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EMERGENCE
Phyllis Klein

To learn sleep, not sleepwalk, not nightmare.
To learn the wane of consciousness without fear.

Sleep—something that was a fish gliding through serene waters, something striped with bold yellows and teacup blues. Became a desert, trudged through the Hell of a terrified mind. To see myself as an effigy, not hanged, not burned, a living sleeping elegy.

To die every night without dying. Without worry.

Underwater breath. Wake to the surface of light.
In our part of town, the sky has learned to unstitch its seams once a month so a new body can fall out. This time, it feels less like a nightmare. More like a metaphor for something I do not know the name of. Maybe it’s just nature. Birds conveying morning back to the god who witnessed it first. After we pray one night, my father teaches me you have to kill a man before you can believe in him. Every Sunday, I trace my way home by corpse. Let’s pretend even flesh could be enough of a streetlamp. Let’s pretend we could raise a riot from the dead. Maybe I dream about crime so much for a reason. O, what language has this many words for execution? When I swish a jawful of light each morning, its stammer reworks itself into my tongue. Come June, and another man asks what accent I was born in—as if I have somehow found a way to mispronounce silence. Vowels limp though my mouth, laments calcify in my throat. My shoulder a dialect of famine, my suppressed spine baring its hunger. Look, the mausoleum is one thing that doesn’t pledge to keep me out. It answers me better than the doctors ever will. The meadows wane into winter’s grip & this too could be a story of fate. Don’t you know the night is just another room to die in? Soundless skyline, traitorous shadow: coroner scribbling on the neighbors’ autopsy report. Their cause of death left nameless. For hours after, I watch their house slump into blazing as effigy. On our porch, my mother spells an epitaph from their ashes, says I won’t let this country take them whole. For hours after, I torch my own shadow, glare at the flame sleepwalking towards my feet. These hands only good for sacrifice, skin a prefix for immolation. Let us do this palmistry all over again. Look ahead: our rivulets of regret. Stretches of dark to forget my own kin inside of. The radio muscling us into perfect victim. Look ahead: even though I never know how some learned to fly, I’m still the one who falls headfirst into guilt, into the guillotine.
THE WALL
Palmer Earl

MOON PHASES
Palmer Earl
Kim Nelson

MISSING PERSONS

NEVER get into cars with strange men. The thought crossed Rowan’s mind as she hoisted herself into the passenger seat of the attractive bartender’s Jeep. Tek slid into the driver’s side, shooting her a grin as he started the engine. She smiled back; her teeth chattered from nerves. According to the more gossipy waitresses, Tek was a fantastic lay. If she really thought about it, there didn’t seem to be any compelling reason not to get into his Jeep and go home with him. She’d been celibate since arriving at the resort at the beginning of the season. Her fingers twitched near the hem of her cotton t-shirt that said “Denali National Park” across the front. She had bought it in the kid’s section of the gift shop where she worked, enjoying the salacious coincidence of where the peaks lined up over her chest.

“My place is just outside of Silver Creek,” Tek said, naming the village about ten miles east as he pulled out of the parking lot onto the main road. “It’s not much to look at—just a trailer—but the view is incredible. You’ll love it.” It was nearly 1 a.m. and a twilight level of sunlight lingered in the sky. Rowan’s Midwestern biorhythm still wasn’t used to Alaska’s midnight sun. It was difficult to hide if it never got dark.

After they passed through town, Tek turned the Jeep off the main artery to an unmarked gravel side street. The sunshine filtered through thick branches of old growth forest on both sides of the road. Rowan stared into the trees, wondering what predators may be lurking in their shadows. The beers in her system made her feel slightly dizzy as her gaze tripped over the trees zipping by.

“I’m glad you came into the bar tonight. Thanks for waiting for me to close up,” Tek said, his voice dipping into a huskier tone that an ex-girlfriend or flirty tourist probably once told him was sexy. Rowan sank deeper into the passenger seat, letting the night happen to her, waiting to feel something. Her gaze drifted back out the window to the scenery outside. An old gray sweatshirt lay crumpled on the side of the road, aged by mud splatter, in effigy of its previous owner. They hadn’t passed a single other car since the parking lot. The desolation of Alaska sometimes overwhelmed her.

“You’re shivering,” Tek noticed. With one hand on the wheel, he reached behind him and pulled a plaid wool blanket from behind the front seat, then handed it to her. It smelled like pine and campfire.

“Thanks.” Though she wasn’t cold, she draped the blanket over herself. It felt good to hide. “These woods are so…. These must be really old trees, I’m guessing?”

“There are trees that are close to a thousand years old here.” Tek nodded his head towards the windshield. “When I first moved
here from Anchorage, this forest kinda spooked me out. Not that Anchorage is a bustling city or anything,” he chuckled at himself. “We grew up playing in the woods all the time. But all the way out here, away from the resort and all the park activity, this land is totally wild. It does kinda have a different vibe to it, like us humans don’t belong.”

Rowan nodded. “Yeah.” Another object along the road caught her eye—the bent rods and tattered red fabric of an old umbrella sprawled in the dirt. “I can’t argue with that. We have a tendency to make a mess of everything.”

Tek tapped on his window, pointing. “There’s a mountain near Silver Creek where they have a 10k race and a town picnic every summer solstice. Last year, a guy from Wasilla was leading for most of the race, but once he reached the foothills, he vanished. They never found his body or any sign of him again.”


“Maybe.” Tek shrugged. “Though in those cases, they usually find some of the remains. With this guy, it was like the forest just swallowed him up.”

“That’s terrifying.”

“When we were kids, my aunt used to tell us old folktales about the forest. Our ancestors believed that humans and spirits existed on the same plane. Sometimes when I’m out here, I don’t feel like I’m alone.” He laughed lightly. “That stuff stays with you.”

The roadside scenery opened up to a sprawling grass prairie. At the foot of a rolling hill, a silver trailer home sat at the end of a gravel driveway. Tek rolled into the driveway, then put the Jeep into park. “Here we are.”

Inside, the trailer was small but clean and well-kept, its main wall lined with custom wood shelves that smelled like fresh pine. Tek left his blackout curtains open, and soft light streamed through the windows. As Rowan bent down to take off her shoes, she felt her buzz slide over her head like slipping off a sweatshirt.

“Do you want a drink?” he asked, standing by the mini fridge. “I might have some beer.” His gaze veered towards the bedroom at the back of the trailer, and she could sense his impatience rising like the tide.

“No, I’m OK. Thanks.” Her buzz was waning, and she was ready to replace it with something else.

He ran the tips of his fingers gently down her arm, just enough that the hairs stood on end from the delicate touch. Goosebumps rose on her skin.

“We can get under the blankets if you want.” He unbuttoned his flannel shirt as he walked to the bedroom in the rear of the trailer. His back was covered with a tribal tattoo of a blue whale, stretched wide over his deltoids. It made her feel far away from home. She stepped in close to him, then raised on her toes to press her lips to his. His hair smelled like shampoo, sweat, and pine needles. She waited to feel something.

“That might be a good idea,” Rowan said. She pulled the hem of her t-shirt over her head, tossing the piece of pale pink cotton to the side of the bed. It lay there, crumpled and lifeless like a dead animal, until morning.

Rowan dreamed of Chris. They were back in his apartment in
Milwaukee, lying in his bed. “I miss you, Pidge,” he whispered to her, their faces inches apart, cheeks pressed against pillows. He called her that ever since the night they drank beers and ate pizza while watching *Lady and the Tramp*, her legs stretched across his lap. That was in the early days, when they laughed so much together, staying up all night drinking and talking, blowing off afternoon lectures to spend entire days in bed. In her dream, she reached out her hand towards his face, her fingers twisting in his thick, dark hair. She brushed her fingertips over the coarse stubble that peppered his cheeks like fur. His amber-flecked eyes looked hungry, like a wolf’s long stare.

“You shouldn’t have gone,” she said, her voice a steel trap. “You found me anyways,” he said.

“Are you happier now?” she asked, tears building behind her eyes.

“Everything’s better here,” he replied, his lips curling into a smile, revealing sharp white teeth.

Rowan startled awake. Next to her, Tek’s tattooed rib cage expanded and contracted with each sleeping breath. His body felt foreign to her. He was wiry where Chris had been soft—wider but firmer, with a broad back that felt hard as an oak plank beneath her fingers. Her whole body felt loose, uncoiled. It was nice, getting laid again. She hadn’t realized how much she missed sex. She felt like a predator who had just been fed, satiated and overstuffed. But her heart still felt detached from her body, raw, and aching. *I miss you, Pidge.*

In the early morning, Rowan dressed soundlessly, then padded across the cold floor on bare feet to the front door where she had kicked off her shoes last night. Despite the hour, the trailer was filled with sunlight. Tek was a heavy sleeper.

The walk back to Silver Creek was about two miles, but she would be able to get cell service and call a taxi back to Employee Housing, or worst case scenario, beg her dorm-mate to make the trek to pick her up. She didn’t want to wait for Tek to wake up. Trying to think of something to say to him after last night would be exhausting. In Alaska, she was different. She knew what kind of air she projected, the effect that her sliding glances had on people, along with the way she deflected personal questions. She didn’t make it easy for people to get to know her. In Alaska, she felt her hard shell crystallize. This is what survival feels like, she thought to herself. Some people were pack animals, and some roamed alone like grizzly bears. It was natural for people to be afraid of grizzlies. Fear meant fewer questions, more space.

She walked along the gravel road, pebbles crunching beneath her flimsy slip-on canvas sneakers. She wished she had thought ahead and worn her hiking boots instead, though there was no way she could have predicted the way the night had unspooled. Squinting ahead, Rowan looked for the turn-off towards town. The road probably wouldn’t be marked; she’d have to pay attention. The vast beauty of Alaska still took her breath away two months after her arrival. Growing up in Wisconsin, she was used to tree-lined streets and summer lake houses, but it was nothing compared to this kind of sprawling wilderness. Away from the resort, you could hike for days on end without seeing another human. A jagged ridge of snow-capped mountain peaks was a
constant backdrop to her daily routine. She spotted an ancient-looking tree, its roots twisted and gnarled like an old man’s hands. The more she stared at it, the more she could imagine that the tree trunk had once been a human torso. She shook her head quickly as if to remove the thought from her mind. Tek’s story was getting to her.

A large bird soared along the horizon, maybe a bald eagle. Rowan hadn’t really thought about running into another predator during her solo walk home. It started to feel warm out; she took off her rain jacket and tied it around her waist. Her legs felt chafed by the inseams of her jeans. She was finally gaining back the weight she had lost after Chris first vanished.

It’s a strange thing, to disappear. To be somewhere on this planet where no other human soul knows where you are, every person who ever loved you. Back in Milwaukee, it had seemed impossible. She couldn’t go to the corner bar without running into someone from college or to the mall without seeing one of her parents’ friends. Here in Alaska, the possibility was real. Every time she went to a gas station or made the trip to the Wasilla Walmart, she saw a new missing person sign on the community corkboard. They always gave her chills. The face in the photos looked so happy, taken at a party or bonfire, the friends surrounding them cropped out. Their faces smiling, oblivious to the fact that sometime within the next few months, they’d go missing, last seen at a campground or heading out for a solo hike.

Chris hadn’t shown up for work on a Friday morning. His boss at the repair shop called Rowan, assuming Chris had overslept yet again. As soon as she got the call, she knew something terrible had happened. She had seen the state of his apartment in recent months—the beer bottles cluttering every table surface, the fridge empty except for half a handle of cheap vodka, the lingering smell of vomit clinging to the bathroom towels, the orange prescription pill container on the bedside table. They found his car left abandoned on the shoulder of the road near Lake Michigan. The police couldn’t conclude anything without a body, but Rowan knew. The lake was her biggest clue. Once he began to unravel, Chris always wanted to get away from anywhere people could follow him or find him.

A yip in the distance snapped Rowan’s attention back to the present. She had practically been sleepwalking, lost in her thoughts. It was early in the morning, the ideal time for coyotes to be roaming. Or wolves. Rowan wondered how close she was to the main turn-off. It seemed like she should have reached it by now. She looked backwards; there were no cars coming in either direction. Rowan’s stomach turned queasy and she questioned whether she knew exactly where she was. What if she turned the wrong way when she left the trailer? She had been pretty drunk last night. In the distance, the sky looked dark with rain clouds. A summer storm could be on its way.

If something happened to her out here, she wondered if she’d ever be found. Maybe Chris was still alive somewhere, in hiding, starting a brand new life, successfully outrunning his demons. Perhaps the news of her untimely death would bring him back. She imagined the headlines back at home: Local woman mauled to death by grizzly bear in Alaska or Milwaukee native swept away by flash flood. She pictured a bearded Chris living in another state,
coming across the link to the story in the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel posted on one of their high school friend’s social media timelines. She wondered if he would regret running away if he saw what it did to her, sending her off on this journey to the middle of nowhere.

She spotted a gravel turn-off and paused, trying to retrace last night’s drive in her mind. A light mist settled over the road, the gray sky threatening potential rain. Rowan observed the well-worn grooves where a heavy stream of cars traveled up and down the main road, so she stayed the course and walked past the turnoff. She had reached the end of the clearing, and foliage crept up to the road. It felt familiar, so she strode forward. The road dipped as the forest grew closer, and the mist hanging in the air thickened.

Rowan’s canvas shoes created soft footfalls that echoed on the road. Branches of trees criss-crossed through the space above, their slim limbs entwining into a leafy canopy. Suddenly, she heard a rustling sound behind her. She spun around but saw nothing. Standing still, she waited. Silence. She walked tentatively forward, her mind racing as she thought back to all the brochures around the lodge with rules on what to do during an encounter with wildlife. When it came to bears, she recalled, “If it’s brown, lay down. If it’s black, fight back.” But black bears could be cinnamon or brown in coloring, and grizzlies could be so dark brown as to appear black, so the key was to look for the telltale hump between their front shoulders. For mountain lions, stamp your feet loudly and pick up any small children in your party, and never run. But if a moose charges, absolutely run and make a serpentine pattern through any nearby trees; it’s usually a bluff charge and they’ll give up quickly. For wolves... she racked her brain.

The rustling came back. She froze, her pulse pounding. The noise grew closer, and she could almost pinpoint the direction it was coming from. It sounded like the paws of a large animal moving through the brush. Fear clutched her heart like a fist. The sound traveled towards the road, landing on the gravel with a delicate crunch. Deep in the thick fog, Rowan couldn’t see more than ten feet ahead.

“Rowan?” a voice called from the direction of the footfalls. Her mind was spinning; that voice was so familiar. She almost replied, but her words stuck inside her throat like a dry stone. The footsteps moved closer to her. “Rowan!”

There was no mistaking it this time. It was Chris’s voice. This is impossible, Rowan thought. But the voice called again, “Rowan, it’s me! Can you see me?”

“Chris?” she croaked in reply. “I can’t see you. Is that really you?”

“Yes! It’s me!”

“How did you find me here?” She began to rush ahead into the mist, waving her arms around her to feel her way. “I still can’t see you.”

“I’m right here.”

She scanned the road ahead of her, looking for his frame. He must be close now.

“Follow my voice, Rowan. I’m so glad I found you.”

The fog had grown so intense, Rowan could barely see her outstretched hand. She took one small, tentative step at a time. “I don’t understand—how did you even know I moved here? And how
did you find me here on this road?”

Chris laughed. Something about it sounded slightly off, like a song sped up by half.

“I’ve known where you’ve been all along, Pidge. I’ve been waiting for you to find me.”

When she heard her nickname in his voice again, after so many months of longing, something deep inside her uncoiled. A happy sob poured out of her. She started walking forward faster again, towards him.

In the middle of the road, a gray shape slipped through the fog. The outline was barely detectable, its thick lustrous fur showing through the mist, black and weightless as a shadow. Two large, amber-colored eyes appeared as the shape loped towards her in long, fluid strides.

Rowan was no longer afraid. She thought of the story of the man who disappeared from the mountain, of the empty car sitting next to a gray, roiling lake.

“I’m ready to go with you now,” she said, and stepped into the mist.
AN EFFIGY OF MY UNCLE’S ANCESTOR, WHO BEARS HIS NAME

Olivia Stowell

effigied and chapel-dormant,
he is memorializing and predicting
as a waning sun. my uncle finds his
own name effigy-etched, marking
the spot where his ancestor sleeps. walking
it back and forth, my uncle’s skin inchworms
to see his name shared with someone
eras-dead. a wasp buzzes near his cheek
like heritage—it is ready to sting
if you brush it away. my uncle thinks
of norman conquest, of his middle michigan
home, climate change, his daughters
and son. he is memorializing
and predicting the wane of
time as it inchworms on. moss
greens and grows until his effigy
sprouts, blooms. opening the chapel door
kicks up his dust, his petals, and
my uncle’s ancestor, who also
is mine, sleepwalks into the night.

EFFIGY OF A FATHER

Judy Kaber

He pulls away, the sweep
of her cheek too soft for him to touch,
her shoulder no longer mint-sweet,
brilliant as untouched ink.

Sex squats on its haunches just
outside the window, a crop
in its hand, ready to whip the thick
bowl of desire. No more piggybacks,
no more jagged belly-laughs. Mornings
he bends above the paper, stranded
across the table from her. The urge
to yell, to berate her swells. She
sleepwalks through days, always
lost, never arriving. He knows
too well what her fate will be, how crassness will open its lips to her,

how tomboy turns to tart, tenderness to thatch. How happiness wanes

as easily as the tide fingerling the shore’s broken shells.
There is a church near my house. I’ve never been inside before, but sometimes if I stand at just the right place in the center of my living room, at just the right time, I can see blue and red reflections from the stained glass windows spreading across my palms as the church bells signal the break of dawn. My father and I used to walk past the parking meters near the church and drop quarters in the unpaid ones. God’s service, he called it. Then we’d walk back home and I’d wait for blue and red reflections to mark up my palms, my cheeks, my hips, before the light wanes, and I am colorless again.

There’s also a hospital near my house. I’ve been inside before. I am five years old and sick without knowing it. They never tell you you’re sick when you’re little—you just kind of assume that the hospital trips are normal, that the taste of chlorine and the scrape of hospital gowns against my thighs when I sleepwalk are universal. It’s all rather blurry now, but I know there was a moment where my father looked at me and started to cry. And I knew very plainly, without knowing how I knew, that he thought I was going to die in that moment.

But I didn’t die, did I? I don’t know much, but I know that it’s been three years and ten months and seven days since my father last spoke to me willingly. It has been a few days since he last looked me in the eye. There are some things that are strangely ordinary and strangely heartbreaking to a seventeen-year-old and this is one of them—not knowing why, just knowing that this is how it is, and you have to live with it. So maybe I did die that day after all. I wouldn’t know.

We drive by the hospital sometimes, my mother and my father and my sister and I, but we never go inside. The car is usually quiet, but my father sometimes reaches over to pinch my sister’s cheeks. She usually swats his hand away, and I just want to shake her and say he doesn’t even talk to me, you are so lucky, you are sososo lucky. It strikes me then that maybe we’ve never gone to church because we had nothing to believe in. But I don’t say anything, and it feels like we can’t save each other this time, not anymore.

There is a church near my house. I’ve never been inside before, but sometimes I like to imagine what it’s like in there. There would probably be a lot of people, a lot of fancy ties and skirts that go down to knees, a lot of quiet voices and whispered promises that people mean but don’t always keep. The stained glass would probably look more beautiful up close. And I’d probably drop a few quarters on my way in, I’d sing hymns under my breath and hold hands with strangers, I’d kneel before the effigy of God and ask to speak with him, and only God would answer, and the church bells would ring and ring and ring.
The redemptive power of love. Emma Quinn wanted very much to believe in it. However, as she leaned against a shelf in the grocery aisle at K-Mart, watching her friend Alison fawn over her good-for-nothing boyfriend and listening to the droning chatter of her own date, Emma found herself growing increasingly agnostic on the subject.

This particular retail establishment, located a mere two blocks from her own uninspiring apartment building, had acquired a number of uncomplimentary nicknames among people on Emma’s side of town. The K-Mart at the End of the Universe. K-Mart of the Living Dead. That kind of thing. People called it these things because it was always nearly empty, and customers and employees alike seemed to sort of sleepwalk up and down the aisles, lost in worlds of their own. It was hard to say for sure what was so icky about it—no appalling crimes had been committed on the premises or anything of that sort. More than anything else, it suffered from an air of neglect so extreme that it almost seemed ashamed of itself. Fluorescent lights flickered and buzzed, refusing to quite burn out. Floor tiles cracked and never got replaced. The restrooms didn’t
bear thinking about. There must have been just enough regular customers to keep it in business—people like Emma, who lived nearby and didn’t feel like driving across town to a nicer big-box store, or who didn’t feel like dealing with a bigger big box store even if it was nicer.

It was a beautiful summer night. It would be light out until nearly nine o’clock. And here stood Emma, in possibly the world’s saddest and most neglected K-Mart, with a boy she hardly knew, a girl she adored, and a man she hated.

Emma felt cold and shaky. She knew she must look very pale and still, like an effigy of a girl. Woman. Whatever you were supposed to call yourself when you got around the twenty-five-year mark. Alison and her boyfriend had dragged Emma out on what was supposed to be a double date. It wasn’t going well. Emma had tried, she had really tried, though she had known from the get-go that the odds were probably against her getting along with any friend of Jim Grant.

Jim was Alison’s boyfriend, an individual who considered himself sensitive because he was in a bad mood a lot of the time. Emma had been raised to have compassion for other people, to avoid being judgmental, to recognize her own imperfections before she came down too hard on anybody else. Because of this aspect of her upbringing, Emma tried very hard not to think the words “piece of shit” when she thought about Jim Grant. She found this difficult to an extent that did not make her proud.

Jim’s friend, the one they had thought would be perfect for Emma, was probably a perfectly nice man. Emma had probably been too hard on him. Emma didn’t know how to flirt, really. She
had made that clear tonight.

Emma and Alison had stupidly decided that Emma, a very small person who had almost freakishly tiny hands and feet, ought to borrow some of Alison’s shoes for this whole misbegotten double date debacle. Emma didn’t really have any sexy shoes of her own, and Alison had these little sparkly gold heels. Of course, Emma had ended up slipping and sliding all over the place in shoes two sizes too big for her, and in the parking lot of the restaurant, she ended up falling out of one of Alison’s shoes altogether.

Emma’s date, Jim’s friend, a Puckish-looking graduate student in film studies named Noah, had retrieved the lost shoe and held it up teasingly, saying, with what Emma thought must be admitted was not a great deal of wit or originality, “I’ve got your shoe!”

Emma, hungry and feeling ridiculous, had rounded on him and hissed, quietly enough not to be heard by any small children who might have been loitering around the parking lot, but quite loudly enough to be heard by Jim and Alison, “Give me my fucking shoe back, motherfucker.”

Noah had looked so frightened that Emma had been immediately sorry. “Geez,” he said as he handed the shoe back. “I was just messin’ around. Like, I was just teasing you.”

So the evening hadn’t exactly gotten off to a promising start, and although Emma hadn’t called anybody “motherfucker” again, she had continued all evening long to miss social cues and generally misunderstand how to be on a date. She had watched Alison beam up at Jim Grant while he went on and on and on about his master’s thesis, and how everyone else in his master’s program was an idiot. Jim kept putting his hand possessively on Alison’s arm, on her wrist, on the back of her neck, and Emma kept thinking, What the fuck am I doing here? Whenever Noah had managed to get a word in edgewise about anything, she suspected she had overdone it just a little too much when demonstrating how interesting she found his contributions, and how much she wasn’t going to cuss him out again.

Emma had had a little bit too much to drink and had been feeling a little blurry when she’d gotten up to go to the ladies’ room. Even slightly intoxicated, though, Emma had extremely good hearing, and as she walked away from their table, she heard Noah ask Alison, “Is your friend like mentally ill or what?”

It had occurred to Emma, at times, that perhaps she might be a little bit mentally ill, the way that reality seemed to tilt and slide around her on occasion, even when she was stone cold sober. Why this question should have offended her, should have hurt her feelings so badly, she hadn’t known. She’d wondered if the angry flush she felt in her cheeks, the rush of tears to her eyes, maybe meant she was a little bit ableist, and she hadn’t liked wondering that one bit. It wasn’t like Noah had accused her of anything bad. It’s the way he said it, she had reassured herself vaguely. Then she had locked herself in a bathroom stall and sat there for a long time, wondering if she had to go back out, if maybe she couldn’t just sit there until Jim and Alison and Noah forgot about her, forgot she existed, and left without her, and maybe the staff would find her when they started locking up for the night and one of the nice waiters or waitresses could drive her home.

After a while, Emma had decided that this plan wasn’t going to work, because Alison, at least, would never forget she existed.
It had felt like she’d been hiding in the ladies’ room for at least half an hour, but a glance at her watch told her that it had been more like seven or eight minutes. Emma had remembered reading a number of trend articles in the last few years, to the effect that soon nobody would be wearing wristwatches anymore, that maybe they would actually stop manufacturing wristwatches altogether before too long, because people could look at their smartphones to see what time it was. Everyone has a smartphone, these trend pieces always said, even though that wasn’t true. Emma’s wristwatch was the only nice piece of jewelry she owned, a gift from her mother, who lived in Ohio. Emma wished, quite often, she hadn’t gone to college so far away from her family.

Emma let herself out of the stall, washed her hands, washed her face, rather half-heartedly, because she had a manipulative streak, and a part of her wanted Noah to see that he had made her cry. Then she had gone out to rejoin the group.

“I still wear a wristwatch,” she had announced as she sat back down.

They had all stared at her. Alison had looked concerned. Jim had made an almost-suppressed little scoffing noise, which Emma had interpreted to mean Crazy bitch. “Well, yeah,” Noah had said gamely. “So do I.” He flipped his wrist over to show Emma his watch.

Emma’s resentment of Noah began to wane, just slightly, in that moment. He’d been trying. You had to admit he’d been trying.

Now they were standing in the creepy K-Mart near Emma’s apartment, all four of them, because Alison and Jim had had the bright idea that they should all go back to Jim’s and watch a movie, only Jim had to have this special kind of fucking popcorn that you could only find at this particular unsavory store out of all the stores in town. This was not because he was vegan or had a food allergy or anything like that, but because he was a spoiled-ass asshole, Emma thought uncharitably, watching him through narrowed eyes as he studied the shelf and Alison beamed at him as if looking for popcorn was the smartest and bravest thing anyone had ever done.

Maybe it’s that popcorn that keeps it in business, Emma thought, looking up and down the grocery aisle, all the packaged food looking sickly under the faltering overhead lighting. Maybe a lot of people love this particular special type of popcorn as much as Jim does. Then, unkindly, she thought, If I had to have my special popcorn before we could all watch a movie, people would call me unreasonable and ask if I was like mentally ill or what. Then a bolt of panic went through her, because she was afraid she might actually have said these words out loud. She stole a look at Noah’s face. Judging by his expression, she hadn’t said anything excessively inappropriate, rude, or crazy.

“—his best movie,” Noah said, and Emma realized that she hadn’t been listening to a single word he’d said. What’s wrong with me? she thought.

“Yeah,” she said absently. “That was a good movie. But maybe some of his other ones were better.”

“Well, that’s a good point,” said Noah, sounding surprised that Emma could have a conversation like a normal human being. “I mean, at the time it came out, a lot of critics thought that it was a departure that didn’t really work—”
He doesn't really care about movies right now, Emma thought. He cares about impressing me with how much he knows about movies. Then later, Jim and Alison are going to pretend they need something out of the kitchen or something during the movie, so they can leave us all alone, and he’ll try to make out with me. The whole thing was just so phony and so depressing that Emma could have wept. She didn’t want to go through with it; she didn’t want to make out with anyone. She just wanted to sit on the sofa next to Alison and watch Harold and Maude for the thousandth time, but you weren’t allowed to do that all your life and still be considered an adult, and to Emma’s mortification, tears began to prickle her eyes, right there in the K-Mart of the Living Dead, with Noah saying, “But for my money, his finest work was probably during the 1970s,” because it seemed so deeply unjust.

Here was what Emma knew about movies: if this whole evening were some critically acclaimed indie film, she and Alison would walk out the front door of the K-Mart with their fingers laced together, an exit which would dissolve into a montage of their carefree, eccentric, and surprisingly well-dressed life together. Emma wanted reality to provide her with this kind of ending more than she thought she had ever wanted anything in her life. She closed her eyes, feeling the world spin wildly outside her eyelids. She thought, Any minute now, I will open my eyes and Alison will be standing in front of me, a smile on her face like she knew all along, and she’ll take my hand and we’ll leave here together. Now, she thought. Now. I am going to open my eyes and it is going to happen now. Right now. Right. Now.

Emma opened her eyes. Jim was nibbling on Alison’s ear, right there in the grocery aisle under the water-stained ceiling, in the world’s saddest K-Mart, while the world’s saddest girl stood there waiting for reality to turn into something different. Alison, giggling, said, “Baby. Find your popcorn and let’s go.”

Noah’s hand settled unexpectedly on Emma’s shoulder, and Emma jerked around and stared at him. She knew she hadn’t had time to rearrange her face into a friendly double-date smile. In another second, she also knew that whatever expression she had allowed to remain on her face, it wasn’t good, because Noah stopped whatever he was saying, mid-sentence, mid-flirt, and said, “Whoa. Are you okay?”

“No. Yes. No. I mean, I’m not sick or anything.” As soon as the words left her lips, Emma wondered if they were true. She felt cold and nauseous and wondered if she might not pass out, and if she did, whether Noah would catch her before she sagged onto the dirty tile floor. She did not want to kiss him or sleep with him; she did not particularly want to ever see him again. But she did think it was a safe bet that he would probably not let her fall onto the floor like one more piece of K-Mart litter. She gestured at Jim and Alison and said, “It’s just, I think she could do so much better. I’ve thought it for years, every time he comes around. She thinks it’s this great romance, but all I know is that she’s fine, she’s fine for months, and she’s happy, and then he calls her up and the shit hits the fan all over again. The things he says, the things he does, the way I have to pick up the pieces every time he decides this relationship isn’t convenient for him. I don’t feel like a shitty bouquet of flowers and his puppy dog eyes should erase all that. And the way he treats other girls, women, whatever, and then when
they tell him to fuck off, he comes crawling back to Alison, only she always seems to be the one who’s crawling, somehow.” Emma no longer felt cold; her cheeks were burning and her head was pounding as if with a fever. She said, “I know he’s your friend, and I know it’s not right to talk shit about people to their friends, and I’m sorry, but he just really, really doesn’t deserve her.”

Noah had absorbed this entire whispered meltdown in silence, nodding uncertainly from time to time. Now, he said, “He’s not actually my friend. We just like work together or whatever.” Noah’s entire speech pattern changed when he was no longer talking about movies. “Hey,” he said, looking very closely at Emma’s tired and burning face. “I know we just met, and this may be way outta line, but you like your friend, don’t you? I mean, like, like your friend, don’t you? Alison.” Obviously feeling he hadn’t made himself clear enough, he continued, “You wish she was your girlfriend instead of Jim’s.”

“Probably,” said Emma. She should have denied it; she barely knew this man and he might choose to ruin her life by repeating this entire conversation to Alison, but she was too tired to lie or to think of a more ambiguous answer. “Probably. I can’t say for sure, because I am not in the habit of being completely honest with myself. But it seems likely. The way I want to knock Jim Grant’s block off when he touches her butt in public seems to point to yes.”

Noah laughed, seemingly before he could stop himself. Looking across at Jim and Alison, he said, “Yeah. She’s gorgeous. And he can honestly be kind of a dick. He told me Alison had this friend, and I thought—” He broke off abruptly. Emma saw his mortification and thought that at least he had the decency to be ashamed of whatever he had been about to say, right out loud, right to her face.

“You thought I’d be hot?” Emma asked, and Noah’s face flushed dark pink. “You thought I’d be as much fun as Alison?” Noah looked down at the floor. “You thought,” Emma said more gently, “that I would maybe not be crazy and in love with my best friend. That last one, you know, that last one might have been reasonable to expect.”

Noah’s next question was perhaps the last one Emma would have expected. “So are you gonna tell her, or what?”

“No, dumbass, I’m not going to tell her, and neither are you,” hissed Emma. She doubted that she seemed very threatening. She was only a tiny, pale woman who wasn’t even big enough to hold a pair of shoes on her own feet, but she did remember that Noah had suspected her of being “like mentally ill,” and hoped that maybe he shared enough of many people’s unreasonable fear of mentally ill individuals for her to be at least a tiny bit intimidating.

“But what if she, like, likes you, too?” asked Noah.

Emma stared at him in utter disbelief. “Look at her,” she said simply. “And look at me. Movies are great, Noah, but you’ve seen too many of them. That isn’t how this ends.”

He looked genuinely crestfallen on her behalf, and Emma could imagine about half a dozen reasons why this might be the case, some of them pointing to more fundamental decency on his part than others. Maybe he was a nice man who just wanted people to be happy. Maybe he hoped he would get to see two girls making out in the middle of K-Mart, even if one of them was significantly less pretty than the other. Maybe he secretly loathed Jim Grant
more than he had let on, and just wanted to see him lose his girlfriend to somebody, anybody at all. Emma laughed, not sure why she was laughing. She shook her head. “You seem like you might be an okay guy,” she told Noah. “You should ask Jim to fix you up with another one of Alison’s friends. Someone who doesn’t have so many issues.” She started to walk away, down the aisle towards the front doors.

“Where are you going?” Noah called after her.

“I’m going home,” Emma said.

“But we’re all in Jim’s car. Are you going to call an Uber or what?”

“It’s summer,” Emma reminded him over her shoulder. “I can start walking and be home before it’s dark out.”

Emma walked past the makeup aisles, past the checkout lanes and the broken claw machine. She walked out through the automatic doors and into the warmth of the summer night. She looked at the cars in the parking lot, the fast food restaurants dotting the perimeter, none of it romantic or panoramic, but in her overwrought state, it all seemed oddly beautiful.

Then she looked down at her feet in Alison’s overlarge shoes and started to laugh. If she wanted to walk home, she had to go back inside and buy some shoes first.

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SANTÉ FE RITUAL
Ellen Roberts Young

Zozobra, effigy of gloom, goes up in flames.
—fire danger!—
His fire does not waken us, sleepwalking crisis to crisis, in the crush of commerce—arrows from Target, din of offers from Walgreens and Walmart—seeing neither exit nor aid.
The glow of resistance darkens before our eyes.
As night wanes, gloom revives in the ash.
The Anointing
Kate Hutchinson

We must’ve been twelve that summer, launching into life with every dive off the pier. You chose me with a whisper and out we crept at midnight, silent, risking dreaded phone calls home but knowing the counselors had drunk illicit beer and slept like the dead.

I still hear the chirping cicadas, feel leaves tickle my ankles as we followed the path to the dock. A haze had settled over the lake, the moon a woolen effigy of itself casting an eerie glow. We dipped our feet in the cool water. Our legs touched, making warmth.

Did we talk at all before the moment we heard soft splashes and saw, in the distance, a white figure rising to beckon us?

You called her the Lady of the Lake and said she had made us the Queens of the Forest. We were not at all afraid. We held hands in our invincibility.

Upon waking in the cabin, I was sure it had been a dream. Or had I been sleepwalking? You were nowhere to be found. But then, as we loaded onto buses for home, you saw me from your window and winked, touching your head where your crown had been.

Why is it in waning memory your name has slipped away? Did the two of us really go to the water’s edge that night and see the white-robed figure, believe we were anointed into mythic beings? Or were you just an inner part of me emerging, sword drawn, in the darkness?
Inspired by *Nail Figure/N’kesi N’konde, 1875/1900*, Kongo, Africa Collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts

N’kesi is a physical and spiritual contract. Nails and blades driven into his body signify negotiated agreements. Many believe that native spirit figures maintain their power even when removed from their homes and placed in museums and galleries. It is said the correct incantation will free the spirit and reignite the power.

N’kesi is of my family.
You and I could be co-conspirators.

An old man’s yellowed wink
signals through the plexiglass.
So many promises broken
you can’t even count them.
A crooked body circling.
We are old, N’kesi and me.
We are longing for peace.
A smile?
No, just his lips, sleepwalking.

We could be co-conspirators,
and you would be the key.

He squats on the gallery floor, soft singing.
N’kesi holds a cowrie in his belly.
Full, like yours after supper.
Full of things—bones gnawed bare,
powder herbs, petals like dried tears.
Powerful breath binds them to the shell, its open slit stretching earth to sky.

All those faithless humans,
but you could be our bridge.

N’kesi carries sworn oaths,
hands on hearts, crossed fingers.
All those faithless humans—lucky dust.
And still N’kesi stands
pierced by their promises,
an effigy to justice.

Haven’t we earned some rest?
You could be our lullaby.
We cross the room, kneel on parquet. His hands weighing on my shoulders. His words waning as they settle upon my lips like love. I can chant through the snaggle of blades and nails. I press my mouth against the cowrie’s twin ridges. Unfamiliar phrases ride my breath.

You are the goodbye kiss.

A moment and N’kesi erupts. The screws, the blades, the bolts, the nails fly like furious rain. The air crackles with blood oaths broken—the dowry paid late and not in full. Partners who cheated each other in grains and kernels all their lives. A woman who left her husband but not their marriage. Boundary lines that changed with the season. N’kesi held these frail and faithless in the cracks and wounds across his shoulders, belly, and chest. His breastplate, old as prayer, lies on the floor. He is free. They are free. We are free.

Pain wafts around the room looking for the exit. I could be that door.

I’m wary of the Venus flytrap of your maw & what stirs you up for sleepwalking like a phantom. You’ve kept me dangling far too long, more respect I could have gleaned from a kite. Sure, Snerd was a sap & Miss Effie an effigy slut, but it was that icy nemesis sister who brewed jealousy for your affinity with Daddy’s larynx. The smirk in your skull launched ten zillion lips & me the exclamation point topping your top hat—the solo lens that made you cartoon rich. The name of your carpenter father has waned, but he left you with a splintering bite that spun us deep & dandy.
MIME
Vicki Miko
My dog in a gentle stretch like a puppet
that knows her strings
are temporary. Closing windows
on the earliest hour. My lover’s eyes: a dishrag
cleaning up cool red of sky. There are no muscles
in ears; we can never stop sleepwalking
to noise. So there was noise. Half-asleep and hungry
the calico cat left an ordinary tally on my knee. I left
a red-hot meridian waning so still—
as if for a portrait. Outside on the porch I held my love
as if he were a lover in a dream. Why are lovers in dreams
more akin to phantoms? Yet, he had been here
with me all along. So kind. Whistling a hair out of my face,
tucking wet fur of my curls behind my ears. Animals
with stomachs full of grasses eaten out of cemeteries came to eat out of our hands. I knew all this. Our bodies at risk, the planet and its mass extinction. As desirable as licking the sing of knife to get it to shine. Each of our old portraits are effigies. Yet, we are here, and I am here leveling white linens on the line with my dark palms. I burnt them once on a stove; oil bubbling out of the pan. Come, my lover is still making maps—the Earth is now just sky.

Pull a single thread and I’m undone. I’m a puddle. Ten years into our marriage, I leave coffee mugs and plates like calling cards littered across the house, spoons and forks buried under pillows and blankets. I was eating in bed again. I was writing and grading and napping and living in our bed while you were out working. I was watching cat videos on YouTube for hours. I forgot to tell you I do that sometimes. I wax and I wane. My hair is graying and growing out, so much longer than it was when you asked me to marry you. I leave dark nests of it in the shower like a ghost from a Japanese horror film. We dust our bedroom with our cells, each one a reminder of the identities we’ve slipped off over the years, whole people we continue to shed. They sleepwalk our halls, these doppelgängers built of ash and body particles. I used to be someone else, I think. We both did. Sometimes it feels like we’re both effigies of our former selves. But in another ten years, we’ll be new again, and again, and again. Whoever I am, I’m yours. You asked and yes, I said, yes.
SLEEPWALK
Maciej Toporowicz
EVERYONE is going to Vancouver. Always going. Never coming back. Either they are wondering why everyone is going, or they are going. They are standing in their yards, turned sideways, watching cars file past. They are in cars, facing forward, not looking back.

It is a storm line on a weather map, sweeping us all forward, one at a time—one car, one house, one block, the lower-central district. We are all in cars, suddenly packed, suddenly going, sleepwalking forward. The line sweeps on, the announcer keeps talking—*Today we can expect lows in the high 80s*—the little arrows catch on the cars and spin their tires forward and then we are going.

We stood in our garden and watched cars drive past and water came out of the hose and splashed on the asphalt and the grass was always a little too brown and the hose burbled on and on, never waning. There are hoses in Vancouver. Sally said there is also asphalt. It was the one stark, full sentence standing out from the blocks of permanent marker in her letter, redactions like bricks laid in a path, and this sentence where the grass grew up and pushed the bricks aside. It can happen like that. Slow.

Not like what is happening here. The heat. The silence. The pale of our grass as we try to water it back to life, to something we understand. Above our heads, helicopters spin on and on and the sky is so blue it burns our eyes, and there is not a cloud in sight. They say there are clouds in Vancouver. They say they shadow the ground until it is solid enough to walk on. They do not say anything about the helicopters, about how our states are drying up, no matter how we keep our hoses on and on and on.

I do not write back to Sally. I do not tell her that the ground beneath our feet is brittle and brown. I do not say that I fear what will happen when the helicopters land. Sally knows. She knows and she knows and she knows.

When the ground started drying people started leaving, and the helicopters started flying, and our letters came back with stark lines of black staining the page. The weather map showed storm lines in Vancouver, and wind in Mexico, and here only sun, sun, sun, until we whispered about luck turned bad and the neighbors started packing, and no one would meet each other’s eyes.

When my mother takes my hand in the garden I know what is coming. Above our heads, metal blades whir on and on and the apples in the kitchen are shriveling to dust and no amount of water can revive our garden. It is more than summer. More than a drought. Maybe distance can save us. I hope. I hold the letter tight. I do not look down.
The drive is quick, quick, quick. We are opening doors on one end and slamming them on the other, and in-between we are staring forward out of our windows, and I have a letter in my hand with the one thing we know. Asphalt. There is asphalt in Vancouver. Sally says.

Sally is a liar. But she sent me a letter. And in it there was asphalt and a brick path, laid out like an effigy, a premonition of what is to come, and that’s more than I would have otherwise, and I do not look out my window. The families in the yards that are not ours look back at me. They ask, *Why are you going?* And I say Asphalt. There is *asphalt in Vancouver*, and I do not move my lips or make a sound and outside it is highs of 100 and I do not blink my eyes and they slide past.
you’d have me sure that i am sleepwalking
beneath a liquid moon which ebbs and wanes
through corn silk stalks entwined like effigies.
acquainted with the patterns of our love

you’d have me note how deep and dark—how lovely
the miles which keep me from sound sleep. walking
 toward what little “we” remains in the waning
i bask in affirmations—effigial

promises. if not effigies
other fuckery mocking my steps of love—
a lumine clock marring sleep. walk
with me again. rage against the waning

of our light. fan the embers waning
before our hope is burned in effigy.
call me back or say goodbye—my love
you could wake me from this sleepwalking.
SLEEPWALK
Guilherme Bergamini
STUDY IN GREY
William Rudolph

A warehouse is on fire in England. Inside
a hundred works of contemporary British art
are burning. In subsequent days some mourn
multi-media passions gone to ash; others claim
nothing of value was lost. Both are correct.

One creation within the blaze is labeled HELL,
an interactive piece. Sleepwalk around it. Look inside
the glass cases: Nazis scream as they kill one another.
We should have known Hell would never
freeze over. We should have known it would go up in flames.

Even the artist—same day, separate interviews—says,
“It is only art. It can be replaced,” and later,
“It is irreplaceable.” His remarks do not contradict themselves.
If we imagine they do, the contradiction
lies—smoldering—within me and you.

Meanwhile, in an alternate, avant-garde life, I sell
my grandmother’s oil paintings and Lara drops
her black dress to cross the ocean and crash the opening
of that scorched exhibit created by human forces
beyond control. Her hand small on my arm,

what we were alters within the embers of our ad-libbed
performance art—an effigy to no truth
but our own—as fire re-imagined
the little death camp chimney collapsing, the soldiers’ faces running
as grey-uniformed limbs splash into a bubbling morass.

Back in this still life,
our separate truths wax
and wane: no way to know what is more true—
what had been created, what has been destroyed
into being.

—after the Moment warehouse fire

“This news comes between Iraqi weddings being bombed and people dying
in the Dominican Republic in flash floods—so we have to get it into perspective.
But I’m really gutted.” —Tracey Emin

“If the insurers decide the fire is an act of God…that God destroyed Hell…
I will start going to church.” —Dinos Chapman

Note: italicized text adapted from The Guardian
https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2004/may/27britartfire
IF MY GOD SAW ME WITH ITS EYES
Denzel Xavier Scott

If I had been born a Southern magnolia tree
basking my waxy, evergreen leaves
in the Savannah sun, and not the
little black boy that I was born and raised to be,
maybe the love in me would not one day wane.
This world has done so much to see
my black body dead with the others it’s claimed.

It’s murdered my brother, my uncle,
my cousin too. Now their black bodies are fertilizer
made indistinguishable from the dark soil
where the peace lilies of their graves took root.

My love of life, of living, wanes
and I beg God, if there is such a thing
as God, and there is such a thing as mercy,
may I sleepwalk with a dreamless slumber,
merely an effigy of my former glory
whose depths I’ve never witnessed.

Let me be a magnolia tree now, if I could not
be a magnolia tree then, so that
I have no mouth, though I must scream.
Let me be a magnolia tree forever sworn to silence
even as I collapse, splintering down my sturdy trunk,
and scatter my white blossoms decorated with
golden pollen for the world to read. Let me
trade in my eyes, so that when the fire comes
I cannot see myself burned black and turned to dust.
DIVIDED CHRIST, FUNERAL EFFIGY, FLORENCE, ITALY

Roger Camp
In the backseat of the car, sky hazed the window and the world slid by.

I watched metal cars move past, stared at those inside. The car roofs burned in sunlight, my mind weedy and wild with the thumbing movement of tires over road.

I read their faces, their hands, placed them in a world full of houses and gates, with rivers and currents and the thick song of ever after. I would sleepwalk through stories, build an effigy of fathers who sang, daughters who danced, mothers who baked cherry pies.

They carried their intentions in baskets—in the backseat, in the trunk of the car—somewhere
near at hand, yet far from my own script, from my own never ever. Eventually those cars would pull ahead or fall behind, disappear in a sea of silent travelers, my interest would wane, I would pick up a book, skip to the marked page, piece together words, a quilt of muted voices.

I teach for a living—eighth grade and seniors—and on a recent Friday afternoon two of my eighth-grade boys, feeling the magnanimous warmth that fills our school at the cusp of the weekend, stuck around after class to talk about video games. I had grown up, they informed me, in a golden age of gaming, the era that saw the first versions of *Halo and Call of Duty*, the pax electronica in which PlayStation 2, the original Xbox, and the Nintendo GameCube had reigned in mutual harmony and the studios had pumped out classics in droves. The boys followed me out of the classroom and down the crowded hallway, clumsy and eager as puppies. They wanted to hear everything.

My brother and I had started, I told them—stopping at my office door, nostalgia fluttering in my breast—as GameCube kids. In the age of *Grand Theft Auto*, my parents had believed that Nintendo (soft, cute, Japanese Nintendo) would offer their sons the safest, least corrupting titles, a principle which now seems sensible
enough. This decision, however, had not been made lightly. Unlike my friends’ more lenient parents, my mom and dad had refused to buy their kids a Nintendo 64, and so our earliest gaming experiences had been confined to playdates at these friends’ houses, where matches of Goldeneye were as sweet and enticing as Turkish delight. Then, in 2001, our parents finally relented, buying us a GameCube and a bundle of games: Super Smash Bros. Melee, Pikmin, Super Monkey Ball—cheery, addictive titles we mastered with amphetamine fervor. We took to the GameCube like ponies loosed on an open plain. It was in our nature to game, I explained to my students, to mash our thumbs into sentient plastic, enacting our dreams with the twitch of a trigger.

The boys listened, smiled, nodded their heads.

But it didn’t take long, I continued, to exhaust these pleasures. After two heated years of Smash Bros. tournaments, the cartoon fisticuffs grew tedious, and even Captain Falcon (my favorite character; a forecast, I’d hoped, of my own future brawn) began to seem childish. What the GameCube lacked, I realized, was guns: the kickback of a rumbling controller, the splatter of gore on the screen. By then I’d played Halo three or four times at GameStop or friends’ houses, and I had seen in its brutality the power I’d been missing. Here was true smorgasbord violence, the only action that matched the itch in my fingertips. And so, with an angel’s face and a lawyer’s wiles, I lobbied my parents to purchase an Xbox.

I was surprised when they actually did, and even more surprised when they agreed to buy Halo. It was 2003 and the game had already been out for two years, but my attraction to it wasn’t based on novelty. For me, the game’s allure was mysterious, essential; its glitzy, blood-slick shine a mere dressing for something deeper, an immersive force that would never betray me with boredom. Rather than scrolling rightward in a 2-D arcade landscape, I found myself—in sharp, convincing first-person—wielding a plasma pistol, bounding from crag to crag, dispatching my foes with masterly ease. Not only had I set aside childish things, but I’d found a space that transcended childhood. Gone were the rules of the classroom, church, and gym—the dreary, unwired kingdom of my teachers and preachers and coaches and parents. When I played Halo, I became something more than a student or son; I was a Spartan, a musclebound hero with unlimited lives.

The boys were nodding again. For a moment it felt like we were peers, veterans of the same foreign war, recalling with pride a distant campaign. I cleared my throat and continued.

The game’s solo missions were inexhaustible, but I soon learned that the multiplayer mode was its greatest treasure. I played with my brother and our friends on my bedroom TV, our portal to destructive joys: firing snipers across alien Saharas, settling bets with bursts from our “Needlers,” destroying each other in brilliant digital effigy. The hours burned themselves away, and soon my first year as a Halo player had passed. I didn’t know it yet, but even greater joys were coming. It was 2004; Halo 2 would launch that fall.

“Halo 2!” said one of the students. “Did you have Xbox Live?”

“Of course,” I said. I was getting to the best part, the apex of my gaming life.

“Did you know you can look up your stats online?” the boy
asked. “It’s all on the Bungie site, every game you ever played.”
“Whoa,” I said. “That’s crazy. I’ll have to check that out.”
It was crazy, but for a moment I doubted it was actually true. Millions of players, millions (billions?) of games—too much useless history for a single website to support. Never mind that this is precisely what computers were invented to do, to store information, to divulge their data at the master’s command, no matter how meaningless or arbitrary.
I cleared my throat again and tried to resume, but this news, this rude convergence of the present and past, had broken my monologue. As I fumbled for a way back in, the boys seemed to recall that it was Friday, and that they didn’t have to be here, talking to a teacher in this long, bleak hall.
“Cool,” said the other kid, shifting from foot to foot.
“Yeah,” said the first. “Let us know if you ever look it up.”
“I think my mom’s downstairs,” said the other. “See you Monday, Mr. Ferg!”
They both peeled off, fueled by the promise of a weekend playing Fortnite. I watched as they scurried down the hall and out of sight. Either one of them might have been me, thirteen years before.
On the drive home, I thought about the Bungie page. The idea of seeing my Halo 2 stats was enticing, sure, but something about it also seemed awkward, even embarrassing, like stumbling across an old Myspace page or reading decade-old Facebook comments. What would these numbers say about me, about how I’d spent my youth? I turned on the radio and pushed these thoughts aside, letting NPR, the voice of the responsible world, cleanse me with its stream of sound. When I got home, I decided, I would have a beer and the weekend would begin.
But then, as I drank this beer, I found I couldn’t help myself. I pulled out my phone and Googled “halo 2 xbox live stats,” and the promised site appeared immediately, a blue-gray page of perfect mid-aughts slickness. On the far right of this page, beneath the Halo 2 and Bungie logos, I found a search bar and typed in my old handle, Jafar the Bad. The results were instant and eerily gratifying. The site had produced 123 pages of statistics, ranging from my final online game, in December of 2006, to my first, on Christmas Day 2004. The numbers lay in neat, efficient columns: Place, Game Type, Map, and (of course) Date and Time. All of it was there. Every game, every kill and death, every second, minute, hour.
The moment’s surrealism, its time-machine uncanniness, was initially intoxicating, but it soon shifted into something heavier and stranger than I’d hoped for. After a moment’s amazement, I clicked on the 123rd page, calling up the entries for Christmas ’04, a day in which I’d competed in thirty-six online games, from 12:47 to 7:46 p.m. These numbers are disturbing, and they raise a multitude of questions. How could I have played so much in one sitting? What was I thinking? What were my parents thinking? By the end of this spree, had I quit in exhaustion, or out of boredom? Or had my parents made me stop? And when I’d logged on the next day at noon and turned off the Xbox five hours later, what had I done with myself? Had I keeled over, eyes sore and mind reeling, and taken a nap? Or had I stumbled outside, slow as a sleepwalker, and absorbed the day’s last hour of light? For the life of me, I can’t
This forgetting is what disturbs me most. Christmas, for many, is a cherished site of memory. When we think of Christmas, we’re supposed to remember the show-stopping presents, the family traditions and jokes, even the occasional bouts of dysfunction. But when I think of Christmas ‘04, I can’t remember a thing. I can’t remember opening Halo 2 or Xbox Live, and I can’t even remember the first game I played—the map, the game type, whether I won or lost. It’s as if the Xbox (and the network it was wired to) simply sucked up my memory and converted it to numbers, one more eddy in the endless digital stream. As I scanned the 123rd page and sipped my beer, I saw an entire week of my life reduced to data, to ranks and assists and kill/death ratios. All of it useless, all of it preserved.

But what about the memories I’d relayed to my students? Wasn’t my monologue a clear sign of a rich, fulfilling childhood? I began to see these memories as a blur, as more of a long, glazed-over impression than a series of discrete events. The thrills I’d recounted had not been singular, but general, a marathon of thoughtless reflex, and like any thrill they’d waned with time. The Bungie site’s final entry, dated 12/13/06, indicates the collective half-life of these thrills, at least within the test site of my brain. By then I’d played 3,062 games over 718 days, with a not-so-hot final kill/death ratio of 1.26. I don’t remember the last time I set aside the controller, or why I hadn’t picked it up again. Perhaps the thrill, the full-blown buzz of Spartan immersion, had simply worn away.

By 2006 my attention was shifting toward music, a joy without a half-life or the burden of a screen. But turning off the Xbox and picking up a bass didn’t save me from the screen, from this portal that connects and disconnects us, creating a world in which the hum of information supplants the human memory. How could I (or anyone) escape the flood of history? How else could I broadcast these thoughts? The screen isn’t going anywhere, and I’m not naïve enough to think that it could (or even should) be destroyed. I am merely concerned about the ways our lives are monitored and quantified, the process by which our days become a tidy, pointless network of statistics. Yet even now, I am grateful for the joys my Xbox brought me, for this paradox of vivid, vague nostalgia.

And as I record these reflections, and check Facebook for updates, and thumb my way through Instagram, it strikes me that memory, that ancient human need, has not yet lost its power. While writing this essay, I can’t help but recall a night when my parents went out with friends, leaving my brother and me to an empty house. We spent the time hunched in front of my bedroom TV, playing Halo 2. The hours whizzed by, and when my parents returned, my mother came upstairs to check on us. To our surprise, however, she didn’t scold us for playing all night, and she didn’t demand that we go to bed. She was smiling, her cheeks a bit flushed. (It was only later that I realized she’d been tipsy, the first time I’d seen her in this bubbly state.) Then, in another first, she asked if she could play, taking a seat between us on the floor.

I remember the game we’d been playing—rocket launchers on Foundation. I handed her the controller, and she promptly fired a rocket at her own Spartan’s feet, blowing him high into the air. Her smile became a giggle; her giggle, a snort. She was spending time with her boys, seeing their world through their eyes, learning
how fun and ridiculous this whole Xbox thing was. My brother and I did our best to coach her, groaning as she snorted and got herself killed, but she still finished last, adding one more loss to my long log of stats. But unlike the other entries, this game—this evening—stands out from the blur. When I remember this night, I don’t see rockets flashing across a screen. I see my mother, her giggle becoming a snort, her face brightening with a joy I’ll never forget.
Your desire wanes when you realize she’s living her life instead of living life,
sleepwalking through children and divorce, a woman unreal as Helen who did not cross the Mediterranean with her beau; she, a sculpted inkblot, a moony aesthete, another candidate for goddess; oh, curse the night-walk, the speeding city ambulance, the dead cigarette, the effigy of a love life.

An electronic window? A lip, a breast, the longest leg elongating itself?

No woman, but a series of appendages, no career, but gig after gig after gig.

Look up at the sun, burn Apollo! Burn! The nightmare a welcome relief.

September & the moon wanes, wobbles into the river, dissolving as yellow skin in black oil. father keeps bringing home soy sauce instead of vinegar despite mother’s ire, or maybe because of it. mother asks why i’ve begun using father’s bowl for rice, her concern forming a solitary body.

i tell her i’m hungry—that father wouldn’t even notice, because our love is just an effigy, ribboning into the microwave’s tuckered beat.
i cling to its pale shadow,
    that gorge
of mimicked heat,
    looking for
coherency.
mother sinks
    wiry hands into balmy dough;
father sinks boneless into
    the sofa. the kitchen timer
spits like a heartbeat &
    we scatter:
    a flock of three,
startled out of sleepwalking.
come october,
the moon has remolded itself,
leaving each of us
awash in the glow
of something that
    comes
and goes
    at its own bidding.
SLEEPWALKER, LA VILLETTE, PARIS

Roger Camp
Amelia Ao is a senior at Wayland High School. She was recognized by the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, as well as numerous other literary journals and art magazines.

Jai Hamid Bashir is a Pakistani-American ecologist and second-generation artist. Currently an MFA student at Columbia University, she recently received the Linda Corrente Memorial Prize.

Guilherme Bergamini is Brazilian and holds a degree in journalism. For more than two decades, he has developed projects with photography and the various narrative possibilities that art offers. His work acts as dialogues between memory and social political criticism. He believes in photography as the aesthetic potential and transforming agent of society. Awarded in national and international competitions, Guilherme Bergamini participated in collective exhibitions in 23 countries.

Neil Berkowitz is a photographic artist and printmaker living in Seattle. His current work deals with notions of place and how individuals construct layered conceptions of places, which has led him to the use of digital multiple exposures, generally taken with his phone’s camera.
Roger Camp is the author of three photography books including the award-winning *Butterflies in Flight* (Thames & Hudson, 2002) and *Heat, Charta* (Milano, 2008). His work has appeared in numerous journals, including *The New England Review*, *New York Quarterly*, and *North American Review*. His work is represented by the Robin Rice Gallery, NYC.

Linh Dao is an artist whose work focuses on the dilemma of growing up, wanting to leave home, and wanting to go home at the same time. Being an immigrant, this is a feeling with which Dao constantly battles.

Palmer Earl was born and raised in New York City, where her passion for painting was sparked by the city’s many art museums. She began taking painting classes at age seven and went on to attend School of Visual Arts. With a focus in painting, she received her BFA in 2002. Since 2006, she has lived in Los Angeles, where she now paints full time in her Los Feliz studio. Palmer is affiliated with the Los Angeles Art Association and has exhibited her work in New York and Los Angeles. She was featured in the 2017 winter edition of *Studio Visit Magazine*.

Annmarie Erickson has spent most of her career in the nonprofit sector, mainly in arts and culture. She devoted nearly 17 years to the Detroit Institute of Arts and is now focused on consulting and writing. She lives with her family just outside Detroit in Beverly Hills, Michigan. She is a dedicated arts volunteer, an avid reader, and an always practicing yogi.

Alejandro Escudé is the author of *My Earthbound Eye*, which was published in September 2013 upon winning the 2012 Sacramento Poetry Center Award. He received a Master’s in Creative Writing from UC Davis, and he works as an English teacher. His new book, *The Book of the Unclaimed Dead*, was published by Main Street Rag Press and is now available at the MSR website. He is a single dad of two wonderful kids, and he lives in Los Angeles with his dog, a Jack Russell named Jake.

Edie Everette is an artist, seamstress, writer, and teacher.

Sam Ferguson lives with his girlfriend and cat in New Orleans, where he teaches high school English.

MEH is Matthew E. Henry, a multiple Pushcart nominated poet with recent works appearing or forthcoming in *3Elements Review*, *Amethyst Review, In Parentheses, The Radical Teacher, Rise Up Review*, and *Third Wednesday*. MEH is an educator who received his MFA from Seattle Pacific University, yet continued to spend money he didn’t have completing a MA in theology and a PhD in education. His collection *Teaching While Black* is forthcoming from Main Street Rag Publishing Co. in 2020.

Kate Hutchinson has just retired from a 34-year career of teaching English to high school students and has begun her next life’s work as family caregiver and volunteer. Her most recent collection is *Map Making: Poems of Land and Identity* (2015). Many of her poems and personal essays have been published in journals and anthologies and won recognition, including two Pushcart nominations.
Judy Kaber is a retired elementary school teacher, having taught for 34 years. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in numerous journals, both print and online, including *Atlanta Review*, *December*, *The Comstock Review*, *Tar River*, and *Spillway*. She is also the author of two chapbooks: *Renaming the Seasons* and *In Sleep We Are All the Same*.

Phyllis Klein has been published in numerous journals and anthologies, including *Crosswinds Poetry Journal*, *Chiron Review*, *Portside*, *Sweet: a Literary Confection*, *3Elements Review*, and *Poetry Hotel*. She was a finalist in the 2017 Sweet Poetry Contest, the 2019 Carolyn Forche Humanitarian Poetry Contest, and the 2019 Fischer Prize. She was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2018. Living in the San Francisco Bay Area for over 30 years, she sees writing as artistic dialogue between author and readers—an intimate relationship-building process that fosters healing on many levels.

Kate Li is a junior in high school from the Chicagoland area. Her work has been awarded by the National Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, Columbia College of Chicago, *From the Bow Seat*, and *Teen Ink*. She currently serves as an editor for the international literary magazine *Polyphony Lit*.

Diego Luis studies history as a PhD candidate at Brown University. His photography has recently appeared in *The Tischman Review*, *December*, *Glint Literary Journal*, *About Place Journal*, and *West Texas Literary Review*.

Vicki Miko is a retired television producer and founder of the EONetwork Productions video series *Opposing Viewpoints Live Radio for Television* and *2nd Opinion*. Her illustrations have been featured in *Billboard Magazine* and displayed on Nagle Outdoor billboards. As a community volunteer, she was nominated for the McKnight Foundation Art Award for creating gardening workbooks for the JD Rivers’ Children’s Garden in Minneapolis. Her inspiration is her patient, humoring husband. She lives in California.

Kim Nelson is a writer from Chicago, Illinois. Her work has been published in *Hobart Pulp*, *WhiskeyPaper*, and *Role Reboot*, and she has written about pop culture for Instyle.com.

Tania Palermo is a photographer based out of Manchester, Connecticut. She runs a small business in town, Tania Palermo Studio on Main, which offers Massage Therapy and Photography services. Her favorite photo is always the next one. The art of creating something new, collaborating with a client, and forever chasing light is exciting and energizing.

Joy Ray is an artist whose “Post-apocalyptic Petroglyphs” evoke artifacts from a mysterious, vanished civilization. Her textile paintings grapple with the tantalizingly unknowable: secret codes, sinister conspiracies, dark rituals, the occult. Ray’s work is defined by a bold, minimalist palette and richly textured materials, including twine, wool, sand, and plaster. Joy Ray received her BA from Sarah Lawrence College and studied art history in Italy. She lives and works on the Big Island of Hawaii and exhibits her work nationally.
J. Rizer’s work has appeared in *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *AVENues*, *Twisted Vine Literary and Arts Journal*, and *The Blotter*, among others. Her contribution to the column “My Own Private Library” appeared in a 2017 issue of *Georgia Library Quarterly*. Her short story “Better” was read on *The Blotter Radio ‘Zine* on WCOM in 2015.

William Rudolph earned his MFA in Writing from Vermont College, where his mentors included Mark Cox, Jody Glading, Leslie Ullman, and Roger Weingarten; he also has studied poetry under Edward Hirsch at Breadloaf and Jane Mead at the University of Iowa. His poetry has appeared in *Barrow Street*, *The North American Review*, *Rosebud*, *Quarterly West*, *The Nebraska Review*, *Rattle*, *The Comstock Review*, *The English Journal*, *The South Dakota Review*, and many other journals. He coaches student writers at Grinnell College and in GC’s Liberal Arts in Prison Program.


Denzel Xavier Scott earned his BA in English from the University of Chicago and received his Writing MFA at Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) in his hometown of Savannah, GA. His works appear in *Spillway*, *Decomp*, *Euphony Journal*, and many others. He has forthcoming publication credits in *Rattle*, *Louisville Review*, and *Cortland Review*. Scott is a past recipient of the University of Chicago’s prestigious Summer Arts Council Fellowship Grant. In September 2018, he became one of the winners of Writer Relief’s Peter K Hixson Memorial Prize.

Helena Barbagelata Simões is a fashion model and multidisciplinary visual artist who develops work in painting, illustration, and photography. Her artworks combine mixed media, acrylics, ink, and watercolor techniques. She is also a writer, political scientist, curator, and columnist in several literary publications.

Olivia Stowell is a graduate student at Villanova University pursuing her Masters in English. Her recent poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Albion Review*, *Madcap Review*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *The Merrimack Review*, *Neologism Poetry Journal*, and *Glass Mountain*.

Patrick Tong is a senior from the northern suburbs of Chicago. His work has been recognized by the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, the Poetry Society of the United Kingdom, and appears or is forthcoming in *Eunoia Review*, *The Wit*, and *Rising Phoenix Review*. He currently serves as an Executive Editor for *Polyphony Lit*, a copy editor for its affiliated blog, *Voices*, and a poetry reader for *COUNTERCLOCK Journal*. 
Maciej Toporowicz is a multimedia artist living in Brooklyn and Grahamsville, New York.

Jessie Ulmer is a graduate of Western Washington University where she studied creative writing and developed a fondness for fog. She is a queer writer who uses magic and fantasy to enchant her writing with themes of identity, transformation, struggle, wonder, and dissonance. She is the Fiction Editor for the Sweet Tree Review, and her work has been included in Pins and Needles: A Journal of Contemporary Fairy Tales, The Yellow Chair Review, Washington’s Best Emerging Poets Anthology, From Bellingham with Love, and WWU’s Labyrinth and Jeopardy magazines. She currently delights in living across the street from an abandoned statuary in the small, rural town of Naches, Washington.

Anna Weber is a writer whose work has appeared in Tar River Poetry, Rattle, Ninth Letter, Salamander, Black Warrior Review, and The Florida Review.

John David Yanke is a painter at heart currently working in three dimensions, manipulating found domestic, communal items. Bedsprings, especially, are and will be a continual challenge and visual intrigue for the artist. Denying the “mattress-ness” through manipulation and hue is his current undertaking. Yanke designed seats and saddlebags for Harley-Davidson Motorcycles in the 1990s, operated a mural and faux painting business, and remodeled homes in the early 2000s. He currently teaches drawing and painting and holds a Master’s degree in guidance counseling from Ottawa University and an MFA from Azusa Pacific University.

Ellen Roberts Young has two chapbooks with Finishing Line Press, Accidents (2004) and The Map of Longing (2009), and one book, Made and Remade (WordTech Editions, 2014), as well as poems in a wide range of print and online journals. She is a co-editor of Sin Fronteras/Writers Without Borders Journal based in Las Cruces, NM.
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End