

Calliope

VOLUME 17 NUMBER 2



errata

Cover illustration credit was omitted from Volume 17, number 1 .
We are very grateful to Kathleen Hancock for her illustration
and we regret the omission.

Calliope

Volume 17, Number 2
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Manuscripts received at other times are returned unread.
Manuscripts should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped
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Manuscripts are discussed with the writer's name masked so that
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Ruth Daigon

JOGGER

Out at 5.

Checks his shoelaces
and runs those uphill miles
orbiting our quiet lives.
Sleep peels away

as he runs through
broad-loomed silence,
mouth cupping air,
eyes slanted inward,
breath clamped between teeth.

In fresh-tarred mornings,
he jogs past granite walls,
birds perched on rusting tractors,
yards full of scratching chickens
and woods ripe with skunk cabbage.

Sometimes, gravity is not enough
to slow him down. Sometimes
distance drags his heels
but after the final stretch

he slams through the kitchen door;
leans against the jamb,
the smell of his breath
like an animal just born.

Ruth Daigon

QUIET AS SAND

i rub my hand across your chest
so gently neither of us
feels it we breathe
in and out of focus limbs
whisper against sheets

the moon spreads
its chalky glow we hear
wind scouring trees
leaves rubbing
smooth-skinned
against each other

after small silences
we listen to the blood-
rush and tongue-soft sounds
feel the cooling sweat
the naked eye
the knowing hand

and everything exactly
where it is
the house the fence
the spine of earth
we're somewhere we've
always been before

all night the unknown
waits to be discovered
when dawn drifts in
quiet as sand
i say goodbye
to all my ghosts
throw open windows

*Daigon/*Quiet as Sand

sunlight melts
on my hands and wild geese
ladder the sky i hear
the stroke of grass
on grass as morning makes
an entrance with fur
and feathers in its mouth

Nancy Cherry

SISTER

we stood together on the ditch lip
and watched frogs grow legs and voices
to carry their green weight into the years

we stood together on curbs and looked
both ways before crossing, always
at the corner

and now I stand at my back door, looking
into winter where stars crowd the rooftops
and stairs lead into night

and there seems no end to the road beyond
fence and lattice caught between our old dreams
of backyards laced with violets

from the back door you see your kitchen,
spice cabinets and tile, door protected
by a security system that bleats

and we swim together through our one-house life
tramp the linoleum, swing the screen door
until my voice comes unlatched

and I open my throat like the frogs
who walked out of mud, thrust themselves
from their slack-rooted world to enter ours

Patricia Fargnoli

ADIRONDACKS, PORCH ROCKER, TWILIGHT

When, in the first days, seas sprayed garlands
of green and blue over everything, and mountains
hurled lava up like blossoms out of the deep
and hidden gardens of the earth,

the land rose from the waters and walked out
for thousands of miles. Whales wallowed and rolled
among the labyrinth of the waves as if they were meant
for nothing but this rollicking.

This is the story the mountains tell. And they say
the earth filled with claw and wing; all setting the stage—
they say we walked out shining into the light,
probably in pairs, holding hands, unsteady but upright.

How I want to believe their tall old story.
But we have come a long way and perhaps we are not
so important after all—certainly not more
than the blazing humpbacks—perhaps not more even

than the least saw fly or click beetle, not more
than the sphinx moth spiraling toward this porch light.
Still, on certain evenings, as the sun folds
its circle of orange silk beneath the horizon—

the mountains gather like old men to smoke their pipes
and tell tales until light diminishes and dreams settle in—
I rock in the watching place cast by their shadows
and anything seems possible.

Ricia Gordon

VISITATIONS

Something has died under my cabin floor,
a thing small and furred,
and I wish some member of its clan
would come and take it away,
the death-stench thick in the air.
I would feel better knowing
this death had not gone unacknowledged,
if the chipmunk mate
would only come and flail herself about,
raise her little striped face and wail
then carry the carcass off

the way the black ant did this morning,
bearing the remains of one
I killed in the sink last night.
He labored up the porcelain slope
with what I'd left of the body,
knowing the dying and dead
need to be cared for
and with them, that part of the self
that wants to die too,
or else remain,
trapped in the mound of the body,
like a child in a closet,

as maybe part of this chipmunk
waits for deliverance,
a memory of rock and leaf

Gordon/Visitations

still coiled in his brainpan,
wanting a way to enter the eternal,
there where the dragonfly
lifts her ghost wings,
the field and sky flowing through them,
waits to be mourned with the patience and beauty
even so small a death warrants.

Garret Jon Groenveld

WALNUT CREEK

small, I knew sun and fuchsia necks, humming birds that sip and dart,
mosquito bites on my face, red and swollen, tall thick lawns,
stubborn under the mower, compost rotting, years with little rain,
dead hatchling on the swimming pool, the cat flicks her paw on the water,

bees in swam, walnuts fallen to the ground, the acidic
leaves, their smell as I rub them, green hills turn
brown then burn to black, plums ripen, get picked, then soak
into a box in the garage, walk several blocks to my older brother,

who works at the candy store, burning asphalt on my bare soles,
blistered, the cool of the white paint, sprinklers on the lawn, to fall,
roll, let the water cover me, a deer wanders onto our cul-de-sac,
down from the mountain to this different world,

forages the dried-out creek, lost like me, scared in the afternoon heat of
dragonflies, yellow cactus blossom, poppies that open and close,
dry on the stem, I collect the pods and scatter seeds on open land
with mustard flowers and thistle weeds, swim till wrinkled, shivering,

ear infections, the cat prowls the squirrels, the missed apple
fallen by the fence, graying, all the neighborhood kids with kick-the-can,
hide-and-go-seek, tag, the racoon eats goldfish out of the pond
then sits on the fence, fights the cat, cuts his claws on her,

then fall pruning, scar hands on stems, scrape the leaves off kindling,
switch to long pants, shorter days, father's lentil soup, then
autumn rain fills walks home from school through walnut leaves,
five inches thick, and I, soaked, sing to myself, abandoned

to kicking up the leaves, I slap my hands against branches,
and the rested water shakes down on me.

Beth Simon

GRAVITY

On a ledge above Bryce Canyon
I watched my sister in morning sunlight
unfold herself, the cleft of her back deep,
arms, a luxurious harp over her head,
clear-tendoned as Gabriel, she called me
up, north, toward jet tails twenty thousand feet high.
Then, quite simply, she stepped off
on nothing, backlit,
shimmering, a moth pinned
in almost perfect stillness outside time,
sculling on filament and dust
and separating clouds like thin silk
and on the next beat, as if the single thought
that held her had turned to something new,
she arced and fell one moment from heaven.

Now what am I to do? Skulk across mid-air
to rewind the sun? Make all time stop?
Why even mark this trajectory?
A hundred foot of rope draws nothing but
a rising cloud of dust,
loose shale rattling the cliff-face.

Julia Wendell

TURNING TO WOOD

Shared tonight with my daughter,
a tale about a wooden toy
sucked down a tub drain.

"What has happened to the tub child?"
the wooden mother and father,
grandmother, doctor, policeman & little dog,

all lined up along the edge of the bathtub,
want to know. The tub people spend the story
trying to get the boy back,

though they have no means
of locomotion on their own.
They are only wooden, after all.

Cailtin gets stuck on the blends,
so we practice: *dr* for *drain*,
tr for *trouble*, or what the tub child

has gotten himself into. While I try to remember
when it was those symbols
first arranged themselves into meaning for me,

the first time I stepped onto the schoolbus
and was somehow changed.
Now that bus follows the path

the years went through.
In the wake of red lights flashing,
waving from the parked Chevy, Mother

Wendell/Turning to Wood

looking frazzled & disheveled,
the way mothers at busstops do.
When she blinked,

I'd disappear, though she'd keep waving,
as if from a long way underwater,
as if trying to summon me back.

Back then, I couldn't gauge the distance
between that car & bus, my wooden mother & me,
a distance I can retrace only now

that I have my own daughter
who snatches the book from me
then insists on pronouncing the words her own way,

who snakes her chubby finger
along the printed path
at her very own speed of understanding,

and for whom *home* requires
a long *o* and a silent *e*
and is still a place to come back to.

Rustin Larson

SWALLOWS

I.

Spring, we watched them build the nest

from our picture window; the parents, dark blue,
pinching puddle mud and grass.

When the nest became dry,
the mother became a small head in a turret.

November, the first black ice took over
wheel ruts. Pickup trucks swooped down the gravel road,

loose strands of hay rattling
the dry beds.

I recalled how swallows fluttered under the overhang
until the young could fly,

then father knocked the nest down with a shovel.

II.

We look out the window, see ourselves
staring back, seated at the table.

The soft yellow light overhead
makes everything warm and safe.

On television, helicopters are landing;
camouflaged soldiers scramble through a field

of tall yellow grass. Sister reads from her textbook
and talks about negotiations in Paris.

Larson/Swallows

Father, the American, says nothing.
Brother will go to college next year,

join a fraternity
of budding professionals.

III.

Dear Brother,

Five new ones this spring: mouths open,
noiseless, always waiting. The mother

goes about her work
without a sound,

killing an English sparrow that flies under the nest.
The young birds are desperate for food.

Your first postcard came from Saigon, today.
I love the dark birds wheeling in its glossy blue.

When the season ends,
there will probably be only two fledglings

from the five speckled eggs.
I seem to find a new one every day: eyeless,

nub-wings hugging
the sidewalk.

Susan Richardson

SNAILS

They inch out onto the red
of the emergency curb
before the fog lifts,
hundreds of them at once
as if they have a communal death wish,
foregoing the easy solitude
of their viny huts.

What little princes, these gastropods,
their antennae the tips
of a permanent crown,
so precious they could be a ring case,
fragile as a contact lens
or an egg,

lightweight as a ping pong ball
and as easily smashed.

Yet their shells, shaped like
army helmets
worn by mercenaries
in the thick of shrapnel,
could be parachutes
suspending daredevil aviators
who retract into a ball, fetal-like,
when they land.

Every morning these risktakers
brave the sidewalks,
toreadors in search of the bull,
and for what? Community,
unshaded light, a change.

When satisfied
the pines on the far hills
will appear to the day,
they inch-roll home again,
miniscule tanks, to their double shell
beneath the leaves.

Richardson / Snails

And we are left with
modern art, trails criss-crossing
trails along the walks,
the porches, the ascending stairs,
gilding lit by the waking sun.

Liz Ahl

NEW STRINGS

The wheat-colored waist of my Fender hasn't seen
twelve strings for years—I've been sneaking by
with six, faking it with fewer.

My callouses, never quite the sandstone
they should have been, have retreated
inside my fingertips, gone soft to the pages
of books, the tame tapping
of the computer keyboard.

Twelve strings are trickier than six
in the stringing. How taut?
How much slack? Years of nothing,
it seems, but forgetting this simple art—

pull it tight enough and it's coppery music.
Too tight—it might snap like the wiry
tendon of an athlete leaping too far.
It might leave the splinter of a scar
on the pale back of your strumming hand.
Ease into it.

I confess I'm lost without the pitchpipe's
little hum—I buzz out the E
for hours till I've got it right, got it tight
enough, bright brass strings wound up
for singing.

Twelve strings instead
of six give thick music—strums full
of honey. Each comes coiled in its crackly
white envelope, each has to be anchored,
threaded, wound in slow, easy increments—
I give myself the afternoon, a gift.

Liz Ahl/New Strings

Out with the old strings, tarnished, sticky
with the grimy, burnished by-product
of music. In with the new, stringing
myself out, stringing myself along
into evening, a long road stretching
out from me, and at the end of it, a song.

Liz Ahl

LUNAR ECLIPSE, 12/9/92

My cactuses, no longer warm enough by the sill,
sink in on themselves; their insides disintegrate;
for prickly, indestructible things, they're bruising
easily. In my darkened kitchen, through the window
over the sink, I watch the moon rise, already half-doused
by the earth. A red halo hazes around it as it slims
to a fingernail, then to a sliver, then to a dim splinter, then—
I don't know when it will come out. And while I watch,

suddenly, briefly, I'm a kid again, in Laos, being lifted
from sleep and led out into the night where the maid tells me
the moon is being eaten by a giant frog. So we empty
the cupboards of pots and pans and metal spoons, pad in slippers
out into the darkness, where people bang on dutch ovens,
howl, shout, honk their car horns, shoot pistols into the sky
to frighten the frog away. Only when the moon is whole
again and glowing do we retreat to sleep. I was never sure,
upon waking, whether I had dreamed it all. This, too, could be a dream—

it's been a day of extremes: Marines land in Somalia, Chuck and Di
officially separate, salt and sand trucks are poised by their interstate
igloos, waiting for this snowstorm to hit. Dream or not, I rattle
my keychain at the frog, believing the moon won't come back this time.
I don't know if I'd like that, no more nightlight in the kitchen,
no more white eye burning me restless, no more hey diddle diddle.
What if it doesn't come back? What will the frog eat? What use then
for pots, for pans, for fists full of keys? I'll never sleep again.

Robin Boyd

FINDING HOME

As I look out the south window
the mountain resembles a woman sleeping,
curled like a fetus, her back to me.

The apple tree is bare of leaves now,
its only adornments a weathered bird house
and a bright rope of bittersweet.

Isn't finding home like this?
The spirit seeking shape outside the self
mingling with forms familiar and rooted.

Things quiet as granite, or constant as the season's turning.
In Siberia, a polar bear lies, shivering,
on the side of a mountain in autumn and waits

for the snow to wrap around her like a cocoon
and follow her contours
like a precise and brilliant shadow.

How else do we find home but to wait for
the world to seek out our form,
to hone our bright edges to the shape

of the horizon? I do this willingly,
not as a prisoner of this place, but as
the stone of some fruit waits

for the flesh of the world to surround her.

Phebe Davidson

WAITING FOR RAIN

All these years, he has not known
what to do for this woman who wrapped herself
in words as in a shawl,

whose everyday comings and goings
left him breathless and shaken in some not
quite definable way, so that now,

in his sixty-third year, he walks
like a man who grows old hoping only
for age. He waits for rain in his back yard

and thinks of the whiteness and slope
of her shoulders, the curve
of her neck in the summer dusk.

He knows that she sits in the quiet yard,
numbering moments from year
to year, unable to tell him the words

have gone — not singly, with some pretense
of grace, but all at once swept out
and away on a wave

that has scattered the grammar
and easy syntax of her life. She cannot
gather such broken things

Davidson/Waiting for Rain

and piece them together again. Now he touches
her silent hand, kisses the bend
of her wrist. He closes her fingers carefully.

He must tell her that it might rain, tonight;
he is certain that something inside her
will almost believe it is true.

Robert Claps

MARGINS

At the margin of the salt pond there are
hard-shelled archaic creatures
clambering out of the shallows, stopping
and starting, tentative as my father
climbing steps after his stroke. There are herons here
the humped shape of patience, and eels
whose least wriggling stirs the silt
that is layered like memory.

And sketched in the margins of my daughter's
spiral-bound notebook pages
are flowers, each disk ringed with petals
curled tight as scrolls,
flowers that can thrive in a third-grader's mind
when it drifts beyond multiplication
tables, or Denmark's major exports.
Sometimes, it seems, lives

are lived more fully in the margins:
those sheltered places
like the fringe of land between the salt pond
and the mainland, fluent with reeds,
where my father hooked into waders evenings after work,
scratching for clams until night
fell; oh how the eelgrass
curled around his ankles,
wrapped his bones in shining.

Allan Peterson

THE NATURE OF PERCEPTION

He thinks three longballs go over
watching their quick shadows.

Then three gulls pass laughing
at their little joke.

In the simultaneous universe
of one thing standing for another,
shapes proclaim without moving lips,
like throwing their voices, but not away.

You can just make out a town in this heat,
and if you were there you would look back
and say the same: solid brick wobbles,
white wood houses and their white pickets
like model flames, burn without burning.
Anyone going to help them on that road,
drowns.

He thought them already full, but this time
the trees fill up like espresso with lemon twists
rising to the top. The flies are back.
Chips of last night, scraped, about to be repainted.

Lauren Schiffman

COUNTDOWN

How utterly light
knowledge is.
How very still
we slept. Your hands
quiet on your belly.
Their warmth seeping
deep into my skin.
My father folded you up
in his arms like a blossom.
When you murmured in his ear
my bones hummed.
Your pulse
lightly licked my veins,
sending feathery shudders
to meet each beat
of the rhythm
of the countdown.

You knew we would be
strangers. Never
would I come to you
with scraped knees
or wild flowers. You still
held buttercups under
your chin, to be sure
he loved you. I knew
your gift was the last
selfless act
I would know.
Mornings I felt
the wrenching jolts
of your sobs,
as I worked and worked

Schiffman/Countdown

at my wrists with soft gums,
never penetrating.

How exhausting to breathe in,
and breathe in sharp
and bright. Blue lips gaping,
sucking at a wall of air.
Succeeding only in releasing
the screams. The aching
weight of birth.

Katherine Peper

AFTER MY GRANDMOTHER

In the kitchen
the water is running,
tapped from underground streams
that run backward
through roots, rivers, towns
and into the fat vegetables
of her garden.

Her nails are short and dirt-black
from picking parsnips and piling
them into her apron.

Lugging them to the pump basin
she draws the cold water
up from the earth and washes
the parsnips till they glow
like eggs.

Sleeping in her old bedroom
after Christmas dinner,
her body rolls into the silt
of a slow creek near Elkton.

The panelling of her room dissolves
into a thicket of oak surrounding
the sod house she was born in.

I bend over and listen
to the rhythm of her breathing.
It has taken on the sound
not of old age, but something older:
her sister brushing her hair. The wind
in her father's wheat
under an opulent sky.

After my grandmother's belongings
had been sold or given away,
I find a grocery list of hers.

Peper / After My Grandmother

"Oranges" and "Pepsodent" scrawl
and collapse under an arthritic hand.
I can feel the ballpoint working
its way into the paper
like the sharp beak of a sparrow
hunting for seed.
After three years, I still find
bits of her. "Afterthoughts,"
she would shrug. "I am not this,
nor are my bones delicate
like those of a bird
or a constellation.
I am out back, under the fields,
building my body with earth."

Katherine Peper

THE SKATERS

Boys
on the rink appear
and disappear between trees.
The surface of the ice
looks like the flesh of the moon.
And the stars are a chorus
of single notes a thousand
light years old.
The boys slap pucks,
leave shapes of breath
in their wake
that could be anything—
a bird, a heart, a hand.
And then they're gone.

In time the ice
will turn to water,
and the boys will disappear
into the spaces between trees.
Fathers will look
at their hands
and not remember how
they've come to this,
while their sons
emerge into the cold
shouting,
deaf to the distance
of age.

Barbara Conyne

STAR LIGHT, STAR BRIGHT

Little brother

the moon is not a melon
nor a giant clam for the final judge

to open on The Ultimate Surprise
as we speculated

summer nights, nested in sweet grass, safe
in the dark together

under a sky so full of constellations
we knew we could never be lost

but now you've gone and I've learned
those starry guides weren't even where we thought

all our wishes hooked on the past
waves of light still drifting

from dead centers, year after year
the way your presence still sifts

into dreams and unwary moments
burning bright as starfire.

Jeff Hardin

THOSE RUNNING TOWARD THE HEART

There was a dream of an ocean,
not my dream, but told to me,
and the water had arms that reached inland,
bringing some of the natives away.

The dream had something to do with fear.
The ones going to the shores were refused
but those running toward the heart
of the island. . .

The past seemed an ocean with many shores,
the sky a dark and pasty horizon,
a trap for the many
who attached the appendage
of the mind there.

And the horizon stretched tiny fingers
along the ocean floor,
bored through the island and squeezed.
The ones running lost.

And the ones on the shores, captivated,
never entered, but continued believing
in this strange affinity,
this feeling the ocean did not return.

W.E. Butts

MOVIES IN A SMALL TOWN, 1957

In the dimness, we felt our way along the rows of upholstered seats, as a pinpoint of light above us suddenly expanded across the screen like creation. The previews came first, all the best parts of the future. We watched the show until its final scene, when the hero we thought was doomed survived after all, the whole place lit up, and we remembered who we were.

My first job was at that theater, Friday nights, placing programs for the next week's movies under the wipers of the parked cars out back. Once, beneath moonlight and wind flickering through the trees, a boy's curiosity bent me over the bridge toward a catastrophe of swirling leaflets, one of those events that does not seem to be happening to you. But it was happening to me. Helpless, I saw their lost message of adventure and romance drop over the dam and disappear.

Past the closed stores and tired faces of shoppers, I went home, plotting my explanation. I had learned how the world could go out of control, and sometimes we were not what we wanted. I didn't know how this would end. Outside the taverns, children laughed and played on the steps, or sat alone in the shadows and cried. I had no excuse. This was everyone's life.

Carol Frome

MILKWEED DAYS

Those days when milkweed pods opened:

the tiny brown seeds

and our yanking them free.

In handfuls, they drifted, bewildered.

Then: how I ran

unthinking in front of a car

and never knew my life

hung on the slender lines

of your love and your anger

until I felt your shove

punch me out of the way

and heard the screaming brakes.

I whirled and

the engine rumbled,

full-throated

as an angry, ambivalent god,

the one that shook Abraham's hand

at Isaac's throat—

the way our father

growled at you

and bared his teeth, looking

like the grill of an on-coming car

just before tragedy.

I whirled, and

you were lying on the asphalt,

but rose, Isaac from the stone.

We never told anyone,

but have held our fingers

to our lips all these years. So long,

we don't even hear

the hush now, a mantra,

where every pause

Frome/Milkweed Days

and silence finds our father,
and his palsied hands
humming like wings
in his pockets.
Or crashing into your face
again, just as the stones
you cast again and
again shattered his image,
the one you saw in yourself,
the picture of our father,
drifting by in windows,
and humming,
hands, now in your pockets,
now casting their fists,
the seeds of his making.

Allison Joseph

LUST

All that steamy summer
one act led easily
to another, our arms and legs
almost always entangled
in sweet, steady rocking,
hands running up and down
each other's bodies, pausing
on hips and chests, backs
and buttocks freed from
stifling clothes. I needed
to stroke you, bring you
to that salty edge of satisfaction,
feel you pulse beneath my hand,
knowing it was all my doing,
my skill, my mouth and hands.
I suppose we should have felt
shame for our sins, our continual
arousals, our pleasures in the
tangible, the sweaty, my curves
never covered, never far from
your fingers, your mouth
roaming skin, no reluctance
to taste where my body dips in,
fills out. But even if we could,
would we have stopped all that
slow motion, would we have
ended everything that flowed
just because someone somewhere
once told us this was wrong?
Would we have exercised
control, hands down, empty,
legs crossed, shut?

Joseph/Lust

I don't think we could have
stopped the headlong motion
of those days: the coupling
and coming that only stopped
when we slept, ate, the house's
humid air shimmering with our
bright need, forward longing.

Robert Sanchez

ME AND RICO

Me and Rico, we heard the whistle from the Shoe. Mom had said the grey monster was the biggest building in the world but short and squat, as though you took a bunch of Empire State Buildings and mooshed them down to four floors. It must have been true, because the whistle meant noontime to the half of Beverly that worked there. We looked up at the white brick chimney with its vertical row of black letters that said "USMC," just like the Marine Corps initials except they weren't. It was really the United Shoe Machinery Corporation, but Rico called it the Untied Shoe. Sometimes a Shoe guy opened up a window and told us to get the hell off the railroad tracks, but we never left until we wanted to. To catch us they'd have had to go to one end of the Shoe—by the time they got over here, we'd have gone home and finished lunch.

We balanced ourselves on the rails, and I was the great Blondin, walking the tightrope across Niagara Falls. Then we headed towards the field where we'd play war before we went for *risi e bisi* at Rico's aunt Carlotta's. Rico usually got to be the sergeant, because his uncle Emilio told him that sergeants run the Marines. Emilio had been in Korea since December, and Rico's aunt Carlotta lived next door to me. She was alone with her baby girl and hadn't heard from Emilio for weeks. We could see how worried she was, so me and Rico saw her every day. Our moms saw her most days too.

Carlotta never changed from one day to the next. Same nails bitten down to the quick. Same flowery skirt with roses that seemed a little whiter every day. Same gold-colored necklace with a crucifix hanging into the vee where the top button of her blouse was undone. Same bun pulled real tight like a fist behind her head. Same puckery smile when she'd pinch my cheek and call me a cute little Irishman.

Same temper. "I like Ike," I said once, repeating the '52 campaign slogan all my friends were saying. "And I like old Blood and Guts, too!" I sashayed around her living room like the conqueror of Rome.

Sanchez/Me and Rico

"I hate them all!" she screamed all of a sudden. "I hate Eisenhower and Truman and Patton and all the dirty bastards who send our men off to fight in God damned—" she stopped herself like she just remembered you don't swear in front of nine-year olds, but her eyes were red and wet. I stopped too. "I'm sorry," she said, and she bent down to touch my face. My eyes went right past Jesus and down her blouse, and they widened at the glory of her chest. I never dared tell Rico what big ones she had, but maybe he knew from the beach. Any other lady, he'd say "Vavoom!" but not his aunt. She stood up and sniffled, then gave me a playful slap. Carlotta cried a lot.

Now me and Rico dodged a hail of machine-gun fire and headed for the low bushes on the far side of the open field. "Dibs on Audie Murphy!" I said.

"And I'm Emilio!" That was Rico's privilege, naturally. He'd rather've been his uncle than anybody, even Douglas McArthur. Across the field, we spied a woman hanging wash on the back porch of her third-floor tenement. Sergeant Emilio pointed toward the Chinese machin-gun nest holding the high ground. "Heartbreak Hill," he said. "We're going to take it."

I lay on my stomach, breathing heavily, looking through the binoculars formed by my thumbs and forefingers. Hot blood flowed down my face from a flesh wound. Sergeant Emilio took a bullet in the chest, and he rolled around in agony. But neither of us bellyached. Heroes didn't mind the pain.

I crouched over my wounded comrade, ignoring the sting of bullets that raked my back, and pulled him into the fort. It was a shady bubble inside the bushes, a wolves' lair, a grizzly's den, Al Capone's hideout, a secret cave where we kept our C-rations and our ammo. This day, it was the only safe place between Pyongyang and Seoul.

Rico lay flat on his back and curled his tongue out like he had to scoop in the fresh air to refill his lungs. "Time for a smoke," he said. "Gotta have a butt." He stuck his hand in his pants pocket and pulled out a cigarette and a matchbook. The butt was all mashed from being in his pocket, and when he held it up it flopped on both ends like a dead worm.

Sanchez/Me and Rico

"Auntie Carlotta will kill me if she finds out I stole one of her Fatimas," he said. He bent a match without removing it from the book, and scratched the sulfur head on the rough black strip. The cigarette was kind of straight in his mouth now. He took a deep drag and pumped the smoke out his nose.

"What's a Fatima?" I asked, thinking about Our Lady of Fatima.

Rico looked at me like he just couldn't figure me out sometimes. "Did your mother have any kids that lived?" he asked, and he handed me the cigarette. "*This* is a Fatima. Try it." I filled my mouth with a shallow drag because I was embarrassed to cough.

"Got to learn," he said. "If it all comes back out, you're not doing it right."

I was more interested in the rations we'd stored in a small hole and covered with leaves. The licorice cough drops, potato chips and half-eaten jawbreaker were still there in a paper bag, and black ants were crawling all over it. "Corporal Murphy!" he barked. "You let the Chinks poison our food supply!" He brushed two ants off a chip and popped it in his mouth. "Want to hear a limerick?" he said, and didn't wait for my reply.

"There was a French lady name Couture
Who thought no man could screw her.
Then along came a Chink
With a cast-iron dink
And bored a hole right through her."

I laughed, but I wondered if laughing at nasty words was a sin. I changed the subject and pointed straight up at the twin-engine Gooney Bird that seemed to lumber from cloud to cloud. "Enemy fighters twelve o'clock high!" Immediately I was at my anti-aircraft post, and now the clouds were puffs from the flak.

"Cease fire, soldier! You can't hit him 'cause he's one of ours," Sergeant Emilio said. I adjusted my binoculars. It was American alright, and now it was flying over the long row of enemy pill boxes.

Sanchez/Me and Rico

"They're bombing enemy positions," I said. "They're softening up Pork Chop Hill!"

Sarge put down his binoculars and gave me the kind of long, slow look that Miss Montague murdered third graders with. "Corporal, we got ten dead guys out in the field and you don't even know what hill we're fighting for? Pork Chop was yesterday! This is Heartbreak!"

It was a direct hit on my pride, and Sarge must've seen the pain in my face. "It's okay, Corporal," he said. "You're shell-shocked. It happens." Together we turned and faced Heartbreak Hill. "If we take this hill, we'll both get Medals of Honor," he said.

I nodded, but my attention was on the field where the grass bent over with the weight of the seeds that pulled down the long green stems. The summer before, the real Emilio had taught me and Rico how to make music with a blade of grass by putting it between our thumbs and blowing real hard. Next thing I knew, the grass was brown and flat and dead, and we were playing our last game of touch football before Emilio shipped out. Frankie's my brother, he was ten, he played. Emilio was a machinist before the Marines, and he'd always lifted weights. He could pick us all up at once, and sometimes we hiked him the ball and all three of us tried to catch him. Three against one was always tackle, except not really 'cause we never could bring him down. "I could drag you guys all the way to the end zone if I wanted to," he said, and the last time we played, on the last down, he did it. We thought we had him for a safety, but he dragged us all the way down the field for a touchdown. Must've took ten minutes, and we laughed all the way. He still let us win.

I kept hoping Emilio would come home on furlough or something and he'd show us his medals. And he'd want to see how I could throw a spiral pass, because I couldn't do it the last time we played.

Sergeant Emilio's voice rang in my ears. "Cha-a-arge!" he said, and I followed. Our automatics swung back and forth and blazed a semicircle of death. We hit the dirt over and over as the

Sanchez/Me and Rico

commie bullets landed in harmless puffs of dust at our feet. We were outgunned, and this time it looked hopeless, even for us. Immediately, we were on our feet and running at top speed. We couldn't go in a straight line because of Mom's garden. She was growing tomatoes and cutworms, she said, and the garden was all lined out with sticks and string. So we zigged around it, and the smell of tomato leaves was in the hot, still air. We zagged around an old ice box with the door taken off so little kids wouldn't get closed inside. I ducked behind a nosed-up wheelbarrow and aimed my automatic up at the lady on the third floor as she clipped one last clothespin onto one last bra. My sound effects amazed me, the rapid-fire grunts starting behind the Adam's apple and tickling my tonsils as they drove the enemy from the ridge. The lady shook her head and went inside. Suddenly the enemy had retreated, and victory was ours.

"Rico! Eddie!" I heard Carlotta's thick accent calling us to lunch. In the wide alleyway, we smelled baking bread from Carlotta's kitchen window, and it pulled us both by the nose like in the cartoons where Bugs Bunny floats in the air toward the apple pie cooling on the sill.

At lunch, Carlotta went for her pack of Fatimas. I wondered if she knew one was missing, but she didn't say anything. I looked over at Rico, then reached for a slice of hot bread to go with the rice and bean soup. She saw me looking at a bottle of red wine sitting untouched on the table. "*Barbera asciutto*," she said, knowing I collected Italian phrases to annoy my uncle with. "A nice wine they have in Lake Maggiore, where I come from."

"Lake Maggiore," I repeated. "Isola Bella."

"You remember the name of my town?" She shouldn't have been surprised, she'd told me and Rico a dozen times before about where she grew up in northern Italy. She got up, pinched us both, and walked out to the yard under the canopy of grape vines. Me and Rico looked out, and she was talking with a neighbor over the back fence.

Rico poked me and crooked his finger, and I followed him to Carlotta and Emilio's bedroom. "Sh-h-h. *Acqua in bocca*," he

Sanchez/Me and Rico

said, his finger to his lips. I felt I didn't belong there at all, that she would trust me not to spy on her. He opened a drawer and pulled out a letter. Rico saw I was nervous. "It's from Emilio," he whispered, and we looked out the back window. Carlotta looked like she'd be a while. Rico handed me the letter. "Read it out loud," he said. "You read good."

March 10, it was dated.

"My darling Carlotta," I read, because that's how it started out. I turned and looked at Rico, his chin was practically on my shoulder. "I hope it's not going to be mush," I said.

"Shut up and read it," he said, so I did.

"Heavy guns woke us up at daybreak today. We've had a tough go for weeks now, and have taken heavy casualties. It's been raining for two days, a cold sloppy mess with sleet and snow mixed in. Everything I own is wet, and we're holed up on the side of this hill that is just rocks and mud and blown-up trees. My nose is running and my feet smell. (Don't you think it ought to be the other way around?) I share a tent with a guy named Rosenstein from New York. First Jew I ever met except our landlord. We had some hand-to-hand fighting and I picked up this dead Korean and threw him at somebody who was about to stick Rosenstein. My CO says something about me being up for a medal. I told him I already got a medal and I showed him Saint Christopher, who hasn't been off my neck a minute since we hit the beaches at Inchon. This whole thing is such a sorry business, I just want to come home." I wondered how could he say that. I'd have given a million bucks to trade places with him.

"Sometime last night I woke up and heard nothing but wind and rain blowing against my tent, and I imagined you and me in my sleeping bag, you'd fit nice and snug and we could pull the zipper and close out everybody but us. And then in the back seat of my old Chevy, you remember the night we never made it to dancing at the Totem Pole? And I said don't worry, you can't get pregnant the first time, and you looked at me with that melted butter look and said you didn't care?"

Rico poked me. "The first time what?" he said.

"The first time they kiss, I think. I don't know."

Sanchez/Me and Rico

"My mind went through a million pictures last night, all love scenes from the movies, and they all starred you and me. I got so hard, and after a while I could hear my own heavy breathing over everything else. This afternoon I'd better see the chaplain about confession."

"Hnh?" Rico said. I shrugged and bumped his chin.

"I got the shaving kit you sent me and the baseball card from Rico and his pal Eddie with the picture of Ted Williams on it."

"He got it!" Rico shouted in my ear, which hurt. I was proud, though, because we'd split the slab of gum and giving Emilio the card was my idea.

"Is it true the Splinter's coming over here with the Marines? Send over Marciano, too, and we'll get this job done quick. Momma and Poppa wrote too, and I got their letter today, so this has been a real good mail call day for me."

"What the hell you boys doing?" Carlotta stood at the bedroom door. Her hands were fists down at her sides and the mouth end of her cigarette was scrunched in her fingers and she was shaking like a volcano about to blow in a thousand directions. The letter slipped out of my hand. We were cornered. "You little sneaks!" Reading my mail, you have no right!" I didn't see tears this time, just eyes narrowed close and teeth set together. "I'm gonna tell your Mommas you never come here again. Now get out!" She knuckled me on the ear as I hurried past. She'd never done that before, and it hurt.

Outside, I tried to forget. Me and Rico, we dried our tears and got ready for battle in the alleyways of Rome like Audie Murphy did. On the sidewalk, two girls played hopscotch. I felt sorry for them. Rico went over to them and said something, and I moseyed to the back yard.

"Eddie, look!" he screamed. "Real Marines! Uncle Emilio's home!"

Emilio! I thought, as though it could have been true. First thing I wanted to do was see his Medal of Honor. Second thing was to get him to make Carlotta forgive us. Parked across the street on the other side of our three-decker was a car with the distinctive khaki green of the military. But I only saw two Marines I'd never seen before, so I decided Emilio must already

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be on the piazza smooching with Carlotta. The soldiers went up the stairs and out of my sight until I got to the end of the alley. They were dressed up in blue uniforms with white caps tucked under their arms, and their backs were straighter than my third-grade ruler. The wicker love seat on the piazza was empty. One of the men pushed the buzzer and Carlotta came to the door. The said something I couldn't hear, and she screamed Emilio's name. Her knees started to buckle, and the Marines held her up. Me and Rico, we just stared.

Maija Stromberg

NOT EXACTLY A MORNING PERSON

Audrey picked her older sister, Lucy, up for dinner in what she thought of as their mother's Catalina. She had inherited it when their mother died, less than a year before. The glove compartment still held a neat stack of unused maps and a first aid kit, moist towelettes, and some cinnamon gum, unopened. Audrey used to tease her mother about the compass which was mounted on the dash. "Did you travel southwest to the grocery store?" she would ask. Her mother would smile.

For Audrey, dinner out was in honor of finding a job after many, many months of unemployment. She hadn't told Lucy yet. Jobs were something of a sore point between them. Audrey had wandered through her working life as a waitress, a bartender, a shoe clerk, a substitute teacher, a flagwoman at a construction site, and most recently, a mail carrier. "You're so sturdy, that's perfect for you," her mother had said hopefully about the last one, but Audrey had not stayed with it. She often felt that her jobs had been a series of extended Halloween outings where she wore a costume and pretended to be one thing or another. She quit when they began to seem real.

Lucy was different. She was a graphic artist at an ad agency near Whitefish Bay. Audrey knew that she had emerged from the womb with this career in mind. Lucy had started in a decent assistant position, working at the same company as her husband, Jorge. He had moved to a different job, but Lucy stayed and got regular promotions. So many that Audrey assumed her sister was by now the czar of graphic artwork for the agency's entire midwest region.

"Jorge's sorry he couldn't come. Too much work. What's the dictionary doing in here?" Lucy asked, as she climbed into the car. It was sitting on the floor on the passenger side where Audrey often left it.

"I look up words a lot," Audrey told her. It was true. For a long time now, she had enjoyed feeling the thin pages of the

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dictionary and running her forefinger down the columns of words and definitions.

"In the car?" Lucy asked as she buckled her seatbelt and pulled it tight. She was smaller than the last person who sat there, Audrey noticed. But then Lucy was smaller than most people. Not so short, but small-boned.

"Yeah. Kind of seems like a Noel thing, doesn't it? Self-improvement through vocabulary building." Noel was Audrey's ex-boyfriend. Audrey found that she talked about him far more often than she meant to. This was particularly annoying because she didn't really think about him. She would be thinking about other things, and then his name would float up and meander insistently around in her head until it tumbled out of her mouth.

"Where'd it come from?" Lucy asked. She pulled lip balm out of her coat pocket and applied it carefully with her middle finger. It smelled of vanilla. "Is it yours?"

Audrey frowned. "It used to be Noel's. He gave it to me."

Lucy checked her hair in the mirror on the sun visor. While they were growing up, Lucy and Audrey had both had long reddish hair. It was the only physical feature which made them look like sisters, but recently Lucy had gotten hers cut very short. "And he didn't demand it back when you dumped him?"

Audrey ignored her sister's comment. "Where do you want to eat?" she asked.

"Nowhere with smoke," Lucy said.

"What?" Audrey glanced at her sister. "Are you trying to quit?"

"I quit. I already did it. I haven't had a cigarette in five weeks and three days." As Lucy gave the numbers, she held up her hands and signalled with her fingers. Weeks were on the left hand and days were on the right. Her nails were neat and even. "Aren't you impressed?" Lucy asked after a moment. Audrey only nodded and felt bad that her response wasn't stronger. Their mother had wanted Lucy to quit. She had cut out countless articles on the dangers of tobacco and had presented them to Lucy at regular intervals. Audrey had stayed out of it then, but now that she wanted to pay her sister a real compliment about

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quitting she couldn't get one out. Lately, she had been that way. "Not very gracious," as their mother, who was from Georgia, would have said. Nobody in Milwaukee used "gracious" the way their mother had. Nobody used the word at all. It was their mother's highest compliment and her wish for what Audrey should be. Audrey knew that her mother had considered Lucy to be beyond redemption on this point. "Lucy takes after her father," she said once, not long before he died. It was when Lucy forgot Audrey's eighteenth birthday. "They aren't unkind. They're just so sure of what they want. It makes them oblivious," she said.

Audrey glanced at her sister. There was little physical resemblance between Lucy and their father, but there were mannerisms. The way her father had kept his chin down as he spoke. Then, as he finished talking, he would jerk his head up suddenly to punctuate his statement and open the floor for response. Lucy had inherited that and the way their father worked. He could concentrate for hours, lose himself in the details of a technical drawing the same way Lucy became completely absorbed in her art. When she and Lucy were younger and their mother called them for dinner, Audrey was always there in a second, but often Lucy didn't even hear. She was in her room, drawing.

"Do you require a written invitation?" her mother would yell upstairs. When Lucy finally came down, for several minutes, her face had a distant, separate look. "You're just like your father," their mother would say, and Audrey accepted that as truth.

Audrey watched Lucy now as they walked into the Greek restaurant they had settled on. She looked for signs of her father, but at the moment, there was nothing to see but Lucy with her beautiful hair cut short, earrings that dangled and her shoulder bag which always held a sketchbook.

Lucy had always been fickle in high school. Their father used to marvel at the string of young men. She had gone to every dance with a different date. "I pity the man that marries you," he had said. But Lucy met Jorge, a Brazilian engineer,

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when she was twenty-three and married him when she was twenty-four. Now, seven years later she was still married. It suddenly occurred to Audrey that there might be a reason that Lucy had quit smoking. She glanced at her sister's middle. She checked her for maternal glow. "You're pregnant," she said.

Lucy smiled. "Not yet."

It took effort not to ask Lucy if she was kidding. Audrey had not thought Lucy was remotely interested. She thought Lucy could only be divided in a limited number of ways.

"Wouldn't Mom have loved it?" Lucy asked.

Audrey didn't say anything, but Lucy didn't seem to notice. Lucy was looking at her gyros, trying to hit on the neatest approach. She finally decided on a knife and fork.

"Have you met anybody lately?" Lucy asked. She meant men.

Audrey said she hadn't. She could follow her sister's train of thought. They had both assumed that Audrey would be the one to have children first. In fact, although Audrey would not have said it aloud, even though she had grown up in the seventies and called herself a feminist at age nine, she had still gotten the idea that she would be married with children and supported by her husband not long after college. That idea was stuck in her head as if her parents had chanted it to her while she was an infant in her crib.

"I always thought you would be the first to marry," her mother had said at Lucy's wedding. Now Lucy wanted to have a baby. Lucy, of all people. "You're not allowed," was what Audrey wanted to say. "You'd do a rotten job." The thought of it made Audrey feel as if someone had changed the rules without telling her.

"Well, I'm glad you didn't marry Noel. Mom thought you would. At least, until you broke up, I suppose," Lucy said.

"You told her we broke up?" Her voice sounded harsh.

Lucy put down her fork and looked at Audrey. "Didn't you?"

Audrey shook her head. "I was planning to," she said. "I just hadn't done it yet. I wanted to wait and see." The gyro was

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dripping on Audrey's hands and spilling into the basket. "These sandwiches are a mess. How the hell are you supposed to eat them without getting grease and yogurt all over the place." She noticed that Lucy wasn't having any trouble. Half of the meat in Audrey's sandwich fell out of the pita and into the basket.

"Mom thought Noel would have made a great dad. I'll get you a fork." Lucy wiped her mouth with her napkin and got up.

"She might have told me that. I don't want a fork," Audrey said, but Lucy was halfway to the silverware.

"I'm glad she didn't. You would have married him to make her happy," she said as she sat down and placed the fork in front of Audrey's basket.

"That's not true," she said. "I don't want to use a fork."

"It works better," Lucy sang.

"Shut up, Lucy." She jabbed a french fry into the ketchup.

Lucy finished her sandwich and placed the basket on a nearby table. She wiped her fingers with her napkin and then began cleaning her section of the formica tabletop. Audrey watched her sister's neat vertical strokes.

"Mom used to do that," Audrey said and nodded at Lucy's hands.

"What?"

"Clean north to south and keep going after it was all spotless," Audrey said.

Lucy's hands stopped moving. "You're right," she said. Audrey glanced quickly at her sister's face. She hadn't expected Lucy to agree.

After dinner, they drove to the 7-11 for gum. "I do three packs a day," Lucy said as she held the door for her sister. "Sugar free."

"Maybe I should quit something," Audrey said.

"Yeah, maybe," Lucy said. "When are you going to get a job?" Lucy asked. She put eight packs of gum on the counter in two stacks of four.

"My job," Audrey said. "I could quit that. June wouldn't mind. She's my boss. She'd probably be delighted." Audrey was studying the candy bars. "Do you ever wonder why they

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advertise some candy bars constantly and others not at all, and then all of a sudden, you don't hear a thing about the famous candy bar anymore—it's as if it dropped off the face of the earth—but then you go to the candy section and there it is, sitting there, looking just fine, like nothing happened?"

"Would you shut up?" Lucy said. "Do you really have a job?" she asked. Audrey was on the way out of the store, and Lucy grabbed her arm to stop her.

"Let's go," Audrey said and pulled her sister out the door. "You can release your grip. Yes, I got a job at a bakery near the Lake." Lucy let go. Lucy was so excited for her that Audrey wanted to slap her. The relief in Lucy's face. The approval in her tone of voice. Audrey realized suddenly that Lucy must have just about given up hope of ever again seeing Audrey a tax-paying, bacon-frying member of society.

As they sat in the car, Audrey outlined all the details Lucy wanted to know. Pay. Location. Size. Four kinds of cheesecake, six breads plus French bread, three featured pies each day, no croissants, no bagels, a variety of cakes, the favorite being carrot with cream cheese frosting, eight kinds of brownies. (Brownies were their specialty.) Volume of production. Co-workers. Co-workers of the opposite sex and relative merits of the aforementioned. Quality of ingredients. Schedule.

"You go to work at four in the morning? I don't believe it. You're not exactly a morning person," Lucy said.

"Yes, I am," Audrey said casually as she rolled down her window, but she felt uncomfortable, as if she had lied and let someone down at the same time. Lucy was right. At least, it used to be true. Audrey had been on the swim team one year in high school and getting up for morning practices while it was still dark had been awful. The house was silent and cold and while the rest of the family slept, she ate breakfast alone.

Audrey rolled the window up again. "Did I tell you Noel's stopped eating red meat and sugar? He's torturing himself. He loves steak."

"I have some news for you," Lucy interrupted.

Audrey ignored her. "I can't decide whether he's practicing abstinence or self-denial. Look up abstinence for me, will you?"

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"I can't read in the car. It'll make me sick," Lucy told her.

"He's lost a lot of weight too, probably twenty pounds, which I always thought would be a good idea. I wonder if celibacy is part of the renewal package." She gripped the steering wheel at the top as they turned a corner.

"Audrey," Lucy tried to get her attention.

They stopped at a light. "I think he's trying to achieve total body fitness," Audrey said.

"He's getting married," Lucy said.

After she dropped Lucy off, Audrey drove aimlessly for a long time, brooding about Noel. He had called Lucy with the news. Audrey and Lucy both regarded this move as pure cowardice. The conversation had been short. Consequently, Lucy knew virtually nothing about the woman that Noel was marrying except that her name was Jill and she was getting a nursing degree. Audrey had already formed a picture of Jill in her mind. She was wearing a nurse's uniform and filling a syringe in a detached, professional way. She held the syringe up to the light to check the accuracy of the measurement. She had light brown, shiny hair.

Audrey found herself circling the same few blocks over and over, past a gas station, an old warehouse, a Catholic church, several nondescript brick buildings and a bar. On the eighth time around she noticed a mailbox. On the ninth, there was a man at the mailbox, but the next time around, he was gone and Audrey stopped. She put the car in park and then picked up the dictionary and ripped out the first page where Noel's name and phone number were written. She left the engine running as she got out and dropped the book into the mailbox slot. It barely fit.

After she got home, Audrey sat motionless on the sofa for almost an hour before she called Noel. "I thought you might have called me by now," she said, when he answered.

"You told me not to," Noel said quietly. He was always

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calm. "I think you screamed it at me." He didn't sound surprised to hear from her. He didn't even sound annoyed.

"Well, I thought you might have called by now, anyway." She knew she sounded miserable, but she couldn't stop. "Lucy told me you're getting married."

"Yes, that's true," he said. "I don't think you know her."

"I talked to you three weeks ago, Noel. You could have mentioned it to me," Audrey said.

"I wasn't engaged at the time," he told her.

"I thought you wanted to marry me."

"I did. A year ago," he said.

"I guess it wasn't one of those lingering feelings," Audrey said.

"Audrey, I'm sorry. I know you've been unhappy."

"Well, congratulations, and you'll never see your dictionary again," Audrey said and hung up. She didn't move. She could barely hear the television in the apartment above her and occasionally a car drove by outside. She felt that if she sat still, nothing could change, and she would feel safe, but a moment later she had slipped into thinking about how Noel used to be with her. He had loved to stand behind her and gather her hair in his hands. Once he started, it was like an addiction. Sometimes he braided it loosely and then combed it out again with his fingers while Audrey stood still feeling only the soft tugs on her hair.

Now he was going to marry someone else. She knew how couples talked about ex-loves. They were used for teasing or in jealous fights. *And what about that Audrey?* Jill might say and Noel would deny that she was of any importance at all. Ex-loves were characters, not people, and Audrey knew that gradually, in Noel's mind, she would melt into a soft lump of memories with all past girlfriends and lesser relatives who had died. Someday, maybe Noel would say to his fourteen-year old son, "I had a girlfriend named Audrey once. I used to give her chocolate-covered cherries, and she'd bite one open and extricate the maraschino with the tine of a fork and throw it out, and then she'd eat the chocolate shell."

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The son would just grunt, but secretly he'd be surprised that his father had ever been interested in someone else. It would seem impossible. Audrey would become something in his mind. Beautiful maybe, the perfect mother, a woman constantly eating chocolate-covered cherries, or his own fantasy of a girlfriend.

Audrey got up and wandered into the bathroom where she stared at herself seriously in the mirror. She remembered how, when she was small, she used to watch herself cry, fascinated by the distortions of her face. Her mother caught her at it more than once, but never said a word. Lucy, on the other hand, called her a faker. "You are so vain," she said, "I can tell you how you look—stupid."

"Shut up," Audrey said, sobbing. She grabbed the sticky bar of soap from the sink and threw it at Lucy, but Lucy dodged it.

"And ugly," Lucy said and then ran. At the time Audrey had imagined that Lucy would grow up to be a nasty adult like their great aunt Etta, who crushed ladybugs and just couldn't stand having children in the house. But that hadn't happened. This evening, Lucy had been gentle when she told Audrey about Noel. "Do you want to come sleep at our house?" she asked when Audrey almost cried.

"It's not Noel," Audrey said, as she wiped her eyes.

"What is it?"

"I don't know." They pulled over in front of Lucy's house. The porch light was on, welcoming Lucy home. "I guess it's Noel," Audrey said. That was the easiest answer, and Lucy seemed to understand.

The alarm woke Audrey at 3:30 a.m. It took her twenty minutes to get up. As she dressed, she remembered that once, when she was in high school, her father was furious at her for some foul thing she said to him in her sleep when he came to wake her. He wouldn't tell her what it was, and she insisted that whatever it was it didn't apply to him, but he still slammed the

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oatmeal down in front of her and said something completely out of character like, "Take it or leave it." As if he were John Wayne.

Audrey's thoughts moved slowly and lingered on this memory of her father, hoping to avoid thinking about the events of the night before. She had aspirin with her cold cereal, and left for the bakery. It was 4:30, and the streets were still quiet and very dark and the stoplights were flashing red. Her father and Noel had never met, she thought, as she pulled into the back parking lot. They had missed each other by years. She parked and then sat in the car, stuck, absently staring at the compass.

Audrey looked up to see June holding the back door of the bakery open with her right hand and motioning wildly with the flour-coated left. She got out of the car to the sound of June yelling, "Let's go, for pete's sake. There's no excuse for this. This time had better be the last time or there won't be a next time!"

Privately, she marvelled that June had put so many words together at once. Not that she was stupid. Far from it. Taciturn might be the right word. Reticent. She wished she hadn't dumped the dictionary. Audrey walked up to her. "I'm so sorry, June," she said graciously.

Audrey's eyes and head still hurt, but the warmth of the kitchen began to relax her. June handed her a list of things to bake. "The cheesecakes are already in the oven," she said accusingly as she took the piece of paper she had just given to Audrey, set it on the counter and crossed "cheesecakes" off the top. "They come out in twenty-three minutes."

Audrey nodded. She suddenly smelled them, incongruous and strikingly pleasant at five a.m. Like swimming in a public pool at midnight. She put on her apron and tied it in front. "Are you married, June?" she asked officially, as if it were a question about the freshness of eggs.

She was surprised to hear June's answer. "No. Double divorced. Married twice to the same man. Dumb mistake. People never change."

Audrey opened the tub of lard and began spooning it out with the back of a flat wooden spoon. The problem was that

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June was wrong, she thought. People changed. She scooped the lard into a huge metal bowl, then poured six cups of boiling water over it. While it melted, she stirred figures into the thickening mixture. Letters and geometric shapes which held for a moment and then faded. The lard gave off a strong, sickening animal smell.

Audrey wished she had told her mother she never meant to marry Noel, and she also wished she had married him.

As she measured in the flour, she thought about both of her parents. What did they feel? The dead did not turn over in their graves when they saw what things had come to, she thought. They were not shocked or horrified when the people they loved behaved in unexpected ways. They were bewildered. She imagined her mother's spirit looking in on her and Lucy. She would watch them and listen to them talk. Maybe the ghost of her father would be there too. "Lucy has changed," they would say. "She's stopped smoking, and she looks different."

"I heard her say she and Jorge were planning to have a baby. Can you imagine? I never would have dared hope."

"And I thought Audrey was going to get married. Who is that nurse-type we saw with Noel?"

"I can't believe she took the bakery job," her mother would say.

Her father would nod with slow, exaggerated movements and a throaty sigh. "No kidding," he would say. "Really, she's not exactly a morning person."

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