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#### **On Waiting**

#### Teresa Milbrodt

I'll admit it now, I'm a hypochondriac. The good part is that I'm fully cognizant of my irrational fears and so is my hypochondriac husband, so much so that we wrote the following provisions into our marriage yows:

Òl will love you when youŌre sick, when youŌre healthy, and when youŌre anxious about being sick. I will Google all of the medical conditions you think you might have, and assure you that you donŌt.Ó

We are people who believe in preparation, though I tend to be more vocal about my worries. My husband usually suffers in silence, but he has been true to his vows. During the five years of our marriage he has looked at more pictures of skin cancers and lesions than a dermatology student. This is how I will forever define true love and commitment.

I was trying very hard not to worry about the odd white bump that had appeared on my chin in early May and failed to look like much of anything that my dear husband could find on Google images. Part of me worried that it was cancer, but part of me worries that everything is cancer. My husband said it didn't look like anything serious, certainly not an evil melanoma, so I should just chill. While chilling I bought some concealer to cover the odd little zit, but whenever I try to conceal anything with makeup it backfires and the thing ends up looking like it has blinking red lights around it, and a sign that reads OPlease stare at my facial blemish. OWhile my husband claimed he didn't notice it when he looked at me, I was sure the rest of the world did.

Yet I continued play it cool, and I was very proud of myself for shirking my hypochondriac tendenciesÑmind over odd bumpsÑuntil I arrived at my parents' house for a visit and my doctor father said, ÒWhat's that thing on your chin?Ó

I said I didn't know, but it was white and looked like it was covered with dead skin and it wasn't getting any bigger.

After a kitchen examination my father said, ÖYou should get it off, it could be squalmous cell carcinoma. Ó

A form of skin cancer. This statement was followed by, ÖWhy do you always worry about things that turn out to be nothing, and you weren't worried about this? Ó

Öl don't know, Ö I wailed, Öl was trying to play it cool. Ó So much for that bright idea. My hypochondriac side was righteously indignant for having been correct after all, and scared out of its mind. But the white bump continued not to look as bad as squalmous cell carcinoma or a cutaneous horn or kerotosis or a wart. It didn't look like much of anything. All the pictures my father and ever-vigilant husband found online appeared much worse than what I had affectionately termed my little white zit from hell. My husband said that should be reassuring, but in my hypochondriac brain the only thing I could process was, ÖWhat is it, and when is it going to kill me?Ó

When you think you might be sicklive when I think I might be sick--it's like there's a black cloud hanging in the back of my mind all the time, even if I try to forget it. The cloud is looming over my shoulder whenever I turn around. That was what happened with the little white zit from hell. I figured it might be similar to how women feel when their mammograms come back inconclusive. You try to pretend you're living in the real world, but really you're in an alternate pseudo-reality where there's an elephant in the room but only you can see it, and you don't want to mention the elephant to anyone else because they'll think you're crazy. This is because you are crazy and you probably realize that, but just because you know you're crazy doesn't mean that you can get rid of the craziness. It's kind of like a bad case of acne. You do what you can to relieve it, but really you just have to tough it out.

ÒWell, it's probably benign like a wart,Ó said the surgeon when I was sitting in his office, Òbut it could be

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squalmous cell carcinoma. I've seen a few of them start out as little horny things.Ó

Forget it, I thought to myself. You're here and I'm here and you have sharp things. Just get the damn zit off and send it to the pathology lab so you can tell me what it is.

While she prepared the aforementioned sharp things and sterile surfaces for surgery, the nurse and I chatted about how I was living in Colorado and her daughter lived in Arizona and how it was very dry so you needed to drink a whole lot of water or risk dehydration. When you're really nervous it's amazing how easy it is to find a connection with someone, anyone, so you can make futile conversation and try to get your mind off impending doom. Or a shot of anesthetics.

The good thing about doing a lot of hand sewing Nand I may be one of the few people who does anymore—is that most shots don't feel too bad. While getting the shot I can ponder all the needle sticks I've had in the past that felt much worse because they were unplanned. After that I had to think of something while lying on the table with a blue sheet over my face and a little bit of chin exposed.

There was an old lady who swallowed a fly, I don't know why she swallowed that fly, I guess she'll die.

There was an old lady who swallowed a spider that wriggled and jiggled and tickled inside her. She swallowed the spider to catch the fly... I worked my way through the bird and cat verses and then didn't remember what came after, so I was alert to the tug of the needle when I was getting stitches.

Someone is sewing my skin together. How about that. I don't feel a damn thing. They used to get people drunk before they did things like this, and then sterilize the wound with more booze. Too bad I don't drink. At least this isn't as bad as dental surgery, but I don't get nitrous. That's a shame. Why don't all doctors' offices have nitrous? Dentists shouldn't have all the fun. Nitrous would make medical procedures so much easier...

Then it was all done and I had a band-aid on my chin and an order not to take off the band-aid or get the wound wet for twenty-four hours. That was fine with me, since I didn't want to see the stitches or the little vial that now held my zit from hell. Now all I had to do was wait for the test results. The problem was that this was a Thursday, and my dad explained the slides took a day to be prepared, so they probably wouldn't be read until after the weekend. The good and bad thing about having a doctor as a father is that I get all the inside information, including the history of research on squalmous cell carcinoma while standing in the kitchen making dinner.

According to my father, the National Cancer Institute was considering re-naming some kinds of squalmous cell carcinoma that occurred in breasts, because some of the cells looked like cancer cells but didn't behave like them or spread beyond a certain point. Except for a few kinds of squalmous cell carcinomas that did behave like cancer cells.

Since I grew up with a family member in the medical profession, part of me wants to shrug at any ailment, take some Tylenol or apply antibiotic ointment and tell myself I'll be fine. The other part remembers all the dinner table stories about people who died suddenly for odd reasons and that taking too much Tylenol could kill my liver, but IÖd have to do it all at once.

My adopted grandma has told me that we spend seventy to eighty percent of our lives waiting. I don't know where she got this statistic, but it sounds true. We pass a lot of time searching for distractions to stop us from thinking about other things. Sometimes I knit. Sometimes I cook. Sometime I watch funny cat videos online. Are funny cat videos proof that humans have superior intelligence, or have they made us take an evolutionary step back closer to lowland gorillas? At any rate they're something to do, since all of us are waiting for something. That would make a good question for a poll. What are you waiting for?

When I was in high school I really wanted a boyfriend. High school of course is its own country with its own social mores and caste system and currency and a range of other customs that shift from year to year when the seniors graduate and a new crew of freshmen move in to be ritually demeaned. But high school relationships and PDAs (public displays of affection) seem to be universal, as does the existence of the much larger and lonelier population of discontented teens who get to watch those PDAs with equal parts ridicule and envy.

My mother stood by the standard mothering scriptful needed to wait until I graduated and entered the larger world, then IOd find a guy who was right for me. While my mother turned out to be right, I didn't relish swaying alone to slow songs at high school dances. I did what I could--got together with a gaggle of girls and tried to have fun, but felt insanely jealous anyway. If someone would have told my seventeen-year-old self that I'd meet

my husband at twenty-seven I probably would have shot them. This is why it's good that we don't have crystal balls, though I really wanted crystal ball during the days when I was waiting for the report on my zit from hell.

When I was job-hunting last spring, I heard way too many people my parents' age say, ÖWow, I'm glad I'm not young anymore, the market is really awful for people your age. Ó I'm not exactly sure why they said this, since everyone in my generation is fully cognizant of the fact that we and our friends and significant others are lost in application hell. My husband has been there for some time. He has two hard-won part time jobs totaling twenty hours a week, but still needs more work.

Dearest baby boomers, we know things suck. Is it supposed to make us feel better that you're acknowledging the fact? Job searches are another kind of hell, another kind of waiting, especially since prospective employers don't feel obliged to tell you when someone else has been hired for the position. Ultimately we end up shooting cover letters and resumes into the application black hole, which I imagine to be a deep dark virtual crevasse sucking in white paper moths.

Or maybe the job market is more like a carnival game where you throw darts to pop a balloon or throw a ball and knock over milk bottles. You have to know the tricks to win a huge stuffed rhinoceros, and even then it doesn't always work. In the meantime all we can do is knit and watch funny cat videos while old people remark on how they're really glad they're not us. How comforting.

My grandma was put into Hospice in early September, when her coughing was getting worse. It was one of those times when everyone in the family knew we were settling in to wait, one of those times when the treatment options would have killed her before the cancer. At least I could Skype my grandma in Hospice since she didn't have Internet in her condo, and I could see what she looked like. Once or twice a week I watched Grandma TV for the latest status report, and we chatted. In the end she wanted to be around for as long as she could. We had to honor that, even if the waiting was uncomfortable, even if it made us wonder if medicine had gotten too good.

Those kinds of experiences make you lie in bed thinking morbid thoughts. If my brain could survive in a jar, would that be okay with me? What would a brain think when it was isolated from everything else? Wouldn't it get really pissed and miss pizza and chocolate, only it couldn't tell anyone because it was alone in a jar? What happens when you're lost in that space, floating in a mason jar in some lab? Could it be fun, like when you realize you're dreaming and suddenly you're God and control everything, or would you just end up waiting forever for...something?

The Lakota people believe that when you die, a relative comes to greet you and take you over to the next side. One of my Lakota friends told a story about her terminally ill uncle who was in the hospital and near death.

One afternoon he sat up and started reaching out his arms and pulling them back to his chest, like he was hugging people no one else could see. My friend said it must have been family members who'd come to walk him to the other side. He passed away not soon after that. He was done waiting. Of all the stories I've heard about the afterlife, that's the one I like best. Everyone wants a hand to hold when they go to a new place, and like anything else you must be a tourist at first and need someone to explain things to you. I wonder what it would have been like to sit in that hospital room while he was hugging people. I probably would have shivered in my chair and made myself small so there'd be more room for whoever else had decided to show up and wait.

Actually, I picture it less like an elephant in the corner of the room, and more like a one-eyed one-homed flying purple-people-eater.

Everyone know waiting is the worst part of any problem, question, or dilemma, because you have time to dream up all the things that might or might not happen. There's no course of action, just the space of waiting. It's one of the most helpless places in the world. I don't think we're getting better at waiting, just at being distracted with the Internet and cell phones and other electronic temptations of a life increasingly lived online. I don't like it. Nobody seems to be able to have a conversation that lasts for more than a couple of minutes without being interrupted by a text or ringtone. At least most people remember to apologize when they answer.

But there are other side effects, like the way I have an ability to focus on something for a long period of time, a talent that seems lost on many twenty-somethings. It on a trait that I never thought would mark me as a product of my generation, but some of us can still concentrate. That also means I could focus on my zit from hell for long periods of time, which wasn't productive. Then I really needed a good funny cat video.

My father is a talking medical encyclopedia. He wants to give you all the footnotes, which is great if you have the time and desire for knowledge. He has all sorts of knowledge, and one of his greatest joys in life is dispensing it. His lectures float from topic to related topic, and I know I do the same thing sometimes, but not about medicine. Kids don't become their parents, but we have a tendency to rhyme. I have my father's temper and inclination to lecture. I have my mother's need to make lists, and her love of asking questions. Both of them are worriers, but my mother will admit to it faster than my dad. Neither of them like to write, so in that I'm an anomaly, but sometimes things can't be explained.

A guy drove into a crowd of people in California the other day. Venice Beach. He killed one person and injured eleven, at least that's what I heard on the radio while I was taking a walk and waiting to hear back on whether my zit from hell would kill me. We get up every day and expect to get back into bed that evening. You don't think something weird will happen in between those times. Sometimes there Ös no waiting, there's just surprise, which has its own kind of awfulness. The lady who was killed was a newlywed. She was just walking along with her husband and then..

Well-meaning and curious people keep asking if my husband has found a full-time job. They keep asking if my parents have found their cat. The cat botted in May after getting dental surgery. May was also when the zit from hell first appeared. The zit is gone. The cat is still gone. My husband is waiting for better job prospects, so for now we just have a string of people my parents' age telling us that they feel bad for our generation. I have also been told not to listen to anyone in my parents' generation, so I can maintain my fragile optimism. Even if the old codgers are right, it's better to be cheerfully young and chasing dreams. I can wait to grow old and jaded, but sometimes I feel five, sometimes I feel thirty-five, and sometimes I feel sixty-five. I don't have to wait for any of this; it happens on its

I wish I could explain things better to my parents' lost cat, why he needed the tooth cleaning and dental surgery, why people who loved him put him through pain. I want to tell him it was in his own best interest because his teeth were turning brown and needed to come out. That's just the way it is. It makes me wonder if there's some greater being trying to tell us the same thing--This sucks now, but you'll be happier for it. Just wait.

For four days\(\times\) which felt just short of an eternity\(\tilde{\lambda}\) walked around with a band-aid on my chin waiting for someone to make a fistlight joke so I could say, Yeah, but you should have seen the other guy. My sweet husband told me not to worv too much about the zit from hell because it didn't make sense to fret. Of course that made sense to me, but of course I was always fretting when my mind couldn't think of anything better to do. This happened too often. I was walking down the sidewalk not long after I heard the report about Venice Beach, when I realized Maybe we'll all waiting for death all the time, only we don't realize it. God, that's a cheery thought...

When you have a father who's a doctor you get certain perks, like the ability to look at hospital records and peer into pathology reports that confirm the zit from hell was not squalmous cell carcinoma but a wart, a very funkylooking wart, but a wart just the same. I was happy. I was surprised. I called everyone who I'd told about the biopsy to let them know. It was a time for rejoicing. I'd never been so happy to have a wart, or have so many other people be happy I had a wart.

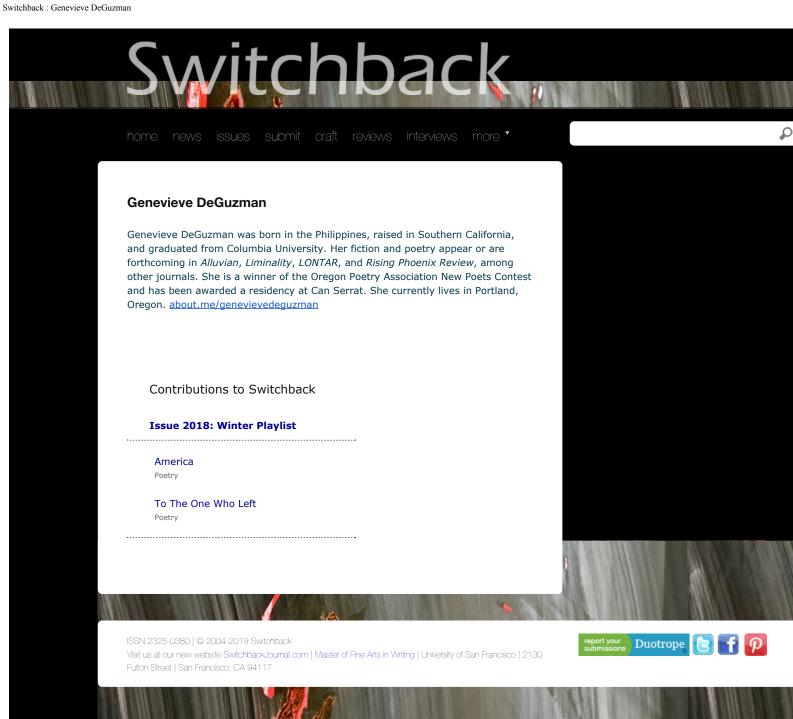
Quietly my brain had been preparing for the worst--cancer that had spread, news I'd need to have chemo or radiation or further tests. Now the slate had been wiped clean. I had a new future, a brighter future, impossibly wonderful and free of burdens, even though they never existed in the first place. It was so elating and completely illogical. I also felt like a total wuss, since I had just escaped a fake brush with death, I'd never been in danger, but the purple-people-eater had left the corner of the room and gone to haunt someone else until he came back to my corner, which I knew he inevitably would.











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#### To The One Who Left

#### Genevieve DeGuzman

On the bed you planted a note in the folds of our shared life rooted in the crumpled twisted sheets smells of rusty ice cream spoons in the loam wrestling of our bodies the night before. The dresser holds an explosion of flowers in the act of molding extravagant tears down my cheek. Petals overcome with getting on fall to the wood floors no bounce, gleaming one by one until there is only the pollen nucleus left lidless eyes torn from my hands rubbed to steady. When enough time has passed I will put the dog in her pen, my locked up bitch Laika in her space travels burning up in the descent. The dog and I will know the roughness of dried flowers that deity propped up in a vase more scarecrow to the ghost of you



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#### Therapy Blues

William Oullen Jr

#### Bourbon Street, 9:30 a.m.

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#### Gate 58, Orlando International Airport

Nina Rennet

#### Apparitions of High Tide

Lisa Favicchia

#### Devil's Hole

Lisa Faviochia

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Jason Gordon

#### Welcome to Dead Child World

Chanel Brenne

### Facebook Post: Mother Son Hike at Solstice Canyon 183 Likes

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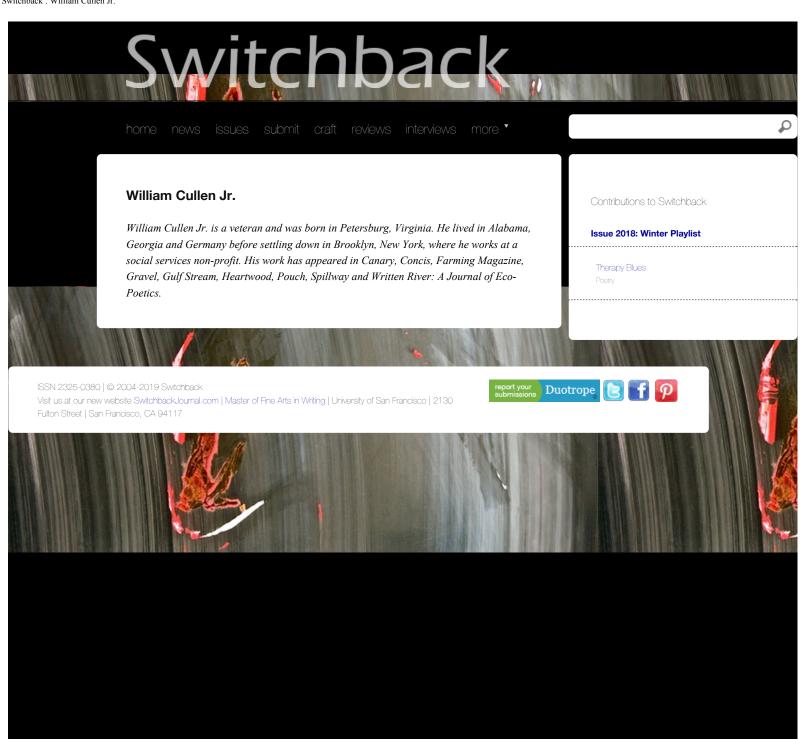
Taylor Napolsk

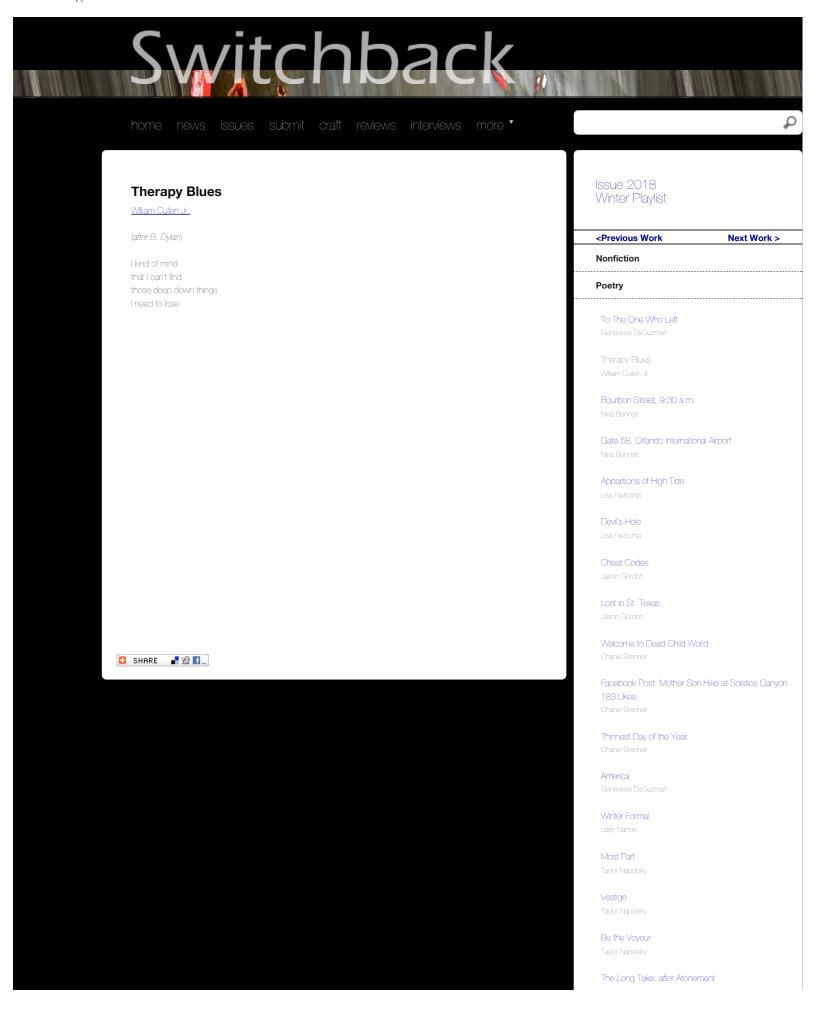
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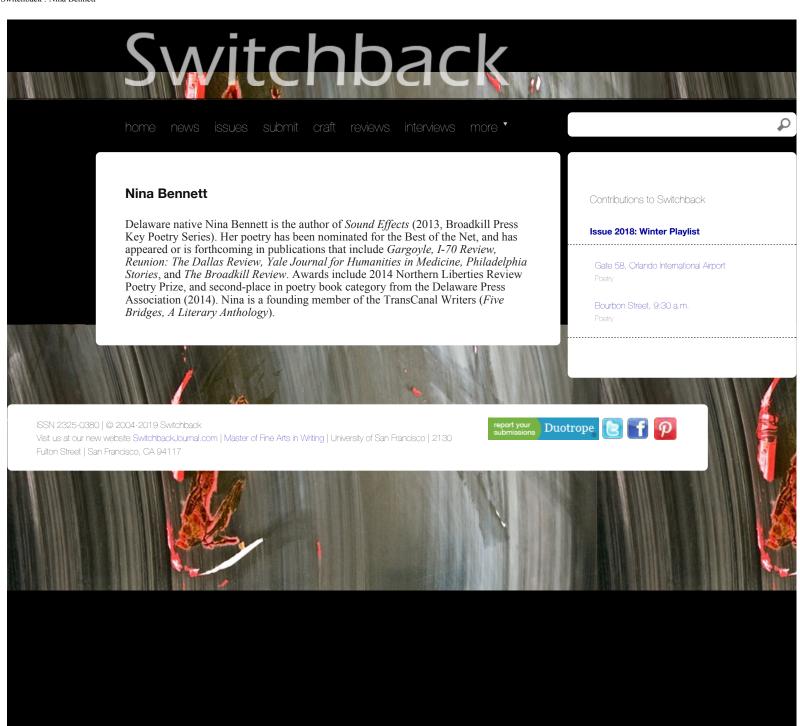
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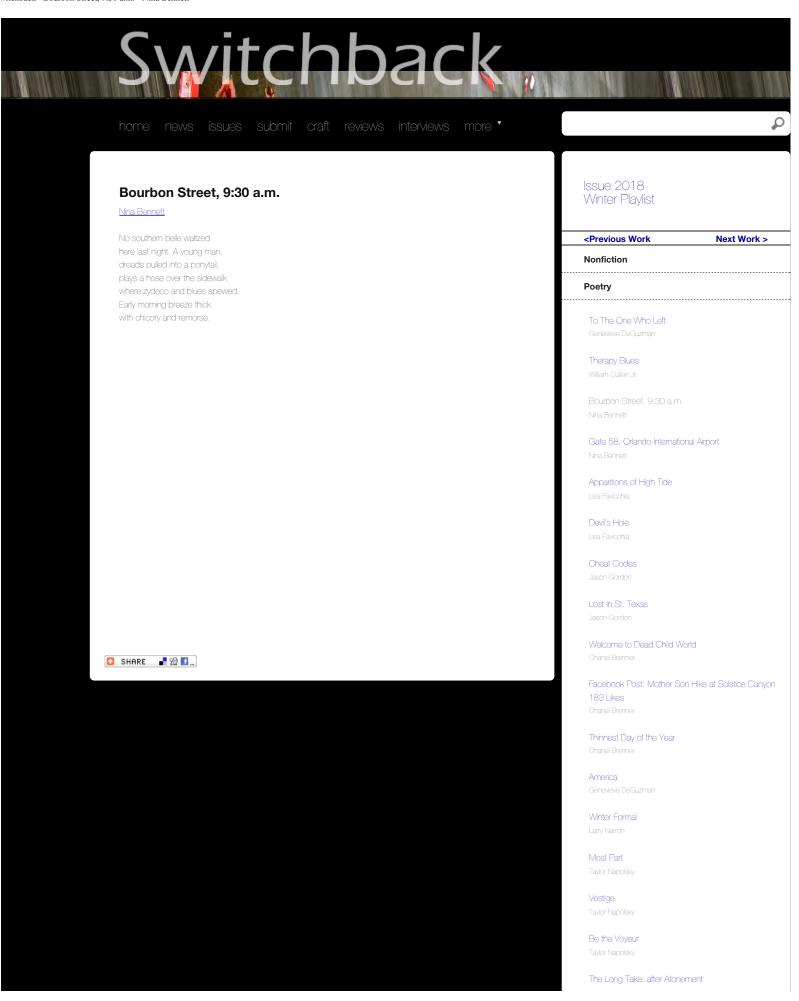
#### Be the Voyeur

Taylor Napolsky









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#### **Gate 58, Orlando International Airport**

#### Nina Bennett

Cinderella and Snow White race through Terminal C, stumble over carry-on bags. Mickey Mouse ears dance above seats as toddlers fidget and squirm. Harry Potter points his wand, flings Cheerios at his sister. Her sobs erupt like a fastball, thirty minutes of toddler screams hurled at their parents. A pre-school Captain America covers his ears and drops the f-bomb. Chatter halts as his fatherŌs slap reverberates through the gate area.

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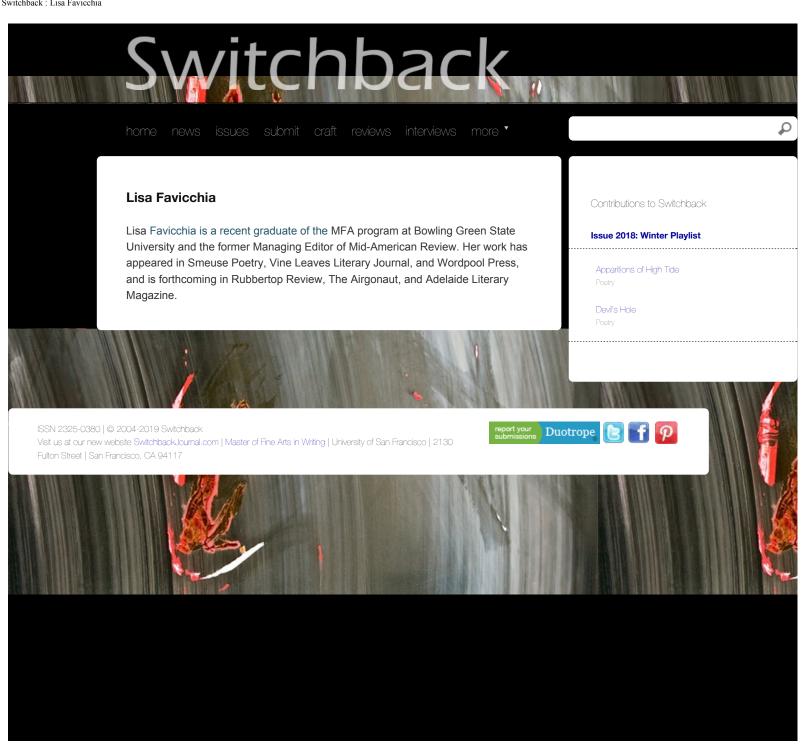
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#### **Apparitions of High Tide**

#### Lisa Favicchia

Watch for the holes. Children often bury dead jellyfish and sea nettles, empty hotel bottles of Fireball. Clear waves will stir shadows that might look familiar, but do not reach for them when the never-landing petrels come to shore scratching mollusks out of their shells and forcing their wings inside to hide in the funneling spirals. DonÕt come to small fishing towns and expect to find what you expect to find. Chances are it will be there, in tangles of seaweed that seem to wrap around your legs just a little too purposefully, or beneath sand that won Ot settle, asking you warmly to allow yourself to keep on sinking, to just stop pedaling your feet. If you canŌt say you wonŌt listen, this is danger. Do not rush, though, to your longboat where the sea waits fleshy and open-mouthed. Remain on land until the petrels, now swirl-tailed, leave their warbling shells beside the shriveled-naked, and the red tide shrinks back, when you Ore certain the gulls have only buried their heads in their necks.



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#### **Devil's Hole**

#### Lisa Favicchia

l donÕt know why l didnÕt turn off the garbage disposal, why I watched GrandmaÕs rogue spoon sputter around, its rose-petal handle fallen prey to metal teeth, why my fingers teetered on the edge, inched closer. I also donŌt know why IÕve never been to DevilÕs Hole, a place I only dare imagine. Some days I picture a long, deep tunnel dug into the earth in the middle of a field, only 4 or so centimeters wide and rimmed with grass, just big enough for a toe to slip into unaware then fall no further. Other days itÕs a swamp no one in town can remember except that once a group of surveyors and the rescue team sent out after them were pulled through the bottomless earth by their feet. It could be a black drainage pipe, one that thrums with the wings of homets as the queen builds their nest from her own salivaÑ But without a doubt it is a place you wish you didnÕt want to sink into all the way up to your teeth.



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#### **Cheat Codes**

#### Jason Gordon

the pillow swallows the head

but the mind with its tentacles of blue light rests on a nest of crumpling un-crumpling poems

or it sits on the TV and stares at the tree growing out of the sofa

it doesnŌt wear pants it canŌt think or hum songs from the 80s

too much not enough synthesized drums

too asleep too awake

it canÕt decide

\*

I wonOt look in the mirror my reflection is a vampire with acne and prescription sunglasses he stays up all day writing poems about nothing heOs not my mirror image he will never taste lobster dipped in blood or bend his fork into a bracelet for you to re-gift like his heart covered in flies

\*

can you turn off your breasts theyÖre cold they burn my tongue I canÕt talk on the phone or leave silent messages like empty bottles in the sea like love or hate poems in my heart your nipples on fire red sky at night blue moon at noon

\*

the sky is dead

no seeds in the glass cubes of its teeth

an endless landscape of hiccups the occasional iceberg of sunlight taps on the window

oh blank dance of clouds the porch is on fire the milk strings of your guitar

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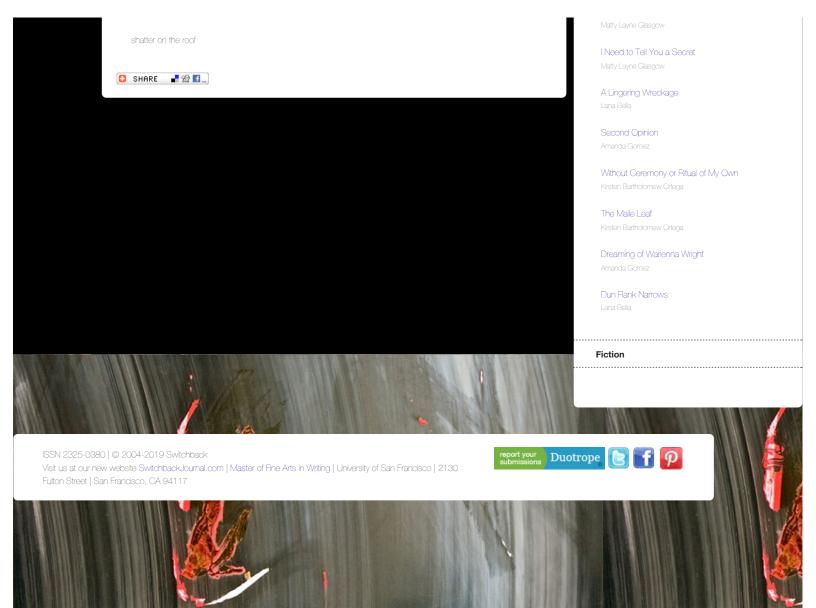
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#### Lost in St. Texas

#### Jason Gordon

my sponge is a brain to squeeze and/or throw

at the cat

making sounds

like a cloud

giving birth

to a phonebook of rain

on the streets of st. texas

where cops huff paint
in the trees
made of steam

that rise from the manholes

that bloom in the dark

where I live in a van or a van lives in me

---

l build a napkin

out of swans

but canÕt make it swim

or fall up like a fridge

full of ghosts

through the weather

blue eggs in the brain

high on stones

not for breakfast

the moon

the brain orbits

so quietly

explodes

I hate yellow ketchup

I want to believe

that life isnÕt boring

the dust off the furniture

the windows

in their frames

expand and

contract

every breath

so important

to calm down the flies

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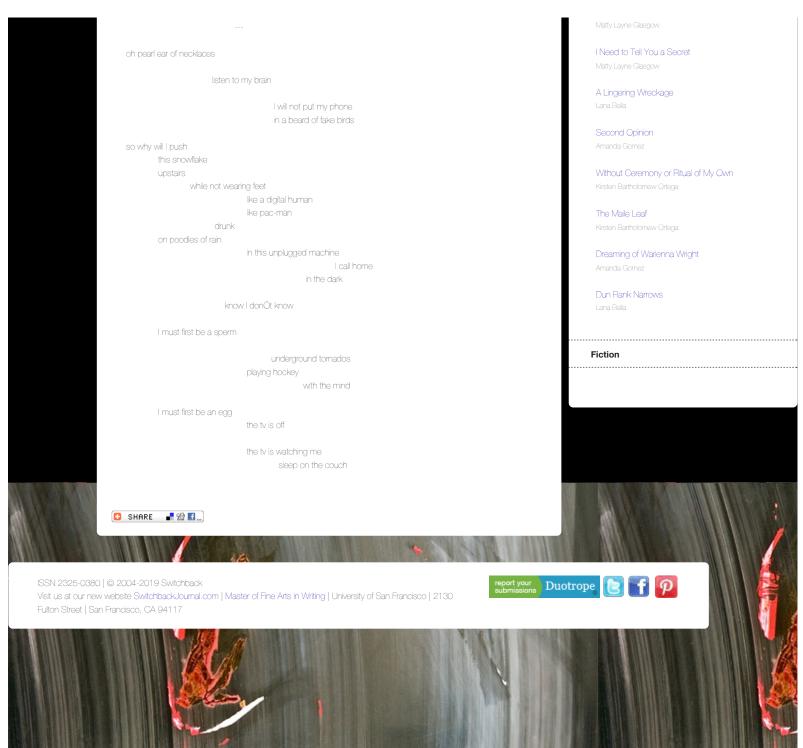
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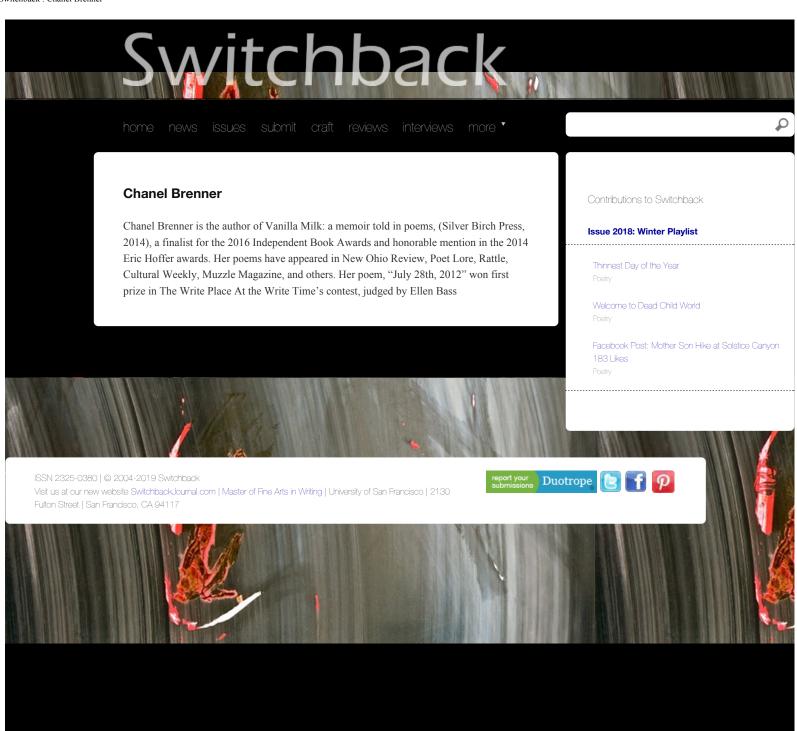
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#### **Welcome to Dead Child World**

#### Chanel Brenner

Please try to make yourself comfortable. If it feels like you are outside your body, it is because you are. Donot worry, this is normal. It helps to think of yourself as a cocoon. Part of you crossed over with your child, and what remains is a shell. We recommend you refrain from catching your fleeting reflection in mirrors or windows. A new you will emerge, but not today. We apologize in advance for the woman who will knock on your door with ashes in a plastic box, tucked inside a baby blue gift bag. We or esorry it will remind you of a shower gift. If your dead child had a brother or sister younger than three, you will need to tell them repeatedly their sibling has died. We recommend you say, No heos not in the hospital. No, heos not coming home. No, heos not going to be bom again. Say the words firmly, in the same tone every time, without tears. We are sorry for the additional pain this will cause. Good news: you canot oo on grief! If you chose to donate your childos organs, remember that his heart, liver, and kidneys will eventually die. If you are wondering whether the label, Parent of a Dead Child, is necessary, it is. Wear it conspicuously, so other parents will know to avoid your sorrowos contagion, so they wonot think about their own children dying. We donot want a situation on our hands.

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#### Chanel Brenner

Look at our wide smiles, muscular legs, blond hair blowing in wind,

not my clenched jaw, tight neck muscles.

See grassy hills, yellow wildflowers, shades of blue,

not me dragging him away from the X-box.

Admire the ocean merging with sky,

not the fight in the car,

the sun-kissed earth,

not his complaints of being cold when he wouldnOt wear a jacket,

our faces, radiant with dew,

not his car sickness.

See the trailÕs summitÑ

not my fear of him falling off the cliff.

Like our heads tilted toward each other,

not someone shouting, ÒSmile, or else!Ó



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#### **Thinnest Day of the Year**

#### Chanel Brenner

When our older son died

I touched a tree to see if it was real.

Six years later, on Halloween, my younger son turns

the yard surreal, with Halloween zombie

heads, severed feet, and tomb stones.

The leaves on the neighborOs ficus blacken.

Mold grows on our shower tileÕs grout.

Canker sores fester in my mouth.

When I drive my son to school, the parking lot

is empty. Where is everybody?, he asks.

A strangerÕs voice answers my husbandÕs phone

when I call him at the gym,

He wants me to tell you heÕs okay,

but thereÖs been an accidentÉ

Home from the hospital, my husband

limps up the steps to our house.

I bring ice packs and pain killers

to his resting place on our living room floor.

Decapitated heads and bloodied necks

glisten in the daylight, severed hands reach

from earth, trying to pull themselves out.

I catch my reflection in a store window.

When did my skin become like ash?



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#### **America**

#### Genevieve DeGuzman

is on a mission to run me down. Behind the wheel it drives, speed demon tailgater tearing up asphalt, leaving curled ribbons of Vulcan on the road. We drift together, matching gaits, tread to tread. Headlights drilling the back of my head, tethering us like twin buoys, womb-tight. Overhead, Fanta orange horizons drip, and the Santa Anas boil down hillsides, those makers of meek wives stroking knives and ruffling my hair. The dangers here are hard to resist. Every hitchhikerÕs a cat purring its way onto your lap to strum picks into bare thighs. Yet it knows me, knows whatÕs aerodynamic, what dives under my skin without a splash, withstands the gales and battering and drills extra holes in my belt, what lights up the dash and disturbs me into motes to salt mountain passes. Mile after mile the yellow lines pulse. I count them off in the dark peeling off of the yucca clerestory and dirt domes. Everything reveals its true state at ten and two oOclock, and I realize what IÕd be without the chase and the devil winds, without the high beams in the mirror, herding me along this desert cosmic axis. What IÕd be when AmericaÕs mask unmasks America.



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#### Larry Narron

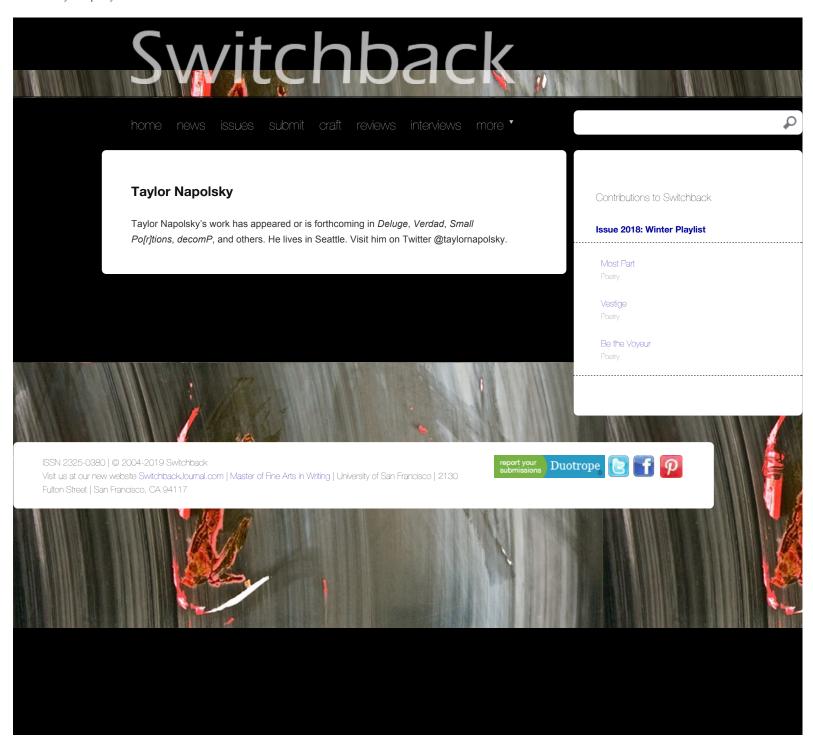
under the blue spell of the strobe-lit gym, the basketball court turned sweaty

palace. paper snow dangles just over the free throw line, where

a dancer scans the grapes of wrath on her phone. purple rain bounces to a forgotten

song from sophomore year. the chorus in the boys' bathroom: a blue corsage in a urinal.





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#### **Most Part**

#### Taylor Napolsky

My shift goes 10 to 5:30 working but \$12 an hour isnÔt cutting it. Ha ha nobody gives a fuck about that, lÔm not the only one who earns \$12 an hour you know, do you realize what \$8 is worth to me shift thatÔs almost an

hourÕs worth of my time, my God, no wonder I donÕt

eat out. WouldnÕt it make a huge, huge difference if I

got to ply myself in intellectual and creative practices rather than spend hours every week on banal frippery labor, but tell me what you thinkŌs best for me. Whatever youŌre the economics person and itŌs best just to have a free market and lŌm not getting older every week. Who cares

how other people get to spend their time. I know what

IOm worth, which is about \$12. ItOs not such a big deal if my opinionOs worthless because of my social status, or if that determines how IOm perceived like, get it, a lot of us been saying what a more esteemed person says and they

get noticed more Öcause theyÖre the one who said it which it isnÖt complicated I think we all recognize this for the most part, which itÖs weird to talk about. I get it!



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Taylor Napolsky

My dad had just discovered Bukowski, and asked me if lÕd heard of him. Yes, sure, heÖs famous, but I havenÕt read him. Then he wanted to bring me the book, bestow it on me, convinced that IÕd like it. And you know what, he was probably right. ItÕs pretty cynical stuff, he summed up. Okay but do I want this copy? Am I going to read it, and anyway I have a shortage of storage space. Plastic drawers. Shelving. Going through his bag, about twenty cases of earplugs were found, along with the one set he repeatedly used, revoltingly stained, shouldÕve been long-since tossed out. You may as well then, add the book to his luggage to bring home, but, thing is, I learned some of the pages are a sickly green with fungus. If Dad were here to gift it to me, I wouldnÕt accept. lÕve heard about the hell that is mold. I know how my room would nurture it.



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#### Be the Voyeur

#### Taylor Napolsky

There is a copy of Richard III to read, both for leisure and because lÖm using it for a project.

At first, I thought I could finish it off in a little over four hours.
This turned out to be wrong.

What IOm looking for has no specificity.

Trails of particulates littered within this ancient perverse story.

Alternating between tearing through it, and watching a version on YouTube, with the spatial noise between lines, at speeches© peripheries.

Remember, there are three characters each with the same teasing name.







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#### The Long Take: after Atonement

Matty Layne Glasgow

INT. BEDROOM Ñ DAY

MOTHER, you lie on the hospital bed the nurse brought into our home when you could no longer rise. The midmorning sun veils your bedroom with a jaundiced filter. Yellow, pale, & ever-fadingNthe last color you will know. I watch the rise & fall of your chest, listen to you exhale: the harsh fragility, the rattle of breath from your lungs, its slow release through your throat. My eyes are the camera, unblinking as they pan over your body, now eroded like the beaches of DunkirkNan evacuation of what life remains as we sit in the theater, our eyes fixed on the screen as Robbie makes his final march past slaughtered stallions, ash & smoke whispering around the distant ferris wheel. What remains of that beach knows only death, & it fills the screen before us. The camera cannot cut away. It follows the devastation: the men who cry like boys, the boys who die like men. I see your crusted mouth twitch. You must hear those brave boys singing on the shore: Take from our souls the strain and stress. Mother, listen, go toward their voices. And let our ordered lives confess. My eyes do not look away; I do not cut to the flowers littering your bedroom with sympathy. The beauty of thy peace. I do not cut to the pictures on your nightstand: you with FATHER, you with your two BOYS. The beauty of thy peace. Because that woman is a stranger to me now. Your body is the beach, but you are the song rattling within me. My eyes on your yellow-fleshed limbs, on your parched, open lips, on the sunken stillness of your emerald eyes, on your chest that does not rise.





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#### I Need to Tell You a Secret

#### Matty Layne Glasgow

I didnŌt read those sad stories when I was younger, but I never left a line of poetry unsung on the page.

Poets know how to turn a phrase. TheyÖre efficient lovers, know youÖve got to get to where youÖre going

& itÕs gonna be deep, & itÕs gonna be raw, & itÕs not gonna take two weeks to finish because who has time

for that shit? Poems let the world turn on the page, give me line breaks like revolutions that spin into

what I need. To tell you a secret might be just enough to keep you here, so let me tell you about those dark

places we go to touch one another. How I hold him in my hand, & on my tongue. How we do it because

it feels damn good, & we donÕt care who listens or watches or reads between our broken lines. Let me

tell you another little secret: some stories donŌt end how you want them to. Some stories are about the son

who watches his mama turn to ash before heŌs ready, the son who tries to check out early, the son who takes

too many pills, about all the scars on his arms, & how the nurse tells him theyÕll let him outta there soon, but

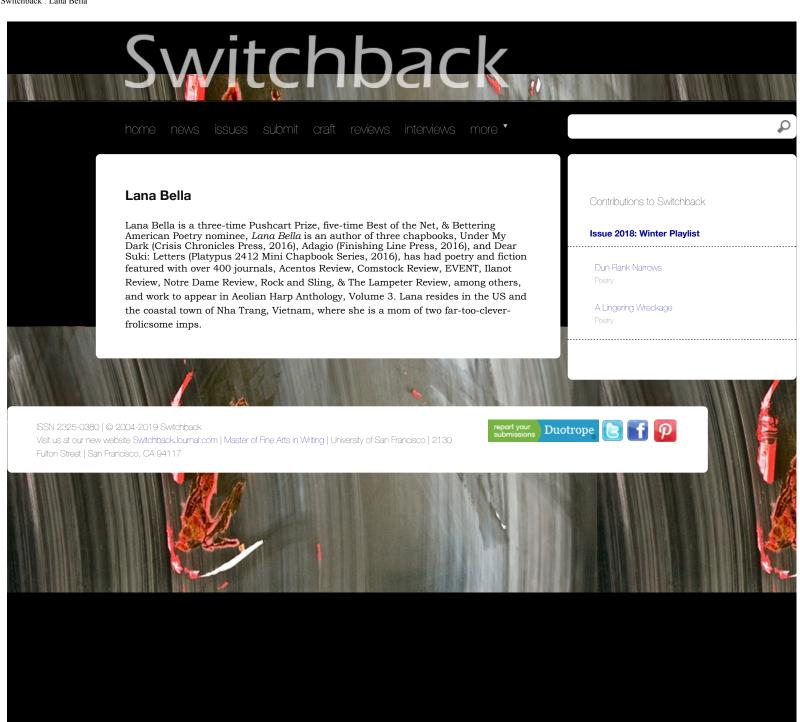
whatÕs he gonna tell his kids about those scars someday? Some stories donÕt even *start* the way you want them to,

so the son doesnÕt finish those stories. & hereÕs a secret about the son: he doesnÕt read the stories, but he sings

you every broken line because he knows timeÕs not on his side, & he wants to bring you with him in every lyric

because someday soon this world ainÕt gonna turn no more. So thereÕs your secret, how you gonna keep it?





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#### **A Lingering Wreckage**

#### Lana Bela

Pale eyes settled into the roar of gust across the wasteland; fingers dragged up vertigo of winter air like red calligraphy. Your voice, a matte haunting, took its time to throb slow and sped black in the footlights, clefs piled as sigils on mass graves. A merest falling felled, you felt too wrecked with the whistlings of dark wood and bleared music, where only the exact sequence of split breaths feathered long the glacial eaves. Synaptic atoms of broken bodies, you calloused flow the liquid dawn, stiffened in the flutes of knife-teeth silver mere.

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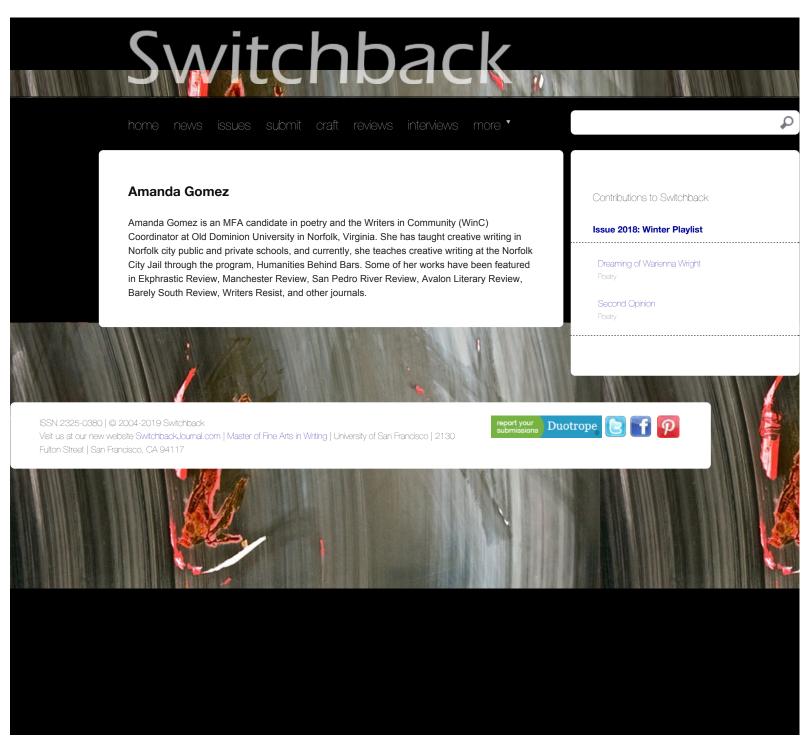
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#### **Second Opinion**

#### **Amanda Gomez**

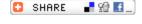
You tilt your head towards me asking: *What becomes of our bodies?*With pleading enticement, I offer a Snickers in my hands.

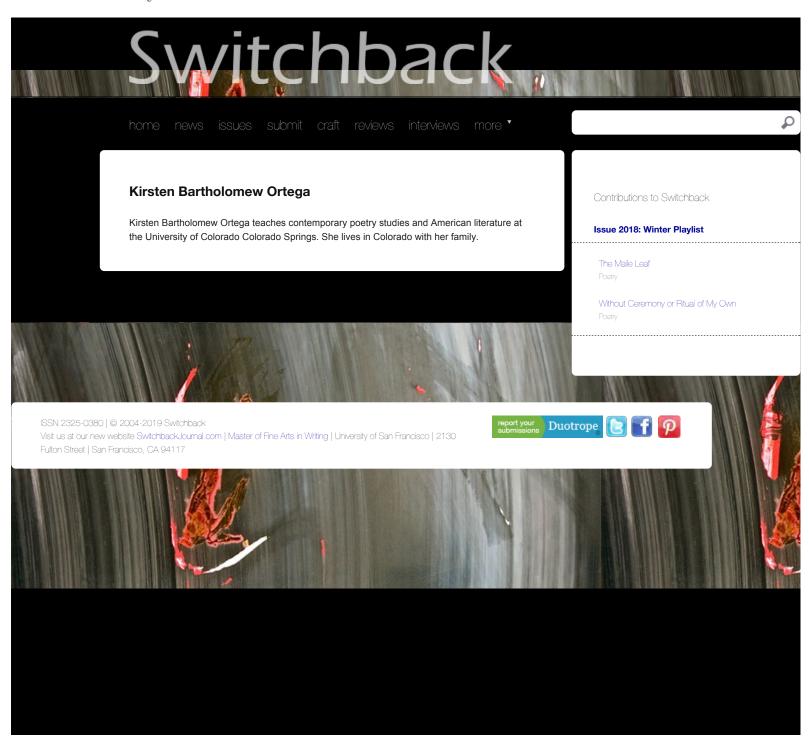
You want a bite? I ask, evading the question. And your voice, more understanding than I expected, embraces a sadness

I don't understand. *No thanks*, you say and we continue our exchange: you layering your sweaters in your suitcase,

me softening my tongue against my palate, searching for words other than *terrified* and *afraid*. Instead, I say, *Absolutely* nothing

fucking happens. You're just going in for a second opinion. Quit talking about dying. How do you think I feel? Maybe get me some marijuana.







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The Long Take: after Atonement

#### Without Ceremony or Ritual of My Own

#### Kirsten Bartholomew Ortega

I have been weaving together these maile leaves without tools of ceremony or ritual of my own

at Hymn Sing, we sat back-to-back, our knees pulled up and sang mostly Negro Spirituals without needing the hymnal

at L.Ös family Seder, bites in taupe mounds on the plate: matzoh, horseradish, gefilte fish, my mouth in shock around these symbols

at sixteen, reaching for K. who had pulled me up to communion during a wedding, I stood with no words before a priest

on his eighteenth birthday, your brother received the thin, brown-paper package across the picnic table from your father and even your step-mother laughed

on the Vermont road at midnight, there were no cars when I snapped a picture of you laying spread-eagle on the White lines

the women in your family grew their hair to their waists, coiled it up at their necks for your wedding

on your shoulder, a pixle winks as you pull your hair aside, begin to dance in the pulsing lights and you are not drunk, you are never drunk

what should have been bitter and sweet, savory and salt I arrange on a plate: in small mounds sugar and flour, butter and chocolate.



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#### The Maile Leaf

#### Kirsten Bartholomew Ortega

At a Starbucks in San Diego, I overheard a woman witnessing to another and she said, ÒThe Bible interprets itself, Ó definitively, and the ocean was not in sight on this crowded corner but I would walk up the hill guided by palms later and there it would spread out a vision beyond and below the green quads and stoic campus so I remembered what came from the unseen across this ocean: the maile leaf dipped in gold and strung on a long chain, received twenty-five years ago with a card defining its significance, the fragrance repressed by solid sheen, suppleness encased in brittle curves.

Your parents

transported fresh maile lei for your crowning moments, always regal never ÖSmiley MileyÓ cute. Your gift to me, preserved across oceans and cultures by a Midas touch a reminder of your name as aura and bond: Maile as bridge and celebration.

IÕm pounding these

metallic words with fingertips as mallets and worry the leaf within will be lost to you, invisible or replaced because remember that time I let J. read my journal and he returned it with analysis, graphs even charting my mood swings over months and drawing correlations and you called him an android?

What if

translation makes words more authentic the way I once heard that ÓvirginÓ may have been more like ÒmaidenÓ and maybe or maybe not an actual virgin because slippery language is rolling out of our mouths over saliva and taste buds onto impermanent pages and what we hold on to might actually be arbitrary but we think it is the only defining thing like the maile leaf made souvenir and friendship pact.

Iknew

I had to tell you because you are the expert on innuendo and double entendre when words lure while all mine do is blaspheme and I see the book between people on a metal table the lookout at the top of the hill

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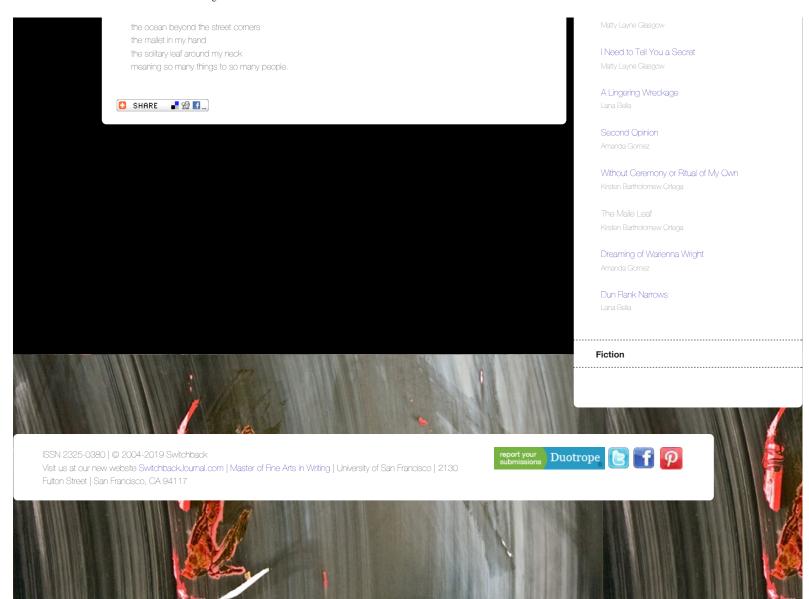
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#### **Dreaming of Warienna Wright**

#### Amanda Gomez

Growing up, my best friendÕs mom told us stories about wife-beating husbands, strangled corpses, and child abductions. It didnÕt help much either her husband was a cop. He kept her up to date with the latest crime patterns in the area: Always have your keys in hand when walking to the car sheÕd say. Or If youÕre in a bad part of town stopped at a red light, donÖt wait for it to turn green. Just drive through. YouOre a sitting duck if not. But the craziest advice was when she told us that if a man ever wrangled us into his car, to rip off a button, assuming we had one, and put in the ignition that way the key wouldnOt fit, assuming we wouldnOt be tied up or locked in the trunk, assuming the button fit the slot. So naturally, when I left home I binge-watched shows like Law and Order:SVU and Snapped. One night, lying on the couch at home, I caught a 60 minutes episode about a Tinder date gone wrong. Warienna Wright, a girl my age, was trapped on the 14th floor balcony. Trying to escape her date, she attempted to climb over the rail. Reach the neighbor below. But drunk, she slipped and fell. Technically, yes, he didnÕt kill her, but if thatOs the last resort to safety, it might as well be murder. The best part: he recorded the entire night: his phone tucked in his chest pocket. When asked by the reporter why he would to do such a thing, he said: I canOt remember what happens when I drink. I was protecting myself in case she made a false claim of rape. What he doesnÕt say: he gave her a red necklace with his hands. When her body reached the morgue, they found a snip of her jeans lodged in her skull: evidence her body bent in half, as if she hugged herself mid-air to reach. the safest place she could before death.



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Nonfiction

Poetry

To The One Who Left

Genevieve DeGuzman

Therapy Blues

William Oullen Jr

Bourbon Street, 9:30 a.m.

Nina Benne

Gate 58, Orlando International Airport

Nina Bennet

Apparitions of High Tide

Lisa Faviochi

Devil's Hole

Lisa Faviochia

Cheat Codes

Jason Gordon

\_ost in St. Texas

Jason Gordon

Welcome to Dead Child World

Ohanel Brenner

Facebook Post: Mother Son Hike at Solstice Canyon 183 Likes

Ohanel Brenner

Thinnest Day of the Year

Chanel Brenner

America

Genevieve DeGuzmar

Winter Formal

Larry Narron

Most Part

Taylor Napolsky

Vestige

Taylor Napolsk

Be the Voyeur

Taylor Napolsk

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#### **Dun Flank Narrows**

#### Lana Bela

Reduced to a plodding crawl that went, and went, nowhere, he feasted on too many skies and bled vellum of ruddy dye. Ghost-light combed the cast-back rain where fear clothed in panic carapace, foul drinks coaxed out from pelican throat. A hundred in the shade and he thought of swamp water, mud in hands, mouth of sand, sweat rust over dun-flank narrows. Instead, he filled the abyss to get closer to home, gauzy abdomen clung to waspsÕ bites, gaze flatlined out to cleft, pale woods, blinded by ceremonies of stars drummed well into duskÕs latticework, until stillness gave shape to what felt through moss, and tucked him in like every hand cradled that dish of ravine earth.



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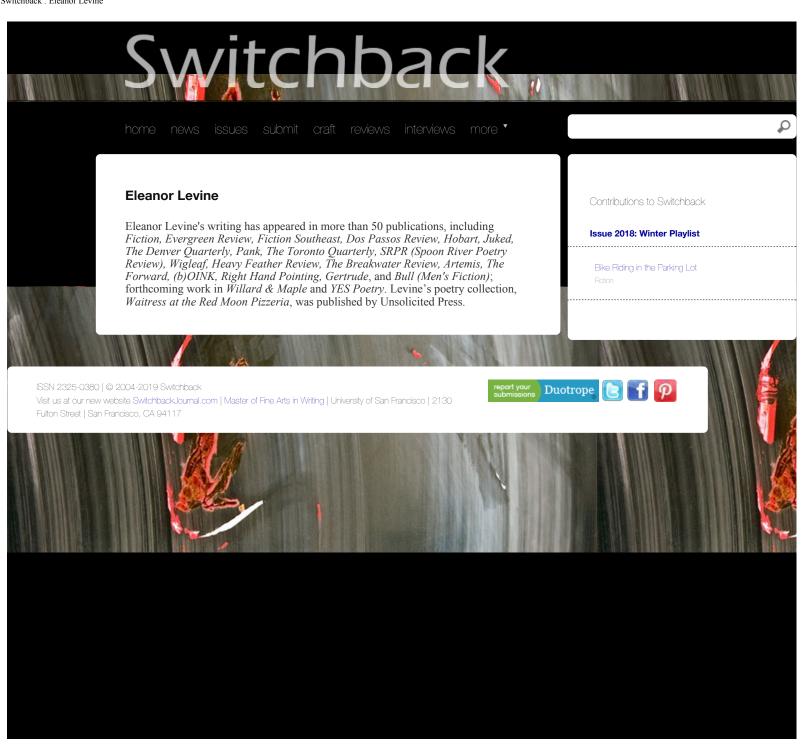
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### 

Scott Bakula

Drive

Ohristopher X. Shade

#### **Bike Riding in the Parking Lot**

#### Eleanor Levine

Marnie Gold was menacing

She chased me all over the beach when we were three.

At five she called me ÒSalamiÓ in Hebrew school, though my name was ÒShulamit.Ó

At 10 she was reading Simone de Beauvoir and tried to explain what a feminist wasÑEuropean style.

By 16 she had crushes on boys and chased my friend Max with her bicycle in the Foodtown parking lot. We were more frightened of her on the bike than other car drivers or pedestrians because she traipsed over suburbia as if she were in a rocket.

\*

Before she went off to study math in college, Mamie and I did not talk senior year in high school.

Indeed, I had more feelings for her when I wasnÕt talking with her than when I was.

Mamie delivered, rather than participated, in extensive conversations that included a voracious laugh loud enough to swallow you alive.

ÒSalami, Ó sheŌd whisper in the girlsŌ bathroom during Hebrew school, Òyou pee in a very existential manner.Ó ÒWhat?Ó

ÒAs you urinate, you experience it.Ó

She made me squirm and I left the bathroom quickly, sometimes not washing my hands.

\*

When I went to summer camp, she wrote me biblical texts, much like her exponential monologues about feminists or boys she liked.

She was particularly fixated on a kid called Ölt,Ó whom she accused of stalking her. They were neighbors, and before everyone on their street became Hasidic, which is the present tense situation, Marnie and ÖltÓ lived across from one another in a perfect state of irreligiosity.

ÒltÓ was also my buddy and whenever we got together he laughed heartily about Marnie and other kids who comprised the I want to get into Harvard cult.

\*

ÒDear Salami, Ó Marnie began letters she sent to my Zionist socialist camp, which she called ÒConcentration Camp. Ó

ÒHope you are having a good time at Concentration Camp. ÔltŐ was out this morning waiting for me. I think he might ask me to his Junior Prom.Ó

Then sheÖd give an expansive thesis on how ÖltsÓ persistence would eventually get him in trouble after her father Nwhom she never spoke withNfiled a complaint.

Òlt,Ó who was my friend, was a genius at math and never mentioned Marnie on an erotic level, so I was confused

by her pronouncements. In fact, the only time Ottó reacted to sexual matters was when we walked along the boardwalk with Max, and I announced to much of Seaside, New Jersey, at the custard stand, OMaxI want to have your babyló Ottó was in tears, giggling by the time MaxOs face turned a radish color.

\*

I saw Marnie in a dream last night, and she was quite furious with me.

It was reminiscent of the time I called her after our tenth high school reunion, which she did not attend, though she sent her biography for the class reunion publication: ÒAm a statistician for an obscure Chicago magazine where I turn derivatives into variables. Ó This was too complex for me, so I moved onto the football player, who, after being kicked off the Penn State team, was now a woman making hosiery in Brussels.

Most people in our high school would not have remembered Marnie except as a spidery creature whose webs fell when she walked. Others, like my friend Beth, who was in MarnieÕs honors classes, feared that ÒMÓ was mildly radioactive.

I dialed her number.

ÒHi, is this Mamie?Ó

ÒWhoÕs this?Ó

ÒSusan Ryman. Remember?Ó

ÒWhy are you calling me?Ó

*ÒWhy wouldnÕt* I be calling you?Ó

ÒYou said terribly mean things to Max about me and your libeling has precluded him from sleeping with me.Ó ÒSo, you donŌt want me to call you anymore?Ó

She hung up. It was worse than the time John F. Kennedy, Jr., hung up on me at Brown University.

Getting hung up on is never a good experience, so I phoned again.

ÖltÖs all your fault!Ó Marnie screamed as I listened from the rotary phone, which would eventually be pulled out of the wall by a neighboring Hasidic Jew weÖd sell the house to in 2011, which infuriated my brother K, who thought the Hasidic, lew had no respect for us or our phone.

ÒMy fault?Ó

 $\grave{\text{O}}\text{That}$  Max got married to someone else. You said horrible things about me. $\acute{\text{O}}$ 

ÒWhatÉ?Ó

ÒListen, Ó she continued, Òl don Õt know how you got my number É. click ÉÓ

\*

I do remember the first time they met.

Max\tilde{O}s house was next to the golf course. Marnie, not knowing who we were going to visit, excitedly rang the doorbell.

Max soon thereafter delivered a sanctimonious lecture on Tom Waits and Elvis Costello. Marnie was enthralled.

Max too (though he didn'Öt want us to know) relished the curves of Marnie'Ös diminutive body. There were many lads, some burnouts, who fantasized about Marnie when she visited their sistersi\"\text{NtheyO}\text{d}\text{ stare at her in the littered.}

\*

MarrieÖs bicycle escapades began in the summer. She knew the approximate times that Max did shopping for his mom, and because her house was only two blocks from the store, sheŌd rush over and hide behind Dairy Queen or Foodtown.

Mamie was not the kind of girl you wanted to cross whether she was an adult or prepubescent. She could make tiger likes shriek or thermometers reach new and insurmountable levels.

You could feel MarnieÖs threadbare gazes during French class, when she snarled at the nasalization of consonants by our teacher Mr. Flame. His mispronunciations caused turmoil in MarnieÖs soul as she believed him to be butchering an ancient language.

Marnie was most mortified when Mr. Flame introduced the past tense because it reminded her of how I had fucked up her relationship with Max.

To be honest, I had merely introduced them on his front porch near the golf course. Okay, maybe I had said, ÒMax, sheŌs on LSD without taking it,Ó or ÒMax, when Mom and I take her to the mail, she bumps against me Ó

There was veracity in evilNand it was Mamie fuming when I passed in the hall.

Marrie still furnes, but this time in the imagination, when she tries to hang out with me, because she\(\tilde{O}\)s home during college, in the summer.

\*

In college, her life would become immensely better. But here, in Lakewood, across from Ölt,Ó she wrestled with French feminists, her father, and not leaving the house much, except when the school bus came.

Though my father was a teacher and her father owned a button store Nithe Marnies were wealthier Nwe, unlike the other residents, didn'Ot travel much in the summer, except when I went to socialist Zionist camp in June. In July, I'Od hang with Marnie.

ÒH,Ó I said to MarnieÖs mother at their door. WeÖd never met before. I didnÖt know she was bald. In synagogue Mrs. Marnie had hair.

MarnieÕs house smelled like a funeral home after a fire. Everything was old, including her family.

ÒCan I help you?Ó

ÒlÕm Susan. Here to see Marnie.Ó

ÒJust a minute, Ó she said, slamming the door.

Marnie came down a few minutes later.

ÒBack from Concentration Camp already? Ó she asked. No one laughed at Marnie Ös jokes except Marnie.

\*

Marnie was the opposite of Hannah Q whom everyone had a crush on, even girls in suburbia who hadnÕt spoken with her in 40 years.

They all rushed to be friends with her on Facebook.

Last night, in a nightmare, Hannah Q moved a block away from me, where my old neighborhood became Princeton, NJ, with paved sidewalks, omnipresent coffee shops, and a few communist groups springing up. Hannah Q was a poetry editor.

She accepted my poems for a literary journal at William and Mary, where she attended college.

Hannah Q was reluctant to make corrections, though I emailed that she needed to correct the spaces and remove typos. Which she had introduced.

Hannah Q felt that making such corrections would cause problems for her journal deadline.

A young boy, who wore Ted Baker shirts he purchased on eBay and lived on her block, also had his work accepted.

He and I went to Hannah QÖs dorm room, which she shared with other people who were far above my socioeconomic status, that is, the people who were not born in but now lived in my neighborhood.

Unlike MarnieÖs family, which was fallen aristocracy, that is, they lived in a burned-out house that was bound to self-immolate through fire or bed bugs, Hannah Q et all had shag rugs and Fresca in their fridge. Also, cold cans of sliced peaches. Whereas Marnie had bottles of expired geflite fish that the homeless in Fincastle, Virginia, wouldnÖt eat

Hannah Q had brothers who were delectable and judicious and only attended elite schools and once threw rocks

at me while I delivered newspapers. MarnieŌs brothers had jobs on Wall Street, before the market collapsed, and we suspected they might have engineered that.

Hannah Q was kinder, better looking, but more elusive than Mamie. Given the choice, one would prefer Hannah

QÕs breasts to MamieÕs. For Hannah was sweeter, more scrumptious.

Hannah Q, who would have been great as a human milk manufacturer, didnŌt want to publish me in her journal though she liked my poetry. She concluded that I place my work in a blog.

ÒWeÕd like to use you,Ó she said, Òbut we canÕt.Ó

ÒBut you sent me an acceptance letterÉÓ

ÒNow itÕs the blog. Either that or not,Ó she insisted.

I emailed her, informed her, that I would never put my poetry in a blog if she had originally promised William and MaryŌs literary journal.

Plus, she hadnÕt made the corrections.

This morning, after my Hannah Q bad dream ended, I looked at her Facebook profile: she is blank, and slightly less creative than Mamie, who had a photograph of a disheveled raccoon as her profile pic. Whereas I look like a dyke with my hat flipping back and forthNilke those ONeolutionO creatures in Orphan Black.

\*

The nightmare about Hannah Q kept flashing on my screen at work.

There was a pervasive darkness in the neighborhood where Hannah Q held an encampment of men who wanted to sleep with her.

One of the boys said she was as old as me and had no boyfriend. That is always a possibility for me\tilde{N}no boyfriend, no girlfriend, and likes to be alone.

Hannah Q looked the same: thin, ponytail, white, Ecuadorian, and a metaphysical countenance that even Stalin lacked

Hannah would sit with  $\mbox{\sc Amy}\mbox{\sc Z}$  when we were in sixth grade.

Nobody but Felicia Diaz, a big Puerto Rican girl who smelled like bologna sat with me.

ÒMrs. Goldstein told us to sit with you because you have no friends, Ó Hannah and Amy, who were cheerleaders, told me.

ÒWII you be able to use this experience in an essay contest? O I asked them.

They ate tuna sandwiches.

Hannah was also a goody two shoes with PF Flyers made by smug human rights activists in Berkeley, California, where she had gone to graduate school to study pleurisy, before she accepted my poems.

\*

None of my love interests, including Hannah Q, were like Anna R.

I knew her phone number.

I called her.

Anna R was more intriguing than lipids.

More lip-smacking than pot pie.

More compelling than a classics poet trying to decipher modernist poetry.

She was frequently in the elementary school parking lot, doing yoga, expecting me to transpose my mind into her book.

Sometimes she read good books. Other times she laughed like a daffodil too silly to fall in love.

After I graduated college I read that Anna R had gotten married and I was thrilled to speak with her, but quite remorseful after the conversation.

ÒHi,Ó I said.

ÒWho is this?Ó

Anna R recognized my voice.

ÒYouÖre still alive?Ó she giggled. She hadnÖt heard from me since the time I defended her honor against prickly big shots in fifth grade. lÖd still have defended Anna RÖs honor had she not been so asinine. ÒAsinineÓ transforms eclectic chicks who were once beauty queens in elementary school into inarticulate ladies who shop at Whole Foods and make snubbing/squeaking/grunting noises like primates if you veer too close to them in the strawberry section. In fact, some of these ladies have Òservice primatesÓ because they have neurological difficulties, which prevent them from loading items into carts. The monkeys are trained to help, though sometimes they eat the fruit before it gets into the basket.

Inarticulate ladies, however, give you more room to breathe than Marnies.

Marnies are insufferable, whereas Anna R and Hannah Q types dismiss trifles such as boredom and make you feel as if there is room, even a possibility, that sleeping with them wonOt divest your soul of enzymes.

\*

But my incubus revealed that I was more likely to sleep with Pee Wee Herman if he were Hitler than Nicole Kidman if she were Eva Braun. You may not know that Mamie is the future Hitler, but her accessibility makes it so. People such as Marnie, who were likely Hitler in a previous existence, which makes them excellent candidates as Hitler in their next existence, are so available and easy to sleep with me because they are the only ones who will. Others, who have green hair and soft dispositions, who laugh loudly at Zyklon B jokes and make reference to your inability to be paranoid, are likely to leave you despondent in a motel room.

Because those fleeting moments with Hannah Q and Anna R were transparently unreal, I shall return to the wonder zone of Marnie and recall how one day, while babysitting for a teacher who claimed to have been part of the French Revolution, we, that is, me and Marnie, were almost molested in his Chevrolet.

This was the same person who tried to have sex with his wifeÕs colleagues.

Females always know when a man is trying to rape them, whether these men do so in the ice cream parlor or the cannoli shop.

Eventually said females will discuss how said perv tried to ply their virginity in a phone booth, and how they screamed so loud, that instead of physically abusing them, he verbally fucked them over.

In this case, he was not a looker, nor was his wife, but he was the man who was supposed to transport me back and forth from my house, in his Chevrolet, to babysit his daughter, who would later become a drug addict and change her name to Cannabis.

\*

We were in his car, Marnie and I, when he scrutinized us in the rearview mirror

Neither of us wanted to sit in the front seat with him, least of all Marnie, who speculated that he should be on a Sex OffenderÖs List long before New Jersey passed MeganÖs Law.

ÒDracula is picking me up this evening, Ó I said to Marnie, Òbecause I have to babysit his daughter. I need you to come over Ó

 $\ \, \text{Dracula, the perv car driver, was not okeydokey when he saw} \, \textit{two of us} \, \text{leave my purple-shingled house}. \\$ 

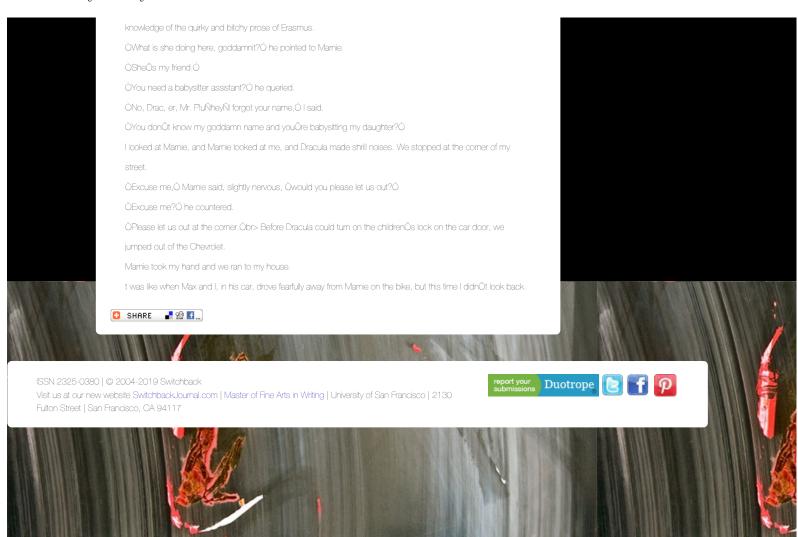
He was not expecting James Joyce or any of the characters from *Dubliners*. He was, however, envisioning just me, my knee, my ability to say nothing, his ability to extend his hand.

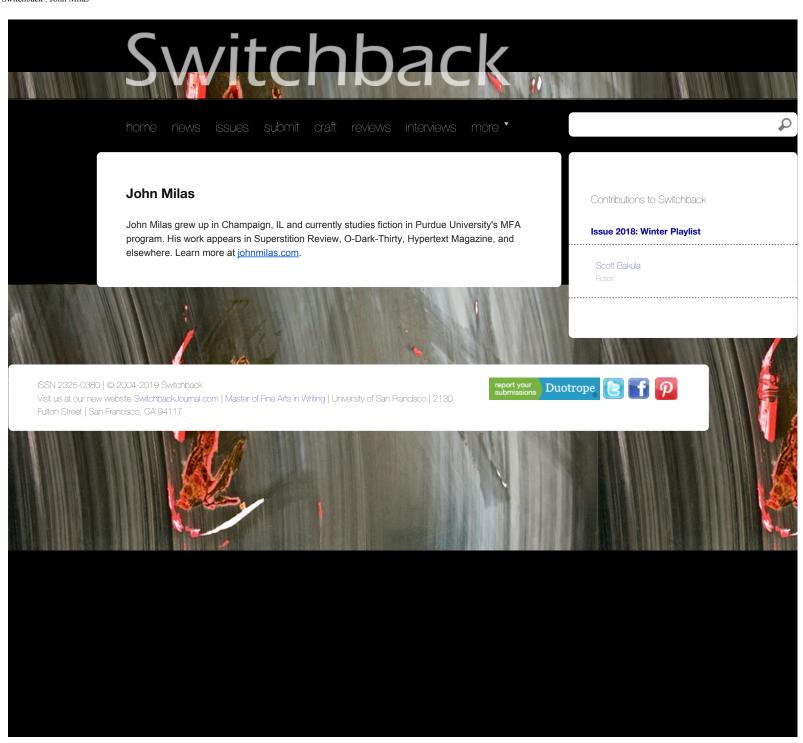
Dracula was a landed gentleman in our town.

His family owned a plumbing agency that specialized in draining unquenchable prunes from the drainer.

World over, and even in *RipleyÖs Believe it or Not*, his family was known for plumbing feats that surpassed the average plumber.

They didnÖt ÒplumbÓ themselves, though their father, Dracula Senior, was so proficient in plumbing he hired numerous liberal arts majors from the tristate area. The only requirement was that you have a slightly intimate





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#### **Scott Bakula**

John Milas

Betty switched off the old RCA television during the CBS Tuesday night promo reel and then watched CliffordÖs reflection in the blank screen. Her husband glanced up from his seat in the dining room and then returned to his important business. These were their typical interactions after dinner. Betty would sit in her recliner with a show on in the background and fill out daily crossword puzzles while Clifford built models. He had spent the past ten years of their retirement together building models, sitting silently at the dining room table behind her, gluing together tiny boats and airplanes, their wet paint dripping onto her old newspapers.

He was painting a model of the Schamhorst, a great big ship that sank during a great big battle a hundred years ago. At least that on what Betty remembered from Clifford sexplanation. When he first brought the model home she had nicknamed it the USS Charlie Horse, which made her laugh, but Clifford grimaced and explained that the ship wasnot American, so the prefix OUSSO made no sense. He told her the little battle ship was one-seventy-second scale, meaning the wreck lying upside down a thousand feet underwater was seventy-two times larger than the model in his hands. Betty imagined all the little sailors like mites marching around on the plastic deck, seventy-two times smaller than grown men.

She folded up the newspaper on her lap and waited for Clifford to say something, anything, but he let the awkward silence persist. She didn'Ot know what to do with him. These Wednesday nights were especially boring and played-out. First the late service at church, then eating whatever she made for supper, then sitting with Clifford and ignoring whatever was on TV for a couple hours before turning in. Tomorrow would be about the same, but Betty felt like having a conversation with her husband, visiting at least, speaking. She pondered what they might talk about, and then what they would never talk about.

Òlf you could let anyone have their way with you, who would it be?Ó she asked. Clifford cleared his throat and asked what she had just said.

Òl know you can hear me, Ó said Betty. ÒThe TVÕs off. Ó

ÒAnd will you turn it back on, please?Ó

ÒHow about you put your boat down for two minutes. LetÕs not be boring for once.Ó

Clifford sighed at her. He was always sighing like characters in the mystery novels she used to take out of the library, before holding a book made her fingers sore, like opening a medicine bottle or folding laundry or doing ponies in her granddaughterÖs hair.

ÒPlease ask me something else, Ó Clifford said, and then, ÒCanŌt you just turn the TV on?Ó

Why was this so hard for him? Men were always looking around, even men like Clifford. He had claimed to Betty that she was his first on their wedding night, but that didnŌt mean he no longer had eyes on the front of his head. After Betty waited a while, Clifford slouched in his chair and finally said Elizabeth Taylor, and after some hesitation Ann-Margret part of the time. Betty scoffed at him.

OObviously, Ó she said. OBut I mean nowadays, not back when you were diddling yourself at thirteen. Ó Good Lord, Ó said Clifford, Ols this about something I said this week? Ó But Betty sat without turning to face him. For someone who spent his retirement building and painting things, Clifford sure wasnOt very creative.

Any man his age would have said Elizabeth Taylor and Ann-Margret part of the time. What was that supposed to mean?

ÒJust tell me,Ó Betty said. She watched Clifford scrunch his face in the TV screen and set the

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Schamhorst down on the newspapers.

ÒWhat for?Ó

ÒAt this point, Ó said Betty, ÒI just want to hear if you can answer a simple question. Ó

 $\hat{O}$ Fine,  $\hat{O}$  he said and thought about it.  $\hat{O}$ How about the girl from that street racing picture you had on the other day.  $\hat{O}$ 

ÒThat doesnŌt help,Ó said Betty. She turned in her chair to look at Clifford directly, but he wouldnŌt meet her eyes, looking down at the table instead. She knew he was worked up. His whole head had turned red.

Öl donÖt know,Ó Clifford said. ÒOne of those newer ones, with that bald guy from Saving Private Ryan.Ó ÒNo, that doesnÖt mean a thing to me,Ó said Betty.

ÒThereÖs more than one of them,Ó Clifford said. ÒltÖs the sequel lÖm talking about.Ó Betty considered the last time sheÖd seen a racing film since watching *Herbie Goes to Monte Carlo* with her grandchildren. She didnÖt remember.

ÒWhoÕs the bald guy?Ó Betty asked.

Òl donỗt know exactly. He has a short name, Ó Olifford said. ÒVan. Ó He snapped his fingers. ÒVin Diesel. Thatỗs him. Ó

Òl have no idea who that is, Ó said Betty.

ÖltÖs that Fast and Furious deal, Ó Olifford said. Öl remember. The second one. Part two. Ó Then she remembered something from TV with close-ups of women os bottoms and quivering car-engines and quite a bit of money and guns and drugs. She of forgotten the actors.

ÒBut you donŌt know this girlŌs name.Ó

ÒYouÕre putting me on the spot,Ó Clifford said.

ÒOh, please, Ó said Betty as she waved her hand at him. ÒHow can I put you on the spot in your own house? Ó She faced the TV again, the family portraits and vacation landscapes in the lamplight framed on yellowish paisley wallpaper. Òlf you can Ôt remember her name you can at least tell me what you Öd let her do to you. Ó

Clifford clasped both hands to his face. OWhat the hell has gotten into you? O he said.

ÒCome on. This would be easy for a lot of men, Ó said Betty. She wanted to remind Clifford of how often it had been easy for him to at least call her pretty when they started going steady, but then she realized these moments didnŌt exist anywhere in her memory.

Òl donÕt see whatÕs so important about it,Ó he said.

ÒWhatÕs the harm in telling me?Ó asked Betty. ÒlÕm not looking for reasons to leave you.Ó

ÒLonger marriages have ended over less.Ó

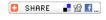
ÒOh really, Ó said Betty. ÒWhat marriages? Ó

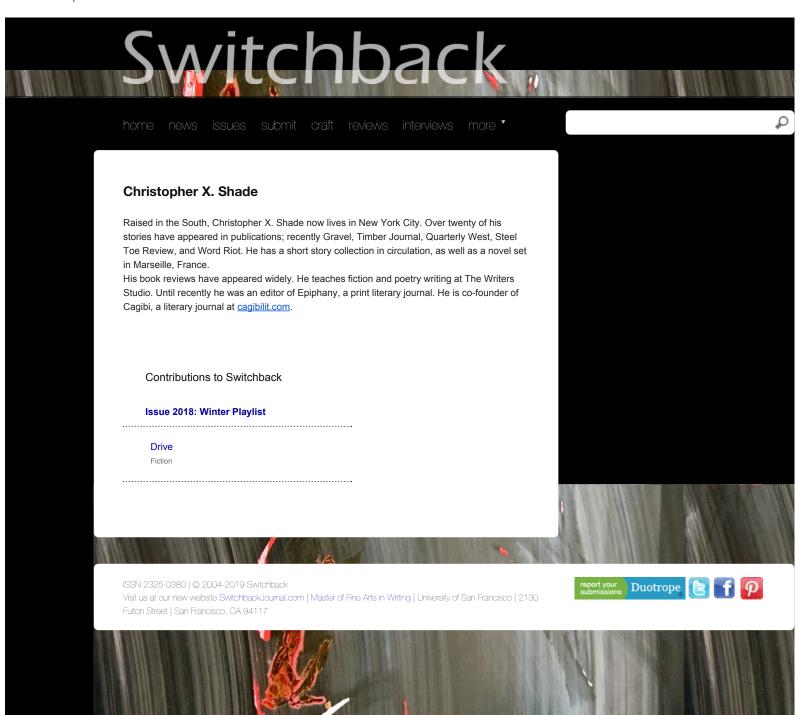
Öl give up, Ó Clifford said. ÒEva Mendez. And Michelle Rodriguez in the same one. And Salma Hayek, alright? IÖd let them tie me up and do anything. Whatever they wanted. Is that good enough? Ó Betty watched Clifford in the TV screen. Eva Mendez, Michelle Rodriguez, Salma Hayek. She knew them. There seemed to be a common denominator though, which she did not fit.

ÖThere appears to be a common denominator here, Ó she said, but Clifford ignored her. HeÖd gone back to work on the USS *Charlie Horse*, poking at the model with his little paintbrush, painting patches of rust and oil streaks seventy-two times smaller than real grime to give the ship its dirty and used look.

Betty switched on CBS and sat through the promo for their Tuesday night lineup again. Clifford spoke up during the spot for NOIS: New Orleans.

ÒHold on a second,Ó he said. ÒNow itÖs your turn.Ó She picked an actor from one of the commercials and said his name in her head over and over again, ready to speak it aloud for Clifford, but the true answer sat at the tip of her tongue. That younger man from next door, jogging through the neighborhood, grilling in his backyard on Sundays. He wore pink polo shirts and took his kids to school in a Ford Windstar. Betty sat for a moment and then turned up the TV volume. She knew better than to tell one man what she would let another man do to her.





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#### **Drive**

#### Christopher X. Shade

He looked everywhere for her. In his Ö73 Super Beetle, he drove to her parentsÖ big yellow house on Humboldt Street, jogged up the porch steps, knocked on the door, panted, waitedl\u00f1no answer. At the side of the house around back where the gravel drive led to the garage, he knocked on the privacy fence gate. The pool\u00f3s smell was in the air. It was a clean smell, a translucent smell, a clear sunlight smell on her wet skin and on her one-piece after swimming while she lay with her face to the sun in the tortoise shell sunglasses. Behind which he could not see, but he knew somehow that she pretended to have closed eyes when she was in fact regarding him through her lashes still moist, with tiny water beads. There was the sound of agitated bees in the air\u00fait was the pool\u00fas dragging pump.

He drove to her favorite place with trees, not Cheesman Park as one might guessÑCheesman was nearby, but a neighborhood awayÑinstead, just north of busy 1st Avenue, her favorite place with trees was a nameless strip of green where neighborhood residents might walk after a meal, or take their dog. Grass and dandelions and other weeds had been thinned by joggers cutting through, by the rare family picnic blanket, by raucous children, by dogs jumping for thrown tennis balls and by lovers like him and her, holding hands, leaning with her back against an old oak so that he might kiss her, and then together sliding to sit in the shade on the fat roots and dirt and weeds to plan great and impossible things: She wanted to be a dancer. She thought she might paint. She would be a Lee Krasner in a wintry countryside cottage. She wanted to cure cancer. She was certain it was possible, anything was possible; it wasnot at all like her father had told her, that she should finish at the university and probably meet someone there and, as a result, everything would get figured outino, she would figure it out, she would not resign to the fate of a great passage of time. The time was now, more urgently than

She would race cars. Those cars were cute, she was petite. She would easily fit inside.

Great people were waiting for her. When she arrived, they would know that she belonged, they would see at once that sheÖd always belonged.

He drove to her high school, Cherry Creek HSNhe didnOt know why. There was no reason he could think of why sheOd evacuate to such a place, but he was looking everywhere. He slid the Beetle to a halt and rushed the front doorsNclosed, locked, secured with a chain and padlock. At the football field, he climbed over the fence. Sprinklers in the grass hissed and ticked. He dodged spray as he hastily searched the bleachers, everywhere, imagining her there, so clearly, imagining her everywhere there, a younger her in oranges and browns and corduroy, but in fact she was not there, it was barren land. HeOd never been with her there. She probably had no fond memories of the place. He climbed back over the fence, hurting his ankle in the jump down on the other side, and sped away in the Beetle.

At her church where he went with her on Sunday mornings, sometimes with her mother, less often with her father in tow Nher church where he Od imagined one day they might be married, he got in front of two white-

haired ladies kneeling in a pew. Neither of these were her and he lifted aside the curtain of the vacant confessional and he looked in at the sacristy, startled by a scarecrow of vestments. She had told him she would be adored. She would not be mean. She would be a church-going Christian. She would be familiar with the Bible and know more than the few verses she knew, like Isaiah 40:31, the one about flying eagles.

She would be someone who did not look back. She would be erudite. When she of told him this, he had no idea what this word meant, and when he looked it up later he couldnot find it, he couldnot guess the spelling of the word, he had to give it up. She would learn languages. She would travel. She would see France, all the way to Cassis. Her grandmother had visited Cassis in 1978, and she had her grandmother of Cassis map that had become delicate over the years of folding and unfolding. She of pointed to things on the map: She would sunbathe on the Plage de la Grande Mer. She would dine in the old port on the Quai des Baux. She would visit the old church Saint Michel.

She would work in the movie industry. Her grandfather had told her so. Her grandfather had said he could tell, he said, there was something about the way she stood at a window. Even as young as she was, there was something about the way her eyes did not quite look at the same point in space, though they in fact did, but he said it struck him that hers were movie star eyes. These many years later she insisted she would be in movies. She would work magic on and off screen.

She had said she would be with him. She would always be with him. They would marry even if someone said they shouldnOtNbut who would say they shouldnOt? Who might say she shouldnOt marry him? Her father who had asked him, Could he close a deal? Her sensible aunt Colleen? Her uncle Mike who had worked in DustoffOs in Vietnam and who had asked him, What were his plans, What did he want to do really, and Why not finish at the university? Why not finish something?

She had told him they would make a future for themselves, a future brighter than anyone would expect, something to change the world. That 0s how important it was for her to be with him.

He went to the Park Hill catŽ where theyÖd gone together in the early days, to their usual outside table, a memory so vivid it seemed like yesterday. He got in front of two women sitting thereinhis heart pounding so hard he felt it in his head because he was startled by the image of her, but only an image, neither of these were her, she was not one of these. That first day here with her heÖd been so flustered, so astonished to be in her presence, it seemed an undue privilege. He couldnÖt talk, he couldnÖt comprehend the menu. She had to order for him. She ordered him a sandwich and something else he discovered when it arrived to be an orange soda from overseasivit was clear, and it was cold and clean in his mouth and throat. When they were leaving the table, he put so much money down that she widened her eyes at him and then picked it all up, counted it, shaking her head, and then she said it was very kind of him but was it really necessary? She slid some of the bills across to him. Take it, she said when he didnÖt movelibecause, in the state he was in, he didnÖt have a grasp of what heÖd doneliand she said. You canÖt afford to be so kind.

SheÖd said she spent most of her time listening to records and what she liked second-most was looking at album covers like Sonny & CherÖs *Look At Us* with those two in the crook of a tree that looked like it couldÖve been a tree in Colorado, maybe up past Boulder, before there was so much snow, on the way to Estes Park, a tree alone on a farm somewhere. She said, ThatÖs just where it mightÖve been.

He went to the Sixth Avenue cafŽ where their usual table was inside at a window with a view of the changing leaves or the snow, and he walked, still limping, all through the place but she was not to be found there. He sat at their table where, one day in particular, theyÖd had hot tea and held hands across the table and then sheÖd asked him, Why were his hands always so cold? She withdrew her own hand. She told him to put his

hands around the teacup like she did: elbows on the table, the cup in both hands, her eyes watching him over the brim. And so he picked up his teacup in both hands and put his elbows up on the table and looked at her. He asked, Now what?

Now, she said, come closer in your chair, now we wrap our legs together under the table.

As they did this, he nearly spilled his tea.

Careful, she said, Now letÖs put our arms across. Put your tea on the other side of mine. DonÖt spill it on

I havenÕt yet.

There we are.

He asked, Now what?

She said, Now we sip the other personÕs tea.

This is elaborate. Are you comfortable?

She said, Yes, I really am. Are you?

WeÕve tied ourselves in a knot.

But the knot loosened over time, over days and weeks, in the gradual way that these things do, in moments of odd words and misunderstandings, and, then, in his shocking, dreadful error of causing a tear in the fold of her grandmotherOs Cassis map. It was his pulling open the map the wrong way that had caused the tear. It made no sound when it tore, the only sound was her quiet moan, and then she grabbed the map from him. He was left with his hands in the air holding nothing. He said he was sorry, he didnOt know how it had happened, it had come apart in his hands. But she was so upset, she would not respond.

He suffered days apart from her and spent countless hours in the car, both hands on the wheel, trying to drive through new and different streets.

He asked her out again, and set out to entertain her. He made her laugh. HeÖd known that this would bring her back, and it had, but it hadnŌt, not really.

At last, he turned the Beetle toward home. He returned it to the garage. He pulled the garage door up, drove in, and then pulled it down on his way back to the house. On the porch he knocked the dirt from his boots and went in the house. Just inside, he unlaced his boots, pulled them off and stood them on the mud rug as his wife Nora called it, or the ugly rug as she sometimes called it, or the washing machine rug because it could be found there when it was missing from the entryway. But it wasnOt missing. Everything was, after all, where it should be.

Nora called from the front room, OWhere have you been, Maurice?O

He said, Ol went for a drive. Ó