

Omnia Vanitas Review

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The Invisible Corset

THE INVISIBLE CORSET

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Cover art by Meg Nafziger.

Deliquescence

by Catherine Borders

The Great War, the great sacrificial carnage, women tossed their stays into the sea of scrap metal, untying the laces of Victorian propriety. Invisible men, invisible corsets. *Corpus. Corps.* Body. Field. *Corps à la baleine.* Metal, silk, leather, lace, whalebone. Body to body. The release of twenty-eight thousand tons of steel, melted down, remolded, then launched in the form of two battleships. Armor. The body must be disciplined, Aphrodite's reign is running out. The hourglass. *Brevity is the soul of lingerie.*

Great Aphrodite, her figure as formless as the clean foam that birthed her, as exotic as the penis that hatched her. Born without a Mother, the infinite sea was her cradling womb. A woundless birth. A male fantasy. Her sex flatters the loophole.

The soft and fluid figure eight, the symbol of infinity when lying on her back, holds no firm place in a world of oppositions. Man. Woman. Culture. Nature. Somethingness. Nothingness. The female sex must be

reappropriated, bound, held together by the immutable armor of the corseted body. Her lips must always be sealed!

A woman in a corset is a lie, a fiction, a story. Which is certainly not to say the female body does not, cannot, has not ever been a sign of strength, on the contrary, but the corset was worn as an insignia. The club of Eve, feasting on a golden apple. The corset, or rather stays, keeps hidden what has always been hidden, as a form of charity for the fear of the formless. The uncertainty of life.

Kenophobia. Apeirophobia. Thalassophobia.
Menophobia. Kolpophobia. Gynophobia.

Fear and desire mapped on the tightly laced torso.

To say her flowing flesh must be disciplined, is to say her flesh must undergo masculinization. *Cuirasse Ésthetique*, the classical male nude, a corset of muscles, naturally corseted. A hard-bodied shell needs no protection, but a woman wears her organs on the outside. Her heart on her sleeve, her sex in her laces.

A corset is a line of demarcation, a border between life and death, between self and other. To improve posture. Induce the straight spine, a straight line. Atrophy,

pain, reliance. Tight-lacing pushes the ribs in and up. Wandering organs. Elongated livers. Triangulated ribs. Constipation. Prolapsed uterus. Diminished lung capacity. Dyspnea. Hysteria. Yellow Wallpaper.

To be corseted is to rely on the corset, is to rely on the accessory respiratory muscles begetting shallow upper-diaphragmatic breathing. To be corseted is to be immobile. To move then is to faint, to swoon. The true *petit-mort*. Now, she is passive, powerless, desirable. The belle of the ball. A princess in a glass coffin.

Granules of sand falling through the hourglass.

These are the days of our lives.

Lacing becomes a surrogate for sexual intercourse, the body is shaped by a man's hand. The waist moves from an ellipse to a circle. But the corset is a body, a body that shapes a body, takes its shape from the body. A corset without a body will still retain the shape of the body it once contained. A shell without a yolk, stiff like a waif.

Only the vulnerable shall be devoured. The yolk must grow into the shell, become the eggshell. Hipless. Breastless. Hard and erect, like the corset itself. Unless, of course, she is pregnant.

Unearthly Mary, the amaranthine Mother,
perpetually full, but full of grace.

Grace, the natural attribute of women, distending
their figures into formless (im)perfection. Embonpoint and
barefoot. Holy Uterus, full of Otherness, muttered the
weeping virgin.

It truly is uterus.

As the vagina is a scary void, a dark and unnamable
abyss, the uterus is separated from her vagina, hovers
homeless, suffers phantom vulva. She is reduced to a
lonely function. No room for love and desire, only trouble
and a desire to love as the licentious vagina loves. The
Mother cannot be sexed, hollowed by her name.

Anyone can fulfill the maternal function, man or
woman.

Out springs Athena.

To avoid his own undoing, Zeus swallows Meta,
but woman's pain flows into his swollen head. He goes
into the woods to hide. He sits near a river, pinching the
bridge of his nose. He does not feel full, he feels
threatened. Metal scraping skull. Empathetic exhaustion
exhausted. He can't concentrate. Double-vision. His skull
cracks, hatches. He thinks of himself, poor Zeus has a

migraine. A silver goddess bursts forth. Cloaked, clinked, clinking, angry. Underneath the aegis, a sempiternal corset of muscle.

Born without a Mother, fully clothed and fully formed. There is an immediacy about Athena, a presence, a *veritas*. In between genders, traversing a strange medial ground, she is not mysterious, only mythological. She too must be made desexed.

Mighty Athena, the straight line, the ray, the vestal. Always reaching outside herself, one step away from her body, cunt shunted.

Athena: a man castrated, an unmanned Goddess.

Aphrodite: a Goddess conceived through the castration of an unmanned Father.

A moment of silence. A moment of epiphany.

Cascades of femininity within a pause. Silence, the landscape of the *in between structure*. Indelible cursive inscribed on white paper, written in milk, signed with an indistinguishable stain. To be anonymous is to be subversive. The amorphous can commingle with anything, anyone, without annihilating herself. Flow from one woman to the next.

Women, like words, are alive because they transform. They are always becoming, moving like water.

The stringent and crippling corset, tight-laced around the waist of words, worn for a taciturnity! These words are forgetting how chaotically tactile they are, how smooth and swollen, how fragmentary and infinite.

From breaking the ironclad chain of masculine referents, the mythologies of hierarchizing oppositions, pinning the chasm underneath the obelisk, the veiled language of profusion can loosen her stays and breathe a sigh of release.

The Amber Curtains

by M.A.A.

The man might be standing in the frame of the doorway, looking through the open window. He's watching a woman walk along the narrow street. The shop windows are filled with fabrics, shoes, perfumes. She stops and stares at a dressmaker. She places her gloved hand to the window. Around her the men and women in thin coats walk quickly.

All this is visible from the window. The yellow dress is on display with a blue corset and white lace. She pushes forward to the front of her boots and blows her breath against the glass. Beyond,

inside the store, there's a smug expression on the clerk's face, he sees the tear in the shoulder of her dress.

The woman walks further along the shop-lit street. The edge of it overlooks the river, then comes back to where she is now, lying facing the doorway, from a room with blood-red wooden floorboards and an old chandelier that shakes when the train passes. She can't see the man.

The train passes and the chandelier shakes. He watches it swing and she does not move. Impossible to discern if she is asleep or awake. She's on the unmade bed wearing a thick corduroy dress torn at the shoulder, cut low at the breast, falling just below the

knees. Washed out, thinned, the fabric clings to her skin, and he watches her ribcage nearly pierce, nearly tear, through it. With her eyes closed she feels him watching her. That's how I witness it. She says nothing. Keeps her eyes closed, hides beneath her eyelids, waiting, he sees everything, as I do.

She enters a fit. Her legs clamped together. Her knees open then shut in a careless butterfly motion. Hands clenched there is a palpitation of her body as she gyrates in a series of positions. In her feral state she gradually shrinks then expands. Violent. Deliberate. The man watches in silence.

Her body lies still.

The streets flood with commerce. Men in navy suits and women carrying children walk quickly as if moving to the mouth of the city. As if rushing towards some kind of permanence, like saints, they could give each other dreams, the relics of love, preserved perfection.

From her apartment there comes no sound. A red light radiates from the sun reflecting off the parquetry floor. He leans farther from the doorframe to get a better look at her hips. There are three blood-red satin screens in front of her windows. Red pushes itself from her bedroom and into the corridor.

She raises her legs. He takes three steps towards her apartment then

skips back down them and enters the street. I wait. He returns. His arm outstretched holding a pomegranate.

He enters the first step of red that's fallen on the white tiles outside her apartment. He peeks his head in. Her body has deformed itself, grown bestial in its positioning: hands like claws, legs elevated and exposed, head jerked to one side. With her eyes closed she can feel him watching her. She can feel him scanning the shape of her body, the torquing of limbs, the accumulation of sweat, ugliness, does he see how her dress is torn?

He casts a shadow over her. She opens her eyes. He tells her entering her room is like entering an exposed vein.

Do you belong to whoever wants
you?

He smiles and pushes his fingers
into her ink black hair half delirious
at how she opens like a fan.

Her body is docile, on the verge of
fainting. He places his hand on the
small of her back and feels the
thread. Her flesh is soft. He dips
his hand up the back of her
skirt. He rolls her over. In the
movement of his hands the fabrics
divide. The corduroy separates
from her skin.

Flashes of indigo, velvet, and lace.

He traces the rough seams of the
corset. Blood rushes. It's almost
painful. Nearly impossible to

restrain himself he tears through the layers of cloth. Stops. Slides his hand between the corduroy and velvet. His fingers entwined in the ribbons of her corset. I shout his name, “Marcus. Her head turns towards my voice. He catches her mouth, her serpentine movements cross his body, he pulls her into him. I again shout, “Marcus.”

Black coiffure hair falls in loose curls onto his shoulders.

Shirt undone he crosses the room and slams the door shut. I scurry up a staircase and stand in the frame of a doorway, looking through the open window. She stands with her hourglass silhouette in a room stained red.

We memorize the blue velvet curve

of the corset.

Holding the bedpost, back turned to him, is that your name, Marcus? Yes. He holds her hips. She smiles and says, 'The East River holds a barge named Marcus. He says he's seen it. Take your shirt off. He does.

Holding the bedpost, back turned to him, she waits for him to untie her. One slow pull of the ribbon. Eyes shut. The velvet, like sheets of iron, unfastens its hold on her ribcage, spine, hips, on the small of her waist. Thick fingers hungrily pull the ribbon until his hands are entwined in strips of satin.

Dear Lover, your hands are not moving fast enough.

He sinks his teeth into her shoulder. She screams. He pulls at her thick hair and she moans. With her back fully arched and her knuckles white he pulls off the corset and enters.

The train passes.

Eyes closed, he draws her in. The chandelier shakes. He pulls, shoves, grabs, thrusts and she meets muscles with language, kisses, licks, moans. She persistently tells him the story of love but he cannot hear her.

Opens like a fan. Helpless. He holds her whole body in his arms.

In a fit of murmurs and moans she again tells him the story of love. He interrupts her. She is

speechless.

He starts to weep. He's weeping.

She curls herself onto his chest
staring at his face for the first
time. She wants to steal that
purplish blue stain beneath his
eyes. To steal the sorrow that
collapses him.

In the sleeping she, Katya, claims
the room. She, Katya, claims her
body. He lies entwined in sheets
and pillows. Can you hear me? His
chest rises and falls in a steady
breath. Am I making sense?

The train passes. The chandelier
shakes. A liminal space. She
climbs out of bed, slips her robe
on, burns Jasmine oil. The early

light highlights the muscles of his back, his calves, his thighs. I am shocked by the shape and opalescent hue of his morning body.

When he wakes the room is completely rearranged. The red satin panels hang on hooks from the ceiling. Yellow curtains with white trim are drawn across the window. An oriental rug is spread across the floorboards.

In the kitchen she bites into the sliced pomegranate and looks back at him. A Japanese robe slips off her left shoulder. He swallows.

I never caught your name.

Katya.

The sound of the wind is deranged and
beating against the window.

The light of day -

It must be early.

The sweet pomegranate lingers on
her lips. Yes. She crosses the
room to him. His attention shifts
from the wind, from the hour, from
the sweet, to remembering her long
narrow touch, to remembering the
satisfaction of their ravaged bodies.
Heat rushes to his face as he
gathers the sheets around
him. Swiftly with one pull from the
corner of one sheet she drags the
bedding just out of reach. The
wind picks up.

He lies naked on the bed.

Branches rap against the
window. She walks past the
branches and they stir behind
her. Her body vulnerable.
Geographically he tries to place her,
there. To keep her before the
window with its amber light, but
she passes like she can't stop.

Just out of reach. Mouth shaped in
yes.

He lies on his side and watches her.

He doesn't know how to begin. To
leave. And so he falls back onto the
unmade bed. She takes her robe off,
climbs on top of him, delicately traces the
dark stains below his eyes, and places his
face in her hands.

When did you become such a mess?

He wraps his thick fingers around her wrists. The train passes. The chandelier shakes. The blood-red satin screens swing on their hooks. He finds her mouth with his mouth, finds her neck, her chest, pulls her in, keeps her, there.

Next time won't you sing with me?

by Lily Robert-Foley

The below list is based on a woman's transcriptions of the her first times with each of her lovers. The sentences from the transcriptions have been rearranged into alphabetical order.

A. A corset the shape of a body. And she enveloped his member in her folds, in her pink ecstasy, and moved her hips in the infinity sign, and hunted for her own pleasure in the marsh weeds. And then in a wild tangle, he fucked her in her white dress, coming in her like a wife, and she felt the spirit of sex coming back to her and pleasure lifting her from sadness, like a light object borne on the wind. As though as his cock massaged her inside, some painful contraction was being undone in pieces, and the pain flowing out as joy, the wetness, a piñata, a high note ballad, exactly that for which the body aches in deprivation. Afterwards, in the bathroom, a little bit of blood. Afterwards she smoked a cigarette and watched the lights,

feeling liquids pour from her like rain funneled off the gutter.

B.

C. “Can I?” “Ce n’est pas que je ne veux pas, parce que ce n’est pas du tout le cas....”

D. Drunk and so driving too fast.

E. Enthusiasm. Even the color.

F. First she made him watch, as she manipulated her fingers, but he couldn’t stand it at some point and tore her fingers away from her, sliding into her roughly. First the stairs, his hands down her pants, her running, him running after her, up flights, the stairs, taking flight. First they beat each other with sticks, and then, in the dark, he took the

bulk of her hair in his hands and hung her: wrung and hungered her.

G. Get out of here, who wants you anyway.

H. He agreed. He begged her, and finally through the unbeatable fatigue that comes through over-drink, she succumbed, and he ripped her open, tore through a new virginity she had built over so many years of freezing. He came at her first after she came out of the bathroom at the hostel. He came at her from the side and underside, and there was a sincere bolt of ecstasy like she hadn't felt in too long. He came behind her and held her as though, even though he could not give himself to her, he could somehow still heal her. He came into her from under, she felt airlifted, maneuvered onto his member as though a seatbelt, locking in. He couldn't, really. He drew a finger down her body's mesa. He gave her what she had been wanting most to feel: pain. He had one ear like a pixie, came to a point. He held her a bit until the light came in and then she vanished. He held her chin near her ear with

his hungry hand, desire in the style of need. He hurt her, smacked her, beat her, tore her clothes, ate her feelings. He kissed her neck, threw her against a wall. He laughed and repeated her. He organized her body. He reached his hands into her and manipulated her organs. He said, "Either one of us or both of us has wanted this for a long time." He said, "Let's go for a drive." He softened, his dick laying down, a sick sleeping puppy. He told her to go sleep in his sister's room so they wouldn't be found out. He turned her over and got her on her palms and knees and came in her from the back. He was ugly but he touched her right, his hands across the ripped holes in her jeans, his tongue all over her, the cab driver pulling over, screaming at them to get out, the desperate shortness of breath, the lugubrious pre-dawn.

Heaven.

Her body had never felt so unified. Her eyes were clamped closed as though in a horror film. Her fingers knew everything. Her hands came to her eyes the way they do to one's mouth as vomit comes up.

His cock became more important than her body, and she became, came, his cock, more, more. His cock

was wide, a little rectangular, substantial, and when he moved into her, Olaf watched from a chair in the corner, hurting, she screamed low, deep, as though the penis had pierced the belly of her sound. His dark hair and Mediterranean face in her mind. His girlfriend's birthday. *His* girlfriend's birthday. His lump moved into her for a moment, and then fell out like a poop.

I. "I love your ass" he said, she called him sexy. "I want you," her words like a pressed grape, his body smooth, covered with down fur, like a baby mole. If the vagina is indeed a wound, it's reversible. Is it even real? It burns now only, oxygenated by the present. It hurt and little air pockets kept coming out and embarrassing her. It was 2am when they met and 4am when they never saw each other again. It was dark grey, there were parents down the hall and a vague odor of adolescence clung even to the bed posts, the bang sweep, the miniature figurines, the rhizome of belongings. It was flat with gravity and smooth as breath. It was night, she was put to bed by the shadow of the trees as the forest limbs raped her, and she lost, I

mean, got lost. It was summer and the hair on the back of his head splayed into otter-textured stalactites. It wasn't hard.

J.

K.

L. Later on the train, he felt for her hands, “you have such tiny hands.” Like the past, just a shade of reality. “Look how much has happened,” she said. Looked at her with a mixture of hate and desire and the center of the earth swallowed her.

M. Most wounds are created from a puncture—it's through the puncture that the skin opens.

N. New lovers. “Non,” and he reached in for her, took her body like a puppet, onto the bed, manhandled her terrifically, grabbed her breasts, position her body for her, overwhelmed her femininity, clamped her legs, pulled and stuck it in her.

O. Olaf was there, he had suggested it, the three of them tromping up the stairs and unsheathing their clothes as youths do, still a little unpracticed.

P. Pure lack, pure cream, pure air, pure breeze, pure Irish.

Q.

R. Rejection has a freshness. “Remember just a moment ago when we weren’t saying anything?”

S. She ate eggs outside, and tried to eat her heart. She became very busy ripping threads and slowly, the white dress was turning to tatters. She couldn't convince him at first. She cried. She doesn't want to write anything now, the memory of his water-like embrace. She felt mishandled, empty, her heart turning to ice. She felt them through her hands and became most intimate with the back of his neck, where the hair ended. She followed him back to France and he leaned her over an end table from where she looked out at the clay roofs of Toulouse and he put it in her and fucked her until he came, his hands under her, around her breast, pumping desperately. She had just fucked, on the street, and she was dry, from the cock, the daylight, the drink, the end of night. She had lost her bearings already, had already felt liked she'd slept with people for reasons she didn't understand, and so uncertain, her confidence shaky, too young to have forgiven herself and too old to be a virgin. She had problems at that time and finally she released herself to tears and moved away from him. She hurt. She leapt through the light blue of the morning shadows on sidewalk. She must not go on now for reasons she won't explain. She reached for the phone later as the men read comic books or ate candy and

she called Olaf, somehow wondering what her virginity had been constituted of. She remembers complaining about men feeling like sticking it in you was some kind of insult, when truly, that's what men want, and can't get it, and it's what women want and can't get it, so he did. She remembers: you call the ones that hang down from the top "stalactites" because they "hang tite," and the ones that grow up from the ground, "stalagmites" because they "mite grow to become stalactites." She shed it like snake skin, and hurled it, speeding, it crashed against a banner and made a sound like a drum. She sorted through the fabric with a sort of wild serenity. She stood naked, in the flesh, feeling her hides strip off of her metaphorically. She stuttered, "Stay with you?" She turned him over and straddled him, wanting to defeat him, and she did. She unfastened the knots, and pulled the strings loose from her corset. She wanted to cry and fell asleep. She was fumbling over her own pleasure, as he moved back and forth, caressing her hunger, feeding her, wrecking her. She was wrong, I mean, wronged. She wasn't sure she wanted to do it, but he called her an angel, and pressed his fingers into spots all over her body, as though he were a blind man who knew nothing, and through his knowing nothing

knew everything. She wore the sexiest jeans ever, and danced the best, she had lost her self—not herself, but her self, and was momentarily free, some kind of gift.

Still, Olaf hid somewhere in a silver box in her room, his face just an image.

T. That had been two years prior. The body's location on the bed moving to its own fancy. The boy with the gaunt posture and the sexy bangs. The hinges on the door making a sound like rust moving fast, like time speeding up, the locks undoing, and yet—. The near future's uncertainty disrupts you, your sense, your direction. The top of a mountain, an octagon of glass, a story written later about the gaze, wanting, wanting to be wanted, wanting to be wanting. The youthful honesty of desire, of sincere athleticism. Then she stood. There was general movement, the name of her lover on her lips. There was a song on about giving love another chance, and he lifted her and swung her round and round. There were two of them, how did they talk her into it? They arrived in one

piece, she said, “I could totally fuck you right now” and so soon upstairs, clothes off, two loaves, unbaked, her body felt like a wad, fat, blond, full of lumps. They attended a party in an old Hausmannian and they hunted for a corner in which to fuck. They found an empty space between roofs and two nights later she stood in his window frame in a white dress, watching the cemetery come to life in the dawn. They had been sitting upright, legs mutually akimbo, she felt her feet pressing into the sweat on his back. They spun and the world turned indiscriminate as though taken over by love or paint. They sweated and heaved, her heart having been restored somewhere. They walked backwards in tiny steps and he reached down and unhooked her scanty red shoes and removed them delicately as though she were a child. They went to the Philosopher’s Club. This one’s dick never went inside her completely, but a bigger dick, the size of a passion, fucked her. “Tu as une jolie petite copine en Angleterre?” she leaned against one of those French iron window railings, and bathed her eyes in her lids.

U. Underneath. Upon opening her eyes, her vision shifted, a blond, blue eyed friend with a different name faced her and rocked over her in violent necessity, grunting, coming.

V.

W. When dancing is right there is no body only music. When Olaf went downstairs for water, the other's face came into that private space in-between the mouth and ear of a lover, "I've wanted to fuck you since I met you." "Why don't you invite me to your house?" she asked, so he did, and by 8:30 he was under her, his little man with his little hat, his tongue against her pink sex, she could barely feel him and it was all over by 9:15 or so.

X.

Y.

Z.

An excerpt from:

{ measurable angle [is to (meaning as
periphery) is] to tide }

by kristin cerda

```

stage.addErrorChecking
Let distance.Value = inches;
Let object.Value = body;
    so that bodyA = 0;
    and bodyB = 1;

Set {
space for accommodating (0, 1);
    { When (0, 1) sit beside
each other;
        { If distance between =
        (</= 1.41421);
        Then yield hushed
        voices; }

        { If distance between =
        (> 1.41421, </= 8);
        Then yield hushed
        voices;
            yield eye contact;
        }

        { If distance between
        (> 8);
        Then yield hushed
        voices;
            yield eye contact;
            yield language of
            negotiating space;
            yield reassuring
            gesture; }
            { If does not
            = stable
            happiness.Value;
            Then begin
            process again; }
    }
}

```

stage.fieldOpen

```
IF {  
  { object.Total is greater than 1;  
    Add object.Overlap (0, 1);  
    and they inhabit the field;  
  }  
}
```

//Moved into a faded text--the ability to leave commentary without affecting the actual function of the code. One becomes interstitial with gestures as small as angling lines. An angle is the figure formed by two lines diverging from a common point.

```
Else  
{ the field briefOpen;  
  Add randomize (collapse,  
  expand);
```

//Most basic movements of the 1 and the 0. To keep control of loving by loving in lists of joints and seismographic equipment. The relationship of one mass to another is dependent upon their mutual ability to collapse and expand.

```
  and transition.Screen; }  
}
```



```

stage.addDreamListener (spaces for
pillows has the imprint
of a single body);
//Add a quality of space in order to
change its visual
nature. Precise measurement of the
internal landscape can
be collapsed and stored.
    If {
        {[Event1]the space is situated
diagonally;
            Then shuttersOpen;}

    Else
    { [Event2]the space is situated
farLeft;
        Then execute music.File;
            only If time.Value (>=
0500, <=0900);

            Else [Event3]eraseBed;
        }
    beginAgain
    }

```

```

Function.beginFade () : void; {

    addEventListener(event:
ENTER_FRAME, doFade);

    //This function handles one moment of
the fadeout and is
called repeatedly by adding the event
listener. It
listens; it listens for itself; it
builds layer upon layer
of the same small instant, and in
doing so longs to be
solid.

    addEventListener(event:
ENTER_FRAME, eachFrame);

    Each instance of a body is an event,
each iteration of an
overlap is a performance in singular.

    This is an attempt to discern
personhood.
    variable timespan1: display (0, 1); }

```

```

Function (Event.Display); {
    attribute(width of pelvis);
    attribute(ball joint);
    attribute(ball joint);
    attribute(pelvic cavity);
    attribute(iliac crest);
    attribute(sacral junction,
bundle.sacralNerves = 5);
}

// now,

Function (Event.Display); {
    attribute(acute angle =
knee_to_hip_to_shoulder);
    attribute(bed.edge);
    attribute(width of pelvis = along
bed.edge);
    attribute(shoulder/over/elbow)
        (weight of
shoulder/over/elbow)
        (shoulder/over/elbow/over/kn
ee)
        allYields (acute angle
of the waist)

//Loving in lists may be represented
as the wave yielded by
a sine function.
}

```

Three Studies for a Figure Laced and Unlaced

by Jane Agnes Quinn

1.

In knots we pose: marionettes shallow in breath and lined in red. There we have lines across the contour the inner skin the left lateral. There is expulsion. Bows. There we are perfect. If we do not inhale much it is not for want of life. If a string holds us it is for want. Easier to dream that way easier. To imagine when the image is what you are and more so what you hide. Please understand but one thing about shallow breathing: it penetrates less. If we go deep the lines go deep. The way we see it a lash. So why do the lips curl is it the blind spots how they darken our vision or is it the freedom from seeing that easier kind of see.

2.

There is how eyes look and I'll tell you what else and understand it: it is only love when the love comes low under a chest risen. A number figures around and through. We realize it is not. We thought time. Under a body come in and the breath will hiss then. One line clipped. Two three four clipped but the others hold us still up into living. Then a concession: it is our bodies moving wild how we come loose one way and tighten in another. There it is skin and we come to love it.

3.

Lines not the red of blood anyway blood is not red. We wonder what ties us and we wonder where and how we are tied. Animation of we do not know. Bows. Double-knotted. I'll say though we suck in. Terribly beautiful that way but dishonest. Maybe it is suffocation. Vaudeville. There is posture and posture is sacrifice yourself. No need to look back or look even. There is suffering makes us antiquated in that it makes us human and human does not evolve with time. Yes it is suffocation. Perfect love. Or come open. It is not.

An excerpt from:

Bergdorf Boys

by Scott Alexander Hess

Dewalt lived at the top of a six floor walk up. A throbbing, vile chant was playing as Neal climbed the stairs. It got louder, then assaulted Neal as Dewalt opened the door.

‘good morning all you mothafuckin knotty headed niggas.’

Dewalt was topless wearing a pair of white boxers and an orange oven mitt, his gold teeth glistening. He smiled, then grabbed Neal and kissed him, a wet, long sloppy mouth kiss in the hallway of the building. Neal imagined angry, homophobic neighbors, or those religious hat-wearing Sunday woman. This date, he decided, was likely to be a disaster though he was enjoying the salty taste of Dewalt’s tongue and the metal tang from his gold teeth.

Keeping his mouth on Neal’s, Dewalt pulled him into the apartment, then swung the door shut, notched three locks, and pushed Neal against the wall. He licked his

cheek, his ear and went again for his mouth, long deep, aggressive.

Rap music pounded.

'I'm da insane nigga from the psycho ward'

"Hey," Dewalt said. "Come on in."

With his oven-mitt covered hand, he pulled Neal into the apartment proudly.

'Gun the bitch and grab a forty.'

The living room had two big windows looking out onto the courtyard. Neal could see the children playing. A smooth, dark leather sofa, a pair of oatmeal colored fabric chairs, a mahogany antique table, and a series of black and white prints of a familiar looking black prize fighter. The living room lead though an archway into a large eat-in dining room, which was unheard of in Manhattan (other than in true luxury apartments). An oval dark wood dining table, set for dinner, sat near a large window. The kitchen was off the dining room and fed around back to the living room then down a hall to a bedroom, and a bath.

The music pounded. Dewalt pulled Neal toward the bedroom.

"Could you turn down the music?" Neal said.

“Come on kid,” Dewalt said, grabbing Neal around the waist, kissing him again, and lifting him off the floor, humping him to the beat of the music.

“No, really,” Neal said.

Dewalt slid him to his feet.

“What?”

‘so come on motherfucka come on.’

“This place is great, but the music can you just...”
Neal said.

Dewalt smiled.

“Sure.”

Dewalt turned off the rap. In the quiet, Neal could hear the distant screams of the children. He wondered if his date had heard the yellow hair taunts. Neal felt awkward, more uncomfortable now with the silence than he had with the audacious rap. He sat on the sofa, glanced toward the window out at the courtyard just to look like he was doing something.

Dewalt came back, oven mitt gone, two glasses of wine.

“You like wine?” he said.

Neal shot to his feet, off of the sofa. Then he sat down again.

“I don’t drink,” Neal said.

“At all?” Dewalt said.

Neal nodded. Dewalt stood still for a moment, then flashed a smile, the gold teeth.

“No beer either? I got juice, you like juice?”

Neal brightened and settled back. The distant screams of the children were fading, replaced with haphazard shouts from women calling them in for the night, gathering the flocks. As he waited, he noticed the softness in the linen curtain which fronted the living room’s main window. A stripe of shadow from a courtyard light edged across its center, and as the night grew darker, he thought the curtain, long flapping and rich, looked milky and cool. He never imagined Dewalt having such beautiful drapes, and with that his date called him to the table for dinner. Two fat bloody steaks sat on two lean china plates, crowded next to French Fries and a really large wedge of tomato. Neal sat at the table, stiffly. The napkins were pale blue, the silverware had duo tone dots. Dewalt stood by his chair.

“Go on now.”

Like an obedient child, Neal cut into the steak and ate. There was a slight smoky flavor, and a touch of something spicy. Delicious. He went for another jab.

Dewalt sat down, sucking down his wine. He watched Neal.

“Kitchens my ground ya know. Loved cooking as a kid. Then, got off ya know. Got messy, ya know what I’m saying?” he said.

Half way through his steak, Neal paused, and Dewalt started to eat. He began with the tomato.

“So you got messy?” Neal said.

“I ran around for awhile, did some shit with my boys. You know what I’m saying?” Dewalt said.

Neal didn’t know what he was saying, but recognized the slang. Still, he had to stifle an urge to ask more questions, to blurt out ‘No I really don’t know what your saying at all. What is the shit? Is that good shit or bad shit or just shit?’

“So what do you do?” Neal said.

Dewalt finished his tomato, and eyed his steak.

“Is this too rare? I love rare. It’s ok?” he said.

Neal nodded.

“Construction. It’s steady work. Good in summer. You gonna like dessert, you like Carmel? You gonna like it if you like Carmel,” Dewalt said, eating quickly now, ravenously, like some hunger-lever had flipped.

Neal watched him devour the meat. Dewalt gripped his utensils hard, like tools, and cut roughly, shoving fat bits of food into his mouth. The muscles in his arms strained. He looked a little beastly and dumb, which Neal liked.

“You work out a lot,” Neal said, immediately regretting the question.

“No. The jobs it, ya know, heavy lifting. I keep in shape,” he said.

Dewalt tipped up his face up, chewing ferociously on the last of the meat. He gave Neal a good long stare, then licked the end of his fork.

“You know how fucking sweet you look right now?” he said.

The linen curtain behind Neal blew forward with a breeze, as evening spread and the room got a tiny bit darker. Dewalt stood up. His white boxer shorts were tenting. It was bobbing, pulsing up, then down, through

his boxers. Dewalt set down his fork and leaned his palms on the edge of the table.

“So you like my place?” he said.

It was rubbing against the edge of the table, resting on the wood. Dewalt leaned further into the table and pressed his crotch so it grazed the china plate. Left over juice from the steak touched lightly onto the front hem of his shorts.

“I do,” said Neal.

Dewalt pressed further into the plate. His boxers were getting wet.

“Stay the night,” Dewalt said.

“I have to work or I would,” Neal said.

“I’m up at five. I’ll feed you. Turkish coffee. You ever had it? Sweet and mad strong,” Dewalt said, coming around the side of the table toward Neal.

The courtyard had gone silent, the breeze was picking up. Dewalt stood at Neal’s chair. The front of his white boxers was stained brown with meat juice. The outline of it, full and reaching, pressed toward Neal.

“You gotta stay, you get that?” Dewalt said.

He leaned down and kissed Neal gently. Dewalt tasted of steak, his tongue tangy. He was exploring the

insides of Neal's cheeks, side to side. He placed one hand, warmly, on Neal's shoulder, the other in his hair. The kiss kept going, as Dewalt lifted Neal from his seat and murmured something unintelligible. Neal suddenly wanted to get rough with Dewalt, to yank his head back, to push him down and start to fuck, to treat him like a dumb beast, a nameless nasty thugfuck, but he felt himself unwillingly falling into Dewalt's rhythm, a slow, awkward mingling dance. Dewalt was holding him now, still exploring his mouth, his teeth, lips. He had both hands around Neal's back, then slid them down to his ass, pressing his fingers lightly past the band of his jeans, touching.

"Get 'em off," Neal said.

Neal was dizzy, out of breath. There was no overhead light in the dining room and as night came, the room grew darker. Neal wanted to push forward, but Dewalt moved away from his mouth and knelt, he untied Neal's sneakers, took them off; unbuttoned his jeans, slid them over soft white feet. He ran his mouth up Neal's legs, brushing his crotch, back to his mouth.

"Lift me," Neal said.

Dewalt stepped back, his skin was wet, sweaty. It glistened in the dark. His shoulders were lean, tight. He

nuzzled his face into Neal's stomach, then swept him up, grunting, swept him up across his forearms and pulled him toward his chest. Dewalt swung around and headed to the bedroom. Neal leaned his head into Dewalt's shoulder. He felt tiny, frightened. The bedroom was dark.

"Turn on the light," Neal said.

The switch flipped, and two steel bedside lamps glowed. The room was masculine, all mahogany, shuttered windows, a pile of dirty clothes, a jock strap on the floor near the window. Dewalt set Neal gently onto the bed. Neal sunk down, gazed up, as his date stood still, staring, then slowly pushed off his stained white boxers, letting them linger mid-thigh. He loosened himself, sighed and shutting his eyes, roughly pushed the shorts to the floor and stepping forward and onto the bed, on top of Neal.

He ground into him, his wet skin slicking over Neal's legs, their stomachs pressing close together. Dewalt's moves were urgent. He licked at Neal's chest, bit his nipple, then yanked Neal's arms and pressed them over his head. He buried his face and breathed hard on Neal's ear, whispering.

"I wanna fuck you now, good," he said.

Neal pressed hard upward, into him, wrapping his arms around Dewalt's back and squeezing him, holding him steady while he found the man's mouth and tongue. He reached down and held tight onto the ass, which was clenching with every grind, and he wanted to slap it, to punish him, hurt him, make him less.

"You my boy, yeah, got that, now, my boy's here," Dewalt said, grinding, kissing.

Neal pressed up into him harder, squeezed his back, then shook, holding back a rush of far off, wandering tears that chose to push through, now, at the wrong time, now with the light on, trapped under Dewalt.

"All right," Neal said, as his eyes clouded, and he failed to stifle a sob.

He buried his face in Dewalt's chest and concentrated on their breathing, together, and didn't care anymore what happened, who fucked who, how it all came out. Dewalt was murmuring in his ear, pressing into his belly, lost in the soft rush of his skin, shooting on Neal's center, whispering.

"It's good," Dewalt said.

Neal pulled himself up a little, holding onto Dewalt's shoulders, pulling himself out of the whole thing,

in the jerky movement, upward, toward his date's cheek, he
shot too, on Dewalt's belly, mingling, both of them,
mingling.

bright nor dirty

by Chandra Smith

It was the off bright walls.

It was the beige and green carpet.¹

It was the no kind light in the whole
apartment so that everything
was bright. And dirty.

It was a super-real moment. my metahumiliation.

It might not have been so bad, if the kitchen light had not
been so
fluorescent.

The light did nothing to hide Manny's shape – of the
muscle-man circus performer – bald with a one-piece tank-
leotard, lifting dumbbells with giant steel balls on each end,
rather than discs. The kind of shape you find in a nursery

¹ filthy.

rhyme book on your grandparent's shelf. Bald, or a ponytail. At this point, he was lifting just eggs from the dirty refrigerator. He was somewhat short but what he lacked in height he more than made up for in girth. i guess. One of those Midwestern-grown circus ball dumbbells with all the earrings but don't let the flame-decorated boots fool you.

In any case he had a lot of thick piercings, but this didn't mean he was experienced. He didn't know what to do when Ben pushed me into the hallway – not a stitch of clothing on. The tiger tattoo climbing up the left side of my thigh only exposed my nakedness further.

He pushed me through the doorway and left me standing on the filthy green carpet unfortunately waxed. i was a 10, 12, 13 year old girl. Or boy i had no sex. i was stripped. i was a bright white bulb white orchid potato flower shining with tender just dug from the clean dark this delicate skin barely containing the life inside. just a prick.

i was torn. Torn between what this situation could have been, and what it was.

What i wanted was to do whatever Ben would tell me to do.

i *wanted* so to please him, to shower him with yes and devotion.

i wanted this – more than i want most things – his exposure of me to be special.

What it could have been – Ben beaming with pride at the shapes and shifts of my body,² at the new, glowiness of my skin, at the way i was constantly open to him (as though my head were in a perpetual about-to-turn-to-him state my mouth always just

about to open with reception or words new for him) and ready to respond to any touch – sinister with wanting to assert his what he had to demand a humiliating task be done and it be done. something beautiful in the exchange. Manny grateful for a glimpse.

² all that i had at the time. all that i was. the of the same-name-ness.

What it was.

i know the feelings of beings.

Manny a protected Midwestern boy. Polite, but not obedient would not grant me/Ben a single glance. The Gardnerian radiance seen only by the kitchen, living room (both dirty) and gray cream walls.

How bad is this. Should I be raging now.

Throwing appliances, bringing forth the math of rage.

Would I scar my psyche permanently with the dichotomy of arousal and wrath?

I thought for sure

for sure any second he would drop the cruel parody.

I couldn't tell – was he sociosadistic, or just.³

³ following his ego.

humiliated.

but couldn't tear myself my eyes away as though i was cheating or stealing but the only victim in the room was me.

Or Manny.

(was i a participant in this game? it would seem not due to such protest of earlier.)⁴

he was an innocent little fucker, and saved me from the ultimate humiliation. (or did he seal me in it?) would i not have been saved if he had turned to look at what Ben was showing him in his... pride. i was relieved, but what did he really save me from? did he steal?

(i had wanted to obey. but not that way. not that way).

5

⁴ before. before being pushed through the door.

what i felt was torn but truth i was bound.

by⁶

what i wanted.

what was happening

forced to show myself

not being looked at

his other girlfriend. somewhere else. in another
room.

probably not as bright.

nor dirty.

⁵ bound to show and bound to not be seen.

⁶ 9god0

The Man in the Hospital

by Caroline Picard

Andreas with a long curly head of hair, it fell down to his shoulders; he never put it in a ponytail. He was from the Bavarian Forest and, with thick meaty fingers, he laughed from the chest. He took her for a walk, she wondered what for, out of pity she suspected and, the whole time it took for him to show her the camel at the zoo, Ingrid imagined what their screwing would be like.

— *I'm surprised there is a camel so close to the hospital,* she had said. *Are there other kinds of wild animals?*

— *It's a zoo. Of course there are more wild animals.*

— *The tigers at the zoo aren't wild. They're always only sad.* She turned to him. *If you were a wild animal, what kind of animal would you be?* She touched one of his curls, pulling it straight and letting go.

Too big for himself, clumsy and kind with a nervous smile of small teeth; Andreas seemed always uncomfortable. He had just come back from Africa where he'd worked with children in a hospital there. Otherwise she'd known next to nothing about him, except that

somehow, one way or another, she'd managed to draw him into a janitor's closet with a slight and leading pressure—the first time she'd taken his hand. Right beside the door, and unthinking herself, tugged lightly his longest finger, opening the door and, once inside, turning with great haste to press her mouth against his; he spluttered in almost protest, before pressing back, pressing both of his hands on the door behind him to keep it shut before putting his arms around her, creating a seat for her body that had already leapt up and wrapped itself around his coarse frame. His hands fluttered with uncertainty. He tried to be gentle.

Kissing fervently, pulling off his shirt, her desire unabashed now, with his tongue in her mouth, she felt the small spaced teeth in his, tasting the wet mush behind them, the warmth like a hot red cave. Thrilled, she spun her tongue around his until he sucked and she could not escape, delightful, paling a little only when he dropped his arms and pushed her back to the ground, yanked and tugged her pants down, round her ankles, roughly now the momentum of this sudden passion hiccupped between the awkward layers of clothing. She shifted with her legs around his torso, reaching with her fingers, insistent and

groping as a child, she opened and closed her fingers asking, *Come. Come to me*, the cold clammy linoleum floor on her back. Except for their bodies everything smelled like antiseptic. Frustrated with his own groping he finally stood up, tore his own clothes off and threw himself on top of her, thrusting against and inside of her, his hand covering her mouth so she could make no noise. Heaving and hard, it hurt her sweetly, she could smell his breath like a thick slab of salted meat, and she whimpered and he grunted, his face turning bright and red and puffy and she let go, utterly, writhing under him, clutching his moist back, she pulled him in closer and closer. She felt his cock like a rod, it drove straight through her body, it drove into her stomach, through her spine, it pounded the base of her skull.

She began to cry, the sanguine dissolution of herself into him and vice versa, she could concentrate only on the thick hot weight and pinch of him inside her, between her legs, their heat and sweat, it lifted her away from everything, she could only feel his hand on her breast pinching the nipple there until it preened, she gasped, her face wet and his shining, *Andreas*, obliterated in ecstasy. She kissed him and he pulled out of her and stood up and

she pressed her head into his thigh, languishing already, he came on her face and she licked her lips and crying a little still, curled into a naked ball where he patted her head a little. His cock still erect and quivering.

Smiling nervously, his little teeth shone. *I have never done that before.*

—*Sshh. Please.*

—*You are crying, why?*

She shook her head. It was hard to speak. At last she stuttered, *I feel like the world is draining through my eyes.* They sat in silence, her leaning on him and drifting, until at last, as she knew he would, he had to go.

—*I hope you are O.K.,* he said, the door clicking after him.

Sandy and the Corset

by Katherine Cox

Sandy wasn't sure exactly what made her finally buy the corset, but she did. She walked into the Seventh Goddess lingerie store at Central and Richmond on her lunch break. With a 36-oz Diet Coke sweating in its paper cup in one hand and her cheap knock-off purse in the other, she took the white satin corset with the 38D cups and the little blue flowers off the rack and put it on the counter.

The checkout girl didn't even flinch.

"Here," she said, reaching behind Sandy's head to a basket full of tightly rolled lacy panties. "The blue here. Matches perfect." She'd picked out the right size – "Plus Size" – without saying a word. "And try these." She produced a package of white thigh-highs, with lace tops, or at least that was what the model on the front was wearing. "I'll give you 30% off the whole deal. Recession special."

Sandy just nodded and handed over her credit card.

Dizzy, Sandy put her purchase in the trunk and went back to work.

When she got home, she almost forgot she'd bought the lingerie, but it was under the bag of groceries in the trunk, smashed now, and still warm from the heat caught in the car from the late October sun. She shook her head and tried to hide the Seventh Goddess bag – black and sultry with red wording, and a logo that included laces between the S and the G, like a corset itself – so that her nosy neighbors wouldn't see it. She could just hear Mrs. Nelson now saying something about a girl her size wearing lingerie...

Sandy shivered and closed the trunk. She went inside and put everything on the kitchen table. She sat down and stared at her two bags – the black Seventh Goddess gift bag with the red tissue paper, and the brown paper bag from Whole Foods. Who was she today? Shopping at Whole Foods and buying lingerie?

She put the vegetables in the fridge. Arugula, celery, apples, tomatoes, carrots, pineapple. She put away the yogurt, the salmon, the frozen peas. There was one leftover box of Chinese takeout, a greasy white box in its third week sitting on the second shelf. She took that out and threw it away.

Then she sat down at the table again and looked at the Seventh Goddess bag.

She realized she had no idea how she would lace up a corset by herself.

Sandy took the bag into her bedroom and made sure the blinds were closed. She turned on the light and emptied the bag's contents onto the bed. The corset kept its shape, feminine and secure, lying on the bed. The panties were rolled into a tight ball and held together with a sticky label. The white thigh-highs were still in their package, a skinny sexy model pouting on the front, her legs halfway crossed in front of her.

Sandy took a deep breath. She turned over the package of thigh-highs once, and looked for the sizing. Queen size. The girl at Seventh Goddess knew what she was doing, again.

Sandy took another deep breath and unwrapped the panties. She held them up. They looked sexy, lacy, blue and stretchy in a comfortable way. She put them down and took the thigh highs out of the package, too. They were sheer and soft. Sandy felt her fingernails snag a bit on the nylon. She stopped herself immediately and laid

everything out gently on the bed. Then she undressed and went to the bathroom.

She wrapped herself up in her fluffy robe and put on her fuzzy slippers. Then she turned the heater up in the bathroom and sat on the toilet while she filed her nails and her toenails, ridding herself of anything that could snag on her new lingerie. She took a long hot shower, and washed her hair, scrubbed her feet and her elbows and her face. When she got out she felt steamy and pink. She wrapped herself in a towel and patted herself dry. Then she moisturized everything, with lilac lotion. She blow dried her long dyed blonde hair, slowly with a round brush.

Finally she had to escape the hot steaming bathroom. She opened the door to her bedroom. It was dark outside now and her bedroom felt chilly. She stood over her bed and looked at the corset. She held it up to her chest and looked down. She couldn't believe she hadn't tried it on. She had been to the store the week before, and someone named Kate had measured her and fussed over her and told her she was beautiful.

"You have gorgeous skin," she'd said. "You're like a doll. And oh my god, your proportions. You're a dress-maker's dream."

Kate had told Sandy she could make her a corset easily. But Sandy had blushed hard and said no, thank you. She'd felt embarrassed enough being measured.

But now she had a corset.

It wasn't a lace-up corset, she realized now. It had hook-and-eye closures. This would probably be easier, she decided. She unhooked the top five hooks.

She shed her bathrobe and, almost shivering, stepped into the corset. She turned in backwards so that the closure was in front of her, and hooked the remaining five hooks to their eyes, her breasts hanging over the corset. She slid the whole thing around so that the hooks were in back, then pulled it up so that her breasts fell into the cups.

It fit. There was enough stretch in it that she could breathe, and enough boning that she felt held in. For the first time in ten years, she felt like she had a waist.

She smiled in spite of herself and put on her "plus size" panties. These also fit with enough stretch that no rolls hung out from above or below. She was wearing a thong. She had never worn a thong before.

Sandy sat on the edge of the bed and took one of the stockings in her hand. It was fragile, but she was

confident she was smooth enough now to put it on without a snag. Slowly, she slid her thumbs in under the elastic thigh band and rolled the nylon up, then slid it over her toes, up her calves, and onto her thighs. It took her a moment to figure out how to hook the garters that hung from the corset onto the front and back of the thigh band. Finally, she had it. She repeated the process with her left leg now. Then she stood up. She felt held in and tight, in a firm, young way. She felt renewed. She felt restrained, but not in a bad way at all; she felt as though if someone unhooked her various straps and hooks, something passionate would flow forth, rather than something flabby.

She held her breath as she opened the door to her closet and revealed herself in the mirror on the other side.

She gasped a little.

She did look like a doll, with pink cheeks and perfect blonde curls, and porcelain skin. The corset was smooth and delicate-looking. She turned around and gazed at her own ass in the thong. The lines from the garter made her legs look amazingly sexy. The white stockings were provocative. She giggled.

Sandy glanced at her alarm clock on the side table next to the bed now.

It was 6:35. He was late. Lucky for me, Sandy thought.

Quickly she threw all the detritus and packaging away and tidied up the room. She dabbed her face with a bit of powder and put on mascara.

When the doorbell rang, she was just lighting a few candles in the hallway to match the ones she had lit in her bedroom.

She answered the door in her corset and stockings, wearing white high-heeled pumps.

“Hello,” she said. “I’m so glad you could make it tonight.”

She pulled him inside and could see his jaw drop. In the ten years she’d known him, he’d never given her a look that made her feel like she mattered more than a coworker or acquaintance. And now he was looking at her like he’d look at a pin up in a calendar on a wall. There was longing in his eyes. This was exactly what she’d wanted.

“Sandy?” he said. “Wow.”

She smiled. “It’s the new me, Tom,” she said. “It’s the new me.”

Kosher Meat

by Michael Sidman

I sat on the log next to the pond and examined my legs, so different now that there was hair sprouting from them. I liked how they looked in my blue swim trunks, and if I thought about how much I liked my legs, I didn't have to pay attention to my chest: my skin pulled tight across my ribs like plastic wrap.

The four kindergarteners around me were quietly drawing in the damp ground with broken sticks. One of them drew the rays of the sun; another traced his mother's curly hair. The western Massachusetts morning air was cold, even in the middle of summer, so we wore our towels around our shoulders, shivering like a pack of abandoned Chihuahuas.

Sandy Kaufman, our swim instructor, approached us with an enthusiastic clap of her hands, even though she was glaring at me. I wondered why a woman older than my mother was teaching swimming at Camp Goldman. A streak of gray followed her cowlick from the front of her forehead to the back of her neck. Her breasts were

oversized and saggy, and her legs were fat and stout and covered in varicose veins. She wore a one-piece because she wanted to hide her slightly protruding stomach.

“Who’s ready to swim?” she asked in her best baby voice. The kindergarteners raised their hands. One little girl yelled, “Me!” I just glared at Sandy. War began early for me that morning.

“OK, everyone in the water!” The kindergarteners went splashing in, giggling all the while, as if water were somehow fun. “That means you too, Nathan,” she said without looking at me.

“I don’t want to,” I said.

“Look, I’m not interested. It’s enough that I have an eleven-year-old in my beginner’s class. I don’t need any grief from you.”

“I won’t give you any, but I’m not going in the water.” I wished I could tell her that I wasn’t comfortable taking my shirt off, and that I was so skinny that the water made my body freeze.

“I’m just gonna go,” I said. “I’ll get to Flagpole early.”

“Don’t you dare leave!” she said, pointing a finger. “This is mandatory swim. You don’t participate, you don’t

stay at Camp Goldman.” She positioned herself in front of me like a tank, but I stood up and got dressed. “I’m surprised at you, Nathan. If your parents knew how you were acting they’d be horrified. Your sister never pulled this kind of thing.”

“I don’t think my parents would care,” I said.

“Never in my whole career have I seen a boy who doesn’t want to swim with his friends,” she said. I walked away, sullen and angry, emboldened by the independence that arrived with the hair on my balls. I turned my back on Sandy Kaufman with the indifference of the Goth kids, whom I admired but could never join. I was too different, too unfortunate, too much of a freak to fit in with anyone, even the freaks. Those days I only seemed to make sense alone, and at Camp Goldman I was never alone.

I sat at Center Camp waiting for the rest of the campers to arrive from their morning classes. Pine trees surrounded me, dry and unapproachable like overheated porcupines. Every morning the clouds that gathered overnight in the Berkshires passed over camp, and I prayed to God that they’d stay for the day and rain out our outdoor activities, especially swimming. Please God, I thought, especially swimming. But in His divine

douchebaggery, He always saw fit to make the sun shine through sometime around nine a.m. The soil turned to hard-packed dust, the air into a gaseous potion, and my insides into a shit soufflé. Only the pines didn't seem to mind. The pines were our landscape. They survived all winter and couldn't have cared less what we did while they slept in the summer. There were no mountains and no water besides the lame little pond where I once saw a large spider floating on top of the water. There were only trees and occasional open spaces reserved for flagpoles, parking lots, and baseball fields: the glories of overnight camp.

Soon enough the rest of camp arrived for Flagpole. The other boys from my bunk sat around me. No one asked questions anymore. At first they wanted to know why I was swimming with kindergarteners, but when I answered, "Because I hate swimming," they left me alone. Boys were good like that.

Debbie Finkle, the camp director, did roll call, like it was a concentration camp or something. She called out 7B and the boys in my bunk got up and shouted like big dogs, throwing their hands in the air. I stayed down since that kind of display of masculinity was not my style,

though I often wished it were. I preferred quiet moments of intimacy to rowdy expressions of egotism, pristine cleanliness to dirty knees, and gentle compliance to rule breaking, though I was often guilty of the latter: I just managed to do it politely and in a self-effacing manner, which was always best.

They raised the American flag and we sang the Star Spangled Banner; then they raised the Israeli flag and we sang the Hatikva.

“Two announcements,” Debbie Finkle shouted. Her voice was strong and masculine, always trying to show the campers that she wouldn’t take any shit from anyone. If anyone was going to send you home, it was going to be Debbie Finkle. “First, the cesspool is at a dangerously high level this summer. We all need to be very careful to conserve water.”

“So wait, are we not supposed to take shits anymore or something?” Eli Spiegel said under his breath. Eli was my bunkmate. He had the top bed. He and I were among the five boys in 7B who hit puberty at an early age. Most of the other boys were feeling its effects that summer, but we considered ourselves part of an elite crowd because we started jacking off at the age of nine.

Eli's body had changed in ways I only imagined. He had taken to sleeping in only his tighty-whities. When he took his shirt off the first night I noticed that his body had become muscled. He already looked like a man, with a smooth, chiseled chest, ripped arms, and an actual six-pack. The fact that his skin was perma-tanned only made me more envious. I would pretend to read *Calvin and Hobbes*, but I would really be watching him undress, comparing his body to mine, looking at how his dick filled out his tight underwear, and wondering why I felt so bad about it when my dick was bigger anyway. When he got into bed he would masturbate so hard that the entire frame would shake, and I'd place one hand on the bottom of his mattress to see if I could feel his movements, reading the bumps like brail, and wondering if at the end his cum would spill over the side and slowly repel down to where I slept, like the spiders often did.

He liked me enough, the way all the boys seemed to: enough that I didn't annoy them, didn't cramp their style. I was quiet and agreeable, and for some reason I seemed to follow boys like Eli around, and they didn't seem to mind.

“The second thing is that we’ve been given word that a white supremacist organization has set up shop not far from here,” Debbie continued. “The police are aware of this and so are we, but you must be on alert at all times. Keep a keen eye on the woods. If you see anyone walking around or coming out of the trees, let a staff member know immediately. But all campers are to stay out of the woods. I’m absolutely serious about this. If we find you messing around out there you will be sent home immediately, no questions asked.”

“What?” I said. Why would they let a white supremacist group set up shop next to a Jewish camp? Shouldn’t people be worried about that? I produced the image of a man walking out of the woods. It was so frightening that I imagined if I really saw it, I would be too paralyzed to act. I supposed that if he made it that far there would be little left that we could do to stop whatever diabolical mission he might be on. It didn’t seem to bother anyone else, though, so I put that terror aside. My mind was used to fear. It was the emotion that made me feel most alive, probably because I could not manage it.

“Look at Lilia,” Avi Menkowski whispered to Eli and me. “Her tits are huge now!” Avi was part of the

Early Puberty Club. He had a low voice and grew a full bush to match his Jew-fro by the third grade. His Adam's apple was the size of my ball sack. Naturally, he felt that Eli and I understood him better.

"Dude, I'm all over that," Eli said. I was mad at him instantly, but I wasn't sure why.

"No shit, man. Do you know how good it would feel to stick your dick between those things?" Avi said.

"I'd cum all over her face, too," Eli said. "Pearl necklace."

"Not my type," I said, and they both looked at me.

"Are you kidding me?" Avi said.

I wanted to say that I thought it was inappropriate to talk about girls like that, because I really liked girls; and I wanted to say that I truly didn't think about girls that way, probably because I was raised right and taught to respect women.

"I guess I'd do it," I said instead.

"You're damn right you would!" Eli said, punching me in the thigh. It hurt, but I knew better than to cry about it. "You'd stick your dick in her mouth, and you'd fuck those titties, and you'd cum all over her. Right?"

"Right."

I knew all three of us were hard at that moment, but I was hard for different reasons. I didn't like thinking about Lilia, but I liked when Eli talked about her. Somehow, I thought, I'd be happy to watch him fuck her.

Uri Stein turned to us, his sickly little head made even more humorous by the thick-rimmed glasses he desperately needed, and blurted out, "Rachel Holzberg is going to give Joe Kellner a blowjob behind the sports shed during Free Time tonight!" He was proud of his announcement, because as the only boy in our bunk who had not even begun puberty, he needed some way to join in. I was jealous of his enthusiasm, and I wished that I could go back in time to the days when kinky hair, orgasms, filthy thoughts, and rivers of cum were nothing but a glorious landscape on the horizon. Uri recounted his pubes every morning: "Is that one? I think that's one. That makes four on my dick and two under my left arm!"

"Oh, no shit," Avi said.

"That's fucking awesome," Eli joined. "Rachel's hot. I bet she'd want to suck my dick too."

"Maybe you should spy on them tonight. See if her skills are any good," I said. I was rock hard, but to me Rachel Holzberg was a shadow of a thought, a featureless

figure made of clay; and I was picturing Joe Kellner, the fourteen-year-old alpha jock, with his back against the rotting wood of the sports shed, his jeans opened, revealing a triangle of well-muscled stomach and thigh and whatever large treasure he held in the center. The foggy figure was on its knees and was responsible for giving Joe a huge amount of pleasure, pleasure he obviously deserved for being such a real and beautiful man. The reward for giving that pleasure was when he came: liquid gold for the recipient. I was aroused and saddened. I didn't feel worthy of receiving the pleasure or of giving it. I decided that Rachel Holzberg was a stupid whore bitch.

"Totally," Eli said. "We gotta watch this. I'm gonna be hard all day." I looked down at his shorts, too loose for me to really see anything, and my eyes lingered a little too long. He saw me look, but that summer we were all horny as fuck, so Eli interpreted it as an act of submission. He smiled and grew a little larger.

At morning *teffilot* the boys put on their *tefillin* and *tallitot*. At Camp Goldman we had the choice of Orthodox or Conservative services. I chose the Orthodox because it was the only place where they left you alone. We prayed at

a makeshift amphitheater where logs jammed into the muddy and mossy hill functioned as both stairs and benches. A white tablecloth separated the boys from the girls, though most of the girls had grown tired of this and gone the way of the Conservatives.

While the religious boys bowed and bended and recited the ancient prayers, I bowed and bended and asked God to let the cesspool overflow so I could go the fuck home. I prayed that the boys I liked, the athletic boys, the older boys, the boys the girls followed around, would confide in me, would become close to me, so close that no one else mattered. But God only heard prayers in Hebrew, and for the life of me I couldn't translate fast enough. The collective sound of the other boys drowned out my prayers. It was a sound entirely unlike my own, and my prayers got caught in the pricks of the pine trees where a bird or two might use them to build a nest, and nothing more.

There was a new chef in the cafeteria that summer. His name was Rich, and he was one of those guys who hated every second of his day. He was old, around fifty, with a butterball face and no hair on his head. The kids

were scared of him. He had some kind of harsh accent, and he hated every single one of us. The older boys liked to push his buttons, and every time they did he started screaming in a high-pitched voice, threatening to serve their organs for the next meal. Then the boys would threaten to have him fired, and I ended up feeling bad for Rich. I saw him as a misunderstood, lonely creature. I left him alone.

At lunch bunkmates sat together, one bunk to a table. I had Gabe Rich on one side of me, and Saul Black on the other. I couldn't stand either one. They sat on their beds all day listening to their tapes of bootlegged Phish concerts. They were quiet, smart, and angry, and they didn't have a damn thing to say to me. But across from me was Jeff Fisher. His mother was the camp nurse, and this was his first time at Camp Goldman. He was nice and caring. He talked to me because he actually wanted to hear what I had to say. Jeff was in the bed just next to mine, and when he slept he didn't move, he just lied there with his eyes shut and a hint of a smile on his lips. I couldn't help but think he was beautiful.

Jeff looked at me from across the table and smiled. I smiled back and my thighs tingled. I knew he wanted to

talk to me, but with all these jackasses around us, why would he even bother to start a real conversation? I gave him a look that was meant to say, “I understand, and it’s OK.” I assumed an unspoken bond with him.

“Did you hear?” Avi shouted from the end of the table. “Rich is a German!”

“What?” someone said. “No way.”

“Shut up, he is! I found out. His name is actually Heinrich! What if he’s poisoning our food or something?”

“What if he’s part of that white supremacist group?” I said. “Like some kind of spy.”

“Holy shit, that’s brilliant!” Avi said. And that ended the conversation. They all went back to eating their sandwiches. I couldn’t stop staring at Rich. With his bald head and unforgiving eyes, I imagined that he once cooked Jews in the belly of Auschwitz. As if he could hear me, he looked out at the crowd of campers, and for the first time crossed over from behind the counter.

“Eggscuse me,” he shouted, his thick German accent more obvious now than ever. “Becoze of a problem vit da meat supplier, ve vill not be having any more meat.”

“What?” children screamed. “For how long? For the rest of camp?” Rich’s face turned red.

“I said, becoze of a problem vit da meat supplier, ve vill not be having any more meat!” The cafeteria fell silent. Rich’s face was bright red and his eyes were as big as golf balls. Debbie Finkle jaunted up to Rich and tapped him on the shoulder. She whispered something in his ear and he walked back into the kitchen, but only after shooting one last glance of hate around the room.

“Thank you, Rich,” Debbie said. “Campers, what’s happening is this: Yiddishe Bubbe Food Corp, the largest kosher meat producer in the country, has been shut down.”

“Why?” I asked, always the inquisitive shit stirrer.

“Well,” she continued, “it turns out that they were run unethically. They were underpaying their workers, using child labor, and the meat they were producing wasn’t even kosher.

“The point being, campers, that whether we like it or not, there is no kosher meat to be had. If something changes, I’ll let you know. Until then, we’re going to be eating more fish and vegetarian dishes.”

Hands flew into the air.

“Mrs. Finkle?” It was one of the girls from 5G.
“I’m allergic to fish. I’m also allergic to peppers.”

“Yes, I know, Becky. We’re very aware of all your many dietary restrictions. If you’re worried, please come talk to me in your own free time. But remember that we’re fully aware of your allergies, and we’re not going to let you eat something that will harm you.”

“Mrs. Finkle?” Another girl from 5G. “I’m anemic and need a high protein diet.”

“Yes, I know. Like I said, we’re not going to let anyone get sick. Any more questions, come find me during Free Time.” She walked out of the cafeteria, leaving a vacuum of murmurs. I watched Rich mix something in a bowl with his hands, shaking his head and talking to himself.

Jeff Fisher was looking at me again and shaking his head. I smiled.

“Ridiculous,” I said.

“Seriously.” He reached a hand across the table and grabbed my arm. I froze and burst into flames simultaneously. His touch was disarming. He looked deep into my eyes and said, “Naomi Klein likes you.”

“Who?”

“Naomi Klein, from 7G. You know, the big girl. She’s sitting right behind you.” I turned and saw her back. Ah yes, Naomi Klein: black belt in Karate at the age of ten, top athlete in the camp with a special passion for the more physical sports: basketball, football, volleyball, and in her spare time, wrestling. She was known to pin boys twice her age. Her torso was as wide as I was tall, and she was short like a gorilla. Two blond pigtails swung as she ate, like pirate corpses warning intruders against a no-tolerance policy.

It was easy to see that the other girls in the bunk didn’t like her, but it was also easy to see that Naomi didn’t care. She spoke freely and carelessly around them, and I respected that. She was one of them, whether they liked it or not.

“How do you know?” I asked.

“She told me!” The mere fact that Jeff was cool enough to talk to Naomi Klein without worrying what others thought about him made me like him even more. I wanted him to be my special friend, the one to never let me out of his sight, to only want to spend his time with me. But it seemed as though guys didn’t do that with their friends.

“Ha! No way!” Eli broke in. “Dude, you should totally hit that!”

“No way,” I said. “I’m not going to hit that. I’m not interested. She could swallow me for breakfast.”

“Imagine what else she could swallow,” Eli said. The table laughed. Jeff laughed too, and I got angry with him. I wanted him to be saddened by the image of me hooking up with someone. He obviously was not.

He smiled and said, “She wants to meet you tonight after Campfire. Somewhere private.” I wanted to kill him. I turned again and looked at Naomi, and she was already looking at me. She smiled, exposing braces that covered her huge chompers like silver train tracks lost in a prairie winter. She and the girls turned to each other and giggled. I wanted to curl up and die. At least we were keeping each other distracted from the meat shortage.

Campfire was as boring as it was pointless. I never understood the idea of forced spirit rallies, especially those that used song. To the tune of “Dust in the Wind” we sang, “Dear Camp Goldman, we all love it here at Goldman.” Everyone seemed to love it, but it made me want to burn the whole place down. I got depressed every

night at Campfire wondering why I couldn't just be like everyone else, and I got anxious thinking about the free time between then and bedtime, when the true natures of the campers at Camp Goldman were conveniently hidden by the shade of night. It was when we went unseen, unmonitored. And it was when I realized that I didn't fit on the side of the boys or the girls once the sun set.

When the spirit rally was over, 7B and 7G stood on opposite sides of the fire, huddling and stealing looks at each other. I tried to stand in the middle of the boys so no one was really able to see me well. Finally, the girls sent over an emissary. Eli intercepted her and they discussed logistics.

"OK," Eli said to me. "She wants to meet you near the baseball field. Go there in exactly ten minutes."

"Why? What does she want?"

"I don't know, dude. That's why you're going to meet her! She likes you!" I knew the other guys would never have let their dicks within ten feet of Naomi, and I was hurt that they wanted me to.

"I heard she got her period a couple days ago," Avi said. "I heard she bled right through her pants. Looked like she'd been sitting in a pool of tomato soup."

“Gross,” I said.

“Yeah, but at least you know she’s got something going on down there. Just don’t eat her out.”

Those ten minutes were the longest of my life. I had to sit there and field questions from the boys as to what I would do to Naomi’s pussy, her mouth, and her tits. Until then I had successfully avoided talking sex with my bunkmates, and I had done it with such stealth that they assumed I always did talk about sex. Now they looked to me for details: dirty, sticky, uninhibited, cum-drenched details. I managed to avoid giving them by insisting that I had no desire even to share the same air as Naomi. They laughed, waiting to see what I’d say and do, and I realized that all this was just fun to them. They would probably have respected me more had I said, “Fuck that ugly bitch,” and demanded we all go jack off in the girls’ beds while they were busy doing something else. But for some reason I felt the need to prove something to these guys. There was something even scarier about what they might have said about me if I didn’t go.

As I walked to the baseball field my dick felt like it was getting smaller with each step. When I reached home plate Naomi stepped out from her hiding place behind the

bleachers. She was wearing a pink frilly dress and had pink ribbons tied to the ends of her pigtails. She looked like a damn fool, like the Hulk in a dress. But I managed to smile at her. I knew that she was a nice person, and I wondered if the girls in her bunk had forced her into this.

“Hi,” she said. Her braces glowed in the moonlight. She was giving me a genuine smile, which was endearing.

“Hi.”

“You came?”

“Um, I did. I’m here.”

“Cool.”

“Yeah.”

“You’re a cool guy, Nathan.”

“Thanks. So are you.” She took a green glow stick from behind her back and started twirling it around. It cast an eerie glow over us. “Where’d you get that?”

“I don’t know,” she said with a trickster smile. She giggled and started putting the glow stick in her mouth, letting the tip of it touch her tongue now and then. Oh, Jesus, I thought.

“Vat are you keeds doing?” A horrible voice boomed from behind us. I turned fast to find Rich right

behind me with a flashlight in my face. Naomi was so startled that she bit down on the glow stick and its toxic ingredients shot into her mouth. She whined quietly at first, and then grew more hysterical until at last she ran away screaming. Her mouth remained as a glowing green orb long after her body had been covered in darkness.

“You keeds aren’t supposed to go into ze voods,” Rich said.

“We aren’t in the woods, Rich! We’re in the baseball diamond. See? Does this look like the woods to you?”

“I should follow her,” he said.

“It’s OK. She’s probably going to the nurse or something.”

“I should follow her,” he said. His voice trailed off, and he walked slowly as his flashlight illuminated her tracks. I was left alone in the empty field. The pine trees were menacingly silent behind me. They stood there watching me, as if to say that they had no particular problem with me per se, but they didn’t like me enough to tell me if anything dangerous was lurking at their feet. I looked into the darkness of the forest. It was still as death.

Suddenly, two eyes glowed at me from deep in the darkness. I turned and ran.

I found the boys only a few hundred feet away. All of them were ducking behind corners or hiding behind rocks. They heard my frantic footsteps and turned violently. Each pressed a finger to his lips.

“Come over here and shut up!” Eli said.

“I saw something in the woods,” I said.

“Dude, shut the fuck up and look over there.” My eyes followed the stares of the other boys and fell on movement just a few yards away at the sports shed. “She’s sucking his fucking dick!”

The moonlight pieced the trees and cast thick ropes of light across Joe Kellner. We were facing him, so we could only see the back of Rachel Holzberg’s head moving rhythmically against Joe’s crotch. Joe’s mouth was hanging open, and I imagined that I could hear his breath flowing with the rising beat of his heart. His eyes were fixed on his dick, watching it get wet, watching it slide in and out of Rachel’s lips. He placed his hands on Rachel’s head and directed her while his hips pumped forward and back. I was so turned on that I stuck my hand down my

pants and started stroking. Eli was doing the same thing. In fact, all the boys were doing it. But they were all imagining that they were in Joe's position. I was not.

I looked at Joe and saw that he was an animal that was totally unfamiliar to me. I saw that he was a man and I was not. His focus was fixed, his conscience was unquestioned, and he received pleasure like he deserved it. He didn't question his body or his attractiveness, he simply existed in himself and the weaker ones flocked to him on their knees hoping to be anointed in his juices. For the first time I got it. I wanted his juices. I wanted him to baptize me in his cum, because when he did I would belong to him, I would be something he possessed, like a woman. I thought of how unfortunate Rachel was, so unaware of what she was doing, as I assumed all women were. They gave out blowjobs because they were supposed to, because that was expected of them. I thought I could do it better. I thought I had something the boys around me wanted, even if they didn't know it or admit it.

Joe's mouth opened wider and his breathing became audible, gasping loudly until he actually called out, "Oh shit!" Rachel's head stopped moving and I knew that he was cumming in her mouth. I didn't know it but my

tongue was hanging out, picking up tiny bits of salt from my lips. A salt that I imagined was someone else's.

Joe and Rachel got up and walked away, not arm in arm, not in love, but in different directions, without so much as a smile or a thank you. We all pulled our hands out of our pants.

"Wow," I said. Someone laughed. We all walked back to our bunk, mostly in silence. Every now and then someone commented, "Joe is so lucky," or "Did you see when she—," but we were mostly lost in our own thoughts. I gazed into the woods, the piercing eyes from before replaced by the image of a dick and balls. I realized that I'd never be satisfied until I got to put them in my mouth, too.

The lights were out and we were in bed, that strange moment when the counselors had just left and we all lay quietly pondering what we were going to do, besides not go to sleep.

"I'm so fucking horny!" Avi called out, shattering our memories of the blowjob. "I need to do something about it now!"

“So jack off, dude,” Gabe said, putting one of his Phish concerts into his stereo and putting on his headphones.

“I know,” Eli said. I could feel the bed shake as he sat up, proud of his idea. “Ookie Cookie.”

“No way, no way,” Gabe said.

“Yes, definitely,” Eli said. “Ookie Cookie. All the way.”

“Yeah, Eli, that’s right!” Avi said, jumping up and down and laughing. Some of the other boys laughed nervously, while others didn’t say a word, hoping to stay out of it. “Who’s in?”

“Not me,” Gabe said, followed by a chorus of at least five other kids who pretended to actually go to sleep. Eli jumped out of bed. His tighty-whities perfectly framed his thighs. He and Avi collected flashlights from around the room and placed them, lit, on the floor. At the center of the floor they put a cookie.

“If you’re in, come on,” Eli said. “Gather ‘round the cookie!”

I got up, not because I wanted to join the game, but because I couldn’t turn down a better look at their dicks, their balls, at their faces as they stroked themselves

to orgasm. My better judgment told me to play the lame-o, to sit out as usual, but a new force in my belly drowned those thoughts in white fog. My heart was racing so fast I thought I might actually pass out. A good six or seven of us, including the five Early Puberty kids, sat around the cookie.

This wasn't the first time it had happened, but usually people chickened out before they came and ran back to their beds to do it under the covers. At the very least, the cookie never got eaten. The guys usually ended up fighting over who actually came last, and in the end the loser just had to pick up the cookie and throw it away.

When I sat down, though, I realized I was out of my league. I wasn't safe. I could end up drooling over their dicks, and that might take things too far. I had already planned to lose the game, to cum last. I just wanted to declare outright, "I will eat the ookie from that cookie!"

"Nathan, no! Where're you going?" I ran back to my bed without excusing myself, leaving the dedicated ones to prove that they were comfortable enough to stick with it. "You pussy!" I just laughed with relief, and I was greeted by the sweet smile of Jeff in the next bed. He was

already stroking under the covers, his legs spread wide and his knees bent. From my bed I simultaneously watched Eli on the floor, making sure I could see every inch of him, and Jeff next to me, the covers rising and falling with his hand movements. Eli came and I watched him shoot onto the cookie, every muscle in his body contracting, his skin becoming flush and sensitive. I came too, so hard that I hit the wall behind me. I fell asleep ashamed of myself, without a thought of Naomi or the eyes in the darkness.

I woke up to the blessed sound of rain. Hell yeah, no instructional swim! I sang a song of praise to the Lord and vowed to pray correctly at *teffilot* that day. We were all in a great mood, and we strolled down to the cafeteria for breakfast with the slightest skips in our steps.

As we queued at the food line the news passed quickly: the meat has returned. It was odd that we would have meat for breakfast on any day, but the campers had been so disappointed by the announcement the previous night that the news came as an early Chanukah present. A chant began throughout the cafeteria: “Meat! Meat! Meat! Meat!” Feet stomped on the ground; forks and knives banged on the tables.

When I reached the front of the line Rich was serving the meal. He held a ladle in his hand and gave me a smile, the only smile I had ever seen on his face. He spilled a deep red liquid into a bowl and passed it to me.

“What is this?” I asked.

“Beef stew,” he said. “Very good for keeds.”

“For breakfast?”

“Vat, you don’t like meat?” He smiled again and let out a hearty laugh. “Eet’s kosher. Only ze finest kosher meat for my lucky keeds!” He laughed a great, robust laugh, coughing it into the air like a predatory dinosaur claiming its territory.

“Fucking Nazi,” Eli said behind me. “I don’t want beef stew.”

“Vell it’s all you get!” Rich screamed. “Eat it or you eat nussing!”

At the table I sifted through the contents of the stew with my spoon. The broth was red and thick with some potatoes and carrots here and there, and one large chunk of meat.

“This shit is nasty,” Gabe said. “I think we should go back to the vegetarian menu.”

“That’s retarded,” Avi said. “I love meat. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I wonder if we can get seconds.”

I looked behind me to see if Naomi was there. I was curious to see if her mouth was stained green. But when I looked there was an empty space where she usually sat.

“Wonder where Naomi is,” I said.

“Aw, you miss her?” Eli teased. “Let’s find out. Hey! Where’s Naomi? Is she in the bathroom thinking about my boy here and fingering herself?”

“Ew, gross,” one of the girls called back. “And no. Naomi’s gone.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“I mean she’s gone. She came to the bunk last night with all this gross glowing stuff in her mouth, and then Rich came and brought her to the nurse. This morning all her stuff was gone.”

“Dude, you broke her heart!” Eli laughed. “She can’t even handle being near you!”

“Shut up, I said. “It’s weird that she went home.” Eli and Avi were both sitting across from me that morning. My thoughts were interrupted by parts of their

bodies that called out to me in ways I had never noticed. Avi's nose, wide and large, was now as seductive to me as his well-defined chest. In his nose I saw his incredibly large dick reflected. His nose was now a symbol of his masculinity. Eli, on the other hand, was pretty. Clothes fit him perfectly: t-shirts showed off every perfect line of his torso, and his shorts rested just below his hipbones, constantly showing off the line of muscle leading down to his treasure. Avi was larger, broader, and less put together; Eli was a sight to behold. I wanted them both in me at once.

"Gross!" A scream came from two tables away, one of the older boys' tables. "Fucking gross! Fucking, fucking gross!" All eyes turned to the kid, one of Joe Kellner's many followers, a lanky and crass dumbass who thought that if he talked like an idiot he would be cool.

"There's a fucking tampon in my soup!" With that smiles faded and the rumble of speech swelled to a pregnant silence. The sound of spoons falling resounded like the chime of a great clock.

"What the fuck are you talking about, man?" Joe Kellner said, standing up.

“Look! Look!” the kid yelled back. “There’s a fucking tampon in my soup!” He picked it up by its tail and held it for everyone to see. The tampon slipped from his fingers and landed on the table with a dull thud.

We all got up from the tables and ran out of the cafeteria to breathe in the fresh air, afraid we had somehow inhaled menstrual fluid. I could hear Rich screaming at someone inside.

“I don’t know, but ze meat vas kosher! I know it vas kosher!”

“That meat wasn’t fucking kosher, dude,” Avi said, a slight smile on his face. “Blood is not kosher, dude! Especially vagina blood!”

We laughed and laughed. It was the only thing keeping us from throwing up, but a dark gloom fell over my mind.

“Oh my God,” I said.

“What?” Avid said.

“Naomi had her period.”

“No shit, dude! Every girl in this camp has her damn period.”

“No, that’s not what I mean! Naomi had her period. And Rich supposedly brought her to the nurse last

night. And then today Naomi's gone. And the suddenly we have meat?"

"OK, that's fucking ridiculous," Gabe barks. "So immature." He walked away and the boys followed, leaving me alone. Jeff stopped to give me a pat on the shoulder.

"Am I an idiot?" I asked.

"Nah," he smiled. "You're not an idiot. The idea's just idiotic, that's all."

Well fuck it, I thought. I headed to the back of the dining hall, where the food was delivered. The sky was dark and drooping with rain, and the campers had all dispersed through the grounds, aimlessly wondering what to do with an entire day of unstructured free time. I examined the ground around the service entrance: no tire tracks in the dirt.

"Dude, let's go inside. There's no one in the kitchen. I checked." I turned around and found Avi crouching next to me. "I want to see what this Nazi's up to."

It was the first time that he and I had been alone together. We put our ears against the cold metal door, and we listened for movement as I observed how well his legs

filled out his jeans. The previous night I had decided that his legs were the most beautiful part about him: athletic, big, and powerful. They were only more seductive covered in denim, like presents begging to be unwrapped.

He pried the door open with a boldness that impressed me. The kitchen was dark and abandoned. Knives and bowls cluttered the counters, and patches of flour soiled the walls like mold. A dim grey light peeked through the two windows above the sinks, leaving the rest of the space blanketed in shadow.

“Dude, c’mere. Check this out.” I walked over to where Avi was standing, just next to the walk-in freezer. He was bent over a small puddle on the floor. “Is this blood?”

In the dark the liquid was opaque but colorless.

“I don’t know. Looks like it.”

“Dude, I’m so fucking horny right now.”

“Me too,” I said.

“Do you think Naomi’s all chopped up in the freezer?”

“That’s what I’m wondering.”

“I think I’m too horny to open the door.”

“Me too,” I said. I saw that he was shaking slightly. I decide to lead the way, for once. “I think I need to jack off right now.”

“Yeah, me too.” Avi started rubbing the bulge in his jeans. I did the same. I put one hand down my pants and started stroking. He watched my hands, my movements, looking for cues. He put his hand in his pants.

“He totally killed Naomi and fed her to us,” I said.

“I know. Fucking Nazi.”

“I can’t jack off in my pants like this. I have no room.”

“Yeah,” he said. I started undoing my belt and unzipping my fly. He pretended not to watch by not looking directly at me, trying to focus his gaze on the freezer door just ahead. I pulled my dick out from my underwear, and I breathed heavily for added drama. He seemed hesitant.

“Let’s jack off into the blood,” I said. He laughed.

“OK,” he said. He started to undo the buckle on his belt and I felt like I could cum right there. He unzipped his fly and pulled his dick out, showing me as little of the rest of his body as possible. His dick was so

big, so long and thick, I couldn't help but stare at it. He saw me looking and started to watch himself. He saw that he was being worshipped, and he started to see himself as being worthy of worship.

"I think I have to pull my pants down more," I said. I pulled my underwear down below my butt. Avi didn't say anything. He followed my lead. I was so happy to see more of him: his thighs, his butt, the lower part of his stomach. I couldn't control myself any more.

I held my hand out toward him. He didn't say anything, didn't flinch. I moved closer and closer until I was brushing the skin on his shaft with the tips of my fingers. I was amazed at how hard and soft he was at the same time, as if the feeling of a penis were somehow foreign to me. I started stroking him, slowly at first, then faster. He was just watching his dick, watching me jack him off. He started moaning, almost crying. I felt his dick swell in my hand, and then it pulsed like a heart. Huge streams of cum spurted from him, splashing silently into the dark puddle below.

Avi got up and put his pants back on. He didn't look at me and he didn't talk to me. He turned around and walked out the door, back into the open arms of Camp

Goldman. Alone in the kitchen I stroked myself. I closed my eyes and imagined the feeling of Avi's dick in my hand, and of the incredible amount of cum he shot. I brought my hand to my nose and breathed in the traces of Avi's smell. I licked my fingers, hoping to taste what I only touched. When I came I moaned out loud, spilling my load into the puddle. I loved that my cum was mixing with Avi's.

I put my pants back on and I felt satisfied, a feeling that was totally new. I felt bold and brazen, like I'd taken only one step of many. I was already fantasizing about what Avi might taste like. I licked my lips. As I buckled my belt I took one more look at the puddle, wondering if it was Naomi's blood. I looked at the freezer door, but I walked the other way. I opened the kitchen door to the rain and the dirt, to the silent pine trees that watched everything but said nothing. The blood didn't matter anymore. I wasn't concerned with the problem of the meat. I walked toward the amphitheater for *tefillot*. That was where the boys were.

An excerpt from:

The North Georgia Gazette

[Endnotes by Lily Robert-Foley]

15.

Mr. Hooper, the ship's purser, his body entwined: arms behind, back arched, his face the direction of his back. Enter, Mr. Wakeham, offering assistance. An improvised corset is now in play, half laced around Hooper's upper half. Mr. Hooper feels pretty in his deshabillee. In spite of himself, Mr. Wakeham, a Romantic, feels virile, full, vertical like an English pine. Mr. Wakeham entwines the ends of the strings, twirling his two digits round in equal opposing circles, spiraling the string around them, layering inch over inch of the tawny, filthy fabric, until they wound up tight like a ball of string with fingertips in the core. He pulls back, bracing his feet on the floor next to Mr. Hooper, his pelvis jutting in slightly as his torso leans away, tightening. He feels the resistance of the corset fabric and pulls decisively and hard, the burly forearms, the weathered palms, but with a touch of

graceful sensuality, the kind possessed by a woman over textile.

He pulls, exchanging corset strings for the proximity of his pelvis. The string pulls. The pelvis pushes. The light from his lamp where he had set it down illuminates the tendons in Mr. Hooper's tilted, arched neck and Mr. Wakeham stumbles across the image of the straight Grecian bridge of his nose sliding down against it, spreading its slick grime against Mr. Hooper's clean white skin like a butter knife on a fresh slice from a steaming loaf of bread.

Pop!

The corset string snaps, the back half unravels and drops to the floor, lost among the folds of Mr. Hooper's petticoat. Mr. Wakeham, spluttering, apologizes profusely, searches blindly, laboriously, through the dense, entangled sheets of Mr. Hooper's bottom half. He juts his glance at Mr. Hooper helplessly, crouched on his knees, searching, desperate, fumbling. "I can't seem to find it down here...." From his eye, a tony strip of paper, balled up, floats down at the speed of a weighted, meaningful pause and Mr. Wakeham catches it. Mr. Hooper asks honestly in a shy voice:

“Do I look like a woman to you, Wakeham?”

Training Bra

by Circadies

"Here, let me light you a cigarette."

The woman looked down at her prey, a pretty face obscured by tears and hair matted with sweat. A ponytail that once had a pert bounce, now hung haphazardly and disheveled. A string of drool gleamed gossamer by candlelight from a small gag in the girl's mouth fashioned by the woman with straps from an old belt and a rubber ball.

The air hung heavy with sweat, blood and newly muffled screams.

"Silly. It's a joke. You're supposed to laugh." She gently caressed the girl's face and wiped away the saliva. The girl sobbed a little, her body shaking from strain, her head hanging.

"Sweetie," she cooed gently, kissing the girl's cheeks, "you're a mess. And now I'm terrorizing you with bad jokes. Let's get you all cleaned up." The girl sobbed harder, and the woman took the girl into her arms on the floor and held her tightly.

"We'll stay here like this as long as you need, nod when you're ready to move." The woman held the girl's hands, which felt flush and healthy, and undid the knots holding the girl's arms behind her back. As the woman undid the buckle behind the girl's head, she pressed her face into the soft cotton of the woman's t-shirt.

"I'm so proud of you," the woman whispered as she massaged the girl's jaw. The girl sobbed more, and pulled both arms into her chest.

===

We'd met at a party and I felt immediately drawn to her, I could feel her watching me and she wasn't shy about it.

"Get wet for me. I'll meet you in the bathroom, lights out. Panties off, face the sink, legs spread." She'd whispered it to me as she lightly touched the small of my back in the kitchen. She hadn't given me a second look as she filled her glass with water and joined a conversation with some other women. Her touch turned my skin to flash paper, if she touched me again I might vanish into a small gasp of smoke.

I felt lightheaded at the notion of her request. I was wearing pants.

I went into the bathroom and felt a nervous sweat come on. I fumbled with my clothing, but soon stood half-naked in a stranger's tastefully designed bathroom with small decorative soaps in a dish. I avoided looking at myself in the mirror, my hands on the sink. I could put my clothes on and awkwardly leave the party. She could come in while I was putting my clothes on and I'd pretend as though I were just taking it off. I waited.

A knock on the door. "Someone's in here." I could hear them walk away.

She opened the door without warning and turned out the light. I felt her presence behind me.

"I don't have to touch you to know that you're not as wet as I'd like you to be. Keep your hands where they are" Her feet pushed mine further apart. "These things can take time."

Her hands ever so lightly lifting the hem of my shirt, the heat of her fingertips making the fine hairs on my belly stand on end. I could hear the click of a folding knife.

Her lips grazed my ear, "listen" whispered so softly

I could have only heard it by the gentle tap of her tongue on her soft palate, her teeth.

One hand pulled my shirt over my bra, and the other I could feel the pressure of the knife on the underwire of my bra. She guessed at the shape of my breast by dragging the knife's edge over the contour, the metal reading the responsive ripples and seams of lacy fabric. Past the cup, I could feel the cold metal against my skin. The tip of the knife caught the strap, and with both hands she quickly sliced through the elastic. It gave so easily that I gasped at the ease of the motion.

She played the knife's edge against my breast, my skin contracting against it's path. The blade's dry sound reading the Morse Code of the imperfections of my excited skin. I could feel myself gently pushing back against her with my back arched, and she quickly found the other strap with her hand and cut it. She put the knife down on the counter and grabbed both breasts in her hands which quickly became a tight grip. I pushed onto tiptoe in protest, but before I could cry out, she muffled my feeble cry.

"You're not done listening yet."

She slipped a finger into my mouth, and I greeted

it by tonguing it and pushing myself against her. I heard her give a small moan of approval, and her other hand felt it's way down and opened my sex.

===

We listened to the sound of her pleasure, I could feel the tide ripple through her thigh muscles against me. With one hand, I felt the honey viscosity along the ridges of her frilled sex. With the other hand, I could feel the contractions of the moans she was trying to keep back in her throat. I'd squeeze her throat so gently, she felt like a live bird in her excited state. I made sure not to make contact with her clitoris, to draw out her thrilling and silent gasps.

I continued to run my fingers along the folds of her sex and turned on the light. Our eyes adjusted and she gasped to see the aroused state she was in. With a handful of hair, I pulled her head back with her ear at my mouth.

"This is who you're going to be."

none of the children were injured.

“Time for my lunch break,” Shannon advised the head lifeguard after the mission was finished, pulling herself out of the pool with the grace of a drunken mermaid; “I think I’ve earned it.”

Diving practice had just begun and Shannon surprised herself by climbing the ladder to the high dive and doing a forward two-and-one-half somersault in pike position before running into the lifeguard shack for some medicine and disinfectant. She grabbed a couple bottles of bee medicine pretending it was Benzedrine and skipped away behind the locker rooms with a rousing ovation from the entire pool area for her valor.

“Thank you,” Shannon said. She bowed and slipped out of sight. The applause and whistles grew louder, forcing her to return a few moments later to offer an encore curtsy--an elegant gesture--especially considering she was wearing nothing more than a yellow bikini. Most mothers agreed that this event was even better than the festival and fireworks yet to come.

“Encore! Encore!”

The sun was shining and Shannon was smiling. A moment later she found Hope hiding in that tall grass

behind the abandoned caddy shack. They caught each other in a wild embrace and collapsed in the weeds, their arms as tangled as the stems from the poison ivy that concealed them and comfortably brushed up against the backs of their necks and underneath their freshly shaven legs, while the hive unbeknownst above their heads was the mistletoe of the summer, as it has been every day since, growing into that edible mountain ash so fast it could easily break that branch and all would come crashing down.

“Bzzzzzzzz.”

bound.

(poem on a blackberry)

by Chandra Smith

every last thing i've heard from you
leaves my words bound –
to my lips
tethered to the back of my
throat
tied, like doves by their feet
to a pole cruel by existing,
by keeping a living thing
from doing what it was
created for –
so
i can't say anything –
it's already all
on the cutting room floor.

like the insides of elbows

of

paper dolls.

wind. draft.

don't turn on

the fan.

The Spring

by M. A. A.

1.

He tells her she's the *Birth of Venus*. She treads lightly in the spring pool. Her skin is like white marble. He enters the water and moves toward her like a rising tide. His hands wrap around her figure. She asks, "What do you want?" He settles into "You," but his voice slides over the water's surface. His voice carries a multiplicity as it distorts in the wind. When it reaches her she hears uncertainty. She swims away from him. He swims towards her. They are both so buoyant. She stands where it is shallow, where the water wraps around her waist. The silence between them thickens. He swims to where he's neck deep and treads quickly. His throat releases another "You." This time it is flat and cold and cautious like it was too much to say and too much to give.

She crosses her arms and lets him enter the cracks of her figure. He whispers “*Repose One*” into her ear. *Repose 1* is the bending of her elbows, the cupping of her hands, the tilt of her chin. How many names does he give her? How many names does she keep? He enters *Repose 1* through the cracks between her arm and waist, thigh and thigh, the fractures of space that divide them. He wants to bind his skin to hers, to wrap around and into her, to reshape them into *Repose 2*. He wraps his arms around her but like water he slides past her body.

The spring water softens their skin. Minerals coat their bodies. It’s nearly impossible to hold an embrace. He returns to the deep.

He watches the beads of water slip down the slope of her neck.

He thinks they are like clockwork. *The Birth of Venus* reclines on warm sandstone titled *Nude 1*. He approaches her. He carries a clementine and an umbrella. She meets his gaze and sighs. Her back slightly concave: *Nude 2*. She looks at him and reaches for the clementine: *Nude 3*.

He peels the fruit for her. He cannot disturb her figure beside the spring. She is the study of a nude. She is almost a painting.

He fumbles to open the umbrella and places it in a stand. *Umbrella fig. 1*: a triangular shadow cuts across her back. The umbrella is too far removed. She stands up quickly. She removes herself from the shadow and walks into the sun.

He tears off the rind. The fast pull breaks the pith. Juice splatters and stings his hands.

She stretches out alongside the spring. The sandstone tiles absorb the water. He sees the traces of her stained into the stone. He places the peeled clementine by her knee and pushes the water out from the strands of her auburn curls. The pink sandstone absorbs the water in lopsided circles of maroon. He feeds her the clementine. Her lips press closed around the fruit. She slightly smiles with the crush of the pulp.

He traces Noon to Six on her back. His breath rises and falls with hers. He thinks they are like clockwork. Two wet bodies dripping water onto stone.

2.

He tells her she's the *Birth of Venus*. She splashes him from inside the spring pool. Her skin is like white marble. He laughs and enters the water. He moves towards her like a rising tide, his hands wraps around her figure. She asks "What do you want?" He settles into "You" but his voice slides over the water's surface. His voice carries a multiplicity as it distorts with the wind. She hears uncertainty, she swims away from him. He swims towards her. They are both buoyant in the spring. In the pool she stands where it is shallow, where the water wraps around her waist., and the silence between them thickens. He treads quickly. His throat releases "You" this time flat and cold and cautious.

The *Birth of Venus* may be described as an oil painting; a painting which marks the Neo-Platonism period and a fusion of reinvesting pagan gods into Christian faith. Boticelli invokes Venus with the Virgin Mary. She sinks underwater. He stares at the auburn crown of her head until her lips push through the water's surface.

She crosses her arms and lets him enter the cracks of her figure. He whispers "Repose One" into her ear. *Repose 1* is the bending of her elbows, the cupping of her hands, the tilt of her chin. How many names does he give her? He enters *Repose 1* through the cracks between her arm and waist, thigh and thigh, the fractures of space that divide them. How many names does she keep? He wants to reshape them into *Repose 2*. He wraps his arms around her but like water he slides past her body.

Repose. He whispers this word in reaction to her staccato movements. She recalls the slide he projected onto his studio wall: a smeared depiction of Picasso's mistress Marie-Thérèse Walter. A canvas covered in oil paint, an abstract figure reposing into a half-seated state, a woman composed of teal, fuchsia, maroon, orange, and indigo. She

pulls herself up onto the edge of the pool and lets her legs dangle in the water. The sun beats down at the center of her chest. She drops her head back.: *Repose 3*.

He pulls at her toes and she lets him pull her entire body back into the water. The spring water softens their skin. It's nearly impossible to hold an embrace.

An underground river floods into the stone foundation. The moss and ferns grow rampant covering the landscape with their green.

The Birth of Venus reclines on warm sandstone titled as *Nude 1*. He stares at her and is reminded of a postcard hanging on the wall of his study: *Nude Woman*, an example of the human figure in Paleolithic Art. The legs and torso are carved so the figure appears to emerge from the stone. The thigh and calf are full and round. The *Nude Woman* appears soft and well polished to highlight the smoothness of the figure's form. He approaches her. He carries a clementine and an umbrella. She meets his gaze and sighs with her back slightly concave. Almost a sculpture.

He stands, fumbles to open the umbrella, places it in a stand. *Umbrella fig. 1* A triangular shadow cuts across her back. The umbrella is too far removed. She stands up quickly. She removes herself from the shadow. She walks into the sun.

He tears off the rind. The fast pull breaks the pith. Juice splatters and stings his hands.

She stretches out on the side of the spring. The sandstone tiles absorb the water. He sees the traces of her stained into the stone. He places the peeled clementine by her knee and pushes the water out from the strands of her auburn curls. The pink sandstone absorbs the water in lopsided circles of maroon. He feeds her the clementine. Her lips press closed around the fruit and slightly smile with the crush of the pulp. He traces Noon to Six on her back. His breath rises and falls with hers. He thinks they are like clockwork. Two wet bodies dripping water onto stone

He tells her she's the *Birth of Venus*. She laughs swimming in the spring pool. Her skin white like marble: Venus de Milo, Cnidian Aphrodite. She wants to tell him, *I'm trying to write you with my whole body, shooting an arrow that firmly pierces the tender nerve ends of the world* but instead she runs her fingers along the surface of the spring watching the sunlight ripple, watching the metamorphosis of light's reflection, watching the metamorphosis of water's shape. He tells her she's the *Birth of Venus*. She is almost a painting. Born from the sea. Almost a sculpture. Birthed by the rocks. Her skin is like white marble.

The spring water is turquoise. Rainwater floods into the pool because the roof decayed and left only a rectangular stone frame above it. Violet bush-clover flowers grow in the gnarled grasses and ferns, their pink petals slightly droop. The scene is composed of maroon, pink, turquoise, green, cerulean, gray, brown, ivory and tan.

She continues to reposition her body and he continues to visually consume her.

The spring water softens their skin. Its nearly impossible to hold an embrace. He returns to the deep and watches water slide down the slope of her neck.

There was a geologist who studied the aquifer. The geologist introduced her mother to the spring. Her mother and the geologist were once young and naked and collected samples of the soil, rocks, and water. The geologist brought the jars to his lab and through the microscope they examined the quartz, feldspar, mica, and the pegmatitic minerals that fed natural lithium into the pool.

The spring as a naturopathic escape.

It was a reunion of types for her to step into the pool. The spring helped her interpret the shape of herself. To return to the structure of her body. To return to weight. His body slides against her, slides past her, she focuses on the action of slide and the layer of skin that transforms from a porous woven wall of oscillation to a tightly woven membrane for slip past.

She stretches out on a conglomerate of sandstone and quartz. He reaches for a clementine. He tears off the rind. The fast pull breaks the pith. Juice splatters onto his hands. He feeds her the fruit. Her lips press closed around the carpel. She crushes the pulp with her teeth releasing its sweet juice into her mouth. She rests her head on her hands. He traces Noon to Six on her back. His breath rises and falls with hers.

*There is a pub on a side street, entrenched in the wild
hundreds of Chicago, that not too many frequent.*

Cooze

by Brian Burton

No pith helmet required.

The dark wood comprising the structure looks as if it were constructed from the scraps of a bonfire. The low watt, hanging lights strung along the rafters eulogize decades of Christmases hence. The long bar has many stools but few occupants. Round shouldered drunks in museum quality clothes stare straight with wet, unfocused eyes. Barflies swat at gnats nipping at their drinks. The beer is warm, the booze is supplemented with rubbing alcohol and the jukebox only has one Warren Zevon record. There is no real reason to come here besides the main attraction.

"Jules!"

The proprietor and owner of a set of tits plucked from the tree of life. I have seen scores of men and leagues of lesbians revert to adolescence in her presence. They are not obscenely large like some with Electra complexes prefer. They are not the teenage buds Hollywood glorifies then discards when gravity discovers them. They are two full moons that make you howl like a werewolf in heat.

"Last call was twenty minutes ago. Help me sweep out the losers, I'll do my checkout, then we'll have the place to ourselves."

A balding, fair-haired, father figure blinks long enough to be offended.

Hiccup

"Hey, I resemble that remark!"

I'm a sucker for a sweet setup.

"You're the spitting image."

"I spent good coin here, damn it, and I want satisfaction."

Jules lines up shots like she is sending a platoon of louts to the firing squad.

"Keyword: spent. And you'll spend a whole lot more if you watch me lean over..."

She demonstrates.

"...and collect my tip."

A little pup tent erects in his pants.

"This last round is on the house. Drink up and get out."

Single file, they humbly belly up to the trough, shoot their pittance, and ankle it before she remits her mercy. I torch a menthol and wait for her highness to tally her offerings. When she has checked the count to her satisfaction, she turns and flashes those wading pool blues at me like a cop at a DUI stop. It takes some effort but I finally notice her outfit; a black corset binding that teeming bust, dark denim breeches and thigh high leather boots.

"Wanna help me finish polishing this turd?"

"I'm your man, woman."

She hands me some cleaning products from behind the bar and I use the least filthy rag to wipe down the countertop while stealing glances other schlubs dutifully paid for. Finally, with the bitch work complete, we risk the rickety stairs leading down to the cellar and ensconce ourselves in the plush couch in her office.

Jules nuzzles her head under my arm and beams a smile up at me as soft as the cotton panties I'm sure she isn't wearing. I take her chin in my hand and raise her head

toward me. There is a scar under her lower lip from a car accident years ago. She tries to hide it with cover-up but I wipe it away with my thumb. I kiss it, then her. Her mouth opens to me like she has been hungry for something she couldn't quite put her finger on and I'm a full course meal.

Her ringtone chirps in the background, an incessant cricket ruining the mood. She scopes the number covertly but I manage to peg the area code. Her boyfriend moved to California and opened up a Chicago themed restaurant on the boardwalk. They are doing the long distance thing with some success but I'm the dickhead that gets off on pushing their boundaries.

She stuffs the phone back into her pocket and sighs into my sternum. I wrap my arm around her waist and hoist us up into the lotus position. I extricate her from the unyielding bodice and the flesh previously housed within the corset is flush since exposed to the air. I trail the length of her back with my fingertips and hubris causes me to grin at the goosebumps rising on her sienna skin. She removes the one piece and her breasts spill gently against my chest. I caress them while circling the nipples with my palms.

I clench a handful of hair, yank her head back and bite her earlobe. Her moan is guttural, primal.

"Oh, El...you're trying to destroy me!"

"I wouldn't if you belonged to me."

California calls again. This time, she ignores him while I unzip her boots, freeing her feet from their bondage. She raises herself off the cushion and shimmies out of her jeans. I was right. There was nothing between us but her Calvins.

Jules loosens my belt and liberates my cock.

"Stroke, coxswain."

She rows my oar into her bay, which gets wetter with each skim of her surface. She masturbates with my member until there is a threat of a flash flood.

FEMA is conspicuously absent.

I cup her ass with my mitts and make my magic stick disappear in her like some X-Rated parlor trick.

Jules' first orgasm is a bucking, rollicking tsunami. The second, a soft wave of electric velvet. Tentatively, she approaches the third, gasping for air with a goldfish pucker. My own climax is building and I don't want to

leave her in suspense. I slow my rhythm and capture her eyes with mine. We blink only when our eyelashes brush.

She bites her lip until a tiny trickle of blood pools in the seam of her mouth. I pry it open with my tongue and taste her DNA. She breaks free and snarls with crumbling resolve:

"Cum...with me..."

I thrust, dealing both the killing blow and seppuku. Heartbeats, breaths, Zen blossoms...

Then the phone rings. She has the decency to wait until the third ring until she dislodges, queefing our cumulative ejaculate on my stomach. The door closes behind her as she wa-wa-wa's through the walls with her West coast inamorata.

I prop myself on my side, rummage through my pants, procure my flask and toast, clinking glasses with the afterglow.

Time Given Over...

by Ryan Block

... to wondering why it isn't told from her point of view. Wondering why, in that instance, cliché would abound. Why she would choose to remember it that way.

And it *would* be a choice – which is another reason, if another were required, to distrust it.

Inside, somewhere behind that iron breastplate of hers, the battle between memory and prerogative rages.

Which is itself a cliché.

In the end – eventually, inevitably – her memory submits to the heartless hegemony of inertia.

One half of her yields before the other, and does so in a very compliant manner, bending her over gently and closing her eyes.

And she's cross-legged under – or, more probably, within – the sheets, steam still rising from the middle of her.

And opinions burst like tears, and collect in the shallow basin of her palms, held over her face as she wails and wails, crying to be heard and to be understood.

Which is, undoubtedly, how she would choose to phrase it, were her semiotic dalliances more strictly controlled, her thesaurus less indulgent, and her assumptions not inherited from a childhood that lasted far too long.

Instead, she merely cries – which is no way to tell a story, or even to report a cliché.

A story (nonetheless) of lonely adolescence still in procession. And in many ways of adolescence also at rest, awaiting the return of the drum-major, who's wandered off to god-knows-where.

Her tales, an unsorted web of plots and sub-plots and counter-plots and contradictions whose complicated interrelationship is lost in the retelling, the weight of the story-teller's affected weariness too colorless for the reader (the listener) to conjure anything like a reliable chronology.

Difficult to witness such a consciousness trapped in such a physiognomy.

Taking pity on him, she holds his hand and, apparently on behalf of them both, curses the vagaries of

human cognition, to which she attributes the supposed gaps in her story(ies).

Her stories about the others reveal, again and again and in ever more brilliant colors, only the pressed boundaries of her own mental map – she, having apparently sucked enough to think she knows a thing or two.

She, a lost cartographer, applying make-up in the mirror, reading Lacan, listening to Schubert.

And he, wondering how to bottle a flood.

Wondering which slit – mouth or cunt – he prefers to be lubricated.

Despite Lacan, and many others, she remains a secondary character, never quite able to stand to her full height – the principle defect being a mis-calibration in her apparatus of discrimination.

Both unable to tell things apart, and congenitally predisposed to lump them together, cliché and many other such offenses to grammar and etiquette spill over her sides.

Against the provincial wisdom of her past, and her reliance upon the advice of others who are guaranteed to repeat her own ideas back to her, her native self-confidence can make no appeal.

What instances of intellectual independence she periodically experiences – through cerebral collisions and accidents that are equally random and mysterious – it is doomed to wander and slowly expire in the vast cognitive clearing house of her mind.

Her intolerance of the contradiction inherent in simultaneously pushing and pulling – for the contradiction can only become tolerable after it is revealed – obliges her, in a not uncommon session of self-reference, to recast her doubts as modest wisdom.

(Doubts, because – need it be said? – she's far from stupid...)

And her face alights with the cliché feminine visage, bright with assurance of vindication, sooner or later.

But, as so often, the story-teller is unaware of the struggle written so blithely across her face – incognizant, as a child might be of a smudge of chocolate across her cheek.

All of this, mixed with a standard upper-middle class aversion to information not already known, rouses her, and she talks and talk and talks, with a conviction as

strong as any metaphor will bear – indeed, the boundless conviction of a little angel.

Her opinions are her own, are labored over and hard won, having been forged in the hostile cauldron of an inquisitive, skeptically-lived life, beset variously by a corporatist oligarchy, a near conspiracy of phallogocentrism, and a vicariously disposed and vindictive mother.

This knot of misunderstandings about herself he regards as the origin of her pettiness, her mishandled and generally undercooked thinking, and her correspondingly comical expanse of self-confidence.

A very unattractive mixture, no less for its presentation in an endless parade of outfits to suit any combination of mood.

Which, he thinks, justifies this version standing in for her own account.

But she fucks like a maniac.

Caterwauls and somersaults.

Like some kind of religious fanatic in receipt of the final judgment.

Perhaps she's correct about the world-wide ruse.

But she also insists that she's fat.

Which is a choice.

An entirely predictable decision.

And therefore, cliché.

Which is hardly worth telling, much less writing.

Better to nod, and to affect a studied interest and urbane encouragement whenever she sucks in her stomach, pushes up her chest, turns to the left, to the right, to the left again, pacing back and forth, toward and away from the mirror, going round and round and round, while the clock ticks closer and closer to 8pm.

Then, eventually, past 8pm.

He takes his shoes off, unbuttons the top button, loosens the tie, lays back and waits for her to make a decision.

Watching the clock like a bureaucrat.

Watching her like a watch-maker, deeply attuned to the inner mechanism, its every skipped tick and broken tock.

Waiting, it seems, until she's finished, and there's only silence.

So they can leave, and he can think of an interesting story to tell everyone about why they're late.

Again.

For Sarah S.'s

Self Portrait With C.

A Map

Please refer to omniavanitasreview.com

Biographies

Omnia Vanitas Review

Omnia Vanitas Review is a small literary erotica press. A delicate mixture of Féminine Écriture, New Narrative, and Clit Lit. We enjoy specific descriptions of sex written in white ink. Deflowering language. Multiple orgasms with multiple climaxes. The playful touching of intertextuality. Deliberately elusive linguistic weavings. Words penetrating the void. Words that slow dance with Aphasia and flirt with Amnesia. Words wet with formlessness. Words pregnant with child. With twins, with quintuplets. Words as bound flesh. In other words, pretentious porn.

We believe that there is nothing more risqué
than the desire to write.

Look at us, submit to us at OmniaVanitasReview.com

And check out our tumblr at:

omniavanitasreview.tumblr.com

Catherine Borders

Catherine Borders has fallen in love many times but never like this. She likes the idea of writing that on paper and folding it into a rose of some sort. She also likes the idea of promoting the other side of literature.

In addition to co-founding Omnia Vanitas Review, she has written a book entitled *A Suburb of Monogamy* which she considers a loose translation of *A Lover's Discourse* by Roland Barthes.

She writes inside a house without any corners. Lately, she can be found packing and unpacking boxes, all of which are heavy to the touch, and full of corners.

M.A.A.

M.A.A. is the co-founder of Omnia Vanitas Review and an MFA Graduate student at the New School in Creative writing. She received her BA at Naropa University's Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics. She is most inspired by this quote, "'This is what makes writing wild. One returns to a savage state from before life itself. And one can always recognize it: it's the savageness of forests, as ancient as time. It is the fear of everything, distinct and inseparable from life itself. One becomes relentless. One cannot write without bodily strength. One must be stronger than oneself to approach writing; one must be stronger than what one is writing. It's an odd thing- not only writing, the written word, but also the howls of animals in the night, of everyone, of you and me, of dogs.'" - Marguerite Duras, *Writing*. M.A.A. wishes to return to this savage state.

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Meg Nafziger

Meg Nafziger has a BFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She currently lives in Chicago.

Cover Art

Lily Robert-Foley

Lily Robert-Foley was born in San Francisco in the later part of the last century to an acupuncturist and a musician/painter. Her studies can be characterized as having a specific interest in language. Mostly, she writes, travels, and makes radical linguistic translation devices known

as machines. Her work has appeared in bathhouse, digital artifact, a s l o n g a s i t a k e s and Vivaporous Blenny, among other places. Sometimes her work appears on walls. She also transcribed and annotated The North Georgia Gazette, a newspaper written on board the H.M.S. Hecla during the early part of the 19th Century (Green Lantern Press, 2009). Selections from her graphemachines project will be published in the coming year as part of the Xerolage series, a division of Xexoxial Editions. Currently, she resides in Paris where she is pursuing a doctorate in General and Comparative Literature at the University of Paris VIII.

kristin cerda

kristin cerda is a hybrid writer, new media artist, and native Texan living in San Francisco, CA. She holds a BA from Naropa University's Jack Kerouac School and an MFA from CalArts. Her work has appeared in *Sprawl*, *Chronometry*, *Interstice*, and her hypertext mischief lives at www.wretchedsymphony.com. {Geekcore for life..}

Jane Agnes Quinn

Jane Agnes Quinn was born and raised in Texas. She lives in Texas.

Scott Hess

An award-winning journalist, Scott's debut novel "Bergdorf Boys" is based on his early whirlwind years as editor of a gay magazine when he discovered both the scandalously uber-rich and a seedy hyper-partying underbelly. He is a 2009 MFA graduate of The New School, where he worked with novelists Dale Peck, Darcey Steinke and Helen Schulman.

Scott's fiction has appeared in the *Thema Literary Journal* and he is a contributor to various national magazines, including *Genre*, *OutTraveler* and *Instinct*. He has been the gay section editor for Harper Collins' *Access NY Guide Book* for the past two years. He has written two screenplays, his latest *Blood of Saints* is about a serial killer

recreating the grisly executions of Catholic Saints.

Chandra Smith

Chandra Smith is living and working in LA in the vast. There are large vats of film and tape and she likes being caught coddled in the web and wrought useful. She changes her name and her medium and still isn't sure "screenwriting is not writing" is true. She's told these days there is poetry in film in poetry. She tends to be a believer.

Caroline Picard

Caroline Picard is a visual artist, the Founding Director of The Green Lantern Gallery & Press, and a Co-Editor for the literary podcast The Parlor ([www. theparlorreads.com](http://www.theparlorreads.com)). Her writing has been published in a handful of publications including the Philadelphia Independent, NewCity, Lumpen, MAKE Magazine, the Chicago Art Journal Review and Proximity Magazine.

Katherine Cox

Katherine "Kat" Cox is a girl from Albuquerque who went out east for schooling. After she got an MFA from the New School in New York, she went home to New Mexico to try her hand as a freelance writer. She currently writes non-fiction and marketing materials for various clients by day, and erotic fiction for other clients at night. She also writes marketing materials as a volunteer for the New Mexico House Rabbit Society, and loves every minute of it.

Michael Sidman

Michael Sidman is in the beginning stages of becoming a much-beloved writer, whose books will be made into some of the most important films in modern American cinema. He will also own a farm-cum-culinary institute-cum-world-class restaurant, where he will

practice the fine arts of Italian shoe making, calligraphy, and kosher butchery.

SarahS

SarahS dabbles in too many creative disciplines but has trained extensively as a theatre artist. Recent endeavors have included cartography and investigations of cultural syncretism in performance. She currently lives in Johannesburg where she is pursuing a Masters degree. She has been trying to shirk her last name since childhood.

Circadies

"From the desert to the shore, circadies dreams and plays into the feedback loop."

Matthew Dexter

Matthew Dexter is an American anomaly living in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. He writes novels, memoirs, poetry, journalism articles, short stories of literary fiction, short stories of narrative nonfiction, and everything else in between. When Matthew is not writing he enjoys life by the ocean; beautiful beaches, breathtaking views, reading, and being inspired. But never candlelit dinners on the beach. He's afraid of Pirates.

Brian K. Burton

Brian K. Burton enjoys the essential -ings of life: writing, reading, drinking, smoking, sleeping, and loving. He is a native Chicagoan who now resides in Falls Church, VA.

Ryan Block

Ryan Block is sweating profusely having just escaped from a torrid love affair. He played with fire and then he got burned. He's currently cooling his heels, taking it easy, re-evaluating his life, and intends to turn over a new leaf. Any day now.