2016-01-01

Only The Aperture

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For my mother, Antonia,
and my grandmother, Concepción.

ONLY THE APERTURE

by

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THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at El Paso
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Department of Creative Writing
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
May 2016

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for their guidance, encouragement, patience, comments, experience, talent, kindness, and friendship: Malena Alanís, Daniela Armijo, Paula Cucurella, Lori De Los Santos Saúl Hernandez, Meagan Kinley, Mijail Lamas, Yenny León, Fatima Masoud, Tafari Nugent, Aaron J. Romano-Meade, Daniela Ruelas, Justin David Stone, and Oscar Zapata.

Paula, Saúl, Daniela, Aaron, thank you for your professional and personal support, and comic relief. Daniela, thank you for your non-judgement and for a friendship I never question. Suzie, thank you for being you; I am lucky to have met you and read your work. Mijail and Oscar, thank you for your generosity. Aaron and Justin, thank you for your seriousness and dedication toward the MFA program—I can think of no two individuals I am prouder to have written and workshopped alongside for three years; I look forward to the days I purchase your books.

Thank you to my professors, Rosa Alcalá, José de Pierola, Sasha Pimentel, Luis Arturo Ramos, Jeffrey Sirkin, David Smith-Soto, and Lex Williford, and my parents, all of whom helped shape this project and directly aided me through these last three amazing years.

And Paula, Daniela, Aaron, Lex, and Mom, thank you for listening.

Thank you all, so much.

Preface

The concept for *Only the Aperture* began as a collection of twelve ekphrastic stories about twelve historical photographers, each story rendering a fictionalized creation myth of a photo by the respective photographer. I'd attempt to fill in the gaps the photo leaves out with text. I wanted to invert the lens back to the photographer and tell the story of the one hiding behind a moment, a representation, a camera by creating a fictionalized version of the characters' reality from a projected image, pit reality against simulacrum and position the photographer on this margin.

This concept came to me after a story I wrote as a final project for a class taught by José de Pierola called Minding Fiction about representations of consciousness in fiction. Actually, I wrote two stories—"Inside The Observatory" and "Right on the Spot"—early versions of "Francesca Woodman, Museum of Zoology and Natural History, *1975*: Inside La Specola" and "Weegee, New York City, 1938: Right on the Spot." The former I turned in for Minding Fiction; the latter I submitted for an Advanced Fiction Workshop with Professor Lex Williford, who I'd asked to serve as my thesis advisor regarding an earlier project. At this time, Professor Williford did not realize my mind was changing about my proposed thesis project right before my final year, and I was terrified my mind changed at all. This would not be the last time, but I'm glad it did. I'm glad I had that freedom.

For "Inside The Observatory," I wrote a self-contained piece that attempted to represent human consciousness, such as we had read in novels for the course. While all the novels in Minding Fiction rendered consciousness interestingly and inventively, Joyce Carol Oates' narrative technique in *The Tattooed Girl* grabbed my attention most because of its subtlety in dominance over other characters in the book, especially Oates' use of free-indirect style of other characters through focalization of one character:

> Alma smiled, taken slightly aback by Seigl's manner. She didn't know how to read him, Seigl supposed. He was nearly forty: in her eyes, old. His untrimmed whiskers, tweed cap, professional and aloof air, his way of speaking marked him as a certain type, yet he seemed almost to be conspiring with her. Speaking so bluntly of Scanlon, as if he and Alma were in league against the bookstore owner.
>
> Seigl said, amending the harness of his words, "Most people are mistaken about most things, Alma. Most adults."
>
> Alma smiled doubtfully. As if thinking: but adults must be trusted, who else can I trust? (76)

This passage creates the effect of a quiet paranoia and self consciousness toward Joshua's, the protagonist, development of what Antonio Damasio calls the self process in which a conscious mind goes through a series of stages in identity and thought—the proto self, core self, autobiographical self, and the reflective self. In *The Tattooed Girl*, Oates' reinvention of free-indirect style also creates the effect of Seigl's ironic self-awareness projected onto Alma, often manifesting as self loathing because of how characters feel others perceive them. This imagined perception roots in a character's autobiographical selves and then appears in their reflective selves. From the few but impactful works I have read of Oates—"Where Have You Been? Where Are You

Going?"; "The Boy"; *The Tattooed Girl*; and "The Mastiff"—she uses this tool often, subtly but effectively, her characters always attempting to recreate themselves and always stumbling through existence. Through Oates' usage of free-indirect style, the very process of thinking becomes dramatic, tense and risky, and so too does the character's conception and projection of self.

With Oates and *The Tattooed Girl* in mind, I looked to the camera for "Inside the Observatory." I altered Oates' narrative device of free-indirect style of other characters through focalization of one character slightly, by also applying this device to objects, most heavily, but not limited to, the camera. I looked to the camera lens instinctively for this project, knowing—as observer, subject, and photographer—that a camera alters the context of time, space, and the self through awareness of the gaze, despite a camera's attempt to document a moment authentically. Authenticity cannot exist when a device intervenes, and authenticity cannot exist when a camera borders a moment in a frame negating greater context, and perhaps authenticity may only exist in our thoughts. In "Francesca Woodman, Museum of Zoology and Natural History, 1975: Inside La Specola," Francesca as the protagonist focuses on what she sees without the camera—a young male guard who might be stalking her inside the museum she visits often—and what she sees behind it—herself naked with the skull of a Canis dirus in the final room of the labyrinthine museum. Projection drives much of the story and Woodman's consciousness—what she sees, what she thinks she sees, and what she wants to see—a

kind of shared consciousness between Francesca and her camera, which at times seems to have a consciousness of its own. Francesca projects her self/selves into the space of the camera's viewfinder, thus the photo, for a self that cannot authentically and comfortably exist in a reality outside the safe space and confines of her camera. In this protagonist's case, the camera functions as a device that allows Francesca sexual freedom and autonomy, while the guard outside of the camera casually and perhaps unknowingly subjugates her.

When I was in high school, I shot for the newspaper and yearbook staffs. I liked hiding behind the camera and watching. I liked existing at the center of the action without directly interacting. I liked the distance, access, and view the camera granted a teenager like me (someone who often hid behind a book). When I was 16, a construction worker heckled and chased me off site for taking pictures of the rebuilding of a grocery store after El Paso's storm 2006. When I was 17, a couple of Border Patrol agents drove up to me, where I walked along the Rio Grande River underneath the railroad tracks, and thought me an illegal immigrant because of where I stood geographically, how I looked, and a menacing object they thought I held in my hands. When the Border Patrol agents got closer, they saw my camera pointed at Mt. Cristo Rey, smiled, laughed, told me to have a good one, and drove away. Holding the camera can feel like holding agency—you control what and how you see, depending on your

ability to compose and adjust—and then you watch people react to that thing in your hands.

Whether or not people look behind a camera is irrelevant—we all gaze. Gaze assesses, judges, ingratiates. Photographer ingratiate themselves in the space of others solely through observation, only with their eyes. Photographers set a gaze, focus, and connect, objectify, interpret, appropriate. Photographers, through cameras, attempt to compose and exert power over the subject for a photo. Even in documentary photography, photographers impose an intention informed by time and space. What we focus on, what we choose to see, reveals most about our self. *Only the Aperture* speaks to the power of the gaze, focus and contextualism, and how the gaze imposes power. A photographic lens clearly reproduces a subject only within a limited range of distances from the camera. Only elements absolutely necessary to a photo's composition are thrown into focus; these can be all elements, a few, or just one, depending on the depth of field. Just as the camera lens, through focus, can blur elements, so too can the mind's eye. Inevitably, the camera alters everything.

Likewise, the spectator may interpret one photo in various ways. The context, its time and space in history, in part give a photograph meaning. Epistemology, or the philosophical theory of knowledge, addresses questions about the nature of knowledge and rational belief. Epistemologists attempt to construct a theory stating the conditions under which people have knowledge and rational beliefs—in other words, what do we

know and how do we know? In his essay "Contextualism Contested" epistemologist Earl Conee argues:

> Contextualism finds truth at the expense of contradiction … it runs a risk of interpretive failure … It is a plain fact that people routinely apply different standards of evaluation in different contexts … Typically, the strength of epistemic position required is said to vary in a range that allows, at its low end, many true attributions in everyday contexts concerning ordinary judgments based on perception, memory, testimony, and perhaps also inductive generalization and high probability. At the high end of the range of variation, the typical Epistemic Contextualist truth conditions are demanding enough to make true many skeptical denials of "knowledge " of the external world. (*Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, edited by Matthias Steup and Ernest Sosa, 50-51)

Epistemic Contextualism is widely contested among theorists as faulty, indecisive, and *ad hoc*, and as a professor of philosophy in an Epistemology course I took as an undergraduate pointed out—after stating his distaste for the theory himself—"Women epistemologists generally adhere to contextualism." My professor failed to provide us with research to support his claim, so I am unsure how he expected me to believe him. Perhaps because, in context of the classroom, he was the professor and I was the student, and it stands to reason he knows more about his subject than a creative writing undergraduate student? Who knows?

Nevertheless, I tend to think mostly in contextualist terms and it is precisely the amenability of the theory that makes it appealing to me, not as a philosopher but as a person meandering and surviving based on trial and error and instinct, and plausibility and probability. For epistemologists, I can see how contextualism may not suffice in attempting to understand the terms of knowledge, but for a short story and a character

in flux, this is precisely what my project required—contexts, or to echo Mario Vargas Llosa, "levels of reality." Clashing, unavoidable, imagined, impossible contexts, maneuvered by protagonists through a photographic image.

For this project, I inverted the lens back at the photographer, then watched the protagonist shift. In *The Naive and Sentimental Novelist*, Orhan Pamuk states:

> The character of my novel's main protagonist is determined the same way a person's character is formed in life: by the situations and events he lives through … The protagonist is someone who is shaped by these situations and who helps to elucidate them in a telling way … The defining question of the art of the novel is not the personality or character of the protagonists, but rather how the universe within the tale appears to them (68-69).

The more I write, I notice, the less I am concerned with technique, convention and experimentation as a priority. Overall, I don't think this is a terrible quality—I'm interested in character, character development, and a solid character-driven narrative begotten by the choices and world views of the protagonists in my stories. A complex protagonist and a commitment to representing the inner life and consciousness of a complex protagonist—to attempt to know, to understand, and to feel as this character does—leads me to a deeper understanding of that protagonist as a person, and as Pamuk says:

> The art of the novel becomes political not when the author expresses political views, but when we make an effort to understand someone who is different from us in terms of culture, class, and gender. This means feeling compassion before passing ethical, cultural, or political judgment. (69)

For me, once the protagonist is understood and realized, the style and form a piece must assume to render faithfully the content of a protagonist's narrative may fall into place. For this effect to occur, however, one must to be willing to remember and feel. In this vein, Vargas Llosa writes, in *Letters to a Young Novelist*:

> All fictions are structures of fantasy and craft erected around certain acts, people, or circumstances that stand out in the writer's memory and stimulate his imagination, leading him to create a world so rich and various that sometimes it is almost impossible (and sometimes just plain impossible) to recognize in it the autobiographical material that was its genesis and that is, in a way, the secret heart of all fiction, as well as its obverse and antithesis. (15-16)

When I was an undergraduate creative writing student, an adjunct professor of mine called this process "writing your blood on the page." Professor Lex Williford calls it writing our obsessions. I've thought about this same thing as "method writing," likening the attempt to know, understand, and feel as my characters do, in a tradition similar to that of director and acting teacher, Lee Strasberg's method acting, in which, "The human being who acts is the human being who lives … The actor must constantly respond to stimuli that are imaginary. And yet this must happen not only just as it happens in life, but actually more fully and more expressively … He must somehow believe" (*Strasberg at the Actors Studio: Tape-Recorded Sessions*, 78). There were periods working on this project when I felt physically depleted, when I'd forget to eat because I was thinking or writing or feeling or weeping, when I existed in my worst memories, with the worst people, and with my worst self, and where a select few individuals

seemed more intolerable than they likely were and are. This sounds terrible, so why do I write? Because, as bad as this sounds, things feel even worse when I am not writing. I feel sluggish and useless compared to the moments during and right after a few hours of writing. What is it? Something like a writer's high? I'm not sure, but however miserable my quotidian life felt at certain points working on this project, a few good hours of writing somehow managed to level me out and convince me something about this was worth it. That said, for a period, the only two people I wanted to see or talk to, or just be around, were my thesis advisor, Professor Williford, and Professor de Piérola during class, maybe because all I wanted to do was talk about or listen to the work that goes into writing fiction. At certain points, thesis conferences with Professor Williford felt like home, and as student and advisor we reached a point where Lex could tell me straight, "I feel like you were really going with this thing for a while, and churning out the stories, and now it seems like you're just kind of stuck," or "I think maybe you might have been a little depressed," or "I think you're really getting at something here. You're going to that dark place where no one wants to go."And every other week after conferences with Professor Williford, I always felt as though I'd gotten exactly what I needed to keep going. I am eternally grateful for Professor Williford's and Professor de Pierola's words and guidance through all this.

My slight tendency of instability aside, a surprising and complex protagonist begets the tone and voice of a narrative, begets style, begets tension, conflict, causality

and plot, and begets form and structure. Everything in a text exists as an extension of the protagonist and the voice telling the narrative. For this to occur, however, a writer must allow the protagonist to live on the page. The text must always remain malleable and surprising so that character, plot, and form can do as they please and as they must. Earlier, I stated I am not concerned with experimentation—this isn't quite true. I am concerned with experimentation and innovation, but the text must earn these elements, and these elements must occur as a necessity of the life and representation of the protagonist.

Because *Only the Aperture* functions as an ekphrastic collection of stories—now 10 stories, as opposed to the projected 12—using the photos of historical photographers, and the photographers as protagonists, I attempted to write each story in the manner of the respective photographer's own aesthetic, to render a discourse within the chronotope of the photographer and photograph, and as such create a milieu of differing voices and viewpoints, or heteroglossia.

Just as each story in *Only the Aperture* speaks to a specific photographer and photo, so too each story speaks to a specific time and space in history. A sociopolitical context and arch founds the structuring of the collection of stories based on their moment in time, beginning with the photographer Man Ray in "Man Ray, Paris, France, 1924: An Instrument Bleeding off the Edge of a Mattress," and ending with selfie-artist Molly Soda in "Molly Soda, living room, Detroit, Michigan, 2015: Amalia." In "Man

Ray, Paris, France, 1924: An Instrument Bleeding off the Edge of a Mattress" Man performs cunnilingus on his latest lover and subject, Kiki de Montparnasse, while contemplating the terms of his relationship with Gertrude Stein, and Stein's relationship to Alice B. Toklas. In Man's inability to gain Stein's romantic affection, thus penetrate her, he exerts his will and dominance over the woman at hand through the act of oral sex and photography when he manipulates the image of Kiki into a woman-cello-object hybrid. Man's photo recreates Kiki as a malleable woman who can be played.

In the final story, "Molly Soda, living room, Detroit, Michigan, 2015: Amalia," a discourse of the degenerative climate of photography—due to an accessibility that makes everyone a photographer—as art looms in the background of Molly's constant snapping of selfies from her iPhone. It is precisely this accessibility and ease of the camera phone, which allows Molly to take instantaneous photos of herself, that also allow her the agency to take her body back from the overwhelming male gaze (specifically Dave's gaze) of society. It is through the simulacrum, the object of the photo, that Molly is able to be most her self, whoever she decides that is in the moment of each selfie.

A second-person narrator presents a modular structure meant to echo Molly's Twitter feed, where she leaks her nude selfies. Unindented paragraphs trigger a respective moment in the protagonist's life outside of chronology, creating a fractal, similar to Carole Maso's novel *AVA*. Each paragraph works as a channel in Molly's

mind where she refers back to or thinks about all of these moments simultaneously, constantly revising her autobiographical self. Molly's memories and thoughts as fractals trigger other memories and thoughts based on images, words, ideas, or individuals, sometimes reasonably, sometimes ironically, for example:

> When Dave left your apartment for the last time, you belly flopped onto that giant teddy bear supine on your bed. You took out your iPhone and pretended to smile. If you tried hard enough, could that bear suicide you? A random thought you never, you told yourself, took seriously.
>
> Tonight, stake yourself on your fingers and say, "you are lovely." (*Only the Aperture*, 181)

Molly's thoughts of suicide after her breakup with Dave trigger the next paragraph in which the narrator commands masturbation. The language used in the latter paragraph —specifically "stake"—suggests violence, aggression, and forced pleasantry, and in this paragraph's case, masturbation may be seen as a little ritual suicide assumed to mourn the relationship that once rendered regular self-gratification unnecessary. In other instances, masturbation functions as an act of agency and autonomy. The use of a second-person narrator allows the narrative introspective freedom of the Molly character. The narrative voice can be an omniscient voice speaking at Molly, or it can be Molly talking to and constantly revising her self.

The voice of the third-person omniscient narrator of "Weegee, New York City, 1938: Right on the Spot" assumes a staccato clip like the city pace, the same pace

Weegee must work against to shoot. The narrator of this story echoes the grit of the business of shooting crime scenes and also of living in New York during the Depression.

The omniscient third-person narrator of "Kevin Carter, South Sudan, 1993: In Flames" blurs two time-spaces into one to echo Carter's own drugged and suicidal delirium. This story begins *in medias res*, right at the moment Carter executes his own death by connecting a hose to his truck's exhaust pipe, which triggers a flashback to an incident of necklacing in South Africa that carries the narrative to the moment of Carter's most famous photo. The two time-spaces exist as one in Carter's consciousness.

Due to my use of free-indirect style and a multitude of differing time-spaces, this collection contains a polyphony of narrators and voices in the tradition of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia, the coexistence of, and conflict between different types of speech: the speech of characters, the speech of narrators, and the speech of the author. Though I hope to have remained absent as author in the narrative, the juxtaposition and structuring of the stories suggests a political dismantling of ideas. The collection of stories begins firmly within and behind the male gaze, with "Man Ray, Paris, France, 1924: An Instrument Bleeding off the Edge of a Mattress." The photographer, aptly named Man, attempts to subjugate and objectify Kiki de Montparnasse by imposing his camera lens and the darkroom on her, as he had attempted to do with Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas in a flashback to the first photograph he shot of the two women in their home. The male gaze penetrates

throughout the collection of stories in some form and manner, and by the sixth story, "Francesca Woodman, Museum of Zoology and Natural History, 1975: Inside La Specola," a shift in gaze occurs. This is the first story with a female photographer as protagonist, and as such she attempts to evade the male gaze throughout the text, interpreting the world and the guard through her furtive and timid female gaze, a gaze set as a sociopolitical reaction to the male gaze. The remaining stories (with the exception of "Kevin Carter, South Sudan, 1993: In Flames,") remain behind and within a female gaze right up to the last story ("Molly Soda, living room, Detroit, Michigan, 2015: Amalia") in which the act of taking selfies turns the female gaze inward, while simultaneously outward onto the male and—increasingly antagonistic, indignant, self conscious and self aware—becomes a reclamation of Soda's female body from the male gaze.

In terms of structuring this collection, I knew I would order the stories chronologically according to the year the photos were taken, and I attempted this against the backdrop of James Joyce's *Dubliners*, a book I often turned to for this project, and for everything.

Around the time Joyce incorporated epiphany as a literary device in *Dubliners*, French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson developed an eye for what he coined "the decisive moment." The writer and the photographer looked for, in Cartier-Bresson's words, "a composition or an expression that life itself offers … The Moment! Once you

miss it, it is gone forever." (Washington Post, 1957). The Joycean epiphany is the brief instant of change as it occurs to a character in flux. The decisive moment is the short amount of time presented to a photographer to capture a temporality constantly in flux. The intersecting concepts of literary epiphany and the photographic decisive moment inform each story in this project insofar as I attempt to capture the respective photographer as protagonist's moment of epiphany through the photographer's act of capturing the decisive moment by camera.

That said, each protagonist in these 10 stories do not experience epiphanies. Instead, the photographer as protagonist experiences a false epiphany through the subjective lens of the camera. The decisive moment serves as a simulacrum of a specific protagonist yearning; a kind of representation of the reality desired by the protagonist made seemingly tangible through the lens of the camera and composition of the photo. In the decisive moment, the projected world view of the photographer appears as a fleeting, but stilled, context. *Dubliners* examines paralysis and epiphany not only on the micro level of each protagonist in each story, but also on the macro level of life itself, beginning in childhood with "The Sisters" and ending with the ultimate epiphany of mortality in "The Dead."

In the stories in my collection, the epiphanies cannot be true. It is not truth my protagonists seek but contentment. Instead, because they are in the business of closely examining representation of context, as opposed to the self, protagonists project their

world view onto the composition of the image, attempting to recreate the world around them to fit their specific yearning. The function of chronotope and heteroglossia in which the respective protagonists exists becomes increasingly important for this reason, and also for the structure as a whole, since the collection spans a period and creates an arch of a little under a century, from 1924 to 2015, the shift in gaze—from male to female—functioning as the ultimate false epiphany.

It seems ridiculous and naive to say that upon starting this project, I had no conscious intention of rendering the male gaze in this project. Whether I was conscious of rendering that gaze, inevitably, it happened. In my research for this project, I was inundated with the female form, and many representations thereof, prompting feminist discourse in *Only the Aperture*. I read and reread *Cunt: A Declaration of Independence* by Inga Muscio while also combing through photographs. It seems as though I was forced to read *Cunt*, as though the act of reading this book functioned as a counter attack to all the images and representations of women that assaulted my eyes in searching for photos for my own book, which at times felt exhausting and antagonistic. And so the project became increasingly informed and shaped by the male gaze and a subversion through the female gaze. Though the project's concept began largely as a documentation and representation of historical time and place, inevitably this project narrowed its focus on the representation and appropriation of the female form throughout history by using using photographers and photos as a vehicle.

The evolved scope of this project, and the obsession that now drives it, however, led me to wonder whether *Only the Aperture* might come across as redundant. Is this just the story I have to write in a different way every time? Redundancy may materialize for the exact reason Charles Baxter warns to avoid it, in his essay "Against Epiphanies," from using a repeated structure of paralysis and epiphany, in this case through a photo as vehicle. Perhaps the only way to make each story fresh in this method is by digging out the protagonists for everything they're worth—increasing the risk of the self, the risk of the protagonists losing their idealized selves and their autonomy. This is undoubtedly something I must continue doing. There were times it became physically and mentally exhausting switching in and out of characters and worlds from story to story to satisfy the requirement of my thesis within the allotted time. All of these characters and voices, I know, require more of me, so that they become more than just the name of the photographer they represent, which became another issue.

Ethically, I struggled with using real people as characters, my representation of these people as characters, and whether or not I should attempt to stay as true to fact as possible, or allow the respective story to go where it must. Ultimately, I studied the works of all the photographers, did my research concerning their lives and studies, but allowed the narrative to show me the way to the protagonists' story, now represented on the page in the context of *Only the Aperture.* For a collection primarily informed by and concerned with different and contradictory contexts, it was important I keep in

mind the defamiliarized context where the photographers exist in *Only the Aperture*. This defamiliarization also threads the stories. Defamiliarizing photographers and their photos ultimately leads to the defamiliarzation of the representation of women in art. In using ekphrasis for the stories of *Only the Aperture*, I attempt to fill in the gaps the photos themselves leave open—the how and why of a photo, the mental state of the photographer as protagonist, not the photographed, and ultimately the voice and the story the photo may not fully utter alone.

Katherine Elizabeth Seltzer

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Man Ray, Paris, France, 1924:

An Instrument Bleeding off the Edge of a Mattress

I like contradictions. We have never attained the infinite variety and contradictions that exist in nature.

—Man Ray, 1890-1976

Man Ray hovers over Kiki's clitoris, then inserts his face between her thighs. The clitoris looks and feels irregular. Too large. Too looming. Not *the* clitoris, Kiki's clitoris. Man lifts the clitoral hood with his tongue and watches that curve of belly, that arch of back, that open of pointed, red lips. Man pushes, flicks, smacks. The clitoris swells and hardens against him in preparation.

When Man was a boy, his parents wanted him classically trained as a musician. Man, groomed for the piano, took more of a liking to the flute. His little boy fingers fell instinctively onto the right open holes to create the right air pressure and sound. Then music. The little boy knew when and how to blow and play. When Man introduced himself to the camera years later, his index finger found the shutter button, and with the right amount of pressure, pressed and kept pressing.

Kiki bucks against his chin, and after five minutes of writhing, Man wants her deluge against his face and he wants her to finish. Alice Ernestine Prin. She told him her real name once. Was that it? Alice? It's possible he's thinking of another woman's name, or, perhaps, he's made up this name completely.

Kiki de Montparnasse. Man knows her by her city. The city in France where they met. He knows her as a setting in which Man rests, places his fingers, and watches.

She grips the bed sheets between her lips and teeth.

She leaves behind the smear of a red mouth.

Her lips, pointed and hard. Man sees a bloodied cat on the sheets.

She leaves behind a rip in the sheets.

She smudges her lined eyelids up to her temples. Marks on her forehead look like gashes.

When he was a child, Man's parents told him the flute was undignified. He would play a gentleman's instrument. A classic instrument.

Kiki's groans meld with Man's growling stomach.

Gertrude expects Man for brunch—he'll surely be late, though Gert much admires Kiki and no doubt understands. A lovely artist, he's sure Gertrude will later say of Miss de Montparnasse with a wink. No, she wouldn't wink. Gertie's not so crude A little grin at the edge of her stiff lips, and that's all? A smile around a thick cigar? Gertrude should understand, in any case. She'll puff and suck at the large, brown cigar and blow out the smoke from deep inside.

Kiki's vagina exhales Gertrude's nicotine breath. Man tastes and smells both women—the woman in front of him and the woman inside his mind. He can't, however, extricate Gertrude's hearty odor from Kiki's tang. Instead, an amalgamation of both women write inside him together.

Gertrude Stein must need a good cleaning out. He longs to lose his hands in the folds of her colossal and grand tummy. Gertrude Stein must taste like soot. Smokey, like sliced salmon.

Kiki moans. Man looks up and reaches for her mouth.

When he forces it shut, lipstick and sweat film his palm.

The last time he saw Gertie she sat in the salon going on and on about Bumby, the little Hemingway baby. Miss Toklas busied herself with the tea kettle in the kitchen and never came out to speak. What a darling little boy Bumby is. He has his father's strong, iron jaw. Man didn't care one iota about that Hemingway baby. Didn't care one iota for that man, Hemingway, Gertrude always discusses.

That day, Gertrude wore the same heavy, woolen dress she wore the first time Man took her photo in '22.

Man, the first to take the woman's photograph. For a time, the only one. The only man. Man Ray.

He pinches the left nipple hoping Kiki comes, and when she does, he will grab his camera and leave. Leave for tea and brunch with Gertrude.

That day, that first day, Gertrude welcomed Man, little cowering Man, holding his camera against his paunch, into her salon with a warm and tremendous smile. He knew right then he would shoot her.

She invited him simply to talk.

For a straight 30 minutes, she took him on the tour of her house. The pictures on her walls, the tradition of the architecture and furniture. Every aesthetic detail and composition containing her. An interview, he guessed, to gauge if this Man even capable to take her. Gertrude Stein's, photograph.

Gertrude glided about her salon, the hem of her dress just hiding her sandaled feet, seasoned in carrying her large body. Her body obeyed. He knew then how he would shoot her.

No tricks. Just large, staid Gertrude.

Man's hair coils around Kiki's fingertips. She holds his head between her hands. She draws him closer into her.

Kiki has a good amount of fat, the right amount of curve and bounce. His hands get lost in the folds of Gertrude Stein's stomach.

Of course, no one actually knew Gertie as a writer quite yet, but Man was the first to take a photograph of Gertrude, not just Gertrude, but Gertrude Stein the writer. No one knew her then as a writer. To be fair, neither does Man, really. She throws it around, name drops this Hemingway once or twice, but, she's not a writer. She writes and collects art. She hangs art on her walls. No one would even know the writer much at all without Man Ray. It's very clear. She does need him. She must know this.

Man Ray is a quiet photographer—you'd have to be to get any shot—for subjects to be themselves. Had word gotten around? Had his gentle invasion whispered into Gertrude's salon and ear? Is that why she allowed him in her space?

In truth, Man initially only cared to see and shoot the art collection hanging on the wall in the atelier at 27, rue de Fleurus. But he would have to meet the woman one day. It couldn't be helped. In truth, he was somewhat curious of the relationship between Gertrude Stein and Miss Alice B. Toklas. In truth, he wanted to see what went on inside that house.

The labia majora flinches.

So do the thighs.

Kiki nears, but Man knows she will sustain this moment for as long as she can.

Gertrude Stein must be massive, cavernous, beseeching.

She must enjoy cunnilingus as much as he. In the way a man does, or in the way a woman does. Perhaps both? Maybe that's the beauty of their kind of relationship. The relationship a woman has with another woman. The versatility. To be both sexed and unsexed all at once.

Kiki knocks Man's head against her thigh. He stops, annoyed, and looks up at her. She, he thinks, barely notices he's disengaged his tongue and mouth from her body.

He watches her ripple below him. He lowers his head again.

That first time, Gertrude welcomed him warmly into her salon. He looked on, amazed by the art on the walls: Matisse, Picasso—hung side by side. A joke of Gertrude's, no doubt. The two boys must surely scoff when forced to look upon their union. A wicked one, Gertie. You deviless. Cézanne jutted out from all surfaces and corners of wall. Gert's unassuming desk, frail compared to the hulking oak chair that holds the writer at work. Gertrude sat in a floral ladies armchair and talked a bit about Dadaism and Cubism and when she'd first met Pablo in 1905 in a darling little exhibit when the young 25-year-old was still in his Rose Period—the dear boy. She'd helped him, as she helped all of them, she said, these lost young boys, crawl out of obscurity and into her home, her eye, her maw. Man felt the camera in his right hand grow limp and slide against his palm and fingertips, despite his own enthrallment. Would she have done the same for Man had he needed her help? Would she have hung all his paintings and photographs and rayographs upon her walls? Irrelevant. He was there to take her picture. He did not need to be, and does not need to be, hung on her walls.

He hadn't needed her help. He knows she knew this from the start.

Surely, though, she would have shown kindness.

Man and Gertrude first met in his hotel room in 1921—he'd just arrived in Paris with nowhere to stay. In contrast to Gertrude, he had the upper hand, established earlier in New York. No one knew her work. Anyone only knew: her. Poor Gertrude, the dear.

They met and took to each other powerfully, except, of course, well, they stayed only friends.

Man looks beyond the pubis at his face to the red cat on the sheets. If only he could burn Kiki's lips down onto the photograph. If only he could do just that without using the camera. He'd, of course, then have to slice her lips off of her body and place them down under the enlarger to burn. All this slicing could be messy, and his face is already glazed a mess. So are his sheets. He'll need to wash, but after brunch, if he makes brunch.

Kiki arches her back and lifts her pelvis. He can taste Alice's Boeuf Bourguignon. Her Stuffed Braised Peppers. Her fudge. Damn you, Kiki. Damn your endurance to hell.

Man lifts his head along with Kiki and quickens his pace. He hears Alice stirring away in the kitchen while he and Gertrude speak in the salon like men.

Kiki lowers her pelvis again and he lowers his head.

Man offered to act as Gertrude's agent. He knows all of British *Vogue*. She took him up on it, of course. Fickle. Acts like she's created anyone. But she's such a cold fish that one—don't blame any one of them really for not readily publishing the woman.

Gertrude would have hung him up on the walls had he needed the charity. Of course. He's sure, if she would only just let him, she might taste delicious and sooty. He's sure Kiki is almost finished and that Gertrude will understand why he's late, even though she hates a broken appointment. At least one piece of fudge waits for him,

surely. Miss Toklas, though she and he don't speak much at all, smiles more warmly than her partner, and has likely set aside a plate of something for Man, when he arrives.

This clitoris is a tough nut to crack. He knows this, but he's thought too much of himself this time, and thinks he might still make brunch.

That first photograph, that very first photograph, Gertrude finally finished her Pablo story and called in Miss Toklas. She shuffled out of the kitchen, also dressed in draping floral. Her short, dark bob, looking much like Kiki's looks now—neater, meeker—did not move a bit.

"Yes, lovey?" Miss Toklas looked down at her hands, spread wide apart, and brushed the left-over crumbs of food on the front of her dress. She looked on again at Gertrude, pointedly, when she ceased to speak.

Gertrude told Miss Toklas to join them, nodding to an empty arm chair. Man Ray stood, looked upon the walls, stole glances at the two women, and gripped his camera. Miss Toklas sat up straight, hands in her lap, knees and feet together. Gertrude sat across, bracing herself it seemed, in her chair. She told Man, smiling, to get on with it then and snap his picture.

Man Ray set his camera down on an end table. "Might we speak, just a bit, before?" he said.

Gertrude guffawed. "Speak?" she said.

Miss Toklas shot a grimace at Gertrude. Gertrude could not or would not wipe a smirk of surprise from her face. No wonder no one takes your photo. Man waited. Miss Toklas sat in her chair obligingly. She did not move. Gertrude looked back and forth between Man and the slight woman. Man supposed Gertrude tried to find a shared gesture of disbelief in her partner, but Miss Toklas sat and waited and would not oblige. Would not even look over at the other woman.

How odd of the two old birds. They sat, Gertrude staring at Miss Toklas and Miss Toklas staring at Man, as though ready for the photograph even though he, the photographer was not. Poor Gertie, she just wanted a bit of recognition from this woman, and Miss Toklas refused.

She sat so stiff. A plank of wood dressed in floral who only needed to jerk to send Gertie lunging right toward her, answering the slight woman's whims and relinquishing any control Man thought she possessed.

Gertrude finally looked away from her partner and prattled about Basket's eating habits, if Man Ray recalls right. Breakfast, lunch and dinner, and of course some biscuits at tea time—as though the damned dog was a person like anyone else in the salon. Miss Toklas smiled, this he remembers, but said nothing at all about the damned dog's habits.

"What are you cooking, Miss Toklas? It smells magnificent," Man asked.

Miss Toklas shuffled in her chair. Her sad, drooping eyes fluttered; a little smile crossed her bird's beak lips, darkened slightly by the bit of hair she left just above.

"Mussel Soup á la Régie. It's actually quite simple. Fifteen minutes on the stove. And delicious."

Man smiled. "It smells lovely, Miss Toklas."

"Aren't you kind. Alice, please. Has Gertrude played for you yet? Gertrude?"

Gertrude turned in her chair, looked upon Miss Toklas and beamed.

"I'm sorry?" Man said.

"She's an expert pianist and composer. She hasn't told you? You haven't told him? Play him something, Gertrude."

Gertrude opened her mouth to speak but Alice interrupted. "Oh, forgive me, Mr. Ray. You're here for a photograph, not a concert. Another time, perhaps." Miss Toklas tucked her hands back into her lap.

Man would have regaled them with tales of when he attempted to learn the piano himself, preferring instead the flute, but Miss Toklas hushed him before he could even open his mouth.

Alice was right. The piano was in another room. That would not do. Man very much wanted to shoot the two women in this specific room, in this salon of the avant-garde. So much on the walls, so much in the chair seemed irrelevant, or otherwise traditional. But the avant-garde sat in that room, quietly. Man, however, was intrigued

by Alice's fleeting persistence on the topic of music and also her goading of Gertrude to perform despite changing the subject.

"Do you play?" Man asked Alice.

The little woman perked. "I do," she said. "I thought I might pursue a concert career at one point of my life. But that passed and I don't regret it a bit. The piano will be there whether I choose to play or not. The same can't be said of people."

Man nodded. He looked to Gertrude who looked to Alice. Alice's voice came out of that thin, stooped body, came out at Man like the tremulous uttering a bow beckons from a large-bodied cello. In fact, he reasoned that instrument much more apt for the woman than the piano. Though her stature seemed to suggest that she did of course play the piano, painstakingly as it were, he felt she was better suited for an instrument with a warbling voice.

"Do you play anything else?" he asked, hoped.

"Anything else?" The little woman looked on at Man perplexed. She seemed confused even by herself. She opened her mouth to speak and then closed it. She, Man could tell, wondered. And then she spoke. "After playing the piano so much I certainly could, but I never cared to try. The one instrument fulfills me and I've never thought even to veer. It never occurred to me before. Isn't that funny? How very, very strange."

She said it was strange with a smile that, to Man, suggested the opposite. He assumed that last "How very strange" was only the little woman's airs assumed for his

sake. She otherwise seemed totally content that she could not and did not need to play another instrument. Miss Alice B. Toklas smiled on at Man and then looked to Gertrude. Her smile widened. Man turned and saw the same doting smile reflected in the enormous woman on the other side of the room. They looked at each other amazed and fervent and seemed the very same person only in different bodies, sharing the very same look. How very strange.

Right then Man reached for his camera, still waiting on the end table next to him. He and the camera, quiet. That shared look, he needed that shared intensity, that shared intimacy, inside his camera, and he needed to develop that look alone in his darkroom. He needed to be alone, and to burn that look down on paper, and watch it float up to the surface in his trays just for him. There was something quite private, he thought, about later developing that photo. If anyone were to walk in, he may very well blush and walk away from his trays.

Man holds down the hips on either side of him. Fleshy, milky, wide and womanly.

They buck underneath him.

He plays this irregular clitoris expertly. He knows this, and she enjoys it. He tries to calm and rile her by slowing and quickening his pace. He slides his hands up and down the curving slopes. He plays this body expertly.

Man reached. Gertrude saw Man and broke her gaze with Alice, who still looked on at Gert. It was Gertrude who ruined everything. Oh, goody, we're ready for the shot then, she said. Man slumped in his chair, grabbed the camera and stood up to just take the shot.

"Yes, yes," he said. "We're as ready as we'll ever be," he said. "Miss Toklas, Alice?"

"Yes?"

"Your voice is lovely."

"Is it? You're joking, I'm sure."

"Not at all. It becomes you."

"Why thank you, Man. That's very kind."

"It sounds like." Man remembered what she'd said about the piano and only needing to play one instrument. "Well, it sounds lovely."

Alice smiled.

Both women, little Alice and looming Gertrude, turned to look into his camera. Alice looked refined, Gertrude abrasive. Man took the shot and that was that. No tricks, no double exposures, just the two women. They went on into the kitchen to eat the soup Alice prepared.

Man buttons up his shirt and smoothes back his hair.

Kiki, akimbo, stays on the bed. She reaches for her slip.

"No," Man says. "Wait." He looks down at the bed. Up and down.

Kiki smiles. She looks at his eyes; he looks at her hips.

"Get up," he says. "Sit on the edge of the bed. Just there."

That hair is askew.

Man tosses a head scarf at Kiki. "Put your hair up in this," he says "Do something with your face."

She giggles.

Man goes into his bathroom to splash his face with water. He doesn't look in the mirror. He knows how he looks and it doesn't matter how he looks.

He grabs his camera from a case in his closet.

I need a cello, he thinks. This body—it isn't enough.

When he walks back into the bedroom, Man looks at Kiki. Her hair is wrapped in the head scarf, and she retouches her makeup.

"Don't worry," he says. "I won't be taking your face. Sit on the edge of the bed."

He might miss brunch. He'd rather take on this moment. He'd rather sustain this moment with Kiki and keep her inside this body.

"Turn your head slightly this way. I want you only in profile."

Kiki's thick eyelashes flutter. Her pointed nose. One little flip of hair below her ear lobe peeks out from underneath the scarf. Her earring dangles.

In the photo it's not clear what the relationship between Miss Stein and Alice is, exactly. The two could be friends, sisters, or casual acquaintances. It was not what Man hoped for. He wanted an exactness. A clarity. But his camera took the photograph all the same. Nothing exact said of either of them, despite Man's intention. Man needed that mediator even if the mediator broke that shared look. The camera gave him another. He trusted the camera. He trusted the two women to stare down into its hole. He'd seized them, both of them, and in that moment they lived inside him through his camera and he penetrated their shared being, elusive as it was.

"What are you, Kiki de Montaparnasse?"

He stares at her blank, white back and remembers Alice's voice.

Something is missing, he thinks.

That backside. So blank. So symmetrical. Perfect. It can't be a woman. It is most clearly something else. But what?

"What?" she says. "What shall I do?" Kiki purrs, flamboyant and nasal.

"Hush," Man Ray says. "Don't do a thing. Just sit on the edge of the mattress. Just there. Keep that face in profile. Don't move an inch."

Man Ray stares at the blank back naked with only his eye. Alice's body will be here when he gets back. Alice's voice ricochets against his ear canal, echoes through his body, the camera's body. He will need to get his hands on that instrument.

"Do not turn," he says behind his camera. This woman is not enough. He stares through the lens at Kiki's lower back and sees two black, s-shaped gashes staring back at him. How is it this body does not constantly bleed? He doesn't care to know. He will need to shoot a cello, or maybe a violin (it doesn't matter, does it?), later. Much later. After he leaves Kiki on this bed, and he has eaten his brunch, which surely waits for him, he will take his camera and shoot Miss Stein and Miss Alice B. Toklas like it is the first time either of them were ever seized by Man.

Weegee, New York City, 1938:

Right on the Spot

Every time I heard a sigh or a groan in the dark, I pushed the button.

—Arthur Fellig

Arthur Fellig always keeps a double-barreled revolver in his trench coat pocket for Weegee. For when he needs one. For when he doesn't have too many options. Fellig doesn't keep the gun loaded, doesn't even own any bullets. If the shot's just right, who needs bullets?

In his apartment, Fellig looks up from the bed at the encroaching ceiling. Darkness crushes in behind his eyelids, so all he sees his black. Stamp this darkness with a signature that reads: *Credit Photo by Weegee The Famous*. Fellig lives in this box of a room, of a bed, until death calls Weegee to live outside behind the camera.

Over on Third in the Tudor Theater, Irene Dunne's giant face, black and white and gray and soft, looks down. She demures. She bats her lashes. Dunne wants Douglas Fairbanks Jr. to forgive her. Take this lady back. Everyone in the audience knows he should, that he will. Fairbanks is no fool. Who can deny Dunne when her face, her giant powdered face, glows soft lit and soft filtered and one, single tear slides down those high cheekbones? Those giant apple cheeks, powdered and highlighted and dewy. He's going to take her back. Everyone knows Dan takes Maggie back. The movie screen crackles and spots. The audience hold their breath, silent, waiting for his answer, for

Dan to take Maggie in his arms and kiss her like they all—all of them in the audience—want.

Fellig's studio apartment, across the street from police headquarters in Weegee's jurisdiction, rests in a row of brick tenement buildings seven stories high. Fire escape balconies and staircases zigzag from the bottom up. A potted garden ready to fall teeters on the first platform. A cat flicks its tail on the third. A man and a woman share a cigarette and a kiss on the fifth. On the sixth, a window without a curtain lifts.

Inside this window, darkness flickers. Pervasive. Final and fleeting. No more. If Fellig shuts his eyes … What lives in the dark. Weegee the Famous. Lately, Fellig gets his sleep during the day, when the sun burns welts onto his lids like a giant flash bulb. He can't face it. Can't look directly without shielding the sun's blow. When the sun bears down, Fellig can't get over the feeling of someone staring heat directly at him. So he closes his eyes. Better to keep himself closed during the day, when the red on his shut lids lets him know he's alive. Better to keep his eyes open at night, ready to shoot what everyone else might miss. There's a reason deadlines are called deadlines.

Weegee's Lower East Side flickers outside Fellig's only window, obliterating his face in shades of light and darkness. He lies in silhouette to the right. He flits his lids. He lies in hard lighting to the left. He keeps his eyes and ears peeled. He listens for the sound of flesh hitting pavement. For the sound of a gasp, then a gawk. Fellig waits for

the moment Weegee pushes the shutter release, to force bulb crack and flare. When the bulb cracks, Fellig's heartbeat hushes—organ and apparatus—but beats harder inside him. Weegee waits to shoot the dead so Fellig stays alive.

At the Tudor, when the film cracks black to the center of the screen and the theater lights fade on, the audience gets up from their red velvet seats.

Tonight hosts a double feature. The next picture up inside the Tudor is *Don't Turn 'em Loose* starring Bruce Cabot, Lewis Stone, and James Gleason—not for the Irene Dunne crowd. This crowd needs to go home, get their snot-nosed kids tucked in to sleep, and wake up early to make flapjacks, bacon and eggs, and read the morning's headlines and stock exchanges and sigh. No, this picture's meant for wise-cracking school boys ready for dramatized blood.

A group of boys amble down the streets toward the Tudor, practicing their best Rico Bandello, Tom Powers, and Tony Camonte. A Robinson, Cagney, Muni dynamo. They laugh and howl, throw fake punches, clip a chin all in good fun. They make a fist, stick out a middle finger, then the pointer, and go "Bang. Bang. Bang."

Fellig's studio, at a tight 400 square feet of empty space, except for a twin mattress crammed into a corner on the floor, a nightstand stacked with papers, and a radio and two desks for work, boxes him away from the city. If Fellig didn't need to

sleep, Weegee could walk the city all night long. The studio apartment: a rehabilitation center for the eyes, and nothing else. Not a refuge, not likely. Weegee needs only a car, a radio, and an assignment. Know your deadlines, Weeg. Know your dead. Fellig waits over the sheets on his mattress. Except for a hat, coat, and shoes, he's prepared to split for death. The next accident shouldn't take long. He'll grab his coat, and all that rests inside it, hat, and camera—get out of these walls, break out onto the streets behind his focus. His deadline.

Outside on Third, little Mary Stevens' father drives his 1938 black Sixty Special down to the Tudor to pick up his daughter. A brand new Cadillac. A brand new line. Stevens pierces the naked city air with his giant hunk of metal between yellow taxi cab after yellow taxi cab. His daughter better not babble about the movie. He doesn't see much in Irene Dunne, and Fairbanks, not even Fairbanks but Fairbanks Jr., is a fop if he ever saw one. That father. No-talent-swashbuckling dandy. Couldn't hack it when it was time to talk; how could you expect the kid to handle anything when the father couldn't? Stevens nears the Tudor. The marquee touts Dunne's name. Give me a damn break. He's early. Mary's nowhere around. No one's out, except for three boys walking toward the theater and horsing around. Dunne's only claim to fame was *The Awful Truth*, thanks to Cary Grant. The only actor who could drag anything worth laughing at out of that dry piece of plank. Where's Mary already? When Stevens sees Mary walk

out of the theater something thuds on the hood of his Sixty Special, and then there's only two boys instead of three.

Johnny sees the car coming when Bernie pushes Frank off the curb. Goddamn, that car's a nice one. Johnny read about the Sixty Special in the paper. The glossy finish reflects the city lights, and in the car's sleek black metal paneling Johnny glimpses a whole other city. He waits for the moment that Special drives by, drives past him so fast, just to see his reflection, himself, mired in that black glossy paint. So close, so right there he can stroke it if he stretches out his arm for a chance. But that Special drives too fast and Frank's the one mired on the side panelling and Johnny and Bernie split before anyone can see. And he thinks it's Bernie's fault anyway, but he saw that car coming and saw himself driving away inside it, just to get away from the streets.

Oh no no no no no. No one's around. No one's around. So no one, not even Stevens, could have seen. Mary, he can see her, puts her hands to her mouth. Stevens drives past the theater, waves Mary to him, and turns the corner. In the rear-view mirror Mary run towards his car. He parks, keeps the motor running, and rolls down his window.

"Dad," Mary says, "that was Frank Lagorio from school. You hit Frank Lagorio."

Lagorio. Lagorio. Doesn't ring a bell. Not a man Stevens knows. Could be anyone around here. This place won't miss another one of 'em. Infiltrating the city like pack rats. High crime. Good riddance. But then again, "Do you know him? Did you like him?"

Mary looks at her father. "I don't know. Not well," she says.

Good. Easy. And no one's around, anyway. "Get in the car," Stevens says. Easy. One-two-three and just leave the spot before anyone sees.

"Dad."

"Get in the car."

Mary opens the passenger door and sits.

"Thank you," he says. He pushes hard on the gas pedal. "Now, did you see any damage to my hood?"

Steven's peels out.

The police scanner on Fellig's nightstand sputters and flicks. His eyes flicker. He uncrosses his legs from his crucifix, the bed. He knows he's not dead. He hears the signal and knows it's not just in his head. Weegee: wake up, you're on, you're up. Weegee flickers inside Fellig, listens and waits.

Nights were almost better before he registered for the scanner. Feedback makes his skin crawl, like mites and a poverty-causing itch. Anticipation is a luxury the dead

don't need—how he knows he's alive. Before Fellig registered for the scanner at least he could channel some energy by cruising around looking for a crime. A bum, a socialite, or any and all potential sales. Now what? He futzes around on his bed, trying to keep still when stillness makes him nuts. Waiting for something to come to him rather than looking for it himself. Tell it to the tabloids, Weeg. Fellig could complain, but the scanner works and works well. At least now he's saving, even if Fellig is going nuts keeping still, locked indoors for the sake of all this waiting, for the sake of listening, muddling through all the garbage scans for just one good call. For one good shot and sell.

The cat from the third platform jumps onto Fellig's sill and yowls.

"Out!" Fellig leaps from his mattress. The cat crouches to run. Fellig hears a crash down below. Garbage. All garbage now. Everything in this city, garbage. He lies back down and keeps still on his bed. The poor cat. Eh, it' not his fault. The cat startled him. He should grab his hat, coat, the scanner, flash and camera. Maybe check out the cat, see if the thing's okay. Then he can hop in his car and get his life started.

But he stays put.

Twiddlse his thumbs to keep his fingers busy. The scans rasp and cough like a man breathing his last. The time is nine 'o'clock, right on the spot, and the city should come alive right about now.

Fellig's radio stutters.

Dispatch says they got a call about a body from the Tudor Theater on Third.

Fellig, already off his bed, grabs his fedora and wool trench coat from a coat tree next to his front door. He has pre-packed film holders, with pre-placed pieces of sheet film, in the back of his car where they always stay. He's got a few extra bulbs in there, too, along with a dark room where he can develop his dead. If he's precise enough, he won't need all these extras. Fellig grabs the scanner, the flash and his 4x5 Speed Graphic camera, preset, as always, at f/16 at 1/200 of a second, from a mug-stained and cigar burnt desk next to the front door where his camera waits. Fellig opens his door. Weegee leaves the studio, ready to shoot.

The cat, the cat. Where's the cat? Where's this pile of garbage besides everywhere? Weegee, down on the streets, hustles to his car scanning the pile of garbage cans in front of his tenement. Tumbled-over cans vomit garbage. Light hits the crinkles in newspapers, shattered wine and beer bottles. The sidewalk gleams, bouncing light up into Weegee's eyes. When Weegee takes a closer look: "Christ, I'm sorry, you poor sucker." He kneels down to the cat, curled up, covered and cradled by garbage. The cat's eyes remain open.

Dead. No question. But Weegee's seen life flee eyes before. Took the snap of it. Grabbed their life in his lens and held.

Lights twinkle between each line of iris in the cat's eyes. "Who would 'ave thunk that was your ninth?" Weegee stands up. "If you were a person," he says, "you'd get me

about 150 bucks." He stares down at the cat and shakes his head, resolving to bag the photo op when he gets back, however long it might take him to return, should the cat still be there, with hungry strays on the streets.

Across the street, at headquarters, Captain Max Finkelstein worries over one of his men, a detective by the name of Barney Ruditsky. Something about that kid seems kind of goofy, kind of off. More often than not lately, Finkelstein finds himself stuck to his office chair and desk, inside the station, listening to the crackle of his radio and watching these other kids take the calls and walking, driving the streets. A city Finkelstein used to own, at least within his own jurisdiction, and walk and talk with. He's lost touch. He knows it. He watches Ruditsky often, as much as he can from his desk, and notices the young detective's edge. He comes in hot, complaining about how these people around the city don't respect the badge, so maybe they'll respect his stick. Finkelstein's waiting for an incident. It's coming. The headquarter's scanner flicks on. Ruditsky, cruising in his car somewhere in the city, takes the call, given by another somewhere else inside this building.

> *That's Third?*
> *Yes. Don't know what happened, but employees say there's a body.*
> *A few blocks from the place. Should be there in no time. I'll need back up and crowd control.*

"Good," Finkelstein says out loud and tilts back in his chair. Maybe the kid'll shape up. He needs structure, that's all. The kid'll be fine. The captain swivels around

from his desk piled high with paperwork, and leans out of the chair to step outside for fresh air and a cigarette.

Outside, where smoke coils and Finkelstein looks down the street. The tenements loom over and beyond him, extending to the horizon line, where he can't see their vanishing point. In that distance, Ruditsky's siren sounds. Two more sirens. Good. Finkelstein inhales smoke down into his lungs, prepares to exhale. He chokes on the cloud rising in his esophagus, coughs, and spits. Blood sprays the sidewalk and dribbles down his chin. When Finkelstein clears his throat, wipes his chin, he takes another drag on his cigarette. Embers flare at his fingertips. Can he trace his fingerprints from the sides of his cigarette? He used to know his city. His city used to look cleaner, friendlier .Lately, a fine layer of grime coats his memories. He can distinguish his fingerprints where he tried to swipe away this filth, but only left a smudge, a smear—maybe made things worse? After he takes one last drag, Finkelstein flicks his cigarette away. The butt hisses and steams in a slushy gutter.

How much more of this can you stand?

Finkelstein turns to face the tenements, an open window, staring at police headquarters. He looks up. "You'll beat us every time," he says. "You'll outlive us all."

Ruditsky. A goofy kid. He's heard this once or twice before. Invalid. Kind of oafish and hulking. Kind of an attention seeker. This one is true. But people will think

what they want to think. He won't deny it. He won't confirm it. He isn't about to do that, but he won't deny it either. He loves this city. And the city loves him. Barney can feel it. This love permeates from every standing body looking toward him to oh please save me, save us, save us all. At your service, ma'am. There's a feeling he gets with the scanner and the sirens that he can't put his finger on. What is it? Validation? Entitlement? Something like that. But he feels it when people cry, too. When he or one of his guys chalks off a body, covers it up with crisp white sheet, and keep rubberneckers back—don't worry ma'am, there's no need for alarm, no need to cry. We're here now. You can rest easy. He even feels this from the bodies on the ground. Feels their cold heat rising into his body, like he's sucked up the life they don't need anymore. Take it. Just take it all. It's not like they're going to need it anyway. Help us, he can hear them say, find the ones who did this. Find the perps and you'll get a spot, just for you, in the papers. Ruditsky smiles and drives.

Weegee parks his car along the curb one block before the scene at the Tudor on Third. Bodies swarm. Buried among live bodies somewhere lies the body the photographer needs to shoot. Buried somewhere down below rests Weegee's life.

"Excuse me," Weegee says and repeats, to cut through this crowd. "Pardon me."

A cop can barge his way through a crowd of no ones, of nothings. A cop can be careless. Weegee's no cop. You got to be ten beats ahead. Spectator, not spectacle. He's

got no delusions. Some low life coming in, demanding respect, when all he wants is to snatch a body and sell it for some bread. Weegee couldn't care less what happens to him. He couldn't care less as long that red on his eyelids keeps warming his sight. When Weegee steps over and clicks in a body with his shutter he knows he's most alive. He needs his camera. One body he can't afford to loose. Weegee looks down to the sidewalk.

"Goddammit," he breathes.

A hit and run. Tire marks screech next to the body. The body's alignment, unnatural. Sweat builds underneath Weegee's hat. This will not be enough. He wipes himself dry and scratches his brow. Weegee figures the cost of this death instantly. No entry or exit wound. Just a big open gash on the side of this poor schmuck's torso, glowing softly with blood and city. Blood spills over the curb. Matte, deep, reflecting the scape. Don't step in that, Weeg. No blood on your feet. Ten feet of distance. Dammit. He really needs a gunshot. A murder. Murders are big. Maybe 300 bucks a pop. With a hit and run he'd make maybe 200 if he plays his shots right.

He got $350 out of a shot a couple weeks ago. A beautiful scene. The guy lay face down on the sidewalk, right on the spot, his nose smeared onto the pavement. A puddle of blood puddled from his broken nose and an exit wound at the cheekbone. Impossible to tell where flesh ended and concrete began. Face, white—a white made whiter by invasive burning bulb. Snap and crack and ca-ching. Full head of dark hair. Black wool

coat, wrinkled. In the background, the brick building faded to black. An emptiness that bled off the edge of the print. In the foreground, nothing.

When Weegee showed up for that particular job, when he heard the tip on the scanner, he was the first on the premises. He'd been crawling the city all night in his car. When he pulled up, he saw the body. He saw the blood. There, on the cheek, the exit wound. Proof, but not proof enough. He saw no gun. Weegee, the first one there. Weegee, the only one there.

He could see the gun even if it was nowhere. It was there, just not where it should be. The gun was all he needed. That's all he needed. Except, instead of the gun at the scene of the crime, the gun rested in Weegee's trench coat pocket, right where it was all along. Weegee is the killer. It makes some kind of sense. Always the first to arrive at a scene. Always the best shot. If he were a cop, there'd be no crimes in this city, or far fewer at the very least. Weegee is no cop.

He's got no delusions the way a cop's got delusions. Weegee needs crime. Cops like to think they keep crimes at bay. If they did their job correctly, we wouldn't even need them. They need crime just the way Weegee needs crime. Crime pays. Crime pays the rent. The gun keeps him alive. The gun on his person. The gun at the crime scene. Weegee looked around. No one. Weegee, the killer.

Let's put you where you belong, he fingered the gun in his pocket. The little man. So unassuming, except for the two large objects in his hands. The camera and the gun.

He ambled toward the body to place the double barrel revolver in foreground. He swiped off his prints and the killer's with a handkerchief. But there is no killer. There's only the shooter. There's only Weegee. The little man raised his bulb and stood ten feet away. The killer can be the shooter. But the shooter is not the killer. He raised his Speed Graphic, burned the bulb, looked down and saw his execution pass in the light.

Once Weegee found the shot, there was no reason to live in his camera long. Always preset. He exchanges one box for another, from his bedroom to his camera. As long as that box isn't coffin shaped, he doesn't mind the change.

Weegee stood alone with the body on the sidewalk. He stared at the unloaded gun. Weegee set his camera down, took out a Steno, and rifled through the man's pockets for I.D. When he found it he stopped. Weegee turned around to look up.

Two open windows with three spectators each. Weegee installed a second bulb and took their photograph, too. When he was done with them, he wrote down his caption:

> Murder in Hell's Kitchen
> One looks out of the windows … talks about the weather with a neighbor … or looks at a murder.
> ~~(I am no killer)~~

This wasn't a caption that could stick, Weegee knew. Fellig liked it all the same.

No. A hit and run, even with a gash like that and that pool of blood, really isn't worth a frame or bulb. Weegee stands around to watch with the others, and wait for a

cop or two to arrive. Shouldn't be long now, though it's too late for the schmuck on the ground. Not too late for Weegee. Not too late for Fellig. All the two have is time. God willing.

Weegee leans against a car. Not his. He parked somewhere else so he can split fast. More and more crowd around the body. Is the movie inside? Or is it outside, right here, right now? Anyone who didn't hear the word might wonder what it is to stare at on the ground in front of The Tudor Theater. Isn't *Don't Turn 'em Loose* starting soon? Isn't there something to watch? Something meant to be watched, bought and paid for? Something to gawk at?

When a cop does show up, it's that louse new kid, Ruditsky something or something. The cop gets out of his car and saunters toward Weegee, disregarding the boy on the ground. Christ, just a boy. That's all.

"All right, Fellig, I need you to clear out of here. I'm going to need all the space I can get." The cop crosses his arms and smirks at Weegee.

Weegee the photographer means to correct the cop but doesn't want any trouble. So Weeg twists his lips, shrugs, nods, and obliges. He mutters. "All yours. Take it. There's no picture here." And I'm no killer. The unloaded gun slams against his thigh when he walks away.

Four other cops arrive on the scene, and some reporters and other photographers, too. Weegee leans against a car parked ten feet away. Where else would a killer hide?

There's a crowd before Weegee, but if Weegee and Fellig know anything it's how to bide time. Weegee holds up his Speed Graphic and flashbulb, just in case, carries the weight of the gun inside his coat. In just a few seconds someone, anyone, will notice the objects this little man holds in his hands and gasp the kind of gasp only witness and victim manage. A little death where Weegee takes this moment and keeps it locked inside. This person will look at the little man, stare down the hole, and widen his eyes. He'll tap his neighbor's shoulder, but won't break gaze down the hole, and point to the little man in the hat leaning against that car. And the neighbor will nod and tap the next shoulder and the next and the swarm of bodies will open up for a shot. For that one shot. The cops do their job. You can see them: two holding the crowd back, two covering the boy's body in the day's headlines, laying him to a kind of rest, and one cop looking through the boy's pockets for identification. Weegee already knows this boy. Already knows this boy's life and holds it inside. The camera already knows this audience. The camera loves this audience, and the audience loves a moment. Above the scene the Tudor marquee hangs, and so does Irene Dunne and *Joy of Living* and *Don't Turn 'Em Loose*. Weegee holds up his camera and bulb. He's waiting for you to look. He's waiting for your lids to feel the sting of red on flesh, and when you finally open your eyes and

stick out your tiny, white face, sir, you too will live forever by the sound of this little man's shot.

Ansel Adams, Manzanar Internment Camp, 1943:

Wire

Sometimes I arrive just when God's ready to have someone click the shutter.

—Ansel Adams

"You can take photos of anything you want, so long as you keep your lens away from barbed wire, watch towers, guards, and guns."

When Ansel drove to the Manzanar War Relocation Center earlier that day, clouds crept and curled low over him. Somewhere underneath their heavy murk stood the western wall of the Sierra Nevada. Flanked on either side of Ansel inside his station wagon, desert and birds and power lines and space.

Ansel eyed the guard's weapon, hanging loose and careless. Even he—too old to serve—knew the guard should take more care in his weapon on his body. So I can take a picture of anything I want, he thought, but not of the war I can't fight.

When Ansel received his letter from the U.S. Government, indicating the elderly photographer too old to fight for his country, Ansel already felt the denial in his bones. Perhaps the two instigated the same sensation. On with your silly picture taking, old geezer—leave this war business to younger and abler men. Your frivolous skylines, and sunshine, and fault lines, and moonbeams. Men who shoot guns, not snap pictures—that's what we need. We need tenacity, not an aesthetic. The letter went nothing like that. Though, Ansel would have preferred a letter that said just this. His denial letter read cordial to the point of rudeness. Something like age, or something like shame.

A year or so later, after Ansel applied, he heard from Ralph, a friend of his from the Sierra Club who had been appointed the Director of the Manzanar Relocation Center. Ralph had heard a fraction or two of Ansel's hemming and hawing. *Why don't you come down and do your part, then, like you wanted? I can't pay you, but I can put you up and provide meals. What do you say?*

Ansel packed his gear: just one camera, some film, a lens and clothes. He said goodbye to Virginia and the children, and set off in the station wagon to his Sierra Nevadas.

Another guard patted Ansel down, checking for anything that may be a weapon. I'm too old for that kind of thing—haven't you read the letter, dear boy? Ansel attempted to silence every grumble this guard stirred. The guard nodded to the one who seemed to be in charge. The let Ansel keep some pens, a notebook, and his camera. Large format. Good for documenting. Good for seeing wide. Careless of them, but they're young enough to know what they're doing. Not quite old enough to know these are weapon enough. Ansel look at the gun on the guard. He wasn't exactly sure what type of gun the guard held strapped against his body, pointed up in the air, away from him; he just knew this one took more care.

"Looks okay," this guard said.

"You hear me, Adams? No shooting barbed wire, watch towers, guards, or arms. I'm not accusing you of any funny business. But just so we're clear. Are we?"

The last time Ansel drove out to shoot a collection, he ended up in the red sands of New Mexico. Michael, his son, and he drove their way back up to Santa Fe after a day's worth of hiking and some shooting. That evening rolled in thick with clouds colored cotton candy blues, pinks, purples and oranges. The sky ensconced the car and Ansel kept his eyes steady, hard on the road. He looked up just once.

Ansel fell silent, but Michael never seemed to notice and kept yapping, even when Ansel slowed the car down to the shoulder of the road.

Out in the desert, no one might ever know a thing. What is it that transpires in the desert—the pit of America—is it something like sin? Or worse, delusion? Outside Santa Fe, Ansel thought it possible he might stay in this desert, might die, and no one would ever know, not even young Michael. The only presence that seemed aware of the man sitting in his car was the moon.

The great, pale eye hung above Ansel in a space where only dirt and wind spoke the ritual the moonrise witnessed over Hernandez, New Mexico and the graves and tombstones and concrete crucifixes took a breath, held it, and sighed. Ansel thought the moon might keep him in that cemetery and that he might, given the option, never leave.

Ansel scrambled out of the car to the trunk to grab all of his equipment and yelled out to Michael to retrieve everything else. Ansel composed the photo between his hands. If he could just make it. Not a second before and not a second after. He set up his tripod, his camera, inserted the film. Inside the viewfinder, and through the lens Ansel

knew time stood fine. But his meter. The exposure meter. That New Mexico sun set rapidly and the sky dimmed.

"Michael," Ansel called. But the boy never heard, never listened. Ansel left his camera to look through the wagon himself. Behind him, he felt his back cool. Felt the sun recede into someone else's sky. The camera stood focused on that moon.

Sharpness, immaculate. In the foreground, leveled desert brush, textured with grit. White cross after white cross dotted the scape under miles of peak, under miles of stark white dune-clouds, under black velvet sky. Horizon line, low. Depth of field, all. The moon.

Ansel needed only to turn around, walk back, and shoot that photo with just enough time.

Sunlight broke the sky. Ansel stood. The sky crept along silver. A desert like this allowed no reign. He could not try and did not try. The desert gripped him. There is no one thing, he felt, anyone can keep. He pressed the shutter.

Though in the car, he never found the meter.

In the end, he did leave New Mexico, as he always knew he could.

Ansel went back to California, as always since 1916. Leaving New Mexico, that red desert and mountains, red like a split pomegranate left to ooze, harden and dry, and the turquoise pink orange sky, shades of white and black to his eye, left him detached. Returning to California was the right thing to do, even if he had yet to figure out why.

A thin man stood holding a bag, outside the main office where Ansel received his briefing. The man crouched down to the gravel of the internment camp. Ansel did not know how temporary these living quarters might be, nor, Ansel guessed, did the thin man crouching down know how long the camp might house him on the dry California valley. The bag on the man's body—slung tightly about him—it was definitely a camera bag. Squared with a latch and worn with age. The long man kept his bag strapped close.

"Adams?"

"Sir?" Adams, staring out the window, said to the guard. Do not look at barbed wire, arms, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera—the people you keep here personify imprisonment.

"Are we clear?" The guard's voice rattled against his glottis. Would Ansel be turned away if he said no?

"Crystal, sir."

"Anything like that, and you'll immediately be removed and your film destroyed. Understood?"

"Understood. Is there anything else?" Ansel himself was not altogether intimidating, though six feet tall. Ansel's face exuded a scorching warmth like the Californian valleys where he grew. He looked at the guard and smiled, the corrugations around his eyes and on his forehead deepened, the unshaved scruff around his mouth framed his elfish smile. He must look old, he thought. He must be old.

"I'll show you to your living quarters," the guard said.

The guard left the camera on the desk, as though the photographer were careless enough to forget. Ansel smiled and looked down at the pine planks. The audacity of the young—he admired it. He packed his large-format view camera and tripod tightly, as though survival hinged on the care issued to these items.

"Let's hurry this along, Adams."

Neither Ansel nor this guard nor anyone on the grounds were going anywhere for a good, long time. When he packed his camera and strapped it tightly against him, Ansel walked back to the door, stopped in front of the guard—he could not remember his name, but assumed this was not a man to ask things of, in any case, and paid him little mind—to smile at him.

"Shall we then, sir? To my living quarters?' Some audacity still rested in Ansel.

The guard grumbled and followed Ansel outside. So damned agreeable—Ansel smiled—so damned amenable.

Outside a powder of dust, sieved by wind and time, floated from a space empty of everything but sky. Somewhere in the background stood the Sierras, barbed by wire as though something so natural deserved confinement. Ansel sheathed his eyes from the dammed sun and walked in the shade. The guard, in the sun, took long and hurried strides and Ansel tried to keep pace with the shadow. The shadow stretched long against the dirt. The shadow's arms barely swung with each sharp step. The rifle,

distinct from the guard's body, pointed upwards. What in hell could that gun point at? The guard muttered to Ansel about the people in the camp—"sneaky" something or something, "not to be trusted." Was the gun to be trusted, instead?

The thin man Ansel watched from inside the office still crouched down on the ground and seemed not to notice the guard and Ansel approach. The man's crouched body soaked up the sun.

He stood, looking first at the ground, then at the gun, then at Ansel and the camera bag at Ansel's side. The man set his eyes back on the guard. This man's eyes tightened behind wire-framed spectacles. Ansel watched, watched so hard he could not hear what the guard said. The man's eyes fought curiosity and Ansel saw this man struggle not to look down at the camera bag.

"Cut the shit, Miyatake. I've got my eye on you. I don't want to see you near there again. We're missing sugar. It's not disappearing on its own."

"I've nothing to do with the sugar," the man, Miyatake said.

"You've got something to do with something. I don't know what it is. But I've got my eye on you now. Watch yourself."

Ansel looked down at the bag against Miyatake. Miyatake tugged his bag, otherwise paying no mind no mind to Ansel watching him save for Miyatake's hands tightening. Ansel felt he somehow violated any sense of privacy by ogling this man's belongings.

"On your way, Miyatake. You're taking up a lot of my time lately. Get out of here."

Miyatake squinted at the sky, at that sun. He went on his way without another word. Ansel watched him disappear into the shade of one of four watch towers. The tower stood obtuse, a nail driven in to a solid scape just amenable enough to bear it. A guard in the tower looked down, held his weapon upright toward the sun, and followed Miyatake's trek.

"Might there be any way I can get up there?" Ansel said.

The guard in the tower kept his eyes on Miyatake and never looked at the man holding the camera.

"Sorry? What's that?"

"Up in the tower. Would it be all right to shoot from there?"

"Sure. I don't see why not."

Up in the tower, Ansel Adams looked.

*

This must be invisibility, Toyo Miyatake though. From any of the four watch towers above, and from any of the lookouts below, this is what invisibility looks like: black eyed, shiny haired, lanky limbed, slim, small, depthless. Miyatake must have looked like the group of men standing before the fence, staring at the space beyond.

Miyatake must have looked like the new internees coming in from the outside on a bus. Miyatake looked like the men sleeping in rows in the barracks. Miyatake looked like all the men, save for the new man, the one so interested in the bag slung about Miyatake's shoulder. Miyatake looked like those left behind to join his father in Los Angeles when he was boy. He looked like everyone just beyond the Pacific. Anyone who looked like him stood incarcerated inside this wire. He remembered the way his family looked when he left Kagawa in 1909. His mother's eyes. Her eyes tried to pull him back to her, and also pushed him away. His mother managed to keep her tears locked inside her eyes, hoping—he thought—he too would stay. Those eyes, he avoided them. He tried. Miyatake's mother looked like someone else. She looked this same way when his father left home. She was not a mother then. Miyatake glimpsed a woman left behind, and she knew. He knew she knew his father left them in the process of leaving for them. One act could not be untangled from the other. In order to provide he needed to abandon. When time came for Miyatake to follow his father, he only thought of leaving, of getting away, not the woman he'd leave behind. His mother became someone else—a woman to leave. And she'd already shed all her tears for her husband. She'd hardened for the sake of her children, for her own sake. When it came time for Miyatake's departure, he swore a puff of dust shed from her slow, blinking eyes. Leave this place, she blinked, and don't let this body of water hold you back.

Across the grounds, the schools let out. Miyatake's sons—Archie, Robert, Richard—left with a flow of other sons and daughters. Richard broke from Archie and Robert for a girl a few steps ahead. She laughed with a group of other young women. This girl glowed when she smiled; otherwise, she did not seem to stand out. She glowed, only noticeable when focused on intently, like Miyatake had, and he suspected his son did often. Small miracles occur under the right amount of focus—nothing to do with the subject, the subject always delivers. He knew nothing about this young woman, apart from what he saw. The way his son looked at her—shifting between eager and timid. Richard looked at the young woman, Miyatake recognized this, and recognized his son would get nowhere, and not earn a place with her until he stopped looking, started talking, and began to see. Then again, the boy was only nine. He'd learn.

Miyatake sat against a watch tower, hidden in the shade and the tower's blind spot. In five minutes, oversight would hide Miyatake from all guards in the watch towers. His eyes were always on them. The north guard would turn to look beyond the wire. The south would look to the north. The west would look to the south. And Miyatake did not have to worry about the guard above.

Robert headed to help his mother at the co-operative store where she'd begun working. Miyatake had good children. He was glad they were with him, even if they were inside the wire. At least they were there together. Archie followed his younger

brother. Miyatake caught his eye, so that Archie headed to his father. His eyes darted between Miyatake and the canvas bag in his arms. Archie rested his eyes on the bag.

"Pop," he said.

"Yes, Archie?"

"You'll be proud."

"I'm always proud of you."

He shook his head. "Not like today. I did good."

"What do you mean? In school? At the market? What?"

Archie was no good for secrets. He didn't know how to keep one and he had no skill for timing. Miyatake wondered how he might do in the family business, despite his boy's determination.

The boy turned to make sure no one stood behind him. Miyatake knew this look. He watched his son's right hand dive into his pocket.

"Wait," Miyatake said. "Hold it." He watched his son flinch. "Hold still for a moment." Miyatake scanned the grounds for guards, all of whom were busy. His eyes darted from each watchtower, making sure no one focused on the man and his son. "Archibald."

"Pop?"

"The guard above."

"Yes?"

"Is he watching?"

The boy looked up without tilting his head. "No, no," he said. He shook his head from side to side. Miyatake watched his son's hair glide over his forehead.

"Sit next to me." He patted the ground. Desert dust rose. "Show me."

Miyatake and his son looked over the camp together. He felt their gaze intersect.

"Show me," he said again.

Archie pulled out a large format camera lens from his pocket, smudged with water stains. "I found this for you, Pop."

Miyatake took the lens from his son's hand. "You found it?" he said.

"Found, got. What's the difference? I have it."

A perfect fit. A wide-angle lens. Perfect for seeing.

One year and the remainder of a lifetime allowed Miyatake the space and breath to convert from portraiture to documentary. He thought it his duty to photograph the Japanese Americans of higher celebrity rankings, or the smalltime celebrities in Little Tokyo back in Los Angeles, where he'd opened up a studio with his family, to record their little winnings in this country. A documentation in its own way, he reasoned. All those faces. Wasn't it his duty now to document lives behind the wire? To smuggle in contraband, as they called it. It was, however, almost impossible to take pictures this way. But ethically, didn't he have to? Ethically. He wasn't sure what ethical meant anymore. Almost everything, he'd managed to bring in with little trouble when it came

time to relocate, except for the lens. Impossibly clever of them. He'd left his camera with some friends. The body he would not risk. The body was easy. The simplest part of the whole. He could craft another, if for some reason the camera body were lost. Simply, however, he'd rather not. He could fashion a body in his sleep. The camp did not lack lumber. He'd made an adequate box camera and tripod. He'd left a space in the middle of the camera's face. For all intents and purposes, the watchmen forced him to leave behind his eye. Miyatake was nothing if not resilient. The catch: the eye was smuggled in by his son.

"How?"

"Dad."

"How?"

"David Miyamoto. He sits in front of me in class. He knows someone outside."

"Be clear."

"He used to go to school with one of the guards' sons. They were friends. The guard recognized David and his father. He's been helping the Miyamotos."

Miyatake nodded. "And they have what to do with you? What did you trade?"

"Dad."

"You traded. What was it? Something from the shop?"

"I just thought—"

"You clearly didn't, otherwise you wouldn't have made the deal." Miyatake felt his son's shoulders slump next to him. Was this how he looked when his mother dared not cry for him? Did he slump and shrivel under her disapproval? "Your mother works too hard for you to be swiping products as though you own the place. As though the world is at your disposal."

"Yes."

"What did you promise David? Have you gotten it to him?"

"Cigarettes. Yes."

Cigarettes. Is that all? That's all the young man wanted? Not even alcohol—worse for a 16-year-old boy, but at least logical. Even if he smoked a pack a day, young Miyamoto still wouldn't have death to look forward to until, at the very soonest, his thirties or forties. And they should all be out of this cage by then, Miyatake hoped. The store sold saki, for special occasions. The boy could lose himself easily with only a few tastes. Good thing these two are not the brightest.

Miyatake looked at the lens in his hand. Yes, his son did well, but this was, in part, what troubled him. He patted Archie's head, and smiled. "You're sure your debts are paid?"

"Yes."

"Good." Miyatake pocketed the lens. "Good. Not again, Archie. Not ever again."

"Can we put the lens in place?" Archie asked.

Miyatake watched Richard linger behind the girl. What is he doing? From another side of the camp, Miyatake glimpsed the man Nishimura. Nishimura took no time at all to meet Miyatake's gaze. Miyatake sat where he often sat, and Nishimura staggered around the camp, likely headed to his barracks, his bed, to sleep off another day of trying to forget. Nishimura changed course, to head instead toward Miyatake. Miyatake shook his head and the man stopped, stumbled a bit, and then went inside the barracks.

"Go meet your mother for dinner."

Miyatake knew what Nishimura wished to speak to him about. If only he'd managed to drop something in his palm a few moments before.

Ansel shared a barrack with 12 other men. Five single-sized beds, padded meagerly with mattress and pillows, stood against two sides of the barrack. Ansel followed the guard down the aisle. Soft sunshine pooled in from bare windows over every bed and bathed the pine paneled room. Though the windows were installed with the intention of surveillance over warmth, both seemed provided in spite of the relocation center. Someone drove nails into the walls above the windows, where maybe some dwellers tore down makeshift curtains of rags and t-shirts upon hearing the footsteps of a guard. All the men in the room stilled and rose from their beds when the guard and Ansel entered.

The guard didn't bother to look at the men. He pointed down to the left, the second to last bed against the wall and a window. Ansel walked toward this space feeling the abrasion of dark eyes.

Each pair of eyes seemed to absorb Ansel. He smiled, amiably, and took off his hat to press it against his chest. He hoped he did not look timid, only respectful, though how does one manage this in this room, to this room of people contained away for such a reason? He nodded to the man on the bed to his left. The man only blinked and stayed in his bed and closed his eyes, slightly shifting. He seemed dizzy and the man focused on the single bulb hanging between Ansel's mattress and this man's, lighting their shared space. The moon, Ansel thought, our moon hangs above us even in enclosure. The moon as artifice. A projection of the sun without burn. The man stretched out on his bed. The shadows cast by two laundry lines hung over the man on his bed, with a few items of clothing drying stiff, divided the man lengthwise in thirds. This man watched Ansel make his bed.

"At five," he said.

Ansel spun around to face this man behind him. "I'm sorry?" he said.

"At five. We eat at five," the man repeated.

Ansel nodded and thanked him. "What happens if we miss dinner?"

"I don't know anything about that. Five, don't miss it." The man turned to the wall. On the wall, behind a damp towel, were 27 notches scratched in some time ago, by

the looks of it. The 28th notch was absent, as was the 29th, the 30th, etcetera. Ansel did not know how many days this man lied in this bed and perhaps the man also lost count. Useless to count, useless to remember. The notches looked like circumstance instead of novelty—an instance of passing time, instead of marking time. Just close your eyes and forget. Ansel wondered how people passed their time inside the internment camp.

"Five, sharp," the man mumbled again.

"Yes. It's kind of you to be so deliberate. Listen, I'm not taking anyone's space, am I? This doesn't belong to a friend of yours maybe?" Ansel asked.

"No."

"Good. That's good to know. I didn't want to assume, though I figure the watchmen know their business. But I wanted to make sure."

"You're taking no man's space, there. You don't have a thing to worry over."

"That's good to hear," Ansel said.

Ansel got as comfortable as he possibly could and raised his arms underneath his head. He stared at the bulb. He'd put his camera bag under his bed, and though Ansel refused to think any one person might take the camera, for whatever reason, he nevertheless reached under for the bag, and strapped it tight around his body. He waited for five o'clock. The chain pull on the bulb swayed like a pendulum.

The man on the bed turned when Ansel's breathing slowed and his eyes closed. He focused his eyes on the bag clasped between Ansel's hands. He looked behind him,

outside his window. For a time, he watched the sun elongate the shadows on the camp's foundation, and looked out at Miyatake, still at the watchtower.

At 4:50, Ansel opened his eyes. And at 4:51, he blinked to focus on the light bulb dangling above his face. And at 4:52, he panicked quietly, and he found he could not move his arms or the rest of his body, save for his blinking eyes. And Ansel gave it a second or more. And this was not a true paralysis—this much he knew—he'd only woken up before his muscles, and that was all. And at 4:54, by instinct, Ansel reached for his bag, and at 4:54, his bag felt lighter than usual. And at 4:55, he remembered what the man in the bed next to him told him about being at dinner by 5:00 p.m. And when his body let him, Ansel rose.

*

When Nishimura stopped counting the days, the first year moved faster, or so he told Miyatake. What was the American idiom Nishimura used? A watched pot of water never boils? For Nishimura it was true. He'd left the year before the removal. He'd left for money. Wasn't that always at least part of the reason to leave any country? And he told his family to give him that year and then he would have enough and send for them too. All three of them. They would live seaside, he'd told Miyatake, so that maybe the kids wouldn't be so homesick. He'd tell them, look, we're not that far away—each wave brings a little piece of the home you used to know, until it's all here right where you are,

until you feel safe. Until this is your home. By the time his year was up, he said, the waves and home were no longer relevant. His family stayed an ocean away, and Nishimura was moved further inland, and he no longer needed to worry about home.

He was an odd one, but Miyatake kept his feelings to himself and became something of a friend to the man, despite Nishimura's reclusive tendencies. Miyatake had heard, back when they were all outside the wires, Nishimura did a number of odd jobs. Could never find a niche. He was happy enough jumping from one thing to the next as long as he was paid.

Nishimura had a guy on the outside—this made his friendship valuable to Miyatake. This guy could get Nishimura—and thus Miyatake—anything, within reason. All he said was, it needs to be a lens, wide. That's all I know. And the guy laughed and said, That'll cost you, like he'd seen one too many gangster movies at a movie house downtown. How much? Two hundred, to start. After I see it. That makes sense, good for it? Of course. That was how Nishimura told Miyatake it had all gone down.

At 4:59 p.m., the Miyatakes sat at a long table in a row among eight, in the mess hall. They ate canned vegetables and fruit, syrupy and globbed over a bed of steaming, overcooked rice. The rice broke down into a gelatinous mess before it hit their mouths, as if someone spent an hour before chewing it for the internees. At 5:00 p.m., Nishimura

asked Robert to slide down so he could sit next to the boy's father to discuss something important. Robert looked to his father. Miyatake nodded.

"Tōyō," Nishimura said.

"Gorou. How are you?"

"I have your item."

Of course, Nishimura had the item. He always did. He was useful, reliable in that way. Not so much in others, but Miyatake never worried. A verbal deal. Nothing other than handshakes exchanged. Nishimura understood reason. He was only a little ornery, but not troublesome or senseless.

"That's good of you. You're always good for it. Listen, we need to talk."

Nishimura grinned. "This was an easy job. I almost feel bad for taking all that nihonshu I'll be drinking later." He took the camera lens out of his pocket and placed it on the bench.

This one was beautiful. Professional grade. Miyatake looked down at the eye and then looked up at Nishimura, who still grinned like an idiot. Unbelievable, even for him, and if it had not been for his son's longing for his father's approval, Miyatake might pocket the lens, eat his rice, and never ask for another thing while inside this fence. That lens. Freedom in that lens. With that lens he could see into everyone, including the guards. His own little rebellion contained inside a wooden box. The lens

his son brought him would suffice, and of course he was pleased with Archie. Archie. Foolish, but admirable. Lovable, if nothing else.

"Gorou, listen. Something's come up. I no longer need that item."

"What?"

"I got one on my own. Someone from the outside. Anyway, it's done. I don't need another."

"Take it."

"I don't need it. Were anyone to find it. It's useless to me loose. I can't have it lying around, and it would take too long to make another camera. You said yourself this was an easy one. No harm done. We'll call it even. I can give you half of what we agreed, for any trouble or time, or what have you, but that's all. And in all fairness, that seems a better deal than you might get elsewhere, Gorou." Miyatake ate his food and did not look at Nishimura or the beautiful piece at his side again. Still, he expected Nishimura to shout, throw his food. Something. Miyatake smelled a morning of drinking on Nishimura's breath, and wondered what this might trigger.

Instead, the man just stared ahead toward the table in front of them.

"Gorou."

"It's fine, don't worry about it. We can stop," Nishimura said.

"No, no. You deserve something for your trouble. It's an amazing piece. I don't know how you got—"

"Tōyō. It's fine. It's clear. We're clear." Nishimura stared ahead, as though there was nothing, no one to look at. Miyatake followed his gaze. His eyes focused on the back of a pale balding head, then to a bag placed on the table next to the man's tray of food. The same man Miyatake saw earlier on the camp grounds, with the same bag.

"Gorou, give it back."

"I don't know why you're still talking."

The pale man—Miyatake knew who he was, recognized him, but couldn't recall the name. He was someone vaguely well regarded and influential outside of this wire. His photos, he'd seen them before. Not photos of him, well, yes clearly of him (that's how he recognized him after all) but photos the man took as well. With a camera of his own. Probably a large format. Probably. The Sierras. The horizon. The moon. Large format. Wide angle. He wanted that lens. What he could do with that lens—with his lens.

This photographer didn't deal with portraiture, as Miyatake did. He remembered no single person. What use would he have for people when his are fine? Miyatake might not either. Might spend his time taking snap shots of light and the edge and the curl of the clouds and the curvature of the earth and what else if he didn't have a care in the world either.

"Yes. Eat your fruit then. I've been told it's delicious," Miyatake said.

"Is it?"

"Yes, it's what I've been told. Now," Miyatake continued. "Do as you should."

"As I should?" Nishimura said.

Miyatake nodded. "As you know you should."

Nishimura finished eating his glop of rice. "When can I expect those couple dozen cans?"

Forty-eight cans of fermented rice, in retrospect, seemed excessive, and Miyatake realized how badly he wanted to see. He'd likely promise three dozen more cans had he known a lens of this quality neared. Miyatake agreed to the 48 cans, no questions asked, though he hoped Gorou had someone, an entire group, to share in the bulk. Miyatake hadn't argued—done, he said, it's a deal. And they shook on it and departed and Miyatake would have no trouble getting Nishimura 48 cans of nihonshu.

"You can come by the store today, tomorrow, whenever you have time, Gorou. Only, make sure it's my wife or one of my boys who help you. They already know."

"Good. I'll be by. Thank you for this, Tōyō." Nishimura stood up from his seat and lifted his tray. He did not pocket the wide lens. He made to leave, but doubled back on the side of the table where Miyatake sat. Nishimura turned for the pale man's attention.

"Old man," he said.

Ansel ate his meal forkful by forkful, steadily, as though he could not even taste the food. It was food, the only food he thought to receive out here. He expected nothing different.

"You. Old man."

If Ansel had his lens, he might have brought his camera into this cafeteria and taken some photos. See how they react behind the lens. But maybe it worked better this way. Ansel, always so ready to have the weight around his neck or cradled in his palm, not to take a photo—he was not one to waste his frames, and he could wait, but was always ready, anticipating—perhaps missed other things. And this time, he thought, maybe this is time for a different kind of waiting. Maybe he must exist with them instead of outside of them—first—for the photos he needed. Yes, this would all work out fine. And he'd find the lens, or send for another. Nothing truly lost.

"Old man."

Ansel, startled, dropped his fork and splattered rice onto his shirt. He answered, wiping at himself. "Yes? I'm sorry. Oh, nice to see you again. I was elsewhere. Yes?"

The man from earlier in the barracks. They had not quite introduced themselves, and though this man had been kind enough to make Ansel aware of dinner, Ansel did not offer his name.

"This man—," Nishimura pointed to Miyatake, "has something dear to you. If you ask, I'm sure he'll oblige," Nishimura said. Then he left.

Miyatake watched, sighed, and braced himself.

Ansel turned to find the same thin man from earlier. Earlier he noticed only this man's bag, but this time the man seemed thinner, in a large button-down shirt and a pair of drooping pants. Despite the ill fitting clothes, the man maintained an elegance and bowed his head (in shame? in embarrassment?) He seemed to try to cover his face from Ansel against his spindly fingers. Those fingers looked perfect for a camera. The man finally dropped his hands to reveal his face, and Ansel saw, but did not know him.

Miyatake met Ansel's eyes and nodded his head toward the bench, indicating the stolen item.

Miytake's face wrinkled with worry. His mouth curved up slightly on the left side, just by habit it seemed to Ansel, even if the man did not want it to. He wore a pair of thin eyeglasses, half framed at the top with wire. Behind these lenses, Miyatake's eyes enlarged, deepened, and Ansel could see each line of iris in the man. The lenses rudely crafted, seemed a product of someone's able hand in the camp. Ansel watched the thin man—something Miyatake, Miyatake something?—sit down at Ansel's table just across from him.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"For what?" But Ansel knew for what. He eyed the man clutching Ansel's lens, keeping it from breaking.

"For this," Miyatake said and placed the lens next to Ansel's tray of food. "I had it in my possession. I apologize." It was no use trying to convince the man Miyatake had not taken the lens. He had it. All he had left to do now was return the lens.

Ansel looked down at the lens, now uncovered for everyone to see. But no one did.

"Oh that," he said. "Yes, tricky thing. I had it when I came, closed my eyes and then it was gone, along with my roommate. What's his name by the way? Nice fellow. He was concerned I'd miss my dinner. Funny fellow. Yes, I knew it was him. I figured I'd keep a better eye on my remaining equipment and go on out or send for another lens. I know it wasn't your doing. No hard feelings and no need, of course, to apologize. Nice of him to let me know where it is. Not so nice to pin the blame on you. I don't believe we've exchanged names. And I'm doing all the talking. Ansel Adams."

"Miyatake. Tōyō."

"Miyatake Tōyō. Yes, that's right."

"No, sorry. Tōyō Miyatake."

"Yes, of course. I remember you from earlier. When the watchman was speaking with you. Now, tell me, Tōyō. Why might these watchmen have such a keen eye for you? Anything to do with this?" Ansel held out the lens and smiled.

"Not at all," Miyatake said.

Ansel grinned. “What kind of camera have you got? For some reason I thought I was the only photographer on the grounds, but as it turns out I was mistaken. This often happens to me.”

Miyatake stared at this elfish man, smiling and yapping, expecting an answer. Was this man in earnest?

“I’m sorry,” Miyatake said again. It seemed to him he spent most of his days, as of late, apologizing for crimes he had not committed. “I need to get back to my dinner and family.”

“Of course, as you should. We’ll speak again, Tōyō.” Ansel smiled, extending his arm to shake Tōyō’s hand.

Miyatake looked down suspiciously. He took his hand. Ansel’s grip was hard but friendly. Miyatake stood staring at their hands clasped together, fitting amicably. They let go and Miyatake felt his mouth curve upward. Ansel’s grin widened.

“Thank you, again, so much for this.” Ansel grabbed the lens and shook it in the air, just as Ansel could and Miyatake was made aware he could not.

A week had passed from the time Ansel spoke with Miyatake. It had been a week since Ansel had stood above the camp. From the watchtower, it was difficult to distinguish the people inside the wire. Was that by design? Ansel had his lens. He’d taken photos here and there and now looked out at the camp as a photographer would.

Right then through his viewfinder, Ansel saw Nishimura take another case of something from the camp grocery shop. For a week Nishimura staggered in and out of that store always taking with him case like the one he carried out now. Ansel looked to the horizon line, cut in two by wire.

Below, life went on. And were it not for the fence, and were it not for the wire, there may be no difference here from the rest of the country. And this might even have been called home. Ansel was a visitor in this home, scraped up from nothing, in the middle of a desert no one else in America saw fit to live in. And there were church and school and market and community, but this was not home. Tōyō Miyatake would not speak to the man Ansel Adams.

Ansel looked down below. The people did not look the same, but he wondered how they felt. A collective ache mixed with each autonomous sigh. A slow rusting over of one group of human. He wanted to document this American rust. Ansel looked down for the man Tōyō Miyatake. He wanted badly to offer him his camera. He wanted badly to watch him take a photograph. But Ansel could not see him.

At 5:00 a.m. the next day, Ansel returned to the top of his watchtower. He set up his tripod and the camera. He fixed his sky between the rail he leaned against. He wanted to see daybreak from up here. Stomping boots crunched against the ground all along the watchtower. The rustling and cooing of starlings broke the air. The starlings

must settle in trees beyond this place. The day was too dark to take a single photograph at just that moment.

At 5:06 the sun still slept. Miyatake exited his barracks. He walked toward another watchtower. Ansel saw him and whistled to catch the man's attention. When he did, he waved Miyatake over. He exited the watchtower with his gear. He left a photo behind. Below, Ansel took care to assemble his camera and tripod.

Ansel Adams had invaded Miyatake's space all week—Miyatake felt the camera on him more often then he would have liked, more often than he felt the guards' eyes. It was, he assumed, how the man showed some care, perhaps the only way he could since Miyatake kept a careful distance. It was not that he did not trust the man. Ansel had been kind, in his own way, even if perhaps a bit too casual, but not in any harmful way. A lack of understanding, that's all. Though that seemed enough to create distance. When does a lack of understanding become a crime? Still, Ansel took his pictures, and more often than not, Miyatake scurried away when the chance presented itself. The camera stood directed at him. This time, Miyatake walked toward the camera and the man standing behind it.

"How long have you had this?" Miyatake asked, sitting down against the watchtower, and admiring Ansel's camera. The man took great care—Miyatake admired that.

"I'm not quite sure. It's done me well. It's not all that old. Would you like to try it out for yourself?"

Miyatake shook his head. "No. I wouldn't know what to do with it." He stepped away.

"That's likely not true, Tōyō." Ansel smiled. "But as you like it. If you feel the desire to test your finger, let me know. I think I've had this camera about six months. Almost broken in now. You'd take well to it, I'm sure," Ansel said.

"It's been six months," Miyatake said.

"Since I've had the camera, yes."

"No, since I've been here. I spoke to your friend the other day. The director," Miyatake said.

"Ralph? How is he? I haven't seen much of him. He's busy, from what I can tell. As am I."

"Yes. He's well," Miyatake looked at the camera sitting on top of the tripod between them.

"What did you see him about? What did he tell you?" For a short moment, Ansel's grin faltered. He listened.

Miyatake spoke with Ralph about the box camera he'd fashioned, and about the lens his son smuggled in for him. Miyatake requested permission to photograph the

people of the internment camp. Ralph told Miyataka that, yes, he was free to do so, free to open a studio. Miyatake no longer needed to sneak a photo or his camera. “It’s all cleared,” Ralph said in his office. “There’s just one thing. You’re free to set up the picture and camera as you see fit. But someone else actually needs to take the picture.”

“Take it? Someone else?” Miyatake said.

“Someone else has to—“ Ralph started.

“Click the shutter.”

“Someone who is not—“

“Japanese.”

“Not an internee, yes.”

“Miyatake? What did he tell you?”

“It has been six months, Ansel.”

Ansel experienced nothing akin. Still, he tried.

“I went through something like that. Once. Not in any comparable way, but something this reminds me of anyhow. This was in ’36. I was on a shoot for the U.S. Park Service. They contacted me and put me on a plane to West Texas. Now, I wasn’t shooting anything out in Texas, but they needed me out in a little New Mexican town called Carlsbad, for the caverns. The El Paso airport was the only one that could get me closest to this site, so that’s where I landed. I had no real intention of staying in that

desolate city. El Paso, at first sight, made no sense to me. But there I stayed, trapped in a hotel room because my trunk had gone on back to California on the very plane that dropped me off, and I had nothing to do or nowhere to go. Outside, there was a dust storm winding around the city. I watched from the window. In fact, I don't think there was a moment, maybe the moment when I finally left, a dust storm wasn't winding through the city. The city was obscured by its permanence. The birds struggled against the winds. Pigeons. I could see them flapping mightily to get back to their roost. Though I'm not sure why. It always seemed to me a pigeon could take up shelter anywhere. Make any inhospitable place its home. Bottom dwellers made for city streets and gutters.."

"Rats with wings?"

"Disease carriers. Though, maybe I'm looking at it wrong. Maybe I'm looking at them as an invasion when they're actually —"

"Resilient"

"Precisely."

"They are annoying though, aren't they?"

"They mean no real harm. And you get used to them. I'd turned on the radio to the only clear station I could get a signal from, to drown out the winds and the rapping on the windowpanes. Two stations fused into one blasted forth Jazz alternating with Mexican advertising. Like the most natural sound in the world. No distinction of being

spliced together. The Jazz came from where I stood, and the ads came from somewhere, from where I looked to from the hotel room window. The hotel room was nice enough, but I had the sensation of inhabiting a space so inhospitable it was as though I should not even be there. Which is not at all to say that I was unwelcome there. I was welcome. And the people were kind and lovely. I keep calling El Paso a city, but it is a desert. It was, however, very hard for me to understand this, what with all the pavement and structure and people that became the city. And that jazz was constantly interrupted by these ads in a language I recognized but did not understand. And I did not at all feel right standing there in my hotel room, waiting for my equipment to come back from California where they had gone on home without me."

Miyatake sat listening against the watchtower. "Had your equipment been there, Ansel, what would you have shot?"

"Some of the most majestic clouds and sunsets exist over the Franklin Mountains in El Paso, Texas."

Miyatake sighed and lowered his head."Then you should go back some time."

"No, I don't think I will. I don't think I should ever go back there."

The two men stood against the watch tower, one perceiving the scene against the sky, the other stood behind the camera.

A third man leaned over them against the watch tower's rail. His gun clanked. The guard looked down to see these two men. The white man leaned into his camera's

viewfinder. He held the tripod steadily on the gravel, even though there was no fear of the camera toppling over. The guard looked out only at what he assumed the white man, Ansel, wanted as a photo. The guard saw only massive clear sky, a sky he saw everyday. Blue, big, constant. The guard shoved himself off the rail to continue his rounds.

"Have you stopped to look up?" Ansel gazed beyond his camera. Today the Sierras faded into the background. Present, always present, but blurred like a mirage. An abstraction Ansel understood. He did. Miyatake shifted his gaze from Ansel to the northern side of camp. Ansel knew the simple appeal of a human face, of the sloping curves, the mounds and dips on any one person's face. Only a week had passed since he'd last seen Virginia back at home, tending to the children. Her forehead, high and ridged with worry when he packed the station wagon. She did not say she would miss him. She might not—he knew this to be true. He knew her to have become accustomed to the long trips in which she stayed home to make sure the children and finances were looked after and when he watched the ridges in the monolith take form under the sun's shine and glare. He shut the car door, put the key in the ignition, and left his house for Manzanar knowing they remained bound by state line and sky. Ansel tilted his camera upward slightly, lowering the horizon line formed by the peaks in background. He focused his lens on the foreground for a shallower depth of field, throwing the horizon into blur, sharpening the thatched roof of the barracks in focusing on a telephone pole

staked in foreground. The sun shone just behind, the pole slicing the light. The wire cut across the sky.

"Miyatake?"

"You're assuming I have time to look down."

Miyatake watched his people shuffle in dust, then looked down at his watch. His sons had 15 minutes to get to their first class, if they were not already waiting outside the school. Miyatake's paper expected him in 30. The shadows of internees elongated, slowly with the rising sun above the Sierras. He watched the shadows recede into their bodies standing from the California terrain like bas relief flesh. One shadow wobbled. Miyatake rested his eyes here, his gaze wavering with the shade on the ground. At one moment it seemed as though the body, Nishimura, might collapse into his shadow and disappear. He recovered and staggered forward. There was nowhere left for Nishimura to go. Nothing but wire ahead. If the shadow kept on walking the body would likely walk straight into, disintegrating into the gaps of chainlink, coming out in pieces though the other side. A man disassembled. Destroyed.

"Do you know what kind of name 'Adams' is?" Ansel mumbled.

Miyatake shook his head. "A white man's name, I suppose."

Ansel laughed and nodded. "Yes, that's the impression people might have at first. And I suppose it does sound more than a bit American, whatever that means. Well, it's not. Not American, I mean. Not originally. It's English."

"That's not surprising."

"No, it's not. But I'm not English. Irish, actually. Father's side. Though some might ask what the difference is, and I'm not quite sure I could find an answer. Though that's not something I'd go hollering about to Ireland."

"Is there much of a difference?"

"Maybe to some. But. Suppose I were German, or had German ancestry. Or Italian for that matter, it wouldn't change things. I'd be inside here, still as a guest, or a visitor."

"Ansel, I'm not—"

Had Nishimura been clear, he might turn around, realizing he would not be able to get beyond or go through that fence. He'd make the best of it, like the rest of them resigned. What else could he do?

"The internment camps. Internment camps have been built for only Japanese Americans, for safety, they say. But the Japanese are not the only ones we're at war with, Tōyō."

"When did you stumble upon this little revelation, Ansel?"

Ansel Adams did not speak. Instead, he looked back into his camera and up at the sky, where he thought an answer might be written.

"Never mind," Miyatake said. "Let's not talk about that."

And the two men did not talk. And Ansel continued staring through his camera, scanning the space before them. Miyatake followed with his own eyes and wondered, since the two of them looked at the very same thing at this same moment, did they in fact see the same? Ansel offered Miyatake his camera.

Nishimura never stopped walking. Did Ansel notice this man? The man he slept next to for a week.

"Ansel," Miyatake said, watching. "Ansel, get this."

Miyatake had left his camera back in his quarters under his bed beneath the barracks floorboards. Miyatake needed his camera. This moment, what he saw, would exist inside him, forever in flux and forever fleeting. The more he returned to this moment, the more it would tarnish, change. He needed the moment stilled. He needed to stop Nishimura from walking into the fence.

"Ansel."

Ansel grumbled behind his camera, setting the lens, acknowledging Miyatake but paying him little mind. In that moment, Miyatake knew they felt differently about their workr. Ansel took on this assignment begrudgingly, and out of necessity to do his part in the war effort. And he would do it his way, as he should. And for once in his life he saw the need to take a photo of faces. These faces and Miyatake's, as he'd already done many frames earlier during the week, were locked away inside his box.

Ansel watched the sun beyond the Sierras, sliced by telephone wire. A body of clouds softened the sun's glare. The sky held a murmuration of starlings. The starlings looked black, like a common nothing black bird, from where he stood, but he knew close up he'd see a purple chest and deep green body speckled with yellow, and outlined orange feathers on the wings. Something great waited.

Miyatake watched the shadows fly over, merging with Nishimura's shadow. They glided over him, then left the shadow behind. He was slow, but Nishimura would reach the fence. He wouldn't stop. Miyatake looked up. The guard was still on the other side, and by his watch, Miyatake figured Nishimura had enough time to turn back if he did so right now. But he did not stop. And the guard kept walking the perimeter of the lookout. The murmuration settled on the telephone wire.

Ansel took a breath, fixed his eye and steadied his finger. Nishimura, in Miyatake's eye, climbed the wire fence and Miyatake listened for a shot.

William Claxton, the Newport Jazz Festival, 1956:

The Man Standing Behind

It's the tool that you would like to be able to ignore, but you have to have it to convey your thoughts and whatever you want to express …

—William Claxton

William Claxton doesn't worry about apparitions. He's never seen one and, if it's all the same, that's a record he'd like to keep. Out here in the sun, sleazy hot, where Claxton can't shut off the jazz if he wanted to, ghosts should be scarce.

"So do you believe it?" Claxton asks, looking down at Muddy's white leather shoes.

He's followed the guitarist around all day, from set to set, listening to what the man wants, and listening to the man muse. And even through all that walking, through all the soil and grass, Muddy's managed to keep his shoes white white white. Claxton barely has any soles. Pitiable. Shredded up canvas Chucks for the likes of a kid on the streets of California. Oh, right, that's exactly what you are, Claxton. That's exactly all you are, man.

Muddy doesn't look up at him, and Claxton's starting to wonder if he—Claxton the photographer, not Muddy—is the ghost. I am here, right? he thinks, I am standing right in front of this blues legend, picking his guitar like he's flossing his teeth.

"Do I believe it?" Muddy says. "What do you mean, do I believe it? Are you telling me you believe Robert Johnson met the devil?"

"The devil at the crossroads, Mr. Waters?" Claxton says, grinning.

"So you, you believe it, kid?"

"Believe is a strong word," Claxton says. He prefers to believe. Isn't that mostly what makes Robert Johnson interesting? A man coming from nothing and walking right out from his lore? What else could explain how well Johnson did afterwards? Except for his death. Only two photos ever shot of Johnson. And there's something about that photo. You can see the devil in his smile.

Muddy clears his throat. "One you just used. You're throwing around the word 'belief' like you know what it means," Muddy says.

Claxton's clothes feel tight and wet around him. "I think it's a good story. It's a necessary story. People believe it for a reason. Maybe that reason is the truth. Satan trailing you for a deal. There's something to that." A ghost, the devil himself, or just a guy up in front of you or right behind. "It could happen. It could explain some things, if that's what you're looking for."

"What are you trying to say, Claxton?"

Muddy picks at his Gibson as though he picks a piece of lint off someone's shoulder. Muddy slides his fingers down the neck, and across the body, without even thinking about it. "If you consider it hard enough," he says, and a drop of sweat splashes from Claxton's brow to the body of his camera tight in his hands.

Claxton recognizes this sound in this other man's body. That groan of the machine in Muddy's hands even before the sound enters his ears. The guttural crawl

oozing from the stout man's fingers drags Claxton out of the California jazz clubs, out of the cool smoke where he wore an oversized suit as a kid shooting for the first time, lifted his shaky hands up to his face, stretched out an arm to burn his flash bulb for his first ever photo. This Muddy sound throws Claxton out somewhere in the field or on the side of the road where heat rises in waves. The sound, foreign, mythical. Too much for Claxton to handle, to take, to understand. A man did this? This man, doing this? No way. There's got to be something else going on here. There's no way any man can make this sound.

Muddy looks up from his guitar at the photographer standing in front of him, and Claxton's got it in his head Muddy knows exactly what he's thinking. Muddy knows all. But this kid is dead wrong. Muddy's only focusing on his music, on his craft, and how to fun around with this lanky white kid trying to make a name for himself.

"Know how I learned to play?" Muddy says.

He eyes the photographer, knows this scrawny white kid right away—mythologizing me and Mr. Johnson. Muddy shakes his head and laughs. Muddy looks down at the camera and wonders if the camera knows something the photographer doesn't. Will that thing in his hand show him how to play?

Muddy recalls a memory that never took place—not in his lifetime, but in someone else's (hearsay): Robert Johnson recording only 29 tracks in San Antone, Texas. Johnson's got his face to the wall, and strums his guitar for a recorder for the first time,

for the men who allow this man a session. Everyone thinks, what is that kid doing there? What is it this kid can't show us going on on his guitar we haven't already heard? Johnson's sweaty hands unfurling fingers, and everyone swears there's another voice in the room besides Johnson's own Delta yowl. Muddy knows better—that's that boy's guitar, just practice, that's all. Not magic—survival. Nothing mythological to see here, folks.

"Nothing?" Muddy says. "Really, kid? You got nothing?"

Claxton doesn't move. Muddy keeps playing, keeps looking at the kid in front of him, goading him on to answer.

"Yeah," Claxton says. "I believe it"

Muddy stops playing. He looks to the ground. He groans. "You ever listen to Robert Johnson, Claxton?"

"Sure."

Muddy laughs. Muddy never saw Johnson play. Never. Muddy heard what he needed to hear, practiced when he wasn't picking, and, he learned. "I'd say you haven't," Muddy says. "Otherwise you wouldn't be sitting here right here and telling me the devil got to him. That it's all simple as that. Otherwise you'd have heard he met —things you can't—" Muddy's Gibson goes up in pitch. The stout man stops to reposition his fingers lower on the neck. A growl ambushes Claxton, starting inside and

then busting outward. “You going to take this picture, son? My set’s creeping up on me.”

Muddy hasn’t even broken a sweat in all this heat, and Claxton’s drenched.

“We have time, if my company isn’t a problem,” Claxton says. He’s hoping it might be, that maybe Muddy’s annoyed with this kid—that this legend will release this awkward kid, uncomfortable in his own pool of sweat.

“You’re doing fine,” the man says without looking up.

Jesus Muddy, Claxton thinks, you’re lying to me, man.

The man, in suit, dark slacks, white socks, white shoes, fingers his strings and ignores Claxton. Muddy Waters, sitting right there in front of Claxton looks nothing like the only two photographs Claxton will ever see of Robert Johnson. There is something, Claxton thinks, slightly Satanic about that fedora tilted on Johnson’s head, that pinstripe suit, and the way Johnson smiles at him, forever unblinking. Johnson’s fingers—stiff—will never move. Claxton looks down at his shirt, rumpled and spotted with sweat, his armpits leaking. Muddy, looking damned dignified.

Muddy notes Claxton’s unease. Just look at the guy, all it takes. Muddy doesn’t have to read minds to know, and anyway, he can’t.

“Don’t worry, kid,” Muddy says. “No one’s looking at you. Shouldn’t you know something like that by now? Everything about you hides who you are from everyone who might be looking; you can do anything you want.”

Claxton looks away, down at the camera in his sweaty hands.

Claxton was 15 the first time he heard Robert Johnson—it was 1942—and Robert Johnson was already dead at 27. He would've been 32; instead he was 29 recordings-old and will stay that way forever.

Muddy's amplifier feedback. Claxton hears the crackle of a radio and Johnson's high-pitched Delta wails his tinny thin strumming. Claxton, just a kid, wants to know who the second guitarist is and why the man on the radio only mentioned this one man, Robert Johnson. Who is this man, and who is the one playing somewhere alongside him? Claxton was 20 the first time he actually listened, but he swears he still hears a second man standing somewhere behind.

"It's not your fault," Muddy says. Muddy says it to Claxton, but then hums it out. "It's noooot, your faaault," from deep down in his gut and lets the words collide against his throat. "Chet Baker. You heard of him? Yeah, yeah, I know you have. What's his story? He got one?" He laughs. "Look at what I'm asking. I'm asking questions like you ask questions."

Claxton wants to ask Muddy what he means by that, and more and more he wonders about his conversation with this man. Whether or not he's doing his job, the one job Claxton's felt comfortable doing his entire life—trying to make someone else comfortable in front of a camera. He is sure of one thing: this man makes his fingertips

limp. The physical act of holding up and hiding behind a camera. This man makes his bones turn to jelly. Claxton wants to melt into the ground.

"You're fine, boy. Calm your nerves. You're going to need a clean pair of pants soon, the way you're going. You already need you a new shirt."

Claxton clears his throat. "I met Chet in a typical California joint. He was warming up in a backroom."

"And?"

"And we hit it off."

"Why do you think that is?"

Claxton laughs. He clears his throat again, then puts down the camera, to let it hang from his neck. "Chet offered me heroin."

"You take it?"

Claxton jerks his head, looks down at his crummy shoes—both left and right untied. He'll be needing new shoes to replace all the holes and scuff marks. Muddy's are pristine white. Brand new leather. Claxton shakes his head. "I'm only as adventurous as my ear allows, and my eyes let me. I've seen a lot. Which is probably the real reason. But Chet was the first musician to offer me any junk. The only one. This clean cut, baby face with a pompadour asking me if I want a hit. That was something I could get behind. Him being so polite even during this, like, insane wolfish consumption I don't understand."

"Don't you?" Muddy mumbles.

"The guy is good looking. There's no getting past that. The kind of person the camera likes. Beautiful. Gap-toothed and beautiful." One crazy flaw.

"Camera loves a flaw."

Claxton looks up at Muddy. Did he just say that out loud? Muddy eyes Claxton to continue, so he does. "There was this line of perspiration above his lip, and his face glowed. His needle and his trumpet on the chair next to him, shined from the light. Chet was having trouble with the, the, what's it. The elastic band? He was having trouble getting that around his bicep. Too jittery, couldn't keep it still. He asked me for help."

"You give it to him."

Claxton shakes his head, not realizing that it wasn't a question. "I didn't. Didn't even answer. Chet just looked at me looking through the lens and snap. Chet got the thing around him, eventually. I watched him slide the needle in, took a picture when he wasn't looking, and stuck around and watched him split right in front of me."

"So you took the photo?"

"His jitters stopped once he got the stuff inside him."

"You're dodging my question, kid."

"I could see why he might need that stuff, if he was expected to have a steady hand for the instrument everyone outside wanted to hear."

"Could've done the same for you."

"For the camera? I never considered it," Claxton says.

"Wait now. You said he was good looking? You saying I'm not good looking? Because I know plenty of women who would argue with that."

"That's not what I'm saying. The camera knows a looker when it sees one. But you have something else."

"I know what I got. You don't, but that's something else. You said you took this picture?"

"Two of them. A before and during. Never developed them." Claxton laughs and swipes his brow with the edge of his sleeve. "That sometimes happens. Is it hot?"

"I feel all right. Why didn't you develop these?"

"It's not what I do. Just because it exists, doesn't mean we should see it. He's a musician. People went to that club to see him play, not to shoot. Everyone knows anyway. I wouldn't be showing them anything anyone doesn't already know." You sure it's not hot, Muddy? Jesus, he looks just fine.

"That a fact? Who decided that? And I got some weed right here, kid, if you want. I know a hint when it's been slid to me. I think maybe you could use some of that too."

Claxton laughs. "I'm okay."

"I got it if you need it."

"I'll keep that in mind."

"So you just never developed them because you're just a sweet kid? Or what? There something else you mean to say?"

"Can I ask you a question?"

"Can you answer mine?"

Claxton looks down to Muddy's white shoes, thinks about after that set, out in the front of that joint, where Chet, joking around, turned angry and smacked the camera right out of Claxton's hands. *I saw you, motherfucker. Next time, focus on the trumpet.* Claxton doesn't say a word about this to Muddy.

"I think you just did," Muddy says.

"You listen to Chet? California cool?"

"Son, who are you talking to?"

"Sorry."

"Don't apologize."

"Sor—. Yeah, it'll break your heart. You ever meet Frank Sinatra?"

"Wish I hadn't."

"You and me both." The two men share a laugh. "But really, he's not a racist. That's just for show. I mean, Sammy Davis Jr.'s his partner," Claxton says.

"That right? Just for show? At what point does joking about it become real?"

"Ok, Muddy. So when Sinatra sings 'My Funny Valentine,' sounds like shit, right?" Claxton smiles when Muddy lets out a slow resounding, mmmmmhmmm. "All right, so that's not true. He's got a great voice. I know it. The world knows it. Sinatra knows. But when he sings it, it's just this jerk who's with this poor woman for kicks and she's none the wiser, or even worse, he thinks she's none the wiser, because, you know, this guy thinks she's an idiot or something. But when I heard Chet Baker singing that for the first time."

"What? Say it."

"When I heard Chet Baker singing 'My Funny Valentine' for the first time—you know the record, *Chet Baker sings*. You know that voice. Goddamn. There's a fullness in his throat. The kind of sound that only happens when you're about to cry. When you're trying to keep from crying. Swallowing your tears, trying to contain your dignity, the last bits you have, stuck right in your throat before the trembling. Just love and fucking resignation."

"Another guy might say the man's voice is weak."

"Another guy would be wrong."

Muddy looks at the photographer.

That year—1952—wasn't the first time this skinny white kid entered a jazz club. Anytime anyone entered or exited one of these joints, there was a breath as dense as

smog burning to get out. From the first time Claxton saw, this smoke caught his eye. Something supernatural about it.

After a night of class at UCLA, he found himself needing to get away, to be among smoke and sound. Dense. So dense. And good. But somehow, he felt out of place. Uncomfortable in all this darkness, and he wanted this dense sound and smoke—that caught in the light and hung white—to consume him. Some guy Claxton didn't know walked up to the stage. There was a ghost in the room. This ghost on stage, made him uncomfortable to be in his own body, in his own mind, and around all this dark. And then because the ghost on stage comforted him, he felt worse. He shifted in his chair, at his small table, where he sat alone. Claxton wanted this ghost, this guy, to start playing so he could recede into the music. Forget about everything, but most of all himself.

"What?" Claxton says to Muddy.

"Never mind, son." Muddy's brow furrows down toward the center of his face. The wrinkle rests in his mouth, his twisted lips, when he says, "I got to take a leak, kid. Stay right there. We're not done. Not just yet. You stay right there. Watch the guitar. If it's gone, I know it's you. I'll be right back." He gets up from his chair with more trouble than either he or Claxton would like. Muddy settles his guitar gently on the chair. "Stay there." The man smooths his hair back. He tries to walk as though he doesn't need to

empty his old, swollen bladder. Claxton smiles. He looks away to let the man walk in peace.

Muddy's bladder bloats fuller, weaker, than he'd like to think about, so he doesn't, and instead he goes somewhere he wishes he couldn't after all these years. The crunch of gravel underneath his shiny white shoes, the rustle of a body on soil. Now Muddy is little McKinley Morganfield—two years away from the time his grandmother finds him playing in Deer Creek and calls him by his true name, Muddy, Little Muddy Waters—waiting by his Grandmother Delia's side. She's lovely, but he doesn't recognize that yet. Right now he waits with his grandmother inside a shack on the Stovall Plantation. When he grows antsy, McKinley tugs at Delia's dress, shakes his head like he's possessed—a sharp, slick sound from outside breaks time in half and McKinley jerks his head and his nerves. He looks to his grandmother for an answer she won't offer. Delia won't let him out, he doesn't know why. Won't even look at him. She doesn't have to. "Don't speak, child. Don't ask questions you don't want answers to," she says, her back facing him, forcing shut McKinley's parted lips. He listens to her and doesn't ask. Instead, he listens. Delia realizes, this is worse. And, before the silence breaks again, she drags out a deep aluminum pot, a cast iron pan, and an enamel percolator. She sets them all on the floor in front of the boy, and then decides she needs the percolator. Coffee to calm her nerves. Delia replaces it with the tin tea kettle. She hands her grandson a cast-iron spoon, looks at him and says, "All right, little one, make

some noise." McKinley wrinkles and raises his right brow. Delia sees the beginnings of a man in this boy. The man between this boy's eyebrows, veining outward like the crust of blood on flesh. "Don't make me say again, McKinley," she says. And he doesn't. He lifts the spoon, brings it down, and bangs.

Feedback from Muddy's guitar distorts, as though to warn the photographer to wait for the bluesman to come back. The Gibson looks useless on the chair without Muddy, an incendiary myth. Picking up the instrument, Claxton feels the slow retraction of muscles setting everything into motion. Chet Baker's veins still throbbed when Claxton saw him in the backroom. He didn't know this man, not yet—and he didn't know how or when, but Chet Baker would surely die.

"Hey. Hey. Yeah. Close that door, will you, man?" Chet said. "Do you mind, maybe, leaning on that thing, since you're already in here?" That gap-toothed grin on anyone else might be hard to take seriously. On Chet, it offered a charm Claxton couldn't deny.

"Sure, sure," Claxton stuttered. He eyed the trumpet teetering on the edge of a chair. Claxton saw every fingerprint, every smudge Chet's ever imprinted on the brass. Next to the trumpet, the syringe waited.

Chet burned the spoon with his Zippo until it boiled. "Thanks," he said. "You want some?" He smiled. "I'm almost done here."

Claxton was sure of only one thing: the photo he was about to take. He shook his head. He focused his eyes adjusting to the harsh light in this quiet backroom.

Chet laughed, giggled almost. “You don’t use?”

“Sure,” he lied, not sure why.

Chet boiled and laughed. Claxton took a shot. “Look, I’m not judging. I’m offering. You got a steady hand on you?” Chet said.

“What do you mean?”

“Can you tie me off?” Chet motioned toward a strip of elastic hanging against the back of his chair. He threw down his lighter and took up the syringe, drawing from the spoon and Claxton wondered if he could do the same. Chet, spastic, grabbed for the elastic band. His trumpet clanked to the floor. Claxton set his flash down. Chet, mouth agape, did not understand, but kept moving. He rolled up his sleeve, knocked everything down but the needle. He tightened the elastic around his bicep by himself—he saw the camera, but maybe right then didn’t realize just what it meant, or didn’t care. His arm, a road map with veins like it was route-fucking-66. Chet sank the needle into a vein, and Claxton took just the photo he needed.

Chet leaned back into the chair, his limbs falling to his sides, he inhaled deep and breathed. “What’s your name?”

“Claxton, William.”

“Baker, Chet.”

Claxton reached to shake the guy's hand but stopped. Instead, he mumbled, "Good to meet you."

"You with the papers?"

"No."

"Who you with?"

Claxton looked down at his camera, then at his shoes, then up to the fluorescent tubes fixed to the ceiling. "Myself," he said.

"Hey. You hear that? Open the door," Chet said. "Silence. That's us. We're up."

Claxton opened the door for Chet. He left and so did Claxton, who shut the door, leaving the used syringe on the chair. The two walked the long white corridor back out to the club veiled in smoke and dark. Claxton looked down at his shoes squeaking on the tile. They were new, canvas, clean and laced. He followed this ghost down the hall making no noise. Claxton the man behind, and Chet the man in front, and Claxton doesn't know how just yet, but Claxton will make Chet Baker. He will make that face famous. Claxton—the man who watched Chet shed his skin, watched him relapse and keeps it hidden in a camera.

Muddy comes back, takes up his guitar and cradles it against him. "You thinking it all through?" he asks. Muddy groans when he sits. "You considering things someone like you never had to consider maybe, kid?" The man plucks his guitar. "Hoochie Coochie Man" drawls from the amplifier. Claxton knows it. He knows that stop-time riff

isn't Muddy's; he knows "Hoochie Coochie Man" isn't Muddy's. He knows there's another man behind all that, somewhere who wrote it. But Muddy's made that song his.

The Hoochie Coochie Man. That's a myth, right? Does Muddy know it? Does Muddy know who that man is? The one standing behind. As far as Claxton knows about, Robert Johnson had no intention of making a deal with the devil out in the Delta Crossroads. But maybe that wasn't true. Did he wear his pinstriped suit when he walked out there all alone under the Delta sun? He carried his guitar, almost dragging against the road. And Claxton's almost sure Johnson hears the drag of something against the tar. It's not his guitar case, he can't feel any friction, but he does feel some heat. He looks up at the sun boasting rays down on Johnson. The smell of something ripe, burning flesh. He does not see the three bodies hanging off to the side in a tree.

"Son, you needing any help this afternoon?"

Johnson stops as soon as he hears a voice he doesn't know but feels he should. The crunch of gravel subsides. Johnson glances to the side for a shadow. He flinches at the sight of only shine. Behind him, a man tilts his hat, nods, and waits for him to speak when he asks, "Do you play?"

Johnson regards the man. Looks at a face he can barely make out underneath the shade of a wide brimmed wool hat. The man should be sweating. "Not well," Johnson finally says, looking down the flatness into a horizon line where the road splits and disappears.

"What you looking for, boy? What you need? Make a decision."

"I need a little kindness."

"Good luck on that one. You know how many are singing that song? Try again."

Johnson doesn't speak. He walks up between the forked road, looks into the distance, a flat scape forever into nothing.

"I can do you a deal right here."

Johnson turns to look at the man, careful not to look at the road below him. He does not want to see what he can't see, the shadow that should be right at the man's feet.

"What kind of guitar you got there?"

"The only one I've ever had."

The man grins. "That'll do you just fine."

Johnson looks up. A whiff of something still lingers in his nostrils, the back of his throat. "Do you smell something?" he asks.

"Just fire and brimstone, boy."

"What?" Claxton says.

"I said: Hell, if I could make a myth out of me—" Claxton watches Muddy Waters speak with his lips, close his eyes, and put his fingers to cords so that "—I might just do it. I just might do it. But there—" Claxton's ears prick up and he sharpens his eyes, and the camera "—wasn't anything coming out of that boy's fingers but practice

and pure laziness. That guitar got him out of picking—“ feels heavy against his palms. “And I’ve met the devil everyday of my life. There might be something to it. Maybe that’s why I learned the way I did. But I learned. Believe in that. It didn’t just happen.” Claxton holds the camera up to his face, places his eye against the viewfinder, and looks through the aperture. Only the aperture “—got Johnson out of any proper kind of job. I can’t say I—“ keeps Claxton from seeing Muddy as he should be seen. “—blame him. In fact, I’m pleased he did. Helped me too. But the kid was a liar.” Muddy Waters sits in the sun and the shine leaves his forehead, his cheekbones as white as his clean leather shoes. Claxton sees a man behind, a man Muddy hasn’t noticed — “Can you blame him? I mean, can you blame him? I can’t —“ the apparition standing to his left, behind —a facsimile of inversion of the stout man sitting down and picking his sound. Claxton sees this apparition, crossed arms, shaded eyes, grimacing down in the heat at Muddy playing a guitar. Should he tell Muddy, or let him keep on talking and playing? Should Claxton save this, frame this myth before it disappears?

Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Mexico D.F., 1960:

A Bitch on the Streets

… every photographer must be living at all times.

— Manuel Alvarez Bravo

When Manuel wakes, the sun crowns the city scape outside his window. Early morning dusts the streets in blue and silence. Manuel looks out the window from his bed, sheets pulled below his eyes. This is a Mexico. Mexico is somewhere. He remembers a Mexico somewhere against these walls.

Condensation slides down his bedroom windows. The slow creep of doors and feet following the tilt of the sun—Huitzilopochtli—light up Manuel's senses. He looks to his wife, a wife so white the morning dust envelops her as though she herself were born blue. Manuel nudges her, uncovering her body from the blanket they share. She pulls the blanket up toward her chin.

"Doris. Voy a empezer el café, mi amor," he says. His voice trembles from waking. Dew on the window slides. Doris does not stir.

In the shower, Manuel lets the water pelt the top of his head. He leans, lathered and useless, against the shower tile, waiting for clean instead of cleaning. If yesterday were today. Stop the flow of time. Once out, dried, he dresses in a linen suit, combs back his hair, smooths his long mustache and looks to the mirror. Somewhere on those walls —Manuel Alvarez Bravo.

Manuel heats water on the stove. Mesoamerica shrouds the kitchen. Doris, curator of the Teotihuacan Hall at the National Museum of Anthropology, uses the table to display her research and clay figurines. Ruins, a mask Manuel does not recognize, a dog bloated and pregnant, Coatlicue and her deformed twins, Quetzalcoatl and Xolotl.

Doris reasons—Manuel's heard it all before—that the best light in the house filters through this large window, so she needs this spot to work. He abides, concedes. Manuel is only a guest in his own home. A newspaper and two speckled enamel mugs wait on the kitchen table. A large format Graflex camera, placed too close to the edge, as always. He glares at the mythic past, invading his space week after week, and wonders how long before he and his Graflex fall off her edge completely.

The tea kettle shakes when the water simmers, metal on metal while he grinds a cup of arabica coffee beans in a stone pestle and mortar. Ground down, used. Coffee dust rises—he breathes in an aroma sweet like morning, gritty like dirt. Manuel drops a cone of piloncillo into a copper pot, a flaccid and useless pyramid rolling back and forth on its side in the water.

The kitchen window frames an alley behind the house in panes, in bars—and Manuel, merely a guest to this prison. The coffee simmers and Manuel sniffs the air like a dog.

Twelve years ago, Manuel called Lola his wife. Thirty-three years ago, the two photographers began sharing the same bed. Lola. Dolores—her name spelled their demise.

Lola kept Manuel's name. Lola Alvarez Bravo. His city and the world forgot the name Manuel Alvarez Bravo. His name echoes along the streets the way he walks them —as a ghost, a two-dimensional something, a myth no one talks about or remembers. The same way he walks along the halls of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. A professor. Just a professor. A professor without a name.

Doris sounds like Dolores, if mumbled or slurred. Lola's success came right after Manuel and she separated, something Manuel tries not think about. The implications of that—he tries not to think about that. Her name superimposes itself on his name. She's reaped success in an industry he taught her. His name, his craft. Is there anything he has left?

Manuel grabs the clay figurine of Doris' pregnant dog—Xolotl—and remembers when he was part of history.

Manuel pours crema into his coffee, and watches white penetrates the dark surface. He inhales steam. His pores wake. Falta algo, he thinks, something is missing. What he needs waits for him in the bedroom. Manuel switches the bedroom light on, looks to his wife to make sure he hasn't disturbed her, looks for his items, then shuts the

light off. He grabs his house keys and tweed cap. In the kitchen, he tops off his café con crema, rolls up his newspaper, nearly knocking over the camera on the edge of the table.

Una concha de vainilla, a vanilla concha para mi, y una pedo de monja para Doris. And if not, a few cherry empanadas should be enough.

Outside, downtown moves on with or without him, crowds him against his front door on Luis González Obregón Street. Cyclists speed past, men and women set off to work this Friday morning, and children dressed in uniforms make their way obediently to school. They leave him behind, a man plastered up against the wall of his building. Manuel locks his front door. He can afford to take his time. This morning, he has nowhere to go. His office at the National Autonomous University of Mexico waits 'til Monday. The old professor walks up his street through his city, holding his mug of coffee, careful not to stain his suit.

It's nice just to see the living among these winding streets, he thinks. It's good the gunfire ceased.

His streets, littered with murals, tarnished with grime, ensconce him. He remembers who painted these corridors. All these walls. He knows just by looking. The strokes, the thickness and roughness. The colors fade under an unforgiving sun, but Manuel's memories remain intact. He keeps the photos of his friends to prove he was there. Something to show for.

A cyclist races past the old, irrelevant professor of photography meandering downtown like an eccentric. Manuel leans against a brick building looming, held up by arches and spires of the New Spanish Baroque. The Secretaría de Educación Pública. Inside the Secretaría de Educación Pública each of Diego's strokes pulsates from the inside patio to the streets of D.F. One-dimensional bullets and gunfire,every brush stroked, pulsing against Manuel's palm.

Diego painted this mural before he married Frida. Unlike most of Diego's later murals, Frida exists nowhere on these walls. Frida kept her name and knew greater rewards than Rivera. But at least she left him his name. She was the more talented, of the two. Frida, vieja loquita. Is Dolores?

When Lola met Manuel, she had no interest in photography. But he taught her everything she knows. He allowed her to assist him in the darkroom. Manuel glanced her leaning over the developing trays, watching the photo sharpen, darken, come more clearly into being. Soon she wanted to borrow his camera. Often, he refused—No tienes nada que la manipulación de mi cámara. What if he needed the camera right then, in the moments Lola held it in her palms? When he barked this, she always laughed—Puedo controller esta cámera como controlo tu pito. You don't need to worry, mi corazon. Soon, Lola took over.

And she was right. Manuel taught her well, taught her to know when to adjust just by looking. Everything. All of her talent and success she got from him. Their photos

might as well be from the same photographer and eye. Lola's lighting, his lighting. Her framing, his framing. Her composition, his composition. His fame, when he had it, was not hers, but she enjoyed his fame. Now, that she's away from him, Lola enjoys her own fame.

First Diego painted lovely Frida; then Lola captured Frida's image in a photograph. And Lola found fame. Lola's photographs encapsulate Frida more accurately than Diego's renditions. Manuel realized this from the start—but kept it to himself. It took a few years before anyone else acknowledged Lola's talent.

By the time Manuel reaches a mercado, he's emptied his mug of coffee. He tilts his head back, reaching for a sip with his tongue, but it's no use. All gone.

"Excuse me," he asks a woman at a table selling cafe de olla, cafe con leche, and chocolate, "can you top me off?" Manuel taps the empty mug on the table.

The woman, face dark and craggy, looks up at him arching her brows. She must recognize him, he thinks. Manuel smiles. "Por favor?" he says, and taps the mug once more.

The woman looks away from him, readying her ladle.

"Dos pesos," she says.

He does not expect this. He puts the cup down on the woman's table to reach deep into his trouser pocket, where he thinks some loose change might hide. He places two pesos on the table.

“Do you know who I am?” he asks.

The woman’s sloppy pouring almost spatters his suit with cafe con leche. “A customer is a customer,” she says. She hands him his cup so he can leave.

He grumbles behind his mustache, moist with coffee and milk, “La vieja perra.”

Coins clink in his pocket. He didn’t think he would need the money, but surely enough remains to buy some pan for Doris.

Besides the bustle of the mercado, the scenery itself could be a mural. Each stand pushed against a building, bright with fruits, foods, and sugars mimic the painted scenes on the walls covering this city. Pan dulce pointilism. He walks along eyeing the sweet breads. If he worked in color, this would make a masterful photo. But no camera. A few coins and only himself.

“Cuánto cuesta?” he asks. Nine pesos. All are nine pesos even. He moves through the stands without checking his pockets.

Earlier this year, the painter David Alfaro Siqueiros attacked Adolfo López Mateos, the president of Mexico. Siquerios paints in prison now. Siqueiros paints. Manuel cannot find space for his camera on his own kitchen table. Siqueiros sits in prison painting, and his paintings sell. Manuel teaches photography as a university professor in the District Federal. And his former wife enjoys her own fame.

A man and a woman—both on the older side, achey, stiff in their movements, dark skin and hair, baked from sun—argue with each other behind their booth where

they sell empanadas y nada mas. Their arguing heightens. The man rolls his eyes at the woman, shakes his head and turns away. She throws an empanada at him, calabaza by the looks of the orange oozing out when it hits the ground. This also would make a decent photograph if Manuel worked in color or held a camera. Instead, he snags four cherry empanadas, oozing with syrup, listens to the coins clink in his pocket.

Down a ways, he asks for a bag from a different woman to put his pan inside.

He settles at a bench on the square, just away from the mercado. Manuel watches a kit of pigeons waddle. They peck at the ground for feed. Meager findings. Not like Manuel's small victory. Take that, palomas idiota. He bites, chews and smacks, slurps at the syrup. The sugary red drips to his brown oxfords, his mustache doused. He laughs at the pigeons fighting for peanuts and then feels a crunch against his tongue. Three quarters of a cockroach—the head bitten off by el pinche professor—wiggles, wriggles its demise, and a fuck you to Manuel. He spits out the wad of crunchy gunk onto the square, where the pigeons crowd around his feet. He kicks at the winged rats. He throws the remnants of his empanada at them and thinks to do the same with the three left in the bag. Crunchy surprise in their centers.

No no, he thinks. I bought these for Doris. They may still be good. And if they're not, she should appreciate that I tried.

A dog watches Manuel from across the square. The dog tramps near. Its nails click against the cobble and its ears retract to the reverb of the city off the walls. The dog

slinks and her nose flutters on the scent. The city smells clear as rain, as the lake underneath. Her belly swells. Ripe. She sniffs the ground. The kit of pigeons oblige when she cuts through, as though she reigned for ages and they must show her some respect. She lowers her head to the wad of shit Manuel spat. She licks at the empanada. A Xolotxoljoitzcuintli by the looks of her, slick, wrinkled, disgusting. The dog's teeth protrude from her slackened maw around the wad of gunk on the ground. The bitch at his feet. In an instant, he wants to kick her away, smack her hide. The elongated neck, the curvature in the back, the tuft of spiky fur just above her brow bone. But then, Manuel thinks—she will do, for all the years I have left. And the two, the bitch and a man this man used to be, look at each other.

Then she is gone.

Manuel watches the swollen belly and ass scamper away. Manuel kicks a pigeon away from the remaining crumbs, and leaves with his mug and bag of pan. When a taxi cab nearly runs him down, he heckles the driver and hops in.

"To the University," he says.

The cabbie starts the meter.

"Pendejo, you nearly killed me."

"You should be so lucky, vago. Where'd you say?"

Manuel sips his coffee, then mumbles into the mug, "The University."

"Right away."

Manuel collapses into himself. “Would you like an empanada?” he asks

“No, gracias.”

At the university, Manuel wanders into his department. Only the young secretary sits present. She barely looks up to receive him.

“Buenas tardes, Ingrid. How are you?”

Ingrid flutters her dark eyelashes at him, smiles as though she doesn’t know how, and goes back to reading her newspaper. She scratches her thigh, exposed by her orange mini-skirt.

“Any calls?”

She shakes her head.

“Is there any mail for me?”

She shakes her head.

“I don’t have my keys.”

Actually, he might have his keys with him buried somewhere in his trouser pockets, but between the cup and the bag of bread, it’s too difficult to check, and Manuel would rather watch Ingrid tear herself away from her newspaper for his sake. Her skirt, stiff tweed, forms around her behind nicely while she walks. Her calves contract in her heels.

“Gracias, Ingrid.”

She walks away, mumbling, “De nada.” Manuel hears the rumple of the newspaper fall back into her young hands and he wishes he were that very newspaper. He walks into his office, sits at his desk, and feels like no one. He feels the cameras on the shelf behind him looming. The shelf may topple onto him, or worse, each camera ,au click at the same precise moment and forever lock him into the viewfinder. just as he sits at his desk, doing nothing. And the film will bear the name Lola Alvarez Bravo.

“Ingrid!”

“Professor?”

“Get me the number for Lola Alvarez Bravo.”

“Your ex wife?” Ingrid shouts. Manuel senses the young woman’s nose wrinkling. He preferred not to call Lola his ex wife, just to call her by her name, by his name.

“Yes, her.”

“You don’t have the number?”

Why would he have the number? Perhaps he does, but he can’t be bothered to remember. “No,” he says. “Just dial the operator and connect me when you’ve found her. Don’t tell her it’s me.”

The newspaper crumples and Ingrid sighs. The receiver clicks and Manuel waits to be called upon and connected. He readies his hand over the telephone.

"Professor."

"Yes?"

"Your ex wife on line one."

"Thank you, Ingrid."

Manuel closes his door then picks up the receiver. He can hear his wife breathe behind his name.

"Hello?" she says. "Hello? Is someone there? Did someone wish to speak with me?"

The sound of her breath leaving her body sounds like his breath. This breath has a name and it is Alvarez Bravo. This breath has awards, awards, awards, and a camera. He hangs up, locks his door with his mug and pan in hand, and saunters over to Ingrid's front desk."

"How can I help you, Professor?' she asks.

"Tienes feria? I took a cab out here, but I have nothing on me."

Ingrid looks up at him, and for the first time, Manuel wants her to look away.

"Do you know how much I make in a week, Professor?"

"I'm good for it. I'll pay you back. Or I'll have to hang around until my wife can pick me up."

"You can't take the bus?"

"No, I can't."

"Muy muy."

"I can't. I could be mugged."

"Who would mug an old trampa like you? Besides, you don't have money on you."

"Ingrid, it's the principle. I'm good for it."

The phone rings and Ingrid puts her finger up to hush the old professor. "One moment," she says into the receiver. "There's a student who's wondering if you're in today."

"No."

"He told me to tell you, 'No.'" Ingrid smiles into the receiver, looking straight at the former photographer, current professor. She hangs up. "She's on the first floor. She's rushing up to see you. Payback for this. Don't tip." Ingrid slips 1000 pesos across the desk and goes back to reading. Manuel slides them into his trouser pocket and closes his office door.

So this is it, he thinks. I've been relegated to an office within the confines of academia, with a sadistic secretary and her nice young ass. There's nothing more for me to do. So I teach. He stares out his office window to look at the city that used to care that he photographed its shifting spaces. He frames the scene perfectly with just his two eyes, but takes down one of the cameras on the looming shelf beside him. He looks in the viewfinder to see if his instincts are correct.

They are.

Of course they are.

He snaps the picture, even though he knows it's not spectacular under his name or anyone's but Lola's.

Then he turns the camera around and takes three pictures of himself just standing there. He must look weighed down by his stained linen rags inside that camera, inside those irrelevant photos.

When he hears a knock he turns around to ready his camera. A pregnant young woman opens the door—he clicks the shutter and freezes her on film without looking through the viewfinder.

"Professor Alvarez Bravo?"

"Affirmative. Have you come to contest a grade I gave you? Have you come to demonstrate a rebuttal of some comments I gave your photo during a workshop? I can assure you, I don't remember the photograph you took for workshop, I don't remember your workshop, and I surely do not remember you, my dear. I have many students, and many more in these years I've been teaching. I cannot remember everyone and I cannot remember every photo, lest it made such a beatific impression—and trust me, it did not —so you'd might as well turn around and accept the grade. My mind will not change."

The woman grins. She rubs her belly over her belly button where the umbilical cord likely tugs from the fetus inside.

“Did he kick?” Manuel asks. “Does the little man want a better grade for his mother? Fine, I’ll do it for him. You’ve got an A. Are we done? Are we done, young man?” Manuel speaks directly to the belly.

“He kicked the entire time you spoke, Professor Alvarez Bravo.” She steps fsrther into his office. “How do you know it’s a boy?”

“I’ve had many wives and thus many children. I can tell just by the way your belly hangs. You are carrying low. You will have a boy.”

“That’s a wives tale. It could go either way.”

“Of course it could, there are only two sexes, dear. Though really, we’re all men. The clitoris is a second-class penis, stunted by hormonal processes so the fetus remains a female. They look exactly the same, but one is much smaller. You’re a photographer, you should look more closely.”

“I’m not a student of yours, Professor Alvarez Bravo. I’m studying for my masters in Mesoamerican studies.”

Manuel turns in his swivel chair to face the window again so he can roll his eyes politely out of her line of vision. Me lleva la chingada. Ah! that reminds him—Doris. Manuel swivels around to his desk to clutch the bag of pan dulce. With any luck, the cockroaches still live inside the squishy goo in each empanada. The highlight of his day rests on Doris’s bite.

“So, what can I help you with?”

"Not a thing. I wanted to come speak with you and express my delight that we share the same campus, along with the same city and country. I've known your photos for years. My father's a great admirer of your work and would often buy your photos when he could. There are even a few of your books around the house. He stopped buying when it seemed you'd stopped shooting. He will be very pleased to hear you are working and lending your eye to students."

"Do you shoot?"

"Not at all. I prefer to look at photos. No desire whatsoever to take them. My interests lie elsewhere and for me standing around taking pictures always seemed frivolous. I probably would not have the talent for it, in any case. "

If only Lola had assumed the same charming self-deprecation as this young woman.

"My dear, that's lovely. Many thanks. Tell me, are you on your way out?"

"I'm sorry?"

"Oh, no. No no. I'm sorry, you misunderstand. I mean, are you leaving campus? If so, do you think you could offer this old photographer a ride home? My ride is unavailable, and my wife waits on me. I've bought her some sweets." Manuel shakes the bag and smiles. "We can speak more, and you can tell me about your father."

The woman steps back. She rubs her stomach.

"I'll just let Ingrid know I'm leaving. Would you mind waiting for me down in the lobby of the first floor, please?"

Manuel thanks Ingrid again for the loan, and five minutes after the pregnant student leaves, Manuel slips out of the department.

When Manuel asks to get out of the woman's car, he sees the bitch—the same one with the same swollen belly—crouches to give birth in an alley.

"Let me off here, dear. Thank you so much. Regards to your father and family and the boy." He slams the car before she can say a word. She drives off. He's left three streets away from his own house, four blocks down.

Manuel watches the spectacle at his feet and the bitch watches the spectacle above.

The bitch lies against a pile of garbage—old newspapers, shattered green glass, an eaten apple core—a puppy crowns. The bitch's body opens, slick and gaping. She heaves in silence, closes her eyes and waits for the puppy to pass. A dark blob encased in placenta. Creación. Manuel kneels down to pull the puppy from his mother's slime. The bitch growls, so he backs away. The puppy slithers inside the viscera, pricks the skin with his paw, and crawls out. The bitch licks the remaining fluid off her pup's fur, licks him clean until he squeals, then leaves him to the garbage to give birth to brothers

and sisters still inside her distended belly. Manuel, in awe of her quiet commitment to these puppies, stares. She heaves and stares up at him.

She licks away the residue of each puppy and each birth is a success but the last. When she gives birth to a stillborn—Manuel knows right away, the body limp, like a flaccid penis with stubby legs—she tries for ten minutes to revive him, to make him breathe. She licks all the viscera off, rips off the umbilical cord and swallows. The puppies drink from their mother, and the body stays still under her tongue. She nudges him, licks and licks and Manuel watches the licks turn into bites, until the mother devours the pup completely. The others mewl and tug at her nipples.

Manuel leaves them alone so they can snack.

At his house, he climbs back into bed with Doris. "Wake up, dear," he says. "I have something for you." Her eyes flutter open. He leaves the bag of sweets for her and leaves before she takes a bite.

Manuel's camera waits for him on the edge of his table. He rubs the camera like the woman rubbed her pregnant belly. Does he feel anything inside? Is there a kick inside? He scans the end of the kitchen, from the edge of the table, panning over Doris' Mesoamerica, the little Xoloitzcuintli statue at the end, and to the window he looks out of every morning. The window he wants to break free from every morning. Does he feel anything inside? The bag rustles from the bedroom. Manuel steadies his camera at the window. He looks through the viewfinder and window and waits. The bitch from the

streets limps into view. No puppies. Her puppies are likely wrapped in newspaper in the alley and the one devoured back from where he came. What is it she's looking for? They've all eaten. What else could she need?

She sniffs the ground and pads her way to Manuel's window. He sees her body barred off by his windowpanes. What else could she need?

Reclamation.

Her name.

Her name as history knows it.

The bitch outside looks at the table where Manuel sits against its edge. Both of them stare at Mesoamerica. At what it used to be.

Not just xoloitzcuintli, but Xolotl. The god of lightning, fire, and death. The god of sickness, deformity, misfortune. God of fire and misfortune.

Xoloitzcuintli stares at Manuel. Alvarez Bravo photographs Xolotl and takes them both exactly where they deserve to be.

Francesca Woodman, Museum of Zoology and Natural History, 1975:

Inside La Specola

I could be a ghost, an animal or a dead body, not just this girl standing in the corner…

—Francesca Woodman

Francesca stood before museum's oak entrance where fragmented light diffused and dusted her in glow. The light caught in the frizz of her hair, tamed by a French braid. She turned and a ribbon slipped loose from her tresses.

"You'll wait for me?" she asked. Francesca clung to the filigreed handle, and waited. The girl set her eyes on her mother's.

Her mother nodded. "As always. Of course," she said.

The girl nodded back—strands of hair fell about her—and she pulled the door open. The light from inside gleamed and brightened her body. Her mother inhaled.

"Wait," she said.

The girl doubled back—the side of her body closest to her mother in shadow.

"You're forgetting." Her mother handed Francesca a camera and tripod.

A Yashica 2 ¼ x 2 ¼, vertical and rectangular, in a pebbled leather case. She gripped the camera, her fingertips against the body's grain. She stared into the twin-lens camera staring up at her. Convex, with a pink glare cutting across the rounded mounds. In the two lenses, Francesca saw her own face.

"Thank you," she murmured. "I won't be long."

"Take your time. And, darling," her mother called. "If anything, happens, you'll __"

"Yes." Francesca wound the crank to the roll's first frame, and listened for the click. "I'll squawk."

Her mother watched her daughter leave and the hem of Francesca's dress sway and rustle into the museum.

Inside, Francesca tapped up thirteen steps to the lobby. The museum closed at 4:30 p.m. everyday, and every weekend Francesca wandered all thirty-four rooms inside. In her imagination, she saw photographs exactly as she envisioned she'd take them, already shot and developed. During one visit on her fifth consecutive weekend, a young guard smiled at her, she gathered out of recognition. Francesca smiled back, out of politeness. When the guard spoke, she thought nothing of his pleasantry and hoped she herself had implied nothing more. He asked about the specifics of her interest in zoology—or was it anatomy?—confided in her that he was not especially interested in taxidermy, skeletal structures, and wax anatomical models morbidly ripped open to exhibit spilling human innards, and that, actually, he found them unsettling, repulsive, and didn't she agree.

Francesca was reminded of their conversation when she reached the top step where the guard now stood. She was, she remembered saying, indifferent toward the anatomy of models, but did not think them morbid. "Maybe it has something to do with

you," she said, attempting to move along the conversation and continue through the museum on her own. What, you're calling me morbid? he'd said. She, flustered, reproached "not at all. Only, just, well, they're just objects. Perhaps you're seeing something in them that isn't there."

The guard stood at the top step, hands in his pockets, rocking back and forth on his heels, smiling. Francesca smiled back, now feeling it her duty, though she recognized the desire within her now that the camera rested against her fingers. She envisioned herself filtered through lens and vitrine and nothing more. She slackened her smile, worrying what the guard might make of her lips.

"I didn't think you'd show," he said.

"Why?" She was the one who enjoyed the museum. No one paid her to be here, or to visit. She was, after all, the one who'd broached the subject. Is it possible to come in after closing? Is it possible you could show me around? She knew what she was doing, and now, she thought he thought, so did he.

The guard shook his head. "Which room?" He leaned in closer to Francesca, and she—careful not to lose her footing on the step behind—inched away.

All along she'd kept Room Eight in mind all day, all week, since she'd first visited the museum. The widest space. A Carnivorous Room. One of a few, and one of fewer exhibiting fossils of extinct species. She had a skull in mind. The skull of a Canis

dirus. It moaned for her every visit. She heard the reverb rattle against the teeth, against the vitrine locking the skull away. Away from her.

"I'd rather just…" she said. "May I just look around on my own? I thought I'd just walk and see what strikes me. Is that all right?"

Francesca edged her way past the guard, toward the thirty-fourth and final room. She didn't turn around—didn't want him to think she'd like him to follow.

The last ten rooms contained wax anatomical models. He wouldn't dare, she thought. Each model on display was crafted using real corpses as templates, eviscerated for medical research. The duplicates lay as sinister renderings of the Baroque paintings they imitated—something the guard mentioned. These models made gruesome the ethereal. They give him the creeps. It must be their eyes, Francesca thought. It must be all those eyes on him when he walks through the rooms alone. And he can't stand it. No one can stop them from looking. Francesca drifted along the perimeter, studying anatomical illustrations hung on the room's walls.

Room Thirty-Four displayed seven adult models—one on each wall in a vitrine and three supine in the center of the room. Females were stood upright, and the males were cased on the floor. Francesca faced an object whose legs had been crossed coyly at the knee. The stomach had been gutted where the large intestine framed what looked like a shriveled tree, roots and branches veining outward to the eyes of the living. The crossed legs and large intestine concealed an implied wax vagina. Francesca could

practically feel the blush crawling upon Gaetano Giulio Zumbo's cheeks while he stared at the dead woman's bristly pubic hair and contemplated how to elegantly negate the space between the legs. A brown mane of hair dangled against the arms and shoulders of the model. The model's chest opened from the stomach to a cavity reaching its neck. A glow radiated from the model—a stroke of the lighting, or the sculptor's doting eye. Were the model sculpted with breasts, they too would have been powdered round and glowing, Francesca thought. She wondered how the breasts of the woman, who lay dead on a table all those years before, may actually have looked. The glow reached the model's chin and sanguine cheekbones. The face had been molded so that it tilted up slightly, though the object looked down with black empty pupils. Francesca looked up into these eyes, tilting her own face, unaware of the likeness.

"That's an eerie one."

The guard leaned into Francesca. She, so focused on the object's gaze, had not heard the guard pad his way toward her, and only now did she feel his slow hot breath on her neck grazing strands of her hair in disarray.

"I'm sorry?" Francesca said. She turned to him, and when he didn't step back, she looked back to the object. She moved a few steps back.

"This one," he said. "This one in particular. Posing like a Venus. But all blood and guts ."

"I don't need a chaperone," she said. The guard straighten. Did he think her comment terse? "I wouldn't want to keep you from your duties. I wouldn't want you to get into any sort of trouble because of me." Francesca looked to him, let the side of her mouth curve upward.

The guard smiled. His front incisors overlapped, feral, charming. The next pair of incisors were perfectly straight. The guard's teeth and mouth might have come off as crooked to some, but to Francesca, this was one of the few endearing qualities the guard possessed. Perhaps if Francesca had met the guard outside of the museum, she wouldn't be so eager to focus on other things. His smile widened as though something from behind tugged lightly at his scruff. The cuspids were large, curving convex and sharpened to points almost symmetrically, glinting in the light. Perhaps Francesca was wrong.

"Look at you. Considerate," he said. "All right. You don't need me distracting."

When the guard turned, Francesca looked a final time at the model standing before her. The glow reached beyond the neck down to the splayed intestines and the darkness beyond. Francesca heard the guard's footsteps stop. She imagined he turned to take another glance at the girl still in this room. At his silence, she walked on to Room Thirty-Three and his footsteps resumed.

Room Twenty-Seven, Urinary and Reproduction System. This was not the first time Francesca had seen a penis and testicles, or even a vagina apart from her own. This

was, however, the room where she first saw the sex organs. The room was small, adjacent to rooms holding models of the uterus and infants, miscellany and oddities. Outside the museum, her mother most likely twiddled her thumbs or paced the cobblestone street, ready to chastise Francesca, who'd surely beam with photographs locked away inside her camera. Francesca tried to wind the crank of the Yashica again, but felt the resistance of an unused frame against her hands. This roll allowed twelve exposures. There was no room for waste, silliness. Francesca looked down into the display case. She stood her tripod on the floor. She held the camera in her hands and stroked. The camera, too, looked on.

Francesca's mother had brought her to the museum for the first time. Her mother brought her, Francesca assumed, so she wouldn't have to discuss these things, these questions girls have about things too awkward to discuss. When Francesca was thirteen, her mother led her by the hand, room by room, through the zoological exhibit. Mother and daughter looked on amazed by stuffed creatures. Her mother held Francesca's hand and regaled her with stories about the unfamiliar animals, so Francesca may learn their common names and nomenclatures. By the time they reached Room 27, Francesca's mother let go of her daughter's hand to excuse herself to use the ladies room. Before leaving her daughter, she said, *Look around, but do not leave this room.*

Francesca looked at a display case holding seven variants of penis. She had yet to see this many beyond the museum. The camera looked on as well. Francesca eyed the

palm prints and fingerprints of others smudged on the glass. She kept her own hands away.

Room Fifteen, a corridor, housed a third of the world's 10,000 Aves subclasses. They perched and gawked. At the end of the hall, Francesca noticed the guard pace back and forth in the lobby, and look over when, she supposed, he thought she was not looking. Francesca walked to him. The guard fixed his body to face her, set his feet and legs wide, and rearranged his arms from crossed against his chest to his sides, hands in pockets. Here she comes, she thought. Francesca set the Yashica down in front of him to point in the opposite direction, ignored the guard's gaze, and splayed the tripod wide to rival his stance.

She looked down into the viewfinder to busy herself looking through the screen of glass—fussed with focus, and opened and closed the camera's aperture. Francesca watched the white corridor below, rows of birds and birds of prey staring down into empty space. In the viewfinder, Francesca watched herself twirl in her dress. She looked up, away from the viewfinder, and saw only light. In the viewfinder, her dress rippled at her calves. Light hit the tip of her nose, her cheekbones, her cupid's bow. She looked up to the birds glaring at nothing. She looked down to the birds eyeing her. She twirled under the lighting. Her braid came loose, the ribbon in her hair fell, and the zipper on the side of her dress slipped down.

Behind, she knew, the guard watched her. Why?—well, she didn't really want to know why.

Francesca held her breath. She felt something tickle her neck, the ribbon from the end of her braid come loose and dangling. She reached behind to tighten it, but stopped, thinking the guard capable of grabbing her hand or tugging to even the ribbon out, though she knew this likely ridiculous. The ribbon caught and fell against her flesh. He, she assumed, watched it fall with her movements. There is nothing this girl could be taking pictures of, he probably thought, except for the birds, and she can very well see them without that camera.

She walked away to stand in the space where she and the Yashica earlier watched a girl move with ease. The birds ignored the girl in front of them now, flippant, pompous. Her mother had enjoyed them very much, taking in the spectrum of colors and plumage, expressing desire to see them flutter and take off. Her mother worked in oils. Understandable how the richness in color might stir her. Francesca walked to Room Fourteen.

"You're forgetting—"

The guard pointed to the Yashica left on its tripod at the end of the corridor. Francesca wanted badly to hide in Room Eight, in that space with the other carnivores and near the skull of the Canis dirus, its toothy mouth agape in grin, almost pleading to

be shot and captured. *You will need me for that, dear,* Francesca looked to her camera and heard. Yes, yes, she knew.

"—your Brownie," the guard finished.

Francesca grimaced. Brownie sounded so common. Eastman Kodak had not manufactured her camera, so it made little sense to call it a Brownie when it was a Yashica, though in truth a Brownie is exactly what it resembled. But the Yashica was complex. The Brownie series Kodak was a simplified camera for everyone to use, and everyone was a photographer with a Brownie. This was the beauty of it of course, yes, she knew. Fixed lens, fixed meter. Point and shoot. Anyone could be a photographer with a Brownie. But this was not the beauty of hers. Francesca had no real skill, she knew all this, but her camera deserved someone who at least realized its potential.

She walked to her Yashica, where, in the upper lens, she saw the guard reflected, looking down into the viewfinder.

"What is it you see in this thing?" he said.

She looked at him on the little screen of her camera. This is how he looks from underneath. His skin hung, drooping over the camera. He was young and taut but even so, Francesca saw him slackening. She focused on the two crooked teeth at the front, revealed by parted lips, and ignored those sharp bicuspids.

Francesca knew he watched her near, and knew they each looked at the other filtered through the lens and mirror, he likely watching her close in until he saw only her stomach dip and curve underneath her dress.

"I'm only fooling my way through it," she said. She grabbed her camera away from his gaze and folded the legs of the tripod back together. She left the guard at the end of the hall. Her dress rustled and fluttered against her legs on her way down the corridor.

Francesca rushed through the remaining rooms, stopping only for the taxidermic Canis lupus. The Honshu wolf, so small, bared its fangs and growled, though the growl came out as more of a whimper than a true growl. Next to Honshu was Hokkaido wolf grimacing for Francesca's attention. Thylacine looked to walk off somewhere it would never reach. These creatures attempted to threaten the girl; however, their plastic eyes, picked for their depth, emitted an undermining warmth—Francesca could see. Each little wolf could easily sell from the shelves of a luxury toy store. Their eyes tamed the wolves and she would not take any one of their photographs. Francesca walked to the sound of moaning ahead.

The moan stretched from a corner in Room Eight.

Francesca readied her finger. Sunlight fell onto smooth bone, caught on the round of the forehead, the flattened surface of the snout. The eye sockets of this skull remained deep in shadow. And those canines, they snarled at the sun's rays. Fangs

beckoned Francesca to push her hands and face to the vitrine, to maybe crawl inside with the skull, and deep inside the jaw, for further observation; the girl stilled a few feet from the case keeping her from the skull and the skull from Francesca. Her fingerprints from another visit pressed upon and smudged the glass. Though she and the camera were not ready, her finger applied pressure and she felt pressure returned.

The sockets of the Canis dirus paid little attention to the lanky girl standing awkwardly beyond. A regular. The seduction was done. The skull only needed to wait.

The girl unfolded her tripod and stood it upright in front of the Canis dirus. She'd have to work quickly for all she envisioned. She angled the tripod at the back of the skull for a deeper look at that jaw. She looked on knowing exactly where to stand—between darkness and window. She snapped back the latch of her camera to peer into the viewfinder at the skull and the space behind the vitrine where she saw herself lean.

The skull's sockets leered and vacillated between the camera's upper lens. The skull looked at the girl from worm's-eye view, and also looked at the girl without aid.

The girl adjusted the lens, turned the focus knob slowly. The skull watched her fingers—she set the aperture, the shutter speed. They moved from the knob to the side of her body. Her fingers found her zipper and tugged down to the curvature of her hip. The skull watched. The camera knew what to capture. The girl set the timer at twenty seconds, leaving the camera on the tripod, her dress and shoes at its feet. She stood opposite the camera, behind the vitrine and skull. She let loose her French braid, pulling

on the end of her ribbon, already freed. She laced each finger through each strand, let fall her hair to graze and veil her shoulders. The skull did not flinch. The skull did not appear to care.

But the camera saw. The jaw fell open wider. Francesca leaned against the vitrine, stretched out her arms and spread her fingers. She embraced the skull. And the skull could not cover Francesca's face.

Inside the camera, Francesca has twenty seconds. The timer ticks in a space with no bodies. Twenty seconds to compose. She tilts her head. The cheek facing the camera in shadow, the other warmed by sun. Her camera ticks. The timer turns. Behind glass, she can look like the woman in Room Thirty-Four. She can be the woman. Ten seconds. Francesca raises her chin to look down into that bottom lens, past the Canis dirus skull. She lowers her lids, parts her lips, holds the case and skull against her body, and looks to the camera. Seven seconds to be a woman. Francesca listens for the ticking. She looks to the bottom lens. She holds her pose and gaze. She listens. She listens to the tick. She listens to the rising sound of footsteps pad toward, and stifle her camera's shutter.

Cindy Sherman, New York City, 1978:

Nobody's Here But Me

The still must tease with the promise of a story the viewer of it itches to be told.

—Cindy Sherman

When Cindy bought the wig a day ago at Wigs N' Things on 14th for cheap, she thought she'd found the right one. Now, wheeling her grocery cart down the frozen food aisle and scratching her scalp, she's wondering which fleabag hooker on which street she had in mind when she picked this cheap thing. It doesn't matter how it feels, she thinks looking at her reflection on a freezer door; all that matters is how it looks.

This is only the second time in weeks she's been more than a block away from her Soho apartment. She's lived there only a year now, just moved out of her childhood home in Huntington, Long Island. The florescent lighting attacks her eyes. She's colder than she thinks she should feel. Cindy, it's just a grocery store, not Vietnam.

Months earlier, Cindy started dressing as a man just to get around. Pants, leather jacket, a leer behind a pair of shades she hoped suggested a knife in her pocket she wouldn't be afraid to whip out, use on whoever. Anyone. A little stereotypical, but, hey whatever she can do to get her message across. A hairdresser she trusted cropped her hair close, asking, "Are you sure?" Cindy blinked into the mirror at her blonde, curly locks. She thought about all the creepos she saw, or suspected, on the streets. She nodded, then watched her blonde hair fall to the floor. She skirted her locks on the way out, the way all the suits in the city skirted beggars, the homeless, and hookers.

But her new pixie cut wasn't just about that, she reasoned; all those wigs would fit better this way too. Yeah yeah yeah, whatever you want to think—for a while she grimaced every time she looked into a mirror.

Sometimes, like when she's cradled in her armchair back at home and she's capable of breathing slowly, Cindy thinks she has a grip on her line of work. Still, if she finds herself counting the squares of toilet paper, or reusing the previous morning's coffee grounds, she wonders what's impetus for the other—does the focus of my work cause me to act this way, or does the way I act cause the focus of my work?

But now, in the grocery store, this lady's really pushing things. She's done herself up before leaving the apartment. She spends way too much on makeup no one ever even sees in the light of day. It's ridiculous. What's ridiculous is right now. When she placed that wig on her head, she couldn't even recognize herself. The dark thick mound of hair, cut into a bob, frames her face, her high cheekbones. That would have been enough, but she needed to look just right. So she kept going with her face. She darkened her brows, applied a smoky eye, and then widened her eyes with long false eyelashes. Her lips, she's covered those up in a frosted nude. Her clothes are also unavoidably feminine. She thought she looked pretty good in the mirror back at home, but now she feels like a time bomb, like her body is just waiting for some violence. White 3/4 sleeve shirt paired with floral skirt and knee high heeled boots. The boots show, but inside the grocery store and while she was out on the streets, she hides behind a plaid trench coat,

buttoned to the top and tied off tight with a matching plaid sash. Oh god, she thinks, oh god.

She gets nervous just thinking about what she's wearing and how she looks in her clothes. Is the skirt too short? Are the boots too high? Jesus, what am I even doing out here? But she needs these items. Both practically—later for when she makes her breakfast, lunch, and dinner—and also later for work, for the shot she expects to take before leaving. Some jeans, you could have at least changed into a loose pair of jeans, fool.

Her skirt rumples up against her thigh and rises. Oh god, my ass, everyone can see my ass. She reaches behind, feeling her coat instead of bare skin, so Cindy relaxes. Idiot, this food isn't even for you. You won't even eat most of it. Who's she kidding? She'll eat it if it's around just so she doesn't have to go out grocery shopping again for a while. She has more takeout menus than books in her apartment at this point. She started alphabetizing them by type of food—burgers, Caribbean, Chinese, Cuban, Dominican, Hatian, Italian, Mexican, Thai, blah blah blah blah—last night when she thought she heard a scream outside her window and then couldn't go back to sleep. She heard another scream, this time she was sure, when she was alphabetizing all her menus. The damned scream startled her and she tossed the menus in a flurry. She watched them all fall onto the kitchen floor. She fell to her knees, weeping and scrambling to collect the menus in alphabetical order. The one thing she had in any kind

of order in the kitchen, in that whole stupid Soho apartment. She stared around at all the empty take-out boxes and dirty glasses and mugs. She started with the menus and now look. Chaos. The rest of the apartment is ostentatious with clean and gleam. Cindy's in there all day long; it's not like she has anything else to do, but she's been avoiding the kitchen. And that's when she gets an idea for another photo:

> Look at her. Start with the face. Doe-eyes—woeful, bored as all freaking hell. The woman reacts to something only she can see. Mouth, agape, silent. The tongue lifts, anticipates something, but does not (cannot?) speak. Dark, long hair. Blunt fringe, face framing. A trench coat hangs across her shoulders, covering her body mid lean. To pick up a bag of groceries ripped and spilled at her feet. A bag of groceries ripped and spilled at her feet. She leans over to clean up the mess—eggs cracked, day ruined. Look at her—you did this.

Cindy has no idea who the "you" would be—in her case, the "you" was either her or the scream. No, definitely the scream—the scream's fault her menus were all over the floor. She didn't do anything to anyone, and besides, she was locked away in her apartment. Plus, she couldn't sleep, so she'd spend the entire night scrubbing and cleaning her kitchen for the shot she'd take the next morning.

And that morning she did herself up, opened her fridge and cupboards in her freshly cleaned kitchen. Nothing, she found nothing for the photo in her mind. She almost started crying again. She knew if she did, she'd have to reapply her makeup.

Cindy held herself together, grabbed her keys, and left for the grocery store she wanders now.

In aisle 6, canned goods, Cindy picks up a few cans of Campbell's Soup and a package of Morton's Salt. Wheeling around to aisle 7—coffee, tea, baked goods—Cindy notices a group of men stopped right in front of the coffee, right where Cindy wants to be. The stale taste of day-old coffee grounds sticks to her gums (oh right, she needs to pick up some toothpaste too), and these four—Mutton Chops, Polyester Pants, Gold Bracelet, Beer Gut—keep her from another fresh cup. She sighs, returning to aisle 6 just to get to the other end of aisle 7 so she can grab a package of whatever's closest and get out. She's running low, and if she doesn't get some today, who knows how long it'll take before she has another cup of steaming coffee splashed with milk and sweetened with honey. It's easier, she thinks, just to avoid the men rather than to interrupt and force attention onto herself.

She grabs a can of Folgers. Not her favorite, but she doesn't want to waste any time looking for something. Besides, Folgers is familiar. And she needs all the familiarity she can get. Polyester Pants looks over at her, looks away, does a double take because maybe he recognizes her from somewhere, but then leaves her alone and goes back to talking with the others. The group of men laugh about something Cindy can't hear. She leaves the aisle and the four men behind, quietly.

An issue of *US Magazine* stares at Cindy at checkout. The older woman in line in front of Cindy must have a hungry cat back at home. All she's come to the grocery store for are 36 cans of 9-Lives cat food. Cindy focuses on these cans to avoid Goldie Hawn's feathered hair, open-mouthed smile, and giant blue eyes—a lot like Cindy's eyes, hair a lot like Cindy's used to be too, but don't think about that—and she assumes the fuzzy stuffed mouse behind the cans of cat food is to appease a hungry and increasingly pissed-off cat. Better a pissed-off cat to come home to than a pissed-off person. Where did that even come from? No one is even after you.

The lady leaves and the cashier tells Cindy, "Hey, how are you? Did you find everything you were looking for today?" The cashier, just a little younger than Cindy, looks up at her and then looks away to the first item on the conveyer belt. A carton of eggs—this kid better not crack them.

Cindy doesn't answer. Instead, frantically, she asks the cashier kid, "Can you hold off on the eggs? I don't want them at the bottom of the bag." Those eggs are not going to crack before she gets home. She doesn't want to have to come out here again for at least another month and half. Or, realistically, more. Then she asks, "If you were going to beat a woman, how would you do it?"

She's careful not to smile, but also remains conscious of how hard her eyes must look. She's careful not to soften her eyes by smiling. There's nothing about this conversation, per se, that makes her want to smile, sometimes she just does this

unknowingly when she's speaking to a stranger. Something about trying to appear approachable, even if she's the one approaching, and friendly so people may act more accommodating. What a contradiction; why even bother cut her hair? This also, of course, even though she wants everyone to think she's going to shank them. And New York freaks her out. This is the last place she wants to look approachable and accommodating. And tiny. She's serious, and she wants this guy to know.

"What? Like beat beat? Like beat a woman? Or beat some eggs?" the cashier-kid says.

"What? No, beat a woman. How would you beat a woman?"

"Come on, I'm not answering that," Cashier-kid says, punching in the prices, and refusing to looking up at her.

"No, really, you come on. What's the big deal? It's just a question. It's just for research."

"What kind of research?" he says.

Think fast, lady. "For a paper, for a psychology course I'm taking at NYU." Believable. Also believable: Cindy could use a psychologist. Don't think about that.

Cashier-kid nods. "Well, I guess quickly," he says, "and without looking her in the eye."

Cindy looks him straight in the eye, or she would be, but he looks down.

"Are you being funny? You're being funny right?" she says.

"I was trying. Was it?"

"I'd work on it. Can you answer me seriously? I'll just assume you've never beaten a woman and I'll assume you never will and you've never thought about it before. This is all hypothetical. Just for my research. So, if you were to beat a woman, how would you do it?"

He prices a tub of sour cream. He stares off past Cindy, considering her question. He parts his lips and closes them again. Thinking hard, she assumes. Then he speaks. "I think I'd do it with my fists. You know, so then at least it's somewhat honorable. I wouldn't screw around or try to keep my hands clean by using some middleman object, like a shoe or a frying pan." Cashier-kid prices the package of Morton Salt.

A frying pan? What's with this kid? Cindy looks down at the little Morton Salt girl on the front of the package. That little girl always walks alone in the rain with an umbrella, carrying iodized salt—doesn't even make any sense. Her dress is always so short and lifted up by the wind. Nice little pageboy haircut. Silky smooth. In that kind of downpour, Cindy's hair, her real hair, would likely frizz. Cindy scratches her head, accidentally lifting up the wig. Cashier-kid notices but doesn't say anything. The salt's logo design makes no sense, although the navy background does set off that canary yellow. The designers did one thing right, at least.

"I see," she tells Cashier-Kid.

Cindy thinks that, at least, if the little yellow girl is attacked, she can throw some iodized salt in her attacker's face and maybe sting his eyes. Would that work?

"You asked, ma'am."

What? Ma'am? "No. I mean, yes. You're right, I did. I didn't mean anything by that. I was just acknowledging your answer. I wasn't being judgmental or anything. I did ask and thank you for answering." Mid-babble, Cindy realizes she's over explaining herself. It's too late. She stammers on and on and Cashier-Kid smiles at her, at what—she assumes—he thinks is nervousness. She sighs, forcing herself to stop. Cashier-kid laughs. Cindy looks away so he won't see her rolling her eyes. She wonders if she should start carrying iodized salt in her handbag, and all of a sudden wants to throw some in this kid's face, just for the hell of it.

She turns back to face him and tries to breathe. "Do you like movies?" she asks.

Cashier-Kid arches his brow, as though to say: No shit. But he doesn't say that, and Cindy appreciates it without allowing her thanks to show in the form of a smile. All he says is, "Yep."

"Name some?"

"*Who's That Knocking at My Door?*"

"Fast."

"Easy. It's my favorite."

"'67, right?"

Why are you asking? You know the film came out in 1967. You even know it's Martin Scorsese's first feature length film, originally titled *I Call First*. Please, you could teach this kid a thing or two about Scorsese's shooting style and filmography to date. *Who's That Knocking at My Door?* was the first movie you sneaked out of the house to watch in a theater on your own. Cindy was 13 years old. Her parents were guests at a dinner party next door. They'd never know and she had the whole night figured out.

"You got it. That was fast, how'd you know?"

"Good guess, is all," Cindy says, thinking about that night.

The sun was going down when Cindy sneaked out to walk to the theater. She'd shoved three dollars into her training bra. Enough for the movie ticket and a box of Junior Mints. She walked through her town easily enough to get to the theater by the time it grew dark, got in line at the ticket kiosk, and then walked to concessions to pay some pimple-face for her box of candy. When she went inside to her screen, the lights were still on. A lot of older kids, and some adults filled the rows of red velvet seats. Some couples came to watch, too. Cindy walked up the steps, toward the back of the theater, her Junior Mints rattling in the box. She sat in the middle of her row, third from the back, and kicked her feet up onto the head of the seat in front of her so she could get comfortable. The lights dimmed—Cindy popped open the box of Junior Mints, shook just one out—and the screen crackled and popped.

Most of the movie seemed like an excuse for this Martin Scorsese guy to shoot a lot of montage and naked chicks (all right, done in a kind of French New Wavey style, but still), and also to talk about, through Harvey Keitel's dialogue, an obsession with film. Specifically westerns. Yawn. Specifically *The Searchers*. Obsessions, smobsessions and the way they ruin a person. And Cindy was supposed to believe this girl in the movie grew all smitten with J.R. because he talked spaghetti westerns to her? Actually, yeah, okay, she could kind of believe it. And even at 13, that kind of thing from a guy could probably work on Cindy. She paused from popping her Junior Mints into her mouth to listen and swoon at the sweet technical nothings of this long lashed, clean-cut, small-time doofus.

Others in the theater may not have been as impressed. A couple sitting behind Cindy swapped spit. For the most part, Cindy could tune out their wet smacking, involved with her Junior Mints, and the dialogue and music on screen.

The way Scorsese's camera rendered memory—there was something suppressed, achieved through long shots and single shots, in this film. The movie was noir without being noir. No cheesy dialogue—a blonde, but no blonde bombshell. No. This girl was all gums and teeth, and nervous without seeming weak. The girl was only a tool so J.R. could lose grip on his reality, but it was clear she accepted herself in a way the guy couldn't. J.R., dweebed out on movies, hung out with idiots in bars and strip joints,

evaded her questions and was more sexually repressed than the girl. This was a reality Cindy hadn't seen before, until Scorsese took hold of her gaze and forced her.

Cindy sat in the space between the couple's sucking noises behind her, and the awkward couple in the parked car on screen. The hand behind the girl's head. "Don't Ask Me (To Be Lonely)" by the Dubs played and grew louder.. The guy on screen—not J.R.—kissing and kissing the girl. The girl, increasingly unsure. The girl's blonde hair. The girl's frizzed blonde hair. The girl's frizzed blonde hair—a halo of fury tossed around as though this guy's hand. Cindy dropped her Junior Mints. They hammered across the floor. Her stretched out legs fell from the seat. The girl—J.R. could never understand.

When the movie was over, and it was time for the walk back home in the dark, Cindy didn't want to leave.

Back at concessions the same pimple-face closed up, wiped down the glass case of candy.

"You here for more Junior Mints?" The rag he wiped the glass surface with squeaked a streaking noise that grated against Cindy's ears.

"Can I use the phone?" She looked over and motioned to the telephone on the counter behind him.

"Say please." He swung the phone over to the case of candy before she had time to do as he demanded.

While she dialed her parents, Cindy watched the number dial spin back to its original place and wanted to be home. The phone rang and rang, but neither her mother nor her father picked up to answer. She'd have to walk back alone.

"What's up? No one cares about you?"

"It's not that," Cindy said. "I think my ride might be late, or forgot or something. Not sure," she lied. She shouldn't have said anything.

The kid nodded. "You're the Sherman kid up the street, right?"

Cindy blinked. It could be he knew her—almost everyone in town knew or knew of everyone. It was possible. This time, she said nothing.

"My parents know your parents. You don't live too far from me. I can give you a ride if you want, but I'm not done here yet. So, you'll have to wait."

Cindy blinked again. Maybe this kid was telling her the truth. Maybe, even, both of their parents were mingling at the same party, having boring conversations, cracking jokes they thought she was too young to understand, and ignoring her phone calls. Maybe he was lying. But, what could he gain from lying?

The scene in the car replayed in her head. The girl's long blonde hair grew more and more tangled. But Cindy didn't have a lot of options. Either she could get hurt walking back home alone in the dark, or she could get hurt in the car alone with this

kid. Or, she could be completely safe in both scenarios. However things played out, it would take a lot longer to get wherever her choice led her by walking than it would in the car. The anxiety of drawing things out was enough to drive her nuts. Cindy was about to accept and thank Pimples, but he cut her off.

"You're scaring my customers away. If you're waiting for a ride, wait over there." He motioned to a bench against a nearby wall. "If not, scram." Cindy backed up and sat down.

Pimples gave her a ride in a trashed up Crown Victoria, but cleared her seat first so she could sit down. He removed several crumpled and greased up paper bags, a rope, a skillet and soda cans. She grimaced and turned away.

"Watch it with that mug, kid. You can always walk. And what, you never been camping before?" he said. "Buckle up. You're not crashing through my windshield. What you think of that movie? I haven't seen it yet. Who's it? Scorsese? Never heard of him. What you think?"

Cindy did as she was told, and tried not to think about the rope and skillet thrown somewhere behind her.

"Shut up, kid. Let me talk for a second, will you?" he said, laughing. "No, huh? Ok. Fair enough." He clicked on his radio. Static sputtered out of the speakers, then all sound completely died.

Cindy stared out the windshield into darkness. She watched the headlights reflect off all the street signs, waiting for hers to come into view.

Pimples began singing "Who's That Knocking" by the Genies.

When Pimples parked his car in front of a house, he stopped singing, and Cindy spoke up.

"This isn't my house," Cindy said. Though it was her street. "This isn't my house."

"No, I know." Pimples unbuckled himself and unlocked his door. "You're right up there, right?" He pointed to Cindy's house. The front light was still on, which meant her parents weren't back home. Cindy saw cars still parked next door for the party going on inside behind the windows. "You can walk the rest of the way, right? My girlfriend's parents are out and she's expecting me," he stopped, and looked over at Cindy, "for dessert," he finished. "I'm late as it is."

Cindy knew what he meant. She envisioned this guy and his girlfriend necking on the family couch, and, at just the right moment, one or three of Pimples' zits erupting. Cindy grimaced, then laughed. His poor girlfriend. She unbuckled herself from the car seat and unlocked her door. She said thanks and bye and ran up her street to her house.

Cindy smiles at the memory, then checks herself. "Lucky guess," she says. "I like Harvey Keitel. He's subtle. Nice face."

"If De Niro hadn't stolen *Mean Streets* from Keitel, Keitel would've starred in *Taxi Driver*."

"But Keitel plays sleazy pimp so well. And thank god for De Niro, then," Cindy says. She can feel and hear her voice go up in pitch. This sometimes happens. "The moment Johnny Boy walks into frame in *Mean Streets*, the movie's De Niro's. He plants a homemade explosive in a mailbox and runs away giggling and smoothing down his hair. The explosive and the whole film sets off. His. And that's only the first entrance. De Niro's second entrance is the real one. That whole sequence is perfectly choreographed with 'Jumpin' Jack Flash.' Anyone who saw that movie when it came out knew De Niro was someone right then and there. You're full of it, kid." Wait, what? She's gone off on a tangent. This sometimes happens. She collects herself by tugging her wig down with the hanging locks of hair at the sides of her face. She smooths out her skirt, still rumpled a little over her ass. Thank you, trench coat, thank you so much. Cindy thinks about what she and Cashier-Kid are talking about and hopes neither of them are blowing it out of proportion.

"Are we flirting? Is this flirting?" she asks him. She didn't just ask this kid about how he'd hypothetically beat a woman and then let their encounter turn into flirtation. She's pretty sure her body language did nothing to suggest interest in this kid. For christ's sake, this entire time she didn't once allow herself to smile. This would all be

fine, of course, if she were actually interested in this kid, but she's not. And this kid should know.

"What?"

"I'm not flirting with you over Scorsese films. I'm just asking you some questions for my research, that's all. I didn't mean to insinuate anything else by anything I said, or did, or what maybe you thought I did."

Cashier-Kid stops smiling and goes back to pricing items. "Listen, ma'am," he says, "I don't know what your game is, but I don't go around dating cancer victims."

"What?"

"Plus, you're too old for me."

"Oh, don't give me that. Jesus."

"No, it's true. I mean, thanks for the offer. And maybe if you didn't have cancer, I could overlook the age difference. But that's a load of commitment, even if you're not looking for a commitment."

"I don't have cancer, all right?" Cindy lifts up her wig to reveal a thick head of matted blonde hair. Her blues eyes bulge out of her sockets, she can feel her false eyelashes bump against her brow bone and cheek bones.

"So you just wear that thing for kicks?"

It's easier to just say yes than to explain. She'd also probably seem less strange than if she were to say: Why no. Actually I romp around in my apartment all day, and I

mean all day, dressing up in sexy and sometimes ridiculous clothing and making myself up all vampy or distressed like for self-portraits because I'm too afraid to walk out of my front door. "Yeah, just for kicks," she says. It's also kind of true. Cindy Sherman, Just For Kicks—her next series of photographs. She's ready to rip out that salt and dump it all over this schmuck.

"Whatever you say."

"Are we done here?"

"$22.47," he says. "You're the one talking to me."

Cindy writes him a check. Cashier-kid removes the plastic divider on the conveyer belt for the next person in line. He looks to the guy behind and says, "Hey, how are you? Did you find everything you were looking for today?" and Cindy thinks he's already forgotten about her. Just as well. She grabs her brown bag of groceries.

Outside, the sun shines a little brighter, hangs a little higher behind the city skyline. A streak of feathering clouds diffuses the sunshine and gives Cindy's eyes sometime to heal from the brightness earlier inside. Still, she grabs her sunglasses.

Walking down 5th, Cindy imagines she looks like Mary Tyler Moore. Jesus, is that what she had in mind when she bought this scratchy thing? She knows that might be exactly who she had in mind when she bought the synthetic bob paired with blunt bangs. Better Mary Tyler Moore than a hooker. She grimaces against a crowd of suits and morning shifters walking off to work in a hurry and hums along to the tune of:

Who can turn the world on with her smile?
Who can take a nothing day, and suddenly make it all seem worthwhile?

Some suit bumps into her and doesn't apologize. Cindy glares at him, but he's already gone and she's not exactly sure who it was that bumped her anyway, so she ends up just glaring at the back of someone's head.

Well it's you girl, and you should know it
With each glance and every little movement you show it

She'd offer this guy her middle finger, but Cindy doesn't want others to think her finger is for them, allowing the situation to get all kinds of confusing, so she backs down and just keeps moving against the current.

How will you make it on your own?
This world is awfully big, girl this time you're all alone
But it's time you started living
It's time you let someone else do some giving

Soon it seems like person after person bumps into Cindy. This is obviously because she didn't gather herself properly with that first bump and allowed that man to throw her off. Assume that leer, assume that leer, she thinks while jostled in a direction she has no intention of taking. Give it a rest. No one's even looking at you—that has its pros and its cons.

Love is all around, no need to waste it
You can have a town, why don't you take it?

The space around her opens up and people walk past, giving Cindy a moment to breathe and room to maneuver. She twirls, shifts her head from direction to direction

and scratches all the while because of this damn, cheap wig. She tries to figure out the way back to the apartment she hasn't left in so long. She needs a cab. No way is she taking the subway. She knows what goes on in the subway. People piss in this corners. People—oh god, don't think about that. Someone accidentally shoves Cindy again, this time into the railing of a subway entrance, and all of a sudden she's leaning over looking down, watching people come and go into the dark underbelly of her city.

You might just make it after all

No amount of scratching takes care of this itch.

You might just make it after all

All those people move in and out beneath the city so easily, in different shades of neutral, ignoring each other and grimacing. This stupid wig. She keeps scratching and then tugs the wig off her head and chucks it high up into the air. Good job, Cindy, you kind of need that.

You might just freaking make it after all

When her wig, glossy and brilliant this far up, reaches its highest point, individual locks part and flare. Her dark, sultry hair plummets to the subway stairwell. She gasps. No, no, goddammit, I need that. That's the most important element of composition. Her hair lands in the middle of the stairwell, without hitting a single person. No one has stepped on it, yet, and Cindy calls down to anyone who will stop and listen. Someone, please, just get her hair back on to her head. No one, of course, stops to listen. She will not go

all the way back to Wigs N' Things up on 14th to buy another. Not today. Not again. Not for a while, at least. Looking all matted and fair haired in her skirt, she'll have to go down and retrieve her locks on her own.

Cindy runs after her hair, careful not to trip down the flight of stairs. She bends over without considering how far she leans and how short or long her skirt might be to cover her back side. She doesn't care, and she's wearing the trench coat anyway so she can moon the whole city for all she cares. She needs this, and she needs it fast. There's only a bit of garbage stuck in the strands—a gum wrapper, a cigarette butt, something undistinguishable and wet. She plucks out the garbage and places her hair back on her head. A woman with a brief case dressed in a white skirt suit walking past her, back up to the streets, turns around to eye Cindy.

This woman says, "It's a little early to be out working, isn't it?"

This is ridiculous. She doesn't even look slutty. She knows, she did that photoshoot last week, and she was wearing a lot less. Cindy takes a moment to laugh at this idiot, then says with a wide smile, "Not for you, sugar-tits. What do you want and how much are you willing to spend?" then immediately feels bad for saying these ugly things.

The woman shakes her head, rolls her eyes, groans and walks on. Cindy runs up behind her. She taps the woman's shoulder, with the intention of apologizing. But she's met with, "Leave me alone, will you, whore?"

Cindy didn't see that coming. How harsh and uncalled for. The woman in white leaves her behind at the stairwell where Cindy has stopped and the city continues to rush around. She wonders if this woman feels at all bad for calling her a whore. Probably not, but she won't hold it against a woman she barely even knows—bitch.

What the hell was Petula Clark smoking when the lyrics and tune for "Downtown" shimmied into her brain? What woman was she thinking of? Oh, wait, don't be ridiculous, whore. You know some guy wrote the lyrics and music with Ms. Clark's lovely little voice in mind. Well, that makes perfect sense, now. Maybe the Stones should do a cover—bluesy skanky. Then the song might actually sound similar to how it feels, sometimes, to walk downtown.

Cindy sets off for her apartment, swinging her grocery bag. She tugs at the sides of her wig, pats her locks down—to make sure it won't go flying off her head again—and walks to the rhythm of "Jumpin' Jack Flash." Her hair's back on her head, her hair's back where it needs to be. She needs the wig later, and that's what matters. Cindy tugs the wig off her head, holds it in both her hands and looks down. Dirtied up, but shiny in the morning light. The best light to work by. She ruffles her short blonde hair, creating body, and stuffs the wig to the bottom of her purse. Cindy walks on, and pretends she carries homemade explosives in her bag, and everything is all right now.

Kevin Carter, South Sudan, 1993:

In Flames

Inside a voice is screaming, "My God!" But it is time to work. Deal with the rest later.

—Kevin Carter

Crank down the window, hook up a hose to the truck's exhaust pipe, weave it through the open window, sit, relax in the truck, wait and look to the hole seeping you off your edge and remember another woman you never knew run down the dirt road, screaming and on fire. A living effigy—the woman stumbles, wobbles, flails her hands at the wrist, where she isn't imprisoned by a tire, and burns. Others stand by. Watch. Afrikaans and English alloy as if one language. Watch. No one checks until the flames die down. See if the effigy might live.

You sit at the edge of this road, scanning behind your camera. Someone from behind throws a bale of hay on the char—the body buckles under the weight. The bale puts the fire to rest once and for all. Dust, dirt, and ash rise, disperse. You take no shots. You've taken shots before of other acts of necklacing, and there it all is, still. The tire. The gasoline. The halo of fire around a body melting. A black body burned blacker. As a joke? As a scorn? The sequence replays in your mind as though it's one woman, one tire, one fire burning. But you know the same slow burn happens everyday to a different person.

The air around you murks. Breathe. Exhale. Breathe. Then hold.

Do not breath in this woman's remains. Do not atomize. Not one more iota. The wavelengths of light cannot render the burn. The grain of light, cannot remold flesh. What could another photo do the first failed to?

From behind, shutter and snaps. You hear the winding of another frame click into the viewfinder, where this pile of ash is a woman frozen in flames. You cap your lens.

You inhale.

"You out?" João shoots behind, and shuffles to your side. A 200 mm lens invades your periphery before you even see the man behind the camera. João shoots and winds, shoots and winds, shoots and winds, his bespectacled eyes compete with, and then succumb to, the camera's long autonomous orb. The camera almost doesn't need the man. You are that insignificant. You look to your camera, and back at João's. You look at men in uniform on the sides of the road, and you look at their weaponry. The long necks filled with bullets pointed up to the sky. And you wonder: what is the difference?

You tell yourself—one commits crimes, the other archives crimes, and both look for them. So what is the difference?

Just breathe.

You look again at the photo João captured, free of lens, free of framing and any implication of context. Look at the scene before you. A million photos like this. You know, just from watching so often, so absently, at what point skin peels away from flesh.

When a person stops feeling, when mouths scream silence. Remember when you felt pain as though your own. Remember when you stopped feeling. Is that what this is? Or, has the pain become so polarizing there exists no region in you temporal lobe strong enough in your mind to understand this pain? No region on your body for this pain to burn.

Thirty-six frames pulse inside your camera. Context—the lens provides context, enables context, negates context. When moment has edges, boundary lines, we can think whatever we want. We can do anything within a moment's notice.

You can raise this window, open the door of your truck, shut out the fumes around you, and never let anything inside.

"Carter?" João punches your arm. "You out?" He asks, securing another shot in his camera. The sound grates and you feel your skin start to peel off the bone.

"No," you say. "No. Still got a roll."

"Here," João hands you a joint, the local dagga. He's kept it in his breast pocket. "Light it up and take it. I don't need it back."

"I don't need it," you say, though you don't quite believe yourself. You don't think João or the joint do either.

"Don't be a joker. Take it."

Your fingers grip the edges. The round feels right against your finger tips, and you bring it up to your face knowing inside this void exists peace.

Your camera falls against your chest. The thud sounds solid in a way you don't think possible. You inhale and the air fills your hollow.

And you breathe.

When you were 16, your father tried to keep you away. He pulled you to him, to the other side of a street in your neighborhood in Johannesburg, away from two black men coming near. You thought your father wanted you away from them, and he did. You protested, but then your father motioned to the two civil officers in a car driving near. And you nodded. So then, you let your father grab you, take your elbow and guide you to the safety of the two men you saw on the other side.

Your father's efforts didn't matter, and, you found, your father had limits. Edges. And he could only do so much. You did not realize this until years later.

Right now, staring into the hose that oozes the fumes you breathe in, you understand.

You forgive him.

At the time, all you felt was indignant. Your father's avoidance did not work. You needed to be inside this scene on the other side of the street. You needed to be in the middle of it all. You thought by doing so, you would feel. But all that became of you was numb.

You sit in your truck and feel nothing. Do you have the same problem with avoidance, as your father? But you are nothing if not persistent. You are nothing.

So you shouted at your father. Watched the men on the other side of the street fined and beaten. On your side, you publicly shame your father for not acting as you felt a father should act. You thought shouting could solve it. As a child, you thought anger was enough.

"Hey, hey, look straight. Don't look at that," your father said. But, you assumed, the two of you had different ideas on what to do next.

"How can you just stand there with what's taking place right in front of you?" You yelled at your father. It was the first time. It would not be the last.

"What am I to do, Kevin? Tell me. Tell me what I could do that would change anything."

"You could try," you said.

"Try. Yes, and then what? You think it will all end well? You think I'll be left alone and more importantly you? You think they won't touch you, Kevin?"

You would not listen. You walked away. Your father called after you, but you would not listen. You walked away.

Then, when you got older, you thought focus enough.

Now, you focus on this empty hole filling you with empty. And you breathe.

You inhale and breathe. Peace exists inside you. Fill inside you.

Your hands shake less, and your solid body knocks against your camera's solid body. Ready with a roll of empty frames. No need to fill that empty yet.

"Better?" João asks you.

You nod.

"Good," he says. "So shoot. And shoot fast. You've already missed."

You smoke. The dagga flares at your fingertips.

And what if you caught on fire right now? What if you just burned away?

"You don't need it," he says laughing. "If you've ever needed anything."

You exhale. "I need," and you look down at the joint, the ring flaring ember, and your camera lens, "a change of scenery."

Later, that week, Ken Oosterbroek invites you and João to dinner. Ken's welcomed you into his and Monica's home for as long as you've known, remember, him. Ken exists in your memories, and only there. You ask Monica if there's anything you can do to help, and she smiles and tells you to back off. She's kidding around, but you also know she knows all about you. You guess her husband talks about you sometimes. You can't really blame them. You smile and sit at the dinner table with João and the Oosterbroek little girl. You can never remember her name. Ken always calls her "The kid." The kid said dada for the first time, the kid can walk, the kid read a book out loud. You stare at the kid. A gangly thing with stringy brown hair, like her dad.

Does your daughter look anything like you? What does your daughter look like?

The kid spittles and stares like you're anything to look at. You want to hand her a camera. You want to see if she knows what to do with the aperture. Would she throw you in or out of her depth of field? Would you blur or clear? Would you even show? What do you look like? Her father looms behind and pats down her hair.

"The kid's got so much static in her cranium. I've got to tame it every five seconds." Ken's using hyperbole, but there are worse things than to constantly comb your daughter's hair. He pulls up a chair next to her to play peek a boo. You watch his action and the kid's reaction. Ken hides behind his palms and the kid's face sours. Father disappears. Daughter's face spasms. Your friend still sits there, but his daughter's little face contorts into pain and convinces you something terrible has happened to Ken. That Ken does not hide behind his own palms. That he's lost forever. Your face crumbles, as the kid's when Ken drops his palms and kisses his daughter on the nose. And you breathe. And you exhale.

And you breathe.

You've come to say goodbye. You wanted to disappear first, before Ken did behind his palms. South Sudan, you tell him. Got to go before I'm done for here.

The two of you—him Ken Oosterbroeck, you Kevin Carter. Look at him, he's back now, back from his hands. And you think of leaving. Ken—A wife, a daughter, awards awards awards, a daughter. You have a long list of ex girlfriends who hate you, a daughter you do not see, the first photo of necklacing the world had ever seen. You

have nothing. You have dagga filling your empty, you have lens filling your palm. You have nothing. Your daughter hates you. You haven't seen your parents in years.

And you breathe.

You find comfort in knowing, like his daughter doesn't understand, you will see Ken again.

The next day, after your dinner with Ken, you sit next to João on a rickety plane to South Sudan. In the air, you look at sky and clouds. White wisps and feathers through blue. Imagine you breathe air. Imagine air as all you need to breathe. Air slices through your lungs and permeates every edge of your insides. The clouds you look at outside your window tickle your guts and innards when you imagine breathing them in, though you breathe a cloud of exhaust, a cloud of fumes, a cloud of done for. You find a softness in this elevation. Below a crag waits for you where you've decided to shoot.

You could go back. You could turn back as soon as the plane touches the ground, onto the crag.

You could leave your truck, you could walk away and return home. You can turn back. You can still stop this. But you want to feel something inside you to know you still can.

When the plane hits the gravel, João says, "Your daughter will miss you," as though he knows exactly what you're considering. He's freeze framed your thoughts without even realizing. You should have taken a million pictures or more of her before you left. Only the fleeting memory of her face, a miniature and minute little you, fills you. Her image rewinds and fades over and over in your mind.

Your daughter will miss you. Your daughter will miss you. Your daughter will miss you. Is this true? Does João actually think so, or can he think of nothing else to say when this machine around you hits the ground? He can't think of anything else? So he tells you a lie. The way perfectly framed context tells the world lies. Some lies people need to hear. Some lies incite change. Some lies keep things the same.

This is not true.

This is what is.

Breathe. Calm your breathing.

Your daughter does not know you. Your daughter, aged four years and 128 days old and looks like you. Tall and lean and lanky and loose. Like skin and bones alone cannot hold everything inside. So delicate. How can a little thing like her survive with someone like you as a father? You see yourself in her, but she will never see you, except when she looks—but she will not know. Crooked smile. Horsey toothed. Beautiful, in a way you are not. A smile, your deep dimples forming a parenthetical aside even you do not have access to. What rests inside your parenthesis? What do they hold? You're still

not sure. But, sometimes, you smile through it. Your smile interrupts your face and thoughts. A deeper hiatus. A deeper aperture. And you are not at all sure what happens inside of that aperture. The aperture lets something out, and all you want is for the aperture to fill you. Sometimes you stare in the mirror to look into your mouth. What are you looking for? Anything to interrupt. Sometimes, you think a burst of flames might charge forth from your mouth and might torch your face. You wait. Something about space makes you queazy. Unsure. Anything can happen with enough space and time.

You are not sure what's inside. You are not sure what you hold. So, you exhale.

Your daughter won't miss you. She does not even know you. But you miss enough for the both of you. You remind yourself not to focus on your daughter, so that that might dull the pain. Focus elsewhere. On something else. On someone else.

And breathe. Keep breathing until you can't.

"What do you know about being a father?" you say. You spit incrimination at your friend as though he should just keep his trap shut. But yours is a genuine question. You mean no snark. You are a father and he is not, but somehow you think it's absolutely possible he—anyone—knows something more about paternity. You want him to share his secretes with you. You want to pump him out and fill yourself with his wisdom.

"Nothing," João says. "And I'm not complaining about it either."

When he becomes a father, he will complain, should he still know nothing about fathering.

"All I know is, your daughter will miss you, Kevin. She will. Believe it."

"And me?" you say.

"Yes, you will likely miss her."

You will miss her, as you have and continue.

"Are there elephants in Sudan?"

"Likely, there are. This is Africa, Kevin. Or, haven't you noticed?"

You haven't noticed. You can't tell apart the humans from the animals, and you're not in the business of nature shots, though you are in the business of inhumanity. Plenty of that to go around, you find you do not have time to stare at animals, or distinguish a difference.

"I'd be surprised to see them," you say. The doors to the airplane open, and the heat from outside smacks your face. "Because, you know, of all this." You tap the body of your camera, alluding to the things not yet inside. "I'd imagine they take cover away from the mayhem. Or they've been shot and mutilated as everything else. Have you seen video of Topsy the Elephant? Thomas Edison oversaw the electrocution in 1903. Maybe even filmed it. But I'm not sure of that," you say.

Is there anything you're sure of right now, aside from empty staring and seeping inside?

"I've heard. Never seen. How'd you get your hands on something like that?" João asks, though, seems mildly interested—keeps his emotions well at bay. Could he teach you a thing or two? Could he offer you anything? Anything more? Anything else?

You remember it well. Like anything else swirling around your head, the elephant in flames cannot be forgotten. Of Topsy toppling over, and over, and over, and down.

You tell João, to pass the time–easily—as though you are explaining to him how to toast and butter bread:

"A friend of a friend knew a kid in America. That guy got his hands on a copy from some library. Just browsing one day and saw this: "Electrocuting an Elephant." Something like the first snuff film, or something—I think that may be the only reason he was interested. But I could be underestimating this guy. And so, he got his hands on it and shot a clip on his camcorder. The original is already scratchy, so you can imagine the kind of job he got the second time over. Vintage vintage. Who knows what he was thinking. But I imagine his dick got hard while he filmed the thing. Probably just like Edison's back in 1903. Filming the first snuff film for the second time. I bet he felt like he was making history. What kind of sick bastard does it take to do something like that?"

You look at João, who does not return your look. Then you look down, and then to the door you will exit onto dry terrain. You laugh. "The original film is 74 seconds long and completely silent. Well, no shit it's silent. But in the version I saw, you can hear

this kid kind of gasp and then let out these small little puffs of laughter, like he doesn't know what else to do with his slack jaw. Maybe he's laughing for another reason and didn't edit it out or care. When you get past what you're hearing, you kind of remember what it is you're looking at. What it is The Edison Film Company, saw, shot, and was commissioned to film. And you think, of course you hear laughter. What the hell else would you hear? Thomas Edison burns an Elephant named Topsy alive. And you laugh. You know, Topsy, she killed her trainer. She was reacting to a cigarette he put out on her trunk. And she killed him and then she was killed. Topsy was killed because of the stakes of her reaction, and the trainer was killed because of the stakes of his. So they burned her for burning. Something else the kid didn't edit out: his mom must have opened his bedroom door. All of a sudden this woman starts speaking, he gasps, and she lets him know it's time for dinner. And he kind of stutters an 'Ok,' or 'Be right there,' shock in his voice. He doesn't want this woman to see what he saw."

"I thought the elephant was electrocuted."

"A current from a 6,600-volt AC source burned Topsy down in flames."

João uncaps his camera and clicks his seat belt off. You click your seatbelt off as well.

"The video starts with Topsy lead on a leash from her cage. There's a group of men around her. One man leads the way out to an open space of what looks like rubble. Crap they've electrocuted before her, as testers. To see if it's actually possible to fry this

animal down. You can see that everything else they've rid before was just a pile of shit no one cared about. Newspapers, clothes. Just junk. Whoever's filming seems a good distance away. Maybe about 50 feet. Far away enough. So those flames don't lick the filter's cheekbones. So even warmth won't creep up to their eyelashes. Do you think it was an accident an elephant named Topsy was chosen? Or do you think it was planned?"

"I don't know, Kevin. You know more about this than I do."

"I don't know much about it. I only know what I saw."

"How often did you look at that thing?"

"Not often." You say. Not often enough. "The first time I was with a group of guys. We were hanging out in his room in the dark while his mother made dinner in the kitchen. She was making pork loin. The smell crept into the room and you could taste just from the scent that that woman was searing it just right. That she knew exactly how to roast that slab of meat. The video was maybe 78 seconds or something. Just a bit longer than the original. We only watched it once. Dinner was ready down the hall right after. That smell crept into my nostrils, coating the air I breathed in while I watched.And then a woman on screen told us when."

You shuffle, uncomfortable with your own arms dangling at your sides.

So breathe.

"And, after dinner, I asked my friend if I could borrow that tape for a while. He said sure, he didn't care too much about it. I stayed up nights watching that recording alone in my bedroom. I remember my mom walked in one night, without knocking or anything. I was lying down on my bed and sat pin straight up, looking guilty. Like she'd just caught me masturbating or something. Or worse, like she'd just caught me masturbating to this snuff film of a circus elephant. That's how she looked at me too. She looked once at me, then once at the television—kind of registering what exactly it was her only son was watching. Her mouth fell open a little bit, but then she smacked it shut tight and austere like an upstanding white woman should and closed the door behind her, letting me alone to finish watching Topsy die all night long. I thought Topsy could teach me something. I was looking for the exact moment Topsy learned it would just be better to stop feeling, and then just stop feeling, and then die."

"Did you find it?"

"I don't think I have. Did. I don't think I did." You are still not quite sure, but you question whether that matters.

You step off the airplane when the motor dies. When the motors die, when the plane stops breathing, it is then you hear the screaming, the magazines of bullets go off. How many apertures will you stare down. Will stare you down. Will you point your own?

The aperture at your nostrils, eking out its fill.

You step off into a field of dirt patched with grass, cows, and people. You adjust your pupils to a hot South Sudan, parched with sun and famine and you. People who look like you. Already, you count fifteen dead and wonder at what point these people stopped feeling and just died. At what point does a people stop feeling?

How a person can die and how a people can let a person die. You walk past children, men and woman, starved and blanketed at your feet. João snaps photos behind you. You feel yourself not breathing around any one of them. Breathing: decadent. Living: grotesque. Your earlobe shines in the sun. Shine radiates from the two caret diamond you bought three weeks ago in Johannesburg, promptly penetrating your ear. Gleam radiates from your very pores. Your head rings and beams. And three weeks ago you couldn't have cared less. Now the shine on your ear burns and you imagine yourself a man in flames. You cut through this field, avoiding stepping, tripping on the dying and dead, and imagine yourself calmly defying the fire engulfing your body. You cannot look down. You do not look down. Do not feel. You will do nothing. There is nothing you will not do so you may not feel. If you look down, Goddammit, you will feel.

Look into this empty and breathe it all in.

You close your eyes. Hope to God you do not step on flesh. Hope to God no bullet flies into your body. You close your eyes to cut through this field to a clearing on the other side where you see space and no one.

A weight on your hip presses against you in your left pocket. You brought a roll with you. You know your limitations. Your weaknesses. You know when to use. When not to. When to shoot. When not to. Your weaknesses. You are weak. You're strong enough to admit this. One of your only redeeming qualities. Maybe your only one. There's a joint in your pocket and slung against your back in your backpack you have as much Mandrax as you could jam against your clothes. The "white pipe." For later. Should you need it. And you know you will need.

Right now, you need all this hose threaded through your truck window has to offer.

Here, in a clearing in South Sudan, it is quiet.

This is all you want.

Here, you load your first roll of 36 frames into you Pentax with long lens.

You stand alone in a field of empty when you realize you are not alone.

To think of your daughter, tottering on her mother's floor in her mother's house, back in her mother's country where she is nowhere close to you. Except that you carry your daughter closer in your mind, next to Ken and Topsy. And somewhere close to you is João, but he is away right now and quiet and you do not have a care in the world and so you breathe it all in as though it is your last.

You breathe your last.

She crawls against her mother's floor inside her mother's house at the edges of your insides.

Little baby girl nails scratching against the tile, shredding a part your skin, shivering your burn and bleed. She makes a sound like dragging against open field and brush. You hear rustles and scratches. Quiet here, so you know you are imagining things. You know you are imagining this. There is no sound here. Only you are here. Only you are here.

You only hear seep. The sound of fumes seep.

The sound your daughter makes—you can hear her wheezing now, trying to catch her breath as though there is no air around—sounds so real. You wonder if she is there with you, so you turn around to see. And behind you you see nothing. Only a vulture biding his time like you. Perfectly at peace. You follow the vulture's gaze to about 15 feet in front of him and 15 feet in front of you. A perfect symmetry. A perfect ease.

And it is there you see your little daughter, thin and sickly as you have never seen her before.

This is exactly as she should look. Truth be told, you have only seen her that one time after she was born. You held her for a fraction of a second, and then the doctors rushed you out because she was not breathing properly. They needed you gone. Had you done that to her? Did she see your face, and she stopped breathing, as you want to

now, right now? And then you never saw her again. Your ex never allowed it and you didn't fight her. You assume she's right. You never want your daughter to stop breathing in your arms again. Not ever, not again.

When your father grabbed you so many times from starting a fight with someone who could and would likely kill you, your elbow fit perfectly in the crook of your father's palm. You will never know again how your daughter fits in your arms. You will never know what your daughter looks like, except that you are seeing her in front of you right now for the first time in months. You see her little body drag across the brush. You think you must die before she does.

You have a roll of film and you have dagga, and you have some white pipe. You can only do one thing right now. And you stare at the fleeting image of your daughter drag through this tarnished jungle. A wine bottle on the floor glints in the sun. You hold up the bottle. You hold up the neck and smack the bottle against a tree. The edge is a little rough, jagged—you could easily hurt yourself, you could easily end yourself at the right angle, at the right edge—but you're careful not to cut yourself and shove this in your pocket for later, when you will need it. And you will need it. Right now, your little girl is crawling away from you. You do not want to go against her mother's wishes. Even though she is unreasonable, let's be honest, she is probably right about you. You have no right to be around a girl. You have no such knowledge of little girls. You would not know how to take care of a little girl. You do not even know how to take care of

yourself. You do not even know how to hold a little girl. You inhale. Your father held you so well. He held you so well away from everything. And here you are. And you cannot do the same for your little girl. You do not even try.

All you do is breathe and stare down this hollow.

You put the jagged pipe in your pocket and replace it in your palm with a roll of film. You click the roll firm and shut in your camera and focus. The frame traps your little girl in your gaze. You do not want that vulture to go after her, but you have no choice but to watch and hope to God the vulture looms in background. You wait. The vulture's wingspan never looms. You loom over the both of them, enough for the both of you. Your daughter pants and struggles and stops. You take one photo. Just one, and turn around and leave to the tree where you make your pipe. You settle down onto the brush against this tree. You sit in the only shade for miles. The panting continues and a creeping ensues, but you know you are alone. You inhale. You fill in. You roll up the window to your truck where you sit, where you've sat all along and inhale from the seeping aperture. And you could light a pipe right now. You could burst into flames. But you, you coward, cannot do as you've watched all your life. So this is it, all you've wanted—a man alone, thinking about wearing his flames.

Annie Leibovitz, Malibu, California, 2014:

Caitlyn Says

We all take what we are given and use the parts of ourselves that feed the work … Photography lets you find yourself.

—Annie Leibovitz

Dear Susan,

Susan, the last thing you told me was this: Please, do not let the mortician make a spectacle of me. I want every wrinkle and crag visible as ever. I want every abnormal white blood cell on display."

If you were alive and caked in ten pounds of foundation and blush airbrushed onto your craggy face, you'd likely pass as a Kardashian. Your wild black hair. Your dark, racially ambiguous looks. A handsome woman. These Kardashians keep themselves and their beauty underneath their flesh-toned sludge and hair heated slick, shiny, and dry.

When your cancer took you completely, Susan, I took your last photograph.

Dear Susan,

I'll take the first photograph of Caitlyn Jenner. She used to be a man. Do you remember him, Susan? You watched him run on screen in 1976, seven years before you and I met. You watched him beat his own best time. You watched him beat himself. You watched him run on screen. You watched him run from him. You watched him run to Caitlyn before he even knew what he was running to.

Dear Susan,

After you died, people started asking what you and I were. *What were you and I?* I can see your face twist. I can see you wrinkle with venom. You're spinning in your grave. *Don't use cliché's*. Okay, Susan, okay. You always win, don't you? Yes, you always do. What you and I were—just people. Just two people. Yes, I agree. No one asked until you died. A question you'd eviscerate. A question I'd stammer an answer for and did. It started with friends and ended with lovers.

Dear Susan,

I'm the photographer for the first photograph of Caitlyn Jenner. Her breasts look like clay, formed and molded too high under her chin. The "C" in "Caitlyn" is a little rebellion against the K—Kylie, Khloé, Kim. A not so subtle, or aggressive, dichotomy to establish his (fuck, her) autonomy in a multinational enterprise, net worth over 300 million. Those breasts and all that cash would give any man a hard on for one Caitlyn Jenner. *Who? The K?* Oh, you don't know the Kardashians. You haven't been keeping up (Ha Ha). *Annie, don't be trite.* I'm not, I'm just.

Dear Susan,

Their olive-tone glitters in the sun. *Because that's actual glitter*. No Susan, that's not glitter. That's Machiavellianism. It seeps from their pores. *That's their primer and*

foundation. I shouldn't know such things. I never used primer or foundation. Oh, the mortician. I told you not to let him touch me. Well, that makes sense. No, Susan.

Dear Susan,

I took a photo of him (fuck!) today. She started to protest at how I'd staged her, what side I commanded she face. I told her not to speak. I didn't say, "don't speak." I don't think I'd ever say that. Did I ever tell you? I would never say, "Do not speak, Caitlyn Jenner. Keep your new pretty mouth pressed tight." But I came close to telling the Kardashian/Jenner enterprise to kindly please shut the fuck up. I muttered, "be still," to Caitlyn. "Keep your head tilted, hold your breath (because, you know, that makes your tits look bigger, and we're trying to be at least a little convincing). Try a kind of wanton look. A come-hither look, but don't look slutty. We want classy here. A kind of Marilyn Monroe, if Marilyn Monroe were a man and could win gold for an Olympic decathlon, circa 1976." Caitlyn knew exactly what to do. Caitlyn ran this over and over in her mind the moment she held her dick in her hand realized she wanted to push it up and back inside her for the rest of her life. Caitlyn's eyes fluttered across the mass of Armenian beautifuls rustling behind me where I shot. "Focus," I told her. *Demanded, you mean. Commanded.* It's not like that. It's just a photograph. *Don't be an idiot, Annie. You've never been. You know just as well as I do what that camera does to people.*

Caitlyn's eyes fluttered and flared, widened on my lens and my aperture widened back. There—a woman now. *Subjugation.*

Dear Susan,

Caitlyn Jenner, the Olympian formerly known as Bruce Jenner, hikes up his (shit, her) black, frilly, lingerie, tilts her face to the left, and tries to soften her face, you know, so that she looks at least a little feminine. And she does. She really really does.

Dear Susan,

The Kardashian Machiavellians whisper shit like: "I hope this gets airbrushed"; "That angle? Really?"; "Are Dad's boobs better than mine?"; "Kendall?"; "What?"; "Dad's not Dad, anymore"; "Well what is she? Why aren't you answering my questions? Is it because Dad's boobs are better than mine?" Are these women women? What are these women? I hear them, but all I see when I look is denial. I see the woman who upped her cuts to be new and dressed the part for the chopping block. *My god, your word play is juvenile.* Your dead. *Touché.* Her biological and adopted daughters do a fine job of Frankensteining Caitlyn back together again.

"Turn this way. Stick out your chin. Like that. Hold that."

"Like this?" Caitlyn said.

Dear Susan,

No cunt in your strut. *Did you write that? That's almost brilliant. I can't decide if it's brilliant, or stupid and trivial.* No. *Who did?* A trans woman on the cover of *Rollingstone Magazine. Did you take her photograph, too?* No, I wish I had. Maybe I was asked and I thought it was ridiculous. Maybe I was never even asked. No, I didn't shoot her. Cass got that one. Cass was ahead of me. Cass's photo: Punk Goes Pussy. *Ok, that is trivial*. *Who did she used to be?* A boy in a band with lovely cheekbones and razor-blade voice. *This was after the cancer?* Everything's been after the cancer, and before the cancer. Can I crawl inside your coffin? Can I live inside your woman?

Dear Susan,

I just want to take a pretty fucking picture. To make this former man a woman as he (fuck) conceptualizes herself back when she was a man wearing pantyhose under her (his? in this case?) jeans. Tight jeans. Tight as fuck, so that maybe he'd (she'd? oh god) squish that schlong into submission. That's no longer a problem. Now, the camera, not Caitlyn, just needs to convince everyone who's looking that that dick no longer hangs between this woman's thighs, exactly in the way she never wanted.

Dear Susan,

Susan, I can't tell them apart anymore, not even the Kardashians from the Jenners. Not even the Bruce from the Caitlyn. I shouldn't compare them. Bruce is dead is dead is dead. Susan is dead. Leave him be and let Caitlyn be. I can't tell a person from another person.

Dear Susan,

Another olive Kardashian walked into the shooting space—the Kardashian living room, where they all (every single one of them) insisted on the photo shot—breathless and giggling. Each of them ready to hop and jiggle in front of the backdrop themselves. To take a deep breath so those magnificent fucking tits stick out and turn more profit. Which one is this? Kylie? Kendall? Susan? No not Susan. The Jenner one (is there more than one K. Jenner?). The women jostle like one combustible entity. Who can even keep them straight anymore?

Dear Susan,

I loved you. I love you. But, my god, you were an ass when it came to interviews. My god, you were an ass. You made Dylan look like Jesus Christ.

Dear Susan,

When Caitlyn was Bruce, the woman trounced him. Now that Caitlyn is Caitlyn, will she exercise the Kardashian autonomy? Will her body consume her? Will both Bruce and Caitlyn disappear?

Caitlyn's eyes jerked to mine and widened. That's right. Look straight at me. Look straight at this camera.

Jesus, Susan shut up. All I'm trying to do is take a goddamn good picture. I don't need your rhetoric. I don't need your theoreticals. *That's exactly what you liked in me best. What you miss most.* Alongside each deep trench rooted on your face, Susan, and body. Always so goddamn articulate compared to me. All I can do is stand back and take a photo. Have to say you know you know you know for everything. I hope you will know, so I don't have to freaking explain it, because I can't.

Dear Susan,

Susan, you knew everything. I could just listen all day. Barely even had to speak. I listened and looked and snapped. Stood back to all of you, Susan, to take you all in.

Maybe it's because you thought in words and I think in images. Could that be, you know, it? (throw hands up and look exasperatedly at Caitlyn). Caitlyn's eyes widen. If they widen anymore, they'll fall out of her eye sockets. That might make a great picture, but it won't be sexy. And we're working for sexy here.

"Is everything, okay?" Caitlyn asked today. Her voice. Her? voice.

Everything's, you know, hunky dory. "Shut your mouth," I told her. *There is an aggression implicit in every use of the camera.* You mean, for the photo. "Keep your lips pressed together for the shots."

Caitlyn nodded

"All right. Let's break." Breaking means moving, and Caitlyn just began to look right. But, you know, people got to eat and take a leak, and other stuff.

"Can I move from here?" Caitlyn said, and I appreciated that she asked that kind of question. "Can I get out of this outfit?" How nice of her to ask.

Dear Susan,

I just shrugged. I put the camera on the coffee table and sat on the Kardashian couch. Or is that Kouch? I don't know all their names, or whether they're even Kardashians or Jenners (or women or men at this point, because, well, you know), but they all filed out of the living room in a huff. Maybe it took me too long. Maybe their Spanx got to them, so they couldn't breathe.

Boom-swagger-swagger-boom-boom-swagger. Ass cheeks lifted and fell and swayed from side to side. Each ass moved out like the same ass over and over. Just maybe a smaller, narrower version of the last. Like matroshyka ass. Kardashian ass. Successive asses, smaller, less obtuse and exhibitionist as they walked out of the living

room. I don't even want to take a picture of those. Everyone's already seen every last one of them. I didn't even get anything out of looking.

Y*ou didn't my ass*

Now who's making juvenile jokes?

As photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal, they also help people to take possession of space in which they are insecure.

Oh god, will you kindly shut up? No insecurity exists behind a camera—in front, sure, but not behind.. No insecurity exists in front of a Susan Sontag.

Dear Susan,

Susan, Susan was a real ass for an interview. Like a Bob Dylan. But even with Dylan, you got the feeling the guy just wanted the interview over, done with. Get this idiot out of my face. Make these questions stop. So he was just an ass for an end.

Susan, you were an ass for the sake of it.

Liked humiliating the interviewer. Sport. You could go after the questions, and the person behind the questions for hours. You'd never shut an interview down. That smile of yours when you cut some poor schmuck up. I could snap up that smile forever.

Susan. Just a writer. Just crucify a person with pen and tongue. You can bet on that.

Joan Didion. Now there's an inarticulate writer. Said it herself. But who can believe that? Who, really, you know, believes her? I don't.

Believe it. You've got to believe it. The woman in front of you is a woman.

No. Scratch that. That's easy.

Believe it. The woman in front of you, used to be a man.

That's what.

Is that what?

I called Susan my lover (after Susan died). Is that what she was?

Believe it.

I, apparently, am a bitch to work for. So I've heard. Believe it?

Believe it.

Dear Susan,

Caitlyn walked back into the living room, with each Kardashian trailing behind. Kim finally spoke. She said, "You're a lesbian, right?" *Did you ask her if she was interested?* Susan, how could you know something like that? *Because that's like you to ask, you snot.* I asked her if she was interested, but said I only dated people. *You avoided the question.* The question was undignified. Also, all she has to do is some research. *Your answer was rude.* Her question was rude. You're rude, Susan. *I think the word is intelligent*. Delusions,

you're a bitch. *A bitch you love.* What're you saying? Are you saying she wasn't rude. *Maybe*. A genuine question with genuine interest. *Maybe.*

Dear Susan,

She wants to know who her father is.

Dear Susan,

Where her father went?

Dear Susan,

She's right there. She's right there, in front of me.

Molly Soda, living room, Detroit, Michigan, 2015:

Amalia

i only exist by comparison / i only matter with context

—Molly Soda

Molly Soda, you are leaking.

You can see it all from your laptop.

Last night your mother texted you, “Take those nudes down from your Twitter and eat a cheeseburger,” and you beamed and beamed because you know someone is looking.

You want someone to impact you. To impact you hard. Harder. And harder, and harder, and harder, harder.

You bled for days.

Michigan looks white outside. This swivel chair spins your state in and out of view.

You look to see if David looks at you.

Imagine you look ethereal when you rub your clitoris, instead of the Dadaism likely plastered all over your face.

Amalia Soto. Snap. Delete. Make yourself new again.

That freckle between Dave's middle and index finger shaped like a scythe. His fingers smelled like you.

Born Magdalena Carmen Frida Kahlo y Calderón, July 6, 1907. Don't focus on the fact that Frida was a Gemini. You may decide you hate her.

Today, a woman said you look lovely.

In eighth-grade you heard about a movie called *A Clockwork Orange* from some kid at school. You remembered that VCR tape in a cabinet back at home. You asked your mom if you could watch. She said, sure, but read the book first. So, within a week, you watched the movie alone in your bedroom. The next day, you told your mom it didn't seem so bad, you didn't know what was the big deal. She said, maybe later you'll understand. Every Halloween for the next four years of high school, you paraded around dressed in a bowler hat, a white button down shirt, braces, white pants, a

codpiece, combat boots, and a cane. You put false eyelashes on one eye and called yourself Alex Delarge.

A mistake made by the both of you, but you shouldered the blame.

Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. Married, 1929.

“I paint myself because I am so often alone and because I am the subject I know best.”

When Dave left your apartment for the last time, you belly flopped onto that giant teddy bear thrown supine on your bed. You took out your iPhone and pretended to smile. If you tried hard enough, could that bear suicide you? A random thought you never, you told yourself, took seriously.

Tonight, stake yourself on your fingers and say, “You are lovely.”

This is art?

Sure.

How?

What does Fuckboy want? Wait. Scratch that. Who cares?

Fuckboy calling Frida *unibrow,* thinking he's charming or hilarious. How like him to reduce a woman to her greatest beauty, thinking it her biggest flaw.

Diego, you swine.

A bright red lip exudes confidence and instills a little bit of fear.

Exude the kind of chaos astrology can explain.

When you met, you couldn't decide whether Dave's eye contact was endearing or creepy or a little bit of both. Why did he stare at you so fervently? Were you attractive, or were you the brightest object in the room and the rule of thirds were at play?

D walking away and not turning around.
You looking on.

Hey, Fuckboy. Fuck, boy. Fuck boy.

You want “bedroom” eyes and hair without having deliberately to partake in the activity prior which achieves said look. Apply eye primer, apply smoky shadow, apply winged eyeliner. Smile broadly for mirror. Smush face into pillow or giant teddy bear. Smush until you smudge. Weep. Look into mirror and know you are beautiful.

Mom said you were a beautiful child. She doesn’t say it, but she wonders where that child went.

Molly Kahlo. Molly Kahlo fair and sallow.

D liked to watch you rub your clit.

A friend of yours tells you that tall dude with the scruffy chin looks at you like he wants more than talk. He’s got a girlfriend, you say, knowing you’d be open to whatever his look wants. Oh, stay away from that one. You probably should have averted your eyes and listened.

Take your cunt back.

Snap snap. Save for later.

Call your mother. Tell her you love her. Apologize for breaking her heart.

You are being childish.

When you bought birth control pills.

Most guys don't like a red lip, according to some magazine. Red lips must remind them of your sloppy, bleeding vagina.

Your sister is the clean version of you. You are the authentic self of her.

Hey, when are you going to do the dishes?

In a minute.

I hope that's paint on your panty crotch.

Sometimes, you scratch the crust off your memories.

Molly and Dave meet, 2013. Dave stares. Molly feels like a caged animal, expected to perform. She looks away.

Dear Inga Muscio,

His name was Dave. He was the first. Some guys think about sex with a woman as opportunity. When I think of the guys I've fucked, I'm never all "man, it's so cool I had sex with that guy." Mostly, I just want a lobotomy.

Your mother asked if you slept with him. "Sleep, yes. Coitus, no." She smiled, then called you a tease. Your guts fell to your echoey uterus. You threw your arms up in the air. "There's nothing I can do right." She hugged you and you thought of his arms pulled tight around your body.

Amalia was lovely.

Cunt

D baked a cake. Smells sweet. He's proud of himself—you can tell by the grin on his face. The one you called fucking adorable once and seemed to describe him perfectly. White cake with white frosting. Pink icing letters spell: *Thanks for the hand job* with an exclamation mark. Look to him. He smiles charmingly, he thinks he's charming. You blink, smile back. Kiss him hard and think of eviscerating his bowels looping through

his punctured and wilting scrotum behind a curved penis hanging like a useless scythe.

He can have your vagina. You take your cunt back.

This will be fun.

Did you bleed?

No.

Was it bad?

Define bad.

So it wasn't bad. Was it lovely?

Only if constant interruption, awkward dirty talk, and watching him jack off is lovely.

How do you feel?

Grey.

Hey, how's it going?

When you met, you thought little of D. Why did he stare at you so often? The rule of thirds was in play. He eked into your line of vision until he was all you saw.

Take a razor to your forehead. Buzz down bangs so they stick up like you've been electrocuted. Look, and breathe again.

Exude the kind of chaos astrology can't explain.

Harder.

That accident left a hole in you the shape of a fuzzy caterpillar. You watched the caterpillar crawl down your chest, torso, navel, and down. The hole burrowed itself inside you. You called it "Frida" and felt like someone.

Anticipated Q & A with Audie Cornish on NPR:

Molly, you're lovely

Thank you, Audie, so are you.

peak of interview

Hey, unibrow.

A scythe comes for you.

Eight filters on your iPhone. Eight edits to face, neck, collar bone, décolletage, torso, pelvis, thighs, gams, feet. Scroll. Think, I will make myself new again, and choose absolutely nothing.

Born Amalia Soto, January 28 (watch out, an Aquarius, decan one), 1989. Made new again with first camera phone.

The bearer of water. Instead of an echo inside your uterus, you think you should hear a wave or a slosh.

In the ‘70s, your parents met on campus. Your father asked out your mother. He wanted to see a movie called *A Clockwork Orange*, for their first date, directed by Stanley Kubrick after a book neither he nor she read. A strange feeling grew inside them during the opening scenes. Something like desire or repulsion or both, respectively. They married and you were born.

D asked her to marry him.

Twenty years is not so many, Matilde Calderón. Don’t you worry, Frida can handle herself.

Your first pap smear elicited a greater reaction than the first time D entered you.

Dear Inga,

A new definition of rape came into effect in 2013, January 1—86 years after the first review in 1927. That same decade, "flapper" became a term in American popular culture to distinguish a new kind of woman. In 1927, Clara Bow became "The 'It' Girl" because of her starring role in the film, "It." Inga, what was Ms. Clara Bow "it" for?

This definition states that rape is "The penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim."

This definition is less gray than the former, "The carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will," but how long it will take for the enactment of a third revision (should one become necessary), and what this new definition might include? Will I live to see the third?

A scythe comes for you.

Harder?

When you started birth control pills, Dave lifted you from the doorway, kicked the door shut, and threw you on his bed. They take a month, and besides, I'm not ready to put them to use, you said. D kissed you anyway, but not as he had, not as slow, not as hard, or soft. Not as anything. *Well, we can still fool around,* Fuckboy said. Yeah, I guess.

The tall scruffy dude who wanted to do more than talk got drunk at a party, where you also got drunk, and later when you asked him to walk you home, you started making out and he tried to penetrate through your jeans with his finger even though you asked him to stop but kept making out.

How long has it been?

Six months?

Six months. Wow, that's, that's fresh.

It feels pretty rancid, but it's not a big deal. So, anyway, this dude moved into my building after he broke up with me.

Wait, wait that means I can't come up, or he's going to be there or something. Like he's watching out for you, or something.

No, no. He's moving out.

Is he? That changes things.

Make yourself new again.

Dad says that ring in your nose makes you look like a steer. That voice coming out of his mouth makes him sound like a horse's ass.

Audie: Do you think it's a little vain?

Self: What's wrong with a little vanity?

Moment in NPR interview where listeners stopped taking you seriously.

Take a razor to your forehead. Connect your eyebrows as they should be connected.

The thing Fuckboy liked best about you: your echoey uterus.

D's bulbus face and paunch. His receding hairline and twin.

Don't tell her, but she was the better painter.

She watched Diego from the rows of the lecture hall. She watched him paint "Creación."

You told D you visited your doctor for a prescription for birth control pills, and D was elated.

When are you going to put a bra on?

Go back to the bedroom, pick up your bra from the floor, lock yourself in the bathroom to lace yourself up again and think of his arms pulled tight around you.

Dad told you not to wear certain things if you did not have the body for it.

New guy. Name: something Hindu or Serbian. Half Mexican. Height: so so so tall, top of head might look like the Alps capped with snow, and you think he might have a scalp fungal, psoriasis or seborrheic dermatitis—something that sounds sexual and disgusting. He asks your sign. He's a Libra (and a satanist). He tells you how you act, how he acts, and how you'd act together. He breaks your life down in decans. You are one and he is three. His hands and feet are too big for 6 foot 2. You want to chop off his hair with a scythe, rub your hands over and over across his scalp, and inspect him like a gorilla inspects her beloved.

Put on a red dress, recite the Hail Mary 50 times. Ask someone you do not know to light a candle for you.

They agreed to be friends, according to Sigal, and it did not last a handshake.

Your uterus echoed upon impact. It was a struggle just to breathe.

Sext: *You probably already know, but the water's off in the building. Maintenance has got it. Should take an hour.*

The first time you had sex, Fuckboy's slippery dick kept slipping out of you and this upset him. You wanted to stop, but kept letting D. You stared at the top of his head and thought of his dick not doing its one stupid job. Afterwards, you drove home, bought a venti Caramel Ribbon Crunch Frappuccino (limited edition) and felt gratified.

All the women said she was better than him.

Don't tell her, but she was the better painter.

Dear Inga,

Do we need a third revision?

Fuckboys.

The RN pulled out the largest speculum. She handed it to your doctor. The doctor looked at the clean plastic appendage. “Are you sexually active?” she asked. You shook your head no, even though you thought a lot about that guy David, who still hadn’t asked you out. “We’re going to need the smaller one.” When she shoved the speculum inside and opened the blades to scrape your cervix, you thought about the fingers of a person you may not know yet that would enter next, the tongue, the penis, and then the baby that could crawl out. Your doctor apologized when you squirmed in the examination chair. You did not say it was okay. At 23, you did not realize this was the last apology in such a situation.

The time Fuckboy wouldn’t speak to you because you didn’t give him a hand job, so you apologized.

You bled for days.

Leonardo, born September, 1925, at the Red Cross Hospital. Leonardo would never exist.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

A scythe comes at you.

Call your mother.

Mom?

Amalia?

Molly.

Molly?

Frida.

The Gemini can be an ass. The Libra has big hands and feet.

Sometimes, he looks so old.

The way D looks at you makes you want to charge him.

The quality you like best about yourself: your bleeding cunt.

Diego, you swine.

Sext: Did you say six months?

Put on a red dress.

The way D looks at you when you think you're talking too much.

The way D looks at you when you think you're not talking enough.

The way, when something funny happens, you both look at each other to laugh.

"I feel like we're going to have a lot of parallels. I feel it in the signs."

They agreed to be friends and she jumped D's bones and he let her.

You thought of pulling up your neckline to cover yourself when you met D. Later, you wanted to pull it down, and down, and down, and down, and down.

What's a synonym for cunnilingus?

There are none.

Really?

Not in a word.

"Lick my clit." But that's very direct.

They're all like that, vulgarish: "eat me out," "go down on me," "lick me." Plus, cunnilingus is a noun. There's no verb for it. Even "fellatio" has a verb derivative.

There's nothing a little more subtle, or soft?

Let's coin one right now. "Kiss the lady"? Or, "Kneel to your majesty"?

When you kissed and kissed for the first time, Dave coiled his finger around the silver chain on your neck. He fingered your cross. *What's this mean?* You laughed and said, not what you think, but then you explained, for other reasons, why you were not ready. He was glad it had nothing to do with the cross, then mocked the woman he claimed to love at 18 because she would not do for him what you were thinking of and wanting to do.

A scythe comes.

Fuckboy reasoned others assumed you were having sex anyway. You wonder, also, if people assumed he asked you to shove your finger up his anal sphincter. You wonder how D feels about this right now, only because he was oddly embarrassed at the time.

Sometimes, you want to swaddle his face.

You sit on your stoop to listen for bass from the house across the street. You think of large hands. Bass line, strong and light in the right spots. El Serbio looks like Rivers Cuomo trying to look like Buddy Holly. Why doesn't he just look like himself?

Dear Inga,

My mother grew up in the '60s. She looked up to Gloria Steinem, Angela Davis, and Cindy Sherman. In the 70's, she met my dad, went on a first date to see *A Clockwork Orange* because he wanted to, got married, conceived and bore my sister and me in the '80s and things were never the same. She's in her 60s now. Can she take it all back? Is her fate my fate? Can I make it new?

The phone call became a contest to see whose dad was the biggest jerk. El Serbio won, but he missed him the most. You felt like a winner.

A beloved.

David, you swine.

The quality you like best about yourself: your full, red lips.

Dear Cindy Sherman,

You are lovely. I saw your photos of you before I saw you. I saw your stills before I knew who you were. A lady, a damsel, a whore, a victim, a woman. I saw them all, and knew.

The time you had a thing for the bassist in that band, six months later, and gave him your number. You talked for three hours until about 2 a.m. And he read into you and into you. And into you. And his hands were very big, too big for his body, he said, and his name was lord of the universe, and he told you exactly how you'd be together. And you were so ready. And you felt stupid for thinking he might not eat you out because he's vegan. The universe was not ready for you. And nothing happened and you didn't really mind.

David.

That three hour phone conversation with El Serbio. You felt childish for thinking he wouldn't eat you out.

You wish Fuckboy came with an off button.

First name Hindu, last name Serbian. First name: lord of the universe.

Are you looking for a proposal? No. You are looking for an impact.

Fuckboy texted you. He tells you obvious things not worth repeating. He tells you things you already know, or will when you check your email. Like when rent is due, or something a friend of a friend said that's already been said to you, or what color the sky is, or when it's raining, or the time of his last bowel movement. You want to slit his throat to stop the updates (or cut off his fingers), but once you do, you will miss the burn of wanting to slit his throat or cut off his fingers. Swallow your iPhone to carry him inside and hush him for the next few hours, until your next bowel movement, and he will be right where he belongs.

Lord of the fucking universe.

Sext: Do you like seitan?

When you bought the pills.

El Serbio texts you. He's likely back with his ex, so don't respond. Is it still winter on his head? How long will his winter last?

Leon Trotsky. No. Not in the way they would have liked.

You bled for days.

In any literal sense, he did not make you bleed.

D asked her to marry him.

She said yes, twice.

"There have been two great accidents in my life. One was the trolley, and the other was Diego. Diego was by far the worst."

When you started the pills.

When D was commissioned to work on 27 fresco panels, she sat quietly by her husband's side at an easel. She painted "Self-Portrait on the Borderline Between Mexico and the United States." She wears her hair up and a pale pink dress, she faces a Mexico passed and behind her the United States pumps industry. She covers her uterus with bandaged arms and holds a Mexican Flag dangling by her side.

When you started the pills, your copay was a monthly $10.

The fetus found no comfort inside a fractured pelvis. The fetus remained unnamed. D did not want children. Too much traveling, not conducive. She had an abortion and she did not give the fetus a name. 1930.

When you started on the pills your copay was a monthly $10, and then some.

Miscarriage. July 4, 1932. Thirteen-day recovery period in Henry Ford Hospital while D paints for the Ford Motor Company. She lies in bed, her son pickled in a jar on a table in front of her. Dieguito's mangled body reminds her of her mangled body. At night on July 4, he asked if you'd like him to stop. You said yes and he slipped out of you. You

tried to sleep. On July 5, you wept in bed together and D wrapped his arms tight around you for the last time.

D, you swine.

After the breakup, you put each other through more than necessary, but after everything—after another guy maybe wanted to split you open and you told Dave—David turned out to be a decent ex boyfriend. You've not told him this, but you hope he knows.

1934. Infantilism of the ovaries. Appendectomy. Abortion. Leonardo never exists.

Swine.

She jumped D's bones.

You told D, after everything was already fine. You'd taken a test. And the test was fine. And everything with you was not fine.

Molly Soda, you are all smiles and bubbles inside. Someone needs to shake you up and open you wide.

Tall dude from South America with scruffy chin, who treated you as though you're a lady and stared as though you're a whore. You two used to talk and laugh and be okay. You asked him out, because, with balance like that, why not? After the incident, he treats you no way, you glare at him, and he cannot speak or look at you.

You told D you weren't sure how you'd feel about an abortion. And everything was fine, because nothing happened and you would not need the abortion.

Dear Inga,

The definition entails physical contact. What about when someone eyes you in a way that makes you squirm? What is intention in someone's eyes that feels like violation? Should there be something about a penetrating gaze? What is this? Is this inception? Is it my own fault? Inga, I'm asking you, what is this called and will it stop?

You asked that dude—the tall one, with hot-homeless-guy scruff, whose girlfriends never stick around—to walk you home from his neighbor's party at four in the morning, once your ex boyfriend David left. This after D (blackout drunk and likely

unconscious of this) implied he'd walk you, and you raised an eyebrow and declared, "I'm not leaving with you." So D left. You stayed on the couch next to that dude and wondered what might happen next.

Molly Soda, with your bright red lips, it looks like you've been trying all day long to tear off your face.

That dude asked if you wanted to go back to his place, and you mumbled "not really." D was gone. What do you call a guy who proposes sex after his friend, your ex, leaves? Opportunistic coward? What do you call a woman who's interested, but not ready? Tease? Even so, you weren't walking home alone in the dark, so you asked That Motherfucker to walk you 12 blocks south. Poor choice. You were drunk, he was drunk and high and an ass. By the third block, he grabbed your hips and swung you around. You patted his cheek twice in jest, felt his coarse beard on your palm, said he was moving a little fast, and he disliked the "terms of a relationship" only you were curious to try. At the sixth block, he insisted on staying the night at your place. "We won't do anything," he said, "I swear." And right then, you felt sorry for him.

You told D, had it come to that, you did not know how you'd feel about an abortion. And D was terrified and he did not tell you, and you thought everything was fine.

No, you said, so he grabbed your face—gently—and you let him. And he was very drunk and very high and very eager and maybe he's a better kisser when he's sober—that smack of his dry lips looking for your lips did not correlate with the confidence his glands secrete. Still, you kissed him. You'd never kiss him again. When things escalated against your objections, when his hands and face roamed and poked despite your objections, you were glad you wore jeans that night instead of a dress or a skirt. You were so fucking glad. He kissed your cheek, softly, before leaving, like all of a sudden he knew decency.

You told D, had it come to that, you did not know how you'd feel about an abortion. And D was terrified and he did not tell you, and you thought everything was fine.

You told him to text you if he changed his mind. You wish you could say you were still drunk, but by then you'd sobered up. He laughed, and that's one thing you deserved. And he remembers—you know this by the way he can't even look at you now. You know, he has a daughter. You've thought about her—has he? How does he feel knowing someday a man like him might think himself entitled to grope his daughter's breasts and vagina the way he groped yours? Oh no. Have you touched a nerve? Well, so did he. You're not the one perpetuating his kind of behavior. In general, you prefer privacy,

but he's evaded you for the last two months since that night, so, you're doing this now. He used his hands, so you're speaking up. You've got a platform, a Twitter feed with followers, and people who are listening. So, there it is, you've said your piece. Now, it's his turn. Or is this a check and mate? You know, there's a reason the king is useless. So maybe it's time for him to kneel to the majesty, apologize, and understand (as you've also come to realize) why all the power belongs to the queen.

You walked the rest of the way home, alone. You did not look back. You do not ever want to look at that again.

You told D, had it come to that, you did not know how you'd feel about an abortion. And D was terrified and he did not tell you, and you thought everything was fine.

Dear Cindy,

I always wanted David to know, to understand, to feel he should put on "Come Together" by The Beatles in the background when we fooled around in his tiny apartment so his neighbors wouldn't hear the crash of waves broiling inside my uterus. He never did, and I never asked.

Molly Soda, Aquarius, always too wet to handle.

You told him you bled, and still he accused you of being irresponsible with your pills, even though you both knew this wasn't true, and you would not need an abortion.

Molly Soda, you know who is looking at all of your tweets.

Fuckboy told you he liked that you weren't and didn't look *strumpety.* He was surprised when you told him you hadn't had sex just yet. You asked why, (because you were 24?). He wouldn't answer. You became accustomed to his *silence*.

Your father told your mother you looked like a slut when she came home with you from an afternoon at the doctor's office and there was a new hole in each ear. You were still in diapers, so you do not remember the pain of puncture. Those must have been some slutty-ass diapers, whore.

Molly Soda, leaking.

Molly Soda, leaking her own nude pics.

What would Amalia think?

Do you think Fuckboy thinks of you when he looks at your tweets and nudes, or is it like staring at porn? Does he even notice your face? Shit, maybe he doesn't even look.

Sext: When did you say he was moving out?

Sext: *I did not appreciate that last tweet.*

Sext: *Are you going to be at that opening tonight?*

Sext: My Venus enters Libra.

The way alone burns.

Look in the mirror and fuck yourself.

The rule of thirds are in play.

Split me open.

Because you were young. Because you were open. Because you were closed.

Because you were closed.

That thing hanging between the cleavage you don't have.

That thing dangling between his legs, like a molting caterpillar looking to die.

Because you were so easily opened.

Dear Frida,

David doesn't like The Mars Volta, a mistake I won't make twice. But Frida, when we fucked, he would put the band on for me—he was sweet enough to do (among a few other things) at least this. He knew I liked something fast, manic, experimental, and dissonant. And so he would finger me, and eat me out, and fuck me while *Deloused in the Comatorium* or *Frances the Mute* or *The Bedlam in Goliath* hummed in my ear. And the Rodríguez-López brothers and I sweat up a storm and soaked David's sheets. And he loomed over me, rapturous.

Because you were not so easily opened.

The blood stain is a device meant to draw your eye down, inward into the place you want to be.

You cried on the drive to Target. You thought about a procedure you had not ever thought to have.

Wear the red dress.

El Serbio still lives with his mother. You thought that might, should things get to that, eliminate a lot of mistakes.

Full of grace. Exploding, fizzling grace.

Split me open.

Full of grace.

Click me open.

Sext: *I saw your art opening tonight.*

Uterus all full of fluid.

It's better if you pee before and after.

And you beamed and beamed as though, for the first time, someone took the care to plug you in.

A paparazzi in your hand.

Molly Soda, you are leaking.

When you were eight, your parents told you never to use the word "cunt." You asked what "cunt" meant. They said it was something to call a woman, something not nice.

Molly Soda, you are spurting.

Molly Soda, you are trending.

Mom, I'm trending.

I have no idea what you're talking about.

Amalia was a beautiful child.

You could trim down your hair. You could button up your hips, torso and décolletage. A tie around your neck, you could put on a pair of slacks, walk around in oxfords, a cigar between your fingers and lips. You could smear off your face, perform a wider gait for a wider berth, and try to pee standing up. Instead you wear the red dress and take your cunt back.

Molly Soda, you are lovely.

The day you finally looked Dave in the eye, looked away like you saw nothing, and then walked away.

Amalia grew up with the notion that "woman" was a euphemism for "cunt."

When Amalia was 13, her cousin locked her in the laundry room. He yelled at her and called her a cunt. She thought her parents might scold him, since she wasn't allowed to use that word. They heard, they were in the same room. All she heard was their silence.

Amalia first received cunnilingus to little effect. Fuckboy told her her clit moved around, keeping him from finding it, keeping Amalia from positive reinforcement.

Fuckboy looked up expectantly behind her pubis, and she just looked at him, not sure what to do, or how to feel.

When Molly Soda tried looking for her clitoris, she fizzled with positive reinforcement.

You wonder if D looks at your leaked nudes. You wonder if he recalls the pictures you took of him on your iPhone. The one's he lectured you about after.

Dave's surprisingly immaculate sphincter.

Detroit is so empty.

Apologize for breaking her heart.

I can always tell when I've lost it because you start to smile.

What possessed you to land in Detroit?

Of all places, Detroit?

You told your mom you stopped wearing that around your neck.

It's advertising something about me that hasn't been true for years.

Romping around your bedroom in blood stained panties is what you're advertising now?

Leaking seems more appropriate, but, yes.

Nothing about that seems appropriate.

Welcome to Detroit: The Renaissance City Founded 1701

Today kinda sucked. Go to bed and know tomorrow may not suck, unless you fuck that one up too, dumb ass.

Fuckboy texted you and said absolutely *nothing*.

Before you left for a gallery opening in New York your roommate told you he would pray for you, to have a good flight, and that he hoped you'd get laid. You, rendered speechless, smiled stupidly.

The one day you decide not to wear underwear your period starts, and then all of a sudden you got blood streams dripping down the insides of your thighs. You like your thighs, so you think it's okay if people stare, but then you realize what a missed opportunity this is when you chose a midi skirt over a mini skirt this morning, you fucking idiot.

Sext: *I've got an idea.*

Molly Soda studied at New York University, where she received her Bachelors of Fine Arts in Photography and Imaging in 2011. She thought about getting an MFA, but, shit happens.

Sext: *It's been strange not talking to you for a week.*

The two of you took a walk down Bagley Avenue. The sky sprung a leak and rained all over—Dave mentioned before you left that you should probably pack an umbrella, but you both forgot and when you walked along the umbrella did not seem to matter. You stopped under the overhang of the United Artists Theatre Building when the rain came down harder—the building still stood 19 stories high, but you felt the crumble of decay powder your cheeks, you saw the windows beam their dim. You sang "Singing in the Rain," Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* style, to fill the *silence*. You danced around, threw your arms in the air and played like you might whack D in the gut, ribs, or wherever. That song beat out "Umbrella" by Rihanna, only because you didn't really know the lyrics to "Umbrella" and your voice would have sounded embarrassing. D *laughed* and grabbed your ankle when you kicked it up. You almost fell down onto the sidewalk but landed, instead, against a boarded up door. You both laughed harder. The door you slammed against gave way.

When you stepped inside, D *sighed* and followed. You bounced around and ran down the abandoned halls. You stared at the windows and walls as though they were art installations and the taggers who marked them were artists. The two of you were all alone and it did not take you long to find the auditorium. D did not run along with you, but followed, and you heard his *footsteps* echo down the corridor into your ears. By the time he reached the auditorium, you were on the stage. The gold curtain billowed and

D sat in the balcony watching. You yelled for him to come over. Your voice echoed from the stage and out. A kit of pigeons erupted from the ceiling. They flew away into a piece of sky leaking down onto the dust and rot. D *laughed* and you yelled for him again. He told you to hush and said he liked watching you from the rows. You said, come down here, you jerk, and that got him slowly coming.

When he walked away from the balcony, he disappeared from your vision. You started singing again, started dancing and tracing the velvet curtain up and down the stage. You felt the crust of abandonment on your finger tips. You felt a weight in each ripple you stirred. You held out your hand against the curtain and felt a tug on your wrist. D said, *if you're going to reenact A Clockwork Orange, then let's reenact it out right*. He pulled you against him and you let him, though according to scene you should have struggled (should you have struggled?), and in his body you felt the weight of history.

The time you both saw each other in a crowded theater and then you both looked away like all you and D saw was nothing.

That day, it was month four on the pill. Your echoey uterus did not feel so echoey. You felt cramps for the first time in three months. You spotted, and you had not spotted for three months. One week before, the two of you decided Dave would not use a condom,

primarily because he didn't have one and he really wanted to up on that stage. You checked the side effects and the side effects were this: the same shit that happens when you're pregnant happens when you're on the pill. Never having been on the pill before, never needing to take it before, you jumped to conclusions, thought you were pregnant, and kept this to yourself. And you felt all this weight coming down on your uterus.

On the drive to Target, you wept and wept.

The abortion pill: useful and safe only between weeks four and weeks eight.

You told Dave, had it come to that, you were not sure what you would do, and your indecision shook him up.

D apologized and his apology echoed so loudly, you wondered why his apology was so hollow.

You took the test twice, and twice it was negative. You took the test twice, and twice you took it alone and you found it was negative and you breathed again by yourself.

The day you finally decided to tell D, you asked him if he could meet you at the Detroit Institute of Arts. He was busy, he said, but he told you to go on without him, that maybe he'd come if he could.

Your mother never did like him. She told her not to marry D.

Fuckboy liked to watch you rub your clit. You asked him if he should be taking notes and laughed.

Stake yourself on your fingers.

Stake yourself.

Put on the red dress.

In eighth grade, Derrick Somebody asked your art teacher what she dressed as for Halloween. She said she and her husband and a group of friends won first place at a club for their *A Clockwork Orange* costumes. Derrick was familiar—he asked who was who. My husband was Alex, I was one of the girls in the record store. Derrick grinned.

Your eighth grade art teacher told you you had a real eye.

That one way your dad looked at you that one time that made you feel like smut.

In eighth grade, your art teacher told you you had a real eye, but she questioned the "aboutness" of your pretty pictures that seemed missing inside.

There is an aboutness missing inside.

Each step up brought you closer to The DIA. "The Thinker" greeted you coldly and you flipped him off and thought, not today. You made your way exactly where you wanted to be and stared up at the unborn baby, rooted on the wall.

You stood in Rivera Court and looked up.

The moments after the breakup were the closest you've ever been.

You stood in Rivera Court and looked up. You heard some steps behind you. You did not turn around.

Two years single. One year celibate.

Your fingers smell like you.

You want someone to impact you. To impact you hard. Harder. And harder, and harder, and harder, harder.

El Serbio texts you and you hit delete.

D hasn't texted you in ages.

Snap. Snap. Save for later.

At home you have lovely roommates. You live in lovely Hamtramck. You can almost pretend nothing is abandoned and nothing bad happens in Hamtramck, Michigan. Almost. You walk home alone. You pass by Kowalski and think about stuffing your gob with kielbasa, but then you get a taste for powdered down raspberry Paczki, and that sounds just right.

His ironic gob.

The nice older lady whose name you can never remember says, "Amalia, I've forgotten what you look like. You're all skin and bones. I hope you're here to buy." You buy a dozen Paczki and apologize for being a stranger. She says, "Don't worry about it. Just take care of yourself," and you tell her you'll try.

You texted D.

You asked Dave if he could meet you at the DIA.

He said *no*.

His ironic fucking gob.

You asked Dave if he could meet you at the DIA. You failed to tell him you needed to talk to him about something important, and you wanted to do it there. He said no, he had *some other stuff*, but if he could come he'd be there, *but how about they hang out later* at his place. You said maybe, and then he responded and you threw your iPhone on the couch to respond later. You took a selfie and hated how you looked, but you didn't delete it, you just saved that picture for later. You sank further and further into the couch, hoping you might slip between the cushions and disappear, be forgotten, like loose change, dried out pens, or used up condoms. And then you hoped there are no used up condoms in there. How gross and lonesome. You slipped your hands between

the cushions on either side of you, not sure what you would or wanted to find, but you were determined to find something. And then you found a fat Crayola marker, black ink. You took the cap off and inhaled. You dotted the crevice between forefinger and middle finger. Still wet. You lifted up your iPhone to take a look at your most recent picture. So so sad. Sad girl eyes, sad girl blue tipped hair, sad girl pouty red lips. The most upbeat thing about this picture is the yellow paint on the walls behind you. You uncapped the marker and inhaled the ink. Perfect red lips and blue hair. Yellow walls. The primary colors never seemed so appropriate. You wear black and will pop pop pop. But that face is too pale and your eyebrows are not bold enough, so you took the marker and scribbled across your eyebrows, gave yourself a nice thin pencil 'stache and then took a picture and you look so so lovely. You tweeted asking "Should i go out?" knowing full well you would stay in and D won't come and you won't go together.

D said maybe you guys could meet at his place later that night. You said maybe, and he said, Y*ou think it through. I'll wait.*

But then you left.

The last time you saw him you both turned away.

You heard footsteps behind you and felt like turning around. Down below you saw one dimensional men hard at work. Up above sunlight refracted through a glass ceiling and cut you up into shadow and light. You heard footsteps behind you and felt like turning around, but you knew it wasn't David. A little girl passed as though you were not even there. You watched her walk to the end of the room, to an opening between two Grecian columns and darkness. An unborn baby hung over her head and the little girl followed the darkness up the stairs and left you alone.

You felt your iPhone vibrate against the side of your thigh. It was him. He'd changed his mind. He said he could come, after all, if you needed him.

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Katherine Elizabeth Seltzer received her Bilingual Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from the University of Texas at El Paso, where she taught introductory undergraduate courses in the Department of Creative Writing. Seltzer was an organizer, moderator, and presenter on two panel discussions accepted for the Association of Writers & Writing Programs Conference 2016 in Los Angeles, California. She is a United States Peace Corps Invitee and will teach university English in Ukraine from 2016 to 2018. Seltzer was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and grew up a Chicana on the U.S.-Mexico border in El Paso, Texas.

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