



tav

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Addendum to Issue 1

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Submissions accepted year round.

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An Almost Empty House

A yellow sky and still it will not rain.
I calm myself, splash water on my face.
I feel feverishly inane.

This is no city on a hill;
it's Wednesday and I've called off work
to contemplate an almost empty house,
to scrutinize a sleeping pill,
to speculate about a hotel clerk.

Being neither brilliant nor iconoclastic
is difficult to take into account,
I only read and write enough to be sarcastic.
This does not do.
And raging against the bores, shamelessly mediocre,
I must break off, concede that I, too,
have leered with the eyes of a pawnbroker,
gone crooked as a crooked brook
without flood plains, only washed-out banks,
and washed-off hands that gave less than they took.

Sitting on a broken, sinking sofa,
becoming involved with a vine and floral pattern,
losing my breath and clenching my eyelids,
I know that this is how I yearn,
this is how the anxious heart must yearn;
and if I had the peace of Christ, or Tao,
or anything to keep myself away
from that matter of the final when and where and how,
I think I would not burn.

A yellow sky. When a stranger knocks,
I wish he had noticed the empty driveway.
I rent and cannot change the locks.

I wish he thought I had been praying.

He might have asked me if I prayed for money
or goodness, and I could have answered,
"I never pray for goodness. I pray for perfection."
But that didn't happen. He was a painter, who said,
"Well, I'll have to touch up this chipped section,"
as he pointed to the baseboard and the molding.

And it was something very commonplace unfolding,
as he made sure that he wouldn't be a nuisance, asking,
"So tomorrow is ok then? You're sure you don't mind?"

I only mind the yellow sky.

I recognize he made an effort to be kind,
accommodating. But there's the crux; I had to be accommodated,
and that's the sort of thing I've always hated.

Having spent two weeks' wages in as many days,

I miss my filthy lucre. I miss my wellbeing.

I miss my protector, whose love ablaze
is that light which makes this world worth seeing.

I could live rightly, be prosperous and have my health,
but I wait, and that's like the rustic waiting for the river
to run out before he crosses, as Horace said.

I go upstairs and sit down on my bed.

I don't move. Today, even the sky has a sick liver.

Love Swims

translated from the Spanish

The past stretches back like a receding wave
in my stomach there is a stone
all those years spent in the quiet library
and now I am joking on the beach with my sickness

tomorrow or the day after tomorrow
love will swim through the salty water

The cup of life seems bottomless
but the old men know
this is the truth, this is the gospel
there is nothing more sad than an empty swimming pool

tomorrow or the day after tomorrow
love will swim through the empty spaces

at that hour, at that minute
these broken red cars
that we have for hearts
will run once more

You need to believe that love is going to swim
like a pink ball into the crowded street
through traffic and countless dangers
to save the world at the last possible second

tomorrow or the day after tomorrow
or the day after the day after tomorrow
love will swim through the salty water
love will swim through the empty spaces
love, like a hungry shark, will devour you at last

an excerpt from
The Red House and the Cleft

Somewhere between the stages of her child and adulthood, Ine's mother vanished. Ine could not be sure that her mother did not still live in the house. The garden was kept and the front door would always lock every night at eleven. But her mother was nowhere to be found.

The vanishing was leisurely, her absence heavy at times, minimal at others, its form filling in one deficient minute at a time. It began sometime before Ine's grandfather, her father, passed away. As he became a magnet, pulling all the scattered bits of himself together, his history, the people he knew, she continued slipping farther and farther from them. Aunts and cousins, people Ine had never met, came to visit them, paying their last respects to her grandfather's dying legacy. As she watched him exchange his stories, the summation of everything that made him the person he was, his life in history became clearer, more vivid, as he slowly faded into a collection of ghosts.

The visitors were all from West Germany, many of whom had not seen him for many decades. Those who spoke a little bit of English would tell Ine about the days of his youth, the division of the country, the planes, black forms that threw dark shadows and bright flashes over their houses in the middle of the night. At first, her mother would translate the conversations for her, into broken images and half-thoughts. As time past, the stories became more and more fragmented, missing vast expanses of time. By the time the last visitor had left, a half-brother from the Rheinland Pfalz, her mother had receded into the back rooms of the house or the farthest reaches of her garden. When they sat down at dinner, she pushed herself back from the table, distancing herself from the conversation, the stories. The more she listened to her own mother tongue, the less she was able to comprehend it herself. Her translations deteriorated, barely consisting of more than the mention of a relative at such an age, or a friend in such a place.

When asked, Ine did not remember seeing her mother at her grandfather's service, though she very well could have been one of the mourning women, watching from behind her black gauze veil, amidst the funeral arrangements of modest flora, chrysanthemums and spears of fern. But watching the front of her house, from high above on the cemetery hill, I thought I saw a dark figure moving among the trembling hedges. In fact, of the handful of women there, I am fairly sure none of them were her. There was a particular way she walked, as though she was forever carrying a tray or a basket.

Ine lived alone in her mother's house for almost a decade. Every morning she awoke with no one beside her, she made her own breakfast, ate alone, locked the front door, saying good-bye to no one as she left for work. She proceeded in this way, alone, for all but a few moments in the course of a week, when she bumped into the mailman on the way out to the car, or apologized to the cashier for taking too long putting away her change. Until one day, while sitting on the floor of the family room of her house, she realized she was not alone.

Ine kept a small heater in front of the television, and would sit before it, every evening or so, fending off the dampness that crept along the subterranean walls. While

sitting there, one Saturday morning in fact, she felt a queer cold pressure on her shoulder, as if someone had passed the hose of a vacuum right over the fabric of her shirt. The force was so strong, she was compelled to turn around. And there she saw a hazy nothingness. She felt it brush her forehead. She could hear it speaking soothingly to her, somewhere from within, in such a way that she could no longer feel the borders of her own skin. She knew it was benevolent, yet it was not supposed to be there. It pulled all the warmth and peace from the room, just to maintain itself in a place that it did not belong. From that point forth the house had a strange air as if, after years of settling into its foundation, it had become unsettled again.

When Ine was only fifteen, she had met a boy by the name of Alex. Alex had no quality that would leave an impression on you, with the given exception of his dullness. He was quiet—but would speak in turn. Intelligent, but not clever. Her grandfather did not approve of Alex. She took him home once and did not see him again, until he came to work in the same office as Ine, to set up their computer network, shortly after the unsettling of her home.

Everyday, for two weeks, he worked in close proximity. Coming into the file room to adjust her computer, eating lunch in the same empty half of the cafeteria under the drafty windows, at half past one everyday. Despite his blandness, he brought a warmth that Ine looked forward to. He was the only one to say good morning to her.

The first week he was there, the office had a scheduled vacation—only seeing patients on an emergency basis. Ine never took vacation, and so she had Alex almost to herself. She unlocked the office door for him in the morning and stayed late when he worked late to lock the door again, sometimes walking him to his car, or really walking towards his car, as he did, before pivoting en route, towards her own. The second week the office staff were being trained on the new system. Alex was explaining, instructing, fixing glitches and errors, and seeing much less of Ine. He was leaving soon. On the last day of the week, their conversation, hardly worth mentioning, went something like this:

“So, next week I am going to be at another office. Upstairs.”

“Oh—that’s a shame.”

“Oh? Yes, this is a nice place to work.”

“Yes, I’ve been working here for six years.”

“Do you still live with your grandfather?”

“No, he’s dead.”

“Ahh. Well, I will see you at lunch next week. It’s been nice working with you.”

“Likewise.”

And with that, he put his hand on her shoulder, patting it lightly, a gesture that was neither a hand shake nor an embrace, but almost a neutralization of both.

Over the next few months, Alex worked through the building, modernizing the filing and records of every practice and clinic in preparation for the advent of the new nursing school, an institute so large that with the first wave of students, Alex and Ine were forced to sit together in the cafeteria.

Every turn in the development of their relationship had been propelled by an outside force, and the final push would be no different. After they had been eating together for several weeks, Alex explained that he would be leaving the medical complex within only a few days, and might be leaving the town altogether.

“This was only a temp job, actually.”

“I didn’t know that.”

“My lease is up, so I might move to the coast. More jobs.”

“It’s only a half hour commute, though.”

“That’s true. But I still don’t have an apartment after next week. I have a friend that said I could stay with him until I found a job out there.”

Like most of their conversations, this small interchange was followed by a long period of silence where Alex quietly ate his sandwich as Ine awkwardly picked at her food, nervous and thoughtful. The prospect of Alex leaving had disturbed her. She was climbing out of her isolation, one step at a time, and she knew his leaving would push her back to the start. Which may have been the reason why this time she took that slight, outside push, and adding her own will, hastily advanced their friendship three steps beyond.

In the evenings, after work, Alex had taken the habit of walking Ine around the side of the complex, to her car. There was a thin layer of stiff snow, glinting with a thousand frozen flakes which covered the pavement like a sugar icing. All afternoon Ine had been thinking about what she was about to say, running the schematics of her proposal through her head, over and over again. She waited in the cold outside the door for twenty minutes, clutching her stomach, regulating her breaths. He walked up to her. She didn’t hesitate.

“I’m renting a room. In my house. You know my house. It’s big. You can have it.”

“Oh really? That’s nice. I will think about it.”

“I mean, I don’t want any money. Just the electric bill. And the phone. That’s it.”

“That’s very kind of you. I will seriously think about it.”

“Just think about it.”

“I will.”

Ine begin walking to her car, watching the tree limbs flattening against the night sky as she rounded the side of the building. She listened to the snow underfoot. Soon Alex’s footsteps accompanied hers. Neither said anything. The silence put her on edge. She began to think about the sounds you hear, the sounds you make, walking with each season. Walking through dry leaves, progressively dryer leaves, on wet asphalt, the full, thick tap of summer, the shrill, gravelly scrape of early spring, the clack, then the lifeless crunch in mid January.

“There’s something wrong with the moon,” Alex said suddenly. “It doesn’t look right.”

“I don’t know. It’s probably just because it’s such a clear night.”

“No, look, you can see the shadowed part clearly. See? The man's face,” he pointed.

“What do you mean? It's just a clear night, I'm sure.”

“I don't know. It looks strange. It's making me nervous.”

Ine was seeing a facet of Alex that she had never seen before, a reflective nature that she would have never guessed he had. She would rarely see this part of him again. They continued to walk, turning the corner, watching the moon as if it might disappear. They stopped for a minute, squinting, trying to see what was happening.

“I think it's an eclipse,” Alex said.

“Maybe. I would think we would have heard about it, though. On the news, or in the paper.”

“Look at it, it's orange. It doesn't look right.”

As a car drove by they started walking half-heartedly, pretending they were moving on, not standing with each other idly watching the sky. The moon was full, but mostly in shadow, a glowing, umber-orange shadow. The upper right side had become a glowing white arc.

“I think the crescent is growing smaller. I am sure it's an eclipse,”

Alex affirmed.

Ine concurred. "Yes, it must be."

As she continued to observe the moon, she became aware of the fact that the moon was spherical. It was the first time it stood before her in all of its dimensions, shadowed and illuminated, like a little ball suspended in the sky. She had seen the curve of the face of the moon before, on television, in pictures from the moon landing. She had seen the shadow of the craters with her own eyes. But until now, she had never felt that it was a sphere. It had been flat. But tonight, under the shadow of the earth, the moon was round. It became real.

The ground below felt too close, white and flat like a kitchen floor, the limbs and twigs of the trees were dotted with little clumps of snow, as if they were bits of cotton, added by an unseen hand. They continued to watch the moon as they arrived at her car, and then after saying good-night, watched as they drove to their homes, rounding corners, catching glimpses as they passed under the snowy trees. The white crescent was slowly fading from the face of the moon. At home, Ine sat under her window. By eight o'clock, the moon was gone, leaving a strange, brown circle in its place, sitting behind the slender poplar branches.

Within a week Alex was living with her, staying in her grandfather's room, sleeping in his bed. The following winter, after Ine slipped on an icy sidewalk, he stayed with her in her bed. They never talked about it, but even after her sprained ankle had healed, he continued to stay with her at night.

He lived with her in the house for nearly two years, guarding her when she slept, walking her to her car every morning. She thought, “He is going to get sick of this. He's

going to be gone one day.” But the Alex we know wouldn’t do that. And she knew that, too. It became clearer which each day. Every night, when she came home, he was still there. She couldn’t be sure that he was actually unhappy, though he never found a job, never had a dollar to spend, never had another friend. He held her hand when he drove, even when she tried to pull away.

* * ** * ** *

When I was twenty-eight years old, I received a letter addressed to Florenz. To me. Yes, I was Florenz, though I seldom thought of myself in this way. And if the letter hadn’t looked so unusual, in its pale gray envelope and stamps in fifty pfennig increments, I probably wouldn’t have even kept it. But this letter immediately struck me as I pulled it from the mailbox, the sort of official notice that you anticipate, long to receive, that speaks directly to you with a human presence on the other end. A notice that speaks to you the way notices rarely do. I can’t explain how some mail is warm, and some mail is empty. But some sense in me told me that this letter was full, alive, sent with care. The letter itself was cryptic, and I could only gather an inherent meaning from the feel of the paper and the few words I could recall, “Francis”, “Haus”, and “Porzellan”. The next day I took the letter to Miss Anderson, the new receptionist from the medical office, to decipher.

Before I was born my mother received a card from my grandmother in East Germany. My mother had just returned from her last trip to visit my grandparents, and with the growing border controls, she had little hope of returning in the near future. The envelope showed signs that it had been opened and resealed. One line, towards the middle of the page, had been blacked out. Probably something small, a minor complaint, about how the price of butter was too high, or how my grandfather’s job was becoming tedious. This didn’t matter to my mother. What mattered was what was yet intact. Tucked within the card were pictures from her vacation. A family hike in the mountains, a few dim pictures of my grandparents sitting with a flock of sheep.

In the note inside, my grandmother asked her to name me Florenz, after the street on which her and my grandfather lived, where my mother was born and raised. My grandfather had been named after the street of his childhood, and I suppose she wanted to start a tradition. Or perhaps she just liked the sound, the feeling that the name invoked. It was a beautiful name. It didn’t even sound like a name for a baby boy. And in fact, my grandmother passed away before I was born, before she could receive the call that I was a little girl. And so, Florenz became my name, though I have always been called Ine, short for Florine.

In this way, Florenz has become only a legal name to me, cold and unfamiliar. Since my grandfather has died, no one I know has addressed me by it. Mail addressed to Florenz could only be official, a bank statement or a notice. If a caller asked for Florenz, I knew it was no one with whom I would care to talk. I would say that I was not in, or I was in the bath, or had moved to another address. I would say there was no Florenz here. No, this was not Florenz.

The letter was sent to inform me of the remainder of my grandfather's estate. There wasn't much remaining of it. The house he had left so many years ago did not belong to him. Just its contents. This is what Miss Anderson and I garnered from the letter as we decoded it on our lunch break, in the file room of the office. I was little help. Except for a few improper phrases I had picked up from my grandfather's two year stay, I did not know a word of German.

As much as I wanted to visit my grandfather's home, to salvage what I could from the past he had left behind, the fear instilled by the language and cultural barrier deterred me from making the journey--to again be isolated and alone. To be away from Alex. After over a month of deliberation I decided to simply ignore the letter, discarding it as I discarded much of my official documents, my mother's documents, in a dark corner of the lower, catchall drawers of her desk. And so the letter was left to slip into the cracks of oblivion, to lose itself inside the internal expanses of the desk frame, until one day, years from now, I would discover it amongst the dust and forsaken paperclips while searching for something else, long after I had ceased to care.

However, this would not be the case. No sooner had I decided to bequeath my share of my grandfather's estate to the German government, did I receive another letter. This letter was also addressed to Florenz, but this time, by human hand, and this time, its warmth inside the envelope--a light blue one, with a fringe border of blue and red--rang clearer than before. The letter read as follows:

Liebe Florenz!

I am the sister of your Grandmother, Rosa. I write to you because I have been unable to contact your mother. I would like to have some belongings from my sister. As you may know, your grandmother and grandfather had never legally married, and I am not entitled to any of your grandfather's estate. Please write to me if you would be willing to assist. The items I would like are not of much value, but I would pay you for them. Please write within the month so we may make arrangements, if you wish.

Yours,
Gertrude

I had never met Gertrude. She was one of the few relatives that had never visited, that I had not heard mention of in any of my grandfather's stories.

"I think you should go," Miss Anderson told me, after I told her about the second letter.

I protested. I didn't want to travel by myself.

"You wouldn't be alone, though. She could help you sort through the estate. You know it will be something you'll regret if you don't go."

"Perhaps," I thought, "I won't be so much alone." By the end of the week I had picked up a passport application at the post office.

At first I let the application sit in the drawer with the two letters. After a few weeks, I began filling it out, fulfilling the requirements one at a time. I didn't acknowledge it then, but now I see that I was inching towards my break--testing my ability to be again without Alex, to function outside of Alex.

The air in the house had become heavier by day, and Alex could feel this, too. "Florenz, I know this is your home but I really cannot stay here anymore," he told me.

"We'll figure something out."

I dropped off the application on my way to work.

The passport took over ten weeks to arrive. I had mailed in my photographs and the application on the fifth of March. I waited patiently for the first month or so. For the first five weeks. Six to eight weeks I was told. Easter passed. I went to the sunrise service, held outside. It was so cold that year that the spring rain had turned to snow. There was an inch of snow on the empty chairs, assembled on the lawn beside the cemetery. There were only three other people, besides the pastor, in attendance. We stood in front of our chairs and shivered to ourselves under the floodlights, waiting for the service to start. I thought about my passport, how they had asked me to send two pictures of myself, but I had thought that they meant two different pictures. In one picture, I smiled, the other, I frowned, and neither looked like me, or how I imagined herself to look. "That must be the problem," I thought. "They think the pictures are of two different people." I had taken my sweater off between shots. The assistant pastor finally arrived. The sky grew a lighter shade of black. The pastors conversed for a moment, one pointing to his watch, the other clasping his hands together in the wide sleeves of his robe.

"Shall we go inside?" the assistant pastor asked us. We followed him into the building.

Inside was bright and dry, but cold. The heat had just been turned on, and the building had sat empty since the evening of Good Friday. I could hear the electric baseboards clicking as I walked down a side aisle. I sat towards the back, but upon sitting down, I realized that everyone else had sat together, in the front. I stayed by myself there, feeling isolated and out of place, for about two minutes. I looked around. The stained glass windows were slowly becoming illuminated. The door to the narthex opened, and another parishioner came inside. She sat down in the front row. I decided then that the embarrassment of sitting in the back of a large church that now housed a total of seven people, for an entire service, far outweighed the momentary embarrassment of standing up, moving to the front of the building, and seating myself among the rest of the congregation. When I reached the front of the church, I smiled at the latest arrival, still adjusting herself in her front-row seat.

"Thought I should join the crowd," I smiled at her.

"What?" she asked. She hadn't understood me.

The assistant pastor rang a bell. I smiled at her again. And then Alex appeared. He looked concerned. He was wearing his winter coat over his pajamas. He motioned for me to follow him, and so I stood up once more, and left the building.

"What's the matter?" I asked, as soon as we stepped outside.

"I didn't know you went to church. You didn't tell me," he replied.

“Why should I tell you? You were asleep. I thought you’d be asleep when I got back.”

“I was,” he said. “Or I would have been. You got a phone call.”

“At this hour? What happened?” I myself was beginning to become concerned.

“Why didn’t you tell me you are planning on going away?”

“I’m not. What are you talking about?” I began to walk towards the house. The air was now a light gray. The street lights flickered off.

“A man called, a young man. He asked if you had your passport yet.”

It hadn’t arrived yet. It should arrive any day now. I hadn’t told Alex that I was leaving, because I wasn’t sure. I didn’t want to leave, because I felt that there was a chance that if I did, I would also not want to return. Over the past few weeks I had fantasized about the trip, imagining that it would be my grand escape. It would change me, and I would stay there, learn the language, attend the university for free. Sometimes I imagined I would meet a handsome man. I would marry him. I saw him clearly, a smiling man, perhaps thirty-five years old, older than Alex, with blonde hair, pale, ruddy skin and large, german teeth, practical like a cart horse. And less immediately, I felt, in the recesses of my vision, an image of our children, three girls, all looking like Heidi, with colorful dresses and hair ribbons, running barefoot on the mountainsides, making flower necklaces for the herds of goats.

“I don’t know any men that would be asking me about a passport,” I replied.

“He had a foreign accent.”

“Did he say his name?”

“Taunt something. Taunter Gertrude.”

My aunt. He meant Tante. Tante Gertrude. “I honestly don’t know a man with that name. I swear to goodness.”

“Did you order a passport?” he asked.

I thought for a second. If I told him no, if I lied, there was always the chance that he would be the one to answer the door when the mailman delivered it. Or worse yet, he would find it, actually see it, hidden among my things, concealing it. Not just concealing it, but concealing the whole process of getting it, the thought, the intent. A secret with the young man on the phone.

“Yes I did.”

“For any reason?”

It took me a minute to gather my thoughts. I started walking towards our house. “Did you walk here?”

“Answer me.”

I searched for another reason that I would need a passport. “My parents have a cabin in Canada.” I said. It was true. It had been unoccupied for perhaps ten years, but it was there. “I thought I’d visit it sometime. I mean, we could.”

“Should I get a passport too, then?” he asked. “Did you forget to tell me? How am I supposed to get there?”

I could tell he was suspicious, but I didn’t know how to assure him. I didn’t want him to know about my Aunt, or my plans of visiting her, or visiting my grandparents’ house. It was my dream. My goal. My secret initiative. I didn’t want to share it, to tarnish it with outside expectations, or comments, or ideas about it. I wanted it to be mine alone.

"I don't know if it's really necessary to have one. I mean, you have your license. And your social security card. And your birth certificate. It's only Canada. They'll figure out who you are."

"So why did you get one?"

"As a precaution, I mean, one of us at least should have it, I thought." And now I knew I was caught. My reasoning was circular. He could never trust me again, because I had snuck out to church, and my Aunt called too early in the morning, and she sounded like a young man, when her voice, already deep and thick with accent, reconfigured itself after its journey of hundreds of miles of degraded phone wire. But despite this confusion, his suspicion was just. It was accurate. I wasn't to be trusted. I know now that I had already decided to leave him. "Actually," I said. "I had this fantasy. Maybe we could move there. You know, leave the house and everything. At least for a little while."

"Hmm," he answered.

"It's what you wanted."

"Yes, I did say that."

"I remember, it's a nice area. I mean, not even remote, but remote enough." This sudden idea, I thought, should quell any suspicion. Here was proof of my commitment. Even though I knew it would never happen. It was just a dream for him. A dream for us. It would never be realized. He wouldn't bring it up if I did not. But it worked for now.

"What do you mean? You mean you're leaving me?" It came off as more of a suggestion than a question. I dropped the crumpled sheet into the basket.

Alex picked up a pillow and began removing the case. "No. Ine, I would never leave you." He looked at me in a sort of pained but patronizing way, his eyes squinted, his head cocked to illustrate his innocence. "Ine?"

"Then what?" I took the other pillow and pulled off its cover, throwing it, inside out, on top of the sheet.

"I really just cannot stay here anymore." He sighed. "Would you want to live in my mother's house?" he asked. He dropped the pillow case in the basket. "I feel like even being here, I'm an invader. Or at least not welcome. I don't know. I don't even have my own room, with my own things."

"Do you want to leave now? I can't leave now. I have work. I just made the bed."

"The bed will be waiting for you when you come back."

"What makes you think we'll come back? If you don't want to live here now, you won't want to live here in a few months, either. Don't you want to move for good? Don't you think we should? Why can't we?"

"I don't know." He dropped the pillow at the foot of the bed.

"Because we aren't citizens. They'd kick us out," I said. "This is it."

"Just for a while."

"There's no such thing as a while." There is no such thing as a while.

"Your passport came today. I think we should go." He left the room, returning with an envelope, a flat, priority mailer. He handed it to me.

"This is dated from three days ago."

He ignored me. He had his own secret now. "I've closed my bank account. One month. I have enough money, you can quit your job. I think we should go for just one month."

Alex had taken initiative. I couldn't say no. It had been my idea. I thought I would have more time before I had to face it. It was only across the border. An hour away. The photograph in the passport frowned up at me. The sweater pulled at the throat too tightly. "Oh no," I thought. "The sweater was on backwards."

"It was your idea."

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Ine spent a week picking through her clothes, before she had the courage to pull every item from the closet, throwing it into the large duffel bag Alex had brought when he first moved in. She left the hangers strewn on the floor, leaving a physical link between the empty clothes rail and the new home--the old cabin.

She bought new sheets. Certain things she could take, but the sheets were all old. Old, embroidered and monogrammed, with a history that belonged at her mother's house. She wanted to leave as much there as she could, as if she could just slip back into the empty house, at any time, completely unnoticed, as if nothing had changed. The beds made, refrigerator full.

The one unnecessary thing she brought with her was a family album. It was of a sweet, mossy green color, leather-bound, with transparent paper between the pages. She remembered how her grandfather had unpacked it from his suitcase, when he first arrived.

After Ine's great grandmother had died, her grandfather had decided to move to the states to live with her mother. He also left his entire house--the only things he took were his clothing, a few toiletries, a bible. And the green album. As he pulled it from the layers of clothing in the case, he looked at Ine for the first time. He could feel as she was watching him, and he looked almost ashamed, as if he was embarrassed to have brought anything with him at all. "Für deine Mutter," he said. For her mother. He put it down on the bed before her, patting it with his hand. She wanted to open it, to look inside, but she could not interrupt his unpacking. It had taken on a magical feel, like a sacred ritual of sorts. Years later, when he was dying, he had her mother retrieve the album from her room. He turned to the back of the book, pointing to a set of pictures, of him, her mother, her grandmother, sitting on a grassy hillside. They were surrounded by sheep.

Ine and her grandfather could have elaborate and detailed discussions regarding any topic, but did not communicate in a language that anyone else could understand. Her mother could translate her grandfather's thoughts to her, and her thoughts to him, but it was the words left untranslated, these words and sighs and slight gestures of hand between translations that housed the meaning of their conversation. Their secret language proved profoundly useful. Her mother's presence continued to wane throughout his stay, and they were eventually left with no other medium of communication, and no one else with whom to communicate. I can tell you what was said, but I cannot tell you how it was said. In some languages, certain words and concepts lack a parallel meaning in another, and you are

left floundering in the wrong tongue, scrambling to pull significance out of inadequate diction and inexact phrasing. I can only give you an idea.

And so, as he lifted the transparent paper from the photographs, he spoke to her.

“Has anyone ever told you about your mother’s last visit?” he asked.

“No. No one,” she replied.

“*Tsk, tsk, tsk.*” He looked at her mother. He disapproved. He always made this sound when he disapproved.

“Tell her about the eclipse,” her mother suggested.

“I am.”

He turned to Ine, shifting in his seat. His eyes become unfocused, glancing about the room, before resting on a certain spot on the wallpaper, where the edges had begun to curl inward. As he talked, her mother talked over him occasionally, translating a word or phrase, so that in the end, she heard him tell the story in two streams, from two perspectives that came together, overlapping and passing through each other.

“Your mother was scheduled to leave on Saturday, I believe. *The eclipse occurred that Thursday, and I remember the eerie shade of yellow light right before the darkness.* We were climbing the small mountain beyond the church, really more of a large grassy hill, and there was a flock of sheep at the summit. When the sun returned to its former brightness the flock was just over the horizon; they were soon upon us.”

He tapped his forefinger on a picture of himself, leaning over one of the sheep, as if to inspect him, or talk to him, as he often talked to the neighborhood dogs, *Yes. You’re a nice dog. Yes. Guter Hunt.*

“*At the time I thought, I would like to know what they thought of the eclipse and what they did during the darkest time,* because they sat there, so still and calm, as if entirely unaffected by the strange occurrence. We took many pictures with the sheep resting beside us. When the film was developed, the pictures still contained the peculiar yellow tinge of light, but we hadn’t noticed it at the time. *It warmed and softened the air; it made us look so young.* Or maybe it was that it made the photographs look so old, so distant.”

His eyes became unfocused again. He closed the album. Ine leaned forward to stand up, but he turned to her, as if to ask her not to leave. She was late for school.

“You were not born yet, and we had just found out that your mother was expecting you. She at first was only going to follow us to the Kogelhütte, but decided to climb the entire way to the top of the mountain. Your father had gone to Innsbrück with Karl, and she did not want to spend the day by herself.

“The hotel had packed us a lunch of sandwiches, and we ate them on a bench. There was a beautiful view. *It overlooked a mountain pass and a sparkling valley lake, like the sky but greener, and there were beautiful flowers growing as tall as your waist.* Plum colored thistles, daisies, red poppies, purple clover, and other flowers which I do not know their name, pink, yellow, and white. Everywhere there were flowers. On the ground, very low, were edelweiss and enzian, little orange and red mushrooms, heather and forget-me-nots, pale crocus and spring beauty. *Flowers I had painted but never seen, such an array. Your grandmother made a crown for your mother to wear in her hair and a band of edelweiss for her walking stick. Now you cannot pick the flowers, you have to leave them be for others to see, but then there were no rules. You could take anything with you, to remember.*

“From the top of the mountain we could get a clear view of the Zügspitze and all the other surrounding mountains, the Thanellor, the Roterstein, and the Alpkopf. We ascended down the crevice shared with the Roterstein, and on the way down saw herds of mountain goats and an ibex fawn, stumbling up the mountainside alone. I took pictures of these, but they are but small dots on the mountain.

“Back in the village we all had an enzian schnapps and returned to our rooms. Your mother wasn’t feeling well and so she stayed in bed during dinner and all the next day. The day after, she returned to the States, and that was the last time your grandmother was to see her. Your grandmother pressed the flowers in a book and when they were dry, she glued them to a card and mailed it to your mother with the photographs of our climb. When I had first seen the pictures I thought, *we looked so young and so healthy, how much had changed in only a few weeks.*”

Ine knew that it was not long after the trip that her grandmother passed away.

* * ** * ** * *

The first thing I did, when we arrived at the cabin, was put on new bedding, straight out of the rectangular plastic cases. New sheets in the front bedroom for Alex. New sheets in the large bedroom for me.

“Two beds?” he asked. “Expecting someone?” His remark was loaded.

I walked past him, tucking in the fitted sheet around the mattress. “These sheets smell funny,” I said.

“It’s the stain-proofing. Or starching. It will go away.”

Night had already fallen. I watched the moon rise through the window, a yellow oval crepe behind the evergreen branches. “Should I close the curtains?”

“I already did.”

“Those are it then? I thought there were drapes, too.” I should have thought of this when I was at the department store. I could have gotten a set to match the sheets. “I should have gotten a heavier set, winter coming and all.” Another layer of the home I had

forgotten, I thought. In the old house, the shutters were built into the window frames. My mother insisted. I went into the kitchen to look around, sending Alex to the car to get the rest of the things. I heard him return a few minutes later, staggering down the front hallway, carrying a heavy box.

The hallway opened into a square room, with high, wood-plank ceilings, empty but for one window imbedded in the thick, outer wall. All of the furniture, even the curtains, had been removed from the room. It had been an addition that my father never finished.

“Alex?” I called. “I thought I heard you in here.” I saw one of my plates, or one of my mother’s plates rather, sitting in the corner, broken in half. I looked around for a moment, before looking up, and there I saw Alex, hanging from the ceiling. But not really hanging, per se, but crouched, like a bat, on the wooden underside of the upper floor. He sat there, knees hugged to his chest, shaking slightly, his shoulders moving up and down, or rather, down and up. I had never seen him so upset.

My first response was to run as far away from the phantom Alex as possible, in hope that when I returned, if I returned, he would be gone. Instead, I froze in my position for a moment, before summing up the willpower to wave my hands around his head, as if to check for some kind of invisible supports. When I was satisfied that he really was suspended against the ceiling by no trick or illusion, I asked in a very calm voice, “Alex, what are you doing up there?”

He looked around the corners of the ceiling, and then, barely astonished, looked down at me and replied, “Me? What are *you* doing up there?”

I had just started cleaning the kitchen in preparation for dinner. Whoever had stayed here last had left very little food, except for a few packets of ketchup and a few cans of ten-year-old soup. The soup had corroded the cans, and they sat on the shelf in a half an inch of hardened black sludge. I had yelled at Alex to bring in the box of dishes, after finding some strange stains on the remaining paper plates, and was waiting for him to return from the car.

I was not sure that I still regretted my decision to come here. I was hopeful about the new surroundings, our adventurous move to the wilderness of the Pacific coast borderland, when I heard a crash in the hallway. I walked into the end room. That was what I was doing there, but I still didn’t understand what Alex was doing up there.

“No,” I said. “You’re on the ceiling, and you’ve broken all of the dishes. What are you doing? Are you stuck?” He didn’t respond for a moment. Finally, he looked down.

“I don’t know,” he said. “I’m sorry. I really don’t know.” He leaned against the wall. “I thought you were on the ceiling.”

“No,” I said again. “You’re upside-down. And you’ve broken all of the dishes. Those were my mother’s. How did you get there? Why couldn’t you be more careful?”

“I don’t know.” He glanced around the room. “There is no up, it’s all the same. I don’t want your mother’s plates.” He put his head back against his knees. He began shaking again. “I couldn’t hold them right.”

For the past few years, or maybe since I met Alex, or at least since I received the letters, I had not been myself. I was all right sometimes, but I remembered a time where I had felt happy, I didn’t remember a change, but I knew this wasn’t that time. It had gotten to the point where sometimes I thought I was actually being nice, and he thought I had some underlying intent, and I wasn’t sure then if I did, and if I did, if it was the same that he thought I had. I had intended to get away alone, but I hadn’t made a change by myself,

so I made us make a big change together. And now I realized, that if it wasn't for me, he would be cowering on the floor in his own apartment, and, more likely I thought, maybe not even cowering at all. He would be sitting on his own sofa, reading his own books, staring out his own window, regardless, it would be his own doing. I had dragged him all the way up here, and as ridiculous as it seemed, I had to get him down.

I was becoming more and more nervous, but Alex seemed to be worried about other things, and I wondered if he even understood that he was somehow attached to our ceiling. I speculated what it must be, the gravity of the sun somehow just overwhelming the pull of the earth, holding him ever-so-gently against the wrong side of the floorboards. I wondered if he opened the window and climbed outside, if he would fly straight into the sky, and how strong was the pull, how fast would he vanish. Maybe it wasn't simply that the sun's pull had, through all these miles, overcome that of the earth. Maybe the earth's pull had just ceased to affect him at all. He was just going to fly off the face of the earth, not into the sun, not into anything at all, into infinity. He was so upset about the plates that it didn't occur to him that if he were to ever leave this house, it would inevitably end in catastrophe. I had to keep him from flying away. I thought a moment.

"Alex," I said. "Alex, Alex. Just stand up. Just give me your hands."

He didn't move.

"Alex, please. Just reach down and I'll pull you back."

He wiped his nose on his sleeve and I saw a teardrop roll up his cheek and fall off the tip of his chin.

"Alex?" I stretched my arms to see if I could reach anywhere near him, but began to feel a little dizzy. "Please, I don't feel well, either."

After a minute he stood up. I looked up at his face, less than a foot from mine, yet I was beginning to feel a gap between us, almost insurmountable, but still growing. "Quickly now," I said grabbing his arms that were now extending uncertainly towards me as well. As I held my head straight up and grasped his arms, I noticed the empty cardboard box, sitting on the ceiling of the hallway, just beyond the door.

I plummeted head first towards the floor, and if Alex hadn't been there to grab my legs as I dove past him, I might have been knocked out for more than a few moments. When I woke up I was sitting on the guest bed, Alex on the chair beside me.

"You had a bad fall," he said.

"I had actually meant to stay in the main room," I said.

"It was closer. You're heavy. Do you want some ice?"

"I think I just want to sleep."

"Maybe you shouldn't."

"I think I would just like to sleep," I said. Nestled in the musty down blankets, I felt the full weight of the situation, our move, and our isolation in the house of the semi-remote borderland. I sank into my pillow and covered my head--all but the top--which now throbbed so painfully with an invisible pressure that even the featherbeds were too much.

I fell asleep and immediately was transported into the family room of my mother's house. I stood, beside the couch and the heater, watching myself as I sat on the floor. I reached out to touch the hair of this detached entity of myself, but I could not reach far enough. My arms were somehow constricted. But fortunately, in dreams, you can will what

happens. You have a thought, and it manifests itself as a dreamed reality. As soon as I thought it, the other of myself stood up, turning around. I looked terrified, and my consciousness flitted between selves, morphing from one to the next as characters often do in dreams. I told myself to be still, that I was harmless, and that I would do nothing, but I could not articulate any words. I reached across again, just to feel if I was real. As soon as I pressed my own forehead, the dream dissipated, and I found myself tangled amongst my blankets, my face resting on the back of my hand.

neighborhoods

The streetlights crooned and corroborated we exist in wave lengths and waves of pocketed air
through arid space smeared into black, like mascara under pallid tears.
Avoid detection and hold onto me while covering factions,
covering the raindrops gathered on the insular street.

Love was complacent in the midst of God,
through never ending backyards we never saw of neighborhoods we didn't know at all,
in states that don't exist.
The color blue and death ascended as we treaded to the edge of town.
Though basements' faceless occupants talk in blurs like of opera halls, floral prints, and white
bedroom walls.
Outside the window where we found the knife after being chased by unknown intentions.
Biological clocks stop,
my skin was vernal and blank.

We held onto the sleeves of one another's sweatshirts
as we were letting go of our dreams.
We held onto our parents' religion as fruit hold their seeds.
The houses would stop and the field would begin, an ocean of beau idealism,
a pattern of strips, the air would be as sure as our deserted lips
as troubled as our educationless expletive aspects
but for now we let the mist place itself and manifest into a flood of churches sprawled across
my body.

The grass was tall and intrigued by our shadows, fell still.
We were just a piece of a shadow that was everything surrounding.
We fell back into puddles away from the blank figures that waited under porch-lights,
scattered infrequently and always watching cause they were, too.
We hid away from static waves among bushes and you held onto me like we held onto the
nostalgia of nonexistence.
Between white fences and the sky we fell into puddles, we split a bag and our clothes were
subtle.

The Case of Dr. V.M. Tatarinov

There is, of course, the curious story of Vadym Mikhailovich Tatarinov, who, it must be said, was perhaps the best-kept of Stalin's secrets. Vadym attended medical school during the years immediately following the declaration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and upon becoming a doctor began working quietly on projects that rather compromised him with regard to the Hippocratic oath. But it was the work he was given, and, in time, he grew acclimated to that work, the ordinary hours, the well-heated office, the double pay. In his first years, he took out many women. At the end of the evening, he would invite them to stay the night at his apartment. When they accepted, he used them and sent them home in the morning with half a loaf of bread and a brick of cheese. But when they declined, he would turn them out into the night without cab fare. Once a woman he turned out begged to be let into the apartment again, and she had her revenge against his behavior by giving him syphilis. However, he knew the treatment, compound 606, and was back to his old self straight off.

Still, with all those women, he never met one whom he found suitable for marriage. By and by, he fell out with the idea of ever feeling love, and in his forty-seventh year, abandoned the notion, as one would call off an arduous search for a climber in the Alps after a lengthy blizzard. Sitting at the table where he ate his breakfast, he poured vodka into a glass emblazoned with a star. He made himself drunk, guzzling a funeral's worth of the liquor. On the far wall he had hung pictures of the people who had been his family. There was his younger sister Elena, who had been killed while serving in the army, with her arm around his older brother Georg, who had been massacred at Nikolaev. Their mother had frozen the second winter Stalingrad was besieged.

He got up from his chair and went to the bathroom. Inside, the light turned from gold to gray – an optical trick. Staring into the mirror, he said:

“Vadym Mikhailovich Tatarinov! That's your name. You are forty-seven years old, Vadym Mikkhailovich. Don't think I don't know it because I certainly do.”

He pointed his middle finger at the reflection. His hairline was receding and his face looked hard and old even though his life's work had been easy. He drew himself up, cocked his head.

“And I'll tell you something else. You neither love nor are beloved. How is that so? You are not misshapen, you earn double pay! Why don't you have someone to bake you fresh bread? Hm? I'll tell you, Mister Doctor!”

He nodded his head and pushed his finger up against the mirror, leaving a smudge when he pulled it away. His breath filled the small room with the odor of rubbing alcohol. “You have gone after love like a lecher. Is that what you are? A lecher? No! So why behave like one? You're a doctor. A scientist!”

Now he put his hands on the sink and leaned in, his eyes meeting his eyes. And that was how it happened. He gave up bedding women and redoubled his work, where he was discovering many interesting facts about the tolerances of the human body and psyche that had not been known before. Single-mindedly, he worked to devise equipment and experiments, but, as was always the case with scientific research, he never seemed to have enough funding to achieve his goals. He applied to his superiors for greater resources, invoking the security of the people's revolution. Love, he wrote, bred unpredictability,

restlessness, trouble. But if love could be dissected, understood, and controlled, then surely such knowledge would be an asset to the Politburo. They granted his request, and he had as much money to work with as would have fed forty-seven thousand mouths for a year.

By August of 1950, the doctor had made some remarkable progress. Utilizing ingenious techniques he had developed himself, he was able to predict to the minute how long a pair of lovers would remain attached to each other. His subjects came to him believing that they were participating in a study on the nature of lovemaking. After spending one night in a room appropriate for such observations, the couple would be separated and the experiments would begin.

It wasn't a matter of deprivation or conditioning – the people truly no longer loved one another. A man and woman who had made love three times a day before arriving at Vadym Mikhailovich's facility would never touch again when they departed. The doctor succeeded universally, the rate of "recidivism," as it was termed in his reports, zero percent. Here was how he did it:

"Yulia, I have some questions to ask you. You have a piece of scratch paper and a pencil that you may use if you would like. When you have an answer, say it aloud. I will record your answers to these questions with this machine," he gestured toward a green metal box on the table. "Do you understand?"

She nodded.

"Firstly, what is the sum of the first five prime numbers?" She worked out an answer and said it.

"Incorrect. The answer is twenty-eight."

He continued to ask her questions, her answers to which were invariably wrong. He manipulated the recording to make it sound as if Yulia had had even greater difficulty, for instance, by doubling the durations of her pauses, looping minor stutters, and so on. He then invited her fiancé Anton into the room with the green metal box.

"It is of interest to us to determine not merely the physical, animalistic connection between certain people, but also what they find mentally, that is, intellectually, attractive about each other."

Asking Anton the same questions, the doctor took notes while the young man responded correctly every time.

"This may seem awkward at first, but you must listen attentively." The recording played.

His prisoners always had food sufficient in quality and quantity – better than most of them ate outside the facility. They had hot water every other day. But Vadym Mikhailovich kept a bag of burrs always at the ready. When confronted with the apparently profound stupidity of his lover, a man became much more likely to acknowledge that perhaps this was not the person best suited for his love. Or else it was the man whose ignorant and unintelligent responses slowly repulsed his girlfriend or wife. This was the mildest method – Level 1, as the doctor referred to it. From there, it became personal, intimate, and cruel.

"Yulia, think of all the men with whom you have engaged in sexual activities. The best, think of as a ten, the worst, a one. With complete honesty and a regard for the import of the scientific research we are conducting, please evaluate Anton on your scale." Her answer was then replayed to Anton, immediately after he had evaluated Yulia on his scale. From mildly pointing out ignorance to exposing sexual inadequacy and revelations of

infidelity, the doctor discovered ways to play the piercing, high notes that stung his subjects instantly, along with the low, persistent, reverberating tones that resonated in the walls and bowels. Most experiments took a week and a half to carry out.

Doctor Vadym Mikhailovich Tatarinov expanded his facility. Every day he finished the reports on twenty-five pairs – fifty people, slightly fewer than twenty thousand per year. The incredible volume demanded of him fourteen-hour days. At the end of two and a half years, he had uncoupled as many people as would inhabit a small city. All of this he put into well-worded, convenient reports that he forwarded to the Kremlin, where the Leader himself read them at and for his leisure.

Sitting at the table where he ate his breakfast, the doctor poured vodka into a tall glass. He drank slowly, letting the warmth in his belly thaw him. For an hour he sat, drinking and reflecting on his work. As the experiments continued, Vadym had become increasingly convinced that the reason he could not find love earlier in his life was that he had intuitively understood what his experiments provided evidence of. One might find a hundred rubles in the streets, he supposed. That would be quite an implausible stroke of luck, but it was possible in precisely the way that “finding” love in the streets was not, for the simple reason that while a hundred rubles was a very real thing, love could only be found when it was fabricated, conjured by the individual, or imagined by couples engaged in an unconscious conspiracy. Under the slightest scrutiny, it all gave way. Hadn’t he been able to prove that?

He walked to the bathroom and, after using the toilet, looked at himself in the mirror. Bald and fattish now, his mouth permanently turned down at the corners, he could see that it would be doubtful he could have any woman but a whore.

“It’s you! Vadym Mikhailovich, you slab of tepid flesh! Well, you were right about love after all, and so maybe you can die happy now, eh?”

Finishing his vodka, he got under his sheets and slept a dreamless sleep.

The next day, a technician introduced case 51.857-A/B to the doctor: Maksim Lebedevich and Vera Nikolaevna. The doctor hurried through his standard, mendacious explanation of the experiment, making sure to emphasize how imperative it was that the two fully participate for the benefit of science and the future. They were not prisoners, certainly, but they could not be let go from the facility until the conclusion of the experiment. That next morning, the sessions began.

“Vera Nikolaevna, please sit,” said the doctor. He lifted a pair of reading glasses from his desk and then returned them.

“I have some questions to ask you. You have a piece of scratch paper and a pencil that you may use if you would like. When you have an answer, say it aloud. I will record your answers to these questions with this machine,” he gestured toward a green metal box on the table, “Do you understand?”

“Yes, doctor.”

“Firstly, what is the sum of the first five prime numbers?” She said the prime numbers aloud, keeping place with her fingers, adding as she went along. She gave her answer.

“Correct,” Vadym declared. She proceeded to respond correctly to all but two of the questions.

“You are a bright woman, so I will tell you more of our purpose. We must find the precise thing that causes love so that we can implement our findings in such a way as to improve the lives of the people. Traditional methods of finding love are inefficient and do not suit the pace of progress that must be made over the next five years.” Very little of what he said was true, naturally, but misdirection had proven to be a very effective way of handling his more intelligent subjects. Vadym Mikhailovich called Maksim Lebedevich in and asked him the same series of questions, then replayed Vera’s responses.

“Doesn’t she have a voice like a cool stream? Imagine swimming naked in that voice!” said Maksim, delighted at hearing Vera’s voice.

“You misunderstand the point of this exercise. Do you not find it curious that Vera could not give the acceleration due to gravity?”

“Haha, well. Yes, probably about as curious as she will find my inability to give the French phrase for ‘Good day, how are you?’ I would imagine,” he said with a smile. The doctor recognized that this would be a difficult case, but he was confident in his methods. He had seen worse.

The days passed but the experiment drew no nearer to completion. Neither had admitted to infidelity or even having ever had sexual relations with another person. And the little foibles that were like ice picks against other couples were as feathers tickling the amusement of Vera and Maksim. Finally, the doctor decided he had to resort to more radical procedures. Technicians, posing as guards, raped Vera Nikolaevna. That afternoon Maksim was called in to see Vadym Mikhailovich.

“Doctor, we have been here nearly three weeks and I have not seen my wife since the first night. Something is not right – I do not know what, but I no longer wish to participate in this experiment, and I think I may also speak for my wife in this regard.”

“Maksim Lebedevich, you must understand that you are a subject in a vital experiment, and, moreover, you are my patient. Believe me when I say I have your best interests at heart. We ask a little of you, so that the future may benefit greatly.”

“Doctor, we are neither of us foolish men. Perhaps Vera and I are simply unsuitable for your experiment – our love is not efficient or progressive or anything but what it is, and so I do not think you will find it worthwhile to study us any further. Please let us return to our lives.”

“We have never found anyone unsuitable for our experiment. Sometimes it takes as long as two months to learn what we need to know,” Vadym told him. In fact, the longest case on record was twenty-two days, most of which was due to the dullness of the subject couple. Generally, cases requiring two weeks were considered nuisances. Vadym dismissed Maksim.

Vadym Mikhailovich determined that it would be necessary to gain a better understanding of the neurological responses of Vera and Maksim. Setting his technicians to work, he had an apparatus built that involved two television screens, a set of buttons, and a timing mechanism. He placed Vera and Maksim in a room together, separated by a soundproof glass partition. In front of Maksim, the doctor placed a screen with these words showing: **DO YOU LOVE VERA? PRESS YES OR NO WHEN INSTRUCTED.** Vera’s screen read the same but asked if she loved Maksim. They looked through the glass at each other. The screen changed with a flash. **“PRESS YES OR NO NOW.”**

What happened next baffled Vadym Mikhailovich. The technician on Vera's side spoke through a microphone:

"The results indicate that the male subject responded first." The doctor began making a note when he was interrupted by the second technician's voice:

"Comrade Technician Yuri has misinterpreted the data. The results on the male's machine conclusively indicate that the female responded first."

How could that be so? The doctor assumed some malfunction of the equipment and had his technicians double and triple check the electrical wiring. He improved the sensitivity of the timing device to a ten-thousandth of a second. And again he brought in Vera and Maksim, who stared at each other through the soundproof glass. The doctor initiated the test.

"The results indicate that the female subject responded first," technician Lev said into the microphone.

"Comrade Technician Lev has misinterpreted the data. The results on the female's machine conclusively indicate that the male responded first."

Which was patently impossible, knew Vadym Mikhailovich.

"We must run the experiment again," he announced. But when it was repeated, the results did not vary. Again, the technicians tested and tuned the equipment, and again the results remained the same, indicating that both Vera and Maksim responded first when asked if they loved the other. Then Vadym Mikhailovich hit upon an idea. He changed the question to "DO YOU LIKE THE SYMPHONY?"

The screens flashed and changed to "PRESS YES OR NO."

"The results indicate that the male pressed NO fourteen hundredths of a second before the female pressed YES," the technician on Vera's side spoke into his microphone.

"The results on the male side confirm Comrade Technician Yuri's conclusion," said technician Lev, at which point the arteries carrying blood to Doctor Vadym Mikhailovich Tatarinov's brain nearly burst. His consternation became so extreme that he could no longer stand the sight of the two and went home to his apartment, leaving instructions that they not be fed or given hot water for four days.

Vadym's apartment felt enormous to him. He looked around at the furniture that had not changed since the day he moved in. A record player sat on a table, unused for a decade now. Not bothering with a glass, he took three gulps of vodka and sat down at the table where he ate his breakfast. He saw his reflection in a porcelain plate on the table.

"Vadym Mikhailovich Tatarinov! That's who you are! And who do these pieces of shit think they are, trying to give you a stroke?"

The doctor nodded in agreement with himself. He took another gulp.

"It's love, isn't it? Well, it must be. It is an abnormal case, but it is love. Beyond all explanation. Love!"

"Well, you know just what to do, I would assume – you are a doctor by profession and are familiar with the treatment of cancers."

He finished the bottle and went to bed sick.

At the end of the four days, he had Vera hauled before him. He lit a cigarette to calm his nerves.

"Doctor, I have not eaten in four days."

“I am aware of that. It is a prescribed part of your treatment.”

“What is this treatment? Your guards abuse and starve me. Can you tell me, what does this treat? An excess of food in my diet? An absence of rape in my daily regimen?”

“Vera, you will lower your voice and understand your place. You are a subject, one of many, in a very important experiment that I am conducting, and furthermore, you are my patient. Do you understand the relationship between us? You are not to question my methods or my expertise. You are not to raise your voice at me. What you are being treated for is a persistent delusional condition. Our experiments have proven irrefutably that “love,” as the neurosis is popularly termed, is a correctable condition. You and your husband have been among our more trying cases, but I have arrived at a definitive cure and have had it implemented.”

Vera’s face looked like a blanched leek, and her mouth asked if she could be returned to her cell.

Maksim Lebedevich was given cyanide in his food that afternoon and did not feel much pain when he died. Vadym Mikhailovich released Vera two days later, giving her twenty rubles and a packet of decent cigarettes as well as her husband’s personal effects. Vadym Mikhailovich wrote a report for Stalin in which he described the case in detail, though he opted not to mention the results of his final experiment when he submitted the report along with his letter of resignation.

cold like the war

I saw you stretch like a tree branch bends
under shaking windows that reflected the light that's sent
from the moon to the water that fell off the clouds to the streets next to the buildings and
miles beneath the tops of them.
You found your feet inside puddles when the sidewalk declined before crossing the block to
the other side.

There's a lot of ways to get where we're goin' and we picked every way that people on drugs
would take.

We came to a fence in an alleyway--we crawled on the ground and stacked plastic crates--
you made crass remarks on how much the cold makes you shake.
Your hair is darker than the night cause I can't see the strands against your hands while you
feel your way through.

The taxis stopped slowing down when we became the rain, as the smoke from your breath
ascended away,
looking backwards as if from distancing trains that moan through the morning mist
carried from places so far away they don't exist, apart from on the curve of your lips when
you have words to say or if some
just slip.

We held dimorphic prayers in our hands and with that corroded the streets
and rocks and the sands.

We saw people undress in different lighting they perceived to make them look best,
so the lighting was varied or the TV's were on,
pulsing blue on varied breasts and embracing arms.

Old men smoked cigars on high rise balconies in a patrician manner, their wives in the
bathrooms applying self tanner.

Morbific by nature but constrained to the ground—we were higher than they could ever
dream and all colors of the sky we attained.

We saw the edge of trashcans lining places of development. We saw piers
peering out from under the cities gown.

We felt our chests move high and our stomachs left on the ground.

We must be of purpose or some form of worship
as what we are now is as undefined as a god or a sermon,
our faces connected the absence of feeling and the mist that never moved in the sky.
The stars began to emit barreling tones of complacency, tones we never cared to hear before.
You took way too long inside the bathroom sometimes. Bad habits never die.
Dwindling smoke curiously peeked out from under a green awning and was swept away
forever like a departing train
and beneath it an empty bottle of Lancers Rosé kept dry from the falling rain.

The Canda Verses

The Canda Verses are a collected record of ideas. They may be incorporated into more fully-developed work or may be used simply to spur new fragments in a recursive process.

534

He wanted to run, no, drive after her. Into her. But there were laws in this state.

Yoga

[in soothing voice] Imagine yourself on an island with white sandy beaches, imagine the sun toasting the tops of your arms as clear friendly water teases your toes.

Imagine this: a wooded highway, three girls driving, a truck. They're underage—overflowing. Such a sweet bass pumping, giving the alcohol a rhythm to swing to, coursing through young veins

Imagine this:

-I really have to work hard, you know.
-Work at what?
-Not falling in love with you

She stares, wondering if he can see the wickedness. Hoping. They never see it, the nice ones. How have they come this far without pain?

[in soft, suggestive voice] Imagine a huge granite boulder. Imagine yourself with the strength of that boulder. Its unmovable, unbreakable, everlasting strength.

Imagine this: the gardens in April, parents chasing toddlers around the swings, the ever watchful shepherds. Lazy anarchic ideas settle over a book of Verlaine and a Lucky Strike.

Imagine this: musty theater, the long anticipated date, first love flushes her cheeks, her thoughts

-I wanted to tell you—I've volunteered. I leave at the end of the month.
-Oh how brave! Excuse me a moment, would you?

In the bathroom she screams, shakes, sobs. Washes her face, takes a breath. Emerges.

-Popcorn?

Imagine this: 4am, a winter night. A new bed, new shadows. The world is asleep but her thoughts swirl like ballerinas on coke. New ideas burn hard but can't destroy the edges, bouncing, between perspective and reality. Birds sing outside the window. Thank god for duty free whiskey.

At the end of each day, imagine a lake, calm on a summer day. Imagine your mind as smooth and calm as the unbroken surface of the water.

Breathe in, breathe out. The instructor turns on soft music, while she twists the words. Imagine your heart, unbreakable as stone, calm as the summer waters. Je ne le ferai pas, parce que j'ai peur de la loi, mais je veux fusiller tous les oiseaux.

117

canceled election - they're murdering spies
in the Red Square, where--
Felt guilty dancing to the Rolling Stones,
weeping at His funeral

Inelegant Eulogy

You showed us the luxury
of eating one hardboiled egg;
with Hitler barking at the gate
you stood us up on two legs.

You recognized our enemies
where they lurked behind the curtain.
You forged a road, the only road
when all paths were uncertain.

We didn't know, until you taught us,
just what was our high, elusive goal--
not laboring for fame or profit,
but to engineer the human soul.

It always takes great sacrifice
to stride upon the world stage.
You built us into what we are;
your face is stamped across the age.

Old Bolshevik, we lay you down.
You answered the National Question;
in honor of your memory,
we canceled the election.

113

cramped room—beneath the U2 posters all alone but a guitar—acne and
glasses—one passion—can't remember when I last had a favorite, an obsession,
a hero—Northern Irish

Boy to October

It'd be a year before the acne cleared;
you still wore glasses, and you didn't smoke,
and you liked U2 too much. You would joke
preemptively, mocking what you revered,
always the first to scorn your heroes, weird.

But you practiced every chord and sixteenth note,
grew from your love like some damn Bono quote,
in a narrow room where silent posters cheered.

Did you outgrow your heroes? Well, we did.
Disowned they lay in quiet rows, words read
to us as children. Back then, we were kids
boiling our dreams to nothing; you ate yours raw.
You tuned your Martin on the unmade bed;
you hadn't yet unhooked a woman's bra.

162

...untenable
soft hands gone, now claws and tentacles

Prayer to Tzeentch

I dreamed last night of a huge bird every color of the rainbow,
a pet that wasn't mine,
and I'm not a fool; I know which way the wind blows.

Forty thousand years, a blue flame, and the number nine,
and it's always been war,
skulls, swords, and guns, every stop on the time line

and today, there's no place to sit down anymore;
it's hard to take a stand
in the best of times, from which we are far. I know my lore,

and my brother died on his feet, but I held his hand--
you, changer of small things,
Dark God of Hope, if it's my worship you demand

I'll gladly give, if giving brings
a tiny surety.
They forged me well, and I delight in slaughtering

like a weapon, and those it kills it does not miss or see;
I'll be amenable.
But there's one thing you have to promise me:

I've seen your kind pass by before, watched love itself become untenable;
leave me a means to touch,
if soft hands gone, then with claw and tentacle.

55

I wanted peace, but I was outvoted—burden of democracy

Please no, he says, he pleads. Please no, he says and there are tears in his eyes, tears of anger, like a five-year-old discovering his will is impotent in the face of older wills residing in bigger, stronger bodies. If his unit knew where he was, they would all be dead, he wants to tell them. But if his unit knew where he was, he would not be where he is, he thinks, and the circle of frantic thoughts starts over again. His livid throat closes in on itself.

He thinks about his mother and father and the girlfriend who broke up with him and how that had driven him to enlist, to forget, to escape, to leave her behind. He wants her to change places with him; no, he wants to kill her himself. The hate that wells up is not directed toward his captors but her, her, that goddam bitch. Jesus, please, he says through a throat so drily tight it feels like the flesh is cracking, flaking off the inside every time he speaks.

There are four men in the windowless room and they are neither amused nor concerned. It is a hundred and five degrees inside, too hot for emotions. Abdul-Qahaar mutters under his breath. Abdul-Khaaliq, covering the door with an AK-47, clucks at him. They are brothers, Abdul-Khaaliq the elder, with black stubble that covers his cheeks to within an inch of his heavy, drowsy eyes. Abdul-Qahaar is much younger, slender and with a slim, hairless jaw and big eyes that blink frequently. Qasim squats next to the American and his stench plugs the American's nostrils like wads of raw, half-digested garlic.

Ghaazi sits on a folding chair at a vinyl-covered card table, head propped on his right hand, spinning a cell phone with his left. They are waiting for instructions.

Ghaazi is thinking. It's been all bad luck the past two months. The day will wipe out all the promises of night. Damn these Americans, he thinks. He has seen them drag away his cousin with a black bag tied around his head and he has to steady his nerves to keep from shooting his prisoner's kneecaps and kidneys out. His father had gone to Bagdad

University and, if he were alive, would have been appalled at the thought of his son killing anyone, he knew. It's barbaric, but we're all barbarians now, as he has told his wife.

"What name?" says Ghaazi without looking back. The American sits in shock, senseless with fear. Qasim nudges him, almost gently, with his pistol. They understand it cannot be pleasant, but that is exactly why they are doing it. None of the men are happy about it.

"What name," he says again, more softly.

"e-Eric Youngman," says the young man. Abdul-Khaaliq clears his meaty throat.

"You kill we. We kill you. You kill we," Ghaazi says as he lifts his sweaty, hairy head from his hand and makes a circular gesture with his fore and middle fingers.

Eric's mouth sticks together. He cannot make any saliva. Qasim holds a bottle of water up to his cheek and pours it over his bottom lip.

"Thank you," says Eric. Qasim nods and twists the cap back onto the bottle. He is weary.

Ghaazi picks up the phone and holds it up to his forehead. It has been six hours now since the action, and more than twenty since he has slept. He cannot keep holding the

American. He has to move. He looks over at the American, who is sitting indian-style with his hands zip-tied behind his back. He feels a sickening pity for him and thinks about how a moment ago he wanted to shoot him in the kneecaps and kidneys. How is it that Allah permits this, he wonders. The minutes pass, the heat and the rank odors slowing down time like a handbrake. Abdul-Qahaar goes over to the corner where they have placed the American's helmet, body armor, and fatigues. They have stripped him to his underwear so he does not become sick with the heat. Abdul-Qahaar is trying on the helmet to see if it will fit him when his brother clucks at him again.

Then the phone rings. Ghaazi takes the phone in his right hand. With a tremendous effort, he struggles to recall the English his father had taught him.

"I... I want-ed peace. But was... outvoted -- burden of," and he pauses, to make sure he gets the next word right, "...democracy," he says, turning to face the American.

"Please, please don't kill me," says the soldier. The phone continues ringing.

"Ghaazi," Ghaazi answers the phone.

Not one second later, there is a blinding flash and the loudest sound any of them have ever heard. In the deafness that follows, the three round bursts of machine-gun fire sound soft and distant. There is not much pain for any of them: for Ghaazi, who is shot twice in the face, for Abdul-Qahaar and his older brother Abdul-Khaaliq, who are both shot many times in the chest, for Saqim, who is shot twice in his belly and once just above his left eyebrow, or even for Private First Class Eric Youngman, who is shot, with a pistol, once through his left ear.

223

“you can teach me all you know” odd request
the sky is blue and full of stars
though we can't see them in the day;
Fender produces rock guitars;
Jim Beam is whiskey, Play-Doh clay.

Havoc is Cyclops's brother;
Roget made thesauruses;
the world cries out for a lover,
most people want more kisses

Etc.

I have no will and so my whiskey sits there well
and drums pounded fast from skin stretched over gourd
out club doors onto downtown streets where it's been raining all week.
You walked in so wet so I guess I'll have one more.

I know my prowess is distanced like black suns
I like your dirty clothes
Da da da doo da

My whiskey don't sit long well and I hope you cannot tell
that I stumbled over trash coming to you
and if u got some money u wanna spend we can score drugs from one my frienz
then creep through screen doors of houses we don't.
If they don't know, we will survive
I like your hair down low
It's the best thing I know daisy chains!
I'm as innocent as you're fatherless and poor.
Da da doo da

405

She's not my baby, not even my friend,
 although she pulls the cat hair from my shirt
 and knows me only as a lover should.
 God save, I love her through the months of hurt
 with battered plate and shield of splintered wood,
 and fight like there was something to defend.

He liked to have his hair washed on Friday nights, and she was willing. Maybe they'd get coffee first. She'd drive, but his car, and he'd buy. They'd sit in the parking lot, seats tipped back, smoking cigarettes and watching traffic. She'd tell him about a dream she had. He'd think of writing a song about it. He was always inventing rhymes and anagrams of her name for the titles.

She'd wash the dishes in the sink and then set the water at the right temperature, which was a tricky thing, and get the towel. It was always the same towel, an unremarkable frayed brown from her grandparents' lake house. It started, as these things often do, out of convenience, and soon became habitual, integral. She'd reach under nicer towels to get it, become sadly puzzled when it wasn't there.

As she went to find the shampoo, she'd remind him that his sweater was bound to get wet, and he'd peel off three or four soft smoke-soaked layers. He'd be waiting when she returned, looking so naked in a stretched and over worn white t-shirt. She'd never seen him shirtless, and in her mind he didn't really exist without one.

He usually stuck his head under the faucet without checking the temperature. Trustingly, but maybe carelessly, and very rarely bravely. She'd wet his hair with what he thought was just the right amount of fingertip and nail. She'd wash it once, and then again, taking care to get the base of his neck and his scrappy sideburns.

Afterward, she'd wring his hair over the sink, pulling a little too hard. He'd rotate and stand before her with his head hanging down. She'd throw the brown towel over and rub his hair vigorously dry, as one would a Labrador. Then with the damp towel, she'd push his head up and rub his face. He usually complained but never resisted, and it was always then that she wanted to kiss him.

They had kissed, once, in Illinois. She was trying to sleep on an unfamiliar couch with a ragged cough and a headache that felt like two black eyes. They were exchanging half sleep thoughts when his head popped up from the sleeping bag on the floor and, for a second, his cigarette mouth touched her cough syrup lips. It was a long drive home, and they never discussed it. If they had, she'd say it didn't mean a thing, and he'd swear he was still free.

HARMOLIPI TOWNSHIP



MUNICIPAL HISTORY

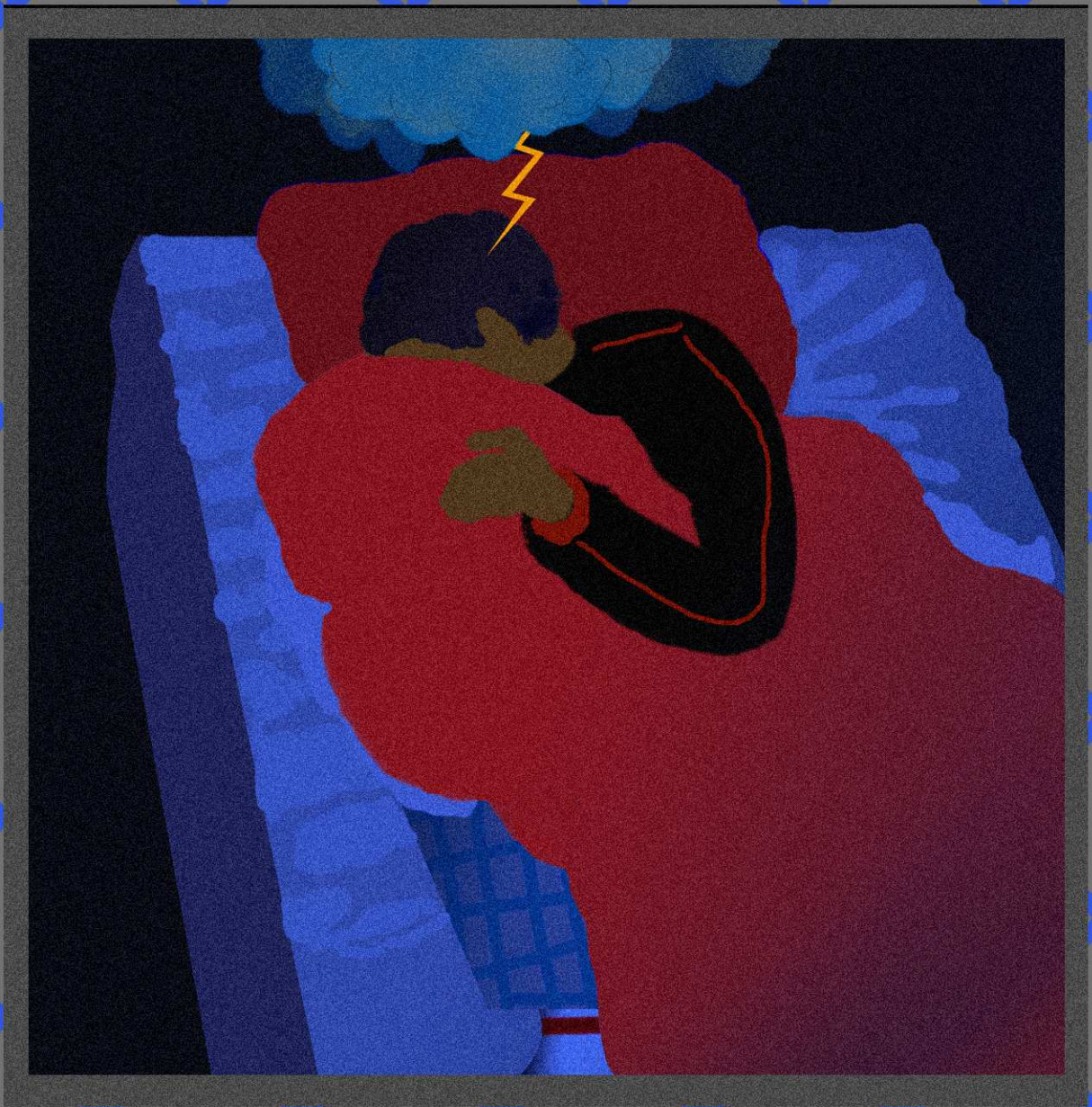
BOOK ONE: WHAT ARE THESE GUYS THINKING?



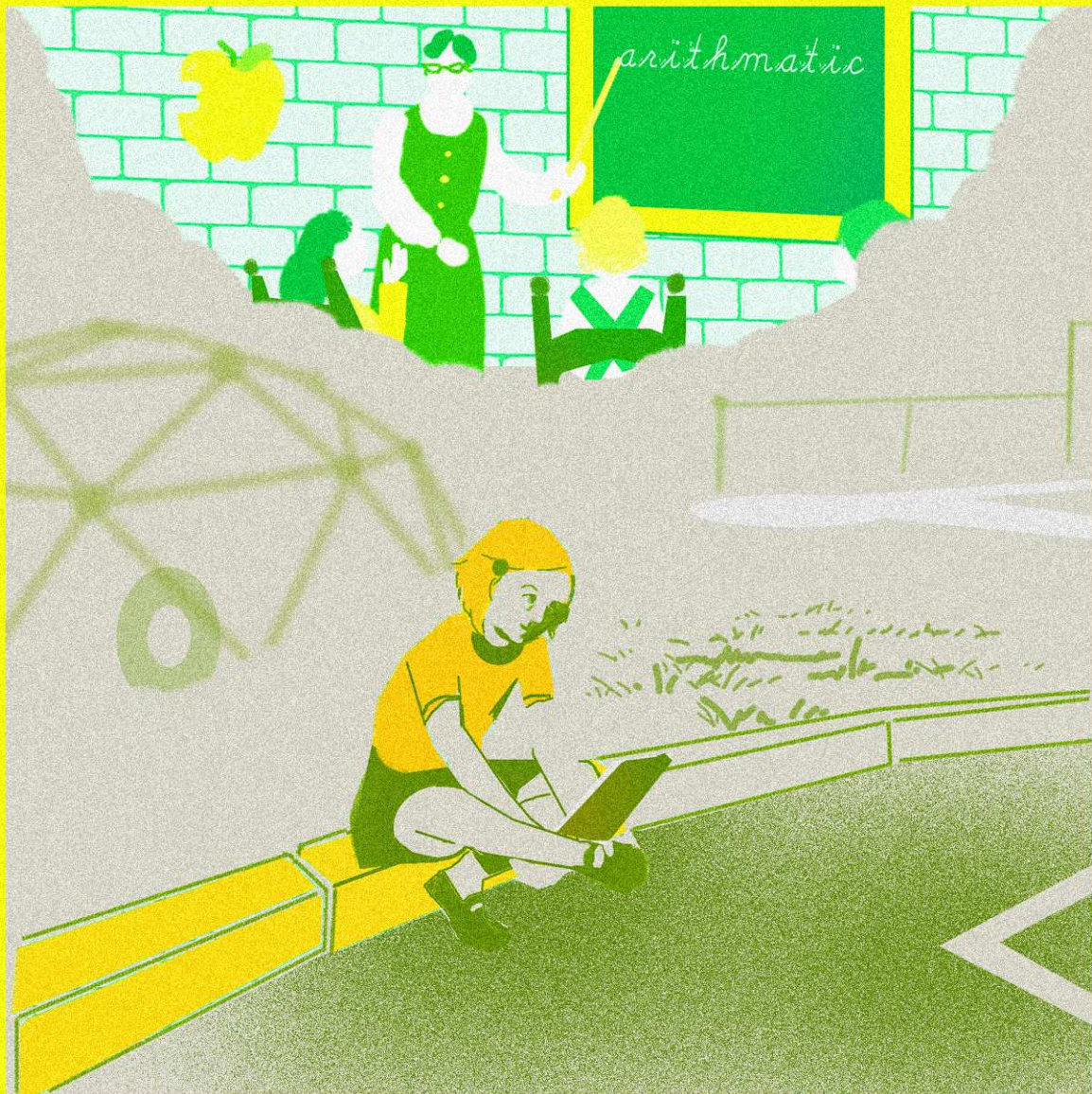
...I hope he's actually home. Ok. Ok. So Samuel, I had this idea and it might be stupid but it could be cool. So I had this idea and it was based on a dream I had which I'll tell you about then, but first here's my idea. Well, its like a club that we would start, but not a club exactly. Maybe it would be better to think about it as a company or uh I guess you might as well call it a club. I guess I might as well tell you my dream. I was at the mall, but there was like a sub-basement where you could have conventions and there was one going on for teachers, from all over the country and I saw a lady give a speech about what colors you should paint a school and she said that it was recommended that hallways always be painted a certain color of green, she kept calling it "bladder green", but I knew she meant that pukey green color that all the hallways in our school are painted and I can't remember the exact reason she gave but I just remember feeling outraged, like it was some kind of really evil plot. But then I woke up and I guess I sorta realized for the first time that things like schools aren't just the way they are in the same way the sky is or trees are, that there are people somewhere who figure these things out and then we just have to live with whatever they pick but that we could do the same thing and make the things in our minds exist, and the club could do that, I mean first it would figure out the conspiracies behind what THEY chose and then we could come up with our own ideas and worlds and our own ways of seeing the world as counter-conspiracies because it's like if two people or more people believe a thing could be real, and act like a thing is real, it become more real to everyone, even if it just changes how the world feels. Hey maybe we can walk to the Pizza Hat. Or your mom could drop us off?...



...OK HERE WE GO. Today representatives of the MLB card division prepare to meet with their counterparts in the Ultra League to draft players for a historic first inter-league all-star match. It is likely that '54 Jackie Robinson or '72 Roberto Clemente will go first for the MLB and there is talk that Arizona's rookie sensation Jerome Sarasqua will be the first selected from the Ultra League. We talk now with the UL's Player-Commissioner Samuel G. Ferko...



...AND HOW DARE HE SAY THAT TO ME, "WHY WOULD SHE CHEAT OFF OF YOU?" I'LL TELL YOU WHY, ITS BECAUSE SHE'S A LITTLE ASS-KISSER WHO NEVER HAD AN ORIGINAL THOUGHT ANYWAY AND SHE WAS AFRAID SHE WASN'T GOING TO GET THE BEST GRADE IN THE CLASS AND ARGH I CAN STILL FEEL ALL THEIR STUPID SMIRKS AND I KNOW WHAT I'LL DO I'LL NEVER SAY A WORD AGAIN AND NEVER EVEN CRACK A SMILE AND IF SOMEONE LOOKS AT ME MY EYES WILL JUST BE LIKE DAGGERS AND THEN THEY'LL TAKE ME SERIOUSLY AND I'LL WALK DOWN THE HALL AND EVERYONE WILL STAY THE HELL OUT OF MY WAY ...



At recess
I like to imagine
Up above the grey clouds
Old schools of long ago
Where Mommies and Daddies went
And teachers wore funny glasses
And there were no calculators!



ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ

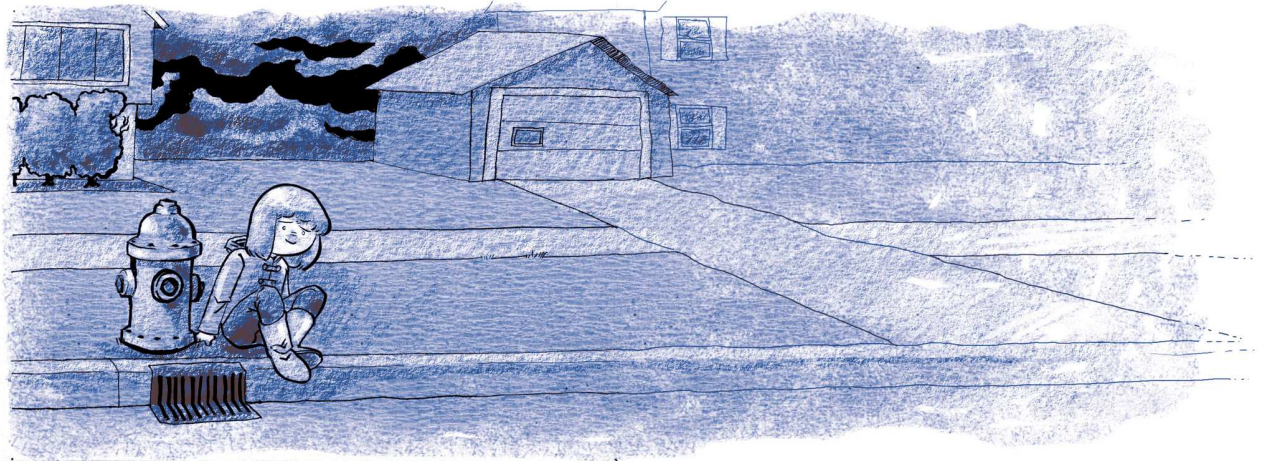


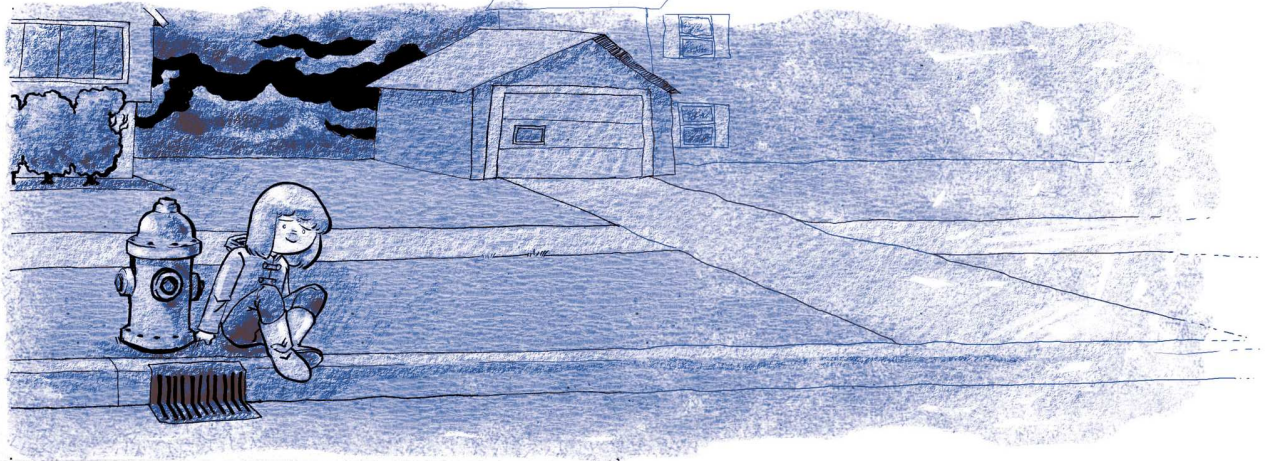
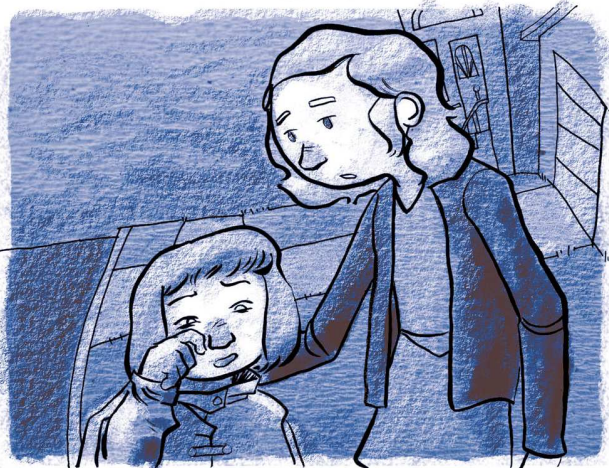
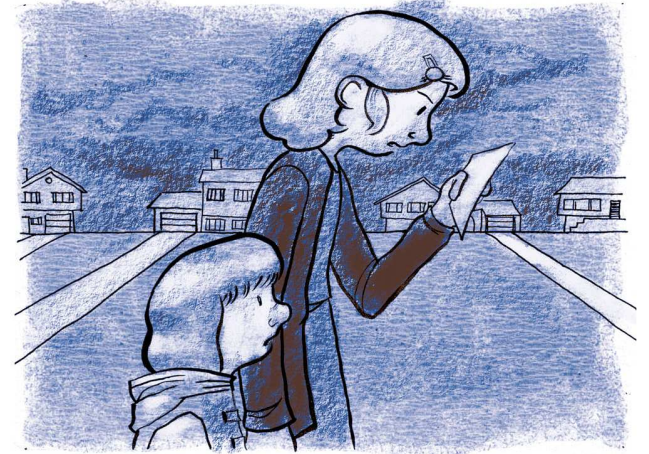
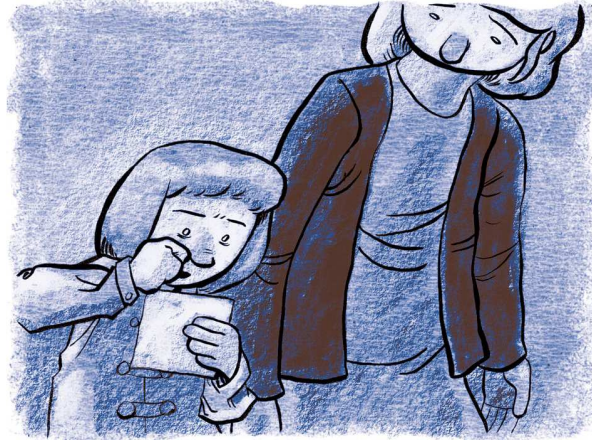
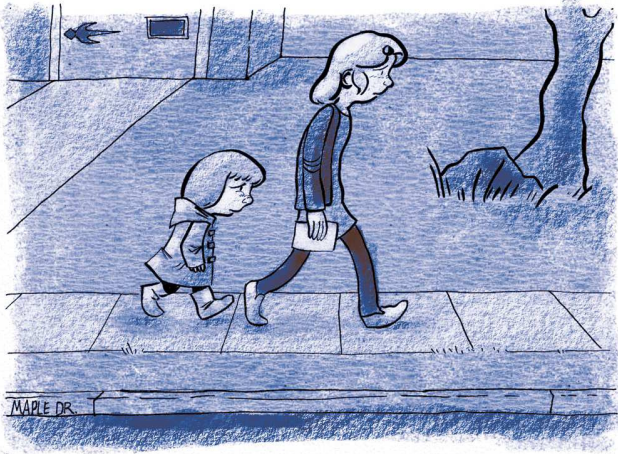
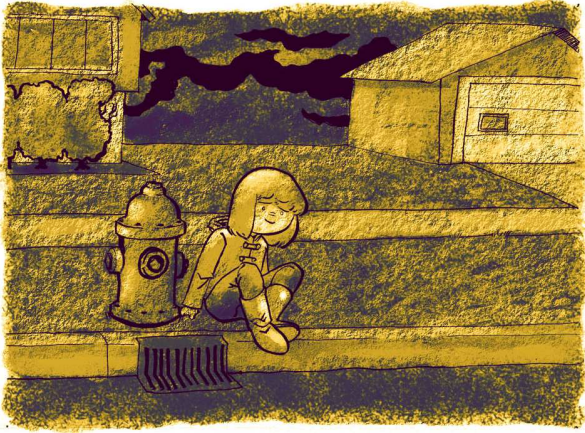


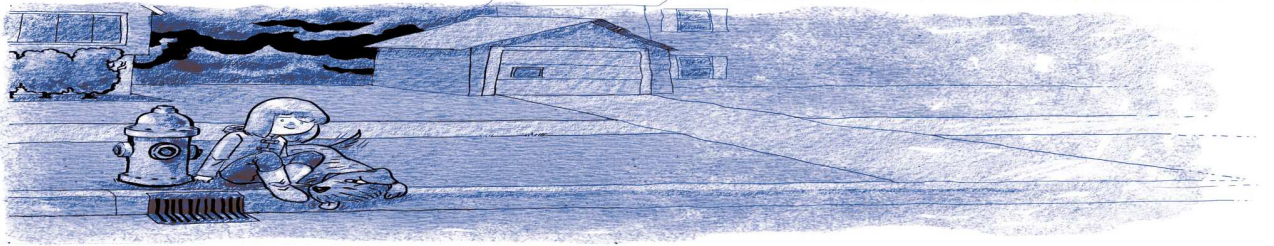
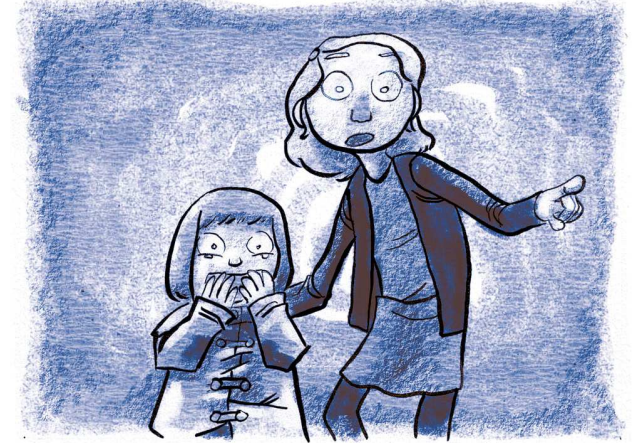
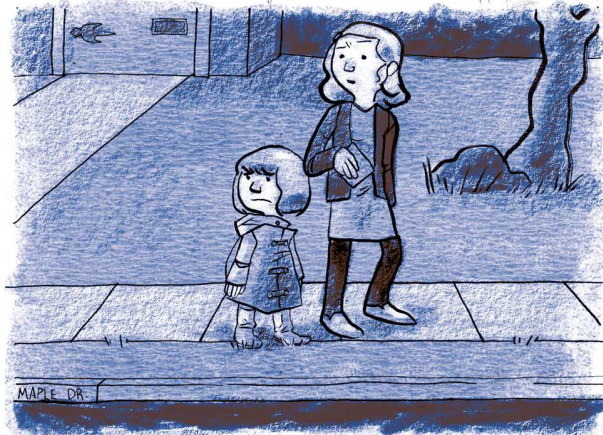
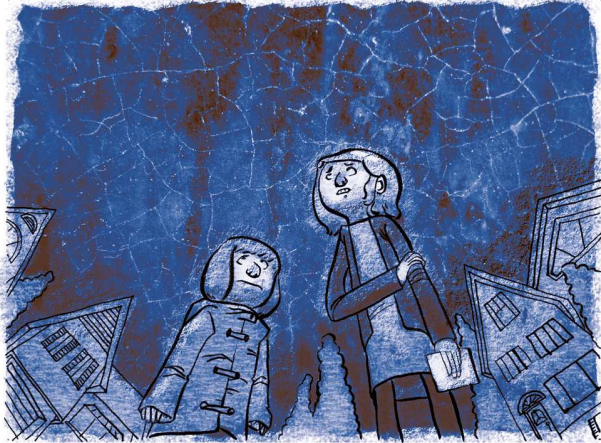
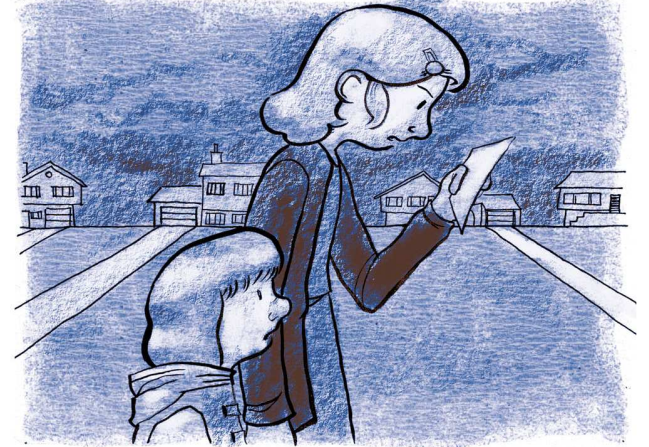
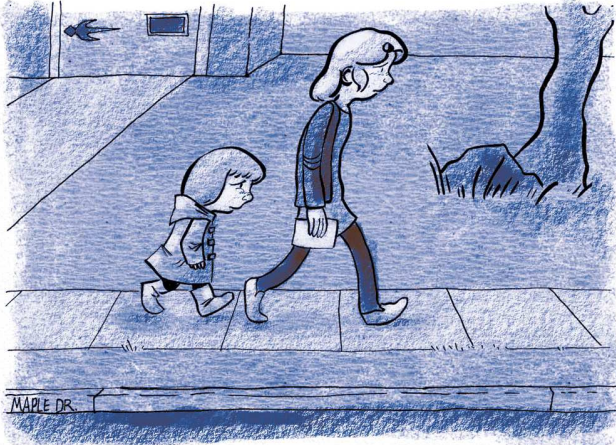
Ideas: "For Club"

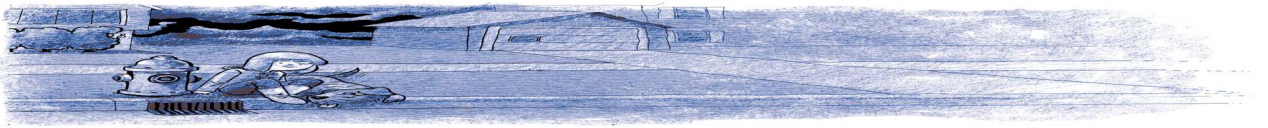
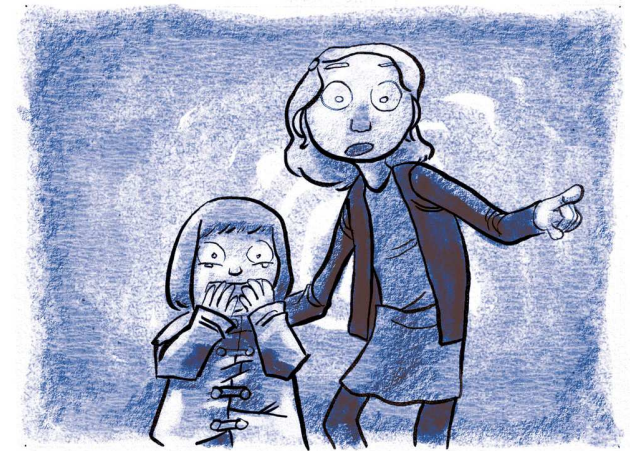
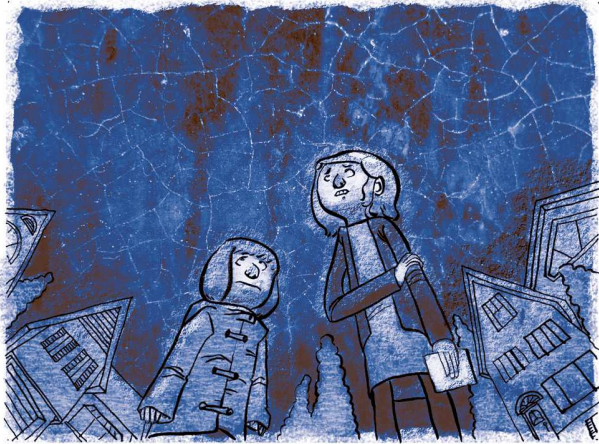
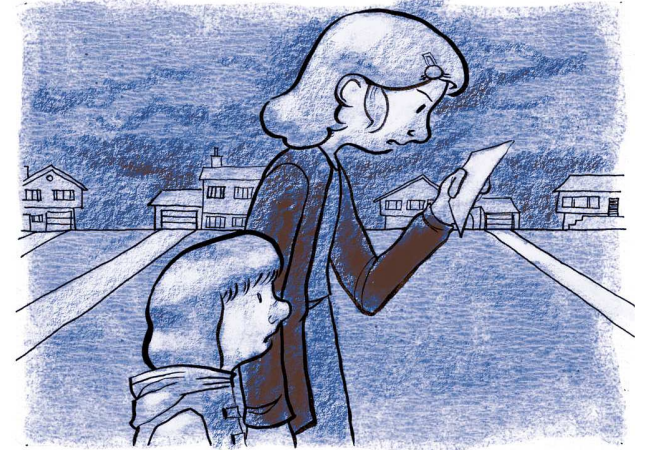
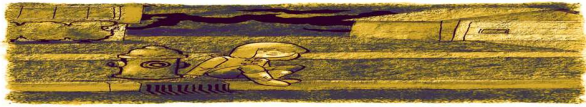
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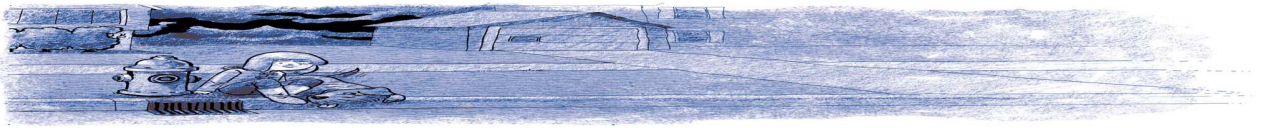
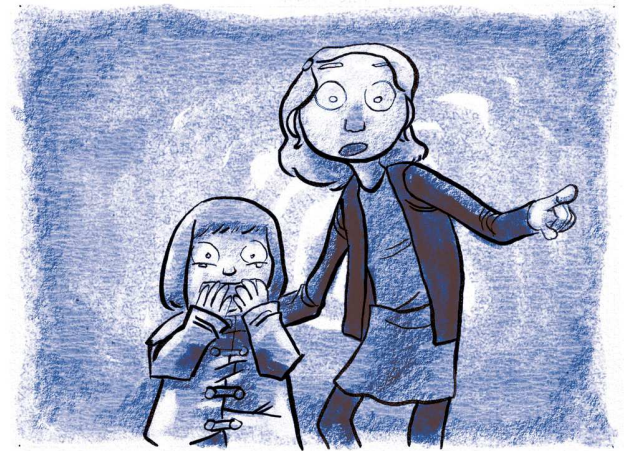
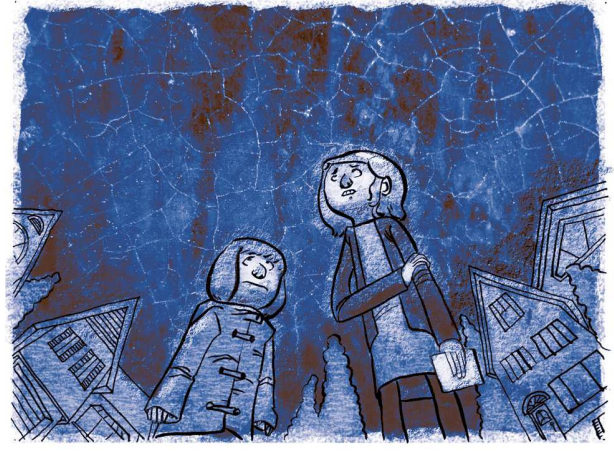
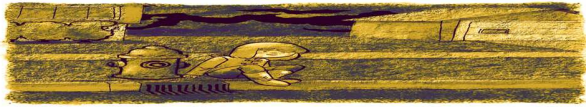
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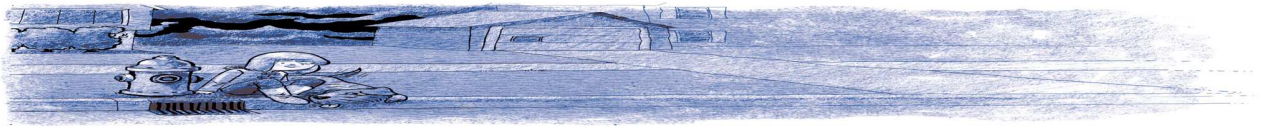
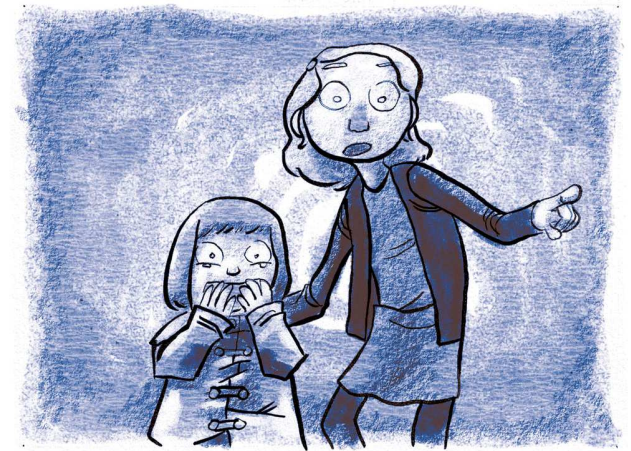
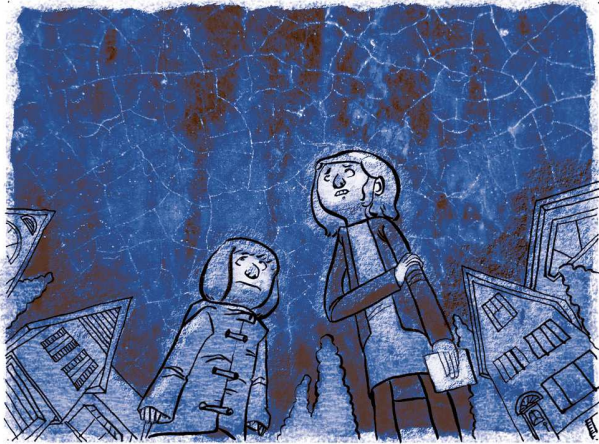
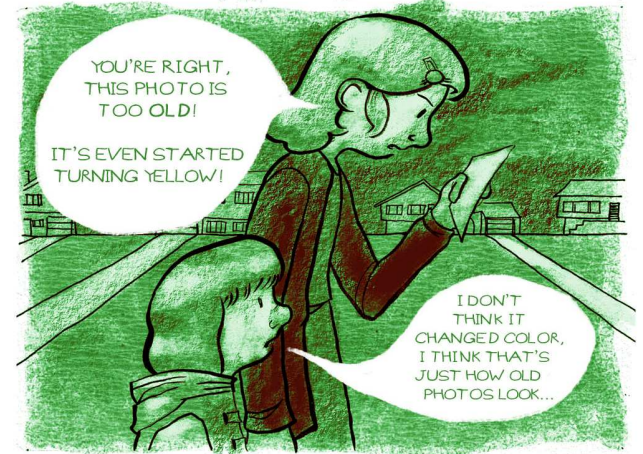
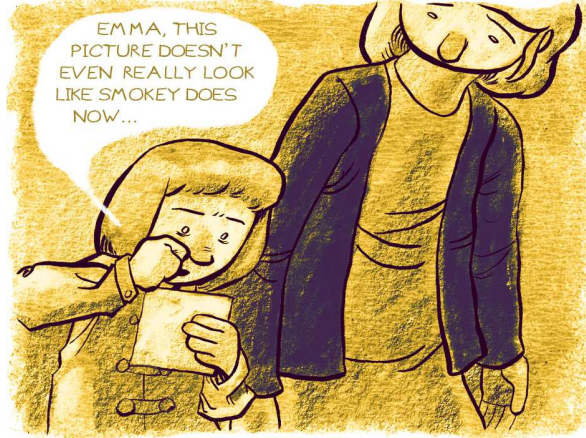
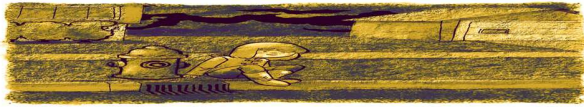


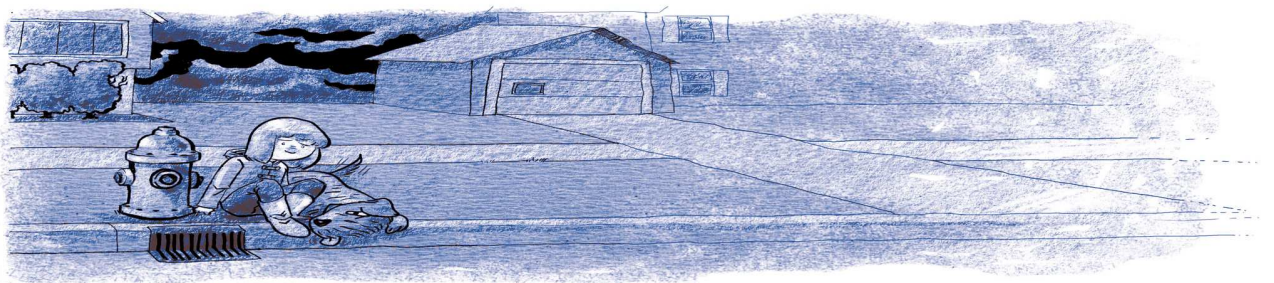
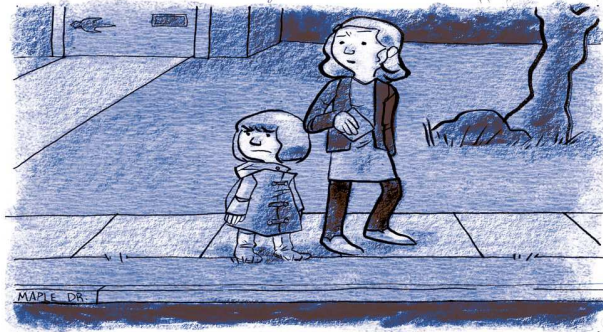
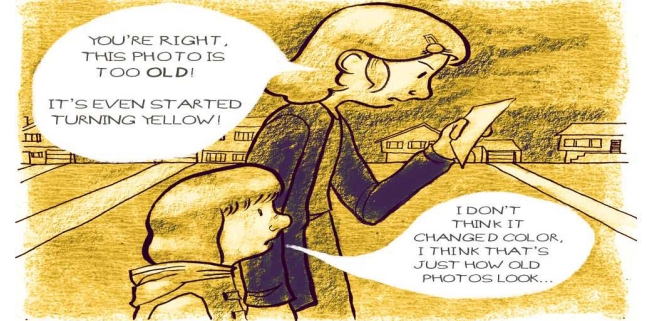


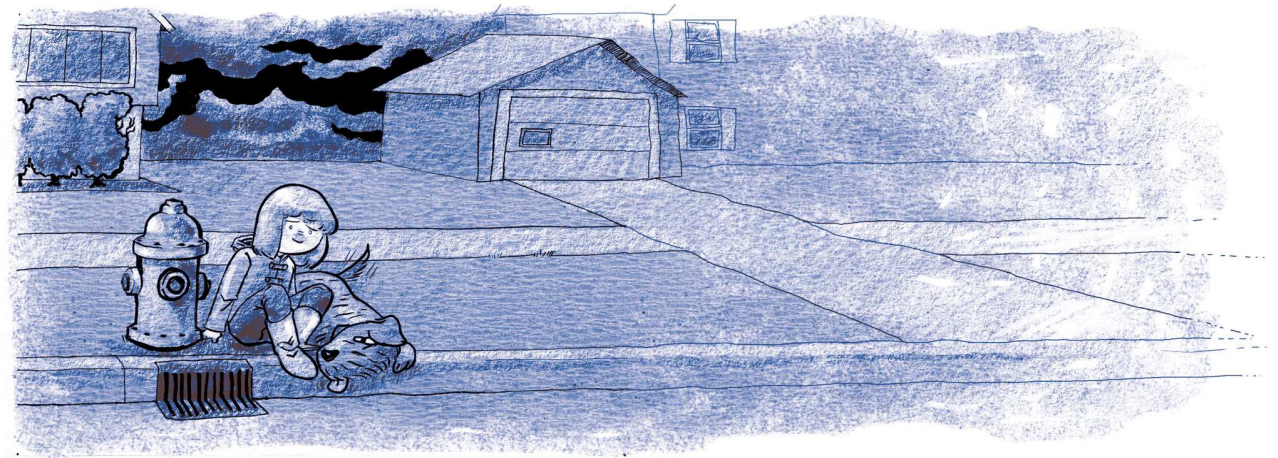
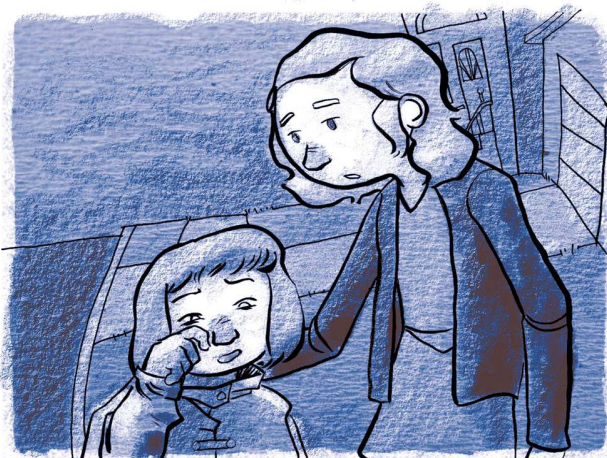
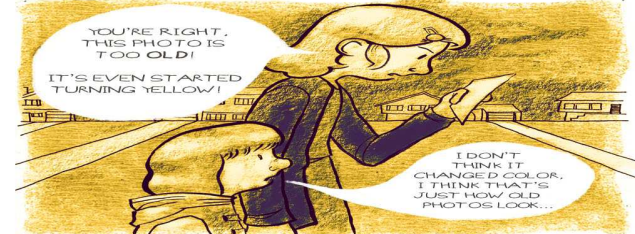
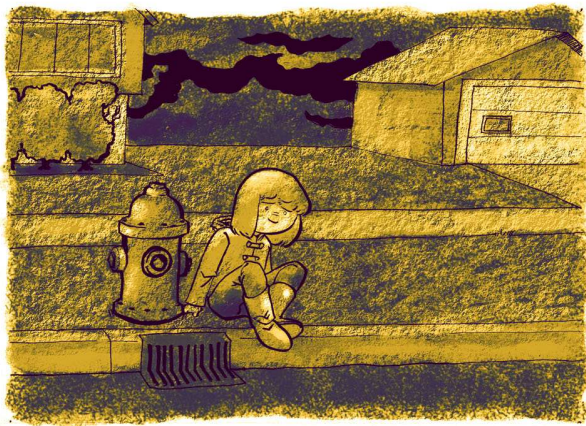


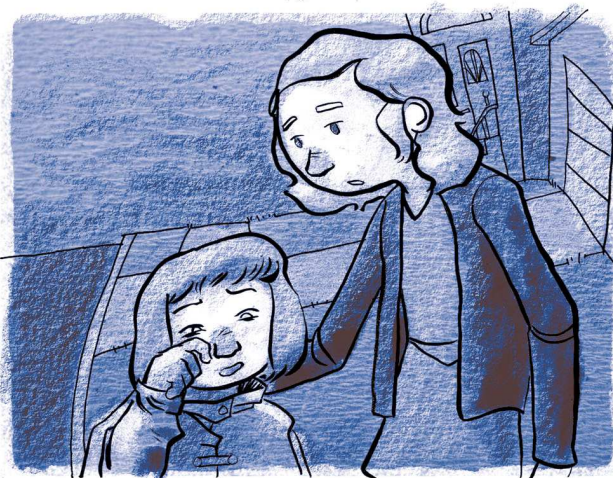


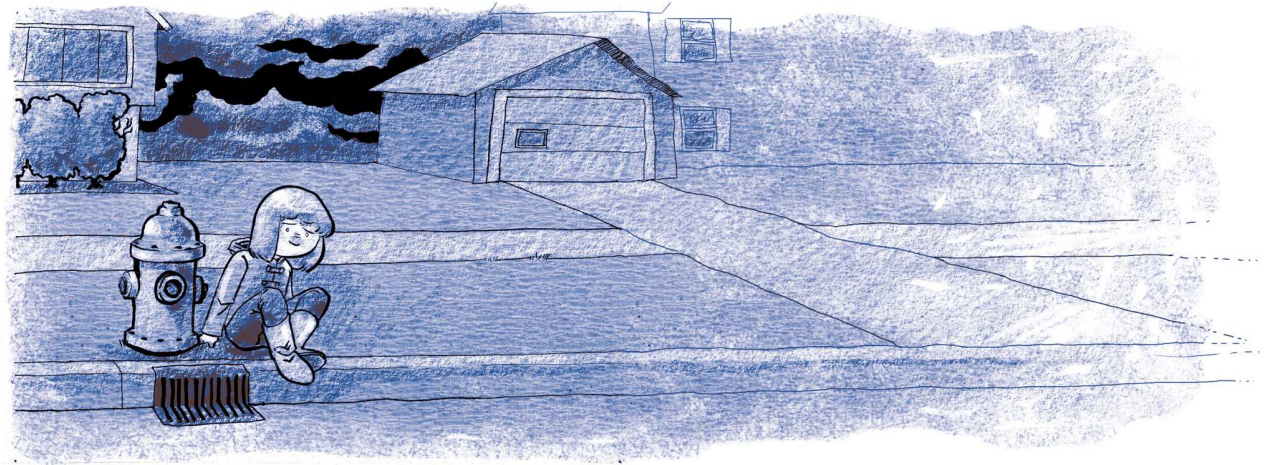
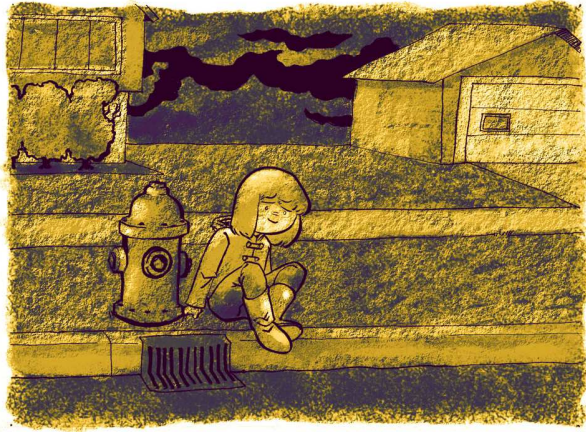












Character Bank

CHARACTER BANK

Lucie	Karl	Anna
Grandmother	Genevieve	John
Maria	Robert	The Large Man

Character Bank is a public domain character project. Submissions of works of fiction, poetry, and art will be accepted on an ongoing basis.

INSTRUCTIONS:

Create a work of art or writing using characters from the above bank. The characters have no set relations, characteristics, or personality traits. Only the names are required to remain the same, and only the characters in the bank should appear by name. New works need not be compatible with previous CHARACTER BANK publications.

CHOOSE 1 OF THE FOLLOWING:

1. Make a portrait of or illustrate a scene depicting one or more of the characters in the character bank.
2. Write a short story, poem, or song about one or more of the characters.
3. Using the characters in the character bank, create a work of art or writing in a format or formats other than those listed above.

Trix

"I don't think that's such a good idea," she said.

"Oh," Karl responded.

And then she left.

Their voices had woken the bunnies, and the rabbits sat nervously in their part of the kitchen, noses twitching, spooked. It was before breakfast. She took them, along with the silverware and the sheets, and packed everything carefully in the backseat of her Volvo. It had been a very domestic scene--drawers opening and closing, the clatter of forks and butter knives, even the smell of fresh laundry wafting up from the basement where it'd been sitting half folded since the previous night. Karl stood near the bay window, watching her pack methodically. She'd wedged the bunny cage between two large amps and a wooden box filled with distortion pedals and was now making sure everything was secure. Her guitar case was already buckled in the passenger seat, riding shotgun. She closed the rear passenger door, got in the car, and pulled out of the driveway. A faded sticker of The Clash clung to the back bumper, but probably wouldn't survive the winter. Karl watched the Volvo drive down Delaware, make a left on Buena Vista and disappear.

The sun was just coming up, illuminating the small front yard with little tendrils of light, and Karl flicked the switch to turn off the porch lamp. He sat down at the CZ-3000, mentally removing the harmony parts from every song he'd written, and thinking. By the time he'd finished, it was mid-morning. He called his agent.

"What's up, Karl?"

"She left, Robert."

"What? When?"

"Today, a few hours ago. She took the bunnies."

"Christ."

Karl heard Robert breathe heavily into the receiver. He pictured him looking out his office window at the downtown skyline, posters of past successes gazing solemnly down on him. Robert's sigh rumbled across the phone line and Karl could hear the past two years, the first album, the single, the upcoming tour rumbling with it.

"But don't worry, I've figured something out. We don't need them, listen to this."

Karl put the phone down on the top part of the keyboard. He could just make out Robert's faint voice saying "Karl..."

"Just listen."

And Karl played a song.

If you wanted to summarize it, you could. A half-decent paraphrase might be: there was a kingdom, and the kingdom is no more. That's literally what the song is about, but you miss the remarkable thing by doing that, by shaving off the edges. People don't know how to write about popular music. They use buzzwords and talk around the core of it, or worse, they get caught up in the drama of musicians. Musicians exist to deliver their songs--that's their importance to us. You don't care about the delivery truck, you care about the medical supplies. Karl knew that. Karl knew he was the method of delivery. And when you heard the song, you knew it, too. It was a motherfucker of a song.

You hear the melody everywhere these days--when you're on hold or when a commercial is trying to appeal to the aging youth demographic. There's been at least one rap song that samples it and any number of covers, all inferior to the original. It's not a commercial tune, is the problem. That song doesn't exist to sell a product, though they keep trying to co-opt it, because the thing is, when you ask somebody where they were and what they were doing the first time they heard the song, they remember. They remember and tell you with all manner of clarity exactly what they were doing. If the suits could figure it out it'd be like marketing JFK's assassination or 9/11--it normally takes great tragedies to get Americans to remember things like that, and that's where if you just went by a summary you'd miss everything. You'd think it's about regret and sorrow, some sad song about lost love, when it's really about something *else*.

Here's how a woman in her thirties responded when asked what she was doing when she first heard it. This is from a twenty-year retrospective article *Boot* did, just first names.

Lucie: I was making out with my boyfriend. He wasn't a very good kisser, all teeth, if that makes sense...God, I don't know why I remember him so well...we broke up after only a few weeks, just one of those things. My parents always listened to talk radio, so I'd heard about the song, but it wasn't until he put the album on that I actually heard it. We were on his bed--he had some ridiculous poster on his wall, some science fiction film or something, but he was a junior...you know, it's funny, the color of his ceiling was off-white, and there were all these little wiggly lines I could see, like the skin of a cantaloupe...it was like time slowed down. I heard the first chord, you know, dooooooo, and then everything extended out forever. It's strange, because I've listened to the song so many times since--who hasn't?--but that first time, it seemed like it would go on forever. It wasn't slow, it was infinite. Or felt that way. It was like you'd entered this exciting world where the hours didn't cycle back after midnight, but kept getting later and later, so there'd be 13 o'clock and 14 o'clock and on and on...no, I've never felt that way again, not outside of, you know, dreams...

This is anecdotal. But ask anyone who has heard the song, and you'll get a similar story. Chances are you remember when you first heard it, too. But what is the song about? I don't think Karl knew. He never spoke about its genesis, or why it's called "A Gift from the Bunnies" or about the incredible success it achieved. Certainly the lyrics offer some clues, but it seems the essential piece of the puzzle is missing. I refer to the controversy surrounding the final line of the song, where Karl sing/speaks "this is what I said to make you leave", which is of course an alteration of the first line, "this is what I sing to make you stay". The first pressing had a colon printed in the lyric booklet after both lines, but this was removed from all subsequent pressings without any explanation from the label. Fans clamor to know what--what did Karl say? And there's more than one forum frequented by those who claim to know. In fact, there's even an Internet meme that resurfaces whenever a new version of the song comes out that shows a picture of a bunny with some speculative answer to that question, often ridiculous or obscene.

It isn't just fans who are intrigued by the song, though. There's been exhaustive exegesis of the lyrics by noted academics and poets, and those waters are muddy and deep. One thing everyone agrees on is the sense of hope that courses through the song--the imagery of spring, of rabbits climbing out of their winter burrows--is impossible to mistake, both musically and more literally in the lyrics. The experience of stretched out time, the

sensation of a world that does not recycle itself but churns endlessly on, which is felt almost universally by those hearing the song for the first time is harder to trace to a specific textual source; empirically, however, it is impossible to deny.

Scientists find the fact that the phenomenon cannot be repeated less troubling than that it occurs at all. For what else behaves this way? There was a small movement to ban the song, but it was never pursued seriously, since there's nothing in the content of the song that is controversial. Quite the opposite, in fact. But because it raises questions that science has been unable to answer, there are still some who have deliberately avoided listening to it. Their abstinence is often a source of envy for the rest of us, as many would love to return to a point before hearing it, to listen with fresh ears and experience the feeling that to most these days is locked away forever in an unusually precise memory.

Critics maintain that we are all addicts of the "gift from the bunnies", and have made much of the reality that it delivers something which cannot be delivered again. They believe this makes our lives poorer while the goal of art is to elevate. This seems ungrateful. For what more can we require from a song? Is it not enough that it makes us feel we are entering into a new world of hope, of infinite joy? Is it the fault of the song if we discover, ultimately, that the world is not new, that the joy is not infinite?

"This is what I said to make you leave," Karl sang quietly as the last chord resonated in the immaculate front room. The light of late morning had crawled its way from the window to cover half the hardwood floor. There was no sound from the phone, but when Karl picked it up he heard Robert weeping.

"That was beautiful, Karl, Christ, where did that come from? It's gold!"

"Thank you."

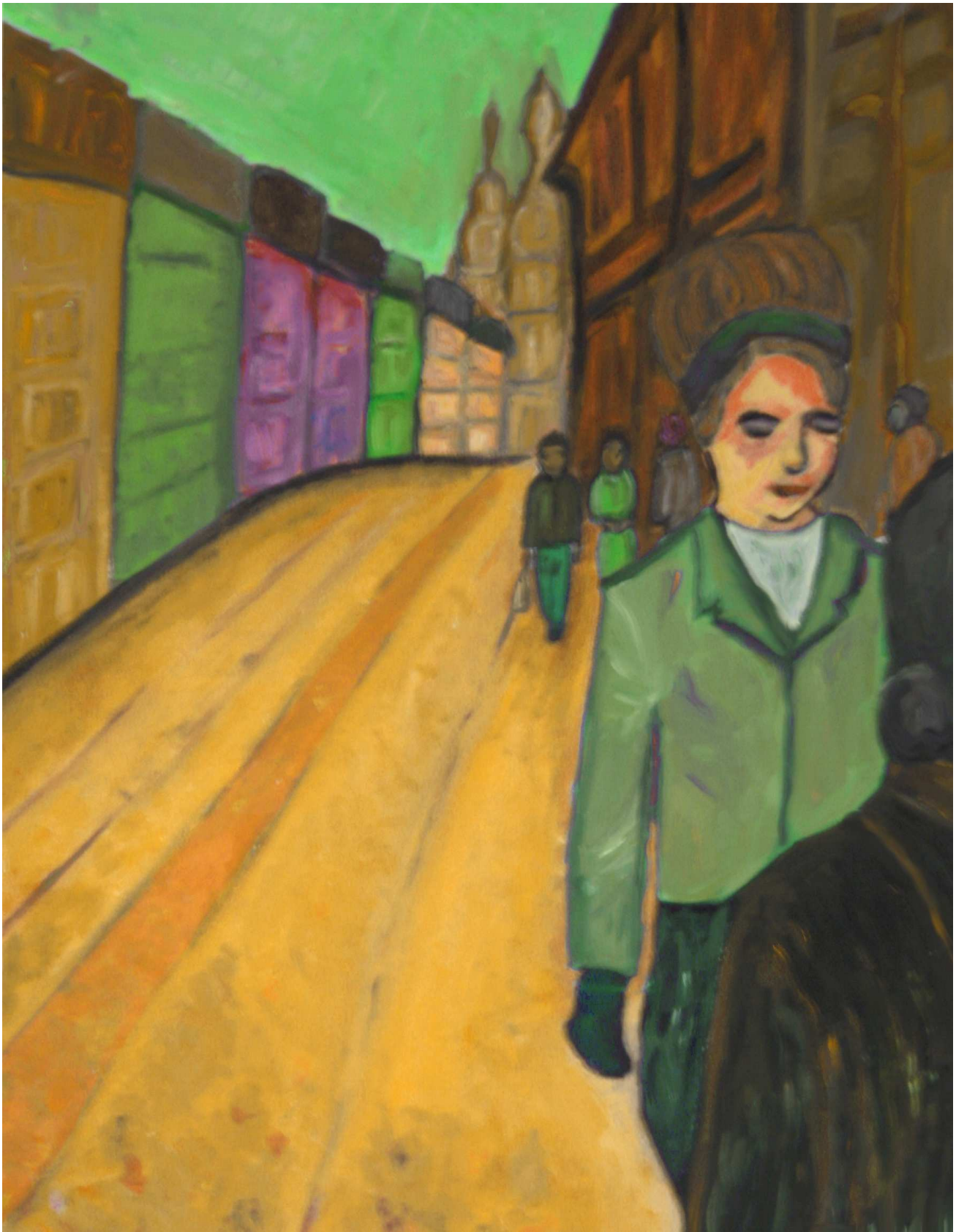
Karl paused. The faint scent of timothy hay drifted from the kitchen.

"I don't know what's happening in my life anymore, Robert. Things are ending and beginning. I think I'm through. She took the bunnies."

"Woah, slow down there, pal, what are you saying?"

"I'm saying I think I'm through."

Karl looked out the window as Robert tried to talk him out of it. A robin whirred by, its pale shadow flitting across the floor. He saw the mail truck across the street pause in front of a mailbox shaped like a locomotive, put something in, and then continue on. A light changed at an intersection, green to amber, and three white cars in a row, all different models, sped through the far lane. It might always be like this, he reasoned: no grief, no wrath, no desire. He was letting himself be convinced. They'd be in Red Vine by now, if traffic were light, if God was willing.



Grandmother Waiting for Maria

The Large Man

“Is that it?” said Lucie, catching sight of her slip just barely peaking out over her olive legs in the pane glass window across from her. She wasn’t sure if Karl had noticed it, and she was unsure whether or not she wished that he had. If she was a coquette, she was a reluctant one. She quickly and discreetly bent down and inched her skirt down over the thin line of white lace that had crept out. She looked down at her notes again, and put down her notepad looking expectantly at Karl.

“Huh? Oh yes. Yes, that’s it, I believe. For today,” replied Karl.

“Alright then, I guess I’ll see you next Friday?”

“Yes, ‘til then,” replied Karl gathering his leather satchel and his cell phone off the table.

Karl Chakravarthy was a visiting professor at the University of Pennsylvania whom Lucie had been assigned to as a graduate research assistant. His seemingly incongruous name was a gift from his parents who had been West Bengali Marxists. Lucie was still unsure whether his work was, well, engaging and ground-breaking or inscrutable and irrelevant.

This ambivalence she felt towards Karl’s project sunk into her thoughts as she was heading towards the Blue Line to catch the metro to meet her friend Anna for drinks. Wry, cleverly hyphenated phrases, fractured images loosely hewn together—worse than Ezra Pound and less earnest, that was her dim perception of it. It also struck her in some sense vulgar... there was no plumbing or forging. It wasn’t a craft, but a party game.

“The waters long to hear our question put/ Which would release their longed-for answer, but.” She couldn’t place it, but it slunk across the back of her mind like a ticker-tape.

The subway steps smelled like piss, and she could hear a couple yelling at each other on the steps above as the evening eased full on.

“Two-hundred fifty dollars,” said a man in a blue-grey trenchcoat matter-of-factly.

Lucie felt like she had almost been hit by a car rounding the corner, caught in the horror of approaching headlights. “Huh?”

“Two-hundred fifty dollars,” he repeated, now in a whisper.



Karl briefly noticed Lucie's slip showing. He pushed it quickly from his mind, not because it titillated him, but because it mildly surprised him. Surprised him in such a way that he was not quite sure why it surprised him at all. It was the same feeling he had had when he noticed a pack of Newports sandwiched between pens and highlighters in Lucie's bookbag while she was fishing for change to buy coffee with.

He noticed the skyline dimming and thought of his wife who has probably at this moment beginning to pour a glass of sherry and becoming irritated.

A question. Karl muttered a reply- he was not quite past the slip. A slip? Really? He was sure slips were the domain of itchy little girls in their hooped Easter dresses and secretaries with silently graying hair. A twenty-something year old woman wearing a slip seemed wrong. It bothered him on his walk all the way home.

Moonlight battled lamplight much of the walk. Maybe it was not sensible to walk through Philadelphia by oneself this time of day. "You have been insensible to my feelings," she would say. Always unnecessarily formal. Nevermind, nevermind.

But a slip? It was almost a ludicrous as a gentleman he had seen when he was exiting Fisher. The man stood like a strip of celluloid smoking slowly under a street light. If that wasn't enough the man wore his hat low over a blue-grey long abomination of a coat.

He had to push it from his mind. There was the question of which wine with dinner and the museum or the arboretum this weekend. Not that Maria would notice (did she ever notice?), but the principal of the matter urged him to give her his full attention since he was gone a long many hours in particular today.

He rounded the cobble stoned street; the heels of his shoes were every day a bit more worn. The door gave a creak; painted toenails peeked over the sofa.

What everyone except Karl Chakravarthy seemed to understand was that Maria, his wife, was clumsy, obnoxious even. She was not clumsy in the same way that a cloyingly sweet waitress is clumsy. You know the type: she'll nervously rattle off the specials of the day with a over-sized smile only to drop a whole tray of drinks later. No, that sort of clumsiness still suggests a slight charm in its ineptitude. Because of her husband's stature, perhaps, people expected something of Maria when they met her. Instead she came off like a renowned concert pianist who drowsily selects a F# when a simple F is wanted, or worse yet comes to an important concert inebriated, fumbling brashly over the keys, the whole house silent and aghast.

Maria was unusually alone this evening however despite her penchant for different women's groups and airing her grating personality which she merely viewed as 'outgoing.' Sunk between two oversize chenille pillows, Maria watched detergent commercial lap into sitcom only to be proceeded by yet another commercial 'til the tide receded back to reveal the evening news. Maria's body subtly attuned itself with the rhythms of the glowing lights and the incessant, almost imperceptible buzz. She was dimly aware that Karl was late and was annoyed not because she really cared, but because she felt obliged to be. He had said eight at the latest, hadn't he? Fuck it, sherry lapped over the brim of another glass. The evening news proceeded undaunted.

Like many things of import in waking life, the dim flicker of inconsiderateness or any other potentially distasteful behavior on her husband's part washed over Maria's lowered

eyelids, propped up on those oversized chenille pillows. Lulled by the sherry and the weekend weather report, Maria couldn't have given a toss if she had heard that the moon was going to be blown up as she drifted still further away, supine freshly pedicured toes alighted on the loveseat's edge.

Anna breathed heavily and pushed the door open with her strong hands. The sky almost followed her in, heavy like a wet stone. She sat at the farthest end of the bar by the jukebox. Red, blue, red, blue...eight o'clock, the bar half-dead, the barkeep flipped a switch behind a wood-paneled divider. She glanced down and realized her legs were dirty; she had been walking around all day.

A chorus of cigarettes flickered up behind her in the same nonchalant fashion and soon stale laughter was heard. Coats gathered in the booths, some would be left there all night whereas others would never be forgotten no matter the level of the owner's inebriation. Someone punched a couple bucks in the jukebox, "I fly like paper, get high like planes"—wry smiles all around and someone knocked over the first drink of the night. A whole lot of ado about thinly disguised irony.

Anna was aware that she stuck out sitting by herself at the end of the bar, a glass of water in front of her. Usually she would have brought a newspaper or a notebook or a sudoku or something for Pete's sake, something to keep her attention diverted from other's noticing that she was sitting by herself. Did they notice? Well, either way the idea of it made her uncomfortable, nothing more uncomfortable both to the noticed and the noticer than someone too obviously alone in public. Where is Lucie? She pulled out her phone, blushing quietly to herself. Even though Lucie had not called and she had already ascertained the time, Anna stared at the phone display a little longer in a desperate attempt to urge time on. This was one of those instances in which transience was a gift.

A man like that had no family of any kind. He lived nowhere in particular. He probably did not exist outside of this moment either before or after. But here he was lit up with all the smoldering intensity of a cigarette put out on one's bare skin, and as frightening as he was she recognized something utterly natural about him, disturbingly familiar, a thin blue vein bisecting the back of an ankle. And as goofy as he would appear out of context, blue trench coat, smoking (Was he smoking? He seemed the type.), all shadows and lamplights, he was utterly alive and humorless before her making his inscrutable demands.

There was no telling how long he had been following her or how they had reached this impasse here, but it seemed like Lucie would now have to answer to whatever it was about this man that rooted her to the spot in front of him.

"I won't say it again. You know why."

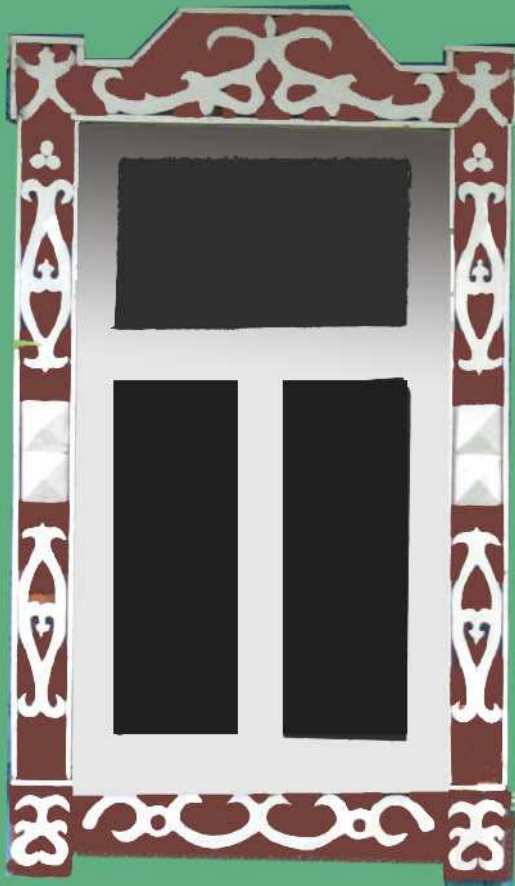
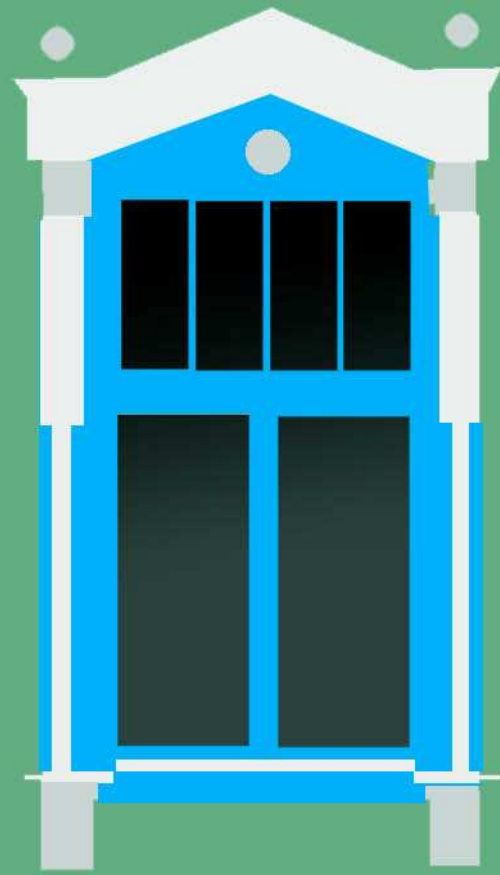
Did she? She instinctually felt that she did owe him something and perhaps this is what frightened her the most. But damn if she had any idea what or why or under what circumstances.

One thousand other people were falling asleep watching t.v., deciding dinner, having drinks with their friends, but here she was for absolutely no reason at all, or at least for no reason she could tell, detained by a man the human equivalent of an ellipsis.

“I, well, but I don’t have it. I’m not sure exactly...look, no, just no.”

“Alright then, if that’s your attitude, then fine.” He nodded and slunk back from the gaze of the streetlight, seamlessly rounding the corner he had come from.

As she walked away she did not feel liberated, but as if she was dislodged from the jaws of the world.



Buenos Aires after Don DeLillo

I guess I thought Argentina would be like Mexico but maybe a little more well-to-do and just a slightly different flavor, like, say, the New England and Canada. But it's nothing like that. Buenos Aires is much closer to Rome than to Mexico City, and the air of the country is European. Everyone is Italian (a handful of Germans sprinkled in from after the Second World War), and there are very few Hispanic or indigenous people to be found, even in the poorer parts of the city (the metropolitan area has 20 million inhabitants and the city is vastly larger than NYC). In Buenos Aires, there is no such thing as a moving violation, so cars drive two to a lane if possible, weaving, flowing, crossing double solids, and it's a surprisingly efficient system. Traffic moves. The lights go from green to yellow to red to yellow to green again, which was strange but seemed to fit in well with the overall fluidity of their system.

Thanatology is the study of death, the process and custom and science of dying. Hood College is the only accredited degree-granting institution in the United States that offers a master's degree in thanatology.

The food in Argentina was nothing like what I had expected. Everything is ham and cheese, maybe with a hard boiled egg for good measure. Pizza comes with a layer of ham. Hamburgers come with a layer of ham. And an egg on top. Even at McDonald's. Calzones come with ham and cheese and tomato. Tortillas, which are actually strange sandwiches generally come with cheese, ham and cheese, cheese and tomato, or ham and cheese and tomato. But not ham and tomato. They never use spices. Garlic, olive oil, and salt is what you have to work with. I ate a goat.

Have you ever seen a full-on drag show? I attended one at a nightclub called Club 69. The performance impressed, mesmerized me. While there I talked with the son of a Peruvian diplomat named Alfredo. We drank beers and danced to some kind of pulsating Argentine turbo-tango musica.

Until a few years ago they put mercury in children's vaccines. Now they use aluminum, mostly.

At the zoo they let all kinds of ducks (exotic ducks, not just the plain white and brown ones) wander about. There is duck shit everywhere. They also let a few other kinds of animals roam freely. They have "acuti," which are so adorable that customs might forgive you for trying to smuggle one back in your carry-on. The grizzly bear looked powerful; the polar bear looked miserable.

Female human babies are harvested by American bio/pharmaceutical companies in countries like China just before they are born. They have a full compliment of eggs, which are removed and fertilized using DNA from other animals. These chimeras gestate in cows, pigs, and tanks of synthetic amniotic fluid. Then, various experiments are performed.

There is a cemetery where all the rich and famous Argentinians are buried. The tombs are ornate, with polished white, gray, and black facades. Some are faced with glass so that the caskets can be seen. Even in the middle of the day it was so haunting that there were certain alleys, crowded with vaulting, tremendous tombs, that I could not walk down the full way. There were many couples on dates. There were lots of dead brigadier generals.

Indonesia

I've never seen the ocean so calm, I could be standing at the shore of a lake. The waves barely ripple. There is something about the small waves, about the muddy sand under my toenails, that turns my mind behind me, to the mountains I've traveled over and through. In a small white van with a broken door I watched the rice paddies slip past and the gorges fall away. I saw butterflies smash against the windshield and goats led to the butcher by a little girl singing and skipping. I watched women step carefully to cross the road, cement blocks or bamboo poles balanced delicately on their heads. They tell me that when I leave here I will understand balance and unity. Maybe they're right, but only if I stay in the tourist areas here on Bali where I can eat organic lentils and go to yoga retreats.

When I was fourteen my grandmother died from brain cancer. It's something that happened, I don't think about it anymore and it's not what this is about. It's just that she would have been really interested in hearing my stories about Indonesia. She would have been interested in the old Ibus here with their bare chests and long fingernails, carrying their grandchildren in sarongs tied around their shoulders. She'd be interested to know that even people here know about the Native Americans and what was done to her grandfather's people. When I told one man I was American the first thing he said was "You killed the Indians! Your ancestors killed them." I told him I was Indian and he shook my hand. "But only a small part," I said. "My ancestors killed my other ancestors." "Yes," he nodded, "That's the way it is."

Relics

Downtown there is a parking garage located inside a converted movie palace. When entering the garage, you must drive under its marquis which now reads:

\$2 Per Hour
\$8 All Day
Valet Available

on either side.

I have walked under a movie palace marquis before, and I have driven into an underground parking garage before, but I have never entered this particular location in either of its forms. I do not know anyone who has been to the theatre before or after its renovation either, but I imagine what it would be like to hear them talk about it. Perhaps there wasn't always valet parking, but ticket costs were comparable.

As a child my father went to other movie palaces which had later not been repurposed but rather demolished. He had a horse and liked to pretend he was a cowboy, so he mainly saw westerns, which were often teamed up with a cartoon segment and newsreel. He remembers that when he came early, a man would play prelude music on the organ before the show. If he happened to miss this performance, the organist would also play between segments and again, at the end of the showing. He doesn't remember how much these shows cost, but it was a Saturday afternoon matinee special, and less than a full priced-evening ticket.

I learned about the garage palace while watching a special on local architecture. I also learned there is an administrative building a few blocks from the garage palace which has casts of statues from the pediment of the Parthenon located on either side of its entrance steps. I have neither been to see these casts, nor have I seen the actual statues in the British Museum. I have, however, seen casts of these actual statues while visiting the Parthenon of Nashville, which is in itself a scale replica of the Temple of Athena Parthenos. You must enter the Parthenon of Nashville below the actual double bronze door entrance. The tickets cost only \$2 after four pm, which is half price.

Before leaving Tennessee, I also visited Memphis. In Memphis there is a great pyramid-shaped convention center along the Mississippi River. At the entrance steps stands a seemingly misplaced statue of Ramses. I am unsure of the size of the convention center in comparison to any actual pyramids in the Valley of the Kings, though its not nearly as impressive, I'm sure.

While in Memphis you can also visit Graceland, the actual home and gravesite of Elvis Presley. The house sits on top of a hill, and in order to get beyond the gates to see the building, you have to purchase some sort of tour. The cheapest tour is exactly eight times more than it costs to see the Parthenon of Nashville after four pm. You enter Graceland through the front door, but one of the first stops, and my favorite stop on the self-guided tour, is down the stairs, in the basement, where you can view the yellow and blue TCB lounge.

After visiting Graceland, I called my father to tell him about the various rooms and costumes and the Presley family burial site. My father was also stationed in Germany at the same time as Elvis, and also met his wife in Germany, the same place as Elvis, although in a

different location. I thought he might be interested in visiting Graceland because it is actually a farmstead complete with a fair-sized horse ranch. While Elvis and my father both enjoyed westerns, my father did not enjoy Elvis's movies.

The movie palace downtown was transformed into a parking facility somewhere in the midst of Presley's film career, although it had never shown a film featuring the musical or acting talents of Elvis, since it had closed nearly a decade before. My father tells me that Elvis made more money from his movies than his records, although he doesn't remember if this is true. Today Elvis's estate makes a great deal through the sale of tickets to Graceland, which his daughter arranged to have converted into a museum especially for his fans. She continues to take care of the finances, and in return, receives much of its revenue.

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