THE RED WHEELBARROW
A ONCE RESPECTABLE PUBLICATION

2006, VOLUME II
EDITED BY:
CHASE YURGA-BELL
WAH MOHN
MY SISTER APPEARED ON JERRY SPRINGER BECAUSE...

I'm from Chicago and that's how I roll.

She likes to eat the food in the green room.

She fell in love with a Mexican Whooping Llama who was involved with Tom Cruise at the time.

She's a militant vegan.

She's been married four times in the past four hours.

W.C. Williams is her baby's daddy—the white chickens have proof.

She was cheating on me with my Siamese twin brother.

She thinks Barry Manilow is hot.

She's a man-eater. Make you work hard. Make you want all her love.

So much depends upon

a red bucket

smeared with grease

filled with fried chicken

- Chase "Original Recipe" Yurga-Bell
Editor's Page

This Red Wheelbarrow was edited by:
Chase Yurga-Bell
Wah Mohn
Direct all of your complaints to them.

We would like to thank everyone who submitted. You guys are what make it happen. A huge thank you to Maggie Mularz and Chloe Zwiacher, who sacrificed literally billions of hours to helping us through our technical incompetence. Thanks also to Kat Reece, A. Papanos of Interlochen, KFC, and James Spica for his fabulous Red Wagon Superhero. Thank you Therese, for making the copies and bringing the whole thing together.

DAG YO.

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Jerry Springer Quotes: Various

The Red Wheelbarrow

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

William Carlos Williams
SWEAT PLAY

This hot-shit father spends his days preaching what he don’t believe, talks about Jesus, then goes home and fucks his next door neighbor while his wife buys meat from the boy at the store, who looks at her sweating creases with more than affection. She is old. She is tied down, shoulda never married a preacher, she thinks, shoulda never married a priest, but she walks outta that store with that meat, the heat and the tension straining her floral housewife dress, her breasts hanging down to her waist. Looks at the workmen ‘cross the street with their tight asses in those blue jeans that fit like rough skin, their tight asses catching her eye like an expensive jewel in a locked shop. Stands and stares, clutching the meat, dripping water down her fingers. She knows about the neighbor, she knows about her husband, grasping that younger skin with those hands he has not touched her with in fifteen years. She had never felt his seed in her belly, never wrapped her arms around a hill of motherhood, never saw herself in the eyes of another. She don’t want him anymore than he wants her; she rolls away from him in the bed, dangling her legs, holding in tears ‘til salt comes out her skin, thinking, just thinking ‘bout that boy in the store licking his lips, those workmen with their tight asses, smelling of piss and wet cement holding her body, her body twenty years younger, praying, praying she won’t have to, won’t have to see him, that hot-shit father again.

-Helen Spica

Miles in some direction, a teenage boy is running as fast as he can, bag of chips clutched in his soaking fist. A woman hums herself to sleep, the same notes like a broken record in her throat. A Styrofoam box filled with leftovers is forgotten on a curb where a man had stopped to tie his shoelace. The bottom is cracked and leaking. On the other side of the block, a man with no hands feels his stomach churn and announce the empty spaces below his ribs. He rubs a circle into his belly with the end of his arm.

Steve grins to the clouds and the rain slides over his teeth, his squinting eyes that see everything that isn’t there. The sound of wind is merely gasps of astonishment from the spectators below him. His blue toes wrap around the edges of the railing. He holds his arms straight out to balance. The cotton nightshirt clings awkwardly to his skin and flaps around him like a ghost’s ragged robes.

A few yards from the center of the bridge, his feet slip and he tumbles over the edge. His heart skips a beat, but he still grins, expecting the slap of his back against a net. Lightning flashes and his tumbling form is silhouetted for a split second against the crash of electric blue sky, and he almost seems to be in flight. The water slaps and churns beneath him, ready to swallow him in the sound of its applause.

-Rebecca Chou
"son" but stumbles, "Michael."

She turns to face the wall, knowing exactly what he was about to say, but says nothing in return. She misses her older brother too, but doesn’t remember him enough to be sad for as long as her father. Lighting ripples silently in the sky miles away. Her father closes the door, darkness shutting in on her room.

Michael replays in her mind the image of her friends at recess all braiding each other’s long locks, a train of braid-making she could only watch. When she told her father about it, he chuckled and said that she should have just gone to play soccer with the boys. They didn’t want her, though. She didn’t want them either.

She grabs at the empty space by her pillow where Miss Muffins used to sit, dressed in blue and a ribbon tied in her deep red curls. Miss Muffins went to Goodwill after the ceremony, along with Michael’s paint set and plastic bead bracelets. She looks up at the window above her bed, where beating rain has started as a drizzle and escalated to a rhythmic downpour.

She watches the storm fall down in sheets, wind whipping the autumn trees into each other. Michael sits up and leans her head against the glass, listens to the hushing voices, branches and rain whispering what sounds so much to her like Michelle, Michelle, Michelle.

VI.

Steve sleepwalks across the steel bridge, walking toe-heel-toe-heel across the thin railing slick with rain. He is the Stupendous Stephano again, the way he was forty years ago. Master of the tightrope. The lighting is a spotlight on his young limber body, the thunder a magnificent drum roll. The distant city lights glistening in the rain are the sequins of his wife’s costume as

MY NAME IS SUE

The night after my mother left, my father emptied out her closet and put her clothes on my bed. He asked me to wear her high heels so he could hear her coming from down the hall. But finds only me wearing her black cocktail dress she wore last Christmas. Her scent vaguely imprinted into the fabric.

After she left, my aunt told me I looked just like Sue, except her hair. It was much shorter than mine. He got the kitchen scissors and cut my hair, I watched his Adam’s apple bopping up and down whenever I lit her Virginia slims.

I pushed him away when he first kissed my neck, his lips trembling as he recited his first love letter to her, written the night his hands went grey from dreaming.

After waiting for three months for her, I let his kisses wrap around my ear lobe, let his body press against mine, his head lying on my chest, his voice, a distant echo, whenever he says my name, Sue.

At night my father sneaks off into the bathroom,
and opens the medicine cabinet above the sink. He reaches in and finds her lipstick, and smudges the rouge across his mouth.

His tongue gently scraping the upper lip. He tries to remember how she tastes. His eyes closed, so he doesn’t have to see himself in the mirror, embarrassed that I caught him once again.

-Ines Pujos

He likes to let himself be swept down the big city streets by crowds hurrying nowhere. He will stop and exit the stream to pick up a dried fig from a basket, sniff it and bite down into the bruised burgundy of it, drop a quarter in the shopkeeper’s hand. Never the same shop. There are too many shops exactly alike to keep track, anyway. He once spent an evening sitting on a curb, watching people through the windows of their apartment building across the street, a grand puppet show. A man undressing for bed, a woman pacing back and forth while on her cell phone, a girl leaning her forehead against the glass and watching the cars until she saw the Wanderer looking up at him, gasped, and closed the curtains.

Right now, the Wanderer is just sitting at his kitchen table counting bottle caps he found in gutters and alleyways, some flattened like coins. He scratches his head and exhales, his breath sparse and smoky. He gulps down a cup of dark, lukewarm tea, which he had forgotten on the table an hour before. It is bitter and he smacks his lips, clicks his tongue at the roof of his mouth. Half a mile south, a train drags its cargo fast along the steel bridge. The water below seems to tremble as it rolls over.

He lets out a laugh that hits the thin walls hard and says, “Twenty two, exactly. We still got it, George. We still got it.” He grins and nods at his reflection in the window.

The evening comes on thick and tinged with yellow, the moon bathed in industrial smog.

V.

“Tell me a story,” says Michael, a girl with a boy’s name and a boy’s haircut.

Her father rubs her head, her hair short above her ears and says, “Not tonight. Just go to sleep—” and he almost says
Charlie could possibly pick up his hat and keyboard at the end of the day, and where he went then, or if he just slept there until morning.

The girl with the pink sandals and shining black braid waits with her mother at the opposite corner and dances, the fried dough from a vendor hot and raining sugar in her hand.

IV.

The Wanderer lives at the outskirts of the city, the area where all the houses look the same except for their color. Even so, each house has been painted some variation of blue or brown. They are like boxes of cereal on a grocery store shelf, all tall, thin and crowded right up against the others. On the street by the river, the houses even appear to be in danger of falling off the edge and splashing into a heap of wood and plumbing in the water.

No one is aware that he lives here, though. To the majority of the city—those who have heard urban legends told at bedtime, and discussions of sightings while waiting for a bus—the Wanderer is the Wanderer. To them, he belongs nowhere and to nothing. A man might mention in passing that he thought he saw the Wanderer at a pub late one night, and this would gain the same wide-eyed attention as a celebrity sighting. The Wanderer is the antithesis of celebrity; nobody knows quite who he is. Elusive and insignificant, most wonder if he even exists or if he is less than human, like a brown leather coat brought to life by moonlight.

Or just a shadow.

The house directly to his right is empty, a For Sale sign five years old stabbed crookedly in the little plot of lawn. To his left, three men hide illegal pit bull fights in their basement, deal pot in the kitchen, take women to their bedrooms. They stay quiet and inconspicuous to avoid the police.
his ashtray. She stepped out of the car and ground out the cigarette with the toe of her white sandal. Her toenails were painted to match her fingernails. Her hair hung down past her shoulders, almost a white blonde. There were sun freckles along her high cheek bones and her lips were defined by a dark pink lipstick. Her body was all smooth curves, from her jaw line to her tan shoulders to her delicate wrists to her knees and ankles. She stood only a few feet away from him. Her hip was cocked to the side and one shoulder was lifted a little higher than the other, defining the line of her breasts, waist, and thigh. Her hair rustled in the wind. She looked like she came out of an advertisement for Wrangler Jeans.

That day the sky was a hazed, cloudless blue. Hot Colorado days are like that. The colors are muted. The distant mountains suddenly begin to look like the painted backdrop for a low budget movie set. Carl’s wife liked to tell him that most men were like the Colorado sky. Hot and hazy in the mornings, full of wind in the afternoon, and stormy at night. He was never positive about what this meant, but he was fairly sure it was a negative thing. He loved his wife, but often times it felt like she had given him little besides insults and children. Being a man of faith, he never resented her. She kept him in touch with reality, an objective hand to guide him through business deals and through social situations. He loved her, but as with all relationships, there had always been something missing. He had never seen anyone so entirely a woman as the one before him now.

She stuck her thumbs into the waistline of her jeans and shifted her weight. She emitted confidence, the kind that would draw attention even in a crowded room. Carl imagined touching her and taking in some of that confidence for himself. She was studying him now, challenging him. He could feel her eyes behind the sun cross. Some avert their eyes, tapping their feet nervously in anticipation to get away from the dirty man with no hands. Charlie notices that a few feet tap to the rhythm of his music. Some people smile, some take pictures on their cell phones. A boy stares with eyes like billiard balls, taking it all in.

A tourist and his wife search in her khaki fanny pack for some money. They pull out a twenty and the man walks over to Charlie’s baseball cap, letting the bill flutter down out of his hand. Charlie looks up but doesn’t stop playing.

“Much appreciated,” he says. His forehead and nose shines with oil, eyes red. He closes them and sighs, pulling himself back to that bar thirty years ago at ‘Nam. Those pretty women with the dark eyes used to stand so close to him, twist their long fingers in his hair.

The tourist couple whisper a few feet away, discussing how
III.

Electronic music jangles and bounces against the high-rise apartments, catches the back fenders of passing cars and rides down the street with the trailing exhaust fumes. Tourists and local small business owners emerge from sub-level parking lots, where the stairwells leading up to the world are concrete caves buzzing orange, reeking of piss, and narrow enough cause panic attacks in the claustrophobic.

In China Town, barrels and baskets of dried roots and fish waft their ancient perfumes from in front of shops. A woman with skin that droops at her neck squats on the stoop of her store, and jabbers in Cantonese with a customer. The young lady’s daughter shuffles in pink sandals and chews the end of her thin braid, staring at the cardboard-and-sharpie sign above dried squid reading, “5 dollar for 3 peaces! Good price!”

There are ten restaurants down the length of the street whose front windows display whole ducks and large slabs of pork, red and dripping with sauce, hung on hooks to water the mouths of passers-by.

On the street corner of an intersection where Asian faces and Caucasian faces merge and mix every time “WALK” lights up, Charlie sits cross-legged, hunched over an electronic keyboard. Both of his arms end at his elbows, the skin there stretched shining over muscle and bone cut short like an Oscar speech. He pushes keys and slides switches deftly with his stubs, having mastered the ability to push up to five keys at one time. His whole body sways and jerks above the keyboard, stubs bumping out upbeat improvised tunes. Piano, guitar, drums and synthesizer sounds blend and echo all at once.

Pedestrians can hear the music from every corner of the intersection, especially the crowd in front of him waiting to glasses. She ran her tongue over her teeth.

“Here’s the deal,” she said, and took a step towards him. He tightened his grip on his beer. “I hit a doe yesterday. Whitetail. It’s dead as road kill, but it’s head is in pretty good condition. I was told you are just about the only taxidermist around, so here I am.”

Carl furrowed his brow and scrubbed his mustache. “You hit a deer and you want me to turn it into a gamehead for you?”

She looked away, took her glasses off and flipped her hair out of her eyes, then replaced the glasses on top of her head. Her eyes were blue. “Shit,” she muttered, “you aren’t going to tell on me or anything, are you? Like what, I should have called it in or something? Do I need to have some sort of a license to get my kill taxidermied? You guys stuff dead animals. You’d think shit like that wouldn’t matter.”

“I didn’t say I wouldn’t do it.”

“You implied.” She shifted her weight again, sighed. Her chest heaved beneath her wife beater, her breasts became more distinct. She stepped forward again. “You got another beer?”

He took a final drag of his cigarette and dropped it in his ashtray. Usually he was careful about drinking and driving, but he couldn’t imagine refusing her anything. He opened up the cooler beside his chair. “Bud Light or Fat Tire?”

“I’ll have the Bud Light.” He took it out of the cooler and popped the top open. Smooth steam coiled like a flame from the opening. She stepped onto the porch, wrapped her fingers around the bottle. His skin tingled where her nails brushed his hand.

“Where is she?” He asked. She took a swig and looked at him.
"Where is who?" She smelled like French vanilla perfume and cigarettes.

"The deer. The one you hit."

The goddess laughed. Her laugh was wheezing, like an engine trying to turn over. It was incredible. "In my car. I wouldn’t leave it on the road."

"You have had a deer carcass in your car for a whole day?"

"It’s in my trunk. The smell doesn’t reach the front. It’s not like it can get stuffy in there anyway, with one window smashed to shit. You wanna see it?" She smiled in a way that suggested something else. Carl shifted uneasily, and grunted again.

"Let me show you around inside so you can decide what you want." She lifted her beer bottle up in a ‘cheers’ sign, and walked towards the door. He opened the door for her, and she went in. Her hips swayed a little too much.

The inside of the Taxidermy Parlor smelled musty. The antler chandelier that he had put together a few years ago was the room’s only light. The parlor used to be a mail depot in the 1800’s, and had been built with only one large room and no windows. When Carl’s family bought it from the state in the 1950’s, they hadn’t gone troubled themselves with installing any, since they only used it for storage. When Carl’s parent’s died, he inherited the little cabin he decided it was the ideal place for his business. It was far enough away from the nearby towns to bother anyone with the stink of the tannery he had put together out back, but close enough off of Highway 149 that it wasn’t difficult to get to. He put on a new roof, insulated the walls for winter, installed electricity, and filled in the gaps in the hardwood floor. The fireplace hadn’t been used in years, so Carl had torn it out and built it again with riverstones. The only furniture was a large desk in the center, where he kept his telephone and did paperwork, a rocking chair near surroundings fuzzy and surreal. It’s at times when she notices her mouth moving with the words, or her seventy-year-old hips swaying, that the music swims back into her consciousness. It triggers the memory of dancing with her husband. She can feel his hand at her waist, his clothes smelling warmly of cigars. For a moment, she dances with the mop, almost trips while allowing herself a small turn. The low-battery symbol flashes on the Walkman at her hip.

II.

Greg tells his son of forty four years that he has hunted ghost-rabbits, that he has skinned them and eaten them in the moonlight, while hail scattered like seeds and froze in his hair. The son holds his father’s shaking shoulders, frowns at the way his jaw keeps tightening and loosening, as if he is still cold. The dim light of the study makes Greg’s face look flat and unfamiliar.

"Look," grunts the old man. "I have proof. Feel how soft their skins are. You can’t get any rarer than ghost-rabbits."

The man pulls a worn handkerchief from inside his coat, flattens it out against his thigh and strokes it. He smiles quietly like he is running his fingers through fur. The blue of Greg’s eyes seems to be thinner every month. They blink at nothing in particular.

The son bends down and pulls the blanket tighter around his father. He decides it best not to mention how far they are from any forest or field, nor to openly question the existence of these creatures. He knows Greg does not quite see the fast-passing headlights on the nearby highway. He doesn’t hear the tri-tonal moan of the train pulling lumber and steel westward.

The son touches his fingertips to the thin cotton square. "It’s nice, Dad."
Margaret is like a silhouette or a paper doll at the end of a gray Baker High School corridor, mopping the mascot's white eagle face, which has been painted onto the linoleum. The music crooning from her headphones is the same—Frank Sinatra's "All the Way," the only song she ever listens to. The song ends and her hand moves to the replay button on her CD player through habit, the rest of her completely unaware of her hand's action. She continues, the ragged, wet mop-end sliding heavily over the floor like a slug. She does not hear the varsity track team approach and round the corner toward her, sneakers squeaking and thudding.

In the classroom to her left, the dean is speaking with the French teacher, casually slipping in phrases like *savoir faire* and *déjeuner* as if to woo her with his impressive knowledge of the language. He is hoping she will accept an invitation out to lunch with him sometime. There is a Chinese restaurant fifteen minutes away that has especially good noodles.

Margaret can see him through the doorway as she moves down the hall, thinking that his lips almost match up to Sinatra's voice singing, *it's not good unless she needs you...*

Members of the team skid and slow to a jog as they feel their shoes slip and slide across the eagle's wings. Margaret looks up just in time to move out of the way of a tall, blond boy who puts his hand out and pushes her when he passes. She cannot decide if this was rudeness or because he truly couldn't stop and turn in time. She couldn't tell if his mouth was forming the words "move it" or "excuse me."

Margaret doesn't even realize how she barely hears the music anymore. It has become the only sound of her world, so familiar and repeated that often she mistakes it for silence. The music forms a soft cocoon around her, turning the rest of her...
"I'll take a look at her."

The goddess strode towards the open door. She tossed her hair, looked at him over her shoulder. "One thing I'll tell you," she laughed, "it sure was a bitch to get it into the trunk. It's guts kept spilling everywhere. It took the damn thing forever to die."

Carl stopped following her. "She was still alive after you hit her?"

"For about ten minutes or so. Don't worry, I didn't have to wait too long." For a second he could see her standing over the deer, waiting impatiently for its death. He wondered if making a gamehead was the first thing she thought of when she hit it.

Carl started moving again. He walked down, off the porch to where she was already standing at her Camaro. She popped the trunk.

There, in the trunk of her shitty 1974 Chevrolet Camero, was the deer. From the way her shredded skin hung into her abdomen, he could tell that most of her insides had in fact spilled out. Blood was matted around the shards of glass in her shoulder. Her forelegs, thin as his wrist, were shoved sideways so that he could see the protrusions of bone through the flesh where her legs had been snapped. Her neck was bent, cricked sideways so that she stared at him. Her eyes were open. The white and brown fur across her face and neck was clean and smooth. There were still a few dots along her back. Barely older than a fawn. She looked innocent, and he felt guilty.

"Well? How long do you think it will take?" The woman said behind him. The doe looked at him pleadingly from the trunk.

"I'm sorry," Carl said, "I don't think we have a deal."

She blinked. "What?" The woman laughed and stepped closer.

"Sorry. I can't do this for you. You should report this accident to the cops. They'll straighten it out for you. It's illegal."

Her smile faltered a little. "Alright. How much do you want for..."
it, then? Five hundred? Seven hundred? I want this thing stuffed and mounted, not rotting in the back of my car."

Carl broke eye contact and looked at the ground. The paint on her toenails was peeling off. "I said I can't do it. There's another taxidermist in Salida, but he might decide to call the cops for you."

The woman looked at him and a muscle in her jaw tightened. Suddenly she looked very young, like a teenage girl about to throw a tantrum. "So you are the prick you look like," she said, "F*ck you."

She slammed her trunk and slid back into the car. Her hips didn't move quite as much as before when she walked. The engine struggled, then turned over, and after a painful sounding shift of gears, she dipped away back down the road, the dust trailing away in puffs behind her.

He walked slowly back onto the porch and spied his Stetson. He bent down and put it back on, tipping it a little over his eyes. That night he would make a point of thanking his wife for buying it for him. That night he would make a note of all she gave him.

-Allie Quiller
NURSING HOME

I try to visit her when I have the time. She gives me stale Saltines, flat soda in a Dixie cup, a smile: the gifts of her retriever-like love. Patting my knee, my grandmother lavishes me with compliments I don’t deserve, the skin on her arms paper thin, veins blue and slumbering beneath. It almost makes me angry, this kind of innocence.

Her roommate hasn’t had a visitor in six months. When she isn’t asleep, she screams. The nurses know not to come. Where’s my husband? she wails. Where is he? My grandmother turns up the volume on the TV.

She doesn’t seem to mind the stops and starts in conversation, the old movies I bring along. Peter O’Toole conquers Aqaba in weak technicolor, the pinks and greens of Pepto-Bismol tablets. She stares at our hands, her bones like a pile of twigs in my palm.

There was a time we could afford to keep her at home. I don’t remember it; the sad diabetic arms as foreign to me as the sands of Arabia blowing on the screen. I kiss the top of her balding head good bye for the night and she says she won’t wash for a week.

I promise myself I will start visiting regularly and hurry down the antiseptic hall, past arms reaching out like the fragile necks of cranes, past the stink of age, hoping not to be caught by a stare, to snag like cloth on the hook of mercy.

"Yes," it says, "That’s exactly what I’ve been telling you. But it’s not as easy as unfolding a map and using your fingertips to make sense of the directions."

"I’m not going to hold the door open, waiting for you." my body says. "I’m going to continue to function because that’s why I was formed around you. You have to decide when you can live in your own home."

-Phoebe Rusch

---

you can cross with powder on your feet so you don’t slip.

I can talk to my body about lines. Roads that mean more than travel—
they mean more than distance,
they are a connection.

"I’m not going to hold the door open, waiting for you." my body says.
"I’m going to continue to function because that’s why I was formed around you.
You have to decide when you can live in your own home."

-Jenna Davey
TRAVELING

I can regard my body as something separate from me as solid and empty as a steam engine—propelling itself forward with hot air.
A fleshy machine of skin wrapped around a system of veins and arteries, muscles and bones. Running parallel and crossing over each other—like twisting blue roads you can follow from the outside with your finger tips.

I feel like I’m living inside a map and I ask where it leads—
“But you don’t know?” it says,
“I’m the pages your words are typed onto, I’m the frame you are held up by.”

“But where are you mapping? When I hold out my wrists I don’t know what I’m looking at.”

Train tracks built the lines on the country—leading themselves from one person to the next person and made that line a solid rope.
**BREAKING INTO BLOSSOM**

*Suddenly I realize
That if I stepped outside my body I would break
into blossom.*

- "A Blessing" James Wright

I have never spent the night on the sand. I have only slept in tents, in houses, taken naps on the hammock I used to have in the backyard. Everything has been sheltered. The only owls I have ever heard were filtered through a blue tent, the penetrating scents of autumn mixing with the faint odor of mildew in my sleeping bag. I carry the memory of these smells with me like photographs or scars: I would be lost if couldn't pull aromas down from the wind like a photo album. After it rains in the summer I lie down on my driveway, listening to a noise that reminds me of chalk being dissolved. With water, I have to get down close to discern the different notes wafting from the ground. I remember these different flavors, detecting in the wind undertones of cigarettes, or sweat, or the way the dog I had for ten years smelled before she died. Noses buried into glass bowls, it's the same way some people evaluate the bouquet of notes in wine.

When I get packages from my father, they always smell exactly like the office where he lives. I have never noticed this in mail from anyone else. I don't see my father often anymore, but almost every time I visited we ended up in Bodega Bay taking the bus for three hours from Santa Rosa. He hasn't had a car since I was seven. As I got older, the bus rides became a time for me to stare quietly out of the window—something he thinks is rude, especially when I put on my headphones. I watched grass waving by and, once we got closer, the coastline. Hills grew out of the distance to rise up around us like the square quilts in my down comforter.

I smell the eucalyptus trees as soon as the doors of the bus open. We have eight hours before our return to Santa Rosa. A few
buildings is blue more often than in the last town, more like the
color of the girl’s jeans. Sally hated long car rides. She was
always restless, always wanting to be outside, where there was
space to stretch her legs. The girl’s legs are too long for cars,
even an SUV, but the mother will not stop here. She is not sure if
she has lost me yet.

It is almost dark when we reach the next town and they stop
at the gas station there. I park in the back in an attempt to hide
my car while they pull up to the pump. I slide the pocketknife
Sally bought me into my back pocket, then walk around to the front
of the store, sit down on a bench there. The mother and daughter
emerge from the SUV, the girl stretching her long, slender legs
towards the ground, practically bursting out of the car like Sally
used to do. She heads in my direction as the mother begins to pump
gas. I rest my head in my hands so she won’t recognize me as she
passes me on her way into the store. I want to watch her a little
longer, want to make sure the mother does not see us together.

The restrooms are on the side of the building, the kind you
have to get keys for from the cashier, so when the girl comes back
outside with a key attached to a big piece of blue plastic, I
assume that’s where she’s going. I wait a moment, give her time
to get around the corner, then follow.

When Sally comes out of the restroom, her hair is in a
ponytail, like she used to wear it for me. I take her by the arm,
lead her back towards the truck, but she pulls back like she isn’t
ready to go yet. She says she wants me to let go, but I want to see
what she was painting. I tell her this, pull out the pocketknife
she gave to me and cut her arm so I can see it. It looks just as
real as in her paintings, just like the first time I saw it on her
wrists, the color of those small red berries spreading over white
skin. It tastes like radishes. I tell her she can have her garden
back when we get home.

-Chloe Zwiacher

years ago we used to spend days here, renting a house along the
small beach at Salmon Creek, separated from the ocean by a large
finger of sand. My dad cooked in the kitchen and we played scrabble
on the sun porch in the mornings. He taught me to heat the house by
doing all the day’s cooking early, and to save the fireplace for
the evening. This grey-shingled house with blue shutters was where
I learned how to bake pies. I’ll always remember the strange
variations we made—mango-peach apple or raspberry-apricot apple.
There always seemed to be extra apples around. With no television
or computer we played board games, read, or went out to walk among
the sand dunes on the beach. Sometimes we only strayed right
outside the doors, waiting along the edge of Salmon Creek with a
bag of stale bread. We fed the ducks, seagulls and geese, the only
birds that would come near us. One year, we saw a goose that was
separated from the rest of the flock—ugly with a deformed beak. He
didn’t fit in. We nicknamed him Gorgeous George and I tried to
give him more food than the other birds. The next summer, when we
returned, George was gone—killed by the flock he tried to join, or
maybe he’d left, finding somewhere else to belong.

Even times like this when we take daytrips to Salmon Creek,
I bring bread for the ducks and seagulls. It is hard to fit in my
backpack between my Latin textbooks, novels, and blank notebooks—
things to make the hours on the sand seem more “productive.” In
the problems with the bread I am reminded by a line by Wendell
Berry, “they had to break her before she would lie down in her
coffin.” But somehow, it works out, bending or snapping in half as
things often do. We feed the birds, taking pictures with my dad’s
disposable camera, and begin to climb up the side of one of the
sand dunes; I am trying to find an area in the sand to shift into
the shape of my body. After living by many different sandy beaches
I have learned that the only way to get comfortable is to mold the
place to my contours, as individual as those tempurpedic mattresses
on TV. While clumsily making my way to the top I think of my
brother. Every time he calls, he talks about taking me with him
skiing down black diamonds or hiking the John Muir trail in California. The JMT is his latest conquest and after 211 miles it ends at the top of the highest point in the lower 48 states. He talks to me from outpost stations and says that he “tries not to make himself available” but that he was thinking of me while he was in the Sierra Mountains. I would love to go with him but it’s never going to happen: I hate skiing and I can’t even walk up this 30 foot incline of sand without running out of breath.

When I find the place where I want to spread out for a few hours, the air is chilly. I’m a little way from the ocean but I can still hear its lull in the distance. I watch the patch of seagulls perched on the sand closer to the shore rise into the air as someone runs toward them. On top of this dune, I am backed by small evergreens, immature trees or just shrubs— I can’t tell. I’m above everything, or at least that’s how it seems. Directly below me on the dune, some kids are playing along the shoreline of the creek. They’re digging sandcastles next to the water as their dog swims out, trying to reach the other edge. The children don’t go in. I wonder if it’s because of the leeches. Their black lab doesn’t seem to mind. For a while, I make my place in this sand and study the first few chapters of Wheelock’s Latin. I hate declensions, don’t understand how anyone was ever able to read in this language as easily as I can read in English. There is no discernable order to the words in a sentence and I have to look at an entire block of text to figure out what any of it means. I decide to see where my father has made camp—probably lying on the only part of the beach where the sun is even slightly warm. He should have skin cancer from all the tanning he does.

I find him and, leaving my backpack in the sand next to his left arm, I walk deeper into the dunes. It’s fenced off because of the damage people can cause to these fragile domes of sand. I want to know what happened to “survival of the fittest.” How do people manage to toe that line? Some things aren’t supposed to stick around forever. Still, these days it seems like everything natural...
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On the way back, I walk next to the ocean. I listen to the waves whipping the wind around me. Reverting to a game I used to play with my dad when I was little, I run past the watermark of the last wave on the sand until the bottoms of my shoes are wet. I am daring the waves to catch me, to spoon me into the ocean like stray feathers or shells. I almost always win. My hair is tangled by the wind and I can’t see the resemblance clearly, except in their pallor.

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let my father walk ahead as I bend down to wrap myself completely in
their fragrance. I want to stay here by this shed for hours, but have to
catch up. There isn’t another bus until morning. Before I leave, I take
a clump of nasturtiums from a vine and tie them into a wreath that I use
to crown my dyed hair. In a few months these flowers will all be gone
along with the birds that survive off of their nectar: the August air is
already turning crisp. On the bus I snap some of these flowers off their
vine and press them into my notebook next to some Latin vocabulary words.

Those pressed flowers were lost long ago, but even now I remember
how they smell. Some nights I want to crystallize my lungs with the smell
of everything, imagining certain aromas into an existence as tangible as
the winter that’s around me now. My lungs stay warm no matter how deeply
I breathe. I remember the day in physics when I learned that I could
never truly touch anything—had never touched anything in my life. It had
something to do with the molecules not being able to line up, but I felt
confused for days afterward. Everything I had ever touched was only half
there. But still, I remembered the feeling of the sand rolling around in
my shorts, sloughing my skin because I wanted to cut my outline into the
flats between the dunes. The discomfort didn’t matter. Science doesn’t
know what it is talking about.

I am wrapped in clothing from neck to toe, but those nasturtiums
are wrapping around every nerve in my body. They are sinking tendrils
into my pores for support and climbing. But their leaves stay unfurled:
everything is dormant in this cold. When the air is warm again I will
walk down to the lake. On the beach, I will be alone. I won’t leave one
footprint in the sand, won’t find my place on the earth. Eternity isn’t
worth watching wind file the hills around me into nothing. These trees
outside my window will all die, whether or not I know what they are
called. Nothing of mine will stay forever. I am content to wait, letting
these vines bed down beside me—breaking into blossom when the season and
their buds are ripe.

—Tove Danovich
inspired by the photograph "Nuns on a Beach" by Larry Bartlett

Where have they been, these nuns?
They sit on a beach of rocks,
pebbles, and stones as numerous
as the Bible stories they know by heart.

Here, they shed
the holy skin that binds them under
the habits of cotton and linen.
Under veils and tunics, they are threadbare,
thin from years of Hail Mary's,
confession on their knees,
praying for forgiveness
for the sins of the world, the weight
of history's mistakes on their shoulders.

What do nuns talk about?
Their lives before the convent;
childhood mistakes, adolescent love,
grasping for something
getting nothing, emptiness in the palm of a hand,
memories slipping away like the steam
from their tea, circling around their heads
then up, up, up, towards God.

The wind blows their veils back,
revealing their necks,
lets their hairlines peek
grey against black and white.
Age creeps into their faces,

What do nuns dream of?
The warmth of a man's hand
in theirs, the caress of his breath
on her neck. Or was this never
what they wanted? Was the devotion
so deep in the dark corners of their
hearts that God filled every inch of space
in once-empty bodies?

The cool gold around their fingers,
wraps a promise to the Lord.
They twist the rings, over and over
etching circles in their skin.
Each one feels the heaviness on her hand,
their marriage to Him, as complex as the rosary.
God, His weight in precious metal,
glints in the fading sun.

-Meggie Cramer
THE WEIGHT OF FAITH

inspired by the photograph “Nuns on a Beach” by Larry Bartlett

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Age creeps into their faces,  
their fingers trace  
soft wrinkles, the letting go of past hopes.

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On the way back, I walk next to the ocean. I listen to the waves whipping the wind around me. Reverting to a game I used to play with my dad when I was little, I run past the watermark of the last wave on the sand until the bottoms of my shoes are wet. I am daring the waves to catch me, to spoon me into the ocean like stray feathers or shells. I almost always win. My hair is tangled by the wind and I can imagine La Llorona, a Hispanic variation on the Banshee, wanting to walk these foggy shores. Wearing a white gown, she haunts places beside water. She is always crying for her dead children. At the end of her life, La Llorona searched the shoreline for daughters she drowned until she either died herself or simply disappeared. Somewhere a seagull cries. The wind picks up again and I pull my sweatshirt tighter around me. I think she is here, leaving the Southwest to search under grey clouds. I look at the sky and pick out shapes between them—the only one I find reminds me of a duck.

My father and I walk to the bus stop through the hills of houses along the creek. The paint has faded on all of them. We pass the ducks waiting patiently by the water and have to ignore them: they already ate everything we had to give. I laugh at the sign that says “Bump Ahead,” placed fifteen feet in front of another sign that simply states “Bump.” We are almost out of Salmon Creek when I see a small white shed with peeling paint. Like most of the houses, there are no cars parked in front—it’s basically a ghost town this late in summer. But beside that shed, nasturtiums are winding their tendrils up the drainage pipe. To me, these flowers are far more erotic than orchids will ever be and I wonder what it would feel like to get out of a shower and let them wind around my limbs like a lover’s touch. I

I’m on the highway when I find them. I’m about to pass their dark SUV when I see that the two of them are alone. The older one is driving. She must be in her forties, weak. The other is maybe nineteen, and she moves her mouth so much she must be singing along with the radio. I watch the way she produces long, round sounds, how her lips form soft padding around the words so they come out softly, gently. I imagine that voice in my ear, singing to me.

She leans back in the grey leather seat, looking at whatever she is fiddling with in her hands. She is wearing a dark tank top, so her arms are bare. Her neck is bare; her pale, healthy, young skin is bare. They are in all likelihood mother and daughter, but I can’t see the resemblance clearly, except in their pallor.

We are alone on the highway. Wherever they’re going, they will not find another route for miles. There are only trees lining the pavement, and the occasional abandoned-looking pasty shop or view of Lake Michigan that are the trademarks of the UP. I can have them to myself here, so I stay even with their car, watch them from my Chevy until the road changes back into two lanes. Then I follow them.

It is much easier to see them from the back. I can watch them comfortably, see them speak without swiveling my head between them and the road as the daughter moves her perfect mouth, sending those cushioned words to her mother’s ear. Staying close, I wait for each moment she turns her head or moves an arm, forming arcs in the air, creating invisible objects with her hands. She is blonde. Like Sally.

The mother has dark hair and is wearing black. She begins to speed up. I am staying too close now. I slow down a bit, give them a few more feet between our bumpers, but I cannot see the girl as clearly from here. There is too much tinted glass between us. I speed up, get close again because I want to see more of her skin.

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Sally used to paint things like that. Always with red. She painted wine and blood and small red berries. I liked the blood best of all; how she made it beautiful, made it leak from a white hand.

The car slows down. I slow down. It speeds up again. The mother does not like my tailgating, but I stay with them. The road opens up into four lanes, and I pull up beside them again. I am closer still to her, and I can see the place on her neck where I would make the cut, on the side, near the base, where the neckline of a t-shirt would fall. The mother looks at me, and I see dark eyebrows pulled low over dark eyes, her thin mouth in a frown. She will not keep her daughter from me.

We come upon more cars, and they speed up again, faster than before, passing the other cars. I accelerate, begin to sweat, pull my wheel back and forth, pushing the truck to weave quicker. My tires squeal on the hard turns, but I cannot keep up, and the road is closing into two lanes. I am stuck with a view of the white back of a semi. “How’s my driving? Call this number,” it says, but I do not have a cell phone. I cannot tell them from here that he has cut me off too soon.

I see red everywhere in the trees. Her blood is on the leaves, the pine needles, the ground. I know if I opened the trees to the ringed flesh inside, I would see the white of her skin. But here, behind the semi, on this one-lane road to nowhere, her skin is out of reach, and I can feel sweat on my palms, on my forehead. I readjust my hat, smooth the coarse hair beneath it. I think of her hair, how it must be soft like her skin. I will pull it, tear it out, listen to her scream as I run my hands over the rest of her body, grab at her. Damn this semi. Damn the grey metal framing and the dirty white and the black tires and the smoke trailing behind it.

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I fall backward onto the sand. Opening my eyes, I notice for the first time that the sky has gone entirely grey since I left the sound of the ocean. I feel like I should make a sand angel and do—spreading my arms wide and scrubbing the backs of my limbs clean of dead skin. Sand gets everywhere. It is in my sweatshirt, my hair, eyebrows, shoes, and creeping its way up the fabric of my shorts. I don’t even try to stand up or shake small particles off me like a dog. There is something melancholy about this place and the absence of sound, save for the wind that is blowing the tips of sand dunes into almost nothing. The wind polishes these dunes down like small stones. A feeling like loneliness wells up inside of me. Only a few years ago I used to write poems about a place in Bodega just like this. I wanted to fall asleep with someone I loved, nestled next to him more safely in this sand than we would ever be in a bed. I would run with him across the whole of this place, sand flying out from our ankles. The footprints we left would never be brushed away by the wind—an eternity of sorts. In the morning I imagined myself waking at sunrise to the sound of horses. He would still be asleep, who ever he might be and I would open my eyes and see a black silhouette rearing up, cutting its shape out of the red and gold
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buildings is blue more often than in the last town, more like the color of the girl’s jeans. Sally hated long car rides. She was always restless, always wanting to be outside, where there was space to stretch her legs. The girl’s legs are too long for cars, even an SUV, but the mother will not stop here. She is not sure if she has lost me yet.

It is almost dark when we reach the next town and they stop at the gas station there. I park in the back in an attempt to hide my car while they pull up to the pump. I slide the pocketknife Sally bought me into my back pocket, then walk around to the front of the store, sit down on a bench there. The mother and daughter emerge from the SUV, the girl stretching her long, slender legs towards the ground, practically bursting out of the car like Sally used to do. She heads in my direction as the mother begins to pump gas. I rest my head in my hands so she won’t recognize me as she passes me on her way into the store. I want to watch her a little longer, want to make sure the mother does not see us together.

The restrooms are on the side of the building, the kind you have to get keys for from the cashier, so when the girl comes back outside with a key attached to a big piece of blue plastic, I assume that’s where she’s going. I wait a moment, give her time to get around the corner, then follow.

When Sally comes out of the restroom, her hair is in a ponytail, like she used to wear it for me. I take her by the arm, lead her back towards the truck, but she pulls back like she isn’t ready to go yet. She says she wants me to let go, but I want to see what she was painting. I tell her this, pull out the pocketknife she gave to me and cut her arm so I can see it. It looks just as real as in her paintings, just like the first time I saw it on her wrists, the color of those small red berries spreading over white skin. It tastes like radishes. I tell her she can have her garden back when we get home.

-Chloe Zwiacher

years ago we used to spend days here, renting a house along the small beach at Salmon Creek, separated from the ocean by a large finger of sand. My dad cooked in the kitchen and we played scrabble on the sun porch in the mornings. He taught me to heat the house by doing all the day’s cooking early, and to save the fireplace for the evening. This grey-shingled house with blue shutters was where I learned how to bake pies. I’ll always remember the strange variations we made—mango-peach apple or raspberry-apricot apple. There always seemed to be extra apples around. With no television or computer we played board games, read, or went out to walk among the sand dunes on the beach. Sometimes we only strayed right outside the doors, waiting along the edge of Salmon Creek with a bag of stale bread. We fed the ducks, seagulls and geese, the only birds that would come near us. One year, we saw a goose that was separated from the rest of the flock—ugly with a deformed beak. He didn’t fit in. We nicknamed him Gorgeous George and I tried to give him more food than the other birds. The next summer, when we returned, George was gone—killed by the flock he tried to join, or maybe he’d left, finding somewhere else to belong.

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Suddenly I realize
That if I stepped outside my body I would break
into blossom.

— "A Blessing" James Wright

I have never spent the night on the sand. I have only slept
in tents, in houses, taken naps on the hammock I used to have in
the backyard. Everything has been sheltered. The only owls I have
ever heard were filtered through a blue tent, the penetrating
scents of autumn mixing with the faint odor of mildew in my
sleeping bag. I carry the memory of these smells with me like
photographs or scars: I would be lost if couldn’t smell aromas down
from the wind like a photo album. After it rains in the summer I
lie down on my driveway, listening to a noise that reminds me of
chalk being dissolved. With water, I have to get down close to
discern the different notes wafting from the ground. I remember
these different flavors, detecting in the wind undertones of
cigarettes, or sweat, or the way the dog I had for ten years
smelled before she died. Noses buried into glass bowls, it’s the
same way some people evaluate the bouquet of notes in wine.

When I get packages from my father, they always smell
exactly like the office where he lives. I have never noticed this
in mail from anyone else. I don’t see my father often anymore, but
almost every time I visited we ended up in Bodega Bay taking the
bus for three hours from Santa Rosa. He hasn’t had a car since I
was seven. As I got older, the bus rides became a time for me to
stare quietly out of the window—something he thinks is rude,
especially when I put on my headphones. I watched grass waving by
and, once we got closer, the coastline. Hills grew out of the
distance to rise up around us like the square quilts in my down
 comforter.

I smell the eucalyptus trees as soon as the doors of the bus
open. We have eight hours before our return to Santa Rosa. A few

‘HIC

‘Why, this doesn’t pertain to chickens, stalk-
ers or literary things at all!’ some of you
might be saying. Well, it’s the holidays, so
live with it, Scrooge. Drunken angels are
funny.
TRAVELING

I can regard my body as
something separate from me
as solid and empty as a steam engine-
propelling itself forward
with hot air.
A fleshy machine
of skin wrapped
around a system of veins
and arteries,
muscles and bones.
Running parallel and
crossing over each other-
like twisting blue roads
you can follow from the outside
with your finger tips.

I feel like I’m living inside a map
and I ask where it leads—
“But you don’t know?”
it says,
“I’m the pages your words
are typed onto,
I’m the frame
you are held up by.”

“But where are you mapping?
When I hold out my wrists
I don’t know what I’m looking at.”

Train tracks
built the lines on the country—
leading themselves from one person
to the next person
and made that line a solid rope
I try to visit her when I have the time.
She gives me stale Saltines, flat soda in a Dixie cup, a smile:
the gifts of her retriever-like love. Patting my knee,
my grandmother lavishes me with compliments I don’t deserve,
the skin on her arms paper thin, veins blue and slumbering
beneath. It almost makes me angry, this kind of innocence.

Her roommate hasn’t had a visitor in six months.
When she isn’t asleep, she screams. The nurses know
not to come. Where’s my husband? she wails.
Where is he? My grandmother turns up the volume on the TV.

She doesn’t seem to mind the stops and starts in conversation,
the old movies I bring along. Peter O’Toole conquers
Aqaba in weak technicolor, the pinks and greens
of Pepto-Bismol tablets. She stares at our hands,
hers bones like a pile of twigs in my palm.

There was a time we could afford to keep her at home.
I don’t remember it; the sad diabetic arms as foreign
to me as the sands of Arabia blowing on the screen.
I kiss the top of her balding head good bye
for the night and she says she won’t wash for a week.

I promise myself I will start visiting regularly
and hurry down the antiseptic hall, past arms
reaching out like the fragile necks of cranes,
past the stink of age, hoping not to be caught by a stare,
to snag like cloth on the hook of mercy.

-Phoebe Rusch

you can cross
with powder on your feet
so you don’t slip.

I can talk to my body about lines.
Roads that mean more
than travel-
they mean more than distance,
they are a connection.

“Yes,” it says,
“That’s exactly
what I’ve been telling you.
But it’s not as easy
as unfolding a map
and using your fingertips
to make sense of the directions.”

I can read why my heart races
when the car slams
on the breaks,
and why I smile with my
mouth and my eyes and my cheek bones
when it is calculated in my head.

“I’m not going to hold the door
open, waiting for you.”
my body says.
“I’m going to continue to function
because that’s why I was formed around you.
You have to decide
when you can live in your own home.”

-Jenna Davey
it, then? Five hundred? Seven hundred? I want this thing stuffed and mounted, not rotting in the back of my car."

Carl broke eye contact and looked at the ground. The paint on her toenails was peeling off. "I said I can’t do it. There’s another taxidermist in Salida, but he might decide to call the cops for you."

The woman looked at him and a muscle in her jaw tightened. Suddenly she looked very young, like a teenage girl about to throw a tantrum. "So you are the prick you look like," she said, "Fuck you."

She slammed her trunk and slid back into the car. Her hips didn’t move quite as much as before when she walked. The engine struggled, then turned over, and after a painful sounding shift of gears, she dipped away back down the road, the dust trailing away in puffs behind her.

He walked slowly back onto the porch and spied his Stetson. He bent down and put it back on, tipping it a little over his eyes. That night he would make a point of thanking his wife for buying it for him. That night he would make a note of all she gave him.

-Allie Quiller
"I'11 take a look at her."

The goddess strode towards the open door. She tossed her hair, looked at him over her shoulder. "One thing I'11 tell you," she laughed, "it sure was a bitch to get it into the trunk. It's guts kept spilling everywhere. It took the damn thing forever to die."

Carl stopped following her. "She was still alive after you hit her?"

"For about ten minutes or so. Don't worry, I didn't have to wait too long." For a second he could see her standing over the deer, waiting impatiently for its death. He wondered if making a gamehead was the first thing she thought of when she hit it.

Carl started moving again. He walked down, off the porch to where she was already standing at her Camaro. She popped the trunk. There, in the trunk of her shitty 1974 Chevrolet Camaro, was the deer. From the way her shredded skin hung into her abdomen, he could tell that most of her insides had in fact spilled out. Blood was matted around the shards of glass in her shoulder. Her forelegs, thin as his wrist, were shoved sideways so that he could see the protrusions of bone through the flesh where her legs had been snapped. Her neck was bent, cricked sideways so that she stared at him. Her eyes were open. The white and brown fur across her face and neck was clean and smooth. There were still a few dots along her back. Barely older than a fawn. She looked innocent, and he felt guilty.

"Well? How long do you think it will take?" The woman said behind him. The doe looked at him pleadingly from the trunk.

"I'm sorry," Carl said, "I don't think we have a deal."

She blinked. "What?" The woman laughed and stepped closer.

"Sorry. I can't do this for you. You should report this accident to the cops. They'll straighten it out for you. It's illegal."

Her smile faltered a little. "Alright. How much do you want for

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**LETTER TO ANNE SEXTON**

*IV*

The retarded aunt, who used to chase after my mother with a knife, screaming, is dead. Yesterday I lay on my bed sobbing from exhaustion for an hour. Two minutes after I stopped the call came—a heart attack that no one saw coming, 64 years in the make. The next day a package comes for my birthday. I get an idea; I run to the phone and call my father, want a plane ticket to Louisiana instead of this violin. But it's already paid for and the well is dry. He's sorry. By the time she was my age she lived in an Alexandria asylum, where all anyone ever said were words like lobotomy and Thorazine. If we had been there we would have killed them, Anne, and afterwards appreciated the irony when they strapped us down on either side of her and started tapping the tiny pick-axes against our foreheads. Years later, they would tell our families how we all could have been saved had they known then what they know now. But what's done is done, and anyway, I'm exhausted from waiting.

-Kat Reece
Margaret is like a silhouette or a paper doll at the end of a gray Baker High School corridor, mopping the mascot’s white eagle face, which has been painted onto the linoleum. The music crooning from her headphones is the same—Frank Sinatra’s “All the Way,” the only song she ever listens to. The song ends and her hand moves to the replay button on her CD player through habit, the rest of her completely unaware of her hand’s action. She continues, the ragged, wet mop-end sliding heavily over the floor like a slug. She does not hear the varsity track team approach and round the corner toward her, sneakers squeaking and thudding.

In the classroom to her left, the dean is speaking with the French teacher, casually slipping in phrases like *savoir faire* and *déjeuner* as if to woo her with his impressive knowledge of the language. He is hoping she will accept an invitation out to lunch with him sometime. There is a Chinese restaurant fifteen minutes away that has especially good noodles.

Margaret can see him through the doorway as she moves down the hall, thinking that his lips almost match up to Sinatra’s voice singing, *it’s not good unless she needs you...* Members of the team skid and slow to a jog as they feel their shoes slip and slide across the eagle’s wings. Margaret looks up just in time to move out of the way of a tall, blond boy who puts his hand out and pushes her when he passes. She cannot decide if this was rudeness or because he truly couldn’t stop and turn in time. She couldn’t tell if his mouth was forming the words “move it” or “excuse me.”

Margaret doesn’t even realize how she barely hears the music anymore. It has become the only sound of her world, so familiar and repeated that often she mistakes it for silence. The music forms a soft cocoon around her, turning the rest of her...
“Where is who?” She smelled like French vanilla perfume and cigarettes.

“The deer. The one you hit.”

The goddess laughed. Her laugh was wheezing, like an engine trying to turn over. It was incredible. “In my car. I wouldn’t leave it on the road.”

“You have had a deer carcass in your car for a whole day?”

“It’s in my trunk. The smell doesn’t reach the front. It’s not like it can get stuffy in there anyway, with one window smashed to shit. You wanna see it?” She smiled in a way that suggested something else. Carl shifted uneasily, and grunted again.

“Let me show you around inside so you can decide what you want.” She lifted her beer bottle up in a ‘cheers’ sign, and walked towards the door. He opened the door for her, and she went in. Her hips swayed a little too much.

The inside of the Taxidermy Parlor smelled musty. The antler chandelier that he had put together a few years ago was the room’s only light. The parlor used to be a mail depot in the 1800’s, and had been built with only one large room and no windows. When Carl’s family bought it from the state in the 1950’s, they hadn’t gone troubled themselves with installing any, since they only used it for storage. When Carl’s parent’s died, he inherited the little cabin he decided it was the ideal place for his business. It was far enough away from the nearby towns to bother anyone with the stink of the tannery he had put together out back, but close enough off of Highway 149 that it wasn’t difficult to get to. He put on a new roof, insulated the walls for winter, installed electricity, and filled in the gaps in the hardwood floor. The fireplace hadn’t been used in years, so Carl had torn it out and built it again with riverstones. The only furniture was a large desk in the center, where he kept his telephone and did paperwork, a rocking chair near

surroundings fuzzy and surreal. It’s at times when she notices her mouth moving with the words, or her seventy-year-old hips swaying, that the music swims back into her consciousness. It triggers the memory of dancing with her husband. She can feel his hand at her waist, his clothes smelling warmly of cigars. For a moment, she dances with the mop, almost trips while allowing herself a small turn. The low-battery symbol flashes on the Walkman at her hip.

II.

Greg tells his son of forty four years that he has hunted ghost-rabbits, that he has skinned them and eaten them in the moonlight, while hail scattered like seeds and froze in his hair. The son holds his father’s shaking shoulders, frowns at the way his jaw keeps tightening and loosening, as if he is still cold. The dim light of the study makes Greg’s face look flat and unfamiliar.

“Look,” grunts the old man, “I have proof. Feel how soft their skins are. You can’t get any rarer than ghost-rabbits.”

The man pulls a worn handkerchief from inside his coat, flattens it out against his thigh and strokes it. He smiles quietly like he is running his fingers through fur. The blue of Greg’s eyes seems to be thinner every month. They blink at nothing in particular.

The son bends down and pulls the blanket tighter around his father. He decides it best not to mention how far they are from any forest or field, nor to openly question the existence of these creatures. He knows Greg does not quite see the fast-passing headlights on the nearby highway. He doesn’t hear the tri-tonal moan of the train pulling lumber and steel west-ward.

The son touches his fingertips to the thin cotton square.

“It’s nice, Dad.”
Electronic music jangles and bounces against the high-rise apartments, catches the back fenders of passing cars and rides down the street with the trailing exhaust fumes. Tourists and local small business owners emerge from sub-level parking lots, where the stairwells leading up to the world are concrete caves buzzing orange, reeking of piss, and narrow enough cause panic attacks in the claustrophobic.

In China Town, barrels and baskets of dried roots and fish waft their ancient perfumes from in front of shops. A woman with skin that droops at her neck squats on the stoop of her store, and jabbers in Cantonese with a customer. The young lady’s daughter shuffles in pink sandals and chews the end of her thin braid, staring at the cardboard-and-sharpie sign above dried squid reading, “5 dollar for 3 pieces! Good price!”

There are ten restaurants down the length of the street whose front windows display whole ducks and large slabs of pork, red and dripping with sauce, hung on hooks to water the mouths of passers-by.

On the street corner of an intersection where Asian faces and Caucasian faces merge and mix every time “WALK” lights up, Charlie sits cross-legged, hunched over an electronic keyboard. Both of his arms end at his elbows, the skin there stretched shining over muscle and bone cut short like an Oscar speech. He pushes keys and slides switches deftly with his stubs, having mastered the ability to push up to five keys at one time. His whole body sways and jerks above the keyboard, stubs bumping out upbeat improvised tunes. Piano, guitar, drums and synthesizer sounds blend and echo all at once.

Pedestrians can hear the music from every corner of the intersection, especially the crowd in front of him waiting to glasses. She ran her tongue over her teeth.

“Here’s the deal,” she said, and took a step towards him. He tightened his grip on his beer. “I hit a doe yesterday. Whitetail. It’s dead as road kill, but it’s head is in pretty good condition. I was told you are just about the only taxidermist around, so here I am.”

Carl furrowed his brow and scrubbed his mustache. “You hit a deer and you want me to turn it into a gamehead for you?”

She looked away, took her glasses off and flipped her hair out of her eyes, then replaced the glasses on top of her head. Her eyes were blue. “Shit,” she muttered, “you aren’t going to tell on me or anything, are you? Like what, should I have called it in or something? Do I need to have some sort of a license to get my kill taxidermied? You guys stuff dead animals. You’d think shit like that wouldn’t matter.”

“I didn’t say I wouldn’t do it.”

“You implied.” She shifted her weight again, sighed. Her chest heaved beneath her wife beater, her breasts became more distinct. She stepped forward again. “You got another beer?”

He took a final drag of his cigarette and dropped it in his ashtray. Usually he was careful about drinking and driving, but he couldn’t imagine refusing her anything. He opened up the cooler beside his chair. “Bud Light or Fat Tire?”

“I’ll have the Bud Light.” He took it out of the cooler and popped the top open. Smooth steam coiled like a flame from the opening. She stepped onto the porch, wrapped her fingers around the bottle. His skin tingled where her nails brushed his hand.

“Where is she?” He asked. She took a swig and looked at him.
his ashtray. She stepped out of the car and ground out the cigarette with the toe of her white sandal. Her toenails were painted to match her fingernails. Her hair hung down past her shoulders, almost a white blonde. There were sun freckles along her high cheekbones and her lips were defined by a dark pink lipstick. Her body was all smooth curves, from her jawline to her tan shoulders to her delicate wrists to her knees and ankles. She stood only a few feet away from him. Her hip was cocked to the side and one shoulder was lifted a little higher than the other, defining the line of her breasts, waist, and thigh. Her hair rustled in the wind. She looked like she came out of an advertisement for Wrangler Jeans.

That day the sky was a hazed, cloudless blue. Hot Colorado days are like that. The colors are muted. The distant mountains suddenly begin to look like the painted backdrop for a low budget movie set. Carl’s wife liked to tell him that most men were like the Colorado sky. Hot and hazy in the mornings, full of wind in the afternoon, and stormy at night. He was never positive about what this meant, but he was fairly sure it was a negative thing. He loved his wife, but often times it felt like she had given him little besides insults and children. Being a man of faith, he never resented her. She kept him in touch with reality, an objective hand to guide him through business deals and through social situations. He loved her, but as with all relationships, there had always been something missing. He had never seen anyone so entirely a woman as the one before him now.

She stuck her thumbs into the waistline of her jeans and shifted her weight. She emitted confidence, the kind that would draw attention even in a crowded room. Carl imagined touching her and taking in some of that confidence for himself. She was studying him now, challenging him. He could feel her eyes behind the sun cross. Some avert their eyes, tapping their feet nervously in anticipation to get away from the dirty man with no hands. Charlie notices that a few feet tap to the rhythm of his music. Some people smile, some take pictures on their cell phones. A boy stares with eyes like billiard balls, taking it all in.

A tourist and his wife search in her khaki fanny pack for some money. They pull out a twenty and the man walks over to Charlie’s baseball cap, letting the bill flutter down out of his hand. Charlie looks up but doesn’t stop playing.

“Much appreciated,” he says. His forehead and nose shine with oil, eyes red. He closes them and sighs, pulling himself back to that bar thirty years ago at ‘Nam. Those pretty women with the dark eyes used to stand so close to him, twist their long fingers in his hair.

The tourist couple whisper a few feet away, discussing how
Charlie could possibly pick up his hat and keyboard at the end of the day, and where he went then, or if he just slept there until morning.

The girl with the pink sandals and shining black braid waits with her mother at the opposite corner and dances, the fried dough from a vendor hot and raining sugar in her hand.

IV.

The Wanderer lives at the outskirts of the city, the area where all the houses look the same except for their color. Even so, each house has been painted some variation of blue or brown. They are like boxes of cereal on a grocery store shelf, all tall, thin and crowded right up against the others. On the street by the river, the houses even appear to be in danger of falling off the edge and splashing into a heap of wood and plumbing in the water.

No one is aware that he lives here, though. To the majority of the city - those who have heard urban legends told at bedtime, and discussions of sightings while waiting for a bus - the Wanderer is the Wanderer. To them, he belongs nowhere and to nothing. A man might mention in passing that he thought he saw the Wanderer at a pub late one night, and this would gain the same wide-eyed attention as a celebrity sighting. The Wanderer is the antithesis of celebrity; nobody knows quite who he is. Elusive and insignificant, most wonder if he even exists or if he is less than human, like a brown leather coat brought to life by moonlight. Or just a shadow.

The house directly to his right is empty, a For Sale sign five years old stabbed crookedly in the little plot of lawn. To his left, three men hide illegal pit bull fights in their basement, deal pot in the kitchen, take women to their bedrooms. They stay quiet and inconspicuous to avoid the police.

THE TAXIDERMIST

The car the goddess drove was a shitty, mustard colored, 1974 Chevrolet Camaro. Carl was sitting in his chair on the porch, drinking a Fat Tire and smoking a Marlboro when he noticed her driving towards him, pulling a plume of dust behind. This car approached faster than most cars did on the washboarded dirt road. The grill of the Camaro dipped and crested smoothly: she rode the road’s imperfections like waves.

The goddess pulled up facing his porch. The glass of the passenger side window of her car was missing. A sheet of plastic was duct taped over the frame, and the headlight on the same side was shattered. A slender arm hung out of the opposite window, a cigarette dangled between a long index and middle finger. Her nails were fake, lacquered red. The engine turned off and the goddess leaned out of the window.

"It's hot," she said. "You the taxidermist?" Her voice was low and smooth. The outside of his Taxidermy Parlor was framed by twin piles of bleached antlers, and a particularly large elk rack was displayed in the center of the overhang above the porch. Though the goddess’ s eyes were hidden by mirrored sunglasses, he could feel her considering his collection. Her cheek twitched, almost as if she were about to smile, then took a drag of her cigarette, and dropped it onto the dirt.

Carl grunted in reply to her question, and stood. He readjusted his belly over his belt buckle and nodded to her. She opened her door. "I like your hat," she said. He took it off. It was a brown Stetson with a dark leather band. His wife had bought it for him a couple of years ago at an auction of some dead man’s things. It looked expensive, and probably was. He was the type of man to resent expensive looking things. The hat kept the sun off of his face, and that was all that really mattered.

"Thanks," he said, and put the Stetson on the ground near
and opens the medicine cabinet above the sink. He reaches in and finds her lipstick, and smudges the rouge across his mouth.

His tongue gently scraping the upper lip. He tries to remember how she tastes. His eyes closed, so he doesn’t have to see himself in the mirror, embarrassed that I caught him once again.

-Ines Pujos

He likes to let himself be swept down the big city streets by crowds hurrying nowhere. He will stop and exit the stream to pick up a dried fig from a basket, sniff it and bite down into the bruised burgundy of it, drop a quarter in the shopkeeper’s hand.

Never the same shop. There are too many shops exactly alike to keep track, anyway. He once spent an evening sitting on a curb, watching people through the windows of their apartment building across the street, a grand puppet show. A man undressing for bed, a woman pacing back and forth while on her cell phone, a girl leaning her forehead against the glass and watching the cars until she saw the Wanderer looking up at him, gasped, and closed the curtains.

Right now, the Wanderer is just sitting at his kitchen table counting bottle caps he found in gutters and alleyways, some flattened like coins. He scratches his head and exhales, his breath sparse and smoky. He gulps down a cup of dark, lukewarm tea, which he had forgotten on the table an hour before. It is bitter and he smacks his lips, clicks his tongue at the roof of his mouth. Half a mile south, a train drags its cargo fast along the steel bridge.

The water below seems to tremble as it rolls over.

He lets out a laugh that hits the thin walls hard and says, “Twenty two, exactly. We still got it, George. We still got it.”

He grins and nods at his reflection in the window. The evening comes on thick and tinged with yellow, the moon bathed in industrial smog.

V.

“Tell me a story,” says Michael, a girl with a boy’s name and a boy’s haircut.

Her father rubs her head, her hair short above her ears and says, “Not tonight. Just go to sleep—” and he almost says
“son” but stumbles, “Michael.”

She turns to face the wall, knowing exactly what he was about to say, but says nothing in return. She misses her older brother too, but doesn’t remember him enough to be sad for as long as her father. Lighting ripples silently in the sky miles away. Her father closes the door, darkness shutting in on her room.

Michael replays in her mind the image of her friends at recess all braiding each other’s long locks, a train of braid-making she could only watch. When she told her father about it, he chuckled and said that she should have just gone to play soccer with the boys. They didn’t want her, though. She didn’t want them either.

She grabs at the empty space by her pillow where Miss Muffins used to sit, dressed in blue and a ribbon tied in her deep red curls. Miss Muffins went to Goodwill after the ceremony, along with Michael’s paint set and plastic bead bracelets. She looks up at the window above her bed, where beating rain has started as a drizzle and escalated to a rhythmic downpour.

She watches the storm fall down in sheets, wind whipping the autumn trees into each other. Michael sits up and leans her head against the glass, listens to the hushing voices, branches and rain whispering what sounds so much to her like *Miehell~ Miehell~*.

VI.

Steve sleepwalks across the steel bridge, walking toe-heel-toe-heel across the thin railing slick with rain. He is the Stupendous Stephano again, the way he was forty years ago. Master of the tightrope. The lighting is a spotlight on his young limber body, the thunder a magnificent drum roll. The distant city lights glimmering in the rain are the sequins of his wife’s costume as

**MY NAME IS SUE**

The night after my mother left, my father emptied out her closet and put her clothes on my bed. He asked me to wear her high heels so he could hear her coming from down the hall. But finds only me wearing her black cocktail dress she wore last Christmas. Her scent vaguely imprinted into the fabric.

After she left, my aunt told him I looked just like Sue, except her hair. It was much sportier than mine.

He got the kitchen scissors and cut my hair, I watched his Adams apple bouncing up and down whenever I lit her Virginia slims.

I pushed him away when he first kissed my neck, his lips trembling as he recited his first love letter to her, written the night his hands went grey from dreaming.

After waiting for three months for her, I let his kisses wrap around my ear lobe, let his body press against mine, his head lying on my chest, his voice, a distant echo, whenever he says my name, Sue.

At night my father sneaks off into the bathroom,
This hot-shit father spends his days prechin’ what he don’t believe, talks about Jesus, then goes home and fucks his next door neighbor while his wife buys meat from the boy at the store, who looks at her sweating creases with more than affection. She is old. She is tied down, shoulda never married a preacher, she thinks, shoulda never married a priest, but she walks outta that store with that meat, the heat and the tension straining her floral housewife dress, her breasts hanging down to her waist. Looks at the workmen ‘cross the street with their tight asses in those blue jeans that fit like rough skin, their tight asses catching her eye like an expensive jewel in a locked shop. Stands and stares, clutching the meat, dripping water down her fingers. She knows about the neighbor, she knows about her husband, grasping that younger skin with those hands he has not touched her with in fifteen years. She had never felt his seed in her belly, never wrapped her arms around a hill of motherhood, never saw herself in the eyes of another. She don’t want him anymore than he wants her; she rolls away from him in the bed, dangling her legs, holding in tears ‘till salt comes out her skin, thinking, just thinking bout that boy in the store licking his lips, those workmen with their tight asses, smelling of piss and wet cement holding her body, her body twenty years younger, praying, praying she won’t have to, won’t have to see him, that hot-shit father again.

-Helen Spica

Miles in some direction, a teenage boy is running as fast as he can, bag of chips clutched in his soaking fist. A woman hums herself to sleep, the same notes like a broken record in her throat. A Styrofoam box filled with leftovers is forgotten on a curb where a man had stopped to tie his shoelace. The bottom is cracked and leaking. On the other side of the block, a man with no hands feels his stomach churn and announce the empty spaces below his ribs. He rubs a circle into his belly with the end of his arm.

Steve grins to the clouds and the rain slides over his teeth, his squinting eyes that see everything that isn’t there. The sound of wind is merely gasps of astonishment from the spectators below him. His blue toes wrap around the edges of the railing. He holds his arms straight out to balance. The cotton nightshirt clings awkwardly to his skin and flaps around him like a ghost’s ragged robes.

A few yards from the center of the bridge, his feet slip and he tumbles over the edge. His heart skips a beat, but he still grins, expecting the slap of his back against a net. Lightning flashes and his tumbling form is silhouetted for a split second against the crash of electric blue sky, and he almost seems to be in flight. The water slaps and churns beneath him, ready to swallow him in the sound of its applause.

-Rebecca Chou
This Red Wheelbarrow was edited by:
Chase Yurga-Bell
Wah Mohn
Direct all of your complaints to them.

We would like to thank everyone who submitted. You guys are what make it happen. A huge thank you to Maggie Mularz and Chloe Zwiacher, who sacrificed literally billions of hours to helping us through our technical incompetence. Thanks also to Kat Reece, A. Papanos of Interlochen, KFC, and James Spica for his fabulous Red Wagon Superhero. Thank you Therese, for making the copies and bringing the whole thing together.

DAG YO.

The Red Wheelbarrow

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

William Carlos Williams
MY SISTER APPEARED ON JERRY SPRINGER BECAUSE...

I'm from Chicago and that's how I roll.

She likes to eat the food in the green room.

She fell in love with a Mexican Whooping Llama who was involved with Tom Cruise at the time.

She's a militant vegan.

She's been married four times in the past four hours.

W.C. Williams is her baby's daddy—the white chickens have proof.

She was cheating on me with my Siamese twin brother.

She thinks Barry Manilow is hot.

She's a man-eater. Make you work hard. Make you want all her love.

So much depends upon

a red bucket

smeared with grease

filled with fried chicken

-Chase "Original Recipe" Yurga-Bell
THE RED WHEELBARROW
A ONCE RESPECTABLE PUBLICATION

2006, VOLUME II
EDITED BY:
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WAH MOHN