Spirits: A Red Wheelbarrow with Soul
The Red Wheelbarrow
William Carlos Williams

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.
With special thanks to Dov Stanley, Noah McKee and posse, Jennifer Jaffe for the baked goods, and Aime, Mika and Delp for all of their support.

suffer from depression are considerably less interested in having sexual intercourse with their respective partners than those who don’t.

Decades later, the few people still in our working class would retire, and there no young workers would take their place, because there would be no young workers. Our country’s distribution of wealth would be uneven, and our economy would crash.

We would become a depressed country, where no one has a job, and where public health doesn’t exist seeing that the doctor’s too would stop working. Sooner or later, we would just not care anymore.

In the end, Brazilians would become extinct.

As a result of this study, my team and I came to the conclusion that even though Brazil has always been a country of problems; of one thing Brazilians can be sure, for as long as we have soccer, we will be just fine.
This essay is the result of thorough research on Brazilian culture, and how much it has been impacted by a game. Yes, twenty-two men running after a ball has proven to be an incredibly powerful catalyst for change. Brazilians stopped going to schools, and began playing soccer. As a result we are one of the happiest countries in the world, and one of the most unintelligent ones too.

For decades, soccer has been Brazil's major lover, friend, and villain. We have cheered, cried, and occasionally stabbed each other over it. To the few enlightened citizens of our country, who have realized that things have gotten out of control, punching each other over a game seems too primitive, but to the majority of us who are soccer fans, it has become somewhat of an after-game tradition.

Nonetheless, all Brazilians have a passion for the sport buried inside them. If a tourist were to walk down the streets of São Paulo during a World Cup game, he might be reprehended: "If you're going to come into our country, respect our traditions. Sit your butt on that chair and pay attention, Ronaldinho is about to score."

Brazil's obsession has caused many obscure international scholars to ask the question: "If Brazilians were forbidden to play soccer, would they survive?"

To investigate this scenario my team and I conducted a number of illegal experiments, which were specifically designed to determine how different Brazilians would react to soccer abstinence.

With the results of these tests in hand, our team had meetings in which we attempted to analyze this issue both psychologically and philosophically. We were able to determine different effects that this would have on Brazilians, and that soccer has actually been a positive catalyst in the country's culture.

For once, without soccer, the suicide rate would go up considerably. Major Pharmaceutical Companies would settle in, and Brazil might steal title of Prozac Nation from the United States.

With most of adults suffering of major depression, our working force would be negatively impacted, and people would be fired by the second.

The number of newborns would go down, even though Brazilians have always been considered to be very physical. It has been proven that people who

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Poem from the Musee d'Orsay, June 2010

Mishka Hoosen

"Tempt not a desperate man."

-William Shakespeare

Vincent shot himself through the heart
derf for simpler things.
Perhaps you saw a moth burn to death, perhaps
a church stood too silent
in the moving grass, or
the wheat bent too readily
in the wind. Vincent,
I stood before your portrait
for an hour before
he came, Excusez-moi, mademoiselle,
we are closing, maintenant.

Are the blind impaled
by that desperate blue?

Tempt not a desperate man
with a bowl of monstrous blossoms,
beautiful for what they damage.
Tempt not a desperate man
with your arrival, angel.
Death is too close, it breathes in us,
and the clockwork world knows
all too clearly
the air that is shattered
by a gunshot in the fields.

Letters to Foxglove

Danny Rothschild

CAST

HAYDEN early 20's, ERIC'S younger brother.
ERIC late 20's, HAYDEN’S older brother, engaged to MARY.
MARY late 20's, ERIC'S fiancée.
FIONA early 30's, sells daffodils, spastic, twirly.
NATASHA early 20's, sells irises, sexy and very earthy.
ANYA late sixties, sells foxglove, philosophical and mysterious.

SETTING

Modern time, a series of flashbacks revealed through letters HAYDEN wrote in his journal, but never sent to anyone.

SET UP

HAYDEN stands center stage, and behind him there are five chairs, and seated in those chairs are: FIONA, ERIC, NATASHA, MARY, and ANYA. Stage left there is a spotlight on a pot with a bright purple foxglove. The spotlight does not fade out until the end.

SCENE 1

HAYDEN. (Reading from a journal) March 29, 2009: Dear journal, if we’re going to get along, you need a name. (Pause) Mason. You feel like a Mason to me. I hope that works. I hate not being able to choose your own name. My brother got a nice, simple name, and I got the strange one. I hate my name, but it’s one of those things I was never able to tell my parents. Everyone has something they want to say to people, but can’t. They repeat the words in their heads until they become sounds, until they are unsure if the words even make sense. (Pause) I need you to be those things, the things I don’t tell anyone else, the things that no one else will know.

SCENE 2

HAYDEN. April 13, 2009: Dear Fiona, I don’t know if that’s your name, but it
doesn't matter, you won't be reading this. I'm just guessing; Fiona seems to fit you well. (Beat) I want to thank you. Yesterday I entered "The Flower House," wanting to start a garden. I collect rocks; each one represents a moment in my life. But as a hobby it's not satisfying. Maybe I just need more exciting moments in my life. (Pulls out a sack full of rocks from one of his pockets) Sometimes I look through them, but they're either heavy rocks, or memories that weigh me down. (Puts the rocks away) I want to start something new and watch it grow; I want to see progress! I want a garden, a colorful, beautiful, lively garden. Right over there, so I can see it from my window. So I stepped into "The Flower House," that's where I saw you. (FIONA stands up, wearing a short yellow summer dress and a pink flower in her hair. She starts twirling over to HAYDEN.) You walked up to me, cheerful and all, offering me help.

FIONA. (Upbeat) Hi, there! How can I help your kind soul on this beautiful day? Are you looking for a plant? Well, you're obviously looking for a plant, why else would you be here!

HAYDEN. Yes... I don't really know where to start.

FIONA. Well what is the purpose of this plant? Do you want to grow tomatoes? No, no, you don't seem like the tomato type – maybe rosemary? No, I can tell you don't need any rosemary. Is it just for decoration? I bet it's for decoration!

HAYDEN. Yes.

FIONA. For your bathroom? You want a plant in your bathroom, right? Or bedroom? No, not bedroom. It's for your bathroom!

HAYDEN. I would like to start a garden.

FIONA. Fantastic! You need a start-up plant! We have lots of start-up plants!

HAYDEN. A start up-plant?

FIONA. Is the light coming from north-east-south-west? Do you know how much sun it'll get?

HAYDEN. It'll receive a lot of light.

FIONA. And obviously you want flower blossoms, right? Of course you want flower blossoms!

HAYDEN. That would be nice.

FIONA. Do you want the blossoms big, or little?

HAYDEN. It doesn't really mat—

FIONA. You could always go with daffodils!

HAYDEN. Daffodils?
it doesn't snow? Of course not, the other side is Canada. The other side of the Pacific are islands, tropical, Japan. The only thing that freezes over there is Russia. There are more waves in Lake Michigan and the rain falls faster here, but it's not such a graceful things as it is by the Sound.

It's just water.

There is a story of a dog who swam out when his owner threw a stick into the Pacific. But he just kept swimming. Kept swimming, and slowly he faded into the ocean. Apparently he had hearing problems.

It's just water.

FIONA. They're easy to take care of! And they have beautiful flowers, very bright colors!

HAYDEN. I like bright colors.

FIONA. What's your favorite color? It's blue, right?

HAYDEN. No—

FIONA. No, no no you're right. It's not blue. It's a warm color. Red! No, orange!

HAYDEN. I like orange a lot.

FIONA. Well we don't have orange blossom, so I'll give you the yellow ones instead!

HAYDEN. Alright. (Pause) What do I have to do to plant them?

FIONA. Oh don't worry about that! They're perennial plants, they'll just keep on coming back! You just have to divide the clumps every few years!

HAYDEN. Clumps?

FIONA. They grow so fast, and before you know it there'll be hundreds of them! They have flower parties, I bet they gossip to each other!

HAYDEN. I just want something to keep me company. Maybe something that grows alone?

FIONA. No no, you won't get better than daffodils! They spread out and create daffodil drifts! They can cover your whole lawn in yellow!

HAYDEN. (Nervous) I don't know if my brother would appreciate that.

FIONA. Your brother? Why do you care what your brother thinks! This is your garden!

HAYDEN. (Insecure) Yeah, I guess you're right. I have my real friends for that.

(Beat) Thank you: they are the start of a garden that I know will be beautiful.
SCENE 3

HAYDEN. April 15, 2009: Eric, I thought you would appreciate my daffodils. Your yard is filled with gravel and the few plants that were there when we moved in. (Beat) All I want is for you to say that you like one rock, for you to say that you like one flower, but you never will. You make fun of my rocks, and why? What do you get out of it? Those are my memories, the moments that mean something to me. Instead, you cast the rocks across the floor, and preceded to pick one up to show me how pathetic it was. It was number 18.

ERIC. (ERIC stands up, a rock in his hand, walks to HAYDEN. He's wearing dark jeans and a football hoodie.) 18? You number them?

HAYDEN. So I can match it up with my list, remember the day and place I found it.

ERIC. You wrote them down?

HAYDEN. It's not like you have that many. Nothing exciting ever happens in your life.

ERIC. What's the memory behind 18?

HAYDEN. (Pulls out piece of paper from his back pocket) 78. April 3rd, 2009: from outside Teavana, where I was watching the news. Iowa has finally legalized gay marriage.

ERIC. You collected a rock for the day our state legalized gay marriage?

HAYDEN. Yes.

ERIC. You don't realize how ridiculous this is, do you?

HAYDEN. It's a string of moments, and that's all life is, really, a string of moments that you knot together. Each of these rocks is one of those knots.

ERIC. (Takes the list from HAYDEN, starts reading it.) 19. April 10th, 2009: from the Buchard Gardens: fell in love and decided to start my own garden. 20. April 13th, 2009: from The Flower House, I got daffodils to start my own garden. (Puts down the list, hands it back) You started a garden?

HAYDEN. I got some daffodils.

ERIC. You started a garden.

HAYDEN. Mary might enjoy them.

ERIC. I don't care about Mary.

HAYDEN. You should, she's your fiancée.

ERIC. Why don't you do something with your life, why don't you get a job?
about love. To love the way he pulled
the ones off the highest branches for you,
and the ones that fell with the rain in the spring.

HAYDEN. I can’t keep a job. People don’t... they’re not comfortable with me.
ERIC. You can’t just live here and grow flowers!
HAYDEN. Why not?
ERIC. It’s wasting your time. You’re not accomplishing anything.
HAYDEN. It’s adding beauty to the world.
ERIC. Beauty? Daffodils are beauty?
HAYDEN. Yes.
ERIC. They’re just flowers, Hayden, and growing them is the gayest thing you’ve
ever done. It beats your rock collection.
HAYDEN. Gay is not a synonym for stupid.
ERIC. You know what I meant. (Picks up a small pebble from the ground) These are
stupid. Your life is heading nowhere: you collect rocks, rocks! And that’s how you
remember your life; it’s pitiful. (Throws the pebble at HAYDEN, then returns back
to his seat.)
HAYDEN. (Reading the journal again) I kept that pebble, added it to my list;
number twenty-one of my collection. April 15, 2009: From home, the pebble Eric
threw at me, calling my collection of rocks, my life, pathetic.

SCENE 4
HAYDEN. May 12th, 2009: Dear Natasha, I’m sorry I was so awkward. I’m not used
to people being so straightforward around me. You were very beautiful, but all I
wanted was some flowers. I really wasn’t looking for anything more than that. I love
the daffodils, but I wanted something more. I always want something more... I hate
that. (Natasha gets up from her chair, barefoot, wearing a sexy red dress. She slowly
walks to HAYDEN) I walked into the greenhouse, you had a mischievous look on
your face. I watched you watch me from behind the counter, not saying anything.
When our eyes met, you would smile, and I went back to looking through the
plants, feeling the texture of different leaves.

NATASHA. Can I assist you in exploring the flowers?
HAYDEN. I’d just like to look around.
NATASHA. Don’t hesitate to find me if you need... anything. (Smiles.)
HAYDEN. Thanks. (Pause) What flowers are those?
NATASHA. Those shades of scarlet?
HAYDEN. Yeah.
NATASHA. (Walks out from behind the counter, towards HAYDEN) Those, darling, would be irises... Jewel's of Jakarta.

HAYDEN. (Looks in a different direction) And those?

NATASHA. (Giggles) Also irises...

HAYDEN. But those are white.

NATASHA. (She rests her hand on his shoulder) The white ones are called Maui Moonlight. (Beat) Iris comes from the Greek word meaning rainbow, the arch of colors formed in the sky.

HAYDEN. (Nervous, tries to back away from her – she follows) Oh, I see.

NATASHA. I say irises would look pretty good with you.

HAYDEN. Is that a compliment?

NATASHA. (She moves her hand down his chest) They're my preferred flower. You can get lost in them, the roots draw you in. (She starts playing with the buttons on his shirt.)

HAYDEN. (Pushes her hands away) They're a very pretty flower.

NATASHA. Should I pack some up for your lady love?

HAYDEN. Lady love? No, there's no lady love.

NATASHA. (Raises an eyebrow) Oh? Striking man like yourself... 

HAYDEN. ...but I would like some for my garden.

NATASHA. You have a garden! (Giggles) A man gardening... There's something seductive about that.

HAYDEN. My brother says it's pathetic.

NATASHA. I think it's attractive. You don't find someone like you every day.

HAYDEN. I guess I'm different...

NATASHA. (She slowly presses her body up against his) Oh, that you are!

HAYDEN. I'd just like some of the yellow ones, please.

NATASHA. (Putting her arm around his neck) Go for the red. They're more... voluptuous. More desirable, sultry. More... (Slowly moves her free arm down his chest) ...tempting.

HAYDEN. The jewels of Jakarta?

NATASHA. No, those are violet. (Runs her fingers through his hair) The reds are Ruby Eruption. (Long silence.)

HAYDEN. (Backs off) Aren't irises the plants that get really cluttered, causing the blooms to suffocate?

NATASHA. All you have to do is lift them, and spread them out, though they will

Go back home, because you know that is where your heart is.

Because home always smells of summer, sweet milk and sage.

And the heat is the love that you have been missing.

Because home is the only place where you can pull pomegranates from the trees in your yard.

When they bloom in fall, you wait everyday for one to turn the perfect shade of red.

And when you pull them down from the branches, your fingers wrap around that heart shape. You cut through the thick skin and your mouth stings with the need. Welcoming the fruit flesh under your nails, staining your palms red for the winter.

Because you can let the juice drip to the cracks of the porch, streak down your thigh and forget that it is winter at all. Because the sun still rises each day, and the fruit juice becomes your own blood.

Because those afternoons of sitting on the back porch with your father taught you everything you needed to know
eventually reunite. (She moves closer, and he moves back.)

**HAYDEN.** Is there anything else I need to know about the plant?

**NATASHA.** Keep your beds neat—cut the weeds down. Irises don’t have a taste for competition.

**HAYDEN.** How often do I water them?

**NATASHA.** They’re impervious to drought. Only water when it’s essential.

**HAYDEN.** They sound like they’re pretty easy to have.

**NATASHA.** Ravishing blooms, needing only minimal care.

**HAYDEN.** How much sunlight?

**NATASHA.** (Giggles) Half a day of sun, but they value their nighttime too.

**HAYDEN.** I would definitely like some for my garden.

**NATASHA.** I’ll go swathe the flowers for you, wrap them in tissue. Here’s the invoice. (She writes something on a piece of paper, and hands it to him) And there’s my number, at the bottom.

**HAYDEN.** Do I need that?

**NATASHA.** Just in case, if you want coffee, or lemonade, or tea!

**HAYDEN.** Tea?

**NATASHA.** I make a mouthwatering hibiscus tea.

**HAYDEN.** I’ve never tried hibiscus tea.

**NATASHA.** Then you’ll have to call me one of these days.

**HAYDEN.** Like a date?

**NATASHA.** Don’t you go on dates?

**HAYDEN.** No, I do, just not with...

**NATASHA.** ...not with women! I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable.

**HAYDEN.** No, no—

**NATASHA.** Don’t be embarrassed! It’s all right, I understand!

**HAYDEN.** (Quietly) I was going to say not with florists I don’t even know the name of.

**NATASHA.** (Pause. Smiles at him) I’m Natasha. (Beat) I think the irises will be stunning in your garden. (NATASHA exits back to her seat. HAYDEN continues reading the from his journal.)

**HAYDEN.** And then you left, and I went back home. I had a lot to think about. I’ve been accused of being gay before, many times. It’s always Eric who calls me gay, and I get angry and deny it. There’s nothing wrong with being gay, but he says it in a negative way. (Beat) But it’s true. (Pause) I wonder about him too, sometimes,
though I never say anything because he's engaged. Mary's okay, she's never really done something mean to me. We never talk, actually. I don't know what he sees in her. I don't know if he sees anything in her. I wish I could talk to him but he's so distant.

SCENE 5
HAYDEN. May 26, 2009: Mary: when you asked me to talk, I was hoping you had something nice to tell me, that maybe you liked my gardens. (Beat) You had something very different in mind. I want to tell you that I've thought about what you have asked me to do. If you want me to leave, I'll leave. I don't think it'll change anything. I don't think it'll strengthen your relationship, but I'll leave.
MARY. (Stands up from her chair, and walks forwards, a disapproving look on her face. She is wearing all black) Hayden. Do you mind if we talk?
HAYDEN. What about?
MARY. This stays between us, okay?
HAYDEN. What?
MARY. How old are you, now, Hayden?
HAYDEN. 24...
MARY. I'll put this in a more subtle way. I'm in love with your brother, and we've been engaged for almost two years now. (Beat.)
HAYDEN. And?
MARY. And I believe that the reason we haven't gotten married yet is because of you.
HAYDEN. Because of me?
MARY. Because you live here.
HAYDEN. How would that affect anything?
MARY. (Ignores him) If we want to start a family, we're going to need the extra space, and we can't afford to take care of an adult.
HAYDEN. Are you planning to start a family?
MARY. We can't do that until you find an apartment.
HAYDEN. I, I can't move out.
MARY. Packing would take a day. (Manipulative smile) I'll even help you, if you'd like.
HAYDEN. I don't know anyone else. I have no other connections.
Tell the mad child children’s tales
and tuck her in at night;
thank God for her silence as she sleeps.

A few hours after dawn, her father comes down to find her shivering violently on a wooden chair in the Hall. The clattering sound of her teeth echoes against the cold stone walls. Her feet and fingers and lips are blue and as he reaches out for her hand, he can feel the cold that surrounds her. To him, her skin feels as cold and tough as stone, but to her, it seems to dance and burn with more life than ever before. In what strange reality does a father think his daughter is dying when she has come back life for the first time since that age of seven, when she had dreamed of looking-glass land? This is not what dying feels like, surely.

"Alice?"
She looks at him calmly, smiling, but she does not speak. Her father picks her up and carries her to her bedroom like he did when she was a child and too sleepy after dinner to walk back up the stairs. As he climbs, she can feel herself drifting back into sleep, but the nightmares won’t return tonight. She’ll dream up a new adventure and tomorrow morning she’ll remember it like she always used to.

Alice is asleep when her father lays her down on her bed and pulls the covers up to her chin. He hurries then to wake her mother and tell her that Alice is freezing, Alice is dying. She runs, hair tumbling about her shoulders, to Alice’s room as her father rushes down to call a doctor while his wife sits with the child.

Downstairs, he orders the just-woken maid to put a kettle on the stove for a hot water bottle and sets off to ride to the doctor’s house. He cannot stop remembering the coldness of her skin and that smile. It is so rare for her to smile now. She looked just like a child when he lifted her up. The weight of her head against his shoulder as she drifted off to sleep had been familiar. How long has it been, he wonders, since he had done that? Could she pinpoint the last time he had carried her to her bed? If she had known, that day, that it wouldn’t happen again for years, would she have cried? He wonders about her – if it is too late now to save her from her own mind, if he has been a fool to care too much about scandal to help her, even if she might be better off on her own, wandering about in her own imagined world. If she lives through this, who will she grow up to be? Perhaps no one – he can’t say. What had she been thinking, going outside? When he had

MARY. Well this will be good for you then. It’ll force you to make friends.
HAYDEN. I’m not leaving my brother. We’re—we’re brothers...
MARY. And we’re lovers.
HAYDEN. Are you?
MARY. It’s either you, or me. (MARY stands up, and exits back to her seat.)
HAYDEN. (Reading from his journal.) You walked out of the room. I’m sorry that you’re not good enough for my brother, and I’m sorry that he realizes that, and I’m sorry you think it’s my fault. I will leave, I’ll move out. But only because I want to prove to you that even when I’m gone, nothing is going to change for you. (Pause) Have you ever thought that maybe the reason that you two aren’t married yet is because you’re heartless? Don’t expect anything to happen soon. He doesn’t love you.

SCENE SIX
HAYDEN. June 1, 2009: Anya, you saved me. You freed me. (Beat. Reads the letter with a choked throat, hoarse voice.) My brother makes fun of me, and his fiancée asked me to leave. That hasn’t left me with much. I still go to the garden, but the flowers are beginning to wilt. Nobody waters them anymore. I still have the rocks, though some are beginning to fade, and I can’t remember which memory they belong to anymore. (Beat) I’ve been lonely for a while now, and so I came to “The Flower House.” That’s the only place I could feel life. Watching things grow gave me some kind of hope, some happiness. But this time, it just didn’t... You told me your name. It was a beautiful name. (ANYA gets up and walks over to HAYDEN, dressed in a black floor-length skirt and an old grey sweater. She has wavy grey hair. A green amulet hangs from her neck.)
ANYA. (Talks softly the entire time) Hello, my name is Anya. How is your soul today?
HAYDEN. (Reading journal) You were older than the other two – grey hair, and at first I couldn’t tell if you were talking to me, or the vines, you never made eye contact. (Turns to ANYA) Good. Thank you.
ANYA. And your spirit?
HAYDEN. The same, I guess.
ANYA. Are you on a quest for anything in particular?
HAYDEN. I just like it here. I’d like to just walk around, if that’s okay.
ANYA. That won't be a disturbance (HAYDEN walks around, and then stops. Turns his head and looks at her.)

HAYDEN. Excuse me?

ANYA. Yes?

HAYDEN. Are there any plants that aren't perennial? All the plants in my garden come back every season. Are there plants that just... don't?

ANYA. Any annuals. (HAYDEN gives a confused look) Annuals are plants whose souls leave when they are done blossoming. They don't keep going. They live, they die, drop some seeds perhaps, and that's the end.

HAYDEN. Do you have annuals?

ANYA. Not at this time of the year. People tend to want plants that go on forever, the ones that are continuous. (Pause) We might have some biennials.

HAYDEN. Biennials?

ANYA. Two year plants – they go through different phases. In the first year, they are born, and in the second year, they become fully alive, they bloom.

HAYDEN. Do you have any of those?

ANYA. We do have digitalis, over there in it's second year, with the violet flowers. But you must be very careful, vigilant around it.

HAYDEN. Digitalis?

ANYA. Some call it foxglove. It has tremendous power. Some know it as "Dead Man's Bells."

HAYDEN. Why such a sinister name? It's a beautiful plant.

ANYA. It is, but every part of it flirts with the loss of something. The roots, the leaves, especially the flowers.

HAYDEN. The loss of what?

ANYA. If you so much as taste it, it touches your heart. (Beat) It finds its way between the space of one heartbeat, and another, and interferes with the natural pattern of life. A nibble is enough to potentially cause death. (Beat) I wouldn't recommend it. It could be dangerous for others living with you, if they don't know the consequences.

HAYDEN. It's only me and my brother... and his fiancée.

ANYA. The way you say it makes it sound like a lonesome life. Digitalis might do you good, keep you company. It's an interesting plant, ironic in many ways: it may be very companionable, but can hurt you if you're not careful.

HAYDEN. How so?

why would God want to keep everyone away? And certainly God would not want her coming to a holy place like a church in such a hideous color as that pale pink dress. That had been on her mind as well that day. If God struck down sinners with bolts of lightning, then surely that dress would be up in flames.

She has come to the front door now. As she opens it, she can feel the sharp cold on her skin, but she will not get a coat. The insects from her nightmares don't like the cold, don't like her delight in it. They scamper away as she thrills to the biting cold of her feet in the snow.

She makes her way out to the back and trudges up the hill, going slowly as her numb feet begin to resist movement.

At the top of the hill, the wind is stronger, unrestrained by the trees below. She can see their leafless branches wiping through the air. The sheer cold of it hits her and she stretches out her arms to pull it all in, letting her shawl drop from her shoulders. The ice forces its way through the pores of her bare arms, numbs her fingers and ears. Her ears are full of the whistling song of the wind.

"I'm here. I'm here on this bloody cold mountain top, God, and where are you? Up in your damnable heaven where you never feel anything? There are no thunderstorms in your heaven, so what do you have. I'd rather be in hell, thank you. At least there are flames there, and fire is passion." Her voice has risen to a scream, drowning out the wind in her ears. Her nightgown flaps around her ankles. "I will not be ashamed. I will not repent. I am the mad child on the hill now and you can't strike me down now that I've learned to dance."

She remembers the words of the poem clearly now.

She wants only to be crushed
by a thousand angry archangels
ready to restore the honor
of their mysterious God.

Panting and out of breath from yelling, she leans down and pulls all the cold of the air into her lungs. She looks up into the gray sky of early dawn and sees no lightning bolts whatsoever, so she is quite certain of her conclusion. Her God is there somewhere, smiling at her daring, in a heaven with cloudy skies and long, sleepless summer nights. How silly of them not to see this.
power will reach deeper than her skin and freeze her heart and then, worst of all, her mind. A mind of stone—that is something to dread. Then she'll be just like everyone around her, all grown up and completely lost. That can't happen now.

She wonders why she can't be a little child again, so that she could fear a monster under the bed instead of little insects that will crawl into her heart and make her grow up. She could battle a monster, she thinks. Or have a most heroic death at the very least, but these insects frighten her because she does not know how to fight them. Would they let her be if she ran away? No. No such luck with these monsters. She'd have to escape herself to escape them. That is a cruel trick. What kind of God makes creatures like that? But this is good, she thinks. Irritation, anger, the desire to get up and walk around until she is tired again helps battle the fear, and it is fear that brings the little insects.

She takes her shawl and wraps it around herself and puts on her slippers. She hugs herself as she gets up to walk. In the hallway, the soft bottoms of her slippers let her slide about on the smooth wooden floor, and that makes her smile. This is good. Smiling frightens the insects. Back to her train of thought, though.... this God. They have it all wrong with this God. But perhaps she has it wrong as well....

"Let's see," she says to herself as she slides along the floor. "They look at me as if I'm mad. They think I create my own world now, that what I see is my own, and not God's, so perhaps God is alright after all. Perhaps it's me that there's something wrong with. But no, that isn't right. Perhaps it's a little of the rest of the world creeping in—something that other people make."

In church, she had been so angry when they told her to fear the day of the Lord. "No, that's all wrong," she had thought. "It will be wonderful. A cloudy day, I think, with plenty of thunder and people dancing about for joy." She does not, in the end (for she has given the matter much thought) want a God that she fears. She wants a good, forgiving, infinitely loving God, and they have, after all, promised that as well. Such contradictions. It is strange, this religion. This God is like the rosebushes that prevent her from carrying out her planned death because of their loveliness. They have such beautiful, sweet-smelling blossoms and yet the thorns scratch her hands when she gets too close. (She smiles when she remembers how haughty they'd been when she'd spoken to them all those years ago. Since then they haven't shown their faces, but she hopes they've learned better manners by now.) The roses simply didn't want to be picked—she can understand that. But...
The kitchen has just been built
and the newlyweds are still young and happy.
The son with the weak heart is lying face up
on the brand new gold wood floor,
gathering his breath
which gets away easily,
waiting for blood
to pool back to his head;
when he stands up
everything is
haloed and bright.
Dad's tuned the radio in
to an opera station, he's wailing
and spilling coffee
and waltzing around
and this is how he'll act
even when his son's too old for it.
Their two dalmatians Saba and Elmo
are barking because it's noisy
and they want to help.
Mom's hugging the doorjamb
smelling like welding and cigarettes
admiring her two little boys:
it's early Sunday morning in the South
and they're the only family
in the neighborhood not at church,
but in their new gold room
filled to the brim with faltering soprano
they're dancing around the beginning
of a very long marriage.

"Caring for the Mad Child"), but she does not remember writing it. It is the one that
goes round and round in her head day after day, but no matter how many times
she reads it, she cannot remember all the pieces. The words are always confused
and mixed together and none of it fits. It troubles her that when she dies they will
find it and believe she wrote it. Of course she will have to die young and most
theatrically. (She is considering flinging herself out the window, but she doesn't
want to crush the deep red rose-bushes beneath.)

She wonders what she would be like now if she had never fallen down
that rabbit-hole, never discovered how she could climb through the looking-glass.
Now she is always aching for adventure, and how it had broken her heart when she
found she couldn't escape this world anymore. She'd climbed up on the mantle and
at first simply touched the glass, trying to reach through it again, then pounded at
it, and finally cracked it with an umbrella sitting in the horribly fussy pink umbrella
stand. She sobbed her heart out until she'd heard thunder in the distance and
laughed out opening the umbrella to keep dry. Tempting fate, she thought, breaking
a mirror and opening an umbrella indoors on the same day. Perhaps tomorrow
she'll trip over a crack in the pavement and die. How wonderfully morbid. The
thought had made her smile.

In winter she climbs a high hill
so she can stand, freezing, at the top
and scream blasphemy in the icy wind.

It is perhaps three or four in the morning when Alice sits up in bed, shivering
(it is winter now, and she has a habit of keeping her windows open to let in the
fresh air), with a single thought that she can't chase away. It is in her dreams that
she goes on adventures these days – nothing so vivid as Wonderland, but better
than everyday life. Occasionally, though, she will have nightmares. It is from one
of these that she has woken, and the thought that frightens her is that perhaps these
nightmares are as real as her childhood fantasies. She dreams of little monstrous
insects that creep through cracks in the plaster ceiling and from under the carpet
and burrow into her skin, slowly turning her to stone. Perhaps they will crawl now
from that crack in the ceiling that drips when it rains. Perhaps they are under her
skin now, maybe soon it will begin to crack at the surface and the insects will crawl
out to find the next child they will freeze. They make her feel so old. One day their
"Don't listen to this mad child. She's dangerous," they say, "speaks no poetry but only lies."

After that Sunday they try to keep her quiet, keep her from going outside, but she becomes increasingly hard to control over the months. They can't take her to be looked at, of course (the scandal!), but what should they say when people ask them how she is? Their excuses for her behavior are quickly becoming obvious. They can never tell anyone that she spends her time smashing clocks and staring at the metronome in the music room, that she sings children's songs to herself, that she refuses to eat anything but plum cake some days, that she chases, laughing, after ravens in the back yard and cries when they fly off, black against blue skies. They cannot explain to people that they find her in the library looking at star charts and that she sneaks out at night even in the cold of late fall to stargaze. Such a strange child she'd been, they think now, and had it been wrong of them not to worry, to think she'd grow out of it? Too late now. She'll never marry, they suppose, because they can't introduce her to suitors - then the secret would come out. Madness in the family. Sometimes they catch themselves thinking she would bless them all by just dying.

Do not listen. Try to soothe the mad child, impatient, always, for the next spring's thunderstorms, perhaps, or messenger-ravens to carry love letters.

Alice, too, has given up the idea of marriage. She has written stacks of letters to her love (a star-crossed love, of course, for the poetry of it), but she hasn't found any messenger-pigeons to carry them. He is beautiful and tall, with dark hair and eyes who told her the names of the stars on clear nights. She can still remember the names: Rigel, Vega, Capella, Polaris... Now he's gone far, far away, and there is no hope of reunion. No, she will spend her life alone, and that will show them all how cruel they have been to keep her from this love (nevermind that she has mentioned him to no one) and perhaps she'll write desperately sad sestinas that no one will find until after her death and then they'll weep for her. Among the stacks of poems she has written or copied out of books is one without an author's name (titled
Sammiches and Pie
Ariel Foy
“In Nonsense is strength!”
from Kurt Vonnegut’s Breakfast of Champions

It turned out Veronica’s, the only other diner on 51st and Saturday, closed because she let her cook work after he came down with pox. All of her customers were in and out of the all-remedy-playlist in the week, and those who didn’t take up pill-bills compulsively checked for oozing sores to find only freckles. Problem is, people don’t always remember every freckle they have, so the city had a big skin cancer scare that lead to major sales in sun block.

Everyone was convinced they were about to die.

With Veronica’s closed, Sammiches and Pies was left a small, smooth pillar-building on a road of boarded up brownstone tourist traps. We were doing well in spite of the lack of tourists; locals were fond of our bait. We had our day-regulars and our night-regulars: the first were always on their way and the latter were too jellied to use a fork right. On Fridays and Saturdays the lonely ones came in after work, or ten hours later after last call — wrinkled, blood drunk, mind sobered. They came from further corners of the city on Sundays, not just from the suburbs, but from those cracker-jack boxes and marble mansions that dotted the forest like asteroid fallout.

We didn’t know what would happen to us now that we were alone on the street.

It was Friday, the jellybrains who wobbled in for pie at three in the morning were still seated in the booths that took up the edges of the diner. They giggled into their coffee until they choked, but we knew they were sobering up. They checked their napkins for blood when they coughed.

Lily turned on the plasma screen behind the bar and the friendly, soft face of Newscaster Lance Marshall blinked into existence. The jelly heads, provoked by the ice blue of the Newscaster’s eyes, began gnashing their teeth over the latest economic crisis and welfare of capitalism. Michelle’s swift pitch of a napkin-wrapped table setting beat one of them squarely in the shoulder. He buried his hands into the tacky mess of spiked blue-green on his head and laughed.

“Wir’ll be quiet Wir’ll be quiet.

“You better be.” Michelle resumed her wrapping of table settings, remembering the night before and Sara’s conspiratorial whisper from behind the house with an open umbrella, exclaiming about a thunderstorm. It hasn’t rained in months.

When she sees them, she drops the umbrella and rushes over to them, grabbing her mother’s wrists.

“You can see the lightening everywhere — oh, look, over there, it’s flashing again. We won’t need to light lamps tonight —”

“Alice —”

“But you have to be careful — keep moving or it will hit you —”

“Alice, you’re inside —”

“If you dance fast enough God won’t catch you —”

“Don’t talk like that, Alice —”

“He’ll never be able to send me to hell now that I’ve learned to dance.”

This girl who pours secrets out on the streets like gold
preparing the earth for her strange deity
drinks honey like wine and speaks to the sky.

The day after the looking-glass incident is a Sunday, so they go to church. Alice sits quietly in her pew, twisting lacy strips of her dress around her fingers. She resists the temptation to tap the heels of her shoes against the stone floor, resists the urge to speak out loud the words of the poem chasing its tail in her mind. She does listen, however grudgingly, to the sermon because she has forgotten how to block out the droning words. In her mind she makes a check-list of the preacher’s blasphemy. It becomes too much. Dropping the lacy skirt in irritation, she stands up, hands clenched at her sides and yells “You’ve found the wrong God,” cutting through the preacher’s voice, and begins to storm down the aisle, slamming her feet down to make as much noise as possible. Outside, she finds a low wall in the garden and sits down there. She can see through the propped open door of the church that her mother is coming, kneeling down for a moment as she leaves the pew and rushing down the aisle trying to make as little noise as possible (as if that matters now). She kneels down beside her daughter and watches her face as Alice fidgets with her pale pink dress. Finally, she looks up and says, “I hate this color.” It is the only thing she says for weeks. Then, one night, they find her sitting in the gardens at dusk looking up in wonder at a few fireflies. When her father sits down next to her, she points to them, almost smiling, and says “Faeries.”
They tell you: “stay away from this mad child. She breaks all promises, does her best to bring bad luck on herself, tempting God to strike her down.”

After spending a childhood lost in imagined adventures, Alice finds her teenage years unbearably dull. The dresses, the manners, afternoons spent in soulless music lessons seem made to tame her wild mind. Now she can only slip away in dreams. Her parents are concerned about her health and brain. She’s too pale, too thin, too absentminded. Nowadays she doesn’t even smile, not even when she’s outside among the roses where she always used to love to play. After her adventures in the place she called “looking-glass land,” her exuberant stories about her dreams started coming less frequently, and by the time she was nine, they had stopped entirely.

She had always been an odd child – her manners were not exactly bad, but she was excessively curious. Sitting on the bank with her sister a few weeks before her marriage, she had asked her: “If I gathered enough bird feathers and tied them to my arms, could I fly?” To her mother when they had been tending the new-born kittens together: “Why don’t we have fur like cats?” And to her father, when they were making their way home in the rain from church when her mother had been ill: “Why does rain fall in drops?” Still, none of it was too bad, too noticeable until her older sister married, just a few weeks before Alice’s sixteenth birthday, and moved out of the house.

On summer nights she never sleeps but goes out and listens for the thunderstorm she’s sure will come.

In August, two weeks after her sister’s wedding, her parents come home to find the looking-glass over the mantle shattered and Alice dancing about the bar. See Michy, those women who went to Victoria’s are like the poodle to our shelter dog. When they finally crawl out of their doghouses tomorrow, we’ll bring them in. Sara would be thrilled if the plasma got wrecked before she paid it off. Michelle was determined not to let the jellyheads ruin anything until after her shift ended. The news would make the poodles comfortable and the glow would lure them inside from their usual walk. Sarah knew that people didn’t like walking too far off their beaten paths.

Samuel Hoover was such a path beater, but that was due to his limp. As soon Newscaster Lance Marshall announced the time as just after seven-thirty A.M. on this glorious sunny day the small brass bell over the entry door jangled and the Prophet entered the restaurant. He wore a brand new sport coat over his flannel shirt. He tugged at the lapel and grinned.

“Mornin’ Sammy,” said Lily coming out from her place behind the bar to stand at the hostess’ podium. She smoothed her uniform, a powdery yellow dress, circa 1950’s, over her bulging mid-section. “That’s a great coat.”

“Morning, Lilith. Thank you. When’s the growth due?” The Prophet carried a walking cane topped with a tarnished eagle head. He leaned on it heavily because he couldn’t feel his knees. He thought sometimes that they were having an identity crisis. He had always felt his knees probably should have been kidneys, they would have been much better at that job.

“Two months more, on the sixteenth. So said D.J. Cure-All. You want a bar or a booth, Sammy?” The Prophet scratched at his spidery veined arms underneath the sleeves of his coat, small pink injection sites slowly flaring up with allergic reactions.

“I’ll always sit at the bar,” he punctuated with the sproing of the rubber cane-tip on tile.

“Can’t drink, but I’ll always sit at the bar.” He shuffled to the bar top and the glow of Newscaster Lance Marshall’s brilliant white teeth. The Prophet sat down and Michelle poured him his first of the routine two and three-fourths cups coffee.

The news began its selection on celebrity gossip: The child actor you all know and love, LittleRonnie Curtis, has once again been fired from his position on the Interblag drama, Pre-Ordered Affairs. LittleRonnie, who we all know isn’t so little anymore, is said to be quitting the screen for good and continuing his new career with his given name: Ronald Louis. All of us, I’m sure, will be interested to see what is in store for our Ronnie, won’t we? And now, traffic reports on the West
"I never trusted that Little Ronnie kid," said the Prophet, conversationally.

"I dunno, Sammy, I grew up watchin' him on Untold and Unreal," said Michelle.

"You didn't grow up that long ago, that's why. Anyone with age-sense knows better." Michelle was the youngest waitress among us at just barely nineteen years old, but when you've worked the kind of jobs our Michy has, you grow up fast. Michelle told the Prophet as much, her small frame terse with triple-shift hours. The prophet laughed at her.

"I know the kinds of jobs you girls have worked, it's not anything anyone else hasn't done."

While Michelle resisted maiming the Prophet with her carafe of Ugandan blend coffee, three poodles began sniffing at the front door where our menu was posted for convenience.

Among the three women, each with an appropriately large bouffant, a man wearing an unseasonable checkered scarf peeked through the restaurant window. He was looking past the booths to the small opening where Linda placed meals that were ready to be served.

"Lindy, is J.J. here yet?" Lily called from behind the hostess' podium and cash register.

"Miss Steel has yet to make her grand arrival." Linda appeared in the small window, her oil slick of hair pulled back to the nape of her neck and the uniform 50's frock stained with Sammich Makins' and flour. "She doesn't work until lunch. Who wants her?"

The brass bell jangled and the poodles wandered inside, the scarf-wearing man shortly behind. Lily seated the poodles in the middle of the room, away from the Jellyheads. The scarfed man took a seat at the bar, distinctly far from the Prophet and his egg sandwich and Sriracha coated beard. Michelle took it upon herself to serve the scarfed man, it was a more discreet way of dodging the slurry that flew off the Prophet when he ate.

"Welcome to Sammiches and Pies," she said, "can I get you something to drink?" The scarfed man looked Michy up and down from his side of the bar, his upper lip and eyebrows quirked in constant disapproval. He had the pouty kind of lips that J.J. liked, Michelle thought.
Collecting
Aly Sarafa

Step one: After you've given all the animals clean water, after you've fed the goats their buckets of grain, after you've dumped the duck's swimming pool—full of brown water—onto the grass and refilled it with fresh, wipe the dirt and muck off your hands and find the feed bucket to hold the eggs in.

Step two: Put the eggs into the bucket, gently. There are usually many eggs. Some from the ducks, some from the chickens, some that have been carelessly stepped on—by the hooked toes of hens or orange pads of webbed feet—and now leak out onto the straw. The ducks don't care for your taking their eggs and you get used to the small, pink lines that form on your skin everyday, from where their bills pinched you.

Step three: Bring the eggs inside. Tell your parents how many you've collected that day. It's always more than any of you expect. Rinse the eggs off lightly in your clean, cream, porcelain sink. Watch the dirt run into the drain. The eggs have a few raised dots. That's okay.

Step four: Make breakfast. Sometimes you watch the sunrise through your kitchen window while you cook. You make omelets for everyone and hope they will wake up before the food gets cold.

Step five: When your aunt and uncle and their three children drive up north to visit, cook breakfast for them, this time, with your dad. Try to crack an egg with one hand. Hope no one notices you fishing a piece of shell from the bowl.

Step six: Put the scrambled eggs and toast on the table. Laugh quietly when your mom tells your aunt that the eggs came from the chickens their kids were just petting. Your aunt asks, as if she doesn't believe, “These eggs came from those chickens?”

Step seven: Wonder where your aunt thinks the eggs from the grocery store are from.

“No,” he said in a clipped baritone. “Unless John is hiding back there.”
“J.J. doesn’t work until the lunch shift,” said Michelle.
“Then I’ll stay.”
“Counter’s for payers only.”
“Fine, coffee and a menu.”

The scarfed man rolled his eyes. Michy kept herself from becoming violent when she noticed the way he touched his neck, and the small marks that the scarf was hiding. She poured the man his coffee and left him with his menu. Three shifts and a pop-culture discussion with the Prophet always made her want a cigarette, but as an empty mug flew from the outskirts of the room and barely missed Newscaster Lance Marshall's socialist pigs' face, she knew her break would be a long way off.

Michy was smoking outside and picking breadcrumbs from her curly brown hair when J.J. Steel's Miada veered into the back lot. Its tailpipe belched sulfur; its body was covered with frequent dents, all dewy with cherry red paint. On the hood a new dent had yet to be painted over, fresh like a cracked skull. J.J. pulled up to the fire lane next to the trash cans and shoved the car into park as it gagged on its own gears.

“Good morning, J.J.,” said Michy, her toes protectively brought up next to her on the curb, away from the white-walled tires that had come close enough to make Michelle renew her love of those limbs.

“Says who?” J.J sidled out of the cream-interior holding a bra with pre-attached implants by the cup.

“Says the Prophet. What happened to your hood and why aren't you changed yet?” J.J. was still wearing what she referred to as her “man garb”: jeans and a button-down. Michelle often dreamt of an alternate reality, where Jasmine Johnson just went by John and wore tailored vests and ties. In Michy's reality, J.J. was interested in women. Michelle was always a fantastic and absurd day dreamer. Miss Steel chose this moment to throw what might have been a small Persian cat with rabies at Michelle, but it was actually only a sandy blonde wig. "I left a place early today because I had to drive all the fuck back to my apartment for my uniform and face. Then some drunk bastard decided to jump in front of my car." J.J. looked both ways down the alley before throwing off her shirt into her car and putting on the pre-implanted bra.

“What?” Michelle took another puff off her cigarette. She arranged the wig
carefully over her free hand, taking the long strands of it and combing them into place. "Don't get that thing burnt," J.J. said, shimmying out of her jeans and putting on the uniform slip and dress. "I left a guy's house today and then this drunk fuck nearly kills himself on the hood of my car, all 'cause he wanted to know where to get a slice of cake."

"Was he a kind of angry looking guy? Mochaccino with pouty lips?"
"The drunk?"
"No, the guy you were with last night."
"He was a halfie, alright. What do you mean, angry?"
"What I'm asking you is, did he seem like the kind of guy who would wear a scarf? Did you give this guy a reason to wear a scarf?"

J.J. went a couple shades pale, asked "He's sitting in the restaurant, isn't he?"
"Only if he's an angry mochaccino man with puffy lips who has reason to wear an unseasonable scarf."

"Well, damn. Toss me my wig." Michy tossed J.J. her wig. J.J. slipped it on and arranged in the rearview mirror before opening a bag of cosmetics and applying her face.

"So, why did he want cake?"
"The guy from last night?"
"No, the drunk."
"Hell if I know. I told him to go take his gooeybrain to an alleyway to rot."

"Does Mr. Scarf know you're a drag queen?"
"He met Jake John last night, who works at sammiches and pies, not the waitress."
"Think he'll recognize you with your face on?" asked Michelle.
"Maybe." J.J. slammed her car door and plucked Michelle's cigarette to steal the final drag, leaving a red-lipped stain on the paper. She tamped it out on the concrete.

"Going for a quadruple-shift, Michy? Or you going to catch the bus?"
"Fuck you, J.J. Steel. I'm going home."
"Have fun."
"You too."

The waitresses clocked their hours and began the rest of their day.
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"Lindy, is J.J. here yet?" Lily called from behind the hostess' podium and cash register.

"Miss Steel has yet to make her grand arrival." Linda appeared in the small window, her oil slick of hair pulled back to the nape of her neck and the uniform 50's frock stained with Sammich Makins' and flour. "She doesn't work until lunch. Who wants her?"

The brass bell jangled and the poodles wandered inside, the scarf-wearing man shortly behind. Lily seated the poodles in the middle of the room, away from the Jellyheads. The scarfed man took a seat at the bar, distinctly far from the Prophet and his egg sandwich and Sriracha coated beard. Michelle took it upon herself to serve the scarfed man, it was a more discreet way of dodging the slurry that flew off the Prophet when he ate.

"Welcome to Sammiches and Pies," she said, "can I get you something to drink?" The scarfed man looked Michy up and down from his side of the bar, his upper lip and eyebrows quirked in constant disapproval. He had the pouty kind of lips that J.J. liked, Michelle thought.
After Looking-Glass
Emily Hittner-Cunningham

They tell you: "stay away from this mad child.
She breaks all promises, does her best
to bring bad luck on herself,
tempting God to strike her down."

After spending a childhood lost in imagined adventures, Alice finds her teenage years unbearably dull. The dresses, the manners, afternoons spent in soulless music lessons seem made to tame her wild mind. Now she can only slip away in dreams.

Her parents are concerned about her health and brain. She's too pale, too thin, too absentminded. Nowadays she doesn't even smile, not even when she's outside among the roses where she always used to love to play. After her adventures in the place she called "looking-glass land," her exuberant stories about her dreams started coming less frequently, and by the time she was nine, they had stopped entirely.

She had always been an odd child – her manners were not exactly bad, but she was excessively curious. Sitting on the bank with her sister a few weeks before her marriage, she had asked her: "If I gathered enough bird feathers and tied them to my arms, could I fly?" To her mother when they had been tending the new-born kittens together: "Why don't we have fur like cats?" And to her father, when they were making their way home in the rain from church when her mother had been ill: "Why does rain fall in drops?" Still, none of it was too bad, too noticeable until her older sister married, just a few weeks before Alice's sixteenth birthday, and moved out of the house.

On summer nights she never sleeps
but goes out and listens
for the thunderstorm she's sure will come.

In August, two weeks after her sister's wedding, her parents come home to find the looking-glass over the mantle shattered and Alice dancing about the bar. See Michy, those women who went to Victoria's are like the poodle to our shelter dog. When they finally crawl out of their doghouses tomorrow, we'll bring them in. Sara would be thrilled if the plasma got wrecked before she paid it off. Michelle was determined not to let the jellyheads ruin anything until after her shift ended. The news would make the poodles comfortable and the glow would lure them inside from their usual walk. Sarah knew that people didn't like walking too far off their beaten paths.

Samuel Hoover was such a path beater, but that was due to his limp. As soon Newscaster Lance Marshall announced the time as just after seven-thirty A.M. on this glorious sunny day the small brass bell over the entry door jangled and the Prophet entered the restaurant. He wore a brand new sport coat over his flannel shirt. He tugged at the lapel and grinned.

"Mornin' Sammy," said Lily coming out from her place behind the bar to stand at the hostess' podium. She smoothed her uniform, a powdery yellow dress, circa 1950's, over her bulging mid-section. "That's a great coat."

"Morning, Lilith. Thank you. When's the growth due?" The Prophet carried a walking cane topped with a tarnished eagle head. He leaned on it heavily because he couldn't feel his knees. He thought sometimes that they were having an identity crisis. He had always felt his knees probably should have been kidneys, they would have been much better at that job.

"Two months more, on the sixteenth. So said D.J. Cure-All. You want a bar or a booth, Sammy?" The Prophet scratched at his spidery veined arms underneath the sleeves of his coat, small pink injection sites slowly flaring up with allergic reactions.

"I'll always sit at the bar," he punctuated with the sproing of the rubber cane-tip on tile.

"Can't drink, but I'll always sit at the bar." He shuffled to the bar top and the glow of Newscaster Lance Marshall's brilliant white teeth. The Prophet sat down and Michelle poured him his first of the routine two and three-fourths cups coffee.

The news began its selection on celebrity gossip: The child actor you all know and love, Little Ronnie Curtis, has once again been fired from his position on the Interblag drama, Pre-Ordered Affairs. Little Ronnie, who we all know isn't so little anymore, is said to be quitting the screen for good and continuing his new career with his given name: Ronald Louis. All of us, I'm sure, will be interested to see what is in store for our Ronnie, won't we? And now, traffic reports on the West
Sammiches and Pie
Ariel Foy
"In Nonsense is strength!"
from Kurt Vonnegut's Breakfast of Champions

It turned out Veronica's, the only other diner on 51st and Saturday, closed because she let her cook work after he came down with pox. All of her customers were in and out of the all-remedy-playlist in the week, and those who didn't take up pill-bills compulsively checked for oozing sores to find only freckles. Problem is, people don't always remember every freckle they have, so the city had a big skin cancer scare that lead to major sales in sun block.

Everyone was convinced they were about to die.

With Veronica's closed, Sammiches and Pies was left a small, smooth pillar-building on a road of boarded up brownstone tourist traps. We were doing well in spite of the lack of tourists; locals were fond of our bait. We had our day-regulars and our night-regulars: the first were always on their way and the latter were too jellied to use a fork right. On Fridays and Saturdays the lonely ones came in after work, or ten hours later after last call — wrinkled, blood drunk, mind sobered. They came from further corners of the city on Sundays, not just from the suburbs, but from those cracker-jack boxes and marble mansions that dotted the forest like asteroid fallout.

We didn't know what would happen to us now that we were alone on the street.

It was Friday, the jellybrains who wobbled in for pie at three in the morning were still seated in the booths that took up the edges of the diner. They giggled into their coffee until they choked, but we knew they were sobering up. They checked their napkins for blood when they coughed.

Lily turned on the plasma screen behind the bar and the friendly, soft face of Newscaster Lance Marshall blinked into existence. The jelly heads, provoked by the ice blue of the Newscaster's eyes, began gnashing their teeth over the latest economic crisis and welfare of capitalism. Michelle's swift pitch of a napkin-wrapped table setting beat one of them squarely in the shoulder. He buried his hands into the tacky mess of spiked blue-green on his head and laughed.

"We'll be quiet. We'll be quiet."

"You better be." Michelle resumed her wrapping of table settings, remembering the night before and Sara's conspiratorial whisper from behind the house with an open umbrella, exclaiming about a thunderstorm. It hasn't rained in months.

When she sees them, she drops the umbrella and rushes over to them, grabing her mother's wrists.

"You can see the lightening everywhere — oh, look, over there, it's flashing again. We won't need to light lamps tonight —"

"Alice —"

"But you have to be careful — keep moving or it will hit you —"

"Alice, you're inside —"

"If you dance fast enough God won't catch you —"

"Don't talk like that, Alice —"

"He'll never be able to send me to hell now that I've learned to dance."

This girl who pours secrets out on the streets like gold preparing the earth for her strange deity

drinks honey like wine and speaks to the sky.

The day after the looking-glass incident is a Sunday, so they go to church. Alice sits quietly in her pew, twisting lacy strips of her dress around her fingers. She resists the temptation to tap the heels of her shoes against the stone floor, resists the urge to speak out loud the words of the poem chased its tail in her mind. She does listen, however grudgingly, to the sermon because she has forgotten how to block out the droning words. In her mind she makes a check-list of the preacher's blasphemy. It becomes too much. Dropping the lacy skirt in irritation, she stands up, hands clenched at her sides and yells "You've found the wrong God," cutting through the preacher's voice, and begins to storm down the aisle, slamming her feet down to make as much noise as possible. Outside, she finds a low wall in the garden and sits down there. She can see through the propped open door of the church that her mother is coming, kneeling down for a moment as she leaves the pew and rushing down the aisle trying to make as little noise as possible (as if that matters now). She kneels down beside her daughter and watches her face as Alice fidgets with her pale pink dress. Finally, she looks up and says, "I hate this color."

It is the only thing she says for weeks. Then, one night, they find her sitting in the gardens at dusk looking up in wonder at a few fireflies. When her father sits down next to her, she points to them, almost smiling, and says "Faeries."
“Don’t listen to this mad child. She’s dangerous,” they say,
“speaks no poetry but only lies.”

After that Sunday they try to keep her quiet, keep her from going outside, but she
becomes increasingly hard to control over the months. They can’t take her to be
looked at, of course (the scandal!), but what should they say when people ask them
how she is? Their excuses for her behavior are quickly becoming obvious. They
can never tell anyone that she spends her time smashing clocks and staring at the
metronome in the music room, that she sings children’s songs to herself, that she
refuses to eat anything but plum cake some days, that she chases, laughing, after
ravens in the back yard and cries when they fly off, black against blue skies. They
cannot explain to people that they find her in the library looking at star charts and
that she sneaks out at night even in the cold of late fall to stargaze. Such a strange
child she’d been, they think now, and had it been wrong of them not to worry, to
think she’d grow out of it? Too late now. She’ll never marry, they suppose, because
they can’t introduce her to suitors — then the secret would come out. Madness in
the family. Sometimes they catch themselves thinking she would bless them all by
just dying.

Do not listen. Try to soothe the mad child,
impatient, always, for the next spring’s thunderstorms,
perhaps, or messenger-ravens to carry love letters.

Alice, too, has given up the idea of marriage. She has written stacks of letters
to her love (a star-crossed love, of course, for the poetry of it), but she hasn’t found
any messenger-pigeons to carry them. He is beautiful and tall, with dark hair and
eyes who told her the names of the stars on clear nights. She can still remember the
names: Rigel, Vega, Capella, Polaris... Now he’s gone far, far away, and there is no
hope of reunion. No, she will spend her life alone, and that will show them all how
cruel they have been to keep her from this love (nevermind that she has mentioned
him to no one) and perhaps she’ll write desperately sad sestinas that no one will
find until after her death and then they’ll weep for her. Among the stacks of poems
she has written or copied out of books is one without an author’s name (titled
The kitchen has just been built
and the newlyweds are still young and happy.
The son with the weak heart is lying face up
on the brand new gold wood floor,
gathering his breath
which gets away easily,
waiting for blood
to pool back to his head;
when he stands up
everything is
haloed and bright.
Dad's tuned the radio in
to an opera station, he's wailing
and spilling coffee
and waltzing around
and this is how he'll act
even when his son's too old for it.
Their two dalmatians Saba and Elmo
are barking because it's noisy
and they want to help.
Mom's hugging the doorjamb
smelling like welding and cigarettes
admiring her two little boys:
now she is always aching for adventure, and how it had broken her heart when she
found she couldn't escape this world anymore. She'd climbed up on the mantle and
at first simply touched the glass, trying to reach through it again, then pounded at
it, and finally cracked it with an umbrella sitting in the horribly fussy pink umbrella
stand. She sobbed her heart out until she'd heard thunder in the distance and
laughed out opening the umbrella to keep dry. Tempting fate, she thought, breaking
a mirror and opening an umbrella indoors on the same day. Perhaps tomorrow
she'll trip over a crack in the pavement and die. How wonderfully morbid. The
thought had made her smile.

In winter she climbs a high hill
so she can stand, freezing, at the top
and scream blasphemy in the icy wind.

It is perhaps three or four in the morning when Alice sits up in bed, shivering
(it is winter now, and she has a habit of keeping her windows open to let in the
fresh air), with a single thought that she can't chase away. It is in her dreams that
she goes on adventures these days – nothing so vivid as Wonderland, but better
than everyday life. Occasionally, though, she will have nightmares. It is from one
of these that she has woken, and the thought that frightens her is that perhaps these
nightmares are as real as her childhood fantasies. She dreams of little monstrous
insects that creep through cracks in the plaster ceiling and from under the carpet
and burrow into her skin, slowly turning her to stone. Perhaps they will crawl now
from that crack in the ceiling that drips when it rains. Perhaps they are under her
skin now, maybe soon it will begin to crack at the surface and the insects will crawl
out to find the next child they will freeze. They make her feel so old. One day their...
power will reach deeper than her skin and freeze her heart and then, worst of all, her mind. A mind of stone— that is something to dread. Then she'll be just like everyone around her, all grown up and completely lost. That can't happen now.

She wonders why she can't be a little child again, so that she could fear a monster under the bed instead of little insects that will crawl into her heart and make her grow up. She could battle a monster, she thinks. Or have a most heroic death at the very least, but these insects frighten her because she does not know how to fight them. Would they let her be if she ran away? No. No such luck with these monsters. She'd have to escape herself to escape them. That is a cruel trick. What kind of God makes creatures like that? But this is good, she thinks. Irritation, anger, the desire to get up and walk around until she is tired again helps battle the fear, and it is fear that brings the little insects.

She takes her shawl and wraps it around herself and puts on her slippers. She hugs herself as she gets up to walk. In the hallway, the soft bottoms of her slippers let her slide about on the smooth wooden floor, and that makes her smile. This is good. Smiling frightens the insects. Back to her train of thought, though.... this God. They have it all wrong with this God. But perhaps she has it wrong as well...

“Let’s see,” she says to herself as she slides along the floor. “They look at me as if I’m mad. They think I create my own world now, that what I see is my own, and not God’s, so perhaps God is alright after all. Perhaps it’s me that there’s something wrong with. But no, that isn’t right. Perhaps it’s a little of the rest of the world creeping in— something that other people make.”

In church, she had been so angry when they told her to fear the day of the Lord. “No, that’s all wrong,” she had though. “It will be wonderful. A cloudy day, I think, with plenty of thunder and people dancing about for joy.” She does not, in the end (for she has given the matter much thought) want a God that she fears. She wants a good, forgiving, infinitely loving God, and they have, after all, promised that as well. Such contradictions. It is strange, this religion. This God is like the rosebushes that prevent her from carrying out her planned death because of their loveliness. They have such beautiful, sweet-smelling blossoms and yet the thorns scratch her hands when she gets too close. (She smiles when she remembers how haughty they'd been when she'd spoken to them all those years ago. Since then they haven't shown their faces, but she hopes they've learned better manners by now.) The roses simply didn’t want to be picked— she can understand that. But

ANYA. It causes deaths, but grows very well in graveyards. It does well in rocks, you’ll find it in crevices on a wall, or on the side of a highway—a lost beauty growing on its own. It needs little soil to grow, though the soil must be very rich in humus.

HAYDEN. Humus?

ANYA. What was once life, now dead, beginning to rot, decompose.

HAYDEN. Decompose?

ANYA. Yes.

HAYDEN. I think I’ll take it.

ANYA. As you wish. Just be cautious. The poison and the blooms come together as one.

HAYDEN. (Reading from the journal again) You took out a piece of paper, and on it wrote: drying the plant does not reduce toxicity. You handed it to me. (ANYA hands HAYDEN a piece of paper, then exits back to her seat.) I wonder if you would have sold it to me if you knew of my plans. (Wipes away tears) Of course you would have, you knew what I was thinking. I know you did. But you know it’s better this way. (Pause) So this is my thank you letter.

SCENE 7

HAYDEN. (Lights rise on HAYDEN, sitting on the floor picking all the petals off the foxglove and putting them in his tea mug.) Smells like jasmine. (HAYDEN pulls out pebbles, and puts them around the stem in the pot.) June 7, 2009: Mason, You’ve been a good journal, a great friend, but I’m afraid this might be the last of my letters. (Beat) I’ve decided to keep my rocks around the foxglove, a memorial, a grave bed. I remember only a few of these memories. This white one was from an apartment I considered, this red one from a gay bar I went to and sat alone, drinking coke. This was the pebble Eric threw at me. (HAYDEN pulls out his journal, and some matches. He burns the letters, letting the ash fall over the rocks in the pot) Mason, keep my letters, will you? Don’t let anyone see them. (HAYDEN picks up his mug, sips, and walks out.)

END.
ANYA. That won’t be a disturbance (HAYDEN walks around, and then stops. Turns his head and looks at her.)

HAYDEN. Excuse me?

ANYA. Yes?

HAYDEN. Are there any plants that aren’t perennial? All the plants in my garden come back every season. Are there plants that just... don’t?

ANYA. Any annuals. (HAYDEN gives a confused look) Annuals are plants whose souls leave when they are done blossoming. They don’t keep going. They live, they die, drop some seeds perhaps, and that’s the end.

HAYDEN. Do you have annuals?

ANYA. Not at this time of the year. People tend to want plants that go on forever, the ones that are continuous. (Pause) We might have some biennials.

HAYDEN. Biennials?

ANYA. Two year plants – they go through different phases. In the first year, they are born, and in the second year, they become fully alive, they bloom.

HAYDEN. Do you have any of those?

ANYA. We do have digitalis, over there in it’s second year, with the violet flowers. But you must be very careful, vigilant around it.

HAYDEN. Digitalis?

ANYA. Some call it foxglove. It has tremendous power. Some know it as “Dead Man’s Bells.”

HAYDEN. Why such a sinister name? It’s a beautiful plant.

ANYA. It is, but every part of it flirts with the loss of something. The roots, the leaves, especially the flowers.

HAYDEN. The loss of what?

ANYA. If you so much as taste it, it touches your heart. (Beat) It finds its way between the space of one heartbeat, and another, and interferes with the natural pattern of life. A nibble is enough to potentially cause death. (Beat) I wouldn’t recommend it. It could be dangerous for others living with you, if they don’t know the consequences.

HAYDEN. It’s only me and my brother... and his fiancée.

ANYA. The way you say it makes it sound like a lonesome life. Digitalis might do you good, keep you company. It’s an interesting plant, ironic in many ways: it may be very companionable, but can hurt you if you’re not careful.

HAYDEN. How so?
Tell the mad child children’s tales
and tuck her in at night;
thank God for her silence as she sleeps.

A few hours after dawn, her father comes down to find her shivering
violently on a wooden chair in the Hall. The clattering sound of her teeth echoes
against the cold stone walls. Her feet and fingers and lips are blue and as he
reaches out for her hand, he can feel the cold that surrounds her. To him, her skin
feels as cold and tough as stone, but to her, it seems to dance and burn with more
life than ever before. In what strange reality does a father think his daughter is dying
when she has come back to life for the first time since that age of seven, when she had
dreamed of looking-glass land? This is not what dying feels like, surely.

"Alice?"
She looks at him calmly, smiling, but she does not speak.

Her father picks her up and carries her to her bedroom like he did when
she was a child and too sleepy after dinner to walk back up the stairs. As he climbs,
she can feel herself drifting back into sleep, but the nightmares won’t return tonight.
She’ll dream up a new adventure and tomorrow morning she’ll remember it like
she always used to.

Alice is asleep when her father lays her down on her bed and pulls the
covers up to her chin. He hurries then to wake her mother and tell her that Alice
is freezing, Alice is dying. She runs, hair tumbling about her shoulders, to Alice’s
room as her father rushes down to call a doctor while his wife sits with the child.

Downstairs, he orders the just-woken maid to put a kettle on the stove
for a hot water bottle and sets off to ride to the doctor’s house. He cannot stop
remembering the coldness of her skin and that smile. It is so rare for her to smile
now. She looked just like a child when he lifted her up. The weight of her head
against his shoulder as she drifted off to sleep had been familiar. How long has it
been, he wonders, since he had done that? Could she pinpoint the last time he had
carried her to her bed? If she had known, that day, that it wouldn’t happen again
for years, would she have cried? He wonders about her — if it is too late now to
save her from her own mind, if he has been a fool to care too much about scandal
to help her, even if she might be better off on her own, wandering about in her
own imagined world. If she lives through this, who will she grow up to be? Perhaps
no one — he can’t say. What had she been thinking, going outside? When he had
though I never say anything because he's engaged. Mary's okay, she's never really
done something mean to me. We never talk, actually. I don't know what he sees
in her. I don't know if he sees anything in her. I wish I could talk to him but he's so
distant.

SCENE 5
HAYDEN. May 26, 2009: Mary: when you asked me to talk, I was hoping you
had something nice to tell me, that maybe you liked my gardens. (Beat) You had
something very different in mind. I want to tell you that I've thought about what you
have asked me to do. If you want me to leave, I'll leave. I don't think it'll change
anything. I don't think it'll strengthen your relationship, but I'll leave.

MARY. (Stands up from her chair, and walks forwards, a disapproving look on her
face. She is wearing all black) Hayden. Do you mind if we talk?

HAYDEN. What about?

MARY. How old are you, now, Hayden?

HAYDEN. 24...

MARY. I'll put this in a more subtle way. I'm in love with your brother, and we've
been engaged for almost two years now. (Beat.)

HAYDEN. And?

MARY. And I believe that the reason we haven't gotten married yet is because of
you.

HAYDEN. Because of me?

MARY. Because you live here.

HAYDEN. How would that affect anything?

MARY. (ignores him) If we want to start a family, we're going to need the extra
space, and we can't afford to take care of an adult.

HAYDEN. Are you planning to start a family?

MARY. We can't do that until you find an apartment.

HAYDEN. I, I can't move out.

MARY. Packing would take a day. (Manipulative smile) I'll even help you, if you'd
like.

HAYDEN. I don't know anyone else. I have no other connections.
eventually reunite. *She moves closer, and he moves back.*

**HAYDEN.** Is there anything else I need to know about the plant?

**NATASHA.** Keep your beds neat—cut the weeds down. Irises don’t have a taste for competition.

**HAYDEN.** How often do I water them?

**NATASHA.** They’re impervious to drought. Only water when it’s essential.

**HAYDEN.** They sound like they’re pretty easy to have.

**NATASHA.** Ravishing blooms, needing only minimal care.

**HAYDEN.** How much sunlight?

**NATASHA.** *(Giggles)* Half a day of sun, but they value their nighttime too.

**HAYDEN.** I would definitely like some for my garden.

**NATASHA.** I’ll go swathe the flowers for you, wrap them in tissue. Here’s the invoice. *She writes something on a piece of paper, and hands it to him* And there’s my number, at the bottom.

**HAYDEN.** Do I need that?

**NATASHA.** Just in case, if you want coffee, or lemonade, or tea!

**HAYDEN.** Tea?

**NATASHA.** I make a mouthwatering hibiscus tea.

**HAYDEN.** I’ve never tried hibiscus tea.

**NATASHA.** Then you’ll have to call me one of these days.

**HAYDEN.** Like a date?

**NATASHA.** Don’t you go on dates?

**HAYDEN.** No, I do, just not with...

**NATASHA.** ...not with women! I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable.

**HAYDEN.** No, no—

**NATASHA.** Don’t be embarrassed! It’s all right, I understand!

**HAYDEN.** *(Quietly)* I was going to say not with florists I don’t even know the name of.

**NATASHA.** *(Pause. Smiles at him)* I’m Natasha. *(Beat)* I think the irises will be stunning in your garden. *(NATASHA exits back to her seat. HAYDEN continues reading the from his journal.)*

**HAYDEN.** And then you left, and I went back home. I had a lot to think about. I’ve been accused of being gay before, many times. It’s always Eric who calls me gay, and I get angry and deny it. There’s nothing wrong with being gay, but he says it in a negative way. *(Beat)* But it’s true. *(Pause)* I wonder about him too, sometimes,
NATASHA. (Walks out from behind the counter, towards HAYDEN) Those, darling, would be irises... Jewel's of Jakarta.

HAYDEN. (Looks in a different direction) And those?

NATASHA. (Giggles) Also irises...

HAYDEN. But those are white.

NATASHA. (She rests her hand on his shoulder) The white ones are called Maui Moonlight. (Beat) Iris comes from the Greek word meaning rainbow, the arch of colors formed in the sky.

HAYDEN. (Nervous, tries to back away from her - she follows) Oh, I see.

NATASHA. I say irises would look pretty good with you.

HAYDEN. Is that a compliment?

NATASHA. (She moves her hand down his chest) They're my preferred flower. You can get lost in them, the roots draw you in. (She starts playing with the buttons on his shirt.)

HAYDEN. (Pushes her hands away) They're a very pretty flower.

NATASHA. Should I pack some up for your lady love?

HAYDEN. Lady love? No, there's no lady love.

NATASHA. ( Raises an eyebrow) Oh? Striking man like yourself...

HAYDEN. ...but I would like some for my garden.

NATASHA. You have a garden! (Giggles) A man gardening... There's something seductive about that.

HAYDEN. My brother says it's pathetic.

NATASHA. I think it's attractive. You don't find someone like you every day.

HAYDEN. I guess I'm different...

NATASHA. (She slowly presses her body up against his) Oh, that you are!

HAYDEN. I'd just like some of the yellow ones, please.

NATASHA. (Putting her arm around his neck) Go for the red. They're more... voluptuous. More desirable, sultry. More...

(Slowly moves her free arm down his chest) ... tempting.

HAYDEN. The jewels of Jakarta?

NATASHA. No, those are violet. (Runs her fingers through his hair) The reds are Ruby Eruption. (Long silence.)

HAYDEN. (Backs off) Aren't irises the plants that get really cluttered, causing the blooms to suffocate?

NATASHA. All you have to do is lift them, and spread them out, though they will...
about love. To love the way he pulled
the ones off the highest branches for you,
and the ones that fell with the rain in the spring.

HAYDEN. I can’t keep a job. People don’t... they’re not comfortable with me.
ERIC. You can’t just live here and grow flowers!
HAYDEN. Why not?
ERIC. It’s wasting your time. You’re not accomplishing anything.
HAYDEN. It’s adding beauty to the world.
ERIC. Beauty? Daffodils are beauty?
HAYDEN. Yes.
ERIC. They’re just flowers, Hayden, and growing them is the gayest thing you’ve
ever done. It beats your rock collection.
HAYDEN. Gay is not a synonym for stupid.
ERIC. You know what I meant. (Picks up a small pebble from the ground) These are
stupid. Your life is heading nowhere: you collect rocks, rocks! And that’s how you
remember your life; it’s pitiful. (Throws the pebble at HAYDEN, then returns back
to his seat.)
HAYDEN. (Reading the journal again) I kept that pebble, added it to my list;
number twenty-one of my collection. April 15, 2009: From home, the pebble Eric
threw at me, calling my collection of rocks, my life, pathetic.

SCENE 4
HAYDEN. May 12th, 2009: Dear Natasha, I’m sorry I was so awkward. I’m not used
to people being so straightforward around me. You were very beautiful, but all I
wanted was some flowers. I really wasn’t looking for anything more than that. I love
the daffodils, but I wanted something more. I always want something more... I hate
that. (Natasha gets up from her chair, barefoot, wearing a sexy red dress. She slowly
walks to HAYDEN) I walked into the greenhouse, you had a mischievous look on
your face. I watched you watch me from behind the counter, not saying anything.
When our eyes met, you would smile, and I went back to looking through the
plants, feeling the texture of different leaves.
NATASHA. Can I assist you in exploring the flowers?
HAYDEN. I’d just like to look around.
NATASHA. Don’t hesitate to find me if you need... anything. (Smiles.)
HAYDEN. Thanks. (Pause) What flowers are those?
NATASHA. Those shades of scarlet?
HAYDEN. Yeah.
SCENE 3

HAYDEN. April 15, 2009: Eric, I thought you would appreciate my daffodils. Your yard is filled with gravel and the few plants that were there when we moved in. (Beat) All I want is for you to say that you like one rock, for you to say that you like one flower, but you never will. You make fun of my rocks, and why? What do you get out of it? Those are my memories, the moments that mean something to me. Instead, you cast the rocks across the floor, and preceded to pick one up to show me how pathetic it was. It was number 18.

ERIC. (ERIC stands up, a rock in his hand, walks to HAYDEN. He’s wearing dark jeans and a football hoodie.) 18? You number them?

HAYDEN. So I can match it up with my list, remember the day and place I found it.

ERIC. You wrote them down?

HAYDEN. How else would I remember them?

ERIC. It’s not like you have that many. Nothing exciting ever happens in your life.

HAYDEN. That’s not true.

ERIC. What’s the memory behind 18?

HAYDEN. (Pulls out piece of paper from his back pocket) 78. April 7th, 2009: from outside Teavana, where I was watching the news. Iowa has finally legalized gay marriage.

ERIC. You collected a rock for the day our state legalized gay marriage?

HAYDEN. Yes.

ERIC. You don’t realize how ridiculous this is, do you?

HAYDEN. It’s a string of moments, and that’s all life is, really, a string of moments that you knot together. Each of these rocks is one of those knots.

ERIC. (Takes the list from HAYDEN, starts reading it.) 19. April 10th, 2009: from the Buchard Gardens: fell in love and decided to start my own garden. 20. April 13th, 2009: from The Flower House, I got daffodils to start my own garden. (Puts down the list, hands it back) You started a garden?

HAYDEN. I got some daffodils.

ERIC. You started a garden.

HAYDEN. Mary might enjoy them.

ERIC. I don’t care about Mary.

HAYDEN. You should, she’s your fiancée.

ERIC. Why don’t you do something with your life, why don’t you get a job?

Our temporary shelter is much more high tech than that of any nomad that must of passed through this land before we came and camped, but I have a feeling they weren’t this damp. Or do you just get used to this, being damp? Our armpits sweaty, our foreheads, too, and the sleeping bag isn’t dry (far from it) and then the tent is sweating. If it doesn’t sweat, if it doesn’t let the rain in it won’t let the wind in either and we’ll suffocate. Why is it so cold in here? Why is it so wet? So we can, we can breathe, I want to say. So we can breathe.

Even though it’s only eight miles, it takes us four hours to hike through the rain from the Dunes back to the campground. When we’re walking, we’re too hot, the rain ponchos don’t breathe. When we stop, we’re too cold. We hunch under evergreens, eating soggy sandwiches that once lined our pack. It’s supposed to snow tomorrow, it’s supposed to snow.

But the water makes every thing more animated; the bugs crawl faster, we move faster to shield ourselves in the tent. Everything is more green, everything is more yellow and more brown. Shines, quickly, everything shines more quickly and is fleeting.

I wake up the next day with a stone lodged in my heart - at least it feels this way, my heart hammering too quickly. Too quickly, everything is quickly.

How can one thing bring us alive, keep us alive and slow us? Water.

Someone on the Internet once set up a fake petition to get dihydrogen monoxide banned because it causes things such as drowning, death lots of death. Most people don’t realize that dihydrogen monoxide is just water … It’s just water, you realize.

Someone tells me on the camping trip that next year, if they go (that’s important), they’ll have to bring their umbrella. It’s just water. If you see somebody on the streets on Seattle with an umbrella it’s either an Asian or a tourist. It’s just water.

My hair dries well when it’s just water and scalp oil. What kind of product do you use to get your hair to look like that? Water. Just water.

And I long for the salt spray of the bluff and the Pacific, where the water warms the climate instead of brings in the snow. Doesn’t Lake Michigan make it so
it doesn’t snow? Of course not, the other side is Canada.

The other side of the Pacific are islands, tropical, Japan. The only thing that freezes over there is Russia. There are more waves in Lake Michigan and the rain falls faster here, but it’s not such a graceful things as it is by the Sound.

It’s just water.

There is a story of a dog who swam out when his owner threw a stick into the Pacific. But he just kept swimming. Kept swimming, and slowly he faded into the ocean. Apparently he had hearing problems.

It’s just water.

FIONA. They’re easy to take care of! And they have beautiful flowers, very bright colors!

HAYDEN. I like bright colors.

FIONA. What’s your favorite color? It’s blue, right?

HAYDEN. No—

FIONA. No, no no you’re right. It’s not blue. It’s a warm color. Red! No, orange!

HAYDEN. I like orange a lot.

FIONA. Well we don’t have orange blossom, so I’ll give you the yellow ones instead!

HAYDEN. Alright. (Pause) What do I have to do to plant them?

FIONA. Oh don’t worry about that! They’re perennial plants, they’ll just keep on coming back! You just have to divide the clumps every few years!

HAYDEN. Clumps?

FIONA. They grow so fast, and before you know it there’ll be hundreds of them! They have flower parties, I bet they gossip to each other!

HAYDEN. I just want something to keep me company. Maybe something that grows alone?

FIONA. No no, you won’t get better than daffodils! They spread out and create daffodil drifts! They can cover your whole lawn in yellow!

HAYDEN. (Nervous) I don’t know if my brother would appreciate that.

FIONA. Your brother? Why do you care what your brother thinks! This is your garden!

HAYDEN. Well I live with him... him and his fiancée.

FIONA. And why would you ever want a plant that grows alone?!

HAYDEN. It would be easier to get close to it, become almost... friends.

FIONA. When it comes to flowers, the more the merrier! You have your brother and real friends to get close to.

HAYDEN. (Insecure) Yeah, I guess you’re right. I have my real friends for that.

(Awkward silence.)

FIONA. I think daffodils will be perfect! Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy, you must have daffodils! I’ll even give you a discount! (FIONA exits back to her seat.)

HAYDEN. (Starts reading off his journal again.) You then handed me the daffodils, and wrote a few notes on how to take care of them: plant the flowers each a few inches apart, six to eight inches from the surface, water every other day.

(Beat) Thank you: they are the start of a garden that I know will be beautiful.
doesn’t matter, you won’t be reading this. I’m just guessing; Fiona seems to fit you well. (Beat) I want to thank you. Yesterday I entered “The Flower House,” wanting to start a garden. I collect rocks; each one represents a moment in my life. But as a hobby it’s not satisfying. Maybe I just need more exciting moments in my life. (Pulls out a sack full of rocks from one of his pockets) Sometimes I look through them, but they’re either heavy rocks, or memories that weigh me down. (Puts the rocks away) I want to start something new and watch it grow; I want to see progress! I want a garden, a colorful, beautiful, lively garden. Right over there, so I can see it from my window. So I stepped into “The Flower House,” that’s where I saw you. (FIONA stands up, wearing a short yellow summer dress and a pink flower in her hair. She starts twirling over to HAYDEN.) You walked up to me, cheerful and all, offering me help.

FIONA. (Upbeat) Hi, there! How can I help your kind soul on this beautiful day? Are you looking for a plant? Well, you’re obviously looking for a plant, why else would you be here!

HAYDEN. Yes... I don’t really know where to start.

FIONA. Well what is the purpose of this plant? Do you want to grow tomatoes? No, no, you don’t seem like the tomato type – maybe rosemary? No, I can tell you don’t need any rosemary. Is it just for decoration? I bet it’s for decoration!

HAYDEN. Yes.

FIONA. For your bathroom? You want a plant in your bathroom, right? Or bedroom? No, not bedroom. It’s for your bathroom!

HAYDEN. I would like to start a garden.

FIONA. Fantastic! You need a start-up plant! We have lots of start-up plants!

HAYDEN. A start up-plant?

FIONA. Is the light coming from north-east-south-west? Do you know how much sun it’ll get?

HAYDEN. It’ll receive a lot of light.

FIONA. And obviously you want flower blossoms, right? Of course you want flower blossoms!

HAYDEN. That would be nice.

FIONA. Do you want the blossoms big, or little?

HAYDEN. It doesn’t really mat—

FIONA. You could always go with daffodils!

HAYDEN. Daffodils?
Poem from the Musee d'Orsay, June 2010
Mishka Hoosen

"Tempt not a desperate man."
-William Shakespeare

Vincent shot himself through the heart for simpler things. Perhaps you saw a moth burn to death, perhaps a church stood too silent in the moving grass, or the wheat bent too readily in the wind. Vincent, I stood before your portrait for an hour before he came, Excusez-moi, mademoiselle, we are closing, maintenant.

Are the blind impaled by that desperate blue?

Tempt not a desperate man with a bowl of monstrous blossoms, beautiful for what they damage.

Tempt not a desperate man with your arrival, angel. Death is too close, it breathes in us, and the clockwork world knows all too clearly the air that is shattered by a gunshot in the fields.

SCENE 1
HAYDEN. (Reading from a journal) March 29, 2009: Dear journal, if we're going to get along, you need a name. (Pause) Mason. You feel like a Mason to me. I hope that works. I hate not being able to choose your own name. My brother got a nice, simple name, and I got the strange one. I hate my name, but it's one of those things I was never able to tell my parents. Everyone has something they want to say to people, but can't. They repeat the words in their heads until they become sounds, until they are unsure if the words even make sense. (Pause) I need you to be those things, the things I don't tell anyone else, the things that no one else will know.

SCENE 2
HAYDEN. April 13, 2009: Dear Fiona, I don't know if that's your name, but it
Soccer and the Downfall of Brazil: A Case Study
Gustavo Sampaio

This essay is the result of thorough research on Brazilian culture, and how much it has been impacted by a game. Yes, twenty-two men running after a ball has proven to be an incredibly powerful catalyst for change. Brazilians stopped going to schools, and began playing soccer. As a result we are one of the happiest countries in the world, and one of the most unintelligent ones too.

For decades, soccer has been Brazil’s major lover, friend, and villain. We have cheered, cried, and occasionally stabbed each other over it. To the few enlightened citizens of our country, who have realized that things have gotten out of control, punching each other over a game seems too primitive, but to the majority of us who are soccer fans, it has become somewhat of an after-game tradition.

Nonetheless, all Brazilians have a passion for the sport buried inside them. If a tourist were to walk down the streets of São Paulo during a World Cup game, he might be reprehended: “If you’re going to come into our country, respect our traditions. Sit your butt on that chair and pay attention, Ronaldinho is about to score.”

Brazil's obsession has caused many obscure international scholars to ask the question: “If Brazilians were forbidden to play soccer, would they survive?”

To investigate this scenario my team and I conducted a number of illegal experiments, which were specifically designed to determine how different Brazilians would react to soccer abstinence.

With the results of these tests in hand, our team had meetings in which we attempted to analyze this issue both psychologically and philosophically. We were able to determine different effects that this would have on Brazilians, and that soccer has actually been a positive catalyst in the country’s culture.

For once, without soccer, the suicide rate would go up considerably. Major Pharmaceutical Companies would settle in, and Brazil might steal title of Prozac Nation from the United States.

With most of adults suffering of major depression, our working force would be negatively impacted, and people would be fired by the second.

The number of newborns would go down, even though Brazilians have always been considered to be very physical. It has been proven that people who...
With special thanks to Dov Stanley, Noah McKee and posse, Jennifer Jaffe for the baked goods, and Aime, Mika and Delp for all of their support.

**suffer from depression are considerably less interested in having sexual intercourse with their respective partners than those who don't.**

Decades later, the few people still in our working class would retire, and there no young workers would take their place, because there would be no young workers. Our country's distribution of wealth would be uneven, and our economy would crash.

We would become a depressed country, where no one has a job, and where public health doesn't exist seeing that the doctor's too would stop working. Sooner or later, we would just not care anymore.

In the end, Brazilians would become extinct.

As a result of this study, my team and I came to the conclusion that even though Brazil has always been a country of problems; of one thing Brazilians can be sure, for as long as we have soccer, we will be just fine.
Spirits: A Red Wheelbarrow with Soul
The Red Wheelbarrow
William Carlos Williams

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.
Spirits: A Red Wheelbarrow with Soul

edited by Delali Ayivor and Justine Jaffe

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