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MASTHEAD

No Tokens

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SWEAR NOT TO LOOK

by Okwiri Oduor

CHIBWIRE IS A GIRL of fourteen. She lives with her mother in 3F. Her mother owns the hovel down the road, where men huddle at dusk to listen to the stern staccato of tragedy on the nine o'clock news and to exchange spittle in the unwashed mouths of their brew mugs.

Chibwire's mother ferments millet all day and serves it all night, and so Chibwire is left to her own devices. The girl spends her days walking from house to house, peering through kitchen windows to see who has spread jam on their bread and who has eaten yesterday's cold ugali for breakfast.

Sarah sees Chibwire crossing the courtyard, and she says, "Akh!" even before Chibwire stands outside the kitchen window and rubs the glass with the bib of her dress and peers inside. Sarah says to Chibwire, "You have the manners of a mongoose."

People always say things like that to Chibwire. Once, she peered into the schoolteacher's window and the schoolteacher told her that she had the manners of a duck-billed platypus, and it was the most exhilarating thing that anyone had ever heard.

Chibwire says to Sarah, "Wah-wah-wah! You must be told what happened."

Again, Sarah says, "Akh!" but she does not throw a slipper at Chibwire and murmur, "Get out of here, you ruffian," like the other neighbours do.

On Sundays, Sarah takes out a sheet of newspaper and lines the sofa set so that Chibwire can sit on it with her filthy dress. Then she brings out a pitcher of tamarind juice and pours it into two plastic cups, and the juice is sour and they have to drink it with one eye fluttering open and shut.

Sarah says, "Go on then and tell me the thing that I must be told."

Chibwire says, "You have to come out and sit with me before I tell you the thing that you must be told."

Sarah puts away the yam which she had been scraping with a blunt knife. She opens the door and follows Chibwire into the courtyard.

Chibwire has a sticky ball of simsim in her pocket. She puts the entire ball of simsim in her mouth and breaks it with her teeth and spits it into her grimy palm and offers some of it to Sarah.

Sarah chooses the smaller piece. She wipes it against her dress first, and then she crushes the ball and arranges the tiny seeds in a straight line down the middle of her tongue. She watches as Chibwire sticks her tongue out to see if she can see the seeds. They look like dead sugar ants. They stick to her tongue, and she scrapes at them with the nail of her forefinger.

Chibwire touches her neck with her tongue. Her mouth stretches into a brazen cavern, and a glistening serpent emerges from it, slithering over the boulders of her lips, crawling over the chipped, granite wall of her chin, to the steep escarpment of her neck. Chibwire swallows a cloud of gnats, and she spits in the grass and rubs her tongue with the bib of her dress. Her fingers are clammy with saliva.

Nearby, Bahati from 2G is bent over her veranda, mopping, her buttocks jiggling inside her lessa. The writing on her lessa says: He who is not taught by Mother is taught by World.

Bahati talks to herself as she works. She says, "Haiwezekani! How can someone come to your house and bring you porcupine juice, as though porcupine juice sates anything but the appetite for porcupine juice? What about other appetites?"

She wrings her mop-cloth into a bucket of ochre-coloured water, and she hangs the mop cloth on the wash lines, and she scrubs her feet beneath the tap until her soles are as white as the pulp of a pear fruit. She hurls the dirty water across the courtyard. It splatters against the glass windows of neighbouring houses. Bahati rinses her bucket under the tap, then she waddles away, bucket beneath her arm.

They watch her disappear into the dark orifice of her house.

Chibwire says, "Let me just tell you! You see Bahati's man-friend? Yesterday, heh! He spent the day chewing miraa, my god. You know how when you chew miraa your thing does not work? Now he came home to her and she took off her dress for him, and he couldn't even raise a finger. You do not want to hear the bad names that they started calling each other! She called him, 'Makende,' and he called her, 'Kuma.'"

Chibwire curls her tongue, relishing the taste of her own vulgarities. Sarah slaps the girl's wrists. "You, don't speak such mud loudly, people will hear!"

They watch as Kadogo strolls down the street. Kadogo is a thirteen-year-old housemaid. She lives in house 2A, and works for Mama Boi. Mama Boi is called Mama Boi, even though she does not have any children. She is called Mama Boi because she likes to talk about Boi, the boy-child she will give birth to one day.

Boi will eat potato chips and Coca-Cola every day for supper, and he will read only the pretty Ladybird storybooks. Boi's mouth will not hold the curdled taste of Swahili words in them, and he will be above playing with the dirty little ruffians of Kinshasa Street. Boi will be a half-American child, and if not, then a half-British child, and if not, then concessions will have to be made to allow him be half-Indian or Chinese or Arab.

Chibwire watches Kadogo for a few moments, then lowers her voice to a conspiratorial tone. She says to Sarah, "You know what happened this morning? Mama Boi counted the stew and found twelve pieces of meat instead of fifteen. Also, one potato was missing. So Kadogo is not being paid for this month. This morning I saw her in the kitchen, crying monkey tears."

Kadogo throws a rock at Chibwire. "Stop gossiping, mango head."

Across the street, a woman huffs as she climbs off the back of a bicycle. Beneath her right arm, a chicken is smothered, gasping for air.

Chibwire says, "My god, look at the size of that woman's melons."

Kadogo, who has ambled closer and now sits with Chibwire and Sarah, says, "Wah, those are not even melons. They are potato sacks. Do you think she sleeps on her back, with those slung over the headboard?"

Chibwire pulls at the bib of her dress and peers down her chest. She says, "I swear, Bible red! When mine grow, they shall be oranges."

"Why oranges?"

"Oranges fit well in a man's hand. Pawpaws ripen too soon, and they squiggle and leak and take the shape of anything they can find. Melons, where will someone find a sling to carry their melons inside? Just look at that woman, dragging hers on the ground."

Sarah says, "Who has been filling your head with such mud?"

Chibwire and Kadogo laugh.

The sky is the colour of the insides of someone's eyelids. The sun is a dried, wispy leaf, and it is gently blowing down to the ground. Children stamp on it with their bare feet as they race down the street, saying to each other, "The last person to touch the red gate is the wife

of Mr. Frog."

The breeze is hot, and it flicks grit into people's mouths, and the grit knocks against the enamel of people's teeth and fizzles in their saliva. Chibwire spins coins in the soil, singing *Mwamba Mwamba*.

Her voice is a thin wire. It twists round and round, and in the end it breaks into two incongruent pieces. When her voice breaks, Chibwire has two voices, and she sings soprano with one voice and alto with the other. If you closed your eyes, you would think that there were two people singing.

Sarah imagines that the voice that has broken off is perched higher up Chibwire's head, and that it curls out in soft tendrils through Chibwire's ears.

Chibwire gets up to go, and Sarah clutches at the corner of her filthy dress. "Come back, you little wench."

"I have things to do."

"Oh, I know what things," Sarah says, rising to her feet. "That's enough spying through windows for a day. You follow me now, Chibwire. God knows when someone last scrubbed that grimy body of yours."

Chibwire's forehead crumples. "You are going to scrub me?"

"Well, your mother does not care enough to do it herself."

Chibwire throws Kadogo a furtive glance.

"What is it?" Sarah asks. Chibwire does not respond, and so Sarah turns her questioning eyes to Kadogo.

Kadogo says, "Chibwire is afraid that you will see her naked."

Sarah laughs. "Is that it? I won't even look."

"You will look. Everyone looks at nakedness every chance they get."

"Chibwire," Sarah says, placing a gentle hand on the girl's shoulder. "I will not look at your nakedness. The whole time I will just be bending, scrubbing the wrinkly skin between your toes or washing the soles of your slippers."

"Swear it."

Sarah licks her forefinger and holds it up. "Bible red!"

As they walk away, Chibwire says, "Kadogo told me that if someone touches you, people can tell just by looking."

"What do you think?"

"I think they can tell sometimes."

"Like when?"

"Like when someone touches your hair and rearranges the

braids, holding them up with rubber bands, everyone can tell. Or if someone touches your white dress with muddy fingers, everyone can tell. Or if you were eating and someone touched you by mistake, and they hit your elbow, and they made you miss your mouth, everyone can tell: they will see all the peas and cabbage and potatoes over the front of your dress.”

“And when can’t someone tell just by looking?”

“Well, if you were in the bus and the conductor touched your shoulder and said to you, ‘Pesa, madam?’ How could anyone tell then that the conductor had touched you? Does the conductor leave finger-shaped holes in the shoulder pads of your dress? Or if you were walking down the street and you met a friend of yours and you exchanged a high five, how could anyone tell that your friend had touched you? Could someone take your palm and study it and say, ‘This is where your fingerprints smudged when your friend’s hand slammed into yours?’”

Sarah pours hot water into a basin, and the two of them stand naked in the little bathroom with the rotten, rat-chewed door.

“Turn around, Chibwire,” Sarah says. She flattens her palms against the girl’s back, spreading soap in circular motions, making thin white paths that lead down to her buttocks. Chibwire’s flesh is supple, like warm plasticine. It bends and folds under Sarah’s hand, and if she squeezes it with her slippery fingers, it takes the shape of a banana or an avocado or a brew mug.

Later they sit on Sarah’s bed and towel each other and spread coconut oil on each other’s legs, and Sarah rolls a pair of white socks up Chibwire’s thighs. Sarah holds Chibwire for a few minutes, both of them naked save for the socks.

Sarah’s hand is limp on Chibwire’s waist and Sarah’s chin is soft on Chibwire’s shoulder. For a few moments, Sarah does not smell the harshness of Imperial Leather or the sickly sweet odour of coconut oil. All she smells is the gauziness of smiles dismantled from faces, smiles placed on footrests, next to metal tea cups with chinks in their corners, next to rag dolls and tightly wound dreams.

Sarah sits up. Her breasts are pressed down hard against her stomach, her nipples aligning themselves with her distended navel. Those nipples, they are puckered, sad nipples, like little grieving faces. They are surrounded by rings as wide and as chapped as the tobacco-singed mouths of men who must have loved her once.

“Chibwire,” Sarah says. “You would tell me if someone touched you, wouldn’t you?”

Chibwire says nothing.

Sarah unfolds a clean dress. She holds it up against the light, studying the macramé of patches, studying the flaps of fabric stretched over holes, like Elastoplast over a cut. The dress looks as though it has hit itself hard, as though there is pus inside the cloth.

Sarah wiggles into the dress. She unfolds another dress, one whose fabric is softer, sinfully softer, like the copper hair that falls over cobs of maize in the garden. She pulls it over Chibwire’s head. A pin scratches the small of Chibwire’s back.

“Turn,” Sarah says, and when Chibwire does, Sarah pulls the zipper up until it pinches the back of Chibwire’s neck.

They sit on the doorstep and eat dried fish and ugali and listen to the death news on the transistor radio.

CONVENTO DA ORDEM DO CARMO: AN ODE

by Kay Cosgrove

Demise reveals time.
Look at the Carmelite Convent [the translator's chime]
look at what the 1775
earthquake did to its integrity. Nothing but what was now: an outline.
The walls: skeletons; the sky: a fine,
misty flesh. A kind
of testament to bare bones. A joy-ride
over human-made. Who knows what the Carmelites did inside?
Hide
and seek?
Write to their mothers?
If walls could speak...as the saying goes.

Dead dead dead, every last nun. Count down from ten, nine...
1775!

The 5000 books that did not survive
were read by 500 virgins who died
consumed by the moving earth AND the words
of classic psalms:
the hand of Jesus that gives
to the poor, the flies
sent in the plague. The cries
of children in black & white,
the cries
of virgins in brown & white
dresses, bee-hived
hair hidden in habits. Crystalline
beauties, oh-so-refined.

All the skeletons look identical, all the books, revised
to end in ashy ashes, they all fell, intertwined.

Their ghosts haunt the convent, supine
in stone: shrines.

NO TOKENS

THESE GREEN DAYS

After work
the first & the fifteenth

& here are your two eyes.
Have I told you?
We're drinking our green days.

The waiter keeps lists these days
and I've had more than enough.

We keep the apartment in order
the books placed two by two—

your pillow next to mine.

It's like the sound of the air conditioner
doing its job—

I had to write myself a note to figure it out,
the dishwasher turned on

& my thinking the steam was a fire,
not a fairy tale.

We're indistinct & loud on the platform
these days which are
"moving us for 100 years."

I sing the song
of the mojitos we drink

& we still are
new like March

money just enough
please leave it on the bar.

The crossed arms of so many young women waiting
to be pleased.

They're all me,
all of them.

SO NICE YOU FOLLOW

by Joseph Riippi

There is a stage. Two chairs. A shared table or stool set between.

*Enter VERSO (30 years, male) stage right with bottle of champagne in hand.
Enter RECTO (30 years, female) stage left with champagne flutes.*

VERSO and RECTO enter and touch in the middle where they meet. They smile at each other, clearly in love, clearly made for each other. They then separate to their chairs. Other than the slight gestures to the other as noted, VERSO and RECTO do not acknowledge the other on stage. VERSO is self and RECTO is self. It's as if when one is speaking, the other cannot hear.

VERSO begins unwrapping bottle of champagne as RECTO speaks.

RECTO

FRIENDS, a couple of them, two couples, actually, visited from the city this past weekend. It was so nice. Nearly midnight when they arrived, but still so nice. We stayed up till past three a.m. drinking and talking. I don't really remember what about. They're the sort of friends we can just talk with, drink with, sit. Time passes happily. The kind of friends people have on television. You understand. Surely. You do. Since we moved here we haven't really been able to find many television friends. Everyone seems to be too much older. I think my husband over there (*gestures to VERSO, who is finishing unwrapping the top of the champagne*) likes it better than I do. It's easier for the men here. They hunt and shoot and talk trucks and ammo and from the age of thirty onward that doesn't much change. So nice for them, I guess. (*VERSO uncorks the champagne with a pop and proceeds to fill the flutes*). A man of sixty and a man of forty may as well be brothers if they're standing next to a pickup. It's like grease is in their blood. But it's harder for a woman. If you don't have children, it's damn hard. They're not "just-thinking-about-it" mothers or "maybe-one-more" mothers. Those were the women I was drawn to in Brooklyn. But here they're all those "honest-to-god-I-know-my-way-around-a-nutrition-label-and-let-me-tell-you-something-about-the-amount-of-fiber-a-four-month-old-should-be-eating-goddammit" kind of mothers. I don't have much to offer in that conversation. (*VERSO hands RECTO a glass of champagne which she takes across the center with a very brief smile*). Conversations like that make me feel like I don't have much to offer in general. None of my friends in the city had kids yet. We weren't old enough. But here they all do and I only end up saying something stupid. Like about how our dog wakes us up at night, too. Like about how puppies can make a bigger mess than a baby. But no one seems to care or believe me. Except him. He's so nice.

VERSO

(WITH full flute of champagne in hand, sipping occasionally.) We moved here from Park Slope a couple months ago. It was a good move. Just up the river, beyond the major trains. The country's freer than the city. The air is cleaner. The smells are cleaner. You follow? Even the smell of shit smells like cleaner shit. People don't realize that. People say there're so many more experiences in the city. But they're talking about different things. Here I can walk half a mile and pet a cow if I want to. I can birth a cow if I want to. Smell the clean shit. I can walk outside, cut down a tree, chop it up and heat my house, you know? My wife gets colder than I do so I try to keep the house at seventy-eight. Here, I can drive for miles and not stop. Think about that. THINK about that. I can drive for miles and not pass a single other car. Not a single truck. Just birds and places where birds probably are if I looked. When was the last time you were in a car that went for miles and didn't stop or see another car? You follow what I'm getting at? The truth of it is, you haven't. But you want to, don't you. Don't you. You do. You know you do. Roll the window down. Smell the cows. The shit. Light a cigar. Shoot a gun at the fucking sky. Go exploring. It's fucking fantastic. This life is fucking fantastic if you let it be.

RECTO

I should say that I love our house. I do. It's just so nice! I mean, just look at this. The corners, the moldings. The gutters. I love it. I absolutely do. So nice. And I was the one who said it's the space that matters, not the location. A good kitchen is what matters, a big fridge, storage. You should see my stove. It's an incredible range. My husband installed it himself. Top of the line. The kind of stove rich people install and ignore or hire someone for. Someday I'm going to make incredible—*(a brief pause as she struggles to think of something)*—somethings for us. Meals that require sewing. Sewing up birds, you know? Elaborate lace-like meals. Meals like surgery. Like crochet. Life savers.

VERSO

(REFILLING his glass, topping off hers). We have a wine cellar. Show me a two-bedroom in Carroll Gardens with a fucking wine cellar. In Cobble Hill. In Boerum Hill. Anyone says different is full of that shittier smelling shit. You follow me?

RECTO

I'LL admit I was scared of the town. I mean, it looked so nice in the sunshine, but then later. Anyway. We drove out to this house and my husband loved it right away. Made of stone. Built in the 1700s. I said something to the agent about haunted houses and she laughed and said all the ghosts are dead, so don't worry. It took me a second to realize she was joking. And we're not really in town. We're not even really all that close to town. But we do have a wine cellar, which is nice. You can't get that in Brooklyn. My husband kept saying that. You can't get this shit in Brooklyn, he said.

VERSO

I wish the kitchen was bigger. That's one thing I'd change. We've got a beautiful range, but you can always use bigger cabinets. More space. A freezer for venison, a side of beef, you know? Seems like that's probably a good idea. Maybe a place under the house like in those suburban homes on television. A space to crawl around in the foundation and look at the pipes, a place to hide things, to inspect and make sure everything underneath us is solid. It must feel good to inspect a crawlspace like that. To make sure everything's good and right. A good place to store metal tools.

RECTO

OUR mailman has to make a special trip for us. I get a kick out of that. (*Short pause, she takes a drink*). He doesn't wear a uniform. That was a surprise. He's just a man in a jeep with the steering wheel on the right side. Not even a real US mail truck. A British mail truck. (*She takes another drink. VERSO reaches and refills her glass again*). He told me his name when we first met, but I can't remember it now. He and my husband chat sometimes, shoot guns together. It's so nice that he's made friends.

VERSO

FIRST week we moved in I set up a couple targets out on the hill. I hadn't been shooting much in Brooklyn. Not with the fun guns, at least. Fun guns need open space. Fun guns aren't allowed on the range. The last owner'd left a bunch of clay flower pots under the deck and I figured they were as good as anything to shoot at. So I filled them with dirt, set them sideways into the hill like little fox hollows. I had the luger out. Was about to switch to the seventeen when a guy in a British jeep drove up. He shouted howdy, said we were the new owners. Said it, didn't ask, you follow? Said he knew the previous ones and asked if he could shoot, too. I said, You shoot? He said, Always wanted a luger like that but my wife won't have handguns in the house. I showed him what I had and we shot for a bit. Turned out he was the mailman. Wasn't wearing a uniform or anything. Good guy. My wife came out, heard the voices, said hello. Told me later it was nice to get to know the mailman. Said it felt small-townie and good. "So nice," she said. She says that a lot. When she went back into the house I saw she was wearing her old college sweatpants with writing on the ass and the mailman's eyes were following it and then he smiled at me like he was jealous. *(Slight laugh.)* I know I shouldn't but I have to admit I liked that. And I'll tell you what – I know we're in the middle of nowhere, but I like that we're in a place where someone like the mailman isn't so concerned with his job that he can't take a moment to have a shoot. Take a break and chat before giving us our bills and checks and advertisements.

RECTO

So, like I was saying, we had some of our best friends from the city come out for a visit. I was so looking forward to it, kept picturing it in the days leading up. We'd make a nice big pork roast, the house would fill with smell. And we'd catch up on what was happening in Brooklyn, take a walk through the woods, show them the cattle farm, the creek. It'd be so nice. Maybe I'm sounding sad, or maybe this is wrong, but I was excited to have people to talk to other than my husband. *(She takes a long, deep breath.)* I mean people to talk to without having to work so hard. Sometimes it's nice to take a break from having to try so hard. Trying so fucking hard to find a middle ground, you know? *(She sniffs a little and catches herself. VERSO is finishing glass of champagne during RECTO's last sentence. RECTO reaches across with bottle to refill her husband's glass as he is speaking.)* I mean, I said I'd follow him anywhere. I did. I said it and meant it. And I do want to be here. I do.

VERSO

THE most personal we ever got with the mailman in Brooklyn was during the holidays. When he – or she, see, I can't even remember – would leave that holiday greeting card in the box. You know the one. Happy holidays and a self-addressed envelope for our convenience to send back our own holiday greetings with a twenty or a couple twenties inside. That's something I never really understood. Tipping the mailman. We didn't have a doorman, but I do understand why you would tip a doorman. There are degrees of service you get from a doorman. Like a waiter. A waiter or a doorman can do a job, and do it really well, or not so well. There are degrees of good. There are no degrees of good with the mail. You either completed the delivery, or didn't. You either did your job, or didn't. A tip in Brooklyn would be like saying, "Thank you for not bending our photos, for not doing a shitty job." A tip should be, "Thank you for doing more than your job. I am paying you this tip because you did more than you had to." (*Shakes head.*) Now out here the mailman'll do some shooting with you. He'll shoot the shit, be a friend, earn a degree. A mailman can't do that in Brooklyn. Too many mailboxes to fill, too much shitty shit to do, no good shit to shoot. No time for relationships. Same old shit all over the borough.

RECTO

THE first week we were here my husband spent most of his time outside. Said he wanted to understand the well, the cellar, placement of the property lines. He would leave early and disappear into the cold. Then we would talk in the evenings about finding room for a meat freezer. He would talk about hunting, mention tracks or trails he'd seen during the day. I stayed inside most of that first week. It was warm, I wanted to get the kitchen set up, my office set up. We didn't see much of each other except the evenings that first week, when we were both exhausted, me buried in a book and him in a bourbon. From my reading chair I could look out the window to where the stars were beautiful, like snow falling, it looked so nice but it was freezing, too cold for snow. I suppose I wanted it to snow because I was lonely. I had this picture of us raising our kids in this house, and while I was imagining snow I imagined rolling torsos for a family of snowpeople, making faces with carrots and coal. But it wasn't snowing. Our internet wasn't hooked up yet. I read books I'd read already, listened to my husband go on and on, tried to let a little of his happiness rub off on me. I keep wondering when the house will start to smell like us and not the people who lived here before.

But if You Tame Me,
Then We Shall Need Each Other

Katie Mayfield

Read the rest of *SO NICE YOU FOLLOW* in
No Tokens Issue 2

“Just that,” said the fox. “To me, you are still nothing more than a little boy who is just like a hundred thousand other little boys. And I have no need of you. And you, on your part, have no need of me. To you, I am nothing more than a fox like a hundred thousand other foxes. But if you tame me, then we shall need each other. To me, you will be unique in all the world. To you, I shall be unique in all the world...”

- Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*

They like to kill him on red velvet floors in restaurants while the diners turn and gasp, on long piers at the edges of coastal towns where it's so midnight his blood is dark blue, in deserts where the only shape is snakeskin, his lips cracking white as the cameras watch.

Today, it's electrocution. James Dean sits backstage and drinks his thermos of tomato soup, knocks his fingernails against the enamel. The director, Natalie, isn't ready for him yet, which is fine, because James Dean is reading Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, and not that he's ashamed or anything, but he's a little ashamed. It's not even his copy, but it reminds him of before, of Indiana and the farm, of skinning his knuckles climbing over fences, so long ago in his life that the pain was real. He didn't even have to try for his mother to find him, turning over his hands in hers to wash off the grit in the kitchen sink. All the blood kept inside and if his father wasn't home, they'd pick out a cassette and tap-dance.

Jimmy, she'd say to him, you're so good.

This is before LA. No Natalie yet, just his mother, and because of his mother, his father. Going to church most nights of the week to watch the preacher grip arms and necks and reel his voice like a fishing line across the room until it ripped the cancer out of bodies. His mother read *The Little Prince* inside her Bible, and he could lean into her shoulder during the hymns. When she was led up to the front of the room to be healed, she told James she loved him, touching his cheek, and went.

She'd fallen the day before, and he found her in the kitchen on her back, dress spread out along the linoleum, haloed by shelled peas and pieces of ceramic. Her hands were crossed over her chest, gaze fixed on the slowly moving ceiling fan, before he said her name, Mama, and her eyes met his.

"Just give me a moment," she told him. "I'll be up in a moment," but it had taken an hour, at least, and James sat with her in the shelled peas and rolled them under his palm. She told him not to be scared, and not to

call his father.

In church now, the holy spirits swarmed around her and sank into her bones. She didn't shudder like the others had. She didn't faint. James Dean held *The Little Prince* inside her Bible as the preacher yelled and paced, James Dean's father not breathing next to him. His mother was alone with the preacher at the front of the room, congregation watching. James could feel the pages inside the pages inside the Bible. His mother stood very still. The yelling didn't pull holy ghosts down to move her, to shake her, but she had fallen the day before, and maybe they knew, he thought, and were trying to be kind. She held her arms out as if offering to be guided out of the room, but didn't move beyond her own lift. Fix her, James Dean thought, fix her.

Later in LA, unfolding *The Little Prince* from the Bible, she slept more and longer, moving between the stories and he wished his voice wasn't so light, so reedy. Even now he remembers the exact softness of her body, the feel of her skin in sleep, pain sweating onto the chenille bedspread. He was too young to ask what was wrong, and his father and the doctors wouldn't tell him, but it was too late to do anything, too late even to go back to Indiana. He didn't understand, missed the farm, missed tap-dancing, missed church, missed his mother in anticipation as she'd say, waking up with her voice pooling in the back of her throat, "Jimmy, come here," leaning over to reach for him, and he'd crawl onto the bed just to feel the texture of the blanket shift against his cheek as she breathed.

She had a softcover edition, all the paper used enough to become tender, to shred a little if you touched too much. The copy he's reading is from the props department, a hardback with a smooth white cover and marbled paper inside, something Natalie spreads around the rooms they film in to make a home for his characters, to make a life he can die inside. The clarinets and animal statues and window shades and fishing rods and sheepskin and

knives and the stage light resting its face hot on his.

There's barely any fake blood on this copy, just little red blots of fingerprints here and there. Last week, James Dean was stabbed twice in a library. He bled to death against the medical encyclopedias, and there was blood everywhere by the time they wrapped, which sucked because corn syrup dries sticky and gets on fucking everything.

His throat hurts, and it must be the cold outside, the sunset closing down for the night. He can still feel her hands, how light they were as she considered how they fit against his neck. He shouldn't have come in early, and, see, he knows this. Natalie was onstage, pleated cotton skirt blooming out around her as she painted out a scene six weeks in advance. James Dean came over to watch. Heavy white paper cut rough around the edges, pencilled strangulation scene filling in with color. Her brush was resting on the shoes, a close-up mid-storyboard, color creeping up the toes. Pink paint wrapping around her hands and arms from the characters' skin. Natalie looked up at him from the middle point of her skirt, legs hidden, hands layered in light pinks and folded against the starch.

In her painting, James Dean wore a corduroy jacket.

In life, he wore a denim one.

"Take it off," Natalie said, and her eyes, he thought, were resting somewhere along the underside of his chin. "Take it off and stay a while," and so he did, kneeling down within the perimeter of her skirt, knees crushing the carefully ironed folds and darts.

"Do you want to practice?" Natalie asked, and her voice was regretful, even now, even as he said yes, leaned forward, shrugged off the jacket to let the spare paint bleed into its collar. She was already reaching for him, arms out and soft dark hair letting go of its curls to fall across her face. It was cold in the theatre, he realized.

"It's like this," Natalie said, and set her finger-

nails against James Dean's throat, not even any pressure yet, and then just barely. "This is what he's going to do. He's going to put his hands around your neck, just like this," and her hands compressed to emphasize, "but not all that much," and her hands relaxed, "but," she said, palms sinking down into his throat as together they listened to his breath narrowing into a single point, "a little more, a little more, and then—James," she said, distressed, because he was coughing.

He never went as silently as she wanted, without resistance, tears, coughing, just dropping down like a coin through water, face serene and noble for the cameras, but he was still coughing, trying not to, trying to twist his throat back to normal. His knees still pinned Natalie's dress to the floor, and her legs shifted underneath it, until he got up and she doubled it back so it wouldn't get into the paint like his jacket had. She leaned back on one hip, bare knees raw against the stage floor as she said, voice so soft, "It just looks better on camera if you don't struggle so much."

He wanted to know how much he could struggle.

"Not as much as you have been," she said. "People get uncomfortable."

"I'm trying," he said.

"Did I hurt you? I didn't—I never want to—"

Her pleated cotton was creased as she touched his back and he tried to overcome his breathing even then. He was fine, but she had to be sure, and her hand on his chest rose and fell.

"You're fine," she said, and of course he was, so he cleared his throat one last time, pulled away from her and stood up. Natalie got to her feet, smoothing the wrinkles from her skirt, and looked at him in that tender way he absolutely hated.

"It's going to be like that," she told him. "Just like that," and started pinning back pieces of her hair. He didn't move, watched her as she stepped into her moccasins, crushing the heels, balled up the stockings she'd

taken off to paint, and pocketed them. Paint was flaking off her arms.

He wanted to ask who was doing the strangling, whose hands if not hers, if only to be able to tell himself where the bolts of pain should hit and when. You didn't always know the style people had, but all of them took it seriously. Some of the people who killed him were soft, almost remorseful about it, but they killed him all the same. Some people were shuttered up the entire performance, and it was more painful, sometimes, if they forgot and slipped and maybe their hands started coming down too hard, but you didn't break character. You could never break character. Natalie was only ever Natalie, and she'd turned back to him now, pink lipstick smudged across her mouth.

"James—," she began, but he didn't want to be reassured again, couldn't be reassured again without pulling away and upsetting her, and so had gone off to find a book.

Right now as he reads, the narrator is dying of thirst, which is comforting in that it's never happened to James before, and he hasn't had to act like it has. Would be too long a film, probably, or maybe they could do a time-lapse thing, but he has a feeling their viewers wouldn't go for that. You get used to a person dying after a while, Natalie says, too familiar, and by the time they go there's no shock left.

But what if they don't want the shock?

Then they wouldn't watch the movies we make, Natalie tells him, like it's obvious.

James Dean wants to touch the narrator's face and tip some water into his mouth, watch him swallow, but that's only him, not the people who watch his movies. He doesn't like to think about them when he's in the process of dying, or even when he's dead, eyes closed and listening to his cause of death walk away with quiet steps.

Every time he dies, he thinks, this is it, this is it, and closes his eyes and hopes. It's only afterwards,

when Natalie says cut, and the lights dim back down and he sees her, that he thinks of the audience at all.

The narrator is dying of thirst, and the story always finishes too soon, or maybe not soon enough. James Dean wants to dig the book into his own throat until it bruises, but he can't, of course, because he doesn't get choked to death for two weeks yet, and it upsets the makeup artists if he gives them anything extra to work with. He turns the page and drinks more tomato soup, taps the enamel for nickels of sound. He should be going over his lines for today, be professional about it so Natalie doesn't despair, but the script is folded up under his jacket in the dressing room, and anyway he wants to read. James Dean's fingers move from the enamel to the spine of the book. He wants to cup the back of a head, bring water to cracked lips in a desert without snakes.

He's not weak. He's not. James Dean can be all square shoulders and cigarettes that match the white of his teeth, all slow downturned eyes and hands in his pockets, and when he dies your heart is going to break. He dies as a teenager a lot of the time, vulnerable in a jean jacket, pale open throat, and it's disgusting, he thinks, wanting to watch this. It's low. It's a mess.

The fake blood is a given, dripping down and matting his eyelashes together and drying into his cuticles dark red. And then there's the makeup and prosthetic noses and chins and splintered furniture and hair dye and names and torn, stained clothing of all the characters he dies wearing. Natalie loves his work. You're really beautiful, she says, just after it happens, because that's when they miss you the most.

When she says things like this he wants to stop, wants to keep his eyes closed after the take and just lie there until the camera gives up and the crew leaves, and even Natalie, even if she were to shake him, and even if she were to cry, he wouldn't move, he thinks. Wouldn't even breathe until the last light shut off, but instead, Natalie writes the next character's obituary and hands it

to him along with a brand new script. He's her favorite actor.

Maybe it's like bullfighting. He went with his father once, the summer after what happened to his mother happened to his mother; he must have been ten. It's a surprise, his father told him. You're going to love it. They drove down to Texas from LA, and it was fun, being near his father for so long, watching the towns and fields skim by, picking out candy from fluorescent dioramas of convenience stores. They got there, and he followed his father up the aluminum stands, sweating under the collar of his shirt. Even after he saw the animal, it took him almost a full minute to realize what was going on, and then James Dean couldn't get up, not with his father right there and yelling encouragement. He sat and concentrated on the summer heat creeping down the back of his shirt. He did not listen to how the crowd yelled, how they moved in unison, watching protected in their seats, or to the sounds the animal made, which he was sure he could hear. They sat high in the stands. James Dean stared at men's backs, how their arms pulled their shirts tight across their muscles, the deep sunburn in their necks.

The animal gave up after a while, lying down in the center of the arena. Barbs wrapped in bright yarn bobbed where they dug into its back, forced its neck to hang low, and the animal looked surprised that its head was suddenly so heavy. The crowd was yelling.

It wasn't until the end of the fight that his father realized James Dean was crying, and as they filed out he didn't look at him, didn't speak to him, until the doors of the truck were closed behind them and he asked, What's wrong with you? What's wrong?

Can we just go home? James Dean had asked. Daddy, please? and it wasn't until halfway back that he realized his father was crying, too.

James Dean has never met anyone who's admitted to watching snuff films, but he wonders if they do it alone, or if they do it in crowds.

He glances over at Natalie, who's sitting back in her director's chair with her long legs kicked out in front of her, moccasins off again. Her family helped revive the snuff film industry, but she doesn't like to talk about it. Her parents directed and she acted, and the last time she put her hands around his neck, she'd said, This is what my mother taught me.

He'd started to say her name, but that was when she pressed down.

By the time James Dean had gotten recruited to snuff films, Natalie was just getting out of acting. They had one scene together, his first and her last. He'd had to drown her. Killing was easier, Natalie told him. Getting killed took finesse. You had to make people care about you. Even in the context of the film, as they waited for you to die, it had to hurt them. You have to create that moment, she said, that knowledge that you're leaving them soon, and they'll never see you again. They want to miss you.

"Your character," he said.

"They'll never see your character again."

She had been hiding, backed into the corner of the dressing room in a bathrobe patterned in roses. He remembers her chapped hands, the sweat on her forehead stringing her hair together, how every breath sounded heavy, like she was trying to save it up. When he took a step forward a tray of eye shadow snapped under his boot, and they both jumped.

He asked her what was wrong.

Her mother had stippled kohl into her eyelashes so it would run in the bath, and Natalie said, "I'm so afraid of drowning. I'm so afraid."

"You're afraid?"

"I've always been afraid of it."

"I don't have to do it."

"Yes, you do."

Yes, he did. He felt responsible for her, and then embarrassed by the feeling.

“But then why are your parents—?”

“It’s more genuine this way.” Her face was blotchy and her jaw kept clicking. “If I’m actually afraid. They say. And it’s just pretend, James. That’s all it really is.”

Natalie, who then was still Natalia Nikolaevna (a name she told him around her character’s false teeth), was sitting against the bathtub later, hair up in a towel and her old-fashioned bathrobe tied around her waist. She turned to James Dean, who was still shell-shocked after holding her under take after take, her hands grasping at his sleeves, tearing into the soft parts of his arms, jostling water onto the front of his shirt. James Dean, who had more than anything wanted just to let go, to let her up and get her a goddamn towel already, and had been about to when Natalie finally let herself go limp and her parents said cut. Natalie turned to him and asked him to stay. Her voice sounded abraded from where his hands had been. His shirt was soaking wet.

“I can’t kill anyone anymore,” he told her. “I just can’t do it.”

“It’s fine,” Natalie told him. “You won’t have to.”

Natalie’s looking between the stage and her scrapbook of obituaries, considering. She doesn’t particularly relish Ford’s, the theatre where they work—it’s old and a family of bats lives above the catwalks and the whole thing is maybe a second away from being condemned—but the rent is cheap and the acoustics are surprisingly good. There aren’t a lot of other actors in this city, or maybe there’s just not a lot of theatre, but it doesn’t really matter because it doesn’t take that many to make a film like this. Just him and Natalie and the cause of death and their skeleton crew.

Natalie has exactly the sense of humor you’d expect. She keeps a scrapbook of obituaries for all the people who live and die inside their films. Howard Lipinski, a scientist researching rare skin conditions at a New York library, was the one who died two weeks ago

against the medical encyclopedias. He liked whiffle ball and collected arrowheads, and is survived by a wife and young daughter, which is the worst part.

“Think of them when you’re dying,” Natalie had told James Dean beforehand, arranging Howard Lipinski’s carefully pressed white lab coat over his shoulders as his wife might have done that morning before he went to work. “Just before he stabs you, think of your wife. Her name is Adeline, and she owns a laundromat with her sister. Think of your daughter, Mazie, who will grow up to be a veterinarian and who will miss you every day for the rest of her life. Just before he stabs you, and after, and after, think of them.”

She tucked some pens into his pocket, smoothed loose strands back into his gelled hair.

“They won’t care, though, will they?” James Dean had asked, uneasy although he couldn’t say why. “The audience, I mean. They just want to watch someone die.”

“Now listen, don’t be so anonymous. The audience doesn’t know them, but you do.”

“What’s going to happen to them, after?”

Natalie paused, looked up at him. “After what, Jimmy?”

“After I die.”

She smiled at him. “They’ll be in the obituary. You can visit them, I promise.”

Today, his name is John Booth, an homage to some actor who played Hamlet here a million years ago. The plain name doesn’t suit Natalie’s usual scripts—her tastes tend towards pulp—but he can feel it echoing his own, and he wonders if John Booth, whoever he was, grew up on a farm, too.

Natalie has drawn out the scene in that inaudible [indelible?] way she always does, the stills of John’s death done up in soft grey inks pinned to the wall backstage. Natalie likes to paint, and she does it well. John is tied to a chair, and while his shoulders and back are rigid, legs straining against the rope, his face is ex-

pectant. Eyes unfocused, head tipped, lips parted, and James Dean wants to pull his shoulders up against the expression alone: one straight ahead stare, so the audience can watch his pupils contract.

John Booth wears tight jeans and scuffed boots. He has knobbly ankles and rumpled hair and a stained undershirt under his red jacket and, according to his obituary, a brother. James Dean turns back to his book, and he wants to take water and tip it into the narrator's mouth, rest his fingertips on the narrator's neck and let his Adam's apple push them up as he swallows. Natalie climbs onto the stage and pivots the chair he'll be tied to so it faces the cameras. The narrator stays in the desert with his plane and watches *The Little Prince*.

It's just—it's just that he hates getting electrocuted, or anyway acting as if he's getting electrocuted. Not that it should bother him, but it's not elegant the way you can pretend being shot is elegant: your hands clutched over the traveling color and the pain you tell yourself is there, letting red stream out of your mouth as you look up at the other person and ask them why, or sometimes how, as in, How did you get in here? Sometimes, it's not why or how, but more of a How could you? (Half-screamed, let your voice drag over the vowels, that's right, Jimmy, let the accent come out just like that) as you slump down against the elevator walls and slide wet handprints down the buttons so that when your eyes finally close and your breathing stops all the floors are lit up. When Howard Lipinski died, he just said Stop.

Being electrocuted, it's unsettling, and James Dean should know; he's done it twice. You make your body seize up tight, elbows and knees lit up tight by some abstract current. You can't move as you die, not as you would, and James Dean hates it. Natalie is set on it. Torture is too common, she says, and people are used to it. They both know how he can scream, and what he can say, and how his body can flinch back from all the instruments she writes into the scripts. So why not, says Natalie, we'll make it

into something different. She'd wrinkled her forehead and smiled like she was doing this for him, and James Dean suggested the whole bathtub-and-toaster scenario, but she'd started making her betrayed faces at him again so he had to stop.

Natalie adjusts the chair one last time before she tells him they're ready for him, so he folds down the page (they're a chapter away from finding the well) and goes to the center of the stage to let her put the ropes on. The chair is all threadbare plush with slashes across its back and seat, velvet flaking off to settle on the tops of his boots. It's the kind of chair you could believably tie someone to and then electrocute them in; he has to give Natalie that, at least. She ties his left wrist down, then his right, before catching sight of his hair and clucking—John's, apparently, was never like this. She sets to rearranging, and over her shoulder he sees Tad amble over. Natalie has him in a studded leather jacket going tatty at the edges, her particular shorthand for evil, as well as an expertly applied beard. James Dean has to choke down a laugh. Tad, who's too tall with his arms all stretched out and hanging down like he doesn't know what to do with them, can somehow pull it off. It might be the eye makeup.

"Heya Jimmy," says Tad. He's got one of those easy voices, companionable and low, and despite how thin he is, he's good-looking, and it's such a shame he has a girlfriend he's devoted to. He asks James Dean who he's supposed to be today, and James Dean tells him John, just John. Natalie finishes tying his ankles down.

To Tad, "So what do I call you today?"

Tad shrugs a shoulder and zips his jacket up a little higher. "Don't have to call me anything today; I'm just the cause of death."

James Dean nods, but he hates that. Natalie does that sometimes when she wants more spontaneity in the scene, lets other people decide when James Dean dies, but it makes him anxious, not knowing exactly when. If he's

the one dying, he thinks, he should get to know, get to imagine what it will be like and plan. The other person just leans in sometime and says it, The End, and James Dean has to let himself go still, and even if he won't, even if he can't, he has to.

He's surprised it's Tad this time, though. Tad is usually one of the bodies, like him, not one of the causes. They have the same look, and sometimes they even die together. Sometimes they're even the same person, just quick-cuts back and forth in time, the before and the after. When they die together it's usually Tad who goes first, because the audience seems to like him less. James Dean has that movie star appeal, Natalie says even when he waves her off, but Tad has the soul for it.

She's walking Tad through where the electrodes go, gesturing over James Dean's body like she's passing out driving directions. Tad is listening like he always does, eyes narrowed, hands thinking in his pockets. Together they map out a grid, starting at James Dean's temples and moving down from there. Go left here, now right until he starts begging you to stop. Did you get everything?

Tad's local, studying history and politics just like his dad did. He plays college football and keeps chickens, Iowa Blues and Rhode Island Reds, and only works here when he needs the money, but he usually needs the money. James Dean wonders what Tad tells people when they ask about his job, if his family knows, what he tells his girlfriend when he has a bad day at work, when he has to die dozens of times and Natalie sits by the cameras and frowns reassuringly and picks at the obituaries until some of them are half-shredded by the time they finish. James Dean asked Tad why he did it once, and Tad told him he liked acting.

"John," Natalie says, and her hands drop mid-direction. "Did you read your obituary?"

"Of course I read it, Nat. Of course."

"So tell me about yourself."

"I'm an actor."

"So much more than that, Jimmy Dean, so much more. You played Hamlet! And your brother the actor also played Hamlet, and you love him more than the entire rest of your family, you got it?"

"I got it."

"And he loves you, and every time you perform he's there in the audience, and he's watching you, and he's proud, and you feel warm right here—" she taps his chest so her heavy rings jar his collarbones, "—because you know that after the performance you'll go home together and eat mangos at the kitchen counter, and you love him."

"Mangos. That's for the obituary?"

"No, that's for you."

"All right."

"Think of your brother."

He opens his eyes as she steps off the stage and says, "Places."

They pick up the lines she's written for them, Tad first with the stage directions, jerking back John's jacket with fists clenched so tight the veins stand up, one hand around his neck as he tears the undershirt the costume department stained so carefully.

John looks up at Tad's face and tries to watch his real features shift under the beard and creams and clays and spirit gum, asks him what it is he thinks he's going to do.

"What do you think I'm going to do?"

James Dean loves Natalie like a sister even though she kills him at least twice a month, but goddamn her scripts are formulaic. Right now, they're at the questioning stage, where the body in the chair twists and pulls and sprains its muscles so the audience can see how alive it is, can study the tendons in James Dean's neck under John's skin.

"Let me go," John tries, but it's more of a gesture at protest than the real thing. Natalie has given him a slight southern accent. His fingernails dig into a layer of wood varnish.

"You want me to let you go? Do you think that's what I'm gonna do?"

Tad's voice is light, but when he turns his face back to John, James Dean can hear the sound tech spark the first faint hum of electricity. He looks around the room the script says he's been confined to for a week. John knows it well because James Dean helped lay the chilled floor with hospital-green tiles, mock up the rotting mosaics of paint peeled in layers off the wall. Sitting downstage with Natalie and her brushes last Saturday morning as they drank coffee and she'd nodded over to where he is right now, and told him that was where he was going to die.

The cause of death is leaning against the wall Natalie has sponged a constellation of mildew onto, and it auras out behind him in curving sections of black. His back touches one that looks almost like a planet, close to the stairs, which on one level lead to the catwalks but on another lead to a door.

"Please, I have to go. I have people who are going to be looking for me."

"No, no, you don't anymore."

"What? You don't know what you're saying. You don't—"

John and John's brother the actor are in an apartment or a trailer or a house or a houseboat, splitting the skin off a mango after the rush of a performance. John's brother the actor tells him that his soliloquy made him never want to leave, and when he gets closer to John he turns to him and there are no eyes in his face. Natalie never said what he looked like. He wonders if they look alike, if other people can tell they're related—

John Booth barely has a chance to consider this before the fist glances off his cheekbone, and before he can even register the pain James Dean knows John's makeup is smeared, but Natalie doesn't say cut, so they don't. Blood beats behind his eyes, and he could say stop, this isn't like rehearsal, Tad, you're actually hurting me,

but Tad's knuckles impact again, catching his jaw this time and making his teeth snap together on his tongue. Blood starts leaking between his teeth, and when Tad hits him again it's so hard that the chair rocks back on its hind legs. It's not John anymore, but James Dean who thinks of his head meeting the hard stage floor, all the bones parting and his mouth is bleeding, lips split, and Natalie isn't saying anything, and it hasn't been like this since after church in Indiana a few years ago, and not the preacher but his dad who grabbed him and said—

"The End," Tad says in his ear, but it isn't. John dies and doesn't think of his brother at all. James Dean's face is too hot underneath the painted bruises that Tad's knuckles have cut tracks through and spread across his face, and he can't even look up at Natalie when in a small, shocked voice, she says, "Cut," and hurries over.

"Tad," she says. "I didn't mean that hard." She's reaching out to James Dean, but she doesn't seem to want to touch him, holds her hands out instead like the angles from the cameras could connect them, and even if there were a dozen feet between them she could move her hand and he could lean into it, but the thing is, he doesn't. He stays where he is. Tad isn't saying anything, and it's hard to focus like this, everything working down into a half-daze and his heart knocking into his throat. Tad's breathing hard, and Natalie hesitates as she speaks, asking what happened to rehearsal, to the cues, and they barely have this space for another week, and you—she turns to James Dean—"and you died twenty minutes too early. And Tad, you didn't even try to touch the electrodes." James Dean knows Natalie is proud of the electrodes. She broke the knobs off three different stoves to make them.

And then it occurs to him: "Wait, what do you mean you didn't mean that hard?"

"James," Natalie says, "I just thought—" she draws out the word.

"Look, man," Tad is saying, leaning to untie the

ropes as he speaks. "I didn't mean to—"

"You're bad at dying," Natalie says. She's further away than she was.

And James Dean has to look up at that. "What?"

"Jimmy, you're a wonderful actor but you're bad at dying," Tad says, and his voice is gentle and low and wonderful and James Dean hates it. "I can always tell you're alive when I watch your films."

"Of course you know that I'm still alive. We all know that I'm still alive."

But with snuff films what the audience wants is accuracy. They want to believe that you live for as long as the story or until someone turns the screen off and the picture goes dark and you along with it. You insulate yourself around the lie like a pearl and put it in people's mouths, and it's beautiful because you're the only one in the world who knows it isn't real.

Natalie slips a hand into her pocket and draws out a tube of lipstick, reapplies it as she watches him. Pale pink, and James Dean can see her last layer underneath, smeared faintly across her skin. "Stay here," Natalie says finally, and walks offstage to get her mock-ups. The camera operator taps his fingers against the plastic, and they listen to the sound walk up to the ceiling.

Tad isn't saying anything. James Dean can feel his face starting to swell.

"Jesus," he says. "I can't believe you hit me."

"She wanted it to be believable for once when you died."

"Fuck you, I'm believable."

"No," and Natalie's back, paper spilling from her hands, voice sharp like he's never heard it before. "You think you are, but really, every time someone comes at you with a knife or you're drowning or whatever you make this face like you're taking on all the suffering of the human race, but you know what, Jimmy? When people die it isn't like that. When you die, you're scared."

"Nat—"

"And you're never scared enough when we shoot."

When they met, Natalie was sitting by the water in her mother's robe, trying to breathe.

They're both watching him expectantly, waiting for him to respond, and so he does the only thing he can: "Just get away from me."

"Jimmy." Tad's face changes. "Look, okay, I was trying to help. Thought I'd scare you a little and then maybe—"

"I'm just going to go. We can wrap tomorrow. I've got a thing."

James Dean hunches his shoulders against whatever Natalie calls after him and picks up his book and thermos and goes back to his dressing room and strips off as much of John as he can, shoes, jeans, jacket, shirt, and pushes his hands through the stage makeup so it smears across his face and sticks to his palms. He goes to the sink and by the time he's done washing John only lives under his fingernails. James Dean changes into his own clothes, a black turtleneck that belonged to his father and his mother's plasticky 1970s glasses. Puts them on and tells himself they make him feel safe.

He forgets *The Little Prince* on his dressing room table and only realizes it as he's leaving, but it's too far away to go back. He walks along the back hallway of Ford's. All the empty seats torn out of the theatre floor live here, because they had to make room for the cameras somehow. James Dean doesn't want to look at them as he closes the door.

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Read the rest of *But if You Tame Me*,
Then We Shall Need Each Other in
No Tokens Issue 2

SAY WHERE SHE IS

by Chelsea Bieker

SELENA'S FATHER BAGS GROCERIES at the Pac N' Save. His nametag reads Marcus but we call him Daddy Marc. Selena is good at making names for people. She has called me Colt since we compared underpants beneath a desk in second grade. I reminded her of a little horse crouched under there, she says, legs folded in, face long and still. My underpants had tiny horses all over, riled up on their hind legs and whipped by an even tinier blonde rider girl, but Selena doesn't tell that part. She tells the story different. Either way, the name stuck, and most people use it, though my mother will only refer to me by my Christian name, Briley.

Daddy Marc checks me out when I buy cereal for Mother, buttermilk and candied nuts, bags of semisweet chocolate chips. I won't eat any of it. In the three months Selena has been missing, I've lost twenty pounds I didn't have in the first place. My thinning has received many compliments, but Daddy Marc keeps his eyes on the cashier's screen, acting like I'm not before him, like I could be anyone at all.

That morning when I went to pick her up, I wore a light crinkled dress and it stuck to my back as I idled in her driveway. First period with sexy Fairfield and we didn't want to be late. But she wasn't home. No one was, not that I could see. I called and called her cell phone. I got out of the car and peeked in her little bedroom window. The blinds were drawn. I rang the doorbell. I walked around back and stood near the fig tree. I broke off a tiny branch and chewed it to rocky bits and spit it out in the dirt. A bald-spotted cat hopped on the fence and trotted along to the neighbor's property. She would never ditch Fairfield's class, I thought, having to pee sudden and desperate. We had waited all of high school to finally take senior lit with him.

I squatted on the side of the house and pissed and my ankles caught a mist of backplash. A breakfast noise, dishes shifting in the sink, came from inside and I jumped, cut off my stream and ran to the car for fear Daddy Marc had seen me with my panties around my an-

kles, making a wide dark circle on his side yard. I pictured what kind of scene he'd pull if he caught me as I slammed it out the driveway. He had a way of recalling our offenses when the night grew weary, as his eyes fell tired. He would make Selena sorry. I went to school alone, half-forgetting the reason I came, worried more about Daddy Marc's eyes on where they should never be.

A few days later her picture was up on every pole, in every shop window, people lighting candles on Shaw Avenue, those skilled at prayer communicating with God through microphones on the concrete stage of the town square. *Bring us our Selena, Lord, let her walk back into the arms of the community.* Girls who were jealous of her and talked shit on the regular stood misty-eyed with signs that read Save Selena. *We love you, girl.* They posed and were interviewed for the paper, answering questions in shrill voices, arms around each other's waists, holding hard.

The excitement still thrives, though the hunger of those first few weeks has died down. Then, even the stink-faced girl at the Mickey Ds went nice on me and gave me free fries I didn't eat, asked me how I was holding up.

They send out fewer search teams lately—everyone was certain her body would turn up in the Kerman Canal, where at least three small kids drown every summer—but no Selena, and now it's just the same group of die-hard community members, the ones who will march about anything. They don their Save Selena shirts and go into the fields over and over, angrier each time they return without her decomposing body. If you wear your shirt and you look field-weary, The Right and Rooster will give you a complimentary buffalo chicken salad. I have seen families in the parking lot change into their shirts before walking in, mothers forcing stiff cotton over toddlers' heads, spanking them hard when they cry that it is too hot, too hot. Selena's posters have faded in the sun. She remains in prayers, people claim, but I'm sure she's not first on their lists. I picture her body contorted in the trunk of a car. She is cut up, pieces of her floating in a shallow basin. But it's not real, can't be, so I have prayed to the Lord and wished to dream of her, to be gifted with vision. My best friend Selena, nowhere at all, but everywhere to me.

I never had a daddy, so Daddy Marc was it, I guess, by proxy, because

we were always hanging around Selena's house instead of mine. She said my mother depressed the shit out of her. My mother lies in bed and polishes the tiny glass cats she orders by the dozen off the Home Shopping Network. She divides them into families and puts them in tissue box homes each night so they can *get their rest*. They have tiny quilts with embroidered names. She laments my father, a man she barely knew, but thought she would be with forever. *He looked like Merle Haggard, Briley, like James Dean*. She hasn't left the house in three years. Without Selena to report to, though, I've lost the humor in it. What's funny about a woman who binds herself up in her old prom dress, straining seams down the back, and stays that way for days without taking a bath?

Selena's mother is gone a lot, working and sighing, too tired to make dinner. She looks the other way when her Virginia Slims go missing, but once she called Selena a whore. She found her making out topless with a boy from the AM/PM.

When we practice dance routines in the yard, it makes Daddy Marc happy. His eyes narrow as if frustrated, trying to solve something, but his large mouth hangs open in a soft smile and you can see the thick ridges of his tar-stained bottom teeth.

"He isn't my daddy," Selena said one afternoon when we were in junior high. We were sitting in the shade spraying each other with the hose, drinking Dr. Pepper. "Look at him. I'm Mexican. He has red hair and a burnt neck."

"What does your mom say?"

"She says some shit about me taking after her Spanish heritage," Selena said. "She was running around."

"Does Daddy Marc know?"

"He isn't any kind of sharp tool, Colt," Selena said. "But come on."

"Don't it make him mad?"

"He likes that I ain't his," she said, pointing the hose at my face.

Selena didn't look like either of them, I thought. Like she came from somewhere else entirely.

"He likes it," she said again and got up to go inside, tears streaming down her cheeks.

I haven't been sleeping much and when I do it's sweaty and part of me is still awake. The ceiling fan whirs always above, too cold with it, too

hot without it. Last night I got down on my knees and I prayed to feel her. I know this can happen. I have been researching other gone-missing girls, and many times someone comes forth with an image from beyond, and then they find the person right away. Occasionally still alive. Police suspect Selena dead. Something about after two days missing, the odds of survival go down to almost nothing. I want to be the one to lead them to her. I want her to be saved and I want Selena to always remember it was me who found her. Those search dogs are useless. I'm the only one who can pull her scent from a crowd, the deep vanilla that makes something in the pit of me ten degrees warmer.

The first few weeks they suspected Daddy Marc because of his criminal history. After Selena went missing, newspapers blabbed all over town that years ago, he'd been arrested for taking his dick out in broad daylight near a preschool. He had said in the report that he was urinating and the kids happened to be on recess. Until she is found, police track Daddy Marc with a GPS system they slapped on the bottom of his clunker truck. They document his trips from the Pac N' Save to home, home to the Pac N' Save, supplying the town with updates about their Number One Suspect. A police man named Officer Geary asked me if I ever had reason to fear Daddy Marc. I felt confused about the question and told him no, he was all right. But later, an hour into biology, I ran to the bathroom and vomited everything I had, pressed my face to the cold floor tile. With a sharpie on the stall wall, I wrote *Selena's a slut*, and went back to class. That night, I sat by the phone, picking it up and setting it back down. I should have called the police and told them more, told them something different.

Told them maybe of the time Daddy Marc had barbequed all day, in the heat of the valley sun. Sweating over the grill, searing thick burgers and dogs, white hunks of chicken. How Selena's mother got a migraine and went inside. How the three of us ate on the lawn of their small backyard as the sun set behind rooftops, and Daddy Marc got sentimental over his high school days drinking his beers, and all the pretty girls he used to love. He told us about each one. He told us about the first time he ever tasted a girl, and I watched as Selena sucked an orange pop, tapped her foot to the country playing on the radio. He drank beer after beer and when he started saying that one of his sweethearts looked a damn sight like me, like she and I could be sisters, when he

invited me onto his lap and Selena lit up one of her mother's cigarettes, when all that happened and I felt the elastic of Selena's bikini cut into my thighs, felt her top too snug and felt myself too big, I got up, said I had to go to the bathroom. I went instead to Selena's room and waited. Wondered if this would be the kind of night she had told me about. The kind where Daddy Marc got ahead of himself. I took off the bikini and put on some of her soft cotton shorts. I got up three different times to go get her. Finally on the third time I stopped before the sliding glass door, and stared. I could see the glow of their cigarettes. I could hear the low push of their voices.

"What are you doing?" Selena's mother had been sitting on the couch in the dark.

"About to see if Selena is coming inside."

"She's happy out there," her mother said. She sounded slow and heavy, weighed down by her migraine medication, the one she took often. "I just let them at it. I think they get along better than Marc and I."

"Any word?" I ask, as Daddy Marc scans Mother's requested multi-pack sandwich cookies and powdered raspberry water flavoring.

"You'd know it if there was," he says, eyes on the groceries. "Everybody would."

"I'm sure she's fine," I say. "I just feel it, she's going to come back."

Daddy Marc turns the register screen so I can see the total. He didn't apply my usual discount. "Go on, Colt, this ain't a good time."

"I need to talk to you," I say. "When are you off?"

"I don't think so," he says.

No one is behind me in line. "I got more to say to the cops," I whisper. "Afraid I may have to go back and tell them right."

Daddy Marc closes the register. "Say whatever you please, just let it be true. You acting strange and sneaking around and I ain't sure why."

"You're in love with her," I said.

"You wouldn't know the first thing about love."

I walk off leaving the groceries. I go behind the market and scream on hands and knees into the dirt.

I count the days. I wait for a message. I write notes to the Lord on notebook paper that I fold into tiny ships and release in the canal. I ask Him questions but nothing comes. I tell myself at night that what I did is

separate from all this, has nothing to do with it. I tend to think if anyone should be blamed, it's Daddy Marc who has a weird contract with his girl, not me. And if no one will realize that she didn't go missing that morning, that she didn't get kidnapped on the way to school, but the night before as we all laid deep in sleep, then they are more stupid than I thought.

No one in the town forgets the scandal a few years ago when a girl from a different county wound up gutted in a college experiment crop field. Gone missing for a while, assumed runaway. Some Ag major guys found her and the town went crazy. They arrested Wiley Dansmere, a man who had recently been let out of prison. He had a history of hiding in women's unlocked cars and jolting them with a taser gun while he raped them, usually in the evening hours in empty parking lots behind grocery stores. But no one can look to Wiley for this. He is locked up and done with.

I rejoin bible study, something Selena would laugh at, but I felt no other option. I have read that the Lord anoints some people the ability for prophecy, and I think I could be a candidate. I know her better than anyone, and I can feel the Lord growing close to giving me an answer. I recognize the need for my own forgiveness in all this, too. But it's tricky, what needs forgiving.

Last summer Selena and I loved the same boy. His name was Colin and we became obsessed. We had a journal that we shared and we would write notes about him. Things we had observed about his looks and habits, his three crooked teeth and his left pigeon toe. Things we noticed when we would follow him around town, always allowing a few cars between his truck and my mom's Taurus. It felt like a shared thing, sealed in the protection that neither of us would ever have him. He was only to look at, only to fantasize about. Until the day Colin asked Selena to the junior prom.

"I'm the prettiest girl in school, of course he wants to go with me," Selena had said as we walked laps around the track in matching grey gym shorts. "I didn't have to throw myself at him. I was sending him vibes."

"How did he do it?"

"Last night he rang my doorbell," she said. "I had just showered so my hair was all wet."

“How did he know where you lived?”

“I don’t know,” she laughed. “It’s no secret. We know where he lives.”

“Does he like you?”

“Is that a real question?” She did a high kick, her knee almost reaching her nose. “He said he has liked me all year.”

“You and I were going to drive to the beach and say fuck prom.”

“That was before Colin asked me,” she said. “Don’t be jealous. It makes your skin age.”

“I’m not jealous,” I said.

“You should be happy for me,” she said, lacing her fingers with mine. “I liked him just like you did.”

The night of prom I stayed in and watched movies with Mother and got sick drunk on red wine. She braided my hair into hundreds of tiny braids and strung each stock with beads that appeared from the closet. They were plastic and glittery, depositing tiny flecks of shine across my collarbones.

“It’s horrible when a man leaves you, Briley,” Mother said. “I bet you’re imagining them together, ain’t you?”

“She always gets whatever she wants,” I said, standing up in front of the entryway mirror. The braids were too many. “This makes me look even more like a horse.”

“Sit back down,” she said. “Let’s add some Sprite to that wine.”

I looked at her. She plucked all her eyebrows out again and had drawn them on in the dark, mistakenly with a red lip liner. “Why don’t you get a date?”

“No, not me,” she said. “Only one man for me.”

I sat down and drank from the bottle of red. My mother shifted in her seat and the taffeta from her dress sounded like plastic. “Just one man.”

Selena and Colin hung out all summer and I made up reasons why I was busy. Then Colin went off to college across the country. Selena said he tried to get her to come with him, but she decided he wasn’t all that. We went back to normal, and I stowed the Colin journal in the box under my bed with my other Selena stuff. My pictures of her and a few of her hair ribbons. A small bottle of her vanilla lotion.

The thing is, Selena always wanted an older boyfriend. She

thought that older men would understand her in new and uncharted ways. When I set up an online dating profile for her, I didn’t tell her about it. I wanted it to be a surprise when I found Selena the perfect match. I was trying to help her, to get her away.

The police want to know everything about Selena and me. Old Officer Geary has come by several times. He putters around our kitchen, right at home. He wears a white horsetail braid down his back and his denim looks ink blue, like it could rub off on fingers.

Mother raises her eyebrows from her place sunken down into the couch, says, “Need something?”

And he says, “No, ma’am, please don’t get up.”

“You come here to tell me you all found her?” I say, sitting at our small kitchen table in my nightshirt.

“No, see, that’s the problem, we can’t seem to find your girl anywhere,” Geary says, taking a seat across from me. “Her daddy called me up and said you might be holding back.”

“Daddy Marc has himself confused,” I say. “With him being a sex offender and all.”

“What would you say you and Selena’s biggest best friend secret was?” he asks.

“You mean, what our secret is,” I say.

“Of course. Is.”

“We once hid scissors in our purses and cut the security tags out of the nice jeans at Macy’s,” I say. “Will that help you find her?”

Geary smiled. “You never know what could help.”

“She’s probably off with some man,” I say. “Did you think of that? They all love Selena.”

“Any man in particular?”

I thought of the man from the dating site who called himself Angel. Lots of men messaged her profile, saying how pretty she was, but he was persistent and the one I replied to the most. He sent Selena’s inbox at least five messages a day. In one message, a photo of his naked body, face cut off. Tattooed over his dark patch of hair were the letters MOB. His penis was hard in the photo and he gripped it and pulled it sideways a bit. Not big, but I guess not small. I had looked at the picture until my eyes were dry. He wanted her address so he could leave her

roses by her window.

“All men loved Selena,” I say again. “She could have had anyone.”

“You’re a nice looking girl, too,” Officer Geary says, standing up.

“Do the boys ask you out?”

“Not really,” I say. “I’m shy.”

“You don’t strike me as shy,” he says. “You strike me as coy.”

“What’s coy?”

“Ain’t the same thing as shy,” he says. “Look it up.”

“Need something?” Mother croaks from the couch. “I got some of them Ore-Os in the cupboard. Briley, get the man one of them Ore-Os and a glass a milk.”

“He’s leaving,” I say.

Geary pauses before the hall like he is going to step in my room and my heart falls from my chest to the floor. But he walks out the front door, tipping his felt hat to Mother.

“What’s about it?” Mother asks without looking at me.

“More Selena stuff,” I say.

“Why don’t you tell them what you all were up to?”

From the window I watch Geary pull away from the curb. Our neighbor Trish walks by, bends down and picks up a cigarette butt and pops it between her lips.

“He gonna keep coming around,” she says. “If you just tell him, he ain’t gonna think nothing of it. Just two little girls having some fun.”

Mother had used my computer one day to research how much her Beanie Babies were worth, and saw Selena’s profile. She had been angry with me at first, saying we were too young for something like that, and where did Selena take such slutty pictures? She grounded me for a day and then forgot about it.

“Selena used to call you a funt,” I say.

“What’s that?”

“Fat cunt.”

“I feel like I don’t know you much these days, Briley,” Mother says. “If you ain’t careful, I’ll show that old man into your room. Let him figure all that out.”

“There’s nothing to see,” I say.

“Let’s hope for it.”

Anyone would tell you that friendship boxes are something a lot of

girls have. Since we were little I’ve been the collector. I’ve protected the important things. I saved up for a camera a few summers back, and bought black and white film at the Pac N’ Save. I took pictures of Selena lying out by the school pool. For some she posed. Silly model poses with pouty serious faces. But my favorites of her are the ones when she didn’t realize I was shooting. There’s one when her arm is up shielding her eyes. She had untied her suit strings and you can see a crest of boob.

“Colt, let me take one of you,” she had said.

“Okay, but tell me how to pose. I want it to be good.”

“Take off your top and, like, hold your tits together,” she said.

“Like this?”

“Wait, take your hands away,” she said.

“What?”

“Kind of saggy,” she said. “Ski jump boobs.”

I put my top back on.

“No, girl, I was messing you.” She laughed. “I want to take the picture. Hold still.”

The picture is weird to look at now. When it was taken, I never thought I was fat, but now being so skinny, it’s a body I don’t recognize. It’s the only one of me, and my hand is moving over my breasts and they are blurred and my face is sad. I don’t know why I’ve never thrown it away.

I saved the hair-ties she threw to the floor, a pair of panties she let me borrow, a container of wax she used to carry when she had braces. I used the bikini pics for her online profile. I used a fake name, too, which is the only reason Geary hasn’t discovered it yet. I named her Belinda. It seemed good at the time.

I take the box and drive to the dump miles outside the city and bury it there. A few tents are set up where homeless people sleep. There are used needles on the ground and I am glad I wore close-toed shoes.

I didn’t do anything wrong, but I can see how someone might wonder about the box. How could they understand our bond? She told me everything. Told me Daddy Marc sleepwalked into her room some nights, curled his body around her in the twin bed and breathed hard, pressed to her back.

Bible study with Denay. Denay is a believer in the charismatic tradition and thinks that when the Holy Spirit goes into you, He comes out your tongue on fire. So she squawks and hums and mutters other-language

while she lays hands on each of us. I have yet to speak like this, but I think I will soon. Denay says the Holy Spirit is re-awakening inside me and when He comes out I will be changed. I will have answers.

“Prayer requests?” Denay asks us girls, four of us sitting in a circle.

“Me,” I say. “I need a vision of Selena.”

Denay looks at Amber and raises her eyebrows. “Why you need a vision? You don’t think the Lord is big enough to handle Miss Selena without your asking for visions?”

“She needs to be found,” I say.

Amber puts a hand on my shoulder. “Maybe Jesus has her out there to learn her something. Think of that?”

“And if He already took her home,” says Ramey, “Then it ain’t no business of ours.”

“I feel called to know where she is,” I say. “Please.”

“I have a prophecy.” Denay stretches her arms upward and closes her eyes. “The Lord says to look within yourself, Briley.”

“What else,” I say, eyes closed.

“And that she’s dead already.”

Ramey gasps. “Oh, fuck.”

“Lay hands,” Denay commands. She walks over to me and forms a chokehold around my neck and the other girls entwine themselves around me, around each other. Amber kneels before me and hugs my shins.

“Lord, let Briley feel Selena’s death. Let her process what it means. Where is the body? Where is the body?”

They begin to chant “Where is the body” over and over and it is Ramey who jerks on the floor and coughs and coughs. I close my eyes and listen deeply and I hear a heartbeat, thump, thump, and I think live, live, live, and I think, live, Selena, come out of the dark. I start to tremble and it feels like an earthquake until I realize that Ramey has braced herself against my chair and is rocking me back and forth, shrieking like an animal. When they stop we all sit in silence.

“Yes,” Denay says finally. “Dead.”

“I saw fields,” says Ramey.

“I saw sex,” says Amber.

I am the only one who didn’t see a thing.

Read the rest of *SAY WHERE SHE IS* in
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TSAREVICH

by Chris Messer

See the rest of *Elizabeth Hoy's* work in
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MY WHOLE FAMILY IS seated around our table. The kitchen light is on but all the other rooms are dark. My chin is on my chest. My father speaks but all I can focus on is his bottom row of crooked teeth that look like golf tees.

My mother tells him she doesn't know.

You do know, he says. He lets us all inhale and then he says it again, slower.

I keep drifting off to sleep. I try to stay awake by focusing on something in the room with my eyes closed. I look at the red and black wires hanging out of the ceiling fan. I close my eyes and picture where the wires are in the darkness. The top middle left. I open my eyes. I am slightly off. I hold the wires in sight again. I close my eyes.

I wake up being carried off to bed in my mother's arms. I wake up again at the table. The room is now lit only by the blue stovetop light. My brother is speaking. His gaunt wrestler's eyes look hollow. He pauses for a moment to suck the moisture out of a wet towel.

I focus on the reflection of the blue light in the table and close my eyes. The bottom left. I open my eyes and see my father's sweaty hand covering the reflection.

His sleeve is unbuttoned at the cuff. On his wrist his scuffed watch ticks. His teeth clatter. The pocket where he keeps his pens is stained in the shape of a pinned medal. He stands to speak louder.

My sister interrupts, speaking slowly and nervously. She stutters and pulls on her earlobes. My father sits. We all have our fingers interlocked over our mouths as we listen.

And later, we all see the laundry basket full of clothing that my father pitches out of the door as we flee. It lands in a patch of gravel, folded clothes down. It's weird to say that he threw it. It's weird to say that we all threw it.

My sister finishes her speech abruptly and starts plucking at her eyelashes. She pulls her blanket up around her shoulders.

The loud hum of the refrigerator fills the room. Everyone is

looking at everyone, but no one is looking at each other.

My mother taps my shoulder. I catch my father's crooked mouth at the end of a sentence and watch his eyebrows rise. His eyes diamond.

I wake again in my room. My mother tries to carry me out of bed but I refuse her arms. She holds my hand as we walk into the kitchen where everyone but my father is waiting. I give them a terse, sleepy little wave and they all laugh. I enter with this warm procession as if I were the Tsar's son, too wrapped in precious gems to be killed.

FATHER'S RETURN

by Rupprecht Mayer

My father, who had passed away some time before, suddenly entered the room wearing a new suit. He appeared taller and younger, but I couldn't tell for sure, for he paced back and forth, restless, as if he were full of plans. His tailored suit was of a light fabric in a style reminiscent of Nehru, minus the collar. The men in the room watched him with some puzzlement. Although they could never have known him, they seemed to blame me for him being my junior. We went out together and walked to the edge of the hill, where I told him that we had to tear down one of the houses because it obstructed the view. My father seemed to be trying very hard to absorb the new situation. He did not look me in the eye, but beyond me over my head. When I started towards the woods, he fell in behind. I thought about which path to take. I didn't want us to pass mother's grave, but I had forgotten where it was.

"Father's Return" Translated by Eldon Craig Reishus

A NEW YORK STORY (2)

A light rain in Inwood and the empire of snow melts and the music is out of its case with the small islands of people gathered in their rooms with all the curtains open so that all the views get all mixed up with the talk that gets all mixed up with the train whistle (where does it come from when one never sees the train?) and planes overhead; a siren, a car horn.

There's always someone playing a scale on a flute or a piano in the same key. And then, that nothing that feels like the end of youth.

I love it in the almost spring when the opera singers in their tight dresses open their windows as wide as their mouths proclaiming NO SHAME like old New York when people came here to start everything moving and life was informal and from a window some tousled head drooped over a ledge and yelled: "WAIT THERE, I'm throwing down the keys."

acquired through drink in middle age. Drink accomplished what God did not. It also served to kill me; to kill. I acquired that drinker's face before I drank. Drink only confirmed it. The space for it existed in me. I knew it the same as other people, but, strangely, in advance. Just as the space existed in me for desire. At the age of fifteen I had the face of pleasure, and yet I had no knowledge of pleasure. There was no mistaking that face. Even my mother must have seen it. My brothers did. That was how everything started for me—with that flagrant, exhausted face, those rings around the eyes, in advance of time and experience.

I'm fifteen and a half. Crossing the river. Going back to Saigon I feel I'm going on a journey, especially when I take the bus, and this morning I've taken the bus from Sadeq, where my mother is the headmistress of the girls' school. It's the end of some school vacation, I forget which. I've spent it in the little house provided with my mother's job. And today I'm going back to Saigon, to the boarding school. The native bus left from the marketplace in Sadeq. As usual my mother came to see me off, and put me in the care of the driver. She always puts me in the care of the Saigon bus drivers, in case there's an accident, or a fire, or a rape, or an attack by pirates, or a fatal mishap on the ferry. As usual the driver had me sit near him in the front, in the section reserved for white passengers.

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Laura Didyk, *mishap*

March 2014

from *The Lover*, Marguerite Duras

CONTRIBUTORS

NO TOKENS

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AMELIA GRAY is the author of four books: *AM/PM*, *Museum of the Weird*, *Threats*, and *Gutshot* (April 2015). Her work has appeared in *Tin House*, *VICE*, *Flaunt*, *Guernica*, *BOMB*, and *Lucky Peach*, among others. She lives in Los Angeles.

JOEL HANS is an MFA candidate in fiction at the University of Arizona in Tucson, and the prose editor for *Fairy Tale Review*. His fiction has been published or is forthcoming in *West Branch*, *Redivider*, *Nashville Review*, *Necessary Fiction*, and others. He is also an editor with *Cartridge Lit*, an online literary magazine devoted to literature inspired by video games.

ELIZABETH HOY lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. She recently took part in a two-month residency in Brittany, France through the Alfred and Trafford Klots International Program for Artists, and in 2015, Hoy will be a resident at Wave Hill's Winter Workspace Program. Other residency programs she has participated in include 4Heads Governors Island, Chashama, the Stonington Painters Workshop, and in 2013 she completed the Artist in the Marketplace program at the Bronx Museum. Her work has been exhibited in New York, Boston, Maine, and France, most recently at Fowler Project Space in Brooklyn, the Maine Center for Contemporary Art, and on Governors Island in New York Harbor. In 2008, Hoy was awarded a fellowship to the Royal College of Art in London. Hoy received a BA from Wesleyan University and an MFA from the University of Pennsylvania.

MICHAEL KLEIN's third book of poems, *The Talking Day* (Sibling Rivalry Press) was both a Thom Gunn Award finalist and a Lambda Literary Award finalist in 2013. His poems, essays, and interviews with American poets have appeared in *POETRY*, *American Poetry Review*, *BLOOM*, *Fence*, *Tin House*, *Ploughshares*, *Provincetown Arts*, *Poets & Writers*, and many other publications. For many years he was on the faculty of the summer program at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, where he was a fellow in 1990 and now teaches at Castle Hill Center for the Arts in Truro, Massachusetts. He lives in New York City and Provincetown, Massachusetts with his husband, Andrew Hood.

RUPPRECHT MAYER spent his childhood in the mountains south of Salzburg and resettled in Burghausen, Germany after living some twenty years in Taiwan, Beijing, and Shanghai. He likes to translate Chinese literature (like poems of Gu Cheng, stories of Shen Congwen, brush notes of Qing-scholar Ji Yun) and writes short prose. English versions of his work have appeared in *AGNI Online*, *Bicycle Review*, *Connotation Press*, *Lunch Ticket*, *Mad Hatters' Review*, *Mikrokosmos/mojo*, *Ninth Letter*, *New World Writing*, *Prick of the Spindle*, *Washington Square Review*, *Word Riot*, and elsewhere.

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CHRISTOPHER STACKHOUSE is author of the chapbook *Slip* (Corollary Press), co-author of the image/text collaboration *Seismosis* (1913 Press), which features Stackhouse's drawings in discourse with writer/translator John Keene's texts, and a volume of poems, *Plural* (Counterpath Press). His writing has been published in several literary journals and arts periodicals including *American Poet - The Journal of The Academy of American Poets*, *Art in America*, and *The Brooklyn Rail*. Stackhouse is a contributing editor at *Fence*, *BOMB*, and *Vanitas* magazines. He teaches at the Maryland Institute College of Art.

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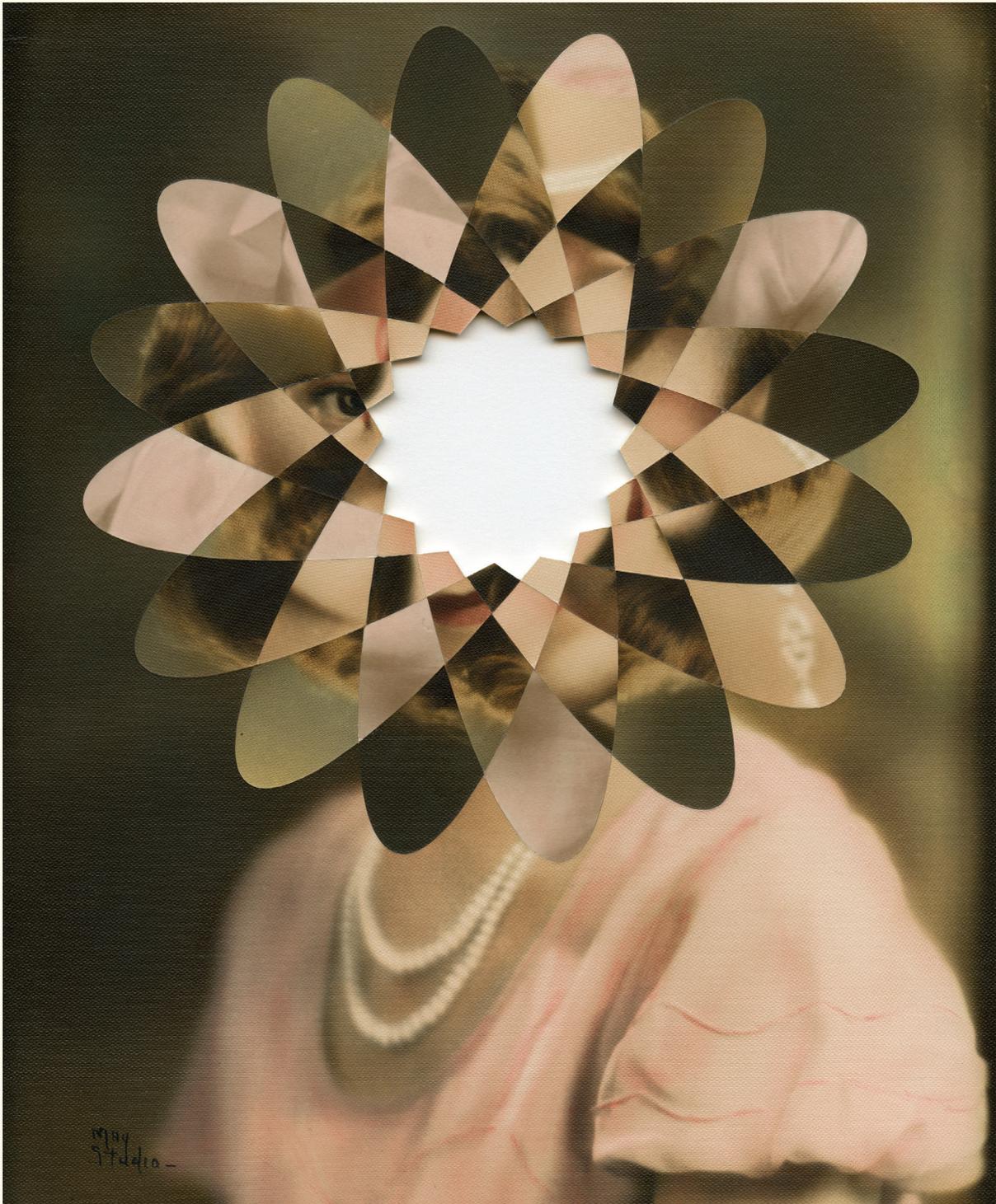
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His work is represented by Sous Les Etoiles Gallery in New York City and Johansson Projects in Oakland, California.

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JULIE MARIE WADE is the author of *Wishbone: A Memoir in Fractures* (Colgate University Press, 2010), winner of the Lambda Literary Award for Lesbian Memoir; *Without: Poems* (Finishing Line Press, 2010), selected for the New Women's Voices Chapbook Series; *Small Fires: Essays* (Sarabande Books, 2011), selected for the Linda Bruckheimer Series in Kentucky Literature; and *Postage Due: Poems & Prose Poems* (White Pine Press, 2013), winner of the Marie Alexander Poetry Series. She lives with her partner Angie Griffin in the Sunshine State and teaches in the creative writing program at Florida International University in Miami.



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