



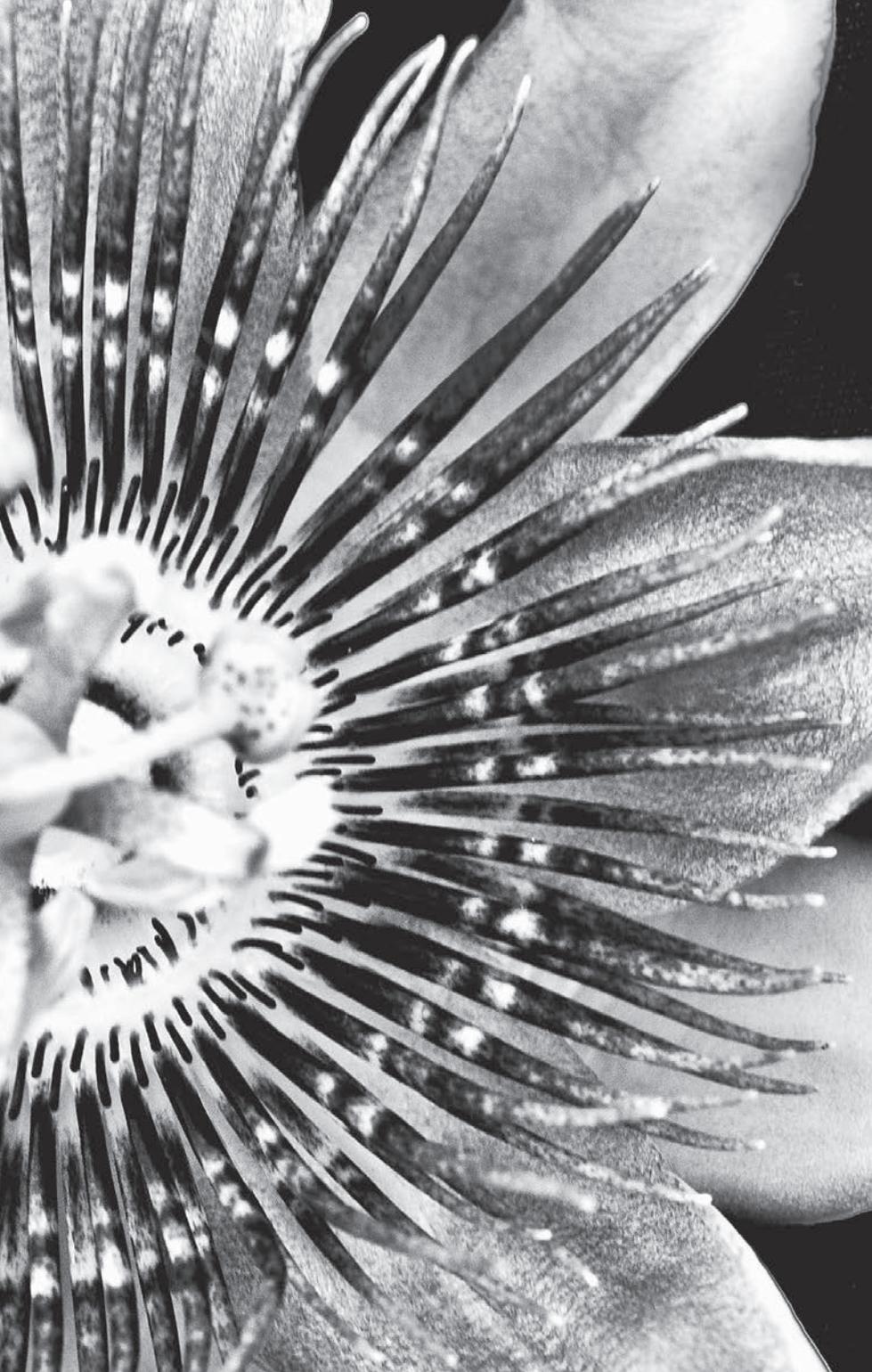
WOODCREST

for words // unable to speak // reticent // unable to understand or comply // not knowing how to act or what to do // tongue-tied // a moment in time when pain or grief is experienced // misfortune of losing a job // bewilderment // a point of separation from those you love // traumatized // recognizing things have changed // devoid of emotion // restrained // guilt turns to loneliness, then // disbelief, and finally numbness // voiceless //

{at a loss}

cover image:
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■ rebecca pennock
photography

Seasons

The arrival of spring welcomes all ready memories,
and we tend them, render them, in flowers and bone.
And apricot crayons shape pictures of women,
apprehensions and tensions locked tightly at home.

And summer sweats out most motivation.
Apathy perseveres through the haze.
With questioning memories, answering mentions,
a kindled desire for something called more.

But autumn teaches you much more severely,
with rickets, cracking, and new shades of gray.
So retreat amongst your beautiful memories
as body fatigues with evident age.

And winter will leave you a little bit slower,
while knowledge disappears from your eye.
And when memories don't want to come see you,
erasing them is the mind's only reply.

And finally we lie with nothing we've gained,
but wrinkles, sorrow, confusion, and pain.

Pieces

You are the red balloon I let go of after my birthday party
and watched until my eyes lost you in the clouds.
I hang on that string, the memory of what was beautiful.

We were once an exquisite and lovely force.
We always won the battles; we could do anything we wanted.
Incomparably intertwined, we were not seaweed in the ocean floating,
nor a cloudy afternoon that might alter our brilliant romance.

It is easy to adore you, with your passionate ways and broken parts.
But like the fall leaves, our love fled as quickly as the tide.
Yes, it was the wind and the leaves that took our love
and soon all that was left was the winter
slush and the absent passenger seat.

I look at you differently now, without the longing
and aching. I still remember how ripe it was.

But it's raw now,
a sore that burns in sunlight.
You are still scattered and skipping
like a centipede in the city and I
am still the same.

I pick up the shattered pieces
where we picnicked in the park.
If you dig long enough, you can find our romance
like a precious fossil.
I take my fossils home and I put them in a box.

I put you on a shelf.
I throw away what is unimportant.
I do not care for much, and I have thrown away
most of what we owned.
The red balloon string keeps the box together,
intact.

It is not that I wonder what you will become,
I just wonder where all this has taken you
and whether you will ever be a different someone.





The Wilting Orchid

The vivid magenta fades away, and the leaves wilt and begin to face in. It was given birth in the month of May, surrounded by others, not even one twin. As the chill grows near and the wind moves along,

The orchid lay down at the end of its song. She once was so beautiful; to us she still is. Her hair has turned from deep chocolate to gray,

cheeks now just wrinkle as she leans in for a kiss. She prays every night hoping to stay. The beautiful yet wilting orchid catches her eye, and suddenly she's not so scared to die.

■ courtney mcgann
photography

4 April

December passed me over.
With not even a hiccup.
And January, with nothing new, resolved
a quiet love.
And February elevated a tiny nervous fiber,
while March captured a smile
but April was no kinder.
I want to recede.
I want to recede.
I want to recede into nothing.
Riding boots and white dresses
freckled with red flowers,
and red lipstick
that she didn't really need,
but wore to ensure
her teeth looked whiter,
so when she pulled the trigger
on her shotgun smile
every available man available
would be fucking blown away.
All at once,
let it come.

All at once,
have it end.
All at once,
and at once,
it is done.
But Monday passed without a whisper,
and Tuesday offered nothing better.
Wednesday remained just the same,
and Thursday it began to rain.
Friday came, Friday went.
But she was still magnificent.
The time is now.
The time is now.
Sit with me as it all falls down.
We'll watch and wonder how
the time has washed from then to now.
And fearing not the waters cold,
as murkiness engulfs my soul,
I will myself to take a breath,
embrace thin ice and
welcome death.

Art Major Syndrome

Warning: Before you pick up that pencil, remember that you'll enjoy it. You'll find the freedom and inspiration addicting; it will become your high.

The world will see you in a different light. Society will see you as different. They'll expect you to stand out, to be creative and unique. You will fulfill their stereotypes, but not live up to their expectations; you can't be an artist twenty-four-seven. It gets tiring. But just as the world sees you differently, you'll see the world differently as well. You'll no longer see it through your eyes, but through a sketchbook. Reality will be converted into shapes, colors, shadows, lines, brush strokes, doodles . . . everything but what it truly is.

You won't be able to stop; the ink will take control of you. At first, you'll make a few doodles on a napkin or the corner of your notebook. They won't be developed—just small sketches—but they will get bigger and more elaborate. Soon, the pages of your notebooks will be unrecognizable. Biology notes will be overwhelmed by the imaginary characters spilling from the sketchbook in your head. Every line that escapes your pencil has the potential to be a masterpiece. You're insane if you think you can limit your addiction to the pages of your sketchbook. It will spread to your arms, your jeans, and any untouched piece of scrap paper you can find. Your pen will dance across restaurant placemats, leaving a graceful

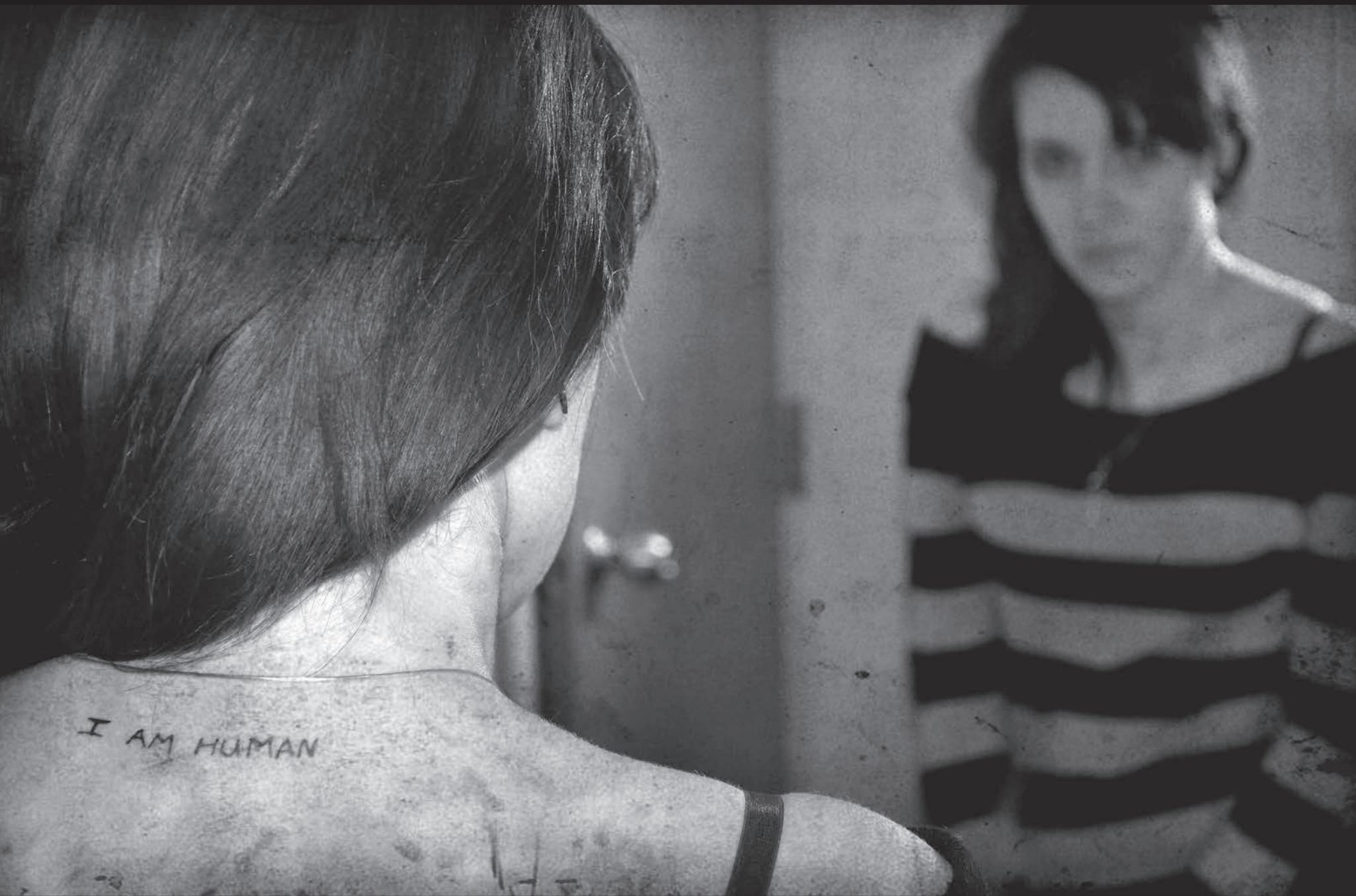
ink stain in its wake. Blank pages will haunt you. You'll want to fill them with your overflowing imagination, have to fill them, with the characters breaking loose from your brain. No Post-It note, business card, or solid object capable of holding ink will be safe. No page or place will escape your mark.

Be prepared. You'll lie to yourself to justify spending two weeks' pay on a set of pastels. New brushes instead of gas. Sketchbooks instead of rent. Paints instead of food. Your human needs will become second to your art needs. Like a junkie in need of his fix, art will become your lord and master. You'll always carry a sketchbook with you; while on the bus, train, or a plane. You'll lay out your lines, worsening your addiction; one small idea will grow into a 16-hour drawing. Who needs sleep anyway? It's overrated.

You'll spend four years in art school, refining your technique, feeding your bottomless need. You'll be the girl who sits in the back of the classroom drawing on the desk, the boy on the bench carving doodles into wood. It's all-consuming. Your homework and papers will be late, grades will slip, your attention will spiral downwards—and what a well-drawn spiral it will be. Clean hands and clean clothes will be a distant memory. You'll be stained with ink, charcoal, paint. You will absolutely hate it, but at the same time, love it, and continually—always and forever, dear Lord—come back for more.



mary jacobs
photography



■ ashley vanacore
photography

woodcrest ■ 2011-2012

Slow Leak

"This better be the last time," I thought feebly as my head slammed against the bedroom mirror. While the glass shattered against my skull, I was glad that I did not have my cartilage pierced because I think the top part of my ear was torn, but I was overreacting at that point. It was a nice mirror too, even though it was from Pier 1. I bought it on sale for \$15.99. It was framed, a deep border of pink flowers floating on a black background. It hung on the wall next to my bureau. The light from the window would shine like a spotlight on my wardrobe, only this was nighttime and there was no light except the dim moonglow that bounced off the cream curtains and was reflected on the now broken glass. The blood flowed freely from the top of my ear or some place over there; I couldn't be sure exactly because my whole head was throbbing.

Like a bobble head doll, I fell to the wooden floor. I always wanted to have carpet in the master bedroom, but my husband didn't like carpet because he said it was girly. Although I insisted on a masculine color like gray, brown, or blue he insisted that wood was more manly and strong. The smell of oak and the look of a forest were favorable to him. Of course, you couldn't smell oak because we had bought the planks from Home Depot, glossy with a plastic urethane. Plus, trees were killed to make the floor, which didn't help nature. Clearly his ideas were twisted from the start. When I thought about that I thought I was never exactly in love with him. I was more in love with the idea of love and an imagined escape from my life.

After I crashed to the floor, I lay there motionless trying to cover my head with my arms. But he was persistent and ran over to me and yanked me up by my arms. He was stronger than I'd have guessed. I hadn't seen his face yet. He grabbed me from behind when I got out of my car in the driveway. Sneaky asshole. He must be a robber, I thought as soon as he grabbed me, but then he sprayed mace in my eyes and hit me and dragged me inside and upstairs. I'm pretty sure I heard a bone in my arm or shoulder crack or snap, but now my whole body ached, I wasn't at all sure what might be broken. The scene wasn't as gory as it could have been, I mean it wasn't like a war movie or a slasher flick or anything, but there did seem to be a lot of blood.

As I was saying, he grabbed my arms and lifted me up until I was standing upright in front of him, his hands grasping my arms tightly. I wobbled because my legs hurt too and my brain was shutting off and everything and I couldn't stand properly. That made him angry, and I thought for Chrissakes, that's your fault, not mine.

"Stand up for god sake! Hold yourself together!" he yelled. The arrogance of the bastard to tell me to hold myself together! If I wasn't so messed up and damaged, I would have cursed him out and . . . well, there's no point in giving threats or playing the should've, could've, would've game, because none of that stuff happened anyway. I didn't curse him out or insult him, mostly because my jaw hurt and like I said, my brain wasn't working effectively because my head just broke the mirror.

I continued to totter feebly on sea legs as he bombarded me with dead end comments and flat insults and my eyes began to droop shut slowly until I felt a swift slap across my face, and then I heard, "Damn it! You keep your fucking eyes open! Are you listening to me?" The nerve! I mean, how could I respond—God knows—so I just continued to sway on my Silly String legs as the curtain fell across my eyes like it was the end of Act 1 and time for intermission.

His voice seemed familiar but my head throbbed so that all I heard was the sound of a guy yelling through a megaphone, disjointed and yappy. Then he hoisted me over his shoulders and attempted to carry me out of the bedroom and along the hallway and down the stairs. I didn't understand the point of taking me up stairs, breaking my fucking skull, and then going back down the stairs, but he was ringleader of this clusterfuck, so I guess it was up to him.

When we were in the bedroom he was looking through things, like a robber, but he didn't take anything; he just kept complaining about how messy everything was. But again I thought, for Chrissakes, what do you expect throwing me into furniture and dragging me across the floor. Be my guest and make a mess why don't you. But I could smell that he was drunk and, in his anger, unsure himself and staggering and banging into things. I focused on my breathing while he tried to balance himself against the wall. I felt like a marionette, a flimsy thing and he was the puppeteer who controlled my movements. I never felt like that before and never want to again. Why didn't he just throw me down the stairs and end it then?

I kept thinking of all the people I ever met, cared about, or screwed trying to figure out who he was. My head suddenly whacked into the banister on the way down the stairs and he

said, "Oh shit," and I thought for a moment he might be apologizing. My head began thumping and I for a split second I thought I was in one of those nightclubs that play techno music where all you hear is the loud, irritating beat of an electronic drum.

I remembered the one time when my father dragged me down a staircase. When I was 13 years old I failed out of 8th grade and had to take summer courses to make high school in the fall. That was my "experimental" phase (drinking, a little weed) and schoolwork really interfered with my blackouts. I hid my bad grades from my parents for months, forging their signatures, getting the mail before they could, etc. So one day I was eating dinner with my family and my dad says, "So, how is school going, girl?"

"Pretty good, Dad," I said nervously, well aware that I wouldn't be going to high school.

Then he goes, "Really? Because I don't think flunking out of school is pretty fucking good." As he was saying this, he clenched his fists, mashed his teeth, narrowed his eyes, and pushed his chair slowly away from the table. "So you've been lying to us for months, you little shit. You think this is a joke? Huh?"

His voice was intense, but not yelling yet, more haunting and angry. I couldn't argue with him, I thought about it of course, but he was right and so furious with me. Normally he screams and throws things and then his tantrum is

over, but this was different. He had always pushed me so hard in school, to succeed in ways that he hadn't in his past. I decided to just go to my room and hope it would blow over.

"Where the fuck do you think you're going?" he growled as I scoot my chair away from the table. I went to run around the table. If I could make it upstairs, I could lock myself in my room and then sneak out the window. It was hardly a genius plan, but I didn't see the options. I dashed out of the kitchen and ran up the stairs, but of course my dad was right on my heels—and before I reached the landing, he was dragging me down step by step. My mother, a huge drinker, just sat in the kitchen and drank in the dark while I screamed and cried and he beat me until it was time to watch *Wheel of Fortune*. Then he went into the living room and I went upstairs, only I didn't lock my door or go out the window or do anything but curl up and lick my wounds.

Needless to say, I went to summer school and kept my grades up from then on, mostly out of fear of getting pummeled again. I always resented him for that night and also my mother for not stopping it and for her drinking too. But I'd take that beating to this one any day. That one was, in a sick and twisted way, for my own good. This one was just cruel. I couldn't understand why anyone would want to kill me. What did I do to him? I'm a slightly decent person. Maybe not the best wife, or

friend, or churchgoer, or employee, but on a scale from 1 to 10 I'd give myself like a 7 and that's pretty good.

Ben, my husband, isn't my biggest fan, but he's not psycho enough to try to kill me. Want to kill me, maybe, but not try and actually do it. Roger, no way. We have a great relationship. If it wasn't for the being married thing, we'd have no problems. And Raoul, I employ him and I doubt he'd turn on the hand that feeds him and sometimes jerks him off. Only now I was being pulled up onto the couch, facedown. I know he didn't realize it, but I couldn't breathe in this position and I started to grunt and then gasp into the corduroy pillow.

"Shut up!" he yelled, but I continued my crusade for oxygen and, after about a minute, I could tell he realized his mistake because apparently he wasn't ready for me to die yet and he quickly and clumsily turned me onto my back. I felt the pain in my shoulder again, sharper—and now I thought it had to be broken because it just swung off the couch and drooped there lifelessly like a wilting flower.

"You're fine," he cooed in my bleeding ear.

I moaned.

"You're fine."

That was a phrase I'd heard all my life, like at home whenever I had a problem and no one ever cared enough to deal with me. When I was about 8 years old, I tried to ride a two-wheel bike by myself. I took my bike—a used one from a friend—out into the road in front of our house. At first, I thought I had it: just like with the training wheels, but a little shakier. Then, out of nowhere, a squirrel. I swear it must have been rabid, because not only did it run out in front of me; it stopped like it was stupid or crazy. I ran it over, which is trauma enough, but then I slid across it as I lost control and fell hard on the pavement. I ran back into my house, covered in my own blood and squirrel blood, crying. I remember wanting someone to wash my cuts, bandage them up, and rock me in their arms, like parents do in the movies. But I was "fine." My dad told me to suck it up and if I bled on the carpet, I'd be licking up blood.

I limped into the kitchen and found my mom zoned out at the table, a whiskey in her hand staring a hole in the placemat.

"It hurts," I cried, pointing to my arm.

She looked empty at me, aloof and uncaring. "You're fine."

My husband, Ben is pretty much the same way: empty. He wasn't at first, but he was never much of a man to begin with. The first time I met Ben, I

was at an A.A. celebration meeting with my mother, congratulating her and others for their "commitment to sobriety." Yeah, right. She was drunk at all the meetings and was only committed to her precious bottle, but she loved to be celebrated for any reason so she was a dedicated member. I was about 21 and miserable, working a lame job answering the phones at a dentist's office.

So, one of the members there, a man about 50 with what appeared to be a thick white toupee, came over to talk to my mom and pat her on the back for living clean. He probably tried to hit on her a few times, but she was so messed up she never caught on. Good thing for this guy; my dad would have killed him. So this white haired man introduced his son to us, 25-year-old Ben Tanser, a nice, single lawyer. Ben was tall, about six-foot, with light thinning hair and the shoulders of a fourteen-year-old girl. He had a nice smile and dark brown eyes that looked haunting against his eggshell skin. I was no ox, but his slender physique made me feel overweight. He smiled a lot while my mom and his dad talked about the miracle of children and keeping clean. Bullshit. Anyway, I talked to Ben for a while and thought he was very nice, even too nice. And that was the end of that. A few weeks later, my mom said she gave my phone number to Whitey to pass along to his son, who said I was "charming." Clearly, Ben wasn't paying attention to the conversation, because I remembered telling him:

1. I wish I were an alcoholic so I wouldn't have to deal with my mother sober.
2. Lawyers are scum who protect the wrong people from going to jail and should be shot in their "fun parts."
3. I work in a dentist office and stole a drill and was thinking of using it against intruders or on myself if my life didn't improve.

Clearly, I wasn't interested in making a good impression on Dear Old Ben. When he called me, he said I was "refreshing," meaning crazy. We dated for like 6 months until he asked me to marry him. I thought he was nice, but that was about it. All our dates were the typical dinner-movie combo. Nothing fun or interesting: bland, like him, but it got me out of the house and beat cereal for supper.

I wasn't used to nice guys either. My dad never showed respect for any woman, except his mother, and all the guys I ever dated were mistakes. First, there was Rob. His real name was Carl, but he was called Rob because he robbed tons of stores and gas stations and got away with it. He was fun, until I realized that he was stealing things from my house too. Then there was Rake. Rake was hot, older and strong. He had tons of tattoos and was in a gang. I didn't know his real name, but he got the name Rake from using his long fingernails when he got into fights with guys. He would drag his nails across their faces or whatever he could get a hold of, like when you rake leaves in the yard. During foreplay, it was a

huge turn on, but when he decided to turn on me, it wasn't so sexy.

A year before I met Ben, I was seeing Sam. Sam had a steady job as a bartender and a motorcycle. He wasn't a fighter, but he had a really bad temper if something set him off. After a year of dating, he told me he had cheated on me, but still wanted to stay together. I told him to fuck himself. Then he tried to run me over with his motorcycle. My parents never cared who I dated, except for Rob because he tried to steal our T.V. and my dad needed to see that Wheel spin. Besides him, they couldn't have cared less. My dad actually liked Rake because Rake was everything my dad wanted to be but wasn't: tough, feared, strong, and in a gang. I dated some other guys too, but none of them meant anything or tried to kill me, so I figure they're not worth mentioning.

So, when goody-goody Ben showed an interest in me, I thought maybe I should try being with a nice guy. Boring, dry, uninspired, passionless, but nice. After dating for 6 months, I still didn't love him and I didn't really like kissing him either because it was like kissing the back of your hand. I wouldn't have sex with him because I figured it would be boring too and awkward, like most of our dates. Then he asked me to marry him, probably so he could finally get in my pants. He isn't as ugly as I'm making out to be, but he was so dull that any attraction I might have had for him never materialized. I wanted to get out of my house so badly, but I told

Ben no; I couldn't commit to him yet, since I was so young and had such a bad job and blah blah blah. Then, one night soon after that, Whitey must have told my mom, who told my dad that Ben proposed to me and I said no. My dad was furious and high. He told me to get the fuck out of his house and stop wasting his money. Either marry Ben or leave. And if I wouldn't marry Ben or leave, he'd beat the shit out of me. I weighed my options carefully in all of three seconds and agreed to marry. I moved in with Ben and married him two weeks later. He was so excited. I still don't know what he saw in me. Maybe he wanted an escape too, from all the nice, normal, boring girls he knew that were just like him.

I still never liked kissing him or talking to him because I lost interest and would stop listening, like you do in Church during the homily. Whenever I was supposed to be listening, my mind wandered elsewhere, always to the dirtiest and most random places. I wouldn't call what we did "making-love" because it was too much of a routine, like doing laundry every Saturday morning. To finish, I would have to think of Mark Wahlberg or that bagger at the supermarket who always winked at me even though he was 16. How lame and sad. Anyway, he made money and we lived in a nice house, small but spacious, with a backyard and a garage, which I never had before. My parents and I had lived in a shit hole semi-detached connected to another fucked up family with problems and addictions. So it was

nice to pretend to be a homeowner, a wife, a woman. Keyword: pretend. After we got married, Ben, who had always given in to my requests, now began demanding that things to be his way, "like the man of the house" he'd say. I hated that. That's why we don't have carpet in our house and why I've had affairs if you can call them that. I don't because I never really felt married, only trapped.

Back on the couch, I ached. It was dark and every time I tried to blink or adjust my eyes to see his face, the mace would burn and my eyes would sting shut. I could hear heavy footsteps across the floor, pacing quickly. I moaned and grunted, "Ughh." Repeated, it became my mantra.

"Oh, God. What now?" he bellowed after every sound I made.

"Ughh." I still couldn't speak. The one side of my head was numb from the hits and I couldn't move my mouth to talk. I had only fainted once in my life and I didn't have the good fortune to do it again. The first and only time I had fainted, I met Roger.

After a few loveless months married to Ben, I wanted to find an excuse to get out of the house. I had quit my job at the dentist's office once I got married, so I could be a good wife. But once I learned how sucky that life was, I talked Ben into letting me get a job. I made it sound like he wanted me to

get a job so he could be proud of me, his wife, for following in his footsteps as a professional, blah, bull, blah. He was excited to find me a job at a neighboring law firm that his worked with. I had an interview with the boss, Richard Strugten, on a very hot summer day.

I had on a very conservative long black skirt with a brown cashmere sweater, as Ben requested. My wardrobe had changed once we got married to that of a Puritan woman ready to burn some witches. So I was sitting in the waiting room of Mr. Strugten's office, staring at his old maid of a secretary, sweating my balls off, and feeling strangely spaced out. I felt weak and light-headed, and when his door opened and he called me into his office, I felt my legs jelly-tumble out from under me.

When I woke up, I was still lying on the floor, with no shirt on, just my black bra, and Mr. Strugten's secretary, and some other man stood over me, fanning me with papers and running cool paper towels across me. When I was more aware, they propped me up against a chair and gave me my shirt back, which was probably more awkward for the secretary than it was for me. My Strugten has apparently left for a meeting, but sitting by my side was a guy I didn't know. He hadn't spoken yet, but he was nice to me. I figured from his attire that he was a Fed-Ex deliveryman. He was tall and thick, not fat or round, but had heavy muscles and full arms, the opposite of Ben.

He had a few tattoos on his arms; I could see the ink under his white shirt. His features were large too. He had a wide, straight nose, big almond eyes, and bulky lips. Maybe close to forty, he still had a full head of thick, tangled (but attractive) dark hair. The age lines in his face were subtle, but added definition to his tanned skin.

When I felt stable enough, we started talking and his voice matched his body. It was deep and heavy, and very sexy. I tried to listen to what he was saying about his job and all, but the sound of his words distracted me, and hearing them come out of those swollen lips, I had no chance. He offered to walk me to my car and always kept his hand around my waist. He was the only man to touch me that way since I married.

"Are you okay to get home?" he asked.

"Yeah," I was trying to think of what to say next.

"Good," he seemed relieved. "Be safe." He turned to walk away.

"Hey," I called. He turned around smiling. "I want to see you again... to thank you."

Men should make the first move, but I didn't have that kind of time to follow those rules; I found him to be that attractive. Plus, I wanted to have an affair with him, so I obviously wasn't concerned with social norms. We exchanged numbers and planned to

meet Thursday night, when Ben had a meeting for work in the next town over.

When I got home, Ben was pissed that I missed the meeting, even though I explained how I was unconscious for most of the time.

"You were fine," he said impatiently. My frown darkened more than usual. He must have noticed because he moved closer to put a hand on my shoulder.

Once Thursday came, I felt eager, a feeling I hadn't for a very long time. Roger, in a Fed-Ex van, pulled up outside my house at about 5:30. Apparently, he had one more stop to make and wanted me to come along, since I was on the way. After he finished his delivery and we were still parked outside the last house, I asked to see the back of the truck, and just looking at him briefly reminded me of Ben's razor thin lips and made me feel like kissing him. I leaned forward and immediately Roger's thick lips covered mine.

Dinner after was boring. He wanted to eat and get to know me. It's not that he wasn't interesting, I just didn't need another friend, I needed an escape. I withheld the fact I was married. I'd tell him later if this thing kept up, but it wasn't vital information. I didn't love my husband, so it wasn't like cheating. It was more like a hobby or something, like joining a bowling league.

After dinner, we walked around the square where the restaurant was. Its shops were all closed but the windows were lit with a soft, gold glow. Roger wrapped one arm around my waist and used his other hand to point out objects in the window, like a long silky black dress he thought I'd look great in. It was funny how much I enjoyed that moment, imagining things that wouldn't be.

"What do you think?" he asked.

"About what?"

"That dress. Your outfit for our next date?" He grinned at me like a schoolboy, daring me to be the nun that reproached him. I grimaced into a smile, knowing my face couldn't hold the lie for too long.

When I was on a motorcycle during my teenage years, I used to love riding without a helmet and hearing the wind blow through my ears. It was better than listening to the ocean through a seashell. Now, lying on the couch, I could hear air rushing through my head as if my ears had been ripped off. I was paralyzed by it, falling deeper and deeper into the loud and endless tunnel. He had the T.V. on, sitting on the floor in front of me watching the 6 o'clock news. I kept wondering when Ben would come home and if he could stop this. I figured I wasn't going to live through all this pain, so I was fine with someone

just offing me right here. At least I wouldn't have to suffer and I wished for it, I remember, as I lay there inert.

This guy seemed preoccupied with the news. "Ugh-uh," I cried with more effort than before. I wanted this shit to stop. He turned around to crouch in front of me. Squatting in front of the couch, he patted the side of my head softly. "You're fine," he said as he rubbed my temple and a moist patch of hair. It was dark out now, the sun had set on the other side of the house and I closed my eyes. He stroked my head a few more times until he thought he had pacified me. Then he stopped and went back to watching the news. I hated the news.

One night, a week after my date with Roger, I was cooking dinner for Ben. We had an unspoken agreement that on the nights I cooked dinner we didn't have to be intimate, so I tried to cook every night. He probably thought that it made me tired or something, but I believed that since I cooked I had performed my wifely duty for the day. We were sitting down at the table to eat dry meatloaf, soggy mashed potatoes, and under-seasoned salad when he told me about my career path.

"I found you another job," he said proudly.

"Where?" I feigned interest as best I could.

"A restaurant."

"What happened to the law offices?" I was surprised to hear of the change.

"Eh, they'd rather higher young kids and pay them nothing. The two jobs I was looking into for you are filled already."

"What restaurant? Waitressing?"

"Oh, God no. Being the manager at La Cabana."

"La Cabana? The Mexican restaurant with the dancers?"

"You think it's stupid?" Ben showed displeasure at me questioning his idea.

"No, Ben. It's just kind of random. I've never worked at a restaurant before. I wouldn't know what to do."

"It'll be easy. You just make sure everyone else is on time and doing their jobs. I know the owner; he said he'd love to interview you. You have an appointment tomorrow at two. His name is Carlos, a real classy guy. You'll have to buy some new clothes if you get the job."

I smiled happily at the thought of actually looking nice and stylish for the first time ever. Ben took that as gratitude and smiled back warmly.

"But I don't speak Spanish."

Ben hesitated. “Ehh, who does these days?”

That was good enough for me.

I started marveling at all the possibilities. I’d be working at night and that meant time away from Ben. And maybe I’d learn some Spanish, which is helpful I guess. But new fancy clothes that I knew Ben would pay for made me really look forward to this job. It’s shallow, but I didn’t have much to look forward to anymore and I figured Roger might like them.

The next day I was getting ready for my meeting. I had on a t-shirt, blazer, and black Capri pants. Ben was at work so he couldn’t approve my outfit before I walked out the door. When I got to the car, it wouldn’t start. I almost cried on the spot, knowing this might be my only chance for some freedom and I was trapped in the driveway. I kept revving the engine pointlessly, praying for a miracle. Exasperated, I started thinking about my options if I wanted to get to that meeting in twenty minutes. There were cabs, I could run there, or hitchhike and hope that I didn’t end up dismembered in someone’s trunk. Mr. Fenton, our next-door neighbor, was walking to his car and I flagged him over. He was an elderly man, about seventy, but he didn’t seem to let that slow him down. Women were always leaving his house. He smiled when he saw me waving my arms fanatically at him.

“Mr. Fenton! I am so glad to see you!” He looked stunned, but amused. I had never really had a conversation with him before, but now wasn’t the time to be shy. “Do you know anything about cars? Mine won’t start.”

“Well, I was a mechanic in the war.”

I didn’t know which war and didn’t care. I nodded eagerly.

He looked over the engine skeptically, eyeing it up like it was a rabid dog. Pulling something metal out of his back pocket, he rolled his sleeves up and did something, I couldn’t tell you what. Again, don’t care.

“Give it a try, willya?” he said after a minute of tinkering.

I went over to the car and started it. That baby purred like a mother. Jumping out of the car like an excited teenager, I thanked him.

“Sure thing. Be careful with her, she can’t handle this heat,” he offered kindly. And I was off to my interview and got there on time. I was a little sweaty, but knew I wouldn’t pass out this time.

Carlos was a pretty easy guy to spot. He was La Cabana. Flamingo pink shirt, pinstriped pants, elf-pointed shined shoes, hair violently greased back—a man who loved himself as much as he loved life. He walked over to me as I entered the restaurant.

“Hola, chica!” he said in a heavy accent. I never knew anyone who was Latino so this was exciting, like being in a foreign country or Los Angeles.

“Carlos?” I guessed knowingly. He nodded. “I’m here for the interview. I’m Ben’s wife—”

“Ah, Señor Ben. A magnificent man. He never told me that his wife was beautiful.” Carlos was working the juice hardcore.

“Ha. Thank you. Grashious.” I was attempting *gracias*, but it didn’t work too well. His eyes crinkled at the mispronunciation.

He extended his arm, an “after you” gesture. I led the way around the restaurant, Carlos stopping me to point out different things like the licorice black wood of the imported tables, the thick straw legs of chairs, the native made cream floor tiles that had been in his family’s pueblo or something. Everything was supposed to be very foreign, but it seemed like he just bought the stuff at Lowes. The restaurant was painted bright, pastel colors, and each wall had a different Easter egg hue with some accents, lines or flowers, painted across them.

We walked into the kitchen; the tiles on the floor were green and smudged with dirt and looked like guacamole. The fans on the ceiling were working overtime and seemed like they would spin off their hinges at any moment. I was hoping not to be in the way when

they hurled someone to their knees and violently chopped their head off. The two doors leading outside were open but did not help the humidity in the oven-filled room.

“Everyone, say hello. This might be your new manager.”

“Hello,” everyone said collectively and unenthusiastically.

“Carlos, phone,” said a girl dressed in a long black skirt. She must have been the hostess.

He nodded, “Okay. Wait here,” he directed me as he left the kitchen quickly.

I stood there in the middle of the kitchen, not knowing what to do. I had never been in a restaurant kitchen before. It was pretty intense all the things they had going on back there, the massive preparation before opening at 4 o’clock. Workers whizzed by me with all kinds of platters and equipment while I struggled unsuccessfully to find a spot where I could stay out of the way.

“You look berry comfortable here,” I heard a deep voice with a light accent laugh at me from over my shoulder. I turned around with a sour look on my face and immediately put my hands on my hips. He laughed even more. It wasn’t a malicious laugh, but a playful one. It sounded enjoyable. I don’t know if I had ever laughed like that in my life. Nothing

was ever that funny to me. I examined him quickly and found myself smiling at him without comprehending the action. I stopped immediately.

“I haven’t spent much time in a kitchen,” I said honestly.

“Most managers haven’t. That is der problem.” His eyes were black as stone and he was looking me over the same way I was him. “I’m Raoul.” He confidently put his hand out to shake mine. “I’m a cook.”

“Raoul, nice to meet you. I—”

Carlos fluttered back into the kitchen. “Lolita, we are going to have to hurry des up a bet.”

Lolita? I guess that was going to be my nickname. I could hear Raoul snicker.

After the briefest interview ever, consisting of questions about my old job and if I liked people, he gave me the job. Once I told him that I was available any and every night, that pretty much sealed the deal. He probably wondered how Señor Ben would feel about an absent-tee wife, but I didn’t care.

Carlos grandly hustled out of the room and back into the kitchen. I guess the paper work would be later? That worked for me. Unsure, I slowly picked myself up and left. When I got outside, I was so relieved I almost started to think about saying a prayer, but then laughed instead. This was my escape

from home and what better place to go than Mexico?

After the 6:30 news had ended, *Jeopardy* began. I could hear Alex Trebek and was mentally visualizing his moustache and how predictable it all was.

He stood up. I was silent for the first time in a while, and that must have worried him because he came over the couch and shook my shoulder. My body didn’t respond at all. I’m not sure if that was a choice or if I was just that senseless. He grabbed my chin with his fingers and squeezed, like your overweight great-aunt does when you see her at the family reunions, except this was much harder. He was shaking my head back and forth while he squeezed tighter. My jaw already felt unhinged and I was pretty sure it would drop to the floor at any moment. But I didn’t make a sound. My eyes stayed closed, my breathing shortened, and my head moved whichever way he shoved it. After what felt like hours of this, but was probably only seconds, he let my head drop back to the couch harshly, almost thrusting it to the cushion.

“Playing dead, huh?” he said, as if this was a game of hide-and-seek and he was saying, “Hiding in the closet, huh? Well, I’ll wake you up.” His tone was menacing.

I heard him, go into the kitchen and turn on the light. After a few moments, he turned the light off and came back

into the living room holding something. I could hear him flicking his fingernail against it. Metal? I wondered and then suddenly I felt something cool on the side of my neck, nice like an ice pack. He was just tracing it around my neck; it didn't hurt, but I couldn't figure out what it was. I never spent much time in the kitchen and only used the basic utensils, so I was at a loss as to what was moving down my neck and to my chest.

"You want to wake up now?" He taunted me like he was the playground bully daring me to say "Uncle." Still, I remained completely still.

It was flat, like a spatula or something. Maybe he would smack me in the face with it. It was moving softly over my arms now, just brushing them enough so the hair stood on its end. He shifted his grasp on it to position the object at a different angle. Instead of being a cool, flat surface, it was sharp and hard and scraping my arm. It was so wide though that it couldn't be a steak knife or anything. What else did I have in the kitchen? I tried to think frantically.

Then, I knew. In the kitchen, we had a metal clock that was shaped like a diamond that hung on the wall above the table. It didn't have numbers on it, since it was one of those pointless clocks that just have dots and arrows to make you do all the work. It was about the size of a plastic water bottle, smooth on the front with pointed corners and jagged edges down the sides. All at once, my right arm went completely numb. It had been dangling

off the couch but suddenly I didn't know if it was there or not. My burning eyes shot open and I saw the clock sticking out of my lower arm with the big hand pointing to the 12 o'clock dot buried under my skin. I started screaming, my voice as raspy as the uneven edges of the metal clock. Even though I couldn't feel the pain, knowing something is lodged in your arm is not a good thought. I saw red pour over my arm and fall to the floor. I frantically yelled—not words, just sounds.

"Good morning," he laughed loudly.

"Out! Out! Get it out!" I managed to shriek with increasing intensity through my raw throat. My tongue felt dry and swollen. I felt like I was going to swallow it whole. I watched as he ripped the clock out of my arm and more blood covered everything. I could see the hole in my arm. He dropped the clock on the floor and walked back into the kitchen. I was gripped by fear at the thought of what he'd bring back next, but I didn't move. He came out with a thick wad of paper towels and wrapped them around my arm tightly. The blood acted like glue, sealing the towels to my arm like paper mache. I really couldn't understand this. What was the point of torturing someone and then cleaning it up? Was he was going to pay Stanley Steamer to get the blood out of the sofa? And I thought, no matter how this ended, I wasn't going to thank him for the makeshift tourniquet. I screamed out again as I heard him say, "You're fine."



■ brittany ryan
photography

The Black Arrow

Keep

your breaths short
your head down
your feet spry
your voice mute
your ears sharp

your eyes fixed
your scent clean
your tracks masked
your knives honed
your bow taut.

We are ghosts in this snow.



■ mary jacobs
photography

woodcrest ■ 2011-2012

And I Drive

It's the silence that gets me every time. They sit in the back of the van in total silence. I see the girls sitting there behind the wire mesh separating me from them through my rear-view mirror. Some look straight ahead, others look down at the ground, and occasionally one or two look up to the ceiling of the van and mumble silent prayers with only the hint of sound coming from their lips.

The girls are dressed in casual attire. Jeans, tank tops and t-shirts in assorted colors and shades. Their hair ranges from blonde to black, their eyes from blue to green to brown. All so different, coming from different countries, yet somehow they all ended up in the back of this van and I am Charon bringing them over the river Styx and into Hell. And yet, I drive.

These women weren't arrested, nor were they forced into this. No, people much worse than me manipulated them. It's easy for me to give myself some moral leeway in the situation; I'm just the driver. I'm the middleman. Hell, I could even say that these girls were just stupid. They all want to come over here to the U.S. It's Oz, that mystical land at the end of the rainbow where dreams become reality and prayers are answered. God's country. Ha. If it was up to God I'd be struck by lightning and the van doors would open. No, they get a housing project in the city. God has nothing to do with it.

The chains are starting to bother me. The way they slam against the metal under their feet sounds like a gong shot repeatedly with a nail gun. The sudden smack of impact and the scratch afterwards. I turn on the radio to the classic rock station and The Wind Cries Mary by Jimi Hendrix comes on. I turn it up loud to drown it out. I let myself have the moment and escape the grind and I'm lost in the music.

"And the wind, it cries, Mary," I sing softly before the solo. I start to sway my head back and forth and tap my steering wheel with the beat of the song. The stop-and-go traffic, the construction, it all starts to go away. I look at the picture I have of my daughter on my dash. She's ten now. Her blonde hair and green eyes remind me of her mother. She's got my nose, though; she's cute as a button. I put it back on the dash and look up into the rear-view mirror to check on the

girls. That's when I notice the one in the middle of the left bench. Damn if she doesn't look like my daughter. I try to get lost in the music again, but the song ends. Then this girl does what no one ever did. She looks at me through the rearview mirror. We lock eyes and I'm staring back at my Jennifer.

"What are you looking at?" I shout. I put on that tough tone and she looks back down. If it weren't for the money, I'd turn back. That moral sensibility is something I've had to stuff down and put away for the sake of my family. I need the money, my daughter needs it. I can't get a job that pays well, not with a felony on my record. This is the only thing that can pay the bills and get me some money for her college fund. It's legit on the books; these guys are good. As far as anyone knows, I deliver construction materials. I can't turn back. I'm dead without this.

I turn into the alley behind the housing project and park, waiting for one of the shepherds to appear and make the transfer. The girls all look at the floor now. They know what's going to happen. I roll down my window and light a cigarette. I take one big drag and I exhale. I close my eyes as Bad Moon Rising comes on the radio. I keep telling myself that I'm delivering pizza, flowers, construction material...anything to keep my mind off of that one in the back that looks like my little girl.

I peek at my side mirror and see a man in a brown leather jacket. His long ponytail and goatee make him look

like some Russian Bond villain. I can't remember if I've seen him before. He walks up to me.

"Hey man, how's it going?" he asks me, and I notice that his American accent is a little too good.

"Good, you?" I ask after taking a drag of my cigarette. I've got to play it cool.

"Good, you got the girls?" he asks casually. That's when I know I'm screwed. We never say that. I quickly flick the cigarette and try to put the car in drive, but before I know it, I have a Glock jammed into the side of my head and two police cars blocking me in.

They pull me out of the car and read me Miranda like gospel. I've heard it all before—but right now, all I can see is my daughter's picture on the dashboard through the window. I try to take it in, the final moments I'll see her smile. I can't help to see the irony; I can only see her through glass.

"Do you understand these rights?"

"Yes sir," I say. I see them bring the girls out of the back one by one. It's funny how they're being treated like criminals, like me. They probably think they're prostitutes. I get slammed into the back of the car.

"Can you get my daughter's picture for me?" I ask the cop. He says nothing. The door slams shut and they drive.



■ jordan bichler
photography

Roads

they sink and crack
the roads

they get patched lazily

the roads are curved like the river

they are curved

like my sides

the roads break, but not without hope
to be fixed

my insides do the same



alyson winkler
photography

A Story About a Bridge

"They tore it down a year ago."

The sentence washed over me and rested around my ankles like a pair of cement shoes. When you're young, the places you see every day are simple facts you never give a second thought. Life isn't a changing and growing organism; it's a static and structured thing. It is a building. A place. A definitive monument, untampered by time.

I walked over the torn-up soil where there was once an old wooden bridge over a small creek. "I don't think 'tore it down' is quite the phrase you wanted to use," I joked, pretending that the loss of the bridge wasn't a big deal. "There was a creek here. They fill that up?"

"Yeah, before the bridge went, even. Honestly, I'm surprised it took them so long to tear it down."

Amy had been one of my closest friends through grade school into senior high. She was one of those rare friends that didn't abandon you in the awkward pubescent years. We waited until after graduation to drift apart. She got attractive in eighth grade, which put me in a weird position because I always looked young for my age. It wasn't until late in high school that I sprouted up. She could have left me for any boy she wanted or the sudden interest of a cooler group, but she never did. We watched Star Wars on Friday nights and saw Attack of the Clones opening day.

In retrospect, it was a waste of money. I never thought of her as a girl, which is why I never understood why guys hated me after they asked her out and then saw us at McDonald's. She was just Amy.

My family moved just before I started college. I guess they figured I'd be going away to school anyway, so what was the harm? At first I visited Amy and traveled home during breaks. But after a while it got harder. I didn't have the time and I only ever spoke to Amy occasionally online and said, "Man, I haven't seen you in so long!" That led to "We have to see each other this Christmas break," but never to seeing each other in fact.

Amy came up to my school last semester because I guess we finally got tired of the circular conversations. It was fun. We spent the night watching Star Wars and drinking every time they said "I've got a bad feeling about this," or when Darth Vader choked someone. But it was different, like the time we spent apart was separating us the whole night. It manifest in gaps in conversation, in the awkward reference to embarrassing things we had done together then forgotten about. It was as if we were eulogizing the friendship instead of reinvigorating it. I decided then that I needed to visit home again.

And that's why we came here. When we needed to get away from parents or high school drama, we'd come to the

bridge, sit on the edge and throw rocks into the creek.

"I remember more trees," I said. If my memory served me, I was standing at the center of the bridge. If I closed my eyes I could see the old view. Lush and green trees older than the world we knew. They blocked out the late afternoon sun. Today, I had to shield my eyes. When we were here, time stopped for just a little while. It didn't matter if it was day or night; there was always the same hazy glow from between the leaves. The trees were our sanctuary.

"Oh, those have been gone for years, James," Amy responded, as if it wasn't a tragedy.

"Shit. It's been a long time."

"They're supposed to turn this whole place into a new development for the over-50 community," Amy laughed. "Can you believe that? And we came here to get away from grown-ups."

I laughed and tried to forget for a moment that I was 23 now and part of the world I wanted to escape from back then. "This was our place."

"I guess things change," she offered with a half-smile, placing her elbow on my shoulder, despite having to reach up to do so. She used to do it all the time when she was taller than me for most of our lives. It was a habit she hadn't broken despite the shift in size. "Besides, it hasn't been our place in

four years. Not since you moved." I shrugged, using one shoulder.

"What do you think would have happened if I stayed? Would we be here right now?" Amy moved her arm and her feet brushed the fallen leaves beneath her feet.

"The bridge would still be gone," she answered. I turned around to face her, and she was doing that familiar ballet twirl she always did when she was thinking about something. "We grew up, you know? It just happens."

"Yeah, I know, but I missed you. I missed this place and this town. Maybe we would've gotten to say goodbye to the bridge before they tore it down."

"Don't be such a girl," Amy teased and pressed her finger into my chest. That was familiar, too. "When was the last time we even came here? Before the day you moved, anyway. We never came here after graduation. One day, something is there and the next it's just not. We can't live in the past forever."

I looked again at the patch of soil that used to be our bridge and took in a deep breath. "How about us? Think we would still be friends if I hadn't moved?"

Amy laughed at that. "What, we're not friends anymore? We're here now, aren't we? That's enough for me."

And I guess with those four words, it was enough for me, too.

carol ann porter
photography

Untitled 1

The left side of my closet slumps lower than the right.

A heavy box with memories; a dead friend.

Weighing enough to slant the symmetry of my wool sweaters.





■ student name
photography

The Nana Berries

I called my great-grandmother 'Nana'—I guess I was told to, because who chooses these things?—though whenever she signed a card to me, she put a space between the two syllables large enough to suggest that her name was actually two words. Na. Na. I regret to say that she wasn't very important to me. When you went to her apartment, she served Sunkist fruit candies that gummed your teeth shut, and reminded you again about the "smartest pet she ever had," a white American Eskimo dog named Fritzzy. When she entered a nursing home during the last years of her life, she accused the attendants of stealing both the Sunkist fruit candies and her gold-plated toothbrush. I was astounded to hear that such a thing as a gold-plated toothbrush existed—weren't you supposed to throw away your toothbrush every three months or so when the bristles got yellowed and splayed? It never did turn up.

Nana and her late husband, Antonio, were first-generation Americans. She had a portrait-sized photograph of the two of them at their fiftieth anniversary eyeing each other mistily, because at that point they had recently experienced a resurgence of attraction to one another. Otherwise,

stories about Antonio were of a common theme: he was violently unhappy, and he frequently cracked his children and grandchildren over the heads with various objects. This was told with a mixture of bitterness and amusement: "Remember when Grandfather broke the corner of the little clock when he threw it at me? That would have been valuable today, because it was a Black Forest clock." But there's the portrait, tinted a Lawrence Welk golden color, of a gentle-looking elderly man. The pearls around Nana's neck, a gift from him, were actually a decorative hearing-aid wire, attached to a box worn around her neck. They both had identical thick glasses. Nana left him twice, and after he died, she outlived him by thirty years.

The facility where she ended up was called Wallingford, it had a gazebo in the garden, and its staff staged events such as Victorian High Teas and Piano Sing-Alongs. Nana had unknowingly been saving for her entire life to move here. My grandmother warned us all grimly that there would be no inheritance, taking us each aside one at a time. "At least go to a Piano Sing-Along," we urged Nana. We wheeled her into the lobby, where an activities director was trying to get some of the

patients to clap their hands, but they were experiencing some distress when it came to lifting their arms. Petit fours on paper plates slipped off of laps.

We contented ourselves that at least it was not one of those nightmarish homes where Girl Scouts visit at Christmas time to earn their Empathy for Seniors merit badges. Fair Acres, the selected site of my Scout Troop's annual Caroling Outing, had grimy baseboards, no acreage to speak of, and nurses who smoked inside. Each of us was required to make friendly conversation with the residents, to qualify for the badge, but I always hung back, alarmed by their nose tubes. When I'd read in the papers about "the Nursing Home Rapist" who climbed in through windows and pressed himself against the bodies of helpless patients strapped into their beds, the crime-scene I imagined was Fair Acres. You couldn't tell men from women there, because they were all hairless with perpetually open, gummy mouths. My parents bought me the Seniors badge anyway, and my grandmother sewed it onto my tiny brown Scout vest, while she told the story of being forced to work in a sewing factory as a teenager. They were a poor family. Nana and Antonio

took away her paycheck each week and left her a five dollar allowance for her stockings and trolley fair. It was obvious my grandmother still resented this, as she attacked the vest with perfectly microscopic stitches.

My grandmother dutifully went to Wallingford once a week to change Nana's wrist brace when it got smelly, which proved what I suspected: that being ancient meant you could no longer be fully submerged in water, perhaps due to the risk that pieces of you could float away. There was an onsite wig-fitter, and if you walked by you saw foam heads wearing real human hair sewn into gray pin curls. Fish was served three days a week due to its easy digestibility, and Nana hated fish. She preferred Celeste single-serving pizzas. The food at Wallingford was her chief complaint, followed by her inability to lock the drawer in her dresser that held her stash of candy and, at one time, the golden toothbrush of legends.

When we were in a dour mood, my grandmother and I plotted ways that we, ourselves, could avoid becoming Nana. My grandmother took a medication that replaced the function of her absent thyroid, without which she would die, and her plan was to stop taking the pills if a nursing home fate loomed near. My plan was to sit in a locked car in a locked garage with the engine on, until I grew sleepy and passed away. Secretly, though, I thought it might be exciting to experience a motorcycle accident, or

to be crushed in a herd of stampeding buffalo. I imagined piloting my wheelchair across the dusty plains and lowering myself to the earth when I felt (rather than heard, for I would almost certainly be completely deaf by that time) the vibration of distant hooves.

I'm not sure about the details of Nana's death. Her living relations and acquaintances were too few to form an adequate funeral, so a small memorial dinner of cold cuts and potato salad was held in my grandmother's condo. I had work and didn't go, but my mother tells me that the memorial portion of the dinner consisted of each person relating a favorite story or memory. Those present seemed to experience a mental block. They pushed food around their plates. My grandmother brought up the sewing factory again, the commandeered paychecks. I wondered what memory I would have been forced to summon had I been in attendance, and I felt relieved that I worked for a department store which was not very understanding when your great-grandmother died in the middle of the Back to School Sale. I remembered two things about Nana. One year for her birthday, when she had asked for a pet, all the relatives got together and bought her a toy dog with a computer chip that obeyed voice commands. It was plastic and made wheezing mechanical sounds when it walked. When it barked, it didn't even have a dog's voice—it had the voice of a robot saying "Ruff!"

"We thought this would be good for you," they said, "because it's easy to take care of. You don't have to walk it or clean up after it." I played with it when we visited her, and observed how inadequate it was as a living companion.

My other memory involved a tiny, ethereal baby locket Nana had given to me when I was born, and which she seemed to expect me to wear for the rest of my life like a nun wears a simple gold cross. The chain was as thin as a thread, and a child could have broken it in two, which I did. Before every holiday or family gathering for the next seventeen years, I rehearsed the lie that I would tell in the event that I was asked about it. "Where's The Locket?" my mother would quiz.

"It's at the jeweler's, being cleaned."

"Why is it being cleaned?"

"Because I wear it so much."

Then when Nana would come, she'd say, "Do you know why I gave The Locket to you and nobody else? I gave it to you because you were the first great-grandchild."

I didn't even learn until much later what happened to Nana in the days following her memorial service. It simply came up in conversation when my Aunt Jo was visiting from upstate New York. "The raspberry bushes behind my house," she said innocently, "are really thriving. The berries are twice as big now as they were before."

It was not the first irreverent funeral in our family. The ashes of an uncle of mine, who died of brain cancer, were mixed with those of his cat. "It's what he would have wanted," his immediate relations flatly explained. My grandfather, who served in the Navy, had the wish to be scattered at sea when he died, but my grandmother dropped him in the Delaware River instead, rationalizing that he would get to the ocean eventually. The price of gas was up. The beach was such a long way away, two or three hours on highways that were populated by maniacs.

There is also a tradition in my family of using what nobody else wants, a habit that has led to family members picking dirty bowls out of people's recycling bins that, when scrubbed up, turn out to be valuable old carnival glass or Waterford crystal. When nobody wanted Nana's ashes residing eerily on their mantle, my Aunt Jo dumped the contents of the urn into a zip-lock freezer bag and took it back to New York with her in her carry-on. When her luggage went through the scanner, she was detained while a security officer curiously weighed the bag of ashes in his hand. "Oh, that's just my grandmother," Aunt Jo explained brightly. "I'm taking her home to sprinkle her somewhere." The somewhere turned out to be the soil around her raspberry bushes, because she had read that ashes are good for fruit-bearing plant species. The spectacular size and fruitfulness her bushes later exhibited were worth the looks of horror at the airport, and anyway, I think she enjoyed herself.

When my mother heard, she said, "I would never eat berries from those bushes. I would choke and throw up before I could get them down." I tried to be bothered in the same way as my mother.

At Nana's 90th birthday celebration, years ago, I had been very much bothered by the decree that no gifts were to be given. Instead, the powers that be had decided each of the great-grandchildren would present Nana with a single rose. "Your rose will be white," they said, "because you are the first great-grandchild." Everyone else's roses would be red.

"You live to be 90 years old and no one gives you a present?" I said.

"When you're 90 years old, you'll understand," said my grandmother. "You don't want much of anything at that age."

We gathered at the restaurant. One of my uncles walked around with a video camera, asking for bets on whether or not she would live another year. "What do you think, will there be a 91st birthday?" he asked, and my mother put her hand in front of the camera in disgust. I drank from the wrong glass and ended up doubled over, choking, with grenadine running out of my mouth. "You're a mess," someone said, plucking at my dampened velvet dress. I cleaned myself up in time to greet Nana at the door with the white cellophane-covered rose. Soon her arms held four roses. There

were only four great-grandchildren. I felt like I needed to stand up for her, to tell someone that she didn't want battery-powered toy dogs or inadequate bouquets that wouldn't fill the smallest vase in her apartment. What if this was her last birthday? If I remember correctly, my uncle with the camcorder bet against her, joking, "A dollar says that this is the last big jamboree." But there was a 91st birthday party, and in fact there was a 101st birthday party at which my Aunt Carla's pariah boyfriend was placed in the corner behind the couch to play "Happy Birthday" on his electric guitar. "Oh thank you, that's nice," Nana said to the sofa cushions, before leaning forward in a rusty motion to blow out the battery-powered candle they'd put on her cake for safety reasons.

One summer, I visited my Aunt Jo and Uncle Harry for a week. They favor healthy foods like quinoa and bee pollen, but knowing about my love of sweets, they had planned a different dessert for each night of the week. One of the desserts was berry shortcake. It was a biscuit topped with homemade whipped cream and raspberries—plump, moist, freshly-picked jewels from their own carefully cultivated bushes. The first one went down easy, as did the second. Later that night, I stole into the darkened kitchen and consumed a third shortcake, standing right in front of the open refrigerator, raspberry juice dripping from my chin.

Felipe

In a corner of Alba de Tormes, at the top of a narrow, two-story building, sits a small pottery shop. An intriguing shop, it is barely large enough to contain everything inside; ceramic vases and mugs, ashtrays and wall decorations weigh down a multitude of shelves and a handful of tables. Beautiful, luminescent glazes in shades of blues and greens, oranges and yellows, reflect the afternoon light that filters through the windows and open door.

Out the door, at the bottom of an old wooden staircase, which hugs the outside wall of the narrow, two-story building, is the workshop of Felipe Perez, the craftsman, the creator of the hundreds of pieces displayed in the shop. The workshop is an open room, unlike the cluttered space upstairs, with large windows along one wall allowing sunlight to light Felipe's workspace. But the walls are still lined with dozens of rough, unglazed pieces and shelves hanging from the ceiling hold even more. Felipe stands at his pottery wheel, a simple disc no more than a foot in diameter. The high table in front of him, a large slab of smoothed stone propped on spindly legs, is stained the burnt orange of dried clay, as are the walls and light switch behind him.

Felipe cuts into the fresh clump of clay before him, throwing a handful onto the spinning wheel. The rust disc turns through his fingers, and in an instant a deftly fingered vase emerges from the stone. A twitch of a finger and ridges appear, evenly running down the curved body of the vase. Felipe swiftly removes the piece from the wheel with a stroke of his cutting wire and sets it on another slab of stone to dry. Within the next minute, a large jar and perfectly fitting lid join the vase.

He is the only potter providing pieces to the small shop, Felipe tells customers as he works. When he can no longer work, the shop will disappear. He knows no one who will carry on the craft.

The glazed pieces upstairs are suddenly even more appealing. One-of-a-kind vases from a dying store, possibly the last that will be sold. (Ignore the fact that Felipe is only in his early 60s, and still quite skilled at his craft.) Such a crafty way to garner customers.

But Felipe doesn't think long on the money, or on the fact that his business will eventually fade. He's content in his workshop, wet mud slipping between his fingers, coaxing vases from lumps of clay.



■ brittany ryan
photography



■ megan ryan
photography

I.

Frustration is essential for transcendence of limitations; smothering, the catalyst of gasping mouths for new breath. As much as we think we are free, coasting on liberation-movements' ripples, we're wildly repressed. Our chests are collapsing. We need more sun.

Nightly news lauded by diabetic-hand holding remote control, gay kids tuned in and dropped off bridges; trepid stream and meat-grater rock inhumane as home but certain. Raisins imprisoned, the prize for greedy eyes; counteractive cataracts illuminate the lies. What have we actually done?

We've created an illusion.

Famously, painters brushed over already rendered canvas. The new came last but faded first, preceding sought through for light; creating an appearance like accordion-folded-elementary-art, perspective subjected by position. This was the Renaissance though;

structure, symmetry stone by stone erected. Venetians built toward the sky from inward eye out instead; windows where the sun spoke brightest; plaster, tile ornaments like orbs in eyes from looking at the light; art, in fact.

To hell with phony architecture.

Icons be in breaths, no longer speculations, act as artifacts: trendy wall-poster-plastic, blurbs in blogs, moccasins packaged in boxes, teachers as witches on Halloween. There've been plenty of marches and mind of equilibrium-ethos sprouting through sidewalk cracks and cerebellum; photographic x-ray moment's malign cement is artificial. But there still exists burnt oil disgusting new meat on public stoves, to feed those who line up in droves. For every person like 'Me' there is someone like 'Them', at the counter to self-serve and disregard the marrow of the Bull. They heed and applaud; a salted being -

Matthew 6:1-4

"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

- institutions silence the gun; lobotomize the spark, neuter our nascence, latent slime to slip on ascent, make us a nuisance, chairs tip and hang us from nooses. We're all born from a cord, knotted with our mothers. Severed ceremoniously, out of habit-out of need. Not hung from crosses and deemed as creed. She raises us among them and our father - the cause, the effect. Classified-words, polyester hoods, and water fountain-blood bank, simulated bodies preserved in bell jars, wash it down with spirit, don't choke and revere it. Look at Vatican walls from afar and hope, put needles in your arm lay low and doped. Watch TV and heed thee, buy power as need be. Sacrifice life, simulate identity and bleed Me.

Burn your inhibitions, light fire to your idols; gasoline is made of fallen leaves.

Our icons are well lit or tip toed alone on ashen-hardened-floors bellowed over-cessless-plight; breakthrough and fall forever, seizure into dust; we build them high with cards.

Our precedent is brown, dirt from the ground for defiance to sprout and show growth toward the sun. Not lurk in wake, lay level to run. Waiting for us to lie wrapped in mahogany, Mother Nature's misogyny. Lie in your bed, not at the table where you serve bread.

Forgive omniscient clergy who omit their own perjury, pervert perfect as invisibility; typed words on the stereo; cluttered desks stacked high muffle the radio. Wind wills away the audio; mind words that precede, Amen.

We live inside the hollowed-cape of fear, grabbing at the neck to feel the pulse we surrendered, residual reverberation keeps our skin warm-enough; transgendered by desperate appendage, amend us. Eerie music sound affects the witching-hour corners of the room; malignant melanoma skin recites like rhymes with paraffin: *We need visionaries as luminaries to unfurl upon the world, to void incubi and succubae like mosquitos in pursuit of pearls. To be the sun is all, and it not blamed for lack of shade; there*

must be windows – cause we have more than fire to light the night – venue for views to see the sun for certain burn. Light can come from bulbs, light can come from souls: what's human-made can be so easily depraved:

Little Big Horn, Salem, Woodstock:

oxygen is essential for emblazed libation; breathing, the catalyst of engulfed mouths for letting new blue-orange-yellow-red breath plume from lips, balanced over stalwart hips. As much as we think we are free, we are. Sailing on liberation-movements' seas, we are wildly confessed. Our chests surmount. We are the son if we must. Jim Morrison is radio confetti.

It's 'We' that chooses what to burn fore 'I' ignite the spark.

You are obligated; use what you have, disrupt, rebel, ring bells, conform to benevolent norms. Be brave. Ghost Dance. Hold prejudice to fire. Refuse what lurks in shade with sun and herd in hoards of one. Bell-curved glass, straw, steal on concrete renders spark, friction by way of fiction. Memoir, Renoir to start.

But, gasoline drips like water.

And, only the Sun lives without oxygen, only Sun burns without shade. The nativist of Native Americans is dead. We will not muster Custer: put their face on others, shoot them with our bullets, and they retort with arrows. We will live with them to share words and land; pupil and the sun.

Because,

One man engulfed in flames moves like Indians that dance for rain.

mary jacobs
photography

Untitled 2

my dad left behind ties,

royal grey, a Shepard's pink,
yellowed ice and fragile white,

to look at but
not wear.

the grip of a mistress,
bringing them toward her,
pushing with the other hand against
him
up onto the desk
pupils dilated,
pencils on the floor.

a caricature suspended on the wall,
blurred in peripheral wake;
a youth,

around my neck,
a noose, they'd choke

bring blood to the eyes,
baptismal suite.





daniel ross
photography

I am Gorgeous and You are Bitter: Reflections from a Doff-Capped Hatter

woodcrest ■ 2011-2012

A raw shadow of my dreams: I am not above asking her to want.

Are you waiting for me, with your coffee cup and your midnight fatigue?
I have not been gone too long, yet you have learned the names of the minutes
that have passed.
I am broken: worn out by the tug and pull of the city.
I escape to your island paradise: still, lovely and warm.
Are you thinking of those days when cups of gin were easy and long?
Talks over burning incense ate up our afternoons, reminding us of our own mortality,
monotony, begging us to remember time.

I am unsure they were the brightest of times, but I know there was laughter.
I gripe with Time because He does not see the world the same way I do.
He counts every moment without fail and never misses the seconds ticked away.
But I cannot dismiss those moments as carelessly as He—no, I am not so digital.
I am a sundial—I am fixed in place and those dark moments pass over me so slowly
that I have no choice but to recall them later.
I am that hourglass—the sandy specks of solitude dripping between my head and
my heart. They pile and never pour out—grains never fit for glass—forever trapped
in that constant.

No! I cannot be like Time. Because, well, I don't have the strength to simply move on.
Unceasingly.
I need these moments etched into my skin.
I could not trade them for eternity.
Or the ecstasy. "This is how cats must always feel. Timeless."
Gone so far from screaming children and silver spoons.
Those highway walkers knew how to survive on Mom and Dad's credit cards, didn't they?
Did they know we knew, tangled in jealousy though we were, twisted by time and
smoke serenity.
Kinship of a different kind.

The Absence

It was the non-colorful period of autumn, the one when leaves are dying, slush is forming, and the temperature's bitterness gives birth in your bones.

The summer has jumped out of a plane with a parachute. It seems as if the environment has become absent. Silent.

The kind when freezing rain spatters on your already tense neck and the wind is wailing against your umbrella. The umbrella breaks, of course, and that is all you really have in that moment.

There you stand, caught and vulnerable.

No one can see you but vulnerability does not require a partner. The wind slaps your face. It does not make it into the Seattle paper.

Weather is wimpy and it is often what people talk about when there is nothing they want to expose. It is safe and meaningless, chatter small talk with forced friendly faces. Do not fret; the elevator has reached the floor you need to go to. You can loosen your tight collar now and become warm again.





■
matt mcguriman
photography

Small Town, PA

My hometown: where you go to die. Like Florida, but colder and less entertaining, full of old people with too much time and even more money. It's a safe town because there's nothing to rob. The only options are a 24-hour gas station that closes at 8pm, a Wawa, and a row of antique shops that closed years ago and now remain vacant. Any and all scandals that happen in the town can be discussed at the one drug store that is not part of an obnoxious chain. People camp out there just to get the local gossip: who died, who got divorced, and when are those teens on skateboards going to leave the parking lot because they are causing a scene and shouldn't they pull their pants up. The drug store was recently repainted a vomit blue color. If you don't know what that looks like, find the most obnoxious blue you can imagine and stare at it for 15 minutes, which is what happens when you go in the store to fill a prescription. It makes me want to vomit.

The cops are very useful for speeding traps. When church lets out on Sunday morning, they park themselves next to the bank and wait for cars to roll through the stop signs. Anyone that doesn't meet the 3-second standard gets a ticket. It's pretty much the only crime in town. Conveniently, the police station is attached to the public library covered with deadened bricks bleakly facing the road. I guess putting the police station in the library is beneficial for the cops; it gives them something to do in their free time.

Directly across from the library is a dirt softball field where I used to play Little League and there's a basketball court too. This is one of the most active spots in my town and the cops go there to keep an eye on the hooligans shooting hoops—only the street gets swarmed with cars, anxious parents who care way too much about their children's athletic careers and who would cause a problem if the police needed to leave fast. Good thing they never do.

You don't need a GPS when traveling through town because all roads lead to Main Road. Seriously. Name any location you want to go to—a horrible Italian restaurant that gets packed every night, someone's home, a place to leave your pets for the weekend—it's either on or right off Main Road. I live off of it, so I know.

When I was growing up, I was one of the two families with children in my development. Besides us, it was prime territory for elderlies who didn't have to worry about little ruffians running through their hydrangeas. As a child, I couldn't even leave my bike outside because the "association" said it ruined the "purity of the landscape." So forget the possibilities of having a trampoline or a moon bounce for your birthday. They treated children's toys as if they were a goiters or tumors that would infect the neighborhood if they were seen in daylight. (As if the fading eggshell paint and molding window glass was really appealing to people. I guess a bike might detract from that rare beauty.)

I remember having a scooter that would make a loud rattling sound, as if the pavement was being scratched off. I remember seeing my neighbors' disapproving glances as I flew by. The faster I went, the more intense the noise became and the more of a nuisance I'd become. I played chicken with the parked cars, narrowly escaping a collision at the last second, showing my rebellious nature. I wondered what would have happened if I scratched or dented their cars. Luckily, I was skilled at riding my scooter and was never sued. They threatened that kind of stuff all the time only they didn't get the joke.

Most of my neighbors are older single women. There's Rita, who lost her husband a few years ago. She's about 70 years old and parks her car in two parking spots in the lot, which pisses everyone off and causes violent debates about whether we should tell her or not. Farther down the development is Rebecca. She's in her late fifties and has never been married. She used to be a rich debutant or something, but never has any visitors, so I guess that didn't work out for her. Regardless of the time of day, her hair is perfectly set, as if she just got it done—but since she hardly ever leaves her house, we know she didn't. She treats her three annoying Shih Tzus like gods and would throw you in front of a trash truck to save them.

Farther into the land of gray there's Brittany in her late forties and divorced. She's a nurse, so she gets out of the house more than the other two, but obsesses about her four cats way too

much. Then, near the bottom, is a young man who lived with his mother who had Alzheimer's and just passed away. No matter how many times you met her, she always looked at you with a horrified expression like you were a stranger who was wearing a skunk with a machine gun on your head. Very welcoming. We tried to stay isolated from them by looking out the window to see if the coast was clear before we'd get the mail or take out the trash. Avoiding small talk at all costs was a main goal for my family. Those ladies would latch onto us like herpes, and we'd be trapped for hours talking about the deadly hanging tree limbs that would harm anyone who walked over their flowers. Our safety was apparently a major concern.

If you're the religious type, there are two churches conveniently located next to each other right off Main Road, a Catholic church and a Baptist church. The Catholic one is newer, set with old stone on the outside, white marble floors, and freshly painted glass windows to make it the much more aesthetically pleasing. The Baptist church, with its tattered white paint chipping violently off the weak walls, is always more crowded and has a much livelier audience. But I'm not exactly sure who goes there because there are hardly any black people in town. In fact, we just got an Asian family in our neighborhood and you would think we were on an African safari, watching them through the windows, discussing their mini-van and their children playing in the parking lot, at times, unsupervised! What are they?

Animals? And what language do they speak? Chinese, Japanese, Asianese? Turns out, they speak English and the dad's name is John, so that calmed people down a bit. We recently got a Mexican family in the development. My dad heard the man on the phone and thought he was speaking Arabic. A terrorist? Turns out it was Spanish.

We have a public school at the bottom of the hill. I attended a Catholic school, so I don't know much about it. My education there consisted of learning racist jokes and realizing how boys can lower a girl's self-esteem. I always wondered if they had to ship students from other towns and states to go to the public school because the town doesn't have enough kids living in its zip code. Everybody I knew went to Catholic school.

Tell your grandparents about what my hometown has to offer. In the church basement, they can go to the weekly dance for seniors. Wouldn't want any young punks there to ruin their waltz. They can go antiquing. Even though most of the antique stores are closed, any store that's open never has many customers and the products are ancient, overpriced, and useless, but they won't have to wait in line. If they really want to get crazy, there's one bar on Main Road guaranteed to get Grams and Pop going. There's a horrible Dylan cover band whose singer sounds like he has a sinus infection. The only food is burgers and fries, but no one goes there for the food: they go for music I guess—anything to escape my hometown.



■ andrew kvech
photography

Cherries

My skin is on fire.
It floods joyously with sweat.
Summer.
Oaken shade wards off
the sun,
Ruined pale skin like the
flesh of cherries.

Ruby marbles,
Jewels of July,
My tongue yearns
to be drenched in your
sweet
red nectar
for this emaciated vampire.

I spit your pits
and lay them reverently,
nature's tomb of unknowns.
For they may sprout
and I, never leave
Spitting cherries.



mary jacobs
photography

It's Been A Year

It's been a year.

I doubt I'll ever forget the moment I heard the truth. We sat in my car, in the parking lot of the hotel next to the Starbucks where I used to work. When we were still inside the café, you wouldn't tell me what was going on. All you said was that you needed to see me as soon as possible, so naturally I appeased my best friend.

You were acting strange. I can't remember a time when you were so harsh.

"What's going on? You're acting like something terrible happened," I said. Like somebody died, I thought.

Back in the car, your voice shattered as you explained the inconceivable. I gripped the steering wheel tighter, trying to fight off the tears that came streaming down my face.

The truth about it was so surreal. Like something out of a movie. Car crash in northern California, around Napa Valley. Fittingly, on the way home from a wine tasting trip. Bright-eyed, beautiful, blonde-haired teenager and her father heading back home with his parents. To the new house in Oregon, not the old one in Pennsylvania where her life was before, where the rest of us waited without her.

I still don't understand it. I don't understand that if there is a God out there somewhere, why did he take her? You hear stories like this on the news, but even then something seems rare.

Father, daughter, and grandparents killed by a tractor-trailer on the interstate. The news reports said on the passenger side a young woman was "impaled."

They say the truck driver was driving too fast, but somehow it wasn't his fault. Not his fault? Each report cut like a knife, each new one deeper than the one before. Each time I cried. We all did. We still do.

I still do.

I think about her every day. I miss her more with time and I wish we could have had more time together. We grew up together, graduated high school and shared adventures.

Sometimes, I wonder if it's greedy to have wished someone else had taken her place.

Sometimes I wish it were me.

Last month it could have been. I know it was her, looking out for me. It's been a year.

Coined Change

Words. That's all, just words.

Making up a language that's making up itself.
Stealing from others' creativity, culture, and style.

Or borrowing like a beggar collecting change in a subway somewhere.

And when this pilfering and pillaging of others ceases to suffice,

Words are simply crafted, combined, or juxtaposed like putty filling the gaps in this wall of language.

"Original." What's that?

An idea, a thought, something no one has had before?

Unlikely.

Maybe something no one has communicated before?

The words didn't exist. We didn't steal them yet. Didn't borrow them. Didn't create them.

Until now.

Ideas, rolling around in our heads like change in our pockets, slowly accumulating.

21 cents—not even enough to make a quarter. We pick them up as we progress.

Words. Ideas. Thoughts.

38 cents. If they fell from your pocket would you pick them up?

No.

But someone might.

Ideas, falling from our heads one by one; pennies from our pockets.

Dropping to the ground, waiting for someone to pick them up, return them, or use them.

39 cents.

A penny for your thoughts.

Trampled on by the critics and passed by the skeptics.

Collecting the dirt, grime, scratches of worn and aged copper.

58 cents, but none of them quarters.

None of them worth enough to warrant attention.

But it's growing now, the change in your pocket, the ideas in your head.

76 cents. If you trade them in now, you might have enough for a can of pop.

And you'd still be left with one original thought.

No, you've come too far to conform to pop.

Besides, these aren't just your ideas anymore; they're our ideas.

Just like language, they've been picked up, shared, and passed off as our own.

The change in our pockets.

89 cents—your pocket is starting to make noise now.

Your head is constantly jingling, filled with ideas, words, thoughts.

Don't let them escape yet. You're close.

99 cents. Only one more now.

Or a collect call.

Or a cheap meal from the dollar menu.

Trade in your "originality" for mass-marketed "happiness."

Conform . . . or hold out?

mary jacobs
photography





■ david alonso
photography

Traveling Lost

Escaping a state that I once knew
Tangled up with you
I travel the highways in my mind
Hitchhiking through my thoughts only to find
Myself
On
Your
Street
Again

MM

as we talk I feel the twisting of pleasure
you, nothing.

for you to let yourself feel is a painful reminder
that we have the ability to feel at all
and many times
hurt.

for me to let myself feel
is the happy reminder
that I can

Helen

Generic advice, a friend gave to me:
"Dwell not on the past, for you swim around
an ocean immense; other fish in the sea."
But lonely I float outside Puget Sound.

What I wrought in Washington is lost,
softened to a specter, faded in haze,
and amongst raindrops I fall. A ghost
watching, with ache, pleasant words wash away.

And Seattle has never been kinder
to the broken and those who are dead,
and those who rest distraught in diners,
with their loss suspended firmly overhead.

If lovers are bubbles caught floating alone,
I watch from below them. I am stone.





■ brittany ryan
photography

Panic

My luggage was checked under the name "Ryan, Jason W."

I stare blankly at the airport worker as she hands me my passport.

"It's all going on the same flight," she assures me. "It'll get there."

And if it doesn't? I wonder. I'm clearly not Ryan, Jason W., and you didn't give me the stub as proof. What do I say when I call the airline? Will they deny me the case because the barcode calls up Ryan, Jason W.'s name? Did you put a note in the computer system? All I saw you do was rush to shut down the conveyer belt, but it was too late. My red suitcase had already dropped off the belt and disappeared to wherever suitcases go before they end up on the plane.

And what about poor Ryan, Jason W.? Now, I don't know how this works, but doesn't the airline only allow one free checked bag? What if Ryan, Jason W., already checked a bag? Does my bag, added in his name, get billed to him? Or what if Ryan, Jason W., shows up later, and can't check his bag because mine's already been checked?

And how did you mess this up in the first place? With my passport propped open next to your computer, and me standing on the other side of the counter, wasn't it obvious I wasn't Ryan, Jason W.? Has it just been a long

day for you? Was this just a simple slip up or does this happen all the time? Is that why you're so calm now, as if you've forgotten what just happened to the suitcase filled with all my clothes for next week? Am I overreacting? Can you tell it's my first time flying overseas?

I take my passport and plane ticket, tucking both securely into my carry-on, a smile plastered on my face. "Thank you so much," I reply. She doesn't respond and she turns her attention to person behind me.

How easily she can forget about my suitcase, checked under the name of Ryan, Jason W., when I know this will plague me the whole seven hours to Madrid—along with my worries about the plane exploding right after take-off in a Final Destination-esque manner, or dropping into the Atlantic Ocean mid-flight. Can my nerves really handle anymore?

I'm afraid of heights.

Well, not all heights, exactly. Just open heights, with narrow room for your feet and little or no handholds. Like ladders and lighthouse staircases; heights that are quite easy to fall from.

Spain seems to be nothing but narrow, deathly staircases, especially with all the old buildings we've been touring. I was

hesitant yesterday when we visited the Cathedral Vieja in Salamanca. The twisting stone stairwells did nothing good for my heart. Solid wall on one side, a thin column around which the steps—narrow, steep steps—wrapped on the other. No railing, no handgrip, nothing. One wrong step, one misplacement of a hand and you fall. Each step was a struggle, my heart pounding, fingers shaking.

Look. My hand's shaking now too.

You would think today would be better. Yes, we're still climbing, climbing to the top of the only remaining tower of the old castle in Alba de Tormes. But while this is an old building, the staircase is new. Polished wood steps with metal supports wrap around the narrow, square-shaped tower. Stone wall on one side, solid black railing on the other. It's completely stable and safe, right?

But these steps don't have backs; the worst type of steps in my opinion. It's completely possible to trip and slide straight through the open back and break your neck on the stairs below.

And even worse than the claustrophobic, winding stairwells of the Cathedral is the openness of this one. The seventy-foot drop, down the center of the tower to the ground floor, is clearly visible on the other side of the railing. Only a thin piece of waist-high metal is protecting me from that fall. I'm short, but it's possible I could trip and hit that thin

piece of waist-high metal in the wrong spot and lose my balance and topple over the railing to my death.

I take it back. Railings mean nothing.

I really think I'm having a heart attack.

I once read a book in which a character died when she tripped and fell and was trampled to death by the crowd of panicked people around her. That scene has stuck with me, and pops into my head at the most inconvenient of moments. Like now. In the crowded streets of Madrid. Surrounded by hundreds of people of all nationalities, bodies pressed together tighter than in a club, as I trip through the streets, praying that I don't fall and die.

The 2010 Union of European Football Associations Champions League Final is today, and you know how big soccer is in Europe. Though neither team is Spanish, brutally fanatic soccer fans fill the streets, wasting time in the city while eagerly awaiting the game slotted for later that afternoon. We're trapped between Milan Blue and Munich Red, fanatics to the highest degree. Decked out in their team's finest, these fans roam the streets, jeering and shouting (what I presume are) obscenities when they encounter opposing colors. Chant-offs seem popular, not only between adversaries but also between crowds of the same fans. We pass numerous

groups pounding their feet, clapping their hands, shouting in their native languages at passers-by, regardless of which team they support or whether they're in Madrid for the game at all.

There's a thin line between ecstatic fan-fighting and actual brawls, and police are everywhere, just waiting for that line to be crossed. A double-decker bus passes, blue-clad Milan fans spilling over the open top, attracting the attention of idling cops as the Italians jeer and gesture towards the red Germans below.

Shady folk use the chaos of the coming game to dabble in their shady business. Shoving through the crowded streets, we witness a drug deal going down—with an undercover cop. As soon as the bag is procured, the plainclothes officer signals to his partner and, with a flash of badges, the two slap handcuffs on the dealer and shove him into their car. I clutch my purse tight to me as we enter Madrid's Plaza Mayor. A statue of Felipe III, wrought of dark metal, rests atop a stone podium in the center of the square, looking over the multitude of white canopies temporarily set up. "Le Courier d'Espagne," declares the large white banner hastily hung in front of the canopies. Must be some type of conference, I think, looking at the people milling around displays... before my attention is caught by an overweight man in a Spiderman costume. Spandex stretches over the masked man's vast stomach as he shifts from pose to pose, modeling for the laughing audience's cameras.

Reaching the opposite side of the Plaza, we hit a wall of people, gawking as uniformed police shove a handcuffed woman into the back of a navy blue police van. A few more people are handcuffed to the side of the barred interior. Cameras are whipped out as we document foreign law enforcement at work, because they operate oh so differently from American police.

I have to smile as I step back into the street. Almost 5000 miles from home, and it's the same. Crowded city streets filled with drug dealers, cops, and all types of people parading in all types of clothing. It's all the same.

jordan bichler
photography





Mascara Tundra

White wine eyes
smoked with Cherie
clumped
mascara forest,
dry
as the tundra.
Sleeping on

thirst and
pinpricked
to perfection
that uncoils slowly
around
your wax-stuffed
ears. Deafened mouth,

yanked up
tirelessly
every day
around noon
in bed alone,
hung up
against the ceiling.

mary jacobs
photography

nourish, flourish

excuse your
self from
bad times
and dodge,

by way of
beautiful art
and
espionage;

prey vice
and fault
like snail
to salt,

let
shriveled up
in dust
to malt;

take it
in your hands
and squeeze
to siphon onto
bland and need,

sprinkle it
on white
or black
to stir
crackle,
pop

and snack.

balloons

inflated for
parties and bars
red carpets and
pop stars;

insecurity
fastened to string
at whim of wind
and everything;

plastic dispersed
by empty breathe
and while:

inflated till they're
not,

popped corn
like treaded mile.

Sampson: A Story of Loss

The day I cut all of your hair off,
was the day I knew we were the same person.

I was braided up with you
tied tight into your thoughts,
woven perfectly into your actions.

A couple of seconds and your hair, my hair, in an envelope
mailed to some girl I would never know,
and you would never know.





samantha uhler
photography

Snow in the Poppy Field

Life is incomplete, as is evident by me
standing here and spitting these words.
More—bitching these words into the open
air, to land on the shoes
Of those trifling mothers and brothers
who've been treading on me.
Those feet, so rank with ignorance to
my eye,
Lifestyle in their retinas—"s'just how we
do here" and
"What up doh?" All of which spoken so
quickly,
So effortlessly. Effort, effortless—see?
And now you stare because my tone
has offended you, or misrepresented
my hope.
It's as if you can't see my eye—mine blue,
yours shifting and nervous,
Beautiful and deep—but not quite a
window to the soul.
That well dried up and lost itself in this
abandoned city
So desperate for a drop of something, a
wave from the great length, to wash
over this whole plain of existence, to
wash out all the grime and the hurt
and the injustice and the whites in their
shorts and the blacks in their sweats
and the babies and the criminals and
the joys and the memories.
Yes those too, because what good is
something in the past if there is no
hope for a return—even in dreams,
which these days are clouded with
hummers and addictions
Clouded by the parents that failed us in
their greatest of efforts, broken for their
lost children—clouded by fantasies of

what is and what could be, neither
pleasing to imagine—clouds of exhaust
leave tracks in our heart as friends
move on and move to one side of
the Woods or the other—Ward off the
people we hurt—the clouds we find our
faith in, the spotlight searches nightly.
Cloudy in my eyes—these dreamers
jump rope and hop down the Scotch,
elbow upright.
Relaxing and restless—so far from being
over the rainbow—wicked witches
and wings and apes and broomsticks
and bubbles.
Only basketballs and courts and cussing
and white boys and black boys and
divas trying to sweat him and cock
block her ex, and her ex, and his ex—
but that one is on the down low, so
don't be too loud.
This autumn breeze requires more than a
jacket. A revival. A warm look. A friend.
A drink. A storm. A something. Anything
to stir up these waters and drown in
them. To fill the lungs with more than
smoke and cough up our inners and
cry through the burning of water in our
bodies and our eyes.
Depth comes in the death—the frozen
waste brings calm, drowns out the
poison in this town, wrinkles the Sunday
best of the best, pious and conformed.
Sometimes a curse. Sometimes a blessing.
But this November dusting cleans more
than the shelves of bodies standing
around waiting for their dreams to
come true. It's home reaching out and
clicking its heels for me—heals for me.

Untitled

The first.

Sweet and delicate, its soft coconut innards dissolved happily across my tongue. The warm June sun smiled down at us, and i—with one eye winced shut against that bright sun—looked over at you wondering what was next. Sprawled across the neon yellow and green knitted blanket you swatted a wasp away (rather protectively) from the napkin on which rested three more sweet treats. i wondered if you would ever become that protective of me. that is, were i to take on a more bronzed, baked and fruity appearance. for the meantime, i turned my gaze back to the spacious home in the distance, somewhere far on the other side of the park. it was nestled in a sea of emerald and dark green, the white stucco (i assumed it was stucco) staring back at me, almost glaringly. maybe it was brick. maybe it was marble or maybe it wasn't a home at all, but rather a castle. i was tired of wondering about stucco and castles and not-castles. i heaved a sigh, and fell back onto the blanket, the coconut treats being the only space between us.

the third.

the car grumbled as the gravel crunched beneath the tires. the august sunlight dove through the roof and splashed playfully on our laps as we drove along. your hand reached over to seize mine from my lap. "don't do that, you're driving stick shift!" i thought. i didn't mutter these words, even at the risk of my own safety, but rather inadvertently memorized the tiny hairs on your hand, your freckles and where you had bitten the skin around your fingernails. there was a scab on your index finger, somewhere around the cuticle. maybe you were the nervous type who needed to nibble on something, but frowned upon nail biters. how lucky i felt—were that the case—you didn't know me when i was 12.

"so, do you want to learn stick or not?" you asked after what seemed like an eternity. you grinned and looked over at me through your black sunglasses.

courtney mcgann
photography



stifled appendage

arrows
in Saint
Sebastian,

nails
in Jesus
Christ

the brush
by Painters'
hand;

within
eternal
might.

fingers
parting Antoinette

pasteled bed
to knuckle,

bristles
tithing oil;

giving crevice to
the muscles.

sleek wood
smiting flesh,

weeping red
to blush,

linen
veiling hearth;

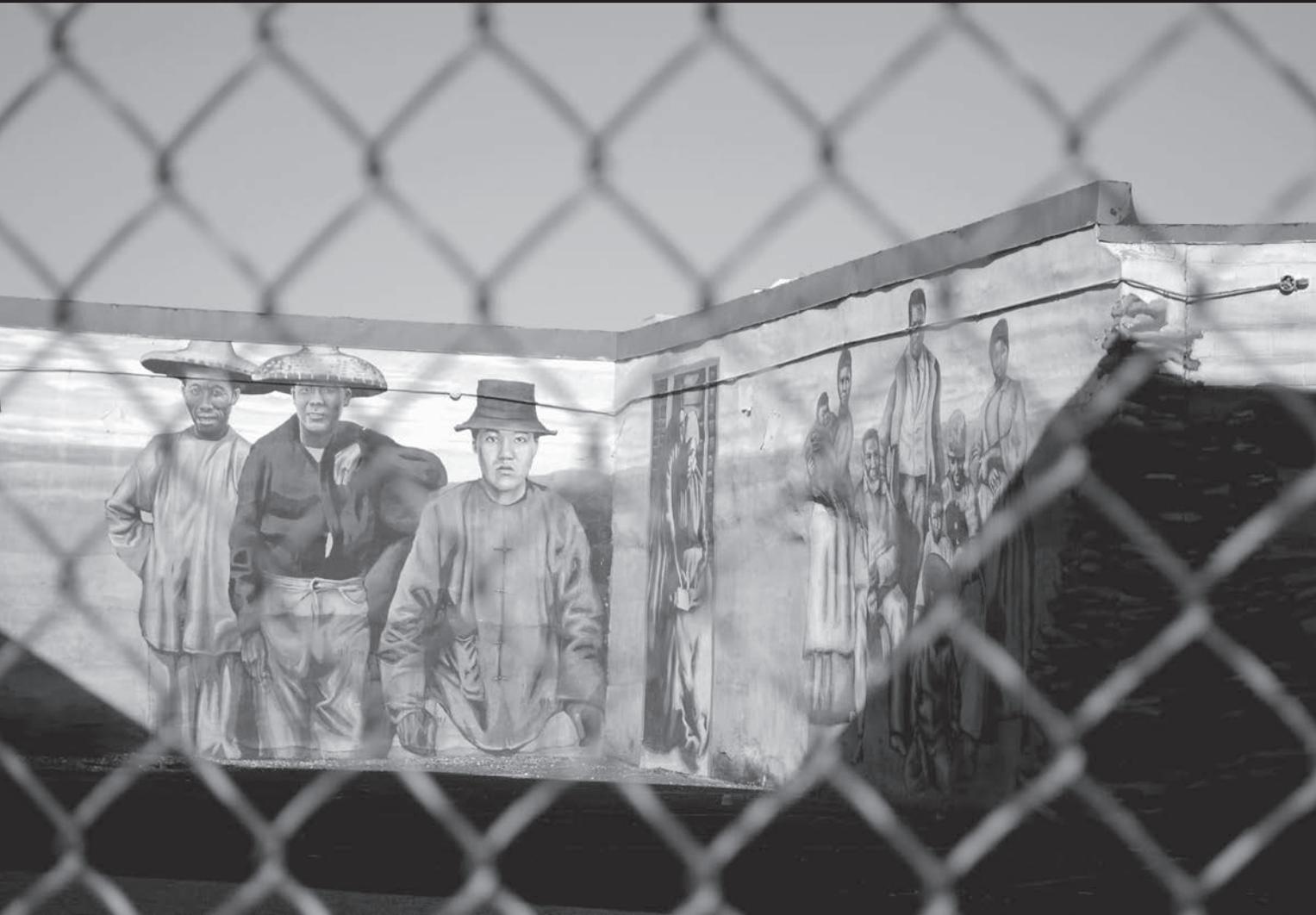
wax virtue
let to rust.

framed
martyrs:
Mary, Ryes:

be heeded
female pride,

artists
portend history,

within
eternal stride.



alexandria jetter
photography

The Midnight Switch

Character List

Ben, *young bachelor*

Travis, *Ben's unwanted roommate*

Mrs. Easterwood, *Ben's elderly neighbor*

Emily, *roughly same age as Ben*

Juan Valdez-Navarro, *Travis's Spanish speaking associate*

Randy Piper, *superintendent of the building*

Paul, *Emily's ex boyfriend*

Scene 1

*Apartment Building Lobby
Ben and Travis are waiting for the elevator*

BEN

When are you going to pay me back for those Mets tickets you bought with my credit card?

TRAVIS

I'll pay you back bro. Why are you always so worried about money?

BEN

You haven't paid rent in like four months...

TRAVIS

I am not on the lease. Why would I pay rent?

BEN

Because you live there?

TRAVIS

I am just staying with you till I get back on my feet. I thought we had that established.

BEN

You haven't had one job interview Travis.

TRAVIS

It's not my fault; the economy is rough right now.

BEN

Have you applied anywhere? Why don't you get your job back at Saladworld?

TRAVIS

They treated me like an animal there; I am done with those people.

BEN

You never told me you didn't like it there...

TRAVIS

It was hell Ben. I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy. I liked it at first when I could festively design each salad I made, but when customers started complaining that it took too long my managers started to come down on me... HARD. I had to rush through each salad I made-- they looked terrible. I was embarrassed by the product I was putting out...my sex life started to suffer. It sucked the life out of me... it really did.

BEN

Wow.

TRAVIS

I know. I know. You can see why I don't like to talk about it.

BEN

So there is no chance of you going back there?

TRAVIS

I sorta burned my bridges there, too.

BEN

What do you mean?

TRAVIS

Well my manager, Ray, he had a cute daughter and let's just say one day he caught me dipping my pen in the company ink.

(BEN takes a deep breath and shakes his head.)

TRAVIS

What's wrong?

BEN

Ray is my uncle; that's how I got you that job.

TRAVIS

Wait, really? So we're like blood brothers now?!

BEN

No, not at all.

TRAVIS

Oh whatever. I never really got what that meant anyways. I know you are worried about money and stuff because you invested in your first stock or whatever. Listen, if I don't have rent by the end of the month I will move out, deal?

BEN

Deal!

TRAVIS

Sorry it had to come to that. Can you stay out of the living room tonight?

BEN

What? Why? What are you doing tonight?

TRAVIS

I am in an online Madden tournament. I can't have any distractions.

BEN

No! It's my apartment I'm not staying locked up in my room so you can play Madden.

TRAVIS

You are being ridiculous.

You are being ridiculous.

BEN

Shut up Mrs. E is coming. Stop being a child.

TRAVIS

(MRS. EASTERWOOD enters lobby.)

Ohh my boys! How nice it is to see you!

MRS. EASTERWOOD

Hi Mrs. Easterwood.

BEN

(Travis Nods)

Benjamin! Why don't you and your friend come to dinner tonight?

MRS. EASTERWOOD

I can't. I have a big football game.

TRAVIS

My husband Truman used to play football. Did you ever see his games on the television Benjamin?

MRS. EASTERWOOD

No I haven't.

BEN

I have... he was great Mrs. E. Sorry I can't make it tonight, but Benjamin would be delighted to come... wouldn't you Ben?

TRAVIS

Uhh...

BEN

Oh Benjamin! This is fantastic! Emily from the second floor is coming also!

MRS. EASTERWOOD

Really?

BEN

Oh yes! She visits every Thursday! This is great! I haven't had a full dinner table since my weekly bridge game got cancelled.

MRS. EASTERWOOD

What happened? Did everyone die?

TRAVIS

Oh no I wish. I found out a few of them were cheating. Very awful people. But anyways, Benjamin, I am so excited! I am going to go bake a cake! I better go back to the store to pick up icing!

MRS. EASTERWOOD

Oh no, you don't have to do that!

BEN

Hush! I'm already on my way! Come over tonight after Bill O'Reilley's program! Ta Ta!

MRS. EASTERWOOD

(MRS. EASTERWOOD exits.)

I am gonna kill you.

BEN

Why? You should be thanking me.

TRAVIS

For what?

BEN

I just got you a date with Emily; I just wingmanned the shit out of that for you.

TRAVIS

Why do you keep thinking I even like her?

BEN

Cause you get pissed when I say I'm gonna bang her.

TRAVIS

BEN
You say that about every girl we meet.

TRAVIS
But you only get pissed about her, so relax. I won't bang her. But seriously, I might bang Mrs. E.

BEN
She is like eighty years old and weighs more than you.

TRAVIS
I am not an age-ist, and yea she has a little bit of meat on her bones but I am not a vegetarian. Tell me how her cooking is and I'll make the executive decision later.

BEN
I don't want to talk about this. Who are you being in your Madden tournament?

TRAVIS
I don't want to talk about it.

BEN
Why not?

TRAVIS
I never give out my strategy

BEN
Who am I going to tell?

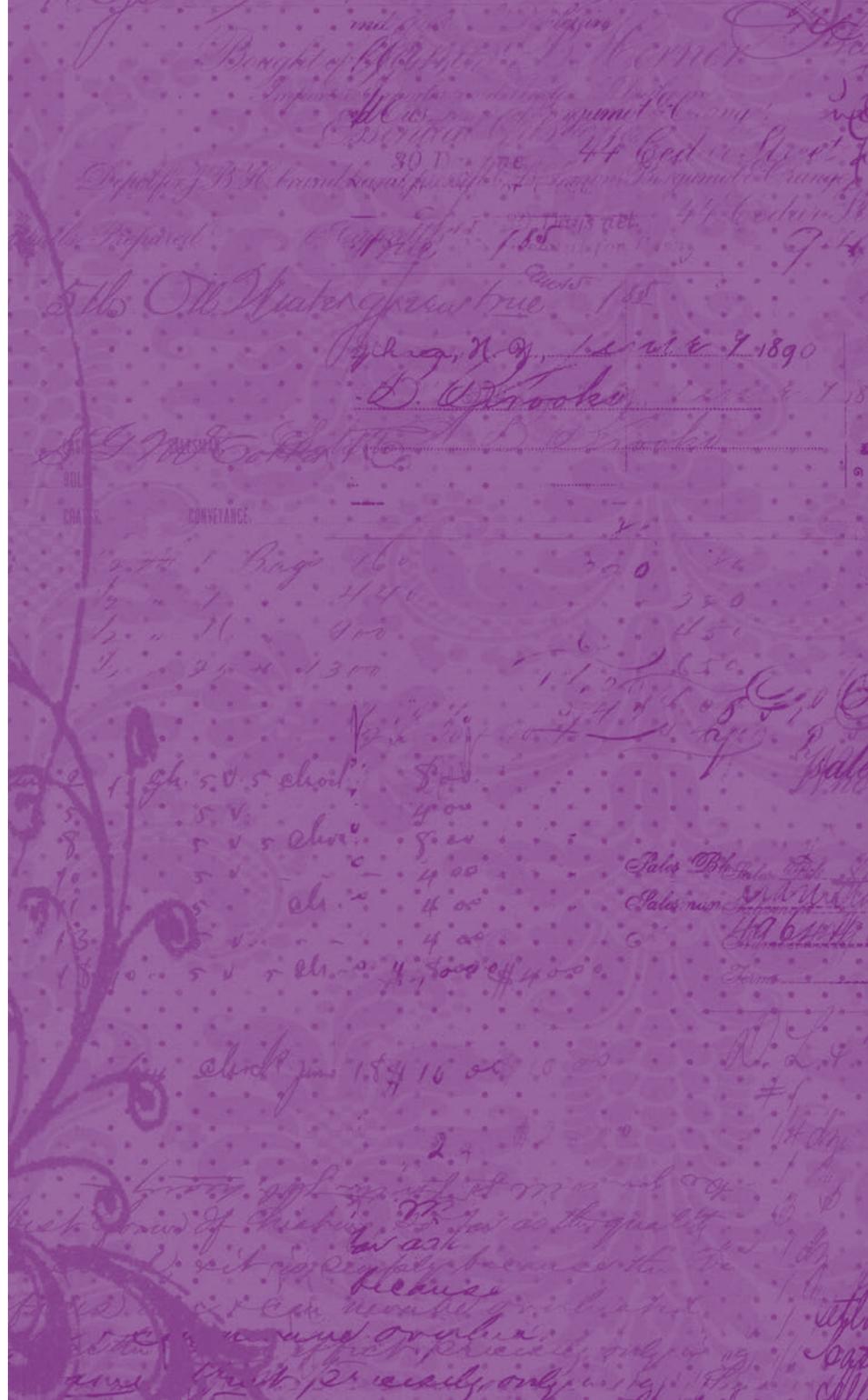
TRAVIS
I dunno but you sure are asking a lot of questions.

BEN
I am taking the stairs. I can't put up with your shit any longer. This elevator blows.

TRAVIS
I know. Why do you think I don't pay rent?

(BEN exits through the stair well.)

(Travis' phone rings.)



TRAVIS
Talk to me.

(Voice-over phone mumbling.)

What's up Cheeks? Yea we are good for tonight. Yea yea yea don't worry... the eagle has landed.

(Voice-over phone mumbling.)

Yea come over after the O'Reilly Factor. Stop asking questions it has to be tonight. Okay.

(Voice-over phone mumbling.)

Alright.

(Voice-over phone mumbling.)

Cheeks I gotta go, I am going through a tunnel I am gonna lose you.

(Person on phone says " You don't have a car.")

(Travis hangs up. Stares at elevator.)

(Randy Piper walks by, looks at Travis and then pushes the elevator button. The elevator opens immediately.)

TRAVIS
Oh, duh. Thanks Quincy.

(Travis gets in the elevator.)
(Randy gives a confused look.)

Scene 2

Mrs. Easterwood's apartment
Mrs. E is walking about preparing the apartment for the dinner.
Opera music is playing in the background as she sways around.

(Ben knocks and opens the door.)

BEN
Hi Mrs. Easterwood I am here....

MRS. EASTERWOOD
Benjamin! You are made it! You look dashing too!

BEN
Sorry if I am late? I ran to the store to get you these flowers.

MRS. EASTERWOOD
Benjamin! How thoughtful of you!

BEN
Oh it's no problem. It's the least I can do. Am I late?

MRS. EASTERWOOD
No, Benjamin, you are right on time! Would you like some tea?

BEN
No thanks. Is Emily here yet?

MRS. EASTERWOOD
She said she is going to be a tad tardy. What can I get you to drink?

BEN
I am fine right now.

MRS. EASTERWOOD
I'll go get you a beer!

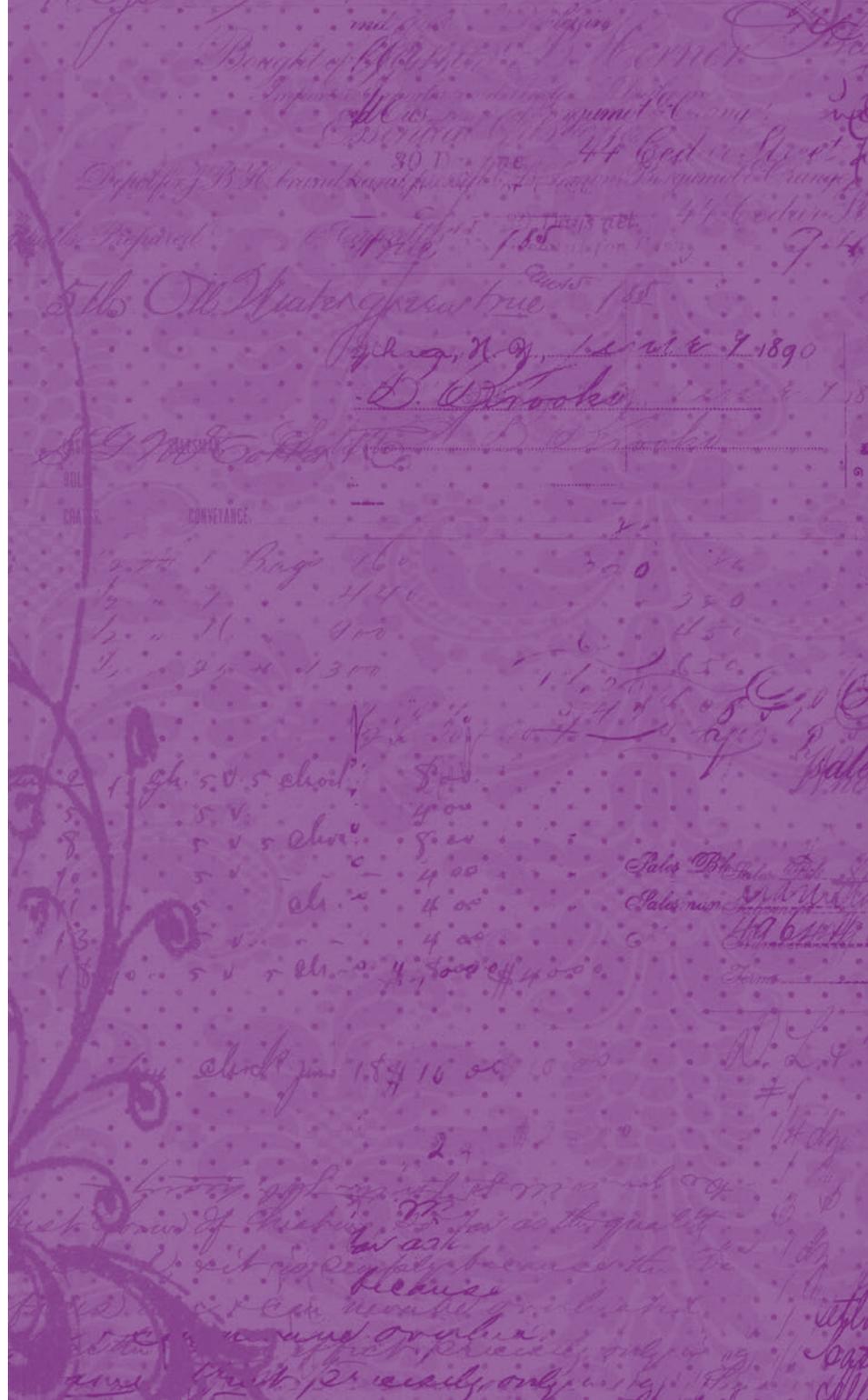
(Mrs. E leaves living room walks to other room.)
(Travis sticks his head in the door.)

TRAVIS
Dude, where do you keep your scuba gear?

BEN
I don't have scuba gear? What are you doing over there?

TRAVIS
Nothing! Where's Emily?

BEN
She isn't here yet.



TRAVIS
Where's Mrs E?

BEN
In the kitchen

TRAVIS
How's it going?

BEN
Awkward as hell.

TRAVIS
Okay love you.

BEN
Love you too.

(Travis leaves.)

(Mrs. E returns with a two large glasses of wine.)

MRS. EASTERWOOD
Benjamin I poured you some Merlot. Who were you talking to?

BEN
I was just talking to ... your bird. What its name?

MRS. EASTERWOOD
Oh, his name is Sherman. He is a joyful little bird isn't he, Benjamin? I named him after my lover.

BEN
Wait... wasn't Mr. Easterwood's name Truman?

MRS. EASTERWOOD
Yes, yes it was. How is your Merlot, Benjamin?

(Ben takes a sip of wine.)

BEN
It is good... I never really had wine before though so I don't have much to compare to.

MRS. EASTERWOOD

Really? Benjamin when I was your age I drank a bottle wine every night!

BEN

Oh really?

MRS. EASTERWOOD

Benjamin, I never told you about how I met my husband have I?

BEN

No, I don't think so.

MRS. EASTERWOOD

Okay well I need to go check on the dinner-- you just sit here patiently and I will come back and tell you all about it!

(Mrs. E goes to kitchen.)

(Emily walks in.)

EMILY

Hey Ben! I am so glad you're here. I get kind of bored when it's just me and Mrs. E.

BEN

Hey, really? My night has been kind of interesting so far.

EMILY

Yea she always talks about her canary Felicia that she named after her 4th grade teacher. Hey I'll be right back. I gotta go run and grab my phone charger from my apartment. This thing's about to die and I am expecting an important call about a job. Sorry I'll be right back.

(Emily leaves.)

(Travis pops his head in, then enters with Juan.)

TRAVIS

Dude, where did you put my sword?

BEN

I have no idea what you're talking about. Who is that?

TRAVIS

Oh this is Juan. Don't mind him. How is it going?

BEN

Well I found out Mrs. E used to get drunk and make love to someone named Sherman.

TRAVIS

I like it. Did you put the moves on Emily yet?

BEN

No she just got here and left right away.

TRAVIS

Did you wear that shitty cologne? Nevermind. No time. Okay, don't worry about the sword; I'll find something else.

(Mrs. EASTERWOOD re-enters.)

MRS. EASTERWOOD

Thomas! You made time to come visit? This is wonderful.

(Mrs. EASTERWOOD sits down.)

TRAVIS

Listen lady I can't stay.

MRS. EASTERWOOD

Oh that's a shame.. Benjamin and Emi.. and Emily are coming for dinner. It would have been..

(Mrs. EASTERWOOD passes out.)

TRAVIS

Well that was rude.

BEN

Shit she probably drank too much.

TRAVIS

Did you roofie her?

BEN

Seriously? No man.

TRAVIS
 Okay, okay, Juan take a look at her.
 (Juan goes to closely examine Mrs. E.)

BEN
 No Juan don't take a look at her. What the hell Travis?

TRAVIS
 Relax, Juan was a doctor in his homeland; he knows what he is doing.
 (Juan does the sign of the cross and covers her body with a blanket.)

JUAN
 Muerte de la señora.

TRAVIS
 Ben we have a slight problem.

BEN
 What did he say? Does he speak English?

TRAVIS
 No, he doesn't speak English. There is no law that says you have to speak English. I hate how people assume that the.....

BEN (Interrupting)
 What did he say?

TRAVIS
 Oh he said she is dead.

JUAN (nodding)
 Sí.
 (Ben stands up and walks toward phone.)

TRAVIS
 Who are you calling? Wanna get a pizza? I am starving.

BEN
 I am calling 911.

(Travis runs towards Ben.)

TRAVIS
 No! Don't do it. We can't have any random people on our floor right now.
 (Ben puts down the phone.)

BEN
 What do you mean?

TRAVIS
 Okay slowly...and I mean slowly go look across the hall at our apartment.
 (Ben walks out the door and runs back in two seconds later.)

BEN
 Oh my God! How did you? What?...Who are you?

TRAVIS
 Listen I'll fix everything. I'll take care of Mrs. E and your apartment will be the way it was when you left. Just stay here and entertain Emily for a few hours, okay? After Emily comes back, don't let her leave for a little while I just need some time. Juan grab the body and let's go.
 (JUAN drags Mrs. EASTERWOOD out of the apartment and TRAVIS mouths "stay calm" to Ben as he backpedals out of the apartment. BEN sits with his head in his hands in disbelief.)
 (A few seconds later Emily returns.)

EMILY
 Hey sorry about that. I had fourteen messages from my ex-boyfriend so I had to find the pepper spray my mom bought me for college just in case.

BEN
 It's no problem. You didn't miss too much.

EMILY
 Where's Mrs. E? What did you kill her or something?

BEN (Nervously)
 What? Why would you say that?

EMILY

I was just kidding Ben.

BEN

Oh right. Well see Mrs. E actually left.

EMILY

She left?

BEN

Yea she said she had a doctor's appointment

EMILY

It's seven thirty at night....

BEN

Yea I think he is a specialist or something. She said we could still eat the dinner she made and everything though.

EMILY

Oh ok. So this is like our first date?

BEN

Yea you should be happy you just got upgraded from third wheel to date.

EMILY

Must be my lucky day.

BEN

What's the job you are waiting to hear back from?

EMILY

It would be a job in PR for the Mets. It's like my dream job but it seems like a long shot.

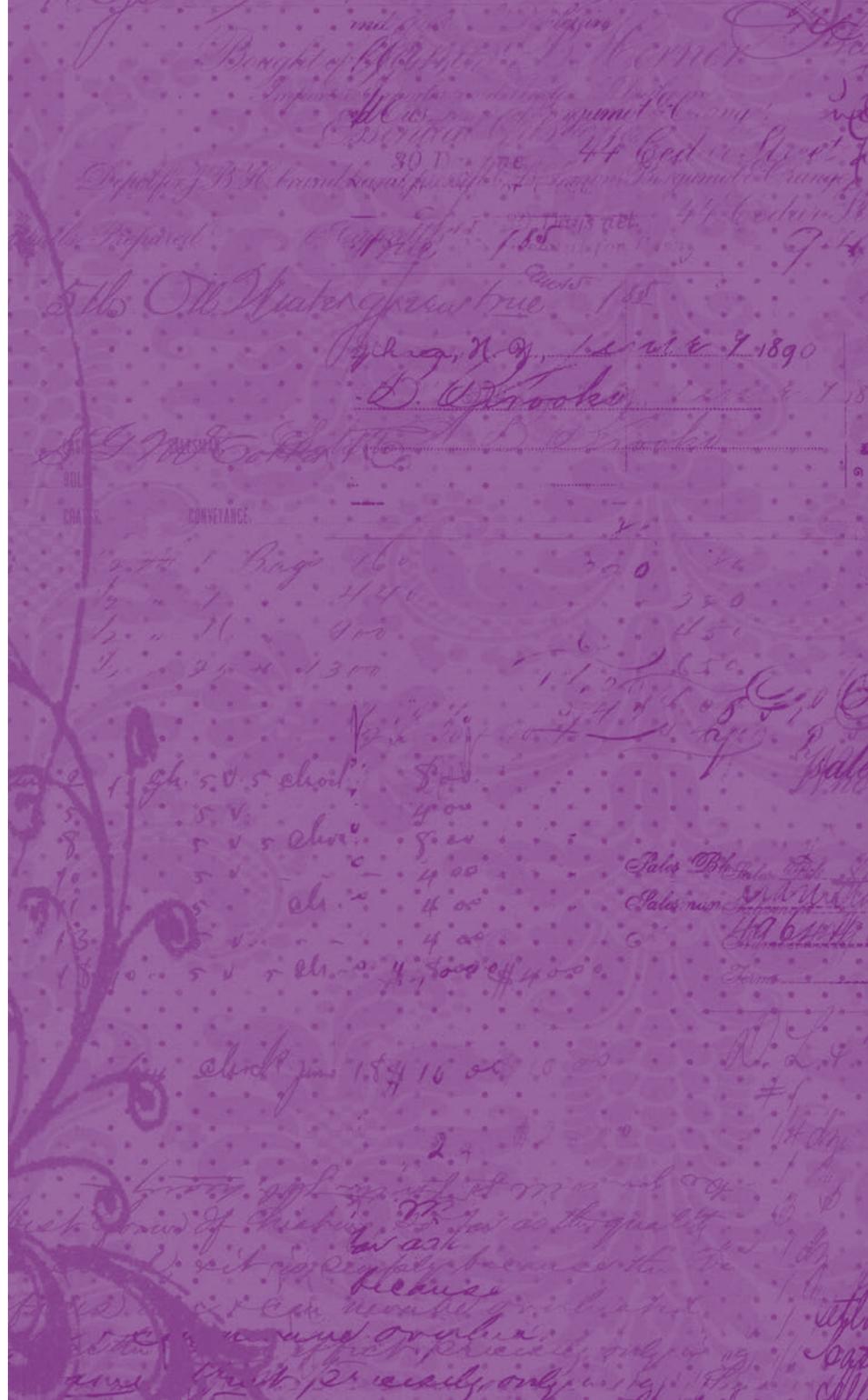
BEN

How far of a long shot?

EMILY

Someone would probably have to die for me to get it.

(Ben nervously laughs.)



(Emily starts texting on her phone.)

BEN (to himself)

It's not like it's the Yankees.

(Loud noise from outside the apartment is heard.)

EMILY

Did you hear that?

BEN

Hear what? I didn't hear anything.

EMILY

Ben, are you alright?

BEN

Yea I am fine. Maybe that was just the construction across the street maybe.

EMILY

Oh, yea that makes sense.

(EMILY starts playing with her phone.)

BEN

So anyways, you and your boyfriend broke up?

EMILY

Yea it was one of those things I wish I did a while ago. He was a jerk. I always felt like something was missing.

BEN

Yea that's how I felt in my last relationship, too.

EMILY

Oh really? I didn't know you were seeing someone.

BEN

Well it was in high school, but we definitely had that something missing factor that you were describing.

EMILY

That's cute.

(Loud thump heard from outside.)

Holy Shit Juan!
TRAVIS (from outside the apartment)

Ben, what the hell is going on out there?

At this point I really have no idea, but I think for our safety it would be best for us to stay in here.

Okay I am leaving!

(Emily gets up to leave.)

(TRAVIS opens the door and walks in slowly breathing heavily
he sits down and wipes his brow.)

It's over. It's over.

Where is Mrs. E?

With Juan.

Who is Juan?

BEN
Her doctor.

(Emily's phone rings.)

Hello, yes this is her. Yes.....Yes....Thank you so much for calling..... Great see you then!

(Hangs up.)

(Emily hugs Ben.)

I got the job!

That's great!

What are you doing, Travis?

I just thought we were sharing this special moment together.

Want to go celebrate?

Sure, what the hell! Travis you coming too?

No, I gotta stay here and clean up my mess.

What mess?

Can you leave now?

Really?

Yea I gotta talk to Ben alone, please.

Okay, Ben I'll meet you in the lobby.

(Hug breaks.)

(Travis joins the hug.)

(EMILY leaves.)

TRAVIS
Okay here.

(TRAVIS hands BEN a pillowcase filled with money.)

BEN
What? How much money is this?

TRAVIS
That's the rent I owed you plus for the next year and also it should cover the damages done to your apartment.

BEN
Travis where did you get this? This is like ten grand?

TRAVIS
Listen just take this money, put it somewhere safe...Oh yea and take this knife too.

(Travis reaches under his shirt and takes out a knife, then he hands Ben the knife.)

BEN
What is this for?

TRAVIS
Mrs. E didn't die, and she thinks we tried to kill her. There is no reasoning with her. She is out for revenge. She is like a zombie. Have a good night. I have to go find Juan; he had a crazy look in his eye.

(Travis runs out of the apartment.)

(Ben hesitates for a second then follows and closes the door behind him.)

(Moments later Mrs. E kicks in the door and looks around then bolts out.)

Scene 3*Set is dark with spotlight on Juan.*

JUAN

It has been cuatro (holds up 4 fingers) weeks. Señora Easterwood has no been seen. Señor Ben has been seeing Ms. Emily. Señor Travis and I have been good good friends. He is teaching to me Ingles! But it has not been all sunshine. Señor Ben seems to be angry with Mr. Travis and Mr. Travis is mad with Señorita Emily!

Scene 4*Ben and Travis' Apartment.*

Clothes and empty plates are all over the living room. Travis is sitting on the couch in a robe, wearing penny loafers, eating cereal, watching tv (facing the audience) while Ben is walking around picking up the trash and putting them in a trash can.

BEN
Travis, I was gone for 3 hours. How the hell did you trash the place so fast?

TRAVIS
This isn't even bad. Are we still going to the shore next weekend?

BEN
I think so. Emily said she might come too she needs to get off work still though.

TRAVIS
C'mon dude! You don't bring sand to the beach.

BEN
You are dumb. Why is there so much trash in here? Did you have Juan and his family here for dinner again? Why are you wearing that robe it's almost six.

TRAVIS
I was hungry. But now that you mention it the Valdez-Navarro's will be coming tomorrow night for dinner. This robe is awesome; I got it at the flea market.

BEN
No...

Okay, where did I buy it then? TRAVIS

No, I don't care about your stupid robe; I meant "No you are not having Juan's family over tomorrow night." BEN

Where do you get off? I paid rent. I deserve to get full access to my bedroom and the common areas which include the living room, kitchen, den, bathroom, and catwalk. Is this 'cause I banged your cousin? TRAVIS

No, shut up. I told you on Wednesday I was having Emily over for dinner tomorrow and you aren't supposed to be here remember? BEN

(Travis dramatically drops his spoon into his cereal and places the bowl on the coffee table.)

Dude, that girl is the worst. You are really are gonna let a small Mexican-American family starve for her? She is like a seven at best. TRAVIS

Since when do you not like Emily? BEN

Since she is always here! Even when you go to work sometimes she is sleeping here. I used to have alone time where I could do some personal things in the living room. Now that's all gone because you are dating Emily Rose. TRAVIS

She isn't always here. You are exaggerating. What the hell do you do in the living room that you consider "personal"? BEN

It wouldn't be personal if I told you. Plus you don't want to know. TRAVIS

Great. Anything else? BEN

Yea, I am adopting a cat. TRAVIS

(Travis grabs a Polaroid of a cat off the coffee table and hands it to Ben.)

His name is Admiral Soup. TRAVIS

Emily is allergic to cats; you aren't getting it. BEN

That girl is ruining both of our lives! TRAVIS

She isn't ruining my life. BEN

Yea she is, you just can't see it because you are in a stupid voo doo love trance. TRAVIS

I am not. BEN

She probably still talks to her ex. What's his name? Malakai? TRAVIS

His name is Paul. You are terrible with names. BEN

Well she is probably banging him still so you should let me get Admiral Soup. TRAVIS

Can you stop bashing her? BEN

Have you farted in front of her? TRAVIS

No. What kind of question is that? BEN

TRAVIS

Dude, that's how you know. If you can fart in front of a girl and you are both okay with it, that's how you know it's the real thing.

BEN

You are an idiot. I am not taking relationship advice from someone who hasn't had a girlfriend since fourth grade.

TRAVIS

That was low you son of a bitch. Don't attack me because I am being honest with you. I am telling you, rip one tonight and see what happens. I would bet the farm she sticks her snobbish beak up and does her little bird trot outta here.

BEN

You are just saying this crap because you want a cat and you think she is the only obstacle in your way.

TRAVIS

Not true. But seriously Ben, I need this cat.

BEN

We can't have cats, Randy doesn't allow them.

TRAVIS

Who is Randy?

BEN

The landlord--the one you talk to literally every day.

TRAVIS

I thought his name was Quincy

(Deep breath by Ben.)

BEN

His name is Randy Piper. You can't have a cat, and you will not be here Saturday night - got it? If you don't like it you can move out, move to Mrs. Easterwood's old apartment. It doesn't look like she is coming back.

TRAVIS

But Saturday use to be our bro-out night...

BEN

Not anymore.

(Ben leaves and slams the door.)

(Travis's phone rings, he reaches for it and answers.)

TRAVIS

Yo D Bird, I am glad you called. Listen, things at the nest have gotten worse, we are going to have to go into phase two. Wanna meet me tomorrow at five-ish?

(Shakes his head side to side as the person over the phone responds.)

TRAVIS

Wait, why did you call me?

(Chuckles as the person over the phone responds.)

TRAVIS

Of course I'll go to the funeral. I gotta go my wife is calling me, I'll catch ya later.

(Randy Piper knocks and enters.)

RANDY

Hey Travis, mind if I look at your sink?

TRAVIS

Quincy?

RANDY

What?

TRAVIS

Never mind, I don't have time. Yea you can look at the sink. Here after you get it working wash this...

(Travis hands Randy his empty cereal bowl.)

TRAVIS

I gotta run.

(Travis leaves the apartment with the door open and Randy stands confused for a second then begins to wash the dish.)

Scene 5*Ben's Apartment.**Ben and Emily are sitting on the couch watching a movie semi-close. The lights are dimmed. Emily is texting and Ben seems a little nervous about it.*

BEN

Geez, Dexter the texter, you haven't put your phone down yet.

EMILY

Oh sorry, this is the last one I swear. My girlfriend is just going through some drama right now.

BEN

Oh right. So you are sure you want to watch this movie?

EMILY

Yea! My dad told me it's really good.

BEN

Your dad told you "What's Love Got to do with it" is really good?

EMILY

Yep. He loves Ike Turner for some reason.

BEN

Oh, okay...

BEN (mumbling to himself)

That's normal...

EMILY

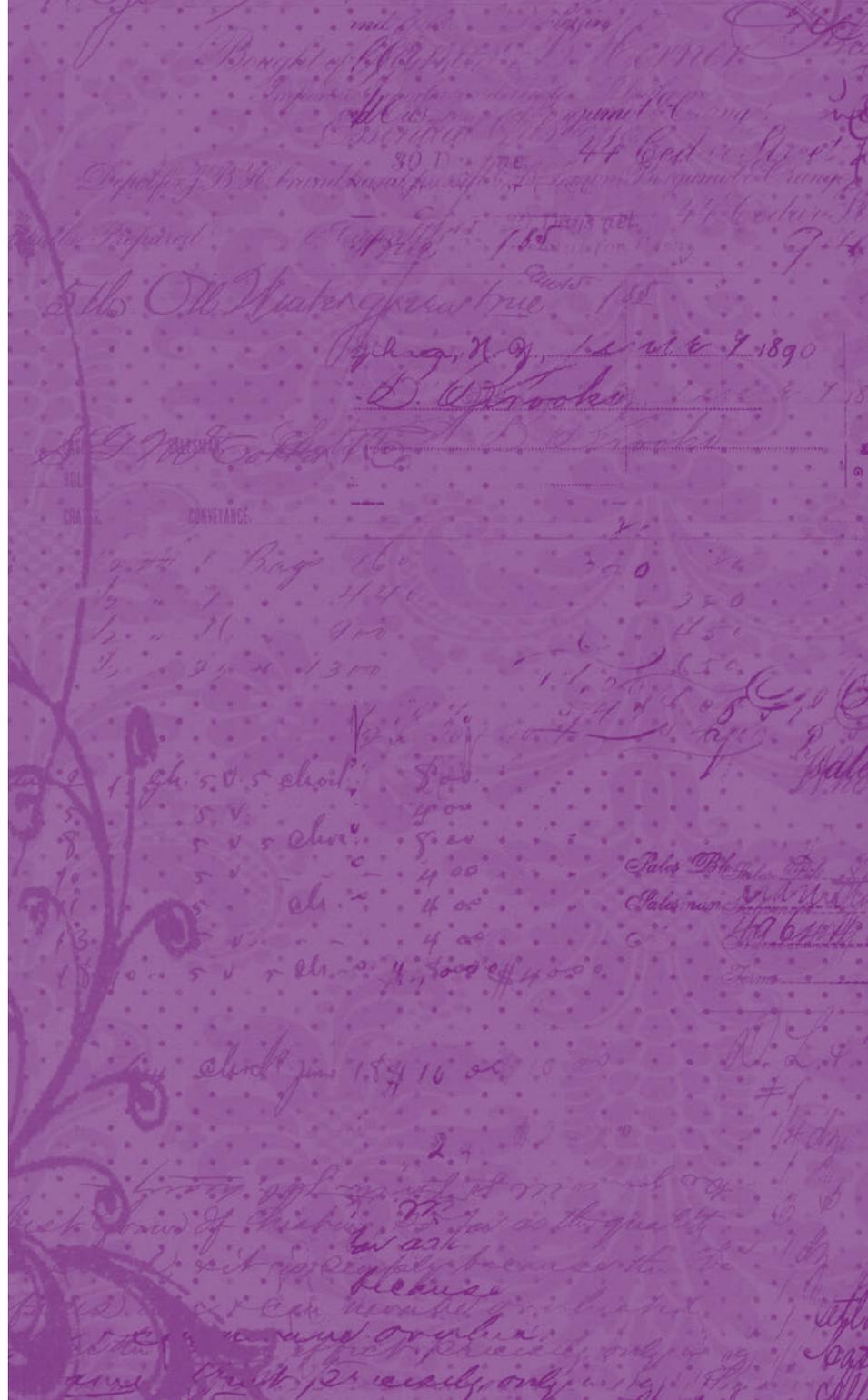
So you know how I told you about how my ex-boyfriend still tries to call me a lot?

BEN

Tries to call you? What do you mean? He means to call you but dials the wrong number?

EMILY

Well he does call me but I don't always answer. Oh hold on I love this part!

Television: (Ike Turner, Sr.): Hey, Anna Mae, where you goin'. I need to get some sleep!
(Tina Turner): Go straight to hell, Ike!

BEN

...Great part. So what were you saying again?

EMILY

Oh right, well I have been wondering if I should answer to tell him.

BEN

Tell him what? About us?

EMILY

Yea that and...

(Travis swiftly opens the door and runs and dives behind the couch. Juan carelessly strolls in the open door behind him and opens it. Juan is carrying a baseball bat in his left hand and a bottle in a brown paper bag in his right.)

TRAVIS (from behind the couch)

Sorry I know I know I am not supposed to be here. But Juan's birthday got a little out of hand.

BEN (sarcastically)

Oh happy birthday Juan!

(Juan raises the bottle in the air as a gesture to Ben, then takes a big swig.)

EMILY

What were you two doing?

(Travis gets up dusts himself off and walks over and sits down on the recliner.)

TRAVIS

Well we were out in Chinatown for that festival they were having for the Chinese New Year. We're having a good time drinking Saki and what not...

JUAN

Sí... SAKI!!

TRAVIS

And then you know those big dragon things that people stand under and dance around under?

BEN
Yea..

TRAVIS
Well Juan thought they were moving piñatas. He has a great swing too. We have to get him on our softball team. But there are a lot of Asian people unhappy with us.

Television: (Ike Turner Sr.) : Eat the cake Anna Mae!

JUAN
Ike Turner!!

BEN
So Juan started swinging a baseball bat at a bunch of Chinese people in a dragon costume?

TRAVIS
Yea, did you hear what I said? He is going to be the savior of our softball team. He must have played semi pro ball in Cuba or something.

BEN
Cuba?

TRAVIS
I don't know. Where ever he is from. How has your night been?

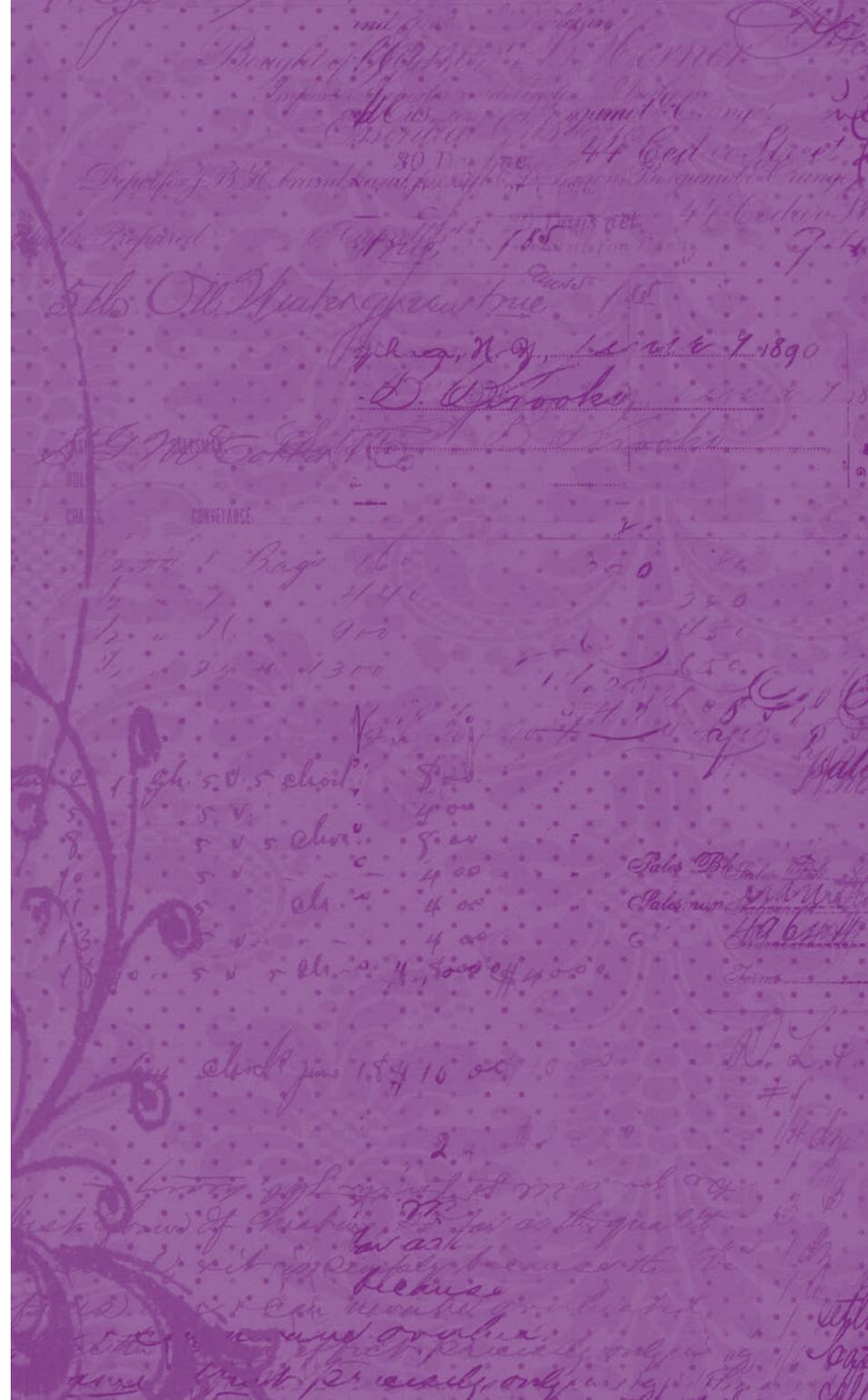
(Ben turns to Emily.)

BEN
I am really sorry about this.

EMILY
No it's fine, but I was about to tell you something kinda important.

BEN
Just go ahead, Travis will find out anyways and Juan doesn't really speak English.

EMILY
Ok here it goes... I am pregnant. And I don't know whose it is.



BEN
What?

JUAN
¿Chico pequeño?!

TRAVIS
You are NOT keeping it! I don't care if I have to kick you in the stomach!

BEN
Travis chill!
(Emily's phone rings, she answers it.)

EMILY
What Paul? I told you not to call me anymore... I will call you.....
No don't come over here....
You know what, fine come over.....
My new boyfriend is going to kick your ass if you do though.....

BEN (trying to yell into the phone)
No, Paul I didn't say that!

EMILY
Yea, I guess we'll see you in a little bit asshole.

BEN (trying to yell in the phone)
It's okay Paul don't come over please!
(Emily hangs up.)
(Juan starts laughing hysterically.)

EMILY
Sorry. I am just really hormonal right now.

BEN
So you have no idea whose it is?

EMILY
Ben I don't want to talk about this right now.

(Travis whips his phone out of his pocket and starts dialing.)

TRAVIS

Yes, I would like to put in an order for a cat please.

EMILY

Ew. Cats are gross.

TRAVIS

You're gross.

EMILY

Oh yea? Why don't you get your own apartment?

TRAVIS

Oh yea? Why don't you go get measured for your C section?

BEN

Everybody stop!

(Apartment buzzer goes off.)

(Travis stands up and goes to answer the intercom.)

PAUL

Hey let me in so I can beat your ass!

TRAVIS

Who is this?

PAUL

It's Paul. Emily's boyfriend.

TRAVIS

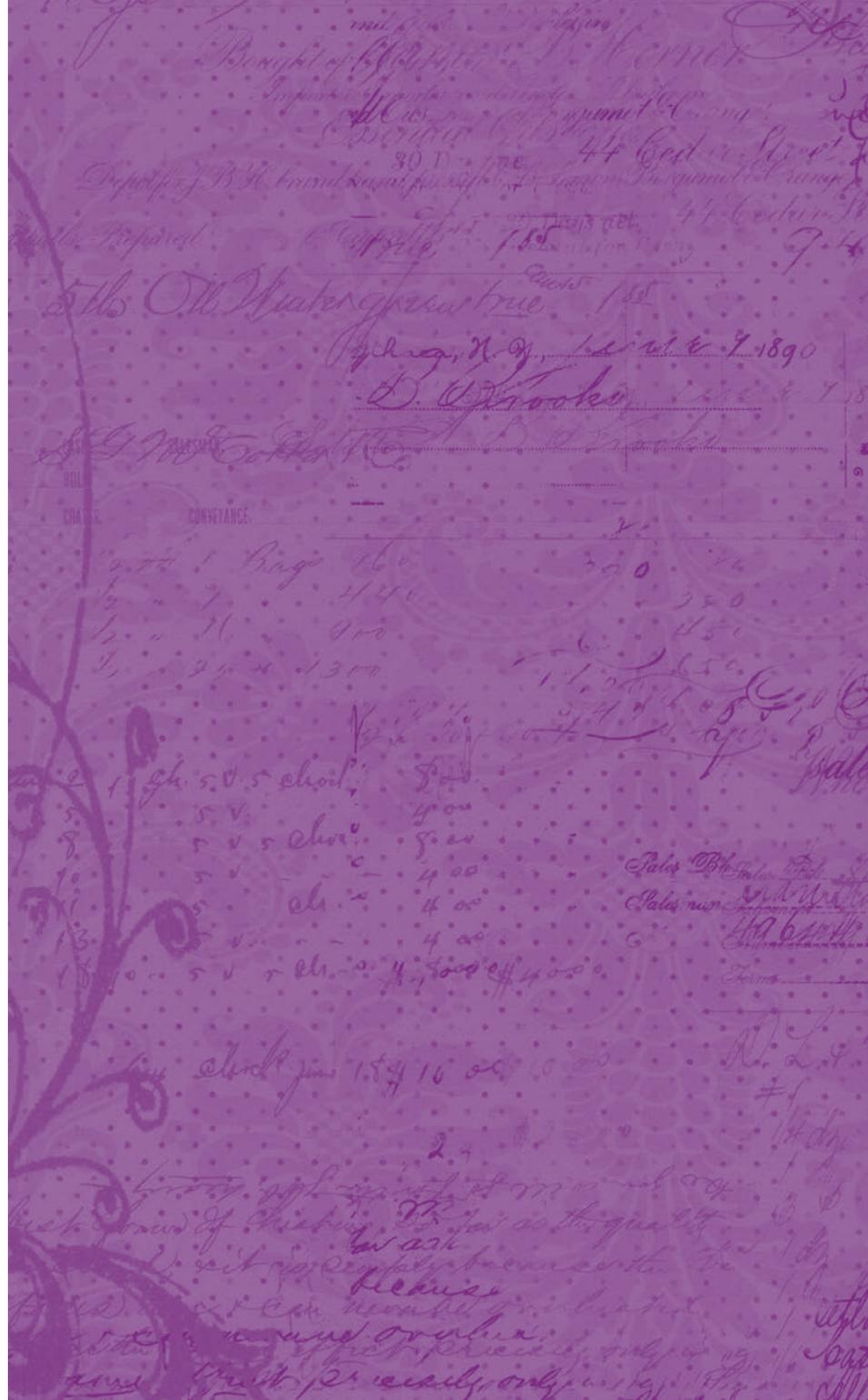
I think you have the wrong apartment.

EMILY

You're not my boyfriend Paul!

PAUL

Oh yea, who was that then if I have the wrong apartment?



TRAVIS

We are watching the Tina Turner movie.

PAUL

Let me in!

JUAN

Sí señor.

(JUAN hits the buzzer to let Paul into the building.)

BEN

Thanks again Juan!

TRAVIS

I think I might like drunk Juan even more than normal Juan.

(JUAN holds up the bottle in the air as a gesture to Ben and Travis and takes another swig.)

TRAVIS

Don't worry it will be fine. I saw this in a movie once.

(Travis grabs the bat from Juan and jumps on top of the refrigerator.)

EMILY

What are you doing?!

TRAVIS

Shhh! I can hear him coming!

(Travis signals to Juan to turn off the lights which he then does.)

(There is a knock at the door, then the door opens slowly.)

RANDY

Hello?

(There is a loud *thud* noise.)

TRAVIS

Juan turn the lights on! Take that sucka!

(The lights are turned on and Randy Piper is laying down on the floor unconscious.)

EMILY

OH MY GOD! Wait...that is not Paul!

TRAVIS

Quincy! What have I done?!

BEN

I am calling an ambulance...

(Paul stomps in over the body.)

PAUL

That's a great idea, cause your gonna need one!

EMILY

You better leave before you get your face stomped Paul!

BEN

No, no there will be no stomping of faces everyone-- relax!

PAUL

Big tough guy ain't so tough anymore now is he!

TRAVIS

Hey Paul, did you know that Emily is pregnant?

PAUL

What?

(Paul turns to Emily.)

PAUL

You're not keeping it!

(Paul starts walking towards Ben, as he passes Juan, Juan hits him in the head with the bottle and Paul falls to the floor on top of Piper.)

(Travis kneels over the unconscious body of Paul and speaks softly to him.)

TRAVIS

That's what I said, too, Paulie. That's what I said, too.

(Travis jumps up.)

TRAVIS

Well that all escalated quickly.

JUAN

Sí. ¡Very rápido!

(Juan tries to take another swig but realizes that the bottle is empty and tries to salvage the few last drops.)

BEN

This is crazy.

TRAVIS

No, no I'll tell you what would be crazy. If you and Emily let a little thing like this ruin the rest of your evening. You have a lot to talk about, baby names, whether or not you want to sell it, and stuff like that. Enjoy these moments they go by too fast. Juan grab the bodies and let's go.

BEN

Stop Travis, we have to call an ambulance this time.

EMILY

This has happened before?

TRAVIS

Ben, I'll take care of it. Juan is a doctor, remember? Why pay an ambulance bill when you get the milk for free? Juan let's go!

(Travis and Juan each drags a body out the door.)

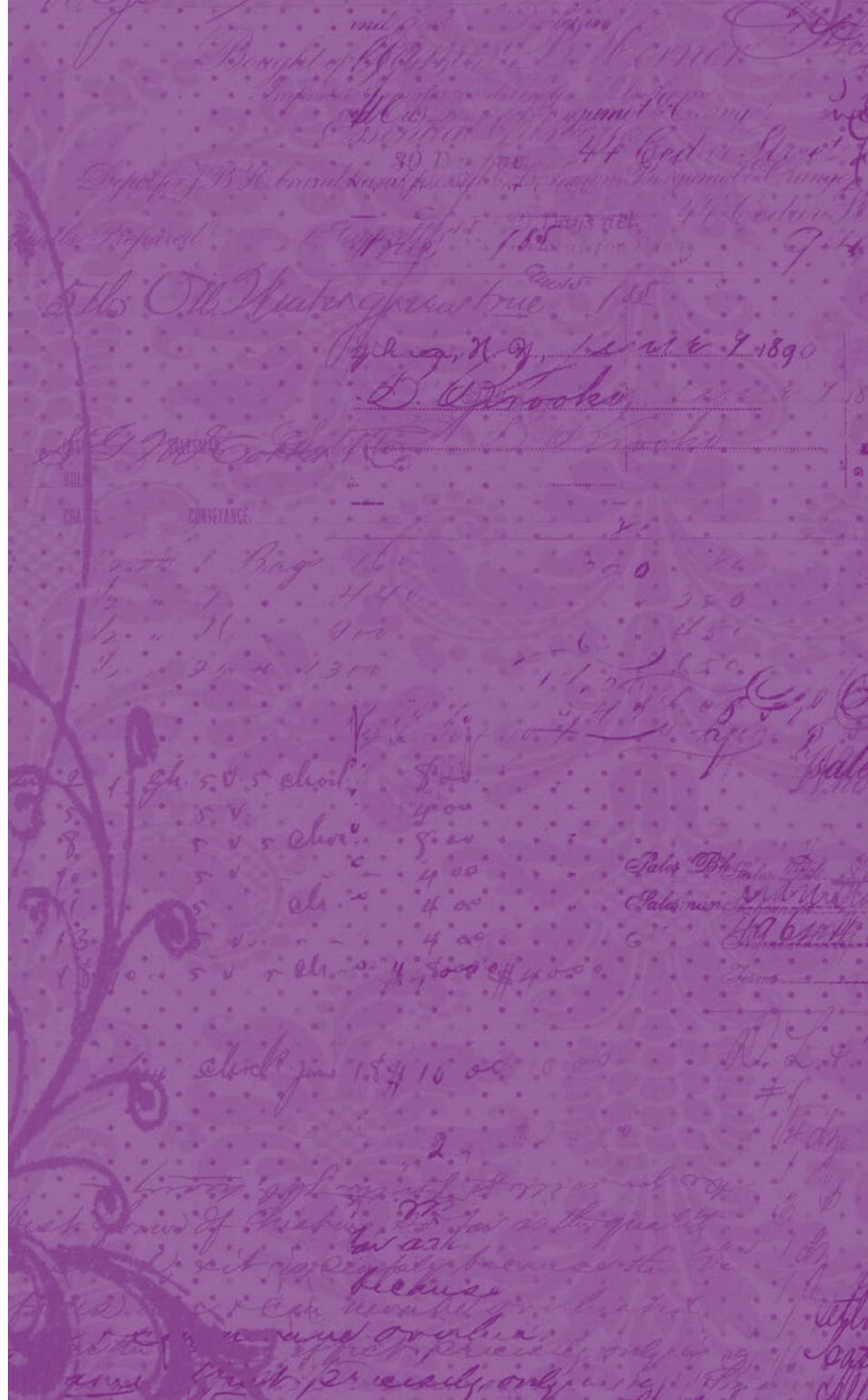
(Emily and Ben are left in the room.)

BEN

What are the chances it's mine?

EMILY

I don't think the chances are very high.



BEN
Why not? We did that one time after your cousin's Bar Mitzvah...

EMILY
Well that actually wasn't me. There is something else I have to tell you...

BEN
What?!

EMILY
My friend really liked you so we did the midnight switch.

BEN
The midnight what?

EMILY
The midnight switch. It's when you get someone in the bedroom, turn the lights off, then go to the bathroom and then your friend goes in and seals the deal. You were pretty drunk from those wine coolers so it was really easy to fool you.

BEN
Why would you do that?

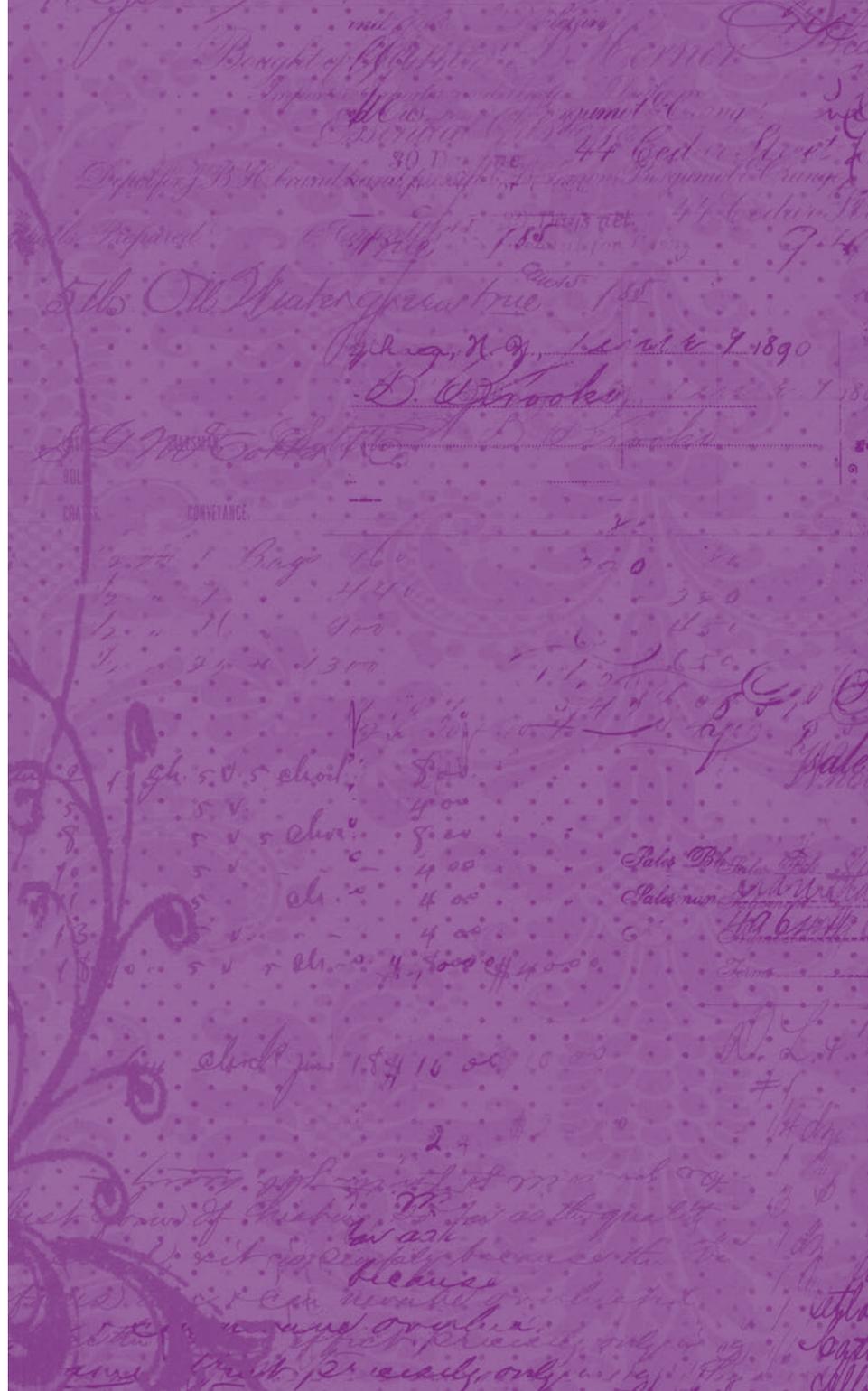
EMILY
I guess I was nervous about actually going there with you cause I liked you so much and my friend told me she would do it and tell me all about it so I wouldn't be nervous then.

BEN
We never did it after that then though?

EMILY
She didn't give you very good reviews.

BEN
Who was she?

EMILY
Just some girl named Sandy... no big deal.



BEN
I was drunk. Tell Sandy I was drunk.

EMILY
I think we both need some time to think. I am gonna go. I'll see you later or something.

(Emily leaves, Ben puts his hands in his head and sits there recollecting what just occurred.)

(After a moment there is another knock at the door.)

BEN
What?

(The door opens and Mrs. Easterwood walks in.)

MRS. EASTERWOOD
Ohh Benjamin! It is so nice of you to invite me in!

(Ben jumps to the corner of the couch terrified.)

BEN
Hi Mrs. Easterwood.... I haven't seen you in awhile...

MRS. EASTERWOOD
I know, I know, now whose fault is that Benjamin?

BEN
Uhh.. I dunno I guess I have been busy and you probably are too and stuff so...

(Mrs. E creeps closer.)

Mrs. EASTERWOOD
Benjamin what's wrong?

(Ben stands up and closes his eyes.)

BEN
Just get it over with!

(Mrs. Easterwood takes a step closer to Ben and kisses him on the cheek.)

(Ben jumps back.)

Mrs. EASTERWOOD

Thank you Benjamin. Whatever you boys did to me, it has made me feel wonderful. I haven't felt this great in years! I went to visit my grandson in Sin City. I think I took the phrase "What Happens in Vegas Stays in Vegas" to a new level. I even got a tattoo. Would you like to see it Benjamin?

BEN

Please not right now.

MRS. EASTERWOOD

Okay maybe later! Anyways now I want to thank you. Upside down pineapple cake at my apartment...it will be ready in two minutes.

BEN

Upside down pineapple cake?

MRS. EASTERWOOD

Oh yes it is delicious Benjamin! Maybe we can have a few Margaritas as well!

(Ben shrugs his shoulders towards the audience.)

BEN

Sure, I'll be over in a minute.

MRS. EASTERWOOD

Oh this is lovely! See you then Ben!

(Mrs. E exits the apartment.)

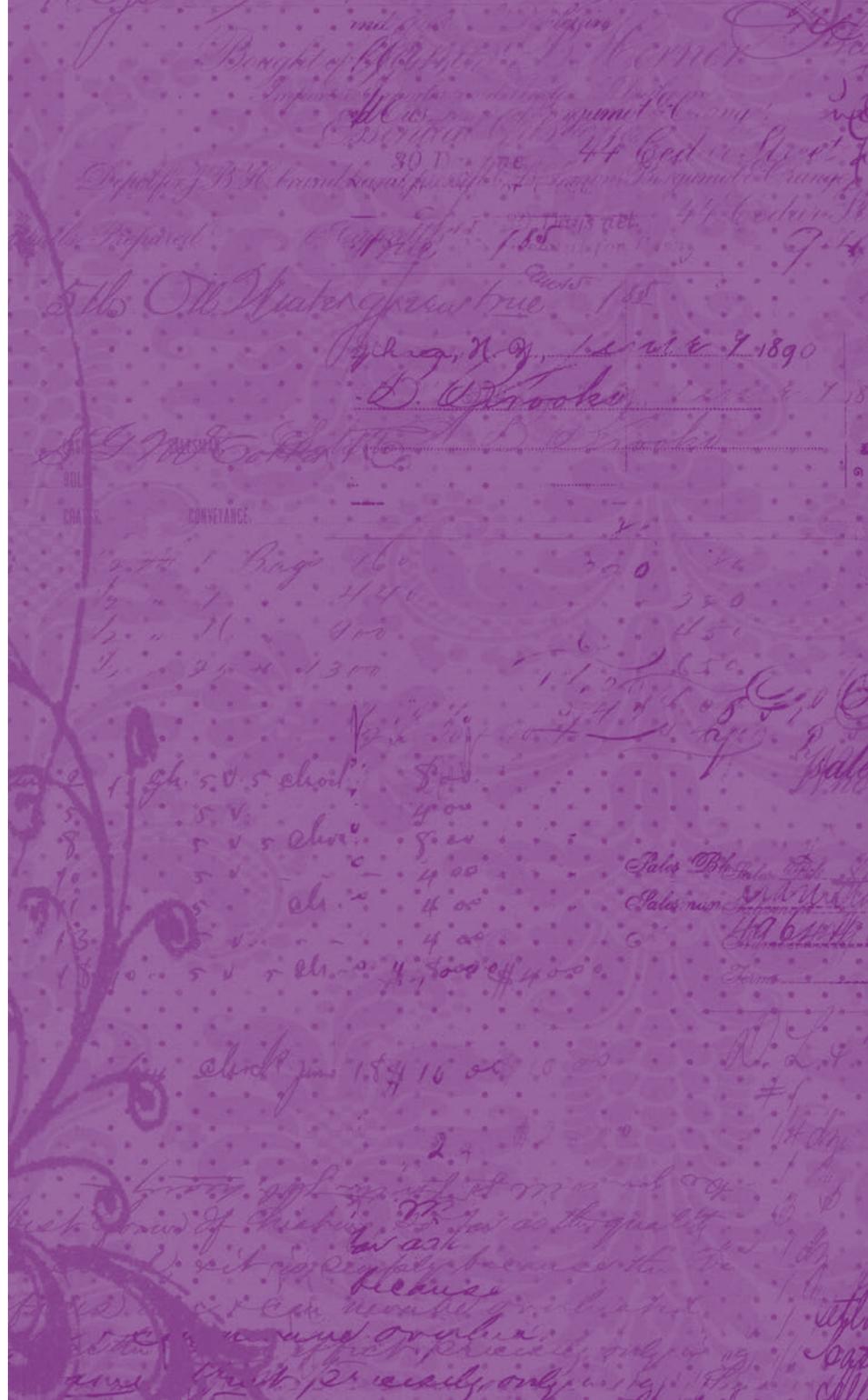
(Travis re-enters with a cat on a leash moments later.)

TRAVIS

Did she just call you Ben?

BEN

Hi.



TRAVIS

Hey man.. .Ben this is Admiral Soup, Admiral Soup this is Ben.

(Ben kneels over and pats the cat on the head.)

BEN

He is kinda cute. Sorry about everything with Emily man.

TRAVIS

It's okay bud, I knew you would be back. Bring it in!

(Travis gives Ben a hug.)

BEN

She was crazy, she did this thing called the...

TRAVIS

The midnight switch. I know.

BEN

How do you know?

TRAVIS

I invented it years ago. She actually might have gotten the idea from me.

BEN

So you knew?

TRAVIS

No, I figured it out when I saw that Sandy girl leaving. I kept trying to tell you she was bad news but I didn't wanna ruin it or I knew you would hate me for it. Do you?

BEN

No, no, it's not your fault.

TRAVIS

That Sandy girl was pretty worthy bro, much better looking than Emily.

BEN

Really? Well she said I was awful anyways so I guess it doesn't matter.

No. TRAVIS

No what? BEN

She gave me this note for you but said not to give it to you 'til Emily and you were done. TRAVIS

What? Where is it? BEN

(Travis looks around for a few seconds then nods and runs to the freezer and takes out a note.)

The freezer? BEN

I put most of my literature in here.... Got it here you go. TRAVIS

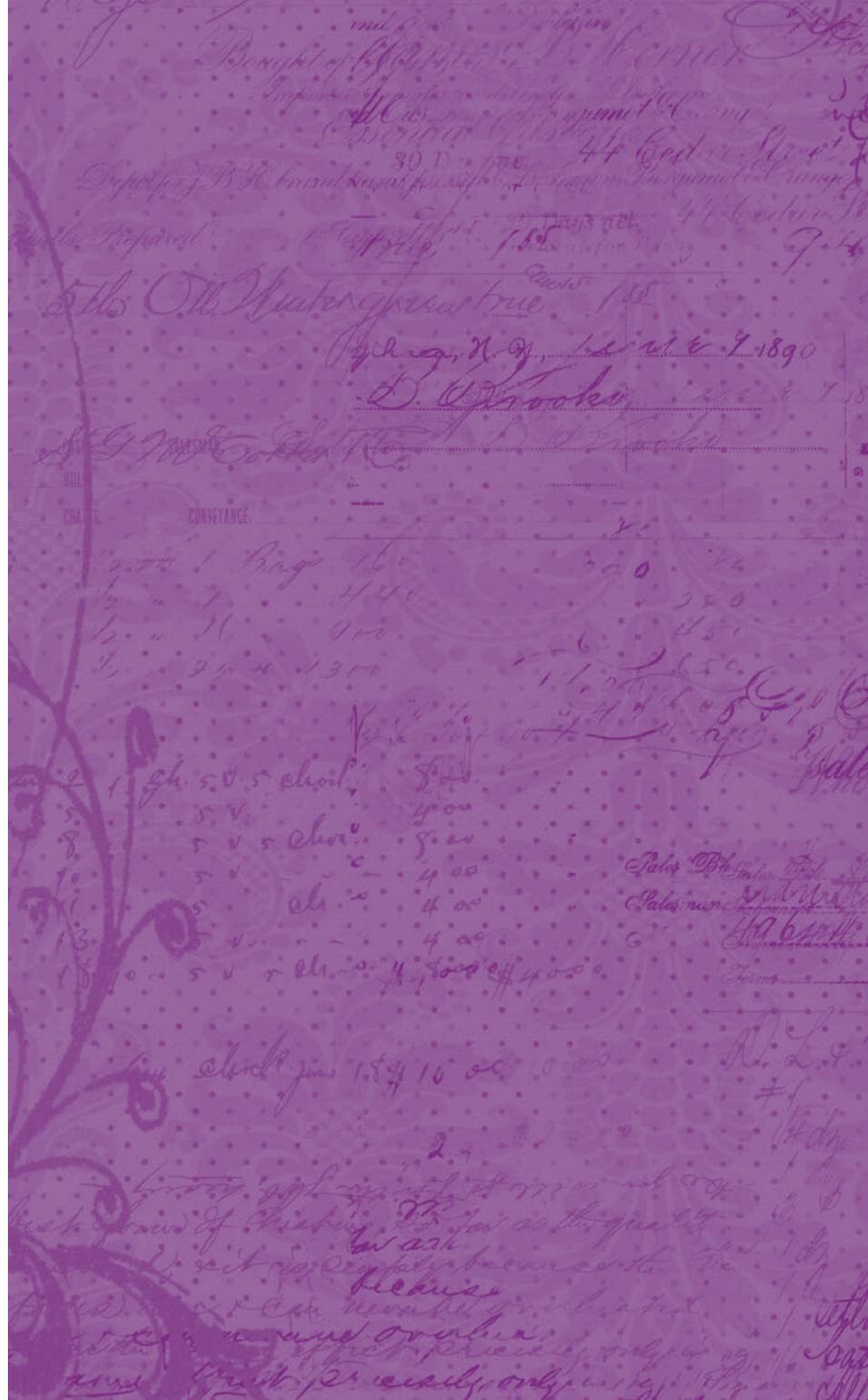
Thanks, hey it's all smeared. BEN

I memorized it anyways it said... "Dear Ben, If you are reading this note then you already know what happened. I am sorry. I feel awful, whoever made up the midnight switch is a truly demented creature and I will never regret anything more in my life. But the good part of all of this is that I got to meet you and that you were the best I ever had. I lied to Emily. TRAVIS

She always screws guys over and I think you deserved better. Call me when you get this 212-495-6721 Love heart Sandy. TRAVIS

How did you remember all that? BEN

I dunno. The number is still at the bottom and the heart next to her name is sorta there. TRAVIS



Really? Let me see.. BEN

(Ben studies the note.)

This is good news! BEN

I got your back buddy! Wanna play Uno or something? TRAVIS

I can't I just told Mrs. E I would visit. BEN

Oh yea, she is back. I guess I will have to find a different apartment to move into. TRAVIS

Shut up, you aren't going anywhere. I'll see you later buddy. BEN

(Ben leaves.)

Well this where we are going to live. I'll give you a tour later. If a bunch of Asians or an old lady come around, make sure you hide okay? Ben who you just met lives here, too. He is nice... he just needs us to guide him a little bit. He is kind of weird. TRAVIS

Are you hungry? Let's go find you a mouse!

(Travis and the cat exit through the window and go down the catwalk.)
(Lights fade to black.)

THE END.

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Ashley Jones is a 2011 Cabrini graduate. She majored in Accounting.

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Ashley Vanacore is an alumnus of Cabrini College, graduating in 2011 with a bachelor's degree in Graphic Design. She loves creativity and enjoys experimenting with various mediums and techniques. In the future, Ashley plans on furthering her education and going back to school to receive a master's degree.

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Brittany Ryan is a senior English/Spanish major who owns close to 300 books and has read the Harry Potter series at least 11 times. She hopes to pay off her student loans by becoming the next J.K. Rowling.

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Janie Chieco has 9 years of experience in writing for academic, creative, technical, and journalistic mediums and is a published journalist and poet. Drawing inspiration from avant-garde figures such as Charles Bukowski, Anne Sexton, Allen Ginsberg, Ernest Hemingway, and Gertrude Stein as well as innovative psychological literature, poetry is one of Janie's most rewarding forms of artistic expression.

Joe Cahill

Joe is a 2011 Cabrini College graduate. He studied Communications, with a minor in English and a concentration in Film and Media Studies. While at Cabrini, Joe advanced his skills as a radio DJ, and was the Music Director for 89.1WYBF-FM "The Burn" Radio. Joe currently works for Airbnb.

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Katherine Parks is a senior double major in English and Spanish. She is also co-editor of Woodcrest, and hopes to use her editing and writing skills to pursue a career in copyediting or to further her education through graduate studies in English.

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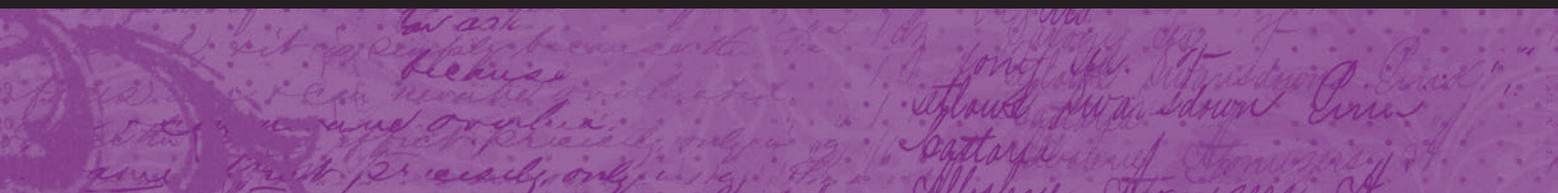
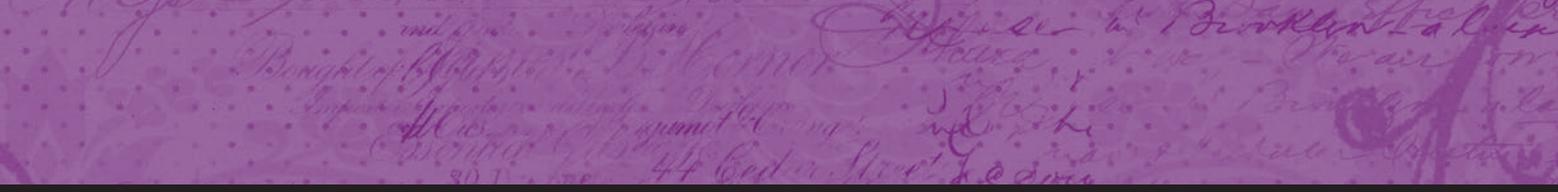
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