



The
Sunnerset
Review

Summer 2006

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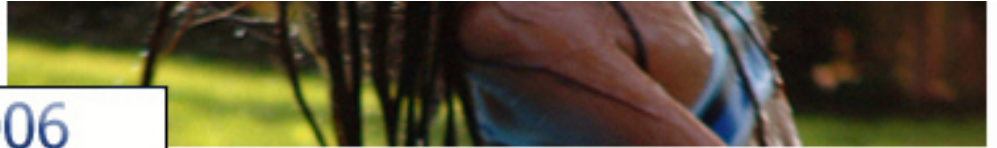


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The Summerset Review



Editors' Notes

We've been busy with preliminary work in putting out our first print issue. Originally envisioned to collect some of our favorite pieces that have appeared here in the first five complete years, after looking at the calendar and seeing that we'd need to wait until content from the Summer 2007 issue is agreed, the decision's been made that we simply can't—wait, that is. We'll have something you can touch well before the fall of 2007, just you watch. If you're an avid reader and a certain story or essay has stuck with you over time, we'd be grateful if you'd let us know. We'll do our best to include it.

Our Lit Pick of the Quarter highlights the *New England Review*, where a piece entitled "Joint Custody" by Elizabeth Rollins appears in Vol. 26, No. 2 / 2005 under the category of Testimonies. It's an engaging story of a girl caught in a flip-flop of stays between mother and father. The narrative partitions each scene, each bounce from one place to the other. Here's one short segment:

W. WALNUT ST.

I am asked not to mention my mother's name at my father's house.

My sister lives with my mother, so I stop mentioning her, too.

Nor do I mention my family on my mother's side.

And my dog lives with my mother, so I try not to mention him, either.

Also, sprinkled throughout the piece are sections in italics, where the voice is the same but the perspective is not from any particular house:

Whenever people say "joint custody," it makes me think of actual joints: fingers, knees, elbows. Or roasts. Or the hinged parts of chickens. I like a sharp knife for joints. I like to slice through the webs of connective tissue with no resistance.

If it's a crown of lamb, say, I cut each bone free before I'll even take a single bite. If no one is watching, I put the bones against my teeth and nip at the bits of flesh my fork and knife can't reach. I lick and gnaw each bone clean and then place them, curved and spooning neatly, at the edge of my plate.

Our selections for this summer issue begin with Jeffrey N. Johnson's "Raw Toscana," a story set in Italy involving a painter who is distracted by what he sees and what he feels. In "Voiceless," by Penny Feeny, brother and sister try to overcome their parents' alienation and adjust to a new community. There's an ominous knife atop John Gooley's story, "How to Write a Romance." Elizabeth Bernays brings us to the high mountains of California in her essay, "Sierra Interlude," where butterflies are being studied. And Shellie Zacharia appears in *The Summerset Review* for a second time, with a short-short entitled "Tres, Dos, Uno."

We'll never get tired of saying thanks to the many kind people out there who have complimented us on our journal. Your words keep us going. Lots of gratitude goes out to you and all those who have and continue to send us submissions.

The Summerset Review

Joseph Levens – Editor
Amy Leigh Owen – Assistant Editor

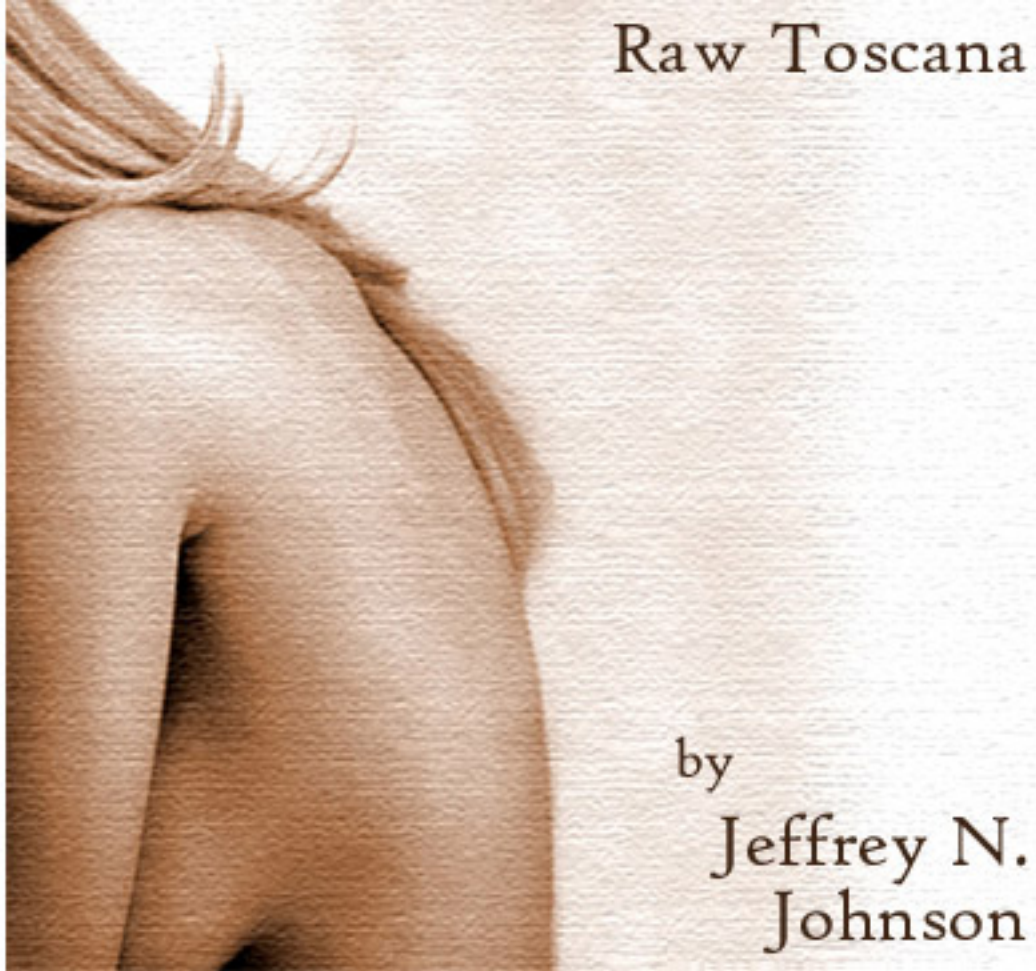
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The Summerset Review

The Sunnerset Review



The Communist Party sought friends and converts by way of the belly, throwing a village festival with an arousing penne and cream sauce. As I gorged on the slippery pasta and nursed a carafe of Chianti at one of the long tables striping the piazza, I ran a fork through the warm cheeses like a palette knife on canvas and thought for a moment I could paint with it. I imagined an edible painting, a canvas of Biscotti and pigments of local cuisine, mixed live and served from the menu—pomodoro reds and cappuccino ochers.

"How did you end up in Travenelle?" the Brit across the table asked, jolting me back to reality. His mouth was full of roasted chicken and his teeth beamed through the debris like a strand of greasy pearls, which somehow added balance to his irregular face.

"Just a stopover," I said. "I'm trying to get to Sienna for a day."

"Going for the *Running of the Bulls*?"

"That's Pamplona, Simon," his wife said. "In Sienna it's *The Palio*; the horse race."

"Ah, yes. Horses running in circles. That should be a fine spectacle," he snickered.

His wife, Audrey, had a round and pretty face, but she lacked Simon's dental fortune, having a rebelling lower incisor and several snarling canines.

"Did you notice the plates when we sat down?" I asked. "The placement of the knife and croissant made an abstract hammer and sickle."

"Could be worse. They could have been swastikas," said Simon. "Don't worry about our hosts, Michael. Italian politics is secondary to Italian pleasure. Food, wine and opera rank much higher. Take the chefs, for instance." At the high end of the piazza the town's two finest chefs were squabbling over an open stove, their ladles flailing at one another like they were conducting opposing orchestras.

"We all have our priorities," I said, as I wiped up the last of my imaginary paint with a tuft of bread. Audrey raised her delicate hand to order another carafe as my eye caught our new waitress. My first impression, among many, was of her lengths. Her black silk hair, fingernails, and eyelashes were longer than vogue. Dark hairs hatched her arms like fine brush strokes, and her legs stretched and arched like a black widow in a web. Her attention passed over Audrey's hand and locked into my eyes. She pursed her lips and mouthed *vino rouge?*

"*Por favore,*" I said, wiping a spittle of white sauce from my lips. She turned away and I watched her legs fade into the dark of the restaurant.

"You'll enjoy Sienna," said Simon. "They're more democratic."

"I'm not going there for the democracy."

"Ah, the horse race."

"Actually, no. That'll just be a distraction. I'm going there for the color." I craned my neck for the waitress.

"The color?"

"I want to understand brown." And I did. If I could master a palate of nothing but brown, then I could work into the primaries with confidence. It was my way of getting back to basics.

"I suppose Sienna would be a logical place to study brown. You might try Umbria as well."

"I'd like to, but I'm running out of time. I've been touring the hill towns for the past month. I paint."

"Well, if you find some sienna and umber remember to light a match. I hear they're wonderful when they're burnt." Simon let out a howl and Audrey a groan, presumably embarrassed for us all.

"There's that Limey wit I've been waiting for," I said, though I was really waiting for Angelica, our new barmaid, who was coming out with two carafes of red wine. I was trying to behave myself, but she didn't make it easy. I couldn't decide if her blouse was half-open or half-buttoned.

"Due?" I said, catching her olive eyes. "You're trying to get us drunk?"

"*Uno per el signore Inglese e suo moglie, e uno per el Americano a bello.*" She wrapped her hand around the nape of my neck with several fingers in my hair as she poured my glass full.

"You want the translation, Michael?" Audrey asked. "She's trying to get you shit-faced." She raised her empty glass to be filled, but had lost her cheer at my flirtation with Angelica. I had met Simon and Audrey at the hotel that morning as our rooms were being prepared, and since we had hit it off we decided to spend the day together. Though I didn't know her, I sensed a heightened gleefulness in her that afternoon, and as best I could tell, it had

something to do with being escorted through ancient Tuscan streets with a man on each arm.

Angelica kept her hand in my hair as she poured Audrey's glass.

"I no get people drunk. People get themselves drunk, no?"

She was beautiful and she was getting me drunk, but not on wine.

"Your English is good," I said to her.

"Yes," she said, nodding across the table toward Simon and Audrey. "They are very nice."

I was tempted to steer her into my lap when a boisterous table of graying Italians, probably communists, summoned her away to help, as Angelica put it, get themselves drunk.

"I think she's smitten with you, Michael. I know that look. I get it from Audrey every day." Simon patronized his wife's hand with a little squeeze.

"My look isn't quite that trashy." She raised her glass to those unfortunate teeth, then turned to me and said, "We'll be your chaperones for the evening, Michael. I'll make a complete report to your lovely Catherine in the morning."

I had left Catherine, my fiancée, in her air-conditioned suite in Paris. Her pink skin wasn't suited for the sun of the Italian peninsula, she had declared. Autumn was barely tolerable. She seemed more suited to spending her summers in the cool boutiques along the Boulevard de la Madeleine, spending her father's money.

"I've been faithful to Catherine since the day we met," I said, and it was true, though I didn't disclaim we'd known each other for only six months. After all that Catherine had done for me, I owed her my fidelity, which was admittedly something I had never given anyone. I guess this trip was the first test. 'Go,' she had said to me, 'take the month, paint, and find your brown.' It was like she was sending me on a shopping trip to pick up some inspiration.

The ancient town hall cast its final shadow over the stone palazzo behind us, and the sky dimmed to a deep ultramarine, punctuated only by the glowing dime of a rising moon. The two chefs sat together now, reconciled over a bottle of grappa, and the piazza buzzed with storytelling and bits of local gossip. One area of tables was being cleared for dancing and a local rock band began setting up their equipment.

Simon looked over my shoulder and raised his brow. "I don't know if this is the main show or the intermission, Michael, but I believe they're burning your flag."

I turned around to see a hapless mob of five ornery Italians in a huddle. The same portly gentleman who had taken my credit card at the hotel struck the match. Earlier he had referred to me as his "American friend."

"That's the hotel guy," I said.

"He is Antonio," said a German gentleman with a Lenin tipped beard sitting down from Simon. "He owns half the town. Many business interests in Travenelle."

"So he's a business man, a hotelier, a real estate magnet, and heads the local polit bureau. How convenient," I said. "I bet he sells flags too." I felt a familiar hand in my hair and turned my head near Angelica's breast.

"No worry about Papa," she said, dismissively.

Papa? Shit.

"He is diseased with old ways, but I am not Communist. I am Italian. Let me fill your glass."

And I believed her. Political affiliation didn't matter a damn in her presence.

"You a big time capitalist, no? Big shot Americano with a big . . . eh . . . *portafoglio*." She waved her palm, searching. "Wallet?"

I hadn't really thought about it like that before.

"I've been known to dabble in capitalism."

"*Prego?*"

"I sell my paintings. I am an artist." Not many recently, but I had sold a few in my time. Enough to pay for canvas and paint and the lousiest pensions. I was doing O.K. up to a year ago, but it didn't last. In another six months I was starving.

"*Un artista!*"

Her whole body moved when she said that word, and I imagine she could have said 'bowling ball' in Italian and I would have crumbled like an old fresco. My fiancée's father, sitting behind his hand-carved desk, had said the same word at our introduction, but in an entirely different way.

The official protest concluded with the stars and stripes frittering to ash, and the rock band kicked into their first tune, some overplayed U2 cover. We were each into our third liter of wine and everyone in the piazza seemed closer and louder as we all leaned in and talked over the band.

"You came through Poggibonsi? *We* came through Poggibonsi!" said Simon, looking for an excuse to celebrate. "Tell me, how in bloody hell could anyone name a place Poggibonsi?" He turned to his wife. "Pardon me love, I was going to step out and I was wondering if you needed me to pick up anything in Poggibonsi?" We pounded our fists on the table and laughed until our bladders hurt. Several empty glasses fell over in the clatter, and I kept staring at Audrey's damn teeth. Just then Simon motioned over my shoulder. "I think we're going to receive a guest." Antonio, the communist innkeeper, was barreling toward us with his belly clearing the way.

"Benvenute, my American friends!" his voice boomed over the band. "I am so happy you have come. Welcome to L'Unita Festival!"

"The two of us are from England," Audrey said, mustering a little dead empire pride.

"No matter. Welcome. I hope you have not taken our fun too seriously. We are family first, we are communist second."

"We've enjoyed most of it." I said. "The food especially."

"When our chefs fight, we know we will eat well," he said, before pointing a fat finger at my chest. "But I know what *you* enjoy. I see things with my eyes, you understand? My daughter rebels, or she thinks she rebels. She eyes you." His cheeks plumped as he smiled. "She thinks I will not approve, but no, I worry for you. She is trouble enough for Italian blood, but you, you will be eaten alive!"

This felt like a challenge I couldn't refuse, but I wasn't showing my hand. I held up my palms, shook my head. "I'm just here to enjoy the food and wine."

"And our women, and that is no fault. I went to America once, to New York to visit my brother. He lives in . . . in Satin Island, you know? I eat your food, drink your drink, fuck your women. Makes for very pleasure and good time. So you in Travenelle, you do as Travenelles do, no?"

I just played along, laughing with Antonio and his belly full of Chianti.

"Benissimo. You laugh good. A man must laugh to enjoy life. You take my daughter with laughter, you may survive." He made a sweeping gesture with his hand. "I see the future. My grandson will be half communist and half capitalist, no? Bread for lunch and circus for dinner, yes? Ah." He gave a joyous guttural sound and slapped my back entirely too hard as he danced back to his table. As I stared helplessly at the red wine stain in my lap, Angelica reappeared from the shadows with a towel and dabbed my pants in long slow strokes like she was petting a cat.

Simon leaned over his glass. "*Scusi*, uh . . . Angelica I believe it is. Have you by chance found Poggibonsi down there?" Audrey grabbed Simon, who was giggling hysterically, and dragged him into the throng of dancers. I stuck my face in Angelica's hair.

"Let me paint you."

"Si, of course."

"Tomorrow. We'll start in the morning and hike into the hills. I want to see you in the Tuscan sun."

"I will bring a lunch."

"Dance with me."

"I must work."

"You're killing me."

"Tomorrow," she said, and pressed two long fingers over my lips, then brushed her hand over my cheek as she walked away.

I watched Simon and Audrey dance badly until they stumbled back to the table and fell into their chairs like sacks of oats. Simon immediately rose and excused himself to find a toilet, mocking a goose-step on the way. Audrey drained the last drop from a carafe, then swirled her glass and looked at my chest as though she was a man and I had breasts.

"I know what you're up to, you and your beer-tending amante with the long legs. You Americans ever heard of fidelity?"

"I've done nothing but a little innocent flirting. Nothing less than what we've been doing all day." This seemed to catch her off-guard as she looked up from my imaginary breasts.

"Flirting? You Americans are all alike. So self-centered. We just thought you might be lonely and wanted company." She tossed her hair aside and turned to the band.

"Oh come on, Audrey. We've been playing all day," I countered, but she didn't respond as her eyes were glazing over from the wine.

Simon stumbled back to the table and suggested turning in for the evening. I had grabbed the other waitresses, asking each where Angelica had gone, but no one claimed any knowledge, nor were any of them worth grabbing as much as Angelica. Though her disappearance was probably for the best, I can't say I was happy about it. The three of us eventually wound our way through the streets to the hotel, at one point breaking into an off-key tribute to the band:

In da mane of dove.

Un more in da dame of glove.

We fell into the hotel lobby and called for our room keys like we were ordering another round. A barrel of a man, devoid of humor or trace of musical ear, lumbered toward us and slapped our keys on the counter, then retreated to a back room and the harking blue glow of a television.

"Time to tinkle, love." Audrey meandered toward the end of the hall to the common bath for the floor.

Simon fiddled with the key in his lock. "Audrey and I are going hiking in the morning, in case you'd like to join us."

"No, thanks. I've made plans."

"Going to find your brown?"

"Something like that." He didn't take my pursuit too seriously. I knew if I could capture the subtleties of brown, then I could work back into color and keep my palate under control. So much is about control.

After trying several doors, I found my room, stripped, and sunk into my mattress about six feet. In what could have been anywhere from five minutes to an hour, I heard a knock at the door. I climbed out of bed as if escaping from a net.

"What?" I said, squinting from the dim bulb in the hall.

"Is Audrey with you, Michael? Is she here?" Simon stood in the doorway with his shirt half tucked in.

"No," I wondered aloud, as if the question was presented in a dream. "We were just flirting. No. Wait . . . why would she be here?"

"She's not back from the toilet. She seems to have wandered off."

"I'm sure she's fine."

"It's not like her. It's not."

I knew I was being enlisted for a search party, so I reached for my pants. By the time I was dressed, Simon was in the street calling Audrey's name into dark corners as if he'd find her in a doorway suckling a bottle.

"I'll take the alleys behind the hotel," I said. "You take the street back to that Unitas Festivus whatever." He agreed and I slid into a narrow passage. The stone walls were lit by a moonbeam sliver of sky, and I wondered how the light would fall on Angelica's skin. The alley opened into a small cortile with a lone olive tree glowing in the far corner. Under the tree was a nicely shaped ass heaving up and down, and when it settled onto a pair of plump ankles, Audrey showed her face and mine drew a smile.

"Too good to throw-up in a squat toilet? You British are all alike."

"Fuck you."

"Can I help you up?"

"I can manage just fine. I feel better now."

"Simon's looking for you. He's worried."

"Simon worries too much." She stumbled as she tried to stand, and I caught her, then we both stumbled and held each other up. My arm wrapped around her back, and her hand touched my inner thigh. "I can manage myself," she said.

We held each other for a moment in awkward silence and then she kissed me. It was long and soft and of the lips only, until I lost myself and thrust my tongue and found the bitters of bile between her twisted teeth. I drew back and stiffened. She raised her hand to my chest and pushed away.

"Go back to your fiancée, Michael."

She left me alone in the courtyard under the olive tree, its leaves shivering light and silver.



Cool air blew through the shutters and sprayed the room with bright stripes of morning light. I peeled my eyes open and separated the pounding in my head with the gentle knock on the door.

"Boun Giorno, Michael," Angelica cooed as if waking a child.

"Morning . . . giorno." I wrapped both hands around my forehead.

"We meet at noon? In lobby?"

"Yeah. I'll be there."

Her response was muffled and I heard her footsteps echo down the hall.

I struggled out of bed and sat on a chair by my open suitcase. Shirts and underwear were spilling onto the floor, and a lone sock reached out to one side, searching for its mate. I grabbed my wallet and pulled out a photo of Catherine and rubbed its edge with my thumb. She had been a savior of sorts. When I met her I was in the artists' death trap of painting the same scene over and over; the one that always sold, though never for much money. I wasn't even cleaning my palette. Little craters of dried paint melted into one another, all competing for space. I was afraid to lose the formula.

Catherine found me in a café in Lyon. I don't know what did it for her; my desperation, my poverty, or my salvageable good looks. She saw me down an espresso in one shot, and came over to remind me that it's not good to look too American these days. Then she offered to buy me another espresso and teach me the finer points of what to do with it. Who was I to refuse?

She lived with her father in Paris where he made gobs of euro in import-export. Given his taste, it was probably in exporting American pop shit to every quaint postcard hamlet on the planet. As an ice-breaker, I gave him the last of my formula paintings, which could have housed and fed me for another week. Being a detail man, he examined it as though it was a blueprint of every intangible molecule of my being, then stuck it in his filing cabinet where he had probably already started a dossier.

He tried to warn Catherine off, which made it all the more surprising when he finally agreed to help me. Catherine got her way; she loved me, or so she said, and she loved my portfolio of paintings that I couldn't seem to paint anymore. Which she loved more, I don't know. Part of me thought it was my starving artist appeal. She had this ever so slightly pretentious notion of uncovering a great talent and nurturing him to stardom. Nurturing to Catherine meant dressing me in nice clothes and showing me off to her theatre friends. I guess sometimes we all need someone to save, and at the time, I needed saving. We were engaged two months later.

After breakfast I primed a canvas, preparing the surface to take Angelica's flesh. All I remembered from the night before was a residue of insane lust I had for her under the influence. Her face I'd already forgotten, her figure a dream. I reduced her to a still life of baskets and fruit, waiting to be arranged and composed at my will. I had a model for the day, just a model, and for that I was grateful.

Angelica greeted me wearing a sundress of flowering orchids that hung lightly over her shoulders, giving her the curves of a gently blowing sheer. Lean viridian cypress lined the road out of town like sentinels, and we walked under their pointy shadows until Angelica turned us through an ancient gate under a siege of vines. We passed into a meadow of sunbaked grasses, and from there and everywhere beyond ran the endless vineyards,

fences of green and furrows bending with the earth. The vines, full of embryonic grapes the size of peas, dangled lightly on their crosses.

"Come," she said. "I know a place."

She led me up a hill between the lines of trellis and I stumbled along behind her, trying to keep the boney legs of my easel from brushing the virgin vines. We came to a small patch of grass, an island in a sea of ripening fruit, and I raised my easel and Angelica her blanket.

"First, we eat," she said, and began laying out rolls of prosciutto and little cubes of provolone. I sat on the far edge of the blanket and watched her slender hands do their work. She kept glancing up as if anticipating me to say something extraordinary.

"I like your shirt, Michael. You must be very successful artist to afford such clothes."

"I have someone who picks out my wardrobe," I said. "Here, let me." I took the bottle of red and raised its cork, and at the same time sold myself the idea that its contents would cleanse the residue in my head from the night before. I saturated my mouth with the first sweet sip and, after resisting the gag reflex, remembered the last time I saw her.

"Where did you go after I finished dinner? I looked for you."

"I tell you. I had to work."

"But you were working there."

She sliced off a section of bread like she was decapitating a small animal.

"Papa has many businesses."

"And you work for Papa?"

"Si. I work for Papa."

She lost her smile, and I was afraid I had said too much. The sun reached its post-noon swelter and a moist film formed over Angelica's body, making her appear well-oiled. I was beginning to sweat.

"We should get started," I said. I left her on the woolen stage and took my place behind the easel where I laid out my paints, an ode to brown, with yellow and beige fingers to draw out the palette. With a stick of charcoal in hand, I looked from behind the easel in time to see Angelica's dress float to the ground like an innocently dropped veil. Her bare skin was cut from a bolt of satin of some exotic Mediterranean hue. She stood statuesque, hands on hips; all oil, body and curve.

"How would you like me?"

A multiple choice question with no wrong answer.

"Ah . . . umm. Sit down and turn your torso like . . . like that. Fine. Whatever. That's good enough." As quickly as I was overcome with her beauty, I overcame a whimsical urge to bang my head into the canvas.

I took another sip of wine, a large sip, and started sketching, working the charcoal gently at first, then picking up attitude. This wasn't to be another formula painting. A lone black line traced her thigh and faded in. One oblong circle hung a breast, and a soft point made the other in profile. Sweeps of brown paint were next, folds and creases and narrow places touched and patterned by fingers of bristles. I made her in abstraction and made her my own, and she didn't even know it.

I wanted to paint this for Catherine, for the things she had done for me. I wanted it to rise above formula, to peel away the layers of the subject, not just let the eyes speak, but fill the nose and shoulders with voice, give each

bump and knuckle a story. While watching my hand move free I realized that control was a bastard. I stripped away the layers of safety and let the brush love the canvas.

An hour passed and I was soaked with sweat and coming down off my first burn. The process was sound, and I was invigorated, frustrated and alive. Angelica was ready for a break.

"How much longer?" she asked.

"Now."

She stretched and arched her back, drawing her breasts taut and parting her legs. I struggled to find a neutral subject.

"When will the grapes be ready?" I asked.

"No, no. The grapes are not ready. The grapes will not be ready for some time."

"You can't rush art, eh?" I sat down, again on the far side of the blanket, and tried to focus on the pea-size grapes. Together, Angelica and I made a sort of Manet picnic.

"No. We must not rush art. The greater the art, the greater the riches," she said staring at me, running her fingers through her flowing hair. "What is wrong, Michael? Are you well?"

"I'm fine. I'm just thinking about my process. My colors."

"What is wrong with your colors?" She crawled across the blanket, her breasts and hair swaying, and sat by my side.

"I'm not sure. I'm not mixing right."

"I think we mix well."

"That's not what I mean."

"I think your colors are *bello*," she said, taking the brush from my hand. "Do you have a color for this?" She ran the bristles over her skin, painting a waning half-moon around her areola. I traced the other half-moon with my fingers and cupped her.

There is a place on the undersides of eyelids where all colors merge in a sparkling prism. In this field-view lies every color simultaneously in a kind of coop that transcends all prejudice and all jealousy. Everything is equal and everything is fair. We tangled between the vines in this color prism and I found my brown and tasted its salt in full color. After release we lay on our backs and slept between the sun and the rolling bonsai hills.

I woke to see her bending over her basket, her knobby spine trailing down to her breezeway. She stood and dropped her dress over her shoulders, then flung her hair from side to side. She grabbed the empty wine bottle and tossed it in her basket.

"Did I do something wrong?" I asked.

"No. You are well," she said blankly.

"I still wanted to have another hour with you and the canvas."

"Perhaps another time."

"Tomorrow?" I reached for my underwear.

"That is up to Papa."

"Ask Papa for the day off. I want to see you. I *need* to see you."

"I go now, Michael."

"Can I see you tonight?"

"No. I work."

Antonio was right, she was difficult. I summoned my will and took her arm, drew her body to mine and tried to kiss her, but she pulled away with a loathsome eye and reached for the blanket, folding it in three quick wisps. Under her arm it went, and with the basket in hand she left our garden and descended the hill, the vineyard slowly swallowing her figure.

I went back to the canvas to see *my* Angelica, disjointed and mysterious, lengths out of proportion. There was an underside to her, a depth I hadn't felt in the flesh, but exposed under my brush. She was seductive and horrible and I'd never painted anything like it. I had to finish it, but for the moment I couldn't touch it. I just stood there staring into the canvas until I heard a rustling from up the hill.

"Look, Audrey. This must be one of those nude artist colonies we read about. A ghastly thing, if you ask me."

My clothes were scattered as if tossed by a sudden storm. I just stood there in my BVDs.

"I've heard of painting nudes, Michael, but really." Audrey came to my side, taking care not to touch me, and looked into Angelica's abstraction. She knew.

"For your lovely Catherine's sake, I hope it's finished."

"No painting is ever finished." I walked over to my pants and wrestled them on.

"She obviously wasn't as much trouble as her father said."

Simon looked the painting over and pulled Audrey to his side. "Love, all this sudden nakedness has made me a bit raw. Will you allow me to wine you and dine you and nibble you in naughty places tonight?" Audrey rocked in her husband's arms, then took his hand and led him down Angelica's path. Before they bobbed out of site, Audrey gave me a mischievous look.

"Your art is inspiring, Michael."



That evening I went to all five restaurants in town. Each maitre d' offered me a table and each time I refused more rudely than I intended.

"Do you know her? Do you know where she's working tonight?"

Even the ones I knew who spoke English pretended not to, and they cloaked themselves in innocent smiles and offered me tourist menus with unbelievable pictures of each dish.

At the last restaurant I spotted Simon and Audrey nestled in back at a table for two, gazing into each other's eyes and balancing each other. I waved to them like I had just run into old friends, but Audrey distracted herself, took Simon's hand, and leaned in close. I heard Simon's cackle all the way to the street, where the first drops of rain were pelting the canvas awning.

I stepped out into the piazza and let the drops fall cold and piercing, slicing through the lingering heat of day. Then I wound my way to the hotel, summoning my nerve.

"I need to speak with Antonio."

The night auditor didn't answer. Just as he did the night before, he dropped my key on the counter and lumbered back to his program.

In my room the sound of rain made the walls soft and the floors hard, and I uncovered my Angelica and sat her under the light. Catherine will still be excited, I thought. She couldn't help but to be excited. It was like looking into a mirror and seeing your eye had changed color. There were new layers I had never found under my brush, all with an urgency that didn't exist a day before. Then I realized, even without another sitting, I had uncovered a new layer of my art. Angelica could disappear. Everyone could disappear. I was out of my slump.



The next morning I stood in the hotel lobby with the train schedule in my hand, the Florence-to-Paris lines circled, waiting to check out. Antonio slid the bill across the cold travertine counter, then pretended to read something important from a stack of papers on his desk. I perused the bill.

"300 euro for special services? What the hell is this? The room was only 60 euro."

Antonio looked over his frame glasses, his eyes different.

"I am afraid you have lost your humor, my friend. Perhaps the mistake is yours?"

"I don't think so."

Antonio began to transform from the jovial clown at the festival to a bull moose posture, his formerly unthreatening gut now an impenetrable rampart.

"Un momento, Signore. This is not your credit card. The name does not match your passport. I cannot stand by while you make a fraud on me." He reached for the telephone.

"It's my father-in-law's card. My future father-in-law."

"Ah. Then I will be happy to detail the charges to your future father-in-law."

"That won't be necessary. What the hell are the charges?"

The door behind me creaked open and Angelica swept into the lobby and passed behind the counter, where she opened a cabinet door and deposited a roll of bills. She wore the same flowering orchids from the day before.

"Buon Giorno, *mio preziosa*," her father cooed.

"Buon Giorno, Papa."

Her humorless eyes swept over me as if they might whisk me into the street before she disappeared into the back room and slammed the door.

"She models for you, no?" Antonio said. "And other services?"

I couldn't look into his eyes, as they were burning a hole in my head. For a moment I said nothing, just waited for divine intervention. Then I looked at him with a pathetic shudder of desperation.

"I'd appreciate it if you would leave the bill as vague as possible."

"For a mere ten euro, cash, Signore, I will be happy to process the bill with a minimum of detail."

I dug into my wallet and pulled out the last of the cash Catherine had given me and slid it across the counter. Antonio tore up the detailed bill and wrote a new one with only a total room charge at the bottom. As I signed the bill, I predicted I would suffer the least consequence with one extravagant hotel stay.

"But of course," Antonio said, "if contacted by the card holder, I will have to detail the charges. It is business, you understand?"

I threw the pen down on the counter. "I thought we reached an understanding?"

The night auditor stepped out of the back room and stood behind Antonio, his arms folded, chest bulging.

"Signore," he said gravely. "You have lost your humor. You do not want to lose anything else."

I gathered my suitcase, easel and portfolio, and stumbled out the door into the street. The earlier showers made the stone pavers glisten, and I stood there squinting for a moment, disoriented, before finding my bearing to the bus station.

I sat outside at the station trattoria and ordered an American coffee. My portfolio leaned against the next table, bulging with abandoned work, and I pulled it toward me and unzipped it for another look at Angelica's image. There were lines of fear I hadn't seen before. The browns fought in chaotic clashes and textures of conflict, as if she was trapped and trying to get out of her skin. It was raw and unknown, and it worked, and it was a part of me. We belonged together like Simon's and Audrey's unfortunate faces. I zipped up the portfolio and kept it close to my side.

As I finished my coffee, I noticed a charred piece of blue fabric with the tip of a star at my feet, and I imagined it pointing north, toward Catherine. The bus to Florence was due in an hour, and from Florence, the train to Paris. Catherine's father would be interested in the progress of my work, and of course, the details of my travels.

The bus south to the hills of Poggibonsi was due in five minutes. From there I could catch the train to Sienna and fade into Umbria. There I could disappear into my art. My compass spun. North and south stood off in my head like two chefs arguing over how best to proceed, for the sake of taste and direction and control.

At the end of the narrow street the sun flashed a glimmer of light off a windshield and a bus roared into view, spewing the damp morning air with diesel. It coughed to a stop and its doors swung open, wide and inviting. The sign in the front window was torn in half and just said "bonsi." I gathered my things, checked for my wallet, and boarded the bus.



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Voiceless

by
Penny Feeny



Clinging to the walls like shadows they creep to the end of the corridor, to the big box casually piled with limp heaps of wool and polyester, cotton and nylon. Everyone else has gone home.

"It isn't stealing," says Sufia. "These are clothes nobody wants."

Lost, discarded and abandoned, the pieces of grey school uniform are mounded over the rim of the box like rain clouds. It's a curious choice, thinks Sufia, for the beige skin tones of their classmates in this cold northern place. From head to toe they appear to have taken on the colour of dying.

She fishes out a pair of trousers and holds them against her brother's skinny legs. She's determined they should both dress the same as the other children. Sufia wants to blend in with the grey waves that flood into canteen and playground, that ebb, more cautiously, toward the back of the classroom. The headmistress has said they can wear whatever they like until the uniform vouchers arrive; it really doesn't matter in the least and their own clothes are quite charming. Sufia disagrees.

She stows trousers, skirts and jumpers into her school bag until it bulges alarmingly. Hearing the tap of high heels, she tosses a shirt to Yusef to hide. "Quick!" she whispers.

"Why are you still here?" demands the teacher, rounding the corner.

Sufia cradles her bag. "My brother lost something," she says.

"What is it, Yusef?"

Yusef pulls the edges of his coat together and stares down at the shoes that pinch his toes. He wonders why she has bothered to address him at all—surely everyone knows what he has lost are his words. Like marbles, in a bag that's suddenly burst, they have scattered and rolled away from him.

No one can remember the last time they heard him speak, whether it was in the camp or on the ferry. Or even earlier, as they journeyed, hidden in the back of a lorry, in a dark so complete, so hot and fetid, it felt like the inside of a goat's stomach. He used to be such a chatterbox. Their mother used to say his tongue would run away from him. Now it flickers nervously at the corner of his mouth or lies clamped between his teeth when he is concentrating. No one can remember the last time it rolled around the shape of a sentence.

"It's not important," Sufia tells the teacher. "We look tomorrow."

As they turn and flee down the corridor, the white polo shirt embroidered with the logo of the school and the name of another pupil slips from beneath his coat, falls onto the shiny floor. Sufia swoops to pick it up without breaking step. They don't stop running, through rows of red brick terraces, across a scrap of wasteland, around the back of the pub, until they reach their street and the door that leads to their flat above the bookmakers.



Usually when they get back, their mother is waiting for them. For most of the day she's been surrounded by silence—or the gabble of voices she doesn't understand. Over the hours she has penned in her anxieties and her loneliness; when her children come home the words tumble out in a torrent. She storms through their three rooms like a tornado while they shift quietly toward the bread on the table. The bread is so soft and white it forms a plug in their throats that no sounds can pass. They fold slices into their mouths while their mother unleashes her stored-up thoughts to her only audience.

But today there is no bread on the table and the cold drab sitting room squats in darkness. Sufia doesn't turn on the lights. She lifts the cushions of the old leatherette sofa and lays the purloined uniforms flat underneath, glad that her mother isn't hovering, interrogating or complaining about her day. Only when she has finished and all the cushions are replaced does she catch the low groan of pain from the bedroom and rush towards it.

Yusef, left behind, knots his fingers tightly together. He likes to watch his knuckles whiten, to become as pale and sharp as the face of an English child. When Sufia comes back she's trembling with importance. She shouts at him for standing there still in the dark.

"Can't you do anything?" she hisses violently, snapping on the light switch. "I have to go out and telephone the hospital. I have to find Papa. I have to do all this and you—you're no use at all!" She stamps her foot in frustration, because at eleven years old she has to be in charge of the family. It isn't fair that while other children are eating biscuits and watching television she must roam the windy Liverpool streets in search of her father.

Every morning he goes out, hoping to find casual work. He tells them solemnly that he's a good responsible father, that he needs to earn extra cash because, as everyone agrees, the vouchers are not enough. Sufia knows this is true; she also knows he has discovered alcohol. And sometimes even the noblest of fathers, along with other compatriots emasculated by their circumstances, will find a way to escape in a can of lager.

Yusef can't be sent, of course, because he can't carry messages, and in any case he's too young. He'll have to stay and sit by their mother's bedside and let her clutch his arm when the pain gets too bad. Sufia will be back as soon as she can. Maybe the doctor or the ambulance will arrive first. If there's a knock at the door Yusef must open it. They used to hide and pretend they weren't at home, but this is an emergency. All he has to do is lead the caller to the bedroom; the situation will be self-evident.

As the door bangs shut on Sufia, Yusef gingerly goes to find their mother. She is lying in an enormous heap in the central sagging dip of the bed. She would have preferred her daughter to stay with her—what use is a six-year-old boy with terrified eyes?—but at least she's no longer alone. She bites her lip to stop her cries escaping, not wanting to frighten him, but he has already been reminded of their time in the belly of the lorry. How cold it was at night, how hot by day: the overpowering smells of oil and grease, of sweat and ammonia, of fear.

He had been climbing into the back, into his father's arms, when he'd caught his shin on a jagged piece of metal and yelped. "Another sound," the driver said, "and I'll cut your tongue out."

Yusef had never counted their fellow travellers. Their family stayed close together while other forms heaved and wriggled and tried to find comfort. One day—they knew it was day from the temperature, from the way heat licked their faces and their mouths grew parched—a young man went wild for water. He pounded on the sides of the lorry and yelled for something to quench his thirst. At night when they stopped and the air around them seemed to freeze, the doors swung open. "Who wanted a drink?" the driver asked and was swiftly delivered the culprit. Yusef wasn't sure whether he heard a shot, maybe after all it was the pop of a water bottle opening. But the man didn't come back for the rest of the journey and even with a water bottle, he wouldn't get far wandering the desert.

Later, when they'd arrived, when they were threatened no longer by guns or knives, but only by overwhelming ignorance, Sufia took control. She could understand the voices. She could listen and translate and relay information. She became interpreter, confidante and diplomat, building her words into bridges. She explained why they had been dispersed across the country, from Dover to Liverpool. She knew how to ask for furniture from the landlord and how to talk to the teachers at school. She'd shown Yusef how to practise the long sweeping shapes of the English alphabet and how to write his name. She protected him from other children, from the ones who prodded curiously between his ribs or tried to peer into his mouth to uncover the secret of his silence. Once he defended himself by biting; now they mostly give him a wide berth.

He wishes Sufia hadn't abandoned him. When the knocking hammers on the door he doesn't want to answer it; he wants to cower under a chair. But his mother pushes him forward and swings her legs onto the floor in preparation; she has essential possessions ready in a plastic carrier bag. Two men in uniform fill the hallway. They each take an elbow and half carry his mother down the stairs and into the street. They help her into the back of the ambulance and the white double doors slam behind her, and as it drives away at speed he wonders whether he will ever see her again. He can imagine his father sinking into despair, lamenting his loss noisily with his friends, ignoring his motherless children.

Sufia has arrived on the step beside him and scrubs the tears from his face. "Don't be silly, Yusef," she says.



Now, in less than two days, their mother has returned.

She's back in bed again, but this time she's propped upright against the pillows and in the crook of her arm lies a fragile infant: flesh as succulent as a fig, dimples pitting the softness of tiny star-shaped hands.

Everyone is pleased about the baby. At the very least, he will bring them extra money. And Sufia hopes he will even give them a better chance to win the coveted leave to remain. Their father shakes his head when she suggests this, but he looks so proud and happy. He parades the baby on his shoulder and says to Yusef, "Do you want to hold your brother?"

Yusef nods and perches in the corner of the sofa. Clear dark eyes gaze steadily up at him; he sees no flicker of fear or distress. He cups his hand around the warm soft head and watches while the rosy mouth purses and puckers, the lips moving apart and together, but no sound coming out. Who would think that such a small helpless creature, one who couldn't walk or sit or feed himself, could be so powerful? That a person who couldn't even speak might be able to work magic?

In the night they hear wailing, the strong defiant clamour of hunger and impatience. Yusef tenses his body, waiting for his mother's anguished pleas for silence through the partition wall. Instead he hears a snuffling, the greedy sucking of a creature altogether unaware of consequences. By degrees, Yusef relaxes the grip of his hands, the muscles in his calves, and the baby falls into a steady soothing sleep.



On Monday morning, Sufia produces the new uniforms, sharply pressed from their hiding place beneath the sofa cushions, original name tapes safely snipped away. Her skirt hangs loosely over her hips; his trousers flop over his shoes and his shirt collar has a grubby mark.

"Where did those come from?" asks their mother, frowning.

"The teacher gave them to us."

"Did the vouchers arrive?"

Sufia nods, not knowing if she will be believed, but their mother is more interested in the infant tugging at her breast, her new miracle. "Well, I suppose there's room for you to grow," she says carelessly.

Up until now she has taken her children to school. Perhaps she's afraid that if she doesn't deliver them through the gates they will spend the day in doorways or bus shelters as their father sometimes does. She hasn't realised how much they long to dissolve into the scampering crowd, to disassociate themselves from her bulk, from the swathes of material that shroud her and set her apart from the other parents with their jeans and dyed spikes of hair. But today she must stay at home with the baby; her legs are still too weak for walking and he is too small and new for the inhospitable air of the street.

Bold in their new identities, Sufia and Yusef stroll into the playground, wondering if anyone will point and notice, whether they have truly managed to look the same as all the rest. On the asphalt some boys are kicking a football—as they do every morning in this football-crazy city. Their bags and coats are piled into makeshift goalposts. As Yusef stops to watch, the battered sphere of leather soars into the sky and bounces near him, twice. He reaches out, catches it, and cradles it in his arms.

Like a pair of lost marbles, rollicking in his direction, the words jostle for

position in Yusef's head. He extends his trophy to the boy approaching him and opens his mouth. "Play ball?" he says.



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My husband and my sons are in there now, the bone saw ripping through the corpse, dismembering it. Soon they'll get out the cleavers and the special knives and go to work with the chopping and the cutting and the slicing. My husband is the town butcher, our sons are his apprentices. My husband is six-foot-four. The boys are both six-two, identical twins, eighteen years old, big and hard and hairy. All that rough masculinity every night around the kitchen table as we devour our dead animals and veggies. Of course you know what butchers are like. Bare-armed and charming and always with a sly wink and a let-me-take-you-away-to-paradise-love look. So I fell for a butcher, a dashing handsome butcher, and we got married and had twin sons and now they're both butchers and that's the way of the world.

Let me take you on a tour of my town, Rockley, population 1000, but soon to be one less because tomorrow I intend to scarper, to bugger off, for good, forever, never to return.

So yes, over there, that's the butcher shop, built more than a hundred years ago of the local red brick (as you can see). And that over there is the School of Arts, naturally, and right next to it is the museum, our glorious history (men mining, men constructing, men fighting far away, men at sport, men in the fields, whiskered men, bronzed men, skinny men, ugly men, old men) housed in what used to be the mill. And then next to that, as you'd expect, the pub. And all built of the same red brick. My great-grandfather made those bricks. Or a good many of them at least. His father came to this town when the gold was first found. We've been here ever since, and now I'm the last of the line, the only child of dead parents.

And I took my husband's name at marriage, as is the local custom. So there you go.

X X X

Middy already. For lunch, a salad sandwich and a bottle of mineral water. I'm in the town park sitting under a gum tree. The trees here are old, most planted by the founding fathers. On the other side of the river you can see oaks and pines and ashes. Nearer the water are the willows. They've recently done this park up, put in new barbecues and picnic tables and public toilets. On the weekends there are lots of people here, eating, drinking, playing cricket, fishing. I love these winter days, clear sky, sunshine, windless, calm.

I've decided to lay off the booze today. I want to be sober for my final look around the town. And I want a clear head tomorrow when it's time to leave. The drinking usually starts at midday, a large glass of claret accompanied by Days of Our Lives. In the mornings I work—cook, clean, shop. I keep a good house.

I've never had a job outside the house. I've never really wanted one. The women in my family have always stayed home. In this part of the bush it's 1900. Forever 1900. My husband used to say he didn't mind if I worked. But he actively encouraged me not to. 'A woman's place...' So I've kept myself in my place. Of course, he has his little joke: 'I wouldn't mind being able to sit around all day and do nothing.'

The trick with drinking is firstly always to have a ready supply from a safe source, and secondly to have an efficient and secret way of disposing of the empties. By safe source I mean getting it out of town. There's only one bottle shop here and the amount of alcohol one purchases is everybody's business. There are half a dozen big and small towns within an hour's drive and between them there are a lot of grog outlets. I vary my place of acquisition. 'What'll it be today, love?' Any one place knows me only as the occasional buyer.

And then there are the empties. I drink wine casks. Always the same—claret because it doesn't require refrigeration. At any given time there's a half-full cask on show. But I'm always actually refilling from a secret stash. If questioned, the family would have to admit, 'Mum's been on that cask for ages.'

I get through a four-litre cask in less than two days. Plus the beer. I always buy cans, not bottles. That's the key. Cans crush easily. Crush everything and wrap it with the daily garbage and get it into the bin. It just takes a system. I have excellent organizational skills.

My husband never knows how much I've been drinking, even though I'm always tanked by tea time. He and the boys spend two hours at the pub before coming home, but I'm sure it makes no difference. The orbit of their genuine interest in anything does not include me.

And that's the way it is.

X X X

One night a few weeks ago I made an announcement. A well-cooked leg of lamb was shining on the table. My husband was sharpening the knife prior to carving. The baked veggies were crisp and golden. The boys were hungry.

I said, 'I'm thinking of becoming a vegetarian.'

My husband stopped carving.

'What?'

'You know ... A vegetarian.'

'You're kidding?'

'No.'

'Don't be bloody stupid.'

'I'm not being stupid. I'm being very serious.'

'You are aware of what I do for a living?'

'That's got nothing to do with it.'

My husband carved some meat. My sons were silent. My husband said, 'What's put this idea into your head?'

'Nothing. It's just the way I think.'

'You've never thought this way before.'

'I've always thought this way. I've never said anything about it before but I've always thought this way.'

'Bullshit.'

'It's something I feel more and more strongly about. You know, the way that we all...'

My sons laughed. One of them said, 'You're bonkers, Mum.'

At that moment I knew it was possible to hate your own child. My husband has often called me bonkers. It's the word he uses whenever I do or say anything that does not accord with his incredibly broad view of the world. Bonkers. I mean, what sort of a stupid bloody word is that? My husband's mother was bonkers too. And thus it continues.

But anyway, after my son had informed me of the fact that I was bonkers, my husband turned to him and said, 'She's getting more and more bonkers every day.' They all laughed. Then my husband went back to the carving, the boys started talking about work. They seemed oblivious to what had just occurred.

I stared at my plate. Then I looked at my sons, and at my husband as he dished up the meat. I felt as if I'd just been emptied out and crushed. I knew that it was time to leave.

You're probably wondering why the cemetery is so far out of town. Five kilometers, and then half a kilometer up this rough track. Maybe the founding fathers envisaged great expansion. But instead, when the gold ran out the town shrank. If it weren't for the brickworks there'd be no one here.

But just look at how much space the dead get. Paddocks and paddocks. There's a lot of room in the bush. And so quiet.

My family's up here in this corner. Half a paddock to themselves. As you can see there are lots of unmarked graves. Unknown relatives from the nineteenth century. Here's my great-grandfather, the brickmaker. And my grandmother. And my mother.

It's three in the afternoon. Usually by now I'd be deep into the claret and the arvo soopies. I'm not sure why I brought you out here. Maybe it's something to do with the fact my husband is getting into his family history, tracing his family tree.

Of course, he doesn't give a damn about my mob here. I told him so. He said nothing was stopping me from doing my family history. But I told him I didn't really care about that stuff anyway, family history is nonsense. I mean, you don't have to go back too far before you're related to half the people in the world; it all depends what line you follow, six generations back you've got sixty-four direct ancestors all with the same amount of genetic input, one of whom happens to be

the great-great-great-great-grandfather you share a name with.

But my husband didn't care for that argument. He's gone back six generations, and he's in Ireland digging up spuds, and he's happy because he knows where he comes from.

X X X

One year ago I decided to write a novel, a romance. I announced my decision to the domestic hearth. This time I was not bonkers.

'You've always got your nose stuck in the damned things. Might make a bit of money.'

My mother read Mills and Boon. I inherited her collection—thousands. I'd heard that Mills and Boon had guidelines for aspiring writers. I contacted them. They sent me a booklet, *How To Write a Romance*. I read the whole thing. There are many categories of romance. I learned the different rules for the different categories. What it comes down to is the stage of the relationship the happy couple is allowed to jump into the sack—after marriage (my mother's books), before marriage, whatever. But remember: *lovemaking should only take place when the emotional commitment between the characters justifies it*.

The booklet also told me: *the successful romance writer will fully understand and believe in the redemptive power of true love*.

X X X

Five o'clock and here I am back home. Look all you want, you won't find a speck of dust. And the carpets were vacuumed yesterday, the floors were washed this morning.

My husband and sons will be home in a couple of hours. They'll be knocking off about now, and then they'll head to the pub for a while. If you were to stay and meet them you'd probably think I'd been giving you a bum steer. You'd probably say, 'They're not so bad, they're just ordinary blokes.' And I'd have to agree with you; of course they're O.K., of course they're just ordinary blokes. Of course.

Anyway, I need a drink. And yeah, I know I said I wouldn't be drinking today, but let's not be too bloody ridiculous about it. One beer. One can of beer.

What I've got to do is sit and think and work out a strategy. But first I'd better get some tea organized. I'm doing a stir-fry tonight, something simple. Onion, capsicum, Chinese greens, garlic, beef slices, soy sauce, palm sugar, oyster sauce, noodles. It's always a favorite with the boys.

I like slicing and dicing, working slowly and methodically, putting a meal together, sipping my drink. So I'll prepare everything now and when they get home I can whack the lot into a pan and it'll be ready in five minutes.

X X X

All done. And now I think just one more beer. All right, so tomorrow's the big day. Tomorrow's the day that I'll be pissing off forever. So have I told my husband and sons that I'm leaving? No. Will I tell them? Absolutely not. This time I refuse to be declared bonkers. I'll just up and leave—when I've packed of course. I'll have to do that in the morning, after they've left for work. So yes, that's what I'll do, I'll pack in the morning.

X X X

They'll be home any minute, and then I'll start the cooking. Get that stir-fry going. They'll be hungry.

There's the car in the driveway now. One more drink. I reckon a large claret will do the job. Yes. And tomorrow I'm leaving, tomorrow I am definitely leaving, definitely, I just need a strategy and I'll be all right.

x x x

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Silence at last. We hadn't made it to the overlook in time for sunset, but a suggestion of red glowed over a series of angular mountaintops. A picture-book crescent moon highlighted the darkness overtaking the sky—all seen through silhouettes of lightning-damaged pines. It felt so fine to be back in California, in the high Sierras, in the cool dry air of eight thousand feet. And the silence was good.

Freddie was the first to speak. "Big storms up here—not a tree without a high dead branch. Look at that one, shaped like a tuning fork."

Molly laughed, "I thought you were going to say something else." She didn't elaborate and none of us especially wanted to hear—knowing it was likely to be another dildo joke.

As star-brilliance replaced red dusk, the group began to talk again, but in almost whispers. Finally Julie's, "Must get back to work, I suppose," reminded us of what we all were here for.

"O.K.," said Freddie. "Gotta go, gotta go."

We piled into "Taylor," the truck, and Freddie slid it slowly down the rough track with the headlights off, allowing us to enjoy the moonlit scrub, the starry night.

"Hey Freddie, you forgot the lights," Molly giggled.

He sighed slightly and gave us the bright view of the path we were bumping along, turning the mysterious night into a cozy truck-full of field biologists going back to camp.



I had joined the camp a week earlier, keen to see how the field crew members were doing their experiments, keen to examine the butterflies and hoping that I could use the system they all worked in to test my own theories on insect foraging and the problems of being a herbivore. Freddie was a friend of more than twenty years, and I had read many of his research papers about his beloved Edith's checkerspot butterfly. He had worked in Californian field sites for thirty-five years, twenty at this particular one near King's Canyon. His knowledge of the butterfly was prodigious, and his long-term study of genetic change in behavior over time—evolution in action—unprecedented.

This year there was Freddie and three students, Julie, Molly and Dave—four highly contrasted individuals, but it would take time to find out about them properly. For my visit, I was honored with a sleeping space in "Lambert," the old trailer that Freddie towed up the mountains every year. The others slept in four of the six tents in camp, though Julie's tent was out of sight among the lodgepole pines and ceanothus bushes.

Lambert turned out to be a mixed blessing. There was the bunk, certainly, and with screening, an absence of mosquitoes. The cooking facility for camp—a pentane stove—was also convenient for early morning cups of tea while everyone else still slept. The broken-down fridge contained a useful library. However, Lambert was also the place for night work at the small table. Electricity from solar panels allowed lights and an electric balance for weighing larvae and pupae. Gossip and work continued until midnight, except for Julie who usually went on until the small hours, long after I was undressed and in my sleeping bag on the darker side of the cramped space.

Between me and the workstation, the stove was usually covered with dirty pots and pans, the sticky blackened floor with food coolers brought in so as not to tempt bears, the shelves with plastic cups of caterpillars and pupae and all kinds of paraphernalia needed for the field work. At the foot of my bed was a heap of Freddie's clothes and papers, Dave's shoes, bags full of sticks, markers, wire, and other unidentified objects. The space above, including over my bed, was hung with cages of butterflies. The small sink was full of variously aged corn, onions, potatoes and oranges, there being no running water. The small toilet was for emergencies, as emptying it was somewhere in the distant future.

It was delightful to get out early and alone into the fresh still air, to see the first rays of sun through the trees, hear the woodpeckers and watch the mountain chickadees, to walk among the great sweeps of phlox, collinsia, paintbrush and monkey flowers, and then across the meadow full of shooting stars and daisies. The view south included snowy peaks. I was the first to get the spade and toilet roll from its spot under the largest ponderosa pine and walk to one of the sandy areas with dense bushes. I was the first to get a splash of water on my face from the carboy outside Lambert, avoiding the forlorn bowl of dirty dishes under the spigot. I was the first to forage for bread or fruit or cereal from among the various boxes, cupboards and coolers.

By seven o'clock, Julie was checking small dishes of eggs or caterpillars, putting pupae in or out of the sun, examining butterflies in cages hanging all along the long clotheslines strung between two Douglas firs. She took breakfast from her own store of health foods in her isolated truck and sat down at a small table in the early sun to sort newly hatched larvae into new cups. Slim and boyish, with dark curly hair, long legs, dimpled smile and gentle eyes, she bent over a cup and peered into it with a hand lens. She has an immediate boyish appeal.

"How's it going, Julie?"

"Fine, thanks Liz. Busy day." She smiled. And then she would have some technique to discuss: "Do you think I need to worry about the fate of eggs in the field, or should I just put out newly hatched larvae? I would like to have the females lay the eggs on the plant, but so many eggs are taken by predators I don't think I can get enough data on larvae if I start with eggs."

On another occasion she began, "I don't want to handle the larvae; should I let them just climb out of the epi tube themselves?" And so we would talk, turning over the details of each experiment, trying to establish the best compromise for getting the data she needed for her question. She knows the literature on evolutionary ecology and all the relevant studies of plant-feeding insects, including my own. She is curious about many details but has big questions.

Julie studies speciation. How do two species arise from one? Evolution of new species is thought to come about when populations become physically isolated, allowing them to develop different characteristics in the different places (allopatric speciation). Among plant-feeding insects, it appears that speciation can occur without geographic separation of populations (sympatric speciation), and Freddie's team had established, using molecular techniques, that genetically distinct populations of "spotties" used different host plants—collinsia or pedicularis or plantain or paintbrush. Females of each population had behaviors adapted to the physical details of the specific host plant—details of landing, curling the abdomen to lay the eggs, or arrangement of the eggs on the plant. This then could be a starting point for the evolution of new species. Julie's plan was to cross individuals that used different hosts and to compare performance of their offspring with performance of those reared from pure strains.

If a butterfly species is splitting into two, hybrids between them are typically weaker in some way—the best offspring coming from same-kind matings. Julie's careful experiments would, for the first time, test whether there was evidence of the beginning of this kind of speciation occurring in a single geographical area.

Julie has a goal with a specific focus. She works with speed and precision. She works long hours. And she loves the outdoor life, the physicality of camping, though her eyes mist over when she talks of her lover, a woman working in Tanzania this summer.



After Julie, Dave is usually the next to emerge from his tent. He stretches, "Ah, fabulous day, what luck." Then he stands on his hands by the picnic table, jumps up over a chair, before racing off down the slope for his morning run. Julie and I laugh. But he is only away about fifteen minutes. He approaches us, firing his comments:

"Hi Julie. Hi Liz. Great day, good day, good morning!"

"Say, you girls had breakfast yet?"

"Must just run to my outcrop site." He picks up his backpack, ready with vials to collect plants with spottie eggs on them, and is gone.

Dave is examining movement of butterflies within and between populations at different subsites, near King's Canyon. It is important to know if changes in host preference could be due to movement of butterflies with different preferences, or could be the result of genetic changes in the butterflies resident at a site. He and Freddie do a lot of preference testing—a time-consuming study in butterfly behavior.

A female butterfly in a waiting cage is gently picked up by the wings and placed on a potential host. If she is interested, and if the smell is right, she

taps with her front feet on the leaf surface and lowers her antennae—a complex tasting procedure. A highly acceptable plant causes her to curl her abdomen after just two taps with her feet. A somewhat less acceptable one requires more thought—she taps four or five times before curling. Marginal hosts require repeated tapping and may not result in curling at all. Unacceptable plants never elicit curling. She abuts her curled abdomen onto a leaf, and one by one small green eggs emerge and remain lightly stuck to the leaf and to each other. In about twenty minutes there may be fifty eggs in a bunch. The method varies with the host. On pedicularis, she likes to nestle down in the crevices at the base of the plant and push the eggs downwards. On collinsia, she may walk delicately on an upper leaf and put the eggs in lines along the petiole. "Pedic" and "colly" specialists are not the same however. Pedic females occasionally accept colly but have trouble with it; they fall to the ground looking for the elusive crevices in this spindly plant. Colly specialists walk around on the prostrate pedic plant with abdomens waving upwards, apparently seeking the more erect stems of colly. Dave and Freddie work together most days. Freddie loves to reiterate the wonders of spotties.

"Just look at that, Dave. Come over here Liz. Look at this colly kid on pedic. Guess what pop she comes from, eh? What an *indecive* girl!" Freddie's eccentric habit of inverting syllables or even words, or altering their pronunciation, is one of his rather endearing characteristics.

This female butterfly is being tested on colly and doesn't curl. She is then tested on pedic and curls after just two taps, but is not allowed to lay eggs, as this would alter her readiness to lay eggs at all. She is re-tested on colly to ensure the difference is not just due to the order of plants offered. She rejects it again after eight taps. She is definitely a pedic specialist—on to the next butterfly.



Freddie emerges from his tent in his crumpled clothes of yesterday. His blue denim shirt is missing a button where it is tightest over his small paunch, and the white skin of his behind shows through a hole in his gray baggy pants. His nearly bald head is sunburned and the remaining wispy gray hair straggles down his neck and around his ears.

"Good morning Freddie," I call from Julie's table. "Want a cup of tea?"

"Arghhhh."

"You O.K. Freddie?"

"Arghhhh."

"Yes then?"

"Diarrhea, no tea." He struts slowly to the spade and disappears over the hill.

Meanwhile Dave is back. "Hi guys, anyone want an egg over-easy in butter?" But he knows he is the only taker. He wipes out the dirty frying pan and searches the coolers. Ice has turned to water in all of them and a smell of very old broccoli fills the air.

"So who's going to get ice, eh? Pong-dong here."

He finds the eggs and butter and disappears into Lambert singing. In a few minutes he appears at the door.

"Anyone seen the thingo for turning eggies?"

"Try Freddie's tent," I suggested, "I think he had it for scooping up some

spilt seeds in there."

He finds it eventually, with a dozen rubber bands around the blade and a small note tucked into them. "Remember to collect more males from Tamarak," he reads before skipping back to Lambert. Freddie, returning, repeats it, "Remember to collect more males from Tamarak. That's what you need, isn't it Julie? And don't we want some more capertillers from the R5 site?"

Most mornings Freddie forgets breakfast as he checks on the various livestock in camp. There are trays of pupae waiting to emerge into butterflies on a table under a shade cloth stretched between four young lodgepole pines. He peers into the cups with transparent lids.

"Ah-ha, a Tamarak female and two Pinetree males."

Next he checks the potted plants. There are collinsia seedlings grown in the natural soil—large flowered and small flowered varieties.

"Liz, look at this. See the *senescking* ones?" I examine the little plants that are senescing, or beginning to die. "Some go yellow and some go red. The collinsia butterflies from stone ridge prefer the red-*senescking* ones and grow better on them, but they lay the eggs long before the plant gets to that stage, and the pedic butterflies that will accept collinsia don't *discriminate*, fantastic eh?"

Next he checks the exotic plants that contain certain chemicals called iridoid glycosides—plant specimens he has obtained from nurseries. These are the host plant chemicals that spottie butterflies particularly like. Are there some species that all butterflies will accept? It would be useful for Julie perhaps. He proceeds to his cups of larvae being reared. He has two types—small ones that will go into diapause, the resting stage, in a week or so and stay that way until next spring. The larger ones that hatched last summer, in diapause through last winter, will soon become adults. I offer to feed them and get detailed instructions.

"Just so much fresh food—too much and it gets too wet in there, and the moisture on the sides of the cup is an *impediment* to locomotion. On the other hand, too little and it's not enough to last a day. "

He sits on a chair beside the box and talks. He tells and retells his spottie findings, his stories of evolution and behavior. He is proud of his long-term studies and all the details of the evolutionary history he has uncovered. He reminds me of a comment I made to him years ago—long before I saw the butterflies and discovered how docile they really were. "You said," he reminds, laughing, "'I have to say your methods don't look at all feasible, except that they produce such reasonable results.'"

"Well, yes, it has to be seen to be really believed!" I replied. And I remembered when he first told stories of holding butterflies by the wings in order to test their plant preferences. I was not the only one who thought the method preposterous—most of us in the entomological world were more than conscious of how stress altered insect behavior, and nothing, usually, was worse than handling for stressing an individual and making it behave abnormally.

He sighed and removed his very dirty feet from sandals, the heels worn through around the edges.

He continued with a sigh, "I have had such trouble with grants over the years because people didn't believe how wonderfully *anemable* spotties really are. But now I think they do."

"I am a believer now," I assured him, and he leaned over to peck me on the cheek as he chuckled into his scruffy beard. He had always been a kind friend, but it was nice to have him say so this way. And I put off the discussion I had been waiting for—my theories on the importance of natural enemies. We had diverged in our views on plants and insects over the last

fifteen years—Freddie was certain that the plant was the principal reason of specialization, whereas I was certain that predators and parasites had more to do with it. I would wait a few days before discussing the experiment I wanted to set up.

As Freddie talked and I listened by the box of cups, Julie went on sorting eggs and larvae at the outdoor table, and Dave ate his hearty breakfast in Lambert's doorway. Slowly, out crawled Molly from her tent, shaking her brown hair with its bleached and bright pink strands.

Yawning and stretching in front of her tent she spoke slowly, "I *doan* know how you manage on so little sleep, I gotta have eight hours at least."

Freddie smiled. He liked this youngest of the students though she was still without any research focus. "Rise and shine, Molly. Go and get some breakfast and then you can help with butterfly feeding."

Molly is obese but seemingly not concerned about it. She returned to her tent and came out with three chocolate bars.

"O.K., I better get all the cages into the sun, eh?" she says.

"Yeah, and bring over the feeding pads so I can lick them and taste them for *concentration*—they are in Lambert somewhere... Oh dear, they are too *concentrated*, let me just add a bit of water."

Molly removed about fifty of the lightweight pentagonal butterfly cages hanging from ropes stretched between trees, and placed them on the ground in the sun. By the time she had finished her chocolate, there was fluttering of wings and a general waking up of butterflies. She sat on one of the stray chairs, turned to face the sun, and took a cage onto her lap. She unzipped the side nearest, and slid in a Petri dish containing a foam pad soaked in artificial nectar. The butterflies rested or fluttered on the sunny side of the cage and she picked each up by the wings and placed it on the pad. Obliging, as their feet touched the sugar, out came each one's proboscis and feeding began. Females can overeat, so each of them was allowed no more than two minutes before being chased off the pad. They don't find the sugar on their own in the cages so this controls these gourmands' appetites.

"Freddie, I have one here that won't feed. What am I gonna do with her?"

"I'll come over. She will need to have her proboscis unrolled and placed on the pad. Here, just use this needle and poke it into the roll of her proboscis, then gently pull it away, see?"

"Food and sex is all these things do, eh? And they can't do anything in cages. Look at this old male. Do you think he is any good for crosses, any sex in him?"

"Old doesn't mean no good at the romantics, Molly," Freddie chuckled.

"Ha ha, no offense meant, Freddie. By the way, when are you going down to Fresno? I wouldn't mind doing some shopping. When you went down Monday, I asked you to bring cake and all you brought was nuts. Oh, and we need more vials at Smart and Final. By the way Freddie, you snore. I distinctly heard you last night."

"Now, my spouse never said I snore. She said she couldn't live with a man who snores—that's her *semintent*."

"Well you do. My boyfriend snores a little bit. But I just kick him gently and he stops—well for a while anyways. Unless we get busy like."

As the morning warmed up and everyone concentrated on their jobs, conversation dropped off, though at intervals Freddie started again on a spottie story. Dave would have had jokes, but he was at another field site. The fierce California sun climbed and under hats heads were damp.

"How about lunch?" I ventured.

"Sure," was the answer from all.

I decided to find materials for a salad and get away from the individual foraging syndrome. In one cooler was a pack of mixed greens, and in another the tomatoes I had brought with me. In Lambert, I found an onion and a pepper, some walnuts, lemon and olive oil. Dave was back just in time. He remembered his last trip to Fresno and a lovely girl he saw in Kinkos, where he went to plug in his computer and get email.

"Gorgeous—two taps curl, for sure!"

"Say, Liz, what about a trip to Tamarak, eh? It's only ten miles as the fly crows, but we have to go down the mountain, then north and up to seven thousand five hundred feet again, O.K.?"

"Sure, whatever..." I was happy to go along and see everything.



In the previous ten years, I had steadily worked on different systems to test a new idea. Perhaps the restriction of most plant-feeding insect species to narrow ranges of plants was related to the avoidance of predation. After all, an insect could have a more sophisticated camouflage on a single plant type, than by having a generalized green or brown that was only crudely camouflaged on any particular plant. Specific cases were famous—the looper caterpillar that is exactly like a pine needle, or the grasshopper that is a wonderful replica of a grass blade. The notion was unpopular when I began testing the hypothesis—plant chemistry and plant defenses were fashionable, together with the belief that narrow diets were about adaptation to specific plant chemistries. The examples of perfect camouflage were seen as unusual, or at best, the end result of eons of time spent on the particular hosts after adaptation to the plant chemistry.

Time passed and experiments proved that specialists escaped predation more than generalists, but here, in the California mountains with spotties having preferences for one, two, or several different host plants, I could perhaps manage a completely naturalistic study.

Freddie was keen but felt he knew enough to be sure I was wrong. "I know the *persolanity* of 'em Liz, and they ain't like your grasshopper guys."

Julie was intrigued and being younger seemed more open. "Be great if it worked."



The next day Freddie and I went to Tamarak. With nets and vials and new butterfly cages, with coolers of food and bottles of water, we wound our way to the ridge. We had many stops: Stone Creek where, eight years ago a fire came through and the quality of host plants changed so that colly insects began to prefer plantain, which had been introduced from Europe; Glenwood Flats where Freddie first found paintbrush feeding caterpillars; and eventually Shadow Gap where we began to see flying spotties. It took me a while to get the technique—females fly close to the ground searching for host plants and nectar plants, males fly higher and faster and more erratically, seeking out females and avoiding other males. The differences require different netting methods. We mainly needed males for Julie, but then Freddie decided it would be nice to get females as well, to check that their host preferences are the same as last year.

We stopped for our picnic lunch, jumping up to net the occasional passing spottie, and as we rested I mentioned my plans again with Freddie.

I would have to coax butterflies with preferences for one or several hosts to lay eggs on the various plant species, and then study the fate of eggs and caterpillars in detail. Time and endless patience would be needed. Long hours of watching tiny nature would be essential. But the desire to get an answer bugged me so much. I was compelled to do whatever it took.

Handling of individual butterflies I had learned from Freddie and his team, but it was a long job to get fifty individual females to lay eggs on appropriate plants, count the tiny eggs with the aid of a lens, mark the plants, and record everything relevant.



Back at camp at the end of the day I had one last discussion with the team about my plans. We decided Pinetree Meadow was the best spot—it was an easy walk and close to where Julie had experiments running.

Freddie was skeptical, "Liz, you'll be dead lucky if you get good data. And you know, I have looked at natural enemies—nothing in it." But he was happy to help with the egg-laying experiments and impart the details of his "spottie knowledge."

Julie knew it would be a long job. "Good luck," she smiled, as Freddie fussed over exactly how I should hold each female butterfly and get her to do the job.

Molly gaped, "You really gonna spend that much time?"

"Good on ya," was all Dave could say.



For many days, I lay on my stomach in Pinetree Meadow, wearing an optivisor (magnifiers on a head band) and hat, long pants and long sleeves. I recorded predators, deaths, losses. I ignored the night hours, returning to my patch at daybreak to see what had disappeared in my absence. Certainly eggs and baby larvae disappeared. There was a suggestion that the offspring of more picky butterflies survived in greater numbers and my excitement grew. Bets were cast in the camp at night.

"Good on ya, Lizzie. Go for it," Dave encouraged.

"It's all over the shop each year I tell you, and for sure there will be just a confuzzed data set,"— Freddie's usual pessimism with a newcomer to his system.

Julie was hopeful, "Aw, Freddie, you haven't seen the trends."

"*Incredulous* I will be if she finds a pattern."

I rose earlier each day, made tea and rushed to my sites.

Molly brought me snacks. "Don't know how you can stand it. Where do you pee an' that?"



It was nine days after I had started my observations. I hurried into my clothes as my tea brewed, examined my notebook, collected my optivizer and vials. I felt that this experiment was to be a definitive test of my idea in a well-researched, totally natural system. Would the results support the growing interest in the role of higher trophic levels in host affiliation of plant-feeding insects? I would surprise Freddie! The timing was critical. The season was coming to an end and I must use every hour I could muster in this last enormous effort. The next week would provide the answer—yes or no.

Arriving at the first site at daybreak, I found that all the plants had been grazed to the ground. At the second, many were gone and critical labels were knocked over. And the third was a similar scene of confusion. I never did discover what rabbit or other animal had done the deed, but it was the sudden end of my experiment. Such are the vagaries of field-work. Such are the reasons why students take years to complete degrees in ecology. They all said, "Too bad," with knowing looks, and Freddie laughed, "See!" I knew they felt for me really, but each had experienced frustrations of one sort or another, and knew that such is the nature of field research.

Though my disappointment was profound, I said, "Too bad," and laughed with the others.



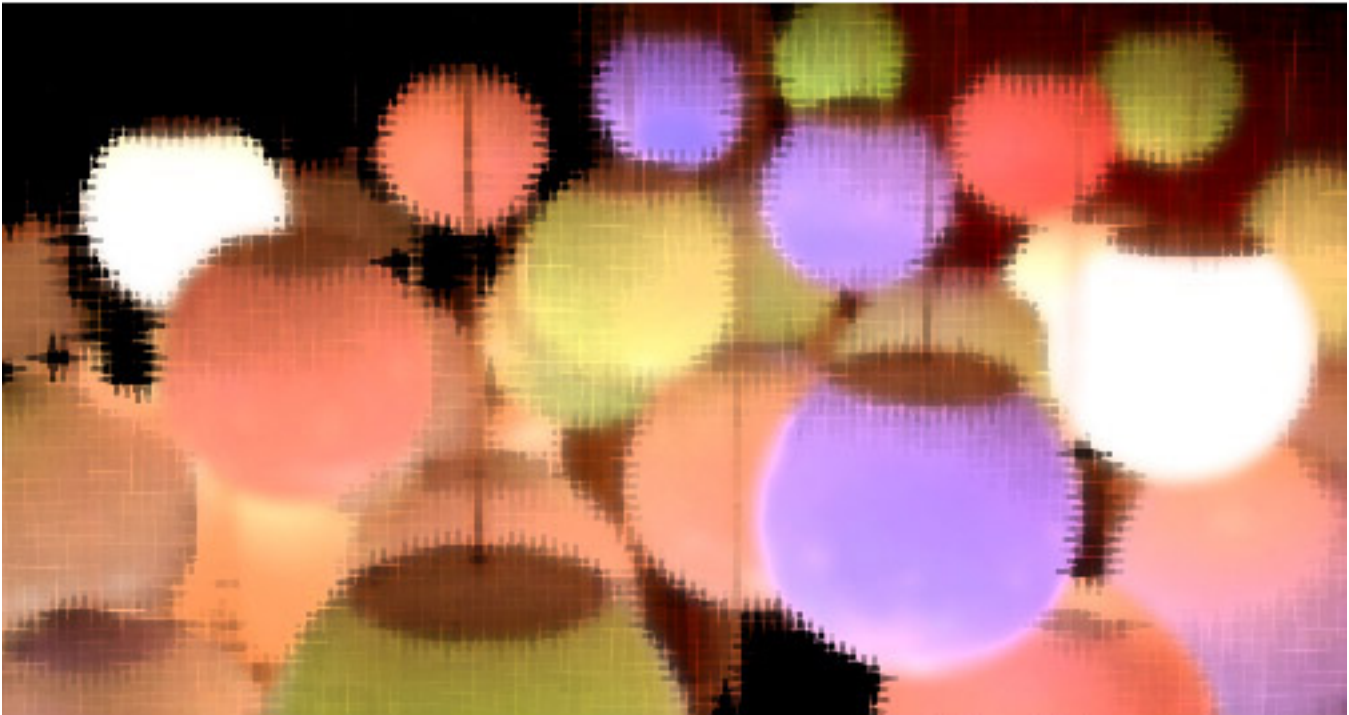
Few outside biology know the enjoyment of fieldwork in a team of real enthusiasts, and few understand the resilience that must be part of being a field ecologist. Disappointments abound, but there is always hope for the next day, the next season, the next new discovery, the unexpected. And, at the end of the day, there is the friendly bonding among a group of colleagues who are passionate about their investigations.

Weeks have passed since my foray into the Sierra Nevada. My memories are full of congeniality in the midst of mess and apparent chaos, of hard work and fun in the midst of conifers and meadows clothed in alpine flowers, where myriads of butterflies went about their lives—butterflies and caterpillars that were subjected to the vagaries of life in nature and the selection pressures that change the proportions of particular genes in their populations. I found out nothing concerning the questions that forever rumble in my head, yet came home quite renewed. And I will be there again next year; I will get the answers next time.



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Tres, Dos, Uno



by **Shellie Zacharia**

O.K., so let me tell you how none of my best friends showed up tonight for the Banks High Class of '85 Twentieth Reunion and I'm left sitting all alone at table ten with Teresa Alvarez, who smells like lavender soap and has a wart on her left index finger, and Joe Briggs, who at one time was sort of hunky in an athletic way, but now he just talks golf and birdhouses and waves his thick hands around.

Mylar balloon bouquets and shouts of "Banks Lions Rule" followed by someone's roar and the band with the slinky buck-toothed singer taking requests for Madonna and Cindy Lauper and Jimmy Buffett and Otis Redding. I just couldn't take it anymore. I hope you don't mind if I hang out over here for a while. Do you make good money as a hotel bartender? Cash bar at a reunion. For the money they charged us, you'd think we'd get free drinks. You know what I'm saying. Maybe you could add another splash of rum?

My friends didn't come tonight. Weird. I mean, we used to be big shots. And I don't mean we were cheerleaders. I'd just as soon kick a cheerleader in her short-skirted ass and feed her pom-poms to a bear, so that's not what I mean by big shots. I mean, we ran the school. Student Government Secretary, Treasurer, Drama Club President, Yearbook Editor, Soccer Team Captain, and First Chair Flute in a state-recognized orchestra. That was us. But they left me alone this evening, bailed out one by one, and so I've spent quite a bit of my night thinking about pulling the fire alarm so we can all go home.

Madison Rucker isn't here. She says she refuses to get older, and she tries to stay fresh with her crazy hair dyes and just recently that belly piercing that made her husband jump like a frog on a hot lily pad. He shouted, "So that's what you think looks good, that's what you think?" and Madison called me laughing and crying

because Carl was hollering. He's always hollering. "Don't let that man hit you," I said. No man has ever bullied me. They never stay around long enough; they say I'm too nuts.

And Joni Holloway isn't here. She's got eating issues. She's a little flower stem right now, living on oranges and spinach salads. That woman thinks she looks good, but she's so thin I swear she's looking like a Picasso, angular and scary if you ask me. I could snap her wrist with my hand if I wanted to, not that I'd do that, even though I have been sort of violent lately, tossing that plate against the wall when my boss recently fired me. Six years with that damn company, and I think it's because I wouldn't sleep with him – fat-ass that he is – but he says it was department overhaul, some sort of business-speak for, "I'm putting in some younger women."

Eliza Rubio, who still works for old fat-ass, isn't here. She did say she'd quit for me and she says she hasn't slept with old fat-ass, though she lies. I know this and I still love her, but I say no, no, no because Eliza needs the money. Her boyfriend just ran off. He took all his art supplies and left one wall of her house half-painted, some underwater adventure, a mermaid with no tail, a fish with some scales. She threw a can of soda at him; he ducked and now she's got a dent in that wall too, right there in the seaweed, a chunk of plaster fallen, a splash of brown like an exploded starfish.

My therapist says I focus too much on other people's lives. I once asked her how she spends her evenings. She said I wasn't funny.

She's the one who told me to come to the reunion, even after I heard Madison and Joni and Eliza had cancelled. I told her it was foolish, that we had all planned to go together, make it a reunion of us, but she said it would be good for me. So I suppose I came to please my therapist, although she'd say I came to please myself. She may be right on that one, but I'd hate to tell her that. Whenever she thinks she's somehow succeeded, she has this habit of tapping her heels. Dorothy-to-Kansas like. I pointed it out and she said, "We all have our quirks." So now I'm always looking at her shoes. Designer shoes.

You know, I also came to see my high school sweetheart, and look at him now. He's on the dance floor, Billy Stern, waving his arms around to Culture Club. Yeah, I know he can't dance well, but I won't hold that against him. Who can dance to 80's music anyway? But see over there, sitting by the table with the yearbooks stacked on it, that pregnant woman, that beautiful woman half-hidden by the yellow balloon centerpiece? That's his wife.

Another splash of rum, please. Just a little one.

My therapist says I drink too much. She should meet my friend Nell Herman, who also didn't show up. And maybe it's just as well. Nell's loonier than the rest of us, though she says the Lord is helping her through. She says things like that – "the Lord will help me through" – but then she also talks to objects, like the clothes in her closet and the food in her fridge. I've heard it, scared the hell out of me the first time she said, "Hello peanut butter," but now I just find it charming in a crazy Nell sort of way. She'll be wearing those long flower dresses one day, all dusty rose and lace, and she'll have cats and crickets in her living room.

And Emmy Munro-Winterson cancelled just yesterday. She was supposed to drive with me. But she called and said she had issues at home. I didn't ask; I just repeated, "Issues," because that's pretty much a code word for somebody sleeping around on somebody. Emmy is the one who sent in the photo of all of us for the reunion display wall. It's the beach snapshot where we're all slightly open-mouthed. That's senior year in Ft. Lauderdale, a girls-only weekend and a month before Billy broke up with me. We look silly happy, like we're not aware of what's going to happen, how we're going to age twenty years and lose ourselves and find ourselves on Prozac and in therapy.

I mean, we couldn't know that when the cute Venezuelan boy said he'd take the picture. We grouped up, all bikini giggles and baby-oil and sunburn, and he said on the count of three, two, one, but he said it in Spanish, tres, dos, uno, and we shouted along with him, which is why our mouths are in o's. You probably can't

see it from here. On your break, go take a look. It's like we're surprised – our mouths open like that.



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The Summerset Review



Contributors' Notes

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John Gooley lives by the beach in Corrimal East, Australia. He has worked as a process worker, handyman, tree lopper, gardener, library attendant, house painter, stand-up comic, juggler and children's entertainer. His short fiction has received a number of awards, including winner of the Ulitarra Short Story Competition, and joint winner of the 2005 NSW Writers' Centre Flash Fictions Competition. His work has appeared in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *Overland*, *Scarp*, *Ulitarra* and *Redoubt*, and online at *The Scruffy Dog Review*, *Defenestration* and *manuscriptsonline.com.au*. He can be contacted at jgooley@aapt.net.au.





Jeffrey N. Johnson's stories have appeared or are forthcoming in *Connecticut Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *Aethlon: The Journal of Sport Literature*, *Potomac Review*, *The Distillery*, and others. He was recently awarded a grant from the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation, which supported a residency at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. He can be reached at www.jeffreyjohnson.com.

This is the second time **Shellie Zacharia's** fiction has appeared in *The Summerset Review*. Elsewhere, her fiction can be found in *Swivel*, *Washington Square*, *South Dakota Review*, *Vestal Review*, *Dos Passos Review*, and other places. Write to her at shelliez@atlantic.net.



The Somerset Review

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Writers are invited to submit literary short stories and essays of up to 8,000 words. To get more of an idea of what we are looking for, please read *The Somerset Review* or consult our [Recommended Reading List](#).

Email submissions to editor@somersetreview.org as an attachment in MS Word, or as plain text. We suggest you include the word "Submission" in the title of the email, so that we don't mistake it for junk mail. You may alternatively submit in hard-copy by sending to 25 Somerset Drive, Smithtown, New York 11787, USA.

All submissions receive replies as quickly as possible. If we have not responded within three months, please hassle us. We read year-round and never go on hiatus.

All submitted work is assumed to be original. Book excerpts will be considered if you believe the work stands alone. Reprints will be considered if the work has not appeared elsewhere within the last two years. Simultaneous submissions are encouraged.

We do not give previously-published authors any more attention than new writers, and judge submissions objectively on literary merit. Even so, a brief note accompanying the submission is preferred. We are not sure what we want to read in this note, but would appreciate the extra effort, rather than a blank email with an attachment. We are always interested in knowing how you've heard of us, and what you like about us.

Authors will see drafts of accepted pieces for review prior to release. Beginning in December 2005, we pay twenty-five dollars at release time to each writer appearing in the issue.

Writers retain all rights to use their work elsewhere in any way they choose, however, we reserve the right to republish the material, without modification, in a nonprofit print volume. We also reserve the right to quote brief excerpts of text at literary events, with no connection to monetary gain, crediting the author in all cases.

We nominate stories annually for the *Pushcart Prize*, *New Stories from the South*, *storySouth's* Million Writers Award, and elsewhere.

The Somerset Review

Recommended Reading List

Author	Title	Source
Aciman, Andre	Cat's Cradle	From the November 3 issue of <i>The New Yorker</i> , 1997
Altschul, Andrew Foster	From A to Z	From Issue #1 of <i>Swink</i> , 2004
Anderson, Dale Gregory	The Girl in the Tree	From the Spring/Summer issue of <i>Alaska Quarterly Review</i> , 2003
Ashton, Edward	Night Swimmer	Online at <i>The Blue Penny Quarterly</i> , Spring/Summer 1995
Baggott, Julianna	Five	From <i>Other Voices</i> #28, 1998
Bardi, Abby	My Wild Life	From <i>Quarterly West</i> #41, 1995
Baxter, Charles	Snow	From the collection <i>A Relative Stranger</i> , published in 1990
Benson, Amy	Vectors: Arrows of Discontent	A memoir excerpt in Issue 29.2 of <i>New Orleans Review</i> , 2004
Borders, Lisa	Temporary Help	From the Spring/Summer issue of <i>Bananafish</i> , 1998
Brooks, Ben	Wildflowers	From the Spring issue of <i>Georgetown Review</i> , 2005
Broyard, Bliss	Mr. Sweetly Indecent	From the Fall issue of <i>Ploughshares</i> , 1997
Burns, Carole	Honour's Daughter	From <i>Other Voices</i> #31, 1999
Cain, Chelsea	Pretty Enough To Be a Showgirl	From the Spring issue of <i>Grand Tour</i> , 1997
Cheever, John	The Stories of John Cheever	A collection published in 1980
Christopher, Nicholas	Veronica	A novel published in 1996
Clark, Susan	Besides the Body	From the Spring issue of <i>Red Rock Review</i> , 2004
Coake, Christopher	Solos	A novella from Vol. 9, No. 1 of <i>Five Points</i> , 2005
Crane, Elizabeth	When the Messenger Is Hot	A collection published in 2003
Crowe, Thomas Rain	Firsts	Online at <i>Oyster Boy Review</i> in January, 1997
Dancoff, Judith	Vermeer's Light	From <i>Alaska Quarterly Review's</i> Intimate Voices issue, 1997
Dormanen, Sue	Finishing First	From the Summer issue of <i>Lynx Eye</i> , 1998.
Doyle, Larry	Life Without Leann	From an issue of <i>The New Yorker</i> in Fall, 1990
Kennedy, Thomas E.	Kansas City	From Vol 62 No. 4 of <i>New Letters</i> , 1996
McInerney, Jay	Model Behavior	A novel published in 1998
Millhauser, Steven	Enchanted Night	A novella published in 1999
Moses, Jennifer	Circling	From the Spring issue of <i>Gettysburg Review</i> , 1995
Murakami, Haruki	South of the Border, West of the Sun	A novel published in 1998
Offill, Jenny	Last Things	A novel published in 1999
Orlean, Susan	The Bullfighter Checks Her Makeup	A collection of essays published in 2001
Perry, Rachael	Sullivan's Inventory	From No. 82/83 of <i>Confrontation</i> , Spring/Summer 2003
Raboteur, Emily	The Eye of Horus	From <i>StoryQuarterly</i> #40, 2004
Robison, Mary	Why Did I Ever?	A novel published in 2001
Russell, Karen	Haunting Olivia	From the June 13 & 20 issue of <i>The New Yorker</i> , 2005
Salinger, J.D.	For Esme - With Love and Squalor	From the collection <i>Nine Stories</i> published in 1953
Tilghman, Christopher	The Way People Run	From the September 9 issue of <i>The New Yorker</i> , 1991

The **Summerset** Review

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