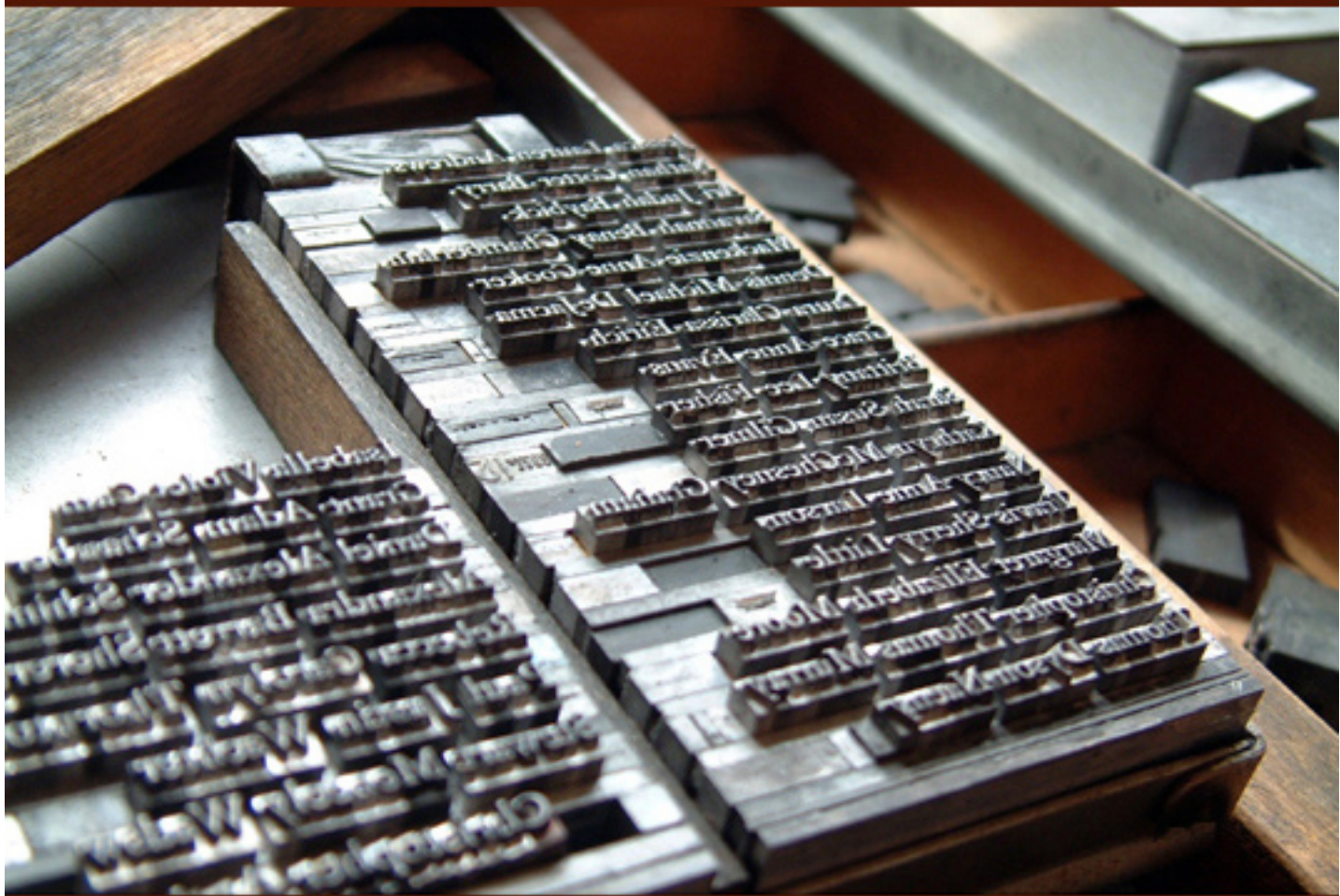


The Somerset Review



Spring 2007

The Somerset Review

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The Somerset Review



Editors' Notes

Coinciding with this issue is the release of our first print edition of *The Somerset Review*, a collection of fourteen stories and essays that have appeared in our little corner of the Internet since 2002. As soon as this volume is available, we will add information to the site describing how you can get a copy for your very own. As you know, we're nonprofit, and all proceeds from sales will go back into our journal. We hope to put out future editions for years to come, and our decision to do this will be based, in part, on how well Volume One is received. Please join us in celebrating!

For anyone who may have gone to the Southwest / Texas Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico on February 14-16, hoping to see us at the online literary journal panel discussion, we're very sorry. We tried, spending nine hours in LaGuardia Airport and three more in taxis to and from. The weather just wouldn't allow planes in and out of New York. We will keep you posted on future events. For one, we are certain to be at the usual haunt in June: the CLMP's annual book fair in Soho at The Housing Works. Unless there's more snow.

This online issue brings one essay and four short stories that we hope you will enjoy. The essay, by Nathan S. Webster, merges the writer's own experience in Iraq with that depicted in artwork of the painter, Steve Mumford. We're grateful to Postmaster's Gallery in New York for permission to show glimpses of four works which correlate nicely to Webster's piece entitled, "Steve Mumford's Iraq, and Mine."

Several troubling elements play off one another in Olivia Kate Cerrone's story, "Babydoll." We found ourselves sympathetic with the narrator of this story, working to rationalize everything she says and does. In "Kissing the Dog-Faced Boy," we visit sideshow tents in a traveling carnival, and some of the relationships going on there among the multi-faceted characters. Kelly Jameson transforms the brick and mortar walls of a bar into red velvet and an aurora borealis in her story of an exotic dancer, "French Accents." And Ron Savage's "Little Gypsies," set in Venice, combines elements of spousal loss and petty crime to bring a touching story of resolve and fortitude.

Our Lit Pick of the Quarter this time is an essay, "Tell Me Again Who Are You?" by Heather Sellers, appearing in the Fall and Winter 2006 issue of *Alaska Quarterly Review*. The piece is included in a book of creative nonfiction she is completing, titled *Face First*, and revolves around a condition called *prosopagnosia*—a difficulty of recognizing faces. The narration is stylish and at times you will find yourself working hard to understand and follow along, but we found this effect made it all the more pleasing. Here are several excerpts:

For the test, my body and brain are wedged in this white plastic MRI tube in a dark room in a dusty lab by a navy yard. My arms are pinned at my sides, and my face is in a white plastic cage with metal wires, stuffed with packing material, sponges in this case, lodged all around my face.

I could be shipped to the Alps.

Mark me fragile.

The test is called Same Different. Same Different is created by a neuroscientist, tiny slim Galit Yovel. She keeps popping in to check on me.

...

But then I got married. Fast, at nearly forty years of age, and I couldn't recognize this man, at the grocery store, wrong man, at the races, 5Ks we ran together, only not together. Dave is fast, and kind, and he said, "I don't think you can tell people apart."

...

There is no diagnosis code for the inability to recognize other humans.

The science literature says prosopagnosia is extremely rare, usually caused by a stroke or injury to the head.

You pronounce it like this: pro. Like you are for something. Soap. Nice and clean. You are for cleanliness.

Agnosia, there's a lot of those, that's the easy part. It's any kind of not-knowing. Not knowing, well, it's even more common than knowing.

Think: agnostic.

...

On the bus, I do not want to be seen. No girl, I believe, does. I want to make up a whole new life. Don't look at me now while I am trying to do that.

The Summerset Review

Joseph Levens – Editor
Amy Leigh Owen – Assistant Editor

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The Summerset Review

STEVE MUMFORD'S IRAQ, AND MINE



BY NATHAN S. WEBSTER

Steve Mumford's watercolored images of battle-torn Iraq filled dozens of sheets in his sketchbook, drawn in the war zone amidst both quiet and chaos, some inked hastily, others leisurely. I am sure that underneath each glass frame, the thick paper still smells like the desert, and the desert smelled like old canvas and boot leather.

I visited Tufts University's Koppelman Art Gallery in Medford, Massachusetts, looking for nostalgia from his images of war.

Mumford's paintings were presented at Tufts in November, 2006, in his show "Baghdad and Beyond: Drawings by Steve Mumford." These bright watercolors and sparse sepia sketches portray Mumford's Iraq, one filled with fig trees, scenic marshy riverbanks, and crowded and hectic street side shopping markets. Those images mix with the deadly and dangerous Iraq of combat patrols, and American infantrymen waiting to charge into a sunny street, searching for a sniper who just killed a friend and fellow soldier.

Mumford's artwork does not represent the Iraq I remember. My Iraq featured only the endless brown desert, ending at the banks of the Euphrates River where the marshes and greenery began. I recall looking down upon the river from a helicopter once, surprised at the sudden appearance of vegetation that, as we banked and flew away, just as quickly disappeared. At the time, I thought the entire country was a dustbowl.

My Iraq was the Iraq of the anti-climactic glorified camping trip otherwise known as Desert Storm, in which I served as an Army photojournalist. It wasn't much of a war, certainly not a tenth of the war soldiers fight there today. But, as I've said since then, I played the war they dealt.

Mumford himself was at the Koppelman this evening, giving a presentation and being feted at an artist's reception. About 125 people attended, listened to his remarks and strolled the exhibit of fifty of his paintings. He spoke about the four separate trips he took to Iraq, embedded with the U.S. military the same as any media member. A typical struggling artist since the mid-'90s, the forty-four-year-old Mumford might be nearing the tipping point of a cultural breakthrough. A camera crew from NBC's *Today Show* films tonight's appearance.

Trim and mustachioed, Mumford knows how to work a room. He wears a black T-shirt he must know is tight around his chest and arms. His closely cropped brown hair is carefully tousled. Quickly surrounded by a half-dozen starry-eyed women wishfully ignoring his wedding band, he holds court in the post-remarks reception.

He's very personable and happy to chat with this well-heeled audience. When I tell him about the differences in the Iraq he saw and the one I visited sixteen years earlier, he understands exactly what I mean.

"It was like the Wild West. Dust and dirt," he says to me about the desert. When he entered Iraq in 2003, he drove with a crew of French journalists from Kuwait to Basra, through a flat wasteland identical to the Saudi Arabian-Iraqi frontier I had grown familiar with. "North of Basra, the landscape changed completely. It was all green countryside."

His paintings brought that Iraq to the Koppelman. In the tradition of the posh galleries of Boston's Newbury Street, the bright white walls of the wide-open room take nothing away from the exhibited art.

Mumford's displayed paintings are uniform in size, appearing on eleven-by-fifteen-inch heavy stock papers specifically designed for watercolors and ink. The corners of the papers slightly curl where the paint has absorbed and dried, giving the paintings a rugged, aged appearance. They are not matted; each canvas is rear-mounted onto a hard backing, and then protected in a glass frame.

Mumford spent about ten months in Iraq, spread out over four trips beginning in April, 2003, even before U.S. forces occupied Baghdad. He traveled to Tikrit, Samara, Baquba, and the capital city. Embedded with the U.S. military the same as a reporter or photojournalist, he carried watercolors and sketchpads instead of notebooks and film.

He arrived at tonight's appearance straight from several days of work at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland. Soon, sketched and painted images of rehabilitating soldiers at Walter Reed will join similar images already completed, of injured troops at Brooke Army Medical Center in Texas. The show at Tufts marks the first time sketches from Brooke share display space with those from Iraq.



All of the Iraq artwork here, and dozens of other examples, are also presented in his large coffee-table book, *Baghdad Journal*, published in 2005.

While the framed images did not remind me of anything, I tell Mumford that one of his paintings, which he presented in a slide show, certainly did.

Titled *Sandstorm in Tikrit*, the huge five-by-four-foot oil canvas then hung at Postmasters, Mumford's "home" gallery in the Chelsea section of New York City. Unlike the small watercolors on display here, his large format oil paintings were completed in the studio, far removed from the war zone. Their strong detail arrives from the luxury of time. This painting shows a night convoy, traveling through a sandstorm. The headlights of one Bradley Fighting Vehicle shine on a second Bradley in front of it, creating a spotlight effect in the midst of the blowing brown sand. A group of three soldiers rides on top of the more distant Bradley. One of them looks backward, into the headlights glare and toward the painting's viewer. In a second slide showing close-up detail of his face, he looks plaintive, alone, even with two other soldiers sitting next to him.

Mumford said he used actual sand in *Sandstorm*, throwing handfuls at the canvas, providing layers of depth.

"I really wanted the viewer to feel the physicality of the sand," he said. "To feel that isolation, that sense of danger. I wanted it to look like a ship at sea."

In the mind's eye, the Bradleys could be replaced with ships pitching through fog-enshrouded waves, the crewmen using distant lights to signal each other. Instead of sand, it would portray a salty mist churning off the high seas. That comparison was truly used in the most isolated parts of Iraq. The empty, wind-shifted landscape was called the "high desert," because the flowing sand dunes resembled undulating ocean waves.

Sandstorm works for me on a literal level. It recaptures the second day of the first invasion of Iraq—February 25, 1991. I was about forty miles into the country when the western frontier suffered a monstrous daytime sandstorm.

The sand blew everywhere, through every crack and crevasse. My Humvee didn't have any doors, and the jury-rigged tarp I tied over the driver's side opening barely slowed the wind, much less kept out the sand. Visibility was reduced to nothing. Only the red taillights of the vehicle in front of us kept us going in the right direction. A photo shows my eyes hidden behind fogged-up goggles, with a brown bandanna covering my face and mouth. But the relentless sand exploited any gap in clothing or equipment.

The small photograph, with its shallow depth of field and grainy focus, doesn't do the storm any justice. Other than the blob of green that's actually me, and the tan frame of my Humvee, details are hard to pick out. It's a neat picture, but it doesn't show how monolithic a big sandstorm truly feels.

Sandstorm captures my recollection, even though it presents a lesser storm than the one of my memory. In the glare of the Bradley's headlights, the sand looks like coffee, swirling around the soldiers riding the back of each vehicle. In Mumford's painting, the two visible soldiers' faces aren't completely covered; one doesn't even wear eye protection. The storm must have lacked really fierce winds. Just keeping my eyes open during the 1991 storm, much less driving in a convoy, absolutely required goggles.

Mumford said comic books were his earliest artistic influence, and that experience shows up in the very detailed *Sandstorm*. In his late-'80s, early-'90s college days at Boston's School of the Museum of Fine Arts and New York's School of Visual Arts, he focused first on abstracts, and eventually moved to "realist" art. As late as 2002 his efforts consisted of, according to a negative review in the *Village Voice*, "highly colored, semi-sensationalist, quasi-apocalyptic depictions of underwater nudes, submerged cars, and the like. Often these canvases resembled adventure posters or paintings you see on the sides of vans. They were jazzy and weird, but little else." Mumford shows a few examples in his slide-show presentation, and more than a few titters arise from the audience. The *Village Voice's* descriptions were accurate. He uses a bit of dry humor when introducing these images, seeming to make clear this style represents a past to which he does not intend to return.

"When the war happened, it gave me a completely different relationship to art," he said during his presentation. "In 2003, everyone was watching this kind of war machine build up, and at some point I realized that I could actually go to the war myself."

His journey to Iraq was not overly difficult. He bought his own plane ticket and gained credentials through Artnet.com, a website focused on the art industry. He hooked up with the French journalists and made his way into Iraq. His inspiration for the entire trip was Civil War artist Winslow Homer.

"Homer's art didn't describe the politics. He focused on the experience of the Union soldiers," Mumford said. "His artwork was relatable to soldiers in all wars."

In his first few days in Iraq, he photographed street scenes before realizing how intrusive it was to take unsolicited pictures of Iraqis going about their daily business.

"I was pretending to be a photojournalist. I wasn't an artist, I was a tourist," he said. "I had to work up the nerve to accept I had the right to be there. One day I went outside to smoke a cigarette, and started drawing what was in front of me. I began to regain my composure, began to feel like I belonged."

Because his sketching took time, soldiers and Iraqis alike became more comfortable with his presence, appreciating the effort he put into his interactions. The Iraqis invited him for tea, gathering around as he sketched, nodding approvingly as their streets appeared on his pad; U.S. soldiers paid attention at first, but Mumford said they were much happier gossiping with him about the latest barrack's romances.

"When I started sketching, the suspicion would melt away," especially among the Iraqis, he said, "because they could see what I was doing. People were very excited."

Average Iraqi citizens populate about a third of Mumford's five hundred finished sketches and paintings.

"They would ask if I could draw them," he said. "I got much closer to them than if I had been walking around with a camera."

The comic book influence still appears in his Iraq paintings, and many of the images would fit perfectly in a graphic novel, with text bubbles above the soldier's heads leading a reader through the story. The images of soldiers and streets are not abstract. One woman at the exhibit compares Mumford to Norman Rockwell, for his care with faces and bodies. Just as with Rockwell, no mystery hides in Mumford's images, no veiled metaphors.

"As soon as there was ever a moment to pause, I'd pull out my art supplies and start drawing like crazy," Mumford said. While he did have a camera and sometimes took pictures to use as the model for a final painting, Mumford said he preferred finishing paintings or sketches in the moment the events were happening.

"There's not much thinking. It's a lot of intuitive editing. I wasn't objective, that wasn't my point," he said. The unyielding truth of a photograph cannot be recreated through an entirely subjective piece of painted art, he said. "Information from another source is inevitably mediated. Everybody remembers things differently. When I'm drawing, I'm putting things in, I'm leaving things out. I'm constantly altering as I go, compressing the events of a battle, rearranging things on the battlefield."

Mumford was not objective in his artistic portrayal of the war or his participation in it. During his remarks, he drops a casual statement into the middle of a story about a battle he found himself in as a passenger of a Bradley personnel carrier. It was hit twice by rocket-propelled grenade fire. Very loud and frightening he said, but ineffectual against the Bradley's armor.

"I kept my head down, kept myself out of trouble," he said. "Handed ammo up to the gunner. Stuck my hand out of the hatch every once in awhile and took a picture."

That act made Mumford a combat participant, not merely an artist. The bullets he handed to the gunner had a destination, after all: a building, a home, a person. But as Mumford said—not in defense, because he did not accept the notion that it should have been a controversy—"If you're with soldiers, and you're under fire and they need you to hand up some ammo, you're damn well going to do it."

Later, I ask Mumford what kind of response he's received from veterans. He says he's not sure how many are aware of his work. *Baghdad Journal* was published late in 2005 and an online journal he posted to Arnet.com while actually in Iraq generated interest. But to this point, the art community gives him the most buzz and business. Most U.S. Army infantrymen do not travel in the same circles as New York City art collectors.

I mean to tell him they'll find his book eventually. Most veterans need a few years to put events in perspective, before they get nostalgic for their salad days. I think most twenty-one-year-old veterans will return to the U.S. and talk about Iraq nonstop for a year or so, until they figure out nobody knows how to respond to their stories. Then they won't mention the war again for fifteen years.

But the subject changes and I forget to tell him that. Before he signs my copy of *Baghdad Journal*, he asks if I want it personalized. I tell him he can write as much as he likes. I ask if he could even draw a quick sketch, if he can think of one on the spot.

I deliberately make the comment about the sketch. The cameraman from *Today* hears my request and leans in with the big camera on his shoulder. He takes an extreme close-up of the book's title page, waiting to see what Mumford might draw. As the cameraman crowds in, Mumford gives him a

quizzical double take. "I can back off if you want me to, Steve," the cameraman says.

"Just back up a little bit, O.K.?" Mumford gently replies, and then thinks a few seconds about something he could quickly sketch, but now his rhythm seems off. He apologetically shrugs, writes "To Nathan, Thanks for serving in the first one, Steve Mumford," which I am happy with, though I notice the cameraman's disappointment. I don't expect my book to appear on TV. If I was going to make a wisecrack, I could say I'm surprised he found no problem sketching in a war zone, but can't handle a looming camera lens.

I tell him, "Thanks for doing your part, too." But I know he did not really go to Iraq to support soldiers or as "part" of the war effort. He traveled to Iraq as a professional on the job, like a print reporter or photojournalist. Painting is his career.

"I'm not sure they can afford these paintings," Mumford said, when someone asks how much contact he has with soldiers outside of his work. He doesn't mean it rudely, but a fact's a fact. The small watercolors sell for \$1,500 each; *Sandstorm in Tikrit* sold for \$15,000. The hardcover edition of *Baghdad Journal* costs \$35. Selling his work and promoting his name keeps Mumford traveling around, shaking hands and signing expensive books. I have no doubt he might easily have gone a different direction, if the eventual results were potentially more lucrative. He made the artistic decision and took the risk that these paintings will sell and earn him money. His philosophy is one I, and I think most veterans, can understand.

Mumford keeps in touch with a few of the soldiers he drew, including Army Capt. Caleb Cage, pictured in the image *Lt Caleb Cage Leading Patrol to Buritz*. In the painting, Mumford's watercolors recreate the artificial green glow that fills the cab of a tracked Paladin artillery vehicle operating with night vision equipment.



In the painting, the figure identified as then-Lt. Caleb Cage sits in profile. His one visible eye focuses downward on the indistinguishable screen of a satellite-guided map, his face cast in a slight shade of green as he holds a radio receiver to his ear. Cage looks calm, almost bored, with the faintest appearance of a slouch.

A viewer of the painting knows Caleb Cage's name but can only estimate what his face really looks like. Watercolors are deceptive and the bright and varied hues fool viewers into thinking they see real detail. They can provide a theory, but not the facts. Standing ten feet back from the best of Mumford's images provides the same general view a photo might give. But as a viewer moves in closer, the brush strokes and shading become evident. Each new layer of color thickens the layer beneath it. Evidence of the painter's hard and time-consuming work begins to appear.

I easily relate to Mumford's mission of capturing the moment. As an Army photojournalist during Desert Storm, I took many documentation photographs. In a photo taken at the northernmost checkpoint on the allied occupation's far western flank, I captured a tiny detail that Mumford *might* have missed. In the photo, a convoy of passenger-packed trucks and buses wait at a French army checkpoint for permission to continue south to the village of As Salman, about sixty miles north of Saudi Arabia. I had snapped a few shots of the French soldiers chatting with the drivers.

Studying the image many years later, I noticed for the first time an Iraqi woman, everything covered by her traditional black robe except her face, riding in the open air on top of one of the buses. She stared directly at me.

It would be melodramatic exaggeration, saying I saw hate in her eyes. But the look she gave, in the split second of her life now captured forever in the color print, was certainly *not* happiness to see me.

A hastily sketched watercolor might lose that detail, but still transcend the here-and-now. As Mumford said, paintings rely more on memory than reality. His street scenes of Baghdad recreate moments that passed hours and days before the painting was completed. The final, finished image of Cage, cast in emerald shadow, arrived from a recollection in Mumford's mind, when he sat in that same hazy half-light. Cage moved or shifted in his seat mere moments after Mumford began sketching. The image that became the painted Cage began as an idea, a few quickly drawn lines that Mumford filled with color and energy basically on faith.

The watercolors bring more life to the subjects than the much more detailed larger oil paintings glimpsed in the slide show. Many of the watercolors, and all the sketches, were basically completed in the same sitting as the event. He might have touched them up later, but the form and concept of the piece was visualized and drafted in that specific moment.

The large paintings have been reproduced from photographs or very basic sketches. They are almost too real, too static. While *Sandstorm in Tikrit* brings back a memory and he certainly got the portrayal right, it's only nostalgia that I feel. Unlike the watercolors, the painting doesn't create an intense, in-the-moment sensation.

"If I couldn't finish something on the scene, I'd finish later using a photo, if I had taken one. I much preferred to do it in the moment," Mumford said. "There's something I like about rushing, about making a line or a mark in a sketch that's inexact."

Once the ink hits paper, there's no going back. He either finished what he started, flaws and all, or he began all over again. A mistake does not always ruin a potential image but in some ways proves a painting's worth, he said. A misplaced line gives the painting a true place in a moment's history, rather than if he "finished it from a photo on a computer screen," Mumford said.

Another image, *Soldiers of 3rd Platoon getting ready to bound forward to a sniper's location, minutes after the death of Spc. Josiah Vandertulip*, shows three kneeling soldiers waiting in shadow at the end of a covered

passageway between two buildings, a sunny street directly in front of them. Only the soldier's backs are visible and their bodies are dark and unidentifiable. Behind one soldier lies an empty plastic one-liter water bottle.

"Those water bottles were everywhere," Mumford said. "I wanted lots of details like that in the paintings. I like the depth, the detail. There should be lots of things for the eye to see, to meander down a street. There were all these scenes of tension, and yet the fig trees would be blowing in the breeze, and the sky was always so clear and blue."

The moment the sketch reveals passed in just seconds, then the soldiers moved forward to search for the enemy. *Soldiers of the 3rd Platoon* was drawn on October 14, 2004, the day twenty-one-year-old Vandertulip, a member of the 1st Cavalry Division, was killed by a sniper. Without the descriptive sentence explaining the image's backstory, a viewer could assume the three painted soldiers were simply relaxing during a stop on their patrol, rather than trying to avenge a dead friend. And that they did not do, at least that day. According to Mumford's written account in *Baghdad Journal*, the sniper was not located.

The street appears in yellow and orange paints representing a bright, sunny day. A defined line of shadow extends into the corridor where the three soldiers wait, each ensuring the darkness hides them from any gunman surveying the street itself. The soldiers lack detail, but their indistinctness gives the watercolor its power. Far from a crafted and painstakingly retouched studio painting, this watercolor was started and practically finished by Mumford while he sat in the same alley, sketching and painting quickly in his pad.

Mumford understands the history that he follows, like Winslow Homer during the Civil War. One of Mumford's large oil paintings, which he shows during the slide show, pays homage to a Homer image. The sharpshooter in Mumford's seven-foot-long painting, *Sniper*, sights his rifle, aiming from a point atop the roof of a downtown Baghdad high-rise. His helmet sits next to him, taken off because its brim rides down over the eyes when a soldier lies in a prone position. The rifle's safety lever is set to Off, and the sniper draws a lethal bead on his target.



The painting directly reflects Homer's classic Civil War engraving, *Sharpshooter on Picket Duty*. Homer's woodcut, made for *Harper's Weekly* in 1862, shows a Union Army sniper deliberately aiming his long rifle. He steadies the barrel on a tree limb, preparing to take a shot at an unseen Confederate enemy.

Homer's images were also distinctly lifelike, and were published throughout the Civil War by *Harper's Weekly* (now *Harper's* magazine), a publication that, not coincidentally, recently presented the next chapter in Mumford's work. This part takes place in Brooke Army Medical Center in Texas and serves as a coda to the combat experience. Some of the most seriously wounded soldiers go to Brooke for rehabilitation, including those who have lost limbs or sight. These new sketches are at the end of Mumford's Tufts display.

"My images are not pro- or anti-war," Mumford said. In these images of grievously wounded soldiers, "I wanted to capture the poignancy, the martial spirit these guys have. The spirit of optimism."

At his recent trip to Walter Reed, Mumford observed—and will paint in some form, probably for *Harper's* again—the amputation of a soldier's ruined leg. In another image painted at Brooke, three soldiers, all with prostheses where one or both legs used to be, practice on an indoor archery range. Mumford points out the ratty blue carpet on the hospital room's floor, as another detail he tries to recreate.

"I don't know if I'd say the soldiers are heroes with a capital H, but I think they're heroic with a little h," he said. "I was really impressed with what I saw, how they reacted under pressure. And how they were at Brooke. This one soldier lost both his legs—both above the knee," he pauses. "That's rough."

But they always stay optimistic, he said. "Some of them are trying to go back to Iraq, back to their units, with prosthetic limbs."

A sketch shows a soldier holding cards with the hook where his right hand used to be. In another, a blind and scarred Mississippi national guardsman tries to work his fingers with a therapist's help. Men with artificial legs ride exercise bikes.

A soldier identified as Corporal Joshua Griffin of the 1st Infantry Division sits on a bed in one sepia sketch. He looks O.K., still possesses all four limbs, though he holds one leg's calf as if it was sore. The image doesn't explain why he was at Brooke. Griffin's eyes seem to indicate either annoyance or anger, maybe at the artist, maybe at his life. Or maybe his gaze shows determination. In Mumford's painting, no real eyes exist to look into, no true expression to interpret. Only what the viewer thinks they see.

The flesh-and-blood Griffin was injured on November 6, 2005. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, a roadside bomb attack on his Humvee shattered his right femur, broke his jaw, and killed the soldier sitting next to him. Griffin would be airlifted from Iraq to Germany, a tube in his throat, his face seriously burned. From there, he made his way to Texas. While not permanently disfiguring, the injuries still required months of rehabilitation. Mumford visited Brooke in March 2006, and Griffin was still there. But by April he had returned to Fort Campbell, Kentucky and was trying to rejoin his unit.

In Mumford's sketch, Griffin wears a T-shirt, its logo neatly recreated in two lines of sepia-inked text. The T-shirt reads: "Temporarily Out of Service."

According to the April 4, 2006 *Los Angeles Times*, Griffin fought hard for clearance to return to his unit and friends in Iraq once he could pass a final physical fitness test. As of April 4, he was well on his way for a full return to duty. The T-shirt Mumford sketched him wearing—and Griffin's decision to pose in it—turned out to be absolutely correct.

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Graphics: Copyright © Steve Mumford

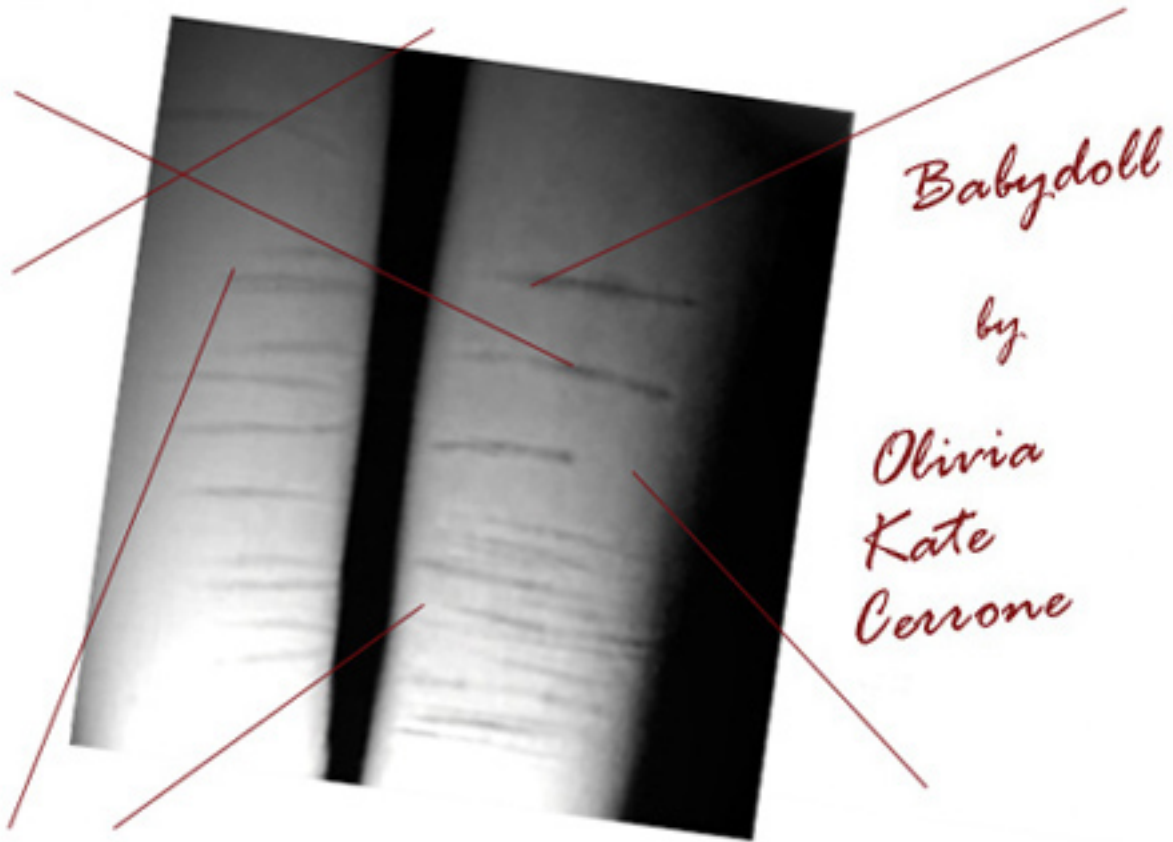
Steve in Baghdad, 2006, oil on linen, 20 x 48 inches.

Sandstorm in Tikrit, 2006, oil on linen, 54 x 66 inches.

Lt Caleb Cage Leading Patrol to Buritz, 2004,
ink and watercolor on paper.

Sniper, 2006, oil on linen, 36 x 84 inches.

Graphics used with permission of Postmasters Gallery,
New York.



The third time my brother disappears, I get the news from his wife, Rebecca. It is a Sunday evening when she calls and informs me that Michael has been missing all day. Sometimes Rebecca confides in me about her fears, the lack of passion apparent in the bedroom. She comes to me for reassurance, and I never turn her away.

"He must've left while I was asleep," she says. "Do you think I should call the police? I mean, what if there's been an accident? You wouldn't know anything, would you?"

"You have to calm down, Becca," I say. "I'm sure everything is all right. Did you try his office? His cell phone?"

She snuffles and clears her throat. "Yes, Sophie, I did. He didn't bring his phone or leave a note or anything. I'm sorry. He's never like this."

I imagine her on the other end, pulling at a turquoise or wine-red scarf coiled around her neck, and trying to regain her composure. Rebecca is never without her scarves. She works as an art teacher in an elementary school in Watertown. Sometimes she sells her own paintings at local galleries and coffee shops.

I ask her if she wants me to come over, but she declines my offer. She hates to be a burden, she says. When I hang up, I run a hot bath and wonder if she will call the police.

The first time Michael disappeared, he was twelve years old and we

were still mourning the loss of our mother. She died within a year of fighting pancreatic cancer.

The second time Michael disappeared was on the day of our father's wedding to Cynthia, back home in Connecticut. The ceremony was delayed an hour, until it became obvious that my brother had stood up the family.

Rebecca calls an hour later and I am still soaking in the tub. Michael has come home, drunk and unresponsive. She asks what she should do. I tell her to let him sleep.

My bedroom closet houses a large assortment of babydoll nighties in silk and chiffon, and satin chemises trimmed in velvet and lace. I buy compulsively from catalogues and boutiques, adding to a collection I began when I was fourteen. On the days I see Michael, I like to place the babydolls on my bed and admire them. My favorite is a black negligee with sparkling black flowers embroidered at the bust. I wear it with black stilettos that lace at the ankle.

I don't wear the shoes when I fuck. I bring a man home and tell him to take me from behind; pin my hands against the sheet. I don't like to see his face. I want nothing beyond what he does to me in bed.

The lingerie feels like a cool rush of liquid spilled over my body. I pull the chair right up to the mirror for the best look. Sometimes I like to dance against the chair real slow, but usually staring will do just fine. I put on my makeup and my hair hangs in thick curls down my back.

I sit upright against the chair, take the silk rope from my kimono robe and wrap it from elbow to wrist. I squeeze the end of the rope carefully. The other hand holds a knife.

Michael had left for college when I did it the first time. I hated him for leaving me alone with our father, but by then I had my license and was never questioned over who I spent my weekends with.

When I start playing butcher, I like to watch it in the mirror, as if it's happening to someone else. I do it often enough so there are always traces left visible in the flesh. I imagine Michael standing behind me, seeing it all take place.

My brother calls the next day. He apologizes for any alarm Rebecca may have caused, and asks me to lunch at the Gardens on Newbury Street. Michael practices family law in downtown Boston, and sometimes confides in me about his cases. He wears expensive suits and his features are sharp and dark, like our mother.

We meet a few times a month for lunch or dinner—always his treat. These meetings are his way of keeping tabs on my life, though I don't mind them. Occasionally, he asks when I'm going to decide to finish college and, in his words, "start a life for myself." Michael does not think that tending bar at McCovy's Tavern is much of a livelihood. He says that I am going to regret wasting my life one day. I don't challenge his remarks, though sometimes I remind him that I'm twenty-six and confident in my decision-making skills.

After we are seated and grazing through the menu, I ask him what happened.

Michael shrugs. "I had to get away for the day. We have friends in the Berkshires. Rebecca and I have an understanding about these things. I don't know why she got so hysterical over it."

"She says you left no note," I say. "No fair warning."

Michael looks at me and sighs. "You mean she didn't tell you?"

"Tell me about what?" I ask.

"She's pregnant, Sophie," he says.

His words leave me a little breathless. "Michael, that's wonderful," I say.

"I'm surprised she didn't say anything to you," Michael says. "But she's only known for a few days."

He unfolds the cloth napkin beside his plate and spreads it on his lap. I watch his hands drop beneath the table to smooth out the creases.

"When did she tell you?" I ask.

"Friday. Friday night. She's been very emotional about it," he says.

The waiter comes to our table and we give him our order. When he leaves, I ask Michael if he is happy about the news.

"Of course I'm happy," he says, almost brusquely. "It's just a bit of a shock."

"Well, next time you want to escape, I hope you'll think to call me first," I say.

Michael says nothing, but smiles pleasantly, as if we have exchanged compliments.

I take Ilya home with me after work Monday night. He stays with me until closing, and we leave together, grasping for one another like old lovers. Ilya Komarov is one of my regulars at McCovy's. He comes in on weeknights and orders whiskey sours or double vodkas, depending on his mood. He is forty-two and has never been married.

Conversation is a fluid thing between us. Ilya still considers himself a transplant from Russia, though he has lived in this country for two decades, and retains a heavy accent. He builds kitchen cabinets and owns his own shop in Somerville. I enjoy hearing the stories of his life, his business, and the books he loves.

He gives me poetry collections, mostly by Anna Akhmatova. Some nights when I can't sleep, I take his books in bed with me and hold them against my body. There are passages that haunt me. I read "Requiem," one of Ilya's favorites, and I see Akhmatova standing outside a prison camp in Leningrad waiting for her son, imprisoned because of his mother's poetry. I imagine her coming every day for seventeen years, to stand in the frigid winds among throngs of others, all waiting for signs of life from their beloved. I see Akhmatova in her proud, somber beauty, holding notes crumpled against her palm, and bread hidden in the folds of her sleeves—all for him, everything for him, her son, her blood.

As children, Michael and I were not allowed to see our mother during her final months. Our father thought we were too young to understand, though he often left us alone at home on the nights when he visited

the hospital. My eight-year-old brother was instructed to take care of me. We stayed up late watching television, wondering when we would see our mother again.

At my apartment, I fix us drinks—Scotch with water—and Ilya tells me how his grandfather, his *zayde*, died.

"I was still a boy living in Lefortovo, the eastern district of Moscow, when it happened," Ilya says. "But I never forgot. No one was ever closer to me."

He says his *zayde* was born blind, but always impressed the family with his storytelling abilities. He was later diagnosed with a rare form of mouth cancer, and had his tongue removed. He died a few months after that.

"I stayed with him in the hospital till the end," Ilya says. "I would sit beside him and squeeze his hands. The man could only speak through touch."

I tell Ilya that my brother and I never saw our mother in her final days. "Our father thought it would be better if we were kept away. We were children then, but Michael never forgave him for it."

They haven't spoken to each other in seven years. My father still harbors his own grudge against Michael for not attending the wedding. I communicate with the man through polite emails, and he tells me about the trips he and Cynthia take—Nassau, Saratoga Springs, Paris, Venice. I speak to my stepmother on rare occasions, though she always sends me a fruit basket on my birthday. She is the only bride I know who wore a black suit on her wedding day.

Ilya leans in to kiss my neck and face, and I let him.

"That is sad about your brother," he says.

I move gently from the couch. "He's a happy man. He's going to be a father soon," I say.

I make my way to the bedroom and pull the clothing from my body. Ilya follows my lead, and when I face him, we are standing before one another naked.

"Beautiful girl," he whispers.

"You're drunk," I say and lean against the bed.

But then he is looking at me strangely and I see what it is that disturbs him. I fold my arms across my breasts. He sits beside me and stares at his feet.

I tell him how I want to be fucked. I show him how he should hold my hands and suggest the things I like my men to say. When I finish, he looks up at me and grabs my wrist, twists my arm around for both of us to see.

"What is this, Sophie?"

I pull away from him. "Don't. Don't you ever touch me like that."

He embraces me and traces the length of my spine with his fingertips.

"Maybe you should just leave," I say quietly.

He shakes his head and studies me with a kind of compassion that I

find startling. "I'm sorry, Sophia. Let's just lie together."

In bed, he wraps his limbs around me and we do just that.

In the morning, Ilya is gone. I lie in bed longer than I should and think of Michael. I want to call and tell him about last night, but instead I phone Rebecca to congratulate her about the baby. She sounds distracted and tense.

"I took a sick day," she says. "I haven't been feeling myself lately."

"I can't imagine how overwhelmed you two must be," I say.

"I don't even think Michael wants to be a father," she says.

I laugh. "Of course he does. He has no choice now, anyway."

Rebecca does not laugh. "Even when he tells me he does, sometimes I think he's lying. He's so complex. Has he always been this way?"

"Complex is the right word for him," I say.

"I just want to make him happy. Do you think I make him happy?" she asks.

"Of course," I say.

"Does he ever mention me when you two are together? Does he ever bring me up in conversation?"

"Yes." He never talks about her unless I do.

"We should get some coffee sometime," Rebecca says, "I'm having a show at this gallery in Cambridge next month."

"I'll try to make it," I say.

Ilya comes into McCovy's that evening around closing time. I ignore him at first and continue to clean the bar. Soon he is close to me and says he wants to take me out to dinner Friday night. He wants to talk about things.

"I don't think that's a good idea," I say.

"Why not?" he asks.

"It's just not the way I do things," I say.

Ilya studies me carefully. "There's someone else," he says.

I shake my head; begin wiping down the countertop with a rag. "I just think it was a mistake."

He stands there, watching me. "One dinner," he says. "And then I'm out of your life forever. I'll never come into this bar again."

I smile at him. I know men or at least have known my fair share of them—a former boyfriend once threw a dish at my head; another used to slap my face during sex. Ilya is different.

"Well I'd be fired if the owner knew I was driving patrons away," I say.

"So Friday is a go then?" he asks.

I tell him he's lucky that I have the night off.

I imagine that Michael and I meet secretly sometimes, often unexpectedly. He calls me from Manhattan or Chicago while on business, and says he will pay for everything. All he wants is my company.

I arrive later in the night. He picks me up from the airport and we get drunk on gin and tonics at the hotel bar. At some point during the conversation, I roll up my sleeves to show him the underside of my wrists.

"Sophie," he says, "Sophie." He rubs the deep red lines in my skin with his thumbs.

I tell him it feels good; that I think of him when I do it. I confess everything, and afterward, he takes me up to his room where we collapse together on the single, queen-sized bed.

As children, we often slept together in the same bed because I was afraid of the dark. Michael was scared that I might pee myself, and kicked his feet away from me, pulling all the blankets with him. But sometimes we cuddled up against each other and slept.

Tonight, it's still possible that we might go right to sleep, innocent of the possibilities. But he sits up and caresses my arms. "Promise me you won't ever do this again," he says.

I say nothing and he begins to kiss my wrists. Then his hands rest on my hips and move slowly up my waist. "You're not eating enough," he says.

I pull him down beside me. Our noses touch. He kisses my face, but not my lips. He moves up along my body and buries his head in the space between my neck and shoulder. I place my arms around him and hold him tight.

The first time my brother disappeared, I was the only one to discover his absence. Our father was sleeping. For weeks after the funeral, he spent his nights drinking and falling asleep in front of the television. We were not allowed to disturb him. I slipped beneath the covers of Michael's bed and waited. I bit into his pillows to muffle my sobbing through the long, silent hours. I fell asleep and woke up when he returned. He pulled back the sheets and ordered me out. I said I wanted to stay with him, but he barked at me to go to my own room. Then he told me that if I stopped crying, he would tell me where he went. I stopped crying.

Michael calls me Friday evening. I am dressed in a slip, trying to put on eyeliner, when the phone begins to ring.

"Rebecca wants a divorce," he says.

"My God. Why?" I say.

"I don't know," he sighs, "I don't really understand any of it. She was in hysterics when I came home. I asked her what was wrong, and she

said it was over."

"But she's pregnant. What about the baby?" I say.

"Let me come over," Michael says.

When he arrives, I'm in the kitchen, with a kettle of tea on the stove.

"Give me your coat," I say. He slips it off and I hang it on the rack by the door. I guide him to a seat at the kitchen table. "I made tea. How do you like yours?"

"Plain," he says, "I'm easy."

I bring two cups over and sit opposite him. For a moment we just stare at each other, and I'm shaking my head in sympathy.

"She said she had given it enough thought. Plenty of thought," he says.

"That doesn't make sense. All she used to talk about was how much she wanted things to work out between you two," I say.

Michael shook his head. "She said she realized that somehow it was all wrong with me. That I would never be a good father. That I wasn't even a good husband. She said she doesn't want me in the baby's life."

I watch Michael take a few sips. He bites the insides of his cheeks to stop his lips from trembling. The phone rings and I disconnect the cord from the wall.

"What can I do? Just tell me what you want," I say, sitting beside him.

"I want to disappear," he says to me. He reaches for my hands and squeezes them. I stand up from the table with my hands still clasped in his.

"Come with me," I say.

In my bedroom, I open the closet wide so he can see them hanging from their delicate straps. He pushes through, and the light catches the sequins of one, causing it to sparkle. "Jesus," he says, "what is all this?"

I tell him to choose the one he likes best.

He looks at me uncertainly, but continues to riffle through the closet. "Here." He draws one out; holds up the hanger by his fingertips.

I take it from him gently and place it on the bed. "Wait outside. Just for a moment."

"What are you doing?" he says.

"Please," I say.

When I open the door, I am wearing a satin babydoll with matching kimono robe and stiletto heels. He stands in the doorway, staring at me with a look I can't quite register. I move against him slowly, allowing the robe to slip off my shoulders.

"Sophie," he says. His fingertips brush against my cheekbone, and I kiss him, full and soft on the lips.

He takes a few steps backward and regards me with a look that says *now I've seen everything*. Then he turns and leaves my apartment. I

wait ten full minutes for him to come back. When he doesn't, I return to my room, shutting the door behind me.

I don't bother to change. I sink into the chair, and begin to wrap the rope around my wrist.

The buzzer rings. I release my arm and pull the kimono over my body before leaving the room.

I press the button on the intercom. "Michael," I say.

"It's me," Ilya's voice says. "I tried calling."

I hesitate before responding; I have completely forgotten about our date.

"Ilya," I say. "I'm sorry, Ilya. Something awful has happened to Michael."

"It's O.K.," he says. "Let me in."

I press the buzzer and unlock my apartment door. As I curl against the couch, I remember Michael, twelve years old, telling me how he went looking for her, our mother, in the cemetery. I imagine him walking the dark, deserted streets, clutching his backpack tightly, until he reaches the graves. I see him wander through rows of headstones, unable to read the inscriptions for want of better moonlight. But somehow he finds her among the dead; something guides his steps straight to her. He sits up against her tombstone, waiting for her unearthly presence.

I hold myself, this tight knot of flesh and bone, and wonder what he saw.

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The Sunnerset Review



Highway

Right now, she's sick to her stomach.

Rolling over, Ivy drops her head in Cason's lap and clings to him as the RV bounces along uneven highway. Under the shadow of her blonde hair, she sees Cason's jeans are stained; she breathes in his scent of sweat and latex, a perpetual perfume he can't escape.

Maybe he smelled like cologne once, or soap, or like the ocean, like boys do in Ivy's romance novels, but sideshow tents amplify everything.

It's never just a little hot under aging canvas; it's sweltering. It's never just a little dirty, it's filthy—and Cason's been with the carnival for a couple of years now.

He traces her shoulder with his left hand; the right is busy holding a soft-paged paperback to the window to catch the last of the day's light. It's gentle, distracted comfort, and it's all he's got until they make the next town.

If they roll into Lawrenceburg before dark, Ivy's going to get her hair washed. Every little stick-and-plumb on the east-west trail has a beauty parlor; they smell like perms and gossip and carnations.

Women that feel like aunts and nanas sink their fingers in and ask questions like they care—where are you from? where are you going?—

and Ivy lies.

Sometimes she's in college; sometimes she's visiting a sick cousin. Anything but the truth— the confidential womanhood club seems to dissolve if the salon ladies find out they're set-and-styling the Living Mermaid.

The summer's gone on too long for Ivy to protest, to explain how she's completely normal, how she's not really homeless, how there are people waiting for her to get home and start her life. These things are all true, or they were.

Before she ran away to join the circus and only found Binion's Traveling Fair.

Before she got her fins.

Then

Without a spray of sparkling lights to cast the illusion, the Ferris wheel was nothing but rusted arms and faded paint.

The top car groaned against the wind, a blue-black shadow against the night sky, and Ivy—six months ago Ivy, still clean and wearing pressed khakis—wandered past.

She hugged herself with thin arms, trying to figure out what an office looked like at a carnival. The Dolores-like woman at the ticket booth had said she'd find it in the back, but where was the back, exactly?

Ducking around a funnel cake stand, Ivy startled when a man whipped around with a fan of swords in one hand. Blood pounded in her ears, her muscles tensed to flee, but the man's expression was more irritated than homicidal.

"Something I can do for you?"

Ivy shook her head, then nodded, flashing mixed signals because she still hadn't figured out front from back, and her nerve had started to fade. "I'm looking for the office, please."

The blades wavered, jouncing like rubber toys, pointing out a huddle of RVs in the distance. Dingy little sheepdogs in the dark, crowded together behind the funhouse, so that's what a carnival office looked like.

It wasn't so far, not so very far, and she murmured her gratitude as she walked away. She slipped past a half-naked man, blue with tattoos from his forehead to his ankles, and offered a wan smile to a pair of conjoined twins sharing a cigarette by the Tilt-a-Whirl. Their lipstick looked black in the dark, their mourning mouths slack between draws of smoke.

The sky traded place with earth, something Ivy saw in a flash before everything was veiled in her dishwater hair. Her heart pounded a warning beat as she tried to make sense of her new up and down. She wasn't usually this clumsy; she got tangled in a black nest of wires taped to the ground.

"Walk much?" The voice was rich and low and not unkind, just teasing enough to make her blush.

Ivy shook her head as she swept the hair from her face. "I tripped."

"Obviously."

He thrust a hand at her, pale, faint grime crescents beneath the nails. It was unremarkable, neither particularly smooth nor especially rough, but it was attached to a boy Ivy paid three tickets to see in the sideshow that afternoon.

Well, a guy—he was her age and just a few inches taller—with greenish eyes and dark hair. A lot of dark hair, on his head and tumbling down to his shoulder in waves, and on his face, wolfman style. His hand fit neatly in hers.

Ivy stared at his shoulder as she stood, skimming past eye contact, warding off another blush. "Thanks."

Still holding her hand, he inspected it, turning it to examine her palm. "So what are you doing out here?"

"Trying to get there," she said, nodding toward the RVs. That's clever, she decided; that's good conversation.

"Oh," he said. "Running away, huh?"

"My family knows where I am." Mom, Dad, aunts, uncles, her shrink, the neighborhood gossip, oh, they knew.

He studied the rise and fall of her knuckles with a brush of thumb. "Well, alrighty then. What's your thing?"

"How do you mean?" Ivy stretched when he squeezed her hand. It was like playing a game, holding his hand—her fingers slipping hide-and-seek between his.

"You know, your thing?" He tugged her closer, drawing her into his space—close enough to share heat. "Like, do you eat bugs? Or fire? We don't have a fire-eater." She said nothing, watching the ice cream curls of his mouth, so he tried again. Another tug, a low buzz in his voice. "Amazing feats of strength? Put your ankles behind your head?"

Her skin reacted to the tone, her body too. Tight everywhere, and stinging with a new blush, Ivy licked her lips and admitted, "I was hoping I could do face painting or something."

He raised a brow, and then his other hand. A sticky popping sound curdled beneath his fingers. He peeled a long, silky strip of pelt from his face in slow motion.

Ivy gaped. "You're not real."

It was a stupid thing to say, and Ivy realized that when he looked himself over—down at his plain jeans and T-shirt, then back up at her.

"I'm not?"

The good blush faded, replaced by embarrassment. Freeing her hand, Ivy shook her head. Breathe; all she had to do was breathe and explain. "I mean, your face, you're not really..."

"Everybody has to have a thing," he said, and moved to touch her. When she turned away, his touch followed, tracing the shape of her face in the air. She hesitated; started to look up, and he pressed the furred strip to her cheek.

She cut him a quick glance as she swallowed the stone in her throat. He was too close, his touch was too familiar, but she didn't step away. Touching the fur gingerly, she said, "But I don't want to be the Dog-Faced Girl. Boy. Whatever."

"Nobody does," he said, pulling off the other appliance to offer it to her. There was a shadow in his green eyes, a darker, forest hint that disappeared with an unexpected smile. "I try to be just Cason after hours."

"Ivy," she said automatically, though suddenly it seemed like a wasted word. There was a secret kind of past between them that she almost remembered, right on the edge of wakefulness. It glimmered like fireflies

just finding their light, and she knew it was real because he took her hand again, exactly when she wanted him to.

Probably Oklahoma

Larry Binion owns the Ferris wheel and the Tilt-a-Whirl, the bunkhouse RVs, the Italian sausage stand and the sideshow, but it's the sideshow he loves the most.

First off, it doesn't cost him much to run. It's not like the midway, that giveth with its four-ticket four-dollar rides, but also taketh away with maintenance and parts and safety inspections and state licenses.

The midway is expensive; the sideshow is cheap. The geeks who work in it put up the tents. Then they pay fifty dollars a week out of a \$150 paycheck to sleep in the bunkhouse—meals extra. Binion likes cheap.

Second, it brings regular folks down to his level. Sometimes he puts on a ragged top hat and tears tickets himself just to see upstanding people, church people, had-a-shower-that-morning people, give into the ugly voyeurs that live in their hearts.

They pay to stare at Mike Cole, who isn't part lizard at all, but his psoriasis is so bad he can't even get a job flipping burgers.

Or they watch through their fingers while Clara and Marybeth do calisthenics with their four legs but just three arms. The sisters share a heart and a lung, and stuck together like that, they share everything else, too.

Unnatural, abnormal—take a minute to gaze at Lyle, the Man With No Face, as he threads another fishhook through skin thick with scar tissue. He can't feel it—he hasn't felt anything since the fire.

Keep moving, folks, Binion's got a unicorn, a two-headed goat, stillbirths in jars, and oh yeah, the Living Mermaid and the Dog-Faced Boy, come look, come look.

Good people pay good money to be openly horrified—they want to stare at deformed babies and ask what happened to the arm that man on the bus is missing, but they're too *civilized*. That would be *rude*. Binion gives them a chance to hop down in the gutter; it only costs three tickets.

And finally, it's an opportunity for him to brag, though most of the brags are lies. Larry Binion alone is keeping carnival history and tradition alive, which is probably news to Jim Rose and his circus, and any number of county fairs with their own homegrown geeks on display. Political correctness, he'll slur after his third whiskey, ruined the great American sideshow.

When the caravan stops, Binion comes around to bang on all the bunkhouse doors. Ivy burrows down to bury her face against Cason's side. Everything spins in her head, a hot-and-cold flash stirring her belly sour again.

She squeezes her eyes closed, and clenches her teeth so hard it stops up her ears, just so she doesn't have to hear Binion yell, "Time to make some money!" for the thousandth time that summer.

She doesn't like him; she hasn't liked him since he put his hand between her thighs and asked if she was a virgin. That was three days and three hundred miles from home, after she'd taken the job to prove she could leave the house (take that, Dr. Neill).

"Go ahead and stay here," Cason says, tucking a receipt into the book to save his place. "I can put up the pool."

Ignoring the ache in the small of her back, Ivy drags herself to slump

beside him.

Like magic, like destiny, her fingers slip between his. His skin is still soft-rough, and it's damp from sweltering in the RV; even though she can hold his hand anytime she wants, actually doing it still makes her sting with pleasure.

She swallows silence, considering the offer, then shakes her head. "I don't want him to give you a hard time."

Cason raises their joined hands to his mouth and kisses her knuckles. "Fuck him." His dark eyes simmer, long lashes fanned out as he looks at her through his brows. His lips linger on her skin, dry as paper, but hot.

An 'I love you' tries to escape from her. The confession climbs into her throat and claws to escape; it has insistent feet and hands that push her ribs to breaking. She's been thinking it for a while, every time he puts his thin body between her and some threat, however petty; all the nights when he makes a circle with his arm and invites her to sleep there—just sleep.

She thinks it when they don't just sleep, too; that's when it's hardest. Afterward, her fingers stroke his bare waist; she just can't stop touching him, and instead of saying I love you, I'm in love with you, she tells herself, "You're such a girl."

As if there's something wrong with that, but it works. She cools in the dark, turning her face to beg another lazy, lingering kiss, and says nothing.

He doesn't have her willpower. If the looks aren't enough to give it away, if his hands worshipping the span of her waist mean nothing, he's said it out loud. He's whispered it into her ear as she sleeps; sometimes he tells the space that surrounded her after she's walked away.

It's a secret they're keeping from each other.

Binion knocks again, and they hurry outside before they get docked ten dollars for skipping work. Sweat paints a V on the front of Ivy's shirt, and she fades each time she blinks.

Though the sun's setting, the humidity hasn't quite let go of the day. It's a vicious kind of hot, the kind that steals a breath and makes it hard to take another. That's probably what's making her dizzy—it's too hot to think, let alone move.

Fortunately, putting up the tents is simple. Ivy knows where to stand and how to hold the poles to keep them from buckling or falling over, now.

She shares the task with Lyle—because of the scars, he can't raise his arms above his head. The twins thread painted banners onto their frames, and Cason and Mike crawl beneath the suffocating weight of canvas to raise support stakes. It gives them a chance to out-testosterone each other, racing to see who can get theirs up first. A job for everybody, everybody with a job, nice and neat.

"Think they'll come back?" Lyle asks, nodding toward the feet disappearing beneath the spread tents.

Ivy shakes her head. "Doubt it."

"Guess you'll have to marry me, then."

"Looks like." She smiles, then turns her face against her shoulder when Mike warns he's ready to raise.

The tents rumble thunder, springing off the ground one, two, three fast

and groaning as they give up another pound of dust to the already dirty-thick air.

Ivy coughs through it, weaving between thinking and not-thinking, awake and not-awake. The tents get up; her pool gets filled; these things happen. By the time the sky is truly dark, no more hints of purple and gold on the horizon, the carnival's ready to open in the morning.

All Ivy can think about is sleep, and she reaches out to catch Cason's hand. This time, she misses, and he gives her a gentle nudge.

"You go on back, I'm going to run into town."

"Oh... all right." She hesitates.

"You want anything?"

Orange juice. She wants orange juice, cold and fresh, thick with pulp, but even though her mouth is souring for it, she shakes her head. There's no way to keep it ice cold until morning.

He asks if she's sure, and when she nods he jogs to catch up with a couple of the ride jockeys. Their voices ring out, reflected off all the midway steel, jeering and laughing together. They walk until they're shadows, and Ivy turns away when she can't make Cason's familiar lope out in the dark

It feels like being kicked in the chest, like being pushed down and having the wind knocked out, when he goes away like this.

The world that's small and intricate as a diamond when they're alone disintegrates. Suddenly there are miles and miles open in every direction, so much space, no one could hope to fill it. Too much space to find someone lost in it.

Still, she heads back to the bunkhouse alone.

Indiana, Somewhere

Six weeks ago, nearly to the day, Binion called from the front flap of the sideshow tents, "Right this way, folks, step up, get close to the strange and unusual!"

He wore his top hat, and he'd managed to produce a red suit jacket from somewhere. He strutted like a ringmaster, oblivious to the fact that he looked like an insane insurance salesman.

In spite of the get-up, he seemed to be pulling a better-than-usual crowd into the tents. They shuffled through with their lemon shake-ups, slurping through the dregs and tossing yellow peels into the dirt, pretending to be invisible at the human zoo.

Ivy thumbed through a magazine behind waist-high plastic barriers. Warning signs around her pool claimed that the barriers were for the visitors' protection—mermaids had a nasty habit of drowning men, after all—but they really just kept people from looking at her fishy half too closely.

The first time she wore the costume, she thought it was cheap, but beautiful. If there had ever been a tag in the fins, she couldn't tell where it might have been. They looked handmade—sewn from shiny blue-green rayon, the quilted scales were uneven with staggered-stitches, dusted with glitter. When she sat, no one could see how the color had worn off the fabric by the zipper—they couldn't see the zipper, either. A flap of fin hid her feet and hobbled her with sequined scallops.

All her life, she'd been a one-piece bathing suit kind of girl, but a mermaid didn't have a V between her legs, or a waistband to tuck

anything into. Ivy forced herself to wear a green bikini top she picked out at Wal-Mart her third night there. The one that came with the costume was two cups too big.

She swished her fins; sometimes she played with the shell barrettes in her hair, or pretended to comb her locks for the little girls who were hoping to see Disney but got Binion instead.

Mostly, though, she kept to her magazine. Glossy fashion covers ruined the illusion of the maiden of the deep, but it shielded her. Some people thought three tickets bought them the right to do anything; women didn't whisper when they wondered if she was a slut, kids threw the peanuts they couldn't shell, and some men... well. Three spitters already that morning, and on the last one, Cason nearly jumped the ropes that kept the customers from the curiosities.

The whole day had that kind of feel, an unburdening of manners, a vicious, restless seed waiting to feed a storm. When the lights finally went down, Ivy followed Cason to the bunkhouses. She was his puppy, afraid of everyone else, content with his company. He turned fast enough to catch her when she stumbled.

His wolf face peeled at the edge, a gash to reveal smooth cheek beneath, and he ducked his head to meet her eyes. He didn't have to; he wasn't that tall.

"I'm a head into town," he said.

Ivy shrank, looking toward the thin strip of highway that led away from the fair. "Oh. I'm, I need a shower."

Reaching back to open the trailer door, Cason stepped out of her way. "You can sleep in my bunk tonight." When she didn't move right away, he smiled and teased, "Don't steal anything."

"Are you coming back?"

Broad and certain and strong of hand, Cason turned her, nudged her. Up the first step, then the second, barely raising the dust beneath their feet. She moved like a music box dancer for him. When she was inside, and he was out, Cason peeled away his working face and shook the strips of fur at her as he backed away. "Be beautiful for me in the morning, would you?"

And he left, which was different from *and then he was gone*. Ivy clung to the doorknob and watched him walk, forty yards, fifty, a hundred, to her point of pathetic, then she closed herself inside.

The trailer smelled of sweat and man, mildew and stale beer, but it was better, so much better, than sleeping on the carousel. Cason had a hotplate and a radio; he had an uneven bed that washed her with prime otherness. She rubbed her mouth against the rough curve of his pillow because she hadn't kissed him yet.

She wrapped herself in his blanket and watched the unlocked—unlockable—door until she fell asleep. She woke alone, and filled up her section of the tents alone. Binion muttered that the Dog-Faced Boy had to get his distemper shots that day. He muttered, "ten dollars a day for no-call, no-show."

Ivy shielded herself with the extra-thick summer style issue, but read nothing. Trapped in her fins, she had to beg Lyle to take a look for her—did the ride jockeys come back? Is Natty handing out water pistols at the horse race game? They all left together; have they come back? She had to ask about midway strangers because Cason's pen stayed empty.

She slept on the step to his bunkhouse.

And the next night.

And on the third, Binion wandered through camp, using his hands as a bullhorn. "Let's move, people. Let's move."

"Mr. Binion," Ivy said, smoothing her hair from her face. She tried to stand in his conversation space, but the scent of cherry tobacco on his breath pushed her away. She blinked, brushed at flies and dust, hands constantly moving between them in semaphore for the ill at ease. "Mr. Binion, Cason's not back yet."

Binion blanked, then caught light. "So?"

"We're packing up," Ivy said. It was obvious; the way she gestured at the midway coming down explained everything; didn't it?

"Ain't no contract here. He's free to go if he wants." Binion's arm brushed hers when he turned to yell needless directions. His voice seemed to fall into the dust; it didn't carry at all.

With a weak smile, Ivy intended to walk away. She had to drain her pool; she needed to roll it up so it wouldn't get torn. Onto the truck, or onto her back, the mermaid's lake had to make it to the next town over. Rubbing her pale mouth, she looked toward the tents and talked instead of walked. "He didn't just go."

"Rent's fifty bucks a week for the bunkhouses," Binion said, distracted. "I'm taking ten out of your check for the other night, so you know."

"I only," Ivy said, then decided not to argue. "Fine, but what about Cason?"

Binion clapped a hand on her shoulder, using her as leverage to shove off. "You can work it off with me personal-like, if you want. I'm easy."

Just like that, nothing at all, worse than the hand between her thighs. The suggestion slapped her cheeks shamed-red; by the time she thought to tell him to just dock her, he'd climbed into the inner-works of the carousel to figure out what the hell was making that pin stick.

May he get eaten by painted circus ponies. May his insides grease the gears forever and ever. Amen.

Ivy scrubbed her arms with her hands and turned, her sandals muddying prints into the dust. All around her the carnival sank to the ground, dying without struggle. She tipped her face back to the dirty late-day sunlight, growing smaller and smaller, until she made herself grow big again.

Wouldn't her mother be relieved if she gave up right now; wouldn't Daddy be thrilled, wouldn't Dr.-*damned*-Neill applaud her for being level-headed, if she gave up, if she went home, this is no way to prove a point, Ivy Lee. But she had a reason to stay:

Somebody had to be the Dog-Faced Boy.

Into Illinois

It's a moment of meditation: if a sideshow geek falls through the slats of an old railway bridge, is there anyone there to catch her? What if she's perfectly normal, just a girl pretending to be a geek, out in the open, rebelling against home and phobia, sweet phobia, and what if somebody does catch her, and he kisses her, and they make love down by the banks of the Wabash, and that's the first time she's ever *allowed* anyone into her skin?

Is there anyone there to catch her?

Right This Minute

Ivy splashes her face with lukewarm water and falls into bed. Cason's away, even the local channels suck—she's air-drying and staring at the ceiling.

The throb working at the base of her spine finally translates. Sick, no thermometer, please—the blizzard beneath the sheets keeps her too cold to have a fever, surely, definitely.

A doctor would meet the fair somewhere in August. She takes the west-east route, ministering to carnies and game jocks all over the country, cash-only, no-insurance accepted. Rumor in the geek tents has it that she lost her license when she slipped and turned a little boy into a little girl, but her prescription pad seems legal enough.

Can I wait?

She asks against the back of her hand. Between knuckles—the little curve between her thumb and forefinger—she discovers, is exactly the shape of a kiss. August isn't far, full of dates and portents.

The first day of school, the first day of college, the first day of the rest of your life—Ivy kisses her hand and closes her eyes.

She can wait for Dr. August. She has nothing to cut off.

The Town After They Left Him

The fine, churchgoing people of Gem, trickling through the musty-hot tents, didn't applaud when some longhaired hippie (as if Gem had ever seen a true hippie, even forty years ago when it was likely), stepped over the rail to lay hands and mouth on the Dog-Faced Boy. There was no applause when they kissed.

Some asked for their money back, and that pissed Binion off—but not enough to throw them out of the fair. Hell no; he single-handedly kept American sideshow history alive, and that meant displaying a goddamned Dog-Faced Boy and a goddamned mermaid, whether they'd lost their goddamned minds or not.

He yanked them both up by the arm dragged them into sunlight behind the tents. To Cason, he said, "You owe me a hundred." To Ivy, he said, "Take off the beard and put on that fucking bikini before I send you home." He probably would have shoved her, but he knew—even if he wouldn't admit—Cason would beat him into the dirt if he did. He liked his power uncomplicated and unquestioned.

They ran back to the bunkhouse, and Ivy had to remember that she didn't really live there; she let Cason go in first, then gathered her things as quickly as she could. She ached with questions; she burned with demands, and all of it came out in an unexpected wail.

She beat at his chest with crabapple fists, small but strong. Each strike made his lungs rattle; disturbed the beat of his heart. Not painful, unpleasant. Unsettling. She hit him for going away, for making her worry, for making her step in to his blue jeans since somebody *had* to be the Dog-Faced Boy. She hit him for sleepless nights. She hit him for coming back. She hit him for kissing her, and for not doing it sooner.

And when she stopped, he just smiled. Wry or thoughtful, he just smiled, like he knew he deserved it. As if he could read every worry in every punch. After she'd worn herself out, he just smiled, and held out his hands for his costume.

Behind the half-open bathroom door, Ivy pushed her jeans down and stepped out, watching to see if Cason watched her undress.

He didn't; he had to enwolf his face now that she'd quit hitting him and returned the appliances. He brushed his long hair down to cover the

uneven edges, turning from side to side to try to catch a glimpse of himself.

"I was really worried," Ivy said. Her mouth still stung—abused, taken advantage of; molten soft and hungry, it wasn't fair.

He didn't look over. "I'm sorry."

"I tried to hold the fair for you in Richmond." Grabbing a doorknob for balance, Ivy stepped into the narrow cone of her fins. Sequins, glitter, fluttered to the floor. "What happened to you?"

The bruise, a blue double line on the fine crest of his cheek, was obvious.

"It was just a fight."

"Did you win?" She frowned expectantly; she had that right.

Cason shook his head, examining the ceiling as Ivy bent over, baring the curve of her breasts for anybody who cared to look down her collar. "I shouldn't have had it."

"Guess not." Ivy snorted, trying to sound tough, but she wanted to kiss the dusky spot; she could heal him and soothe her all at once. Working the ridge of the costume over her hips, she squeaked when she tipped over. "I worried, you know."

"Don't wait for me," Cason said, and caught her. His hands lay flush and smooth against her waist, better balance than a lousy tin doorknob. He stroked the small of her back idly, with his thumbs. "Don't count on me."

Her eyes reflected sequin light when she looked at him sharply. "I won't again."

"I'll save you when you need it." Horsehair whiskers brushed her neck. "But that's all."

"That's mighty big, considering I filled in for you," Ivy said, offering the obvious. She still had spirit gum on her cheeks; dust and flecks of hay stuck to it as she struggled with the last inches of her fins. His hands were in the way; she slapped at them impatiently.

Cason nodded. "Thank you."

She raised a hand over her head and waited until he slipped her arm around his shoulders. Most days, she hopped to her tank because the costume hobbled her; today he understood he had to carry her. "You missed it, too, because I was gorgeous that morning."

"Now, I am sorry I missed that."

The fine, churchgoing people of Gem didn't applaud when the mermaid got a kiss, either, but somebody in the back whistled their approval. Good enough; nearly a vow.

Last Spring

They always talked in the living room, underneath Ivy's bedroom, as if sound never traveled past the ears meant to hear. Her mother had a ticky-tock walk; when she paced, she sounded like a metronome. After Ivy first retreated, her mother covered the whole ground floor, andante. Soon, it turned agitated allegro, punctuated with angry murmurs.

"She never leaves the house."

"She goes to school, doesn't she?"

"And nowhere else. She's seventeen, Jack."

"At least she's not in trouble."

"Look, I'm telling you, there's something wrong. I'm her mother."

Ivy drew her shades and sank to the floor beside the vent. Heat, conversation, the ducts were indiscriminate and carried sound or central air with equal indifference. Plucking the metal grate with her fingers, Ivy made it sing like a slow harp blending with the endless, staccato tap of her mother's shoes on the hardwood below.

"And you know these things."
"Don't mock me."

On one hand, Ivy hated it when her father used that voice. It was his lesson tone, the one steeped in worn sarcasm. When he used it, you were supposed to understand you'd been stupid, how you'd been stupid, and in what ways you might endeavor to be less stupid in the future. He wasn't a mean man, just a smart one who'd gone ragged with regular minds years before.

"What about the therapist?"
"He agrees with me."

On the other hand, Ivy didn't care if Dr. Neill agreed. Despite his diplomas and red leather chairs, no matter his shelves of thick statistical manuals and obscurely-titled texts, Dr. Neill understood exactly nothing. He was the crazy one, if he thought walking around outside was safe. Maybe he needed a little Prozac or Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, if he thought it was *reasonable* to let your body move around all vulnerable and obvious outside four walls, where anybody could see it. Where anybody could touch it.

"I think you're blowing this out of proportion."
"She's disappearing!"
"You're being ridiculous. We can't force her
to have a social life."
"I'm trying to force her to have a life, period."

Without looking, Ivy reached into the bowl of change on her desk. Quarters and dimes clicked when she closed them in her fist. She was tired of this argument—about her, not involving her—she was tired of being the thing.

The coins roared a crescendo when she dumped them down the vent, and thank God, everybody finally shut up.

Midwestern to Midwater

Later, she remembers it like a house of mirrors.

The fever made her wild—when she opened her eyes, she saw a funhouse in the bunkhouse. The colors had turned sticky-old-photo-grey, blue with grey, brown with grey, red with grey, and the ceiling's angles failed to meet.

She heard her parents whispering about her all over again, even though she'd left them far behind. They filled one ear with hissing doubts, they're so worried, please go outside, just one date, at least graduation! And then they cry in the other, a carnie? the fair? this isn't what we meant, don't you think you're going overboard?

She tried to tell them it made sense; if she couldn't be safe, she should be reckless, but the man came back. Drowning in her fevered sweat, Ivy fought this time. He held her down again, and she screamed, but it stopped with the taste of orange juice in her mouth.

Though there must have been a car involved, what Ivy remembers is being carried. Cason carried her out to the stage lights—no, just the overhead lights that surgeon-magicians in green blocked with their heads. He stayed, and stroked her hair, and promised to watch out for her as long as he could.

She knew, because her mother told her, that the pinprick she'd felt in her hand wasn't a Cinderella needle, it was an IV. She knew, because the scar on her belly told her, that her appendix couldn't wait for Dr. August after all.

But she knew because she'd said I love you, and Cason had said, "Don't count on me," meaning exactly the same thing. He got to kiss her once more, but it didn't feel like a goodbye until he turned around. When they released her from the hospital, the carnival had moved on.

Briefly, she considered chasing it, even though Cason had somehow found her old life and dragged it to Midwater, Kansas. She considered chasing him, too, but she let her mother take her home instead. Somewhere on the east-west trail, he still got in fights he shouldn't have, and still paid good money for a dirty bunk that should have been condemned, because somebody had to be the Dog-Faced Boy.

She couldn't count on him, except that she had. Exactly as much as he'd let her; exactly as much as she'd needed to.

When the stitches came out, she swam. In spite of the scar, she wore a bikini, and plunged into the wide-open ocean of the back yard pool. A little the first day, and that left her gasping. A little more the next—her muscles quivering, she splashed, and swam, and came to understand: Cason protected her and kept devotion a secret—

Don't count on me; don't wait on me.

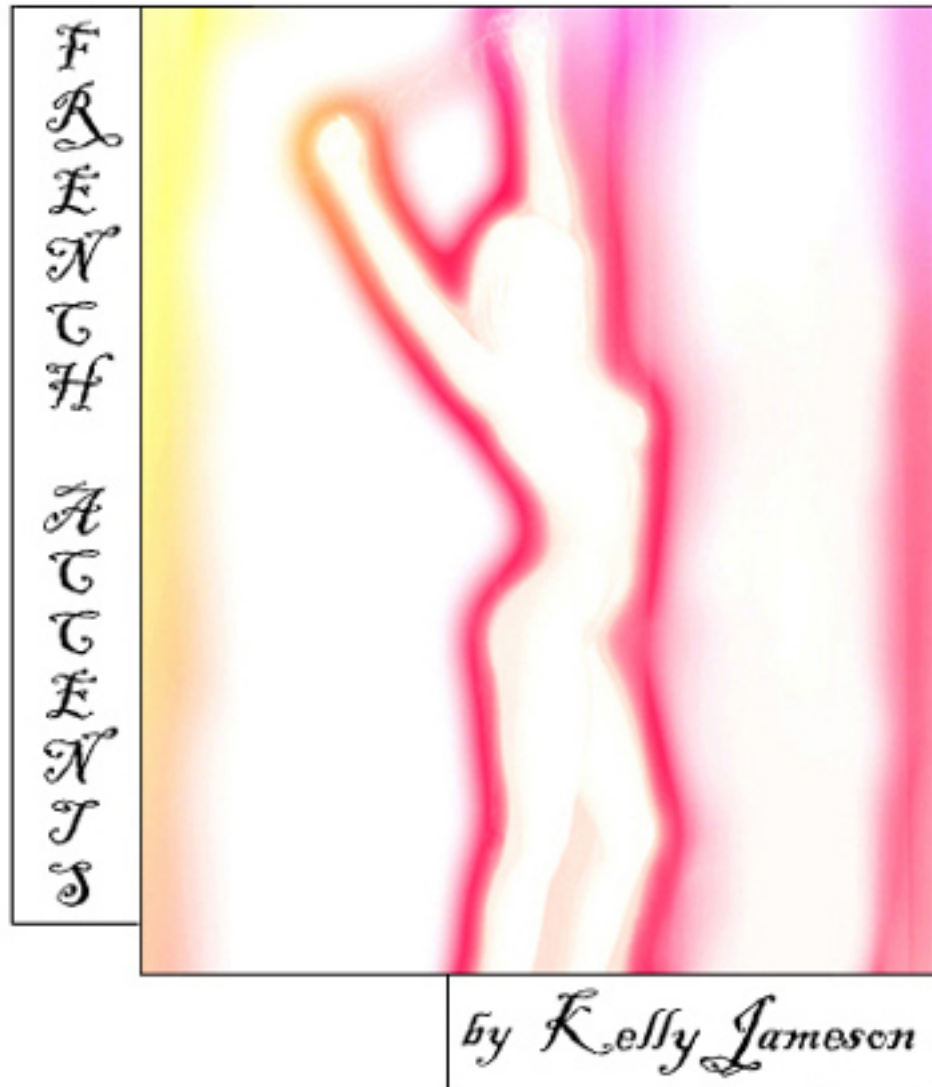
Now, Ivy swims to the surface, and up and up, dripping gold with wet sunlight. She's fast and beautiful and uncatchable, her fins left behind in a three-ticket sideshow. She's free because she went, because he let her go, because she's a myth and much better, a fable and overboard and real.



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The Summerset Review



Let me say straight off that I don't do booths. The windows are one-way and the girls don't really have to see anyone, but the space is so tight you can barely stand up. There is always a sleazy, smelly carpet beneath your bare feet, and the show to be done, the one the customers want, is usually just too kinky for me. *Girls—we're all mirrored boxes.*

Here's another thing that might surprise you: most of the girls who strip are nice. I avoid those, though, who will only dance to Ricky Martin or songs like "My Heart Belongs to Daddy," and those who don't dance, the ones who sort of just stand there in glittery thongs and pasties and jiggle and do horribly executed cartwheels or sit in giant champagne glasses. I mean, if you're not dancing, you're not moving, you're not living.

I should probably tell you I drive a Dodge Dart with bumper stickers that read "Piss Off" and "I'd Rather Be Dancing" and "Eve Was Framed." Dancing is not a self-imposed handicap, as so many people believe.

Men like to watch me dance, except most Japanese. Those guys either don't appreciate art or prefer another kind of butt. That's O.K.; the Japanese aren't good dancers themselves. I think it's because they are so business-oriented. "You really know how to close a deal" and "You have good *Wa*" don't usually inspire me.

I once gave a private dance to a man from Kobe who was obviously high, the neon lights pouring over my tanned body like liquid rainbows. I enjoyed moving, breathing, sweating, arching, watching myself *become* the music, so much so that I forgot about him. Then he grabbed my breasts. Over the music, I said, "You can't do that," and he left, and I made \$300 in five minutes. The song continued and I just kept dancing, even though nobody watched.

My name is Delacorte. I forgot to tell you that. I'm not dancing for love or to pay the rent or because I hate men and like to taunt them. The customers all think my stage name is sophisticated, clever, exotic. Maybe because they all have names like Harry, Joe, and Sam; men whose lives have become trekked-out and stable, tucked in at the edges like the corners of a scratchy sheet. So they come, come to watch me grind against a sweat-stained steel pole in the heart of New York while outside, neon signs flash with purple cave-like cadence, beating like a million hearts, calling them back. *Girls, girls, girls. The closed-air theater of sweat and dreams and strong inner thighs.*

"Delacorte, come sit on my lap." "Delacorte, rub your tits in my face." "Delacorte, you have such a great ass." Comments like that don't bother me; they run over my flesh like water or the steady, punching beats of a drum. I'm kind of used to it, actually. I might even miss it if I had to work in a halogen-lighted office cubicle.

The strip club is the perfect place for me, a girl whose real name is Sherrybeth. Flesh bathed in a shifting shimmer of artificial lights. As a young tart of a girl with Cherry Coke-colored braids down my back, I started telling people I was French. And, aw, they just all thought it was so cute. I'm from Hoboken. Unlike my sister, now gone, I've never been to Paris, with its Claude Monet prints and orchestra seasons and fancy Metro station names. Paris, which shakes and twinkles and dazzles and pulls people in from all over the globe—it is, after all, the birthplace of the *can-can* and probably the perfect city—and the idea of it holds everything for a windmill of a girl like me, who's been raised on cheeseburgers and Gap jeans and Bruce Springsteen and Donna Summer.

The music thumps loud and hard in the club; it moves up my thighs,

wraps itself around my middle, grabs at my chest, makes me move like nothing ever made me move before. And it's just me when I'm like that, a girl beneath a pool of lights—green lights sprouting like new grass, pink lights running across my belly like smeared lipstick, men leaning against a cocoa colored bar in the chocolate dark—I'm a dancing girl finding my candied center. I'm in a primal place where confrontation and attraction merge, and I love that kind of tension. Let me tell you something. I'm the kind of stripper you most want: I love to dance and I love music so much that sometimes I forget to pick up the money. Don't tell anyone, but I'd get naked and dance for free.

Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls

Standing behind the red curtain that leads to the dance floor between the U-shaped bars, the DJ calls my name. "Now coming to the stage for your enjoyment, Delacorte..."

There's whistling, clapping, flames of lighters held high in the dark.

It's a three-part set, and the first song is the tease; the Black Crowes cover of "Hard to Handle" starts pumping from the speakers. The music is loud, too loud to hear someone unless you're in their bubble. It helps create that instant intimacy.

I dance in a silver shorts suit with a belt and silver thigh highs. I don't lose anything during the tease, but the bar starts giving up some of its brick and mortar walls and neon beer signs, the red brick becoming red velvet; the signs transforming into an aurora borealis. The magic starts when my body synchs with the music.

For the reveal, the DJ slows it down with "She Talks to Angels." The reveal is my least favorite part of the three-part set, and it is true for many other girls as well. The flirting is done and now you're peeling away your lacy shields; now you're being judged. If you've got any insecurities, the reveal is when they'll stop whispering and start shouting into your ears. There are times during the reveal when my body and the music are at odds. My hips miss a beat so that I can unsnap a garter or a belt buckle and the stained glass window of St. George and the Dragon becomes Marty the bouncer lifting a drunk who just spilled his tallboy lager all over the mahogany bar top. Taking off my panties is the toughest. I'm thinking about trying the breakaway G-string. It's not that I'm embarrassed to show anything; it ruins the rhythm.

Once the reveal is done I can rejoin the music, the third song, a live version of "Remedy." I twist and turn until the notes of the electric guitar start to bend at my command. For this part of the set, my body is an orchestra. I'm no longer moving to the beat; my body *is* the beat. My limbs are strings; my nipples the magic wand and hand of the conductor. My hair is wind. The sharp details of reality fade completely to colors and sounds and emotions. There is a part of the song where the loud guitar chords are pounded three times and then all instruments go momentarily silent. My braids whip violently during this, knock about in a thousand different directions, and on that third beat they're thrown to the four walls, then drop to my shoulders and go still in the silence.

Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls

When I'm not dancing, I'm a girl who always feels a little outside herself, the edges and berms of my being scattered like TV snow

around my body. When I'm not dancing, it's like I'm hovering and watching myself, like I'm somebody else. My husband understands this. Yes, I'm married. Are you surprised? I hooked him with a table dance.

He—my husband of four years—doesn't mind that I have my regulars. "Delacorte, you weren't here last night. Where were you?" they ask, like a demanding spouse. "Where were you? Who were you with? What were you doing?" *Mile by mile is a trial. Yard by yard is hard. Inch by inch is a cinch.* Coins in the couch. A dead twin sister. No real family within miles. So I dance.

I don't want to become like those other women, the ones who wait for their husbands to come home from the strip clubs stinking of liquor and sweat. The husbands who will peel off their sweaty dark work socks, leave them on the floor, and climb into their marriage beds next to their slumbering, exhausted wives who've given up the questioning routine long ago in exchange for the gullible peace of not knowing. *Inch by inch.* It sounds corny, but I think, no matter what she looks like, every woman should dance on a table. Only then she will truly know how powerful and beautiful she is.

Right now I am gyrating, pressing myself against the hard, shiny pole. I squat down slowly, flip my long Cherry Coke braids over my shoulders, arch my back, feel the base drum in my kidneys, press my breasts up toward the ceiling, let my body express the ancient yearning of how it is meant to open itself to a man, think of my husband, how I like to swallow all of him into me. I feel the levels of humanity jammed into the club, the neon lights outside striping my skin like a strange zebra, smell the rotgut liquor and beer and onions from the steak joint across the street. I inhale. Arch. Inhale. I dance. The walls drip steam from my body. The theme from Star Wars plays loudly between sets. It inspires me.

Once, a long time ago, I feared becoming one of those other women. One who corralled her sexuality and filed it away like a Country Living magazine in a rack by the couch. *Tight as glass.* The stopper on a perfume bottle. One who'd never dreamed of Paris. *Gare Saint Lazare, Paris' first train station. Where cars bumped along steel tracks, grinding lives together, stolen kisses in the breath of a night-shrouded city where anything could happen.*

"Delacorte, you're far away tonight, babe."

I focus on my elderly male customer whose white, white hands with their hairy knuckles keep trying to find my ass. In the deep indigo stench of the club, the hands on my thigh where they aren't supposed to be, like windblown snow across a frozen lake.

Harry is drunk. He probably went bald when he was twenty. "C'mon, little Delacorte. You're *so* sexy." Beneath the fabric of his tired work pants, he is hard as a kitchen counter. Words seem difficult for him, dribbling from his lips like juice. "C'mon, just one little feel. You won't get in trouble."

I throw some French at him, which essentially amounts to "You've put on weight." I've learned a few useful French phrases and speak them in a pinch. He never has any idea what I am saying. He licks his thin lips. "That's it, honey, talk dirty to me, talk dirty. My wife won't ever talk dirty to me. She thinks it's, um, dirty."

I continue in French, this time saying, "You've got a face that would blow off manhole covers." I learned some of the phrases from postcards, which I keep tacked up on a small corkboard in our small apartment in an overcrowded city that is not Paris; no, definitely not Paris.

The postcards are old and bent now, having crossed from Paris to New York, having come from my twin sister. She was a world famous ballerina, and danced too, before she overdosed. She weighed ninety-eight pounds when she died. I was always the "other" one, the one people were disappointed in.

Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls

Later, in the apartment that I share with my husband, the only light coming from the common hallway, sliding beneath the door like broken egg yolk, I easily forget about all the Harrys and Toms and Joes. I think instead about Paris and how my imperfect body is more perfect than any Metro art. I don't mind that I grew up in hotels and motels—I even miss them sometimes. My mother was a maid who gathered dirty sheets and emptied ashtrays (we always lived in hotels that allowed smoking) and my dad a traveling poker player. They'd thought I was stupid and cute at the same time.

"You want to be a damn dancer?" my dad would ask, a six-pack of beer dangling from a thumb. "What kind of shit is this? Kid, you have to have grace to be a dancer. Grace, like your sister." He'd rub my head and pull my braids playfully and plunk down in front of the TV and soon he'd be snoring drunk. He'd never known how to dance.

I climb into bed next to my slumbering husband and dream about the Paris Metro at night, the sighing of the closing doors, the constant clink and hum of strangers going somewhere and nowhere at the same time. I dream about dancing at the top of the Eiffel Tower.

Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls

The next night, I'm back at the club with Harry, who is drunk again, and still trying to put his bear paws on me. It is so easy to make the man happy. To speak French to him, to say, "My God your children are ugly" with a sophisticated, tumbling accent.

"Yeah, baby, that's right. That's right. Talk dirty. You are so sexy." He stares at my body and completely misses the irony.

"You ever been to Paris?" I ask, while squirming in my sparkly thong and hovering just above his lap and the part of him that would eat me alive if I let it. I dance some more.

"Paris? Ha! Paris is for fags who like those chateaus or castles or whatever they're called and fancy wines and stupid hats. Besides, I don't need to go to Paris to get an erection as tall as the Eiffel Tower, babe. And you're dancing too much."

"It's called a lap dance for a reason, Harry. You know, when it was first built, everyone thought the Eiffel Tower was an eyesore."

"Huh?"

"They thought it was ugly."

"Oh."

I turn and face him, dipping my breasts low and close to his face.

"God, you have nice tits."

"Turtle soup?"

"Huh?"

"Do you like turtle soup, Harry?"

He laughs. "You're in a strange mood tonight, Dela." He shortens my name to Dela. I don't mind. "No, I don't like turtle soup," he says. "I think it's cruel to pull a shy, little creature like that out of its shell and mash it up."

This surprises me. I didn't think Harry was the type of guy to care about a turtle. And I was sure his wife was the kind of woman who did everything as prescribed in women's magazines. The kind who went completely mental if she missed an episode of Oprah or Dr. Phil.

"Harry, do you think we're ever too old for fun?"

"Fun is where you find it," he says, reaching for my ass again. I slap his hand away this time, hard. He puts both hands up in the air, as if to say, *O.K. I was out of line*. But no words come from his mouth. Just a knowing smile. Then he gives me a wad of cash. I turn my back on him but keep up the lap dance.

"I heard they have an ice-skating rink at the top of the Eiffel Tower. Fifty-seven meters above the glittering city. With colorful lights. Bubble gum pink and baby blue and heart red. You don't even have to bring skates. You can rent them. I've always wanted to go there."

Harry makes some kind of half-masculine sound in his throat. "Well who's gonna want to climb all the way to the top *carrying* a pair of ice skates? Anyway, c'mon honey, don't take this the wrong way, but I'm not paying you to talk."

After the lap dance is done, I stand up. I give him the names of some good moisturizers for his hands. Then I say, "Goodbye, Harry."

His eyes briefly light on my face before returning to my breasts. "Yeah, babe. I'll see you tomorrow. Same Bat Time. Same Bat Channel."

Tight as glass. Corralled in their own late-for-class, can't-remember-my-locker-combination skins.

When I get home, I count the cash, then recount it, dumbfounded at how much Harry had given me. I step out onto my little balcony and smoke three cigarettes in a row, inhaling the taste of New York with all its neon life and hard men in hard suits, with their wet, work-stained socks, their ice-like wives at home crocheting their days into Jell-O salads and PTA meetings and reasons to increase their use of antidepressants.

"I made good money tonight," I say to my half-asleep husband. I never have to reassure him I'd made it legally. "We're going to Paris!"

"O.K., honey," he says, throwing an arm gently across my body and pulling me close.

Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls

Later, we pack only the bare essentials. It takes me a long time to remember who I am: a famous ballerina's sister. My bones are still delicate and strong. I'd be back to dance for Harry again, probably many times. But now I am going to dance in Paris. It won't be on a stage, like my sister had done, for well-dressed ladies and gents who clapped their delicate, diamond-studded hands for thin, disciplined

girls, but that doesn't matter.

Before I board the plane, I undo my braids. On the flight over, I put headphones on and listen to all kinds of music, absorb it into my corpuscles and sinews and heart. *Girls, girls, girls.*

I feel my blood move and thud the entire time with my little girl dreams, my little girl splits and back flips and tumbles.

I am not bitter when I think about Harry, the Harrys of the world. I smile to myself. They give me a reason to do what I love. Hours after I get off the plane, me and Brian—that's my husband's name—we climb that Eiffel Tower like it is a giant bar stool and I dance in the electric, yellow glow of its blinking lights, drawing strength from its sturdy beams and endless lattices, white-knuckled with the sweetness of my dreams, my movements to song. I don't know if Brian notices. When I am finished, I hear people clapping. Someone even throws a rose. It is Paris, after all.



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The Summerset Review



They were stoning her, two boys and three girls. The bunch couldn't have been older than nine or ten, and that included the girl being stoned. Horace watched them and did nothing, not at first. At first he wanted to spin what he was seeing into something he could live with. Didn't children like to pretend? You be this and I'll be that. Children pretended all the time, didn't they? When he saw blood, the argument left him.

Horace was standing near the church of San Trovaso beside the canal. He had hiked there from San Marco, crossing the Ponte dell'Accademia, completely lost but enjoying the warm Venetian night. Forty-two years ago, he and his wife, Celeste, had come to Venice for their honeymoon. He was in his early sixties now, still slim, still barely graying. His wife had died last month after a two-year battle with a carcinoma the size of a soccer ball.

The girl laid on the cobblestone, her skinny knees pressed to her chest. Her hands buried in her dark tangled hair. Blood seeped between her fingers. Horace began shouting at the children. He said, *Arresto! Arresti questio immediatamente!* Stop! Stop this at once! A boy with black eyes and thin dirty legs threw a stone at Horace, grazing the side of his forehead. Horace felt a sting and a warm liquid down his left temple and knew he was bleeding. Now the three girls and the other boy began throwing stones at him. They were yelling in a language he didn't understand. Horace used his forearm to protect his face. He knelt and picked up a handful of smaller stones and began throwing them at the two boys and the three girls. Again, he shouted at them. He said, *Esca! Esca!* Get out! Get out!



Horace used a folded white linen handkerchief to wipe the blood and the dirt from the girl's face. He smelled sweat and urine on her. She said her name was Tusia and that she lived near Rome. Her English was better than his patchy Italian.

Tusia told him why the children were stoning her. She said, I take their money. Money they steal from tourists.

Good for you, Horace said. Were you going to give it back to the tourists?

No, keep it, she said.

Tusia couldn't stay conscious, and Horace carried her to a water taxi and told the driver to get them to the doctor.

He was holding the child with both arms as they entered the hospital at Campo Santi Giovanni, her head propped on his shoulder. She weighed nothing, just bones and air. How did a person this small and light remain on the ground? Why didn't she just sail off like a balloon? Her face had tiny features, tiny nose, tiny mouth, her skin pale against her dark tangled hair.

Nurses and orderlies walked past Horace as if he and the girl weren't there. He began shouting at them, too. *Chiamici un medico!* he said. *Dove e' il medico?* Get us a doctor! Where is the doctor? That was when Tusia opened her eyes halfway and looked up at Horace. She had large brown eyes the color of fall acorns.

A young orderly with short black hair and a thick mustache started to lift Tusia onto a gurney but her arms locked about Horace's neck. Skin had been scraped from both her elbows, the dried blood already beginning to scab. She said, Don't leave Tusia. O.K.? Sir stay with Tusia.



Horace had bought his wife a twenty-lira gold coin on a gold chain during their honeymoon. Forty-two years and Celeste never took the pendent from her neck. She had showered with it, slept with it, and went about her life with it. When she died, Horace removed the coin while she laid in her coffin at the funeral home. Whatever pants he wore on whatever day, the gold coin and chain were always in his front pocket. He loved touching it. He loved to rub the coin and chain between his forefinger and thumb like worry beads.



They hide on the *treni*, si? Dr. Golemba said to Horace. Then he said, *Ecuse*, I mean trains. They hide on trains.

Horace rubbed the gold coin in the front pocket of his tan gabardines as he listened to the doctor.

Dr. Golemba was slender and delicate with long pale fingers and thinning black hair slicked straight back. He had just finished putting six stitches in Tusia's scalp and three stitches beneath her left eye. He had also cleaned her scraped skin and bandaged her elbows, knees, and her right shoulder. Dr. Golemba was talking to Horace in the waiting room, explaining the little gypsies.

They come from the south on the trains to steal, the doctor said. That's what they do. They come here to *Venezia* to steal. They are *professionisti*, si? Very, very. The parents teach them. What can you do? They call themselves the *Romani*, the *Roma*. That's what they want you to call them, the *Roma*.



Horace was listening to Dr. Golemba but thinking about Celeste. When his wife called her doctor, she had talked to the woman who scheduled appointments.

No, it's not an emergency, Celeste said. I just don't feel like myself.

We have an April 3rd at 3:30, the woman said. That's the earliest he's got. If it was an emergency, he could see you sooner. You're sure it isn't an emergency?

Celeste hated bothering people, so she waited the two months. By that time the tumor in her abdominal cavity had grown from five and a half centimeters to twenty-six centimeters and was siphoning her blood supply. The tumor pressed against the bottom of her stomach and its weight and its hunger fatigued her and hurt her back. When Dr. Michie opened Celeste and saw the size of the tumor and the number of vessels that ran through it, he closed her and went to Plan B.



Are you all right, sir? Dr. Golemba said.

Tusia told me she's from Rome, Horace said. He didn't like being in hospitals. They smelled like cleaning chemicals and reminded him of how his wife suffered with her treatment. Hospitals left him feeling helpless and angry.

Si, outside the city, Dr. Golemba said. Many *Roma* outside the city. Very poor, very dirty. The parents send the children into the streets to steal. The children, they are like *lupi* with the tourists, like the wolves, si? These little gypsies, they wait in the train stations, the ruins. *Li circondano*—how you say?—they surround our tourists. The Americans, the Dutch, the Japanese, it doesn't matter. The children show them paper signs. The tourist, they try to read. This is when the little gypsies surround them and steal.



Dr. Michie had smiled and sat next to Celeste's bed. We'll do chemo, Dr. Michie had said to Celeste and Horace. Dr. Michie liked using the royal "we." We can't remove the tumor now, it's dug itself in, he'd said. We don't want any hemorrhaging, do we? The prudent way is to shrink it.

Shrinking the tumor would take six eight-hour sessions. Celeste had a port-a-cath inserted into a vessel near her heart for chemo.

The chemicals kill everything. They don't know the difference between good tissue and cancerous tissue. The chemicals are nondenominational killers.

Celeste once told Horace, If the cancer doesn't get me, the treatment will.

Don't talk that way, Horace said. You shouldn't put that sort of thought out there. I hate when you talk like that. You'll be fine, you'll be more than fine. Horace and Celeste had been together since they were kids, since high school. He touched her cheek with his palm. She had a smooth tranquil face with green-gray eyes that always approved of him. Horace said, It's unbelievable. You're still a beauty, you know that? How can you have no hair and still be a beauty? Answer me that one.



Horace was in the bedroom of his second floor apartment on the Ghetto Vecchio, staring out the open window. He liked the Jewish Quarter, the shady piazza, the ancient synagogues. He and Celeste had rented this same apartment on their honeymoon, far too many years ago. They had eaten early dinners at the little kosher bar and restaurant near the Ponte delle Guglie.

Sir lucky to live here, Tusia said. Her voice was thick and whispery from sleep. She laid in the bed with her head and her shoulders raised, leaning against a stack of three pillows. White gauze hid the left side of her face, the skin bruised, swollen, and both elbows and her right shoulder were bandaged. While she was in the hospital, the orderlies had bathed her and shampooed and brushed her dark hair. Horace's double bed made the child appear even smaller and thinner than she'd looked laying in the street. Then Tusia said, Do I stay here? Does Tusia stay with Sir? I cook and clean. I am good cook, Sir, you'll see.

Horace thought the girl spoke better English than Dr. Golemba, but Dr. Golemba didn't have to forage the tourists for food.

All I want you to do is rest, Horace said. I'm going to give you some antibiotics. When you're well, you can go back to Rome. Will your parents be worried? Should I call them?

I live with my sister, Tusia said and gave a weak and dismissive wave of her hand. Her boyfriend happy Tusia gone. I stay with you; I be your little girl. Such a beautiful *appartamento*.

The apartment wasn't beautiful. Tusia thought it was beautiful because of where and how she lived, Horace knew that. He was no different than her when it came to this place. The beauty here had nothing to do with the apartment and everything to do with the memory of his Celeste. Its marble floor and high ceiling were lost to the peeling and cracked beige walls and the cheap furniture. The walls needed scraping. They needed new plaster and paint.

My wife and I stayed here on our honeymoon, Horace said. He sat at the edge of the black wrought iron bed and held the girl's thin hand. He said, My wife died last month but we had many good years. Horace tried to sound upbeat. I filled this apartment with wonderful flowers and brought her up here blindfolded. We were both very young, and the apartment and the flowers were a surprise. My wife was so happy she cried. I remember that, the crying. You should have seen her.

I bet she was a pretty wife, Tusia said and adjusted the bedsheet about her waist. She wore a white cotton nightgown with a brocade collar and short sleeves. Horace had bought the gown yesterday on their way back from the hospital. Tusia smiled, her swollen, bruised lips keeping the smile only for a moment. She said, You know why Tusia think Sir had a pretty wife? Pretty wives like the handsome husband.

I'm leaving at the end of the summer, Horace said. He gave her two blue and white pills from the plastic bottle on the nightstand, and a paper cup of water. He watched her swallow the pills and return the cup to the nightstand. Horace wanted to keep his upbeat tone. He said, You, Miss

Tusia, you'll be ready to leave in the next couple of weeks, after your stitches come out. I'm sure you won't have trouble finding tourists to charm.



This morning Horace forgot the pain. He had been using his living room sofa as a bed and the foam-worn cushions were working bad magic on his lower back. He called the impromptu bed his Roy Rogers's sofa, a brown and green plaid that had found its way into Venice but belonged in a bunk house. Horace slipped on his navy blue terrycloth robe and glanced about the apartment. He was sleepy and squinting his eyes, not ready for the sunlight. This morning the living room, kitchen, and bedroom were filled with flowers.

Surprise, Tusia said. She grinned and covered that grin with her hand.

God, what have you done? Horace said. Look at these flowers. Tears smeared his vision. Memories and sadness swelled his chest. There were bright vases of white and pink roses, orange gerberas, purple and white gladiolas, yellow lilies and sunflowers. Horace felt he had awakened inside a cloud of color. He said, I don't want to ask how you did it.

You like my surprise? Tusia said.

How did you do it? Horace said.

See, I make Sir happy, Tusia said.

Horace had taken Tusia back to the hospital two days ago. Her stitches and bandages were gone. Yellowish bruises tinted the left side of her face and her right shoulder. Tiny black dots where the stitches had been curved beneath her left eye.

I stay with Sir, Tusia said. Summer go, I go. O.K.? Good deal? I cook and clean.

Horace stared at the black and white marble floor and didn't answer. Maybe he should not have helped the child at all, that was what he thought. Then he tried to think of a kinder way to tell her what he had already told her.

Your stitches are out now, Horace said. He was still staring at the marble floor, his voice a whisper. Now its time for you to go. That was our arrangement. Horace looked up at her. He wanted to smile and be upbeat but didn't know how to do it. He said, Your sister must be sad you aren't home.

She not sad, Tusia said.

I'm sorry, Horace said.



Horace showered and shaved and put on a fresh white shirt and fresh jockey's and the tan gabardine pants he'd worn yesterday. When Horace left the bathroom, he saw the bed been made and the marble floor had been swept. A soft-boiled egg and a glass of pulpy orange juice waited for him on the gray Formica table. He cracked and salted the egg. He said, Thank you, Tusia. Horace said it loud enough for her to hear in the next room, but he was sure she had already gone. The apartment was just too quiet.

Tusia? he said.

Nothing.

A sudden feeling of emptiness took him. Horace reached into the front pocket of his gabardine pants to touch the gold coin and chain. That was gone, too.



He had rented a hospital bed, an electrical one that adjusted to any position, and fixed Celeste a place in the living room. They liked the living room. Their friends could visit, everybody could talk and watch the plasma TV. During her last days, Celeste was a skeleton with gray skin. She had always been a small woman, no more than five-two, maybe ninety-five pounds on a fat day. Now she looked like a nightmare child.

If I had my way, I'd live a lot longer, she said. This was her deathbed talk. Then Celeste asked the question Horace hated to hear. She said, What are you going to do after I'm gone?

Let's watch the Golden Girls, Horace said and aimed the remote at the TV and clicked.

You should marry a hot twenty-year-old, Celeste said and giggled. Her giggle turned into a cough and she reached for the glass of ginger ale that sat within an amber field of medicine bottles on the table next to her. Then she said, You know, we should've gone back to Italy. People don't enjoy themselves enough. Promise me you'll do that. Go back to Italy and enjoy yourself. Think of me, think of us.

Can I take the twenty-year-old? Horace said.

You're a riot, Celeste said.

After Celeste had died Horace didn't know what to do with himself. He was used to caring for her, cooking meals, doing their laundry, giving her medication, driving her to the hospital for chemo treatments. This was such an uncomplicated way to show his love. Before Celeste got the Big C, she used to do everything, clean the house, cook their meals, wash their clothes, and she liked doing it.

I'm the laundry and cooking queen, she would say to Horace. Just call me Your Majesty. Call me little Ms. Susie Homemaker. Ha ha.

Horace didn't understand why she liked all that stuff until the tables were turned and he started doing it. These weren't chores, this wasn't slave labor, it wasn't work or a job. To take care of his Celeste had been his joy. That's how he saw it, exactly. There was a sad pleasure in smoothing her days.

I feel guilty, Celeste would say. This was when her face was a gray skull and she had no hair. She'd say, I used to do and do, and loved it. I did, you know, I absolutely loved cooking and doing laundry. Call me crazy. Now you wait on me hand and foot.

Hey, can't I be Susie Homemaker? Horace said.

You're a riot, Celeste said and patted his hand.

You always watch my back, Horace said. You take good care of me. He told Celeste this one day while lying next to her on the hospital bed. He had said, What's good for the gander is good for the goose. Now it's my turn, I deserve that. This isn't a one-way street, you know. I deserve to show you my love, too. You shouldn't keep the good times all to yourself.

I'll miss you, Celeste said. She said it like she and the girls were going to Vegas for the weekend.

You're my bald-headed sweetie, Horace said and kissed her gray cheek.



The gypsies lived outside the city near Rome's Cinodromo district, an area called Shantytown. Horace had taken the train to *Termini* in Rome and then a taxi. The driver let him out beside a big muddy field. Horace told him to wait. There were rusted cars and lean-to huts made from scraps of wood and metal. There were patched tents and small graffiti-painted trailers. Laundry hung on these homes like dreary Christmas ornaments. Everything looked balanced against everything else.

A fat naked girl with a dirty face was squatting in a tub of water. The old woman in front of the child rested on the steps of her trailer, smoking a cigarette and directing the fat girl's bath. Barefoot children ran between the huts, tents, and trailers. The camp smelled of earth and frying meats, tobacco smoke and urine. Three men were sitting in a circle on wooden chairs. They had muddy feet and wore summer T-shirts and rolled up pants. They smoked cigarettes and talked and gestured to each other. One man laughed; he had no upper teeth.

Horace had his hand cupped above his eyebrows, scanning the camp. There must have been eight hundred to a thousand of these huts, tents, and trailers. The army had sent Horace to Korea in '64, Tague, Pusan, Seoul. He was an AFKN D.J. then, playing Motown and the Stones. Even the bigger cities had muddy streets and huts made from scraps of metal and wood. He saw them when he was riding the trains. Some who lived in the huts died of asphyxiation in the winter and encephalitis in the summer. Korea was different now, his old friends told him in their e-mails and letters. What would his friends think of Shantytown? What would they say about the huts, tents, and trailers sprawled along the edge of such a rich and ancient city?



Sir come for this? Tusia said. She was holding the gold coin by its chain. Her dark hair had become tangled again. Bits of mud were dried gray on her narrow face and the shins and calves of her skinny legs. She said, I wait for Sir. I watch the road. I pretend Sir come for me.

Horace knelt, eye-level with her. He felt the cold mud seeping through the knee of his tan gabardines.

I did come to see you, Horace said. I didn't know it on the train, Tusia, but I know it now. On the train, I wanted my wife's coin back in the worst way. I was so angry. I felt you had stolen my wife from me, that tiny part I had left of her.

Take coin, Tusia said. I want to see Sir.

I know, Horace said. He kissed her forehead and placed a white envelope in her hand. Then he said, I am going back home. You give this to your sister. Or keep it for yourself, buy a gelato. But I'd prefer you buy warm clothes for the winter.

You take, Tusia said and held up the gold coin.

Keep it, Horace said. It was never mine, really. And my wife would've liked the idea.

He slid into the backseat of the cab and heard Tusia calling him after he had shut the door. She was shouting as the cab drove off. I go with Sir, she was shouting. I cook and clean.



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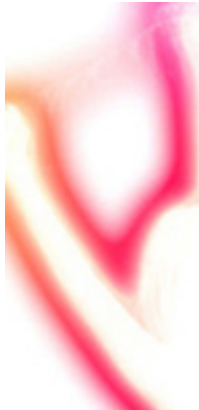
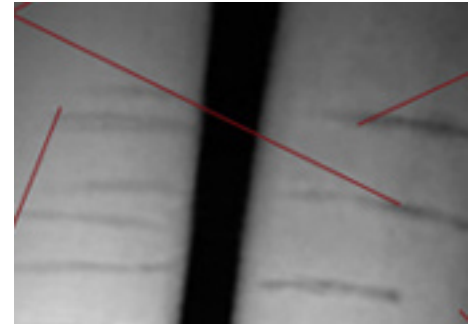
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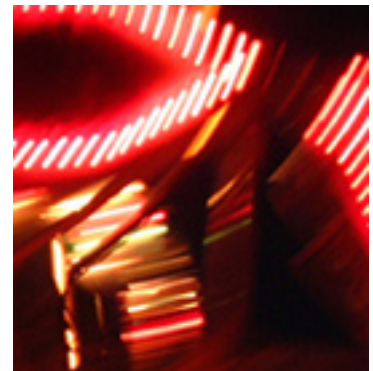
Contributors' Notes

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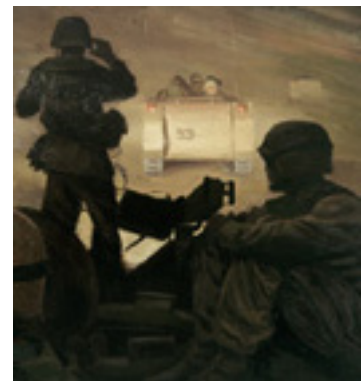
Sandra Mitchell is a screenwriter and author at work in the American Midwest. She writes both the *Fresh Films* and *Girls in the Director's Chair* short film series, and recently sold her first book to Random House's Delacorte imprint. She's also published short fiction with *Vestal Review*, *SmokeLong Quarterly* and *Edgar Literary Magazine*. She can be reached at host@saundramitchell.com.





Ron Savage has been publishing stories since age eighteen. Recent publications include *Jabberwock Review*, *Film Comment*, *G.W. Review*, and *Southern Humanities Review*. Ron has a BA and MA in psychology and a doctorate in counseling from The College of William and Mary. He has worked as an actor, a broadcaster, a newspaper editor, and for twenty-something years as Psychologist Senior at Eastern State Hospital in Williamsburg. He has recently retired from everything but writing and his wife Jan. Write to him at rsavage42@cox.net.

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The Somerset Review

Guidelines for Submissions

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, and will receive twenty-five dollars at release time for their contribution.

Writers retain all rights to use their work elsewhere, 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 have nominated stories annually for various anthologies and awards, including *Pushcart Prize*, *New Stories from the South*, *Creative Nonfiction's Best Of anthology*, *storySouth's Million Writers Award*, *Sundress Publication's Best of the Net*, and others.

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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
Ryan, Jean	Paradise	From the <i>Massachusetts Review</i> , Autumn 2001
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

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