

# *Slices*

*Spring 2014*







# Voices

Voices is produced each fall and spring semester by students enrolled in Journalism 139 under the direction of Professor David Pink, with the help of Professor Scott Fustin.

Submissions are accepted from current students, alumni, faculty, and staff. All submissions are assessed anonymously, and current student winners in art, prose, photography, and poetry are awarded prizes. Acceptance, publication, and awards are based on artistic quality as perceived by the student editorial staff.

The views or opinions expressed in this magazine are those held by the artists and authors.

Current and past issues of Voices, submission forms, instructions, and deadlines are available at [rvcvoices.com](http://rvcvoices.com).

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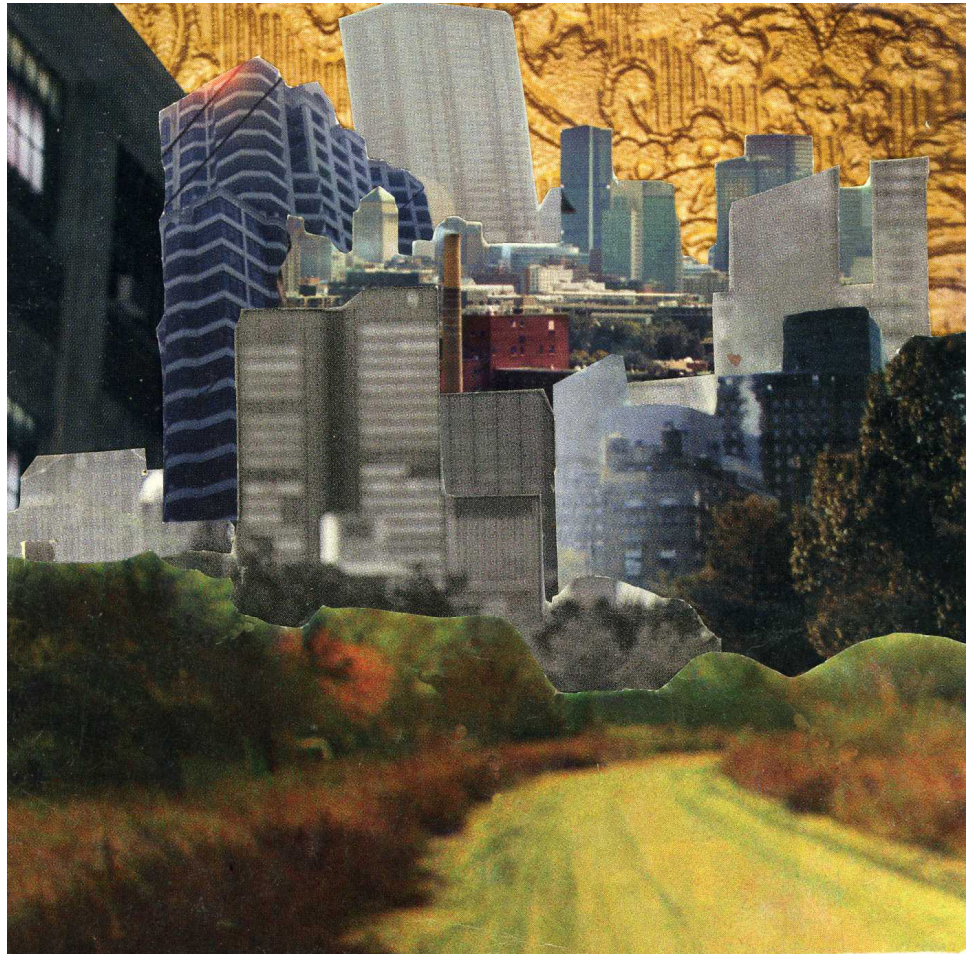
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# City/Country

Eleanor Boersma

Category Winner





# Labeled Identity

McKenzie Palmeri

I am

a faggot

a dyke

a lesbian

I am a

human

I am

not

condemned to hell

I

am not

disgusting

or

perverted

attention seeking

or sick

I will not change

a phase does not last

17

years

It is me

rooted

in my soul

My life

I did not choose

to fall in love

I fell

Unpredictably

I fell

Scared

I fell

into love

And who are you

to tell me that I do not deserve that?



# Apparition

Mary Rudny



# The Diner

Craig Heart

Category Co-Winner

The diner never closed, not even on Christmas. That was what the girl with the blue kerchief on her head told him when he walked in with rain dripping off his fedora. It was midnight and she picked up a pencil and scratched out another day square on the 1934 Coca-Cola calendar.

“I love marking the days,” she said. “I work late, so I always get to do it.”

“You always work late?” he asked.

“That’s why I get to mark the calendar.”

He asked for eggs and coffee. Fried eggs, no runny yolk, and black coffee as hot as it could get. He could never get his coffee hot enough.

It was a typical roadside diner, sparse and utilitarian. The stools at the counter might have had padding at one point, but not anymore. The light was

yellow, the walls were yellow. The tile was yellow, although it used to be white. The place smelled of old grease and rain.

Highway 12 ran past the diner and the lights of passing cars flashed by every now and then. It was not a busy night. It was rainy and dark and he was the only customer.

“You work by yourself?” he asked.

“Mostly,” she said. She had her back to him, setting a new pot of coffee while eggs popped and sizzled on the burner.

“That doesn’t seem safe. Working late by yourself.”

She shrugged. “People are pretty nice around here. There’s one fella who comes in, Mr. Pritchett. He’s not always nice, but he’d never hurt me. He just talks rough sometimes.”



“I don’t see how anyone could talk rough to you. If anyone talked rough to you while I was here, I’d lay them out.”

The girl looked over her shoulder and blushed a little. “He’s okay. He never comes in this time of night anyway.”

“Still, I’d lay him out.”

“Listen to you talk. I guess you’re quite the charmer.”

He removed his fedora and placed it on the counter. His hair was cut short and a section of his scalp was scarred and bare. The scar was an angry red and ran from the top his head to just above the left ear. He waited to see the girl’s reaction. She looked at it, but did not seem repulsed like most people did.

“What happened to your head?” She sounded genuinely concerned.

“Railroad accident. We were laying rail up by Traverse when a dynamite stick went off too early and sent a spike through the side of my head.”

“That’s awful.”

He shrugged. “It’s all right. Most people don’t survive that kind of accident. Or if they do, they end up kind of crazy. I’m lucky, I guess. I’m not crazy.”

A telephone jangled. The girl scooped the eggs onto a plate before walking to the back of the diner. She reappeared a minute later.

“Sorry, that was the boss. He always checks in around this time to see how things are going just before he heads off to bed. It’s real thoughtful of him.”

“Every night, huh?”

“Yeah. He’s real thoughtful. Here’s your eggs.” She set the plate of eggs in front of him and poured a cup of fresh, steaming coffee. “Hope you like them.”

“I’m sure they’re delicious. A girl as pretty as you couldn’t make bad eggs.”

The girl blushed again. She was young and could not be much more than eighteen. He liked that. Young girls

were usually nicer than the older ones.

The door banged open and a small man stumbled inside. He wore a pea coat and a floppy hat with rain dripping off the brim.

"It's like a monsoon out there!" he said, making a shivering motion. "Give me a coffee for the road."

The man at the counter looked at the newcomer, sizing him up. He wondered if this was Pritchett.

"Don't you want to sit a spell?" the girl said.

"Can't. Wife's in labor down at St. Anthony's. I been working on the new roadwork by Detroit. The call came through earlier today that she'd been taken to the hospital. Jumped in the car soon as I could."

"Is your name Pritchett?" the man at the counter asked.

The newcomer looked confused.

"He's not Pritchett," the girl said. "I've never seen this man before."

"No, my name's Adams," the man said. "Who's

Pritchett?"

"Pritchett never comes in this late," the girl said. She poured coffee into a cardboard cup and pushed it across the counter. "There's your coffee."

"Thanks," Adams said. He clutched the coffee and took a single sip. He smacked his lips. "Good and hot! This should keep me awake for another few miles."

"Good luck to you and your wife," the girl said.

The door slammed behind Adams. His car rumbled to life and crunched gravel as he pulled back onto the highway.

"I hope he makes it okay," the girl said. "What with a baby on the way. I think that's very exciting."

"It's funny," he said.

"What's funny?"

"Somewhere in the world, there's a thousand babies being born and a thousand people dying."

The girl made a face. "What a thing to say!"



“It’s just the way of it. It’s the circle of life.”

“Well, I don’t want to talk about that.” The girl began scrubbing grease off the fryer. “I don’t like to talk about people dying.”

He looked down at his plate. He hadn’t eaten a bite yet and was hungry. He picked up the fork and cut into the eggs. The eggs had sat too long and were cold, but the coffee was hot. If the eggs had been hot, but the coffee cold, there would have been a problem. The eggs were rubbery and he didn’t like that. He beckoned for the girl and she walked over.

“The eggs. They’re rubbery.”

“You don’t like the eggs?”

“They’re rubbery. I don’t mind cold eggs, but I don’t like them to be rubbery. I don’t like how they feel in my mouth.”

“I can make you some more.”

“Don’t bother. They’d just be rubbery too.” He pushed

his plate away. “A girl as pretty as you shouldn’t make bad eggs.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry. Just don’t make bad eggs. The coffee’s good. Hot.”

“You want me to make you some more eggs?”

His voice rose a little. “Stop talking about eggs.”

“I’m sorry.” The girl went back to scrubbing the grease.

He watched her as she worked, arms moving rhythmically forward and back, like the piston rods on a steam engine. As she scrubbed, he saw a sheen of sweat on her brow. He licked his lips. Her head bobbed as she moved, the head of an engineer, working the controls of a train. She was a steam engine, working, sweating, steaming. Her arms moved, jerking forward and back. The metal surface around the fryer was gleaming, shining like new tracks, working, chugging, straining. A train whistle

sounded and he sat up straight.

“Did you hear that?” His eyes darted around the diner, as if he expected to see a train come roaring through the side wall.

The girl stopped scrubbing. “Hear what?”

“I...it was a train.”

“It must be 12:30,” the girl said. “It’s the freight. Right on time.”

He relaxed onto the stool. It had been a train. He wasn’t crazy. It had been a real train. He drank from his coffee cup.

The girl leaned against the counter. Her face was beaded with sweat. She removed the blue kerchief from her head and wiped her face. Golden hair, lightly curled, cascaded around her shoulders. She gathered it up and tied it at the back with the kerchief.

“The boss likes us to cover our heads,” she said. “Hair in the food. But it makes me warm. He won’t be in tonight.

He calls at midnight to make sure everything is all right and then he goes to bed.”

“Do you get many customers after midnight?”

“Not many,” she said.

“How much longer before I get my eggs?”

“What’s that?”

“My eggs. You said you’d make new ones. The old ones were rubbery.”

“You said you didn’t want more eggs.”

He wondered if the girl was slow. If he had ordered eggs and the first ones were bad, why wouldn’t he want new ones? He sighed.

“I want eggs. Good ones this time.”

The girl looked annoyed, which angered him, but she cracked two eggs on the burner. They sizzled and popped. She slid the eggs onto his plate.

“I hope you like them.”

He took a bite of the eggs. They were hot and good. “I

like them.”

She reached forward to take his coffee cup. He grabbed her arm. She looked up at his face, her eyes wide.

“You’re hurting my arm.”

He pulled her closer. Her upper body stretched across the counter and she used her other arm to brace herself. He fingered her blonde hair.

“I knew a girl with such pretty hair couldn’t make bad eggs.”

She struggled against his grip. Her resistance angered him.

“You shouldn’t struggle,” he said. “I won’t hurt you if you don’t struggle.”

His words, intended as comfort, only made her struggle harder.

“You don’t listen well,” he said. “Pretty girls never listen well.”

He gripped both of her arms and gave a massive pull.

The girl slid up and over the counter, legs kicking. She screamed and he hit her.

“I don’t like loud noises,” he said. “Loud noises hurt my head.”

She looked up at him and he saw defiance there. She wasn’t going to be nice. Pretty girls were never nice.

He pulled her by the arms and dragged her behind the counter. She struggled and he hit her. He pulled the blue kerchief from her hair. He pushed up her skirt and fumbled with her stockings. He was breathing heavily. Then he was on her and she stopped struggling.

\* \* \*

After, he rolled away and lay on his back, panting and sweating. The girl had not moved, but her eyes were open, looking up at the yellow ceiling. Her eyes were wet with tears, but she did not make a sound.

He sat up and buttoned his pants. “Thank you,” he said.

The girl's shoulders quaked, whether in a shudder or a sob, he wasn't sure.

"Why?" she asked in a small, ghostly voice. "Why did you do that?"

He did not answer right away. He had never been asked that question before. He stood up and looked down at her and felt sorry.

"I don't know," he said. "Thank you." It was all he could think of to say.

The girl lay still and he felt sorry. Maybe she was nice after all. He had acted too quickly and frightened her. A girl this young was probably a virgin. Of course she would scream and struggle. He thought about not killing her. He wanted her to get up and move around. He wanted it to be like it had been earlier, when he had first arrived at the diner. He moved away from her.

"You can get up," he said.

Her face was white against the tile, which used to be white, but was now yellow with age and old grease. She straightened her clothes and awkwardly pushed herself to her knees, then to her feet. She leaned against the counter and her shoulders shuddered.

He walked around the counter and sat on the stool.

"Do you get many customers this time of night?"

She shook her head and the golden curls, free of the blue kerchief, bobbed around her shoulders.

"Not many," she whispered.

He pushed his coffee cup forward. "I'd like some more coffee, please. Hot."



# Blue Sweater

Illiana Durbin



# Seven Hannah Embry

Category Co-Winner

They say our cells are replaced every seven years.

By then, I will have peeled the bruises from my skin.

My scars are invisibly profound.

The stain of your scent, lifted.

Our child's remains will have been bled out.

Abuse is never forgotten.

Failure is on my record.

My cells are new; not my soul.

# Mothcatcher

Sierra Hilbert



# Pregnancy Test: A Trilogy

Rebecca Denham

Category Co-Winner

Part I:

The fuck is this?

Did they shrink-wrap this fucking box?

Jesus Christ,

I already chewed off all my fingernails

At the idea of having a child inside my body,

My hands are already shaking

And sweaty

And cold

And I cannot afford an abortion

And I have to fucking pee

I drank a peace tea an hour ago

That's 23 ounces of potential pregnancy prediction

And I can't even get the fucking box

Open

Part II:

The fuck is taking so long?

I peed on the stick thing like, 5 minutes ago

I read the Frequently Asked Questions

Pamphlet three times.

That hourglass on the little screen is

Taunting me.

I had to buy the most expensive test –

The digital one that takes

up to 7.5 minutes

To deduct whether or not my life is ruined

7.5 minutes is a long time to fucking

re-evaluate your life choices.

I'm surprised one of the FAQ's isn't

“How much do abortions cost again?”



Part III:

Not Pregnant.

Good.

It's Over.

But now that I'm staring at the floor

In the Woodman's bathroom,

Resting my elbows on my knees,

Resting my forehead in my hands,

My lace panties resting around my ankles,

I'm thinking back on the time when

Morgann thought that she was pregnant.

I'm remembering her gripping my

Hand until my fingers turned her favorite shade of purple,

Until her rings left inverse jewels on my palms.

I'm counting the number of tears that rolled down her cheek.

While waiting for the test to say

That she can go on with her normal life.

I'm thinking about how funny it is

That I'm taking a pregnancy test by myself now

And now

I'm thinking that maybe it wouldn't be so

Bad

To be pregnant.

Because maybe then, I wouldn't be so alone.



**Ritualistic Steer Head**  
Elizabeth Horvath

# Dead and Rural

Cari Ann Wayman



# Stuck Underwater McKenzie Palmeri

A sinking ship could easily be translated  
to a lost love a lost hope  
What we used to fight for  
is now a losing battle  
We were both left treading water  
when  
something beautiful came  
back  
to destroy us  
I use the term “we” lightly  
because  
“we” are not an “us” anymore  
It is simply you and I  
Combined only by the phrase  
Captain & Sailor



# Again Never Again

Irina Jelnov



Douglas Scribman hunched over a student's exam. He worked with the fervor of Jack the Ripper, his red pen slashing, drawing blood on every page. Finished, he grinned and placed the dissected test atop the pile on his dining room table.

His wife, Helen, handed him a steaming mug of coffee. "How's it going?"

"Done." Douglas patted the stack of papers. "I hope the students learn from this."

"You shouldn't be so hard on them. It's an intro to business class."

"I'm an educator, Helen," Douglas said in an even tone, perfect for instructing a toddler. "The university pays me to teach. That's what I'm doing. It's basic learning theory: you learn, or you suffer. Those too stupid to retain the lessons are

stuck on the lowest rungs of society. They're beyond help."

"What?" Helen said, staring out the window. Across the street, Billy Seton balanced on his ladder and scooped globs of wet leaves from his eaves trough. "After you finish your coffee, ask Billy to clean our gutters."

Douglas frowned. "I'll do it myself."

"Why? He's done it for the past five years."

"He's ripping us off. It takes him ten minutes. He charges \$40. That's \$240 an hour. I'd be shocked if he graduated high school. Do you think a dropout is worth that much? I don't."

Douglas couldn't care less about the \$40. He spent more on a case of craft beer. But the thought of paying a coolie like Billy \$240 an hour for a menial task irritated Douglas. He was at the pinnacle of his academic career, and he couldn't demand that kind of money.

“He knows what he’s doing,” Helen said. “If you fall, you’ll break something.”

“I won’t fall.”

“Do you even know how to set up a ladder?”

“I’m assuming that was a joke.”

“I’m serious.”

“If the troglodyte across the street can do it, I’m sure I can figure it out.”

Helen tucked her chin and cocked her right eyebrow.

Douglas hated that look. She flashed it whenever she thought he was acting like an ass. Who is she to criticize my actions? he thought. She’s got an MFA. It’s not even a real degree, for Christ’s sake.

“Okay,” she said, hanging the word in the air. “Should I wait until you’re finished before I go to the store?”

“Why?”

“In case you need help.”

“To pick leaves from the gutters of my house? I’m a professor, not an idiot.”

After Helen left, Douglas wrestled the cobweb clogged ladder from the hooks on the garage wall. Its weight sent him reeling into the passenger door of his Volvo. The ladder slipped from his hands and clattered on the concrete. Douglas hoped nobody had seen his mistake.

Across the street, Billy sat on the tailgate of his Seton’s Roofing and Siding truck with a can of Old Style tucked in the crotch of his patched jeans. He chuckled and shook his head.

“You need help, Dougie?”

“I’m fine,” Douglas mumbled. He swatted cobwebs from his Dockers and scratched his nose. An errant strand of web stuck to his trimmed beard. He spat three times and shook his head like a wet dog. The web held tight. He buried his face in the crook of his elbow and rubbed his mouth with the sleeve of his North Face fleece.

“What the hell’re you doing, Dougie?”

“Preparing to clean my gutters.”

“You want me to show you how?”

“I know how.”

“Is that right?”

Douglas hoisted the ladder and carried it lengthwise like a battering ram. He stumbled out of the garage. The front end tipped down and scraped the asphalt. Douglas lifted it, overcorrected, and bounced the back end off the ground. His potbelly worked like a bellows pumping breath through his gaped mouth. His cheeks and ears burned with embarrassment.

“It’s easier if you carry it straight up,” Billy said. “Like a flag.”

“I prefer to carry my ladders horizontally,” Douglas said. “It eases maneuverability.”

“Suit yourself.” Billy sipped his beer.

Douglas spun the ladder in a wide arc until he faced his

house. He’d planned to start on the front gutters. But fear of Billy’s scrutiny forced Douglas to retreat to the rear of the house. The ladder teetered, as Douglas tottered toward the backyard like a child learning to walk.

“Watch that hill back there,” Billy said. “Your ladder’ll tip on you quicker than shit.”

Behind the house, Douglas dropped his burden. The muscles in his shoulders and forearms burned. His legs were sapped. He leaned on the house to catch his breath and surveyed the yard. It sloped almost imperceptibly to the right.

“Watch that hill back there,” Douglas said imitating Billy’s voice, exaggerating his Southern twang. A gust of wind scattered leaves across the lawn and mussed Douglas’s side-parted hair. He decided to start on the left end and work down the nonexistent hill.

Dragging the ladder, Douglas pointed the bottom end at the house. He lifted the top end over his head and pushed up

rung by rung. The ladder half-raised, Douglas's arms quivered. He stumbled forward. The bottom banged the foundation. He grunted. A bead of sweat slid into his right eye.

"Shit," he said, squinting.

The ladder's rungs dug into his palms. His pulse drummed in his ears. He wheezed like a broken kazoo. Surrender would be easy: let go, leap out of the way, and pay Billy \$40. But what would he tell Billy? That the university called? There was an emergency? He had to go?

Douglas blinked the sweat out of his eye, exhaling long and hard. He considered his plan. No, not even a moron like Billy would believe that story. Especially after our exchange out front. He'd never let me live it down.

"No way," he mumbled and pushed the ladder with all his might.

He grunted, groaned. His loafers slipped on leaves. But he managed to stand the ladder vertical, tug its rope, and extend

its top until it rested on the eaves.

The gutters appeared higher than two stories. Maybe it was a trick of perspective. The thought of balancing on an aluminum spindle at that height clenched his stomach like a fist. This is a bad idea, he thought. I could walk inside, sink into my recliner, watch the news. It sounded good. But when Helen walked through the door, she would cock her eyebrow and call Billy. Douglas couldn't let that happen. He locked his eyes on the rungs above him and climbed. With each step, the ladder wobbled. The shaking grew more violent the higher he ascended.

Two feet below the roofline, Douglas felt the ladder slide to the right. He froze and held his breath. The skid stopped after six inches. He had to get off. The roof was closer than the ground, so he clambered up. As he swung his left foot off the ladder, he accidentally kicked it. Its fiberglass rails grated on the aluminum gutter as it slid out of view and crashed to the



ground.

“Yo, Dougie!” Billy yelled from the other side of the house.  
“You all right?”

Douglas winced at the sound of Billy’s voice. “I’m fine,” he hollered. “Just setting down my ladder.”

“You need help?”

“No.”

No trees grew close enough to the house to shimmy down. Douglas was marooned on a shingled island with only one way off. Sweat beaded his forehead. He bit his bottom lip until he tasted blood. Below, wind stirred leaves over the fallen ladder. Helen would be home any minute. He’d rather die than let her discover his mistake.

His feet dangled from the roof. It didn’t seem so high from his perch. Maybe it was a trick of perspective. He sat like a gargoyle staring past his swinging loafers, trying to build his courage. When Helen’s car crunched the gravel at the end of

the driveway, he jumped.

That afternoon, Douglas sat in his recliner. Plaster casts encased his elevated feet. Oxycontin hazed his vision. Two twenty dollar bills lay on the end table. On TV, a pundit droned about the economy. The closed bedroom door muffled Helen’s laughter. She was probably gloating to her mother about what he’d done.

Something thudded against the house, startling Douglas out of his daze. Standing on the bottom rung of his ladder, Billy peered through Douglas’s front window. Douglas pretended not to see him grin and scurry up, out of view. He pretended not to see the soaked leaves plummeting effortlessly to his lawn.

# Abeyance

Carrie Allen





**Erin**

Illiana Durbin

# Punctual Bekkie Roman

A period

Is what stops my fool's words  
from escaping my fool's lips.

An apostrophe

Is what gives you a  
trait, possession, keepsake,  
me.

A comma

Is what gives me slight pause,  
Fumbling to finish,  
or explain.

An ellipses

Is what lets me know I've wandered  
or given in to Daydream's pull.

A space

Is what I left for you  
heart, mind, soul,  
life.



## Hands of Time

Adam Heinzeroth



# Night Flight

Eleanor Boersma



# SugarGlassPlum David Kozuck

Rocks sprinkle at my window while the sky runs orange. A boy stands below awaiting me. He starts at me with a shout, but draws to a falter.

“Will you come out with me?” he asks.

The low set sun sharpens the outline of his cheekbones and covers his face in shadow besides his left eye and a tussle of hair, highlighted by the sky’s last breath. I know this boy. I’ve known him since early childhood. And yet I cannot get words to pass his ears.

“Out how?” I puzzle from his sudden appearance.

“Ya know, like outside. Let’s go somewhere.”

I squeeze what saliva I can from my tongue to regain speech. There’s a sting in my throat I only feel after a shower singing session. I want to say something cool. I want to say something clever. I want this moment to be Hollywood worthy. But all I can scrape is, “Sure.”

I remember the promise I made myself and this promise builds in my stomach straight to my heart, causing it to beat harder and faster and stronger with each contraction. I’m going to marry that boy, I told myself. I will marry Todd Evans.

## Category Co-Winner

Thoughts of the primary school desk snakes come to me. It was the most memorable feature of the classroom that I shared with Todd. The way they connected and wound around like a twisting vertebrate.

“I want you to tell the class your name and anything interesting about yourself you’d like to share,” my teacher said with a soft giddy tone.

This would become a tradition that would follow me around throughout my school career. An icebreaker that I hated more and more every time.

My voice was a broken hinged door.

“Elsie,” I would squeak out, “Elsie Douglas.”

I contribute nothing more besides a burning red face and a sunken head staring at my shoelaces. Todd was different. He relished in his opportunity to brag. He spoke of a foreign girlfriend, who he immediately dismissed as being gross, as little boys do. He told about his rare Japanese trading card collection that he claimed was worth thousands. But what stood out to me the most was his insistence

that his grandfather owned prime New Zealand land which produced most of the world's plum distribution. It was such a strange thing to brag about. A story that was grand in scale and obviously a lie, but his confidence sold it to me.

"Prove that I'm lying," he boldly claimed to the class.

I was dazzled with his words and I couldn't stop listening or look away.

We became friends. That tends to happen when every other kid hates you. You eventually end up together. We were both odd kids. Me too quiet and him too loud.

I changed while I was with him. We became little suburban devils: stealing antique bicycles from a neighbor's shed, destroying the forts of kids that we disliked, using a makeshift paper clip key to start and ride around in a golf cart that we took from a local course. No afternoon felt wasted with him. And when we weren't in trouble, he would be introducing me to the strangest things: candy flavored cigarettes, Korean slasher flicks, and rock bands from Tel Aviv. These weird hobbies brought us closer and we became inseparable.

"Hey Rodger," Todd says between smacks of biting food. "I hear you have a girlfriend now?"

Todd wasn't perfect. I knew that. I loved him, but never

worshipped him. Sometimes, he could be inexplicably harsh to others, sudden outbursts of rudeness. It was more apparent as we entered high school together. Strangely, I found that he never did it to me.

"Uhm, yeah. I guess," Rodger sheepishly replies.

"So is she cute or what man? Come on, show me a picture or something."

Rodger pulls out his phone to show a picture of his girlfriend, causing Todd to smugly smile and give an upwards twitch of his eyebrows.

"What?" Rodger asks in response to Todd's strange reaction.

"Nothing man, whatever gets you horny."

"Is there something wrong with her?"

"Gee, I don't know Rodger. Maybe it's the shabby boys' haircut or possibly the fact she dresses like a guy. Ya know, I always had suspicions about you."

"I don't understand," Rodger says with resentment in his tone.

"Look dude, if you want to fuck a guy, just go on and do it. Don't be prancing around with some tomboy trying to convince yourself. If you want to suck a cock then, hey, that's your business."

I don't remember Rodger and Todd talking much after that. Understandably I guess. It was cruel, even by how Todd normally acts

with others.

“I think you should apologize. That was pretty rough.”

“Forget him. I don’t need to deal with some insecure faggot,”

Todd mutters back.

I dropped the subject after that.

Rule number one in ‘Miss Sauntain’s Guide to Enhancing Beauty’ was to never try to impress others. I never followed this rule. ‘Miss Sauntain’ was a book that my mom gave me after I asked her if I could get my nails and hair worked on at a parlor shop that she would go to. She was pretty excited to help me. We always enjoyed each other, but I can’t say we were ever super close before I started to hang out with her at beauty shops.

I wanted to look good for Todd. Actually, all men I suppose. It wasn’t as if Todd was the only one who felt this way about girls. I never found myself to be boyish, nor a shining example of femininity. I loved to get made over. I gained some confidence and started to feel good about my body. But I’d be lying if I said that I wanted it mainly for self-gratification.

I felt good, and I thought that I looked good, but Todd and I started to drift apart. Less and less we would see each other outside of school. Most of the time he gave lame excuses and eventually, I stopped trying.

I blame his parents more than anything. It was always awkward to hang out at his house. His mom would coo at me and tell me how pretty I was and his dad would slap Todd on the back about bringing home such a nice girl. I wanted it to be like this, but it wasn’t. We were still only friends, and any chance of Todd confessing feelings for me would dwindle each time his parents tried to match us together. It was counterproductive to what they and, admittedly, I wanted. But that didn’t matter now.

A cutesy style is what I went for. I wore a canary yellow cami dress and white stockings under a black and white plaid skirt. I highlighted this with a floppy bow tied in my waist-length, radioactive platinum blonde hair. I wanted to show off my arms and legs without appearing slutty. This was the first time in quite a while that we would be together, just us. I wanted to impress him and have him notice me.

Our trip turned out to be a visit to a site that we used to camp out at as kids. We ran away from home a lot; I think that our parents eventually just gave up being mad at us, knowing we’d return by the next day. This wasn’t a legal campsite either, not sure who owned the land.

Tall, golden grass and weeds filled out a long stretch of plain that led to a secluded woods with its own fishing creek. I always stared at the stars. Todd and I would point out constellations to each other. We

didn't know any of the real ones so we made up our own until we fell asleep in the dust and branches.

We can't experience that anymore. The field turned into a condo lot, filled with half finished structures. Going from condo to condo, we look to see which design we like best. In my mind, I pretend that we are married searching for a starter home. He would ask me if I like the look of this one and I would worry that there wouldn't be enough room for the baby.

We settle on lot 16, because it was the only house without an established roof overhead, so we could look up and see the sky, like we used to as kids.

I don't have much to say and neither does he. I look at him and smile shyly. I try to play the constellation game, but Todd isn't feeling up to it.

"Sorry. I'm no fun right now," he tells me.

"It's alright. It's just nice being out with you. We can just sit here."

Stroking my hand, he gives me shivers. Looking at me, noses apart, he asks if this is okay. Pressing my palm to his face, he receives my answer. My fingers run through his pillow cotton hair as we kiss. He's soft with me and strokes my hair as well, a comforting gesture that makes me feel secure. He bites my lip slightly and takes a breath

of air. We both do.

Sensual expressions flow as he kisses me more. From my forehead, to my neck, to my breasts, he shows a love for me that I've always wanted. He takes off his shirt and we continue to explore each other's bodies. He's lean, or maybe closer to lanky, without his clothes on. I stroke his chest apologizing for my cold hands. I notice bruises on his body. Todd was always violent and wild. But looking at him with dim light makes him appear frail, like he was made of sugar glass. I rub him, trying my best to avoid any injuries that I see.

"I'm ready," I say and he takes me slowly, just as the foreplay was.

Clutching to his back and digging into him after every thrust, I close my eyes and feel every twitch of pleasure, magnified with every movement he makes.

Tension builds and I see him struggling.

"Don't be nervous. You were doing wonderful before. Just keep doing what you were," I tell him.

I didn't know if he really was performing correctly or if the sex we had could be described as amazing. I had no past experiences to compare it to. But it felt good and that's all that mattered to me.

His struggling continued.

"Do you want to stop? Are you okay?" I ask with concern.



"I'm fine," he grunts back.

"It's okay if you want to relax for a second."

He waves his hand, a gesture meaning he wants to continue. He gets rough with me and I start to feel pain. I wince and try to take it. I've heard that your first time always hurts a bit. But the pain increases and Todd becomes even more rough.

"Ow, Todd, you're hurting me."

Todd doesn't listen and starts to go faster.

"Todd slow down, please," I plead, but he still ignores me.

"Stop it!" I scream, pushing him off.

Todd is visibly angry and starts to yell back.

"God, can you ever shut up Elsie? I'm trying to get off and all you keep doing is talking."

"You were hurting me. And you wouldn't stop. I'm sorry."

"See, this is the problem, it's you. I can't get hard because of you. Maybe if you'd just shut the fuck up for a minute, I could get going here."

"I don't understand what you're saying. You were doing fine before. Is something wrong?"

He says nothing, but tries desperately to say something back to me. His expression of anger becomes sadness as tears fill his eyes. Grabbing his head, he falls to his knees, putting his head as close to his

body as he can, weeping into himself and giving off a soft whimper. I try to hug him to show him that it's alright, but he pushes me away. We put the clothes we had taken off back on.

Lying there again, we don't speak. but this time, it's an awkward silence, not a comfortable one. Back to back, we lay down next to each other. Neither of us wants to move or go home. Temperatures dropping, I get closer to him and wrap my arms around him. He gives my hand a light squeeze and I fall asleep feeling safe again.

I awake to two police officers standing over me. I search for Todd, but he's gone.

"Where's Todd?" I ask.

They look at each other, but say nothing. Taken away, I get put into a holding cell at the police station.

Trespassing was far from the worst things me and Todd had ever done together. I won't be here for long, I think. I fantasize about last night, remembering the feelings I shared with him. I also remember our fight. I think back to school and the girls Todd has been with, but I can't remember any faces. Had Todd ever been with another girl before? Perhaps I was his first time as well. I knew after this we could work things out and talk about last night.

"Do you know a man named Todd Evans?" a detective questions me.

“Yeah?” I respond.

“Do you know where he is?”

I pause, “Is he not here?”

I had assumed he was taken earlier, caught from getting up before I did.

“When were you with him?”

“Late last night. Like, when the sun was setting. What’s this about?”

He ignores me, “What did you talk about?”

“I don’t know, nothing much,” I stutter out, beginning to blush, hoping he doesn’t ask what we were doing.

I’m visibly nervous now with his rising tone. He takes notice and backs away, leaving the room. Soon after, I’m released.

My parents are in front of the station to pick me up. My arresting officer tells me that I’m free to go and I was no longer needed in their investigation.

“What investigation?” I ask my parents.

“Elsbeth, if you know where Todd is, you can’t hold it in. I will not let my daughter fall into hell for covering up a murderer.”

I feel my face form a shocked expression. I want to ask questions, but I have no words, like always.

“Todd attacked his mother. He tried to kill her. She’s in a

hospital now, but he wanted to murder her and that’s what counts.”

I don’t say anything for a while. I ignore my parents and peers and just keep to myself. Todd was never pure, but he wasn’t a murderer. Not a real one, or an attempted one. Todd’s been in many fights before, but never would he want to kill someone. Usually he’d laugh it off when he was done and that would be it. Not knowing what else to do, I apologize to Todd’s dad.

“You never did anything wrong, Elsie. Todd is responsible for this. I believe you,” he tells me.

“I don’t know what else to say, I guess.”

With a pause I ask if he’s alright. He’s quiet, but eventually utters something I’ve heard before.

“I don’t need to deal with that faggot. He can stay gone, for all I care.”

Todd never tried to contact me. I don’t even know how I would contact him.

My mother brings home food and I point out that she has bought plums.

“They were on sale,” she says, “Do you not like them?”

I shake my head no. I take a bite and immediately spit the piece out. It’s rotten.



Of Things That  
Descend in the Air  
Sierra Hilbert

# Beauty in Old Age

Irina Jelnov



# Current Ricky Dobbs

An image appears on the water, reshaped by the current.

The source remains untouched, constant.

The light replicates the source, projecting its Technicolor shadow on an obtainable surface,  
which so happens to be reflective.

Water.

Moving, though appearing still,

is a whole unit.

It is a collective body.

When we flow together what do we project?

Is there a large enough body of us in connection to reveal the image being cast upon us?

The light remains ample.

The question is where are we?



# Down Under

Deb Dietz





# Coffee with a Saint Aurora Campbell

I try not to glance again at that website.

You know, that one that features many smiling faces,

accompanied by many sarcastically worded updates of how miserable we find  
the going-ons of our lives?

That one that is a simply perfect tool to use, when trying to gauge how your life compares  
to that of your friends, co-workers, and that one girl you hate,  
but find so, very fascinating?

And you said you didn't have the money to go out that night.

I can hear the sound of coffee beans going through a grinder,

of that baby who I wish wasn't here,

of that ceramic cup that he just dropped,

over the song that is streaming through my earbuds.

I thought these were supposed to cancel out the sound of my surroundings?

Best Buy lied to me again.

And you said you didn't have the money to go out that night.

I feel the need to ask,

St. Anselm, how has he managed to take words,

all of which I comprehend as individuals,

and arrange them in such a way as to make it impossible for me to understand.

I have read the first, the second, and the third paragraphs three times now.

But I still have yet to gain any information from the text,

except, perhaps, that this saint would think me a fool.

And you said you didn't have the money to go out that night.

I've had too much coffee.

But if I'm going to make it through the rest of my assigned reading,

if I'm going to take the necessary notes,

if I'm going to get a head start on that incredibly daunting paper,

I'm going to have to drink some more.

I wonder if they offer free refills?

And you said you didn't have the money to go out that night.

I grab my mug, that mug I insisted on using because  
wasting another paper cup would likely leave me feeling  
as horrible as I did that time that

You said you didn't have the money to go out that night.

We both had just gotten paid that day.

I had ran into you at work that morning  
when we both were stopping by to pick up our checks.

You know that website, the one with the faces,  
the one that is useful when comparing?

I saw the pictures she posted on there.

The ones of you, and her,  
and that other her, as well as him.

You were holding a beer, you were at that place,  
that you told me you didn't have the money to go out to that night.

# Invisible

Verenice Sandoval





Rock Valley College

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