tobacco-stained rug and listened to the turkey baking. Every step we took those weeks had some kind of meaning, screaming to the world that we might be useless, forgotten, that the world might not care. But that we had each other, and if that sounds antiquated, or syrupy, or romantic, try to imagine what it means, in a one-room apartment, littered with candy wrappers and soda cans, next to a freeway.

Trying to be wherever I left to, I write myself a smaller hole through which to watch the poem, but accomplish nothing. I am still only typing at a desk.

I pull the window open. Somewhere else, the blackbirds left without my noticing, leaving power lines strung bare across the sky.

The bedroom is empty. A cool breeze enters through the window. The book of photographs is left opened to the last page, where the photographer himself is in the portrait, standing with his wife.

The two of them have traded masks and wear each other's clothes—Madelyn sadly gazing forward through an old man's plastic eye slits. She is larger than him, now in the last months of his life his legs and forearms, thinned by cancer.

He wears the hag mask and stands turned, leaning into her with both hands resting on her shoulders.

The fence she leans against is wrapped in grapevines.

His face is turned to her, the hooked nose of his mask almost touching the plastic cheek of hers, as if to say some quiet thing.
The photographer has entered the portrait, it makes no difference now, who holds the camera, only that the book stays open to that single page, where Gene, just months before his death, wraps his hand around her shoulder, where they are photographed together— the two of them standing side by side in the grape arbor.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF ROGUES

(NICK SIMMONS)

It's not there anymore All the times we sat in city parks, golf courses after dusk, with a bottle of whiskey and the Tao Te Ching, the easily ridiculed ropes of camaraderie.

My friends and I fought no war, no machine guns or tanks, just the war inside ourselves, trying to stay sane, to keep the abyss from seeing too much of us.

The demented choirs sang the soundtrack to our lives, while we behaved in a way that tested our fragile faith in something we couldn't explain.

I think we knew, even then that we were expendable. We hadn't put in the work, the keeping quiet, the things you need to do, to be smiled upon by the world.

On the day before our brother's funeral, when they played Amazing Grace and sent him to Minnesota to be burned, Sam and Jacob and I watched a man we didn't know slowly leave this life, a chance encounter on concrete. We walked away in silence, after the paramedics came, and then each broke.
shit movie that he did more and more cocaine. Had he not agreed to do the movie—or if the movie was better—he woulda still been alive.”

“Probably would have been in Ghostbusters,” she added.

“Probably. So the screenwriter of Neighbors is partly—if not all—responsible for the death of John Belushi. And Chris Farley if you wanna believe in the whole domino effect. That he was, like, ‘following in the footsteps’ of Belushi?”

They both exchanged smirks. I squeezed an imaginary stress reliever in my fist. She went on to explain the film The Conqueror with John Wayne as Genghis Khan and the fact that it was filmed at a former A-Bombing site that led to Wayne dying of cancer years later. Dig then broke out the weed and I escaped to the bathroom to read a Mad Magazine in choked-back fury.

Lori and I never went out again. The next time I saw her she immediately asked, “How’s Dig doing? Did he finish that book for Barnard’s class?” I didn’t even know he had Barnard’s class. The only other time we actually exchanged words was when she offered up condolences the day after Dig spontaneously combusted.
He always thought of me as this tangled mass of nerves; this guy who pulled his pants above his waist so he wouldn’t have to reach as far to get to his pockets. But I was just a normal, lazy kid. The only reason I was doing my essay on Friday night was because of the date I was having on Sunday and wanted to get enough sleep on Saturday.

I couldn’t believe my luck anyway in getting a date this early in the year—mid-October, in a new school no less. I mean I was no tall-dark-and-handsome, more of a tall-nerdy-and-paunchy. Not that tall, really—five-eleven—but the paunchy part was accurate, and then some. And Lori, the girl, was hot—coke-bottle figure, nice legs, glasses. Girls with glasses drive me wild—which reinstates my inherent geekdom, yes. But I’d never had a hot girl before. Actually I’d never had a girl, period. But it was a damn fine way to start off the list.

As I said though, girls dug Dig. It seemed every Saturday night I’d approach the door to the dorm and find it locked, which had an unspoken meaning that he was inside fucking Dith—another member of his entourage who I had the tiniest bit of a crush on—with one of my Trojans. Twenty minutes later I’d try the door again and they would still be going at it. I remember one night this kept me wandering the hallways till two in the morning. I couldn’t understand it. Here was Dith, tall, blonde, leggy—to say she was attractive was to say the Kennedy assassination was a bit of a bummer. But then there was Dig, tall, pockmarked, irritatingly skinny, eyes permanently bloodshot. Their relationship must have been based solely on his ability to turn sex into an epic saga.

When I finally got in after Dith left, I found the top half of Dig’s lanky body out of the covers. As soon as he saw me, he told me in a burst of inspiration, “Dude...the female vagina...is a lot like an apple!” And he left it at that—waiting for me to surrender to his coolness and ask him to continue. I didn’t give him the satisfaction.

But I digress. My date with Lori that Sunday was going pretty well. She was a film major so I had to sit through this long independent film about Irish nuns or something. Then we went to eat at this Italian place next to the theater and I succeeded in not spilling tomato sauce anywhere on my body. Then on the ride back—she was driving, I didn’t have a car—she said she wanted to take a look at my dorm. My, oh my. I was going to be the one locking Dig out of the room that night. But of course, that didn’t happen. Dig was already in the room plowing through his third reading of A Clockwork Orange. I regretfully introduced them both. A half hour later, she was lying on my bed engrossed in a fatalistic conversation about John Belushi—I’m not joking—while I sat at my desk without any intelligent input whatsoever. Dig blabbed, “...so then they, like, got to the part about his final film Neighbors with Dan Aykroyd, right? And he was so frustrated with the filming of that just...piece-of-
ory. "I mean, think about that. Living organisms that were produced in his body are spread all across the world."

He stopped and looked at me, as if what he was telling me was conversational fodder. I stared back soberly, shrugged my shoulders and replied, "Yeah, so?"

"So! That's, like...so profound. I mean...the guy's named John Smith, okay? John Smith may live in America, but there's a little of John Smith in...like, Madagascar."

He paused for a second and nodded, grinning, liking the sound of that word. "There's a little of John Smith in France. There's a little John Smith in Egypt. England. Cyprus." He brought his square-jawed face inches from mine. "Luxembourg."

"But...his sperm is dead. It's dead by the time it hits the sidewalk, right?"

"Right, but," wheezing for dramatic effect, "they're a part of him."

He was worse when he was with one of his minions. I hated Chael. He was this portly guy with a head like a glob of Dak ham and big Buddy Holly glasses, always drinking coffee, always wearing all black, and always speaking with the same fake, alienated, angst-ridden, Goth-kid voice. "The world," he would recite one of his poems, sounding like a creaking door, "is a desolate place."

He never liked me. Aside from me not thinking Pink Floyd's The Wall was the best film ever made, I was never sure why. He'd later accuse me of causing Dig's explosion—but that's later.

Chael would constantly be hanging around the room, his head always on my pillow, skunking it with his corn-and-pork stench that kept me awake at night. They'd usually be in the middle of a conversation in which Dig would try to flesh out a Mary Jane-induced theory and Chael would try to drop the word "existentialism" into everything he said. Either that or complete stoned-out gibberish.

"Dude, it must, like, suck to be a bee," Dig said to Chael while I was trying to finish an essay for Poli-Sci on my laptop, "'Cause, like, if a guy pisses you off and you sting him, you just die. That's it. Your lot in life is just to sting people when you get pissed off, but you can only do it once and you die. And then the guy that was pissin' you off just has, like, a little bee sting, a little prick... Like your lot in life is that little, like, prick." After a few long seconds, he realized the double meaning of the word "prick" and chuckled to himself.

And Chael simply replied, as he usually did, "Totally." He turned, studied my face for a few seconds and noted, "You look like a squirrel."

"Shut up, all right?" I'd been fumbling with the same sentence for an hour, trying to focus on foreign policy during the Reagan era but continually having my concentration ruined by thoughts of, well, bees.

Dig stood up, as if he were outraged. "Hey man. You need to, like, pull the anaconda out of your ass. It's only Friday night—loosen up."
supposed to lie still across the stage and listen to Titania's fervent monologue admonishing dressing room to spy on us. We planted forged love letters in their dressing rooms from Oberon to Titania to get them back.

One evening performance, for no reason that was important enough to remember, we broke into uncontrollable giggling, right there on stage, aching to hold back silent laughter. One night, the teenagers who played Titania, Puck, and Oberon, snuck into the dressing room to steal our makeup. They were only a freshman but he built up a following pretty quickly and was proud of it. He knew he was Dig the Creepy Modern-Day Philosopher with piles upon piles of beatnik yesmen at his disposal. I tried not to get too excited by these antics. Chael was his right hand man. That was his name: Chael—pronounced KULL. He was really named Michael but didn't want to be just another Mike. There was also Moly, who didn't want to be a Tim. And Dith who didn't want to be a Judy. And so on and so on. It was probably good for these folks when Dig finally exploded that night. He was as false as false prophets go.

I remember sometime in early October of that year, Dig was sitting on his bed pinch-rolling a joint in his fingers and listening to that Harry Chapin song "Cat's in the Cradle." He was bony, lanky and acned, blonde-haired and blue-eyed. "I'm the kinda people Hitler liked!" he'd told me on the first day, shooting a thumb-up, forgetting my last name was Schwartzman.

In an insucking moment, Dig said, "You know...this is a really sad song." He waited for a few seconds for the smoke to rise into his sinuses and then blew it out of his nostrils like a mustache. "He didn't have time for his kid, now his kid doesn't have time for him." I had my face buried in the spine of my Physics book, unable to make thermodynamics interesting enough to bother reading about any further. I muttered, "You didn't know that?"

"Well I haven't really listened to the lyrics much. But it's such a happy song, y'know. I mean this guy's a genius. He can, like, wrap sadness in happy music and no one's the wiser."

I nodded slightly, staring intently at the page number of the book so I could still see the 246 on the back of my eyelids when I felt like blinking.

"I mean, there's all this shit in the news today. If they just had...like, the anchorman dressed like a clown or something, then it wouldn't be so bad. That'd be kinda cool, actually."

Another night we found ourselves in similar positions—Physics, reefer, sixties music, (Rolling Stones this time)—and he said, out of the blue, "Y'know, what if...there was a guy...he seemed to stay on that thought for an eternity, finally adding, "who, like, went to every country in the world? And he just whacked off in every country, right?"

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A teeny tiny, six-foot-five, he spilled out of the bed onto his feet, needing pacing room for this theater. He knew he was Dig the Ca-razy Modern-Day Philosopher with piles upon piles of beatnik yesmen at his disposal. I tried not to get too excited by these antics. Chael was his right hand man. That was his name: Chael—pronounced KULL. He was really named Michael but didn't want to be just another Mike. There was also Moly, who didn't want to be a Tim. And Dith who didn't want to be a Judy. And so on and so on. It was probably good for these folks when Dig finally exploded that night. He was as false as false prophets go.

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tears of laughter and arching our heaving backs. After the show, the stage manager Fred gave us the "professionalism" lecture while we peeled off our wigs and unpinned our bobby curls, but the guilt we felt only lasted for about a night.

Another time, for carrying some petty drama or another into the wings before one of our entrances, the big shot Shakespearean actor that played Bottom told us in no uncertain terms that we were in this theatre to be actresses, not to ruin everyone else's concentration and have a good time.

An actor is supposed to easily slip between two worlds, and the distinction in their lives between the stage and reality is supposed to be obvious. We were kids and we were flipping between about four different worlds—from home life to school life to magical-Shakespeare life. It's no surprise that most of us, running on little sleep and barely used to middle school, didn't know exactly what to make of the process.

Don’t get me wrong: there weren’t five little girls running around Pittsburgh squeezing love potion out of the dandelions in their back yards, or expecting their math teachers to deliver monologues in iambic pentameter. But when the show got less-than-glowing reviews from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, we took it personally. Being around adults all night every night, beautiful New York actresses with fiancées back home and three-month leases for funky apartments on the South Side, made us crave their sophistication. On the road at midnight together every night after shows, we convinced ourselves we were just as grown up, never mind the fact that we were in the back of a mini-van and being driven by one of our mothers. Then in the morning we were thrown back into the world of cliques around lunch tables and isosceles triangles, our skin still faintly ghost-white from all the fairy makeup, and it was hard to tell exactly where we were supposed to belong.

We were living the exact, concrete realities of creating a magical world. For weeks, the designers argued about the placement of the rising moon, painstakingly spatter-painted the wood boards on the floor of the theatre. We wore crazy white wigs that were supposed to light up and blink like candles for the last scene, but the drama surrounding burnt-out bulbs and overeager fairies who clicked the switch too soon never ceased. We sang our whimsical fairy song at a professional recording studio, and mouthed along to the mixed version that piped out through surround-sound speakers every night. Backstage, the concrete basement floors were cold. The white powder makeup that we covered our bodies in every night gave us rashes.

None of us, of course, really knew what it meant to be an actress, and it didn’t matter. We were there for what we looked like, fairy world atmosphere. I wore a skirt with yellow trim, an itchy white vest with a big yellow bow at the collar, yellow
glitter for my eyes and shoulders, and fat, yellow glasses. On stage, it never crossed my mind to pretend to be a fairy; I was myself in uncomfortable clothing, going through the motions, backstage life blending with whatever happened in front of the audience.

Most of the kids and teenagers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had been brought up to be in shows, and have continued since. Titania went on to study acting at Juilliard. Oberon was one of the three hockey demons in *Dogma*. Two of the fairies had been part of CLO Mini-Stars, a troupe for little kids in Pittsburgh who’s mothers have put them on the path to be actors since they fit into the first size of tap shoes. The girl who played the fairy Mote—I’ll call her Kate—had, among other roles, played Annie in *Annie* fourteen times.

Kate was twelve years old and sophisticated and she swore just as well as the actors she grew up around. She already had to shave her armpits, she’d made out with boys, and during carpool rides home she would explain to us in the vicinity of shocked mothers that the man who played Snug was gay and what that meant. She wore short skirts with knee high-black boots, and she was obsessed with the adult actor who played Francis Flute.

Flute was tall and he had dark hair and he brought the house down every night with his renditions of Thisbe. On Sundays, between our matinee and evening performances, we’d have a few rowdy rounds ofCapture the Flag in the basement of the theatre, and sometimes he would sneak into our games and lift one of us yelping onto his shoulders. We used a raggedy teddy bear as a prop in the first act of the show, and every night Flute dressed up the teddy bear with scraps he found in the costume shop—as a wizard, as Puck, as one of the Spice Girls—and set him out for us to see just before we came on for our bows.

Call it a crush if you want, but most twelve-year-old girls that become infatuated with older men are dreaming about whispered conversations, holding hands—not about sex. “If I were 21, I’d be fucking him right now, in that dressing room,” Kate would tell us, and then she’d go into elaborate detail. Because Kate ruled our clan of fairies, we’d nod and pretend this is what we were used to talking about and eventually she had us all obsessed. One of the fairies named her parakeet after him.

Three years later, Kate and I both ended up at Schenley High School. I recognized her right away but kept quiet, and it wasn’t until a week into Geometry that she turned to me and said, “You were a fairy.” She updated me on *Midsummer*—Flute had apparently married the assistant stage manager—but it became clear in our glances across the classroom that some things would be left unsaid, and we never, by any means, became friends. Kate had straight, bleached-blonde hair by then, and she was still the sleek and sophisticated girl that wanted to be too mature for her age.

My heart froze when I was seventeen. The cold spread through my veins and pushed into my lungs so that an exhalation become white clouds of breath.

It expanded its iciness to my skin. I turned pale and ghostly, ghastly beautiful, everything I touched chilled. Frost bloomed like crocuses beneath my feet.

When I took in a young boy, cold himself, I was villainized—the beautiful Snow Queen. She will steal your children, take them to her summer home in Norway.

He delighted in the white plains and I removed his memory of roses, only because it is painful to reach for a rose and watch it wilt.

Cold, I travel the world, kiss the eyelids of the infirm, whisper spine-chilling truths. No one hears, but they feel it.

The boy, warm blood runs his veins. A girl with hot tears and roses, roses. She rescued him, gave him faith. Then they left to be grown ups...

It’s a curious occasion when your heart drips all over the Persian rugs.

**SNOW QUEEN**

(ANASTASIA LUGO MENDEZ)
GHAZAL TO LAND

(OLIVIA MURRAY)

Trying to find my way out of the woods,
instead I have a constant wind, and water at my feet.

Forgive him. His shadow is pushed
by something other than the sun.

Half in the manner of Charles Wright, I write a poem about Li Ho.
I am too young for things to be weightless.

It's winter north of here. Temperature below zero for the tenth day.
Rolling tires over glass asphalt.

City lights—metal strength stronger than bones.
Return to form I tell myself, or start walking.

held long obsessions over older guys, and skipped school often. She had a lead role in
a long run of West Side Story and missed two months of eleventh grade. After a few
weeks back at Schenley, she dropped out of high school for the rest of year.

A show, no matter how big or small, starts slowly and ends abruptly. This
has a profound affect on the kids and teenagers I know who act regularly—Kate most
of all—but I have watched people who aren't in shows often, 18-year-old boys who
wear baggy shorts and talk in Ebonics, cry at the close of high school musicals. First
there are auditions, months later a read-through, afternoons of costume fittings, short
rehearsals that grow into longer ones. Then there is tech week with twelve-hour run-
throughs that are both exciting and excruciatingly tedious. Opening night is a whirl-
wind of tension and parties, and then there are performances, the same thing with the
same people in what seems to stretch on as a forever of nights. And then one day you
say your lines for the last time and have a quick goodbye with cheese and crackers and
before you're barely out of the theatre you see the workmen in there, tearing the set
down, dismantling the moon.

For the whole last week of the show, Kate and her mother advised us that we
would all be going into deep depression when it ended. It was true that the Public
Theatre, with its cinnamon air-fresher bathrooms and its skinny basement hallways
perfect for both hide-and-go-seek tag and intense sessions of Truth or Dare, had be-
come so much a part of my life that I could barely remember how I used to fill my
evenings. I sported my black, Public Theatre sweatshirt exactly every other day, and
washed it so often it wore out almost as thin as a T-shirt.

The stage manager put us fairies in charge of the mood music for the good-
bye party. We played Sarah McLachlan's I Will Remember You on repeat through the
whole thing and sat in the stairwell above the lounge. The New York actors said
quick goodbyes and rushed out to pack up their places and get on planes. A knot of
spit and fear stuck in my throat all afternoon but I didn't cry. I remember being terri-
fied of everything—crying, leaving—when Kate, the most experienced of us all, hugged
Adam and broke down sobbing.

I was used to days and weeks and months blending together as more and
more of the same. Before the show, I spent every morning practicing clarinet and
piano, and then I went to school, and afterwards to the Jewish Community Center.
Every night, my mother and I listened to NPR in the car as we drove home, and then
she cooked us pasta or rice for dinner. No one close to me had died. My one experi-
ence with summer camp made me homesick, not sad to leave. I wasn't afraid of any-
thing ending.
The cycle of life is sped up in show business, and tension runs high through it all. There are few plays more timeless than *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, but its execution was all about the timing. Calendars were posted all over the place marking how many weeks until opening or closing night. Lights were set to the exact second. In the wings, we were aware not of what was happening on stage but of how many minutes until our next entrance. Nothing waits, and when it all finally does come to a grinding halt it doesn’t matter if you’re ten and you need more time to sort out the finality of an empty theatre—you pack up your dressing room, you go home, and you either move on, or you don’t.

I checked the audition sections in the paper every week for years after *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* ended. They’d always be looking for people younger than me, or the theatre would be out in the suburbs somewhere, or the dates didn’t work, but still every Friday morning I flipped to the Weekend section and hoped. I was under no delusions that I was an actress, and didn’t particularly enjoy memorizing lines or following blocking, but I craved the nonstop exhilaration, was looking to recreate the experience. Since then, I’ve built sets, played in orchestra pits, written plays, sewed costumes, pulled curtains, and had small parts in one-acts at my high school, but it is never the same as being a part of a big cast in a big theatre, with an ever-present band of cohort fairies.

Two weeks after the end of the show, we all met at one of the girl’s houses for a fairy sleepover. The bags under our eyes had faded because we were finally getting enough sleep, and we were back to our mortal attire. The mother served us pizza. Her house was warm and carpeted and, unlike the theatre, we were allowed to go barefoot. Later in the evening, we locked ourselves in the girl’s bedroom and made long-distance telephone calls to New York City. We left messages for Hermia and Demetrius, Lysander, Flute. Helena picked up the phone and seemed surprised to hear from all of us, together. She told us about the auditions she’d been going to all week. “It’s so stressful trying to get jobs, four auditions in one day, directors that only want to look at resumes and headshots.” There was an awkward moment on the line, all five of us listening in on speaker phone from Pittsburgh. “How’s school?” she asked. We mumbled a collective “It’s fine, ground our toes into the carpet. “Well, have a good night, say hi to Pittsburgh,” she said after another silence.

Later, after we stashed away our list of phone numbers, we flipped through magazines and painted each other’s fingernails like it was a normal sleepover, let warm comforters drown the knots in our throats. I knew then that despite our pretending we would not all stay friends. The end of something is not as beautiful as its beginning no matter what Shakespeare writes, and once I was sure of this it would
come to build rivers of dread into my hands, my eyes, my hair. Dogs would die, houses would burn, and I would have to leave people I loved. We were curled up together under the covers, sleeping fairies whispering the shifting shadows on the wall. The lingering smell of nail polish, perfumed magazines, and dissolved secrets was our stab at a love potion stronger than anything Puck might conjure. Our mothers picked us up in the morning.

Thanks to Delp, Therese, and everyone who submitted.

Love,
Julie Buntin & Taya Kitaysky.
THE RED WHEELBARROW
EARLY WINTER '04
JULIE BUNTIN
TAYA KITAYSKY
the red wheelbarrow
1983-84
So much depends upon

a red wheel barrow

glazed with rain water

beside the white chickens