THANK YOU FOR YOU.

Emby Tolmato, I hope this to be my last article in the editing of the Red Whistle.

1. Pretend you are a very sad person. Tell your friends just how sad you are.
2. You are sad and you have no more moths to fly.
3. A mockingbird can see you, too.
4. If you feel a weep, you make a very sad face.
5. Good fortune is always good fortune. You make a weep, but no reason to be carful.

I once was a woman and I could not neither.

And six years have been the joy of my life to be carful. The Red Whistle is always good fortune. You make a weep, but no reason to be carful.

Tillie may make a very sad face. Tell your friends just how sad you are.
## AESTHETIC ART

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POETRY

"poetry: language sung, chanted, spoken, or written according to some pattern of recurrence that emphasizes the relationships between words on the basis of sound as well as sense; this pattern is almost always a rhythm or meter, which may be supplemented by rhyme or alliteration or both. The demands of verbal patterning usually make poetry a more condensed medium than prose or everyday speech, often involving variations in syntax, the use of special words and phrases. The three major categories of poetry are narrative, dramatic, and lyric, the last being the most extensive."


I was everything my father wanted to be. At the Unitarian church’s “women’s night,” complete with Hot Dish and drums, he whispered to me across the table, “When you menstruate I’m going to throw a party and buy you a monkey.” I didn’t think it was that big of a deal.

As my parent’s day in court approached the promises grew, “If you come with me, I’ll let you get a belly button ring when you turn thirteen,” he said, “We’ll do it together. We’re going to have a pool in Arizona” But when my mother won custody we knew that an Amber Alert would meet me at the state line.

We hauled the mattress from the basement, unscrewed the bookshelves from the walls, tore down the kitchen table. My father smashed my piano with a Slugger. I carried the pieces out to the fire pit. He lit up a cigarette and then the edge of my mattress, whose flowers melted into its wire springs.

We watched from the patio, drinking white wine and vodka in Squirt, as the flames climbed, catching on the lowest leaves of our oak tree. I picked up the leftovers of my room into a garbage bag. When the trees turned golden, my father and Susan came to Marcy Open School with their red Ford F-150. Sunroof open, my father raced me around the block at eighty, eighty-five, ninety, seeing how fast we could go. We ate falafel on the tailgate. We hugged goodbye. “I love you, Mom,” I said.

Their were no drums for my first blood, no dances, just a trip to Rainbow Foods for pads. The June air distilled into beads on my skin I stuck my feet out the window. It was father’s day.
"It looks pretty good," I said. I smeared some decade old Lilac eye shadow on his lids. The he rubbed it off with peach cold cream.

Finally my father, who had been ordering Estrogen online from India got a prescription and a lesbian therapist whose parrots imitated the answering machine.

"Ring, Ring, Ring," one parrot said. I looked up from Steven King.

"Hello, you've reached the private confidential line of Karol Jenson," the other parrot cooed, "If this is an emergency, please call 9-1-1. Please leave a message after the tone." Sometimes it was not the parrots and a client would begin to speak. So much for "private confidential."

Karen was the first lesbian I met. She was tall with short hair, although not as tall as Ellen, my father's 6'5" role model. Ellen curated the electricity museum in Minneapolis. She transitioned into a woman at fifty. Her wife, Mary who writes Embroidery Murder Mysteries, stayed with her, even after the surgery. At dinner at Olive Garden she explained, "The trick is to find the end first." My father smiled.

"Rosella's butch anyway. She'll stay,"

In the drive through at McDonald's, a few weeks later, my father pounded the steering wheel and sobbed, "I can't believe she's leaving me," I wrapped my arms around him as he heaved, "That bitch!"

Before the first of endless psychological assessments, we went to Perkins. My father wore a skirt.

"What would you ladies like to eat today?" the waitress asked.

He gave her a ten dollar tip. That was the last time I was in a room with them both.

Logistics eroded all of my father's relationships. Because my mother wouldn't call him anything but Tom, their lawyers sent their kids to private schools. My father sobbed when I mentioned "my mom," or when his mother forgot he was now a woman. I started calling my mother "R" and he stopped seeing her.

Others tried to help work out the worms of the situation. Analisa down the block gave me a VHS of a transsexual on Oprah. My cousin, Jessica, who is six foot five and works for Planned Parenthood brought my father garbage bags filled with her old clothes. "Have you ever watched Oprah?" she asked me, "They had a show on transsexuals. One of the kids said he calls his father 'Maddy.' It's a cross between 'Mommy' and 'Daddy.' Maybe you could call Theresa that." I started calling him "Mom." He just loved that.

In the middle of fifth grade, my father's girlfriend Susan moved in. I spent Wednesday nights and Sundays with my mom, digging through the Walgreens clearance and watching "Passport to Paris," while my father and Susan cruised gay bars and bought cocaine. In the basement while they shot methadone, I watched "But I'm a Cheer-a-leader" and "My summer of love." Whoa, that could be me, I thought, watching the young lesbians kiss. And then I went back to my scrambled-egg quesadilla.

A.C. MILLER

NEIGHBORING

I've walked around with one eye closed for three days.

People speak to my right ear but I ignore them and apologize

I'm sorry, it's deaf. My family thinks I am losing my mind, but I'd just like to see what it's all about.

The night after Christmas, he and I go swimming. It's too hot to have the windows closed but the water is ice by the moon.

My whole body tensed up and studied as if he might understand if he looks long enough. The three moles on my back, a small birthmark near the clavicle.

What could it mean? His good eye whirrs, the other already sleeping. He steams peppers and carrots, tomato, banana, asparagus. I look inside the bowl and imagine parrots soaring out, beaks aimed at my iris'.

Late at night, I stand in the driveway and watch him through the window;
folding hand towels or eating candy out of glass bowls.

Things have gone wrong before.

A wild orange Colt impregnates the same mother
over and over. Sometimes I wait for him in the backyard
and we stare each other down.

He comes out of the kitchen
and walks me around the lake to the house with the hammock
and presses my arms against the rope.

He whispers to me. Sorry, wrong ear, I say.

My teachers, concerned with my "unfeminine behavior," called my parents almost
daily about my uncombed hair, dirty or mismatched socks, and skirt that flew up on the
jungle gym. And by second grade, my floral skirt was too short. Every few weeks, I kneel
on the floor in front of the class. Of course, my hem didn't touch the ground and was
then too short. I was sent to have a heart to heart with the principle. "Knees," he said,
"are fundamentally sexy. We can't allow you to have them show." When I figured out
what sexy meant, I didn't know how legs could fit the bill. But I hadn't watched profes-
sional volleyball, either.

My norms for marriage and relationships didn't come from my parents, but from
"Leave it to Beaver" which I watched with my mother while eating "Moose Tracks" ice
cream. Unlike June Cleaver, neither of my parents cooked, besides my father's occasion-
ally bratwurst on the propane grill or my mother's Pillsbury Brownies.

"Mom," I asked, "Why don't you cook?"

"I don't have time," she said, sighing, "I work. Why don't you ask your father why he
doesn't cook? He's here all day."

"Women cook." My father said. We ate rotisserie chicken and bagged salad on the
bed, again.

When, in front of the television she explained chromosomes to me, and with it, sex, I
was surprised but unshaken. "Sperm cells are tiny," she said, "They don't contain much
and they don't have any mitochondrial DNA. The X chromosome is so powerful that
only one is activated." The strength of The Egg compared to the slithering sperm was
clear. "More boys are conceived then girls," she explained, "But more girls are born.
The boys die off before they're born."

I pitied boys. Their testosterone-severed corpus coluim made mental math excruci-
ating, their Y chromosomes made reading hurculean. I adored my father but knew he
had to compensate. Unlike my mom, he lacked a job, biceps and two X chromosomes. I
believed him when he said, "Nail polish is too sexy," and "The Girl Scouts are filled with
lesbians." Even more than I was missing out, he was too.

When I was in forth grade, riding home to watch ER at 4, he told me, "I'm changing
my name to Theresa." His thin blond hair hung down to his shoulders and nubs of breasts
stuck out from his shirt because he was so

"Oh, that's cool," I said.

At Northern Sun, a leftist store downtown, we chose a purple embroidered purse. He
bought Birkenstocks. I picked out "Siren" Ten-Hour Lip Color which painted his thin
lips orange in our bathroom.

"What do you think?"
SCRAMBLED EGGS

Jaundiced and coated in amniotic fluid, I was born a specimen of femininity. I weighed nine pounds eight ounces, stretched to twenty four inches and had an ovarian cyst the size of a chicken egg. As one obstetrician stitched up my mother's episiotomy the doctors on call filed in to poke my belly in awe. By the time I could walk the cyst would dissolve, along with its simple declaration of biological gender. Already I was trying to nurse my father through his grief.

My mother, quickly approaching forty, had wanted a blond daughter to name Honey. She met my father, a blond RN without a place to stay. They married a month later. When she told him he was pregnant he didn’t believe her. And then he said, "I think I’ll move back in with my mother." Before he could leave he pushed a patient in a wheelchair down a flight of stairs, killing him. He lost his nursing home job and, with it, his patient’s drugs. But when my father held me "he fell in love," my mother said. I slept on his shoulder as he dissected motherboards, watched Jeopardy and shopped Best Buy. My mother couldn't stand being at home with him, so after six weeks of a six-month maternity leave, she went back to work, processing film at the state crime lab.

For all the importance my father placed on having a daughter and not a son (my father abhorred Granson, my mother’s son from her first marriage) I was not distinctly feminine. I wore my brother's "ideally unisex" sweat pants and flannel pajamas and a purple and yellow Barney pullover. My brother, who is twelve years older than me, taught me how to do Karate and build Lego rockets. He took me by my ankles and swung while I giggled and screamed, spinning. I ate Chunky Beef Sirloin and staged Fire Rescue Crime Scenes. I have a picture of myself at thirteen months, blond haired in my Barney sweater, inserting a CD into my computer. Instead of ballet or gymnastics or soccer, I played kickball in the street and soccer in the alley with a group of kids from the block, their heads swarming with lice.

I hadn't realized any distinction between the sexes until I was pulling the mandatory skirt for my first day of school. I had known, theoretically, that I had "girl parts" and that my brother had "boy parts," and that's why he was a boy and I was a girl. At Forth Baptist Christian School, wearing a skirt was necessary to qualify as a girl. I had imagined "school" as a warehouse with a kidney shaped pool surrounded by desks, where I would learn how to be a firefighter. Or a medical missionary, or a Christian comedian, or a defense attorney. Instead I learned that God I learned that I shouldn’t save lives but should save myself for marriage and follow the gender roles inscribed on the back of the Ten Commandments.
Amelia Wright

Hiroshima
The Moment of the Explosion

I.
For a moment
there is nothing but
ten Sun's worth of light
and then only darkness,
a hush of ash
falling over a village
already buried by rubble,
and a silence so pure
it is the unsung song
of bodies disappearing
into thin air.

Soon it is the sound
of fire crackling, people
crawling, bodies
scraping across the
broken glass from
blown out windows,
that devours the silence.

It is the sudden cry
of a baby and the frantic
scuffling of feet
as those thrown from
where they stood
search for a child,
a sister, an old man
close to dying, a mother.
Anyone.

II.
A girl swimming
in the river surfaces,
...Glazed with Rainwater...

Non-Fiction

"Non-Fiction writing includes essays, journalism, 'how-to' books or articles, scholarly writing, in other words, it is writing which reports, analyzes, informs or instructs. It may contain the author's personal opinions, but its main purpose is to deliver information, and the style will lack emotion or subjectivity. When a writer embarks on a piece of creative non-fiction, any subject might be tackled - even the same subjects about which essayists or journalists might write - but the approach to writing the piece will be different. In creative writing, or fiction, the writer seeks to engage the reader and move the reader; creative writing conjures vivid pictures and draws the reader in, using language that is emotive and dramatic. The aims of a Creative Non-Fiction writer are the same."

Discussed: Genders of All Great Types and Ways, Purple Purses, Christian Comedians, Girl Scouts of America, "Passport to Paris"
To: ,ing a lemon into the glass of iced tea, you walk in a stupor to the drunken
guy’s table. He sees you and says “Feisty girl, what took you so long? I missed you.” You
nod without really seeing the guy and hand him his drink, thinking of breath on your ear,
your growing addiction to men, Chris’ shoulder under your chin. Wonder if he’s broken.
Wonder if he’s waiting. You start to walk away from the table, but stop when you feel a yank on your wrist.

“Where you think you’re going?” His eyes are swimming and wild, his hair an
obviously dyed shade of brown. “We were just getting to know each other.” He tugs on
your wrist and lowers his voice, “C’mom, no one’s around.” He’s right. The room is empty. All of the guests are getting their coats; all of the waiters are seeing them off. Keegan isn’t even lurking near by.

There’s sweat on the guy’s forehead, quivering there in droplets. He asks you
what you’re doing after the party, draws you closer. There is a swell of laughter in the
other room as everyone says goodbye.

Sir, you need to let go of me,” you say.

He pulls you onto his lap. “I’m an artist, you know,” he whispers into your ear,
his words moist and sticky. “I could paint you. You’re beautiful, you know that? You’d
be beautiful to paint.” He puts his hand on your ribs, leans his face into you.

“Fuck off,” you say and push him off of you, heading directly
1’0 the door.

“C’mon, I was just messin’ around,” he calls.

Grab your purse, your jacket, your cell phone. Mikey tries to stop you from
leaving through the back door so he can give you another pick-up line, but you hurry out
without saying anything to him.

Dialing Nina’s number, you head for the beach. It rings and rings but she doe-


sees her stripped-off
clothes burst into flames
on the bank
and her eyes begin
to melt.

III.

An old man wearing
only underwear
on the upper story
of the village hospital
becomes
his naked shadow.

IV.

A new mother
digs through the
splintered wood and
melted tiles to find
her child in its crib,
screaming and
unscathed.

V.

A boy drags himself
to wear his sister lies
and tries to find
the bleeding. There are
no cuts, no scrapes,
only blood.

VI.

An old woman
looks to the clouds to see
the sky aflame.
Her fingertips burning,
she is finally
a part of the heavens.

You feel worthless, a coward, and imagine slapping that guy in the face and eve-


She holds the baby
to her breast,
and the poison is
slowly sucked
clean from her body.
It doesn’t bother me
that if my mother let him
my father would watch
the weather channel all day.
And it doesn’t bother me that my father
wages war with the snow on the roof,
despite that it is impossible to make
the snow stop falling.
And it doesn’t bother me that when I help my father shovel
the roof he swears
every time he bends his knees.
I am only bothered that I find
the older I get the more I am like him,
and the fact
that I find myself telling a snow flake
to go screw itself.

Well, once Ray came back they made her stay and she can’t answer the phone or go anywhere by herself because her husband’s afraid that she’ll find Kurt and run off again.”

“Wow,” you say. Rachel excuses herself to go to the restroom and you do a round on the floor to take dishes to the kitchen.

As you enter the dinning area, you pass Ray chatting up the father of the bride. He is paying for everything, so she talks to him like they are old friends, about how much she loves the restaurant, her life here in the Middle-of-Nowhere, Michigan. The father is smiling and stealing glances down the front of her paisley dress, which is starting to look too young for her, hugging the building fat on her hips. You wonder what it’s like to spend all day, everyday—except for Sunday—in this restaurant, and feel bad for her, those fake nails and high-heeled flip flops. You wonder if she thinks about the life she could have had with Kurt every time she lays eyes on her husband with the sweat stains at his wok.

After collecting all the plates you can carry, you dump them at the dish station without scraping the leftovers into the garbage can. An untouched piece of sushi is sitting on a platter and you pop it into your mouth without shame. Javier notices what you’ve done and says, “You have quite a hunger, yes?” Shrug and get to work on getting the next round of plates.

A man from the groom’s side is waving an empty glass in the air as you emerge from the kitchen. “More iced tea,” he shouts. The other three men at his table laugh and you pluck the glass from his hand. “Feisty,” he says drunkenly. “I like feisty.” Don’t giggle; don’t even smile. Just make your way through the congestion of people to the waiter’s station.

As you shove ice into the glass, you think about spitting in it, just a little bit, like the waiters do in all the movies. But then Chris comes up and you are suddenly alone together.

“Crazy out there, huh?” he says.
“Yeah,” you say.
“I saw you handle that drunk guy out there. Impressive.”
“Well, what can I say,” you tell him as you press “G” on the soda gun, the mantra ‘G for tea’ running briefly through your head, “I’ve got experience.” You sneer a glance at him and he smirks. Notice that you are smiling stupidly and cut it out, LOOK away.

There is a pause as you keep your hands unnecessarily busy in the ice bucket to prolong the moment, putting a few cubes into a glass you don’t need and filling it with water.

“I see you looking at me sometimes,” he tells you quietly.
A little pink running to your cheeks as you peek up at him. “Oh, I...”
“[I look at you, too,” he says, inches his body closer, making you lean against the counter. You wonder if you are day dreaming, but then he puts his hand on the counter behind you, and his arm is just grazing your waist, your hip. He’s not against you, but his breath is warm as it hits your ear. Remember the glass in your hand, cold glass, warm breath, listen closely; he is speaking, his words deliberate and heavy.

“I have to get something from the walk-in freezer. I might be there for a while, if you want to join me.” He straightens up and you feel your body missing his closeness. With a small smile, he turns his face and walks away from the station.
On weekends, when the restaurant is busiest, a guy from Mexico named Javier comes in and scrubs the endless stream of bowls, plates, silverware. He has a greasy ponytail and wears his bibbed apron with the top folded down. He’s usually in a muscle tank and leans at you with suds up to his elbows. Once, he muttered that he wanted to “take you around the world,” or at least you think that’s what he said. His English can be hard to understand.

You start looking forward to the nights that Chris works, memorizing the days of the week with his name under them: Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday. One time, when you were filling glasses, he bumped into your elbow, then stared directly into your eyes. You read in a magazine that if a guy holds eye contact with a girl for more than 3 seconds, he’s into her. You thought that must have been at least 5 and felt strangely giddy for the next hour.

On the second Saturday in August, you are wiping down soy sauce bottle and startled by a hand on your shoulder. Rachel says, “Little one, we have a wedding shindig tonight.” Nodding, you take the stairs down to the lounge. Fold silverware into napkins and glare at Chris as he tears butcher paper into squares.

Mikey comes out of the storage closet with a small bag of rice and stands next to you until he’s acknowledged. “Yes, Mikey?”

“Hey, Beautiful, if I said you had a great body would you hold it against me?”

“Maybe, you say. His jaw drops and his belly wobbles from side to side as he runs off, giggling and calling to the kitchen guys to tell them the news.

By 9 o’clock, the wedding party is finished eating and everyone is drunk, including the servers, bartender and Ray. You are not, because 18 is not 21 and no one will sneak you anything because they’re afraid of getting caught.

Everyone changes with alcohol in their blood. Ray lets everybody sneak soup and fortune cookies from the kitchen. Keegan is silently standing by the bar, watching the movement around him like a telephone pole on the side of a highway. Rachel is talkative and almost kind, telling you about the gossip going around town.

A few people you don’t know have slept with their cousins without realizing it. They found a rat in an industrial-sized bag of rice here, but used it anyway. Chris only married his wife because she was pregnant—this at you are strangely excited, creating the scenario of his loneliness, his need for you to save him from a forced and loveless marriage. Imagine him sitting at home, in bed or at the dinner table, with his wife, not saying a word to each other. Because of your past experiences with men, you’ve developed a habit of thinking of them as something broken, and this only gives you more incentive.

You’ve been fiddling with a napkin, but Rachel stills your hands with her own and leans in closer to your face, the artificial raspberry smell of her drink wafting from her mouth, “But the most juicy part of the whole deal is Ray,” she says. She holds her finger up to her lips and looks around, her head pivoting loosely. She leans in again. “You know how she doesn’t answer the phone?” Nod to her. “Well.”

She whispers in your ear, all of her S’s drawn out and somehow violating, “It’s because of her husband.” She nods like she’s just told you the most important thing in the world, like she’s done you a big favor.

“What?” you ask.

“Well,” Rachel takes the last sip of her drink and shakes the ice around in her glass, ”a couple years ago, she fell in love with this waiter, Kurt. I think his name was, and they ran away together.” Put the napkin down and give her your full attention.

“Then, after they tracked her down, in Arizona or something random state like that, Ray’s mom called her and told her that her dad was dying, even though he wasn’t, just to get her back here.” Rachel threw her hands out to her sides because your face must be showing some kind of surprise. “I know, right? Crazy.”

“Yeah, but then what?”

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GOAT PHILOSOPHY

My boss and I have discovered that Petra is the formerly unknown superhero The Gestator.

The Zen master of pregnant goats, she waddles with her sides bloated by the promise of kids and hums. Her humming has become as necessary as the rain on the garden and the yard feels forsaken when she passes to eat or sleep, incomplete without her meditations resonating down the hill to the panting ewes swollen with lambs, the chickens sifting through the straw as they climb into boxes to lay, and Sirloin, waiting patiently to follow his brother to the freezer.

Hasn’t this doe proved her mettle, shown that any resident of the barn can find transcendence? She is the sole survivor of a massacre by loose dogs. Upon arrival, she stood alone...
at the bottom of the yard by the cement blocks
and filbert cuttings and screamed for days
just as she hums now, call growing hoarse
with each hour, no one to respond.

There is nowhere safer than inside a mother
or nestled up against her udders. This fact
sustains the does and their kids, born and unborn
the young mothers the only ones sure or not
that the swelling in their sides is more than just hay belly.

Goats are not like the alpacas who spit at every male
they see after becoming pregnant. Two got out
the other day and trotted down the hill to chat up
the bucks. They then escorted themselves home
and waited patiently to be let back inside.

In the first few weeks of the job, you cracked a lot of glasses, but Chris took you
to the sink in the kitchen and showed you how to cool them under tepid water first, so
you don’t break many anymore. You’re starting to find him attractive, with that blonde
stubble grazing his jaw line. He smiles frequently and his eyes are a different shade every
time you see them in the light. He’s taken to calling you “kiddo,” which could be a bad
sign, but he smiles playfully out of the corner of his mouth when he says it, so you don’t
mind. He looks too young to be married and reminds you of the one boyfriend in high
school who didn’t cheat; the one who was in the 4-H club, who’d push your hair behind
your ears and call you his wild colt.

Although you’ve gotten a hang of the mechanics of this job, dealing with the
people is still confusing. Out of all the customers, the tourists are especially rude, and
usually demand things when you’re the busiest. They want chopsticks for their kids, even
though it makes them spill rice everywhere. They get pissy about stained napkins, and
want window tables, even when there’s a line out the door.
It’s hard to get their attention as they speak boisterously over their mouthfuls of food,
chinking their glasses together as they steadily consume one fruity alcoholic beverage af-
ter another. You’ve tried gently asking large parties to pass down their plates so you
could take them away, but they often ignore you while telling anecdotes about their
bosses and engaged sisters. Usually you stand next to the table awkwardly for about 20
seconds before they listen, or notice the hand your holding out for dirty dishes.

Apparantly Keegan thanks your social awkwardness with the customers is cute
because you hear him snicker behind you almost every time. He’s becoming just another
work-related hazard. One night, when business was slow, you were standing by the
waiter’s station and he came up behind you, grazed your arm with his fingers. You didn’t
turn around, just tightened your jaw and walked away. Fuck. That, you thought. It’s not
worth the trouble.

Your nights here are each a variation of the one before it. Your spine always
feels misaligned the next morning, right between the shoulder blades, and you’re always
covered in peanut sauce and smell like egg rolls when you get home. You’ve learned that
if you’re not careful, curry sauce will funnel out the corner of the square plates and onto
the pocket of your apron, making mothers hold out their wetted napkins, chucking “Oh,
poor thing.”

Ray tells you often that you don’t smile enough, that you have a pretty little smile, that
smiling makes the patrons feel comfortable. Flash her those pearl whites, more like a
wolf baring her teeth than a grin. Whenever the phone rings, Ray has someone else pick
it up before her. She says she can’t answer it, but it’s likely that she’s just lazy. You think
bitterly, smile Ray. put on a face for the nice people and their money.

And you cut your hand every week on broken vases and cups because it is an
unspoken part of your job to pick up shattered glass. Chris bandaged you up once—ran
your palm under warm water, dried it, and undid the band-aid, gently smoothing down
the sides and cooing “there we go.” Think that he must be a great dad and wonder if his
wife appreciates him enough.

Your paychecks always seem short, but you don’t care enough to say anything
about it. By the middle of the season you’re raking in about $90 a night in crumpled ones,
fives and sometimes tens, counting and flattening the bills out on the car rides home with
Nina. It’s amazing how rich a stack of small bills can make a person look. The only thing
that seems to change is the names of the workers on the schedule.

The dishwasher’s name switches from weekdays to weekends. During the
week, Ray’s elderly father washes dishes when they stack up high enough.
HOW TO BUS TABLES

Arrive three minutes before 5 o'clock at a glass door that says "Thai Fusion," wearing a silky top that you picked out because it seemed kind of Asian. Smoothing down your shirt, you step through the door, pass the small water fountain and sit at the bar. Ask the bartender, who is rubbing off blue and green bottles of liquor with a stained rag, where you can find the owner. He disappears suspiciously down some stairs for about 7 minutes.

He reappears followed by a Thai woman in high-heel flip-flops and a flowy dress that looks a bit like your top. She introduces herself as Ray, and says she owns the restaurant, makes small talk. Where are you from? Down state, but I'm staying with my cousin a few miles away. Are you in school? Yes, I go to State. Have you ever worked in a restaurant? No, but no time like the present.

She guides you around the floor and shows you the layout: 24 tables surrounding an island in the center of the room, every table set up in exactly the same way. She asks you to mimic the set-up of the plates and silverware in front of her, undoes it and says that when she comes back she wants it to be right again. You finish quickly and stare out of a window that takes up the entire north wall. There is a view of Lake Michigan and a half-empty parking lot where two boys are sharing one skateboard. They aren't wearing helmets and one of the boys falls against the curb and scrapes a knee. You can tell by the way he stoops to cover it with his hand that he wants to cry, but he doesn't.

Ray comes back and inspects your work. The forks are where the spoon should be, but she fakes you anyway because you are new at this whole thing and she likes that you look Italian. You are actually Greek, but don't say anything.

She hands you two black shirts with writing on them. One says "Wanna get that'd up?" under a take-out box of noodles, and the other says "Dirty" with a cartoon martini glass hanging over it.

You come in five nights a week, the summer progressing steadily into the hottest part of the season. The heat clings to your clothes when you walk back into the restaurant after tossing Hefty bags of trash into the dumpster out back. Through the north window facing the bay, you can see the layers of seagull shit building on the docks as the days roll through July. As it gets deeper into the summer more tourists show up to scull around the beaches of Lake Michigan and because of the influx, business is picking up.

The plates are getting lighter and you've figured out how to carry the half-empty bowls without dripping egg drop soup all over the floor. Now you can work the water gun like a gunslinger from those old westerns that your dad made you watch when you were younger: using both at once, filling two glasses at a time, watching closely so they don't over flow.

The owners, Ray and her husband who works the wok, are too cheap to buy the needed amount of water glasses, so sometimes you have to wait for the ones in the washer to come out. If you're in the weeds, there isn't time for them to cool and when you pour the water while the glasses are still warm, steam curls out of them like breath on cold nights, floating up to leave a mark on the mirror above the bar. If you fill them while they're hot, the cold water will expand the glass too fast and the sides will crack. Then you'll have to hide the evidence under old food in the garbage can so Ray, or her husband, won't see them and charge you.
The inside of the crematorium was all in shades of beige. White was too clinical, too much like a hospital. The beige linoleum squeaked as Adam and Isadora approached the large counter. There were a few customers milling about in the lobby, one woman who had a small coffin with her, the wood at the top carved into the shape of a bird’s head. When they reached the counter the redheaded behind it looked them up and down.

“You’re here to cremate?” She asked.

“Yes we are,” said Isadora, “My friend here, his dog died the other day and we need to get it taken care of.”

“Well that’s good. My names Darla and we are the Pet Cremation Center are very sorry for your loss. We know how traumatic it can be to lose a pet. I just need you to fill out this statement form. Like how finely you want your pet cremated, a plastic bag of a vase of sorts. It has a list of the different prices next to it. Do you have your pet with you?”

“She’s in this bag here, we didn’t really know what to transport her in.” Adam appreciated that Isadora was taking the lead.

In the bus the bag that Tess was in had ripped a little bit and proved that dead bodies start smelling after a few days. Through the rip Adam could see Tess’s fur, golden and a little bit matted and sticky from whatever was at the bottom of the dumpster in his apartment complex.

Adam and Isadora brought the questionnaire back to the seats with them. They circled the “hour deal” that said that they would have the ashes after only an hour because neither of them wanted to make another trip. Adam also decided to get a vase for the “departure vessel”, that way it would look less obtrusive. They turned in the questionnaire and within five minutes an attendant came out to collect the body.

When the bus arrived at Adam’s stop he got up and so did Isadora. Adam was confused, because he knew that Isadora didn’t live by him, that had been something they discussed. Before Adam could get off the bus Isadora kissed him. He didn’t know what to do, never having been kissed for such a long time so he just stood there and let his lips slack. She quickly stopped,

“So I’ll see you tomorrow at the 7-11?”

“Sure,” Adam said, flustered. As the bus left Adam smiled to himself. It was nice to have something for him to look forward to. Maybe he could use Isadora as a past time and he wouldn’t have to have any more frustrating experiences with the hip-flexor.

...THE RED WHEEL BARROW...

“Genre fiction tends to be written and read primarily for entertainment. Though it may certainly aspire to and attain other goals, entertainment is the primary objective. However, as David Mamet points out in his essay, "The Humble Genre Novel, Sometimes Full of Genius," many works now considered great literature were originally genre novels. Raymond Chandler, of course, exemplifies this phenomenon. Mamet goes so far as to open his essay with the line, "For the past thirty years the greatest novelists writing in English have been genre writers." If you’re unsure whether your story or novel can be considered both genre fiction and literary fiction, it’s worthwhile trying both camps. It certainly doesn’t hurt to have more options for publishing your work, especially if you’re not too proud.”

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TRIP TO THE CREMATORIUM

Adam was vacuuming his living room when he found his dog, Tess, dead under the coffee table. At first he thought she was asleep, but Tess was the type of dog who as soon as he turned on the vacuum she would jump and growl at it, trying to bite off the two plastic lights in the front. Adam first pushed the coffee table away from Tess, letting her head roll back on her neck and rolled her to the tile in his kitchen so he could continue his vacuuming and not miss any spots.

He’d had Tess since he first moved into his apartment and it still smelled of leftover Kim-chi and the type of cigarette smoke that has been there for so long that it clings, yellow, to the spot where the walls and ceiling meet.

For the most part Adam rarely left his apartment. He had the night shift at the 7-11 because he didn’t sleep at night anyway. The rest of his day was spent cleaning and taking Tess for walks. He’d always been wary of everyone else on the street so preferred to just stay around his building. Every day was the same routine but now that Tess died Adam didn’t know what he was going to do with the extra three hours he had. Maybe now he would have to take up some sort of exercise. He had always admired that commercial for a sort of bow-flexor for the hips. Maybe he would get one tonight.

Adam disposed of Tess before he went to sleep that night. He took two of those large black trash bags and stuck her front half in one and her back half in the other. He was thinking of maybe getting her stuffed so that he could keep her in the kitchen because he liked the company. He realized he would have to transport Tess somewhere and Adam didn’t have a car. He figured that it could be a little bit awkward for the other people on the bus if he tried to transport Tess with him that way, so he just left her in the apartment complex’s dumpster. Weeks before Adam read in the newspaper about a serial killer who cut all of his victims up and dumped them in random dumpsters all over the country. Adam thought about cutting Tess up a bit, just to freak people, but he figured that it would be too weird and everyone would recognize Tess anyway and link it with him and he didn’t want to be known as the sociopath.

That night Adam was watching the hot dogs spin round in their little glass container. It was supposed to be Adam’s job to change them out every night but he hadn’t in two weeks, ever since he realized that the day manager never checked if they had been changed. The idea of hot dogs grossed Adam out. When he was little his uncle described rooms, they would just pee in the vats.

There is a girl who came to the 7-11 every night at nine. She always wore the same outfit with a nametag on her chest that said, “I can help you! Call me Isadora!” Adam thought that he had seen nametags at best buy, but he found it less awkward to talk to the phone salesmen because at the store he always became uncomfortable seeing the sales-people in their uniforms. Uniforms made Adam uncomfortable. He had to wear them once when he worked in McDonalds for a year.

Isadora went to the 7-11 for her slurpee at twelve every night. She liked the way that Adam had very clean thumbnails. She saw him picking the dirt from under them every day with a pointy metal nail file. She had always appreciated cleanliness in men.

At six a.m. when Adam’s shift ended he walked back to his apartment. In his mailbox there was the hip flexor that he’d express ordered two nights before. He was eager to see what muscles it would tone. He couldn’t figure out why anyone would need an excessively strong pelvis. When he got up to his apartment he checked his messages on his phone and found one from his apartment supervisor. “Hi, Adam. It’s Colton, the apartment supervisor. I would just like to bring to your attention a matter of some importance. Our garbage service was emptying the dumpsters into their trucks and found a bad smell of what seemed like overly fairy human body, which was soon to be discovered to be a dog. They called me to come and identify and I knew right away it was Tess. No one else in the building has a golden. The garbage service made me aware that their service does not like to deal with disposal of bodies. I’m sorry, you will have to find a proper and more sanitary way to dispose of Tess because I will not do it for you. I can recommend the pet crematorium on 12th street. I went there for my last pet and I was very satisfied with their expertise. Bye.”

Adam needed someone to go to the pet crematorium with him because Tess was too heavy for him to carry by himself. Adam figured Isadora was his best bet for a crematorium buddy. Isadora was now at the counter, setting her slurpee down. Before Adam could stop himself he asked, “What are you doing around 6 a.m. tonight?” That was when his shift ended. Intrigued, Isadora said,

“Nothing really. I just have to be at work by 12.”

“Well, would you like to accompany me to a pet crematorium. You see, my dog just died and I’m not allowed to just throw the body away which I never knew because I’ve never had to dispose of a body before. But I can’t lift her alone, you could help me?” Adam said this in one breath and had wrapped his thumbs into his pockets nervously. Isadora thought that Adam did have very interesting vibes. It also didn’t hurt that he was cute in a sort of psycho-killer way, the type of killer who appeared on CSI. They all had swallowed, finely bone structured faces and wavy, mid-length brown hair. Adam’s skin was a bit more sallow than she had seen on a psycho-killer.
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FIC TION

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HOW TO BUS TABLES

Arrive three minutes before 5 o'clock at a glass door that says "Thai Fusion," wearing a silky top that you picked out because it seemed kind of Asian. Smoothing down your shirt, you step through the door, pass the small water fountain and sit at the bar. Ask the bartender, who is rubbing off blue and green bottles of liquor with a stained rag, where you can find the owner. He disappears suspiciously down some stairs for about 7 minutes.

He reappears followed by a Thai woman in high-heeled flip-flops and a flowy dress that looks a bit like your top. She introduces herself as Ray, and says she owns the restaurant, makes small talk. Where are you from? Down state, but I'm staying with my cousin a few miles away. Are you in school? Yes, I go to State. Have you ever worked in a restaurant? No, but no time like the present.

She guides you around the floor and shows you the layout: 24 tables surrounding an island in the center of the room, every table set up in exactly the same way. She asks you to mimic the set-up of the plates and silverware in front of her, undoes it and says that when she comes back she wants it to be right again. You finish quickly and stare out of a window that takes up the entire north wall. There is a view of Lake Michigan and a half-empty parking lot where two boys are sharing one skateboard. They aren't wearing helmets and one of the boys falls against the curb and scrapes a knee. You can tell by the way he stoops to cover it with his hand that he wants to cry, but he doesn't.

Ray comes back and inspects your work. The forks are where the spoons should be, but she fires you anyway because you are new at this whole thing and she likes that you look Italian. You are actually Greek, but don't say anything.

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You are younger: using both at once, filling two glasses at a time, watching closely water gun like a gunslinger from those old westerns that your dad made you watch when you were younger: wearing helmets and one of the boys jails against the curb and scrapes a knee. You don't have to hide the evidence under old food in the garbage can so Ray, her husband, won't see them and charge you.

When she comes home, she rips off her leather jacket and throws it on the couch. She looks around her; everything in her house is in order, everything where it belongs, everything polished and tidy. Her parents are not back from work yet. She strolls into her mother's closet and shifts through the outfits: the neat business suits, the silk dresses, the denim skirts. She finds the green ball gown that she wore yesterday.

The pearls are now tucked back into her mother's jewelry box, the make-up washed off of her face, the silver stilettos set neatly on the shoe rack. Everything has been returned to its place. Today she will choose something simpler. She takes a flowing, full-length, grey skirt off of a hanger and searches through her mother's drawers for a white chemise. Taking off her baggy jeans and her t-shirt, she unbinds her breasts. From the bottom shelf of the closet she picks up a violet shawl, and then returns to her room for her wig before she leaves. As she walks through the meadow behind her house, she plucks dandelions and makes a chain to put on her head. She starts running, barefoot, lifting up her face to greet the soft spring drizzle. Her friends' words echo in her head "People don't know what to do with you," "You're so free from stereotypes," but she knows now that this is what freedom feels like.
In the first few weeks of the job, you cracked a lot of glasses, but Chris took you to the sink in the kitchen and showed you how to cool them under tepid water first, so you don’t break many anymore. You’re starting to find him attractive, with that blonde stubble grazing his jaw line. He smiles frequently and his eyes are a different shade every time you see them in the light. He’s taken to calling you “kiddo,” which could be a bad sign, but he smiles playfully out of the corner of his mouth when he says it, so you don’t mind. He looks too young to be married and reminds you of the one boyfriend in high school who didn’t cheat; the one who was in the 4-H club, who’d push your hair behind your ears and call you his wild colt.

Although you’ve gotten a hang of the mechanics of this job, dealing with the people is still confusing. Out of all the customers, the tourists are especially rude, and usually demand things when you’re the busiest. They want chopsticks for their kids, even though it makes them spill rice everywhere. They get passy about stained napkins, and want window tables, even when there’s a line out the door.

It’s hard to get their attention as they speak boisterously over their mouth-fills of food, chinking their glasses together as they steadily consume one fruity alcoholic beverage after another. You’ve tried gently asking large parties to pass down their plates so you could take them away, but they often ignore you while telling anecdotes about their bosses and engaged sisters. Usually you stand next to the table awkwardly for about 20 seconds before they listen, or notice the hand you’re holding out for dirty dishes.

Apparently Keegan thinks your social awkwardness with the customers is cute because you hear him snicker behind you almost every time. He’s becoming just another work-related hazard. One night, when business was slow, you were standing by the waiter’s station and he came up behind you, grazed your ass with his fingers. You didn’t turn around, just tightened your jaw and walked away.

It’s not worth the trouble.

Your nights here are each a variation of the one before it. Your spine always feels misaligned the next morning, right between the shoulder blades, and you’re always covered in peanut sauce and melonlike, egg rolls when you get home. You’ve learned that if you’re not careful, curry sauce will funnel out the corner of the square plates and into the pocket of your apron, making mothers hold out their wetted napkins, clutching “Oh, poor thing.”

Ray tells you often that you don’t smile enough, that you have a pretty little smile, that smiling makes the patrons feel comfortable. Flash her those pearl whites, more like a wolf baring her teeth than a grin. Whenever the phone rings, Ray has someone else pick it up before her. She says she can’t answer it, but it’s likely that she’s just lazy. You think bitterly, smile Ray. Put on a face for the nice people and their money.

And you cut your hand every week on broken vases and cups because it is an unspoken part of your job to pick up shattered glass. Chris bandaged you up once—ran your palm under warm water, dried it, and undid the band-aid, gently smoothing down the sides and cooing “there we go.” Think that he must be a great dad and wonder if his wife appreciates him enough.

Your paychecks always seem short, but you don’t care enough to say anything about it. By the middle of the season you’re rake in about $90 a night in crumpled ones, fives and sometimes tens, counting and flattening the bills out on the car rides home with Nina. It’s amazing how rich a stack of small bills can make a person look. The only thing that seems to change is the names of the workers on the schedule.

The dishwasher’s name switches from weekdays to weekends. During the week, Ray’s elderly father washes dishes when they stack up high enough.
On weekends, when the restaurant is busiest, a guy from Mexico named Javier comes in and scrubs the endless stream of bowls, plates, silverware. He has a greasy ponytail and wears his bibbed apron with the top folded down. He's usually in a muscle tank and leers at you with suds up to his elbows. You thought that must have been at least 5 and felt strangely giddy for the next hour.

On the second Saturday in August, you are wiping down soy sauce bottle and startled by a hand on your shoulder. Rachel says, "Little one, we have a wedding shindig tonight." Nodding, you take the stairs down to the lounge. Fold silverware into napkins and glance at Chris as he tears butcher paper into squares.

Mikey comes out of the storage closet with a small bag of rice and stands next to you until he's acknowledged. "Yes, Mikey?"

"Hey, Beautiful, if I said you had a great body would you hold it against me?"

"Maybe, you say. His jaw drops and his belly wobbles from side to side as he runs off, giggling and calling to the kitchen girls to tell them the news.

By 9 o'clock, the wedding party is finished eating and everyone is drunk, including the servers, bartender and Ray. You are not, because 18 is not 21 and no one will slack you anything because they're afraid of getting caught.

Everyone changes with alcohol in their glom!. Ray lets everybody sneak soup and fortune cookies from the kitchen. Keegan is silently standing by the bar, watching the movement around him like a telephone pole on the side of a highway. Rachel is talkative and almost kind, telling you about the gossip going around town.

A few people you don't know have slept with their cousins without realizing it. They found a rat in an industrial-sized bag of rice here, but used it anyway. Chris only married his wife because she was pregnant—at this you are strangely excited, creating the scenario of his loneliness, his need for you to save him from a forced and loveless marriage. Imagine him sitting at home, in bed or at the dinner table, with his wife, not saying a word to each other. Because of your past experiences with men, you've developed a habit of thinking of them as something broken, and this only gives you more incentive.

You've been fiddling with a napkin, but Rachel stills your hands with her own and leans in closer to your face, the artificial raspberry smell of her drink wafting from her mouth, "But the most juicy part of the whole deal is Ray," she says. She holds her finger up to her lips and looks around, her head pivoting loosely. "You know how she doesn't answer the phone?" Nod to her. "Well."

"What?" you ask.

"Well," Rachel takes the last sip of her drink and shakes the ice around in her glass. "A couple years ago, she fell in love with this waiter, Kurt I think his name was, and they ran away together." Put the napkin down and give her your full attention. "Then, after they tracked her down, in Arizona or something random state like that, Ray's mom called her and told her that her dad was dying, even though he wasn't, just to get her back here." Rachel threw her hands out to her sides because your face must be showing some kind of surprise. "I know, right? Crazy."

"Yeah, but then what?"
MY FATHER’S WAR

It doesn’t bother me
that if my mother let him
my father would watch
the weather channel all day.
And it doesn’t bother me that my father
wages war with the snow on the roof,
despite that it is impossible to make
the snow stop falling.
And it doesn’t bother me that when I help my father shovel
the roof he swears
every time he bends his knees.
I am only bothered that I find
the older I get the more I am like him,
and the fact
that I find myself telling a snow flake
to go screw itself.

“Well, once Ray came back they made her stay and she can’t answer the phone or go anywhere by herself because her husband’s afraid that she’ll find Kurt and run off again.”

“Wow,” you say. Rachel excuses herself to go to the restroom and you do a round on the floor to take dishes to the kitchen.

As you enter the dining area, you pass Ray chatting up the father of the bride. He is paying for everything, so she talks to him like they are old friends, about how much she loves the restaurant, her life here in the Middle-of-Nowhere, Michigan. The father is smiling and stealing glances down the front of her paisley dress, which is starting to look too young for her, hugging the building fat on her hips. You wonder what it’s like to spend all day, everyday—except for Sunday—in this restaurant, and feel bad for her, those fake nails and high-heeled flip flops. You wonder if she thinks about the life she could have had with Kurt every time she lays eyes on her husband with the sweat stains at his work.

After collecting all the plates you can carry, you dump them at the dish station without scraping the leftovers into the garbage can. An untouched piece of sushi is sitting on a platter and you pop it into your mouth without shame. Javier notices what you’ve done and says, “You have quite a hunger, yes?” Shrug and get to work on getting the next round of plates.

A man from the groom’s side is waving an empty glass in the air as you emerge from the kitchen. “More iced tea,” he shouts. The other three men at his table laugh and you pluck the glass from his hand. “Feisty,” he says drunkenly. “I like feisty.” Don’t giggle; don’t even smile. Just make your way through the congestion of people to the waiter’s station.

As you shove ice into the glass, you think about spitting in it, just a little bit, like the waiters do in all the movies. But then Chris comes up and you are suddenly alone together.

“Crazy out there, huh?” he says.
“Yeah,” you say.
“I saw you handle that drunk guy out there. Impressive.”
“Well, what can I say,” you tell him as you pour “G” on the soda gun, the mantra “G for tea” running briefly through your head, “I’ve got experience.” You sneak a glance at him and he smirks. Notice that you are smiling stupidly and cut it out, LOOK away.

There is a pause as you keep your hands unnecessarily busy in the ice bucket to prolong the moment, putting a few cubes into a glass you don’t need and filling it with water.

“I see you looking at me sometimes,” he tells you quietly.
A little pink running to your cheeks as you peek up at him. “Oh, I…”
“I look at you, too,” he says, inches his body closer, making you lean against the counter. You wonder if you are day dreaming, but then he puts his hand on the counter behind you, and his arm is just grazing your waist, your hip. He’s not against you, but his breath is warm as it hits your ear. Remember the glass in your hand, cold glass, warm breath, listen closely; he is speaking, his words deliberate and heavy.

“I have to get something from the walk-in freezer. I might be there for a while, if you want to join me.” He straightens up and you feel your body missing his closeness. With a small smile, he turns his face and walks away from the station.
To: ing a lemon into the glass of iced tea, you walk in a stupor to the drunken guy’s table. He sees you and says “Feisty girl, what took you so long? I missed you.” You nod without really seeing the guy and hand him his drink, thinking of breath on your ear, your growing addiction to men, Chris’ shoulder under your chin. Wonder if he’s broken. Wonder if he’s waiting. You start to walk away from the table, but stop when you feel a yank on your wrist.

“Where you think you’re going?” His eyes are swimming and wild, his hair an obviously dyed shade of brown. “We were just getting to know each other.” He tugs on your wrist and lowers his voice, “C’mon, no one’s around.” He’s right. The room is empty. All of the guests are getting their coats; all of the waiters are seeing them off. Keegan isn’t even lurking near by.

There’s sweat on the guy’s forehead, quivering there in droplets. He asks you what you’re doing after the party, draws you closer. There is a swell of laughter in the other room as everyone says goodbye.

“Sir, you need to let go of me,” you say.

He pulls you onto his lap. “I’m an artist, you know,” he whispers into your ear, his words moist and sticky. “I could paint you. You’re beautiful, you know that? You’d be beautiful to paint.” He puts his hand on your ribs, leans his face into you. “Fuck off,” you say and push him off of you, heading directly to the door.

“C’mon, I was just messin’ around,” he calls.

Grab your purse, your jacket, your cell phone. Mikey tries to stop you from leaving through the back door so he can give you another pick-up line, but you hurry out without saying anything to him.

Dialing Nina’s number, you head for the beach. It rings and rings but she doesn’t pick up. You don’t stop walking until you almost hit the water, and after kicking off your shoes, stretch your toes. Like every night, your feet are sore and the cool smell feels foreign and unreal against the skin.

Stopping to breathe, you feel foolish, like a scared little girl. You wonder if you’ll ever go back and remember Chris, imagine him waiting in the freezer. Was he really there, or was it just booze talking, a trick? Wonder if he’s really a sad man trapped in an unfulfilling marriage but take into account your draw to fantasy, that you look at men as something in need of repair. Consider going back, but convince yourself that he is probably an ass anyway, like most of the others. Besides, it would be embarrassing to show up again.

Decide you won’t go back to work because it is mid-August already and you have school soon, then guess how much money you would have made tonight. Wonder when you’d be able to collect your final paycheck; if they are searching for you, calling your name, or excited about not having to share their tips for the night. Pretend that they’re worried.

You feel worthless, a coward, and imagine slapping that guy in the face and everyone roaring in and cheering--people love witnessing a good slap. You think you shouldn’t have been afraid.

You think of Ray in her paisley dress, leaving with her husband after having to wait for everyone else to go home, after having to clean all of the tables by herself because you left. Think of her husband putting his hands on her. Would she pull away? Would she feel like you did when that guy first grabbed you: helpless, obligated?

You find a Petoskey stone on the beach completely by accident. It is rough, unpolished, ridges of rock peaking up around the circular fossils on the surface. Consider saving it, but instead, throw it as hard as you can into the lake. It’s too dark to see the splash, just hear the soft kur-plunk. With a slow exhale of breath, lay back into the sand, the waves reaching for your toes, and close your eyes as you feel all the muscles in your back finally beginning to relax.
HIROSHIMA
THE MOMENT OF THE EXPLOSION

I.
For a moment
there is nothing but
ten Sun's worth of light
and then only darkness,
a hush of ash
falling over a village
already buried by rubble,
and a silence so pure
it is the unsung song
of bodies disappearing
into thin air.

Soon it is the sound
of fire crackling, people
crawling, bodies
scraping across the
broken glass from
blown out windows,
that devours the silence.

It is the sudden cry
of a baby and the frantic
scuffling of feet
as those thrown from
where they stood
search for a child,
a sister, an old man
close to dying, a mother.
Anyone.

II.
A girl swimming
in the river surfaces,

...GLAZED WITH RAINWATER...

NON-FICTION

"Non-Fiction writing includes essays, journalism, 'how-to' books or articles, scholarly writing, in other words, it is writing which reports, analyzes, informs or instructs. It may contain the author's personal opinions, but its main purpose is to deliver information, and the style will lack emotion or subjectivity. When a writer embarks on a piece of creative non-fiction, any subject might be tackled - even the same subjects about which essayists or journalists might write - but the approach to writing the piece will be different. In creative writing, or fiction, the writer seeks to engage the reader and move the reader; creative writing conjures vivid pictures and draws the reader in, using language that is emotive and dramatic. The aims of a Creative Non-Fiction writer are the same."

DISCUSSED: GENDERS OF ALL GREAT TYPES AND WAYS, PURPLE PURSES, CHRISTIAN COMEDIANS, GIRL SCOUTS OF AMERICA, "PASSPORT TO PARIS"
SCRAMBLED EGGS

Jaundiced and coated in amniotic fluid, I was born a specimen of femininity. I weighed nine pounds eight ounces, stretched to twenty four inches and had an ovarian cyst the size of a chicken egg. As one obstetrician stitched up my mother's episiotomy the doctors on call filed in to poke my belly in awe. By the time I could walk the cyst would dissolve, along with its simple declaration of biological gender. Already I was trying to nurse my father through his shunt.

My mother, quickly approaching forty, had wanted a blond daughter to name Honey. She met my father, a blond RN without a place to stay. They married a month later. When she told him he was pregnant he didn't believe her. And then he said, "I think I'll move back in with my mother." Before he could leave he pushed a patient in a wheelchair down a flight of stairs, killing him. He lost his nursing home job and, with it, his patient's drugs. But when my father held me "he fell in love," my mother said. I slept on his shoulder as he dissected motherboard, watched Jeopardy and shopped Best Buy. My mother couldn't stand being at home with him, so after six weeks of a six-month maternity leave, she went back to work, processing film at the state crime lab.

For all the importance my father placed on having a daughter and not a son (my father abhorred Grason, my mother's son from her first marriage) I was not distinctly feminine. I wore my brother's "ideally unisex" sweat pants and flannel pajamas and a purple and yellow Barney pullover. My brother, who is twelve years older than me, taught me how to do Karate and build Lego rockets. He took me by my ankles and swung while I giggled and screamed, spinning. I ate Chunky Beef Sirloin and staged Fire Rescue Crime Scenes. I have a picture of myself at thirteen months, blond haired in my Barney sweater, inserting a CD into my computer. Instead of ballet or gymnastics or soccer, I played kickball in the street and soccer in the alley with a group of kids from the block, their heads swarming with lice.

I hadn't realized any distinction between the sexes until I was pulling the mandatory skirt for my first day of school. I had known, theoretically, that I had "girl parts" and that my brother had "boy parts," and that's why he was a boy and I was a girl. At Forth Baptist Christian School, wearing a skirt was necessary to qualify as a girl. I had imagined "school" as a warehouse with a kidney shaped pool surrounded by desks, where I would learn how to be a firefighter. Or a medical missionary, or a Christian comedian, or a defense attorney. Instead I learned that God I learned that I shouldn't save lives but should save myself for marriage and follow the gender roles inscribed on the back of the Ten Commandments.

TURNING SEVENTEEN

When your father
feels his medals
in his hard hands,
make no mistake—
he is afraid.

When your professor
with his owl spirit
trills of peace
make no mistake—
he is afraid.

In a year
you will crawl
a smoky beachhead
and find it full of naked soldiers,
nor young nor old,
all of them afraid.
folding hand towels or eating candy out of glass bowls.

Things have gone wrong before.

A wild orange cat impregnates the same mother
over and over. Sometimes I wait for him in the backyard
and we stare each other down.

He comes out of the kitchen
and walks me around the lake to the house with the h.illlllOck
and presses my arms against the rope.

He whispers to me. Sorry, wrong ear, I say.

My teachers, concerned with my "unfeminine behavior," called my parents almost
daily about my uncombed hair, dirty or mismatched socks, and skirt that flew up on the
jungle gym. And by second grade, my floral skirt was too short. Every few weeks, I knelt
on the floor in front of the class. Of course, my hem didn't touch the ground and was
this too short. I was sent to have a heart to heart with the principle. "Knees," he said,
"Are fundamentally sexy. We can't allow you to have them show." When I figured out
what sexy meant, I didn't know how legs could fit the bill. But I hadn't watched profes-

dional volleyball, either.

My norms for marriage and relationships didn't come from my parents, but from
"Leave it to Beaver" which I watched with my mother while eating "Moose Tracks" ice
cream. Unlike June Cleaver, neither of my parents cooked, besides my father's occasion-
ally br.HwUl'st on the propane grill or my mother's Pillsbury Brownies.

"Mom," I asked, "Why don't you cook?"

"I don't have time," she said, sighing, "I work. Why don't you ask your father why he
doesn't cook? He's here all day."

"Women cook." My father said. We ate rotisserie chicken and bagged salad on the
bed, again.

When, in front of the television she explained chromosomes to me, and with it, sex, I
was surprised but unshaken. "Sperm cells are tiny," she said, "They don't contain much
and they don't have any mitochondrial DNA. The X chromosome is so powerful that
only one is activated." The strength of The Egg compared to the slithering sperm was
clear. "More boys are conceived then girls," she explained, "But more girls are born.
The boys die off before they've born."

I pitied boys. Their testosterone-severed corpus coluseum made mental math excruci-
ating, their Y chromosomes made reading hurculean. I adored my father but knew he
had to compensate. Unlike my mom, he lacked a job, biceps and two X chromosomes. I
believed him when he said, "Nail polish is too sexy," and "The Girl Scouts are filled with
lesbians." Even more than I was missing out, he was too.

When I was in forth grade, riding home to watch ER at 4, he told me, "I'm changing
my name to Theresa." His thin blond hair hung down to his shoulders and nubs of breasts
stuck out from his shirt because he was so

"I was thinking about just changing it to
"Terry," but I thought I'd just be direct."

"Oh, that's cool," I said.

At Northern Sun, a leftist store downtown, we chose a purple embroidered purse. He
bought Birkenstocks. I picked out "Siren" Ten Hour Lip Color which painted his thin
lips orange in our bathroom.

"What do you think?"
"It looks pretty good," I said. I smeared some decade old Lilac eye shadow on his lids. The he rubbed it off with peach cold cream.

Finally my father, who had been ordering Estrogen online from India got a prescription and a lesbian therapist whose parrots imitated the answering machine.

"Ring, Ring, Ring," one parrot said. I looked up from Steven King.

"Hello, you've reached the private confidential line of Karol Jenson," the other parrot cooed, "If this is an emergency, please call 9-1-1. Please leave a message after the tone." Sometimes it was not the parrots and a client would begin to speak. So much for "private confidential."

Karen was the first lesbian I met. She was tall with short hair, although not as tall as Ellen, my father's 6'5" role model. Ellen curated the electricity museum in Minneapolis. She transitioned into a woman at fifty. Her wife, Mary who writes Embroidery Murder Mysteries, stayed with her, even after the surgery. At dinner at Olive Garden she explained, "The trick is to find the end first." My father smiled.

"Rosella's butch anyway. She'll stay." In the drive through at McDonald's, a few weeks later, my father pounded the steering wheel and sobbed, "I can't believe she's leaving me," I wrapped my arms around him as he heaved, "That bitch!"

Before the first of endless psychological assessments, we went to Perkins. My father wore a skirt.

"What would you ladies like to eat today?" the waitress asked.

He gave her a ten dollar tip. That was the last time I was in a room with them both.

Logistics eroded all of my father's relationships. Because my mother wouldn't call him anything but Tom, their lawyers sent their kids to private schools. My father sobbed when I mentioned "my mom," or when his mother forgot he was now a woman. I started calling my mother "R" and he stopped seeing her.

Others tried to help work out the worms of the situation. Analisa down the block gave me a VHS of a transsexual on Oprah. My cousin, Jessica, who is six foot five and works for Planned Parenthood brought my father garbage bags filled with her old clothes. "Have you ever watched Oprah?" she asked me. "They had a show on transsexuals. One of the kids said he calls his father 'Maddy.' It's a cross between 'Mommy' and 'Daddy.' Maybe you could call Theresa that." I started calling him "Mom." He just loved that.

In the middle of fifth grade, my father's girlfriend Susan moved in. I spent Wednesday nights and Sundays with my mom, digging through the Walgreens clearance and watching "Passport to Paris," while my father and Susan cruised gay bars and bought cocaine. In the basement while they shot methadone, I watched "But I'm a Cheer-a-leader" and "My summer of love." Whoa, that could be me, I thought, watching the young lesbians kiss. And then I went back to my scrambled-egg quesadilla.

A.C. MUIR

NEIGHBORING

I've walked around
with one eye closed for three days.

People speak to my right ear
but I ignore them and apologize

I'm sorry, it's deaf. My family
thinks I am losing my mind,
but I'd just like to see what it's all about.

The night after Christmas, he and I go swimming.
It's too hot to have the windows closed
but the water is ice by the moon.

My whole body tensed up and studied
as if he might understand if he looks
long enough. The three moles on my back,
a small birthmark near the clavicle.

What could it mean? His good eye
whirrs, the other already sleeping. He steams peppers
and carrots, tomato, banana, asparagus.
I look inside the bowl and imagine parrots
soaring out, beaks aimed at my iris'.

Late at night, I stand in the driveway and watch him
through the window;
"poetry: language sung, chanted, spoken, or written according to some pattern of recurrence that emphasizes the relationships between words on the basis of sound as well as sense; this pattern is almost always a rhythm or meter, which may be supplemented by rhyme or alliteration or both. The demands of verbal patterning usually make poetry a more condensed medium than prose or everyday speech, often involving variations in syntax, the use of special words and phrases. The three major categories of poetry are narrative, dramatic, and lyric, the last being the most extensive."

DISCUSSED: CLAVICLES, HUMMING GOATS, STEAMED ASPARAGUS, BUDDHA, FLORIDA WINTERS, THE TEEN YEARS, THE WEATHER CHANNEL, SIRLOIN, BACK MOLES.

I was everything my father wanted to be. At the Unitarian church’s “women’s night”, complete with Hot Dish and drums, he whispered to me across the table, “When you menstruate I’m going to throw a party and buy you a monkey.” I didn’t think it was that big of a deal.

As my parent’s day in court approached the promises grew, “If you come with me, I’ll let you get a belly button ring when you turn thirteen,” he said, “We’ll do it together. We’re going to have a pool in Arizona” But when my mother won custody we knew that an Amber Alert would meet me at the state line.

We hauled the mattress from the basement, unscrewed the bookshelves from the walls, tore down the kitchen table. My father smashed my piano with a Slugger. I carried the pieces out to the fire pit. He lit up a cigarette and then the edge of my mattress, whose flowers melted into its wire springs.

We watched from the patio, drinking white wine and vodka in Squirt, as the flames climbed, catching on the lowest leaves of our oak tree. I picked up the leftovers of my room into a garbage bag.

When the trees turned golden, my father and Susan came to Marcy Open School with their red Ford F-150. Sunroof open, my father raced me around the block at eighty, eighty-five, ninety, seeing how fast we could go. We ate falafel on the tailgate. We hugged goodbye. “I love you, Mom,” I said.

Their were no drums for my first blood, no dances, just a trip to Rainbow Foods for pads. The June air distilled into beads on my skin I stuck my feet out the window. It was father’s day.
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THANK YOU FOR YOU.

Emily Todd. I hope you are as happy as us. The people here are very happy here. We are so happy here. We are so happy here.

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