The Editors: Elsbeth Laye Teague
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Thank you Delp and Oo. Your images will reside in the sky forever.....

THERESE! (Thank you.)
Example:
What an amazing journey this Red Wheelbarrow Reading has been. Call me over the summer. 
821-3472
Keri 
Tegnie

or...
you’re cool!
like chicken-cool!
don’t ever change!
email me!
Kot Bree

This Writing:
Laurie Ortega-Murphy... My Brother, Connor
Chase Yurga-Bell..... The Firetender
Lucie Alig..............Our Whole Lives
Tory Wegerski..........The Phobics Convention
Thea Prust.............. Washing Windows

That Writing:
Cathy Bueker......Coconutty
Taya Kitaysky.........Family Dinner
Kara Krewer....... At a Roadside Diner
Anastasia Lugo-Mendez..... Blue-Tinted

The Other Writing:
Betsy Moss....... Riding in the Car With You
Karen Olsen... Living With a Gynecologist
Graham Swindoll.... The Babies
My Brother, Connor

Stencils my brother cut
crack across my cheek,
painted when he still received
money for the subway
from our mother.
My brother sprays fresh paint
forcing my mouth to spit the truth
that the paint delivers.
Truths that I can’t see
because they exist in grey factories
and buildings with reflective windows.

The nape of my neck is a cigarette, the
smoke, a money sign. Circling above
it is a rifle shooting at that flag
with those stars.
Cheeks are the eyes of a woman,
who has only seen dim light and on
my nose her tears splatter in grey.
One day he pleads to put Chomsky
on my back.
I say no.
Bakunin?
I can’t preach his logic
or ideals.
Tomorrow I’ll try harder
not to buy from China, only
No Sweat.

I get to tomorrow,
and stroke my chin

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MEMORIES:

BEST RED WHEELBARROW MEMORY:

WORSTE RED WHEELBARROW MEMORY:

WHAT’S WRONG WITH
THE SPELLING?

A) WORSTE?
B) MEMORIES?
C) BARROW?
D) NOTING.
E) RED
(DARLENE turns on the radio. The same song is playing. MARLA takes the pile of pictures and starts tacking them on the wall, studying them the whole time. The pictures are of DARLENE and/or MARLA, in many different poses. Occasionally there is a mirror, and in the mirror a masked man holding a camera can be seen. DARLENE sits, transfixed on the song.)

Why can’t we go back, Darly?

DARLENE
Because there’s nothing there.

(Fade.)

END

where skin is left.
I pull at an issue
which is not stenciled on.
His words are at a loss
as my thoughts bound out
above his head.
Before he leaves me
he slips out a new knife,
sits me in a chair, in our kitchen,
hands me a cup of green tea,
and teaches me how to
cut my own stencils.

-Laurie Ortega-Murphy
The Firetender

Ash and smoke are what you receive for your labor. Though you sit surrounded you will always be alone, for few understand the burden you have undertaken.

You taste acrid pine wood smoked, the smell of sap evaporating into steam. Others may experience these things, but only you know when to stir up the logs to rekindle the flame, when to add dry needles, when to add newspaper, when to douse, when to smother.

Only you know where the fire is the hottest, the coals, and while many will leave when these bright tongues have faded, you stay because you know it only takes one spark to leap the ring.

And while others revel, you sit apart, and Prometheus takes that ember, races down the rocky slopes of Mount Olympus, spreads a firestorm across Earth from Hiroshima to Dresden. And you, lame Hephaestus, bound to your forge, must weather this storm, take it, confine it you must keep the flame from running wild, as you too might want.

-Chase Yurga-Bell

MARLA
No one I want to know.

(Pause)

I miss Daddy.

(DARLENE sits down and holds MARLA against her breast.)

DARLENE
Me too. He was like a mother to us, so sweet...

(The Telephone rings again. MARLA tries to go to answer it, but DARLENE holds her back. The phone stops ringing, they both fall slack.)

MARLA
Let's go back home.

DARLENE
We can't go back.

MARLA
Why not?

(DARLENE reaches under the cushion of the couch and pulls out a pile of photographs. The two girls look at them.)

That one's real pretty. And that one, when you doing the splits. I like the ones where you can see him.
Marla.

(The MASKED WOMAN runs out of the apartment and off-stage. DARLENE ignores the phone, which soon stops ringing. Then the same woman returns, unmasked and knifeless. It is MARLA. She runs in, mock frantic.)

MARLA
Darlene! A maniac with a knife tied me up in the other room! He had a mask...

DARLENE
Oh... Yes. I see.

MARLA
He threatened-

DARLENE
-To cut your face.

(MARLA is disappointed. She sits on the couch, facing the blank wall.)

MARLA
I'm real lonely, Darly. I've been lonely since we moved to the city.

(DARLENE reaches under the couch and takes out a slightly crumpled picture. It is a picture taken out of a window, looking out into a section of New York City at night. DARLENE tacks the picture to the blank wall. Both girls look at the picture.)

DARLENE
Shut up. There's lots of people out there.
Our Whole Lives

There’s an old joke that whenever a Unitarian dies, they reach a fork in the road on the way up to heaven and have to choose which path to take. The choices are a) to go directly to heaven or b) to contemplate going to heaven. And of course, the joke runs that any Unitarian will choose b. I first heard this during post-service coffee hour one Sunday, when it was loudly announced by a man with tattooed eyebrow extensions and a salmon-colored mug. UUI, my church at the time, had a rule where visitors or guests of the church couldn’t use a plain white mug. They had to differentiate themselves. But I guess for many people, that’s what Unitarianism’s all about: not only sticking out, but contemplating the motives for being different.

I was baptized Episcopalian in a huge, two-thousand member church somewhere in Southern Indiana. My brother underwent a similar process, and we both have more godparents than we know what to do with. By now, my godmothers serve little purpose in my life besides calling every now and then and feeling obligated to send birthday presents, which, in the case of my “aunt” Barbara, has been the same fairy-tale book four years in a row. In fact, my mom now admits that the only reason they went through with the whole procedure was so that my great-grandmother could live the last months of her life with contentment. After her death, my parents officially joined the Unitarian Universalism Church of Indianapolis.

I stopped going to youth group in junior high. The few times I did go, I always felt a little uneasy. They sent us to a church-owned trailer (there was no room in the church itself) to talk about non-church-related topics. Tim, our group leader, was obsessed with roller coasters. He had no job, besides leading a youth group, and spent all his time traveling to different amusement parks. Whenever a religious topic did come up, Tim would find a way to parallel its significance to coasters: how they’re grounded, supported, how they go down and come back up like...
DARLENE
This is really just silly, you know?

MASKED WOMAN
(Man Voice)
Shut up, shut up. Lower your leg, turn your head right. Put your arm behind your head.

(MASKED WOMAN readjusts the mirror so she can be seen in it while she photographs DARLENE)

DARLENE
Why do you want to see your self Marla? You’re still Marla.

MASKED WOMAN
(Man Voice breaking)
I’m not Marla!

DARLENE
Who are you then?

(MASKED WOMAN readjusts the mirror again.)

MASKED WOMAN
(Man Voice)
Right arm left, up. Left arm on left knee, lift skirt. Don’t tell any body, but I’m Bill Marino.

(Snap, snap, flash flash.)

DARLENE

so many things in life. And for many of us the comparison rang true—our beliefs were in a constant flux. In fact, I’m pretty sure that all ten of us were tentatively agnostic except for one atheist named Joe who looked like he was straight out of West Side Story. He was Italian, and for the longest time, I thought his last name was DiMaggio. Clearly I knew nothing about baseball, but even that aside, the name just seemed to fit him so well. Sometimes Tim allowed Joe to light our chalice with his cigarette and the girls would go wild. My decision to stop attending youth group hit me rather suddenly when I realized one day that I’d rather be in the actual congregation, standing up for (but never singing along with) the many hymns, their names generic like “Spirit of Life” or “Rejoice!”

Eventually, Sunday mornings became crucial for things besides church: sleeping in, homework, general free time. Even though I stopped going to the actual service, my parents were still driving me to UUI on a weekly basis. As a thirteen-year-old, Tuesday nights from six to nine became reserved for “Our Whole Lives,” an essential sex-ed class for pre-teens. My parents gave me no choice. To them, this was the alternative to church. They said that because they were willing to drive me there and pay a couple of dollars for the flimsy little textbook, I had no reason not to go.

The mission statement behind OWL, as we lazily titled the program, is to teach seventh through ninth graders about self worth, sexual health, responsibility, justice and inclusiveness. The four teachers had all undergone months of training, which seemed to have made them feel even more authoritative and intense. On the first evening of the program, they—an elderly gay man, a young attractive woman and a middle-aged couple—bolted the trailer door shut, looked us straight in the eye and told us that this was not a joke. Everything that happened inside the trailer needed to stay within the trailer walls. As they outlined the course, we couldn’t take it seriously. A group of boys were already scoffing at the mere mentioning
of “sexuality” and “compassion.”

Similar to the procedures of youth group, we began each session by lighting the same red ceramic chalice, whose flame acted as a strange reminder of the way in which these direct sexual teachings were linked to our religion. Just like everything else on the UUI grounds, the classes felt relaxed as we covered the nine subjects: gender roles, gender identity, body image, masturbation, puberty, love, respect, commitment and values. We were all quick in noticing that the course itinerary did not mention abstinence once. In fact, contraception as a unit was messily intertwined with the “values” session when one of our teachers announced that if we wanted to, we could spend our fifteen minute snack break putting condoms on bananas. It was impossible not to contrast OWL’s priority of topics to that of my sixth grade health class at school. There we learned the plumbing of the human body as if its varying parts were different battles in a war or different elements in a compound. The teacher, who doubled as the P.E. coach, made up vague code names for body parts like core tube and john and whenever he reached a loss of words regarding sex, would burst out in “just don’t do it guys. Please don’t do it.” In the trailer, however, there were no illustrations of human bodies and instead, movie posters for Clockwork Orange and The Shining adorned either side of the refrigerator. There was also a bulletin board of FAMOUS UNITARIANS with pictures of Tolstoy, Vonnegut, Sylvia Plath and Louisa May Alcott. I understand my religion’s history well enough to grasp that even though these four people were all Unitarian, they did not necessarily share the same beliefs. How could they? Not only were they all from different countries and eras, but Unitarianism is constantly shifting. Perhaps the most enduring definition I’ve heard is that it’s the “religion for the non-religious,” but even still, there’s no denying that many Unitarians still hold intense spirituality. Tolstoy or any other person with a famous essay called “The Kingdom of God is Within You” should be considered far from secular. Over time, I ap-

(Man Voice)
Hands up!

DARLENE
Marla...? What are you doing?

MASKED WOMAN
(Man Voice)
I said hands up, bitch! Stand on that chair.
(DARLENE does so)

DARLENE
Marla, I don’t understand. I know it’s you. We’ve lived together for years...

MASKED WOMAN
(Man Voice)
If you don’t stop talking, I’ll cut your face! Then we’ll see who’s a pretty girl.

DARLENE
We’re both pretty Marla. We’re all pretty.

MASKED WOMAN
(Man Voice)
No, no they aren’t. Some of ’em are ugly.

(MASKED WOMAN takes out a camera.)

(MASKED WOMAN snaps a couple pictures.)
The Babies
by Graham Swindoll

Characters:

DARLENE - A young woman.
MARLA / MASKED WOMAN - A young woman.

Setting:
The interior of a small New York apartment. Walls are implied, except for one strip of a dirty white wall. A tacky couch. A moveable standing mirror. A coffee table with a phone, a radio and a bunch of silver thumb tacks on it.

(Lights fade up on DARLENE and MARLA's apartment. Music pours forth from a radio. It might be "Strange Fruit" being sung by Billie Holiday. Enter DARLENE, smiling and pretty.)

DARLENE
Hello? Marla? Geez. She left the radio on again.

(DARLENE enters the living room. She mechanically takes off her coat, sets it down and turns off the radio.)

Daddy loved that song.

(A MASKED WOMAN emerges from behind the couch. She holds a large kitchen knife)

MASKED WOMAN
weight of the food it contained, was the “negative” area: the part of the room you went to if you disagreed with a statement. Even in a case like Susan’s that seemed so clear-cut, kids would still scatter independently. People were completely sincere in how they voted. I still remember the clump of girls that stood in the “positive” area by the front door. They too would have chosen the looker over the old friend and because they admitted to it so fearlessly, I couldn’t have thought less of them if I’d tried. It was always surprising to see people’s beliefs portrayed visually. Even when the issue at hand was as basic as good vs. bad, nice boy vs. bad boy, the whole point was how you placed yourself in relation to others. There were many times when I thought to myself that surely everyone will agree on this one, but that seldom proved to be the case. We had become shameless. We stood where we believed we should stand with our past, our morals, everything in consideration.

I got to know that trailer so well. I grew accustomed to the smell, the mix of Fe-breeze and Clove, whose origin was never identified. A couple weeks into the program, I had a pretty good idea of who’d be sitting where and who would shuffle in twenty minutes late. The cupboards, I learned, were usually stocked with bags of chips and pretzels that had expired the year before. This may be part of the reason why people never actually snacked during the snack break, but just as we never ate much, we didn’t talk much during break time either. The transitions in and out of the subjects at hand were too awkward. It can take a lot of concentration and willpower to go straight from discussing sexual abuse to what happened in school that day. Instead, breaks just allowed us to further observe each other. We looked around, made comments here and there. I would let my mind do whatever it wanted. Sometimes I’d look up at the ceiling and count the knots of wood on the paneling. The darkened circles were scattered around in a way that reminded me of a photograph I’d seen of the United States at night. Whichever parts of the country had the
highest concentrations of night life—California, east coast, parts of Texas—were represented by their amounts of light pollution, the little white specks that linked to population and livelihood. At first, I felt sorry for states like Indiana, whose area stayed solidly black.

The trailer had a bathroom, a kitchen, a front door, a back porch. There were times when my mind would drift into thoughts about how livable a place like this would be—a place that's small with a sense of comfort. Everything in the air felt tight, like the space between you and every single object and person in that room was unbreakable. I remember wishing that I owned the trailer, that maybe someday I could spruce it up and live there.

I don't believe OWL would have been as effective had the class not contained a fairly equal number of boys and girls. These days, girls overpower everything. The college process has shown me that there are no liberal arts schools in the country whose males outnumber the females. Because of the rather artistic path I've chosen, I've been tricked into picturing the typical classroom as one with many girls and a few boys hidden in the corner. But so much of what we read and discussed in OWL was about balance and equality: the precise numeric value of a hormonal imbalance, how to give a relationship as much as you take from it. We took full advantage of the fact that for every girl in the program, there was a boy to even things out. It became our instinct to fall into a boy-girl-boy-girl seating arrangement whenever we gathered around a point of interest—whether it was a stereo blasting Three Six Mafia's “Slob on my Knob” (whose lyrics we studied as degrading to women) or a guest speaker from the congregation I'd left.

Sometimes the speakers were boring, like the time an old married couple came in and spoke of commitment, how hard (but yet so lovely) it is to keep a marriage going these days. As they spoke, regardless of how uplifting their words may have been, we could all feel how this didn’t carry the same momentum as our other discussions. I wasn’t surprised when none of us utilized the anonymous question feature that day. Even though, like always, we were encouraged to scribble out our curiosities,
the soft-spoken man and woman had failed in raising the questions that we now expected to deal with. It's not that we already knew everything about camaraderie and love, even in their simplest forms. In fact, I doubt any of us knew much of anything beyond what we could scrape out of our own memories and experience. Some of us lived amid a happy marriage every day and some of us had never seen it happen. The only common trait we all shared was that we were in that trailer, one way or another, because of our spirituality, or the spirituality of our parents, or as is the case for Joe DiMaggio, because we happened to live adjacent to an all-inclusive church. I had never heard Holland, the UUI piano accompanist speak until one night when she came to talk to us about gender identity. I always felt a little guilty when I saw her because years ago, I had stolen one of the hymnals from under the seats. I had liked her accompaniments so much that I wanted to take them home and try to pluck them out myself. It was weird to see the person against whom I had indirectly, committed my first crime as she stood there preparing to speak. As a class, we had acquired a keen awareness towards when something was about to be revealed. One of our teachers introduced Holland and told us that she had undergone a sex change and was here to discuss some of the emotional changes that the operation had stirred. It was the last night of OWL, and as creatures of habit, we all expected the program to end on a normal yet mildly conclusive note. Holland started talking in a voice that I never would have matched to her face. It was low and masculine. She told us about why she felt more comfortable as a woman, how the change was inevitable thanks to certain instances in her childhood. It was obvious something was coming. I was cramped onto a loveseat with two boys, one on either side, and heard one of them swallow his gum. We were all completely still as she told us about how she used to live right next to a hockey rink and would walk to and from games there all the time. One night, when she was about our age and walking home in the dark, all different shapes and sizes. He can say push in four languages, performs c-sections daily, comforts the father (if he shows up) about all the blood.

Daddy's job must be exciting, watching sticky bundles of life come popping out between legs. Once he delivered three babies in just seven minutes. He had to run from room to room, pulling his red gloves off and snapping on new white ones, but he got them all out, showed those three little ones what the world looked like.

Daddy doesn't do anything wrong, but lots of people sue him. Daddy is in at least two court cases all the time. Daddy tries to make the world a happier place, and people try to take money out of his pockets.

Daddy has teddy bears in his office that he lets the six year olds who've been raped hold while he looks at them. They're always afraid of Daddy,
Living with a Gynecologist
or What My Daddy Does

It isn't that bad.
It isn't like we have
condom lamshades and
speculum wallpaper in our bathrooms.
But ever since the day
I learned about “woman parts,”
Daddy’s always said
Keep your eyes open and your legs closed.
Then he'd clasp a firm hand on my shoulder
and talk about how he was a boy once,
how he knew what kinds of filthy things
went around in their minds.
I delivered a twelve year old today,
and let that be a lesson to you!
The penis is the enemy!
Whatever you do,
stay away from the penis.

Daddy delivers kids like me all the time,
that's why he acts the way he does.
If you've got a vagina, then you can get pregnant,
he says. Daddy delivers thirteen year olds rarely,
fifteen year olds frequently, and sixteen year olds
almost every week.
Kids come crying out of kids,
clinging to broken mothers
who wish they didn’t exist.

But Daddy delivers older women too,
a bunch of boys from her high school had been hiding behind tele-
phone poles and jumped out at her from behind them. They kicked
her and punched her and eventually tied her to one of the poles where
she stayed all night until her brother found her the next morning. “All
because a young boy was a little girlish” was her statement used to
end the story. Her face looked damp and reddish now, this happy ac-
companist who I used to snicker at for bouncing in her seat as she
played. When I looked away, the trailer was motionless—the last si-
ence that this group of people would ever share. I could feel my heart
beating in my feet, the palms of my hands, my temples. The boys on
either side of me were sinking into the couch, the only soundless way
to reposition.

That night, I tried to picture what kind of teenage kid would
ever have the malice and the stupidity to do such a thing. I tried to
think of what they’d look like, and how they’d move and speak; but I
couldn’t. In the strangest way, my involvement in OWL had tricked
into forgetting how judgmental people can actually be.

The last time I went to church was to hear one of my old youth
group friends give a speech on Christmas Eve—something about what
the holidays meant to her. The service took place three years after our
“graduation” from OWL, and at this point, I was already spending
most of my year up in Northern Michigan at a fine arts high school.
When I talked to her after the service, she updated me on her own life:
how she was going to college down in Richmond, Indiana—three
hours away—and how she still made the drive to Indianapolis every
Sunday for the service at UUI. I remember viewing this as a kind of
addiction, as if she was reliant on the comfort of the church—the way
everyone accepts everyone under the roof of that building.

Now, whenever religion crops up, it’s hard for me to associate
the word with any concrete images or specific memories. My reli-
gious upbringing was far too imprecise to distinctly relate back to our
minister’s makeshift alter, the tinted mugs or even our covenant,
which was about as soft as a pile of old rags. Instead, the aspects that continue to strike me are vague and on a much larger scale. I guess what it all comes down to, years later, is that feeling of unwavering accord: that harmony felt with people who aren’t like you at all.

-Lucie Alig

that we did Gadna— Israeli army training simulation with the shlichot— ambassador teachers as commanders. Or that we made matzah in the auditorium with the Chabad rabbi who taught us how to make shofars. You’d let us talk about their days, the math quiz or the English discussion, You would drive and listen, occasionally throwing in your own questions, What was Antigone about again? Why don’t you talk to the teacher? but mostly listening, like a crow in the forest, waiting to hear a clue of danger.

And when the other Heights kids in the car had been dropped off, you would listen to your daughter as we sat in silence, listening to each others interest.

-Betsy Moss
Riding in the Car with You

In the evening, the crisp hour of eight o’clock, the students would pour out of the Siegal College of Judaic Studies after its biweekly hiatus as Akiva High School.

You were not perfect. There would be the days when you would simply be human, distracted, and then have to slip on your overshoes and drive the 15 minutes to your carpool.

There were the days when the blizzards were so bad, that the school made students call to say they had arrived home. But you would be there then, waiting in line. You hated making the carpool wait, rather smiling at their smiles as your car came.

You usually were third in line, a winner, in your daughter’s mind.

You would listen to WCLV, classical music, or NPR, but when they, the kids of the Heights area, got into the car, the radio would quiet, and you would listen to them.

You’d ask, What did she talk about in Hebrew this evening? Did they do something special for Rosh Hashanah, prying to make sure we were learning. You heard of our fun.

The Phobics’ Convention

Once the responses have all arrived, the hand-written letters from the cyberphobes shuffled in with the neatly-penned answers from the papyrophobes who mailed back their RSVPs on cloth napkins, drink coasters, the backs of matchbooks, and the phoned-in replies of the graphophobes, along with the polite declines of the agoraphobes, the organizers open their doors (and their windows, for the xylophobes) and welcome all the phobics.

There is some difficulty, of course—an event of this magnitude can’t go off flawlessly. The claustrophobes have to be coaxed from the corners and the claustrophobes pushed gently out of the center of the room. The chorophobes hug the edges of the dance floor, sipping their drinks, while the methyphobe clutches his Shirley Temple like a life raft. It’s easy to identify the ablutophobes, clustered together in silent, mutual understanding of their aversion, not so easily accepted by others who can’t see the terror in soap. The osmophobes, especially horrified, spray themselves with perfume and finger their travel packs of deodorant. The gymnophobes, eyes carefully averted, urge clothing onto the vestiphobes, who don’t mean to flaunt their nudity. The heterophobes, one man and one woman, take up familiar positions on opposite walls, while the monophobe mingles with an almost manic determination.
The high point is the keynote speaker, who takes to the stage after the phonophobes have been escorted to their soundproof rooms. A recovered glossophobe and a famous orator, he tells them his own story, stands before them a changed man and all the better for it, exhorting these myriad, anxious people to look beyond what they fear, to see the beauty inside, their personal haunting. At the mention of haunts, all the spectrophobes scatter, but the disturbance is brief and the speaker recovers.

It's possible, he tells them all, for a caligynephobe to make love to a beautiful woman, for an anuptaphobe to embrace her singularity and rejoice in her freedom. It is only a matter of seeing things more clearly, he says, and as he steps down the scotomrophobe applauds the loudest of all.
And afterwards, when everyone but the kathisophobe has sat down for dinner, there is an unspoken comprehension of their resemblance, the parallels they might find if they were ever to face their opposite, the second side of their coin.

In the end, though, they all depart for their private rooms and only the somnephobes are left to drift through the hallways like nightgowned ghosts; at the window, one keraunothnetophobe keeps his vigil for falling satellites, his eyes trained on the stars.

-Tory Wegerski
Washing Windows

I spent Sunday washing windows
With my father. Holding the ladder
Steady as he sponged and squeegeed
With soapy vinegar water.
He decided to wash the inside
From his perch outside so I
Opened and closed the windows,
Staring at him through cob-webbed
Screens. Once he lost his balance
And for a moment he swung
His arms aimlessly, the expression
On his face like the time
My sister climbed over the railing
At the top of the stairs, standing
Two stories above a granite
Floor calling him to watch her
Jump. He said no over and over
Again, as if his voice could catch her, bring her down safely;
She said she’d prayed all night and
She knew God would help her fly.

My father caught hold of the window
Sill, uttered a shaky laugh and kept
Washing. He wasn’t the one who
Stopped my sister from trying to fly,
I had come up behind her and slid
My arms around her small body,
Pulling her back over the railing.
Yesterday, while my father worked
I pressed my hand on the screen
Blue-Tinted

The world looks black and white
and blurred when the moon is out.
The sky is dark like cold
and we’re both pale out here.

We have no famous lines,
no “here’s looking at you, kid,”
or, “frankly, my dear, I don’t give a damn.”
We’re not quite classic yet.

But we play pretend that I wear skirts
and you smoke cigars and own a bar.
The scripts we carry crackle like they’re yellowed,
not just wrinkled and water-stained.

Maybe our play-acting should end,
but I’m not ready to bow to the crowd
and step back behind the curtain, change into myself.
I don’t waste words as a starlet, just give looks.

I know we’re too blue-tinted to be old,
our games too insubstantial to outlast dawn.
Still, I’ll keep my Southern lilt and smile-eyes
until the sun rises and there are no more shadows.

-Anastasia Lugo-Mendez
A screaming child
or separate rooms,
unpaid bills
or a dying pilot light?

Conversations trip across
the phonelines:
long-distance families,
local take-out.
Underneath the footsteps
and cable channels,
we hear the patterned sighs
of sleeping lovers,
the breath of all hotels.

-Kara Krewer
At A Roadside Hotel

We’ve stopped on the roadside,
gone unquestioned by the midnight clerk
only to ask ourselves
where we’re headed.

We leave our tiny packhorse car
under an orange streetlamp
in a whirl of midges
and fall side by side
into the hotel bed’s sheets,
fill in the spaces between
the pastel swirls and cigarette burns.

We hear the endless groan
of I-75’s midnight drivers
stretching the road North and South,
from the Florida Keys to
a fishing village in Canada
that time spared from the provisions of change,
the fast food chains and billboards.

We’re going more than North;
we’re pushing towards lenience,
the sleepy evergreen towns
where we are ageless,
and any two can be seen
walking together.

But what are the other couples
here running from?
Coconutty

“Hey!” Oh.

I’m sitting in the passenger seat of a half-wrecked beige’99 Toyota Corolla in our neighborhood junkyard that borders on the car impoundment center for the DMV, wondering where the hell the little red pull-tab on my roll of Tropical Fruits LifeSavers is. On every candy packaged in a roll shape, be it Mentos, LifeSavers, bubble gum, or Jolly Ranchers and even the occasional cd, there is customarily a little red piece of plastic tape that is wound into one extremity of the tube’s packaging and has an end sticking out, saying “Pull me! Pull me!” so you can grab it and rip open the top.

But why doesn’t mine? It’s vexing. It’s worsening the headache the dry heat’s created. I’m turning the thing around in my hands, rolling it around, flipping it over and checking both ends, but I can’t find it. Now I have to dig through the thin wrapper, with its joyous colorful bands, and then the second layer of protective waxy, metallic-sided paper to get to my delicious dyed, flavored, ring-shaped treats for a flavor explosion from the equator. And it won’t be neat either. With the little red pull-tab everything is tidy and starts on a good sloping diagonal so you can unravel further as you suck down those candies. But now it’ll be sloppy, uneven tearing. Who the hell doesn’t put a red pull-tab on their tube of LifeSavers? A Neanderthal, that’s who, someone who doesn’t care about humankind’s great advances in candy technology.

“Hey. Alex. Allllex.”

This is Mary. “Open this,” I say, squinting in the sun to look up at her and hand her my precious parcel. “It’s retarded.”

“Oh my God, you mouth-breathing idiot.” She deftly picks it open and hands it back. Mary has three mommies, owns no pants, and likes: making shapes like a capital A when two things meet at an angle, evenly-made stacks, symmetry, watching the currents in teacups,
and ending on strong cadences. Today she is wearing her usual sullen attitude. She crosses her arms and goes controposto, shifting her weight onto her right leg. She looks down at me. "I tried calling you, but I think your phone’s not on."

"Oh."

"So I looked here. Yeah... so, Chet is threatening to take down the stuffed alligator from the biology lab and jump with it from there."

"Ohh." I imagine Mary sauntering over and taking her sweet time after Chet had delivered his suicide threat. Mary moves for no one. And then, Chet flinging himself out of the window, alligator held aloft, flailing his legs, a jubilant suicide cowboy. Slow motion. The angle is from behind him, and he's going down onto a grey dusty plain. "Do you think he’s dead yet?"

"Eh, I don’t think the fall would even kill him. It’s the second floor. Break bones, yes. But not kill."

I ask, "Hey, what if he only got a little messed up, like he only broke his spine, and he was confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life and we had to take care of him?"

"That would suck."

"Should we go check on him?"

"I guess so."

Brushing the dirt off my jeans, I hop up and start walking. I’m a lot taller than her: she’s tiny and cute and I’m hulking and big, or at least just long and lanky. I switch on my CD player in my back pocket and suddenly there’s a self-justifying soundtrack for my life.

We sling ourselves over piles of refuse, amid jumping-up curls of dust puffs, because even though we’re here on a day they’re not operating body-crushing equipment that could finish us off before the workers even noticed our presence – this is a good place to sulk and hide from the world, so we’ve figured out the schedule – we really shouldn’t be here. I sometimes think on why they’d be unappreciative
of our presence. The air is tangy and metallic, free of the organic, rot-
ting-sweet smell of the average dump. Would the rusty stuff here give
us tetanus if we cut our hands on it?

It’s only a few blocks over to our school. “So how was the
party last night?” I ask. I talk over the music in my head. Right now
it’s Coldplay and I bounce a little as I walk.

“Meh, pretty good.” Mary makes that “meh” noise a lot.
“Everyone was pretty drunk. Liz started making out with some guy,
then realized what she was doing and freaked out and called John and
cried to him since it was cheating or whatever. And then I cut my
knees to bits because I stumbled up the stairs to my house because I
was totally wasted.”

“That sounds fun.”

“Yeah.” Mary also parties a lot. I have another one of my Life-
Savers, and it’s coconut, which is probably my most favorite flavor of
anything.

Could a LifeSaver actually be a lifesaver? If a little marzipan
Titanic went down in an iceberg-laden maple syrup ocean, and the
little gummy people were panicking and drowning, could LifeSavers
be little round O’s of hope for corn starch people before they dissolve,
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We get in by the back entrance, the fire escape door that says
an alarm will sound if the door is opened. The alarm never goes off.
Chet’s on the second floor, so we walk up through the stairwell in the
rear that isn’t near the main entrance with the poor teacher on guard

we hit on the road, and somehow forgot about.
It sleeps the sleep of those who may soon die,
or those who already have,
weeping for the long life we have ahead of us.

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-Taya Kitaysky
Family Dinner

After a good dinner, a city slowly builds inside each of us, where houses on hills and streets roam and graze like ghosts at night, and men and women hulk over glass bottles on the wooden stools of brightly lit bars.

When we lived beside a city, we could walk back from a restaurant together, our hands stuffed into our pockets as we sailed over sidewalks and gravel paths cool as the moon. Animals slinked out of dumpsters, fur of the greasy glamour found in pools of gasoline. The smell of the sea made the park grass flounder with fish; and the tops of the trees became a tunnel every time the wind passed through them.

Now, on the drive home—father in the driver’s seat, my mother beside him, and me hovering between them in the back—only the ashy mountains surround us. This winter has made the cities inside stiffen into towns. The houses stand still as cattle in a pastoral painting, and the hills cannot shift under the snow.

Those bars grow brighter and emptier, roads darker. We return to haunt our home, to acknowledge candles left burning in our cold bathrooms and glasses of water on the tables. We amble off to our solitary caves. And all the while, back in the trunk of our car, something large breathes, like an animal.

duty this Sunday. Our school has a grey-green theme, if you can call it that: walls that were either originally painted off-white or are now from dirt, grayish lockers that vaguely match, and a floor of warped linoleum tiles in a checkered institution-green and flecked white. With the ceiling lights out and only the bright sunlight from the windows at either end of the hall, there’s some shade, but what light there is picks up the glimmer from the warpings of the floor tiles. It’s nicer in here with the cool sea green covering instead of the dry, brown, dusty aridity and blazing sky of the junkyard. There’s none of the thousand students and everything seems farther than usual. The building naps.

Three rooms to our left, it’s the biology lab. I can’t hear anything, but just as Mary and I enter, Chet jumps up from the windowsill he’s been sitting on and dangling his feet off of, starts making lots of noise cutting down the stuffed alligator where it’s suspended from the ceiling as part of our biology teacher’s plan to make a dynamic environment that showcases the (now dead) wonders of life. “Don’t come near me!” he cries frantically over one shoulder. It’s a really weath- ered alligator, its once-verdant skin now a sickly, pickled, warty grey-green. The skin’s flaking off a little.

This is Chet. He has a strange name because his parents wanted him to have something unique, his mom is running for mayor, and he likes: the feeling of smooth cast plastic, blue hair, the glowing buttons on computers and printers when the lights are turned off, and parenthetical asides.

“I... vote we leave. The attention we’re giving is encouraging him,” Mary says. “It’s like a pet whose bad behavior you have to ignore.”

By now the majestic alligator’s swinging wildly, mouth slightly agape, as Chet hacks away at the nylon threads holding it up with a dissection scalpel, rusted from preservative chemicals like formaldehyde from the lab. Nylon is a pretty nifty invention of mankind, aided by our discovery of the polymerization process. I eat another
Life Saver, this time fruit punch. Fruit punch is the most heinous of flavors, but at least it’s sugary and with this one out of the way there might be a coconut flavored one waiting eagerly later down the tube for me.

“Chet, why are you doing this? Seriously,” I ask, hoping we don’t get a teacher wandering up to see what is going on.

In between sobs, he chokes out, “Jo broke up with me and she says I smell bad and I’m stupid and my ferret is missing and—Chet is about six and a half feet of scrawny teenager. It’s embarrassing to see him like this, like when he tried it two weeks ago with an English classroom on the fourth floor and two months ago with the chemistry lab. That one was actually pretty spectacular, since he threatened to drink the ingredients for nitro-glycerin and jump around a lot. Nitro-glycerin is actually a lot more complicated than just dumping some stuff together, but still. Mary and I, thinking of these episodes, look at each other.

“Yeah, but it’s gonna get us found out, and then we’ll get expelled, and your parents will dig up your grave and hurt you some more,” I say, the last part for levity.

Chet pauses for a moment. He goes back to the alligator liberation anyway. “You guys, I’m really gonna do it this time. Really.”

Asking “Did you take your meds today?” doesn’t help. I know he has a shrink and a prescription for stuff. I tried taking some of his meds once. It made me wish I had seasonal affective disorder like him.

One alligator thread snaps off. I think proportionally this is farther he’s gotten than the other attempts. Now he’s wrenching it, both arms around it in a bear hug, and jumping up and down. Crap.

And with that, the alligator snaps loose with a crunching sound of nylon tendons breaking off. Chet cradled it in his arms and strode over to the open window.

I start with an interjection of “Please, Chet, no, God, please, don’t, Jesus.”

“Chet, don’t be stupid,” Mary mutters, and strangely enough, that does it.

He pivots and starts shouting at her. “Don’t call me that, okay?! Don’t belittle me! I have real legitimate emotions! I’m working on them with my therapist!” He has on a Sublime shirt today. I approve.

Mary slowly backs out into the hall through the open door, and Chet follows. “You’re so unsupportive!” he’s saying, his voice rising. We’re back in the echoing corridor. “This is just a cycle, and you have to help me break it!” he adds, and then he looks in the other direction at the teacher who’s coming up the main stairwell to see what the heck was going on up here. “Oh.”

It’s a quick run down the stairs to where we came in, thunk thunk thunk thunk land and thud, quicker still with the adrenaline after the teacher saw us. He doesn’t pursue. We lean against the chill stuccoed outside wall in the shade and rest. Mary smacks Chet’s arm. “You retard,” she says. We make up our minds to go back to our respective homes, since it’s halfway through the afternoon now and school is tomorrow.

As I walk, hands in pockets, I wonder if Chet’s gonna go to a psychiatric ward like two of my other friends. One of them tried to o-d on Tylenol, the consensus of my friends being that it was pretty weak. I wonder if he’ll know how stupid this is and grow out of it. I wonder if I can offer them all a Life Saver. And maybe the tube’ll have a red pull-tab. Maybe we’ll all have red pull-tabs and it’ll all be neater.

Next week in health class I think we’re gonna do this topic of suicides and stuff, and maybe I’ll bring this up as a hypothetical situation or something to ask the teacher so the people in that class in the hard blue plastic chairs don’t know who I’m talking about.

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At A Roadside Hotel

We've stopped on the roadside, gone unquestioned by the midnight clerk only to ask ourselves where we're headed.

We leave our tiny packhorse car under an orange streetlamp in a whirl of midges and fall side by side into the hotel bed's sheets, fill in the spaces between the pastel swirls and cigarette burns.

We hear the endless groan of I-75's midnight drivers stretching the road North and South, from the Florida Keys to a fishing village in Canada that time spared from the provisions of change, the fast food chains and billboards.

We're going more than North; we're pushing towards lenience, the sleepy evergreen towns where we are ageless, and any two can be seen walking together.

But what are the other couples here running from?
Conversations trip across the phonelines:
long-distance families,
local take-out.
Underneath the footsteps and cable channels,
we hear the patterned sighs of sleeping lovers,
the breath of all hotels.

-Kara Krewer

A screaming child
or separate rooms,
unpaid bills
or a dying pilot light?

You can only imagine

Alfred dreams of his mistress.
Blue-Tinted

The world looks black and white and blurred when the moon is out. The sky is dark like cold and we're both pale out here.

We have no famous lines, no “here’s looking at you, kid,” or “frankly, my dear, I don’t give a damn.” We’re not quite classic yet.

But we play pretend that I wear skirts and you smoke cigars and own a bar. The scripts we carry crackle like they’re yellowed, not just wrinkled and water-stained.

Maybe our play-acting should end, but I’m not ready to bow to the crowd and step back behind the curtain, change into myself. I don’t waste words as a starlet, just give looks.

I know we’re too blue-tinted to be old, our games too insubstantial to outlast dawn. Still, I’ll keep my Southern lilt and smile-eyes until the sun rises and there are no more shadows.

-Anastasia Lugo-Mendez
Washing Windows

I spent Sunday washing windows
With my father. Holding the ladder
Steady as he sponged and squeegeed
With soapy vinegar water.
He decided to wash the insides
From his perch outside so I
Opened and closed the windows,
Staring at him through cob-webbed
Screens. Once he lost his balance
And for a moment he swung
His arms aimlessly, the expression
On his face like the time
My sister climbed over the railing
At the top of the stairs, standing
Two stories above a granite
Floor calling him to watch her
Jump. He said no over and over
Again, as if his voice could catch her, bring her down safely;
She said she’d prayed all night and
She knew God would help her fly.

My father caught hold of the window
Sill, uttered a shaky laugh and kept
Washing. He wasn’t the one who
Stopped my sister from trying to fly,
I had come up behind her and slid
My arms around her small body,
Pulling her back over the railing.
Yesterday, while my father worked
I pressed my hand on the screen
And afterwards, when everyone but the kathisophobe has sat down for dinner, there is an unspoken comprehension of their resemblance, the parallels they might find if they were ever to face their opposite, the second side of their coin.

In the end, though, they all depart for their private rooms and only the somnephobes are left to drift through the hallways like nightgowned ghosts; at the window, one keraunothnetophobe keeps his vigil for falling satellites, his eyes trained on the stars.

-Tory Wegerski
The high point is the keynote speaker, who takes to the stage after the phonophobes have been escorted to their soundproof rooms. A recovered glossophobe and a famous orator, he tells them his own story, stands before them a changed man and all the better for it, exhorting these myriad, anxious people to look beyond what they fear, to see the beauty inside, their personal haunting. At the mention of haunts, all the spectrophobes scatter, but the disturbance is brief and the speaker recovers.

It’s possible, he tells them all, for a caligynephobe to make love to a beautiful woman, for an anuptaphobe to embrace her singularity and rejoice in her freedom. It is only a matter of seeing things more clearly, he says, and as he steps down the scotomophobe applauds the loudest of all.
Riding in the Car with You

In the evening,  
the crisp hour of eight o’clock,  
the students would pour out of  
the Siegal College of Judaic Studies  
after its biweekly hiatus as  
Akiva High School.

You were not perfect.  
There would be the days  
when you would simply be human, distracted, and then  
have to slip on your overshoes and drive the 15 minutes to your carpool.

There were the days when the blizzards  
were so bad, that the school made students  
call to say they had arrived home.  
But you would be there then, waiting in line.  
You hated making the carpool wait,  
rather smiling at their smiles as your car came.  
You usually were third in line,  
a winner, in your daughter’s mind.

You would listen to WCLV, classical music, or NPR,  
but when they, the kids of the Heights area,  
got into the car,  
the radio would quiet, and you would listen to them.

You’d ask,  
What did she talk about in Hebrew this evening?  
Did they do something special for Rosh Hashanah,  
praying to make sure we were learning.  
You heard of our fun,

The Phobics’ Convention

Once the responses have all arrived,  
the hand-written letters from the cyberphobes  
shuffled in with the neatly-penned answers from  
the papyrophobes who mailed back their RSVPs  
on cloth napkins, drink coasters, the backs of matchbooks,  
and the phoned-in replies of the graphophobes,  
along with the polite declines of the agoraphobes,  
the organizers open their doors (and their windows,  
for the xylophobes) and welcome all the phobics.

There is some difficulty, of course—  
an event of this magnitude can’t go off  
flawlessly. The claustrophobes have to be coaxed  
from the corners and the claustrophobes pushed  
gently out of the center of the room.  
The chorophobes hug the edges of the dance floor,  
sipping their drinks, while the myriaphobe clutches  
his Shirley Temple like a life raft.  
It’s easy to identify the ablutophobes,  
clustered together in silent, mutual  
understanding of their aversion, not so easily  
accepted by others who can’t see the terror  
in soap. The osmaphobes, especially horrified,  
spray themselves with perfume and finger their travel packs  
of deodorant. The gymnaphobes, eyes carefully  
averted, urge clothing onto the vestiphobes,  
who don’t mean to flaunt their nudity. The heterophobes,  
one man and one woman, take up familiar positions  
on opposite walls, while the monophobe mingles  
with an almost manic determination.
which was about as soft as a pile of old rags. Instead, the aspects that continue to strike me are vague and on a much larger scale. I guess what it all comes down to, years later, is that feeling of unwavering accord: that harmony felt with people who aren't like you at all.

-Lucie Alig
Living with a Gynecologist
or What My Daddy Does

It isn’t that bad. It isn’t like we have condom lampshades and speculum wallpaper in our bathrooms. But ever since the day I learned about “woman parts,” Daddy’s always said Keep your eyes open and your legs closed. And then he’d clasp a firm hand on my shoulder and talk about how he was a boy once, how he knew what kinds of filthy things went around in their minds. I delivered a twelve year old today, and let that be a lesson to you! The penis is the enemy! Whatever you do, stay away from the penis.

Daddy delivers kids like me all the time, that’s why he acts the way he does. If you’ve got a vagina, then you can get pregnant, he says. Daddy delivers thirteen year olds rarely, fifteen year olds frequently, and sixteen year olds almost every week. Kids come crying out of kids, clinging to broken mothers who wish they didn’t exist.

But Daddy delivers older women too,
the soft-spoken man and woman had failed in raising the questions that we now expected to deal with. It's not that we already knew everything about camaraderie and love, even in their simplest forms. In fact, I doubt any of us knew much of anything beyond what we could scrape out of our own memories and experience. Some of us lived amid a happy marriage every day and some of us had never seen it happen. The only common trait we all shared was that we were in that trailer, one way or another, because of our spirituality, or the spirituality of our parents, or as is the case for Joe DiMaggio, because we happened to live adjacent to an all-inclusive church.

I had never heard Holland, the UUI piano accompanist speak until one night when she came to talk to us about gender identity. I always felt a little guilty when I saw her because years ago, I had stolen one of the hymnals from under the seats. I had liked her accompaniments so much that I wanted to take them home and try to pluck them out myself. It was weird to see the person against whom I had indirectly committed my first crime as she stood there preparing to speak. As a class, we had acquired a keen awareness towards when something was about to be revealed. One of our teachers introduced Holland and told us that she had undergone a sex change and was here to discuss some of the emotional changes that the operation had stirred. It was the last night of OWL, and as creatures of habit, we all expected the program to end on a normal yet mildly conclusive note. Holland started talking in a voice that I never would have matched to her face. It was low and masculine. She told us about why she felt more comfortable as a woman, how the change was inevitable thanks to certain instances in her childhood. It was obvious something was coming. I was cramped onto a loveseat with two boys, one on either side, and heard one of them swallow his gum. We were all completely still as she told us about how she used to live right next to a hockey rink and would walk to and from games there all the time. One night, when she was about our age and walking home in the dark,
The trailer had a bathroom, a kitchen, a front door, a back porch. There were times when my mind would drift into thoughts about how livable a place like this would be—a place that's small with a sense of comfort. Everything in the air felt tight, like the space between you and every single object and person in that room was unbreakable. I remember wishing that I owned the trailer, that maybe someday I could spruce it up and live there.

I don't believe OWL would have been as effective had the class not contained a fairly equal number of boys and girls. These days, girls overpower everything. The college process has shown me that there are no liberal arts schools in the country whose males outnumber the females. Because of the rather artistic path I've chosen, I've been tricked into picturing the typical classroom as one with many girls and a few boys hidden in the corner. But so much of what we read and discussed in OWL was about balance and equality: the precise numeric value of a hormonal imbalance, how to give a relationship as much as you take from it. We took full advantage of the fact that for every girl in the program, there was a boy to even things out. It became our instinct to fall into a boy-girl-boy-girl seating arrangement whenever we gathered around a point of interest—whether it was a stereo blasting Three Six Mafia's "Slob on my Knob" (whose lyrics we studied as degrading to women) or a guest speaker from the congregation I'd left.

Sometimes the speakers were boring, like the time an old married couple came in and spoke of commitment, how hard (but yet so lovely) it is to keep a marriage going these days. As they spoke, regardless of how uplifting their words may have been, we could all feel how this didn’t carry the same momentum as our other discussions. I wasn’t surprised when none of us utilized the anonymous question feature that day. Even though, like always, we were encouraged to scribble out our curiosities,
weight of the food it contained, was the “negative” area: the part of
the room you went to if you disagreed with a statement. Even in a
case like Susan’s that seemed so clear-cut, kids would still scatter in-
dependently. People were completely sincere in how they voted. I
still remember the clump of girls that stood in the “positive” area by
the front door. They too would have chosen the looker over the old
friend and because they admitted to it so fearlessly, I couldn’t have
thought less of them if I’d tried. It was always surprising to see peo-
ple’s beliefs portrayed visually. Even when the issue at hand was as
basic as good vs. bad, nice boy vs. bad boy, the whole point was how
you placed yourself in relation to others. There were many times
when I thought to myself that surely everyone will agree on this one,
but that seldom proved to be the case. We had become shameless.
We stood where we believed we should stand with our past, our mor-
als, everything in consideration.

I got to know that trailer so well. I grew accustomed to
the smell, the mix of Fe-breeze and Clove, whose origin was never
identified. A couple weeks into the program, I had a pretty good idea
of who’d be sitting where and who would shuffle in twenty minutes
late. The cupboards, I learned, were usually stocked with bags of
chips and pretzels that had expired the year before. This may be part
of the reason why people never actually snacked during the snack
break, but just as we never ate much, we didn’t talk much during
break time either. The transitions in and out of the subjects at hand
were too awkward. It can take a lot of concentration and willpower to
go straight from discussing sexual abuse to what happened in school
that day. Instead, breaks just allowed us to further observe each other.
We looked around, made comments here and there. I would let my
mind do whatever it wanted. Sometimes I’d look up at the ceiling and
count the knots of wood on the paneling. The darkened circles were
scattered around in a way that reminded me of a photograph I’d seen
of the United States at night. Whichever parts of the country had the
The Babies
by Graham Swindoll

Characters:

DARLENE - A young woman.
MARLA / MASKED WOMAN - A young woman.

Setting:
The interior of a small New York apartment. Walls are implied, except for
one strip of a dirty white wall. A tacky couch. A moveable standing mir-
ror. A coffee table with a phone, a radio and a bunch of silver thumb
tacks on it.

(Lights fade up on DARLENE and MARLA’s apartment. Music pours
forth from a radio. It might be “Strange Fruit” being sung by Billie Holi-
day. Enter DARLENE, smiling and pretty.)

DARLENE
Hello? Marla? Geez. She left the radio on again.

(DARLENE enters the living room. She mechanically takes off her coat,
sets it down and turns off the radio.)

Daddy loved that song.

(A MASKED WOMAN emerges from behind the couch. She holds a
large kitchen knife)

MASKED WOMAN

preciated the bulletin board more and more. It was a sight to rest my
eyes on when I didn’t feel like making eye contact with the lewd boys
across the room or our middle-aged teacher as he pointed out the com-
mon mistakes of teenage relationships. OWL was only re-enforcing
how rule-less our religion really was. Instead of Wednesday night
mass, here we were, sitting in a trailer asking questions about mastur-
bation, learning how a person can be born male and still die female. I
can’t say I’m too surprised that all the images on that board were the
faces of writers. Learning to understand others has always been at its
core, even if some versions of the theology aren’t quite as “anything
goes” as our Universalistic branch. Biblical Unitarianism does be-
lieve in Jesus, and that Jesus was God’s son, while the Rationalist
Unitarian believes that Jesus did exist but was nothing more than a
good, wise man. Though this rationalistic approach was held by
Frank Lloyd Wright and Florence Nightingale, their beliefs were ap-
parently a little too coherent for their faces to grace our walls. UUI
had “Universalism” in its name for god’s sake, and our program was
all about each other and people in whole. Sylvia Plath’s humanism
shone through with much of her work, which is religiously linked
through its topics: the fathers, patients, the domestic and the ordinary
to which abstract undertones are secondary.

Every week, we’d spend the final minutes of the ses-
sion on a process called “vertical voting.” I always looked forward to
it, the way it caused everyone to release their opinions at the very last
minute. We’d all stand up while the teacher read out a hypothetical
statement and then we’d relocate depending on whether or not we
agreed with what they’d read. For instance, one of these statements
could be something like “Susan has two potential dates to the dance.
One is an old friend whom she respects and appreciates and the other
is mean and good-looking. Susan chooses the latter.” Everyone who
thought Susan was in the wrong would go stand by the refrigerator.
The fridge, which whirred and hissed at a volume proportional to the
of "sexuality" and "compassion."

Similar to the procedures of youth group, we began each session by lighting the same red ceramic chalice, whose flame acted as a strange reminder of the way in which these direct sexual teachings were linked to our religion. Just like everything else on the UUI grounds, the classes felt relaxed as we covered the nine subjects: gender roles, gender identity, body image, masturbation, puberty, love, respect, commitment and values. We were all quick in noticing that the course itinerary did not mention abstinence once. In fact, contraception as a unit was messily intertwined with the "values" session when one of our teachers announced that if we wanted to, we could spend our fifteen minute snack break putting condoms on bananas. It was impossible not to contrast OWL's priority of topics to that of my sixth grade health class at school. There we learned the plumbing of the human body as if its varying parts were different battles in a war or different elements in a compound. The teacher, who doubled as the P.E. coach, made up vague code names for body parts like core tube and john and whenever he reached a loss of words regarding sex, would burst out in "just don't do it guys. Please don't do it." In the trailer, however, there were no illustrations of human bodies and instead, movie posters for Clockwork Orange and The Shining adorned either side of the refrigerator. There was also a bulletin board of FAMOUS UNITARIANS with pictures of Tolstoy, Vonnegut, Sylvia Plath and Louisa May Alcott. I understand my religion's history well enough to grasp that even though these four people were all Unitarian, they did not necessarily share the same beliefs. How could they? Not only were they all from different countries and eras, but Unitarianism is constantly shifting. Perhaps the most enduring definition I've heard is that it's the "religion for the non-religious," but even still, there's no denying that many Unitarians still hold intense spirituality. Tolstoy or any other person with a famous essay called "The Kingdom of God is Within You" should be considered far from secular. Over time, I ap-

(Man Voice)
Hands up!

DARLENE
Marla...? What are you doing?

MASKED WOMAN
(Man Voice)
I said hands up, bitch! Stand on that chair.
(DARLENE does so)

DARLENE
Marla, I don't understand. I know it's you. We've lived together for years...

MASKED WOMAN
(Man Voice)
If you don't stop talking, I'll cut your face! Then we'll see who's a pretty girl.

DARLENE
We're both pretty Marla. We're all pretty.

MASKED WOMAN
(Man Voice)
No, no they aren't. Some of 'em are ugly.

(MASKED WOMAN takes out a camera.)


(MASKED WOMAN snaps a couple pictures.)
DARLENE
This is really just silly, you know?

MASKED WOMAN
(Man Voice)
Shut up, shut up. Lower your leg, turn your head right. Put your arm behind your head.

(MASKED WOMAN readjusts the mirror so she can be seen in it while she photographs DARLENE)

DARLENE
Why do you want to see your self Marla? You’re still Marla.

MASKED WOMAN
(Man Voice breaking)
I’m not Marla!

DARLENE
Who are you then?

(MASKED WOMAN readjusts the mirror again.)

MASKED WOMAN
(Man Voice)
Right arm left, up. Left arm on left knee, lift skirt. Don’t tell any body, but I’m Bill Marino.

(Snap, snap, flash flash.)

DARLENE

---

so many things in life. And for many of us the comparison rang true—our beliefs were in a constant flux. In fact, I’m pretty sure that all ten of us were tentatively agnostic except for one atheist named Joe who looked like he was straight out of West Side Story. He was Italian, and for the longest time, I thought his last name was DiMaggio. Clearly I knew nothing about baseball, but even that aside, the name just seemed to fit him so well. Sometimes Tim allowed Joe to light our chalice with his cigarette and the girls would go wild. My decision to stop attending youth group hit me rather suddenly when I realized one day that I’d rather be in the actual congregation, standing up for (but never singing along with) the many hymns, their names generic like “Spirit of Life” or “Rejoice!”

Eventually, Sunday mornings became crucial for things besides church: sleeping in, homework, general free time. Even though I stopped going to the actual service, my parents were still driving me to UUI on a weekly basis. As a thirteen-year-old, Tuesday nights from six to nine became reserved for “Our Whole Lives,” an essential sex-ed class for pre-teens. My parents gave me no choice. To them, this was the alternative to church. They said that because they were willing to drive me there and pay a couple of dollars for the flimsy little textbook, I had no reason not to go.

The mission statement behind OWL, as we lazily titled the program, is to teach seventh through ninth graders about self worth, sexual health, responsibility, justice and inclusiveness. The four teachers had all undergone months of training, which seemed to have made them feel even more authoritative and intense. On the first evening of the program, they—an elderly gay man, a young attractive woman and a middle-aged couple—bolted the trailer door shut, looked us straight in the eye and told us that this was not a joke. Everything that happened inside the trailer needed to stay within the trailer walls. As they outlined the course, we couldn’t take it seriously. A group of boys were already scoffing at the mere mentioning
There's an old joke that whenever a Unitarian dies, they reach a fork in the road on the way up to heaven and have to choose which path to take. The choices are a) to go directly to heaven or b) to contemplate going to heaven. And of course, the joke runs that any Unitarian will choose b. I first heard this during post-service coffee hour one Sunday, when it was loudly announced by a man with tattooed eyebrow extensions and a salmon-colored mug. UUI, my church at the time, had a rule where visitors or guests of the church couldn't use a plain white mug. They had to differentiate themselves. But I guess for many people, that's what Unitarianism's all about: not only sticking out, but contemplating the motives for being different.

I was baptized Episcopalian in a huge, two-thousand member church somewhere in Southern Indiana. My brother underwent a similar process, and we both have more godparents than we know what to do with. By now, my godmothers serve little purpose in my life besides calling every now and then and feeling obligated to send birthday presents, which, in the case of my "aunt" Barbara, has been the same fairy-tale book four years in a row. In fact, my mom now admits that the only reason they went through with the whole procedure was so that my great-grandmother could live the last months of her life with contentment. After her death, my parents officially joined the Unitarian Universalism Church of Indianapolis.

I stopped going to youth group in junior high. The few times I did go, I always felt a little uneasy. They sent us to a church-owned trailer (there was no room in the church itself) to talk about non-church-related topics. Tim, our group leader, was obsessed with roller coasters. He had no job, besides leading a youth group, and spent all his time traveling to different amusement parks. Whenever a religious topic did come up, Tim would find a way to parallel its significance to coasters: how they're grounded, supported, how they go down and come back up like Really?

MASKED WOMAN
(Man Voice)
Really.

DARLENE
Daddy? You're back?... to photograph me.

MASKED WOMAN
(Man Voice)
Yeah, yeah.

DARLENE
Just like you used to!

MASKED WOMAN
(Man Voice)
Yes, Baby girl.

DARLENE
I can't believe it... I never thought it could possibly happen.

MASKED WOMAN
(Man Voice)
I'm here!
(Telephone rings.)
(Woman Voice) Aren't I?

(DARLENE falls limp out of her pose. Snap, flash.)

DARLENE
Marla.

(The MASKED WOMAN runs out of the apartment and off-stage. DARLENE ignores the phone, which soon stops ringing. Then the same woman returns, unmasked and knifeless. It is MARLA. She runs in, mock-frantic.)

MARLA
Darlene! A maniac with a knife tied me up in the other room! He had a mask...

DARLENE
Oh... Yes, I see.

MARLA
He threatened-

DARLENE
-To cut your face.

(MARLA is disappointed. She sits on the couch, facing the blank wall.)

MARLA
I'm real lonely, Darly. I've been lonely since we moved to the city.

(DARLENE reaches under the couch and takes out a slightly crumpled picture. It is a picture taken out of a window, looking out into a section of New York City at night. DARLENE tacks the picture to the blank wall. Both girls look at the picture.)

DARLENE
Shut up. There's lots of people out there.
The Firetender

Ash and smoke are what you receive for your labor. Though you sit surrounded you will always be alone, for few understand the burden you have undertaken.

You taste acrid pine wood smoked, the smell of sap evaporating into steam. Others may experience these things, but only you know when to stir up the logs to rekindle the flame, when to add dry needles, when to add newspaper, when to douse, when to smother.

Only you know where the fire is the hottest, the coals, and while many will leave when these bright tongues have faded, you stay because you know it only takes one spark to leap the ring.

And while others revel, you sit apart, and Prometheus takes that ember, races down the rocky slopes of Mount Olympus, spreads a firestorm across Earth from Hiroshima to Dresden. And you, lame Hephaestus, bound to your forge, must weather this storm, take it, confine it.

you must keep the flame from running wild, as you too might want.

-Chase Yurga-Bell

MARLA
No one I want to know.

(Pause)

I miss Daddy.

(DARLENE sits down and holds MARLA against her breast.)

DARLENE
Me too. He was like a mother to us, so sweet...

(The Telephone rings again. MARLA tries to go to answer it, but DARLENE holds her back. The phone stops ringing, they both fall slack.)

MARLA
Let's go back home.

DARLENE
We can't go back.

MARLA
Why not?

(DARLENE reaches under the cushion of the couch and pulls out a pile of photographs. The two girls look at them.)

That one's real pretty. And that one, when your doing the splits. I like the ones where you can see him.
(DARLENE turns on the radio. The same song is playing. MARLA takes the pile of pictures and starts tacking them on the wall, studying them the whole time. The pictures are of DARLENE and/or MARLA, in many different poses. Occasionally there is a mirror, and in the mirror a masked man holding a camera can be seen. DARLENE sits, transfixed on the song.)

Why can’t we go back, Darly?

DARLENE
Because there’s nothing there.

(Fade.)

END

where skin is left.
I pull at an issue
which is not stenciled on.
His words are at a loss
as my thoughts bound out
above his head.
Before he leaves me
he slips out a new knife,
sits me in a chair, in our kitchen,
hands me a cup of green tea,
and teaches me how to
cut my own stencils.

-Laurie Ortega-Murphy
My Brother, Connor

Stencils my brother cut
crack across my cheek,
painted when he still received
money for the subway
from our mother.
My brother sprays fresh paint
forcing my mouth to spit the truth
that the paint delivers.
Truths that I can’t see
because they exist in grey factories
and buildings with reflective windows.

The nape of my neck is a cigarette, the
smoke, a money sign. Circling above
it is a rifle shooting at that flag
with those stars.
Cheeks are the eyes of a woman,
who has only seen dim light and on
my nose her tears splatter in grey.
One day he pleads to put Chomsky
on my back.
I say no.
Bakunin?
I can’t preach his logic
or ideals.
Tomorrow I’ll try harder
not to buy from China, only
No Sweat.

I get to tomorrow,
and stroke my chin

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Example:
What an amazing journey this Red Wheelbarrow Reading has been. Call me over the summer 821-3472

or...

you're cool!
like chicken-cool!
don't ever change!
email me!
Kot Puse

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THE RED WHEELBARROW LITERARY MAGAZINE AND COLORING BOOK!

IT'S A HARD RAIN'S GONNA FALL!