

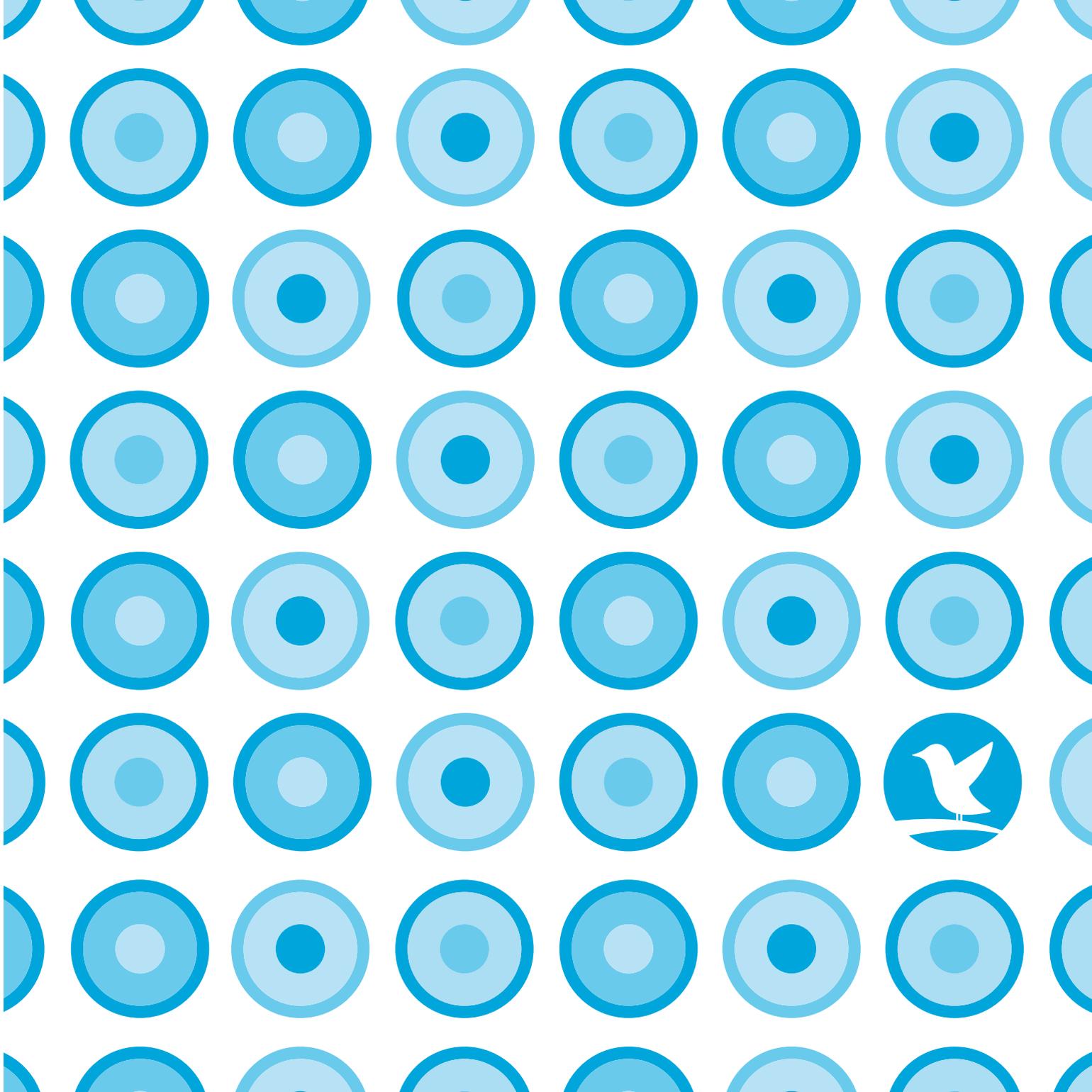


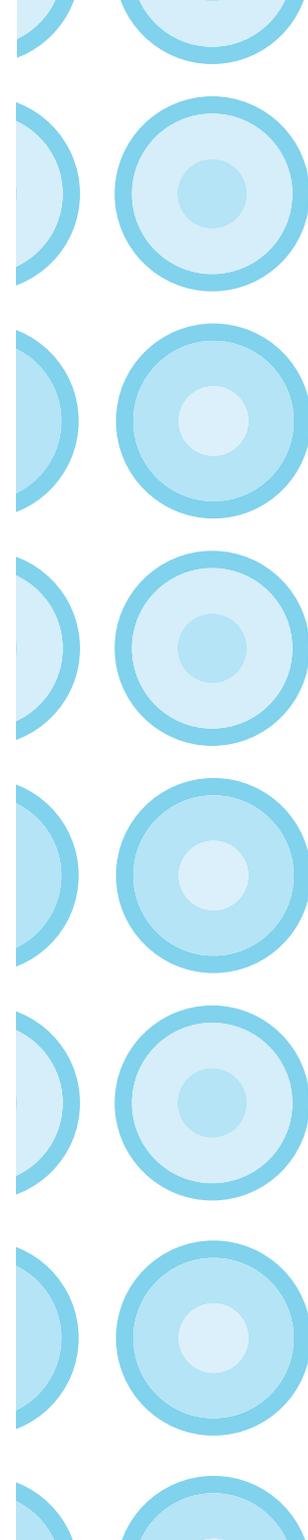
WOODCREST

the fourth card put out in texas hold-em//to persuade a group to drop its purpose
//in favor of a counterpurpose//to revolve//slowly in a circle//a blind eye//
a deaf ear//your curdling stomach//in pro-wrestling, to change from Face to Heel
//to make everyone who hated you//love you//swing your partner//don't
get caught in the door//you have to push it and keep moving//to shift the
paradigm//stage your revolution//change the channel//macaroni in the
microwave//a sequence of notes side by side//in the scale//tern, a kind
of sea bird//the wheels on the bus go//somewhere, have you heard?//

[turn]

COVER DESIGN + PHOTOGRAPHY // MARY GUNHEIM
THEME // SHANNON FANDLER





[TURN] SPRING 2010

WOODCREST

CABRINI COLLEGE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH





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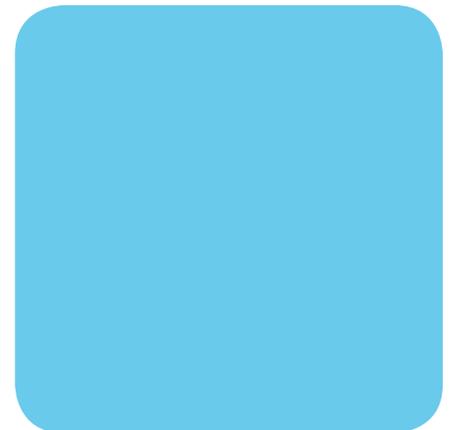
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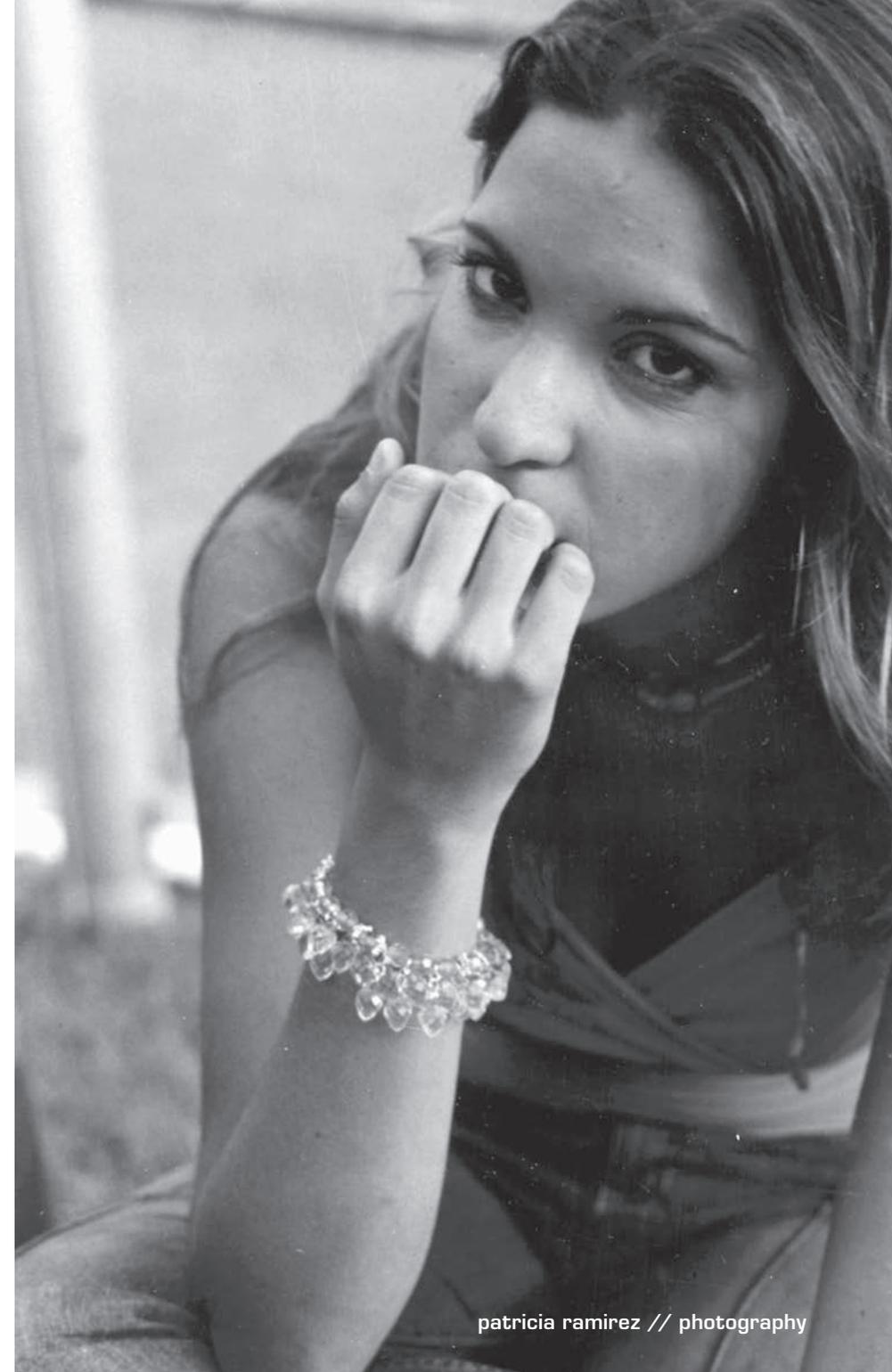


[61]

the life of a hand model is a hard one

We were learning about hands in Biology, how testosterone lengthens your fourth finger in the womb and how estrogen lengthens your first finger, so that depending on whether someone is a man or a woman, that's which finger will be longer, either the first or the fourth. I held my hand up to yours, and of course my first finger was longer than my fourth. Your fingers were about the same—you have a very square hand, which perhaps means that you don't feel one way or the other about anything. And when the professor finally stopped talking and we were supposed to make graphs or charts or some other kind of senseless measurements, I turned to you and told you how my aunt was once a hand model for QVC, for a living. I never thought about which of my aunt's fingers was longer, the first or the fourth, though I'm guessing she had a lot of estrogen, given her beauty and femininity. Of course there was also her hard-headedness and the way she

made decisions, even the wrong ones, very quickly. But no one ever thinks about the woman who splays out her manicured fingers before the camera, a ring crowded below each knuckle, turning her hands this way and that so the jewels catch the light. Even the housewives who watch QVC every day don't think about the hand model, because you rarely see her face. You're supposed to concentrate on the rings she wears on her fingers: the sapphires unnaturally blue like a chlorinated swimming pool, the diamonds so large and glittering you doubt their authenticity until you see their price tags. This was as close as my aunt, an actress, ever came to the Hollywood dream, I told you. The studio wasn't even in California, it was in West Chester, Pennsylvania. It wasn't quite good enough for my aunt, and as a result she became a diva, or a pain-in-the-ass as my mother would say. She wore rubber gloves when she ate Bing cherries so her nail beds wouldn't become stained. She never



“

you will be happy and
beautiful and **animated** like
 me if you buy my jewelry

”

washed dishes or did yard work or even read books, because, she said, paper cuts showed up much more vividly on camera than in real life, and if the skin of her hands was anything less than creamy, smooth, and perfect, she would lose her job. It wasn't even enough to have creamy, smooth, perfect skin on her hands, she had to have statuesque bone structure as well, which she did. Her hands couldn't be too fat or too thin, and they had to be animated as they wore the rings, meaning that they had to converse silently as if my aunt were grasping for words that she couldn't quite come up with, those words being, "You will be happy and beautiful and animated like me if you buy my jewelry." And of course it wasn't my aunt's jewelry. It belonged mostly to a company called The California Diamond Mine. My aunt was good at what she did, I told you. The phone lines at the QVC studio would be perpetually tied up with middle-aged and older women who were calling in to buy, say, the canary-yellow diamond ring or maybe the gold tennis bracelet with the filigreed box clasp draped across my aunt's firm, slightly veined wrist. These women would put their house payment in an envelope and mail it to the California Diamond Mine,

which was a warehouse in Cincinnati. Or else they would give their already maxed-out credit card numbers and maybe even their social security numbers to one of several operators who handled the lines when my aunt was on the air at about ten o'clock most mornings and again at three o'clock, four afternoons a week. The host of the show would sometimes take questions from callers, who would ask to see a specific ring by itself on my aunt's hand while the host explained its characteristics such as the African nation where it had come from, or the clarity of the color, or the precision of the cut. My aunt would slip the ring in question from its velvet holder and slide it gently over the first knuckle of her first finger, the one affected by estrogen, or if it was an engagement ring and the caller was a male, over the first knuckle of her fourth finger, which was the one affected by testosterone, so that the male could see how the ring would look on his new bride-to-be should she say yes and allow him to clumsily force the ring over *her* first knuckle of *her* fourth finger with his large, nervous hands. Isn't that interesting? I asked you, and before you could answer, I told you how, evenings after work, she'd go to swanky

bars, the 15-dollar martini kind, for happy hour or as my mother said, to meet a rich guy. It seemed to me though, that she felt *obligated* to like cocktails and businessmen. I pictured them, the drinks, as emerald-green and poisonous-looking, my aunt's fingertips tracing and encircling the frosted glass. I could never picture the men except that they more often than not noticed her hands without being quite sure why their eyes were drawn there. They would compliment her manicure or say what long fingers she had. Thank you, she would reply vacantly. I can almost hear her saying this, my aunt, in a tone of boredom and disbelief. I can hear her getting up, her dress pants groaning against the bar stool. Most evenings she spent with her cat and a baby spinach salad. She sipped seltzer. Then an hour or so of TV and bed. She always slathered lotion on her hands, rubbing it into her cuticles and even in the areas between her fingers, and slipped them into silk gloves before falling asleep. She told me to try this. It makes your hands exquisitely soft, like a baby's cheek, she told me. But in the mornings, the gloves would always have fallen off my hands and my sheets would be spotted with greasy cream. My aunt had

learned not to pull the sticky silk from her fingers in the night; she had learned, incidentally, to sleep stilly in one position so that her hair in its curlers wouldn't unravel on her pillow. Would you believe you can discipline yourself to wake up beautiful? I asked, and then I told you how my aunt lost her job when she turned fifty, because her hands were too old. She had gotten collagen injections and a chemical peel and juniors' department sweaters to appear younger, but what could she do about her hands? I wonder just how they told her, and whether she cried. Her hands were still beautiful, but in the way of a cougar's rather than a kitten's. The veins stood up more prominently than ever, and when she wore her rings, her hands looked like those of an aging heiress. A lady who lunches. We all told her she was a classy-looking older gal. Now you can relax and not worry, we told her. You can do, you know, normal things. After she lost the job, she did normal things, but unhappily. She worked at the jewelry counter in Macy's where during her lunch hour, if she wanted to read, say, a Vogue magazine she'd picked up off a newsstand, and if, reading it, she happened to get a paper cut on the soft webbing attaching her

left opposable thumb to her left palm, it wouldn't matter. If the cut started to bleed, she could put a band-aid over it and keep working. At night, she would lock the rings into their glass cases, drape the counters with thick red security cloths, and walk across the parking lot to her car without even bothering to shove her fingers in her pockets against the cold. She would turn on the engine and stab at the defroster button and sit, chewing her nails, as she waited for the ice to melt off the glass so she could go home. Don't you think the life of a hand model is a hard one? I asked you, or some such question. You looked at me like I was crazy. Sure, I guess, you said. But no harder than anything else, really. There's a lot of hard jobs, you said, like electrical engineering or being the President. Being a hand model is perhaps one of the easiest professions you can have, for christ's sake. I can't even think of anything easier to do for a living than being a hand model, you said. And although I continued to regard you with glowing eyes for the rest of that Biology class and maybe even, against my better judgment, the rest of that week's worth of Biology classes, it did occur to me, shortly after, that I was not in love with you. 🐦

decade

kindling. scrap
 earthbound
 where is she?
 my ladybug
 these are your clawing children
 wandering on the void
 one
 waiting in the graveyard garden
 [four/get/ten/years]
 all five to ask—why fly?
 but there is no home now,
 anyway.
 no place for you to land.



patricia ramirez // pen on paper

untitled

The madman of a run-on sentence
 His hand-gestures, wide and repetitive...
 He conjures in my head a scientist of the
 Written word
 Running on his own pocket watch
 Set in rhythm to his footsteps
 His shoes that walk on auto-pilot
 His soul busy with other grandeurs
 Never dancing but flowing in and
 Out of a borrowed smile.
 Borrowed from those poets
 Borrowed from the age when youth is
 Wasted on afternoon burnouts
 Borrowed from a joyous memory of
 A cartoon character, falling out of
 Its grid and into the hands

Of a new generation
 A generation of icons and rascals
 A generation of endless noise
 A generation of vulnerable sex
 addicts—urging
 To be reprieved
 But his smile, his grin cannot
 Be unmade
 As he shakes his head,
 Gestures widely
 And disagrees
 With everything I have said.

paste

I copied what you wrote
and made it mine.
made it famous, too.
you read it then
and thought,
it's like he knows me.





on the fourth

He looked like an aging surf bum—he was in his driveway waxing his longboard—and yet his house must have cost a couple million, waterfront and palatial as it was. When the beach grass of his landscape parted in the wind, the ocean appeared behind it like a piece of blue scalp, the grasses like hairs brushed aside. A comb-over, so to speak. I had hoped he would let me park in his expansive driveway and cut across his lawn to the beach, but I just couldn't ask. I had hoped he would offer it, this guy with the type of long gray pony-tail that doesn't usually come with entitlement.

There was currently a police cruiser angled in front of the beach parking lot. The officer had gruffly gestured at me to keep moving, keep

moving. The lot was full. Every beach along the Delaware shore so far had been full. I was a small person in a small car. I didn't even have a beach umbrella. But the beach was too full for me.

So I asked the man, who was wearing a Rolex with his surf-suit, if he knew of an alternate place to park. A commercial lot, maybe, where they said they towed you but wouldn't, really. He suggested a construction site up the road, where a house was in the process of being built. I could park there, he said. It was the Fourth of July. The builders were all at home. Doubtfully, I thanked him. What I really wanted was to park here, in his circular drive or even just at his curb. It would lend me the validity I needed. For obviously, he owned a part of

“

I practiced, in my head, saying thanks. **thanks so much.** with gratefulness and with humility.

”

the beach and therefore a part of the world. His neighbors had equally large houses and equally large drives. They had boats in their garages, and Mercedeses and Lexuses. But I couldn't ask him.

Or, he said, I could park at the Saiboat School. It's the marina with all the sailboats in it, he told me. Yes, I had passed it on the way here, to this development. The sails of the boats perked up in the wind a little too hopefully. Everybody had a jeep and seemed both vigorous and inordinately wholesome.

Or, he told me, I could park at the bay about a quarter mile from the beach. I would have to cross the highway, but if I parked at the bay, it was perfectly legal. It cost four dollars, which was cheaper than the beach lot.

But, I thought, the beach is right here. Right here, behind your head. The clouds over the water could be the steam from your cooking. The ocean could be your shower or your toilet. The planes trailing their banners are

legible from here. Go to Duffy's, they say. Cold Drinks, Live Band.

And that's the best I can tell you, he said, lowering his sunglasses with finality. I drove to the bay parking lot and, because my car was out of state, paid six dollars. I parked in finely crushed gravel. You could just stay here, the old man collecting the parking money remarked. He seemed loyal to the bay, somehow. The beach, he warned, is a good mile up the road.

I hear it's less, I answered. The bay was shallow and shimmering funnily, like a high fever. A sick thing, you think when you see it. I went and put my feet in, and the water was unhealthily warm. The lowering sun had dropped a haze above it, and lines of sparkles ran all the way out to the boats in the distance. Standing in the water with my beach bag on my shoulder, I fantasized about the wealthy surf bum.

Go through that back gate there, see, he could have said, pointing. There behind the clumps of sea grass where the seagull is sitting. Go past the

lounge chair with the yellow striped umbrella over it. And you will be at the beach.

But, I would have argued, That is your private beach.

It's okay, he would say. I'm not using it right now, I'm waxing my longboard.

Thanks, I would say. Thanks so much. I practiced, in my head, saying Thanks. Thanks so much. with gratefulness and with humility I tried it with a lilt of something like tears, wanting just the right intonation to express my renewed faith in the human species. Then a creeping rope of seaweed gripped my ankle. I shuddered it off and stalked out of the water.

Careful crossing the street! called the old guy who takes the parking money, but I really only imagined him speaking. A mile up the road, you say? I yelled out to him, but he looked at me like he didn't hear me and turned his face to the sun. 🙄

unrelenting noise

I.

Stars outlined her silhouette as she crouched in the window, gazing upon the still form. Her knife glinted in her hand, moonlight reflecting off the cool metal. Blood dripped from the blade as she leaped off the sill, landing in a crouch on the ground below.

II.

I saw myself tonight
 A cold reflection, a distorted image
 She looked straight back
 Glaring, questioning
 Pleading
 Why, she asked
 Her voice engulfing me.
 Hesitating,
 I almost turned away
 [She is me]
 I confronted myself tonight
 Though she's always walked beside me
 Invisible, but always there
 Her whispers hissing in my ear
 Poison: stinging, scarring
 You can't see her
 But I can feel her
 And the cold grip she has on my heart

III.

The pencil sits on my desk, resting. A yellow strip of wood, nearly archaic compared to the technology littering the desk. Not a school bus yellow, but more gold. Golden-yellow. Light reflects off the glossy surface, highlighting the holographic green writing: Dixon Ticonderoga. 2 HB.

I pick it up, run my fingers along its length, barely longer than my hand. Smooth, except for a few nicks. [Very soft wood.] My fingers snag on a strip of tape wrapped around the middle. Pencil snapped a while ago, the crack barely visible beneath the matte tape: a thin jagged line of tan where the paint chipped away.

IV.

Writing about yourself is like taking off your clothes. Each sentence written is like another layer taken off, revealing more and more of yourself, until you're standing there, naked.

V.

The flames licked the dark sky, spitting embers out onto the ground. I sat on a chair, pulled close to the fire, hunched against the breeze. Summer was ending; you could feel it everywhere, from the brisk air to the changing leaves.

VI.

She stood with her back to the wind, hunched against the cold that pierced through her upturned collar, waiting. Her hair fell over her eyes, hand resting on a cocked hip, a soft smirk on her face.

VIII.

The station's crowded
 Just before the train arrives
 Unrelenting noise



martha sweigart // photography

truth in the back of a truck

sighs and cigarette smoke
slipping out our mouths and our noses
and the ghostlike cloud that billows
into the windshield and out of cracked windows
staring at the porch light and the roof of the house
asking questions we'll never figure out

tree branches; into sky
“fucks” and “shits”; into guesses why

wawa cups
filling up the floor of this truck
and my coffee's almost gone
about to join the speeches my feet are on
spitting out the slit
of the window and the rain-guard split

flashlight beam; into sky
reckoning life; with a mortal mind

playing with the radio
just to get out of our minds for a second, though
that don't ever turn out
usually plays what we don't want to think about
and then we light up again
laughing in our throats what we're aching in

high-beams; into fog
thinking too long; into whiskey walks

smelling my shoulders and wrists
swept across my nose and my cheeks
and pulling my fingers through my hair
losing my lighter and finding it somewhere
talking about everything
and understanding maybe one thing

renga

JAPANESE COLLABORATIVE POETRY

Soothing doom, thunder,
The clasp of a warm friend's hand
Distracting the wet

S.R.

Leaves turning over
[raped, ravaged on the damp bark]
soon to sigh and rest

S.F.

Refrain from morning,
In inches of cold fulfilled
In a full belly

S.R.

The grass hills sated,
the earth drunk on the sweeping
and falling of rain

S.F.

Revealing the news
That you are mornings for me,
Renewing promise

S.R

Not colored prisms
which are rare and false to the
true nature of storms

S.F





that damn autumn storm

O bnoxious wind chimes line the road out of town. They briskly sing while the wind rips quietly through the treetops and pushes the leaves toward her. She had waited until that autumn storm had died down and now that it's over, she is still waiting, wondering why she didn't leave sooner.

The air smells of burning fire places with a faint aftertaste of marshmallows, her favorite scent besides raw gasoline. She drinks it in soberly while her nose runs from the windy chill. She only has one tissue left in her pocket. It's ruffled with holes in it from earlier use, but it is her only one left. She reuses it. It feels wet and makes her colder and more bitter than before. Next time, she is going to use her sleeve.

The red Buick sits motionless under her leaning left arm, her steady. Parked outside the local supermarket, its lights are on and the driver's door remains open from earlier. The leaves

fly into it and rest on the seats, the floor mats, and the steering wheel like leeches sticking to your body. They aren't going anywhere fast.

She keeps staring at the ground, waiting for bugs to pass or maybe his feet to appear, but the ground stays empty, just the sidewalk's cracks and blisters. Finally, her cell phone begins to vibrate frantically in the back pocket of her jeans.

"Hello?" she asks doubtfully, as if waking up from a dream when you hear your name being called. Silence on the other end. "Hello," she repeats quickly, with more authority, like a mother waiting for her child to respond to a command.

She hears a cough on the other end, like the clearing of a phlegmy throat. It sounds deep, a man's voice. Shifting her weight onto her right foot, she sits upon the hood of the red car with her left side, her right leg

“

...somewhere else, in a town
that didn't bleed when it rained

”

dangling off the car and bumping the tire every now and then. Waiting restlessly, she holds the phone tightly to her ear, trying to hear more than silence.

The call meant that she was screwed. Typical, she thinks bitterly, more at herself than at him. Her sniffing begins to reach epic proportions while the wind keeps punching her nose.

“Umm, so...” he begins guiltily. She knows he is ashamed, but so is she. But he isn't off the hook.

She wants a tissue desperately to blow her freaking nose on. This is getting so damn annoying. “Just say it,” she says simply. She's waited long enough. He breathes heavily into the phone, stalling or preparing himself to say it. “Uh, I went back,” he says curtly. She puts her hand to her forehead, flicking back the brown wisps of hair that strayed from her butterfly clip. She looks down at the car on which she sits, the red paint like a tomato or rosacea on someone's face, bright yet dirty, dark but pinkish. Again, a feeling of regret pushes through her. That town should have been long gone, but there she sat, on the hood of her old '87, wishing she'd left before or

even during that storm. She would have risked it now, after the fact. He was gone. She was what was left.

He was the only nice person she'd ever met. She hated her parents and their stiffness, her tight-ass teachers preaching lies in class, her shallow “friends” who burned their hair straight everyday and persecuted those who refused to join that cult. The buildings all looked like prisons in their own way, inescapable cells. The lawns, thick and hard as cinderblocks painted that emerald green, drowned in fatal fertilizer. The leashes stapled to the pets behind the invisible choking fence. She always felt like the dogs. He wasn't like them. His parents followed the same mold as everyone else in that town, as did his friends. It was a breeding ground for assholes.

He smiled more. She started to practice her smiling abilities so they could smile together at all the shitty things that happened to them.

After months of staying in that happy circle, people try to throw sticks in it and turn it into a weird trapezoid or some other disfigured shape. By senior year, both hadn't cracked smiles in weeks, only

slightly tilting their chins to one side to imitate a cocked, upturned lip, praying it resembled a smile to the other. It never did.

The decision to go to college wasn't their own, but rather their parents'. He was to be sent two states away to a prestigious institution where maybe there was laughter and knowledge coexisting together. She was to be trapped in the town's community college with the same miserable masks always looking at her: glum, empty holes.

Both, wanting desperately to change their situation, made a plan that summer. Dumb. It was to leave together during fall break in October, somewhere else, in a town that didn't bleed when it rained. He ended up enjoying that first month of college while she sank lower into emo territory. Both returned home for break, visiting each other once casually, not to seem suspicious. She was to drive to the 8th train station west about 45 minutes away and meet him at the station to go anywhere. He would be waiting there at 3:00 pm on the Sunday that he was to return to school. His bags would be packed already. No suspicion. Fail.

She couldn't risk the engine of her Buick in the chaotic, pissed-off storm. It was intense to say the least. Waiting was the only option. Mistake. He left on the 3:00pm train at their local station to college, with his packed bags. It was over.

"Okay," she whispers into the phone, she knows he heard it, he always heard everything she said; sometimes she never even had to speak. "Okay," he mirrors in a final tone, like a couple deciding where to eat dinner and settling on a classic close-by restaurant that they have been to a hundred times, okay. Both knew it was not okay. "Alright... I'll see ya," he said firmly until his grief choked his last word out and it popped above the others into the sky like a champagne cork. "Mm, bye," she squeezes out while the tears are thrust back into her eyes from the forceful wind. Now she really wants a tissue, not so much for the tears or the snot string, but rather to hide her face from her future.

She closes her cell phone, slips it back into her jeans, and wearily rises off the car, both of her legs now firmly on the ground. "Bye," she repeats finally, with this sickening surprise. It is

probably the same tone used by some astronaut's mother when he told her that he was travelling to the moon. She doubtfully and untrustingly utters, "the moon."

She positions herself slowly in the driver's seat, brushing away some leaves and debris that had flown in. She shuts the door loudly and turns on the screaming radio to her favorite rock station, 103.4 Guitar Gods. That town was cheesy, too.

She starts to drive back home, away from the wind chimes that children had hung from trees and bushes to signal her forgotten exodus. She is forced to return to her empty home filled with stuff she never cared about, toward the job she hates with the fat boss who never cared about anyone except himself, and toward the shitty restaurants she hates eating at with the miserable employees who have nothing in their eyes. She drives faster, furious at her old memories and terrified for her future. It will not be as satisfactory as the one she had imagined if only she had driven through that damn, angry, pointless, messy autumn storm. 🌧️

passengers

i used to watch planes
 thinking they were stars
 that burned in somber dusk
 the stars go somewhere
 so do the planes
 men in coach wear
 suits scuffed with sleep
 an infant's ear aches
 and mothers are tired
 i'm tired too
 curled in my window
 but i go
 never and
 nowhere



patricia ramirez // pen on paper

she's warm

this yarny cotton mess
sprawls about like a ribbon in the wind
fuzzy and
warm feeling
it was knit with care
for hours and hours
with care
and is the work of loving hands

wild turns of yarn
a dazzling faded orange
giving warmth
spotted with fuzzies
I wore this thing to death
because it smelled like her
and because I was cold
but even when it wasn't cold I'd wear it
twirled around my neck three times
or like a priest giving the last rites

ragged yarn tumbles about
warm curls of burnt orange

that used to smell like her
subtle sweet like a strawberry
in the morning
on top of a mountain
now it smells like my neck
wool and leather, nicotine and sweat
but even when it wasn't cold I'd wear it
twirled around my neck three times
or like a priest giving the last rites

ragged yarn tumbles about
inviting seductive bohemian cloth
carelessly fuzzied
warm curling old orange
last used to smell like her
subtle sweet like a strawberry
in the morning
on top of a mountain
wet in still air
now it smells like my neck
wool, leather, nicotine, sweat



marcia mcconnell // photography

vessel

Imposing facade: vinyl exterior, fiberboard construction,
stock windows and doors, grotesque rooms, cold imported tile,

I got this in Mumbai, I got this in France

Flashing lights hungry in the trees.

Black-baby, effete, stage left.

My sunglasses. [demanded with a limp hand and received]

No, the pair that match my baby.

A wooden curtain pulled to its proscenium.

The flashing lights dance, empty lenses in a trance

Creating wind, finding light. Parading through the house.

Black-baby in the carriage. Black-car at the curb.

Exotic. they marvel. Good for you: So colorblind. So forward.

So chic. I want one of them.

She teases with a smirk. *How exclusive: doting mother, new Black-baby*

Who's it wearing! they Inquire. Where'd you get it—Bangladesh!

Africa is charmed.

Another curtain closed. A mere baby, bellowing in her arms.

Take this. It smells.

My Blackberry. [demanded with a limp hand and received]

Imposing facade: waxed exterior, leather and aluminum,
tinted windows and handless doors.

Another venue scored.



martha sweigart // photography

a null protrusion + the vacuum of identity
 enhanced senses. Being digests the body
 photosynthesis: the green regenerates.
 robert kallwass

sunrise, where are you now?
 the enveloping darkness flickers in the grove
 like anticipation dancing on a matchstick
 soon discarded in the green moss of an empty mountain
 sean ryan

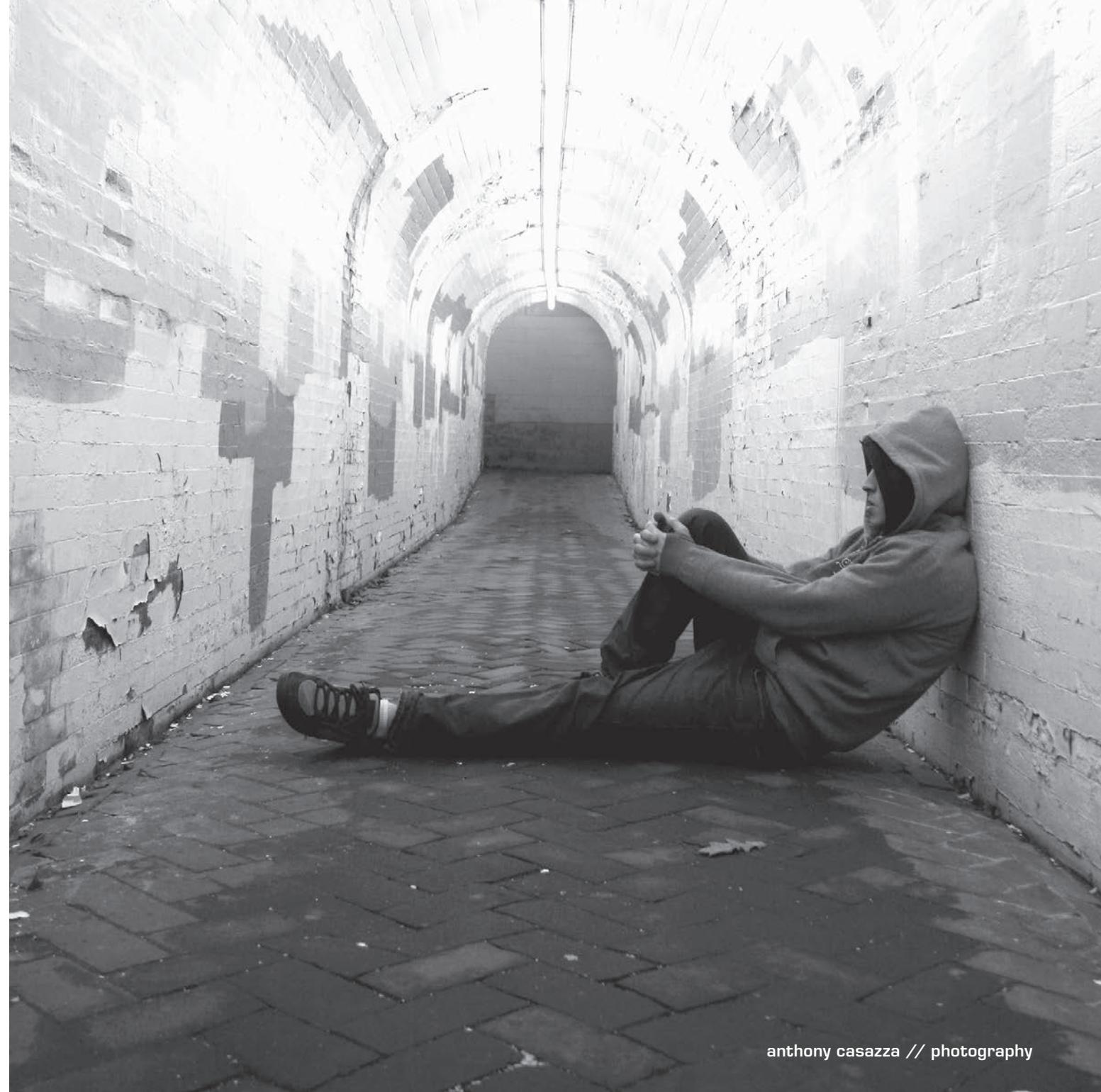
soulless mountains with no one scaling their spines
 yet whispers reverberate throughout
 shadows invade the thick foliage
 once more reflecting above a bed of green moss.
 katherine parks

ghosts dwell on the mountain,
 astral voices, disembodied,
 bursting through the still like sunlight
 that pierces the thicket and warms the green moss.
 sean ryan

eyes

Lights fall
orange and yellow
crooked colors drown
gray and
common phrases
soft and temperate light reaches
and gently lays
silent
beckons
caught in communion of the eyes
these eyes
wettered with wonder of
some
unthought thing
felt
just felt, but now beheld

Behold the tender euphoria
of the space between
that lucky air to hold that light
given and received
in divine speed
quickenened with tilted heads
turning with question
silent in desire
mirrors to mirrors
light
in infinite travel



longing for change

The leaves were turning orange and brown, like college girls who fall asleep in tanning beds and come out with skin that looks like an old boot. It was Fall again. The cycle of nature is funny. People get older, fall apart, and die. Then it's over. But nature knows no age, repeating itself endlessly. Like college girls who stay the same age while I lose my hair and expand my gut.

God, I miss college girls.

What Fall meant for me was that the bank I work at would put up some Halloween decorations. I'm not really sure why. It's not as if parents will suddenly want to bring their kids to the bank to run around and see all of the fun decorations while they take out high-interest loans. I guess they're just for Kathryn, the girl who's in charge of putting them up. Gives her something to do for a few hours every few months.



mary gunheim // photography



it stared at me, called to me, tempted me like some kind of gray, plastic siren.



The rest of us had to find our own ways of passing the time. For Melinda, it was knitting. For Arthur, it was tabloid magazines. For me, it had always been the button. The button sat below my teller station. That was the hardest part of going to work every day: the button. It stared at me, called to me, tempted me like some kind of gray, plastic siren. It was the “robbery-in-progress” button. I stood there as it mocked me day after day, daring me to press it. Maybe it was because it knew I never could. We hadn’t had even a robbery attempt since management installed bullet-proof glass all over the building four years ago, two years before I got here. No one in his right mind would rob this place now. That’s why the most exciting times of Kathryn’s year are putting up pumpkin and snowflake decorations. Know what’s even sadder? Those are probably the most exciting times of my year too.

There’s no excitement dealing in banking, even though we handle transactions that add up to millions of dollars every year. Money loses all meaning when you’re a bank teller or a millionaire. I’m the former, although I deal with members of

the latter from time to time. Anything you have to deal with all day loses any allure it once had. Like when you work at McDonald’s or any fast food joint. You’ll never want a burger again. All of that green paper might as well have been green leaves. It was worthless to me. I couldn’t touch it—not really, at least. I was just a middleman. I was just passing the buck. Green leaves... The seasons are funny. The whole death and rebirth thing. Everything is new, fresh, and green in Spring; old, rotten, and gray in Winter. Then it starts over. Like reincarnation. Mother Nature’s a Hindu. Makes sense, I guess.

Reincarnation would be nice. Fair, at the very least. Heaven makes no sense to me. Who could possibly deserve eternal happiness? Not nearly as many people as those who think they’re going there. Maybe Mr. Rogers or Mother Teresa. Maybe not even them. What would I be reincarnated as? Probably a fly or something. A lemur if I’m lucky.

I check my computer. Two transactions in two hours. Slow day. Tuesdays are always slow. That’s what I get for dropping out of college junior year. Slow Tuesdays. I didn’t really want to be an accountant

anyway. So much work. At least here I can have a menial, soulless job and still have time to be bored. A luxury I don’t appreciate enough.

But the button inspires sick fantasies in me. The idea of robbing the bank excites me unlike anything else. There are ways to rob a bank. Give the money meaning again. There are plenty of ways, for someone with enough guts. Or with nothing to lose. I find a small bank, much like my own. I go into the drive-thru lane—the 2nd one. The one farther from the building. The one with the pneumatic tube. I’m wearing sunglasses and sporting a beard. It’s not very full, but it’ll do. I bought the car from a junkyard. It barely runs, but it’ll do. I stole a license plate from a random car I found at the Wal-Mart parking lot. The teller half-heartedly greets me and sends me the tube. Here’s my chance. I put plastic explosives into the tube. The teller isn’t paying attention. I set the timer perfectly—I’ve tested it a thousand times. I send the tube back to the teller and drive forward 15 feet. The bomb explodes. BOOM! There is a gaping hole in the side of the bank. No one saw it coming.

“

the money is counted. so
much green. it's a rebirth.

”

Panic ensues. The tellers are all injured or dead. The manager is out to lunch. I have a partner inside who is filling out a loan application with the assistant manager. He shoots her the second the bomb goes off and takes her keys. He opens the vault and grabs as much as he can in 30 seconds. He runs through the hole in the building and into the getaway car. The whole ordeal takes about 60 seconds.

We drive off and ditch the car in a stranger's driveway, then run to my partner's apartment. We run in and shave off our beards and give each other buzz cuts—just in case any of the video cameras got a good look at us. No one saw us, I'm sure of it. No one pressed the button. No one had the chance. The button lives for moments like that. I've beaten it. Beaten the button. It's a good feeling.

The money is counted. So much green. It's a rebirth. We're two Falls who just became Summers—bright, burning, in our prime. Full of green. We split it evenly—\$950,000 each. My partner did well. He says he's going to buy his girlfriend an engagement ring. A big one. I don't

know what I'll do with mine. The thought never occurred to me. I beat the button; the money was just a bonus.

The high is so great, we think we'll never come down from it. The sound of sirens in the distance brings us down instantly. They're not heading in our direction. We're still sweating nonetheless. Sweating bullets. The high returns, although diminished slightly.

The robbery makes the news that night. Four people dead, two injured badly. $\$1,900,000 \div 6 \text{ people} = \$316,667$ per person. That's how much each life was worth, approximately. I have a sinking feeling in my stomach. My partner says he has to go to the bathroom. I hear sobs coming from down the hall. I want to cry, but I can't. Still riding the high, to some degree. Nothing's real yet.

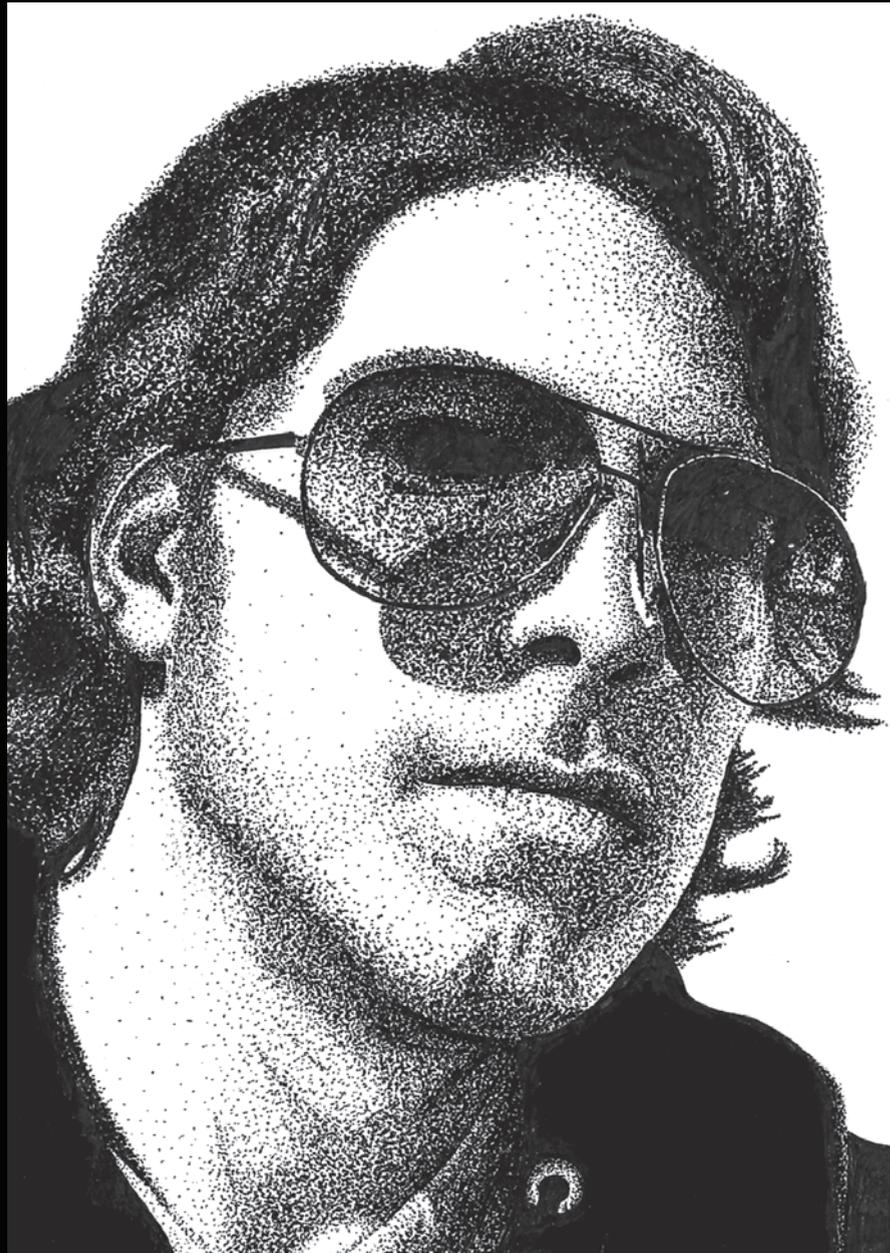
Then, all of a sudden, it's real. The money's worthless again. It means nothing. Scratch that—it means six lives. Scratch that—it means eight lives. I can no longer hear sobs. I hear running water instead. My partner slashes his wrist in the bathtub. I find him, but it's too late. Seven down. I'm all that's left. It's beyond real.

I write out a confession. I apologize. To my mom and dad first, for disappointing them. To the victims of the robbery, for taking their lives. To my partner's girlfriend, for getting him to ruin his life with me. To the world, for wasting its time. And finally to God, just in case. Then I blow my brains out. My winter is over. I do not return. Not even as a fly. No Spring for me.

“I'd like to deposit this check, please.” I snap out of my daydream. My finger has wandered dangerously close to the button, and it jerks back when my eyes open. Reflex. I see a young kid standing in front of the glass, no older than 14. He hands me his paycheck—it's from the local paper. Must be a paperboy. He looks anxious; this must be his first one. A spring chicken.

I take his check and deposit it in the account he opened a week ago with his mother. There's about \$100 in there now. The boy goes on his way with the deposit receipt stuffed securely in his pocket. Enjoy yourself, spring chicken; you can turn into a fall chicken without even realizing it.

Three transactions in three hours. A slow Tuesday, for sure. 🐔



anthony casazza // pen on paper

ir/re-placeable

illustrious woods and sky. local stone built Tall and Wide.

Brass, Sophisticated Mahogany, Brass. Silk. Robust Fireplace, Marble, Leather and Imported Treasures, Dormant Silver, Confident Glass, Lead.—maintained by weathered—hands. Bear—Rug. Taxidermy. Taxidermy. Taxidermy.

I lay in a box. Cold to the touch, brand new.

Ty Coon pinches me to attention, clutches me in—hand. Duns me to the dark.

Smack, [dust], clicks and clanks—this happens often.

Ty Coon's phone rings, it's business—again. Enabled, but abandoned.

Green supersedes green.

Ty Coon Jr. wants to play, needs his daddy. Enabled, but abandoned.

little, clumsy hands, befuddled. Eager eyes peruse me.

BOOM.

brain and blood routine. Freckles—these are new.

stampedes in a tremble. scattered and distressed; Freckles, Freckles, Freckles.

shrilling guilty, repenting shrills. cacophonous—guttural. unruly tears. red-hands. bear-hug.

I am successful—this happens often.

crying. crying. crying: mourning—hands over sodden eyes. cut flowers. lead, confident glass,

silver, marble. lowly pulpit. Brass, Sophisticated Mahogany—

local stone built tall and wide. illustrious Woods and Sky.

if you consider

if you consider that we spend a third of our day
 sleeping, and another third working [well for
 five-sevenths of the week anyway] and a
 couple more hours eating plus commuting
 committing vomiting reading
 whitman laotse and blake and watching our
 phillies [you took me to my first if you remember]
 oh and I learned to drive and bought my first
 car and rented my first apartment and had
 sex and figured it out all by myself [well not quite by
 myself] and oh my god twenty years go by so
 fast I haven't really missed you at all,
 Dad.

little black book

Her name was scratched into my bed
Tayra
Red and cracked and slanted left-down-right
Up until this point I had always feared
Man—
Like God felt when He made Adam—
And I questioned how I had gotten there.

Was it John who called me from my home by night?
Or Andrew who found me in the rain
And walked me to the church?
Or was it Kyle who tried so hard to make me tick,
Or Doug who gave me that endless car ride?

Or maybe it was Ralph, who made me remember how it felt
To belong...

Or Eric, who would have kissed me in an instant if he hadn't gone off to war?
What if it was Seth? Or Will? Or Jarrod? Or Jake? Or Pat? Or Nick?

Either way, I'm lying here smiling because it was Chris who introduced us:
Tayra and me.
And all she brought me was two hours of stillness and flies.



martha sweigart // photography

i feel differently about my neighbors

I feel differently about my neighbors since they shot their dog. My father, an insomniac, had been in the kitchen one August night, standing in the dark to conserve electricity and looking out the window at the moon. "Wake up," he called up the stairs to my mother, "I think the Harrys shot their dog!"

"Huh?" she said. "You're kidding." We all got up and hid behind one another in the unlit kitchen. The Harrys' kitchen door was directly across the shared driveway from our kitchen door. We saw the oldest son put his gun down in the sink and slam both hands, twice, on the kitchen counter. "What are they going to do with the body?" my mother demanded. "Jesus Christ, it's the hottest week of the year!" At about dawn, after the rest of us had gone back to bed, my father saw the oldest son and his younger brother double-sack the dog with Hefty heavy-duty commercial-grade garbage bags [my father managed to note both the brand of the bag and the



weight of the plastic] and drag it between their garden shed and ours. "Good thing that shed is made out of the best pressure-treated fungicidal lumber money can buy," my father said. But it was obvious that all he could think about was contaminated wood.

Now that the Harrys had shot their dog, it seemed he regretted having bought a property with both a shared driveway and a backyard that joined into theirs, sans fences. But for the past fifteen years we had lived, side by side with the Harrys, a life which miraculously did not include the Harrys much at all. They were shy people, and they would usually smile and say good morning or, if we were out shoveling the shared driveway, some appropriate remark about the snow, but that was the extent of their impact on our lives.

Mr. Harry didn't say anything at all, and in fact I don't think I heard him speak once in fifteen years. The most we would ever know about him at any given time was his profession, judging by the vehicle he was driving. When he was a maintenance worker, he drove a truck full of tools. When he was a plumber, he drove a commercial van with

the name of the plumbing service printed on the side, and my father would complain about the amount of space it took up in our shared driveway. "Can't even get out of my car like a normal human being," he would announce to my mother as he squeezed past the van's giant mirror. My mother would be in agonies, her hands in the air as she tried to catch my father's words before they passed through the Harrys' always-open kitchen window. She would whisper ferociously, "They're good neighbors, *please don't piss them off with your griping*. Park in the street. *Park in the goddamn street.*" Then Mr. Harry became a cabbie, and my father stopped complaining. But this was before they shot their dog, when taking up too much space in a shared driveway was cause for justifiable concern.

"We are," my mother often intoned, "lucky to have the Harrys. We could, for instance, be stuck living next to That Guy Across the Street With OCD." My brother and I, if we are bored, watch That Guy out of our large picture window, because he, unknowingly, is a provider of amusement rivaling any of those exposés on alcoholism or hoarding you find on daytime TV. He trims his bushes with tiny

manicure scissors, and he wipes his car down with fluffy Egyptian cotton towels after it rains. "Ha," we say, "Look what That Guy is doing now!" One morning, we watched him spend hours arranging three small clay flowerpots on the wall running parallel to his garden. At lunchtime, he drove away and returned with a woman who appeared to be his mother. She also had varied and conflicting opinions on how the flower pots should be juxtaposed just so against the rustic stone wall and bordering shrubbery. When finally a decision was reached, and That Guy had gone back inside, exhausted, a kid on a skateboard, flying down the road in the dark, did a grind on the garden wall and knocked one of the three flowerpots to the driveway in a carnage of terra cotta. The next day, the two remaining flower pots had been removed, but for the following week That Guy could be seen endlessly sweeping the spot where the broken pieces had been. Like Lady Macbeth washing and re-washing the blood from her hands, he swept until the bristles of his nylon push broom were splayed and worn. "Imagine," said my mother, "Living next to someone like that." But this was before the Harrys shot their dog.

All afternoon, my mother lingered in the kitchen, her fingers discreetly parting the curtains every few minutes. But the garbage bag between our sheds remained, even as our wilting gardens and the heat waves rising off the hoods of our cars suggested a climate unkind to the unliving. In the late afternoon, the Harrys' oldest daughter, who was married, dropped by with her two children. "Oh my god," my mother said. "The Harrys' grandchildren are here. They're playing in the backyard."

"You're shitting me," said my father. "They let the kids play outside with the dead dog?"

"I guess it's okay," said my mother. "The oldest Harry son is out there supervising."

"Supervising?" said my father. "What makes you think he's not going to shoot them too?"

The oldest Harry son is about 25, and he has lived next door to us for the majority of his life, but we don't know his name. Besides Mr. Harry, he is the shyest of all the Harrys. The two of them have the same perpetually

somber countenance. They could be pallbearers. We don't know Mr. Harry's name, either. His wife told my parents once or twice, but they forgot.

The younger son has what you would kindly or not so kindly refer to as "problems." We don't know what these problems are, just that he has them. The middle daughter we know is named Jennifer, because even though she is five years older than me, she played with me a few times as a child. I have only a couple memories of her. One, of us sitting on my swings eating ice-cream-truck water-ice and her accidentally swinging into me and knocking my water-ice to the dirt. She was sorry, but not overly sorry. Another time, we went trick-or-treating together. She was a cat, and I was a cowgirl with a trick Indian arrow impaling my forehead, possibly my favorite costume out of an otherwise bland succession of witches and princesses. But Jennifer took Halloween far too seriously. No talking, just steady walking up one block, down the next. I thought at the time that it was because cats don't talk, and she was staying in character, but

I was probably crediting her for more dramatic flair than she possessed. Now she is a member of some profession which requires scrubs but no college degree, which is all that I can detect from having seen her walk up our shared driveway in a high school graduation gown one day, and back down the driveway in nurse's gear a month or so later. Receptionist at a dentist's office? we guessed. The girl who takes your pet in the back to be weighed before you see the veterinarian?

Definitely the dentist's office, we decided after the Harrys shot their dog.

My mother remarked, "I wonder if the Harrys know that we know."

"They fired three shots in the middle of the night," said my father. "They weren't exactly secretive about it."

"But whatever the case, I'm sure Mrs. Harry didn't have anything to do with it," said my mother. "She's the nicest person living in that house over there." True, when we'd had deaths in the family and when my brother had

been born, Mrs. Harry had sent over baskets of assorted candies and delicacies, some of it kind of expensive. She had never actually hand-delivered the baskets, but she had packaged them up, taken them to the post office, and mailed them to us. She, unlike her husband and her children who take after their father, is pleasant and smiles a lot. Maybe if she hadn't married Mr. Harry, she would have turned out to be a different person entirely. But now it seems that she has been caught up in the trap of silence, and all she does is stare out of her kitchen window at the swingsets and Subarus of what must be a very narrow world.

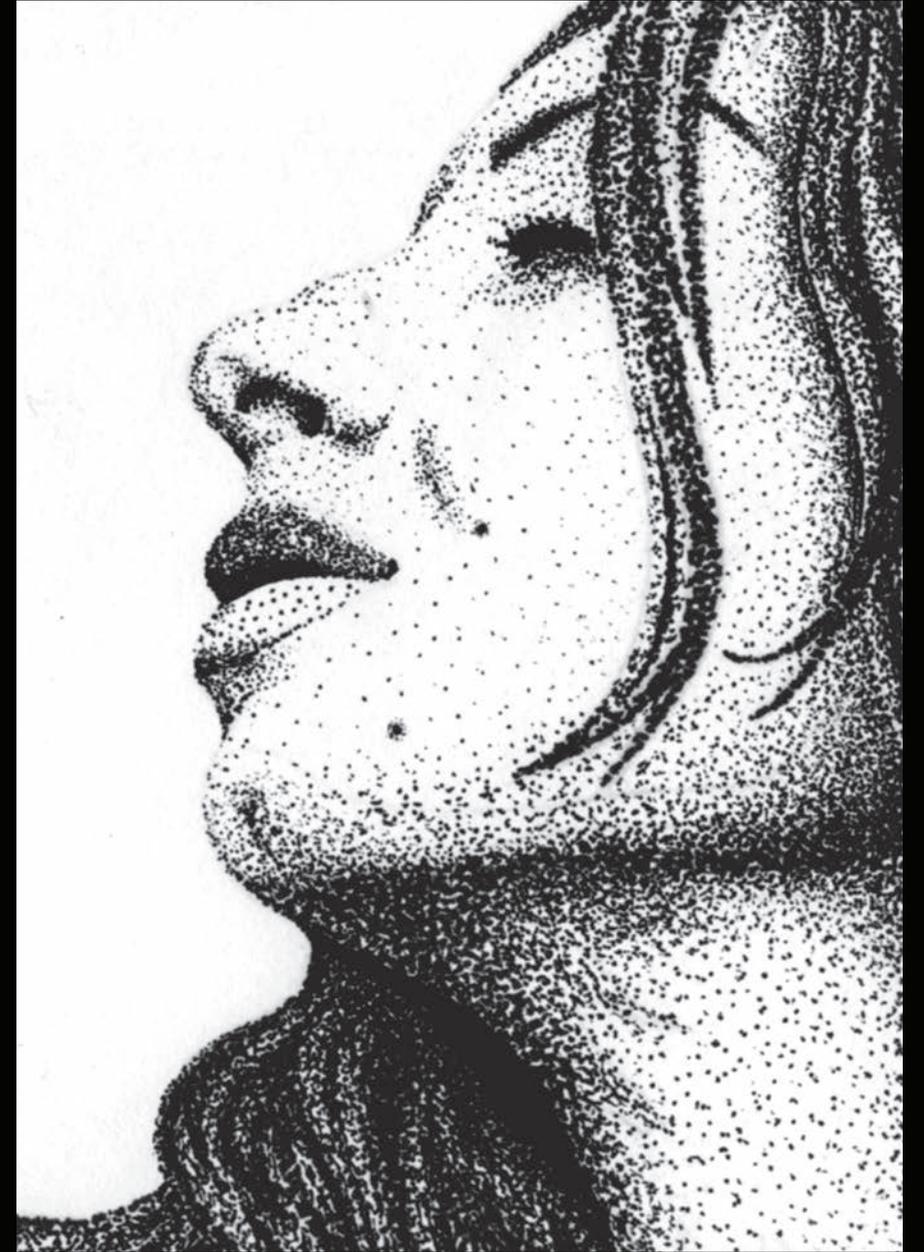
The next day right before dawn, my father woke up to see if the Harrys intended to covertly bury the body. "They better," he declared. "They better start shoveling like they goddamn mean it." His timing was right, because the two brothers, the one with problems and the one whose name we don't know, were outside in the semi-darkness carrying the bundle to the trunk of Mr. Harry's cab. They got into the cab and drove away,

and several hours later, just as my father was leaving for work, they came back. "I guess it's that simple," said my mother. "Here one day, gone the next. It could have just as easily been a human being in that bag."

Where, we wondered, had the Harrys dropped the body? There is a large area of fairly remote woods and marshland near the Philadelphia Airport and this, we speculated, was where they'd made the dump. We pictured them stepping into waist-high rubber waders; we pictured them shouldering the bundle, wincing a little under the weight of it. We imagined them moving stealthily like marines through the dark, slapping mosquitos to small deaths and trampling the undergrowth. They held low-hanging branches aside for one another, watching anxiously for the sun. At last, they parted the leaves and slipped their dog silently into the swamp. 🐾

la petite mort

help; i feel
 like death
 is forcing its tongue down my throat
 dismantling
 my reserve—i give in.
 there are worse things than
 slowly losing breath
 to black
 little gasps
 of disbelief
 a mouth, the teeth
 against
 a throat
 can't be real
 the damaging
 intercourse
 of mind and body
 mere surface area
 for play.
 it's all a thought; the fault
 [he says]
 is yours.



patricia ramirez // pen on paper

mother

Born naïve as everyone. Nurtured by a war-vet and only-child.
 Sisters with hair-pieces draped over mannequin-heads,
 taping line divides in shared rooms, a brother with a sexy car.
 Painted the bathroom black. Rebelled against God.
 Fuck That.
 Fuck Nuns.
 Fuck War.
 The Purple Heart stomped the house where you played—you were in the way.
 JFK, MLK, RFK shot dead, the whites on TV.
 “I wish you all were chickens, because chickens you can eat.”
 Iwo Jima zipped him up and rusted shut.
 A job and city came and went. Pictures of spirit and youth boxed in the attic.
 First marriage done and gone.
 A job and city, came back.
 Second marriage and children. A reason to take extra breaths,
 smile for the pictures, display them on the mantel
 A career and city you left. Little boys needed love and opportunity.
 Second sunk it all in dirt, hid it in the shade where the crocus only seeds.
 He came back.
 He left.
 You gave and give.
 It's you that mends: no nanny, no maid, no magic.
 And still you stay and laugh.
 You fed, you love, you feed.
 Pre, Elementary, Middle, High schools, a College squeeze.
 Money spent and wasted, beds in new addresses never cold.
 And we are growing old, yearning to create our place.



sean ahern // photography

Finding what's unique.
 In the wingback chair you rest, the
 garden that you tend—
 the other side is where you've found
 your light;
 The hill is just a means.
 We come back.
 We leave.
 You gave and give.

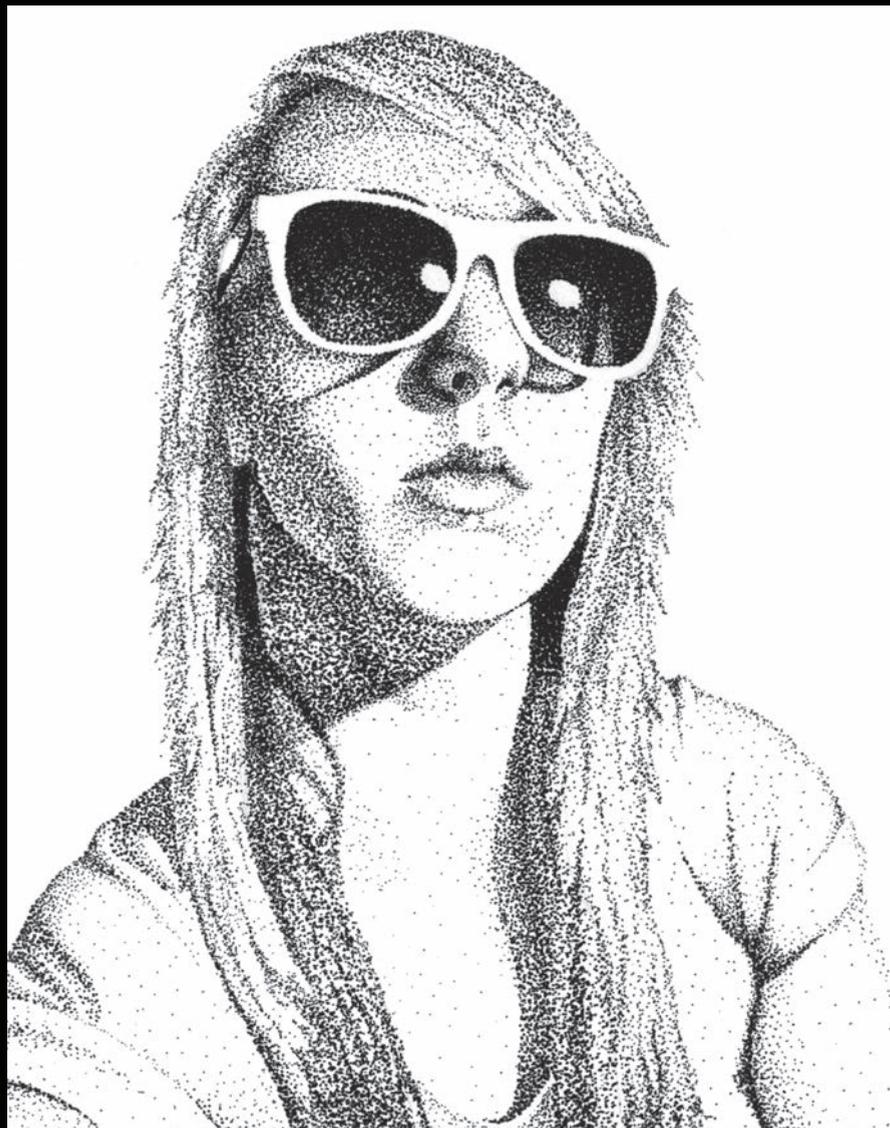


hostel bus stop

Every day I walk
to the hostile bus stop.
The uncouth sidewalk
scuffs my shoes
and trips my feet.
I don't mind,
I keep walking.
Jagged shrubbery
tugs at my pants.
Intrusive trees
listen to my thoughts.
I keep my head down
And look for coins.
Last week's newspapers
wrestle the walls
and nearby fences.
The hot dog cart guy
is kind, the franks—
they're all right.
A dirty mattress
is insulation this winter,
but gone in the spring.
The bus is here—
I've got to leave
the hostel bus stop.

conversations

window blinds [closed]
always carpets and windowsills
dashboards and front lawns too
sometimes Valley Forge Park in all its wondrous beauty
bookshelves and lamps
mostly though, my hands
why not your face?



martha sweigart // pen on paper

funny how that works out

I. I felt like I was robbing them blind of their youth. Everyone in the room was younger than I. Well, everyone except for you. Somehow, you managed to slip through the academic wormhole and weasel your way into getting an extra year of school, even though you are a few months older than I am. Way to go, stupid. But it didn't matter too much to either of us; I saw something in you—you made me laugh with your simple, awkward smile. You didn't care that I was already in college and more accomplished than you and sometimes a complete snob. It was okay. With you, I could be myself... within reason.

So we managed to get along. And here we were, a few months later, engrossed in the fervent splendor of the most poignant evening of your life to date. I had already lived it once, on my own terms, and while the thought of relishing in the opulence of your evening seemed quite attractive, I still couldn't separate myself from my own mental preoccupations.

My sister hated me for being with you. My mom couldn't stand you, because she thought I could do better. My dad said nothing; he kept his thoughts to himself. But it took too long for me to come to terms with my mother's concerns, and to see that she was right.

I didn't get to wear a new dress; the gorgeous cream and rosy pink lace knee-length Betsey Johnson dress was four hundred dollars too expensive. I felt like a princess in it. But here I sat with you, in the dress I had worn once before, feeling half like a princess and half like an inward advertisement with my mother's voice, demanding that I "REUSE! RECYCLE!" the dress.

II. I still remember the exact moment I realized everything. You know exactly what I mean, don't you? After all, you knew, in your heart, that you felt the same, didn't you?

I find it increasingly difficult to restrain the flood of tears welling up in my eyes and to fight back the burning guilt in my cheeks as I remember those few moments of completely silent shock. Raw, purely unadulterated understanding between us. Swallowing a sharp knot of pride is not something I could have prepared myself for.

I remember the afternoon like no other. It was this same time of year, when everything in nature lies on the cusp of ripeness and maturity. That afternoon was exceptionally brisk. The monochromatic leaves, a blend of gold, crimson, and warm sienna, swirled up from the ground in the cold, clean breeze.

Situated behind the steel countertop in a warmer, cozier setting, I, the critical visual learner, took note of every contemplated, precise movement you made. You had this incomparable, swift grace as you took care in teaching me everything. Teaching me how to hold everything in my hands, and combine my efforts passionately to create something satisfying.

But I stuttered and fumbled, and I lacked the appropriate grace necessary. Worst of all, your impatience was evident, as you squinted to deflect the penetrating sunlight, heaved a great sigh, and bit your bottom lip until blood rushed to the site, turning it an almost offensive shade.

The demitasse cup slid off the counter, making a sweet tinkling noise before it hit the tile floor and shattered into a million pieces.

Tap, tap, tap. Your brown Pumas rapped on the rubber mat, bursting with repressed impatience at my mistake. Practice makes better.

III. I sat upstairs, quietly observing the other people in the room, whose faces were highlighted by the frosted glass windows and door. I couldn't see much, as I was trying to get through my pile of Spanish homework, but from what I could detect, there were a few business people, two friends who had met to catch up before the holidays, and then there was me. Sitting on the rightmost corner of the worn leather couch, I felt so disconnected from everyone in the room. I left my phone on the

coffee table next to my Americano, opting to engross myself in *Texto y vida: Introducción a la literatura española* and the week's respective homework packet.

It was right after Thanksgiving, and I was still completely drained from the family festivities that had taken place. Spanish homework was the furthest thing from my mind, and the longer I sat, the quicker I just wanted to pack up and leave. I had a little bit of time to relax before I had to head off to work, so I unclamped myself from the couch's edge, settled back, and took a long sip of my coffee. Putting the paper cup back down on the table, I resumed my former position, this time, more comfortably.

It took me a good fifteen seconds to detach myself from the undeniable bliss of *Lazarillo de Tormes* and recognize his presence. His long legs carried him swiftly up the short staircase, and he plopped down next to me, but far away enough for comfort.

"Hey, what brings you up here? How'd you know I was here?" I asked him, noting that he was still in his work clothing. "I didn't," he replied, setting

his lunch and ice water down on the coffee table. I couldn't tell if he was being honest; he didn't look me in the eye. "But if I am distracting you, please..."

"Oh, no, it's really fine. I hate doing Spanish homework over break. I can take a few minutes to chat," I answered, closing *Texto y vida* for what would be the last time that day. "So, how was your Thanksgiving?"

He relayed the details, and then sat back, started eating, and let me do the talking. Before I knew it, a half hour had almost passed. I was running low on time but high on hope. Things seemed to be coming back together again. Not quite full circle, but back into one piece. Things would never be the same, but that's just something I'm preparing to wrestle with for a long time.

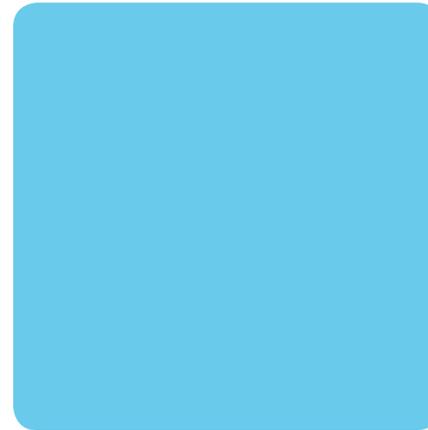
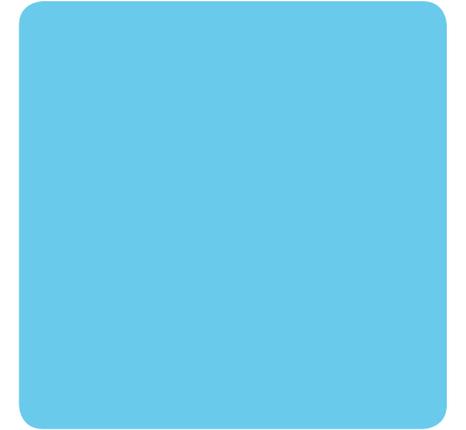
"I hate to cut this short, but I have to head to work now, parking is going to be a killer today," I bemoaned, packing my homework away and catching sight of his brown Pumas. Silly, I know, they're just shoes. But not just any shoes. They'd become so tattered and worn since I saw them last. Funny how that works out. 🐦

the de-beautification of lenny

He wasn't allowed to keep his moustache. As if he were a child being scolded for sticking his tongue in the glue bottle during art class, he simply could not. He pleaded his point to his wife, offering to dye the tattered gray hairs a distinguished black, the natural color of in his youth. She said no again. So he wasn't going to keep his moustache.

The next morning, after a restless sleep on rocky pillows and punching mattress springs, he woke up. His alarm choked on its beeping sound, as tired and worn as the man it was supposed to wake each day. His wife was still asleep; he had set his alarm fifteen minutes early that day. He rose, stiff and starchy like the uniform shirts he had to wear every day, pressed and hanging in the closet.

His cardboard body scuffled to the bathroom. He slid his fingers along the frayed peach, pear, and apple



“

a moustache meant **respect,**
wisdom, and **confidence**

”

wallpaper to flick on the light switch. The flattened fruit was sprawled across a creamy pink color, like the skin of a fetal pig during a dissection in anatomy class. Unpleasant.

Barefoot, he let the dirt and hairs on the tiles squeeze between his cramped toes. No one had cleaned in a while. The tan floor seemed to live beneath a shadow of debris. He didn't mind it much anymore. Hovering over the frozen tiles, he longed for socks or slippers, but not until he completed the task at hand.

Facing the mirror, his reflection was greasy and smeared. They hadn't cleaned the glass in a while, either. Toothpaste, watermarks, and spit stains drowned his reflection. His moustache, streaked across his mirrored face, seemed to stand in opposition to the decision being made. If it had the strength and ability to move his lips, it would have begged for its life.

He readied the razor and shaving cream, preparing but still unsure of his next movements. Rinsing his face with the dripping water, objection crept in. This moustache, that his

wife now found ridiculous, was the one remaining symbol of his vitality. A moustache meant respect, wisdom, and confidence, at least it did when he was younger.

The handsome man standing at the oak bar with the heavy drink and the perfect woman, smiling, oozing sex and self-assurance, that was him. The dark, midnight moustache complimented his tan, unlined skin. Not a wrinkle on his forehead, which was covered by thick, wavy hair. The perfect reflection.

Back in front of the mirror, the middle-aged man cocked his head and widened his myopic eyes to see what was really in front of him. Age. Time. Scraggly old facial hair clogging up his face like a dirty wad of toilet paper in a seedy bar's bathroom. In fact, that hair was like the graffiti on the bathroom stall, so graphic and obnoxious that it hid the color of the door beneath it.

Suddenly, the shaving cream sprang up, the razor tightened in his hand, wide strokes dragged against his face. It was done. The 'stache was gone. He rinsed it once more and patted his skin dry. His face seemed almost empty,

a mattress without its sheets and coverings, but still a bed nonetheless. After a moment of over-dramatic smiling, frowning, and staring, he finally saw his face. "Sharp," he thought to himself in surprise, suddenly mesmerized by the fresh cheeks of a growing boy with the entire world stacked in front of his hairless face. He sauntered back into the bedroom where his wife was waking, turning off the alarm from her side of the bed. He strolled around the room casually but shook slightly, unsure of his new identity, without a mask, naked.

His wife looked up from the clock and glanced knowingly at her husband's face. "Now, isn't that better?" 🗨️

love according to english majors

We are not so different. We use short sentences to communicate mute points. Our eyes provide punctuation where statements seem to trail. When you tell me that you love me and your blue eyes break mine, I know there is not a period, but a comma followed by a condition. And I am ok with that. Because when I tell you I love you, there is nothing more than a question mark. But you are answering my question every day. So I have faith that maybe, some day, we can state simply and powerfully, "I love you. Period."

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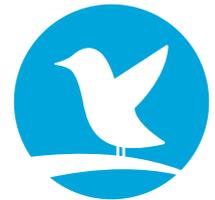
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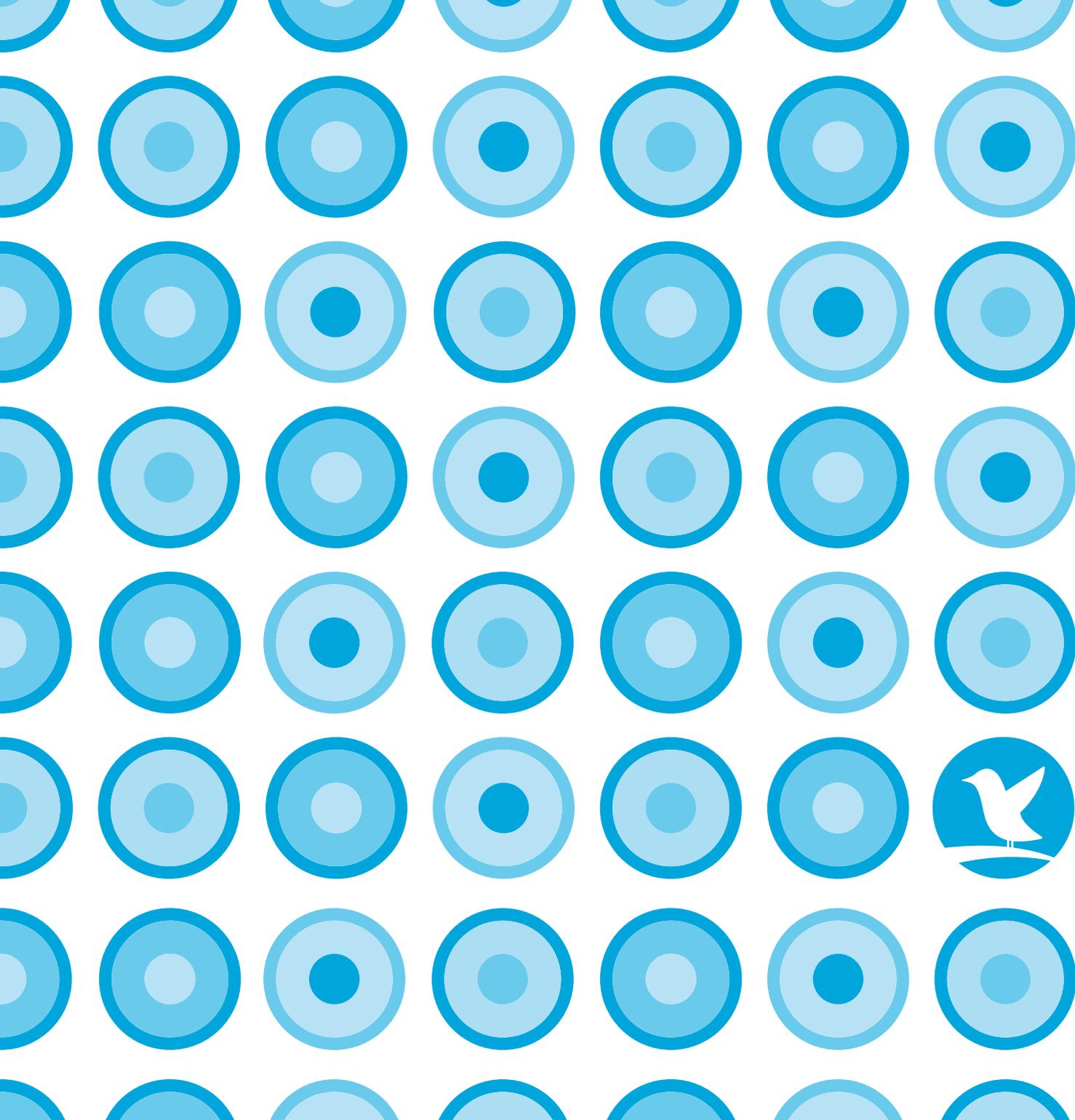
EDITOR shannon fandler
GRAPHIC DESIGNER mary gunheim

COPY EDITORS brittany ryan
katherine parks

ADVISOR dr. seth frechie

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