

AFTER HAPPY HOUR

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FALL/WINTER 2023 EDITORS AND READERS

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FOREWORD

Hello & welcome to another issue of *After Happy Hour*... or is it? Since daylight saving time just ended, the good ol' evil clock might be lying & Happy Hour prices still in effect!

If you've read a prior issue or two, maybe even one dating back to the first administration, you might think you know what to expect from this so-called internet publication or cyber-anthology of content, if you're that determined to be rude.

But that might not be true either, & it definitely isn't for us hapless, blood-sweating editors over here. What, then, can you, the reader, in fact, expect to read in this thing?

Well, there are your poignant meditations on nature and grief, the nature of grief, the grief of nature, & so forth, but hopefully with some kind of insightful twist you didn't see coming a mile off; a cogent riff (& who amongst us doesn't love a good cogent riff?) on a ubiquitous but seldom apostrophized subject near to my retired parking attendant's heart; dumplings & boxers & wasps (oh my, or, more to the point, your); a mime moonlighting as a fed, or vice versa, you may recognize from a certain cinematic prequel to a popular TV show of yore; a witch I've never seen before in my life, officer; &, yes, even the charming escapades of an unopinionated onion as told by a Broccoli. Such wonders as these await, if you'd only get on w/ it & turn the "page!"

As always (& this is the After Happy Hour Guarantee), if you don't like the words, there are a couple cool pictures too.

Nathan Kukulski
After Happy Hour Editor-at-large

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Modern Homo's Guide to Making Fire

BY JACOB ORLANDO

Start small.

Clock him checking you out. Serve that shit. Note his blush.

Keep it light.

Stoke his longing. Let him imagine what he can't do with you. Tease him until he asks, with a hard edge, "Can I help you?" Reply, "If you want."

Give it something.

Remind him who caught who catching who. Stop him before he puts a thought together. Give him the finger, if you want. Apologies, but he's not exactly your type.

Don't choke it out.

Ease up. Consider that he might not be so bad. Consider his legs. See, maybe he's okay.

Breathe.

Tune in — he's asking if he seems like some kind of fruit.

Don't stop now.

Look deep into his soul. See him raw. Shake your head and tell him, "I eat fruit like you for breakfast."

Feel that heat.

Let him lay into you. Oh, he doesn't know what side of the bed you woke up on, or what's stuck up your ass? Too bad.

Don't blink.

He's coming at you, getting up in your space. Let him come. Smell sweet on his breath.

Remember, breathe.

His legs, right? Not to mention the curve of his chin and his lips, his smoldering cheeks and the weight in his hands.

Now hold it.

He wants you to be supple. But he's not the boss of you. Do what you want with him.

Lil Has a Surprise For You

BY KAIT QUINN

Puckers her face like she's sucked the lime
out of a sour candy spiking tongue's
ridged root. I ask her if I die
by choking. By drowning. Food poisoning.

An accident? By his hands or mine?
She flutters her lashes at me; they whisper,
Do you really want to know? I do and I don't
and I wilt down to inhale the chemical scent

of cinnamon from the blue rose pinned
to her 70s marigold lapel. Petals frayed,
as if she's ripped a single fabric
bloom from a craft store bouquet just

to taunt me with her secrets, shut closed
casket tight. *Trust me, you don't*
want to see this. I think of my funeral. I think
of my grave. I think of a single wilted rose. I ask her

if I die alone. She stuffs her right hand into her pocket
as if to bury me, pulses her left into a fist. She knows
I want to die loved and seen, skirt of her dress licking
night's pupil like a flame. I die unheard.

I trace retinas down to the tailored
darts of her bodice, feel caged, feel suffocated.
I am washed back to choking, back to waterlogged
spleen, lungs scraped salt raw, back to wondering

if the coroner will tweeze peach silk
pillowcase fibers from my right nostril's
crumbling back wall. She marches
her feet in place to stampede the unknowable

from amygdala. Nothing warns me of the bird's
tangerine beak, yellow talons hooking me
at the shoulders. The killer masked
by the face of my father. Arms tied and bent back.

Body washed up violet and cyan on the logger's
rugged shore. But it's all there: in the scream of her dress,
concealed fist, palmed SOS, blue boutonnière
with ragged edges I cannot unbend elbows to grasp.

In the World Over

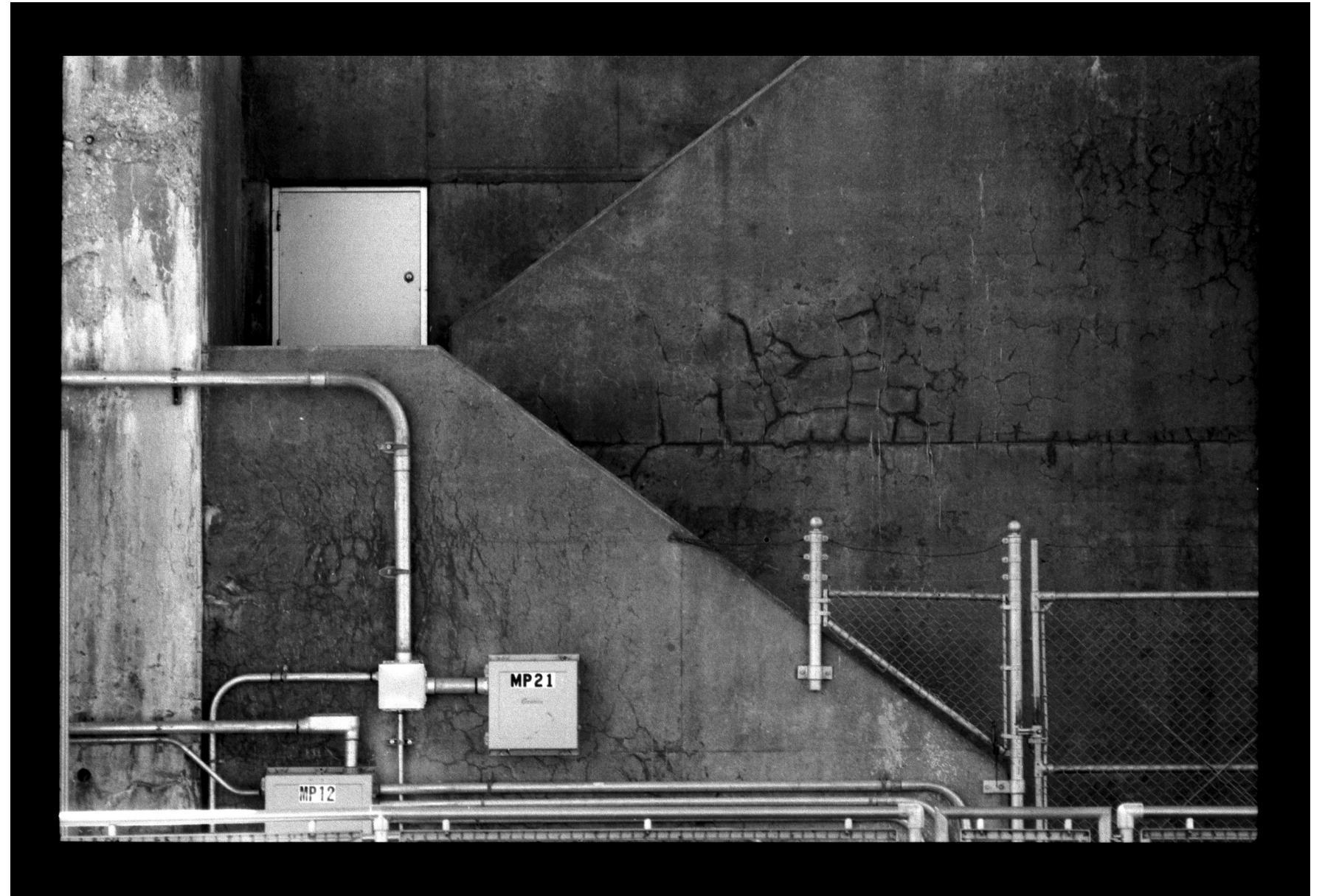
BY ANNA MOLENAAR

There are parking lots.
The shadows of the Great Pyramids are
spoiled, lousy with parking lots.

Babies were born and old men died,
ancient roadways and hallowed battlefields
over top of lands that
are now parking lots, where
men and women argue, call, agree, cry,
make love.

Whole civilizations of insects and
bacteria live and die having seen
nothing but the baked blacktop, the abandoned
bottlecaps and antiqued chewing gum
of parking lots.

Someday there will be nothing but parking lots.
We will not even bother getting out of our cars,
just drive from one to another.



J. DANIEL CLOUD

The Onion

BY KEVIN B

The mayonnaise has not been made.

As the onion contemplates how long it will be until someone notices that the mayonnaise has not been made, it sees Chef Doyle trying not to cry.

Chef Doyle does not cry at work. In general, Chef Doyle does not cry at all, but the onion has no way of knowing that. We only know what the onion knows, and the onion knows that, for the most part, crying at work is frowned upon. The onion also knows that crying in a busy kitchen on a Saturday night is not helpful when the tickets are already piling up and the weeds are so high you feel like you're in a Floridian swamp.

The onion has never been to Florida. It's from Eastern Oregon. The restaurant is in Portland. The onion has no opinion of Florida, or Portland, or Chef Doyle crying. The onion has considered having opinions about crying people, but opinions seem dense and fibrous. An onion doesn't have much room for anything but itself. It has memories and a few feelings, but the feelings are mainly about being an onion.

And concern.

Why hasn't the mayonnaise been made yet?

The onion notices Chef Doyle avoiding making eye contact with Chef Marza. The two chefs seem to be maneuvering around each other in a way that almost resembles a dance. The onion saw two of the busboys dancing in the kitchen earlier while singing a song called "El Hombre

Grande" before they were chased out by the chef with the mustache who the onion thinks of as Chef Mustache, because nobody ever uses his name. They just call him "Chef."

Chef Marza wipes her brow, and a bead of sweat falls down onto the steel prep table. A head of lettuce is grabbed with a bit too much aggression, and she proceeds to chop it with a fervor the onion has not seen from the chef until this moment. Chef Doyle coughs, but the cough obviously (obviously to the onion) was meant to conceal a burst of emotion. The onion wants Chef Doyle to cry and get it over with, but Chef Doyle excuses himself from the kitchen instead. Chef Marza seems to note his exit, but it doesn't deter her from the task at hand. The lettuce is dismembered. The onion feels sympathy for the lettuce. Someday that will be the onion. Not today, of course, because somebody has mistakenly placed the onion behind a rather tall container of salt, and it is almost totally hidden.

The onion knows the salt won't spare the onion from its fate forever, but based on how often the kitchen is thoroughly cleaned, it'll be a few weeks before they find it. When they do, it's unlikely they will use it for food. It'll go in the trash next to scraps and peels and an empty container of heavy cream. The onion isn't sure whether or not it's happy to be cast aside instead of consumed. An onion that's eaten becomes something other than an onion. An onion made garbage is still, for the most part, an onion. It'll wind up in a landfill or a dump somewhere, and it might be allowed to exist that way until it decomposes or sprouts. Most likely, it will sprout and the onion likes that idea. It likes it very much.

Of course that all depends on whether or not somebody moves the salt. There is so much salt in this kitchen. The chef in charge of inventory is not very good at his job. That means many things get ordered even when they're not needed, and some things never get ordered at all. Good luck finding any parsnips in this kitchen.

Or mayonnaise for that matter.

At least, mayonnaise can be made. You can't make a parsnip. Not unless you're God. The onion wonders if it is God. Could God be an onion? The onion tries not to get too lofty. If you don't have room for opinions about crying, you can't have religion. You can't have philosophy. You can't have resentment either, which is nice. That means if you end up getting chopped, you don't hold any ill will against the person chopping you. If Chef Marza moves the salt, sees the onion, and promptly dices it, the onion will not carry any bad feelings as it's being decimated. The role of chefs is to turn the food into the cuisine. The role of the food is to try and make peace with itself as the knife comes down. Marie Antoinette may have had to find that same kind of peace, but the onion knows nothing of Marie Antoinette or the French Revolution, although it did overhear one of the chefs saying something about the American Civil War, because there had been a question about it at something called "trivia" the previous night. Apparently, the chef had done rather well at "trivia" and had won something called a "coaster."

Chef Doyle comes back into the kitchen. There is some red under his eyes, but he seems to be composed. He walks over to Chef Marza and whispers something into her ear. She shakes her head and begins to peel a potato. Chef Doyle whispers again, perhaps repeating what he said the first time, and this causes Chef Marza to stop peeling the potato. She stares at him. She says nothing. Her lip is quivering. Might she cry? So much crying in this kitchen. The tickets are piling up. The busboys are coming in, but they're not singing. They're sweating. The chef who chased them out earlier is asking where the salmon is. Where is the salmon? There should be a salmon. The onion knows there has not been a salmon tonight. A salmon will have to be made. And mayonnaise. And who knows what else.

The onion sees Chef Marza say something with lips quivering, with eyes blinking and blinking hard, with a shaky hand. She says something,

and Chef Doyle puts up his hands in a way that either says "I surrender" or "I'm so, so sorry." The chef looking for the salmon is asking why the steak is cold. He's standing over a plate of steak and he's putting his finger on the steak and he's determining that it's cold. He's screaming about it. He's screaming "Cold! Cold!" and he takes the dish, and throws it directly into the trash. Chef Marza goes back to the potato. She is not affected by the screaming chef. Chef Doyle goes looking for salmon. Nobody does anything about the mayonnaise.

The onion settles into its spot behind the salt. It will be busy for another few hours, and then the tickets will stop spitting out of the small, gray machine that distributes them. The rags will come out. Light cleaning will be done, but no one will move the salt. Plans will be made to go to bars that stay open later than restaurants. Chef Doyle and Chef Marza will leave separately. The screaming chef will make himself a drink at the bar in the restaurant, and if anybody sees him, he'll give them a look that dares them to say anything about it. The lights will be turned off. The night will be over. The restaurant is closed the next day and the day after that. The onion will not see any of them again until Tuesday.

What will the onion do until Tuesday?

The onion doesn't know. There's uncertainty. There's darkness. There's the smell of cleaning solution and the persistence of garlic and oil.

All that would be enough to make anybody cry, but the onion doesn't cry.

It won't.

It can't.

It's an onion.

How to Catch a Birthing Witch: Instructions for Water Shifters

BY DARCY SMITH

Start with a garlic poultice, then lure
her with diamond-cut-cucumber sandwiches,
their cooling properties appeasing but
how to apply the poultice? And where?

First, wash her feet if she'll allow it. If they're
blackened, offer milky tea. The brew will
sooth her, remember she can't enchant liquids.
You are, after all, mostly water, your wants--

vapor. She can't capture air, you're the kettle's
rattle, you're steam. Warm garlic quells. Don't
settle on cold window panes. You're smarter
than frost, you're mist, invisible

and never nervous. Wrap her tightly, drain all three
breasts. Milkless, she'll growl softly. Prepare a
mugwort mash. Gently, yes, that's it. Steady,
as you cover her entire left-arm

nipple. Blocked ducts don't feed
demons. Docile now, she labors,
births a cub. Closer, yes,
kiss the lioness.



SCOTT GOLDSTEIN

Sick Days

BY KASEY BUTCHER SANTANA

My child has been sick before, but this fever makes her acutely miserable. On Sunday, my husband brought Veronica home from the playground with a premonition: “When we’re all sick midweek, let’s blame the kid who coughed in her face.”

Tuesday morning before sunrise, she climbs into our bed. Her hot little feet on my bare legs confirm her illness. At bedtime Monday night, she made a slight crinkly wheeze with each breath—a warning. We snuggle, sleeping a few more minutes before taking her temperature. 101.5°F. Veronica pretends the thermometer is a telephone, calling Lady Aberlin while I pour coffee and prepare for a day of *Mister Rogers* and wiping a runny nose.

That night, the fever flares while we wrestle an exhausted toddler into pajamas. Rocking her to sleep, I listen to a virtual Moms Demand Action meeting through one earbud while a speaker plays Veronica’s bedtime music, *Baby Road*—Beatles songs arranged as instrumental lullabies. I had a cassette of this album when I was a child. In the 1990s, there was an Assault Weapons Ban, and my mother didn’t have to hear psychologists explain how ineffective and traumatic active shooter drills are for children. As my little girl drifts off, from across Denver in their parents’ study, two sisters tell the Moms group about the horrors they survived at their high school and how their friends are lobbying for reform.

Wednesday, Veronica feels worse. She asks for medicine and clings to me, resting her droopy, bloodshot eyes. Her cheek burns against my shoulder while I read a new book about climate change, *Not Too Late*. In one essay, which I’ve read before, Yotam Marom describes the heartache of seeing his daughter fall in love with parts of the earth that may disappear in her lifetime. I remember that passage often as I play in the garden with my daughter, watching her explore the flowers and bugs. Right now, her feverish body feels like too apt a metaphor for a warming world, but here I am, trying to bring her temperature down, swallowing like medicine this book and the spoonful of sugar it offers.

Veronica has started to call me Mother. It sounds too mature in her two-year-old voice and I nudge her back to Mama. All Thursday, she asks, “Mother, help me?” never specifying what she needs. We’re both listless and cranky from inactivity. I try to hide frustration while I reorder fragrance-free bubble bath and research which teabags leach microplastics. Another dam built in a constant struggle to shield her from pollution, hoping not to pass down my autoimmune disorder. Mother. Mother! Mother? Little hands twist my hair.

While Veronica naps, I write postcards for the Environmental Voter Project and watch teenagers, grieving families, and three elected representatives protesting at the Tennessee Capitol after yet another school shooting. I remember a statistic I read: 1 in 25 American five-year-olds will not live to see their fortieth birthday. The guns, giant cars, drugs, despair—so many ways adults have failed them.

At bedtime, I watch Veronica’s flushed, drowsy face in her nightlight’s amber glow. In the rocking chair, I sometimes feel trapped by the weight of her growing body. Drained by the wiggles, the unintentional smacks to my glasses, or a foot intentionally resting on my face. When *Baby Road* ends, I tuck her in, and she asks for a hug, a kiss, and a squeeze. After this ritual, I bundle up, chilled. As much as I want my own space, my body feels an absence, the loss of contact with my child. This phase

will not last much longer. I remind myself that I will rock her every night so long as she wants me to.

By Friday, Veronica is eager to run outside again. Like most days lately, over her clothes, she wears a denim jumper with an embroidered rainbow and hearts across the front. She carefully points to and names each color while I slip Wonder Woman boots on her feet. She claps, “We did it!” This is what she knows of life. I let worry burn off in the heat of the sun, trying to focus on her now: sliding down a pile of dirt, unaware of my fears, finally free of the fever.

The Run

BY SEAN WHALEN

the handful of pilots call it. Or *shopping at V-town*, or *dropping the kids off at the beach*, or *regando el desierto con las lágrimas de Dios*.

After the water war it was simple mechanics. The bays on the biggest planes held tons of bombs. Gutting the infrastructure opened up the needed space for cargo.

Fences are redundant. Despair is economy. A few dogs guard the perimeter, forage.

Bullets and bombs and chlorine are needed elsewhere. It’s economic to load the refugees into the planes, hop over Mount Baldy, swing west towards the ruins of Victorville. Home by supper.

At mass the congregation is told they are moving to the last camp. It is not a lie. There are never lies. *Take very few clothes – it is hot where you are going. Yes, yes, there is food. Your family waits.*

The bodies cover the ground for miles. Crumpled heaps on the baked hardpan, scattered, arms and legs and hands and feet pointing east.

During monsoons the heads wear haloes of flowers.

Later, the pilots, over *cerveza*, swear they hear the thump...thump...
thump...thump...thump over the roar of the engines, but never screams.

The optimal altitude is 30,000 feet for one hour. The pilots, over tequila,
say they are flying with God. *We caress his face, spit in his eye.*

The bomb bay is a cathedral. The floors are polished and round. It is
impossible to stand. The roof opens to the sky. It is blue, blue, blue,
blue, blue.



RUINS II

PETER SCACCO

what my mother does for a living

BY RHIANNON BRIGGS

what other bones do we collect? none so intimate
as teeth I think but when my father met his age replaced
his hip with another my mother the physical therapist

convinced the nurse to smuggle the original joint out
in a biohazard bag and kept it in the fridge until the ground
thawed enough to bury it months later when the sky began

to leave early again we unearthed it with a gentler curiosity
than most relics are with inquisitive hands my mother began
to know the cartilage and the smoothness it had left

in its absence the uncushioned shadows of youth

Tankas Written at Pebble Beach While Samantha Naps on her Towel

BY RHIANNON BRIGGS

Gliding cormorants
& what togetherness must
be: winged time, clear
reflecting sky, rocks & stones
& pebbles & the glinting

just between (it was
born lived beaten tossed & worn
down by the crashing
encroaching roar now to lie
quiet old epiphany

on the palm which took
it, shining, from the mother
who gasps please over
my feet); to the infinite
soon I return. *Don't worry,*

Sea, your shelldaughter
is me and not mine. Time &
time & time again
I pray I am ocean and,
one day, a wave over rocks.



Do Wasps Sting When It's Raining?

BY ZK HARDY

The day is near June and the weather wet. My brother, a barbarian of a man, twenty years older than me, returns home, eyes glazed with the promise of a midday joint. He eats a doubledecker sandwich and drinks an iced coffee, the near molasses consistency of the coffee dyeing his voice black.

My mother pulls into the driveway in her white, white Winstar followed by another car, red and rusted and half-broken, rain streaking the glass. The woman in the red car is my mother's friend's sister, Sharon, who my brother refers to as the cleaning bitch. Sharon teaches my mother which cupboards to dust, where the books should go, how to mop the floor to see streaks glinting in the sun so everyone knows that you've cleaned. My mother told Sharon to never open the doors to the children's rooms.

"They should learn to clean their own rooms," she'd say, even though she had never learned to clean. She always says she's too pretty to clean.

I sit at the table, too, silent as I watch my brother eat. It is one of the few hours we share together, unobstructed by his night job and my elementary school career. He works at a Best Buy, stocking shelves, because he'd dropped out of school, and "can't be bothered to go back," as my mother says. He enjoys his sandwich without a book (unusual) and his fingers tap a rhythm against the false-wood of the table, muffled a little by the table cloth.

"There's a hornet's nest in the swing set," my mother says, putting down the cleaning supplies she and Sharon had purchased from Target.

We do not share a mother. Our father married my mother, who was twenty years younger than him, after he left his first wife. "He traded in for a younger model," my brother always says when he's drunk or high, as if he'd forgotten who I was.

"So?" he says. His eyes do not leave the vast void where they stare.

"So, I want you to take care of it," she says. Her face is not blotched by wine, but will be soon. She always drinks when the cleaning bitch comes to make cleaning fun. She places two bottles of Barefoot wine on the counter.

"I pay rent so I don't have to." He takes a final bite and swills coffee.

"You pay less rent so I can make you," she says.

"I'm eating lunch," he says, though his plate is empty. "I just got home."

My mother tosses her strange, narrowed-eye look at him, the look that states silently that she will complain to our shared father when he returns from work. Sharon stands a few feet back, watching, polishing a mirror without looking at it.

My brother does not fight back.

He drains the mug and steps onto the porch, into the pouring rain. The water soaks his beard and what little hair he has left. His red hair will be Einstein-wild when it dries. He turns to look at me, still sitting in the kitchen, his eyes suddenly bright in the dark rain.

"Come on," he says to me. "Let me show you something."

The swing-set is steel. It seems as timeless as the house: ancient, unquestionable, probably built sometime in the mid-seventies. The top pole lies across two poles about ten feet apart from each other and a single swing hangs between them. The top pole is hollow. The top pole is infested. There is a hornet's nest at one end. The torrential rain doesn't let up and my brother tells me to go inside and change into my bathing suit. When I return, he's threaded the first half of a black hose through the pole and stands by the outdoor faucet. I stand beside him.

“When I turn on the water, make for the door,” he says. “You don’t want to get stung when they start flying.”

He hits the water and I do as I am told, but not without catching a glance over one shoulder. The hornet’s nest shoots out one end into the woods, hornets streaming behind it, trying to hold on. My brother whoops and my legs pump, slamming me against a screen door that is impossible to open in the best of times. Eventually, the black handle gives and I stand at the screen, each square one millimeter by one millimeter, as if it had been made big enough to tempt a wasp and small enough to thwart temptation.

My brother remains standing in the center of the yard. His limp hair hangs on his shoulders, and beard-water drips off the chin. The wasps ignore him, impossibly, and he raises his arms. The water falls around him and he lifts his face to it, silently praying for lightning to strike.

Dumplings

BY CHRISTIAN LOZADA

For White Christmas
(Christmas with my White family),
I make chicken dumplings:

chicken breast
cream of chicken
biscuit dough
white on white on white.
White Mom’s recipe.

When I announce it to my Asian cousins,
I can hear the saliva slosh in their mouths.
Steamy meat wrapped in a thin dough will do that,
but I announce, “It’s not the kind you’re thinking of,”
and watch disappointment wash over them

every
damn
year

but this year, at a Chinese festival,
White Mom saw the sign for the dumpling booth.
Her face lit up

for connection
they eat what I do!
for deliciousness
why am I salivating so much!

I said, “It’s not the White kind.”
My words dry her tongue
and the world seems to be a lonelier place.

Grandmother

BY CRISTY SHANER

The clock on the nightstand glows in the dark, a strobe on the underside of my eyelids;
this bed is softer than any bed I've ever laid in, because it is hers.

Sleeping is safe here.

In the carpeted kitchen, she is staring out the window into the night.
She is surprised to see me awake. We drink hot chocolate in the living room,
and she doesn't tell me what to do.

She melts marshmallows for me.

In the morning I eat crackers on the floor, and she tells me how bored I look.

She has nothing, but she gives me twenty dollars.

She asks who will take care of me. When she is in hospice,
she offers me candy as comfort.

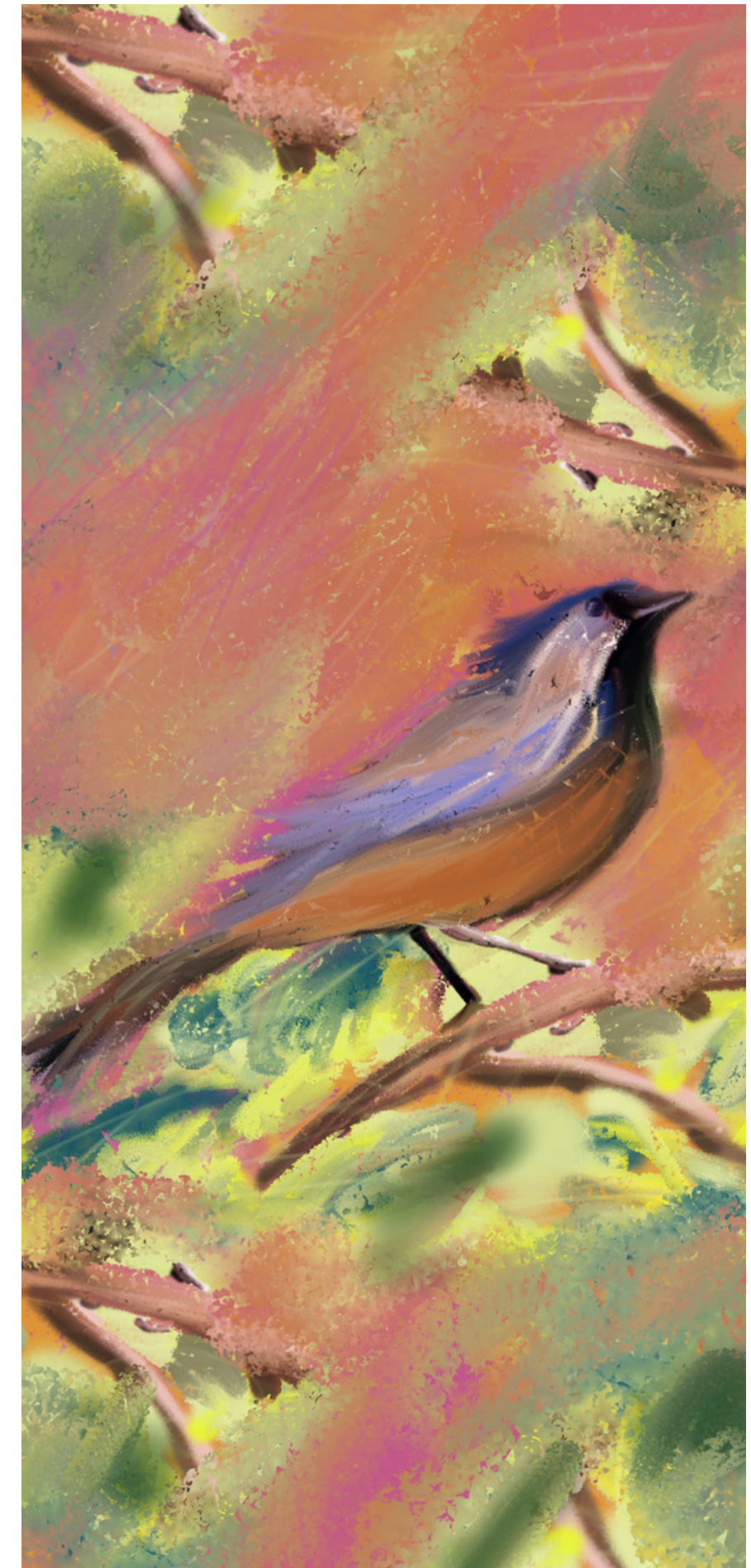
When we pull her curtain closed she loses sight of the sun—
we are never there long enough. She is afraid to go to hell.

Her laughter is limping, and she is rude to the nurses.

Everything she wears is baby blue or pastel pink; she gets her hair cut twice a year.
“They butchered it,” she says.

Her feet are as small as a child's. We don't know what to do with her ashes.

EASTERN BLUE



A Matter of Time

BY JAY RANDALL

The teacher's name was Mrs. Jackson, like the state pen. Little Terry McClintock was maybe eight years old. The second grade. Like, five years before Terry even thought about boxing.

Back then Terry's mother wasn't hitting the sauce too hard. She had a boyfriend, a local guy with a union job, General Motors, who looking back on it had a helluva lot more money than he should have. Dealing to the plant workers. Best customers within a hundred miles of the D in 1979: Always had money, bored as the polar bears at the zoo.

Not hitting it too hard meant they took it easy on the weekdays. Terry's mother, Lisa, was still cleaning houses. Decent money, under the table. A lot of people prefer to have a Caucasian maid, she said. This was seriously back in the day. This was B.C. *and* B.T.: Before Crack, Before Toyota. General Motors employed 80,000 workers in Genesee County.

That regional prosperity hadn't done Lisa any good.

She'd graduated high school, didn't curse, didn't use "ignorant" phrases like "can't hardly" or "I didn't do nothing." She kept herself "put together," which was the opposite kind of phrase, used by a certain kind of beauty parlor white person. Feathered her hair like Farrah Fawcett. But inside, at home, she was a mess. She got the chablis out of the fridge when she got home, say two in the afternoon. She was on her third or fourth glass when Terry came in from school.

Chablis. Lisa said the word like it was a holy sacrament.

Might as well have been Mad Dog 20/20. California jug wine. Wine-in-the-box.

The General Motors guy, Dave something, worked seven to three and was home at like three-fifteen, like he put the keys in the ignition with one hand and punched out with the other. Stroh's man. Probably not the first time Terry heard it, but that was the first memory he had of that crunch-whoosh of a beer can opening.

Pierson Elementary let out at three, too, like GM and the Flint public schools were churning out different widgets for the same machine, but Terry took his time going home.

He got on the school bus with the other kids and got off at his stop. Kept his head down, so the bus driver would be cool. Looked for Dave's shit brown Eldorado ragtop on the street in front of River Village. If he saw it parked there, which was most days, he walked a mile to the public library on East Kearsley, if it was wintertime, or nearby Doyle Ryder Elementary in the summer.

He'd slip into the house after the library closed at eight o'clock or after dark when the night shift took over the playground. An apprenticeship for burglary, that was.

He'd fit his key into the lock with the painstaking care he'd later apply to his picks, turn the knob like a safecracker, listening for footsteps, voices. Most of the time he could hear the blah-blah of the TV in the living room. The laugh track. Other times, it was the stereo. That meant Dave and Lisa were "getting it on," a phrase that the beauty parlor white ladies wouldn't have used, but Lisa did. Lisa favored Bob Seger, Mitch Ryder, Detroit guys she'd seen at Cobo Hall. Dave liked Ted Nugent. Van Halen. MC5. Robin Trower. Crank that up at the beauty parlor, see what happens.

Terry snaked his way sideways across the hopscotch pattern of creaking floorboards under the carpet to the corner and edged along the hall to his room. Beef jerky, Slim Jim, Snickers bar, microwave burrito, orange cheese-and-peanut butter crackers for dinner — whatever they had behind the bulletproof glass at the gas station.

He didn't always make it.

"Ter?" his mother would call out. He'd stand stock still, poised like the frozen surface of a pond had cracked beneath him, and strive to analyze her tone, a single word, impossible to remember how it was said afterward. He'd weigh the risks of not answering, then call back, Yeah, Mom, It's me, I'm home, or whatever. "Okay," Lisa would say. Or "Did you get my cigarettes?" which was illegal but okay with the pump jockey if there was nobody else around. Or "How was school?"

Once a week or so she'd say, "Come in here and say hello," in her white-lady-beauty-parlor voice, too blitzed to care that her denim skirt was up so high that Terry could see snatch, panties off, thanks to UAW Dave. She'd make Terry sit down next to her, UAW Dave on one side, Terry on the other, her bare ass on the naugahyde, and stroke his head, touch his face, pretending to love him. Her stone-gray eyes jagged, like gravel.

UAW Dave didn't give a fuck, would even try to get his mother to cut him some slack sometimes, but Terry was always on Lisa's bad side. Like, she set him up for it. Put him through his paces like an asshole training his dog, waiting to smack him when he got something wrong.

Mrs. Jackson, who, looking back, was like twenty-four years old, couldn't have known any of that. Only thing she knew was that little Terry had some serious B.O. Yep. Lisa would smack him dizzy if he said "I didn't do nothing." But she'd let him go to Pierson in dirty clothes. Why not? She didn't ever see him leave. He got himself out of bed, made his own damn Cheerios. Got his ass whipped if he didn't. Got his toys put down the garbage disposal. Like, Luke Skywalker, the Force is with Kenmore. Like, the hand that giveth also taketh away. Got locked in the closet. Tame compared to what came later, after UAW Dave split and Lisa started hitting it hard. But still.

By law, Mrs. Jackson was required to report any suspicions of child abuse or neglect to Child Protective Services. But she'd grown up in Royal Oak or Bloomfield Hills or some shit. She didn't know jack about

serious fuckups, whom she probably called "dysfunctional." The worst parenting she'd witnessed were the Little League Dads who told their sons to suck it up when they got beamed by a fastball.

Anyway. One Friday, Mrs. Jackson busted Terry for recycling his black Disco Sucks T-shirt the whole week and asked him if she could give him a ride home. He stood there, dead still. All he'd have had to say was that his mother wasn't home after school, so he went to the Boys and Girls Club or some other bullshit place. But he choked. The vision of Mrs. Jackson confronting Lisa and UAW Dave half-dressed and half in the bag on the living room sofa wiped every other thought out of his head.

He gave it a shot when they were on the road. "My Mom's probably not home," he said. "She cleans houses in the afternoon." But Mrs. Jackson wasn't buying.

He pretended he didn't have a key and rang the doorbell, fair warning. They waited in the hallway for maybe three minutes that felt like thirty, and Mrs. Jackson rang the doorbell again, just about the time Lisa opened the door. Terry caught a glance that told him he was in hot water and then Lisa smiled like she was posing for Good Housekeeping and said, "What a surprise! You must be Mrs. Jackson!" Pulling the name out of the air. Any other time, Lisa couldn't have produced his teacher's name if you gave her a hundred tries. She was always gold for a command performance.

They sat in the living room. No evidence of the chablis. Lisa led the conversation like she'd scheduled a parent-teacher conference. Like every teacher made house calls. Talked about his homework. The trouble he was having with spelling, reversing the d and b when he wrote them. Terry stared at her like a talking dog, half-believing that she looked through his school stuff when he was asleep. Lisa made out like he refused to wear anything but the Disco Sucks T-shirt, and she'd let him get away with it, thinking that the other kids would break him of it. Left Mrs. Jackson thinking she was a hardworking-but-out-of-

her-depth single Mom, or so Terry thought.

After the teacher was gone, Lisa flung herself down on the couch and dug her cigarettes out of her purse. Lipped a butt and flicked at her Bic lighter half a dozen times before she got it lit. Took a deep drag, not a trace of her Good Housekeeping-June Cleaver routine. “Get me a glass of chablis,” she snapped.

When he brought the glass, she made him turn his back to her and lift up his shirt. He heard her take another drag, and she said, “Don’t you dare do that again.” Then she sank the red-hot end of her cigarette into his shoulder blade.

A social worker from Child Protective Services called the next day to schedule a home visit, and Terry got a matching burn on the other shoulder. Lisa must have gotten a kick out of sizzle on skin, because by the time he turned 15, his back looked like he’d had smallpox.

Nobody saved him. All that was left when the rescue was over was the shame, and some extra help with his d’s and b’s.

Terry met Emmanuel Steward a few years later at a Silver Gloves tune-up meet between the Kronk’s fifteen-and-under team and Father Mike Shanahan’s Northside Boxing Club, where Terry had landed after his release from the W.J. Maxey Training School for Boys. After his bout, Emanuel caught him by the arm when Terry came up to get Tommy “Hit Man” Hearn to sign his gloves.

“You did good in there, son,” Emanuel said. Like the rest of Shanahan’s boys, fifteen-year-old Terry, all of 119 pounds and fresh out of Maxey, had taken a beating from the kid from the Kronk, an eleven-year-old named Jamal Franklin who must have thrown a hundred punches in each of the junior-level contest’s truncated, one-minute rounds. Terry foxholing behind a peekaboo guard, waiting for a chance to wing a hook. Heavy-handed, even then.

“You kept your head,” Steward said when Terry looked at him like

he was shining him on. Emanuel turned to the Hit Man. “What do you think, Tommy?” he asked.

Hearn looking like the snake he was named after, the Motor City Cobra, all sinew and jerry curl, made a fist and mock-punched Terry on the chin. “Little man don’t punk,” the Hit Man said.

This was the summer of 1985. Hearn’s biggest fights were in the past — Leonard, Benitez, Duran, Hagler — but it was like meeting the King of Detroit. The Hit Man in velour warmups, slip-on patent-leather ankle boots instead of sneakers, and more gold than Mr. T. Every kid got a twenty-dollar bill and the Nancy Reagan line: “Say no to drugs.”

Three years earlier, 1982, the year Thriller dropped, the year Hearn beat Benitez, Terry was walking the gauntlet between Jerome Patterson’s crew and the Top Dawgs, when Deon Mossman, one of Jerome’s cornerboys, demanded Terry’s off-brand Walkman, a piece of shit Sanyo. Terry tried to walk away, like, Yeah, right, but Deon clapped a hand down on a fresh cigarette burn on his shoulder — courtesy Terry’s drunkass bitch of a mother — and Terry whirled around with everything that was scarred in him, a sound in his head like the fountains at the Courtland Center until Jerome himself pulled him off by the shirt collar, arms and legs flailing, Jerome saying, “Easy, White Boy. You best not tag me by mistake.”

Mossman sprang to his feet, blood dripping from his mouth like Dracula, picked up a bottle. But Jerome held up his hand. “Settle,” Jerome said. “We’re taking White Boy on. White Boy can fight.”

Terry’s first ring name, in a way. One that made everybody want to see for himself. White Boy Can Fight.

Two years later, 1984, “When Doves Cry” pumping out of every car radio on Saginaw Street, Terry had fought every ten- to fourteen-year-old kid in a five-mile radius of the schoolyard. Like, Jerome’s gladiator.

Marquis of Queensbury rules, more or less, like the Tough Man

contests held in Cobo Hall. Bare knuckles. No ropes, no bell. No referee except pride and audience opinion, like pickup basketball, calling your own fouls. Terry didn't win all of them, but he won more than he lost, and he never quit. They had to pull him off, sit on him so he couldn't get up, whatever. Fought like his blood was liquid flame. He still hadn't stepped into an actual gym, but he listened to the street talk now about Hearn, Bernard May, Floyd and Roger Mayweather, Steve McCrory, a new kind of Superman vs Batman.

No way Terry was not going to get into some scraps that weren't sanctioned by the Don. No doubt that shit was going to escalate. The way it goes: from fists to bricks to gats to AKs, all the way up to the hydrogen bomb, if you can afford one.

He was back living with Lisa after a stint in foster care. She was a straight up drunk, then. Like, not even pretending. Like, selling the food stamps for thirty cents on the dollar, Wino Mom's fire sale prices. Buying off-brand vodka with the proceeds. Fuck Ernest *and* Julio Gallo.

He washed his own clothes, bought his own food, stole it, usually. Took the bus to Pierson. Hoodied up like Obi-Wan Kenobi to try to avoid getting jumped. Like, this is not the White Boy you're looking for. Carried rolls of pennies in his sweatshirt pockets in case the Jedi mind trick failed. An advantage he could bring through the school pat-down — like, lunch money, dawg, step off — which made his heavy hands even heavier. Back when it was still rare for a kid under fourteen to carry a gat.

First week of school: Everybody showed, especially the Top Dawgs, who wanted to trot out those back-to-school kicks, whatever else drug money could buy, check out which girls had found titties over the summer. Truancy began where novelty left off.

Terry took the bus like always, hood up, earphones around his neck, shitass Sanyo hooked in his pants, penny rolls in his pockets.

He looked good. Using the same clippers she used on Jerome, the gangster's mother, Mary Lee, had trimmed Terry's dirty blonde hair

down to the skull on the sides and left it a little long on the top, like a '50s flat top, but curled back a bit. With the proceeds from some radar detectors he'd stolen out of cars, Terry picked up those black-on-white Adidas low-tops like the ones Run-DMC wore, and he paired them with some baggy chinos and this coal black Lacoste polo shirt that he wore with the collar up under his hoodie to create his own preppy-from-the-hood look a decade or so before Sean John. Scoped the mirror through a pair of those Ray-Ban Wayfarers like Tom Cruise wore in *Risky Business*.

A serious neighborhood crime wave behind that back-to-school ensemble.

The Murray brothers stopped him on the sidewalk around the corner from the bus stop when he went to get a Mountain Dew at the Pump 'N Pantry. It's like seven forty-five in the morning, and they're all ready to go, like they knew Terry's bus number. "Lemme see them shades," the older brother, Charles, known as Jo Jo, told Terry. See meaning hold. Hold meaning keep. Or smash. Younger brother, Tommy, known as Tee, backing him up. Detroit Tigers jerseys and stadium souvenir batting helmets.

The both of them sold Starlight, Atomic Dog, whatever, for the Flint offshoot of Dwayne "Wonderful Wayne" Davis's Detroit-based H2O Crew. Jo Jo almost sixteen years old but still in the eighth grade. Waiting for his dropout date, Billy D. Williams mustache. Tee, the smart one, fourteen years old like Terry, but already taller than Jo Jo, topped off his Tigers rig with one of those miniature Louisville Sluggers they give away on Bat Day.

Figuring the shades weren't going to survive the scrap anyway, Lil Tear tilted the Wayfarers up onto his head like one of those knights in shining armor do with the helmet thing, the visor or whatever. His right hand he kept in his pocket, wrapped around one of those rolls of pennies. "You want to see my sunnies?" he asked.

Then he frisbeed the shades off his head at Jo Jo's eyes and jumpstepped at Tee with a kind of tomahawk Supafly Snooka hook,

penny roll tight in his fist. Laid him flat out before he could get that mini bat above his shoulder, like, *wham!* Not right on the button, but high on the jawbone, close on his ear. The impact felt like he'd slammed his fist in a car door. Never mind. Terry karate stomped on Tee's stomach and stepped over him in one motion, turned to face Jo Jo in the "put up your dukes" peekaboo style he favored back then, caught him with a left to the bridge of the nose as he charged and matadored him into the side of the building, hit him in the back of the neck with a right that bounced his face off the bricks and put him to sleep.

He looked up and saw two of Flint Township's finest looking at him through the window of a black-and-white. Deer in the headlights for half a second, then — Zoom! — he sprinted up the sidewalk toward the school so they'd have to wheel around or come after him in reverse. As luck would have it, the cop in the passenger seat had been a star wideout at Flint Central, literally collared Terry by his Izod maybe fifteen yards from the laid-out Murrays, took the pennies off him and pinned him up against the chain link for the cuffs.

An hour later Terry was in lockup. By dark he was lodged in the Genesee Valley Regional Center for juveniles awaiting trial. Two weeks later he was "enrolled" in the W.J. Maxey Boys Training School in Whitmore Lake — a little town in the sticks somewhere, all scrubby trees and corn fields, cars up on blocks in the front yards, from what he saw out the bus window. His introduction to incarceration, and to organized boxing, as it turned out, thanks to those penny rolls, which added "intent to cause great bodily harm" to the assault charge.

They called the guards counselors, but they acted like hacks, handcuffing fuckups to posts and whatnot, sending them to LSU, the "Life Safety Unit," a euphemism for solitary, for garden-variety teenage bullshit and leaving the logbook blank so there was no record of how long they'd been isolated. Big John Woodrow, aka Coach Woody, aka Big Woody, aka Black Woody, aka Johnny Wood, was a notable exception.

Six foot six and three hundred pounds, Johnny Wood was too damn big to be mean. Meanness was born out of fear, and Big Woody, who had played chaperone for Henry Marzette, the Black Godfather, before Uncle Sam discovered a use for his skills in Vietnam, had no call to be afraid of a bunch of kids. Not that he couldn't choke you out, stab a hole in your sternum with his index finger, or whatever. But nobody thought about that. Big Woody was just a guy you wanted to like you, a guy you wanted to impress, and not with what a badass motherfucker you could be, either. Explains how he could turn Marzette down flat when he came back from Vietnam, the year Marzette's heroin wars accounted for two murders a week in the D. Closest Johnny Wood ever had to come to violence with the boys from Pod Seven was a raised eyebrow. Like: Really? Shit ended.

There were some other Flint kids at Maxey, too, so the name Jerome had given Terry preceded him. White Boy Can Fight? Let's see. Flint boys had his back. The hillbillies figured white was right, as far as they were concerned. But on day one Terry got into it with some boys in his pod from the D. Broke one kid's jaw and knocked another one out cold — a straight one-punch kayo — before Big Woody picked him up by the neck like a mama cat. Said, "Son, you need a new name, 'cause ain't none of my boys can fight, black, white, brown or yellow."

Big Woody brought him into the fold after that. The man had mad love for the sweet science, bought into all that hooey about how boxing kept kids out of trouble. Another testimony to Johnny Wood's charisma, the training school's white principal, Mr. Benedict, allowed him to run a boxing program out of the school gym, with kids from Sequoyah (gen pop), Woodland East (sex offenses) and Woodland West (psych and max) all gloving up together.

Just like in Pod Seven, nobody gave Johnny Wood any trouble. Kids from West that otherwise would have straight matriculated at LSU behaved themselves just to stay eligible for Woody's boxing program. Did homework, colored their maps of the world within the lines and

whatnot, swallowed their pride and filled up those Aa Bb Cc sheets with their fatass first-grader pencils. They also wrote their life stories, or told them, as much as their abilities allowed, in before-the-bell sessions run like a twelve-step program with the bullshit excised. Got perspective like it was Jesus.

Everybody got a boxing name. Part of the transformation Johnny Wood was working, Terry understood later. Mike “T-bone” Taylor, Deshawn “Donald” Curry, “Molasses” Maurice Robinson. After Terry put a couple more kids on their backs, Johnny Wood breaking out the smelling salts, White Boy became Terrance “Tick Tock” McClintock. Like, it’s a matter of time. Terry didn’t learn lesson one about boxing from Big Woody — except maybe keep your hands up, protect yourself at all times — but he did learn how to be cool. Johnny Wood laid it out for him easy, in the form of breadcrumbs, like, “Some brothers gotta fight everybody over everything,” or “See, when I figured out ain’t nothing personal, that’s when I found my peace,” or “Nine times out of ten, brothers get fucked with, they’re bringin that shit on themselves.” Saw the constellation of burns on Terry’s shoulders and said, “Some hurts you gotta take inside and turn into heat, because they don’t never heal.”

No HBO in lockup, no Showtime, no closed-circuit TV. That’s how Terry saw Hearn beat Duran, seated on the gym floor with the rest of Johnny Wood’s boys while the giant black man recapped the fight, bell to bell, acting the parts of both fighters as well as Tim Ryan on play-by-play and Gil Clancy, one-time trainer of Ken Norton, supplying the color. Twenty-some years later, in his mind’s eye Terry could still see Duran stumbling to the wrong corner after Hearn dropped the hammer on him in round one, even though he’d never seen anybody but Big Woody do the drunk walk.

After that, Terry would have gone straight from lockup to Father Mike’s gym (Johnny Wood’s squared circle of choice) when they let him

out if he could have. As it was, he got there before the priest opened the doors the next morning, slipping out of the house maybe half an hour after Lisa, trying her best at A.A. now, finally went to bed.

White boy could fight.

The Monday after the Silver Gloves smoker where he’d met Steward and the Hit Man, Terry hotwired a Lee Iacoca shitbox off Saginaw Street and drove it sixty miles down I-75 to the D. He kept it under the limit for the whole whack, no matter what WRIF’s Arthur Penhallow and Sammy Hagar had to say about it. White boy in a stolen K car driving into the hood, no clue where he was headed, since the car’s owners had neglected to stick a map in the glove box. No registration, either. Just a chintzy little off-brand .38 and a dime bag of Atomic Dog. Like, wrong Aries, Mr. Tock.

He followed the signs for Detroit, wound up on the (W Edsel) Ford Freeway and took the first exit he’d heard of and asked for directions: Grand River Avenue. After a few tries, he found out what he needed to know from a cornerboy dressed like he was part of a merc unit run by Adidas, the uniform of the west side’s Young Boys, Incorporated, aka YBI, the area’s largest employer.

Terry parked the borrowed K car a couple blocks down the street without touching the .38 or the dope in the glove box and hoofed it to the Kronk Recreation Center — named after a Polack city councilman — that Emanuel and the Hit Man had made famous around the world.

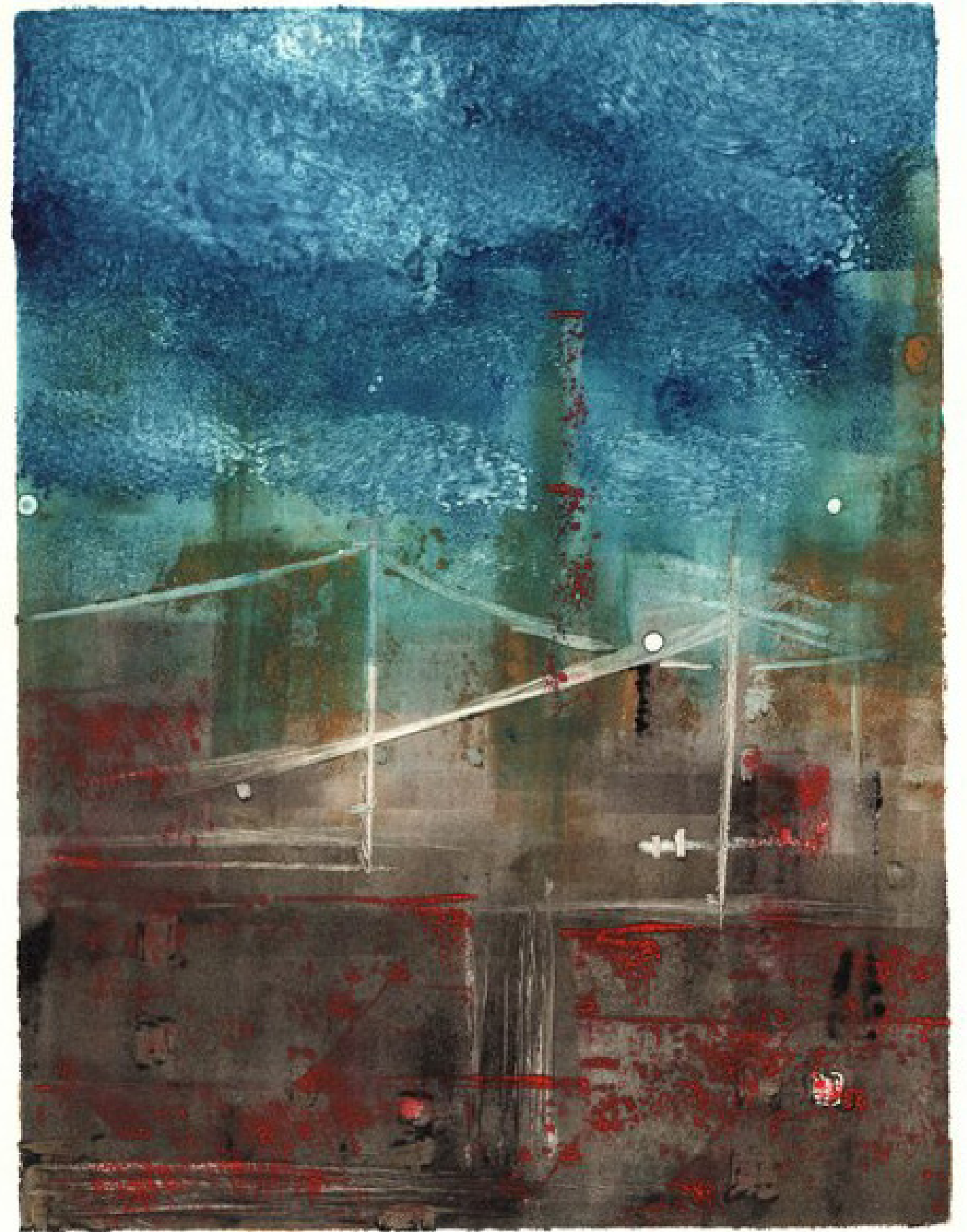
Six months later, Lisa “sold” him to Steward for two hundred dollars and a fifth of Johnnie Walker Black. Not like property of Kronk Boxing sold. More like you won’t be hearing from child protective services as long as I keep getting my AFDC sold. But still.

How it happened: The first time Terry put on a yellow Kronk tank top, Steward scoped all those cigarette burns on his back, and the trainer told him he could hook him up with a room, whether he kept

fighting or not. Set him up with a bed at an off-the-books halfway house around the way, junkies kicking in every other room, doors bolted from the outside. After a week or so Terry slept right through it, like a guy living by the railway tracks, woke up when there wasn't screaming. A couple months like that before Emanuel found him room in a house down the street from his own, run like a bunkhouse for boxers from broken homes.

Got his ass kicked awhile, not like in Maxey or one of Jerome's gladiator fights, like, *learning*. Then something clicked and he started catching guys with his right — jab, jab, jab, BAM! — like a fifteen-year-old, featherweight version of the Hit Man himself.

One day, he said to himself, never letting on to anyone else, Terry "Tick Tock" McClintock would be the champion of the world. It was only a matter of time.



ALEKSEY NISENBOYM

What I Understand Now

BY LOIS MARIE HARROD

*

Those who keep
the room exactly as it was,
unmade bed, poster slack.

The ones who lie
beside the body
as it cools.

The ones who kiss
the crooked mouth.

*

And, yes, later
the ones who pack up
the never-worn shirts
and the eight pairs of shoes
down in the heel.

Reeboks, the only ones
that ever fit
those Neanderthal feet of yours—

the sort Michelangelo
gave his prophet Daniel.

*

At Rehab, Erica
told you to buy new sneakers
imagining, I guess
your lumpy feet
suddenly sleek and fluorescent.

Next session
I dug your newest
black look-alikes
out of their closet box
and shoved them on.

*

You preferred your books
to clothes—

though you liked it
when I bought something new,
always telling me
how lovely I looked.

Who will I ask now
when I walk into the living
room, “Am I okay?”

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Peter L. Scacco began making woodcut prints when he was sixteen years old. His artwork has been featured in numerous print and online journals. Mr. Scacco also is the author of seven books of poetry and a translation of Théophile Gautier's *The Salon* of 1850-51. Born in Ohio, Mr. Scacco has lived and worked in France, Japan, Belgium, and throughout the USA. Since 1995, he has resided in Austin, Texas. Examples of his art can be seen at www.scacwoodcuts.com.

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Darcy Smith's debut collection, *River Skin* (Fernwood Press June 2022) was a semifinalist for the 2020 Hillary Gravendyk Prize. Recent poems appear and are forthcoming in *Please See Me*, *Medmic*, *Silver Birch Press*, *River Heron Review*, and *Songs of Eretz*. Awards include the *Please See Me* Mental Health Poetry Prize and the *Medmic* Poetry Prize. She is a Certified Sign Language Interpreter, Buddhist, kickboxer, wife and mother. Smith lives with her husband and their cat, Miley, in New York's Hudson Valley. For more information visit: www.darcysmith.org

Carolyn EJ Watson is an interdisciplinary artist, who is drawn to the useless and unusual. She takes what she can find to tell a story, using a mixture of unconventional materials. Through her art, Watson strives to advocate and educate, particularly focusing on concepts such as identity, trauma, abstraction, chaos and conservation.

Sean Whalen is a (soon to be retired) health and safety professional from central Iowa. For better or worse, he has returned to writing after an extended hiatus. He was fortunate to have had works previously published in *Flyway*, *Grasslands Review*, *The Mid-America Poetry Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Plainsongs*, and others. Recent works have appeared in *Halcyon Days*, *Founder's Favorites*, and *Last Leaves*.

